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## The Union of Natures & The Eucharist

### The Word-united flesh of Christ was life-giving during his earthly ministry and is life-giving now via the Eucharist

After the Incarnation [Christ's humanity and the Word] are not divisible, except insofar as one knows that the Word that came from the Father and the temple that came from the Virgin are not identical in nature. For the body is not consubstantial with the Word that is from God. But they are one in their coming together and in the ineffable way in which they are combined. And if the flesh of the Saviour became life-giving, seeing that it was united with that which is Life by nature, i.e the Word that is from God, when we taste of it we have that life within ourselves, since we too are united with the flesh of the Saviour in the same way as that flesh is united with the Word that dwells within it.

That is also why when he raises the dead the Saviour is seen to be operating not by word alone, nor by commands such as befit God, but he firmly insisted on using his holy flesh as a kind of co-worker, that he might show it to be capable of giving life and already made one with him. For it really was his own body and not that of another. Thus when he raised the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue, saying, 'Child, arise' (Lk. 8:54), he took her by the hand, as Scripture records. While giving life as God by his all-powerful command, he also gives life by the touch of his holy flesh, demonstrating through both that the operation was a single and cognate one.

... If by the touch of his holy flesh he gives life to that which has decayed, how shall we not profit more richly from the life-giving Eucharist when we taste it? For it will certainly transform those who partake of it and endow them with its own proper good, that is, immortality.<sup>1</sup>

### The Eucharist is an insertion of the "glowing ember" of immortality

Although death which sprang upon us because of the Fall (cf. 1 Pet.5:8), forces the human body towards unavoidable decay, nevertheless if Christ comes to be in us through his own flesh, we shall certainly rise. For it is not credible, or rather, it is impossible that he should not endow with life those in whom he comes to dwell.

It is as if one took a glowing ember and thrust it into a large pile of straw in order to preserve the vital nucleus of the fire. In the same way our Lord Jesus Christ hides away life within us by means of his own flesh, and inserts immortality into us, like some vital nucleus that destroys every trace of corruption in us.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Commentary on John 4.2* (Russell, pp.115-6)

<sup>2</sup> *Commentary on John 4.2* (Russell, pp.117-8)

## Eucharistic implications of the union of natures

We proclaim the death according to the flesh of the Only begotten Son of God, and confess the return to life from the dead of Jesus Christ, and his ascension into heaven, and thus we perform in the churches an unbloody worship, and in this way approach mystical blessings and are sanctified, becoming participants in the holy flesh and the precious blood of Christ the Saviour of us all.

We do not receive this as ordinary flesh, God forbid, or as the flesh of a man sanctified and conjoined to the Word in a unity of dignity, or as the flesh of someone who enjoys a divine indwelling. No, we receive it as truly the lifegiving and very-flesh of the Word himself. As God he is by nature life and since he became one with his own flesh he revealed it as life-giving.

So even if he should say to us: 'Amen, Amen I say to you, If you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood' (Jn.6.53), we must not consider this as if it were the flesh of any man like us (for how could the flesh of a man be life-giving from its own nature?) but rather that it has truly become the personal flesh of him who for our sakes became, and was called, the Son of Man.<sup>3</sup>

## Christ's very own holy and lifegiving body is transformative for us

Is it not wicked and shocking to try to take away from God the Word his birth from a woman according to the flesh? For how could his body possibly give life to us if it were not the very own body of him who is Life? And how could it be that the "blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin" (1 Jn 1:7) if it was in reality only that of an ordinary man subject to sin? And how has "God the Father sent his Son born of a woman, born subject to the law" (Gal 4:4)? Or how has "he condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom 8:3)?

To condemn sin does not belong to someone with a nature like ours, under the tyranny of sin, an ordinary man. But insofar as it became the body of the one who knew no transgression, how rightly it could shake off the tyranny of sin to enjoy all the personal riches of the Word who is ineffably united with it in a manner beyond all description. Thus it is a holy and lifegiving thing, full of divine energy. And we too are transformed in Christ, the first-fruits, to be above corruption and sin. What the blessed Paul says is true: "Just as we bore the image of the earthly, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly" (1 Cor 15:49) that is to say, of Christ.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Third Letter to Nestorius 7* (McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: The Christological Controversy*, pp.270-1)

<sup>4</sup> *On The Unity of Christ* (McGuckin, pp.60-1)