

Reinhold Oswald Messner's (1911–1971) Theory of Apposition, Reduplication, Specification and partial Opposition in general

A philosophico-theological Evaluation

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Reinhold Oswald Messner (OFM) veröffentlichte – hauptsächlich im Laufe der 60er-Jahre – nicht nur eine systematische Metaphysik und eine Untersuchung zur Kernstruktur des monotheistischen Gottesbegriffes, sondern auch eine wegweisende Studie zur Modernisierung und Präzisierung der scholastischen Unterscheidungskategorien. Mittels logischer Analyse konnte er wichtige Begriffe wie Apposition, Reduplikation, Spezifikation und Teil-Opposition im allgemeinen einer weiteren Klärung zuführen. Auf dieser Grundlage behauptet er, eine konsistente Interpretation der Anselm-Regel: *Omnia sunt unum in divinis ubi non obviat relationis oppositio* geben zu können. Ferner präsentierte er neue Explikationen für einige zentrale philosophische und theologische Schlüsselbegriffe.

1. Introduction

Looking back over the last 60 years, the period between the Second Vatican Council and today, we see many theologically motivated attempts to promote a philosophy open for theological concerns. Especially in German speaking countries, we can find many publications which pursued primarily apologetic objectives. Prominent opponents were the Marxists, some members of the Vienna Circle, and some analytically motivated skeptics and atheists. Instead of exploiting philosophical tools for deepening their philosophico-theological key concepts – e. g. God – along modern logical lines, philosophers and theologians unfortunately, remained within their traditional ordinary language thinking. Perhaps due to the brain drain under the Nazi regime, many highly specialized European intellectuals emigrated to English speaking countries. Being logically well educated they accordingly supported and promoted logical studies predominantly at many universities in Britain and the US. This led to intensive and broad development of analytical thinking in those countries. In German speaking countries, however, new logical means were scarcely adopted, and only reluctantly applied. Probably under the influence of Heidegger, the bigger part of Catholic philosophers and theologians refused to acknowledge the usefulness of logical

methods for theological purposes. Only a very small number of philosophers and theologians were open-minded enough and prepared to use the logical achievements of the foregoing decades. Among them, one of the outstanding scholars is Reinhold Oswald Messner (OFM). Inspired mainly by Scotus' striving for clarity and controllability, Messner studied logic and the foundation of mathematics. He continuously thought about integrating a higher degree of logicity into his introductory courses at Vienna University (Albertina). As a result, he published his proposal of a course on formal logic for catholic theologians in 1958¹ and 1962² and, last but not least, his idea of systematic metaphysics which will be described in the next paragraph.

Before discussing the logical background of Messner's theology, I am going to report briefly on his idea of well-founded metaphysics and his concept of God (2.). The next steps (3.) consist of a first glance at the concept of reduplication and some hermeneutic pre-thoughts on a putative frame for the reconstruction of the so-called reduplication talk. In the following section (4.), the reader will find a short overview of Messner's contributions to apposition, reduplication, etc., and its application to theological questions. The subsequent paragraphs (5.–6.) contain a discussion of trinitarian problems, especially of Messner's suggestions referring to the matter and, last but not least, of the hypostatic union in Jesus Christ. Finally (7.), we summarize results focusing on two basic concepts: participation and personal identity. To conclude, I shall present a short outlook on future projects. The floor will be given to communication between Messner and Michael Schmaus, the former Nestor of Catholic dogmatics.

2. Messner's idea of a well-founded metaphysics

Before going *medias in res*, I shall take a brief look at Reinhold Oswald Messner's philosophical background: his idea of systematic metaphysics and his philosophical theology. Messner not only contributed to the interpretation of Scotus' privileged concept of God (*perfectissimus conceptus*) as *Ens infinitum*. He also developed his own proposal of systematic philosophical theology, which can be regarded as a modern elaboration of Scotus' ideas. The standards of this enterprise are high and similar to the methodological requirements for the rational philosophy of the so-called Erlangen School, which was founded by Wilhelm Kamlah and Paul Lorenzen in the 60s. Messner developed similar ideas already in the late 1950s and published his concept of a well-founded systematic philosophy in 1962³. His perfect-being ideas are embedded in a wider systematic context. In order to define the 2-place concept "... is more perfect than ...", which is metaphysically central, one first has to develop an ethical pre-theory for the expression "... is morally better than ...". To introduce ethical vocabulary in a systematic way, one needs an explicit language frame and an extended logic. In short, logic, ethics, and metaphysics are *in nuce* Messner's

¹ Cf. Reinhold Oswald Messner, Über die Funktion des Logikstudiums im Rahmen der theologischen Ausbildung, in: FranzStud 40/I (1958) 30–73.

² Cf. id., Die Gestaltung der logischen Grundausbildung im Rahmen des katholischen Theologiestudiums, in: FranzStud 44 (1962) 242–274.

³ Cf. id., Die zwei Grundbereiche der Metaphysik im wohlgeordneten Aufbau der Wissenschaften, Wien 1962.

idea of well-founded metaphysics. Unfortunately, Messner died too early (†1971) to publish his research of formal logic and his cosmological proof of the existence of God. He only left us with a few argumentative ideas⁴.

Let me make an additional historical remark. As far as I know, Messner was the only philosopher-theologian who mastered logical methods and applied them constructively to theological problems at that time. Therefore, he can be regarded as the pioneer of analytical theology⁵ in the German speaking countries of central Europe.

Furthermore, Messner was a historically versed philosopher. He was well acquainted with the ideas of Aristotle, Scotus, and Kant. He knew that Aristotelian metaphysics mainly tries to deal with two types of questions. The first contains what we broadly call logical or ontological questions. The elements of the second class are questions of value – both extrinsic or intrinsic – and finally, the untranslatable “*metaphysische Sinnfrage*”. The Aristotelian canon treated ethical questions only after the metaphysical ones. This arrangement of philosophical disciplines led to an overemphasis on ontological questions during the scholastic period. Another consequence was that axiological questions were not treated as eagerly within scholasticism. This is an additional reason why scholastic philosophers were not in a position to define the concept of perfection in a satisfying manner.

The chain of definitions, which via ethics leads to the evaluative question of whether the world’s course (*Weltgeschehen*) as a whole makes sense at all (*metaphysische Sinnfrage*), is clearly linked to the problem of theodicy. Moreover, this question is the key to a well-founded treatment of the question of whether God exists. To define the concept of *God as an entity that excels in everything adequately different in an incomparable way in perfection*⁶ one needs – among other auxiliary concepts – the 2-place evaluative predicate “... *is more perfect than* ...”. However, this is only an intermediary step. For a well-organised introduction of this concept, Messner moreover uses the predicate “... *is morally better than* ...”, which is less general and takes deliberate human actions as their arguments. Messner’s proposal for an explicative introduction of the more perfect-concept dates back to his 1962b study. Here is his definition:

“A is more perfect than B if and if only a whole that only consists of A is preferable with respect to the same principles to a whole that only consists of B, which are the reasons to estimate the morally better higher than the morally less good.”⁷

That means: Messner starts within ethics⁸ and, from here onwards, introduces the more general evaluative more-perfect concept. *Nota bene!* Thus, the criteria for evaluating human actions and the world’s course must be the same. For an adequate understanding of

⁴ Cf. id., Die Kernstruktur des monotheistischen Gottesbegriffes. Zugleich Erstellung einer Basis für den Dialog mit dem wissenschaftslogischen Atheismus, *FranzStud* 50 (1968) 31–161 and 373–381, at 73.

⁵ Perhaps cum *grano salis* because Josef Maria Bochenski (OP) had similar interests but mainly focused on the history of logic and philosophy of religion, the latter in a very abstract way.

⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 53. For alternative proposals along perfect-being lines, see: Jürgen Ludwig Scherb, Philosophisch-Theologische Hermeneutik. Bestandsaufnahme und Programm im Hinblick auf eine explikative Einführung des Ausdrucks „Gott“ in eine christlich monotheistische Sprache, in: *MThZ* 53/IV (2002) 337–352, especially 349.

⁷ Cf. id., Die zwei Grundbereiche der Metaphysik (see fn. 3), 46.

⁸ Cf. id., Zur Schlüsselfrage der Theodizeeproblematik, in: *WiWei* 32 (1969) 139–144.

this definition, one needs to consider a couple of pre-theories. Besides those already mentioned, these would include at least a 2-valued classical logic, an ontology, a mereology, and a logic of events. Furthermore, taking a closer look at the *definiens* of Messner's definition of "... is more perfect than ...", the question of the criteria or principles of evaluation arises immediately. My guess is the FOLLOWING: Maybe a generalized golden rule along with Harry Gensler's theory of moral rationality⁹ could fulfil that task. But this is only a guess which needs to be investigated carefully. To conclude: Messner's proposal is an extremely attractive piece of perfect-being philosophy/theology, which requires enduring energetic intellectual efforts. These may follow three different directions: Firstly, the *definitia* (defining parts) of his concept of God need further clarification. Secondly, an analysis and an explicit reconstruction of the proof of Messner's principal theorem (*theologischer Hauptsatz*), which states that God has no proper parts could bring additional progress and perspicuity to discussions about God's simplicity and changelessness¹⁰. Thirdly, an investigation into his ethical pre-theory might help us understand the predicate "... is morally better than ..." or "... is morally worse than ..." better.

3. A first glance at the concept of reduplication

Due to Aristotle and his successors, discussions of so-called *qua-terms* and questions of reduplication already had a long philosophical and theological career in the 13th and 14th centuries. The surrounding problems were forgotten until the late 80s of the 20th century. Here Allan Bäck's 1987 monograph *On Reduplication*¹¹ seems to mark a turning point in the history of negligence. He states the basic idea as follows: "*Reduplication* concerns the qualification of statements so as to talk about certain aspects of them."¹²

On this matter within theology, things were – a few exceptions conceded – no better. Here the outstanding exception is Reinhold Oswald Messner's (OFM) proposal. Unfortunately, Messner died in 1971, too early to realize many of his promising projects. In a few publications, he presented his view on the logic of apposition, reduplication, specification, and partial opposition in general and argued for their theological relevance in Christological and Trinitarian contexts. In what follows I shall describe his theoretical ideas and therein concentrate on Trinitarian concerns. For introductory purposes, I want to give a brief overview of Messner's ideas. Therefore, I will select five contributions related to the topic of *apposition*, *reduplication*, *specification*, and *opposition*. I shall start with some preparatory hermeneutic reflections.

⁹ Cf. Harry J. Gensler, *Ethics. A Contemporary Introduction*, London ³2018, chapters 7–9, 98–172.

¹⁰ This may lead to a fundamental alternative to Thomas Morris' stability proposal for an explication of God's simplicity; cf. Thomas V. Morris, *Anselmian Explorations. Essays in Philosophical Theology*, Notre Dame 1987, 76–97.

¹¹ Cf. Allan T. Bäck, *On Reduplication. Logical Theories of Qualification*, München 1987. Occasionally I follow his new extended edition (= STGMA 49). Unfortunately, Bäck didn't discuss Messner's achievements. For more concise information see also Bäck's contribution: id., *Reduplication*, in: H. Burkhardt; J. Seibt; G. Imaguire; S. D. Gerogiorgakis (Eds.), *Handbook of Mereology*, München 2017, 487–498.

¹² Ibid, 487.

4. Hermeneutic pre-considerations and Messner's main contributions

If one plans to give a sustainable interpretation of a formal philosophical problem, it seems appropriate that one considers firstly some methodological questions of the hermeneutic type. The predominant question here is: which logic we ought to choose as an apt tool for reconstruction and evaluation? As there exist many options,¹³ a choice cannot avoid being somewhat arbitrary. Having realized that Desmond Paul Henry offers successful applications of Lesniewski's systems¹⁴ for many medieval logical problems, I favor Roberto Poli's congenial suggestion¹⁵ to use Lesniewski's ontology and a classical two-valued logic with unrestricted quantifiers as a hermeneutic framework. It may also prove useful to extend our logical tools by adding mereology. Those three systems satisfy the maxim of hermeneutic neutrality which is of prominent relevance for problems of existence.

Before going into details, I have to concede that the five selected *loci* now to be mentioned are not the only ones but probably Messner's most important ones. His first contribution is a short piece with the title „Rechtfertigung des Substanzbegriffes mit den Mitteln der modernen Logik“. ¹⁶ Already the headline „Justification of the concept of substance by means of modern logic“ indicates Messner's intention for taking up scholastic ideas and applying modern logic to them. The second text contains a longer study about the relevance of logic studies within the context of theological education.¹⁷ The third contribution is the essay „Logic and Theology. About the unrecognized meaning of modern logic for the progress in theology“. ¹⁸ Further information can be found in Messner's outstanding study of 130 pages „The Core-structure of the Monotheistic Concept of God“. ¹⁹ By the way, this study not only contains substantial progress in the interpretation of Anselm's and Scotus' concept of God but also Messner's own proposal of the concept of God. Therefore, it is – in my opinion – obligatory to study this work for anybody who is interested in a deeper understanding of monotheism, be their religious conviction Jewish, Christian, or Muslim. Further, the fifth text is titled „Logico-analytical modernization and precisification of scholastic categories of distinction“²⁰. Therein Messner develops analytic tools for a consistent reading of the core dogmas of Constantinople (381) and Chalcedon (451).

¹³ Cf. e. g. *Peter Simons*, *Parts. A Study in Ontology*, Oxford 1987 (reprint 2003), 298–301.

¹⁴ Cf. *Desmond Paul Henry*, *Medieval Logic and Metaphysics. A Modern Introduction*, London 1972.

¹⁵ Cf. *Roberto Poli*, *Formal Aspects of Reduplication*, in: *Logic and Logical Philosophy*, Volume 2 (1994), 87–102.

¹⁶ Cf. *Reinhold Oswald Messner*, *Rechtfertigung des Substanzbegriffes mit den Mitteln der modernen Logik*, in: *FranzStud* 39/I (1957) 9–11.

¹⁷ Cf. id., *Über die Funktion des Logikstudiums* (see fn. 1).

¹⁸ Cf. id., *Logik und Theologie. Über die unerkannte Bedeutung der modernen Wissenschaftslogik für den Fortschritt der Theologie*, in: *StGen* 19 (1966) 242–259.

¹⁹ Cf. id., *Die Kernstruktur des monotheistischen Gottesbegriffes* (see fn. 4).

²⁰ Cf. id., *Sprachanalytische Modernisierung und Präzisierung der scholastischen Unterscheidungskategorien*, in: *FranzStud* 51/II (1969) 161–191.

5. Discussion of problems with the Trinitarian formula

Let us begin with Messner's 1957 proposal for a logical reading of the crudely spoken Aristotelian concept of substance. His aim is to show that the classical version of that concept can be given a modern explication. Firstly, Messner presents some examples of substance expressions (s-expressions) in contrast to process phrases such as "an A exists now", "a man", "something which is a man" and "something that runs". On the opposite we have "a thundershower" and "the number three". Within this range of substance expressions, Messner distinguishes two classes: reduplicative and non-reduplicative terms. Secondly, reduplicative or content-related expressions are terms in which a *qua*-part shows up. They are equivalent to terms that contain a *qua*-phrase which refers to a certain property. Examples are Socrates *qua* philosopher or God *qua* creator or God *qua* possessor of the first inner-godly property. Thirdly, suppose there is an s-expression A. Let there also be s-expressions B and C so that B is A and C is A but B is not C and neither B nor C is reduplicative. If we cannot find two s-expressions B and C which don't satisfy the aforementioned conditions, then expression A refers to an individual object in a non-platonic sense. Fourthly, for every expression that refers to an individual thing, we can find infinitely many other expressions which refer to the same thing. Suppose there is an expression A which refers to some object A. Then we can ask which conditions every individual object that is determined by some expression has to satisfy in order to guarantee that this by some expression fixed individual object is A. Fifthly if there is an A that refers to the individual A then we can form a concept of all those properties of A which every object referred to by any expression must have in order to be identical with the individual object A. The collection of these properties of A can be called the individual essence of A. On the other hand, we can call those properties of A which don't belong to the primary essence of A additional attributes (*accidens metaphysicum*). To be clear "substance" and "accidence" are not real parts of an individual object, they are parts in a quidditative sense. Sixthly, if there is an expression A that refers to an object A, then we can ask which properties any other individual has to have in order to belong to the same species. Properties that define a species can be called – following Aristotelian practice – a secondary substance or essence. Seventhly, as a final point Messner characterizes the concept of those individual properties of A minus its secondary essence, e. g. B. As its logical form of that difference, he presents: non A or B *vice versa*: non B or A.

In his 1958 FS 40/I-study, Messner shows the apologetic power of his reading of reduplication. There his focus is on a consistent interpretation of the trinitarian formula. He starts with Franz Brentano's mathematically motivated criticism which leads to three Gods and therefore contradicts the Christian dogma. According to Messner, the crucial point lies in distinct logical types between expressions like e. g. the number "2" and "2 *qua* prime number" or "Socrates" and "Socrates *qua* philosopher" or "Socrates *qua* Greek". On a natural number basis, we can go on to maintain that there is only one number 2 and there are phrases like "2 *qua* prime number" and "2 *qua* even number" but add that "being prime" is not the same as "being even". On similar grounds, we can say that there is only one Socrates and Socrates *qua* Greek is Socrates and Socrates *qua* philosopher is Socrates but Socrates *qua* Greek is not Socrates *qua* philosopher. This model can easily be transferred

to talking about God. As the expressions “God” and “God Father” are not of the same type, we cannot deduce a contradiction from the premises that God Father as well as God Son is God and ergo the divine persons are different from each other. Within the Christian tradition, we can characterize each divine person by a special property and God through his individual essence, his deity.

In his 1966 essay “Logic and Theology” (Logik und Theologie), Messner discusses some transfinite mathematical analogies of the trinitarian God-talk. After a short mention of his study on the relation of his theory of the inner person to Othmar Spann’s theory of I-parts (Teil-Ichheiten) and St. Augustin’s asset-psychological (*vermögenspsychologische*) theory of the Trinity, he presents three models for an interpretation of the three divine names: 1. God, the Father; 2. God, the Son; 3. God, the others’ Helper.

- *First model*: God, the archetype of strengthening spiritual goods which support salutary bodily efforts. God, the archetype of salutary mental efforts for strengthening spiritual goods of the first inner-personal echelon. God, the archetype of spiritual goods of the second inner-personal echelon. God, the archetype of spiritual goods of the third and higher inner-personal echelons.
- *Second model*: Here Messner adds the idea of participation.
- *Third model*: Here the key term is “infinite perfect clarity about one’s bodily capacities of action”. This model is also expanded along the foregoing lines. Obviously, clarity about my bodily capacities of actions is different from clarity about my mental action capacities.

Finally, Messner claims the need for a logic of apposition, specification, and reduplication in particular, and a logic of partial oppositions in general.²¹ As an apposition example, he offers the expression “God, the archetype of ...”. On the other hand, *qua*-terms can be read in a specificative or a reduplicative sense. Messner gives the following example “God *qua* father is God”. This can be read specific actively: “There is no father who is not God”, which is obviously wrong. A similar reading cannot be given of the sentence “God, the Father, is God”²².

In his study on the core structure of monotheism Messner, *inter alia* discusses Duns Scotus’ concepts of God’s intensive and extensive infinity in relation to his own proposal.²³ In the course of this discussion, he asks to what extent we can find a characterization of God as an absolutely comprehensive perfect entity in Scotus’ texts. Here the concepts *perfectio simpliciter* and *perfectio pura* play a central role. Following Anselm and Scotus, Messner gives the following explicative definition: a property F is a *perfectio simpliciter* if for every x: if x doesn’t have F, then we can think of any, which is more perfect than x. That means that x is not of the highest perfection. On the other hand, a *perfectio pura* is an unlimited

²¹ Cf. id., Logik und Theologie (see fn. 18), 255.

²² Well knowing that the usage of articles in English is somewhat different from German language customs, I have to ask for a certain amount of benevolence from native speakers of English. What I try to do is to mirror and respect Messner’s German usage carefully in order to preserve the immanent logic. Therefore, some knowledge of German seems to be helpful.

²³ Cf. id., Die Kernstruktur des monotheistischen Gottesbegriffes (see fn. 4), 112 and 53.

property. Such a property can be defined as follows: *F is unlimited* if not for every *x*: if *x* has *F*, then we can think of any such that *y* is more perfect than *x*.²⁴ Messner asserts that those two concepts are not equivalent. He proves this by example. So, the property of *being God, the Father* – taken as a pure perfection – doesn't entail that we can think of something more perfect which would mean – in contradiction to a well-known trinitarian truth claim – that God, the Father is not of the highest perfection. Messner continues with separating pure perfections into two classes: Members of the first class have one and elements of the second class have two parts that can bear opposite accents. For example, the properties of *being God* or *being Francis* are mono-opposite. God is not Francis. On the other hand, depending on our choice of the opposite property, concepts like *being God, the light of our external activities*, and *being Francis, the conscientious promoter of our fellow humans* have two structure members on which we can put emphasis. So, we can say, e. g. *God, the Father* is not *God, the Son*, or *God, the Father*, is not *Adam, the Father*. If one wants to underline the structure of property expressions, we can talk of mono- and twofold-designed properties. Furthermore, Messner claims that the concept "the bearer of all pure perfections" includes "the bearer of all perfections *simpliciter*" and *vice versa*. On the basis that the concepts *perfectio pura* and *perfectio simpliciter* are not equivalent, the foregoing assertion seems problematic.

As mentioned above, the fifth text is titled „Logico-analytical modernization and precisification of scholastic categories of distinction“. Therein Messner develops analytic tools for a consistent reading of the Christian core dogmas of Constantinople (381) and Chalcedon (451). Therefore, this study seems especially interesting not only for specialists in medieval philosophy but also for Christian theologians. I suggest treating the content of this essay in three steps: After outlining old and new key concepts, I will focus on the application to trinitarian talk: one divine essence in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This will be followed by the presentation of Messner's proposal for a consistent reading of the Chalcedonian creed: Jesus Christ, one person in two natures.

Messner starts by asking how scholastic philosophers read the real distinction between *A* and *B* where "*A*" and "*B*" name two concrete entities. Under modern mereological conditions, it can be understood that either *A* or *B* is wholly or at least partially exterior to each other. But this was not the way how medieval scholastics interpreted that difference; e. g. they taught that God, the Father, and God, the Son are really distinct but on the other hand they denied that God, the Father, and God, the Son are wholly or partially exterior to each other. Here Messner speaks of *A* and *B* being *copulatively* but *not partially distinct*. The reason lies in the partial opposition of God, the Father, and God, the Son. Here one needs to distinguish between a direct and an indirect opposition. The divine persons are indirectly opposite and therefore copulatively distinct. This is the direction in which – following Anselm and Scotus – many scholastics read the rule "*Omnia sunt unum in divinis ubi non obviat relationis oppositio*".

On monotheistic presuppositions, Jesus, the man, is not the same piece of reality as God. This means that Jesus as man is partially but not copulatively distinct from the second divine person. So, we can say that Jesus according to his intrinsic and extrinsic value is

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 87.

neither surpassed nor surpassable. He is the reproduction of the Logos (God, the Son) within creation. In other words: Jesus is the incarnation of the Logos. Jesus, the man, and the Logos are one and the same person.

Messner's next step consists of an analysis of differentiation concepts within Christological and trinitarian theology.²⁵ Here the question is: what does the 2-place concept "*A and B are two distinct persons*" in dogmatic Christological and Trinitarian contexts mean? He suggests following Richard of St. Victor and Duns Scotus and defines: *A and B are personally distinct* if A and B are (i) complete entities and A and B are (ii) not predicable of each other. Against Scotus, and for clarity's sake, Messner pleads to keep the two defining parts separate. In order to speak of two persons A and B, it is necessary that A and B are copulatively distinct. If A and B are not copulatively distinct and therefore copulatively identical one cannot speak of two persons, at least in Christological and trinitarian contexts. Those are the laws of copulative speech for *concreta*. We can extend this kind of speaking also to *abstracta* like *being God* or *being God, the Father*. *Abstracta* can be copulated only if the matching *concreta* can be substituted for each other in all sentences *salva veritate*. Ergo one should acknowledge that the property of *being God* is not the property of *being God Father*.

More distinguishing concepts: *to be analytically distinct* and *to be substitutionally distinct*. The expressions "God" and "God, the Father" are not predicable of each other. Ergo they are substitutionally distinct and therefore don't have the same meaning. Finally, Messner states that the expressions "God" and "God, the Father" are copulatively, partially, and analytically identical, but substitutionally distinct.

Messner's category of inner inequality deserves further attention.²⁶ In his monotheistic definition of the concept of God, he used the category of inner difference. Accordingly, he says that x is God iff for every y which is in x, the following holds: y surpasses every z which contain neither y nor something equal to y, infinitely in perfection. We use the concept of inequality in different ways, depending on the context. For *abstracta* like numbers, we can say that 1 + 1 has the same meaning as 2, they can be substituted for each other *salva veritate*. Looking at *concreta*, we need to mention a certain property that describes in which regard we compare two things, e. g. magnitude or weight. Furthermore, we can speak of two *concreta* A and B being absolutely equal. Messner mentions two conditions that have to be fulfilled:

- (i) A and B must be either partially or copulatively distinct. If there is no difference at all, we speak of a self-sameness or strong identity.
- (ii) Every mono-oppositive inner property that belongs to A must also belong to B, and that in "absolutely the same sense of *belonging to*" and *vice versa*.

²⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 165.

²⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 174.

A problem from Scotus is furthermore dealt with by Messner's approach.²⁷ Asking whether the properties of the divine persons are formally infinite, Messner scrutinizes Scotus' proposition *paternitas non est innascibilitas*. Scotus thinks that from the fact that God, the Father, is not God, the Son, one can deduce that in God there are properties that cannot be predicated *vice versa* and therefore none of those properties is formally infinite. Consequently, he denies that paternity is innascibility. In order to throw new light on this problem, Messner offers a model for a better understanding of the three holy names. As a precondition, he introduces the following three concepts:

- (i) All goods belonging to a demanded practical human insight and love will be called *first-inner human spiritual goods*.
- (ii) As *second-inner human spiritual goods* we shall call those goods belonging to cognitive human insight and love which enable us to realize the demanded spiritual efforts for our *first-inner spiritual goods*.
- (iii) As *most-inner human spiritual goods* we will designate those goods belonging to the cognitive human insight and love which enable us to perform the demanded spiritual efforts towards *second-inner* and *deeper lying spiritual goods*.

On that basis the following concepts can be built:

- (ia) the entity which excels infinitely all thinkable first-inner human spiritual goods and everything adequately different from itself;
- (iia) the entity which excels infinitely all thinkable second-inner human spiritual goods and everything adequately different from itself;
- (iiaa) the entity which excels all thinkable most-inner human spiritual human goods and everything adequately different from itself. Those three concepts are copulatively non-identical because they are indirectly opposite. The indirectly opposed part is formally not infinite but finite. Remember that we speak of human spiritual goods, which are certainly finite.

In the next step, Messner presents a ternary concept that is substitutable with the former and in which the opposed is neither finite nor infinite and therefore formally indifferent towards infinity or finiteness:

- (ib) the bearer of all pure properties of all thinkable first-inner human spiritual goods and all thinkable pure properties whatever;
- (iib) the bearer of all pure properties of all thinkable second-inner human spiritual goods and all thinkable pure properties whatever;
- (iibb) The bearer of all pure properties of all thinkable most-inner human spiritual goods and all thinkable pure properties whatever.

Here the following collections of properties stand in opposition:

²⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 176.

- (ic) all pure properties of all thinkable first-inner human spiritual goods whatever;
- (iic) all pure properties of all thinkable second-inner human spiritual goods whatever;
- (iiic) all pure properties of all thinkable most-inner human spiritual goods whatever.

The properties here mentioned belong to the infinite as well as to the finite which means that they include neither finiteness nor infinity. If they would include infinity, we could not speak of pure properties of human spiritual goods. If they were finite, we would not be entitled to speak of pure properties because God has all pure properties. Finally, Messner transfers his achievements to Augustin's and Scotus' models of the three holy names along asset-psychological lines (e. g. *memoria*, *intellectio* and *amor*).

6. Discussion of the Hypostatic Union in Jesus Christ

Messner also addresses problems with the dogma of Chalcedon (one person in two natures) and especially the exchange of inner properties (the *communicatio idiomatum*). At the council of Ephesus (431) the church fathers denied that Jesus is an independent person in relation to the Logos (= second divine person). Consequently, Jesus, the man, and the Logos are one and the same person and therefore human and divine properties must be exchangeable (*communicatio idiomatum*). But how can this be? Remember that God is – according to a central monotheistic claim – changeless. This means that in God there cannot be a change by which God, the Father is or will be God, the Son. This is a necessary incommunicability or copulative distinctness. Things are different when we look at the relation of a creature to the second divine person. Here the first element is changeable in a way that the incommunicability in the sense of copulative distinctness disappears. As a consequence, we can say that this creature is the second divine person. Theologians call this a *hypostatic union*. Disapproving Scotus' position that there can be no absolute entity within creation,²⁸ Messner suggests ascribing to Jesus the man such an inimitable and unsurpassable inner setting of grace that we can speak of the incarnation and representation of all those inner goods which especially characterize the second divine person. Finally, Messner gives the following warning: Beware of misunderstanding the *hypostatic union* in the sense that Jesus the man and the second divine person do not transcend each other and are only of one and the same essence, and are one and the same piece of reality (*Gesamtwirklichkeit*). In this context, Messner's key concept is *maximal participation* (*Höchstteilhabe*). In the end, he mentions the advantages of his conspectus of the inner-godly personal properties in comparison with Augustin's extrinsic view of the *hypostatic union*. Within the Augustinian tradition, the ultimate basis of the hypostatic union consists in a unique external relation. In contrast, Messner favors his attribution of spiritual goods of different inner echelons to the three individual divine persons because on each level one can find insight and love. On that basis, Jesus can be regarded as an unsurpassable second inner incarnation of the insight and love which promotes the demanded autonomous spiritual efforts towards

²⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 181.

practical insight and love in man – i. e. insight and love which are related to God, the Father.

But Messner says even more about the communality of properties (*communicatio idiomatum*) between Jesus, the man, and the second divine Person. In the last step,²⁹ Messner asks why the commonality of properties between Jesus, the man, and the second divine person presupposed, their partitive identity doesn't follow. According to Messner, the justification lies in a different reading of the copula, respectively *applies to*. In the proposition *God, the Son is God*, the copula can be read directly. Therefore, we only have to know the meaning of the expressions *God, the Son*, and *God*. Things are different when we say *the man Jesus is God*. Here we have to read the copula indirectly. In a more explicit way, the sense of the *is* can be explained as follows: Within the limits of humanity, Jesus the man has such unsurpassable spiritual gifts (of insight and love) and accordingly, an unsurpassable meaning for the salvation of mankind that we are entitled to speak of the humane embodiment of God (i. e.: *God, the Son* that is *the infinitely perfect second-inner insight and love*). With the direct and the indirect reading of the copula, Messner can say why the *communicatio idiomatum* doesn't imply the equality (partitive identity) of Jesus, the man, and God, the Son. To get equality, two conditions must be fulfilled.

- (i) No strong identity or absolute self-sameness must obtain; moreover, the two areas affected must be partitively distinct;
- (ii) every simply opposable inner property which *applies* in the first area must apply in absolutely the same sense as *apply* in the second area.

Here the first condition is fulfilled, but not the second. The property of *being God* doesn't apply to *Jesus, the man*, directly, which means it doesn't apply in the same strong sense and directness to *Jesus, the man*, as it applies to *God, the Son*.

7. Results and outlook

We can divide the results into two classes: The first class contains Messner's philosophical achievements, that is a proposal for a systematic metaphysics and a clear concept of God which serves the main monotheistic requirements. It allows to deduce core theorems such as being absolutely without parts (absolute simplicity) and changelessness. The second class consists of theological results. Based on Messner's logic of opposition, reduplication, specification and partial opposition in general one can be fairly secure that his Trinitarian God-talk is consistent – which means free of contradictions. So is his Christology, at least if one prepared to follow Messner's interpretation of the hypostatic union in Jesus Christ. From a philosophical point of view, this is only a intermediary step. Some future projects are still awaiting elaboration. As I indicated before, what is still desirable is a logical explication of the *communicatio idiomatum* and *maximal participation*. The most promising

²⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 185.

background frame for this project seems to be a quidditatively extended Lesniewski-ontology, which clearly avoids any undesirable form of Platonism (e. g. the existence of abstract objects).

Finally, a notable communication is worth mentioning: In a letter from March 11, 1970, LMU professor Michael Schmaus, a versed scholar in scholastic philosophy and Christian doctrine, wrote the following lines as an expression of gratitude and high esteem for Messner's achievements.

„Sehr verehrter, lieber Kollege!

Sie haben mich wieder mit einem wertvollen Aufsatz beschenkt. Lassen Sie sich herzlichst dafür danken.

Was Sie hier in einer außerordentlich scharfsinnigen Weise vorlegen, ist eine echte Förderung vieler unlöslich scheinender theologischer Probleme. Zugleich aber tritt Duns Scotus in ein noch helleres Licht.“³⁰

Essentially during the 1960ies, Reinhold Oswald Messner (OFM) not only published a systematic metaphysics and an investigation on the core structure of a monotheistic concept of God but also a modernization of scholastic categories of distinction. By logical analysis, he managed to clarify concepts like apposition, reduplication, specification, and partial opposition in general. On that basis he claims to offer a consistent reading of Anselm's rule: *Omnia sunt unum in divinis ubi non obviat relationis oppositio*; and give a clearer explication of central philosophical and theological key concepts.

³⁰ This is a quote from an unpublished letter which I found in Messner's literary remains (Nachlass) among diverse manuscripts and documents in the Franciscan Monastery of Schwaz (Tyrol/Austria). In a *Post Scriptum*, Schmaus cites the reference, that is Messner's study: *Sprachanalytische Modernisierung* (see fn. 20).