



Assumption
University

Digital Commons @ Assumption University

Theology Department Faculty Works

Theology Department

2019

Rev. of *The Word Enfleshed: Exploring the Person and Work of Christ* by Oliver D. Crisp

Ty Monroe

Assumption College, tp.monroe@assumption.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.assumption.edu/theology-faculty>

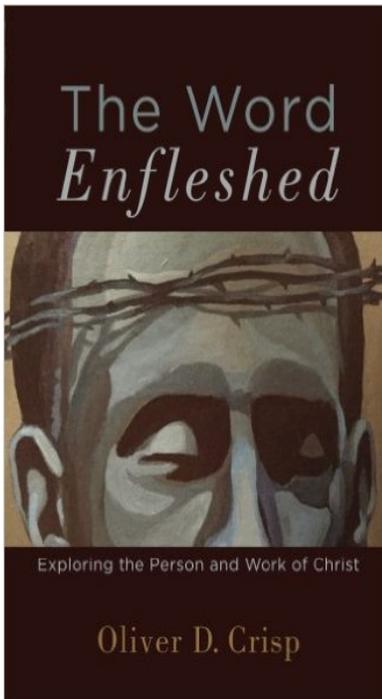


Part of the [Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Monroe, Ty. "Rev. of *The Word Enfleshed: Exploring the Person and Work of Christ* by Oliver D. Crisp." *Reading Religion* (December 16, 2019). <http://readingreligion.org/books/word-enfleshed>.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Theology Department at Digital Commons @ Assumption University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theology Department Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Assumption University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@assumption.edu.



[Link to Publisher's Website](#)

(<http://bakerpublishinggroup.com/books/the-word-enfleshed/381930>)

The Word Enfleshed

Exploring the Person and Work of Christ



Oliver D. Crisp

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, September 2016. 208 pages. \$26.99. Paperback.
 ISBN 9780801098093.

For other formats: [Link to Publisher's Website \(http://bakerpublishinggroup.com/books/the-word-enfleshed/381\)](http://bakerpublishinggroup.com/books/the-word-enfleshed/381)

Review

"Theology," writes Oliver D. Crisp, "is addictive" (xv). It's a descriptively true claim about himself. Crisp aims consistently to engage in thoughtful discourse about God and all things in relation to God, and his recent monograph, *The Word Enfleshed*, is no exception. It's a lively mix of historical exegesis and constructive speculation. Among Crisp's primary goals is to work out the implications of Chalcedonian Christology, with special attention to its soteriological implications.

The first chapter, "The Eternal Generation of the Son," recapitulates the conceptual narrative of the Nicene controversy so that Crisp can wade into recent debates over subordinationism. He deploys the Augustinian-Thomist distinction between eternal processions and economic missions. What's gained are the building blocks of Crisp's own Christology, in which the mission of the Son is rendered extrinsic to the divine identity. From here, Crisp can embark upon the second chapter, "Christ Without Flesh." It stages Crisp's engagement with the thought of theologian Robert Jenson over the *Logos asarkos*, which Crisp affirms and Jenson long denied. To Crisp, Jenson's denial is a consequence of his (errant) notion that "Christ is identical to the Second Person of the Trinity" (20). The goal here is to save Jenson from a charge of "Arianism" (21) while faulting him for giving up on divine simplicity and impassibility.

Crisp's affirmation of a fleshless Word (Christ? see below) appears again in chapter 3, "Incorporeality and Incarnation." He draws on both Christian scripture and conciliar statements as recent as Lateran IV and Vatican I to argue for the "traditional doctrine of divine simplicity" (35), in which (it seems) one must avoid any implication that any form of composition is predicable of a divine person. Though, it should be noted that the conciliar text he quotes says that the divine *substantia seu natura* is *simplex*, not that a divine *persona* is. The solution is a "compositional model" for Christology in which Christ *is* his divinity but "has metaphysical ownership of" a human nature (45). According to Crisp, "the Second Person of the Trinity is strongly united to [his human nature] but not identical to it" (46).

In chapter 4, "The Christological Doctrine of the Image of God," Crisp draws upon relatively standard patristic emphasis on Christ as the archetypal human. The author hopes to transcend the dialectics of competing attempts to discern the *imago Dei*. Crisp returns to Christology proper in chapters 5 and 6, "Desiderata for Models of the Hypostatic Union" and "Compositional Christology," respectively. In the former, Crisp aims to outline the *regulae* for fruitful, orthodox Christological speculation, using Chalcedon as his jumping off point. Though, he augments Chalcedon's "dogmatic minimalism" (80) with brief gestures toward Constantinople II and III. The outcome is an account in which Christ "names" the composite of which "the Son [of God] is a metaphysically simple component" (92), though this makes one wonder whether Crisp wishes to affirm a "Christ Without Flesh" or a "Son Without Flesh."

Christ's work comes back to the fore in chapter 7. In "The Union Account of Atonement," Crisp briefly writes about various soteriological models (e.g., "ransom," "satisfaction," "penal substitution," and "exemplar") in an effort to show his own as different from each of these but capable of preserving their most salvageable intuitions. In the penultimate chapter, "The Spirit's Role in Union with Christ," the author again reaches for an Augustinian-Thomist inspired theory—this time, it's Trinitarian appropriations. Crisp intends to specify "with full metaphysical seriousness" the work of the Spirit in salvation. The outcome is a claim that the Spirit "acts as a kind of

adhesive, preparing and enabling the human subject to be joined to the body of Christ” (161). The monograph concludes with a short reflection on Crisp’s overarching claims. In this ninth chapter, “The Nature and Scope of Union with Christ,” he intends to ward off a straightforward universalism that might seem inherent to a soteriology in which Christ’s very taking up of human nature has salvific effects.

Theology addicts like Crisp will be glad to share in his ardent desire to think about God and all things in relation to God. Crisp makes his theological fervor plainly evident, while presenting his case in concise chapters that are often filled with thought provoking examples and analogies. He’s aware that equally fervent readers are likely also to have concerns about his proposals. This is evident in his regular rehearsal of potential objections to such claims. I revisit one set of those objections in order to register my own concerns.

In chapter 6, Crisp concedes that his compositional model must overcome apparent complicity in the “Nestorian problem” (103), and elsewhere he implies that retaining a “Cyrillian tenor” (30, 92) to one’s Christology is commendable. But these terms feel rather abstract, since the author never directly quotes Cyril or Nestorius (or any other thinker from this period). In fact, for some readers, aspects of Crisp’s “compositional model” may appear to track quite closely with Nestorius’ own effort to use the term “Christ” as a *tertium quid* in a way that conceals his neatly partitive account of the Incarnate Lord. And this approach is quite different from that of Cyril, who is content to speak of one and the same subject “suffering impassibly.” Similarly, it seems far from clear that the conciliar canons Crisp alludes to (including the Theopaschite formula ratified in canon 10 of Constantinople II) underwrite the claim that the Son “is a person who has the divine nature essentially” (90) and so *is* his divine nature but only bears an “accidental” relation to his human nature (109). Here there’s deep ambiguity in Crisp’s use of the term “essentially,” since “nature” has the effect of suggesting that Christ’s *is* his divine nature *personally*. And, yet, it’s precisely the conceptual and terminological distinction between ‘person’ talk and ‘nature’ which became essential for the post-Chalcedonian canons and their theological champions, such as Leontius of Byzantium and Maximus the Confessor. Still, such concerns about identity are at the heart of the Christological problem, and even those who worry over Crisp’s solutions will welcome his courage and his contagious love for the craft.

About the Reviewer(s):

Ty Monroe is Assistant Professor of Theology at Assumption College in Worcester, MA.

Date of Review:

December 16, 2019

About the Author(s)/Editor(s)/Translator(s):

Oliver D. Crisp (PhD, King’s College, University of London) is Professor of systematic theology at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. He has authored or edited numerous books, including *Divinity and Humanity: The Incarnation Reconsidered*, *Deviant Calvinism: Broadening Reformed Theology*, and *Jonathan Edwards among the Theologians*. He serves on editorial boards for the *International Journal of Systematic Theology* and *Jonathan Edwards Studies*, on the steering committee of the AAR Christian Systematic Theology Section, and on the Analytic Theology Consultation for ETS. Crisp is the recipient of a Templeton Foundation award for *Original Sin Redux: A Study in Analytic Theology* (forthcoming).

Add New Comment

Reading Religion welcomes comments from AAR members, and you may leave a comment below by logging in with your AAR Member ID and password. Please [read our policy](#) on commenting.

[Log in](#) to post comments