

David A. Michelson, *The Practical Christology of Philoxenos of Mabbug*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Pp. xvi + 245; \$105.

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Despite the fact that Philoxenus of Mabbug, who died in 523, produced the largest surviving corpus in Syriac literature, scant attention has been paid to him, apart from the magisterial work by André de Halleux (*Philoxène de Mabbug: sa vie, ses écrits, sa théologie* (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1963)), the focus of which was christology and soteriology, and subsequent studies following on from de Halleux, which the author of this book details on p. 2, n. 3. While de Halleux and others have dealt with the historical, textual, and theological aspects of Philoxenus' work, the present study is devoted to the praxis of the bishop of Mabbug and its interaction with his christology.

The book has seven chapters and includes a useful map on p. 4 of the world of Philoxenus. Chapter 1 is an introduction to Philoxenus and his context, including his key christological ideas: incarnation as becoming, the economy of salvation, unity and trinity, the mystery of the incarnation, error and heresy, and faith and simplicity. Chapter 2 deals with the practical considerations that the divine *oikonomia* raised for the bishop. Here Michelson seems to be struggling with term *oikonomia* and the various possibilities of its translation, which in English do not have to be the same in every instance, but rather depend on whether the meaning is the divine incarnation or the bishop's governance. Coming up with the antiquated 'churchmanship' for the latter (p. 36, n. 4) is not helpful. Consultation of the work of Gerhard Richter (*Oikonomia: Der Gebrauch des Wortes Oikonomia im Neuen Testament, bei den Kirchenvätern und in der theologischen Literatur bis ins 20. Jahrhundert*, Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte 90 ((Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008)) would have afforded some solutions to the quandary of translating the term into English. Chapter 3, devoted to the Patristic sources of Philoxenus' theological epistemology, is valuable for alerting us to the fact that the bishop of Mabbug used not only Ephrem the Syrian and Cyril of Alexandria, but also the ps-Apollinarian writings and the works of the Cappadocians. The author's conclusion on p. 69 is pertinent: 'we may say that Philoxenos viewed Cyril as the

culmination rather than the origin of miaphysite Christology'. Chapter 4, entitled 'Proof Texts for the Ineffable', examines Philoxenus' ideas of faith, simplicity, and the fear of God, and his advocacy of the correct way of interpreting Scripture, which was meant to inculcate obedience and lead to contemplation of the divine vision – a departure from the commentaries of Theodore of Mopsuestia and the 'school' of Antioch. This consideration ties in with chapter 5, which is devoted to christological threats to liturgical practice and illustrates how Philoxenus' anti-Chalcedonian stance informed his practical theology. Here Michelson builds on the work of Sebastian Brock (see p. 145 with n. 2), especially with regard to the description of an early West Syrian baptismal liturgy preserved in Philoxenus' works. The author stresses that for the bishop of Mabbug the liturgical mystery was a christological mirror, and that wrong (especially Chalcedonian) doctrine informed wrong worship. Philoxenus, he argues, called for an end to speculation and for the proper worship of the incarnate Christ, an approach that involved the struggle of the Holy Spirit against Satan. This again is a well-articulated transition to the next chapter, in which Philoxenus' attitude to dogma, doctrinal enquiry, demons, and the ascetic system are analysed. Implicit in this system is the fact that communion with heretics must be fought against, and that faith must be accompanied by simplicity, craftiness being a cloak for sin. Chapter 7 is a short general conclusion. The book includes a list of manuscripts consulted, a bibliography, general index, and an index of places (after which inexplicably there are twelve blank pages).

This book is a coherent exposition of Philoxenus' practical theology. It is well conceived and researched, and provides the reader with English translations of many Philoxenian texts, whether by Michelson or other scholars. Many readers, however, will find the persistence of split infinitives jarring and will wonder about the suitability of the illustration on the cover – dice-players as portrayed in the Antiochene Yakto mosaic.