

Sharia, on the one hand, and Catholic Canon Law, on the other. He notes that while the Talmud and Sharia provide exegesis of their respective (Jewish and Muslim) sacred texts, Canon Law is an autonomous discipline, standing apart from the Bible, though indirectly informed by it.

Indeed, Canon Law is procedural. Its primary emphasis is on providing individual believers (and the Church herself) with principles for addressing moral questions and making moral decisions—with comparatively little stipulated about religious requirements that must be fulfilled. Canon Law, Brague says “does not claim to embrace all of human behavior; it leaves aside the entire domain of morality,” which in the end, is the province of the properly formed conscience.

DE-NATURALIZED LAW

Brague is excellent in discussing the destruction of the idea of divine law in the modern world. He traces the development of philosophical relativism (which has led to legal *positivism*, the idea that law should reflect current social

conditions, rather than any timeless, transcending principles) from its roots in the Enlightenment, to its pervasive application throughout post-modern Western society. He observes that “the birth of wholly human law was at first a consequence of the modification of the notion of the law of nature” (as if the law of nature were only a metaphor designed to help human beings achieve whatever transitory goals they might be pursuing at the moment). “As the law is not presently seen as natural,” he writes, “even the human comes to be conceived as not natural.”

He asserts that this *de-naturalization* of law lends itself to the contemporary ideology of the “rights of man,” noting wisely that this “avoids evoking to what source ‘man’ owes the humanity that renders him capable of having rights.” Law thus becomes not an expression of divine truth, but simply a balancing of pragmatic interests.

Brague lays this development largely at the feet of Protestantism. For the Jews, he writes, “law could only be deployed in the private domain . . . its political dimension is reserved for the time of the Messiah.” Islam, on

the other hand, “insists on the impossibility of separating the political and the religious.” But Protestant Christianity’s “separating the entire genus of the practical from the divine made it possible for three species of that genus—the ethical, the economic and the political—to declare their independence.”

The book concludes with Brague’s positive appreciation of the basic Catholic principles of law expressed in the works of the late Pope John Paul II. He approves the pope’s insight that if law is to be humane, it must be rooted in a “transcendent source of meaning,” which united to human reason, can provide a moral culture.

Clearly, Brague’s observations will not convince relativists, legal positivists, or, for that matter, radical Islamists. They do, however, provide at least an understanding of (to use the modern colloquialism) “where people are coming from.” And that may, perhaps, act as a foundation for dialogue. ❖

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On His Throne

PUTTING JESUS IN HIS PLACE:

THE CASE FOR THE DEITY OF CHRIST

by Robert M. Bowman, Jr., and J. Ed Komoszewski
Kregel, 2007

(392 pages, \$18.99, paperback)

reviewed by FRED SANDERS

THE CASE as perceived by scholars for the deity of Christ is stronger now than it has been for a long time, and those who went through seminary more than a decade ago should take a moment to update their notes. Though the New Testament is clear about the deity of Christ, generations of modern critical scholars have picked away

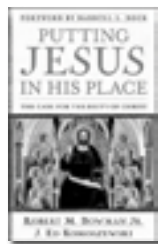
at the standard proofs. Here a verse, there a verse, the arguments that Christians have always relied on to demonstrate that the New Testament teaches that Jesus is God have been rendered dubious.

Putting Jesus in His Place does not simply reclaim those lost passages, re-visit the standard debates, and bolster the old arguments (though in many

cases it does that, and persuasively); it publicizes new arguments for demonstrating the deity of Christ, which have previously been available only to scholars.

The authors are ideal popularizers, each with one foot in the library and one in the local church. Robert Bowman is manager of apologetics and interfaith evangelism for the Southern Baptist Convention’s North American Mission Board, while Ed Komoszewski is the founder of the educational ministry Christus Nexus and a director of Reclaiming the Mind Ministries.

To help readers remember the arguments, they organize the book around the acronym “HANDS,” arguing that Jesus shares God’s Honor, Attributes, Names, Deeds, and Seat. The text breezes along in straightforward, popular prose—it paraphrases the



Nicene *homoousios* as “Jesus: The Right Stuff,” for example, and explains pre-existence as being “Older Than Dirt—Literally!”—with more technical matters referred to the endnotes.

ENACTING JESUS

Older apologetics relied heavily on Jesus’ claim to deity (think of the Liar-Lunatic-Lord trilemma made famous by C. S. Lewis), but that approach tended to restrict attention to a handful of verses. Likewise, the appeal to the few passages in which Jesus is directly referred to as God could result in a rather narrow basis for such an important doctrine.

“The case for the deity of Christ does not rest on a few proof-texts,” say the authors. Rejecting “the popular notion that some fourth-century Christians decided to impose on the church a belief in Jesus as God and wrenched isolated Bible verses from their contexts,” they recommend thinking more broadly about the nature of the New Testament evidence.

Jesus didn’t so much verbalize his claim to deity, for example; he enacted it. The people of God were waiting for the Lord to show up in person to bring reconciliation; Jesus walked

among men, healing, forgiving, and doing everything that God was supposed to do. When, on occasion, he also claimed to be more than a prophet, his claim made sense because it put into words what he was doing in the flesh.

Jesus does what God does. This is the foundation for his claim to deity. N. T. Wright has recently helped his readers see this with his massive narrative arguments, and Bowman and Komoszewski boil a lot of Wright down to a manageable size. They also manage to hold onto the more direct claims to deity that Jesus occasionally makes in the Gospels, a task at which Wright himself is not always successful.

Similarly, older apologetics focused on the titles ascribed to Jesus Christ, and sought to demonstrate that those titles were properly divine (Lord, God, Savior, Immanuel, and so forth). Bowman and Komoszewski spend four chapters on those titles, but begin by observing that before the first Christians could apply these titles to Jesus, something must already have occurred in their basic religious mentality.

These devout, monotheistic Jews must have somehow become capable of worshiping a man as the one

God. This “devotion revolution,” as they call it, is the presupposition of the Christological titles applied to Jesus, who has the “name above all names.”

Readers alert to the scholarly scene will recognize that the authors reproduce at an accessible level the arguments of Richard Bauckham (particularly in *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament*) and Larry Hurtado (in *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*), among others. (Bauckham and Hurtado are among the book’s many endorsers.)

The S in the HANDS acronym is for Seat, as in, “Jesus occupies the seat of God.” “Of the five major lines of evidence for the deity of Christ we are discussing in this book,” the authors admit, “this last category of evidence . . . is the least familiar to Christians.” But it is the most intensely biblical as well, grounded in Jesus’ claim during his trial that he was the Son of Man from the enthronement vision of Daniel. It is also the burden of the most frequently quoted Old Testament verse in the New Testament, Psalm 110:1, in which God invites someone with great authority to sit at his right hand. And John’s Revelation is centered on a vision of this very enthronement. Bowman and Komoszewski trace the lines of this argument well.

Many are the temptations that face the popularizer: to distort the evidence by avoiding the hard arguments; to sound absolutely certain when the evidence does not allow for certainty; to bully the audience with erudition; to cite authorities in a credibility-mongering manner. Bowman and Komoszewski avoid all of these, and deliver a highly useful book. ❖

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