

Oliver D. Crisp. *The Word Enfleshed: Exploring the Person and Work of Christ*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016. 190 pp. \$26.99 (paper).

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There is an identifiable continuum of styles that fall under the heading of analytic theology. On one end of the spectrum are treatments that are clearly analytic and only recognizable as theology in that the question at issue is derived from theology. On the other end are treatments in which analytic philosophy is one element within a broader methodology that includes traditional theological sources. Oliver D. Crisp's contributions to analytic theology regularly exemplify this latter style and *The Word Enfleshed* is no exception. With the hope that analytic theology will make inroads into systematic theology, Crisp's approach should be imitated. In fact, the methodology exemplified in his book could be seen as simply good systematic theology in that Crisp carefully treats a range of interconnected theological questions about the person and work of Christ in a manner that brings together philosophical and theological sources of knowledge.

The Word Enfleshed is written clearly and Crisp went to considerable lengths to make the more difficult concepts comprehensible. This book not only introduces the reader to important issues in Christology, atonement theory, and pneumatology, but it also moves debates in those areas forward in creative and stimulating ways. While the argumentation is certainly profitable to theologians from a variety of traditions, Crisp forthrightly writes from a Reformed perspective. I highly recommend the book for scholars working on the person and work of Christ as well as theology students engaged in such issues. In this review essay, I aim to briefly summarize each chapter and, occasionally, constructively engage Crisp's views.

In chapter one, Crisp defends the historic Christian view that the Second Person of the Trinity is eternally generated by the Father. Crisp offers three theological reasons to maintain this view: it is implied by Scripture, it is affirmed by ecumenical tradition, and it is a means to individuate the First and Second Persons of the Trinity. This final reason for the view is essential for Augustinian trinitarianism in which the doctrine of divine simplicity leaves no other resources for distinguishing the persons of the Godhead. Being such an Augustinian trinitarian, Crisp defends the eternal generation of the Son from Paul Helm's objection that the biblical language of begottenness should only apply to the roles the Father, Son, and Spirit play in the economy of salvation and *not* to their eternal, ontological relatedness. The notion of

eternal generation is unnecessary for distinguishing the Divine Persons, according to Helm, as long as it can be postulated that God exists as three co-eternal and equally divine persons.

Crisp responds to Helm by reasserting the metaphysical necessity of eternal generation for Augustinian trinitarianism: eternal generation is “an eternal divine act of *internal* self-differentiation...the sort of Augustinianism espoused by Anselm and Aquinas requires eternal generation as the means by which two of the divine persons are individuated within the Godhead” (13). Since Helm shares this sort of Augustinian trinitarianism, Crisp finds it strange that Helm does not see the necessity of eternal generation.

But I take it that Helm’s objection (or a nearby objection) is that there is a semantic incoherence to the claim that the Father eternally begets or generates the Son. If in timeless eternity it is never the case that the Father exists and the Son does not exist (i.e., co-eternality), then what does the language of procession, generation, or begottenness mean when applied in this way? Certainly the Augustinian trinitarian needs to maintain a relational distinction between the members of the Godhead, but why land upon the language of generation/procession when such language adds no sense to the distinction required? It seems fairly clear that the gospel of John’s usage of “only-begotten Son” was not in reference to distinguishing members of the Godhead. Thus, Helm’s concern is that theologians have co-opted biblical language to fashion a relational distinction when that language actually refers to the economy of salvation. In other words, does it add any conceptual clarity to the historically orthodox view to claim that the Father eternally *generates* the Son versus the claim that the Father is eternally *distinct* from the Son?

Chapter two considers whether the eternal Second Person of the Trinity existed *asarkos* (without flesh) prior to the incarnate (*ensarkos*) Christ. Crisp generously engages Robert W. Jenson’s position on this matter. Jenson insists that the Second Person of the Trinity (i.e., God the Son) is identical to the incarnate Christ (hence, the incarnate Christ preexists his earthly existence and is eternally generated by the Father). Crisp demonstrates that such identification raises problems for divine simplicity and impassibility and therefore he attempts to find pathways to resolve those tensions for one sympathetic with Jenson’s position. In the end, Crisp does not perceive an easy way out for Jenson’s preferred Christology and sets up his own resolution to these issues by pointing to a compositional account of the incarnation (see chapter 6).

Given the set-up in chapter two, it would have been fitting for Crisp to move right into his compositional Christology, but chapter three discusses a preliminary question regarding the incorporeality of God in relation to the incarnation. The heart of the issue is how traditional Christianity can hold that God is essentially incorporeal and yet God the Son possessed a physical body. Crisp begins with reasons to think that God is essentially incorporeal. Crisp’s main reason for so thinking is his commitment to absolute divine simplicity, which entails divine noncomposition. Since materiality implies composition, an absolutely simple God is a nonmaterial God. After considering alternative views of God’s relation to matter (*viz.*, idealism, materialism, pantheism, panentheism, and Neoplatonism), Crisp returns to the classical Christian view that God is essentially incorporeal. He argues that this

position is consistent with the incarnation if one adopts a compositional Christology in which “the Second Person of the Trinity is strongly united to his human nature but not identical to it” (46).

I will save my reflections on this compositional Christology for chapter six, but one interesting implication of Crisp’s view is that the Godhead is essentially incorporeal and accidentally strongly united with physical substances. While Crisp does not entertain extensions of this implication, such a view could be used to make sense of biblical cases besides the incarnation in which God’s incorporeal presence is specially related to extended objects (e.g., the burning bush, the Holy of Holies, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, etc.).

Chapter four is entitled “The Christological Doctrine of the Image of God.” While discussions of the *imago Dei* are typically found in treatments of theological anthropology, Crisp maintains a christological view of the *imago Dei* that makes his discussion fitting in a book on Christology. Crisp argues that his christological view provides a more satisfying and comprehensive account of the divine image than either the substantive or relational views. Crisp writes:

on this way of thinking, Eve, Adam, and every other human being are made in the image of Christ, who is the image of the invisible God. Hence, the divine image you and I bear is, as it were, a facsimile of that image borne by Christ; it is ectypal. Although he lived long after any first putative human community, he is the one who bears the archetypal divine image, after whose divine image the rest of humanity is fashioned (62).

Crisp, it seems, wants to read Genesis 1:26–27 in light of Romans 8:29. Indeed, on Crisp’s view, God has Christ’s human nature eternally in mind logically prior to his decree to create human beings. While the archetypal human nature began to exist in the early first-century, God eternally ordained Christ’s human nature to be the blueprint for all other previously and subsequently existing humans.

While I am all for interpreting the Old Testament in light of the revelation of Christ, it is unclear what Crisp’s christological read of the *imago Dei* gains. For one, at the end of the day there is barely any difference between Crisp’s christological account and the more typical way of understanding the image of God. The more typical account I have in mind follows the classic creation-fall-redemption-glorification motif. In creation, the image of God in humans is understood as referring to a unique manner in which humans are like God (not the incarnate Christ per se). In humanity’s fall into sin that divine likeness in humans is disfigured and restored in redemption due to Christ who is understood as the perfect exemplification of the image of God such that when humans are conformed to the image of Christ they are restored to the image of God. On this view, the incarnate Christ is the archetypal or prototypical human to which all human persons must conform in that in Christ “the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (Col 1:19). But this more typical rendition falls short of making Christ’s earthly nature the blueprint at the moment of creation. God desires to make humans like himself and not humans like the one Christ would

assume. It seems to me that this is a more intuitive and biblically sensible way of understanding the relation between the image of God and the image of Christ.

Crisp thinks that his christological view allows the image of God to include the whole of human nature—capacities, relations, and functions. But that move is open to a traditional understanding of the relationship between the image of God and the image of Christ. For example, Anthony Hoekema has this holistic view of the *imago Dei* without taking on the christological perspective.¹ The image of God in humans turns out to be all of what can be expressed of the divine nature by a finite, limited human nature, which is precisely what the incarnate Christ qua human perfectly exemplifies.

Chapter five sets out the desiderata for models of the incarnate Christ that are, Crisp argues, encapsulated in a consensual Christological tradition represented by the deliverances of the Councils of Chalcedon (AD 451), Constantinople II (AD 553), and Constantinople III (AD 681). Crisp sees the minimal claims of Chalcedon to include: (i) “Christ is one person”; (ii) “Christ has two natures, one divine and one human”; (iii) “The two natures of Christ retain their integrity and are distinct”; (iv) “The natures of Christ are really united in the person of Christ—that is, they are two natures possessed by one person” (83, 94). From this Crisp derives a Chalcedonian Axiom: “Christ has one of whatever goes with the person and two of whatever goes with natures” (85, 94). Crisp adds to these minimal claims two further desiderata. The first additional desideratum, stemming from Constantinople II, is made up of two claims: (i) the human nature assumed by the Son is not a person independent of the son (*anhypostatic*) and (ii) the human nature assumed by the Son is personalized in the hypostatic union (*enhypostatic*). Crisp refers to this conjunction of claims as the an-enhypostatic distinction (83). The second additional desideratum is the claim that Christ has two wills (dyothelitism) stemming from Constantinople III.

With these parameters in place, Crisp turns in chapter six to an articulation of the previously alluded to three-part compositional Christology. On this account, in the incarnation the Second Person of the Trinity—God the Son—assumes a human nature, which is a concrete particular composed of a human soul and body. The incarnate Christ, then, is composed of three parts: God the Son, a human soul, and a human body. Crisp ably defends the compositional view against two theological and four metaphysical concerns.

One slightly different concern is that on this compositional Christology there is a *sense* in which one *cannot* say that Jesus is God and Jesus is a human person. Since the composite Jesus is not strictly identical to God the Son, one has to say that one of the parts of Jesus is God the Son and that God the Son assumes a human nature. While such a position may not fall short of fulfilling the desideratum that Jesus is truly God and truly human, it does fall short of saying that Jesus is identical to God and Jesus is a human person. Hence, there is a sense in which Jesus is *not* God the Son and Jesus is *not* a human person. Such a result seems to me to be costly when the overriding desideratum of any Christology is to maintain the full divine and full human status of Christ.

¹ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 66–82.

Regarding Jesus not being a human *person* on a compositional Christology, I wonder if there is a way out of this result. Why couldn't the defender of compositional Christology maintain that while the Second Person of the Trinity is the only person in the incarnate Christ, the Second Person becomes a human person in assuming an impersonal human nature? That is to say, in assuming an impersonal human nature, the Second Person of the Trinity individuates that human nature and thus becomes a human person. Some metaphysicians have posited a bare particular as what does the work of individuating natures. On this metaphysic, the Second Person of the Trinity is or has its own bare particularity that individuates the human nature it assumes. If so, then perhaps the compositional view can maintain that the composite Christ is a divine person that individuates, and thereby personalizes, a human nature.

In chapter seven, Crisp canvasses various traditional atonement schemes (ransom, satisfaction, moral exemplar, and penal substitution) in developing his own union account of the atonement. While Crisp does not call this theory a penal substitutionary account, it appears to be a version of penal substitution. What is unique is that Crisp proposes a four-dimensional ontology of "Redeemed Humanity" in order to explain the transfer of the elect's penal consequences to Christ.

Crisp sees his view as circumventing the forensic fiction involved in other theories of penal substitution that have an innocent Christ suffering the penal consequences of guilty humans (137, 139). But it is unclear to me how Crisp's four-dimensionalist account soothes that worry. At the end of the metaphysics, we still have an innocent Christ suffering the penal consequences of a guilty party. Perhaps I am missing something, but I don't see how it is that Christ's being an innocent part of a metaphysical whole (viz., Redeemed Humanity) that has temporal parts that are guilty of sin make it any less *morally* objectionable that the innocent part, namely Christ, suffers the penal consequences of the guilty parts. While the transfer of the elect's penal consequences to Christ as well as the transfer of the benefits of Christ's atonement to the elect are better grounded on this ontology, it seems to me that all the same moral objections to penal substitution arise with equal force. If so, Crisp's account has not circumvented the chief forensic fiction of treating an innocent as if he were guilty.

Chapter eight deals with how the Holy Spirit unites believers to Christ, which is, Crisp holds, the ultimate end of God in creation (155). Crisp employs the same four-dimensional ontology as in the previous chapter to provide an account of union with Christ. Analogous with a tree that has different physical parts and different phases to its life, "so also we are 'parts' of Christ scattered across space and time—one four-dimensional entity with Christ as its head" (161). The Spirit acts as a kind of adhesive or glue such that, "We become part of his body really and truly—as really and truly as the foam, wood, tacks, fabric, and glue form the one composite object that is an armchair," except that the Spirit's work is "personal, intimate, the real union of one organism with another" (161).

While there is much to appreciate about Crisp's account, I found myself wondering why the Spirit is the *glue* between believers and Christ. Could not the Spirit simply be that person of the Trinity that unites himself to us and thereby unites us to Christ? Crisp holds that even unfallen human creatures would need the Spirit to unite them to God: "union is not natural to us; it requires a special divine action"

(159). This could be read as meaning that human persons do not have the capacity for union with God such that the Spirit creates that capacity and then connects us to Christ (i.e., the Spirit is the glue). But why would God create humans without the capacity for union since that was his ultimate end in creating humans? If humans have the capacity for union (which is lost in the fall and then restored), why not simply think of the Spirit as uniting himself to us in his indwelling thereby uniting us with Christ and the Father? The Spirit is not glue or adhesive, rather he is the person of the Trinity that does the divine work of making personal, relational contact. The reason for pressing this is that it has implications for the sanctifying work of the Spirit. As we grow in closer union/communion with Christ, does the Spirit apply more *glue*? This would suggest that sanctification is a non-relational process. Or, rather, is it that as we grow in closer union/communion, we receive more of the personal, loving Spirit?

In the final chapter (nine), Crisp treats the question of whether union with Christ obtains in virtue of Christ's incarnation or in virtue of faith in Christ. While the answer to this is important for issues pertaining to the order of salvation, Crisp is mainly interested in avoiding what he calls "Vanhoozer's Worry" (168). This is the worry that Crisp's account of union with Christ collapses union with Christ brought about by means of Christ's assumption of universal human nature with the union brought about by the agency of the Spirit. In response, Crisp clarifies how he understands the order of God's salvific decrees (167–8), but it should be clear from Crisp's compositional Christology and his four-dimensionalism that he was not understanding the human nature that the Son assumes as universal human nature, thus avoiding Vanhoozer's worry. Moreover, even if one took the human nature the Son assumes and perfects as a universal human nature, it could be held that participation with this perfected universal human nature is only by faith in Christ. Those without faith in Christ still participate in Adam's fallen universal human nature.

In *The Word Enfleshed* Crisp offers a thorough, careful, and clear treatment of some of the most vexing questions in Christology and applies his account to related issues in theological anthropology, atonement, and soteriology. The book is a rewarding read for anyone who is following current discussion on these topics.