Fully Human Fully Divine: An Interactive Christology

Michael Casey OCSO


Michael Casey is a Cistercian Monk of Tarrawarra Monastery in Glen Vale, Victoria and an international expert on St Benedict. His other works include Toward God: The Ancient Wisdom of Western Prayer (1995) and Sacred Reading (1996).

This work is a spirituality text that in many revives a theology of grace prevalent in the writings of both the Greek and Latin Fathers of the Church including Origen and Irenaeus, who understood participation in the life of God through Christ and in the Holy Spirit as a true divinization. This concept of grace was also accepted by Pope Leo the Great, d. 461 and Augustine and was to become the foundation of the whole of theology of grace in the medieval period, as is particularly evident in the writing of Thomas Aquinas.

Michael Casey's work is the fruit of his own particular interest in the theme of divinization and of his own personal reading and reflection on the theme over a decade. The work is particularly influenced by the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux and other Cistercian authors of the twelfth century and their sources (vi-ix).

The book contains a preface in which the author sets out the purpose of the text. This Preface is followed with a helpful exposition on Cistercian spirituality which includes brief biographical details of monastic authors, both men and women, whose writings span a period from 185 to 1267AD. It is on these writings that the reflections in the twenty-five chapters, which follow, are based.

The subtitle (an interactive Christology) reflects the structure of the text which balances a close textual study of the Christology of Mark's Gospel with the application of the principles of Jesus' humanity, to our human condition as his followers. It is by use of this structure that the author encourages the reader to grow in an understanding of our own humanity, to embrace renunciation, detachment, and knowledge of the truth about ourselves and to come to an appreciation of the precious gift of divine life in and through Jesus Christ.


In the last chapter, Casey reflects on how God’s raising of Jesus, and all that that subsequently entailed for him, can be lived out in our daily life, because, as he suggests, in the process of divinization nothing of our humanity is lost or left behind. The book also includes notes, an index of biblical texts and an index of authors.

The book makes for easy reading, but as Casey himself suggests this is not a book to be read in a hurry (viii). Indeed the author has deliberately inserted a number of devices into the text to slow down the reader so as to achieve a slower reflective perusal of the content. It is this slow, reflective reading which the author hopes will encourage readers to begin or to continue the journey “to become fully human and fully alive” (ix). I believe that Casey achieves this purpose admirably.

Each of the chapters is short and is presented clearly and logically. The chapters dealing with Mark’s Christology of Jesus open with a lengthy quotation from this Gospel designed to set the theme of that particular chapter. The alternative chapter, which compares the Markan Jesus’ human experiences to that of our own, opens with a quotation taken from various sources, such as Cistercian, patristic, or contemporary writers. These quotations are intended to complement one another and to lead the reader to a slow and reflectively reading of the material that follows. It is this slow reflective reading (Lectio Divina) which assists the reader to understand more fully the reality of our incorporation into Christ in Baptism. Each chapter also helps readers see Jesus’ humanity and divinity more clearly and to assist the reader to understand the divinization process more clearly.

The notes which are conveniently situated at the close of each chapter not only offer elucidation of the various points covered, but also a wealth of other resource material for further reading and reflection.

The author has designed the book for reflection and prayer and means it to be used over a substantial period of time. It is therefore best suited for readers interested in using it for this purpose and who wish to deepen their own personal growth and spirituality.

Casey has also carefully mined a relatively untapped source - Cistercian writers and their sources - for a theology of grace which is largely missing in the plethora of modern theological books on this topic. Therefore, this work which treats the topic of divinization so simply and yet so thoroughly will also be of interest as a rich resource for those researching this topic.

Reviewer: Dr Margaret Hannan SGS is Honorary Fellow with Australian Catholic University.