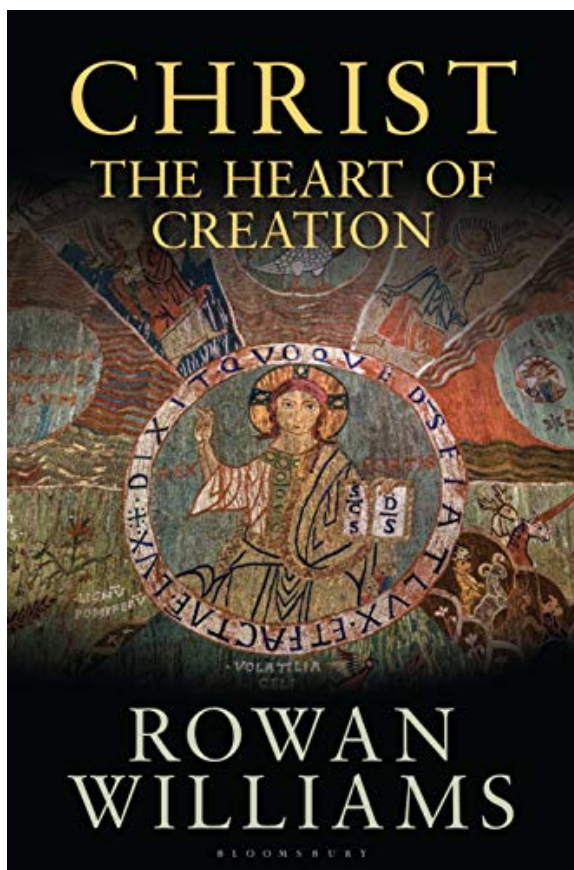


Rowan Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation*.

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*Reviewed by
the Rev S C Sharman, PhD*

This book is a characteristic work of Archbishop Williams, sometime Archbishop of Canterbury, full of deep scholarship, wisdom and learning. This reviewer hopes that there are people in this world who can read a book like this, understand it, enjoy it and learn from it. However, this reviewer regrets that he is not one of them; he found it heavy going. He

will confess that he did learn from it and is the better from his attempt to cope with Williams' profound scholarship. He now knows that his calling is to be a simple church historian and not a theologian and philosopher. Such self-knowledge is important.

This book is about Christology. Williams begins with Austin Farrar, then visits St Thomas Aquinas, returns to the Council of Chalcedon and traces the history of the study of Christology from then to the present. Along the way he examines St Bonaventura, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Erich Przywara who is a Jesuit metaphysician and theologian, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Williams examines the contribution of each theologian to the study of Christology. This is a noticeably idiosyncratic selection of scholars.

They are for the most part Western European scholars. There are no contemporary Eastern Orthodox scholars in his list and one can think of several including John Meyendorff and Alexander Schmemmann. He does write about those who built the Definition of the Council of Chalcedon, and so we read about Leontius of Jerusalem and Leontius of Byzantium. This chapter is an especially useful one. This reviewer is puzzled by the omission of Richard Hooker, a major architect of the Elizabethan Settlement, and of Charles Gore who is known for his kenotic Christology. These omissions are surprising in the work of an archbishop of the Church of England. This reviewer does recognise that, if Archbishop Williams had examined these missing theologians with the care and scholarship which he had devoted to the theologians whom he did include, the book would have been much longer.

The guiding theme in this study of Christology is the relationship between the Infinite, God, and the finite, man, in the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Williams studies his chosen elite of theologians through the lens of this relationship. He derives his theme from the theological works of Austin Farrar, notably his Bampton Lectures, *The Glass of Vision*, and a monograph, *Finite and Infinite*. Later in the book, Williams observes “the logic of finite and infinite overall has to be repeatedly clarified for the sake of affirming both divinity and humanity in their proper integrity” (p. 120).

In various places in his book, Williams insists that he defends the orthodox doctrine of the Incarnation. For instance, he writes “and all this is summed up in our belief in a Christ who is uninterruptedly living a creaturely, finite life on earth and at the same time living out of the depths of divine life and uninterruptedly enjoying the relation that eternally subsists between the divine Source or Father and the divine Word or Son” (p. xiii). In another place he argues for the value of Christology: “the main argument of these chapters, however, remains the claim that Christology, so far from requiring a rethinking of the classical account of divine perfections (impassibility, immutability and so on), actually provides the fullest possible rationale for them” (p. 11). His analysis of Protestant theologians, especially Luther and Calvin, is guided by his assessment of how each one of them handled classical accounts of Christology as expressed by Aquinas.

When he writes about Bonhoeffer in Part II, Williams explains how Bonhoeffer's Christology influenced his political activities in the Germany of the Third Reich. He discusses this point thoroughly in "Section 3. Christology, Ethics and Politics: Discourses of Transformation." We remember that Bonhoeffer's convictions cost him his life. This is an indication that a knowledge of Christ as the Son of God and Saviour, a study which is known as Christology, has an impact on all parts of a faithful Christian's life and may require heroic self sacrifice.

Ultimately we must ask if this book is worth reading by the non-specialist as well as by the specialist. The answer is yes, emphatically yes. It is a difficult book, at times a very difficult book, but worth reading and rereading. This reviewer who is a non-specialist found that reading this book was worth the effort and so recommends it to others.

About the reviewer: Father Stephen Sharman is a priest at St. Nicholas parish in Narol, Manitoba. He received his PhD from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in 2013. The title of his dissertation was *Visions of Light in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*.