

must legitimate the state-oppression in the name of Christianity. The distinction between self-inflicted death and martyrdom becomes convenient for such a purpose.

In sum, dynamics of power complicate Tabor and Droge's notion of voluntary death. Once factored into the analysis, the distinction between suicide and martyrdom reemerges as the distinction between death of convenience and a death of resistance, reactive self-destruction when no other options seem available versus active self-destruction to reveal the nature of power that inflicts oneself and others. Not only does such a distinction ring true for those in antiquity, it may also help us see what is truly at stake in the contemporary debate as voluntary death becomes more and more convenient.

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Erickson, Millard J. *The Word Became Flesh: A Contemporary Incarnational Christology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991. 663 pp. \$29.95.

Millard J. Erickson has once more written an important book. The various pluralistic tendencies with which contemporary theology has to contend raise serious questions for almost every foundational orthodox Christian tenet. Christology is no exception. In the last two decades there have been sufficient problematic developments to warrant a careful rethinking of the orthodox approach to the incarnation. *The Word Became Flesh* seeks to give an affirmative answer to the question of whether the traditional doctrine that Jesus of Nazareth is fully divine and fully human can be stated in a way that is intellectually justifiable in the context of the current problems of Christology.

The extent of these difficulties is particularly evident in three areas. Much of the challenge to orthodox Christology stems from the use of historical criticism which today views with suspicion the words and deeds traditionally attributed to Jesus. There have also been widespread social and political changes which regard as inadequate the orthodox Christology done by westerners, and middle-class male westerners at that. Finally, there are increasing suggestions that a cultural paradigm shift from the modern to the post-modern period considers that old ways of doing Christology no longer speak to this generation.

In response to this new situation, Erickson has divided his book into three main sections. The first part is an attempt to understand the basic orthodox interpretation of the person of Christ as it developed from the biblical materials up to the Council of Chalcedon. Both the biblical presentation and the account of the Christological controversies are illuminating. Part Two, "Problems of Incarnational Christology," examines and evaluates several contemporary Christological views and the specific

problem for orthodox Christology which each presents. In this largest section of the book (69-379)—in many ways the most informative—the author presents chapter-long discussions of eleven "problems," from critical Christology, to liberation Christology, black Christology, feminist Christology, process Christology, and narrative Christology, among others. This is no mere catalog of issues. Each chapter provides a summary of the main presuppositions of each system that poses a problem to traditional Christology and offers an evaluation of it. The novelty of the approach lies in the fact that the doctrine of the person of Christ is set clearly and concisely on the map of competing contemporary theological systems. Those wanting to understand the philosophies masquerading as biblical Christologies will appreciate Erickson's presentation and evaluation of the eleven competitors. One can only regret that he does not explain the criteria he used to select the systems retained, and why, for instance, he omitted a discussion of the New Age.

In Part Three, now that he has described the contemporary theological setting in which he will develop his own understanding of the person of Christ, Erickson seeks to articulate a Christology for today which maintains the orthodox understanding of Jesus as both fully human and fully divine, and yet takes into account and responds to the problems posed by contemporary views.

Before doing so, however, he most efficiently devotes two chapters to the reliability of the biblical evidence for the historical Jesus in the four Gospels, engaging the issues of form criticism and evaluating its conclusions. In successive tests of his own Christology, Erickson then considers Jesus' divinity, His resurrection, the metaphysical basis and the logic of His incarnation, and, finally, His task as Savior. Part Three ends with an attempt to solve one of the most difficult problems of the Christian faith, i.e., the relationship of God's goodness and greatness to the obvious presence of evil and suffering in the world.

Many readers will probably regard the third part of *The Word Became Flesh* as its strongest section. Erickson's endeavor to respond to the challenges of modern criticism regarding the reliability of the historical evidence for Jesus is impressive. His biblical evidence in support of Jesus' divinity and incarnation is even more arresting.

While Erickson states that certain customary topics of Christology—such as the humanity of Jesus—will not receive separate treatment in his book because they are issues hardly contested in contemporary Christology, one might wish that he had given more prominence to the matter of Jesus' pre-existence.

It seems also that the volume would have gained from a less superficial treatment of the temptations of Jesus. Unlike other aspects of the doctrine of Christ, which lead to a careful analysis of the biblical data, Erickson, after dealing with if and how he could have been tempted, simply concludes that "Jesus could have sinned." Little effort is made to grapple from a biblical perspective with such basic issues as the nature of

temptation, the essence of Jesus' temptations, the key to His overcoming, the example He set for us.

As far as Jesus' death is concerned, Erickson's view—stated without documentation—that the Scriptures teach an intermediate state, a state of conscious existence between death and the resurrection (564) leads him to conclude that our Lord's death was no extinction or end of life, but rather a mere transition from one state to another (565). This tends to limit our Lord's sufferings on the cross to merely physical suffering. Erickson thus fails to comprehend Christ's real agony, the feeling of being eternally separated from the Father.

In the historical section, a question begs to be answered, i.e., What happened in the Christological debate between 794 and 1800? Did the Reformation or the Enlightenment have any influence on the debate? Are they not significant enough that Erickson should have explained why they did or did not?

Many readers will commend Erickson and his publishers for the physical characteristics of the book. The font style and size are pleasing. The margins are wide. The layout is attractive. Headings and subheadings help guide the reader through the material. The book also provides a Scripture index and a name and subject index, though no bibliography, which, it is to be hoped, will appear in a second edition.

Erickson's use of inclusive language is so skilled that it does not "show." It may, in fact, do more to attract feminists than the chapter featuring salvation and women.

Has Erickson reached his goal of developing an orthodox incarnational Christology for our time? He certainly has made an admirable and much-appreciated attempt to speak to his contemporaries. He did not shy away from challenging the contemporary mind-set. *The Word Became Flesh* shows convincingly that an incarnational Christology of the traditional Chalcedonian type is possible and relevant today, and fits the biblical data better than any other.

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Geisler, Norman L. *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal*. Foreword by Ralph McInerney. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991. 195 pp. \$12.95.

Norman Geisler writes with two very clear purposes in mind. First, he wants to uncover, underline, and defend the basic continuity that he sees between evangelical theology and the philosophical-theological synthesis produced by Thomas Aquinas. Second, because of such a perceived continuity, he feels the need to introduce evangelical students and theologians to some features of Aquinas' thought that he considers to be at the foundation of evangelical theology. Geisler considers an introduction