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De Incarnatione Filij Dei
Jerome Zanchi (1516-90) and the Analysis of Reformed Scholastic Christology

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Abstract

This is a study in the Christology of Jerome Zanchi (1516-90), a leading 16th century reformed scholastic theologian. The study as a whole is bound together by doctrinal topics, themes and trajectories important to the 16th century Christological debates as well as by philosophical issues and arguments. It divides into three parts, comprising two chapters each. The first part is concerned with research in reformed scholasticism and Christological method, the second part with the hypostatic union and the third part with the consequences of the union.

In the first chapter, I situate Zanchi in the contemporary research into reformed scholasticism. I give an account of what I will call ‘analytic Christology’ and why it is relevant to the present study. In the second chapter, I contextualize Zanchi’s Christology, historically and theologically. I discuss the sources and context of Zanchi’s Christology and characterize it as catholic, scholastic and reformed.

In the second part, on the hypostatic union, I discuss Zanchi’s view of the virgin birth in the third chapter. I concentrate on his view of the process of the hominization of Christ. I first conclude that his views on this are ad hoc and at odds with his general anthropology, thus jeopardizing Christ’s true humanity. Then I suggest some correctives to Zanchi’s views, arguing for a different application of the hylemorphic principles. In the fourth chapter, I analyze Zanchi’s uses of the part-whole and soul-body similes for the hypostatic union. What emerges is a rather ambiguous view of the hypostatic union. At the end of this chapter, I offer further correctives to Zanchi’s assumed metaphysical framework in order to better accommodate the sort of claims Zanchi wants to make about the hypostatic union.
The central theme in the debate between the Lutherans and the reformed theologians, the communication of properties, is treated in the third part. Chapter five begins by discussing an interpretation of Martin Chemnitz’ three genera (tria genera) of the communication of properties, with special attention to the third and most controversial genus, the majestic genus (genus maiestaticum). Then, I introduce two reformed principles, which Zanchi used, traditionally expressed as extra calvinisticum and finitum non capax infiniti. I explicate what I take to be the metaphysical background to the non capax-principle. The debate was complicated by the fact that Chemnitz, contrary to Zanchi’s assumption, also held a version of the non capax and that some of Zanchi’s argument therefore misses the point. After a brief excursion on Calvin’s view on the non capax, I return to the interpretation of Chemnitz. I argue that Chemnitz’ reluctance to use scholastic terminology leads him to use other ways of expressing the third genus. One of these ways is examined in the final section, where I discuss the soul-body simile (again, now) in the context of the communication of properties. I argue that Zanchi has resources to show that Chemnitz’ reliance on the soul-body simile is not sufficient to establish the third genus.

In the sixth chapter I analyse the most controverted issue in the debate: ubiquity. The chapter begins by giving an account of the different notions of presence (circumscriptive, definitive and repletive) against the background of the Aristotelian category of ‘place’ (a concept central to the project of physics, conceived as a ‘science of motion’). I then show that Zanchi tends to argue against a sort of generalized version of ubiquity. Secondly, I examine the ways in which the argument for ubiquity receives the characteristically voluntarist qualification in Chemnitz to the effect that Christ’s humanity can be located at many places at the same time if Christ so wills (multi-voli-presence). Moreover, I will try to show that there is a sense in which Chemnitz also ascribes to ubiquity. This creates an ambiguity in Chemnitz’ Christology which makes it rather hard to assess his actual position as well as the force of Zanchi’s objections. I conclude that Chemnitz’ notion of ubiquity is significantly weaker than is often assumed by Zanchi and that he, therefore, sometimes fails to give a convincing argument against ubiquity. Thirdly, I focus on Christ’s ascension and his sitting at the right hand of God the Father, as this was a major way in which the Lutherans defended some version of ubiquity. I explore what sense ‘heaven’ had in Zanchi and his opponents and explore some strategies for solving dilemmas arising from certain views of heaven. Finally, I will look at two scholastic arguments in Chemnitz for multi-location and reconstruct a possible Zanchian response to them.

I end with a reflection on the value of this study and suggest some trajectories for future research.