

Despite the above weaknesses, *A Wideness in God's Mercy* will stimulate contemporary evangelical thinking on the problem of religious pluralism.

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Rhodes, Ron. *Christ Before the Manger: The Life and Times of the Preincarnate Christ*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992. 299 pp. \$13.99.

In *Christ Before the Manger*, Ron Rhodes, Th.D., gives a glimpse of the fellowship of the triune God such as Christ, the eternal Son, makes possible to finite beings. For Rhodes, the sonship of Christ does not denote inferiority, since for the Semitic mind "son of God" means "of the order of God" (12-13, 30-31). God is revealed in Christ according to a plan conceived for humankind before time, to be carried out in time. This plan includes the preincarnate appearances of Christ and culminates in an earthly millennial kingdom, after which glimpses of God are replaced with his unveiled presence (14-15, 34).

Rhodes presents Christ as possessing all the divine attributes; he is the image, exact representation, and fullness of God. Christ's immutable, omnipresent divinity is mobile, active, and capable of local presence. These attributes are comforting, Rhodes writes, because Christ can never change his mind about using his power to secure us forever in faith (43-48). Rhodes further expounds the biblical revelation of Christ as Creator, Preserver, Angel of the Lord, Shepherd, Savior, Eternal Logos, holder of divine names, virgin-born, and possessor of human life and eternal glory.

The discussion of Christ as Savior, Logos, and fully human deserves special notice. (1) Christ's role as Savior was not an afterthought, but a part of God's plan, which encompassed even sin. This plan was a matter of sovereign decree, formulated on the basis of boundless wisdom and knowledge and allowing for freewill decisions. God's eternal decree is his sovereign resolve and purpose controlling all of creation (125-131). (2) Concerning the Eternal Logos, in the OT the Word was an active agent of God while in the Jewish targums "Word of God" was substituted for "God." Around A.D. 25, Philo developed dualistic concepts of a good God, evil matter, and mediating logos. However, John presents the Word as a divine person, unlike the OT or Jewish ideas (146-148). (3) "All that Christ did among human beings in his *preincarnate* state prepared in some way for what he would accomplish in his *incarnate* state" (190). His conception was supernatural but His subsequent development was normal, except that He never sinned. Christ did not cease to be God, but neither did He use divine attributes for Himself. He became "God *plus*," for in contrast to triune oneness, he has two natures (198-199). Rhodes postulates that Christ, "with his divine nature *and* with his human immaterial nature . . . departed from his human body" and returned "to the same physical body in which he died" (201). The natures were without mixture or separation. Christ is *fully God and fully man*, always conscious of deity and humanity, one Will-er who possesses both a divine will and a human will (203-204).

In his book, Rhodes reviews early Christian thought, referring to Church Fathers and ancient creeds. He also takes note of contemporary theologians, not to prove, but to support and illustrate his conclusions. However, *Christ Before the Manger* is especially useful because of its biblical content. His writing style is based on a conscious theological method. For Rhodes, viewing the OT "Christo-centrally" is imperative in the light of Christ's claims, as recorded in Scripture (17).

Rhodes' extensive use of biblical material (often more than ten references per page) provides a useful introduction to the biblical revelation of Christ. However, there were issues raised which seem to deserve more complete treatment. Concerning the relation of time and eternity, Rhodes admits that his idea of created time is based on "hints" from the *Epistle to the Hebrews* and from extrabiblical sources (36-37, 149). However, while creaturely time began with creation, God's time is another matter. See F. Canale's *Toward the Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983).

Other matters in need of clarification include God's attributes, the millennial kingdom, Christian assurance, and human freedom. (1) What is the relation between immutability and omniscience, and the "God *plus*" of becoming human and learning what it feels like (198)? (2) Alternative interpretations of the millennial kingdom of Christ deserve consideration. (3) The linking of assurance with the idea of indefectability seems to ignore certain Scripture passages such as: "make your calling and election sure . . . so you shall never fall" (2 Pet 1:10). (4) Rhodes holds that God acts in history beyond his decrees, but his concept of sovereignty raises questions concerning the goodness of God, human freewill, and human sin.

Finally, Rhodes' description of how the divinity as well as the *immaterial* humanity of Christ survived death, seems inadequately supported. For instance, Millard Erickson, writing from a perspective similar to that of Rhodes, agrees with Rhodes that some Bible passages "seem to indicate an intermediate [conscious] state between death and resurrection," but he acknowledges that from the wider perspective of other texts, "the Bible does not view the human being as body, soul, and spirit [as discrete entities] but simply as self." Erickson approves H. Wheeler Robinson's conclusion that "the Hebrew idea of personality is an animated body, and not an incarnated soul" (Millard J. Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, ed. Arnold Hustad [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992], 173).

Of course Rhodes could not be expected to deal with all these issues within the limits of his book. He has accomplished the aims he set for himself, to survey the biblical revelation of the life and times of the preincarnate Christ. His book is made doubly useful by an index, a bibliography, and 70 pages of appendices on the names, titles, and types of Christ, fulfilled messianic prophecies, difficult passages, Christian creeds, and ancient errors on the person of Christ (229-299). I recommend this Bible-saturated book as a useful aid to biblical study of the person and ministry of the preincarnate Christ.