Two letters to Pope Celestine

Nestorius (c. AD 386–451)

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The Second Letter of Nestorius to Celestine of Rome
Written in the early part of 430, Nestorius once again asks for information on the Pelagians taking refuge in Constantinople after being excommunicated by a synod in Rome . He tells of his own troubles with heretics in Constantinople , and gives a brief account of their views: confusion of the human and divine natures in Christ. Translated from the 5 century Latin version of Marius Mercator (Loofs, Nestoriana, 169-172); the original Greek is not extant. Here begins the second letter of Nestorius to Celestine.

1. I have often written to Your Beatitude on account of Julian [of Eclanum], Orontius, and the others who have usurped for themselves episcopal dignity and made an appearance before the most pious and commendable emperor [Theodosius II], and have succumbed before us to frequent lamentations as though they were [orthodox men] expelled from the West in orthodox times. But we have still not received from Your Worship anything written about them. If I had such documents, I would be able to respond to them and give them a response commensurate to their weeping. As things stand, apart from the uncertain things they say, there is nothing to which one might turn [to understand the situation]. Some call them heretics and say that on that account they have been expelled from the western regions. But they themselves swear that they are the targets of false accusations and because of surreptitious activity they have endured this trial for the sake of the orthodox faith. Our ignorance of them is a heavy burden, whether their account is true or not. For it is a crime to commiserate with them if they are truly heretics, but it is harsh and impious not to commiserate with them if they are the targets of false accusations. Therefore, let Your Soul, most beloved by God, deign to inform us who are still pulled in two ways by the weight of each impulse, that is, toward hating them and having mercy on them. We wish to be taught what opinion we should hold about them. For day after day we defer giving a response to these men, disguising the fact that we still hope and wait on Your Beatitude. For this is not for us, Your Worship, an insignificant discussion of a pious faction, nor is the examination of those who do this a trifling matter for us.

2. For we have also expended much energy here [in Constantinople] striving to root out from the church of God that most despicable impiety, the most harmful opinion of Apollinaris and Arius. For I do not know the extent to which some ecclesiastical men have become sick with

the sickness of the aforementioned heretics, on account of their acceptance of the idea that the divinity and humanity of the only-begotten are blended (contemperationis imaginem ex deitate et humanitate unigeniti). These heretics both dare to make the bodily passions pour over into the divinity of the only-begotten and pretend that the divine immutability has passed over to the bodily nature. They confuse each nature through the mutability that arises through the blending, even though in reality each nature is adored through an unconfused conjunction of the highest sort (per conjunctionem summam et inconfusam) in the single person (in una persona) of the only-begotten. Blind men! They do not remember the account of the holy fathers who openly contradict them: We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. For this statement [is made] with the title which signifies each nature, Christ... <lacuna> [the Holy Spirit?] is co-essential (homoousios) with the divinity of the Father. But the humanity born in these latter times is from the holy Virgin; on account of its conjunction with divinity, the humanity is worshipped by angels and humans together.

Therefore, have consideration for the one who is here wearied by so many labors on account of factional depravity, what he will unavoidably suffer, if he should not know what the men mentioned above are doing and has a great fear of causing through ignorance of the heretics more problems in addition to those already here. Therefore I ask that Your Holiness be diligent in every respect in granting knowledge of the men mentioned above, especially since the most loyal carrier of the letter, the cubicularius Valerius, can himself give to Your Beatitude an account of how they vex. I and those who are with me greet most heartily all the brothers in Christ who are with you. Translated March, 2005 by Mark DelCogliano

The Third Letter of Nestorius to Celestine of Rome

Written in the latter part of 430, Nestorius claims that the controversy over the term Theotokos (Mother of God) has been concocted by Cyril to forestall judicial proceedings against himself. Nonetheless, Nestorius defends Christotokos (Mother of Christ) as a scriptural term that is preferable because it avoids the heresies to which a misunderstanding of the terms Theotokos and Anthropotokos (Mother of a human being) can lead. Translated from the 5 century Latin version of Marius Mercator (Loofs, Nestoriana, 181-182); the original Greek is not extant. To Celestine the Pope, from Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople.

I have learned that Cyril, the most distinguished bishop of the city of Alexandria, has become worried about reports against him that we received, and is now hunting for subterfuges to avoid a holy synod taking place due to these reports. In the meantime he is devising some other disturbances over terms and has chosen [as a point of controversy] the term Theotokos and Christotokos: the first he allows, but as for Christotokos, sometimes he removes it from the gospels, and sometimes he allows it, on the basis of what I believe is a kind of excessive prudence. In the case of the term Theotokos, I am not opposed to those who want to say it, unless it should advance to the confusion of natures in the manner of the madness of Apollinaris or Arius. Nonetheless, I have no doubt that the term Theotokos is inferior to the term Christotokos, as the latter is mentioned by the angels and the gospels.

And if I were not speaking to Your Worship who is already so knowledgeable, I would need to give a very long discourse on this topic.

But even without a discourse, it is known in every way to Your Beatitude, that if we should think that there are two groups opposed to each other, the one using only the term Theotokos, the other only Anthropotokos, and each group draws [others] to what it confesses or, if they have not accomplished this, puts [others] in danger of falling from the church, it would be necessary to assign someone to such an affair if it arises who exercises concern for both groups and heals the danger of both parties by means of the term taken from the gospels that signifies both natures. For as I said, the term Christotokos keeps the assertion of both parties to the proper limits, because it both removes the blasphemy of Paul of Samosata, who claimed that Christ the Lord of all was simply a human being, and also flees the wickedness of Arius and Apollinaris. Now I have written these very things to the most distinguished bishop of Alexandria, as Your Beatitude can tell from the copies I have attached to this letter of mine, as well as from the copies of what he wrote to us. Moreover, with God's help it has also been agreed to announce a world-wide synod in order to inquire into the other ecclesiastical matters. For I do not think it will be difficult to investigate a uncertainty over words, and it is not a hindrance for a discussion of the divinity of Christ the Lord.

Translated March, 2005 by Mark DelCogliano.

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