



The Resolved Church

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The Theanthropos - a hypostatic union

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Introduction

Theos is Greek for God and *anthropos* is Greek for man so the *theanthropos* is God-man, referring to Jesus Christ. Hypostatic means a state union between two substances, *ousias*, or natures in one unified person. The Westminster Confession describes the hypostatic union this way, "The Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who being the eternal Son of God became man, and so was and continues to be God and man in two distinct natures and one person, forever."

Why is this important?

With a word like "hypostatic" I'm guessing that the tendency in our minds is to think that this is simply high theology, mere speculative information, that belongs to white bearded men stuffed in ivory towers. That this is an area of theology which really isn't all that important but may be sort of fun for us to think about. But don't let the language fool you. Words are helpful tools, I love big words because they are a way of short hand...you can say a lot in a very little amount of time or give good explanations, if the people you are talking to know what those words mean. So yes, words are helpful but they can also be very deceptive. They can deceive into thinking that the childlike simplicity of faith that Christ calls us to does not require that we understand some necessary things about who He is!

And that is my first point, that this doctrine matters and it matters a lot because if you get Jesus wrong it's not just a "well, that's my opinion" or "that's my take" sort of thing but it becomes a hell thing. You can very easily end up having a Jesus that you like or that makes sense in your head and you can follow that false Jesus straight into the pit of hell and taste the lick of God's wrath upon your soul for rejecting His Son. You don't want that.

So my first point is that the hypostatic union is a salvation issue. Let me explain why. Now, I'm going to assume that you guys know your Bibles fairly well, and if you don't that's okay, but I'm going to assume you know your Bibles and thus some good Anselmian soteriology. What that means is that our problem as human beings is sin and that we need salvation from it, we need a savior. But how do we get a savior?

First let's talk about sin. Sin is moral wrong. But it isn't so much the acts, the specific things that we do which make sin. And it isn't so much the condition of our hearts which give us certain affections leading us to immoral acts. So sin isn't so much the acts themselves and it isn't so much our motives for doing what we do but it is a personal betrayal or attack against the source of morality, God himself. Because morality isn't something that God just made up but is something that flows out of His being, it is who He is, He is a holy God. And wronging a holy God is rightly deserving of an infinite or eternal (same thing) outpouring of justice or he isn't really holy

or the author of morality if he let's infinite wrongdoing go unpunished. Because God is so good the proper response to our attack against the moral fiber of His being is eternal. So we need a savior who can somehow save us or spare us from having to own up to our sin and suffer eternal consequences. (see Romans 1:18-25)

Let's talk a little about having a savior of humanity. Each human deserves eternal justice, that's hell. The only way for a human to escape that is not to sin but every human sins both because of their own volition and first and foremost because of what happened with Adam in the garden Eden. So what I need is a human that doesn't sin and one who can be another Adam who can be a representative for all humanity in order to undo all that has happened and effected everyone. I need a human savior whose sinless actions can effect everyone. (see Romans 5:12-21)

Now let's put it together a little bit. Here is why I say the theanthropos or the hypostatic union is a salvation issue. Because if you don't have a divine Jesus he is insufficient to satisfy the eternal demands of justice that hangs over your head. And if you don't have a human Jesus then he is insufficient to take my place on the cross and be my representative. So we must have one person that is fully human and fully divine or else there is no hope. (see Romans 3:25 and 1 John 4:10) We have to get this right. But those who have borne the name "Christian" have not always got this right and there are groups today who still cannot get past this issue and it is a stumbling block to their faith.

History and Errors

I want to take a few minutes to explain to you a few of the major historical controversies that arose concerning this issue and how godly men of old ended up ultimately dealing with it at a council called Chalcedon. There is something great about being part of a rich history of faith. That we have a Christian tradition and heritage and that there is an orthodox teaching is very significant because we are not following new teachings but are part of a historic time tested faith. These things we are talking about are not new issues. There have been many other occasions throughout history where men with beer in hand read scripture and wrestled and taught and talked about who Jesus really is and what he really has done for us and that is a great great thing. We stand in a privileged place to be able to read and learn from errors and mistakes and the responses to those heresies.

Truth throughout history is most often clarified by falsehood. Many times there have been new ideas that arise, some new take on something that raises an issue no one had thought of yet. And Christian leaders and teachers have then turned to the Scriptures and the new counterfeit claim clarifies with even greater precision what exactly Christianity is and that is a good thing even though it may be trialsome.

The other thing I want to say before we start talking about these different errors is that just because there is controversy over something does not mean that one particular view is not correct. I've quoted this passage of John Piper a few times at The Resolved Church where I preach, but he says this,

"We do not have the luxury of living in a world where the most nourishing truths are unopposed. If we think we can suspend judgment on all that is controversial and feed our souls only on what is left, we are living in a dream world. There is nothing left. The reason any of us thinks we can stand alone on truths that are non-controversial is because we do not know our history or the diversity of the professing church. Besides that, would we really want to give the devil the right to determine our spiritual menu by refusing to eat any teaching over which he can cause controversy?"

With that said let me expose you to a few wrong views of the person of Christ which were all rightly condemned as heresy by the leaders of the church. There are other erroneous teachings

about Jesus but these are the most relevant to our discussion so I'll try to keep it short and not explain all the circumstances and exchanges but just the outcomes.

The first is Arianism. Arius was the pastor of the church in Alexandria in the beginning of the fourth century and he began teaching that Jesus was God's created son, who is like or similar to the Father but is not of the same nature as God the father. Jehovah's Witness is Arianism's bastard child whose teachings end up with a Jesus who is not fully God and thus unable to satisfy the eternal demands upon us.

The second is major error was Apollanarianism. Apollanarius was the pastor of a the church in Laodicia about halfway through the fourth century and taught that Jesus had a human body but not a human mind. So the human body was just sort of a container cell for the divine nature of Christ. This Jesus isn't fully human because he doesn't have a human mind or soul and is thus unable to be our human representative.

The third error is Nestorianism. Nestorius was the pastor of the church in Constantinople in the fifth century. He said that there were two separate persons, a divine person and a human person in the one body of Jesus so that these independent persons could operate contrary to each other. As a result of not having a unified person, this Jesus would be unable to be our human representative and unable to satisfy God's just demands.

The last view is Eutychianism. Eutyches was the leader of a monastery in Constantinople through the fourth and fifth century and he said that the one person of Jesus Christ was a mix of human and divine creating a whole new nature that was neither fully divine or fully human but one new substance. This Jesus too would have been both unable to be our representative and save us from the wrath of God because he was neither fully God nor fully man.

So here is what happened. All these teachings are flying about, people getting excited about them thinking they somehow discovered some new thing and unlocked the secrets of the universe...and a bunch of the church pastors and leaders from all over get together at Chalcedon and draft this creed. Here is the Chalcedonian creed:

"We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [coessential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us."

"Since now we have drawn up this decision with the most comprehensive exactness and circumspection, the holy and ecumenical synod hath ordained, that no one shall presume to propose, orally, or in writing, another faith, or to entertain or teach it to others; and that those who shall dare to give another symbol or to teach another faith to converts from heathenism or Judaism, or any heresy, shall, if they be bishops or clergymen, be deposed from their bishopric and spiritual function, or if they be monks or laymen, shall be excommunicated."

The geniusness of the Chalcedonian creed is that it doesn't try and answer how Jesus is both fully God and fully man and is one person, but it sets boundaries for what must be believed about Jesus in order to have the correct Jesus. In essence it creates a box. On the top you have Jesus

is true God. On the bottom you have Jesus is true man. On the left side you have Jesus is one person. And on the right side you have Jesus two natures are distinct. What you come up with in the middle is open but beyond those parameters is heresy. I love it. I think the Chalcedonian box is the best way to think about the hypostatic union of the theanthropos.

About a hundred years ago a new teaching sprung up called the "kenosis" theory. They took the words "emptied himself" from Philippians 2:5-7 that says "Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men"; and said that Jesus gave up some of his divine attributes while here on earth.

So let's put our Chalcedonian box to work and see how a wise use of history can help us. I've got two distinct natures, got one person, Jesus is true man, but no...not fully God. So what of this interpretation of Philippians? I'm not going to do a full exegesis on the passage but it isn't difficult to see how this theory violates the surrounding words, context, and plain meaning of the passage. What Jesus emptied himself of was the constant display his divine glory. The point is humility, in allowing his divine and infinite glory as the creator of the universe to be primarily shielded while on earth and to undergo the shame and suffering of being a man and the lowest of man a servant. Jesus' subtraction was a subtraction by addition. He added something to himself but never gave up any of his divinity.

Scriptural Considerations (how this plays out)

Okay, heresy just makes me mad. So let's move on and see how the hypostatic union plays out in a few scriptural issues or questions that arise.

One thing I want to point out before we get into these things is the humanity and divinity of Jesus. No one today really questions whether there was a Jesus and whether Jesus was really a man. Some early groups called docetists did, who said Jesus was just a spirit that appeared as a man, who if walking in the sand would not leave any footprints. But the big question about today, the thing challenged most often, is Jesus' divinity. But I don't want to take a bunch of time proving to you with reason and scripture that Jesus is divine.

We could talk about attributes of what it means to be God and see how they were exhibited in Jesus' life, or about Jesus being called I AM or LORD or the Son of God or the Creator. But if the Bible really is God's revealed Word, even in every letter and stroke of the pen...then what the Scriptures plainly and clearly say is true. So I'll just refer to a couple of Scriptures which should be sufficient. Even if something occurs just once in scripture it is enough.

So listen to John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." And at the end of John's gospel after Jesus' has risen from the dead and after He appears to the disciples and Thomas comes up to him to inspect the holes in his hands and after seeing them he falls down and worships and says "My Lord and my God (Jn 20:28)" and Jesus tells Thomas that many will come to believe this even without seeing Jesus with their eyes (that's us).

That should be sufficient for us to know that Scripture clearly teaches that Jesus is God. So let's talk about how this one person, Jesus, both God and man at the same time, is born, grows up, is tempted, and is self-conscious.

It would be easy at this point just to chuck all of that to mystery. A lot of times when stuff like this comes up...like the trinity or like predestination, people just say, oh well...it's just a mystery. Now, don't get me wrong, because I love mystery, I'm all about mystery. I think in mystery there is something very great and wonderful about recognizing that our infinite God has an unending amount of things to teach us for eternity and before we know them are mysteries to us. Mystery

is great, the gospel is in one sense is a great mystery. Rudolph Otto said God is a “mysterious tremendum.”

But we *must* let mystery be where God tells us. Yes, our finite little minds can only comprehend so much of infinite deity until we throw up our hands and cry mystery! But what we can comprehend is determined by what He has revealed to us. So my plea is to draw the line of mystery where Scripture does, no less, no further.

Okay, so how does all this play out according to Scripture? How does the theanthropos come into the world, grow up, be tempted and be aware that He is both God and man?

First the virgin birth. At Christmas time talking about the hypostatic union seems appropriate because the Christmas story begins with Jesus, God, becoming man in a manger. An angel comes to Mary, the mother of Jesus and says “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God (Lk 1:35).” The virgin birth, that Mary conceive the baby Jesus without having sex with anyone is important because it tells us first that salvation comes from God and not human effort, it shows us the means God used to unite himself with humanity, and it makes Jesus humanity possible without inheriting sin.

One of Jesus’ names is properly “the redeemer” and the thing that makes the Christmas story so great is that we have a savior who was born to die. God came into the world to save us since we can’t save ourselves. God perhaps, I don’t know how, but perhaps He could have done something so that Jesus was the result of two humans having intercourse but then it would be very difficult for us to understand how Jesus was fully like God since his origin would have been like ours in every way. Likewise God could have sent Jesus into the world without any parents but then it would be very difficult for us to see how Jesus was fully human.

Most importantly the virgin birth makes it possible for a divine-human savior who did not inherit sin from the first man Adam like all the rest of us have down through the centuries. It may not be far from the truth that sin is passed through the semen but we hit a point of mystery and speculation there. Now, surely Mary was sinful. The Catholic church says no she wasn’t and couldn’t if she had God in her which is correct. However, listen to the words of Luke again, “the Holy Spirit will come upon you...*therefore* the child to be born will be called *holy*.” Thus the Holy Spirit sanctified or purified the womb of Mary from her sinfulness. The Catholic church’s solution does not help any, it only pushes the problem backward because at some point God had to purify some womb to allow for an un sinful person and we know from other Scriptures that only God is without sin, so Mary would not fit the profile.

Thus, the God-man is born but then we have this passage in Luke when Jesus is 12 years old which says that Jesus “grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man (Lk 2:52).” This helps us think about how being a God-man played out. How can a divine being who knows all things grow in wisdom?

Now think with me. Jesus is fully-God and fully-man and the purpose of him coming into that state is to redeem mankind and in order to do that he comes to be humiliated and to experience all human weaknesses and limitations. So Jesus has a mind that learns because learning is part of the ordinary process of what it means to be human. Does it mean he did not know everything and thus was not fully God? Not at all. He demonstrated his omniscience on several occasions (woman at the well etc.). But he chose to be humiliated and to experience human weakness by allowing his human side to be taught.

So perhaps you ask how he experienced this. Essentially what we find is that Jesus has a two-fold consciousness, a human consciousness and a divine consciousness and both are aware of each other because of their unity in one person. Not consciousness in the modern psychological sense of dormancy and discovery of some hidden inward virtue but rather ever present

consciousness. And thus we find two wills, a human will and a divine will in Jesus. Wherein the human acts perfectly because of its union with the divine...it always follows and submits to the divine will. Example: the garden of Gethsemane.

This is the difference between doing theology from the top down vs. the bottom up. It is our inclination as humans to first attempt to conceive of Christology from the human perspective, but the human perspective is always secondary, we must start from the divine and from that dictate what human aspects properly fall in line. We need to do theology from the top down, where our first and primary concern is God and His glory.

Now, I say those things to prepare us for point at which the most questions arise and that is concerning the temptation of Christ. Theology from the bottom up thinks that for Jesus to be a high priest who sympathizes with our weakness (Heb 4:15) and who is truly human then he must know what it is like to have been sinful. However, this line of thought not only directly denies scripture's multiple statements that Jesus was without sin throughout the entirety of his life but it also forgets that sinfulness is not part of true humanity. Sin was introduced to humanity in the garden of Eden after human beings were created, thus sin is not something that properly belongs to our nature, it is foreign and our spirits and bodies hate it.

If we say that Jesus was able to sin we also fail to recognize that one does not have to give into the temptation or even have the possibility of giving in for the temptation to be real and to be intense. Jesus' divinity assured that his human humiliating experience of real temptation could not fail. As our perfect human example he drew from divine strength, though he could have used it *carte blanké* he chose to draw from his divine power in ways that we can emulate (prayer, fasting, reading God's word, caring for God's people).

Listen to what William G.T. Shedd says, "Because an army is victorious, it by no means follows that the victory was cheap one. The physical agony of a martyr is not diminished in the least by the strength imparted to him by God to endure it. In order to sympathize with a person, it is not necessary to have had exactly the same affliction. It is only necessary to have been afflicted. A different kind of affliction may make a man all the more sympathetic. Because Christ was sinlessly tempted, he feels a deeper and more tender sympathy with sinfully tempted man than he would had he been lustfully and viciously tempted." The pain and agony, suffering, of one who withstands temptation is much greater than the one who gives in.

Conclusion

Okay, let's conclude with a few personal applications and then some questions. Some personal applications I see are when we face difficult situations. We are then able to identify with the humanity of Jesus that we have someone who is with us and knows exactly what it is like to feel what we feel. Then because Jesus is divine we can find hope because he overcame those intense feelings and as a result we can find hope in the impartation of his strength to us.

As the disciple's understanding of Jesus grew and deepened over the years they spent time with Him so shall ours as we have a growing realization of who Jesus truly is and we will come to worship Him with greater and greater allegiance as our king.

We can rejoice because Jesus is our mediator, our representative and substituted himself for us on the cross and died an eternal death. And not only that one act but all the acts leading up to it from the time of his manger through his youth and into his earthly ministry, all serve as an example and pattern of life for us both now and unto the day we die when we receive a fully redeemed and glorified body like Jesus' resurrected body.

There are many facets in the beautiful diamond of Jesus' humanity and divinity. May we cherish and pursue the *theoanthropos* with all our might.