

ARTICLE III.

THE TWOFOLD NATURE OF CHRIST.

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ALL who accept the doctrine of the incarnation admit that it is environed with mysteries. Not the least of these mysteries pertains to the person of Christ in his incarnation.

A careful reading of the New Testament makes two distinct, if not irreconcilable, impressions on the mind of the candid reader. One is that Jesus was as truly a man as any man that ever lived. His whole life on earth was that of a man. He is called a man. He calls himself a man, and the Son of Man. He is the ideal man, the highest conceivable type of humanity. The other impression is that he was more than a man, and more than any other man that ever lived. Though he was born of a woman, like other men, he was supernaturally born, and declared when born to be the Son of God. He is called the Son of God, and accepts the appellation. He claims divine authority (Luke v. 22-24). He claimed divine honor (John v. 23). He declared his oneness with God, whom he calls his Father, as no mere created being could have done (John x. 30). He is called God (John i. 1; Rom. ix. 5; Heb. i. 8), and he puts himself on an equality with God, as no created being would dare or desire to do, as in the baptismal formula.

The New Testament conveys each of these impressions with equal distinctness. We might accept either one alone and reject the other (in which case we must set aside the divine authority of the New Testament), or we must believe that Christ was both human and divine, whether we can or can-

not see how the two beliefs are consistent with each other.

Three theories seem possible: (1) We may suppose that in Jesus Christ, during his life on earth, there were two distinct personalities, mysteriously united, with two consciousnesses and two wills. Such was evidently the case with demoniacs; though in the case of Jesus these two wills were in perfect harmony, as was not the case with demoniacs. Or (2) we may suppose that the human and divine natures were mysteriously blended in him, so that they constituted one personality, with but one consciousness and one will. Or (3) we may suppose that he had but a single nature,—that in the image of which man was created,—and that at his incarnation he voluntarily limited himself in the exercise of his divine prerogatives to the measure of humanity; so that, while he remained divine in his essential nature, he was human in the exercise of his powers.

The doctrine of the incarnation as it is set forth in nearly all church creeds, is that there was in Christ, not two persons, but two natures in one person, mysteriously blended. It is desirable that we get as full and distinct an idea as possible of this doctrine as it is contained in the various creeds of Christendom.

In the fifth century the Council of Chalcedon made this statement: "We teach men to confess . . . our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, of a rational soul and body, consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the manhood, . . . the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, . . . not parted and divided into two persons, but one and the same, Son and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ."

The Augsburg Confession of the Lutheran Church teaches, that "the Word, that is, the Son of God, took unto him man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary, so that there are two natures, the divine and the human, inseparably joined together in unity of one person, one Christ, true God and true man."

The Second Helvetic Confession (1566), Article II. of the Church of England, and the Westminster Confession are each equally distinct in affirming the existence in Christ of two natures, divine and human, in one person. Dr. A. H. Strong in his *Theology* fairly represents the doctrine as affirmed by the creeds of modern Christendom. He says: "This possession of two natures does not involve a double personality in the God-man. . . . It is important to mark the distinction between nature and person. Nature is substance possessed in common. . . . Person is nature separately subsisting, with powers of consciousness and will."

By his definition of "nature as substance possessed in common," Dr. Strong cannot mean that there is a certain substance (material or immaterial), out of which all men are made, as a potter makes vessels out of clay. If it were asked, What is the nature of a diamond? the answer would not be, It is composed of pure carbon, for the question has respect, not to the *substance* of which it is composed, but to the *qualities* of the diamond, especially those which chiefly give it its value. So when it is asked, What is the nature of the human soul? the inquiry has respect to the qualities of the human soul which distinguish it from everything else. Substance is not quality, nor an assemblage of qualities, but that in which qualities inhere; and qualities do not exist outside of the substances in which they inhere, except as mental concepts. Things are classified according to their qualities, that is, according to their

natures. Each thing has not only the qualities common to it and all others of its class, but also other qualities peculiar to itself. Each man has qualities common to humanity, and others peculiar to himself. The former constitute his nature as a man, the latter his nature as an individual.

By human nature, then, we mean that assemblage of qualities to be found in every man, either in an active or latent state. These constitute his nature as a man. Every man is endowed with intellect, sensibilities, and will. These are qualities, not substances. Dr. Strong further says, "The possibility of the union of Deity and humanity in one person is grounded in the original creation of man in the image of God, (in other words) his possession of a rational nature is the condition of the incarnation." This harmonizes with the statement of Dr. Samuel Harris, that "man is a supernatural being, on the same side of the line with God, and in the likeness of God as rational spirit." God and man, by virtue of their nature, belong to the same class which we designate as spirit. God is infinite spirit: man is finite spirit. To say, then, that Christ at his incarnation took human nature would be to say, that he took in *finite* measure the same nature (or qualities) which he already had in *infinite* measure, for he made man in his own image. But if to infinite intelligence there be united finite intelligence,—if to omniscience there be added limited knowledge,—will the being, possessed of but a single consciousness, be conscious at the same moment of both omniscience and of limited knowledge? The same consciousness must be conscious either of omniscience or of limited knowledge. It cannot be conscious of both. The doctrine that there are two natures in one person in Christ, the human nature being a finite image of the divine, involves us in a confusion of thought which compels us to question the truth of the doctrine itself.

We are forced to inquire, whether this doctrine is really taught in the New Testament.

Notwithstanding the apparent unanimity of the creeds of Christendom in affirming the two natures in one person in the incarnate Saviour, there is nowhere in the New Testament a plain affirmation that Christ *took human nature*: that he *united humanity* to his divinity, or that he had two natures. John (i. 14) says, "The Word became flesh," which is not the same as to say that the Word *took upon himself* humanity, or *united human nature* to his divine nature. The scriptural proof of the doctrine (of two natures in Christ) mainly, if not wholly, is derived from the passages where the word "flesh" (*σάρξ*) is used in the New Testament in reference to Christ. It is claimed, or assumed, that its meaning in these passages is "humanity in its totality."

This word is used in about one hundred and forty places in the New Testament, in only eighteen of which it is used of Christ. The senses in which it is used shade into each other, so that it is difficult to group them into distinct classes. Without question the word is sometimes used, by metonymy, to denote man, or humanity, as in John i. 14 (just referred to), "The Word became flesh," i.e. man. But this use is not so frequent as to allow the assumption that this is its invariable or usual meaning in the New Testament. Wherever it is used in this sense, the connection will plainly indicate it. The following are the chief classes: 1. There are twelve places where the word is used in its literal sense of "flesh." Three of these refer to Christ; viz. Luke xxiv. 39; Acts ii. 26-31; Col. i. 22. 2. In about thirty passages it denotes the body, often as distinguished from the soul. Of these, eight refer to Christ; viz. John vi. 51-56; Eph. ii. 15; 1 Tim. iii. 16; Heb. x. 20; 1 Pet. iii. 18; iv. 1; 1 John iv. 2; and 2 John 7. These are

all defined by Thayer as referring to Christ's body. Hebrews v. 7 ("who in the days of his flesh") can only mean while he was in the body. 3. In twelve passages it denotes descent by blood. Two of these refer to Christ; viz. Rom. i. 3 ("of the seed of David according to the flesh"), and Rom. ix. 5 ("of whom as concerning the flesh, Christ came"). 4. A few passages, such as John i. 13, denote the sensuous as distinguished from the higher nature, but none of these refer to Christ. 5. In numerous passages, especially in Paul's Epistles, the word denotes the carnal or sinful nature. Of course none of these refer to Christ. 6. A few passages occur in which the word is used to indicate weakness, frailty, or inferiority. Meyer renders the passage 2 Cor. v. 16, "No longer know we him according to human appearance." Roman viii. 3 ("God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh," etc.) presents the fact, that, though Christ was sinless, he was in personal appearance, and in his subjection to all the conditions of humanity, like other men. If it were claimed as its meaning that Christ united human nature to his own, it would imply that it was a sinful nature. The only remaining passage where the word is used with reference to Christ is Heb. ii. 14 (forasmuch as the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same, etc.). That this phrase "flesh and blood" does not of itself denote humanity, soul as well as body, is evident from 1 Cor. xv. 50 (flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God). The reason here given why Christ partook of flesh and blood is, that the children, to whom he must be made like, were sharers in flesh and blood. Before his incarnation, Christ had not flesh and blood. But if man was made in his image, his nature and man's were kindred, the finite kindred to the infinite, and the Word had only to take a body of flesh

and blood, and limit himself in the exercise of divine prerogatives to our measure, to become in all things like unto his brethren whom he came to redeem. Professor Stuart says of this passage, "The meaning is that Christ had a natural body, truly corporeal and mortal. With this he was endowed, in order that he might suffer death in it, and by that death vanquish the spiritual enemy of mankind." With this harmonizes the rendering of verse 16 (preferred by the American Committee of Revisers), "Verily, not to angels doth he give help, but he giveth help to the seed of Abraham."

We do not, then, find in the New Testament any passage directly authorizing the assertion, that at the incarnation the divine Logos took upon himself, or united himself with, humanity, but that he became (*εγέβετο*) man; nor do we find warrant for affirming, that the phrase "flesh and blood," or the word "flesh," when used with reference to Christ, carries with it the conception of a human soul. We fall back, therefore, upon the third hypothesis named above, viz. that the divine Logos at his incarnation voluntarily limited himself in the exercise of divine prerogatives to the measure of humanity, and took flesh and blood like to his brethren, by being born of the Virgin, and subjected himself to all the conditions of humanity. He who was in the beginning with God, and was God, did not cease to be God, but emptied himself (Phil. ii. 7) by voluntary self-limitation. Thus he was made in all things like unto his brethren. He was still divine, because he was in his essential nature unchanged, and he was human because he had resigned the independent exercise of divine prerogatives, and so subjected himself to human conditions. Being free from sin, he is in fact the ideal man, such as we shall be when we shall see him as he is and be like him.

. According to this view, the incarnation was not an engraft-

ing of divinity upon humanity. Christ was the root as well as the offspring of David. He did not *take upon himself* our nature, because he *had* it eternally, and we were made at our creation in his image. The only difference we can know is that his nature is original and infinite, ours is derived and finite.

It may be said that this view of the person of Christ was held as early as the fourth century, and was then condemned as heretical. It is true that Apollinaris, as early as the close of the fourth century, put forth the view, that Christ (according to the trichotomic theory of humanity, which he held) had, as his human part, a human body and an animal soul, and that the Logos supplied the place of the reason or spirit (*πνεῦμα*). But the view here presented is that God had eternally the human nature in whose likeness man was created, and that in the incarnation the Logos limited himself to the measure of man, whom he had made in his own image, and took a body of flesh and blood by being born of the virgin.

Henry Ward Beecher, in his "Life of Jesus, the Christ," rejected the doctrine of two natures in Christ. His words are: "Jesus was God, and he was made flesh. The simplest rendering of these words would be that the divine spirit had enveloped himself in a human body, and in that condition been subject to the indispensable conditions of material laws." This statement is inadequate. It does not recognize the self-emptying, which was an indispensable condition of the incarnation. This was something more than subjection to material laws.

Christ so identified himself with the human race as to receive in himself all the consequences of human sin which were possible for a being himself sinless.

The doctrine of the two natures was elaborated as a bulwark for the protection of the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, and may have served well its purpose for a time; but it may

be doubted whether, with our better psychology, the doctrine is not harder to maintain and defend than the one of which it was made the bulwark. A divine Christ temporarily self-limited, is as truly divine in his self-limitation and humiliation for human redemption as in the full exercise of divine prerogatives,—as truly divine when agonizing in Gethsemane as when coming in his glory with the holy angels.

The trend of thought on this subject may be seen in recent utterances of representative thinkers. Sir William Hamilton says, "If our minds are not in the likeness of God's mind, we can have no notion of him, and we are to look for the highest proof of his existence in our moral constitution." President E. Benjamin Andrews says, "We perversely exaggerate the difference between the divine and the human. The two are alike in nature." Canon Gore says, "Jesus Christ is not only the revelation of the Godhead: he is also the revelation of manhood." Dr. Harris says, "The Son or Word of God when manifested in the form of finite personality, is the essential Christ, revealing that in God which is eternally and essentially human." Again, he says, "God in Christ, when he ascended, did not leave his humanity behind him, for he brought it with him, and it is eternal in him." And yet again: "We know that in Christ God has revealed himself on earth in his likeness to men, and has thus united himself and identified himself with humanity." And once again, Dr. Harris says, "God in Christ, revealing the fact that the likeness of man is eternal in God, demonstrates that the true knowledge of God must be, in important respects, anthropomorphic." Dr. William N. Clarke says, "His humanity consisted outwardly in the possession of a human body and human relations, and inwardly, and more significantly, in the human limitations that restricted the action of the divine which constituted his spirit. He was

divine in spiritual nature, and human in range of action, and hence in experience. The spirit that constituted the personality of Christ was divine, the fact that that spirit was living within human limits, spiritual as well as physical, renders the personality human."

Those who find in the New Testament that the humiliation of Christ in the incarnation consisted chiefly in his voluntary self-limitation and subjection to human conditions, have no need of a doctrine of two natures in Christ.