

## Christology in Context: Review Essay of Thomas Joseph White, O.P., *The Incarnate Lord*<sup>★</sup>

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### Catholic Christology in the Twentieth Century

FROM THE RESTORATION of scholasticism in the nineteenth century to the 1960s, Catholic Christology was a happy house unto itself. The person, natures, faculties, grace, knowledge, and work of Christ were expounded from Scripture, illuminated by the Fathers, and understood with St. Thomas (or maybe Scotus). There were happy in-house and never-to-be-concluded conversations: why the complete and perfect humanity of Jesus does not make a created person, whether we ought we to impute one or two acts of existence to the *hypostasis sunthetos* of Christ, whether the impeccability of Christ is intrinsic or extrinsic, and so on. There was an important recovery of patristic and medieval soteriology, a soteriology antecedent to the pressures exerted on the theology of the atonement by late medieval and then subsequent Lutheran and Calvinist pictures of a Christ who bears the punishment his Father metes out to him in our place. But the conversation was not without innovation inspired by modern philosophy and psychology. There were questions on the relation of the human consciousness of Christ to his person, about the psychological unity of Christ, and concerning whether one or two psychological egos are to be recognized in him. Notwithstanding such engagements with modernity, it was more important to know something about

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★ *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015).

St. Margaret Mary Alacoque than about Albert Schweitzer because it was more important to justify devotion to the sacred humanity of Jesus than to consider the quest for that humanity historically known. Modernism (and magisterial suppression of Modernism) significantly retarded the critical reception of historical critical New Testament studies. As to engagements with non-Catholic Christians, it was more important to know something about the great monophysite patriarch Severus of Antioch than about the *genus maiestaticum*, but the first only for historical reasons, not because one was going to talk to present day Armenians, while the second could be safely ignored altogether, since one was concerned with neither historical nor contemporary Lutheran understandings of the communication of idioms.

The restoration reached a sort of climax in which old things were both developed and newly perfected, such as at the Gregorian University in Bernard Lonergan's *De Verbo Incarnato* (1964), surefooted methodologically, stunning in its conceptual clarity and rigor, orderly in its marshalling of Scriptural and patristic proof, and brilliant in its systematic understanding of the hypostatic union, the consciousness and knowledge of Christ, and the work of Christ according to the "Law of the Cross."

The destruction of this house was the work especially of Karl Rahner, S.J., and Hans Urs von Balthasar, beginning in the fifties and continuing for twenty years after the Second Vatican Council, as volume after volume of the *Theological Investigations* appeared in German (1954–1984), crowned with *Foundations of Christian Faith* (German, 1976) and matched by volume after volume of *The Glory of the Lord* (German, 1961–1969) and the *Theo-Drama* (German, 1973–1983). The dismantling was not direct, but the joint message was that it was no longer important to maintain the house. Of course, they had many helpers in what was commonly understood at the time to be a necessary work of theological liberation and maturation: despite their own metaphysical commitments and attention to dogma, Rahner and Balthasar were a sort of bridge to a more complete liberation from scholasticism (which meant at least some attachment to classical ontology) so as to enter into Enlightenment maturity (an historicism that told us why a dogmatic formula that formerly was useful was meaningless today).

Rahner re-conceived Christology as the uttermost limit of a transcendently constructed theological anthropology, a framework hospitable to almost whatever the New Testament scholars told us about Jesus of Nazareth. Balthasar, on the other hand, was a much

more serious reader of the New Testament than Rahner. And he did not subject dogma to the acid of Enlightenment historicism, as even the later Rahner was wont to do. But in the vast project he embarked on of subsuming the whole of Western philosophy and theology into the form of Christ, he gave an architectonic place to the way in which Karl Barth related the economy of salvation to the Trinitarian processions. And notwithstanding his diligent attention to Scripture and dogma, the effect was largely to remove any metaphysical constraint on what we say, not only about the relation of Father to incarnate Son, but also about Father and Son within the Trinity. Balthasar thus ensured a break in the continuity of Christological discourse within the Catholic Church perhaps more radical than did Rahner.

The spirit of things after the Second Vatican Council, moreover, abetted the dismantling of scholasticism already long desired by the figures surrounding what Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange called “la nouvelle théologie.” The coin was Pietro Parente’s, but Garrigou-Lagrange gave it polemical punch: he did not have to wait for Fergus Kerr to observe that Henri de Lubac seemingly planned his books “in order to destroy neoscholastic theology.” Notwithstanding its traditional endorsement of St. Thomas for theological education in *Optatam Totius* (1965), therefore, wherever the Council was understood to be a product of “the new theology,” it was just as widely understood as permission to wave a final good-bye to the thirteenth century and its Leonine reviviscence.

Since the Council, and apart from many questionably orthodox (and therefore ecclesially useless) offerings that rewrite John 1:14 to tell us the flesh became Word, there have been some workman-like Christologies from Catholics that dutifully recapitulate the New Testament, some with more and some with less attention to critical studies, that report the councils and fathers, that may have a chapter on the middle ages, but also that concede the description of Christ’s knowledge to exegetes and proceed to some round-up of soteriology that does not do much more than speak of Christ’s solidarity with sinners and of the Cross as especially the manifestation of God’s love for us (which it surely is), but often with no authorial enthusiasm for the classic doctrinal elaborations of the atonement such as are to be found in St. Anselm and St. Thomas. More excellent are the worthy essays in Christology from Roch Kereszty, O.Cist., James T. O’Connor, and Thomas Weinandy, O.F.M.Cap. They recognize that revelation is not a report of our experience, they accept the normative rule of dogma, and they are serious about soteriology. But they no longer

aspire to produce “*théologie comme science*,” as Marie-Dominique Chenu styled it in his *historical* appreciation of the thirteenth century, and to which Lonergan really *did* aspire even in the twentieth.

### **The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology**

After the destruction by Rahner and Balthasar and the earthquake of the Council and its reception, it seems there can be no such thing as a Christology in continuity with the pre-conciliar pattern. “There is no going back,” and so on and so forth. And anyway, for what reason would we want such a thing? But, surely, an obvious reason is plain enough at a moment’s consideration. It should be urged that there can be no real breaks, no real and unbridgeable gaps, that divide the discourse of the Church about Christ into incommensurable quantities. What one age makes of Christ cannot be severed from what another age says of him—this, in fact, Balthasar himself saw very clearly. How otherwise could it be true that Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8), if the Church hears one thing in one age and another in a second? It cannot be the case, therefore, that the Thomist tradition of theology either is consigned to the past or must be thought at best to run on a parallel track with what such men as Rahner and Balthasar put in motion. Such a scenario has quite unacceptable ecclesial and even metaphysical implications.

A second reason is equally weighty. We might want a conversation between the old and the new just because the pre-conciliar Christology in fact contains better resources with which to meet the concerns that moved such figures as Rahner and Balthasar in the first place. It may then turn out that the Christology of St. Thomas has the wherewithal to solve some of the puzzles in which contemporary Christology, Protestant and Catholic, lands us, such as the idea of a savior who does not know he is saving us, or of a human savior of a human nature for which, alas, we no longer know how to recognize in what its salvation might consist, or of a divine obedience that threatens to split the Trinity into three gods, or of an infinitely good God who is nonetheless interiorly conditioned by a history of evil.

Of course, to knit up the raveled sleeve of Christological discourse thus and make of St. Thomas a contemporary interlocutor would take considerable skill and erudition. It is not just the old St. Thomas that has to be re-introduced, and in the detail it takes to have him say something up and down the line of Christological discussions. In addition, Rahner and Balthasar (as well as Schillebeeckx, Chenu, Pannenberg, Jüngel, and Moltmann, all these important and some-

times quite original and distinctive figures) must be brought forward, not in the broad strokes such as this review can hardly manage, but in detail. And the greater frame within which the modern discussion takes place, determined by modern historical studies and Enlightenment criticism (especially Kantian) of prior philosophical tradition, would also have to be in play, explicitly or in the background. It would take a lot, in other words, not only to prosecute Leo XIII's program today—*vetera novis augere et perficere*—but to execute the program we also need—*nova veteribus corrigere et complere*.

Thomas Joseph White addresses himself to both programs in *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology*. It may seem the second is more prominent, but in fact the old is appreciated and better understood in comparison, and sometimes in sharp contrast with, the new. On the other hand, his labor is more evident in showing us that St. Thomas offers a better way to think about the issues of contemporary Christology. This way has not only to correct error but also to show us how to meet the widespread contemporary demand to see in the obedience of Christ and the very manner of his saving death and resurrection, such as the New Testament describes them, the adequate manifestation of Trinitarian reality. This way has also to show how to welcome historical studies within a theological science already possessed of its own method. The first claim of White's book is that the correction of error and the fulfillment of systematic demand about obedience and Trinity cannot be accomplished without welcoming a metaphysical ontology into the service of the gospel. The second, related claim is that Christology, while it must be historically informed, has first of all to be framed by revelation and the reception of revelation by faith. Historical studies are the fuel but not the engine of Christology.

### **New Testament Ontology and the Modern Parameters of Christology**

This book is not a proposal or a mere essay, but a fully developed and, in its own order, complete argument. White therefore lays his guns very carefully, or, to change the metaphor, pours his footings broad and deep and accomplishes two important things, one in his Introduction, the other in his Prolegomena, before ever he constructs his argument in detail.

The introduction of the book demonstrates the necessity of an explicitly ontologically informed Christology from the New Testament, hence its title "The Biblical Ontology of Christ." The

demonstration is informed by the work of C. F. D. Moule, Richard Bauckham, Simon Gathercole, James Dunn, Larry Hurtado, and others. He adduces four pieces of evidence. First, the New Testament asserts that a pre-existent Son of God, his Word and Image, became man. Therefore, the New Testament itself invites us to contemplate the unity and distinction of Father and Son in one God. Second, the man Jesus is asserted to be the Lord, ruler, and judge of the world, things proper to divinity. Third, not only are divine things such as the creation of the world predicated of the man Jesus, but human things such as suffering and death are predicated of the Son of God. These second and third things together adumbrate the insight captured in St. Cyril's talk of a "hypostatic union," which conceptualizes the ontological basis according to which divine things predicated of the man Jesus and human things predicated of the Logos, the Son of God, are literally and not metaphorically said. Such New Testament doctrines pass well beyond the limits of a "functional Christology" and require us to think out the reality and being of Jesus of Nazareth both in relation to the transcendent God of creation and in relation to us men made in his image. Though the predications are literal, they require for their coherence a metaphysical reach that can keep straight the analogical character of language that speaks of both God and his creatures. Fourth and last, the man Jesus is presented to us as the exemplar of humanity, as that man in whom can be found no more perfect or excellent instance of humanity. This, too, requires a metaphysical exercise, a metaphysical appreciation of a nature, human nature, that is not conceived in a nominalist way, but such that the real discernment of human capacities and powers is one thing with the conception of their fulfillment and end. The introduction assures us that, when we take up St. Thomas's metaphysically sophisticated Christology, we shall not be leaving behind the mystery vouchsafed us in the New Testament, but going deeper into it and in a way that it invites of itself.

The introduction establishes the necessity of a metaphysically informed Christology. The Prolegomena ask whether that is possible today, given the parameters of modern Christology. They are two. First, there is the contemporary prominence, even preeminence—a methodologically authoritative preeminence—of New Testament and early Christian historical studies. Second, there is the anti-metaphysical challenge of Emmanuel Kant. According to the first, Christology's point of departure is not the New Testament understood as itself a word of revelation, but the critical reconstruction thereof and

the historically determined shape of early Christian thought. According to the second, if the proto-Catholicism of the New Testament demands a metaphysically informed contemplation of the Christ, the demand cannot be met. There is, then, all the more reason to shift to historical grounds pioneered in the German Enlightenment. Thus White's prolegomena asks "Is a Modern Thomistic Christology Possible?" The Prolegomena situates the prospects for a renewed Thomist Christology between two responses to the twin challenges posed by historical studies and by Kant, those of Friedrich Schleiermacher and of Karl Barth. It closes by outlining how a Thomistic Christology can engage these responses.

Schleiermacher stands at the head of a host of modern theologians who let modern, reductive historical studies trump dogma. The consequence of this decision is likewise paradigmatic: Schleiermacher concludes that the divine and saving word Jesus speaks to us arises from a consciousness of God than which no greater can be conceived or desired. While some who follow Schleiermacher in granting history hegemonic theological rights try, by hook or by crook, to make the Church's Christological dogma somehow conform to the results of historical critical studies, Schleiermacher does not, and in this he is more evidently conformable to the Kantian parameter of modern theology. If ecclesial Christological doctrine demands a hospitality to a metaphysical point of view even to be understood, a properly modern theology cannot itself then be hospitable to dogma.

Schleiermacher proves himself to be a more consequent thinker than Barth, who provides the second paradigmatic response to the twin modern challenges. Unlike Schleiermacher, Barth denies the rights of historical critical studies within theology: dogma trumps history, the Bible itself has no interest in historical certitude, and Christians are moreover forbidden by their adherence to faith alone to be interested in such questions. But like Schleiermacher, he takes Kant to show the impossibility of natural theology. He understands the Kantian limits on reason to be the limits of *fallen* man to speak of God: there is no indestructible capacity belonging to man to speak truly of God. But he welcomes a sort of *revealed* metaphysics, some of the articulations of which he finds in Friedrich Hegel, with which to do justice to the demands of both Bible and Church dogma. While Catholics have thought that the ancient metaphysical patterns linking the world of our experience to a first principle could be pressed into the task of articulating and understanding dogma, Barth walks a seemingly simpler, but in the end more difficult, path. It seems

simpler in that the revealed word of God must bring with it its own metaphysical resources, worked out in the post-Kantian but still Christianly inspired discourse of German idealism. But it is a position of which it is difficult to iron out all the wrinkles, the chief one of which is discerning what Christ has to say to us and what Christ does for us that is not already implied in the very fact of our having proceeded from a God who realizes himself in and through us.

The disparate paths of Schleiermacher and Barth unite in finding no way to speak of Christ except in univocal terms: Schleiermacher's Christ differs from us only by degree, not in the constitution of his being; and Barth's Christ shows in his humanity an obedience that is verified *also* in the Trinity. Both end up making the consciousness of Christ foundational for understanding his being among us. The similarities of Schleiermacher and Barth to one another are much greater than their dissimilarity to Aquinas.

How is a Thomist word to be inserted into this framework? As to the relation of historical studies to theology, White connects us with his Dominican predecessors, Ambroise Gardeil and R. Garrigou-La-grange, on the object of Christology formally and materially considered. Formally, it is what God reveals about Christ by the words and deeds recounted in the economy of salvation and stored up in the Bible. But materially considered, Christ can be approached by history, too. Therefore, while theology judges the offerings of historical studies relevant to the contemplation of Christ, just as St. Thomas teaches in the first question of the *Summa* (a word for Schleiermacher) it also needs to make use of them (a word for Barth). Why must it use them? It must do so for two reasons, one apologetic and one systematic. White illustrates the latter with N. T. Wright's discussion of sacrifice and the intention of Jesus facing his death. This is not a historical word it is prudent to ignore. It helps us execute the Christological task. As to the former (the apologetic), it is not the case that theology should be unconcerned with linking the word of revelation with the antecedent concerns and questions of reason still un-illuminated by faith. In giving an account of our hope, as the New Testament urges us to be prepared to do (1 Pet 3:15), we have also to be prepared to say why it is reasonable to believe that God has spoken and reasonable to believe we have a trustworthy account of the culmination of that word in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It is a mistake to conceive of the word of God as a sort of nuclear explosion that levels everything at ground zero and blows away every human structure. There is a receptivity to the word, natural before supernatural, that

has also to be respected and which the word of God does in fact respect. This issue is taken up in a different way in the body of the book when White examines Barth's refusal of the analogy of being.

There remains the second, metaphysical challenge of modernity. White has already treated this issue at length in *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity: A Study in Thomistic Natural Theology*, which undertakes to install St. Thomas's natural theology and deployment of analogy in the twenty-first century. There, he first answers charges originating with the views of Kant and Heidegger that Thomist metaphysics is onto-theological, then adjusts some of the infelicities of previous presentations of the analogy of being to be found in Catholic thinkers such as Etienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, and Rahner, and finally outlines a reconstructed Thomist metaphysics and natural theology in the last ninety pages. The prolegomena of *The Incarnate Lord*, for its part, offers a brief but illuminating word a Thomist might speak to the metaphysical issues raised by both Schleiermacher and Barth, a word that, *modo scholastico*, distinguishes between primary and secondary acts. The metaphysical invitation of the New Testament will have us understand the union of humanity and divinity in Christ according to first, substantial act, the divine act of existence according to which the Word subsists in a human nature. The union cannot be accomplished on the level of operation, of consciousness and knowledge and will. Such a union would not save the communication of idioms. On the other hand, the consciousness and will of Christ can and do express the filial character of the one person who now subsists in human nature. It is rather we who are united to God at the level of operation, and in this light, the vision of God Christ enjoys in his humanity ensures that he is exemplary for us not only now in our consciousness of and obedience to God, but also in anticipating the end held out to all who are saved in Christ, a vision in which human nature reaches a fulfillment beyond and divinely perfective of it according to its radical possibility as made in the image of God.

The introduction tells us the New Testament requires a metaphysically astute Christology; the prolegomena shows how such a thing, in its Thomist variety, would relate to modern Christology. The demonstration that a metaphysically informed and historically wise Christology can meet the issues that Rahner and Balthasar and company tried to meet better than they did is the burden of the ten chapters that follow.

### Three Contributions of The Incarnate Lord

Each chapter in this volume can be read on its own, and many certainly have been, since they have already appeared in journals. The volume does more than put previously published material between two covers, however. For one thing, three chapters previously unpublished have been added so as to fill out a complete Christological itinerary from Incarnation to Cross and exaltation. In addition, there is a cumulative force to the succession of topics, both because of their relation to the two overarching issues of Christology in the contemporary age (that of the integration of modern historical studies into Christology and that of ontology after Kant treated in the prolegomena) and because they follow the order of topics in St. Thomas's Christology in the *Summa*: from the one person of the hypostatic union, to the integrity of the assumed human nature, to the graced powers of Christ, and last, to the actions and events of the Paschal Mystery—passion and death, descent into hell, and resurrection. The presentation's cumulative force comes in part, in other words, from the fact that it follows the method of a mature science (the *via docendi*), which moves from the *priora quoad se* to the *priora quoad nos*. That is, White's discussion moves from the divine and human principles that constitute the incarnate Word in his being to their operation in the work of our salvation. Because of its engagement with many of the greatest modern theologians (Rahner, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Balthasar, Jürgen Moltmann, et al.), because of the care with which it has been framed between the concerns of Barth and Schleiermacher in the prologue, because of the richness of the appeal to St. Thomas in every chapter, the work as a whole is like listening to a great symphony, or like taking the back off of a Swiss watch and observing a complex, highly ordered movement and its regulation. There is a sort of aesthetic pleasure in appreciating the whole work. Three of the more important things White accomplishes are detailed in what follows.

#### *Close Encounters with Karl Barth*

There is a close engagement with Barth throughout the book: first, there is Barth on analogy in consideration of the natures of Christ (ch. 3); next, a vindication of the necessity of natural theology (ch. 4); and third, a consideration of the divine obedience of the Son within the Trinity (ch. 6). With regard to the topics of analogy and natural theology, this is a closer and more sustained engagement by a mature Catholic theologian than anything of which I know since Henri Bouillard, S.J. But Barth also figures in the chapter on abandonment (ch. 7, with

Balthasar and Moltmann); he is in the immediate background of the kenoticists treated apropos of the death of Christ (ch. 8, with Pannenberg, Eberhard Jüngel, Balthasar); and he figures in the chapter on the descent into hell (ch. 9, with Balthasar). That is to say, Barth figures in over half the book.

Evidently, the topics of analogy and natural theology remain the foundational issues they have always been recognized to be. For Christology, how can one rightly assert the two natures of Christ of the Chalcedonian confession without the analogy of being? White formulates the Barthian objections to Thomist analogy with the help of Jüngel, which charge that it includes God within common categories of cause and being that do not escape the confines of creatureliness and treats him onto-theologically. White wonders politely about the ignorance of Thomist texts such accusations betray, but he patiently cites the relevant texts of Aquinas that deny that God is included in the subject matter of any human science, metaphysics included, that exclude him from the notion of *ens commune*, and that insist on the non-reciprocal relation between creature and creator according to which, while it is true to say that creatures are like God, it is by no means true to say that God is like anything.

The demonstration of the necessity of natural theology for sacred doctrine is elegant. Must there not be some analogical understanding for us even to hear that the Word became flesh? It cannot be a Word like our words! White's position amounts to insisting that the gratuity of God's bestowal of a revealed knowledge requires a natural knowledge from which it is distinct. But, if the revelation of such things as the Trinity and the Incarnation is to be really heard by us in faith and therefore integrated into our up and running consciousness of what we already know about ourselves and our neighbors and the world, then such integration requires that we recognize it *as* the revelation it is. It remains in itself a gift of God and must be appreciated *as such* to be integrated into our knowing selves. This is to say that, in relating revelation to what we already know, we have to be able to contrast it to the non-revealed, natural knowledge we already possess. So, as White illustrates, if we assent to the truth that the Word that was with God in the beginning is God and became flesh, then, if we are to think this through as much as we can and as it deserves, we must be able to marvel at the sameness and greater difference there is between the divine Word and a human word.

Or again, we have to think about what it means and what it could not mean to say that a divine person "becomes" something. This

means, centrally, that we have to think it through in such a way that we do not make the ascription of the work of creation (John 1:3) impossible. We would do that, for instance, by supposing that “becoming” here means change, by way of either diminishment or augmentation. For, if that is how the Word “becomes” flesh (John 1:14), then the Word is being thought of as just one more thing within the world, and that is not coherent with thinking the Word as creating the world, which is to say being unconditionally responsible for the totality of its being.

To think rightly of the divinity of the Word, therefore, “we must have an intrinsic natural capacity to recognize such revelation as something exceeding the scope of our ordinary natural powers of reflection and knowledge” (227). But if we can say how the knowledge of revelation is to be related to our natural human knowledge such that we can say we have really received the revealed word, then we are ineluctably engaged in the task of thinking about divinity just on its own, and thinking about it just on our own—that is, by force of our own native, natural powers. We are therefore engaged in a “natural theology,” which turns out to be a sort of subroutine required by faith itself within the all-inclusive theological program. This is of ecumenical moment: Thomists do not claim to be dragging something into theology from outside that we on our own think theologically useful; we are doing what revelation itself requires in order to complete its self-unfolding in *sacra doctrina*. We could put it like this: since God reveals *himself*, after all, we can appreciate this self-revelation as the revelation it really is only against a logically prior knowledge of him from the “outside,” as it were. Only with such a knowledge will the revealed knowledge of God be intelligible to, and so assimilable by us as what it is. And this logically prior knowledge is “natural theology.” Without such knowledge, the terms of revelation will either be indistinguishable from the terms in which we know the world or be some alien body whose equivocal claims cannot be related to what we are and what we desire. For White, the vindication of natural theology is just the flip side of the defense of the analogy of being.

One of the most immediate consequences of the difference between St. Thomas and Barth on analogy shows up in the chapter on the obedience of Christ, where the question of the manifestation of the Trinity is addressed: does the economy constitute the Trinity, or is the Trinity constituted in view of the economy? These ways of construing things are invited precisely by seeing in the human

obedience of Christ a direct reflection of an identical and specifically divine obedience within the Trinity. Such a view collapses the difference between God and the world that analogy keeps open. Barth is right, of course, to see that the human obedience of Christ manifests the Trinity—but not in the direct way he wants. Rather, White reaches, with St. Thomas, for the distinction worked out most clearly by Maximus the Confessor and taken up by John Damascene, the distinction between *logos* and *tropos*, between the nature of something and its way of being, here, specifically, the distinction between the nature common to the Trinity and the *tropos tes hyparcheos* of the Son, his filial manner of receiving, but not in an act of obedience, all that he is from the Father. Without this precision, Father and Son have distinct wills, commanding and obeying, that tip the doctrine of the Trinity into tritheism.

It is not only a divine obedience that Barth and his followers want to verify in God, but also other elements that classical Christology thought proper to the economy. Chapter 8 examines how the kenotic Christologies of Pannenberg, Jüngel, and Balthasar understand the death of the Lord. With no other access to God, and no access to him by which to measure how we receive the revelation of Christ, such Christologies end up imputing not only a filial obedience but finitude and suffering to the divinity as well. Christ does not, therefore, conquer death by his divine authority and power in submitting to it, but rather only by exhibiting solidarity with us in our suffering, even to abandonment by God and the experience of hell, introducing suffering into divinity itself. White questions how such a dark God can really save or offer any comfort to us his worshippers. He brings to bear the categories of merit and efficiency in showing the power of the Cross for Aquinas and moreover explains how the theandric acts of Christ are permanently available to us in their saving efficacy.

#### *The Unity of Christ's Agency as God and Man*

Christ acts to save us in charity, knowing what he does for our sake, and knowing that it accomplishes our salvation by the power of God. Without this known unity of his action on Christ's part, without knowing as man what he is doing both humanly and as the Son of God, Jesus's activity can be an occasion of divine beneficence but not its real instrument, an instrument befitting the knowing and self-conscious character of the humanity assumed by the Word to accomplish salvation. For Aquinas, it is just in this way that a divine person, the only Son, works through the human actions and passions displayed

especially on the Cross to effect our salvation. It is one of White's signal achievements to show the necessity of this unity, a necessity that the Gospels take every pain to point out to us (e.g., Mark 15:39—"Truly, this man was the Son of God") but that much of modern Christology has denied or made obscure.

The urgency of this task is evident if we think of Christian worship. In the third verse (originally the eighth of Paul Gerhardt's text) of Hans Leo Hassler's "Passion Chorale," the Christian thanks Jesus for dying on his behalf and for his compassion for him, a sinner: "What language shall I borrow to thank thee, dearest friend, for this thy dying sorrow, thy pity without end?" On Good Friday, the Christian addresses the dying Jesus with these words in the very moment of his death. The prayer is not directed to the risen and exalted Christ, but rather places the Christian at the foot of the cross. The Christian thanks Christ as if thanking a friend—that is, as someone who does what he does knowingly and willingly for those whom he loves, among whom are certainly included those at Good Friday services. What must be true of Christ's agency if this act of Christian prayer and devotion is itself to be genuine and not some make believe, to address the dying Christ with words truly descriptive of what he is doing? For Aquinas, Christ does what he does on the Cross with the intense love of supernatural charity, charity that he identifies as the supreme instance of friendship. Only Christ's graced action, the charity with which he obediently responds to his Father, the charity with which he dies for sinners, a graced love just in that way exemplary for all Christians (Rom 5), will fill the bill.

In the second verse, the Christian has already acknowledged that Christ dies on account of his (the Christian's) sin. "What thou, my Lord, has suffered was all for sinners' gain; mine, mine was the transgression, but thine the deadly pain." The *admirabile commercium* is here confessed, and it is an exchange Christ knows full well. That is, Christ's suffering is informed by the knowledge that what he does works for the sinner's salvation. This is why he undertakes it; this is why he is the "dearest friend" in the third verse. The Christian therefore speaks to Christ as to one who knows what effect his suffering and death will have. What must be true of Christ's knowledge if the Christian speaks to Him truly?

What must be true is that Christ knows who he is in doing what he does. And for this knowing, he has to behold his Father humanly and know immediately and with certainty who he himself is. Without this, as White demonstrates in chapter 5, we are left with a sort

of gnoseological parallelism: Christ as God would know what is happening, but Christ as man could at best believe he was fulfilling God's will, a God whom he likewise believed was his Father. To the contrary, we thank Jesus as knowing certainly what he was doing, and therefore doing it with all the greater charity. An infused or prophetic knowledge cannot supply what is needed here. Our debt of thanksgiving is not owed to another wayfarer, one who cannot act beyond the limits of a wayfarer's confidence and trust in God, but to the God who died for us, of whose death as God therefore he had humanly to be conscious and conscious of what it was effecting. If there is a disconnect between the divine person acting humanly and the human perfection in the lines of knowing and willing, then we cannot really pick up the words to Hassler's chorale as our own.

The traditional Catholic doctrine on Christ's human knowledge of God is required to make the Christian's prayer a true prayer. This doctrine of the immediacy of Christ's vision of God also makes his *own* prayer true, even the standard of all prayer to God. It certainly does not mean that his own prayer and obedience are less real, some fiction played out for our sake, but rather the contrary: he can deliver himself in prayer to the Father more completely, more profoundly than any prophet or apostle precisely because of the vision—knowledge enables and illumines action, and greater light does not mean lesser devotion or a feebler motion of the heart. Rather, in his prayer and obedience, Jesus shows us a sonship in human form than which no greater can be imagined, for his human prayer and obedience now betray the *tropos* of his divine person more perfectly just because of the perfection of his human knowledge.

The immediate vision of God that White defends does not obviate the infused and acquired knowledge of Christ Aquinas also maintains. On the contrary, the infused knowledge of Christ enables him to translate what he knows in immediacy and with certainty within the already revealed categories of salvation established in the Old Testament. His acquired knowledge enables him to complete that hermeneutical act for the very people with whom he lives and who are to be witnesses to his deeds and rememberers of his word.

White returns to this theme in chapter 8, already touched on. In Pannenberg's kenoticist understanding of the Cross, Christ delivers himself to death freely, and because of God's fidelity, his death is salvific. White readily acknowledges the many merits of Pannenberg's recapitulation of the New Testament data. Still, it is incomplete. The death of Christ itself is no longer a divine act—a humanly conscious

act of someone who knows he is divine and knows that his actions will save for all time. It may be that, for Pannenberg, as for Barth, Christ's obedience reveals his divine sonship to us. But what we cannot say is that Jesus knowingly lays down his life as the God-man (370). The divine will that this act will save remains extrinsic to the human act of Jesus, and we end up in a sort of soteriological Nestorianism: the two tracks of the divine intention of the Son of God and of the human intention of Jesus never meet undividedly and inseparably in one act. Rather, White argues, "Christ can choose to redeem the world freely in love only because he knows of the value of his sacrifice, and its meaning. His act of free self-offering requires that he know that he has been sent by the Father for our salvation, but it also requires that he know who he himself is who is making the offering" (356). The Thomism we thought we knew shows an unexpected contemporaneity and power when White closely contrasts it with modern greats.

The contemporary gnosiological and soteriological Nestorianisms delimited in chapters 5 and 8 are echoes of the more original Nestorian temptation. For there is also the first verse of Hassler's Chorale to be made good, where Christ is addressed: "O sacred Head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down, now scornfully surrounded with thorns, thine only crown." If the head really is "sacred," and if also the grief and anguish are wounds of a similarly sacred sensibility and will, what must be true of the ontology of Christ? As we know, what must *not* be true is Nestorianism. This, too, has been an issue in contemporary Christology, and White deals with it in his first chapter.

Karl Rahner, White explains, wanted a Christology that returned us to a serious consideration of the human freedom and agency of Christ. Rahner thinks this is prevented, however, by the view that the humanity of Christ is the *instrument* of the Word, for this obscures the humanity of Jesus in its freedom and autonomy. Moreover, it is precisely the human agency and historical consciousness of Christ that should disclose his divine identity. Rahner thinks to meet both issues by a "Christology of consciousness" in which the created grace with which Christ's humanity is endowed and which flowers in the immediate vision of God becomes the grace of union itself: Christ's human act of surrender to God in the fullness of his awareness of God is, for Rahner, the very act of God being among us, and in this way the divinity of Christ is revealed. While acknowledging Rahner's intention to say nothing to impugn the Church's Christological

dogma, White situates Rahner's response to the invitation of a greater historical attention to the human career of Jesus against other attempts antecedent and subsequent to Rahner, medieval and contemporary, to found the union of divinity and humanity in Christ in the order of grace and the graced second acts (operations) of the man Jesus—that is, in the broadly Nestorian way of speaking of Christ.

But the head of Christ is not sacred unless the grace of union is the uncreated person of the Son subsisting in his human nature. Thence it follows, as White observes, that the humanity of Jesus is indeed the instrument of the Word: a way of exercising agency is, as it were, a sort of *organon* of the agent. But it does not follow that this instrument is therefore changed and loses its native freedom, and nor does it follow that he can no longer be understood to reveal (but not constitute) himself and his divinity in the categories of first-century Palestinian Judaism.

### *Theological Anthropology*

A third contribution is White's consideration of the relation of Christology to theological (and therefore also philosophical) anthropology. In the first place, and logically prior to insisting on the analogical understanding of the two natures of Christ, he argues for the necessity of a philosophically available concept of nature by which we can appreciate what Christ does and does not bring to us. This was the topic of chapter 2. But White returns to philosophical anthropology at the end of his volume (chapters 9 and 10, on Christ's descent into hell and his resurrection from the dead).

There have been two desires, launching two theoretical projects, that have challenged the way in which classical Christology illustrated and governed basic tenets of the Church's theological anthropology, which may be summarized as follows. Christ's death is the separation of his soul from his body—for Thomists, of his unique substantial form from his body. His soul continues to exist, since it is strictly immaterial and subsistent, between his death and his resurrection. Like all human beings, Christ has completed the trajectory of his human life; he has run the course and finished the race: after death, there are no mission-defining decisions left for him to take, nor could his soul naturally compass such decisions in its disembodied state. His descent to the abode of the dead is not the completion of his mission as deed, but consists simply in the announcement of his victory to those in hell, purgatory, and the place of the just. Christ's resurrection, on the other hand, means that his humanity is made

whole: body and soul, both of which remained hypostatically united to the Word, are rejoined, and rejoined in the state of glory. Only so is Christ's victory realized in himself, and only so is our own final hope manifested to us in convincing form. His completed and glorified humanity is no longer an instrument of meriting grace or of vanquishing the devil, but it nonetheless continues as the instrument of the application of already merited grace to all who seek him with a sincere heart. He intercedes for us according to the merit already won on the Cross.

Two modern desires, however, subject this view, both as to Christ and to our own imitation of his pattern (a death which imitates his as completing our destiny, an interim state like his between death and resurrection, but in which no reversals or conversions or apostasy is possible, and resurrection) to serious strain. A first desire is to maintain the possibility of God's offer of saving grace through Christ to sinners after death. This requires man's freedom to be conceived in such a way that it does not complete itself in this life and that it can complete itself, as perhaps finding an even better space of responding to God, in a disembodied existence where freedom is still to be exercised. Of course, one can postulate whatever is needed for such a state of affairs to be realized. If one's view of man's nature precludes a determining exercise of freedom after death, then one can suppose that the possibility is supplied by some preternatural gift giving the wherewithal to continue the journey of freedom. Or one can suppose that death always delivers us to the Christ who has (logically) preceded all men in the exercise of human freedom, such that death always consigns us to him, either in his glory or in a sort of atemporally available experience of the distance sin establishes between God and men. There, finding Christ with him in his alienation from God, the sinner finds also a sort of last offer of grace in solidarity that cannot be refused.

White enables us to see the difficulties with such a view. Thinking about man's condition after death is always difficult, but this view seems more *ad hoc* than most, and with little connection to a tradition earlier than Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. What exactly is the nature of man? And is embodiment a necessary factor of human perfection such that we make or break ourselves now, in time, and thence forever? Such anthropological constructions fashioned to make freedom still determinative after death do little to make us take this life seriously. Second and more importantly, White alerts us to the high price we pay in forfeiting any consummation of meaning and

moral direction to human freedom in this life, for he reminds us of the kinship of this forfeiture with Duns Scotus's view of the relation of human to divine freedom, where it is not *man's* rejection of grace but *God's* decision to stop offering grace that determines our destiny.

A second modern desire is to re-conceive the event of death in such a way that the interim state of dis-embodied souls, the idea of which is distrusted paradoxically at one and the same time as both mythological and yet philosophically indebted to Greek philosophy, is completely avoided. Thus there is postulated the idea of an instant and not-to-be-delayed "resurrection in death," which Rahner and Balthasar have both welcomed. This view obviates the problem of a disembodied human freedom, but it, too, has hidden costs. First, once again, it is a whistle while passing the graveyard: we avoid the fearsomeness of death and the very idea of an existence that is only ghostly and incomplete—which is to say, this view de-potentiates the existential seriousness with which we should face death. Second, it has its own philosophical background, to be found in Kant's view of the distinction of the empirical from the transcendental subject. What is really and only decisively important is what happens beyond the veil of sensibility and the categories of understanding in the noumenal realm where we see realities face to face. But again, this amounts to devaluing this life as the final place of mission, decision, destiny. Third, what happens to Christ's resurrection on this view? Does he rise twice, empirically and noumenally? We should rather think that his resurrection as reported in the Gospels confirms this life as the venue in which human reality is completed and perfected. His resurrection, re-uniting body and soul, illustrates rather the truth of the theological anthropology to be found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

### **Christology Is Not History**

The volume's conclusion, "Why Christology Is Not Primarily a Historical Science," reprises the argument for an ontologically informed Christology by showing the inability of a wholly hermeneutically governed Christology, such as that of Eduard Schillebeeckx, to resist the depredations of modern Nietzscheans like Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. Schillebeeckx finished his career as a sort of pure instance of what White thinks is wrong with Christology today: disavowal of classical metaphysics and entrance into Enlightenment historicism. But without express metaphysical sophistication, Schillebeeckx has no defense against the charge that he, too, is engaged in only a superficial

semiotic exercise, and perhaps some form of the will to power. White confronts these postmodern views with the arguments of Alasdair MacIntyre (*Three Rival Versions*) and Aristotle (*Metaphysics* IV). Under the title “Inevitable Scholasticism,” he again reasserts the relevance of metaphysics to Christology, showing how the narratives that are the object of Schillebeeckx’s hermeneutically minded Christology presuppose the time-transcending scope of the human mind.

The more ambitious object of this conclusion of the book’s argument, however, is to the effect that the Christology White envisages deserves to be called “science” according to the very notion Aristotle gives this term at the beginning of Western high culture. This is a common aim of the Thomistic Ressourcement Series to which White’s volume belongs. Would not that reestablish a sort of diachronic healing of memory? What Chenu gave us as a historical, time-bound and culture-bound artifact, White gives us a perennially and time-transcending possibility. What are the chances here? How can Christology, whose subject is an individual and particular man, be the subject of a science that deals with the universal and gives explanations of human hopes that are truly causal? The chances are the chances of faith. White takes up this medieval objection in the form it took in the eighteenth century, the “ugly, broad ditch” between the contingent facts of history and the necessary truths of reason that Gotthold Lessing could not leap. But according as Christ is man *and* God, and according as there is a revealed science of God, Christology is also certainly a science, one whose object includes the universal agent of redemption and the universal cause of our salvation, and one that the mysteries of the Incarnation, atonement, and resurrection give us to contemplate. Because Christ is also the exemplary cause of our salvation in his glorified humanity beholding God, Christology is also practical and, like theology generally, is the wisdom that unites both speculative and practical truth—both the way and the truth leading to life. In this light, White reminds us of Christology’s capacity to provide a framework in which every truth, not just philosophic but also scientific and historical, can find a home and recognize its relation to every other truth. Christology therefore embraces the natural lights of all the modern studies concerned with development across time—cosmology, New Testament historical studies, and a teleologically conceived ethics—and thus vindicates, as to the last mentioned discipline, the claim that theology is not only science, but wisdom.

This evocation of the *universitas artium et scientiarum* in the last pages of *The Incarnate Lord* recalls the institutional, economic, political will it would take in the contemporary world to make White's contribution a seed of a more abundant harvest, yielding thirty or sixty or a hundred fold. Catholic University Press, with its Thomistic Ressourcement Series, is a hopeful sign.

Where to end? The clarity of White's exposition and argument over very detailed and difficult ground is wholly admirable. Also, the courtesy with which he engages all his interlocutors and discusses all positions is a model for how theological disputation should be carried out.

What, after all, is theology for? This is a book of high ambition and deep seriousness. White is not interested in being original or in winning points; he is interested in displaying the ever-contemporary wisdom of St. Thomas. He is interested in helping us all behold the Christ more truly and with greater love, and he is interested, insofar as a theologian can think himself to be, in winning souls. *The Incarnate Lord* is an apostolic work. N&V