



The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Cathedral

THE ISSUE BETWEEN MONOPHYSITISM AND DYOPHYSITISM Part. III

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church considers itself to belong to the One, Holy, Universal and Apostolic Church founded by Jesus Christ. It is holy because its founder, Jesus Christ, is holy; it is catholic because the whole world is its province and because it is universal in time and place; it is apostolic because it was established on earth by the apostles of Christ.

The Ethiopian Church belongs to the group of Orthodox Churches wrongly termed "Monophysites" but which prefer the epithet "Non-Chalcedonian". The other members of this family are the Coptic, Armenian, Syrian and Indian Churches. Together with the Roman Catholic Church and the Byzantine Orthodox Church they comprised the One Church for four centuries until the division arose on account of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 which insisted that Christ had the two natures of humanity and divinity.

Dyophysites teach that, after the union, Christ retained the natures of divinity and humanity in His one Person in such a way that He ate food, slept, laughed, suffered, walked as man in the human nature, but healed the sick and resuscitated Lazarus as God in the divine nature. Thus He is one Person in two natures of humanity and divinity. The wrongly called Monophysites reject the allegation that they teach one Nature and one Person in Christ. The teaching of the Ethiopian Church may thus be summarized:

1. The Ethiopian Church rejects Eutyches, who is believed to have taught that in Christ the human Nature was absorbed by the divine Nature. Nestorius also is excluded.
2. Dioscorus, whom the Council of Chalcedon deposed, is accepted. But it should be remembered that the Council of 451 did not believe that Dioscorus was a heretic. Dioscorus did not deny the continuance of Godhead and manhood in the One Christ after their union and he agreed with the Council that the teaching which Eutyches was understood to hold was heretical.
3. The teaching of the Ethiopian Church is the faith of the Fathers expounded by the great theologians of the Alexandrine tradition, especially by St. Cyril and his illustrious theological followers. Accordingly the Ethiopian Church maintains that Christ is perfect God and perfect man, at once consubstantial with the Father and with us; the divinity and the humanity continuing in Him without mixture or separation, confusion or change. He is one and the same person both in his eternal pre-existence and also in the economy, in which he performs the redeeming work of God on behalf of man, from the indivisible state of union of Godhead and manhood.
4. The Church abides by the formula "The one Incarnate Nature of God the Word", on which St. Cyril of Alexandria increasingly insisted, a formula which was accepted as correct by the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D and which, after the Council of Chalcedon, the Chalcedonian side in the East itself admitted.
5. It is unfair for the Church to be nicknamed "Monophysites" by the faithful who accept the Chalcedonian formula of "two Natures in the one Person of Jesus Christ", because the expression used by the non-Chalcedonian side was always miaphysis, and never Monophysis (mia standing for a composite unity unlike mone standing for an elemental unity). Therefore these churches are best referred to as the non-Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches.
6. "Tewahido" is the Ethiopian term (meaning "made one") which is the best expression conveying the faith of the Church, since it emphasizes the inseparable unity of the Godhead and manhood in the Person of Christ. The Church's official title is "The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Bete Christian."

7. After the Union, Christ was no longer in two natures. The two natures became united into one nature without separation, without confusion and without change. Thus He was at the same time perfect God and perfect man. This is the union of the natures in the Incarnation. After the union Christ is not two persons or two natures, but one Person, one incarnate Nature of God the Son, with one will, but being at once divine and human. If you separate the natures after the union and say that Christ is in two natures, you will be confronted with serious problems. You will have to admit, for instance, that Christ was crucified merely as a man and that therefore he did not redeem the world, for God alone is able to accomplish the world's redemption. In brief, it is held that Christ, in acting, acted as a united being, not separately as man or separately as God.

8. Proof that we believe in the continuance of divinity and humanity in the One Christ may be illustrated:

- a) In the Communion we receive the very body and blood of Jesus Christ. These belong to man, humanity, and we know that Jesus Christ is God, divinity.
- b) The present Liturgy can be used as a criterion of the Church. There it is openly expressed that there is divinity and humanity in Christ.
- c) The Chalcedonian formula was rejected because it was thought to destroy the one person of Christ and there was no clear distinction between "nature" and "person", person meant nature.
- d) We believe the Nicean Creed in which the divinity and humanity of Christ are set forth, and in the Creed of the liturgy we declare our belief in the co-equality of Jesus Christ with God the Father, and belief in his having grown like men, yet without sin or evil, and in his having taken flesh from Mary.
- e) The confession of Faith by the Emperor Claudius declares that Jesus Christ was perfect man and perfect God.

Monophysitism is rejected. It is a question of error in vocabulary, the concepts of Nature and Person not being clear and there being obscurity in philosophical terms such as physis, hypostasis, ausia, prosopon, atreptos, mia, mono etc. As to the two natures of Christ the Dyophysites and non-Chalcedonians are one, it is a matter of interpretation after the union of the two natures. Happily the Dyophysites are currently realizing the position.

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