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Certain aspects of the Christological argument during the present century

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While the subject of Christ's person has from the first engaged the thought of men, never has the interest been so keen as in the present century, especially within the last fifty years.

The feeling is to-day that theology, at least that part called didactic, should be treated from a Christocentric standpoint.

That there has been an advance in Christology no one questions especially in treating of the human nature of our Lord. Our own Dr. Sheldon tells us that "no previous age has equalled the present (1720-1890) in an appreciative consideration of Christ's human perfection or wrought out so rich a literature in behalf of its illustration" and Dr. Dorner

has said "with the exception of the time of the Reformation, in which there was no sequential elaboration of its Christological thoughts, a one-sided preponderance, now of the divine, now of the human side, had hindered since 451 the erection of the dogma".

He further says, "the problem of to-day is to so maintain the unity of the person that both sides shall receive their full share, to show that unity can be preserved without opposition of the divine and the human".

The Christological attempts of the century classify themselves into logical, physical and ethical unity, all of which may again assume different forms, especially the ethical, as for instance, the kenotic or the juridical, according as justice or self-surrendering love is the more considered.

The reasons given for this special interest in the subject are its intrinsic value and the differences of the Reformed and Lutheran Churches on this subject at the time of their ecclesiastical union early in this century in Prussia. This fact led the leading theologians of both these communions to give the subject their attention in the interests of doctrinal union. Its intrinsic value is manifest in the fact that hardly a leading thinker but what has given us his view on Christology from Kant to the present. The Christ of Jacobi is a religious ideal to whom worship can be paid only as such an ideal; Fichte regards the interest in Christ not from a metaphysical but from a historic standpoint; the pantheistic Schelling views the incarnation of God as an eternal

fact and that Jesus is the beginning of that manifestation to men. With Hegel the incarnation of God in Christ is but the symbol of the incarnation of God's incarnation in humanity at large. Again, in spite of rationalistic efforts to explain away Christ as the God-man by making Paul the founder of Christianity, the interest of modern criticism centres in the God-man.

Unitarianism in its various phases, now naturalistic again transcendental, is in constant change as to views of Christ from the affirmation of Jas. F. Clarke that "Christ is the God-man in whom the divine spirit and the human soul become one in a perfect union" to the radical statements of others who hardly conceive of him as a typical man and teacher

The efforts of the Evangelical Church have taken on various forms, two of which will be touched upon in this present paper - the kenotic and the platonistic views.

The kenotic has been in thought of the church many hundreds of years, but as moderns hold it we shall have to go back no farther than Jungendorff, the founder of the Moravians; whose view was a sort of metamorphical kenosis. After about one hundred years had passed this view in its crude form attracted the minds of theologians and between years 1840 and 1850 the kenotic theory received such an impulse that to-day it has scores of theologians among its adherents. Of these perhaps it

would be impossible to find any two who state the theory in precisely the same way. Bruce has well-stated the document idea, as also our own Dr. Curtis, who says, "The main idea is that the eternal Logos empties himself until his own being is reduced to a point adequate to a complete incarnation"

From this point questions arise as to whether this depotentiation is absolute or relative, and what is the relation of this depotentiated Logos to the man Jesus. Again, is the depotentiation so complete as to reduce the Logos to a mere man or part man and part God? All these questions are differently answered. However far apart the various views may be there is a general agreement to insist upon our Lord's humanity. All Christological arguments are a

failure unless they reflect the Jesus of the Gospels. Our Lutheran friends failed in that they made the earthly life of Christ a communication of human properties to God instead of vice versa.

Thomasius is a representative of the absolute depotentialization - claiming that no union of the divine is complete without the divine of its own accord parts with enough of its own nature to prevent dualistic existence. To make this possible the divine emptied himself of his divine mode of being to such an extent that he became a mere man, subject to limits of space and time and conditions of human development. However, Thomasius claims that the son of God is still himself, that God is not destroyed by self-limitation.

tion, claiming that self-limitation is an act of the will and an affirmation of existence.

Our author claims, in short, that several things are subserved by his theory - that the doctrine is scriptural as Gods love has room for exercise, as it was the motive of the incarnation - that humanity remains intact, personality in Christ's consciousness of his humanity as well as his divinity subsists, that the only difference between Christ and us is that his personality was born into a human nature to work out of and through it to a divine-human person. The trinity also is preserved as Christ loses none of his essential attributes of deity, such as, absolute power, absolute truth, absolute holiness and love. But during

his earthly state Jesus part^s with omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence as these are relative attributes of deity. Besides, the absolute attributes Christ revealed as opportunity permitted.

Bruce says that this distinction which Thomassinus makes between the absolute and relative attributes is the speculative foundation of that school's doctrine of the kenosis.

The one criticism to be offered here is that - the Logos is made so human that there is no need of a human soul. Besides Christ had all the mutability of the human and was fully man with all the characteristics of a man, but on this theory the manhood is essentially sacrificed and the trinity is for the time a duality.

We now pass to Gess, a representa-

of another view of the Kenosis. Gess advances the idea of such a loss of communion with the father, also the loss of the dignity of having the Holy Spirit proceed from him, also the loss of his position as creative upholder of the world as to be come a man. To be sure Gess believes that this man in his glorified humanity becomes the human representative in the trinity, but freely admits that the trinity for the time being is sacrificed. Yes, the Logos becomes, according to this theory, a human soul. Here the traducianist may say, if Christ is merely a human soul, then Jesus has his humanity pure and simple and is like every one else born of woman. Gess gets rid of this by declaring for the creationist's theory and also admits Christ's capac

ity for sinning to subserve the reality of human nature. It may be unjust judging by the totality of his theory to say that Gess here is akin to Arianism, but in his declaration for the creationist theory, it looks very much as if he were not far from making Christ an exalted creature. As to Christ's capacity to sin, Gess says that Christ's will was not necessarily for God, to make it such would be to revive the Apollinarian error in a new form, making an unchangeable being take the place of a human soul. Again, Gess made the incarnation cause, as one of its accompaniments, the loss of eternal holiness, but to prevent alarm to any critic or even his friends Gess posited the divine foreknowledge to impose upon

Christ, and, that without loss of freedom, the necessity of not sinning; and as further reason for Christ's not sinning there is assigned the extraordinary devotion of Christ to God's will besides the knowledge of divine things which that life gives.

The theory as set forth by Gess involves the loss of the trinity as held by the church. In reply Gess admits that this is practically true during the kenosis of the son but prefers not to adjust his view to meet requirements of the Catholic doctrine of the trinity but to adjust the trinity to suit his theory. He makes the Father alone to possess aseity - the life of the son is simply a gift. He claims, therefore, an inequality of persons in the trinity and that no true kenosis would be

otherwise possible as it would imperil the Godhead of the father.

Our one objection to the theory of Gess is that it imperils the purpose of incarnation - the redemption of sinners as that requires that the redeemer should be free from sin. For as Bruce has truly said, while the foreknowledge of God is surety that Jesus would not sin there seems to me to be the same risk here as in the case of Adam, and at best the argument is weak at this point because in spite of all he says to the contrary Christ's moral freedom was awfully jeopardized, and, if Christ kept from sin it was pure determinism of a fatalistic type that kept him so.

Ebrard agrees with Gess in making the incarnate Logos take the place of a human soul, but there

was simply a disguise of his divinity while Christ was in the flesh, all the while, however, he maintains his existence in the trinity. In fact, Ebrard believes in a double Logos. Ebrard accepts the two natures of the Chalcedonian formula, but gives his own interpretation to the natures, namely, two aspects of one divine human person. Christ gave up the form of God accepting the form of the human with a divine essence still retaining its existence in both human and divine modes. There is simply the assumption of the divine of the human nature, the divine attributes remaining in an applied form and in that are truly human. Kösgen, it seems to me, has truly stated the case when he says, "this makes Christ too much of a middle being". The more, I think

of it, the more Edwards view assimilates Societism and hardly in harmony with the hard facts of the Gospel. Again, the objection of Stodge certainly is unassailable when he says that Edwards view leads him to assume "that the same individual mind can be conscious and unconscious, finite and infinite, ignorant and omniscient at the same time". It has been truly said that the doctrine of the Kenosis by itself affords no real assistance toward conceiving the personality of Christ. The temporary quiescence of the divine may explain how the experiences of Christ were temporarily assimilated to the human type but as all the divine functions are supposed to have been regained after a brief space we have the same difficulty now of bringing into unity of the same

person the traits of a human soul
and its finite will &c. and the traits
of divinity proper" Again, "the di-
vine brought down to the plane
would be a humanized divine a-
longside of the human." If similar-
ity was the result on the part of
the divine with divinity proper "It
is not identity" To have a working
kenotic theory the humanity of Christ must
be rejected "to the extent of rejecting a
rational soul" and in its place "we
must predicate divinity temporarily
humanized and dwelling in a ma-
terial tenement" As Prof. Sheldon
says this kind of a theory might be
helpful in exegesis of certain facts
if there were no other way of explain-
ing the same. "The radical doctrine
of the kenosis then not being required to
explain incitations in the life of Christ
is left to bear its own difficulties and

These are very serious especially from the trinitarian standpoint. Such a depolentiation as the doctrine supposes contradicts the notion of immutability which the scriptures attach to God and which has commonly been recognized in theologic thought. If such an attribute as omniscience may be resigned, what attribute is there belonging to God as the living God may not be resigned? What shall assure us that the living God will not be a sort of moribund deity, a sleeping Brahmā?"

Dorner hints at a theory of gradual incarnation leaving ample room for true normal development. Here he does not lessen or reduce the Logos but only a limitation of the self-communication of the Logos is claimed. The being and activity of the Logos remained unchanged

which Jesus possessed in virtue of the union merely so far as compatible with the truth of human growth. Hence the eternal personality of the Logos did not become, immediately and before there was a divine consciousness, a divine-human. There is an enlarging impartation of the Logos to a growing receptiveness of the human nature. The physical union is momentary but the physical and ethical effects are gradual. As Prof Sheldon says "Dorner prefers" to regard the union as ethically mediated, the divine indeed taking the initiative but the human indeed not occupying an attitude of simple passivity. Certainly as held by Dorner we see no need to reject it without a most thorough examination.

ation, for there seems nothing in the scriptures to militate against it and as stated by him it meets the demands of philosophy.

As Rothe held the view, perhaps, it is too radical. He believes as to his humanity Christ was created. Then Christ develops more and more till at death union with God is complete. The incarnation is not confined to Christ but God is incarnate in redeemed humanity and that the incarnation of Christ is only the beginning of a process.

This we must reject as prejudicial to the preexistence of Christ and approximating, though perhaps not intentionally on his part, manism.

The theories of Ritschl and Py-
schlag mediate between an
orthodox standpoint and that
of modern humanitarians.
We do not feel called upon
to criticise these for a suffie-
cent criticism of any form of
Unitarian thought upon this
topic is all sufficient.

We feel with Prof. Curtis
that speculation at this point
is largely personal, the
theme being too profound for
reasoning into an exact scien-
tific statement. There is mys-
tery in it yet we neverthe-
less feel the force of the fact
that Christ is God.

Prof. Fisher has most concisely
stated it when he says "He who is
to effect the re-union of man to
God is himself the Son of God"

as well as son of man . There is a mysterious community of being with the Father an inscrutable derivation distinct from that of all creaturely existences of which the human relationship of sonship is to finite apprehension the most expressive symbol . There is an incarnation , a great act of self sacrifice . That nature of the deity which is called , in the language of technical theology , the Trinity is a mysterious truth . That is , it is a truth with regard to which we know that it is , also to a certain extent what it is , but not how it is . We know that a plant grows from the seed ; we know that it grows but very imperfectly how it grows . We know that bodies attract each

other in inverse ratio of the square
of their distance - We know that
a result takes place but not
in the least how it takes place
'Attraction' is a figure of speech
so the connection of the soul and
body, and of a thousand other
things. So true is it that omne ex
it in mysterium. We may
know that two attributes co-ex-
ist in an entity, but how they
do or can we may be ignorant
A mysterious truth may be
clear in its practical relations
It is thus with the divine son-
ship of Christ. Endowed with
all human sensibilities, ex-
posed to temptation he devotes
himself, in obedience to the will
of God, to the task of bear-
ing witness for him, and with
an absorbing sympathy to the

work of bringing men to repentance".

"Tis mystery all; th' Immortal dies!
Who can explore his strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine!"