

The following is a quote/excerpt of <https://medium.com/@fanaticthomist/is-christ-a-composite-person-61a7924aff04> and is titled *Is Christ A Composite Person?* Slight edits for flow and format.

Is Christ A Composite Person?

By Fanatic Thomist

<https://medium.com/@fanaticthomist> & https://x.com/Scholastic_X

Begin Quote/Excerpt:

The Second Person of the Trinity, God the Word, is an absolutely simple subsistence or hypostasis before the incarnation, but the Christians confess that the same subsistence of the Word, by assuming a true flesh from the Blessed Virgin Mary became truly human, and therefore, by virtue of this union, became the God-man Jesus Christ.

Here, a question is immediately raised: Is the person of Christ a composite person post-union of the divine and human natures? Some might respond negatively and say that it is impossible because God is simple and immutable and thus incapable of becoming composite in any way. But on the contrary, this is not what the General Councils and the Church Fathers affirmed, since they all confess a single composite hypostasis of Christ after the incarnation.

Here we will answer two difficult questions: **First**, in what sense is Christ a composite person? **And second**, how can He be a composite person if He is an absolutely simple subsistence in the divine nature?

To this, St. Thomas offers a response in his monumental work *Summa theologiae* III, q. 2, a. 4 where he says:

‘I answer that, The Person or hypostasis of Christ may be viewed in two ways. First as it is in itself, and thus it is altogether simple, even as the Nature of the Word. Second, in the aspect of person or hypostasis to which it belongs to subsist in a nature; and thus the Person of Christ subsists in two natures. Hence though there is one subsisting being in Him, yet there are different aspects of subsistence, and hence He is said to be a composite person, insomuch as one being subsists in two.’

Here, St. Thomas distinguishes by saying that one and the same person can be considered in Himself, i.e., the subsistence of the Word who is in the divine nature and

identical with it, in which sense He is absolutely simple; and second, insofar as the same person is said to subsist in and fulfill the office of the [subsistence] of two natures, namely, divine and human, and in this sense, He is said to be truly composite.

To make this matter clear and to resolve the dispute, I will use one of the greatest Thomists of all time, Jean-Baptiste Gonet, O.P. (1616–1681) who is one of the top 5 authorities in Thomism and wrote one of the most important and lengthy commentaries on his master's *Summa theologiae*, called *Clypeus theologiae thomisticae contra novos ejus impugnatores* in six volumes (1875 Vives ed.).

- <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/gonet-jean-baptiste>
- <https://archive.org/details/clypeustheologia01gone>

The following dispute is taken from the fifth volume of his work which is on Christology, disp. VI, art. II, pp. 493–496.

ARTICLE II.

Whether the Person of Christ can truly and properly be said to be composed of the divine nature and humanity, and of humanity and the subsistence of the Word?

XXV. Many ancient theologians, such as St. Bonaventure, Scotus, Durandus and Richard deny this, thinking that the union of the divine and human natures in Christ is not a strict and proper composition, but only an improper and metaphorical one. Others, however, admit that the Person of Christ is truly and properly composed of two natures, but not of the Person of the Word and humanity. This is stated by Asturicensis in question 7 of *On the Grace of Christ*, conclusion 4.

§ I.

The true opinion is established with a double conclusion.

XXVI. I say firstly: Christ is a person truly and properly composed of the divine and human natures. This is affirmed by the Holy Doctor here in article 4 (Cf. *STh. III*, q. 2), and his disciples commonly agree.

This is first proven by the Third Council of Constantinople, acta 8, where it is formally defined that by the union effected in the Incarnation, there is a composition, and after the union, the Person of Christ is composed. The reason given there is that the

union effected by the Incarnation not only preserves without confusion those things that have come together but also allows for distinction. The same is defined in the Sixth General Council, acta 4, in the letter of Pope Agatho to Emperors Heraclius and Tiberius, and in acta 11, in the letter of Sophronius, approved by the whole Council, where Christ is called a composed Person, consisting of an unconfused union. In acta 29, chapter 6, those who do not confess one subsistence in Christ composed of two natures are condemned. The Holy Fathers speak in the same way, especially Damascene in book 3 of the *Orthodox Faith* where he says: “*In our Lord Jesus Christ, we recognize two natures, but one hypostasis composed of both*”; and St. Dionysius in chapter 4 of *On the Divine Names* where he calls this an ineffable composition.

XXVII. The second proof is by reason: What consists of truly distinct and united elements is truly composed of those elements; for composition is nothing other than the simultaneous placement or union of distinct things; to compose is the same as to place together with another. But the Person of Christ consists of two natures really distinct and united; therefore, it is truly composed of two natures, namely divine and human. **The minor is proven:** The Person of Christ is divine and human at the same time; but it would not be such unless it were constituted as such by the divine and human nature, and thus unless it contained both; therefore, it truly consists of two natures really distinct and united.

XXVIII. This is confirmed: Where there is a multitude of things without composition, there must be inordinate confusion, as is evident in a heap of stones. But in the Person of Christ, there is no inordinate confusion of natures; therefore, the Person of Christ must be composed of two natures.

XXIX. The third proof of the conclusion: The term of the hypostatic union is not something simple, but composed. But the Person of Christ is the term of the hypostatic union; therefore, it is not simple but composed. The minor will be evident from what will be said below, **and the major is proven:** Both because it is against the nature of union to be terminated at something simple, since union always pertains to distinct things; and also because the simple extremes of that union pre-existed it. But what pre-exists the union is not its term; therefore, the term of the union is not something simple but composed.

XXX. I say secondly: The Person of Christ is composed of human nature and the Person of the Word.

This conclusion follows from what was said in the preceding article. Although the Councils mentioned above formally speak only of the composition from the divine and human natures, this cannot be admitted unless the composition from nature and person

is presupposed. For the human nature is united more primarily and immediately to the Person of the Word than to the divine nature; the reason why it is united to the divine nature is because it is united to the Person of the Word. Therefore, by the fact that the Holy Fathers and Councils acknowledge in Christ a composition from the divine and human natures, they also implicitly admit a composition from human nature and the Person of the Word. I add that the reason given in the previous conclusion also proves this: for if the union of distinct things is composition, but in the Person of Christ there is a union of the Person of the Word with human nature, which are really distinct and prior to the union of the two natures; therefore, in Christ there is a composition of the Person of the Word and human nature.

§ II.

Solution to the principal objections.

XXXI. First objection: Every composition is from parts, but the divine nature in Christ does not have the status of a part. Therefore, Christ is not composed of divine and human nature. The major premise seems certain because to compose is to make a whole from parts. The minor is also evident since every part is something incomplete and therefore imperfect and is subordinated to the whole as to its end. However, the divine nature cannot be something incomplete and imperfect nor subordinated to the Person of Christ as to its end. Therefore, it cannot have the status of a part. Hence, St. Thomas teaches in *Sent.* III, dist. 6, q. 2, art. 3 and in *ad Annibal.* III, the same distinction, q. 1, art. 3 and in *The Disputed Questions on the Union of the Word*, art. 1, ad 6 that the Person of Christ after the Incarnation can in some way be called composed because some reason of composition is preserved in it, namely, that the components exist by the same being. However, there is not a true reason for composition because the divine nature cannot have the status of a part.

XXXII. I respond by denying the major premise. Although composition, which is commonly in use or which naturally occurs, involves many imperfections, the first and root of all other imperfections is that the extremes of it truly have the status of parts, or of incomplete entities. Nevertheless, just as the notion of wisdom, which in us is an accident, quality, and habit, can be purified of all these imperfections and thus found formally in God, and just as the notion of union, which regularly involves many imperfections from the part of the united things and of that which results from it, can be abstracted from all these imperfections and placed truly and simply between human nature and the Word, so likewise the composition of divine and human nature found in Christ abstracts, at least from one extreme, namely the divine nature, from all those imperfections found in natural and created compositions. Therefore, it is called ineffable by Dionysius. Hence, the divine nature does not have the status of a part in that marvelous composition, but only as an extreme contributing to the constitution of the

composite Person of Christ. This can be clarified and illustrated with three examples. From God and the universe of creatures, there results a certain composition, which is called the universe, whose head is God, according to Aristotle in 12 *Metaph.*, text 62, and yet this composition is not from God as a part. Likewise, the Blessed and the divine essence united as a species result in one principle of the beatific vision, and yet the divine essence does not enter that composition as a part but as an extreme, excluding the imperfection of a part. Thirdly, the Sacrament of the Eucharist is something composed of the sacrament and the reality of the sacrament, namely from the species of bread and wine and from Christ contained under them, and yet Christ does not have the status of a part. Similarly, we say in the proposed matter that the Divinity and personality of the Divine Word enter into the composition found in Christ not as a part, but as an extreme contributing to the constitution of the composite Person. Hence, the Holy Doctor said very well here in art. 4, ad 2 that the composition of the Person of Christ from divine and human nature is not according to parts but according to number, which is to say that the composition of the Person of Christ from divine and human nature only implies what is essential to composition as such, namely the concurrence of multiple things to constitute something, but not those imperfections that composition implies in pure creatures, among which the chief is that both extremes composing are parts. From this, it is easily understood that when the cited places teach that there is not a true reason for composition in Christ because the divine nature cannot have the status of a part, they are speaking of composition not according to itself and its formal reason, but according to the laws and imperfections it implies in pure creatures, in which sense it is certain that it does not apply to the Person of Christ.

XXXIII. You will say: Every composition is a kind of whole, but every whole is from parts, therefore every composition must be from parts. **This is confirmed:** That into which something is resolved is a part, but every composition is resolved into those things from which it consists, therefore those things have the status of parts.

XXXIV. I respond to the objection by denying the minor premise, for it is not of the essence of a composition as such that it is a kind of whole strictly taken, as it is said in respect to the parts of which it consists, but only that it is a complete being, which if it consists of parts, is a certain whole properly, but otherwise, if it consists of extremes only not having the status of parts, it is not a whole strictly taken. Unless perhaps by whole is understood a complete being, as it is distinguished from an incomplete being essentially ordered to composition.

To respond to the confirmation, I also deny the major premise, for it is not always true that that into which a composition is resolved must be a part, for it suffices that it be an extreme really distinct from the other, as is evident in the three examples given above.

XXXV. Second objection: Every composite is greater and more perfect than any of its individual components taken separately; but Christ is not something more perfect than the divine nature or the personality of the Word by itself; therefore, Christ is not something composite from the divine and human natures, nor from the humanity and the subsistence of the Word.

I respond that when the component extremes are finite, then the composite is greater than any of those components individually. However, this is not the case when one of the extremes is infinite, as it is in this situation. The reason is that the infinite extreme eminently contains the entire perfection of the other; thus, the composite cannot be said to be greater, except at most in an extensive sense.

XXXVI. Third objection: If Christ were truly composed, it would be true absolutely that the Divine Word and the Son of God are composed, because those things said of Christ are also said of the Son of God by the communication of idioms. But it cannot be said of the Word and the Son of God that he is a composite person, therefore neither of Christ.

XXXVII. I respond that the Son of God, or the Word, absolutely and without addition signifies the second Person of the Trinity, subsisting in the divine nature, in which way composition is repugnant to him. Therefore, it must not be said absolutely that the Son of God or the Word is composed, but with the addition that he subsists in human nature or that he is a human person. As for the addition concerning the communication of idioms, it must be said that those things absolutely said of Christ can be said absolutely of the Word or the Son of God by the communication of idioms, unless they are such as to determine this subject, Christ, to stand only for the composite of human nature and Divinity. These predicates, however, “Christ is composite,” “Christ is the term resulting from the personal union of two natures,” determine Christ to stand for the aggregate of human nature and Divinity, and thus cannot be said without addition of the Son of God or the Word, but only with the addition, namely, as he is a human person or as he subsists in human nature.

XXXVIII. Fourth objection against the second conclusion: Personality is the medium in which the divine and human nature in Christ are united, but the medium in which the composing parts are united is not an extreme composing part, therefore the personality of the Word cannot properly be called an extreme in this composition which we are discussing.

XXXIX. This is confirmed: Although a true composition is found between an accident and the subject in which it inheres, it is not found between the accident and the

quantity through which it inheres in the subject, because quantity is not the sustaining subject of the accident, but the medium by which the accident is joined and coupled to the subject and inheres in it. In the same way, the personality of the Divine Word in this marvelous union we are discussing is the reason for uniting the divine nature with humanity, therefore it cannot properly be called an extreme in this composition.

XL. I respond that when what is the reason for uniting one extreme with another only has the status of a bond and connection (as is the union between matter and form, according to those who say that it is a kind of substantial mode distinct from matter and form itself), it does not have the status of an extreme component. But when it does not have the status of a bond and connection, it can have the status of a component. Thus, the point joining the parts is not only the medium by which they are united but also in some way an extreme that is united. Likewise, quantity is the medium by which whiteness is united to the body, and at the same time is an extreme that is united to the body. Therefore, since the personality of the Divine Word does not have the pure status of a bond of human nature with the divine but truly terminates it and completes it in the genus of substance, it can be an extreme in that marvelous composition found in Christ.

XLI. To the confirmation, I deny the assumption, namely, that a true composition is not found between quantity and whiteness, for if it were not a true composition, quantity could not be said to be white. But more on this in Philosophy.

XLII. From what has been said, you can gather what should be thought about the opinion of Cabrera, who maintains that the composition in the Person of Christ is not only from human nature and Divinity, both as nature and as the Person of the Word, but also from another and another formally distinct reason for subsisting. For since the composition is the union of such distinct things and real distinction is not found in Christ regarding the proposed matter except between divine and human nature, and between the divine Person and human nature, no other real composition can be found except from human and divine nature and from the Person of the Word and human nature.

(End disp. VI, art. II, pp. 493–496)

Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto, sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper, et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.

End Quote/Excerpt

From <https://medium.com/@fanaticthomist/is-christ-a-composite-person-61a7924aff04>