

1 | Contemporary Thomistic Christology

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will survey some of the most notable works of Thomistic Christology that have appeared in recent decades. These include historical works on Thomas Aquinas's Christology; dogmatic works of Reformed, Anglican, and Eastern Catholic Thomistic Christology; and dogmatic works of (Roman) Catholic Thomistic Christology. My purpose in this first chapter is to present the arguments of these books and to make clear that I associate my "reconfiguring" closely with their theological and metaphysical perspectives. Modern Christology benefits greatly from attention to the richly biblical, patristic, and metaphysical Christology offered by Aquinas.

Since I also hold that some important biblical elements should be added to Thomistic Christology as presently practiced, this makes it even more incumbent upon me to provide a detailed portrait of contemporary Thomistic Christology. If I am calling for contemporary Thomistic Christology to be reconfigured in a certain way, this proposal requires an assessment of the contributions of recent scholars in the domain of Thomistic Christology.

Before proceeding, let me add that I recognize that Aquinas's Christology was never merely ignored even by those theologians who sharply disagreed with the neoscholastic thinkers who predominated in Catholic theology between the late nineteenth century and the 1950s. To name one influential example, Karl Barth makes relatively frequent references to Aquinas in the first volume of his

Church Dogmatics. Rather acerbically, Barth states of Aquinas that the “story that when he was engaged in the christological part of the work [the *tertia pars*] Christ appeared to him with the words: *Bene scripsisti de me, Thoma!* seems to be less in accord with the facts!”¹ Barth thinks that Aquinas, in treating of Christ, not only did so in an improper order – in the third part of the *Summa* rather than in its opening part – but also imported far too much Aristotle.² Barth warns that Protestant theologians must not become “so weary of Descartes that we throw ourselves into the arms of, e.g., Aristotle or Thomas.”³

Barth goes on to say that he does not agree with Aquinas’s conception of a divine “person” or with Aquinas’s approach to identifying Jesus Christ in his eternal Sonship as the “Word.”⁴ He thinks that Aquinas’s doctrine of the “Word” arises more from his anthropology than from Scripture. Barth criticizes Aquinas’s account of Mary’s *fiat* at the Annunciation.⁵ In arguing that Jesus represented us as Priest, Barth finds Aquinas’s position too weak, because Aquinas does not perceive that the category “priest” applies solely to Christ. Moreover, Aquinas does not present Christ as the Judge judged in our place: “Jesus Christ is

¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God, Part 1*, 2nd ed., trans. G. W. Bromiley, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 21.

² Indeed, as Corey Barnes and Jean-Pierre Torrell have shown, there is no doubt that Aquinas employs Aristotle in highly significant ways in the *tertia pars*’s treatise on Christ’s Person and work. See Corey L. Barnes, “Aristotle in the *Summa Theologiae*’s Christology,” in *Aristotle in Aquinas’s Theology*, ed. Gilles Emery, O.P., and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 186–204; Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Jésus le Christ chez saint Thomas d’Aquin. Texte de la Tertia Pars (ST IIIa) traduit et commenté, accompagné de Données historiques et doctrinales et de cinquante Textes choisis* (Paris: Cerf, 2008).

³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1.1, 195.

⁴ See Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1.1, 437.

⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God, Part 2*, trans. G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 144.

the One who was accused, condemned and judged in the place of us sinners.”⁶

In the Christology and soteriology of his *Theo-Drama*, Barth’s fellow Swiss dogmatician Hans Urs von Balthasar likewise cites Aquinas at important junctures, even if to criticize him. More than Barth, Balthasar finds himself in agreement with Aquinas. In his account of Christ’s Person, for example, Balthasar refers to Aquinas’s argument that the Person of the Son, in the economy of salvation, is a “mission.” For Balthasar “the economic Trinity cannot be regarded as simply identical with the immanent,” but nevertheless the incarnate Son is indeed “the Subject in whom person and mission are identical.”⁷ Aquinas would surely agree, even if Aquinas’s understanding of “person” and of “mission” is somewhat different than Balthasar’s.

Balthasar describes Aquinas’s account of Christ’s knowledge in some detail, while differing from it.⁸ He disagrees with Aquinas’s view that the Word’s activity in the Incarnation precedes (non-temporally) that of the Spirit.⁹ In his view, too, Aquinas’s position that Christ has only one *esse* is mistaken.¹⁰ Remarking that “Thomas’ view of Christ’s ‘representation’ builds on the soteriology of Anselm,” Balthasar contends that the New Testament requires us to go beyond this perspective.¹¹ In his historical overview of Christian soteriology, Balthasar devotes four pages to Aquinas, arguing that

⁶ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation, Part 1*, trans. G. W. Bromiley, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 277; on Aquinas see 275.

⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 3, *The Dramatis Personae: The Person in Christ*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 157.

⁸ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, vol. 3, 174–75, 192.

⁹ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, vol. 3, 186.

¹⁰ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, vol. 3, 228n68. *Esse* in this debate is not the *esse* of predication but rather is *esse in realis*.

¹¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, vol. 3, 241–42.

while Aquinas does better than Anselm, he fails to grasp the radical nature of Christ's bearing of our sin.¹²

Elsewhere I have challenged some of these criticisms of Aquinas. For present purposes, however, the point is simply that Aquinas's Christology never disappeared entirely from the scene, even among its critics. No doubt, in the first few decades after the Second Vatican Council, Aquinas's Christology garnered far less interest among Catholic dogmatic theologians than it had prior to the Council. In Jon Sobrino's *Jesus the Liberator*, for example, Aquinas's contribution to Christology is summed up by including Aquinas in a list of patristic and medieval theologians who failed to take seriously enough Christ's abandonment by the Father and also by asserting, without further comment, that Aquinas's denial that Christ had faith is the result of his reliance on "a scholastic and non-biblical concept [of faith], and a type of argumentation starting from the hypostatic union."¹³ Sobrino, a Spanish Jesuit who received his theological formation in the years immediately after the Council and then became a noted liberation theologian in El Salvador, does not apologize for paying only dismissive attention to Aquinas's Christology. Whereas Balthasar takes some time to criticize Aquinas and draws upon him positively in certain ways, Sobrino does not.

Sobrino's companion volume to *Jesus the Liberator* – titled *Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims* – mentions Aquinas only once, stating that although Aquinas should be commended for devoting twenty-five questions in the *tertia pars* to the mysteries of Christ's life, contemporary theology must entirely revise Aquinas's approach, through the lens of historical-critical exegesis. For Sobrino, Aquinas has to be superseded because, like his patristic

¹² See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 4, *The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 262–66.

¹³ Jon Sobrino, S.J., *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 155, cf. 237–38.

predecessors, he grounded himself in “doxological and not historical statements,” whereas contemporary theology must focus upon “the *reality* of Jesus of Nazareth, recalling it and understanding it as *history*.”¹⁴

In the wider Church, Sobrino’s burial of Thomistic Christology in the 1990s was generally assumed to be justified. On this view, Thomistic Christology would continue to be studied by historical theologians, but no more would it be taken seriously by dogmatic theologians. How mistaken this perspective was!

1.2 The Revival of Thomistic Christology

Thomistic Christology began to revive in the 1980s when historically minded studies reintroduced the value of Aquinas’s perspective. Romanus Cessario’s 1982 *Christian Satisfaction in Aquinas: Towards a Personalist Understanding* and Thomas Weinandy’s 1985 *Does God Change?* planted the seeds for the reintroduction of Thomistic Christology in the English-speaking world. By expounding and defending Aquinas’s theology of the Incarnation and the Cross, these published dissertations made the case that Aquinas’s Christology remains highly relevant. Cessario studied at the University of Fribourg under the Thomists Colman O’Neill, Servais Pinckaers, and Jean-Hervé Nicolas, and Weinandy studied at the University of London under the Anglican Thomistic theologian Eric Mascall.¹⁵ Cessario’s book has appeared in two subsequent editions (1990 and 2020), demonstrating its value. Weinandy has continued on the

¹⁴ Jon Sobrino, S.J., *Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), 227–28.

¹⁵ See Romanus Cessario, O.P., *Christian Satisfaction in Aquinas: Towards a Personalist Understanding* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1982); Thomas G. Weinandy, O.F.M. Cap., *Does God Change? The Word’s Becoming in the Incarnation* (Still River, MA: St. Bede’s Publications, 1985).

path of constructive Thomistic Christology in later books such as *Does God Suffer?* (2000) and *Jesus: Essays in Christology* (2014).¹⁶

In the 1990s, Jean-Pierre Torrell was at work on studies of Thomistic Christology that have exercised a notable influence throughout the Catholic world. He first published *L'Initiation à Saint Thomas d'Aquin: Sa personne et son oeuvre* in 1993, and he published its companion volume, *Saint Thomas d'Aquin, maître spirituel*, in 1996. The first book is a historical introduction to Aquinas's life and writings, and Torrell shows that "in Thomas's thought not only does the Incarnation not introduce any disruption into the schema *exitus-reditus* [that governs the *Summa theologiae*] but, on the contrary, it is only through the Incarnation that this movement achieves its fruition."¹⁷ The second book gives full rein to Torrell's valuation of Aquinas's Christology, though by no means does Torrell neglect Aquinas's other themes. The Son is "the Father's Art and perfect Image" and is the one "through whom we come forth from the Father and return to Him."¹⁸ The Son becomes incarnate as Jesus Christ as our Savior, model, and path to union with the Trinity. Torrell emphasizes the centrality of the imitation of Christ for Aquinas's spirituality and understanding of the moral life.

In 1999, Torrell published a landmark two-volume study, *Le Christ en ses mystères: La vie et l'oeuvre de Jésus selon saint Thomas d'Aquin*.¹⁹ This book tracks Aquinas's treatise on the mysteries of Christ's life, questions 27–59 of the *tertia pars*. Torrell covers all the topics that Aquinas investigates in this profound section of the

¹⁶ See Thomas G. Weinandy, O.F.M. Cap., *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000); Weinandy, *Jesus: Essays in Christology* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2014).

¹⁷ Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, *The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 155.

¹⁸ Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 2, *Spiritual Master*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 101.

¹⁹ Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Le Christ en ses mystères: La vie et l'oeuvre de Jésus selon saint Thomas d'Aquin*, 2 vols. (Paris: Desclée, 1999).

Summa theologiae. In his study, Torrell expresses a debt to the Italian scholar Inos Biffi's historical research on Aquinas's Christology, synthesized as *I Misteri di Cristo in Tommaso d'Aquino*.²⁰ As Torrell shows, Aquinas finds in all of Christ's words and deeds matter for inexhaustible theological reflection and spiritual meditation.²¹ I should also mention Torrell's 2008 translation and commentary on the *tertia pars*, published as *Jésus le Christ chez saint Thomas d'Aquin*, as well as various essays (mainly from the 1990s and early 2000s) that were translated and published in English as *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas*.²² Torrell's historical retrieval of Aquinas's Christology helped to make it a respectable object of study again.

1.2.1 *Historical, Reformed, Anglican, and Eastern Catholic Retrievals of Aquinas's Christology*

Beginning in the late 1990s, a steady stream of historically erudite studies of Aquinas's Christology began to appear. Let me mention a few of them here. Michael Gorman defended a dissertation at Boston College under Matthew Lamb in 1997 that was eventually published, in a much revised form, as *Aquinas on the Metaphysics of the Hypostatic Union*.²³ Gorman clears Aquinas of the charge of rationalism in his metaphysics of the Incarnation – showing that Aquinas never pushes too far but instead tacitly grants that “our reflection must always reach a point where we must settle for something that is, in itself, not fully satisfying” – while also demonstrating that Aquinas does not reach this point too soon but instead

²⁰ See Inos Biffi, *I Misteri di Cristo in Tommaso d'Aquino* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1994).

²¹ See Torrell, *Le Christ en ses mystères*, 21.

²² See Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez saint Thomas d'Aquin*; Torrell, *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Bernhard Blankenhorn, O.P. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011).

²³ Michael Gorman, *Aquinas on the Metaphysics of the Hypostatic Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

fruitfully allows metaphysical inquiry to address the problems that challenge the doctrine of the Incarnation.²⁴ Gorman also responds to the view that Aquinas's account of the Incarnation tends toward monophysitism.²⁵ Around the same time, Paul Gondreau completed his doctoral dissertation under Torrell at the University of Fribourg. First published in 2002 and twice republished since (most recently in 2018), Gondreau's *The Passions of Christ's Soul in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* is a tour de force of historical scholarship, exhibiting a mastery of the various sources and systematic conclusions of Aquinas's on Christ's passions. In exploring Aquinas's account of Christ's full humanity, sinlessness, and suffering, Gondreau makes clear that Aquinas "ranks as the one medieval author who paid the greatest heed to the demands of the Incarnation and who did more than anyone to shed light on the human face of God."²⁶

In 2012, Corey Barnes published his dissertation, completed under Joseph Wawrykow at the University of Notre Dame, titled *Christ's Two Wills in Scholastic Thought: The Christology of Aquinas and Its Historical Contexts*. Barnes helps us to appreciate the relation of the Incarnation of the Word and the human redemptive acts of Christ. Clearly, the unity of Christ as an acting Person matters greatly for orthodox Christian understanding of how this particular man can accomplish salvation for the whole world.²⁷ Most recently, Dominic Legge in 2017 published *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas*, a revised version of his dissertation written

²⁴ Gorman, *Aquinas on the Metaphysics of the Hypostatic Union*, 163.

²⁵ For this view, see Richard Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation: Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Cross's book gave a boost to the study of Aquinas's Christology.

²⁶ Paul Gondreau, *The Passions of Christ's Soul in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Providence, RI: Cluny, 2018), iii. The first edition appeared under the same title from Aschendorff.

²⁷ As Barnes says, "Aquinas's repeated references to Christ's humanity as *instrumentum divinitatis* avoid Nestorian overtones precisely because he specifies *instrumentum divinitatis* as a hypostatically united rational instrument. This both eliminates a

at the University of Fribourg under Gilles Emery. In his foreword to this book, Emery notes that Legge reads “Christology in light of Aquinas’s theology of the divine missions,” with the result that Aquinas’s Christology is unveiled as “a genuine Spirit Christology” in which the words and deeds of Christ are interiorly unified and through which we come to appreciate that, as the Gospels attest, “Christ and the Holy Spirit lead us to the Father by giving us a participation in the very relations that they have with the Father.”²⁸ With Legge’s insights in hand, Christians can discover that “the Trinitarian shape of our salvation is derived from the Trinitarian shape of the mystery of the incarnation.”²⁹

At the same time, serious Reformed interest in Aquinas’s Christology has emerged. Let me confine myself to a few notable representatives. First, Michael Allen has mined various elements of Aquinas’s theology in his work. This includes devoting considerable effort in his published doctoral dissertation, *The Christ’s Faith: A Dogmatic Account*, to understanding and criticizing Aquinas’s view of Christ’s knowledge. In his chapter on the metaphysics of the Incarnation, Allen approves Aquinas’s understanding of divine transcendence (and immanence) and analogous discourse. He then shows along Thomistic lines that “the claim that divine transcendence and analogy has been overcome in the *hypostatic* union fails to honor the otherness brought within the very life of

Nestorian interpretation of instrumentality and elevates the soteriological role of Christ’s human will” (Corey L. Barnes, *Christ’s Two Wills in Scholastic Thought: The Christology of Aquinas and Its Historical Contexts* [Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2012], 284). Barnes draws upon a European historical study from the period of the relative desuetude of Thomistic research: Francis Ruello, *La christologie de Thomas d’Aquin* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1987).

²⁸ Gilles Emery, O.P., “Foreword,” in Dominic Legge, O.P., *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), v–viii, at v–vii.

²⁹ Emery, “Foreword,” viii, citing Legge, 235. See also Gilles Emery, O.P., “*Theologia and Dispensatio*: The Centrality of the Divine Missions in St. Thomas’s Trinitarian Theology,” *The Thomist* 74 (2010): 515–61.

the eternal Son.”³⁰ He rejects Aquinas’s view that Christ did not have faith, arguing that Aquinas’s understanding of “the moral and intellectual dimensions of Christ’s personality” is a weak spot that can be corrected by a fuller attention to “the emphasis on history and dynamism throughout the rest of Thomas’s Christology and soteriology.”³¹

In his 2019 *God in Himself: Scripture, Metaphysics, and the Task of Christian Theology*, Steven Duby devotes a chapter to the Incarnation. Duby is one of the clearest and most incisive theologians writing today, and he shapes his chapter as a Thomistic dialogue with Karl Barth, T. F. Torrance, Eberhard Jüngel, Robert Jenson, and Bruce McCormack. He argues that a proper understanding of God’s speaking through Scripture justifies “contemplat[ing] God from above in what Thomas calls a ‘way of descent,’ understanding God himself (in an ectypal manner) and then with God’s own guidance framing his outward works in the light of his eternal triune life.”³² In short, everything that Christ does in the flesh must be understood in light of his relation to the Father and to the Spirit, but not in such a way as to derive that relation simply from (e.g.) the Cross. The Old Testament frames Christ’s identity, and the New Testament helps us to see, as Aquinas holds, that “the humanity of the Son is uniquely endowed with wisdom by the one who is the Spirit of the Son as well as the Father.”³³

In his 2021 *The Same God Who Works All Things: Inseparable Operations in Trinitarian Theology*, Adonis Vidu devotes chapters to the Incarnation, Christ’s “theandric” action and suffering, Christ’s work of atonement, and the Spirit of Christ. The central

³⁰ R. Michael Allen, *The Christ’s Faith: A Dogmatic Account* (London: Continuum, 2009), 117.

³¹ Allen, *The Christ’s Faith*, 148–49.

³² Steven J. Duby, *God in Himself: Scripture, Metaphysics, and the Task of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 141.

³³ Duby, *God in Himself*, 151.

question that Vidu investigates is whether the three divine Persons can truly be said to be undivided in their operation *ad extra*. Are the Father and the Son distinguished from each other not only by the Father–Son relation (eternal generation) but also by distinct divine knowing and divine willing in the economy of salvation?³⁴ What is at stake here is the metaphysical simplicity and infinite plenitude of the Godhead. If the Son and the Father are not perfectly identical in attributes pertaining to the divine nature (such as intellect and will), then neither the Son nor the Father is the full plenitude of the Godhead. The result would be that the Father, Son, and Spirit are not infinite in being but rather each of them is limited: Where the Father’s will begins, the Son’s ends. On this view, they would be three finite gods.

Vidu inquires into how, if the divine Persons are not distinguished by acts *ad extra*, it makes sense to say that the Son, and the Son alone, became incarnate. In response, he draws upon Aquinas to articulate the Trinity’s agency in assuming a human nature to union with the divine nature in the Person of the Son. He also asks whether there is “a specific personal causality of the Son upon this human nature, consequent upon the assumption.”³⁵ Vidu’s answer makes appeal to John Duns Scotus and to the Thomistic Christology of the Reformed theologian John Owen. He addresses the criticisms of Aquinas’s position lodged by Karl Rahner and concludes along Thomistic lines: “The eternal Word remains extrinsic to the human nature in the sense that he is ontologically distinct from it, as uncreated. That said, the human nature upon its union with the Logos begins to manifest the unique mode of existence of the Logos

³⁴ See also the background and constructive insights, in light of contemporary debates about the “subordination” of the Son, provided by Scott R. Swain, “The Radiance of the Father’s Glory: Eternal Generation, the Divine Names, and Biblical Interpretation,” in *Retrieving Eternal Generation*, ed. Fred Sanders and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2017), 29–43.

³⁵ Adonis Vidu, *The Same God Who Works All Things: Inseparable Operations in Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021), 163.

on its own created level of existence.”³⁶ Indeed, Vidu argues that Aquinas’s account of the incarnate Son’s *esse* – an account that in the decades after the Council fell profoundly out of favor – is in fact crucial for understanding the historical Jesus Christ. He states, “The human nature mediates the revelation of the Son because it supernaturally acquires the personal *esse* (existence) of the Son as its ultimate metaphysical foundation.”³⁷

Further chapters on Christ draw heavily upon Aquinas, often in dialogue with Scotus. Vidu notes the agreement between Balthasar and Aquinas on the understanding of a person as “a particular realization of a given nature,” thereby ensuring that Person and nature remain united in the Trinity.³⁸ He probes into how the Son’s divine and human actions should be distinguished, arguing that “persons act from their natures” and therefore “two natures originate two sets of first acts, which come together in the one person of Jesus Christ, the eternal Logos.”³⁹ Clarifying this claim further (in a Scotistic rather than Thomistic direction), he observes: “Actions do not originate at the personal level; they are perfected by the person. Thus, the incarnate Logos perfects in himself a human operation that springs from his human nature.”⁴⁰ In a lengthy discussion of Aquinas’s Christology, Vidu argues that Aquinas succeeds in describing a truly theandric agency in Christ. Aquinas offers a fully Trinitarian Christology, with Christ in his

³⁶ Vidu, *The Same God Who Works All Things*, 176.

³⁷ Vidu, *The Same God Who Works All Things*, 177. The Son reveals himself in his humanity.

³⁸ Vidu, *The Same God Who Works All Things*, 190. Vidu refers here to Balthasar’s reflections on the Monothelite controversy, in Balthasar’s *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe according to Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Brian E. Daley, S.J. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003).

³⁹ Vidu, *The Same God Who Works All Things*, 193.

⁴⁰ Vidu, *The Same God Who Works All Things*, 193. For Aquinas (by contrast to Scotus), Vidu explains, “personality is a positive entity that disposes a singular nature for existence; it comes to the individual substance before and as a condition of its existence” (195).

human nature taking on the Son's filial mode of being and thus receiving everything from the Father and manifesting the Father through his human actions.⁴¹

I note that in unpacking the consequences of a properly Trinitarian doctrine of the atonement, Vidu turns to the Latin theology of Bernard Lonergan, specifically Lonergan's *The Triune God: Systematics*.⁴² I mention this fact in order to signal the value of the current recovery of Lonergan's Thomistic Christology. Jeremy Wilkins remarks in his *Before Truth: Lonergan, Aquinas, and the Problem of Wisdom*, "Lonergan was convinced as a matter of faith seeking understanding, that Christ, throughout his human life, contemplated divine wisdom and love in the light of the glory proper to the heavenly Jerusalem."⁴³

The Anglican theologian A. N. Williams's 1999 *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* began as her dissertation at Yale under George Lindbeck. Though her section on Aquinas's Christology is short, it is notable. She begins with a helpful comparison of Aquinas's Christology with his doctrine of creation, explaining that Aquinas understands "the Incarnation as the fruit of divine desire for self-communication and union with humanity."⁴⁴ She reflects upon the ways in which the Incarnation brings human nature to its perfection, both in Christ himself and by enabling our minds – accustomed to gaining knowledge from the realm of the senses – to know God and thereby to love God. She points out that the "Incarnation," as such, is a created reality,

⁴¹ In addition to Aquinas's texts and Legge's book, Vidu draws upon Gilles Emery, O.P.'s "The Personal Mode of Trinitarian Action in Saint Thomas Aquinas," *The Thomist* 69 (2005): 31–77.

⁴² See Bernard Lonergan, S.J., *The Triune God: Systematics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

⁴³ Jeremy D. Wilkins, *Before Truth: Lonergan, Aquinas, and the Problem of Wisdom* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018).

⁴⁴ A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 90.

even though the term of the Incarnation is the Son and the cause of the Incarnation is the Trinity. In a sense, the Incarnation can be described as a “grace,” since the union of the divine and human natures in the Person of the Son is not anything that human nature could have merited. Too strongly in my view, she maintains that for Aquinas “our destiny is a sharing of divine life as intimate as that represented by the hypostatic union. To be divine by participation through grace constitutes no second-order, derivative union with God but a union after the manner of Christ’s very own.”⁴⁵ Williams’s emphasis on Christ’s deifying centrality – and thus on the centrality of his charity (and of the Eucharist) – is welcome.

The Anglican theologian Rowan Williams’s 2018 *Christ the Heart of Creation* deserves mention here for its extensive engagement with Aquinas’s Christology. The introductory first chapter, which sets the stage for all that follows, is devoted to Aquinas’s perspective. Williams’s speculative investigation focuses on the question of how “Christology itself generate[s] a new and fuller grasp of the ‘grammar’ of createdness.”⁴⁶ While he cautions against treating every aspect of Aquinas’s Christology as “timelessly true and adequate,” he nevertheless credits Aquinas’s synthesis with being “the point at which the broadest range of theoretical questions was brought into view and a robust and consistent vocabulary developed for integrating these questions.”⁴⁷ He argues that modern Christology could be spared many dead-ends and puzzles simply by retrieving what Aquinas has already worked out. The topics that he has in view include not only the Incarnation itself but also Christ’s knowledge and grace. Regarding the Incarnation, Williams shows that what at first may seem to be overly abstract or arcane questions in the *tertia pars* turn out to be, in fact, an

⁴⁵ Williams, *The Ground of Union*, 92.

⁴⁶ Rowan Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 6.

⁴⁷ Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation*, 7.

extraordinarily valuable “grammatical clearing of the ground so that there is no room for any notion of incarnation as a heavenly individual ‘turning into’ an earthly one.”⁴⁸

Khaled Anatolios, a Greek Catholic Melkite scholar, offered in 2020 an account of Christ’s saving work that draws constructively upon Aquinas. In his *Deification through the Cross*, Anatolios seeks “to present the fundamental framework of a constructive theology of Christ’s doxological contrition that is grounded in the Byzantine Christian tradition.”⁴⁹ He observes how strongly Aquinas highlights Christ’s sorrow over sin. Indeed, for Aquinas the sorrow that Christ endures on the Cross is the greatest sorrow ever experienced. As Anatolios notes, this claim may appear exaggerated, given that there seem to be ways of dying that inflict even more suffering than does the torture of crucifixion. Yet, for Aquinas, Christ’s immense interior sorrow or contrition regarding each and every human sin is constitutive of the superabundant “satisfaction” that Christ offers for sin. Placing his finger on a theme that has been somewhat neglected by Thomists in their accounts of Aquinas’s theology of the Cross,⁵⁰ Anatolios observes that Aquinas “speaks explicitly of the representative suffering of Christ as a contrition that transcends all other human experiences of repentance.”⁵¹ As

⁴⁸ Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation*, 12. See, however, Katherine Sonderegger’s concerns regarding Williams’s account of the two natures, in Sonderegger, “Christ as Infinite and Finite: Rowan Williams’ *Christ the Heart of Creation*,” *Pro Ecclesia* 30 (2021): 98–113.

⁴⁹ Khaled Anatolios, *Deification through the Cross: An Eastern Christian Theology of Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020), 35.

⁵⁰ I am among those who have somewhat neglected it! As Anatolios points out on 334–35, a Thomist who deserves credit for perceiving this element is Bruce D. Marshall, “The Dereliction of Christ and the Impassibility of God,” in *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering*, ed. James F. Keating and Thomas Joseph White, O.P. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 246–98, at 272–73. Anatolios, like Marshall, draws especially upon Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981), III, q. 46, a. 6.

⁵¹ Anatolios, *Deification through the Cross*, 333.

our representative, Christ on the Cross makes satisfaction for us by experiencing the profound contrition that we should have had for each and every sin.

Anatolios combines Aquinas's insight with some elements of Matthias Joseph Scheeben's doxological or latreutic understanding of Christ's Paschal sacrifice. The combination of these two thinkers serves Anatolios's presentation of the Cross as "doxological contrition," an insight that arose for Anatolios primarily through celebrating the Byzantine liturgy. Even without drawing upon Scheeben, one can find a link between Christ's sorrow and doxology in Aquinas himself. This link is Aquinas's insistence that while sorrowing most intensely in his lower soul, Christ in his higher soul enjoyed beatific communion, praising God perfectly. Here Anatolios moves from *Summa theologiae* III, q. 46, a. 6 to q. 46, a. 8. According to Aquinas, Christ did not allow the joy he experiences in his higher soul to overflow upon his lower soul; thus his immense sorrow was not alleviated by joy but rather both were present at the same time in different ways. For Anatolios, the important thing is not parsing the psychology of this claim but rather the fact that Aquinas places front and center both immense sorrow and immense doxological praise. Anatolios describes these two elements in terms of coinherence, rather than in terms of a higher and a lower part of the soul. In Anatolios's view, Aquinas approaches this solution when he holds that if Christ did not know and praise God perfectly, then Christ could not have realized how intensely we should sorrow over sin. This is what Anatolios means by "coinherence," namely, that "during his earthly life Christ's perfect enjoyment of the vision of God was entirely intrinsic to and even constitutive of his contrition for human sin."⁵²

Anatolios here shows an extraordinary penetration into and appreciation for Aquinas's theology of the Cross. As Anatolios says, "the representative contrition of Christ was itself a certain

⁵² Anatolios, *Deification through the Cross*, 337.

mode of the ‘overflow’ of his glory.... Conversely, his vision of God persisted not by virtue of being oblivious of the suffering of some hermetically sealed ‘lower part’ of the soul but precisely in and through this suffering of Christ’s contrition.”⁵³ Anatolios argues that every moment of Christ’s life combines these two elements, but the sorrow for sin is intensified on the Cross, where Christ sorrows vicariously for us. The Resurrection takes up and glorifies Christ’s wounds and his contrition. Thus, the Paschal mystery “shines forth as divine forgiveness and the reconciliation of God and humanity.”⁵⁴ This is a constructive argument that retrieves Thomistic Christology in a fruitful way, in accord with Anatolios’s ecumenical intentions.

1.2.2 *Thomistic Christology and Contemporary Catholic Philosophical Theology*

Let me now mention a few examples of the contemporary interest in Aquinas’s Christology within (Roman) Catholic dogmatics. Eleonore Stump’s massive 2018 book *Atonement* followed upon an equally lengthy, but more strictly philosophical, set of essays published by Stump under the title *Aquinas*. Two of the essays in the latter work treat aspects of Aquinas’s Christology, specifically the metaphysics of the Incarnation and the atonement.⁵⁵ But whereas in *Aquinas* Stump’s primary concern is to understand Aquinas rightly – although she brings her immense creativity to the task, inevitably seeking the truth of the matter whatever Aquinas might have thought – in *Atonement* we find a fully constructive work of philosophical theology. She states, “I have tried to learn from varying interpretations of the doctrine of the *at onement* which are found in different periods in the history of the Christian theological

⁵³ Anatolios, *Deification through the Cross*, 338.

⁵⁴ Anatolios, *Deification through the Cross*, 338.

⁵⁵ See Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003), chapters 14 and 15.

tradition, but I have not adopted wholesale any one of them, not even that of Aquinas.... I am not either presupposing or defending Aquinas's interpretation of the doctrine."⁵⁶ Yet Aquinas appears in one way or another on nearly every page.

Stump divides theories of the atonement into two categories: theories that argue that God must be placated for human sin (she calls these theories "Anselmian") and theories that argue that humans must be changed in themselves (she calls these theories "Thomistic"). The "Anselmian" theories refer above all to the divine justice or the divine honor, which requires the payment of a penalty or a debt in order to be "satisfied" – a payment that the merciful God himself pays. The "Thomistic" theories refer above all to the fallenness of the human will, which is turned away from God and is in need of God's healing grace. By his love and grace exhibited on the Cross, Christ offers "a bridge that spans the gap between the condition in which sinful human beings find themselves ... and the desired union with God."⁵⁷ Or as Stump puts the matter at the end of her book, describing her own "Thomistic" theory of atonement that she calls "the Marian interpretation": "[T]he atonement of Christ is the unquenchable love of God offered to all the suffering, the self-alienated, and the evil, so that in their own beauty they might be at peace with themselves and with others and at home in the love of God."⁵⁸

To my mind, Stump has correctly identified an element of Aquinas's understanding of Christ's Cross, but she has overlooked or rejected other elements that Aquinas includes. Her polarity between "Thomistic" and "Anselmian" is unhelpful, partly because Peter Abelard's position is much more like Stump's than is Aquinas's. Still, this does not take away from the fact that Aquinas's Christology – linked

⁵⁶ Eleonore Stump, *Atonement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 14.

⁵⁷ Stump, *Atonement*, 37.

⁵⁸ Stump, *Atonement*, 411.

with his doctrine of God, anthropology, and theology of grace – plays a highly significant role in Stump’s stimulating book.

Stump’s student Timothy Pawl has published two works on Christology that contain significant engagement with Aquinas: *In Defense of Conciliar Christology* (2016) and *In Defense of Extended Conciliar Christology* (2019).⁵⁹ Aquinas is a significant presence in the first volume and even more so in the second. Both volumes mount arguments employing analytic philosophy in order to show that the basic claims of classical Christological orthodoxy are intelligible. Pawl has recourse to the documents of the early Councils and to patristic theologians, but his favored interlocutor is Aquinas. In *In Defense of Extended Conciliar Christology*, he addresses various problems treated by Aquinas, including whether there could have been multiple Incarnations, Christ’s interim state, Christ’s freedom, Christ’s temptation, and Christ’s knowledge. In *In Defense of Conciliar Christology*, he asks whether it is intelligible to argue that an immutable God could become man, whether a divine Person could intelligibly subsist in two natures (divine and human), and whether Christ really is a unity. Pawl argues, “Aquinas’s incarnational theology is robustly metaphysical.... Showing that a Thomistic view of the Incarnation can survive philosophical objections suggests that other, less robust views can survive, too.”⁶⁰ Pawl’s books are not Thomistic Christology per se, but their ample use of Aquinas within an analytic-theology defense of the claims of conciliar Christology shows the significance of Thomistic Christology within the field of analytic theology.

In three lengthy books, Olivier-Thomas Venard has constructively reflected upon Aquinas’s theology of the Word. The titles

⁵⁹ See Timothy Pawl, *In Defense of Conciliar Christology: A Philosophical Essay* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) and *In Defense of Extended Conciliar Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁶⁰ Pawl, *In Defense of Extended Conciliar Christology*, 10.

of his books show his literary and hermeneutical emphasis, which he grounds in a metaphysics of the Word: *Littérature et théologie*, *La langue de l'ineffable*, and *Pagina sacra*.⁶¹ For English-speaking readers, selections from these books have recently appeared as *A Poetic Christ: Thomist Reflections on Scripture, Language and Reality*. Consider for example the selection that appears as “Towards a Poetic Christology.” Venard asks, “Is the admirable literary complexity of the New Testament merely the result of clever rhetorical propaganda which then calls for deconstruction, or did Jesus himself lay the foundations of this literary complexity in the course of his ministry?”⁶² In answering this question, Venard turns especially to the Gospel of John but also to Aquinas. Aquinas helps him to demonstrate “the extensive fittingness between the mystery of the incarnation and the being and functionality of the sign.”⁶³ In Venard’s work, the Christology of Aquinas’s *Commentary on John* plays a particularly important role. He brings Aquinas’s Christology into dialogue with postmodern theorists of the sign, and he reflects upon the relationship between the Incarnation of the Word and the various human modes of participating in the incarnate Word and in the Word as such. Here Aquinas’s Christology becomes important for the project of rethinking hermeneutics in general and biblical exegesis in particular.

Simon Francis Gaine’s *Did the Saviour See the Father? Christ, Salvation and the Vision of God* stands out for its broad defense of Aquinas’s position on Christ’s knowledge. Gaine critiques the ways in which some fellow Thomists, such as Jacques Maritain

⁶¹ See Olivier-Thomas Venard, O.P., *Littérature et théologie. Une saison en enfer* (Geneva: Ad Solem, 2002), *La langue de l'ineffable. Essai sur le fondement théologique de la métaphysique* (Geneva: Ad Solem, 2004), and *Pagina sacra. Le passage de l'Écriture sainte à l'écriture théologique* (Paris: Cerf, 2009).

⁶² Olivier-Thomas Venard, O.P., *A Poetic Christ: Thomist Reflections on Scripture, Language and Reality*, trans. Kenneth Oakes and Francesca Aran Murphy (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 64.

⁶³ Venard, *A Poetic Christ*, 65.

and Jean-Hervé Nicolas, have modified Aquinas's account. What especially makes Gaine's book interesting is his insistence that Aquinas's view of Christ's beatific vision does not pose problems for Christ's growth in acquired knowledge and does not require to be "translated" into concepts via infused knowledge.⁶⁴ In dialogue with a wide range of contemporary theologians and biblical scholars, Gaine shows that Aquinas's teaching in this domain is much worthier of consideration than is generally supposed today.

The work of Emmanuel Durand also deserves attention here. Christ's Person and work receive a central place in Durand's understanding of providence in his *Évangile et Providence*, where he devotes a chapter to Aquinas's approach to providence. Aquinas offers a richly metaphysical account of divine providence in the *prima pars*; but Durand points out that for Aquinas, it is also the case that "faith in divine providence acquires a considerable importance because it implicitly contains faith in Christ the Redeemer."⁶⁵ Influenced by Thomistic Christology as well as by the perspectives of other thinkers and by his own constructive biblical theology, Durand concludes by articulating the doctrine of divine providence in a fully Trinitarian key. Further works by Durand make a similarly constructive use of Thomistic Christology, as for instance his *L'Offre universelle du salut en Christ*.⁶⁶

In *Ecce Homo: On the Divine Unity of Christ*, Aaron Riches offers an extensive survey of the patristic developments arising from the challenge of Nestorianism. He then takes up Aquinas's Christology to address problems such as the *esse* or being of Christ and the theandric action of Christ. As he says, "Thomas Aquinas's discovery

⁶⁴ See Simon Francis Gaine, O.P., *Did the Saviour See the Father? Christ, Salvation and the Vision of God* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

⁶⁵ Emmanuel Durand, O.P., *Évangile et Providence: Une théologie de l'action de Dieu* (Paris: Cerf, 2014), 179.

⁶⁶ See Emmanuel Durand, O.P., *L'Offre universelle du salut en Christ* (Paris: Cerf, 2012).

of the conciliar texts of Ephesus, Chalcedon, and Constantinople II confirmed his own highly unitive doctrine of the hypostatic union.”⁶⁷ He shows how deeply Aquinas’s thought converged with the anti-Nestorian perspective of the Greek Fathers. Aquinas was fighting a Nestorian drift in the medieval West, and he employed Cyril and John of Damascus to hone his Christology. The influence of the Second Council of Constantinople increasingly appears in Aquinas’s writings, in particular through the doctrine that the union takes place according to subsistence, so that Christ only has one person and one subsistence. Riches explores how Constantinople III shapes Aquinas’s account of Christ’s two wills and two operations. He praises Aquinas’s understanding of the instrumentality of the human nature of Christ, which allows Aquinas to affirm that “Jesus works divine things humanly” and “theandrically.”⁶⁸ Riches also addresses Aquinas’s theology of Christ’s suffering in light of Christ’s beatific vision, and he advocates a reading of Aquinas’s position that fits with what Anatolios terms “coinherence”: “[T]he *maximos dolores* suffered by Jesus are internal to the *fruitio beata* he nevertheless enjoys.”⁶⁹ Riches’s work is an immensely stimulating dogmatic Christology that is as Eastern as it is Thomistic.

In addition, Aquinas’s Christology has recently been praised by Catholic scholars as diverse as Aidan Nichols, Denys Turner, and Bernard McGinn.⁷⁰ But arguably the most significant contemporary retrieval of Aquinas’s Christology is Thomas Joseph White’s *The Incarnate Lord*. Guy Mansini has noted that in the neoscholastic

⁶⁷ Aaron Riches, *Ecce Homo: On the Divine Unity of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 155.

⁶⁸ Riches, *Ecce Homo*, 185.

⁶⁹ Riches, *Ecce Homo*, 202.

⁷⁰ See Aidan Nichols, O.P., *Discovering Aquinas: An Introduction to His Life, Work and Influence* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2002); Denys Turner, *Thomas Aquinas: A Portrait* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013); Bernard McGinn, *Thomas Aquinas’s “Summa Theologiae”: A Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

period, Catholic Christology was essentially an in-house theological affair in which a large role was played by Aquinas. The great figures of the *Ressourcement* movement brought an end to this in-house Christology, but the Christologies of the *Ressourcement* theologians also have deficiencies. As Mansini sees it, what was needed was to retrieve Aquinas's Christology and thus also, to some degree, neoscholastic Christology – but now in dialogue with biblical scholarship, with the great *Ressourcement* thinkers, and with Protestant and Orthodox Christologies. It is this task that White's *The Incarnate Lord* undertakes.⁷¹

In his book, White proposes that a metaphysically rich, explicitly creedal outlook of the kind modeled by Aquinas is necessary for a Catholic Christology. Without metaphysical realism and analogous speech about God,⁷² it will be impossible to speak suitably about either the human nature or divine nature of Christ, let alone about their unity-in-distinction in Christ's divine Person. White shows that Scripture itself presumes an ontology,⁷³ both with regard to Christ's preexistence as Creator and Lord and with regard to his human nature. Likewise, the "hypostatic union" is not a Greek imposition upon the New Testament but rather is an affirmation arising out of the New Testament's testimony to Christ as the

⁷¹ See Guy Mansini, O.S.B., "Christology in Context: Review Essay of Thomas Joseph White, O.P., *The Incarnate Lord*," *Nova et Vetera* 14 (2016): 1271–91.

⁷² For further background and a constructive proposal (engaging in a detailed way with leading twentieth-century Catholic perspectives in light of Martin Heidegger's critique of ontotheology), see Thomas Joseph White, O.P., *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity: A Study in Thomistic Natural Theology*, 2nd ed. (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2016). For White's assessment of the positions of Barth, Przywara, and others, see White, "Introduction: The *Analogia Entis* Controversy and Its Contemporary Significance," in *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Antichrist or the Wisdom of God?*, ed. Thomas Joseph White, O.P. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 1–31.

⁷³ See also – on how to read Exodus 3:14 (and thus the "I am" passages in the Gospel of John, although these passages also draw upon the Septuagint version of Isaiah) – Thomas Joseph White, O.P., *Exodus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2016), 35–44, 292–304.

incarnate Lord. Metaphysical realism about human nature is not imposed by philosophically minded Christians upon Scripture but rather flows from the New Testament's "presupposition ... that Christ shared in some way in what is common to Adam and all other human beings, the natural form or essence that is possessed by each."⁷⁴ This is not simply a Thomistic claim but one made by the Council of Chalcedon, and New Testament Christology makes no sense without it.⁷⁵

What about the notion that the one divine Person, the Son of God, acts through his two natures? White points to Philippians 2:5–11, among other passages, as evidence that this credal claim derives from the New Testament. The very questions that Aquinas addresses at his most "metaphysical" in the *tertia pars* arise from Scripture and require to be addressed if the New Testament portrait of Jesus is to be intelligible.

In his chapters, White takes up themes that track the order of topics in the *tertia pars*: the hypostatic union, the grace of Christ, the knowledge of Christ, the obedience of Christ, the Cross, Christ's death and descent in hell, and the Resurrection. While all of his chapters are important, I will here pay attention in particular to his "Prolegomenon: Is a Modern Thomistic Christology Possible?" and his "Conclusion: The Promise of Thomism: Why Christology Is Not Primarily a Historical Science." These bookends of *The Incarnate Lord* go to the very heart of the contemporary debates.

White's "Prolegomenon" argues that if Thomistic Christology is *not* possible, this must be because Schleiermacher and Barth, in

⁷⁴ Thomas Joseph White, O.P., *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 17.

⁷⁵ White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 19. Or as White later comments: "If we are capable of thinking theologically by grace about the reality of the incarnation, then a necessary presupposition of this fact is that we are naturally capable of thinking philosophically about the creator by way of analogical terms drawn from the creation. In other words, orthodox Christology is in no way reducible to natural theology, but it is also not possible without it" (26).

their distinct ways, are correct that Chalcedonian doctrine must now be reinterpreted in a postmetaphysical way. Accepting the early historical-critical view that Jesus cannot rightly be thought of in Chalcedonian terms, Schleiermacher argues that Jesus still has theological significance insofar as he exemplifies the intensification of human religious consciousness and brings this consciousness to its highest point. On this view, elements such as Christ's virgin birth, Resurrection, and Ascension can be reinterpreted for what they say about Jesus' exemplary religious consciousness and its impact upon ours. Jesus' divinity can be reinterpreted in terms of his followers' experience of his profound God-consciousness. White sums up the methodological presupposition: "Historical study of Jesus in what is presupposed to be a post-metaphysical age permits us to recover anew the truth of Christianity that lies behind the artifices of ontological doctrine."⁷⁶

Against Schleiermacher, Barth argues that historical-critical studies cannot get at the truth of Jesus, which is given by the Scriptures and by the community's obedience in faith to the living Lord Jesus. Barth rejects speculation about Jesus' consciousness. Yet, White argues that Barth cannot avoid the problem identified by Schleiermacher. If classical metaphysics is false, then Chalcedonian claims – whose intelligibility is inseparable from metaphysical realism – cannot stand. Absent metaphysical realism, it necessarily follows that "the *transcendence* of God incarnate as it is understood *to be revealed in Christ* is in fact something the mind simply does not have the capacity to entertain intellectually," since we can "only conceive of the presence of the divine *in this world* univocally."⁷⁷

White's argument is that the rejection of the power of the human mind to think metaphysically, and thereby to think intelligibly about transcendent divinity and about the distinction between the human nature and the divine nature of Christ, cripples Christology.

⁷⁶ White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 37.

⁷⁷ White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 47.

The solution must be to retrieve some form of Thomistic Christology – whether or not it is labeled “Thomistic.” White draws from Balthasar’s book *The Theology of Karl Barth*, in which Balthasar shows that (in White’s words) “a natural ontology and metaphysical theology are possible and even necessary within the framework of a Christological doctrine of the God-world analogy and a Catholic consideration of the relations of nature and grace.”⁷⁸ White’s argument is somewhat different: He defends the possibility of natural theology (i.e., classical metaphysics) on the Christological grounds that such metaphysical range turns out to be necessary for the intelligibility of Christ as the incarnate Lord. White emphasizes that Christ does not differ from us fundamentally in terms of his human powers, for example, his human consciousness; rather he differs from us fundamentally in his “primary actuality” or “substantial being,” his personhood rather than his operations.⁷⁹ For Christology, then, it is necessary to insist that “the union of God and man in Christ is substantial and not accidental. It takes place within the subsistent person of the Word, and not in the accidental operations of the man Jesus.”⁸⁰ Only in this way can we truly say that the eternal Word has become incarnate. This path requires the ability to distinguish ontologically the divine and human natures and operations of Christ.

Historical study and knowledge of God by faith both have a place in Christology, but the latter (faith’s knowledge) will be foundational, because it is the latter that attains “to the deepest ontological core of his person,” important though “the empirical, historical-cultural conditions” of the life of Christ are.⁸¹ As an

⁷⁸ White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 62n58.

⁷⁹ White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 62–63.

⁸⁰ White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 64. White notes further, “Neither Barth nor Schleiermacher, however, grasps adequately this analogical distinction, and so both think *univocally* about the being-in-act of operations (Jesus’s consciousness of religious dependence, Christ’s human obedience) as in some way equivalent with or susceptible to signifying formally the being in act of substantial being (the subsistent person of Christ in his unity of being with the Father)” (65).

⁸¹ White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 58.

example, White offers historical-critical reconstructions of the sacrificial meaning of Jesus' death, including reconstructions of Jesus' own view of his death. These reconstructions are plausible and valuable, but they cannot *prove* what Jesus thought he was doing. They assist faith's knowledge of the incarnate Lord, but they do not provide its foundation. White also observes that Christology must speak about the "ontological ground of unity between Christ and the Father," given that Christ's consciousness reflects his status as the incarnate Lord who "has come to us in human nature to reveal to us the inner life of God the Trinity, and to call us to himself in the eventual vision of the divine essence."⁸²

Let me now describe White's "Conclusion: The Promise of Thomism: Why Christology Is Not Primarily a Historical Science." The last subtitle says it all. As a historical enterprise, Christology begins with a study of the New Testament, then turns to the Fathers, the medievals, and so on, eventually arriving at the current debates within systematic theology. This approach presumes progress in reflection and also presumes that history itself can be the standard for what is enduringly true doctrine about Christ. Yet, history is always told by a particular narrator who values some elements more than others. The question therefore becomes pressing: What is the standard for truth about Christ? One may answer: dogma. But as soon as this is done, then it becomes clear that history is not the fundamental science involved; rather, the guiding science turns out to be *sacra doctrina*, "informed by supernatural faith in the teachings of scripture and the Catholic church."⁸³ Christology has to do with a historical reality and makes use of historical studies, but Christology interprets that history – explains its meaning – "in light of what unifies and transcends historical existence," namely, God.⁸⁴

⁸² White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 68. White concludes, "Thomistic theology invites us to overcome a problematic modern opposition between Christological ontology and the anthropological dimension of theology" (68–69).

⁸³ White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 468.

⁸⁴ White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 469.

White therefore seeks to reclaim a “scholastic” approach – a dogmatic, metaphysically rich Christology, “not disinterested in the most subtle indications of historical learning but above all marked (in and through such considerations) by the study of the intrinsic essence and content of the mystery of Christ.”⁸⁵ I agree with this project, though in the present book I place emphasis on “in and through such [historical] considerations.” It seems to me that a new scholastic Christology will need to be sure to avoid mere proof-texting of scriptural and other sources; it will need to be sure to give ample room to the voice and narratives of Scripture and to the arguments (rather than simply the conclusions) of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. In addition, a new scholastic Christology will need to be ecumenically oriented, as White’s is. Earlier scholasticisms (like modern antischolasticisms) have sometimes been too quick to dismiss opponents.

White contrasts his viewpoint with that of Edward Schillebeeckx, who holds that the truth claims made by Christians are absolute only within a particular historical context and may have to be reformulated substantively in later historical contexts. The result for Schillebeeckx is that Christology is fundamentally a historical discipline and nothing more, since “there is no access to trans-historical truths of Christology that are simply available to every age.”⁸⁶ The key question in Christology becomes, then, what Christ means or should mean for us today, with “today” receiving a decisive role. It follows that every epoch reflects, in its Christology, its own faith experience of God.

As White points out, Schillebeeckx does not hesitate to interpret Jesus from within the faith experience of the time when

⁸⁵ White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 469.

⁸⁶ White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 477. For further background and a constructive path forward, see Thomas Joseph White, O.P., “The Precarity of Wisdom: Modern Dominican Theology, Perspectivalism, and the Tasks of Reconstruction,” in *Ressourcement Thomism: Sacred Doctrine, the Sacraments, and the Moral Life. Essays in Honor of Romanus Cessario, O.P.*, ed. Reinhard Hüter and Matthew Levering (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 92–123.

Schillebeeckx was writing. On this view, a relevant Christology is one that is in solidarity with the political movements of liberation within and outside the Church. Christology becomes, fundamentally, an ethical praxis that changes and develops in accord with the supposed march of history.⁸⁷

White shows that Schillebeeckx's project neglects a fundamental challenge to postmetaphysical modernity. Namely, how do we know that texts themselves "have some intrinsic signification that can be measured by external realities," rather than having signification imposed upon them by "interpreters"?⁸⁸ Furthermore, how do we know even that there *are* "interpreters" or stable selves, or indeed any stable realities or values whatsoever? To Friedrich Nietzsche and others, many modern thinkers are guilty of importing a metaphysics according to which there exist real and identifiable referents of texts. The alternative is that texts are fundamentally collections of linguistic signs that refer simply to desires, especially the desire for power. From a Nietzschean perspective, the question is as follows: If doctrine simply expresses a particular era's religious sensibilities, then how do we know that doctrine is not simply the expression of the will to power, rather than expressing "truth" at all? Likewise, if consciousness is reducible to culture (or prevalent semiotic signs) rather than to a "self," then how do we know that a particular set of cultural values are more than arbitrary? White points out, "If our hermeneutics are those of Nietzsche, then the

⁸⁷ As White says, "The hermeneuticist recovers the truth of the past by 'going forward' into new horizons of political praxis, in the name of the Gospel. The truth in question is a radically historicized one. Now unusable doctrinal concepts of a past historical age are studied in view of the elaboration of new theological concepts of the future. God is himself in some sense the subject at the heart of the church's historical life who safeguards the inner workings of this process. The church mediates the ongoing sacramental expression of a perpetual divine-human encounter by taking up into herself the ongoing dialectic of human conversation regarding truth" (White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 480).

⁸⁸ White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 481.

theological guilds that seek to challenge received doctrinal tradition through a series of ‘progressive’ and ‘empowering’ discourses are themselves adopting a morally arbitrary stance. They too give voice to a will to power.”⁸⁹ White shows that the alternative is to retrieve metaphysics – real existential referents, real natures, and (in the Christian domain) real dogmatic truth.

Schillebeeckx’s disciple Claude Geffré, recognizing the Nietzschean problematic, argued that the solution consists in granting that one’s own perspective is relative and thereby insisting that no one interpretation of Christianity can have hegemony.⁹⁰ But, as White observes, Geffré has not perceived the true problem. For example, Geffré continued to refer to the “Spirit,” but to whom or what is Geffré referring? The Personal status of the Spirit in the tri-Personal God was affirmed by the Council of Constantinople and belongs to Catholic dogma, but not if this is merely a contextual claim that cannot have hegemony over other opposite claims made before, during, and since the Council of Constantinople. Furthermore, in insisting that no one interpretation of Christianity may have hegemony, has not Geffré asserted hegemony over interpretations of Christianity that affirm the hegemonic truth of a particular interpretation? In repudiating the legitimacy of hegemonic claims, Geffré is making one himself. In such a situation, continuing with the project of dogmatic or systematic theology is useless; one might as well admit that in doing so, one is simply staking out a power-claim, not a truth claim about anything extrinsic to the “self.”

As White comments, therefore, perspectivalism in theology does no more than conceal its metaphysics, namely, its teleological “ontology that emphasizes either the normativity of the inclusive political good or the celebration of the will to power.”⁹¹ It turns out to be

⁸⁹ White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 483.

⁹⁰ See Claude Geffré, *The Risk of Interpretation: On Being Faithful to the Christian Tradition in a Non-Christian Age*, trans. David Smith (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).

⁹¹ White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 485.

impossible to narrate the history of theology, no matter how much one rejects enduring dogma and metaphysical realism, without some tacit account of enduring realities, such as “human nature, political justice, grammar, language, human volition, and so forth.”⁹² It follows that a “scholastic” theology – understood as a theology that makes enduring truth claims about reality, rather than simply canvassing historical opinions or modes of political praxis – is inevitable.

This should not surprise us. The human mind is made for knowing being, and there would be no possibility of speaking about intelligible historical change unless there were in fact “realities that exist and that have essences and properties.”⁹³ History as such, then, cannot have primacy. Even the study of ideas is not merely a study of flux, since to identify their intelligible content “we must be able to identify what is *essential* or *determinate* in the ideas under consideration.”⁹⁴ And since the narrator of any history produces his or her narrative with an end in view, the narrator thereby not only confirms the existence of teleology but also reminds us that human nature seeks various ends and that these ends or goods are inevitably evaluated in terms of a hierarchy of goods. Indeed, even Nietzsche’s scorched-earth critique of

⁹² White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 485.

⁹³ White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 486. White goes on to say, along Aristotelian lines that seem incontrovertible to both him and me: “The mind cannot fail to note that some existents are distinct from others ... and that the natures and characteristics of diverse realities cannot be attributed to them in simultaneously contrary senses under the same aspects at the same time.... Our implicit use of the principle of non-contradiction denotes that we perceive a world of formally determined realities that have various properties” (488). Further, White explains that “there is a distinction in all the realities we experience between ontological potency and being-in-act” (491), and he shows that in understanding realities in time (realities that are changing) “we must first grasp that these realities exist and have a given nature,” a nature that in this sense “transcends” time (492). Otherwise, we could not measure change in the reality under examination. White concludes that “the objects of reason are not determined uniquely by the processes of temporal change. The intellect attains to ‘that which exists,’ and that which exists possesses an essential form” (492).

⁹⁴ White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 493.

teleology as an illusion continually inquired into why things are as they are (final causality) and urged people to pursue certain goals. Metaphysical realism, no matter how sternly rejected, turns up ever anew.

Returning to Christology, White observes that Jesus Christ is universally relevant for all human beings because he is the God-man, he is the Redeemer, and he has risen from the dead. These points fit with the principles of metaphysical realism: Jesus exists, he can be known in his essential identity, and he acts with an ultimate end. It follows that the Incarnation, the Cross, and the Resurrection will be at the heart of a Christology that has universal relevance. When Christians believe in these realities, they are able to understand in a deeper way the conclusions of the natural sciences about the cosmos – since Christ reveals its purpose – and they are able to integrate the reconstructions about Jesus offered by historians. Through faith in Christ, they are also able to describe the fallenness of humanity in light of its healing by Christ and its ultimate consummation in Christ. White concludes that Thomistic Christology is both speculative and practical, oriented “toward knowledge and enjoyment of the Trinity.”⁹⁵ Ultimately, Thomistic Christology is wisdom, since in Christ “we come to find rest in a wisdom that surpasses ourselves, and which redeems our human history and our personal lives in time, but which also orients us toward the world to come.”⁹⁶

1.3 Conclusion

In the above, I have sought to sketch the emergence in recent decades of a new historically informed, ecumenically valuable, and

⁹⁵ White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 507.

⁹⁶ White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 509.

dogmatically constructive Thomistic Christology.⁹⁷ This movement emerged, in fact, just as the death knell of Thomistic Christology was sounding. There is good reason even to think that this renewed Thomistic Christology may sound the death knell of the modern Christology that had attempted to bury it. Ecumenically, the contributions of Reformed and Anglican theologians to this informal “movement” stand out, ensuring that contemporary Thomistic Christology is not solely the province of Catholic dogmaticians.⁹⁸ Although Eastern Orthodox theologians have yet to tap into Aquinas’s Christology, A. N. Williams’s observation certainly includes Christology: “The ground that Aquinas and Palamas share is vast compared to the points at which they diverge.”⁹⁹

More could be said about this movement of contemporary Thomistic Christology. For example, the contributions surveyed above could be organized more systematically. They represent different guiding principles for soteriology. Some of the authors focus on the hypostatic union; some on the two natures of Christ; some on Spirit Christology, inclusive of Christ’s “capital” grace and his perfection of knowledge; and some on Christ’s meritorious life and death as the principle of redemption. It would be

⁹⁷ A further instance of the impressive renewal in Thomistic Christology has just recently appeared, in a volume containing many richly informative and constructive essays: see Michael Dauphinais, Andrew Hofer, O.P., and Roger W. Nutt, eds., *Thomas Aquinas and the Crisis of Christology* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2021).

⁹⁸ For historical parallels, see Manfred Svensson and David VanDrunen, eds., *Aquinas among the Protestants* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017); and Matthew Levering and Marcus Plested, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception of Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021). For Orthodox contributions to this history, see, in addition to the relevant chapters of *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception of Aquinas*, Marcus Plested’s *Orthodox Readings of Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). See also two works that could have profitably been added to this chapter, although their focus is not Christology per se: Charles Raith II, *Aquinas and Calvin on Romans: God’s Justification and Our Participation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Edgardo Colón-Emeric, *Wesley, Aquinas, and Christian Perfection: An Ecumenical Dialogue* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009).

⁹⁹ Williams, *The Ground of Union*, 175.

worthwhile to compare these perspectives with the guiding principles of other contemporary Christologies, so as to show still more clearly why this movement is of constructive importance. Exploring in more detail the various Thomistic Christological emphases would also strengthen my case that the typological Christologies truly refer to the ontological reality of Christ and his saving work, rather than being mere metaphors or implausible stories.

In addition, expanding the above discussion of contemporary Thomistic Christology could assist in demonstrating how the New Testament typologies themselves enrich our understanding of Christ and salvation. The “kingdom of God,” the “new exodus,” and the renewed Temple can be expressed in ontological terms. But it adds something crucial to express them in narrative-typological terms. The typologies help to connect us with the historical figure of Jesus and to enable us to appreciate the various dimensions of our discipleship to, and sacramental inclusion in, Christ’s Pasch as members of the “Israel of God” (Gal 6:16). The typologies help to ensure that ontological reflection on Jesus Christ and salvation does not float free of the late Second Temple context in which Jesus lived and in which the New Testament took shape. The typologies also make clear that Jesus is not merely “the perfect *homo religiosus*” but rather is the incarnate Lord bringing salvation history to its goal.¹⁰⁰ As Bruce Marshall emphasizes, his are “the actions and sufferings of the Word of power who upholds all things.”¹⁰¹

In his *Heavenly Participation*, Hans Boersma remarks, “Time and time again, the church fathers and medieval theologians explained the events reported in the Old Testament as ‘future mysteries’ (*futura mysteria*) or ‘future sacraments’ (*futura sacramenta*),

¹⁰⁰ Bruce D. Marshall, “God Almighty in the Flesh: Christology and the Crisis of Faith,” in *Thomas Aquinas and the Crisis of Christology*, 345–67, at 348.

¹⁰¹ Marshall, “God Almighty in the Flesh,” 349.

referring to Jesus Christ and to the church.”¹⁰² It was not only the Fathers and medievals who did this; the New Testament did so too in its literal sense regarding Jesus. This shared pattern explains why Aquinas’s own writings are seamlessly filled with so many references to Scripture and the Fathers, including the typological portraits of Jesus the New Adam, New Isaac, New Moses, New Joshua, and New David. Thus, my “reconfiguring” of Thomistic Christology depends upon the fact that Aquinas’s own metaphysical and dogmatic Christology is already figurally rich. If Thomistic Christology is to be reconfigured, therefore, it cannot be reconfigured in such a way as to imperil the metaphysical and dogmatic insights that I have noted in this chapter. A test for whether my proposal succeeds will be its reception among the theologians whose works I have examined above.

In the following five chapters, I explain my typological path for adding a more explicitly eschatological inflection to contemporary Thomistic Christology, building upon and augmenting Aquinas’s reflections on Adam, Isaac, Moses, Joshua, and David as figures of Jesus Christ. Piotr Roszak and Jürgen Vijgen point out, “The typically modern separation of speculative theology and biblical exegesis is foreign to the mind of Thomas Aquinas.”¹⁰³ Aquinas learned this unity from the Church Fathers, who made frequent recourse to the New Testament’s typological–eschatological portraits of Jesus. In this regard, the path that I propose involves encouraging contemporary Thomistic Christology to follow even more fully the example set by Aquinas himself.

¹⁰² Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 39.

¹⁰³ Piotr Roszak and Jürgen Vijgen, “Introduction,” in *Towards a Biblical Thomism: Thomas Aquinas and the Renewal of Biblical Theology*, ed. Piotr Roszak and Jürgen Vijgen (Pamplona: EUNSA, 2018), 11–20, at 11.