



McDonough, Sean M.

Christ as Creator: Origins of a New Testament Doctrine

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

Sean M. McDonough is Professor of New Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts. *Christ as Creator: Origins of a New Testament Doctrine* spans eleven chapters that I'd break down into roughly four sections: 1) Introduction, 2) Background, 3), Exegesis, 4) Theology.

The first section contains an introductory chapter in which McDonough briefly summarizes prior research on the subject of Christ's role in creation and outlines the manner in which he intends to approach the question.

The second section, beginning with chapter 1, lays the foundation of the study by first examining the creation theme in the earliest memories of Jesus in the Gospels, which are depicted in the opening scenes of each Gospel as well as in Jesus' miracles, exorcisms, and healings.

In chapter 2 the prevalent relationship between creation and social/moral order in the Ancient Near East and Greco-Roman world is shown to be ubiquitous: "Practically everyone seems to have believed that the beautiful arrangement of the heavenly bodies served as a model for human behavior." (60) This helps to establish the close connection between creation and salvation.

McDonough continues in chapter 3 by suggesting that 'Messiah' was the "key organizing principle" (95) in thinking through Christ's role in creation. Here he is critical of the emphasis

placed on Wisdom as a conceptual category and he joins the ranks of Gordon Fee and Aquila Lee in rejecting its significance. This isn't to say that wisdom has no role in Jesus' *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft* (mediation in creation), on the contrary, Wisdom, Word, Spirit, et al., are concepts that are subsumed in the readymade category of Messiah.

A survey of creation and mediation in Hellenistic (e.g., Platonic, Stoic, Peripatetic) thought follows in chapter 4. McDonough effectively shows that there was no single view of creation throughout the various streams of thought although there were shared questions and common themes to be found across the board. This accounts for the seeming similarities that we find in the NT. In other words, it's not that the NT writers borrow from Hellenism in their formulation of Christ's role in creation, it's that these themes and questions were widespread and appeared throughout the ancient world; similarities were inevitable.

The final chapter in this section examines the problems (e.g., ambiguity and inconsistency) of Philo and his relevance, or lack thereof, for understanding the NT treatment of Christ's mediatory function in creation.

The third section comprises the exegetical portion of McDonough's study, addressing significant creation passages in 1 Corinthians (chapter 7), Colossians (chapter 8), Hebrews (chapter 9), and the Gospel of John (chapter 10) respectively. There is a not so subtle escalation from historical inquiry and exegesis into dogmatic theology throughout these chapters.

The fourth and final section contains a single chapter in which McDonough examines the theology of six theologians: three ancient (Justin Martyr; Irenaeus; Athanasius) and three modern (Wolfhart Pannenberg; Jürgen Moltmann; Karl Barth) in light of the exegetical concerns outlined throughout the book.

Christ as Creator is a helpful study of a neglected Christological theme. McDonough's circumspect treatment of this subject helps to build a convincing case for an early high Christology. The influence of Richard Bauckham can be seen throughout the volume in McDonough's various references to Jesus' inclusion in the "divine identity," but he provides the argument to back up his assertions.

I was impressed with McDonough's reluctance to begin with Hellenistic backgrounds since beginning with the earliest memories of Jesus in the NT seems to be the most logical starting point for inquiry into the subject. The highlighting of the creation theme in the Gospels' introductions was revelatory to me personally. The exegetical section focuses on passages that are

fairly clear but to bring out the theme in the opening sections of Matthew, Mark, and Luke evinces a keen interpretive eye.

I also commend McDonough for his repudiation of Wisdom Christology. He's quite correct to assert that as Messiah, Jesus *has* wisdom rather than *is* Wisdom. He also makes a convincing case for eschatology as the impetus for reflection on protology. Christ's role as creator of the new creation inevitably led to the understanding of his role as Creator of the original creation; the connection between creation on the redemption of fallen creation is firmly established throughout this volume.

Finally, I appreciate that McDonough wasn't content to stop with mere historical inquiry. It's fine to ask what early Christians believed, but it's also important to ask what impact this has on what modern Christians believe. While I would have liked to have seen more (or at least different) theologians interacted with, his limited treatment was understandable.

The faults in this volume are limited and rather insignificant in the grand scheme of things. I would have preferred to see a fuller explanation of Bauckham's concept of "divine identity" since McDonough appeals to it repeatedly (1, 72, 84, 95, 134, 169, 187, 214). As it stands he tells the reader that Bauckham "notes particularly how the ascription of creation to Jesus was one of the surest ways to locate Jesus on the Godward side of the line separating God from all created reality." (10) This is only part of the concept though; the other major part being God's relationship to all other reality as Sovereign Ruler over all things (although I can see how one might argue that the focus on eschatology as the impetus for reflection on protology could cover this ground). I'd also note that Bauckham's understanding is largely relational, a significant concept that McDonough *does* pick up in this volume, and for that he is to be commended.

A minor personal quibble has to do with the untranslated German quotations and terms that are peppered throughout this work. To my knowledge, while a scholarly monograph this is *not* McDonough's doctoral dissertation, so to my mind there is no good reason for this phenomenon. Most readers below the doctoral level will probably not be able to read these portions of the work. Translations could have been provided in the footnotes.

Another minor quibble has to do with a disagreement over Paul's allowance of the eating of idol meat in 1 Corinthians 10. McDonough contends that Paul condones it under certain circumstances (152-53); I disagree. This is really irrelevant to his main argument though so at this point I'm just nitpicking. Typographical errors abound but this is the fault of the editor as much as it is McDonough.

A detailed bibliography, ancient source, modern author, and subject indices round out this well informed and well argued volume. While a bit slow at times in the early going, it picks up steam as it progresses. I'd highly recommend it to those engaged in the divine Christology debate as well as those interested in NT accounts of creation.