

A Schleiermacherian Rejoinder to Thomas Joseph White's *The Incarnate Lord*

JOSHUA RALSTON
University of Edinburgh
Edinburgh, Scotland

INDULGE ME A PERSONAL CONFESSION to begin this review. I am a Protestant theologian in the broadly Reformed tradition whose own theological thinking is shaped in fundamental ways by reading and thinking with both Friedrich Schleiermacher and Karl Barth. At the same time, I am preoccupied with Islamic theology and the majority of my theological work is focused on engaging with and responding to Muslim critiques of Christian claims regarding God's triunity, Christology, and Scripture. Central to my work is reconsidering classical Christian theologians and particularly mining the insights and creative thinking of late antique and early Arab Christian thinkers, both Chalcedonians like John of Damascus and Theodore Abu Qurrah, but also non-Chalcedonians such as 'Ammar al-Basri and Abu Ra'itah al-Tikriti.

Why begin a review of Thomas Joseph White's wide-ranging and impressive articulation of a Thomistic Christology with a personal testimony on the two diverging strands of my own scholarship? In part because it is vital to be honest about the different theological and ecclesial assumptions that we bring to the task of reflecting on the person and work of Jesus Christ. In White's and my case, that includes central divergences regarding the binding norms of Church councils and the legacy of the Reformation on the one hand. Neither my philosophical condition nor my ecclesial formation aligns with White's. I am a post-Kantian Protestant committed to undertaking theology through reflection on Scripture, within attention to the provisional norms of tradition and the need for theologians to "begin again at the beginning" in each generation. This is not to deny the

import of tradition, but to subject it constantly to fresh analysis in light of Scripture, Christian piety, and contemporary thought. The debates around Chalcedon and the Council's aim to affirm Jesus Christ's divinity and humanity without any confusion or change, division or separation do provide a vital touchstone for contemporary theological articulation of Jesus's identity and work. With the Council, I too wish to affirm the identity of Jesus of Nazareth as the Word of God and to articulate how Jesus is truly God and truly human. At the same time, I view the metaphysical assumptions that were used to articulate this confession at Chalcedon as contextual and accidental.

It is not only my Protestantism, however, that has me see the import and limitations of Chalcedon. For on the other hand, theological and ecclesial engagement with churches of the "East" means that the "heresies" of Nestorianism condemned at Ephesus and the monophysitism challenged at Chalcedon are not simply theological hermeneutics to critique modern theologies, but living Christian communities. The Church of the East, Syriac Christians, Coptic Christians, and others have worshiped and theologized in the shadow of the mosque, to use Sidney Griffith's provocative phrase, for millennia, and have much to offer us in the West who seek to consider the meaning of our confession of God's presence in Jesus in the context of Muslim and Jewish critiques.¹ While this concern is not central to the review, I do wish to register it, and asks questions about Chalcedon's legacy, not only theologically, but also in current ecumenical engagement between the Latin Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox communities, especially those indebted to Cyril of Alexandria. How does starting, not only with Chalcedon, but its later interpretations and formulations allow us in the Latin West to engage with these church communities and name the misinterpretations and misrepresentations that were present on all sides, even if we still wish to affirm the fundamental logic of Chalcedon? Are we not asking more than is theologically necessary, both for non-Chalcedonian churches but also for Muslims, when we tie faith in Christ and a commitment to God's redeeming work in Jesus primarily—or only—to its interpretation by a council in 451?

These two strands of my theological approach fundamentally impact my reading of White's work and name diverging assumptions about Chalcedon and its legacy, post-Kantian theology, and the import of classical metaphysics for articulating the central Christian confession that "Jesus is Lord."

¹ Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

Simply put, we bring to the theological task of reflection on the person and work of Jesus both fundamentally different philosophical commitments and also diverging ecclesial formations. White considers theology to be “primarily speculative in nature” (3), while I contend that theology should refrain, as much as possible, from speculation. Reading White’s book, then, was like entering an ornate and highly structured theological cathedral, one that was impressive in its command of Thomas Aquinas, reading of Scripture, and engagement with modern theology. And yet, the foundations and its framing assumed so much about history, the centrality of Rome as theological arbiter, the normative place of Thomas, and the fundamental primacy of Aristotelian logic and Greek metaphysics, that it was ultimately uninhabitable for my own piety, theology, and philosophical assumptions.

How might theological discourse bridge these fundamental divides around philosophical disposition, historical approach, and theological commitment on the one hand, but also recognize points of conversation and contact? Is it possible to engage in substantial theological dialogue across Protestant–Catholic and post-Kantian–Thomistic divides without falling into an overly irenic ecumenism that fails to recognize the true differences between us?

Rather than re-litigate these prior ecclesial and metaphysical divergences, rooted as they are in century-long central theological debates, let me instead register my appreciation for the work, and suggest ways that a certain more “orthodox” reading of Schleiermacher’s account of Christ’s person and work may provide a path for Thomistic–Reformed dialogue. In the space that remains in this review, I will seek to explore this possibility in dialogue with Schleiermacher’s Christology and White’s own theological concerns about errors in modern theology. White’s aim in deploying Thomistic Christology, especially its own constructive attempts in part 2 of the book, is to consider the mystery of redemption in relation to the obedience of the Son, the death of Jesus, the cry of dereliction, and the central importance of the resurrection. Interestingly enough, given my disagreement about the enduring import of classical metaphysics, I am either in sympathy or agreement with much of his analysis of the problems of modern theology. While White’s reading of Thomas and my reading of Schleiermacher do fundamentally disagree on the metaphysics of Christology, it may turn out that our constructive concerns about errors in modern theology, especially kenotic Christologies, divine suffering on the Cross, and the historicizing of God, align in spirit if not in metaphysical letter. To address this, I will first offer a sketch of Schleiermacher’s Christology and its relation to Chalcedon before turning to a brief analysis of White’s

seventh chapter and its resonance with Schleiermacher's own reading of Christ's suffering and our redemption.

Scriptural Reading and the Primacy of Metaphysics

Before turning to Schleiermacher, I first must register a more fundamental protest about White's understanding of the necessity of metaphysics, not only for Chalcedon but more importantly for reading Scripture and confessing faith in Jesus Christ. The central wager of White's book is that Christology has an "irreducible ontological dimension that is essential to its integrity as a science" (5). Theological reflection on the identity and saving work of Jesus of Nazareth is formed by scriptural revelation (3) that can neither be proven nor disproven by philosophy. At this point, all is well and good. However, White offers a much thicker and more speculative metaphysics to advance these opening claims about Christology and theology.

According to White, much of modern theology has gone adrift and Thomas Aquinas provides a scriptural, philosophical, and metaphysical ballast that might correct the tides of Nestorianism brought about by post-Kantian philosophy and historical criticism of the New Testament. Kant and Nestorianism hang over much of the book. Thus, the opening two chapters propose a model of reading the Bible ontologically and suggests that a modern Thomistic approach is the best response to the limitations in both Schleiermacher's and Barth's Christologies. Unlike these Reformed theologians from Berlin and Basel, a modern Thomistic Christology offers an "adequate understanding of the relationship between Chalcedonian ontology and a realistic philosophical metaphysics," thereby allowing for "analogical discourse concerning the transcendent God" that rejects Kantian restraints on speculation and still makes "judicious use of modern historical-critical approaches to the figure of Jesus" (70). With these provisions in mind, White goes on to offer an extended defense of the hypostatic union, natural theology, the *analogia entis*, and a particularly metaphysical articulation of the human and divine natures of Jesus.

I do not contest that a reading of Thomas and the deployment of his Aristotelian logic and metaphysics might prove useful for interpreting and articulating the saving mystery of God's presence in Christ and the classical articulation of this in Chalcedon. However, I am unconvinced that this is either necessary or the only way to speak of Jesus as truly God and truly human. Moreover, I fear that White's own philosophical commitments become so identified with his theological claims about the mystery of the

triune God and Jesus Christ that they are virtually indistinguishable. Faith in Christ veers toward faith in metaphysics. Let me expand on this concern.

"Only" is a versatile word that may operate as an adverb, adjective, and occasionally as a conjunction—but no matter its use, it is a term that seems to beckon the theologian to (over) use. In the case of White's introduction and prolegomena, "only" recurs again and again. This occurs in relationship to his understanding of biblical interpretation. He writes that that "speculative issues" lie at "the heart of New Testament theology" and that these "can *only* be engaged by an overly metaphysical reflection on scripture" (17). Additionally, he claims that that "ignorance of ontology is ignorance of Christ" and that the reading of the Fathers and the Scholastics is "the *only* form of reading that attains objectively to the deepest truths of the New Testament" (8). What this means is that "seeking to understand the New Testament claims about Christ non-ontologically is in the end a non-biblical exercise" (117).

One can agree with the impulse behind White's claims and assert that the New Testament witness is more than simply historical data, and that it invites theological reflection on the nature of God, humanity, and salvation. However, as the argument proceeds White presents a very specific form of theological and metaphysical reflection as the truly faithful and scientific reading of Scripture. For instance, he argues that a minimal ontology or metaphysic is insufficient and what is need is a "robustly metaphysical form of thinking" (5). What is this robustly metaphysical and ontological form of thinking? Chalcedonian Thomism, of course.

For example, Christ's likeness to us is best articulated through metaphysical discourse on human nature, one that is particularly indebted to the substance metaphysics of Aristotle. White writes that "only a metaphysics of human nature that understands there to be perennial characteristics of the human being through time" can make sense of the divine economy and saving work of Christ (25). Similarly, he argues that, "if we believe in the incarnation, we need to be committed to the retrieval of some form of classical metaphysics" (66), since "one cannot articulate a genuine Chalcedonian metaphysics without a simultaneous commitment to classical metaphysics in general" (46). Part and parcel of this commitment to metaphysics is also a commitment to a particular form of rational theological knowledge grounded in analogical forms of causality and knowledge of God "derived from the metaphysical considerations of creatures." There is much to unpack in these claims, and other contributors to this symposium like Ian A. McFarland also draw attention to them. Suffice it to say that the metaphysical and ontological meaning of Jesus is taken to included certain

forms of analogical discourse, natural knowledge of God, and views of nature and grace.

Two questions arise from this. The first concerns how we read the New Testament, and the second relates to the normative import of Aristotelian substance metaphysics. White asserts that affirmation of the pre-existence of Christ is a hermeneutical prerequisite for reading Scripture. John 1, Colossians 2, Hebrews 1, and Philippians 2 are interpreted as the key to reading the New Testament as a whole, such that “the pre-existence of Christ is a normative doctrine” and “a framing issue” that gives “right perspective on all else that is presented in the apostolic testimony” (10). While the New Testament surely testifies to the pre-eminence of God’s action toward us in Christ and Christ’s relationship to God, I wonder if prioritizing this top-down approach is the only or even the best way to read the New Testament.

Instead of beginning with the pre-existence of Christ as a necessary condition for theological reflection, I read the New Testament witness as framed by the biblical invitation that White rightly notes to “consider the personal identity of Jesus of Nazareth” (14) and “the kind of life undertaken by Christ” (18). By shifting the starting point from the pre-existence of the Word to the life of the Word made flesh, we begin with Jesus’s life, teaching, death, and ultimately his vindication through the resurrection. It is in this life that Jesus is revealed to be Lord, and it is because of this life that early Christians, by the power of the Spirit, came to testify to God’s saving power in Jesus. This gave way to theological claims about Jesus’s identity as the Word of God and Son of God. The pre-existence of Christ was not the condition for Christian claims that Jesus saves; it was a consequence of it. White argues that the “presupposition” is that “Jesus of Nazareth is God made man” (73). This presupposition, however, is based on a more fundamental confession, namely that God has acted to save the world in the crucified and risen Jesus. It is this doxological claim and its accompanying soteriological belief that presses toward these more theologically proper claims and their accompanying metaphysics. We confess that Jesus is God made human only because we first confess that Jesus saves, or in a more Schleiermacherian idiom, that Jesus is the Redeemer. For me, at least, this soteriological commitment precedes these more theologically proper claims about pre-existence. This fundamental shift from White’s desire to begin with pre-existence to the primacy of the concrete life of Jesus as testified in Scripture and in history demands speculative and metaphysical constraint. And here with Calvin and Schleiermacher, and against

Thomas and Barth, theology must say enough about the eternal life of the God of Israel as revealed in Jesus but not too much.

For the early Christians, the issue of Jesus's place within the divine life did not emerge from a fascination with ontology or speculative metaphysics, but out of an experience or encounter with divine salvation and revelation in and through Jesus of Nazareth. This event pressed Christian theologians to begin to haltingly and inchoately connect Jesus with the power and presence of God. There is then something like a double move in Scripture where writers both identify the Word with Jesus and also note excess where the Word or Son exists before Jesus. When the historical encounter with Jesus occurs, we read backward so that Paul or the deuterio-Pauline authors can place Jesus before creation. While in other contexts, like in John's prologue, the Words pre-existence can signal a coming into flesh as Jesus at a particular time and place. Thus, the author of Hebrews shows both of these moves in his opening homily: "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word" (Heb 1:1–2; NRSV). While these verses have many theological complications to work out, it is vital that we see the double movement within the New Testament and not view the top-down approach as the only way to make sense of God's Word. Contra White's critique of this move, this does not demand that the project of historical study alone can vindicate Christ's substantial identity as the Word. It is very much a recognition, following scholars like Luke Timothy Johnson and Wolfhart Pannenberg, that we only see these more fundamental claims about God's presence in Christ through the light of resurrection faith.

Second, I wonder if commitment to the Chalcedonian pattern and its distinctions necessitate a Greek and late antique metaphysics, such that Scripture and Christian theology becomes inextricably tied to Greek and Latin? White writes that "the metaphysical tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas is of perennial value and that it permits us to articulate a Christological science that is of enduring value as well" (29). While I agree with White that "sacred doctrine can make use of philosophy to illustrate theological truths" (54), I fear that he elevates one particular mode and discourse of philosophical reflection to such an extent that it becomes near impossible to confess God's presence in Jesus without recourse to it. He does caveat this insistence when he argues that he is not "presuming that Aquinas's metaphysics is necessarily correct, or that a particular version of

classical metaphysics must be embraced if any modern Christian theology is to succeed" (51), but the difficulty of the book, however, is that all other theologians are judged not only by their adherence to the New Testament witness or even the logic and impetus of Chalcedon, but by Thomas's metaphysical articulation of it. White invokes "Thomistic standards" (102) throughout the book to show the limitations of his various interlocutors, who may be working with different philosophical understandings. Is it possible, then, to confess Jesus is Lord and truly God and truly human by deploying the philosophical tools of say, Hegel or Kant or Husserl? Or is Christian confession bound to the philosophical options available in late antiquity?

In the end, I fear that White ties the Gospel confession that Jesus is savior and Lord too strongly to its Greek philosophical and metaphysical articulation at Chalcedon and later in Thomas. If the metaphysics of Chalcedon are part and parcel of Christian faith, it becomes hard to see how Christianity and the Church are not only accidentally Western and Greek, but essentially so. Let me be clear, I am not suggesting that the New Testament and early Christianity was corrupted through Hellenization à la Adolf van Harnack. Or that the use of metaphysical and philosophical language in the classical period was necessarily problematic. Far from it. For as Kathryn Tanner has argued, theology depends on engaging and taking up the language, cultural practices, and philosophy within which a theologian and church community exists.² That Greek philosophy, not to mention Syriac thought, was deployed in such a manner is wholly appropriate. The question for me is whether or not this is the only way to articulate our faith in the incarnate Lord, especially under alternative philosophical and cultural conditions. For many, including myself, the metaphysical assumptions of Thomas are simply alien to our understandings of science and philosophy. Language of natures imply static and settled realities, which inhibit how we account for human plasticity or the dynamic and changing nature of creation. Reference to God's nature, especially when primarily interpreted through discourse of the omni-attributes, distracts from what seem to be more primary biblical concerns regarding God's faithfulness, love, and wisdom. One is left to wonder if Christian faith demands not only confession that Jesus is Lord, but that Thomistic metaphysics are true.

² Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1997).

Schleiermacher's Christology Rethought

Friedrich Schleiermacher would seem an odd conversation to turn to at this point in the review, especially suggesting that a re-reading of his theology of redemption might serve as a bridge between White's theology of redemption and my own. It might seem odd particularly because White's opening two chapters include a repudiation of Schleiermacher's Christology as overly determined by historical criticism and post-Kantianism, which gives way to a "subtle" form of the Nestorianism (102) that reduced "the union of God and man in Christ to one that is moral rather than substantial" and thus is "something novel and represents a rupture" with tradition (43). Moreover, White suggests that Schleiermacher's account of salvation leaves much to be desired. He writes how "Schleiermacher's confusion . . . obscures the supernatural mystery of Christ and confines his meaning to the reductionist speculations of historical-critical scholars and their conjectures" (61), and how John Hick and other theologians go awry because, "pace Schleiermacher, the person of Christ cannot be said to be the exclusive mediator of salvation for all human beings" (104). The reason for this, according to White, is Schleiermacher's decision to abandon the hypostatic union and locate the "union" of God and man in Christ "within the world of human consciousness, and specifically within the human consciousness of Christ. Christ is united with God through his self-awareness" (43). The fallout of this is that the union of God and humanity is accidental and not substantial, and thus fundamentally moral and grounded in coordination rather than true unity of identity. This veers toward Nestorianism, which White diagnoses as one of the modern heretical tendencies par excellence. This is the case because of the propensity that White sees in Schleiermacher as well others like Karl Rahner to locate the "ontological union of God and man in Christ in the same place where Nestorianism typically locates it" (76). For White's Schleiermacher, this is Jesus's own self-awareness or self-consciousness, which White reads as an attribute or property of human nature, and not the substantial being of his person as such. White rightly is worried about how Rahner and by extension Schleiermacher invoke a Christology of scale, where Jesus Christ is distinct from us only in light of his excellence and not due to his divinity identity.

What to make of this critique of Schleiermacher? On the one hand, White is certainly correct in his reading that Schleiermacher challenges Chalcedon and its accompanying metaphysics. In fact, §§91–97 of the *Christian Faith* involve a recurring critique of Chalcedon and other later

Protestant confessions. In particular, Schleiermacher demurs from descriptions of the divine nature, asserting that God is “beyond all existence and being,” since God alone is simple and unconditioned (§96).³ Moreover, Schleiermacher argues that the attempt to make sense of the living unity of the divine and the human in Christ, the Redeemer, is hampered by Chalcedon’s metaphysics. While Schleiermacher rejects the metaphysical language of Chalcedon, particular the category of divine nature, he nonetheless seeks to articulate how Christ is both truly God and truly human. As such, §96 affirms that in “Jesus Christ divine nature and human nature were combined.” In fact, the entire section on Christ’s dignity or person is oriented around affirming both Christ’s fundamental likeness to us and also Christ’s fundamental difference from us. The aim of theology is to “describe Christ in such a way that in the new corporate life a vital fellowship between us and Him shall be possible, and, at the same that the existence of God in Him shall be expressed in the clearest possible way” (§96.1; p. 391). Schleiermacher seeks to name how Christ is fully human and shares in all of our realities, save sin, and also how Christ is not in need of redemption himself and thus can truly be our Redeemer.

There remains a Chalcedonian instinct at work even in Schleiermacher’s rejection of the metaphysics of Chalcedon. He writes that “all the results of the endeavor to achieve a living presentation of the unity of the divine and the human in Christ, ever since it was tied down to this expression (Chalcedon), have always vacillated between the opposite of errors of mixing the two natures to form a third which would be neither of them, neither divine nor human, or of keeping the two natures separate, but either neglecting the unity of the person in order to keep firm hold of the unity of the person, disturbing the necessary balance, and making one nature less important than the other and limited by it” (§96.1; p. 394). The critique, however, is not primarily of the creedal patterns, but of the philosophical assumptions that they carry. For instance, Schleiermacher strongly emphasizes the priority of the divine “person” acting in and through the human nature throughout §§96–97. As Jacqueline Mariña notes, it is clear from Schleiermacher’s discussion that: “He is in complete agreement with Chalcedon in regard to the position it *rejects*. . . . Nevertheless, Schleiermacher rejects the starting point of Chalcedon, namely the adoption

³ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart, trans. D. M. Ballie, et al. (London: T & T Clark, 1999), 393. All citations will reference the § numbering in the 1830/1831 German original [*Der Christliche Glaube* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008)]; translations will be from Ballie, with page numbers from that edition after the German §.

of the language of two natures requiring one to attempt to construct an impossible figure.”⁴ He writes, for instance, how “the existence of God in the Redeemer is posited as the innermost fundamental power within Him, from which every activity proceeds and which holds every element together” (§96.3; p. 397). Or later in the same paragraph after affirming both the Pauline claim that God was in Christ and Johannine testimony that the Word become flesh, he contends that, “in so far as all human activity of the Redeemer depend, as a connected whole, upon this existence of God in Him and represents it, the expression is justified as exclusively of Him,” such that every moment of Christ’s existence is rightly named as the incarnatedness of God” (§96.3; p. 397). As such, Lori Pearson has argued that he “affirms a single-subject Christology that gives a prominent and primary role to the divine without compromising the full integrity of the Redeemer’s human nature”⁵

Recent scholarship by figures such as Mariña, Pearson, and Kevin Hector, have shown how Schleiermacher creatively engages with the Chalcedonian legacy, not to reject its concerns *tout court*, but to consider how its framework, although not its metaphysics, provides a hermeneutic for presenting the saving presence of God in Christ. So, for instance, Pearson has shown how Schleiermacher’s own thinking “represents a new synthesis of the mutually corrective Christological positions that Chalcedon brought together”⁶ that draw on both Alexandrian concerns about the single-subject and Antiochene commitments to the integrity of the divine and human. In a different direction, Hector has argued that interpretations of Schleiermacher’s Christology should attend to its actualist ontology and his description of love as the only proper predicate of God’s essence. If love is the only attribute that can unequivocally be applied to God’s essence, and Jesus’s own activity is marked fully by “the divine in Christ,” which is nothing other than “divine love” which shapes all his action, then Schleiermacher’s theology can rightly be described as truly high (§97.3; p. 407).⁷ Moreover, Schleiermacher, unlike Hick’s claims about him, seeks to protect the unique and unparalleled redeeming power of God in

⁴ Jacquelina Mariña, “Christology and Anthropology in Friedrich Schleiermacher,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher*, ed. Jacquelina Mariña (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 155.

⁵ Lori Pearson, “Schleiermacher and the Christologies behind Chalcedon,” *Harvard Theological Review* 96 (2003): 365.

⁶ Pearson, “Schleiermacher,” 350.

⁷ Kevin Hector, “Actualism and Incarnation: The High Christology of Friedrich Schleiermacher,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8 (2006): 307–22.

Christ. In Jesus of Nazareth alone is redemption found. What sets Jesus apart from all others is that in him and him alone is God fully present and redemption found.

One of the limitations of Schleiermacher's own theological presentation is the misleading nature of the term "God-consciousness." Much like theological terms such "mode," "person," or even "nature," "God-consciousness," when extracted from its particular usage within a dogmatic context, can give way to misunderstandings. Simply put, God-consciousness is not simply Jesus's own self-understanding. To claim as such, as many interpreters of Schleiermacher's Christology assume, is mistaken. Schleiermacher actually ties Christ's God-consciousness directly to God's presence in Christ. "To ascribe to Christ an absolutely powerful God-consciousness, and to attribute to Him an existence of God in Him, are exactly the same" (§94.2; p. 387). The God-consciousness is present in Christ's self-consciousness, but this is not to say that the God-consciousness is simply Christ's own self-awareness, as implied by White. In fact, Schleiermacher affirms that the presence of God in Christ is not a gradual unfolding within him, but is implanted in Christ from the beginning. "The God-consciousness in Him was absolutely clear and determined in each moment . . . that is to say, the existence of God in the Redeemer is posited as the innermost fundamental power within Him, from which every activity process and which holds every element together" (§96.3; p. 397). If it was not, then, Christ would not rightly be called our Redeemer, since there would be moments in Christ's life where the redemptive love and power of God was not present. Thus, unlike us Christ has an "absolutely powerful God-consciousness" at all times of his life, even if this is understood by Christ in ways that are appropriate for his various ages and stages of human development. Like White's own assertions about Christ, Schleiermacher also seeks to affirm that the human life of Christ is marked by growth, education, maturation, and change—all features of human existence. Theology must account for the absolute humanity of Jesus, and thus ascribe to his humanity its own will, intelligence, and growth, without thereby compromising the presence of God in him. Schleiermacher deploys the philosophical language of his day and his own program to account for that, which is language of sensible self-consciousness and God-consciousness. However, God-consciousness does not finally equate to self-consciousness, but is more akin to how the tradition has deployed the divine nature. Christ's full God-consciousness is present and active throughout his whole life, even if his self-awareness of this is varied as appropriate for a human being at distinct stages of development.

By gesturing to these aspects within Schleiermacher, I am not aiming to convert White from Thomism, but to suggest ways that modern Christology can make sense of the aims of Chalcedon without necessarily adopting its metaphysics. As Hector writes in his defense of Schleiermacher's high Christology, "Schleiermacher's is not the definitive word on such a description" of traditional Chalcedonian Christology, "but his approach can help us think about God, Christ and redemption in a world where Greek metaphysics are no longer convincing."⁸ Now of course, for White, Greek metaphysics are not only still convincing but a salve for what ails much of modern theology. However, for Schleiermacher and other theologians after him, theology is not required to deploy Aristotelian substance metaphysics in order to offer an account of Christ and the hope that he instills within us.

This is not to defend Schleiermacher's account in full, for his own philosophical assumptions and deployment of God-consciousness can obscure as much as it illumines. They, like Chalcedon's, may not be our own. Moreover, Schleiermacher's claim that the resurrection is not central to the science of Christology is inadequate for making sense of either the New Testament witness or of the experience of early Christians who began to ascribe to Jesus of Nazareth a divine identity. Here White's own critiques of Schleiermacher and arguments for the central importance of the resurrection as one with both existential and bodily import provide an important correction to Schleiermacher's focus on Jesus's life and death. Without a clear sense of how the resurrection vindicates Jesus as God's own loving presence to and for us, it becomes difficult to see how Schleiermacher's claims about redemption through Christ and union with him can be saving. There is more to be said about both White's and Schleiermacher's Christologies, but let me conclude with a reflection on where they may share abiding commitments, and that is around the cry of dereliction and suffering of Christ.

Schleiermacher and Modern Theology's Limitations

Chapters 7 and 8 of White's book presents a compelling reading of the cry of dereliction and the salvific meaning of the Cross that diverges from certain modern theologians' arguments about the soteriological importance of divine passability or Jesus's abandonment by God on the Cross. Through a close reading of John and the Synoptic Gospels, as well as

⁸ Hector, "Actualism and Incarnation," 322.

Thomas, White argues that “Christ in his crucifixion experienced terrible agony, both spiritual and physical . . . yet did not despair of the promises of God, nor experience the moral separation from God that is characteristic of the damned” (319). Implicitly criticizing post-Shoah theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann and Johann Metz who see Christ’s suffering as indicative of a fissure within the divine life, White presents a nuanced reading of the true agony of the Cross on the one hand, but also Christ’s full unity with the Father and continued beatific vision. Christ truly suffers anguish in his humanity, even as this suffering does not separate him from the Father. The cry, according to White’s reading of Matthew 27 in particular, is an eschatological cry for the redemption of the world. Thus, White rightly argues for the compatibility between a realistic suffering and anguish on the one hand, and also Christ’s enduring unity with the Father on the other. The power of God’s saving act in Christ does not occur because of suffering within the divine life, but because, even in suffering and anguish, Christ “as God retained the power to save effectively human beings even in and through the mystery of the cross” (377). Echoing Rahner’s critique of Moltmann, White asks how it is sensical or theological compelling to introduce into “his own deity the historical states of suffering, death, non-being, and separation from God” (351). Instead, White shows how the whole of Jesus’s ministry, life, death, and resurrection prove saving in the theology of Thomas.

Reading these two chapters alongside Schleiermacher’s theology of the atonement in his account of the threefold office and work of Christ might prove surprisingly illuminating. For as much as Schleiermacher and White diverge on metaphysics and their interpretation of Chalcedon, they may find more common ground in their understanding of divine suffering and the saving power of God in Christ. For instance, Schleiermacher shares a worry with White about how Calvin’s theology overemphasizes motifs of repayment and suffering. Schleiermacher, like White and Thomas, seeks to read the whole of Jesus’s life as redeeming. By locating Christ’s death within Christ’s life, Schleiermacher tries to guard against a number of problematic interpretations. First, Schleiermacher shows how Christ’s death can have a form of necessity without suffering being explicitly chosen. He does this by interpreting Christ’s decision to go to the Cross as “identical with His persistence in redemptive activity”; Christ does not choose death per se, as to do so would be “arbitrary self-torture” (*Christian Faith*, §104.4; p. 462). Rather, Christ persisted in his vocational work of redemption, both in his proclamation of the Kingdom and his persistence in sympathizing with human misery. Suffering is not a punishment for sin that levels the scales of

justice. Suffering occurs because of Christ's commitment to the Kingdom of God. Christ does not choose suffering or death for its own sake, but for vocation and life even in the face of death's shadows. Christ can thus be said to have voluntarily chosen his death, but only in so far as it was part of the "duty involved in His vocation" and in order to "proclaim the full dominion of the spirit over the flesh" (§104.4; p. 463).

Thus, Christ's entire life, not just his death, is actually touched by suffering. "Now Christ's sufferings can be thought of in connection with his redemptive activity only when regarded as a whole and a unity; to separate out any particular element and ascribe it a particular reconciling value" is flawed in so far as it fails to see how the whole of our lives are marked by sin and suffering (§101.4; p. 437). This is the case because Christ existed in our world, one marked by experiences of suffering in the sensible self-consciousness. It is within these qualifications that he affirms, then, a connection between suffering and salvation. To borrow from Tanner's argument, God is not changing God's relationship to us in the redemptive activity of Christ; God is addressing our condition and relationship to God. Avoidance of suffering is simply not possible for creatures.

Christ's suffering is a characteristic of his whole life and ministry. Christ suffers in all of his life in so far as he sympathizes with our sin and misery; Christ is actively obedient, even in death, as he maintains an unbroken union with God. His whole life is saving, not because of what it merits from the Father, but because of how it proves healing for us. Suffering is caused by Christ's opposition to misery and sin. "The climax of His suffering . . . was sympathy with misery." For Schleiermacher, Christ saves by maintaining blessedness and God-consciousness even in the face of sin and death. Contra Moltmann, there is no divine suffering in the Cross or radical breach between Jesus and the one he calls Father. Instead, Christ saves by maintaining full union with God even to the point of death. His blessedness is "not overcome by the full tide of suffering. The more so that this suffering arose out of the opposition of sin, and that therefore the Redeemer's sympathy with misery, ever present, though without disturbing His blessedness" (*Christian Faith*, §101.4; p. 436). Even in death and suffering, nothing can separate Christ from the love of God.

In this section, we can see how Schleiermacher's theology, despite its role in inaugurating modern liberal theology, is still marked by recognizably classical commitments about God's immutability, simplicity, and transcendence, values that White's own contemporary Thomistic Christology seeks to affirm. Moreover, the salvific import of Christ's suffering is found in his sympathy with us and how God's redeeming power is found

even at the point of death. Christ saves, not because of a fissure between the Son and Father on the Cross, but because Christ's God-consciousness and blessedness reaches into the very depths of our suffering and death. Moreover, the way that he renders participation or union with Christ as central to redemption places him much closer to classically Catholic or Orthodox theologies of salvation than to typically Reformed penal substitutionary ones. Despite all their divergences, then, over the metaphysics of Chalcedon, I wonder if shifting the conversation with Thomas and Schleiermacher to the saving meaning of Christ would provide a more fertile ground for shared Catholic-Reformed theological exchange than White's project appears to allow. This would entail a recognition of the parting of metaphysical ways, but also of a shared desire to consider the meaning of the Christian confession that Jesus is Lord and that in Jesus Christ God reconciled the world to God-self.

And yet a fundamental issue still remains: both White and Schleiermacher share a view that metaphysics is baked into the Chalcedonian formulation. The question, then, becomes: if one finds this metaphysics either inaccessible or implausible given the nature of science and philosophy in a post-Kantian era, how then are we to relate to them? White argues, in what must be one of the most fulsome defenses possible in the modern period, for the renewed metaphysical import of Chalcedonianism as interpreted through Thomas and his own contemporary reconfiguration and re-articulation of Thomism. Schleiermacher rejects the substance metaphysics of Chalcedon as ill-suited to his own 19th nineteenth-century context, even as he seeks to affirm the single identity of Jesus Christ who holds together both the divine and human. I wonder, however, if Chalcedon is inextricably tied to the metaphysics of hypostasis and ousia, or if these might function more as grammatical frames for confessing how Jesus Christ is truly like us and also truly the saving power of God. The question is not, at least for me, if Schleiermacher or Thomas any other theologian remains true to the metaphysics of Chalcedon, but if their engagement with the heritage of Chalcedon is deployed in such a way that it allows us to confess that Jesus is Lord and that Jesus saves. On this, both White and I can agree. NEV