



BOOK REVIEW

## Matthew Levering, *Reconfiguring Thomistic Christology* (Cambridge: CUP, 2023), pp. x + 331. \$110.00

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It is no secret that academic theology has become largely compartmentalised. The reasons for which are well-documented. The explosion of information in the past two centuries has encouraged a certain modesty of scope among scholars. As many have chosen to stay within the narrowing bounds of their methodological competence, we have witnessed a move towards hyper-specialisation in the theological guild. When combined with the felt need for novelty (issuing from hiring policy and publication pressures), we arrive at the current state of highly learned quasi-disintegration in the discipline. It's every man and woman for his or her theological (or non-theological) self.

In *Reconfiguring Thomistic Christology*, Matthew Levering proposes a way forward. His work concerns the enhancement of dogmatic theology, specifically Christology pursued within the contemporary Thomistic school, by a fuller recovery of its biblical foundation and inspiration. While the Angelic Doctor himself profited immensely from the study of sacred scripture, the Thomistic school, with its penchant for technical language and precise distinction, has, at times, profited less from the biblical text.

On the one hand, this tendency is understandable. The general move to hyper-specialisation is especially conspicuous in biblical studies. The requisite mastery of various domains, ranging from ancient Near Eastern languages to literary theory and from archaeology to exegesis, has made the discipline increasingly forbidding to the non-specialist. And so many, even many within the theological guild, relegate themselves to biblical silence rather than prove themselves biblical bumpkins.

On the other hand, this tendency is intolerable. Scripture remains 'the soul of sacred theology' (*Dei Verbum* §24), supplying the lifeblood of the whole theological enterprise. 'For the life of the flesh is in the blood' (Lev 17:11). So, while the Thomist may despair of mastery in all matters of biblical wisdom, he has no choice but to engage it, at least so long as he hopes to engender *life*. And if theology is in some way ordered to Christ-conformity, then biblical studies ought to inform its practice of receiving the life of Christ.

In his book Levering proposes *typology* as an entrée to biblical wisdom. The choice may seem strange, as some exegetes have argued that typology distracts from the historicity of the biblical text. Levering argues that this is wrong-headed. Typology, he contends, reads sacred scripture in deference to the divine intention at work in sacred history. For, is not God both provident Creator and sacred Author, disposing all things strongly and sweetly even as he reveals his purpose on the sacred page?

In successive chapters Levering explains how Christ fulfils five different Old Testament types: he is the New Adam, New Isaac, New Moses, New Joshua and New

David. He argues further that Christ – provident Creator and sacred Author – *intends* these fulfilments for the purpose of a divine pedagogy (or even mystagogy). In effect, Levering has chosen these titles because Christ has chosen these titles. Thus, they – the titles and the realities they mediate – afford keen insight into the very dispensation of salvation and so enrich theological inquiry.

The bulk of the book is dedicated to defending the historicity and applicability of these five titles. Levering shows, with the help of contemporary biblical scholarship, how each title appears in the literal sense of the biblical text. He shows further how the fathers received this biblical teaching. He shows next how St. Thomas, as a reader of sacred scripture and student of the fathers, appreciates each title in his biblical commentaries and theological treatises. Finally, he suggests how typology might feature yet more prominently in our reading of the theology of St. Thomas and in the Thomistic school. His intention is not so much to ‘add’ a biblical theology to an otherwise unbiblical theological synthesis, as to show how it affords access to the most basic intelligibility of Christ’s words and deeds and so offers privileged resources for a renewal of Thomistic Christology.

Clearly, Levering has succeeded in holding these disciplines together in himself. He has dedicated his life, in part, to the task. But his intention is not simply to demonstrate that the reconfiguration can be accomplished; his intention is to inspire and communicate it. Hopefully, as members of the theological guild look up from the limited fare on offer in their disciplines, they will find in Levering’s work an invitation to greater abundance, for Wisdom ‘has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table’ (Prov 9:2).

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