



Reviews

THE INCARNATE LORD: A THOMISTIC STUDY IN CHRISTOLOGY by Thomas Joseph White OP, *Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC, 2015, pp. xiv + 534, \$65.00, hbk*

In this fifth volume of the ‘Thomistic Ressourcement Series’, the author draws together much previously published material into a masterful and coherent vindication of Aquinas’s Christology in the context of the diverse claims of modern christologies. Part One covers the incarnation itself – the ontology of the hypostatic union, Christ’s human nature and his grace, the two natures, the place of natural theology in Christology, and the necessity of Christ’s beatific vision. Part Two treats redemption – the Son’s obedience, the dereliction of the cross, the descent into hell, and the resurrection. Some treatment of the events of Christ’s life would have been welcome, given their distinctive place in Aquinas’s theology, but there is more than enough here to keep the reader, whether student or expert, fully and fruitfully occupied.

The immense importance of this work lies principally in the fact that it can benefit not only Thomists, but anyone committed to serious theological reflection on the Scriptural witness to Jesus Christ. Thomas Joseph White has thus presented us with a paradigm of contemporary Thomist theology, or at least of one crucial aspect of the cooperative spectrum that is required of Thomism today. Rather than take an easier option of recounting Aquinas’s doctrine in isolation from the trajectories that have troubled Christology since at least Kant, the salient features of Thomistic Christology are articulated in such a way that their inherent wisdom brings the contemporary Christological landscape to order before the reader’s eyes. Chapter 1, for example, examines different solutions offered by Schleiermacher and Barth to the challenge raised by studies of the historical Jesus, and by way of exposing their common predicament sets out a Thomist programme whereby a traditional Chalcedonian Christology founded on biblical ontology both encompasses a realist philosophical metaphysics that acknowledges our natural capacity to speak analogically of God and draws judiciously on historical-critical methods.

A whole range of modern theologians besides Schleiermacher and Barth contributes to filling out White’s basic premise in subsequent chapters: Jüngel, Bultmann, de Lubac, and Schillebeeckx, to name a few. It is a mark of his authentic Thomism that White consistently remains respectful of opposing positions, clarifying common ground with them and so determining where they differ – and err - with precision. This is

found especially in his generous consideration of von Balthasar's theory of Holy Saturday. It was not clear to me, however, that White successfully demonstrated Rahner to exemplify Nestorianism in the sense of reducing the union from the level of being to that of consciousness, though White more certainly attains his target in others such as Hick. Might not the difficult passage quoted on p. 98 simply manifest Rahner's assumption of a Thomist rather than Suárezian answer to the question of the uncreated or created character of the grace of union?

One salient feature of White's approach to Christ's human nature and grace is his rescue of a common Dominican doctrine of pure nature from confusion with that of Suárez. While Cajetan, for example, is sometimes viewed historically as a passing moment on the way to a universally accepted Suárezian concept of pure nature (a state which is historically realised), White rightly sees their approaches as competing alternatives. Such care is needed in an age when neoscholasticism is no longer remembered first-hand and we find ourselves in danger of taking Rahner's account of the schools and their concept of pure nature uncritically. White suggests that Rahner was in fact departing specifically from a Suárezian account in search of something more akin to that of Garrigou-Lagrange. Given that he himself in true Thomist style distinguishes 'pure nature' from any actual historical state, White is able to deploy the concept Christologically to significant effect.

Moreover, by securing the place of the union of the level of being, White safely attends to Christ's consciousness, especially his beatific vision, without fear of confusing the latter with the union as such. Noting that Aquinas's arguments in favour of Christ's beatific vision are soteriological, White puts forward an argument of his own. However, it also does not stray too far from soteriological concerns, because it is based on the need for the Saviour's human will to be conformed to the divine will. For the Word to be humanly conscious of his divine will, White argues that he must enjoy the beatific vision. This is because only this vision gives 'evidential certitude' of the divine will. This is contrasted with the obscurity of faith, but this is where White's own argument is rendered obscure by the fact that he does not explicitly acknowledge here that faith, though obscure rather than evident, is also certain. Why this certitude cannot be sufficient for Christ's human consciousness of his divine will White neglects to say. Need the presence of faith in Christ have necessarily led to the atomistic picture of Christ's consciousness depicted on p. 259? Granted that faith would allow for defectibility in Christ's will while vision would not, surely there might be another way for God to guarantee indefectibility of will, but impeccability's formal reason is not a subject that White really pursues. An added ambiguity is that, while he rejects the theological virtue of faith in Christ, he seems to admit a place for the theological virtue of hope in Christ's heart

(p. 319), despite recognising that Aquinas denies the latter (p. 311, n. 9).

In conclusion, I can but quibble about details: the book is magnificent.

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THE EUCHARIST IN MEDIEVAL CANON LAW by Thomas M. Izbicki, *Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015, pp. xxiv + 264, £64.99, hbk*

Canon law and liturgical texts have a number of similarities and they share a long association. Both have divine law as a foundation, both combine doctrine with detailed specifications, both direct human acts and thoughts towards the attainment of eternal life, both make for ecclesial communion by relating a number of participants and actions, and both are established and applied at a variety of levels, from the universal to the local. Simply to go by the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*, today's canons concern several aspects of the liturgy, especially the sacraments, and there are many other relevant norms outside the *Code*. Canon 838§1 provides that the ordering and guidance of the sacred liturgy depends solely upon the authority of the Church, which resides in the Apostolic See and, according to the norm of the law, the diocesan bishops.

Dr Thomas Izbicki, an established medievalist, was led to write this original, fully documented and scholarly book by considering a painted picture of the Dijon 'bleeding host' inserted in a medieval manuscript. The final chapter is, in fact, on the feast of Corpus Christi and 'wonder hosts', not neglecting to mention the dispute between Franciscans and Dominicans over the possibility that Christ had left behind some of the blood shed on earth. Pius II had to intervene.

The available sources for medieval eucharistic theology and sacramental practice are many and varied, and Izbicki chooses to focus on canon law broadly construed. Although the index is too brief for a study so packed with information, there are helpful opening annotations on the citation of canon law texts, and on canonists and collections. The part of Gratian's *Decretum* commonly referred to as *De consecratione* was a foundational text, but it held no lasting monopoly in the universities or in practice. Izbicki presents a wide sample of evidence from different genres and across Europe. Providing a reasonably full presentation of the contents of *De consecratione* would have helped to identify which topics attracted subsequent legislation and commentary or were neglected. Incidentally, because art, liturgy and devotional practices are included as evidence by Izbicki, greater consideration of the way canonical texts were illustrated seems required. The study of legal iconography has yet to reach maturity, and as a consequence the ways in which the use of art in manuscripts facilitated comprehension of the law and its glosses, or interpreted them, are still not fully understood. Excellent starting points