

The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology. By Thomas Joseph White, OP. Washington: Catholic University of America, 2015. Pp. xiv + 534. \$65.

This closely reasoned and clearly written collection of essays (a number previously unpublished) presents an invaluable perspective upon many of the crucial issues debated in contemporary Christology. As one would expect, White shows an intimate familiarity with the thought of Aquinas. But he has also read carefully and deeply in modern and contemporary Christologies. His knowledge of Schleiermacher and Barth, Rahner and Schillebeeckx, von Balthasar, Pannenberg, and Moltmann is impressive.

The volume as a whole is exceptionally well-crafted. W. helpfully frames the collection with a “Prolegomenon: Is a Modern Thomistic Christology Possible?” and a “Conclusion: The Promise of Thomism: Why Christology Is Not Primarily a Historical Science.” The project, then, is “a Thomistic Study in Christology,” and not a study of St. Thomas’s Christology, though, in following the exposition of the former, one learns a great deal about the latter.

In many ways the individual chapters constitute a series of explorations of *quaestiones disputatae* in Christology. Among the topics W. treats are: “The Ontology of the Hypostatic Union,” “The Necessity of the Beatific Vision in the Earthly Christ,” “The Death of Christ and the Mystery of the Cross,” and “Did Christ Descend into Hell? The Mystery of Holy Saturday.” Each exploration presents, fairly and at length, views contrary to his own, before setting forth his own Thomistic-inspired position.

Significantly, even prior to the “Prolegomenon” mentioned above, W. provides an introductory essay: “The Biblical Ontology of Christ.” It grounds his conviction of the need for ontological reflection in Christology, by indicating how the New Testament itself supports its claims concerning the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ with an incipient ontology. The “hypostatic union” of classical Christology finds clear warrant in the christological hymns of the New Testament. As Pliny famously attested of the early Christians, “They sing hymns to Christ as God.”

W. contends that many modern Christologies, by scanting ontological reflection, lack sufficient resources to undergird the New Testament confession of Christ’s uniqueness and its elaboration in the church’s creedal and conciliar tradition. Liberal Protestantism, beginning with Schleiermacher, has, in W.’s view, tended toward a “Nestorian” Christology. Here the man, Jesus Christ, appears joined to the eternal Word through a moral attunement of wills. This trend has only accelerated as a result of the growing sensitivity to historical context and cultural diversity. In this regard, though respectful of the legitimate concerns and the speculative richness of Karl Rahner’s theology, W. does not exempt Rahner from his critique of a “subtle Nestorianism.”

What is at issue in W.’s reflections is whether many modern and contemporary Christologies (a number of which he engages) can support the tradition’s claim regarding the unique incarnation of God in Jesus Christ or whether they fail to rise above a view of Jesus as inspired prophet: a Spirit Christology that begins and remains “below.” Thus, a perfectly valid concern to underscore the full humanity of the Savior can fall short of the Chalcedonian insistence on both “truly God and truly man.”

Suggestively, W. holds that Karl Barth's "high" Christology faces the opposite peril. By espousing a uniquely christological ontology that excludes any appeal to metaphysics and natural theology, Barth risks compromising Jesus's humanity and his commonality with us. Paradoxically, Barth's aversion to a metaphysics of the analogy of being results in limiting, not expanding, the scope of Christ's dominion.

Hence, W. insists both upon the doctrine of the "hypostatic union" as guarantor of the tradition's confession of Christ's uniqueness and upon the legitimacy, indeed, the necessity of reason's probing of the essential traits of human nature, notwithstanding the deformation wrought by the Fall. Throughout the book, the Catholic celebration of *fides et ratio* is on full display.

Avowedly, W.'s is an exercise in "speculative theology." In this regard it is exemplary: a feasting in the company of Thomas the systematician. However, this reviewer would have also appreciated a morning collation with Thomas the *magister sacrae paginae*, showing the scriptural and, indeed, liturgical matrix of the church's doctrine. When W. writes, "In some real sense it is true to say: ignorance of ontology is ignorance of Christ" (8), one understands his meaning in the context of his valid concerns; but his assertion would have confounded the usually voluble Jerome!

W. is alert to "the dangers of an all-too-conceptual or reified vision of the person of Christ that is insufficiently sensitive to the biblical historical life of Jesus of Nazareth as it is portrayed in the Gospel" (116). But at times, in this discerning and demanding study, the shining face of the Savior can appear clouded by the sheer intensity of metaphysical speculation. Nonetheless, the book provides excellent material for a doctoral seminar in Christology, compelling both instructor and students to come to grips with their own positions and their spiritual and pastoral implications in this most crucial of theological disciplines.

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The Gospel of Jesus Christ. By Walter Kasper. Trans. from the German by Sister Katherine Wolff. New York: Paulist, 2015. Pp. xiv + 295. \$49.95.

In an increasingly secular world, the gospel itself specifies the optimal witness of faith through actions closely harmonized with beliefs. Thus Kasper proposes after multiple considerations of modernity, the situation of freedom and of contemporary theology. This volume of the author's collected works includes an early lecture on the situation of faith and a theological reflection on the New Evangelization. A shorter section clarifies the concept of faith and the life of faith.

The first section, "Introduction to the Faith," originally arose as a series of lectures in Münster and Tübingen from 1970 to 1971. K. responds primarily to student unrest after the Second Vatican Council. The author suggests that this crisis signals not the collapse of faith, but a decisive period akin to the Constantinian and Reformation renewals. After analyzing the philosophical backdrop, K. names the present situation