

Letter 28 - "The Tome"

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To Flavian commonly called "the Tome."

I. Eutyches has been driven into his error by presumption and ignorance.

Having read your letter, beloved, at the late arrival of which we are surprised, and having perused the detailed account of the bishops' acts, we have at last found out what the scandal was which had arisen among you against the purity of the Faith: and what before seemed concealed has now been unlocked and laid open to our view: from which it is shown that Eutyches, who used to seem worthy of all respect in virtue of his priestly office, is very unwary and exceedingly ignorant, so that it is even of him that the prophet has said: "he refused to understand so as to do well: he thought upon iniquity in his bed." But what more iniquitous than to hold blasphemous opinions, and not to give way to those who are wiser and more learned than ourself. Now into this un wisdom fall they who, finding themselves hindered from knowing the truth by some obscurity, have recourse not to the prophets' utterances, not to the Apostles' letters, nor to the injunctions of the Gospel but to their own selves: and thus they stand out as masters of error because they were never disciples of truth. For what learning has he acquired about the pages of the New and Old Testament, who has not even grasped the rudiments of the Creed? And that which, throughout the world, is professed by the mouth of every one who is to be born again, is not yet taken in by the heart of this old man.

II. Concerning the twofold nativity and nature of Christ.

Not knowing, therefore, what he was bound to think concerning the incarnation of the Word of God, and not wishing to gain the light of knowledge by researches through the length and breadth of the Holy Scriptures, he might at least have listened attentively to that general and uniform confession, whereby the whole body of the faithful confess that they *believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary.* By which three statements the devices of almost all heretics are overthrown. For not only is God believed to be both Almighty and the Father, but the Son is shown to be co-eternal with Him, differing in nothing from the Father because He is *God from God*, Almighty from Almighty, and being born from the Eternal one is co-eternal with Him; not later in point of time, not lower in power, not unlike in glory, not divided in essence: but at the same time the only begotten of the eternal Father was born eternal of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. And this nativity which took place in time took nothing from, and added nothing to that divine and eternal birth, but expended itself wholly on the restoration of man who had been deceived: in order that he might both vanquish death and overthrow by his strength, the Devil who possessed the power of death. For we should not now be able to overcome the author of sin and death unless He took our nature on Him and made it His own, whom neither sin could pollute nor death retain. Doubtless then, He was conceived of the Holy Spirit within the womb of

His Virgin Mother, who brought Him forth without the loss of her virginity, even as she conceived Him without its loss.

But if he could not draw a rightful understanding (of the matter) from this pure source of the Christian belief, because he had darkened the brightness of the clear truth by a veil of blindness peculiar to himself, he might have submitted himself to the teaching of the Gospels. And when Matthew speaks of "the Book of the Generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham Matthew 1:1," he might have also sought out the instruction afforded by the statements of the Apostles. And reading in the Epistle to the Romans, "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called an Apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God, which He had promised before by His prophets in the Holy Scripture concerning His son, who was made unto Him of the seed of David after the flesh Romans 1:1-3," he might have bestowed a loyal carefulness upon the pages of the prophets. And finding the promise of God who says to Abraham, "In your seed shall all nations be blest Genesis 12:3," to avoid all doubt as to the reference of this seed, he might have followed the Apostle when He says, "To Abraham were the promises made and to his seed. He says not and to seeds, as if in many, but as it in one, and to your seed which is Christ Galatians 3:16 ." Isaiah's prophecy also he might have grasped by a closer attention to what he says, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is interpreted "God with us. " And the same prophet's words he might have read faithfully. "A child is born to us, a Son is given to us, whose power is upon His shoulder, and they shall call His name the Angel of the Great Counsel, Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace, the Father of the age to come. " And then he would not speak so erroneously as to say that the Word became flesh in such a way that Christ, born of the Virgin's womb, had the form of man, but had not the reality of His mother's body. Or is it possible that he thought our Lord Jesus Christ was not of our nature for this reason, that the angel, who was sent to the blessed Mary ever Virgin, says, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon you and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you: and therefore that Holy Thing also that shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God Luke 1:35," on the supposition that as the conception of the Virgin was a Divine act, the flesh of the conceived did not partake of the conceiver's nature? But that birth so uniquely wondrous and so wondrously unique, is not to be understood in such wise that the properties of His kind were removed through the novelty of His creation. For though the Holy Spirit imparted fertility to the Virgin, yet a real body was received from her body; and, "Wisdom building her a house Proverbs 9:1, "the Word became flesh and dwelt in us ," that is, in that flesh which he took from man and which he quickened with the breath of a higher life.

III. The Faith and counsel of God in regard to the incarnation of the Word are set forth.

Without detriment therefore to the properties of either nature and substance which then came together in one person , majesty took on humility, strength weakness, eternity mortality: and for the paying off of the debt belonging to our condition inviolable nature was united with possible nature, so that, as suited the needs of our case , one and the same Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, could both die with the one and not die with the other. Thus in the whole and perfect nature of true man was true God born, complete in what was His own, complete in what was ours. And by "ours" we mean what the Creator formed in us from the beginning and what He undertook to repair. For what the Deceiver brought in and man deceived committed, had no trace in the Saviour. Nor, because He partook of man's weaknesses, did He therefore share our faults. He took the form of a slave without stain of sin, increasing the human and not diminishing the divine: because that emptying of Himself whereby the Invisible made Himself visible and, Creator and Lord of all things though He be, wished to be a mortal, was the bending down of pity, not the failing of power. Accordingly He who while remaining in the form of God made man, was also made man in the form of a slave. For both natures retain their own proper character without loss: and as the form of God did not do away with the form of a slave, so the form of a slave did not impair the form of God. For inasmuch as the Devil used to boast that man had been cheated by his guile into losing the divine gifts, and bereft of the boon of immortality had undergone sentence of death, and that he had found some solace in his troubles from having a partner in delinquency , and that God also at the demand of the principle of justice had changed His own purpose towards man whom He had created in such honour: there was need for the issue of a secret counsel, that the unchangeable God whose will cannot be robbed of its own kindness, might carry out the first design of His Fatherly care towards us by a more hidden mystery ; and that man who had been driven into his fault by the treacherous cunning of the devil might not perish contrary to the purpose of God.

IV. The properties of the twofold nativity and nature of Christ are weighed one against another.

There enters then these lower parts of the world the Son of God, descending from His heavenly home and yet not quitting His Father's glory, begotten in a new order by a new nativity. In a new order, because being invisible in His own nature, He became visible in ours, and He whom nothing could contain was content to be contained : abiding before all time He began to be in time: the Lord of all things, He obscured His immeasurable majesty and took on Him the form of a servant: being God that cannot suffer, He did not disdain to be man that can, and, immortal as He is, to subject Himself to the laws of death. The Lord assumed His mother's nature without her faultiness: nor in the Lord Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin's womb, does the wonderfulness of His birth make His nature unlike ours. For He who is true God is also true man: and in this union there is no lie , since the humility of manhood and the loftiness of the Godhead both meet there. For as God is not changed by the showing of pity, so man is not swallowed up by the dignity. For each form does what is proper to it with the co-operation of the other ; that is the Word performing what appertains to the Word, and the flesh carrying out what appertains to the flesh. One of them sparkles with miracles, the other succumbs to injuries. And as the Word does not cease to be on an equality with His Father's glory, so the flesh does not forego the nature of our race. For it must again and again be repeated that one and the same is truly Son of God and truly son of man. God in that "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God John 1:1;" man in that "the Word became flesh and dwelt in us. " God in that "all things were made by Him , and without Him was nothing made:" man in that "He was made of a woman, made under law Galatians 4:4 ." The nativity of the flesh was the manifestation of human nature: the childbearing of a virgin is the proof of Divine power. The infancy of a babe is shown in the humbleness of its cradle : the greatness of the Most High is proclaimed by the angels' voices. He whom Herod treacherously endeavours to destroy is like ourselves in our earliest stage : but He whom the Magi delight to worship on their knees is the Lord of all. So too when He came to the baptism of John, His forerunner, lest He should not be known through the veil of flesh which covered His Divinity, the Father's voice thundering from the sky, said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased Matthew 3:17 ." And thus Him whom the devil's craftiness attacks as man, the ministries of angels serve as God. To be hungry and thirsty, to be weary, and to sleep, is clearly human: but to satisfy 5,000 men with five loaves, and to bestow on the woman of Samaria living water, droughts of which can secure the drinker from thirsting any more, to walk upon the surface of the sea with feet that do not sink, and to quell the risings of the waves by rebuking the winds, is, without any doubt, Divine. Just as therefore, to pass over many other instances, it is not part of the same nature to be moved to tears of pity for a dead friend, and when the stone that closed the four-days' grave was removed, to raise that same friend to life with a voice of command: or, to hang on the cross, and turning day to night, to make all the elements tremble: or, to be pierced with nails, and yet open the gates of paradise to the robber's faith: so it is not part of the same nature to say, "I and the Father are one," and to say, "the Father is greater than I. " For although in the Lord Jesus Christ God and man is one person, yet the source of the degradation, which is shared by both, is one, and the source of the glory, which is shared by both, is another. For His manhood, which is less than the Father, comes from our side: His Godhead, which is equal to the Father, comes from the Father.

V. Christ's flesh is proved real from Scripture.

Therefore in consequence of this unity of person which is to be understood in both natures , we read of the Son of Man also descending from heaven, when the Son of God took flesh from the Virgin who bore Him. And again the Son of God is said to have been crucified and buried, although it was not actually in His Divinity whereby the Only-begotten is co-eternal and con-substantial with the Father, but in His weak human nature that He suffered these things. And so it is that in the Creed also we all confess that the Only-begotten Son of God was crucified and buried, according to that saying of the Apostle: "for if they had known, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory 1 Corinthians 2:8 ." But when our Lord and Saviour Himself would instruct His disciples' faith by His questionings, He said, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" And when they had put on record the various opinions of other people, He said, "But *you*, whom do you say that I am?" Me, that is, who am the Son of Man, and whom you see in the form of a slave, and in true flesh, whom do you say that I am? Whereupon blessed Peter, whose divinely inspired confession was destined to profit all nations, said, "You are Christ, the Son of the living God Matthew 16:13-16 ." And not undeservedly was he pronounced blessed by the Lord, drawing from the chief corner-stone the solidity of

power which his name also expresses, he, who, through the revelation of the Father, confessed Him to be at once Christ and Son of God: because the receiving of the one of these without the other was of no avail to salvation, and it was equally perilous to have believed the Lord Jesus Christ to be either only God without man, or only man without God. But after the Lord's resurrection (which, of course, was of His true body, because He was raised the same as He had died and been buried), what else was effected by the forty days' delay than the cleansing of our faith's purity from all darkness? For to that end He talked with His disciples, and dwelt and ate with them, He allowed Himself to be handled with diligent and curious touch by those who were affected by doubt, He entered when the doors were shut upon the Apostles, and by His breathing upon them gave them the Holy Spirit John 20:22, and bestowing on them the light of understanding, opened the secrets of the Holy Scriptures. Luke 24:27 So again He showed the wound in His side, the marks of the nails, and all the signs of His quite recent suffering, saying, "See My hands and feet, that it is I. Handle Me and see that a spirit has not flesh and bones, as you see Me have ;" in order that the properties of His Divine and human nature might be acknowledged to remain still inseparable: and that we might know the Word not to be different from the flesh, in such a sense as also to confess that the one Son of God is both the Word and flesh. Of this mystery of the faith your opponent Eutyches must be reckoned to have but little sense if he has recognized our nature in the Only-begotten of God neither through the humiliation of His having to die, nor through the glory of His rising again. Nor has he any fear of the blessed apostle and evangelist John's declaration when he says, "every spirit which confesses Jesus Christ to have come in the flesh, is of God: and every spirit which destroys Jesus is not of God, and this is Antichrist. " But what is "to destroy Jesus," except to take away the human nature from Him, and to render void the mystery, by which alone we were saved, by the most barefaced fictions. The truth is that being in darkness about the nature of Christ's body, he must also be befooled by the same blindness in the matter of His sufferings. For if he does not think the cross of the Lord fictitious, and does not doubt that the punishment He underwent to save the world is likewise true, let him acknowledge the flesh of Him whose death he already believes: and let him not disbelieve Him man with a body like ours, since he acknowledges Him to have been able to suffer: seeing that the denial of His true flesh is also the denial of His bodily suffering. If therefore he receives the Christian faith, and does not turn away his ears from the preaching of the Gospel: let him see what was the nature that hung pierced with nails on the wooden cross, and, when the side of the Crucified was opened by the soldier's spear, let him understand whence it was that blood and water flowed, that the Church of God might be watered from the font and from the cup. Let him hear also the blessed Apostle Peter, proclaiming that the sanctification of the Spirit takes place through the sprinkling of Christ's blood. And let him not read cursorily the same Apostle's words when he says, "Knowing that not with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, have you been redeemed from your vain manner of life which is part of your fathers' tradition, but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ as of a lamb without spot and blemish 1 Peter 1:18 ." Let him not resist too the witness of the blessed Apostle John, who says: "and the blood of Jesus the Son of God cleanses us from all sin 1 John 1:7 ." And again: "this is the victory which overcomes the world, our faith." And "who is He that overcomes the world save He that believes that Jesus is the Son of God. This is He that came by water and blood, Jesus Christ: not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that testifies, because the Spirit is the truth , because there are three that bear witness, the Spirit, the water and the blood, and the three are one. " The Spirit, that is, of sanctification, and the blood of redemption, and the water of baptism: because the three are one, and remain undivided, and none of them is separated from this connection; because the Catholic Church lives and progresses by this faith, so that in Christ Jesus neither the manhood without the true Godhead nor the Godhead without the true manhood is believed in.

VI. The wrong and mischievous concession of Eutyches. The terms on which he may be restored to Communion. The sending of deputies to the east.

But when during your cross-examination Eutyches replied and said, "I confess that our Lord had two natures before the union but after the union I confess but one ," I am surprised that so absurd and mistaken a statement of his should not have been criticised and rebuked by his judges, and that an utterance which reaches the height of stupidity and blasphemy should be allowed to pass as if nothing offensive had been heard: for the impiety of saying that the Son of God was of two natures before His incarnation is only equalled by the iniquity of asserting that there was but one nature in Him after "the Word became flesh." And to the end that Eutyches may not think this a right or defensible opinion because it was not contradicted by any expression of yourselves, we warn you beloved brother, to take anxious care that if ever through the

inspiration of God's mercy the case is brought to a satisfactory conclusion, his ignorant mind be purged from this pernicious idea as well as others. He was, indeed, just beginning to beat a retreat from his erroneous conviction, as the order of proceedings shows, in so far as when hemmed in by your remonstrances he agreed to say what he had not said before and to acquiesce in that belief to which before he had been opposed. However, when he refused to give his consent to the anathematizing of his blasphemous dogma, you understood, brother, that he abode by his treachery and deserved to receive a verdict of condemnation. And yet, if he grieves over it faithfully and to good purpose, and, late though it be, acknowledges how rightly the bishops' authority has been set in motion; or if with his own mouth and hand in your presence he recants his wrong opinions, no mercy that is shown to him when penitent can be found fault with: because our Lord, that true and "good shepherd" who laid down His life for His sheep and who came to save not lose men's souls Luke 9:50, wishes us to imitate His kindness; in order that while justice constrains us when we sin, mercy may prevent our rejection when we have returned. For then at last is the true Faith most profitably defended when a false belief is condemned even by the supporters of it.

Now for the loyal and faithful execution of the whole matter, we have appointed to represent us our brothers Julius Bishop and Rhenus priest [of the Title of S. Clement], as well as my son Hilary, deacon. And with them we have associated Dulcitius our notary, whose faith is well approved: being sure that the Divine help will be given us, so that he who had erred may be saved when the wrongness of his view has been condemned. God keep you safe, beloved brother.

The 13 June, 449, in the consulship of the most illustrious Asturius and Protopogenes.

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