

Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. xxii + 746pp. \$55.00. Hardcover.

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Larry Hurtado, professor of New Testament at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, is well known for his many fine contributions to scholarship, and this volume is no exception. Hurtado's aim in this book is "to offer a full-scale analysis of the origin, development, and diversification of devotion to Christ in the crucial first two centuries of the Christian movement (ca. 30-170 C.E.)" (2). Hurtado's intended audience is the guild, and he hopes to "(re)shape scholarly opinion" (xiv), so his interaction with other scholars is extensive.

Not only is the interaction with other scholars extensive, Hurtado covers all the primary data one could desire and more as he shows "how astonishingly early and quickly an impressive devotion to Jesus appeared" (215). What makes this astonishing is, among other things, Jewish Monotheism (cf. Deut 6:4). And yet, as Hurtado demonstrates, the early Christians remained monotheists even as they worshiped Jesus as God together with Yahweh.

The book consists of ten chapters. Hurtado begins by discussing the various "Forces and Factors" that must be considered as ancient times are described. From there he discusses evidence from Paul's letters (ch. 2), from Acts ("Judean Jewish Christianity," ch. 3), from "Q" (ch. 4.), from "Jesus Books" (the Synoptic Gospels, ch. 5), from John (ch. 6), from "Other Early Jesus Books" (New Testament Apocrypha, ch. 7), from the "second century" (ch. 8), "Radical Diversity"—found in heretical groups (ch. 9), and "Proto-orthodox Devotion" (ch. 10).

Hurtado sets out to explode many untenable conclusions held on the question of how early Christians thought about Jesus. He devastates the view that it took the Christians a long time to conceptualize Jesus as God, presenting an exhaustive case that "devotion to Jesus emerges phenomenally early in circles of his followers" (2). This is not a difficult thesis for those who believe the Bible to swallow.

This book, however, is intended to persuade people whose view of Scripture is not so high, and hopefully it will be effective in that regard. The weighty tome does a great service in carefully evaluating a huge amount of evidence as well as the mountains of claims about that evidence in the attempt to get at what may be truly concluded from the data. And, the author seeks to present the material in a manner that will be palatable to those whose minds he is trying to change. This raises questions that are worth pondering as we seek to be both truthful and persuasive.

While this book is an example of thorough, thoughtful scholarship, certain aspects of Professor Hurtado's approach forces the question of how Christians should seek to persuade audiences that are sometimes hostile. Hurtado seeks to establish that the early Christians were devoted to Jesus, but he insists "*I do not intend thereby either to refute or to validate the religious and theological meaning of early devotion to Jesus*" (9, emphasis his). The insistence on integrity with historical data can be appreciated, but can we separate these historical conclusions from the demand they place upon us? Hurtado apparently recognizes that the Academy does not appreciate Christians when he writes, "To come clean, I confess to being guilty of Christian faith" (9). Confessing that

Christian faith makes him “guilty,” he apparently seeks to accommodate the unbelieving perspective of his desired audience. For instance, he finds arguments for the authenticity of 1 Peter, James, and Jude “impressive,” but treats them as “pseudonymous” anyway (80 and n. 3). Three times in less than fifteen pages he states that the historical reliability of Acts does not affect the point he is making (162 n. 19; 170 n. 29; 176). He then invests 40 pages in a discussion of the hypothetical document Q. Our only access to this source is through the Synopsis, whereby we discern that there are around 235 verses where Matthew and Luke agree with no Markan parallel. These agreements between Matthew and Luke are our only access to “Q.” There are no extant manuscripts of this hypothetical source. Yet, from scholarly hypothesizing upon the content of these verses, Hurtado can conclude that “Q is apparently a carefully designed text, not a grab bag of Jesus tradition” (257). These examples seem to reflect an overly cautious stance on the authenticity and reliability of canonical texts, accompanied by an embrace of certain aspects of critical orthodoxy that is not cautious enough.

This book is a massive resource, billed as the replacement of Wilhelm Bousset’s 1913 *Kyrios Christos*. Hopefully the volume, with its sound argument for early Christian devotion to Jesus, useful 47 page bibliography, and extensive indexes, will indeed exercise much influence. We must grapple, too, with the question of what aspects of our world-view are negotiable as we seek to be all things to all people in the effort to win some. As accommodating as Hurtado is in his approach, his conclusions will inevitably be perceived as folly by some (1 Cor 1:18), but no apologies are necessary, for the proclamation of this foolish message has a transforming power.

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