St Cyril of Alexandria

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Part 1

Welcome back brothers and sisters in St. Dominic

Let me introduce to you St. Cyril of Alexandria. He was born in Egypt in the 370's during a very volatile period of Church history. These were the years after the great persecution of the Church had ceased, and the great debates over the dogmas of our faith began, especially in the debates over how to describe Jesus Christ. St. Cyril's icons usually show him (as in this picture) with his head covered in the manner of the Egyptian monastics. Sometimes the head covering has a POLYSTAVRION pattern as is seen here. He is usually depicted holding a gospel book or scroll. He's often pictured in the vestments of a Bishop, alongside the Blessed Virgin holding the child Jesus.

St. Cyril is also called "the pillar of faith", "Seal of the Fathers", Bishop of Alexandria, confessor, Teacher of the faith, and in the Catholic Church - Doctor of the Church. His feast day is June 27th. Little is known for certain about his early life. He is the nephew of THEOPHILUS, who was the patriarch of Alexandria from 385 to 412. Under Theophilus's guidance St. Cyril received a good education. Cyril also spent 5 years in the desert of NITRIA studying the Holy Scriptures under ST. MACARIUS, ST. SERAPION, and his future mentor ST. ISADORE. His early education and the influence of his uncle Theophilus prepared St. Cyril for his role as a defender of the faith. In 403 Cyril accompanied his uncle to attend the Synod of the Oak in Constantinople, which deposed St. John Chrysostom.

The prior year in 402, Theophilus had been summoned by the Emperor to Constantinople to apologize before a synod over which St. John Chrysostom would preside on account of several charges that were brought against Theophilus by certain Egyptian monks. Theophilus had marched against the monks, burned their dwellings and ill treated those whom he captured. At the Synod of the Oak, a year later, Theophilus drafted a long list of largely unfounded accusations against St. John Chrysostom and St. John was deposed. I can understand if these events seem very unChristian like but its crucial to understand and remember that these were the years the great debates of our faith began. The cities of Alexandria, Antioch and Constantinople became bitter rivals. There were long standing rivalries between the 3 churches. Christianity in Antioch and Alexandria had long predated the Church in Constantinople.

In the 50 years between the 2nd ecumenical Council in Constantinople and the 3rd ecumenical Council in Ephesus in 431, rivalries continued over a mixture of doctrinal discussions and ecclesiastical authority. The rivals were often exacerbated by rivalries between bishops with popular personalities and energetic supporters. One big problem for Cyril was canon #3 of the result from the council of Constantinople in 381 which affirmed that the Bishop of Constantinople was to be respected as the highest church authority besides the Bishop of Rome. The preference of

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Constantinople gave the appearance of sibling rivalry in which the youngest of 3 brothers was given priority.

Problems between Alexandria and Constantinople centered on an intense power struggle for ecclesiastical dominance, theological supremacy, and imperial favour.

There were also various controversies in Alexandria the city itself. It was a cosmopolitan hub, rich in culture and conflict. It was an established ancient centre for Christianity and resented the rapid rise of Constantinople as the new "second capital" and top church authority. Alexandria, a center of learning, and philosophical traditions became a focal point of religious and political tensions.

Theophilus died in 412 and Cyril was immediately made the new Patriarch of Alexandria. Thus, Cyril followed his uncle in a position that had become powerful and influential. There were frequent violent conflicts between Alexandria's pagan and Jewish and Christian inhabitants. St. Cyril had to navigate many conflicts in Alexandria, as well as work with Antioch and Constantinople.

In 427, the Antiochean Nestorius became the new Patriarch of Constantinople and his heretical teaching soon became known to Cyril. Nestorius had argued that Mary was neither a "Mother of Man" nor "Mother of God" as these referred to Christ's 2 natures, rather, Nestorius said Mary was the Mother of Christ, the Christokos. The controversy centered on the issue of Christ's suffering. Cyril maintained that the son of God truly suffered in "the flesh". Nestorius however claimed the Son of God was altogether incapable of suffering, even within his union with the flesh. There began a series of letters between Cyril and Nestorius which gradually became more strident in tone.

Cyril related all that occurred to Pope St. Celestine and begged him to do what he saw fit. Finally Emperor Theodosius 2nd convoked the Council of Ephesus in 431 to solve the dispute. Cyril was appointed president of the Council and chose the venue of Ephesus since it supported the veneration of Mary.

Before I get into the Council of Ephesus, I would like to discuss Cyril's adequacy in his role in fighting the heresy of Nestorianism. St. Cyril was a prominent and learned theologian. His writings were numerous and already widely disseminated in various Latin and Eastern translations in his own lifetime. They were an instant success and extremely important for the history of Christianity. His commentaries on many of the Old and New Testament books are of the utmost importance including those on the entire PENTATEUCH, Isaiah, the Psalms, and the gospels John and Luke. Also important are his many doctrinal works in which his defence of the Trinitarian faith against the Arian and Nestorian theses recurs. Among Cyril's other writings, the books against Julian deserve mention. These were the last great response to the anti-Christian controversies, probably dictated by Cyril in the last years of his life to respond to the work called "Against the Galileans" composed many years earlier in 363 by the emperor known as "the Apostate" for having abandoned the Christianity in which he was raised. Cyril was a scholarly Bishop and a prolific writer. In 429 as the Christological controversies increased, the output of his writings was so extensive that his opponents could not match it. His writings and his theology have remained central to the traditions of the Fathers and to all Orthodox to this very day. Cyril, however, was also known for his fiery

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personality. It was thought that if Cyril had displayed more patience and diplomacy it might have possibly prevented the Nestorian sect from arising at all. Cyril demonstrated theological brilliance and theological brashness. He had episcopal competence along with episcopal carelessness. But one of the highlights of Cyril's life was his brutal theological takedown of Nestorius. Historians have described Cyril as an "episcopal warrior" and a bully due to his aggressive tactics.

Nestorius held that Jesus was a divine person and a human person, joined by a moral bond. So Mary, was just the mother of human personhood. (The Christokos) not (The Theotokos) which means God-Bearer. This was not just mincing unimportant Greek words. If we got Jesus wrong, we lose our relationship with our heavenly father, and Cyril knew it. It was a messy time. Cyril was a man of great courage and force of character. We can discern that his natural vehemence was repressed and schooled by his master and advisor from his youth, St. Isadore. Cyril listened with humility to the several admonitions of St. Isadore. He and Cyril were contemporaries with a close spiritual and mentorship connection. At the Council of the Oaks, St. Isadore is quoted as saying he urged Cyril to stop "contentious arguments and focus on pastoral duties rather than personal vendettas regarding the deposition of St. John Chrysostom." Cyril had inherited his rivalry with Chrysostom from his uncle. Cyril's grudge lasted until 417, 10 years after Chrysostom had died, when Cyril had a dream in which he was admonished by the THEOTOKOS to honour Chrysostom. Following this, Cyril repented of his prejudice and upon advice from St. Isadore worked to place Chrysostom's name back in the DIPTYCHS of the Saints. St. Isadore, a monk and an ascetic mentored St. Cyril, guiding him toward practical wisdom and challenging him during the Nestorian controversy to avoid personal vengeance.

Saints in the making aren't exempt from the mess of their society but Cyril wasn't even all that graceful in engaging it. His legacy is often marred by his combative and sometimes ruthless political manoeuvring.

Cyril began his role of Patriarch of Alexandria after Theophilus's death by exerting his authority and he took it upon himself to challenge opponents of Christian orthodoxy. He closed churches of the NOVATIANISTS, they, were those who had abandoned their faith in time of persecution to be re-baptized. He expelled the Jewish community from Alexandria in retaliation for their attacks on Christians. After Cyril rounded up all the Jews, he ordered them to be stripped of all their possessions, allowing their possessions to be pillaged by the remaining citizens of Alexandria and then he banished the Jews. While respected for his holiness he was also known as a "Holy Terror" who could be harsh with his opponents. He was a strong political leader who used his position in Alexandria to challenge rivals including the Patriarch of Constantinople - Nestorius, and the civil governor Orestes. Orestes was the Roman Prefect and there was a power struggle between him and Cyril over who controlled Alexandria. Cyril sought to increase the influence of the Church, while Orestes aimed to curb this power and uphold Roman Secular Law.

Meanwhile the issues between Nestorius and Cyril were becoming more strident. The main issue that prompted the dispute between Cyril and Nestorius was the same question which arose at the Council of Constantinople. What exactly was that being to which Mary gave birth?

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Cyril confirmed that the Holy Trinity consists of a singular divine nature, essence and being, in 3 distinct aspects or SUBSISTENCIES of being. These distinct aspects or HYPOSTASES are the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Cyril's constant stress was on the simple idea that it was God who walked the streets of Nazareth hence Mary was Theotokos or God-Bearer. Nestorius spoke of the distinct "Jesus the man" and "the Divine Logos" in ways in which Cyril thought were too dichotomic, widening the gap between man and God in a way Cyril believed would annihilate the person of Christ. The opponents of Nestorius charged him with detaching Christ's divinity and humanity into 2 persons existing in 1 body thereby and this is important, denying the incarnation. Cyril of Alexandria became noted in Church history for his spirited fight for the title of Theotokos during the Council of Ephesus. Prior to the controversy, Cyril rarely if ever used the Mariological title Theotokos but political circumstances compelled him as Archbishop of 1 of the Empire's chief See's to become involved and develop his theology.

Everything came to a head in 431 when the Council of Ephesus was convened by Emperor Theodosius the 2nd. Nestorius had the backing of Theodosius and there were severe tensions between Theodosius and Cyril.

The main reason behind every one of the convening of the ecumenical councils was to respond to theological problems which were related to finding precise, correct, and helpful language to describe who Jesus Christ is.

The heresy of Nestorius was the idea that Jesus Christ was split, that he wasn't fully God and man, he was 2 persons, or that he was a man that God had come upon at some point in his life. Nestorius's teaching developed during his studies at the school in Antioch. Nestorius probably studied under Theodore of MOPSUESTIA who was a well known biblical scholar and theologian in the 5th century. Theodore used language that indicated the Divine Word inhabited the body of an already existing man. This idea is called adoptionism because God seemed to adopt a human to become Messiah, Son of God. Nestorius's Christology may best be viewed as an attempt to carry his teacher Theodore's Christological theory to its logical conclusion. This would also explain why Nestorius preached against the use of the term Theotokos or God-Bearer to refer to Mary as the Mother of Christ. ANASTASIUS a PRESBYTER of Antioch and confidential friend and counsellor of Nestorius uttered the words that destroyed the peace of the Church for so many years "Let no one call Mary Theotokos, She is but a human being". Nestorius supported and defended ANASTASIUS and adopted the language as his own. ANASTASIUS and Nestorius preferred to explain that Mary gave birth to Jesus Christ, but would not say she gave birth to God. Nestorius's name would forever be linked to the position that Mary should be said to have never given birth to God. The followers of Nestorius refused to use the title mother of God instead using the title "Mother of Christ" (Christokos) because they did not believe that Jesus was God when he was born or after he was born. So when the Council of Ephesus was called to deal with the Nestorian heresy this was one of the things they realized they had to get right. In order for this heresy to be refuted and not appear again, they really had to make the title "Mother of God" an official term because if we say that Mary was the Mother of God then what we are saying is that she gave birth to Jesus who was from God from before he was born. Not using the term Theotokos or Mother of God was seen as a personal attack on Christ. It was a very big deal NOT to say it.

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Cyril agreed that Nestorius's refusal to acknowledge God's incarnate birth from Mary was a blasphemy against Christ. Cyril alleged that Nestorius's view in conjunction with his 2 nature Christology leads to 2 persons in Christ which results in an incomplete incarnation and by extension an incomplete salvation for the world and Cyril argued that the flesh of Christ is truly the flesh of God, in that it is life giving in the Holy Eucharist.

Also there is a deeper issue at stake in the discussion of whether or not the word "Theotokos" should be applied to Mary. It has to do with how we understand Jesus' Christ divinity and humanity. Jesus Christ is a unique being. He is not the Father, or the Spirit.

St. Cyril was a staunch witness of Jesus Christ as he repeats in his 1st letter to Bishop SUCCENSUS in 433 "Only one is the Son, only one the Lord Jesus Christ both before the incarnation and after the incarnation". Indeed the Logos, born of God the Father was not one son, and the one born of the Virgin Mary another, but we believe that the very one who was born before the ages was also born according to the flesh and of a woman."

This dissertation shows that faith in Jesus the Logos born of the Father is firmly rooted in history because as St. Cyril affirms "this same Jesus came in time with his birth from Mary, the Theotokos, and in accordance with his promise - will always be with us: and this is important: God is eternal, he is born of a woman, and he stays with us every day! In this trust we live, in this trust we find the way for our life."

The Nicene creed was very important in the Council of Ephesus. It is a statement of orthodox faith of the early Christian church in opposition to certain heresies, like Arianism. These heresies disturbed the church concerning the doctrine of the trinity and of the person of Christ. Both the Eastern and western churches held this creed in honour, though with one important difference: the western church insisted on the inclusion of the phrase "and the son" in the article of the procession of the Holy Spirit, this phrase still is repudiated by the Eastern Orthodox church. In its present form this creed goes back particularly to the council of Nicea in 325 with additions by the council of Constantinople in 381. It was presented in its present form at the council of Chalcedon in 451, but the phrase "and the Son" was not added till 589. However, the creed in substance an accurate and majestic formulation of the Nicene faith.

The Nicene creed of 381 affirmed the Christian faith "One Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, Begotten of the father before all worlds, that came down from heaven and was incarnated by the Holy Ghost and of the Virgin Mary, and was made man." Hence the term "Theotokos" affirms Jesus Christ's full divinity as God by referencing Mary as the "Mother of God".

Cyril had the Nicene creed and his 2nd letter to Nestorius and Nestorius's reply read aloud to the assembly of the Council of Ephesus which included 250 bishops representing all of Christendom. They confirmed the Nicene creed and condemned the teaching of Nestorius the Patriarch of Constantinople. The Council decreed that Jesus was 1 person, not 2 separate persons yet possessing both a human and a divine nature.

The Virgin Mary was to be called Theotokos (God-Bearer) or the one who gave birth to God. The term Theotokos has remained in the church until this very day. The Council issued 8 canons

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including the condemnation of Nestorius and his followers, and a prohibition against modifying the Nicene creed. But, the Council of Ephesus of 431 doesn't end there, it continued on.

John of Antioch, the Patriarch of Antioch from 429-441 was late arriving to Ephesus and arrived after the Council concluded. He and other pro-Nestorius bishops, assembled their own council, condemning Cyril for heresy, deposed him from his see, and labelled Cyril as "a monster, born and educated for the destruction of the Church." However the Bishop of Rome, Pope St. Celestine agreed with the condemnation of Nestorius and he ratified St. Cyril's final decision hoping this would achieve peace among the churches.

Nestorius was exiled and MAXIMIANUS was appointed as Nestorius's replacement as Archbishop of Constantinople.

In the year 433, 2 years after the Council's conclusion. John of Antioch and Cyril agreed to a formula of reunion. It was a compromised theological document that bridged Alexandrian and Antiochene Christology by accepting the term Theotokos (Mother of God) while affirming 2 natures of Christ. Both sides realized the need for reconciliation to restore Church unity. The formula, largely drafted by THEODORET OF CYRRHUS but accepted by both John and Cyril, reconciled the 2 schools of thought. It affirmed that the union of 2 natures resulted in "One Christ, one Son, one Lord." Cyril accepted the Antiochene language of "2 natures" provided it did not divide Christ into 2 persons.

John accepted the condemnation of Nestorius and conceded that Mary was Theotokos, uniting the Antioch Patriarch with Alexandria. It maintained the term "union of 2 natures" which was crucial to Antiochenes and allowed Cyril to maintain the HYPOSTATIC union concept promoting "one nature of the word of God incarnate".

This agreement allowed for peace, though it caused significant division within John's own camp, as some felt he conceded too much. Many of Cyril's own supporters were unhappy with Cyril's compromise.

Cyril was seeking unity as some followers of Nestorius separated themselves from the Orthodox church and formed their own denominations. They began to detach even from their Antiochean foundation and moved eastward setting up their capital in Persia. This was one of the first major splits within Christianity into different branches. The Nestorian Schism, by which churches supportive of Nestorius were severed from the rest of Christendom and became known as Nestorian Christianity or the Church of the East whose present day representatives are the Assyrian Church of the East, the Ancient Church of the East, and the Chaldean Catholic Church (which recently restored communion with Rome). Nestorianism didn't die out.

Many of Cyril's own supporters were not happy with Cyril's attempts at reconciliation for unity's sake. However this reconciliation did prepare the way for a decisive discussion of the exact relationships of Jesus Christ's divine and human natures at the Robbers Synod of Ephesus in 449 and the Council of Calcedon in 451. Cyril died in 444. The final formulation of the 451 Council of Calcedon became the decisive statement of faith which Christians in the West would agree finally and accurately represented true Orthodox belief about the relationship between the divine and

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human natures of Jesus Christ. It reads "Jesus Christ, truly God and truly Man, and without confusion, without change, without division without separation".

And now, I would like to expand my presentation on Mary's identity and status as Theotokos because it has a bearing on the identity of Jesus Christ. Mary's title as Theotokos is formally defined in church dogma, the only other Mariological teaching so defined is her virginity.

Cyril is accredited with using one of the 1st historical attestations of the salutation - "Hail" as in Hail Mary, being used to invoke the Virgin Mary. Cyril also used terms such as "container of the uncontained" and "the place for the infinite" among other lauded descriptions. Cyril's spatial metaphors represented Mary as a sacred place and he applied metaphors depicting royalty and exaltation to Mary, she was "the treasure of the world", "the crown of virginity", "the sceptre of Orthodoxy". Subsequently such praise would become normative in Marian theology. In several of his works, Cyril focused on the love of Jesus for his mother. On the cross, he overcomes his pain and thinks of his mother. At the wedding at Cana, he bows to her wishes. The acknowledgement and acceptance of the Theotokos title was one of the greatest achievements of Cyril's life.

The tradition of Marian veneration was greatly expanded with the affirmation of her status as Theotokos at the Council of Ephesus. The mosaics in Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome dating from 432 to 440, just after the council does not yet show her with a halo. The iconographic tradition of the Theotokos showing the Virgin enthroned carrying the infant Jesus is established in the following century. There are a very small number of surviving icons from the very beginning. I'm now going to show you 2 of them.

This 1st icon is called the Salus Populi Romani.

I first must explain that this icon that you are seeing here was fully restored and had the full conservation process in 2017 at the Vatican museum. This restoration process included refilling of insect holes and work to repair damage to the image, mantle, faces, background, and hands. The process was completed within 1 year and was given the honour of a pontifical mass by Pope Francis in 2018 on the anniversary of the icon's transfer to the current shrine at the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome. The Salus Populi Romani is unique among all icons. It is believed to have been painted from real life by St. Luke the Evangelist himself. According to legend: after the crucifixion, when Our Lady moved to the home of John the apostle, she took with her a few personal belongings among which was a table built by Jesus in the workshop of St. Joseph. It was the top of this table that was used to memorialize her image. The image is 5' high by 3¼' wide, very large for an icon. It is painted on a thick cedar panel. While applying his brushes and paints, St. Luke listened carefully as the Holy Mother spoke of the life of her son, facts which the evangelist later recorded in his gospel. Legend also tells us that the painting remained in and around Jerusalem until it was discovered by St. Helena in the 4th century. When it was transported to Constantinople, St. Helena's son, Emperor Constantine the great erected a church for its enthronement. This icon is closely linked to the Council of Ephesus in 431.

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Part 2

Saint Mary Major was founded by Pope Liberius prior to the Council of Ephesus. Pope Liberius selected a venerated picture to hang in the pontifical oratory. It had allegedly been returned to Rome by St. Helena. The letters in Greek at the top identify Mary as Mother of God. The folded together position of Mary's hands distinguishes this image as a very early version. She is shown holding the Christ Jesus who is shown with a book in his left hand, presumably the gospel. What is different about this icon is that we see Mary rather than Jesus, looking directly at the viewer. The Virgin holds in her left hand a ceremonial and imperial handkerchief showing she is Queen of Heaven. The title of Mother of God abbreviated is MP ΘY is often found on Eastern icons where it is used to identify Mary. This image is unique among all icons. Cyril of Alexandria wrote "I am amazed that there are some who are entirely in doubt as to whether the Holy Virgin should be called THEOTOKOS or not. For if our Lord Jesus Christ is God, How is the Holy Virgin who gave him birth, not Theotokos."

This second icon I'm introducing is called an HODEGETRIA icon. HODEGETRIA means in Greek, she who knows the way, or Directress, hence this icon is called Our Lady of the Way. This particular icon is the most venerated of the HODEGETRIA TYPE. Most other icon are variations of this particular icon. Although the original has been lost, this icon that you see here is said to be copied from the original also said to be painted by St. Luke. According to tradition St. Luke painted the icon from real life and Mary received it with great joy and blessed it saying "May the grace of Him who was born of me be with this icon". This icon today can be found in the Monastery of XENOPHONTOS on Mount ATHOS. The original was rescued from Palestine and sent to Constantinople during the reign of THEODOSIUS 2nd. The same Theodosius from the Council of Ephesus as a gift to the Emperor's sister - Saint PULCHERIA. St. Pulcheria lived from 399-453. She is famous for her role in establishing the veneration of the Theotokos in the Eastern Roman empire particularly after the Council of Ephesus in 431. This icon I'm showing today is thought to be a copy of that exact icon. [unclear marginal note] St. Pulcheria influenced the Catholic Church and its theological development by being involved in the Council of Ephesus and by guiding the Council of Chalcedon. Our Lady of the Way is showing us the way and pointing us toward the Way - her Son. The Way, the Truth, and the life - Jesus Christ himself. Mary points to Jesus and he is God. At the top of the icon you'll see 4 abbreviations for the Greek word MALTA and FILLE which mean mother of God. Mary holding this little Boy gave birth to God. On her forehead and shoulders there are 3 stars - symbolism of the presence of the Holy Trinity in the life of the Theotokos. She stretches out her hand to direct our attention to the centre of all reality - Christ himself.

While his face is small he still has the furrows and looks of an aged man. Showing that even as an infant, even before his birth he has always been the Word of God. Ancient and wise, holding in his hand a scroll or book, the teachings of the gospels and the Christian faith. He is wearing golden robes of royalty and divinity as he sits like an ancient scholar or teacher. Jesus in the icon seems to be encouraging us to be like his mother, to follow God, to trust God, to carry Christ, and to show him to the entire world.

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Now, near the end of my presentation, I am going to bring us into modern times. During his general audience on Oct 3rd 2007, Pope Benedict 16th offered his reflections on St. Cyril as he continued his series of teachings on the Early Church Fathers. He mentioned many things that I have already discussed but some new points of interest are that in the Greek East, Cyril was described as "a custodian of accuracy" - that is a guardian of the true faith and as "a seal of the Fathers". These ancient formulae highlight a fact that is characteristic of Cyril - namely his constant reference to those church authorities who preceded him. In a very deliberate and explicit way, he placed himself within the Church's tradition, where he recognized a guarantee of the Church's continuity with the apostles and Christ himself. He governed the church with tremendous energy for 32 years, always striving to affirm its primacy throughout the East while maintaining its strong traditional ties with Rome. In Cyril's 2nd letter to Nestorius, Cyril described his Christological faith very clearly. He wrote "this we affirm that the natures are different that are united in one true unity, both from Both has come only 1 Christ and son, not because due to their unity, the difference in their nature's has been eliminated, but rather because divinity and humanity re-united in an ineffable and indescribable union have produced for us 1 Lord, Christ, and Son: and this is important: true humanity and true divinity are really united in only 1 person - Our Lord Jesus Christ."

And now as my presentation is drawing to a close, I would like to finish my talk with Cyril's teaching about Jesus Christ and the mystery of our Salvation today and how they are connected.

In 1994 the Common Christological Declaration between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East marked the resolution of a dispute between those 2 churches that had existed since the Council of Ephesus in 431. They expressed their common understanding of doctrine concerning the divinity and humanity of Christ and recognized the legitimacy and rightness of their respected descriptions of Mary, as on the Assyrian side "the Mother of Christ Our Lord and Saviour" and on the Catholic side as "Mother of God" and also as "the Mother of Christ." The declaration reiterates the Christological formulations of the Council of Chalcedon as a theological expression of the faith shared by both churches, at the same time respecting the preference of each church in using these titles in their liturgical life and piety.

Some more connections are that

1. Cyril had the words from the Gospel of St. John as his motto: "the word was made flesh". These words are still true today. God became human which had never happened before.
2. Cyril introduced the concept of hypostatic unity of the 2 natures of Christ. The Logos forever became human. He made human nature and human body his own. It is precisely why we can say that God was born, grew up, was hungry and thirsty, suffered and died. Jesus's Body is the Body of God, so we can openly say that the Virgin Mary who gave birth to Jesus is the real Mother of God - the Theotokos. All of this is still true today.
3. Cyril, like his predecessor, St. ATHANASIUS the great, considered the incarnation to be the cornerstone of our Salvation. To save the entire world, God had to be incarnated to become really human. Salvation is possible only if human nature is taken by God and becomes His own.

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The Nicene creed confirming the incarnation still remains a dogmatic statement of faith for R.C. church.

4. While Alexandrian theologians focused on the Savior's divine divinity they weren't as outspoken when dealing with purely human aspects of Jesus Christ. Cyril's excessive emphasis on the divine nature of the Savior was corrected by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 which pacified the representatives of the school of Antioch by confirming the full humanity of Christ "Jesus is the true God and the true Man. The Word was made flesh". This healing between the churches is still happening today as witnessed by the 1994 declaration between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East.

5. The Eucharist is still the key to our Salvation. God became man, Jesus's body is divine and transformed. There is neither death nor corruption but life, and a more abundant life. How can a 21st century person join this immortal life, this victory over sin and death? St. Cyril believed the answer for his day was in the sacrament of the eucharist. Nothing has changed. It is living in the church and participation in the Eucharist that saves you, makes you part of the body of Christ and allows you to partake of the life of the most holy trinity. Cyril's theology and Christology is important for the time in which we now live. The Orthodox teaching of St. Cyril on the incarnation of God, the healing and divinification of human nature or the fountain of immortality that each person can access through participation in the divine liturgy is what this world and the modern human who has lost the meaning of their existence, really needs.

And finally I think we need to extend mercy where it is needed and praise where it is warranted. St. Cyril of Alexandria was a good and faithful servant in many crucial ways in his defence of Christ's identity. In all those ways that he fell short on Sanctity, he turned his sins over to his Saviour whom he knew had not just come close to us, but truly became one of us to bring our human natures within the love of God.

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This last picture that I'm presenting to you was a joint effort between my niece and myself. She printed the picture for me, and I framed it. This is Our Lady of Pompeii. To Dominicans this image represents Our Lady of the Rosary as Queen of Heaven. She and the child Jesus are handing the holy Rosary directly to St. Dominic and St. Catherine of Sienna. St. Bartolo Longo, who was a 3rd order Dominican obtained the painting in 1875 in Naples from a Dominican priest. It has had extensive restoration as it was initially in very poor shape. This picture reinforces the historic belief that the Rosary is a central weapon of spiritual warfare and a divine gift entrusted deeply to the Dominican family from the very throne of the Queen of Heaven, the Theotokos. According to Catholic Tradition Our Lady appeared to St. Dominic in 1208 at the Church in PROUILHE France and handed him the Rosary and instructed him to teach the faithful to meditate on the mysteries of Christ's life in order to guide the people back to Catholic teaching and to combat the Albigensian heresy. For Dominicans looking at this picture it is a reminder of their lifelong promise to preach and pray the rosary. It connects their daily prayers to the heavenly vision shared by St. Dominic. And our pope Leo XIV was chosen on the feast of Our Lady of Pompeii which is on May 8th.

Along with a hammer and nails to hang the picture I've also put on the table copies of the Supplica which is a powerful and solemn prayer composed by St. Longo in 1883. It is traditionally recited worldwide at noon on May 8th and the 1st Sunday in Oct, though it can be prayed at any time. There have been many reports of miraculous physical healings and spiritual conversions associated with this picture which is currently found in the Papal Basilica - the Sanctuary of the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Holy Rosary of Pompeii.

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