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St. Cyril of Alexandria's Miaphysite Christology and Chalcedonian Dyophysitism

The Quest for the *Phronema Patrum*

The critically important phrase which St. Cyril of Alexandria uses in his early Christological doctrine, *Mia physis tou theou logou sesarkomene* (One enfleshed nature (*physis*) of God the Word), is one that the Non-Chalcedonian (Oriental) Orthodox Churches return to with great insistence, as part of their historic position that Chalcedon 451 departed from Cyril's authentically patristic theology of the Incarnate Union (of God and Man) in Christ's own divine person. It is therefore of the utmost importance in the ongoing discussion of the separated Orthodox traditions that this Cyrilline Miaphysite teaching should be understood (by all parties), for it is something that is the common faith of both the Byzantine and the Oriental Orthodox traditions. It is the thesis of this paper that the Byzantine Orthodox tradition, offering as its confession of Christological faith a synthesis of the synodical teachings from Ephesus 431 to Chalcedon 451 and Constantinople 553 (the three can never be separated in the confession of the Byzantine Orthodox, since all are regarded as the authentic exegesis of the others) is that the Miaphysite doctrine of St. Cyril is as correct as the Dyophysite doctrine of Chalcedon. That this is not a hopelessly illogical stance is explained on the basis that the term *physis* is being used by Cyril in an archaic sense, as equivalent to the term *hypostasis* at Chalcedon later; and so the *Mia physis* can coexist as an important (and common element of universal Christian Orthodoxy) along with the *dyo physeis*, without being logically contradictory. The implications of this will be further argued to the effect that Cyrilline Miaphysites are not necessarily Monophysites (who have largely existed between the covers of heresiology books) no more than Chalcedonian Dyophysites must be either Nestorians or deniers of the wondrous effects of the Christological Union (*henosis*). How-

ever, the article also states as its thesis that the Christological difficulties between the separated Orthodox communions do not thereby disappear by lexicological magic, as if they never existed outside the realm of semantic confusion and misunderstanding. On the contrary, the discussion will address the charge of the Oriental Orthodox that the continuing insistence on two natures after the Christological Union means that Chalcedonians do not really take on board the implications that what the Word has made one in himself (the two natures of Godhead and Humanity) cannot legitimately be spoken of, after the Union, as two.

The investigation of this ancient patristic phrase of the *Mia Physis* is thus more than an exercise in historical theology. It has direct and important implications for the communion of the Orthodox churches in fundamental ways today, as separated brothers and sisters begin to hear one another more clearly, and study the foundational texts more seriously than for many centuries past. What is at stake is a common search for a central value for all Orthodox, namely the true exegesis of what is the *phronema patrum* or patristic mindset and how this is manifested in synodical statements that are believed to be Oecumenical (that is of the whole Christian *Oikoumene*) precisely because these synods themselves represent this essential *phronema* most purely. Before we get more deeply embedded in these matters let us start by considering the concrete history.

St. Cyril and the *Mia Physis* terminology

The exegesis of the *Mia Physis* phrase depends quintessentially on understanding what the great Alexandrian meant by *physis*. The precise Christological sense of a word in any patristic writer cannot be gained from a dictionary article's many nuances, rather it needs to be derived from the actual context of the ancient argument, in accordance with the 'tradition' (*paradosis*) of that writer's school. This aspect of belonging to a school of thought is clearly apparent in the ancient writers and has been deeply neglected, even scorned, by many scholarly writers in the 20th century who have preferred to imagine the ancients were like themselves – independent speculators. St. Cyril, however, tells us time and again that he sees himself, as Archbishop of Alexandria, deeply rooted in the Alexandrine school, and stands here in so far as he believes that this represents the

phronema patrum: the mind of the Fathers. This concept is so important to Cyril that by the time he has resolved to test the issue at the great council of Ephesus in 431, he has already expended much research effort in laying out what he considers to be the lineage of the universal Church's Christology.

We can see the results of these studies in the dossier of patristic authorities he collates and presents to the conciliar Fathers at Ephesus. This is one of the earliest explicit instances in the ancient Church of presenting one's opinion in terms of its standing in patristic tradition. After Ephesus 431, the assembling of authoritative *catenae* will become a standard and classical way of doing theology. But before that time, Cyril need not be imagined as inventing the notion. Belonging to one's church's 'tradition of the Fathers' was therefore an important aspect of clerical training. What Cyril adds to this in the Nestorian crisis, however, is that it must be a local tradition that can be shown to be in harmony with the wider thrust of patristic theology. It was his thesis that the Syrian school after Theodore had lost the right to claim this. We can, therefore, suspect the trajectory of Cyril's thought in advance, as it were, and can observe whether or not he follows the expected line. In this way also, we can supply a solid and typical context to his overall theology (*skopos*), and use this to determine those cases where ambivalence or obscurity attaches to particularities. If this method had been adopted in times past (a basic hermeneutic of coherence one would have thought, where semantic meaning is taken from the larger context of argument in the observed writings) much less nonsense would have been written about St. Cyril's theological teaching than has been the case.

A close study of the saint's writings and thoughts reveal that what he says explicitly, is true. St. Athanasius of Alexandria (296-373) is for him the major source of his incarnational thought, and serves for him as a towering, and ecumenical, authority. Cyril (378-444) is writing, however, almost a lifetime after his Alexandrian predecessor, when new elements concerning the personal subjectivity of the Incarnate Lord have surfaced and have been sufficiently controverted as to impact his own generation. After Athanasius' great struggles with Arian Christology had begun to raise questions over the single subjectival personality of the divine Word, at the very end of his life and in the immediate generation after it, Christian theologians moved the issue of subjectivity in the Incarnate Lord to the

centre stage, which it had not occupied before. The Cappadocian Fathers were involved, at this time, in setting out a resolution to the polarities of problems caused to the Nicene theology by the separate schools of Apollinaris of Laodicea (a Nicene friend but something of an embarrassment to Athanasius) and the Syrians following Diodore of Tarsus, namely Theodore of Mopsuestia and Nestorius. In the case of the latter, the problem reached directly into Cyril's lifetime. In many respects Cyril's immediate and deep seated aversion to Nestorius' Christology stems from the way he recognized it as an attack on his own Alexandrine tradition. It is no surprise, therefore, to find that Cyril's response to the Christological crisis of his own day goes beyond the letter of Athanasius, and also incorporates the larger responses of the immediately succeeding Nicene generation. In this particular case we need to ask what were his intellectual Christological sources after Athanasius?

Scrutiny of these reveals that for Christology Cyril is a close student of the work of St. Gregory the Theologian; and in exegesis (perhaps surprisingly given the family history)¹ he is a close follower of Origen of Alexandria and St. John Chrysostom. Although he undoubtedly adds his own brilliant manner of synthesizing argument, and brings to the fore of the Christological debate a hugely important macro-context (namely that all true Christology is a soteriology of deification or it is nothing) it is clear enough that he both knows the earlier tradition, and has sufficiently refined it so as to draw out a line of *paradosis*: who were the authors in harmony with Athanasius' intentionality, and who were those authors who missed the point entirely. Several modern scholars have accused Cyril himself of 'missing the point' by not listening to his opponents' detailed argumentation – presumably on the basis that if all could have sat down calmly around a seminar table all would have come away in agreement. But this is patently nonsensical and anachronistic. Ancient schools of thought did not work that way, any more than moderns do. Cyril knows well enough, from a very close study of the Syrian tradition of Diodore, Theodore and Nestorius, that the latter is a faithful enough exemplar of what is purporting to be a 'nationalist' school of Christianity. It is just that he refuses to allow Theodore the right to claim the status of oecumenicity. He elevates Athanasius to be a universal voice for the Christian tradition, but refuses that role to the Syrians; and this, in effect, is the projection of his theory of patristic 'weight' in the voices he studies.

From this we learn two things about Cyril's use of the *Mia Physis* formula. The first is that he was acutely conscious of his tradition's *skopos*, that is the tendency of thought that characterized the Alexandrian-Cappadocian synthesis he had drawn up as its latest lineage, and that he can be expected to be consistent with this *skopos* from beginning to end, something that a dispassionate scholar will observe in his work. The second is that he was no fool. Some commentators have depicted him floundering in both argument and semantic, changing his tack as each new objection is placed before him. Well, he certainly was an energetic controversialist, and tailors his arguments to meet the audience on many occasions, but the great array of images and semantic *formulae* in his Christology can all be seen to resolve down to the same concern to defend two great and overriding ideas: first, that Christ is One (God the Word has made the flesh his very own); and second, that this mystery of the divine self-unification with humanity is the *energeia* of our race's salvation in so far as it deifies the assumed humanity. In other words: the assumption of flesh in the God-Man is an active paradigm for the graceful transfiguration of the mortal creature.

Whether Cyril describes the incarnation poetically in terms of the lily and its perfume, or uses his renowned strong paradoxes of juxtaposition (suffering impassibly – *apathos epathen*, or Mary *Theotokos*, or Life-giving flesh, or Death of God)² it all amounts to the same thing, and this overall stress on the *enanthropesis* of the *Logos* as the dynamic of our salvation is something Cyril never tires of returning to. Commentators who have excessively narrowed their study of his thought to formulaic aspects of his work, have sometimes failed to see this pattern inherent in all his writings, whether controversialist or exegetical. Similarly they have largely failed to take into account that his Christology does not exist like an isolated specimen in a bell-jar. It is rooted in the great Alexandrian's eucharistic theory, his biblical exegesis, and above all in his profound pneumatology. Cyril's works on the Holy Spirit, the Divine Trinity, and the exegesis of the saving power of the scriptures have been shamefully neglected as Anglophone literature has mainly rushed to comment piece-meal on the controversial issues in the style of a mid century scholastic manual. It has proved to be a very deficient methodology. Meanwhile, even now, the great Cyriline treatises on Trinity and Pneumatology remain untranslated, unread, misunderstood.

St. Cyril found the *Mia Physis* formula in the archives of the Alexandrian Archiepiscopal chancery attributed to Athanasius. In this the archivists before him were mistaken, and thus misled him. It was wrongly filed under Athanasius' title when it was a work of Apollinaris. Similarly Dioscoros of Alexandria was equally mistaken when he synodically argued at Ephesus in 449 that the phrase was found in both Athanasius and Gregory Thaumaturgos. He too had been led astray by his otherwise most excellent church archives. This history had already been laid clear by Petavius,³ and has become commonly accepted today.⁴ But it was claimed even at the time by the Syrian apologists and it was after 432, when Cyril realized that they might well be correct about the provenance of the phrase, that he decided to move away from reliance on this terminology as a main spearhead of his argument; though this is not to say that he ever distanced himself from its theology.⁵ After realizing it could not convince the wider scholarly world, and actually gave ammunition to his Syrian foes that he "really was" an Apollinarist in intent, he moved the emphasis in his Christology to the formula of a single *hypostasis*.⁶ This in itself gives us the first real indication of what the earlier phrase's primary intellectual context was for Cyril. In short: *physis* here serves as a rough semantic equivalent to *hypostasis*.⁷

In so far as *hypostasis* connoted the notion of *hypokeimenon* – the underlying reality of a thing⁸ – it is clear that Cyril comes to the argument of the *Mia Physis* from an acutely different Christological angle to that of Apollinaris. The latter used the concept to articulate his vision of the divine enfleshment (*sarkosis*). In this model the humanity was simply a non-theologically-significant vehicle for the divine presence of the Word within its envelope of flesh. For Apollinaris, in Christ the human nature's primary incarnational duty was 'not to get in the way' of the action of the Divine Word in the body used as an instrument. By contrast, using the term in the Athanasian manner, Cyril wanted the *Mia Physis* phrase to exegete what was meant by a divine ensouled inhomination (*enanthropesis*). In other words he took the humanity of God so seriously that he saw a metaphysical mystery of a vast cosmic order having taken place in coming of the Word into history by means of an incarnation as Man. For Cyril, the divine Logos did not simply come to 'indwell' a fleshly envelope, the Word (as a divine person) became human, and was thus the God-Man. In this act of re-creative power over humanity (for humanity was changed in

its character of being divinely re-graced, reconciled and vivified), the God-Man effected an new and unbreakable unity (*henosis*) between the divine and the human – realities which had formerly been divorced (by sin and by ontology) but now were united in a new creation-order instituted by the mystery of the *enanthropesis*. Humanity in Christ was authentic (true humanity) but rendered different in its capacities to the ordinary fallen nature of our race – in other words, immortalized. It was Christ's deification of his own human nature, while preserving its human authenticity, that Cyril saw as the act which saved the whole race, by passing on the new potentiality of redemption (Life in God) to all the family of Christ through the Eucharist: his own body disseminated throughout his Church to deify his followers.

Mia physis thus means single concrete reality, exactly what *hypostasis* would come to mean in generally accepted Christian semantic after the time of Cyril. Unfortunately at the time Cyril was applying this sense of *physis*, the term had already become slightly archaic, for the meaning had shifted in general parlance to the concept of a particular nature: that is a set of attributes that defined a nexus of things within a *genus*. In the Christological context this sense of a '*physis-nature*' would be akin to *ousia* and mean humanity or divinity, and many of Cyril's listeners could thus hear him advocating by *mia physis* a "single hybrid nature" resulting from the Incarnation (a concept which had already been rejected widely by the 4th century Church in the form of Apollinarism), whereas in fact he was propounding the necessity of confessing the single concrete reality of the Divine Word's enfleshment. Nestorius, for example, completely failed to see Cyril's point in the *Mia Physis*. He thought it was simply a restatement of Apollinarism,⁹ and consequently got into the habit of addressing Cyril as if he were a theological ignoramus who had either confused the natures (that is did not know the difference between creator and creature) or had confounded them (mixed them up indiscriminately so that they were no longer integrally authentic). His critique reads thus:

You say that Christ was constituted one nature (*mia physis*) from the incorporeal and the body and was a single natural hypostasis¹⁰ of the divine enfleshment (*theo-sarkoseos*). But to say this is a confusion of the two natures; a confusion which deprives the natures of their own respective hypostases by confounding them with one another.¹¹

Cyril, however, was very far from being a simpleton. He knew the phrase was ‘startling’, like *Theotokos* and like his favoured *aporia* ‘He suffered impassibly’ (*apathos epathen*), and he was using it in the same way, namely to stimulate deeper reflection because the startling ‘first reading’ caused one to think out the puzzle (*aporia*). He used it in fact (just as he did the *Theotokos* title) in a similar way to the manner in which Athanasius adopted the Nicene *homoousion*, because he knew it annoyed his Syrian opponents and flushed out their tendency to speak as if Christ were two subjects.¹² He knew that the integrity of the natures in Christ was a basic given. He regarded that fact as so simplistic that a theologian needed to go on further, to talk about the why and the how of Incarnation, not merely the what of it.¹³ He would even admit that the phrase could be read in a heretical (Apollinarist) sense, but this was possible only if one deliberately omitted the key adjective ‘enfleshed’ from its qualification of *physis*; and since that adjective was such a key element of the phrase, actually providing the very force of the *aporia*, it was equally his belief that it could be read as heretical only by a careless mind, or one with malicious intent.¹⁴

The *Mia Physis* phrase, for Cyril, does not deny that Christ is fully God and fully Man, it simply challenges the clichéd concept that these natures were something static, like possessions. In this it clashes also with the mindset of the Roman Christology, because Tertullian had (unfortunately) determined the range of key Christian Latin terms a long time before and had defined *natura* in a somewhat closed fashion as ‘that which was possessed by a *persona*.’ Cyril’s phrase clashed even more severely with Syrian Christology, because the Orientals had phobically reacted against Apollinaris so much in the previous generation that they believed they now saw him everywhere they looked, and that all Christian thought had to be heavily inoculated against him. This was a major reason why Nestorius could not understand what Cyril was talking about. The fatal obscurity involved in applying *physis* in this sense of concrete instantiation, when it also connoted, in a wider range of semantic meanings, the same sense of nature as *ousia*, led to Cyril’s own later preference for mono-hypostatic language in Christology. In this, the larger Church followed him. But Nestorius’ inability to follow the argument here cannot be wholly blamed on Cyril’s semantic, because the overall sense of his theology is clear enough from his general context apart from his *formulae*, if one had ‘ears to hear’.

Cyril uses the *Mia Physis* phrase, therefore, to insist that the Christ was One, that the divine Word was One both before and after his Incarnation, and that this oneness comes as a result of a dynamic mystery. In other words the Incarnation is not a chemo-physical or necessary conditioned reality, rather an exercise of God's untrammelled freedom. In particular, the affirmation of *mia physis* states that the Incarnate Word of God is one single *hypostasis*, or concrete reality, not a synthesis of different 'natures' in the sense of two separate or loosely correlated *ousiai* (*naturae*).

The Mia Physis Language in Orthodox Confession

The actual phrase *mia physis tou theou logou sesarkomene*, however, is horribly mistranslated in a very wide range of English language text books, and has come to be commonly and wrongly rendered today as *One Nature (physis) of God the Word Made Flesh*. This is not St. Cyril. This is the (English version of the) confession of Eutyches of Constantinople: *Mia physis tou theou logou sesarkomenou (the single nature-physis of God the Word who was made flesh)*. And it is interesting to see how the semantic confusion of the 5th century continues to dog our heels as we render the critical terms across so many centuries and so many language schemes.

The English phrase 'One Nature of God the Word Enfleshed' gives rise among the Byzantine Orthodox even today to the dismissive and generally erroneous understandings of the ancient Cyrilline Miaphysites (such as Dioscoros of Alexandria and Severus of Antioch) as Monophysites, that is those who teach there is only one set of natural properties in the Incarnate Lord (presumably a fusion of Godhead and Manhood, the resurrection of Apollinarist ideas). Most of what the Byzantine Church reacted to in its heresiology books about 'Monophysitism' was, one has to admit, about as inaccurate¹⁵ as the corresponding later Miaphysite understandings of what the Byzantine synodical tradition¹⁶ had to say about the Incarnate Union (*henosis*). So much fighting in the dark. So much real-time correspondence about the core Christological matters: yet so much dissonance on the nature of synodical process (whether a council authentically expressed the patristic mind – *phronema patrum* - or not) which is the real and abiding cause of the remaining separations, at least for any open-minded,

open-hearted person (for prejudice and a preference for clichéd versions of the facts remains alive in every age).

The commonly heard English version, therefore, echoes the confession of Eutyches, which caused Pope Leo of Rome to react against him (and the phrase) so violently at Ephesus 449 and Chalcedon 451; and it perhaps endures as a testimony to the deep distaste the Roman (hence western) Christological tradition had for this approach.¹⁷ In English the proximity of the adjective 'enfleshed' to the noun 'Word' gives an implication of their conjunction. This is what Eutyches meant by changing Cyril's language from *sesarkomene* to *sesarkomenou* – thus asserting "God the Word who is enfleshed has but one nature." But the authentic Cyrilline phrase relates the adjective 'enfleshed' (*sesarkomene*) to the term 'nature' (*physis*), not to 'God the Word' (*theou logou*). It is therefore the *physis* that is enfleshed; that is, the Word of God has become flesh, not by turning into flesh, but by dynamically assuming humanity personally to himself, and making it his very own flesh; God the Word's own flesh. This is what is meant by saying the Word has become incarnated, remaining all the while as God in his own 'natural' (*to idion*) divinity.

And therefore, to be very careful that what we assert is the authentic Cyrilline, patristic doctrine, we must correct our English version of the *Mia Physis* phrase to this and this only: *One Enfleshed Nature (physis) of God the Word, (mia physis tou theou logou sesarkomene)*. This alone is St. Cyril. This is Orthodox – and thus for the Byzantine Orthodox also, a fully authentic exegesis of the doctrine we too sustain in Chalcedon 451. It is actually the foundation for the Byzantine Orthodox claim that 'St. Cyril's doctrine is in accord with Chalcedon 451' which we make not simply on the basis of anachronistic wishful thinking, but rather on the grounds of Cyril's own acceptance of the substantive terms of that further nuancing of the *Mia Physis* Christology in his re-expressing of it in mono-hypostatic language, and in his acceptance of the terms of the mutual agreement with John of Antioch in the aftermath of Ephesus in the decretal *Let the Heavens Rejoice* of 433. These were movements which Dioscoros rejected, thus altering the overall subtlety and universal vision of Cyril's theology, and thereby causing the crisis of Ephesus 449.¹⁸ Now this double confession of the *Mia Physis* and the Chalcedonian decree speaking of *dyo physeis* means we are in a somewhat confusing state because the ancient semantics were themselves in some flux at this period. But it is not a confusion of thought if one reads

the fathers carefully; especially that most careful of them, St. Cyril himself.

If we follow his lead it means the Byzantine Orthodox can, and must, confess both (Cyrilline) Miaphysitism and (Chalcedonian) Dyophysitism. How, when this looks like double-speak? Because, to the intelligent and for those interested in confessing the authentic *phronema patrum* and not just concerned with sustaining ignorant caricatures or mouthing ancient formulae they cannot understand, it is quite clear the same father (Cyril) used the key term *physis* in two different ways in different parts of his writings. One time it signifies a concrete instantiation of something (synonymous with *hypostasis*). Another time it signifies the characteristics of a nature (a set of properties appropriate to an *ousia*). In the first application it was already something of an archaic usage by the end of the 4th century, a semantic application which was becoming too confusing to sustain in the longer run of things and in view of a newer terminology of hypostatic language was coming in the early 5th century to displace it. The term *hypostasis* itself had by the late 4th century moved away from being a synonym for nature (*physis* considered as descriptive of an essence or *ousia* / *substantia*) and towards a more particular use (the one recorded in St. Cyril and in Chalcedon) as a synonym for ‘concrete instantiation’ (or what we mean by person). *Physis*, in its second usage (as regards natural properties) had the weight of the pagan philosophers behind it to signify that accumulation of concrete and specific properties (physical characteristics) that went together to define an *Ousia* (*nature*). The difference between *physis* and *ousia* both connoting nature in this physical sense, would be comparable to the realm of difference between the Latin terms *substantia* and *natura*, where the first describes the defining characteristics or *hypokeimena* (underlying realities) of a thing, and the second the quality of the *genus* that distinguishes it from other things (a man from a horse or such like).

If the Greek semantic range causes us problems precisely because of the significant overlap of synonymous meanings between key terms at the period in question, we may shift it for the sake of clarity into viable Latin or English equivalences. Then we can see the issue in this way: Cyril’s *Mia Physis* means that the Divine Word in his Incarnation is a single concrete reality (person). He has effected a Union between Godhead and Humanity in his own divine person. The Greek for this is *henosis*, and it is of critical significance, for it means precisely not an association, or an enduring parallel juxtaposition, but exactly, and nothing less than, a Union. As initiated

and sustained by the Word himself it is thus a divine union. This massively powerful and wondrous union of Godhead and Humanity is thus irrefragable, Cyril teaches, and in that *henosis* lies the divinely initiated charism of salvation for the human race. This is why he so obsessively says (as does the patristic tradition as a whole) that “to get this union wrong” (by diluting it as Nestorius did) destroys the comprehension of the divine act of deifying the Race through the mystery of the Incarnation itself. This is a more sophisticated way of expressing what St. Athanasius could put all so simply a generation earlier than Cyril: ‘He was made man that we might be made god.’¹⁹ What was thus a natural event for the Incarnate Lord, making the union so deeply intimate that the Word can be said to possess his own flesh, or humanity within his own single reality (*physis* or *hypostasis*), was then offered through him to the whole Race as a grace of deification (*theiopoiesis*). The transaction of the Incarnate Union, therefore, is both a unique event in Christ, but also a paradigm of how the race is given back life. St. Cyril never tires of repeating that this is the whole core and essence of Incarnational theology, best illustrated in the mysteries of the Eucharist where the Incarnation is lived out among his Church on the same pattern as it was lived first in his own body as energized by the Divine Word.²⁰

So, a fully Orthodox confession can clearly assert (Cyril’s) Miaphysite phrase and the Chalcedonian definition simultaneously. In the first we confess that the Divine Word, now incarnate, is one single reality – a single *hypostasis* or person if we like – but also more than this, a single divine Lord who has formed a real and wondrously deifying Union out of his adoption of a different nature to his own eternal Godhead, in order to give back the gift of life to the dying race of mortals. This is the real meaning of Cyril’s dense but lovely Miaphysite phrase. On the other hand we can equally be (Chalcedonian) dyophysites and affirm that the Incarnate Lord has two *physeis*, even two unconfused natures or *ousiai*, but in the Incarnation made inseparably one by him, within the single divine *hypostasis* of the Word who is the sole subject of his Manhood and his Divinity unified in himself.

Is this double speak to be at once Miaphysite and Dyophysite? Not for those who understand the patristic semantics; because in the first phrase *physis* means more or less what *hypostasis* came to mean, and still means now. And in the second affirmation, in the Chalcedonian *dyophysite* lan-

guage, *physis* means no more than a set of natural attributes deductible from observation, but certainly no longer the archaic sense of ‘concrete instantiation’. Thus we affirm in the Miaphysite phrase that the Incarnate Lord is a single *hypostasis-as-physis*. And in the Chalcedonian dyophysite language we affirm that the Single Lord unites two perfectly intact natures (Godhead and Humanity) which are irrefragably and mysteriously made One in the unificative energy of his own single person (*hypostasis, prosopon* – even *physis* – but only as the latter term was understood in the time of the earlier Fathers, as a synonym of *hypostasis*).²¹ Therefore it is by no means incompatible with Orthodoxy, rather necessary for a fuller confession of the faith, to assert the correctness of both the Cyrilline Miaphysite formula and the Chalcedonian definition: *Mia physis* and *dyo-physeis*. But here we have to understand the patristic semantics properly and keep the two key issues to the fore: first that *physis* in the Miaphysite confession means ‘person’; secondly that the Chalcedonian dyophysite statement does not mean two natures abiding after the *henosis* in an unchanging static parallelism, but rather as inseparably united in the divine force of the unity of Christ’s person.

So, is the long and large falling out between the Byzantine and Oriental Orthodox all about this simple misunderstanding of how ancient words can carry different meanings and shift in nuances over the years? Yes, partly. But something else is also at stake; and, for me at least, it still carries on today in similar, less radical, ways to the root causes of the ancient debate. There was, for example, a tendency for the Alexandrian tradition to sing the song of the Incarnation in a certain key; and a tendency for the Latin West to sing it another way; and a tendency for the 4th century Syrians to sing it in another way still. And there was a recurring desire on the part of the Byzantines (I am thinking first about Proclus of Constantinople precisely but it applies also to the fathers of Chalcedon and Constantinople II)²² to try and stand in between the schools to serve as a force seeking international synodical resolution towards a universally accepted Christian semantic in an age where the key terms of confession were still fluid, and where churchmen of different traditions often had little time or patience to hear one another. Have we changed all that much? Then indeed, parts of the tradition sang their song excessively and in an unbalanced way that the universal *oikoumene* found objectionable. Diodore and Theodore and Nestorius, in Cyril’s thought, were stressing the distinction

of the natures in Christ (*physeis* or *ousiai*) so severely that he felt they had lost sight of the core necessity of sustaining the life-giving mystery of the Incarnation, which was precisely the Word's creation of a Union (*henosis*) of God and Man in himself for the sake of the Race. So it was, he believed, they passed out of legitimate differentiation of local theological styles, into the domain of destructive heresy. The protection of the mystery of the union was so important, for him, it could not be allowed to be damaged by mere surface ecumenism.

But Cyril's assent to the mediations of Proclus in the decretal 'Let the Heavens Rejoice' (Cyril's *Letter 39*), shows that he equally realized that John of Antioch was acceptably orthodox – that, unlike Nestorius, he had not fatally damaged the *henosis*. What survives now as Cyril's *Letter 39*, however, is not by his hand. It is the statement first drafted by Theodoret, proposed by John of Antioch, and mediated by Proclus and then sent on for Cyril's study and eventual agreement. *Letter 39* is hardly Cyril's own preferred way of stating the mystery of the Incarnation, therefore, but it was nevertheless his oecumenical confession that not every Antiochene (or Latin or Byzantine, or for that matter anyone who would not use precisely the same terms and phrases as himself) was a heretic. This is why Chalcedonians can (and must) affirm the 'One Enfleshed Reality (*physis*) of God the Word' with St. Cyril, and yet simultaneously, and with perfect logic affirm the 'Two sets of natural characteristics (*dyo physeis*) running together in consilience in one divine *hypostasis*' of the Chalcedonian settlement. As I have suggested earlier, this logical coherence exists for two reasons. By now the first should be obvious and need no further elaboration: the Cyrilline and Chalcedonian senses of *physis* are different. But the second reason now requires some further elaboration, and it is because Chalcedon certainly does not forget why St. Cyril found the *Mia Physis* was so useful and important in the first place, and that was because it correctly laid the Christological stress on the "mysterious making of One of two things that had not been one before" (Godhead and Humanity).

Now in all his arguments with Nestorius Cyril never ceased to repeat, in the face of the latter's accusations that he had 'confused the two natures' of Godhead and Manhood, running them together in some sort of illegitimate fusion, that this was an utterly foolish charge against him, and a position that only a theological ignoramus could possibly adopt. He refuses to spell out in any primitive ABC that Christ has an authentic humanity and

authentic deity. This he takes for granted, as do all catholic and apostolic Christians. It was never the real issue in the 5th century controversies. And this is why later Byzantine apologetic tradition flogging 'Monophysites' has had to rely so heavily on cliché, distortion and misreading of texts. In refusing to address Nestorius' real (or rhetorical) worries that he does not know the difference between God and Man, or that he imagines the Lord Incarnate is some kind of new hybrid, neither God or Man, St. Cyril instead keeps relentlessly on to the real point of the original conflict: not that he himself does not know the basics of physics (properties of natures) but rather that Nestorius seems to have forgotten the fundamental point of the mystery of Incarnation – because he has lost sight of what Chalcedon calls the *confluence to unity (henosis)* of the natural properties in the one person: the dynamic running together that is *of things which had been disparate* and which are now made one unconfusedly in the Divine Word. In the case of the Lord's Incarnation these separate things were God and Man. In our case it was the alienation of the Race from divine communion. Now in Christ the reconciliation has taken place. 'What God has joined together, therefore, let no human divide' henceforth.

Nestorius can only imagine this stress on unity in one way: a confusion of natural properties in the God-Man considered as hybrid being. Cyril tries to make it clear to him that this crude doctrine of *krasis* is by no means the only putative sense applied to the Christological union, but rather that the divine *henosis* Christ accomplishes in his Incarnation (and thus his divine Passion and Resurrection which flow out of this) is the actual *energeia* of salvation. The Christological *henosis* is not, therefore, a 'style' of doing incarnational theology (wherein we can allow Syrians to understate it, and Alexandrians to overstate it) but is actually a short-hand for the dynamic and divine transaction that takes place in the mystery of Incarnation so as to effect the salvation of the dying Race. So when Chalcedon had to be more precise than the densely suggestive *Mia Physis* phrase, and had to take the Syrian and Latin worries seriously that the Alexandrians "might have" confused the natural properties in Christ (even though this was a position all the Church had definitively set aside after Apollinaris' poor efforts), this was when the Synod spelled out as an ABC to all concerned what Cyril had thought too obvious to waste much time on: that humanity and divinity are different and distinct conditions – thus there are two *physeis* in Christ, and they are not confused, mixed up, or destroyed by

their coming together. This is what (and only what) the affirmation of two *physeis* means for the Orthodox.

But Chalcedon does not stop here, as if *Dyophysitism* does not also mean an affirmation of the *Henosis*. For it also goes on crucially to say (giving greater force than the *Tome of Leo* does, for example) that this alone does not express the mystery properly: it only rules out foolish extremes. For if one affirms two natures abiding in the Christ in such a way that they are distinct and separated (stuck together in a loose parallelism) this is wholly to neglect the fundamental Mystery of the God-Man's divine unification of the two. A unification (*henosis*) as St. Cyril never tired of saying is no more and no less than what it says. The natures have been made as one: united. They are now as one in the ongoing Union that the Word has effected with his own humanity, a unification that he has passed on to the church (in the mysteries such as eucharist and baptism) as the dynamic of its deification: for what he was by nature we can become by grace. In short the Christological union is no less than the paradigm of the reconciliation of the human race. *Henosis*, in this sense, is the very synonym for Incarnation.

This understanding of the centrality of the Union corrects those (like Nestorius) whose language tends to keep on stressing separability of natural properties. It also corrects those (like Leo in the *Tome*, who were nevertheless Orthodox) who affirmed one divine *hypostasis* as the ground of the Christological union, but carried on talking about the two natures as if they were parallel realities inside that *hypostasis* – like two belongings rattling round inside the same person who owned them both, and sometimes inhabited one of them, sometimes another. What Chalcedon meant by agreeing with Rome that the natures (*substantiae, naturae; physeis, ousiai*) were 'unchanged', is that the natures of God and Man in Christ were not altered in their *essential identities as natures* in the Christological *henosis*. So, for example, the Lord's humanity was not changed from being authentically human in its possession by the divine Logos. Nor was the eternal deity of the Logos compromised by being united with historical time-bound life after accepting birth from the Virgin. But it is clear to all who read it that the Chalcedonian *Ekthesis* is much further down the road than the *Tome of Leo* concerning the dynamic sense of the union. The *Tome* was not in fact substantially a mid fifth century document at all. It was a *pastiche* made up out of the works of Tertullian and Augustine – and thus

already massively archaic when it was sent over to the East, not least in the manner it approaches nature as properties possessed by persons. What Cyril had raised, however, was the concept of (human) nature as bounded potentiality capable of being offered new forms of existence (dynamics of change or redemption) not fixed vessels of being.

While insisting the nature as such were not altered or destroyed as a defining *physis*, Chalcedon certainly does not imply that the Human nature was not changed. To change humanity *was the entire point of the Incarnation*. We see this most clearly if for 'change in nature' (in the sense of *metamorphosis*) we substitute what the Fathers were really most interested in, namely 'the healing of fallen human nature.' To admit this kind of change does not mean that the essential nature (either of divinity or humanity) is altered or destroyed. Cyril thought the 'change' that occurred to the divine nature in the Incarnation (not *kata physin* but *kat' oikonomian*) was its sublimely humble *kenosis* considered as an act of eternal glory, not of limitation. And the 'change' that happened to the human nature was its irradiation by divine beauty and life and grace, in short its restoration: not a change *kata physin* as such, but nevertheless profoundly and ontologically a change in terms of the natural limits (*oroi*) removed from the old nature in the face of the Word's gift of immortal life; limits which had once been imposed by its collapse into *ptharsia* and death.²³

In short, the whole point of the Incarnation was that the old Adamic nature of fallen humanity needed to be healed, rescued, restored. Therefore the adoption of humanity by the divine Word meant nothing other than the re-making of the human nature. This dynamic of change in the sense of healing is what Cyril, and Chalcedon, meant by the christological *Henosis*. This Christology was not, therefore, a barren exercise in physics or mathematics (despite how it has so often and so lamentably been exegeted), but rather a song of salvific healing: how the Eternal Lord's stooping down to an earthly nature resulted in that nature being lifted up from the dust of death.

The Lord's human nature, adopted authentically by his divine self in the Incarnation, was thereby transfigured from the common status of fallen human nature into the status of none other than the human nature of the Divine Word himself: grace-filled, light-filled and restorative (all that God had once intended humanity to be). In short it became the paradigm, as the source (*arche*), of all the change that humanity can expect to receive

from the gift of deifying grace through the Incarnation. So it is most important to understand that Chalcedon's refusal to admit of change or alteration in the *physeis* by no means is tantamount to a confession of two natures after the Incarnation remaining just as they were beforehand, the change however being not in the natures as such but in the dynamic effects of the divinity permeating the mortal corruption of humanity, in order to restore it to a life-giving stasis in union with the Godhead. This is exactly what the Christological *Henosis* did for the Incarnate Lord - empowering and irradiating his authentic humanity. And this is what the Incarnation still serves to deliver to the fallen Race through the Church - the ongoing effects continuing to be felt such that believers are yet passing out of old Adamic Humanity, mortal and corruptible, and into the new Humanity of the Second Adam, full of divine blessing and life.

If Chalcedonian dyophysites do not communicate that the *Ekthesis* of 451 fully affirms this wondrous mystery of the Christological Union (*Henosis*, *Tewahedo*) as dynamic transformation in Christ, then we have wrongly exegeted the faith of Chalcedon. Those who read Chalcedon predominantly through the lens of the *Tome* (as much Catholic and Protestant theology has done for centuries) can also be guilty of hiding the light of this synodical understanding of the 'consilience to unity' under the bushel-measure of a wooden insistence on enduring authentic properties of humanity and divinity in the Incarnate Lord. But the Miaphysites are neither Apollinarists, nor Eutychians, as they have made clear on numerous occasions since the 5th century. And we ought not to keep on elevating Chalcedon and its synodical exegesis in the form of Constantinople II (553) as if it were merely a slapping down of these two heretics. It is so much more.

But Constantinople II has been largely ignored by the Western Chalcedonians, to their great disadvantage in soteriological theory. And as a clarification of the true intent of 451 it has also been overlooked in the Oriental Orthodox traditions. As a result the Byzantine Chalcedonian tradition has not been properly appreciated for the power it has to correct the wooden dyophysitism of such approaches as Leo's *Tome*, and yet meet the insistence of the Miaphysites that the whole mystery hangs on the affirmation of *henosis* as a dynamic. The critically important Chalcedonian phrase that the abiding natures (divine and human) are (after the *henosis* takes place) *gnorizomenon*, that is recognized by mental affirmation only,²⁴ does not

mean that they henceforth exist only in 'theory' not in reality, as has often been imputed by those who have not exegeted the text carefully. It means rather that the Christian mind will always confess in Christ, the difference between his humanity and his divinity – not least because in this confession it understands why the Church worships Jesus as God, and can also witness Jesus himself bowing the knee before his Father, and addressing Him as his God. But even so, after the divine mystery of the Word making the human nature his own in such an intimate way as to be truly described as a *henosis*, there is no fruit in harping on an obvious point (that divinity is differentiated from humanity) when a great wonder is taking place before our eyes: that in his own Incarnation the Word has made the two natures inseparable (unconfusedly) as one, because this unifying power is none other than the reconciliation of the ontological faults that caused our mortal falling away from God. We confess the Union, therefore, as I have said before, not as an exercise in physics, but rather as a mystical experience of regaining immortality in Christ. It is one of the great tragedies of Chalcedonian thought that so much effort has been spent on the mathematics of a mystery, and so little on exegeting the dynamic of the 'consilience to unity' that is the *energeia* of salvation in Christ.

It is this clear confession how Chalcedon corresponds faithfully with Cyrilline thought which may encourage our separated Oriental Orthodox brothers and sisters to trust us when we say that the Cyrilline *Mia Physis* and the Chalcedonian *Ekthesis* are really saying the same things. Given that clarification, we might be able to move on from centuries of mutual mishearing, to begin to address the really divisive theological issues that continue to divide us, not least what constitutes synodical oecumenicity, but essentially how that relates to the patristic *phronema* which we all jointly venerate.

Notes

- ¹ His uncle Archbishop Theophilus had involved him in the oppression of the Egyptian Origenists, in the case of the Tall Brothers, and the deposition of Chrysostom at the Synod of the Oak.
- ² For a broader range of his vivid images of the Christological Union see McGuckin (1994) 196-207; McKinion (2004).
- ³ Denis Pétau (Petavius), *In Quo De Incarnatione Verbi Agitur*. Bk. 4.4.4. of the: *Theologicorum Dogmatum*. Paris 1650. Newman abridges the argument in his *Tracts Theological and Ecclesiastical*, No. 4.
- ⁴ c.f. G Voisin, *L'Apollinarianisme*. Louvain 1901, 152, 188; H Lietzmann, *Apollinaris von Laodicea und seine Schule*. Tübingen 1904. Vol. 1, 103f.
- ⁵ It appears in one of the last of his works: *The Quod Unus Sit Christus*. See McGuckin (1995).
- ⁶ This realization came to him after face to face discussions with moderate Oriental bishops at Ephesus. The change in conception is visible in the 1st and 2nd *Letters to Succensus* and the *Letter to Eulogius* where Cyril justifies the purposes of the *Mia Physis* language as insisting with great force on the singleness of divine subjectivity in Christ.
- ⁷ Cyril, *Defence of the Anathemas Against the Orientals*. PG 76, 401. 'Thus there is only one nature (*physis*) of the Word, or *hypostasis* if you prefer, and that is the Word himself.' In the *Third Letter to Nestorius* (para 8) Cyril actually alters the *Mia Physis* phrase to this: 'This is why all the sayings in the Gospels are to be attributed to the one *prosopon* and to the one enfleshed *hypostasis* of the Word.'
- ⁸ We must not presume at the early stage of the Cyril-Nestorius arguments that the term *hypostasis* signified psychic personality as connoted by the modern term 'person'; and so we would do better being extremely careful about making that ancient-modern semantic equivalent (as is so often done carelessly in text books). Cyril uses it as a delineating term. In some of his early texts it signifies a substantive reality (equivalent to the common meaning of *physis* as 'nature', and consonant with its own semantic origins from the terms *hypo* (beneath) and *stasis* (what stands), thus the literal equivalent of the Latin *sub-stantia*). But in later texts it connotes a subjective instantiation (closer to what we would mean by a person-subject). If the modern notion of personhood and subjectival action had been available at the time, the Fathers of this era would not have had such laborious work in actually creating the semantic of subjectival personhood for Western philosophy. As it was the Christological dispute is all about finding the correct new-terms (for at the end of the argument these antique philosophical terms become neologisms in the hands of the Fathers) to work in a world where personhood had so far been only an 'accidental' category, and where they were intent on moving it to the category of ontological substantives, so as to bear the weight of divine confession.

- ⁹ When Apollinaris used the *Mia physis* language he actually did mean that there was a fusion of natural properties as the divine Logos absorbed humanity into his own life. This model of divine absorption failed to do justice to the Church's theology of the divine 'assumption' of humanity, and so Apollinaris usually talked about the adoption of flesh. By the *Mia Physis* Apollinaris meant that the adopted flesh formed 'one natural reality' with the Logos, that is, that it was ontologically and naturally (*synousiomene kai symphytos*) united with him (H. Lietzmann, *Apollinaris von Laodicea und seine Schule*. Tübingen 1904, 257-260). As Gregory the Theologian and others pointed out this made the Incarnation a mechanical affair 'under compulsion'. Nothing could be further removed from Cyril's intentionality to restore the sense of divine freedom in the Incarnation seen as divine liberation of the Race.
- ¹⁰ That is Nestorius notes how Cyril uses *physis* and *hypostasis* as synonyms – but thinks (wrongly) that for Cyril they are synonyms of *ousia* (essential nature) whereas they are really indicators of individuation.
- ¹¹ Nestorius, *The Theopaschites*. (fragm.) preserved in Severus of Antioch, *Contra Grammaticos* 2.32. Tr. J. Lebon. CSCO 112, 192.
- ¹² Athanasius at first did not find the *homoousion* formula to be all that useful. He preferred *Tautotes tes ousias* to convey the essential point of the deity of the Logos. But when he realized the word's utility in flushing out Arian sympathies, he applied it vigorously.
- ¹³ Cyril, *Scholia on the Incarnation*. PG 75, 1385; *Second letter to Nestorius*, para 3.
- ¹⁴ Cyril, *Second Letter to Succensus* 3. McGuckin 1994, 361.
- ¹⁵ If, that is, we are to understand the classification of 'Monophysite' as an effort to try and categorize the theology of the opponent, instead of just labeling 'as opponent' those who refused the acknowledgement of Chalcedon 451 as an oecumenical council, that itself being sufficient offence to place them in the heresiology lists without further intellectual engagement.
- ¹⁶ Chalcedon 451 and Constantinople 553.
- ¹⁷ The *Tome of Leo* was assembled to bang it on the head as much as to confute Nestorianism – though the Confession of Chalcedon corrects the Leonine emphases in many respects, and accepts the *Tome fundamentally as it accords with Cyril's confession of faith*, which is the more fully elaborated basis of the actual Chalcedonian *Ekthesis* and solution, and why the conciliar Fathers would not accept the *Tome* as a stand-alone confession for use in the universal church which is what the Pope wanted at Ephesus 449 and Chalcedon 451. In short, Chalcedon unites Rome with the wider universal tradition, just as it was attempting to unite Syria and Alexandria – on the basis of the *phronema patrum*: the patristic mind. The Latin reception of Chalcedon, however, has always been one that elevates the *Tome* to the forefront and Cyril to be background and, thus, a somewhat unbalanced exegesis of the Chalcedonian settlement as a whole. The *Ekthesis* of Constantinople 553, which was meant to correct the perceived imbalance, was hardly adopted at Rome, and thus one has to admit that there are several forms of 'Chalcedonianism' still operative in the Church's under-

standing: particularly the Byzantine one which reads the *Ekthesis* through St. Cyril, subordinating Leo's confession to that end and rephrasing Chalcedon in the form of Constantinople II; the Latin traditional reading which elevates Leo as the full exegesis of the *Ekthesis* of 451; and the later Miaphysite reading which interprets it, through the lens of Leo and finds the continuing affirmation of *two physeis* tantamount (if not to Nestorianism) then to a denial of the true impact of the Christological *Henosis* – the coming together of the two natures to be as One.

¹⁸ Cyril, *Letter* 39.

¹⁹ Lit. 'For He was inhominated, the he might divinize us.' *De Incarnatione* 54.3. PG 25, 192B

²⁰ Further see Gebremedhin 1977.

²¹ Of course the Chalcedonian fathers, by the time of the 5th century, thought it best to stop using *physis* in this context because of too many confusing associations with *ousia*. Their laying aside of this archaic language therefore became a synodical sign that though it was Orthodox it was not suitable for the universal (Oecumenical) confession of the Orthodox churches.

²² Because it was part of the perceived vocation of the *Basileus* to foster, sustain, protect, preserve and repair a single Orthodoxy across the whole of the Empire; a vocation that was expressed through the efforts of the Constantino-politan archiepiscopal chancery, or by the summoning of large councils by imperial *sacra*.

²³ *Ptharsia* and the fall of humanity into death, because of sin and the loss of the life-giving divine vision, is the key term of Athanasius' Christology of redemption as set out in his great treatise *De Incarnatione*.

²⁴ The two natures thus abide in the way the intellect acknowledges them as distinct things – but now inseparably united – that is, made one. The *gnorizomenon* here is essentially the same as the 'notional scrutiny' (*oson men heken eis ennoian*) of Cyril's *First Letter to Succensus*. Chalcedon's *Ekthesis* is disastrously exegeted if it is read (as is the longstanding Latin custom) through the lens of Leo's *Tome*. On the contrary it is accepting Leo's *Tome* as orthodox, but limited. In other words the synodical *Ekthesis* stands as a corrective of Leo. Cyril himself actually provides all the fundamental elements of the Chalcedonian settlement in his *First Letter to Succensus* 6-7: 'And so we unite the Word of God the Father to the holy flesh endowed with a rational soul, in an ineffable manner that transcends understanding, without confusion (*asynchytos*), without change (*atreptos*), and without alteration (*ametabatos*); and we thereby confess One Son and Christ and Lord. The same one God and Man. As to the manner of the Incarnation of the Only Begotten, then theoretically speaking (but only in so far as it appears to the eyes of the soul) we would admit that there are two united natures, but only one Christ and Son and Lord, the Word of God made man and made flesh.'

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Tiivistelmä

John McGuckin, *Pyhän Kyrillos Aleksandrialaisen miafysiittinen kristologia ja kalkedonilainen dyofysitismi*

Kyrillos Aleksandrialaisen (378–444) varhaistuotannossaan käyttämä kristologinen määritelmä *mia physis tou theou logou sesarkomene* ("Jumalan Sanan yksi lihaksitullut luonto") yhdistää ei-kalkedonilaiset (orientaaliset) kirkot kalkedonilaisiin. Näin on siitä huolimatta, että ei-kalkedonilaiset ovat perinteisesti olleet sitä mieltä, että Kalkedonin kirkolliskokous 451 kieltää Kyrilloksen määritelmän hyväksymällä määritelmän "yksi *hypostasis* kahdessa luonnossa".

Erillään olevien ortodoksisten kirkollisten perinteiden lähentymiselle on sen takia ratkaisevan tärkeää, että kalkedonilaiset kirkot pystyvät selittämään ei-kalkedonilaisille kirkoille, miten Kalkedonin hyväksymä dyofysitismi on sovittavissa Kyrilloksen miafysiittisen kristologian kanssa. Samalla kalkedonilaiset voivat puolestaan ymmärtää, etteivät ei-kalkedonilaiset välttämättä ole monofysittejä, vaan että hyväksymällä Kyrilloksen miafysitismien he pysyvät ortodoksisessa perinteessä. Kyrilloksen määritelmän oikea tulkinta on myös tärkeä suhteessa ns. nestorilaiseen kirkkoon. Nestorios piti määritelmää apollinaristisena, toisin sanoen ymmärtäen, että siinä jumalallinen ja inhimillinen luonto Kristuksessa muodostavat jonkinlaisen sekaluonnon.

Kyrillos lähtee liikkeelle aleksandrialaisesta koulukunnan perustalta. Athanasios Suuri (296–373) oli näissä kysymyksissä ollut tärkein auktoriteetti. Athanasioksen jälkeen keskustelun painopiste oli siirtynyt Kristuksen jumalallisen luonnon teemasta kysymyksen hänen subjektiivisesta persoonallisuudestaan. Kyrillos oli uudessa tilanteessa valmis hyväksymään vaihtoehtoisia kristologisia ilmaisumuotoja, mutta arvioi niitä linjassa Athanasiokseen. Hän koki, että Theodoros Mopsuestialaisen jälkeen syyrialainen perinne oli astunut hyväksyttävissä olevan moninaisuuden ulkopuolelle.

Kyrilloksen määritelmä oli itse asiassa peräisin Apollinariokselta. Kun tämän lisäksi termin 'luonto' (*fysis*) merkitys oli alkanut muuttua tarkoittamaan tiettyä luontoa ominaisuuksineen – ts. samaa kuin mistä alettiin yhä enemmän käyttää termiä *ousia* – Kyrillos selitti: "Näin ollen on vain yksi Jumalan luonto (*fysis*), tai *hypostasis* jos haluat, ja tämä on itse Sana". Kyrilloksen määritelmässä termiä 'luonto' (*fysis*) siis käytetään samassa merkityksessä kuin *hypostasis* Kalkedonin määritelmässä.

Kyrilloksen määritelmä ei tarkoita, etteivätkö jumalallinen ja inhimillinen luonto pysyisi Kristuksessa. Määritelmällään Kyrillos haluaa kuitenkin alleviivata, että Kristus on yksi ja sama ennen lihaksitulemistaan ja sen jälkeen. Ilmaisuuksella "yksi luonto" tarkoitetaan yhtä, konkreettista todellisuutta.

Kyrilloksen määritelmä käännetään joskus "lihaksitulle Jumalan Sanan yksi luonto". Tämä on itse asiassa Eutykhioksen ilmaisu (*mia physis tou theou logou sesarkomenou*) ja oikeata monofysitismia. Määritelmä ymmärretään toisinaan edelleen

Eutykhioksen määritelmän valossa. Tästä johtuen kalkedonilaiset kristityt pitävät historian miafysiittejä (kuten Dioskuros Aleksandrialaista ja Severios Antiokialaista) monofysiitteinä.

Kyrillos tarkoitti, että Jumalan Sana on omaksunut inhimillisyyden, ei että Sana on muuttunut (jumal-)lihaksi. Sana on lihaksitulleena yksi konkreettinen todellisuus (vrt. *persoona*). Kalkedon päätyi omaan määritelmään samaa tarkoittaen: jumalallinen ja inhimillinen luonto ovat yhdistyneet (*henosis*). Yhdistymisen jälkeen luonnot eivät pysy staattisina ”vierekkäin” tai erillään. Vaikka ne eivät sekoitu toisiinsa, ne ovat kuitenkin yhdistyneet erottamattomasti Kristuksen persoonan yhteyden voimasta.

Sen takia Kalkedonin kirkolliskokous ei hyväksynyt Rooman paavi Leon *Tomosta* sellaisenaan vaan sitä tulkittiin yhteensopivana Kyrilloksen ajattelun kanssa. Konstantinopolin toinen kirkolliskokous (553) jatkoi samalla linjalla. Ei-kalkedonilaiset ovat tulkinneet Kalkedonin päätöstä liian yksipuolisesti Leon *Tomoksen* mukaisesti ja sen takia pitäneet päätöstä lähellä sellaista dyofysitismiä, joka kieltää luontojen todellisen yhdistymisen. Leon *Tomos* ei kuitenkaan tue tällaista päätelmää. Sen sijaan Kyrilloksen määritelmä ”yhdestä lihaksitulleesta luonnosta” on lähellä Kalkedonin ja Konstantinopoli II:n intentioita, tavoiteltiinhan kirkolliskokousten päätöksissä selkeää ilmausta Jumalan Sanan lihaksi tulemisen todelliselle ihmeelle: että jumaluus ja ihmisuus ovat Kristuksessa tulleet yhdeksi todellisuudeksi. Jos korostetaan liiaksi kahden luonnon pysymistä (erillään) Sanan lihaksi tulemisen jälkeen, pelastuksen mysteeri hämärtyy. Vaikka Kalkedon vahvistaa, etteivät luonnot lakkaa olemasta inkarnaatiossa, se ei silti väitä, etteikö inhimillinen luonto sen seurauksena muuttuisi. Inkarnaation tarkoitushan oli juuri siinä, että inhimillinen luonto vapautuisi turmeluksesta ja muuttuisi osallistumalla Jumalan armosta, elämästä ja kauneudesta. Kalkedonin korostama *henosis* viittaa juuri tähän ja on tällä tavoin uskollinen Kyrilloksen määritelmälle ”Jumalan Sanan yksi lihaksitullut luonto”.