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The Orthodox Remnant Testimony

Doctrinal No. 1

THE 1890 RAVEN CONTROVERSY

Letter (1953) to a brother in Christ on the
Christology of Orthodoxy, with Notes.

Questions Discussed

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R.T.4.

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Christians unite in penitent prayer!
Humbly survey God's altars laid bare;
Think how by heart-break God's prophets we've slain!
Own how we've shamed His glorious Name.

Brethren beloved, the dust is our place.
How dare we hope except by His grace?
Shall we our wounds and our sores seek to hide?
Nay, let us seek the balm from His Side!

Came He the Blest by water and blood?
Yea, let us boast His sweet cleansing flood!
Lord, we are washed all, yea clean, every whit;
Wash now our wayward, sin-stained feet.

Free us O Lord from Satan-wrought lies.
With Thy blest salve anoint Thou our eyes.
Sell us Thy gold and with Thy garments white
Clothe wretches poor to seek Thy delight.

Grant us Lord zeal and first love's response,
Grace to renew the works we did once;
Fallen we have and dare scarce raise our eyes
Till we recall Thy Voice from the skies.

Teach us Blest Lord Thy face e'er to seek;
Of Thee to learn, our self-will to break,
E'en by Thy grace and the Spirit's blest power
That we may rise and serve Thee this hour.

Brethren unite in worship and praise!
Fall down before the Ancient of Days!
Hymn your Creator to Bethlehem come!
Hail the E'er Blessed! Worship the Son!

Brethren unite in service and song!
In truth and grace your witness prolong;
Righteousness, peace in the Spirit's blest rule,
Love, joy and kindness, meek self-control!

Brethren prepare for Jesus' Last Trump!
Soon from the skies His Voice calls us home!
Carry the Spirit's blest message to all
To saint and sinner, freedom from thrall.

Christians unite in preaching the Cross!
For His blest sake count all things but loss!
Spend and be spent for HIM let ardour burn
Calling all men to worship the Son.

Repeat verse 7.



ROBERT S. BOYES.

Notes in Appendix and remarks in square were not part of the original text. Some slight formal alterations have been made.

Brockley House,
11 Endwell Road,
Bexhill-on-Sea.
20th July, 1953

My Dear Brother,

I write as promised to deal with your charge of heterodoxy as to the Person of Christ.

First, I would make plain that I retract nothing, nor have I modified my doctrine this past nine years, and indeed I have always been orthodox in substance, and my acquaintance with orthodox Christology has only been an apprehension of how the ideas which I am certain the Spirit of God teaches to the simplest soul are clearly and systematically expressed by men who realise from the history of the Church that Christology is both proper and necessary. [I do not accept J.N.D.'s deprecation of Christological dogma].

Secondly, I trust that the difference between us is apparent only, and is purely a matter of intellectual confusion. The purpose of my letter is to explain in greater detail the orthodox position and terminology, but if after perusal you are still minded to reject what I say, then I would suggest that you should most carefully peruse Liddon's Bampton Lectures on the Divinity of Our Lord before you come to any further conclusion on the matter.

Thirdly, I make this reply not with any anxiety for personal justification, but in order that the path of Christian unity and happy fellowship between us may be brought before us so that we both tread it together.

Fourthly, I wish to make my position clearer privately, so that you do not find it difficult to abandon your accusation without loss of face. There is always the tendency for one to seek to justify an accusation once made even if it means shifting the ground, but I hope this letter will remove any possibility of both accusation or disagreement.

Fifthly, I impute to you no desire to discredit me; and presume that you are willing to believe that statements such as those to which you refer were not made without serious thought and careful composition, but must be taken fairly in their context, and according to their proper meaning.

Finally, I would state that in Christian charity I assume your entire soundness in the faith; and that unless I am given further ground for suspicion I look to see the joys of Christian fellowship restored when the mists have blown away. [I am glad to say this hope has been realised].

The phrases you question [These are repeated in this letter] occur on page 3 of my letter to you of the 29th ultimo. I firmly adhere to the statements made in paragraphs "a" to "e" and can only hope that you have not perceived their true force, and seen their true relation to and consistency

with one another. If you had read the orthodox theologians referred to at the head of the same page [Hooker, Liddon, Moule] before judging of the matter I think you would have found the position clear, but I will now, though with some hesitation, seek to expound the leading elements of the Doctrine of Christ in accordance with the orthodox systematisation of Scripture.

The major trouble with the Christology of modern "Brethren" is the failure to appreciate the basic force of the phrase "The Person of Christ." It has acquired a hazy mystical connotation which is impossible to define, but which has scant relation to the requirements of linguistic principles. Orthodoxy confesses One God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, three Persons, yet One in essence; and that it is the Person of the Son which has become Incarnate, though thereby also the Divine Essence common to the Trinity. Yet it is only the Person of the Son, not the Person of the Father or the Person of the Holy Ghost which has become Incarnate.

It is from the establishment of the Doctrine of the Trinity that orthodox theology derived the expression "The Person of Christ" and the primary meaning of the phrase is therefore, the Person second in mention in the Trinity, God the Son. [I have avoided here the controversy over subordination]. When this is seen it is not difficult to appreciate why orthodox theologians are so insistent that the Person of the Son of Man is divine and eternal; for it is none other than the Person of the Eternal Word, the Eternal Son of God. [vide Liddon on Nestorianism in Bampton Lectures].

Divine Immutability forbids one to think that the Incarnation involves any change in the Divine Person of Christ in itself. He cannot change; He is the Same. The Incarnation involves the assumption of another mode of subsisting as His own personal experience [Hooker: "He has but changed the manner of His subsisting. . ."].

The foregoing introduces the following remarks especially directed to the question whether the Lord is properly spoken of as "a human person." I most emphatically deny that he is a human person, and that for the following reason. To use the adjective "human" as a preceding epithet in relation to the word "person" has a definitely qualifying sense; it is not purely descriptive when so used. It amounts to asserting that the Lord was a created person i.e., one whose personal subsistence was originated by God's creatorial power [which is Arianism]. There is a vast difference both grammatically and logically between such a qualifying use and a predicative use.

In the proper sense of the words to say that the Lord is a human person is utter blasphemy; and I would rather die than assent to the use of such an expression. I do not deny that a man devoid of any proper measure of linguistic sense might use the expression innocently, but that does not alter the fact that I could not tolerate the expression as an expression. It is vital to insist on a sound word that cannot be condemned.

It is perfectly proper to say that Christ is a person both divine and human; or that the divine Person of the Son has now become human by His gracious assumption of a human nature into personal union with his divine nature.

I repeat that there is, however, a vast difference between the proper force of a preceding qualifying adjective in relation to the word "person" and a mere predicative description.

I now turn to the use of the expression "impersonal humanity." I stoutly maintain the truth thereby expressed as absolutely vital to the Doctrine of Christ and our salvation. At the same time I fearlessly condemn the Ravenite formula, "God in Person, Man in condition." Personally He is the Son, Man He is because He has truly the full nature, sin apart, of man, body soul and spirit, including a human will; and that as His own personal instrument and experience.

The Manhood of our Saviour is no mere outward means of manifestation, or a mere condition in which He resides. He has taken manhood into the realm of His own personal consciousness. [Cf. Moule "Outlines of Christian Doctrine," p. 62, para. 4]. His Manhood is His, not by mere creatorial property or redemptive sympathy as we may be said to be His. The orthodox faith which dear J.N.D. so clearly confessed was Hypostatic Union i.e., that the Manhood was His by personal union, because He had united it to His divine Person.

God the Son is Himself the Man of Sorrows by virtue of His taking part in flesh and blood. While He is perfectly Man, the Manhood which He has assumed is intrinsically impersonal, for there is no person in Christ save God the Son. "Impersonal" means simply that it possesses no personal link other than that which God the Son imparted to it by uniting it to His Person and making It His very own. The unspeakable and inscrutable wonder of the Incarnation, which sends the mind reeling if it be but for a moment contemplated, is that the individuality of the Man Christ Jesus as a man among men was none other than the individual human consciousness and experience including and combining full spiritual, moral and physical elements, of the Creator Son. He took the nature of man (though thereby remaining utterly sinless in nature, will, thought and deed) into union with His Divine Person; from the very beginning the Babe was God the Son and no other person; the Eternal Word was Himself made flesh, He did not merely associate Himself with a human person.

Let us adore when we contemplate how Jehovah, the Almighty God, the Only-Begotten Son of the Father lay as a helpless babe in the manger at Bethlehem, and consummated His course by being crucified in weakness. [Catholic orthodoxy rejoices thus to dwell on the paradoxical reality of the Incarnation].

To deny that the Lord's Humanity is impersonal i.e., *intrinsically* so, is either to deny His Divine Personality or to divide Christ into two persons. Could you have given due thought or weight to the word *intrinsically*? I trust that you do not contend that there was a human ego distinct from the Divine Person of the Word. No other Person than God the Son was born of the Virgin and died on the Cross.

I could understand a simple man who read the isolated statement that the Lord's Humanity was impersonal thinking that here was grievous error indeed. Was not the Lord a real individual man who lived and loved and

thought and acted as a man? Ah yes indeed; but the individual experience was that of no other Person than the Word. Christ's individuality as man was the human individuality of God the Son. It is vital to distinguish, but also not to divide. But there is not an atom of justification for any supposition that impersonal was used in any such vague sense by me, for indeed I added my own explanation indicating the precise sense in which I used it. It is its primary meaning.

In the History of the Brethren Mr. Nap. Noel attacks T.H. Reynolds for saying: "The Lord could say 'I' as God, He could say 'I' as Man; but when we asked who is the conscious 'I' the answer is 'The Son of God speaking as Man on earth.'" Mr. Reynolds did not state, as he should have done, that the Lord could say "I" as God and Man; he also does not notice the difference in his use of the expression "as Man" in its two occurrences. But that is not the complaint made by Mr. Noel, but that he taught an impersonal humanity. If the Son of God speaking as Man on earth could say "I" as Man in saying "I thirst" what is impersonal about that—except in the orthodox sense? Mr. Noel by a slavish following of J.N.D. supposes that he must regard an impersonal humanity as unsound. If the whole article by J.N.D. is read it can be seen that J.N.D. is not disputing the orthodox doctrine of the impersonal humanity. But the most important thing is that J.N.D. could only be supposed to be disputing with orthodoxy on the assumption that he was a Nestorian at heart and therefore thoroughly dishonest in pretending to assent to orthodoxy. That is—to me at least—an impossible hypothesis. From the point of view of understanding 1890 and its catastrophic events I see no way of interpreting Mr. Noel's remarks and his adoption of the remarks of J.N.D. other than supposing that he (Noel) was a Nestorian, or was so confused in his mind that he did not know what he was talking about.

I believe that to charge Mr. Raven with denying the Hypostatic Union is totally unwarranted so far as 1890 is concerned. I believe that when he refused the idea of unity put forward against him and said that it was perfect nonsense, he was using the definite article in a demonstrative sense i.e. he meant *their* idea of unity. Most have assumed that when he criticised his critics saying that while "claiming to maintain orthodoxy their doctrine was destructive of Christianity etc.," he was in effect confessing that he was unorthodox, but that it was necessary to be unorthodox to be Scriptural. I do not so regard what he said. I believe that he meant simply what he said, but was not in effect concerned to base his defence on whether he was orthodox or not. I am firmly convinced that while claiming to maintain orthodoxy his critics were unorthodox. Their words were certainly heterodox and what they maintained was in substance a departure from the fourth cardinal point of orthodoxy. He was God, *truly*, Man *perfectly*, both *indivisibly*, and both *distinctly*.

Hooker gives us the principle with regard to the perfectly proper process of distinguishing the Godhead and the Manhood. I believe it could be stated as follows. The Lord was, acted and was receptive in three distinct ways: first as God, in that He was omnipresent, He raised His own body, and He knew with divine omniscience; secondly as Man, in that it could properly be said that He was not at a particular place or He was at another,

He was thirsty, He died, He trusted, He was crucified; thirdly as both God and Man, in that He loved me and gave Himself for me, he worked miracles the two natures co-operating unto one effect, he willed the two wills harmoniously joining in one act of volition, and generally he acted as God and Man. But two points must be noted: first, the unity of Person; secondly the fact that in relation to those very things which Christ was, did and suffered as Man the Deity was *implicitly* involved in its gracious abstinence from any interference with the rigours of manhood. The Deity was not *explicit* in His thirsting; but a reverent faith and an accurate theology would alike insist, that the Divine love of God the Son may be perceived by the adoring saint in His Manhood sufferings. It may be most reverent to confuse this with saying that "one nature is never expressed to the exclusion of the other" that one must only "speak of one nature predominating or being more expressed than the other," but it is just untrue and very bad theology.

In the light of the foregoing I trust you can now see, why I have said that the error of the "Lowe" position in 1890, was to make the Unity of His Person the result of the Union of the Natures. They speak as if His Person were the product of the Union. The Unity of His Blessed Person consists in His eternal personal distinction in the Godhead, and as Incarnate in the fact that He now has both divine and human natures. The Union of the Natures consists in the Unity of the Person, who as Incarnate, possesses both. [I cannot suppose from what he said that F.E.R. would in 1890 have dissented from the substance of this].

Actually to charge a man with dividing the Person of Christ *and* teaching an impersonal humanity is to an orthodox theologian quite ridiculous, unless you are dealing with a man who is so stupid as completely to contradict himself, for one charge contradicts the other. [Indeed in making the second charge, Nap. Noel makes *himself* fairly liable to the first charge!]

When you have digested and thought over the foregoing, I should be glad to see you, and trust that our efforts will be directed to achieving unity among the people of God on the basis, so far as you and I are concerned of a real attempt to understand one another.

If you are still confused with reference to anything I have said and do not see how it is consistent with something else, tell me, and I will do my best to explain; though I would remind you that the Hypostatic Union 'is an inscrutable mystery, and statements with reference thereto may therefore appear in conflict with others, and be reconcilable only to the Infinite Mind.

I do not mind if you show this letter to others, and indeed it may enable someone else to see a point I am making and thus help you. I believe that what I have stated above is the truth of God and in relation to the 1890 controversy shows why I say that I look to "Glanton" to adhere to orthodoxy and to convert "Kelly-Lowe" Brethren to orthodox unity.

Yours most sincerely in Him,

ROBERT S. BOYES

APPENDIX

Chalcedon is the solution to the vagaries of Christological dissension amongst "Brethren," yet this pathetic state of affairs followed at least two major improvements to the "old" orthodoxy of Chalcedon for which we have Mr. Darby to thank. I append a draft of a revised form of the Definition of Chalcedon which will demonstrate not only its original merits but the value of Mr. Darby's contribution to accuracy in Christology. My challenge to Glanton and Kelly-Lowe Brethren is whether it is not true that Ravenism and Ordism (anti-Ravenism) compel an orthodox Christian to remain sorrowfully apart from both. Both have adjustments to make or remain schismatic. The official position of Kelly-Lowe Brethren seems to be based on Ordism, while a neo-Ravenite element in "Glanton" is still disposed to resist Mr. W. R. Dronsfield's pamphlet on "Apollinarianism." My doctrinal position is one which would have enabled W. Kelly, John A. Trench and T. H. Reynolds to walk together in unity. We need that basis of unity to-day and those who obstruct this are in grievous sin.

Draft REVISED VERSION of the DEFINITION OF CHALCEDON

We confess One and the Same Son, Our Lord Jesus, and all with one voice teach that He is perfect in Godhead and perfect also in Manhood, God truly and also Man truly, of created human spirit, soul and body consisting, His Blessed Body being of flesh and blood during His Humiliation, but now as exalted and ascended in resurrection He is resplendent in a Body of glory of flesh and bones; that He is consubstantial with the Father and the Spirit in the Unity of the Godhead, and consubstantial with us as to His Manhood, and in all things like unto us yet without sin or its consequences in mortality or corruptibility, His Body in His humiliation being holy and free from any subjection to death or corruption; (a-mortal, i.e., not subject to death, yet not in His humiliation immortal or incapable of death, for He did truly die and suffer for our sins); eternally begotten of the Father in co-equal and co-eternal glory and essential unity as to His Godhead, but also in the end of time for us men and for our salvation born of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who thus as to His Manhood is the Mother of God the Son; confessed thus by us all to be One and the Same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-Begotten, in two natures or essences, Deity and Humanity, without compound, without change, yet also without division or possible separation, the difference and distinguishability of the natures or essences being in no way changed by their Union in His Person but rather preserved and concurring and operating harmoniously in One Person and One Subsistence incapable of separation into two persons or egos; possessing thus a human will ever operating in harmonious subjection to the divine will, yet One and the Same Person the Only-Begotten Son, the Word, Our Lord Jesus Christ.

NOTE

Is not this, my brethren, the truth of God, a basis of healing and unity? I submit that it is in substance the only Scriptural basis.

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