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PERSONAL UNION BARTH, BRUNNER, BERKOUWER; Lobien; S.T.M., 1961

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**THE PERSONAL UNION IN THE THEOLOGY OF
BARTH, BRUNNER AND BERKOUWER**

**A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology**

by
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May 1961

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I.	Introduction	1
	Statement of the	
	importance of the study	1
	Outline of the study	2
	Methodology	4
	Administrative	4
	Assumptions and scope	5
II.	The Development of the Philosophy of	7
	William	7
	His philosophy in general	7
	James Ford, its development	11
	William's view of God and	11
	The nature of the person and nature in	
	William's	14
	William's view of philosophy	15
	The development of William's	16
	philosophy	16
	William's	17
III.	The Philosophy of James Ford	17
	Introduction	17
	William's philosophy	18
	James Ford's view of	19
	James Ford's view of	19
	William's philosophy	20
IV.	The Philosophy of James Ford	20
	Introduction	20
	The doctrine of the Trinity	21
	The doctrine of the Virgin Mary	21
	The doctrine of Jesus Christ	21
	The doctrine of the Holy Spirit	21
	Considerations of Revelation	21
	The doctrine of the Holy Eucharist	21
	The doctrine of the Holy Communion	21
V.	Summary and conclusions	20
	Definition of the concept of	20
	A critique of William's	20
	A critique of James Ford's	20
	A critique of William's	20
	A critique of James Ford's	20
	Summary	20

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. PROLEGOMENA	1
Statement of the Problem	1
Importance of the Study	1
Limitations of the Study	2
Thesis Arrangement	4
Methodology Employed	4
An Overview of the Study	5
II. THE PERSONAL UNION IN THE THEOLOGY OF BERKOUWER	7
Distinctively Calvinistic	7
Jesus Christ is True God	8
Jesus Christ is True Man	11
The Union of the Human and Divine in Christ	14
Ecumenicity of Christology	18
The Communication of Attributes	19
<u>Extra-calvinisticum</u>	25
<u>Incognito Theories</u>	27
III. THE PERSONAL UNION IN THE THEOLOGY OF KARL BARTH	30
Calvinism Modified	30
Jesus Christ as True God	32
Jesus Christ as True Man	34
<u>Extra-calvinisticum</u>	42
<u>Communicatio Idiomatum</u>	45
IV. THE PERSONAL UNION IN THE THEOLOGY OF EMIL BRUNNER	50
The Doctrine of the Trinity	50
The Doctrine of the Virgin Birth	51
The Humanity of Jesus Christ	54
The Deity of Jesus Christ	60
Implications of Revelation	63
The Doctrine of the Two Natures	65
The <u>Communicatio Idiomatum</u>	67
V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	70
Definition of the Concept Personal Union	70
A Critique of Berkouwer's Theology	72
A Critique of Barth's Theology	75
A Critique of Brunner's Theology	80
BIBLIOGRAPHY	84

CHAPTER I

PROLEGOMENA

Statement of the Problem

The problem about to be investigated is whether or not G. C. Berkouwer, Karl Barth and Emil Brunner teach a personal union of the two natures in our Lord Jesus Christ. Or, to state it more comprehensibly, if they claim to teach a personal union of the two natures, we then propose to uncover exactly what they mean by the use of this term. Furthermore, throughout the study we shall attempt to indicate to the reader the areas of agreement and disagreement among these three outstanding Reformed theologians. Lastly, it must be admitted in all candor that our appraisal of their theological opinion will be given from a traditional Lutheran viewpoint.

Importance of the Study

Certainly little validation should be required of any subject which deals with the heart and core of theology-- Jesus Christ. However, I feel that there are certain features which make this study particularly important and rewarding. The first stems from the fact that such a study of this exact nature has never been done before to the knowledge of this author. This fact by itself might seem insignificant if the subject were not the personal

union of our Lord Jesus Christ and the theological systems of three such outstanding Reformed theologians as Berkouwer, Barth and Brunner.

Ultimately practically any area of theology can be related to the personal union of the two natures in Jesus Christ, but we immediately recognize the importance of this subject for such fundamental things as the atonement and the reconciliation of sinful mankind to God. Barth and Brunner will especially remind us of the importance of the personal union for a correct understanding of revelation also.

There is another concern which makes this subject pertinent and this might be labeled "ecumenical" in nature. In an age when we are being pressed to accept such abbreviated and fundamental affirmations such as, "Jesus is Lord," it seems extremely important that we should understand just what is being confessed by such a statement. This study will help us understand what at least three theologians of repute mean by it.

Limitations of the Study

The very nature of the study forces me to limit myself almost exclusively to the works of the men in question themselves. This is helpful in that the author is not so likely to be influenced by the thoughts of others in the area being treated. It is always interesting, however, to be able to offer a variety of opinions on one controverted

point. Until more work is done in this area we shall have to deny ourselves this latter luxury.

If anyone wishes to deal with the subject of Christology in the theology of Karl Barth, he has to be familiar with practically every piece of theology which Barth has written. The area of Christology which we are treating is sufficiently limited and technical so that we can limit ourselves, for the most part, to those areas of his theology which deal specifically with the person of Jesus Christ. The same generalization would be true with respect to Emil Brunner but not of Berkouwer. We have in each case attempted to introduce the best evidence available for every point being made and yet to be comprehensive in our gathering of materials. This means that we concentrated mostly on the Christological works but did not fail to familiarize ourselves with any other writings which could have possibly aided us in our presentation of the theologians' positions in question.

The terminology which will be employed is taken from the individual being studied. No attempt has been made to make these men speak like Lutheran theologians. Every effort has been expended to be impartial and objective in the presentation of their respective theological positions. If the same categories are not discussed in all three men, it will be because the men in question do not all discuss the personal union with identical terminology.

Thesis Arrangement

This first chapter is obviously introductory in nature. At the conclusion of the first chapter the reader will find a brief summary of the findings of this study. The second chapter contains a summary of the theological position of G. C. Berkouwer on the subject at hand. The third chapter summarizes Karl Barth's position. The fourth chapter presents the position of Emil Brunner with respect to the personal union. Chapters II, III and IV contain no summary of the theological positions contained in them. Individual passages which are quoted will naturally have to be criticized when they are presented in order that a summary can be made. This evaluation will then be found in the fifth and concluding chapter.

Methodology Employed

As has already been stated, the major theological works of the men in question will be used when they deal with the subject at hand. The reader will find the material presented heavily footnoted because the author has attempted to make this work useful as a tool for reference in the event of further study or expansion. In some instances it has been necessary to quote sections of certain writings at some length. Even though this sometimes makes the work more burdensome for the impatient reader, the author has not hesitated to follow this procedure where he felt it

necessary to establish some context or thoroughly document a point being made which might otherwise be misunderstood. This is a part of his attempt to be fair and objective in his presentation while giving the reader an opportunity to conveniently judge the conclusions which have been drawn from the sources quoted.

An Overview of the Study

This research has led me to the conclusion that at least one of the three men involved wishes to teach a personal union of the two natures in Jesus Christ--G. C. Berkouwer. He does not react adversely to the terminology and seems to agree with the theory involved but usually is unable to break away sufficiently from his Reformed background to be able to transfer his theory into concrete theological expression. The extra-calvinisticum and finitum non est capax infiniti appear to smother his efforts at genuine expression of a personal union.

Karl Barth also uses terms like union and communion. He, however, seems to lack the seriousness of Berkouwer. Barth is intelligent enough to perceive the contradictions and inconsistencies within the Reformed system, but in some areas he seems to wish to solve these difficulties by using certain terminology with unclear or meaningless definitions attached to it. In other cases he merely solves the dilemma by stating that we will have to affirm two contradictory "truths" and be happy with this Christological climate.

Although Barth makes statements in some contexts which might lead one to believe that he affirms the personal union of the two natures in Jesus Christ, a careful examination of his position will reveal that he is actually not doing this.

Brunner is more definite in his position. His theory of revelation leaves no room for even lip service to the personal union. Just as the miraculous doctrine of the virgin birth must be sacrificed for this theory of revelation, so must the personal union. The divine incognito must be maintained at all costs.

The personal union of the two natures in Jesus Christ is a doctrine which Brunner would not accept. He would rather maintain the divine incognito and the virgin birth than accept the personal union. He is clear on this point. The personal union is a doctrine which he would not accept. He is clear on this point. The personal union is a doctrine which he would not accept.

Barth's position is clear. He is not accepting the personal union. He is clear on this point. The personal union is a doctrine which he would not accept. He is clear on this point. The personal union is a doctrine which he would not accept.

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CHAPTER II

THE PERSONAL UNION IN THE THEOLOGY OF BERKOUWER

Distinctively Calvinistic

I have chosen to begin with a discussion of the theology of G. C. Berkouwer because I feel it is most representative of the traditional Calvinistic approach to the subject. It will therefore give the reader a more solid basis for evaluation of that which is hereafter discussed.

The Christology of Berkouwer centers about the traditional confessional statements of the Reformed church. He quotes these approvingly and interprets them in a manner which seems to do justice to the literal sense of the document. One of his favorites, besides the writings of John Calvin himself, is the Heidelberg Catechism.

With reference to this Christ it is said that he is truly God and truly man. " . . . With respect to His human nature, He is no more on earth; but with respect to His Godhead, majesty, grace and Spirit, He is at no time absent from us." The two natures of Christ are here plainly distinguished, while over against the Lutherans, in Question 48, there is a polemic against the inclusion of the Godhead of Christ in the human nature, a confessional statement generally referred to as "extra-calvinisticum."¹

This quotation, based on the Heidelberg Catechism, gives evidence of my previous generalization and places into sharp

¹G. C. Berkouwer, The Person of Christ (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954), p. 76.

focus one of the most controversial areas of Christology between the Lutheran and Reformed. We shall reserve further comment on the "extra-calvinisticum" for a later time.

Jesus Christ is True God

There can be no doubt about the fact that Berkouwer affirms the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. He does this not only in a positive manner but also in a negative one by condemning both subordinationists² and adoptionists.³

Although the entire testimony of Scripture is the basis for confession of the deity of Christ, there are places in Scripture which in a special way point to the mystery of Christ as the Son of God. The most striking is probably the designation of Christ as the "only-begotten" of the Father. . . . Christ is the only-begotten, not only in the sense of being a beloved child, but in the unique sense expressible by the words "only-begotten God." This Beloved is the beloved of the Father, again not in an Adoptionistic sense by which he is put on the same level with others who share the special affection of God, but in the full trinitarian sense. He is in the bosom of the Father.⁴

²Subordinationism: Heretical form of Trinitarian teaching which regards either the Son subordinate to the Father or the Holy Ghost subordinate to both. Error usually caused by influence of gnosticism and a fervor for monotheism. Cf. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (hereafter designated Oxford Dictionary, 1958 edition, p. 1301).

³Adoptionism: Eighth century Spanish heresy. Christ in His humanity is not the true but only the adoptive Son of God. Only the Logos was the true, natural and eternal Son of God; Christ was the adoptive Son. Revived in 12th century in modified sense by Abelard, Gilbert de La Porree et al. (Cf. Oxford Dictionary, pp. 18-19).

⁴Berkouwer, op. cit., pp. 175-176.

Likewise he states:

There is a discussion in several places about the Son's being subject to the Father, and about his being sent and given by the Father, but at the same time, lest any notion of Subordinationism should arise there occurs the truly mysterious assertion: "For as the Father hath life in himself, even so gave he to the Son also to have life in himself" (John 5:26). The mystery of the Son does not consist only in his being sent, but no less in his having come (John 5:36, 37, 38; 6:29). At this point we encounter the confession of Christ's pre-existence, one of the most embattled parts of Holy Scripture, and no wonder since the pre-existence of Christ is bound up closely with his trinitarian life.⁵

The topic of the pre-existence of Christ is important for an understanding of the personal union. The "vere deus" can only be affirmed of this person if the Logos within the "vere homo" is the one which existed with the Father from eternity. Berkouwer realizes this very well when he writes: "To violate the confession of Christ's pre-existence is to violate the mystery of Christ and to lose the background of his entire self-testimony."⁶ On this account he seriously criticizes the Christology of Bultmann.

In John too Bultmann finds many utterances which "speak of Christ in mythological form as the pre-existent Son of God." (Theol. des N. T., p. 163.) He descended from heaven--as this mythology has it--and will be glorified with the glory which he had in his pre-existence with the Father. But Bultmann--this much is plain--does not for a moment intend, on this basis, to express his approval of church dogma. Bultmann is interested in the eternal value of the atonement made on the cross of Christ but he does not believe this has anything to do with a real pre-existence. In the final analysis the reliability of the New Testament, the

⁵Ibid., pp. 162-163.

⁶Ibid., pp. 168-169.

veracity of Christ's self-witness, and that of the apostolic witness, is at stake here, and, in this veracity, the mystery of the ages, the act of God in Jesus Christ, the revelation of God in the flesh.

Behind all opposition to Christ's pre-existence lies the rejection of the historical salvation of God, the incarnation of the Word, not in a speculative or Hegelian sense but in the Scriptural sense of the words, which form the foundation of the faith of the Church and of its dogma.⁷

Berkouwer's theology is written with a practical bent. Indicative of that spirit is the final observation which I would like to make with respect to the need for a strong affirmation in our modern day that Jesus Christ is True God.

The question has of late become particularly relevant in view of the confessional formula adopted by the World Council of Churches. It speaks of Christ as follows: "The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which accept Jesus Christ as God and Saviour." As a result the question arose whether the Liberals could agree to this formula and since then there has been again a general debate about "Jesus Christ as God." . . . One can understand, upon serious consideration, that the World Council formula in a sense produced crisis in liberal thinking. The one rejected it because he heard in it the language of the ancient church and of the creeds; the other thought he could accept it if interpreted so that the phrase "as God" no longer has the full weight it has in the creeds. . . . Hence, also for the history of dogma, as regards the right view of the development of the creeds, the essential question will remain whether the testimony of Scripture can in fact be the foundation of the confession of "vere deus"--as offense in creed and hymn in many a period.⁸

Berkouwer is certainly worthy of our admiration for his

⁷Ibid., p. 184.

⁸Ibid., pp. 159-161.

position in the face of modern liberal theological developments.

Jesus Christ is True Man.

The greatest effort of Berkouwer is expended on the thesis that Jesus Christ was "vere homo." This point is made in similar fashion to that mentioned under the section treating the divinity of our Savior. After strong affirmative statements all traces of docetism are roundly condemned.

The New Testament not only does not contain a trace of Docetism⁹ but it already polemicizes against it. The epistle of John especially makes that very clear. He takes position against all who deny that Jesus Christ truly came into the flesh. . . . The Gospels, no less than John's epistle, describe for us the genuine humanity of Christ and that with special emphases. Docetism is strongly at odds with the Gospels.¹⁰

Some of the statements which Berkouwer makes concerning the humanity of our Savior have a ring which is somewhat peculiar to the non-Calvinistic ear. For instance, the humanity of Christ is usually discussed in connection with His suffering to the exclusion of any participation of the deity. We are not advocating a renewal of any "theopaschitism," but this suffering sometimes seems to be the essence

⁹Docetism: Considered the humanity and sufferings of the Christ as apparent rather than real. Among those especially charged with this teaching was Cerinthus. Serapion, Bishop of Antioch (190-203) was the first to use the name Doketai. (Cf. Oxford Dictionary, p. 409).

¹⁰Berkouwer, op. cit., pp. 204-205.

of Christ's humanity. This naturally limits all such discussions to the "pre-crucifixion" humanity.

There can be no doubt either about the true humanity of Christ in the period prior to his crucifixion. Any number of texts point in some way to his genuine humanity. One can not detect any tendency to eliminate this humanity as something foreign or distasteful. One must register dissent from Van der Leeuw when he writes concerning John: "John's picture of Christ resembles the Byzantine figures of Christ: hard and impassive, speaking his divine words in unapproachable majesty." . . . One can characterize his entire life with the words: "It behooved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren" (Heb. 2:17). . . . His sinlessness and holiness, according to Scripture, does not detract one whit from his true humanity.¹¹

Note also this brief passage.

In his response to suffering and in the reality of obedience Christ was truly man. In his struggle to do the will of God his obedience was not a placid and abstract something that lay hidden on the bottom of his soul but consisted, rather, in being driven onto the way of judgment as the bearer of a guilt that was foreign to him. Before his final sufferings he already spoke of having accomplished his work (John 17:4), certainly, but Christ still had to learn obedience in the reality of the passio magna. The necessity of the learning process was implied in his true humanity.¹²

Berkouwer cogently states: "Indeed, this Ecce homo, in the language of the church, is inseparable from the confession of Christ's true deity. . . . The confession of Christ's true humanity touches upon the fulfillment of his task."¹³ Furthermore, in order to give no false impressions Berkouwer affirms that the resurrected Christ is the same as the

¹¹Ibid., p. 208.

¹²Ibid., p. 249.

¹³Ibid., p. 234.

crucified Christ.¹⁴

Some of the Scripture texts speak of Jesus Christ as being inferior to the Father, or, to state it positively, of the Father as being superior to the Son. These passages are applied equally to the humiliation and the humanity of the Christ.¹⁵ The Roman Catholic exegesis of these passages is completely rejected as being unfaithful to a clear affirmation of the "vere homo."

No one, says Christ, knows of that day or that hour, and then more specifically: not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. . . . Greitemann has pointed out that a Catholic exegete does indeed take account of the Catholic doctrine of Christ and that the doctrine illuminates the exegesis of this text. This is precisely why we demur: for by this dogmatic exegesis the text is robbed of its evident meaning. According to the Roman Catholic exegesis it is a priori impossible that the text should mean that Christ did not know. A limited knowledge of the future would disqualify his Godmanhood. This judgment of Roman Catholic theology has broad consequences for its evaluation of Christ's human nature. This employment of the word "impossible" conditions all of Rome's exegesis and compels it to look for parallels in order to escape the self-evident meaning of the words. To oppose this procedure does not imply that to the opponent the hypostatic union has become clear and transparent. Who can penetrate into the unfathomable mystery of this union? But the idea is not to penetrate that which simply passes our comprehension but to accept the message of Scripture which distinguishes for us the power of Christ from the omnipotence of God (Matt. 28:19) and the knowledge of Christ from the omniscience of God. If anywhere, then here our thinking must be normatively conditioned by Scripture. The Roman Catholic exegesis of these words from Matthew and Mark is symptomatic of a conception which, operating as it does with dogmatic inferences, makes it hard

¹⁴Ibid., p. 207.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 187.

truly to heed the witness of Scripture.¹⁶

This is a good passage for Berkouwer to emphasize the non-interpenetration of the divine attributes to the humanity of the Christ. If there were such a phenomenon, Berkouwer would argue, then it would have been impossible for Christ to disclaim knowledge of the events of which he was asked.

Allow me to point out one more item on the basis of the foregoing quotation. Note that in it and in some which preceded it, the hypostatic union is judged to be "unfathomable," "mysterious," "that which passes our comprehension." When we later speak of the communication of attributes, this will no longer be the case.

The Union of the Human and Divine in Christ

Having already discussed Berkouwer's affirmations both of the Divinity and humanity of Christ, let us turn to his ideas of the union of these two natures in the one person. The remainder of the paper could well come under this caption, but here we are concerned only with the question of whether or not Berkouwer states that there is a union of the divine and human in Christ. The implications of this affirmation or denial will be drawn out in the remainder of this chapter.

As we might well expect, Berkouwer does affirm that the human and divine are united in the person of the Christ.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 214.

At no point in Scripture does his true humanity threaten or eliminate the true deity. The tensions in his sacred life are not the tensions of an abstract connection between the divine and the human, but rather those of his humiliation in the unity of the person.¹⁷

This unity is again affirmed to be mysterious and incomprehensible in nature. At one point Berkouwer approvingly cites the analogy of John Calvin who explains the personal union in Christ by means of the comparison to the soul and body in man. However, he immediately states:

For this reason one can correctly assert that the unity of the person of Christ, in virtue of its unique character, does not have a single intracosmic analogy. There are no analogies to the Incarnation of the Word which can make it at all comprehensible. In the absolute sense of the word it is the mystery of God. Not a mystery in the sense that the unity of a human soul and body is a mystery--merely something incomprehensible to us--but the "mysterion" of God revealed in the flesh.¹⁸

One of Berkouwer's keener insights is evidenced when he includes in this section another denouncement of the heresy which he so dearly likes to condemn--that of docetism. He sees in this heresy the denial of the two natures of Christ.

The search for the essential core of Docetism is quickly rewarded. It was patent wherever it sought entrance in the church. The central motif of Docetism, though it is not always conscious, consists in the conviction that a tie-up, a genuine union between God (of the divine) and the physical, material, and terrestrial is basically impossible. Basic to all Docetism is a dualism which in one way or another reveals itself as a threat to the church. To put it simply,

¹⁷Ibid., p. 300.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 299.

Docetism could never yield to what John declared when he said that the Word became flesh. That God or the divine Logos should unite, really unite, with the flesh, in some way, was deemed unthinkable.¹⁹

In the light of the foregoing quotations and discussion, it must be granted that Berkouwer most certainly intends to teach a real union between the divine and human natures in the person of the Christ.

A more complete and helpful statement is given in the following:

. . . The *Confessio Gallicana* reads: "God and man in one person." Servetus²⁰ is rejected because "he attributes to holy Jesus an imaginary divinity." The two natures are "truly and inseparably conjoined and united, each nevertheless remaining in its own distinction."

The divine nature is uncreated, infinite, filling all things; the human nature "has remained finite, having its form, measure and properties." The same thing is striking in the *Confessio Helvetica posterior* of 1562, which confesses, in opposition to gnosticism, the reality (*nec phantastica*) of the body of Christ, which he did not, it is said, bring from heaven. United, but not mixed, these natures are--Apollinaris²¹ and

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 199.

²⁰*Servetus*: Michael Servetus, 1511-1553. Servetus was a physician-heretic who abandoned the dogma of the Trinity and expressed his views in his *De Trinitatis Erroribus Libri VII*, 1531. He was repudiated by Calvin. In 1553 he anonymously published his principal work, *Christianismi Restitutio*, in which he denied the Trinity, the true humanity of Christ which supposedly consisted of three elements--the Logos, which was the model of all creation, though not really divine; the soul and the human body. He fled to Geneva hoping for support from the anti-Calvinistic party but was arrested by Calvin and burned as a heretic at Champel on October 27, 1553. (Cf. *Oxford Dictionary*, p. 1244).

²¹*Apollinaris*: Bishop of Laodicea c. 360. Apollinaris (preferred spelling) denied the existence of the human spirit in Christ. The spirit was replaced by the Divine Logos.

Eutyches²² to the contrary notwithstanding. There was never any talk of a deification of human nature, while on the other hand, the separation of the two natures, as it appears in Nestorius, is likewise rejected.

In the English confessions we soon discover the same lines, namely, with reference to the inseparable union. The Westminster Confession rejects "all confusion" with emphasis. Stress is laid on the unity of the person, "each Nature doing that which is proper to itself."²³

From this quotation we can see that while Berkouwer is speaking of a personal union he is none the less operating with loaded theological terms which include definite ideas about the nature of the "divine" and "human" in Christ. This fact influences the interpretation of Chalcedon with which Berkouwer operates and leads him to conclude that the Belgic Confession (Cf. Article 19) is in complete agreement with the doctrine and spirit of Chalcedon.

Completely in the spirit of Chalcedon it says that each nature retains its own properties in the union--clearly antithetically to every attempt at deification or humanization, and to every form of monophysitism. The position that Christ would be a mixture of God and man in one theanthropic nature was forcefully rejected. Against this idea of mixture the Confession points out concretely that the divine nature is uncreated and continues to fill heaven and earth without beginning

He professed a perfect Godhead but lacked complete manhood in Christ. Thus Christ redeemed only the spiritual elements of the human nature. (Cf. Oxford Dictionary, p. 70).

²²Eutyches: (c. 378-454), heresiarch. Confounded the two natures in opposition to Nestorius. He was repudiated by Leo in his "Tome." He was deposed and exiled by Chalcedon. He denied that the manhood of Christ was consubstantial with ours. He predicated two natures before but only one after the "union" in the incarnate Christ and thus became the founder of monophysitism. (Cf. Oxford Dictionary, p. 476).

²³Berkouwer, op. cit., p. 80.

of days or end of life. The Confession knows of no inclusion of the divine nature in the human, and is therefore in complete harmony with the Heidelberg Catechism. Of the human nature it is said that it too retained its distinct properties, remained created and finite, and kept everything belonging to a true body. There is a decided concern here--that much is evident--to preserve the mystery of Chalcedon. The reality of the human nature in Christ remains unchanged. Our salvation and resurrection depend on the reality of his body. Not even death, according to the Confession, can separate the two natures of Christ; of the one Christ it remains true that he is really God and really man. Finally, a summary states that Christ was "very God by His power to conquer death; and very man that He might die for us according to the infirmity of His flesh."²⁴

Those who are most familiar with the proceedings of Chalcedon would certainly wish to question the interpretation of the purpose and "spirit" of the council according to Berkouwer's exegesis of it. Note that his conclusion precludes any "Gott selbst ist tot!"

Ecumenicity in Christology

Berkouwer makes one reference to the area of agreement which once existed between Lutheran and Reformed theologians against their common foe. This little quotation helps to bring into focus the discussion which will follow and sheds light on how the Reformed evaluate our own position on the communication of attributes--an insight which will aid us in our understanding of their position.

As to this anti-docetic witness there was great unanimity in the Reformation. There was, to be sure,

²⁴Ibid., p. 79.

some disagreement between the Lutherans and the Reformed over the doctrine of the communication of attributes. And the Reformed have more than once held against the Lutherans that they fail to do justice to the true humanity of Christ. But it cannot be denied that Reformed theologians and Lutherans joined hands in rejecting the Anabaptist view of Christ's human nature. We have reason to be grateful, here if anywhere, for this flash of the full-fledged ecumenical witness of the church. The reformation, and in particular the Reformed confessions, saw as the background of the Anabaptistic view the dualistic doctrine that the Logos had taken his flesh and blood down from heaven. This dualism proceeds on the assumption that the Logos cannot be united with the true human nature. Over against this dualism the Reformed confessions maintained, with emphasis and explicitness, the truth and implications of the "vere homo."²⁵

From this statement, as well as what has preceded it, it would appear that if there is one thing which could unite the Lutheran and Reformed camps in the area of Christology, it is a condemnation of docetism.

The Communication of Attributes

With this specific topic we have reached the high-point of our discussion. Perhaps, in order to be as completely fair as is possible, we ought to let Berkouwer speak for himself and speak thoroughly on this topic.

. . . certainly, the doctrine of the two natures did not imply the existence of two persons, two independent subjects, but was concerned with the one life of Jesus Christ. To this fact the church gave expression when it spoke of the two natures in the unity of the person. In close connection with the preceding there arose, in the period of the Reformation, a controversy over the nature of this union. It was the conflict between the Lutherans and the Reformed: a conflict concerning the so-called communicatio idiomatum. In this discussion

²⁵Ibid., pp. 78-79.

the participants concentrated their attention particularly upon the Lutheran confession of the omnipresence of the human nature of Christ, a thesis which played a dominant role especially in Luther's doctrine of the Lord's Supper. . . . For whatever one may think of the historical development of this doctrine, there can be no difference of opinion about the fact that Luther adhered to the doctrine of ubiquity. And it is plain too that the problem has ramifications beyond this ubiquity. Basically we are concerned with the character of this union of the two natures in the unity of the person of Christ; and in connection with it, the significance of the union for the properties of the divine and human natures.

In describing this controversy between Lutheran and Reformed theology, one must be very cautious. It is incorrect, in any case, to say that the doctrine of the communicatio idiomatum as such is already monophysite, hence involves a mixture of properties. Lutherans, as will appear, have polemicized with emphasis against monophysitism. One can understand why people believed they detected in Lutheranism a monophysite tendency, but it will certainly be necessary, especially with regard to the Lutheran Formula of Concord, to read carefully and to distinguish sharply.

We can assume in this connection that it is incorrect so to contrast the Lutheran and the Reformed confessions that the one is made to teach a communicatio idiomatum while the other is not. This would be as wrong as it is to say that the Lutherans did, and the Reformed did not, teach the real presence of Christ at the Lord's Supper. Bavinck correctly says that between Lutheran and Reformed men an important difference arose about the effects of the union. He presents a reproduction of the Lutheran conception by saying "that the properties of both natures were communicated, not only to the one person, but those of the divine nature were communicated also to the human." Thus the human nature was elevated to a position of divine omnipotence and omnipresence. By the communication of divine properties to the human nature, Bavinck feels, the communication of gifts to the human nature has ceased to be significant. "Lutheran theology still mentions 'gifts,' but it is embarrassed in finding a place for them and lacks room even for the anointing of Christ with the Holy Spirit." Moreover, by this communication of the properties of the divine nature to the human in Lutheran theology, a Docetic element creeps into Christology: "The purely human development of Christ does not come into its own." In Reformed theology, on the other hand, the union of the

divine and the human natures was grasped more correctly, says Bavinck; particularly in the doctrine of the communication of gifts, a "beautiful doctrine," he discovers this superior insight, since by it the genuinely human nature of Christ is kept inviolate. Reformed theology principally overcame the Lutheran doctrine of the mingling of the two natures. Reformed theology did austere maintain the unity of the person but in this unity it insisted, for the human nature, on the rule that the finite cannot contain the infinite (finitum non capax infiniti). At the same time, says Bavinck, Reformed theology circumvented Nestorianism by asserting that the union of the two natures was embedded in the unity of the person.²⁶

It is somewhat confusing to see that the Reformed are able to grasp so much of the Lutheran emphasis and concern in Christology and still render the decision that we are "docetic." I would particularly call your attention to that statement of Berkouwer's in which he says that it would be as erroneous to accuse the Reformed of not teaching a communicatio idiomatum as it would be to say that they did not teach a real presence. Perhaps Berkouwer has here given us the best key to the understanding of the position which he is trying to represent. It is also true to say that the Reformed are not teaching a communicatio idiomatum any more than they have taught a real presence in the Sacrament of the Altar. But the strangest turn of all occurs when Berkouwer objects to saying that Calvin was guilty of spiritualization both here and in the Lord's Supper. If there was any real presence being taught by Calvin, surely it would have to be in the area of the

²⁶Ibid., pp. 271-274.

spiritual. Listen to Berkouwer's remarks.

There is every reason to assume that Luther, in his resistance to the spiritualistic tendencies of Zwingli, drew Calvin too much into Zwingli's Nestorianizing atmosphere. To Luther this Christology and the doctrine of the Lord's Supper were inseparably linked together. He believed that Calvin also paid tribute to spiritualism and that, in fact, he repudiated the "real presence."

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 The heart of the matter, which casts its light both upon Christology and the Lord's Supper, is pointed out in Dankbaar: "Calvin found the way of escape from subjectivism and spiritualism without lapsing into an unspiritual depersonalization of the sacrament and without doing violence to the 'finitum non capax infiniti.' And Luther did not understand this or perhaps he understood it when it was too late."²⁷

In the light of the facts as we know them, this is a very strong inference to be guilty of drawing. If Calvin was not guilty of spiritualization with respect to the Lord's Supper and the Reformed are not guilty of the same charge with respect to their Christology which admits to a communication of attributes with no real communication, then we are evidently dealing with words open to meanings with which we are not presently familiar. But if we have not yet presented sufficient evidence to show what the Reformed position on the communication of attributes really is, then please consider the following evidence.

The Reformed, according to Berkouwer, do not even prefer to speak of the communication of attributes. They rather prefer the term "communication of gifts."

²⁷Ibid., pp. 280-281.

This is the beautiful doctrine . . . of the communication of gifts, a doctrine which certainly cannot be put on a par with the communion of properties as an item in the same series. With it Reformed theology resisted every form of deification of the human nature of Christ. In this doctrine they made room for the human development of Jesus Christ whom they saw, in the Gospel in his way from infancy to maturity. Scripture also speaks of the anointing of Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit "without measure." This is something principally different from what the Lutherans intended with their communication of the divine properties to the human nature. With the gifts are meant those which equipped the man Jesus Christ for the fulfillment of his official calling. This is not a granting of the supernatural to the human nature but the equipment, by the gifts of the spirit, of Jesus Christ for the completion of the work assigned to him.

The confession of the communication of gifts is a direct result of the confession of the church in Chalcedon. Christ was genuinely man, and assumed the likeness of sinful flesh--human nature in its weakness. We witness here that the human nature of Jesus Christ is not consumed in the union by the divine nature but that it was really united with that divine nature for the fulfillment of Christ's office.²⁸

Whether one speaks of communication of "gifts" or of "properties" the problem is not dealt with honestly unless it is granted that there is, in fact, a communication. Merely changing the word "properties" to "gifts" seems to be an attempt to draw attention away from the real issue. Close examination will show that Berkouwer is not teaching a real communication of "gifts" any more than he is teaching a real communication of "properties." Such meaningless usage of terminology is unfortunate.

In the light of such a specific statement we can understand and interpret the following generalization.

²⁸Ibid., p. 295.

In Christ we are not merely concerned with created gifts of finite qualities occurring also in the saints. Indeed not: so great is the glory in which the human nature in the union is permitted to share, that is, at the glorification, that one should not try to decide "of what the human nature in Christ, without damage to itself, could or should be capable."²⁹

Note that the glorification of the human nature is reserved by Berkouwer for a post-resurrection event as is hinted here and explicitly stated elsewhere. But even then it is pointed out that in the resurrected Christ the human nature still retains all of the properties which are essential to the human nature as such, so that the finite is still not capable of the infinite. The glorification, therefore, most likely consists in one of honor and dignity as opposed to power and might.

It is very perplexing when Berkouwer alludes to the Zwinglian doctrine of alloeosis, to which Luther and the Lutheran party strenuously objected. He understands Zwingli's position correctly and states that the Reformed Christology ought not be associated with any Christology which holds that "though one can say with words that the entire person has performed something, he still means that only one of the two natures has in reality performed it;"³⁰ Yet neither does Berkouwer wish to be classified with the Lutherans who objected to this "mask of the devil" (Luther's term for the alloeosis). The author

²⁹Ibid., p. 278. Italics mine.

³⁰Ibid., p. 276.

seems to feel that there must be a middle ground between Lutheranism and Zwinglianism, and it is on this territory that the Reformed church stands. That middle ground is never more explicitly defined by Berkouwer.

Extra-calvinisticum

It must be said at the outset that this is a term which has been bequeathed to Reformed Christology by those of Lutheran persuasion. It is not a term which pleases the Reformed but is one which they are willing to justify in the light of their interpretation of Chalcedon. Let us begin by observing Berkouwer's understanding of the term.

With this term (extra-calvinisticum) is meant that by the Incarnation the Logos is not included in the flesh but that, as the Catechism has it, "since the Godhead is illimitable and omnipresent, it must follow that it is beyond the bounds of the human nature it has assumed, and yet nonetheless is in this human nature and remains personally united to it."

Korff acknowledges that, strictly speaking, it is unfair to speak at this point of an "extra-calvinisticum" --as if this teaching were a specific peculiarity of Calvinism. For, says he, in itself this doctrine was not new; the "extra" was rather a common conviction found in practically all pre-Reformation theology. Athanasius already had it and Augustine gave it specific formulation when he wrote: "Christ added to himself that which he was not; he did not lose what he was." And the epistle of Leo, which profoundly influenced the decision of Chalcedon, declares that the Son, though he did descend from his abode in heaven, did not depart from the glory of his Father (Epistle of Leo IV). Korff then speaks of a peculiar accent which the doctrine gets in Reformed theology. He believes that serious objections must be registered against it, since, says he, we here reach out to a level unbecoming to us. But one can hardly assert that Reformed theology has wished to do anything other than maintain what Chalcedon says, namely, that the peculiar properties

of the natures are preserved in the union. Reformed theology stressed this truth over against Lutheran theology, to be sure, but there are no grounds for the argument that the Reformation added anything essential to the old doctrine.³¹

It is most likely unnecessary to point out the inconsistencies of this presentation. The extra-calvinisticum deals with the problem of whether or not, since the incarnation, one can speak of the Logos either apart from or outside of the flesh. Therefore the inadequacies of the statements from Augustine and Leo are immediately seen. Furthermore, a close study of Chalcedon will not yield evidence in favor of the extra-calvinisticum which opposes the Lutheran view that since the incarnation one cannot speak of the Logos extra carnem.³² In a similar exposition concerning the interpretation of Chalcedon and the extra-calvinisticum, even mystery with respect to the union is denied in order to justify the Reformed position.³³ In another quotation faith is appealed to as an avenue of escape in contrast with mystery in the incarnation.

It has been a blessing for the church, as we remarked earlier, that it did not, in view of the importance of the divine nature, depreciate the human. But it was also a blessing that it did not regard the incarnation as an irrational, paradoxical mystery, a contradictory association of two substances, but

³¹Ibid., pp. 93-94.

³²The Lutheran view is classically given by Chemnitz in his DE DUABUS NATURIS IN CHRISTO where the old phraseology is employed, neque $\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ extra carnem, neque caro extra $\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$.

³³Ibid., pp. 94-96.

rather as an act of the Son of God. And when in the Reformation period the problem of the union of the two natures was again a live issue, now in response to the Lutheran Christology, the Reformed churches, and Reformed theology, again took seriously--not some irrational superiority of the divine but--the truth of Christ's deity according to the Scriptures; and it is a dark page in the history of dogma that this defense came to be known by the horrible name "extra-Calvinisticum." . . . Only by faith can the unity of the Christ, as the Scriptures present it to us, be understood. And this understanding is not a comprehension of the great mystery, but rather a life of communion with him who, though he was the Son, yet became one of us.³⁴

The reader must judge for himself whether or not these words suggest a spirit of "activism" or "pietism" in the face of necessary theological formulation--by a theologian who does not hesitate to affirm a "finitum non est capax infiniti."

Incognito Theories

Berkouwer is justifiably suspicious of all such theories with respect to Christology. He admits that Reformed theology has spoken of concealment but adds that when it has done so "it was always thought of in reference to the darkness of the way of suffering."³⁵ To this extent then, concealment never became the scapegoat for a denial of clearly articulated doctrines with respect to the person of Christ, such as his virgin birth.

In an excellent section, Berkouwer demonstrates how Christology is perverted if one approaches it from

³⁴Ibid., p. 326. Italics mine.

³⁵Ibid., p. 360.

predetermined ideas of revelation and then attempts to produce a theology of the second person of the Holy Trinity which is in keeping with these philosophically oriented ideas of revelation.

The influence of the incognito-theory can be explained only from the fact that it took up the element of the humiliation of Christ and seemed thus to be in line with the biblical revelation. But it is clear that the theory was introduced as an independent factor issuing from the structure of revelation and that the revelation of the humiliation was not the sole determinant. The revelation of Christ was reduced to logical categories, which brought Kierkegaard, for instance, to the idea of the intellectual skandalon of the old-man paradox in Jesus Christ. This logical treatment of the possibility of faith and offense was possible only in terms of a given conception of the structure of revelation, and could not have arisen if from the beginning the argument had been in terms of the content of revelation itself.³⁶

Or again:

But the Scriptures speak differently. They never formulate the problem in terms of the incognito--as does Brunner--or in terms of the "Welthaftigkeit" of revelation--as does Barth--but they picture for us the son of man in the flesh of his humiliation standing in the flood-light of the Word which interprets him:³⁷

The best of the remaining material which Berkouwer offers on the subject of the incognito deals with the theology of both Barth and Brunner. We will therefore reserve this material for the final chapter. It might be said in conclusion that Berkouwer is not denying that there is miracle and concealment involved in the personal union, but he is taking issue with every theology which begins with

³⁶Ibid., p. 346.

³⁷Ibid., p. 347.

Kierkegaardian preconceived notions with respect to revelation so that the incognito must be found throughout Christology and every area must be interpreted in light of a theory of incognito.

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CHAPTER III

THE PERSONAL UNION IN THE THEOLOGY OF KARL BARTH

Calvinism Modified

Although Karl Barth is usually associated with the theology of Neo-Orthodoxy, perhaps he makes a valid point in not wishing to have his theology categorized under any one school. Even though Barth usually tries to state anew what he feels are valid Reformation emphases, yet he is enough of an individualist to part company with the Reformation as well as the Reformed tradition where he feels this is necessary. The subject of the person of Christ is one of these particular areas. Barth is conscious of the fact that his position is not acceptable to either orthodox Lutheran or Reformed theology.

We have given a relative preference to the Reformed because of its persistent and certainly instructive and pregnant centring on the decisive concept of the unio hypostatica. But there can be no doubt that in our departure from this whole conception we have left even Reformed Christology far behind. We cannot expect to be praised for our "orthodoxy" from any quarter.¹

The manner in which Barth feels that he has parted from the orthodox position is that he has taken that which is usually considered abstractly and made it historical.

¹Karl Barth, The Doctrine of Reconciliation, in Church Dogmatics (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), IV, Part Two, 106. (Hereafter volume and part will be designated IV, 2. Page reference will be third number in sequence).

He rejects any discussion about Christ which cannot be placed in an existential context. He himself states this quite honestly.

What is it, then, that we have done? We, too, have considered and attempted to describe the being of Jesus Christ in its truth and reality. There can be no dissolving or weakening the hard reality, the genuine "objectivity," of this basic element in the divine action for us and to us which is as such the basic element in all Christian knowledge and confession. What has happened, however, is that we have left no place for anything static at the broad centre of the traditional doctrine of the person of Christ--its development of the concepts of unio, communio and communicatio--or in the traditional doctrine of the two states. We have, in a sense, kept company with the older dogmatics in each of the three concepts, as in those of exinanitio and exaltatio, to the extent, that is, that they are all terms which speak of actions, operationes, events. But--thinking and speaking in pure concepts of movement--we have re-translated that whole phenomenology into the sphere of a history.²

The reticence of Barth to discuss those traditional concepts of the two states of Christ as well as the unio, communio and communicatio will make our task of understanding his position with respect to the personal union somewhat more difficult, but since these are merely categories which help us in conveniently categorizing scriptural witness to the person of Christ, we shall find the same materials discussed by Barth under different headings. This only means that we must be most careful to try to understand exactly what Barth is saying when he speaks to us in these new categories.

²Ibid., p. 106. Italics mine.

Jesus Christ as True God

In Barth's theology Christology is intimately connected with revelation. Christ as revelation is differentiated from the Scriptural witness to Christ. Barth's emphasis seems quite wholesome when he states that prior to the witness of either the New Testament or the Christian community Christ was what He claimed to be--the Son of God. Moreover, he does not find any contradiction between the witness of Scripture and the claims of Christ. ". . . He actually was and is and will be what He is represented in the reflection of this witness, the Son of the Heavenly Father, the King of His kingdom, and therefore 'by nature God,'" he writes.³ But it must be admitted that the Scriptural witness, to stay with Barth's terminology, is somewhat superfluous.

It is not a Christian conception of Him, and to that extent not the Christian kerygma, but He Himself in His revelation and being, who according to the New Testament builds His community and calls the world to decision: He Himself in the power of His resurrection, the Lord who is the Spirit. Only when this is seen and admitted do we know what we are doing when we either accept or reject the New Testament witness.⁴

In keeping with his dynamic or ontic theology, Barth discusses the deity of Jesus Christ only in terms of His

³Karl Barth, The Doctrine of Reconciliation, in Church Dogmatics (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), IV, Part One, 163. (Hereafter volume and part will be designated IV, 1. Page reference will be third number in sequence).

⁴Ibid. pp. 172-180.

activity. This is the only way that we have of knowing that Jesus Christ was divine and truly the Son of God.

That Jesus Christ is very God is shown in His way into the far country in which He the Lord became a servant. For in the majesty of the true God it happened that the eternal Son of the eternal Father became obedient by offering and humbling Himself to be the brother of man, to take His place with the transgressor, to judge him by judging Himself and dying in his place.⁵

Barth further states that the mystery of the deity of Christ is seen in the willingness of God to condescend to us.⁶

Barth has to become somewhat static in his discussion when he considers that in the humiliation of Christ there was no diminution, change or transformation in the deity of Christ. He points out that it would be impossible for God to cease to be that which He is by nature. All mingling of the divine and human natures in Jesus Christ would be sternly rejected by Barth. The deity must remain unaltered in order that no doubt might be cast upon the atonement.⁷

Exactly what Barth means when he speaks of the divine essence in Jesus Christ is somewhat confusing. This is how he would define it.

What is, then, the divine essence? It is the free love, the omnipotent mercy, the holy patience of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And it is the God of this divine essence who has and maintains the initiative in this event. He is not, therefore, subject to any higher force when He gives Himself up to the lowliness of the human being of the Son of God. The

⁵Ibid., p. 157.

⁶Ibid., p. 177.

⁷Ibid., pp. 179-180.

Father, He Himself, gives Himself up. This offering is, therefore, elected and determined by His own majesty--the majesty of the divine Subject.⁸

It may be helpful in attempting to understand this statement to remember that Barth always speaks of the "modes of presence" of the deity in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is the member of the Trinity which is usually most depersonalized and defined as love. Perhaps the key to the understanding of this statement lies in Barth's interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity. Unfortunately it is not within the scope of this paper to debate Barth's position with respect to this doctrine. His position has been evaluated, and it is suggested that the reader consult some of these evaluations if he is further interested in the problem.⁹

Jesus Christ as True Man

While most theologians would be satisfied with the statement that "The Word became flesh" on the evidence of John 1, Barth is not. He feels that this statement ought

⁸Barth, op. cit., IV, 2, 86.

⁹G. C. Berkouwer, The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956).

Cornelius Van Til, The New Modernism (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1947).

Leonard Hodgson, The Doctrine of the Trinity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944).

Claude Welch, In This Name; The Doctrine of the Trinity in Contemporary Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952).

Cornelius Van Til, Has Karl Barth Become Orthodox? (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1954).

to be paraphrased to read, "The Word assumed flesh." Barth says that the incarnation is inconceivable, but it is not absurd. To understand the word became in its traditional sense makes an absurdity out of the incarnation. If, however, we use the word assumed, we then guard against two possibilities of error. The first would be to understand by the phrase, "The Word became flesh" that God in His mode of existence as the Son ceased to be the eternal God. The second, just as blasphemous, would be to understand that in the incarnation a third being arose who would be neither true God nor true man.¹⁰ Barth feels that there are only two things which can be said about the incarnation on the basis of John 1:14, and that when these are said, all is said that can or should be ventured. If we put the emphasis on the word flesh, then we make a statement about God, namely, that without any change in His nature, according to His second mode of existence, He went into the far country of human creatureliness, corruption and perdition. If, on the other hand, we place the emphasis on the Word, then we have made a statement about God. Then we say that,

. . . without ceasing to be man, but assumed and accepted in his creatureliness and corruption by the Son of God, man--this one Son of Man--returned home to where He belonged, to His place as true man, to fellowship with God, to relationship with His fellows, to

¹⁰Karl Barth, The Doctrine of the Word of God, in Church Dogmatics (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), I, Second Half-Volume, 160. (Hereafter designated I, 2. Page reference will be third number in sequence).

the ordering of His inward and outward existence, to the fulness of His time for which He was made, to the presence and enjoyment of the salvation for which He was destined.¹¹

In a very brief section Barth discusses the proposition that Jesus Christ, as true man, exists only inasmuch as the Son of God is this one man. He is here trying to guard against any idea that there was a man existing apart from the Logos into whom the Logos entered and took up a new form of existence.¹² He affirms that Jesus Christ from the moment of conception was True God and that therefore the Theotokos must be predicated of the Virgin Mary. However, Barth wishes to be certain that we understand that by his affirmation of this ascription to the Virgin Mary he is not a partner to the Mariologizing of the Roman Communion. Moreover, Barth also admits that this is one of the places where he is somewhat parting company with Calvin who either avoided or contested the term Theotokos.¹³

Barth has an all-inclusive understanding of the "human nature" in Jesus Christ which leaves little doubt as to whether or not he affirms the true humanity of Jesus Christ.

By the "human nature" in which He who is very God is also very man we have to understand the same historical life as our own, the same creaturely mode of existence as an individually distinct unity of soul and body in a fixed time between birth and death, in the same orientation to God and fellowman. From this

¹¹Barth, op. cit., IV, 2, 20-21.

¹²Barth, op. cit., I, 2, 150.

¹³Ibid., p. 138.

standpoint "human nature" means quite simply that which makes a man man as distinct from God, angel or animal, his specific creatureliness, his humanitas. By "human nature," however, we have also to understand the "flesh," human nature as it is determined and stamped by human sin, the corrupt and perverted human nature which stands in eternal jeopardy and has fallen a victim, not only to dying, but to death, to perishing. It is human nature as characterised in this way, adamic human nature, that the Son of God assumed when He became man, and it is as the bearer of this human nature that He was and is the Mediator and Reconciler between God and us. Jesus Christ was and is very man in this twofold sense.¹⁴

However, we are immediately forced to ask the question as to whether or not Barth has gone too far in his statement about the humanity of Jesus Christ. It is to be doubted whether or not Barth is taking seriously the statement about Jesus Christ found in Hebrews 4:15-16.

A good "for instance" of this accusation is afforded when Barth discusses the theology of Gregory of Nyssa. Gregory of Nyssa discussed the incarnation of our Savior as well as the human nature which He assumed, and in order to deal honestly with the witness of Scripture with regard to both the creation and continued creation of man by God, as well as with the sinlessness of our Lord, he was forced to make the distinction between original sin as being essential to human nature or being accidental to human nature. St. Gregory, of course, decided in favor of the latter and found the source of sin in man's will. He argued that sin was not essential to human nature and that the mere fact

¹⁴Barth, op. cit., IV, 2, 25.

that a man is born does not involve sin but that any sin which is involved in the act of procreation is inherent in the lust which precedes the act of birth.¹⁵ The Lutheran Symbols make the same kind of distinction in the light of the Scriptural evidence as well as the Church's tradition.¹⁶

Karl Barth frankly repudiates Gregory of Nyssa and the early tradition of the catholic Church so it must be imagined that he would do the same to the Lutheran position.

He writes:

The Early Church and its theology often went too far in its well intentioned effort to equate these statements with those about the sinlessness of Jesus. But there must be no weakening or obscuring of the saving truth that the nature which God assumed in Christ is identical with our nature as we see it in the light of the Fall. If it were otherwise, how could Christ be really like us? What concern would we have with Him? We stand before God characterised by the Fall. God's Son not only assumed our nature but He entered the concrete form of our nature, under which we stand before God as men damned and lost. He did not produce and establish this form differently from all of us; though innocent, He became guilty; though without sin He was made to be sin. But these things must not cause us to detract from His complete solidarity with us and in that way to remove Him to a distance from us. We must not agree with Gregory of Nyssa (Or. cat. 15 f.), when he bases his statement that the incarnation is not unworthy of God upon the intrinsic goodness of human nature itself, upon the fact that birth and death in themselves do not involve suffering in the strict and proper sense. Our comment must be that our

¹⁵Edward Hardy and Cyril Richardson, editors, Christology of the Later Fathers, in The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), III, 292f. and 306f.

J. N. D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), pp. 349ff.

¹⁶Theodore G. Tappert, editor, The Book of Concord (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), pp. 466ff. and pp. 516ff.

nature is not a human nature good in itself. . . .
We can only comment that our nature is now natura
vitiata.¹⁷

Although Barth does not mention the Symbols, as has already been inferred, he does criticize the Lutheran dogmaticians in general and Quenstedt and Hollaz in particular.

In fairness to Barth it must be stated that he does not want to make a sinner out of Christ--that is, a person who actually committed sin in His sojourn in the far country. In the light of the previous quotation the following one is extremely interesting.

In becoming the same as we are, the Son of God is the same in quite a different way from us; in other words, in our human being what we do is omitted, and what we omit is done. This Man would not be God's revelation to us, God's reconciliation with us, if He were not, as true Man, the true, unchangeable, perfect God Himself. He is the true God because and so far as it has pleased the true God to adopt the true being of man. But this is the expression of a claim upon this being, a sanctification and blessing of this being, which excludes sin.¹⁸

Barth maintains the sinlessness of Jesus Christ by saying that "Jesus' sinlessness obviously consists in His direct admission of the meaning of the incarnation."¹⁹ By this he means that the "second Adam" unlike Adam does not wish to be as God but acknowledges before God the state and condition of fallen man in which He now finds Himself in Adam's nature and thus bears the wrath of God as ". . . a righteous

¹⁷Barth, op. cit., I, 2, 153.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 155. Italics mine.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 157.

necessary wrath."²⁰ Thus Barth can say that Christ was not a sinful man, but that inwardly and outwardly His situation was that of a sinful man. Thus, "He bore innocently what Adam and all of us in Adam have been guilty of."²¹

But perhaps there is a less complicated way to solve the riddle of the Sinless sinner. Certainly the mystery seems to be solved if the humanity of Jesus Christ is merely an organ in which the Logos operates or through which He performs His mighty deeds. This is exactly what Barth seems to have done with the human nature of our Lord. He states:

There is no reason to mistake the pure humanity of Jesus Christ in relation to the empowering which comes to His human essence by the electing grace of God. We insist that its function is that of an organ of the Son of Man who is also and primarily the Son of God. It is to Him and not this organ, to His human essence as such, that there is given "all power in heaven and in earth" (Mt. 28:18). It does not possess, but it mediates and attests the divine power and authority. It bears and serves it.²²

At another point in his discussion, in a very rationalistic sense, Barth makes the point that any deification of this temple in which the Godhead dwells would utterly destroy it.²³ This kind of language hardly seems to be taking the testimony of the Scripture seriously. If there is no union

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid., p. 152.

²²Barth, op. cit., IV, 2, 98. Italics mine.

²³Ibid., p. 89. Also I, 2, 168 where flesh is called "shell of the Word."

or communion between the two natures, if the one merely uses the other, then it is easy to see how complete sinfulness can be predicated of the human nature per se which was assumed by our Lord and yet keep Him the "spotless" Lamb of God. But the moment we do this we surrender God's mystery.

Now we can understand how Barth speaks of the "exaltation" of humanity--both His and ours. When He speaks of Christ as the "unique" Man he merely means a man who came with unquestionable authority, One who did not have to be instructed by either Scribe or Pharisee.²⁴ The exaltation of the humanity never for a moment makes the humanity of Christ a bit different from ours as far as power and glory are concerned, but Barth says, "It means the history of the placing of the humanity common to Him and us on a higher level, on which it becomes and is completely unlike ours even in its complete likeness. . . ." ²⁵ The manner in which His and our humanity is exalted is that God humbled Himself by assuming it. This is the extent of that which can be said on the subject.

Barth maintains that the incarnation of Christ was an absolutely necessary event and one which will have eternal consequences. He states at one place in his discussion that the humanity of Christ is not something which happens now and will later disappear--something assumed merely for the

²⁴Barth, op. cit., IV, 1, 159-160.

²⁵Barth, op. cit., IV, 2, 28.

purpose of mediation.²⁶ In another volume he states, "He would die as a true man, only to rise from the dead the third day as the same true man."²⁷

Docetism is clearly condemned by Barth. He goes so far as to say that every kind of docetism is impossible and forbidden. To doubt the historicity of Jesus Christ is to bring into question the prima veritas.²⁸ It is interesting and rewarding to see how Barth ties up the unity of the Old and New Testaments as a necessary corollary in the avoidance of any docetic influence.

In its bracketing with the Old Testament the New closes the door against every kind of Docetism, however crude or subtle, by positing the man who was and is the Son of God in His singularity and at the same time in the relevance of His existence for every man of every place, by setting the happening of the redemption history between God and man in world history, at a cosmic place, a place on earth. Docetism is the old enemy, an enemy which is constantly reappearing, of the concrete truth of the history of redemption as the history of the passion. When Docetism threatens, this truth is threatened. And when the authenticity of the Old Testament is disputed in its unity with the New, Docetism threatens.²⁹

Extra-calvinisticum

The statements of Barth that the assuming of humanity by the Logos is an event with eternal significance and

²⁶Ibid., p. 35.

²⁷Barth, op. cit., I, 2, 41.

²⁸Barth, op. cit., IV, 2, 36.

²⁹Barth, op. cit., IV, 1, 168.

durability would naturally lead us into a discussion of Barth's position on the extra-calvinisticum in order that we might be able to understand what he means by these affirmations.

The big problem encountered in any discussion of the extra-calvinisticum is, "Who is guilty of the innovation?" The Lutheran party, as might be expected, accuse the Reformed of an innovation. Barth, who is traditionally Calvinistic in his basic outlook on this subject, strenuously accuses the Lutherans of being guilty of adding a "new" element to the Church's theology.

Barth feels that the extra-calvinisticum must be maintained because:

An absolute inclusio of the Logos in the creature, the man Jesus, would mean a subordination of the Word to the flesh, a limitation and therefore an alteration of His divine nature, and therefore of God Himself.³⁰

This is another example which leads us to believe that Barth is not taking seriously the Lutheran position over against the extra-calvinisticum. It must be admitted that he is familiar with the Lutheran position, but it appears that Barth is too much captivated with the finitum non est capax infiniti to be able to understand and appreciate it.

Barth states:

The early Lutherans were quite aware of this doubtfulness in their doctrine. In practice they wished to adhere as much to the vere Deus as to the vere homo, and not to infringe upon the Word as God in His divinity

³⁰Ibid., p. 180.

or upon the flesh as a creature in its creatureliness. Thus J. Gerhard . . . explained that the unity of the flesh with the Word, in virtue of which the Word was never anywhere henceforth without the flesh as the flesh is not without the Word, must be thought of in the modus illocalis, supernaturalis et sublimissimus. And Quenstedt . . . continued his exposition with the qualification . . . ita tamen, ut nec caro immensa sit, nec Δ ros includatur, finiatur vel circumscribatur, sed et illa finita et hic infinitus permaneat. But what does a limiting of the Word to the flesh mean, if it is specifically not to assert a really spatial limiting, i.e., one appropriate to the concept "flesh", yet just as little an unlimitedness in the flesh appropriate to the concept "Word"? Have not Luther and the Lutherans ventured too much in their attempt at such a simple reversal of the statement about the enhypostasis of the humanity of Christ, or at the completion of it by a statement about the "enfleshment" of the Word in the exclusive sense? Does such a statement make any clear assertion at all, seeing its aim is to deny neither the vere Deus nor the vere homo? The road which led to this crowning statement is understandable and illuminating. But would it not have been better either not to make it, or to explain it at once by a counter-statement, since it obviously cannot be explained in and by itself?³¹

It is understandable that Barth can never agree with our position as long as he confines himself to spatial concepts in spite of the careful qualification which the Lutheran party has used.

It is interesting, however, to see that Barth is far from satisfied with his extra-calvinisticum. He is honest enough to see and admit the many difficulties into which this leads all those who take the doctrine seriously. He is even willing to admit that it had an adverse effect upon the theology of John Calvin with special reference to his doctrine of predestination. He also admits that right down

³¹Barth, op. cit., I, 2, 167.

to our day the doctrine has led to fatal speculation about the work of the logos asarkos. This leads to the evolution of some "other" god whose presence and activity we can contemplate outside of the Word made flesh. Of this "other" god Barth wishes to have no part.³² He finally states, "In short it cannot be denied that the Reformed totus intra et extra offers at least as many difficulties as the Lutheran totus intra."³³

Communicatio Idiomatum

I should like to begin this section of the discussion with a statement of Barth's which is probably as close as we shall come to finding anything similar to the Lutheran approach on the communication of attributes or any real union and communion between them. One would hardly expect to find such a positive statement in the theology of a Calvinistic theologian, and this helps us to see again how Barth does not hesitate to break with his tradition when he feels that this is necessary. He writes:

When we think of Him, we cannot imagine two--a divinity which does not yet impart itself to the humanity, and a humanity which still looks forward to the impartation of the divinity, and therefore still lacks it. We cannot speak of Him in words which refer exclusively to His divine or exclusively of His human essence. We have to see concretely in the one Jesus Christ, and to think and say concretely of Him, everything that belongs to divine and everything that belongs to human

³²Barth, op. cit., IV, 1, 180.

³³Barth, op. cit., I, 2, 170.

essence. Again, whatever belongs to divine or human essence, whatever characterises or distinguishes the one or the other as such, is to be seen concretely in Jesus Christ, and to be thought and said concretely of Him.³⁴

Barth, however, is no Jesuit and will not allow us to deceive ourselves. He does not really believe that there is any actual communication of attributes. He goes to great pains to deny this. And while he is so belabored to deal with this point, his reasoning and sense of fairness with another theological system (the Lutheran system) seems to be at its lowest ebb.

Barth speaks of the "peculiarly Lutheran doctrine of the unity of the natures and of the consequent communicatio idiomatum."³⁵ Here Barth has one question for the Lutherans and that is this: "Do we not have revealedness instead of revelation, a state instead of an event?"³⁶ This seems like a rather insignificant question in comparison to the one which Barth admits the Reformed will have to answer, namely, are they not guilty of teaching a "nuda sustentatio" --a mere presence lent to human nature by the Word of God.

Barth is continually setting up straw men in his attempt to deal with the Lutheran question addressed to the Reformed position on the communio idiomatum. At one point he says:

³⁴Barth, op. cit., IV, 2, 74.

³⁵Barth, op. cit., I, 2, 164.

³⁶Ibid.

But when it speaks of a divinisation (Lutheran theology that is) of human essence in Jesus Christ, and when his divinisation of the flesh of Jesus Christ is understood as the supreme and final and proper meaning and purpose of the incarnation--even to the point of worshipping it--a highly equivocal situation is created. All this is still said, of course, within the sphere of Christology. And it is all said with a reference only to the humanity of Jesus Christ. But how are we to guard against a deduction which is very near the surface, which once it is seen is extremely tempting, and once accepted very easy to draw, but which can compromise at a single stroke nothing less than the whole of Christology? For after all, is not the humanity of Jesus Christ, by definition, that of all men? And even if it is said only of Him, does not this mean that the essence of all men, human essence as such, is capable of divinisation? If it can be said in relation to Him, why not to all men?³⁷

An entire paper could be written in reply to this brief paragraph. Allow me to state just a few of the most obvious points which ought to be considered:

1. What Lutheran theologian of any repute has ever stated that the divinisation of the flesh of Jesus Christ is the supreme, final, proper meaning and purpose of the incarnation?
2. Doctrinally erroneous deductions can be made from any doctrinally sound statement.
3. A Lutheran theologian would say that the humanity of Jesus Christ was exactly like that of all men except that it was without sin. (Hebrews 2)
4. What can be said of Him cannot be said of all men because of the personal union. This demonstrates the appropriateness of our position. A Lutheran theologian would not discuss the communication of attributes to the human nature outside of the context of the personal union. We are not interested in the human nature in abstracto. Surely Barth knows this!

Let us consider another case in point. Barth writes:

The objection can obviously be brought at once against

³⁷Barth, op. cit., IV, 2, 81.

this view (the Lutheran view of the communicatio idiomatum) that it is a strange deity which can suddenly become the predicate of human essence, and a strange humanity to which all the divine predicates can suddenly be ascribed as subject. Does not this compromise both the true deity and the true humanity of Jesus Christ? Does it not involve either a deification of the creature, or humanisation of the Creator, or both?³⁸

At this point Barth has done a grave injustice to Lutheran theology. The rhetorical question as to whether or not he is unfamiliar with our position on the communicatio idiomatum is not even in place. Barth is familiar with our position. He admits that we have no genus tapeinaticum.³⁹ He knows that no Lutheran theologian has ever applied all of the divine predicates to the humanity of Jesus Christ! I should like the name of one Lutheran theologian of repute that has ever predicated eternity of the human nature--one of the first ascriptions made of the divine nature. This is a misrepresentation of fact.

Not only does Barth misrepresent the Lutheran position, but he seems to be somewhat sarcastic with respect to our position when he speaks of our "heaven-storming doctrine of the humanity of the Mediator." In this paragraph the Lutheran party is blamed for the development of the modern speculative anthropology. In the light of the denominational affiliations of those who have been doing most of the

³⁸Ibid., p. 79.

³⁹Ibid., p. 78.

promulgating of this "modern speculative anthropology,"⁴⁰ I do not think that this statement should even be considered too seriously. Likewise the statement that in the main our ". . . interest now centres on the communion of the natures quite apart from the personal union--if on the basis of it"⁴¹ ought to be received with the same kind of charity.

Barth makes the observation that Lutheran theology has no genus tapeinaticum. This ought to point out that our system is not based upon some form of logic but rather upon a desire to take seriously the witness of Scripture with respect to the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Evidently this does have some salutary effect upon Barth for he states that our rejection of this temptation stems ". . . from an honest if misguided zeal for a material concern delimited by Scriptures." He then hastens to add:

Of course, all these restrictions can and will be found rather artificial and laboured. They are illogical and disturb the formal beauty. But we are forced to admit that they testify to the realism, and the resolve to be faithful to Scripture, which control the development of this Lutheran theologoumenon.⁴²

As Lutherans we ought to gratefully accept this statement as a compliment.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 83.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 77.

⁴²Ibid., p. 78.

CHAPTER IV

THE PERSONAL UNION IN THE THEOLOGY OF EMIL BRUNNER

The Doctrine of the Trinity

To some readers this might seem like a strange subject with which to begin a discussion of the personal union in the theology of Emil Brunner. The author begins here because Brunner has intimately related the Trinitarian Dogma and Christology. We merely alluded to Barth's interpretation of the Trinity and allowed the subject to rest. We cannot do that with Emil Brunner because he is more outspoken than Barth on the subject.

Although Barth speaks of God in his modes of presence I seriously doubt that he would agree with Brunner when he makes a statement like the following.

This does not mean that a detailed doctrine of the Trinity, or even the mere conception of the Trinity, forms part of the Christian message, for such a conception cannot be found within the New Testament. It is, however, true that the whole of the testimony of the Apostles is full of the Trinitarian idea, and every Christian statement is rooted in it, namely, in the idea that between Christ and God there is a relation which differs from that between Christ and us, a relation in which from the very beginning Christ was on the side of God over against us, as the divine authority, as the Lord (Kyrios) whom we worship.¹

It would certainly seem that even more than a "mere conception of the Trinity" is involved in the subject of

¹Emil Brunner, The Mediator (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), pp. 311-312.

Christology. The Scriptures nowhere ascribe incarnation either of the Father or of the Holy Spirit. It seems that this fact would immediately involve us in some concept of the Holy Trinity.

In lieu of discussing the doctrine of the Trinity, Brunner offers a novel solution. Why not speak of two persons instead of three? By this he obviously refers to the first two persons. The Holy Spirit is then understood as the echo of the Word of Christ in our heart.² It seems unnecessary to point out that this suggestion does not do justice to the Scriptural evidence concerning the nature and function of the Holy Spirit.

The Doctrine of the Virgin Birth

If there is one concept which is at the center of Brunner's theology, it seems to be his idea about revelation. He holds a dynamic view of revelation--one which maintains that if anything can be grasped by the mind, it ceases to be of the nature of divine revelation.³ Perhaps this is why Brunner has so much difficulty with certain doctrines found in Holy Scripture, such as the virgin birth, the Holy Trinity, and the two natures. But does the fact of the virgin birth, which Brunner calls a theory, really solve any mysteries or claim to be a substitute for miracle?

²Ibid., pp. 282-283.

³Ibid., p. 278.

Evidently Brunner thinks that it does.

One of the first reasons for rejecting the virgin birth of Christ which is advanced by Brunner is that it tends to obscure the meaning of the incarnation. He is of the opinion that men will become so captivated with the how of God's miracle that they will overlook the what that has happened.⁴ Brunner is not able to document this claim, of course, in the theology of any major conservative catholic group.

Brunner realizes that in order to deny the miracle of the virgin birth he will have to deal with the Scriptural evidence for this doctrine. He does this with great subjective gusto.

Of course, as the theology of the Church has done for centuries, we can interpret the narratives of Matthew and Luke in such a way that their statement can be brought into harmony with that of the Gospel of John; but apart from this re-interpretation there is a clear contradiction. It is therefore not wholly improbable that the Johannine Prologue was deliberately placed where it is, in opposition to the doctrine of the Virgin Birth.⁵

The little words "of course" are pushed to carry an extremely heavy load in a context in which they are completely undocumented. And how one finds a clear contradiction between Matthew-Luke and John is an interesting question since St. John neither affirms nor denies the virgin birth. He is not interested in speaking to the question.

⁴Ibid., p. 322.

⁵Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1952), II, 353. Cf. also p. 329. (Hereafter referred to as Dogmatics, II) Italics mine.

We ought to allow Brunner one last statement in defense of his position. He here relates his rejection to the incarnation as intimately as he can and struggles to show us exactly why he feels he must reject the virgin birth of our Lord.

The great, unthinkable, unimaginable miracle of the Incarnation which the apostles proclaim, is not that the Son of God was born as the son of a virgin, but that the Eternal Son of God, who from all eternity was in the bosom of the Father, uncreated, Himself proceeding from the Being of God Himself, became man; that He, the eternal and personal Word of God, meets us in Jesus Christ as man, of our flesh and blood, as our Lord, who in His existence manifests to us the Being of His Father, and as the Redeemer, in whom we have reconciliation and free access to God and are true sons of God, if we believe in Him. . . . The fight against this view is usually carried on by those who do not believe in the divinity of Christ, by modern Adoptionism, which in theological terms is called "Liberalism". It should be clear from the tenor of these remarks, that our rejection of the doctrine of the Virgin Birth has nothing to do with this view, but comes from the very opposite angle.⁶

Brunner's high appreciation of the incarnation of our Lord is most gratifying. Surely it is not necessary to sacrifice the virgin birth of our Lord, however, to maintain an equally high appreciation for the incarnation of the Savior.

Although we are now leaving our formal discussion of the virgin birth in Brunner's theology we shall have to treat it at later times when he himself relates it to other doctrines of the person of Jesus Christ, such as his humanity, for instance.

⁶Ibid., p. 356.

The Humanity of Jesus Christ

Emil Brunner affirms the fact that in the incarnation the Logos assumed a human nature. He seriously takes modern theology to task for their misunderstanding of what this event means.

This statement has been misunderstood by modern theology, with its lack of perspicacity, and taken to mean simply "naturalism." But the early Fathers meant by "nature" simply the totality of human existence as the possibility of personal life. "Human nature is all that makes up a human life." Jesus Christ is true Man; His life lacked nothing which formed part of human historical life. It does not mean that a "section" of human and natural life has been removed and in its place a "section" of the divine life has been inserted. At least this is the central tendency of the doctrine. . . . The life of Jesus is not a blend of natural and supernatural elements. So far as the historical and visible side of His life is concerned it is quite natural and historical.⁷

It appears evident that Brunner would have no difficulty affirming the vere homo.

But this high concept of the humanity of Jesus Christ affords Brunner additional grist for his anti-virgin birth mill. Brunner asks the question, "Is a man who is born without a human father a 'true man'?"⁸ Brunner feels that a man born without a father lacks the most essential thing for a human being--the fact that he has been born in exactly the same way as we all are.⁹ Brunner finds traces of docetism

⁷Brunner, op. cit., The Mediator, p. 317.

⁸Brunner, op. cit., Dogmatics, II, 355.

⁹Ibid.

and ascetic anti-sex tendencies in the doctrine of the virgin birth. Furthermore, and this is extremely important, he feels that the doctrine of the virgin birth has done much to foster "Mariolatry." In a footnote he states that when Karl Barth (K. D., I, 2, p. 200) quotes with approval Berdyaev's passionate rejection of his denial of the virgin birth, Barth fails to include a sufficient amount of the context of Berdyaev's writing so that all can see that the only reason Berdyaev is denouncing him is in order that he might defend ". . . the foundation of the worship of the Virgin, of Mariolatry."¹⁰

The Word became flesh! Brunner understands by this statement that the Logos assumed personality. He is careful to state that in our human historical sense of the word, personality applies only to the humanity of Jesus Christ.¹¹ He makes a careful distinction between person and personality. Brunner states:

It is this Man, in whose personal existence the Divine Person meets us--through faith. The Person of this personality does not resemble a human being; here the humanity of Christ ceases; indeed, this Person is not historically visible at all. He can be seen by faith alone.¹²

This is a distinction which Brunner must make in view of his concept of revelation. It is a handy way to keep the Word

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Brunner, op. cit., The Mediator, p. 266.

¹²Ibid., p. 345.

separate from the flesh.

The above distinction is important to Brunner for another reason. He does not want to have to say that the Christ assumed or became a human person. He wants to avoid this because of the implications of sin and corruption which are connected with the human person as Brunner understands the person of man. He might go along with Barth in the rejection of the distinction between that which is essential and accidental to human nature as formulated in the theology of Gregory of Nyssa, but he is much more cautious than Barth in that which he is willing to ascribe of human nature to the incarnate Christ.

It is the mystery of the Person of Jesus Christ that at the point at which we have this sinful "Person" He has, or rather is, the divine person of the Logos. For "person" means precisely that which we cannot have, but must be. Christ has indeed assumed human nature, but not a human person. Thus He may have assumed the possibility of being tempted--the possibility of sin which is connected with the historical personality--but He did not assume the corrupted personality spoilt by Original Sin, that is, the necessity of falling into temptation. To fall in temptation--in spite of Original Sin--is never a natural fact, but always and only a personal act.¹³

In this particular context both Barth and Brunner treat the passage in Romans 8:3. Brunner shows himself to be more cautious by qualifying his exegesis in the light of the testimony about Jesus Christ found in Hebrews 4:15.¹⁴

One of the passages in Brunner which would seem to have

¹³Ibid., p. 319.

¹⁴Brunner, op. cit., Dogmatics, II, 323-324.

serious implications in any discussion of the personal union in Jesus Christ is that in which Brunner treats the humanity of Jesus Christ and our redemption. He is objecting to Arianism and Sabellianism, both of which heresies compromise the deity of Jesus Christ. But then Brunner appears to go to the opposite end of the spectrum insisting that our salvation can in no way be accomplished by the Man Jesus. It is certainly true, as Brunner states, that no human being can be a Redeemer since every human being needs redemption himself.¹⁵ But, even in this context, is it not important to stress the union of the two in Jesus Christ? Theoretically one would have to answer the question, "Could we be redeemed by God alone without the incarnation?" in the affirmative but the fact is that we were not so redeemed by God.

It is somewhat unfortunate that Brunner does not discuss the extra-calvinisticum as did both Barth and Berkouwer, but the following passage would lead us to believe that he might well affirm the type separation which is taught in this doctrine.

The "flesh" is not the "Word," although it is practically impossible to separate this "Word" from the "Flesh." The identity which exists between the two is not direct but indirect. But it is quite certain that this indirect identity does exist, so that we who believe, in spite of the fact that this history is not itself the revelation, are absolutely bound to it and interested in it.¹⁶

¹⁵Brunner, op. cit., The Mediator, p. 277.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 355. Italics mine.

We shall take occasion at a later time to point to other passages that would indicate affinity with the extra-calvinisticum. This passage has been listed here because it deals with the "Word-flesh" relationship.

Brunner is not easily excited by those passages which are ordinarily applied to the human nature of Jesus Christ. When he encounters one of them he merely states that "It belongs to the very nature of the incarnate Logos, to the very nature of the Son who goes through the world in the form of a servant, that He should subordinate Himself to the Father."¹⁷ These passages all indicate the role which the Son has to play in His incarnation.

Brunner also points out that for all of the ways that the Incarnate Son is like us human beings there are still certain manners in which He radically differs from us. He writes:

. . . while we agree with the verdict "He is a Man like ourselves", we are also obliged to come to the exactly opposite view and say: He is not a Man like ourselves. Not only can no one accuse Him of sin, but He stands before us as One who, at every point in His life, is wholly one with the will of God; who really does not allow Himself to be ministered unto, but who "ministers, and gives His life a ransom for many".¹⁸

Beside this life of sacrifice which differentiates the Man Jesus Christ from us men, Brunner also points to the authority of the Divine-Man as opposed to all other men. What prophets

¹⁷Ibid., p. 353.

¹⁸Brunner, op. cit., Dogmatics, II, 324.

promised this One was able to give and fulfill.¹⁹

Whereas Barth and Berkouwer affirmed the extra-calvinisticum they at least stated that the incarnation also had implications for the resurrected Lord. Barth could say, for instance, that the God-man who dies was the same as He who rose from the grave. But Brunner denies the bodily or corporeal resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here again, as in the case of the virgin birth, Brunner is extremely subjective in his use of Scripture and tenuous in his argumentation.

Naturally for both conflicting parties the physical resurrection was understood in the sense of the Empty Tomb. (Parties are Lutheran and Reformed.) The fact that the witness of the Bible on this very point, so far as the Exalted Lord is concerned, has nothing to say about a "corporeality" of Jesus Christ, seemed not to disturb these theologians, who were so sure of their ground. Since they did not doubt the traditional conception of the physical Resurrection, they did not feel obliged to carry the original Pauline line any further, and they also overlooked the fact that whenever Paul speaks of the Body of Christ he means the Church, and nothing but the Church, and that the New Testament knows nothing of a Christ transferred to heaven in bodily form--save for those two passages of Luke in connexion with the story of the Ascension. But the fact that both the Lutheran Pro and the Calvinistic Contra were defended with the same intense religious passion, should warn us that here they had ventured into a region of theological speculation where a clear statement of faith is no longer possible, but opposing "truths" can be maintained and "proved" with equal reason.²⁰

It is extremely difficult to communicate with a man who can affirm "opposing truths" and be happy with this situation.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 325.

²⁰Ibid., p. 376.

It is equally frustrating to try to deal with a person whose theology can merely overlook certain passages of Holy Scripture which he feels to be unimportant. Then what shall we say about the subjective exegesis here employed as well as in the passage where Brunner says that "The 'Body' of the Risen Lord, according to the Bible . . . is always and only the Church."²¹ In I Corinthians 10:16 is the blood of Christ the Church? Then neither is the body of Christ! Subjective judgment is written all over the closing quotation.

Thus, as we look back, we can see that the further Christological development of the doctrine of the physical Resurrection confirms our view, based upon the testimony of Paul, that the traditional view of the physical Resurrection is not based upon the testimony of the first witnesses, but upon a later, cruder, view, which for its part led to the medieval belief in the Resurrection of the flesh, to that dramatical mythical vision of the dead arising at the sound of the trumpet.²²

The Deity of Jesus Christ

It is on the subject of the deity of Christ that Brunner's theology is most forceful and positive. One might well expect this because the deity of Christ relates directly to Brunner's dynamic concept of revelation. He himself points this out.

Every attempt to destroy this quality of His Being, which is defined in the "Two Natures" doctrine, weakens and finally completely destroys the scriptural belief

²¹Ibid., p. 377.

²²Ibid., pp. 376-377.

in revelation. Thus we are forced to this conclusion: If Christ really is the revelation of God, in the same way as the prophetic Word is the revelation of God, save that He is the Word in Person, making known the Will and Mind of God through Himself, instead of through a merely spoken word, then in His own nature He is God. For He who reveals the Proper Name of God is Himself God. He who brings to us the secret mystery of God, the mystery which apart from His coming would be for ever hidden from our sight, is indeed supra-mundane and supra-human; His place is "yonder" where God is; His "Nature" is as Divine as ours is human; in the mystery of His Person the secret of the personality of God is revealed; yet such a revelation is indeed wholly beyond our understanding. He is not a creature, but is Himself the Creator.²³

Brunner ties up his discussion of the divine nature of Jesus Christ and revelation with the fact that the Christ is the "only" Son, not the primus inter pares. Christ is said to stand on the further side of the frontier between man and God. He is in absolute contrast to humanity on the whole. He has absolute authority and is worthy of worship--something which could not be granted to any man without committing idolatry.²⁴

There are many passages which, if isolated, make the reader wonder if Brunner actually believes in the divinity of Jesus Christ. They are those passages which say that Jesus stands on the side of God over against man, etc. However, when one reads such a statement as the following then most of those concerns are allayed. Brunner says of Christ, "Thus His Person is not the transparent veil through

²³Brunner, op. cit., The Mediator, p. 248.

²⁴Ibid., p. 243.

which gleams the divine, but He is Himself the Divine; hence He is not that which is divine, but God."²⁵ Remember that Person for Brunner means the Divine Nature.

Brunner maintains that it is only according to this above-mentioned Divine Nature that we may worship Christ. He makes the following statement.

If Christ is to be worshipped as divine, then certainly He is not to be worshipped as an "historical personality," for this would be to idolize a creature--in other words, idolatry--but His claim to be an object of worship lies in His Divine Nature.²⁶

From a passage such as this it is easy to see how Brunner would interpret those passages which ascribe worship to the entire Christ. One must make a separation for purposes of worship.

It is rewarding to see how Brunner deals with those who claim that Christ was the greatest of the prophets and thus would deny His divinity. He seeks them out on the very ground on which they think they are safe and shows that those who make such claims do not understand the true nature of the prophet and that actually to say that Jesus was more than a prophet is to ascribe deity to Him. If Christ is more than a prophet, then He is the one in whom God does not merely express His own Name in Word but in Person. This makes of the Christ the one in whom God Himself is personally present and who acts with God's authority. This means

²⁵Ibid., p. 274.

²⁶Ibid., p. 265.

that in contrast to all men Christ is the "Wholly Other."²⁷

Brunner condemns certain heresies with respect to the person of Christ among which are adoptionism, sabellianism and arianism. He sees in arianism the arch-heresy because it equates the Son with the Jesus of History and therefore makes Him subordinate to the Father in essence.²⁸ In His role as the incarnate Redeemer Brunner is ready to allow for a theory of subordinationism but strenuously rejects all such statements if they are applied to the "essence" of divine nature in Jesus Christ.

Implications of Revelation

In Brunner's theology revelation has certain definite implications for a study of the personal union of the two natures in Jesus Christ. The first implication of revelation is the necessity of the incarnation of our Lord itself. Brunner defines the central truth of the Christian faith as being that ". . . the eternal Son of God took upon Himself our humanity, not that the man Jesus acquired divinity."²⁹ He furthermore states that "The direction of the movement is the decisive question for faith as a whole."³⁰ In other words, revelation is that act of God by which He comes to us.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 352-353.

²⁸Brunner, op. cit., Dogmatics, II, 347.

²⁹Brunner, op. cit., The Mediator, p. 316.

³⁰Ibid.

The coming of God to us always implies a condescension on the part of God for it is a movement from above to below. However, this does not involve any change in God. Brunner is very definite on this point.

Revelation means the assumption of the temporal by the Eternal, of finitude by the Infinite, of personality by the Absolute. Then does this mean an actual change? No. Through the revelation God does not become anything other than He is. Otherwise how could this be a revelation of God, how could we know God in the revelation? Nowhere do the Scriptures assert that "God became a man."³¹

The fact that God does condescend but does not change nor become a man leads us to a third implication of revelation.

The third implication of revelation for Brunner is that even while God is revealing Himself He is still the hidden God, the deus absconditus.

For a God who even in revealing Himself were not at the same time the hidden God, the mysterious, the Lord, the One who cannot be possessed, would not be the God who as perfect Love is also the Holy and Unapproachable.³²

The abscondity of God is then part of the very definition of revelation in Christ Jesus according to Brunner.

The fourth point which must be made here is that this condescension has implication for the mind of Christ. To the question as to whether or not the knowledge of Jesus was limited, Brunner claims we must answer with a decided "Yes."³³ Brunner even points to the prayers of Jesus as evidence of

³¹Ibid., pp. 332-333.

³²Ibid., p. 334.

³³Brunner, op. cit., Dogmatics, II, 324.

the Savior's limited knowledge. He writes, "Jesus at prayer places Himself on the level of those who are limited in their knowledge of future events. Jesus would not be True Man if this were not the case."³⁴ One wonders what Brunner would do with the prayer of Jesus, knowing before He prayed how He would revive the corpse, in order that those who saw the miracle might believe and glorify God.

The Doctrine of the Two Natures

Brunner evidences a great reluctance to discuss the subject of the Two Natures in Christ for which he would like Luther to share some small responsibility. It would be impossible to tell exactly what passage Brunner had in mind because the reference is completely undocumented. Brunner feels that a discussion of the Two Natures doctrine turns a miracle of salvation into a metaphysical problem. He feels that the existential question: What took place? is turned into the inquisitive inquiry: How did it take place? He claims that we find no trace of this question in the New Testament outside of the "theory of the Virgin Birth."³⁵ He furthermore likens the Two Natures discussion to the case of the doctrine of Inspiration through which ". . . people have wanted to look into the divine mechanism (to see how it works) instead of listening to the divine word itself."³⁶

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Brunner, op. cit., The Mediator, p. 322.

³⁶Ibid.

The thing which really makes Brunner dislike this discussion, as he himself admits, is that any discussion of the "substance" of the divine humanity will disrupt his theory of "revelation." According to this theory any discussion of the Two Natures is superfluous because it adds nothing to the statement that the borderline between Creator and creature has been crossed. Or, as Brunner thinks,

. . . once we begin to think in abstract terms of the schema of the Two Natures, then we cannot hold the unity of the divine-human Person save through the denial of the duality, thus, through the assertion of the unity of the divine nature.³⁷

Nevertheless, abstractly speaking, Brunner will affirm that Jesus is simultaneously true Man and True God.³⁸ He is willing to say:

We only see Him (Christ) as a figure in history aright when we see Him as the God-Man, when we see Him as the One who is the Eternal Son become Man, true God, of one substance with the Father. But also we only see him aright as He really is when, while insisting that He is "True God", we do not forget the other point--which, indeed, from the historical point of view comes first--that at the same time He is "True Man". This is what the doctrine of the Two Natures is trying to express, and which was expressed, in lapidary simplicity, for the first time, by the Confessio Augustana: "Vere Deus, vere homo." The great controversies--which later on became so terrible--about the doctrine of the Two Natures were all fought over this simple, yet profoundly mysterious truth.³⁹

Brunner strenuously maintains that when we have said Jesus Christ, the God-man, we have said all that can be

³⁷Brunner, op. cit., Dogmatics, II, 362.

³⁸Ibid., p. 327.

³⁹Ibid., p. 357.

said. He sees no chance for any communion between the two, and although he does not discuss the genus maiestaticum as does Barth it is evident that his position would be similar.

Brunner states:

Once we begin to think in terms of the abstract schema of "Natures" then all we can say is this: Even in Jesus Christ the human element is human, and the divine element divine, and the human and the divine are never the same.⁴⁰

All would agree that the human and divine are not the same. This is actually an unnecessary statement. But not all who do not share Brunner's theory of revelation would agree that there can be no communion between the two.

It is interesting to note that Brunner does not hesitate to make use of the doctrine of the Two Natures when it serves his purpose in the rejection of the virgin birth of our Lord. Thus he states:

All the arguments in this direction are obviously made to fit a dogmatic idea to a traditional fact, although actually it was strongly opposed to the fundamental idea of the doctrine of the "Two Natures." The doctrine of Parthenogenesis is one of those attempts to insert a divine "section" into something which is otherwise natural, a supernatural fact, and indeed a fact which can be perceived, of which two people could know something without faith.⁴¹

The Communicatio Idiomatum

Here again we have to do with the subject of revelation. Brunner states that there is a constant temptation to

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 362. Cf. also p. 360.

⁴¹Brunner, op. cit., The Mediator, p. 326.

confuse Christ's human form with His Divine Humanity which must be perceived by faith. He states that "The great theologians of the Christian Church have always been aware of this danger; but they have never been able to avoid it entirely."⁴² They too have become guilty of considering the Johannine picture of Christ as plain narrative. Then Brunner adds this gem:

The idea that Christ was "true Man" still formed part of the Creed, it is true, but the interpretation supported by the gospel history did not correspond with it, hence this theology was confronted with the necessity of thinking of a divine-humanity in which the divine was mingled in some way with the human--and this in spite of the ἁποκρίματα of the Creed. The dogmatic connecting link evolved the fatal doctrine of the communicatio idiomatum, by means of which the statement of faith concerning the unity of the divine with the human was transformed into a metaphysical theory.⁴³

Supposedly the communicatio idiomatum makes it possible for the God-man to be perceived by all. One wonders whether Brunner is not making the same mistake that Barth made in not seriously attempting to understand exactly what is being taught by the communio idiomatum.

The same type of a straw man is set up by Brunner when he writes:

The Apostles did not trouble their heads about the problem of the possibility of combining divine personality with human nature, or if they did think about this at all they did not regard it as sufficiently important, or good enough to mention it to their Churches. It was enough for them to know that He is

⁴²Ibid., p. 342.

⁴³Ibid. ἁποκρίματα should be ἁποκρίματα.

both true God and also true Man, not only from the physical but from the mental and spiritual point of view, in no way absolute, unlimited, all-knowing, all-mighty, but a weak man, who suffers, is hungry, one who has tasted the depths of human anguish and despair; in brief, a human being, whom it is only natural to regard as a mere human being.⁴⁴

Perhaps there are some who are interested in the possibility of combining divine personality with the human nature, but these ought to be differentiated from those who are more interested in taking account of the witness of Scripture concerning the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are forced to agree with Brunner that it is only natural to regard Jesus Christ as a mere human being. History testifies to this. That is what the Pharisees did. But only as long as we are captivated by the philosophical pre-supposition of the "finitum non est capax infiniti" are we forced to conclude that the physical nature which is subject to hunger cannot partake of the power of the divine in the miracle of the personal union. If we are fascinated by both the mysterious and the miraculous, it would seem that the latter position has, in fact, more to offer.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 345.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Definition of the Concept Personal Union

One of the most brief and positive statements of the meaning of the personal union is found in the Athanasian Creed.

Sed necessarium est ad aeternam salutem, ut incarnationem quoque Domini nostri Jesu Christi fideliter credat. Est ergo fides recta, ut credamus et confiteamur, quia Dominus noster Jesus Christus Dei filius, et Deus pariter et homo est: Deus est ex substantia patris ante saecula genitus, et homo est ex substantia matris in saeculo natus. Perfectus Deus, perfectus homo, ex anima rationabili et humana carne subsistens. Aequalis patri secundum divinitatem, minor patre secundum humanitatem. Qui licet Deus sit et homo, non duo tamen, sed unus est Christus. Unus autem non conversione divinitatis in carne, sed adsumptione humanitatis in Deo. Unus omnino non confusione substantiae, sed unitate personae. Nam sicut anima rationabilis et caro unus est homo, ita Deus et homo unus est Christus. Qui passus est pro salute nostra¹

The items included then are that God became man in Jesus Christ so that He is both God and man; He is perfect God and perfect man; as such He is not two Christs but one Christ; He is one not by confusion of substance but by unity in one person. This is one ancient manner by which to describe the miracle of the personal union.

¹Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1952), pp. 29-30.

Many of these exact stipulations are discussed in another of Christianity's classic statements--the Formula of Concord. Article VIII confesses faith in the one Christ who is simultaneously God and man, who possesses "two distinct natures" which are so united in His person that they are not mingled nor abolished. Furthermore,

We also believe, teach, and confess that after the incarnation neither nature in Christ henceforth subsists for itself so as to be or constitute a distinct person, but that the two natures are united in such a way that they constitute a single person in which there are and subsist at the same time both the divine and the assumed human nature, so that after the incarnation not only his divine nature but also his assumed human nature belong to the total person of Christ; and that without his humanity no less than without his deity the person of Christ, or the Son of God who has assumed flesh and has become man, is not complete. Therefore Christ is not two different persons, but one single person, in spite of the fact that two distinct natures, each with its natural essence and properties, are found unblended in him.²

The personal union involves an affirmation of the theotokos. The personal union means that the two natures in Christ are so constituted that they have a communion with each other--not that they are blended or mixed into one nature--". . . but, as Dr. Luther writes, into one person."³ The Formula of Concord points to the fathers ". . . (Irenaeus, Book IV, chap. 3; Athanasius in his Letter to Epictetus; Hilary, On the Trinity, Book IX; Basil and Gregory of Nyssa, in Theodoret; John Damascend, Book III,

²Theodore Tappert, editor, The Book of Concord (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), p. 593.

³Ibid., p. 594.

chap. 19)⁴ as further testimony for its use of the terms communion and union of the two natures. Thus they state:

Because of this personal union and communion of the divine and human natures in Christ, according to our plain Christian Creed we believe, teach, and confess everything that is said about the majesty of Christ according to his human nature at the right hand of the almighty power of God, and everything that follows from it. If the personal union and communion of the natures in the person of Christ did not exist in deed and truth, all of this would be nothing, nor could it even be.⁵

This brief summary should be sufficient to properly orientate any reader who is not familiar with the Lutheran-Scriptural understanding of the personal union. The communication of the properties of the natures, communication of attributes, exchange of properties, communicatio idiomatum, or by whatever terminology the phenomenon is known, comes from this same foundation and basis--the personal union.⁶ To avoid technicalities where they are not specifically mentioned by individual theologians, we have chosen not to discuss either this term or the three genera of the Lutheran theology further at this point. Wherever this is necessary clarification will be made.

A Critique of Berkouwer's Theology

Berkouwer's theology certainly measures up to some of the stipulations which have already been mentioned in the

⁴Ibid., p. 595.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., p. 597.

explanation of the meaning of the personal union in Jesus Christ. He, for instance, does not hesitate to affirm that Jesus Christ was and is true God. Berkouwer even discusses the pre-existent Christ as being this Son of God who is now in the flesh. In contrast to this ascription he also affirms that Jesus Christ was a true man, like us in all respects--sin being excepted.

Furthermore, Berkouwer sees a lasting effect and value to the incarnation of God's Son and affirms that the same Christ who died rose again from the dead. He affirms that in the incarnation there has occurred a miracle which defies human analogy and comprehension. And note well that he does not hesitate to use the term "union." He uses the term, however, in the sense of that found in the Belgic Confession where there is affirmed a union of both natures so that each does the things which are proper to itself.

When Berkouwer condemns docetism he does so because he rejects their basic principle that there can be no union between God and man; the infinite and the finite. Berkouwer does not agree with any theological system which says that there can be no real union between the divine and the human.

This does not mean that Berkouwer rejects the Reformed philosophical presupposition that the finite is incapable of the infinite. He definitely agrees with this formulation and defends it. To this end he limits the presence of Christ and says that He is no longer on earth as far as His humanity is concerned but only spiritually or according to

His Godhead.

Nevertheless, Berkouwer definitely speaks of a real union of the two natures in Jesus Christ. In fact, he is willing to grant the validity of the communicatio idiomatum doctrine and is indignant when he is told that the Reformed do not teach a communicatio idiomatum. Berkouwer is familiar with the Scriptural evidence for such a doctrine and will not surrender it to Lutheran theology exclusively. But somehow Berkouwer is looking for an unoccupied corner midway between the monophysite tendency which he finds in Lutheranism and the spiritualization of Zwingli's alloeosis. He really wants no part in either.

Berkouwer solves his problem of the unity of the two natures which are embedded in the unity of the person--to speak in his terms--by teaching a communication of "gifts." By "gifts" he means those powers which are communicated by the Holy Spirit to the God-man to equip Him--qua man--for the completion of the work of redemption. Yet there is never any communication of attributes involved in this gracious deed.

The extra-calvinisticum is a doctrine which Berkouwer feels is unfortunate in its explicit deliniation yet necessary to defend in order that there might be no limitation placed upon the divine nature. In this discussion Berkouwer shows himself strongly influenced by the finitum non est capax infiniti.

Does Berkouwer teach a personal union of the two natures

in Jesus Christ? He says that he does! But we must ask what kind of a union that is in which the two natures can be separated for purposes of manifestation (extra-calvinisticum); we wonder whether there is any union involved when we cannot ascribe a certain deed--such as Christ's death--to the whole Christ according to one nature but must only apply it to its one proper nature itself. Actually there is no middle ground between Luther and Zwingli. Either certain ascriptions can be made to the whole Christ because of the personal union or they cannot. There is either an actual union by which the human nature participates in certain privileges of the divine or there is a strict separation of the two natures in Christ so that this is impossible. If the latter is correct, we ought not speak of the Mediator between God and men--the man Jesus Christ. (I Tim. 2:5) Nor should we say that we are reconciled to God by the death of His Son, (Ro. 5:10) for His Son never died. I am certain that Berkouwer wants to take these passages seriously. He sees the weakness in the denial of the personal union and spiritualization theologies. But I am not convinced that he has been able to free himself from his Reformed philosophical presuppositions.

A Critique of Barth's Theology

It ought to be stated at the outset that Barth is not especially interested in speaking of the personal union. This is because he fears that in so doing he may sacrifice

something of his dynamic conception of Christology. Whenever we speak of unions, communions, states, etc., we are leaving the realm of the ontic and entering upon the static as far as Barth is concerned. In Christology, which is related to revelation, this is the unforgiveable sin.

Barth, like Berkouwer, affirms that Christ is the Son of God and of divine essence. Few of us would be satisfied with his definition of divine essence, I fear, but there are passages in Barth's theology where he affirms the deity of Jesus Christ.

Barth certainly affirms the humanity of Jesus Christ also. You will recall that we had to question whether or not Barth had made our Savior too human with respect to the sinfulness or sinlessness of the human nature which He assumed in the incarnation. You will recall here how Barth objects to the statement that the Word became flesh and prefers rather to say that the Word assumed flesh. This is done to avoid committing an absurdity against the divine nature.

The manner in which Barth speaks of the Trinity and what Person of the Trinity manifested itself in Christ has usually caused some concern in orthodox circles. Berkouwer, for instance, makes the following unqualified statement: "It (the Church) always understood the phrase 'God in Christ' in a different sense from that used by Vogel and Barth."⁷

⁷G. C. Berkouwer, The Person of Christ (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954), p. 352.

Although Barth sometimes refers to the humanity of Christ in very abstract terms--as an organ, for instance--he nevertheless affirms that the same man who was crucified was the one who rose from the dead. This does not mean, however, that he intends to take the personal union too seriously after the resurrection of the Lord because he still affirms the extra-calvinisticum of Reformed theology.

An inconsistency in Barth's writing is that he calls the doctrine of the unity of the two natures in Christ "peculiarly Lutheran!" But he uses the terminology himself. The following quotation illustrates this fact and we have previously listed a statement in which he beautifully speaks of the substance of this doctrine.⁸

In our presentation of the union of divine and human essence accomplished by the Son of God in His incarnation, we touched more than once on the thought of the mutual participation of divine and human essence as it follows this union, or rather takes place in and with it. According to this concept, they are not united in the Son of God, who is of divine essence and assumed human, like two planks lashed or glued together--to use an image which often occurs in older polemics--as if each retained its separate identity in this union and the two remained mutually alien in a neutral proximity. The truth is rather that in the Son of God, and therefore by the divine Subject, united in His act, each of the two natures, without being either destroyed or altered, acquires and has its own determination. By and in Him the divine acquires a determination to the human, and the human a determination from the divine. The Son of God takes and has a part in the human essence assumed by Him by giving this a part in His divine essence. And the human essence assumed by Him takes and has a part in His divine by

⁸Karl Barth, The Doctrine of Reconciliation in Church Dogmatics (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), IV, Part Two, 63.

receiving this from Him.⁹

At first glance the statement seems to be affirming the personal union but the word "determination" in this context is ultimately meaningless--it says nothing. Barth is familiar with the problem--he saw it already in the extra-calvinisticum--but even though he uses orthodox terminology, he will not allow himself to admit that there can actually be a real communion and union between the human and divine natures as they are miraculously present in the person of the Christ.

But Barth condemns himself when he makes the following statement.

And somewhere along this way the question can and will always arise whether the relationship between the unio hypostatica and the unio mystica may not be reversed; whether the unio mystica is not to be understood as the true and basic phenomenon, the analogans, and the unio hypostatica in Jesus Christ as the secondary, the analogatum, the representation or mythological copy of the unio mystica, of the religious happening as it takes place in us.¹⁰

This procedure makes the union purely subjective and puts the ultimate criterion for judging the personal union in Jesus Christ within the heart of the theologizing subject.

Barth finally offers us a solution to the differences which lie in the Lutheran and Reformed teachings on the personal union. He states:

But Lutheran theology will have to abandon or to

⁹Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 56.

modify the isolated assertion of its view, its denial, its inherited distrust of the more comprehensive way of putting the question; it will have to expound its special thesis on the basis and in the framework of the superior orderliness of a theology of the divine action. But when we recollect that in the centuries after the Reformation both sides strove genuinely and seriously, but unsuccessfully, in this direction for unification, when, above all, we recollect that there is a riddle in the fact itself, and that even in the New Testament two lines can be discerned in this matter, we will at least be on our guard against thinking of oversimple solutions. Perhaps, if it is to be Evangelical theology at all--and truly so, it may be, only when this necessity is perceived--there always has to be a static and a dynamic, an ontic and a noetic principle, not in nice equilibrium, but calling to each other and questioning each other. That is, there must be Lutherans and Reformed: not in the shadow of a unitary theology, but as a twofold theological school--for the sake of the truth about the reality of Jesus Christ, which does not admit of being grasped or conceived by any unitary theology, which will always be the object of all theology, and so perhaps inevitably of a twofold theology--object in the strictest sense of the concept. It may even be that in the unity and variety of the two Evangelical theologies in the one Evangelical Church there is reflected no more and no less than the one mystery itself, with which both were once engrossed and will necessarily be engrossed always, the mystery that ὁ λόγος ἐγένετο ἔξωτος .¹¹

Once again we have arrived at an impasse because Barth would have us believe that in the interest of Evangelical theology it is possible to hold contradictory opinions about one of the central and most fundamental articles of the person of Christ. The personal union, after all, is a minimum affirmation.

Allow me to close with one other scholar's opinion of

¹¹Karl Barth, The Doctrine of the Word of God in Church Dogmatics (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), I, Second Half-Volume, 171.

what Barth is saying with respect to the personal union and revelation. Dr. Preus states:

However, when he sums up his section on "Jesus Christ the Objective Reality of Revelation" he makes the following statement: "To sum up: that God's Son or Word is the man Jesus of Nazareth is the one Christological thesis of the New Testament; that the man Jesus of Nazareth is God's Son or Word is the other. Is there a synthesis of the two? To this question we must roundly answer, No." Here is the point where Van Til sees Barth as refusing to identify God's revelation directly with the man Jesus of Nazareth and insists that the question must be answered with a resounding yes. And it surely appears that Barth is here dividing the person of Christ and denying utterly the third genus of the communicatio idiomatum, to which even Reformed theology gives lip service.¹²

Is Barth actually teaching a real personal union between the two natures in Jesus Christ? It is much easier to say no in this case, all confusing terminology notwithstanding.

A Critique of Brunner's Theology

Brunner will say of Christ that He is true God and true man. But in his theology we are confronted with the most radical deviations from traditional Christology so far encountered. These statements are made only in relation to Brunner's overarching theological concept--that of the revelation of God.

This theory of revelation forces Brunner to separate the two natures in Christ more radically than either Barth or Berkouwer. In fact, both of these men do not hesitate

¹²Robert D. Preus, "The Word of God in the Theology of Karl Barth," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXI (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, February, 1960), 110.

to challenge Brunner on several of his inferences. Berkouwer challenges him most seriously with respect to the humanity of our Lord while Barth adds his voice to the denunciation of the virgin birth.

The humanity must be thoroughly separated from the deity in Jesus Christ because if it is not, then the divine would become apparent in some other form than through the faith encounter. It is for this reason that the incognito theory must be so strenuously emphasized by Brunner.

Berkouwer's analysis of Brunner's position is good.

In this connection Brunner refers to the picture of Christ given in the gospel of John. This picture is by no means one which can be observed by the sense. Were this the case, it would be an example par excellence of a direct revelation, of a direct knowability which would suspend the incognito. This would imply a mingling of the divine and the human in Christ. The bridge which theology crossed in this direction is the "fatal doctrine of the communication of properties." The glory of the Son of God would then glitter without concealment before the eyes of all. Brunner is grateful to historical criticism for having broken through the crust of theology and having opened our eyes to the true humanity of Christ in the flesh. Thus the idea of the incognito could assume its prominence and, against this background, the decision of faith could come into its own. Here, too, lies the ground for Brunner's strong aversion to the doctrine of the virgin birth; for by this doctrine the deity of Christ is explicated and made metaphysically evident. The Incarnation of Christ, in theology, is made into a miracle which radically eliminates the incognito.¹³

You may recall that Berkouwer did not speak of the communication of properties as a "fatal doctrine." He wants to be known as a theologian that teaches the communication of

¹³G. C. Berkouwer, op. cit., pp. 334-335.

properties in a non-spiritual sense--in the sense in which the Reformed communion holds to the real presence in the Lord's Supper. Barth does not like to use the terms but will speak of a unity between the two natures. But Brunner is forced to deny any such terminology a serious place in his system because of his view on revelation.

Berkouwer makes another observation which is worthy of note with respect to Brunner's theology. He writes:

When Brunner says that, in virtue of the incognito, Christ can be mistaken for any other man at all, his error is that he argues theoretically in terms of the structure of revelation instead of thinking in terms of the convicting force of the revelation of God. The Scriptures make plain, moreover, that we are not confronted by a dual possibility given with the form of revelation but rather by the rejection of the content of the revelation. This rejection is continually placed in a glaring light, because the rejector is confronted by the Son of man who is surrounded by the voices of God: the prophetic and apostolic witness. The flesh which Christ assumed does not eclipse the radiant light of God. The most profound reason for the offense as a reaction to the revelation of God in Christ is not the "form" of this revelation of the power and wisdom of God but rather the resistance of the whole man who refuses to admit the revelation of reconciliation into his life.¹⁴

Berkouwer gives us a good insight into the results of a theological system which passes by Scriptural revelation in favor of a philosophical concept of revelation.

Although we have already covered most of the pertinent points for our purposes we ought to recall that Brunner spoke of only an "indirect" relationship between the flesh and the Word; that in order to avoid any contact with the

¹⁴Ibid., p. 345. Italics mine.

divine and the human in Christ it is necessary to say that Christ was born as the result of ordinary sexual processes; that the incarnation had no effect for eternity since he denies the physical or corporeal resurrection; that the two natures in Christ must be separated for purposes of worship; the the "two natures" theory is analogous to the doctrine of verbal inspiration and must therefore be rejected.

Does Emil Brunner hold to a personal union of the two natures in Jesus Christ? A most definite no can be given to this question.

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