

## A Statement of Reasons for Not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians: Section Five\*

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*ignorant of what (being God) he knew, and unable to perform what (being God) he could perform” (Statement, 60).*

*We reprint below section five of Norton’s discussion of the Trinity in his Statement of Reasons; this portion deals with the hypostatic union. Small editorial changes have been made in punctuation, spelling and paragraphing to facilitate reading.*

#### CONCERNING THE HISTORY OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE HYPOSTATIC UNION

It may throw some further light upon the human origin of the doctrine of the Trinity, briefly to notice the history of that of the Hypostatic Union.

By Trinitarians it is represented as a doctrine of fundamental importance that Christ was at once God and man, the two natures being so united as to constitute but one person. It is this, indeed, which is supposed to give its chief interest to the doctrine of the Trinity; since only he who was at once God and man could, it is said, have made for men that infinite atonement, which the justice of God, or rather the justice of the Father, required. But in the minds of most of those who profess the doctrine, it exists, I conceive, merely as a form of words, not significant of any conceptions however dim or incongruous. They have not even formed an imagination, possible or impossible, of what is meant by the Hypostatic Union. It is a remarkable fact that while new attempts to explain the doctrine of the Trinity, new hypotheses and illustrations of it, have been abundant, this other doctrine has, in modern times, been generally left in the nakedness of its verbal statement that “the Godhead and manhood being joined together in one person never to be divided, there is one Christ, very God and very man, who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried.”

It was in the fifth century that the doctrine assumed its present form. The Fathers of the second century believed in the incarnation of the Logos, or the Son of God; they believed that he became a man, that is, they believed that he manifested himself in a human body; but their conceptions concerning the particular nature of the relation between the divinity and humanity of Christ were obscure and unsettled. Their general notions respecting the Incarnation may more easily be ascertained, though they have not till of late been made the subject of much critical inquiry.

In Justin Martyr, there is, I think, but one passage concerning the mode and results of the connection between the two natures in Christ, which has been regarded of much importance; and that has been differently explained,

and as the text now stands, is, I believe, unintelligible.<sup>1</sup> What, however, is more important, it appears from the general tenor of his language on this subject that Justin regarded the Logos alone as, properly speaking, Christ himself. His notions of the *incarnation* of the Logos were essentially those which we usually connect with that word, as denoting the assumption of a body by a spiritual being, and not as implying any union or combination of a superior nature with the human. Though he uses the term “man” in reference to the animate body of Christ, yet the real agent and sufferer whom he seems always to have had in view is the Logos; for the conceptions of Justin concerning the Logos were not such as to exclude the idea of his suffering. Speaking of the agony of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, he says it was recorded “that we might know that it was the will of the Father that his Son should truly thus suffer for our sakes; and that we might not say that he being the Son of God had no feeling of what was done to him or what befell him.”<sup>2</sup> In later times, indeed, language was used, and its use has continued to our own day — language not utterly intolerable, only because it is utterly without meaning — in which God is spoken of as having suffered and been crucified. But Justin, and other early Fathers, when they spoke of the sufferings of the Logos, meant what they said. This is evident not merely from passages as explicit as that just quoted, but from the manner in which they regarded the doctrine of those who denied the personality of the Logos, and maintained that the divinity in Christ was the divinity of the Father. Such opinions, it was affirmed, necessarily led to the belief that the Father Himself had suffered. Those who held them were charged with this belief, and hence denominated Patripassians. The charge, without doubt, was unjust; but it shows that the doctrine of those who made it was that the Logos, the divine nature of the Son, had suffered in Christ. If they had not

<sup>1</sup> Justin (*Apologia Sec.*, 123., ed. Thirlb.) is speaking of the superiority of Christ to all other lawgivers. These, he admits, possessed a portion of the Logos, that is, were enlightened in a certain degree by the Wisdom of God; but Christ was the Logos himself; therefore the doctrines he taught and Christians believed (τα ημετερα) were far higher than all which had been taught before. The passage in question, by the insertion of a comma and a letter, may receive a certain meaning, but one which throws little light on the subject. Μεγαλειοτερα...φαινεται τα ημετερα δια τετο [...] λογικον το [f. τον] ολον τον φανενα δι' ημας Χριστον γεγονενα, και σωμα, και λογον και ψυχην. “It appears that our doctrines are far superior, for this reason, that the whole Christ who appeared for us, body, Logos, and animal soul, pertained to the Logos” (λογικον γεγονενα).

Perhaps the use of such language may be illustrated by a passage of Origen (*Cont. Cels.* Lib. III. §. 41. Opp. I., 474), which will be quoted hereafter.

<sup>2</sup> *Dial. cum Tryph.*, 361, 362.

held this belief concerning the Logos or Son, there would have been no pretense for charging their opponents with holding a corresponding belief concerning the Father; especially as their opponents maintained what they themselves did not maintain, that Christ was properly and in all respects a man; and this being so, had no occasion to turn their thoughts to any other sufferer than the man Christ.

The opinions of Irenaeus were similar to those of Justin. He regarded the Logos as supplying in Christ the place of the *intelligent soul* or *mind* of man. I use these expressions because Irenaeus, in common with other ancient philosophers, distinguished between the mind, intellect, or spirit, and the principle of life, or animal soul, which was also considered as the seat of the passions. The vagueness with which the names were used, denoting these two principles in man, is one cause of obscurity in the present inquiry. But Irenaeus, it appears, conceived that the Logos, in becoming incarnate, assumed only a body and an animal soul, the place of the human intellect being supplied by the Logos himself.<sup>3</sup> In holding this doctrine, he, though the champion of the church against the heretics of his own day, was himself a precursor both of the Arian and the Apollinarian heresies concerning the Incarnation; for the error of both consisted in regarding the Logos as having supplied the place of the human intellect in Christ.

In opposition to those Gnostics who maintained that the Aeon, as they denominated him, or the divine being, Christ, at the time of the crucifixion,

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<sup>3</sup> See the passages quoted by Münscher, in his *Handbuch der christlichen Dogmengeschichte* Band II. §. 181. Münscher, however, is incorrect in representing Irenaeus as having supposed the Logos to have assumed a human BODY only. According to Irenaeus, *an animal soul* (anima, ψυχή) was also conjoined with the Logos. In opposition to the Gnostics, who denied that Christ had a proper human body, he says (Lib. III. cap. XXII. §. 2): "If the Son of God had received nothing from Mary, . . . he would not have said my soul (ἡ ψυχή μου) is exceedingly sorrowful." Dr. Priestley, on the other hand, contends (*Hist. of Early Opinions*, Vol. II, 203 seqq.) that, according to Irenaeus, Christ had a proper human soul. His error arises from his not adverting to the distinction above mentioned, between the intellect or spirit, and the animal soul. This distinction is stated and illustrated by Irenaeus, Lib. V. cap. vi. §. 1. The latter passage is to be compared with that quoted by Dr. Priestley, of which his rendering is erroneous.

It may be observed that the mistake of Münscher is followed by Neander (*Geschichte der christl. Relig. u. Kirche*, Band. I. s. 1063) who says, speaking of the early opinions concerning Christ: "The assumption of the human nature was conceived of merely as the assumption of a human body, as we find it clearly expressed by Irenaeus."

departed from the man, Jesus, and left him to suffer alone, Irenaeus often speaks of the proper sufferings of the Logos.<sup>4</sup>

Of the opinions of Clement of Alexandria concerning the mode of connection between the two natures, nothing, I think, can be affirmed definitely and with assurance.<sup>5</sup> Of the passages adduced from him, one of the principal has, I think, no relation to the subject; but refers throughout to the indwelling of the Logos in all true believers. It is, however, so remarkable, as showing how loosely language was used, on which, in the writings of the earlier Fathers, too much stress has often been laid, that it deserves quotation. "That man," he says, "with whom the Logos abides, does not assume various appearances; but preserves the form of the Logos; he is made like to God; he is beautiful, not adorned with factitious beauty, but being essential beauty; for such God is. That man becomes a god, because God so wills it. It has been well said by Heraclitus, 'Men are gods and the gods are men'; for the Logos himself, a conspicuous mystery, is God in man, and man becomes a god; the Mediator accomplishing the will of the Father; for the Mediator is the Logos common to both; being the Son of God, and the Savior of men, being his minister and our instructor."<sup>6</sup> Archbishop Potter, in the notes to his edition of Clement, observes "that Clement often says that

<sup>4</sup> See many passages to this effect collected by Jackson in his Annotations to Novatian, 357, 358. On this subject, and on the opinions of the earlier Fathers generally respecting the Incarnation, see also Whiston's *Primitive Christianity*, Vol. IV, 272-321.

Dr. Priestley (*History of Early Opinions*, Vol. II, 205, 215, 216) produces a single passage from Irenaeus (L. III. c. 19) on which he relies for proof that Irenaeus did not conceive of the Logos as suffering. The Greek of this passage is quoted by Dr. Priestley. It is preserved by Theodoret, who may probably have somewhat altered the expressions to conform them to his own opinions, as they do not agree with those of the old Latin version which is here the better authority. Nor does Dr. Priestley's translation correspond even with the Greek. He renders: "The Logos being quiescent in *his* temptation, crucifixion, and death," thus separating the Logos from Christ, and representing Christ as a distinct person by the use of the personal pronoun *his*. The Greek is ησυχάζοντος μεν του Λογου εν τω πειραζεσθαι και σταυρουσθαι και αποθνησκειν; which should be rendered: The Logos being quiescent (i.e. suspending his powers) when tempted, when crucified, and at death.

<sup>5</sup> See the quotations from and references to him in Münscher, *Ibid.* §. 183.

<sup>6</sup> The following is the original of the passage. See Potter's edition of Clement, 252. I have altered his pointing, as the sense seems to me to require, and, in one instance, in the last sentence, θεος is printed with a small initial letter, where he has used a capital.

Ο δε ανθρωπος εκεινος, ω συνοικος ο Λογος, ου ποικιλλεται, ου πλαττειται μορθην εχει την του Λογου εξομοιουται τω Θεω καλος εστιν, ου καλλωπιζεται καλλος εστι το αληθινον, και γαρ ο Θεος εστιν. Θεος δε εκεινος ο ανθρωπος γινεται, οτι βουλεται ο Θεος. Ορθως αρα ειπεν Ηρακλειτος, Ανθρωποι, θεοι θεοι, ανθρωποι. Λογος γαρ αυτος, μυστηριον εμφανες, Θεος εν ανθρωπω, και ο ανθρωπος, θεος και το θελημα του Πατρος

men through piety and virtue are not only assimilated to God, but as it were transformed into the divine nature, and become gods.<sup>7</sup>

But the opinions of Clement respecting the Incarnation appear perhaps with sufficient distinctness in what he says of the body of Christ. According to him:

It would be ridiculous to suppose that the body of our Savior required the aliments necessary to others for its support. He took food not for the sake of his body, which was sustained by a holy power; but that he might not give occasion to those with whom he was conversant to form a wrong opinion concerning him; as, in fact, some [the Docetae] afterward supposed, that he had been manifested with only the appearance of a body. But he was wholly impassible; liable to be affected by no motions either of pleasure or pain.<sup>8</sup>

It would seem that Clement here excludes all conception even of an *animal soul* in Christ; and that he regarded the appearance of the Logos on earth as merely the manifestation of him to the senses of men in a body, answering in form and substance to a human body, but not subject to the same necessities and accidents.

The language of Tertullian is vacillating and self-contradictory. His conceptions on the whole subject of the Logos were unsteady; and no form of words had as yet been settled which might serve as a guide to one without ideas of his own. He rejected the philosophical distinction of his day between the intellect (*mens, animus*) and the animal soul (*anima*), and maintained, in conformity with our modern belief, the proper unity of the soul (*anima*), of which he regarded the intellect as a part. But this soul, in common with many of the ancient philosophers, he conceived of as corporeal. He regarded it as diffused through the body, possessing its shape, and constituting its principle of life.<sup>9</sup> A living body he probably considered as essentially united with a soul; and in believing the Logos to have assumed a living body, he represents him as having assumed also a human soul. The soul being, in his view, corporeal as well as the body, the conception or the

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ο μεσιτης εκτελει μεσιτης γαρ ο Λογος, ο κοινος αμφοιν, Θεου μεν υιος, σωτηρ δι ανθρωπων, και του μεν διακονος, ημων δε παιδαγωγος. Paedagog. III. c. 1.

<sup>7</sup> See note 11, 71 and note 7, 88. In the latter he produces remarkable examples of this use of language.

<sup>8</sup> Stromat. VI. §. 9. 775.

<sup>9</sup> See his Treatise, *De Animâ*.

imagination thus became easier to be apprehended. But that in assigning a human soul to Christ, he assigned to him likewise a human intellect, is not, I think, to be proved. This part of the soul, he may have thought was supplied by the Logos; and there is much in his writings which favors the supposition. It appears, I think, to have been his *prevalent* conception, in common with the other Fathers of his time, that the Logos alone was the proper agent in Christ. I will produce only two passages, to which there are many, more or less analogous. In arguing against the Gnostics, who denied that Christ had a fleshly body, he compares the assumption of such a body by Christ to the appearances of angels related in the Old Testament. "You have read, and believed," he says, "that the angels of the Creator were sometimes changed into the likeness of men, and bore about so true a body that Abraham washed their feet, and Lot was drawn away from Sodom by their hands; an angel also wrestled with a man, the whole weight of whose body was required to throw him down and detain him. But that power which you concede to the angels, who may assume a human body and yet remain angels, do you take away from a Divine Being more powerful than they? (*hoc tu potentiori deo aufers?*) As if Christ could not continue a Divine Being (*deus*) after having put on humanity."<sup>10</sup> He often speaks, though I think not with clear or consistent conceptions, of the sufferings of the Logos. He represents him as the agent in all those operations referred to God in the Old Testament, which the Gnostics regarded as unworthy of the Supreme Being. They are ignorant, he says, that though not suitable to the Father, they were suitable to the Son; and proceeds to express conceptions very different from those which, as we have seen, were entertained by Clement of Alexandria. "They are ignorant that those things were suitable to the Son, who was about to submit to the accidents of humanity, thirst, and hunger, and tears, to be born, and even to die."<sup>11</sup>

Thus far, the loose general notion of most of those who speculated on the subject seems to have been that the incarnation of the Logos was analogous to the appearance of angels in human shapes; and to the supposed incarnations of heathen deities, with the imagination of which a great majority of Christians were familiar, as converts from Gentilism.<sup>12</sup> One of the latest writers on the history of Christian doctrines, Münter, late Bishop of Zealand, observes that:

<sup>10</sup> *De Carne Christi*, cap. 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Advers. Praxeam*, cap. 16.

<sup>12</sup> "Alia sunt quae Deus in aemulationem elegerit sapientiae secularis. Et tamen apud illam facilius creditur Jupiter taurus factus aut cygnus, quam vere homo Christus penes Marcionem." Tertullian, *De Carne Christi*, cap. 4.

The Catholic Fathers, who maintained in opposition to the Gnostics the reality of the body of Christ, appear in part to have placed the human nature of Christ in this body; and their common expressions and representations show clearly that they had very imperfect conceptions concerning this nature, corresponding to those entertained by the heathen, by the learned Jews, and by all parties of Christians, concerning the appearances of God or of gods in the ancient world . . . The well-known error of Apollinaris, that Jesus had only an animal soul, the principle of life; and that the Divine Logos performed in him all the functions of an intelligent soul, was by no means so new as it was represented to be in the fourth century.

Among the Fathers, according to Münter, Tertullian was perhaps the first who affirmed Jesus to have a proper human soul; although he adds that some passages may be adduced from him which appear to favor the contrary opinion.<sup>13</sup> Similar remarks to those quoted from Münter are made by Neander in his *Ecclesiastical History*.<sup>14</sup>

Such, we may conclude, was the state of opinion respecting the Incarnation from the time of Justin Martyr, about the middle of the second century, to that of Origen in the third century. It is a remarkable fact that the foundations of the doctrine of the deity of Christ were laid in the virtual rejection of the truth of his being, properly speaking, a man; a truth at the present day almost undisputed. This fact was admitted only in words; the sense of which was nearly the same as when angels assuming a human shape are spoken of as men in the Old Testament. It may be observed also that in this, as in other doctrines, the ancient Fathers had a great advantage over those who in later times have been denominated Orthodox; as their doctrine which represented the Logos as constituting the whole of the intelligent nature of Christ, or, in other words, made the Logos and Christ identical, was neither absurd in its statement, nor abhorrent to our natural feelings. But there is another remark, which, though not immediately to our present purpose, is still more important. When we find that in the second century Christ was no longer considered as a man, properly speaking, but as the incarnate Logos of God, we perceive how imperfect a knowledge had been preserved by unwritten tradition, not merely of the doctrines of our religion, but of the impression which its historical facts must have made upon the first believers; for if Christ were a man in the proper sense of the word, those who

<sup>13</sup> Dogmengeschichte, B. II, H. I., 269-274.

<sup>14</sup> Band I. 1063, 1064. II. 905.



were conversant with him while on earth undoubtedly believed him to be so. In the passage of our religion from the Jews to whom it had been taught, to the Gentiles through whom it has been transmitted to us, the current of tradition was interrupted. Hence followed, even in the second century, a state of opinion respecting the facts and doctrines of Christianity which renders it evident that neither Christianity itself, nor those writings from which we derive our knowledge of it, had their origin, or received their character, in that age. The Christianity of the Gospels is not that of the earliest Christian Fathers. Though they had departed but little from the spirit of our religion, or from its essential doctrines; and though their works (I speak of the Fathers of the first three centuries), notwithstanding the disrespect and unjust prejudices of many in modern times, are monuments of noble minds; yet it is equally true that we find in their writings the doctrines of Christianity intimately blended with opinions derived either from the philosophy of the age, or from the popular notions of Jews and Gentiles, or having their source in the peculiar circumstances in which they themselves were placed.

We come now to Origen, in the first half of the third century, and with him, new opinions open upon us. Origen fully and consistently maintained the doctrine of a human soul in Jesus. Imbued with the principles of Platonism, he believed this soul, in common with all other souls, to have preexisted, and in its preexistent state, to have, through its entire purity and moral perfection, become thoroughly filled and penetrated by the Logos, of whom all other souls partake in proportion to their love toward him. It thus became one with the Logos, and formed the bond of union between the body of Jesus and the divinity of the Logos; in consequence of which both the soul and body of the Savior, being wholly mixed with and united to the Logos, partook of his divinity and were transformed into something divine.<sup>15</sup> But from the illustrations which Origen uses respecting the

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<sup>15</sup> Εἰς θεὸν μεταδεδηκέναι. Cont. Cels. Lib. III. § 41, 474. The words should not be rendered, as they are by Münscher, "transformed into God" (in Gott übergegangen). Origen here, as often elsewhere, uses θεός (God) not in our modern sense, as a *proper* name, but as a *common* name. This use of the term, which was common to him with his contemporaries, and continued to be common after his time, is illustrated by his remarks upon the passage "and the Logos was God" (Opp. IV, 48 seqq.) in which he contends that the Logos was "god" in an inferior sense; not, as we should say, *God*, but a *god*, or rather, not *the* Divine Being, but *a* divine being; and in which he maintains that "beside the True God, many beings, by participation of God, become *divine*," literally "become gods."

The full illustration of the use of the term *god* as a *common* name would, I think, throw much light upon the opinions both of the ancient Heathens and Christians. But this is not the place to enter upon it.

connection between the Logos and the human nature of Christ, it is clear that he had no conception of that form of the doctrine which prevailed after his time. "We do not," he says, "suppose the visible and sensible body of Jesus to have been God, nor yet his soul, of which he declared, *My soul is sorrowful even unto death*. But as he who says, *I the Lord am the God of all flesh*; and *There was no other God before me and there shall be none after me* is believed by the Jews to have been God using the soul and body of the prophet as an organ; and, as among the Gentiles, he who said, 'I know the number of the sands and the measure of the deep, and I understand the mute, and hear him who speaks not,' is understood to be a god, addressing men by the voice of the Pythoness; so we believe that the divine Logos, the son of the God of all, spoke in Jesus when he said, *I am the way and the truth and the life; I am the living bread descending from heaven*; and when he uttered other similar declarations." A little after, Origen compares that union of the soul and body of Jesus with the Logos, by which they are made one, to the union of all Christians with their Lord as described by St. Paul (1 Cor. 6:17), "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him," though he represents it as a union of a far higher character, and more divine.<sup>16</sup>

In this unsettled state the doctrine of the Incarnation continued till the fourth century. It is remarked by Münscher, when he comes to treat of the controversies which then arose, that:

Most of the earlier Fathers spoke simply of a human body, which the Logos or Son of God had assumed. Origen, on the contrary, ascribed to Christ an intelligent human soul, and considered this as the bond of union between his divine nature and his human body. Some Fathers had also spoken occasionally of a union or commingling of man with God; but their propositions concerning it were indefinite and incidental, and had obtained no authority in the Church; and the opinion of Origen was far from being an hypothesis generally received.<sup>17</sup>

I quote this as the statement of a respectable writer, without assenting to all the expressions, as may appear from what precedes.

In the fourth century, the doctrine of Athanasius concerning the Trinity being established by the Council of Nice; and its partisans, in opposition to the Arians, zealously using the strongest language concerning the divinity

<sup>16</sup> Origen, Cont. Cels. Lib II. § 9. Opp. I. 393, 394.

<sup>17</sup> Dogmengeschichte. Band IV. § 77.

of the Son as *consubstantial* with that of the Father, the Orthodox faith was now verging to such a profession of their equality that to represent the Logos as suffering in his divine nature began to appear an error, like that of representing the Father as suffering. On the other hand, the Arians, viewing the Logos as a created being, found no difficulty in retaining the ancient doctrine concerning his simple incarnation in a human body, and his having suffered in the proper sense of the words. Among their opponents likewise, Apollinaris, who had been the friend of Athanasius and distinguished for his zeal in asserting the Orthodox faith concerning the Trinity, undertook with a less fortunate result to define the doctrine of the Incarnation. He, with the Arians and the ancient Fathers, maintained that the Logos supplied in Christ the place of the human intellect. He also freely used the language, which has since become common, concerning the sufferings of the Divinity in Christ; and his opponents, in consequence, represented him as believing the Divine nature to be passible. But it seems most probable that he, like others, used this language without meaning. His doctrine was condemned by the second general council, that of Constantinople (AD 381), in which it was decreed that Christ was not only “the perfect Logos of God,” but also “a perfect man possessed of a rational soul”; and the latter doctrine was thus at last established as Orthodox.

The Deity being impassible, it would seem, indeed, if Christ really suffered, that it was necessary to regard him as a perfect man, capable of suffering. But, on the other hand, if the sufferings of Christ were those of a man only, it might seem to follow that Christ was only a man, and the whole mystery of the Incarnation would disappear.

In this state of things recourse was had to a doctrine which has been denominated the Communication of Properties.<sup>18</sup> It was maintained that the divine and human natures in Christ being united in one person, what was true of either nature might be asserted of Christ. Christ then being God, it might be affirmed with truth that God was born, hungered, thirsted, was crucified, and died. It was maintained, at the same time, that the Divine Nature was impassible and unchangeable. The last proposition annihilated all meaning in the former, not leaving it even the poor merit of being the most offensive mode of expressing some conception that might be apprehended as possible. What sense those who have asserted the sufferings of God have fancied that the words might have, is a question which, after all that has been written upon the subject, is left very much to conjecture. I imagine that it is,

<sup>18</sup> Αντιδοσις. — Κοινωνία ιδιωμάτων.

at the present day, the gross conception of some who think themselves Orthodox on this point, that the divine and human natures being united in Christ as the Mediator, a compound nature, different from either and capable of suffering, was thus formed.

The doctrine of the Communication of Properties, says Le Clerc, "is as intelligible as if one were to say that there is a circle which is so united with a triangle, that the circle has the properties of the triangle, and the triangle those of the circle."<sup>19</sup> It is discussed at length by Petavius with his usual redundancy of learning. The vast folio of that writer containing the history of the Incarnation is one of the most striking and most melancholy monuments of human folly which the world has to exhibit. In the history of other departments of science we find abundant errors and extravagances; but Orthodox theology seems to have been the peculiar region of words without meaning; of doctrines confessedly false in their proper sense, and explained in no other; of the most portentous absurdities put forward as truths of the highest import; and of contradictory propositions thrown together without an attempt to reconcile them. A main error running through the whole system, as well as other systems of false philosophy, is that words possess an intrinsic meaning not derived from the usage of men; that they are not mere signs of human ideas, but a sort of real entities, capable of signifying what transcends our conceptions, and that when they express to human reason only an absurdity, they may still be significant of a high mystery or a hidden truth, and are to be believed without being understood.

In the fifth century, the doctrine of the Hypostatic Union was still further defined. Before this time, says Mosheim:

it had been settled by the decrees of former councils [those of Nice and Constantinople] that Christ was truly God and truly man; but there had as yet been no controversy and no decision of any council concerning the mode and effect of the union of the two natures in Christ. In consequence, there was a want of agreement among Christian teachers in their language concerning this mystery.<sup>20</sup>

The controversy which now arose had its origin in the denial of Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople, that Mary could in strictness of speech be called "the Mother of God," a title which had been applied to her by Athanasius himself. Though we are accustomed to expressions more

<sup>19</sup> *Ars Critica*. P. II. S. I. c. ix. § 11.

<sup>20</sup> *Hist. Eccles.* Saec. V. Pars II. cap. v. § 5.

shocking, yet this title may perhaps sound harshly in the ears of most Protestants. Mosheim, however, who is solicitous to pass some censure upon Nestorius, finds but two faults or errors to impute to him, the first of which is that “he, rashly and to the offense of many, wished to set aside an *innocent title* which had been long in common use.”<sup>21</sup> The other is that he presumptuously employed unsuitable expressions and comparisons in speaking of a mystery transcending all comprehension. Cyril was at this time patriarch of Alexandria, and the rival of Nestorius, a turbulent, ambitious, unprincipled man. He took advantage of the opinions of Nestorius to charge him with heresy, and procured the calling of the third general council, that of Ephesus, AD 431. In this council Cyril presided, and the heresy of Nestorius was anathematized, and Nestorius himself was deposed and denounced as a “second Judas.” On a subject concerning which the parties understood neither each other nor themselves, it has been found by modern inquirers hard to determine in what particulars the heresy of the “new Judas” differed from the Orthodoxy of Cyril, except in the denial that Mary could in strictness of speech be called “the Mother of God.” In general, Nestorius was charged with making so wide a distinction between the human and divine natures in Christ as to separate Christ into two persons. There is however no ground for supposing that Nestorius maintained so heretical and so rational an opinion as that God was one person, and the inspired messenger of God another. Whatever was meant by the accusation of his dividing Christ into two persons, he himself earnestly denied its truth; while, on the other hand, it appears that Cyril, in his eagerness to widen the distance between himself and his rival, either fell into the snare of the Apollinarian heresy, or at least grazed its limits. Cyril prevailed in his factious contest through his influence with the officers of the Imperial Household, and the bribes which he lavished upon them; for what was Orthodoxy was to be determined in the last resort by the emperor Theodosius, or rather by the women and eunuchs of his court. “Thanks to the purse of St. Cyril,” says Le Clerc, “the Romish church which regards councils as infallible is not, at the present day, Nestorian.”<sup>22</sup> The creeds of Protestants are equally indebted to St. Cyril for their purity.

But notwithstanding the decision of the Council of Ephesus, the contest still raged. The *monophysite* doctrine, as it was called, that is the doctrine of but a single nature in Christ, the heresy of Apollinaris, on the very borders of which lay the Orthodoxy of Cyril, was maintained by Eutyches, who

<sup>21</sup> “ — vocabulum dudum tritum et innocens.” *Ib.* § 9.

<sup>22</sup> *Biblioth. Univers. Suite du Tome XXI, 27.*

had been a friend of Cyril and a bitter opponent of the Nestorians. Eutyches was condemned and deposed by Flavian, patriarch of Constantinople. But though Cyril was dead, his party still predominated. A council was called at Ephesus, the proceedings of which were determined by the will and the violence of Dioscurus, who had succeeded him as patriarch of Alexandria. The opinions of Eutyches were sanctioned by it; and Flavian, who was present, suffered such personal outrages from his theological opponents that he only escaped to die on the third day following. This council, however, the Church of Rome does not regard as ecumenical and entitled to authority. Leo, then pope, joined the party opposed to Dioscurus, which through his aid finally prevailed; and the Council of Ephesus received a name, of which we may best perhaps express the force in English by calling it a Council of Banditti.<sup>23</sup>

So far, however, as its authority was acknowledged, the Church had been plunged by it into the monophysite heresy. But a new council was called, which is reckoned as the fourth general council, that of Chalcedon, AD 451. The majority of this council was composed of monophysites; but the Emperor and the Pope favored the opposite party. Their authority prevailed; and the result may be given in the words of Gibbon:

The Legates threatened, the Emperor was absolute . . . In the name of the fourth general council, the Christ in one person, but in two natures, was announced to the Catholic world: an invisible line was drawn between the heresy of Apollinaris and the faith of St. Cyril, and the road to paradise, a bridge as sharp as a razor, was suspended over the abyss by the master hand of the theological artist.

“This council,” says Mosheim, “decided that all Christians should believe that Jesus Christ is one person in two distinct natures without any confusion or mixture, which has continued to be the common faith.”<sup>24</sup> It has continued to be the doctrine of creeds; what is now the faith of those who consider themselves as believers in the Incarnation is probably a question which the greater number have never thought of answering.

Of the language, however, that has been used in modern times concerning this doctrine, it may be worthwhile to produce one or two specimens.

<sup>23</sup> Συνοδος ληστρική.

<sup>24</sup> *Hist. Eccles. Saec. V.P. II.cap. v. § 15.*

Lord Bacon gives us this account of the belief of a Christian:<sup>25</sup>

He believes a Virgin to be a Mother of a Son; and that very Son of hers to be her Maker. He believes him to have been shut up in a narrow room, whom heaven and earth could not contain. He believes him to have been born in time, who was and is from everlasting. He believes him to have been a weak child carried in arms, who is the Almighty; and him once to have died, who only hath life and immortality in himself.

The following passage is from a sermon by Dr. South:<sup>26</sup>

But now was there ever any wonder comparable to this! to behold Divinity thus clothed in flesh! the Creator of all things humbled not only to the *company*, but also to the *cognition* of his creatures! It is as if we should imagine the whole world not only represented *upon*, but also contained *in* one of our little artificial globes; or the body of the *sun* envelop'd in a *cloud* as big as a *man's hand*; all which would be look'd upon as astonishing impossibilities; and yet as short of the other, as the greatest Finite is of an Infinite, between which the disparity is immeasurable. For that God should thus in a manner transform Himself, and subdue and master all His glories to a possibility of human apprehension and converse, the best reason would have thought it such a thing as God could *not do*, had it not seen it *actually done*. It is (as it were) to cancel the essential distances of things, to remove the bounds of nature, to bring heaven and earth, and (which is more) both ends of the *contradiction* together.

To one wholly ignorant of theological controversy, these passages might have the air of malicious irony. But a little further acquaintance with creeds and theological systems would satisfy him that such language may be used in earnest.

It is with some hesitation that I adduce another passage from the same sermon of South, which occurs a few pages after what has been quoted. When thus treating, as it were, of the morbid anatomy of the human mind, it is often a question how far one ought to proceed in exhibiting to common view the more disgusting cases of disease. The reverence due to the subjects which are profaned, and an unwillingness to shock the feelings of his

<sup>25</sup> In his *Character of a Believing Christian*.

<sup>26</sup> South's Sermons, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., 1727, Vol. III, 299. Sermon on Christmas Day, 1665.

readers, should restrain a writer from any unnecessary display. But it is not a little important that the character of the doctrine under consideration, and the monstrous extravagances to which it leads, should be well understood. In reading, then, the following words, it is to be recollected that the author was a man distinguished as a fine writer, whose uncommon natural talents had been cultivated by learning. From the works of grosser minds it would be easy to produce many passages more intolerable.

“Men,” says South, “cannot persuade themselves that a *Deity* and *Infinity* should lie within so narrow a compass as the contemptible dimensions of an human body: That Omnipotence, Omniscience, and Omnipresence should be ever wrapt in swaddling-clothes, and abased to the homely usages of a stable and a manger: That the glorious Artificer of the whole universe, *who spread out the heavens like a curtain, and laid the foundations of the earth*, could ever turn carpenter, and exercise an inglorious trade in a little cell. They cannot imagine that *He who commands the cattle upon a thousand hills, and takes up the ocean in the hollow of his hand*, could be subject to the meannesses of hunger and thirst, and be afflicted in all his appetites. That he who once *created*, and at present *governs*, and shall hereafter *judge* the world, shall be abused in all his concerns and relations, be *scourged, spit upon, mocked, and at last crucified*. All which are passages which lie extremely cross to the notions and conceptions that reason has framed to itself, of that high and impassible perfection that resides in the divine nature.”

There is a short poem written by Watts after the death of Locke,<sup>27</sup> in which, on account of “the wavering and the cold assent” which that great man was supposed by him to have given to “themes divinely true,” he invokes the aid of Charity that he may see him in heaven. What were these “themes divinely true” appears in the following verses:

Reason could scarce sustain to see  
The Almighty One, the Eternal Three,  
Or bear the infant Deity;  
Scarce could her pride descend to own  
Her Maker stooping from his throne,  
And dressed in glories so unknown.  
A ransomed world, a bleeding God,  
And Heaven appeased by flowing blood,  
Were themes too painful to be understood.

<sup>27</sup> On Mr. Locke’s Annotations, left behind him at his death.



The Eternal Three! The Deity an infant! God bleeding! The Maker of the Universe appeasing Heaven by his flowing blood! These are not doctrines to be trifled with. Consider what meaning can be put upon these words; take the least offensive sense they can be used to express; and then let anyone ask himself this question: If these doctrines are not doctrines of Christianity, what are they? It is a question that deserves serious consideration. There is but an alternative. If they are not doctrines of Christianity, then they are among the most insane fictions of human folly: the monstrous legends of Hindoo superstition present nothing more revolting, or more in contrast with the truths of our religion.

But, in fact, some of the most portentous of these expressions are used utterly without meaning. They can express nothing which an intelligent man will admit that he intends to express. Attempt to give a sense to the propositions, God was an infant; God poured out His blood; God died. Even he whom familiarity has rendered insensible to language really equivalent, may shudder at so naked a statement of what he professes to believe. Let him attempt to give a sense to these words, and just in proportion as he approaches toward the shadow of a meaning, will he approach toward a conception from which, if he have the common sentiments of a man and a Christian, he will shrink back with abhorrence.

Since Christianity then has been represented as teaching such doctrines, and even as suspending the salvation of men upon their belief, is it wonderful that it has had, and that it has, so little power over men's minds and hearts? Could means more effectual have been devised for destroying its credit and counteracting its efficacy? If TRUE RELIGION be the great support of the moral virtues, and essential to the happiness of individuals and the well-being of society, is it strange that there has been so little virtue, happiness, or peace in the world? And what then are our duties as Christians, and as friends of human kind? What is the duty of all enlightened men; of all qualified to inquire into the character and history of these doctrines; of all who profess or countenance them with an uncertain faith? Of such as are fitted to think and act upon subjects of this nature, there is but one class to whom a solemn appeal may not be made. It consists of those who, after a thorough examination, have felt themselves compelled to receive these doctrines — if the thing be possible — as doctrines taught by Christ and his Apostles.