

Overview of SYTH 422
The Doctrine of Christ
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I. Redemptive-historical structure of the Old and New Testaments and how it informs our understanding of the person and the work of Christ

- A. Melito of Sardis: OT/NT redemptive history fulfilled in the Incarnation
- B. Irenaeus of Lyon
 - 1. Biblical unity of Old and New Testament and unity of the Godhead contra two Gods
 - 2. Son of God as Second Adam; recapitulation theology
- C. Scripture is redemptive-historical revelation
 - 1. Scriptural revelation is progressive with cause-effect relationships.
 - 2. Christ is the *Telos* of redemptive history; it all points to and leads to Him.
 - 3. The Biblical-theological structure of redemptive history is covenantal.
 - 4. All OT promises are yes and amen in Christ, but we live in the already-not yet tension.

II. Biblical support for the doctrines of the Incarnation and the two natures of Christ:

- A. Biblical support for the Incarnation: (Matthew corresponds with Isaiah, Luke with Genesis)
 - 1. NT: Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:36-38; Romans 1:3; Galatians 4:4
 - 2. OT: Isaiah 7:1-19 (especially 14); 9:6-7; Genesis 18:1-15 (nothing is impossible for God)
- B. Biblical support for the two natures of Christ (Systematic Theology, 316-320)
 - 1. A few introductory thoughts:
 - a) A nature is simply a collection of attributes
 - b) Scripture and theology both support the two natures and unipersonality of Christ.
 - c) Biblical support for the two natures, therefore, indicates both the divine attributes of Christ, the human attributes of Christ, and their predication to the one person.
 - 2. Philippians 2:5-11; Isaiah 9:6; John 1:1-18; Hebrews 1:1-3; Psalm 2:6-12

III. The development of the debate in the early church on the person of Christ in the Trinitarian and Christological controversies and the essential content and significance of the Chalcedonian consensus:

- A. Chalcedon commended three documents
 - 1. Second Letter to Cyril to Nestorius (rejection of two nature-two persons of Nestorius in favor of two natures-one person, although for Cyril the divine was predominant).
 - 2. Leo's Tome (two natures-one person)
 - 3. Formula of Reunion (union of two natures with "theotokos" of Mary).
- B. Chalcedon reaffirmed Nicea (Doctrine of the Trinity)

- C. Christological Formula: One Person, Two Natures. First two are contra Alexandria (Word-Flesh emphasis), the second two are contra Antioch (Word-Man emphasis)
 - 1. Without Mixture (unconfusedly)
 - 2. Without Change (unalterably)
 - 3. Without Division (undividedly)
 - 4. Without Separation (inseparably).
- D. Assessment of Chalcedon:
 - 1. Its negative declaration largely described what Jesus is not.
 - 2. Its positive value:
 - a) It did not move beyond what Scripture teaches.
 - b) Its relation to salvation.
 - c) Imagio Dei of Scripture

IV. Important criticisms that have been lodged against the doctrine of the Incarnation

- A. The big one involved John Hick who stated, “to say that...the historical Jesus of Nazareth was also God is as devoid of meaning as to say that a circle...is also a square.” According to him, the Chalcedonian consensus changed the metaphorical language about Jesus into metaphysical language about Jesus. He and others reject the prospect of Incarnation a priori because of the presumed incompatibility of divine and human natures.
- B. The response is that they offer no convincing proof that the divine and human natures are incompatible, they simply assume this is so. Moreover, they must drastically reinterpret Scripture to support the view that texts which refer to the Incarnation and divinity of Christ were meant to be metaphorical statements.

V. Calvin’s views of the person and work of Christ and the classical Reformed discussion of Christology found in Louis Berkhof:

- A. Why was the Incarnation necessary?
 - 1. Calvin distinguished between Mediator and Redeemer
 - 2. The divine human gulf necessitated the Mediator, but sin necessitated the Incarnation
 - 3. Calvin dismissed as speculation Osiander’s claim that the Incarnation would be necessary even in the absence of sin.
- B. How do we know that Jesus was truly human?
 - 1. Calvin argued by Philippians 2 that Christ did not renounce His divinity, rather, He hid it with the veil of humanity.
 - 2. Christ was the “seed of the woman” though the Virgin Mary. The Holy Spirit kept Him sinless through His sanctifying work, not through the mechanics of the VC.
 - 3. “Extra-Calvinisticum”: Christ’s divinity overflows his humanity.

- C. What is the proper view of the relationship between the person and natures of Christ, and especially of the communication of attributes?
1. Son of God became Son of Man by hypostatic union (unity of person).
 2. Each nature retains its distinctiveness in the one person.
 3. Scripture does not speak of the office of Mediator as simply divine or simply human.
 4. *Communicatio idiomatum*: Christ is Lord and Son of God according to, not by reason of, His humanity.
 5. Rejection of Nestorius (double Christ) and Eutyches (unity of person at the expense of two natures, that is, Certs with retsin).

VI. The Biblical background and theological significance of the three Mediatorial offices of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King.

- A. Prophetic Office: Christ is the pinnacle of the prophetic ministry (Heb. 1:1-2). This demonstrates both the continuity of the OT and NT and the superiority of Christ. Calvin said that Christ is the end of all prophecy and that the pious learned salvation from the prophets but looked to the Messiah for complete revelation. Berkhof said that a prophet received God's revelation and spoke as His agent. Christ was active in OT prophetic ministry, but after the Incarnation He did this with greater clarity (immediate) through the Holy Spirit (mediate). Deut. 18:15 may possibly apply. Liberal theology emphasized the prophetic office of Christ as the expense of the others.
- B. Priestly Office: Christ as "high priest forever in the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 7:20-27). Hebrews also demonstrates that Christ is both the perfect priest and perfect sacrifice. He is the convergence of many themes such as priest and mediator. In the NT Jesus' priestly office is demonstrated during His earthly ministry in His baptism (ordination), the Last Supper (Christ as fulfillment of sacrifice), and in the crucifixion (perfect sacrifice). Calvin noted that as priestly Mediator Christ appeased the wrath of God by His blood sacrifice which He presented to the Father. As our Intercessor, He pleads with the Father on our behalf. We are also Christ's companions and share the "priesthood of all believers" and enter boldly into God's presence. Berkhof distinguished prophet and priest; a prophet is teacher and the mouthpiece of God, a priest represents humanity before God (Heb. 5:1). Berkhof also noted the twofold priestly work of Christ in being the Perfect Sacrifice and our Intercessor, both during his earthly ministry and especially in heaven. Christ's sacrifice was typified in the Mosaic covenant. Modern liberal theology displaces the priestly office for the prophetic. Christ's priestly intercession continues in heaven. Atonement and intercession are intimately related and cannot be separated. Christ's intercession is a request from the Son to the Father.

- C. Kingly Office: Christ's Kingly office is rooted in the progressive revelation of redemptive history. Key scriptures are Luke 1:32-33, Acts 2:36, Philippians 2:9-11. Berkhouwer noted that Christ's Kingship is real both before and after His exaltation (Nathaniel and Pilate). According to Calvin, Christ's Kingdom is spiritual, based on endurance rather than prosperity. As members of His Kingdom believers must forsake the world. Yet Christ is the eternal Protector and Defender of the Church (Psalm 89). He has been anointed with the Holy Spirit with wisdom and understanding for the task. A strong eschatological element of Christ's Kingship encourages us to endure for the hope of the afterlife. Calvin said Christ's Mediatorial Kingship will end at the consummation and final judgment (2.15.5). Berkhof distinguished between Christ's dominion as the Second Person of the Trinity and His dominion as Mediatorial King. His Mediatorial Reign began at the Fall and extends into eternity.

VII. Major theories of the Atonement, including the representatives of each and the Biblical themes and texts appealed to in support of these different positions.

A. Anselm's Sanctification Theory:

1. Humanity has incurred an infinite debt to God and has offended His honor through sin. It would be both unfitting and unjust for God to leave humanity in their sinful state. Furthermore, humanity would be unhappy if they were not redeemed. Yet redemption requires an infinite payment which humanity cannot pay. It is unsuitable for no human to attain what God had intended because God would have then created in vain. Satisfaction by humanity to God is therefore necessary because:
 - a) Satan would remain unconquered (Classical/Christus Victor; Kingly Office).
 - b) God's justice would be violated (Satisfaction; Priestly Office).
 - c) Humanity would be unhappy (Moral Influence; Prophetic Office).
2. Humanity owes God an infinite debt, but only God can pay it. Therefore the one who pays the debt must be fully God and fully man in accordance with Chalcedon. Since the God-Man is greater good than all sin, His death is a satisfactory payment for sin. Humanity benefits by receiving the reward the Father gave the Son for His sacrifice. In this way both God's justice and mercy are served and harmonized.
3. Abailard's Critique of the Ransom and Satisfaction views of atonement:
 - a) Why was it necessary for God to assume human nature to save humanity instead of simply pardoning us? If God is capable of the greater miracle of the Incarnation, why could He not forgive sin without it?
 - b) From what captor did God free us? Satan is under God's control and could have been stopped by a simple command.
 - c) What is the standard of justice for the atonement? It seems that the crime of the crucifixion is far more serious than the sin of Adam and Eve.

B. Abailard's Moral Influence Theory:

1. Abailard gave central attention to divine love rather than divine justice in the atonement. He shifted focus from Christ's death to His life. By His death the Son of God kindles love in our hearts and motivates us to serve Him. Change occurs in the recipients of God's grace rather than in God Himself. The best explanation for the Incarnation and atonement is logic and centrality of divine love.
2. Abailard's Moral Influence Theory found a favorable reception within 19th Century Liberalism. They accepted Kant's noumenal/phenomenal duality, and Moral Influence rested squarely within the phenomenal realm.

C. Calvin's Penal Substitution View of the Atonement:

Christ suffered in our stead as the perfect sacrifice for sin. He was an expiation to appease the wrath of God against sinful humanity. Christ's righteousness has been imputed to us, and our sin has been "transferred to His head." His blood both makes satisfaction and to cleans sin away. In this way Christ appeased God's wrath, expiated our sin, and satisfied God's justice. The explanation for the atonement is the love of God; God loved us even when He hated us because of sin. For the elect the atonement language of God's wrath is accommodation to engender an appreciation of the greatness of Christ's sacrifice and God's mercy.

VIII. Explanation and defense of the traditional Reformed understanding of the nature, necessity, perfection, and extent of the atonement:

A. Reformed View of the Atonement:

Penal substitutionary atonement is objective in that it affects a change in God's disposition to humanity. It is rooted in the good pleasure of God and not by any external compulsion. It has necessity only by virtue of God's determination to act. God is the offended party who is reconciled to humanity. Christ's atonement is vicarious because Christ is humanity's representative in our place. The atonement is redemptive and saves humanity from the curse of the Law, ceremonial Law, works obligation, and sin. Christ brought about atonement through both His active and passive obedience.

B. Reformed View of the Perfection of the Atonement:

Christ's atonement freed humanity from the obligations to gain atonement through penance and the Mass contra Roman Catholicism. Christ's atonement is "once for all" (Heb. 7:27; 10:10), historically objective, unique and unrepeatable, and has "intrinsic efficacy."

C. Limited/Definite Atonement:

The atonement is definitely for some, that is, the atonement is definite in its effect. God saves those by the atonement whom He has chosen for salvation. Since God's intentions for salvation cannot be thwarted, and only a limited number are saved, those whom God has chosen to save.

IX. Modern theological developments in Christology:

A. The Quests:

1. First Quest for the Historical Jesus:
Reimarus' 1778 (posthumous) work distinguished between the historical Jesus and the preached Christ of the Church. He believed Christ' life ended in failure and His divinity is a fraud of the disciples. Paulus called Jesus a moral exemplarist who preached and practiced rational religion. The miracles are naturally explainable (Feeding the 5,000 = sharing lunches). Strauss (1808-1874) called the Gospel a mythical story or legend in an attempt to temper Reimarus. Jesus' ideas outweigh His person, and the historical figure is unattainable.
2. Barth on the historical Jesus:
Barth's neo-orthodoxy rejected 19th Century Liberalism. He embraced Kant's noumenal and phenomenal distinction, but said that God (noumenal) revealed Himself to the believer (phenomenal) in an event called a theophany. Barth's commitment to Kant resulted in the loss of the historical sequence of events in favor of the "Christ-event".
3. Bultmann on the historical Jesus:
Bultmann did not participate in the "Quest" because he viewed Christianity as independent of history by virtue of existentialism. To obtain truth one must remove the husks of myth to arrive at the kernel of truth in Christianity. Jesus is the object of the existential reflections of the Biblical authors. The historical reality of Jesus must be reinterpreted according to anthropological categories since His historical reality is unimportant, only the eschatological event of salvation is important. Bultmann stumbles on the fact that Jesus must have existed to attract such a following.
4. The Second Quest:
Several of Bultmann's notable students took up the Quest anew in reaction to Bultmann's No Quest. They again distinguished between the Jesus of History and the Christ preached by the Church and shared a commitment to Kantian philosophy. They desired to know the real identity of Jesus Christ.
5. The New Quest:
Led by Pannenburg and Moltmann, the New Quest reemphasized history, notably the historical truthfulness of the Resurrection of Christ. Satisfaction theory of Anselm, Calvin, and Berkhof: Christ is the completion and pinnacle of the priesthood. He is a priest forever and continually pleads with the Father on our behalf on the basis of His perfect self-sacrifice.

B. Angles that modern challenges to tradition typically take, per Klas Runia:

1. Exegetical: Challenge is that there are multiple Christologies in the NT.
2. Creedal: The Creeds are contaminated by Greek philosophy and metaphysical language.
3. Functional: Ontological categories no longer carry meaning today, the trend is function.

X. Christological Controversies