THE THEANDRIC NATURE OF CHRIST

DAVID COFFEY

[In stressing that the human nature of Christ is theandric (divine-human), the author first traces a continuity and development of thought between Pseudo-Dionysius and Karl Rahner. He notes a constructive shift of emphasis from the communication of idioms (on which Scholastic Christology relied too heavily) to the doctrine that the human nature of Christ subsists in the hypostasis of the divine Word, and, further, that the divine word subsists in the human nature. This insight is used to demonstrate the necessity of pneumatology for the advance of a Christology that is Spirit Christology.]

THE THEME OF this study is of general importance for Christology, for my concern is to contribute toward a credible understanding of Jesus Christ the God-man in terms of present-day knowledge and perspectives, at the same time respecting the normative christological dogma of Chalcedon and the witness of the Gospels. My approach is to concentrate on the unity of Christ without thereby devaluing his humanity over against his divinity. In fact my study transfers the focus of his unity from the divinity to the humanity, so that the former is clearly seen to be actualized in the latter. In so doing, it opens the way to a more constructive approach to the question of how the events of salvation history occurring in the humanity of Christ impact on the Godhead itself, though I cannot treat this question here at length. More specifically, the "theandric" (divine-human)[1] character of Christ's human nature emerges from a critical study of Karl Rahner's Christology that deepens our understanding of human nature itself. Fur-

DAVID COFFEY holds the William J. Kelly Distinguished Chair of Theology at Marquette University. He received his doctorate in sacred theology from the Catholic Institute of Sydney, Australia. His latest volume, *Deus Trinitas: The Doctrine of the Triune God,* is scheduled for publication this year by Oxford University Press. He is now preparing a book on the sacrament of reconciliation.

[1] It has been suggested that "theanthropic" would be a more suitable word to use than "theandric" since it is gender inclusive. It is true that this word is found in the patristic age along with "theandric," but "theandric" is the word to which the theological history is attached, as the entries of M. Jugie ("Monothélisme") and A. Michel ("Théandrique [opération]") attest (*Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* [Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1929 and 1946] 10.2, col. 2307–23 and 15.1, col. 205–16). Hence I retain "theandric."

ther, this theandric character enables us to appreciate better the role of the theology of enhypostasia (the doctrine that the human nature of Christ subsists in the hypostasis of the divine Word, and inversely that the divine Word subsists in the human nature) as a key, indeed in my view, *the* key to Christology. Rahner's Christology enables us to clear up confusion that may exist in relation to the distinction of nature and person. And finally my work aims to shed light on the disputed question of whether Christ had habitual, that is, sanctifying grace.

This study is important for me personally, and I hope also for others, because it consolidates my work in Spirit Christology. In this regard I have been spurred on by my critics. In the first instance the study represents my response to critical comments about my work by two reviewers of Ralph Del Colle's *Christ and the Spirit*.[2] The first, Thomas Weinandy, criticized my postulated order of the hypostatic union—creation, sanctification, union—in these words: "It is not possible for the Holy Spirit to sanctify the humanity of Jesus prior to the union, for the humanity never exists separate or apart from the Son. Even at the level of logical priority, it is through the grace of union that the Holy Spirit sanctifies the humanity."[3] Here, going beyond my earlier reply in this journal[4] and making some adjustments to my argument in the process, I invoke the theandric character of the human nature to show that in a sense the sanctification *is* the union (not its consequence). Even so, it should still be asserted prior to union, as the union is with the Son. And all the more, in a more transcendental sense of union, that is, that asserted by "descending" Christology, sanctification by the Holy Spirit should be asserted prior to union, because the former is a logical presupposition and in that sense only is a "disposition" for the latter. The second critic, Simon Francis Gaine, criticized my idea of grace as a disposition to union.[5] In this study the theandric character of the humanity enables me simply to dispose of this offending idea. To both theologians I am sincerely grateful. I also owe a word of thanks to a third critic, Dennis Ferrara, with whom I had an extended correspondence on certain of the issues raised in this study.

Let me proceed then to a systematic presentation of the case I wish to mount here. In the first part the issue of the human nature of Christ as theandric is treated in the context of the traditional Logos (Word) Christology, and, in the second, the results of this exercise are applied to my work in Spirit Christology.

---

[2] Ralph Del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit: Spirit-Christology in Trinitarian Perspective* (New York: Oxford University, 1994).
[3] *The Thomist* 59 (1995) 656–59, at 658.
[4] See David Coffey, "The Common and the Ordained Priesthood," *Theological Studies* 58 (1997) 209–236, at 219–20 n. 21.
[5] See *Journal of Theological Studies* 48 (1997) 359–63, at 362–63.

LOGOS CHRISTOLOGY

Pseudo-Dionysius and His Interpreters

In one of his letters to the monk Gaius, the fifth-century theologian known as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, wrote the following:

For, if I may put the matter briefly, he [Christ] was neither human nor nonhuman; although humanly born he was far superior to man, and being above men he yet truly did become man. Furthermore, it was not by virtue of being God that he did divine things, not [sic] by virtue of being a man that he did what was human, but rather, by virtue of being God-made-man he accomplished something new in our midst—the activity of the God-man [literally, the "theandric" activity].[6]

This text does not appear ambiguous: the single activity of Christ should be characterized neither as simply divine nor simply human, but as something unique, divine-human, theandric. Though Pseudo-Dionysius does not say so, the implication is that producing this activity is a single nature of Christ which should also be termed theandric. At the time, it was inevitable that this text should be seen as favoring a monoenergetist and monophysitic understanding of Christ, though such was the authority of its author, who was believed to be a convert and disciple of Paul, that eventually, and with some violence, it was interpreted in line with the orthodox doctrine of the two natures and two operations. For in 649 the local council of the Lateran under Pope St. Martin I, after inserting in the creed an explicit statement about two natures and two wills in Christ (DS 500), went on to anathematize those who, instead of the two operations, had asserted a single, "theandric" operation (DS 515).[7] And, except that the word "theandric" was not used, this judgment was repeated and confirmed by the Third Council of Constantinople in 681 (DS 553-59).

So instructed, John of Damascus interpreted Pseudo-Dionysius in a resolutely dyoenergetist sense when he wrote:

Thus, the theandric operation shows this: when God became man, that is to say, was incarnate, his human operation was divine, that is to say, deified. And it was not excluded from his divine operation, nor was his divine operation excluded from his human operation. On the contrary, each is found in the other. Now, when one expresses two things with one word, this figure of speech is called circumlocution. Thus, while we speak of the cut burn and the burnt cut of the red-hot knife, we nevertheless hold the cutting to be one operation and the burning another, the one belonging to one nature and the other to the other—the burning to the fire and the cutting to the steel. In the very same way, when we speak of one theandric opera-

---

[6] *Epistola IV,* PG 3.1072, trans. Colm Luibheid, in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works,* Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist, 1987) 265.

[7] It has been suggested that the redactor of these decrees may have been Maximus the Confessor; see M. Messier, "Théandrisme," *Catholicisme hier, aujourd'hui, demain* 14 (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1996) col. 953–56, at 955.

tion of Christ, we understand the two operations of his two natures: the divine operation of the divinity and the human operation of the humanity.[8]

The relation of these two operations he expressed in the following way: "Being God made man, he manifested a new, strange, and theandric operation: divine but working through the human, human but serving the divine and exhibiting the tokens of his conjoined divinity."[9] And because of their unity in the divine person, the two natures operated in "communion" with each other:

For he willed and performed what was proper to each nature, each in communion with the other, the divinity acting independently and omnipotently through his humanity, and the humanity acting independently and in all things in subordination to his divine will, willing what the divine will willed it to will, because of the unity of the person.[10]

Half a millennium later in the West, Thomas Aquinas was saying much the same thing. Because of the distinction of natures, he was able to invoke the following general principle in the case of Christ: "Wherever mover and moved have different forms or operative powers, there is necessarily one proper operation of the mover and another of the moved, though the moved participates in the operation of the mover, and the mover uses the operation of the moved, each thus acting in communion with the other."[11] He says that the humanity of Christ, the "moved" in this case, became the "instrument" of the divinity through his obedience freely rendered to the sovereign will of God. He describes the process in the following way:

An inanimate instrument such as an ax or a saw is moved by an artisan only through a bodily movement, but an instrument endowed with a sensitive soul is moved through its sensitive appetite, as a horse is controlled by its rider. However, an instrument endowed with a rational soul is moved through its will, and in this way a servant is moved to do something by his master. . . . Therefore the human nature in Christ was the instrument of the divinity in that it was moved through the will proper to it.[12]

Thus he was able to interpret Pseudo-Dionysius in the following way: "Dionysius places in Christ a theandric or divine-human operation . . . because his [Christ's] divine operation uses his human operation [that is, via his obedience], and his human operation participates in the efficacy of

---

[8] *De fide orthodoxa* 3, 19; PG 94.1080–81, trans. Frederic H. Chase, Jr., in *Saint John of Damascus: Writings.* Fathers of the Church 37 (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1958) 323.

[9] *De duabus in Christo voluntatibus,* PG 95.184 (my translation).

[10] *Libellus de recta sententia,* PG 94.1429 (my translation).

[11] *ST* 3, q. 19, a. 1 (translations from the *Summa theologiae* are my own).

[12] *ST* 3, q. 18, a. 1, ad 2.

the divine operation."[13] Hence what appears as a single, theandric opera-
tion of Christ is in reality two distinct operations working together in
perfect communion.

Aquinas argued from two quotations found in Chap. 2 of *De divinis
nominibus* that this was the position of Pseudo-Dionysius himself.[14] The
whole passage from Pseudo-Dionysius, with the quoted parts in italics,
reads as follows:

Again, it is by a differentiated act of God's benevolence that the super-essential
Word should wholly and completely take human substance of human flesh and do
and suffer all those things which, in a special and particular manner, belong to the
action of his divine humanity. *In these acts the Father and the Spirit have no share,
except of course that they all share in the loving generosity of the divine counsels* and
*in all that transcendent divine working of unutterable mysteries which were per-
formed in human nature by him who as God and as the Word is immutable.* So do
we strive to differentiate the divine attributes, according as these attributes are
undifferenced [sic] or differentiated.[15]

Only then, in particular circumstances, do the Father and the Word share
in the human action of Christ; otherwise they do not. One such set of
circumstances is "all that transcendent divine working of unutterable mys-
teries which were performed in human nature by him who as God and as
the Word of God is immutable." Pseudo-Dionysius does not specify this
statement any further, but it seems that he has in mind the redemption
performed by the Word in a unique way in his humanity, by his life, death,
and Resurrection, but also by the Father and the Holy Spirit in their special
divine ways. From the fact that Pseudo-Dionysius says that "they all share"
in this action and that this statement is put in parallel with "they all share
in the loving generosity of the divine counsels," Aquinas not unreasonably
interprets Pseudo-Dionysius to mean that, in addition to the redemptive
operation of the Word in the sacred humanity, the same Word operating in
his divinity is here associated also with the Father and the Spirit in their
divine redemptive operation, and this because of the necessary unity of the
divine operation (notwithstanding the fact that within this unity each per-
son operates in his own distinct way). This enables Aquinas to conclude
that for Pseudo-Dionysius also, Christ has two distinct operations, one
divine and one human.

But it is important to note that nowhere in this passage does Pseudo-
Dionysius refer to Jesus Christ as such. Throughout, his subject is the
divine Word, now spoken of in the human nature, now in the divine. In
other words, it is not Christ who is here said to have two operations, but the

---

[13] *ST* 3, q. 19, a. 1, ad 1.   [14] Ibid.
[15] PG 3.644, trans. C. E. Rolt, in *Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite on the Divine
Names and the Mystical Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1920) 73.

divine Word as such. When, therefore, Pseudo-Dionysius speaks of the human operation of the Word, it is likely that he means what he said in the letter to Gaius when he spoke of the single, theandric operation of Christ. It is not as though he there denied the divine operation of the Word; indeed, we may take it that he implicitly affirmed it. But he seemed to appreciate what his commentators in East and West did not, that to speak of Jesus Christ is to refer to the existence and operation of the divine Word in the human nature rather than the divine.

What we need to understand when we interpret Constantinople III's doctrine of the two operations of Christ is that it already presumes and applies the *communicatio idiomatum* (interchange, or communication, of attributes) of the Council of Ephesus. In other words, what renders it permissible to say that Christ has two operations (or natures) is the fact that the *divine Word* has two operations and that this Word is the person in Christ.[16] But this kind of application of the *communicatio* requires to be treated with caution, for it always has two possible senses, only one of which is fully and properly correct. Thus, for example, if we say that Christ is omniscient, this is correct in the sense that the person in Christ, the divine Logos, is omniscient, but that the Jesus Christ whom we encounter in the Gospels is omniscient is contradicted by the Gospels themselves. Likewise, when we say that Christ has two natures or operations, this is correct in the sense that the divine Logos has two natures or operations, but patently not so if we understand the word Christ to mean, as we normally do and as the word itself immediately suggests, the divine Logos in the *human* nature, for here the limitation placed on the subject of the sentence is extended to the predicate as well. What is truly remarkable is that neither Constantinople III nor our chosen commentators of East or West showed the slightest awareness that they were already invoking the *communicatio* when they said that Christ had two natures or operations.

Hulsbosch and Schillebeeckx

In the mid 1960s, however, there arose in the Netherlands a group of theologians who showed by their Dutch-language writings that they appreciated this point. They shared the insight of Pseudo-Dionysius that properly speaking the mystery of Christ was contained within the being and operation of the divine Word in the humanity, the human nature, of Jesus

---

[16] A similar claim can be made about the dogma of Chalcedon itself, in regard to the two natures of "our Lord Jesus Christ," as the latter part of the dogma speaks of the person of Christ as "one and the same Son, only-begotten, divine Word" (see DS 301–302). In other words, properly speaking the one who was "made known in two natures" was not so much "Christ" as the "divine Word."

of Nazareth. Robert North summarized their contribution in a memorable article in this journal in 1969.[17]

The most outspoken of these theologians was the Augustinian Ansfried Hulsbosch. North reproduced the following powerful statement of Hulsbosch:

This man [Jesus] is Son of God in that this man is in contact with God in a way that separates him from ordinary men. But this can mean nothing other than a special way of being-man, since the whole actuality of the mystery still lies precisely in the sector of the human. In reflecting on the mystery, it is doubtless convenient to set the two natures over against each other, but a divine nature juxtaposed beside the human gets us nowhere.[18]

North went on to quote Edward Schillebeeckx as giving his "one hundred percent approbation" to this thesis from Hulsbosch:

The divine nature of Jesus is relevant to the saving mystery only insofar as it alters and elevates the human nature. And whatever that is must be called a new mode of being man. We keep turning around in the same circle: the divine nature is here irrelevant except insofar as it elevates the human nature. To the extent that it does this, it puts us in contact with a *human* reality. When one says, "Jesus is, besides man, also God," such an "also God" cannot form part of the salvation reality. The mystery borrows its whole reality from what belongs to the human sphere.[19]

Rahner

This very point, however, had already been made by Karl Rahner in his 1958 essay "On the Theology of the Incarnation,"[20] though not with the same force or effect. In this essay Rahner made the beginnings of a further point which he left largely undeveloped, a point, however, not made at all by the Dutch-writing theologians so far as I can see. It took Rahner well beyond the position of Thomas Aquinas. And it constitutes the principal subject of the present study. My aim is to take it up and develop it as far as I can.

To begin this task, let me present two key texts of Rahner from this essay. The first is a radical new statement about human nature as such:

[17] Robert North, "Soul-Body Unity and God-Man Unity," *TS* 30 (1969) 27–60.
[18] Ibid. 36–37, citing Ansfried Hulsbosch, "Jezus Christus, gekend als mens, beleden als Zoon Gods," *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 6 (1966) 250–73, at 255.
[19] Ibid. 37, citing Edward Schillebeeckx, "Persoonlijke openbaringsgestalte van de Vader," *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 6 (1966) 274–88, at 275.
[20] *Theological Investigations* 4, trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966) 105–20; the original was "Zur Theologie der Menschwerdung," in *Catholica* 12 (1958) 1–16.

The indefinable nature [human nature], whose limits—"definition"—are the unlimited reference to the infinite fullness of the mystery, has, when assumed by God as *his* reality, simply arrived at the point to which it strives by virtue of its essence.[21]

In the second text, which follows a few lines later, Rahner draws the startling conclusion implicit in this statement:

The incarnation of God is therefore the uniquely *highest* case of the perfection of the human reality, which consists in the fact that man *is* insofar as he gives himself up. He who understands with theological correctness what *potentia obedientialis* for hypostatic union means—the assumability of human nature by the person of the Word of God—knows that this *potentia* cannot be just another ability *alongside* other possibilities of the human condition, but is objectively identical with the essence of man.[22]

A brief comment is in order before teasing out the implications of these statements. When Rahner speaks about the human "giving himself up," he refers primarily not to an *actus secundus*, a *free* human act of self-surrender, but the *actus primus*, which precedes all exercise of the human will and consists in the *existential* perfection of the human essence considered precisely as orientation toward God. In the light of this, any subsequent act of self-surrender is to be viewed as the free ratification of the essential tendency of human nature itself, by means of which the task of self-realization before God is accomplished—always under divine grace of course—over the span of a lifetime granted for this and no other purpose. In the case of Christ the grace of union executes the *actus primus* of the human nature in a unique way, to the point of the coincidence of its being with the being of God. This it is that makes Christ "the uniquely highest case of the perfection of human reality."

What Rahner has done here is to push the concept of human nature well beyond the point reached by Aquinas. For Rahner, human nature, though created, is potentially divine, and in the case of Christ actually so. But this does not mean that Rahner has lapsed into Monophysitism (from below), Monotheletism, or Apollinarianism, as for him Christ's human nature remains genuinely human, that is to say, it is *divinely* human, human in a divine way, or, equally, divine in a human way. Hence he could have called it "theandric," though in fact he did not. It is not simply identical with the divine nature, for that is divine in a divine way. Hence there is no conflict with the "without confusion, without change" of the Chalcedonian dogma, provided the "change" that is here denied is understood as essential change (no one would dispute that when human nature is elevated into hypostatic union with the divine, change in *some* sense takes place). The thesis that

---

[21] Rahner, "Theology of the Incarnation" 109.
[22] Rahner, "Zur Theologie der Menschwerdung," *Schriften zur Theologie* 4 (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1964) 137–55, at 142–43 (my translation).

Christ's human nature is theandric becomes inevitable once human nature is defined in terms of orientation to God. Though also divine, Christ's human nature remains basically and integrally human, and therefore, to put it negatively, incapable of states of being or operations that are strictly divine (hence the divine "condescension" involved in the Incarnation). It is not, therefore, some kind of *tertium quid;* it is *human,* but the human at the limit of its possibility under grace. Here I must refine the statement of Pseudo-Dionysius that [by nature] Christ was "neither human nor nonhuman." It would have been more accurate for him to say that Christ was neither simply human nor simply nonhuman. But if this nature is also in a sense divine, it remains a nature and does not itself become the person of the Word; it merely becomes a nature possible and suitable for assumption by the Word. While it is true (and important) to stress that the Word assumed a human nature like ours, it is also true that it is rendered unique, theandric, in the act of assumption.[23] For hypostatic union is not a natural potency of human nature. It is a supernatural potency, one that would allow a human nature, God so willing, to be borne by grace beyond its natural limits to an absolute fulfillment. On the part of Christ's human nature it is this transcendence of natural limits along with its unsurpassable outcome in hypostatic union that justifies my use of the word "theandric" in its regard. For the rest of us there remains a destiny beyond our natural limits and one indeed not extraneous to hypostatic union: participation in Christ through grace. Hence we can say that human nature as *potentia obedientialis* for hypostatic union is realized absolutely in the case of Christ, and relatively in the case of others.

There are therefore two ways of being divine: the simply given divinity of the transcendent God, and the divinity achieved by divine grace in humanity. Achieved divinity is itself found in two ways, expressed by the Scholastics as "substantial" in the case of Christ, and "accidental," that is, by habitual grace, in the case of other human beings, or expressed by the Church Fathers as hypostatic or personal for Christ, and by participation (in him) for others, that is, they become sons or daughters in the Son.

Before proceeding with the development of Rahner's position, it may be well to point out the difference from that of Aquinas. For Rahner Christ's human nature was theandric, but for Aquinas because it was created it was simply not divine. Answering the objection that because Christ was "very God" (*Deus secundum veritatem*) and not divine by participation, that is,

---

[23] Hence the charge sometimes leveled against Rahner that in his Christology he confused nature and person is not justified, though admittedly he laid himself open to it by not sufficiently explaining his thought. See, for example, J. Michael McDermott, "The Christologies of Karl Rahner," *Gregorianum* 67 (1986) 87–123 and 297–327, at 311–13 and 319–25.

by habitual grace, he did not need such grace, Aquinas says that "Christ is very God according to his person and his divine nature. But since with the unity of person the distinction of natures remains, Christ's soul is *not divine by its essence.* Hence it is necessary that it become divine by participation, which is by grace."[24] I shall return to this illuminating remark later.

A question that needs to be faced in regard to Rahner's position is this: What kind of distinction is there between the human (that is, theandric) and the (simply) divine natures of the divine Word? For Aquinas, the distinction between the human and the divine natures, as a simple distinction between created and uncreated, is clearly real. For Rahner, who did not ask himself this question, I think the answer would have to be the same, and for the same reason. As the *finitum capax infiniti,* the human nature of Christ would always have to be defined in terms of its basic finiteness, its createdness, even though its capacity for infinity or divinity is fully realized through the working of the grace of union. A further question is: What sort of distinction is there between the divine Word subsisting in the divine nature and the same Word subsisting (as he must according to Rahner) in the human nature? It cannot be a real distinction, for there are not two persons. Nor can it be a purely logical distinction, for though the person remains one, the natures are really distinct. Perhaps it should be identified as the Thomistic virtual distinction, a logical distinction with a foundation in reality, the foundation in this case being the real distinction of natures.

The Enhypostasia

I have argued that in Rahner's Christology the divine Word must subsist in the human nature as well as the divine. A priori such a statement is not to be expected from the Thomistic Christology, the reason being the limitation that the latter places on the human nature. To explain this point further it is necessary to discuss the enhypostasia, which I now address briefly.

The enhypostasia is the doctrine, long associated with the sixth-century theologian Leontius of Byzantium, that the concrete human nature of Christ does not subsist as an independent human hypostasis or person (which would be Nestorianism); nor is it simply without a hypostasis (anhypostasia, which would be Monophysitism, as such a nature would lack reality); but it subsists *in* the hypostasis of the divine Word (hence *enhypostasia*). The word "subsists" is important here. The human nature does not simply *exist* in the person of the Word, for that would be merely accidental existence (in fact impossible for God because incompatible with his infinite perfection). No, it *subsists,* that it, it exists in its own right, but

---

[24] *ST 3,* q. 7, a. 1, ad 1 (emphasis added).

only *by* (and in that sense *in*) the subsistence, that is, the existence in and of itself, of the divine Word. (My observations later about the Thomistic secondary human act of existence, the *esse secundarium,* in Christ will throw further light on this, since such an *esse* would be impossible in the case of a merely accidental existence.)

In the light of recent studies, the attribution of the enhypostasia to Leontius of Byzantium now appears to be thoroughly discredited, and even the continued use of the word is coming under fire,[25] but in all this the doctrine itself remains unscathed. Aloys Grillmeier and Theresia Haintha-ler traced it to the other Leontius, Leontius of Jerusalem (also sixth century), who has often been confused with his namesake.[26] It can also rightly be said to be one of the planks of the Christology of John of Damascus.[27] But more than this, I believe that it is the only orthodox Christology to result from the Council of Chalcedon, and that therefore any *later* orthodox Christology must re-present it in either an open or a disguised way, consciously or unconsciously. Even after 30 years I find no reason, apart from the attribution to Leontius of Byzantium, for disagreeing with the position of Frederick Crowe that, in the two opposed extremes in the early attempts at understanding the God-man, the one-sided definition of Ephesus required the complement of Chalcedon, and that therefore at this point:

Leontius became inevitable: the adversaries were quite right in saying that the human nature of Jesus could not be anhypostatic, but they were wrong in concluding that He had a human hypostasis; the correct conclusion is that the humanity of Jesus was enhypostatic. On the basis of Ephesus and Chalcedon, the Leontian position cannot be avoided; if there is not someone who is eternal and someone else who is born of Mary, then there is only one who is God and man; if the one-who-ness is eternal, then it is not created at the Incarnation; it follows that the human nature defined by Chalcedon has its existence in the person of the Word.[28]

There can be no doubt, therefore, of the value and importance of the doctrine of enhypostasia. But what about the *terminology* of this and related words? For the following reasons I plan, at least for the present, to retain the terminology of enhypostasia. First, for over 100 years the schol-

[25] See F. LeRon Schults, "A Dubious Christological Formula: From Leontius of Byzantium to Karl Barth," *TS* 57 (1996) 431–46.

[26] See Aloys Grillmeier and Theresia Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition* 2/2, trans. John Cawte and Pauline Allen (Louisville: Westminster/Knox, 1995) 271–312; also Dennis M. Ferrara, " 'Hypostatized in the Logos': Leontius of Byzantium, Leontius of Jerusalem and the Unfinished Business of the Council of Chalcedon," *Louvain Studies* 22 (1997) 311–27.

[27] See "John of Damascus, St.," *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church,* 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University, 1997) 891–92, at 891a.

[28] Frederick E. Crowe, "Christologies: How Up-To-Date Is Yours?" *TS* 29 (1968) 87–101, at 90.

arly community has been using it in an etymologically justifiable sense, even if it was not the one intended by the ancient Fathers (apparently by it they only meant "hypostatic" as opposed to "anhypostatic").[29] It is the terminology in possession, and it is reasonable terminology. Second, in this modern sense it expresses, after Chalcedon, the best and indeed the only orthodox Christology. What it stands for is very important, and therefore it should not be tampered with unnecessarily. Third, as terminology goes, it is succinct and exact and would be difficult to replace. For English-speakers, Grillmeier and Hainthaler's word "insubsistence" is hardly an acceptable substitute.[30] If the theological community decides to dispense with it, I shall have no problem following suit so long as a reasonable alternative emerges and the doctrine itself remains beyond criticism.

I now return to my point, namely the difficulty one would expect the Thomistic Christology to have in recognizing that the divine Word subsists in the human nature of Christ. For to do this would be to recognize that human nature was such that the divine Word could be actualized in it. But this would be possible only if human nature were capable, under grace, of an ontological expansion from within that would reach beyond all confines and embrace divinity itself, even that of the Word of God. But this was the concept of human nature proposed by Rahner, the point that set him at odds with Aquinas, for whom human nature, even that of Christ, did not surpass the realm of the creaturely. Arguing his position that human nature is more suitable than any other for assumption by the Son of God, Aquinas gives as his basic reason, "Human nature, being rational and intellectual, can reach the Word himself through its operation of knowing him and loving him."[31] The context makes it plain that by this he means not a purely natural operation (which would be at least Semipelagian), but the operation of faith and charity made possible by grace. But this is as far as he is prepared to go. Now if *operatio sequitur esse,* the very fact that human nature can attain God by faith and charity implies that human nature as such can attain God ontologically, not of course, by way of a natural potency but, as Rahner says, by way of an *obediential* potency. But evidently this was a conclusion that Aquinas did not draw. Hence his actual position, that the divine Word can subsist in a nature which has the ability to attain the Word through its operations of knowledge and love but not through its being, is an impossible one. But there is no doubt that this was his position, for he said on the one hand that the ability inherent in the operations was the ground of possibility for the assumption of human nature by the Word, and on the other that "human nature is joined to the

---

[29] See Schults, "A Dubious Christological Formula" 431–32, 437–38.
[30] See Grillmeier and Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition* 2/2.283.
[31] *ST* 3, q. 4, a. 1.

divine person in such a way that *the divine person subsists in it.*"[32] In this way he was able to maintain his position that the human nature of Christ did not exceed the ontological status of a simple creature.

A legitimate question one could put to Aquinas here would be: To what extent could human nature thus conceived truly belong to the Word? For nature is an intrinsic mode of being. How could a nature incapable of embracing the Word by its being be an intrinsic mode of being of the Word? The humanity of Christ in Aquinas's conception could still be called a nature in respect of some hypothetical human person (which would however be Nestorianism), but hardly a nature in respect of the divine Word. In my view Aquinas's scheme, in addition to being impossible in itself, and despite his statement about subsistence, conveys an extrinsicism that is at odds with the true concept of nature. This criticism of Aquinas is supported by the observation of Henri de Lubac, to which attention has been drawn by Joseph Komonchak, that in his theology of human nature Aquinas failed to reconcile the Aristotelian concept of a finite nature possessing an immanent, proportionate end with the patristic concept of the "image of God," openness to the absolute.[33] Aquinas's view of human nature as capable of God by its action but incapable by its being seems indicative of precisely this failure.

Hence the enhypostasia is in fact reversible, or invertible, though I take no comfort from the fact that Aquinas would agree with me on this point,[34] for though he would be right it would not be for the right reason. If one may assert that the human nature of Christ subsists in the person of the divine Word, we may also assert that the divine Word subsists in the human nature of Christ. This reversibility serves to contain the mystery of Christ within his human nature which was the intention of Rahner and the Dutch-

[32] *ST* 3, q. 2, a. 8 (emphasis added).

[33] See Joseph Komonchak, "Theology and Culture at Mid-Century: The Example of Henri de Lubac," *TS* 51 (1990) 579–602, at 587–88, and particularly the pertinent quotations from de Lubac's *Surnaturel* which he there deploys. In criticism of de Lubac on this point, David Schindler draws attention to the comment of Anton Pegis that, "strictly speaking," for Aristotle the finality of human nature "was neither (simply) open nor (simply) closed" but "as open as that nature is in its constitution." But Schindler further indicates that Pegis recognized that de Lubac's point that the human person only ever had a supernatural end still stands, and does not depend on a dubious constrast with a "closed" nature. (Schindler's introduction to the reprint of de Lubac's *The Mystery of the Supernatural* [New York: Crossroad Herder, 1998] xxiv–xxv. Probably de Lubac exaggerated, and interpreted Aristotle in too Averroistic a sense, when he said that for Aristotle human nature remained "shut up within its own order." But if even the revised interpretation of Aristotle falls short of God "as he is in himself," as Pegis himself recognizes, de Lubac still seems right in discerning in Aquinas a discrepancy between this Aristotelian conception and the patristic concept of human nature.

[34] *ST* 3, q. 2, a. 8, cited above.

writing theologians. Further, it makes his human nature theandric, and it allows him a single theandric operation in the Pseudo-Dionysian sense. From this perspective the assertion of two operations, divine and human, acting in communion, the position of John of Damascus and Aquinas, even though it can be justified as orthodox by an appeal to the communication of idioms, appears unnecessarily complex and extremely difficult to reconcile with the picture of the thoroughly unified Christ, human in a divine way and divine in a human way, that emerges from the pages of the Gospels.

This "reversal" is not to be confused with that made by Piet Schoonenberg, who asserts, "It is primarily not the human nature which is enhypostatic in the divine person, but the divine nature in the human person."[35] This is a highly problematical, even contradictory, position. How could the divine nature become personified in a human person? This would subject the infinity of God to a created human *esse*. There is no similarity between what I am saying and what Schoonenberg says here.

In my view, what has been said about the enhypostasia expresses in principle all that can be said theologically about the mystery of the person of the God-man. There are two points in this sentence that require elucidation. The first is the word "theologically." A category mistake frequently made by Catholic as well as Protestant theologians is to treat the dogma of Chalcedon as a hermeneutical principle, a theology. But it is not. All that it does is to set the parameters of faith in the God-man; it requires for its complete intelligibility the application of a hermeneutical principle, a theology, from without. In one sense it is an end; it was meant to conclude the Christological controversy. But in another sense it was only a beginning, as it spawned several theologies in competition with each other to carry out the hermeneutical task, as Frederick Crowe noted in an earlier quotation.[36] Of these theologies, and not just in fact but in principle, only the enhypostasia was orthodox, and this guaranteed it a unique place in theology. For Christology it became akin to what Lonergan called a "heuristic concept,"[37] a partial specification of a mystery that awaits further specification through the advance of knowledge, and that therefore indicates a consistent even if latent structure at the heart of any orthodox Christology, past,

---

[35] Piet Schoonenberg, *The Christ,* trans. Della Couling (London: Sheed and Ward, 1972) 87.

[36] See the original title of Rahner's essay in vol. 1 of *Theological Investigations:* "Current Problems in Christology," namely "Chalkedon—Ende oder Anfang?" [Chalcedon—End or Beginning?], in Aloys Grillmeier and Heinrich Bacht, ed., *Das Konzil von Chalkedon: Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Würzburg: Echter, 1954) 3.3–49.

[37] See *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1958) 63.

present, or future. This constitutes the second point announced above: it explains my choice of the expression "in principle."

The enhypostasia, then, contains in principle whatever we could come to know of the mystery of the God-man. But because it confines the mystery to what is realized in the human nature, it could tempt us to think of the divine nature as irrelevant to the mystery. Hulsbosch, as noted, said exactly this about the divine nature, but he attempted to avoid the pitfall just indicated when he added the rider "except insofar as it elevates the human nature." However, it is necessary to go beyond this minimalist position of Hulsbosch and assert an event of communication from the divine nature to the human. But, and this must be emphasized, this will mean that whatever divine reality is communicated will be received in a human way: *quod recipitur in aliquo est in eo per modum recipientis.* This brings us back to the discussion of the communication of idioms, which we must now pursue in a more thorough way.

The Communication of Idioms

No one will dispute that in its historical setting the communication of idioms was concerned with "the predicability of essential properties (attributes, *idiomata*) pertaining to one of Christ's two natures to the other nature on the basis that they possess unity in the hypostasis of the Logos."[38] That is to say, the communication of idioms had to do with predication, with what one might appropriately *say.* But already in antiquity there was some appreciation of the fact that communication as predication would be meaningless unless it were based on communication as event. And my primary interest here is in communication as event. J. N. D. Kelly, speaking of Cyril of Alexandria, notes:

It goes without saying that he exploited the "communion of idioms" in the fullest sense, stating that it was correct to say that "the Word of God suffered in flesh, and became first-begotten from the dead." *Indeed, so close and real was the union that Cyril conceived of each of the natures as participating in the properties of the other* [italics mine]. "We must therefore confess that the Word has imparted the glory of the divine operation to his own flesh, while at the same time taking to himself what belongs to the flesh.[39]

I repeat, it would be meaningless to speak of the interchange of attributes unless it were already founded on an ontological communication between the natures. Yet how realistic is it to speak of the human nature communicating anything to the divine when the latter already contains in an eminent way whatever the former possesses? The fact is that what belongs

---

[38] Gerhard Müller, "Idiomenkommunikation," *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche,* 3rd ed., 14 (Freiburg: Herder, 1996) col. 403–6, at 403–4 (my translation).
[39] *Early Christian Doctrines,* 3rd ed. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1965) 322.

to the human nature, for example, suffering, is rightly attributed to the divine person as the sole subject of the God-man, but not to this subject precisely as divine, that is, in the divine nature. On the other hand, the divine person in his divine nature communicates to the human nature everything the latter is and has, though always what it is and has, it is and has *per modum recipientis*. My concern, then, is with what is communicated from the divine to the human nature. Though this may seem a strange way of speaking, it is justified by the fact that each nature is concrete, that is, not an abstraction. In any case, I shall later recast our conclusions from this section in a trinitarian context which I hope will be more readily understandable. At this stage, though, it is necessary to choose as our point of departure the actual *communicatio idiomatum* of history.

A little reflection on the communication that takes place from the divine to the human nature of Christ will show that it is governed by two principles, the first a priori and philosophical, and the second a posteriori and historical. They can be formulated as follows: the divine nature must communicate to the human nature whatever the latter requires for its integrity as a human nature; and beyond this, the divine nature can communicate to the human nature whatever divine realities God wills to communicate provided only they are commensurate with human nature, that is, can be received in a human nature without violating its integrity. The test for the first is the question: Is the reality in question required for the integrity of the human nature? And as the second depends on God's free will, the test for it will be whether after the application of historical criticism the presence of the reality in question is witnessed to in Scripture.

An example of the application of the first principle would be had in answering the question whether Christ knew his own complete identity. The only way he could know this would be by revelation (communication) from the divine to the human nature. The answer must be, as Rahner has said,[40] that such a communication must be affirmed, and indeed at the subjective level, as to know at this level who one is is integral to human nature. Without this knowledge Christ in his humanity would have been less than other human beings. Of course, this is not to say that he would have expressed this knowledge objectively in the way that a theologian might today. The way he actually expressed it can be discovered from the Gospels (after criticism) and shown to be the equivalent from that time and culture of what would be confessed in a relatively sophisticated and technical way in the theological culture of today. An example of the second principle in action would be had in answering the question whether Christ

---

[40] See Karl Rahner, "Dogmatic Reflections on the Knowledge and Self-Consciousness of Christ," *Theological Investigations* 5, trans. Karl-H. Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966) 193–215.

performed a particular miracle. In general, miracles cannot be denied him if they are admitted of holy men and women both before and after him. Whether he performed a particular miracle can only be decided on the evidence, by an appeal to the Gospels and the application of the historico-critical method. Application of that method could result in any of three conclusions: a negative one, that is, that Jesus did not actually perform this miracle, for example walking on water; a simply positive one, that is, that he did perform this miracle as described, for example the cure of a sick person; or a qualified positive one, that is, that he did perform this miracle though not in the striking or dramatic way in which it is reported in a particular Gospel, for example the "raising" of Jairus's daughter, the question being whether she was actually dead, as in Matthew 9:18, or perhaps only at the point of death as in Mark 5:23 and Luke 8:42 (Mark 5:35 and Luke 8:49 notwithstanding).

The fundamental communication (fundamental in the sense that it is both the first and the foundation of all others) that takes place from the divine to the human nature of Christ is the communication of the divine *esse,* the divine act of existence, whereby he is constituted in human existence as the only-begotten Son of God. John Michael McDermott makes the point that all serious Thomistic Christologists need to face this issue, and that non-Thomists, who presumably do not, "owe the theological community a new and clear ontology."[41] Aquinas himself wavered on the matter. In the *Summa theologiae* he represents the view that there is a single *esse* in Christ, the divine. But in the *De unione Verbi incarnati* he says the following:

As Christ is one *simpliciter* [simply] on account of the unity of the supposit and two *secundum quid* [in a certain sense] on account of the two natures, he has one *esse simpliciter,* on account of the one eternal *esse* of the eternal supposit. But there exists also another *esse* of this supposit, not in so far as it is eternal but in so far as it became human in time. This *esse,* though it is not accidental—since humanity is not predicated accidentally of the Son of God—is nevertheless not the principal *esse* of its supposit, but a secondary one.[42]

Aquinas's hesitation on the matter is reflected in later Thomism. Hence the comment of Rahner as reported by McDermott, "At a seminar with the Theology Department after the reception of an honorary doctorate on May 25, 1982, at Fordham University, Rahner replied to a question about the number of existences in Christ with a chuckle: 'An old question: in one respect, two; in another, one.' "[43] Hardly a satisfactory answer!

Applying the principles elaborated in this study, we can make the fol-

[41] See McDermott, "The Christologies of Karl Rahner" 310 n. 276.
[42] *De unione Verbi incarnati,* a. 4 (my translation).
[43] Cited in McDermott, "The Christologies of Karl Rahner" 310 n. 276.

lowing assertions. In Christ there is a single *esse* corresponding to his single divine personhood. In as much as he is the incarnate Word of God, this *esse* viewed from the perspective of the communicating Word is the divine *esse*. But in so far as it founds Christ's human nature in existence, it is received as a human *esse: quod recipitur in aliquo est in eo per modum recipientis.* It is the *esse secundarium* of which Aquinas speaks in the quotation just given.[44] Yet this human *esse* is not in every respect the same as ours, for in our case it founds a purely human person and is a mere created delimitation of, and participation in, the divine *esse,* whereas in his case it founds the unique person who is both human and divine, and it is more than the mere created participation referred to above. It is neither simply divine nor simply human, but in keeping with his human nature, is theandric. Its relation to the purely divine *esse* is dialectical, and, as I have argued, perhaps best expressed in terms of the Thomistic virtual distinction. If, according to my argument, one regards Christ as the realization of the divine person in the human nature, then to be consistent one should say that there is in him a single theandric nature and a single theandric act of existence. All this, I claim, is implicit in Rahner's Christology, but that he did not appreciate it himself is plain from his quoted Fordham statement in which clearly he did not see his own already complete Christology as contributing anything to the disputed question of whether the *esse* of Christ was single or twofold.[45]

[44] An important modern theologian for whose Christology the *esse secundarium* is central is Bernard Lonergan, for whom it is the *assumi* (the to-be-assumed) of the human nature. This would be Lonergan's answer to my question (put to Aquinas) whether human nature's capacity for God lies in the field of action only or of being. See Lonergan's *De constitutione Christi ontologica et psychologica: supplementum* (Rome: Gregorian University, 1956) part 4, 71–82.

[45] These reflections point up a certain inconsistency in Rahner's writing on Christian anthropology. In his essay on the relation of nature and grace, "Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace," (*Theological Investigations* 1, trans. Cornelius Ernst [Baltimore: Helicon, 1961] 297–317), he speaks of our "supernatural existential" as our ordination to grace and beatific vision. (It would have been more accurate for him to say "grace and glory," but I shall not pursue this here, though I shall use the latter expression when speaking in my own voice.) He goes on to say that nature's openness to the supernatural existential is beyond a mere nonrepugnance, "an inner ordination, provided only that it is not unconditioned" (315). But in a dictionary article he says of human nature in us that "in its 'ek-stasy' (its standing outside itself because of its orientation beyond itself) it constantly falls back on itself and becomes 'hypo-static' in itself" ("Person," *Dictionary of Theology,* 2nd ed. [New York: Crossroad] 378–81, at 379). I take the latter hyphenated term to mean "standing 'below' that to which it is really referred," namely God. Here he must have the supernatural existential as ordination to hypostatic union rather than grace and beatific vision. Now while human nature in the abstract, in Christ and ourselves, undoubtedly is *potentia obedientialis* for hypostatic union, our

Summary Statement

The fundamental hermeneutical tool for the right understanding of the mystery of the God-man is the enhypostasia in both its historical and its inverted sense. The latter opens up the possibility of understanding Christ's human nature as theandric in the Pseudo-Dionysian sense without any compromise of orthodoxy. But it needs to be complemented by the communication of idioms, not just in its historical sense of a rule of thumb for the orthodoxy of certain statements about the God-man, but as event, that of ontological communication from the divine to the human nature, which is presupposed by the historical sense. My readers will not be surprised to learn that I was delighted to read in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* the following statement about the Christology of John of Damascus: "He adopted the Enhypostasia of Leontius of Byzantium, which he interprets along the lines of the 'communicatio idiomatum.' "[46] We can disregard the reference to Leontius of Byzantium. But to adopt the enhypostasia and interpret it along the lines of the *communicatio,* this is what all Christology should do. It has been pointed out to me that neither John of Damascus nor the Oxford Dictionary writer would have meant by these terms precisely what I mean by them, and this I happily concede. But my claim is that, theologically speaking, these expressions represent heuristic concepts that as such belong together—with the enhypostasia primary and the *communicatio* secondary—in constituting a template for all orthodox Christology. The enhypostasia sets the two natures in their correct ontological relationship, which the communication of idioms then transposes into a dynamic communication from the divine to the human.

SPIRIT CHRISTOLOGY

In this final section, I want to apply the conclusions reached above to my work in Spirit Christology. This can be done under two headings: first, reexpressing the communication of idioms in trinitarian terms, and sec-

---

concrete human nature (that is, with the supernatural existential) is ordered only to grace and glory, not to hypostatic union. Rahner, however, goes on in his chosen line to conclude that human nature in us has "a certain negativity." These statements of Rahner's need to be corrected in the light of what has been pointed out above. It is not correct for him to say that human nature in the case of ourselves falls back on itself in order to become hypostatic, as hypostatic union was never its concrete end in any case. Only ever actually destined for accidental union with God, it is constituted hypostatic in its own right, with no implication of negativity. Its simple finiteness contains no such implication. The only negativity we may associate with it is a historical one deriving from sin.

[46] "John of Damascus, St.," *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church,* 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University, 1997) 891–92, at 891.

ondly, reconsidering the question of the order of the hypostatic union. I begin with the trinitarian transposition of the *communicatio*.

The Communication of Idioms Reinterpreted

When one situates the *communicatio* in the context of the Trinity, one must begin with the primordial trinitarian communication, the self-communication of the Father to the Son, whereby the Son is constituted as a divine person. This is the beginning of the trinitarian order or *taxis*. One then needs to consider the second communication that takes place in the Trinity, the self-communication of the Father and the Son to each other.[47] Objectivized, this self-communication becomes the person of the Holy Spirit. Henceforward it is seen to be the self-communication of the Father and the Son to each other in the Holy Spirit. Only with this statement does one have the timeless Trinity constituted in being, the Trinity *in facto esse*. Prior to this one only has the Trinity coming into being, the Trinity *in fieri*. This difficult language is forced upon us by the dialectic set up by the origins of the persons from one another on the one hand and their absolute consubstantiality on the other. But in the midst of all this difficulty one thing is clear: one only has the Trinity as it actually exists when one has arrived at the self-communication of the Father and the Son to each other in the Holy Spirit, bond of mutual love between them, though this does not abolish the simple self-communication of the Father with which one began.

When, then, the Father intervenes eschatologically in the economy, his plan of redemption and salvation, and gives himself in all fullness to the world through the Holy Spirit proceeding from him, he summons into existence a human being, Jesus of Nazareth, as recipient of this self-communication. In one and the same act Jesus is created and hypostatically united to the divine Son. Why precisely to the Son? Because the Father's Spirit who rests on the Son in the Trinity draws into hypostatic union with the Son when bestowed in all fullness beyond the Trinity. The self-communication of the Father in the world is dialectically one, that is, at the same time identical and nonidentical, with his simple self-communication in the Trinity. Each self-communication posits the person of the Son—the first in the divine, the second in the human nature; the first directly, the second in the Holy Spirit; the first in eternity, the second in time.

What I expressed earlier as the ontological communication from the divine to the human nature in Christ, beginning with the communication of the divine *esse,* can now be re-expressed as the Father's communication of his being through the Holy Spirit to Jesus in and at the inception of his life

---

[47] This point is made in my forthcoming book, *Deus Trinitas: The Doctrine of the Triune God* (New York: Oxford University, 1999).

so that he comes into existence as God's only-begotten Son. This places Jesus in a unique ontological, psychological, and spiritual relationship with the Father, mediated from the Father to him and from him to the Father, by the Holy Spirit. This is indeed the Jesus whom we meet in the Gospels. And it is entirely as a human, in his human nature, that Jesus thus relates to the Father. He has, in so far as it is possible for a human, the very relation of the Son to the Father in the Trinity. This tells us that his human nature is unique, theandric. By the special action of the Holy Spirit in his case Jesus has, in a human way, the same utter openness to, dependence on, and love for the Father that the divine Son has in the Trinity. This means that all his human experiences, including his sufferings, are imported into the life of the Trinity, a statement heard often enough from Protestant theologians but rarely from Catholics, for the latter fear thereby to compromise the divine transcendence. But in fact the divine transcendence is not compromised by this, for there always remains the dialectic of identity and nonidentity spoken of earlier between the existence of the Son in his divine and in his human nature, a dialectic comparable to that between the transcendent essence and the immanent energies of God in Palamism.

The Order of the Hypostatic Union

I have now reached my final point, the order of the hypostatic union. As one's approach to this question is affected by the stance taken toward a preliminary question, that of the habitual grace of Christ, that is where one must make a start. In my previous writings I reversed Aquinas's order, that is to say, where he had the habitual grace following upon hypostatic union (though not in time), I had it preceding union (again, not in time). Yet I followed Aquinas uncritically in asserting that Christ had habitual grace at all. His reason for this opinion has already been stated: "Christ is very God according to his person and his divine nature. But since with the unity of person the distinction of natures remains, Christ's soul is not divine by its essence. Hence it is necessary that it become divine by participation, which is by grace."[48]

But what if Christ's soul was not divine but divinized, and uniquely so, that is, rendered one with God in its concrete existence? The clear implication in that case is that there would be no need of habitual grace; it would be superfluous. Furthermore, it would be impossible. For if his soul were already divine substantially (as it would be), how could it be so also accidentally? Now the burden of this study has been to show that Christ's human nature is theandric, and this means that his soul is theandric, which

---

[48] *ST* 3, q. 7, a. 1, ad 1.

in turn means that it is divine, at least in a human way, and so without prejudice to the distinct divinity of his purely divine nature.

I have argued elsewhere that in the concrete our human spiritual opera-tions open the way only to accidental union with God, that is, the union of habitual grace. In the same place I argued conversely that hypostatic union is brought about not in this way but only through the prevenient action of God coincident with the creation of Christ's particular human nature.[49] To quote the Augustinian expression, *ipsa assumptione creatur.*[50] The super-natural human operations of Christ flow from this divine act, not vice versa, and they are unique to him, though not extrinsic to our supernatural op-erations. Thus, as I have already argued, whereas our love for God and our fellow human beings is a human love *in* the Holy Spirit, that is, charity, the corresponding love in Christ is identical with the person of the Holy Spirit, divine love incarnate in human love.[51] Christ's supernatural operations flow not from habitual grace as with us, but directly from the hypostatic union itself. There is no room in this scheme for a habitual grace in Christ.

Writing as long ago as 1958, the Dutch Jesuit Felix Malmberg summa-rized his position on the matter as follows:

In our exposition there is no place for a "habitual accidental grace" of this sort alongside the "grace of union." This seems to us not only superfluous but also to suffer from an inner contradiction. The whole concrete human nature of Christ is divinized through and through in the highest conceivable way by the "grace of union": it is God the Son's own human nature. What needs to be added, nay, what can be added, to this absolute fullness? Certainly, this "grace of union" has numerous "accidental" features, indeed as many as has Christ's concrete human nature. But this is not to assert that beyond this "grace of union" Christ's human nature needed additional "accidental graces" for its proper "divinization" in being or act, or for our divinization.[52]

I give a hundred percent approbation to this judgment, particularly as I suspect that by theandric I mean considerably more than Malmberg did by divinized.

Thus I come at last to the question of order. Aquinas had this order: hypostatic union, habitual grace. "The grace of union is precisely personal existence divinely and freely given to the human nature in the person of the Word, and this existence is the term of the assumption. But habitual grace, belonging as it does to the special holiness of this man, is an effect following

[49] See David Coffey, *Grace: The Gift of the Holy Spirit* (Sydney: Catholic Insti-tute of Sydney, 1979) 72–87.

[50] See *Contra sermonem Arianorum* 8.6; *PL* 42, 688.

[51] See David Coffey, "The 'Incarnation' of the Holy Spirit in Christ," *TS* 45 (1984) 466–80.

[52] Felix Malmberg, *Über den Gottmenschen,* Quaestiones Disputatae 9 (Basel: Herder, 1960) 85 (my translation).

upon union, as John has said, 'We saw his glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.' "[53] Clearly this is a descending order, indicated by the Gospel of John, which Aquinas quotes. Further, in discussing whether the Word assumed a human person or a human nature, Aquinas, opting for the latter, enunciated the principle: "What is assumed must be presupposed for the assumption."[54] This means that he saw the creation of the human nature as presupposed for the hypostatic union. Hence his complete order was: creation of the human nature, hypostatic union, infusion of habitual grace. While these three outcomes coincide in the one divine action, they are really distinct from one other, since creation belongs to the natural order, union to the supernatural order of substance, and grace to the supernatural order of accident.

For me, however, the order had been creation, grace, union. Clearly this is an ascending order, based on the Synoptic Gospels as distinct from that of John. It corresponds to the order suggested in the Annunciation scene in Luke 1:35: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born [creation] will be holy [grace], the Son of God [union]."[55] Readers will understand why, following the lead given by Luke, I called the middle term sanctification, and identified it—uncritically, I admit—with the Thomistic infusion of habitual, that is, sanctifying, grace.

In the light of my argument here it is now necessary to revise this position, at least to some extent. If Jesus' human nature was theandric, there was no place in him for habitual grace, for the radical sanctification of his human nature by the Holy Spirit terminated in its union with the divine Son. This consideration on its own requires me to retain the logical order: sanctification, union. But one needs also to remember that the union thus brought about was not simply identical with the hypostatic union as normally understood. For the union effected by the Holy Spirit, which in a *descending* perspective must be acknowledged as a work also of the Son, was the achievement of divine Sonship precisely within the humanity, and therefore did not coincide in every respect with the purely given divine Sonship of the inner-trinitarian Son. This matter has already been discussed earlier and there is no need to repeat it here, except to point out that the distinction between these two forms of divine Sonship is probably best expressed by the Thomistic virtual distinction. When one speaks of the hypostatic union as such, one refers to the divine Son in his purely given

---

[53] *ST* 3, q. 6, a. 6.   [54] *ST* 3, q. 4, a. 2, see also a. 3.
[55] I am not claiming that this is the literal sense of Luke's verse. I only suggest that Luke's Christology "from below" naturally expresses itself in this rising way in which three distinct stages are discerned.

divinity "humbling himself" in order to become incarnate in Christ's human nature. And for this concrete human nature to be assumable by the Son, it must be theandric. In other words, its substantial sanctification by the Holy Spirit is logically prior to its assumption by the Son, its last "disposition" to assumption. Only when one speaks thus does one refer to the purely given divinity in its utter transcendence. And only in this way does one acknowledge the necessary point that in the last analysis the assumption of the human nature must be the work of the Son rather than the Holy Spirit, even if the latter does play an essential role. Hence I am justified in retaining my three terms, creation, sanctification, and union, in that order, for the sanctification by the Holy Spirit is not the same as the hypostatic union with the Son.

In my perspective, therefore, the three outcomes of the single action of the Father in the Holy Spirit are distinct from each other in the following way: the creation is really distinct from the sanctification, but the sanctification is only virtually distinct from the union understood terminatively, as the outcome of sanctification. However, in the transcendental sense, "hypostatic union," union is really distinct from sanctification, for two reasons: because the two forms of Sonship are virtually distinct in themselves, and because the two operations, sanctification and union (in this sense), are performed by different divine persons, the Holy Spirit and the Son respectively. From this it can be seen why in the end I insist on the complementarity of Christology "from above" and Christology "from below." Each contributes an element lacking in the other; only in the light of each other is a balanced Christology attained. To introduce hypostatic union after creation, sanctification, and nontranscendental union is to change the perspective from "below" to "above" in the interests of just such a balance. But while the Gospel of John may be the Everest of Gospels, the Synoptic Gospels are not thereby rendered superfluous. This study has shown that it is not possible to erect a fully satisfactory Christology on the basis of a single Gospel (John), even if the history of Christology to date has been characterized by precisely such attempts.[56]

---

[56] See Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology,* trans. Hubert Hoskins (New York: Seabury, 1979) 436, 570. I agree with Schillebeeckx that the appropriate alternative to the Johannine model is the Synoptic—as distinct from the Pauline—model. There are basically two reasons for saying this. First, it is still a matter of debate as to whether Paul holds an actual preexistence for Christ, and therefore whether his Christology rightly belongs on the Johannine, or on the Synoptic, side of the divide. Second, unlike the Synoptics, Paul is not concerned with the earthly history of Jesus and therefore with the activity of the Holy Spirit on and in his humanity (though he *is* concerned with the activity of Christ's humanity on and in the Holy Spirit—hence his theology of "the Spirit of Christ").

If there were no habitual grace in Jesus, then obviously habitual grace could not be a disposition to hypostatic union or represent a "critical threshold" on the way to it, as I was fond of saying. But the Teilhardian concept of critical thresholds is one that I still want to retain, and to develop in a later study. Allow me to sketch in a few swift strokes, and without references, what I would want to say in such a study.

In addition to the "tangential" energy which is what one normally indicates by the word "energy," Teilhard de Chardin spoke of an inner "radial" energy that propelled matter along the path of evolution across various critical thresholds toward an inevitable culmination in spirit, that is, hominization. In his faith-filled vision, he identified this form of energy, which he called "Spirit," with the power of God, and the term of the process, its "Omega Point," with the person of Jesus Christ. Combining this view with the theological anthropology and the Christology of Karl Rahner, and going beyond both theologians with the insights of contemporary Spirit Christology, I would like to develop a position that identifies the Teilhardian "Spirit" with the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, but precisely as "Spirit of Christ," as is suggested by 1 Peter 1:10–11. This remarkable text reads: "Concerning this salvation, prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and investigated it, investigating the times and circumstances that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when testifying in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the glories to follow them." This is the only place in the New Testament where the Holy Spirit at work in the world *before* the time of Christ is called "Spirit of Christ." And he is so called because, in Rahnerian terms, he acts as an entelechy, a guiding principle, working in salvation history, leading it through the People of Israel to its fulfillment in Christ. This he ultimately accomplishes by being bestowed in all fullness as Spirit of Sonship by the Father in his act of the creation of Christ's humanity, and thereafter by being the Spirit existing and acting in the depths of Christ's person as he lives out his mission. This is the Spirit who in the first place creates the world, and then draws it toward its fulfillment in Christ.

Lest I be suspected here of confusing nature and grace, let me hasten to say that though the one Spirit is operative throughout the process of evolution, as long as one remains in the realm of matter the effects of his operation flow from the efficient causality inherent in God's formal or personal causality as its "deficient mode," to quote Rahner, and therefore in themselves do not exceed the level of nature. But once hominization is attained, the causality becomes truly formal, that is, the self-communication of God, in grace. However, while grace in us and hypostatic union in the case of Christ are further steps in the process of evolution, they are not blind, inevitable steps. They depend on God's providential will, and call

for special distinct but related interventions from him at the level of grace. And they depend likewise on free, graced human consent, of ourselves in the bestowal of habitual grace, and of Mary in regard to the Incarnation.

The affirmation of these distinct but related self-communications of God opens up fresh insights into Mariology, in which Mary, grasped initially as the culmination of the preparatory phase of salvation history, is both its high point and the point of departure in the transition from the most perfect instance of God's self-communication to ordinary human beings in grace (Hail, Mary, full of grace ...) to his unsurpassable self-communication in the hypostatic union. At the same time as representative of both Israel and the Church she is, in body and spirit, the critical threshold between them. Mary as critical threshold to Christ, Mary as critical threshold to the Church, these are the applications of the concept of critical threshold that I now wish to retain and deploy.

CONCLUSION

Let me summarize the findings of this study. First, if Christ is to be understood as a unified subject at once divine and human, as the Gospels present him, we need to adopt as a hermeneutical model for interpreting the Chalcedonian dogma the enhypostasia originally attributed to Leontius of Byzantium but now credited to his namesake of Jerusalem, and complement it with the communication of idioms taught by the Council of Ephesus and now understood dynamically. Second, this scheme will require not only the subsistence of Christ's human nature in the divine Word but the subsistence of the divine Word in the human nature. This latter subsistence becomes the basis of all further divine communication to the sacred humanity. And it sums up in a thoroughly unified way the total mystery of Christ. But this subsistence will only be possible if the human nature, abstractly conceived, is capable, under the grace of union, of attaining the Word not only through its operations but through its being. This will mean that in the concrete it is theandric. This conclusion needs to be spelled out, though it is implicit in the Christology of Rahner. It explains on the one hand the human limitations of Christ as evidenced in the Gospels, and on the other his unique personal status and exceptional gifts of grace.

This picture of Christ is enriched by the addition of the dimension of Spirit Christology. In the first place Spirit Christology allows one to recast this picture in a trinitarian context. When this is done, it assumes a highly evangelical cast: instead of relating the human nature to the Word (and vice versa), it relates the man Jesus in the most profound ways, ontological, psychological, and spiritual, to the Father (and vice versa). Second, Spirit Christology enables us to see that the immediate agent of the hypostatic union is the Holy Spirit sent for that purpose by the Father, though the

ultimate agent remains the Son. The human nature of Christ only ever existed as hypostatically united to the Son by the Holy Spirit through a radical act of substantial sanctification, which dispenses with any need, or even possibility, of sanctifying grace in him. This single act of the Holy Spirit contains three elements, creation, sanctification, and union. Between these elements distinctions exist: between the first and the second a real distinction; between the second and the third a virtual distinction. However, in the ultimate, transcendental sense of union, what is normally meant by the expression "hypostatic union," there is a real distinction between union and sanctification. Apart from all these distinctions, however, there exists, within the unity of the divine act, an important distinction of order. Against the Thomistic order of creation, union, sanctification, this study has argued for an order of creation, sanctification, union, on the grounds that only this acknowledges to the Holy Spirit the vital role in the Incarnation with which the Synoptic Gospels credit him. Christology and pneumatology can no longer be regarded as independent studies; they are interdependent.