



Miaphysitism

Miaphysitism (/maɪˈæfɪsaɪtɪzəm, miː-^[1]) is the Christological doctrine that holds Jesus, the "Incarnate Word", is fully divine and fully human, in one 'nature' (*physis*).^[2] It is a position held by the Oriental Orthodox Churches and differs from the Chalcedonian position that Jesus is one "person" (Greek: ὑπόστασις) in two "natures" (Greek: φύσεις), a divine nature and a human nature (dyophysitism).

While historically a major point of controversy within Christianity, a few modern declarations by both Chalcedonian and miaphysite (/maɪˈæfɪsaɪt, miː-) churches state that the difference between the two Christological formulations does not reflect any significant difference in belief about the nature of Christ.^{[3][4]}

Terminology

The word *miaphysite* derives from the Ancient Greek μία (*mía*, "one") and φύσις (*phúsis*, "nature, substance"). Miaphysite teaching is based on Cyril of Alexandria's formula μία φύσις τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου σεσαρκωμένη, meaning "one *physis* of the Word of God made flesh" (or "... of God the Word made flesh").

The 451 Council of Chalcedon used *physis* to mean "nature" (as in "divine nature" and "human nature"), and defined that there is in Jesus one *hypostasis* (person) but two *physeis* (natures). It is disputed whether Cyril used *physis* in that sense. John Anthony McGuckin says that in Cyril's formula "*physis* serves as a rough semantic equivalent to *hypostasis*".^[5]

Others interpret the miaphysite term *physis* in line with its use by the Council of Chalcedon and speak of "miaphysitism" as "monophysitism", a word used of all forms of denial of the Chalcedonian doctrine. However, they add that "miaphysitism" is "the more accurate term for the position held by the Syriac, Coptic and Armenian churches".^[6]

The Second Council of Constantinople (553), the ecumenical council that followed that of Chalcedon, accepted Cyril's phrase, but warned against misinterpreting it.^[7]

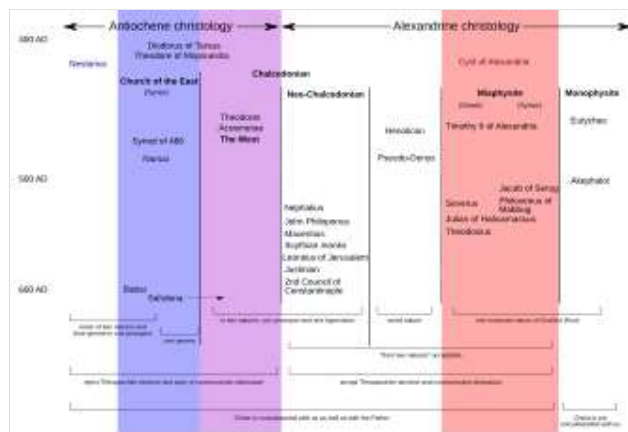
The broad term "dyophysitism" covers not only the Chalcedonian teaching but also what Nestorianism interpreted as meaning that Jesus is not only of two natures but is in fact two centres of attribution, and thus two persons, a view condemned by the Council of Chalcedon. Similarly, "monophysitism" covers not only Oriental Orthodox teaching but also the view called Eutychianism, according to which, after the union of the divine and human natures in the incarnation of the eternal Son or Word of God, he has only a single "nature", a synthesis of divine and human, identical with neither.^{[8][9]} This doctrine is rejected by miaphysites, who teach instead that the incarnate Christ has one "nature" that is both divine and human in its character, retaining all the characteristics of both humans and divinity, but with no mingling, confusion (*pouring together*) or change within.

To avoid being confused with Eutychians, the Oriental Orthodox Churches reject the label "monophysite". Coptic Metropolitan Bishop of Damiette declared it a misnomer to call them monophysites, for "they always confessed the continuity of existence of the two natures in the one incarnate nature of the Word of God. Non[e] of the natures ceased to exist because of the union and the term 'mia physis' denoting the incarnate nature is completely different from the term 'monophysites'. [...] The Oriental Orthodox do not believe in a single nature in Jesus Christ but rather a united divine-human nature."^[10]

The Agreed Statement by the Anglican–Oriental Orthodox International Commission in 2014 said:

The term 'monophysite', which has been falsely used to describe the Christology of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, is both misleading and offensive as it implies Eutychianism. Anglicans, together with the wider oikumene, use the accurate term 'miaphysite' to refer to the Cyrilline teaching of the family of Oriental Orthodox Churches, and furthermore call each of these Churches by their official title of "Oriental Orthodox". The teaching of this family confesses not a single nature but one incarnate united divine-human nature of the Word of God. To say "a single nature" would be to imply that the human nature was absorbed in his divinity, as was taught by Eutyches.^[11]

Conflict



Christological spectrum c. 5th–7th centuries (miaphysitism in red)

The conflict over terminology was to some extent a conflict between two renowned theological schools. The Catechetical School of Alexandria focused on the divinity of Christ as the Logos or Word of God and thereby risked leaving his real humanity out of proper consideration (cf. Apollinarianism). The stress by the School of Antioch was on the humanity of Jesus as a historical figure. To the theological rivalry between the two schools added a certain political competitiveness between, on the one hand, Alexandria and, on the other, Antioch and Constantinople.^[12]

The condemnation of Nestorius at the Council of Ephesus in 431 was a victory for the Alexandrian school and church, but its acceptance required a compromise, the "Formula of Reunion", entered into by Cyril of Alexandria and John of Antioch two years later. Cyril died in 444. Under his successor, Dioscurus I of Alexandria, a Constantinople-based archimandrite named Eutyches, whose answer to questions put to him was judged heretical by Bishop Flavian of Constantinople, in turn, accused Flavian of heresy. The Emperor convoked a council and entrusted its presidency to Dioscurus. This Second Council of Ephesus, held in 449, rehabilitated Eutyches and condemned and deposed Flavian and some other bishops. These appealed to Pope Leo I,

who, calling their assembly not a *concilium* but a *latrocinium*, a robber council rather than a proper council, declared it null and void. The miaphysite churches still recognize it as valid, but outside their ranks it is not reckoned as an ecumenical council.

The Council of Chalcedon was held in 451 and annulled the earlier council that had been presided over by Dioscurus. It has not been accepted by the Oriental Orthodox Churches, who do not defend Eutyches and accept the implicit condemnation of him by the (non-ecumenical) Third Council of Ephesus held in 475.

Chalcedon accepted by acclamation Leo's Tome, the letter by Pope Leo I setting out, as he saw it, the church's doctrine on the matter, and issued what has been called the Chalcedonian Definition, of which the part that directly concerns miaphysitism runs as follows:

Following, then, the holy Fathers, we all unanimously teach that our Lord Jesus Christ is to us One and the same Son, the Self-same Perfect in Godhead, the Self-same Perfect in Manhood; truly God and truly Man; the Self-same of a rational soul and body; co-essential with the Father according to the Godhead, the Self-same co-essential with us according to the Manhood; like us in all things, sin apart; before the ages begotten of the Father as to the Godhead, but in the last days, the Self-same, for us and for our salvation (born) of Mary the Virgin Theotokos as to the Manhood; One and the Same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten; acknowledged in Two Natures unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the difference of the Natures being in no way removed because of the Union, but rather the properties of each Nature being preserved, and (both) concurring into One Person and One Hypostasis; not as though He was parted or divided into Two Persons, but One and the Self-same Son and Only-begotten God, Word, Lord, Jesus Christ; even as from the beginning the prophets have taught concerning Him, and as the Lord Jesus Christ Himself hath taught us, and as the Symbol of the Fathers hath handed down to us.

—Bindley, T. Herbert, ed. (1899). *The Oecumenical Documents of the Faith* (https://archive.org/details/MN41552ucmf_1/page/n241). London: Methuen.

Dissent from this definition did not at first lead to a clean break between what are now the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches. While in the West, Rome tended to uphold steadfastly the text of Leo's Tome and of the Chalcedonian definition, the situation in the East was fluid for a century after the council, with compromise formulas imposed by the emperors and accepted by the church and leading at times to schisms between East and West (cf. Acacian Schism, Henotikon, Monoenergism).

The situation then hardened into a fixed division between what are now called the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Chalcedonian churches later divided into the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church and its Protestant derivations.

Thoughts of resolution

In recent decades a number of Christological agreements between miaphysite and Chalcedonian churches have been signed not just by theologians but by heads of churches. They explicitly distinguish the divinity and the humanity of Christ, without necessarily using the phrase "two natures".

On 20 May 1973, Pope Shenouda III of Alexandria and Pope Paul VI jointly declared:^[13]

We confess that our Lord and God and Saviour and King of us all, Jesus Christ, is perfect God with respect to His Divinity, perfect man with respect to His humanity. In Him His divinity is united with His humanity in a real, perfect union without mingling, without commixtion, without confusion, without alteration, without division, without separation. His divinity did not separate from His humanity for an instant, not for the twinkling of an eye. He who is God eternal and invisible became visible in the flesh, and took upon Himself the form of a servant. In Him are preserved all the properties of the divinity and all the properties of the humanity, together in a real, perfect, indivisible and inseparable union.

—Common Declaration of Pope of Rome Paul VI and of the Pope of Alexandria Shenouda III

At that meeting they decided to set up an official theological dialogue between the two churches. On 12 February 1988 the commission that carried on that dialogue signed "a common formula expressing our official agreement on Christology which was already approved by the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church on 21 June 1986". The brief common formula was as follows:^[14]

We believe that our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Incarnate-Logos, is perfect in His Divinity and perfect in His Humanity. He made His Humanity one with His Divinity without mixture nor mingling, nor confusion. His Divinity was not separated from His Humanity even for a moment or twinkling of an eye. At the same time, we anathematize the doctrines of both Nestorius and Eutyches.

—Mixed Commission of the Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church: Common formula on Christology

A "Doctrinal Agreement on Christology" was signed on 3 June 1990 by Baselios Mar Thoma Mathews I, Catholicos of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and Pope John Paul II, in which they explicitly spoke of "divine and human natures":^[15]

Our Lord Jesus Christ is one, perfect in his humanity and perfect in his divinity – at once consubstantial with the Father in his divinity, and consubstantial with us in his humanity. His humanity is one with his divinity – without change, without commingling, without division and without separation. In the Person of the Eternal Logos Incarnate are united and active in a real and perfect way the divine and human natures, with all their properties, faculties and operations. [...] It is this faith which we both confess. Its content is the same in both communions; in formulating that content in the course of history, however, differences have arisen, in terminology and emphasis. We are convinced that these differences are such as can co-exist in the same communion and therefore need not and should not divide us, especially when we proclaim Him to our brothers and sisters in the world in terms which they can more easily understand.

—Doctrinal Agreement on Christology approved by Pope John Paul II and Catholicos Mar Baselius Marthoma Mathews I of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, 3 June 1990

Similar accords were signed by the head of the Catholic Church and the heads of the Syriac Orthodox Church and the Armenian Apostolic Church.^{[16][17]}

Although unofficial dialogue between individual theologians of the (Eastern) Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox began in 1964, official dialogue did not begin until 1985;^[18] but already by 1989 an agreement was reached on the Christological dogma, stating that the word *physis* in Cyril of Alexandria's formula referred to the *hypostasis* of Christ, one of the three *hypostaseis* or *prosopa* (persons) of the Trinity, who has "become incarnate of the Holy Spirit and Blessed Virgin Mary Theotokos, and thus became man, consubstantial with us in His humanity but without sin. He is true God and true Man at the same time, perfect in his Divinity, perfect in His humanity. Because the one she bore in her womb was at the same time fully God as well as fully human we call the Blessed Virgin Theotokos. When we speak of the one composite *hypostasis* of our Lord Jesus Christ, we do not say that in Him, a divine *hypostasis* and a human *hypostasis* came together. It is that the one eternal *hypostasis* of the Second Person of the Trinity has assumed our created human nature in that act uniting it with His own uncreated divine nature, to form an inseparably and unconfusedly united real divine-human being, the natures being distinguished from each other in contemplation only."^[19]

A second Agreed Statement was published in the following year 1990 declaring:^[19]

The Orthodox agree that the Oriental Orthodox will continue to maintain their traditional Cyrillian terminology of "one nature of the incarnate Logos" (μία φύσις τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου σεσαρκωμένη), since they acknowledge the double consubstantiality of the Logos which Eutyches denied. The Orthodox also use this terminology. The Oriental Orthodox agree that the Orthodox are justified in their use of the two-natures formula, since they acknowledge that the distinction is "in thought alone" (τῇ θεωρίᾳ μόνῃ). [...] we have now clearly understood that both families have always loyally maintained the same authentic Orthodox Christological faith, and the unbroken continuity of the apostolic tradition, though they have used Christological terms in different ways. It is this common faith and continuous loyalty to the Apostolic Tradition that should be the basis for our unity and communion.

—Joint Commission Of The Theological Dialogue Between The Orthodox Church And The Oriental Orthodox Churches, Second Agreed Statement (1990)

Implementation of the recommendations of these two Agreed Statements would mean restoration of full communion between the Eastern Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, but as of 2021 they have not been put into effect. Of the Eastern Orthodox churches, only the patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch and Romania have accepted the Statements, as have the Coptic, Syriac and Malankara Churches on the Oriental Orthodox side. The Russian patriarchate has asked for clarification of some points. The monastic community of Mount Athos rejects any form of dialogue, whether with Oriental Orthodoxy or otherwise.^[20]

References

1. "miaphysitism" (<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/miaphysitism>). *Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*.
2. "The Universal Church and Schisms" (<https://ukmidcopts.org/coptic/universal/>). *Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Midlands, U.K.*

3. Joint Commission of the Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches. "Agreed Statements between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches (June 1989 & September 1990)" (<https://www.trinityorthodox.ca/sites/default/files/Agreed%20Statements-Orthodox-Oriental%20Orthodox%20Dialogue-1989-1990.pdf>) (PDF).
4. Rowell, Geoffrey; Bishoy of Damietta; Gabriel, Abba (17 October 2014). "Agreed Statement by the Anglican-Oriental Orthodox International Commission" (<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/103502/anglican-oriental-orthodox-agreed-statement-on-christology-cairo-2014.pdf>) (PDF). *Anglican Communion*. Cairo, Egypt. Retrieved October 22, 2020.
5. McGuckin, John. *St. Cyril of Alexandria's Miaphysite Christology and Chalcedonian Dyophysitism: The Quest for the Phronema Patrum* (<https://classicalchristianity.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/St.-Cyril-of-Alexandria%E2%80%99s-Miaphysite-Christology-and-Chalcedonian-Dyophysitism.pdf>) (PDF). p. 38.
6. Parry, Ken (2009). *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=fWp9JA3aBvcC&pg=PA88>). John Wiley & Sons. p. 88. ISBN 978-1-4443-3361-9.
7. Denzinger in Latin, 429 (<http://catho.org/9.php?d=bxp#bfj>); English translation of an earlier edition, 220 (<http://patristica.net/denzinger/>)
8. Grudem, Wayne A. (2014). *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=2uKmBAAAQBAJ&pg=PT276>). Zondervan. ISBN 978-0-310-51587-6.
9. Newman, John Henry (2011). Francis J. McGrath (ed.). *John Henry Newman Sermons 1824-1843* (https://books.google.com/books?id=V2KysK_jhqAC&pg=PR32). Vol. IV: The Church and Miscellaneous Sermons at St Mary's and Littlemore. Oxford: Clarendon Press. ISBN 978-0-19-920091-7.
10. Bishoy of Damiette (3 February 1998), *Interpretation of the Christological Official Agreements between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches* (<https://web.archive.org/web/20040722082531/http://www.metroplit-bishoy.org/files/Dialogues/Byzantine/CHRSTAGR.doc>), archived from the original (<http://www.metroplit-bishoy.org/files/Dialogues/Byzantine/CHRSTAGR.doc>) (doc) on 2004-07-22; cf. Coptic Orthodox Church of the Southern United States (<https://www.suscopts.org/q&a/index.php?qid=918&catid=279>), The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (<https://www.ethiopianorthodox.org/english/dogma/monodyo.html>).
11. "'Agreed Statement by the Anglican-Oriental Orthodox International Commission" (Holy Etchmiadzin, Armenia 5–10 November 2002. Revised. Cairo, Egypt 13–17 October 2014" (<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/103502/Anglican-Oriental-Orthodox-Agreed-Statement-on-Christology-Cairo-2014.pdf?year=2014>) (PDF).
12. Rausch, Thomas P. (2003). *Who is Jesus?: An Introduction to Christology* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=8OJCa6euw5gC&q=catechetical>). Liturgical Press. p. 153. ISBN 9780814650783.
13. "Common declaration of Paul VI and Shenouda III" (https://web.archive.org/web/20200214123730/http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/anc-orient-ch-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19730510_copti_en.html). Vatican. Archived from the original (http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/anc-orient-ch-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19730510_copti_en.html) on 14 February 2020. Retrieved 2020-09-16.
14. "Coptic Church Common Formula on Christology" (https://www.cam.org.au/Portals/66/Resourses/Documents/OrientalOrthodoxChurches/Coptic_Church_Common_formula_on_Christology_1988.pdf) (PDF). AU: CAM.

15. "1990 Accordo dottrinale sulla cristologia tra Giovanni Paulo II e Mar Baselius Marthoma Mathews I" (<http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/it/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-orientali/relazioni-bilaterali/chiesa-malankarese-siro-ortodossa/accordi/1990-doctrinal-agreement-on-christology-jp-ii-mar-baselius-marth/en.html>) [1990 Doctrinal agreement on Christology between John Paul II and Mar Baselius Marthoma Mathews I]. *Christian community* (in Italian). Vatican.
16. "Dichiarazione Comune di Giovanni Paolo II e del Patriarca Siro d'Antiochia Moran Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas" (<http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/it/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-orientali/relazioni-bilaterali/patriarcato-siro-ortodosso-dantiochia-e-di-tutto-loriente--damas/dichiarazioni-comuni/1984-papa-giovanni-paolo-ii-ed-il-patriarca-siro-ortodosso-danti.html>) [Joint Declaration of John Paul II and the Syrian Patriarch of Antioch Moran Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas]. *Christian community* (in Italian). Vatican.
17. "Common Declaration of John Paul II and Catholicos Karekin I" (<http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/it/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-orientali/relazioni-bilaterali/chiesa-apostolica-armena/chiesa-apostolica-armena--sede-di-etchmiadzin--armenia-/dichiarazioni-comuni/1996-giovanni-paolo-ii-e-karekin-i/testo-in-inglese.html>). *Christian community*. Vatican.
18. Bishop Youssef, "The Agreed Statements: Oriental Orthodox Responses" in *St Nerses's Theological Review* (1998), pp. 55-60, as reported in the *Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States* (<https://suscopts.org/resources/literature/161/the-agreed-statements-oriental-orthodox-responses/>)
19. Jeffrey Gros; Harding Meyer; William G. Rusch, eds. (2000). *Growth in Agreement II. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations at World Level 1982–1998* (<http://archive.org/details/wccfops2.194>). Michigan: World Council of Churches.
20. A. Rofoeil, "What Hinders the Full Communion between the Coptic Orthodox and the Eastern Orthodox" (https://www.academia.edu/40176808/What_Hinders_the_Full_Communion_between_the_Coptic_Orthodox_and_the_Eastern_Orthodox), pp. 10–11.

Further reading

- Brock, Sebastian P. (2016). "Miaphysite, not Monophysite!" (<https://books.google.com/books?id=TwKJDAEACAAJ>). *Cristianesimo Nella Storia*. **37** (1): 45–52. ISBN 9788815261687.
- Chesnut, R.C. (1976). *Three Monophysite Christologies*. Oxford.
- Davis, Leo Donald, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787) Their History and Theology*, 1983 (Michael Glazier, Wilmington DE), reprinted 1990 (Liturgical Press, Collegeville MN, Theology and Life Series 21, 342 pp., ISBN 978-0-8146-5616-7), chaps. 4–6, pp. 134–257.
- Frend, W.H.C. (1972). *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*. Cambridge.
- Kavvadas, Nestor (2016). "Severus of Antioch and Changing Miaphysite Attitudes toward Byzantium" (<https://books.google.com/books?id=rrS9CwAAQBAJ&pg=PA124>). *Severus of Antioch: His Life and Times*. Leiden-Boston: Brill. pp. 124–137. ISBN 9789004307995.
- Meyendorff, John (1989). *Imperial unity and Christian divisions: The Church 450-680 A.D.* (https://books.google.com/books?id=6J_YAAAAMAAJ) Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press. ISBN 9780881410563.
- Ostrogorsky, George (1956). *History of the Byzantine State* (https://books.google.com/books?id=Bt0_AAAAYAAJ). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Tannous, Jack (2013). "You Are What You Read: Qenneshre and the Miaphysite Church in the Seventh Century" (<https://books.google.com/books?id=OkX8g2hRnVsC&pg=PA83>). *History and Identity in the Late Antique Near East*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 83–102. ISBN 978-0-19-991540-8.

- Winkler, Dietmar W. (1997). "Miaphysitism: A New Term for Use in the History of Dogma and in Ecumenical Theology" (<https://www.academia.edu/15344445>). *The Harp*. **10** (3): 33–40.
- Winkler, Dietmar W. (2016). "Miaphysitismus. Anmerkungen zur ökumenischen Sinnhaftigkeit eines Neologismus" (<https://books.google.com/books?id=TwKJDAEACAAJ>) [Miaphysitism. Notes on the ecumenical meaningfulness of a neologism]. *Cristianesimo Nella Storia* (in German). **37** (1): 19–29. ISBN 9788815261687.
- Zachhuber, Johannes (2018). "Personhood in Miaphysitism: Severus of Antioch and John Philoponus" (<https://www.academia.edu/25704705>). *Personhood in the Byzantine Christian Tradition: Early, Medieval, and Modern Perspectives*. London: Routledge. pp. 29–43.
- Severios, Mathews (July 2020). *Word Became Flesh: The Christology of Philoxenos of Mabbug*. LIT Verlag Münster. ISBN 978-3-643-91301-2.

Retrieved from "<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Miaphysitism&oldid=1242040944>"

■