

R E V I E W E S S A Y

Beyond the Historical Jesus:
Embracing Christology in Scripture,
Doctrine, and Ethics¹

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EVERYTHING OLD IS NEW AGAIN.” Indeed. At a recent academic meeting, the keynote speaker, a prominent historian of early Christianity, described the fundamental similarities between voluntary associations in Greco-Roman society and what he called “the early Jesus-groups” in the first three centuries. Ultimately, the speaker questioned whether the practices of Jesus, his customary table-fellowship or even the Last Supper, really informed the ritual of breaking bread and communal eating in early Christianity. He suggested instead that the words of institution were better explained as a contrivance designed to legitimate a ritual that had its origins in the basic drive to commensality and the social practices common in first-century Rome. From the presenter’s perspective, monocausality was fundamentally untenable, and the characteristic practices of Jesus needed to be minimized (though perhaps not totally ignored) as the origins of Christian practices as did any sense of the uniqueness of the early Christian community in relation to other associations in the first-century Greco-Roman world. For the presenter, Jesus did not seem to play a significant role in defining the table-practice of the Christian community. For many of those gathered at the conference, the room seemed to be haunted by the ghost of Bruno Bauer, the nineteenth-century figure who famously argued that the foundation of Christianity rests in Greco-Roman civilization

¹ Special thanks to Julie M. Pomerleau (Seton Academy) and Patricia Sharbaugh (Saint Vincent College) whose insights, corrections, and encouragement helped to improve this essay.

and not a historical individual.² The presenter would certainly have bristled at the notion that he was somehow conjuring the ghost of Bauer, and in fact, his point about the complexities involved in any account of the origins of Christian worship has substantial merit.³ Yet, the presenter's argument also powerfully demonstrates the impact of certain presuppositions of modern historical investigation, which have tended to mute the distinctiveness of Jesus and make more tenuous his connection to the proclamation, not to mention the life, of the Christian community.

It is precisely the integral connection between Jesus and the foundational claims about his religious significance within the Christian tradition that has marked some of the more recent contributions to Christology. Over the past decade, a noticeable shift has taken place, a movement away from a preoccupation with historical Jesus research and its relevance for Christian faith and practice, to a far more organic, systematic, and Christologically centered discussion of the biblical data and its relationship to the dogmatic tradition, and all of this with an eye on the methodological implications of Christological claims have for practical living and even for Christian moral theology.⁴ In other words, at least in some circles, *Geschichte* has given way to *Historie*, to borrow Martin Kähler's well-worn distinction. Though there is no going back to a pre-critical reading of Scripture, historical consciousness has matured beyond the positivism and hubris of the past and has been chastened by the hermeneutical and theological complexities of history, complexities which seem to increasingly demand a reengagement with the Christological tradition and not just historical Jesus research. The following paragraphs present a thoroughly selective *tour d'horizon* of some important developments in Christology over the past few years that reflect this shift with the hope that at least some of these developments may prove salutary for considering the practice of Christian moral theology.

CHRISTOLOGY AND THE GOSPELS

A form of exemplarism has defined the relationship between Christology and moral theology in many quarters. Exemplarism, the sometimes rather simplistic notion that the actions of Jesus function

² See Bruno Bauer, *Christus und die Cäsaren. Der Ursprung des Christentums aus dem römischen Griechentum* (Berlin: E. Grosser, 1877).

³ Paul F. Bradshaw offers a clear and thoughtful account of these complexities in *Reconstructing Early Christian Worship* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2010).

⁴ William P. Loewe aptly summarizes both the merits of as well as the fundamental limitations to historical Jesus research in "From the Humanity of Christ to the Historical Jesus," *Theological Studies* 61.2 (2000): 314-31.

as the benchmark for Christian discipleship and moral reflection, was perhaps best popularized by the WWJD (“What Would Jesus Do?”) movement within more conservative Christian groups in the late 1990s. Within these groups, the biblical witness to the singularity of Jesus as the unique Son of God and the sole agent of salvation, particularly in the Gospels, provided the unquestionable and utterly transparent model for the Christian disciple. At the other end of the spectrum within the Christian community, historical Jesus research, and the corresponding conviction that such research provided a fundamental criterion for Christian thought and practice, tended to cast doubt on the biblical witness concerning Jesus’ singularity and tended to find first-century models or types within which to situate Jesus. Although the Gospels provided the best resource for constructing the historical Jesus, they also imposed seemingly insurmountable obstacles to the construction of a more concrete, historical, and less dogmatic account of Jesus, one that emphasized how Jesus fit into his first-century context, not how he stood out. The so-called “Jesus of history” was consistently contrasted with the “Christ of faith” found in Scripture and the dogmatic tradition. Of course, within the academy, the historical (i.e., non-dogmatic, non-theological) Jesus tended to be the exemplar, while among the devout laity, a much more simplified form of the *imitatio Christi* dominated, one that simply accepted the portraits of Jesus in the Gospels as the model for discipleship. Yet, neither of these forms of exemplarism could stand given the exigencies of critical history, on the one hand, or the doctrinal claims of the Christian tradition on the other. Thus, a variety of concerns have conspired to initiate a bridging of this destructive dichotomy, one that pitted the critical picture of Jesus produced by modern sciences against the portraits of Jesus in the Gospels celebrated in Christian piety, moving these positions into greater contact with one another.

Twenty-five years ago, while still Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Joseph Ratzinger inaugurated an examination of the progress of historical-critical exegesis that culminated in the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s document, “Interpreting the Bible in the Church.”⁵ He has since carried on this reexamination in

⁵ Ratzinger participated in a roundtable discussion on the issue at the Erasmus Institute in New York City with Raymond Brown, Joseph Komonchak, and other luminaries from the American theological scene. For a collection of the remarks made at the conference see, Richard John Neuhaus, ed., *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church*, Encounter Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989). The conversation took place as the Pontifical Biblical Commission was beginning work on “Biblical Interpretation in the Church.” Joseph A. Fitzmyer was on the PBC at the time and wrote an important commentary on the document. See,

his own work, the three-volume *Jesus of Nazareth*, in which he, as a theologian, has offered a reading of the Gospels informed by modern critical biblical scholarship, but nonetheless thoroughly and explicitly theological.⁶ In doing so, the pope hopes to make scholarly exegesis of the New Testament “a theological discipline, without abandoning its historical character,” one that combines a hermeneutics of faith, which recognizes God has done something new in the person of Jesus, with a thoroughly historical hermeneutic responsible to the insights born of the Enlightenment.⁷ As such, Benedict clearly embraces the development of Catholic exegesis articulated at the Second Vatican Council; in other words, he does not simply embrace a pre-critical or dogmatic approach to exegesis and maintains an on-going dialogue with a wide range of exegetes in his footnotes (though he clearly favors exegetes like Feuillet, Schnackenberg, and Gnllka over and against Bultmann and the long shadow he cast over NT studies in the twentieth century).⁸ Benedict seems well aware of the major on-going debates in at least some areas of NT criticism, but he does not get bogged down in those debates.⁹ Rather, Benedict maintains a focus on the theological substance of the Gospels, in part by emphasizing the simple but profound fact that he “trusts the Gospels.”¹⁰ His judgment appears to be that historical criticism, even though its validity endures, has nonetheless already offered most of what it has to offer. The challenge to the exegete then is to make the theological voice of Scripture resonate within the contemporary context as it is read in light of the Christian tradition and the teaching of the Church. To that end, the pope constructs a treatise on the life of Jesus that transcends the categories of biblical criticism (and even those of recent theology), yielding a work that is both somewhat archaic and forward thinking at the same time.

Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Biblical Commission's Document "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church": Text and Commentary*, Subsidia Bilica 19 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1995).

⁶ Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *Jesus of Nazareth*, 3 vols., trans. Adrian J. Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007/2011/2012).

⁷ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 2, xiv.

⁸ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 2, xv.

⁹ He does on occasion spend significant time on historical matters while at times he seems to bypass significant historical issues. For example, the date of the Last Supper receives substantial treatment (*Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 2, 106-114), while the text-critical and historical value of Luke 23:34 (“Father forgive them, they know not what they do”) goes unquestioned and unexamined (*Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 2, 206-208); on the originality of the passage see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 154.

¹⁰ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 1, xxi.

Perhaps novelty or singularity represents the most important theme in Benedict's theological exploration of Jesus through the Gospels (mostly Matthew in volume one and John in volume two). This theme of singularity stands over and against the tendency of historical-critical method to eschew novelty in favor of commonality, situating individuals and events within larger patterns of history. Of course, the pope's move here resonates strongly with traditional doctrinal claims about Christ, and these are played up in both volumes of the book. Many of the claims Benedict makes naturally reflect his own theological sensibilities, and some historians may take issue with these claims. For example, the pope's claim that Jesus changed the world through his separation "of politics from faith, of God's people from politics," resonates strongly with how the Gospels portray Jesus over and against the religious leaders of the day.¹¹ But this position will strike historians (and even many theologians) as problematic given that the central symbol of Jesus' ministry appears to be that of the advent on earth of God's kingdom. God's kingdom on earth can only mean that other kingdoms were somehow inadequate, partial, or even deceptive. The kingdom of God certainly envisions a new kind of political community in which God would exercise dominion over the world, and such a reality cannot be characterized as "non-political."¹² The pope's characterization of Jesus' non-political message appears, however, to stand within the line of thinking that caused him, as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, to issue several admonitions about political theology, particularly liberationist theologies.¹³ The pope's point here nonetheless stands in some tension with the integration he sets out to develop in the book, an integration contemporary theology so desperately needs for its own sake and for the sake of its intelligibility and clarity in an increasingly post-Christian western world. The alternative politics (or counter-politics) of Jesus, which the pope rightly acknowledges, needs to be seen and proclaimed precisely as a counter-politics, for if it is really non-political, then the destructive, violent, and alienating politics of the merely human will continue to be unredeemed.

¹¹ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 2, 170-1.

¹² Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 2, 170-1. See also *Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 1, 49-45 where the treatment of the third temptation from Matthew 4 helps to illustrate the profound distinction between the politics of human beings and the kingdom or reign of God. But precisely as a distinction and not a differentiation that one might argue that the characterization of Jesus' message and person as "non-political" remains problematic.

¹³ See e.g., Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Declaration Concerning Certain Aspects of the 'Theology of Liberation'" (Rome: Vatican, 1984), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19840806_theology-liberation_en.html.

For Benedict, the apex of Christian theology remains the death of Jesus, a claim made abundantly clear by the fact that the pope devotes an entire volume to the last week of Jesus' life. Benedict treats these events simply as historical events, and those familiar with the difficulties of such an approach may balk at some of the material presented here. But Benedict is intentionally moving beyond the historical to the theological as the events unfold both a robustly Trinitarian theology of God and a thoroughly substitutionary soteriology. Throughout volume two, Benedict presents the final events of Jesus' life as a reflection of Old Testament allusions, and for him this represents the hinge for any adequate understanding of Jesus. For example, Benedict makes the fulfillment of Psalm 22:18 in the Fourth Gospel a hermeneutical key to unlocking the high-priestly dignity of Jesus (i.e., the seamless garment) and connecting this image to the slaughter of the Passover lambs on the Day of Preparation.¹⁴ In his account of the death of Jesus, the pope provides a thoroughgoing cultic or liturgical theology of Jesus' death—one that strongly echoes the richness of Aquinas's appropriation of Anselm and that provides the foundation for Roman Catholic sacramental theology. The cross of Christ becomes, for Benedict, a cosmic and liturgical event.¹⁵

Setting aside the objections of much contemporary reflection on atonement theology stemming from the twentieth century, Benedict presents anew the central ideas of Anselm and Aquinas as the heart of an authentic (and authentically Catholic) atonement theology, one that does not attempt to contrast the justice of God and the love of God. Rather, the pope presents God as the sole agent of reconciliation in which the cross represents an offering to the Father of the Son's love and obedience. The cross is not a punishment for crimes against God (as it is in the penal substitution model offered in the Reformation); rather, the cross is an oblation, an offering to God of the obedience and love of the Jesus, the incarnate Son. The gift of the Son, thus, is the total gift of self, offered to the Father and to the world, bridging the chasm caused by sin. Such an approach helps to inform not only the pope's concern for liturgy and its character and its role in the salvation of the world, but it also provides an occasion for revisiting one of the most intractable issues within Christology, i.e., the theology of atonement. For Benedict, the deep connection between liturgy and life is reflected throughout his thought, and indeed throughout his papacy, and it comes as no surprise then to see

¹⁴ See Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 2, 202-40.

¹⁵ See e.g., Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 2, 239 where Benedict refers to "the liturgy of the Cross."

that the culmination of his account of Jesus rests in such a sophisticated and provocative liturgical Christology.¹⁶

REVISITING THE DOGMATIC TRADITION

The pope's book strikes an important note within contemporary Christology, one that seeks to capture a theological sense of Christ's work, especially the significance of his death. Over the course of the last century, Schweitzer's famous account of Jesus as failed apocalyptic prophet has given way to a more traditional approach to the death of Jesus, one that has Jesus interpret his own death in light of the OT, particularly as seen in Isaiah and the Psalms. Benedict, for his part, provides an exposition of Jesus' self-understanding as a vocation to death understood in light of the Psalms and the suffering servant songs of Isaiah 42-53, particularly evidenced in the "high-priestly prayer" of Jesus in John 17.¹⁷ Thus, for the pope, the cross constitutes the mission of Jesus and represents the moment of supreme vicarious substitution for the atonement of the sins of humankind. While historians may raise doubts about attributing such an intention to Jesus in his lifetime, the more persistent discussion of substitutionary atonement and its import or implications for Christian faith and life has come from systematicians and moral theologians. As Daniel Bell and many others have noted, Christian life unfolds according to the pattern established in Christ's redemptive work. If God demands blood and violence to make things right, as so many caricatures of atonement theology have contended in the Christian tradition, then we can also employ similar rationale to legitimate our own violence. "God does not require blood. Life is what God desires; life is what God gives us in Christ. Let the same mind, the same desire be in you."¹⁸ Bell draws on a widely held concern when he holds that the connection between Christian living and Christian redemption needs to be more evident and more positively stated. While Benedict clearly eschews notions of the atonement that valorize bloodletting or punishment, and he clearly connects his liturgical soteriology to the life of the Christian disciple, one may still wonder whether his liturgical Christology might invite a more broadly developed soteriology, one that more clearly and concretely connects to the lived reality of the Christian faithful.

¹⁶ See e.g., Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *God is Near Us: The Eucharist, the Heart of Life*, trans. H. Taylor (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 2003).

¹⁷ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 2, 80-1.

¹⁸ Daniel M. Bell, Jr., "God Does Not Desire Blood: Beyond Redemptive Violence," in *God Does Not Entertain, Play "Matchmaker," Hurry, Demand Blood, Cure Every Illness*, ed. D. Brent Laytham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 61.

Benedict's liturgical Christology with its corresponding soteriology finds its place within a renewed conversation about the soteriological tradition and atonement theology. The standard taxonomy of atonement theology was constructed early in the twentieth century by Gustav Aulén's famous work, *Christus Victor*, which was representative of Protestant neo-orthodoxy of the early twentieth century. In that work Aulén famously, and some would still argue rightly, valorized a symbolic-narrative account of Christ's "battle" against Satan that he found in Luther's writings. He set his symbolic-narrative account over and against what he termed the "Latin" theology of Anselm and the scholastics, whom he accused of instituting legalism and giving credence to a theology of the atonement that centered on penal substitution. Although some theologians still succumb to Aulén's distortion of Anselm and Aquinas, there has been a wholesale re-engagement with the tradition of atonement theology in recent years that has moved beyond the taxonomy established by Aulén.¹⁹

Although within evangelical circles one often still finds ardent supporters of penal substitution in conjunction with so-called "forensic" accounts of justification, one also finds numerous voices raising questions about such an approach and whether it adequately reflects the complexity of the biblical data.²⁰ For example, Mark Baker and Joel Green argue for an ambiguous but rich and somewhat opaque narrative soteriology that, while not quite apophatic, nonetheless eludes any neat systemization.²¹ The drive to systematic meaning, for them, results in an artificial and static doctrine when pushed too far beyond the biblical data, a doctrine evacuated of its power to confound, provoke, and ultimately animate a life of Christian discipleship. Similarly, Paul A. Rainbow has used the study of Paul's atonement language and his corresponding parenesis to chal-

¹⁹ See e.g., Ted Peters, "The Atonement in Anselm and Luther, Second Thoughts about Gustaf Aulén's *Christus Victor*," *Lutheran Quarterly* 24 (1972): 301-14; Peter Hünemann, *Jesus Christus: Gottes Wort in der Zeit. Eine Systematische Christologie* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1994), 199-202; see also Thomas Schärfl, "Propter Nostram Salutem: The Cross and Our Salvation," in *Finding Salvation in Christ: Essays on Christology and Soteriology in Honor of William P. Loewe*, ed. Christopher D. Denny and Christopher McMahon (Eugene: Pickwick, 2011), 143-70.

²⁰ Defenders of penal substitution still abound in Reformed and more conservative evangelical churches; see e.g., Thomas R. Schreiner, "Penal Substitution View," in *The Nature of Atonement: Four Views*, ed. James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 67-98.

²¹ Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Rediscovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000).

lenge the sharp division, held in many corners of the evangelical tradition, between salvation and sanctification or discipleship.²²

Beyond the contribution of scholars in the evangelical tradition, Steven Finlan has offered a series of academic and more popular works in which he has re-examined the biblical legacy of cultic imagery used to interpret the death of Jesus, particularly in Paul.²³ For Finlan, the cultic imagery used by Paul stands as a testimony to the power the Temple cult held on the religious imagination of first-century Jews and the earliest Christians. For them, the meaning of the Temple had been spiritualized under the influence of Greek thought and also due to the actual absence of the Ark, destroyed six centuries earlier by the Babylonians. The Temple in Jerusalem provided the language and the imagery that Paul would exploit as one of his ways of describing the saving work of Christ. The exaltation of the cultic language in Paul distorts Paul's own theology and leaves the Christian tradition freighted with a misconstrued account of Christ's saving work, and it is this misconstrued account that recent efforts have sought to correct.

Feminist and liberationist theologians in particular have long critiqued the cultic, Anselmian, and substitutionary approaches to soteriology as violent and even pathological. At the same time, many have lauded René Girard's approach to this religious violence as the decisive landmark in repudiating violent distortions of religious practice and doctrine while also holding onto the symbolic and narrative heart of the Christian theological tradition.²⁴ Although a wide range of scholarship has developed over the past two decades around the work of Girard, Robert Daly has recently engaged this work in

²² See, Paul A. Rainbow, *The Way of Salvation: The Role of Christian Obedience in Justification* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2005).

²³ Stephen Finlan, *The Background and Content of Paul's Cultic Atonement Metaphors*, Academia Biblica (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004); *Problems with Atonement: The Origins Of, And Controversy About, The Atonement Doctrine* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2005), and *Options on Atonement in Christian Thought* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2007). Along with Vladimir Kharlamov he has also edited the collection, *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*, PTMS (Eugene: Pickwick, 2006).

²⁴ See René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, trans. S. Bann and M. Metteer (New York: Athlone/Continuum, 1987) and *The Scapegoat*, trans. Y. Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1987). For a provocative conversation regarding Girard's theories and the reading of early Judaism and Christianity see, Ann W. Astell and Sandor Goodhart, ed., *Sacrifice, Scripture, and Substitution: Readings in Ancient Judaism and Christianity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2011). For a constructive Roman Catholic soteriology based on Girard's insights see, Raymond Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?: Violence and Redemption in the Bible* (New York: Herder, 1987) and *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption* (New York: Crossroad, 1999).

order to make sense of the language of sacrifice beyond the violence of the scapegoat mechanism so characteristic of Girard's mimetic theory. Beginning in the late 1970s, Daly has developed an understanding of Christian sacrifice that moves away from primitive notions of sacrifice as religious violence and builds a systematic account that brings together the theological, liturgical, and moral dimensions of sacrifice. In his recent comprehensive treatment of Christian sacrifice, *Sacrifice Unveiled*, Daly focuses on sacrifice as an event foremost in the very life of God.²⁵

For Daly, the archeology of "sacrifice" in the history of religious traditions, and even in the Christian theological tradition, has distorted the reality and obscured the power of sacrificial language in Scripture. Daly argues that an authentic archeology of sacrifice rests in the life of the Trinity, precisely in the Father's initiative of self-offering in and through the Son. In turn, the Son's response to the Father is also a self-offering. The language of sacrifice then, for Daly, centers not on what one does to another; rather, sacrifice is self-gift, or love, and the mutual self-giving of the Father in the Word/Son finds reciprocation in the self-gift of the Son in his humanity and in the life of the Spirit. At this point Daly begins to make some of his most important points regarding sacrifice and the life of God, specifically through his emphasis on the centrality of the Resurrection and the church's life in the power of the Spirit for understanding sacrifice. Sacrifice enters into the human response to God when, in the same Spirit that was in Jesus, human beings respond as self-gift to neighbor and to God through concrete practice. In this context, the Eucharist then becomes intelligible precisely as sacrifice in Daly's presentation. In the Eucharist and in the living reality, human beings accept God's invitation to participate in the communion of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

Daly's work is remarkable as a constructive account of sacrifice, but it also stands as testimony to a historical and theological corrective to the distortions of sacrifice and related language in the tradition. Moreover, Daly recovers and rehabilitates the soteriologies of Abelard and Julian of Norwich, as prominent and unfairly vilified examples of those who saw more clearly than many of their contemporaries the fundamentally relational and therefore moral dimen-

²⁵ See Robert J. Daly, *Sacrifice Unveiled: The True Meaning of Christian Sacrifice* (London: T&T Clark, 2009). The title of the work plays with Gil Bailey's *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), which develops Girardian theory on the origins and resolution to social violence. While the organization of the book will strike some as labyrinthine, the content of the book remains highly pertinent.

sions of Jesus' death, namely the nature of sacrifice understood as the self-gift of the Trinity.²⁶ This rehabilitation casts doubt on the notion of sacrifice that governed the theology and practice of the Eucharist in the late Middle Ages and into the Counter-Reformation, highlighting also the wide range of language used in those prayers especially prior to the Council of Trent.

For Daly, love responding to self-gift supplies the Christian tradition with the most profound truth that can be expressed about the Triune God as well as the most profound statement we can make about the ultimate form of human life given in the Spirit. As such, the love expressed in the self-gift, the sacrifice of God, lies at the center of Christian worship, the Eucharist. An authentic Christian Eucharist, the source and summit of the church's life in the world, celebrates this love and sends forth those who participate in its celebration.²⁷ Sacrifice is found in all of human life, wherever self-giving love responds to self-giving love.²⁸ Daly's semi-autobiographical conclusion to the book appropriately punctuates this robust work, making concrete and illustrative the claims made throughout the work and making the liturgical language of sacrifice transparently human, approachable, and affirming rather than cultic and mysteriously opaque.²⁹

The retrieval of the dual aspects of sacrificial language—as both violent and redemptive—stands as one of the important achievements of Girard's work and Daly's amplification of it. As Neil Ormerod has pointed out, confusing the dark and redemptive aspects of sacrificial language remains a significant problem for the Christian tradition, one to which theologians like Girard and even interpreters of Bernard Lonergan have dedicated themselves over the past several years.³⁰ Unfortunately, many continue to quarantine sacrificial lan-

²⁶ See Daly, *Sacrifice Unveiled*, 108, 113-18.

²⁷ See Daly, *Sacrifice Unveiled*, 228-9. Daly expresses his debt to the liturgist Edward Kilmartin, S. J. for some aspects of this insight and its place in the Eucharist (See Edward J. Kilmartin, S.J. *The Eucharist in the West: History and Theology* [Collegeville: Liturgical, 1998]).

²⁸ E.g., Daly, *Sacrifice Unveiled*, 232-7.

²⁹ See also Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2010), 247-73 where she develops similar points regarding sacrifice as God's gift to humanity, citing Daly's earlier work *the Origin of Sacrifice* (264 n.13).

³⁰ See Neil Ormerod, *Creation, Grace, and Redemption*, *Theology in Global Perspective* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2007), 102-10. See also e.g., Cynthia S. W. Crysdale, *Embracing Travail: Retrieving the Cross Today* (New York: Continuum, 2001); James Allison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin through Easter Eyes* (New York: Crossroad, 1998); William P. Loewe, "Toward a Responsible Contemporary Soteriology," in *Creativity and Method: Essays in Honor of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Matthew L. Lamb (Milwaukee: Marquette, 1981), 213-37.

guage and therefore many related aspects of the Christian tradition as inherently violent and fundamentally dysfunctional. The work of Daly, Ormerod, Crysedale and others stands as a hopeful bulwark against the wholesale dismissal of this language.

Concomitant with the strongly Christological note struck in the pope's book and related to the soteriological reassessment that has been afoot for some years now stands the revisiting of the classical Christological formulas. As Karl Rahner's call to reassess the Chalcedonian doctrine precipitated a wholesale revision of Roman Catholic Christology at the middle of the twentieth century, so too has a similar reappraisal of the doctrine of Nicaea helped to reinvigorate the Christological and Trinitarian discussions in the past ten years. Lewis Ayres's *Nicaea and Its Legacy* celebrates and revises the fourth-century Christological debates and gains significant momentum with contemporary theology as to the relevance of those ancient debates.³¹ For Ayres, conventional portrayals of Arius and his supporters presupposes the theological grammar that emerged out of the controversies, and therefore stand as anachronistic. Instead, an adequate account of the controversy must reckon with the fact that the issue at stake in the controversies centered on "the very flexibility with which the term 'God' could be deployed."³²

Ayres' reconstruction of the debates of the fourth century sets up at least four positions (Alexandrian/Athanasian, Eusebian, Marcellan, and Western Anti-Adoptionist) that eventually devolve into two camps around Nicaea.³³ On the one hand, Alexander, Athanasius, and their supporters emphasized the identity of the Father and the Son and characterized the Son as an aspect of the Father (e.g., Word or Wisdom). On the other hand, there was Arius, Eusebius of Nicomedia, and others who emphasized the diversity of Father and Son through an appeal to a clear notion of divine hierarchy and relationship. The historical drama that ensued revolved around the ecclesiastical, and therefore political, alliances that unfolded around the personalities involved and the positions held. Ayres contends that orthodoxy, particularly as it emerged in the fourth century, is a theological grammar worked out over time by judging which set of theological terms, biblical texts, and metaphors should be privileged. Alt-

³¹ Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2004).

³² Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 14.

³³ Ayres is here indebted to Joseph T. Lienhard and Michel René Barnes; see e.g., Lienhard, "The 'Arian' Controversy: Some Categories Reconsidered," *Theological Studies* 48 (1987): 415-37 and Barnes, "De Régnon Reconsidered," *Augustinian Studies* 26 (1995): 51-79.

though differences in terminology could be divisive, the metaphors and biblical texts remained flexible and therefore provided the foundation for the debates more so than any technical terminology generated for expressing “right belief.” The formation of theological principles upon which there could be agreement was the result of theologians, such as the Cappadocians and Augustine, and these principles emerged through the cultivation of a pro-Nicene culture in the preaching and practices of the church, not in Greek metaphysics.

Contributing to the discussion of Nicene orthodoxy, Khaled Anatolios has offered a contribution to the on-going discussion in his *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine*, one largely complimentary to Ayres’s work. Arguing through a presentation of some of the same material (with special emphasis on Athanasius), Anatolios contends that while a certain theological grammar and culture may have emerged in response to the Arian controversy, certain presuppositions were nonetheless held in common before and during the debate.³⁴ For example, all those involved in the debates rejected Gnostic dualism while they affirmed Christ’s pre-existence, that in the Incarnation he was both human and divine, and that he was the savior of the world. What was at issue was the precise relationship between the Son and the Father. The attempts to express this relationship were not simply a matter of Greek metaphysics; rather, these were attempts to express with precision and clarity both the scriptural witness and the testimony supplied by the experience of worship in the Christian church. Anatolios identifies two fundamental principles that anchor the development of Christological/Trinitarian theology in the fourth century.³⁵ First, the primacy of Christ was a foundational principle for the construction of Trinitarian theology, but not in the manner often construed in historical theology which views the primacy of Christ as developed from a “Hellenistic” conception of a transcendent or remote god. Instead, Anatolios argues that the primacy of Christ was derived from the very person and work of Christ, from the biblical account and from the experience of Christ in worship and the life of the church. The second principle involves the clarification of a theological epistemology. In other words, how human beings know and relate to God proved central to the debates of the fourth century, and that epistemology finds its anchor in the comprehensive performance of the Christian faith. The theological epistemology Anatolios outlines in

³⁴ Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011). Ayres and Anatolios participated in a lively symposium on the former’s work, and the papers were collected in *Harvard Theological Review* 100.2 (2007).

³⁵ Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, 8-10.

his account of the fourth-century Christological debates and which proved necessary for Trinitarian faith is fundamentally experiential and enacted in the life of believers; it is thus also quintessentially systematic.³⁶ Thus, the historical narrative Anatolios constructs has more than a purely historical significance; it resounds in the history of Christian thought and practice in every age.

Anatolios and Ayres are both convinced that contemporary theology can still draw from the various elements of the fourth century to restate Trinitarian theologies in a contemporary idiom, though they make no attempt to proffer any constructive proposals on Trinitarian theology. Instead, they provide contemporary theologians with a fresh understanding of the original formulations and their relationship to the needs of those who still worship the triune God. Both authors, having addressed the emergence of pro-Nicene theology, propose that the history of the fourth century provides contemporary theologians, not just with doctrine, but with resources (exegetical methodologies, liturgical insights, etc.) for constructing faithful and powerful Christologies and Trinitarian theologies. Contemporary assumptions, particularly for Ayres, have distorted Trinitarian thought and made it less approachable and less ecclesio-centric for contemporary believers. The meaning of Christological and Trinitarian doctrine is made available to contemporary believers precisely through the questions and issues confronted by the ancients. Both authors' convictions, however, raise the more profound question as to the basis for making the fourth century normative (not just useful) for doing theology. In other words, while the normativity of Nicaea is a given as the ecclesial benchmark for Christological orthodoxy, what makes the theologizing or theological performance of Athanasius, Gregory, and Augustine normative for "doing theology" today? Their personal holiness? Their innovation and fidelity to the nascent Christian theological tradition? Or, is it the act of historical retrieval and theological exposition performed by contemporary theologians like Ayres and Anatolios that make it all possible?

The contemporary retrieval of classical theology is deeply connected to the performance of constructive systematic theology, and Kathryn Tanner has offered a provocative theological performance in her systematic reflections on the import of Nicene orthodoxy in her work on Christology. In a recent essay, which also epitomizes her book, *Christ the Key*, Tanner argues that it is Christ and not the Trinity *per se* that provides human beings with the possibility of partici-

³⁶ See Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, 281-92.

pating in the divine life as triune.³⁷ For instance, the Trinitarian relations have such intensity and power but never threaten to obliterate the individuality of the persons of the Trinity. Human beings, on the other hand, constantly wrestle with individuation and identity over and against dysfunctional relationships that co-opt identity. As such, Tanner contends that the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be applicable as a model for human living in the sense that Moltmann or Boff, for example, suggest.³⁸ Rather, in Christ, not the doctrine of the Trinity, believers have access to the triune life of God and not through a doctrine of the Trinity whereby human community might find an appropriate model. For Tanner,

By becoming incarnate, the second person of the Trinity takes the humanity joined to it into its own relations with Father and Spirit, and therefore in Christ we are shown what the Trinity looks like when it includes the human and what the human looks like when is included in the Trinity's own movements—the character of a human life with others when it takes a Trinitarian form, as that is displayed in Jesus' own human life [in his relations with other human beings].³⁹

Her work reflects the growing concern within systematic theology to integrate more effectively the claims of the ancient Christological councils with the demand that full attention be paid to the life and ministry of Jesus. This integration remains the on-going task of theology and the task of the church as it signals moral theologians to more robustly and directly engage the relationship of Christology and ethics.

ETHICS AND CHRISTOLOGY

The dogmatic tradition has reemerged with a noticeable accent on its own relevance for the lives of believers, and this reemergence has made the intersection between Christology and ethics, two disciplines long estranged from each other, more apparent in recent years. Some attribute the separation of Christology and ethics as emerging from the compartmentalization of Christology and soteriology on the one hand, and on the other hand, the abstraction of the individual in theological ethics, a move that left the subject divorced from context,

³⁷ See Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key*, chs. 4 and 5; and Kathryn Tanner, "Trinity, Christology, and Community," in *Christology and Ethics*, ed. F. LeRon Shults and Brent Waters (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 56-74.

³⁸ See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, trans. M. Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) and Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, trans. P. Burns (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988).

³⁹ Tanner, "Trinity, Christology, and Community," 70.

community, or narrative.⁴⁰ In many ways, the movement away from the preoccupation with historical-critical methodologies in the study of Scripture discussed above represents a concerted attempt to connect Scripture and the individual with the broader tradition and community. Moreover, the reassessment of the dogmatic tradition has contributed to this reconnection of the individual with the community while also integrating the soteriological tradition that had, for a long period, tended to emphasize personal, forensic, and even mechanical accounts of salvation. These developments have helped to create considerable momentum toward a more organic and systematized theology, one in which the integration of Christology and ethics no longer serves as the exclusive concern of liberationist and feminist theologians (the longstanding champions of this integration), but one that now may engage a far wider constituency and a wider range of scholarship.

One fine example of this emerging trend is Terrence Tilley's remarkable book exploring the relationship between the person of Jesus and the life of Christian discipleship, one rooted in Scripture but also transcending mere exemplarism.⁴¹ Tilley describes the book as a constructive Christology, one that sees praxis as the key to understanding the identity of Jesus, and in particular, the reconciling practice of the early Christian church modeled on the mandate, the deeds, and the person of Jesus. In this approach, Tilley echoes the work of so many liberationist theologians, including Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Johann-Baptist Metz, and Jon Sonbino to name but a few. Tilley interprets Jesus' use of the symbol "reign of God" as a reign of human flourishing. But he does not succumb to the naïve exemplarism mentioned earlier in the essay; rather, he connects the praxis of Jesus deeply to the person or identity of Jesus as *autobasileia* ("the kingdom himself" or "the reign of God in person") so that the life of discipleship becomes the locus for Christological insight and reflection, leaving practice and proclamation deeply connected. Christology, Tilley contends, "begins in the active imagination of the disciples" as they seek to walk in God's ways and live the reign of God.⁴² In this regard, Tilley builds upon the work of Larry Hurtado who identifies the worship of Christ as God as a prominent feature in the life of the earliest Christian communities and not as a fourth-century innova-

⁴⁰ See F. LeRon Shults, "Prologue," in *Christology and Ethics*, F. LeRon Shults and Brent Waters, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 1-4.

⁴¹ Terrence W. Tilley, *The Disciples' Jesus: Christology as Reconciling Practice* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008).

⁴² Tilley, *The Disciple's Jesus*, 123.

tion.⁴³ The intimate connection between the praxis of Jesus and the recognition (and worship) of Jesus as the Incarnation of God's Reign makes the practices of teaching, healing, forgiving sin, and table fellowship constitutive of human flourishing and the life of the Christian church even from the earliest moments of the Christian tradition, among the earliest followers of Jesus as evidenced in the pages of the New Testament.

Like Tilley, Christopher Holmes, in his *Ethics in the Presence of Christ*, seeks to draw the life of the Christian community into the orbit of the presence and ongoing ministry of Christ, its natural environment, and thus to explore the consequences of his presence for ethics and offer an account of the moral landscape of ethics that is dependent on that environment.⁴⁴ However, Tilley's emphasis on Jesus and the earliest disciples as exemplars of a kingdom ethic, while not quite the "exemplarist" position that Holmes decries in his opening chapter, stands apart from Holmes' Christological account of Christian ethics which centers not on the questions, "What would Jesus do?" or even, "What did Jesus do?" but "What is Jesus doing?" In the spirit of Bonhoeffer and Hauerwas, Holmes contends that Christian ethics is necessarily deformed when separated from an encounter with the living Christ who is worshipped in the Christian community. Holmes cautions against assuming a Christian context or the resources of the tradition without admitting to a kind of methodological humility that requires listening to the Word in the context of worship and becoming obedient to that Word so that the authentic context of moral deliberation might find illumination.⁴⁵

Holmes develops a Christological ethics through a series of meditations on the power of Jesus, the truth of Jesus, and the love of Jesus centered on three passages from the Gospel of John. The display of Christ's power in the story of the healing of the paralytic in John 5:1-18, Christ's claim to be the Truth in John 18:1-19:42, and Christ's abiding love in John 21, all impinge on the Christian community and make decisive claims on how Christians ought to live in the world. For Holmes, following Terrance Torrance and Wolf Krötke, Scripture is the place from which Christ's prophetic voice speaks to the church. In the encounter with Scripture, "God takes hold of [the text] to testify to the real, to set forth the real, that which is going on in the

⁴³ See Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); see also, James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered, Christianity in the Making, Volume I* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 881-93.

⁴⁴ Christopher R. J. Holmes, *Ethics in the Presence of Christ* (New York: T&T Clark, 2012).

⁴⁵ Holmes, *Ethics in the Presence of Christ*, 15-16.

real world, the actual world, which, as such cannot be conflated with the factual.”⁴⁶ Holmes thus eschews the historical-critical reading of biblical texts and sees the reading of Scripture as “the chief means by which the One who enacts his identity therein is known.”⁴⁷ Therefore, the encounter with Christ in Scripture transcends the methodological questions posed by a historical-critical approach and centers on the encounter with “the coming one” who is always free, interruptive, and indeed disruptive.⁴⁸

Both Tilley and Holmes rightly emphasize Christology’s connection to lived reality, a connection that moves beyond an account of true doctrine and its claim on “decisions.” Rather, as both Ayres and Anatolios have demonstrated in their accounts of classical Christology, liturgical practice, lived reality, and praxis provide the foundations for any account of Christology, making Christology fundamentally ethical. Yet, whether it is the disruption brought by the advent of the kingdom of God in the person of Jesus, the disruptive encounter with the coming one in the contemporary community of believers, this disruption may also raise questions about its own grounding and raise questions about its specifically Christological dimensions, because while Christology and ecclesiology (and therefore moral theology) are inseparable within orthodox Christian theology, this does not mean that they can be easily collapsed as if there is no distinction. Moreover, the question of history and its practice continues to loom over the shift in the renewed emphasis on Christology and moral theology, and while not all Christological claims are open to historical scrutiny (as the pope’s book suggests), history will remain a constant factor in the on-going conversation.⁴⁹

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The Christological tradition and its connection to moral reasoning have played a prominent role in current scholarship. Christian theologians have placed renewed emphasis on the specifically Christian character of theology and moral reasoning by moving beyond

⁴⁶ Holmes, *Ethics in the Presence of Christ*, 139.

⁴⁷ Holmes, *Ethics in the Presence of Christ*, 152.

⁴⁸ Although Holmes’s work bespeaks his allegiance to Bonhoeffer and Torrance, among others, his position strongly resonates with that articulated in the ambitious project of Robert Barron systematically outlined in his book, *The Priority of Christ: Toward a Postliberal Catholicism* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007), esp. 274–80.

⁴⁹ Tilley has written extensively on the intersection of history and theology. See his *History, Theology, and Faith: Dissolving the Modern Problematic* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004). Tilley argues several points in the book, but he notably rejects the idea of history as an “authorizing” discipline in itself.

mere exemplarism to explore the reciprocity between truth and value, doctrine and ethics. This exploration has both empowered and complicated the current state of affairs within theological circles. For while the emphasis on historical Jesus research noted at the beginning of this essay has abated, the question of the relevance of historical scholarship remains problematic. For example, in the historical work on the dogmatic front, the value of critical history seems to enjoy a more privileged status. For example, few would question the value of restating or re-narrating the Christological debates of the early church so that we might have a more accurate picture of the issues at stake and the various positions adopted. Such historical accuracy, for Ayres, Anatolios, Daly, Finlan, and others, has supplied each of them with energy and focus for a renewal in contemporary theology. Again, few would contend that any historical investigation has said all it has to say, but when it comes to the historical-critical reading of Scripture, a different standard seems to emerge. In the case of the Benedict XVI and Holmes, the relevance of historical or contextual biblical criticism for appropriating the Christological tradition and for encountering the power of the Risen One remains open. The conviction that the encounter with Christ occurs anew in the reading of Scripture, the worship of the community, and the life of believers does little to address the question of the historicity or the concrete dimensions of this encounter as it relates to that history. Certainly, contemporary theology has been reoriented by this growing conviction that reflection on the religious significance of Jesus, on Christology, remains inseparably bound to the lived experience of those who worship and follow the living Christ. Yet, the process of reconciling critical biblical scholarship and the Christological tradition remains to be more fully engaged so that the authentic encounter with the risen Christ, who is Jesus of Nazareth, might still have the power to confront Christians with the concrete call to follow him and to participate fully in the kingdom uniquely and fully present only in his advent, both then and now. **M**

Christology:Volume 2, Number 1, January 2013 Edited by Christopher McMahan and David Matzko McCarthy.Christology and the Christian Life,Paul J. Wadell.Christology and Moral Theology,Paulinus Ikechkwu Odozor, C.S.Sp. The Light Burden of Discipleship: Embodying the New Moses and Wisdom in the Gospel of Matthew ,Patricia Sharbaugh. Paul and the Cruciform Way of God in Christ Christology:Volume 2, Number 1, January 2013 Edited by Christopher McMahan and David Matzko McCarthy.Christology and the Christian Life,Paul J. Wadell.Christology and Moral Theology,Paulinus Ikechkwu Odozor, C.S.Sp.Â Review Essay: Beyond the Historical Jesus: Embracing Christology in Scripture, Doctrine, and Ethics, Christopher McMahan ...more. Get A Copy. Amazon. Ethics and Christology Evolutionary History. - Rediscovering. Jesus.Â If next we find in ancient doctrine a hermeneutical starting point for thinking about Jesus as â€˜fully human and fully divineâ€™™, then the sheer fact of his complete humanness should also be a (biblical) key to understanding his imaging of God as an embodied male who share with us our most defining human characteristics precisely as they evolved evolutionary history. Furthermore, in a postfoundationalist approach to the problem of Christology and Ethics, the