The Person of Our Lord.

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III.

The problem which Christian faith in our Lord and Saviour offers to theological science is how to conceive of the union in the experience of a single Person of what pertains to the Divine and to the Human mode of life; and this problem, as we saw in a previous paper, the Ancient Church failed to solve. It was really attempted only by one school of thought—the Athanasian-Cyrillian; for its rival school frankly accepted two centres of life in Christ, not one. The Alexandrian attempt miscarried, mainly because it worked from a misleading category—that of two 'natures' which it strove to combine into one; and because in such a combination the nature which is infinite is bound to overbear the created with which it is combined, reducing it to an organon through which God operates to effect His saving purpose.

No similar effort to reach the unity of a theanthropic life was made for a thousand years: not till the memorable renaissance of Christianity that we call the Reformation revolutionized men's conception of our Lord's saving work by developing for the first time the Pauline teaching on Soteriology, both on its objective and on its subjective side. When this new and richer doctrine of salvation came to Western Christendom, it could not fail to tell profoundly on the Protestant treatment of Christology: according to the acknowledged law that as men think of what Christ did and is doing to save us, so must they conceive of Himself the Saviour;—in other words, the dogma of the Person follows, does not lead, the dogma of the Office and the Work of our Redeemer. In several ways this rediscovery of Pauline Soteriology told upon Christology. Three of them I may name, though not all of them bear directly on the problem of unity.

1. Our Saviour's office came to be conceived expressly under the governing idea of a Mediator between God and fallen man; and this fundamental conception of mediation which best described His unique vocation, served at the same time to demand equally both the constituents of His Person—Godhead and Manhood,—as well as to assign to each its value for the work He did. Mediation is a two-sided transaction, of which each side is of equal value. The balance or equivalency which the Creeds established between His Godhood and His Manhood, long disturbed by both ancient and mediæval theology, was restored. But there was no contribution here to the unity of the two; rather the duality seemed to be emphasized.

2. In the second place, the stress which Protestant divines laid on the active and passive obedience of the Mediator as a fulfilment on man's behalf of man's unaccomplished righteousness came as a welcome reinforcement to the ethical character of Jesus' earthly life as a man. Especially when the active obedience as a fulfilment of the Divine Law took its place alongside the atoning death as an endurance of its penalty. Mediæval religion had dwelt, not too much, but too exclusively, on the Passion, and in it had found, ever since Anselm, what it termed the infinite merit of our Atoner. But the Protestant dogma of a finished righteousness imputed to the believer forced divines to see in the free and loving fulfilment by our Lord of the whole duty of man a distinct value for redemptive purposes parallel to that of the Passion.

Now, both of these lessons for the Christologist, drawn from Protestant teaching on the objective work of Christ, have been of some service. They have helped to correct and to deepen the Church's comprehension of our Lord's Person as at once the Perfect Revelation of God and the perfect Exemplar, as well as Surety, for Man. This service they have rendered to Calvinist and Lutheran alike.

3. But there is a third factor in Protestant Soteriology, not (like these two) on its objective, but on its subjective side, which bears far more directly than either of these upon the mystery of a divine-human life. Neglected by the Reformed Christology, it led straight to Luther's bold, if unsuccessful, attempt to solve the ancient problem of the oneness of God and Man in the Incarnate

Person. It was this: Underneath the basal Protestant doctrine of Justification by Faith in Christ there lies the idea of a union between the trusting soul and the Incarnate Saviour. For the characteristic Protestant gospel of forensic justification, through the imputation to the believer of Christ's perfect righteousness, cannot be made either reasonable or morally safe from antinomian abuse, unless you assume that faith's function is to unite the soul to the living Lord, who is its object in a vital and dynamic bond so close that the two, sharing one life, do also share in each other's obligations and privileges. No one was more fond than Martin Luther of enlarging with startling boldness on the blessed exchange of our guilt to Christ and of Christ's merits to us. But graphic and suggestive as this 'wonderful exchange' is, it is not the core of the fact. It may even mislead, as he well saw, unless we penetrate to the underlying unity which faith establishes between the soul and Christ, in virtue of which alone such an exchange of possessions or of status becomes possible. With the deep vein of mysticism which was in him as in his master, St. Paul, Luther shrank from this mysterious union as little as his favourite apostle had done. Thus he speaks: 'Aus Christus und mir werden gleich als eine Person: so dass ich sagen möge, "Ich bin Christus"; und wiederum Christus sage, "Ich bin dieser armer Sünder."'

The mysterious spiritual fact at which such daring words point is really (as I have said) what saved the imputation theology from the reproach of being a make-believe or legal fiction. And it was the common property of all Protestant Churches. But it was Luther alone who was led to infer from it a parallel uniting of the Divine and Human in the Saviour's Person in virtue of which a parallel exchange of properties takes place; in other words, to his much debated dogma of the *communicatio idiomatum*.

I confess to a feeling that Reformed divines have never done entire justice to this peculiar tenet of old Lutheranism. As it came to be worked out in Lutheran dogmatic, or as haltingly fixed in the 'Formula of Concord,' I own it is not very easy for a Calvinist to think his way into the understanding of it. And I do not question that the polemic of the Calvinists, as that may be read, for instance, in the Neostadt 'Admonitio,' issued the year after the appearance of the 'Formula of Concord,' is theologically and logically unanswerable. But without conceding that Luther's attempt to reach unity in the God-man was successful, one may acknowledge sympathy with its aim; even with his underlying axiom that human nature has been created for participation in the life of God, and is destined to reach it to a degree of which we can form no conception save from the exemplary instance of Jesus Christ, our Head. Has not this deep affinity between Man and God since become the dominant note of a great deal of subsequent speculation in the philosophical schools of Luther's fatherland? Reformed divines, in the end of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, made no effort to sympathize. Preferring to abide within the trenches of Chalcedon, they maintained an attitude of more than reserve, of suspicion, towards every attempt to advance beyond these traditional limits. No great shame to them perhaps, since the timid mind even of Melanchthon shrank from following his bolder colleague. And when they even refused to see in Luther's semi-deification of the Lord's humanity anything better than the desperate expedient of a controversialist, hard put to it to defend the Bodily Presence in the Holy Supper, there was some excuse for them in the fact that by later Lutherans, at all events, the *communicatio idiomatum* was chiefly championed in the interest of sacramental multipresence.

Yet that had neither been the inspiring motive nor the deepest root of Luther's Christology. The bulk of modern investigators are agreed that his views were in substance arrived at previous to the rise of the sacramental dispute in 1527. So such authorities as Dorner, Baur, Thomasius, Schneckenburger, and Heppe. If we accept their conclusions, what really led Luther to reach after a closer indwelling of God with Manhood in Christ was the mystic indwelling of Christ in the believer. If between the soul of man on the one hand, in its need of God, its longing after Him, its capacity for receiving His life into itself—and on the other hand, God's love which longs to communicate of His own fulness to His human child, there be possible so close an intimacy, that of His fulness (in St. John's words) we all receive, or in words ascribed to St. Peter (2 P 1^4), we become 'partakers of a divine nature'; and if it is in Christ that all this is realized by us through our faith-union with Him,—who shall put limits to the interpenetration and intercommunion of God and Man in the

blessed Person of Christ Himself? The traditional Christology of the schools, which so coldly held asunder the finite and infinite natures, seeing in the incarnation no more than a mere clothing of unchangeable Deity with a garment of mortal flesh to be its medium of self-manifestation, could no longer satisfy. Rather Luther saw in the incarnation—(1) the attainment by God of what He has always longed for in His love, namely, humanity as His own form of existence, and (2) the reception by Man of what he was made for, namely, Divinity as the very contents of his spiritual life; a union, in brief, real and vital, by which two disparate, yet allied or kindred, natures coalesce for good and all into one single indivisible personality.

I think I am entitled to call this a reversion after so long an interval to the *motif* of Cyrillian Christology. It is true that Luther held loyally by the Chalcedon anathema against a Monophysite extreme. True also that, warned by Cyril's error, he substituted for a combination of two *natures* into one, a sharing so far as might be only of *properties*. Still, the aim is the same—to unite the two factors in so vital a fashion that they combine in a single life—that you can say: Each has the other; each in a sense is the other. God is Man, and Man is God; for both are possessed of each other and by each other in the same ever-blessed, ever-loving Person.

To see Luther's Christology at its strongest, or even to understand it, one has to begin with our Saviour's present state of exaltation in heaven. This is a method exactly opposite to the one pursued in modern theology. And that fact alone lends to it a remote and alien look in modern eyes. You have to commence with that state of Christ's Person which we know least about; since materials fail us when we try to form any clear conception of the present glorified life of the God-Man. Still, it is the natural point to start from when you approach the problem as Luther approached it. For it is with our Lord, now ascended and uplifted in celestial majesty to the Father's right hand, that faith sets the Christian believer into union. We sit with Him, as St Paul says, 'in the heavenlies'; and the Christ-life whose powers we experience, whose privileges we share, through the Holy Ghost sent down from our Head, can be only the present glorified life of our Head on high. In that glorified life our Lord's humanity must certainly be in some way, or to some extent, a sharer.

But if this potentiation of humanity with powers that are properly Divine be really what incarnation meant, as Luther supposed, then it cannot have commenced at the date of the ascension. It must be as old as incarnation itself. From His conception to His decease you must suppose our Lord's humanity already possessed of Divine powers. Yet Luther attached the utmost value to Jesus' earthly life as one of limitation, growth, and trial. He was therefore compelled to assume that from the origin till the close of that earthly life, although Jesus was already as a man in possession of the same divine powers as now, yet He abstained from the exercise of them in the interest of His mission. The self-emptying act of Paul's famous Philippian passage, he had to interpret not of any Kenosis of the Divine Person, but of the Incarnate Person in respect of His human nature. Jesus, that is to say, laid aside, for any practical use He made of them during His humiliation, those very divine powers and qualities with which His humanity had just become invested.

These are hard points in the Lutheran scheme into which I have no need now to enter. For my present design it is sufficient to point out this result—that a Human Nature semi-deified to begin with, but then stripped once more of its divineness and depotentiated; which on earth at least emptied itself of its Divine Majesty in order to lead our impoverished life from cradle to grave, gives us no help at all for the understanding of the life of Jesus among men. He might as well, for our problem, have received no such share in Divine attributes at all. Allow that His humanity even then continued to share in that inalienable majesty which the Divine Son was all the while exercising unseen in the wide universe of being, still, that does not seem to bring us one step nearer to that unity of incarnate experience we are in quest of—that unifying of the conscious life-experience of our Lord on earth as at once Divine and Human, yet single.

There is no need therefore for me to recall the subdivisions of later Lutheran school theology or the intestine debates between Giessen and Tübingen which were silenced by the cannon of the Thirty Years' War. It is enough to note that whatever value one may attach to the *communicatio idiomatum* as a theory of our Lord's present

exaltation to the right hand of majesty (and here, possibly, its hints may be helpful)—when applied to His state of humiliation, it leaves the old unreconciled dualism of a divine life and a human life coexisting in a single Person exactly where it was. Quite as urgently as either the old Catholic or the Reformed Christology, it craved to be supplemented by another kind of depotentiation than Luther imagined—a depotentiation not of His semi-deified Manhood, but actually of His very Divinity itself.

This brings us to the Protean Kenotic theories of the last sixty years. To my thinking, this modern Kenosis, which has fascinated not a few, stood for the very next step in christological speculation — for Lutheran thinkers especially, who loyally clave to the orthodox traditions of the early creeds. It was called for by the failure or decay of Luther's effort after a solution. It was almost suggested by Lutheran Christology itself.

It is clear that this recent theory has something in common with old Lutheranism: it takes the self-emptying like it in a deeper sense than the rest of Christendom has done; means by it a laying aside for the time at least of properly divine qualities or powers, and not of mere external or accidental circumstances of manifested glory. And this may account for the rise of the new theory on Lutheran soil. Though its ancestry has been doubtfully traced by Schneckenburger to Count Zinzendorf and by Schultz to Schwenkfeld, it was first suggested by König in 1844, clearly worked out in its modern form by my old Erlangen teacher Thomasius in 1845, and carried to its extremest form in 1856 by Gess. Among confessional Lutherans it sprang up, and from confessional Lutherans it has received on the Continent its friendliest welcome.

For all that, it is, as Thomasius admits, nothing short of a reversal of the old Lutheran Christology in some essential features, and above all in its method of approaching the problem of personal unity. What it really means is that the old attempt to solve the problem by imparting divine qualities to the manhood of our Lord is abandoned, and a fresh start begun from the opposite side. Twice over (as we have seen) had theologians endeavoured to secure for the Incarnate One a single theanthropic life by potentiating the feebler created factor till it approximated to the level of the divine: first at Alexandria by a merging of two natures into one; next at Wittenberg by a communication of divine properties to the human nature. Both times without success. What remained save to assail the problem from a new direction—that is, by depotentiating the nobler uncreated factor till it shrunk within the limits and lived upon the level of the humanity it had assumed? No longer on this theory is there any effort to combine in the earthly life of Jesus both divine and human attributes. That life becomes frankly human in its experiences; as exclusively human as you please. Only let the process of self-exinanition on the part of the Son be supposed complete enough, and you get a single life, to be sure, a unity of conscious experience and activity; only it is the single life-experience of a Man; a Man who is more than other men in this only—not that He knows more or does more than a man may know or do—but that He remains all the while, personally and in Himself, God.

This sudden reversal of method may have come more easily to Lutheran divines perhaps than to Reformed. But I question if it could have come to either had it not fallen in with modern studies on the Life of Jesus. I question if a theory so startling and audacious as full-blown Kenoticism would have won even the partial favour it has received from Reformed divines on the Continent like Ebrard or Godet, or from English theologians like the Bishop of Birmingham or Principal Fairbairn, if its way had not been opened for it by the whole drift, not of christological speculation, but of christological research, during the last two centuries. Every historian of our doctrine calls attention to the revolution which since the opening of the eighteenth century has passed over men's way of studying and appreciating the Marvellous Life which is the puzzle of history. From the second century, it may be said, till the seventeenth, the incarnation as the descent into human conditions of the Eternal Word and Son of God, Second Person in the Adorable and Blessed Trinity, formed for Church thinking, both popular and theological, the fixed point of departure; and the question was, how much or how little this Awful Visitant veiled His superhuman glory in consenting to lead a suffering life for man's deliverance. But for the last two hundred years, on the contrary, men have set out from the records we possess of Jesus' earthly career, and the efforts of a host of exegetical and

historical scholars have been concentrated with unwearied and microscopic research on the actual Four Narratives of His life. The aim has been to understand Jesus of Nazareth as an historical Personality in the setting of His age's environment, the actual incidents of His career, His aims and His limitations, above all, in the development of His inner life and Messianic consciousness. And the hope has been, that along this humbler line of research into facts theologians may be more likely to reach the truth on the old secret of His wonderful Person or the explanation of the impression of divinity which He has left behind Him in the world.

Recent Foreign Theology.

The Son and the Spirit of God.[1]

This collection of nine essays, prepared for use at various recent functions amongst the Lutherans, is unusually attractive. The style is that of a vigorous preacher, fond of compact and telling phrase; and the spirit breathes evangelical devotion, with a degree of independence and strength not always found in such company. Professor Lütgert would make an effective mission-preacher to an audience of men, who were familiar with the outlines of theological controversy. They would listen with enjoyment to his crisp and emphatic sentences, and some of them would be likely to be led into a better appreciation of the things of God.

For the essays themselves the author claims a certain unity, without which, however, their intrinsic qualities are so high as to make them well worthy of publication. Four are strictly Christological, concerned with the evidence for the divinity of Christ, with the credibility of His portraiture in the Gospels, or with the relation of His Cross to the salvation of man. A discussion of justification follows, with a couple of brilliant papers on the Holy Spirit, detailing some of the evidences of His presence in the Church, in the believer, and in the Bible. The scriptural ideal of the Church is next traced in outline; and a historical investigation of the modern controversy as to the grace imparted in baptism completes the series. The author deals thus with some of the central and most significant matters in current religious thought. And their unity arises from the fact that they are all alive and all related, whilst the settlement of each bears immediately upon practice. The value of the inner attitude of faith is the continuous undertone; and no theory is allowed to pass, if its appeal is solely to the speculative reason, or if it violates the rights of man as entrusted with responsibility for himself and clamorous in his heart for sincerity.

It would not be fair to the writer to pick out all the plums from his pages, but a taste is permissible. He argues that during the first half of the nineteenth century we lived in idealism, but we have now learnt the value and meaning of deeds, and are become realists. This modern realism has tended to make the cult of Jesus a kind of hero-worship. The claim of Jesus is, however, like that of Christianity, to uniqueness and absoluteness. It is founded upon His divine sonship, and, approving itself in daily experience, it provides man with an actual theology, a revelation of God the Father, and not merely with a science of comparative religion. The question of the credibility of the Gospels is intrinsically a question of the credibility of their representation of Christ. Such an investigation is not concerned so much with details as with the picture as a whole, and that in the evangelists is one and the same. The credibility lies especially in the connexion of the teaching of Jesus with His work, of His power with His Cross. 'Because justification brings us to God, it includes in itself the entire gift of God. We have everything because we have Him. He does not merely give us power, but He gives us Himself, that is to say, His Spirit.' That is the point of connexion with the second part of the theme as stated on the title-page.

The doctrine of the Spirit is taken as the characteristic and focus of modern religious thought in succession to the Christologies of earlier days. But Jesus still remains central; and to become a Christian does not mean to adopt a new morality

[1] *Gottes Sohn und Gottes Geist: Vorträge zur Christologie und zur Lehre vom Geiste Gottes.* Von D. Wilhelm Lütgert. Leipzig: Deichert (Georg Böhme), Georg Böhme, 1905. Price 2 M. 80 pf., *geb.* 3 M. 60 pf.