

April 26, 2009

Dear Friends of the Foundation:

We have already begun, and now we are ready to complete, chapter 14 of Book II of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. This has to do with Christ being both fully divine and fully human in one person (that is to say, not half-divine and half-human in one person, and not fully divine and fully human in two persons, and so forth).

If anything like this very great mystery can be found in human affairs, the most apposite parallel seems to be that of man, whom we see to consist of two substances. Yet neither is so mingled with the other as not to retain its own distinctive nature. For the soul is not the body, and the body is not the soul. Therefore, some things are said exclusively of the soul that can in no wise apply to the body; and of the body, again, that in no way fit the soul; of the whole man, that cannot refer—except inappropriately—to either soul or body separately. Finally, the characteristics of the mind are [sometimes] transferred to the body, and those of the body to the soul. Yet he who consists of these parts is one man, not many. Such expressions signify both that there is one person in man composed of two elements joined together, and that there are two diverse underlying natures that make up this person. Thus, also, the Scriptures speak of Christ: they sometimes attribute to him what must be referred solely to his humanity, sometimes what belongs uniquely to his divinity; and sometimes what embraces both natures but fits neither alone. b(a)And they so earnestly express this union of the two natures that is in Christ as sometimes to interchange them. This figure of speech is called by the ancient writers "the communicating of properties." (section 1, pp. 482-482)

Two things are of special note here. The first is that Calvin is strictly following the orthodoxy of the Council of Chalcedon, A.D. 451, which taught that Christ was one person of two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation. Again and again we have seen that Calvin is not an innovator. He sought to restore the historic faith of the church, not to update or modify it.

Second, it is significant that Calvin drew this comparison of the divine and human natures of Christ to the soul and body of man from Augustine (A.D. 354-430). Calvin read, studied, and learned much from the church fathers, and especially from Augustine.

Grace and Peace,

Jim

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