

***“Great is the mystery of piety:  
God was manifested in the flesh”***

*(1.Tim.3:16)*

A Critical Commentary on the book "On the Nature of Christ"  
by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III  
of the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria

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## *Introduction*

In 1984 Pope Shenouda III gave a series of lectures at the Seminary of St. Mark, about the Christology of the Coptic Church. The Coptic Church later decided to publish the lectures for educational purposes, and subsequently they were translated into English to be presented as a paper at a meeting of the Pro-Oriente Group<sup>1</sup> in October 1991. This small book bears the signature of Pope Shenouda III and can be taken as the official Coptic Christological Position. Most of the below critical commentary has been compiled from the exegetical and dogmatical writings of the Fathers of the Church. The reason for this is that Holy Scripture must be understood within the Tradition of the Church, which is the experience of the Church, and this experience is handed down to us through the writings of the Fathers. Pope Shenouda quotes many scriptural passages, but very rarely does he quote any of these exegetical and dogmatical Patristic writings. Recognizing with great respect and love the ancient Tradition of the Coptic Orthodox Church, and especially Pope Shenouda's steadfast defence of Orthodox Christianity through many struggles his homeland, Egypt, I shall nevertheless venture to give a critical commentary on the most important christological statements made by Pope Shenouda III in his book, as seen from a Chalcedonian, or Byzantine Christological position. In his book Pope Shenouda often seems to identify the term "nature" with "person", which in my understanding results in a misinterpretation of the Byzantine Christology. Hopefully the following will explain and clarify the Byzantine Christological position on the person and natures of Christ the Incarnate Logos. Due to limited space, I have been forced to paraphrase most of Pope Shenouda's statements, but have done my utmost to retain the essence of his statements without alteration. The statements of Pope Shenouda is in bold, and the commentary in normal typeface and the commentary follows the chapter headings in Pope Shenouda's book.

### *The Orthodox Concept regarding the nature of Christ.*

**The divine and human nature was united in a hypostatic union, without mingling, confusion or alteration. God the Logos took flesh from the Holy**

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<sup>1</sup>A Standing Commission of Oriental Orthodox Churches following the Oriental Orthodox Tradition.

**Virgin and, “*The Holy Spirit purified and sanctified the Virgin’s womb so that the Child to whom she gave birth would inherit nothing of the original sin*”.**<sup>2</sup>

The first statement is fully Orthodox and very sound indeed. But as for the second statement in the above - the Orthodox Church never taught a doctrine of ”original sin”, but always maintained that mankind has a liability to sin, which is know as the ancestral sin. The doctrine of ”original sin” was created in the Western Church, first suggested by St. Augustine, but later systematized and dogmatized by Anselm in the Latin Church. The idea of original sin leads to the depressing concept of the total depravity of mankind. The Orthodox teaching is that even though mankind exists in a fallen state, the image of God was not destroyed but only distorted. Man did not inherit any ”original guilt” from Adam. St. Cyril of Alexandria says, “*How could all we who were not yet born, all be condemned with him...?*”<sup>3</sup> Furthermore such a geneologically inherited original guilt does not correspond with the Angel’s salutation to the Virgin Mary, “*Rejoice thou who hast been shown grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women*”.<sup>4</sup> St. Leo says, “*What was assumed from the Lord’s mother was nature, not fault*”.<sup>5</sup> There was no ”immaculate conception”, like taught in the Western Church, but the Virgin Mary was purified when she accepted to bear God in the flesh, and became the Theotokos.

**This unity of natures lead to the formation of “The One Nature of God”<sup>6</sup> , says Pope Shenouda quoting St. Cyril of Alexandria<sup>7</sup>. The term “Monophysite” has been misinterpreted through the centuries, and has led to a false understanding among the Churches accepting the council of Chalcedon, that the Oriental Churches holding the Monophysite Christology, only believes in one nature of Christ and denies the other. Pope Shenouda says, “*We wonder which of the two natures the Church of Alexandria denies?*”<sup>8</sup> It cannot be the divine nature, since the Alexandrian Church fought against Arianism. According to the Oriental Christology, “*The expression One Nature does not in-***

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<sup>2</sup> The Nature of Christ p. 7

<sup>3</sup> The Ancestral Sin, p. 166.

<sup>4</sup> Luk 1:28. ONT.

<sup>5</sup> Tome of St. Leo p. 256.

<sup>6</sup> The Nature of Christ p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> No reference.

<sup>8</sup> The Nature of Christ. P. 9.

*dicare the Divine Nature alone nor the human nature alone, but it indicates the unity of both natures into One Nature which is the The Nature of the Incarnate Logos*".<sup>9</sup> It can be likened to the human nature, which is composed of two united natures - soul and body. The divine nature is hypostatically united with the human nature. The expression "two natures" suggests separation or division, and this was why the Coptic Church rejected Chalcedon, where the, "*tone of separation*",<sup>10</sup> was obvious.

Let us listen to St. John of Damascus, "*How is it possible for the same nature to be at once created and uncreated, mortal and immortal, circumscribed and uncircumscribed? ...How can they ever say that Christ has two natures, while they are asserting that after the union He has one compound nature? For it is obvious to anyone that, before the union, Christ had one nature*".<sup>11</sup> This is of course the Divine nature, since the flesh which the Lord took from the Mother of God was not pre-existent or consubstantial with the Divine Logos. What He took from the Virgin was created human nature. And when we speak of the human nature, "*...all share the nature of the soul and possess the substance of the body*".<sup>12</sup> They form one species made up of human hypostases, individual beings with a soul and a body. However Jesus Christ is not an individual out of many, and there is no "Christ-species" with whom He shares His hypostasis, because we are speaking about the Hypostasis of the second Person of the Holy Trinity. His Hypostasis is therefore different from the individual human hypostasis. His is one composite *person* (hypostasis) because, "*His natures are united in His person...and in this He differs both from the Father and the Spirit and from His Mother and us*".<sup>13</sup> Again – Christ is not an individual, and therefore the union of the soul and body in one human nature cannot be compared to the union of the Divine nature and human nature in one Divine hypostasis!

***Appolinarius***

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. P. 10.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Writings p.272.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. P. 275.

**The Coptic Church condemns Appolinarius because he taught that Christ did not have a human soul when He became Incarnate. He preached that Christ had a divine nature but since he did not believe that Christ had a human soul, Appolinarius did not believe in Christ having a fully human nature.**

However Appolinarius like Pope Shenouda also taught that Christ had only One Nature after the union for, "*just as man is one nature, so is Christ Who has come in the likeness of men...One incarnate nature of the Divine Word*".<sup>14</sup> This statement sounds dangerously close to what the Coptic Pope says.. Appolinarius was actually the first to introduce the word *hypostasis*<sup>15</sup> in Christology.<sup>16</sup> However Appolinarius mostly used the term *proso-pon*<sup>17</sup> for Christ's Person, whereas Pope Shenouda uses the term *hypostasis*. According to St. John of Damascus, the followers of Appolinarius taught that, *the Word only was made flesh*",<sup>18</sup> meaning that Christ did not take flesh from the Virgin, even though He was born from her. So in Appolinarius' view Christ was not consubstantial with mankind. Obviously the Coptic Church condemn Appolinarius, but the, perhaps unwilling, over-emphasizing of the divine nature, and somewhat erroneous understanding of the Chalcedonian use of the terms person and nature, might result in the over-emphasizing of respectively both the divine and the human nature in Christ, depending on the context.

### ***The Council of Chalcedon***

**Pope Shenouda lists the Council of Chalcedon together with Appolinarius and other "widely known heresies". He explains: Even though Chalcedon had excommunicated Nestorius, it was still Nestorian itself. The Council declared that Christ is two persons: A God and a human being. The first person is working miracles and the latter does the suffering and accepting humiliation. St. Leo of Rome was also a Nestorian and his Tome confirmed**

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<sup>14</sup> Kelly p. 293.

<sup>15</sup> Ἰποστασις – *Substantial nature, essence, actual being, reality*. (Bauer) Used by the Orthodox Church to describe the Persons in the Holy Trinity.

<sup>16</sup> Kelly p 293.

<sup>17</sup> Πρόσωπον – *Face, countenance* (Bauer). Used in ancient pagan Greek drama for "mask".

<sup>18</sup> Writings p. 131.

**that Christ had two natures. Pope Shenouda reminds us, that Nestorius said that the two natures were distinctly separated and that Christ had two wills, and two actions.**

Nestorianism leads to the idea that if Christ has two distinct persons, these must necessarily be a divine and a human hypostasis, or persons. Chalcedon did not declare that Christ is "two persons", but two natures<sup>19</sup>. St. Maximos the Confessor says, "...a fourth person is not added to the Trinity, which would be the case if the Incarnate Christ was divided into two persons".<sup>20</sup> But it is necessary to distinguish between the two natures in Christ because, "nothing can be coessential or cognate with the Divinity...in other words, in the Incarnation the two natures have united to form a single person, not a single nature".<sup>21</sup>

It is true that St. Leo's Tome could be accused of occasionally being somewhat unclear in the language used to describe these concepts. Especially this phrase by St. Leo, "...each "form" does the acts which belong to it, in communion with the other; the Word...performing what belongs to the Word, and the flesh carrying out what belongs to flesh...one shines out in miracles, the other succumbs to injuries".<sup>22</sup> This has been greatly criticized by the Coptic Church as being "Nestorian", but hear how St. Leo explains this in the very next sentence of his Tome, "...as the Word does not withdraw from equality with the Father in glory, so the flesh does not abandon the nature of our kind...For...He is one and the same, truly Son of God and truly Son of Man".<sup>23</sup> Obviously Pope Shenouda's fear that St. Leo is speaking of "two persons", is unfounded.

When speaking about the hypostatic union of the two natures in Christ<sup>24</sup>, St. Leo used the Latin word *substantia* which in Greek was translated into hypostasis. Etymologically these two terms are very similar "hypo-stasis", and "sub-stantia", but after the Arian controversy, hypostasis was used by the Greek Fathers for the Latin "persona". Substantia was then translated into "ουσια" in Greek (nature or essence). Unfortunately

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<sup>19</sup> See Appendix.

<sup>20</sup> Philokalia Vol 2 p. 250.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> NPNF Ser 2 Vol XIV p 256.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> C F. Oxford Dictionary p 1553

St. Leo was probably not aware of this. But if one reads the few examples given above it is obvious that St. Leo spoke about the two natures in Christ, and not of two persons. St. Leo emphasized that these two natures in Christ were, *"active in communion with each other"*.<sup>25</sup> He did so against Nestorianism and the heretical claim that Christ was a mere man, in whom the Divine "indwelt". Leo's emphasis on this is essential for the Orthodox concept of Theosis or perfection through Christ the Mediator, because Christ became man, so that man could become God. The concept of Theosis seems not to be considered at all by Pope Shenouda. St. Leo also affirmed *Theopaschism*, which was in perfect harmony with what St Cyril taught. It is also a fact that the Council of Chalcedon found no discord between the teachings of St. Cyril and of St. Leo. The Tome of St. Leo was compared with the letters of St. Cyril, and there is no reason to believe that St. Cyril's letter of anathema against Nestorius was not considered by the Council, thereby elevating Chalcedon above any suspicion of Nestorianism.<sup>26</sup>

### ***The Nature of This Union***

***"The Divine nature did not mix with the human nature nor mingle with it, but it was a unity that led to Oneness of Nature".***<sup>27</sup> To illustrate this, Pope Shenouda quotes St. Cyril, who used the analogy of fire and iron: **When iron is heated, it does not become two natures, fire and iron. But rather the iron unites with the fire. The fire and the iron is united but retains all their respective properties. In the same way the Incarnate Logos is not "God and man".**

**St Cyril and St Augustine**<sup>28</sup> **used the example of the union between the soul and the body, "...both become one in essence and in nature, so we say that this is one nature and one person."**<sup>29</sup> **Those who believe that Christ had two natures never mention the two natures in man, but consider them one**<sup>30</sup>. **In fact, "If we go into detail we would find...ourselves before three natures in Christ!!!**

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<sup>25</sup> Meyendorff p. 173.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. P. 174.

<sup>27</sup> Shenouda p 16.

<sup>28</sup> No reference.

<sup>29</sup> Shenouda p. 18.

<sup>30</sup> St. John of Damascus explains the two natures in man. See p. 2 of this paper.

*The Divinity, the soul, and the body, each and each of them has its distinct entity and essence.*<sup>31</sup> If we accept the union of soul and body in one nature in Christ, it becomes easier for us to use the expression "One Nature in Christ".<sup>32</sup> And *"just as we say that the human nature is one nature consisting of two elements or natures, we can also say about the Incarnate Logos, that He is one entity of two elements or natures."*<sup>33</sup>

The above allegory is not valid, because the union of the soul and the body does not constitute a union between two different human natures – as Pope Shenouda himself affirms in the above. St. Maximos says about the Incarnate Logos that, *"We speak of a distinction of natures to avoid asserting that the flesh is coessential in its nature with the Logos"*.<sup>34</sup> Which is exactly the heresy of Appolinarius, whom Pope Shenouda rightly condemns.

**If the divine nature is different from the human nature, then how do they unite? The reply is that the nature of the soul is different from that of the body, but they still unite in one human nature. All man's acts are attributed to him as a whole being. All Christ's actions are similarly attributed to Him – not to this nature or that nature. The union of soul and body is a real and hypostatic union, which took place in the Virgin's womb. The example of the union of soul and body in man is inclusive – it is only incomplete in the sense that it does not explain why the soul leaves the death at death, nor how they reunite in the resurrection.**<sup>35</sup>

The Hypostatic union of the natures in Christ, which took place in the womb of the Virgin was not between soul and body. Because as already mentioned, Christ was not an ordinary individual hypostasis. The union was between the human nature of the Virgin's flesh and the divine nature of God the Logos, and it happened for our healing. St. Paul says somewhere that there is only one mediator between God and man, Christ. This mediation becomes possible exactly because of the two natures in Christ. St. Gre-

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<sup>31</sup> Shenouda p. 18.

<sup>32</sup> CF. Ibid. pp. 18-19.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. P. 19.

<sup>34</sup> Philokalia Vol 2 p. 250.

<sup>35</sup> CF. Shenouda . p. 20.



gory Palamas says, *"Being twofold in nature, He could truly be a mediator, joining each of the two to the other"*.<sup>36</sup> As for the resurrection of the dead, it is truly a real reuniting of body and soul. The rising of Lazarus<sup>37</sup> is proof of this. As to Pope Shenouda's question how this will take place? – hear St. John of Damascus, *"How do the dead rise again? Oh what lack of faith" Oh, what stupidity! He who just by His will changed dust into a body...will He not much more be able to raise up again the body...? Senseless man, if thou art callous enough not to believe the words of God, then at least believe His works...*"<sup>38</sup>

### ***The Unity of nature and the birth of Christ.***

***"Christ is not two Sons, one the Son of God to be adored, and the other a man and not to be worshipped"*.<sup>39</sup> It is not possible to separate between the two natures. We must make one genuflection to One Christ.<sup>40</sup> A father<sup>41</sup> said that, *"He was born from the Father before all ages without a mother, and was born from a Virgin in the fullness of time without an earthly father"*.<sup>42</sup>**

There was indeed never two Sons. However the Divine Logos was not born, but begotten from before all ages, as our Creed says. Born denotes an event taking place in historical time having a beginning and an end. Begotten is without a beginning and with no end - from all eternity, and outside historical time. About the adoration St. John of Damascus says, *"...according to its own nature His flesh is not adorable...when, however it has been united with God the Word, it is adorable because of Him and in Him"*.<sup>43</sup> So we adore One Christ, Who in order to fully become one of us, let Himself be born in historical time from a human mother, the Virgin Mary from whom He took flesh. Likewise St. Joseph took care of the Lord Incarnate, when He was a child – just like any real father would do. Christ submitted Himself to earthly parenthood. This is important to emphasize

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<sup>36</sup> Palamas, Homily 16 p.191.

<sup>37</sup> Jn. 11:1-46.

<sup>38</sup> Writings p 405.

<sup>39</sup> Shenouda. P. 22.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. (No reference)

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Writings p. 336.

in order to point out just how fully He accepted to become one of us in His human nature, while eternally remaining God the Logos and part of the Holy Trinity.

### ***The One Nature of the Incarnate Logos***

***”It is One Nature (one entity) but has all the properties of two natures”<sup>44</sup> And there was no separation between the two Natures at Christ’s death. ”On the third day His soul, united with His body which was also united with His Godhead; thus resurrection took place”.<sup>45</sup> When Christ left His tomb, and when He walked through closed doors (John. 20:19) was it the divine or the human nature?, or was it Christ the Incarnate Logos?<sup>46</sup>***

There was never any separation of the natures at Christ’s death, and here Pope Shenouda is in full agreement with Chalcedonian Christology. St John of Damascus says, *”...the person of Christ was always one, since, even though the soul was separated from the body in place, it still was hypostatically united to it through the Word”*.<sup>47</sup> Regarding when Christ walked through the closed doors and appeared in the midst of His disciples - closed doors obviously present no hindrance to Him Who let Himself be born from a Virgin!

### ***The Importance of the ”One Nature” for propitiation and redemption***

**If Christ’s human nature performs acts independantly of the divine nature, then death of the human nature on the Cross is not enough! (1 Cor 2:8.)**

St. Paul is not speaking about the ”death of human nature” in this passage. He is speaking about the jews crucifying the Lord of glory well knowing who He was.<sup>48</sup> It was for the very reason of freeing us from the tyranny of of the devil that the Lord united to Himself human nature. St. Gregory Palamas says, *”...the Word of God put on man’s nature to trick the trickster. He received this nature in its undeceived and pure state...offering it as firstfruits to the Father for sanctification from ourselves for ourselves”*.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Shenouda. P. 26.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. P. 27.

<sup>47</sup> Writings p. 333.

<sup>48</sup> Palamas Homily 19. p. 241.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. Homily 16. p. 197.

**Christ was crucified in One nature, and this is essential for our salvation.  
Acts 3:14-15, Heb 2:10, Col 1:16, Rev 1:17-18.**

In none of the passages listed above do the God-inspired Fathers detect any "one nature" or any necessity for the Divine to suffer or die. About Acts 3:14-15, St Gregory of Nyssa says, "*He becomes the first-born of the new creation of men in Christ by the two-fold regeneration...by Holy Baptism and that which is the consequence of the resurrection from the dead, becoming for us in both alike the Prince of Life*".<sup>50</sup> Heb 2:10, St. John Chrysostom, "*...sufferings are a perfection and a cause of salvation...for the Christ was glorified when He suffered. But...do not suppose that there was an accession of glory to Him: for that which is of nature He always had, and received nothing in addition*".<sup>51</sup> Col 1:16, St. John Chrysostom, "*...(He) Himself holds them together now, so that were they severed from His providence, they would be destroyed and ruined*".<sup>52</sup> Rev 1:17-18, St. Bede, "*He is the First, because in Him were all things created, the Last because in Him all things are restored...Christ has conquered and dominated death*".<sup>53</sup>

**Therefore it is very dangerous for our salvation to separate between the two natures. The Tome of Leo stated that Christ is two: God and man. "What then? If that one being is alone the receiver of suffering, then where is the salvation we gained?"<sup>54</sup>**

There is no division or separation in Christ Incarnate. St. John of Damascus says, "*...that which was created remained created, and that which was uncreated remained uncreated*".<sup>55</sup> In other words both the created and uncreated nature remained united in Christ without separation. St. Leo says, "*He assumed the form of a servant...enriching what was human, not impairing what was divine*

### ***The One nature and the suffering***

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<sup>50</sup> NPNF Ser 2 vol V. p. 113.

<sup>51</sup> ONT Heb. n.26. p. 410.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. Col. n.9. p. 320.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. Rev. n. 32 & 36. p. 553.

<sup>54</sup> Shenouda. p. 30.

<sup>55</sup> Writings p. 274.

***”What is related to the Divine aspect can be attributed to the Divine nature at the same time without distinction”.*<sup>56</sup> And again, *”Thus the One sacrificed by God is the Son, the Only-Begotten Son, that is, the Second Hypostasis (Person) of the Holy Trinity; the Logos”.*<sup>57</sup>**

The logical consequence of what Pope Shenouda says in the above is that the divine and human nature became merged into one nature, and subsequently the Second Person of the Holy Trinity had to die! Regarding possibility of the crucifixion inflicting suffering on the divine, St. Leo says, *”...the Son of God is said to have been crucified and buried, inasmuch as He underwent this, not in His actual Godhead; wherein the Only-begotten is coeternal and consubstantial with the Father, but in the weakness of human nature”*<sup>58</sup>.

### ***The Term ”Son of Man”***

**When Jesus called Himself Son of Man, He really meant Son of God.**<sup>59</sup>

Such speculations might lead even deeper into the idea that Christ Incarnate had only a divine nature. The ”one nature” he refers to as the Son of God can only be the divine nature. Why would Christ refer to Himself as Son of man, if in reality He meant Son of God? The example of the blind man outside Jericho<sup>60</sup> who cried out ”Son of David” illustrates that He was known as the Son of David, and David was surely not ”a divine father” of Christ Incarnate? Christ was the Son of God according to His divinity, and Son of David according to His human genealogy. The angelic salutation to the Theotokos shows this very clearly, *”This One shall be great and shall be called Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give to Him the throne of His Father David”*.<sup>61</sup> ”Son of the Highest” is the Son of God, since there is no one higher than God, and ”His father David” refers both to His literal genealogy through the Virgin Mary, and to the fact that He was sent to David’s people to lead them into the heavenly kingdom.

**Pope Shenouda lists 8 Scriptural passages in defence of his position:**

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<sup>56</sup> Shenouda p 30.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. p. 33.

<sup>58</sup> Writings pp 256-257.

<sup>59</sup> Shenouda. p. 35.

<sup>60</sup> Luk 18: 35-43.

<sup>61</sup> Luk 1:32.

**1) Jn 3:13, It cannot be the Incarnate Logos Who speaks to Nicodemus, therefore this verse is proof of One nature.**

St. John of Damascus says of this passage that it, "...is indicative of the One Person and displays both natures"<sup>62</sup> and that, "...we know that His one Person thus preserves for itself the essential difference of the natures. How, indeed, would the differences be preserved, were not those things preserved in which they differ from each other?"<sup>63</sup>

**2) If the Son of Man means human nature, and if the Lord of the Sabbath means divine nature – then these two terms put together proves that Christ has one nature.**

The Holy Fathers do not speculate in linguistic separations and additions in this way. St. Theophylact explains Christ's words this way, "*I, the Son of Man, am Lord of the Sabbath for I am the Creator of all things, including the days...it is I as Master Who sets aside the Sabbath*".<sup>64</sup> There is One Lord Jesus Christ, Who is both Son of Man and Lord of the Sabbath at the same time, precisely because there is no separation between His natures, and there is no need to add "two sons" together to come to the Unity of Christ.

**3) Matt 9:6, Which one of the natures forgive sins? Only God alone can forgive sins, therefore the Incarnate Logos.**

The Incarnate Logos' divine nature is consubstantial with the Godhead, and the miracles worked by Christ Incarnate was of His divine nature. St. John of Damascus says, "...we recognize both the miracles and the sufferings as His, even though it was in one nature that He worked miracles and in another that He endured sufferings.

**4) Matt 16:27, Will human nature or divine nature judge the world? The terms, Son of Man and Son of God indicate one nature, and the angels indicate divine nature. So this is proof that Son of Man cannot indicate human nature alone.**

The angels are not consubstantial with the divine nature. They are bodiless, created beings of created nature. St. Gregory Palamas says that we must understand this passage as explaining , "...from what point in time Matthew, Christ's Apostle and Evangelist

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<sup>62</sup> Writings p. 382.

<sup>63</sup> Writings p. 274.

<sup>64</sup> Explanation of St. Matt. p 101.

*counts the six days preceeding the day on which the Lord was transfigured...Six days after the day when the Lord taught His disciples saying, "The Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father".*<sup>65</sup>

**5) Matt 25:31-34, Here the Son of Man and Son of God speaks at the same time. Son of Man will judge the world, while judgement proceeds from the Son of God "So here unity of natures (the One Nature) is obvious".**<sup>66</sup>

Here in this passage the Lord only calls Himself Son of Man, and this passage rather than being proof of "one nature", shows exactly how the Lord's two natures communes and how the two wills act through both natures. Yes, the unity is obvious, but so are the two natures – Son of God, and Son of Man.

**6) Matt 26:63-65. Is it the human or divine nature who is sitting at the right hand? And Acts 7:57. It is impossible to separate here.**

In Matt. 26:65 Christ quotes from the Prophet Daniel 7:13. It is the Son of Man who is sitting at the right hand of the Father. Because there is only one Son of the Father. St. Theophylact says, *"Power here means that of the Father, and the Son of Man will be coming not from earth but from heaven".*<sup>67</sup>

**7) Matt 24: 29-31. ("He" is the Son of Man) This is also the One nature Who speaks.**

This passage speaks about the final judgement. It is Christ discoursing with His disciples on the Mount of Olives. He clearly speaks as the Son of God foretelling what is to come, but since the discourse does not come as a voice from the heaven, but through Christ Incarnate, this passage also proves that He speaks to us in our own nature. The sign mentioned by Christ is the Cross, and the sending of His angels does not prove that Christ has only one nature.

**8) Jn 6: 62. This is of course the Son, the Hypostasis, but also, "due to the One Nature, He says concerning the Son of Man what he says about the "Hypostasis" of the Son because He is the Incarnate Word".**<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Palamas, Homily 34 pp 134-135.

<sup>66</sup> Shenouda p 37.

<sup>67</sup> Explanation of St. Matt. p 236.

<sup>68</sup> Shenouda p. 39.

This passage says, "*What if then ye should see the Son of Man ascending where He was before?*" It is the next verse, however, that holds the key to the correct understanding of this passage. "*It is the spirit that maketh alive; the flesh profiteth nothing. The words which I have spoken to you are spirit and life*".<sup>69</sup>

### ***Evidence from the Bible***

**Pope Shenouda states in 8 points what according to him is Scriptural proof of the one nature.**

**1) Matt 3:17. The Father did not say this about the human nature of His Son. This cannot indicate two natures, so Christ has evidently One Nature.**

The Baptism of Our Lord was of course not necessary in order to "purify" His own human nature, since there was no sin in Him. The Fathers interpret Matt 3:17 as a manifestation of the Holy Trinity. St. Gregory Palamas says, "*In this way He was declared to be truly the Son, the Father in heaven was manifested as being truly the Father, and the Spirit too was made known as proceeding from the Father...The grace of the Son, of His Father and of the Spirit came to dwell in the baptismal water*".<sup>70</sup> Also this passage clarifies that John was not the Christ as some thought. St. Theophylact, "*They all saw the Spirit descending upon Jesus so that they would not think that the voice which said "This is My beloved Son," was referring to John*".<sup>71</sup> Interestingly enough Pope Shenouda nowhere quotes any of the passages where Christ clearly manifests His human nature, as for example in Matt 4:1-3, where Jesus hungers and is tempted by the devil. Did this happen in "one nature" as well? Did the Lord's fasting inflict hunger and temptation on the Divine Logos? Did the tempter lift up the Divine Logos and carry Him around?

**2) Jn 1: 15, 30. John did not separate between the natures, "for the One Who John baptized was He Himself Who was before him".<sup>72</sup>**

St. John the Divine speaks here about dignity, and not about geneology, and even in the geneology of Christ, there is nothing that suggests that Christ did not have a human nature. St. John Chrysostom says, "*...The One Who cometh after me, means, the One Who*

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<sup>69</sup> Jn. 6:64. ONT p. 424.

<sup>70</sup> Palamas, Homily 16 p. 189.

<sup>71</sup> Explanation of St. Matt. p. 37.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. P. 40.

*preacheth after me, not the One Who was born after me*".<sup>73</sup> And regarding the phrase "because He was before me", St. Bede says "...*meaning, because He was eternal God before the ages; for this reason, although He was born later than I (John), even in His assumed humanity, the glory of His majesty to precedence over me*".<sup>74</sup> Another clear proof of the two natures in Christ.

**3) Jn 1:18. How did he declare the father? When He became Incarnate. Who declared Him? The man Jesus Christ, Who came after John the Baptist by human birth, and this proves the One Nature.**

Christ being born in the flesh after John has already been addressed above. Regarding the verse in question. This verse speaks about the fact that before the Incarnation of God the Logos, no one had seen God. Only when the Divine Logos assumed our human nature, did He become visible to man, and declared Him. Still God only makes Himself known through His divine energies. St. John Chrysostom confirms that no one has seen God in His Essence, and that all the visions of the Old Testament was merely God's condescension. "That One" (Εκεινος) is a demonstrative pronoun frequently used by the evangelist, when emphasizing the person or thing immediately at hand. Jesus also uses it about Himself (Jn 9:37)<sup>75</sup>

**4) 1 Jn 1:1. The evangelist talks about Him Whom he has seen and touched. How can this be if He was not the Incarnate Logos? This is not about the human nature alone or the divine nature alone, because the human nature was not eternal and the divine nature cannot be touched.**

This is very sound Orthodox teaching. And here St. John the Divine illustrates very clearly that Christ had two natures. The Logos of Life Which was from the beginning, yet as already stated in point 3, they were able to hear Him and touch Him when He took flesh of our nature. St. Bede says, "...*Thomas said, "My Lord and my God" (Jn 20:28)...He is speaking here about that life which says in the Gospel, I am the resurrec-*

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<sup>73</sup> Jn. 1:15. n. 17. ONT P. 476

<sup>74</sup> Jn. 1.18. n. 20. ONT p. 478

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.



tion and the life (Jn 11:25) which was made manifest, being revealed by the divine miracles that He worked while in the body".<sup>76</sup>

**5) Jn 9: 35-37. "It cannot be the human nature alone because the Lord Jesus Christ confirms that "it is He that talks with you, the Son of God". Thus He is the Incarnate God Who was manifest in the flesh (1. Tim 3:16)".<sup>77</sup>**

This too is very sound Orthodox teaching. St. Cyril of Alexandria says that, "Christ conversed with the people, sometimes "οικονομικως", that is to say, as a man, and sometimes with divine authority (μετ εζουσιας της θεοπροπους ), as God".<sup>78</sup> St. Augustine says about this verse, "And now at last with the face of his heart washed, and a conscience purified, acknowledging Him no only as the son of man, which he had believed before, but now as the Son of God, who had assumed our flesh, he said, Lord, I believe".<sup>79</sup> And again listen to St. Cyril of Alexandria, "Great is the mystery of piety, the self-emptying of the Logos...Who, though He was in the form and equality of the Father...came in likeness of us and shared in flesh and blood, and graced everything under heaven with the economy of the Incarnation".<sup>80</sup>

**6) 1 Cor 10:4. Pope Shenouda says, "how could He be with them quenching their thirst unless St. Paul is speaking about the Divine nature which is God the Logos?"<sup>81</sup> This must be the Divine nature, God the Logos. But the Logos was not called Christ until His Incarnation But due to the One Nature the Apostle could not distinguish between the natures, and he speaks about the eternity of Christ. Same in 1 Cor 10:9.**

It is the second Hypostasis of the Holy Trinity, God the Logos Who makes Himself known to the Israelites in the desert through His divine energies. St. Paul here speaks about one of the many types of Christ found in the Old Testament. St. John Chrysostom says, "...The Rock was Christ...it was not the nature of the rock which sent forth the wa-

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<sup>76</sup> 1 Jn. 1:1. n. 3. ONT pp. 485-486.

<sup>77</sup> Shenouda . p. 42.

<sup>78</sup> Palamas, Homilies Vol 1. n. 41 p. 282.

<sup>79</sup> NPNF 1 ser. Vol VII. p.249

<sup>80</sup> 1. Tim. 3:16. n. 24. ONT pp. 358-359.

<sup>81</sup> Shenouda p 42

ter – such is his meaning...but another sort of Rock, a spiritual One...that is Christ Who was everywhere with them and wrought all the wonders.”<sup>82</sup>

**7) Matt 2:11. Did they worship the Divine nature alone or the human nature? The human nature alone cannot be worshipped. So it must be One nature.**

Human nature in itself cannot be worshipped, but the Invisible Divinity became visible in humanity to us, and this is how the Magi worshipped Him. St. Theophylact says, “...Gold they offered to Him as to a king...frankincense as to God...they offered myrrh since He would taste of death. For the Jews would prepare the dead for burial with myrrh”.<sup>83</sup> St. Theophylact says that the Magi had been taught by the prophecy of Balaam<sup>84</sup> that the Lord was both God and King. St. Theophylact, “Behold the kingship in the lion, and death in the reclining. Behold the Divinity; for only the divine nature has the power to bless”.<sup>85</sup> The magi worshipped not “one nature”, but One Hypostasis – person.

**8) Who walked the sea? Rebuked the wind? Was it the Divine or human nature? It was of course the Incarnate Logos. Was is only the Divine nature Who worked miracles? Then how about Lk 4:40? Who laid His hands on them? How about Mk 5:29? How was she healed by touching His clothes? How did Christ heal the blind man by spit and clay? It was of course the Incarnate Logos.**

And the Incarnate Logos did this as Mediator and Healer, which was only possible because He assumed our human nature. St. Theophylact says on Mk 5:29, “You should...understand these things as pertaining to human nature, which also has an issue of blood. For human nature had been gushing forth sin which was killing the soul as it drained out the life-blood of the soul...But as soon as our human nature touched Christ’s clothes...His flesh, it was healed. For he who touches Christ’s clothes is he who believes that Christ took flesh”.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> 1. Cor. 10:4. n. 69. ONT pp 185-186.

<sup>83</sup> Explanation of St. Matt. p. 27.

<sup>84</sup> Num. 24:9.

<sup>85</sup> Explanation of St. Matt. p. 27.

<sup>86</sup> Explanation of St. Mark p. 46.

### *The One Will and the One Act*

We believe like St. Cyril in **One Nature of the Incarnate Logos**. And we believe in **One Will and One act**. Jn 4:34. Christ had the same will as the Father. Also Jn 5:19, Jn 6:38, and Jn 10:30 is proof of One Will. The Son was, *"fulfilling the Will of the Heavenly Father, thus it must be that He Who united (Himself) with the manhood had One Will...sin is nothing but a conflict between man's will and God's"*.<sup>87</sup> Jesus Christ had no sin at all, Jn 8:46, therefore His Will was that of the Father.

It is interesting to listen to what St. Cyril himself wrote in his letter to John of Antioch, *"He (Christ) is also called the Man from heaven, being perfect in His divinity and perfect in His humanity, and considered as one of us in one Person (hypostasis). For One is the Lord Jesus Christ, although the differences of His natures are not unknown, from which we say the ineffable union was made"*.<sup>88</sup> Obviously St. Cyril of Alexandria here recognizes the two natures in Christ Incarnate, and hear him again from the same letter, *"Will your holiness vouchsafe to silence those who say that a crisis, or mingling or mixture took place between the Word of God and the flesh. For it is likely that certain also gossip about me as having thought or said such things"*.<sup>89</sup> The will of Christ is the will of the Father, since the Logos is never apart from the Godhead, and there are not three wills in the Holy Trinity. We see that when Christ prays to the Father at Lazarus' tomb (Jn. 11:1-46). That is, in His divine will and nature He is consubstantial with God the Father, and this explains how He fulfills the will of the heavenly Father. In Christ there are two natural wills and two natural operations, or acts. Both are in one Person (hypostasis) so it is the same Person Who wills and acts in both natures. The actions are not separated but in full concert and communion, since there is no division or separation in Christ. St. John of Damascus says, *"...the will and operation of things having different substances are different. Conversely, the substance of things having the same will and operation is the same"*.<sup>90</sup> The Scriptural passages quoted by Pope Shenouda do not indicate that Christ had only one nature, but rather listen to St. John of Damascus again, *"...in Father and Son*

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<sup>87</sup> Shenouda. p. 45.

<sup>88</sup> NPNF 2nd Ser. Vol 14 p 252.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Orthodox Faith Book III p. 296.

*and Holy Ghost we discover the identity of nature from the identity of the operation and the will”.*<sup>91</sup> God the Logos makes Himself know to us through His acting through the two natures, and when we observe these actions of the second Person in the Holy Trinity, Christ Incarnate, in the Holy Gospels we, *”...discover the difference of the nature from the difference of the wills and operations”.*<sup>92</sup> These two wills are not what in Pope Shenouda’s understanding of Chalcedonian Christology would be called personal. They are natural, *”For if we concede these to be personal, then we shall be forced to say that the three Persons in the Holy Trinity differ in will and operation”.*<sup>93</sup> And we do not worship three gods with three separate wills!

**The saints are perfect in their behaviour and their will becomes the will of God, 1 Cor 2:16 –. *”He (St. Paul) did not say that our thoughts are in accord with the mind of Christ, but that, ”we have the mind of Christ, and here unity is stressed.”***<sup>94</sup>

There are several examples of Saints who were not perfect in their behaviour, St. Nicholas of Myra once retorted to physical violence, St. Tikhon of Zadonsk had a somewhat hot temper sometimes, and St. Paul often laments his own imperfections. This does not mean that they are not Saints, but rather that they were humble and God-loving human beings, who struggled to overcome the passions and came out victorious. The passions can only be overcome by the purification of the heart<sup>95</sup> by noetic<sup>96</sup> prayer and ascetical efforts, which have been extensively described in the writings of the ascetical Fathers. To make the human will conform to the will of God is part of the ascetical path leading towards Theosis or perfection. The transfiguration of man, is not a mechanical achievement but a result of the ascetical life in Christ.. The mind does not become consubstantial with the mind of Christ, like one might understand Pope Shenouda’s statement above. To have the mind of Christ can only come from living a life in Christ sacramentally, nourished by the Holy Mysteries, in particular by the Holy Eucharist, which is the Holy Body

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. P. 297.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Nature of Christ p. 45.

<sup>95</sup> Νους – the ”eye of the soul”. Vlachos p 385. Also frequently translated ”intellect”.

<sup>96</sup> Νοερος - adjective of ”Νους”. Ibid p 396. Frequently translated ”mental”.

and Blood of Christ. By God's grace this life in Christ leads to the understanding of spiritual things, as St. John Chrysostom says on 1 Cor. 2:16, "...the knowledge which we have concerning the things of the faith is spiritual...it is not possible that one material-minded should know divine things"<sup>97</sup> This spiritual knowledge is always, and only, a gift of God's grace in the Holy Spirit, "...For who knoweth the mind of the Lord?"<sup>98</sup> The ultimate goal of the life in Christ is to reclaim the likeness of the image of God which was distorted by the fall. This transfiguration was foreshadowed by Moses when the Israelites could not look at his face (Ex. 34:30-35). Christ Himself was transfigured to the glory of the Father, on Mount Tabor, and the disciples could not even look at Him. Before this Christ had told them, "For the Son of Man is about to come in the glory of His Father..."<sup>99</sup>. The disciples who were with Christ on Mount Tabor were allowed to see this glory, which is the uncreated light of God. St. Gregory Palamas says that, "...they saw that ineffable light, when and as much as the Holy Spirit's power granted them to do so".<sup>100</sup> Was this "one nature" revealing this ineffable light, or was it the uncreated energies of God through the Holy Spirit? St. Gregory Palamas says, "...when Christ was transfigured he neither received anything different, nor was changed into anything different, but was revealed to His disciples as He was".<sup>101</sup> After Christ's Resurrection and Ascension Protomartyr Stephen's face became angelic at his martyrdom, which proves that Christ's Transfiguration was a model for the human transfiguration in Christ, of which also St. Seraphim of Sarov witnessed during his conversation with Motovilov<sup>102</sup>.

**The crucifixion was the choice of both the divine and the human nature. Otherwise He would not have died by His Own Will for our sake. The Will is One, and consequently the Act is also One<sup>103</sup>.**

It is definitely true, that the death on the Cross was not the will of one nature or the other. It was by the will of God the Son, Who's will is never in opposition to the Will of God the Father. All of John 17 shows how Christ Incarnate prays in His human nature,

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<sup>97</sup> 1. Cor. 2:16. n. 25 ONT p 177

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Matt. 16:27. ONT.

<sup>100</sup> Palamas, Homily 34 p. 138.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. p. 142.

<sup>102</sup> Moore. p 197.

<sup>103</sup> Shenouda p 46.

while at the same time there is perfect concordance between Him and the Father. When the Lord prayed in Getsemane Garden He showed very clearly how fully He had made our nature His own, when He said to His disciples, *My soul is very sad, even unto death*".<sup>104</sup> He certainly had a human soul in his human nature! St. Ambrose says of this passage, *"...He seemed sorrowful and was sorrowful, not because of His own Passion, but because of our dispersion. He was sorrowful, because He left us like little children"*<sup>105</sup>. He was truly among us and loved us, and when He prayed that night in the Garden, He was using the language of Him Who assumed our nature – but not the language of that nature. St. Gregory the Theologian says of Christ's prayer in Getsemane Garden that this, *"... passage does not mean that the Son has a special will of His own, besides that of the Father, but that He has not...for as we have one Godhead, we have one Will"*.<sup>106</sup> When He prayed, *"O My Father, if is possible, let this cup pass from Me; however not as I will, but as Thou wilt"*<sup>107</sup>, He showed that He had truly made human nature His own. "Father" He said as being consubstantial with the Godhead, *"if it is possible"*, to teach us to put the divine Will before our own, and *"however not as I will, but as Thou wilt"*, as God, *"since He is of the same will as the Father, while at the same time He says it as man to show the natural will of His humanity, for this last naturally shrinks before death"*.<sup>108</sup> Regarding Christ's death on the Cross, St. Gregory Palamas says, *"Although as God He was and remained above suffering and immortal, as man He chose to suffer in the flesh for our sake, to be crucified, to die and to be buried"*.<sup>109</sup> It was not "one nature" who grew physically, and became older as Christ Incarnate did, since the divine is not corruptible, but having assumed our nature, still having a divine nature, Christ endured this corruption, and even death on the Cross. He suffered as a man in His human nature, but as God He always remained above suffering in His divine nature.<sup>110</sup> The same is true when Christ is on the Cross and cries out *"My God, My God, why didst Thou forsake*

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<sup>104</sup> Matt. 26: 38. ONT.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. n 262 p 124.

<sup>106</sup> NPNF 2nd Ser. Vol VII p 314.

<sup>107</sup> Matt. 26:39, ONT.

<sup>108</sup> Orthodox Faith Book III p 330.

<sup>109</sup> Palamas, Homily 8 p. 87.

<sup>110</sup> C.F. n 97. Ibid. p 290.

*Me?*<sup>111</sup> St. Theophylact says, “just as Christ agonized and was sorely troubled before the cross, showing the fear that is ours by nature, so now He says why have you forsaken me? Displaying our natural thirst for life”.<sup>112</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria offers his interpretation, teaching us that, “...the nature of man was made rich in all blamelessness and innocence in Him, so that it could now cry out with boldness, “My God, My God, why didst Thou forsake Me”(CF. Ps. 21:1) (Θεε Μου, Θεε Μου, ινατι Με εγκατελιπες;) Understand that in becoming Man, the Only-begotten spoke these words as one of us and on behalf of all of our nature...It is as if He was saying...In Me Thou seest the nature of man made clean, its fault corrected, made holy and pure...He did not invoke the Father’s graciousness upon Himself, but rather upon us”.<sup>113</sup>

### ***Post scriptum instead of a conclusion***

From the above it is clear that the Latin Christian concept of original sin and the resulting need for purification of the Virgin’s womb, at one point made its way into the Coptic Orthodox theology. This is a real theological issue which the Coptic Church needs to address and solve among its own theologians. Will the Coptic Church follow the Latin teaching or the Orthodox on this point?

Another stumbling block for the understanding between the Coptic Orthodox and the Byzantine Orthodox is definitely the terminology used in Christology. Regarding Christ’s Incarnate person we have seen how the Coptic Orthodox emphasize that they do not deny any of the natures in Christ. However they invariably slide into over-emphasizing the divine nature in Christ in order to counter what they fear is Chalcedonian Nestorianism, especially with regards to the Tome of St. Leo. This very real Christological problem begins with their identification of the term nature with person. It should, however, be more than obvious from the above that St. Leo was not a Nestorian. Given all the above Patristic interpretations and explanations, which certainly must be known to all Coptic Orthodox Theologians, one cannot help but wonder why they still maintain the position that nature and person is one and the same thing? St. Cyril of Alexandria, so highly ve-

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<sup>111</sup> Matt. 27:46, ONT.

<sup>112</sup> Explanation of St. Matt. p 247.

<sup>113</sup> Matt. 27:46 n 286 p 128. ONT.

nerated by the Coptic Orthodox, believed, as we have seen, in the two natures, and he argued against any ideas about the natures having been mixed into one.

We have also seen how it becomes impossible for the Coptic Orthodox Christology when seen in the light of the writings of the Fathers, to explain how a combined, single nature in Christ can retain all the properties of two natures? The long list of numerous Scriptural passages looks impressive, but the argumentation falls apart, because of the total absence of the Patristic witness of the Fathers of the Church in the Coptic argumentation. In the Orthodox Church Scripture does not explain itself. The idea that Christ Incarnate only had one nature, also invariably leads to the uncomfortable conclusion that suffering and death was inflicted upon the Divine Logos at his crucifixion. But Christ the Incarnate Divine Logos, second Person of the Holy Trinity came as the Mediator and Healer of mankind, and joined to Himself real human nature, while remaining eternal God. And God did not suffer in His Divine nature on the Cross. The Divine Logos is not susceptible to suffering and death.

It is however also clear from the above that we agree on at least one very essential point, namely that Christ the Incarnate Logos was One Person. This belief in Christ's real Incarnation is an essential part of our common Orthodox Tradition, and the importance to reach a mutual understanding between the Coptic Orthodox Church and the other Oriental Orthodox Churches, and the Byzantine Orthodox Churches cannot be over-emphasized. The tragedy of the split between us because of these issues mainly of terminology must not prevail. May God grant that mutual understanding and ecumenical efforts between our Churches will one day be successful.

By the prayers of our Holy Father among the Saints, Cyril of Alexandria!

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## ***Appendix***

### ***Non-Chalcedonian agreed Statement on Christology (AD 1991)***

*"We believe that our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Incarnate - Logos is perfect in His Divinity and perfect in His Humanity. He made His humanity One with His Divinity without Mixture, nor Mingling, nor Confusion. His Divinity was not separated from His Humanity even for a moment or twinkling of an eye. At the same time, we anathematize the Doctrines of both*

*Nestorius and Eutyches".*

*(Signatures of Hierarchs taking part in the Pro-Orient Group meeting)<sup>114</sup>*

***The Chalcedonian Statement of Christology (AD 451)***

*“Wherefore, following the holy Fathers, we all with one voice teach that our our Lord Jesus Christ is one and the same Son, the same perfect in divinity and the same perfect in humanity, truly God and truly man, the same consistent of a reasonable soul and body, consubstantial with the Father according to His divinity and the same consubstantial with us according to His humanity, similar to us in all things except sin; begotten of the Father before the ages according to His divinity, but the same begotten, in these last days, for us and for our salvation, from Mary the Virgin and Theotokos, according to His humanity; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-Begotten, acknowledged in two natures (Εν δυο φύσεσιν), without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the difference of His natures never being abolished because of their union, but rather the characteristic property of each nature being preserved and concurring into one person and one hypostasis, (εις εν προσωπον και μιαν υποστασιν συντρεχουσης), not as if He was parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, Only-Begotten, God, the Word, Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from ancient times spoke of Him, and as Jesus Christ Himself instructed us, and as the creed of the fathers handed down to us”.*<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Shenouda p 47.

<sup>115</sup> Meyendorff pp 177-178.