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978-0-521-68600-6 - Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology
Marilyn McCord Adams
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Christ and Horrors

Who would the Savior have to *be*, what would the Savior have to *do*, to rescue human beings from the meaning-destroying experiences of their lives? This book offers a systematic Christology that is at once biblical and philosophical. Starting with human radical vulnerability to horrors such as permanent pain, sadistic abuse, or genocide, it develops what must be true about Christ if He is the horror-defeater who ultimately resolves all the problems affecting the human condition and Divine-human relations. Distinctive elements of Marilyn McCord Adams' study are her defense of the two-natures theory and of Christ as Inner Teacher and a functional partner in human flourishing, and her arguments in favor of literal bodily resurrection (Christ's and ours) and of a strong doctrine of corporeal eucharistic presence. The book concludes that Christ is the One in Whom not only Christian doctrine, but also cosmos, church, and the human psyche hold together.

MARILYN McCORD ADAMS is Regius Professor of Divinity, University of Oxford, and Canon of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford. She has published extensively in academic philosophy and theology.

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For

John Hick and Allan B. Wolter,

excellent mentors

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Preface

In my earlier book, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, I registered my discontent with standard “big-picture” and “free-will” theodicies. Not only do *they* not do justice to the very worst evils – the ones I identified as “horrendous.” I argued that, where horrors are concerned, *no* solution within the confines of a religion-neutral value-theory is possible. By contrast, a range of options opens up if one turns to the wider resources of Christian theology. One methodological moral of my story was that, in explaining how Christian faith can be coherent, Christian philosophers should not act as if Christian beliefs sum to “restricted-standard theism” – the claim that there exists an omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good God. Instead, Christian philosophers should bring the richer and more nuanced doctrines of the Trinity, Incarnation, and atonement into play.

My own wrestlings with evil convinced me that, while sin and horrors are both problems, horrors are the more fundamental problem. My opening question in this book is: what does Christology look like, if rescuing the world from horrendous evils is the Savior’s principal job? Where *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* urged philosophers to be more theological, *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology* invites theologians to define the soteriological problem in a philosophical way. I myself am committed to this approach and its consequences. Naturally, I hope my arguments will convince many readers. Others will know in advance, however, that their commitment to centering soteriology around solving the sin-problem is too deep to budge. I make bold to suggest that even these should not stop reading, but instead regard themselves as invited into a thought

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experiment in systematic theology. Studying Riemannian geometry to see what happens when Euclid's parallel postulate is taken away helps one understand Euclidean geometry better. Besides, even those who start with sin will have to account for horrors. What follows may furnish them with some transplantable ideas! A Christology that is philosophical as well as biblical owes an account of the metaphysics of the Incarnation (which I offer in chapter 5). I have structured the book in such a way that readers less interested in metaphysics can pass over chapter 5 without losing the thread of the argument of the other chapters.

That Christology would be the place for me to start in doing systematic theology was probably already determined by the Jesus-centered faith of my bible-belt upbringing. It was reinforced by my Anglo-Catholic mentors and the Incarnational vision of the great turn-of-the-twentieth-century Anglicans surveyed in Archbishop Michael Ramsey's wonderful little book *An Era in Anglican Theology, from Gore to Temple: Anglican Theology between Lux Mundi and the Second World War 1889–1939*.¹ It was fed by the medieval theologians I have spent most of my adult life studying, great thinkers who have their own marvelous Christological visions and who also made philosophy the backbone of their extensive theological reflections.

The materials in this book took some years in developing. Parts were presented in Gifford lectures (the University of St. Andrew's, November 1999), DuBose lectures (Sewanee, the University of the South School of Theology, October 2003), and Warfield lectures (Princeton Theological Seminary, April 2005). I am grateful to these schools for inviting me and to the individuals who attended for many probing and provocative questions. I am happy to thank Yale University for sabbatical leave and the Luce Foundation for a Henry Luce III Fellowship in Theology (2002–2003) that supported my work.

¹ Arthur Michael Ramsey, *An Era in Anglican Theology, from Gore to Temple: Anglican Theology between Lux Mundi and the Second World War 1889–1939* (New York: Scribner, 1960).

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Special thanks go to the Rockefeller Foundation Study Center at Bellagio, Italy, whose extravagant hospitality provided the spiritual leisure to finish this project.

During my ten Yale years, I enjoyed many stimulating class sessions and conversations with excellent students, who are now moving into their own careers. Among them, I mention Michael Barnwell, Wendy Boring, Alice Chapman, Andrew Chignell, Shannon Craigo-Snell, Andrew Dole, Stephen Edmondson, Christine Helmer, Cynthia Hess, Ruthanna Hooke, Maurice Lee, Todd Ohara, Edwin van Driel, and Edward Waggoner (who also did a spectacular job as my research assistant). For me, working with them was the academy at its best! Kathryn Tanner offered useful and insightful feedback in her role as Luce Conference commentator. Rowan Greer was an invaluable guide to turn-of-the-twentieth-century Anglican authors. Robert Merrihew Adams has facilitated this project with scholarly critique and moral support that did not stint at transatlantic relocation! He also joined Oxford colleagues Jane Shaw and Sarah Ogilvie in brainstorming a new title. I am indebted to all of these persons in many and various ways.

This book is a sequel to *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*. The conception of horrendous evils and their anthropological consequences, which I worked out in the earlier book, has been appropriated and reasserted here. Some other ideas in this book have been previewed or overviewed in the following published articles:

“Biting and Chomping Our Salvation! Eucharistic Presence, Radically Understood,” in *Redemptive Transformation in Practical Theology*, ed. Dana Wright and John D. Kuentzel (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 69–94.

“The Coherence of Christology: God Enmattered and Enmattering,” *Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, vol. 26, no. 2, new series (2005), 157–179.

“*Cur Deus Homo?* Priorities Among the Reasons,” *Faith and Philosophy* 21:2 (April 2004), 1–18.

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- “Three Great Theological Ideas from the Middle Ages” (The Dubose Lectures), *Sewanee Theological Review* 47:2 (Easter 2004), 129–180:
 “The Metaphysical Size Gap,” 129–144;
 “Courtesy, Divine and Human,” 145–163;
 “The Primacy of Christ,” 164–180.
 “Trinitarian Friendship: Same Gender Models of Godly Love in Richard of St. Victor and Aelred of Rievaulx,” in *Theology and Sexuality: Ancient and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Eugene F. Rogers, Jr. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 322–339.

I am grateful to these journals and anthologies for permission to incorporate some of these materials into the present work.

When my attention was absorbed by the details of medieval metaphysics, two people in different ways reminded me that Christology centers my driving questions: John Hick and Allan B. Wolter OFM, both of them intellectual adventurers who follow questions where they lead and seek truth where it may be found. This book is dedicated to them with thanks for their inspiring examples.