

ST. LEO'S EPISTLE TO FLAVIAN :  
THE TOME OF ST. LEO (Epist. 28).

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LEO, BISHOP, TO HIS DEARLY BELOVED BROTHER, FLAVIAN, BISHOP OF CONSTANTINOPLE.

HAVING read your letter, dearly beloved Brother, at the tardiness of which we are surprised, and having had the proceedings of the Episcopal Synod explained to us, we now understand the scandal which had arisen among you touching the orthodox faith. What before was obscure is now manifest. And Eutyches, who bore the honoured title of Presbyter, is shewn to be exceedingly foolish and ignorant, so that the prophet's words are applicable to him: "He would not understand that he might do good; he hath devised iniquity upon his bed<sup>1</sup>." For what can be more iniquitous than to be wise towards impiety, and to refuse to yield to those who are wiser and more learned than himself. But men fall into this folly, when, on being prevented by some obscurity from becoming acquainted with the truth, they have recourse, not to the writings of the Prophets, not to the Epistles of the Apostles, not to the authority of the Gospels, but to themselves, and thus become teachers of error because they have not been disciples of truth. For what instruction has he gained from the sacred pages of the New and Old Testament who does not

<sup>1</sup> Psalm xxxvi. 3, 4.

comprehend the first words even of the Creed? The truth which is pronounced, through the whole world, by the voice of those who are about to be regenerated, is not yet taken hold of by the understanding of this aged man.

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## CHAPTER II.

NOT knowing then what he ought to hold concerning the Incarnation of the Word of God, and not caring to have his understanding enlightened by travelling in the wide field of Holy Scripture, he should at least have listened attentively to that common and uniform confession, in which the whole body of the faithful profess that they believe "IN GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, AND IN JESUS CHRIST HIS ONLY SON OUR LORD, WHO WAS BORN OF THE HOLY GHOST AND THE VIRGIN MARY." By which three sentences the devices of almost all heretics are overthrown. For when God is believed to be both Almighty and Father, it follows that the Son is co-eternal with Him, in no respect different from the Father, because He was born God of God, Almighty of Almighty, co-eternal of eternal, not posterior in time, not inferior in power, not dissimilar in glory, not divided in essence. But the same only-begotten, eternal Son of the eternal Father was born of the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary. Which temporal nativity hath made no diminution from, no addition to, that divine and eternal nativity, but hath bestowed itself wholly on the restoration of man who had been deceived, that it might both overcome death, and by

its own virtue destroy the devil who had the power of death. For we could not gain the victory over the author of sin and death unless He had taken our nature and made it His own, whom neither sin could defile nor death hold, having been conceived by the Holy Ghost, in the womb of His Virgin mother, whose Virginitv remained entire in His birth, as in His conception.

But if Eutyches was unable from this most pure fountain of Christian faith (the Creed) to draw forth its genuine meaning, seeing that he had wilfully blinded himself to the brightness of transparent truth, he ought to have submitted himself to the teaching of the Gospel. He should have listened to Matthew when he says, "The Book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham;" he should have sought instruction also from the preaching of the Apostles (the Epistles); he should have read in the Epistle to the Romans, "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an Apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God, which He had promised before by His Prophets, in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was made unto Him of the seed of David according to the flesh;" he should have attended also with pious solicitude to the Prophets, and finding the promise of God to Abraham, "In thy seed shall all nations be blessed:" lest he should have any doubt as to the proper meaning of this "seed," he should have followed the Apostle, when he says, "To Abraham and to his seed were the promises made. He saith not 'to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'to thy seed,' which is Christ." He should have apprehended too,

with his inward ear, Isaiah's words, "Behold a Virgin shall conceive and bring forth a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which is being interpreted 'God with us.'" He should have read also with an honest mind the words of the same Prophet, "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, whose authority is upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Angel of great Counsel, Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace, Father of the future age." Nor would Scripture have been so inconsistent as to say that the Word was made flesh in such wise, that Christ, born of the Virgin's womb, had the form of man, and yet had not the true nature of His Mother's body. Or did Eutyches therefore possibly suppose that our Lord Jesus Christ was not of our nature, because when the angel was sent to blessed Mary, ever Virgin, he said, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee, therefore also that holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God," so that because He who was conceived by the Virgin was conceived by divine operation, therefore His flesh was not of the nature of her who conceived Him? But we are not so to understand that generation singularly marvellous and marvellously singular, as that by the novelty of the mode of production the distinctive generic character was precluded. For the Holy Spirit gave fecundity to the Virgin, but the verity of the body was received from the body; and when Wisdom built herself a house<sup>†</sup> "The Word was made flesh and dwelt

<sup>†</sup> Prov. ix. 1.

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in us," i.e. in that flesh which He took from man, and which He animated with the Spirit of rational life.

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### CHAPTER III.

THE property or distinctive character then of each nature and substance remaining entire, and coalescing into one person, humility was assumed by majesty, by might weakness, by eternity mortality, and in order to pay the debt of our condition an impassible nature was united to a passible one, that, as a remedy suited to our case, one and the same Mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ, might be capable of death from the one and incapable from the other. Very God, therefore, was born in the entire and perfect nature of very man, whole in His own nature, whole in ours. Ours I mean which the Creator framed in the beginning, and which He assumed that He might restore: for that which the Deceiver brought in, and man being deceived admitted, had no trace in the Saviour. Nor, because He condescended to share our infirmities, did He therefore partake with us in our sins. He took upon Him the form of a servant without the defilement of sin, augmenting what was human, detracting nothing from what was divine, forasmuch as that emptying of Himself, whereby the Invisible rendered Himself visible, and the Creator and Lord of all things willed to be a mortal, was a stooping down of compassion, not a defect of power. Accordingly He who remaining in the form of God made man, the same in the form of a servant was made

man. For each nature retains its own property without defect, and as the form of God does not take away the form of a servant, so the form of a servant makes no diminution of the form of God. For, forasmuch as the devil gloried that man, deceived by his fraud had been deprived of divine gifts, and, stript of the dower of immortality, had incurred the stern sentence of death, and that himself, in his own evil case had found a sort of consolation in the companionship of the transgressor, that God, moreover, justice requiring, had changed his own sentence in respect of man, whom He had created in so great honour, there was need of a dispensation of secret counsel, that the unchangeable God, whose will cannot be deprived of its own benevolence, should accomplish the original intention of His goodness towards us, by a more recondite mystery, and that man driven into sin by the wicked craft of the devil, should not perish contrary to God's purpose.

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#### CHAPTER IV.

THE Son of God, therefore, coming down from His heavenly throne, and yet not departing from the glory of His Father, enters this lower world, born after a new order, by a new mode of birth: born after a new order, forasmuch as, invisible in His own nature, He became visible in ours, incomprehensible He willed to be comprehended, being ever before time, He began to be in time, the Lord of the Universe He took upon Him the form of a servant, throwing a veil over His infinite majesty, God impassible, He did not disdain to be-

come passible man, immortal, to be subject to the laws of death: born by a new mode of birth, forasmuch as virginity inviolate which knew not concupiscence ministered the substance of flesh. From the mother of the Lord was received nature, not sin: nor in the Lord Jesus Christ, born of a Virgin's womb, because the birth is marvellous, is the nature therefore dissimilar to ours, for He who is very God is also very man. Nor is there any unreality in this unity, while there is on the one hand the humility of man, on the other the majesty of Godhead. For as the God is not changed by compassion, so the man is not consumed by dignity. For each nature in union with the other performs the actions which are proper to it. The Word those which are proper to the Word, the flesh those which are proper to the flesh. The one is resplendent with miracles, the other succumbs to injuries. And as the Word recedes not from equality with the Father's glory, so the flesh parts not with the nature of our race. For (and it must be said again and again), one and the same person is truly the Son of God, and truly the Son of man:—God, for “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,”—man, for “the Word was made flesh and dwelt in us;” God, for “all things were made by Him, and without Him was not any thing made,”—man, for “He was made of a woman, made under the law.” The nativity of the flesh is a manifestation of human nature, the birth of a virgin a token of divine power. The infancy of the little Child is exhibited in the lowliness of swaddling clothes, the majesty of the most High is declared by the voices of angels. He whom wicked Herod seeks to kill

is like a human infant; but He whom the Magi rejoice suppliantly to adore is Lord of all. When He came to the baptism of John His forerunner, lest the God-head which was covered by the veil of flesh should be concealed, the Father's voice thundered from heaven, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He whom as man the devil tempts with his subtlety, the same, as God, is ministered to by angels. To hunger, to thirst, to be weary, to sleep, is manifestly human; but with five loaves to satisfy five thousand men, and to bestow on the Samaritan woman that living water, which whosoever drinks shall never thirst, to walk upon the surface of the sea without sinking, and to rebuke the tempest, and lay the surging waves, is without question divine.

As, therefore, to be brief, it belongs not to the same nature to weep with pity for a dead friend, and with a command to raise the same restored to life, on the removal of the stone which covered the grave wherein he had lain four days; or to hang upon the cross, and, changing light into darkness, to make all the elements tremble; or to be pierced with nails, and to open the gates of Paradise to the believing malefactor,—so it does not belong to the same nature to say, "I and My Father are one," and to say, "The Father is greater than I." For although in the Lord Jesus Christ there is one Person of God and Man, that from which there is in both a common contumely is one, that from which a common glory another. From ours He has the human nature inferior to the Father, from the Father the Divine nature equal to the Father.

## CHAPTER V.

ON account, therefore, of this unity of Person to be understood in both natures, both the Son of man is said to have descended from heaven, when the Son of God took flesh of His Virgin Mother, and again the Son of God is said to have been crucified and buried, when He suffered these things, not in the Divine nature in which He is the only-begotten of the Father, co-eternal and consubstantial with Him, but in the weakness of human nature. Whence also we all confess in the Creed that "THE ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON OF GOD WAS CRUCIFIED AND BURIED," according to the saying of the Apostle, "For if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory<sup>k</sup>."

But when our Lord and Saviour was instructing the faith of His disciples by questioning them, "Who," says He, "do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" and when they had related diverse opinions of others, but "ye," says He, "who do ye say that I am?"—I who am a son of man, and whom ye see in the form of a servant, and in the verity of flesh—"who do ye say that I am?" On which blessed Peter, divinely inspired, and by his confession about to confer a benefit on all nations, answers, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Deservedly, therefore, was he pronounced "blessed" by the Lord, and from the archetypal rock<sup>l</sup> drew the solidity both of his virtue and of his name, who by the revelation of the Father

<sup>k</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 8.

<sup>l</sup> A principali petra, ἀπὸ τῆς πρωτοτύπου πέτρας. Leo then understood the "rock" of our Lord, not of Peter.

confessed the same Person both the Son of God and the Christ, seeing that one of these received without the other availed not for salvation ; and it was equally perilous to believe the Lord Jesus Christ either God only and not man also, or man only and not God also. But after the resurrection of the Lord (which assuredly was that of a true body, because no other was raised but the person who had been crucified and dead) what else was done in the forty days' interval than to cleanse the soundness of our faith from all obscurity. For conversing with His disciples, and abiding with them, eating with them, and permitting those who doubted to touch Him with careful and curious touch, He both entered in to the disciples, the doors being shut, and breathing on them gave them the Holy Spirit, and enlightening their understanding, opened to them the Holy Scriptures, and again—still the same, He shewed the wound in His side, the prints of the nails, and all the tokens of His recent passion, saying, “ Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see Me have,” that the properties of both natures, the Divine and the human, might be recognised in Him continuing inseparable, and that while we understand that the Word is not the same as the flesh, we may confess one Son of God both Word and flesh.

Of which mystery of the faith this Eutyches must be regarded as plainly void, who acknowledges our nature in the only-begotten Son of God, neither through the humility of His mortality, nor through the glory of his resurrection, having no fear of the

sentence of the blessed Apostle and Evangelist John, who says, "Every spirit which confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit which disuniteth Jesus is not of God: and this is antichrist<sup>m</sup>." What indeed is to "disunite Jesus" but to separate His human nature from Him, and to make void the mystery, by which alone we have been saved, by most impudent figments?

But being blinded concerning the nature of Christ's body, he must needs be blinded with the same blindness in the matter of His passion. For if he does not esteem the Lord's cross to be unreal, and does not doubt the truth of the punishment which was undergone for the salvation of the world, let him acknowledge the flesh of Him whose death he believes; and let him not deny Him to have been man with a body such as ours, whom he knows to have been passible; since the denial of very flesh is the denial also of bodily suffering. If, therefore, he holds the Christian faith, and does not turn a deaf ear to the preaching of the Gospel, let him consider what nature it was that was pierced with nails and hanged upon the cross, and let him understand whence it was, that when the side of the crucified was pierced by the soldier's spear, blood and water issued, that the Church of God might be bedewed both with the Laver and with the Cup.

Let him listen also to the blessed Apostle Peter proclaiming that the sanctification of the Spirit is

<sup>m</sup> 1 John iv. 3. Qui solvit Jesum. Socrates says that  $\delta \lambda \acute{\upsilon} \epsilon \iota \tau \acute{\omicron} \nu \text{'I} \eta \sigma \omicron \upsilon \nu$  was the reading of the ancient copies (7. 32); but it has no countenance from any known Greek MS. The Vulgate has "Qui solvit Jesum Christum."

effected by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ<sup>a</sup>. And let him read attentively the same Apostle's words, "Knowing that ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot<sup>o</sup>." And let him not resist the testimony of the Apostle John, "The blood of Jesus, the Son of God, cleanseth us from all sin<sup>p</sup>;" and again, "This is the victory which overcometh the World, even our Faith." "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? This is He that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ: not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit which beareth witness, for the Spirit is truth. For there are three which bear witness, the Spirit, the water, and the blood, and these three are one," the Spirit, that is, of sanctification, and the blood of redemption, and the water of baptism, which three are one, and continue inseparable, and no one of them is severed from its connexion with the others: because by this faith the Catholic Church lives, by this makes increase, that in Christ Jesus, neither the manhood is believed without very Godhead, nor the Godhead without very manhood.

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## CHAPTER VI.

BUT when on being questioned in your examination Eutyches replied, "I acknowledge that our Lord was

<sup>a</sup> 1 Pet. i. 2.      <sup>o</sup> 1 Pet. i. 13.      <sup>p</sup> 1 John i. 7.

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of two natures before the union, but after the union I confess one nature," I marvel that his so absurd and so perverse profession met with no rebuke from the judges, and that a sentence so extremely foolish and so extremely blasphemous was suffered to pass without notice, as though nothing offensive had been heard; seeing that the assertion that the only-begotten Son of God was of two natures before the Incarnation, was as impious, as the assertion was wicked, that after "the Word was made flesh," there was in Him but one nature. Which saying lest Eutyches should regard it as right or tolerable, seeing that it met with no confutation on your part, we advise thee, dearly beloved brother, to take care that if by God's merciful inspiration, the matter is brought to a satisfactory conclusion, the folly of the ignorant man may be purged also from this pestilent sense of his. Who indeed as the record of the proceedings shews, had made a good beginning in renouncing his persuasion, when, constrained by your sentence, he made profession of saying what before he had not said, and acquiesced in that faith to which formerly he was a stranger. But when he would not consent to anathematise the impious dogma, you understood, brother, that he continued still in his misbelief, and deserved to be condemned. For which if he grieves sincerely and to good purpose, and acknowledges, though late, how properly the Episcopal authority has been put in motion, or if, for complete satisfaction, he shall condemn *viva voce*, and by actual subscription all that he has held amiss, no lenity towards him, now corrected, how great soever, will be blameworthy. For

our Lord, the true and good Shepherd, "who laid down His life for His sheep," and who came to save men's souls, not to destroy, would have us to imitate His clemency, that those who sin justice should restrain, but those who repent mercy should not repel. For then is the true faith most effectually defended, when a false opinion is condemned also by its upholders.

But for the carrying out of the whole matter piously and faithfully we have appointed our brothers, Julius, bishop, and Renatus, presbyter, of the Titular Church of St. Clement<sup>p</sup>, and, moreover, my son Hilary, deacon, as our representatives; with whom we have associated Dulcitus our notary, of whose fidelity we have had proof, confidently trusting that God will be present with His assistance, so that he who had erred, his mischievous opinion having been condemned, may be saved. God preserve thee, dearly beloved brother.

*The Ides of June (June 13, 449), the very eminent Asturius and Protogenes Consuls.*

<sup>p</sup> There is some doubt as to the meaning of "Titulus" in this connection; Bingham (*Antiq.* 8. 1. 10) adopts a suggestion of Mede's, "that the Titular Churches were Churches which gave a 'title' of Cure or denomination to the presbyters to whom they were committed." Pope Marcellus (A.D. 304—309) is said to have appointed twenty-five of these Churches in Rome.