

Oliver D. Crisp. *Revisoning Christology: Theology in the Reformed Tradition*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011. 148pp.

Over the last decade, Oliver Crisp has been at the forefront of an emerging movement that applies the tools of analytic philosophy to issues in Christian systematic theology. Meet 'Analytic Theology'. Think Anselm meets Alston. As far as Crisp is concerned, this does not give philosophy control of the theological task, but rather it provides the theologian with the conceptual tools necessary to understand the central doctrines of the Christian faith. It is, as Crisp says in another place, "a faith seeking understanding approach to theology".^[1] In practical terms, this amounts to a couple of things. First, it is a stylistic shift in theological discourse, so that one attempts to make clear one's assumptions and to avoid any significant use of metaphor. Numbered propositions and playful analytic "thought experiments" abound. But, secondly, there is a more substantive, and surprising, change in this approach to theology—at least as Crisp carries it out. Far from being a rationalisation of Christian doctrine, Crisp chases down mystery like a bloodhound. The rigor of his methodology exposes what we might falsely call "mystery", and points us in the direction of the true difficulties.

Revisoning Christology attempts to inform our own constructive christological efforts through a substantive engagement with theologians in the Reformed tradition. As Crisp says, it is "theological retrieval". To this end, Crisp dances—and spars—with one Reformed theologian from each of the last six centuries. As he proceeds, Crisp derives constructive insights, levels critiques, and suggests ways that the view of a particular theologian might be salvaged. As an intended side effect Crisp shows us how diverse, and even exotic, Reformed theology can be.

Chapter 1 engages with Scottish theologian Donald Baillie on the role of paradox in christology. Crisp brings clarification to what Baillie meant (or should have meant) by Baillie's "paradox of grace" ("I...yet not I, but God" (1 Cor 15:10)). Making distinctions between real and apparent paradoxes, and articulated and unarticulated equivocations, Crisp says we may affirm mystery without trampling the law of non-contradiction. In **chapter 2** Crisp reads Calvin on the motivation for the incarnation. While Calvin is generally taken to be an explicit infralapsarian, Crisp muddies the water with some of the Genevan Reformers' statements indicating that the Son would have become incarnate even if the fall did not occur. Crisp tries to make sense of both sets of statements by offering a species of supralapsarian "incarnation anyway" christology. **Chapter 3** takes up the christology of Jonathan Edwards. Here Crisp lays out the contours of Edwards' idealist metaphysics and then traces the consequences for Edwards' christology. What are the christological implications if all that exists are immaterial ideas in the mind of God, and if there is no causal agent besides God? Crisp says this metaphysics makes Edwards' christology highly exotic, but not unorthodox. And it holds both advantages and difficulties over against more traditional accounts. **Chapter 4** engages 19th century American William Shedd. Shedd's traducianism leads to a three-part understanding of the incarnation (Christ assuming two human natures—body and soul)—a bizarre christology. Crisp does a nice job of showing the confluence of factors in this account, but in the end can only recommend that we jettison any traducian understanding of Augustinian realism. **Chapter 5** analyses the "Spirit Christology" of puritan John Owen. Crisp admires Owen's attempt to marry a consistently Chalcedonian christology with the biblical narratives that indicate Christ's empowerment by the Holy Spirit. Nonetheless, by confining the Son's role in Christ's life to the moment of the incarnation, Owen does not do justice to the unity of Christ's two natures. So instead Crisp advocates a "krypsis"

christology where, without ceasing to be God, Christ gives up the exercise of divine power during his earthly life and depends on the Spirit. Finally, in **chapter 6** Crisp deals with the “incarnation as atonement” christology of Kathryn Tanner. Tanner views Christ’s whole life as atonement to the extent that it is a recapitulation of humanity. This single act culminates in the cross—not as a sacrifice for sins, but as simply the end of Christ’s atoning life. Crisp sees two serious flaws here. First, Tanner has Christ assuming “human nature” in an ambiguous, general sense. Second, Tanner has jettisoned the historic and biblical emphasis on divine justice as retribution. Amending these two aspects, Crisp says that Tanner’s work has great promise for understanding how to understand Christ’s work as a whole.

Revisioning Christology will be of interest to anyone working through the technical aspects of christology. Here as elsewhere, Crisp provides his own unique brand of theological analysis. Some of his conceptual clarifications brilliantly illuminate what it means for Christ to be both divine and human. At other times Crisp can only show us more precisely where the mystery in christology lies. In these ways, Crisp’s essays on Reformed christology are eminently helpful. On the other hand, this 21st century reader cannot help but sense that each essay is far from complete. Crisp provides little indication of how meditation on these insights will fuel reverent worship toward God, or fervent love for our neighbour. One feels as if only one side of Calvin, Edwards, or Owen greets us in this book. For better *and* for worse, this is Protestant scholasaticism redivivus.

[1] “On Analytic Theology”, in *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 43.