

Book Reviews

The Birth of the Trinity: Jesus, God, and Spirit in New Testament and Early Christian Interpretations of the Old Testament. By Matthew W. Bates. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. xii + 234 pages. \$90.00.
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Contending that a high Christology already exists in the texts of the New Testament, Matthew W. Bates retrieves the practice of a “prosopological exegesis” whereby passages in the New Testament are viewed as representing “pre-incarnation” discourse between the Son and the Father. These “binitarian” conversations, Bates contends, are part of the earliest Christian understanding, presenting a “theodramatic” reading of the texts that were the basis for the nascent Christian community. This reading, he asserts, was familiar to the early community, is found in both canonical and noncanonical sources, and continues through the critical period of doctrinal formation. Thus he retrieves what he refers to as “the person-centered exegetical thread that connected the earliest Christians to their ancient Scriptures” (25).

Opening the possibility that a theological hermeneutics will engage both divine and human authorship, Bates traces the thread of conversation, beginning with the plural form that marks the creation narratives. The mission of the Son, as presented in the Synoptics, emerges in new light, and in multiple perspectives from Isaiah to the texts of Qumran. The lament texts of Psalms are now seen as “cross-shaped conversations.” The Pauline texts of trust and encouragement and power are read as illustrations of an already-familiar perichoretic dynamism, brought to a point in the theodramatic claims of authoritative rule. Bates’ prosopological hermeneutic, which draws on the integrity of the interpretive world of the text itself, finds its strongest theological case (particularly given the broader systematic interest sparked by the disciples of von Balthasar) in Irenaeus’ presentation of the recapitulation of the divine economy in Christ.

On a larger stage, his careful delineation of this reading strategy, including its coherence with early Christian writers, adds a welcome vibrancy to the reading of both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. It places the person of Jesus Christ more deeply in the world of the prophets and the writings, in a manner that is faithful to the ancient experience. It also provides a

genuinely theological engagement with doctrine and text that, even for those who argue for a Christology that would isolate the sociopolitical message of Jesus of Nazareth, cannot be discounted.

Bates' suggestion that this approach yields a mosaic from which the triune God emerges is indeed, as he puts it, a welcome respite from the "monochrome hues of procession and subordination" (175). Yet, to his implicit charge that other readings of Scripture are not only partial, but somehow flawed, one replies, of course, that modernity matters too. Thus, to present this hermeneutical strategy as the retrieval of a conversation among the persons of the Trinity, rather than conveying this as a catholic extension of the consciousness of Jesus Christ, seems problematic, although a series of interpretive "critical controls" assuages this somewhat. On balance, however, the point that this is not merely an early, implicit form of Trinitarian speculation is warranted, as such a frame might now seem wanting, missing, as it would, the genuinely prosopological force of this reading, the retrieval of which marks this work as one of the most important additions to the Trinitarian literature of the last twenty years. While of interest to Trinitarian theology, this study is perhaps even more relevant to graduate students and scholars in the area of Christology. As a thoughtful and scholarly point of engagement for questions about the self-consciousness of Christ, its insights will also be useful for the seemingly naïve questions that typically arise in an undergraduate classroom.

NANCY A. DALLAVALLE
Fairfield University

Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission. By Michael J. Gorman. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015. x + 341 pages. \$28.00 (paper).
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This book appears as the author's third volume in a "partly deliberate, partly accidental" (2) trilogy on Paul, following *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (2009) and *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (2013). Building on his previous work, Michael J. Gorman identifies his central claim as follows: Paul desired the communities he addressed "not merely to believe the gospel but to become the gospel, and in so doing to participate in the very life and mission of God" (2). A missional, justice-making God "creates a missional, justified, justice-making people" (9). The book involves the intersection of Pauline studies, hermeneutics, and missiology and is intended for, and accessible to, scholars, pastors, and lay church leaders (10).