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BOOK REVIEW

George A. Bevan, *The New Judas: The Case of Nestorius in Ecclesiastical Politics, 428-451 CE, Late Antique History and Religion*, vol. 13, Leuven: Peeters, 2016. Pages xii + 374. ISBN 978-90429-3259-3.

The book begins with this forthright, perhaps misleading, claim: “The career of Nestorius presents a fundamental paradox: How could a man condemned at the council of Ephesus in 431 as the ‘New Judas’ have the essence of his teaching declared orthodox at the Council of Chalcedon twenty years later, a supposed paragon of ‘correct doctrine’” (p. 1).

Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople, was censured at Ephesus for his refusal to attend the council before his supporters, led by John of Antioch, had arrived and although described as the ‘New Judas’ by some participants, he was never formally condemned in these terms. The council ended inconclusively, with both leaders – Cyril of Alexandria and Nestorius – detained on the orders of emperor Theodosius II. Cyril escaped back to his see of Alexandria, while Nestorius acquiesced and eventually died in upper Egypt. Nestorius did not rule out completely Mary’s title of ‘Mother of God’ (Theotokos), so favoured by Cyril and the Egyptian church, but warned that it could be misinterpreted and much preferred the title ‘Mother of Christ’ on account of its clear orthodoxy and lack of ambiguity.

The council of Chalcedon did not declare Nestorius orthodox, even though it moved from the strong emphasis on Christ’s divinity, favoured by Cyril and his supporters at Ephesus, to a more balanced teaching of two natures – human and divine – in the one person of Christ. This was closer to the teaching of Nestorius and was elucidated principally through Chalcedon’s endorsement of pope Leo I’s ‘Tome,’ the centre-piece of the council’s decrees.

As the sub-title indicates, the book forms a detailed study of Nestorius’s career and the controversies around him, mainly from the standpoint of ecclesiastical politics, from the time of his elevation to

the see of Constantinople in 428 until the council of Chalcedon in 451, which took place shortly after his death. Maybe he would have been rehabilitated, as Bevan argues, if he had lived a little longer and been able to attend Chalcedon. Theology gets a fair look-in, as it should, given the nature of the controversies, even though the book's principal focus is political.

Chapter 1, "The Nestorius of History" provides an introduction to writings by and about Nestorius, coming right down to modern scholarship. Chapter 2 focuses on the years leading up to his election as patriarch of Constantinople in 428. The next five chapters follow his life and surrounding events until his death in 450, with a long chapter on the council of Ephesus in 431. The last chapter "Epilogue: Chalcedon and Beyond" looks at the council of Chalcedon, what might have been if Nestorius had lived long enough to attend it, and a section on his legacy.

The various appendices and extensive bibliographies of original and secondary sources, at the end of the volume, are welcome. Footnotes within the book are extensive and very informative. Regrettable, however, is the absence of a concluding Index: an index of Persons would have helped greatly to follow individuals through the complexities of the story.

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