

“But who do you say that I am?” (Mt 16:15)

✠ Lecture II: The Nature of Our Lord Jesus Christ ✠

✠ Our Faith Concerning Christology:

Our Lord Jesus Christ is God Himself, the Incarnate Logos, who took to Himself a **complete** manhood. His Divine Nature is united with His Human Nature in a **complete Hypostatic (personal) Union without mingling, confusion, alteration or separation**. Furthermore, the unity between the two Natures occurred **without transmutation**. Thus neither the Divine Nature transmutes to the Human Nature, nor did the Human Nature transmute to the Divine.

Without mingling as in the case of wheat and barely or salt and sugar. Without confusion as in the case of wine and water or tea and milk. Without alteration as in the case of chemical union: Carbon dioxide consists of Carbon and Oxygen, and the nature of both changes when they are combined; each loses some of its properties that distinguished it before this unity. In contrast, no change occurred to the Divine or Human Nature as a result of their unity. Without separation for His Divinity parted not from His Humanity for a single moment nor a twinkling of an eye.

The Divine Logos was united with the Human Nature (body & spirit) that He took from Virgin Mary by the action of the Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit purified and sanctified the Virgin so that the Child to whom she gave birth would not inherit the original sin. This unity between the Two Natures (Human & Divine) took place from the first moment of the Holy Pregnancy. As a result of this unity between both Natures (Divine & Human) inside the Virgin’s womb, **One** Nature (entity) was formed **out of both**: “**The ONE Nature of God, the Incarnate Logos.**” The Term “One Nature” **does not refer to either** of the Two Natures (Divine & Human), **but it refers to the result of the union of Both Natures** into this One Nature which is “the Nature of the Incarnate Logos”. The term “Two Natures” implies division or potential separation. Human language is inadequate when it comes to describing this union but here are two examples³:

a) The union between Iron & Fire:

In the union of iron and fire, the iron is not changed into fire or the fire into iron. They are both united without mingling, confusion, or alteration. {At a certain temperature the iron will change and extinguishing the fire will separate them}.

b) The union between the human spirit & body:

The nature of the human spirit unites with the physical earthly nature of the body without mingling, confusion, alteration, or transmutation {they will separate by death and then they reunite}. This union of the two natures (spirit & body) results in ONE nature that is the human nature. The term ONE here doesn’t refer to either of the two natures (spirit – body) but it refers to the result of this union of BOTH natures into this ONE human being. **Therefore, just as we say that the person is ONE nature consisting of two elements (spirit & body), we can also say about the Incarnate Logos that He is ONE entity of two natures (Divine & Human).** The union of the spirit & body is a hypostatic one. So is the union of the Divine Logos & the Human Nature in the virgin’s womb. A hypostatic, real, self-essential union not a mere connection that separates as Nestorius claimed. Although a person is formed of two natures (spirit & body), nobody refers to him/her as two. All the person’s acts are attributed to this ONE nature, not to the spirit alone or the physical body alone. Similarly, all the acts of Christ should be attributed to Him as a whole, not to His Divine Nature independently or to His Human Nature independently.

³ These examples are intended to clarify some aspects of the union but they are not perfect, just like our human language. The imperfections are put between brackets { }.

✚ In a Nutshell:

→ Our Lord Jesus Christ has One Nature composed of Two Natures:

1. The Divine Nature of the LOGOS.
2. The Human Nature that He took from Virgin Mary.

→ The Human Nature is composed of Two⁺ Elements:

- a) Human Spirit.
- b) Human Body.

The Divine Nature of the LOGOS is united with every element of the Human Nature without mingling, confusion, alteration, transmutation, or separation. As a result of this Hypostatic Union, One Entity is formed out of Both (Divine & Human) Natures. This is the “One Nature Of God, The Incarnate Logos”. When we refer to this **ONE NATURE** we are referring to this **ONE ENTITY** that resulted from the union of **BOTH** the Divine and Human Natures. So what happened on the cross? Our Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross. Death means that His Human Spirit was separated from His Human Body. The Divine Logos remained united with **BOTH** the spirit and the body after their separation. Hence, His Divinity parted not from His Humanity. This explains why the body was not corrupted in the grave and it also explains how the spirit was able to return to the body when the Resurrection took place.

✚ Are we Monophysites?

The Oriental Orthodox Churches (Coptic, Syrian, Armenian, Ethiopian, an Indian) are ‘**Miaphysites**’. There is a difference between the ‘Monophysites’ who believe in **One Single Nature** (Divine) of our Lord Jesus Christ and the ‘Miaphysites’ who believe in **One United Nature** or **One Composite Nature** (Divine & Human) of our Lord Jesus Christ. We do not believe in a Single Nature but we believe in One Incarnate Nature of the Logos.

✚ Our Faith concerning the One will and Act:

Naturally, since we believe that after the union of the Divine and Human Natures, One Nature (entity) resulted, namely, the Nature of the Incarnate Logos, we also believe in **One Will** and **One Act** for the Incarnate Logos. There is no contradiction or conflict between the will and the act of the Two Natures; what the Divine Nature chooses is undoubtedly chosen by the Human Nature. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work” (**Jn 4:34**). This proves that His will is the same as the Father’s. Certainly, the Divine Logos has the same will as the Father since He is one with Him in the Godhead. Thus, it must be that the Nature of the Incarnate Logos has One Will that is not different from the Father. In fact, sin is nothing but a conflict between man’s will and God’s. But our Lord Jesus Christ said, “Which of you convicts Me of sin?” (**Jn 8:46**) proving His One will with the Father.

If there were no unity between the will of the Divine Logos and His Human Nature, internal conflict would have resulted. Far be it from Him! How then could the Lord Jesus Christ be our guide and our example? The complete righteousness that marked the life of our savior was due to the unity of His Divine and Human will. Also, the crucifixion was the choice of both the Divine and Human will. Had it not been one will, it would not have been said that He died by His own will for us. And since the will is one, the act is also one.

⁺ The human nature actually consists of three elements: The body, the spirit and the soul. As St. Paul said, “May your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless” (1Thess 5:23). Only two are mentioned above for simplicity. But we need to understand that our Lord had a FULL human nature.

→ Did the Divine Nature (of the Logos) suffer?

+ St. Cyril of Alexandria said in his first letter to Nestorius:

“For thus we say that He both suffered and rose again, not as though God the Word suffered in His own Nature either stripes or piercings of nails or the other wounds (for the Godhead is Impassible because It is also Incorporeal), but since that which had been made His own body suffered these things, He again **is said to suffer for us**, for the Impassible was in the suffering Body. In like manner do we conceive of His Death too. For the Word of God is by Nature Immortal and Incorruptible and Life and Life-giving; but since again His own Body by the grace of God (as Paul saith) tasted death for every man, Himself **is said to have suffered death for us**, not as though He had experienced death as far as pertains unto His own Nature (for it were distraction to say or think this) but because (as I said just now) His flesh tasted death. Thus too when His Flesh was raised, the Resurrection again is said to be His, not as though He fell into decay (not so!) but because His Body again was raised. Thus shall we confess One Christ and Lord; not as if co-worshipping a man with the Word, that a fantasy of severance be not privily brought in, by saying with [*syn*] but as worshipping One and the Same, because not alien to the Word is His Body with which He sits with the Father, not as though two sons sit with the Father but One in union with His own Flesh. But if we reject the Personal Union as either impossible or as uncomely, we fall into saying, Two sons; for we must needs sever and say that the one is man by himself, honoured with the title of son; by Himself again, the Word of God, having of Nature both the Name and Fact of Sonship.

+ St. Cyril is saying that the Divine Nature is Impassible and Immortal **BUT** since the body is mortal and passible **AND** the Divine Nature was united with this mortal and passible body **THEREFORE** the Logos is "said" to have suffered pain "said" to have suffered death - St. Cyril emphasizes "not as though He had experienced death as far as pertains unto His own Nature.

+ St. Cyril said in his Anathema # 12:

"Whosoever shall not recognize that the Word of God suffered **in the flesh**, that he was crucified **in the flesh**, and that likewise **in that same flesh** he tasted death and that he is become the first-begotten of the dead, for, as he is God, he is the life and it is he that giveth life: let him be anathema."

+ St. Cyril emphasis is "**in the flesh**" - He is not saying that the Divinity (after the union) suffered pain or died but the Logos suffered and died "**in the flesh**". The Divine Nature is united with the Human nature **without alteration**; **The Son of God** remained Impassible after the union yet the suffering is "ascribed" to **Him**.

+ We can appreciate more what St. Cyril is saying when we read Nestorius' counter Anathema; "If any one, in confessing the sufferings of the flesh, **ascribes these also to the Word of God as to the flesh in which he appeared**, and thus does not distinguish the dignity of the natures; let him be anathema."

+ St. Cyril is saying that the sufferings of the flesh are "**ascribed**" to the Word of God because the Logos was united with the flesh (Not because the Divine Nature suffered) Nestorius, on the other hand, who wants to separate the two natures finds fault in this ascription.

+ Notice that **NEITHER** St. Cyril **Nor** Nestorius is saying that the Divine Nature suffered in Itself; St. Cyril is saying that the Logos suffered "in the flesh" and Nestorius is saying that the Logos "never suffered at all".

+ The Logos is Impassible (does not suffer physical, emotional, or psychological pain) yet He took a complete human nature (with emotions and a personality etc.) thus the prophecy of Isaiah the prophet; "it

pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief" (**Is 53: 10**) is fulfilled in the Incarnation of the Logos.

+ The example of the Lord's Circumcision:

This is a Feast to the Lord because the Lord (the Incarnate Logos) accepted circumcision. He was circumcised **in the flesh**. No one can say that the Divine Nature was circumcised yet the circumcision of the flesh **is ascribed** to the Divine Logos because He was united Hypostatically with this flesh. The same applies to His death and suffering; He suffered and died **in the flesh** yet remained Impassible and Immortal.

The Logos is Spirit, yet He took flesh and circumcision **is ascribed to Him**.

The Logos is Immortal, yet He took flesh and death **is ascribed to Him**.

The Logos is Impassible, yet He took flesh and suffering **is ascribed to Him**.

+ This does not in any way decrease or minimize the suffering of the Lord because we say (with St. Cyril) suffering was "**in the flesh**" and it was "**ascribed to Him**". We maintain that the Divine attributes are **NOT** altered by the Incarnation.

+ Also, in the fraction prayer of the Lord's feasts, we say about the Incarnate Logos that "He grew little by little" as it was written "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature" (**Lk 2: 52**) – Obviously, the Divine Logos who is Spirit, does not increase in stature. And, the Divine Logos who is "the wisdom of God" (**1 Cor 1:24**) does not increase in wisdom (the divine Nature is Immutable; does not change). However, the increase in wisdom and stature "**are ascribed**" to the Divine Logos since the Divine Nature was united with the human nature in the Incarnation and thus the Divine Logos (who is Immutable) increased in wisdom and stature "**in the flesh**".

+ St. Athanasius said in his famous book "On the Incarnation of the Logos":

"He [the Logos] endured shame from men that we might inherit immortality. **He [the Logos] Himself was unhurt by this, for He is impassible and incorruptible;** but by His own impassibility He kept and healed the suffering men on whose account He thus endured."

"You must understand, therefore, that when writers on this sacred theme speak of Him as **eating** and **drinking** and **being born**, they mean that the body, **as a body**, was born and sustained with the food **proper to its nature; while God the Word, Who was united with it, was at the same time ordering the universe and revealing Himself through His bodily acts as not man only but God. Those acts are rightly said to be His acts, because the body which did them did indeed belong to Him and none other; moreover, it was right that they should be thus attributed to Him as Man, in order to show that His body was a real one and not merely an appearance.** From such ordinary acts as being born and taking food, He was recognized as being actually present in the body; but by the extraordinary acts which He did through the body He proved Himself to be the Son of God."

St. Athanasius is saying that the human acts of eating, drinking, being born, suffering and dying are meant that the body (Human Nature) was born, was eating, was drinking, suffered and died; yet God the Word (the Divine Nature) who was united with this Human Nature did not eat, drink, suffer or die (because it was UNCHANGED by this union).

HOWEVER, these acts are **RIGHTLY** said to be the acts of God the Word because the body (the Human Nature) which did them did indeed belong to the LOGOS. THEREFORE, it is **RIGHT** that **ALL** these acts should be **attributed** to The Son of God as a Man (i.e. "in the flesh")

*This Lecture is adapted from 'The Nature of Christ' by H.H. Pope Shenouda III.