

02250

THE HYPOSTATIC UNION

The doctrine stated: "In the incarnation of the Son of God, a human nature was inseparably united forever with the divine nature in the one person of Jesus Christ, yet with the two natures remaining distinct, whole, and unchanged, without mixture or confusion so that the one person, Jesus Christ, is truly God and truly man." 1

Ryrie states the problem that we now face thusly "This concept of the hypostatic or one-person union of the divine and human natures in one Person is probably one of the most difficult concepts to comprehend in theology. Not one of us has ever seen Deity except as the Scriptures reveal God, and not one of us has ever seen perfect humanity except as the Scriptures reveal pre-fallen Adam and our Lord. To try to relate these two concepts to the person of Christ adds complexities to ideas that are in themselves difficult to comprehend." 2

Scripture states the problem:

HE WAS FULLY GOD: "For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the godhead bodily." Col. 2:9

HE WAS FULLY MAN: "Then Joseph...took unto him his wife, And knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born son; and he called his name Jesus." Matt. 1:24-25

Shedd suggests the early church fathers illustration. (Chalcedon and later) They suggest that this union is

similar to iron and heat. The heat can heat the iron but the two will remain heat and iron. Neither loses any of its own properties.

Dr. Miller suggests that Christ's two natures were united, yet they each maintained a separate identity. ³ Others suggest that the two natures were united into one. That one nature was unique in all of eternity past and eternity future.

The union of God and man was complete. There was only one personality. Jesus Christ was the God man. He was not God. He was not man. He was totally God and totally man. This was the merger of two natures into one essence and indeed, one nature.

Some suggest that He had two natures within the one being, yet if you understand the definition of nature, you will realize that a being cannot have two natures.

In short there was no communication between natures for they were one nature.

This union is also referred to by some as the Theanthropic union. The = God and anthro = man. The note should be made however, that this term applies only to the person of Christ and not to His natures. If His natures were theanthropic there would be a mixing of the natures and this is not possible.

Some statements that might clarify what we are talking about.

1. Two natures united without any loss of essential attributes.

2. Each nature maintains essential identity.

3. No loss or transfer of any attribute or property from one nature to another.
4. Christ had both human and divine consciousness.
5. Christ had two areas of desire but one determinative will - that of his divine nature.

We might just take a moment to consider just what his human nature was like. We know that He was completely human but was he "COMPLETELY" human as you and me? The answer is in the physical realm, yes, He was as human as you and me. On the other hand we must consider him on the spiritual level. He did not have a sin nature due to the virgin birth. (The fallen nature descends through Adam and the man. With no human father, there was no sin nature.)

The question comes then, was he totally like Adam was before the fall? The indications are yes. He had no earthly father to transfer the human, fallen nature, so He must be as Adam was before the fall.

Next question. Are there any other differences either spiritually or physically between Christ's humanity and Adam before the fall. I see none.

Pardington states, "The human nature and the divine nature - each in its completeness - are organically and indissolubly united in the one unique person of Jesus Christ."

"Neither the human nor the divine nature acts independently of the other; but in every thought, word, and act both natures are so inseparably united that the thought, word, or act is the product of one single personality." 4

Strong states, "Distinctly as the Scriptures represent Jesus Christ to have been possessed of a divine nature and of a human nature, each unaltered in essence and undivested of its normal attributes and powers, they with equal distinctness represent Jesus Christ as a single undivided personality in whom these two natures are vitally and inseparably united, so that he is properly, not God and man, but the God-man." 5

If you were a disciple walking with Him you would view Christ as one person, as a total - just like any other person. You would not see one day, a man side and the next a glorious side. He is not a Jekel and Hyde - His personality was His personality - no division or difference.

SOME TERMS TO PLAY WITH:

Hypostasis = "the mode of being by which any substantial existence is given an independent and distinct individuality." New Standard Dict. as quoted by Chafer 6

The Hypostatic union is a term unique to Christ and the union of two complete natures.

Nature = Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, "1 a: the inherent character or basic constitution of a person or thing: ESSENCE....." 7

Substance = Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, "1 a: essential nature: ESSENCE....." 8

Essence = Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, "1 a: the permanent as contrasted with the accidental element of being b: the individual, real, or ultimate nature of a thing esp. as opposed to its existence c: the properties or attributes by means of which something can be placed in its proper class or identified as being what it is....." 9

You note that the three are seemingly used as interchangeable.

If you apply this interchangeability to Christ and His natures you will find yourself into some of the misconceptions that we looked at last time.

We need to view nature as the composite of attributes. We need to view substance as the composite of material or immaterial. Jesus was man - material. Christ was God - immaterial.

We need to view essence as the composite of the nature and substance. This would allow us to look at all info and determine that Christ was unique in all of creation and time. He was the God-man.

The Chalcedon Creed of 451 seems to state it quite plainly. "Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; [underlining is the authors] the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the Fathers has handed down to us." 10

The Westminster Confession states it a bit differently.

"The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fulness of time was come, take upon Him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the

Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures - the Godhead and the manhood - were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man" (Chap. viii. sec. 2, cited by Cunningham, HISTORICAL THEOLOGY, 3rd ed., I, 311 as quoted in Chafer. 11

Lutheranism teaches that the attributes of deity could be transferred to the humanity, thus allowing the transference of Christ's omnipresence to the humanity. Christ is thusly seen as omnipresent in His humanity and thusly present in the "Real Presence" in the Lord's Table. 12

Theissen comes very close to this same thought in his Theology. "...Christ is in His people. He is there in His deity; and by the union of His humanity with His Deity, also in His humanity." 13

In His humanity? I'm not sure. I'd say in His divine presence. His body is at the right hand of the Father. I'm not sure I feel comfortable saying his humanity is omnipresent. He is a glorified person, not a person, and that is quite a difference. He is glorified at the Fathers side, not me, or you.

Bancroft also follows this line, "In other words, the attributes of the divine nature are imparted to the human without passing over into its essence - so that the human Christ even on earth had power to be, to know, and to do as God." 14 "without passing over into its essence." "How is that possible?"

The mixing or transference of attributes is impossible for if the infinity of God were transferable to man then would not God be the less and man the more? The thought of transference comes from the idea that Christ did some things as man and some things as God and some things as God-man.

Hodge suggests the following categories. I list them as Ryrie lists them for your information:

"(a) actions predicated on the whole person, like redemption (both natures being involved);

(b) actions predicated on the divine nature (though the whole Person is the subject, like preexistence true only of the divine nature); and

(c) actions predicated on the human nature, like being thirsty." 15

Ryrie summarizes his thought by stating, "Whatever help such a classification may give, it seems more important to remember that the Person does whatever He does, revealing whatever attribute of whichever nature He reveals." 16

The question arises as to whether Christ had one will or two wills.

TWO WILL HOLDERS:

Ryrie

"...it seems to me that every single decision stemmed from either the "will" of His divine nature or the "will" of His human nature or a blending of both, making it proper to think of two "wills." 17

ONE WILL HOLDERS:

Ryrie mentions Walvoord's comment in his book on Christ when speaking of the decision to die on the cross, "here, as in all other cases, the ultimate sovereign will of Christ was to do the Father's will." 18 The conflict of DESIRES as Walvoord puts it was what went on in the garden and not a conflict between

wills. He sees two desires and one will that chooses between those two desires. If the Human desire thirsts and the divine side doesn't thirst the will decides to drink.

Let's list the parts of the Lord in this discussion:

I might add that none of the theologians that I have checked did this, nor did they delve into the area of how many spirit's or souls were present.

1. One body.
2. Two natures. (sets of attributes.)
3. Two substances. (Material and immaterial.)
4. One essence. (Compilation of all that He was.)
5. One personality.

Theissen suggests via a comment by Hodge that there is one personality and that personality is divine. "Christ's personality resides in the divine nature, not the human. Hodge says: As in man the personality is in the soul and not in the body, so the personality of Christ is in the divine nature...It was a divine person, not merely a divine nature, that assumed humanity...." 19

God's personality in man. A personality is all of ones makeup. God plus man would develop into one

personality. That personality would be divine and human. Personality comes from the make up of the parent and the environment of upbringing thus we might assume that Mary and Joseph may have had some input into the personality of Christ.

6. One soul would be my choice at this point in time and that soul being the human soul of Jesus. I am open to instruction on this one.

The above comment by Hodge would suggest only one soul and that, divine. The idea of a human child being born without a soul however is untenable, especially in that He is to be completely and wholly man. We saw in our study on Christ's humanity that Christ had all three parts of man, a body, soul and spirit.

To say that He had a divine soul and human body doesn't compute. Indeed, does a spirit being such as God have a soul? Does God have a soul? Might it be proper to view it as the divine personality coming to be the personality of this human soul that has no existence apart from this union?

This seems to be what Strong suggests, "This possession of two natures does not involve a double personality in the God-man, for the reason that the Logos takes into union with himself, not an individual man with already developed personality, but human nature which has had no separate existence before its union with the divine." 20

7. Two spirits? No, one only and that being the spirit of Jesus.

It may be suggested that there was one divine spirit and no human spirit.

I believe that a child born even in the manner of Jesus would have to be containing all attributes of the human being including not only body, but soul and spirit as well. If this be true then there would have to be two spirits.

No, God is spirit - He doesn't have one. The facts indicate that Christ had one spirit, with one body, and one soul, merged with God, a spirit being.

Might we suggest that rather than two spirits we have complete man, body, soul, and spirit of Jesus united with complete God, Christ?

The fact of souls or spirits is academic, if that. The two complete beings were united in some manner. That is fact of Scripture.

Chafer states that Christ was simply "As other men are threefold in their beings - body, soul and spirit - this incomparable Person is fourfold, namely, Deity, human body, human soul, and human spirit." 21

This eliminates the discussion that we have just had and may well have as much substantiation.

This would be consistent with our definition of essence. That which makes up the being. All of God was merged with all of man. This to me would demand that there be two wills, and that there would be one that was determinative as some theologians suggest and that determinative will would be the divine. (Chafer has good coverage on this section of theology in the full set. Vol. I p 382ff. Strong p 683ff also has a lengthy section on this topic.)

CONCLUSIONS:

1. God has really left us up in the air on this one with very little information other than statement of fact. We might do well to leave it alone, yet there are so many errors that come up from an improper understanding of what was revealed. We need to know what we have covered to be forewarned of some of the false teachings that are around.

2. Our Savior is quite unique in all the world and in all the saviors that have graced our planet. He alone is God-man.

3. Do you have a feel for those that went astray in the early years of the church? They were struggling with these issues and questions and they had no church fathers to refer to, nor commentaries to jog their minds.

I believe what has been covered here is true and that it can help us understand the Scriptures easier. We should know our Savior a little better for having worked through this.

END NOTES:

1. Walter A. Elwell, Ed., "EVANGELICAL DICTIONARY OF THEOLOGY," Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984, p 540

2. Reprinted by permission: Ryrie, Charles C.; "BASIC THEOLOGY"; Wheaton: Victor Books, 1986, p 250

3. Dr. David Miller, Theology notes, Western Baptist College, Salem, OR

4. Rev. George P. Pardington, Ph.D., "OUTLINE STUDIES IN CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE," Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1926, p 237

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6. Lewis Sperry Chafer, "SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY," Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947, vol. 1, p 382
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20. Augustus H. Strong, SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY, Valley Forge, PA: The Judson Press, 1907, p 694
21. Chafer, vol. V p 49

HANDOUT

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The doctrine stated: "In the incarnation of the Son of God, a human nature was inseparably united forever with the divine nature in the one person of Jesus Christ, yet with the two natures remaining distinct, whole, and unchanged, without mixture or confusion so that the one person, Jesus Christ, is truly God and truly man." 1

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HE WAS FULLY MAN: Matt. 1:24-25

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2. Each nature maintains essential identity.
3. No loss or transfer of any attribute or property from one nature to another.
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5. Christ had two areas of desire but one determinative will - that of his divine nature.

SOME TERMS TO PLAY WITH:

Hypostasis

Nature

Substance

Essence

TWO WILLS:

ONE WILL:

1. One body.

2. Two natures.

3. Two substances.

4. One essence.

5. One personality.

6. One soul

7. Two spirits?

CONCLUSIONS:

Study questions:

1. Does it matter if Christ had two wills, or one? Why?

2. Is Christ unlike you, except in His sinlessness? How?

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1. Walter A. Elwell, Ed., "EVANGELICAL DICTIONARY OF THEOLOGY," Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984, p 540

