Michael F. Bird, *Jesus the Eternal Son: Answering Adoptionist Christology*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017. (xvi + 155 pp.) [ISBN 9780802875068]

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Michael Bird, a lecturer at Ridley College in Melbourne, Australia, is well known as an evangelical scholar of the New Testament. In *Jesus the Eternal Son* he argues against the view that "the earliest retrievable Christology was adoptionist" by making two claims: that "the first Christologies were hastily devised venerations of Jesus as a divine figure" and that "adoptionism originated as a particular second-century phenomenon" (p. 9). The book is intended to be a "short, sharp, and provocative volume" (p. xi). Bird finds the significance of Christology for the New Testament communities was that Jesus' nature directly impinged upon soteriology and ecclesiology. A different Jesus would lead to a different salvation and a different understanding of Christian identity (p. 4). While Bird rightly accepts that early Christian Christology was not monolithic he also argues that Christologies that were incongruent with apostolic witness and the scriptures, or had dubious ethical outcomes, were pushed to the margins and thus became considered "heresies" (p. 5–6).

After the introductory chapter Bird turns his attention to the texts that are often held by scholars to suggest a "primitive" Christology where Jesus was first appointed the Son of God at the resurrection, that is, Romans 1:3–4 and the sermons in Acts. For Bird, Rom 1:3–4, "appointed the son of God in power," does not describe an initial bestowal but "a transition from one state of divine sonship to another state of divine sonship" (p. 15). Among other arguments, he reasonably argues that Paul would not have used the creedal fragment if he had understood it to be affirming something different to the pre-existence and incarnation of Jesus that he affirms elsewhere (eg. Rom 8:3; Phil 2:6–7). Bird then examines Acts 2:36; 5:31 and 13:33 (p. 24–25). These texts have often been argued to suggest Jesus only became the son of God at the resurrection. Central to his argument is that such a reading is atomistic, ignoring the wider context of Luke/Acts and the immediate context of the sermons of which the texts are a part (p. 26–27).

Chapter three addresses the topic of Greco-Roman beliefs in humans that became gods upon their death or through great virtue. In particular, Bird relates these beliefs to early Christian views of Jesus and whether those Greco-Roman beliefs were the source for the Christology of Mark's Gospel. Bird surveys Greco-Roman heroes and emperors who became gods or had divine honours bestowed upon them. Primarily he summarises the data, although he does refer frequently to the primary literature. This allows him to cover a great deal of ground. He concludes that divinity was "relative rather than absolute" (p. 40), "not primarily about essence but about honour, status, and power" (p41); divinised humans were ranked below the traditional gods (p. 47); and that Greco-Roman divinisation was contested and even mocked by both Greek and Jewish writers (p. 49). Bird then juxtaposes his account of Jewish monotheism, which "includes an absolute distinction between God and humanity that could not be traversed" (p. 57). Importantly, for Bird, Jesus "was not given his own shrine next to Yahweh like Augustus was slotted next

to Roma or Jupiter . . . worship of Jesus necessarily involved worship of God the Father" (p. 62). Thus Greco-Roman divine humans are not a legitimate model for Jesus' divinity in Mark or early Christian thought. The issue of early Jewish monotheism is still contentious one, and those not already persuaded by the theses of Richard Bauckham and Larry Hurtado, etc, may not find Bird's logic compelling.

Chapter four aims to be a "close reading of Mark's Gospel" to "contend against an adoptionist reading" and argue for a divine identity Christology in Mark (p. 64). However, Bird first launches into a ten page refutation of Michael Peppard's *The Son of God in the Roman World* (Oxford University Press, 2011) which argues that the baptism of Jesus in Mark 1:9–11 would be interpreted in the light of Roman adoption practices and the imperial cults (p. 66–76). Bird then discusses a number of reasons why Mark's baptism account is not adoptionist, including fine points of grammar, the recognition of Jesus by demons, and the use of sonship language at the transfiguration and crucifixion (p. 76–81). Bird goes on to consider "evidence from the wider Markan narrative that . . . ascribes transcendent qualities and a divine identity to Jesus" (p. 81). In some detail, he examines Mark's *kyrios* (Lord) language for Jesus, Jesus' prerogative in forgiving sins, the water miracles and Transfiguration as "Theophanies", and Jesus' authority (p. 81–101). He concludes that Jesus is a pre-existent heavenly being. Usefully, albeit briefly, Bird then also examines the use of some early Jewish sources as proof-texts to argue that Mark's portrayal of Jesus is parallel to that of human agents of God portrayed in other early Jewish literature. He concludes, "Mark, as the Jewish monotheist he was, would find it singularly difficult to imagine a human being elevated to divine status and power."

Bird's argument in chapters 2–4 is thorough and builds a wide and consistent case. However, while he is successful in showing the so called "adoptionist" passages of the NT *can* be read as consistent with a belief in the pre-existence of Jesus, he has not shown they *must*. The nature of the collected evidence is uniformly indirect and inferential and thus open to alternative interpretations. Especially uncertain is the heavy lifting done by assumptions about what Mark could or could not believe and the assumption that Mark, Paul and Luke would have been conscious of these Christological concerns as they wrote. The question arises, if Mark, Paul and Luke were so alert to finer points of Christology why are their texts not more direct on these matters? Of course the same critique applies *mutatis mutandis* to those arguing for NT adoptionism, and this is something Bird's work clearly reveals.

In the fifth chapter the book's pace quickens considerably. Having argued that the New Testament does not contain adoptionism Bird works through the "likely suspects" (p. 107) of the post-New Testament era to find the first true adoptionists. The fifth parable of the Shepherd of Hermas, although often considered adoptionistic, is, Bird argues, better understood as "complicated and incoherent" Christology, closer to angel-Christology than adoptionism (p. 111–112). He argues that "the old and repeated claim that the Ebionites were a single Jewish Christian group with an adoptionist Christology is patently false" (p. 120). Instead they should be understood as a diverse grouping of Jewish Christians resistant to incarnational Christology and generally holding to a possession Christology. Finally, he concludes the first true adoptionists were some of the followers of Theodotus of Byzantium sometime from 190 to early 200s AD., although Theodotus himself was not an adoptionist. "One group of the Theodotians, who held that Jesus

was deified after his resurrection, were the first, true, authentic, and genuine adoptionists, as far as definitions and evidence go" (p. 122).

The final chapter is a brief discussion of modern theology and adoptionism. John Knox and John Macquarrie, among others, are given as examples of recent adoptionist theology. He also argues that some advocates of Spirit-Christology, David Coffey and Ralph Del Colle, leave themselves open to the charge of adoptionism because they are not explicit as to whether Jesus was divine before receiving the Spirit at his baptism. Bird briefly argues against them all concluding, "A Christology that presents us with a mere man who bids us to earn our salvation is an impoverished alternative to the God of Grace and mercy who took on our flesh and 'became sin' so that we might become the 'righteousness of God"' (p. 130).

Overall this is a highly stimulating and readable book. Use of Greek alphabet rather than transliteration might hinder non-academic readers, although there is not a lot of it. Equally, explanation of some terms (e.g. angel- and possession Christology which are introduced without explanation) would improve accessibility for a general audience. From a scholarly perspective Bird engages impressively with the secondary literature, with some very useful footnotes. The brevity of the book and amount covered means more time spent at the theoretical level than the exegetical. Occasionally this means some arguments appear a little thin. In particular his argument for the pre-existence of Christ in Mark's Gospel would need a much fuller treatment if it were to be convincing to a sceptical reader. Likewise, his criticisms of modern adoptionists in chapter 6 is so brief it is in danger of being perfunctory. Notwithstanding, Bird has succeeded in creating a short, readable and provocative book which both serves as a useful summary of the state of the discussion and forcefully throws down the gauntlet to those who argue for an adoptionist Christology in the New Testament.

Alexandra Radcliff. *The Claim of Humanity in Christ: Salvation and Sanctification in the Theology of T. F. and J. B. Torrance*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2017. (208 pp.) [ISBN: 9781498230193]

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Radcliff's book is based on her doctoral studies where, as intimated by the title, she focused upon the twin themes of salvation and sanctification in the work of Scottish reformed theologians and brothers, James B. and Thomas F. Torrance.

Masterfully written, the book follows a two-part chiastic structure (A-B-C C-B-A). The first section (A-B-C) is headed up under the heading *The Triune God of Salvation.* Here Radcliff deals with the Torrance's soteriology. Radcliff argues that salvation is a Trinitarian event; *from the Father* (covenant over contract, or filial over federal Ch. 1), *through the Son* (achieved ontologically through Christ's vicarious humanity rather than some external benefit Ch. 2), and *by the Holy Spirit* (applied subjectively to us by the Spirit based upon the objective union achieved in Christ Ch. 3). Within this filial, ontological, and objectively grounded