INTRODUCTION

The two centuries that separate the meeting of the Council of Ephesus in 431 from the Arab invasions have a vital place in the history of the Mediterranean peoples. On the one hand, they witness the magnificent achievement of Justinian in reuniting for a moment the whole Mediterranean world in a single religion and civilisation; on the other, they reflect the slow working out of the religious, political and social tensions that made Justinian's ideals incapable of fulfilment. In the end the northern and southern halves of the Mediterranean were to be divided between Christian and Arab-Moslem, while in the territories retained by the Christians, east and west were to go their separate ways.

In these developments the passionate religious controversy following the Council of Chalcedon in 451 played a primary role. The Byzantine Empire was a church state. Already by the reign of Theodosius II (408–50) the imperial monarchy and the church represented an integrated structure of society in which the secular and religious formed a single whole. The civilised world corresponded to Christendom and its sole ruler was the emperor at Constantinople. In the provinces, people felt that whether they were Egyptians, Syrians or Illyrians by birth they belonged to 'the race of Christians', distinct from Jews and barbarians, assured of their own destiny under Providence. This solidarity reflected in unswerving allegiance to the 'God-loving' or 'orthodox' emperor was a significant factor in the survival of the east Roman provinces from attacks by external enemies in the fifth century.

Within the framework of religious unity, however, the church was being subjected to increasingly severe strains. Christianity was in origin a religion preached in an Aramaic and non-Classical medium. How were its truths to be interpreted in the context of traditional Greek philosophy in which the great majority of the Christian leaders had been educated, but which the mass of the Christians particularly in Egypt and Syria were finding an increasingly alien medium? Moreover, the four eastern patriarchates, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and (after 451) Jerusalem, coincided with territories that possessed their own distinctive histories, cultures and ecclesiastical traditions, and this facilitated the emergence of regional bias in what ostensibly were purely ecclesiastical problems. In

the background, too, lay the perpetual clash between the collegial outlook of the eastern patriarchates based on their autocephalous relationship to each other and the authoritative and authoritarian claims of the Roman see grounded in the belief that the living voice of Peter spoke through his successors, the popes.

At the Council of Chalcedon these latent divisions came to a head. The council's decision representing an alliance between Rome and Constantinople, that Christ was to be acknowledged as existing in two natures inseparably united, was bitterly opposed in Egypt from the outset and increasingly so in most of Syria, on the grounds that there could only be one reality or nature, namely the divine nature, in the incarnate Christ. He could be 'out of two natures' but not 'in two natures'. This movement of opposition has become known to history, though not to contemporaries, as Monophysitism. Our problem here has been to study its development in the two centuries following Chalcedon. Despite the wearisome doctrinal hairsplitting that much of its history involves, it also seems to provide the main clue to the ultimate failure of the east Roman emperors to continue the work of the Hellenistic monarchies and their own pagan predecessors to weld the diverse peoples of their empire into an homogeneous whole. In a few years during the seventh century the Arabs succeeded in dismembering a large portion of the empire where the Huns and Persians had failed. Why?

In this survey, therefore, an attempt has been made to see beyond the exasperation of both contemporary and modern critics who would relegate the whole religious issue to a 'quarrel about words',[1] and at the same time to look carefully at the arguments of those who conclude perhaps too easily that 'Monophysitism became a symbol of the separatist movements in Syria, Egypt and Armenia'.[2] Regional identity does not necessarily imply separatism. The wise study by A. H. M. Jones, 'Were the ancient heresies national or social movements in disguise?',[3]

[1] Thus M. Jugie's summing up, 'Monophysitism' was 'moins une hérésie qu'un schisme, moins une controverse de doctrine, qu'une querelle de mots', in 'La Primauté romaine d'après les premiers théologiens monophysites', *Echos de l'Orient* 33, 1934, p. 181. Compare J. Maspero's view that 'Monophysitism was not a heresy, but merely a schismatic intention', in his *Histoire des patriarches d'Alexandrie* (Paris, 1923), p. 11. For a contemporary view to the same effect see Evagrius, *HE* II. 5, or John of Damascus (*c.* 750 A.D.), *De haeresibus* 83.

[2] A. N. Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century* (Amsterdam, 1968), p. 4.

[3] *JTS*, n.s. 10. 2, 1959, pp. 280–98.

warns against too ready an acceptance of the 'nationalist' approach to the study of non-orthodox movements, especially in the east Roman provinces.

At the same time a study of the Monophysites cannot be confined to the history of Christian doctrine. The issues raised by the councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon touched on many, perhaps nearly all, aspects of the relations between government and governed in the east Roman provinces in the fifth and sixth centuries. Religion was the medium through which this relationship was expressed both in its harmony and its dissent. Indeed, it was the only medium that would have been understood at this period. Nearly all the art, much of the finest architecture and a great deal of the literature of the times were inspired by religion. It was the work of men, whether clerical or lay, working in the interest of Christianity to win victory for the people of God and its rulers over demonic forces represented by paganism, schism and civil disorder. Through the whole range of society the line between secular and lay was finely drawn. Justinian was not a mere amateur theologian but a ruler whose chief concern was his own and his subjects' right religion, and who immersed himself in the doctrinal questions of the day to become no mean performer in the intricate logic by which Chalcedon was defended in the interests of the patriarchate of the capital and the unity of *Romania*. The Emperor Anastasius (491–518) was personally a deeply religious man and had been actually short-listed as patriarch of Antioch three years before he became emperor.[1] His nephew John, Justin I's rival for the throne in 518, found himself metropolitan of Heraclea. Justin himself appointed his former military commander (*comes Orientis*) Ephraim to be patriarch of Antioch in 526, and a vigorous choice he was, during his eighteen years in that see. One of Justinian's more curious appointments was that of Photion, described as a 'monk of high rank', to command the levies used to put down the revolt of the Samaritans in 564.[2] The list of high officials who end their days as churchmen, and churchmen who conduct affairs of state, is a long one. They include many of the great men of the day, from Cyrus the prefect under Theodosius II, who became for a short time bishop of Cotiaeum in Phrygia,[3] to Constantine of

[1] Theophanes, *Chron.* A.M. 5982.

[2] John of Nikiou, *Chron.* (ed. Charles), ch. 95. 17.

[3] Cyrus had originally been a pagan but had been forced to convert to Christianity by the emperor (Theophanes, *Chron.* A.M. 5937). Other fallen ministers less lucky could find themselves ordained deacon (John Malalas, *Chron.* XVIII. 184).

Laodicea, a one-time *magister militum* who for a decade or so (540–50) was a sort of Monophysite pro-patriarch of Antioch, and Dometianus, archbishop of Melitene, who achieved a role something like that of Chief Minister in the reign of Maurice. The tendency is perhaps summed up in the person of 'Cyrus the Caucasian' whom Heraclius appointed as the governor as well as orthodox patriarch of Alexandria in 631. He epitomises the interlocking of the concepts themselves of the Christian church and Byzantine state. When eleven years later he capitulated to the Arabs and sailed away from Alexandria, an era of Mediterranean history had come to an end.

These trends found their response among the people as a whole. From the middle of the fourth century public and private life was coloured by religion, indeed the more abstruse the doctrine in question the livelier the public interest. The well-known expostulation by Gregory of Nyssa about the level at which theology was discussed in the capital was typical of the situation, and was made in a sermon devoted to doctrinal issues.[1] 'If in this city [Constantinople] one asks anyone for change, he will discuss with you whether the Son is begotten or unbegotten. If you ask about the quality of the bread you will receive the answer, "the Father is greater, the Son is less". If you suggest a bath is desirable, you will be told "there was nothing before the Son was created".' This familiar text is confirmed, however, by other evidence from the capital. A decade later, about 390, we find the Arians there split over the issue of whether it was right to call God 'Father' when referring to the time when 'Christ was not'. The point was hotly disputed, and those who believed that there was a time when the term Father was inappropriate took their name Psathyrians from an ardent supporter who spent his spare time selling crumbly cakes (*psathyropoles*).[2] The concern for theological questions was indeed world-wide. In almost every village in Syria there would be monks to keep discussion going, waxing the more fanatical as the issues became less intelligible. In the west also, theological debates provided public spectacles; on 22 August 392 Augustine's controversy with his old friend, the Manichee Fortunatus, was brought to a halt by demonstrations in the crowded ranks of the spectators.[3] Even in the midst of the barbarians' invasions two decades later Pelagianism was being argued in many provinces in the west.

[1] *De filii deitate*, *PG* 46, col. 557.

[2] Philostorgius, *HE* II. 15; Socrates, *HE* V. 23.

[3] Augustine, *Contra Fortunatum* I. 19 (*PL* 42, col. 121).

In this era of deep and avid theological inquiry Chalcedon assumes overwhelming importance. The two centuries of Byzantine history that follow may be regarded as a long aftermath, ended only when the success of the Arabs in conquering Egypt and Syria rendered efforts to find doctrinal compromises academic. The story unfolds slowly. There could be no greater mistake than to think that the opponents of Chalcedon formed a separate church from the outset; indeed, 'Monophysitism' is relatively a modern concept. No one used the term in the period with which we are dealing. To the emperors, opponents of Chalcedon were the 'Hesitants', the *diakrinomenoi*, those who 'had reservations' about accepting its definition. Orthodox clergy and laymen often found their position baffling. As the Patriarch John the Faster (582–95) complained in the reign of Maurice, their doctrines were irreproachable yet they would not communicate with Chalcedonians.[1] In moments of impatience, as after the ending of the Acacian schism in 518, the opposition became 'dissidents' (*aposchistae*) or more sinister, the 'headless ones' (*acephaloi*), referring to the apparent anonymity of their leadership. Though I use the term 'Monophysite' in this work I do so mainly to avoid circumlocutions; but it is only apt as a description of the anti-Chalcedonians after the establishment of a separate Monophysite hierarchy in the second half of Justinian's reign.

Even this move was undertaken with extreme reluctance. Severus and his colleagues were forced into it by the circumstances of the persecution in Justin's reign. Fifty years later, however, in *circa* 600, the Monophysite 'empire' stretched almost unbroken from the Black Sea, down Rome's eastern frontier with Persia, thence to Egypt and the Nile valley to Ethiopia, a vast expanse of territory, greater than that covered by Latin and orthodox Christianity combined. This Monophysite tradition became the tradition of the Armenian, Jacobite, Coptic, Nubian and Ethiopian churches, and insofar as these have survived they have continued to be loyal to it. At the outset, however, except in Egypt, it would be hazardous to see Monophysitism as an expression of regionalism on the part of the non-Hellenistic provincials. Ultimately it developed in that direction, but study of the evidence even in the relative detail attempted here reveals that Monophysitism owed little of its initial impulse as a reaction against Chalcedon to non-religious factors. It is not true, for instance, that 'at an early period in their history the Monophysites and Nestorians attracted to

[1] John of Ephesus, *HE* (Part iii) III. 12 (ed. Brooks, *CSCO* III. 3, p. 102).

themselves the Semitic population of the eastern provinces of the Roman empire who found in their adherence to a schismatic church an opportunity of expressing hatred of foreign rule'.[1] There was no 'Monophysite church' for nearly a century after Chalcedon, and in the early stages of the movement the Hellenistic element was just as prominent as the native. Neither Cyril nor his 'Monophysite' successors were Copts, nor was Severus of Antioch a Syrian. The issue at the back of their minds and those of their followers was whether the life-giving elements of the Eucharist had been dispensed by a cleric who had a truly orthodox attitude towards religion, and Chalcedon was not truly orthodox. Even in Egypt, the amalgamation of resentment against ecclesiastical rule from Constantinople and Alexandrian and Egyptian particularist feeling was slow to develop. Elsewhere it was centuries before Monophysites would express themselves in words attributed to the Armenian Catholicus, Gregorius VII (1293–1307), 'We are prepared rather to be in hell with our fathers than ascend to heaven with the Romans'.

In this respect the contrast with the history of the Donatist schism in the west is instructive. Whereas the Donatists questioned the right of the emperor to intervene in ecclesiastical affairs and their movement derived its strength largely from the single province of Numidia, the Monophysites invited it. The emperor's sovereignty embraced the government of both church and state in imitation of his Master, the divine Word. They abhorred the very idea of provincial separatism, schism and rebellion. Their object, down even to the eve of the Arab invasions, was to persuade the emperor to renounce Chalcedon and accept the Christology of Cyril as interpreted by them. Even the great Monophysite missionary, James Bar'adai (d. 578), who was responsible more than anyone else for the establishment of a permanent Monophysite church, would have been willing to return to communion with the emperor on the latter's rejection of Chalcedon, or even his acceptance of the *Henotikon* of Zeno understood in the sense of cancelling the synod.[2]

The final parting, therefore, between the adherents of Chalcedon and the Monophysites was only gradually brought about. The landmarks are the *Henotikon* of Zeno in 482, followed by the Acacian schism between Rome and Constantinople lasting from 484 to 519, the election of Severus

[1] T. W. Arnold, 'The pictorial art of the Jacobite and Nestorian Churches', *BZ* 30, 1929–30, p. 596.

[2] See below, p. 319.

to the patriarchate of Antioch in 512, and the persecution of the anti-Chalcedonians in Syria in 519 and even more violently in 532 and 536. Each time hopes of reunification became more slender and the tone of polemic more abrasive as the doctrinal differences between the two sides became harder to define. The experts became the more rancorous because they were convinced that it was possible to achieve agreement on a shared body of doctrine. Only after the death of the Empress Theodora in June 548, however, was hope abandoned of an 'orthodox emperor' who would restore Second Ephesus ('the Robber Council') as symbol of orthodoxy and dethrone Chalcedon. After that, the establishment of an episcopate and clergy in direct opposition to the Chalcedonian grew apace, but even in the early years of Justin II's reign the two communities came within an ace of agreement. One cannot say that political rejection of Byzantium was inevitable before the failure of the Emperor Maurice's policy of coercion.

In this work I have followed the beaten track established by the past generation of Continental and British scholars. The essays contained in the first two volumes of A. Grillmeier and H. Bacht's work commemorating the 1,500th anniversary of Chalcedon must be the starting point of any research. I am indebted also to the encyclopaedic studies of Eduard Schwartz, especially for the chronology and elucidation of events in the complicated period from the accession of Leo I to the end of the Acacian schism. To R. V. Sellers, *The Council of Chalcedon*, I owe many insights, particularly those relating to the period leading up to Chalcedon. To the works of R. Draguet and A. de Halleux I owe guidance towards understanding the doctrinal intricacies of the Monophysite position, and to E. Honigmann's detailed surveys of the bishoprics and bishops in the patriarchate of Antioch, some grasp of the actual distribution of Chalcedonian and Monophysite opinion in the sixth century.

The present work claims to be no more than a survey. Tchalenko's classic study of the north Syrian villages shows what can be done in the field to demonstrate the connection between religious attitudes and livelihoods of the inhabitants in a specific area.[1] More of the same kind of work is needed before one will be in a position to say why one area of the Byzantine Empire preferred Monophysitism to Chalcedon and vice versa. For instance, why should the province of Pamphylia in southern Asia Minor be described by John of Ephesus as having been 'ex initio' 'orthodox'

[1] G. Tchalenko, *Villages antiques de la Syrie du Nord* (Paris, 1953–8).

(i.e. Monophysite)?[1] Was it the commanding personality of the powerful metropolitan, Amphilochius of Side, the only prelate who voted 'the wrong way' in Leo I's plebiscite concerning Chalcedon and Timothy the Cat, or did he represent merely the *genius loci* derived from the province being dominated by its monasteries and villages (*pagi*)? Why, moreover, should Pamphylia have been a hotbed of the Tritheist brand of Monophysitism and the whole province characterised by popular religious zeal? Similarly, the island of Chios: why should this island have been singled out as the seat of John, one of James Bar'adai's bishops? One would give much for more documents such as Athanasius of Nisibis' collection of Severus of Antioch's letters, which shed so much light on obscure local situations that often played a great part in influencing opinions for or against Chalcedon. At the moment one must accept one's authorities and wait for the archaeologist and student of prosopography to provide more evidence on the ground.

The historian is always dealing with incomplete evidence. His assessment of the facts as he finds them must reflect to a large extent the ideas of his own age. The questions he asks, however, may have a longer validity. How did the development of Monophysitism affect the relations between the Greek and Latin-speaking worlds? What light can be thrown on the breakdown of confidence that led to the Monophysites preferring Moslem to Byzantine rule? How did Monophysitism emerge by the end of the sixth century to become a third religious force in the Mediterranean world distinct from both Latin and orthodox Christianity? What factors, if any, lay behind this debate about seemingly unanswerable trivialities? These are questions of interest to the historian of Europe as well as to the specialist in Christian doctrine. Some attempt at answering them was made in the lectures on which this book is based.

[1] John of Ephesus, *HE* v. 6.