

The Chalcedonian Definition

The Council of Ephesus in AD 431 forbade the making of any new creed. The Council of Chalcedon, which met in 451 to confront new errors, chose to issue a decree to affirm earlier versions of the Nicene Creed (both the 325 and the 381 versions) and also to offer a concise clarification regarding the church's teaching about the person of Christ. The council then promptly banned anyone else from making a new creed, no matter how good his or her intentions.

This clarification, formula, or definition was the clearest statement to date on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. It confesses who Christ is now: God and man, one person in two natures (hence its language of both natures coming together in one person). Unlike earlier creeds, it does not emphasize the actual event of the incarnation, the person of the Son taking to himself humanity. Famously, it also offers a series of denials about Christ when it teaches that the natures of Christ “undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation.” This “negative,” or *apophatic*, theology reflects a belief among many Greek-speaking Christians that much of what we say about God—perhaps the best of what we say about God—involves saying what he is *not*.

The level of detail offered in the creed, including the use of the term “natures,” eventually alienated those who preferred earlier statements of faith. Thus, while this creed is held by Western Christians and the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Oriental Orthodox, including various Coptic churches, do not subscribe to the Chalcedonian Definition.

Following the saintly fathers, we all with one voice teach the confession of one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man, of a rational soul and a body; consubstantial with the Father as regards his divinity, and the same consubstantial with us as regards his humanity; like us in all respects except for sin; begotten before the ages from the Father as regards his divinity, and in the last days the same for us and for our salvation from Mary, the virgin God-bearer, as regards his humanity; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation; at no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union, but rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person and a single subsistent being; he is not parted or divided into two persons, but is one and the same only-begotten Son, God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ, just as the prophets taught from the beginning about him, and as the Lord Jesus Christ himself instructed us, and as the creed of the fathers handed it down to us.