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THEOLOGICAL TURN

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Christ's *Esse* and Filiation

*Interpreting St. Thomas on the Metaphysical
Status of Christ's Human Nature*



I. The Filiation of Christ: An Introductory Test Case

As a preface to the body of this essay, which focuses on the debate among Thomists over Christ's *esse*, brief consideration will be given to Aquinas's treatment of Christ's adoption.

In the narrative of the *tertia pars* of the *Summa theologiae*, St. Thomas situates the questions treating Christ's *esse* (17) and adoption (23) within the larger section (questions 16–26) devoted to “those things which follow upon the union.”¹ As effects or consequences of the hypostatic union, the topics of Christ's *esse* and adoption shed reciprocal light on each other; indeed, it is difficult to imagine maintaining consistency in Christological doctrine without taking a similar position on both issues. In the four articles of Question 23 on Christ's adoption, Aquinas proceeds in a fashion that is unique in this section of the *Summa*. The first three articles do not, in fact, pertain to Christ directly, but ask whether or not it is fitting for God to adopt sons, whether this adoption is done by the whole Trinity, and whether adoption of the rational creature is especially appropriate.

1. *Summa theologiae* (ST) III, q. 16, *praefacio*: “de his quae consequuntur unionem.” All English citations from the *Summa theologiae*, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the translation of the Fathers of the English Dominican Province originally published in 1911 and reprinted in five volumes as *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Allen, Texas: Christian Classics, 1981). All Latin texts, unless otherwise noted, are taken from E. Alarcón's posting of the *corpus thomisticum* at www.corpusthomisticum.org.

After this richly Pauline mini-treatise on adoption by grace, Thomas then asks in the fourth article the specifically Christological question: namely, “Whether Christ, *secundum quod homo*, is an adopted son of God”—the *secundum quod homo* being an important qualifier relative to the question of Christ’s *esse*. In light of the fact that Aquinas has already affirmed, earlier in the *tertia pars*,² that Christ, as man, enjoyed grace to a superabundant degree, the answer would seem logically to be yes—Christ, as man, having received grace in his human nature, is an adopted son of God. Thomas’ answer, however, runs to the contrary: “Sonship,” he reasons, “belongs properly to the hypostasis or person, not to the nature. . . . Now in Christ there is no other than the uncreated person or hypostasis, to Whom it belongs by nature to be the Son.”³ Because adoptive sonship in grace is participatory of natural sonship or likeness, Aquinas concludes that “Christ, Who is the natural Son of God, can in nowise be called an adopted son.”⁴

In the fourth book of *Summa contra gentiles*, Aquinas articulates his position against those who deny the eternal and natural sonship of Christ even more sharply and with appeal to the order of being: “It goes without saying,” Aquinas declares, “that the son generated by God did not take up a beginning of being from Mary.”⁵

The distinction between person or hypostasis and nature thus plays out even in Aquinas’s understanding of Christ’s singular mode of filiation as the Eternal Son of God. What makes Aquinas’s discussion of Christ’s adoption a “test case” for the *esse* question is, precisely, that if Christ’s human nature did indeed contribute a human *esse* to Christ, the human *esse* of the human nature would, it seems, by virtue of Christ’s superabundant grace, be adopted. Aquinas, however, manifestly denies that such an adoption took place. Given Aquinas’s position following the Christology of Chalcedon that in Christ there is but a single person and subsistence,⁶ the grace

2. See, for example, q. 7, where Aquinas affirms that Christ had habitual grace (a. 1), infused virtue (a. 2), gifts of the Holy Spirit (a. 5), and gratuitous grace (a. 7).

3. ST III, q. 23, a. 4.

4. Ibid.

5. *Summa contra Gentiles* (SCG) IV, chap. 4, no. 11: “Unde relinquitur quod filius a Deo genitus initium essendi a Maria non sumpsit.”

6. The discussion of Christ’s *esse* by Medieval thinkers is a continuation of the Patristic developments regarding Christ’s subsistence. The Councils of Chalcedon (451) and Constantinople II (553), in addition to teaching that Christ’s two natures are united in one person also teach that there is a single subsistence. By *esse* Medieval authors wish to consider whether each of Christ’s natures contributes existence to the reality of Christ or if the *esse* of the Word pro-

received by Christ's human nature was not adoptive, but merely perfective of that nature. Hence, the adoption question provides a kind of test case for thinking through the *esse* question with consistency.

The remaining sections of this essay examine the acuity of the interpretation of Aquinas on Christ's *esse* by Herman Diepen and Jacques Maritain. Special emphasis will be devoted to the diverse interpretations of the disputed question, *De unione verbi incarnati*, by Maritain and Diepen, on the one hand, and the advocates of the so-called "ecstasy of being theory," on the other.

II. Aquinas's Single-*Esse* Position

St. Thomas consistently articulated a single-*esse*⁷ understanding of the reality of the union of the two natures in the one Person of the Word. In the *Compendium of Theology*, St. Thomas offers a concise explanation of his position: "Since there are in Christ one person and two natures we have to examine the relationship between them to determine what is to be spoken of as one, and what is to be spoken of as multiple in Him."⁸ Christ is, then,

vides and acutates the existence of the human nature. David Tamisiea explains that the sense of *esse* that Aquinas uses in the context of his Christology "means that which causes a thing to exist in reality, and is only attributed to real things contained within the categories of being identified by Aristotle." See David Tamisiea, "St. Thomas on the One *Esse* of Christ," *Angelicum* 88, no. 2 (2011): 383–402, 385.

The decree of the Council of Chalcedon (451) reads as follows: "One and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation; at no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union, but rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person (*prosopon/personam*) and a single subsistent being (*hypostasin/subsistentiam*); he is not parted or divided into two persons, but is one and the same only-begotten Son, God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ, just as the prophets taught from the beginning about him, and as the Lord Jesus Christ himself instructed us, and as the Creed of the fathers handed it down to us." *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1, *Nicaea I–Lateran V*, edited by Norman P. Tanner, S.J. (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 86–87. Emphasis added.

7. See *Quodlibet* 9, a. 3; ST III, q. 17, a. 2; *Scriptum in Sententias* III, d. 6, q. 2, a. 2; *Compendium theologiae*, chap. 212. See also Stephen Brown, "Thomas Aquinas and his Contemporaries on the Unique Existence in Christ," in *Christ Among the Medieval Dominicans: Representations of Christ in the Texts and Images of the Order of Preachers*, edited by Kent Emery and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 220–37.

8. Thomas Aquinas, *Aquinas's Shorter Summa: Saint Thomas's Own Concise Version of His Summa Theologica* (Manchester, Vermont: Sophia Institute Press, 2002), p. 249, n. 212. "Quia igitur in Christo est una persona et duae naturae, ex horum convenientia considerandum est, quid in Christo unum dici debeat, et quid multa."

considered two or multiple “in accord with the diversity” of his natures. While, Thomas continues, “whatever belongs to the *suppositum* or *hypostasis* must be declared to be one in Christ.” This unity includes Christ’s existence: “if existence is taken in the sense that one *suppositum* has one existence, we are forced, it appears, to assert that there is but one existence in Christ. . . . [I]f we look upon Christ as an integral *suppositum* having two natures, His existence will be but one, just as the *suppositum*, too, is one.”⁹

In ST III, q. 17, a. 2, Aquinas again advocates a single-*esse* understanding of the Incarnate Word. “Since the human nature,” Aquinas explains,

is joined to the Son of God hypostatically or personally, as was said above [in question 2 on the union], and not accidentally, it follows that no new personal being came to the Son of God, but only a new relation of pre-existing personal being to the human nature [came to of the Son of God]: namely, such that the Person of the Son is now said to subsist not only according to the divine nature, but also according to the human [nature].¹⁰

There is, on this account, one personal being or *esse* in Christ, that of the eternal *suppositum* of the Word subsisting in two natures.

III. Cajetan, Maritain, and the Ecstasy-of-Being Theory

This articulation of Christ’s *esse* is usually associated with the likes of Cardinal Cajetan and, more recently, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange.¹¹ It is called the “ecstasy-of-being” theory because (according to Adrian Hastings’s summary of Cajetan’s position): “[Christ’s] human nature possesses

9. Ibid., pp. 249–50, n. 212. “Ea vero quae ad *suppositum* sive *hypostasim* pertinent, unum tantum in Christo confiteri oportet: unde si *esse* accipiatur secundum quod unum *esse* est unius *suppositi*, videtur dicendum quod in Christo sit tantum unum *esse*. Manifestum est enim quod partes *divisae* *singulae* proprium *esse* habent, secundum autem quod in toto considerantur, non habent suum *esse*, sed omnes sunt per *esse* totius. Si ergo consideremus ipsum Christum ut quoddam integrum *suppositum* duarum naturarum, eius erit unum tantum *esse*, sicut et unum *suppositum*.”

10. ST III, q. 17, a. 2: “Sic igitur, cum humana natura coniungatur filio Dei hypostatice vel personaliter, ut supra dictum est, et non accidentaliter, consequens est quod secundum humanam naturam non adveniat sibi novum *esse* personale, sed solum nova habitudo *esse* personalis praeexistentis ad naturam humanam, ut scilicet persona illa iam dicatur subsistere, non solum secundum naturam divinam, sed etiam humanam.”

11. For a discussion of Cajetan’s reading of *De unione* 4 see Klaus Obenauer’s monumental critical edition of the *De unione*, Thomas von Aquin, *Quaestio disputata “De unione Verbi incarnate”* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-holzboog, 2011), 409–412.

no 'esse proprium,' but instead it can be said to have—not only an ecstasy of knowledge and love through the beatific vision—but also a very 'ecstasy of being,' of existence itself; for an ecstasy is literally a being out of oneself."¹²

In his commentary on ST III, q. 17, a. 2, Cajetan defends the superiority of the single-*esse* position by means of the distinction between nature and person or "*quo est*" and "*quod est*." "Nature," Cajetan explains, "is the principle by which"¹³ of a thing's *esse* while person is to *esse* "as the subject, or that which has being, or that which is."¹⁴ The distinction between *quo est* and *quod est* leads Cajetan to "two important conclusions" about the *esse* of the Incarnate Word.¹⁵ "First, this lack of personality," in the words of Shawn Colberg, "implies that the human nature can bring no additional *esse* to the person of the Word. Second, the potential humanity of Christ (only in the order of logic) can have no *esse* of its own because it has no person of its own."¹⁶

Cajetan's position (in his commentary) is developed not only with an eye to Aquinas's text, but also with an awareness of the criticisms against Aquinas's single-*esse* doctrine made by Duns Scotus. A central component of Scotus' critique is that each nature in Christ must have an *esse*. Cajetan explains Scotus' position as follows: "In Christ living was two-fold as is obvious from the fact that he lost one of the living things through death. Therefore, in Christ there was a two-fold *esse*."¹⁷

Scotus' criticisms of Aquinas and his two-fold *esse* position provide an important context for understanding the impatience that the great com-

12. Adrian Hastings, "Christ's Act of Existence," *The Downside Review*, no. 232 (1955): 153. For a thorough evaluation of the ecstasy of being theory see Helen-Marie Deloffre, *Question disputée L'union du verbe incarné* (Paris: Vrin, 2000), 219–29.

13. Citations from Cajetan are taken from the text of his commentary included in the Leonine Edition of the *tertia pars* of the *Summa theologiae*, vol. 11 (*Comm. on Tertia Pars*) (Rome, 1903). "Natura est principium quo immediatum ipsius esse." (sec. 13, p. 226.). Most of these texts are identified in the helpful study of Shawn Colberg, "Accrued Eyes and Sixth Digits: Thomas Aquinas and Cardinal Cajetan on Christ's Single *Esse* and the Union of Natures," *Nova et Vetera* (English edition) 8, no. 1 (2010): 55–87.

14. Cajetan, *Comm. on Tertia Pars*: "Persona enim est cui primo convenit esse ut subiecto, seu quod habet esse, seu quod est." In *De Christo Salvatore* (Turin: Case Editrice Marietti, 1949), Garrigou-Lagrange explains his view as follows: "Haec thesis sancti Thomae est alta conceptio secundum quam humanitatis Christi habet non solum extasis cognitionis et amoris per visionem beatam, sed extasis ipsius esse, prout existit per ipsum esse aeternum Verbi." (314)

15. Shawn Colberg, "Accrued Eyes and Sixth Digits," 76.

16. Ibid.

17. Cajetan, *Comm. on Tertia Pars*, sec. 10, p. 225: "In Christo fuit duplex vivere: ut patet ex hoc quod unum per mortem perdidit. Ergo in ipso fuit duplex esse."

mentator has for two-fold *esse* readings of Aquinas's Christology. According to Cajetan, Aquinas's position on Christ's *esse* throughout his *corpus* can be spoken of as two-fold, if by duality one means "according to a duality of natures; in relation to those words a duality of *esse* is indeed less affirmed, though not totally negated."¹⁸

This Christological point of the Thomist tradition was clearly in the mind of Jacques Maritain, when he penned the fourth appendix of the first edition of *The Degrees of Knowledge*. In this appendix, Maritain explains the "notion of subsistence" in the following way: "We may say that its formal effect is to make the (substantial) nature or essence so possessive of existence that it cannot communicate in the act of existence with anything which is not itself, or which it is not already."¹⁹ This understanding of subsistence, Maritain argues, is superior to the account of subsistence as "that which renders a nature incommunicable to *another suppositum*" because subsistence pertains to "the setting up of the suppositum" and should thus not be used in defining it.²⁰

The "*mystery of the Incarnation*" is one case to which Maritain appeals to defend this view of subsistence. "Because the subsistence of the Word is an infinite subsistence," Maritain argues, "It can receive in Itself the human nature of Christ, a created substantial *quo* (without a created personality) which subsists and exists by the Divine Subsistence and the Divine Existence themselves."²¹ How is it possible following Maritain's definition of subsistence that the divine and human "communicate" or are united in Christ? The divine subsistence of the Word, Maritain observes, can assume the human nature because "this is a *privilege of the infinite subsistence* of a Person whose nature is identical with His existence and is eminently all things."²² In short, the Person of the Word, following this account of Maritain, can assume a created nature into his subsistence and be personally united to that nature because of the fullness of existence that He (the Word) enjoys.

18. *Ibid.*, sec. 4, p. 223. J. L. A. West in "Aquinas on the Metaphysics of *Esse* in Christ," *The Thomist* 66, no. 2 (2002): 231–50, rejects this position, arguing that there is no sense in which the *esse secundarium* of the *De unione* can be read without contradicting Aquinas's metaphysics and consistent arguments against the Christological heresies.

19. *The Degrees of Knowledge*, translated by Gerald Phelan (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Press, 2002), 455.

20. *Ibid.*, 455–56.

21. *Ibid.*, 456.

22. *Ibid.*

The same is not true, however, for created natures. "We must say" of created natures, Maritain explains, "—precisely because subsistence enables them in their very finitude to imitate in some manner the self-sufficiency of divine beings—that none of them, once sealed in its own subsistence, can exist in common with any other nature whatsoever."²³ A finite created nature, contrary to the full perfection of existence enjoyed by the Word, "excludes those others from the existence which actuates it, itself, and which properly belongs to it."²⁴

IV. *De unione* article 4

The general position of Aquinas as read by Cajetan and Maritain was normative among Thomists until Aquinas's famous disputed question *De unione verbi incarnati* was read under a new light. In the twentieth century, scholars began viewing the *De unione* as a later work, near to the date of the *tertia pars*.²⁵ When the *De unione* began to be viewed as a mature work, Jean-Pierre Torrell points to the "originality" of Herman-Michel Diepen, who argues that the ecstasy-of-being theory "could no longer claim to follow Thomas directly" because the *De unione* says, in his view, something to the contrary.²⁶

The content of the fourth article of the *De unione* is, as a result of these claims, one of the most controversial and commented upon aspects of Aquinas's Christology.²⁷ In this text Aquinas asks directly: "Whether in Christ there is only one being (*esse*)?" This point logically follows the argument of the previous article (a. 3) on Christ's numeric unity, where Thomas concludes that because of the unity of the suppositum in Christ, Christ is one *simpliciter*, and two only *secundum quid*. Aquinas makes the connection between these two articles in the first line of the body of article four:

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. For a discussion and defense of the authenticity and date of the *De unione*, see F. Pelster, "La quaestio disputata de Saint Thomas *De unione Verbi incarnati*," *Archives de Philosophie* 3, no. 2 (1925–26): 198–245. Pelster's work is viewed as lying to rest the question of authenticity.

26. See Jean-Pierre Torrell, "Le thomisme dans le débat christologique contemporain," in *Saint Thomas au XXe siècle*, edited by Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P. Actes du Colloque du Centenaire de la *Revue Thomiste* (Paris: 1994), 379–93, 383–84.

27. The parallel passages, as noted above, in which Aquinas also treats Christ's *esse* are *Quodlibet* q. 9, a. 3; ST III, q. 17, a. 2; *Scriptum in Sententias*, III, d. 6, q. 2, a. 2; *Compendium theologiae*, chap. 212.

“It should be said that this question [on Christ’s *esse*] is, in a certain sense, the same argument [*ratio*] as the previous because something is said to be [*esse*] one and a being [*ens*] from the same thing.”²⁸

The heart of Aquinas’s argument is as follows: first, “in Christ the subsisting suppositum is the person of the Son of God, who is sustained²⁹ *simpliciter* by the divine nature.” Secondly, “the suppositum of person of the Son of God, however, is not sustained³⁰ by the human nature.” “This is so,” Aquinas concludes, “because the person of the Son of God existed before he assumed the humanity, and [his] person was not in any way augmented or perfected by having assumed a human nature.” Aquinas points out, however, that “the eternal suppositum is sustained by the human nature in so far as it is ‘this man.’”³¹

The central point in this sequence is that the subsisting suppositum “is sustained *simpliciter* by the divine nature.” This insight provides the governing principle for the last paragraph of the body of article four—which is at the heart of the interpretive controversy. First, Aquinas moves from Christ’s unity as one established in article 3 to his consequent unity in being: “Just as Christ is one *simpliciter* on account of the unity of the suppositum and two in a certain respect on account of the two natures, likewise he has one being [*esse*] *simpliciter* on account of the one eternal being of the eternal suppositum.”³² This is an important point in the interpretive debate: Aquinas declares there to be one *esse simpliciter* in Christ.

28. *De unione*, a. 4, c. “Dicendum, quod huius quaestionis est quodammodo eadem ratio et praemissae: quia eodem dicitur aliquid esse unum et ens.” All citations from the *De unione* are from my own translation, which is forthcoming in a volume on the *De unione* to be published by Peeters Press in the Dallas Medieval Text series. The translation is from the Latin text of Obenauer’s volume (see n. 11 above), which is vastly superior to the text of the Marietti edition.

29. The word “sustained” (*sustentificatur*) marks, perhaps, the most significant contribution of the critical Latin text of the Obenauer edition of the *De unione*. The manuscript tradition followed by the Marietti edition has *subsistentificatur*. The difference between the two is subtle but important. *Subsistentificatur* would inaccurately indicate that the Word is made a substance by the divine nature.

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.* “In Christo autem suppositum subsistens est persona Filii Dei, quae simpliciter sustentificatur per naturam divinam, non autem simpliciter sustentificatur per naturam humanam: quia persona Filii Dei fuit ante humanitatem assumptam, nec in aliquo persona est augmentata seu perfectior per naturam humanam assumptam. Sustentificatur autem suppositum aeternum per naturam humanam, in quantum est hic homo.”

32. *Ibid.* “Et ideo, sicut Christus est unum simpliciter propter unitatem suppositi et duo secundum quid propter duas naturas, ita habet unum esse simpliciter propter unum esse aeternum aeterni suppositi.”

What, then, is to be made of the existence of Christ's human nature? "There is also another being of this suppositum," Aquinas adds, "not in so far as this other being is eternal, but in so far as the [eternal] suppositum was made man temporally." Aquinas concludes this line of argument with the following hotly-debated formulation: "Although it [the created nature] is not accidental being—because 'man' is not accidentally predicated of the Son of God, as was said above in the first article—it is nevertheless not the principal being [*esse*] of its suppositum, but the subordinated [*secundarium*] being."³³

V. Does the *De unione* Negate the *Ecstasy-of-Being* Theory?

The controversy sparked by article 4 stems from Aquinas's use of the "*esse ... secundarium*" formulation. The introduction of the *esse secundarium* seems to contradict Aquinas's treatment of Christ's *esse* elsewhere in his opera because the *De unione* is the only work in which Aquinas speaks of any other *esse* in Christ than that of the Word.

The interpretive debate over *De unione* article 4 thus stands as a fault-line dividing Thomists, like Cajetan and his followers, including the early-Maritain, from the school of Diepen and the later-Maritain who read the *De unione* as affirming a second *esse* relative to the human nature. Cajetan's reading of the *esse secundarium* in article 4 of the *De unione* in relation to Aquinas's other treatments of Christ's *esse*

boils down [in the words of Shawn Colberg] to the distinction between *quo est* and *quod est*; specifically, *esse* can be considered in a dual manner *insofar as it relates to the two natures* whereby it exists. This is a necessary flexibility that stems from affirming that a nature gives a thing its quiddity or that it is related to *esse quo est*. As a positive insight, then, Cajetan allows the possibility that *De unione* (and also ST III, q. 17, a. 2, ad 1 and ad 3) can be taken as speaking to the way in which Christ's natures relate to his *esse*, as *quo est*.³⁴

Because, however, of his awareness of the Scotist two-fold *esse* position, Colberg notes that "if a reader refuses to interpret Thomas's position in this

33. Ibid. "... est autem et aliud esse huius suppositi, non in quantum est aeternum, sed in quantum est temporaliter homo factum. Quod est, si non sit esse accidentale—quia homo non praedicatur accidentaliter de Filio Dei, ut supra habitum est—, non tamen est esse principale sui suppositi, sed secundarium."

34. Colberg, "Accrued Eyes and Sixth Digits," 81. Emphasis in original.

more supple and generous manner and insists that he posits of Christ's humanity a second *esse quod est*, then the *De unione* should be abandoned as misleading.³⁵ As a result, Colberg concludes that according to Cajetan, "if one cannot see a way of harmonizing the *De unione* text ... then it cannot be regarded as authoritative against the weight of Thomas's other writings on this issue."³⁶

The originality of the opposing view, that of Diepen and Maritain, stems from their quest to integrate the consistent *unum esse* doctrine with a reading of the *esse secundarium* of the *De unione* that affirms something unique in Aquinas *corpus*.³⁷ In the words of Helen-Marie Deloffre, Diepen's position, against that of Cajetan's, works "by the integration and not the elimination of the created existence."³⁸ Article 4 of the *De unione* is thus central to Diepen's theory, in so far as he holds that this text represents Thomas' most complete formulation of the *esse* question. With traditional Thomists, Diepen maintains Aquinas's real distinction between essence and existence, person and nature, and stands with Cajetan against the *duplex esse* position of Scotus.

However, against Cajetan's rejection of any talk of a human or created *esse*, Diepen maintains (a) that the *esse secundarium* of *De unione* 4 *does indeed* refer to a created *esse* and (b) this created *esse* does not violate the unity of the *esse* of the Word. How so? The two-fold *esse* "is realized by participation and exemplarity, by subordination and integration."³⁹ The two *esses*, then, do not stand in relation to the person of the Word "*ex aequo*." "There is an essential subordination," Diepen explains, "of the *esse humanum* (which is a non-personalized act of a nature) to the *esse divinum*."⁴⁰

Diepen holds that the affirmation of a two-fold *esse* in Christ along the lines of his reading of Aquinas better renders the revealed mystery of "the

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid., 82.

37. From 1949–1960, Diepen composed a series of influential articles in which he worked out his theory. The fruit of this effort is brought together in his book *La Théologie de l'Emmanuel: Les lignes maîtresses d'une Christologie* (Desclée de Brouwer, 1960); see especially 51–158.

38. Deloffre, *Question disputée L'union du verbe incarné*, 19. For a formidable criticism of Diepen's "integration" theory, see Obenauer, ed., *De unione*, 402–417. Also, *ibid.*, 418ff, has a helpful section on the "conceptual divergences" between *De unione* 4 and ST III, q. 17, a. 2. The use, for example, of *esse personale* in ST III, q. 17, a. 2 is not followed in *De unione* 4. It does not have to be held that such differences result in speculative contradictions between the texts, but they do make the integration thesis difficult to maintain.

39. Diepen, *La Théologie de l'Emmanuel*, 155.

40. Ibid.

natural Son of God in *utraque natura*" than does the "too facile and simplistic" ecstasy-of-being theory.⁴¹

This examination of Diepen's argument brings this paper back to Jacques Maritain. Maritain famously abandoned the ecstasy-of-being theory which he had supported in the first edition of *The Degrees of Knowledge*. Maritain adopted the position defended by Diepen, as a result of Diepen's criticisms, in a series of "Further Elucidations" appended to the 1954 edition of the same volume. Maritain articulates his position, following the work of Diepen, according to several primary tenets:

1. As the "great Commentators" taught, there is "only one single subsistence" and "*personal existence*" in Christ.
2. Following the *De unione* and Fr. Diepen's argument: "there is ... a created *esse*, by which the human nature is actuated" in Christ.
3. The created *esse* "is only *received* by the human nature, it is not exercised by it."
4. "The created and human *esse* does not at all concur in the constitution of the *esse personale* of Christ."
5. This means that the created *esse* is "integrated ... to the *ens personale*, to the subsistent whole."
6. The created *esse* does not compromise the hypostatic unity of Christ because the eternal person and suppositum subsists "henceforth according to this nature also, and no longer only according to the divine nature."⁴²
7. The created "*esse*" "is received by a human nature without human subsistence, it is exercised by an uncreated supposit which pre-exists it and for whose existing as supposit, or personally (for its existing *simpliciter*), it in no way contributes."⁴³

Two immediate observations must be made in light of the position advocated by Diepen and adopted by Maritain. First, more reflection is needed on the meaning of the term *secundarium*. *Secundarium* does not mean "second," as if there were one being of the Word and a second *esse* in Christ of the human nature. Why not? Aquinas is not contrasting that which is numerically first with that which is second, but rather that which is "*prinicpale*"

41. Ibid.

42. Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, 464–66.

43. Ibid.

with what is "*secundarium*." Aquinas's use of the word *secundarium* elsewhere clearly indicates an order of dependency in which what is *secundarium* depends on what is "*principale*."⁴⁴ For these reasons *secundarium* is translated in this essay as "subordinate."⁴⁵ "Secondary" can be misleading in English if it is read as indicating a "second" (numeric) *esse* along with that of the Word, while a subordinate *esse* does not posit a second created actuation.⁴⁶

Secondly, Diepen's attempt to integrate and synthesize article 4 of the *De unione* with Aquinas's other works by viewing it as a fuller articulation, which offers a new insight (*esse secundarium*) through which the other texts can be read, fails to discern precisely what Aquinas was seeking to accomplish in the *De unione*. Aquinas's language in the *De unione* more clearly betrays an attempt to modify (and mollify) the position of others, than to introduce something new into his own position.

Sr. Deloffre catalogs the different ways in which the major authors of the thirteenth century, following Lombard's second opinion, the Subsistence Theory, speak of one *esse* in Christ.⁴⁷ Reading the *De unione* in light of these attempts is helpful in pinpointing Aquinas's intentions. These formulations include, *inter alia*: *esse simpliciter* and *esse personale* (used by Alexander of Hales, Albert the Great, and Bonaventure) and *esse hypostasis* (Albert and Alexander of Hales).⁴⁸ Conversely, many of these same authors, especially the Franciscans, use the phrase *esse humanum* to speak of Christ's human nature.

A problem arose for these authors, however, regarding Christ's unity. How can the unity of Christ be articulated in terms of *esse simpliciter*

44. For example, addressing the order of ends, Aquinas says the following: "just as there is an order in agent causes, so too there is an order in final causes: as, namely, a secondary end [*secundarius finis*] depends on a principal one [*a principali dependeat*], just as a secondary agent depends on a principal one." SCG III, chap. 109, no. 5. The primary and secondary ends are twofold, but the *finis secundarium* does not contribute *finis* to the primary end and the secondary end exists as an end in a relation of dependency on the primary end. The same is true with Christ: there is a genuine *secundarium* of the human nature, but because it depends on the primary *esse* it does not contribute *esse* to the one reality of Christ.

45. Of course, given that the *esse* in question is the created *esse* of Christ's humanity there is no question of Christological subordination.

46. It is also the case, in defense of translating *secundarium* as subordinate, that *A Latin-English Lexicon of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, edited by Roy J. Deferrari (Fitzwilliam: Loreto Publications, 2004), offers the following English choices for *secundarius*, a, um: "coming in second place, subordinate, secondary, the opposite of *principalis*."

47. See Deloffre, *Question disputée L'union du verbe incarné*, 45–50.

48. *Ibid.*, 45.

“without eliminating the reality of the human nature?”⁴⁹ To address this problem, Bonaventure spoke of Christ's human nature in relation to the divine *esse* of the Word as “inclining toward an accident” (*vergit in accidens*).⁵⁰ Bonaventure offered this position because it has the advantage of safeguarding the substantial and hypostatic unity of Christ, for when a person or suppositum accrues new accidents to itself, the person remains one *simpliciter*.

Albert the Great, on the other hand, rejects the position of those who speak of Christ's human nature as *vergit in accidens*. In so doing, although he speaks clearly of a single *esse simpliciter* in Christ, at times Albert speaks of Christ's human nature in terms of a two-fold *esse* or even hypostasis:

It should be said that human nature is properly and *per se* assumed, and also united by a certain mode: but it was assumed first and *per se*, and it was united in its hypostasis to the divine hypostasis.⁵¹

The *esse* according to this or that nature, however, is the *esse* taken in comparison to the nature making the *esse* in the hypostasis, and from that part the *esse* in Christ is doubled. For, the *esse* of the nature of humanity is in that one, as well as the *esse* of the nature of deity. If we wish to speak properly, then we would say that according to this consideration [the hypostasis] would not have two *esses* but rather one twofold, constitutive *esse* [*unum duplex in constituente esse*].

The *esse* of the nature is the *esse* that the nature has in itself: for every thing has its own *esse*. The *esse* of the human nature in Christ is not the *esse* of God's nature, but the *esses* are not by that way two as the natures.⁵²

Albert is not embracing Nestorianism with this language. He is reacting to the accidental language of Bonaventure and the first and third opinions of Lombard by affirming “the substantial reality of the human nature assumed by noting that the *esse* of Christ's human nature is not the *esse* of the divine nature.”⁵³ Albert does this, as Corey Barnes explains, out of a desire to subordinate

49. *Ibid.*, 46.

50. *Ibid.*, 47. Bonaventure forwards this position in the commentary on Lombard's *Sentences*, III, d. 6, a. 1, q. 3.

51. This text is from Albert's commentary on Lombard's *Sentences*, *In III Sent.*, d. 5, a. 10. From Corey L. Barnes, “Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas on Person, Hypostasis, and Hypostatic Union,” *The Thomist* 72, no. 1 (2008): 122.

52. The second and third of these passages are from Albert's commentary on Lombard's *Sentences*, *In III Sent.*, d. 6, a. 5. The citation and translation are from Barnes, “Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas,” 131.

53. Barnes, “Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas,” 132.

this duality to the greater unity of Christ in terms of *esse simpliciter*, which is one as the hypostasis in Christ is one. Stressing the unity of *esse simpliciter* in Christ while noting the duality of natural *esse* according as the hypostasis subsists in human nature is an attempt to strike a proper balance between the reality of Christ's singular human nature and the ultimate unity of hypostasis.⁵⁴

In the end, as Barnes points out, "Albert inherited ambiguous terminology with which to address Christological questions along a fluid spectrum of opinions." "His great triumph," Barnes continues, "was to recast pressing questions and concerns in terms of Christ's *esse*, a maneuver that allowed affirmation of Christ's personal unity without undermining the integrity of his two natures."⁵⁵

Aquinas stands in the immediate context of these various attempts to maintain Christ's unity *simpliciter* and the reality of his human nature. As Barnes notes, "Aquinas preserves many of Albert's insights while simultaneously tidying the ambiguous terminology that Albert inherited."⁵⁶

VI. Conclusion

This essay began with a brief consideration of Aquinas's argument against Christ, as man, being an adopted son of God. Maritain, following Diepen, asserts that Christ's human nature possess an *esse* which actuates it. Is it possible to maintain, however, that the created, actuating *esse* of Christ's human nature would not be adopted by the superabundant grace enjoyed by Christ's human nature?

In light of these considerations the following conclusion seems most consistent with both Aquinas's argument and the context in which it was developed: the uniqueness of the *De unione* on the metaphysical status of Christ's human nature is to be explained primarily by Aquinas's attempt to situate his own position on the reality and integrality of Christ's human nature against the *esse accidentale* tendency in Bonaventure and the ambiguities entailed in Albert's position. *Esse secundarium* is therefore not introduced to indicate a second *esse* in Christ according to the human nature, but rather to articulate how Christ's human nature is full, integral, and real without being predicated an accident of the Word or a second hypostasis.

The assessment of Victor Salas on this point seems correct: "Simply

54. *Ibid.*, 132–33.

55. *Ibid.*, 133.

56. *Ibid.*

put, the human *esse* introduced in *De Unione* seems to be none other than the divine *esse* when considered from the point of view of its subsisting in a human nature.⁵⁷ This means that the "*De unione* highlights," Barnes argues, "the *esse* of the Word as determined by the form of human nature. While Thomas's other treatments more narrowly highlight the one *esse* of the Word, this is not to the exclusion of the nature's role in forming that *esse*."⁵⁸

The move by Diepen and, following him, Maritain, to read the *De unione* as affirming a second, received and created *esse* misplaces Aquinas's actual intention. Aquinas was not seeking a new way, nor does he indicate that he ever sensed a need to do so, to affirm the reality of Christ's human nature in the order of *esse*. Rather, by *esse secundarium* Aquinas intends to affirm the real, integral, though subordinate and derivative, existence of the human nature of Christ.

The *esse secundarium* of article 4 must be read in light of the qualification that Thomas makes in the concluding sentence of the previous paragraph, "the eternal suppositum is sustained by the human nature in so far as it is 'this man.'" Had Aquinas wished to say something more, to indicate a second *esse* of the human nature, he could have adopted one of Albert the Great's formulations or selected a word other than *secundarium*, such as *secundum*, to indicate such an intention with much greater clarity.

From the perspective of its relation to the works of his contemporaries, the *De unione* is, in the end, less, not more original, than his treatments of the issue in his other writings.

57. Victor Salas, "Thomas Aquinas on Christ's *esse*: A Metaphysics of the Incarnation," *The Thomist* 70, no. 4 (2006): 592; cited in Barnes, "Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas," 144.

58. Barnes, "Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas," 144.