



## Reviews

**UNION WITH CHRIST IN THE NEW TESTAMENT** by Grant Macaskill, *Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2014, pp. 368, £75.00, hbk*

This fascinating study is an important contribution both to New Testament studies and to dogmatic theology, written by a biblical scholar with profound exegetical insight who is also a Calvinist theologian with a deep knowledge of this theological stream, from the writings of Luther and Calvin right up to the work of present-day systematians, particularly in the Barthian tradition. That he also shows a familiarity with and prudent judgement of the writings of the patristic era, and integrates these into his study in a convincing fashion to add another important dimension to his work, is hugely impressive and enviable.

Ultimately, Macaskill is concerned with the question of salvation. Taking his cue from the Reformed Scholastic movement, and with more than a nod also to the Finnish school of Lutheranism, he understands salvation ultimately in terms of communion with God in Christ. The question he proposes is whether there is a discernible 'New Testament theology' of participation, and whether the Reformed understanding of salvation in Christ is consonant with such a theology. It will not surprise the reader to discover that the answer to both questions is 'yes'; it would have been an odd project to complete if it were not so. However, this reader at least is convinced not only that Macaskill has succeeded in making his case most convincingly, albeit not without a couple of significant if unsurprising *lacunae*, but also that in doing so he has made a contribution of the first importance to New Testament studies. I do not consider myself truly competent to judge his reading of his own theological tradition, but as an outsider I found his exposition clear, his arguments coherent and his position more than plausible.

One of the most pleasing things about this book is its very conception: it seeks to be a work of biblical theology, and is unabashed in proposing a deep coherence to the New Testament's varied portrayals of union with Christ – what is the nature of that union and, by way of an equally coherent New Testament Christology, what it means for the relationship between the christian and God. That coherence, moreover, is one that springs from the consonance between the theology of the New Testament writers and that of the Old Testament itself, particularly in regard to the overarching concepts of covenant and glory. Macaskill achieves his aim of demonstrating this without opening himself up to the accusation of eisegetical naivety or ahistoricism. Quite the contrary, indeed: following Markus Bockmuehl, who is quietly becoming the guru of biblical theology of the best kind, he insists that theological exegesis of the scriptures must always engage in careful historical work – that is to say, with the recognition that the divine discourse of the scriptures takes place within a world of time and place. This responsible and incarnational exegesis can be achieved, as Macaskill demonstrates, without lapsing into the 'magisterially diachronic and reductionist approach of much historical criticism' (p. 6). Though it may not sound like it, what is even more to be celebrated, setting apart Macaskill from many others whose instincts are equally sound in regard to the study of the scriptures, is that he does not spend half of the book talking about methodology. One senses a real eagerness to get to the meat of New Testament doctrine.

This does not mean that there are no preliminaries to be dealt with: the first three chapters (around 100 pages) offer us a reprise of the state of the question as regards the New Testament in chapter one, a review of the patristic evidence, along with an excursus into modern Eastern Orthodox approaches in chapter two, and a detailed account of participation in Christ in the Lutheran and Reformed traditions in chapter three. The message Macaskill wishes to impart is that the fathers, perhaps lacking in the systematic approach that characterises the scholastic and subsequent periods, nevertheless offer a coherent reading of the New Testament to which the Protestant reformers were faithful. Some quite pronounced confluences between a number of contemporary Reformed dogmaticians and some modern Orthodox theologians' readings of the patristic tradition suggest that the former are likely to be on the right lines. The reader will notice the startlingly obvious *lacuna*, that of Catholic theology – indeed, of any theology from the end of late antiquity to the work of Luther; Macaskill does at least, unlike some of his non-Catholic contemporaries, recognise that theology did not stop for the best part of a millennium, though his nod to this period is largely restricted to Aquinas, and one may suspect that he shows his true (Barthian) colours when he writes of 'the false distinctions introduced in Thomistic theology between created and uncreated grace' [p. 51]. One cannot but wonder whether an open-minded dialogue between Macaskill and a skilled exponent of Aquinas might not be mutually beneficial.

Two final chapters of the first part of the book explore the historical background to the New Testament's presentation of union with Christ, concentrating on relatively recent developments in scholarly understanding that clear away some misconceptions that might have been seen to subvert the possibility of discerning a shared soteriological vision. In the first of these, we are reminded that there is not (as was once thought) a profound schism between apocalyptic and covenantal forms of Judaism, that older and implausible ideas about 'corporate personality' do not preclude the notion of what one might call an ontological representative mediator, and that the intertwined notions of the divine presence in the temple and the glory that is imparted thereby are central to the understanding of the relationship between God and his people found both in the Old Testament and in later Judaism. There is also an exposition of the place of the 'suffering servant' of Isaiah in late second temple messianism, although Macaskill seems unaware of some recent doubts as to the real prevalence of this figure (particularly helpful here is L.A. Huizenga's *The New Isaac*, 2009). By contrast, the fifth chapter is a masterly account of the alleged Adamic background to New Testament Christology, offering one of the most powerful and convincing counterblasts to J.D.G. Dunn's tendentious attempt to establish St Paul's Christology on this basis (notably of course in *Christology in the Making*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989).

The second part of the book is where Macaskill begins to grapple with the text of the New Testament itself, and he does so with verve, skill and unflinching sound judgement. It may be because this was where the book deals with my particular interests, but it did seem that it was in this second part that the prose became more readable, liberated from a certain denseness hitherto. One has a sense that Macaskill is really enjoying himself; and so will the reader. Rather than treat each portion of the New Testament in turn, which might have led to a tiresome repetitiveness, his approach is thematic for the most part, the biggest and most important theme being the role of Christ as fulfilment of the Jerusalem temple, which is not only the place of encounter with the living God but also the place wherein God imparts his glory. Macaskill argues convincingly that the New Testament is consistent in presenting Christ as the image of God, by which is meant one who shares in the divine glory *by nature* – rightly he has no truck with those who attempt to relegate 'high Christology' to a secondary layer of the New Testament – and as such the one who mediates this glory as a gift to the

believer, through a real participation or 'exchange' that nevertheless maintains the distinction between God and man, just as it maintains the distinction between the natural Sonship of Christ and the adoptive sonship of the Christian.

Macaskill's particular strength in this section is his interpretation of St Paul's theology, which readily acknowledges the challenges to the traditional Lutheran reading offered by the so-called New Perspective, while also offering that school some acute challenges of his own. The understanding of salvation in Christ as a kind of 'exchange' avoids an excessive emphasis on substitutionary sacrifice, and has much in common in fact with Morna Hooker's 'interchange'. If there is a weakness anywhere in these chapters, it is perhaps in the fact that the ecclesiological dimension is substantially underplayed: I would have welcomed a deeper consideration of the interplay of ecclesiology, soteriology and Christology particularly in Paul and in *Hebrews*.

But one cannot say everything in a book, and under the same constraints I find that space does not permit a full enunciation of the many exegetical riches of these chapters, so I will close with a warm recommendation of this book as a very convincing demonstration of the possibility of a theologically-thematic exegesis of the scriptures which pays the proper due to the real achievements of the historical-critical method without the narrowness so often associated with it, and which shows that beginning one's reading of the scriptures with certain theological presuppositions need not result in nothing but the question-begging and eisegetical confirmation of one's own beliefs.

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**RECONSIDERING THE DATE AND PROVENANCE OF THE BOOK OF HOSEA: A CASE FOR PERSIAN-PERIOD YEHUD** by James M. Bos, *T&T Clark, Bloomsbury*, London, 2013, pp. 186, £60.00, hbk

Exegetes find themselves in the biblical texts they study. How could it be otherwise? The linguistic turn has taught us that the mind constructs the meaning of a text through the 'encyclopaedia' of the language in which the text is written and the 'horizon' of the reader, i.e. her or his cultural and biographical background. James M. Bos reveals his biographical background in the preface of his doctoral dissertation. It was completed at the Department of Near Eastern Studies at the University of Michigan. He is an academic who submitted his writing at an institution bearing the name of a state, probably in order to secure a career and earn his living. He thinks the same must have been true for the prophet Hosea, because '... unless one assumes that Hosea was 'financially independent' (and thus a member of his society's elite), he needed to be able to earn a living' (p. 23). However, it is improbable that Hosea was an employee of the Israelite administration because of his critique of the religious and political establishment. Where did Hosea and his disciples receive their training? 'Where did they get the writing materials? How did they earn a living? ... Thus, in order to maintain an Israelite origin for the text of *Hosea* in the eighth century, one must ask whether it was possible for someone to be highly literate outside of the circles of the state administration' (p. 24).

The main thesis of the dissertation is that the book of *Hosea* was composed by scribes perhaps in the service of the High Priest in Jerusalem in early Persian times (about 540–440 BC). 'The Judahite priesthood would have benefited from propaganda opposing a monarchy (as well as propaganda opposing competing cult sites to the north). In this post-monarchic setting, then, one might expect