CHAPTER TWO

THE CHRISTOLOGY OF NESTORIUS

1. SOURCES FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF NESTORIUS' TEACHING

From the surviving Acts of the council of Ephesus, the remains and fragments of Nestorius' own writings and sermons, and his correspondence with Cyril, John and Celestine, a basic picture of his original doctrine can be built up. He is largely in agreement with Theodore of Mopsuestia on all central points and, following Theodore, he had advanced Antiochene theology to the point of regarding the more primitive formulations of Eustathius of Antioch and Diodore of Tarsus' Two-Son theory as crudely untenable. For the Alexandrian commentators such an advance had not been generally registered. In the early part of this century the greater portion of Nestorius' last work, The Book of Heraclides, thought to have been entirely lost in antiquity, was dramatically rediscovered surviving in a Syriac translation from a time just posterior to Nestorius himself. With this discovery a fuller resource became available for the reconstruction of his mind. The work needs to be used with some caution because of its interpolations, and because it generally represents the hindsight of Nestorius looking back on what he meant to say to Cyril perhaps more than simply

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1 In part the chapter is a revised edition of an earlier treatment McGuckin (1988).

2 H.E.W. Turner (1976) p. 48, described the relationship as Nestorius following Theodore in all essentials but expressing it all with a sharper edge and narrower perspective.

3 Certainly Cyril regards both Nestorius and Theodore as teaching a double-subject Christology which is tantamount to 'Two Sons', and this forms the main point of his intellectual attack on Nestorius.

4 Because of an early mistranslation from the Syriac it was first propagated by Bethune-Baker (1908) and thereafter by Driver and Hodgson in their translation of it (1925), as the 'Bazaar of Heraclides'. The word that was taken for 'market place' (hence Bazaar) in fact represented the Greek 'Tomos', book or treatise.

5 The Book of Heraclides: Syriac text Ed. P. Bedjan Paris, 1910; French Tr. F. Nau, Paris, 1910 (The French version has been used mainly as the basis for this present exposition); E.T. Driver and Hodgson (1925).

6 See Abramowski (1963) and (1972, vol.2); also Grillmeier (1975) pp. 559–568; and Chesnut (1978) for a discussion of the textual tradition and authenticity questions.
what he actually did say on the occasion. The work thus represents a state of Nestorius' mind at its most 'clarified'. It was written in that island prison in a sea of sand, the Great Oasis in Egypt, after his final exile by the Emperor, perhaps fifteen years or more after the events it describes.

In the fourteenth century a Nestorian bishop, Ebed Jesus of Nisibis, listed the complete works of Nestorius' as: a Liturgy; \(^7\) a Tragedy, The Book of Heraclides, The Letter to Cosmas, \(^9\) a Book of Letters, and a Book of Sermons and Discourses. To this list we might add the so-called First Apology (the Book of Heraclides being considered as the Second) fragments of which, under the title of Hypomnemata are preserved by the monophysite theologian Severus of Antioch. In the same source there are also fragments of a work apparently entitled The Theopaschites, evidently designed by Nestorius as a refutation of the Chapters of Cyril.

The sources necessary for a Nestorian reconstruction had been painstakingly assembled by F. Loofs in the years just preceding the rediscovery of the Book of Heraclides\(^8\) and several works both by Nestorius and his supporters have been re-edited since in a collection of texts and translations by Abramowski and Goodman.\(^11\) Of Nestorius' many sermons, which Cyril complained had been circulated far and wide even by 429, only nine have survived intact, the rest are represented only by a few scattered fragments, from which Loofs claimed to be able to reconstruct at least three distinct homilies. There is also the complete Greek text of a Sermon on the High Priesthood of Christ which had been discovered in the nineteenth century and published as a work of John Chrysostom.\(^12\)

Three of Nestorius' important official letters have survived thanks to the conciliar record-keeping, being his correspondences with Cyril, John of Antioch, and Celestine of Rome. A Latin theologian who


\(^8\) Still in use in the Nestorian church but certainly not composed by Nestorius himself.

\(^9\) This text is not by Nestorius but rather about him, giving us important information concerning his life, his character, and his subsequent exile. It is an apologia for his memory. The text is printed at the end of the Book of Heraclides in Nau's version.

\(^10\) Loofs (1905).


\(^12\) cf. Migne, PG. 64.453–492; Loofs (1914) p. 7; also S. Haidacher, Rede des Nestorius über Hebr. 3.1., in Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie, 29, 1905, 192–195. For a review of the position see Bethune-Baker (1908) pp. 105–120.