



Morgan, Christopher W. and Robert A. Peterson, eds.

The Deity of Christ

Theology in Community

Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011. Pp. 311. Hardcover. \$24.99.
ISBN 9781581349795.

Nick Norelli

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

If I'm not mistaken *The Deity of Christ* is the third volume in the Theology in Community series. The series "aims to promote clear thinking on and godly responses to historic and contemporary theological issues" while "seek[ing] to demonstrate that theology should be done in teams" (13), hence the call for multiple contributors from various disciplines. The present volume gathers together biblical scholars, historical theologians, and systematic theologians with the purpose of proclaiming and reflecting upon the deity of Christ in Christian Scripture, theology, and life.

After a summary introduction by the book's editors, Stephen J. Nichols sets a nice pace with a chapter on "The Deity of Christ Today" in which he warns against the dangers of having our "own personal Jesus," i.e., a Jesus of our own making, a culturally conditioned Jesus. As a corrective to this kind of Christology Nichols advocates submission to both tradition (particularly Nicene & Chalcedonian orthodoxy) and Scripture (which is the foundation of any and all tradition that we should submit to).

The following five chapters examine the deity of Christ from various books of the Bible. Raymond C. Ortlund covers the Old Testament and he approaches the subject by taking a look at three kinds of passages: 1) those mistakenly thought to reveal Christ's deity (Ps. 2; Prov. 8); 2) those that actually reveal Christ's deity (Pss. 45; 110; Isa. 9; Dan. 7); and 3) those that are ambiguous and thus uncertain (Isa. 7; Mic. 5).

Stephen J. Wellum looks at the Synoptic Gospels with a focus on Jesus' self-identity as opposed to his self-consciousness. To get at Jesus' self-consciousness we'd need to know Jesus' thoughts, which is obviously impossible, but we can get at his self-identity from what he reportedly said and did. With this understanding in place Wellum proceeds to examine the implicit and explicit claims to deity in the Synoptic tradition.

Andreas J. Köstenberger situates John's Gospel within a Second Temple Jewish monotheistic framework before offering a titular Christology (i.e., examining various titles such as "Son of God," "Son of Man," "I Am," "Lord," and "God"), which he follows by summarizing other relevant themes related to John's presentation of the deity of Christ (e.g., Jesus' preexistence and foreknowledge). Two chapters later he covers the Johannine letters and the book of Revelation in what I'd describe as a commentary-like manner, i.e., in providing information on the occasion and date of writing, the genre of literature, the audience, etc., before moving on to examine important passages related to the deity of Christ.

Wellum offers another chapter on the "Deity of Christ in the Apostolic Witness," which one might assume would cover the book of Acts, but instead covers predominantly Pauline material in addition to Hebrews. Wellum takes a more exegetical approach in this chapter and examines a number of well-known, well-worn, and Christologically significant passages, namely Rom. 1:3-4; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:1-4, 8-9; Tit. 2:13; 2 Pet. 1:1. He rounds his presentation out with two brief sections examining the divine acts and works of the Son and the divine titles and names applied to the Son.

Gerald Bray offers a historical summary and defense of Chalcedonian Christology. He recounts the events leading up to Chalcedon before discussing its place in the life of the Church since. Bray notes that the past two or three centuries have seen Chalcedonian orthodoxy "challenged from within the Christian churches by a wave of skepticism loosely, but not inaccurately, associated with the Enlightenment." (185) These challenges have driven defenders of the faith back into the root of Chalcedon—Scripture—and Bray advocates an application and re-appropriation of Chalcedon to modern questions and concerns. He suggests that it must be developed to deal with new challenges without its past force and application being forgotten.

Robert A. Peterson's chapter takes a five-pronged approach to arguing for the deity of Christ by noting that Jesus is 1) identified with God; 2) receives devotion due to God alone; 3) brings the age to come; 4) saves those in spiritual union with him; and 5) performs the works of God. Peterson's method and argument is reminiscent of the H.A.N.D.S. approach used by Ed

Komoszewski and Rob Bowman (whom Peterson cites often and approvingly) in their *Putting Jesus In His Place*. Peterson makes an accumulative case for the deity of Christ by looking at the whole of Scripture. This is, after all, what systematic theology does: it examines all of Scripture and arranges the data into an orderly system.

Alan W. Gomes identifies a number of ancient heretical Christologies/theologies—namely polytheism, Dynamic Monarchianism and Gnosticism, Arianism, and Modalistic Monarchianism—before fitting them with modern cults (which he defines theologically rather than sociologically). So naturally Mormons are identified with polytheists; Jehovah’s Witnesses with Arians; Oneness Pentecostals with Modalists; and less obviously Unitarian Universalists with Gnostics. Gomes presents a few brief arguments for the deity of Christ and then considers the theological implications of deficient understandings of Christ, especially as they relate to the Gospel and salvation. In short, the Christ(s) of the cults is a Christ that can’t save. The chapter is concluded with a few points of advice for those interacting with people in cults.

J. Nelson Jennings’ thought provoking chapter on the “Deity of Christ for Missions, World Religions, and Pluralism” describes missions as cross- and intercultural initiatives empowered and guided by God as part of his redemptive plan. They’re all about presenting Jesus to adherents of other religions so that Jesus might intrude into peoples’ collective and individual lives and elicit their complete loyalty and confession of his ultimate authority. (266) One concern of Jennings’ is translatability. Is it possible for people of other cultures and languages to believe the right things about Jesus yet express them in the religious language of their culture? Well, yes, so long as that expression boils down to an affirmation of the central Christian proclamation that Jesus is Lord and God. Jennings suggests that Christian inclusivism and religious pluralism cannot accommodate such a proclamation.

All in all this is a wonderful collection of essays. If the goal of this book was to provide a sound case for the deity of Christ then the mission was accomplished. The authors did that and more and they did it in a manner that non-specialists can easily understand. The copious footnotes and selected bibliography (283-88) will undoubtedly lead readers down many fruitful avenues of research. The subject and Scripture indices are also immensely helpful for navigating this volume when using it as reference material.

There are a couple of drawbacks though, which I will mention briefly. The first is repetition. I suppose that repetition is inevitable in a volume focused on such a narrow topic, but it seems to me that a stricter editorial hand could have prevented some of the overlap between Peterson’s

chapter and the material found in Wellum's and Köstenberger's chapters. Wellum could also be questioned for what seems to be an uncritical reading of Richard Bauckham. For example, he approvingly cites Bauckham's eschewal of functional and ontic categories (116-17) while going on to stress that "the New Testament does not dichotomize christology in this way" (116) before saying that the "biblical storyline entails that what Jesus *does* (functional) is intimately tied to *who he is* (ontological) and vice versa." (117) The problem is that Bauckham's Christology of divine identity doesn't actually move us away from these categories and Wellum clearly finds them to be biblical, so one wonders how or why Bauckham is especially helpful on this particular point.

Another issue concerns Gomes' identification of ancient Christological heresies and their modern counterparts. He surprisingly says nothing of Nestorianism and seems unaware of its affinities with modern day Oneness Pentecostal Christology. In point of fact, Nestorian Christology in many ways has more in common with Oneness Christology than does the Modalistic Monarchianism that is attributed to it, i.e., modern Oneness theology doesn't see God manifesting himself successively as Father, then Son, and finally Holy Spirit. It does however see Jesus as being both Father (the divine nature) and Son (the human nature), functionally treating each alleged nature as a person. But these criticisms are relatively minor in the grand scheme of this book, which I believe has a little something for just about everyone.