Totus Christus: A Proposal for Protestant Christology and Ecclesiology

David Moser

Forthcoming in *Pro Ecclesia* 29 no. 1 (2020)

I. Introduction

Reformed theologians can be catholic today, or so say proponents of "Reformed catholicity," a burgeoning movement in contemporary Reformed theology. In the movement's eponymously-titled manifesto, Michael Allen and Scott Swain claim that 'Reformed catholicity' is not a theological system, but a "theological sensibility" rooted in Reformed Protestant theological principles. Its purpose is to retrieve the Church's ancient teaching for "theological and spiritual renewal" of Reformed churches and theology within Reformed confessional boundaries.[1] One important recent contribution to it is *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic,* a single volume in which 'Reformed catholic' theologians address major dogmatic loci "within the context of the catholic church of the Reformed confessions."[2] Allen and Swain, its editors, admit that the volume parallels Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson's edited volume of the same title, which was designed to address the 'catholic church' from the standpoint of the Lutheran confessions.[3] In these discussions, to be 'catholic' means to engage the entirety of the catholic, or universal and historical, Christian tradition from a Lutheran or Reformed theological perspective, assenting to what is true and dissenting from what is false based on the perspective's

---

[1] Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 12-13. Other examples of contributions to this movement can be found in the *New Studies in Dogmatics* series published by Zondervan, though not all contributors are Reformed. See also the recently published "Reforming Catholic Confession," signed by 1,428 pastors and theologians of various Protestant confessions, which states some central premises that overlap with those of Reformed catholicity, at https://reformingcatholicconfession.com, accessed December 8, 2018.

[2] Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, "Introduction," in *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic*, eds. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 2.

[3] Allen and Swain, "Introduction," 2n2.

theological axiology. 'Reformed catholics' desire continuity with ancient catholic tradition where it is possible, especially with its early conciliar teaching on God and Christ.[4]

However, Reformed catholics typically reject an ancient teaching on the identity of the Church which has expressed the Catholic Church's self-understanding for hundreds of years: the teaching that Christ has formed a mystical union with his Church so that they are now one spiritual entity, the *Totus Christus* ("the whole Christ"), Head and members. Augustine (354-430) is responsible for developing this teaching, though it is not original with him.[5] Reformed catholics are indebted to Augustine's teaching on the Incarnation, sin, nature, and grace, as Luther and Calvin were. Augustine has been so influential on both Protestant and Catholic theology that we might think that agreement with Augustine is part of what it means to be catholic or universal. But Augustine's ecclesiology of the *Totus Christus* has not enjoyed favor among Reformed catholics. One reason for this may be the fact that it is explicitly encoded in Catholic ecclesiology but does not appear in any Protestant confession of faith.[6] Thus the reason for this absence may be historical.

However, the main reason *Totus Christus* is unpopular with Reformed catholics is theological. Michael Horton, Kevin Vanhoozer, and John Webster, all of whom have either identified as Reformed catholics directly or been associated with the title indirectly, have

---

[4] When I capitalize 'Catholic,' I refer to Christians in communion with the see of Rome. When I do not capitalize it, I refer to the Reformed catholic theologians described above.

[5] Augustine was not the first to use the concept, since Tyconius, the Donatist theologian, preceded him in doing so. See Michael Cameron, "*Enarrationes in Psalmos*," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald et al (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 292.

[6] The Westminster Confession, §25.1, claims that the catholic (universal) Church is the elect that are gathered into one under Christ the Head, but it does not identify them together as *Totus Christus,* in *The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as Adopted by the Presbyterian Church in America with Proof Texts* (Lawrenceville, GA: Christian Education & Publications, 2007, 123-4). However, Westminster does describe the Church as the body and bride of Christ. By contrast, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, "Christ and his Church thus together make up the 'whole Christ' (*Christus totus*). The Church is one with Christ. The saints are acutely aware of this unity…," in *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* 2nd ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1994), §795, pp. 228-9.

rejected it. In this essay, I will address their objections to the doctrine. I will argue that Reformed catholics, and Protestants in general, should accept the language of *Totus Christus* as a true description of the Church. My argument proceeds in four parts. First, I present what Augustine said about *Totus Christus,* particularly his exegesis of Scripture supporting it, and draw out four features of the doctrine from Augustine's theology that I will defend. Second, I list five Reformed objections to *Totus Christus.* Third, I argue that none of these objections are compelling, because *Totus Christus* does not have the deleterious consequences these objections claim that it has. The strongest responses to these objections come indirectly from the works of Augustine and Hans Urs von Balthasar, two of the best theologians in the Catholic tradition, and the Protestant luminary Karl Barth. All three theologians held that Christ and the Church are *Totus Christus,* and they drew this conclusion based on Scripture. None of them think that *Totus Christus* has the unsavory consequences the Reformed objections say it has. And the Reformed objections fail to undermine the Catholic account of *Totus Christus* as it appears in Augustine and von Balthasar. Fourth, drawing on the analysis in the third part, I will discuss what *Totus Christus* entails and does not entail in an attempt to advance the conversation on this ecclesiological motif.

II. Augustine on Christ and the Church as *Totus Christus*

The Church is the one body of Jesus Christ, according to Paul.[7] Jesus Christ, one and the same as the divine Logos, did not need to take on flesh, nor did he need to make the Church his body. But in God's great love, the Logos became incarnate for our salvation. He drove out sin and death on the cross and in the resurrection through his infinite divine power working efficaciously in his human acts. Precisely because of this power, what Christ accomplishes in his

[7] Though this is not a comprehensive survey of the biblical motif, see Romans 12:5, 1 Corinthians 12:12-17, Ephesians 1:22-23; 3:6, 4:1-16, 5:23, 29-32, and Colossians 1:18, 24.

flesh – most of all in his death and resurrection – is saving.[8] And by this same divine power working in his bodily death and resurrection (Rom. 7:4), Christ has made us his body, so that "we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another" (Rom. 12:5, NRSV).

For Augustine, this scriptural teaching reveals a crucial claim about the Church's identity: Christ is united with his Church so that one new spiritual entity – the *Totus Christus* – comes to be.[9] Before we proceed, we need to define what this entity is as precisely as possible to avoid misunderstanding. Augustine helpfully does this for us in an anti-Arian sermon preached in 419. There he argued that Christ can be understood and named in three ways in Scripture. The first way is according to his divine nature, in which he is coequal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The second way is post-Incarnation, according to which he is both God and a human being. The third way is insofar as he is the Head of the Church, to whom he is united; in this third way, Christ is understood "in some way as the whole Christ (*totus Christus*) in the fullness of the Church, that is, Head and Body, according to the completeness of a certain perfect man, the man in whom we are each members."[10] On Augustine's view, we must take this third way as

---

[8] As John of Damascus argues, the communication of divine excellence to the humanity of Christ in the hypostatic union made his suffering in the flesh salutary for us, but not by destroying the integrity of his humanity. For John, Christ's flesh was an "instrument of the divinity" (οργανον του θεου). See *De fide orthodoxa,* §59 (III.15), in Bonafatius Kotter, OSB, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos,* vol. II (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1973, 144-53; English translation in *St. John of Damascus: Writings,* trans. Frederic H. Chase, Jr. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1958), 304-14. Thomas Aquinas developed this idea extensively. He argues that Christ's flesh being an instrument of the divinity is sufficient for the saving efficacy of Christ's human actions. Christ's physical flesh is efficacious for driving out sin, bringing us new life, and incorporating us into Christ's mystical body because of the divine power working in it. See *Summa theologiae* III, q. 48, a. 6, c. Christ's suffering in the flesh joins us instrumentally to his mystical body, of which he is the Head (*Summa theologiae* III, q. 8, a. 1, ad 1).

[9] Michael Cameron observes that Augustine's first known use of the *Totus Christus* motif appears in his exposition of Psalm 17. See Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere: Augustine's Early Figurative Exegesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 204-5.

[10] Augustine, *Sermo* 341.1 in *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina* (PL), ed. J-P Migne (Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1844-64), vol. 39, col. 1493: "Tertius modus est quodam modo totus Christus, in plenitudine Ecclesiae, id est, caput et corpus, secundum plenitudinem perfecti cujusdam viri, in quo viro singuli membra sumus." All English translations of Augustine's works are my own unless otherwise noted.

seriously as the first and the second in our Christology if we are going to be faithful to Scripture. But we must also be clear about the distinction of this third way from the first and second. In Scripture, Christ and the Church, Head and members, form the *Totus Christus*, one "perfect man" (*vir perfecti*). But Christ and the Church are not united as one Christ in the same way that Christ's two natures are united in his person. Christ's union with the Church is not the same kind of union as the hypostatic union. Christ is complete, or perfect, as the whole Christ without the church. Yet Christ willed to unite us to himself in the economy of salvation in another way.

> Indeed head and body are one Christ, not because he is not complete without the body, but because he deigned to be complete (*integer*) with us, he who without us is always complete, not only in that he is the Word, the only-begotten Son equal to the Father, but also in the man himself that he took on, and with which he is God and man together.[11]

Christ is ontologically complete without us. He does not need us to exist; he is perfect without us. Yet out of sheer love, he has united himself to us, the Church, so that we are the *Totus Christus* with him.

Augustine thinks Scripture teaches *Totus Christus* in a rather straightforward way. In his study of *Totus Christus* in Augustine's thought, Tarsicius van Bavel argued that Augustine got the idea for the motif directly from the words of Paul.[12] To take one central example, in a sermon, Augustine expounds a central Pauline text that identifies the *Totus Christus*, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, which reads, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and yet all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all

---

[11] Augustine, *Sermo* 341.11, PL 39 col. 1499. "Etenim caput et corpus unus est Christus: non quia sine corpore non est integer, sed quia et nobiscum integer esse dignatus est, quia et sine nobis semper est integer, non solum in eo quod Verbum est unigenitus Filius aequalis Patri, sed et in ipso homine quem suscepit, et cum quo simul Deus et homo est."

[12] Tarsicius van Bavel, "The 'Christus Totus' Idea: A Forgotten Aspect of Augustine's Spirituality" in *Studies in Patristic Christology,* ed. Thomas Finan and Vincent Twomey (Dublin: Four Courts, 1998), 84-94, here, 85.

made to drink of one Spirit."[13] He meditates on the kind of union that Christ maintains with his members, commenting,

> He [Paul] does not say: so it is with both Christ and his body; but he says, 'the one body has many members, so it is with Christ.' Therefore the whole thing (*totum*) is Christ; and because the whole thing is Christ, therefore the Head shouted from heaven, 'Saul,' he says, 'Saul, why do you persecute me?'[14]

Augustine thinks we should understand Paul's statement here in the following way: "Christ *is* Head and Members together, and not: the relationship between Christ and us bears a resemblance to the relationship between the head and members of a body."[15] In other words, the precise natural sense of the biblical language, especially its predicative force (the *is* of identity), should lead us to think that Christ and the Church, Head and members, are one spiritual entity, *Totus Christus*. This is why Augustine thinks that the statement 'the Church is Christ's body' cannot be a weak or empty metaphor. If it were, the Church's relation to Christ would be utterly dissimilar to how a natural body relates to its head. But this is exactly the opposite of what Paul flatly says: the Church *is* Christ's body in some real way. As Kimberly Baker observes, "[T]o say that Christians are incorporated into the one body of Christ is much more than a symbol or metaphor; it describes the reality of a transformed relationship between Christians and God."[16] This transformed relationship must be a real, spiritual union than which a greater cannot be conceived.

---

13 **"**Καθάπερ γὰρ τὸ σῶμα ἕν ἐστιν καὶ μέλη πολλὰ ἔχει, πάντα δὲ τὰ μέλη τοῦ σώματος πολλὰ ὄντα ἕν ἐστιν σῶμα, οὕτως καὶ ὁ Χριστός· καὶ γὰρ ἐν ἑνὶ πνεύματι ἡμεῖς πάντες εἰς ἓν σῶμα ἐβαπτίσθημεν, εἴτε Ἰουδαῖοι εἴτε Ἕλληνες εἴτε δοῦλοι εἴτε ἐλεύθεροι, καὶ πάντες ἓν πνεῦμα ἐποτίσθημεν." Greek text from Eberhard Nestle et al., *The Greek New Testament*, 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993).

14 Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 142.3, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (CCSL) (Turnhout: Brepols, 1953-), 40:2061-2: "Non ait: Ita et Christus et corpus; sed: *corpus unum membra multa, ita et Christus*. Totum ergo Christus; et quia totum Christus, ideo caput de caelo, *Saule*, inquit, *Saule, quid me persequeris*?" On the interpretation of this passage, see Michael Fiedrowicz, *Psalmus vox totius Christi: Studien zu Augustins "Enarrationes in Psalmos"* (Freiburg: Herder, 1997), 370-2.

15 Tarsicius van Bavel, "The 'Christus Totus' Idea," 85.

16 Kimberly Baker, "Augustine's Doctrine of the *Totus Christus*: Reflecting on the Church as Sacrament of Unity," *Horizons* 37.1 (2010): 7-24, here, 9.

For Augustine, Christ unites himself to the Church by the Holy Spirit.[17] The Holy Spirit's distinctive task, though not apart from the Father and the Son, is to cause human beings to dwell in God by transforming them inwardly. Augustine thinks this is based on a straightforward biblical notion: The Holy Spirit makes us dwell in God by giving himself to us (1 John 4:13). This gift is a work of the whole Trinity. Although the persons of the Trinity *are* love commonly, because God is love, 'love' is appropriated to the Holy Spirit who conforms us to the love of Christ.[18] Augustine says of the Spirit, "So it is God the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from God, who inflames man to the love of God and neighbor when he has been given to him, and he himself is love."[19] The great work of the Spirit, as Love, is to give us love for God, or charity, which comes from Christ's love. In this love, the Spirit binds the individuals in the Church together as one Body with Christ (Eph. 4:13). However, this union is not perfect. Though we are united to Christ now, we are not united to him in full, since perfect union with him will only come in the eschaton. Augustine draws this distinction carefully: "We are with him in heaven through hope, and he is with us on earth through charity."[20] Charity unites us to Christ in the present, but hope directs us to desire to be united with him in the future when we see him as he is (1 John 3:2).

---

[17] Augustine, *Sermo* 267.4 (PL 38 col. 1231), cf. *Sermo* 268.2 (PL 38 col. 1232-33).

[18] Augustine, *De trinitate* XV.17.31, CCSL 50A:505-6. For Augustine, conforming us to the love of Christ is attributed or appropriated to the Holy Spirit because of his personal property as the Love of the Father and the Son. See Gilles Emery, OP, *The Trinity: An Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God,* trans. Matthew Levering (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 164-68. Emery helpfully summarizes the doctrine I try to make clear here: "The three divine persons act in the world by a single action. The effects of the divine action are also common to the whole Trinity. In the one action of the Trinity, each person operates by virtue of the nature common to the Three, and each person acts according to the distinct mode of his property. The affinity of an action, or of an aspect of an action, or of an effect, with the property of a divine person lets us appropriate this action or this effect to a divine person, in such a way that the proper traits of the persons are better manifested to us" (148).

[19] Augustine, *De trinitate*, XV.17.31, CCSL 50A:506, "Deus igitur spiritus sanctus qui procedit ex deo cum datus fuerit homini accendit eum in dilectionem dei et proximi, et ipse dilectio est."

[20] Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 54.3, CCSL 39:657. "Nos cum illo in caelo per spem, ipse nobiscum in terra per caritatem." I am indebted to Jim Lee for pointing me to this text.

Here we should summarize some basic features of *Totus Christus* ecclesiology as Augustine presents it. First, *Totus Christus* denotes a spiritual union between Christ and the Church so that, out of the two, one spiritual entity, Head and members, comes to be. The union is spiritual because the Holy Spirit brings it about. Second, *Totus Christus* is a metaphysical union between Christ and the Church. Third, the metaphysical union in the *Totus Christus* is qualitatively distinct from the hypostatic union and from the unity of the three divine persons. The Logos is hypostatically united to his flesh so that his flesh truly is his own, that is, it belongs to his person. But his union with his Church, though metaphysical, is decidedly different and non-hypostatic. Fourth, *Totus Christus* denotes a kind of metaphysical identity between Christ and the Church, such that the "whole thing" (*totum*) is Christ. But this spiritual entity is not composed of two distinct entities that become numerically identical, or one and the same thing. Christ and the Church are distinct in one way and united in another: distinct in their being, we might say, since God and creatures are distinct, but united by the Holy Spirit. As I will show, these four features overlap with what the Reformed and Catholic traditions have called Christ's 'mystical body.' 'Mystical body' and *Totus Christus* have a common lineage with overlapping meanings.

III. Protestant Objections to *Totus Christus*

Even though *Totus Christus* was a fundamental component of Augustine's biblical ecclesiology, several 'Reformed catholic' theologians have recently rejected it. As far as I can tell, they have leveled five main objections to it. Some of these objections originate in longstanding disagreements between Rome and Protestant communions over the nature of the Church. Other objections articulate worries with contemporary versions of *Totus Christus.* I

will list these objections, focusing in greatest detail on the fifth, which I take to be the most basic and the most serious against any account of *Totus Christus*.

Kevin J. Vanhoozer sums up four of these objections succinctly in his recent *Biblical Authority after Babel: Retrieving the* Solas *in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity*.[21] First, he recognizes that *Totus Christus* calls for some kind of ontological union between Christ and the Church. But he argues that Christ and the Church are not ontologically united because Christ in his divine nature is only ontologically united to the Father and the Holy Spirit. He writes, "In the first place, the church is not constitutive of the Son's identity as are the Father and the Spirit; its relation to the Son is not substantival but covenantal, a matter of fellowship, not ontology."[22] Vanhoozer seems to suggest here that *Totus Christus* implies that Christ is united with the Church in the same way that Christ is united to the Father and the Holy Spirit, whether the doctrine's proponents realize it or not. One reason for this may be that *Totus Christus* identifies Christ and the Church as one 'person,' head and members; identifying Christ and the Church in this way would seem to collapse Christ into the Church, eliding the distinction between God and creatures. If this consequence follows, *Totus Christus* raises yet another problem: if Christ and the Church are one person, then the Church is identical to Christ himself. Reformed theologians must protest, Vanhoozer argues: "the church is not a continuation of the incarnation."[23] Second, Vanhoozer claims that "Jesus was impeccable; and the Church is fallible."[24] But the Catholic Church has claimed that it is identified with Christ as the *Totus Christus,* and this underwrites the infallibility of its teaching in matters of faith and morals. Thus, Vanhoozer seems to think that *Totus Christus* supports the claim that everything the Catholic Church teaches is divinely

---

[21] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel: Retrieving the* Solas *in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016), 152.

[22] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel,* 152.

[23] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel,* 152.

[24] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel*, 152.

authorized. Third, Vanhoozer holds that *Totus Christus* seems to entail that the Catholic Church's sacraments are necessary for grace, and thus that Christ alone is not the only source of grace. For this reason, Protestants cannot hold the *Totus Christus*, since they maintain that Christ alone gives grace to the Church (*solus Christus*).[25] Motivated by the same worries, Reformed theologian Michael Horton has argued that recent Catholic theologians, primarily of the *communio* persuasion, have used *Totus Christus* to legitimize the institutional and hierarchical Roman Catholic Church as the sole source of true doctrine and sacramental grace: Rome alone is Christ alone.[26] Fourth, Christ has ascended into heaven and is no longer present on earth with the Church. Thus, he cannot be united with the Church ontologically.

The fifth objection is not one Vanhoozer makes explicitly, but it underlies some of his objections, especially the first. This objection is the most serious, for it claims that *Totus Christus* contradicts a basic principle of theology: God's distinction from creatures. The Reformed theologian John Webster of blessed memory develops this objection in detail. He argues that *Totus Christus* elides the metaphysical distinction between God and creatures.[27] That is to say, *Totus Christus* collapses Christ, truly God, into the church, truly creature. He thinks Protestant ecclesiology preserves this distinction better. For Protestants, God and creatures exist, as Christoph Schwöbel has argued, in a "fundamental asymmetry."[28] Protestant ecclesiology

---

[25] It is not clear to me where the reality this third objection opposes is found in current Catholic ecclesiology, but I leave that issue aside for now.

[26] See Horton's analysis of *Totus Christus*, which focuses on Karl Adam's account of the doctrine, in his *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 155-68.

[27] Webster has made this argument in a number of places and it seems to have been his consistent view throughout his illustrious career, though I will not survey the whole of his thinking on ecclesiology here. A representative essay is John Webster, "The Church and the Perfection of God" in *The Community of the Word: Towards an Evangelical Ecclesiology*, eds. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 75-95.

[28] See Christoph Schwöbel, "The Creature of the Word: Recovering the Ecclesiology of the Reformers," in *On Being the Church: Essays on the Christian Community,* ed., Colin E. Gunton and Daniel W. Hardy (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 110-55, here, 120. For the Reformers, on Schwöbel's reading, divine action is the condition of possibility for human action. This results in the state of affairs that human action can never be the condition of divine action: the church is always the "creature of the Word," its witness and steward. Its reality as one, holy,

takes this fundamental distinction to be basic, "following through the logic of the distinction between uncreated and created being in thinking about the church and its existence in time."[29] Because God is distinct from creatures, so this argument goes, Christ must be distinct from the Church. Similarly, the Church must "add nothing to the identity of the exalted Son."[30] To summarize, Webster thinks the distinction of God and creatures is logically prior to the distinction of Christ and the Church: "The distinction between uncreated and created, expressed in the Son's transcendence of the flesh even in its assumption, is crucial to a theologically intelligent grasp of the historical forms and acts of the church."[31] That is to say, we cannot adequately understand the relationship of Christ and the Church if we do not grasp the distinction of God and creatures first.

Webster is concerned that several recent works in ecclesiology "ordered around a particular construal of the 'body of Christ' metaphor" err, especially theologies of the *Totus Christus*, because they do not adequately attend to the distinction between God and creatures.[32] He worries that the *communio* ecclesiology of Henri de Lubac and the Protestant ecclesiologies of John Milbank and Robert Jenson go awry because they do not give full weight to the "perfection" of Christ.[33] On Webster's view, Christ the Logos exists as Lord over the Church

---

catholic, and apostolic church is grounded not in traditions or human offices of authority, but in the reality of the revelation of Jesus Christ (129).

[29] John Webster, "*Ressourcement* Thought and Protestantism," in *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology,* ed. Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 482-494, here, 491.

[30] John Webster, "'In the Society of God': Some Principles of Ecclesiology" in *God Without Measure, Volume 1: God and the Works of God* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 186.

[31] John Webster, "'In the Society of God" in *God without Measure,* Volume I, 185.

[32] Webster, "In the Society of God," 186. Webster specifically addresses this problem as it is found in *Totus Christus* ecclesiologies in Webster, "*Ressourcement* Thought and Protestantism*,"* 491.

[33] Webster treats some of Jenson's ecclesiological claims in Jenson's *Systematic Theology, Volume 2: The Works of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999) in great detail in "'In the Society of God': Some Principles of Ecclesiology" in *God Without Measure, Volume 1*, 186. Webster is mainly concerned with Jenson's ecclesiological claim: "Where does the risen Christ turn to find himself? To the sacramental gathering of believers" (Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Volume 2*, 214). This statement articulates precisely the problem with *Totus Christus*, on Webster's view: it elevates the creature into Christ, subtracting from his self-sufficiency and perfection. Webster

because of his divine perfection, which is his "metaphysical rather than his moral greatness."[34] God's perfection is his metaphysical greatness. God's metaphysical greatness is his ability to create *ex nihilo*. If God alone is perfect and creates *ex nihilo*, his creatures, imperfect and unable to create *ex nihilo,* cannot be ontologically united with him. *Totus Christus* collapses God into creatures and brings about what Calvin accused Osiander of creating with his doctrine of "essential righteousness": a *crassa mixtura* between God and human beings.[35]

However, Webster thinks that if we take God's distinction from creatures seriously in ecclesiology, we will understand that Christ did not create the Church to be an extension of himself, but to be a distinct subject that enters into "fellowship" with him. Webster suggests that the relation of Christ and the Church is best characterized as covenantal fellowship rather than mystical or spiritual union.[36] "Covenantal fellowship," a term that implies at least two distinct subjects, is the best way to maintain the ontological distinction between Christ and the Church; ontological participation in God is not.[37]

IV. Augustine, von Balthasar, and Barth on *Totus Christus*: Union and Distinction

The fifth objection is the most serious because if it is correct, *Totus Christus* violates a fundamental principle of Christian theology. Webster's objection may apply to the ecclesiologies of Jenson, Milbank, and some versions of *communio* ecclesiology. But I do not

---

examines the proposals of Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man,* trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Sr. Elizabeth Englund, OCD (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), and John Milbank, "The Name of Jesus," in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 145-70, and "Ecclesiology: the last of the last" in *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003), 105-37, in Webster, "The Church and the Perfection of God," 84-7.

[34] John Webster, "The Church and Perfection of God," 79.

[35] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960) III.xi.10, pp. 736-8.

[36] John Webster, "The Church and the Perfection of God," 91; cf. Kevin Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel,* 152.

[37] Webster, "The Church and the Perfection of God," 91. The varied responses to participation in the divine nature and deification in the Reformed tradition are many and wide-ranging, and I will not pursue them here.

want to defend those ecclesiologies here. Instead I will argue that *Totus Christus* does not violate the distinction between God and creatures; rather, it maintains it. We can find strong arguments for this claim in the work of Augustine, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Karl Barth. They maintained both *Totus Christus* and the ontological distinction between God and creatures. However, they did so in different ways and with different concerns. But they illuminated the doctrine from their respective vantage points while substantially agreeing on its truth.

Augustine and the Totus Christus in Enarrationes in Psalmos

Augustine consistently held both that Christ and the Church is *Totus Christus* and that God is distinct from creatures. We can see this in how he understands Christ's suffering with the Church. In his exegesis of Scripture, he learned that Christ is intimately joined to the Church so that he suffers with its members when they are persecuted, even after his ascension. But Christ does not suffer with the Church in the same way that the Church suffers, because the two are not numerically identical. Augustine expounds this idea in detail in his second exposition of Psalm 30. He characterizes Christ's suffering with his Church as the "wonderful exchange" (*admirabile commercium*), where Christ suffers for the Church both in his body on the cross and in the present with the Church.[38] He thinks the Psalms reveal this teaching. And he developed that notion from his study of Paul's use of the Old Testament, where he learned that Christ and his sacrifice form the interpretive center of Scripture, including the Psalms.[39] That is to say,

[38] Augustine, *Enarrationes en Psalmos* 30[2].3, CCSL 38:191-3. On the "wonderful exchange" and Augustine's "ecclesiology of solidarity" of Christ with the church, see William Babcock, "The Christ of the Exchange: A Study in the Christology of Augustine's *Enarrationes in Psalmos*," PhD diss., Yale University, 1971. See also James Lee, *Augustine and the Mystery of the Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 52-55.

[39] Michael Cameron, "*Enarrationes in Psalmos*," in *Augustine through the Ages*, 290-96, here, 292. Cameron has argued elsewhere that the *Totus Christus* is the hermeneutical center for Augustine's reading of the Psalms. See also Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), chapters 5-6.

Scripture itself warrants his Christological readings of the Psalms.[40] Moreover, Augustine adopted a "prosopological" form of exegesis, a rhetorical strategy that discerns different speakers in one and the same text. In this way, Augustine regularly discerned Christ as the speaking subject of the Psalms who can speak in the place of the psalmist.[41] In his second exposition of Psalm 30, Augustine asks whether Christ is able to experience fear. His solution is striking. Christ indeed speaks in this psalm as one who fears, but it is not he himself who fears. Rather, he fears *in us*, the Church.

> But nevertheless, he who deigned to assume the form of a servant, and in that form to clothe us with himself, who did not disdain to assume us into himself, did not disdain to transfigure us into himself and to speak in our words, so that we could speak in his. For this is the wonderful exchange, the completed divine 'trade,' the celebrated alteration of things in this world by the heavenly trader. He comes to receive insults and to give honors; he comes to drain the cup of suffering and to give salvation; he comes to endure death, and to give life. Therefore, since he intends to die because of what he had from us, he was fearful in us, but not in himself.[42]

Christ gives the Church life in exchange for our death. However, Christ's gift goes beyond his historical sacrifice on the cross; he has taken on the Church's sufferings even now. Christ and the Church have become one, and Christ wills that this should be so. Thus, Christ has united himself to the Church so that when Christ speaks words of fear, he can speak them not in his own person, *but in us*. This means that

> [B]ecause he said this, that his soul was sorrowful even to the point of death, certainly we all said it with him. For without him, we are nothing. In him, we are Christ himself. Why? Because the whole Christ (*totus Christus*) is the head and the members.[43]

---

40 Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere,* chapter 6.

41 Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere,* 9-10, and crucially, 160-4.

42 Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 30[2].3, CCSL 38:192, here, 192. "Verumtamen quia dignatus est assumere formam serui, et in ea nos uestire se, qui non est dedignatus assumere nos in se, non est dedignatus transfigurare nos in se, et loqui uerbis nostris, ut et nos loqueremur uerbis ipsius. Haec enim mira commutatio facta est, et diuina sunt peracta commercia, mutatio rerum celebrata in hoc mundo a negotiatore caelesti. Venit accipere contumelias, dare honores; uenit haurire dolorem, dare salutem; uenit subire mortem, dare uitam. Moriturus ergo ex eo quod nostrum habebat, non in se, sed in nobis pauebat."

43 Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 30[2].3, CCSL 38:192. "[Q]uia et hoc dixit, tristem esse animam suam usque ad mortem, et utique nos ipsi omnes cum illo. Nam sine illo, nos nihil; in illo autem, ipse Christus et nos. Quare? Quia totus Christus caput et corpus."

Christ suffers with the Church, so that when Christ our Head cries out in suffering here in the Psalm, we do so with him as his Body. Christ is not distant or absent from the Church's sufferings, but is intimately present in them.

Augustine finds one pillar of *Totus Christus* ecclesiology in Acts 9:4, where we are told that Christ suffers with the Church and the martyrs.[44] In this text, the ascended Christ addresses Saul on the road to Damascus and asks why Saul persecutes him. As Augustine points out, Christ's famous cry to Saul calls for a theological explanation:

> Yet because of our union with him, whatever the Lord says in virtue of the fleshly nature he assumed can be taken as said both by the head who has now ascended into heaven and by the members who still struggle along on their earthly pilgrimage. When Saul was persecuting Christ's earthly members, Christ cried out from heaven in the person of those suffering members, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'[45]

Because Christ is united to us, we can understand his question to Saul in two ways. First, we can apply it to Christ as an individual human being, and second, we can apply it to us, the members of his body. Christ's words in Acts 9:4 fall under both categories: they refer to the sufferings of Christ and the sufferings of his members. Christ speaks to Saul for himself and for us: when we suffer, he suffers. Why? The Church is inseparably joined to him. Thus, *Totus Christus* explains what Christ says to Saul. Augustine might say that if Christ were not *Totus Christus* with us, then the Christ's words on the road to Damascus would not make sense.

However, Christ does not suffer with us *in the same way* that we suffer, or in an unqualified sense of numerical identity. This is true because Augustine's *Totus Christus* ecclesiology is tempered by a heavily eschatological dimension: Christ's union with the church

---

[44] Augustine**,** *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 138.2, CCSL 40:1990-1.

[45] Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 138.2, CCSL 40:1991. "Quidquid igitur Dominus loquitur ex persona susceptae carnis, et ad illud caput pertinent quod iam adscendit in caelum, et ad ista membra quae adhuc in terrena peregrinatione laborant ; pro quibus laborantibus membris, cum ea Saulus insequeretur, clamauit de caelo: *Saule, Saule, quid me persequeris?*" The English translation here is from *Expositions of the Psalms 121-150,* The Works of St. Augustine III/20, trans. Maria Boulding, OSB (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2004), 257.

is real and metaphysical, but not fully realized as it will be in glory. By contrast, Jürgen Moltmann posits that *Totus Christus* ecclesiology, especially its modern variants, is an "'over-realized' eschatology." The reason, he argues, is that the Church is now only Christ's Bride, awaiting her eschatological marriage to the Bridegroom.[46] But Augustine's ecclesiology is not overrealized. For him, Christ's sufferings are not unqualifiedly identical with the Church's sufferings for two reasons. First, Christ as a human being is in heaven, and this fact distinguishes him from his members on earth. Second, the Church remains on pilgrimage through this world, aiming for the eschatological goal for which she hopes: fully realized union with Christ.

Two representative texts bear out these judgments. First, in his exposition of Psalm 142, Augustine claims that Christ, having willed to die for us, also wills to speak in us, his members. However,

> And so sometimes he [Christ] says things from the person of his members, sometimes from his own person, as he is our head. He has something which he says without us; we cannot say anything without him. The apostle says: 'So that I may fill up what is lacking of the sufferings of Christ in my own flesh' (Col. 1:24). "So that I may fill up," he says, "what is lacking of the sufferings," not of mine, but "of Christ"; "in the flesh," not of Christ, but "of my flesh." He says that Christ is suffering now, but not in his own flesh, in which he ascended to heaven, but in my flesh, which labors now on earth. Christ, he says, is suffering in my flesh: 'For now I live my own life no longer; truly it is Christ who lives in me' (Gal. 2:20).[47]

Paul can "fill up what is lacking" in Christ's sufferings by his own suffering, in the sense that Christ suffers with him. Similarly, his members can fill up what is lacking in Christ's sufferings when they suffer together as one body. However, the man Jesus in heaven does not physically

---

[46] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God*: *Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 184. German original *Das Kommen Gottes: Christliche Eschatologie* (Gütersloh: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1995), 208-9.

[47] Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 143.3, CCSL 40:2061. "Aliquando itaque ex persona membrorum suorum loquitur, aliquando ex persona sua, tamquam capitis nostri. Habet aliquid ille quod dicat sine nobis; nos sine illo nihil possumus dicere. Apostolus dicit: 'Ut suppleam quae desunt pressurarum Christi, in carne mea.' 'Ut suppleam,' inquit, 'quae desunt pressurarum,' non mearum, sed 'Christi'; 'in carne,' non iam Christi, sed 'mea.' Patitur, inquit, adhuc Christus pressuram; non in carne sua, in qua adscendit in caelum, sed in carne mea, quae adhuc laborat in terra. Christus, inquit, pressuram patitur in carne mea: 'Viuo enim non iam ego, uiuit uero in me Christus.'"

suffer when Paul or the Church suffers. Christ suffers with his members in their suffering on earth as the Head of the Body, since suffering will be part of the Body's life in its pilgrimage on earth. As Augustine argues in exposition of Psalm 87, "[t]hese tribulations are never lacking to the Church while it makes its pilgrim way through this world; now they afflict some members, now others, for the calamities strike from every direction."[48] Christ suffers with the Church now, but not in his human nature as he did on the cross.

One could still object, however, that Augustine's *Totus Christus* doctrine improperly elides the distinction between Christ and the Church: Christology has become ecclesiology. Augustine would likely counter this objection by pointing to the biblical distinction between Christ and the Church as Bridegroom and Bride. If the Head and the Body motif leads the mind to think of one person, the nuptial motif draws it to think of distinct persons. In the second exposition of Psalm 30, Augustine expounds Ephesians 5:31-32, which contains nuptial language signifying the relation of Christ and the Church. Paul calls this "a great mystery" (τὸ μυστήριον τοῦτο μέγα). Augustine argues that this mystery, unfolded now at the end of the age, is that we have two distinct entities out of which one single entity, the *Totus Christus*, comes to be: the Bridegroom and the Bride are also the *Totus Christus*, Head and Body.[49] This new creation is the "unity of person" (*unitatem personae*). This united person forms one body, but one body that has distinct members, viz., two subjects. Christ and the Church are not ontologically equal or identical so that one collapses into the other; the Church neither becomes another person ofthe Trinity nor a part of the hypostatic union. Rather, as Augustine says, the Church depends on

---

[48] Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 87.15, CCSL 39:1219. "Et quia ecclesiae in hoc mundo peregrinanti ista non desunt, dum modo in his, modo in illis, modo in illis membris eius usquequaque contingunt." English translation here from *Expositions of Psalms 73-98*, The Works of St. Augustine III/18, ed. John E. Rotelle OSA, trans. Maria Boulding OSB (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), 271.

[49] Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 30[2].3, CCSL 38:193: "Fit ergo tamquam ex duobus una quaedam persona, ex capite et corpore, ex sponso et sponsa."

Christ, but Christ exists perfectly, even without the Church. Commenting again on 1 Cor. 12:12, Augustine writes,

> A body is a single unit, with many members, but all the members of the body, numerous as they are, constitute one body; and it is the same with Christ. Many members, one body: Christ. All of us together with our Head are Christ, and without our Head we are helpless. Why? Because united with our Head we are the vine, but if cut off from our Head (God forbid!) we are only loppings, of no use to the vine-tenders and fit only for the bonfire… If we can achieve nothing without you, Lord, we can do everything in you. Yes, because whatever work he does through us seems to be our work. He can do plenty, or rather everything, without us, but we can do nothing without him.[50]

Christ surely exists without the Church, but the Church will cease to exist apart from Christ. Christ has united us to him as his Body so that the Church is wholly dependent on him, but Christ does not depend on the Church for his being or his works.

Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Totus Christus *as* Sponsa Verbi (*Spouse of the Word*)

In Scripture, Christ is distinct from the Church because the Bridegroom is a distinct person from the Bride. Hans Urs von Balthasar carefully attended to this nuptial motif and its signal importance for *Totus Christus* ecclesiology. He believed this distinguishing motif balanced the unity evoked by the Head-Body motif. I introduce von Balthasar here not because he offers a corrective to Augustine's account of *Totus Christus*, but because he used personalistic

[50] Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 30[2].3, CCSL 38:193-4. "Sicut enim corpus unum, et membra habet multa, omnia autem membra corporis cum sint multa, unum est corpus, sic et Christus. Membra multa, unum corpus: Christus. Ergo simul omnes nos cum capite nostro Christus, sine capite nostro nihil valentes. Quare? Quia nos cum capite nostro uitis; sine capite nostro, quod absit, sarmenta praecisa, non alicui operi agricolarum, sed igni tantummodo destinata. … Domine, si sine te nihil, totum in te. Etenim quidquid ille operator per nos, nos uidemur operari. Potest ille multum et totum sine nobis, nos nihil sine ipso." English translation here from *Expositions of the Psalms 1-32,* The Works of St. Augustine III/15, trans. Maria Boulding, OSB (New City Press: Hyde Park, NY: 2000), 324-5.

categories to explain *Totus Christus* in a creative way that shows how the distinction between Christ and the Church must observe the limits set by the distinction between God and creatures.

Von Balthasar believed that the biblical motif of the Church as the Bride of Christ distinguishes the Church as a collective person or agent from Christ.[51] But the Church's collective 'personhood' evinces the Church's mysterious identity, since Christ and the Church are also one Body, Head and members. Von Balthasar sought to understand this mystery in his essay "*Wer ist die Kirche?*" (Who is the Church?), which contains his main account of the *Totus Christus*.[52] He argues that *Totus Christus* does not eliminate the ontological distinction between Christ and the Church, precisely because it does not elide the qualitative distinction between God and creatures. For him, this distinction, formalized as the (in)famous 'analogy of being' (*analogia entis*), is a condition all Christian theology must meet.

In the essay, von Balthasar inquires about the nature of the Church, since it seems to be a single subject or a person even though it lacks consciousness.[53] And the Church in Scripture is also the body of Christ, an extension of another subject or person. If we are going to be faithful to Scripture, then, we must develop an ecclesiology that links both motifs together conceptually: "this means, if we allow its full range of meaning, that the Church, in regard to her Head, is not a person on her own, a new and second one. The 'body' in the sense of the simile, forms, together

---

[51] There are a number of philosophical concerns with von Balthasar's use of 'person' as applied to the Church. For our purposes, however, it is sufficient to point out that his concern is to distinguish the Church as one entity over against Christ. We can benefit from von Balthasar's insights on this point without having to take a position on whether the Church is a person.

[52] Von Balthasar refers to the *Totus Christus* at various places in his work, most notably in *Theodrama* III in the section, "Admirabile Commercium," which explores aspects of the atonement and the inclusion of the church in Christ's mission. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* III: *Dramatis Personae – Persons in Christ*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), 241.

[53] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Who is the Church?," in *Spouse of the Word: Explorations in Theology* II, trans. A.V. Littledale with Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 143-191, here, 143. German original *Sponsa Verbi: Skizzen zur Theologie* II (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1961), 148-202, here, 148-9. In what follows I will use Littledale's translation.

with the 'Head,' one being; that is, she is a person only 'by grace' of the Head."[54] For von Balthasar, as for Augustine, Christ the Head can exist without the Body, but the Body is dependent on the Head. By grace, the Head allows the Body to "participate in His personality."[55] Therefore, the Church must be Christ's Body by grace in order to be a person at all.

Von Balthasar thinks it is striking that Paul uses personalistic categories when he describes the Church as the Body and Bride of Christ in Ephesians 5. Scripture requires that we say that two seemingly contradictory motifs about the Church are true at the same time:

> [T]he personal, in virtue of which the Church is a 'someone' whom the Lord loved and for whom he delivered himself up, 'a someone', therefore, who in a certain way already existed; and the somatic, in virtue of which the Church is what she is, namely, the glorious one without spot or wrinkle yet owing her origin wholly to this event of the Cross.[56]

For von Balthasar, we need both the personal or nuptial and the somatic or bodily motifs of the Church for an adequate account of the Church's nature. These motifs present a picture where the Church is both a 'someone' distinct from Christ and Christ's Body. Von Balthasar calls this a "paradox, not to say contradiction."[57] He thinks ecclesiology falters if it draws attention to the body of Christ motif and overlooks or ignores the nuptial motif, as theology had been doing in his day.[58] To correct this overemphasis of the somatic or bodily motif, von Balthasar foregrounds the personal or nuptial motif in his account of the *Totus Christus*: thus his question, "Who is the Church?" As John O'Donnell, SJ comments on Balthasar's theological motivations, "If we ask

---

54 Von Balthasar, "Who is the Church?," 144-5.
55 Von Balthasar, "Who is the Church?," 145.
56 Von Balthasar, "Who is the Church? " 147.
57 Von Balthasar, "Who is the Church?," 147.
58 Von Balthasar, "Who is the Church?," 149.

who is the Church, a question which supposes that the Church is a subject and not a thing, the bridal image can help us to find an adequate response."[59]

Because the nuptial motif involves distinct persons, "contradistinction" must be utterly basic to Christ and the Church.[60] Moreover, the Church is a subject in the sense that its subjectivity is comprised of the individuals who constitute it.[61] The role of the hierarchy of the Church is to communicate grace to the individuals who constitute the Church: "the structure and the graces they impart are what raise the created subjects up to what they should be in God's design: a humanity formed as a bride to the Son, become the Church."[62] Von Balthasar's account of the ecclesiastical hierarchy understandably causes Protestants to worry, but as we will see further on, it is not necessary to follow von Balthasar on this point to hold *Totus Christus*.

For von Balthasar, the nuptial motif in Scripture presupposes three things. The first is the union of two persons. The second aspect is the Eucharist, the physical sacrament that generates

---

[59] John O'Donnell, SJ, "The Form of von Balthasar's Theology," in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work,* ed. David Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 216. My account of Balthasar's theology of the Church has been aided by Paul McPartlan, "Who is the Church? Zizioulas and von Balthasar on the Church's Identity," *Ecclesiology* 4 (2008): 271-288, esp. 286-88. See also Larry S. Chapp, "Who is the Church? The Personalistic Categories of Balthasar's Ecclesiology," *Communio* 23 (1996): 322-38 and Stephan Ackermann, "The Church as Person in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar," trans. Emily Rielley, *Communio* 29 (2002): 238-49. For another account of Balthasar's ecclesiology that argues that its center is the Eucharist in the spirit of *communio* theology, see Nicholas Healy and David L. Schindler, "For the Life of the World: Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Church as Eucharist," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Edward T. Oakes, SJ and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 51-63.

[60] Von Balthasar, "Who is the Church?," 155.

[61] Von Balthasar, "Who is the Church?," 156.

[62] Von Balthasar, "Who is the Church?,"158. Von Balthasar has a sophisticated way of handling the role of the institutional Church in the spiritual life of the individual persons of the Church. The office of Peter, the Church's "masculine principle," exists entirely dependent on Christ, the Church's Head and Bridegroom. But the Church cannot assert itself over against Christ in a masculine way; to avoid this, Christ must reproduce himself in the Church so that a new subject, the Bride, stands before him ("Who is the Church?," 161). Here Balthasar's "Marian principle of the Church" becomes essential. Mary, as receptive woman, corresponds to Christ's masculinity: "Her faith, with its love and hope, in its womanly openness to the divine, the Divine-human Bridegroom, is coextensive with the masculine principle, embedded in the Church, of office and sacrament, even though it is not part of its womanly character to comprehend totally, in the manner of the Bridegroom, the objective spirit therein contained" ("Who is the Church?," 161). The Church is female and receptive to the seed of eternal life Christ imparts to it, and its task is to bear fruit in the world as distinct subject and also to be the extension of Christ himself. Its masculine principle, evinced in its offices and the mediation of the sacraments, is subordinate to this feminine principle: and all of it is subordinate to Christ ("Who is the Church?," 216).

new spiritual life in the Church.[63] The third aspect is the mystery of how the two persons resolve into one, the *Totus Christus*. In the *Totus Christus,* Christ and the Church are not numerically identical because the Church is not Christ "purely and simply."[64] The Church does not directly participate in the hypostatic union. Yet Christ gives his "seal of identity" to the Church so that the opposition between them is overcome. Von Balthasar explains,

> It is comprehensible that the seal of identity should be imprinted from above on the oppositions that arise in salvation history: thus, too, the opposition between Christ as Bridegroom and the Church as bride is subsumed in the identity of the one Christ, Head and Body, who, as *Christus totus*, is for Augustine 'one person', and for Paul the 'one" (see Gal. 3:28). This seal of identity imprints itself right through the unity Christ-Church until it reaches that most fundamental opposition that rejects identity, because in it the dissimilarity is ever greater than the similarity – the opposition, that is, of God and creature. In the hypostatic union (and its imperfect participation in the Church), even this irreducible abyss, without being eliminated, is bridged and tunneled by the power of God's love.[65]

Christ gives his seal of identity to his Bride and overcomes the opposition between them, giving rise to the *Totus Christus*. However, this union of the *Totus Christus* must obey the metaphysical strictures of the analogy of being. For von Balthasar, these strictures are regulative, conceptual boundaries that condition how we understand Christian doctrines, and they derive from the fact that God is qualitatively distinct from creatures in the order of being. If we apply these strictures to Christian doctrine, every doctrine is understood to maintain "a dissimilarity greater than any

---

63 Von Balthasar, "Who is the Church?,"187. Henri de Lubac argued that "mystical body" (*corpus mysticum*) once referred to the Eucharist and in the medieval period its usage was changed to refer to the Church, resulting in an overly juridical ecclesiology. See Henri de Lubac, *Corpus mysticum L'Eucharistie et l'Eglise au Moyen Age: Étude historique.* Oeuvres completes XV (Les Éditions du Cerf: 2009). The Eucharist and its function of uniting us to Christ has its provenance in Augustine as well, and the Eucharist is undoubtedly central in nearly all Christian traditions, though Protestant traditions differ from the Catholic Church on what exactly is accomplished in the sacrament. The task I am pursuing here would be aided by attention to this problem, but due to space I cannot pursue this at length. For an argument that Reformed theology (evinced in John Webster's theology) needs a robust Eucharistic ecclesiology, see Matthew Levering, *Christ and the Catholic Priesthood:Ecclesial Hierarchy and the Pattern of the Trinity* (Mundelein, IL: Hillenbrand, 2010), 137n42. For a positive statement of this view, see Benedict XVI, "Sacramentum Caritatis," §36, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_sacramentum-caritatis.html#The_eucharistic_celebration,_the_work_of_Christus_Totus, accessed November 28, 2018.

64 Von Balthasar, "Who is the Church?," 187.

65 Von Balthasar, "Who is the Church?," 187-8.

similarity" between God and creatures.[66] On this view, then, any union between God and creatures must not be understood strictly in a creaturely way. For example, Christ and the Church cannot be united in the *Totus Christus* so that the two become numerically identical as would be the case in some kinds of union between creatures, such as the mixture of water and salt in saltwater, or the unity of one's own bodily integrity. Christ and the Church are one spiritual entity, but also two distinct subjects – their union neither collapses their subjectivities into one, nor separates them.

Karl Barth on the Totus Christus *in* Church Dogmatics IV

Von Balthasar's close relationship with Karl Barth is well known. They shared a rich theological friendship and had many similar aims. Both were concerned with identifying the relationship between Christ and the Church; their ecclesial moment, the years prior to Vatican II, made the issue a pressing concern.[67] In in the 1950s, Barth moved away from his earlier theology that moderately emphasized the importance of sacramental mediation in the Church while other Protestants warmed to the idea of *Totus Christus*.[68] He developed an "ethics of testimony" in the fourth volume of the *Church Dogmatics* that explains how Christ is distinct from the Church. On his view, Christ calls the Church and the Church responds to him in

---

[66] Von Balthasar uses this idiom in his theology to describe the relation of creatures to God in human action, Christology, and Trinitarian theology, among other doctrines. This account of the *analogia entis* is defended by Erich Przywara, "The Scope of Analogy as a Fundamental Catholic Form," in Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm,* trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014). Von Balthasar most notably applied Przywara's account of the *analogia entis* to a critique of Karl Barth on the relation of nature and grace. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*: *Exposition and Interpretation*, trans. Edward T. Oakes, SJ (San Franciso: Ignatius, 1992), 285.

[67] For an account of Barth's and Balthasar's relationship that focuses on Barth's developing ecclesiology, see D. Stephen Long, *Saving Karl Barth: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Preoccupation*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), chapter 6.

[68] John Webster, "Balthasar and Barth," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar,* ed. Edward T. Oakes, SJ and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 253.

obedience and witness.[69] Yet for Barth, Jesus Christ and the Church are tightly united as the *Totus Christus*.

Barth's account of the *Totus Christus* is partly based in an account of double agency in his Christology, which George Hunsinger has dubbed 'Chalcedonian': "a relationship of asymmetry, intimacy, and integrity between God and the human being."[70] Barth then applied this Chalcedonian logic to Christ's relation with his community, the Church.[71] For Barth, Jesus Christ has two forms of existence: in the incarnation itself, and in his union with the "community," or the Church.[72] In the incarnation itself, the Word takes flesh and joins it to himself, generating the asymmetrical relation between the Word and human nature. The two natures are hypostatically united in the Person of the Word, while they remain irreducibly distinct. In his union with the community, the same Chalcedonian logic orders the union, though it does this in a way merely analogous to the incarnation. Christ and the community are united, but unlike the union of two natures in the Word, they remain irreducibly distinct subjects.[73] Within this schema, Barth calls the Christian community the *Totus Christus* with Christ. For Barth, like Augustine and von Balthasar, Christ is intimately one with his Body, the Church, but they also remain distinct.

Christ's election is the foundation of the Church's election, and therefore is the basis for the *Totus Christus*. The Church exists because of Christ, who reconciled humanity to himself

---

69 Webster, "Balthasar and Barth," 253. For an account of Barth's ethics in the context of his understanding of divine and human agency, see John Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* (Bloomsbury: T&T Clark, 2004).

70 George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 223. Bruce McCormack has questioned just how Chalcedonian Barth's Christology is. This is a dispute I cannot resolve here.

71 Kimlyn Bender, *Karl Barth's Christological Ecclesiology*, (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), 199. For a less sanguine account of Barth's ecclesiology, especially for its "dichotomization" of Christ and the Church, see Ian A. McFarland, "The Body of Christ: Rethinking a Classical Ecclesiological Model," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7:3 (2005): 225-45.

72 Bender, *Karl Barth's Christological Ecclesiology*, 199.

73 Bender, *Karl Barth's Christological Ecclesiology,* 199-200.

and offers the Church the possibility of its existence.[74] Because the Church is elected in Christ, the Church becomes Christ's "earthly-historical form of existence."[75] The doctrine of reconciliation is therefore *the* crucial foundation for the Church. Because of this reconciliation, Jesus Christ now "lives in a special element of this history created and controlled by Him… This particular element of human history, this earthly-historical form of existence of Jesus Christ, is the Christian community."[76] Christ reconciles the Church to himself and becomes its Head, a biblical motif that Barth attends to closely in his ecclesiology: "He is the Head of this body, the community. And it is the body which has its Head in Him. It belongs to him, and He belongs to it."[77]

Christ the Head is asymmetrical and distinct from the community, the body, but they are also deeply united so that they are one. Barth has a distinct way of parsing these matters. And Kimlyn Bender points to a central passage where Barth does this. Barth writes:[78]

> When we say Jesus Christ, and therefore speak of the existence of the Son of God in human nature as it was actualized in Him, we certainly speak of the One who exists as this man and in this way, but we do not speak of One who is alone as such, who became this man and existed in this way for Himself. When we say Jesus Christ, we say Jesus Christ and His own – those who are co-elected by Him as the Son of God and in Him as the Son of Man. We say Jesus Christ and His community, Jesus Christ as the Head of the body, Jesus Christ in both His heavenly and also His earthly historical form of existence. His existence takes both the one form and the other.[79]

In assuming human nature, Christ elects all humanity implicitly. However, wherever this election is known in faith, hope, and love, human beings are caught up in Christ as his earthly-

---

74 D. Stephen Long, *Saving Karl Barth*, 195, referring to Barth, *CD* IV/1, 17, 21.

75 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (CD) IV/1, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 661. All other volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* cited herein are from the Bromiley translation. German original *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1947-67). On the priority of election and reconciliation in Barth's teaching on the church, see Bender, *Karl Barth's Christological Ecclesiology,* ch. 5.

76 Barth, *CD* IV/1, 661.

77 Barth, *CD* IV/1, 661.

78 Bender, *Karl Barth's Christological Ecclesiology,* 204n14.

79 Barth, *CD* IV/2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 59.

historical form of existence.[80] Christ's relationship to the Church is "indirectly identical" to the relation of divinity and humanity in the hypostatic union. But the "indirectly" is important here; Christ and the Church are not numerically identical. Like Augustine, Barth thinks Christ does not need the Church to exist, but the Church is utterly dependent on Christ, particularly on his election. Thus, he argues that there cannot be an analogy or "repetition or extension of the incarnation" in the community. The community is the earthly-historical form of Christ's existence that corresponds to Christ's heavenly form of existence, but they are not the same.

As Head and members, Christ and the community are the *Totus Christus*; but like Augustine, Barth argues the *Totus Christus* has an eschatological dimension. That is to say, though Christ and the community form a "differentiated, but inseparable unity,"[81] Christ will fulfill his imperfect union with the community in the eschatological renewal of all things: "In God's eternal counsel, in His epiphany, and finally in His revelation at the end of the age, He was and is and will be this *totus Christus*- Christ and Christians."[82] Barth affirmed this eschatological dimension because of his study of Scripture. He thought Paul's phrase "attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (εἰς μέτρον ἡλικίας τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 4:13) was fundamental; the fulfillment of the *pleroma* will not occur until Christ is all in all.[83] The church does not experience this fulfillment yet. For the present, Christ prepares the community as a "provisional representation" to the world of Christ himself.[84]

Barth thinks the Church is the *Totus Christus* because of Paul's phrase "in Christ" (ἐν Χριστῷ), which he attributes to the Church. The significance of this prepositional phrase cannot be overstated: "Jesus Christ *is*, and in His being the apostles and communities are. For this

---

80 Barth, *CD* IV/2, 59.
81 Bender, *Karl Barth's Christological Ecclesiology,* 202.
82 Barth, *CD* IV/2, 60.
83 Barth, *CD* IV/2, 625.
84 Barth, *CD* IV/2, 626.

reason, directly or indirectly, everything that is said about the being of Jesus Christ can be only an explication of the being of Jesus Christ, and everything that is said about the being of Jesus Christ applies directly or indirectly to the being of Christians."[85] Because Jesus Christ lives, the New Testament apostles and all Christian communities live in him "as the *totus Christus.*"[86] Christ thus lives not only in heaven but also on earth in the community. He does not live only in the faith, prayers, or confessions of the community, but "as the place in which all this can and may and must and will happen"; Christ makes all that the Church is, possible.[87] Joined to Christ, the Church is the "fullness" (πλήρωμα) of which Paul speaks in Ephesians 4. It is destined for union with Christ, the "perfect man" (ἀνήρ τέλειος), but it does not see this fulfillment yet; it can only expect it to arrive in the eschaton. Nevertheless, Christ and the community, the *Totus Christus,* will be the ἀνήρ τέλειος in the end. Christ does not need the Church to constitute his identity, but the Church as part of the *Totus Christus* is inextricably tied to Christ's election.[88] Salvation history will end with Christ as victorious along with his body: "Salvation history is the history of the *totus Christus*, of the Head with the body and all the members. This *totus Christus* is *Christus Victor*."[89]

---

85 Barth, *CD* IV/2, 658.

86 Barth, *CD* IV/2, 658.

87 Barth, *CD* IV/2, 659.

88 D. Stephen Long points out an ambiguity in Barth, where Barth claims that "the world would not necessarily be lost if there were no Church" (*CD* IV/3.2, 826) in Long, *Saving Karl Barth*, 216. This point raises an ambiguity in Barth's meaning in the text cited above. Does Barth change his mind on whether the Church is inextricably tied to Christ? As Long notes, Kimlyn Bender isolates a tension in Barth's thought between the church as event and as institution, which Barth does not supply adequate conceptual tools to resolve (Bender, *Karl Barth's Christological Ecclesiology*, 151). Long worries that Barth's move here in *CD* IV/3.2 calls the ordered economy of salvation that Barth painstakingly defends into question, especially in that it could not be trusted due to the arbitrariness of God. But I think Barth intended to show how the work of Christ in the church is an act of sheer grace, and that God is not bound in any way to redeem the world through the Church. The fact that he does so – that he has willed to use the Church - is a gift that displays his mercy and forbearance. Barth writes, "It is an act of free grace that Jesus Christ wills to claim its [the community's] service in this matter" (*CD* IV/3.2, 826).

89 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.1, 216. On the role of the Holy Spirit in Barth's theology, see George Hunsinger, "The Mediator of Communion: Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," in *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 148-85.

For Barth, the Holy Spirit is the principle of the unity of the *Totus Christus*. The community is the "predicate" of Christ's existence; it lives as he lives.[90] However, the Holy Spirit's action "as the work of the free grace of God in Jesus Christ is the basis and secret of the existence of the Christian community."[91] The Holy Spirit does not work apart from Jesus Christ; both have the same will and power to create the community. Barth writes, "The Holy Spirit is the power of God proper to the being of Jesus Christ in the exercise and operation of which He causes His community to become what it is."[92] The Holy Spirit is the "bond of peace" of the Father and the Son, and so he is the one who brings peace and reconciliation to the community in history.[93] The Spirit does this precisely by constituting the unity of the *totus Christus*, "i.e., Jesus Christ in the heights and in the depths, in His transcendence and in His immanence. He is the One who constitutes and guarantees the unity of the first and the second predicates, of the primary and secondary dimensions and forms of existence of His being."[94] Thus, the Holy Spirit upholds both the heavenly and earthly-historical forms of Christ's existence.

One might say that the Holy Spirit is the efficient cause of the unity of Christ and the Church for Barth. The Spirit joins Christ and the community while keeping them distinct in their forms of action, divine and human. The Spirit's work is "to bring and hold them together, not to identify, intermingle nor confound them, not to change the one into the other nor to merge the one into the other, but to coordinate them, to make them parallel, to bring them into harmony and therefore to bind them to a true unity."[95] That is to say, the Holy Spirit coordinates the action of Christ on the community, on the one hand, and human freedom and obedience to Christ, on the

---

90 Barth, *CD* IV/3.2, 754.
91 Barth, *CD* IV/3.2, 760.
92 Barth, *CD* IV/3.2, 759.
93 Barth, *CD* IV/3.2, 760.
94 Barth, *CD* IV/3.2, 760.
95 Barth, *CD* IV/3.2, 761.

other. In this way, the community is not identical to Christ even though it "corresponds" to him. As Barth writes elsewhere, "Between [the community's] invisible being and that of Jesus Christ, between its distinction from the world and His, there is indeed correspondence but no parity, let alone identity. Even in its invisible essence it is not Christ, nor a second Christ, nor an extension of the one Christ."[96] Barth does not deny here that the community is Christ's body; he only denies that the community is identical to the person of the Word. As we have seen, Augustine and von Balthasar deny this as well. Christ is not numerically identical with the community, but he is one with it by grace. In fact, for Barth, Christ is so intimate with his community that the community can represent him in its suffering. Barth thinks this is the best way to read the account of Saul's vision of Christ on the road to Damascus, the text that was so important to Augustine's *Totus Christus*.[97] In that account, Christ is the subject of the community's suffering; that is, the community does not 'point to' Christ in its suffering, but Christ himself is present in that suffering.[98] Much like Augustine in his reading of Psalm 30, Barth thinks Christ is so intimately united with his community that Christ suffers with them. Barth's theology of the *Totus Christus* represents a striking level of unity between Christ and the church, actualized by the Holy Spirit.

Totus Christus *and the God-Creature Distinction Objection*

Augustine, von Balthasar, and Barth hold *Totus Christus* but reject versions of it that destroy the distinction between God and creatures. To summarize my analysis: (1) For these theologians, God and creatures are distinct ontologically, even in the *Totus Christus.* Yet Christ and the Church are united ontologically in some way. Therefore, Christ and the Church are both

96 Barth, *CD* IV/3.2, 729.
97 Barth, *CD* IV/3.1, 206-7, noted in Bender, *Karl Barth's Christological Ecclesiology*, 203.
98 Bender, *Karl Barth's Christological Ecclesiology*, 203.

united and distinct, a reality that surely discloses the mysterious character of the Church (Eph. 5:32). For von Balthasar, this means that the nuptial motif in Scripture must balance the head-body (somatic) motif in our account of the *Totus Christus*. (2) Eschatology should shape how we should understand the doctrine. Christ is one with the Church now, but not in full. (3) The Holy Spirit unites Christ with the Church while Christ physically remains in heaven, that is, according to his human nature. Based on these arguments, we have good reason to think that *Totus Christus* does not elide the distinction between God and creatures. In what follows, I will respond to the Dr. Vanhoozer's four objections listed in part III of this paper. Then I will discuss what *Totus Christus* entails and does not entail.

V. Responses to Objections - What *Totus Christus* Entails and Does Not Entail

The first objection stated that *Totus Christus* is false because it entails that Christ as God is united to the Church in the same way that he is united to the Father and the Holy Spirit. However, *Totus Christus* as I have tried to represent it teaches that the Holy Spirit unites us to Christ, not in a hypostatic unity or the unity of the Trinity, but in a mystical or spiritual union. Vanhoozer, Horton, and Webster seem to think the *Totus Christus* must be the same kind of union as the unity of the Trinity or the hypostatic union. And they do not seem to think there are other ways of conceiving this union, or they do not say so explicitly. But this seems to be mistaken. Scripture teaches that Christ is really, or ontologically, united to the Church. Among the Pauline texts that teach Christ's union with the Church as his Body and Bride that we have already mentioned, we can see this in Peter's claim that human beings participate in the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). How should we describe the kind of union of the *Totus Christus* to avoid any "crass mixture" between God and creatures? Thomas Aquinas provides a helpful theological

taxonomy that accounts for this mode of union and distinguishes it from other kinds.[99] According to him, God is present to creatures in three modes. First, he is present to all creatures according to his essence, presence, and power as their first cause.[100] Second, he is present to the Christian by the grace of the indwelling Holy Spirit which flows from Christ's humanity as the Head of the Church.[101] Third, he is present to a creature in the closest possible mode by the grace of hypostatic union.[102] In the *Totus Christus*, Christ is present to a creature in the second mode, not in the third. This conceptual move furnishes us with a set of theological rules for how we should talk of the *Totus Christus*. For example, since *Totus Christus* is not the hypostatic union, things that are true of Christ are not necessarily true of the Church. For example, we cannot argue that the Church is sinless because Christ is sinless. This would only be true if Christ and the Church are numerically identical, which would surely be a "crass mixture" between God and creatures. However, some things that are true of Christ as man can be attributed to the Church. For example, Christ as man is holy and therefore the Church is holy, since grace flows to us from his holy humanity by the Holy Spirit. The difference here is that Scripture invites us to attribute holiness to the Church because of Christ's holiness; Christ himself gives the grace of adoption to the Church (Eph. 1:4-6, Rom. 8:15). But Scripture does not say that the Church is identical to Christ. The *Totus Christus,* then, is not the hypostatic union. Thus, the Church is not the ongoing Incarnation, if we suppose that "ongoing Incarnation" here means that the Church directly participates in or becomes a part of the hypostatic union.

---

99 Thanks to Mitchell Kennard for his suggestion to use Aquinas's distinction in this way here.

100 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 8, a. 3, c.

101 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 110, a. 1, cf. I-II, q. 112, a. 1, ad 1; III, q. 8, a. 1, c. and ad 1.

102 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* III, q. 2, a. 10, ad 2.

However, in Barth's effort to deny that the Church is the ongoing Incarnation, he also denied that the Church is the mystical body of Christ, a term that overlaps in meaning with *Totus Christus*. He denied it because he found no basis for it in Scripture.[103] Thus Barth affirmed *Totus Christus,* but denied the mystical body of Christ. This raises a question: can we affirm *Totus Christus* and deny the mystical body of Christ if the two bear a similar meaning? Interestingly, Barth is out of step with a good deal of the Reformed theological tradition in this denial. For example, the Westminster Confession explicitly affirms that Christians are members of Christ's "mystical body" (§29.1), a spiritual union between Christ the Head and the members, his Body. Moreover, the English Reformed divine John Owen and Italian Reformed scholastic Girolamo Zanchi, both students of Thomas Aquinas's theology, held that the Church is Christ's mystical body, and they thought this doctrine is based in Scripture.[104] Probably more than any other Reformed divine, Owen argued, similarly to Barth, that the Holy Spirit is the principle of our union with Christ. But unlike Barth, Owen affirmed that the we are members of Christ's mystical body by faith. Owen writes, "Faith in Christ is that grace whereby the church is united unto him – incorporated into one mystical body with him. It is thereby that he dwells in them, and they in him."[105] Christ sends the Holy Spirit, who makes Christ present to them and joins

---

103 Barth, *CD* IV/1, 666.

104 Girolamo Zanchi, *De religione christiana fides*, ed. Luca Baschera and Christian Moser (Leiden: Brill: 2007), 236-39: "So as this mystical body, consisting of Christ as the head and of the faithful members, sometimes is simply named Christ. So great is the conjunction of Christ with the faithful and of them with Christ, that surely it may seem not to be said amiss that as the first union was made of two natures in one person, so this is made of many persons as it were into one nature, according to those sayings: "That ye should be partakers of the divine nature," and "We are members of his body, of his bones and of his flesh," here, 239. I have revised the English translation in this volume for readability. On John Owen's debts to Aquinas, see Christopher Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013).

105 John Owen, "Christologia" in *The Works of John Owen,* Vol. 1, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh/Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 130. For a helpful analysis of mystical union language in John Owen's theology, see T. Robert Baylor, "'One with Him in Spirit': Mystical Union and the Humanity of Christ in the Theology of John Owen" in "*In Christ" in Paul: Explorations in Paul's Theology of Union and Participation,* ed. Michael J. Thate et al. (Mohr Siebeck: Tübingen, 2014), 427-452.

them together into one body.[106] It seems clear, then, that Reformed catholics do not need to reject Christ's mystical body because it fuses Christ and the Church into the same thing; many Reformed divines did not think so, and they held that the Holy Spirit is the principle of Christ's mystical union with his body.

Furthermore, and importantly, recent Catholic teaching affirms this judgment. Pius XII's encyclical *Mystici Corporis* attests that to the Holy Spirit "as to an invisible principle, is to be ascribed the fact that all the parts of the Body are joined one with the other and with their exalted Head; for he is entire in the Head, entire in the Body, and entire in each of the members."[107] Protestants can agree with Catholics that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Son (Gal. 4:6), is the principle of Christ's union with the Church.

The second objection stated that *Totus Christus* underwrites the Church's infallibility; our analysis shows that this claim is not warranted. Not everything the Church teaches is divinely authorized, precisely because its union with Christ is not yet consummated. The Church is united to him as his Body, but it is not fully realized as his body as it will be when Christ is all in all. This means that *Totus Christus* does not underwrite the Church's teaching as *viva vox Dei*; neither does it make it necessary to assent to all conciliar or papal decrees. Catholics and Protestants disagree on whether the Catholic Church mediates divine revelation, but *Totus Christus* should not be the reason why.

The third objection claimed that *Totus Christus* entails that the Catholic Church's sacraments are necessary for grace, and thus that Christ alone is not the only source of grace. However, the sacraments of the Catholic Church are not logically necessary for grace in the

---

[106] John Owen, "Pneumatologia," in *The Works of John Owen,* Vol. 3, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh/New Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 25.

[107] Pius XII, "Encyclical *Mystici Corporis*: Mystery of the Church" in Henrich Denzinger (DZ), *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum,* ed. Peter Hünermann, 43rd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2012), §3808.

economy God has willed. This contention seems to be the standard position of the Catholic Church after Vatican II. In *Lumen Gentium,* the Council Fathers teach that the Church subsists in a visible society in the Catholic Church, though many elements of sanctification are found beyond this visible structure. These elements, the document argues, belong to the Church of Christ, and "are forces impelling to catholic unity." [108] These elements outside the visible Catholic Church introduce a distinction: the mystical body of Christ is not the same thing as the Catholic Church's visible structure, even though the mystical body and the institutional hierarchy are not "two realities" (*duae res*). The Holy Spirit joins Christians beyond the hierarchical and sacramental boundaries of the Catholic Church to Catholics "in some real way" (*imo vera quaedam*).[109] It seems clear, then, that the grace of Christ exists beyond the Catholic Church and its sacraments. If Christ's grace extends beyond the Catholic Church, *Totus Christus* also extends beyond it, though it also includes it.

Against the fourth objection, which argues that Christ's ascension into heaven precludes his presence with us on earth, there are a number of ways to respond. First, Augustine argued that Christ's physical absence was deeply significant for the Church's pilgrim journey in this world. For Augustine, "we are with him [Christ] in heaven through hope, and he is with us on earth through charity ."[110] Charity is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us (Rom. 5:5). In this action, the Holy Spirit unites us with Christ despite Christ's physical absence. And the theological virtue of hope instills in us a longing to be physically present with Christ when he returns. John Calvin argued, quite similarly, that the Holy Spirit unites us with

---

108 Vatican Council II, "*Lumen Gentium*," DZ §4119.

109 Vatican Council II, "*Lumen Gentium*," DZ §4139.

110 Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 54.3, CCSL 39:657. "Nos cum illo in caelo per spem, ipse nobiscum in terra per caritatem."

Christ, particularly in the Lord's Supper, and that in this action the Spirit overcomes the distance between Christ in heaven and his Church on earth.[111] Another way to solve this problem is to argue that Christ's humanity is the instrumental cause of our salvation. This means that the human actions of Christ are saving for us because of the divine power of the Logos working in them. By this divine power, Christ can also 'touch' us through the faith that he imparts and in the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, even though he is physically absent from us.[112] We do not need to affirm baptismal regeneration or transubstantiation to hold this doctrine. By the Holy Spirit, Christ works through faith, the sacraments of the faith, and the preaching of the Word to minister to us now.

What does *Totus Christus* entail? First, as Augustine might say, Christ is more present to the Church than the Church is to itself; the union between Christ and the Church is a real, metaphysical union. For this reason, as the Church suffers in this world and hopes for her eternal home, Christ bears her sufferings with her. Second, this metaphysical union is not the same as the hypostatic union or the unity of the Trinity: Christ is present to the Church in the mode of grace, not hypostatic union. Third, Christ is not numerically identical with the Church, even though by the Holy Spirit he is united to it and makes up one spiritual entity with it. Fourth, the Church is not yet fully united to Christ, which will only be accomplished at the end of time, the Parousia, and the resurrection of the dead. Fifth, Scripture describes an analogous relation between our bodies and Christ and his mystical Body, the *Totus Christus*. That is to say, Scripture uses the analogy of our bodies, head and members, to signify by analogy the real,

---

111 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960) IV.xvii.10, p. 1370: "Even though it seems unbelievable that Christ's flesh, separated from us by such great distance, penetrates to us, so that it becomes our food, let us remember how far the secret power of the Holy Spirit towers above all our senses, and how foolish it is to wish to measure his immeasurableness by our measure. What, then, our mind does not comprehend, let faith conceive: that the Spirit truly unites things separated in space."

112 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* III, q. 59, a. 1, ad 3.

metaphysical union of Christ and the Church. It derives this analogy from the meaning or *ratio* of heads and bodies as we know them.[113] Following Scripture, we apply this *ratio* to the terms 'Head' and 'Body' as Scripture uses them of Christ and the Church, since this reference shares a common *ratio* with how the terms refer to our heads and bodies. But God infinitely exceeds creatures in the order of being. This means that our terms about bodies cannot adequately name the fullness of Christ's union with the Church in his Body, the *Totus Christus*. The union of his mystical Body far exceeds the union even within our own bodies, and is a unity than which a greater cannot be conceived.

Why hold *Totus Christus* to be true? First, *Totus Christus* follows the precise sense of Scripture's teaching about Christ's relationship to the Church. Second, it does not entail any of the negative consequences that the Reformed objections say it does, and the objections fail to apply to what Augustine, von Balthasar, and Barth say about it. Third, if we want to be Reformed catholics by seeking to revive ancient catholic teaching for renewal of our churches and theology, we must carefully examine every ancient 'catholic' doctrine, including ecclesiological doctrines. And we must look past faulty recent permutations of those doctrines that may not be the same as the ancient, venerable ones. If a version of *Totus Christus* is biblically and theologically sound, Reformed (and Protestant) theologians should accept it. We should do this not because it is the most ecumenical decision, but because the doctrine is true.

---

[113] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 13, aa. 5-6. On Aquinas's view of the analogical use of terms and its relation to the order of being, see Bruce D. Marshall, "Christ the End of Analogy" in *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Antichrist or the Wisdom of God?,"* ed. Thomas Joseph White (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 280-313.