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The Orthodox Remnant Testimony

Doctrinal Tract No. 2.

CHALCEDON BRIEFLY EXPOUNDED

*A Plain Man's Guide to the Understanding of
The Definition of the Council of Chalcedon*

NOTE: Although written with particular reference to a doctrinal controversy amongst "Exclusive" Brethren, my tract "The 1890 Raven Controversy" is of general doctrinal interest. A revised version of the Definition of Chalcedon is appended both to that and my tract "The 1961 Revival." It is intended to publish a further doctrinal tract "The Unity of the Faith" in which a translation of the original Definition is included as well as my draft revised version.

R.T.7

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The Unity of the Faith—Chalcedon and the "Brethren."

This Confession has been called a "Definition" because it defined in well-trying terms what orthodox believers held as the Scriptural Doctrine of the Person of Christ. The Infinite Son of God cannot be defined; but what we hold as doctrine can be defined, and then it is found whether our minds have been duly taught by the Spirit of God or have been working on their own lines.

The composition of the Definition followed four major heresies: the Arian, which denied that Christ was truly God; the Apollinarian, which denied that Christ was completely Man, alleging that He was a mere manifestation of a Divine Person in a human body; the Nestorian, which erred in supposing that Jesus was a human person to whom a Divine Person had become ineffably united; and the Eutychian, which falsely deduced that if Christ was God and Man in One Person, then He was a God-man, and Deity and Humanity were blended or compounded into one.

In opposition to these baneful errors, the orthodox held to four cardinal points, that Christ is God truly, Man perfectly, God and Man indivisibly, both God and Man distinctly.

The Arian doctrine was that Christ was not increate, but was the supreme creature, who created all other beings and things. The essence of their position was that His nature before the Incarnation was not fully divine, (though they would acknowledge Him as "divine" and even by the name of God,) that He was in essence dissimilar from the Father. The orthodox maintained that Christ was of the same increate essence as the Father, "co-essential" or "consubstantial" with the Father. The heterodox expressed different shades of meaning, some saying that He was like unto the Father, others that He was of like substance to the Father, "simili-substantial," as it has been put. This is all very instructive because at bottom, *if* Christ were only simili-substantial, then logically He was in some respects essentially dissimilar to the Father; and the variation in the terms of the heterodox schools of doctrine was really only a deceitful attempt to mis-lead the orthodox into accepting a form of words which (while true in its measure yet) tolerated a doctrine which merely was *less obviously* derogatory to Christ.

Hence the orthodox have rejoiced to affirm that Christ is "perfect in Godhead . . . God truly . . . consubstantial with the Father and the Holy Spirit."

In saying that Christ is "perfect in Manhood" or "Man perfectly," the orthodox were maintaining that the Manhood of Our Lord was *perfectly constituted*, that is, that it lacked nothing, body, soul or spirit which go to make up full manhood.

Thus the orthodox Scriptural doctrine is that the Creator-Son entered the created sphere in Manhood full and complete, and thus had a human spirit. God is a spirit, uncreated, self-existent, eternal, and Christ is God in that sense, that full sense and no less. He also has a human spirit subject to human limitations and capable of human experiences, and it is proper to say that His body, soul and spirit were created, because they were certainly not increate and eternally existent before He became Man.

The Son, a Divine Person, took part in flesh and blood; Heb. ii. 14; but in resurrection we read of a body of flesh and bones; Luke xxiv. 39. We ought to maintain the truth of the corporeal or bodily resurrection of Our Lord; but He rose in a Body of glory, a spiritual body, and those



conservatives err (terminologically) who speak of a "physical" resurrection. It was sown a natural (physical) body; it is raised a spiritual body. The resurrection body of Our Lord was visible, tangible, capable of taking food, yet immortal and by its spiritual and supernatural character not subject (it appears) to normal laws of space and matter. Luke xxiv. 43.

Our Lord was and is Sinless, and His Blessed Body, even in His Humiliation, was holy, which yours and mine are not. We are conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity; but He was Virgin-born by the Holy Spirit's overshadowing, and His Body, even in His gracious Humiliation, was not mortal or subject to death. Death had no claim on Jesus. Yet it would not be right to fall into error on the other side and out of supposed loyalty to Christ say that He was as Man immortal, though that is perfectly true of Him as God. In His Humiliation His Blessed Body was capable of death, and He did truly die for our sake and our salvation. Therefore I have suggested that to avoid the error on either side, we could properly say that His Body was a-mortal, non-mortal if that is plainer. So far as its constitution was concerned, Our Lord's Body was not doomed to death. But for the sin of man and determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God, Jesus could have been, would have been, alive in that Body to-day; but He came to die of His own voluntary will, out of His subjection to the Father's will, out of His love to us, and the Father has glorified Him raising Him out of death.

Because of the superstition which Romanists have brought into the subject of the Virgin Birth, some Protestants re-act by not giving honour where honour is due, and because of Mariolatry and the Babylonian connotation have demurred to the expression "Mother of God." In our revised draft we have avoided the evil but retained the essential aspect of truth by saying that Our Lord Jesus was "born of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who thus *as to His Manhood* is the Mother of God the Son." If any have difficulty, let them consider Luke i. 43; and answer the question whether in the light of John xx. 28, we cannot rightly say that Mary was the Mother of my Lord and My God?

Many have grave difficulty with the doctrine of eternal generation, and I have gone into the matter in my paper on "The Sonship of Our Lord"; but I leave the doctrine in the Confession of Chalcedon, because I am fully satisfied that it is right. The basic error of those who deny eternal generation is to suppose that generation means the origination or initiation of existence. It does not. It means the outflowing of life and love. In the created sphere, God conjoins in the act of generation to create. You may generate a son. He will be a creature. But he is God's creature, not yours.

The Eternal Generation of the Son of the Father not only has never ceased, It never began. It always was in process! In time it entered a new phase in the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection. See Psalm ii. 7; Heb i. 5; Acts xiii. 33.

Then the orthodox confess "one and the Same Christ in two natures or essences, Deity and Humanity." The orthodox and Scriptural conception of the Incarnation is that Christ is One Person and the names or titles, "Christ, Son, Lord, Only-Begotten" apply to Him both as God and Man. Nestorius in effect conceived of the Incarnation as being God being manifested in flesh through the indwelling of the Word a Divine person in a human person the Man Christ Jesus. Jesus was thus in his erroneous estimate, a human person with whom a Divine Person became associated

and mystically united. Nestorius could see that the Son of God was God, truly God, and that Jesus was truly Man, possessing all human faculties, but he could not see how God the Son could be a man who has told you the truth. John viii. 40. The orthodox could not explain it but accepted it.

Eutyches, on the other hand, accepting that Christ was God and Man, One Person indivisibly, went further and maintained that the Deity and Humanity had become blended or compounded into one nature, and thus Christ was a God-man, and you could no longer say that this was Godhead and this was Manhood. Leo the Great refuted his errors and expounded the doctrine of the Incarnation in his Tome in a manner which repays study.

Each nature or essence retains its own properties, Deity is still Deity and possessed of divine attributes, Humanity is still Humanity and subject to the limitations of Humanity. John i. 14 shows nevertheless that the Human Soul of Our Lord was illumined with a complete and perfect knowledge of divine truth; and thus even considered as Man, Our Lord was an infallible teacher of the truth. Thus things were true of Christ as God which were not true of Him as Man; but it was the One Person of whom both could be said. He had two spheres of existence, both intensely real, two spheres of personal consciousness. He did not lose His Omnipotence, Omniscience and Ubiquity (or Omnipresence) as God, because He in mercy and grace entered the created sphere, and thus as Man could be said to be crucified in weakness, (II Cor. xiii. 4), not to know the day of the Second Advent and be capable of surprise (Mark xiii. 32; Matt. viii. 10) not to have been in a certain place (John vi. 24), although as God still in that sense in heaven; yet because God the Son and the Son of Man are One and the Same Person, Omni-presence can properly be asserted of the Son of Man. John iii. 13.

It would be utterly destructive of the moral power of Christianity to lose sight of either aspect of the truth, the Unity of the Person who is God and Man, on one hand, and the reality and distinctness of the Godhead and Manhood of Christ on the other. Some things are true of Him as God and not as Man, some things are true of Him as Man and not as God, so that He is as truly Man as we are, yet without sin. In general, however, we see Him acting as God and Man, the two natures acting in harmonious unity of will and purpose.

Orthodoxy confesses thus One Person or Subsistence, Christ the Son of God, in two whole and perfect natures, essences or substances. That is the mystery of the Hypostatic or Personal Union. It does not explain how it could be. It merely states the Scriptural evidence in concise form.

Orthodoxy also confesses One God, Three Persons or Subsistences in One Nature, Essence or Substance. That is the mystery of the Trinity in Unity. That God is One Being in Three Persons is the Scriptural evidence. We cannot explain it, but like the doctrine of the Hypostatic Union, we can accept it. The essence of true and intelligent worship is that you know what the mystery is. You have not mis-construed it. You cannot comprehend it. You can only adore.

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