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THEO602  
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December 10, 2012

**WAS CHRIST'S HUMAN NATURE DEIFIED?  
A COMPARISON OF KARL BARTH AND THOMAS AQUINAS  
ON THE COMMUNICATION OF IDIOMS**

This paper compares the Christologies of Karl Barth and Thomas Aquinas, focusing on the communication of idioms or the ways in which we understand and talk about Christ and his two natures. St. Thomas says that the communication of idioms is a consequence of the hypostatic union, and it allows us to attribute to either God or Man any of the properties of either the divine nature or the human nature of Christ. Barth rejects this idea because he says that (1) the communication of idioms changes Christ's human nature; (2) grace is sufficient for Christ and therefore he does not need the communication of idioms; (3) Christ's human and divine natures are mixed as well as separated by the communication of idioms; and (4) scripture is inconsistent with the communication of idioms.

Section I contains an introduction to the two theologians, and section II is an overview of Barth's writings and theology. Section III presents the communication of idioms. Section IV discusses four reasons for Barth's rejection of the communication of idioms and contrasts these reasons with the writings of St. Thomas. The final section summarizes the paper with some thoughts about how we perceive Christ, with application to ecumenism.

**I. Karl Barth and Thomas Aquinas: Great Theologians**

Karl Barth (1886-1968) is possibly the best known Protestant theologian of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His origin was in Reformed theology and he served as a Reformed pastor for 10 years.

He taught theology in Germany until the war, and then spent the rest of his life as a professor of theology at Basel, Switzerland. He developed his own theology, at one point saying “But there can be no doubt that in our departure from this whole conception we have left even Reformed Christology far behind. We cannot expect to be praised for our ‘orthodoxy’ from any quarter.”<sup>1</sup> His theology is best known for being radically and totally Christocentric. Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, Barth’s contemporary, said that Barth’s “christological starting point,” though “legitimate” is an “exaggeration, an overstatement, a failure of balance.”<sup>2</sup> Barth’s theology is “dynamic” in the sense that he describes the incarnation as an event that is continually being experienced and that the being and work of Christ is his history.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) needs no introduction to readers of this paper. However it is interesting to point out the many parallels between him and Barth. Both were revered theologians in their time, recognized and sought out by church leaders and other theologians for their theological work and insights. Both left a massive and consistent body of work which other theologians have ever since studied and referenced. Barth's lifetime work was his 9000-page *Church Dogmatics* published in 17 books from 1932 to 1955 while St. Thomas’ *Summa Theologica* comprises 3000 pages in five volumes. Both theologians left their major works unfinished. St. Thomas never completed Part III of the *Summa* and Barth did not finish his *CD* volume V. Today, both are taught in their respective seminaries, there are contemporary Thomists and Barthians, and as well there are theological centers named for them that concentrate on studies of their works.

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and F. T. Torrance, tr. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936-69). References to this work are cited as *CD* followed by the volume and part number, and then page number. This citation is *CD* IV/2, 106.

<sup>2</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth* (San Francisco: Communio Books, Ignatius Press, 1992), 242.

Often quoted is the famous statement of Pope Pius XII calling Barth the greatest theologian since Thomas Aquinas. Barth's humorous response on hearing this was that it just proves the infallibility of the pope!

Why is it useful to compare the Christology of a Protestant theologian with that of St. Thomas? First, it will help us to better understand and respect the basis for at least some parts of Protestant theology. As the church has taught since Vatican II, this can lead to better informed discussions with other Christians. A second reason is that it helps sharpen our understanding of St. Thomas by looking at points of comparison in more depth. The attempt to compare and contrast the viewpoints of differing theologians challenges our understanding and comprehension. Thirdly, Barth's Christology is dynamic and complex and resonates with much of Catholic thought. An understanding of his theology can help us in our own approach to Christ our savior.

## **II. Overview of Barth's Christology and Writings**

The dynamic sense of Barth's Christology is captured by Adam Neder in his book *Participation in Christ: An Entry to Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics*. He describes Barth's "unmistakable" message: Christ is the origin of all things, and nothing exists apart from him; he "encloses the existence and history of humanity within himself."<sup>3</sup> Neder shows how Barth's Christology is focused on the being and act of Christ and on the history of this Man, so it is impossible to examine static details. In Barth's view the event of the incarnation has happened already, but the history of Christ looks forward to salvation.<sup>4</sup> Everything is an event in this

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<sup>3</sup> Adam Neder, *Participation in Christ: An Entry to Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics*, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 17.

<sup>4</sup> *CD IV/2*, 94.

history and if we try to view Christ statically then we lose sight of him and cannot understand or even recognize him because we take him out of his history.

According to George Hunsinger, Barth is thoroughly Chalcedonian in his Christology: one person, two complete natures, without separation or division, without confusion or change.<sup>5</sup> Why is this an important point to make about Barth? In the course of his comprehensive writings, Barth focuses on either the divinity or humanity as he discusses different aspects of Christ. Those readers who fail to appreciate his dialectical approach may interpret particular parts of his work as being representative of the whole. Because of this Barth has been called both Antiochian and Alexandrian, that is, having the point of view that emphasizes, respectively, the humanity of Christ or the divinity.

Charles Waldrop argues that Barth is Alexandrian, however he also provides extensive support for an Antiochian interpretation. He says it is important to determine which is true because there is considerable evidence for each of these interpretations, reputable theologians disagree on which is correct, and the interpretation will influence how Barth's entire theology is understood.<sup>6</sup> His proof that Barth is Alexandrian lies in showing that Barth's Christ is divine by nature: he is the act of God, the event of revelation, and the history in which God deals with man. To support this point Waldrop quotes Barth saying:

In every theological context in which we must name the name of Jesus Christ – and there is none in which we do not have to name it at the decisive point – it is this history which is meant according to our assumptions: the act of God in which the Son of God becomes identical with the man Jesus of Nazareth, and therefore unites human essence with his divine essence, and therefore exalts the human into

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<sup>5</sup> George Hunsinger, "Karl Barth's Christology: Its Basic Chalcedonian Character," in *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 128.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Waldrop, "Karl Barth's Concept of the Divinity of Jesus Christ," *Harvard Theological Review* 74, 3 (1981): 242.

fellowship with the divine; the act of God in which He humbles Himself to exalt man. The Subject Jesus Christ is this history.<sup>7</sup>

Waldrop shows that Barth's Christ is divine and he speaks and operates through his human nature. However, to support his argument Waldrop quotes from Barth's exposition of Lutheran or Reformed doctrines which he (Barth) later opposes, so some of Waldrop's claims do not have force. Barth writes expositions of other viewpoints, which he may later refute, and these (sometimes long) passages if read in isolation could be taken for his own views. Barth's embedded small-print sections are a great help in understanding not only the background for his discussions but also to figure out what he was just talking about.

Hunsinger says that critics on one side say Barth's concept of Christ's humanity is deficient and he tends towards Docetism, others say his view is that Christ's deity is not intrinsic and he tends towards Nestorianism. As Hunsinger points out, Barth alternates his viewpoints at different times as he fully explores Christ and "offers one of the most fully elaborated Chalcedonian Christologies ever."<sup>8</sup>

Barth's writing is often described as having a musical structure: it states a theme, develops it in several ways, recapitulates the theme and developments, and has excursions into subordinate themes.<sup>9</sup> He also uses the equivalent of "leit-motifs" which are short musical phrases that recur throughout a musical composition to emphasize an idea or theme. For example, in Barth's section on the incarnation the phrases "very God and very Man" and "the humiliation of the Son of God and the exaltation of the Son of Man" recur on nearly every page.

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<sup>7</sup> *CD IV/2*, 107.

<sup>8</sup> Hunsinger, 129-130.

<sup>9</sup> John Webster, "Introducing Barth," in *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 9.

Volume IV of Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, titled "The Doctrine of Reconciliation," addresses the humiliation of the Son of God (Part 1) and the exaltation of the Son of Man (Part 2). This paper uses Barth's discussion of "The Homecoming of the Son of Man" in §64.2 of Volume IV/2 where he says "All that will occupy us in this chapter has its root in the exaltation of this servant to be the Lord, of the man Jesus of Nazareth to the side of God the Father; and this exaltation is itself based on the fact that He is the humiliated Son of God, the Lord who became a servant."<sup>10</sup> Barth treats in this section many of the same questions St. Thomas does in his Part III Questions 1-25, for example: why was it the person of the Son who become incarnate, what is the grace of the union, why it is the greatest of unions, and the human attributes Christ needed. Barth's subsection on the event of the incarnation concentrates on the differentiation of the human and divine natures as shown by the impartation of properties (i.e. communication of idioms), the sovereignty of grace, and Christ's operation.

This paper focuses on an aspect of Barth's Christology that is sharply different from St. Thomas: the communication of idioms. Barth rejects this idea and gives it his characteristic thoughtful discussion over many pages. It is a fruitful comparison with St. Thomas because it has consequences for the doctrines of the hypostatic union and Christ's human nature as well as interpretation of scripture.

### **III. What is the Communication of Idioms?**

This section describes the communication of idioms as presented by the Fathers of the church and St. Thomas, and briefly describes the Lutheran and Reformed doctrines because these are also considered and rejected by Barth.

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<sup>10</sup> *CD IV/2*, 28.

The communication of idioms means that, as a result of the hypostatic union, there is a “communication” or exchange of “idioms” or properties between the divine and human natures of Christ. Thus we can speak of Christ and attribute to him any of the properties of either nature, because the attribution goes to the Person of Christ. Therefore we can also attribute these properties indifferently to God or to the man Jesus. The communication of idioms is sometimes presented as a technical term and not as a central issue of Christology today. However the formality of the communication of idioms informs statements that we make and may take for granted, such as “the Son of Man is eternal” or “God died on the cross.”

The concept of the communication of idioms was not new to St. Thomas. It had been demonstrated in the New Testament, for example when Peter says “The author of life you put to death” (Acts 3:15) which says that God, the author of life, was killed. The church Fathers continued to develop this doctrine, first stating it in Canons 4 and 12 of the Council of Ephesus (431):

If anyone shall divide between two persons or subsistences those expressions (φωνάς) which are contained in the Evangelical and Apostolical writings, or which have been said concerning Christ by the Saints, or by himself, and shall apply some to him as to a man separate from the Word of God, and shall apply others to the only Word of God the Father, on the ground that they are fit to be applied to God: let him be anathema.

Whosoever shall not recognize that the Word of God suffered in the flesh, that he was crucified in the flesh, and that likewise in that same flesh he tasted death and that he has become the first-begotten of the dead, for, as he is God, he is the life and it is he that gives life: let him be anathema.<sup>11</sup>

The purpose of these canons was to counter the Nestorian heresy which taught that there were two persons in Christ, and that divine and human properties were attributed separately to the two persons who were said to be united in Christ via a moral union. St. John of Damascus elaborated

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<sup>11</sup> Council of Ephesus, “The Twelve Anathemas of St. Cyril Against Nestorius,” online at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3810.htm> (accessed 26 Nov 2012).

the idea of the idioms, writing in summary that “this is the manner of the mutual communication, either nature giving in exchange to the other its own properties through the identity of the subsistence and the interpenetration of the parts with one another.”<sup>12</sup>

St. Thomas discusses how the predication of attributes may be done in the 12 articles of Part III, Question 16. He says that “the divine nature is not the human nature. But because they agree in suppositum, they are predicated of each other in the concrete.”<sup>13</sup> It is important that concrete words be used because this ensures that statements are being made about the Person. Then, as St. Thomas says, “of concrete words we may predicate indifferently what belongs to either nature.”<sup>14</sup> However the use of abstract words can lead to statements about the natures which would not be correct. The example often used is that we can say “God died” but we cannot say “divinity died.”

The Lutheran view of the communication of idioms was different from St. Thomas’ description. Luther stressed that the human nature is dominated by the divine. Barth describes Luther’s doctrine as a “penetration of the human by the divine” in which the human nature of Christ “is in full possession and capable of full use, and participant in the full glory of the divine.”<sup>15</sup>

The Reformed doctrine emphasized the transcendence of God over the human nature of Christ, but did not teach that they were mixed as Luther did. Calvin talks about the

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<sup>12</sup> St. John of Damascus, *An Exposition of the Orthodox Faith Book III*, online at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/33043.htm>, accessed 11/26/2012.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, tr. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Coyote Canyon Press, 2010), Kindle edition. References to this work are cited as *ST* followed by the numbers of the part, question, article, and (if appropriate) reply. This citation is *ST III Q 16 a 1 ad 2*.

<sup>14</sup> *ST III Q 16 a 5*.

<sup>15</sup> *CD IV/2, 77*.

communication of idioms in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and shows how the idea is proved in scripture. He derides those who “fasten on the attributes of humanity to destroy his divinity; and, on the other hand, on those of his divinity to destroy his humanity.”<sup>16</sup> According to Barth, the Reformed theologies accepted the concept of the communication of idioms but “they refrained from certain statements which were quite possible within this common framework but seemed to be rather arbitrary and without biblical foundation, as, for example, that ‘God died’ or that ‘the man Jesus Christ is Almighty.’”<sup>17</sup>

Barth admits having to discuss the communication of idioms because it is a legacy from the older theologies, and cannot be ignored or passed over lightly. He uses somewhat confusing terms in the ensuing discussion. He begins with a long description of the consequences of the communication of idioms and then asks as a challenge: “What is really meant by the humanity of Jesus Christ as it is appropriated and illuminated and inter-penetrated by His deity – loaded, as it were, with His deity, because participant in all its attributes?”<sup>18</sup> Even though Barth is talking about the communication of idioms here, he is not careful to distinguish that the divine properties are attributed to the Person of Christ and not to his humanity in the abstract.

Barth uses the phrase “deification of the flesh” to mean the attribution of divine properties to Christ’s human nature. This is an unfamiliar way to phrase a description of the communication of idioms, but the term is consistent with St. Thomas’ discussion where he says

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<sup>16</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, tr. Henry Beveridge (Signalman Publishing, 2009), Kindle edition, II.14.4.

<sup>17</sup> *CD IV/2*, 76.

<sup>18</sup> *CD IV/2*, 79.

that in consequence of the hypostatic union “the Divine Nature is said to be incarnate and the human nature deified.”<sup>19</sup>

#### **IV. Why Does Barth Reject the Communication of Idioms?**

Barth rejects the communication of idioms explicitly and often in the section of *Church Dogmatics* we are considering. Neder analyzes Barth’s rejection of a deified human nature for Christ and discusses four reasons why Barth cannot accept the communication of idioms: (1) it tends towards docetism, (2) it denies the sovereignty of the grace of God, (3) it undermines Christ’s active history, (4) and it makes Christ superfluous.<sup>20</sup> This paper starts with Neder’s list of reasons but modifies them and the analysis in order to facilitate comparison with St. Thomas. This section of this paper presents the following reasons for the rejection of the communication of idioms from Barth’s writing and compares them to St. Thomas’ writing. Barth says that the communication of idioms (1) changes Christ’s human nature, (2) is unnecessary because the grace of union is sufficient, (3) mixes and separates Christ’s two natures, and (4) makes scripture inconsistent.

**Reason 1: Christ’s human nature is changed.** Barth says that Christ’s human nature must be the same as our own nature, but he argues that if Christ’s human nature exchanges properties with the divine then his human nature changes and it ceases to be our human nature. If Christ’s human nature is not the same as ours, it does not satisfy for our salvation, it is not a credible human nature, and it is no example for our behavior. He asks, “Does not a deified human essence cease to be our human essence, usable as such for the work of the Son of God for

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<sup>19</sup> *ST* III Q 16 a 5 ad 2.

<sup>20</sup> Neder, 65-67.

us and to us, and accessible and recognizable to us as such? If the human essence of Jesus Christ is deified, can He really be the Mediator between God and us?”<sup>21</sup> He says that we cannot recognize our human nature in him if his human nature is amplified with divine qualities. He needs Christ to have our human nature exactly as we have it, including all its weaknesses (see Reason 4 below).

Though Barth feels that Christ’s human nature would be changed by the communication of idioms, St. Thomas insists it is not. He says that Christ’s human nature was not changed in the hypostatic union but it was deified by its relation to the divine. He says that “the flesh is said to be deified, not by change, but by union with the Word, its natural properties still remaining, and hence it may be considered as deified because it becomes the flesh of the Word of God, but not that it becomes God.”<sup>22</sup> Therefore Christ’s human nature remains unchanged and therefore what was assumed can be saved.

St. Thomas states that the human nature of Christ is indeed from the stock of Adam, which shows that it is our human nature, and this is fitting. In some areas Christ’s nature does differ from ours, by reason of the union, but it is not changed. St. Thomas says, “The human nature of Christ has a greater dignity than ours from this very fact that in us, being as it were existent by itself, it has its own personality, but in Christ it exists in the Person of the Word.”<sup>23</sup>

**Reason 2. The grace of union was sufficient for Christ.** In Barth’s view the mutual participation of the human nature and divine nature in the hypostatic union is determined totally by grace and it is this relationship that determines the characteristics of Christ. The union as

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<sup>21</sup> *CD IV/2*, 89.

<sup>22</sup> *ST III Q 2 a 1 ad 3*.

<sup>23</sup> *ST III Q 2 a 1 ad 2*.

Barth sees it does not require the communication of properties because “it is hard to see why its [the union’s] total and exclusive determination by the grace of God is not enough.”<sup>24</sup>

Barth spends a 10-page small-print section discussing the hypostatic union, showing in eight different analogies what it is not. Some analogies are: it is not like marriage; it is not like fire and iron (a favorite of St. Thomas); it is not like soul and body (an analogy used by Calvin). In the end, Barth says there is no analogy for the union, it is just a fact and theology can “give only the assent that it has heard it and understood it.”<sup>25</sup> Barth considers the union of the two natures a confrontation between the divine and the human. They are next to each other so that “The actuality of the incarnate Son of God, the union of the two natures in Him, is the direct confrontation of the totality of the divine with the human in the one Jesus Christ.”<sup>26</sup>

The electing grace of God is the only grace of Christ, it is what flows to us, and “His grace of origin does not involve or effect any alteration in his human nature.”<sup>27</sup> Barth says that it is genuinely human to live by the electing grace of God, and this is exactly how Christ is human.<sup>28</sup>

But Christ has no infused or habitual grace: his human nature is not invaded by grace. Barth says that “there can be no question of a transferred condition, or an infused habit, in this grace.”<sup>29</sup> Grace is not something that can be possessed because “grace is divine giving and

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<sup>24</sup> *CD IV/2*, 88.

<sup>25</sup> *CD IV/2*, 59.

<sup>26</sup> *CD IV/2*, 86.

<sup>27</sup> *CD IV/2*, 91

<sup>28</sup> *CD IV/2*, 89.

<sup>29</sup> *CD IV/2*, 94.

human receiving”.<sup>30</sup> Since it is continually freely given, grace cannot be “had” and therefore there is no such thing as habitual grace.

Like Barth St. Thomas says that the union of the two natures in Christ took place by grace because “the fact that the human nature is united to the Divine Person may be called a grace, since it took place without being preceded by any merits.”<sup>31</sup> He distinguishes the uncreated grace of union, which is the cause of the hypostatic union, from other types of grace that Christ had. The grace of union in turn is the source of the created habitual grace of Christ<sup>32</sup> which sanctifies his human soul so that “the habitual grace pertaining to the special holiness of that man is an effect following the union.”<sup>33</sup>

In addition St. Thomas says that the soul of Christ has the fullness of grace.<sup>34</sup> The hypostatic union is so close to his human nature that the grace flows in. The dignity of Christ's soul required fullness of grace: his soul is not divine, so it needed grace so it can participate in the divine, just as we do. And, since Christ is our mediator to God he needs the grace to give to us. Christ's humanity is the instrument of his divine nature, and his soul's actions demand habitual grace.

**Reason 3. Christ’s divine and human natures are mixed and separated.** Barth argues that under the communication of idioms the union of the two natures would be contrary to Chalcedon’s defining terms. He says the two natures would be mixed “to the extent that the human is deified” and they would be separated “to the extent that this deification can be ascribed

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<sup>30</sup> *CD IV/2*, 90.

<sup>31</sup> *ST III Q 2 a 10*.

<sup>32</sup> *ST III Q 7 a 13*.

<sup>33</sup> *ST III Q 6 a 6*.

<sup>34</sup> *ST III Q 7 a 9*.

to it only as it is considered statically in and for itself isolated from the dynamic of the history.”<sup>35</sup> He concludes that “The recognition of Jesus Christ as true salvation and saving truth is not really strengthened, as intended, by the theory of divinization of His human essence, but weakened and even jeopardized completely. This is one reason why we have no option but to reject it.”<sup>36</sup> This appears to be the fundamental reason for Barth’s rejection of the communication of idioms, and since it is based on his essential view of Christ, it cannot be countered without throwing out his entire theology.

Christ’s human nature cannot “have” the divine properties any more than he can “have” habitual grace because the divine and human natures can be comprehended only in Christ’s history. Barth claims that the focus on idioms and on the effects of the union looks away from Christ himself and we fail to recognize him as our savior if his flesh is deified. It means we are “looking away from the event of the divine giving and human receiving to what is given to the human nature of Christ in this event, to a status mediated to him.”<sup>37</sup> The deification of Christ’s flesh denies the true glory of divine-human communion by focusing on the idioms of the natures instead of asserting that the confrontation between natures must remain.

On the contrary, St. Thomas says that the communication of idioms is simply a logical and reasonable consequence of the hypostatic union. St. Thomas and the medieval scholastics were intent on defining and describing various states of being and investigating them closely by means of reason. This was their philosophical approach, and it contrasts distinctly with Barth’s approach of looking at active history and events.

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<sup>35</sup> *CD IV/2*, 80.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *CD IV/2*, 79.

The charge that the communication of idioms mixes or separates the two natures is addressed by St. Thomas. He said there can be no mixture of the two natures in the union. If they were mixed, then the divine nature, being infinite, would dominate and engulf the human nature. Neither nature can be changed by the union because “both natures are perfect – each in its kind.”<sup>38</sup> Neither can the natures be separated in the union because this would invite the heretical concept of two persons in Christ, which St. Thomas deals with thoroughly in several articles.<sup>39</sup>

**Reason 4. Scripture is inconsistent.** Barth says that Christ truly assumed our entire human nature including “every human capacity and every human weakness.”<sup>40</sup> It was necessary for Christ to have our human nature exactly the same as ours so that he could be our Brother in all ways. Barth cites passages in the gospels “in which we see clearly the limited and conditioned nature of the humanity of Jesus,”<sup>41</sup> such as how Jesus grew in knowledge (Lk 2:52), his temptations, and that the knowledge of the day and hour is withheld from the Son (Mk 13:32). Based on these passages he says, “obviously it is with great difficulty, and very artificially, that these facts can be harmonized with the thesis that the human nature of Jesus was divinized, and it is hard to see how some kind of approximation to docetic conceptions can be avoided if we propound this view.”<sup>42</sup>

St. Thomas makes clear that Christ did not assume all of the defects of our human nature, only the ones necessary for our salvation. Christ did not adopt our “ignorance, a proneness toward evil, and an obstinacy toward well-doing” and he only needed “to have assumed those

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<sup>38</sup> *ST III Q 2 a 1.*

<sup>39</sup> *ST III Q 2, a 3 and a 6.*

<sup>40</sup> *CD IV/2, 74.*

<sup>41</sup> *CD IV/2, 95.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

defects which flow from the common sin of the whole nature, yet are not incompatible with the perfection of knowledge and grace”.<sup>43</sup>

While Barth claims that the referenced gospel passages deny the communication of idioms, St. Thomas attributes them to the different types of knowledge in Christ. Although Christ as man had infused knowledge of all things past, present, and future,<sup>44</sup> he also acquired knowledge which he gained through human experience. According to St. Thomas, it was growth in this latter type of knowledge to which the gospel passage (Lk 2:52) refers.<sup>45</sup> About the knowledge of the day and hour of judgment, St. Thomas says that Christ of course knew it via his infused knowledge but “was unwilling to reveal it.”<sup>46</sup>

## V. Conclusion

Both of the theologians discussed in this paper are concerned to describe Christ in terms that support both his full humanity and full divinity. However as we have seen, each theologian presents Christ in strikingly different ways. Barth portrays Christ as “very God and very man,” with the two natures confronting each other without sharing of properties. His Christ is fully man, having all our defects and weaknesses including ignorance. The Christ of St. Thomas also shares our full human nature but through communication of idioms Christ is also omniscient.

St. Thomas allows us to glorify Christ in his humanity as well as his divinity thus giving us a rich access to God through Christ. Barth’s dynamics of Christ as simultaneously humiliated in his divine nature and exalted in his human nature gives us a sense for the ongoing action of

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<sup>43</sup> *ST III Q 15 a1.*

<sup>44</sup> *ST III Q 11.*

<sup>45</sup> *ST III Q 12 a 2.*

<sup>46</sup> *ST III Q 10 a 2 ad 1.*

our salvation. The specific descriptions of properties and states that St. Thomas provides offer a solid foundation and understanding of the person and natures of Christ our savior. We can learn much from Barth's Christology while resting our foundation of belief with St. Thomas. Bruce McCormack concluded that the two ways of viewing Christ are the "traditional theism" of St. Thomas and the scholastics on one hand and the "being-in-act of God" of Barth on the other, and "were that basic difference to be grasped, ecumenical dialogue might well find a new ground for its future."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Bruce McCormack, "Grace and Being" in *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 109.

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