

## BOOK REVIEWS

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*“Wyr gleuben all an eynen Gott.” Das Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum in seiner Bedeutung für Martin Luther und Philipp Melanchthon.* By Jennifer Wasmuth. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2024. 586 pp. + xvi.

Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon anchored their call for reform in Holy Scripture and understood it as the Word of the Holy Trinity, whose identity is summarized and confessed authoritatively in the creeds of the ancient church. In his *Three Symbols or Creeds of the Christian Church* (1538), Luther treated the Apostles' Creed, the Athanasian Creed, and the *Te Deum Laudamus*, printing the Nicene Creed at the end with the brief comment, “it is sung in the mass every Sunday” (*Luther's Works* 45:228). Wasmuth finds that the Apostles' Creed assumed great significance for Luther as a catechetical tool and that the Athanasian Creed provided him with the terminology that he used in explicating his doctrine of God and demonstrating his catholicity. In contrast, Luther seldom discussed the Nicene Creed explicitly in sermons and theological treatises; however, Wasmuth shows that its terms and phrases supplied him with fundamental elements of his confession of faith. Even in the disputations of his later years that touched on Trinitarian issues, his attention to the Nicene Creed was largely reactive to others' use of it. Nonetheless, it fed into his Trinitarian and Christological positions as a decisive secondary authority.

Melanchthon gave the ancient creeds, with prominence accorded the Nicene Creed, a key place in the public teaching of the Wittenberg circle when he incorporated the ancient creeds into the doctoral oath of the theological faculty in 1533. Although they played no role in the *Loci* of 1521, designed as a handbook for reading Romans, in the later editions bearing the *Loci* title, they take on “a central function for methodology, content, apologetics and practical-theological matters” (264). When Caspar Cruciger died in 1548, Melanchthon assumed the lectures on the Nicene Creed that his colleague had held. Wasmuth argues that the *Enarrationis Symboli Niceni articuli*

*duo* of 1550 stems largely from Melanchthon's pen and not from Cruciger's, rejecting Timothy Wengert's argument for the latter's authorship. Certainly, the posthumously appearing *Explicatio Symboli Niceni* (1561) presented Melanchthon's teaching of the Creed also found in the later editions of the *Loci*; this work actually treated the entire range of dogmatic topics from the Nicaenum's text. He maintained that the credal formulations reflect what scripture says about God and Christ and all that the Wittenberg professors confessed. The ancient creeds proved the catholicity of Wittenberg teaching.

Wasmuth's thorough review of Melanchthon's treatment of the Nicene Creed in other genres embraces disputations, biblical lectures, sermons, instructions for congregational visitation, ecclesiastical ordinances, catechetical works, formal confessions of the faith, responses to specific opponents, as well as his introduction to his *Corpus doctrinae* (1560) and his *On the Church and the Authority of God's Word* (1539). In these various works, the Nicene Creed supported Melanchthon's pedagogical intent to convey biblical teaching. In his later ecclesiastical ordinances, the three ancient creeds took on a role as secondary authorities: Melanchthon used them more as hermeneutical standards by which to measure faithfulness to scripture than as legal requirements to be imposed upon pastors and teachers.

Particularly valuable is Wasmuth's assessment of the critical function of the ancient creeds in shaping Melanchthon's summaries of Christian teaching in confessional documents (especially the Augsburg Confession and its Apology) in their Trinitarian and Christological articles, and in determining the structure of the documents and their application to practical issues needing reform (349–404). For the Wittenberg circle the Nicaenum served as a standard for public teaching, a methodological framework for instruction, an aid for biblical interpretation, a guide for congregational life, a part of the liturgy, and encouragement for pious living (462–470).

Wasmuth's study meticulously surveys a wide range of sources in order to assess the ways in which the Wittenberg reformers put the Nicene Creed to use in their proclamation of God's Word. Throughout, she engages nineteenth- and twentieth-century interpretations of

the Creed and its use in the Wittenberg circle. Her careful, insightful analysis fills a significant gap in our understanding of the way in which the two reformers and their colleagues formulated public teaching. Students of Wittenberg teaching will find here foundational analysis and insightful challenges for their further research.

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Robert Kolb

*Early Scholastic Christology: 1050–1250.* By Richard Cross. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024. 276 pp. + xvii.

This volume joins several others in which Cross surveys late medieval, Reformation, and early modern Christological metaphysics, that is, how the divine and human natures exist in the one person of Christ. In two parts, this new addition analyses over forty thinkers and conciliar decisions from Anselm to Albert the Great and so provides the background for later thinkers.

The first part describes three theories about Christology operative in the early Middle Ages: (1) the *homo assumptus*, indebted to Augustine, presenting the hypostatic union as that between two persons, the Word and the man Jesus, (2) the *habitus*, which Cross prefers to designate the *non aliquid* theory in which the Logos dresses himself in humanity, which apart from the Logos' presence is nothing, and (3) the subsistence theory, indebted to the credal traditions of Chalcedon and Constantinople, as mediated by both Boethius and John of Damascus, which argues that the one person of the Logos possesses both divine and human natures. This later theory became favored by 1180. Its advocates pointed out that the *habitus* theory came across as docetic while the *homo assumptus* theory was Nestorian.

The second part shows how thinkers ironed out the details of the subsistence theory, such as whether the hypostatic union is best understood as something created or uncreated and how the human nature in Christ, though a particular substance, is not itself a person. Obviously, nothing here directly bears on Lutheran Christology, but the subsistence theory, as mediated through William Ockham, is assumed