

Thomas H. McCall. *Analytic Christology and the Theological Interpretation of the New Testament*. Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2021. 240pp. \$85.00 (hbk).

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Both analytic theology (AT) and the theological interpretation of Scripture (TIS) are burgeoning movements within the disciplines of biblical studies and systematic theology. However, one might be strained to find explicit projects that bring both disciplines together. In *Analytic Christology and the Theological Interpretation of the New Testament*, Thomas McCall aims to do just that. After discussing how both AT and TIS have “taken off” in contemporary theological academia, McCall explains why it would be beneficial to bring both movements together.

McCall provides some basic definitions of both AT and TIS in his brief Introduction. Broadly defined, AT is “systematic theology attuned to the skills, resources, and virtues of analytic philosophy” (2).¹ McCall later provides a helpful distinction between what he calls “soft analytic theology” and “hard analytic theology”: “Soft analytic theology is simply any theology done with a commitment to the goals of clarity of expression, transparency and rigor of argument, and accountability with respect to broader intellectual standards” (3). He claims that “hard analytic theology . . . does not hesitate to employ specific theories, arguments, or conclusions drawn from mainstream analytic epistemology, logic, metaphysics, esthetics, or moral theory. . . . it takes actual work in analytic philosophy and presses it into service for the sake of doctrinal analysis and formulation” (3). McCall defines TIS broadly as “what happens when biblical scholars and theologians alike read the bible to see what it tells us about God” (1). More specifically, “theological exegesis deals with the Bible as a word about God and from God” (4).² TIS, however, is not limited to interpreting the biblical texts according to grammatical-historical or historical-critical methods, though it may benefit greatly from these. But TIS often does move beyond these readings to better discern what Scripture teaches about God. In the following six chapters, McCall brings both AT and TIS into dialogue in order to better contemplate matters Christological.

In Chapter 1, McCall brings the tools of AT and TIS to aid in the contemplation of Paul’s claim that he has been crucified with Christ and that it is no longer him that lives but Christ that lives in him (Gal 2.19–20). What did Paul mean when he claimed this in his letter to the Galatians? More specifically, “But just who is this ‘I’ who no longer lives? Who is the ‘I’ who

¹ This is a quotation that McCall takes from William J. Abraham, “Systematic Theology as Analytic Theology,” in Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea, eds. *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 54.

² This is a quotation that McCall takes from Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 36.

is said now to live? What is the relation of these 'I's to one another? And how are the themes of union with Christ—and, indeed, participation in Christ—to be understood? Indeed, is the right account of the relation to the 'I' to Christ somehow even stronger than what can be captured by language of 'union' and 'participation?' Is it identity?" (7–8). McCall focuses primarily on what are often referred to as apocalyptic interpretations of Paul in this chapter. These interpretations of Paul are very different than those older Protestant or older Lutheran interpretations, and they are often very different from so-called "New Perspectives" on Paul. McCall divides these apocalyptic readings of Paul into more radical options and more modest options. Unlike the older Protestant and New Perspective readings, both which emphasize some sort of continuity between the covenant God made with Israel and what God is doing in the person of Christ, apocalyptic readings typically reject "this basic assumption of continuity. Instead, apocalyptic readings of Paul insist that the gospel is an in-breaking that disrupts all that came before" (9). When applied to Paul's statements in Gal 2.19–20, the implication is that there is a grand distinction between the old "I" and the new "I." Radical apocalyptic interpretations of this insist that there is a complete discontinuity between the old "I" and the new "I." In McCall's words, "Some of the apocalyptic proposals seem to be saying nothing less than this: the person of the 'I' is actually destroyed or demolished but then a new person is made in place of the old" (17). He notes that there are several ways radical apocalyptic interpreters could explain their position, namely by way of replacement theories and fusion theories. Both sorts of theories, however, are beset with problems and one is likely not to find much aid from them. Instead of these radical apocalyptic readings, McCall offers a "modest proposal" that is based in a reconsidered traditional interpretation (33–38). While these apocalyptic interpreters are right to emphasize a drastic change that has occurred between the old "I" and the new "I," there still needs to be some sort of continuity between the two. His main dialogue partner for his proposed solution is John Chrysostom, whose interpretation of the passage makes much of the believer's union with Christ.

McCall turns his attention to the *pistis Christou* debates in Chapter 2. For some time now, scholars have debated whether Paul's phrase "*pistis Christou*" should be interpreted as an objective genitive or a subjective genitive. The former renders the traditional-Lutheran translation "faith *in* Christ," where *Christou* is taken as the object of *pistis*. The latter renders the translation "faith (or faithfulness) *of* Christ," where *Christou* is taken as the subject of *pistis*. Some New Testament scholars, McCall notes, have argued that Paul intentionally uses this somewhat ambiguous phrase because he intends to communicate both meanings in it. McCall rightly notes that theological concerns play more of a role in determining the proper interpretation of the phrase than purely exegetical concerns, as the latter seem to provide equal warrant for both interpretations. After demonstrating how the protestant-scholastic tradition offers useful resources in executing theological assessments of the interpretative options, McCall concludes in favor of the interpretation of Morna D. Hooker, who argues for a both/and interpretation (68).

The Son's identity and its implications for trinitarian theology are the subject of Chapter 3. Specifically, McCall provides a thorough analysis of Bruce McCormack's work on the Trinity, which he—McCormack—claims is also offered as the correct interpretation of Barth, though he also admits to going beyond Barth. After noting the debates over the proper interpretation of Barth on the identity of the Son and its implications for trinitarian theology, McCall focuses most of the chapter on McCormack's provocative and radical claims. According to McCormack, God's decision to be God-for-and-with-us is logically prior to his being triune (72). In other words, God's election is prior to his trinity. McCall offers a litany of critiques of McCormack's claims, on both theological-exegetical and analytical grounds.

Drawing from works such as Madison Pierce's on christology in the letter to the Hebrews, he first shows that McCormack's exegetical case for his position fails. McCall then turns to the coherence of McCormack's view, noting that, if God is free to elect to be triune, i.e. God for us, then God is not essentially triune, which makes God's triunity contingent. Per McCormack, God's triunity and God's incarnation share the same modal status, which is very problematic for orthodox Trinitarianism and Christology. Ultimately, McCormack's view leads one to affirm a God behind God, which is both unorthodox and incoherent. In other words, God is not essentially triune; he only is so subsequent to his election to be so. Not only this, but another challenge for McCormack's claim here is that it also leads one to a modal collapse, wherein every act of God is absolutely necessary, which is also problematic. McCall concludes that the positive case for McCormack's position is underwhelming and that these objections are very powerful.

McCall addresses Christ's submission to the Father in Chapter 4. After acknowledging that the NT, particularly Hebrews, describes Jesus not only as equal with the Father but as submissive to him as well, he states his intention to analyze the treatments of Karl Barth and Thomas Aquinas on this subject (114). He turns to the treatments by Thomas and Barth after making some initial exegetical observations on Hebrews 5.7–10. After noting that Barth most likely was aware of the classical distinction between the functional/economic subordination of the Son and the ontological subordination of the Son, McCall highlights that Barth "is reticent to avail himself of the traditional distinction. Instead, he thinks that submission or subordination belongs to the very nature of the Trinity (118). McCall further argues that Barth "clearly interprets the subordination of the Son in an eternal sense. He insists that the subordination of the Son somehow belongs to the person of the Son *qua* Son in the life of the immanent Trinity" (119–120). Thomas, on the other hand, takes a very different approach. He denies that the Son submits to the Father *qua* his divinity but affirms that the Son does submit to the Father *qua* his humanity (121). Such is the traditional view of the Christian tradition. "It is the *incarnate* Son who is subordinate to the Father. This is the case because it is the *incarnate* Son who has *the form of a servant*" (121). After noting the many problems that would arise from Barth's claims that there is an eternal subordination of the Son to the Father, McCall concludes that the traditional view as advanced by Thomas is preferable to the Christian theologian (134–136).

McCall turns his attention to the Son's communion with the Father in Chapter 5. Specifically, he takes up an analysis of so-called "Social Trinitarianism" (ST) and its critiques. McCall first notes the large ambiguity surrounding ST. Depending on who one reads, one will likely get a different definition of ST. These definitions include ST as "socio-political advocacy" (141–142), as "Eastern vs Western theology" (142–143), as "theology that employs the social analogy" (143–144), as "theology that makes use of the 'modern notion' of person" (144–147), as "intra-Trinitarian love" (147–148), as "distinct agency" of the persons (148–149), and "real" ST (149–150). McCall notes this vast array of definitions and the problems and ambiguities that surround so many of them, and he asserts that, due to this plethora of usages, the term "Social Trinitarianism" should likely be dropped, or at least it should be clearly defined by theologians when used. After making some general critiques of Keith Ward's anti-social Trinitarianism, McCall looks at a particular argument offered by Ward, one that is offered by many other anti-social Trinitarians: the argument that there is no intra-Trinitarian love. The problem with this, he notes, is that 1) Scripture seems to affirm in multiple places that the persons love one another, and 2) that intra-Trinitarian love is affirmed throughout the Christian tradition, even by ardent defenders of so-called Latin Trinitarianism, such as Richard of St. Victor. After a brief analysis of Scott Williams's recent "Latin Social Trinitarianism"

(172), McCall concludes that all Trinitarians need to find some way to affirm intra-Trinitarian love, and he reaffirms that theologians need to be very specific in their meanings of the ST term.

McCall takes up Jc Beall's contradictory Christology in the sixth and final chapter of the book. Somewhat recently, Beall has argued that, in the Incarnation, we are faced with a genuine contradiction that is nonetheless true. He looks to the tools of paraconsistent logic to aid him in his task, a logic that allows for both gaps and gluts in argumentation. As a result, one can affirm both A of Christ and $\sim A$ of Christ, where A can stand for such properties as omniscient and omnipresent. Granted, some who affirm more traditionalist christologies, such as Timothy Pawl, would make a similar claim; however, they qualify this claim by utilizing a specific version of the *qua* qualifier. So, in brief, Christ might be A qua his divine nature but $\sim A$ qua his human nature. Beall's claim is more radical than this; the contradiction is real and not merely indexed to a given nature. McCall argues that there are several problems with Beall's proposal. First, this seems to go against the intentions of the patristic fathers, who were instrumental in the writing of the ecumenical creeds and holding the ecumenical councils. Clearly, they were not conceiving of paraconsistent logic when they were framing these (185–189). Second, there is the problem that this paraconsistent logic holds for modal logic/modal metaphysics. A lot of work needs to be done to explain how this logic works with important insights in modal logic and metaphysics, particularly those insights revolving around S5 (189–194). Last, McCall does not see, pragmatically speaking, how allowing even for only one true contradiction, such as the Incarnation, will not create some sort of precedent for Christians to want to affirm other true contradictions. Such a precedent could create a number of problems for the church, both doctrinally and ethically (194–198). McCall concludes the chapter by looking at how NT authors seem to use elements of classical logic, such as *modus tollens*, in their own doctrinal treatments, which seems to be a powerful argument against Beall's proposal.

McCall's book is a welcome addition to the budding world of AT. Such an explicit work on how theological exegesis and philosophical analysis might come together for theological construction has been much needed. Throughout the book, McCall rightly demonstrates how analytic theologians should engage in theological exegesis, and he demonstrates that such an engagement should be one that considers the exegetical work of patristic, medieval, and reformation thinkers, as well as the exegetical work of contemporary biblical scholars and biblical theologians.

One question, however, continued to pop up while reading this book. What was McCall's criteria for his selection of Christological topics? Sure, topics such as being crucified with Christ, the *pistis Christou* debate, the identity and submission of the Son, the communion of the Father and the Son, and the logic of Christology are important topics that deserve a strong theological-exegetical foundation followed by a careful analytic articulation, but why *these* topics? For example, why not discuss compositional Christology, divine simplicity in Christology, or the impeccability of Christ? Granted, these items have already been the subject of much work in AT, but McCall never provides an explanation or criteria for the topics that he chooses. Such an explanation/criteria would have been helpful for the reader.

Overall, McCall's *Analytic Christology and the Theological Interpretation of the New Testament* is an excellent contribution to the field of AT. His example of how to marry TIS with AT—while in conversation with the rich tradition of the church—is surely one to be emulated. This book is a valuable resource both to all those working in New Testament Christology and to those working in systematic theology.