

separated from her young sons, wrote a ‘handbook’ enjoining them to live a moral and Christian life. The American Protestant mother Dorothy Leigh wrote a popular book, *The Mother’s Blessing*, aimed at instructing children (both her own and others) on Christian life and Christian belief. And enslaved mothers, who had been taught a version of Christianity aimed at justifying their oppression, recognised the dissonance between those teachings and scripture and taught a revised version to their children.

Marga’s book is fascinating, helpful and timely. Although some of the details of her analysis will already be familiar to those who have read books like Clarissa Atkinson’s *The Oldest Vocation*, there is much in Marga’s book that is new. I confess I was not always convinced by Marga’s assessments. It is not clear to me, for instance, that early Christian mothers like Paula left behind their families because they were motivated by ‘ambitions of spiritual power and position’ (p. 24). Such an assessment seems to ignore, or at least omit, the surrounding context, especially the early Christian belief that the second coming was imminent. Quibbles like these notwithstanding, this is an enjoyable and important book, one which is helpful for scholars while at the same time accessible to the average reader.

doi:10.1017/S0036930624000152

Michael F. Bird, *Jesus Among the Gods: Early Christology in the Greco-Roman World*

(Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2022), pp. xi + 480. \$59.99.

Sean McDonough

Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA, USA (smcdonough@gordonconwell.edu)

In *Jesus Among the Gods*, Michael Bird sets out ‘to demonstrate that ancient notions of divine ontology have been sidelined for too long in academic discussions of early Christology’ and ‘to engage in a comparative analysis of Jesus and ancient intermediary figures with a view to showing what is distinctive about Jesus’ divinity in early Christian discourse’ (p. 2).

Chapter 1, ‘Problematizing Jesus’ Divinity’, offers an overview of what it might mean to call Jesus ‘divine’ in the ancient world. Far from being a straightforward proposition – Jesus equals God in the modern sense of the world – both the Graeco-Roman and Jewish worlds offered a spectrum of possibilities. Gods might be properly divine beings of various ranks, or humans drafted into the divine realm; even in the Jewish sphere (which Bird still wishes to regard as ‘monotheistic’ despite some necessary caveats in light of current research) a figure like Moses might receive the epithet ‘god’.

With the possibilities thus expanded, Bird goes on in chapter 2, ‘The Search for Divine Ontology’, to see where Jesus best fits amidst this multiplicity of divine figures. His primary goal is to demonstrate that ontological concerns about God (and hence Jesus) were not raised only in the Nicene era; they were a consistent part of Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Christian discourse about deity. In this, Bird sets himself on the one hand against scholars like Larry Hurtado and Richard Bauckham, whose

early high Christology is framed in large measure apart from ontology; and on the other against 'the standard story' wherein Jesus gradually morphs from a subordinate exalted human to a fully divine one. He goes on to distinguish the categories 'divinity by nature' and 'divinity by merit' in the Graeco-Roman world and argues that the New Testament and other early Christian writings show plenty of evidence that Jesus was often placed in the former category; he is careful to add 'that identifying Jesus with absolute divinity was not necessarily immediate or universal' (p. 83).

Chapter 3, 'Putting Jesus in His Place', begins a new section on Jesus and intermediary figures. Bird emphasises that the ascription of absolute divinity to Jesus does not preclude the contributions to Christology by various intermediary figures in antiquity, and he offers a survey of scholarly suggestions for candidates in this regard.

Chapter 4, 'Jesus and the In-betweeners', constitutes the majority of the book (pp. 115–380), and offers a detailed analysis of intermediary figures and their possible effect on understanding Jesus. He begins with Demiurge, Logos and Wisdom, moves on to angels, exalted patriarchs (including Adam) and concludes with ancient ruler cults. Throughout this chapter, Bird explores a wealth of primary and secondary literature, and he makes a concerted effort to deal fairly with both ancient texts and modern interpreters. Indeed, Bird is so even-handed that at times it appears he is endorsing a position he will go on to critique at the end of a section. This is noticeable, e.g. in the treatment of the Christ hymn in Philippians 2, where he approvingly cites Lohmeyer to the effect that Jesus and Caesar are here set in 'conscious opposition to each other' (p. 352). Only in his concluding remarks does he note the limitations of this increasingly popular explanation for the shape of the Philippians hymn. The same might be said for his treatment of angel Christology earlier in the chapter.

In the concluding chapter 5, 'Setting Jesus apart from Demiurges, Deities, Daemons, and Divi', Bird argues – compellingly, to my mind – that while angels, heroes, emperors and the rest could indeed have shaped early portraits of Jesus, these portraits most resemble the God of the Old Testament; and thus the biblical texts, as they are developed in early Judaism, are the most salient sources for early Christology. Judaism in the Hellenistic era was shaped in various ways by the broader culture, but it remained a distinctive entity, and the matrix within which Christian discourse emerged. 'Jewish traditions', he writes, 'do seem to provide something of scaffolding and brickwork even if a few of the supporting beams have been especially imported from Rome and Athens' (p. 401).

It is inevitable that such a wide-ranging book will invite debate at various points. With respect to ontology, one might ask whether it can be easily disintegrated from function, and hence whether prior discussions of early Christology have indeed been devoid of ontological content (Bird himself, citing Chris Tilling in a footnote on p. 38, is aware that there is a need to 'move beyond the ontological vs. functional dichotomy'). His consistent transliteration of the root *demiourg-* in Christian sources suggests a tighter connexion to the Platonic material than might be warranted in each case. Could it not sometimes simply mean 'fashioned', without a direct link to Plato? His (cautious) approbation of some angel Christology is defensible, especially with respect to the angel of the Lord and the angel bearing the divine name in Exodus 23; but often those traits deemed 'angelomorphic' – for instance, a shining appearance – can be explained as generic characteristics of heavenly beings (including God) without being specifically angelic. Finally, given the multitude of ingredients meant to be at play in early Christology, one does wonder how it was all in fact cooked up in the early church

(but that is a question that might require a volume all its own). Of course, such questions would arise from any treatment of this highly contested topic.

Bird's lucid and thorough volume makes a valuable contribution to current christological discussions and should benefit a wide range of readers. The book achieves its stated goal of expanding the parameters of christological discourse to include (broadly speaking) ontology, and thus is of interest to specialists in the sub-discipline. At the same time, it is ideally suited to orienting a wider range of scholars to debates on early Christology, since Bird is in a position to survey both the ground-breaking discussions of Hurtado, Bauckham, Dunn and others, and the responses to them. Beyond this, the wide scope of ancient religious material covered means *Jesus Among the Gods* can serve theological students as a lively introduction to the spiritual milieu of the early church. Bird's focus on the particular question of early Christology keeps him from the taxonomical drudgery that plagues many 'An Introduction to...' volumes. *Jesus Among the Gods* is a lively and learned addition to studies in early Christology.

doi:10.1017/S003693062400005X

Joshua Cockayne, *Explorations in Analytic Ecclesiology: That They May Be One*

(Oxford: OUP, 2022), pp. xxiii + 202. £65.00.

Kimlyn J. Bender

George W. Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor University, Waco, TX, USA (kimlyn_bender@baylor.edu)

In this work in the *Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology* series, Joshua Cockayne applies the tools of analytic philosophy to ecclesiology as others have already done with questions of God, incarnation and sacraments. The intent of the book is therefore not to present a comprehensive ecclesiology, but to apply analytic tools and models to bring clarity to traditional ecclesiological questions, and specifically to the question of 'the unity, or oneness, of the Church' (p. viii). Particularly important for this work is the analytic literature on social groups, used to illuminate and analyse a central theme that runs throughout the book: how a collective body can act as a single agent, and how the collective identity of the church should be understood in view of the individual identities of its constitutive members. As Cockayne states in the Preface: 'The central thesis of the book is that the Church is a social body, composed of many individual members, united through the work of the Holy Spirit to be the body of Christ' (p. xi). This 'unity thesis' is then expanded in the book in both conceptual and practical directions, the first three chapters focused upon the identity of the church, and the latter four chapters focused upon its activity.

Chapter 1 is a conceptual chapter that lays the groundwork for the rest of the book by addressing the relationship between individualism and collectivism. Cockayne does not choose for one over the other, finding common conceptions of individualism and collectivism overly simplistic. He opts instead for 'a model of the Church and its oneness which assumes the truth of *both* holism and individualism' (p. 19). He maintains