

The Birth of the Trinity: Jesus, God, and Spirit in New Testament and Early Christian Interpretations of the Old Testament

By Matthew W. Bates

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How and when did Jesus and the Spirit come to be regarded as fully God? *The Birth of the Trinity* offers a new historical approach by exploring the way in which first- and second-century Christians read the Old Testament in order to differentiate the one God as multiple persons. The earliest Christians felt they could metaphorically 'overhear' divine conversations between Father, Son, and Spirit when reading the Old Testament. When these snatches of dialogue are connected and joined, they form a narrative about the unfolding interior divine life as understood by the nascent church. What emerges is not a static portrait of the triune God, but a developing story of divine persons enacting mutual esteem, voiced praise, collaborative strategy, and self-sacrificial love. The presence of divine dialogue in the New Testament and early Christian literature shows that, contrary to the claims of James Dunn and Bart Ehrman (among others), the earliest Christology was the highest Christology, as Jesus was identified as a divine person through Old Testament interpretation.

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Editorial Review

Review
"It is not every day that one reads a book that makes a distinct contribution to our understanding of how the NT authors interpret the OT, sheds significant light on the reading practices of the NT authors by means of the early church fathers, and uses those results to make a compelling argument for the origins of the doctrine of the Trinity. But this is exactly what Bates does in *The Birth of the Trinity...The Birth of the Trinity* is a stunning achievement that makes a powerful argument for the origins of the doctrine of the Trinity by means of close attention to the reading practices of the early church and the NT authors."--*Themelios*

"*The Birth of the Trinity* is a stunningly important book that defies easy categorization. Is it exegetical? Is it theological? Is it historical? The resounding answer to each of these questions: 'Yes, and much more!' Setting aside widespread and long-held views about Christological development or adoptionism, or about Trinitarian theology as an intrusion into biblical faith from Hellenistic philosophy, Bates urges that early high Christology and Christian understanding of the Trinity itself were cultivated through dramatic reading of Israel's Scriptures. For biblical and theological studies alike, this is a compelling game changer." --Joel B. Green, Professor of New Testament Interpretation, Fuller Theological Seminary

"This is a bold and ambitious book that cuts across disciplinary lines as typically perceived, and will certainly (and reasonably) generate debate on a number of the points argued in it. But Bates makes an important contribution in underscoring how early Christians perceived the voice and person of Jesus in their ('Old Testament') scriptures, and in contending that this constituted an important mode of theological reflection along the route to the doctrine of the Trinity." --Larry W. Hurtado, Emeritus Professor of New Testament Language, Literature & Theology, University of Edinburgh

"In this fascinating new study Matthew W. Bates mines a stream of early Trinitarian thinking that has all too often been forgotten. Of particular importance is his attention to the continuities between the New Testament writers own ways of attending to the divine agents at which Israel's Scriptures already hinted, and also to the modes of Trinitarian exegesis that remained central throughout the early Christian period." --Lewis Ayres, Professor of Catholic and Historical Theology, Durham University

"In this bold and erudite study, Matthew W. Bates argues that it was not least by reading the Scriptures (the 'Old Testament') theodramatically, or prosopologically, that Jesus and his followers came very early on to Trinitarian conclusions. Scholars and students will find here a new and exciting way of investigating Christian origins. A landmark book." --Matthew Levering, Perry Family Foundation Professor of Theology, Mundelein Seminary

"On the dust jacket Joel Green calls this book a 'game changer', and it certainly is that." --*Heythrop Journal*

"Ambitious." --*Expository Times*

"Whatever the final verdict on Bates's overall claims about the role of prosopological exegesis in the development of Trinitarian theology, his approach opens up beautiful, rich Trinitarian readings." --*First Things*

"...[A] fresh approach to Christian trinitarian interpretation..." --*Euangelion Blog, via Patheos*

About the Author

Matthew W. Bates (Ph.D., The University of Notre Dame) is Assistant Professor of Theology at Quincy University in Quincy, Illinois.

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Elizabeth Ramsey:

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