

11-1-2000

Christology

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Recommended Citation

Scully, Eileen (2000) "Christology," *Consensus*: Vol. 26 : Iss. 2 , Article 17.
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol26/iss2/17>

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holding this assumption, Snook proceeds to call his re-visioning of the Spirit, “postmodern”. Probably the greatest difficulty in reading this book is Snook’s use of language. Although he defines words from time to time, he could use an initial chapter on the use of language. While he seeks to eliminate dualism in the language we use, he includes dualistic language in his discussions which tend to confuse more than clarify.

This is a book worth reading for clergy and lay people alike. Snook’s social location of Africa adds dimensions other books cannot compete with.

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Christology

Hans Schwarz
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998
352 pages, \$38.99 Softcover

Hans Schwarz, of University of Regensburg, Germany, and Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, South Carolina, set for himself a lofty challenge: to articulate a christology that answers the questions of those engaged in secular religious-studies’ historical critical search for the historical Jesus. Wishing to avoid the polemic typified by the best-selling (on both sides) N. T. Wright/Marcus Borg debates, Schwarz attempts to steer a “middle course”. His fear is that most research and writing in the field of christology has left the seminaries and faculties of theology and is now housed in secular religious studies departments, where historical-critical, social scientific and cultural- anthropological approaches have all but obscured the question of faith. Schwarz counters this trend toward what he calls “pursuit of the historical Jesus for its own sake” with a self-consciousness about the task of theology as a word *of* and *about* God. This he does by providing a “solid historical and biblical introduction to the Christ of faith”. This he does by paying attention to the findings of those engaged in “historical Jesus” research – these are surveyed chronologically and critically (and exhaustively). His critical questions: is faith in Jesus as the Christ a logical outcome of the person, work, and proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth? What continuity is there between the Jesus of Nazareth portrayed in Scripture and the doctrines of the Trinity, incarnation, and the Chalcedonian definition? Hardly new questions. But the strength of Schwarz’ work is the way in which he offers and evaluates the answers given in the past one hundred years or so of (mainly Protestant, mainly German) theology. One has the impression of following a senior theologian around his

well-stocked private library. As he takes each book down from the shelf in turn, he offers a masterfully sharply-honed precis of this then that text, from Reimarus to Strauss to Schweitzer to Bultmann. The beloved tomes (Bultmann, Goppelt, Jeremias) appear dog-eared and worn from thorough study. (And they are all in German – hardly a fault, but telling of the intellectual tradition from which hails the professor.) Then there are the shelves that house the borrowed texts representing the theological perspectives and methodologies that he wishes to argue against. These are less well-read, and, in some cases, (such as his rather quick and dismissive treatment of feminist theology), not fully representative enough on their own of a wider field of inquiry.

The book is presented in three major parts. In part I, Schwarz takes a close look at both the contributions and the limitations of “The Quest for the Historical Jesus”. This section shows off Schwarz’ tight command of the field. Part II presents a “History of Jesus” through the biblical witness and through what he calls a survey of “Stations of Christological Reflection”, a section that looks at the development of christological doctrine in the patristic, medieval, reformation and modern eras. Part III finds Schwarz taking on questions from, as he calls them, “skeptics”, in a section called “The Relevance of Jesus Christ for Today”. Here again Schwarz’ aim seems to be for breadth: one hundred pages to deal with questions ranging from the Jewishness of Jesus, Jesus’ self-awareness, the salvific significance of Jesus’ death, the resurrection, feminist critiques, pluralism, and eschatological concerns – to name a few.

Despite its thinly-veiled polemic undertone, *Christology* would be a helpful core text for graduate-level studies, or for post-graduate continuing education, provided one’s interests lie predominantly with German Protestantism – other traditions barely see the light of day in this book. Schwarz is writing here in a second language, and this shows in a certain stylistic awkwardness. Language difficulties aside, as a reader one has the impression of being lectured to and argued at: truly the teutonic professor at work in these pages. Nevertheless, for its wide-ranging scholarship, and for Schwarz’ keen ability to deal comprehensively – and systematically and historically – with the key issues at the heart of christology, the book is to be recommended to all who wish to hold together reflection on the Jesus Christ of both history and faith.

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