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The Hypostatic Union: How Did Jesus Function?

The Senior Pastor of the Vineyard Fellowship in Kelowna, BC, Canada, here offers an exegetical study of how we are to understand the outworking of the combination of the divine and human natures in the incarnate Son of God. This is a controversial area on which there has been little written by evangelical scholars, and it is good that Mr Helland is prepared to blaze a trail.

Introduction

In the early centuries the Church contended with at least five major Christological heresies: (1). Arianism—which held that Jesus was a created being, the Son of God, but not eternal; (2). Ebionitism—which emphasized the humanity of Jesus at the expense of his deity; (3). Apollinarianism—which emphasized the deity of Christ at the expense of his humanity; (4). Nestorianism—which split Christ into two distinct persons, one human, one divine; (5). Eutychianism—which confused the two natures of Christ into one mixed nature of divine-human. The Council of Chalcedon (AD 451) has been traditionally recognized as the last word for the sake of established confessional dogma for orthodox Christology. Against Arianism, Apollinarianism, Nestorianism and Eutychianism this Council affirmed the full deity and full humanity of Jesus Christ. It declared that he was fully God and fully man in one person with two natures. The theological term used to label this relationship (coined by Cyril of Alexandria and accepted by the Council of Chalcedon) is the ‘hypostatic union’.

This Council may have stated *ontologically* what this union was, but the Church is still left with the difficulty of expressing how these two natures actually functioned *practically* in one person. How could Jesus function as a man who was God, or how could Jesus function as God who became a man? How did his two natures function in one person? This is a profound theological question to

which I believe the New Testament provides sufficient revelation to formulate a clear answer.

My presupposition is the view of the hypostatic union declared at the Council of Chalcedon—that Christ was fully God and fully human with two natures in one person. What I shall present are a number of New Testament passages which reveal how Jesus functioned while on earth as the God-man. Any and every interpretation must be arrived at through proper grammatical-historical-contextual inductive exegesis not previously governed by theological grids, constructs, or biases. Let the writers of the New Testament speak for themselves. I also presuppose that a multitude of Scriptures are available to prove the deity and humanity of Christ. I shall not rehearse the plethora of evidence (see, for example, Jn. 1:1, 14; 8:58; Col. 2:9; 1 Tim. 2:5; and Heb. 1:3).

I. Jesus Functioned as a Total Finite Man

I shall present passages which, on a grammatical-historical, contextual, exegetical reading, will show how Jesus functioned as a man. I shall seek to prove that whatever Jesus did, he as a normal healthy person functioned as a total finite man. We shall see a Jesus who experienced human limitations because of the finiteness inherent in being human. The only exception is that he lived a sinless human life—but this too will become a reality for Christians in the eternal state. As a man, Jesus, we shall observe, did not live as God nor out of the eternal attributes of God. This is not to say that he gave up or lost his deity or his attributes of deity. It is to say that in order to live a *fully human life*, Jesus had *by necessity* to lay aside *the exercise* of the attributes of deity—the kind of attributes that are not characteristic of human beings (omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence). However, Jesus as a man was dependent on the Father's will and derived his power not from his own inherent deity but from the Holy Spirit. In this way he serves as an accessible human model for his disciples. Let us investigate the New Testament evidence.¹ I shall highlight the pertinent parts with italics.

Mt. 20:21

21 *'What is it you want?' he asked.*

Mk. 5:9

9 *Then Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?'*

¹ All Scripture citations are taken from the NIV. Definitions of the meanings of Greek words are taken from BAGD.

Mk. 10:35–36

35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. ‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘we want you to do for us whatever we ask.’ 36 ‘*What do you want me to do for you?*’ he asked.

These initial passages, on a plain unbiased contextual reading, show that Jesus demonstrated a limitation in his knowledge. He asked questions to secure information. It could be argued that where Jesus asked questions, he was not seeking information, but was merely drawing out matters for his purposes. I would argue that, unless we have contextual clues from the writer or from a parallel reference, the burden of proof lies with those who would suggest such an interpretation.

There are, however, some teaching and discussion situations where this interpretation is valid. For example, on at least the occasion of the feeding of the 5,000 Jesus asked the question ‘Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?’ John tells us: ‘he asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do’ (Jn. 6:5–6). This suggests, contextually, that Jesus was not asking a question for the purpose of receiving information, but was leading his disciples into a discovery of the miraculous that he intended to accomplish. In other words, Jesus was in this case drawing out matters for his own purposes and not asking for information. There is no good reason to presume this in Mt. 20:20–23, Mk. 5:1–10, and Mk. 10:35–40.

Mk. 6:5–6

He *could not do any miracles there*, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And *he was amazed* at their lack of faith.

This passage clearly states that Jesus was limited in his ability to do miracles—he *could not do any miracles there* except heal a few sick people. Matthew’s redaction of Mark lightens the force. He states: ‘And he *did not do many miracles there* because of their lack of faith’ (Mt. 13:58). In both statements the absence of faith, in at least his home town, was a primary factor (cf. Mk. 6:4, Mt. 13:57b). D. A. Carson comments on Matthew 13:58:

Many say that v. 58 softens. . . . Mark 6:5–6. But two factors must be borne in mind: 1) Mark mentions some miracles, and Matthew, typically condensing, may be referring to these rather than commenting on Jesus’ ability to do miracles; and 2) it is doubtful whether Mark’s ‘could not’ is ontological or absolute, for Mark records other miracles in which the beneficiaries exhibit no faith. . . . The ‘could not’ is related to Jesus’ mission: just as Jesus could not turn stones to bread without violating his mission (4:1–4), so he could not do miracles indiscriminately without turning his mission into a sideshow. The ‘lack of faith’ . . .

of the people was doubtless a source of profound grief and frustration for Jesus . . . rather than something that stripped him of power.²

Carson appears fearful that acknowledging a limitation in Jesus does in fact say something ontologically or absolutely about him. He does not prove how the statement that Jesus 'could not do any miracles there' is related to Jesus' mission. The Synoptics are patently clear that the mission of Jesus was in fact to preach the Gospel of the kingdom and to heal the sick (cf. Mt. 4:23; Mk. 1:14-45; Lk. 4:17-44). In Mt. 4:1-4, Satan was testing Jesus. He *would not* turn bread into stones. Mark does not say that Jesus would not or did not do any miracles, but that he could not. In Mark, there is *no* contextual evidence to indicate that doing miracles in his home town would be 'indiscriminate' or a 'sideshow'. Dr. Carson commits the age-old hermeneutical error of trying to harmonize the Gospels by discussing these two passages together. He seems to ignore New Testament theology—Matthew and Mark, taken on their own, make particular theological points according to their purposes in their *Sitz im Leben* or *Sitz im Evangelium*.

Matthew's and Mark's theologies and purposes are different. One theological purpose in Mark is to show that Jesus is a complete man—he displayed human limitations and was treated as a man. Leon Morris writes:

There can be no doubt about the lowly humanity of Jesus in the second Gospel. We see this, for example, in the account of his reception at Nazareth (6:1-6). Local people, astonished at his wisdom and his 'works of power' (*dynameis*), asked, 'Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?' (v. 3) . . . But as Anderson puts it, 'The whole thrust of the question in verse 3 is to show that those who ask it *cannot believe because of the all-too-human connexion [sic] of Jesus with an ordinary family*' [Italics his]. Mark says that Jesus could do no mighty work there except heal a few sick folk, and the account ends with Jesus' amazement at his townsfolk's unbelief (v. 6). This is a very human Jesus, knowing rejection as in some way all members of the human race do.³

Morris goes on to show Mark's purpose in portraying the humanity of Christ. His ignorance of the time of the *parousia* (13:32), his cry of dereliction (15:34), and the strange verbs used in reference to Jesus in Gethsemane (14:33), for Morris, all point to a very human Jesus with limitations.

A major theological purpose in Matthew is to highlight the

² D. A. Carson, 'Matthew' in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* Vol. 8, ed. Frank Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1984), 336.

³ Leon Morris, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1986), 98.

greatness of Jesus the Davidic King, Messiah, Teacher, and Son of God. Matthew concentrates on Jesus as the fulfillment of major Old Testament prophecies, who, as the great Davidic promised One and Teacher gives five major discourses, and acts as the Son of God. Matthew pays more attention to the 'Son of God' theme much more than Mark does. It is not hard to see why Matthew (in 13:58) would redact Mark (at 6:5-6) to soften the force of the statement of Jesus' limitation. It does not fit his purpose.

Furthermore, Dr. Carson's interpretation of the people's 'lack of faith' is *read into* not *out of* the text. In this text, there is no indication that Jesus was grieved or frustrated. If he was frustrated, would this not in fact show a limitation? The lack of faith did not *strip him of power* but rather limited his power as a man. Dr. Carson, it would appear, has committed some of the 'exegetical fallacies' that he has written about of others! He commits the fallacy 'arising from omission of distanciation in the interpretive process'—this is reading one's theology into the text. He also creates 'problems relating to juxtapositions of texts'—this is linking certain verses together and not others, thereby producing a grid that affects the interpretation of other texts.⁴ Matthew highlights the divine side (though not exclusively while Mark highlights the human side of Jesus (though not exclusively). Let Mark be understood in terms of what *he* intends as an author, and Matthew as well. Jesus, on a plain reading of Mark's account, *could not* do any miracles there. Jesus, on a plain reading of Matthew's account (and I would add, redaction of Mark), *did not* do any miracles there. That Jesus *did not do any miracles because he could not* are different perspectives of the historical account which presents no theological contradiction.

Furthermore, how could Jesus be *amazed* at their lack of faith? This Greek word—*thaumazo*—means 'to wonder, marvel, be astonished'. A parallel usage of the word can be found in Matthew 8:10 = Luke 7:9—when Jesus marvels at the faith of the Roman centurion where one would not expect faith. In Mark, he marvels at the lack of faith where he had a right to expect it. We would ask the question: how could one exercising divine omniscience ever be astonished or amazed at anything? Clearly, Jesus the man is depicted as limited in Mk. 6:5-6.

Mt. 24:36 (cf. Mk. 13:32)

'No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.'

These parallel passages are *indisputable* in affirming that the Son

⁴ D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 136f., 140f.

was limited in his knowledge about perhaps the most important truth regarding his second coming—when it would take place! If God knows all things—past, present, and future—then something is here being revealed about the limitations of Christ's humanity. It is non-sense for Jesus to simultaneously know as God but not know as man about the day or hour of his return. If we argue that this is possible, then we are left with a Jesus who has a split personality, one human, one divine—and this is the heresy of Nestorianism. Jesus functioned as one person—one *human* person, limited in knowledge of the past, present, and future.

Mk. 5:30–32

30 At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, 'Who touched my clothes?' 31 'You see the people crowding against you,' his disciples answered, 'and yet you can ask, "Who touched me?"' 32 But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it.

One could argue that Jesus is here 'playing dumb' in order to draw out the woman, bring attention to her healing, and thus glorify God. However, three observations easily dismantle any such possibility: (1). how can an intentional divine attribute of omnipotent omniscience ever *realize* that power had gone out from him—or for that matter *realize* anything? The Greek word here (*epignous* means 'to notice, perceive, learn of, to perceive something (on oneself)'); (2). the fact that Jesus *kept looking around* shows that he did not know who it was in the throng of the crowd; (3). if he was drawing the woman out he could (we would assume from his omniscience) have singled her out of the crowd—an even greater display of divine attributes! A plain unbiased reading can only yield the conclusion that Jesus and the disciples were unaware of the identity of the woman who touched him.

Mk. 7:24

Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet *he could not keep his presence secret.*

If we argue that Jesus as the God-man enjoyed all the attributes of deity then why could he not keep his presence secret? The assumption is that this is what he desired. The Greek is even clear, he was *not able* to escape notice.

Mk. 8:23–25

When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, *Jesus asked, 'Do you see anything?'* 24 he looked up and said, 'I see people; they look like trees walking around.' 25 *Once more Jesus put his hands*

on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.

Here we see Jesus accomplishing a 'progressive healing' which is based on gaining insight as to how far this man had received his eyesight. It appears that there is a limitation on this particular occasion for Jesus to perform a complete and instantaneous miracle. There are no contextual clues to show that Jesus intended to make this a two-stage healing.

Mk. 9:14–24

16 *'What are you arguing with them about?' he asked.* 21 *Jesus asked the boy's father, 'How long has he been like this?' 'From childhood,' he answered.* 22 *'It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.'* 23 *'If you can?'* said Jesus. *'Everything is possible for him who believes.'* 24 *Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, 'I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!'*

Again, there is absolutely nothing in the context that would show that Jesus was testing the people or the disciples, or drawing out this incident for his preordained purposes. It is clear from a plain historical-grammatical-contextual reading that in an *ad hoc* fashion, Jesus came upon a situation and responded with information-seeking questions. To top it off, 'everything (including this kind of healing situation) is possible for him who believes'. Christ, we would argue, did not accomplish this healing out of an exercise of divine omnipotence, but out of belief. This incident becomes a paradigm for discipleship—we as his followers may do the same!

Lk. 2:52

And *Jesus grew* in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Luke is stating that Jesus as a person—*grew* in wisdom. The Greek word *proeopten* denotes a cutting forward as through a forest or jungle as pioneers did, and is in the imperfect tense, to denote action in progress in past time, with the thought of process.⁵ This passage makes very plain that Jesus made progress intellectually, spiritually, and socially. A similar statement is said of John the Baptist (Lk. 1:80). We cannot divorce Christ's humanity from his deity and say that only his human side grew while his divine side did not. We would *not* suggest that Christ's divine side grew, but rather as a God-man—one person with two natures—Jesus grew, advanced and progressed on the basis of his human limitations which are essential attributes of being in the form of human likeness. To be at the same

⁵ A. T. Robinson *Word Pictures in the New Testament* Vol. II (Broadman, 1930), 35; and Dana and Mantey *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Macmillan, 1927), 187.

time omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent and yet finite and limited is a contradiction. We cannot have it both ways. Jesus is seen in the New Testament as man.

Jn. 5:6

6 When Jesus saw him lying there *and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time,*

Jn. 11:3–6, 17, 33–35

3 *So the sisters sent word to Jesus, ‘Lord, the one you love is sick.’*

4 *When he heard this, Jesus said, ‘The sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.’*

5 *Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. 17 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. 34 ‘Where have you laid him?’ he asked. ‘Come and see, Lord,’ they replied. 35 Jesus wept.*

A number of observations of this passage demonstrate the limitations of Jesus’ personhood as the God-man. Jesus responds to the situation *ad hoc* by hearing of Lazarus’ condition, staying where he was two more days, finding Lazarus dead for four days, and asking where they had laid him. A straight-forward reading of the text reveals absolutely no prior knowledge on Jesus’ part. His human limitations are seen through and through. Here Jesus is clearly reactive, not proactive. He used the situation to glorify God and to identify himself as the resurrection and the life.

Phil. 2:5–8

This passage gives insight regarding the practical nature of the incarnation. This text traditionally known as the ‘kenosis’ passage is a transliteration of that Greek word in verse 7. Two words are important for our understanding of this passage: (1). *harpagmon*—translated as ‘grasped’ (NIV) but as ‘robbery’ (KJV), ‘exploited’ (NRSV), and ‘by force’ (GNB). The idea seems to be that Christ in his pre-incarnate existence made a decision to not grasp at or exploit his position as deity to his own profit or advantage—even though he held the privilege of being God; instead, (2). *ekenosen*—he ‘made himself nothing’ (NIV, REB), ‘made himself of no reputation’ (KJV), ‘gave up all he had’ (GNB), ‘emptied himself’ (NASB, NRSV). The verb *kenoo* means ‘to empty’ and ‘of Christ, who gave up the appearance of his divinity and took on the form of a slave . . . he emptied himself, divested himself of his privileges’.

What did Christ empty himself of? Was it his relative divine

attributes, or his pre-existent glory, or his eternal self-consciousness? The passage really only says that *he emptied himself*: that is, he emptied himself of *himself* (I owe this obvious but profound observation to Dr. Gordon Fee of Regent College). What does this mean? This entails what is described in verse 7b and c. These two aorist participial clauses (*labon* and *genomenos*) are coincident to the finite verb (*ekenosen*), and modal, as they explicate the manner in which the 'self-emptying' took place. He took the nature of a servant—which meant he had no rights whatsoever. Jesus also expressed this self-emptying by being made in human likeness. He became a man. Jesus as God took on the nature and characteristics of a slave and a man. We would argue that the language of *ekenosen* is metaphorical—that is, he did not literally empty himself of anything, but figuratively emptied himself of what he was when he became what he was not—a man.⁶

When Jesus emptied himself, he became what he was not before—a man. According to Gerald Hawthorne, this means:

. . . , that Christ's self-giving was accomplished by taking, that his self-emptying was achieved by becoming what he was not before, that his kenosis came about not by subtraction but by addition, that his *kenosis* (an emptying) was in reality a *plerosis* (a filling). Thus, there is nothing in this crucial text that could possibly lend credence to any theory that claims that the eternal Son gave us any of his attributes in the incarnation, or that humanity is a realm which by definition excludes God. It seems, rather, to imply that there is an innate suitability of humanness for God and God for humanness, God having made human beings originally in his 'own image and likeness' (Gn. 1:27). [italics his]

. . . , in becoming a human being, the Son of God willed to renounce the exercise of his divine powers, attributes, prerogatives, so that he might live fully within those limitations which inhere in being truly human.⁷

Jesus maintained his divine nature even though he was a man. This is not inconsistent for humanness, for we may participate in the divine nature, as the following passage will disclose. Here is a theological atom-bomb that I do not believe has been given much explosive treatment for our own Christian anthropology:

his divine power has given everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them *you may participate in the divine nature* and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. (2 Pet. 1:3-4) [italics mine]

⁶ For a detailed exegetical discussion see: Peter T. O'Brien, *Commentary on Philippians* (Eerdmans, 1991), 205-226.

⁷ Gerald Hawthorne *The Presence and the Power* (Word, 1991), 207-08.

The statement above by Hawthorne that 'there is an innate suitability of humanness for God and God for humanness', is profound. According to Ralph P. Martin, the kenosis means:

he shared our human nature in all its frailty and finitude (Rom. 8:3; Heb. 2:7, 14) and entered upon this earthly life circumscribed by the restrictions by that nature with the glorious exception that he was without sin. His true stature was concealed in the weakness of his mortality, and his glory was veiled in his humanity.⁸

I agree with Dr. Martin up to the point of where I cited him. However, he continues in the next sentence: 'The "kenosis" was this act of self-abnegation in which his native glory which he had enjoyed from all eternity (Jn. 17:5, 24) was laid aside in his becoming man.' This is likely true, but I do not think it goes far enough. He did lay aside a prior divine glory which was necessary in order to become a man. A man cannot enjoy that kind of glory, nor can he enjoy infinite divine attributes and actions. However, Christ also displayed a 'glory' of reputation and character in grace and truth (Jn. 1:14), but did so as a finite man made in human likeness. But Philippians 2 is saying more than this.

This passage shows the humiliation of Christ in becoming man, and in dying a human death as a result of 'emptying himself of himself—he let go. This is the ultimate act of self-emptying and self-humbling! For Jesus not to hold on to his equality as God, and instead come to earth through natural childbirth and grow up as a young Jewish boy and man, would be an astounding venture of radical faith in, and submission to, God the Father! If, in this passage, Jesus is to be our example, it hardly seems fair that he could be unlimited in his exercise of divine attributes and be a realistic model for each of us to follow! Who could be like Jesus if he did not in fact become limited as all other human beings are and be totally dependent on the Father? He has a necessary advantage on us if indeed he was unlimited. Humanness implies and requires limitations.

Heb. 5:8

Although he was a son, *he learned obedience* from what he suffered.

This is a prime example of the limitation of Jesus' knowledge—he *learns* obedience. The Greek word here is *emathen* which means 'to learn or appropriate to oneself less through instruction than through experience or practice'. Jesus the finite man, functioning totally

⁸ Ralph P. Martin *Philippians* Revised Ed. in Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1987), 105.

through that humanity as one person, learned obedience through practical first-hand experience. In John 5 he also *learned* about the condition of the invalid at the pool of Bethesda. The Greek word in John 5 is *gnous* which means ‘to learn (of), ascertain, find out’. We cannot argue that only Jesus as a man learned, but Jesus as God knew. This would again leave us with a Nestorian split personality Jesus and not the New Testament Jesus.

II. Jesus Functioned in Dependence on the Father Empowered by the Holy Spirit

Nowhere in the New Testament do the writers ever attribute Jesus’ power, works, miracles, or words to his own inherent ability or divine attributes. In fact, Jesus himself never attributed his works, words, and power to himself either. The Gospels and Acts present a Jesus who was dependent on, and in total submission to, God the Father by the Holy Spirit. This was the necessary model for Jesus to portray. He could not and did not exercise divine attributes in order to declare or do anything supernatural. This is because human beings cannot and do not do that! His words and deeds came out of his dependent relationship with the Father and his power came out of his anointing by the Holy Spirit—they did not occur because he was God.

We would reject the history of religions school which sought to establish the Jesus of the Gospels as a ‘divine Man’. He was not a divine man who derived a supernatural substance from God. The Gospels do not present Jesus in this way. Instead, they present him as the unique Son of God who realistically shows what a ‘son of God’ is to be like in this life. He models what his disciples and Church ought to pattern themselves after. He is the last Adam, and paradigmatic Son of Man. To be human means to be dependent and finite. Jesus lived a Spirit-filled and Spirit-led life of submission and obedience to the Father’s will *as a man*. Let us look at the New Testament evidence.

John 5:19, 30

19 Jesus gave them this answer: ‘I tell you the truth, *the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing*, 30 *By myself I can do nothing.*’

This passage reveals a profound truth about the way Jesus functioned as *the Son*, he could do *nothing* by himself. The Greek in verse 19 is *ou dunatai ho huios poiein aph’ heatou ouden*. This literally reads: ‘the son is not able to do anything from himself.’ Verse 30 is emphatic: *Ou dunamai ego poiein ap’ emautou ouden*, which

literally reads: 'I am not able to do anything from myself.' In both verses the order of the words lays great stress on *ouden*.⁹ John also reveals that what Jesus *says* is not from himself either (see John 3:34; 8:26; 12:49–50). This passage affirms that the Son, as a man, derived his ability not from himself as God but out of a dependent derived ability from God the Father. This, we can infer, reveals actual limitations that Jesus the Son experienced.

Matt. 12:28

'But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.'

Jesus confronted the Pharisees with the true source of his power to cast out demons. He did not drive them out by his own power or spirit, and certainly not by Beelzebub, but *by the Spirit of God*. The dative *en pneumati* is instrumental—Christ drove out demons *by means of the Spirit of God*.

Luke 4:1, 14, 18

1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit. 14 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, 18 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me . . .'

In Lucan theology, the Holy Spirit is a central motif in the birth, baptism and ministry of Jesus. In this passage, the inauguration of his ministry is preceded by the baptism, anointing, leading and empowering of the Holy Spirit. This was to fulfil and carry out the mission of Isaiah 61:1–2. Before this time, Jesus did not function in that capacity. The significance of this encounter with the Spirit changed the course of his life.

The consequence of this crisis event was that the entire course of Jesus' life was forever changed. From this moment onward the directing and empowering impulse of the Spirit of God ordered the way he was to go, the things he was to say and do . . ., it will become clear also that the Spirit so fully motivated Jesus' speech and actions that the miracles he performed and the words he spoke and performed, not by virtue of his own power, the power of his own divine personality, but by virtue of the power of the Holy Spirit at work within him and through him.¹⁰

Luke 5:17

One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. *And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick.*

⁹ Leon Morris *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1971), 323, n. 87.

¹⁰ Hawthorne, 145–46.

This is another way for Luke to say that *God* was with Jesus for him to heal the sick. If Jesus acted out of his own deity and inherent power, then why are we told that ‘the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick?’ Was that power not there before? The Greek preposition *eis* used with the infinitive *to iasthai* indicates *purpose*. This verse states that a special presence of God in healing power was at that time present for the purpose of healing. This implies that it was not there in the same way before. Jesus would not do or say anything that he did not first see or hear from the Father (cf. Jn. 5:19–20; 8:28; 12:49–50).

Acts 2:22

‘Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.’

Here we are told that Jesus did not perform miracles, wonders, and signs by himself. They were done *by God through him* as God accredited Jesus. They were not done by him but *through him*. The ministry of signs and wonders were also accomplished by God through the apostles and others (see Acts 2:43; 3:12; 4:29; 5:12–16; 6:8; 8:5–7; 14:3 etc.). The early church modeled the ministry of Jesus in carrying out his words and deeds, dependent on the power of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 10:38

‘how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.’

This is an important theological theme in Luke–Acts. The anointing of Jesus by the Holy Spirit was the means by which Jesus carried out his Messianic mission with power and authority. This verse is reminiscent of Isaiah 61:1–2 which Jesus cited in the synagogue (Lk. 4:17–21). This Spirit empowerment for ministry began with his baptism at the Jordan (Lk. 3:21–23 and 4:1–21). After this anointing at his baptism, Jesus at age thirty, launched on a ministry which accomplished the message of Isaiah 61:1–2. Jesus, the man, was able to do good and heal only because *God was with Him by the Holy Spirit and power*. ‘Jesus is the Spirit-led man *par excellence*.’¹¹

III. Jesus Functioned As the Unique Son of God and Prophet

Though Jesus was the spirit-led man, throughout the Synoptics, and in the center of John’s Christology, he was viewed as the ‘Son of God.’

¹¹ James B. Shelton *Mighty in Word and Deed* (Hendrickson, 1991), 65.

What did this title mean or imply? Taking all the evidence together, we may safely conclude that it refers primarily to the unique intimate relationship he had with God, his Father. He was the Son of God in a unique way which is not true of anyone else. He was pre-existent (Jn. 1:1; 8:56–58; 17:5, 24), the only-begotten *monogenes* (Jn. 1:14, 18; 3:16), born of a virgin by the Holy Spirit (Lk. 1:35), who exemplified perfect intimacy with (Lk. 10:21–22; Jn. 4:22–23; 6:45–47; 8:55; 15:15) and obedience to his Father (Mt. 3:13–17; Lk. 23:47; Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 7:28). The Father did his works through him (Jn. 5:17; 9:4; 10:37); Jesus claimed that God was his Father (Jn. 5:17; 6:40; 10:18; 15:15) and that he and the Father were one in essential unity (Jn. 10:30, 38). At the Transfiguration the Father affirmed the special and unique status Jesus had with him (Mt. 17:1–13; Mk. 9:13; Lk. 9:28–36). Each Synoptic account is quite different, while John omits the incident altogether!

In the Synoptics, Jesus as the ‘Son of God’ was not presented *ontologically* in terms of the essential make-up of his existence. Surprisingly, Jesus never attributed the title ‘Son of God’ to himself. The Synoptics emphasize the relational aspects of divine sonship with the Father. D. R. Bauer writes:

It is clear that in the authentic statements from the Synoptic Gospels Jesus did not speak of his divine sonship in terms of pre-existence or focus on ontological realities (such as ‘divine nature’). Rather, Jesus emphasized the elements of personal relationship and active function [with God, his Father].¹²

In John, the Son Christology is central to his purpose (e.g. 20:31). After prefacing his entire work with a statement of Christ’s pre-existence (1:1), John zeroes in on his humanity: ‘The Word *became* flesh’ (1:14). The pre-existent Son entered time and space, became a man, and experienced human circumstances and limitations. His divine attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence would have been curtailed although potential yet latent during his earthly life-time. He could still be God as long as these attributes were never divested. Gerald Hawthorne remarks that:

Only if one assumes that the divine attributes were potential rather than active does it seem possible to talk about a real incarnation. If the Logos enters time and space omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, his entrance is a theophany. He certainly is not a human being like us. But on the other hand, if he abandons these attributes—attributes that belong to the essence of deity—he is reduced to the level of a mere human being. In the

¹² D. R. Bauer ‘Son of God’ in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* eds. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, I. Howard Marshall (IVP, 1992), 770.

one case the humanity is not humanity at all; in the other case divinity is not divinity. The dilemma is resolved, however, if it is assumed that all the attributes of deity are present but latent.¹³

Furthermore, the writers of the Gospels, the people, and Jesus himself, viewed him essentially as a *prophet*. For proof of this consult the following passages: Mt. 13:57; 14:5; 21:11, 46; Mk. 6:4, 15–16; 8:28; Lk. 1:76; 7:16, 39; 4:24; 13:33; 24:19; Jn. 4:19; 6:14; 7:40; 9:17. We would hasten to add that Jesus was no ordinary prophet, but the prophet *par excellence*, long-awaited in accordance with Deuteronomy 18 (superior even to the greatest prophet, John the Baptist). As *the* prophet he exercised a unique ministry. He did not merely promise or predict the coming of the Kingdom of God, he proclaimed that the Kingdom came in himself (Mt. 12:28–29; Mk. 3:27; Lk. 11:21–23). Jesus fulfilled the mission as messenger and mediator of the Kingdom of God. Jesus, the Son of God and Prophet, however, fulfilled a unique role within the time-space limitations of humanity.

IV. Theological Reflection and Application

Jesus Christ, though fully God, was also fully man, with two natures in one person. How this relationship was expressed was never established by the orthodox creeds nor in classical Christian theology. To deny ontologically either Christ's humanity or his deity is considered heresy. However, I have argued that the writers of the New Testament saw Jesus Christ function as a finite man, empowered by the Holy Spirit at his baptism, under submission to the will of his Father and in a unique relationship with him as the Son of God and a prophet. The evidence shows that Jesus experienced limitations as any human being would face. If we say that Jesus was not finite and limited, then we must say that he was not human. Humanness entail finiteness and limitations. In order to become human and to suffer like us (Hebrews 2 and 5), by necessity, Jesus left his heavenly abode, set aside the *exercise* of his divine attributes while maintaining his divine nature, was conceived *by the Holy Spirit* in the virgin Mary, grew up as a boy and young man, and then entered ministry after his baptism and anointing by the Spirit. This is the ultimate expression of *faith*. Whatever Jesus did, he did as a total human person by faith. Any other conception is an aberration.

A common position is to view Jesus as one who shifts back and forth between his humanity and his deity. This view attributes his supernatural miracles, knowledge and power to his deity, while

¹³ Hawthorne, 212.

attributing his tiredness, temptations, trials, thirst, and emotions to his humanity. Yet, this view makes him into some sort of schizophrenic divine-man who functions back and forth between his two natures. This is not the Jesus presented to us in the New Testament. This is modern Nestorianism! Whenever Jesus did or said anything, he did it out of his total being as one person. For Jesus to be fully human—to be the last Adam and the Son of Man—is to affirm his humanness, which implies and *necessitates* finiteness, limitations, and faith. However, Jesus as God never lost or gave up his divine nature but certainly curtailed its exercise and expression in full glory. He continued to enjoy the experience of an eternal, immutable, sinless existence, with magnificent perfection and holiness, but he did so as a *man*. He did not draw on his own inherent divine attributes for power and knowledge. If we say that he did, then he is not a model for us—we humans do not have the prerogative of drawing upon inherent divine power.

Jesus, though, was a unique man. He differed radically from other men. He was sinless (Jn. 8:46; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 1 Pet. 1:49; 2:22) and functioned as the Son of God and prophet as discussed above. He nevertheless continues to function as a model for his disciples in life and ministry. The paradigm of his ministry and message is echoed in the words 'as the Father has sent me, I am sending you . . . Receive the Holy Spirit' (Jn. 20:21–22). His Kingdom ministry of miracles through the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit is available for all who believe in Him (Jn. 14:9–14; Gal. 3:1–5). Jesus, however, still differed from those who seek by faith and dependence on the Spirit to do all that he did. Hawthorne expresses it well:

Thus, in answer to the question of how Jesus differed from other people who depended upon the Holy Spirit for the *extra* in their lives, it is possible to answer that in terms of his humanness it differed in essentially no way. By this I mean that God the Son, who became flesh in Jesus, became a real human being, and as such, he *needed* the Spirit's power to lift him out of his human restrictions, to carry him beyond his human limitations, and to enable him to do the seeming impossible. To be sure, only of Jesus was it said that the Father gave to him the Spirit 'without measure.' To be sure, the Spirit met with no natural resistance in Jesus as in those of us whose lives have been hardened and scarred by sin. To be sure the Spirit—his influence and guidance—was always central and perfect in Jesus, while this is never so in all others of us. But apart from these differences, which certainly are considerable, Jesus was nevertheless a human being and empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring it all to a successful completion. Thus, Jesus Christ becomes an object

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 219.

lesson, the source of tremendous encouragement and hope for every believer who studies his life and aspires to emulate him. [*italics his*]¹⁴

A quick concordance search will disclose that the most references to the Holy Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus and in the life and ministry of the early church come from Luke–Acts. Luke is making a paradigmatic point: that just as Jesus was baptized, anointed, filled, led, and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the Father’s messenger, so the Church is to be baptized, anointed, filled, led, and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be Christ’s messenger. This is in fact the pattern revealed in his two volumes (cf. Lk. 24:48–49; Acts 1:4–8; 2:1–42; cf. Jn. 14:15–18; 15:26–27; 16:5–15; 20:21). What he began to do and teach the Church is to continue to do and teach (Acts 1:1–2). He is a model to be presently followed by his disciples—in his words and works of preaching and practicing the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Finally, and practically, the Jesus who experienced limitations and had to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit, in submission to his Father, through the exercise of incredible faith and trust, becomes for us a more realistic and accessible model. A man who exercises all the attributes of divinity is no model at all—because he would have infinite advantage over us. Jesus functioned as fully human and fully alive—we are called to do the same. The ministry and model of Jesus *stands as a glorious paradigm* for a Spirit-empowered and Spirit-led Church.

Abstract

Orthodox Christology has affirmed ontologically the full humanity and full deity in the one Person Jesus. The problem of how these two natures could practically function still exists. The New Testament—predominantly the Synoptics—reveals a Jesus who experienced limitations and finiteness. He, furthermore, did not perform supernatural works out of his inherent deity but by dependence on the Father and empowered by the Holy Spirit. However, he did not divest his deity or his attributes of deity but curtailed their exercise. Jesus was unique as the Son of God and a prophet who enjoyed an intimacy and special status with the Father. Therefore, Jesus is a realistic model for his disciples on how to live in dependence on the Father and empowered by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Kingdom of God and minister in the supernatural as he did.