

...nor is there a corresponding genus *tapeinotikon*.

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by Pastor Gregory Schulz

“*Who do you say that I am*” (Mt 16:15)? We have no answer to give that’s more important than our answer to this question. Instructing a confirmation class, preaching a powerful sermon or bringing lasting comfort to a hurting soul—it all comes back to His question, “*Who do you say that I am?*”

A faithful ministry will be founded on a healthy biblical Christology. As the angel of Revelation 19 says, “*The testimony about Jesus is the soul of preaching.*” Let’s test out our Christology against a few quotes. Do you agree or disagree with each statement below?

- A. Agree or Disagree—“Who ran the universe during the three days that Jesus was dead and in the grave... If Jesus was the immortal God, He could not have died.”¹
- B. Agree or Disagree—Acts 3:21, οὐδὲ δεῖ ὑμῶν ἀποκατασταθῆναι πάντα ἐξ οὐρανόθεν. can be translated “... *He (Christ) must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything.*”²
- C. Agree or Disagree—“(Following the celebration of the first Maundy Thursday Lord’s Supper, Christ will have a) different relationship with disciples in the future: Not as close after (His) resurrection, not physical after ascension, not so personal again until in heaven.”³
- D. Agree or Disagree—“The human nature has its hypostasis (substantive existence) in the divine. In that way and in no other is the Holy Scripture primarily and essentially God’s Word. The human word in Scripture has no independent significance.”⁴

From a crass denial of the Christ’s deity (A.) to blatant Zwinglinism (B.) and a Reformed mindset (C.), these statements all contradict the clear statements of Scripture. So does this last point (D.)

It is this last concept, the attempt at doing an end around verbal inerrancy with a comparison of Scripture to Christ’s two natures, which sparked this paper. Our treatment of the Christ and of His written Word do go hand in hand, as Kurt Marquart points out:

What ought to be crystal clear is that any retreat from biblical facts and history as such is a retreat from the Incarnation itself. Any driving of wedges between the human and the divine in the Bible, between fact and faith, between history and theology, hits at the inmost nature of biblical Christianity. The written Word is about the incarnate Word and is of a piece with Him. The Gospel is about the life, death, and resurrection of the Word-made-flesh (John 1:14) and is forever bound up with even seemingly minor details of the narrative: the Lord Himself decrees that the Bethany anointing will be reported “wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world” (Matt. 26:13). Without the earthly, historical, geographical facts and particulars there simply was no Incarnation. To say that the Lake of Gennesaret must be understood not as a geographical place but as a “theological place” is to mock the Incarnate Son of God. To sacrifice facts and history is to sacrifice the Incarnation and change the Good News about Jesus into bloodless abstractions. This is the *spirit of antichrist, which denies that Jesus is come in the flesh* (I John 4:3). And this is precisely the spirit of historical criticism...⁵

¹ *Let God Be True*, p109. This is a Jehovah’s Witness Watchtower publication.

² This is the New International Version quote of the verse.

³ *Learn of Him: Nine Sermon Outlines for Lent and Easter*, p17. This is an NPH booklet.

⁴ Hermann Sasse. *Sacra Scriptura*, p289. This is Wachler’s translation, WLQ 82.1.43

⁵ Kurt Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion*, p119.

1.

Now, the fires of the faith forged the Church's Great Answers to the question, "Who do you say that I am?" from the very words of God's Word itself. These Great Answers are the creeds and confessions. Consider the Athanasian Creed of the sixth century, which confesses in part,

For the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man, God of the substance (*ex substantia*) of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and Man of the substance of His mother, born in the world; Perfect God and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His manhood; Who, although He be God and Man, yet is not two, but one Christ: *One, not by conversion of the Godhood into flesh.* (non conversione divinitis in carnem), *but by taking the manhood into God* (sed assumptione humanitatis in Deum). (My italics.)

Another Great Answer to the questions of Christology is the Formula of Concord's Article 8. (The Catalogue of Testimonies, with its quotes from the early fathers is very much to the point, too!) In the Epitome we read,

The chief question (between the pure theologians of the Augsburg Confession and the Calvinists) has been whether, because of the personal union, the divine and human natures, as also their properties, have *realiter*, that is, in deed and truth, a communion with one another in the person of Christ, and how far this communion extends (Ep 8.2).

Not to wrangle, but to answer the questions about Christ fully and accurately for the sake of all concerned, Andrae, Chemnitz and the other quiet Lutheran pastors drew heavily on Luther's writings and listed the pertinent passages of the Bible under three headings. In Latin, the word for heading or classification is *genus*. So, we like to talk about three *genera* while listing (and listening to!) the Scripture's words about our Savior being, in deed and truth, God and Man and also how His two natures interact.

Here is a thumbnail sketch of the three genera in the order they are presented in the Formula:

1. *Genus idiomaticum* ("class of attributes") – The attributes of each nature, God and Man, belong to the person of Christ (FC 8.36ff).
2. *Genus apotelesmaticum* ("class of official acts") – Both natures, God and Man, contribute respectively to Christ's every act (FC 8,46ff).
3. *Genus maiestaticum* ("class of greatness") – Christ's divine nature contributes to His human nature; not vice versa (FC 8.49ff).

Incidentally, John Schaller feels that, for teaching purposes, it's more logical to present first the *genus idiomaticum*, secondly the *genus maiestaticum* and finally the *genus apotelesmaticum* although our confession discusses the *genus maiestaticum* in the third place because special attention had to be given to it "under the prevailing circumstances."⁶ If this business of undercutting verbal inspiration via a comparison with Christ's two natures becomes widespread, it will be another reason for hitting the *genus maiestaticum* once again with sixteenth-century fervor!

It is not incidental that the Formula begins its discussion of the *genus maiestaticum* by ruling out a two-way communication of majesty or a loss of divinity from Christ's divine nature:

⁶ John Schaller, *Biblical Christology*, p65.

Now, as regards the divine nature in Christ, since in God there is no change, Jas. 1,17, His divine nature, in its essence and properties (*quoad essentiam et proprietates eius*) suffered no subtraction nor addition by the incarnation; was not, in or by itself, either diminished or increased thereby (FC 8.49).

A few paragraphs along, the Formula seems to anticipate the attack on verbal inerrancy via careless analogies to Christ's human nature this way:

But the best, most certain, and surest way in this controversy is this, namely, that what Christ has received according to His assumed human nature through the personal union, glorification, or exaltation, and of what His assumed human nature is capable beyond the natural properties, without becoming annihilated, no one can know better or more thoroughly than the Lord Christ Himself; *and He revealed it in His Word*, as much as is needful for us to know of it in this life. Now, everything for which we have in this instance clear, certain testimonies in the Scriptures, we must simply believe, and in no way argue against it, *as though the human nature in Christ could not be capable of the same* (FC 8.53). (My italics.)

2.

Every time we have the opportunity to give an answer for the hope we have in Christ, there are two passages which teach a comprehensive Christology all by themselves:

John 1:14 – *And the Word became flesh, and dwelt* (better: *tabernacled*, *eskhhsen*) *among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Colossians 2:9 – *For in Him all, the fulness of the Deity* (*pan thj qeothtoj*) *dwells in bodily form* (or: *bodily, swmatikwj*).

Beyond the bare fact (!) that our God became flesh and tabernacled among us – that all the fullness of God fills the body and soul of Jesus Christ – there is one more passage which we want to keep at the head of the lists of passages. The passage is Philippians 2:5-11. This passage does answer some of the why's and wherefore's of Christ's being God and Man both. It's also a great passage for teaching the *genus maiestaticum* as a one-way communication from Christ's divine nature in a winning and clear manner.

⁵Touto gak froneisqw eD uDin o\$kaileD Xristwt Dsou~⁶of eD morfht-Qeou-uparxwn, oux aDpagmoh hghsato toleijhai isa Qewt⁷aDl OeDuton eDhws morfht doulou labwh, eD oDoiwmati aDgrwDwn genomenoj .⁸Kai\sxhmati euDgeij\ wD aDgrwpoj , eDapeihwsen eDuton genomenoj uDhkooj mekri qanatu, qanatu de\staurou~⁹Dio\kai\oDeoj auDton uDperuywse kai\ eDarisato auDwt-onoma to\upek pan onoma, ¹⁰isa eD twt-onomati Dsou~tan gohu kamyh eDpouraniwn kai\epigeiwn kai\kataxqoniwn, ¹¹kai\pasa glwssa eDmologhsetai oDi Kurioj Dsouj Xristoj eiD doctan Qeou-Patroj .

These verses are the very heart of Paul's letter to the Philippians. While the rest of Philippians is written in an informal and conversational style, the fifth through the seventh verses of this second chapter are highly polished and poetic in style. This polished and condensed style is what makes this section such a useful reference for our topic.

Both Christ's states of exinanition and exaltation are very much to the point of how His divine nature influences His human nature. Let's touch down on a few points. There are three words from the Holy Ghost I would like to mention.

The first is *isa* in verse 6. In form it's a neuter plural adjective in the accusative case. Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich correctly lists it as being adverbial in its usage. BAG then goes on to translate it as an adjective, however: "be equal with someone." However, *isa* is an adverb modifying *ei hai* and is better translated "to exist equally with God."

Second, there is ἀρπαγμαῖν. *Christ did not consider it ἀρπαγμαῖν to exist equally with God.* This word has been translated *robbery* in the KJV and *something to be grasped* in the NIV. The Greek word, though, means *booty*. More specifically, ἀρπαγμαῖν means *booty for display*. So, Paul is writing, *Christ Jesus, although He certainly existed with God's nature,⁷ did not consider the fact that He exists equally with God booty for display.*

Our very God of very God did not come in thunder and lightning to establish His kingship of grace by divine fiat. He had something far more wonderful in mind. The key to the Redeemer's assumption of a servant's nature, His death on the cross and His exaltation is that He emptied Himself. This word for emptying, ἐκένωσεν, is the third word in our discussion. It's clearly an important word as far as the Holy Ghost is concerned; He had Paul write it in the emphatic position. With this one word, the apostle is summarizing for us the entire sixth verse. At the same time, he is carrying along the line of thought to demonstrate the consequences (death on a cross and exaltation) of Christ's kenosis. This kenosis, not so incidentally, absolutely cannot postulate the elimination of His divine nature; the participle ἰαβωῆν defines the act of emptying and οὐκ ἴσχυεταί shows that Christ never, at the incarnation or any time, ceased to be God. Besides, Paul would have used a form of ἀλλάξω had He intended to say "exchange!"

This *locus classicus* for the exinanition has its parallel in 2 Corinthians 8:9, where Paul explains in what χάρις or "free giving" consists: *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.*

The parallel especially emphasizes the purpose of Christ's kenosis. Also drawing from the Philippian passage, Martin Chemnitz brings the ancient fathers to the witness stand:

All antiquity understood this exaltation of Christ, not with reference to His divine nature, which in itself as the highest could not be exalted any higher... but we understand it with reference to His human nature, according to which He was humbled and died.⁸

Alright, then. With a firm scriptural grasp on who Christ is, what is this alleged *genus tapeinotikon*? Literally, this Latin and Greek combo translates into "a class of low position." This would be just fine if it were used in connection with Jesus' state of exinanition. But instead *genus tapeinotikon* is a term Reformed theologians have used to mock what they see as the inconsistencies in the *genus maiestaticum*. This line of reasoning seems to follow Hodge's writings⁹ alleging that the Lutheran teaching only infers a communication of majesty in Christ, and a one-way communication at that!

These *genera* (as I mentioned above) are not, however *inferred*; they are classes, ready-for-the-blackboard lists of pertinent Bible passages, tirelessly assembled by the Lutheran pastors and professors.

Divine attributes and activities are communicated to the human nature of Christ in a host of passages. With their usual thoroughness and devotion, our Lutheran fathers jotted down verses and, with exegetical thoroughness, arranged them in a very teachable format.

John Schaller lists such passages about the communication of majesty from Christ's divine to His human nature under headings of God's attributes. With lists of unmistakable passages, he talks about Scripture's statements that Christ's divine authority, power and honor have been communicated to His human nature. Under the headings Omnipotence, Omniscience, Omnipresence and Divine Honor Schaller writes out in full verses which name these divine works and qualities as endowments of Christ's human nature. Especially

⁷ In my translation *God's nature* is to carry across μορφή Θεού. Kittel (TDNT 4.742) tells us that μορφή in the Greek of Pindar and Aeschalos means *form expressing essence*. Paul shows us Jesus in the μορφή of God and in the μορφή of a slave because He was. Stoeckhardt (p37) quotes the church father Hilarius, "While Christ entered into the form of a servant, He remained in the form of God."

⁸ Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures In Christ*, p327.

⁹ This is quoted by Frances Pieper in his *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. 2, pp232f.

interesting for our topic are his comments on the passages about divine omnipotence being communicated from the divine to our Lord's human nature:

In the clear distinction from the first genus where the subject of the proposition may be either nature, the propositions of the second genus pertain *to the human nature alone*; for while the human nature could be, and was, endowed with divine attributes, the divine nature, being absolutely perfect, could not be enriched by any further endowment, much less could it be lowered in majesty by being burdened with creature attributes derived from the human nature. Hence this genus is not *reciprocum* (compare Mal 3:6)! This must be remembered as the conclusive argument against those modern scholars who reject this biblical doctrine concerning this genus *communicationis idiomaticum*, and at the same time accuse Lutheran theology of inconsistency because it refused to teach a corresponding *genus tapeinoticon*, to the effect that, as the human nature of Christ was glorified by the *unio personalis*, so the Logos gave up certain divine prerogatives at the incarnation.¹⁰

Martin Chemnitz offers a slightly different format, presenting Scripture passages on the communication of the majesty with tons of exegetical commentary. His lineup of Scripture includes Colossians 2:9, Matthew 28:18, passages on the session of Christ at the right hand of the Father, verses mentioning divine glory or majesty in connection with the Christ, references about Christ being anointed of the Holy Spirit, words on Christ's omniscience, on Christ giving life, on Christ judging the world, on Christ cleansing hearts and consciences, on Christ's offices and on the Church's worship of Christ.¹¹

Where are the passages referring to a backward, human-to-divine communication of majesty or a reciprocal His-humanity-gains-while-His-divinity-diminishes doctrine? There are no Bible passages under the heading *genus tapeinotikon*, for it is not a Bible doctrine!

3.

Therefore, to propose an analogy between the two natures in Christ and the divine and human elements of Scripture – especially to suggest that the human nature of our Lord is fallible – is not healthy Christology. It is not theology; it is philosophy. It is, as Kurt Marquart mentioned in the earlier quote, antichristology.

This sort of thinking and speaking is not Lutheran, either. Gottfried Wachler parries this attack on verbal inspiration quite decisively:

Hermann Sasse ... adduces the well-known Luther statement: "The Holy Scripture is *God's Word*, written and (if I may say so) spelled out and formed in the letters of the alphabet, exactly as Christ the eternal *Word of God is clothed in his humanity*... and exactly as Christ is treated and dealt with in the world, so it is also with God's written Word. It is considered a worm and no book in comparison with other books" (comment on Psalm 22:7; 1541) (emphasis by Sasse). In connection with this passage it is to be noted that Luther does not develop his doctrine of Scripture out of Christology or in an analogous manner. He was a stranger to such systematizing. He simply compares two facts for him which stand firm independent of one another, namely, the entrance of God's Word into human language and, on the other hand, the incarnation of the Logos. In doing so, a similarity suggests itself to him. But he doesn't then draw the conclusion from this that the case of Christ and that of the Scripture are in every respect analogous. Rather, he establishes a further analogy: As Christ was despised in his state of humiliation, so also the Scripture is despised. Both are also facts that cannot be contested individually.¹²

¹⁰ John Schaller, *Biblical Christology*, p70. Schaller's book is a "gotta have" for our study of Christology. For this paper, pages 68-79 are definitive and ready-to-go for a Bible class presentation of this genus.

¹¹ Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures In Christ*. See pages 313ff.

¹² Gottfried Wachler, op. cit., p43.

In a time when pastors are urging us and our flocks “to see Scripture in its humanness” and to appreciate “Christ in His humanness” we must know our Savior and His scriptures well enough to keep *holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching*, that we as pastors *may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict* (Tt 1:9).

Realizing that the doctrine of salvation itself is at stake, every conscientious Lutheran pastor will make every effort to preach and teach in full harmony with the Holy Scriptures. He will carefully avoid speaking of the death of Christ as if it were a mere man who died. On the other hand, he will also avoid saying that it was the Godhead or Christ’s divine nature that died. It was Christ, in whom the divine nature and the human nature were inseparably united in one person, who “was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification” (Ro 4:25).¹³

¹³ Wilbert Gawrisch, *The Practical Application of the Doctrine of the Two Natures of Christ*, WLQ 82.2.107.