

Chapter 8 – Of Christ the Mediator

No chapter in the Confession contains as much pertinent to what is central in Christian confession as does Chapter VIII. (John Murray, *Collected Writings*, 4.254)

8.1 CHRIST THE APPOINTED MEDIATOR

- From all eternity, it ‘pleased’ the Father to sovereignly appoint Christ to the position of mediator of the covenant of grace
- All the elements of the covenant of redemption are in this paragraph (even though it is not denoted) e.g. believers are spoken of as the gift promised to the Son from all eternity.¹
- Christ’s role as mediator embraces his threefold office (WLC 43-45):²
 - Prophet – ordained to teach because we are by nature ignorant
 - Priest – presenting a sacrifice to God on our behalf because we are defiled and guilty
 - King – to rule over us because we are in thrall to Satan and dominated by sin

This threefold office of Christ as prophet, priest and king together with his headship over the church has vast implications for the way we consider his church. Plainly, it ought to shape how we think and speak of it, how we order it, how we serve in it, and how we worship in it—for it is his church, and we must seek his will diligently and constantly in all we do (van Dixhoorn, *Confessing the Faith*, 108).

8.2 THE MEDIATOR IS THE GOD-MAN

Here the confession addresses the constitution of the one who is the mediator as it focuses on the person of Christ.

The only Redeemer of God’s elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continueth to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, for ever (WSC 21).

¹ Scott R. Swain, ‘Covenant of Redemption’, in *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic* eds. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Baker, 2016), 109.

² Though popularly attributed to Calvin, the threefold office had been spoken of by patristic and medieval authors. See Richard A. Muller, ‘Demoting Calvin: The Issue of Calvin and the Reformed Tradition’, in Amy Nelson Burnett (ed.), *Calvin, Myth and Reality: Images and Impact of Geneva’s Reformer* (Cascade, 2011). Calvin’s exposition is however particularly rich (*Inst.* 2.15). Robert Letham structures his *The Work of Christ* (Inter Varsity Press, 1993) according to this pattern. See also Richard P. Belcher Jr., *Prophet, Priest and King: The Roles of Christ in the Bible and Our Roles Today* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 2016).

Christ, the Son of God, became man, by taking to himself a true body, and a reasonable soul, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and born of her, yet without sin (WSC 22).

This summarises classic Chalcedonian Christology (451), affirming:

- The equality of the Son with the Father i.e. ‘of one substance and equal’
- The reality of the incarnation, the Son taking ‘man’s nature’ and Jesus being ‘of [Mary’s] substance’ and so really human.³
- The identity of the God-Man – ‘Two whole, perfect, and distinct natures’ in the one person
 - ‘Whole’ – nothing appropriate to a human nature was lacking
 - ‘Perfect’ – without flaw
 - ‘Distinct’ – in the one person of the Son, both divine and human natures are distinctly possessed
- The historic teaching of the church against ancient heresies that were reappearing in the seventeenth century. The natures are ‘inseparably joined in one person’ – contra Nestorianism (the Son assumed a human nature *not* a human person)
 - Without ‘conversion’ – contra Eutychianism
 - Without ‘composition’ – contra Apollinarianism
 - Without ‘confusion’ – contra Monothelism
- Note also the allusion to the Nicene Creed (325) – ‘very God, and very man, yet one Christ.’

8.3 THE SPIRIT-ANOINTED MEDIATOR

- As one filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus was thoroughly equipped to take the highest office as ‘mediator and surety’ (a surety is one who, knowing the cost, is a guarantor of the covenant no matter what the cost).⁴
- This section sets the ministry of the mediator within a Trinitarian context. The divines see the cooperative participation of each person of the Godhead in the work of salvation (this is the Augustinian doctrine of inseparable operations).
 - There is no sense of a loving Son persuading a reluctant Father
 - There is no ‘cosmic child abuse’

³ Brandon D. Crowe, *Was Jesus Really Born of a Virgin?* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 2014).

⁴ Richard B. Gaffin Jr., ‘The Last Adam, the life-giving Spirit’, in Stephen Clark (ed.), *The Forgotten Christ: Exploring the Majesty and Mystery of God Incarnate* (Inter Varsity Press, 2007), 191-231.

8.4 THE WORK OF THE MEDIATOR

Now the work of Christ comes to the foreground. This paragraph succinctly outlines the cost, weight and glory of redemption:

- Even though this costly work was given to Jesus, it was something that he did 'most willingly' undertake
- Christ placed himself under all the obligations of the moral and ceremonial law
- As our mediator, Jesus endured most 'grievous torments'
- The wording of the Apostles' Creed is easy to detect

8.5 REDEMPTION ACCOMPLISHED

This paragraph explains what Christ purchased by his obedience and sacrifice

- This is a thoroughly Trinitarian account of the atonement – His perfect obedience and sacrifice were offered through the eternal Spirit to the Father
- There is a clear commitment to particular redemption – an effective salvation was accomplished for 'all those whom the Father hath given unto Him'.⁵

8.6 REDEMPTION APPLIED WITHIN THE ONE COVENANT OF GRACE

This is about how redemption was applied or 'communicated' to those who died before the coming of Christ.

- The 'virtue, efficacy, and benefits' of his work of redemption were 'communicated' to the 'elect in all ages'
- There is one way of salvation in both testaments (7.5) – the saints of the OT found salvation in Christ
- That way is set forth with varying degrees of clarity and in different ways – before the coming of Christ by 'promises, types, and sacrifices'

⁵ This paragraph, along with 8.8, does not exclude English Hypothetical Universalism in an unambiguous way.

8.7 DETAILED DISCUSSION OF THE PERSON AND NATURES OF CHRIST

This reminds us of para. 2 but it adds more depth. There is a polemical focus (esp. against Lutherans and Roman Catholics).

- The communication of properties (*communicatio idiomatum*).⁶
 - Christ, the God-man, acts according to both natures
 - The one person may be described in terms of either nature:
 - Jesus was hungry, thirsty and grew in knowledge
 - His blood can be called the blood of God (Acts 20:28)

[I]t is not the human nature of Christ that saves us. Nor is it the divine nature of Christ that saves us—no, it is Christ himself ‘acting according to both natures’ who is our Saviour and Deliverer (van Dixhoorn, *Confessing the Faith*, 125).

The works that Christ did, then, were not simply the works of a human; they are the works of the mediator, who is both fully God and fully man. Therefore the value of Christ’s death is infinite because of the worth of his person. In other words, one who was a human being only could not have paid the debt owed to God for so great a number of people. Yet because Christ had a true human nature he was able to pay the debt on behalf of sinful humanity (Mark Jones, *A Christian’s Pocket Guide to Jesus Christ*, 22-3).

8.8 THE CERTAINTY OF THE APPLICATION OF REDEMPTION (WLC 57-59)

- Christ’s mediation achieves what God intended to achieve for the elect
- This is accomplished through his ministry as our priest, prophet and king:
 - As priest he intercedes before his Father
 - As prophet he teaches the way of salvation, sending his Spirit to persuade and bring his own to faith and obedience
 - As king he rules their hearts by Word and Spirit, conquering all their enemies
- There is consistency between redemption accomplished and applied – in reference to this paragraph John Murray comments that ‘impetration and application are coextensive ... This excludes any form of universal atonement’.⁷
- ‘Particular redemption is clearly close to the Assembly’s heart’.⁸

⁶ Stephen R. Holmes, ‘Reformed Varieties of the Communicatio Idiomatum’, in *The Person of Christ* eds. Rae, Murray, and Holmes (T & T Clark, 2005), 70ff.

⁷ John Murray, *Collected Writings*, (Banner of Truth, 1983) 4.256.

⁸ Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context* (Banner of Truth, 2009), 241.