King's "St. Cyril of Alexandria: Three Christological Treatises" (Book Review)

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fact that they are not implemented by more churches suggests that their articulation here is necessary. The book is also strong in the guidance that it provides to stepfamilies themselves, identifying common experiences and challenges. Again, Deal provides readers with seven clear and realistic steps that they can take to overcome these challenges and ensure that the family’s life is in alignment with biblical teachings. At times repetitive, the book may also frustrate readers by its propensity for directing them to accompanying workbooks or resource guides for more specific guidance. Nevertheless, The Smart Stepfamily should be praised for its willingness to focus attention on an often-overlooked aspect of family ministry and for unhesitatingly welcoming stepfamilies into the broader family of Christ.


Reviewed by Stefana Dan Laing, Assistant Librarian, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Houston, TX

This primary source material by the indomitable Egyptian bishop, Cyril of Alexandria (d. AD 444), is the latest offering in CUA’s excellent patristics series, which includes several other volumes of Cyril’s works. This slim volume opens a window into the very heart of the Nestorian controversy, and provides some clear and revealing examples of the characteristic Christological concerns of Alexandria and Antioch. The book contains three works by Cyril dated in the year just before the Council of Ephesus (AD 431), and is therefore of immense importance in clarifying the Christological points at issue in the heated controversy.

The first treatise (AD 430), addressed to the eastern emperor Theodosius the Younger (d. AD 450), reads like a heresiology, treating six heterodox positions which Cyril rejected based on Scripture and the authority of the orthodox fathers. Cyril set himself up as a “constructor of orthodoxy” (p. 10), distancing himself from several heresies of which he had been accused (e.g., Apollinarianism). At the culmination of his work, he marshalled his objections to Nestorius’ heretical two-nature (dyophysite) Christology (pp. 59-82).

The shriller and more aggressively polemical tone in the two latter documents (likely composed in AD 431 in the months leading up to the council) signaled the escalation of the controversy. When Pope Celestine stepped into the fray against Nestorius, Cyril “was emboldened to compose his famous twelve propositions,” also known as the Twelve Anathemas against Nestorius (p. 5). The second and third treatises constitute Cyril’s defense of his anathemas against Nestorius’ supporter, the...
formidable Antiochene theologian Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus, as well as against the entire cadre of Eastern bishops spread throughout Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Israel, Syria, Cyprus, and parts of Turkey. Cyril determined to maintain a one-subject Christology, while Theodoret was concerned to preserve the Godhead unchanged and guard Christianity against a docetic mixture Christology.

Each treatise runs only to about 50 pages, but taken together these works illustrate the construction of orthodox Christology. For Protestants, it is particularly enlightening to note that this controversy was very truly a hermeneutical one, with all sides basing arguments solidly on the Scriptures. Additionally, opponents buttressed their arguments with the witness of prior theologians, establishing a “patristic” method of argumentation. Above all, one realizes through the polemical cut and thrust of the debate that the fathers’ chief concern was to theologize accurately, carefully, and consistently with the Scriptures about salvation and the natures of Christ.

The nature of this treatment is scholarly, appropriate for seminary master’s level electives in systematic and historical theology, and highly recommended for research doctoral seminars in patristics or systematic theology. Translator Daniel King (lecturer in Syriac studies and Semitic languages at Cardiff University, Wales) offers this new and lucid English rendition, with a particularly useful glossary of technical theological terms used in the debate between Cyril and Theodoret. Reading aids include indices (general and scriptural) and a first-rate introduction which frames the primary source documents.

St. Epiphanius of Cyprus: Ancoratus,

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Cyprus has received heightened interest recently as archaeologists at several sites are digging down straight into the fourth century, tapping into the island’s late antique heritage as revealed by material culture. Consequently, Young Richard Kim’s translation of the Ancoratus by Epiphanius of Salamis – lead bishop on the island AD 367-403 – could not have come at a better time.

The Ancoratus (meaning “the well-anchored man” in a theologically orthodox way) is a doctrinal treatise by a figure better known as a heresy hunter. His later and more famous work, the Panarion (“Medicine Chest”) railed against all manner of false doctrines current in the late fourth century. Although the Ancoratus contained the