

## **Solus Christus Against Totus Christus Reconsidered:**

### **Introduction:**

At its core, the theological project of MA is to rediscover “Christology applied.” Our theological vision is to reunite Christ’s person to Christ’s work-- Christology to Soteriology-- Christ’s two natures, human and divine, to Christ’s salvific fulfillment of God’s intervening grace by means of temple and covenant respectively—*Totus Christus!* Herein we encounter a dilemma in modern facing reformational interpretation. *Solus Christus* is often posited against *totus Christus*.

By “modern facing:” it is meant a post-enlightenment reductionist modus of operandi in theological epistemology—a kind of politicization (aka polarization) in theological dialectic that pre-modern theology managed as “distinct but not separate” within the reasonable mystery that is part and parcel to a revelation based, versus evidential/sensory perception based, Christology. Such a modern reduction is almost always evident in expositions of the “Five Solas,” a 20<sup>th</sup> century categorization of the reformation in its own right.<sup>1</sup> This results in an incarnation centric *solus Christus* to the exclusion of Christ’s ascension. If then *totus Christus* is defined in incarnation terms as extended to the church, then by default *solus Christus* is contra *totus Christus*.<sup>2</sup>

The modern facing protestant trend is perfectly illustrated by the recent and otherwise well-argued presentation by Mark Saucy’s “Evangelicals, Catholics, And Orthodox Together: Is The Church The Extension Of The Incarnation?”<sup>3</sup>

He sets up his discussion with the following observation:

The nature of Christ’s relationship to the Church and the Church’s role in salvation have been points of dispute among the Christian traditions since the days of the Protestant Reformation.

As then explained by footnote:

The Protestant Reformation was just as much a struggle of ecclesiology as it was of soteriology. The soteriological assertions of *sola gratia*, *sola fidei*, *sola scriptura* were at once also (negative) pronouncements about the Church’s nature and role in salvation. Despite considerable progress toward convergence on many divisive issues, participants in twentieth-century ecumenism repeatedly are returning to the ecclesiological question as *the* issue holding back unity.<sup>4</sup>

Of special relevance to the MA thesis is Saucy’s acknowledgement that many recent evangelicals indicate “an openness to the usual Catholic and Orthodox charge of being weak in ecclesiology. One evangelical, for example, reflecting on his own encounter with Orthodoxy states, “it is understandable that evangelicals feel that the Orthodox doctrine of the church is too ‘high.’ But perhaps our theology of the church is too ‘low,’ much lower than our Protestant forebears would have it.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that the so called “Solas” were never catalogued by any of the 16<sup>th</sup> century reformers. It was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> century where all five were published together in its collective entirety as representing the reformation focus. In 1916, Lutheran scholar Theodore Engelder published an article titled “The Three Principles of the Reformation: *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Gratia*, *Sola Fides*” (“only scripture, only grace, only faith”). In most of the earliest articulations of the solas, three were typically specified: scripture over tradition, faith over works, and grace over merit, each intended to represent an important distinction compared with Catholic doctrine. In 1934, theologian Emil Brunner substituted *Soli Deo gloriam* for *Sola Scriptura*. In 1958, historian Geoffrey Elton, summarizing the work of John Calvin, wrote that Calvin had “joined together” the “great watchwords”. Elton listed *sola fide* with *sola gratia* as one term, followed by *sola scriptura* and *soli Deo Gloria*. Later, in commenting on Karl Barth’s theological system, Brunner added *Christus solus* to the litany of solas

<sup>2</sup> I see the other four “solas” as subsumed under the title “Solus Christus” as the ultimate revelatory manifestation all things pertaining to salvation wherein it is said “in him all things hold together.” (Col. 1:17)

<sup>3</sup> *JETS* 43/2 (June 2000) 193–212

<sup>4</sup> Underline mine. c.f. (Robert W. Jenson, *Unbaptized God: The Basic Flaw in Ecumenical Theology* [Minneapolis: Augsburg–Fortress, 1992] 4, 90–94

<sup>5</sup> Daniel B. Clendenin, “Why I’m Not Orthodox,” *Christianity Today* (Jan. 6, 1997) 38. Clendenin continues the thought by

To this point Saucy is again spot on in acknowledging that “high ecclesiology” proponents, contrary to “low ecclesiology” proponents, want to understand Paul’s favorite reference to the church as the “body of Christ” as more than a mere metaphor, but “a statement of reality proving that the relation of church and Christ should be seen more in terms of identity.” He again observes how “this interpretation is illustrated by appeal to Chalcedonian Christology whereby the Church, like the God-man, is the mysterious union of the divine and human natures in the eternal person of Christ.”<sup>6</sup>

Taken to this extent, the incarnation as an analogy of the church is acceptable to Protestants; there is a divine and human component in the Church’s gatherings. But Catholics and Orthodox raise the stakes in their use of incarnation theology to make the claim that the union of divine and human in the Church actually makes a new single acting subject: *one person* with two natures. The immanence of Christ with his people through the Holy Spirit is the mechanism for this claim as Christ’s spirit is literally fashioned as the soul of the body, the Church. Through the Spirit, Christ is organically united to his body, the Church, so that he is with her *Totus Christus*,

This then brings us back to the title of Saucy’s essay and especially the question that is raised within it: Is The Church The Extension Of The Incarnation? Saucy will argue for a resounding “no,” the church is not an extension of the incarnation. *And we agree!*

And yet Saucy will take it a step further as to necessitate a “no” to *totus Christus* Christology such as to result in “high ecclesiology.” Herein we must *disagree*-- again not suggesting that the church is an extension of Christ’s incarnation, but “no” this doesn’t negate that Christ IS present on earth through the church in a very real and salvific way such as to become to us *totus Christus*. This “no,” we believe, is consistent with what Augustine proposed in the 5<sup>th</sup> century conception of *totus Christus*. To be sure, Augustine taught that the visibly and organically socialized church into a given cultural-linguistic “flesh” BECOMES Christ in the midst of us today. Augustine writes for instance:

Then let us rejoice and give thanks that we are made not only Christians, but Christ. Do you understand, brothers, and apprehend the grace of God upon us? Marvel, be glad, we are made Christ. For if he is the head, we are the members: the whole man is he and we... The fullness of Christ, then, is head and members. Head and members, what is that? Christ and the Church.<sup>7</sup>

In this manner, Augustine clearly understands Christ ascension presence to be full or “total” in the visible flesh and blood of the church on earth—the spiritual presence of Christ *not separate* from the flesh of the body of Christ.

But what about the “distinct” in Christology as then applied to ecclesiology? Often lost is Augustine’s definitive qualifier of the “not separate” as to correspond to the spiritually mediated, vs. bodily immediate, presence of Christ in the local church. For instance, in his comments about the meaning of “I am the bread of life” applied to the Eucharist in relation to Paul’s warning that “some have died” concerning a wrongful participation in the Lord’s Supper, Augustine once raised the question “why then are there some that have not died who have eaten the bread improperly?” His answer:

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citing the opening pages of Book IV of Calvin’s *Institutes* where Calvin refers twice to the famous words of Cyprian, “you cannot have God as your Father without the Church as your Mother” (IV, 1.1, 4).

<sup>6</sup> In contrast to modern Protestants, incarnational categories are more fundamental to Orthodox and Catholic ecclesiology. William Lynch describes the Catholic uniqueness in the fundamental human problem of the meeting of the finite with the infinite in Christ and the Church: “In Christ God and man meet and are one person, and the Church claims resolutely, scandalously, to be Christ Himself” See also Miroslav Volf’s discussion of John D. Zizioulas in *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 73–123,

<sup>7</sup> St. Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, In. Io. XXI.8).

“Why? Because they understood the visible food spiritually, hungered spiritually, tasted spiritually, that they might be filled spiritually. For even we at this day receive visible food: but the sacrament is one thing, the virtue of the sacrament another.”

He further explains:

Consequently, he that dwelleth not in Christ, and in whom Christ dwelleth not, doubtless neither eateth His flesh [spiritually] nor drinketh His blood [although he may press the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ carnally and visibly with his teeth].<sup>8</sup>

This perfectly sets up our discussion relative to an attempted rediscovery of *totus Christus* in a way sympathetic to, if even an essential element of, *solus Christus*. We will propose a “both-and” response to the perceived modern evangelical rejection of *totus Christus*—all within the mystery of *Christology Applied*.

Our method is to follow Saucy’s analysis of the *munus triplex* of Christ or Christ Our Prophet, Priest and King. His thesis is as follows:

“the *munus triplex* of Christ and the Church reveals the inadequacy of the incarnational paradigm to characterize Christ’s relationship with his Church and remain faithful to Scripture.”

And again, we concede as much in so far as we seek to distinguish Christ’s incarnation presence from Christ’s ascension presence today— the former immediate, the latter mediated. To be sure, as applied to the fulfillment of the redemptive historical covenant vis-à-vis Christ’s incarnation ministry<sup>9</sup>, we will agree with Saucy that

When the *munus triplex* of Christ and the Church is played out against the NT...incarnational categories lead to patently false conclusions for ecclesiology. What Neuhaus wants to unite into one subject in the *totus Christus*, the NT stubbornly keeps separate. Only God and Christ are the objects of saving faith, never the Church.

Absolutely. Christ’s incarnation and Christ’s ascension ministries must be distinguished, but not separated! Mystery? Yes! Less real and efficacious? No!

To conflate incarnational categories with ascension categories suffers what could readily be described as a modern evangelical amnesia pertaining to the *historia salutis* of Christ’s ascension, and with significant implications for missional ecclesiology and a completed *ordo salutis* even. Consider for instance the words of David Boech,

We stand in need of an interpretation of salvation which operates within a comprehensive Christological framework, which makes the *totus Christus*-- Christ’s incarnation, earthly life, death, resurrection and parousia.”<sup>10</sup>

To his greater point regarding the need for a comprehensive Christology and *totus Christus*, our point exactly. And yet what happened to Christ’s ascension in Boech’s *historia*? Conflated with resurrection perhaps? And at what cost to *solutis*?

Again, all this begs for a rediscovery of the meaning and significance of the oft neglected *historia salutis* of Christ’s ascension and its subsequent *ordo salutis* benefits by Christ’s continued presence today. As Douglas Farrow in his

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<sup>8</sup> Augustine, *Homilies in John*, Tractate 26, Sec. 11 Accordingly, J. N.D. Kelley will conclude how “in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century... the universal, if somewhat vague assumption was that the sacraments were outward and visible signs marking the presence of an invisible, but none the less genuine grace.” Kelley will go on to explain how according to Augustine’s view of baptismal efficacy, “the sacrament itself is one thing and the power of the sacrament is another... in baptism the water serves as the sacrament of the grace imported, but the grace itself is invisibly operated by the Holy Spirit.”

<sup>9</sup> e.g. birth, life, death, resurrection and the “once and for all” aspects of our salvation that were procured...

<sup>10</sup> David Boech, *Transforming Mission*, p. 399.

*Ascension and Ecclesia* has noted “the kind of ecclesiology we, wish to do is quite impossible, then, without careful attention to the ascension... the church is marked off from the world... by its mysterious union.”<sup>11</sup>

The following analysis will follow three steps, albeit in summary fashion:

- 1) *Solus Christus* applied to Christ’s incarnation ministry as *minus triplex* (Saucy’s point)
- 2) *Totus Chritus* applied to Christ’s ascension ministry as *minus triplex*
- 3) *Solus Christus* applied to *totus Christus*

## **Reconciling *Solus Christus* with *Totus Christus* To The *minus triplex* of Christ**

### Christ Our Prophet

#### 1) *Solus Christology* Applied to Christ’s Incarnation Ministry as Prophet

In the simplest of terms, by “prophet” Saucy means one “who speaks the words of God” (John 3:34) And most assuredly, the church is not the *Word* as Saucy argues:

While Christ, the incarnate one, preaches God’s truth, he also declares that he himself *is* the truth. While he preaches God’s way, he declares that he *is* the way. While he preaches God’s abundant life, he also preaches that he himself *is* that life (John 14:16). He preaches the kingdom of God, and as Origen of Alexandria noted so long ago, he in a unique sense is the kingdom, the *autobasileia*, of his own proclamation (cf. Luke 11:20, 21; 17:21).

In contrast, the Church of the NT never proclaims her message in such a self-reflective manner. With an incredible variety of terminology the Church always and without fail preaches Christ, and never herself. The Church “pro- claims” (Acts 8:5), “preaches” (Acts 5:42), “testifies” (Acts 18:5), “convinces others” (Acts 28:23), “shows” (Acts 18:28), “teaches” (Acts 28:31), “remembers” (2 Tim 2:8), and “confesses” (1 Cor 12:3) that Jesus is the Christ.

Very clearly, Christ alone is the ultimate revelation concerning the “word of truth.” The prophet doesn’t preach himself, but Christ. And to be sure, Christ, acting as prophet, preached about himself such as illustrated by his reflective statements. And yet already there is a distinct but not separate dynamic playing out in Christ’s incarnation-- the human once and for all ministry of Christ as prophet and the eternal divine Word in the person of Christ- the mystery of Christology here revealed in Christ’s incarnation. The question is therefore begged, does such a distinction continue during Christ’s ascension ministry? E.g. IS Christ still present as human prophet albeit proclaiming himself as eternal word?

#### 2) *Totus Chritus* applied to Christ’s ascension ministry as Prophet

Christ preached then (incarnation) and he preaches now (ascension). For instance: Is there an effectual aspect to God’s word in redemptive history? Is the word, without effect (without the two edged sword of justice or mercy both) really truly the Word of God?

Throughout redemptive history the answer is “No!” We see how the word is more than a message, but a power, beginning with creation and continuing in new creations such as in Ezekiel 38 about the coming age. The word is the life giving power of God’s word “preached” as to be both proclamation and vivifying power on earth from heaven.

The New Testament describes the “word” as the sword of God’s spirit” (Eph 5:17) Is this just the spirit in inspiration? And is revelation complete with just inspiration? Again, yes and no. Yes, it is the completed plenary *verbal* inspiration. But more, the Word is power such as to effect salvation. See then Hebrews 4:12 (underline mine).

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<sup>11</sup> Douglas Farrow, *Ascension and Ecclesia* p. 40

Heb. 4:12 *For <sup>w</sup>the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and <sup>a</sup>discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

We agree therefore that as an act of incarnation, the “words” of God’s by inspiration into scripture is “once and for all” complete in scripture and is “solus Christus” “words of God. But the *Word* is not complete apart from illumination and new birth. After describing the great redemptive benefits of Christ’s incarnation ministry in Ephesians 1, Paul then prays vs. 17ff

... that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe... And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, <sup>g</sup>the fullness of him who fills <sup>i</sup>all in all. (Eph 1:17ff0

Clearly the salvation of God is not complete according to Paul if only to extol the great benefits of Christ’s once and for all incarnation ministry. It is “the fullness of Christ” that by the Spirit “enlightens the mind” and is amazingly linked to the church as “Christ’s body” which is the “fullness of him who fills all in all.” And to be clear, as not to diminish solus Christus related to Christ incarnational ministry of inspiration— the church can neither add to or take away from the verbal words of God in scripture. Such words are complete and are alone as our only rule of faith and practice.

But then can it be said that Christ is in/with/through the church prophetic? Assuming the definition that *Prophecy is a supernatural word (communication) from God*, we read in scripture concerning the present age:

Rom. 12:6 *Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith...*

And lest we would become guilty of quenching the Holy Spirit!

1Th. 5:19 *Do not quench the Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Do not despise <sup>z</sup>prophecies, <sup>21</sup> but test everything; hold fast what is good.*

*Clearly the church is given the spiritual gift of prophecy.* And without equivocation—without prophecy the spirit is quenched, and so too the power of Christ in our midst. What then exactly is prophecy during the ascension ministry of Christ? The admonishment to not only reject prophecy in the church, but to test it is instructive.

1John 4:1 *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.*

The assumption here is that just calling it prophecy doesn’t make it prophecy. (c.f. 2 Cor.11:13) And then the true test of prophecy is that it is regulated “by the words of the Old and New Testament as God’s only rule of faith and practice.” And this is exactly what we discern in scripture:

Acts 17:10 *when Paul and Silas arrived in Berea “they went into the Jewish synagogue (to preach/teach) ... they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.*

2Tim. 3:16 *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, **17** that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.*

We are therefore back to “sola scriptura” (an extension of Christ’s incarnation ministry) as our only “words” of God, even if such word’s are never fully prophetic apart from the supernatural presence of Christ in illumination, new birth and sanctification by the Holy Spirit as mediated through the church. And this is again consistent with the early reformers understanding. Two examples:

## Second Helvetic Confession The Preaching Of The Word Of God Is The Word Of God.

Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is proclaimed, and received by the faithful; and that neither any other Word of God is to be invented nor is to be expected from heaven: and that now the Word itself which is preached is to be regarded, not the minister that preaches; for even if he be evil and a sinner, nevertheless the Word of God remains still true and good.

### Westminster Confession of Faith:

The spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing and humbling sinner of driving them out of themselves and drawing them into Christ!!

### 3) *Solus Christus applied to totus Christus as Prophet*

Herein we encounter the great irony of *solus Christus* being limited to Christ's incarnation ministry. To deny *totus Christus* is to deny *sola Christus applied to Christ's ascension ministry of prophecy as carefully regulated by the apostolic design of sola scriptura*. The human aspect of the church is wholly untethered from the divine aspect of the church as by the Holy Spirit and Scripture. Now, as in the days of Paul, we are inundated with self-appointed prophets and the so called "gift of prophecy" that if not explicitly then implicitly confuses personal intuition and expressive individualism with Christ's prophecy in and through the charismatic persona of "prophet." Rather than prophecy being equated with Christ acting jointly through the apostolic church as carefully regulated by Christ's incarnational ministry of verbal inspiration in Scripture, we are left to the subjective and effective power of personality that moves persons to action. That is to say, that the Holy Spirit is now democratized in a way that is not subject to Christ as Priest and King.

*Sola Christus* "needs" *totus Christus* lest the exclusive Lordship of Christ's prophetic word that was regulated by the immediacy of Christ's incarnational ministry on earth THEN, is NOW on earth absent without a carefully regulated mediatorial ascension ministry... And to the greater point, the Word is not fully the Word except when it is at once regulated and efficacious—covenant paradigm and temple presence respectively...

**NOTE: Having exceeded the 5 page limit ☺ As the greater point has been made by this first illustration of the minus triplex—you may proceed to the Conclusion if desired (p.12 —otherwise, Christ as Priest and King, is as follows. PG**

## Christ Our Priest

### 1) *Solus Christus applied to Christ's incarnation ministry as Priest*

Again, Saucy's focus on the priestly ministry of Christ (*sola gratia*) is, like most modern protestant evangelicals, exclusively targeting Christ's incarnational ministry without reference to Christ's ascension ministry today. And in so far as the benefits of Christ's priestly incarnational ministry, we concur:

In the Biblical understanding, the priest makes approach to God possible through the offering of sacrifice and gifts to God on behalf of men (cf. Heb 7:25; 8:3; 9:11–28). It is especially in the office of priest that incarnation is tied to redemption, as the God-man, who is the Priest, is also himself the blameless sacrifice (John 1:29; cf. 1 Pet 1:18; Heb 9:11–28).

In the NT it is always Christ, never the *ekklesia*, who is the single subject of salvific activities. *Christ* "died for" (Rom 5:6), "loves" (or loved; Eph 5:2), "accepted" (Rom 15:7), "redeemed" (Gal 3:13), "heals" (Acts 9:34), "nourishes" (Eph 5:29), "cherishes" (Eph 5:29), "laid hold of" (Phil 3:12), "gives light to" (Eph 5:14), "came to save" (1 Tim 1:15), "gave himself for" (Titus 2:14), "suffered for" (1 Pet 2:21), "was sacrificed for" (1 Cor 5:7) *the Church*.

It is he that “set us free” (Gal 5:1) and “gives us peace and love with faith” (Eph 6:23). To this list must be added the key provisions of our reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18) and propitiation (1 John 2:1–2; 4:9–10), which again are accomplished by Christ and God alone according to the NT.

Finally, against incarnational ecclesiology, saving faith is never presented in the NT as the gift of the ecclesia, but as the gift of God (Eph 2:8–9; Phil 1:29).

Here again, we agree-- *Solus Christus* as related to *sola gracia* and *solus fidei*. And Saucy's conclusion?.

Thus, the NT itself seems to be at odds with *totus Christus* ecclesiology that sees the Roman mass, for example, as the re-presentation of “an offering to the Father which is presented by *the whole Christ (totus Christus)*, by the Head and the members.”

Here again, agreed, but with respect to the sacerdotal church wherein *totus Christus* is undermined precisely because the distinction between Christ's incarnation ministry and ascension ministry—one immediate and the other mediated—is conflated. (Why we should be careful NOT to speak of the church as an incarnational ministry of Christ—although sympathetic with what most mean by that)

## 2) *Totus Christus* applied to Christ's ascension ministry as Priest

But then again, we say “No” to the above Saucy conclusion in so far as we do believe that Christ is still present as to confer the grace that is ours by faith in the finished work of Christ's incarnational ministry.

As for Christ's ascension ministry, we discern in scripture the many efficacious statements concerning the ministry of Christ as being mediated through the sacramental Church. For instance, we notice that such an efficacious presence acting through the sacraments is foretold even at Christ's own baptism:

Matt. 3:11 “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.** His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Matthew will then conclude his gospel with the great promise of Christ to the apostolic church “and behold, I am with you always until the end of the age.” Was this “in spirit” only? Yes, and yet not some would make it as therefore in sentiment only. Rather, will preserving the once and for all immediacy of Christ's human-divine presence in the incarnation, we see that he does mean it *mediatedly* as by the mystery of Christ's heavenly union with the earthly body of Christ by the Holy Spirit. This is nowhere more powerfully noted in the gospels than by John's version of the great commission as reported in the following succession of events:.

1. A Temple Benediction: “Peace be with you.”
2. A Temple Commission: “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”
3. A Temple Power: “And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” (c.f. 1:33)
4. A Temple Ministry: “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” (c.f. Mt 16)

About the Spirit's relation to the church Thomas Torrance concludes:

We cannot pay too much attention to the fact that the Holy Spirit was sent upon the church after the crucifixion, resurrection and the ascension of Christ. In that series Pentecost belongs as one of the mighty salvation events, and to that series the parousia will belong as the last.”

The spirit operates by creating out of the word a body that St. Paul calls the Body of Christ.... It is the sphere where through the presence of the Spirit the salvation-events of the birth, life, death, resurrection

and ascension are operative here and now in history, the sphere wherever within the old creation the new creation has broken in with power.”<sup>12</sup>

Do we see this efficacious presence of Christ in the description of ecclesial sacraments? Just try to rationalize away the following statements without such circumlocutions as could readily be described as desperate:

Titus 3:5 *He saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.* (what water except the water of baptism could Paul be describing)

Acts 2:38 *Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*

Acts 22:16 *And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name.*

Likewise, about the Lord’s Supper:

*The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*<sup>13</sup>

That is to say,

*There is, in every sacrament, **a spiritual relation**, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified: whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other.* (WCF 27:2)

Pertaining to Christian baptism for instance:

*the grace promised is not only offered, **but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost**, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God’s own will,* (WCF 28.6)

Grace conferred? Yes! But not necessarily:

*grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it; or, that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.* (WCF 28.5)

Grace conferred? Yes, but not necessarily immediately:

*The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered... in his [God’s] appointed time* (27.6)

All predicated upon divine election as evidenced in saving faith (assent, receive, rest)

Accordingly about the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, John Calvin affirms:

*All the benefits which we should seek in the Supper is annihilated if Jesus Christ be not there given to us as the substance and foundation of all... Thus it is with the communion, which we have in the body and blood of the Lord Jesus. It is a spiritual mystery that can neither be seen by the eye nor comprehended by the human understanding. We must confess then, that as the internal substance of the sacrament is conjoined with the visible signs and the bread is distributed to us by hands, so the body of Christ is communicated to us in order that we may be made partakers of it.*<sup>14</sup>

And to think, this doesn’t sound so different as the Orthodox theologian Gennadios Limouris: \*

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<sup>12</sup> T. F. Torrance, *Royal Priesthood*, (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd LTD, 1955), p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> 1Cor 10:16-17 ESV, c.f. 1 Peter 1:4, John 14, 17

<sup>14</sup> John Calvin, *Treatise of the Lord’s Supper*, 17.



The dogma of Chalcedon must be applied to the Church as well as to Christ. Just as Christ the God-Man has two natures—divine and human—so in the Church there is a synergia or cooperation between the two that the one is perfect and sinless, while the other is *not yet fully so*. Only a part of the humanity of the Church—the saints in heaven—has attained perfection, while here on earth the Church’s members often misuse their human freedom. The Church on earth exists in a state of tension: it is already the Body of Christ, and thus perfect and sinless, and yet, since its members are imperfect and sinful, it must continually become what it is.

### 3) *Solus Christus applied to totus Christus as Priest*

If we limit *solus Christus* to Christ’s incarnational ministry, how then is *solus Christus* denied in relation to Christ’s ascension ministry? One clear example is the manner in which the sacraments are getting detached from the other aspects of *totus Christus* as by the carefully regulated ministry of the church as Prophet and King.

For instance, detached from Christ as Prophet as mediated and therefore regulated by the apostolic foundation given to the church, the meaning and use of the sacraments become unregulated and democratized. The result can be false assurance or even a false gospel that is communicated through the sacrament. Increasingly for example, we discern in contemporary spirituality how the meaning of Christ’s sacrifice is being interpreted in the context of Christ being our moral exemplar resulting in self-righteousness in either the moralistic direction or the pharisaical direction. The former, in so far as we confuse Christ’s alien righteousness on the cross with our own righteousness and condemn ourselves in comparison to Christ’s suffering. The latter in so far as we confuse Christ’s unique suffering on the cross interpreted to our suffering at the hands of oppressive others such as to result in our own pharisaical sins of condemning others.

Detached from Christ as King, one of the great dangers is that we are left to ourselves, and our own subjective discernment, as related to the confirming purpose of the sacraments. For instance, how we admit ourselves to the Lord’s table will result in how we demit ourselves, and with arguably disastrous effects upon our Christian assurance. With a gospel centered government in the church, such government serves as a means of grace when a person, rather than excommunicating themselves on a given Sunday, will submit themselves to Christ’s government wherein by their confession of sin they are directed to Christ’s grace and absolution. For almost always, personal subjective discernment alone leads to self-condemnation, wherein the gospel centered government of Christ will lead to grace and forgiveness, not only officially declared (e.g. Matthew 16- binding and loosing, c.f. John 20).

#### Christ King

### 1) *Solus Christus applied to Christ’s incarnation ministry as minus triplex (Saucy’s point)*

Saucy defines Christ as “king” simply if not truly as Christ “the ruler of God... with full regal authority in his domain... moreover, the NT makes it clear that Jesus is God’s anointed basileuv with a kingdom (e.g. Luke 1:30–33; 19:11–26; John 18:36; Heb 2:7–9).

As to the church, Saucy concede that “while the Church cannot yet lay claim to a present “reign” (1 Cor 4:8),<sup>51</sup> there still is a correspondence she has with Christ’s authority. To the Church have been given the “keys to the Kingdom” by her Lord (Matt 16:19). Whatever she forgives on earth will be forgiven in heaven, whatever she retains on earth will be retained in heaven (Matt 18:18). But should the relationship of authority between Christ and his Church be made in terms of her identity with Christ?

And again Saucy reiterates how “in terms of authority, theo- and Christo-centricity, not ecclesio-centricity, is the posture of the NT. Christ and God, not the ecclesia, are “king.” The kingdom is “God’s” and “Christ’s,” never the Church’s. Christ, not the Church, is “master,” “Lord,” “head of every man,” “cornerstone,” and “foundation.” *He*

“judges the living and the dead.” It is Jesus’ name, not the Church’s, that must be confessed before society and in the Christian community (Mark 13:13 par.; Matt 10:22; Luke 21:12; John 15:21; Acts 9:16; 1 Pet 4:14-19)

## 2) *Totus Chritus applied to Christ’s ascension ministry as King*

Again we are in full agreement with all the above. The question however how, if Christ is humanly seated in heaven, are such judgements as needing to apply Christ’s exclusive lordship by his word to subjective and earthly circumstances on earth? One thinks of the many contested claims of one member against another Or the ongoing decisions in governing the church such as to remain true to the missional imperative by avoiding over-contextualizing or under-contextualizing the missional church—nothing to repel, nothing to compel, save Christ. Or who will hear the confession of a repentant sinner such as to judge a *credible* profession of faith such as to give assurance of salvation.? On it goes!

In short, how is Christ to judge all the messiness of earthiness governing without an earthly presence of his kingship on earth as it is in heaven? How is Christ’s ascended kingdom made efficacious, *really*?

In acknowledging such passages that affirm Christ’s exclusive kingship, Saucy often negates within the same passage the presence of Christ acting through the church to administrate that kingship. For instance.

Following Christ’s great declaration concerning the mediatorial “keys of the kingdom of God” given unto the church for the purpose of “binding and loosing on earth what is bound and loosed in heaven, Chapter 18 clearly wants to work this out with respect to particular adjudications.

**Matt. 18:15** *“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18 Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”*

But the key point here after establishing a quorum of “two or three” as acting jointly on behalf of Christ’s church (Mt 16), Christ declares “I am among them.” Mystery? Yes! But real and efficacious. This is all the more significant in light of Paul’s teaching in 1 Cor. 5 concerning the church’s authorization to excommunicate persons from the church who our found to be living in unrepentant sin. At the crucial point of Paul’s argument, he writes:

**1Cor. 5:3** *For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. 4 When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.*<sup>1</sup>

We see here in direct relation to governing the church how it is that Christ the King of the church IS present—*totus Christus*—as the covenant head is mystically united to the earthly body of Christ in a way that enlivens that body to be Christ, not necessarily (e.g. not infallibly), not necessarily immediately (e.g. through many trials and errors), but present all the same. Martin Bucer makes this point poignantly:

Christ the Lord is always himself present with his church... truly and actually... for the Lord is never absent from his church, but is always personally present, personally doing and performing everything in all things... ruling, leading and feeding it himself. But he effects and carries out this his rule and the feeding of his lambs in such a way as to remain always in his heavenly nature, that is, in his divine and intangible

state, because he has left this world. Therefore it has pleased him to exercise his rule, protection and care of us who are still in this world with and through the ministry of his word which he does outwardly and tangibly through his ministers and shepherds.<sup>15</sup>

Likewise, in the PCA Book of Church Order Preface:

Jesus Christ, upon whose shoulders the government rests... having all power given unto Him in heaven and in earth by the Father... and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all (Ephesians 1:20-23); He, being ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things, received gifts for His Church, and gave all offices necessary for the edification of His Church and the perfecting of His saints (Ephesians 4:10-13). It belongs to His Majesty from His throne of glory **to rule** and teach the Church through His Word and Spirit by the ministry of men; **thus mediately** exercising His own authority and enforcing His own laws, unto the edification and establishment of His Kingdom.

### 3) *Solus Christus applied to totus Christus as King*

Today there is a clear need to regulate church power or government. We see this in two extremes—hypo and hyper church power—both needing *solus Christus* applied to *totus Christus*.

On the hyper-power side of the extreme, we discern in the more charismatic contexts of an individualized Holy Spirit acting through prophetic personalities, the tendency to bind conscience where conscience isn't bound. Church power is reduced to a populace leader's intuition as if equal to the Holy Spirit. Power in this context is mystical and unregulated, except perhaps at best as to not be contrary to the word of God, but all the same beside it. To this point, James Bannerman describes the hyper-power tendency wherein:

Church power is an undefined and mysterious thing, having no very well marked limits at all,—a magic charm, a supernatural virtue, within it administers ordinances, or dispenses sacramental grace, or exercises priestly offices to the members,—an absolute and irresponsible spiritual authority, not to be profanely scanned or impiously restricted...(Bannerman, p. 235)

On the other extreme is hypo-power. Everyone is more or less left to their own self-judgment and opinion as then to bring harm unto themselves without Christ as King in any practical sense active in their lives. Again, Bannerman describes the hypo-power tendency wherein it is:

Denied to Church power its proper place and standing as a Divine ordinance,—in whose eyes it ceases to be a power of God at all, and its exercise is no longer stamped with a Divine warrant, or accompanied with a Divine and special blessing; a nullity when it administers laws in the Christian society, carrying with it no binding obligation except from the consent of the members; and an empty and unblessed form, divorced from any Divine or gracious influence when it dispenses sacraments and ordinances in the Church... reducing it to the level of a mere human appointment, binding no Divine obligation on the conscience, and communicating no Divine blessing to the soul...(Bannerman, p. 235-36)

In both instances, *totus Christus* preserves *solus Christus*. On the one extreme, *solus Christus* is preserved against the commandment of men. On the other instance, *solus Christus* is preserved against spiritual anarchy. To this very point, the Westminster Confession Chapter 20 makes the following two observations:

20.2: God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in anything, contrary to his Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship. So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of

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<sup>15</sup> Martin Bucer, *The True Pastoral Care and the Correct Shepherd-Service...*

conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.

20:3. They who, upon pretense of Christian liberty, do practice any sin, or cherish any lust, do thereby destroy the end of Christian liberty, which is, that being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

## Conclusion:

Our argument has sought to affirm Saucy's application of incarnational Christology applied to *solus Christus*, even if then to extend *solus Christus* to ascension Christology. Our analysis asks that the same regulative principal that preserves *solus Christus* to Christ's incarnational accomplishments apply also to the grace that is now being accomplished during Christ's ascension ministry by his mediatorial presence in the local church. By distinguishing incarnational Christology from ascension Christology we therefore reject the modern protestant polemic against *totus Christus*, even suggesting that *totus Christus* preserves *solus Christus* in so far as redemption applied—all *sola deo gloria*.

Therefore, we reject Saucy's thesis that "High" ecclesiology inevitably means "low" Christology. Such a rejection is we believe sympathetic to the early reformational premise, if not to the modern evangelical premise. This is perfectly illustrated by reference to 16<sup>th</sup> century reformer John Calvin. What else but a high ecclesia spirituality could be surmised when about the ascension ministry of Christ being mediated through the church, Calvin explains:

*He therefore sits on high transfusing us by his power, that he may quicken us to spiritual life, sanctify us by his Spirit, adorn the church with divers gifts of his grace, keep it safe from all harm by his protection, restrain the raging enemies of his cross and of our salvation by the strength of his hand, and finally hold all power in heaven and on earth.*<sup>16</sup>

And again,

*We acknowledge without any circumlocution that the flesh of Christ, is life-giving, not only because once in it our salvation was obtained; but because now we being united to him in sacred union, it breathes life into us... because being by the power of the Spirit engrafted into the body of Christ, we have a common life with him; fore from the hidden fountain of divinity life is, in a wonderful way, infused into the flesh of Christ and thence flows out to us..." Christ is absent from us as to the body; by his Spirit, however dwelling in us, he so lifts us to himself in heaven, that he transfuses the life-giving vigor of his flesh into us, as we grow by vital heat of the sun.*<sup>17</sup>

And yet again,

*No extent of space interferes with the boundless energy of the Spirit, which transfuses life into us from the flesh of Christ.*<sup>18</sup>

And the implications for missional ecclesiology as through the Prophetic, Priestly and Kingly presence of Christ in and through the local church is clear. More than a source of mission, the church becomes the locus for mission, the very epicenter of "heaven to earth" in kingdom power. Such high ecclesiology serves as our greatest argument today for why the church is an essential element of the gospel for those who seek a bodiless, and therefore powerless, Christ today.

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<sup>16</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.xvi.16

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Hodge, DR, *Essays*, p. 364.

<sup>18</sup> John Calvin, *Corpus Reformatorum*, 37:4

Likewise, such high ecclesiology will want church planters and pastor to trust more fully those “ordinary” means of grace given unto the church as Christ’s mediated presence, less the creative “new measures” of more-modernist “hip” spirituality. This is because in the church is the minus triplex ministry of Christ, not just remembered, but efficaciously present. For again in Calvin’s words,

*We expect salvation from him — not because he stands aloof from us, but because engrafting us into his body he not only makes us partakers of all his benefits, but also of himself... you become a member of him, and hence one with him.*<sup>19</sup>

**For Discussion:**

1. How have you discerned *solus Christus* against *totus Christus* (high ecclesiology) and how has this paper suggested we respond?
2. What ways have we seen *solus Christus* diminished because of the rejection of *totus Christus*? What significance is the regulative principal in all of this as applied to the minus triplex being mediated through the church today?  
E.g. To be sure, equating the church with the incarnational ministry of Christ would be catastrophic to the grace that was once and for all secured by Christ’s incarnational ministry—justification and assurance of salvation especially. In this, a hyper-high (sacerdotal) church is toxic. But what of such graces as effectual calling effectual calling and sanctification (the ascension categories of the *historia salutis*)? And if the “solas” are not applied to Christ’s ascension ministry, what then will replace Christ as either “beside” or “even contrary to” Christ as carefully regulated by the apostolic foundation of the Christ-centered Church?
3. How does the *sola Christus* applied to *totus Christus* change our identity as called to fill the office of church planter/pastor?

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<sup>19</sup> *Institutes*, III.2.24