

The Nature of Christ

The Lord Jesus Christ is God Himself, the Incarnate Logos who took to Himself a perfect manhood. His divine nature is one with His human nature, yet without mingling, confusion, or alteration; a complete hypostatic union. Words are inadequate to describe this union. It was said, without controversy, "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh." (1 Tim. 3:16).

As this union is permanent, never divided nor separated, we say in the liturgy that His Godhead never departed from His manhood for a single moment nor even for a twinkle of an eye.

The divine nature (God the Word) was united with human nature which He took of the Virgin Mary by the action of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit purified and sanctified the Virgin's womb so that the Child to whom she gave birth would inherit nothing of the original sin; the flesh formed of her blood was united with the Only-Begotten Son. This unity took place from the first moment of the Holy Pregnancy in the Virgin's womb.

As a result of the unity of both the divine and the human in the Virgin's womb, one nature was formed out of both: "The One Nature of God the Incarnate Logos," as St. Cyril called it.

The Holy Church did not find an expression more reliable, deep, and precise than that which was used by St. Cyril the Great, and which St. Athanasius the Apostolic used before him.

Both of them were true leaders in the theological field worldwide. When I participated in the dialogue arranged by the Pro-Oriente group in Vienna, Austria, in September 1971 between the Roman Catholic Church and the ancient Oriental Orthodox Churches concerning the Nature of Christ, the point of discussion was St. Cyril's expression "One Nature of God the Incarnate Logos" (Mia Physis Tou Theou Logou Sesarkwmene).

After the schism that took place in the year 451 A.D., when the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church rejected the motions of the Council of Chalcedon and its theological struggles, we were called "Monophysites," that is, those who believe in the "One Nature." Sharing our beliefs are the Syrians, the Armenians, the Copts, and the Indians; who were also called "Non-Chalcedonian" Orthodox Churches.

On the other hand, the Chalcedonian Catholic and Greek Churches "The Roman Orthodox" believe in the two natures of Christ; the Protestant Churches also hold this belief. Consequently, these churches are known as "Diophysites" - believers in the two natures of Christ. The Roman - or Chalcedonian - Orthodox Churches include those of Constantinople, Greece, Cyprus, Russia, Romania, Hungary, and Serbia as well as the Roman Orthodox Churches of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, America, and the St. Catherine Monastery in the Sinai desert.

The term "Monophysites" used for the believers in the One Nature has been intentionally or unintentionally misinterpreted throughout certain periods of history. Consequently, the Coptic and the Syrian Churches, in particular, were cruelly persecuted because of their belief, especially

during the period that started from the Council of Chalcedon held in 451 A.D. and continued to the conquest of the Arabs in Egypt and Syria (about 641 A.D.).

This misinterpretation continued throughout history as though we believed in one nature of Christ and denied the other nature. We wonder which of the two natures the Church of Alexandria denies. Is it the divine nature? Certainly not, for our Church was the most fervent defender against the Arian heresy in the Council of Nicea, held in the year 325 A.D., as well as before and after that. Or is it the Lord's human nature that the Church of Alexandria denies?

St. Athanasius of Alexandria resolved this entirely in the oldest and greatest book on this subject, *The Incarnation of the Word*. The expression "One Nature" does not indicate the divine nature alone nor the human nature alone but indicates the unity of both natures into One Nature, which is "The Nature of the Incarnate Logos."

The same applies when we speak about our human nature, which comprises two united natures: the soul and the body. Thus, man's nature is not the soul alone nor the body alone, but their union in one nature called human nature. We will discuss this point in detail later on.

St. Cyril the Great taught us not to talk about two natures after their unity. So we can say that the divine nature united hypostatically with the human nature within the Virgin's womb, but after this unity, we do not ever speak again about the two natures of Christ. In fact, the expression "two natures" implies in itself division or separation, and although those who believe in "the two natures" admit unity, the tone of separation was obvious in the Council of Chalcedon

- a matter which prompted us to reject the Council and caused the exile of St. Dioscorus of Alexandria. Before we go further in explaining the subject of the One Nature and the two natures of Christ, we would like to give a brief description of the widely known heresies concerning the Nature of Christ.