

## Book Reviews

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***The Incarnate Christ and His Critics: A Biblical Defense.* By Robert M. Bowman Jr. and J. Ed Komoszewski. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2024. 896 pages. Hardcover. \$57.99.**

This tome is an extensive defense of the deity of Jesus Christ as presented in the Scriptures. The authors previously collaborated in 2007 to write *Putting Jesus in His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Kregel). This volume was originally planned as a second edition of that work but became an entirely new volume three times as long once they decided what they wanted to address. One of the basic organizing features of the original book that continues in this volume is the five-point outline for characteristics of deity using the HANDS acronym: Honors, Attributes, Names, Deeds, and Seat. This volume is succinctly described as “a cross-disciplinary study of biblical Christology, comparative religion, and historical Jesus studies” (18).

The distinguishing feature of this volume compared to others on the deity of Christ is its engagement of seven alternate perspectives on Christology and pointed arguments against them. These perspectives are nonreligious skepticism, Islam, theologically progressive Christianity, Unitarianism, Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Oneness Pentecostals. The authors take the arguments of these alternate perspectives seriously and then seek to refute them on the basis of the Scriptures. There is, therefore, a definite apologetic tone to their writing.

Their work is, broadly speaking, very thorough and conservative in engaging biblical texts, relevant secondary literature, and the positions of these alternate perspectives on Christology. There is much to commend here. There are some places where this volume falls a bit short, of which I will name only two. First, there is sometimes an effort to make the biblical witness fit their categories. For example, in spite of their familiarity with my *Angelomorphic Christology* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), they make this statement: “the New Testament never uses the term ‘angel’ for Jesus Christ in any context” (375). They argue against my exegesis of Galatians 4:14, agree with my understanding that Michael in Revelation 12 is not Christ, but never engage my argument that the “angel/messenger” of Revelation 10 is certainly a depiction of Christ, much less engage the possibility that some of the other “angels/messengers” depicted in Revelation are also portraits of Christ (Rev 7:2, 8:3–5, 20:1–3). Fear of Arianism continues to inhibit recognition that this title is used of Christ in the Book of Revelation. Second, their chapter on the “Name Above All Names” focuses on the personal name Jesus instead of the divine name, which is a common error. In their

chapter on the title “Lord,” they do argue that Jesus has the divine name YHWH. It would also have been helpful if they simply pointed out that “Jehovah” is a faulty transliteration instead of using it on occasion as an alternate transliteration of the divine name.

If one is looking for an extensive volume on Christology that is informed about the alternate perspectives mentioned above and argues pointedly against them, this work will serve you well.

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***The Reformation as Renewal: Retrieving the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church: An Intellectual and Theological History.* By Matthew Barrett. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2023. 1,008 pages. Hardcover. \$59.99.**

This book is a lengthy overview of the Reformation period, starting with medieval monasticism in the fifth century and ending with the Council of Trent in 1563. The pre-Reformation material follows the trend in recent Reformation textbooks that provide the context of the Reformation—for example, Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250–1550*.<sup>1</sup> In Barrett’s case, the background material is intended to prove his thesis that the Reformation considered itself to be “a renewal of evangelical, reformed catholicity, a retrieval of the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church” (32). Confessional Lutherans will agree with Barrett’s thesis, because the Augsburg Confession says almost the same thing: “There is nothing here that departs from Scripture or the catholic church, or from the Roman church, insofar as we can tell from its writers” (AC Conclusion of Part One 1).<sup>2</sup>

The standard textbooks that have been used by Lutherans, at least since the 1950s, in my experience, have already made the case for the “catholicity” of the Lutheran Reformation. Jaroslav Pelikan is quoted to this purpose by the author (24–32). Is there then anything new in Barrett’s book that makes it worth reading or purchasing by Lutherans? I think so.

First, and foremost, is the fact that the author gives insights from the *recent* scholarship on the Reformation throughout the book. Heiko Oberman, David Steinmetz, Steven Ozment, Richard Muller, Willem van Asselt, Denis Janz, John Farthing, Randall Zachman, Euan Cameron, and Scott Hendrix are mentioned by

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250–1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1980).

<sup>2</sup> In *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).

the author as examples of this recent scholarship in his first chapter (30–31 and 30n83). Barrett admits that his Luther chapters are indebted to books by Oberman, Hendrix, Cameron, Martin Brecht, E. Gordon Rupp, and Diarmaid MacCulloch (371n1). Where he refers to these recent authors, he interacts with their work and usually agrees with it. The fifty-seven-page bibliography is mostly drawn from recent works. This book is thus, in my reading, a product of fifty years of Reformation scholarship, though Barrett's interaction with the scholarship does not interrupt the narrative flow.

Second, and most significantly, the author laments the fact that evangelical Protestants (e.g., Presbyterians and Baptists) have since the nineteenth century viewed the Reformation “as if the Reformers were radicals, throwing off the shackles of tradition, as if the church had been corrupted and lost since the apostles” (22). Then he declares that “the best evangelical academics avoid this oppositional narrative. . . . However, among the evangelical masses, the oppositional narrative is prevalent” (23). We Lutherans can hope that modern evangelicals will understand Barrett's thesis and take it to heart. His intent is not to say that everything was fine in the medieval church or in modern Roman Catholicism but that the magisterial Reformers in the Lutheran, Reformed, and Anglican churches were in harmony with the patristic churches and with many aspects of the medieval church and so on that basis could rightly claim “catholicity.”

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***The Great Works of God: or Jesus, The Heart and Center of Scripture—Part Seven: The Mysteries of Christ in the Book of Leviticus.* By Valerius Herberger. Translated by Matthew Carver. Fort Wayne, IN: Emmanuel Press, 2024. 220 pages. Paperback. \$28.00.**

Consolation in the name of Jesus—that's what Valerius Herberger delivers in Part Seven of his meditations on Scripture. Much like Augustine's *Confessions*, this devotional commentary teaches and exhorts, convicts and comforts the Christian through a running prayer to the Father, through the Son, with the Holy Spirit. Every page richly orders all of Leviticus towards Jesus Christ and his atoning sacrifice for us. Yet, as Herberger sees Jesus in the covenant to Adam and Eve, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he's never willing to leave us as the baptized out either. It's always looking back and forward, and always from the cross of Christ. The breadth of Scriptural knowledge and citation, along with hymns and classical poets, makes this series of meditations through Leviticus a true nourishment of the soul; and Matthew Carver's

translation allows one to feed without interruption! That is, the book that causes most of us to stumble while reading through the Scriptures—Leviticus—comes to us through Herberger’s insight and Carver’s translation as a book of Christ. Herberger shows how profitably and clearly Leviticus “explains how the Lamb of God was slain from the beginning of the world (Rev. 13:8). From the beginning of the world, His bloody death was always seen in the sacrifices of the people of God; and from the beginning of the world, the power of His merit has also availed for all believing hearts” (25). Everything points to Jesus: the sacrifice of cattle to his strength; the corners of the altar to the corners of his cross; the sheep to his gentleness and innocence; the goats and kids to his authority and boldness; the doves to his humility; and every burnt offering to Christ the crucified (31, 33). On and on it goes—here in Leviticus the shadow, there in Christ the truth itself—“This is all full of mystery” (72). With Herberger as your guide, the “Mosaic shell” of Leviticus cracks and gives forth “the precious, delectable nut” of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (79). And not just Leviticus alone, Herberger claims, but “how utterly the whole course of [Christ’s] life is wrapped up in the Old Testament!” (165). So, “Rouse yourself, devout heart, and ponder this. You will discover it in truth” (123).

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*Useful Hymns: for Worship, Prayer, and Instruction in the Lutheran Church, School, and Home*, 2nd ed. By R. D. Fish. Park Rapids, MN: A Fort Made of Books, 2016. 405 pages. Paperback. \$25.76.

*Edifying Hymns: for Worship, Prayer, and Instruction in the Lutheran Church, School, and Home*. By R. D. Fish. Park Rapids, MN: A Fort Made of Books, 2021. 288 pages. Paperback. \$20.14.

*Bountiful Hymns: for Worship, Prayer, and Instruction in the Lutheran Church, School, and Home*. By R. D. Fish. Park Rapids, MN: A Fort Made of Books, 2023. 392 pages. Paperback. \$25.14.

Music to glorify God for all his works is a wonder both to hear and to perform. Music set to solid hymn texts takes that artistry to a higher level. Without faithful and well-crafted hymn texts such height is unattainable. It is in this light that one should consider the hymn texts and music by Robin D. Fish, Jr.

*Useful Hymns* (UH) and *Bountiful Hymns* (BH) are largely organized according to the Church Year, UH around the one-year lectionary; BH around the three-year lectionary. *Edifying Hymns* is primarily based on daily meditation and concerns.

Each book includes topical hymns. Some topics are akin to what one would find in a typical Lutheran hymnal; some are specific to certain occasions and maladies. The topical hymns could serve well as an optional resource for pastoral theology classes as they sing about theology where it meets the life of Christians.

Although one could improve the organization of the church year hymns by arranging the hymns that fit for a whole season with the appropriate season, overall these hymns preach and sing gloriously. One might also arrange the hymns by different authors (e.g., John Kleinig and Alan Kornacki, Jr.) under the corresponding season or topic rather than in separate sections of the book.

The final lines of the first stanza of the *Dedication Hymn* in *UH* are a litmus test to the collection in its entirety, as well as to all hymnody:

Breathe into us a reverent song,  
And hold it back from speaking wrong;  
Help us to frame Thy praise aright!  
Draw those who hear it to Thy light! (*UH*, 1)

Some of these theologically and sacramentally rich hymns should find inclusion in future Lutheran hymnals.

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***Remarriage in Early Christianity.* By A. Andrew Das. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024. 359 + xx pages. Hardcover. \$44.99.**

Divorce and remarriage are perennial problems for Christians. People know that divorce is wrong, but they do it anyway. Every generation brings forth books and articles dealing with whether and when divorce and remarriage are permitted according to Scripture. Throughout the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church allowed divorce in some situations but never remarriage while the first spouse still lived, no matter the circumstances. Against this position, the Lutheran Reformation taught that in a few situations (adultery and malicious desertion) God permits a divorce, and if he permits a divorce, he also permits remarriage. Treatise 78 puts it so: “Unjust also is the tradition which forbids an innocent person to marry after divorce.”<sup>1</sup> This classic Lutheran position is based on Matthew 5:32; 19:9; and 1

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<sup>1</sup> W. H. T. Dau and F. Bente, eds., *Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church, German-Latin-English* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 527. See also Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), in *Luther’s Works, American Edition*, vol. 45, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962), 30–35; *On Marriage Matters* (1530) in *Luther’s Works, American Edition*, vol. 46, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 310–315;

Corinthians 7:15, but among Protestants there are variants both on the left and on the right. Permissive approaches to divorce and remarriage are not hard to find.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, passages such as Mark 10:2–12 have led some Protestants to question the Reformation position on remarriage and to take positions on remarriage very similar to what the Lutheran Reformation rejected.<sup>3</sup>

The latest entry in this debate is an impressive monograph by A. Andrew Das, the Niebuhr Distinguished Chair and Professor of Religious Studies at Elmhurst University, Elmhurst, Illinois. Das is well-known to CTQ readers from his commentary on Galatians in the Concordia Commentary series (2014). Das takes a very conservative view in which remarriage is never permitted so long as the first spouse still lives.

Chapter 1 deals with the cultural setting of the New Testament: the widespread acceptance of remarriage in both Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures.

In chapter 2 Das reviews various scholarly approaches to the Gospels and how these affect the issue of divorce and remarriage. He avoids source-critical approaches and instead opts for a combination of “dissimilarity, embarrassment, multiple attestation, and what is common.” Using these approaches, he finds that in the Gospels “Jesus taught strictly against remarriage as adulterous” regardless of the causes for the divorce. Das assumes that the original recipients of Mark’s and Luke’s Gospels did not know about Matthew’s Gospel, and thus were taught an absolute prohibition of remarriage, at least before the death of one’s former spouse (103).

Chapter 3 examines the exception clauses in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 in detail. Das finds that these are genuine exceptions: there can be divorce on account of πορνεία (143).

In chapter 4, Das argues that the exception clauses in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 only permit divorce in a case of adultery, but not remarriage. In order to make this explanation fit with Matthew 19:9, Das suggests that the reading of Codex Vaticanus (in which the wording of the exception is identical to Matt 5:32) may be original, or that a reconstruction of the text is needed so that one word (μοιχᾶται) can mean a metaphorical “adultery” when one divorces (but not literally “adultery,” i.e., carnal intercourse of a married person outside the marriage) and at the same time regular,

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Philip Melancthon, *The Chief Theological Topics: Loci Praecipui Theologici 1559*, trans. J.A.O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia, 2011), 490–496; Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent, Part 2*, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1978), 740–755.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Craig S. Keener, *And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> E.g., William A. Heth and Gordon J. Wenham, *Jesus and Divorce: The Problem with the Evangelical Consensus* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985); William A. Heth, “Divorce, but No Remarriage,” in *Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views*, ed. H. Wayne House (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 73–129. Heth later recanted his former views: William A. Heth, “Jesus on Divorce: How My Mind Has Changed,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 6, no. 1 (2002): 4–29.

physical adultery when one remarries (175–177). Apparently, Das wants one word to mean two different things in the same sentence at the same time. Furthermore, Mark 10:11–12 and Luke 16:18 are for Das the clearer passages, controlling the exegesis of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9.

Chapter 5 deals with Paul's teaching on remarriage in 1 Corinthians 7. Das argues that 1 Corinthians 7:10–11, which forbids remarriage after divorce, applies in all situations except the death of the former spouse, and that v. 15 does not permit remarriage after suffering a divorce. Instead, "He or she may permit the divorce to take place" (198). Yet on pp. 29–30 Das had shown that in the Greco-Roman context an abandoned person was already legally divorced. How could an abandoned/divorced spouse then permit the past divorce to take place?

In chapter 6, Das considers the witness of the early church, especially before the Council of Nicaea. Early Christian writers got their ascetic views from the Bible, but they also opposed extreme views, such as the absolute prohibition of marriage and the prohibition of the remarriage of widows and widowers. (Though to be honest, the remarriage of widows is precisely what Athenagoras [241–243] and Tertullian [252] forbade, and what St. Paul [1 Cor 7:8–9, 39] permits and commands!) Das is aware that some early Christians were more ascetic than the New Testament, but he argues that their rejection of some extreme ascetic views renders their remaining ascetic views reliable indications of the meaning of the New Testament.

The attempt to shore up the church's practice of discipline is wholly needed in this era of at-will divorce and remarriage, in which everyone does what is right in his own eyes. Moreover, the coordination of the Lord's general prohibition (such as in Mark 10) with his exceptions (in Matthew 5 and 19) needs to be clearly articulated in each generation. Das has raised all these issues, treated them in detail, and made an argument that will be welcomed by many scholars and churchmen, if not by all.

Das's analysis of the meaning of Greek words and his descriptions of the ancient near east, second temple Jewish, and Greco-Roman contexts are unquestionable and reliable. He is also committed to the unity of the New Testament's message. But his basic position is (at least to my mind) untenable: that remarriage is not permitted even after a divorce that God permits. I find an underlying ambiguity throughout the book concerning the marital status of people whose divorces God permits. Das treats them both as divorced by God's permission, but at the same time still married to the former spouse in God's eyes. (For why else would a remarriage be adultery?) Das's book will surely influence exegetes and churchmen for years to come, but I fear that it will wrongly trouble the consciences of pastors and people, and lead

Lutheran pastors to qualify their confessional subscription, at least with regard to Tr 78.

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**Esget, Christopher S. *(Dis)ordered: Lies About Human Nature and the Truth That Sets Us Free*. By Christopher S. Esget. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2023. 208 pages. Paperback. \$17.99.**

There are many books out there that try to present a Grand Unified Theory of Everything. Something about books that have a sweep of history to them is inherently appealing. It tries to make sense of the senseless.

This is just such a book.

In *(Dis)Ordered*, Pastor Christopher Esget tries to give us a framework to understand the chaos that surrounds us. We could be talking about the radicalization of both the left and the right, the bizarre turns in the sexual revolution of the new millennium, or the addictive character of every glowing rectangle known to man. In all of these cases and more, many people have the sense that something has happened, something darker and stranger than we have even imagined was possible. Is this just more of the same, or has something truly shifted in our world?

That is the question.

The first part of the book is entitled “The Contagion Infecting Humanity.” This contagion began, for Esget, with Descartes’ famous dictum *cogito ergo sum*, or “I think, therefore I am.” By placing the self as the center of the universe, modern man began a quest for authenticity and a desire to discover the “real me.” This quest runs through attempts at defeating death, the innate desire for freedom by destroying all law, “selfie” culture, and the idea that one can be born in the “wrong” body. This part ends with the place of race and culture, with a particular bent toward understanding the Marxist nature of Critical Race Theory (CRT).

It is a theory of everything that begins in the Enlightenment and ends in the nihilism of the modern world. While I do not object to any one part of the narrative, the way it is presented is so profoundly negative that it is almost impossible to see a way out. All one can really say is “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24–25 ESV)

The second part of the book is entitled, “Healing Humanity,” and runs us through the theology of the cross, the proper understanding of “conversion



therapy,” resisting our passions, fighting our own demons and temptations, and finally, returning to the Garden and Genesis at the resurrection of the body on the Last Day.

This part of the book could really be considered a way of looking at the Christian life under the cross. It points us to Christ as our only hope in times of need, and how we as the Christian Church have an important, even critical, role to play in the world today. Because hope comes only through Jesus, it is only in his word that we may have hope.

Overall, the book is a tour de force through our cultural landscape, helping us to understand how so many disparate parts are interconnected. If the book has a weakness, it is that Esget sees almost too much order and purpose behind so many forces arrayed against us today. In the continual push back to the formless void before creation (Gen 1:1), not everything has to make sense or tie together quite so nicely. But perhaps I have simply swallowed the words of Alfred in *The Dark Knight*, “Some people just want to see the world burn.” Things do not have to make sense or be a part of a carefully-constructed conspiracy theory to serve as tools of the Evil One.

Overall, I found *(Dis)Ordered* to be spot-on, but depressing. The picture he paints is of a war with all the forces arrayed against us. The Scriptures are not shy about describing our life this side of the Last Day as a war (e.g. Rev 12:7). It is a war that is only won by the blood of Jesus Christ, which has already happened.

Is there a better way of portraying the Christian life today? Some may disagree, but I do not find this image of the Christian life under the cross to be hopeful. Esget is not wrong, but neither is his portrayal exactly satisfying. For myself, I will continue to look to the altar for communion with Jesus Christ. That is where my own hope lies.

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