On our saying ”and became incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary”

Yahya ibn Adi (AD 893–974)

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On our saying ”and became incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary” — By Ya yā ibn Adī

[Translated by Sam Noble] When some of the brothers asked, one after another, about the meaning of our saying in the Catholic Creed ”and became incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary” each one of them received a response appropriate for him that proved this, so that they may recall what the scholars have examined and articulated (if indeed it needs articulation) so that those who have need of it may benefit from it. I say: the source from which these words were taken is the Holy Gospel because in it is written, ”Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called the Christ,[1] and she gave birth to her firstborn son and his name was called Jesus,[2] and the one to whom she will give birth is of the Holy Spirit,[3] and she was found with child from the Holy Spirit.[4]” So it is established that Jesus Christ was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. The Apostle Paul made clear the circumstances of His birth from His mother and said, ”He was born in the body of a woman,”[5] meaning that He was born in His human nature of Our Lady the Virgin Mary and it was established in our previous essay[6] on this statement that that His human nature is created.

The existence of each created thing requires causes such as the carpenter and the wood and other things.[7] His efficient cause is the one divine nature which creates every creature, that is, the divinity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. His material cause is the Virgin Mary. Just as it is not possible for iron to be made into a sword without fire entering into it and giving it form in order to make it possible for a sword to be formed from it, so too the Virgin Mary did not have a human nature that the Holy Spirit did not rest upon and prepare for the adoption of the human nature from it. For this reason, when the angel said to her, ”Behold you will bear a child and give birth”[8] and she said ”How can this be for me when I have not known a man?”,[9] he said, ”The holy spirit will come upon you”[10] and the Holy Spirit put into her the natural power to form an embryo.

This is like what was written in the Old Testament: "The Spirit of God hovered over the waters."[11] The Holy Spirit rested upon the water and put into it the natural power for animals to come out of it. Then after that God said, "Let the water bring forth animals, and it brought forth."[12] This is like when a bird sits on its egg to warm it and the power of life goes from it to its egg and after that an animal is brought forth from it. It is also known that the relation of the woman to what is born of her is the relation of the earth to what springs forth from it. Just as God wanted in the beginning of creation for the earth to bring forth plants without plants first being sown there, so too the Almighty wanted a woman to be with child without a human being sown [in her].

The expression "of" when we say "and of Mary" is the genitive of material, like when we say "the ring is of gold" because the human nature is a part of Mary in the way that the ring is a piece of gold with the form of the ring that the goldsmith made in it and in the way that each embryo is from its mother. The expression "of" when we say "of the Holy Spirit" has the meaning of something made by Him. This is like when it is said that all is of God, not meaning that something is a part of God, but that everything is made by God. There is no difference between when we say that the human nature is made by the Holy Spirit and when we say that it is made by the divine nature, since the divine nature is the divine nature of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is clear that the Holy Spirit prepared Mary to bear that which the divine nature formed from her nature, according to the natural, gradual development of the embryo in the belly of the one bearing it. About this it was written of old, "Wisdom built itself a house."[13] In expressing building, there is indication of an agent, which is the divine nature, and of a material, which is the nature of Mary, and of an object, which is the human nature of Christ. In His gradual development, which is His natural formation, and in our saying "built itself a house" there is indication of the divine nature's residing in the human nature. This is the residing of union, not the residing of resting within, like the union of the soul and the body in man.

The Virgin Mary is the material and the Holy Spirit is the one who prepares and the human nature is what is made and the divine nature is the maker. The hypostasis of the Son is united to the human nature at the beginning of His existence, in the way the soul is united to the body. Christ subsists from them both, that is, from His divine nature and His human nature by their union and their existence within him. For this reason he has the attributes of both of them. <70> " " [14]
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[1] Matthew 1:16 [2] Matthew 1:25 [3] Matthew 1:20 [4] Matthew 1:18 [5] Galatians 4:4 [6] He indicates here an essay of his on this subject the location of which we do not know. [7] This is like the chair, the efficient cause of which is the carpenter, the material cause is the wood, the formal cause is the form of the chair, and the final cause is sitting upon it. [8] Luke 1:31 [9] Luke 1:34 [10] Luke 1:35 [11] Genesis 1:2 [12] Genesis 1:20 [13] Proverbs 9:1 [14] 1564 [15] : [16] : [17] : [18] 16:1 [19] 25:1 [20] 20:1 [21] 18:1 [22] 4:4 [23] [24]

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