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Magisterial Teaching and Tradition:
On separating Jesus and Christ.

Henk J.M. Schoot

The central painting of the Isenheimer altarpiece (ca. 1512), considered as a highlight in the history of art, depicts Christ crucified. The painting is both realistic and mysterious. Its realism is located in the very concrete way in which the agonizing suffering of Christ is painted. Note not only the expression of Christ's face, but also the crown of thorns which has left parts of thorns all over the body, as well as the many wounds with which the body is covered. The fingers of Christ's hands are grabbing agonizingly in the air, and his feet give a similar distorted impression. This realism is mysterious at the same time. Christ's corpse is much larger than the bodies of those surrounding the cross. Moreover, it seems as if Christ suffered from the same disease as the patients of ergotism or Anthony's fire that were led before the altar by the monks of the monastery of St. Anthony for which this altar piece was made. There is a certain similarity between the crucified body of Christ and a patient of ergotism which is painted at another panel of the altar piece. Ergotism is a disease which causes very severe problems. Gangrenous ergotism includes symptoms such as skin peeling and dying, and deformation of hands and feet. It later turned out to be a poor man's disease, since it was caused by eating cheap but fungus infected rye bread. So, the painter of this altarpiece did not know that he was painting Christ as a poor man crucified, but he did identify Christ with a patient of ergotism. In doing so he approached with his painting the mystery of salvation: the belief in the infinite meaning of Christ's suffering. The figure of Jesus Christ and those for whom he died merge. A nice example of contextual theology.

Since it is obvious that the earthly Jesus was not a patient of ergotism, someone might raise the question whether there are in fact two Christs, the historical one and the late-medieval St. Anthony Christ. Such a question might easily be settled, by answering that we are in fact dealing with the one Christ, whose meaning is different in different contexts. Isn't that what the mystery of salvation is all about, that its meaning changes in changing contexts? Salvation is a mystery because not one situation or one

representation can capture the whole of this infinite grace. And the identity of the earthly Jesus and the Christ of Isenheim is well established by the depiction of the cross itself. The Christ of Isenheim is an expression of the faith in the mystery of salvation of the cross of Christ. There is a difference between the earthly Jesus and the Christ of Isenheim, and a historical approach of Jesus might emphasize that the two are not the same, but Isenheimer faith says they are one.

This distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith has been crucial to modern Christology ever since Martin Kähler introduced it, at the end of the nineteenth century.¹ Especially those theologians who are concerned with a historical ‘underpinning’ of Christology, such as Walter Kasper or Wolfgang Pannenberg, have made it the central distinction of their work. They intend to show the identity of both, and deny the incompatibility of history with theology, or the Jesus of history and the Christ of theology. There is but one Jesus Christ, so to say. The magisterium of the Catholic Church has wrestled for a long time with the challenge that history poses to church and faith, and in a certain sense it still does, because many historians of Jesus doubt or deny the faith in Christ the Saviour. And so, in several teachings the magisterium has expressed this as a warning not to separate Jesus and Christ. This paper is dedicated to understanding the content and limitations of that warning not to separate Jesus and Christ. What does the magisterium say and how should it be interpreted? In which way is the theology of interreligious dialogue involved? How does it compare to the history of theology, especially the theology of the hypostatic union? What can we learn from the so-called doctrine of the *extra Calvinisticum*, which seems to posit just that which seems to be denied: a separation - or at least distinction - of the *Logos ensarkos* (in the flesh) from the *Logos asarkos* (without flesh)? My aim is to show that the theological tradition about Jesus Christ is larger than the Magisterium recently teaches, which is both relevant for a true understanding of the Mystery of Jesus Christ and for the further development of a theology of interreligious dialogue.

1. *Magisterial teaching on separating Jesus and Christ/Word*

¹ Martin Kähler, *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus* (Leipzig, 1892).

Whenever the magisterium exercises its teaching office, it teaches the interpretation of Scripture and Tradition which is to be upheld and respected within the Catholic Church. So, it is of the essence of the teaching office to be in dialogue with actual developments in theology and church. The orthodox doctrine of Christ is, so it is thought, taught under circumstances that ask for it: in 2001 it is expounded and applied to 'ambiguous statements and insufficient explanations' in a book by the late theologian Jacques Dupuis.² The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published a notification (ND), which Jacques Dupuis signed, in which it is expressly stated that to distinguish between the Word and Jesus, in the sense of a separation, is contrary to the faith.³ In search of the meaning of the existence of several world religions, and especially their possible salvific meaning, one could attempt to venture the hypothesis that the Word of God is present, speaks and saves also outside the boundaries of the Catholic Church and even the boundaries of Christianity. Dupuis searches for ways in which, one could also say, Christ is present in other religions without being bound to the historical 'person' of Jesus. The advantage of such a position would be considerable, since one would be able to hold on to the unique position of the Word/Christ, stating that all revelation and salvation originates in the divine agency of the Word/Christ, whereas on the other hand there would be room for salvific truth in other religions, up to the point of acknowledging other religions as ways to God that are related but independent from the humanity of Christ. ND, however, declares such a separation of the Word and Jesus as contrary to the faith:

1. It must be firmly believed that Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, crucified and risen, is the sole and universal mediator of salvation for all humanity.

² *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York, 1997).

³ The notification continues with a section which rejects "limited, incomplete or imperfect" conceptions of revelation in Jesus Christ, revelation being usually integral to this discussion. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Notification on the book "Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism"*, (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York 1997), by Father Jacques Dupuis, S.J. (Rome, 2001, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20010124_dupuis_en.html, accessed on September 21, 2021).

2. It must also be firmly believed that Jesus of Nazareth, Son of Mary and only Saviour of the world, is the Son and Word of the Father. For the unity of the divine plan of salvation centred in Jesus Christ, it must also be held that the salvific action of the Word is accomplished in and through Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of the Father, as mediator of salvation for all humanity. It is therefore contrary to the Catholic faith not only to posit a separation between the Word and Jesus, or between the Word's salvific activity and that of Jesus, but also to maintain that there is a salvific activity of the Word as such in his divinity, independent of the humanity of the Incarnate Word.

The text itself gives a very short argumentation in number 2, as to why the separation, understood in three different manners, is contrary to the faith. To rephrase the three different manners: there is no salvific activity of the Word as such in his divinity independent of the humanity of the Incarnate Word; the salvific activity of the Word is that of Jesus; the Word is Jesus. The reason for this position ("It is *therefore* contrary...") is not easy to determine. For it seems that no reasons are given but that we are dealing with a rephrasing of the conclusion: Jesus *is* the Word of the Father; the salvific action of the Word is accomplished in and through Jesus Christ. So, one could ask the question, whether number 2 of the notification actually develops an argument, or just repeats the same position in different wording: Jesus is the Word, the Word is Jesus.

Number 2 contains three footnotes with references, which explain the position taken. The first is to the councils of Nicea and Chalcedon, and so refers to the faith in the divinity of Jesus and to the union in his person (hypostasis) of two perfect natures, human and divine. The reference to the definition of the council of Chalcedon is probably the major argument for the position taken. Chalcedon defines the relationship between the two natures of Christ, human and divine, as being without confusion, without change, without division and without separation. These are all negative determinations that serve to delineate the mystery that we are dealing with. The second pair, without division and separation, is somewhat explained by the definition, stating that he is "not split or divided in two Persons, but he is one and the same only begotten Son, God the Word, the Lord

Jesus Christ.”⁴ The separation not allowed is the separation of the two natures in Christ into two persons. This part of the definition was intended against Nestorius, whose approach to Christ is sometimes circumscribed with the word “separation Christology” (*Trennungs-christologie*).⁵ Such an approach puts so much emphasis on the difference between divinity and humanity, usually to safeguard Christ’s true humanity, that it endangers the unity of Christ. Nestorianism is connected to gnostic and docetic interpretations, that would be inimical to corporeality and deny the possibility of a body being personally united to the Logos, once again a threat to the unity of Christ. It results in the separation of Jesus and Christ, or Jesus and the Word/Logos. This background accounts for these and other texts of the magisterium being rather short in their argumentation as to why separation is not allowed. It is thought to be rejected by the important definition of the Council of Chalcedon: *inseperabiliter* (sic).

The second footnote refers to the Council of Trent on justification and to the Second Vatican Council on liturgy and the church and the world, focusing on Jesus Christ as unique saviour of all. More interesting for our purposes, however, are the two references in third place, one to the encyclical on mission activity from John Paul II in 1990, *Redemptoris missio* (RM), and the other to the declaration *Dominus Jesus* (DJ) from 2000, on the unicity and salvific universality of Jesus Christ and the Church. RM broaches the question ‘why mission?’, and in doing so acknowledges Jesus Christ as the only saviour. Towards the end of this section, the document states in words that sound familiar by now:

To introduce any sort of separation between the Word and Jesus Christ is contrary to the Christian faith. St. John clearly states that the Word, who "was in the beginning with God," is the very one who "became flesh" (Jn 1:2, 14). Jesus is the

⁴ H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, Editio XLIII (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), nr. 302 (109-110).

⁵ The concept *Trennungschristologie* has a wide area of application. It is used to circumscribe the alleged position of Cerinthus, for whom Christ was a spiritual heavenly being and only temporarily connected to Jesus of Nazareth. This position might be the one that the first letter of John speaks about (2,22: someone denying Jesus to be Christ). Grillmeier applies it to the approach of Paul of Samosata and the Antiochene School (as opposed to “Einigungschristologie”; *Christ in Christian Tradition* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1965) 297-299). It is also used as a name for the Christology of Nestorius and/or his followers and other approaches deemed dualist.

Incarnate Word - a single and indivisible person. One cannot separate Jesus from the Christ or speak of a "Jesus of history" who would differ from the "Christ of faith." The Church acknowledges and confesses Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16): Christ is none other than Jesus of Nazareth: he is the Word of God made man for the salvation of all. In Christ "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col 2:9) and "from his fullness have we all received" (Jn 1:16). The "only Son, who is the bosom of the Father" (Jn 1:18) is "the beloved Son, in whom we have redemption.... For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his Cross" (Col 1:13-14, 19-20). It is precisely this uniqueness of Christ which gives him an absolute and universal significance, whereby, while belonging to history, he remains history's center and goal: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Rv 22:13).⁶

Again, this passage, even though it refers to a number of passages in Scripture, seems to be primarily rhetorical in nature. Reference is to Jesus being the Word incarnate and Christ being none other than Jesus. The passage, however, does not reflect upon the *nature* of the identity of Word and Jesus, or Jesus and Christ, and so it does not help those who would like to understand why it is that separation is not allowed, apart from the Chalcedonian condemnation. Isn't it the case that the Word has *become* incarnate and so that there was a time that the Word was not incarnate? Isn't it the case that the Word 'shares' in God's providential and salvific agency also when the Word was not incarnate?

The other reference is to DJ. This declaration makes it quite clear that the context of our question is the relativizing of the unique Jesus, and says:

More concretely, for some, Jesus would be one of the many faces which the Logos has assumed in the course of time to communicate with humanity in a salvific way (9).

⁶ RM, n. 6.

It adds:

Furthermore, to justify the universality of Christian salvation as well as the fact of religious pluralism, it has been proposed that there is an economy of the eternal Word that is valid also outside the Church and is unrelated to her, in addition to an economy of the incarnate Word. The first would have a greater universal value than the second, which is limited to Christians, though God's presence would be more full in the second (9).

The words that matter here are 'unrelated' and 'greater'. The magisterium neither wants the Church nor Jesus to be part of a bigger picture so to say. Number 10 then summarizes RM, but offers no arguments additional to what we have already seen. The last sentence of this section is worth quoting however, because of a telling nuance:

Therefore, the theory which would attribute, after the incarnation as well, a salvific activity to the Logos as such in his divinity, exercised "in addition to" or "beyond" the humanity of Christ, is not compatible with the Catholic faith.⁷

The words "after the incarnation as well" qualify the position taken: before the incarnation there was no Jesus, and thus no separation of the Word and Jesus, but there was the Word, and there was salvific activity of the Word. So, salvific activity of the Word is possible without Jesus, this passage rightly implies. If it is God who saves Noah and the ark, and if all outward divine action is to be said of all three divine persons, as classical Trinitarian theology has it, it is 'also' the Word, not incarnate, who saves. Paul says it was Christ who saved the Israelites in the desert (1 Cor 10, 4). Peter says it is the Spirit of Christ who worked in the prophets of Israel (1 Pe 1, 11). It means that before the incarnation God works his way towards it, the incarnation itself being the centre of the one divine salvation economy. But if with Christ we mean Christ incarnate, and with the

⁷ Valkenberg and Goris identify the object of this condemnation as the theory of logocentrism, stressing the universal active presence of the Logos, advanced by Pieris and Dupuis. Pim Valkenberg and Harm Goris. "In Hem is Gods volheid lijfelijk aanwezig", *Jezus en de religies*, in *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 48 (2008), 403-421, 405.

Spirit of Christ we mean the Spirit of Christ incarnate, this divine saving agency cannot literally be the work of Jesus Christ (incarnate).

So, one wonders why DJ states the following:

It is likewise contrary to the Catholic faith to introduce a separation between the salvific action of the Word as such and that of the Word made man. With the incarnation, all the salvific actions of the Word of God are always done in unity with the human nature that he has assumed for the salvation of all people. The one subject which operates in the two natures, human and divine, is the single person of the Word. (10)

It just begs the question, to state that the single person of the Word is the one subject operating in both natures. This truth cannot make up for it not being the case that 'all actions of the Word of God are done in unity with the human nature he assumed', since there was a time when there was no incarnation. However, the document does not state absolutely that all actions of the Word of God are always done in unity with human nature assumed, but qualifies this statement: "With the incarnation", probably meaning: from the incarnation onwards. So, here we have a second implicit acknowledgment of a distinction between the Word and the Word made man.⁸

DJ not only dismisses a separation of the Word and the Word made man, but also a separation of the Spirit and the Spirit of Christ incarnate. It does not do so in these words, but that is what its denial of the existence of a salvation economy of the Spirit (which would be more universal in scope than the one of Christ) entails. The Spirit is at work 'in the whole universe and in the entire history', but always as the Spirit of the paschal mystery, the Spirit of Christ incarnate (DJ 11). One must be aware, however, that the hypostatic union, unique as it is, differs from the union between Christ incarnate and

⁸ Edward Oaks suggested that there is a development between DJ and ND. DJ rejects salvific activity 'in addition to' or 'beyond' the humanity of Christ, but ND only salvific activity 'independent of the humanity of the Incarnate Word'. *Infinity Dwindled to Infancy: A Catholic and Evangelical Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) 2011, 411-417.

the Spirit. Whereas the former admits of a *communicatio idiomatum*, the latter does not.⁹ One cannot say that the Spirit weeps or that the Spirit suffers, in the same way as one can truthfully say that the Word weeps or the Word suffers. Therefore it is more likely to state truthfully that the Word and Jesus cannot be separated, than that the Spirit and Jesus cannot be separated. This probably accounts for the fact that in the theology of interreligious dialogue the appeal to the Spirit working in other religions is more viable than the appeal to the Word (or, which comes down to the same, an Unknown Christ or a Mysterious Christ). On the other hand, were we able to work out plausibly some sort of real distinction between the Word and Jesus, it would be likely to apply to the Spirit and Jesus as well. Therefore I will limit myself in this paper to the distinction between the Word and Jesus.

2. Separation and distinction: some clarification needed

The reader must have noticed the different words with which a separation is indicated: between Jesus and Christ, between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith, between Jesus Christ and the Word, and between the Word as such and the Word made man. This rather complicates the matter. Sometimes 'Christ' opposes 'Jesus', and sometimes they are mentioned together. We can safely assume, however, that the separation indicated is, with one exception, the separation between time and eternity or humanity and divinity. So, what is actually defended, is the truth of the hypostatic union. The exception to this is rather telling, for the separation of the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith is different from the other separations. Here we are not dealing with a separation in reality of different 'entities', but we are dealing with a separation of two different approaches of Jesus: the first chosen by the science of history, and the other by church and theology. So, the first separation is an ontological one, one of entities, and the second is a conceptual or formal one, one of approaches.

⁹ In general, the doctrine of *Communicatio Idiomatum* maintains that in view of the unity of Christ, divine attributes and actions can be predicated of a subject-term denoting Christ in his humanity, and vice versa.

So, we have to make one very fundamental distinction. On the one hand, there is the conception, usually implicit, that there is more than one Christ. On the other hand, there exist different conceptions of the one Christ. In the latter case, there may be conceptions that are true and ones that are false; there may be conceptions that exclude each other and ones that are complementary. Jesus as a prophet, Jesus as mediator, Jesus as cynic, Jesus as wonderworker, the historical Jesus, the Christ of faith, the gangrenous Christ of Isenheim etc. In the first case we are dealing with a conception of which opponents say that it in fact implies a twofold Christ; if one were to state explicitly that there are two persons in Christ, one would be guilty of explicit heresy. So, it is not something a theologian would say him- or herself, it is a critical evaluation made by others. Theologians of interreligious dialogue would not say themselves that they are posing two different Christs, it would be something a critic would say. So, the critic should be asked for the grounds on which his position is built. Should the position of a theologian of interreligious dialogue, namely that the one Christ manifests himself differently in different contexts, be reduced to the second category (different conceptions of the one Christ) or to the first category (the conception that there are different Christs)? Are we dealing with the crucified Christ who is pictured differently in different contexts, or are we dealing with different Christs?

If we take into consideration the words that are used, the rejection of separation or severing (Dupuis¹⁰), a third possibility comes to the fore: a real distinction which sometimes is interpreted as a separation, but need not be. Classical Chalcedonian Christology distinguishes between both natures in Christ, but does not separate them. Nevertheless the distinction is a real one, not about approaches but about the real Christ. We might find theologians, and we will, who defend that there is a real distinction to be made between Jesus and the Word, which does not entail Jesus and the Word to be separated, but only distinguished.

It may be the case, that concerning the unity of salvific action by the Word of God and the Word of God incarnate, DJ speaks with subtle nuances, but this is not the case with RM and the separation of Word and Jesus Christ: it states in absolute wording that

¹⁰ *Christianity and the World Religions. From Confrontation to Dialogue* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 83.

'any sort of separation' is not allowed. Since RM not only mentions a separation of Jesus (Christ) and Word, but also between Jesus of history and Christ of faith, it must mean that separation should be broadly understood. We have offered three distinct possibilities:

- a) a real separation of two entities
- b) a real distinction within one entity
- c) a conceptual distinction of approaches of one entity.

The first possibility falls prey to the accusation of Nestorianism and separation Christology. The third possibility, which we also discussed in our introduction comes down to a denial of faith in Jesus Christ and a denial of a theological interpretation of him (or a denial of an earthly Jesus and consequently of the relevance of historical Jesus-research, which would be a mythological interpretation). So, these possible interpretations of what is meant by separation must indeed be rejected, but how about the second possibility mentioned? The next two sections will be devoted to studying two examples of Christologies of a more classical nature, which entertain a real distinction without a real separation in Christ: Thomas Aquinas and the so-called *Extra Calvinisticum*.

3. *A real distinction without a real separation in Christ: Thomas Aquinas*

We turn now to the Christology of Thomas Aquinas, to see whether there is an approach to Christ that might be deemed to be liable of separation which is nevertheless quite classic. To separate the one person of Christ in two persons is the heresy of Nestorius and Theodorus of Mopsuestia, Aquinas says.¹¹ Separation here amounts to dividing Christ and, unintentionally, letting go of his unity. Just as there is no separation of persons in Christ, there is also no separation of body and soul, except during death. But even when dead, Christ's soul on the one hand and Christ's body on the other are still not separated from the Word of God.¹² Ambrose may speak of the man Christ who is about to die being severed from the Godhead, when interpreting the cry of dereliction on the cross, but Aquinas replies that abandonment is to withdraw protection or, referring to

¹¹ *Summa theologiae* III, q. 2, a. 6 c.

¹² The separation of Word and body is the subject of *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 50, a. 2 and the separation of Word and soul of q. 50, a. 3.

Augustine, not hearing Christ's prayer to let this cup pass.¹³ God's grace, however, is never taken back except in case of guilt, and so it goes not only for the grace of adoption, but even more so for the unique grace of (personal) union.¹⁴ The creed implies this non-separation (of the soul and the body of Christ from his person) when saying that the Son of God was buried (body) and that he descended into hell (soul).¹⁵ The only separation admitted, is the separation that occurs in human death, which consists of body and soul being separated from each other. Each one of them, however, is kept united to the Word.

We may conclude that Aquinas would agree with the denial of a separation of Jesus and Christ, if such a separation would mean to posit two persons in Jesus Christ, or if such a separation would mean that one cannot truthfully say that Christ is Jesus, a human being such as other human beings with body and soul united to each other. And he would also agree with the denial of a separation of Jesus and Christ if such a denial would mean that the unity of the Godhead with the body and the soul of Christ would end in his death: Christ not being Jesus during his death.

Aquinas, by the time he wrote his *Summa Theologiae*, however, was well aware of the definition of the council of Chalcedon, not only mentioning *inseparabiliter* and *indivise* on the one hand, but also *inconfuse* and *inconvertibiliter/immutabiliter* on the other; in the incarnation human nature does not turn into divine nature, or the other way around, nor does a third nature come into being. Aquinas acknowledges that Christ according to his human nature is not omnipresent, which he according to his divine nature is. This question comes up when discussing whether Christ during the days of his death can be called man, and whether it is true to say that he according to his body was buried, according to his soul descended into hell and according to his divine nature was everywhere. Peter Lombard mentions several passages of Augustine and John Damascene, that show a difference between *totus* and *totum/totaliter*. This difference is similar to another distinction which is taught in Trinitarian theology, the one between *alius* and *aliud/aliquid*. Just as one can say that the Son and the Father are someone else (*alius*) but not something else (*aliud*), one can say, in Christology, that the whole Son is

¹³ *Summa theologiae* III, q. 50, a. 2, ad 1.

¹⁴ *Summa theologiae* III, q. 50, a. 2, c.

¹⁵ *Summa theologiae* III, q. 50, a. 3, c.

everywhere (*totus*), but not that the Son is wholly or totally everywhere (*totum/totaliter*). *Totus* and *alius* regard the person or supposit, whereas *aliquid* and *totum* regard the nature or the natures. According to his human nature Christ is not everywhere. But according to his person (identical to his divine nature) the whole Christ is everywhere. The whole Christ is God perfect, but he is not totally God, as Peter Lombard quotes John Damascene. Logically consequent is that Christ according to his human nature is not everywhere. This is the conclusion that Aquinas draws in his commentary on the Sentences, provided that we speak about Christ according to his human nature, and not only about his person.¹⁶ It is not right to say that Christ is man everywhere (*Christus est homo ubique*). It is right to say of Christ: that man is everywhere, since ‘that man’ refers to the person of Christ. In his answer to the second objection this is succinctly put: “Wherever God is, this man is in that place, but still the human nature is not there, and therefore it need not be that there he is man.” Even though “This man was from eternity” is true, this is false: “Christ was from eternity a man.”¹⁷ In the Christology contained in his *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas acknowledges the same logic of reduplication (‘according to his human/divine nature’).¹⁸ When elaborating his understanding of the hypostatic union, Aquinas states that it is not the case that the divine nature/the Son of Man ceased to be in heaven because of descending in the incarnation.¹⁹

In this way Aquinas develops his understanding of the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* regarding “being everywhere” as predicate-term, in relation to a subject-term indicating the person of Christ. There are of course limits to this approach, of which the most important one is that one cannot assume or implicitly hold that we know perfectly well what is meant in saying: ‘is everywhere’. In the *Summa theologiae* Aquinas seems to be well aware of this. When discussing the similar question whether the whole Christ, *totus Christus*, was in hell, his soul having descended there, Aquinas answers the objection that Christ was not totally (*totaliter*) in hell because his body was in the grave

¹⁶ *Commentum in Quatuor Libros Sententiarum*, Book III, d. 22, q. 1, a. 2.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 16. Reduplication refers to the repetition in a sentence of that ‘part’ of the meaning of the subject-term to which the predicate-term is applied: Bishop Tutu is according to his hair white.

¹⁹ *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 5, a. 2, ad 1.

and his divinity everywhere. What is the case for corporeal reality is not the case for divinity. When the whole of corporeal reality is somewhere, nothing of his reality is in another place. But there is no place which can circumscribe the whole Christ because of his divinity. All places taken together could not contain his immensity, Aquinas says, and on the contrary: his immensity contains all things/places.²⁰ So, to be everywhere is explained here as to contain all places, and this shows that to be everywhere and to be somewhere are logically different sayings which cannot be simply opposed. Such an awareness shows that it is not the case that God instead of in one place is in all places including this one. He cannot be contained in any place, but contains all places. Similarly one could say that since God has no parts, the grammar of *totus* is quite different when applied to God or to a human being. God is always and everywhere *totus*. One has to bear this in mind when using the distinction *totus/totaliter* or *totus/totum*.

What applies concerning locality, applies concerning understanding as well: the finite cannot contain or comprehend the infinite. Because of the hypostatic union, which is a union with God closer (*propinquius*) than can be said of any other creature, the soul of Christ has a knowledge of the Word of God which excels all human knowledge of it.²¹ But, on the other hand, the soul of Christ is a human soul, and cannot be regarded as divine and in possession of a knowledge which is applicable to the divine only, in so far as we can tell. So, one cannot maintain that the human nature that the Son of Man assumed, transgressed the boundaries of created rational being. The soul of Christ sees the entire divine nature, but not totally, that is not as perfectly as it is seen by God himself; therefore one has to deny that the soul of Christ comprehends the Word of God. The infinite cannot be comprehended by the finite. The soul of Christ has no full comprehension of the divine essence. Full comprehension would be that Christ according to his human soul would know all the things God could do, even the things that he does not actually do. There is no full comprehension, Aquinas states.²²

²⁰ *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 52, a. 3.

²¹ *Summa theologiae* III, q. 10, a. 4. Cf also q. 10, a. 1, ad 1.

²² *Summa theologiae* III, q. 10, a. 1-2.

Thus, if we return for a moment to the three possible separations/distinctions mentioned in the former section, we can conclude that Aquinas denies the first possibility of a real separation: there are in fact two types of real separation in Christ that he denies. He acknowledges, however, the second possibility, a real distinction within Christ, and he does so when explaining his understanding of the Chalcedon definition, and applies this to his understanding of Christ's omnipresence and Christ's knowledge of the divine.²³

4. *A real distinction without a real separation in Christ: the Extra Calvinisticum*

An echo of this medieval discussion on separation and its limits when applied to both natures of Christ and his actions can be found among theologians of the reformation. The similar doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* that we encountered above, led Lutheran theologians to their understanding of the real presence of Christ during the Eucharist. When applied to the Eucharist it enabled these Lutheran theologians to account for the ubiquity or omnipresence of the body of Christ and its special presence during the celebration of the Eucharist. Reformed theologians, however, thought that such an approach would harm the humanity of Christ; omnipresence is not a property of human nature, not even when it is united to Christ's divinity. This controversy has become known as the so-called *Extra Calvinisticum*, indicating that the Word of God exists also outside of the human flesh of Christ, *etiam extra carnem*. An alternative name for this doctrine is the doctrine of the *Logos asarkos*, the Word without flesh. It says that the divinity of Christ cannot be limited by his humanity; the divinity of Christ must be thought to be 'bigger' than his humanity, and so there exists a real distinction between the *Logos ensarkos* and the *Logos asarkos*.

Recent studies of the *Extra calvinisticum* show that this doctrine is not limited to Reformed theologians.²⁴ In fact these studies propose that the *Extra calvinisticum* be named *Extra*

²³ The third distinction, strictly speaking, cannot be found in Aquinas since there was no science of history investigating Jesus yet. His refutation of Arianism - for instance in *Summa contra Gentiles* IV, 6-8 - is only in some respects related.

²⁴ E. David Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology. The Function of the so-called Extra Calvinisticum in Calvin's Theology* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966). Andrew M. McGinnis, *The Son of God Beyond the*

catholicum, since in the history of theology many theologians can be pointed to who entertain similar or identical views on the matter, many of which belong to the church from before the reformation. Our study of the Christology of Thomas Aquinas confirms this. On the other hand, the *Extra calvinisticum* remains disputed among protestant theologians. The studies mentioned show that several interpretations exist side by side. There are those who embrace the doctrine, also because such a doctrine suits a more classical theism best. But there are also those who are critical of the doctrine, since they do not want to endorse any theology of a *logos asarkos* which, so they think, would lead away from the concrete biblical salvation history and the concrete historical person of Christ. This latter approach, which is typical for Karl Barth later in his life, is quite close to the approach Karl Rahner took, even though their understanding of the transcendence of God to the world is quite different. Rahner is known for his rule ('axioma') that the economic trinity is the immanent trinity and vice versa.²⁵ This rule, according to a strong reading, must be taken to be an implicit denial of the *extra*: if there is sheer identity between the economic and the immanent trinity, there is no 'room' for a distinction between or a separation of Jesus and the Word, since they are identical.²⁶

James Gordon has made a very convincing case that what he calls a 'weak' version of the *extra*, but which I would prefer to call a negative version, is in fact not only catholically orthodox but also necessary for orthodox Christology. It cannot be rejected by someone wanting to defend orthodox Christology. The negative version would maintain that "the Son cannot be reduced to Christ's physical body" and that "there is some form of presence exercised by the Son beyond the Son's incarnate life in Christ", without however indicating what kind of presence or agency this would be. Such a negative version enables theology to entertain a position which can still conceive of the pre-existent Son begotten of the Father before all ages. On the stronger interpretation,

Flesh. A Historical and Theological Study of the extra Calvinisticum (London etc: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014); James R. Gordon, *The Holy One in Our Midst. An Essay on the Flesh of Christ* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016).

²⁵ Karl Rahner, "Der dreifaltige Gott als transzendenten Urgrund der Heilsgeschichte", in J. Feiner, M. Löhrer (eds), *Mysterium Salutis. Grundriss heilsgeschichtlicher Dogmatik* (Einsiedeln: Benzinger Verlag, 1965-1981) Bd 2 (1967) 318-401. James Gordon shows ways in which Rahner's Rule is compatible with the *Extra Calvinisticum: The Holy One in Our Midst*, 177-183.

²⁶ Gordon, *The Holy One in Our Midst*, 177-183.

the usual one, which is still formulated mostly in negative terms, the *extra* would also maintain that “the Son is not exhaustively revealed in the person of Christ”, that “the Son *simpliciter* does not participate in the full range of human experiences of the person of Christ” and that “the incarnation is contingent to the Son’s life.”²⁷

Gordon shows that the interpretation of the hypostatic union which is made orthodox by Thomas Aquinas, is capable of refuting all Christological criticism of the *extra*. The *extra* has fallen out of favour in modern theology, since it seems to belong to a more philosophical approach to God, and seems to promote natural theology and other speculation about what lies behind what is revealed. One does not, however, need to entertain a classical doctrine of God, in which the perfect attributes of divinity play a major role, in order to appreciate the *extra Calvinisticum*. The *extra* can very well be defended on scriptural grounds, focusing on the biblical interpretation of divine presence and absence in relation to the temple and thus the human body, and also on dogmatic grounds, focusing on the definition of the Council of Chalcedon. In fact, the primary use of the *extra* is to safeguard the Chalcedonian orthodoxy, in preventing the Son of God to be limited by human nature. A few interpretations of the *extra*, such as ones which distinguish between a *Logos asarkos* engaged in secular mediation and a *Logos ensarkos* operating within the Church, may be suspected to be guilty of Nestorianism, but this does not apply to the *extra* as such.²⁸ It is both reasonable and orthodox to assume a real distinction without a separation in Christ, the *extra* teaches.

Conclusion

²⁷ Gordon, *The Holy One in Our Midst*, 1, n. 1.

²⁸ Gordon mentions David Van Druenen and Christian Link, *The Holy One in Our Midst*, 199-203. Cf. also Dupuis in his *Toward a Christian Theology of Pluralism* (299): “Admittedly, in the mystery of Jesus-the-Christ, the Word cannot be separated from the flesh it has assumed. But, inseparable as the divine Word and Jesus’ human existence may be, they nevertheless remain distinct. While, then, the human action of the *Logos ensarkos* is the universal sacrament of God’s saving action, it does not exhaust the action of the *Logos*. A distinct action of the *Logos asarkos* endures – not, to be sure, as constituting a distinct economy of salvation, parallel to that realized in the flesh of Christ, but as the expression of God’s superabundant graciousness and absolute freedom.” Dupuis would later abandon this manner of speaking about two Logoi.

The magisterium of the Catholic church recently teaches in several documents the need for a denial of any separation whatsoever between Jesus and Christ. We have designed three possible interpretations of such a separation or distinction. Two of these indeed have to be rejected, the third one is part and parcel of classical theological traditions. It seems that the dominant position modern theology awarded to salvation history in theology, which was confirmed by the second Vatican Council, has a reverse. The reverse is that, for fear of Nestorianism and a Jesus who is only historical, a more classical traditional theological approach is downgraded. Such a classical theological approach may be the one needed when developing a theology of interreligious dialogue or a spiritual theology of a more global nature.²⁹ Such a theological approach is certainly needed when safeguarding the mystery of God in Christ and God's absolute freedom. Could it be that the magisterium of the Catholic church, deliberately or not, teaches the one approach above the other, favours the modern more than the classical one? If so, would it be wise to do so? Would it not abandon the policy of not favouring the one theological school above the other? Tradition seems to be broader than the recent teaching of the magisterium.

²⁹ See a book in spiritual studies which I do not endorse, but is relevant here: Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ. How a forgotten reality can change everything we see, hope for and believe* (London: SPCK, 2019). Also: Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism. Towards an Ecumenical Christophany* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1965).