

The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology. By Thomas Joseph White, OP. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015. xiv + 534 pages. \$65.00.
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Neo-Scholasticism fell upon hard times in the wake of Vatican II, but recent years have seen the emergence of a group of soi-disant “ressourcement Thomists” determined to regain for the Common Doctor the place of privilege in Catholic theology accorded him by Leo XIII. The present volume, formidable in heft, erudition, and argument, represents a significant moment in that campaign. Thomas Joseph White, professor of systematics at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, DC, assembles a series of essays, many of which appeared previously in *Nova et Vetera* or *The Thomist*, to forge a systematic confrontation with a broad range of representatives of modern Christology. Following the order of the *Pars Tertia* of the *Summa*, he devotes five essays to topics related to the incarnation and another five to topics related to redemption. For each topic he identifies his interlocutor (s), lays out the position he wishes to contest, locates its aporias, and urges the superiority of either Aquinas’ actual treatment of the topic or of one based on Thomist principles. His adversaries, to use the term, are no straw men; White has read broadly and deeply. While the material is complex, each essay is a model of pedagogical clarity, as White announces what he is about to do, executes it, and then recapitulates the chain of argument.

Aquinas, following up on the Fathers, took the hypostatic union as the first principle of Christology. Modern Christologies, on the other hand, eschew metaphysics, and so both Schleiermacher and Barth look to Christ’s human consciousness rather than his very person as the locus of his union with God. With this move they reduce the grace of union to habitual grace, and White pulls no punches in naming positions of this sort a form of Nestorianism that he finds subtly represented by Rahner’s “hypostatic unity” and overt in Sobrino, Hick, and Dupuis. Again, Rahner’s critique of the notion of pure nature has become standard in modern Christology and has unleashed a chorus of “historically superficial and rhetorically facile shibboleths” (142). Yet, White notes, Rahner’s target was an error that infected Suarez and the Jesuit tradition but was in fact deliberately, and more adequately, countered by a line of Dominican Thomists up to and including Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange.

White returns repeatedly to the theology of Karl Barth to argue that in order to achieve coherence Barth’s valid intuitions in fact require the underpinning of the analogy of being, which Barth misunderstood, and he seeks to rescue Barth’s notion of Christ’s inner Trinitarian obedience by reducing it

to metaphorical status. White also accords Hans Urs von Balthasar great respect—he works “in a profound and beautiful way out of the heart of the Catholic theological tradition” (421)—and yet Balthasar’s position on Christ’s descent into hell “tends toward an overt form of Gnosticism” (428). Far from falling into the sin of despair on the cross, White argues, Christ’s human will clung to the divine will and it is this unity of Christ’s two wills, and not a principle of perfection, that demands that Christ enjoyed the beatific vision. From the beatific vision there flowed that prophetic infused knowledge by which Christ knew his divine identity and was enabled to commit himself to his sacrificial, redemptive mission.

White’s vigorous defense of classic Thomistic Christology and its companion metaphysics can serve as a salutary astringent for contemporary theologians. That Christology stands as a permanent achievement within the Catholic tradition. Leo XIII’s mandate, however, was a call to augment and complete the old with the new—*vetera novis augere at perficere*. White, on the other hand, seems mainly concerned to assert the adequacy of “the great tradition” over against modern novelties. It may be, however, that fidelity to the “great tradition” requires the exercise of more theological functions than the systematics at which Thomas excelled, and that the metaphysics that Thomas forged itself requires a critical grounding. The Catholic Press Association deemed White’s volume best theology book of the year. Garrigou-Lagrange would smile in approval.

WILLIAM P. LOEWE

The Catholic University of America

‘Lex Crucis’: Soteriology and the Stages of Meaning. By William P. Loewe. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016. ix + 381 pages. \$79.00.

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This book represents the cumulative fruit of William Loewe’s scholarly work on soteriology. It covers the work of Irenaeus, Anselm, Aquinas, Luther, Schleiermacher, and Lonergan, taking a developmental perspective on how the question of God’s saving work in Christ has evolved. More than just a historical review of ideas, it delves deeply into what is going forward methodologically and theologically in each of these authors.

Loewe cites the work of Gustav Aulén in the introduction. This reference is apt, since Loewe’s book accomplishes the kind of broad sweep of history that Aulén’s work, *Christus Victor*, did in its day. Published in 1931, Aulén’s book set out a threefold typology of theories of salvation that influenced many generations. *Lex Crucis* does not directly challenge this typology, nor does it