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TMST 8085: Christology of Aquinas  
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**All of Christ's Actions are for our *Salvation*:  
Christ's Humanity as Instrument (ὄργανον, *organon*) of His Divinity**

1. *Introduction*

In contemporary theological discussions on Jesus Christ much is made of the difference between the Christologies arising from the Johannine and the Synoptic Gospels. Thomas Aquinas, for his part, had no qualms in positing one Christ of the Gospels, fully divine and fully human.<sup>1</sup> For, he began his theology on a twofold foundation: upon the canonical Scriptures unified by the *analogia fidei* and on the ecclesial faith in Christ as testified to in the Ecumenical Councils of the Church. Thus, the point of theology for Aquinas is to take the Christian faith wholeheartedly and ask the question *why are these beliefs most fitting?* Given that God has revealed himself and acted in history and that God who is all good does all things in the most suitable way possible, one must approach the reality of divine action with human wonder and seek to understand as far as possible with the assistance of grace the intelligibility of God's inner nature and his divine plan. The whole *Summa Theologiae* unfolds in this manner, and the *Tertia Pars* beginning with his Christology is no exception.

Deeply informed by the biblical witness and his ecclesial faith, Aquinas held that Christ's humanity is an instrument of divine agency.<sup>2</sup> Because Christ's human will is always aligned with his divine will, every human action of Christ gains divine efficacy by virtue of the fact that his

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<sup>1</sup> See Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae: A Guide & Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) 293: "Aquinas reads the New Testament as inspired by God and, therefore, as containing divine revelation. And not only that, for he also reads the New Testament Gospels as being historically accurate and as giving us a true account of what Jesus did and said."

<sup>2</sup> See Joseph P. Wawrykow, "Instrumental Causality," In *The Westminster Handbook to Thomas Aquinas*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005) 75.

humanity never ceases to be the instrument of his divinity. Aquinas' understanding of the humanity of Christ as instrument of the divinity beautifully illumines the unity of the whole edifice of the faith. This doctrine forms a nexus enlightening the connections between the Trinity, creation, the Incarnation, soteriology, ecclesiology, the sacraments, and eschatology. In particular this doctrine preserves the divine transcendence, human exemplarity and sacramentality, and soteriological significance of Christ and his actions. Aquinas follows Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria in their use of the Greek word ὄργανον (i.e., *organon*, Ln., *instrumentum*) to highlight Christ's humanity as a conjoined, living, and intelligent instrument. Additionally, the pneumatology of Aquinas is operative throughout the Christological treatise of *Tertia Pars*. Turning now to the divine transcendence, the ever-present question of theology is, *Why did God deem this way most fitting?*

## 2. *The Divine Transcendence in the Incarnation*

One would not ask the question of the fittingness (*conveniens*)<sup>3</sup> of the Incarnation were it not for these basic assumptions, taken in faith: *a*) God is perfectly free, wise, and omnipotent in his actions; *b*) all of his actions are supremely good in an incomprehensible way;<sup>4</sup> and *c*) from revelation and by grace, human persons can begin to understand the intelligible goodness of these actions.<sup>5</sup> While theologians are unable to comprehend fully the sacred mysteries, they should seek to understand the underlying unity of the truths of faith and make their interconnections explicit.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Jean-Pierre Torrell, OP, *Aquinas's Summa: Background, Structure, & Reception*, trans. Benedict M. Guevin, OSB (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2005) 51: "This term deserves a closer look, for it expresses both a spiritual attitude and a theological method. Master Thomas holds with the Bible the certainty that the work of God in the world is pregnant with meaning accessible to human reason."

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 52: "When it comes to a primary truth, for example, the incarnation of the Word, reason cannot arrive at a comparable [deductive] certainty, but only at a rightness or, if one prefers, at an 'appropriateness.'"

<sup>5</sup> See Ibid., 51: The order and wisdom with which God creates and governs his creation means "it must be possible for the theologian to discover and understand something of the way in which things work in God's plan."

<sup>6</sup> See Ibid., 51-52: "Contrary to a deductive method that is sometimes attributed to him but which is not his, Thomas does not want to prove the truths of the faith, nor to demonstrate other truths from those that he holds in faith. He simply wants to bring to the fore the connections that bind together the truths that we do

For every truth about God in his immanence, his economic actions, and those things that he has revealed, manifest his perfect goodness. It is altogether right then that one of Aquinas' most repeated arguments in the *Tertia Pars* is that of fittingness (*conveniens*). In fact he uses it so often that one could give the *Tertia Pars* a subtitle: *Convenientissima*, the most fitting actions of God in the Life, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ. For no greater good could be given to humankind with no greater generosity than God himself becoming human that humans might become God, i.e. to partake of his divine life.

By way of introduction to the divine transcendence, God in himself is perfectly happy and contains knowledge of all possible worlds in his eternal wisdom. It is revealing of the inner nature of God that out of his generous love he freely chose to create. The Three Persons of the Trinity are forever blessed in themselves in an eternal exchange of love. The Trinity did have to create anything. But the good is diffusive of itself. The good seeks to communicate itself to others that more may partake in this goodness. So God who is Goodness itself in an eternal action freely chose to create the world that all creatures including humankind might partake of his goodness.<sup>7</sup> Contained within the timeless will of God<sup>8</sup> was the entirety of salvation history. And it was in his loving wisdom that he chose to create, even knowing of the occurrence of that *felix culpa*, that happy fault, the fall of Adam and Eve.

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hold and to show how all of this is explained as coming from God.” See also Davies, *STh Commentary*, 312: “Aquinas’s talk about suitability or appropriateness when it comes to God saving people should be read (a) in light of his conviction that God actually *has* saved people by certain means (a conviction grounded in his reading of the Bible), and (b) in light of the fact that he thinks that something can be said at the level of philosophical reasoning to the effect that the means in question were good when considered from a human point of view.”

<sup>7</sup> See Torrell, *STh: Background, Structure, & Reception*, 53: “It is in the nature of the good to communicate itself, but this by no means implies that God is constrained to diffuse his goodness. His freedom remains intact. It is precisely God’s freedom that ‘appropriateness’ respects, thus expressing a spiritual attitude of respect for the mystery.”

<sup>8</sup> See Davies, *STh Commentary*, 307: “Aquinas does not take the Incarnation and what he believes to be its effects as an *afterthought* on God’s part. He takes it to express God’s timeless will for Christ and those united to God in Christ.”

Knowing of the fall in his eternal present, his eternal now, God so wondrously arranged salvation history that his Son—God the Son<sup>9</sup>—would become human in order to save the human race. That is, the very purpose of the Incarnation is soteriological.<sup>10</sup> God in the fittingness of divine action, viewed from the eternal today outside time, saw the whole plan of Christ’s Incarnation, Life, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension and willed each act carefully and deliberately.<sup>11</sup> His action is filled with goodness and wisdom and it is with faith in this beneficent wisdom that Aquinas asks the question of fittingness, suitability, rightness of divine action. Aquinas knows that who and what Christ is and every action he has committed from the moment of his conception to the moment of his Ascension is suffused with meaning, namely, the meaning of the divine Logos himself. In accordance with his duty as a theologian Aquinas must reverently seek out this meaning in order to better understand and profess it.<sup>12</sup>

The entirety of who Christ is and what he did is irreducibly soteriological because this was the whole purpose for his coming.<sup>13</sup> His divine actions, inseparably one with Trinity—creating the universe, inspiring the prophets, gradually preparing for the time of the Incarnation, effecting miracles through the public ministry, providing salvific efficacy to his own human actions

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<sup>9</sup> See Ibid., 292: “Aquinas’s approach to the Incarnation rests on his faith that Jesus is divine, not on any inference to be drawn on the basis of empirical investigation. It also rests on what he takes the teaching of Jesus to be as recorded in the New Testament, for he believes this to include a claim to divinity.”

<sup>10</sup> See Torrell, *STh: Background, Structure & Reception*, 50: “the study of Christ is *necessary* to achieve the goal of his theological enterprise.” Namely, the return of the rational creature to God.

<sup>11</sup> See Davies, *STh Commentary*, 297: “Aquinas thinks we are saved by the Incarnation, but he does not think that we could not have been saved without it...On the other hand, Aquinas regards the Incarnation as bringing about our salvation in an especially good way since, among other things, it involves God directly speaking to us as a human being, since it brings us to hope and to charity because of our recognizing (if we do) that God is one who shares our human nature, since it provides us with a perfect and intelligible example of right living, and since it reminds us of the dignity of human nature.”

<sup>12</sup> See Torrell, *STh: Background, Structure & Reception*, 53: “the theologian, to be true to himself, cannot refuse the challenge of trying to understand the mystery. He thus tries to give as many reasons as he can, in spite of their weaknesses, to grasp all that he can of the incomprehensible love that moved God to this extreme.”

<sup>13</sup> See Davies, *STh Commentary*, 311: “Aquinas’s Christology is irreducibly soteriological—focused on the theme of salvation.”

including the Passion, effecting the Resurrection and the Ascension—these divine actions are just as soteriologically important as his human actions—even from the womb, in childhood, staying back from his parents in Jerusalem, staying hidden in Nazareth, being baptized in the Jordan, calling his apostles, his entire public ministry, to his free and deliberate death on the cross, and beyond. The hypostatic union ensures the soteriological efficacy of Christ’s human actions.<sup>14</sup> His human actions have divine power while he as divine Person has a human nature through which he can redeem the whole human race.<sup>15</sup>

Over time the Church has come to a deeper and more explicit faith in the hypostatic union and what it means for Christ’s salvation of the world. This is especially seen through the first six Ecumenical Councils from Athanasius arguing against Arius leading up to Nicaea through to Cyril of Alexandria debating Nestorius about the single Personhood of Christ during Ephesus and even to Constantinople III where the cooperation of the distinct divine and human wills of Christ was clarified. In particular this paper focuses on the influence on Aquinas by two figures—Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria—and their impact on Nicaea and Ephesus due to their development of the theology of *organon*, the instrument, of Christ’s humanity.

In *The Deposition of Arius* Athanasius spoke against an erroneous usage of *organon* employed by Arius. While this argument concerned the divinity of the Son, it provides the context of Athanasius’ developing understanding of the word *organon* which will later influence *On the*

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<sup>14</sup> See Joseph Wawrykow, “The Christology of Thomas Aquinas in its Scholastics Context,” In *The Oxford Handbook of Christology*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., editors F. Murphy & T.A. Stefano (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) 235: “Of itself, no human acting could be causal of spiritual effect. But, as the personal, conjoined, and animate instrument, by the Word’s assumed humanity the incarnate Word can cause grace and bring about salvation, spiritual gifts that have their origin in God; the divine Word does this...through the instrumentality of the operations of knowing and love of the Word as human.”

<sup>15</sup> See Dominic Legge, OP, *The Trinitarian Christology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 67: “by joining a human nature to himself in the incarnation, the divine Word offers us a participation in the Wisdom that is both our path of return to God and our ultimate perfection.”

*Incarnation*. Current scholarship on the dating of *On the Incarnation* places it after *The Deposition*.<sup>16</sup> The word *organon* has a basic ambiguity about it because of the many ways in which an instrument can function. Various kinds of instruments used by humans include a bow and arrow, knife, arm, one's body weight, charisma, mind, soul, and self. Moreover, one can instrumentalize another person including a friend, enemy, servant, superior, or even a village, city, state, or country. There seems to be a spectrum across which drastically different meanings of instrument can be used including instruments which are locally remote or proximate, materially conjoined, the sum of the material, spiritual qualities, spiritual faculties, the essence of the spirit itself, and the whole of the individual.

Arius made use of this ambiguity in the interpretation of the creation narrative. Arius argued that the Father using the Son in the creation of the world denoted a subordinated status of divinity for the Son. He argued that the Father made use of the Son as a separate spiritual instrument in creation and, if the Father had not created, the Son would not have existed, clearly subordinating the Son's status and separating him from the substance of the Father.<sup>17</sup> Elsewhere Athanasius responds to this Arian argument that, if the Father must use a separated instrument in order to create, this demeans the Father's divine power which should be able to create without an

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<sup>16</sup> See John R. Tyson, *The Great Athanasius: An Introduction to His Life and Work* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 9-10 and 30. *The Deposition of Arius* was most likely written in 322. While Archibald Robertson (editor of Athanasius' works in the 1892 *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*) placed *On the Incarnation* at 318 because it does not address Arianism, more recently Timothy Barnes has dated it between 325 and 335, Hanson in 335 or 336, and John Beher ca. 328. One major reason for this is the similarity in phraseology to Athanasius' *Festal Letter of 337* which Khaled Anatolios highlights.

<sup>17</sup> See Athanasius of Alexandria, "Deposition of Arius," In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, Vol. 4, trans. Archibald Robertson, ed. P. Schaff & H. Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1892). [Hereafter *NPNF*.] Online version revised & edited by Kevin Knight. Accessed 30 November 2017. <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2803.htm>>. §2: Among the errors of Arius, he said that "the Son knows not His own essence as it really is; for He is made for us, that God might create us by Him, as by an instrument; and He would not have existed, had not God wished to create us."

exterior instrument.<sup>18</sup> The implication here is that the Father created through the Son in the sense that they created together by their shared divine power. Based on his response to the Arians, it seems that Athanasius would say, *if* the word *organon* is used, it must have some flexibility to signify something beyond a simple exterior material instrument. It was “by” the Son and “through” the Son that the world was made, but this Son was “instrument” of the Father only insofar as Wisdom can be appropriated to the Son. Therefore, it seems Athanasius would only accept “instrument” here if it had a referent (Son) fundamentally united with the agent (Father).

Athanasius’ most abundant use of the word *organon* is in his work *On the Incarnation* where it is used 15 times. At this point in the development of patristic Christology the primary concern was to maintain the divinity of Christ. One should not be surprised that Athanasius distances the qualities of the humanity of Christ from the Person of the Son,<sup>19</sup> for he certainly did not want to predicate human qualities of the divinity itself and the communication of idioms was not yet fully developed. On the other hand, he did not shy away from affirming that this human body belonged directly and personally to Christ as he speaks of the “Lord’s body”<sup>20</sup> or “his body [i.e., Christ’s].”<sup>21</sup> Moreover, one should not be surprised that Athanasius regularly uses the term

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<sup>18</sup> See Athanasius of Alexandria, “Discourse I Against the Arians,” trans. John Henry Newman and Archibald Robertson, In *NPNF*, Vol. 4, §7.26: “You rather prove the weakness of the Maker, if He had not power of Himself to make the universe, but provided for Himself an instrument from without, as carpenter might do or shipwright, unable to work anything without adze and saw! Can anything be more irreligious?”

<sup>19</sup> See Athanasius of Alexandria, “On the Incarnation,” In *NPNF*, Vol. 4, §43.6: “while He used the body as His instrument *He partook of no corporeal property*, but, on the contrary, Himself sanctified even the body.” Emphasis added.

<sup>20</sup> See *Ibid.*, §8.4.

<sup>21</sup> See *Ibid.*, §§8.4, 9.2, 22.5, 44.2.

“body” (*sōma*) to refer to the whole concrete humanity of Christ,<sup>22</sup> for the Apollinarian controversy had not yet necessitated a clarification on the *full* humanity, body and spiritual soul, of Christ.<sup>23</sup>

At this point one of Athanasius’ theological goals in writing on the topic was to show how it is fitting that the divine Son is present in a human body and that the human actions witnessed are indeed works of the divine Son. Most frequently, *organon* is used to affirm that the Son “dwells in”<sup>24</sup> the human body and is “manifested in”<sup>25</sup> it. Moreover, Athanasius is at pains to show that it is not unseemly for the Son to be “in” or “use” a part of creation so intimately.<sup>26</sup> Some of Athanasius’ strongest language in using *organon* is in §§43-44 of his work *On the Incarnation*. The divine Son “unites Himself with”<sup>27</sup> the instrument which is the human body in order that humans may “know His Father more quickly and directly by a body of like nature and by the divine works wrought through it.”<sup>28</sup> This is the fruition of his theological usage of *organon*. Effectively, having affirmed that the instrument is united to Christ, a way of knowing God, and that divine agency is achieved through it, Athanasius begins to lay the groundwork for later developments focused on Christ’s humanity including its soteriological role and the communication of idioms.

Athanasius showed that the miracles which Christ performed through his humanity revealed divine power and thus the instrumental relation between the divine Son and his

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<sup>22</sup> Every time he uses the word *organon* in his work *On the Incarnation*, he uses the word *sōma* nearby. See *Ibid.*, §§8.3-4, 9.2, 22.5, 41.7, 42.6-7, 43.4-6, 44.1-2, 45.1. For the Greek text see Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation: The Greek Text edited for the use of students*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., editor Archibald Robertson (London: David Nutt, 1893).

<sup>23</sup> See Charles E. Raven, *Apollinarianism: An Essay on the Christology of the Early Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004) 104: Apollinarius’ “beliefs did not incur a breath of suspicion until at least 374.”

<sup>24</sup> See *Ibid.*, §§8.3, 42.5.

<sup>25</sup> See *Ibid.*, §§8.3, 42.5, 42.6.

<sup>26</sup> See *Ibid.*, §§41.7, 42.3, 42.7.

<sup>27</sup> See *Ibid.*, §43.4

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, §43.5.



humanity.<sup>29</sup> An instrument can only transcend its own power by participating in the power of its user. Moreover, the bishop of Alexandria recognized the importance of a common nature between Christ and humankind for the purpose of sharing in the effects of the redemption.<sup>30</sup> It is the fact that Christ has a like nature to humanity that they could benefit from the power of his divinity. This is another reason why the incarnation is of utmost soteriological importance: Christ's "consubstantiality" with the human race. Christ's human actions have salvific effect because the power of the divinity can flow out through the common human nature such that the whole human race has the opportunity to receive grace through him.

This gives better context to one of the overarching themes of Athanasius' *On the Incarnation*, namely, the renewal of man who is the image of God in his humanity by the Son who is the perfect image of the Father in his divinity. It is the uniting of the instrument of his humanity to the divinity that allows redeeming graces to effect this renewal of humankind so that they could more perfectly conform to and reflect the fullness of divine goodness. This provides a fitting segue from focusing on the divine agency of Christ in its relation to his humanity to Christ's humanity and its exemplary and meditating role.

### 3. *The Human Exemplarity and Sacramentality of Christ*

Crucial to the entire notion of the soteriology of the Incarnation is the way in which Christ is related to Christians, his followers in the community of the Church.<sup>31</sup> Aquinas' atonement theory

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<sup>29</sup> See Davies, *STh Commentary*, 305: "Christ's human activity could instrumentally come under the control of divine activity so as to produce what only God can produce, and the natural processes of Christ's human body were subject to his reason and will in a way that they are not when it comes to the rest of us."

<sup>30</sup> See Athanasius, "On the Incarnation," 9.2: "And thus He, the incorruptible Son of God, being conjoined with all by a like nature, naturally clothed all with incorruption, by the promise of the resurrection. For the actual corruption in death has no longer holding-ground against men, by reason of the Word, which by His one body has come to dwell among them."

<sup>31</sup> See Davies, *STh Commentary*, 313: "the mere fact of the Incarnation amounts to God becoming a human being in order to express a solidarity with us that we might not have expected when thinking about God and ourselves from a purely philosophical perspective..."

takes into account the great weight of sin that was counting against the whole human race and the fact that because of the infinite offense against God, none of them were worthy to definitively satisfy for that offense. Following Augustine and Anselm, Aquinas understood Christ to make satisfaction because he who was perfectly innocent took on the punishment of sin so as to redeem those who were guilty. He who was God became human that humans might become God, i.e. participate in his divine life. Only a human could make satisfaction for humans but only God could make satisfaction for an infinite debt. And so God the Son took on human nature to fulfill both requirements. But the motivation for the satisfaction was not to avert the wrath of the Father (the penal substitution theory of Calvin) but in order to manifest the merciful love that Father, Son, and Spirit were extending to bring humankind back into communion with the Triune God. Christ poured out his very blood to express the effusiveness of divine love and effect the return of the rational creature to God, to that eternal exchange of love which is the divine communion.

Moreover, based on St. Paul's ecclesiology in Ephesians, Aquinas recognized that Christ himself is the Head but the Church is his very Body. The Church is in spiritual communion with him. What the Head does, the Body participates in. The graces which Christ himself was filled with are extended to the entire body. Faith in Christ as Head of the Church in the redemption expanded through the development of the concept of the *organon* of Christ's humanity.

Cyril of Alexandria further developed the notion of *organon* in his project to understand how Christ is one, organically building off of Athanasius and responding to Nestorius. First off it should be said that Cyril's notion of "one nature" in Christ should be read in light of Constantinople II as Aquinas reads him.<sup>32</sup> One reason why Cyril's pronouncement of "one nature" in Christ should

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<sup>32</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* [Hereafter *STh.*], 2nd & Revised Ed., trans. English Dominican Province (1920). Online Edition, ed. Kevin Knight (2016). <http://www.NewAdvent.org/Summa>. Accessed November 30, 2017. III q.2 a.1 ad 1.

be taken with a grain of salt is that Cyril may have read certain Christological works wrongly attributed to Athanasius which emphasized “one nature.” Not wanting to contradict such a holy and revered figure, who Cyril believed was doing theology in authentic continuity with the ecclesial tradition, he adopted the phrase “one nature” into his own Christology. Based on that confusion and his many statements on the full humanity of Christ as well as the full divinity of Christ,<sup>33</sup> Constantinople II rightly took his meaning to be that the divine nature of the Son united a concrete instantiation of humanity into his one person.

Perhaps it is best to first look at Cyril’s responses to Nestorius, as some of these were approved in the Council of Ephesus. Whereas Arius used “instrument” to demean the quality of Christ’s divinity, Nestorius used “instrument” to distance and even separate the humanity from the divinity. Again, resorting to the ambiguity of the term *organon*, he postulated that the concrete Jesus was a whole human person that was used as an instrument of God the Son. Cyril denied this bifurcation of Christ’s humanity and divinity into two persons, saying that the Son did not take a separate man into union with himself.<sup>34</sup> Cyril had to distinguish the singular kind of instrument which Christ’s humanity was for his divinity. Affirming the full humanity of Christ, Cyril argued that this humanity was subsumed into who the Son is. Cyril described the humanity of Jesus as “the living and intelligent temple” indicating a body informed by a rational soul, and he describes the incarnate Lord as “the One only Son, with the holy body united to Him.”<sup>35</sup> Here Cyril continues

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<sup>33</sup> See Cyril of Alexandria, “Against Nestorius,” In *Cyril of Alexandria*, ed. & trans. Norman Russell (New York: Routledge, 2000) 156 (§46): “Therefore confess that he is one, not dividing the natures, and at the same time you should know and hold that the principle of the flesh is one thing and that of the Godhead, which belongs appropriately to it alone, is another.” Here Cyril seems to use “division of natures” as Aquinas would say “division into two persons.” Then Cyril seems to use “principle” to mean what Aquinas would mean by “nature.”

<sup>34</sup> See Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Luke*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1859) Sermon 12: “the Only-begotten gave not His glory as to a man taken separately and apart by himself, and regarded as the woman's offspring...”

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, Sermon 12.

Athanasius' usage of "body" to refer to what was human in Christ yet Cyril clarifies that it is a signifier for a whole humanity including a rational soul. Moreover, Cyril indicates that the unity that the Son possessed before the Incarnation or what caused his unity then is the same cause of unity after the Incarnation. The "One only Son" before continues to be the "One only Son" after, only with an instantiation of humanity united to him.

Most notably, Cyril ascribes the full divine power to Christ in the flesh on the basis of a more developed communication of idioms.<sup>36</sup> Several times Cyril speaks of the human body or flesh of Christ being endowed with "godlike power" or "might."<sup>37</sup> He even says that the divine Son was "able easily, even by His own flesh, to accomplish all things."<sup>38</sup> Just as an instrument participates in the power of its user, Christ's humanity participated in the full power of his divinity. The image that Cyril uses is of a vessel filled with fire, which causes the vessel to share in the fire's heat. Cyril would even say that in a certain sense Christ's human will achieves a divine effect, the implication being that the human will is moving with the divine will. Faith in the hypostatic union was maturing because the tension between Christ's full humanity and yet his single personhood were being hammered out.

Drawing on Athanasius, Cyril, and the Councils<sup>39</sup> in which their writings were so influential, Aquinas picked up use of *organon* (*instrumentum*) in order to hand on more fully the

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<sup>36</sup> Cyril, "Against Nestorius," §46: "For we deny that the flesh of the Word became the Godhead, but we do say that it became divine in virtue of its being his own. For if the flesh of a man is called human, what is wrong with saying that that of the Word of God is divine?"

<sup>37</sup> See Cyril, *Commentary on Luke*, Sermon 12: The divine Son "endowed [his humanity] with the power of actively exerting His own godlike might."

<sup>38</sup> See Cyril, *Commentary on Luke*, Sermon 12.

<sup>39</sup> See Torrell, *STh Background, Structure & Reception*, 53: "Thomas shows himself to be quite well informed about the great patristic and conciliar tradition which developed the dogmatic teachings on Christ over the course of several centuries. He is the first in the West to know and to use the complete collection of the early councils. Between the writing of the *Sentences* and the *Tertia Pars*, his references to this tradition saw a six-fold increase." See also *Ibid.*, 75: "the fact that he got to know the complete collection of the first councils contribute decisively to forming his Christological and Trinitarian thought. For

ecclesial conciliar tradition. In addition to the fundamental inspiration of Scripture as the soul of theology, Aquinas took the Ecumenical Councils of the Church as definitive guides to the reality of faith. In the “*Sed Contra*” sections of the *Tertia Pars*, Aquinas often uses Councils as the voice of authority as he would use Scripture or a well-recognized Church theologian or bishop. It is certainly appropriate that in the *Tertia Pars*, Aquinas draws on the most important Christological councils including Nicaea I, Constantinople I, Ephesus, Chalcedon, in addition to Constantinople II and III.<sup>40</sup> Because of his reliance on the Councils and on theologians from both East and West, his approach to Christology is most reliable and representative of the united ecclesial Tradition.<sup>41</sup>

In keeping with this ecclesial faith, the instrument which God the Son assumed in the hypostatic union was not just any human nature but a full and true nature with every power and faculty of any other human person. In his human nature Christ had a human intellect, will, body, and soul. He made use of all the same powers but with the utmost perfection. Important in the discussion of Aquinas’ Christology is the distinction between Christ’s concrete human nature and the perfections and defects which he assumed. In contemporary discussion on Christology many assume that Christ had to share most, if not all, of fallen humanity’s defects in order to save human persons from those defects.<sup>42</sup> For example, some say that in “becoming sin” Christ actually chose sin in his human will, or they say that at the Incarnation or the Cross, Christ literally emptied

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example, the doctrine of the full humanity of Christ as an instrument (*organon*) of his divinity came directly from the Alexandrian fathers Athanasius and Cyril.”

<sup>40</sup> See Ibid., 53: “Well aware of the various controversies, he made full use not only of the teachings of the school of Antioch and of Saint Leo the Great, from whom the Council of Chalcedon (in 451) retained the most important elements, but also of those of Cyril of Alexandria at Ephesus (431) as reread by the Second Council of Constantinople.”

<sup>41</sup> See Ibid., 75: “Thomas is the faithful heir to the undivided Church...”

<sup>42</sup> See Ibid., 55: “Christ voluntarily assumed suffering and death but does not say that he was subject to them. Since Christ was totally free from sin, he was not subject to them in the same way that we are.”

himself of divinity and became totally and only human as he descended into hell.<sup>43</sup> These lowest Christologies fail to see the very point of the Incarnation and make a fundamental confusion concerning the salvific efficacy of Christ. Whereas Thomas beautifully integrates both Augustine and Anselm's atonement theory with the precision and distinction of his metaphysical system, some of these contemporary Christologies try to proceed without any metaphysics at all, effectively without a true and structured belief in the hypostatic union and its permanency.

The metaphysical status of the hypostatic union is of the utmost importance precisely because Christ in his humanity is *organon*, instrument. An instrument is used by a user. Insofar as *it* is used, it bears the properties of itself, but insofar as it is used *by a user* it can participate in the properties and efficacy of the user. The example that Aquinas brings up is a searing hot knife (bringing to mind Cyril's vessel of fire). By virtue of its own nature the knife bears the properties of sharpness but by virtue of the heat it has received it can burn. Christ as principal agent of the instrument in his divinity and Christ as the instrument itself in his humanity brings two distinct altogether requisite dimensions to the efficacy of the redemption. The divinity has the power to save and the humanity has the power to represent the human race. The goal should not be to "humanize" Christ, if by "humanize" one means degrade. The goal is to see the function of Christ's humanity as soteriological and revelatory.

Christ's humanity is the soteriological channel through which grace flows out to the rest of humanity. The whole human race depends on Christ first possessing a grace as Head in order that they might in turn possess it as Body. One might postulate that Christ as Head does not need

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<sup>43</sup> See Thomas Joseph White, OP, *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology* (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2015) 351: "if God saves us only at the cost of introducing into his own being the very grave ills that threaten us, then our union with God is of a questionable soteriological value, for our ills have now been introduced into the very life of God. There is ultimately, in a kenotic world, nothing that itself necessarily transcends the world of ills, insofar as these have now become a constitutive part of the being of God, or so it would seem."

certain graces until the Body needs them, e.g., the beatific vision. So the beatific vision was not fitting for Christ to have until Christ possessed a fully glorified human nature. But this implies that Christ did not actually see the Father in his human nature during his public ministry, when he was already manifesting the Father in his deeds and words. This sight of the Father would seem necessary to being a true mediator and redeemer. A better approach would be through asking what human defects were actually necessary for Christ to endure the Passion with a true humanity, just as Aquinas does in the *Tertia Pars*. Ultimately the perfections of Christ's humanity ought to be a most welcome doctrinal profession because of his soteriological role. Christ's human nature is the measure of the human nature of every created human person. The created human person, much less a sinner, is not the measure of Christ's human nature. Out of the fullness of Christ's communion with the Father all human persons have received grace upon grace (Jn 1:16).

For this reason the notion of capital grace plays a key role in Aquinas' Christology and illumines why Aquinas would use the word *organon*. Aquinas begins the *Tertia Pars* proclaiming that Christ is the way, the truth, and the life.<sup>44</sup> All disciples should draw near to the mysteries of Christ's life because every action he commits participates in this quality: that of his being the way, the truth, and the life. Every action of Christ affects humankind because it is the action of God the Son and the action of the Head of the Church which exists for all humankind.<sup>45</sup> Grace and merit flows to humankind through Christ's humanity.<sup>46</sup> His meritorious actions overflow out to the Body of the Church in order to fill it.

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<sup>44</sup> See Ibid., 50-51.

<sup>45</sup> See Davies, *STh Commentary*, 308: "Aquinas believes that the Incarnation was not just a brute fact but something with effects in the life of Christ and in the life of Christians."

<sup>46</sup> See Davies, *STh Commentary*, 301: "Aquinas holds that Christ is head of the Church (3a,8,1), and he speaks of Christ having grace as head of the Church not only to insist that Christ was graced in himself but also to stress that the grace had by members of the Church should be thought of as flowing from Christ as God incarnate. As head of the Church, says Aquinas, Christ holds the highest place in the body of Christ that is the Church, and Christ's humanity 'acts upon people, on their bodies as well as on their souls.'" See

Surprisingly to modern ears, Aquinas argues that Christ willed or chose if, when, where, and how to complete all of his human actions. Even the temptation of Jesus in the desert by the Devil was discretely chosen to be endured. The Devil himself would have had no freedom to tempt Jesus had not the divine will allowed it. With his divine will the Son chose (in unity with the Father and Spirit) when he should become incarnate. He also chose to allow many of the circumstances of his earthly incarnate life including the difficult or threatening circumstances. Christ's human will was perfectly in accord with his divine will similar to the way a saint may will in accord with God's will. Because rational instruments are moved with full deliberate freedom, Christ's human will freely cooperating with the divine will is the perfect example for the saints who also are called to this free cooperation. Christ's human will being docile, he willingly endured his trials and Passion<sup>47</sup> but he also willingly followed the divine plan for the entire extent of his earthly life. Every mystery of Christ's life, every person he spoke to, every work he undertook, every choice he made, every suffering, and every joy was planned and chosen by the divine will from eternity.

Knowing that every fully human (voluntary) action of Christ was deliberate in a twofold manner, i.e. from eternity and in time, the significance of each event takes on an infinite character. The deliberateness of the divine plan is another reason why Aquinas never tires of asking the question of *conveniens*: why was this action fitting for God to choose? Thus every mystery and action of Christ's life is a manifestation of the total mystery of who Christ is in manifesting the

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also 305: "Christ could merit for himself since by always acting in conformity to God's will he could lay claim to certain goods not yet had by him (goods such as being raised from the dead) even though he was always graced by God and always enjoyed the beatific vision. And Christ could merit for others since he is head of the Church and can help its members insofar as they are in solidarity with him." See also 315: "In particular, says Aquinas, human salvation is effected (if embraced by sinners) because Christ by his life and death merits grace for his followers. As head of the Church, Aquinas holds, Christ is at one with his followers, who therefore share in his grace as a human being."

<sup>47</sup> See Davies, *STh Commentary*, 319-320.



Trinity and saving the human race.<sup>48</sup> There is a meaning, often hidden, to every one of Christ's human actions. Again, Christ is the way, the truth, and the life *in his incarnate life*. Because his human actions are deliberate they also reflect the power, plan, and message of the divinity. Jesus shows humankind the path they must take. His human life is exemplary in the manner of a graced human. His life is the form on which every other Christian life ought to be patterned.<sup>49</sup> The exemplary value of Christ's human life extends just as far as the *Tertia Pars* extends:<sup>50</sup> through the *ingressus, processus, exitus*, and life in glory (that is, through his entrance in the Incarnation, his way of proceeding through life, and his departure and life in glory).<sup>51</sup> And overall in Christ's holiness, his docile human will is an example for all human persons because just as his humanity was a rational instrument insofar as Christ could make fully deliberate human actions, so too in order to become saints every Christian is called to seek to know God's will with their intellect and

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<sup>48</sup> See Torrell, *STh: Background, Structure & Reception*, 58: "If we speak of 'mysteries,' it is to make clear that each of the events that marked the life of the Word made flesh, from his birth to his resurrection, is conceived of as a manifestation and a realization in act of the total *mysterion* in the Pauline sense of that word."

<sup>49</sup> It is important to clarify here that Christ's human actions are not exemplary in and of themselves. It is by coming under the principal agency of the divinity that the human actions received a greater significance. Without the divine grace that accompanied encounters with the Godman in the flesh, the exemplary value of his actions would be lost, as on the Pharisees and scribes. See Richard Schenk, OP, "*Omnis Christi Actio Nostra Est Instructio: The Deeds and Sayings of Jesus as Revelation in the View of Thomas Aquinas*," In *La doctrine de la revelation divine de saint Thomas d'Aquin....* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990) 130: "in order to cause an acceptance of the non-evident truth of this claim [the divinity of Christ], the deeds and doctrine of Jesus had to be accompanied by divine power, that illumination by the Holy Spirit, of which Thomas spoke in the Commentary on John: *non nisi ex divina virtute* [nothing unless by divine power]."

<sup>50</sup> See Ibid., 57: "he is the first and the only to treat them [the life of Christ and his great saving work] within a structured unity conceived of as an integral part of his speculative Christology. While other authors refer to them occasionally, in order to stress the humanity of Christ for example, Thomas looks at them from the perspective of ontology and soteriology...as well."

<sup>51</sup> See Ibid., 58: "This part of the *Summa* is constructed according to three time periods mirroring the very unfolding of Jesus' life: his entrance into the world (*ingressus*), his life in the world (*processus*), his leaving the world (*exitus*). The fourth and final state begun by the Resurrection is his life in glory. This schema is that of the *Summa* as a whole; only the vocabulary changes slightly. The path followed by Jesus is in fact that of all creation and is, therefore, the path that we must take to be with him in paradise. Thus Thomas establishes the exemplary value of the mysteries of the life of Jesus, making this treatise one of the places where we can best grasp the connection between his theology and the spiritual life."

seek to live it with their free will. It does not diminish the freedom of the saint in the slightest to follow the will of God, but actually elevates it and perfects it in what redeemed human nature is meant to be.

#### 4. *Salvific Effect Upon the Mystical Body of Christ*

The saving effects of Christ's human actions upon the Mystical Body of Christ can be summed up in the work of sanctification wrought by the Holy Spirit. Christ in his humanity was moved by the Holy Spirit.<sup>52</sup> The Holy Spirit poured forth into Christ's humanity the Holy Spirit's gifts which bring about a divine impulse to do God's will and so to be holy. The action of the Holy Spirit here is completely inseparable from the action of the whole Trinity but it is meaningful to talk about the gifts at work in Christ's human soul for the sanctifying effect it has for all those who receive grace from Christ.<sup>53</sup> Christ's human soul and its powers were moved by a divine impulse of the Holy Spirit. This is a special aid that moves the powers of the human soul to act more organically according to the divine will. This is especially appropriate for rational creatures in general because the divine impulse guides human will but with full respect of its freedom. Thus the full rational cooperation of the human nature of Christ is the perfect example and sacrament for the Mystical Body of how to be moved by the Spirit.

The holiness which Christ brings about in humans is nothing else than the gift of the Holy Spirit himself. Every action of Christ in his humanity reveals the holiness of the Holy Spirit which Christ both receives and imparts to us. This is why the saints are said to live a life patterned after

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<sup>52</sup> See Legge, *Trinitarian Christology*, 14: "Christology for Aquinas is Trinitarian not only here or there, but in its deepest roots, in its most far-flung branches, and in its varied fruits."

<sup>53</sup> See *Ibid.*, 56: "This [the instrumentality of Christ's humanity] he gets directly from the Greek patristic tradition and it has a rich meaning for Christian life. It means that the grace that comes from the Holy Spirit as its first source is 'colored' in some sense by passing through Christ with all of the qualities that are his. This grace, having received his imprint, is then communicated to his body, the Church and becomes properly Christian, making of those who receive it prophets, priests, and kings."

Christ's. There is indeed the exemplary value of Christ's actions which instructs members of the Church in truth and moral commands but there is also the soteriological mediation that Christ effects in the manner he performs actions. Just like Christ, saints have that *human* need for the gifts of the Holy Spirit in order to have such a humbly submissive will to the divine will.

Thomas sees the seven traditional gifts of the Holy Spirit as enumerated in Isaiah 11:1-2 as disposing the human person to be moved by the Holy Spirit. Each of the seven gifts of Aquinas corresponds to a specific virtue (theological or cardinal) including knowledge and understanding (faith), fear of the Lord (hope), wisdom (charity), counsel (prudence), piety (justice), fortitude (eponymous), and once more fear of the Lord (temperance).<sup>54</sup> In other words, Christology, pneumatology, and moral theology are inextricably linked. The grace by which Christians persevere in virtue is won by Christ and poured out through the Holy Spirit. Christ is truly the author of holiness in that every virtue perfected by grace is conformed to his example and empowered by his gift of holiness which is the Holy Spirit.

Among the roles or offices which Christ assumes and fulfills are his submission to the Father, his fervent prayer, his sanctifying priesthood, his sonship of the Father, being chosen or predestined before the world to his role, and the mediation of grace he effects.<sup>55</sup> This is highly instructive and transformative for all Christians. Though Christ did not need to engage in long vigils of prayer to be in union with God the Father, he did so in order to instruct his followers how

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<sup>54</sup> See *STh* II-II q.8-9, 19, 45, 52, 121, 139. Concerning temperance, see *STh* I-II q.68 a.4 ad 1.

<sup>55</sup> See Torrell, *STh: Background, Structure & Reception*, 56: "This [the instrumentality of Christ's humanity] he gets directly from the Greek patristic tradition and it has a rich meaning for Christian life. It means that the grace that comes from the Holy Spirit as its first source is 'colored' in some sense by passing through Christ with all of the qualities that are his. This grace, having received his imprint, is then communicated to his body, the Church and becomes properly Christian, making of those who receive it prophets, priests, and kings."

to pray and form them in his way of prayer.<sup>56</sup> He shows what the universal priesthood looks like through persevering petition and offering sacrifices of praise and the sacrifice of one's own life. Christ invites his disciples to enter into and partake of his eternal identity in the relation of Son. The Sonship of Christ is the foundation for the sonship and daughterhood before God the Father of every Christian. This divine filiation is the identifying form or mark of the baptized: divine adoption.

The humanity of Christ as instrument is pivotal to Christ's mediation. Mediation involves joining together and uniting two parties in a mean (that is through a mediator comes "in between" in order to unite).<sup>57</sup> While Christ's divinity supplies salvific efficacy and the source of beatitude, his humanity in which he is close to humankind acts as a channel through which grace flows. Christ alone is the perfect mediator between God and humankind because of his death which efficaciously brings about the reconciliation of humankind as a whole. However, this does not prevent other individuals acting as subordinate or "dispositive" mediators by cooperating with Christ's mediating action and preparing and leading others to him.<sup>58</sup> Specifically, Aquinas speaks of the prophets and priests of the Old Law who foretold and foreshadowed Christ and the priests of the New Law who minister the sacraments. Here one could add that all Christians are called to participate in Christ's mediation to others.

Christ founded the Church because he wanted the deposit of faith and the sacraments to be handed on in a graced human society or community that participates in his divine life. Individual Christians participate in the mediation of Christ by joining the dispositive and ministerial

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<sup>56</sup> See Davies, *STh Commentary*, 306: "Christ wished to pray not because he lacked any power but 'for our instruction.'"

<sup>57</sup> See *STh* III q.26 Corpus.

<sup>58</sup> See Davies, *STh Commentary*, 307: "people other than Christ share in his status as mediator insofar as they help to get others to turn to God and insofar as they minister to those who aim for union with God."  
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mediation of the Church, mediating exteriorly by instruction or exhortation or in a hidden manner through prayer and redemptive suffering. Co-mediators with Christ are necessarily subordinate to his true and perfect mediation because they act as vessels or channels of his grace and have no other source of grace from him.

Overall, the salvific effects of Christ's human action upon the Mystical Body of Christ are striking. He is the perfect example and mediator of Christian living because in his true human nature he showed all humankind his submission to God, the depths of prayer, the reality of divine filiation, and mediation of grace. He thus enabled humankind with the grace of the Holy Spirit to live in accordance with the model of his life. The image of Christian living that emerges is one of being grafted into Christ through the sacraments of the Church.<sup>59</sup> One sees Christian saints participating in the divine life of God through faith, hope, and charity. Humble men and women of holy heart are seen living uprightly in accordance with prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. And the Church of God is continually being moved by the Holy Spirit in his sevenfold gifts of knowledge and understanding, fear of the Lord, wisdom, counsel, piety, and fortitude. The sanctification of each Christian individual not only benefits them but also all to whom they minister with the charity of Christ. As co-mediators with Christ they dispose others to the full power of his redemption.

##### 5. *Conclusion*

In conclusion, Aquinas' teaching on the humanity of Christ as the instrument of his divinity greatly illumines the unity of the whole structure of the Church's faith. The human nature of Christ

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<sup>59</sup> See Thomas G. Weinandy, OFM, *Jesus: Essays in Christology* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2014) 204: "The Mystical Body, through the shared life of the Holy Spirit, is one living reality. It is composed of the risen Christ as its Head and the members of his Body, the Church...[The] mystical instrumental causality [within the Body] finds its fullest expression within the sacraments (the Eucharist being its definitive expression), for they are his own personal instrumental efficient causes in which he himself acts as Head to sanctify his Body."

is personally united with his divinity so that all humankind can participate in his relationship of Sonship with the Father. Christ's human nature is deeply moved by the gifts of the Spirit so that his Body may be animated and led by the Spirit. His humanity shares in the mediation of grace so that his followers may effectively evangelize and offer sacrifices of prayer for the salvation of the world. Christ with and through his human nature confectioned the Eucharist that every priest could participate in his sacramental power. In all of these moments Christ's humanity is the instrument of his divinity for the benefit of his Body, the Church. The Incarnation has so greatly ennobled human nature that it is at the heart of the redemption of the world. The Church which is the Mystical Body of Christ should rejoice greatly at the many graces and honors bestowed upon Christ including habitual grace, the gifts of the Spirit, and the grace of the Head by which he mediates plentiful graces to the Body.

Moreover, every human action of Christ throughout his life was both instructive for human virtue and mediating of saving grace. This should encourage a revival of the study of the Gospels, of fervent preaching, of life-giving *lectio divina*, and of the holy Rosary all focused on the mysteries of Christ's life. Thus, Christians should return to the sacraments where they encounter in human signs and divine power Christ the Godman who is the fount of all grace.

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