



The Incomparable Christ

**^a Review of the Personal Union of Christ
in the Lutheran Confessions**

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Introduction

“Who do people say that I am?” Jesus asked this penetrating question of his disciples. They reported several answers, all of which put Jesus in the human class with the rest of mankind. Peter confessed the fully correct answer, however, when he proclaimed, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!” (Mt16:16)

That same question has been asked through the centuries. There still are many different answers that are floating around. Suppose you gave a quiz to your congregation after services one Sunday:

Mark these questions true or false:

T or F Mary is the mother of God.

T or F Jesus was able to sin

T or F God died on the cross.

T or F Jesus has retained his human body after He ascended into heaven.

While we could wish everyone would get these basic questions correct, it would not surprise us to find that many of our people would get some if not most of these questions wrong.

The confusion about the person of Christ does not lie either in the lack of clear or numerous scriptural references. Rather it lies in our human reason getting in the way of the simple declarations of God’s word.

In theology the union of the two natures of Christ is called the hypostatic union, from the Greek word *ὑπόστασις* which came to mean substantive reality. What is meant is that the two distinct natures (divine and human) co-existed substantively and in reality in the single person of Jesus Christ. It proclaims that Jesus is simultaneously true God and true man.

Historical Background

Despite the clarity of the numerous Scriptural passages speaking of Jesus’ humanity and divinity, the two natures of the person of Jesus have served as the Scylla and Charybdis of the Christian world already beginning in the first centuries. Some have crashed into some error on the one side by either limiting the divine nature or by limiting or exaggerating the human nature. Others are sucked into the whirlpool of false teaching in how the two natures interact with each other.

Yet through all the strife that would ensue, much of which seems petty to the modern mind, there runs a sincerity of purpose that cannot be ridiculed. Theologians were bent upon a praiseworthy undertaking - the expression of their faith. The problem was that in their zeal for explanation they often lost sight of the scriptural truths because they were willing to surrender what they could not immediately rationalize. Furthermore, yielding to the philosophic tendency of the age, they often sought a metaphysical rather than a scriptural basis for the hypostatic union. As a result a proper view of the person of Christ was lost and had to be regained.

About 319 Arius of Alexandria, began to teach that the Logos (John 1:1)— “...was not divine in quite the full sense that the Father is God...is in some sense inferior or subordinate to, or essentially different from, the Father.”¹ The Council of Nicea was called to settle the dispute. The Greek word "*homo-ousios*" ("of the same substance, or nature, or essence") was introduced chiefly because it was one word that could not be twisted to represent the Arian position. The Council adopted a shorter version of what we now call the Nicene Creed. They declared,

“We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made, who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary and was made man.”

Even more explicit in defining this doctrine is the Athanasian Creed.

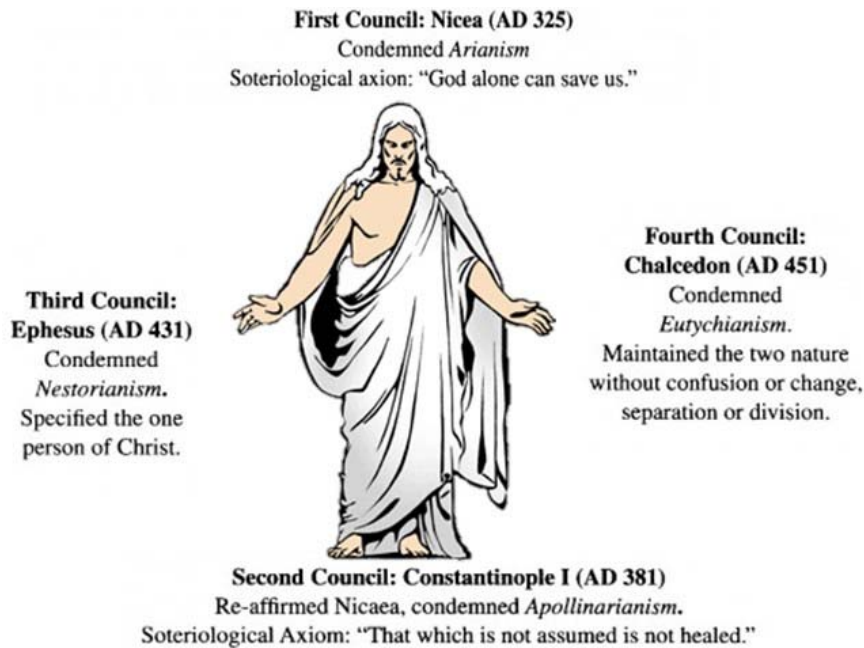
There it is the right faith that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is at the same time both God and man. He is God, begotten from the substance of the Father before all ages; and He is man born from the substance of His mother in this age: perfect God and perfect man, composed of a rational soul and human flesh; equal to the Father with respect to His divinity, less than the Father with respect to His humanity. Although He is God and man, He is not two, but one Christ: one, however, not by the conversion of the divinity into flesh but by the assumption of the humanity into God; one altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person.²

No sooner was the Council ended than its consensus began to fall apart. Over this question discussion ran the gamut of conceivable opinion. There were Apollinarians, Nestorians, Eutychians, Monophysites, Miaphysites, Monothelites, Adoptionists, and other less promoted heresies, until at last they all but lost themselves in subtle distinctions and, bewildered by the dust of battle, actually fought against their own side. A fuller treatment of the ancient heresies are the topics of other conference papers. I have listed a

¹ Allbeck, *Studies in the Lutheran Confessions*, Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1968 p. 28.

² Athanasian Creed, *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, 2006, p. 17-18.

few with their Christological impacts in appendix 1. These heresies were dealt with in the fourth and fifth centuries.



By the time of the Reformation, confusion was again rising about the two natures of Christ. This time it wasn't whether He had one or two natures, but how those natures related to each other.

The scholasticism of the Roman Catholic Church played into this confusion of natures. There were many different forms of scholasticism each with its own personal slants. However, there were two that were especially popular at the time of the Reformation. The Perfection of Christ principle which asserted that **Christ's** human attributes exemplified perfection in every possible sense. Another perspective characterizes Christ's perfection as purely spiritual and moral, while his humanistic traits are subject to flaw, potential, and improvement as part of the current human condition.

The Swiss reformers added their own misunderstandings. Zwingli is often called "Nestorius resurrected." He separated the divine and human natures of Christ. For example, he taught that the suffering took place only in Christ's human nature. He also denied that the attributes of Christ's divine nature were capable of being shared with the human nature, because the human nature was incapable of the things that can be attributed to the divine nature. More on this later.

It was into this cacophony of confusion, denial and misunderstanding that the Lutheran dogmaticians sang once again the harmonious praise of the mysterious union of our Lord based on the clear testimony of Scripture. We need to acknowledge that Martin

Chemnitz's work "The Two Natures of Christ" is considered by most confessional Lutherans to be the definitive study on the person of Christ. Article VIII of the Formula of Concord was based mainly on this work.

After establishing the points of controversy that had become evident among the "theologians of the Augsburg Confession article VIII summarizes in nine theses what the confessors believe on the basis of the word of God regarding the person of Christ.

Most of us have grown up sitting at the feet of sound Lutheran pastors and teachers who taught us to know Jesus as the Scriptures present Him. In as much as this is a wonderful blessing by a gracious God, there can be a disadvantage to this also, however. We may not study the Scripture behind the doctrines as thoroughly as we should. Consequently, we may hold to the doctrines in an orthodox, Lutheran fashion, instead of because they are scriptural. Much like one of my confirmands who exasperatingly blurted out, "Can we skip looking up all these Bible passages. Just tell us what we are to believe!" So, we do well to review the scriptural basis of the doctrine of the two natures of Christ and how the Lutheran confessors expressed these truths. However, since that would be more expansive (and exhausting) than the narrow topic of this paper we will limit ourselves to a few important points.

One final prologial note. Article VIII is grounded on careful exegesis of the pertinent Scripture passages, but not many of those passages are quoted or explained in the Article itself. The reasons for this may be two-fold. First, many of the passages had been under scrutiny and discussed from the early times of the church and their meanings were well established and not challenged. Secondly, a "Catalog of Testimonies" compiled by Chemnitz and Andrea shortly after the completion of the Formula was added as an Appendix. Though it does not form a part of the Book of Concord, it carries considerable weight as a commentary on Article VIII since the authors were tasked with compiling a list of Scripture passages and quotations from the fathers that demonstrate that the Lutheran doctrine is clearly taught in Scripture.

Jesus Christ Is True God

Many people speak in glowing terms about Jesus. They call Him a great man, a religious genius, a guiding example. They may even speak of Him as "the Son of God." But as Georgia Harkness³ explains, "This does not mean that Jesus *was* God. It means that his life was so filled with the character and power of God that when men have seen him, they have seen the Father."⁴

³ (April 21, 1891 – August 21, 1974) was a Methodist theologian. She was the first woman to obtain full professorship in a U.S. theological seminary, and became a leading figure in the modern ecumenical movement.

⁴ Georgia Harkness, *Understanding the Christian Faith* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1947), p. 59. as quoted by Wilbert Gawrisch, in *The Twentieth Century Crucifixion of Christ*, read at the convention of the Minnesota District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, July 28, 1970.

In no uncertain terms the Bible states that the Savior would not be a mere man, but would also be divine. Our catechism lays out for us in simple form the Scriptural proof of Jesus' divinity. This is only a partial list of possible texts.

Divine Names

1 John 5:20 - true God and eternal life Matthew 1:23 – “God with us”
Matt 16:16 the Son of the living God Luke 2:11- Christ the Lord

Divine Characteristics

John 1:2 – eternalness John 21:17 - omniscience
Heb 13:8 – immutability Matt 28:20- omnipresence

Divine Actions

John 1:3 – created all things Heb 1:3 sustains all things
Eph 1:22 – rules all things

Of course we can't forget to mention the miracles recorded for us by the sacred writers: calming storms, raising the dead, curing lepers, expelling demons, and forgiving sins, etc. Certainly these actions could only be performed by God himself.

Old Testament Witnesses

The Old Testament believers understood that the Savior whom God promised would be God himself. Only God could accomplish the work of crushing the devil's head and delivering sinners from his power, as God promised Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15. Time and space do not permit us to cite all the passages in the Old Testament through which God told his people about the divinity of the coming Messiah. Let me give just one example:

David, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote Psalm 110:1, which begins, “The LORD says to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet” (יְהוָה אֱמַר לַיהוָה לְאַדְנָי). Jesus quotes this verse and asks the Pharisees, “If David then calls him ‘Lord,’ how can he be his son?” (Mt 22:45). Who could David, the King of Israel, have possibly called Lord other than God Himself? No one! Who else could be greater than the king of Israel than the KING of Israel?⁵

⁵ Psalm 110:1 is widely referenced throughout the New Testament. Paul also cited the latter part of David's prophecy in 1 Cor 15:25. However, the Epistle to the Hebrews contains more allusions to this particular text than any other New Testament work. While only one direct quotation of this verse is found in Hebrews (1:13), there are at least four other allusions to this text throughout the letter (1:13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2).

New Testament Evidence

The New Testament, like the Old, offers a wealth of evidence for the deity of Christ. Here are three examples of the many that could be given.

In a debate with the Jews Jesus claimed the eternal nature of the divine essence, asserting, “Before Abraham was born, I am” (Jn 8:58). “I AM” (ἐγὼ εἰμί) and was the sacred name by which God identified himself to Moses (יהוה אֱשֶׁר יהוה - Ex 3:15)⁶. Because the Jews realized that Jesus was claiming to be God, they picked up stones to kill him for blasphemy.

One of the most glorious passages is Hebrews 1:3, “ὁὗς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ, φέρων τε τὰ πάντα τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ.”⁷ “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.”

There are two divine truths about Jesus we can glean from this gem. First, the holy writer calls him “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (ὁὗς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ ...). The key of this phrase is the word “representation.” *χαρακτήρ* means an exact copy of something as made by a stamp. So in other words, Jesus doesn’t just represent (think “symbolize”) God’s glory, being or substance. He is the very glory, the exact image (think “the real thing”) of God. Jesus is God’s substance himself. So in my own humble way I’d translate this phrase, “the radiance of God’s glory and the exactness of his being.” I’m not less of a human, than my father. I have the exact same nature as my father had – with finite qualities and characteristics. This is also true of Jesus and His heavenly Father. Jesus is not a lesser god or demi-god, but the exact nature of the Father – with infinite qualities and characteristics since that is the nature of the Father.

The second truth is that He sustains all things by His powerful word – φέρων τε τὰ πάντα τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως... God created all things by His powerful word. It could only be God whose word could sustain everything by keeping it going. I can talk until I’m blue in the face and a rock won’t do anything. Only true God can speak and make the rock give water or even come into existence.

In Philippians 2:6-7 Scripture says that Jesus, “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped” ⁶ ὁὗς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων οὐχ ἄρπαγμὸν ἠγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῶ, ⁷ ἀλλ’ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου λαβὼν, ἐν

⁶ ויאמר אלהים אל-משה, אֱהִיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֱהִיֶה; ויאמר, כֹּה תאמר לבני ישראל, אֱהִיֶה, שְׁלַחְנִי אֲלֵיכֶם.

⁷ Nestle, E., Nestle, E., Aland, B., Aland, K., Karavidopoulos, J., Martini, C. M., & Metzger, B. M. (1993). *The Greek New Testament* (27th ed., p. 563). Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft

ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος· καὶ σχήματι εὐρέθεις ἄνθρωπος, ...⁸ (see note below⁹). What does the word *μορφή* “form” mean here? It occurs twice in this passage – v.6, “form of God;” and v.7, “form of a servant;” it is contrasted with *σχῆμα* fashion or likeness, in v.8. *μορφή* is used almost in the sense of *εἶδος*, that which makes a thing be what it is, the sum of its essential attributes. It is the permanent, constant form not the fleeting, outward *σχῆμα*, (think “through all the changing scenes of life.”) St. Paul seems to follow this distinction between the two words. In Romans 8:29; Galatians 4:19; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 2:10, *μορφή* (or its derivatives) is used of the deep inner change of heart, the change which is described in Holy Scripture as a new creation. *Σχῆμα*, on the other hand, is used of the changeableness of the world or agreement with it (1 Corinthians 7:31; Romans 12:2). Then, when St. Paul tells us that Christ Jesus, being first in the form of God, took the form of a servant, the meaning must be that he possessed originally the essential attributes of Deity, and assumed in addition the essential attributes of humanity. He was perfect God. He became perfect man.

One question deserves a little more discussion. How could Jesus be *eternally* divine? Isn't he the begotten son of God the Father? Isn't the understanding of sonship one of coming after a father? This was the basis for Arius' heresy. Athanasius' reply to Arius was that the begetting, or uttering, of the Word by the Father is an eternal relationship between them, and not an event in time.

For example. I am my dad's son. I inherited his nature as I mentioned earlier. My dad is a creature of time – born in 1912, married in 1947 and had me in 1958. Since I inherited his nature, I too am a creature of time. And so there is a time continuum between my father and me. He came first, I came later. He is older than me. The heavenly Father and His Son share the same divine nature. Since the Father is timeless so the Son who shares His nature must then be timeless. Otherwise you will end up with different natures, different substances, and different gods. Using passages like John 1:1; Micah 5:2; et al, the Reformers clearly proclaimed the eternal divinity of Christ.

We believe, teach, and confess that God's Son from eternity has been a particular, distinct, entire, divine person. Yet He is true, essential, perfect God with the Father and the Holy Spirit.¹⁰

Jesus Christ Is True Man

⁸ Holmes, M. W. (2010). *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition* (Php 2:6). Lexham Press.

⁹ Just a side note: The Holman Christian Bible translates this verse, “who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage. This author considers this a poor translation. “in the form of” doesn't necessarily mean (to this writer at least) that Jesus was really God, but that He just looked like God. Holman Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2009 by Holman Bible Publishers.

¹⁰ McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House. (FCS VIII.6 p. 582).

Luther rightly noted, “If ... He (Jesus) is not a real and natural man, born of Mary, then He is not our flesh and blood. Then He has nothing in common with us; then we can derive no comfort from Him.”¹¹ The Holy Spirit inspired the holy writer in Hebrews 2:17 to declare that Christ took on the entire nature of a human being, “He had to be made like his brothers in every way ...”

The human nature of Christ had its beginning in the fullness of time (Ga 4:4), and came into being by a true, though supernatural generation from a long line of human ancestors. Thus, as a man, Jesus is a creature, produced by a divine act, at the appropriate time. Space and time again do not allow us to delve into the ocean of scriptural proof in both the Old and New Testaments. May the simple outline our catechism gives suffice:

Human names

Jn 6:42 – son of Joseph and Mary
Romans 1:3 – has a human nature

1 Tim 2:5 – called a man
Mt 26:5 – the Son of Man

Human Characteristics

Human flesh and blood (Lk 24:39; Heb 2:14)
Human soul (John 12:27)
Luke 2:40 – grew and became strong

Human birth (Lk 2)
Gal 4:4 – born of a woman

Human Actions

Hunger (Mt. 4:2)
Sadness (Jn 11:35)

Thirst (Jn 19:28)
Death (Jn 19:35)

Slept (Mk 4:38)
Suffered (Psalm 22)

Jesus was a true human being, like us in every way – except in two. He was sinless (He 4:15). Even though tempted in every way just as we are, yet there no corrupt strain in His nature to which temptation could appeal. Jesus was not able to sin. We will return to this thought in more detail in our discussion of the communication of natures.

The other aspect in which Jesus’ humanity is different from ours is in His death. Normally decay begins the moment a person dies. However, God preserved Jesus’ humanity from such decay (Ac 2:31; Ps. 16:10).

The biblical faith about Jesus accepts both his essential divinity and His essential humanity. The divinity and humanity of Jesus were not in question at the time of the Reformation so the fathers didn’t expand upon this thought. What was in contention at this time was how these two natures communicated or interacted with each other. We turn our attention now to the personal union.

¹¹ LW 22:23

The Personal Union

The personal union of the two natures, Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper and the justification of the Christian are intricately intertwined.¹² The Lutheran and the Reformed view agree on the basic Chalcedonian definition of the *unio personalis* but disagree in the *communicatio idiomatum*. Yet they fit so tightly together that to have an error in one means an error in the other.

The *unio* is defined as the assumption of the human nature by the preexistent eternal person of the Son of God in such a way as to draw the human nature into the oneness of the divine person without division or separation of natures but also without change or confusion of natures. Thus, Christ is *una persona geminae substantiae sive naturea*, (one person of two substances or natures).

The term "personal union" is meant to express the truth that in Christ, God and man do not form just any old kind of union, but a personal union which is totally unlike every other union. What this union is and what it isn't can only be carefully deduced from the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit calls the two natures in Christ a mystery which cannot be accepted except by God's gracious revelation (Mt. 16:16-17f). The Formula of Concord states:

We believe, teach, and confess that God's Son from eternity has been a particular, distinct, entire, divine person. Yet He is true, essential, perfect God with the Father and the Holy Spirit. In the fullness of time He received also the human nature into the unity of His person. He did not do this in such a way that there are now two persons or two Christs. Christ Jesus is now in one person at the same time true, eternal God, born of the Father from eternity, and a true man, born of the most blessed Virgin Mary. This is written in Romans 9:5, "from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever."

We believe, teach, and confess that now, in this one undivided person of Christ, there are two distinct natures: the divine, which is from eternity, and the human, which in time was received into the unity of the person of God's Son. These two natures in the person of Christ are never either separated from or mingled with

¹² Andreas Osiander taught that a person is declared righteous by God, justified, because the divine nature of Christ takes up residence within his or her heart, and for that reason, God declares that person righteous. Eastern Orthodoxy is probably closest to this error, with its heavy emphasis on the indwelling grace of Christ as key to a person's salvation. Francesco Stancaró, an Italian professor at Königsberg, Germany, came to a similar conclusion, but said that it was Christ's human nature residing within a person that causes God to justify him or her. Both flow from an improper understanding of the personal union.

each other. Nor are they changed into each other. Each one abides in its nature and essence in the person of Christ to all eternity.¹³

In the first verse of his Gospel John tells us that the Word was in the beginning, that he was with God, and that he was God. This divine Person “became flesh” (ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο).” This does not mean that he turned into a man and stopped being God for John immediately goes on to say, “We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14). Rather, the meaning then must be that the eternally existing Logos took on or assumed a temporal, earthly human nature (σὰρξ) consisting of both body and soul.

This truth cannot be logically or even philosophically understood. It can only be simply believed. As soon as human reason tries to speculate about how this can be, we unleash a Pandora’s Box of errors.

“This is not to the discredit of the divine mystery, but rather is a proof of its character as such; how could human reason ever hope to understand such a tremendous, transcendent act of God as the incarnation?”¹⁴

In Christ the divine nature and the human nature are so closely united that wherever the one nature is the other is, and whatever the one nature does the other participates in doing. From the moment of his conception in the womb of his mother Mary, Jesus has been and always will be both God and man in one person.

We believe, teach, and confess that now, since the incarnation, each nature in Christ does not exist by itself so that each is, or makes up, a separate person. These two natures are so united that they make up one single person, in which the divine and the received human nature are and exist at the same time. So now, since the incarnation, there belongs to the entire person of Christ personally not only His divine nature, but also His received human nature. So without His divinity, and also without His humanity, the person of Christ or the incarnate Son of God is not complete. We mean the Son of God who has received flesh and become man [John 1:14]. Therefore, Christ is not two distinct persons, but one single person, even though two distinct natures are found in Him, unconfused in their natural essence and properties.¹⁵

The Reformed argue that the Word (*Logos*) is fully united to but never totally contained within the human nature and, therefore, even in incarnation it is to be conceived of as beyond or outside of (*extra*) human nature. In response to the *extra calvinisticum*

¹³ McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, (FCSD VIII.6-7 pp. 582–583).

¹⁴ John Schaller, *Biblical Christology: A Study in Lutheran Dogmatics*, NPH:Milwaukee, WI, 1981 p. 49

¹⁵ McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, (FCSD VIII.11 p. 583).

(Calvinistic extra) the Lutherans taught the maxim, *logos non extra carnem* (the Logos is not beyond the flesh). In other words, the fullness of the Godhead permeates the human nature so completely that whoever sees and handles the flesh, sees and handle the divine glory. On account of this personal union the flesh is no longer apart from the Word nor the Word apart from the flesh.

This teaching of course, is based on Scripture. In Colossians 2:9 Paul writes, “In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form (ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς).” By heaping one expression on another Paul emphasizes that Christ’s finite human body does contain his infinite divine nature. In Christ dwells all the fullness of the Deity (θεότητος) bodily (σωματικῶς, corporeally). Not only a portion of the divine, however, but the *fullness* of it. Fullness (τὸ πλήρωμα) includes all of God’s attributes without exception. They all dwell bodily in Jesus Christ, not only in the Son of God (FC, S.D., 57), but also in the Son of Man. And not only for a short time, but perpetually, as the present tense κατοικεῖ indicates.

The Formula states this clearly:

We also believe, teach, and confess that the received human nature in Christ has and retains its natural, essential properties. But over and above these, through the personal union with the Deity, and afterward through glorification, Christ’s human nature has been exalted to the right hand of majesty, power, and might, over everything that can be named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come [Ephesians 1:21].¹⁶

In the incarnation the divine nature is the active and the human nature is the passive. Any change, therefore, which results from the joining of the two natures affects the human nature, not the divine. The Logos cannot cease to be God when he became flesh.

Consider this majesty, to which Christ has been exalted according to His humanity. He did not first receive it when He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. He received it when He was conceived in His mother’s womb and became man, and the divine and human natures were personally united with each other.¹⁴ However, this personal union is not to be understood (as some incorrectly explain it) as though the two natures, the divine and the human, were united with each other, like two boards are glued together. Some say that (in deed and truth) they have no communion whatsoever with each other.¹⁷

In other words, if you glue a red oak board to a white pine board, the two boards don’t mix together. You only have a red oak board and a white pine board stuck together.

¹⁶ McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House. (FCSD VIII.12 p. 583).

¹⁷ McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House. (FCSD VIII.13 p. 583).

They don't become something new (i.e. a pink board) or a semi strong board. They still remain separate boards, with only a *connection* of natures but not a *communion* of natures. In the personal union, both natures, although remaining undiluted by the other, were perfectly joined together where they did in fact share qualities unique to each. The Epitome states,

The two natures are united personally (i.e., in one person). Therefore, we believe, teach, and confess that this union is not the kind of joining together and connection that prevents either nature from having anything in common with the other personally (i.e., because of the personal union). It is not like when two boards are glued together, where neither gives anything to the other or takes anything from the other. But here is described the highest communion that God truly has with the man. From this personal union, the highest and indescribable communion results. There flows everything human that is said and believed about God, and everything divine that is said and believed about the man Christ. The ancient teachers of the Church explained this union and communion of the natures by the illustration of iron glowing with fire, and also by the union of body and soul in man.¹⁸

The Solid Declaration states,

⁷ We believe, teach, and confess that now, in this one undivided person of Christ, there are two distinct natures: the divine, which is from eternity, and the human, which in time was received into the unity of the person of God's Son. These two natures in the person of Christ are never either separated from or mingled with each other. Nor are they changed into each other. Each one abides in its nature and essence in the person of Christ to all eternity.¹⁹

Even though the fathers referred to the Athanasian Creed which states, "As the rational soul and the flesh [body] are one man, so God and man are one Christ," they realized this was an imperfect comparison. One cannot say that the body of a human being is the soul or the soul is the body.

"The reference to the relation existing between body and soul as an analogy is particularly weak. The body does not exist in the personality of the soul, but soul and body are parts of the one personality, two incomplete natures being united to make a complete one; in Christ, however, two complete natures are united in the personality of one of them."²⁰

Of Christ one can, however, say that God is this man and this man is God. The fathers of the church have also compared this union with the union of fire and iron in a hot, glowing

¹⁸ McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House. (FCEp.VIII.9 p. 492).

¹⁹ ¹⁹ McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House. (FCSD VIII.7, pp. 582).

²⁰ Schaller *op cit*, p. 50

piece of iron. Pointing out the inadequacy of such comparisons, the Formula of Concord says,

It is far different in the union of the divine and the human nature in the person of Christ. It is a far different, more grand, and <altogether> indescribable communion and union between the divine and the human nature in the person of Christ. Because this union and communion, God is man and man is God. Neither the natures nor their properties are intermingled, but each nature keeps its essence and properties.²¹

Previously in their confession, the fathers state,

⁸ We believe, teach, and confess also that both natures mentioned remain unmingled and undestroyed in their nature and essence. Each keeps its natural, essential properties to all eternity and does not lay them aside. Neither do the essential properties of the one nature ever become the essential properties of the other nature.

⁹ We believe, teach, and confess that it is the property of the divine nature to be almighty, eternal, infinite, everywhere present at the same time, and all-knowing. In other words, it agrees with the properties of [the divine] nature and its natural essence. These are essential attributes of the divine nature. Never in eternity do they become essential properties of the human nature.

¹⁰ On the other hand, these are properties of the human nature: being a bodily creation or creature, flesh and blood, finite and located in one place; it suffers, dies, ascends, and descends; it moves from one place to another, suffers hunger, thirst, cold, heat, and the like. These properties never become properties of the divine nature.²²

God, being unchangeable, cannot give up his personality. Since *divina natura est assumens, humana assumta*, (the divine nature is the assumer, the human nature the assumed) the Logos, assuming the human nature, endowed it with his divine personality. The hypostasis of Jesus is primarily and essentially that of the Logos, secondarily and non-essentially of the human nature.

Allow me to restate in a more simple way (hopefully).

The union of the divine and human in Christ happened

1. Without mixing – where two different ingredients are joined together, each losing their own identity where the sum is completely different than its parts.

²¹ McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House. (FCSD VIII. 19 p. 584).

²² McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House. (FCSD VIII. 8-10, pp. 582–583).

2. Without transformation – where one of the elements is changed from what it is essentially to the other element.
3. Without separation – where one element can be removed from the other leaving both intact, unaltered from their original essential character.
4. Without limiting – each nature retained all of its characteristics fully, although Jesus did choose to lay aside full use of His divine glory for a while.

For us the union of the divine and human natures in the one person, Jesus Christ, is an article of faith. Scripture teaches it, and so we believe it, even though we cannot understand or explain it. The words of former professor Gawrisch should be remembered:

Here a word of caution to preachers is in order. In speaking about Christ's incarnation they are sometimes inclined to present it as an act of great humiliation that the Creator of all things stooped to become a creature. But this is not what Scripture describes as the humiliation of Christ. Taking on a human nature was not an act of humiliation on the part of the Son of God but rather a manifestation of his power. If his humiliation consisted in his becoming flesh, then his exaltation would consist in putting off his human nature. But there is no such thing as an excarnation on the part of Christ.²³

The Communication of Attributes

An immediate result of the hypostatic union is the so-called communication of idioms. "Idiom" is a term that refers to the attributes, activities or experiences that are peculiar either to the human or the divine nature in Christ. Being born, suffering and dying, for example, are idioms of the human nature. Creating, being immortal, omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient are idioms of the divine nature.

It shouldn't really be necessary to discuss the doctrine of the communion of natures in a special section, since the personal union of God and man in Christ includes the communication of attributes. The communion of natures is directly inferred from all those Scripture passages which proclaim a union of God and man in the person of Jesus Christ. Our Lutheran dogmaticians have rightly said that, strictly speaking, the communion of natures is not really the result of the personal union, but that both are the same thing and are distinguished only conceptually. Yet because of the Reformed and Roman Catholic²⁴ denial of the communication of attributes, it was, and still is, necessary to discuss it. There will be, however, some repetition since the communication of attributes cannot be presented with constant reference to the personal union and vice versa.

²³ Gawrisch, *The practical Application of the Two Natures in Christ*, essay presented to the Fall Pastoral Conference of the Minnesota District's Southern Conference at Newton, Iowa, on November 12, 1984.

²⁴ See appendix 2

In this discussion is very important that we,

...cannot here forget the different relation of essence and attribute in reference to Deity and humanity. With respect to the Logos, essence and attribute are identical; with respect to the humanity they are not, for the attributes are distinguished from the essence. Dependent on this distinction is the fact that in the second genus of the communication of attributes, the *genus majesticum*, the divine characteristics can be shared with the abstract human nature, because they can belong to it as really its own without thus becoming part of the essence of the human nature; but the human characteristics cannot be shared with the abstract divine nature, for they would become part of the divine essence, since in God essence and characteristics are identical.”²⁵

This communication is not mutual for the divine nature cannot undergo any changes in its attributes because it is identical with its attributes. Thus the communication is one-sided.

The first category we call the *idiomatic genus*, namely, that the properties of each nature are ascribed to the entire person, to the God-man.

In Christ two distinct natures exist and remain unchanged and unconfused in their natural essence and properties. Yet there is only one person consisting of both natures. Therefore, that which is an attribute of only one nature is attributed not to that nature alone, as separate. It is attributed to the entire person, who is at the same time God and man (whether the person is called God or man).²⁶

A few examples may help. Christ was begotten of the Father from eternity according to His divine nature and born of the Virgin Mary according to His human nature. The Jews killed (human nature) the Prince of Life (divine nature). Thus the idiomatic genus is this, that things specific to one nature or the other are ascribed to the entire Person of Christ, designated by either nature or by both. However, this does not mean that what is ascribed to the person is at the same time a property of both natures or an inherent attribute of both natures. It is simply an attribute of the entire Person of Christ according to whichever nature that specific name, title, or characteristic belongs.

The Formula states:

This personal union does not exist nor can be thought of without such a true communion of the natures. Not just the mere human nature—whose property it is to suffer and die—has suffered for the sins of the world, but the Son of God Himself truly suffered. However, He suffered according to the received human nature. In accordance with our simple Christian faith, He truly died, although the divine nature can neither suffer nor die. Dr. Luther has fully explained this

²⁵ Hoenecke, Adolf, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, NPH: Milwaukee, 2003, Vol III pg. 82

²⁶ McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (FC SD VIII, 36, p. 587). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

in his *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* in opposition to the blasphemous *alloeosis*, or interchange, of Zwingli, who taught that one nature should be taken and understood for the other. Dr. Luther has committed that teaching, as a devil's mask, to the abyss of hell [LW 37:206–14].²⁷

The Sacramentarians (followers of Zwingli and Calvin, as well as Crypto-Calvinists) subtly undermined this truth. They ascribed attributes to the entire person of Christ, but meant only one nature. George Sohn writes, “But the person of the Son, not the divine nature (was made man) if we wish to speak accurately.”²⁸ Zwingli invented the term *alloeosis* which demands a substitution of the subject to suit its predicate²⁹ for this semantic shell game. The Formula quotes Luther's strong warning,

“Zwingli calls that an ALLOEOSIS when something is said of the divinity of Christ which really belongs to the humanity, or vice versa. As Luke 24, 26: “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?” Here Zwingli juggles, asserting that the word Christ is understood of the human nature. Beware, beware, I say, of the ALLOEOSIS! For it is a devil's mask, for at last it manufactures such a Christ after whom I certainly would not be a Christian; namely, that henceforth Christ should be no more and do no more with His sufferings and life than any other mere saint. For if I believe that only the human nature has suffered for me, then Christ is to me a poor Savior, then He Himself indeed needs a Savior, it is unspeakable what the devil seeks by the ALLOEOSIS.”³⁰

The next category we call the *apotelesmatic genus*. This is “whatever the Savior did and still does to accomplish (His) blessed purpose may not be ascribed to either of His natures exclusively, but must be ascribed to both natures conjointly.”³¹ Here each nature of our Lord contributes to our redemption and works in union with the other nature. The human nature suffered, died, etc and so this was the suffering, death, etc. of God. The divine nature made this suffering and death valid, so the validity of this atonement was also of the man Christ Jesus who is the One mediator. We could add here all the instances which handle the work and offices of Christ, where sometimes as God, sometimes as man, sometimes as Christ, yet meaning that in each case each nature contributed its essential quality to the other for the work of our redemption.

²⁷ McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House. (FCSD VIII.20-21, p. 584).

²⁸ Pieper, F. *Christian Dogmatics*, Concordia: St. Louis, 1951, p.119

²⁹ Lange, *God So Loved the World*, NPH:Milwaukee, 2005, p. 255-256.

³⁰ McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House. (FCSD VIII, 39-40 p.588).

³¹ Koehler, E., *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, St. Louis, MO, Concordia, 1939, p. 92.

The Reformed theologians and their followers demand that the human nature of Christ be kept apart in its activity or operation from the activity and operation of the divine nature, since the human nature as something that is finite is not capable of being the organ of the acts of the infinite divine nature. They contend that though each nature performs within the person what is peculiar to it, this is not to be understood as a partnership where each nature participated in the attributes of the other nature. In response, the Formulators wrote,

In fulfilling Christ's office, the person does not act and work in, with, through, or according to only one nature. It works in, according to, with, and through both natures. As the Council of Chalcedon expresses it, one nature works in communion with the other what is a property of each.⁴⁷ Therefore, Christ is our Mediator, Redeemer, King, High Priest, Head, Shepherd, and so on, not according to one nature only (whether it be the divine or the human), but according to both natures. This teaching has been treated more fully in other places.³²

Sometimes a divine idiom is ascribed not merely to the person, but to the human nature of Christ considered by itself. 1 John 1:7 for example states that "the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, purifies us from every sin." "Blood" is an abstract term, referring to the human nature as such. But here the Bible ascribes to Christ's blood the power to purify us from all sin, a power which belongs essentially to his divine nature. When Jesus calmed the storm in the Sea of Galilee the disciples were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this that even the wind and waves obey him?" (Mt 8:27) Such power is an essential characteristic of his divine nature. This last category we call the *genus majesticum*, namely, that when the Son of God assumed the human nature, He imparted to it divine majesty, glory, and attributes. They show that Christ's divine nature shared its idioms with the human nature. The human nature took on these divine characteristics or properties without any change in its essential characteristics as a truly human nature.

To make alive, to have all judgment and all power in heaven and on earth, to have all things in His hands, to have all things subject beneath His feet, to cleanse from sin, and so on, are not created gifts. These are divine, infinite properties. Yet, according to the declaration of Scripture, these have been given and communicated to the man Christ. (See John 5:27; 6:39; Matthew 28:18; Daniel 7:14; John 3:35; 13:3; Matthew 11:27; Ephesians 1:22; Hebrews 2:8; 1 Corinthians 15:27; John 1:3.) This communication is not to be understood as a phrase or way of speaking, or just words about the person according to the divine nature alone, but according to the received human nature.³³

³² McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (FCSD VIII, 46-47 p. 589). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

³³ McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (FCSD VIII 55-56, p. 590). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

This third genus takes one more deeply into all the implications of the personal union than does the first genus. In the first genus the point was made that the divine and human attributes are to be ascribed to the entire person of Christ. In this third genus, on the other hand, the divine attributes are ascribed to the person of Christ according to his human nature.

Adolf Hoenecke writes,

“The divine majesty, i.e., the abundance of characteristics (omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, immutability immeasurability) is shared with the human nature. So that this sharing of divine infinity and immeasurability will not be understood as abolition or destruction of the human nature, which is in itself still finite, people fall back on the distinction of the transitive, operative attributes (omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience) and the immanent attributes (infinity, immeasurability, eternity). Both kinds of attributes are shared for inhabitation and possession, but only the transitive attributes are shared for use and immediate naming....³⁴

Thus one can scripturally say that the human nature of Jesus is omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient; but not: the human nature of Jesus is infinite, eternal, immeasurable.

The doctrine of the exchange of properties according to its third kind is the most severely contested one. The Sacramentarians had directed their most violent polemics against the doctrine that Christ’s divine attributes are communicated His human nature. Modern day Calvinists haven’t budged an inch. The Formula sets forth this doctrine.

For the Holy Scriptures and the Ancient Fathers from the Scriptures forcefully testify: The human nature has been personally united with the divine nature in Christ. It was glorified and exalted to the right hand of God’s majesty and power. After the form of a servant and humiliation had been laid aside, the human nature did receive—apart from, and over and above its natural, essential, permanent properties—special, high, great, supernatural, mysterious, indescribable, heavenly privileges and excellences in majesty, glory, power, and might above everything that can be named. It has them not only in this world, but also in that which is to come [Ephesians 1:21].³⁵

The Lutheran Confessions in no way wanted to deny that Christ in his human nature received created gifts. But they were also careful to distinguish these from the divine qualities. Whatever Scripture tells us that Jesus received while he was living on earth, he must have received according to the human nature, for the divine nature possessed it from all eternity. Calvinists wanted to restrict all the qualities given to the human nature to created gifts. The Epitome summarizes the Calvinist argument this way:

³⁴ Hoenecke, op. cit., Vol III p. 88-89.

³⁵ McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (SD VIII 51, p. 589). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

Greater and more power is given to Christ <according to His humanity> than to all angels and other creatures; but He has no communion with God's almighty power, nor has this been given to Him. Therefore, they make up a "middle power," a power between God's almighty power and the power of other creatures, given to Christ according to His humanity by the exaltation. This would be less than God's almighty power and greater than that of other creatures.³⁶

The wealth of Scripture is so clear that to deny that the human nature received divine qualities is to undermine the foundation for all Christian doctrine, Scripture itself and to make human reason the basis for doctrine. The Solid Declaration states,

There is and remains in Christ only one divine omnipotence, power, majesty, and glory, which is peculiar to the divine nature alone. But it shines, manifests, and exercises itself fully—yet voluntarily—in, with, and through the received, exalted human nature in Christ. In glowing iron there are not two kinds of power to shine and burn. But the power to shine and to burn is a property of the fire. Since the fire is united with the iron, it manifests and exercises this power to shine and to burn in, with, and through the glowing iron. From this union also the glowing iron has the power to shine and to burn without changing the essence and the natural properties of fire and iron.³⁷

Orthodox Lutherans have used the term "real exchange" (*realis communicatio*) to ward off the *alloeosis* misrepresentation. A real exchange has taken place in deed and truth without any blending of the natures or of their essential properties. In short, the human nature of Christ has received majesty according to the manner of the personal union because the fullness of the deity lives in Christ.

Now, for a slight twist.

Christ always had this majesty according to the personal union. Yet He abstained from using it in the state of His humiliation, and because of this He truly increased in all wisdom and favor with God and men. Therefore, He did not always use this majesty, but only when it pleased Him. Then, after His resurrection, He entirely laid aside the form of a servant, but not the human nature, and was established in the full use, manifestation, and declaration of the divine majesty. In this way He entered into His glory [Philippians 2:6–11]. So now not just as God, but also as man He knows all things and can do all things. He is present with all creatures, and has under His feet and in His hands everything that is in heaven and on earth and under the earth, as He Himself testifies [in Matthew 28:18], "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me" [see also John 13:3]. And St. Paul says in Ephesians

³⁶ McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (Ep. VIII 35, p. 494). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

³⁷ McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (SD VIII, 66, p. 592). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

4:10, “He ... ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.”
Because He is present, He can exercise His power everywhere. To Him everything
is possible and everything is known.³⁸

Yet it should be noted that the humiliation and exaltation affect only the human nature of Christ and in so sense his divine nature which was not “intrinsically diminished or augmented” (SD VIII, 49). The Epitome even calls it blasphemy to refer to the humiliation and exaltation to the divine nature (VIII,39).

It is proper to call Mary the mother of God (*θεοτόκος*) because “God” is a concrete term referring to the person who possesses both natures. We can properly sing, “*O grosze Not, Gott selbst ist tot*” (O sorrow dread, God himself is dead - although *Christian Worship* uses the translation, “O sorrow dread, God’s Son is dead”). It designates the whole, undivided person, the God-Man, who experienced death according to his human nature. Although the divine nature did not die, it participated in the experience of dying through its union with the human nature. It strengthened and sustained the human nature as the *theanthropic* person suffered the terrifying experience of dying.

“There is no passage on the other hand, that says that the divine nature ever gave up any of its divine idioms or that it ever took on the idioms of the human nature. The divine nature as such did not suffer or die. Only the person, Christ, the God-Man, suffered and died. So 1 Peter 4:1, a passage cited earlier, asserts that “Christ suffered *in his body*,” that is, according to his human, not his divine nature. “In his body” is a so-called diacritical particle which indicates that suffering is an idiom that belongs essentially to the human nature.”³⁹

A controversy arose between the Swabian (Brenz) and Saxon (Chemnitz) theologians about how the communication of idioms affected (and when) impacts our understanding of the humiliation and exaltation. (For instance was Jesus only present in the manger or did he also at that time fill all creation?) We will leave that discussion for another paper.

Two Final Questions

Let’s take a moment and consider two questions raised by the communication of natures. The first is “could Christ have sinned?” The sinlessness of Jesus is without objection. Scripture again and again proclaims that we have a High priest who is holy and without spot (1 Pet 1:19). But the why he is sinless seems to be a debated question We won’t spend any time reviewing the false ideas of the *massa sancta* in Israel of the Scholastics and others, or that original sin is passed along only by the male line of humans, nor of the *immaculata conceptio* of the Romanists. The separation of sin from the human race is a work utterly beyond human power. It is solely the work of divine grace and omnipotence.

³⁸ McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (Ep. VIII, 16, p. 493). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

³⁹ Gawrisch, *The Practical Application of the Doctrine of the Two Natures of Christ*, p. 7

“and so it was the work of the Holy Ghost to produce from the sinful nature of the Virgin Mary the holy nature of Christ.”⁴⁰

But does that mean that He couldn't have sinned when tempted? If He couldn't sin then how can the temptations of satan been anything more than a sham? If He could have sinned, then He wouldn't be God, would He?

We emphatically deny the possibility that Christ could have sinned. This is not because of the sinlessness of the human nature in itself. Adam too, was created sinless yet succumbed to satan's temptation. Rather Christ could not sin because his human nature never existed as a separate person but from the beginning constitutes one Person with the Son of God. To assume that the man Christ could sin is then to assume that the Son of God could sin, since the human and divine natures were united into one Person (refer to the quote from the FCSD VIII.11 on pg 10). So to assume Jesus could have sinned would be to give up the personal union or the immutable, sinlessness of God.

If Jesus could not have sinned, does this mean satan's temptations were a sham? Not at all. Even though the outcome of a fight is guaranteed, the enemy can still inflict painful blows in the meantime. Schaller writes,

“In passing, we note that Christ's sinlessness does not render doubtful the reality of his temptation by Satan (Mt.4). It was impossible that he should fall a prey to Satan's wiles; yet nevertheless he suffered the anguish of soul and the severe internal struggle which accompany such experiences in a human soul. This was as much a part of his vicarious work as the *passio magna*, and is included in the remarkable statement that, though he was a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered (He 5:8).”⁴¹

Here we have a divine mystery where we believe the parts (the impeccability of the divine and the frailty of humanity) but dare not mix the two or separate them.

The second question is: how could Christ's body and blood be present wherever the Lord's Supper is celebrated? The denial of the communicated omnipresence was at the bottom of the Reformed denial of the real presence. That made Article VII a necessity. That same denial also made Article VIII with its thorough treatment of the hypostatic union a necessity in the Formula. Without rehashing our previous paper on Article VII let me just offer a summary since the two articles are so closely connected on this point.

The answer of course is that the divine nature shared its qualities with the human nature in this one man Christ Jesus. The Nestorian/Zwinglian error separated the Deity of Christ (together with all the divine attributes) from the human nature (the *σῶμα*) of Christ Jesus.

⁴⁰ Pieper, F., *Christian Dogmatics*, Concordia: St. Louis, 1951, Vol II, pg. 74.

⁴¹ Schaller, op cit., p. 55-56.

Thus according to the Zwinglians, Jesus could not be present everywhere except in a spiritual sense. That error obscures the truth that the body Jesus gave for us and the blood He shed for us on the cross redeemed us because all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in that body and blood. His blood was “holy, precious blood” because it was divine blood (cf. FC, Epit, 14 also Luther in the FC, S.D., 44).

One of the charges leveled against the Lutherans was that they were “*ubiquitists*”. The Reformed applied the term “ubiquity” to the Lutheran doctrine of the omnipresence of Christ’s human nature. “They have consistently misrepresented Lutheran teaching as if it involves a physical and corporeal extension of Christ’s body throughout heaven and earth.”⁴²

Yet the Formula makes a special point of explaining that Christ is also omnipresent in his human nature.

We hold that by these words the majesty of the man Christ is declared. Christ has received this majesty, according to His humanity, at the right hand of God’s majesty and power. So also, according to His received human nature and with the same, He can be, and also is, present where He wants to be. He is present especially in His Church and congregation on earth as Mediator, Head, King, and High Priest. This presence is not a part, or only one half of Him. Christ’s entire person is present, to which both natures belong, the divine and the human—not only according to His divinity, but also according to, and with, His received human nature. He is our Brother [Hebrews 2:17], and we are flesh of His flesh and bone of His bone [Genesis 2:23]⁴³

Christ's humanity was not a mere fleshly shell that God used for a period of time. The Word did not come to “live in flesh as a man,” but the “Word became flesh” (John 1:14). Jesus' humanity is not something that can be discarded. Jesus did not lay aside his human nature when he rose from the dead, nor when He ascended into heaven. Upon his ascension, Jesus was not deified, but rather was glorified. He will always and forever exist in heaven as a glorified man, and the eternally glorious God at the same time. When the Bible tells us that at Jesus’ return on the last day “every eye will see him” (Re 1:7), just as the disciples watched Him leave (Acts 1: 11) it is speaking of him according to his human nature.

Let me close this discussion of the communication of attributes with this quote from the Formula,

⁵³ The best, most certain, and surest way in this controversy is this: according to His received human nature through the personal union, Christ has glorification, or

⁴² Gawrisch, W., *On Christology, Brenz and the Question of Ubiquity in No Other Gospel*, Milwaukee, WI, Northwestern Publishing House, 1980, p.243

⁴³ McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (FCSD VIII.76, p. 594). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

exaltation. What His received human nature is capable of beyond the natural properties, without becoming annihilated, no one can know better or more thoroughly than the Lord Christ Himself. He has revealed this in His Word, as much as is needful for us to know about it in this life. We must simply believe everything for which we have clear, certain testimonies in the Scriptures in this matter. We should in no way argue against it, as though the human nature in Christ could not be capable of the same.⁴⁴

Final Thoughts

Jesus is still important! Witness the deluge of magazine articles, movies, TV specials and books being published about Him – some serious, some ill-informed and some simply off the wall. Most have no discernable basis in fact or reason. Movie stars, athletes, politicians and your neighbor are usually not bashful about sharing their particular idea of who Jesus was. Jesus is still being debated!

The struggle over the Person of Christ continues. We are surrounded by cults with blatant Christological errors (Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Unity, Baha'i). We are surrounded by denominations with subtle Christological errors (Roman Catholic, Reformed, Armenian, pseudo-Lutheran). Modern theologians such as Barth, Bultman and Balthasar often speak in confusing terms (for example that there was a communication of attributes but not a communion of attributes). How well have we trained the saints to bear witness to the Person of Christ in this segment of this dark world?

The fact remains that the union of the Godhead and the manhood in Christ is a profound mystery. To human reason it is a logically mind-boggling enigma. Human reason rebels against the thought that the infinite God could take up his residence in a finite human body. The Formula never loses sight of the soteriological significance of the personal union and the communication of attributes. If the finite flesh was incapable of receiving the infinite God in the second person of the Trinity then there was not a real union of the divine and human natures and in reality there would not be a Savior.

The closing words of Article VIII are timeless:

Since in the Holy Scriptures Christ is called a mystery upon which all heretics dash their heads, we admonish all Christians not to arrogantly indulge their reason in crafty investigations about such mysteries. With the beloved apostles, they should simply believe. They should close the eyes of their reason and bring their understanding into captivity to the obedience of Christ [2 Corinthians 10:5], and rejoice without ceasing in the fact that our flesh and blood is placed so high at the right hand of God's majesty and almighty power. In this way we will

⁴⁴ McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (FC VIII, 47, p. 590). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

certainly find constant consolation in every difficulty and remain well guarded against deadly error.⁴⁵

But God is gracious to us! He has promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against His Church, and He has proven it in history. He assures us that His Word will never pass away, and He deigns to use clay vessels such as us in preserving that Word.

+ *Soli Deo Gloria* +

⁴⁵ McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (FCSD 96, p. 596). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

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Appendix 1

Errors Concerning

<u>Person of Christ</u>	<u>Humanity of Christ</u>	<u>Divinity of Christ</u>	<u>Communication of Attributes</u>
Ebionites	Docetism	Nestorianism	Reformed
Monarchianism	Apolinarianism	Eutychianism	Roman Catholic
Arianism	Monothelitism	Monophysitism	
Eunomianism	Neo-orthodoxy		
Gnosticism			
Anabaptists			
Socinianism			
Unitarianism			
Deism			

(this chart is based on the discussion in “God So Loved the World” pp. 243-254)

Adoptionism, sometimes called dynamic Monarchianism, claimed that Jesus was adopted as God's Son either at his baptism, his resurrection, or his ascension.

Apollinarians argued that in the incarnation the Son of God assumed a human nature but not a human soul. Instead, his divine nature took the place of the soul. This view diminished the full humanity of Jesus and was condemned at the Council of Constantinople in 381. This view is similar to Docetism.

Deism is the belief that reason and observation of the natural world are sufficient to determine the existence of a Creator, accompanied with the rejection of authority as a source of religious knowledge. Deism gained prominence in the 17th and 18th centuries during the Age of Enlightenment among intellectuals raised as Christians who believed in one god, but found fault with organized religion and did not believe in supernatural events such as miracles, the inerrancy of scriptures, or the Trinity.

Ebionites refers to a Jewish Christian movement that existed during the early centuries of the Christian Era. They regarded Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah while rejecting his divinity and insisted on the necessity of following Jewish law and rites.

Eunomians, were a sect that upheld an extreme form of Arianism, which denied not only that Jesus Christ was of the same nature (consubstantial) as God the Father but also that he was of like nature (homoiousian), as maintained by the semi-Arians.

Eutychianism essentially absorbed the human nature into the divine nature. In an attempt to unify the person of Jesus, Eutychianism denied the two natures of Jesus and affirmed a new, or third, nature.

Monophysitism is the position that, after the union of the divine and the human in the historical Incarnation, Jesus Christ, as the incarnation of the eternal Son or Word (Logos) of God, had only a single "nature" which was either divine or a synthesis of divine and human. Monophysitism is contrasted to Dyophysitism which maintains that Christ maintained two natures, one divine and one human, after the Incarnation.

Monothelitism is the view that Jesus Christ has two natures but only one will. This is contrary to the Christology that Jesus Christ has two wills (human and divine) corresponding to his two natures. It enjoyed considerable popularity, even garnering patriarchal support, before being rejected and denounced as heretical in 681.

Nestorianism insisted that there were two natures but that there were also two persons: one divine and the other human. Rather than unifying Jesus, this view separated the person of Jesus along with his two natures.

Socinianism is most famous for its Nontrinitarian Christology but contains a number of other unorthodox beliefs as well.

Appendix 02

Roman Catholic arguments against the communication of attributes

Bellarmino

“True Catholic doctrine teaches two things. First, it follows from the hypostatic union that many gifts were created and infused into the humanity of Christ, as the highest grace, the greatest wisdom, extraordinary power; and the other kind, which are not attributes of the Deity, unless through a certain participation, as we also participate in the attributes of God through created qualities, although less perfectly than Christ’s humanity participates in them. And yet the communication of attributes does not consist in this.”

The Jesuit Tannerus says that the properties of the divine nature are shared with the human nature but only by means of the divine nature, not that the human nature itself is made a partner in them, but because the divine nature was united to the human nature not without its own properties.”

(Both quotes are from Hoenecke’s Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics, Vol III.pg. 9