

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Union, distinction and creaturely perfections: Petrus van Mastricht's rejection of deification

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Abstract

Recent work in Protestant soteriology and eschatology has sought to recover and exposit the strands (or doctrines) of theosis present in figures such as Jonathan Edwards, John Calvin and John Wesley, among others. Yet, such ventures can risk unmooring doctrinal convictions from their embeddedness within a larger nexus of theological judgments and concerns. This essay provides a modest contribution to Protestant engagement with the doctrine of theosis, with the help of seventeenth-century Reformed theologian Petrus van Mastricht. In it, I argue that van Mastricht's 'upstream' commitments to Christology and the incommunicability of divine perfections inform his rejection of deification. The essay concludes by highlighting the promise and perils of van Mastricht's account of the real nature of the *unio mystica*.

Keywords: deification; Petrus van Mastricht; Reformed Orthodoxy; theosis; *unio mystica*; union with Christ

It seems that deification has almost achieved something of ecumenical consensus.¹ In recent years, Protestant theologians have sought to exposit the strands (or doctrines) of theosis at work in the soteriological visions of figures such as Jonathan Edwards,² Martin Luther,³ John Calvin⁴ and John Wesley,⁵ among others. As Oliver Crisp notes, 'there is now a cottage industry devoted to showing how Protestant theologians of the past

¹Throughout this essay, I will use the terms theosis and deification interchangeably.

²See James R. Salladin, *Jonathan Edwards and Deification: Reconciling Theosis and the Reformed Tradition* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022).

³See Bruce D. Marshall, 'Justification as Declaration and Deification', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 4/1 (2002), pp. 3–28.

⁴See Carl Mosser, 'The Greatest Possible Blessing: Calvin and Deification', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55/1 (2002), pp. 36–57.

⁵See Michael J. Christensen, 'The Royal Way of Love: Deification in the Wesleyan Tradition', in Jared Ortiz (ed), *With All the Fullness of God: Deification in Christian Tradition* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021), pp. 177–202.

endorsed something like the doctrine of theosis'.⁶ While the concepts and judgments resonant with deification appear in the writings of patristic figures such as Athanasius of Alexandria,⁷ there is no singular articulation of the concept or doctrine per se, and theologians throughout church history have resourced the language of theosis in disparate ways.⁸ Accordingly, contemporary critics of the *ressourcement* of the conceptual framework(s) associated with deification can find it difficult to ascertain what the conversation surrounding this locution entails.⁹ A recent definition offered by Paul Gavrilyuk, Andrew Hofer and Matthew Levering seems to provide a way forward and in what follows I will assume its viability. They write,

Deification is a process and goal by which the human being or church or in some way the whole creation comes to participate in God, Christ, divine life, divine attributes, divine energies, or divine glory by growing into the likeness of God, while remaining a creature ontologically distinct from the Creator. This process is often also described as divine adoption, regeneration, glorification, sanctification, and union with God. Human deification is made possible by the incarnation of the divine Logos in Jesus Christ and is sustained by the Holy Spirit through the sacramental life of the church, prayer, ascetical discipline, and growth in virtue.¹⁰

Despite the definition's utility (a utility underscored by the fact that its authors intentionally seek a breadth wide enough to include disparate strands of the Christian tradition), pursuing such ecumenical convergences can risk unmooring doctrinal convictions from the larger frameworks and cultures in which they are embedded.¹¹

⁶Oliver Crisp, *Jonthan Edwards on God and Creation* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), p. 167.

⁷Athanasius of Alexandria, 'Four Discourses against the Arians', in *St. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. John Henry Newman and Archibald T. Robertson, vol. 4 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1892), p. 380.

⁸Vladimir Kharlamov, 'Theosis in Patristic Thought', *Theology Today* 65/2 (2008), p. 161. The assumption here is that 'doctrine' refers to something akin to 'a comprehensive account of a particular teaching about a given theological topic held by some community of Christians or some particular denomination' (Oliver Crisp, *Approaching the Atonement: The Reconciling Work of Christ* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020], p. 24). For different articulations of the use of deification language, see Gösta Hallonsten, 'Theosis in Recent Research: A Renewal of Interest and a Need for Clarity', in Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung (eds), *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in Christian Traditions* (Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007), pp. 283–7; Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in Greek Patristic Thought* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), pp. 1–2; Rowan Williams, 'Deification', in Gordon S. Wakefield (ed.), *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (London: SCM Press, 1983), p. 106.

⁹Bruce L. McCormack, 'Union with Christ in Calvin's Theology: Grounds for a Divinisation Theory', in David W. Hall (ed), *Tributes to John Calvin: A Celebration of His Quincentenary* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), p. 505.

¹⁰Paul L. Gavrilyuk, et. al. 'Introduction', in Paul L. Gavrilyuk, Andrew Hofer, and Matthew Levering (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Deification* (Oxford: OUP, 2024), p. 6.

¹¹McCormack, 'Union with Christ in Calvin's Theology', p. 506. Here, I am building on Lewis Ayres' definition of a theological culture as 'a system of learned patterns of behaviour (including thought, speech, and human action), ideas, and products that together shape conceptions of the order of existence and interactions with other cultures' (Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* [Oxford: OUP, 2004], p. 274). He focuses specifically on particular 'intellectual habits' that is made evident by theological strategies that form 'a pattern of argumentation, a way of relating together particular themes, and a tendency to highlight particular themes or topics for discussion' (Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, p. 274).

Indeed, this is especially the case when theological reflection on deification is brought to bear on the doctrine of divine perfections or attributes, and the manner in which this doctrine is bound up with other theological judgments and convictions.

The burden of this essay is to offer an examination of precisely this theological embeddedness through the work of seventeenth-century Reformed theologian Petrus van Mastricht and his interaction with the works of Andreas Osiander and Valentin Weigel. In it, I will argue that van Mastricht's 'upstream' Christological commitments 1) inform his rejection of deification as found in these two figures, 2) envisage a particular set of emphases within his soteriological vision vis-à-vis the priority of moral corruption and the retention of creaturely perfections in glorification and yet 3) is also at risk of depending upon an a-theological understanding of the human creature. In order to bring van Mastricht's critical rejection into relief, I will begin with an exposition of Osiander and Weigel before turning to van Mastricht's articulation of union with Christ.

Union with Christ in Andreas Osiander and Valentin Weigel

After providing a cursory exegetical overview of 1 Corinthians 1:30's implications for union with Christ, van Mastricht offers a warning for what lies ahead: 'And although our union with Christ is real, as we will teach in its proper place, the essences of both remain distinct and intact. Hence the believer is, through this union, neither *Christified* or deified, as Nazianzus imprudently and foolishly once said . . . [and] as some modern enthusiasts, Weigelians, and other fanatics of *Germanic Theology* almost blasphemously dream'.¹² On van Mastricht's reading, both Weigel and Osiander, whose thought he turns to a few sections later, are guilty of a kind of conciliar violation, insofar as they claim that the redeemed are essentially or personally united with God in virtue of their union with Christ. In order to elucidate van Mastricht's concern, it will be helpful to provide a cursory outline of Osiander's and Weigel's account of union with Christ in order to highlight what van Mastricht finds so disturbing about their proposals.

Andreas Osiander and the indwelling of the divine nature

Andreas Osiander is perhaps best known for the controversy with Matthias Flacius and Philip Melancthon over the proper understanding of the doctrine of justification,¹³ for which Osiander was accused of deviating from Luther's teaching and obscuring the value of the 'obedience suffering, death, and resurrection' of Christ.¹⁴ And it is precisely this issue that concerns us here, at least as far as van Mastricht is concerned. For Osiander, the only righteousness that pleases God is the righteousness of God himself. Accordingly, if the redeemed are to be truly righteous, it is only insofar as the righteousness of God becomes properly theirs by faith.

For the most part, Osiander affirms much of the traditional conciliar language about the union of the divine and human natures in the theanthropic person of Christ, even

¹²Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretica-practica theologia* [hereafter *Theologia*] (Utrecht: 1698), 1.6.5 §VIII. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of van Mastricht, Osiander and Weigel are the author's.

¹³Robert Kolb, James A. Nestingen, and Charles P. Arand, *The Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of the Book of Concord* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), pp. 217–8.

¹⁴Johannes Bugenhagen, 'Judgment of the Churches of Wittenberg . . . Against Osiander', in vol. 1 of *Johannes Bugenhagen: Selected Writings*, ed. Kurt K. Hendel (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), p. 186.

distancing himself from the alternative understandings of the Eutychians and Apollinarians of antiquity as well as the Schwenkfeldians of his era.¹⁵ The theanthropic person is truly God and fully human, with each nature retaining its respective properties.¹⁶ It is this latter point, the retention of the respective properties of the divine and human nature in the person Jesus Christ, that proves important for Osiander, especially in conjunction with his understanding of divine simplicity and its implications for the theanthropic person. According to Osiander, there is no real distinction between the divine nature and the divine attributes.¹⁷ In his reading, this means that righteousness does not refer to a part of God or any set of actions God engages in the economy of his works. Rather, righteousness is a property of the divine nature, is identical with Godself and, thus, belongs to God alone.¹⁸ In the incarnation of the Son of God, the divine nature is hypostatically and immutably united with a human nature. But for Osiander, the righteousness of Christ cannot be a property of Christ according to his human nature, but only according to his divinity. Christ is righteous 'because he was born a just Son from a just Father from eternity'.¹⁹ In other words, the theanthropic person is righteous on account of the presence of the divine Son, who is consubstantial with the Father and possesses all the attributes of the divine nature, among which righteousness is enumerated. While the human nature of Christ is far from superfluous, and Osiander affirms Christ is sinless throughout his life, this sinlessness does not amount to righteousness per se. Rather, for Osiander, the righteousness of Christ indexes the presence of the substantial righteousness that is a property of God alone.²⁰

This christological framework informs Osiander's understanding of the manner in which the individual attains righteousness by faith.²¹ According to Osiander, humanity's problem is not primarily that it needs to be forgiven of its sin. More fundamental is the problem that no human creature possesses the attribute of righteousness which is proper to God alone and, as mentioned above, is the only kind of righteousness pleasing to

¹⁵See, for example, Andreas Osiander, 'Osiander an Joachim Mörlin (1551)', in *Andreas Osiander D.Ä Gesamtausgabe*, eds, Gerhard Müller and Gottfried Seebaß, 10 vols (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1975–1997), 9.600–01.

¹⁶Andreas Osiander, 'Von dem einigen Mittler', in *Andreas Osiander D.Ä Gesamtausgabe*, 10.153.

¹⁷Andreas Osiander, 'Gutachten über Disputationsthesen Matthias Lauterwalds (1549)', in *Andreas Osiander D.Ä Gesamtausgabe*, 9.100.

¹⁸Strehle helpfully notes that for Osiander 'there is only one kind of righteousness to God and that righteousness is identical to God himself. . . . Not even Christ, as God *and* man, can be said to serve as that righteousness without some qualification if God and man are to remain qualitatively distinct. He can only become that righteousness in accordance with what makes him so essentially—i.e. in accordance with that righteousness which he shares in essence with the whole trinity, which he alone as God possesses, which subsists only in his deity'. Stephen Strehle, 'Imputatio iustitiae: Its Origin in Melancthon, Its Opposition in Osiander', *Theologische Zeitschrift* 50/3 (1994), p. 210.

¹⁹Andreas Osiander, 'Disputatio de Iustificatione (1550)', in *Andreas Osiander D.Ä Gesamtausgabe*, 9.432.

²⁰As Wilson-Kastner summarises, for Osiander's Christology, 'although both the humanity and divinity of Christ are necessary to our salvation, the divinity of Christ is the means of our salvation'. Patricia Wilson-Kastner, 'Andreas Osiander's Probable Influence on Thomas Cranmer's Eucharistic Theology', *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 14/4 (1983), p. 421.

²¹Steinmetz notes that 'there is a strong parallel in Osiander's teaching between the incarnation of the Logos, the justification of the Christian, and the celebration of the Eucharist. In each case the divine Word, the Second person of the Trinity, unites himself to creaturely elements, though not in the same way'. David C. Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings: From Geiler von Kaysersberg to Theodore Beza*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: OUP, 2001), p. 67.

God.²² Yet, the nature of faith in Christ provides a way for this problem to be resolved. For Osiander, the object of faith is truly present in its apprehension.²³ So when a person believes in Christ, the theanthropic person is truly present to and in that person through faith, indwelling them.²⁴ And insofar as Christ indwells believers, ‘God, according to his true divine nature, dwells in true believers. For where Christ is, there also is his divine nature or divine essence’.²⁵ In faith, the Christian does not merely cling to the divine promise of forgiveness. Rather, faith is the means by which the divinity of Christ and the attribute of righteousness proper to that divinity comes to indwell the Christian.²⁶ And this renders the redeemed truly and essentially righteous ‘because in Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and consequently also in those in whom Christ dwells’.²⁷ As Osiander writes elsewhere, ‘What is the right and true righteousness? So I understand it . . . 6. Faith grasps Christ, so that he dwells in our hearts through faith (Eph 3:17). 7. Christ, dwelling in us through faith, is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30; Jer. 23:6; 33:16). 8. Christ, true God and man, dwelling in us through faith, is our righteousness according to His divine nature’.²⁸

Valentin Weigel and the indwelling of celestial flesh

Inheriting and developing the thought of the medieval mystic Johannes Tauler, Paracelsus and the famed *Theologia Germanica*, Valentin Weigel was a Lutheran pastor and theologian from Saxony who is widely recognised today as a key figure in Protestant mystical theology.²⁹ For Weigel, redemption consists of the inhabitation of the celestial flesh of Christ and the appropriation of Christ’s way of self-surrender, both of which can be understood as a kind of deification. In order to elucidate Weigel’s position, and van Mastricht’s subsequent concern, we will briefly examine Weigel’s understanding of the celestial origins and nature of Christ’s flesh, and the implications this holds for his

²²Osiander, ‘Iustificatione’, 9.432.

²³Osiander, ‘Mittler’, 10.171. See also Walter Sparr, “‘Von dem einigen mitler Jhesu Christo:’ Was man von Andreas Osianders Häresie noch lernen könnte”, *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 64/4 (2022), p. 396.

²⁴Osiander, ‘Mittler’, 10.131.

²⁵Ibid., 10.137.

²⁶Osiander, ‘Iustificatione’, 9.430. As Olli-Pekka Vainio summarises, ‘Osiander understood justification in terms of the indwelling of Christ’s *divine* nature. Because righteousness is wholly a property of God, only God himself can be the righteousness of the sinner’. Olli-Pekka Vainio, *Justification and Participation in Christ: The Development of the Lutheran Doctrine of Justification from Luther to the Formula of Concord [1580]* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 98–9.

²⁷Osiander, ‘Iustificatione’, 9.436.

²⁸Andreas Osiander, ‘Wider den lichtflüchtigen Nachtraben (1552)’, in *Andreas Osiander D.Ä Gesamtausgabe*, 10.412. Osiander proposes elsewhere that ‘to be reconciled to God is the same as to be united with Christ, to be reborn from Him, to have Him in us and us in Him, to live through Him, and to be considered righteous by His righteousness dwelling in us’. Osiander, ‘Iustificatione’, 9.434.

²⁹Douglas H. Shantz, ‘Valentin Weigel’, in Ronald K. Rittgers and Vincent Everer (eds.), *Protestants and Mysticism in Reformation Europe* (Leiden: Brill), p. 243. On the relationship between Weigel and Paracelsus, see Horst Pfefferl, ‘Die Rezeption des paracelsischen Schrifttums bei Valentin Weigel: Probleme ihrer Erforschung am Beispiel der kompilatorischen Schrift “Viererlei Auslegung von der Schöpfung”’, in Peter Dilg and Hartmut Rudolph (eds), *Neue Beiträge zur Paracelsus-Forschung* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1995), pp. 151–65. On Weigel and *Theologica Germanica*, see Von G. Baring, ‘Valentin Weigel und die “Deutsche Theologie”’, *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 55 (1964), pp. 5–17.

conception of the salvation achieved on account of the redeemed person's union with Christ.

Although he signed the Formula of Concord in good conscience, Weigel disputed the value and validity of the Lutheran employment of the *communicatio idiomatum* for understanding the relationship of the divine and human natures within the theanthropic person and the Eucharistic logic this doctrine is purported to uphold.³⁰ Weigel posits that Christ's entire person is 'of heaven', and, as he is not Adam's offspring, that the theanthropic person's human flesh is *celestial* flesh.³¹ Weigel writes,

Christ, God and man, the whole person is from heaven, his blood and flesh were conceived by the Holy Spirit in the virgin If the flesh and blood of Christ were not from heaven, but from Adam's seed, then he would have had to see decay and would be of no use to us, and he would also not be the creator of the new creature. But Christ, God and man, the whole person must be from heaven, so that through him we are transferred from Adam, who is earthly, to heavenly flesh and blood, and the old is cast off from us.³²

Two things are worth observing from this quotation. The first is that Weigel's motivation appears to be the desire to preserve the incorruptibility of Christ. That is, to put the matter in a somewhat different idiom, he worries that any ontological, genetic or genealogical connection between the first and second Adam will render Christ subject to the forces of death and decay. Second, we might note the deliberate soteriological connection Weigel establishes between Christ's celestial flesh and the redemption he provides. According to Weigel, Christ's celestial origin is the basis upon which humanity itself might be 'transferred . . . [into] heavenly flesh and blood' and freed from the corruption inherited from Adam.³³

Perhaps reflecting his indebtedness to the *Theologia Germanica* and the writings of Johannes Tauler,³⁴ Weigel avers that salvation consists in humanity's liberation from its corporeal and volitional corruption, a liberation which is achieved through faith in Christ and the subsequent impartation of Christ's celestial flesh to the redeemed.³⁵ He specifies, however, that liberation from *corporeal* corruption is realised only in the eschatological future, when the redeemed receive a 'spiritualised and deified [body] that comes from the new birth from the flesh of Christ'.³⁶ By contrast, because the will is only

³⁰Valentin Weigel, 'Vom Leben Christi (1578)', in *Valentin Weigel-Sämtliche Schriften*, ed. Horst Pfefferl, 14 vols. (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1977–2013), 7.30. See also Andrew Weeks, *Valentin Weigel (1533–1588): German Religious Dissenter, Speculative Theorist, and Advocate of Religious Tolerance* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 126–7, 560.

³¹Freia Odermatt, *Der Himmel in uns: Das Selbstverständnis des Seelsorgers Valentin Weigel (1533–1588)* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), p. 230.

³²Weigel, 'Vom Leben Christi', 7.30–31. On Weigel's eschatological vision, see Alessandro Scafi, 'All Space Will Pass Away: The Spiritual, Spaceless and Incorporeal Heaven of Valentin Weigel (1533–1588)', in Koen Vermeir and Jonathan Regier (eds), *Boundaries, Extents and Circulations: Space and Spatiality in Early Modern Natural Philosophy* (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2016), pp. 209–27.

³³Weigel, 'Vom Leben Christi', 7.31.

³⁴Edward Howells, 'Early Modern Reformations', in Amy Hollywood and Patricia Z. Beckman (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), p. 128.

³⁵Weigel, 'Vom Leben Christi', 7.49.

³⁶Weigel, 'Vom Ort der Welt (1576)', 10.62. Weigel avers that in eternal life the redeemed will have 'no natural, tangible, visible body, but a supernatural, spiritual, invisibly deified body that is so vivid (*klar*) that

partially broken or bent,³⁷ volitional corruption can be healed even now, turned Godward in a way that allows the redeemed to follow Christ's path of self-abnegation.³⁸ Weigel writes, 'No one can become God-like (*Gottformig*) in the state of glory who has not first become truly Christ-like (*Christformig*); that is, in the state of His cross'.³⁹

Faith in Christ is the medium through which this internal healing takes place. Through faith, 'Christ dwells within [the believer] and in [her] heart and [she becomes] one with him', as the redeemed are reborn from heaven.⁴⁰ On Weigel's account, every Christian, as a result of their new birth, now has a double conception, as there remains within them an aspect of the Adamic flesh 'in us and all his nature and properties' even while Christ's celestial flesh is imparted and united to them from above.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the communication of Christ's celestial flesh through faith effects the soul's healing and repair, enabling the redeemed to ever choose the things of God.⁴² And it seems that Weigel understands the real, substantial union between Christ and the redeemed as a personal and/or essential union. For example, he writes, 'Christ and his Church are one, of one blood, one flesh, just as Eternal Wisdom is begotten and born from God's side, having one essence with the Father'.⁴³ Elsewhere, Weigel speaks of Christ becoming mystically incarnate within the believer through faith,⁴⁴ so that when Christ indwells the redeemed, 'the whole Christ, with all heavenly, eternal goods' is present within them.⁴⁵ For Weigel, the union that obtains between Christ and the redeemed effects an essential and personal change in the redeemed,⁴⁶ enabling them to lay aside their Adamic flesh and follow Christ in the path of self-surrender in pursuit of heavenly glory.⁴⁷

Von Mastricht on union with Christ and the christological logic of salvation

On van Mastricht's reading, Osiander's and Weigel's soteriological schemas amount to a kind of deification or Christification, wherein the redeemed are personally or essentially united with Christ or the divine nature. 'All Protestants vehemently reject these vain

no mortal eye can see it, like the body of Christ' (Valentin Weigel, 'Scholasterium christianum [1571]', in *Valentin Weigel-Sämtliche Schriften*, 10.107.

³⁷Weigel, 'Der güldene Griff (1578)', in *Valentin Weigel-Sämtliche Schriften*, 8.72.

³⁸Weigel, 'Vom Leben Christi', 7.42. Weeks notes that this may be indicative of the sharp inner/outer dualism that pervades Weigel's writings. Weeks, *Valentin Weigel*, p. 63.

³⁹Weigel, 'Vom Leben Christi', 7.91. See Weeks, *Valentin Weigel*, p. 112.

⁴⁰Valentin Weigel, 'Vom wahren seligmachenden Glauben (1572)', in *Valentin Weigel-Sämtliche Schriften*, 5.16.

⁴¹Weigel, 'Der güldene Griff', 8.61.

⁴²Martin Žemla, 'Weigel-Weigelianer-Antiweigelianer: Auf der Suche nach der wahren "katholischen" Kirche, oder vom Luthertum zur "Erzketzerei"', in Svorad Zavarský, Lucy R. Reynolds and Andrea Riedl (eds), *Themes of Polemical Theology across Early Modern Literary Genres* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), p. 222.

⁴³Valentin Weigel, 'Am Dritten Sontage nach Trinitatis Evangelium/Luc 15', in *Valentin Weigel-Sämtliche Schriften*, 12.312.

⁴⁴As Zuber observes, Weigel 'followed Osiander in stressing the mystical incarnation of Christ within the believer . . . In a change of emphasis compared to Osiander, Weigel particularly positioned "the new birth" (*die neue geburt*) as a replacement of the forensic understanding of justification'. Mike A. Zuber, *Spiritual Alchemy: From Jacobo Boehme to Mary Anne Atwood* (Oxford: OUP, 2021), p. 17.

⁴⁵Weigel, 'Der güldene Griff', 8.61.

⁴⁶Weigel, 'Vom wahren seligmachenden Glauben', 5.66.

⁴⁷Seigfried Wollgast, *Philosophie in Deutschland Zwischen Reformation und Aufklärung 1550-1650* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1988), p. 560.

words (*akurologias*) with all their heart, as they breathe manifest blasphemies and have no foundation in the true union between us and Christ that we have described so far. God is not incarnated in man, nor is man deified (*Deificetur*) or Christified (*Christificetur*) in return', van Mastricht writes in the midst of his discussion of the nature of the redeemed's *unio cum Christi*.⁴⁸ Van Mastricht is aware of theosis' linguistic roots within the broader Christian tradition, explicitly acknowledging Gregory of Nazianzus's 'imprudent' use of the language of *theopoiesis*.⁴⁹ Still, he is concerned that any kind of *inhabitatio essentialis* will compromise the ontological and personal integrity of Christ or the redeemed. In what follows, we will first examine van Mastricht's Christology before demonstrating how this establishes a kind of boundary around the extent of the redeemed's union with Christ.

The person of Christ

Van Mastricht turns to articulate his Christology under the broader category of the covenant of grace. For van Mastricht, every human creature is trapped in a state of disgrace, guilt and punishment, afflicted by a corruption that adheres to every element of their life because of their primordial parents' violation of the law of God.⁵⁰ Van Mastricht avers that a mediator is required who is 1) called by God from eternity past and sent forth, 2) receptive of this vocation and 3) equipped by God for the work of reconciliation.⁵¹ Van Mastricht expositis the logic of the hypostatic union and the work of Christ under this third item. Agreeing with the conciliar tradition that Christ is truly God of God, true light from true light, van Mastricht argues that in the incarnation, the second person of the Trinity assumes a human nature in a personal union, a nature that is 'consubstantial with our nature . . . in all things like it'.⁵² Accordingly, Jesus Christ, according to his divine nature, is able to spend his life for many and obtain for them an infinite good, and, according to his human nature, is able to take on humanity's guilt and serve as a sacrificial substitute.⁵³

For van Mastricht, the beloved Son assumes a truly and essentially human nature and retains it, even in his ascension and enthronement, to serve as a high priest and mediator of the covenant of grace.⁵⁴ For van Mastricht, this affirmation of and commitment to

⁴⁸Van Mastricht, *Theologia*, 1.6.5 §XIX. Here, van Mastricht explicitly refers his reader to his former teacher and pastor Johannis Hoornbeek's *Summa Controversiarum Religionis*. See Johannis Hornbeek, *Summa controversiarum religionis; cum infidelibus, haereticis, schismaticis: id est, Gentilibus, Judaeis, Muhammedanis; Papistis, Anabaptistis, Enthusiastis et Libertinis, Socinianis; Remonstrantibus, Lutheranis, Brouvnistis, Graecis* (1658), pp. 408, 419–23.

⁴⁹Van Mastricht, *Theologia*, 1.6.5 §VIII. Van Mastricht's reference to Nazianzus is perhaps to *Oration* 2.17: 'τὸν ἀναπλάσσοντα τὸ πλάσμα καὶ παραστήσοντα τὴν εἰκόα καὶ τῷ ἄνω κόσμῳ δημιουργήσοντα καὶ τὸ μῆζον εἰπεῖν θεὸν ἐσόμενον καὶ θεοποιήσοντα'. As Norman Russell notes, Nazianzus 'uses θεοποιέω only once, in an early oration, preferring on three further occasions to resolve it into θεὸν ποιέω . . . His favourite verb, however, is θεόω, which he uses very frequently'. Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, p. 214.

⁵⁰Van Mastricht, *Theologia*, 1.4.2, XVI; cf. 1.4.2 §XVII, where Van Mastricht argues that there are two essential elements of human corruption: 'an aversion to all moral good, especially spiritual and saving, and an inclination to all moral evil'.

⁵¹Ibid., 1.5.1 §VIII.

⁵²Ibid., 1.5.1 §VI.

⁵³Ibid., 1.5.1 §X. In describing the hypostatic union as 'a personal union', van Mastricht intends that this union is not a '*termini a quo*', which would be the Nestorian error, but a '*termini ad quem*', a union which results in a person. Ibid., 1.5.4 §VII.

⁵⁴Ibid., 1.5.16 §X.

Christ's genuine humanity must be taken all the way down. Christ, according to his human nature, must possess all the *requisita* of humanity (e.g. soul and body), the essential properties of those parts (e.g. the faculties of volition and intellect vis-à-vis the soul), the integral parts that enable those human parts to function well (e.g. a liver, a left ventricle) and the necessary *operationes* of a human being.⁵⁵ And, the personal union of the divine Son with a human nature must occur in such a way as to preserve these human *requisita*, properties, parts and *operationes* without confusion, destruction or damage, to either it or the divine nature. Furthermore, van Mastricht believes that the mediatorial vocation of Christ requires that these essential properties, parts, etc. are retained in Christ's resurrection and ascension. So, while Christ in his resurrection and ascension is subject to a 'glorious transformation', this transformation occurs 'in such a way that he by no means set aside the nature of the human body, its finitude, locality, and palpability; nor could he have set these aside without the destruction of the human nature'.⁵⁶

Here, van Mastricht takes issue with the role the *communicatio idiomatum* plays in Lutheran Christology, especially regarding the *genus maiestaticum* which held that 'certain divine attributes—specifically, omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, vivifying power, and adorability—can be predicated of Christ's human nature, at least in its post-ascension state'.⁵⁷ Van Mastricht rejects this understanding of the relationship between Christ's divine and human natures. While he believes it is appropriate to predicate divine and human attributes of the person *in concreto*, van Mastricht denies any kind of communication of attributes such as eternity, omnipresence or omniscience between the individual natures, fearing it terminates in Eutychianism.⁵⁸ According to van Mastricht, in virtue of his commitment to a certain understanding of divine simplicity,⁵⁹ 'if the divine nature had been communicated to the human nature, then the human nature would have become the divine nature, for that which has the divine nature, that thing is the divine nature, and thus the human nature would cease'.⁶⁰

Christological boundaries and the unio mystica

The circumspection of the divine and human natures in the theanthropic person provides a kind of boundary for van Mastricht's consideration of the redeemed's *unio cum Christi*. United to Christ by the double bond of the Holy Spirit and faith, in this federal and mystical union the redeemed receive both the benefits of salvation and Christ himself.⁶¹ While a precise definition of this union is impossible (as its nature

⁵⁵Ibid., 1.5.4 §XVIII.

⁵⁶Ibid., 1.5.15 §V.

⁵⁷Cross, *Christology and Metaphysics*, p. 266.

⁵⁸Van Mastricht, *Theologia*, 1.5.4 §XXIII. As Richard Cross summarises, 'Divine and human properties are all predicable of the incarnate person *in concreto*; and in no case are the properties of the one nature truly predicated of the other'. Cross, *Christology and Metaphysics*, p. 243.

⁵⁹For van Mastricht, the divine perfections are inseparable and 'all express the same undivided essence of God through inadequate concepts'. Van Mastricht, *Theologia*, 1.5.4 §XXIV. For a discussion of how divine simplicity informs Reformed Orthodox understandings of the divine perfections, see Dolf te Velde, *The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy, Karl Barth, and the Utrecht School: A Study in Method and Content* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 248–50.

⁶⁰Van Mastricht, *Theologia*, 1.5.4 §XXIII.

⁶¹Ibid., 1.6.1 §X. See also *ibid.*, 1.6.5 §X.

remains 'ineffable to us'), van Mastricht identifies four characteristics of the union: it is real, total, inviolable and spiritual.⁶² In light of the fact that his primary point of conflict with Osiander and Weigel concerns the nature of this union as *realis*, we will focus our attention there. As real, van Mastricht is insistent that the redeemed's union with Christ is not merely intellectual, imaginary or accidental. Insofar as real, individual persons exist as substances, and these persons are united to Christ, the redeemed's union with Christ 'is also *substantial* insofar as through it substances and persons join together (*coalescunt*), provided that the person of the believer is united with the person of Christ'.⁶³

But even here, van Mastricht's christological convictions erect boundaries about what might be said about the *unio cum Christi* in at least three ways.⁶⁴ First, van Mastricht argues that the union of divine and human natures in Christ is categorically unique and does not serve as a schema for understanding the *unio mystica*. Unlike the immediate union of the divine and human natures in Christ, in union with Christ there is an 'intervening bond', the double bond of the Holy Spirit and faith.⁶⁵ Accordingly, he repeatedly underscores the mediated nature of the *unio mystica* and its distinction from the personal union of the divine and human natures in Christ, the natural union of a soul with its body, and the essential union of the trinitarian persons. Second, even though the *unio cum Christi* is substantial, van Mastricht argues that the ontological integrity of both Christ and the redeemed individual is retained in the union.⁶⁶ Here, the allusion to the christological convictions of Chalcedon is made explicit, especially the rejection of Eutychianism. The union of Christ and the believer does not result in 'the composition or mixtures of essences', nor does it result in the 'transmutation' or 'transubstantiation' of either Christ or the Christian.⁶⁷ For van Mastricht, the reception of Christ in faith never makes Christ or his predicates a property of the redeemed. Third, van Mastricht affirms the retention of a personal distinction in the union of Christ and the Christian. While a real union exists between the whole, theanthropic person on the one hand, and the Christian, body and soul, on the other, this does not occur in such a way as to obfuscate the fact that they remain personally distinct. He writes, 'We do not deny that the whole Christ, and therefore also His divine nature, is united with us through the Spirit and faith; but we only deny that it is united in such a way as to constitute one essence or person with us'.⁶⁸ Particular human beings remain individuated from one another and from Christ – an individuation that is not replaced or dissolved in virtue of the union.

Instead, van Mastricht argues that the redeemed's union with Christ is *mystical*, as opposed to personal, natural, numerical or essential. It involves the believing saint being drawn and bound, by faith and the Holy Spirit, to her faithful Saviour, something more

⁶²Ibid., 1.6.5 §VI.

⁶³Ibid., 1.6.5 §X.

⁶⁴Ibid., 1.6.5 §VIII. The language of christological boundaries is taken from Sarah Coakley's analysis of the Chalcedonian definition. See Sarah Coakley, 'What Does Chalcedon Solve and What Does It Not? Some Reflections on the Status and Meaning of the Chalcedonian "Definition"', in C. Stephen Davis, et. al. (eds), *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), pp. 143–63. Here, I am transposing Coakley's insight to describe the nature of the redeemed person's union with Christ.

⁶⁵Van Mastricht, *Theologia* 1.6.5 §VII; §XIX; §XX.

⁶⁶Ibid., 1.6.5 §XIV.

⁶⁷Ibid., 1.6.5 §VIII.

⁶⁸Ibid., 1.6.5 §XX.

akin to the face-to-face meeting of two 'selves' than the absorption of one into the personhood of another. So, van Mastricht avers, 'Christ and Christians united still constitute two distinct persons. Otherwise, every Christian, because they are united with Christ, would be a θεάνθρωπος like Christ'.⁶⁹ While van Mastricht holds that the divine Son hypostatizes (i.e. makes personal) the human nature he assumes in the incarnation, the divine Son does not, strictly speaking, hypostatize the human natures of individual believers, nor does he become numerically or essentially one with them. Rather, the redeemed's union is the union of pre-existing persons with one another in a way that ensures the retention of their individuality, personal distinctiveness and predicates.

When van Mastricht expounds the nature of the *unio mystica*, he repeatedly returns to the imagery of marriage. Just as when two persons are united in matrimony, they do not become numerically, essentially or personally one, but 'each of the spouses [retains] their own particular essence',⁷⁰ so too with Christ and the faithful. That is, they are united in such a way that both Christ and the redeemed 'may be distinct from each other; both to essences, to persons, and to bodies'.⁷¹ At another point, van Mastricht draws an analogy from architecture. When two stones are cemented together in the construction of a new building, the stones really and truly can be said to form a new thing. But joining them together does not change the essence or nature of either stone.⁷² So in marriage, construction, and the redeemed's *unio cum Christi*, ontological, personal, natural and numerical distinction is retained.⁷³

Van Mastricht's position can be summarised as follows: 1) if God is simple and the divine properties are inseparable,⁷⁴ and 2) if the divine perfections index the singular, omnimodal perfection that is God,⁷⁵ then 3) the divine perfections are singularly unique to him and thereby, strictly speaking, incommunicable.⁷⁶ And insofar as this is the case, 4) these perfections cannot be truly predicated of any human nature without resulting in damage to or the destruction of that selfsame human nature.⁷⁷ Christology is paradigmatic here, especially regarding the logic that motivates his rejection of the *communicatio idiomatum*. And what is true regarding the human nature of Christ in the incarnation is also true for those united to him in the *unio mystica*, especially considering the mediated nature of the redeemed's connection to Christ. So 5) the redeemed's union with Christ, while real, spiritual and inviolable and affording them the gifts of spiritual life, justification and glorification, does not result in the communication of divine perfections and properties to any human being. Simply put, in the same way that van Mastricht denies that divine perfections can be communicated to Christ's human nature without damaging or distorting that nature, he rejects the notion that any

⁶⁹Ibid., 1.6.5 §XIV.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid., and 1.2.5 §V.

⁷⁵Ibid., 1.6.5 §XIV.

⁷⁶Ibid., 1.2.5 §XII. To say that the divine perfections are, properly speaking, incommunicable is not to comment on van Mastricht's appraisal of the communicable/incommunicable division of the attributes. Rather, it is to say that these attributes cannot be strictly predicated of the human creature. As te Velde notes, 'most [Reformed orthodox] make the qualification that what is "communicated" from God to creatures is not the property itself, but the similitude and effect of God's property'. See te Velde, *Doctrine of God*, 250.

⁷⁷Van Mastricht, *Theologia*, 1.5.4 §XXIII.

human creature, even in virtue of its union with the theanthropic person, can receive or share in divine attributes without a resultant distortion or destruction of human nature.

The promise and perils of van Mastricht's soteriological vision

One of the benefits of engaging van Mastricht's soteriological formulations is that it highlights the outworking of particular priorities and emphases, which may be indicative of the Reformed theological waters in which he swam. First, van Mastricht's rejection of deification seems to be motivated, in part, by his belief that humanity's fundamental issue in the postlapsum world is one of moral corruption, not ontological corruption.⁷⁸ For van Mastricht, the problem humanity faces is not one of the lack of a particular set of metaphysical attributes or properties (*contra* Osiander) or an essentially corrupted materiality along with a bent and damaged will (*contra* Weigel). Rather, van Mastricht conceives of sin and salvation in predominantly moral and covenantal terms, which is perhaps unsurprising given his commitment to a kind of federalism. So, while he views death, disease and corruption as results of humanity's violation of the covenant of nature,⁷⁹ sin itself is primarily interpreted as the transgression of *pactum*.⁸⁰ Whatever issues soteriology seeks to resolve, the problem lies in humanity's accidental corruption and not any lack of being on the creature's part.

Second, and relatedly, van Mastricht's account of salvation emphasises the perfection of human creatures *as the particular creatures that they are*.⁸¹ This emphasis is underscored in van Mastricht's repeated concern that Osiander's and Weigel's accounts of deification risk damaging or harming the ontological and personal integrity of human nature. Instead, salvation is conceived of and emphasised as the perfection of creaturely being, with the retention of all the essential properties, parts and operations pertaining thereto. For example, when van Mastricht speaks of Christ's resurrection and 'glorious transformation', this is not a transformation that sets aside the essential powers, properties, parts and operations of the human creature. Rather, it is a transformation that liberates Christ's human flesh from the debilitating effects of life in a postlapsum world. Christ's body 'obtains incorruptibility and glory', and his soul becomes no longer liable 'to infirmities, fatigue, hunger, thirst, pains, and other things'.⁸² But, he does not set aside any of the essential properties, parts or *operationes* of human nature. And as Christ's resurrection is the paradigm and pattern of the believer's resurrection, when the Christian is raised 'to the highest perfection', she too can expect a transformation that is similar in kind.⁸³

If van Mastricht's critical rejection of theosis is helpful vis-à-vis the priorities it accents, it is not without its perils. For the sake of space, I will focus on only one: Christology underdetermines his theological and anthropological judgments. Van Mastricht's reflections upon the divine perfections at times resort to a kind of perfect being theology that is divorced from consideration of the revelation of God's life in the

⁷⁸Ibid., 1.3.12 §XII–XVI.

⁷⁹Ibid., 1.3.9 §XV.

⁸⁰Ibid., 1.3.9 §XXXV.

⁸¹For the implications of this instinct with respect to the resurrection of the body, see Daniel Lee Hill, 'The Colophon of Eternal Beatitude: Petrus van Mastricht, the *Visio Dei*, and the Resurrection of the Body', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* (forthcoming).

⁸²Van Mastricht, *Theologia*, 1.5.15 §V.

⁸³Ibid., 1.8.4 §X.

economy of his works, as Barth astutely points out.⁸⁴ This is not a problem that merely besets van Mastricht's doctrine of God, but his theological anthropology as well. As Karl Barth puts it, 'theological anthropology expounds the knowledge of man which is made possible and needful by the fact that man stands in the light of the Word of God'.⁸⁵ Yet, van Mastricht appears at times to know who and what the human creature is in abstraction from its relationship to and illumination by the Word of God. This is not to say that criticism of van Mastricht is warranted in light of his adherence to or embrace of a kind of substance ontology, however, nebulously defined. Rather, it is that theological reflection on the human creature and her predicates must maintain a focus on 'the real [human being] perceptible in the light of God's word'.⁸⁶

Conclusion

While there has been a surge of interest in the formulating accounts of deification across the Protestant spectrum, the burden of this essay has been to highlight the goods present within van Mastricht's rejection of this very doctrine, particularly as manifested in the writings of his contemporaries. If these goods and the christological convictions pertaining thereto are worth retaining, van Mastricht challenges us to think about the 'downstream' implications of the categorical uniqueness of the perfection that is the living God regarding the salvation and resurrection of human flesh. That is to say, van Mastricht encourages us to think of the perfections pertaining to the redeemed's glorification as, strictly speaking, *creaturely* perfections that characterise the life secured for us by God's work in Christ and the realisation of that life through the work of the Holy Spirit. To adapt the famous words of the first Johannine epistle, we will be like Christ in his resurrection, and we will be with God, the one who remains uniquely and supremely himself, the selfsame one who devotes 'all his attributes, as our God, upon us, for our blessedness'.⁸⁷

⁸⁴Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* [hereafter CD], 13 vols., ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956–1975), II/1, p. 326–31.

⁸⁵Barth, CD, III/2, p. 20.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 25.

⁸⁷Van Mastricht, *Theologia*, 1.2.23 §XIV.