

Christopher P. Evans (ed.), Victorine Christology. A Selection of Works of Hugh and Achard of St Victor, and of Robert of Melun, and excerpts taken from the Summa sententiarum, Turnhout (Brepols) 2018, 484 p., 1 col. ill. (Victorine Texts in Translation. Exegesis, Theology, and Spirituality from the Abbey of St Victor, 7), ISBN 978-2-503-57980-1, EUR 90,00.

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Christology was much debated in the 12th century. »Victorine Christology«, part of a ten-volume series devoted to providing excerpts in English translations of major writings of key Victorine authors, is important in several respects. It offers an important introduction by Christopher Evans about Christology generally in the twelfth century, followed by excerpts from Hugh of St Victor, the »Summa sententiarum«, Achard of St Victor, and two long extracts from the always prolix »Sentences« of Robert of Melun, each with helpful introductions of their own. Given the recent resurgence of interest in Peter Lombard, it is helpful to understand the perspectives of those opposed to Lombard's teaching, who espoused what is often called the *homo assumptus* theory, that Christ was a man assumed by God.

Evans divides Christological discussion in the 12th century into three phases: 1130–1150, when Hugh and Abelard, as well as their immediate disciples formulated their arguments; 1150–1163, the age of Peter Lombard and Robert of Melun; and 1163–1170, marked by Victorine criticism of Lombard's teaching. Although catholic teaching had always emphasized that Christ was both fully man and fully God, there had never been clear agreement as to how this fusion could be best explained. Evans usefully explains that Hugh of St Victor was the first major exponent of the *homo assumptus* theory, that the Word of God assumed flesh, thus defining Christ as *homo assumptus*. By opening the translations with Walter of Mortagne's letter to Hugh about Christ's growing in wisdom and Hugh's response, »On the Wisdom of Christ's soul«, Evans makes clear that unlike Walter, Hugh had no doubt that Christ was always fully equal to the Father in the extent of his knowledge.

Hugh understood Christ as divine wisdom assuming flesh from the outset, thus minimising his capacity to grow wisdom (as described in Luke 2:40, a passage important to both Walter and Abelard). Reading Hugh's discussion in both this treatise and in his »De sacramentis« with useful annotations (absent from the earlier Ferrari English translation of the »De sacramentis«) brings out Hugh's Christology as shaped by fundamentally Augustinian assumptions about the human person as combining a spiritual substance, namely the soul, and the flesh. In Christ, the fully divine character of the soul assumes human form, but is first of all the Word of God. The discussion in the »Summa sententiarum«, briefly introduced by Joshua Benson, has the merit of summarizing Hugh's perspective in brief, with greater emphasis on the questions it raises and short answers, quelling any doubts.

Evans gives less detail about the Christologies of Abelard, Gilbert of Poitiers and Peter Lombard, their hypotheses are central to



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understanding the Victorine position. Abelard suggested that humanity and divinity were different parts or aspects of Christ, not a view that won many followers. By contrast, Gilbert of Poitiers drew on his metaphysical distinction between a subject and the form by which it subsists, to argue that humanity and divinity were subsistent forms predicated of Christ. Peter Lombard explained both the Victorine and Gilbertine positions, but preferred to think of Christ as having the *habitus* of being a man, controversially suggesting that Christus could not be an *aliquid*, because in being a man, his substance was not divine (Sent. III d.1 c.2). While Evans does not focus in depth on Lombard's Christology, he shows that it offers a profound critique of the Victorine position.

One valuable text included in this volume is a sermon of Achard of St Victor on the resurrection, delivered before 1155, which Feiss suggests provides the earliest known critique of the Christology of Peter Lombard. Achard complains that: »These people who gnaw at his divinity touch our Christ« (p. 220). In his introduction, Feiss suggests that Achard provides our earliest witness (writing before 1155) to a perspective that would be attributed to Peter Lombard: »There are now still other enemies of truth who say that when the Word became man he did not become something and that Christ as man is not something that we are« (p. 220).

Evans also includes a long translation of Robert of Melun's discussion of Christology in the »Sentences«, conceived quite possibly in response to Peter Lombard, in the later 1150s. His introduction to Robert's »Christology« is relatively brief, but important. Evans emphasizes that Robert's criticism was not so much of the *non-aliquid* notion picked up by later polemicists, but of the *habitus* notion as not fully respecting Christ's divinity. More could perhaps be written about how Robert of Melun transforms Victorine (and Augustinian) ideas of *homo assumptus* by considering absurdities that he imputes to the *habitus* theory – such as Lombard's argument that Christ could have assumed the female gender (p. 307), referring to Sent. III d.6 c. 4.3 (not noted by Evans).

Robert transforms arguments of Hugh of St Victor with a much greater attention to paradoxes of linguistic expression. Robert's criticisms of the fluidity of Peter Lombard's understanding of Christus would inspire a small flood of polemical treatises, from the »Apologia pro verbo incarnato« to Walter of St Victor's polemic against the »four labyrinths of France«. While this volume is not concerned with such treatises, it serves to present pre-Lombardian Christology as a sophisticated body of reflection about divine wisdom and knowledge manifest in the person of Christ, building on the teaching of St Paul and St Augustine.

The translations in this volume are of a uniformly high standard, always attaining a level of clarity and sometimes elegance in the presentation of arguments. This volume does not include everything by Victorine authors about the person of Christ. Richard of St Victor is completely absent, and one might regret that more writings of Achard were not included. Nonetheless, it helps make better known the dynamism of Victorine thought about Christ.



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