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A COMPARISON OF THE APOSTOLIC WITH OUR LUTHERAN CONGREGATIONS IN REGARD TO THE LANGUAGE QUESTION.

(By request.)

A practical question of the greatest importance that confronts our Lutheran congregations to-day is the so-called language question. Every one of our German congregations must sooner or later answer the question: "Shall we introduce the English language into our pulpit and school"? Congregations that have already answered this part of the question in the affirmative will soon find it necessary to determine how much English it is expedient to introduce. These questions are more easily asked than answered to the satisfaction of all parties concerned. The experience of centuries teaches that there always will be some who declare themselves most emphatically against any introduction of a new language, who look upon such an innovation as a falling off from the faith of the fathers, as a pandering to syncretism and heresy, and as the ruination of our parochial schools. And if we pastors and teachers, and the members of our congregations do not know what ground and position to occupy when we are confronted by this question, much harm and havoc is likely to result which might have been avoided, if the question had been properly dealt with.

In studying the language question, we find that the first apostolic congregations experienced a transition of language somewhat like the one we are constrained to deal with. If experience is the best teacher, then, most undoubtedly, can we

THE PROOF TEXTS OF THE CATECHISM WITH A PRACTICAL COMMENTARY.

THE SECOND ARTICLE.

(Continued.)

1 Tim. 3, 16: *Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.*

The doctrine of the personal union of the two natures in Christ is a "*confessedly great mystery.*" Paul knows it to be such, and as such he propounds it to Timothy. A mystery transcends all human comprehension. Timothy is not to endeavor to reason out this doctrine; he is simply to accept it in faith. The mystery is this: "*God was manifest in the flesh.*" That says: The invisible God was visible in the flesh. Christ was God invisible from all eternity. By the assumption of the human nature God was so in Christ that He, God, became *manifest*. In the person of Jesus Christ divinity and humanity were so closely united that whosoever saw the man Jesus saw God; whosoever heard the man Jesus speak heard God speak. He was the express image of the invisible God. 'He Himself said: "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father," John 14, 9. "I and my Father are one," John 10, 30. In Christ God became man. *Gerhard*: "The mode of this union is wonderfully unique and uniquely wonderful, transcending the comprehension not only of all men, but even of angels, whence it is called 'without controversy, a great mystery.'"

Though God was manifest in the flesh, though we have a clear revelation of the fact in the Scriptures, still it is a great mystery and will continue to be such to the end of time.— But it is a blessed mystery, for it is a mystery of *godliness*. Where this mystery of the God-man, the doctrine of His person and work, is unknown or rejected, godliness cannot exist; but where it is preached and believed, true godliness is generated. "Every spirit which confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God; whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him, and he in God," 1 John 4, 2. 15.

Col. 2, 9: *In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.*

The context shows that this passage speaks of Christ. "In Him" therefore says: in Christ, in this theanthropic person. According to what nature does it speak of Christ? This the word *dwells* indicates. "The fullness of the Godhead" would not be said to *dwell* in the Son of God as such, because the Son is God in the fullest sense of the term. Hence it is the Son of Man, the *human* Christ, of whom this text primarily speaks. What does it say? "The fullness of the Godhead" dwells in this *man* Jesus Christ. The *Godhead*, ἡ θεότης, that is: *the being God, the divine essence, the deity, Gottheit.* (ἡ θεότης is to be distinguished from ἡ θεϊότης, *the divine quality, divinity, Goettlichkeit.*) — So the θεότης, the divine essence, dwells in Christ, not in part only, but the *fullness*, the plenitude of the essence of God, and as if that were not strong enough, the apostle adds: *all* the fullness of the divine essence undivided and entire dwells in the man Christ. How does it dwell in Christ? *Bodily.* The human body of Christ is the temple which "all the fullness of the Godhead" has made its dwelling-place. — "The entire fullness of the divinity dwells in Christ, not as in other holy men and angels, but bodily, as in its own body, so that, with all its majesty, power, glory, and efficacy, it shines forth in the assumed human nature of Christ, when and as He wills, and in, with, and through it exerts its divine power, glory, and efficacy, as the soul does in the body and fire in glowing iron." (*Formula of Concord.*)

Truly, if the stupendous mystery that the man Jesus Christ is at the same time very God, "over all God" (Rom. 9, 5), can be expressed by the medium of human language, this passage, Col. 2, 9, beyond a doubt expresses it.

Is. 9, 6: *Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.*

“Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel,” Is. 7, 14. Of this Immanuel, Christ, the present passage speaks. — The *son* of the virgin is a *child* like other children, a child with flesh and blood. And still He is unlike other children in this, that He is said not so much to be born unto his parents, but *unto us*, a son *given unto us*. This child is a gift of the Father to the world. He is a unique child, for “the government shall be upon His shoulder.” What government? The *government* in its widest and fullest sense, the government of the world. This Child, from the moment of His birth, is the Ruler and the Preserver of the world. It is He to whom all power is given in heaven and in earth, Matt. 28, 18. His name is *Wonderful*. Indeed, wonderful is His person — He is man and God. Aye, directly He is called: *The Mighty God*. This child in the manger, helpless like other children, is at the same time The Mighty God!¹⁾ “Without controversy great is the mystery: God was manifest in the flesh.”

Matt. 28, 18: *All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.*

Though by virtue of the personal union the two natures in Christ are inseparably united, still they are distinct. Though distinct, but being inseparably united, “each of the two natures,” in the language of the Catechism, “partakes of the properties of the other.” — We turn our attention, first, to Matt. 28, 18. The speaker is the visible, palpable Christ, the God-man. This person is the “*me*” of whom the text speaks. What is the

1) “The translation of this name [אֱלֹהִים בְּרִי] is, as Gesenius remarks, ‘almost a criterion whether the translator is a Christian or a non-Christian.’ The Septuagint translates: *ισχυρός, ἐξουσιαστής*, Aquila and Symmachus: *ισχυρός δυνατός*, Theodoret: *ισχυρός δυνάστης*. Luther, too, who, as no other theologian, lauds and extols the Messiah of prophecy as the God of Israel, as the Lord Jehovah, has translated: “Kraft,” “Held.” But in 1542 he adopted the translation of the Vulgate: *Deus fortis*. *Deus fortis*, starker Gott, mighty God: that is the only correct rendering of this name.” (Stoeckhardt, *Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah*, p. 120.)

assertion made? He possesses "*all power in heaven and in earth.*" "*All power*" clearly is omnipotence, and omnipotence is an *essential* attribute of God. This person Christ, who is man as well as God, possesses "*all power.*" Manifestly He speaks by preeminence of His *human* nature, for He says: this power is *given* to me. "There is a unanimously received rule of the entire ancient orthodox Church, that whatever Holy Scripture testifies that Christ received in time He received not according to the divine nature,—for, according to this nature, He has everything from eternity,—but the person has received it in time, by reason of, and with respect to, the assumed human nature." (*Formula of Concord.*) So when we read of Christ: "All power is *given* unto me," this says: the *human* nature has received "*all power,*" the *man* Christ is almighty.—The divine nature in Christ possesses omnipotence as an *essential* attribute, but this essential attribute, by virtue of the personal union of the two natures, becomes a *communicated* attribute of the human nature. In other words, omnipotence is and remains a property of the divine nature; it is not transferred to, or infused into, the human nature. The human nature *per se* does not become omnipotent. To say that would be tantamount to asserting that the human nature has become the divine nature; but the human nature, being united with the divine, partakes of this divine attribute. Suppose the impossible. If at any time the human nature in Christ were separated from the divine, the human nature would not possess the attribute ascribed to it in the text, *viz.*, omnipotence, because it is not endowed therewith as an attribute properly its own.

Matt. 28, 20: *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.*

Let us again note of whom the assertion is made. The personal pronoun "I" designates the whole person. This "I" is both human and divine. Of this "I," of His whole person, Christ predicates omnipresence when He says: "*I am with*

you always, even unto the end of the world." The divine nature in Christ possesses it as an *essential* attribute; the human nature *partakes* of it in virtue of its personal union with the divine. Christ is with us according to both natures. (For further comment on this passage cf. THEOL. QUART., vol XII, p. 249.)

Acts 3, 15: *Ye killed the Prince of Life.*

Peter speaks of God's Son Jesus, the Holy One and the Just, whom the Jews had crucified. He is here named after His divine nature: *The Prince of Life*. Of this person something human is predicated: *Ye killed Him*. To be *killed*, to *die*, however, can be said of the human nature only, but it is here ascribed to the whole person. The Prince of Life, *i. e.*, God, ye killed. This is biblical language. Hence the poet's wail: "O sorrow dread, our God is dead!" rests on a Scriptural basis. We do not say: the Godhead has died, or God died according to His Godhead, but this dying happened to Christ who is God as well as man. Christ was put to death after the flesh. The divine nature partakes of the property of the human nature. — "If I believe that the human nature only has suffered for me, I have a Savior of little value. . . . It is the person that suffers and dies. Now the person is true God; therefore it is rightly said: 'The Son of God suffers.' For although the divinity does not suffer, yet the person who is God suffers in His humanity. For the person, the person, I say, was crucified in His humanity. In His own nature God cannot die; but now God and man are united in one person, so that the expression 'God's death' is correct, when the man dies who is one thing or one person with God." (*Formula of Concord.*)

1 John 1, 7: *The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.*

Again the person of the Savior is named after His divine nature: "*His Son*," God's Son. But this God's Son is at the same time "*Jesus*," Mary's son. Mary's son has flesh and blood, but, Mary's son being God's Son, this property of having

blood is ascribed to the whole person. And because it is God's blood, it has the power to *cleanse us from all sin*. —

A brief review of the doctrine of the Person of Christ seems to be in place here. — As we have seen, the Son of God assumed the impersonal human nature into His already existing divine person. "The Word became flesh," "God was manifest in the flesh" — such and other dicta of Scripture prove the *personal union*. From this personal union flows the *communication of natures*, *i. e.*, the interpenetration, the mutual permeation — *περιχώρησις* — of the natures. Glue two pieces of wood together and they may be said to be united — externally, but there is no internal, no organic union. Soul and body in man constitute the person. The union of these two is a *personal union*. Where the soul is, there is also the body, and vice versa. Likewise, where the divine nature in Christ is, there is also the human, and vice versa. Owing to this personal union the so-called *Personal Propositions* are true: "God is man," and, "Man is God," John 1, 14; 1 Tim. 3, 16, etc. Furthermore, from this personal union and the resultant communication of natures follows the *impartation of their attributes, or properties*. Each of the two natures partakes of the properties of the other. In Dogmatics this is known as the *Communicatio Idiomatum*. It is threefold: 1. *Genus idiomaticum*; 2. *Genus majesticum*; 3. *Genus apotelesmaticum*.

1. The *Genus idiomaticum* consists in this, that the properties of the two natures are ascribed to the *whole person*. Christ is but one person — a human-divine person. The analogy of the union of soul and body may help somewhat in making the meaning clear. *Thinking* is an essential property of the soul; still one does not say: "My *soul* thinks," but "I think." To be hungry is an essential property of the body; but one does not say: "My *body* is hungry," but "I am hungry." In both cases the subject is "I," which pronoun designates the *whole person*. Apply this to the two natures constituting the one person Christ. *To possess all power, e. g.*, is an essential property of the *divine* nature, hence there is no difficulty in

understanding the proposition: "*The Son of God is almighty.*" But this Son of God is at the same time *man*; hence the proposition is equally true: "*The son of Mary is almighty.*" *To die* is an essential attribute of the *human* nature; but since this dying happened to this person who is God as well as man, it is just as true to say: "God died," "the Prince of Life was killed," God, "the Lord of glory, was crucified" (Acts 3, 15; 1 Cor. 2, 8), as it is to say: "The son of Mary died, the son of Mary was killed, was crucified." The person remains the same, whether He is named after His divine or His human nature. — Other dicta of this genus are: "The Son of God was born of a woman;" "the son of Mary was before Abraham."

2. *Genus majesticum.* The very name indicates this genus to be one-sided. Majesty is possessed by the divine nature only as an *essential* attribute. Hence the divine nature only can communicate majesty. The second kind of communication therefore consists therein, that *the divine nature communicates its properties to the human.* The human nature thereby does not become divine, but remains truly human, and the divine nature does not lose its attributes, but remains truly divine. The sun, by sending its rays through the universe, does not thereby lose its essence. — The *essential* attributes of the divine nature become *communicated* attributes of the human nature. The *Formula of Concord*, quoted above, alludes to two analogies often used by our forbears. Soul and body are intimately united and constitute one person. *Life*, an *essential* attribute of the soul, becomes a *communicated* attribute of the body. Of the whole person we say: He lives. The soul acts through the body in which it dwells. By virtue of this union the eye sees, the ear hears, the nose smells. In death the soul is separated from the body. Though still possessing eyes, ears, hands, etc., it can as little use them as could a lifelike marble statue of the person. — Again, an essential attribute of iron is that it is *heavy*; of fire, that it is *hot*. Iron in itself is not hot, nor is fire heavy, but conjoin the two, as in the case of a red-hot iron poker, and we have an interpenetration of attributes.

Of this poker we may properly say that it is both hot and heavy. The essential attribute of fire becomes a communicated attribute of the iron, and the essential attribute of the iron — its weight — is partaken of by this fire. — Still another analogy. Wire in itself is not electric. Connect it with a dynamo and it becomes a "live" wire; shut off the electric current and it is a "dead" wire. "*Life*," a quality it does not possess in itself, has been communicated to the wire by means of the electric battery. Thus the human nature in Christ *per se* is not omniscient or omnipotent, but by virtue of the personal union the properties of the divine nature are imparted to it.

To the above analogies we would add the caution: *Omne simile claudicat*. In our efforts to make this doctrine somewhat apprehendable, we must never forget: it is and will remain "a confessedly great mystery," which we are simply to believe as the Scriptures declare.

3. *Genus apotelesmaticum*. The Greek word *apotelesma*, from which this genus takes its name, signifies an official act. According to this genus, Christ, in the works of His office, acts not through one nature alone, but through both natures, each nature performing what is *proper* to itself, in *communion* with the other. Passages illustrating this kind of communication may call for consideration later. (See Gal. 4, 4. 5; 1 John 3, 8; Gen. 3, 15; Luke 9, 56.)

Springfield, Ill.

LOUIS WESSEL.

(To be continued.)