

Book Review

Matthew V. Novenson, Ed.

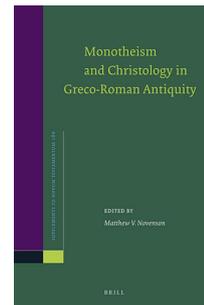
Monotheism and Christology in Greco-Roman Antiquity

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This book is dedicated to the late Larry W. Hurtado, Professor of New Testament Language, Literature, and Theology at the University of Edinburgh. *Monotheism and Christology in Greco-Roman Antiquity* is a collection of twelve essays by leading scholars, edited by Matthew Novenson (who now holds Hurtado's position), covering divergent perspectives on “early high Christology” within the ancient Greco-Roman world with a focus on the issues raised in Hurtado's previous works, including *One God, One Lord* (Fortress, 1988) and *Lord Jesus Christ* (Eerdmans, 2003).

Following Novenson's *Introduction*, the first essay (Chapter 2) begins with *The New religionsgeschichtliche Schule at Thirty: Observations by a Participant* by Hurtado. Here Hurtado lays out the difference between the older and newer *Schulen*. The former believed that early Christianity and Jesus-devotion lay in oriental mystery cults, whereas the newer *Schulen* turned towards Second Temple Judaism to understand its development (pp. 9-15). He highlights some of the scholarly contributions to the newer *Schulen* throughout the years including Stuckenbruck, Bousset, and Dunn, and goes on to project its continuing development and influence on Christology and Christian origins.

In Chapter 3, *The Universal Polytheism and the Case of the Jews*, Novenson focuses on how ancient Greek and Roman writers portrayed God. He explores a counter-example of Robert Parker's hypothesis on universal polytheism; the belief that the same gods and goddesses were worshiped under different names, also known as *interpretatio*. He concludes that Zeus was equated with YHWH by certain Hellenistic Jewish writers and that it was acceptable, stating that the problem is not the difference in the names of the god(s) but the individual rituals the people practiced for their god(s). For example, the changes Antiochus IV made in Jewish temple worship, causing the rebellion of the Maccabees. Granted there were people, whether pagans or Hellenistic Jews who described YHWH to fit their frame of reference; yet it does not infer that all religious Jews would relate YHWH to Zeus or any other god. Even if Antiochus IV allowed the Jewish rituals to continue but dedicated the temple to Zeus, it would be unlikely that the Jews would claim Zeus as the god of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Not only does it go against the Jewish *Shema*, but it also disregards the motif of punishment for idolatry, which is a major theme in the Hebrew Bible.

In *The Divine Name as a Characteristic of Divine Identity in Second Temple Judaism*

and *Early Christianity* (Chapter 4), Gieschen advocates that the possession of the divine name equated identification with the God of Israel for first century Jews. Gieschen elaborates with three examples of individuals possessing the divine name from Second Temple Jewish writings (pp. 65-73): 1) Son of Man (1 Enoch), 2) Yahoel (Apocalypse of Abraham) and 3) in the writings of Philo of Alexandria where the *Logos* is defined as the “visible image of the High God above” (p.72). He continues with more examples, citing evidence found in the New Testament where the divine name indicates divine identity (pp. 74-80). Gieschen’s analysis provides the reader insight on how divine name theology influenced early Christianity.

In *Jesus’ Unique Relationship with YHWH in Biblical Exegesis: A Response to Recent Objections* (Chapter 5) Capes discusses some of the objections to Paul’s use of YHWH texts that refer to Jesus (pp.88-98). He defines a successful analogue as something that must contain an Old Testament reference to the divine name, whether YHWH or *kyrios*, with a clear application of a figure being identified with that name. Without these two conditions being met a true analogue does not exist.

In *God and Glory and Paul, Again: Divine Identity and Community Formation in the Early Jesus Movement* (Chapter 6) Newman gives a splendid overview of Paul’s use of δόξα (glory) in his theological rhetoric ranging from social, doxological, theological, Christological, physiomorphic contexts, including Christian glory. Chapter 7 continues with an analysis of Paul’s works in Bauckham’s essay, *Confessing the Cosmic Christ (1 Corinthians 8:6 and Colossians 1:15-29)*, which gives two examples of high Christology. The first is a Christian

version of the Jewish *Shema* (Deut 6:4), which incorporates Jesus Christ with the one God of Israel. The second is typically defined as a hymn with similar poetic techniques also found in the Psalms. Both passages employ numerical composition, numerical patterning, and gematria to embed additional meaning into a literary text (p.141), as well as prepositional theology, the usage of Greek and Latin prepositions to distinguish different types of causation (p.144). Bauckham demonstrates how both methods can be applied to exegetical interpretation. Space permitting, it would have also been nice to read Bauckham’s analysis of prepositional theology found in Jn. 1:3,10 and Heb.1.2.

Niebuhr and Frey, Chapters 8 and 9, focus on other books of the New Testament. Niebuhr focuses on James, which is typically not used as an example of high Christology in the New Testament and is even infrequently found in Larry Hurtado’s work *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*. Yet Niebuhr argues in his essay, *One God, One Lord in the Epistle of James*, that the religious practices exhorted in the letter convey early Christ-devotion and worship (p. 187).

In *Between Jewish Monotheism and Proto-Trinitarian Relations: The Making and Character of Johannine Christology*, Frey does an excellent job at providing an overview of the high Christology found within the gospel of John covering such phrases as “the Son,” “Son of God,” “Son of Man,” and “The Logos.” He concludes that John’s Christology falls somewhere between “Jewish” binitarian monotheism and a “Christian” proto-trinitarian view, where Jesus is considered as one with the Father, and the Holy Spirit is viewed as a divine

personal figure but not yet in fusion with God the Father and Jesus (pp. 218-221).

In Chapter 10 Bremmer offers a glimpse in *God and Christ in the Earlier Martyr Acts* of the possible beliefs from early Christianity by analyzing the accounts of martyrs in *Acta Martyrum*, official records of the trials of early Christian martyrs, including Ptolemaeus and Lucius, Justin and his companions, and Apollonius to name a few. His focus is on what the individuals confessed during their trials. From their confession Bremmer is able to derive possible values found within second century Christianity such as the belief that God is in heaven and the creator of the world and that martyrdom is an “imitation of Christ.” While it is impossible to say to what extent these beliefs were shared, a trend can be found among the martyrs. Bremmer’s historical analysis is an insightful contribution to understanding the conception of God/Jesus during second century Christianity.

Other essays include *Gnosis and the Tragedies of Wisdom: Sophia’s Story* by PHEME PERKINS and *The One God is No Simple Matter* by April D. DeConick. Both touch on theodicy and the problems of identifying the high god with the creator (p.8). The last essay, Chapter 13, is *How High Can Early High Christology Be?* by Paula Fredriksen, where she emphasizes the importance of history in theological interpretation.

Overall, one gets an overview of early high Christology as a topic with Novenson’s *Introduction* and Hurtado’s beginning essay, while the individual essays give the reader a more microscopic view of the debates found within early high Christology. The key categories that are addressed include: 1) the relation between

Judaism and Hellenism and its effect on early Christology and the attribution of “pagan monotheism” as a new contestant in this field; 2) how to understand the word “divinity” and its application in regard to Christ, 3) defining the one god and which role the act of creation plays; 4) and how Jesus’ divinity is understood in the primary sources (pp. 3-6). This edited volume fulfills the goal of addressing some of the issues raised in Hurtado’s previous work and subsequent reception, yet its coverage is very broad. The book is recommended as a starting point into the world of early high Christology which will point readers in the right direction for further research.

