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Ury, M. William, et al., *Christology as Theology, Volume One*, in John N. Oswalt, Christianne Albertson, and Matt Ayars (Eds.), *Holy Love: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology*. Wilmore, Kentucky, Francis Asbury Press, 2024. 280 pages. ISBN 9780915143597.

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Francis Asbury Press has recently published the first two of five volumes in a series entitled ‘Holy Love: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology’. The collaborative effort has taken ‘nearly a quarter of a century’ (7). The project owes its impetus to Dr Dennis Kinlaw, who ‘mobilized a group of scholars’ to contribute to the Wesleyan tradition. There are five projected volumes in the series: *Christology as Theology*, volume 1; *Trinitarian Theology*, volume 2; *Cosmology, Bibliology, Pneumatology, and Anthropology*, volume 3; *Hamartiology, Soteriology, and Predestination*, volume 4; and, *Ecclesiology and Eschatology*, volume 5. Dr John N. Oswalt, Visiting Distinguished Professor of Old Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary, is the senior editor of the series, and Christianne Albertson and Matt Ayers serve as associate editors. There are several contributors to volume one; however, the principal author is Dr M. William Ury.

Dr Ronald E. Smith, former president of the Francis Asbury Society and author of the ‘Foreword’, notes Kinlaw’s predilections have shaped the work: 1) a high regard for the integrity of Scripture; 2) ‘orthodoxy and orthopraxy ought always to be held concomitantly’ (8); 3) contributors of the Asbury University or Asbury Theological Seminary ilk; and, 4) the purpose and mission of Francis Asbury Society. Smith lists three influential books that shaped the contributors’ thoughts. The first was Kinlaw’s *Let’s Start with Jesus*, whose thesis is that Christ is the norm for personhood, which is ‘more exhaustively researched and reported’ (10) in Ury’s *Trinitarian Personhood: Investigating the Implications of a Relational Definition*. This second influential resource posits ‘that the Social Trinity is the metaphysical reality for humanity’s relational existence’ (10-11). In addition, Oswalt’s work, *Called to Be Holy*, has also shaped the new series.

In the preface, ‘A Trinitarian Theology of Holiness’, Dr Thomas McCall addresses whether or not the project’s Trinitarian theism entails a commitment to ‘Social Trinitarianism’. He provides a brief denial, insisting the contributors have not imbibed ‘Social Trinitarianism’ (19-21).

Dr Kinlaw wrote the introduction, ‘The Implications of the Personhood of Christ’, in which he reasserts his book’s aim that ‘Christology should shape all the rest of the study and the Trinitarian implications of that doctrine should mark the entire work’ (33). *Let’s Start with Jesus*, which is summarized by Dr Vic Reasoner in Appendix A (258-269) of the book under review, argues for a new concept of personhood centred around Christ as the norm for human beings.

Though Dr M. William Ury is not identified as such on the cover or title page, he is the principal author of ‘Part 1: Christology as Theology’ which contains six chapters. In the chapter entitled ‘The Cornerstone’, he assumes Kinlaw’s mantle, asserting ‘Scripture seeks to introduce us to the marvel of Trinitarian reality through the Son. ...theology must find its origin in Jesus (41). ‘The Christocentric Methodology’ leads to the placement of Christology before other doctrines, which, in classical theological works, are typically placed before Christology. The author takes a

stand against the ‘diminishment of the person of Christ’ (46), which arose from the higher criticism of biblical scholars and theologians who denied the deity of Christ in the era following the Enlightenment.

In Chapter 2, ‘Building an Orthodox Christology’, the hermeneutic for evaluating the biblical evidence about Christ is doxological; the author asserts, ‘Christology that does not arise out of worship is useless’ (50). The Christocentric focus of the Christian calendar underscores Christ’s deity and humanity. The *kerygma* was foundational for the later formation of the creeds (59). The author then traces the Old and New Testament scriptures, underscoring the ‘Christocentric shape’ (58) of the unfolding story.

Chapter 3 is entitled ‘The Creeds’. However, the chapter makes few references to the creeds; instead, Chapter 3 focuses more on Christ’s designations and attributes. [In chapter 4, the author curiously states, ‘The *next* area of theological assessment must be addressed: the Christological creedal statements’ (162, emphasis added).] Chapter 3 discusses titles like ‘Son of God,’ ‘Son of Man,’ ‘*Monogenes*,’ etc. In his conclusion on the biblical data, Ury asserts, ‘All of the preceding biblical data have formed the classical belief in the full, real, and personal pre-existence of the only-begotten Son who lives in the love of the Trinity’ (153).

‘Discerning the Incarnation: One Person, Two Natures’ is the title of Chapter 4. It traces the history of the development of Christology in the early Church Fathers and their defence of the Theandric Union against divergent ideas. Ury’s account continues to trace developments in Christology until the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451. The remainder of the chapter is dedicated to defending the creeds against objections.

Chapter 5, ‘Other Christological Nexus Points in History’, is a relatively short chapter compared to the previous chapters, primarily discussing developments subsequent to Chalcedon. It examines the Christology of the Monophysites, the Monothelites, the Nicean (I and II) responses, Boethius (AD 480-542), Thomas Aquinas, and the Reformers. Strangely, the chapter of this book dedicated to ‘Wesleyan’ theology contains no reference to the Wesleys in a section which surveys the theological developments since Chalcedon. The chapter concludes with a summary of Pannenberg’s criticism of a Christology from ‘above’ and briefly raises some concerns about a Christology from ‘below’.

Chapter 6 is entitled ‘Conclusion’ although the section is too short (2 pages) to be considered a chapter. Ury argues for the full divinity of Christ with some citations from John Stott, insisting on the test of Christianity: Can one refuse to worship Christ and still be called a Christian? Ury’s response, relying on Stott, is a clear no. The book helpfully includes a bibliography, Appendix A, which summarises Kinlaw’s book *Let’s Start with Jesus*, a scripture index, and a topic/persons index.

As indicated previously, this book is volume one in the Holy Love: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology series. A collaboration of over twenty years has produced a more profound system of theology than would generally be expected from numerous contributors. The Christocentric methodology is modelled well within these six chapters as one considers them in light of the whole series.

This volume lays the Christological foundation for the next volume on the Trinity. Ury gives clues about using the Christocentric methodology: ‘Triune reality revealed in the person of the Son is the center of theology. All signs flow from this center; they are the unfolding, the explanation, the result. The glory does not begin on earth; Cana only manifests what was already there from eternity in the Holy One’ (83). The doctrine of the Trinity will become foundational for a Trinitarian understanding of human personhood as the series unfolds.

Ury provides his readers with an interesting and informative understanding of Christology, though not as thoroughgoing as some other contributions (e.g. T. A. Noble's *Christian Theology*, vol. 1). Yet, his work and the work of the other contributors to this volume provide a helpful foundation for Wesleyan understanding of Christology and the series.

Despite the commendations above, the Christocentric methodology raises several concerns. First, it appears to ignore the divine pedagogy; that is how God has revealed himself progressively throughout history to human beings. God has, in love, accommodated himself in history to the finite limitations of human understanding in order to reveal himself fully. Theological knowledge has a sequence; in common parlance, we say, 'You must learn to crawl before you can walk'. In the same way, one must know the Sender before knowing the Sent One. Knowledge of the Creator is foundational to the knowledge of the Redeemer.

Secondly, not only does this Christocentric methodology imply something about divine pedagogy, but it also implies something about human pedagogy and a practical approach to ministry. Theological discourse, whether written or oral, is construed to teach the recipients. The structure and order of the Christocentric approach do not seem to take into account the knowledge of the recipients. As God has accommodated himself to humanity, human beings must accommodate their ministry to the recipients in order to gain a hearing. The apparent dismissal of both divine and human accommodation to human finitude seems to engender an obtrusive approach to missiology. Rather than employing a chronological approach to the Bible in teaching and evangelizing, the Christocentric approach appears to impose the missionary's ideas upon recipients rather than beginning with their current knowledge and leading them to the apex of God's revelation in Christ.

Thirdly, the Christocentric methodology seems to arise from sources that are detached from the central commitments of Wesleyan theology. For example, Dr Ury quotes from Karl Barth, who seems to be the impetus for the methodological shift to 'The Christocentric Methodology' (42).

It will be interesting to see how subsequent volumes of this series address some of these concerns. Readers of this volume will benefit significantly from a solid, biblical, and historical study of Christology grounded in the Nicene-Chalcedonian tradition.