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In Defense of Extended Conciliar Christology: A Philosophical Essay, by Timothy Pawl. Oxford University Press, 2019. Pp. xii + 250. \$90 (hardcover).

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This is Book 2 of Timothy Pawl's entirely defensive project against would-be objections to Conciliar Christology (i.e., the theory containing all claims about Christ asserted in the first seven ecumenical councils) and some of its possible extensions (i.e., theories that include all of Conciliar Christology but also contain extra-conciliar Christological claims). The canvassed extensions are theories that affirm either the possibility of multiple incarnations (chs. 2–3), Christ's descent into hell (ch. 4), Christ's free will (ch. 5), that God incarnate was omniscient (chs. 7–8), or that the God-Man (viz., Christ) was both peccable and impeccable (ch. 6). In each case Pawl's aim is to show that would-be charges of contradiction can be met either by metaphysical constructs or by switching the standard semantics of terms.

Pawl's Book 2, like his Book 1 (viz., *In Defense of Conciliar Christology* (Oxford University Press, 2016)), is good—hands down. It is also exemplary in many ways: it champions and exhibits clarity; it champions and exhibits argument; it champions and exhibits history. Pawl's entire discussion of the "extended topics" (e.g., multiple incarnations, etc.) makes for fascinating reading, not only for the expert but, remarkably, for non-experts: it provides a very useful entry into the given topics.

This review, for word-limit reasons, focuses chiefly on Pawl's ch. 6 response to the apparent contradiction involving Christ's being peccable (because human) but equally impeccable (because divine). (This sort of Pawline response shows up elsewhere too, and so, e.g., my comments apply equally to Pawl's ch. 3, §II.b.3 reply to multiple incarnations.) But let me be clear: Book 2 is chockablock with interesting ideas, arguments, and implicit methodological principles that go vastly beyond the target of my substantive comments. Towards giving at least a tiny sense of the vast breadth of Pawl's discussion I turn first to a rapid march through the main topics of the chapters before turning to my substantive discussion of a common idea that bridges Pawl's Books 1 and 2 (viz., Pawl's solution to the so-called fundamental problem).

A march through Pawl's chapters: Pawl's Chapter 1 of Book 2 is a rehearsal of his Conciliar Christology (definitions, background assumptions, etc.). One can read and profit from Book 2 by reading Chapter 1 forward, although my guess (and recommendation) is that first reading Book 1 makes for a richer engagement with Book 2. (It's not necessary for understanding Book 2; it's just useful and valuable background.)



The second chapter presents a variety of theses concerning the possibility of multiple incarnations of God. The aim of the chapter is to distinguish four theses concerning multiple incarnations, each one endorsed by Aquinas according to Pawl.

Pawl's Chapter 3 restarts the driving defensive project. This chapter defends against seven different charges of contradiction arising from target extensions of Conciliar Christology and the various Chapter-2-reviewed theses concerning multiple incarnations. Pawl argues that none of the objections establish their target contradiction.

Chapter 4 considers a would-be objection against the extension of Conciliar Christology with the thesis that Christ descended into Hell during the three-day death. With characteristic detail Pawl spells out the would-be objection and then goes through six different defenses, some of which Pawl thinks may be more viable than others.

Pawl's Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 make up the second (of three) parts of Book 2, this one focusing on Conciliar Christology's commitment to the thesis that Christ has two wills. Chapter 5 defends against alleged contradiction in the freedom of Christ's two wills; Chapter 6 defends against alleged contradiction in Christ's being impeccable (i.e., the impossibility of willing or otherwise doing anything sinful). (It is Chapter 6 that, together with some discussion in Chapter 3, reflects the one firm thesis that Pawl advances in both books, namely, what has come to be called the Pawline solution to the so-called fundamental problem (more on which below); and it is this topic on which the substantive bulk of my review focuses after this march through the vast breadth of topics discussed by Pawl's Book 2.) As with previous chapters, Pawl carefully lays out the target objections and proceeds to argue that they fail to establish the target contradiction.

Part 3, the final part, contains two chapters that concern Christ's knowledge. These chapters focus on would-be contradictions facing extensions of Pawl's Conciliar Christology with theses about Christ's knowledge, including foreknowledge. In both chapters Pawl lays out the would-be charge(s) of contradiction and argues that the objections fail.

The foregoing rapid review of Pawl's chapters makes plain the breadth of Book 2. Each chapter is rich with ideas and arguments, and is valuable even for those without a commitment to Pawl's Conciliar Christology, though certainly especially valuable for anyone committed to standard orthodox theology constrained at least by First Chalcedon.

When, as in the case of Pawl's book, one is faced with a vast number of interesting arguments but a tiny word count, one must make a decision: give superficial comments on a handful of topics or dive into at least one. I take the latter route in what remains of this review, focusing on the common commitment between Books 1 and 2, namely, the Pawline approach to the fundamental problem of Christology.

Some substantive comments: The so-called fundamental problem of Christology—the central problem of Pawl's Book 1—involves a simple-to-state question: How can Christ have the (apparently contrary) properties

that Chalcedon—and a fortiori Conciliar Christology—claims? (Properties are *contraries*, on my usage, if and only if their joint exemplification entails a contradiction.) An instance of the problem is taken up in Pawl's Chapter 6, where the target properties are peccability and impeccability. The problem, in this case, is that on standard usage "peccable" and "impeccable" are contrary predicates: they're jointly satisfied by an object only if there's some contradiction true of the object. What is Pawl's response? Embracing (for what reason?) the standard account of logical consequence, Pawl rejects the salient possibility that Christ is a contradictory being—a being of whom some contradiction is true (some claim of the form *it is true that p and it is false that p*). Instead, Pawl's project is part of the dominant quest to "consistently" Christ—to give a consistent account of Christ. Pawl's particular strategy, as I illustrate below, is a change-the-meaning strategy: reject the standard meanings of "peccable" and "impeccable" and invoke non-standard meanings.

Any change-the-meaning strategy faces a variety of familiar issues. One of them is whether the resulting theory is still focused on its target object—in the case at hand, Christ. And here Pawl's account is wanting.

Focus on the properties at hand: peccability and impeccability.

Standard usage:

x is *peccable* if and only if *x* is able to sin.

x is *impeccable* if and only if it's false that *x* is peccable. (cf. 155)

As Pawl observes (155), a theory of Christ according to which Christ is peccable and impeccable—as the terms are standardly used—is contradictory: it's true that Christ is peccable and it's false that Christ is peccable. The Pawline proposal, being part of the dominant quest to consistently Christ, points to a different theory from the given contradictory one, one in which **-peccability* (pronounced *star-peccability*) and **-impeccability* (*star-impeccability*) are central. (Note well: Pawl does not explicitly use "stars" but they're useful for keeping track of what's going on.) The star predicates express properties that, depending on the account of "has" in "has a concrete nature" (22–31), differ from their starless cousins:

Star-studded usage:

x is **-peccable* iff *x* has a concrete nature which is peccable.

x is **-impeccable* iff *x* has a concrete nature which is impeccable.

Note very well: Pawl's ultimate proposal (155ff.) is more complicated than the one-starred route above, but the one-starred account is enough for present purposes.

Recall the fundamental question: Can Christ be both peccable and impeccable? Pawl's answer is ultimately negative: Christ cannot be peccable and impeccable (any more than Christ can be mutable and immutable, passible and impassible, etc.); instead, Christ can be **-peccable* and **-impeccable* (likewise, **-mutable* and **-immutable*, **-passible* and **-impassible*, etc.). But hold on: there are no explicit star predicates in the conciliar texts! When such texts say that Christ is (e.g.) mutable and immutable (so, extrapolating,

peccable and impeccable) they say it just so—full stop, no stars appearing. What to say? Pawl's response, as I understand it, is that the true theory of Christ is one according to which Christ counts as peccable and impeccable (without stars, so to speak) only by charity: it's not really Christ who is the fundamental bearer of these properties; it's the various "concrete natures" that fundamentally bear those properties, and not one of those beings is identical to Christ (on pain of contradiction). Christ exemplifies *-peccability (etc.) at best; he is not the primary or genuine bearer of our human peccability or God's divine impeccability. Objects very different from Christ individually bear the awesome weight of our peccability and God's impeccability.

Has Pawl given a recipe for achieving a consistent theory according to which Christ is peccable and impeccable? No. Can Pawl's recipe achieve a consistent theory according to which Christ is *-peccable and *-impeccable? Undoubtedly. But will the resulting theory ever be one in which Christ is the fundamental (versus the derivative or by-charity) bearer of the target properties? No. And in this way Pawl's program strikes me as wanting: it clings to consistency at the cost of taking the spotlight off of Christ, by simply conceding the fundamental-problem objection at the get-go: namely, that Christ does not have the target properties that Chalcedon-constrained Christologies have long attributed to Christ—just as Pawl's target objectors have long claimed.

A similar point can be seen by reflecting on the role of "concrete natures" in Pawl's meaning-change account. Pawl's basic theory of Christ is compositional even if, per conciliar demands, the hypostatic union cannot be fully understood (fully analyzed, explicated) only in terms of parthood. (According to Conciliar Christology, the hypostatic union can't be fully understood—analyzed, explicated, etc.—full stop. This obviously doesn't preclude systematic but partial understanding.) To get a sense of the target problem consider an example from outside of Christology:

x *-wiggles iff x has a part that wiggles.

My pinky just wiggled, and so I have a part that wiggled, and so I *-wiggled even though I didn't wiggle; so *-wiggling is insufficient for wiggling. Now, our driving question (let's suppose) is whether *I* can wiggle. You point out that I can *-wiggle. But so what? Talking about my *-wiggling seems to be of little relevance to our driving question *unless*, of course, my pinky (or any other of my wiggling proper parts) is a *representative part* of me in the following sense:

Definition: x is a *representative part* of S iff x is a part of S , and for any (relevant) predicate G , if G is true of x then G is true of S .

(*Side note*: what does "relevant" pick out here? Any compositional account usually invokes some notion of *relevant properties* if it wishes to avoid contradictions that quickly arise from, e.g., " x is a proper part of S " and " S is an improper part of S ." (By x 's being representative, S is thereby a proper

part of *S*. Contradiction, given normal definitions.) I leave the charting of *relevant properties* to others who, like Pawl, try to consistentize Christ via compositional accounts, even where “part” is used, as per Pawl, in its widest and most general sense. *End side note.*)

With *representative parts* comes a different star predicate:

x *-wiggles if and only if x has a representative part that wiggles.

In this case, it’s obvious why we’re looking to a given (representative) part when our concern is in fact the main subject of those parts: we are looking at x ’s representative parts because we care about whether x itself wiggles. And on the doubly starred account *-wiggling is sufficient for wiggling (via the part-to-Subject principle that derives from the account of representative parts).

Enough wiggling. The same question arises for Pawl’s general program: Why are we focusing on these so-called concrete natures? Why those parts (understood, once again, in the broadest sense of “parts”)? Presumably, the answer is that they’re representative parts.

But now trouble: if Christ’s “concrete natures” are representative parts and Christ is both *-peccable and *-impeccable (per above) then we appear to be back at inconsistency. Since concrete natures are representative parts of Christ, and Christ is both *-peccable and *-impeccable, Christ thereby has both of the target properties of said concrete natures—in this case, being able to sin and being unable to sin. And that looks to be just the fundamental contradiction we started with—the one that Pawl’s stars were supposed to resolve.

Pawl’s program looks like it faces a simple dilemma: either “concrete natures” in Pawl’s nonstandard semantics are representative parts (per above) or not. If so, the fundamental contradiction seems not to be avoided because even though each such “concrete nature” has exactly one of the two contrary properties (*viz.*, being able to sin, being unable to sin) Christ winds up with both—contradiction. On the other horn, if the concrete natures aren’t representative parts then there’s no reason to care whether *they* are peccable or impeccable; the driving concern is whether, as Chalcedon plainly says of other property pairs, *Christ* is peccable and impeccable. As far as I can see, looking at non-representative parts to answer whether Christ is both able to sin and unable to sin is analogous to looking at my pinky’s wiggling to determine whether *I* am wiggling. There mightn’t be any contradiction, but it’s far from clear why we’re discussing the matter given our driving question.

Probably I have blundered somewhere, and quite probably the fault lies with me and not Pawl’s work. But even if I did blunder somewhere, there’s reason to think that a Chalcedon-constrained Christology (a fortiori, Conciliar Christology) should accept that Christ is both able to sin and unable to sin—and not just that Christ is *-peccable and *-impeccable, as Pawl affirms. The reason stems from Chalcedon’s clear and unmistakable balance of the human and divine natures. As Oliver Crisp discusses

(*God Incarnate: Explorations in Christology* (T&T Clark, 2009)), the desideratum is to find balance between Christ's divine and human natures, whether it be with the usual Chalcedon-affirmed pairs of properties or the pair on the table (viz., peccability and impeccability). Those on the quest to consistentize Christ rightly seek perfect balance but, in the end, tilt to a "Christology from below," favoring the human nature, or tilt to a "Christology from above," favoring the divine nature. Many wind up rejecting that Christ is able to sin because, for various reasons, they think that this takes away from Christ's divinity—which is by all accounts wholly good. To regain footing, those questing after a consistent but perfectly balanced Christ invoke a well-worn "qua" device with reduplicative flavor, even if officially they explicitly reject QUA "solutions" to the apparent contradiction of Christ. In Pawl's particular case, the words "peccable" and "impeccable" (strictly speaking, some star-studded variation of those predicates) are applied to Christ, and in this way outward tribute is paid to Chalcedon. But unless I'm missing something, the predicates "is able to sin" and "is unable to sin" are not both true of Christ on the given accounts; they're true of very different beings, not Christ. But those predicates were precisely the original question! Despite the stars, Pawl seems to reject that our main-concern predicates (viz., "able to sin" and "unable to sin") are both true of Christ. In this way, Pawl fails to achieve the pure balance of divinity and humanity that Chalcedon so strongly appears to affirm and that, one would think, Conciliar Christology should embrace.

Before closing I flag some hope. Is there a natural consistentization of Christ on which Christ is both able to sin and unable (i.e., not able) to sin? Instead of changing the meanings of the words to eke out consistency (cf. Sarah Coakley, "What Chalcedon Solved and Didn't Solve," in *The Incarnation*, ed. S. T. Davis et al. (Oxford University Press, 2002)), a more promising route is to recognize different—but entirely standard—modalities involved in the Chalcedon-constrained affirmations, one modality tied to the divine and one to the human. The fundamental-problem contradiction is avoided because the conciliar attributions (e.g., "able to sin" and "unable to sin," etc.) involve different modalities—one governed by Christ's human nature, one by Christ's divine nature. This sort of account towards consistentizing Christ is simple but promising (for the given project). But details are for another venue.

I close by repeating a claim at the front: Pawl's Book 2 is a valuable contribution to the ongoing (and, alas, dominant) quest to consistentize Christ. My own view is that the quest for a true and consistent account of Christ is likely to come up short; however, the tools, terrain, and problems produced from the quest are invaluable in the pursuit of the true Christology. And from this perspective, Pawl's Book 2, like its predecessor, is tremendously high-yield.