

## **MONENERGISM (Monergism)**

A movement that developed in the early part of the seventh century from an attempt by Emperor Heraclius I (610-641) to find a formula that would reconcile the Monophysites with neo-Chalcedonian orthodoxy.

The dramatic success of Heraclius against the Persians, culminating in the triumphant restoration of the True Cross to Jerusalem in 630, gave what proved to be a final chance of reconciling the two beliefs with the political framework of the Byzantine empire. The Monophysites were in a commanding position in [Armenia](#) and in the provinces of Syria and Egypt reconquered by Heraclius, and their loyalty had to be retained.

The idea that in Christ the Divine Logos and manhood were separate natures but activated by a single human-divine activity had been held on both sides of the Monophysite-Chalcedonian division and had its place in Coptic theology (Hatch, 1926, pp. 372-81). It was also the view of Sergius, patriarch of Constantinople (611-638), and by 622 Heraclius had been won over to it.

Between 630 and 634, with the ending of the [Persian](#) Wars, Heraclius pressed monenergism successively on Euz, catholicus of the [Armenian](#) Church; on Athanasius, the Monophysite patriarch of Antioch; on the east Syrian church at Edessa; on the Copts; and finally on Pope Honorius I (625-638). Everywhere he gained striking initial success. A national synod of the Armenian church at Erzerum accepted the “one activity” formula, and in the spring of 631 a series of conferences was held at Maboug in Mesopotamia; there Heraclius and Patriarch Athanasius attempted to reach an agreement that in the two natures of Christ there was one will and one activity “according to Cyril” (Michael the Syrian *Chronicon* 11.3).

However, agreement was, as so often previously, thwarted by the issue of the status of the Council of CHALCEDON; and when Athanasius died in July 631, the prospect of success was lessened further. Meanwhile,

opposition to the monenergist formula was starting to grow in Palestine, where the majority of the monks were pro-Chalcedonian. This opposition found a champion in an aged and learned monk named Sophronius.

Heraclius realized that Egypt would provide the decisive test for his attempted compromise with the Monophysites. In the autumn of 631 he sent his friend and adviser Cyrus, bishop of Phasis in Colchis (eastern Black Sea), to be the patriarch of Alexandria. This proved to be a twofold error. First, Cyrus was a “foreigner” (Cyrus “the Caucasian,” he was called by the Copts) who never won the confidence of the Egyptians. Second, in making this appointment he ignored the presence of BENJAMIN, the Coptic (Monophysite) patriarch who had been elected in 622.

Nonetheless, Cyrus was able to hold a synod of Egyptian bishops in 633 at which nine articles were drawn up, the seventh of which confessed that “there was one and the same Christ and Son activating the godly and human through one divine-human energy.” Chalcedon, however, was not mentioned. Even so, the Tome of Union was signed by a considerable number of clergy including, claimed Cyrus, “all the clergy of the party of the Theodosians” (perhaps strict followers of Severan monophysitism, of which Patriarch THEODOSIUS I [535-567] was accepted as representative). On 3 June 633 Cyrus celebrated his success by a solemn *Te Deum* and sent an enthusiastic report of events to Sergius at Constantinople.

Had Cyrus been more trusted by the Copts, he might have succeeded, for nearly all the Monophysite phraseology concerning Christ had been conceded in the Tome, and many Egyptians accepted “one activity” as automatically involving “one nature.” But trust was what he could not achieve, and the [Copts](#) stayed loyal to Benjamin.

Meantime, the monenergist position was being attacked by Sophronius, who became patriarch of Jerusalem early in 634. His protests first to

Sergius, and then to Pope Honorius, were rebuffed. Honorius supported Sergius, and was even more explicit than he in his assent to monenergism. “Inasmuch,” he wrote, “as the Humanity was naturally united with the Word, and Christ is therefore One, we acknowledge one will of our Lord Jesus Christ” (i.e., not merely “activity”).

External events now began to play their part. In April 634 the Arabs began to raid Palestine and Syria in earnest. Henceforth, the emperor’s energies were increasingly devoted to the losing struggle to maintain the empire. In 638, after the loss of Syria with the fall of Antioch to the Arabs, he published an “exposition of faith” (the *ECTHESIS*) in the hope of rallying the provincials to the empire. The *Ecthesis* forbade discussion on the subject of the unity or duality of the “activities” of Christ, and laid down that the [Catholic](#) faith demanded the acknowledgment of only one will in Christ. With this, the monenergist movement merged with MONOTHELITISM and the ultimate refinement of Christology, the monothelite controversy, began.

The *Ecthesis* thus follows the HENOTIKON of Zeno and “The Second Henotikon” of Justin II as an effort by an emperor to bridge the gap between the pro- and anti-Chalcedonians in the empire. It was too little and, in this case, too late.

It came as near success as possible in the circumstances of the seventh century, and it had the added merit of not alienating the papacy. However, once more personal antagonisms, especially the irreconcilable hostility between Cyrus and Benjamin, and the popular fear of [Chalcedon](#) prevented settlement. Cyrus, instead of being the great conciliator between Monophysites and Chalcedonians, went down in [history](#) as the oppressor of the Copts. The arrival of the Arabs on Egyptian soil in December 639 allowed the emperor and his advisers no further chance of conciliation.

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