

**THOMAS AQUINAS' INCARNATIONAL 'BECOMING' AS A
MODEL FOR THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND
CHRISTIAN SECULAR VOCATION**

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Abstract

The teaching that Christ is both God and man is the foundation for our salvation and the leitmotif for traditional Christian theism. Nevertheless, it also presents serious logical difficulties and incoherence, especially in the context of identity. How Christ can simultaneously be perfectly divine and fully human is a fundamental problem. Yet without this foundational truth, Christianity crumbles, and faith is unreasonable. This work examines Thomas Aquinas' understanding of the meaning of person and nature. Thereafter, it presents Thomas' arguments on the union of the two natures in the single Person of Christ, using his 'mixed relation' logic explained by the hypostatic union. This paper affirms that, because Christ became human, human fulfilment consists in this new anthropological vision, not in a radical detachment from the concrete situation in the world, but a commitment to incarnate existence and engagement, to transform the world for good. The Thomistic Incarnational 'Becoming model' provides the model for how Christians can engage the world without losing their identity.

Keywords: Christ, Thomas Aquinas, Incarnational Becoming, Union, Nature, Person.

1. Introduction

The Council of Chalcedon (451) marked a watershed moment in the development of Christology. Against the backdrop of the Christological heresies of the preceding centuries, the Council insisted on the union and integrity of the humanity and divinity of Christ. In this context, the Christological question of the unity of the natures in Christ became an

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issue for analytical clarification. Since both human and divine elements belong to different *genera* and operate under different principles, it became clear that only an analysis of the proper levels of thought proper to each mode and nature can logically demonstrate the truth about Christ. Within this framework and premised on these foundational truths, Thomas Aquinas, in the thirteenth century, sought to explore further the extent and context of this 'unity in person' vs. 'distinction in nature'. To achieve this, he posited an Incarnational logic of 'becoming' following Peter Lombard's *Subsistence* theory of the Incarnation in contradistinction with the *Assumptus-Homo* and *Habitus* theories.²

2. Expressing the Mystery: The Incarnation as 'Becoming'³

A Trilogy of Truths

Thomas Aquinas highlights twelve foundational propositions for a contextual meaning of Christ's being as God and his becoming human at the Incarnation.⁴ Of these, three propositions stand out. We must affirm, in a definitive way, all three – together, without any exception – for any argument that Christ is both God and human to stand. These truths are indispensable. The first is to affirm the true divinity of Christ. This will mean that one must be able to show that the Christ who entered into human history through Mary is the same one who existed as God with the Father from the beginning. In this way, one must affirm the truth that the Son of God came among humanity without losing his divinity. On this, Thomas argues that since "the true divine nature is united with a true

² For a detailed treatment of the Christological heresies concerning the Incarnation, see Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Change? The Word's Becoming in the Incarnation*, (Still River, Massachusetts: St. Bede's Publications, 1984).

³ I recommend the following works by Aquinas for further reading on the theme: *Summa Theologiae* (hereafter referred to simply as *ST*), III, qq. 1-59; *Summa Contra Gentiles* (hereafter *SCG*), IV, c. 27-55; *De veritate*, q. 29; *Comp. theol.*, c. 199-245; *Super Ioannem*, c. 1, l. 14 [165-190]. Aquinas' works can be assessed from www.corpusthomicum.org. Some authors have also examined this topic with depth. I will mention a few. Richard Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation: Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 297-319; Michael Gorman, "Christ as Composite according to Aquinas," *Traditio*, vol. 55 (2000), 143-157.

⁴ *ST*, III, q. 16, aa. 1-12.

human nature not only in person but also in *suppositum* or hypostasis” then it follows that the Son of God is human.⁵ The second point is to affirm the true humanity of Christ. This will mean that we have to answer in the affirmative the question: “Is Christ truly human?” To assert that Christ who is God is truly human by his Incarnation, we must affirm that Christ lived a truly human life and possessed a truly human nature, not an imaginary one. Thomas Aquinas insists – rejecting the positions of Manicheism, Apollinarism, and that of Valentinus – that Christ is truly human because he took up our human flesh and nature for which reason he was capable of redeeming us.

Thomas stresses that the Son of God became human by assuming our humanity. However, there is a caveat: the human nature he assumed is nonetheless immune from the stain of sin. Thus, Christ can assume our nature without sharing in its corruption. This is what the Letter to the Hebrews means when it says that Christ is able “to sympathize with our weaknesses” since he has been tempted in every way that we are, “yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). The Fourth Eucharistic Prayer puts it rather pointedly that Christ was “a man like us in all things but sin.”⁶ This upholds the full humanity of Christ with the only exception of the blemish of evil. It is only because Christ assumed the same nature we had inherited from Adam, without himself sinning, that he is capable of saving fallen humanity.⁷ Although Christ assumes human nature, his divine nature is not absorbed into human nature. It means that Christ became human, but did not change into a human person. This is the basic idea of Incarnational ‘Becoming’.

The third point is that we must affirm that Christ is truly divine and human. The divinity of Christ has to be proof of his humanity and vice versa. There must be a sort of reciprocity of relations in such a way that redemption becomes the ultimate goal of the Incarnation. That is, Christ can redeem humanity because he is divine, but he is also worthy to redeem because he is human. These two natures act as a form of reciprocal guarantee for each other. In the end, we must confirm that the Christ who became human is human. This means that *becoming* has moved forward to the more concrete *is*.⁸

⁵ Cf. *ST*, III, q. 16, a. 1.

⁶ *The Roman Missal*, Eucharistic Prayer IV.

⁷ Cf. *ST*, III, q. 4, a. 6; Cf. also, *ST*, III, qq. 14 and 15; *SCG*, IV, c. 29, n. 7.

⁸ Weinandy shows how this the incarnational ‘is’ is foundational for the Christology of Thomas Aquinas. Thomas Weinandy, “St. Thomas Aquinas. Incarnational ‘Becoming’ as a Mixed Relation,” *Przegląd Tomistyczny*, t. XXVI (2000), 197-213.

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The implication here is that Christ who is the Son of God is the same Christ who is also human. He does not merely become human but performs human acts. However, his becoming human does not change his divinity, but alters human nature: "...when it is said, 'God was made man', we understand no change on the part of God, but only on the part of the human nature."⁹ In this participation of human nature in divine nature, divine nature receives nothing and so "what belongs to human nature can no wise be predicated of the divine nature."¹⁰ Based on this union of the two natures, humanity's redemption is the reason for the Incarnation, and the Incarnation is the foundation for humanity's redemption.¹¹

These three truths are fundamental to any meaningful treatment of the Incarnation and help us to understand how the Christian ought to engage the world following the Incarnational 'Becoming' model. Here, humanity is united to the person of Christ, the Son of God. Yet he remains unchangeably divine. Another nature is added to him not to take away his previous nature, not as a temporary addendum, but as a permanent union. At no point after the incarnation does Christ cease to possess any of these two natures. Christ becomes human, not by the assumption of *hypostases*, but by the union of natures.

The Question of Hypostasis and the Union of the Natures

The major Christological challenge of the Council of Chalcedon was to explain the nature of the union of the two natures in Christ, technically called the *hypostatic union*. To do this, the Council stated that Christ is "to be acknowledged in two natures, *without confusion, without change,*

⁹ *ST*, III, q. 16, a. 6, ad. 2. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (hereafter *CCC*), 464.

¹⁰ *ST*, III, q. 16, a. 5, ad. 3.

¹¹ Cf. *ST*, III, q. 1. See also *ST*, III, q. 1, a. 2: "Unless He was God, He would not have brought a remedy; and unless He was man, He would not have set an example." Some authors have explained the necessity of the true human and divine natures of Christ for salvation. See Daniel KEATING, "Trinity and Salvation: Christian Life as an Existence in the Trinity," *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, ed. Gilles EMERY and Matthew LEVERING (Oxford: University Press, 2011), 444. See also, See John BOYLE, "The Twofold Division of St. Thomas's Christology in the *Tertium Pars*," *The Thomist*, 60 (1996), 439-447.

without division, without separation.”¹² This statement is fundamental to how Thomas views the Incarnation. It gives proper perspectives on the distinction of the two natures, without doing injury to the profound unity that exists in the single Person of Christ. The characteristic property appropriate to each of the natures of Christ explains something of the essential unity that subsists in his person as God for which reason he can redeem. Each is preserved, but also really belongs to the one ὑπόστασις (*hypostasis*; person) of Christ, “*Filium Dei unigenitum*” (only begotten Son of God) and “*consubstantialem Patri*” (consubstantial with the Father).¹³ St. John writes, in John 1:14, of this same Christ: “καὶ ὁ Λόγος ἐγένετο σὰρκα καὶ κατοικοῦσε ἀνάμεσά μας” (*kai aux Logos egine sarka kai katoikouse anamesa mas*; and the Word became flesh and dwelled among us). How the Divine Word assumes human flesh without any change to his divine hypostasis is what Aquinas explains in his Incarnational ‘Becoming’.

First, Aquinas clarifies the meaning of four basic terms about the Person of Christ: *person*, *substance*, *hypostasis*, and *nature*. These terms are very important for Thomas and his first concern is to clarify these terminologies and use them to explain the union in Christ. Long before him, Boethius (480-524) had defined *Person* as *rationalis naturae individua substantia* (individual substance of a rational nature). However, in Thomas, we find a marked essentialist interpretation of the term. For him, every individual of a rational nature is called a person.¹⁴

We must note that the controversy about whether Christ possessed two natures or was two persons was a confusion of the meaning of both terms. Boethius had defined *nature* as *unamquamque rem informans specifica differentia* (Nature is what informs a thing with its specific

¹² DC, 302. For more on the Christology of Chalcedon, see *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*, Translated Texts for Historians 45, 3 volumes, trans. Richard Price and Michael Gaddis, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005). See also, Francis Murphy, “The Dogmatic Definition at Chalcedon,” *Theological Studies* 12 (1951): 505-519.

¹³ The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed.

¹⁴ *ST*, I, q. 29, a. 1.

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difference). Thomas agrees with this definition.¹⁵ However, he insists that the components implied by *nature* are different from those implied by *person*, and should not be confused. Quoting Aristotle's *Physics 2.1 (193a30)*, Thomas explains that since 'nature' pertains to the essence of a thing "which is signified by the definition", it differs significantly from *supposit*, the category to which *person* belongs,¹⁶ as we will soon see. While *nature* belongs to the essence, *person* belongs to the subsistence. However, *nature* and *supposit* (or person) do not differ from each other in a radical way that leads to separation or non-contact. Instead, since the *supposit* includes *nature* and other things that are outside the realm of nature, these things adhere to the *person* and are united to it. Therefore, following this logic, the union of the natures in Christ "took place in the Person of the Word, and not in the nature."¹⁷

In Article 3 of Question 2, Aquinas insists that the *supposit* is the whole and has *nature* as part of it, forming its formal part. Conversely, a *supposit* is what is realized individually beyond the nature of the thing. Thus, for instance, we can identify individual human persons because of their individuation even though we all share a nature that is common to all of our species. Thus, while *nature* belongs to (and is predicated of) all, *supposit* (person) is unique to a single member of the common species. Put simply, *nature* is what is possessed and *person* is that which possesses. Thomas calls the individual in the common genus *hypostasis*¹⁸ and uses both terms – *supposit* and *hypostasis* – interchangeably to mean person.¹⁹ Thomas views *person* within the concept of *hypostasis* with a rational nature, reminiscent of the definition of Boethius but also transcending it by including the possibility of additions into its being.

It suffices to state here that only individuated rational 'substances' can be called 'persons'. Therefore, in the case of the Incarnation, the individuated substance of Christ is that of divinity, not humanity. His humanity resides in what is predicated of all members of the human

¹⁵ Cf. *ST*, III, q. 2, a. 1.

¹⁶ Cf. *ST*, III, q. 2, a. 2.

¹⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Cf. *SCG IV*, c. 41.

¹⁹ For instance, in *ST*, III, q. 2, aa. 2-3.

species. As Aquinas writes, quoting St. John Damascene, Christ “did not assume human nature in general but *in atomo* – that is, in an individual...otherwise every man would be the word of God even as Christ was.”²⁰ However, Thomas argues that “not every individual in the *genus* of substance, even in rational nature, is a person, but that alone which exists by itself, and not that which exists in some more perfect thing.”²¹ Therefore, it follows that though human nature is a kind of individual that belongs to the genus of substance, it lacks a personality since it is incapable of existing independently except in something perfect, in this case in the Person of Christ, the Son of God.²²

Based on the arguments above, Christ exists as human and shares our nature without becoming a human person, and yet is still identified as human in every sense except that conveyed by the concept of ‘person’. How Christ is completely human and divine without being a human person is a mystery. How Christ, by the Incarnation, subsists as human – which is the basic truth of the Incarnation theology and the faith of the Church – is something that Thomas explains as a ‘mixed relation’, distinct from logical or real relations. This relation makes it possible for two different natures to be united in him “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation”, only an addition to the *hypostatic* substance of divinity already present in Christ before all time.

What then is the nature of this union? Thomas mentions three kinds of unions.²³ The first kind of union is that in which the united natures remain intact after the union. The second kind is that in which the united parts undergo a change in the process of uniting in which case a completely different nature appears. The third kind of union is one in which the parts cannot be considered complete by themselves, though there is no change on the part of the individual parts – for instance, the union of the parts of the body or that between the body and soul.

²⁰ *ST*, III, q. 2, a. 2, ad. 3.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ See *ST*, III, q. 2, a. 1.

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Thomas does not find any of these unions adequate to explain the hypostatic union. The incarnational union must be a special and unique form and he calls it *personaliter non naturaliter* (personal, not natural, union).²⁴ This means that whereas it is usual for unions to take place in the natures of the uniting elements, the union of divinity and humanity in Christ at the Incarnation takes place in his Person (*hypostasis*) for which reason it is called 'hypostatic union'. Here, human nature is assumed into the subsistence of the Person of Christ as God.²⁵ Thus, Aquinas' Incarnational 'Becoming' model gives a logical explanation for how Christ moves from 'becoming' to being (expressed by 'is') human. To preserve both the divinity and humanity of Christ in a single divine person, Thomas adopts the *subsistence* theory.²⁶

The Incarnational Union as a 'Mixed Relation'

In the First Part of the *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas explains the nature of relations when he examines the Names of God and whether these names apply to God.²⁷ Here, Aquinas distinguishes kinds of relations, noting that relations are conceived in the context of extremes. For him, these relations of extremes happen in three ways. The first kind of relation is that which happens at the level of idea or reason only as in the case where two extremes are so connected that they apprehend a certain mode of behavior or habitual disposition of a thing to each other; for example, the relations between being and non-being.

²⁴ *De Unione*, a. 1. See also *ST*, III, q. 2, a. 2.

²⁵ See *ST*, III, q. 2, a. 6, ad 2. For further study on the subject, see Richard CROSS, "Aquinas on Nature, Hypostasis, and the Metaphysics of the Incarnation," *The Thomist*, vol. 60, no. 2, (1996), 171-202; Michael Gorman, "Uses of the Person-Nature Distinction in Thomas' Christology," *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie Médiévales*, vol. 67 (2000), 58-70. Also, Thomas White, "The Ontology of the Hypostatic Union," *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology*, (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 73-125.

²⁶ Cf. *ST*, III, q. 2, a. 6. For an examination of how Aquinas presents this theory in contradistinction to others, see Christopher Conn, "Aquinas, the Incarnation and the Relative Identity Thesis: A Modest Defense of the *Assumptus-Homo* Theory," *The Thomist*, vol. 79, no. 1, (2015), 75-111.

²⁷ Cf. *ST*, I, q. 16, a. 7.

The second kind exists at the level of reality that belongs to both of the extremes, for instance, the relation between high and low, great and small, or even between parent and child or action and passion. In this kind of relation, as with the first, both extremes correspond in nature: for the first, both extremes always correspond to logic; in the second relation, both extremes always correspond to reality. However, Thomas introduces a third kind of relation different from these two levels. Thomas Aquinas presents this third relation in the following way: “Again, sometimes a relation in one extreme may be a reality, while in the other extreme it is an idea only; and this happens whenever two extremes are not of one order.”²⁸ Aquinas concludes that since God and his creatures correspond not only to the logical relation nor to the real relation only (since they belong to different levels of engagement while retaining the contact proper to each order), the God-human relation belongs to this third kind of relation.²⁹ The same logic is applied to the Incarnation.

For Thomas, the relation between God and his creatures is mixed: “This union is not really in God, but only in our way of thinking, for God is said to be united to a creature inasmuch as the creature is really united to God without any change in him.”³⁰ In the Incarnation, change does not take place at the ontological logical order (of God) but at the level of the real relation of humanity. Thus, the concept of God becoming human implies “no change on the part of God, but only on the part of the human nature.”³¹ However, in Christ, both human and divine attributes can be predicated of the same divine Person without creating a new person but also retaining the distinction of both natures.³² Theologically, this is known as the *communication of idioms*.³³

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*

³⁰ Cf. *ST*, III, q. 2, a. 7, ad. 1.

³¹ Cf. *ST*, III, q. 16, a. 6, ad. 2.

³² Cf. *SCG*, IV, c. 39, n. 1.

³³ For more on this, see Weinandy, “St. Thomas Aquinas...,” 204-209.

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As a mixed relation, Christ's Person subsists "not merely in the divine but also in the human nature."³⁴ This union is necessary for salvation. To be our Mediator with God and erase original sin, Christ must be divine and human.³⁵ Thus, the Incarnation only leads to Redemption if both natures are united in Christ, "in one hypostasis and one supposit."³⁶

3. Modeling after the Mystery: Incarnational 'Becoming' and Theological Anthropology

Incarnational 'Becoming' as Model for the theology of the Human Person

Theology is a human reflection on God and his relationship with humanity and the world. As such, it must be open to the question of the meaning of human existence and consider human existence in light of the theological vision of the human person as *Imago Dei*. This means that theology needs to demonstrate how Christ is the answer to the question about the human person. It needs to show how Christology is the basis for Anthropology. Indeed, this connection is in the Incarnation and Paschal Mystery of Christ: "The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light."³⁷ Since we are called to communion with God,³⁸ we can only find their true human existence in God. Without God, no human person can come to self-realization since the human person is always to be defined in relation to God. The first point of this relationship is at Creation where God creates human beings in his image and likeness as male and female (cf. Gen. 1:27), and breathes his life into them (cf. Gen. 2:7), thus enabling them to share in the divine life of grace, sanctity, and justice. This truth is the basis for theological anthropology. However, humanity rejects God's gift of grace by sinning. Consequently, this communion is ruptured and

³⁴ *ST*, III, q. 17, a. 2.

³⁵ Cf. *ST*, III, q. 1, a. 3.

³⁶ *SCG*, IV, c. 39, n. 1.

³⁷ The Second Vatican Council, The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* (henceforth *GS*), 22. All quotations from Magisterial Documents used in this work are from the official Vatican website.

³⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Henceforth *CCC*), 1; *GS*, 19.

human nature is corrupted, fallen, and prone to evil. The remedy for this fallen nature comes through the Incarnation. Here, the second level of the relationship of humanity with God is established. As Aquinas proves, Christ becomes human so that he may restore our human nature and renew our communion with God.³⁹ “Everywhere in the Sacred Scripture, however, the sin of the first man is given as the reason for the Incarnation.”⁴⁰

Thomas presents the Incarnation as an event in which Christ enters into human history to save humanity, but also as the action of Christ in becoming human so that he may become one with us. This presents theological anthropology in a new light. Human beings –as ‘Images of God’ – are called to communion with God, but also – because of Christ’s Incarnation that leads to his Paschal Mystery – humanity has been reconciled with divinity. In his incarnate Person, Christ reconciles the antinomies of the natural world and the divine order so much so that, in him, the world is consistent with the divine plan of God and a part of salvation history for redemption.⁴¹ Thus, Redemption is not only about the forgiveness of sins but also about a renewal of human nature and the worldly order. As Aquinas teaches, “the work of the incarnation is to be viewed not as merely the terminus of a movement from imperfection to perfection, but also as a principle of perfection to human nature.”⁴²

The First Letter of St. John presents a truth that I consider important for theological anthropology, and draws the connection between Creation and the Incarnation: “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8). This summarizes all that we can say about God and his intervention in human history, from the time of creation, but especially in his entry into human history at the Incarnation. Theology itself is an attempt at expressing, to the extent that we are able, this love of God, and these two historical events – Creation and Incarnation (together with the Paschal Mystery) – are also significant for this expression and for understanding the Christian vocation in the world.

³⁹ Cf. *ST*, III, q. 1, a. 1.

⁴⁰ *ST*, III, q. 1, a. 3.

⁴¹ Cf. Thomas Špidlík and Marko Rupnik, *El conocimiento integral. La vía del símbolo*, (Madrid: BAC, 2013), 124-125. See *ST*, III, q. 1, a. 5.

⁴² *ST*, III, q. 1, a. 6, ad 2.

Deification as Filiation in the Incarnational 'Becoming'

At the beginning of history, Christ – together with the Father and the Holy Spirit – is involved in the act of creation. He is indeed the medium through which everything that is created comes to be (cf. Jn. 1:1-3; see also Col. 1:16-17; Eph. 3:9; 1 Cor. 8:6; Heb. 1:1-2). Therefore, since Christ was the medium through which the world was created in the first place, it is only logical that he becomes the medium through which the created world that had become corrupted be restored. This restoration presents a new interpretation of anthropology, consistent with the first at Creation as *Imago Dei*, but transcending it because, at the Incarnation, humanity is joined to divinity in such a way that *deification* – a term beloved by St. Athanasius, and appropriated by St. Thomas Aquinas – takes place. However, this deification is not one in which humans become 'gods', but that in which they receive divine adoption as sons and daughters (cf. Eph. 1:5; Rom. 8:17). Hence, in the Incarnation, *deification* is *filiation*. Joseph Ratzinger expresses it this way: "Man can become God, not by making himself God, but by allowing himself to be made 'Son'."⁴³ Yet this is possible because, as Ratzinger says, evoking the thoughts of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, "God himself is Son and as Son he is man."⁴⁴ This Incarnational 'Becoming' of Christ as human thus becomes the new foundation for human existence.

Incarnational 'Becoming', as Thomas projects it, is the basis for the perfection of human nature and the world not as it was at creation, but into a newfound perfection in the Son of God who has assumed humanity that we may assume divinity through divine adoption made possible by the grace and merits of the Paschal Mystery. In the Incarnational 'Becoming', the deification of human beings becomes a perfection of humanity that results, as we have seen, in divine filiation. The first Adam had led humanity to false deification and humanism (cf. Gen. 3:5); Christ, the second Adam, leads humanity to true deification and hominization. A question arises: In what does this true hominization subsist? "Man's true hominization therefore attains its apex in his

⁴³ Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, (Washington: CUA, 1988), 64–65.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 65.

divinization, in his friendship and communion with God.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, since Christ is the perfect human who is “the image of the invisible God” (cf. Col. 1:15), “only in Jesus Christ is man’s limitless openness concretely found.”⁴⁶

Uniting ‘All Things’ in Christ: The Vocation of the Christian in the World

The world, despite the prevailing evil, is good. By accepting human nature, Christ accepted humanity and the world and became united with them, thereby demonstrating the goodness therein. “By his incarnation, the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every man.”⁴⁷ Following this unity, God transforms human persons and confers on them a new status, making them truly divine by filiation. Thus, Christians follow this example and unite with others in the world to bring about an atmosphere of goodness and beauty in God’s creation. Just as “the Word made flesh willed to share in the human fellowship,”⁴⁸ Christians – and indeed all human persons – are called to enter into a fellowship of solidarity. Therefore, the theological interpretation that seeks to distance Christians from political and social action because of the visible chaos and evil in the world is not only false but also dangerous. Indeed, the Church is essentially a spiritual entity, called by her Founder to embrace the faith and things supernatural; but the Church, in Christ, is also the sacrament of salvation in the world.⁴⁹

God is at the centre of what it means to be Christian, and the same God holds the world in being and consecrates it for the fulfillment of his divine will and plan. The Incarnation demonstrates that God shares a home with his creation and loves the world enough to want to engage it

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶International Theological Commission, “Theology, Christology, Anthropology (1981),” *International Theological Commission: Texts and Documents 1969–1985*, ed. Michael Sharkey (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2009), 218; See also *GS*, 21 and 41.

⁴⁷ *GS*, 22.

⁴⁸ *GS*, 32.

⁴⁹ The Second Vatican Council, The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

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at the human level. Thomas' Incarnational Becoming model affirms this. Jean Daniélou follows this same model and asserts that the Christian now finds an example in Christ to also enter into the world seriously, assume it, and transform it through their tasks in the world. In this way, they sanctify the world as Christ sanctified human nature when he assumed it and became human.⁵⁰

Thanks to the Incarnation, human beings can fully realize themselves, but only in reference to God in Christ. Having lost the sanctity of our primary status at creation through the sin of Adam, which we have inherited in the wounding of our nature implied by original sin, it is only in the second Adam, Jesus Christ, that it is repairable. Through this new union with Christ – the old one with God ruptured in Adam – the human person, as an incarnated spirit (i.e. made up of a material body and a spiritual and indestructible soul), finds the fullness of his being and the meaning of his existence.⁵¹ Indeed, it is only when the human person comes to understand his existence in relation to the incarnate Christ that he can in turn discover his vocation in the world towards other human persons and all of creation, transforming the world and reconciling all things – with Christ – to the Father.

There is the often-present fear in the hearts of some Christians who see the danger that involvement in the temporal affairs of the world can pose.⁵² The Thomistic *Incarnational Becoming* becomes the model: just as Christ became human without losing his divinity, Christians too can become engaged in the world without losing their identity as such and their divine orientation. However, they will be capable of this only if they put themselves at the service of the communion of the world through the spiritual benefits received from the Church and through a formation of true Christian consciences formed by their faith, which will in turn inform their decisions and actions in the world. They can thus make the world “breathable for everyone.”⁵³ This attitude will not only breed tolerance but also guarantee true freedom for all men and women

⁵⁰ Jean Daniélou, *Oración y política*, (Barcelona: Pomare 1966), 140. See also *GS*, 41-43.

⁵¹ Jean Mouroux, *Sentido Cristiano del Hombre*, (Madrid: Ediciones Palabra, 2001), 183-184.

⁵² For these fears, see *GS*, 36-39.

⁵³ Daniélou, *Oración...*, 137.

in the world. This way, Christians, in their different apostolates in the world, can bring to the streets and cities of the world, the fragrance of the love of God who loves and cares for all of his creation. The role of the Christian in the world is to take the riches of the Altar of the Church into the platforms of society, discovering the divine perspective to things and carrying out their duties in love and simplicity.

Christ did not take refuge in his divinity. So too, Christians must not be content in a private sphere without any public or political commitment. They should contribute so that, through politics, a more just and coherent social order with the dignity of the human person is established. By becoming human, Christ did not denigrate human nature but elevated it to refined glory. In the same way, Christians have that obligation of entering into politics and public life (without thinking it is denigrating or unbefitting of Christians), to free it from the shackles of corruption and tyranny of evil. There is something holy and divine in the world. Christ found it when he assumed human flesh; Christians should also discover it as they engage the world. We can evince a simple example: God was willing to engage the world by becoming human in Christ because he still recognized the goodness of his creation despite the prevailing evil of humanity and the mystery of sin in the world. This should indeed teach us something. No aspect of the world is so bad that it cannot be transformed. A true theological vision of the world affirms the goodness the world restored in Christ.

4. Conclusion

No serious theologian today can downplay the prominence of the mystery of the Incarnation in the hierarchy of truths and salvation history. After the most profound mystery of the Holy Trinity that God is three Consubstantial Persons, the mystery of the Incarnation ranks the highest.⁵⁴ The Trinitarian mystery is central to the faith as “the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that illumines them.”⁵⁵

⁵⁴ *The General Catechetical Directory*, 43.

⁵⁵ CCC, 234.

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Nevertheless, “belief in the true incarnation of the Son of God is the distinctive sign of Christian faith.”⁵⁶ Therefore, while the mystery of the Trinity “illumines” the mystery of the Incarnation, the Incarnation reveals the mystery of the Trinity concretely. Both mysteries are mutually predisposed to –and enhancing of – each other. As Ratzinger and Schönborn insist, a “Christocentric accent is not opposed to the Trinitarian View”; instead, for a fuller Trinitarian perspective, a Christocentric approach is indispensable.⁵⁷ Yet the Christocentric approach depends on the Incarnational approach since we only know Christ because he has become incarnate, and his becoming human opens up other aspects of his existence for theological reflection. Thomas Aquinas understood this point very clearly and articulated his Christology always in light of the Incarnational ‘Becoming’ of Christ.

As we have seen, the Incarnational ‘Becoming’ model expresses the truth fundamental to our goal. While the perfect unity of both natures in Christ models true theological anthropology in which there is no tension between the spiritual and material in human beings, the nature of this unity without change models the vocation of the Christian in the world. In becoming human and uniting divine and human natures in his single Person, Christ has introduced a new and profound anthropology. Humanity can once again enter into communion with God. Therefore, when human beings attempt to find themselves outside of God, they end up losing their dignity and ultimately losing themselves.⁵⁸ The false ideologies of secularization and anthropocentrism not only detract from the Christian vision of the human person as *Imago Dei* but also give a distorted view of human progress. It is only in Christ, the Alpha and Omega, and the Centre of all history, that the quest for human progress becomes fruitful.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 463.

⁵⁷ Joseph Ratzinger and Christoph Schönborn, *Introduction to the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994), 44-45.

⁵⁸ Cf. *GS*, 21-22.