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CONTRIBUTED ARTICLES

THE MEDIATORIAL PERSON OF CHRIST*

WHAT RELATIONS SUBSISTED BETWEEN THE TWO NATURES OF CHRIST DURING THE PERIOD OF HIS HUMILIATION?

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THE topic proposed now for examination is abstruse, perhaps too deep and too little illuminated by Scripture to be investigated with success. It becomes us who cannot fathom the mystery of our own being, to approach with profound reverence an inquiry touching the interaction of the natures of the Son of God. Were the question one of mere curiosity, we should hesitate to enter upon it; but, as it seems to us, the inquiry may be of practical utility. Indeed in these restless and daring times, when men are prying into the mysteries of the material universe with intense pertinacity, and subjecting the Scriptures to remorseless criticism, such questions as that proposed are almost unavoidable.

In this discussion we assume that Christ is truly God, and that "in the fulness of time" he became man, not by the change of his divinity to humanity, for that is impossible; but by the assumption of a human nature into personal union with his divine nature; into a union so close that to one and the same person may be ascribed both divine and human characteristics. Be it carefully noted, however, that the divine nature of Christ was not humanized, neither was his human nature deified. They are two distinct natures, not blended or confounded, while in a relation of closest intimacy. An illustration, though crude and far from perfect, may be found in our own persons in which are embraced two distinct substances, a material and an immaterial, one never being transmuted into the other. The analogy fails in this re-

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spect that only one of the two constituents of our nature is an intelligent, or spiritual, substance; whereas in Christ, his human nature, as well as his divine, is intelligent. Helpful, then, but only in an imperfect degree, is the constitution of our own nature for the understanding of the combination of natures in the mediatorial person of Christ.

The doctrine concerning the conjunction of the two natures in Christ is technically styled, "The doctrine of the hypostatic union," one of the most mysterious, yet one of the most important, doctrines revealed in Scripture. Our aim now is not to prove the truth of this doctrine, but, assuming its truth, to inquire how communication between the two natures of Christ was maintained during the time of his humiliation. Was there *direct* intercourse between them, so that the inferior was *immediately* guided and sustained by the superior nature? When our Lord displayed his power in working miracles, or his wisdom in teaching, or his stability under temptation, or his unswerving fidelity in meeting, both at the hands of God and men and evil spirits, responsibilities freely undertaken, was there a *direct* inflow from the divine nature into the human nature of the requisite power, wisdom and other qualities?

The answer which, perhaps, most students of the Bible would give to this question is that the two natures were in direct communication with each other; the personal bond established between them being sufficient to secure to the human nature the constant and efficient indwelling of the divine nature. And it must be admitted that some plausible arguments can be adduced in favor of this view. For instance, it may be urged that just as between our bodies and souls there is *direct* intercourse, no intermediary agency being required, so could it be in the case of the two natures of Christ. And further it may be argued that sundry expressions of Scripture lend direct support to this view. Prominent among these are the following:—John 1:14 "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and

truth"; I Tim. 3:16 "God was manifest in the flesh," or, as in the Revised version, "He who was manifested in the flesh"; John 9:35-37 "Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and finding him, he said, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said And who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him? Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him and he it is that speaketh with thee." Col. 2:9 'For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the God-head bodily.'

On closest scrutiny of these texts, however, I am unable to see that they affirm more than this, that he who lived and acted as Jesus Christ was God as well as man. They warrant the belief, and are otherwise inexplicable, that a personal union existed between the Son of God and him who chose to style himself so frequently "The Son of Man." But they shed no light on the question now before us touching the mode in which the divine nature of Christ sustained, or influenced, his human nature, during the time of his humiliation.

The following extracts from The Westminster Confession of Faith and The Larger Catechism seem to be the statements of these formularies which approximate most closely the question under our investigation at present:—

"The Lord Jesus in his human nature thus united to the divine was sanctified and anointed with the Holy Spirit above measure, having in him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, in whom it pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell: to the end that being holy, harmless, undefiled and full of grace and truth, he might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of a mediator and surety" (Conf. ch. VIII, Sec. 3). "The Lord Jesus by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, which he through the eternal Spirit once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father" (Conf. Ch. VIII, Sec. 5). "Why was it requisite that the Mediator should be God? It was requisite that the Mediator should be God that he might sustain and keep the human nature from sinking under the infinite wrath of God and the power of death" (Larger Catechism, Ques. 38). "Why

was our Mediator called Christ? Our Mediator was called Christ because he was anointed with the Holy Ghost above measure, and so set apart and furnished with all authority and ability to execute the offices of prophet, priest and king of his Church in the estate both of his humiliation and exaltation" (Larger Cate. Ques. 42).

In a matter so obscure and subtle as that under consideration, it would be unseemly to dogmatize, and my desire is to treat it cautiously, diffidently, nay, tentatively; but, so far as I now see, the proper position to hold is this, that during at least the season of our Lord's humiliation (when he "emptied" himself) the Holy Spirit was the mediating agent of communication between the divine and the human nature of Christ, just as he (the Spirit) constitutes now the great bond of union and communion between Christ, the Head, and his people, the members of his mystical body. This opinion, though not free from difficulties, seems to me more consonant with Scripture than any other that can be proposed. Favorable to this view, if not fully demonstrative of it, are the following considerations:—

1. The Holy Spirit had a special agency in the production of the human nature of Christ. It appears from Scripture that the divine nature of Christ did not produce his human nature while it assumed, or appropriated, it in the instant in which it was formed. That the son did not operate *directly* in the production of the nature he assumed is evident from Heb. 10:5 "Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a *body hast thou prepared me,*" which is language addressed by the Son to the Father. But that the *immediate* agent in the organization of the human nature which the Son assumed was the Holy Spirit is expressly taught in Matthew 1:18 "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother, Mary, was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost," and in Luke 1:35, where is recorded the announcement made to Mary by the angel, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee:

therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

The fact here declared as to the agency of the Spirit is in line with the general doctrine of Scripture in regard to his functions. For in the economy of nature, as well as in that of grace, the work of the Third Person of the Godhead seems to be that of completing, quickening, adorning. Natural life and order seem to proceed from the Third Person of the Trinity as the efficient agent, while spiritual life and order are clearly attributed to him. See Gen. 1:2; Job 26:13; Ps. 104:30; John 3:5-8; 1 Cor. 12:3; Tit. 3:5.

2. The Holy Spirit was the direct author of those graces by which the human nature of Christ was adorned and qualified for his work of obedience unto death. The angelical announcement already quoted from Luke 1:35 gives a hint of this. As a consequence of the overshadowing energy of the Spirit, a "holy thing" was to be born. The connection between the agent and the character of the product is more plainly indicated in the translation preferred by the English Revisers, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; wherefore also that which is to be born shall be called holy, the Son of God."

In Isa. 42:1 God, the Father, is represented as saying concerning his servant, the Messiah, "Behold my servant whom I uphold; mine elect in whom my soul delighteth; I have *put my Spirit upon him*; he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles." This is an intimation that in virtue of the communication to him of the *Spirit*, the Messiah would be qualified for the work assigned to him and undertaken by him.

In correspondence with this announcement, the Messiah is represented in Isa. 61:1 as saying, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek;" an announcement which Jesus declared found fulfilment in him. Luke 4:21.

To the same effect is the statement made by John the Baptist in witnessing to Jesus, "For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God; for God giveth not the

Spirit by measure unto him," John 3:34. Be it carefully observed that the qualification of Jesus for the performance of his work is not attributed to his divine nature directly, but to the Holy Spirit. If the mere union of the divine and the human nature secured the requisite qualifications, why is the Holy Spirit exhibited as the *immediate* author of them?

3. Even the ability of Christ to perform miracles is ascribed to the Holy Spirit. To the Pharisees, who were daring enough to allege that his ability to cast out demons was derived from Satan, our Lord said, "But if I cast out devils by the *Spirit of God*, then the kingdom of God is come unto you." Concurrent with this utterance of Christ is the language used by Peter when, in addressing Cornelius and his friends, he told them how God had "anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him."

4. In one text it seems to be taught that it was by virtue of the Spirit's operation that Christ offered himself to God as an unblemished victim. The text alluded to is Heb. 9:14 which runs thus: "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot unto God, cleanse (or purge) your conscience from dead works to serve the living God"?

It must be said that as to the meaning of the phrase, "the eternal Spirit," there is disagreement among orthodox expositors; some contending that it denotes the divine nature of Christ, others, among whom is Calvin, maintaining that the Holy Spirit is meant, and that the drift of the passage is that the human nature of Christ was, during the time of his humiliation, so replenished with grace by the Holy Spirit that the sacrifice rendered was without flaw, or blemish. This second view seems to me preferable on the ground partly that to an ordinary reader it is that which would most readily occur, and partly because it accords exactly with the teaching of Scripture as to the immediate source of the Saviour's equipment for the work of atonement. In Isa. 11:2-5, for instance, Messiah's qualifications for his work are thus set forth, "And

the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord."

5. Even in the resurrection of Christ, the Spirit seems to have performed an important part. This stupendous event is, indeed, attributed to the Father. As the representative of the claims of the divine majesty, it pertained to the Father to justify the Son, or judicially discharge and also accept him, on the ground of his perfect satisfaction in behalf of the elect. Acts 2:24, 32, 33; 17:31; Rom. 8:11; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:20; 1 Thess. 1:10. This resurrection is attributable to the Son, who by his obedience unto death, had won the right to it. John 10:18. But efficiently it belonged to the Spirit to reanimate the lifeless body of the Saviour and adorn it for reunion with the soul temporarily separated from it. This is not obscurely taught in Rom. 8:11 "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." It is the same almighty agent that reunited the body and soul of the crucified Saviour who shall reanimate the dead bodies of his saints. I feel strongly inclined to the view that the following texts may most fitly be interpreted as referring to the agency of the Holy Spirit in the resurrection of Christ. Rom. 1:4; 1 Tim. 3:16, 1 Pet. 3:18-20.

OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED.

1. It may be objected that the view advocated precludes the idea that the divine nature of Christ co-operated with his human nature in making atonement for sinners. If the Holy Spirit was the efficient agent in producing and fostering the holiness of the man, Christ Jesus, and in enabling him to do his wonderful works, what part had the divine nature in achieving our redemption?

Our answer briefly is as follows:—

A. By virtue of the *personal* union constituted between the two natures, the acts and sufferings of the human

nature were those of a divine person, and acquired significance and value from that fact. When the man Christ Jesus was crucified, it was the "Lord of glory" that was crucified. 1 Cor. 2:8. The blood shed on Calvary was the blood of one that is God. Acts 20:28.

The acts and experiences of either nature were attributable *not* indeed to the other *nature*, but to the divine *person*, comprehensive of both natures. In the mere matter of our bodies, there is nothing nobler than that of which the body of a beast consists; but the human body acquires dignity and worth because of its intimate union with a rational soul. This may serve to illustrate how the humanity, which was indeed in itself glorious, became exalted in glory because of its close relation to the Son of God. Thus it can be seen how the union subsisting between the human and the divine in the person of Christ lent weight and worth to the acts and sufferings of his humanity. This, then, was a momentous and indispensable contribution which was rendered by the divine nature to our redemption.

B. The Son of God was active along with the Father in communicating the Holy Spirit copiously to the human nature in which our redemption was wrought out. In the economy of salvation, the Third person of the Godhead *freely* carries out the will of the First and Second persons. He is said to be "sent" and "given" by the Father and the Son. He consents to become in some sense a servant, or an agent, to carry out the will of the other Persons. If we may so say, he sovereignly consents to receive a commission and instructions from them. Proof in point may be found in the following texts, Ps. 51:11, 12; Isa. 42:1; Ezek. 36:27; 37:14; Zach. 12:10; John 3:34; 4:14 compared with 7:38, 39; 14:16, 17, 26; 16:7, 13-15; 20:22; Acts 2:17, 18, 33; 5:32.

Now the activity of the divine nature of Christ was exercised in the communication of the Spirit to the human nature in order to qualify it copiously for the entire work of service and suffering requisite to win our salvation. The mighty power of the Son of God sustained *through the agency* of the *Holy Spirit* the man Christ Jesus when

bearing the burden of our guilt and obeying the law in our behalf. Thus the view we advocate finds room for those texts which declare so clearly the important work of the Holy Spirit in reference to the human nature of Christ, and for those which teach that the only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ. In this way the two extremes are avoided, the Nestorian or bi-personal doctrine on the one hand, and the Eutychian or monophysite, doctrine on the other.

2. Some may object that the view is a novelty, and that in a matter so long studied by the Church, a novelty is presumptively wrong and to be regarded with suspicion.

In reply it may be said that in a question closely scrutinized for centuries, we should be slow to broach, or accept, a novel view. Caution in such a case is wisdom. It is not a fact, however, so far as I know, that much research in bygone ages was made in relation to the question we have been considering; while on the other hand it may be said that the opinion we have been offering and urging is not altogether new. More than 200 years ago it was advanced and advocated by one who has been justly styled, "The Prince of English theologians," a man of profound learning, great mental sagacity and deep spirituality, John Owen (1616-1683). In his masterly treatise on The Holy Spirit, he presents with hearty approval the view which has now been submitted. In the treatise, just named he makes this summary assertion, "Now all the voluntary communications of the Divine nature to the human were by the Holy Spirit."

3. It may be objected that the view we have been explaining and advocating is a mere profitless speculation. In answer we would say—

A. The first question to be determined is whether the view given has the warrant of Scripture. Does it accord with the various aspects in which Christ and his work are exhibited to us in the sacred writings? If it does, then it is to be maintained with the assurance that it is of greater practical value than falsehood, or ignorance, can be; for all Scripture is profitable for teaching.

B. It may be of practical benefit in this respect, that

it represents Christ as achieving our redemption through a real, and not merely a seeming struggle. The opinion, or at least, the feeling where a definite opinion has never been formed, prevails that the divine nature of Christ flooded with energy the human nature rendering its action almost mechanical. The effect of this conception is to produce a diminished sense of the reality of our Lord's trials. They come to be regarded as spectacular exhibitions rather than veritable conflicts. The divinity virtually absorbs the humanity; and, in consequence, the service and sufferings of Immanuel begin to be viewed as only apparent tests and trials of his humanity, simply docetic.

On the other hand, if we regard the human nature of our Lord as dependent on the supply of the Spirit from hour to hour, and this supply, again, as in some sense dependent on the strenuous effort and supplication of the burdened humanity, we can see more clearly that the Savior's trials were real and that his triumphs were the result of genuine agonizings. Thus reciprocal action was kept up between earth and heaven; the blessing from above being given in response to the struggle below, and this blessing, moreover, issuing in further struggles and further victories.

C. Furthermore, the view given helps to bring Christ nearer to us and to fit him better to be an example to us; for it reveals him as dependent constantly for supplies of grace on that same spirit on whom we are taught to depend, and as winning victories by faith, just as we are to win them. To some it may seem almost irreverent to speak of Christ as a *believer*, and as drawing by faith strength for his work. But the idea is not foreign to the Scriptures. For instance in Heb. 2:13 he is represented as saying, "I will put my trust in him." He was, indeed, in an emphatic sense "The father of the faithful." He set us an example of faith as well as of love and of patience. He was the greatest believer the world has ever seen. He trusted God when all was gloom around. In that noon of night, when the doleful cry burst from him, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

his faith failed not. The promise of being upheld having been given him, he cherished full confidence in the promise of God, even though all was dark around. This his faith was fostered by the Holy Spirit and in virtue of it he bore the unspeakable ordeal victoriously. If, then, we regard Christ as overcoming by faith generated and sustained by the Holy Spirit, and not by a direct illapse of power from the divine nature, is he not brought nearer to us in thought? and is not his example better adapted to encourage and stimulate us in the life of faith?

4. Some may think that the view we have presented yields aid and comfort to those critics who are reckless enough to brush aside Christ's attestation to the authenticity and genuineness of the Old Testament under the plea that as a part of his humiliation his knowledge was limited.

In reply, I would say in brief that while the soul of Christ did not become omniscient, any more than omnipotent, or omnipresent, it was furnished fully with all the knowledge requisite to qualify him to be the infallible and all-sufficient prophet of the Church. The guarantee of his perfect qualification to teach infallibly is well declared in the words of Isaiah already quoted, "And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord."