

An Introduction to Orthodox Christology

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Why worry about doctrine?

Growing up in an Evangelical Protestant home, and playing an active role in my local Evangelical Church, I often heard people complaining that we needed a lot more love and a lot less doctrine! I knew what they meant. They were rejecting narrow and intellectual faith in words and concepts rather than in Christ Himself. But even as an Evangelical I disagreed, because I understood that if we don't know what we believe, and why, then we may well end up believing all manner of things about God, about the Christian life, about our very salvation, many of which may not be true at all.

If doctrine is the description and explanation of what we believe to be true then it is important that we seek to have a right understanding. Doctrine is a spiritual medicine, or rather it is a description of the spiritual treatment which will heal us. Think how dangerous it is if the wrong medicine is prescribed to a patient, or the wrong amount is administered. Remember the recent drug trial which went so terribly wrong and left several men damaged for life. Describing and understanding our faith using the wrong doctrines is just as likely to cause harm, though it may be spiritual rather than physical.

Perhaps we can briefly consider a manifestly false doctrine, but one which has had some influence in the past decades. The 'Health and Wealth' Gospel teaches that God wants all Christians to be healthy and wealthy. More than that, if you are not healthy and wealthy then it is a sign that you lack faith. What sort of a Christian does this doctrine create? Surely one whose eyes are set on material gain. One who is taught to condemn and disparage those who are less well off because they have brought their poverty upon themselves by lacking faith. We can barely recognise this teaching as being Christian, but it is a Gospel for our modern, consumer society, and it has many hundreds of thousands of adherents, even millions, many of whom are found in the Third World and who hope that by praying more, attending Church services more, naming and claiming what material goods they desire, somehow God will grant them all. Yet the authentic Gospel teaches us 'take up your Cross and follow me'.

So right and true doctrine matters because doctrinal error can cause us spiritual harm, and even prevent us becoming Christian. The Mormon Church considers itself Christian but its teachings are contrary to those of the New Testament. Is it enough that it considers itself Christian, or should there be some lines in the sand which define the boundaries of that which is truly Christian and Orthodox teaching?

This has certainly always been the opinion of the Church, and we find St Paul warning his young Christian disciples to keep away from those who were bringing them another, different Gospel. There is a Christian truth, and the Orthodox Church has been committed to preserving that truth since the beginning. Certainly not because it lacked the imagination to think of new teachings, certainly not because it was merely old fashioned, but because it has always believed that 'the truth shall set you free', and that Christian doctrine is a means of finding salvation, a spiritual map. Not the same as salvation certainly, not the same as knowing Christ, but the means by which we find the true Christ and enter into the fulness of the Christian life.

It is easy to be misled, and the desire to find doctrinal truth is not separated from Christian love, as some of my Evangelical friends thought, but it is the means by which we

enter fully into that love. He who said He was the way and life also said He was the truth, and we neglect the truth at our spiritual peril.

Why is Christology important?

We can imagine that at the heart of all the controversies over doctrine is the teaching about the incarnation, passion, and ministry of Our Lord Jesus Christ. It should be no surprise that our enemy, Satan, will wish to compromise the very Gospel itself, if he can. Therefore Christology, the study of the doctrine of Christ, can appear as though it is so mired in argument and disagreement that it is best left alone. Nothing could be farther from the truth, because in fact the true understanding of Christology is salvation itself, and if we can make a little effort to see our way through the fog of many words and contradictory teachings then we will come to a place of light and life.

Christology deals with the question which Christ Himself posed to His disciples..

“Who do you say that I am?”

He seems to have asked them only a few direct questions which are recorded in the scriptures, and seems rather to have spent His time constantly explaining to them what He was doing and what His teaching meant. But on this occasion he asked them a serious question and therefore it is shown to be of central importance.

“Who do you say that I am?”

Already in the Apostolic Age we can see that the issue of Christology had a central place in the reflection of the Church. In fact the first answers of the Apostles provide some of the diversity of responses which can still be heard...

“Some say that you are John the Baptist, others say that you are Elijah, while others say that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.”

This is a Christological answer. Indeed if we consider Islam as a Christian heresy, a form of Christianity which has gone wrong, then Islamic Christianity provides this same answer. Jesus Christ is a prophet. There are plenty of modern people who consider themselves Christian but who believe no more than this. That Jesus was a good man, perhaps no more than a good man, a prophet of sorts.

But it is not the only answer. When Jesus Christ asked his disciples who THEY thought he was, Simon Peter answered boldly....

“You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God”.

This is a different Christological answer to the same question. But it has the advantage that Jesus Christ Himself acknowledges it as the true answer.

“Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jona; for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.”

These words of our Lord point out the difference between a Christology which is developed solely according to human logic and philosophy, as is the case with the Christological heresies, and that which derives from Scripture, from prayer and from revelation.

So we cannot escape Christology. It seeks to answer, hopefully with humility and a due sense of the limitations of all human thought about God, those central questions about the life of Christ and our salvation which can be summed up in the question..

“Who do you say I am?”

The answer matters a great deal. We cannot be saved by a prophet or a good man. Our spiritual sickness is altogether too grave, indeed it is a spiritual death, separating us from God. Christology matters because Jesus Christ, the Word of God become flesh matters. Indeed the incarnation is the very central point of the whole of creation. All that precedes it is leading up to it, and all that follows is consequent upon it.

A brief overview

We cannot hope to consider all the answers that Christians have produced over the centuries out of their reflection on this question, but we do need to consider several key moments in time, and several important figures, who have shaped the landscape of Christological thought. As is often the case, the greatest periods of doctrinal controversy and deliberation have been times when there has been a challenge to the truths which have been taught about Christ.

So we will consider very briefly the three Christological heresies of Arianism, Nestorianism and Eutychianism; and then we will turn to one of our own non-Chalcedonian Fathers and will an important historical statement of faith which confirms that our own Christological faith is entirely that of the Apostles, and the great Orthodox Fathers of the following centuries.

Arianism

For a while it was enough for the Church to understand that Christ was ‘the Son of the Living God’. We should not think that simply because the Church had not developed a complex Christological language at the beginning this means that it did not have a complex and developed Christology. We should careful to understand that from the very beginning, from the time of the Apostles, the content of the Orthodox faith in Christ was always the same. Justin Martyr, writing in about 150 AD shows this early appreciation of all that an Orthodox Christology should describe when he says..

“Jesus Christ is the only proper Son who has been begotten by God, being His Word and first-begotten, and power; and, becoming man according to His will, He taught us these things for the conversion and restoration of the human race.”

He was ‘the Word become flesh who dwelt among us’. Emmanuel, God Himself with us. We will turn to the scriptures as we consider these three Christological heresies and we will find that the Apostles had already expressed themselves in ways which the Orthodox doctrines, even as they became more terminologically complex, had already described. These Biblical phrases, and may others like them, contain three important concepts which an Orthodox, that is a true and proper Christology must always contain.

These are firstly that Jesus Christ is truly God the Word, secondly that he is one with us in the fulness of our own humanity, and thirdly that He has Himself, and no other, truly become human. Of course each one of these concepts is liable to all manner of misunderstanding and misinterpretation, but these concepts were there from the beginning and it is not possible for us to agree with those who suggest, for instance, that it was only at some later date that Christ was understood by the Church as being God.

Now over the first centuries there were many assaults on one or other of these Christological foundations.

The first serious Christological controversy which we will consider, and which posed a threat to the whole Church originated in the early 4th century. An Alexandrian presbyter, Arius, basing his ideas on earlier false teachings, started to preach that though the Word was the Son of God He could not be considered the same as God. Indeed Arius and those supporting Him essentially denied that the Word of God was God at all. They insisted that only the Father could be properly called God, and that before time He had begotten the Son and Word as His first creation, who had Himself in due course created the Holy Spirit.

Why should the Arians, as they came to be known, wish to hold such a Christological position? One of their surviving writings shows that they used 1 Corinthians 8:5-6 as a proof text. It says...

“To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him, and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him”.

The Arians were strict monotheists, and if we take this verse out of context then we can see how attractive the Arian position might sound. It saves all manner of complicated Trinitarian thinking. There is one God, the Father. The Son is his first and highest creation; and the Holy Spirit is the creation of the Son to help Him in his works. Not only is God able to divorce Himself from the messy business of running the universe, but there is no need to consider the inconceivable idea that He had become man.

According to this view Jesus Christ Himself could not genuinely be considered God. He was little more than a body which was moved and used by the created Son of God. Simply put the Christology of Arius was that the Son of God was a created being, although the greatest, and that Jesus Christ was therefore not God. Indeed it was not even a complete humanity which this created Son had taken, but the shell of a man.

It was Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, who found himself leading the response of the Orthodox party to this challenge. It was certainly not easy for him, and he found himself exiled far from Alexandria on several occasions. The Emperor Constantine had granted some important rights to the Christian Church, but it was not always clear which Christian Church he was going to support, and often those who stood out firmly for doctrinal truth looked like troublemakers, and were treated as such.

There is not the time to go into all that he wrote about these important Christological matters, but he developed two important principles which have always guided a proper and Orthodox Christology ever since. These were...

“That which is not assumed is not healed”

And

“God became man so that we might become gods”

We can see that these two principles are not teaching anything new, but they are explaining and defining more clearly the three foundational concepts we have already described.

The first principle, “That which is not assumed is not healed”, allows us to understand that when we say that the Word became flesh we must mean that the flesh He

became is our own humanity, and it must be a complete humanity, saving only sin. As it is written in Hebrews...

“But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.... Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”

We can see once again from this passage that the Scriptures contain a complex Christology, and these verses teach us to understand that Christ is completely human in all regards, and more than this it shows us that it was necessary for our salvation that he become fully and completely human, like his brothers in every respect, so that He might represent all mankind before God, as the High Priest represented the people of Israel in the Holy of Holies.

We see that even at the time of the Apostles it was clearly understood that it was by truly becoming man and dying our human death that God willed to liberate man from the power of death.

Someone who is not fully human cannot represent humanity. There was a need, according to the will and purpose of God, for a human to once and for all live a perfect and obedient life before God, the life that Adam should have lived, and in dying a death that was not the punishment of his own sin to be able to break the bonds and power of death and sin by His own divine authority and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

If God were incarnate in anything less than a complete humanity then that which was not assumed by God could not be brought through death to resurrection. The Arian Christ was not the Biblical Christ because He did not assume all of our humanity. The mind and soul were replaced by the Son of God.

We can easily see how this explanation fails to safeguard our salvation. When we reflect on our own spiritual lives before God we surely must conclude that the root of our sinfulness is not found in our foot, or our elbow, or our shoulder, but is found in our mind and will and soul. It is these which need to be redeemed even more than flesh and bone.

“What is not assumed is not healed” and “He became like his brothers in every respect...to make propitiation for our sins”. These are expressing the same Christological principle.

But St Athanasius’ other principle is also scriptural, and is also necessary to preclude an Arian Christology. He says that “God became man, that we might become like God”.

What a startling and perhaps provocative statement. But it is a necessary one because it insists that the one who became man was indeed God. Not a creation of God, but God Himself. And it insists equally that we are brought into a new relationship with God, as sons of God, by grace of course and not by the changing of our human nature into His divinity, but sons and daughters none the less.

The scriptures are clear, not least in passages such as

“Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.”

And

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”

During the Arian controversy the Church was having to consider what language and terminology it should use to preserve the authentic doctrine about Jesus Christ, about God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Greek terms were used with a variety of subtle but important differences in meaning.

Some said that the Son was *homoi-ousios*, which has the meaning ‘of a similar essence’, while the Orthodox insisted that Christ was *homo-ousios*, which means ‘of the same essence’.

These two descriptions are a world apart. The one says no more than Arius would agree to, that the Son of God was certainly like God, indeed had been made by God and shared many of his characteristics, but was, essentially, NOT God. The other says that the Son is truly God of God, of the same essence and therefore to be considered God as much as the Father because both were of the same essence.

If it is not God Himself who has become truly man for our sake then we are not saved. This is the heart of all Christological controversy. We are not saved by angels, nor by God avoiding becoming a complete man, but by Emmanuel, God with us, and God in us.

Arianism, for all its temporary worldly success, was not a Christian Christology, and it was therefore rejected by the Church which found that it failed to adequately describe and explain what had always been believed. The Nicene Creed is witness to the Orthodox rejection of Arianism, and to the preservation of an Apostolic and Biblical Christology.

“We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end.”

The second serious Christological error also erupted in the East, and is named after its most well known defender, Nestorianism. For several generations there had been scholars, bishops and theologians who had increasingly described Christ as being the union of God with a man. Their reasoning was that since God was utterly other to His creation it was impossible to say that He had Himself become man, it was necessary to say that He had united Himself in some external sense to a man.

Their desire to preserve the integrity of the Divine nature from change was commendable, but the explanation of the incarnation which they proposed meant that it was not in fact possible to speak of the Word becoming flesh in a substantial sense at all.

The controversy came to a head when Nestorius, the bishop of Constantinople, heard a sermon which described the Virgin Mary as Theotokos, or God-bearer. He objected to this term and insisted that she was only anthropo-tokos, the man-bearer, or christo-tokos, the bearer of Christ. He refused to allow that it could be said that God had been born, or that God had been nursed as a baby.

But his Orthodox opponents, not least St Cyril of Alexandria, asked who had been born if not God the Word? If it were indeed some other person, united to God in some

manner, then it was not God who was crucified and it was not God who was raised from the dead. And if that were so then the Word had not become flesh and had not given us the right to become children of God, as the Gospel of John states.

The teaching of the Apostles in the Acts, and throughout the New Testament is clear. It is the Word who has become incarnate, who has been made man, and therefore Christ is the Word become flesh, not a man in some relationship of grace with the Word.

St Cyril clearly understood the implications of Nestorius' position. No less than that of Arius it denied that God had Himself become man for our salvation, and while preserving the divinity of the Word, unlike Arius, it nevertheless denied that He had become fully and properly man.

St Cyril says...

"Man therefore was He truly made, through Whom God the Father made the worlds too; and was not (as some suppose) in a man, so as to be conceived of by us as a man who has God indwelling in him. For if they believe that these things are really so, superfluous will seem to be the blessed Evangelist John, saying, And the Word was made Flesh. For where the need of being made man? or why is God the Word said to be Incarnate, unless was made flesh means that He was made like us, and the force of the being made man declares that He was made like us, yet remained even so above us, yea also above the whole creation?"

It could be said by the Nestorians that He was in a man, or was united to a man, or dwelt in the man as in a temple, but He was not that man in the sense of having the same identity. In the Nestorian incarnation there were not only two natures in Christ in the sense of two ways of being, the human and the divine, but there were two subjects, the man and the Word.

The same objections which were raised against Arianism apply to Nestorianism. If God has not Himself become man then we are lost because it is not the incarnate Word who has been crucified and it is not the incarnate Word who has been raised from the dead. It is no more than a good man.

St Cyril spent much of his episcopal career writing and preaching against this false Christology. He often used the phrase 'one incarnate nature or hypostasis of the Word'. By this he meant that there was only one subject in Christ, only one identity, and that was of the Word made flesh. There was not 'the Word' and 'a man', but rather the man whom children embraced and soldiers beat was Himself the incarnate Word and no-one else.

In Christ, according to our Orthodox Christology and the teaching of St Cyril, there is only one 'WHO' in Christ, even while we understand that He is fully and perfectly God and fully and perfectly man, without sin. If we were blessed to see Him in the street and someone asked who He was, we could truly answer that He is the incarnate Son and Word of God. There is no other Orthodox answer. He is not Jesus, if by that we mean that He is a man called Jesus who is united in some way to the Word of God, rather this man Jesus is the incarnate Word of God, and the incarnate Word of God is this man Jesus.

While he lay in His mother's arms, at the same time He held the whole universe in His own divine embrace. The one as being truly human, the other as being unchangeably Divine. When He walked it was as a man, because God does not walk, but when He walked on water He showed that He was more than a mere man but rather God incarnate.

This unity and identity of being is no more than the Apostles had expressed, though St Cyril has to state it much more forcefully and clearly because of his circumstances. But he

says no more than St John in his Gospel, "the Word became flesh" when he speaks of 'one incarnate identity or person or subject of the Word'.

In his twelfth anathema St Cyril declares...

"Whoever does not acknowledge God's Word as having suffered in the flesh, being crucified in the flesh, tasted death in the flesh and been made first-born from among the dead because as God He is Life and life-giving shall be anathema!"

This sums up so much of what St Cyril understands the Bible and the Church to have taught as true and saving doctrine.

We must confess that it is God the Word Himself and no other who suffers and dies, but He suffers and dies according to the humanity which He has made His own and not according to His unchanging and unchangeable divinity. If we will not confess God the Word Himself and none other to be Jesus Christ then we cannot say that He has Himself risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, at best we can say that He has raised a man from the dead. A miracle indeed but not enough to gain our salvation.

Unlike Arianism, which in the denial of Christ's divinity remains a popular modern option but lacks a formal Church organisation, the heresy of Nestorianism would appear to persist among the Church of the East, who especially venerate Nestorius' teachers, Diodore and Theodore of Mopsuestia. But more than that it remained an active tendency in the Roman Empire, and even today, when pushed, there are those who claim to be Orthodox but who tend towards a separation of the humanity and Divinity in Christ which amounts to Nestorianism. The same desire to prevent any sense of change or mutability attaching to the Divine nature may still produce the same unbalanced response even today.

The **third period of major Christological controversy** erupted in the decades after the first council of Ephesus in 431 AD. This had succeeded in producing a dogmatic statement about Nestorius and his teaching, but it had failed to overcome the tendency towards Nestorian ways of thinking, which was still prevalent in both the East and West.

After the council of Ephesus there were major communities of Christians, not least those of the See of Antioch under their bishop John, who were out of communion with the wider Orthodox communion, and with St Cyril of Alexandria. It was not until 433 AD that a measure of reconciliation was effected, but this was itself rather illusory because both sides interpreted the reconciliation as being the capitulation of the other. Thus many Antiocheans believed that St Cyril had given up his confusing language of 'one incarnate nature' and was now confessing that Christ was 'in two natures', while St Cyril hoped that the Antiocheans confessed the true union of God and man in Christ, and had given up confessing 'two independent natures'.

This third controversy developed because the issue of Nestorianism, or at least the Nestorian way of thinking about and describing Christ, had not been completely dealt with.

In 449, Eutyches, the famous and elderly archimandrite of a monastery in Constantinople, was called before the local synod of Flavian, the Patriarch of Constantinople, and accused of teaching that after the union of humanity and Divinity in Christ there was only one nature. Flavian, and some of his bishops, used Antiochean terminology and understood 'one nature' as meaning either that the Divinity and humanity were mixed into some third nature, or else that the humanity was not present in the union. Of course Eutyches, not a very competent theologian, was wanting to insist that when the Word of God became incarnate He remained one subject and was not two subjects, the Son of God and a man.

His accusers saw this as an opportunity to both attack St Cyril's language of 'one incarnate nature' and also to curtail the influence of Eutyches in the Imperial court. He was condemned and the local synod expressed the view that it was necessary to say that Christ was two natures, not one, thereby setting themselves at odds with the teaching of St Cyril, and against the settlement of Ephesus in 431.

At Ephesus St Cyril's anathemas had been received, which say in part..

2. If anyone does not confess that the Word from God the Father has been united by hypostasis with the flesh and is one Christ with his own flesh, and is therefore God and man together, let him be anathema.

3. If anyone divides in the one Christ the hypostases after the union, joining them only by a conjunction of dignity or authority or power, and not rather by a coming together in a union by nature, let him be anathema.

4. If anyone distributes between the two persons or hypostases the expressions used either in the gospels or in the apostolic writings, whether they are used by the holy writers of Christ or by him about himself, and ascribes some to him as to a man, thought of separately from the Word from God, and others, as befitting God, to him as to the Word from God the Father, let him be anathema.

5. If anyone dares to say that Christ was a God-bearing man and not rather God in truth, being by nature one Son, even as "the Word became flesh", and is made partaker of blood and flesh precisely like us, let him be anathema.

There is not the time to describe the second council at Ephesus in 449 which defended Eutyches when he presented an Orthodox confession of faith, and which condemned those like Theorodet and Ibas who were teaching that St Cyril had an heretical Christology. Nor to investigate the council of Chalcedon and the Tome of Leo, which both weighed in on the side of the 'two nature' terminology.

But we should take note of the reason why the non-Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches are not Eutychian, and indeed have repudiated him from the beginning. There were times when he presented an Orthodox Christology, but it would also appear that he failed to fully comprehend that of St Cyril, even though he spoke of 'one nature'.

St Cyril always spoke of 'one incarnate nature', meaning one individual, the Word, who has become incarnate. Eutyches spoke simply of 'one nature' and therefore may well be considered as failing to properly safeguard the incarnation. Jesus Christ is not simply the Word, he is the Word made incarnate, without ceasing to be what He is as God.

More than this, on occasion Eutyches also refused to confess that Christ was consubstantial with us in His humanity. This was a seriously damaging position. He rejected the idea that the humanity of Christ had come down from heaven, but if it was not completely our own humanity then he is found to damage one of the foundational principles of an Orthodox Christology, which is, of course, that God the Word became completely human for our salvation.

Eutyches would appear to have adopted a more Orthodox Christology at Ephesus in 449, whether in appearance or in reality and with conviction, but his rather incoherent Christology found some followers and over the next two centuries it was occasionally necessary for it to be repudiated, and various clergy to be excommunicated.

In fact the origins of our own non-Chalcedonian Orthodox communion is rooted in the events which took place before, during and after the council of Chalcedon, which we have understood as confirming a form of Nestorianism, or at least failing to preserve the Cyrilline standard of Orthodox Christology. Eutyches has never been considered a father of the Church, and Eutychianism, that confusing of the humanity and Divinity, or the failure to preserve the integrity of the humanity of Christ, has always been rejected as a heresy. If we are non-Chalcedonians it is because we reject the dividing up of Christ into God and a man which we have understood that council to describe, rather than because we have any commitment to Eutyches and his false Christology.

What do these three examples teach us?

We can see that the principles of an Orthodox Christology are always diminished or degraded by a false Christology. These three principles bear repeating. They are that God the Word Himself became man; that He became truly and completely man as we are; and that He authentically became man, not only in appearance, or by uniting to Himself some other human person.

In the case of Arius, he denied that Christ was truly God. In that of Nestorius, he denied that God had Himself become man; and in that of Eutyches, that God had become truly man as we are. Almost all of the Christological errors throughout history can be understood as falling into one of these categories.

Why does this matter?

The preservation of a right way of thinking about Christ has already been described as having spiritual and eternal consequences. If it is not God the Word who is incarnate then Christ has no power to save us, and His death and resurrection are only his own, effected upon him by some other external Divine power. Death is not trampled down by the death of a man. But if he is not completely and wholly a man like us in every way except sin then our broken and weak humanity is not completely and wholly healed and we remain under the power of those human elements which such a Christ had not assumed. And finally if God the Word has not truly become man then it is a man apart from God who has suffered and died, and again we are not redeemed and have only the example of a good life lived by a good man to follow.

Our Orthodox Christology teaches us that God Himself has come down to enter into our human existence, while remaining without change as God. How comforting this is. We may believe that He knows our frailty because He has shared in the experience of hunger, tiredness and even the fear of death.

“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.”

But He did not become man simply to extend a sympathetic understanding towards us. Rather in becoming man and living a life of obedience to the will of God he overcame the curse which had afflicted humanity, and in truly experiencing death and overcoming it from within as it were, He has won the right to grant to all those who share His humanity the grace of the Holy Spirit and a life lived in union with God, if they have faith in Him.

How important an Orthodox Christology is, and how much a right understanding urges us to enter into the life that Christ, the incarnate Word, offers us. We worship no distant God, nor do we follow a good teacher, a prophet perhaps. But we have been made brethren of Emmanuel, God with us, and God in us, and are sons and daughters of God with Him.

What about our own Christology?

What of our own non-Chalcedonian Christology? We are often accused of being Eutychians and denying that Christ is truly man. Yet all that we have considered shows that this is not the case. Perhaps we can read one statement of faith from the non-Chalcedonian Patriarch of Constantinople, Anthimus, written in the 6th century. It describes clearly both the content of our own Christology, and its exact agreement with the Orthodox Christology of St Cyril.

He says....

“I confess that God the Word, the only Son, who was begotten of the Father in eternity, through whom all things were made, Light of Light, living image of the Father and sharing His nature, in the last times became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and of Mary the Virgin, and became a man perfectly without variation and confusion, in everything like unto us except sin; and He remained God immutable, and, when He assumed our attributes, He was not diminished in His Godhead; and that which was derived from us He made His own by dispensation by a natural union. For He who was begotten without time and without a body of God the Father, the same underwent a second birth in flesh, inasmuch as in an ineffable manner He became incarnate of a virgin mother; and, after she had borne Him, she continued in her virginity; and we justly confess her to be the Theotokos, and that He who was born of her in the flesh is perfect God and perfect man, the same out of two natures one Son, one Lord, and one Christ, and one nature of God the Word who became incarnate; and each one of the natures which combined to form an indivisible unity remained without confusion. And so He is very rightly one of the holy and connatural Trinity, both before He took flesh and after He took flesh, and a fourth number was not added to the Trinity; and He is impassible in that He is of the nature of the Father, but passible in the flesh in that He is of our nature. For God the Word did not suffer in His own nature, but in flesh of our nature; and He who personally united this to Himself suffered in our likeness. And Gregory the Theologian defined the matter and called Him impassible in His Godhead, passible in the assumption of flesh. And He is one in the miracles, and also in the passions, and by dispensation He made our passions His own, voluntary and innocent ones, in flesh which was passible and mortal after our nature, endowed with a soul and an intellect, and passible and mortal all the time of the dispensation; for He suffered not in semblance but in reality, and in flesh that was capable of suffering He suffered and died on the cross; and by a Resurrection befitting God He made and rendered it impassible and immortal, and in every way incorruptible, since it came from the union of the womb, which was holy and without sin. While recognising, therefore, the distinction between the elements which have combined to form the unity of nature, I mean between the Godhead and the manhood, we yet do not separate them from one another; also we do not cut the One into or in two natures, nor yet do we confound Him by rejecting the distinction between the Godhead and the manhood, but we confess Him to be one out of two, Emmanuel.”

This passage surely shows very clearly that our own Orthodox faith preserves an authentic and Orthodox Christology. Christ is indeed understood in this statement of faith

as being God the Word incarnate, as having Himself become man, and as having become truly man, of our own nature, without change.

An Orthodox Christology is the very heart of an Orthodox Faith; and by avoiding the errors of Arius, Nestorius and Eutyches, our Orthodox Church, which includes those of us in the British Orthodox Church, has been preserved from false doctrine and remains truly a source of life in Christ Jesus, the incarnate Word and Saviour of the world.