



Habets, Myk.

The Anointed Son: A Trinitarian Spirit Christology

Princeton Theological Monograph Series 129

Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010. Pp. ix + 329. Paper. \$37.00. ISBN 9781606084588.

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Myk Habets lectures at Carey Baptist College in Systematic Theology, Hermeneutics and Ethics, and has lectured in theology and ethics at the University of Otago, BCNZ (now Laidlaw College), and Pathways College. He has published articles on the Trinity, pneumatology, and soteriology, in such journals as *Scottish Journal of Theology*, *New Blackfriars*, *Irish Theological Quarterly*, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, and *American Theological Inquiry*.

Habets is an ambitious theologian and *The Anointed Son: A Trinitarian Spirit Christology* is an ambitious work in which he advocates a model of Spirit Christology that “articulate[s] the relationship between the ‘person’ of the Holy Spirit and the ‘person’ of the Son, both in the incarnation and in the work of redemption including the intra-Trinitarian relations.” (4-5) Habets’ project is one that wishes to complement, rather than replace, the historically dominant Logos Christology which has focused on the deity of Christ, sometimes to the obscuring of his true humanity.

Habets doesn’t contend for functional Christology (i.e., Christology from below) over and against ontological Christology (i.e., Christology from above) but rather seeks to hold the two in unison without one dominating the other. When one takes pride of place then heresy ensues (in the form of either Docetism or adoptionism). Likewise, he’s adamantly opposed to Christology eclipsing Trinitarian theology or pneumatology, as has been the trend historically speaking.

“What a Spirit Christology seeks to achieve is to bring the role of the Holy Spirit back into focus in all of the manifold expressions of his relationship to Jesus and the Father.” (161)

After an introductory chapter summarizing the book’s contents Habets lays out his approach in the second chapter which is a Christology “that proceeds *from below to above*,” without one eclipsing the other, what he calls “an inspirational-incarnational Christology.” (51) The third chapter takes a brief look at both Logos and Spirit Christology in the patristic period up until the 5th century noting the dominance that Logos Christology achieved in the church. The fourth chapter lays out Habets’ interpretive method which he calls a “retroactive hermeneutic,” a hermeneutic in which the post-Easter experience of Christ in the Spirit bring to mind Jesus’ life, words, and deeds. “In this sense, the present and the past correspond such that the present does not contradict the past, nor vice-versa.” (103) The fifth (and longest) chapter examines several episodes from Jesus’ life that highlight his relationship with the Spirit and establish his identity as both God and man. The remaining chapters situate Spirit Christology within Trinitarian theology (chapter 6) as well as outlining the development of a “Third Article theology,” i.e., a theology that begins with the Spirit (chapter 7), and finally detailing the relevance of Spirit Christology for systematic theology as well as Christian life and ministry. A 38 page bibliography, 6 page Scripture index, and 4 page subject index complete this volume.

Habets has a lot going for him with his proposal for a Spirit Christology. To start, it does justice, for the most part, to the biblical record. By beginning with the Spirit’s role in Christ’s life and seeing how throughout his incarnate career he operated as a man filled with and empowered by the Spirit, Habets is able to maintain the genuine humanity of Christ without denying his true deity. He’s also quite correct to highlight the close relationship between the person *and* work of Christ so that soteriology is incorporated into Christology (this was, of course, a mainstay of patristic thought). It also makes a great deal of sense to explain the Christology and pneumatology in mutually constitutive terms in light of the mutually constitutive relationship of Father, Son, and Spirit in the immanent Trinity (see 129). There’s also something intuitive about this “Third Article theology” seeing as how we, as believers, first experience the Spirit in salvation. As one who holds to an Arminian soteriology I believe that the Spirit is the one who enables us through God’s prevenient grace to respond to the gospel. So while we might first *hear* about the Son it is the Spirit (working according to the Father’s will) whom we first *experience*. Lastly, I can appreciate that Habets is not seeking to replace Logos Christology with Spirit Christology, but rather wants them to complement each other. When held together they help to safeguard against the possible errors that can result from each on their own. There’s much more to agree with but I’ll limit myself to these major points.

But for as much as I appreciate about Habets’ project there are some things that I’d take issue with and others that I’m simply unsure of. On the literary level Habets simply takes too long to

explain exactly what he means by “Spirit Christology.” It’s not until chapter 4 that we’re really sure what exactly Spirit Christology entails but for the first three chapters he uses the term frequently. One is left having to employ his retroactive hermeneutic in order to make sense of the first few chapters! On the theological level I think that Habets overstates at times the pitfalls of Logos Christology. While there is always a risk of deviating into Docetism this is far from a necessity if left unchecked by Spirit Christology. The fact remains that there have been plenty of orthodox believers throughout the centuries who have not fallen into the trap of Docetism and this without the aid of Spirit Christology. I also find myself unconvinced that Chalcedon doesn’t speak to contemporary concerns (see 21; 193). Truth is truth in any era and if what Chalcedon said is true then it’s as useful for contemporary Christology as it was for ancient Christology (Habets himself affirms belief in the tenets of the Symbol of Chalcedon which, against his claims otherwise [261], I find to present a constructive conception of the one person).

Perhaps my biggest point of disagreement is that the Son was separated from the Father (and Spirit) on the cross which resulted in the Father and Spirit undergoing a kenosis along with the Son. Habets seems to want to have his cake and eat it too when he claims that there is no ontological separation on the cross but rather an economic one (see 166, n. 189). One is left wondering what it means exactly for there to be a separation in the economic Trinity and how this is possible without there also being a separation in the immanent Trinity. We’re left with statements like, “In death the Spirit also underwent a kenosis whereby he committed himself totally to the Son,” (165) and “Now, for the first and last time, on the cross, this experienced relationship was severed... For the Father a loss of paternal experience, for the Son the loss of filial experience, for the Spirit a loss of experienced community,” (167) but this is much more than can be gleaned from Jesus’ cry on the cross, which, contrary to the view taken in this book, is actually a cry that points to the Father *not* forsaking the Son. The psalmist certainly *felt* forsaken, as Jesus undoubtedly did, but we learn by the end of the psalm that God was with him the entire time and that his prayers were to be answered. Jesus’ cry is almost surely meant to direct the hearer to the entire psalm which ends in vindication. As I stated above concerning my agreements, there is much more to disagree with, but I’ll limit myself to these points so as to not make this review incessantly long.

In short, *The Anointed Son* is a thought-provoking foray into contemporary Christology, and a work that deserves a wide reading. Habets is clearly knowledgeable about the subject matter, but more than simply being knowledgeable, he’s passionate about it. I commend him for seeking to explicate a Christology that fits nicely into Trinitarian theology without jockeying for position against it, and also for recognizing the integral role that pneumatology plays in Christology in the Christian Scriptures. His prospects for Spirit Christology as it relates to systematic theology and Christian ministry are promising even if still a ways off. And while I may disagree with certain points of his presentation, I can say that he’s not alone in holding such positions, so even if I think them incorrect they’re far from being on the fringe. I can gladly recommend this volume to

any and all students of both Christology and Trinitarian theology—it addresses both subjects so well that I hardly know where to shelf it in my library.