

MILESTONES

A Council of Compromise

Steering a middle course between the opposite extremes of Nestorianism and Eutychianism, the attendants of the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451) were hopeful of arriving at the “right doctrines” (Bindley 234) concerning the person of Christ. The resulting “Definition” reaffirmed the position of the councils held at Nicaea (AD 325) and Constantinople (AD 381), while condemning any teachers who would imply that the humanity of Christ is separable from His divine person (i.e., Nestorius) as well as those who would, conversely, confuse or mix the divine and human natures in one (i.e., Eutyches). In a formula that eventually gained general acceptance in both East and West, the Council of Chalcedon declared the existence of one person in two natures which are united “unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, and inseparably” (Bindley 235). The attendants were zealous to avoid and condemn the heretical extreme of Eutyches, who had actually said that the divine and human natures of Christ had merged into a *third* nature, which was neither human nor divine but in which the divine dominated. However, in their cautiousness, they compromised a vital, biblical reality in Christian experience: the mingling of God and man in Christ and in the believers. From the time of Eutyches, a condemned heretic, who utilized the concept of mingling to an improper extreme, there has been a general hesitation to even mention the tinged term, lest the user also be suspected of heresy (Chemnitz 134-6). This term, however, is employed in the Old Testament in the type of the meal offering, and it was consistently and properly put to use during the four hundred years preceding the Council of Chalcedon.

In the Old Testament there is a very significant picture of the

mingling of divinity and humanity in Christ. In Leviticus 2, the meal offering (ASV; “grain offering,” NASB) is recorded. In verse 4 (cf. Exo. 29:40) the contents of this offering are identified as fine flour and oil, and these two elements are “mingled” (ASV; “mixed,” NASB). As the offerings are considered types of Christ, this verse may be read as describing the mingling of the two natures in Christ, with the fine flour signifying His humanity, and the oil, His divinity. These two are mingled together in such a way that they are not separate; yet the two elements do not lose their distinctive natures. The flour is still the flour, and the oil is still the oil, but they have been mingled, blended together, as the meal offering. A third substance is not produced, as when an acid is mixed with an alkali to form another, neutral substance. The two elements are still present, but they have been mingled together. This is a picture of Christ as the mingling of divinity and humanity: He is perfect God and

complete man in one, wonderful person. His person cannot be divided and His natures may not be confused. This is mysterious, yet it is a fact! But this is not all. On one hand, the meal offering was for a soothing aroma to God (v. 9), signifying God’s pleasure in Christ and satisfaction with Him. On the other hand, “the remainder” of the offering was for the priesthood (v. 10)—to be *eaten*. God was manifested in the flesh, divinity was mingled with humanity, with a view to becoming receivable, even being able to be inwardly partaken of as food. The result is a wonderful divine-human multiplication and enlargement. So, “the

Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:16); the one Son has become many sons (Heb. 2:10), a brother with “many brothers” (Rom. 8:29). The divine and human natures are mingled, blended together

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in these many brothers, making them the same as the One in life and nature, but not in the Godhead. With some of the fathers this thought of mingling was present, right up to the time of the fifth-century controversies; and the corresponding words, in Greek and in Latin, were duly employed (Chemnitz 115-141). Irenaeus (AD 130-200), who lived in Gaul and wrote in Greek, shows in *Against Heresies* that in the second century this term was used with no hesitation: "For the perfect man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the spirit of the Father, and the admixture of that fleshly nature which was moulded after the image of God" (531).

In the same chapter, discussing the flesh, soul, and spirit as the three components of the perfect man, Irenaeus repeats this point when he writes, "The commingling and union of all these constitutes the perfect man" (532). Next, Tertullian (AD 160-225), who lived in North Africa and was the first great Latin writer in church history, held the concept and used the terminology of the mingling of God and man. In his *Apology* he writes, "The Son of God...descending into a certain virgin, and made flesh in her womb, is in His birth God and man united [mingled]" (34-35). In his lengthy rebuttal in *Against Marcion*, he gives this further testimony on the subject of mingling: "The Son,...the Witness and Servant of the Father, uniting [mingling] in Himself man and God, God in mighty deeds, in weak ones man, in order that He may give to man as much as He takes from God" (319).

Then, there is the witness of Hippolytus (AD 170-236), who spent much of his time in Rome and wrote in Greek. He provides further evidence that the concept of mingling was very much present in that part of the world in the early part of the third century. In his *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, he makes the following statement:

For whereas the Word of God was without flesh, He took upon Himself the holy flesh by the holy Virgin...in order that by uniting [mingling] His own power with our mortal body, and by mixing [mingling] the incorruptible with the corruptible, and the strong with the weak, He might save perishing man. (205)

Next, there is the third-century testimony of Cyprian (AD 200-260), who lived in North Africa and wrote in Latin. In his sixth treatise, Cyprian demonstrates the continuing belief regarding the divine-human mingling in Christ and its glorious consequences for the believers:

The Word and Son of God...enters into a virgin; being the holy Spirit, He is endued with flesh; God is mingled with man. This is our God, this is Christ, who, as the mediator of the two, puts on man that He may lead them to the Father. What man is, Christ was willing to be, that man also may be what Christ is. (468)

Another Latin writer who lived in Asia Minor and Europe is Lactantius (AD 240-320). He shows that the concept of mingling along with its terminology was still in full use into the early part of the fourth century. In Book 4 of *The Divine Institutes*, Lactantius has the following to say:

He [Christ] became both the Son of God through the Spirit, and the Son of man through the flesh,—that is, both God and man....In the meantime, we learn from the predictions of the prophets that He was both God and man—composed [mingled] of both natures. (112)

He goes on to quote passages from Isaiah, Jeremiah, David, and Moses to illustrate his point.

An important fourth-century testimony on this term comes from the writings of Gregory of Nazianzen (AD 329-389), who lived and wrote (in Greek) in Cappadocia as well as in the city of Constantinople. In *On the Theophany, or Birthday of Christ*, Gregory makes this clear statement:

The Word of God Himself...came to His own Image, and took on Him flesh for the sake of our flesh, and mingled Himself with an intelligent soul for my soul's sake, purifying like by like; and in all points except sin was made man....He came forth then as God with that which He had assumed, One Person in two Natures, Flesh and Spirit, of which the latter deified the former. O new commingling; O strange conjunction;... (349)

In the *Fourth Theological Oration*, Gregory reaffirms this sentiment when he writes, "What greater destiny can befall man's humility than that he should be intermingled with God, and by this intermingling should be deified, and that we should be so visited by the Dayspring from on high" (310). Gregory's friend and fellow Cappadocian, Gregory of Nyssa (AD 330-395), also writing in Greek, shared this view on mingling and used equally explicit language. In *Against Eunomius*, Gregory of Nyssa states the following: "We on our part assert that even the body in which He underwent His Passion, by being mingled with the Divine Nature, was made by that commixture [commingling] to be that which the assuming Nature is" (176).

In the following section of the same book, he continues this thought, with implications for the believers, as follows: "The Only-begotten God...mingled His life-giving power with our mortal and perishable nature, and changed, by the combination with Himself, our deadness to living grace and power" (179). In the succeeding fifth section, Gregory speaks of the "contact and the union [mingling] of Natures" (181). He then declares, "The Human Nature is renewed by becoming Divine through its commixture [commingling] with the Divine." In the same section, Gregory makes the following strong statement: "...the perishable Nature being, by its commixture [commingling] with the Divine, made

anew in conformity with the Nature that overwhelms it, participates in the power of the Godhead” (181).

A final witness to the vitality of the concept and terminology of the mingling of God and man is Augustine (AD 354-430), who lived in North Africa and wrote in Latin. Early in his *Letter to Volusianus*, written around AD 412, Augustine is concerned for a proper and balanced understanding of how “the Godhead was so blended with the human nature in which He was born of the virgin” (474)—that neither nature was diminished in any way. At the end of the same chapter, Augustine writes the following:

It was this same power which originated, not from without, but from within, the conception of a child in the Virgin’s womb: this same power associated with Himself a human soul, and through it also a human body—in short, the whole human nature to be elevated by its union [mingling] with Him—without His being thereby lowered in any degree; justly assuming from it the name of humanity, while amply giving to it the name of Godhead. (476)

In the third chapter of the same *Letter*, Augustine calls Christ “the Mediator between God and men” who was “uniting [mingling] the two natures in one person,” in Himself exalting the ordinary and tempering the extraordinary; the “human nature was brought into union with the divine” (477). Following this, endeavoring to answer those who “insist upon being furnished with an explanation of the manner in which the Godhead was so united [mingled] with a human soul and body as to constitute the one person of Christ,” Augustine explains:

In the person of man, therefore, there is a combination of soul and body; in the person of Christ there is a combination of the Godhead with man; for when the Word of God was united [mingled] to a soul having a body, He took into union with Himself both the soul and the body. (477)

These testimonies from eight writers in church history, extending from the second to the fifth centuries, show that the concept of the mingling of God and man, in Christ and the believers, was held and its terminology freely and consistently used. However, in the middle of the fifth century, the use of this term was attacked by Nestorius, who strongly disliked this term and formulated a deviant teaching of two separate natures in Christ. At the opposite extreme, Eutyches set forth a doctrine in which the two natures were confused to the extent that they merged into a new, third nature. The effect was to make church leaders wary of using the term *mingling* regarding the two natures of Christ—thus jeopardizing an underlying divine and spiritual reality in Christian experience. This wariness, coupled with political considerations (religious unity being needed in the face of military threats to the Empire) and over-large ecclesiastical egos, can be clearly seen in the “Definition” of Chalcedon.

However, in spite of the language of the Council and the improper influence it has exerted on the following generations, Christians should not refrain from using the scriptural term of *mingling* and from pursuing the divine reality and ultimate consummation to which it points. As the apostle Paul wrote, the God who “was manifested in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16) is now the Christ within the believers, desiring to “make His home in your hearts through faith” (Eph. 3:17a)—an inner and genuine mingling. The goal of such an inner operation is “that you [pl.] may be filled unto all the fullness of God” (v. 19b); and the ultimate issue of the mingling of God and man, both in Christ and in the believers, is: “To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations forever and ever. Amen” (v. 21).

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