Of central importance to Christianity as a religion is the truth of the assertion that Christ is in fact fully God and fully man. Anselm of Canterbury and numerous other theologians have defended the necessity of Christ’s full humanity and divinity on the basis that only man ought to save, but only God could save. While the early church was faced with Docetic heresies that denied Jesus’ true humanity, recent scholarship has focused on refuting Jesus’ divinity. In *Jesus and the God of Israel*, Richard Bauckham, Professor Emeritus of New Testament Studies at the University of St. Andrews and Senior Scholar at Ridley Hall, has entered this debate with fresh evidence that the earliest Christians recognized Jesus as divine, yet remained strictly monotheistic. Building upon a career of careful reflection on the Scriptures, Bauckham seeks to show that the biblical writers had the highest Christology possible, and this Christology was easily incorporated into the strict monotheism of Second Temple Judaism.

**Summary**

In *Jesus and the God of Israel*, Bauckham sets out to show how the New Testament writers “take up the well-known Jewish monotheistic ways of distinguishing the one God from all other reality and use these precisely as ways of including Jesus in the unique identity of the one God” (4). He refines this thesis when he adds that he will

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1 Anselm writes that satisfaction for sin is necessary, but since “no one save God can make it and no one save man ought to make it, it is necessary for a God-Man to make it.” [Hugh Kerr, ed., *Readings in Christian Thought*, 2nd ed., (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 89].
argue that the highest possible Christology existed even before the writing of the New Testament Scriptures (19).

Bauckham’s work is a unique combination of a previously published monograph, *God Crucified* (chapter one in the present volume), and subsequent essays related to the issue of a “Christology of divine identity”. In chapter one, *God Crucified*, Bauckham argues his primary case. Bauckham begins by briefly asserting the strict monotheism of Second Temple Judaism, as evidenced most specifically by their twice-daily recital of the Shema (5). Bauckham then explains that the primary concern for Jews of this era was not what God is, but who God is. They recognized that their God had a unique identity, seen most clearly in his being the Creator of all things and the sovereign Ruler of all things (7-8). Bauckham’s claim is that the New Testament writers consciously included Jesus in the unique divine identity of YHWH by ascribing to Jesus characteristics that could only be true of God, namely creation of and sovereignty over all things (18-20). The second half of this chapter reverses the discussion. Bauckham notes that if he is correct that the New Testament authors included Jesus in the unique divine identity, then it is also true that Jesus reveals the divine identity of YHWH. One significant area that Bauckham explores is Jesus’ humiliation and suffering, the New Testament parallels with Isaiah 40-55, and how these two together are the definitive revelation of YHWH (32-59).²

Once Bauckham has laid out his initial argument, the subsequent chapters address challenges or further clarifications related to his thesis. In chapter two, Bauckham

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²See especially his comment on p. 33: “The profoundest points of New Testament Christology occur when the inclusion of the exalted Christ in the divine identity entails the inclusion of the crucified Christ in the divine identity, and the christological pattern of humiliation and exaltation is recognized as revelatory of God, indeed as the definitive revelation of who God is.”
addresses the challenge that monotheism is an inappropriate category for use because it is derived from Enlightenment ideas (62). As his thesis depends upon the strict monotheism of Second Temple Judaism, this challenge is one against which he must defend his conclusions. Bauckham argues that not all who speak of monotheism have in mind Enlightenment categories; rather, he proposes that ‘monotheism’ as he intends it can be understood as “transcendent uniqueness,” which he defines as “the uniqueness of YHWH that puts him in a class of his own” (86). Chapter three is likewise a response to a challenge. There are those who would argue that the frequent title “Most High God” in relation to YHWH allows for the existence of other divine beings. Bauckham argues that this challenge has come from a misunderstanding of the nature of Jewish monotheism. They were not inclusive monotheists, seeing YHWH as the most supreme or superlative of a class of gods, but rather exclusive monotheists, recognizing YHWH’s uniqueness as an “absolute difference in kind from all other reality” (109).

Unlike the previous two chapters, chapter four moves beyond a defense against challenges into further evidence defending his main thesis. Bauckham argues in chapter one that recognition of the divine identity amounts to worship in the Jewish context (12). Chapter four builds upon this premise to show that Jesus was deemed by the early Christians as worthy of worship, as evidenced by doxologies (132-135), hymns (135-139), and even pagan perceptions of Christianity (139-140). Chapter five likewise builds upon the premise of unique divine identity of YHWH and Jesus’ inclusion in that identity by exploring the throne of God. Bauckham shows how the throne of highest heaven was in Second Temple Judaism a picture of YHWH’s sovereignty over the entire cosmos, which is one of the two characteristics integral to his divine identity (164-165). Chapter
six explores Paul’s inclusion of Jesus in the divine identity, focusing most of his attention on how such inclusion of Jesus in the identity of YHWH can be consistent with Jewish monotheism (185). Chapter seven deals with the high Christology of Hebrews, focusing most specifically on how the author of Hebrews extended the common Christian use of Psalm 110 from verse 1 to verse 4 (236). He concludes from the discussion that the high priesthood as explicated by the author belongs to the unique divine identity just as his role as Creator and Ruler do (251). Finally, chapter eight considers Jesus’ identification with the God-forsaken in his cry from the cross (261-262).

**Critical Analysis**

Much in Bauckham’s work ought to be commended. For one, Bauckham does an admiral job of integrating each chapter into his primary thesis, even though chapters two through seven are additions to a previously published monograph. This type of integration can best be seen in chapter three in relation to his discussion on inclusive and exclusive monotheism. Bauckham is defending his position against those who argue that the phrase “Most High God” suggests YHWH as merely the highest of an order of divine beings. Such a conclusion is at odds with Baukham’s claim to strict monotheism in chapters one and two. However, in chapter two Bauckham argued that the essential element of Jewish monotheism was not the denial of other gods, but the affirmation that YHWH was in a class of his own, which he termed YHWH’s “transcendent uniqueness” (86). Thus, in response to the critiques in chapter three, Bauckham applies the conclusions from chapter two to suggest that the monotheism in view is not inclusive, but exclusive, a notion in which God is understood to be unique “in terms of an absolute difference in kind from all other reality,” once again defined as transcendent uniqueness.
This example is representative of other instances of integration that help to defend challenges in different chapters and strengthen Bauckham’s overall thesis.

Another significant strength of Bauckham’s work is the careful, methodical way that Bauckham exhibits how the New Testament writers included Jesus in the unique divine identity of YHWH. Bauckham gives example upon example of identifying characteristics of YHWH that the New Testament writers then take and apply to Christ. In chapter seven, he highlights seven characteristics of the unique divine identity of YHWH: Creator, sovereign Ruler, narrative identity, eschatological rule, divine name, deserving of worship, and eternal (233-234). At various points in the work, Bauckham gives solid biblical evidence showing how Christ is included in the unique divine identity with respect to each of these seven characteristics. Perhaps the most lucid and powerful connection is his explanation of how Philippians 2 draws on the imagery of Isaiah 40-55 to show how Christ is included in the unique divine identity with respect to his sovereign rule, his eschatological rule, his possession of the divine name, his right to receive worship, and his eternity. Besides these characteristics, he is also said to be equal to God and reveal God in his humiliation (41-45).

Despite the numerous and significant strengths, Bauckham has one glaring weakness. Bauckham purports that “Nicaea represents the triumph of Greek philosophy

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3 The manner and depth of Bauckham’s development of his thesis make his conclusions very convincing. This work has, as a result, become foundational for any discussion in this arena of biblical and theological studies. For example, in his 2010 publication, Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism?, Thomas McCall relies heavily on chapters one and two of Bauckham’s work for discussing not only Jesus’ inclusion in the unique divine identity, but also the nature of Second Temple Jewish monotheism. One area where McCall adds helpful insight is in his discussion of the quality of oneness being more significant than the quantity of oneness (quoting Pinchas Lapide) [Thomas H. McCall, Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism?: Philosophical and Systematic Theologians on the Metaphysics of Trinitarian Theology, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 60-61].
in Christian doctrine” (58). While admitting that these categories still allow for an expression of the Christological monotheism of the New Testament, he adds also that Greek philosophical categories served as “serious impediments to anything more than formal inclusion of human humiliation, suffering and death in the identity of God” (59). Bauckham’s weakness lies in asserting this historical portrait of Greek philosophical influence without any argumentation. Were this issue largely acknowledged, there would be little problem, but that does not seem to be the case. Moreover, in assuming this position, Bauckham fails to consider the possibility that the aim of Nicaea was to discuss the nature of YHWH and not his identity for reasons Bauckham likewise does not delineate. 4 Perhaps there were solid theological reasons, or reasons related to refuting heresy, that prompted the emphasis on nature rather than identity. Regardless of whether Bauckham is correct or not in his assertion, his argument here neglects proper analysis of debatable issues.

**Conclusion**

In *Jesus and the God of Israel*, Richard Bauckham has provided a valuable resource for Christians better to understand the way in which Jesus Christ is shown in the Scriptures to be God. By including him in the unique divine identity of YHWH, the New Testament writers were able to assert Jesus’ divinity, while remaining within the strict confines of Second Temple Jewish monotheism. Bauckham’s thesis is well-defended and has proved in recent work to be foundational for the future of New Testament and theological studies. On account of its biblical fidelity and scholarly value, this book

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4 See Bauckham’s distinction between these two on page 7. “Identity concerns who God is; nature concerns what God is or what divinity is.”
would make an important addition to any library.
Bibliography
