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THE TWO LETTERS OF HONORIUS

NOTE: I believe I have come across the *existing* texts of the infamous '*Two Letters of Honorius to Sergius*', taken from Hefele's *History of the Church, Volume 5*, starting on page 34 and 51, which I found online (here). I do not intend to violate any copyright, but am simply posting these two letters because they are very hard to find, yet are important for those seeking to better understand the Pope Honorius situation. **I will also include Hefele's commentary on the letters, while keeping Honorius' words in blue (the "jumbled text" are Greek words). Any highlights in red are my own; all other emphasis and Greek text are by Hefele**.

FIRST LETTER

The [First] letter of Honorius is as follows: "Your letter, my brother, I have received, and have learnt from it that new controversies have been stirred up by a certain Sophronius, then a monk, now bishop of Jerusalem, against our brother Cyrus of Alexandria, who proclaimed to those returning from heresy *one* energy of our Lord Jesus Christ. This Sophronius afterwards visited you, brought forward the same complaint, and after much instruction requested that what he had heard from you might be imparted to him in writing.

Of this letter of yours to Sophronius we have received from you a copy, and, after having read it, we commend you that your brotherliness has removed the new expression (mia ejnergeia [one energy]), which might give offense to the simple. For we must walk in that which we have learned. By the leading of God we came to the measure of the true faith, which the apostles of the truth have spread abroad by the light (*Lat*. Rule) of the Holy Scriptures, confessing that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Mediator between God and man, worked the divine works by means (mesiteusashv) of the manhood, which was hypostatically united to Him, the Logos, and that the same worked the human works, since the flesh was assumed by the Godhead in an unspeakable, unique manner, ajdiairetwv, ajtreptwv, ajsugcutwv, teleiwv. And He who shone in the flesh, through His miracles, in perfect Godhead, is the same who worked (ejneghsav *Lat*. patitur) the conditions of the flesh in dishonorable suffering, perfect God and man. He is the one Mediator between God and men in two natures. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. He is the Son of Man, who came down from heaven, and one and the same is the Lord of glory who was crucified, whilst we still confess that the Godhead is in no way subject to human suffering. And the flesh was not from heaven, but was taken from the holy God-bearer, for the Truth says in the Gospel of Himself: 'No man

hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven' (S. John 3:13), teaching us clearly that the flesh which was susceptible of suffering was united with the Godhead in an unspeakable and unique manner; on the one hand distinct and unmingled, on the other unseparated; so that the union must be wonderfully thought of under the continuance of both natures. In agreement with this, says the apostle (1 Corinthians 2:8), 'They crucified the Lord of Glory,' whilst yet the Godhead could neither be crucified nor suffer; but on account of that unspeakable union we can say both, *God has suffered*, and the *Manhood came down from heaven with the Godhead* (S. John 3:13). Whence, also, **we confess *one will* of our Lord Jesus Christ** (o[qen kai e{n qelhma oJmologou~men tou~ kurion j Ihsou~ Cristou~ = *unde et unam voluntatem fatemur Domini nostri Jesu Christi*), since our (human) nature was plainly assumed by the Godhead, and this being *faultless*, as it was before the Fall. For Christ, coming in the form of sinful flesh, took away the sin of the world, and assuming the form of a servant, He is *habitu inventus ut homo*. As He was conceived by the Holy Ghost, so was He also born without sin of the holy and immaculate Virgin, the God-bearer, without experiencing any contamination of the *vitiata natura*. **The expression *flesh* is used in the Holy Scripture in a double sense, a good and a bad**. Thus it is written (Genesis 6:3): 'My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh;' and the apostle says (1 Corinthians 15:50): 'Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.' **And again (Romans 7:23): 'I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.'** Many other passages must also be understood of the flesh in the bad sense. In the good sense, however, the expression is used by Isaiah (66:23): 'All flesh shall come to Jerusalem to worship before Me.' So Job (19:26): 'In my flesh shall I see God;' and elsewhere (S.Luke 3:6): 'All flesh shall see the salvation of God.' I**t is this, as we said, not the *vitiata natura* which was assumed by the Redeemer, which would war against the law of His mind**; but He came to seek and to save that which was lost, *i.e*. the *vitiata natura* of the human race. **In His members there was not another law (Romans 7:23), or a *diversa vel contraria Salvatori voluntas***, because He was born *supra legem* of human condition; and if He says in the Holy Spirit: 'I came down from heaven not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me' (S. John 6:38), and (S.Mark 14:36): 'Nevertheless, not what I will, but what Thou wilt,' and the like, **these are not expressions of a *voluntas diversa***, but of the accommodation (oijkonomiav, *dispensationis*) of the assumed manhood. For this is said for our sakes, that we, following His footsteps, should do not our own will, but that of the Father.

We will now, entering upon the royal way, avoid the snares of the hunters right and left, in order that we dash not our foot against a stone. We will go in the path of our

predecessors (*i.e*. hold fast to the old formulae and avoid the new). And if some who, so to speak, stammer, think to explain the matter better, and give themselves out as teachers, **yet may we not make their statements to be Church dogmas, as, for example, that in Christ there is one energy or two, since neither the Gospels nor the letters of the apostles, nor yet the Synods, have laid this down**. That the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son and the Word of God, by whom all things were made, the one and the same, perfectly works divine and human works, is shown quite clearly by the Holy Scriptures; **but whether on account of the works of the Godhead and manhood (*opera divinitatis et humanitatis*) it is suitable to think and to speak of one or two energies (*operationes*) as present, we cannot tell, we leave that to the grammarians**, who sell to boys the expressions invented by them, in order to attract them to themselves. **For we have not learnt from the Bible that Christ and His Holy Spirit have one or two energies**; but that He works in manifold ways (polutro>pwv ejnergou~nta). For it is written: 'If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His' (Romans 8:9); and again: 'No one can say, Lord Jesus, but in the Holy Ghost; the gifts are diverse, but there is *one* Spirit; and the offices are diverse, but there is one Lord; and the operations are diverse, but it is one God that worketh all in all.' If, however, there are many diversities of operations, and God works them all in all the members of the great body, how much more does this prevail in the Head (of that mystical Body), Christ the Lord? … If the Spirit of Christ works in His members in many ways, how much more must we confess that, by Himself, the Mediator between God and man, He works most perfectly, and in manifold ways, through the communion of the two natures? We, however, wish to think and to breathe according to the utterances of Holy Scripture, rejecting everything which, as a novelty in words, might cause uneasiness, in the Church of God, so that those who are under age may not, **taking offense at the expression *two energies*, hold us for Nestorians, and that (on the other side) we may not seem to simple ears to teach Eutychianism, when we dearly confess only *one* energy**. We must be on our guard lest, after the evil weapons of those enemies are burnt, from their ashes new flames of scorching questions may be kindled. In simplicity and truth we will confess that the Lord Jesus Christ, one and the same, works in the divine and in the human nature. It is much better if the empty, idle, and paganising philosophers, who weigh out the natures, proudly raise their croaking against us, than that the people of Christ, simple and poor in spirit, should remain unsatisfied. No one can deceive the scholars of fishermen by philosophy They follow the doctrine of these (the fishermen). All the arguments of cunning disputation are crushed in their nets. This will you also, my brother, proclaim with us, as we do it with one mind with you; and **we exhort you that you, fleeing from the new manner of speech of one energy or two, with us proclaim one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, true God, in two natures working the divine and human.**"

Helfe's Commentary

We feel bound clearly to indicate every considerable departure of this second edition of our history from the first *in causa Honorii*, that everyone may understand how we have previously judged, and what we now think on this subject. For this reason we repeat, first of all, the remarks with which we accompanied this letter of Honorius in the first edition: "We see that Honorius started from the dogma, — The two natures in Christ are hypostatically united in the *one Person* of the Logos. If, however, there is only one Person, then is there but one Worker present, and the *one* Christ and Lord works both the human and the divine works, the former by means of the human nature. … …

These expressions, mia ejnergeia and duo ejnergeiai, **[one energy, two energies]** he proceeds, are, moreover, approved neither by the Holy Scriptures nor by the Synods; and they should be avoided, because their use produces new controversies. **But why was there in Christ only one will? Because, says Honorius, He assumed, not the human nature which was corrupted by the Fall**, but the uncorrupted nature, as it was before the Fall. **In the ordinary man there are certainly two wills — a will of the mind and a will of the members (Romans 7:23); but the latter is only a consequence of the Fall, and therefore could not exist in Christ. So far Honorius was quite on the right way; but he did not accurately draw the inferences**. **He ought now to have said**: Hence it follows that in Christ, since He was God and man at the same time, together with His divine will, which is eternally identical with that of the Father, only the *incorrupt human will*, which never opposes the divine will, could be assumed, and not also the opposing will of the members.

This would have been the natural and necessary inference; but instead of drawing this, he leaves the incorrupt human will either entirely out of account, or more accurately, he identifies it with the divine will. Because the incorrupt human will of Christ is always subject and conformed to the divine, Honorius exchanged this *moral* unity of both with unity in general, or *physical* unity, with the latter of which we have here to do. Even the clear passages of Holy Scripture, in which Christ distinguishes His human will from that of the Father, could not decide him to recognize this human will. Exchanging difference for opposition, he thought it inadmissible to have two *distinct* wills in Christ, lest he should be forced to admit, in a heretical sense, two opposed and mutually contradictory wills in them.

To this criticism we will add what we remarked before, in the first edition, on the second letter of Honorius: "He now says quite correctly, *the divine nature in Christ works the divine, and the human nature performs that which is of the flesh*,

and *we proclaim the two natures, which work unconfused, in the one Person of the only-begotten Son of God, that which is proper to them*. In this Honorius pronounces the orthodox doctrine, and it would be quite incorrect to charge him with heresy." It is thus clear that we always were of the opinion that Honorius was quite orthodox in thought, but, especially in his first letter, he had unhappily expressed himself in a Monothelite fashion. … …

Let us now consider in what connection the unhappy sentence, *Unde et unam voluntatem fatemur Domini nostri Jesu Christi*, stands, which literally taken is quite Monothelite. Honorius intended to reply to the remark of Sergius, who had written: "The admission of two energies would also lead to the admission of two wills in Christ, *of which the one is opposed to the other*, since the Logos is willing to endure suffering, but the manhood opposes. This is, however, quite inaccurate, for in one subject there cannot be two *contrarioe voluntates*." Entering upon this, Honorius says: *Unam voluntatem fatemur Domini nostri Jesu Christi*. This means at the first glance: "You are right, Sergius; we cannot admit *two* wills in Christ." As reason, however, why we should admit only *unam voluntatem* in Christ, Honorius proceeds: "Christ did not assume the *natura vitiata* with its corrupt will (*lex membrorum et carnis*), but the uncorrupted human nature, as it was before the Fall." Quite correct. Hence follows, however, not *una voluntas in Christa*, but DUAE *voluntates*, the divine and the incorrupt human. … …

We shall shortly see that the second successor of Honorius, Pope John IV. (see sec. 298), tried to explain and justify this *unam voluntatem*, by saying that Honorius, in opposition to Sergius, had only to speak of the will of the human nature, and therefore quite correctly said, we recognize only *one human* will in Christ. f55 As, however, we do not find this kind of defense satisfactory, as will be seen, we believe that we can in another way explain how Honorius was led to this now ominous phrase, *unam voluntatem*. With perfect right he denied that there could be two CONTRARIAE *voluntates* in Christ, and was convinced that the *lex mentis* in Christ was in constant harmony with his *voluntas divina*, that it was always *morally* one with it, and this *unitas moralis* he wished to bring out clearly. His words, *Unde unam voluntatem fatemur Domini Jesu Christi*, thus have the meaning: "On account of the *ineffabilis conjunctio* of the two natures in Christ, there are in Him, not *two mutually opposed* wills, but only *one will*, taken *morally*; *i.e.* only one will-*tendency*, one *moral* unity of will, since in Him the human *incorrupt* will was always in conformity with the divine, and was always harmonious with it." **That Honorius meant, in fact, by his *unam voluntatem*, to express this *moral* unity of will, is clearly seen from the words which immediately follow, in which he assigns the reason why there is only *una voluntas* in Christ,**

namely, that He had assumed only the *faultless* human nature, as it were, before the Fall. Thus falls away of itself what we thought ourselves justified in saying in the first edition (S. 138): "Honorius interchanged the *moral* unity of will with the *physical*." We added there: "Even the clear passages of Holy Scripture, in which Christ distinguishes His human will from that of the Father, could not decide him (Honorius) to recognize this human will." … …

Moreover, when Honorius, in his first letter, wished to know that the phrase "one or two operations or energies" was avoided, he was influenced by his desire for the peace of the Church, and by the fear lest, under the *una operatio*, Monophysitism might be foisted upon the Church, or, under *duoe operationes*, Nestorianism. And we must not, in fact, forget that, at the beginning of the Monothelite controversies, men were much less in a position to estimate correctly the range of the terms mia ejnergeia and duo ejnergeiai than at a later period.

SECOND LETTER

The first fragment from the **[SECOND]** letter of the Pope says: "We have also written to Cyrus of Alexandria, that the newly invented expression may be rejected, one or two energies, … for those who use such expressions, what else do they want than the term: Copying *one or two natures*, so to introduce one or two energies. In respect to the natures, the doctrine of the Bible is clear; but it is quite idle to ascribe one or two energies to the Mediator between God and man."

The second fragment, at the close of the **[SECOND]** letter, runs: "This we wished to bring to the knowledge of your fraternity by this letter. Moreover, with regard to the ecclesiastical dogma, and what we ought to hold and teach, on account of the simplicity of men and to avoid controversies, we must, as I have already said, **assert neither one nor two energies in the Mediator** between God and men, **but must confess that both natures are naturally united in the one Christ, that each in communion with the other worked and acted (*operantes atque operatrices*; Greek, ejnergou>sav kai< praktika<v); *the divine works the divine, and the human performs that which is of the flesh*** (these are the well-known words of Leo I), without separation and without mixture, and without the nature of God being changed into the manhood, or the human nature into the Godhead. For one and the same is lowly and exalted, equal to

the Father and inferior to the Father … Thus keeping away, as I said, **from the vexation of new expressions, we must not maintain or proclaim either one or two energies, but, instead of one energy which some maintain, we must confess that the one Christ, the Lord, truly works in both natures; and instead of the two energies they should prefer to proclaim with us the two natures, *i.e.* the Godhead and the assumed manhood, *which work what is proper to them*** (ejvergou>sav ta< i]dia, *propria operantes*) ***in the one Person of the onlybegotten Son of God***, *unmingled and unseparated and unchanged*. This we will make known to your brotherly Holiness, that we may harmonize in the one doctrine of the faith. We also wrote to our brethren the Bishops Cyrus and Sophronius, that they may not persist in the new expressions of one or two energies, but proclaim with us the one Christ, the divine and the human by means of both natures (we did this), although we had already emphatically impressed upon the envoys whom Sophronius sent to us, that he should not persist in the expression *two energies*, and they promised it to us fully on the condition that Cyrus would also desist from proclaiming mia ejnergeia."

Helfe's Commentary

On this point we remarked in the first edition (S. 147): "If we compare this second letter with the first, we find

(a) before all, the like sharp accentuating of the leading proposition: Notwithstanding the duality of the natures in Christ, there is yet only one Worker, the Lord Jesus Christ, who works the divine and human by means of both natures. There, as here, the willing and working are incorrectly regarded as proceeding from the Person and not from the nature. That we do not now maintain this latter assertion we have already remarked; and even if the first letter does not justify the assumption that Honorius, from the correct premiss, there is only one Worker, drew the false inference, therefore there is only one will, for the will lies on the side of the person, not of the nature; the second letter certainly shows more clearly that Honorius, too, sought the will on the side of the nature. We said, therefore, even in the first edition,

(b) "In this second letter, however, Honorius deserts this error (with which we charged him), whether the beautiful and clear explanation of Sophronius helped him to this, or a deeper consideration of the classical words of Leo I, to which he had recourse (*agit utraque forma cum alterius communione*, *quod proprium est*), led him to it.

"Setting aside the unsavory polutropwv ejnergei~(of the first letter), he now says quite correctly: We confess that the two natures are naturally united in the one Christ, that each *works* and *acts* in communion with the other, — the divine nature in Christ works the divine, and the human performs that which is of the flesh; and, "We proclaim the two

natures which work unmingled in the one Person of the only-begotten Son of God that which is proper to them (*propria operantes*). In this Honorius pronounced the orthodox doctrine, and it would be quite wrong to charge him with heresy." Thus we wrote even in the first edition. We now add that Honorius in this passage declares for two natures in Christ, and to each of the two natures he ascribes its own ejnergei~n, and therewith also a will. He there speaks of the two natures as ejnergou>sav kai< praktika>v and *propria operantes*. But we must with all this repeat what we said in the first edition: In contradiction to these his own utterances, Honorius yet demands again the avoidance of the orthodox phrase, du>o ejne>rgeiai. After himself saying, "Both natures *work what is proper to them*," it was inconsistent to disapprove of the phrase, *two energies*. The most offensive thing in the first letter of Honorius, the expression e[n qe>lhma, is no longer expected in the fragment of the second letter.

A defense of Honorius was undertaken, A.D. 641, by his second successor, Pope John IV., in a letter to the Emperor Constantine (son of Heraclius), entitled *Apologia pro Honorio Papa*. When Pope John learnt that the Patriarch Pyrrhus of Constantinople appealed to Honorius in defense of the doctrine of one will, he wrote to the Emperor: "The whole West is scandalised by our brother, the Patriarch Pyrrhus, proclaiming, in his letters which are circulated in all directions, novelties which are contrary to the rule of faith, and referring to our predecessor, Pope Honorius of blessed memory, as of his opinion, which was entirely foreign to the mind of the Catholic Father (*quod a mente Catholici patris erat penitus alienum*). The Patriarch Sergius communicated to the said Roman bishop that some maintained two *contrarias voluntates* in Christ. When the Pope learnt this, he answered him: As our Redeemer is *monadicus unus*, so was HE miraculously conceived and born above all human way and manner. He (Honorius) taught that HE was as well perfect God as perfect man, born without sin, in order to renew the noble origin (*originem*) which had been lost by sin. As second Adam, there was in Him no sin, either by birth or through intercourse with men. For when the Word was made flesh, and assumed all that was ours, He did not take on the *vitium reatus* which springs from the propagation of sin. He assumed, from the inviolate Virgin Mary, the likeness of our flesh, but not of sin. Therefore had Christ, as the first Adam, *only one natural will of His humanity*, not two *contrarias voluntates*, as we who are born of the sin of Adam, … In such wise our predecessor Honorius answered Sergius, that there were not in the Redeemer two *contrarioe voluntates*, *i.e*. also a *voluntas in membris*, as HE had assumed nothing of the sin of the first man. The Redeemer did indeed assume our nature, but not the *culpa criminis*. **Let, then, no unintelligent critic blame Honorius, that he speaks only of the human and not also of the divine nature, but let him know that *he answered that concerning which the patriarch inquired. Where the wound is, there the healing is applied*. Even the apostle has sometimes brought**

forward the divine, and sometimes the human nature of Christ alone.”