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Review of Christ as Creator

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counsel for actual Christian behavior is nonviolence,” Revelation must be read “*in the context of the entire Bible,*” and the “*controlling metaphor . . . for the entire vision at Patmos is the slain lamb*” (p. 135, italics his).

In chapter 9 (Revelation 18–19), Kraybill argues that Revelation “focuses on structural evil—in this case, vast networks of commerce and politics warped by greed, violence, and blasphemous ideology” (pp. 153–54). Every person will either worship empire or God. In chapter 10 (Revelation 2–3), Kraybill discusses the letters to the seven churches. The letters emphasize repentance and the need for both faith and faithfulness. Kraybill argues that because conduct is factored so large in the final judgment, the seven letters put an accent on action (p. 166). He attempts to resolve the apparent tension between how Paul and John viewed engagement with pagan society by discussing their different chronological contexts (pp. 163–64). The millennium simply indicates that “evil someday will suffer utter defeat, and followers of the Lamb will receive honor” (p. 165).

In chapter 11 (Revelation 11; 20–22), Kraybill proposes that we understand the arrival of the new Jerusalem progressively. It began to arrive in John’s day, continues arriving in our day as God restores the world, and will fully arrive with complete restoration when Christ returns (p. 176). Worship “becomes the central means by which God orients individuals and congregations toward God’s future” (p. 179). In chapter 12, Kraybill concludes the book with further reflections from Revelation on Christian worship and its life-changing results.

Every reader will, of course, find points of interpretive disagreement. It does not seem likely that the New Jerusalem is progressively descending throughout human history (p. 176), or that God’s seal (Rev 7:3) represents baptism (pp. 109–12). Kraybill seems to overemphasize the importance of nonviolent resistance in Revelation (pp. 51, 86–87, 101, 121, 135), particularly by arguing that *hypomonē* (endurance) “connotes sustained nonviolent resistance” (p. 135; cf. the similar emphasis by scholars such as Loren Johns and Brian Blount). To be sure, Revelation seems to assume nonviolent resistance (p. 121), but John never explicitly argues for it, defends it, or exhorts believers to it. There is no historical or textual indication that violent resistance to Rome, government officials, or hostile neighbors was a temptation or option for believers in the seven churches John addressed in Asia Minor. It was not part of the rhetorical or historical exigence and was therefore not likely part of John’s rhetorical goals in writing Revelation. Finally, the praiseworthy emphasis on Revelation’s historical context often leaves little room for discussion of its canonical context and use of the OT.

In contrast to these minor critiques, there is much to commend in this brief introduction. Kraybill’s sketch of the historical background, based on primary sources, is unmatched for its relevance and accessibility. It is concise without being superficial. The text is eminently readable and easily holds the reader’s attention. The structure of the book innovatively highlights the historical background necessary for accurate interpretation. Finally, Kraybill is intensely practical throughout, calling God’s people to faithful obedience, witness, and most of all, worship. He has produced a book that will profit pastors, church members, beginning students, and seasoned scholars.

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Christ as Creator: Origins of a New Testament Doctrine. By Sean M. McDonough. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, xi + 294 pp., \$120.00.

The confession that Christ played a role in creation was widespread in the early church (1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:15–20; John 1:1–3; Heb 1:2). This confession, embedded in early

Christian worship, was so well established that it is not argued in the NT, it is simply assumed. McDonough's goal is to reconstruct the theological framework within which such a confession could be made (p. 2).

The starting point for the doctrine that Christ is the agent of creation (his *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft*) is to be found in what the first-century church remembered about Jesus. An over-reading of Philo, with a relative neglect of the stories about Jesus, was a fault in prior work, so Hegermann, Weiss, and Cox (pp. 4–7). McDonough also rejects the explanatory value typically given to Wisdom speculation (p. 10). Instead, the doctrine of Christ's role in creation was developed as the first believers reflected on the memories of Jesus in light of the OT. This was primarily carried out within a messianic matrix. Linguistic and conceptual parallels from the broader first-century religious context, where appropriated, were intended to serve this messianic confession.

The author fleshes out his argument beginning with an exploration of the Gospel stories (chap. 2). The "memories of Jesus" that exhibit Christ's power over creation include mighty works, wonders, signs/healings, exorcisms, and nature miracles. Theological reflection on these memories led the Gospel writers to embed a "creation theology" in their introductions. This is clear in John, and possibly Matthew, and arguably present though less evident in Mark and Luke (pp. 19–22).

Jesus' nature miracles not only exhibit Jesus' power over the created order but echo OT texts concerning God's rule over creation (pp. 24–26). Jesus calms the sea; the Lord God rules over the sea (Ps 89:8–9). Jesus walks on the water; God "walks on the sea as if it were dry land" (Job 9:8). Jesus feeds the crowd; God spreads a table in the wilderness (Ps 78:19). The Gospel authors do not make the connections explicit; but reflection on Scripture would lead the church to associate Jesus with the work of creation.

In a similar fashion, McDonough looks at Jesus' healings and exorcisms (pp. 26–32). McDonough treats John's stories separately, focusing on the turning of water into wine, the healing of the man born blind, and the raising of Lazarus. John's theology is more explicit, but the theological movement is arguably the same: there are memories of the events from the story of Jesus, then there is theological reflection in light of the OT, and finally comes John's prologue with its explicit affirmation of Christ as creator (pp. 33–36).

Chapter 3 develops the connection between recreation and creation, which serves as the theological bridge from Jesus' redemptive power over creation to his involvement in the original creation. The redemptive and creative themes are intertwined in the central NT texts on Christ's *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft*. This paradigmatic move from redemption to creation would make sense to the early Christian writers; it was already clearly established in the OT (pp. 49–53) and was a commonplace in the broader religious thought of antiquity (pp. 53–64).

McDonough provides the last major link to his thesis in chapter 4 where he develops the matrix within which the doctrine of Christ's role in creation emerged—the category of messiah. While previous investigations played lip service to the messianic context, they were more interested in Wisdom speculation or Hellenistic philosophy. The NT doctrine on Jesus' role in creation emerged within a messianic matrix of reflection (p. 64). The key texts on Jesus' role in creation have a messianic focus (pp. 66–71). The other OT images for God's agency in creation (word, wisdom, and Spirit) were all understood to be possessed by the messiah (pp. 72–85).

Finally, McDonough argues that the "image" and "glory" of God are comprehensive scriptural categories related to God and creation, and he teases out how these are applied to the messiah (pp. 86–94).

McDonough draws four important conclusions: (1) Labeling creation texts as "Wisdom Christology" is inappropriate, since there are many contributory streams of thought (word, Spirit, glory, image). (2) A precise account of the process of early

Christological creation thought is unattainable. (3) The personal appearance of Jesus as messiah was not an empty box, but rather radically reshapes the antecedent models for agents of creation. (4) Creation as the beginning of messianic dominion provides a suitable account of Christ's role (pp. 94–96).

Chapters 5 and 6 are helpful treatments of Hellenistic “prepositional” theology and of Philo. These chapters provide useful introductions to the issues and clearly show how Hellenistic philosophy and the Jewish-Hellenistic mix found in Philo differ from the early church's messianic interests.

With this interpretive background in place, chapters 7–10 examine the primary texts for Christ's role in creation (1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:15–20; John 1:1–3; Heb 1:2). There is much here of exegetical value. The concise but well-crafted summary of his findings on Colossians 1 nicely illustrates the fruit of his approach (pp. 188–91).

McDonough concludes his work by casting “a fleeting glance at the dogmatic implications of Jesus' role in creation” (p. 236). He offers a sampling from six theologians: Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Athanasius from the early centuries, and then Pannenberg, Moltmann, and Barth as three German-language representatives from the modern period.

This book is admirably clear and largely compelling. Researchers into Christian origins arguably move in the right direction when they turn from Greco-Roman religion and philosophy to the first-century Jewish context (Hengel, Meyer, N. T. Wright) and then from this Second Temple milieu to focus on the early church's memories and experiences of Jesus (Bauckham, Dunn). McDonough has contributed to this salutary trajectory. The book models how to situate ancient Near Eastern texts, Hellenistic philosophy, wisdom theology, the teachings of Philo, the Qumran material, as well as Rabbinic writings in relationship to early Christology, and at the same directs students to “the intuitively sensible starting point” (p. 19)—the memories of Jesus.

What calls for further attention, both at the end of McDonough's theological journey as well as at the beginning, relates to his treatment of Jesus as “the Son of God.” In two of the four texts that speak of Christ's agency in creation, the subject is explicitly “the Son” (Col 1:15–20; cf. 1:13; Heb 1:1–4). In John's prologue the subject is “the Word,” which is expressly identified in verses 14 (cf. v. 18) as “the Son.” Only in 1 Cor 8:6 does the text link the title “Christ” explicitly with the agency of creation, and here it is “one Lord, Jesus Christ,”—yet even here this is set in the *Shema*-like confession that speaks of one God, “the Father.” In his discussion of these texts, McDonough consistently shifts the subject from “Son” to “Messiah.” The focus on the “messianic matrix” for the origin of Christ's *Schöpfungsmittlerschaft* is correct, but to bring these texts into sharper focus the Son-language needs to be more adequately explained. Why was Christian theology already explicitly highlighting the messiah as “Son of God” in these early creation texts? Foregrounding this aspect of the “messianic matrix” would benefit the transition to dogmatics that McDonough helpfully explores in his last chapter.

McDonough admirably argues for “the memories of Jesus” as the starting point for the doctrine and agrees that the “divine sonship” motif is traceable to the teachings of Jesus. Yet he decides not to press this motif (pp. 40–41; though see the intriguing footnote on p. 41, n. 37). Exploring the “intermediate exegetical and theological moves” (p. 41) that might have contributed to the development of the doctrine of the Christ's role in creation as *God's Son* merit further attention and would have strengthened an already fine monograph.

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