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The Relation of the Divinity and the Humanity in Christ

by R. G. Crawford

Dr. Crawford, Head of the Department of Religious Studies in Brighton Polytechnic, provides an introduction to the contribution of H. M. Relton to the problem of the incarnation and, we hope, will thus encourage a fresh reading of this classic on christology.

One of the most significant questions for christology is how the two natures of the God-man are related. Theologians who emphasise the divinity of Christ in the union of the two natures have often considered the position of Leontius of Byzantium an interesting one: the humanity finds its person in the Word but is itself without a personal centre.

Does this, however, make the humanity impersonal? George Hendry argues that this enhypostasia when described psychologically verges on Apollinarianism.¹ Once the divine 'person' who has assumed human nature without assuming human personality, is taken as a centre of consciousness or subject of experience, the doctrine becomes irreconcilable with the full humanity of Christ, since a human nature is inconceivable without a human personal subject.²

H. M. Relton, however, considers that this is not so. He contends that without God human personality is incomplete, and that he alone can supply it with that which alone can help to its full realisation. Hence the manhood of Christ is more personal than any other man's, because of its complete union with God.³

The present writer whose essay on the two natures of Christ appeared in the *Expository Times* (Oct. 1967) entered into discussion over the years with Professor Relton concerning his position and the following attempts to outline his thought and perhaps do more justice to it than what has been done so far.

When any saying falls from the lips of Jesus *e.g.* 'I thirst', we may ask: Who is speaking? The answer must be that they are the words of a man. Who is the 'I' who utters these words? It is the 'I' of a man. If we say: How can this be, the answer is that the Word or Logos has become a man, Jesus of Nazareth.

The Word or Logos, however, has not ceased to be the word *asarkos*, outside the flesh, when he begins to function as the Word *ensarkos*, inside the flesh.

It means that he has now become what he was not before, namely a man, and, as such, brought into the normal relationship with God that

¹ Apollinarius, Bishop of Laodicea in the fourth century, taught that the mind in Christ was taken by the divine logos. This denied that Christ was truly man, for our minds are the distinctly human element in our nature.

² *The Gospel of the Incarnation* (London, 1959) p.88.

³ *A Study in Christology* (London 1917).

any man occupies whilst alive in the world of human beings, namely the relation of creature to their Creator.

The Word or Logos has thus come into a new mode of existence in which he has deliberately chosen to dwell, a man amongst men. We call this the incarnation. It is not the case of his coming to dwell in a man already there to receive him, but himself becoming a man.

He can and does as such everything that we should expect a normal human being, a man, to do with one exception, namely to sin. On the contrary his whole life is a continuous act of obedience to God.

How then can the Word or Logos become literally and actually a real live man? Given as a datum or fact that he did so, on the evidence of the New Testament, the Church puts the matter in the form of a dogma and speaks of one Person in two natures, the divine and the human, very God and very man.

The credal statements and the Chalcedonian definition state the data or acts and leave the explanation open as the christological problem, yet to be solved, with a warning to avoid certain errors such as Arianism, Apollinarianism, Nestorianism, Eutychianism or Monophysitism.

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But Leontius of Byzantium suggested the idea of the enhypostasia. In this way he hoped, whilst starting from the Alexandrine standpoint, to preserve the truth of the Antiochene insistence upon the complete manhood of Christ.

The point was that if the 'I' of the Person of Christ was the Word or Logos then the impersonality of the manhood and therefore its incompleteness followed, and Jesus was not really a man. A real man, Jesus, had to have an 'I' of his own, and not the 'I' of the Logos, if his manhood was to be complete and something more than a series of human attributes attached to the personal 'I' of the Logos.

Leontius tried to give such an 'I' of its own to the man Jesus by suggesting that the Logos himself already possessed in himself a potential or embryonic human 'I' which came to birth when the Logos was born into the world and became a man.

Thus there were not two 'I's and so two persons, but one 'I' of the Logos containing the possibility of a human 'I' for the manhood he was to assume and which became a real human 'I' when the Logos underwent a birth into time and was born of the Virgin Mary.

The lesser human 'I' was contained in the greater Divine 'I' of the Logos. In this way the impersonality of the manhood, the enhypostasia, was avoided by the personality of the manhood, the enhypostasis, the hypostasis of the Logos giving to the manhood its hypostasis and so making of it a real and complete man. The one hypostasis of the Logos could function in and through both natures, the Divine and the human.

This further step by Leontius received official confirmation and acceptance in the final formulation of Greek theology by John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxa*.

If the Logos really became a man, of course, he could speak as a man and the 'I' he uttered was a human 'I' with human lips.

The presupposition of this idea of the enhypostasia is that there was already in God what we called a human element, or what Karl Barth now calls the humanity of God. This means that God already possessed in himself the possibility of becoming a man; the possession already in himself of a potential human 'I' which became an actual human 'I' when he was born a human man in the days of Herod the King in Palestine in the first century.

This human 'I' he used when he wanted to speak in human language in the days of his flesh when he dwelt among us and manifested himself up to his death on the Cross. His subsequent resurrection revealed who he really was and his suspected divinity was thus confirmed and the Church confessed belief in all this when it said that he was truly God and really man, God in man made manifest.

An impersonal manhood never existed. It had to have a personal manhood to exist at all. It had to have an 'I' of its own to be called a real person. So the Divine Word or Logos became himself a human 'I' and so gave to the manhood he took a human 'I' when the Word or Logos became flesh, that is to say became a real human being which he was not before he was incarnate. In that humanity he was able to fulfil the idea of a man.

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In terms of psychology this means that he was as a man the subject of his own life and with his own will free enough to choose to obey or to disobey the divine will of his heavenly Father.

Thus described psychologically the enhypostasia means that the Divine Word or Logos in assuming human nature did give to it actually what he already contained in himself potentially, namely a human personality or 'I' when he descended or voluntarily reduced himself to the level of a man amongst men.

He thus became a centre of consciousness or subject of experience as a human personal 'I' whilst still continuing to be a divine personal 'I', having in himself two ranges or levels of consciousness, the divine unlimited range or level, and the human limited range or level and he could function at either or both levels at will if and when he chose to do so.

In short what we have is: a single divine 'I' with a potential human 'I' in it and a single divine consciousness capable of ranging in two directions at will.

The present writer hopes that he has interpreted the late Professor Relton's position correctly. It appears to him that this position is more in accord with scripture than many of the views put forward in recent times and does not involve one in going to the extremes of seeing Christ either wholly in terms of divinity or wholly in terms of humanity.

Moreover, it enables us to raise the question of his person in terms of psychology and ethics, as Professor G. Hendry wants us to do. His human nature and human experience can be open to the same modes of observation as those of other men.⁴ Moreover, it is not open to the various forms of objection to which the idea of kenoticism gives rise.⁵ Or the 'concealing' of the divine attributes as contained in the thought of Calvin which could imply duality or even duplicity. Or the position which starts from the human person of Jesus and finds God immanent in him making the divinity of Christ a matter of mere degree rather than that of kind. Or the position which sets forth the alternation of the two natures in such a way that we have his life presented as two lives. Or the more recent 'Man for others' position where in the effort to avoid any form of docetism the divinity is so kept subservient to the humanity that it is difficult to discern.

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In any case it would appear to be a very appropriate time to bring the thought of Leontius of Byzantium, as interpreted by H. M. Relton, to bear upon the contemporary thinking on christology for further comment and criticism.

⁴ G. S. Hendry, *op. cit.* 191.

⁵ See *Expository Times*, Oct. 1967, p. 5.