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The Active Obedience of Christ

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marken ihres Wohnens gesetzt, hat bestimmt, „wie weit sie wohnen sollen“. Meyer-Bendt denkt bei „Zeiten“ an die regelmäßig wechselnden Jahreszeiten, Act. 14, 17, und bei Grenzen an die natürlichen Grenzen (geographische Gebirge, Flüsse und Meere); Nösgen denkt an die „Zeiten der Heiden“, Luk. 21, 24, noch andere an die Perioden der inneren Staatsentwicklung, Baumgarten an die bei Daniel bestimmten Weltepochen; aber das alles hätte genauer gesagt werden müssen. Der allgemeine Ausdruck „Zeiten“ ist schon verständlich genug. So hat Gott von Anfang an das Völkerverleben der Menschheit bestimmt und geleitet, Hiob 12, 23, und hat dabei ganz bestimmte, heilwärtige Absichten gehabt. Diese Absichten Gottes und was sich daraus ergibt, wird dann im nächsten, abschließenden Artikel Gegenstand der Ausführung sein.

L. F.

The Active Obedience of Christ.

Being asked to discuss this important doctrine in the *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, we would, first of all, call attention to the comprehensive treatise of the subject contained in the *Christliche Dogmatik*, Vol. II, pp. 446—453. The matter is there presented substantially as follows:—

The vicarious satisfaction rendered by Christ includes, besides His suffering and death, His fulfilment of the divine Law given to man in place of man (*loco hominum*). In other words, in order to satisfy the divine justice, Christ not only bore the penalty of man's disobedience of the Law, but also rendered in His holy life that obedience to the Law which man is obligated to render, but does not render (active obedience of Christ, *obedientia Christi activa*). As our guilt and punishment was imputed to Christ, so also our obligation to keep God's Law (*γενόμενος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν κατὰρα — γενόμενος ὑπὸ νόμον, ἵνα τοὺς ὑπὸ νόμον ἐξαγοράσῃ*, Gal. 3, 13; 4, 4. 5). In treating of the redemption, some have kept the active obedience in the background, while others have denied outright that it belongs to the vicarious satisfaction. Anselm (*Cur Deus Homo*, II, 11) excluded it on the ground that Christ was bound to yield this obedience for His own sake—“*omnis enim rationalis creatura debet hanc obedientiam Deo.*” (It should be pointed out, however, that, when Anselm permitted his faith and heart to speak, he abandoned his scholastic theory. When he prays: “I refused to obey; but Thou, through Thy obedience, didst expiate for my disobedience; I caroused, Thou didst suffer thirst,” he distinctly included the active obedience of Christ in His vicarious satisfaction.) The Lutheran superintendent George Karg (Parsimonius), misapplying the proposition (which indeed lends itself to misapplication) that “the Law obligates either to obedience or to punishment, not to both at once,” argued that, “since Christ

bore the *punishment* for us, He *rendered the obedience for Himself.*" (His thesis aroused a general protest; he was brought to see his error and retracted in 1570.) A number of Reformed theologians, in particular John Piscator († 1625), held that Christ, as a human being, was required to render the active obedience. Modern theologians in general deny that Christ fulfilled the Law given to *man* in man's stead, insisting that His obedience consisted solely in His willing assumption of the Saviorship and of the *suffering* attending upon the performance of His office in the midst of sinful humanity. (See *Lehre u. Wehre*, 1896, p. 137. On the modern "vocational obedience" see Nitzsch-Stephan, pp. 557 ff.) The *πρώτον ψεύδος* of this position lies in placing the "vocational obedience" and the obedience which Christ rendered the Law given to *man*, in place of man, in *opposition*.

The Formula of Concord teaches clearly and distinctly that the *obedientia Christi activa* is an integral part of the vicarious work of Christ. It states: "Since Christ is not man alone, but God and man in one undivided person, He was as little *subject to the Law* [that is, obligated to keep the Law, *legi subiectus*], because He is the Lord of the Law, as He *had to suffer and die*, as far as His person is concerned. For this reason, then, His obedience, not only in suffering and dying, but also in this, *that He in our stead was voluntarily made under the Law and fulfilled it by His obedience*, is imputed to us for righteousness, so that on account of this *complete* obedience, which He rendered His heavenly Father for us by *doing and suffering*, in *living and dying*, God forgives our sins, regards us as godly and righteous, and eternally saves us." (*Trigl.*, p. 919 f.) The view that the *obedientia Christi* must be limited to "the *voluntary* assumption of the suffering" is here explicitly rejected.

What the Formula of Concord teaches is taught clearly in *Scripture*. In Gal. 4, 4. 5 two things are brought out distinctly: 1) The Law spoken of is the Law given to *mankind*; "Law" cannot mean the "saving will" of God, which was to be executed, not by men, but by Christ. 2) Christ was put under *this* Law which was given to men, and He fulfilled it in order to redeem mankind. Philippi, on Gal. 4, 4. 5: "Israel was under the ordinances of the *nomos*, bound to keep them; accordingly the redemptive work of Christ must be viewed as a substitutionary fulfilment of the Law." *Stoekhardt*: "The Law to which Israel was subject is the sum of all that God demands of man, specifically of Israel, of all that God would have man do or omit. And it is just *this* Law under which Christ also was put. And Christ assumed the obligation, that is, he fulfilled all commandments of God. And it was precisely *this* obedience which made for our redemption." (*L. u. W.*, 1896, p. 137.) We also insist with most of the old theologians that Matt. 5, 17 is

a proof-text for the *obedientia Christi activa*. "Τὸν νόμον πληρῶσαι, to fulfil the Law," cannot mean to fulfil it "by teaching"; the words will not bear such a limitation. Again, it is arbitrary to restrict the *δικαίωμα* of Rom. 5, 18 to the obedience exhibited by Christ's voluntary assumption of the suffering. Over against the *παράπτωμα*, the transgression, of Adam is placed the *δικαίωμα*, the righteous behavior, of Christ, that by which Christ, unlike Adam, approved Himself *righteous*, the *obedience* of Christ (*ἑπακοή*, v. 19) without any limitation. Quenstedt: "*Δικαίωμα ὀρρονιτὺρ παραπτώματι. Ὑτ ἐργο παράπτωμα ἐστ ἀνομιὰ, ἰτὰ δικαίωμα vi oppositionis ἐστ ἔννομία, . . . actio ἔννομος seu activa Christi obedientia.*" Modern theologians are guilty of a flagrant *petitio principii* in this matter. They *assume* that the fulfilment of the Law by Christ does not belong to His execution of the divine "counsel of salvation." But first of all it must be ascertained from Scripture what the "counsel of salvation" *comprises*. And according to Scripture the execution of the "counsel of salvation" required not only the obedience Christ exhibited in assuming the *suffering*, but also the vicarious obedience of life, the fulfilment of the positive demands of the Law in place of man. The righteousness of Christ's life is therefore not merely *exemplary* (it is indeed that, too, 1 Pet. 2, 21), not merely a *prerequisite for the passive obedience* (it is that, too, inasmuch as only the death of a perfectly holy one has expiatory value, 1 Pet. 1, 19), but it is also an essential part of the payment which Christ vicariously rendered unto the just God for the reconciliation of mankind.

The Scripture doctrine of the active obedience of Christ has also a most important *practical* bearing. The following exposition of Luther shows how deeply it affects the life of faith. "He satisfied the Law, He fulfilled the Law in every way; for He loved God with all His heart, with all His soul, with all His strength, with all His mind, and His neighbor as Himself. . . . Therefore, when the Law comes and accuses you that you have not kept it, bid it go to Christ and say: There is the man who has kept it; to Him I cling; He fulfilled it for me and gave His fulfilment to me. Thus the Law is silenced." (Erl. Ed., 15, 61. 63.) We have pointed out already how Anselm practised in his life of faith what he denied in theory.

Against this doctrine the following objections have been raised. I. Christ, being a true man, was bound to yield obedience to the Law; therefore this obedience cannot form a part of the vicarious satisfaction. *Answer:* This assertion involves the denial of the personal union (*unio personalis*) of God and man in Christ. Through the personal union the human nature was taken into the person of the Son of God and is consequently as little under the Law as the person of the Son of God is. By assuming the human nature, the Son of God was not made subject to the Law; rather was the human nature,

through the personal union, made to share in the lordship of the divine person over the Law. Christ was indeed made *under* the Law, but not by virtue of the incarnation in itself; it was rather the result of a special act, which indeed was coincident with the incarnation in point of time, but differed from it in point of fact. God *made* His Son, and His Son *put Himself*, under the Law for man and for man's redemption, Gal. 4, 4, 5; Ps. 40, 7—9. In this manner an obedience to the Law (δικαίωμα, ὑπακοή, Rom. 5, 18, 19) has been achieved by Christ which is available for man. While yet in the state of humiliation, Christ explicitly declared that He, in His person, was *above* the Law, Matt. 12, 8. Quenstedt says on this point (II, 407): "*Obicit Piscator: Christus ut verus homo tenebatur obedire Deo Creatori; pro se igitur activam obedientiam legi praestitit. Eodem modo Socinus ait. . . . Respondeo: 1. Filius hominis est Dominus Sabbathi et sic etiam totius legis. 2. Si Christus esset υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου, obstrictus fuisset legi; iam vero in unitate personae est verus Deus, proinde sui ratione non fuit legi obstrictus. Ἠρώτων πρῆδος huius argumenti, adeoque erroris huius universi consistit in eo, quod actiones et passiones Christi considerantur, ac si essent tantum naturae humanae actiones et passiones; atqui persona est, quae agit et patitur. Obedientia Christi non est naturae tantum humanae actio, sed Christi θεαρθρώπου, qui ut nobis natus et datus, Es. 9, 9, ita et pro nobis sub lege factus, Gal. 4, 4.*"

II. It is asserted that Scripture ascribes the redemption of man to the shedding of the blood of Christ, to the *obedientia passiva*. *Answer:* It does indeed, but not *exclusively*. While certain passages, for instance, 1 Pet. 1, 19; Col. 1, 14, place the *obedientia passiva* in the foreground, other passages, for instance, Rom. 5, 18, 19; Ps. 40, 7—9, ascribe redemption to the *obedientia activa*. Neither the former nor the latter passages are therefore to be understood *exclusive*. Gerhard (*De Iustif.*, § 55 sqq.): "*Quamvis in pluribus Scripturae dictis morti et effusioni sanguinis Christi redemptionis opus tribuatur, id tamen haudquaquam exclusive accipiendum, ac si sancta Christi vita ab opere redemptionis per hoc excludatur; sed ideo illud fieri existimandum, quia nusquam illuxit clarius, quod nos dilexit ac redemit Dominus, quam in ipsius passione, morte ac vulneribus, ut loquuntur pii veteres; et quia mors Christi est velut ultima linea ac complementum, τέλος, finis et perfectio, totius obedientiae, sicut apostolus inquit Phil. 2, 8. Quid? Quod plane αδύνατον est, activam obedientiam a passiva in hoc merito separare.*" Quenstedt (II, 351 sq.): "*AGENDO CULPAM, quam homo iniuste commiserat, expiavit, et PATIENDO POENAM, quam homo iuste perpessus erat, Christus sustulit. . . . Quia enim non tantum ab ira Dei, iusti Iudicis, liberandus erat homo, sed et, ut coram Deo posset consistere, iustitia ei opus erat, quam, nisi impleta lege, consequi non poterat: ideo Christus utrumque in*

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se suscepit et non tantum passus est pro nobis, sed et legi in omnibus satisfecit, ut haec ipsius impletio et obedientia in iustitiam nobis imputaretur."

III. It is further objected that full satisfaction was rendered the divine justice by means of the *obedientia passiva*; God would be demanding *too much* if He exacted not only the payment, on the part of Christ, of the penalty for the transgression of the Law, but also the positive fulfilment of the Law; *lex obligat vel ad obedientiam vel ad poenam*. *Answer*: This objection, which, forsaking Scriptural ground, would settle the matter on *the ground of reason*, does not even square with reason. Even in human law the *suffering of the penalty* for the transgression of the law is not equivalent to the *fulfilment* of the law, to the *conformitas cum lege*. The fact that the thief pays the legal penalty for his crime does not restore to him the name of a law-abiding citizen, as of one who has never stolen. Much less is the suffering of the penalty a fulfilment of the Law in the sight of *God*. Are the damned, who are suffering the punishment of their transgression of the Law in hell, thereby fulfilling the Law of God, the sum of which is to love God with all the heart and the neighbor as oneself? The intent of the proposition: *Lex obligat vel ad obedientiam vel ad poenam* is to enforce the truth that man cannot with impunity refuse obedience to the Law. This canon does not cover the case where the Law has been transgressed. In this case, in the case of *fallen* man, the rule applies: *Lex obligat et ad poenam et ad obedientiam*. (See Quenstedt, II, 407 sq.)

IV. A final objection is made in the interest of morality: If men believed that Christ fulfilled the Law in their stead, they would no longer apply themselves to the observance of the Law. *Answer*: The same argument would apply to the *obedientia passiva* with equal force. We would have to deny that Christ in His suffering paid the penalty of our sins, because men under that teaching would no longer fear hell and repent. No one will raise this objection who is at all acquainted with Christianity, the Christian "experience," as described Rom. 6, 1 ff.

The charge made by modern theologians that the old theologians overlooked the intimate connection of the *obedientia activa* and *passiva*, disrupting them through a *mechanical* juxtaposition, is but another of the many current misrepresentations of the teaching of the old theologians. Compare Gerhard's statement quoted above: "*Quid? Quod plane advarior est, activam obedientiam a passiva in hoc merito separare.*" And see particularly Quenstedt, II, 407. Thus, in substance, Dr. Pieper, *l. c.*

Additional confessional statements may be found in the Formula of Concord, *Sol. Decl.*, Art. III, §§ 4. 22. 56. 58; Art. VI, § 7.

It will serve a good purpose to submit some quotations from other

Lutheran dogmaticians of the present day. H. E. Jacobs, *A Summary of the Christian Faith*, p. 172 f.: "By what means was the satisfaction of Christ rendered? By His obedience to the Law, Rom. 5, 19. How has this been confessionally stated? Formula of Concord, Art. III, § 15. What two factors are comprised in this obedience? It has been divided into the active and the passive obedience. What is the active obedience? Christ's perfect compliance with all the requirements of the Law, Moral, Ceremonial, and Forensic. . . . Matt. 5, 17; Gal. 4, 4, 5; Rom. 10, 4. This can be illustrated by a careful study of the history of His life in the gospels, in which He will be seen to have done fully all that the Law demanded and to have abstained entirely from all that it prohibited. . . . Was this subjection to the Law rendered that He might Himself win the rewards? No. For personally He not only was the Lord of the Law, but already possessed all things. Personally He could not acquire righteousness for Himself, as He already had it. All the merit and reward belongs therefore to those for whom He was vicariously under the Law, Phil. 3, 9; Rom. 1, 17. . . . Can the active and passive obedience be separated? Only in thought. They are the positive and negative sides of the same thing. Man could have no righteousness with the guilt of sin reckoned to him and its penalties impending. By His passive obedience Christ transfers all the penalties to Himself and endures them; by His active obedience a righteousness is provided in which the guilt of sin disappears as night flees before the rising of the sun or man's shame and nakedness are covered by a spotless robe." C. E. Lindberg, *Christian Dogmatics*, p. 261 f.: "The whole life of Christ was one of active and passive obedience, although His suffering culminated toward the end. He not only suffered for our sins that we might be liberated from punishment; through His active obedience He procured a righteousness which He Himself did not need and which therefore redounded to the benefit of mankind in the determined way. This righteousness was the fruit of His active and passive obedience."

It will also serve a good purpose to quote some Reformed dogmaticians. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II, p. 494: "The work of Christ was therefore of the nature of a satisfaction to the demands of the Law. By His obedience and sufferings, by His whole righteousness, active and passive, He, as our Representative and Substitute, did and endured all that the Law demands." P. 517: "Redemption from the bondage of the Law includes not only deliverance from its penalty, but also from the obligation to satisfy its demands. . . . The Law demands, and from the nature of God must demand, perfect obedience. It says, Do this and live; and, 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the Book of the Law to do them.' No man since the Fall is able to fulfil these

demands, yet he must fulfil them or perish. The only possible method according to the Scriptures by which men can be saved is that they should be delivered from this obligation of perfect obedience. This, the apostle teaches, has been effected by Christ. He was 'made under the Law to redeem them that were under the Law.'" A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. 390: "The Scriptures teach that Christ obeyed and suffered in our stead to satisfy an immanent demand of the divine holiness and thus remove an obstacle in the divine mind to the pardon and restoration of the guilty." P. 409: "To this theory [the Anselmic] we make the following objections: . . . (b) In its eagerness to maintain the atoning efficacy of Christ's passive obedience, the active obedience, quite as clearly expressed in Scripture, is well-nigh lost sight of."

We shall now examine the proposition: Scripture teaches that our redemption was effected solely through the death of Jesus on the cross; Scripture nowhere states that the holy life of Jesus belongs to His vicarious satisfaction. In discussing this proposition, which is identical with the second objection noted above, we shall be covering the same ground as before; but that will serve to emphasize the truths there presented and will give occasion to expand some of the supporting statements.

It should be noted, in the first place, that the gospels make much of the holy life of the Savior. The point is stressed that Christ complied with the Law in every way. He was circumcised and presented in the Temple "according to that which is said in the Law of the Lord," Luke 2, 24. He was subject unto His parents, Luke 2, 52. He paid the Temple-tax and observed the Passover and the other prescribed feasts. He honored the high priest and the civil magistrates. He kept the First Commandment, Matt. 4, 4—10. His entire life was given to the observance of the law of love, to obeying His Father and serving His fellow-men. Christ, too, makes much of His fulfilment of the Law. "Even as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." John 15, 10. "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" John 8, 46. The inspired writers, in reporting on Christ's obedience at such length, make of it a most important matter. If it did not belong to His mediatorial work, it was not of supreme, but only of secondary, importance. It would seem to bring an element of incongruity into the Gospel-story to give a matter which in itself has no redemptive value such prominence. One would presume that the holy life of Jesus is described so minutely because the story of the *Savior* is being told. This presumption is strengthened when right at the beginning of the Gospel, in the first chapter of the first gospel, we meet the statement: "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." **Mary's Son is to be known as the Savior from the day of His con-**

ception on. In fact, the rejoicing over the work of salvation set in, not on the day of the crucifixion, but on the day of His birth. Men and angels praised God, not that there would be, but that there *was*, peace on earth, Luke 2, 10—20. Most of this is, to be sure, only presumptive evidence. But it yields food for thought, and in the light of the incontrovertible proof to be adduced in the following it becomes evident that Matt. 1, 21 is an apt motto for the *entire* Gospel-story.

In discussing, in the second place, these incontrovertible proof-texts, we naturally begin with Gal. 4, 4. 5. Enough has been said on this text in the foregoing expositions. But it will bear repetition. Gal. 4, 4. 5 disposes of the contention that Scripture nowhere teaches that redemption was procured by the holy life of Jesus. All hinges on the meaning of the phrase "made under the Law," and one hesitates to write down the platitude that, whatever else it may mean, it certainly means that Christ, in being made subject to the Law, was put under the obligation to keep it. If it means that when applied to men, it certainly means the same when applied to Christ, because the identical phrase is used in the same verse with reference to mankind and to Christ as applying equally to both. It will not do to say that in the case of man it means subjection to the requirements and to the penalties of the Law, but in Christ's case subjection only to the penalties. Again, the apostle is using the phrase "under the Law" synonymously with the phrase "in bondage under the elements of the world," v. 2, and the meaning of that is brought out in v. 10: "Ye observe days and months and times and years." "Under the Law" describes the condition of those who are bound by the provisions of the Law, provisions imposing not exclusively penalties, but also duties. And, finally, they who prefer to remain "under the Law," v. 21, have in mind primarily the duties imposed by the Law. Gal. 4, 4. 5 teaches that "the Son of God took upon Him our nature and our duties" (*Exp. Gr. N. T.*) to redeem us, to render satisfaction for our non-fulfilment of our duties. Luther: "In order that we may the better understand how Christ was put under the Law, we should know that He placed Himself under it in a twofold way. First, under the works of the Law: He suffered Himself to be circumcised, sacrificed, and purified in the Temple; He obeyed His father and mother, and the like, though He was not obliged to do so; for He was the Lord of all laws. But He did it voluntarily. . . . Secondly, He voluntarily put Himself under the pains and penalties of the Law. He not only performed the acts He was not obliged to perform, but He also suffered, willingly, and innocently, the punishment," etc. (XII, 235.) This one text is sufficient to dispose of the claim that Scripture *nowhere* states that the holy life of Jesus belongs to His vicarious satisfaction. But it will be profitable to study some of the other passages of the same import. E.