

Calvinism on Westminster Confession of Faith 8:7 & Larger Catechism 39 (Dr. F.N. Lee)

(1) The famous Scottish Theologian Dr. Robert Shaw once wrote an excellent book on Calvinism titled *The Reformed Faith*. It bears the sub-title: *An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith* [1845]. On page 112 of its 1974 Christian Focus Publications edition (Inverness), Shaw states: "The **human** nature alone **could** suffer and **die**."

Shaw's book was prescribed by the Rev. Principal Dr. Harold Whitney as required reading at the Queensland Presbyterian Theological College till his retirement in 1979. That was **before** he was replaced as Professor of Systematic Theology by (the now-emerited) Rev. Professor Dr. Francis Nigel Lee - who then **continued** to prescribe *inter alia* also Shaw.

Shaw is by no means a lone maverick on the above point. Consider too the following additional Calvinistic authorities on *WCF* 8:7:--

(2) The leading Scottish Calvinist Rev. Professor Dr. William Cunningham states in his *Historical Theology* (Banner of Truth Trust ed., 1969, I:317f): "There is one other position concerning this matter laid down in the *Confession* as taught in Scripture, to which...I may briefly advert* (*Chap. viii, sec. 7.). It is this: 'Christ, in the work of mediation, acteth according to both natures; by each nature doing that which is proper to itself: yet, by reason of the unity of the person, that which is proper to one nature is sometimes in Scripture attributed to the **person** denominated by the other nature'* (*This is called by divines the *koinoonia idioomaton*, or *communicatio proprietatum*.).

"The union of the divine and human natures in the one person of Christ, with a view to the salvation of sinners, was effected just because there were some things necessary for the salvation of men which could be accomplished only by God, and others which could be done or endured only by man. **Man** alone **could** suffer and die, and God alone could satisfy the divine justice and magnify the divine law. Christ, accordingly, being God and man in one person, did **by** each nature **that** which was proper to **itself**....

"The second part of the statement just quoted from the *Confession* is a mere assertion of a fact in regard to a certain scriptural usage of language, and its accuracy is proved by such texts as this - 'Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He [Christ] laid down His life for us.' Dying is, **of course**, proper to the **human** nature" - thus **not** to the divine nature.

"The position in the *Confession*...must be carefully distinguished from a doctrine which **sounds** very like it and which has been strenuously maintained by Lutheran divines as the ground of their tenet concerning the ubiquity or omnipresence of Christ's body, as it is called, which they are accustomed to adduced in defence of their view of the real presence of Christ's body in the Eucharist.

"The Lutheran doctrine is, that what is proper to one nature may be attributed not, as **our** *Confession* says, to the **person** denominated by the other nature, or described by a name taken from the other nature, but to the other **nature** itself....

"It is quite unnecessary to expose **this absurd and monstrous doctrine**; it is enough to point out that, though resembling in sound the statement contained in the *Confession*, it is essentially different in its nature and import, and in the authority on which it rests."

(3) Rev. Professor Dr. Charles Hodge: *Systematic Theology* (Nelson, London, 1974 ed., II:40 7f & II:613f): "The Reformed distinctly rejected all the errors concerning the person of Christ...as well as the peculiar Lutheran doctrine introduced at the time of the Reformation. The Reformed taught what the first six general councils taught, and what the Church Universal received B neither more nor less...."

"The Lutherans...beyond this...insist upon a *communicatio naturarum*.... The divine essence is communicated to the human. The one interpenetrates the other. They ' are mixed' (*commiscentur*).... Where the one is, the other is; what the one does, the other does. The human is as truly divine as the eternal essence of the Godhead, except that it is not divine *ex se* but by communication...."

"The first remark which suggests itself on this Lutheran doctrine, is its contrast with the simplicity of the Gospel.... Luther as a theologian...seemed...never to doubt the correctness of his interpretations, nor was he willing to tolerated doubt [regarding the correctness of his interpretations] in others...."

"The Lutheran doctrine destroys the integrity of the human nature of Christ. A body which fills immensity, is not a human body.... His humanity is merged into divinity, and He becomes not God and man but simply God - and we have lost our Saviour, the Jesus of the Bible.... It seems a plain contradiction in terms to say that the human becomes divine, that the finite becomes infinite; and not less a contradiction to say that the humanity of Christ has infinite attributes and yet itself is not infinite...."

"Christ was not a human person [*cf.* Nestorianism]. He remained after the incarnation as He had been from eternity, a **divine** person.... As the Lutherans at the time of the Reformation departed from the faith of the Church on the person of Christ, they were led into certain peculiarities of doctrine on other related subjects. Insisting, as Luther did, on the local presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist - he was constrained to believe that Christ as to His human nature was everywhere present."

(4) Rev. Professor Dr. A.A. Hodge: *Outlines of Theology* [1860] (Nelson, London, 1879 ed., pp. 384f): "Luther and his followers introduced and elaborated a doctrine that, in consequence of the hypostatical union of the divine natures in the one person of Christ, each nature shares in the essential attributes of the other nature.... We reject the Lutheran view because -- 1st, it is not taught in the Bible.... 2d, it is impossible to reconcile it with the phenomena of Christ' s earthly life.... 3d, it virtually destroys the incarnation by assimilating the human nature to the divine.... 4th, it involves the fallacy of conceiving of properties as separable from the substances of which they are the active powers, and thus is open to the same criticisms as the doctrine of transubstantiation." Hodge adds in his book *The Confession of Faith: A Handbook of Christian Doctrine Expounding the Westminster Confession* [1869], (Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1958 ed., p. 153): "Thus...the Scriptures...never say that the human nature of Christ came down from heaven, or that His **divine** nature suffered."

Professor A.A. Hodge adds in his *Evangelical Theology* [1890] (B.O.T.T., Edinburgh, 1976 ed., pp. 188f): "The Scriptures...in every possible way...set Him before us as one Person... This amazing personality does not centre in His humanity.... It was not made by adding manhood to Godhead....]

"A new Person is not substituted for the second Person of the Trinity, neither is a fourth Person added to the Trinity. But the Person of Christ...through the instrumentality of the womb of the virgin took a human nature (not a man, but the seed of man, humanity in the germ) into personal union with Himself. The Person is eternal and divine. The humanity is introduced into it....

"The Lutherans held the formula *communicatio idiomatum utriusque naturae ad naturam* -- that is, the communication of the attributes of each nature to the other nature. The Reformed Churches, on the other hand, admitted that the attributes of each nature are communicated only to the one Person which was common to both natures. The Lutherans thus held that, at the moment of the incarnation, in virtue of the union between the divine and human natures -- the human nature of Christ became omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent... This doctrine is evidently not supported in Scripture...and is plainly inconsistent with all the facts related in the Gospels as to our Lord' s earthly life."

(5) Rev. Dr. Thomas Ridgeley, in his unsurpassed 1731 *Commentary on the Larger Catechism* (SWRB ed., Edmonton, 1993, I:488f), long before Shaw and the Hodges stated regarding QQ. & AA. 39-41 of the *Westminster Larger Catechism*: "It was requisite that the Mediator should be God and man in one Person. Had His human nature been a distinct human person, the work of our redemption would have been brought about by two persons [as in Nestorianism], which would **each** have had the character of Mediator....

"In the **human** nature, He was to perform everything which implied subjection, obedience, or **suffering**. And, though **none** of these could be performed by Him in His **divine** nature - yet an infinite worth, value and dignity was to be added to them which was not so much the result of anything done by Him in that [divine] nature as [it was the result of] of the union of the **human** nature with it....

"This is generally styled by divines, a communication of properties [**not** a communication of natures]. We must observe concerning it that the properties of the one nature are **not** predicated of the other - as the **Lutherans** suppose, when they conclude that the human nature of Christ is omnipresent and found upon that idea their doctrine of Consubstantiation. But **we** assert that the properties of the one nature are predicated of the same **Person** to Whom the other nature belongs. Hence, when we say that the **Person** Who was God obeyed and suffered..., we are **far** from asserting that the **Godhead** of Christ obeyed....

"The works of each nature must be accepted of God for us, as the works of the whole Person.... Those works...performed by Him in each nature, are to be relied on by us as the works of the whole Person. This reliance...supposes the **Person** Who performs the works, to be God - which **He** was not, in His **human** nature.... We are to depend on Him as a **divine** Person for salvation, and our worship does **not** terminate on His **human** nature but on His Deity."

(6) Rev. Professor Johannes G. Vos: *Blue Banner Faith and Life* (Beaver Falls, Pa., Aug.

25, 1946, on WLC Q. & A. 39, pp. 126f): "God knows all about our human sufferings, and has pity or compassion on them. We may say that God has sympathy **for** but **not with** our human sufferings. The word **sympathize** literally means 'to suffer with' someone. Since God is an infinite Being, and suffering implies limitation -- God Himself, in His Own nature, **cannot suffer**, and therefore He cannot really sympathize with our sufferings.

"Many people speak carelessly about God 'suffering,' who should realize that this is contrary to the truth that God is **infinite** and **unchangeable**. Suffering by its very nature implies limitation and change; therefore an infinite and unchangeable being cannot suffer. God knows all about our sufferings, for He knows all things, but He **cannot** experience them in His Own **nature**". The only way that God could experience our human sufferings was by becoming human, as He did. The Son of God, a Divine Person, took to Himself a human nature; and thus [He Who was and is] God experienced human sufferings **not** in His Own [divine] nature but in His adopted **human** nature."

(7) Rev. Dr. Rowland S. Ward: *The Westminster Confession for the Church Today* (Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, Melbourne, 1992, pp. 70f): "' In His work of mediation, Christ acts according to both His natures by each nature doing what is proper to it [WCF 8:7].... Martin Luther held the position that the two natures in one person demand the participation of the exalted humanity of Christ in the omnipresence of God, hence the Lutheran doctrine of consubstantiation in the Supper; i.e. that Christ is really present by, with and under the elements of bread and wine. This confusion of the natures undermines the perfection of Christ as Mediator...and is evidently an inadequate attempt to move away from the Roman theory of transubstantiation, an actual change of the elements."

(8) The *Heidelberg Catechism* (QQ. & AA. 35-52) which was proposed by the great German Calvinists Rev. Professor Drs. Olevianus and Ursinus as a basis of co-operation with Lutherans - teaches exactly the same as does the *WCF* above. So too do very many commentaries on the *Heidelberger*. Unfortunately, the *Heidelberger* was rejected by Lutherans, so that the Reformation was weakened and Rome thus able to make its huge comeback.

(9) Sadly, some of the Gnesio-Lutherans regarded Calvinism as worse than Romanism. Thus there were those like Hunnius who composed the 1592 *Saxon Visitation Articles* and therein condemned what **they** there call "the false and erroneous doctrines of the Calvinists on the Person of Christ, which differs [from Gnesio-Lutheranism] in particular...that God is man and man God...; that it is impossible to God by all His omnipotence to effect that the natural body of Christ which is in one place should at the same time and instant be in several; that according to His human nature Christ...doth not know and cannot do all things; that according to His humanity Christ reigns where He is absent...; and that it is a **damnable idolatry** to place the hope and faith of the heart in Christ...according to His **human** nature."

Lutheranizers may of course retort that the consistent Calvinism above misunderstands Lutheranism. But they can hardly maintain with any real degree of credibility that Calvinists misunderstand their very own *HC* (QQ. & AA. 35-52), their very own *WCF* (8:7), and their very own *WLC* (Q. & A. 39)! **God did not die at the human death of the man Christ**, Who is also God. And, though also God, **the man** Christ did not walk through stone walls and closed doors.