

Christology and Metaphysics in the Seventeenth Century. By Richard Cross. Pp. 368. (Changing Paradigms in Historical and Systematic Theology.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. ISBN 9780192856432. Hardback £75.00.

The theological differences that led to the breakup of European Christendom in the sixteenth century were not in themselves of a Christological nature. Rather, the various confessional writings produced in the century of the Reformation usually mention that there is no dissent among the parties regarding the doctrines of the early Church Councils. It soon turned out, however, that a neat distinction between controversial and uncontroversial doctrines was impossible. After all, the theological key issue at stake was the precise way in which the person of Jesus Christ stood at the centre of the Christian faith. While this initially resulted in sharp disagreements on questions of soteriology, ecclesiology, and sacramental theology, it was inevitable that Christological questions, too, became part of the controversies of the time. While there is hardly a scholarly consensus on how to interpret the Christological debates of the Reformation age, there is no shortage of excellent literature on the topic. The same cannot be said, however, for the following century, and it is for this reason alone that Richard Cross' latest book is to be warmly welcomed by all those interested in the history of this central doctrine of the Christian faith. Cross, who comes to this task arguably better equipped than almost any other living scholar, has himself previously written authoritative studies on Christology during the high medieval and the Reformation periods. In some ways, though, the present volume holds a unique place among the author's prolific output. The sheer amount of primary material he had to integrate and the scarcity of secondary literature for much of what had to be covered makes this a pioneering study in which the author mostly blazes his own trail. In this attempt, Cross relies, apart from his stupendous reading, on his fine-tuned analytical toolset. With admirable perspicuity he follows his authors into their most subtle scholastic distinctions in order to reconstruct from their writings the contours of a debate which until now has remained largely unknown even to many specialists.

The rather surprising result is that for most of the authors Cross investigates, confessional commitments seem to have played at best a minor role in adopting one or the other Christological position. Although Cross groups his authors into conventional categories (Dominicans, Jesuits, Reformed, and Lutherans) and although he observes how members of these groups often (but not always) chose similar options in the contemporaneous Christological disagreements, these decisions do not seem to reflect any wider theological let alone religious commitments typical for these groups. In Cross' telling, the main two types of theories competing at the time had their origins in the thirteenth century. On the one hand, there were what Cross calls 'union theories'. Classically expressed by Duns Scotus, they held that for divinity and humanity to be hypostatically united there had to be something additional, a medium (though there was little agreement on what this was). Their main conceptual rivals, on the other hand, were communion theories which had the authority of Aquinas and assumed that no such medium was necessary to explain the Incarnation. It is fair to say that all the authors examined by Cross drew on one of these theories albeit sometimes in a modified form. Their main work consisted in a series of attempts to address weaknesses and loose ends left over by their forebears while pointing out the flaws in the approach of the opposing camp. In the shadow of the disruptive events of the time, then, these theologians apparently carved out for themselves a space in which the metaphysical minutiae of Christological theory could be investigated and refined far away from the noise of theological, philosophical, and political conflicts.

The only ones to disturb this finely balanced debate to an extent were the Lutherans who in their majority adopted a Christological model at odds with that championed by nearly everybody since the thirteenth century. Rather than accept the so-called subsistence theory

according to which Christ's humanity was merely grafted onto the divine hypostasis of the Logos, they insisted there was a real human being assumed in the Incarnation (*assumptus-homo*-Christology). As Cross shows, this decision had far-reaching consequences as it required that statements predicating divine properties of a human subject ('The Son of Man is omnipotent') implied the actual communication of divine attributes to Christ's humanity rather than, as in the predominant model, simply saying that Christ's humanity participated in God's perfection due to the hypostatic union. To say that Cross is critical of the Lutherans' innovation would be an understatement. In his presentation, the *assumptus-homo* theory causes multiple and ultimately insoluble conceptual problems without any discernible gain for either Christology or metaphysics. It is not even based on the teaching of Luther himself who, Cross maintains, taught a perfectly classical, Scotist Christology. It was, rather, a misreading of a stray remark in one of Luther's *Table Talks* that lured later Lutherans into the adoption of a view originally developed in the sixteenth century by Johannes Brenz, the Swabian Reformer and antihero of Cross' previous book, *Communicatio Idiomatum*.

While Cross does not hold back his indignation regarding this Christology, he is rather more circumspect about what is at stake theologically. Only in passing does he signal his awareness that his rejection of early modern Lutheran Christology affects large parts of modern theology for which, it is fair to say, a concern for Christ's true humanity and a sense that the traditional Christology 'from above' failed to do full justice to this biblical tenet, has been something of an axiomatic truth.

Perhaps one reason for these divergent assessments lies in Cross' specific approach to Christology. As the book's title suggests, he considers the Christological debate from the vantage point of the history of metaphysics. The task of Christology is thus conceived as the growing philosophical clarification of formulae adopted by the Ecumenical Councils. Yet it is arguable that this is only one, and perhaps not the primary way in which doctrinal development ought to be understood. Christology as a whole makes little sense where it is not seen as emerging from attempts to find appropriate language to express the encounter with Jesus Christ as testified by Scripture and experienced in the life of faith. The danger of scholastic approaches past and present lies in their tendency to forget the question to which all Christology ultimately is an answer. The reader of Cross' book can hardly help thinking from time to time about the momentous intellectual transformations of the seventeenth century about which the book, understandably, has little to say: the increasingly radical rejection of traditional Christology among Socinians and Arminians; the improvement of historiographical tools for the study of early Christian doctrine; the rejection of Aristotelian metaphysics on which all the theological schools relied, and so forth. These developments eventually exposed the rather narrow set of presuppositions on which the scholastics erected their impressive conceptual edifices and, rightly, forced Western Christianity to reconsider the historical and spiritual roots from which Christological reflection had originally grown. This broader story is legitimately not part of Cross' book, but it shows that in doctrinal argument metaphysical and logical refinement is part of the toolkit rather than an end in itself. In this sense, the reader will appreciate the highly complex and sophisticated theories introduced in this volume as attempts of perfecting one possible Christological model rather than proof that this particular model is the most appropriate let alone the only viable one. Read in this light, the authors Cross so ably presents in his book have much to offer to theologians who continue to think about the unique significance of the person of Jesus Christ for the fate of humanity.

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