

The Birth of the Trinity: Jesus, God, and Spirit in New Testament and Early Christian Interpretations of the Old Testament by Matthew W. Bates. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. xii + 234 pp., paper, \$27.95.

The Birth of the Trinity explores the manner in which early Christians read the Old Testament to differentiate the persons of the Trinity. Therefore, it demonstrates that, contrary to the adoptionist claims of scholars like James Dunn, Robert Jewett, and Bart Ehrman, the earliest Christology was the highest Christology.

Matthew Bates is assistant professor of theology at Quincy University in Illinois. Although he has written a previous book, two book chapters in edited volumes, and some journal articles, he is perhaps best known for his recent, and controversial, book that has sent shockwaves throughout the evangelical community. In *Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of Jesus the King* (Baker Academic, 2017), Bates transformed justification by faith into justification by allegiance, discipleship, and faithfulness. Conservative evangelicals might be apt to dismiss anything by Bates on account of his most recent book and this would be unfortunate. Bates' work on the Trinity is fascinating, groundbreaking, and erudite. In spite of what he wrote afterward, or may write in the future, *The Birth of the Trinity* is completely orthodox and extremely valuable.

The Birth of the Trinity is very well-organized. Subsequent to acknowledgments, contents, and a list of abbreviations, an essential introduction that includes brief summaries of each chapter is followed by seven chapters, an epilogue, a bibliography divided into primary and secondary sources, and four indexes: biblical references, other ancient sources, modern authors cited, and concepts and other names. The footnotes are copious and detailed.

Bates argued in *The Birth of the Trinity* that "the idea of separate persons in timeless, intimate communion within the Godhead—Father, Son, and Spirit—was especially fostered and nurtured by a specific reading technique that the earliest Christians utilized as they engaged their ancient Jewish Scripture (p. 3). His thesis is that "a specific ancient reading technique, best termed *prosopological exegesis*, that is evidenced in the New Testament and other early Christian writings was irreducibly essential to the birth of the Trinity" (p. 2). *Prosopopoeia* (literally "character-making") was a rhetorical strategy "discussed extensively in ancient rhetorical handbooks" (p. 31). Stated briefly, prosopological

exegesis involves “assigning dramatic characters to otherwise ambivalent speeches in inspired texts as an explanatory method” (p. 3), and this exegesis “contributed decisively to the development of the concept of the Trinity, since it was this way of reading that especially led to the consolidation of ‘person’ language to express the three-in-one mystery” (p. 7); it was also “essential to how Jesus Christ was from our earliest Christian sources understood to be divine” (p. 204). The book “seeks to provide a panoramic view of the relationship between Father, Son, and Spirit as it was conceptualized through a specific mode of interpreting Old Testament dialogues in the earliest church” (ibid.); it offers “a window into the inner life of God as discerned via person-centered reading of the Old Testament in the early Church” (p. 7).

Bates is singularly focused. He did not seek “to cover the same ground or somehow supplant the many excellent, sophisticated, and helpful studies of Jewish monotheism, early Christology, and the rise of Trinitarianism that have been produced by other scholars” (p. 27). His aim was rather “to supplement, draw out implications, and show that certain correctives are in order” (ibid.). *The Birth of the Trinity* “builds irreducibly upon the foundational theoretical and practical work on prosopological exegesis” (p. 30) that Bates undertook in his earlier book — *The Hermeneutics of the Apostolic Proclamation* (Baylor University Press, 2012) — but also “seeks to explore more extensively prosopological exegesis in the New Testament and second-century church” (ibid.). What is new in this work “is the claim that *prosopopoeia* was not just a rhetorical strategy adopted by New Testament authors to persuade the audience, but also was employed by these authors as a theodramatic reading technique vis-à-vis the Old Testament” (p. 32).

The only criticism of the book is that Bates did not fully explain the concept of prosopological exegesis in one place; it is almost as though he assumed that his readers have read the material on prosopological exegesis in his earlier work, *The Hermeneutics of the Apostolic Proclamation* for there he explained that prosopological exegesis is

a reading technique whereby an interpreter seeks to overcome a real or perceived ambiguity regarding the identity of the speakers or addressees (or both) in the divinely inspired source text by assigning nontrivial prosopa (i.e., nontrivial vis-à-vis the ‘plain sense’ of the text) to the speakers or addressees (or both) in order to make sense of the text (*The Hermeneutics of the Apostolic Proclamation*, p. 218).

Prosopological exegesis "explains a text by suggesting that the author of the text identified various persons or characters (*prosopa*) as speakers or addressees in a pre-text, even though it is not clear from the pre-text itself that such persons are in view" (*ibid.*, p. 183). Bates posited four criteria for detecting prosopological exegesis in the New Testament: speech or dialogue, nontriviality of person, the primacy of introductory formulas or markers, and similar prosopological exegesis in co-texts, post-texts, and inter-texts (p. 59) (but again, these are more fully developed in his earlier book).

Although the book has an introduction, the first chapter is introductory as well. The last chapter almost functions as a conclusion. The real substance of the book is found in chapters two through six.

Chapter two pertains to ancient divine dialogues between the Father and the Son. The main texts discussed are Psalms 2, 16, and 110, and Isaiah 42:1 and 55:3-5, along with their New Testament counterparts. Chapter three focuses upon the incarnation and mission of God the Son. The main texts discussed are Psalm 40, Isaiah 42:1-9, 49:1-12, and 61:1-2, and Malachi 3:1, along with their New Testament counterparts. Chapter four relates to the sufferings of Christ and the Father's love for the Son. The main texts discussed are Psalms 22 and 69, along with their New Testament counterparts. Chapter five concerns the words of trust and praise spoken by the Son to the Father. The main texts discussed are Psalms 22, 18, and 116, and Isaiah 8:17-18, along with their New Testament counterparts. Chapter six pertains to the coronation of the Son, the final conquest of evil, and the consummation of the ages. The main texts discussed are Psalms 2, 102, and 110, along with their New Testament counterparts.

An appendix listing the correspondence of the Psalms in the Septuagint and the Masoretic Text would have been helpful since Bates maintains the versification of the Septuagint when it differs from the standard versification found in the New Revised Standard Version. The author made the apt remark concerning the result of his study: "I find myself even more warmly affirming the Trinitarian dogma as traditionally described in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creedal synthesis: there is one God who subsists as three distinct persons—uncaused Father, eternally begotten Son, and sent-forth Spirit" (p. 11).

The Birth of the Trinity is substantive reading. Those who slowly and carefully read it will be rewarded. The book is essential for any serious study of the doctrine of the Trinity. Aside from this, it is a valuable addition to the literature on Christology, Christ in the Old Testament, Christ in the Psalms, early Christian interpretation, the historical Jesus,

and the New Testament use of the Old Testament.

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No Little Women: Equipping All Women in the Household of God by Aimee Byrd. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2016. 278 pp., paper, \$11.50.

Aimee Byrd, author and co-host of the Mortification of Spin podcast, is on a mission. She declared that everyone is a theologian, whether they know it or not, so “everyone in the church needs to be a good theologian” (p. 34). As the title implies, Byrd is particularly desirous that women be equipped theologically so that they are not easy marks for false teachers who often target poorly taught women in the church (2 Tim 3:6-7). Her exhortation is timely because a plethora of women’s ministries and books exist which are merely superficial (see pp. 116-20, 127-29), appeal to the desire to extra-biblically hear God’s voice (pp. 59, 145, 150), and teach false and even heretical doctrines. The antidote to these concerns is not to create women’s ministries as a separate entity (pp. 13, 19, 22, 48, 50-52, 91, 96-97, 104-06), nor to focus all women’s Bible studies on women’s issues (p. 75); actually it is to teach women sound theology (pp. 168-69) and discernment, especially as related to books written for women (pp. 22-23, 47-50, 115-16, 198-251). Since false teachers counterfeit the Word of God (p. 35), everyone in the church must be theologically equipped (pp. 53-63). Sadly however, women are often excluded from this training and are pressed into niche ministries (p. 91) in which ill-prepared women teach from books written by popular, yet questionable authors (Byrd mentioned Sarah Young, Beth Moore, and Priscilla Shirer as examples – pp. 147-50); it is no wonder that many Christian women are confused and that women’s ministries within the church sometimes become divisive.

Byrd interprets Genesis 2:18 to mean that women are the “necessary allies” of men (pp. 24-26, 109-10, 178-89, 196-201) and believes that it is the responsibility of the elders of the local church to lead and train women in ministry and theology (pp. 30-32, 46-52, 87, 96-98). Such training should not be outsourced to women’s organizations or popular women authors but should be the intentional ministry of church leadership. The author resists books and ministries instructing women as