

That Jesus Christ, Fully God, Is Also Fully Human

From the writings of Saint Alphonsus Liguori.

By The Bellarmine Society.

Catholic Truth Society of Ireland No.apol262a (1964)

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From "THE HISTORY OF HERESIES, AND THEIR REFUTATION"; OR, "THE TRIUMPH OF THE CHURCH."

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN OF Saint ALPHONSUS LIGUORI, BY THE REV. JOHN T. MULLOCK, OF THE ORDER OF Saint FRANCIS, in 1847.

REFUTATION OF THE HERESY OF EUTYCHES, WHO ASSERTED THAT THERE WAS ONLY ONE NATURE IN CHRIST, THE DIVINE.

1. The Eutychian heresy (often called the 'Monophysite heresy') is totally opposed to the Nestorian. Nestorius taught that there were two Persons and two Natures in Christ. Eutyches, on the contrary, admitted that there was but one Person, but he asserted that there was but one Nature, likewise, for the Divine Nature, he said, absorbed the human nature. Hence, Nestorius denied the Divinity of Christ, Eutyches his humanity; so both one and the other destroyed the mystery of the Incarnation and of the Redemption of man. We do not exactly know how Eutyches explained his doctrine of only one Nature in Christ. In the Council held by Saint Flavian (the great Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon held in 451), he merely explained it in these terms: "That our Lord was of two Natures before the union, but after the union only of one Nature." And when the Fathers pressed him to explain more clearly, he only answered, that he came not to dispute, but only to suggest to his Holiness what his opinion was.

Now, in these few words Eutyches uttered two blasphemies: First: That after the Incarnation there was only one Nature in Christ, that is, the Divine Nature, as he understood it; and, secondly: That before the Incarnation of the Word there were two Natures, the Divine and the human nature.

2. Returning, however, to the principal error, that the two Natures became one after the Incarnation, that might be asserted to have happened in four ways: First: That one of the Natures was changed into the other. Second: That both Natures were mixed up and confused, and so only formed one. Third: That without this mixing up, the two Natures in their union formed a third. And, fourth: That the human was absorbed by the Divine Nature, and this is, most probably, the opinion of the Eutychians. Now, the Catholic dogma is totally opposed to this unity of the Natures in Christ, no matter in what sense the Eutychians understood it. This is what we are going to prove.

IN CHRIST, THERE ARE TWO NATURES THE DIVINE AND THE HUMAN NATURE DISTINCT, UNMIXED, UNCONFUSED, AND ENTIRE, SUBSISTING INSEPARABLY IN THE ONE HYPOSTASIS, OR PERSON OF THE WORD.

3. This dogma is proved from the passages of Scripture already quoted against Arius and Nestorius, [in earlier articles written by Saint Alphonsus] in which Christ is proved to be both God and man; for, as he could not be called God, if he had not perfect Divine Nature, so he could not be called man, if he had not perfect human nature.

We will, however, set the matter in a clearer light. In the Gospel of Saint John (Chapter 1), after saying that the "Word is God" "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" it is stated in the 14th verse, that human nature was assumed by the Word: "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."

4. The two Natures in Christ are also most clearly proved by that celebrated text of Saint Paul (Philippians, 2:6), which has been so frequently quoted: "For let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of man, and in habit formed as a man." Here the Apostle allows in Christ the form of God, according to which he is equal to God, and the form of a servant, according to which he emptied himself, and was made like unto men. Now, the form of God and the form of a servant cannot be the same form, nor the same Nature; because, if it was the same human nature, we could not say that Christ is equal to God; and, on the contrary, if it was the same Divine Nature, Christ could not be said to have emptied himself, and made himself like unto man. We must, therefore, admit that there are two Natures in Christ, the Divine Nature, by which he is equal to God, and the human nature, by which he is made like unto man.

5. Besides, this text proves that the two natures in Christ are unmingled and unconfused, each retaining its own properties, because, if the Divine Nature was changed in him, he would no longer be God when he became man; but that would contradict what Saint Paul says (Romans 9:5): "Of whom is Christ according to the flesh, who is over all things God blessed for ever." Thus Christ is, at the same time, God and man, according to the flesh.

If the human was absorbed by the Divine Nature, or even changed into a Divine substance, as the Eutychians say, then the human nature, according to them, was absorbed in the Divine Nature, like a drop of honey in the ocean. (We learn of this comparison from the writings of Theodoret in his Dialogue with 'Eranistes', an Eutychian,) But supposing that to be the fact, Christ could no longer be called man as he is in the Gospels, and all the New Testament, and as Saint Paul calls him in the text already quoted, and again, in his First Epistle to Timothy (2:6): "The man Christ Jesus, who gave himself in redemption for all." Neither could we say that he emptied himself in human nature, if it was changed into the Divinity. If the human nature, therefore, was thus mixed up with the Divine Nature, Christ would no longer be either true God or true man, but some third sort of Person, which is contrary to the whole teaching of the Scriptures. We are bound, therefore, to conclude that the two Natures in Christ are unmingled and unconfused, and that each Nature retains its own properties.

6. All those other passages of the Scriptures which affirm that Christ had a true body and a true soul united to that body, confirm the truth of this dogma, for from this it is manifest that the human nature remained entire and unmixed in Christ, and was not confused with the Divine Nature, which remained entire also. That Christ had a real body is proved by Saint John, against Simon Magus, Menander, Saturninus, and others, who asserted that his body was not a true, but only an apparent one. [This heresy and these heretics were active even in those earliest years of the Church.] Hear the

words of Saint John: "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that dissolves Jesus Christ (in the Greek version who does not confess that Jesus is come in the flesh) is not of God, and this is Antichrist" (1 John Epistle 4:2-3).

Saint Peter (1 Peter Epistle 2:24), says: "Who of his own-self bore our sins in his body on the tree;" and Saint Paul, writing to the Colossians (1:22), says: "He has reconciled in the body of his flesh through death;" and again, writing to the Hebrews (10:5), he puts into the mouth of Jesus these words of the thirty-ninth Psalm of the Vulgate (Psalm 40 in the Hebrew): "Sacrifice and oblation you would not, but a body you have fitted to me."

I omit many other passages in which the body of Christ is mentioned.

Our Lord himself speaks of his soul in Saint John (10:15), when he says: "I lay down my life (animam) for my sheep;" and again (verse 17): "I lay down my life (animam), that I may take it again. No man takes it away from me, but I lay it down of myself." In Saint Matthew, he says (26:38): "My soul is sorrowful unto death." It was his blessed soul that was separated from his body at his death, when Saint John says (19:30), that, "bowing his head, he gave up the ghost." Christ, therefore, had a true body and a true soul united to each other, and he was, therefore, a true man, and that this body and this soul existed whole and entire after the hypostatic union, is clear from the passages quoted, all of which refer to Christ, after this union had taken place. There is no foundation, therefore, for asserting that his human nature was absorbed into the Divinity, or changed into it.

7. A confirmatory proof is given by those texts in which matters are attributed to Christ which belong to the human nature alone, and not to the Divine Nature, and others, which properly belong to the Divine Nature alone, and not to the human nature.

As regards the human nature it is certain that the Divine Nature could not be conceived, could not be born, or grow up to manhood, or suffer hunger or thirst, or weakness, or sorrow, or torments, or death, for it is independent, impassible, and immortal; these feelings belong to human nature alone. Now Jesus Christ was conceived and born of the Virgin Mary (Matthew 1). He grew up to manhood: "he advanced in wisdom and in age, and grace with God and man" (Luke, 2:52); he fasted and was hungry: "When he had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards he was hungry" (Matthew 4:2); he was wearied: "Jesus therefore being weary with his journey, sat thus on the well" (John, 4:6); he wept: "Seeing the city he wept over it" (Luke, 19:41); he suffered death: "He was made obedient unto death, even to the death of the Cross" (Phil, 2:8); and "saying this, he gave up the ghost" (Luke, 23:45); "And crying out with a loud voice he gave up the ghost" (Matthew, 27:50).

It does not belong, either, to the Divine Nature to pray, to obey, to offer sacrifice, to humble himself, and such like actions, all of which the Scriptures attribute to Jesus Christ. All these actions, therefore, belong to Jesus as man, and, consequently, after the Incarnation he was true man.

8. As to the second part, it is certain that human nature cannot be consubstantial to the Father, nor have all that the Father has, nor operate all that the Father operates; it cannot be eternal, nor omnipotent, nor omniscient, nor immutable, and still all these attributes are properly applied to Jesus Christ, as we have proved in our earlier articles against Arius and Nestorius; therefore in Jesus Christ there is not alone the human, but also the Divine Nature. Saint Leo in his Epistle to Saint Flavian states this very forcibly.

9. Besides the Scripture, tradition has constantly preserved the faith of the two Natures in Christ. In the Apostles Creed, we see this marked down most clearly: "I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord"; here is the Divine Nature. "Who was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried"; here is the human nature. In the Creeds of Nicaea and Constantinople, the Divine Nature is thus explained: "And in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, true God of true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial to the Father, by whom all things were made." Then the human nature is explained: "Who for us men, and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Ghost by the Virgin Mary, and was made man: he suffered, was crucified, died, and arose the third day."

10. Even before the Eutychian heresy sprung up at all around 440, it was condemned by the First Council of Constantinople in 381, in the letter which the Fathers, in their Synodical Epistle which they wrote to Pope Saint Damasus. And Saint Damasus, in the Roman Synods of 368 and 369, had already defined against Apollinaris that in Christ there was both a body and an intelligent and rational soul, and that he had not suffered in the Divinity, only in the humanity. In the Council of Ephesus in 431, the Second Epistle of Saint Cyril to Nestorius in which the dogma of two Natures distinct and unmixed in Christ is expressed, was approved.

11. Besides the Councils, we have the authority of the Holy Fathers, likewise, who wrote previous to the Eutychian heresy. These were quoted in the Acts of the Council of Chalcedon, and Petavius collected a great number, but I will only call the attention of the reader to a few.

Saint Ignatius the Martyr, in his Letter to the Ephesians (paragraph 7) clearly expresses the doctrine of the two Natures.

Saint Athanasius wrote two books against Apollinaris, the predecessor of Eutyches.

Saint Hilary writes of it in his treatise On the Trinity.

Saint Gregory of Nazianzen is one of the witnesses.

Saint Amphilochius is quoted by Theodoret, in his Dialogue with 'Eranistes', to similar effect.

Saint Ambrose is another witness in his treatise On the Faith.

Saint John Chrysostom bears witness in his sermon on Psalm 44.

Saint Augustine is another in his treatise On the Trinity.

12. I omit a great number of authorities of other Holy Fathers taken into account by the Council of Chalcedon, consisting of nearly six hundred Fathers, in which Eutyches was condemned, and which dogmatically defined the doctrine of the Church.

13. It is related that the Fathers, after hearing the Dogmatical Epistle of Saint Leo to Saint Flavian, read in the Council, all cried out as with one voice: "This is the faith of the Fathers and of the Apostles; we and all orthodox believers hold this faith; anathema to him who believes otherwise. Peter has spoken through Leo."

In the years following, other Councils confirmed the same doctrine, especially the Second Council of Constantinople, in 553, in its eighth Canon. The Third Council of Constantinople, (681) in the definition of Faith, repeats the words of the Council of Chalcedon, as does the Second Council of Nicaea (787).

14. We may as well give two theological reasons for the dogma.

The first is this: if the human nature Christ assumed was, after the Incarnation, absorbed into the Divinity, as the Eutychians believe, there would be an end to the mystery of Redemption, for in that

case we should either deny the Passion and death of Jesus Christ altogether, or admit that the Divinity suffered and died, a supposition from which our very nature shrinks with horror.

15. This is the second reason: if, after the Incarnation but one Nature alone remained in Christ, this must have come to pass, either because one of the two Natures was changed into the other, or because both were so mixed up and confused that they formed but one alone, or at least because, being united together without confusion of any sort they formed a third Nature, just as the union of soul and body in man forms human nature. But so it is that not one of those things could take place in the Incarnation, consequently both Natures, the Divine and the human, remained entire in Jesus Christ, with all the properties of each.

16. It is impossible that one of the two Natures could be changed into the other, for in that case the Divine would be changed into the human nature, and that is totally repugnant not only to Faith but to reason itself, for we cannot imagine it even possible that the Divinity should be subject to the slightest change.

Then if the human nature was absorbed and changed into the Divine Nature, we should admit that the Divinity was born in Christ, suffered, died, and rose again, which is equally repugnant to Faith and reason, as the Divinity is eternal, impassible, immortal, and unchangeable. Besides, if the Divinity suffered and died, then the Father and the Holy Ghost suffered and died also, for the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost are together one Divinity. Again, if the Divinity was conceived and was born, then the Blessed Virgin did not conceive and bring forth Christ according to the one nature consubstantial to herself, and therefore she is not the Mother of God. Finally, if the humanity was absorbed into the Divinity in Christ, then he could not be our Redeemer, Mediator, and Pontiff of the New Testament, as faith teaches us he is, for these offices required prayers, sacrifice, and humiliations which the Divinity could not fulfil.

17. Therefore it cannot be asserted, first: That human nature in Christ was changed into the Divine Nature, and much less that the Divine was changed into human nature.

Second: It never could happen that the two Natures were mixed up with each other and confused, and so formed one Nature alone in Christ, for in that case the Divinity would be changed, and would become something else; in Christ there would exist neither Divinity nor humanity, but a Nature neither Divine nor human, so that he would be neither true God nor true man.

Third: It never could have happened that the two Natures which existed without confusion, and totally distinct from each other, could, by uniting together, form a third nature, common to both, because this common nature must, in that case, have been produced by the two parts, which, uniting together, must be reciprocally perfect, for otherwise, if one part receives nothing from the other, but loses some of its own properties in the union, it will certainly not be as perfect as it was before. Now in Christ the Divine Nature has received no perfection from the human nature, and it could not lose anything itself, therefore it must have remained as it was before, and consequently could never form with the humanity a third nature, common to both. Besides, a common nature only springs out of several parts, which naturally require a reciprocal union, as is the case in the union of the soul with the body; but that is not the case in Christ, in whom it is not naturally requisite that human nature should be united with the Word, nor is it necessary that the Word should be united with human nature.

OBJECTIONS ANSWERED.

18. First, the Eutychians quote certain texts of Scripture, by which it would appear that one Nature is changed into the other, as that of Saint John (1:14): "The Word was made flesh;" therefore the Word was changed into flesh. Also that passage of Saint Paul, in which it is said, that "Christ emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (Philippians 2:7); therefore, the Divine Nature is changed.

We reply to the first objection, that the Word was not changed into flesh, but was made flesh by assuming humanity in the unity of the Person, without suffering any change in the union. Thus it is said also of Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:13), that "he was made a curse for us," inasmuch as he took on himself the malediction which we deserved, to free us from it. Saint John Chrysostom says, that the very words, which follow the text they lay so much stress on, explain the difference of the two Natures: "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father." (John 1:14) Now, here the Word is said to have dwelt among us, which is a proof that he is different from us, for that which dwells is different from that which is dwelt in.

And here we may remark, that these expressions of Saint John give a death blow, at the same time, to the Eutychian and Nestorian heresies, for when Nestorius says that the Word dwells in the humanity of Christ alone, because the Evangelist says, "he dwelt among us," he is refuted by the antecedent part of the sentence, "the Word was made flesh," which proves not alone a mere inhabitation, but a union with human nature in one Person; and, on the other hand, when Eutyches says that the Word is said to be turned into flesh, he is refuted by the subsequent expression, "and dwelt among us," which proves that the Word is not changed into flesh (even after the union of the flesh), but remains God the same as before, without confounding the Divine Nature with the human nature he assumed.

19. We should not be startled, either, at the expression, "made flesh," for this is but a manner of expressing a thing, and does not at all times mean the conversion of one thing into another, but frequently that one thing was superadded to another, as in Genesis we read that Adam "became (was made into,) a living soul" (2:7). Now, the obvious meaning of this is, not that the body of Adam, which was already created, was converted into a soul, but that the soul was created and joined to the body. Saint Cyril makes a very pertinent remark on this in his Dialogue, "De Incarnatione Unigeniti." (On the Incarnation of the Only-Begotten.)

Saint Augustine also explains how the Word was made flesh without any change in his Sermon number 187, and elsewhere.

20. As to the second objection, taken from the words, "He emptied himself," (Philippians 2:7) the answer is very clear, from what we have said already; for the Word "emptied himself," not by losing what he was, but by assuming what he was not, for he, being God, equal to the Father in his Divine Nature, "took the form of a servant," thereby making himself less than the Father in his assumed nature, and humbling himself in it even to the death of the Cross: "He humbled himself, being made obedient unto death, even to the death of the Cross;" but, notwithstanding, he retained his Divinity, and was, therefore, equal to the Father.

21. It was not, however, the Eutychians, properly speaking, who made use of these objections, for they did not assert that the Divine was changed into the human nature, but that the human, was changed into the Divine Nature, and they quoted some passages of the Holy Fathers, which they did not understand in their true sense, in their favour.

First: They say that Saint Justin, in his Second Apology, writes, that in the Eucharist the bread is converted into the body of Christ, as the Word was into flesh. But Catholics answer, that the Saint only wished, by this expression, to say that the real and true body of Christ is in the Eucharist, just as the Word in reality assumed and retained human flesh; and the context, if read, shows that this is the true meaning of the passage. The argument is this: that as, in the Incarnation, the Word was made flesh, so, in the Eucharist, the bread is made the body of Christ; but if he intended to teach, as the Eutychians assert, that in the Incarnation of the Word the humanity was absorbed into the Divinity, he never could have said that in the Eucharist the true body of our Lord exists.

22. Secondly: They found an objection on that passage of the Athanasian Creed: "As a rational soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ." Hence, they argue the two Natures are but one. To this we reply, that these words denote an unity of Person, and not of Nature, in Christ, and that is manifest from the words, "one Christ," for by Christ is properly understood the Person, and not the Nature.

23. They object, thirdly, that Saint Iræneus, Tertullian, Saint Cyprian, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Saint Augustine, and Saint Leo, call the union of the two Natures a mixture or fusion, and compare it to the mixture of two fluids one with the other. We answer with Saint Augustine (as quoted), that these Fathers did not make use of these expressions, because they believed that the two Natures were confounded, but to explain how close the union was, and that the Divine was united to the human nature as closely and intimately as the colouring poured into a liquid unites with every portion of it. This is Saint Augustine's explanation.

Tertullian previously gave the same explanation, as do the others quoted when they are examined in their total context.

24. They object, fourthly, the authority of Pope Saint Julius in his Epistle to Dionysius, Bishop of Corinth, in which he blames those who believed that there were two Natures in Christ, and also one expression of Saint Gregory Thaumaturgus, quoted by Photius, who says that there are not two Persons, nor two Natures, for then we should be adoring four. But we answer, with Leontius, that these Epistles are falsely attributed to these Holy Fathers, for the Epistle attributed to Julius is supposed to have been the production of Apollinaris, since Saint Gregory of Nyssa quotes several passages from it, as written by Apollinaris, and refutes them. We have the same reply to make to the quotation from Saint Gregory Thaumaturgus, for it is universally supposed to have been written by the Apollinarists, or Eutychians.

25. They object, fifthly, that Saint Gregory of Nyssa says, in his Fourth Oration against Eunomius, that human nature was united with the Divine Word; but we answer, that notwithstanding this union, each Nature retained its own properties, as Saint Gregory himself says.

26. Finally, they say, if there were two Natures in Christ, there would be also two Persons; but we have already disposed of that objection in an earlier article, refuting the error of Nestorianism, in which we have shown that there is nothing repugnant in the existence of two Natures, distinct and unmixed, in the sole Person of Christ. They said there that if the humanity of Christ consisted of both soul and body, it was complete and perfect; there was, therefore, in him a human person, besides the Divine Person. We answered, that the humanity of Christ was complete by reason of nature, for it wanted nothing, but not by reason of the Person, because the Person in which the Nature subsisted and was comprised was not a human but a Divine Person, and, therefore, we

cannot say that there were two Persons in Christ, for one Person alone, that of the Word, sustains and comprises both the Divine and human Nature.

{We have omitted the abundant footnotes which Saint Alphonsus supplied when quoting the Fathers of the Church, in order to allow Alphonsus' argument to flow smoothly. Those readers who would like to consult them, are urged to read the original work in an English translation, such as at:

<http://www.freewebs.com/wallmell/LiguoriHistoryHeresies.pdf>

This extract is from pages 259 to 267.}
