Demonstrations by Syllogisms

Theodoret of Cyrus (c. AD 393–458)

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That God the Word is Immutable

1. We have confessed one substance of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and have agreed that it is immutable. If then there is one substance of the Trinity, and it is immutable, then the only begotten Son, who is one person of the Trinity, is immutable. And, if He is immutable, He was not made flesh by mutation, but is said to have been made flesh after taking flesh. 2. If God the Word was made flesh by undergoing mutation into flesh, then He is not immutable. For no one in his senses would call that which undergoes alteration immutable. And if He is mutable He is not of one substance with Him that begat Him. How indeed is it possible for one part of an uncompounded substance to be mutable and the other immutable? If we grant this we shall fall headlong into the blasphemy of Arius and Eunomius, who assert that the Son is of another substance.

3. If the Lord is consubstantial with the Father, and the Son was made flesh by undergoing change into flesh, then the substance is at once mutable and immutable, which blasphemy if any one has the hardihood to maintain, he will no doubt make it worse by his blasphemy against the Father, for inasmuch as the Father shares the same substance, he will assuredly call Him mutable. 4. It is written in the divine Scriptures that God the Word took flesh, and also a soul. And the most divine Evangelist says the Word was made flesh. We must therefore perforce do one of two things: either we must admit the mutation of the Word into flesh, and reject all divine Scripture, both Old and New, as teaching lies, or in obedience to the divine Scripture, we must confess the assumption of the flesh, banishing mutation from our thoughts, and piously regarding the word of the Evangelist. This latter we must do inasmuch as we confess the nature of God the Word to be immutable, and have countless testimonies to the assumption of the flesh.

5. That which inhabits a tabernacle is distinct from the tabernacle which is inhabited. The Evangelist calls the flesh a tabernacle, and says that God the Word tabernacled therein. "The Word," he says, "was made flesh and dwelt among us." Now if He was made flesh by mutation, He did not dwell in flesh. But we have been taught that He dwelt in flesh; for the same Evangelist in another place calls His body a temple. We must therefore believe the Evangelist's explanation and interpretation of what to some seemed ambiguous. 6. If when the Evangelist wrote "the Word was made flesh" he had added nothing which could remove

the ambiguity, perhaps the controversy about the passage might have had some reasonable excuse, from the obscurity of the terms used. But since he immediately went on to say "and dwelt in us," the combatants contend to no purpose. The former clause is explained by the latter.7. The immutability of God the Word is plainly proclaimed by the most wise Evangelist, for after saying "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us," he immediately adds, "And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." But if, according to the foolish, He had undergone mutation into flesh, He would not have remained what He was, but if even when enveloped in the flesh He emitted the rays of His Father's nobility, it follows that the nature which He has is immutable, and it shines even in the body and sends abroad the brightness of the nature which is unseen. For that light nothing can dim. "For the light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not," as saith the very divine John.

8. The illustrious Evangelist was desirous of explaining the glory of the only-begotten, but was unable to carry out his purpose. He therefore shews it by His fellowship with the Father. For he says He is of that nature; just as though any one to persons beholding Joseph sunk in a slavery inconsistent with his rank, and unaware of the splendour of his descent, were to point out that Jacob was his father, and his forefather Abraham. So in this sense the Evangelist said that when He dwelt among us He did not dim the glory of His nature, "For we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father." So if even when He was made flesh it was plain who He was, then He remained who he was, and did not undergo the mutation into flesh. 9. We have confessed that God the Word took not a body only but also a soul. Why then did the divine Evangelist omit in this place mention of the soul and mention the flesh alone? Is it not plain that he exhibited the visible nature and by its means signified the nature united to it? For the mention of the soul is understood of course in that of the flesh. For when we hear the prophet saying "Let all flesh bless His holy name," we do not understand the prophet to be exhorting bodies of flesh without souls, but believe the whole to be summoned to give praise in the summoning of a part.

10. The words "the Word was made flesh" are plainly indicative not of mutation, but of His unspeakable loving-kindness. For after the illustrious Evangelist had said "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God," and had declared Him to be Creator of the visible and invisible, and had called Him life and true light, adding other similar expressions, and had spoken concerning the Godhead in such terms as human reason can take in and the language at its command can express, he went on "And the Word was made flesh," as though smitten with amazement and astounded at the boundless loving-kindness. His existence is eternal; He is God; He made all things; He is source of eternal life and of true light; and on account of the salvation of men He put about Him the tabernacle of flesh. And He was supposed to be only that which He appeared. So for this reason he did not even mention a soul but only the perishable and mortal flesh. Of the soul as being immortal he said nothing in order to exhibit the boundlessness of the kindness.

11. The divine Apostle calls the Lord Christ seed of Abraham. But if this is true, as true it is, then God the Word was not changed into flesh, but took on Him the seed of Abraham, according to the teaching of the Apostle himself. 12. God swore to David that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ, as the prophet said and as the great Peter interpreted. But if God the Word was called Christ after mutation into flesh, we shall nowhere find the truth in the oaths. Yet we have been taught that God cannot lie; nay rather is Himself the truth. Therefore God the Word did not undergo change into flesh, but in accordance with the promise, took firstfruits of David's seed.

Proofs that the Union Was Without Confusion.

1. Those who believe that after the union there was one nature both of Godhead and of manhood, destroy by this reasoning the peculiarities of the natures; and their destruction involves denial of either nature. For the confusion of the united natures prevents us from recognising either that flesh is flesh or that God is God. But if even after the union the difference of the united natures is clear, it follows that there is no confusion and that the union is without confusion. And if this is confessed then the Master Christ is not one nature, but one Son shewing either nature unimpaired. 2. We too assert the union, and ourselves confess that it took place at the conception; if then by the union the natures were mixed and confounded, how was the flesh after the birth not seen to possess any new quality, but exhibited the human character, preserved the dimensions of the babe, was wrapped in swaddling clothes, and sucked a mother's breast? And if all this did not come to pass in mere phantasy and seeming, then they admit of neither phantasy nor seeming; then what was seen was truly a body. And if this be granted then the natures were not confounded by the union, but each remained unimpaired.

3. The authors of this patchwork and incongruous heresy at one time assert that God the Word was made flesh, and at another declare that the flesh underwent a change into nature of Godhead. Either statement is futile and vain and full of falsehood, for if God the Word, as they argue, was made flesh, why then do they call Him God, and this alone, and refuse to name Him man as well, and find great fault with us who in addition to confessing Him as God also call Him man? But if the flesh was changed into the nature of Godhead, wherefore do they substitute the antitypes of the body? For the type is superfluous when the reality is destroyed. 4. An incorporeal nature is not corporeally circumcised, but the word corporeally is added on account of the spiritual circumcision of the heart; so then the circumcision is of a body; but the Master Christ is circumcised after the union. And if this is granted then the argument of the confusion is confuted.

5. We have learnt that the Saviour Christ hungered and thirsted, and we have believed that this was so really and not in seeming, but such conditions belong not to a bodiless nature but to a body. The Master Christ then had a body which before the resurrection was affected according to its nature. And to this the divine Apostle bears testimony when he says "For we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities but was in all points tempted like as we are yet without sin." For the sin is not of the nature but

of the evil will. 6. Of the divine nature the prophet David says, "Behold He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." But the narrative of the Evangelist describes the Master Christ as sleeping in the boat. Now not sleeping and being asleep are two contrary ideas, so the prophet contradicts the Gospels if, as they argue, the Master Christ was God alone. There is no contradiction, for both prophecies and gospels flow from one and the same spirit. The Master Christ therefore had a body, akin to all other bodies, affected by the need of sleep. So the argument for the confusion is proved a fable.

7. Of the divine nature the prophet Isaiah said, "He shall neither be hungry nor weary" and so on. But the Evangelist says "Jesus being weary with his journey sat thus on the well;" and "shall not be weary" is contrary to "being weary." Therefore the prophecy is contrary to the narrative of the gospels. But they are not contrary, for both are of one God. Not being weary is of the uncircumscribed nature which fills all things. But moving from place to place is of the circumscribed nature; and when that which moves is constrained to travel it is subject to the weariness of the wayfarer. Therefore what walked and was weary was a body, for the union did not confound the natures.

8. To the divine Paul when shut up in prison the Master Christ said "Be not afraid Paul" and so on. But the same Christ, who drove away Paul's fear, Himself so feared, as testifies the blessed Luke that He sweated from all His body drops of blood, and with them sprinkled all the ground about His body, and was strengthened by angelic succour, and these statements are opposed to one another, for how can fearing be other than contrary to driving away fear? Yet they are not contrary. For the same Christ is by nature God and man; as God He strengthens them that need consolation; as man He receives consolation through an angel. And although the Godhead and the Spirit were present as an anointing, the body and the soul were not then supported either by the Godhead united to them or by the Holy Ghost, but this service was entrusted to an angel in order to exhibit the infirmity both of the soul and of the body and that through the infirmity might be seen the natures of the infirm. Now these things plainly happened by the permission of the divine nature, that, among them that were to live in future times, believers in the assumption of the soul and of the body might be vindicated by these demonstrations, and their opponents by plain proof convicted. If then the union was effected by the conception, and, as they argue, made both natures one, how could the properties of the natures continue unimpaired, the soul agonize, and the body sweat so as to sweat bloody drops from excess of fear? But if the one is natural to the body and the other to the soul, then the union did not effect one nature of flesh and Godhead, but one Son appeared shewing forth in Himself both the human and the divine.

9. Should they say that after the resurrection the body underwent mutation into Godhead they may properly be answered thus. Even after the resurrection the body was seen circumscribed with hands and feet and all the body's parts; it was tangible and visible; it had wounds and scars, as it had before the resurrection. One then of two alternatives must be maintained. Either these parts must be attributed to the divine nature, if the body when changed into the divine nature had these parts; or on the other hand it must be confessed

that the body remained within the bounds of its own nature. Now the divine nature is simple and incomposite, but the body is composite and divided into many parts; therefore it was not changed into the nature of Godhead, but even after the resurrection though immortal, incorruptible and full of divine glory, it remains a body with its own circumscription.

10. To the unbelieving apostles the Lord after His resurrection shewed His hands, His feet, and the prints of the nails; then further to teach them that what they saw was not a vision He added "a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have." Therefore the body was not changed into spirit it was flesh and bones and hands and feet. Consequently even after the resurrection the body remained a body. 11. The divine nature is invisible, but the thrice blessed Stephen said that he saw the Lord, so even after the resurrection the Lord's body is a body, and it was seen by the victorious Stephen, since the divine nature cannot be seen. 12. If all mankind shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven, according to the Lord's own words, and He said to Moses "No man shall see me and live," and both are true, then He will come with the body with which He ascended into heaven. For that body is visible, and of this the angel spoke to the Apostles "This same Jesus which is taken up from you into Heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into Heaven." If this is true, as true it is, then there is not one nature of flesh and Godhead, but the union is without confusion.

Proof that the Divinity of the Saviour is Impassible.

1. Alike by the divine Scripture and by the holy Fathers assembled at Nicaae we have been taught to confess that the Son is of one substance with God the Father. The impassibility of the Father is also taught by the nature and proclaimed by the divine Scripture. We shall then further confess the Son to be impassible, for this definition is enforced by the identity of substance. Whenever then we hear the divine Scripture proclaiming the cross and the death of the Master Christ we attribute the passion to the flesh, for in no wise is the Godhead, being by nature impassible, capable of suffering. 2. "All things that the Father hath are mine" says the Master Christ, and one out of all is impassibility. If therefore as God He is impassible, He suffered as man. For the divine nature does not undergo suffering. 3. The Lord said "the bread which I will give is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world," and again "I am the good shepherd and know my sheep and am known of mine ...and I lay down my life for the sheep." So body and soul are both given by the good shepherd for the sheep who have soul and body.

4. The nature of men is compounded of body and soul. But it sinned and stood in need of a sacrifice free from every spot. So the Creator took a body and a soul, and keeping them clean from the stains of sin for men's bodies gave His body and for their souls His soul. If this is true, and true it is, for these are words of truth itself, then wild and blasphemous are they who ascribe passion to the divine nature. 5. The blessed Paul called the Christ "the first born of the dead;" and I suppose the first born has the same nature as they of whom He is called first born. As man then He is first born of the dead, for He first destroyed the

pangs of death and gave to all the sweet hope of another life. As He rose so He suffered. As man then He suffered but as awful God He remained impassible.

6. The divine Apostle calls our Saviour Christ "the firstfruits of them that slept," but the firstfruits are related to the whole whereof they are firstfruits. He is not therefore called firstfruits as God, for what relationship is there between Godhead and manhood? The former is an immortal nature, the latter mortal. Such is the nature of them that sleep, of whom Christ is called firstfruits. To this nature belong death and resurrection, and in its resurrection we have a proof of the general resurrection. 7. When the Master Christ wished to persuade the doubting Apostles that He had destroyed death and risen, He shewed them parts of His body, His side, His hands, His feet and the marks of the passion preserved therein. This body then rose, and this, I ween, was shown to the disbelievers. What rose is what was buried, and what was buried is what had died, and what had died is of course what was nailed to the cross. So the divine nature united to the body remained impassible.

8. They who describe the flesh of the Lord as giver of life make life itself mortal by their words. They ought to have seen that it was giver of life through the life united to it. But if according to their argument the life is mortal, how could the flesh being itself by nature mortal, and made life-giving through the life, remain life-giving? 9. God the Word is by nature immortal, and the flesh by nature mortal, but after the passion by union with the Word the flesh itself became immortal. How then is it not absurd to say that the giver of such immortality shared death? 10. They who maintain that God the Word suffered in the flesh should be asked the meaning of what they say, and should they have the hardihood to reply that when the body was pierced with nails the divine nature was sensible of pain, let them learn that the divine nature did not fill the part of a soul. God the Word had assumed a soul with the body. Should they reject this argument as blasphemous, and should they assert that the flesh suffered by nature, and that God the Word made the passion His own as of His own flesh, let them not propound puzzling and murky phrases, but let them clearly propound the meaning of the ill sounding phrase. They will have all those who wish to follow the divine Scripture as their supporters in this interpretation.

11. The divine Peter in his Catholic Epistle says that Christ suffered in the flesh. But he who hears that Christ suffered does not understand God the Word incorporeal, but incarnate. The name of Christ indicates both natures; but the word "flesh" connected with the passion signifies not that both, but that one of the two, suffered. For he that hears that Christ suffered in the flesh thinks of Him as impassible in that He was God, and attributes the passion to the flesh alone. For just as when we hear him saying that God had sworn to David of the fruit of his loins according to the flesh to raise up the Christ, we do not say that God the Word derived His origin from David, but that the flesh which God the Word took was akin to David, so must he who hears that Christ suffered in the flesh, recognise that the passion belongs to the flesh, and confess the impassibility of the Godhead.

12. When on the cross the Lord Christ said, "Father into Thy hands I commend my spirit," this spirit is said by the Arians and the Eunomians to be the Godhead of the only-begotten,

for they hold that the body which He took was without a soul, but the heralds of the truth say that the soul was so called and they base their opinion on the following passages. The right wise Evangelist immediately adds "And having said thus He gave up the ghost." So says Luke, and the blessed Mark similarly adds "He gave up the ghost." The divine Matthew writes, "yielded up the Ghost," and the divine John, "gave up the Ghost." All speak according to the usage of men, for we are accustomed to use all these expressions about those who die; none of them conveys any meaning of Godhead, but they all signify the soul, and if any one were to receive the Arian sense of the passage none the less even thus will it shew the immortality of the divine nature. For Christ commended it to the Father. He did not yield it to death. If then they that deny the assumption of the soul, and maintain God the Word to be a creature, and assert that He was in the body in place of a soul, deny that He was delivered to death, how can they obtain pardon who while they confess one substance of the Trinity, and leave the soul in its own immortality, impudently dare to say that God the Word of one substance with the Father tasted death?

13. If Christ is both God and man, as the divine Scripture teaches, and the illustrious Fathers persistently preached, then He suffered as man, but as God remained impassible. 14. If they acknowledge the assumption of the flesh, and declare it to be passible before the resurrection, and preach that the nature of the Godhead is impassible, why, leaving the passible nature, do they attribute the passion to the impassible? 15. If our Lord and Saviour nailed the handwriting to the cross, as says the divine Apostle, He then nailed the body, for on his body every man like letters marks the prints of his sins, wherefore on behalf of sinners He gave up the body that was free from all sin. 16. When we say that the body or the flesh or the manhood suffered, we do not separate the divine nature, for as it was united to one hungering, thirsting, aweary, even asleep, and undergoing the passion, itself affected by none of these but permitting the human nature to be affected in its own way, so it was conjoined to it even when crucified, and permitted the completion of the passion, that by the passion it might destroy death; not indeed receiving pain from the passion, but making the passion its own, as of its own temple, and of the flesh united to it, on account of which flesh also the faithful are called members of Christ, and He Himself is styled the head of them that believed.

Source. English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.