

## BOOK REVIEWS

Armstrong, Donald, ed. *Who Do You Say That I Am? Christology and the Church*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. 159 pp. Hardcover, \$20.00.

This volume consists of six essays originally presented at the Sixth International Conference of the Anglican Institute held in the fall of 1998 in Paris, France. The contributors are NT scholars and leaders of the Anglican church: George L. Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury; Alan R. Crippen II, senior fellow for religion and political studies at the Witherspoon Fellowship in Washington, DC; Christopher D. Hancock, former professor of theology at Virginia Theological Seminary; Alister McGrath, Principal of Sycliffe Hall at Oxford; Richard Reid, former Dean and Professor of New Testament Studies at Virginia Theological Seminary; and N. T. Wright, Dean of Litchfield Cathedral. The purpose of the volume is to respond to the radical feminist hermeneutic of the Bible and to reaffirm the conservative perspective of the significance of Jesus and of the church in the postmodern age.

In the opening essay, "The Christological Problem," Hancock maintains that the problem that the Christian student confronts today is the plurality of perspectives with regard to Christology. The real question is not, in his view, what we make of Jesus but rather what he makes of us and what God has to say to us through Jesus. In the rest of the essay he lists the problems that different types of inquirers face with regard to Christology. For example, for the critical skeptic the problem of Christology is the lingering cultural aura of Christ's person and work, while for the NT reader it is the historical reliability of the Gospel material. For the historian of doctrine the problem of Christology involves the divinity of Christ, the development of doctrine, the role of culture, and the impact of science. Hancock suggests that the understanding of Christ concerns both the whole Christian community and individual, committed Christians. Christological problems for the church today are caused by the modern debate about "the Jesus of history" and "the Christ of faith." The foregoing problems felt by the whole church affect, in his view, the heart and mind of each individual Christian.

Richard Reid, in his essay entitled "The Necessity of a Biblical Christology," suggests that Christology is a central Christian doctrine because the way we understand Christ affects how we understand God. A proper Christology is one that has its source in the Bible, which is the only real source of information about the person of Jesus Christ. The Bible not only provides information about Christ, but it also interprets that information and helps us to understand its significance. It provides the context for understanding Jesus as the fulfillment of the OT promises. It further provides the content of Christology, for the NT provides reliable information about Jesus' life, work, death, and resurrection. It finally provides continuity between the message of Jesus and his own understanding of his ministry and mission and the way the NT writers presented his role. In conclusion, Reid argues that "any Christology which is not rooted in the Bible—which does not take into account the context, and the content, and the continuity which the Bible provides, will always be inadequate, or worse, just plain wrong. It may even turn

Christianity into a different religion altogether" (45).

In "The Biblical Formation of a Doctrine of Christ," N. T. Wright argues that central to the church's mission, work, and life is the discovery of "more and more of who Jesus was and is precisely in order to be equipped to engage with the world that he came to save." The basic question that Christology entails is the divinity of Jesus the Messiah. New Testament Christology has developed from the Jewish monotheistic tradition, which is incompatible with ancient pagan and modern deistic and pantheistic ideas of God. It is not based on the idea of an abstract or distant God, but rather on the God involved and continually active in the world. The NT writers present Jesus as the Messiah in the language used in the OT for YHWH. It is "as part of his human vocation" that Jesus came to the realization that "he had to do and be, for Israel and the world, that which according to Scripture only YHWH himself could do and be" (47). In conclusion, Wright suggests that just as the early church was not reticent about confessing Jesus as the Messiah, that his death was God's saving act, and that he and his Father belonged together within the Jewish portrait of God, so there is no reason why the confession of the contemporary church should be reticent either. The mission of the church can be summed up in the phrase "reflected glory," that God's glory may "shine in us and through us, to bring light and life to the world that still waits in darkness and the shadow of death."

Alister McGrath suggests in "Christology: On Learning from History" that a part of the Anglican heritage is to study the history of Christian thought in order to avoid past errors and to prepare to face the future. As his starting point, McGrath takes the Acts of the Apostles, which shows how early Christian apologetics proclaimed Jesus to both the Jews and the Greeks. Acts provides the church today with strategies for the proclamation of Jesus to modern Western pluralist culture. Other lessons that later history teaches us with regard to Christology are: the importance of tradition; the communication of the Gospel in a language understandable to the world; the dangers of allowing philosophical presuppositions and cultural pressures to determine theological agenda, of which Christology is a part; transdenominational collaboration in defending the orthodox view regarding the identity of Christ; and that the presuppositions which one brings to Scripture determine at least a part of his understanding of Christ. McGrath makes a strong appeal to Anglicans to take the past seriously and to learn from both the successes and failures of the past.

In his essay entitled "The Biblical Christ in a Pagan Culture," Allan R. Crippen II warns against any endeavor to subordinate Christ and Christianity to culture. He argues that the Anglican mainstream has always believed that Christ transcends and consecrates culture. Since culture arises from God's creative activity and is an aspect of Creation that he shares with humanity, it is to be ordered so as to fit the created reality. The beginning of the paganization of culture might be traced back to Gen 3: the disobedience of the first human couple has radically affected nature and the cultural norm. It is in Jesus Christ that the cultural dimensions of fallen humanity can be restored. The biblical Christ in the postmodern culture, however, will be made manifest through the church. Therefore, Crippen argues for the end of parochialism not for the purpose of becoming resident aliens, but that we might become soldiers with an invasion strategy. We are to be the church militant,

on the way to becoming the church triumphant. We are God's salvation army of occupation in the world. The mission of local parishes is to reorder their cultural life in anticipation of the coming new world order.

In the concluding essay entitled "Christ and his Church: The Implications of Christology for the Mission of the Church Today," George L. Carey argues that at the heart of the church is the living Christ, and that the way we experience him will guide our mission. Faith in Christ, first of all, challenges privatized forms of Christianity; and, second, it makes members a Christlike people. It calls people to discipleship, radical obedience, and faithfulness. The most important implication of Christology for the church today is to become Christlike and to put Christ at the center of all its activities. The perception of the church as a bureaucracy, institutionalized morality, social agency, or a school of liberal humanism, must be challenged and changed.

The overall approach of the volume is that of systematic theology and its objective is an apologetical response to the radical feminist hermeneutics of the Bible. The stand taken here is especially significant in light of the challenges that Anglican clergy and theologians have faced during the last decade.

Since the pivotal statement of the volume is "biblical Christology," it seems paradoxical that the Bible is not the primary source of the material; it is only referred to sporadically. The stress is on the Anglican traditional conservative position. The only exception is the essay of Wright, who takes a biblical-theological approach. More biblical treatment would be helpful, especially in light of the fact that feminist theologians point to the Bible to strengthen their position. The traditional church position on Christology is certainly important, but it is the NT in particular that defines true Christology and sets the standard for the church's beliefs and teachings.

In conclusion, despite the critique expressed above, the volume proves to be informative and inspiring. Even though I occasionally find it hard to follow the thematic flow of some of the essays, the book is helpful to those who seek some encouragement and direction with regard to the conservative position on biblical Christology.

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Barr, James. *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999. xvii, 715 pp. Hardcover, \$ 48.00.

Fortress Press seems to have undertaken the task of publishing important OT and biblical theologies. After the monumental works of Childs (1993) and Brueggemann (1997), now James Barr's comprehensive analysis of biblical theology has appeared at the same time as Anderson's *Contours of Old Testament Theology*. In thirty-five highly perceptive chapters, Barr surveys twentieth-century works on biblical theology and draws the reader into the conceptual questions, both theological and philosophical, that everyone who is seriously engaged in the task of biblical theology needs to face. Barr's comprehensive knowledge of the scholarly literature as well as his sharp insights make this book a *tour de force*.

Barr begins by delineating the contested notion of biblical theology (chap.