

## Reviews

**DID THE SAVIOUR SEE THE FATHER? CHRIST, SALVATION AND THE VISION OF GOD** by Simon Francis Gaine, *Bloomsbury T. & T. Clark*, London and New York, 2015, pp. viii + 221, £70.00, hbk

The theory that Christ possessed the beatific vision during his earthly life is more peripheral than central in christology. Yet its acceptance or rejection in a christology can reveal much about how the Jesus of the Gospels is being thought about and how his role as Saviour is being understood. The title Simon Gaine OP gives his book about the beatific vision enjoyed by Christ, *Did the Saviour See the Father? Christ, Salvation and the Vision of God*, shows his appreciation of how the subject impacts not only on christology but on all parts of theology – on how it thinks about Christ as Saviour, about his trinitarian relationship with the Father, and about how the salvation he brings to humanity is fulfilled in the vision of God.

Gaine brings to light the wide-ranging debate there has been about the theory since it first made its appearance in the Middle Ages, and he draws attention perceptively to its christological implications in the thought of many authors. His book is painstakingly thorough in its presentation of the debate and its protagonists, and quietly measured in its analysis of the different positions. While listening fairly to those who disagree he holds firm to his own conviction that Aquinas's claim that Christ enjoyed the beatific vision on earth is well founded. He records various magisterial pronouncements that touch on the subject, but sees them as authorizing a 'hermeneutic of continuity' that theology would be wise to follow rather than as sanctions they should be trying to avoid. He goes so far as to say towards the end of his study that one could claim 'moral certitude' for the position he adopts. Although one might have some doubts about the appropriateness of that 'moral' category in an intellectual debate, one does have to admit that his book puts a strong case that anybody discussing the question from now on will have to take very seriously.

Rejection of the position of Thomas is found across a wide range of theological writing. It is found in the work of theologians who do not give any kind of prominent place to Thomas, and particularly among those whose approach to questions about Christ is predominantly that of 'Christology from below'. But it is also found among stalwart Scholastics, like Galot, and even among devoted Thomists, such for example as Torrell. Gaine meets all these theologians on their own terms. But

he also invites them to meet Thomas on his terms. Although he makes no impolite accusations that any of them has not been doing that, the precision of his own analysis might give one reason to suspect that some of them may not have quite completed the kind of careful reading that an understanding of Thomas's position requires. If they have not done so careful reading, Gaine shows them wonderfully well how to do it. His book is a fine presentation of the thinking by which Thomas comes to attribute beatific vision to Christ from the beginning of his human existence. It reads the *Summa Theologiae* with the required sense that every step Thomas takes is built on positions he has elaborated earlier in the work, and looks forward to what will be thought out further on. The beatific vision that Thomas attributes to Christ in *Part Three* of the *Summa* is something he has analysed in detail in *Part One* and *Part Two*. A theologian cannot fairly reject Thomas's attribution of beatific vision to Christ unless he/she has a full picture of what exactly he is attributing, and how it fits into his over-all theological scheme of things. Gaine provides wonderful guidance for anyone who wants to understand Thomas on beatific vision, and on so many points of christology and theological anthropology that arise in attributing it to Christ. Indeed, his presentation of the thought of Thomas makes the book a valuable read for anyone who just wants to know how Thomas does theology.

If one were to single out a particular example of fine progressive reading of Thomas in the book it could be of the way the relationship between the three levels of knowledge postulated by Thomas in the mind of Christ is explained. His explanation of how the beatific vision leaves the mind open to knowledge of other things through the connatural *species* by which the mind knows opens the way to an explanation of what is here called a 'translation' of thoughts between the different levels of knowledge in Christ, and how this can make his knowledge communicable.

In spite of the disclaimers of his Foreword, Gaine's book has serious exegetical, patristic and historical content, including contemporary material that would not have been available to Thomas. But the material is presented in a theological way that, indeed, reflects Thomas's method of dealing with theological issues. Chapters 2–4 of Part I expound argument that are put forward against the position of Thomas by a variety of theologians: 'It's not in the Bible!'; 'It's not in the Fathers!'; 'It's not good theology!'. They might well be taken as imitations of the kind of *videtur quod non* arguments of which Thomas puts three or four at the beginning of each article of the *Summa*. Gaine evaluates these 'objections' one by one and puts forward his conclusion that none of them provide adequate evidence for excluding the position of Thomas. The second group of chapters, in Part II, takes up another set of difficulties that are raised against the position in the name of particular theological doctrines: 'But Jesus had faith!'; 'But Jesus didn't know!'; 'But Jesus was free!'; 'But Jesus suffered!' In replying to these difficulties chapter

by chapter, Gaine advances his positive argument for the position of Thomas. One might wish that, to continue the analogy with an article of the *Summa*, he had included his own equivalent of Thomas's *Respondeo dicendum*. It would have called for a more systematic examination of the key argument Thomas offers for Christ's beatific vision than that which Gaine gives on pp. 17–18. Thomas argument is coherent with the teaching of the Scriptures and the Fathers. But it is not an argument from the Scriptures or the Fathers, but from a piece of theological reasoning that needs full critical evaluation.

For example, Thomas's argument entails use of what Gaine himself calls 'the principle of perfection': Christ, as God incarnate and the Saviour of all humanity, had to have the fullness of all perfection, and that meant having the perfection of knowledge, which is the beatific vision. The principle works well in relation to the grace of Christ. In other levels of Christ's being Thomas sees it qualified by what one might call the 'principle of economy': Christ accepted limitations, for example the passibility of his body, for the sake of our redemption. Is there no room for limitation in his knowledge? The concept of perfection that Thomas applies to the knowledge of Christ would seem to be drawn primarily from Greek philosophy. Is there an exact parallel between it and the biblico-theological concept of grace? Is it so inflexible that it would be negated by reserving the beatific vision to Christ in his heavenly state, and allowing that he could accept some limitations of the absolute perfection of human knowing in his earthly life?

And would such limitations require one to say Christ had faith (Gaine is very convincing in his refusal to admit that he did)? There is room for an analysis of the acquired knowledge of Christ that goes beyond the rather incipient one that Thomas was able to give in the *Summa*. As well as examining the translation of thought downward from the highest levels of Christ's knowledge there would need to be an examination of the movement of his thought upward from his acquired knowledge to higher levels. It might be possible to argue that the movement of discovery and even uncertainty that can be attributed to the earthly Jesus was on the level of his acquired ideas and his *cogitatio* about them, but that when he came to *assentio*, judging whether his thought was true or not, which is where knowledge reaches perfection, the reality of his own divine being might serve as a reality check that would bring him to the truth of his own thought in a way that took him beyond faith. If one mentions these two issues as matters that might deserve further examination one can think of no better person to do so than the Simon Gaine who wrote the book under review.

LIAM G. WALSH OP