

§ 7. *Lutheran Doctrine* .

The Lutherans in their symbols adopt all the doctrinal decisions of the early Church respecting the person of Christ. They therefore hold, (1.) That Christ is very God and very man. (2.) That He has two distinct natures, a human and divine; that as to the latter He is consubstantial with the Father, and as to the former He is consubstantial with men. (3.) That He is one person. There is one Christ and not two. (4.) That the two natures are intimately united, but without confusion or change. Each nature retains its own peculiar properties. Nevertheless they hold that the attributes of the one nature were communicated to the other. They admit a "communio idiomatum" in the sense that whatever is true of either nature is true of the person. But beyond this they insist upon a "communicatio naturarum." And by nature, in this connection, they mean essence. In their symbols and writings the formula "natura, seu substantia, seu essentia" is of frequent occurrence. The divine essence is communicated to the human. The one interpenetrates the other. They "are mixed" (*commiscentur*). They do not become one essence, but remain two; yet 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. (5.) As however it would be derogatory to the divine nature to suppose it to be subject to the limitations and infirmities of humanity, this communication of attributes is said to be confined to the human nature. It receives divine perfections; but the divine receives nothing from the human. (6.) The human nature of Christ, therefore, is almighty, omniscient, and everywhere present both as to soul and body. (7.) As this transfer of divine attributes from the divine to the human nature is the consequence of the incarnation, or rather constitutes it, it began when the incarnation began, and consequently in the womb of the Virgin Mary. (8.) The humiliation of Christ consisted mainly in the hiding or not using the divine perfections of his human nature while here on earth; and his exaltation in the manifestation of the divine glory of his humanity. On this subject the "Form of Concord"¹ says, "Eamque Majestatem, ratione unionis personalis, semper Christus habuit sed in statu suae humiliationis sese exinanivit qua de causa revera state, sapientia et gratia apud Deum atque homines profecit. Quare majestatem illam non semper, sed quoties ipsi visum fuit, exseruit, donec formam servi, non autem naturam humanam, post resurrectionem plene et prorsus deponeret, ut in plenariam usurpationem, manifestationem et declarationem divinae majestatis collocaretur, et hoc modo in gloriam suam ingrederetur." (9.) Nevertheless Christ while here on earth, and even when in the womb of the Virgin, was as to his soul and body everywhere present.

The above statement is believed to be a correct exhibition of the doctrine of the Lutheran Church as presented in the eighth chapter of the "Form of Concord." There is, however, no little difficulty in determining what the Lutheran doctrine really is. The Christology of Luther, although very clear and pronounced on certain points, was

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indefinite and doubtful in others. His successors differed seriously among themselves. It was one of the principal objects of the "Form of Concord" to settle the matters in dispute. This was done by compromise. Both parties made concessions, and yet both insisted upon the assertion of their peculiar views in one part or other of that document. It is, therefore, difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile some portions of the "Form of Concord" with others. It did not in fact put an end to the divisions which it was designed to heal.

Different Views among the Lutherans.

The principal points of difference among the Lutheran divines concerning the person of Christ were the following: The nature and effects of the union of natures in Christ; the ground of that, union; and the time of its occurrence. The Reformed Church in adhering to the doctrine as it had been settled in the Council of Chalcedon, maintained that there is such an essential difference between the divine and human natures that the one could not become the other, and that the one was not capable of receiving the attributes of the other. If God became the subject of the limitations of humanity He would cease to be God; and if man received the attributes of God he would cease to be man. This was regarded as a self-evident truth. The "communion of attributes" which the Reformed, in accordance with the common faith of the Church, admitted, concerned only the person and not the natures of Christ. Christ possessed all the attributes of humanity and of divinity, but the two natures remained distinct; just as a man is the subject of all that can be predicated of his body and of his soul, although the attributes of the one are not predicable of the other. The Lutherans maintained that, according to this view, the two natures were as separate as *duvo asseres applutinos*. This they pronounced to be no real incarnation. The Reformed acknowledged that Jesus Christ the son of the Virgin Mary is a divine person, but denied that his human nature was divine. The Lutherans maintained that man became God, and that the human did become divine. Otherwise, Christ as clothed in our nature, could not be an object of divine worship. As though we could not reverence a man unless we believed that the attributes of his mind were transferred to his body.

Although the Lutheran theologians agree as to the fact that the man Christ Jesus became God, they differ as to the mode in which this was accomplished. Their language as to the fact is as strong as it can be made. Thus Brentius, the friend of Luther and the Reformer of Würtemberg, in his work "De Personali Unione," says, If the Logos "did not intend to remain either personally or with his nature outside of Christ, but purposed to become man, He must needs exalt the humanity into his own majesty. Therein, in fact, consists the incarnation, that the man Christ not merely never existed or worked without the Logos, but also that the Logos never existed or worked without the man, whom He had assumed; and as this was only possible through the elevation of the humanity to equal dignity with the Logos, the incarnation consists precisely in this elevation, —the one is identical with the other."² "According to the philosophy of Zwingli, there is no

proportion between the finite and the infinite; but in the philosophy of God, finite humanity also may become infinite."³ The human nature of Christ, therefore, possesses all divine attributes. It fills heaven and earth. It is omniscient and almighty. In the "Form of Concord"⁴ it is said, "Itaque non tantum ut Deus, verum etiam ut homo, omnia novit, omnia, potest, omnibus creaturis praesens est, et omnia, quae in caelis, in terris et sub terra sunt, sub pedibus suis et in manu sua habet." And again,⁵ "Non in Christo sunt duae separatae personae, sed unica tantum est persona. Ubiunque ea est, ibi est unica tantum et indivisa persona. Et ubiunque recte dixeris hic est Deus, ibi uteri oportet, et dicere, ergo etiam Christus homo adest." This being the case, it being admitted that man becomes God, that the human becomes divine, the finite infinite, the question arises, How can this be? How is divinity thus communicated to humanity? It is in the answer to these questions that the diversities and inconsistencies in the views not only of theologians but also of the symbolical books, appear. It was a principle with the Wittenberg school of the Lutheran theologians that human nature is not capable of divinity. This is true also of Chemnitz, the greatest of the divines of the age after the Reformation. In his work "De Duabus Naturis in Christo, de Hypostatica Earum Unione, de Communicatione Idiomatum," etc., says Dorner, "he controverts in the most vigorous manner, a 'physica, naturalis communicatio,' or 'transfusio idiomatum' and no less earnestly does he deny the 'capacitas' of a 'natura finita' for the 'infinite,' if it signify more than that the divine can dwell and work in man."⁶ As to the ubiquity of Christ's body, the dissent was still more decided.⁷ Yet this idea of the capacity of human nature for divinity became the formative idea in the Lutheran doctrine of the person of Christ.

History of the Development of the Doctrine of the Person of Christ, by Dr. J. A. Dorner. Translated by Rev. D.W. Simon. Edinburgh, T. and T. Clark, 1809. Division n. vol. ii. p. 180.

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Ibid. p. 183.

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VIII. 16; Hase, *Liberi Symbolici*, p. 608.

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VIII. 82; *Ibid.* p. 784.

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Dorner, Div. II. vol. ii. p. 200.

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No less diversity appears in the answer to the question, What is meant by the communication of natures? Sometimes it is said to be a communication of the essence of God to the human nature of Christ; sometimes a communication of divine attributes; and sometimes it is said to mean nothing more than that the human is made the organ of the divine.⁸ The first has symbolical authority in its favour, and is the most consistent with the theory. It is the proper meaning of the worries, for as *natura* in the "Form of Concord" is constantly in this connection explained by the words *substantia* and *essentia*, a communication of nature is a communication of essence. The one is not changed into the other, but they are intermingled and mixed without being confounded.⁹

On this point Dorner, on page 240, note, says, "Selnekker designates the 'Ubiquitas absoluta figmentum Sathanm' (Chemnitz, a 'monstrum' and 'portentum'), and yet subscribed the Bergian formula which included Luther's words, — 'omnia in univsum plena esse Christi etiam juxtahumanam naturam,' — which repeatedly says, whoso believeth not that where the Logos is there also is the humanity of Christ, divideth the person; and which assumes Luther's doctrine of the three modes of existence of the body of Christ, that also according to which 'Christi corpus repletive, absolute ut Deus, in omnibus creaturis sit.'"

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Dorner says of Chemnitz, "In his highest Christological utterances, the Son of man is nothing more than a God-moved organ: — a representation to which even the Wittenberger's objected." *Person of Christ*, div. II. vol. ii. p. 203, note.

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The *Form of Concord* (VIII. 17–19; Hase, *Liberi Symbolici*, p. 765) says, "Catholica Christi ecclesia semper, omnibusque temporibus simplicissime credit et sensit, humanam et divinam naturam in persona Christi eo modo unitas esse, ut veram inter se communicationem habeant. Neque tamen ideo natura in unam essentiam, sed ut D. Lutherus loquitur, in unani personam conveniunt et commiscuntur. Et propter hanc hypostaticam unionem et communicationem veteres orthodoxi ecclesiae doctores supe admodum, non motto ante, rerum etiam post, Chalcedonense concilium, vocabulo (mixtionis), in pia tamen sententia et vera discrimine, usi sunt.... Et quidem erudita antiquitas unionem hypostaticam et naturarum communicationem similitudine anima et corporis, item terri candenti, aliquo modo declaravit. Anima enim et corpus (quemadmodum etiam ignis et ferrum) non tantum per phrasin aut modum loquendi, aut verbaliter, sed vere et realiter communicationem inter se habent: neque tamen hoc modo confusio aut naturarum exaequatio introducitur, qualis fieri solet, cum ex melle et aqua multum conficitur; talis enim potus non amplius aut aqua est mera, aut mel merum sed mixtus quidam ex utroque potus. Longe certe aliter se res in illa divinae et humane natura unione (in persona Christi) liabent: longe enim sublimior est, et plane ineffabilis communicatio et unio divinae et humane natura, in persona Christi, propter quam unionem

The favorite illustration of this union of two natures was derived from heated iron. In that case (according to the theory of heat then in vogue) two substances are united. The one interpenetrates the other. The iron receives the attributes of the caloric. It glows and burns. Where the iron is, there the caloric is. Yet the one is not changed into the other. The iron remains iron, and the heat remains heat. This is very ingenious; but, as is often the case, the analogy fails in the very point to be illustrated. The fact to be explained is how man becomes God and God man; how the human becomes divine, and the finite becomes infinite. In the illustration the heat does not become iron nor the iron heat. The only relation between the two is juxtaposition in space. But in the doctrine the human does become divine; man does become God.

A second and minor point of difference was that some referred the communion of the attributes of the two natures to the hypostatical union, while others held that that union was the result of the communication of the divine nature to the human. The main difficulty, however, and the principal source of diversity related to the time and manner of the union of the two natures. We have already seen that one party held that this union took place at the moment of the "miraculous conception." The conception was the ascension. As the union of the divine with the human nature rendered the human divine, it became *instante* omnipresent, almighty, and infinitely exalted. The effect of the incarnation was that the *λόγος* no longer existed *extra carnem*, neither was the *caro extra λόγον*. Whatever the one is the other is; whatever the one knows the other knows; whatever the one does the other does; and whatever majesty, glory, or blessedness the one has the other also has. "So certainly as the act of incarnation communicates the divine essence to humanity, even so certainly must this actual omnipresence, and not merely its potency, which does not exist, be communicated to the flesh of Christ."¹⁰ The "Form of Concord" teaches the same doctrine;¹¹ it says, "Ex eodem etiam fundamento credimus, docemus et confitemur, Filium hominis ad dexteram omnipotentis majestatis et virtutis Dei, realiter, hoc est, vere et reipsa, secundum humanam suam naturam, esse exaltatum, cum homo ille in Deum assumptus fuerit, quamprimum in utero matris a Spiritu Sancto est confectus, ejusque humanitas jam tum cum Filio Dei altissimi personaliter fuerit unita." This, however, supposes the whole earthly life of Christ to be

et communicationem Deus homo est, et homo Deus. Nec tamen hac unione et communicatione naturarum vel ipse natura, vel harum proprietates confunduntur: sed utraque natura essentiam et proprietates suas retinet."

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Dorner, div. II. vol. ii. p. 284. Dorner makes the remark quoted in the text, in special reference to the doctrine of the Tübingen divines. It applies, however, to every form of the Lutheran theory.

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VIII. x.; Hase, *Libri Symbolici*, p. 608.

an illusion. There could be no growth or development of his human nature. He was omniscient and omnipotent when an unborn infant. The Bible says He increased in knowledge; this theory says that He knew all things from the beginning; that He was the ruler of the universe cooperating in all the activity of the Logos when in the womb of the Virgin; that He was supremely blessed as to his human nature when in the garden and upon the cross; and that as to soul and body He was living while lying in the grave. If this be so He never suffered or died, and there has been no redemption through his blood.

To avoid these fatal consequences of their theory, the Lutherans were driven to different and conflicting subtle explanations. According to some there was no *actual* communication of the divine essence and attributes to the human nature until after his resurrection. The Logos was in Him only potentially. There was on the part of the divine nature a *retractio*, or ἡσυχάζειν or quiescence, so that it was as though it were not there. According to others, there was a voluntary κρύψις or veiling of itself or of its divine glory on the part of the humanity of Christ. According to others, this humiliation was rather the act of the Godman, who only occasionally revealed the fact that the human nature was divine. No explanation could meet the difficulties of the case, because they are inseparable from the assumption that the human nature of Christ was replete with divine attributes from the moment of its miraculous conception. It is a contradiction to say that the same individual mind was omniscient and yet was ignorant and increased in knowledge; that the same rational soul was supremely happy and exceeding sorrowful, at the same time; that the same body was potentially alive and yet actually dead. From the nature of the case there can be no difference between the κτήσις and Χρησις of such divine attributes as omniscience and omnipresence. It would require a volume to give the details of the controversies between the different schools of the Lutheran divines on these and kindred points. This general outline is all that can here be expected.¹²

Remarks on the Lutheran Doctrine.

1. The first remark which suggests itself on this Lutheran doctrine is its contrast with the simplicity of the gospel. The New Testament predicates of our Lord Jesus Christ all

These details may be found at length in the larger work of Dorner on the Person of Christ, already frequently referred to, and in the work entitled *Christi Person und Werk; Darstellung der evangelisch-lutherischen Dogmatik von Mittelpunkt der Christologie aus*. Von G. Thomasius D. und ord. Professor der Theologie an der Universität Erlangen. In two volumes, 1853, and 1857. See also *The Consecrative Reformation and its Theology, as represented in the Augsburg Confession, and in the History and Literature of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. By Charles P. Krauth, D.D., Norton Professor of Theology in the Evangelical Lutheran Theological Seminary, and Professor of Intellectual and Moral Philosophy in the University of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1871, 8vo, pp. 840. This is a very able and instructive book, and presents the Lutheran doctrine in the most plausible form of which it admits.

that can be predicated of a sinless man, and all that can be predicated of a divine person. It is only stating this fact in another form to say that the Bible teaches that the eternal Son of God became man by taking to Himself a true body and a reasonable soul, and so was, and continues to be, God and man, in two entire distinct natures, and one person forever. Whatever is beyond this, is mere speculation. Not content with admitting the fact that two natures are united in the one person of Christ, the Lutheran theologians insist on explaining that fact. They are willing to acknowledge that two natures or substances, soul and body, are united in the one person in man, without pretending to explain the essential nature of the union. Why then can they not receive the fact that two natures are united in Christ without philosophizing about it? The first objection, therefore, is that the Lutheran doctrine is an attempt to explain the inscrutable.

2. A second objection is that the character of the explanation was determined by the peculiar views of Luther as to the Lord's Supper. He believed that the body and blood of Christ are really and locally present in the Eucharist. And when asked, How can the body of Christ which is in heaven be in many different places at the same time? He answered that the body of Christ is everywhere. And when asked, How can that be? His only answer was, That in virtue of the incarnation the attributes of the divine nature were communicated to the human, so that wherever the Logos is there the soul and body of Christ must be.

There are two things specially prominent in Luther as a theologian. The one is his entire subjection to the authority of Scripture, as he understood it. He seemed, moreover, never to doubt the correctness of his interpretations, nor was he willing to tolerate doubt in others. As to matters not clearly determined in the Bible, according to his view, he was exceedingly tolerant and liberal. But with regard to points which he believed to be taught in the Word of God, he allowed neither hesitation nor dissent. The other marked trait in his character was his power of faith. He could believe not only what was repugnant to his feelings, but what was directly opposed to his system, and even what was in its own nature impossible. His cardinal doctrine was "justification by faith alone," as he translated Romans iii. 28. He constantly taught not only that no man could be saved without faith in Christ, but that faith alone was necessary. Yet as he understood our Lord in John iii. 5, to teach that baptism is essential to salvation, he asserted its absolute necessity, although sorely against his will. To reconcile this with his doctrine of the necessity and sufficiency of faith, he held that new-born infants, when baptized, exercised faith, although he meant by faith the intelligent, voluntary, and cordial reception of Christ as He is offered in the gospel. In like manner, he hated the Romish doctrine of transubstantiation, and was bitterly opposed to all the subtleties of scholasticism. Yet as he understood our Lord's words, "This is my body," literally, he adopted all the subtleties, inconsistencies, and, we may say, impossibilities, involved in the doctrine of the ubiquity of Christ's body. Body includes the idea of form as well as of substance. A man's body is not the water, ammonia, and lime of which it is composed. It is certainly a strong objection to any doctrine that it owes its existence mainly to the desire to support a false interpretation of Scripture. Lutherans, indeed, deny that their doctrine concerning the person of Christ is thus subordinate to their views of the Lord's Supper. Even Dorner, in one place, seems to take the same ground. Elsewhere, however,

he fully admits the fact. Thus when speaking of Luther, he says that he "did not develop his deep and full Christological intuitions in a connected doctrinal form. His controversy with the Swiss, on the contrary, had led him, as we have shown, to the adoption of single divergent principles, which aided in reducing Christology to the rank of a follower in the train of another doctrine, instead of conceding to it an independent life and sphere of its own."¹³ And on the next page he says, "Even the champions of peace between the evangelical parties put their Christology in a position of dependence on the doctrine of the Eucharist, which almost involved the entire loss of the grand features of Luther's doctrine."

3. It is to be objected to the Lutheran doctrine, not only that it undertakes to explain what is an inscrutable mystery, and that the explanation derives its character from Luther's views of the Eucharist, but also that the explanation itself is utterly unsatisfactory. In the first place, it is one sided. It insists on a communication of natures and a communion of attributes. Lutherans maintain that God became man as truly, and in the same sense that man became God. Yet they deny that the divine nature received anything from the human, or that God was in any way subject to the limitations of humanity. Nevertheless, such limitation appears to be involved in the Lutheran doctrine of Christ's humiliation. The idea is that after the incarnation the Logos is not *extra carnem*, that all his activity is with and through the activity of his humanity; and yet it is affirmed that the humanity did not exercise, while on earth, except occasionally, its divine perfections. This seems of necessity to involve the admission that the Logos did not exercise those perfections during the period of the humiliation. That is, while Christ was on earth, the knowledge and power of the Logos were measured and circumscribed by the knowledge and power of the human soul of Christ. This is the modern doctrine of κένωσις which Luther rejected. He refused, says Dorner, "to purchase an actual growth of the divine-human vital unity at the price of a depotentiation or self-emptying of the Logos."¹⁴

In the second place, the doctrine in question is destitute of any Scriptural support. Almost all the arguments derived from the Scriptures, urged by Lutherans, are founded on passages in which the person of Christ is denominated from his human nature when divine attributes or prerogatives are ascribed to Him; whence it is inferred that those attributes and prerogatives belong to his humanity. Thus because it is said, "The Son of Man is in heaven," it is inferred that the human nature, *i. e.*, the soul and body of Christ, were in heaven while He was on earth. But they do not carry out the principle, and argue that because Christ is denominated from his divine nature when the limitations of

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Dorner's *History of the Doctrine on the Person of Christ*, div. II. vol. ii. p. 172.

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Dorner's *History of the Doctrine on the Person of Christ*, div. II. vol. ii. p. 97.

humanity are ascribed to Him, that therefore his divine nature is limited. **But if his being called God when He is said to have purchased the Church with his blood, does not prove that the divine nature suffered death, neither does his being called the Son of Man when He is said to be in heaven, prove the ubiquity of his humanity.** Still less force is due to the argument from passages in which the Theanthropos is the subject to which divine perfections and prerogatives are ascribed. That our Lord said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth," no more proves that his human nature is almighty, than his saying, "Before Abraham was I am," proves that his humanity is eternal. If saying that man is a rational creature does not imply that his body thinks, saying that Jesus Christ is God, does not imply that his human nature is divine. If the personal union between the soul and body in man, does not imply that the attributes of the soul are communicated to the body, then the personal union of the two natures in Christ does not imply that the divine attributes are communicated to his humanity.

In the third place, the Lutheran doctrine destroys the integrity of the human nature of Christ. A body which fills immensity is not a human body. A soul which is omniscient, omnipresent, and almighty, is not a human soul. The Christ of the Bible and of the human heart is lost if this doctrine be true.

In the fourth place, the Lutheran doctrine is contrary to the entire drift of the teaching of the Word of God, and of the whole Church. If anything is plainly revealed in the Scriptures concerning our Lord, and if there is anything to which the heart of the believer instinctively clings, it is that although He is God over all and blessed forever, He is nevertheless a man like ourselves; bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh; one who can be touched with a sense of our infirmities; and who knows from his own experience and present consciousness, what a weak and infirm thing human nature is. He became and continues a man that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God. But a man whose body and soul fill immensity, who "as man" is omniscient and omnipotent, as just said, ceases to be a man. 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, who was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, who was one with us in his humanity, and therefore can sympathize with us and save us.

Finally, it is a fatal objection to the doctrine under consideration that it involves the physical impossibility that attributes are separable from the substances of which they are the manifestation. This is the same kind of impossibility as action without something acting; or, motion without something moving. It is an objection urged by Lutherans as well as others against the Romish doctrine of transubstantiation that it supposes the accidents, or attributes of the bread and wine in the Eucharist, to continue when their substance no longer exists. In like manner, according to the Lutheran doctrine, the attributes of the divine nature or essence are transferred to another essence. If there be no such transfer or communication, then the human nature of Christ is no more omniscient or almighty, than the worker of a miracle is omnipotent. If the divine nature only exercises its omnipotence in connection with the activity of the humanity, then the humanity is the mere organ or instrument of the divine nature. This idea, however, the Lutherans repudiate. They admit that for God to exercise his power, when Peter said to

the lame man, "Rise up and walk," was something entirely different from rendering Peter omnipotent. Besides, omnipresence and omniscience are not attributes of which a creature can be made the organ. Knowledge is something subjective. If a mind knows everything, then that mind, and not another in connection with it, is omniscient. If Christ's body is everywhere present, then it is the substance of that body, and not the essence of God that is omnipresent. The Lutheran doctrine is, however, that the essential attributes or properties of the two natures remain unchanged after the hypostatical union. The properties of the divine essence do not become the properties of the human. Then the humanity of Christ has the attributes of his divinity without its essence, and yet those attributes or properties do not inhere in his human substance.¹⁵

It seems a plain contradiction in terms, to say that the human becomes divine, that the finite becomes infinite; and no less a contradiction to say that the humanity of Christ has infinite attributes and yet itself is not infinite.

The Lutheran doctrine of the Person of Christ has never been disconnected from the Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Both are peculiar to that Church and form no part of Catholic Christianity.

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The *Form of Concord*, chap. viii. sections 6 and 7, Epitome; Hase, *Libri Symbolici*, p. 606, says, "Credimus, docemus et confitemur, divinam et humanam naturas non in unam substantiam commixtas, nec unam in alteram mutatam esse, sed utramque naturam retinere suas proprietates essentielles, at quae alterius natura proprietates fieri nequeant. Proprietates divinae naturae sunt: esse omnipotentem, aeternam, infinitam, et secundum naturae naturalisque sum essentia proprietatem, per se, ubique presentem esse, omnia novisse, etc. Haec omnia neque aunt neque unquam fiunt humanae naturae proprietates"

¹Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*. Originally published 1872. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997.