

as well as the connection of the entire material to the obvious purpose of the work.

As for the usefulness of the scientific approach undertaken by our author, we can say that it has a double utility, both practical and scientific. The practical utility consists in offering models much closer to the profile of contemporary man, with practical solutions to existential problems and questions like those faced by the author of the autobiographical text. The scientific utility lies in the interdisciplinary approach, which leads to pastoral, moral, and mystical values, at the same time constituting a source of inspiration for the authors of literary or encomiastic texts and other similar works.

Genuine monograph dedicated to the spiritual autobiography genre in Eastern area, the work of Father Maxim Morariu offers a dense overview of the phenomenon of Orthodox spiritual autobiography during 19th and 20th centuries, the characteristics, scope and its influence, but also a bridge to other spiritualities, through the common elements found here. Romanian theology felt the need for such an approach, hence the methodological need for this work, which can be a paradigm of approach for future research and monographs.

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Michael F. BIRD, *Jesus the Eternal Son: Answering Adoptionist Christology*, Eerdmans Publishing House, Grand Rapids, 2017, xv + 155 pp.

Michael Bird is currently Academic Dean and Lecturer in Theology and New Testament at Ridley College (Melbourne). He has earned the reputation of being a “heavy hitter” in the area of New Testament and Jesus’ divinity studies. This recent book of his is a contribution in the latest field.

Many students of the apostolic age assert that the Savior Jesus Christ did not claim for Himself the attribute of divinity. It was only after several centuries of theological reflection that the Church would come to consider Christ as God. Thus primary Christology would see in Jesus a man of righteous life who is adopted as the son of God. In this book Michael Bird examines the texts on which this theory is based and demonstrates that

neither from the Holy Scripture nor from the history of the Church can it be deduced that primary Christology was adoptionist.

The first chapter outlines the framework in which the Christology of the first century developed, showing which were the elements that pushed the Church towards a formulation of Orthodoxy. Bird discusses a number of factors that are usually neglected, such as the early Christians' life experience with Jesus, its implications for their conception of God, and perception of their own group identity. This experience is formulated in a variety of Christological expressions, which leads the author to the two fundamental ideas of the book: "(1) the first Christologies were hastily devised veneration of a theme of incarnationism, even if the details were still to be fully worked out; and (2) adoptionism originated as a particular second-century phenomenon driven largely by internal debates about preferred texts and socio-religious influences on reading them" (p. 9).

The second chapter examines Romans 1, 3-4 and Acts 2, 36, passages that seem to suggest adoptionism. Romans 1, 3-4 is considered a pre-Pauline hymn due to stating that by the resurrection Christ was appointed Son of God. Bird demonstrates that these verses do not deny the divine status of Jesus before the resurrection, but show that through the Resurrection Jesus passed from one type of divine sonship to another. Acts 2, 36 is sometimes seen as indicating that by the resurrection Christ received a status that He did not have before. However, in context, Old Testament images indicate that Jesus had been identified with God since his earthly activity. By the resurrection Jesus is made Lord and Christ in the sense that Israel is given tangible proof that Jesus is indeed what He claimed to be.

Chapters 3 and 4 deal with the Gospel of Mark. Chapter 3 reviews the various expositions of St. Mark's Christology and compares the Gospel picture of Jesus with the ancient accounts, from Jewish and Roman circles, of human beings rising to the height of divinity. Chapter 4 examines the Christological statements of the gospel. Although there are parallels between the Gospel of Mark and certain Hellenistic literary works, the proposition that Mark appropriates the Roman conception of adoption does not stand. The ancient world does not manifest a uniform understanding of adoption or deification. In fact, in Hellenistic literature we encounter ridicules of this idea, especially from the monotheists (p. 49 ff.), which makes it unlikely that Mark used it as a background for his Christology.

Moreover, this conception of Jesus is not found in the primary expressions of Christian worship, in which the Son is always worshiped in connection with the Father. If Christ had been deified at his death, like the Roman emperors, we would have expected Him to be worshiped separately from the Father.

On the other hand, intertextual analysis seems to be much more productive. From the beginning of the Gospel, St. Mark states that Jesus is the incarnate God who will inaugurate a new exodus (pp. 84-86). Projected against the background of Psalm 2, the baptism of Jesus does not appear as the moment when He becomes the son of God but when he receives the commission to fulfill his messianic mission. Jesus assigns divine prerogatives to himself when He offers forgiveness of sins, a thing possible exclusively for God (pp. 92-94). Theophanic scenes, such as the calming of the storms and the Transfiguration, reveal the divinity of Jesus to a much greater extent than the oracles of the prophets do. In general, St. Mark presents Jesus in such a way that the reader is led to the idea of His divinity.

Chapter 5 traces the evolution of adoptionism as such. Through the analysis of some fragments from the Shepherd of Herma, the Ebionites and Theodotus of Byzantium Bird shows that adoptionism was not the initial Christian belief - subsequently marginalized -, but a later doctrinal development meant to reconcile Orthodoxy with philosophy. The 5th parable from the Shepherd of Herma, usually interpreted in an adoptionist sense, does not speak of a change in ontological status. It is also believed that the primary adoption Christology was preserved in Ebionite circles. This hypothesis is questioned by Bird, on the grounds that the information we have about Ebionites comes from their opponents and is mixed with elements of other heresies, which makes it difficult to accurately describe their doctrine. However, it seems that the Ebionites did not embrace an adoptionist but a possessionist Christology, in the sense that Jesus was possessed by a divine power. The oldest Christology that can be characterized as truly adoptionist is that of Theodotus of Byzantium, belonging to the end of the second century. These remarks make it difficult to support the hypothesis that the Christology of the early Church was adoptionist.

The last chapter highlights the significance of the adoption debate for today, showing that the statement of St. Athanasius the Great still holds

true: if Christ was the Son of God by adoption alone, He cannot save mankind from sin (pp. 128-129). Or, to say that Jesus became the Son by personal merit leads to the idea of salvation by works, foreign to the essence of the gospel (pp. 129-130). For the Gospel to be “God’s power for salvation” (Romans 1,16), it is necessary that Jesus be the eternal Son of God, who saves in his capacity of being truly man and truly God.

This book is useful in many ways. Biblical scholars can find here a very good example of exegesis that takes into account the literary and historical context. In the light of the broad context of the significant passages, the idea of adoptionism in the New Testament becomes difficult to sustain. For the study of early Christianity, this book provides a brief and conclusive analysis of the thought frameworks relevant for how Judaism in the second temple understood the relationship between man and God and the Roman views on deification and adoption. The echoes of these conceptions in the New Testament are too weak to be considered as the main background. Even in cases of clear resemblance, New Testament authors develop these concepts in directions different from what can be seen in the extrabiblical literature. For the general field of theology, the last chapter of the book shows that we are dealing with a still unfinished debate, with profound implications in Christology and soteriology. And finally, the book is important for Apologetics, proving the credibility of Orthodoxy. The claim that Orthodoxy is a late doctrinal development motivated by political interests is false. The author’s historical analysis of the evolution of adoptionism proves that patristic theology stands on the firm foundation of the Holy Scriptures.

Overall, the author successfully supports his hypothesis on several levels. His work may not be addressed to the general public, but it is very useful to those who want to increase their understanding in the identity of Christ and the foundations of Orthodox Christology.

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