



McGrath, James F.

***The Only True God: Early Christian Monotheism in Its Jewish Context***

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

## INTRODUCTION

James F. McGrath (Clarence L. Goodwin Chair in New Testament Language and Literature at Butler University, Indianapolis, IN) has published broadly in the fields of early Christology and second temple Jewish/Christian monotheism.<sup>1</sup> *The Only True God: Early Christian Monotheism*

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<sup>1</sup> See *John's Apologetic Christology: Legitimation and Development in Johannine Christology* (SNTSMS 111; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); w/ Jerry Truex, "Two Powers' and Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism," *JBS* 4/1 (2004): 43-71, w/ Truex, "Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism: A Select Bibliography" in *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism* (eds. Loren T. Stuckenbruck and Wendy E. S. North; JSNTSup 263; London: T&T Clark, 2004): 235-42; "Johannine Christianity - Jewish Christianity?" *Koinonia* 8/1 (1996): 1-20; "Going Up and Coming Down in Johannine Legitimation," *Neot* 31/1 (1997): 107-18; "Prologue as Legitimation: Christological Controversy and the Interpretation of John 1:1-18," *IBS* 19 (1997): 98-120; "Change in Christology: New Testament Models and the Contemporary Task," *ITQ* 63/1 (1998): 39-50; "A Rebellious Son?: Hugo Odeberg and the Interpretation of John 5.18," *NTS* 44/3 (1998): 470-73; "Christology on Two Fronts: A New Testament Model for 'Doing' Christology in a Pluralistic Context," *R&T* 6/1 (1999): 65-82. Unpublished works include a number of societal paper presentations. The influence of McGrath's former work is evident throughout the present volume.

*in Its Jewish Context* (hereafter *TOTG*) in many ways represents a distillation of this body of work as well as a refinement and advancement of it.

## SUMMARY

McGrath's project is an investigation into just how the earliest beliefs about Jesus factored into second temple Judaism's monotheistic commitments, the driving question being to what extent were they continuous/discontinuous with it? Was Christianity a monotheistic faith alongside Judaism? Was either religion monotheistic at all? Or did Christianity depart from Judaism's monotheistic scruples, and if so, at what point? McGrath wants to avoid anachronism at all costs, so while it's commonly argued that the various NT texts depict Jesus as God in the flesh and as one worshiped by the early Christian community, McGrath suggests that this might be reading later beliefs back into the earliest texts. Chapter 1 is spent introducing the issues of monotheism and some of the popular explanations (e.g., Bauckham's view of divine identity, Casey's evolutionary model, Hurtado's focus on cultic devotion) for what we see happening with Jesus. By appealing to the concept of agency McGrath counters claims that Jesus performing seemingly divine actions, being addressed with divine epithets, and even being honored in ways *similar* to how God is honored, makes Jesus divine. Jesus is said to perform such works and receive such honors because he is God's agent *par excellence*, but this is not evidence that Jesus is God himself, as other agents of God in Jewish literature receive the same types of things.

But what of those scholars such as Larry Hurtado who want to push past the rhetoric in written texts and move into other areas such as cultic devotion in the actual Christian communities? McGrath is game to do so, and in fact, this a significant point of focus in *TOTG*. Where McGrath differs from Hurtado is not in the importance of cultic devotion as it is in what constitutes the devotion that is due to God alone. Hurtado includes a range of data to include prayers offered to the risen Lord, hymns sung unto the risen Lord, the invocation of Jesus' name in liturgical settings, and more.<sup>2</sup> McGrath argues that we can find examples from archeological discoveries (e.g., ancient epigraphic evidence from Jewish funeral steles [30]) and early Jewish literature (e.g.,

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<sup>2</sup> See Larry W. Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?: Historical Questions About Earliest Devotion to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 28; cf. idem., *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Christian Monotheism*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 100-114; idem., "The Binitarian Shape of Early Christian Worship," in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus* (eds. Carey C. Newman, et al.; JSJSup 63; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 187-213, reprinted as chapter 3 of *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Early Christian Devotion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 63-97.

Philo, *1 Enoch*) of others being the recipients of such devotion. McGrath draws the line at sacrifice (chapter 2) which “whether literally or metaphorically,” he says, “is never said to be offered to Jesus.” (54) With this framework in place McGrath examines Paul’s epistles (chapter 3), the Gospel according to John (chapter 4), and the book of Revelation (chapter 5), all with a mind to see what they say about (a) monotheism, (b) Christology, and (c) worship.

A large portion of his chapter on “Monotheism in the Letters Attributed to Paul” is taken up by an excursus into 1 Corinthians 8:6 (38-43) where McGrath argues that Paul is not *splitting* the Shema (à la Dunn, Wright, Bauckham, Hurtado, et al.<sup>3</sup>) and somehow including Jesus *inside* of it, but rather *expands* it and adds Jesus *alongside* of it. (39) He makes his case by referring to passages of Scripture (1 Tim. 2:5; 1 Thes. 1:9-10; 2 Sam. 7:22-24) that use “a supplemented Shema” (42) and make additions alongside of it (i.e., “one mediator, the human being Christ Jesus” [1 Tim. 2:5]; the return of Jesus from heaven [1 Thes. 1:9-10]; “one nation that God went out to redeem as a people for himself” [2 Sam. 7:22-24]). This is offered as evidence that something can be added to the *outside* of the Shema without challenging affirmations of God’s oneness, so while Paul was most certainly “making an unusually exalted claim regarding Jesus” this “was not by definition incompatible with ‘monotheism.’”<sup>4</sup> (43) The other major point McGrath makes in his discussion of Paul is that Paul’s Christology must have been within the accepted bounds of Jewish monotheistic faith since he mentions no controversy over it and never seeks to defend it against detractors as he does with his views on the Law. (52)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; 1989), 180; idem. *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 253; Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 97; idem. *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 114; N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), 129; idem., *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), 362; Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament’s Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 97-104; Gordon D. Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* (Peabody, MA: Hendricksen, 2006), 89-94; 502-04; 562-64.

<sup>4</sup> McGrath goes on to highlight the fact that exalted claims are also made of Abel son of Adam in *The Testament of Abraham* 12-13 and the Elect One in *1 Enoch* 61:8; 62:9.

<sup>5</sup> Less important for McGrath’s purposes are texts that appear to be speaking of Jesus’ personal preexistence and role in creation (Col. 1:15-20), which McGrath sees as metaphorical, but even if taken literally such language wouldn’t “move beyond the bounds of first-century Jewish monotheism” (47) since such language is used of Wisdom without issue. The title “Lord” and application of OT YHWH texts to Jesus are “intended to present Jesus

When examining “Monotheism and the Gospel of John” McGrath focuses on four points: First, John’s Prologue (1:1-18) in which John’s *Logos*, much like Philo’s, was the “only boundary marker between God and creation, and the edges were blurred slightly on both sides,” (57) so again, the thing that marked God out as unique was that he “alone [was] worthy to receive sacrificial worship,” and this as opposed to the Creator/creature divide that scholars such as Bauckham argue in favor of. Second, in reference to John 5 & 10, where many suggest Jesus is claiming equality with the Father, he suggests that monotheism was never the issue, because John affirms that there is only one God elsewhere (see e.g., John 17:3). He says, “[t]he issue is whether Jesus has been sent by God and is obedient to God, or whether he is a rebellious, glory-seeking upstart who claims divine prerogatives for himself even though God has not in fact sent him.” (59) So Jesus, as God’s agent, was indeed functionally equal to God as were other agents in Jewish literature. Third, Jesus’ “I Am” statements in John 8 cannot be taken to mean “I am YHWH” since Jesus constantly defers to the Father and speaks of his subordinate role. Fourth, Thomas’ confession of Jesus as Lord and God in John 20:28 is not out of the ordinary when compared to a broader corpus of early Jewish literature.

Nowhere in the NT (except perhaps Hebrews) is cultic worship more at the forefront than in the book of Revelation. With this in mind McGrath turns his attention to how this plays out with reference to God, Christ, and angelic beings. The wide range of meaning (from bowing to full-fledged sacrificial worship) for the verb *προσκυνηειν* (and its cognates) is noted before restating the working assumption that sacrificial worship is offered to God alone. Throughout Revelation, according to McGrath, God is the “recipient of worship... its principal focus... the sole or primary recipient of the worship that is offered” (73) even when the Lamb is included in the devotion received by God. When the Lamb is included it’s merely adulation, honor, and praise that he receives which is “noteworthy, but it is neither unique nor without precedent,” (76) and he never receives sacrifice, except in the case of Revelation 14:4 (cf. 20:6 where another cultic image appears, i.e., believers as *ἱερεῖς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ χριστοῦ* [priests of God and Christ]), which shouldn’t be “pressed too far” because it’s metaphorical. (73) God and the Lamb/Christ share the throne and titles in the book of Revelation but this also “stands within Jewish agency tradition.” (74) But more to the point, McGrath judges it “unlikely that worship is used in Revelation to

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as God’s agent, who shares in God’s rule and authority.” (49) Other beings such as the angel Yahoel in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* are invested with God’s name (cf. Enoch-Metatron who is called “the little Yahweh” in 3 *Enoch*).

make a subtle Christological point” (75) since not only are God and the Lamb the recipients of worship, but Christians are as well (Rev. 3:9). It is suggested that angels refuse worship because they are “fellow servants of God together with Christians, and thus Christians are to regard themselves as equal to them.” (79)

Having argued throughout that early Christian devotion to Jesus did not violate first century Jewish monotheism McGrath turns his attention to later rabbinic literature in an attempt to ascertain at what point Jews and Christians “parted ways” over monotheism.<sup>6</sup> In dialogue with Alan Segal’s work on the subject McGrath challenges the understanding that the “two powers” heresy can be traced back to the first century, opting rather to see it as arising at some point in the first half of the third century (87). He posits that the burgeoning doctrine of *creation ex nihilo* and the demarcation between God and creation in the third century provided the grounds upon which rabbinic Judaism would formulate its denial of the “two powers” heresy. “In response to both Gnosticism and to Christianity, the oneness of God was defined in terms of the denial of a ‘second power in heaven’ who functions as, and could thus be confused with, God. In previous times, the distinguishing factor between the one God and other gods and angelic beings was worship, meaning specifically the sacrificial cultic worship of the Jerusalem temple.” (93) McGrath asserts that it is therefore anachronistic to read these later rabbinical concerns into first century texts.

The concluding chapter offers a summary of all that came before it as well as some points of consideration for what this study means, e.g., for the doctrine of the Trinity, for Catholic-Protestant relations, and for our understanding of the development of doctrine.

## CRITIQUE

Now before I move on to my criticisms I’d like to offer some positive remarks on what I think McGrath got right, with a couple of caveats. I think he’s correct to approach the primary sources inductively and seek to define monotheism from the sources themselves and not later constructs.<sup>7</sup> I also think that McGrath is correct to pay attention to actual devotional practices,

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<sup>6</sup> This chapter is a revision of an article co-authored with Jerry Truex (see n. 1 above).

<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately this approach is not taken consistently throughout this volume. McGrath says, “We shall attempt to take into account all relevant types of evidence and, most important, the perception of outsiders regarding what was typical of Judaism in this period. By doing so, we can get a glimpse of what Jewish belief and worship looked like in this period and what kinds of ‘worship’ were offered and to whom.” (22) I won’t deny the

although his investigation is unbalanced in that he gives too much weight to devotional practices at the *rhetorical level*. And this is where my positive assessment ends. I'll now focus on the most extreme points of disagreement.

### *Sacrificial Worship*

McGrath follows J. Lionel North in identifying sacrifice as the dividing line between what constitutes the unique worship due to God alone and what is acceptable for beings other than God.<sup>8</sup> However, North admits, as McGrath does, that blood sacrifice was tied to the temple. This is of no small significance since Jewish Christians were never the leaders in the Jewish temple. The type of sacrifice that McGrath would expect to see would be impossible on these grounds alone since no provision was (or could be) made for Jesus to receive sacrifice in the temple. There's also the glaring issue of Gentiles never offering sacrifice to God in the temple. By North and McGrath's reasoning Gentile Christians never worshiped God (or at the very most only a small minority did)!

Where McGrath and North part company is that North goes on to point out that after the destruction of the temple in AD 70 "bloodless sacrifices" such as "prayer, Torah-study, and philanthropy" were acceptable substitutes for animal sacrifice, indeed, "the New Testament knows of, indeed urges, that 'bloodless' sacrifices be offered."<sup>9</sup> North simply denies that such was ever offered to Jesus but bloodless sacrifices *were* offered to Jesus in the form of prayers (e.g., Acts 1:24-25, 7:59-60, cf. "calling on the name of the Lord" in e.g., Rom. 10:13; 1 Cor. 1:2, which is an expression regularly invoked in settings of cultic worship in the OT [e.g., 1 Chron. 16:8; Ps. 116:13; Zeph. 3:9]).<sup>10</sup> Also, it's quite surprising that McGrath ignores 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 in

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validity of examining all possible evidence, but how *outsiders* perceived Jewish beliefs and practices is ultimately irrelevant.

<sup>8</sup> J. Lionel North, "Jesus and Worship, God and Sacrifice" in *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism* (eds. Loren T. Stuckenbruck and Wendy E. S. North; JSNTSup 263; London: T&T Clark, 2004): 186-202.

<sup>9</sup> North, "Jesus and Worship," 199.

<sup>10</sup> John 14:14 ("If in my name you ask *me* for anything, I will do it" [NRSV]) is noteworthy for this point as well since Jesus assures the disciples that he will answer their prayers. There is some textual variation in this verse but the inclusion of  $\mu\epsilon$  is supported in the earliest manuscripts:  $\mathfrak{P}^{66}$   $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$   $\aleph$  B W  $\Delta$   $\Theta$  060  $f^{13}$  28 33 700. See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 208; Philip Comfort, *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), 309.

his treatment of Paul's letters even though he is clearly aware of its relevance (see 117 n. 36). This text is significant because Jesus is contrasted with the pagan deities to whom sacrifice is offered; hence he functions in Paul's mind as an object of worship in the *same manner* that the pagan deities do to the pagans.<sup>11</sup>

And as noted above, McGrath denies that even metaphorical sacrifice is offered to Jesus (at least in Paul), yet this ignores Romans 16:5 in which Epenetus is said to be the ἀπαρχὴ τῆς Ἀσίας εἰς Χριστόν (firstfruits of Asia to *Christ*) drawing from the imagery of the firstfruits sacrifice offered to God in the OT (e.g., Exod. 23:16, 19). Revelation 14:4 also speaks of the 144,000 as being offered as ἀπαρχὴ τῷ θεῷ καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ (firstfruits to God *and the Lamb*)<sup>12</sup> which McGrath suggests should not be “pressed too far” since it’s metaphorical and it “need mean no more than that this group represents the first of a larger group to be dedicated to God and the Lamb.” (73) This is precisely the type of devotion that McGrath argues God alone receives. The firstfruits offering was “the first of a larger group to be dedicated to God” and this dedication occurred in a cultic setting. It’s no coincidence that the setting in Revelation 14 is also cultic. This seems too convenient a dismissal in light of the strong emphasis given to sacrificial worship as a divider between agency and deity.

But more to the heart of McGrath’s insistence on sacrifice as *the* unique feature of worship due to God, there are plenty of texts that undermine this understanding, some of which McGrath notes and dismisses (Philo, *Legat.* 116; LXX Esther 13:12-14) and some that he ignores (Dan. 3; Acts 10:25-26; 14:11-15). In some of these texts Jews refuse to prostrate themselves so as not to violate their monotheistic commitments (Philo, *Legat.* 116; LXX Esther 13:12-14; Dan. 3) because to do so would be more than the mere act of bowing, it would constitute worship that is due to God alone. In the other texts Jews refuse such honor because they don’t want to be taken as competition to God (Acts 10:25-26; 14:11-15) and thus receive the worship that is due to God

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<sup>11</sup> See Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 145-46; cf. Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 131-33; Robert M. Bowman Jr. and J. Ed Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus in His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2007), 67.

<sup>12</sup> “The presentation of saints as ‘firstfruits’ develops further the idea of Christians as sacrifices to the Lord. In the OT the ‘firstfruits’ of the harvest were offered to God at the sanctuary to show that they especially belonged to him and to signify that he was the sovereign owner of the whole. The offering of the ‘firstfruits’ also foreshadowed that the rest would soon be gathered in accordance with the Owner’s sovereign provision. In this manner the rest of the harvest was consecrated to God so that it could be used by his people for their everyday needs. In the same manner, ἀπαρχὴ in the LXX refers to a sacrificial offering to God as ‘firstfruits’ at the sanctuary.” (G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999], 742).

alone. So it won't do to simply note that "worship" has a broad range of meaning and is ambiguous (7, 18, 29, 72, 75) but then treat every use of the *προσκυ-* wordgroup to denote prostration when applied to anyone other than God. (7, 18-19, 50, 75, 78) To do so simply begs the question.<sup>13</sup>

*Controversy, or, the Lack thereof*

Following James D. G. Dunn, McGrath insists that the apparent lack of controversy over Paul's Christology is evidence of lack, rather than lack of evidence.<sup>14</sup> It's not surprising that Paul mentions no controversy over his Christology, the reason being, quite simply, that he was writing to believers with like-minds. So McGrath is surely correct when he says, "That Paul does not defend the exalted status he attributes to Christ suggests that he did not need to." (52) But he's on less firm footing when he continues, "Paul's portrait of Jesus was firmly within the boundaries of first-century Jewish belief in God as one: Jesus offers himself to God 'for us' but is never himself envisaged as the recipient of sacrifice." (52) When we do find Paul defending a particular position against opponents it's always an intramural debate such as in Galatians where Paul argues against the so-called Judaizers. Paul has to defend his position on the Law against *other believing Jews* who are causing trouble *within* the community. We don't find him taking the time to address non-believing Jews directly, although Hurtado has argued that there is plenty to be gleaned from the NT, including Paul's letters, which supports that there was opposition to Christ devotion prior to AD 70.<sup>15</sup> Hurtado's article directly addresses the argument that McGrath is

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<sup>13</sup> McGrath repeatedly emphasizes the importance of context when dealing with sociological issues so it's surprising that he underplays its significance for linguistic issues such as determining a word's meaning. He says, "The Greek word for "worship" (*proskynesis*) could denote a range of practices, from prostration before another individual to animal sacrifice. The practice of the former before figures distinct from God did not always raise controversy in a Jewish context, while the latter pretty much always did." (7) This is true so far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough. One cannot assume that the lack of animal sacrifice automatically relegates every use of *προσκυνεσις* to prostration and nothing else. The *context* must be considered before making such judgments. On the determinative function of context see Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 137-69.

<sup>14</sup> James D. G. Dunn, "How Controversial was Paul's Christology?" in *From Jesus to John: Essays on Jesus and New Testament Christology in Honour of Marinus de Jonge* (ed. Martinus C. De Boer; JSNTSup 84; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 148-67; reprinted in idem., *The Christ and the Spirit, Volume 1: Christology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 212-28.

<sup>15</sup> Larry Hurtado, "Pre-70 CE Jewish Opposition to Christ-Devotion," *JTS* 50 (1999): 35-58; reprinted in *How on Earth*, 152-78.



making, insomuch as it addresses the argument that Dunn made a decade earlier. Unfortunately, McGrath doesn't interact with this material at all.

### *Errant Trajectories*

McGrath seems to assume at times that some sort of ditheism or departure from monotheism is what would/should have resulted had Jesus been accorded the type of worship reserved for God alone, so e.g., we read statements like:

- “Nothing whatsoever in this passage [1 Thes. 1:9-10] hints that a departure from monotheism could be envisaged by either the author or his readers. The same, I suggest, is true in I Corinthians 8 as well.” (42)
- “And so, given the important roles and status which were attributed to various mediator figures within the context of first-century Judaism, there is no reason to suggest that Paul's presentation of Jesus as God's agent, who occupies a unique role as mediator and has delegated to him the functions and honors of God, would have been felt to be a denial of belief in ‘one God.’” (52)
- “However, Jesus is never understood to be ‘one Lord’ in any sense that opposes the ultimate sovereignty of the one God...” (53)
- “If John had been asked in his day and age, ‘Are Christians monotheists?’ I am convinced that he would have answered with an unreserved ‘Yes.’” (69)
- “And so the depiction of Christ in the Book of Revelation represents a development *within* the context of Jewish monotheism rather than a development *away from* Jewish devotion to only one God.” (76)

But it is precisely a move *away from* monotheism that scholars like Hurtado and Bauckham argue *against* in their published work!<sup>16</sup> Rather they see devotion to Jesus as an innovation within Jewish monotheism and thus not a violation of it.

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<sup>16</sup> So e.g., Hurtado says, “monotheism has to be reckoned as one of the important forces or factors that, together with other factors to be sure, helps account for the why and how of Jesus-devotion, particularly in the formative period and among those Christian circles that sought to maintain an authentic relation with the tradition of biblical monotheism. The Jesus-devotion attested in the New Testament writings, for example, operates in such a context. That is, *Jesus is not revered as another deity of any independent origin or significance*; instead, his divine significance is characteristically expressed in terms of his relationship to the one God. [...] In other words, the vigorous Jesus-devotion promoted in New Testament writings and, as we shall see, perpetuated and developed also in Christian circles of the second century *does not amount to a separate cultus offered to Jesus as a new second god.*”

## Agency

Coupled with the narrow definition of exclusive worship as sacrificial worship, agency is used as a catchall concept that can explain away literally any and all data that would otherwise be seen as evidence of a divine Christology.<sup>17</sup> McGrath notes that agency has to do with representation and delegated authority. He cites various examples from the ancient world and quotes the rabbinic dictum, “the one sent is like the one who sent him.” (14, 59) We find this sort of agency represented throughout the Gospels (e.g., Matt. 10:40; Luke 10:16; John 13:20), yet John presses Jesus’ relationship with God beyond these bounds in expressing how the Father and the Son are intrinsic to one another, hence we read statements from Jesus like, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (14:9) and “I am in the Father and the Father is in me” (14:10-11 cf. 10:38).<sup>18</sup>

So we can agree that agency can be used to explain the *authority* that Jesus possesses but we will challenge that it can explain the cultic *devotion* that he receives. Apostles in the NT and even angels can be seen as fulfilling the role of God’s agent, a point that McGrath recognizes. (14) They were sent with a divine commission to act on God’s behalf, and while they were to be received just as God should be received they were *not* worshiped as God is to be worshiped. Notice that Peter, Paul, Barnabus, and an angel/messenger all rejected worship on the basis of their not being God (Acts 10:25-26, 14:11-15; Rev. 19:10).<sup>19</sup> A mere agent receiving worship *on*

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(*Lord Jesus Christ*, 52-53, italics mine). Cf. *idem.*, *One God, One Lord*, xiii. Bauckham’s category of the “unique divine identity” is formulated precisely to avoid the idea that early Christology can be equated to a move away from second temple Jewish monotheism; seeing Jesus as somehow “intrinsic” to the divine identity safeguards against any form of ditheism. In fact, Bauckham argues that “If Paul were understood as *adding* the one Lord to the one God of whom the Shema speaks, [recall that this is McGrath’s position] then, from the perspective of Jewish monotheism, we would certainly be producing, not christological monotheism, but outright ditheism.” (*Jesus and the God of Israel*, 101).

<sup>17</sup> It’s not unreasonable to think that if the type of sacrifice that McGrath is looking for was offered to Jesus it *could* be understood as acceptable on this concept of agency. All one would have to do is say, “Of course Jesus receives worship, he’s God’s agent *par excellence*.”

<sup>18</sup> Notice that in these passages Jesus doesn’t merely speak of his delegated authority as he does elsewhere in the Gospel (e.g., 5:19-47); rather he speaks of the Father who dwells in him doing the works.

<sup>19</sup> McGrath repeatedly highlights that *προσκυνηναι* needn’t denote sacrificial worship but can be used of prostration in honor of a human. (19, 50) This is true so far as it goes but then one wonders why divinely commissioned apostles and angels/messengers would refuse such honor if it didn’t infringe upon the honor that was due to God alone.

*behalf of God or in God's place* would be blatant idolatry and a violation of the second commandment (Exod. 20:4-5).<sup>20</sup> Jesus on the other hand received worship without incident.

Mehrdad Fatehi's work *The Spirit's Relation to the Risen Lord in Paul* is also worth noting here because he shows that Jesus is said to be present and active among the churches through the Spirit in Paul's letters. Paul uses a pattern of language about the Spirit in connection to Jesus that is *only* used in other Jewish literature about the Spirit in connection to God. In other words, not even the concept of agency can account for the kind of relational connection Paul makes between God and Christ via the Spirit.<sup>21</sup> This bespeaks a significant lacuna in McGrath's project, that is, the relational aspect of monotheism and Christology.<sup>22</sup>

And lastly, one wonders why, if the types of reverence that Jesus was accorded did not violate monotheism, we don't see more of it throughout Jewish literature. One might think that such a common feature of second temple Judaism would be more widespread.

#### *The Shema and 1 Corinthians 8:6 Sans Context*

Perhaps the biggest problem with his chapter on Paul is his treatment of 1 Corinthians 8:6. To start, some of his alleged parallels (i.e., 2 Sam. 7:22-24 & 1 Thes. 1:9-10) are doubtful. Neither passage employs "one God" language nor can be convincingly argued to be presenting an "expanded Shema" on verbal grounds, i.e., we find no reference to יהוה/κύριος (Lord) or אלהים/θεός (God) being אחד/εἷς (one).<sup>23</sup> The conceptual ties between these passages seem forcefully applied as well but, for the sake of argument, let's say that these are examples of an "expanded Shema." So what? At best this shows that the Shema can be used to various ends,

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<sup>20</sup> The Israelites believed that they were worshiping *YHWH himself* when they made the golden calf (see esp. Exod. 32:4-5) and yet they were guilty of idolatry for worshiping something *in place of* God.

<sup>21</sup> Mehrdad Fatehi, *The Spirit's Relation to the Risen Lord in Paul: An Examination of Its Christological Implications* (WUNT II/128; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

<sup>22</sup> See Chris Tilling, "Paul's Divine-Christology: The Relation Between the Risen Lord and Believers in Paul, and the Divine-Christology Debate" (Ph.D. diss., Brunel University, 2009) which complements Fatehi's work by examining Paul's pattern of language concerning the risen Lord's relationship to believers, a pattern of language that is used of God in his relationship to Israel. This, once again, goes beyond what we can expect of the concept of agency.

<sup>23</sup> We do find reference to גי אחד (one/unique nation) in 2 Sam. 7:23 but this is at best a strained connection.

which is exactly what we see throughout Paul's epistles (e.g., Rom. 3:30; 1 Cor. 8:4-6; Gal. 3:20; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Tim. 2:5).<sup>24</sup>

But the bigger issue, arguably, is McGrath's myopic treatment of 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 without reference to its purpose and function in the larger unit of 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1 and how Paul draws from Deuteronomy in response to the issue of idolatry.<sup>25</sup> 1 Corinthians 8:1-3 begins Paul's argument in terms of a "relational monotheism" where "whoever loves God is known by God" (1 Cor. 8:3).<sup>26</sup> That love is foundational for the Shema (which extends past Deut. 6:4) is evident in the command to "love the LORD with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." (Deut. 6:5 cf. 1 Cor. 16:22 where Paul says, "Let anyone be accursed who has no love for the Lord.") In 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 Paul goes on to reiterate that there is "one God" (cf. Deut. 4:35, 39) before calling for exclusive devotion to the "one God, the Father" and the "one Lord, Jesus Christ" (cf. Deut. 6:4) over and against idols (Deut. 4:15-31; 5:7-9; 6:14-15 cf. 1 Cor. 8:4-13; 10:7, 14-21).<sup>27</sup> More important than Paul's "splitting" or "adding to" the Shema is that he takes a section of Scripture calling for *exclusive devotion* to YHWH and uses it in the service of calling for *exclusive devotion* to God *and* Christ. Paul's argument, which he began in relational terms and then built into exclusive devotional terms, will combine the two in 1 Cor. 10:16-21<sup>28</sup> before concluding with the rhetorical questions, "Are we trying to provoke the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?" (cf. Deut. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; 32:16, 21). God's jealousy is foundational for why he

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<sup>24</sup> See Suzanne Nicholson, *Dynamic Oneness: The Significance and Flexibility of Paul's One-God Language* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010). Cf. Richard Bauckham, "Biblical Theology and the Problems of Monotheism," in *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (eds. Craig Bartholomew, et al.; SHS 5; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 187-229, esp. 218-29, reprinted in idem., *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 60-106, esp. 94-106.

<sup>25</sup> This omission seems intentional since McGrath is obviously aware of the connection (44, 52-53).

<sup>26</sup> See chapter 4 of Tilling, *Paul's Divine Christology* (forthcoming). In short, "relational monotheism" understands God's uniqueness in his relationship to believers. Notice how Moses appeals to the superior relationship between YHWH and Israel when he asks, "What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we call on him?" (Deut. 4:7)

<sup>27</sup> See just a few verses earlier in 1 Cor. 7:32-35 where Paul makes his case for a life of singleness and lists the benefit as *εὐπάρεδρον τῷ κυρίῳ ἀπερισπάστως* ("unhindered devotion to the Lord" NRSV).

<sup>28</sup> Note the relational terms Paul employs throughout this passage: *κοινωνία* ("communion/participation" [vs. 16]), *μετέχομεν* ("partake/share" [vs. 17]), *κοινωνοὶ* ("partakers/partners" [vs. 18]), *κοινωνοὺς* ("participant/partner" [vs. 20]), and *μετέχειν* ("partake" [vs. 21]) in stating that the Corinthians cannot share in the Lord's table and the table of demons.

calls Israel to exclusive devotion. Paul plays on this theme in arguing that the Corinthians cannot share their allegiances with anyone other than the Lord Jesus Christ without provoking *his* jealousy, thus the Lord relates to believers as God relates to Israel in Paul's argument.

### *Exaggerated Evidence*

McGrath cites the discovery of two Jewish funeral steles from the late second or early first century BC that invoke angels *along with* God the Most High and the Lord as evidence that invocation or prayer to figures other than God did not constitute worship proper and therefore did not violate monotheism.<sup>29</sup> It should be noted that McGrath uses this to insist that "cultic worship" which includes "prayer, hymnic adoration, invocation and other practices" (29) is inadequate as a boundary marker for monotheism, but as Clinton Arnold notes, "There is no *cultic worship* of angels reflected in this text."<sup>30</sup> These steles do not provide reason to believe that Jewish groups gathered regularly to worship angels so we have no analogy for the religious practices associated with Jesus in the early Christian communities. Where there is evidence of genuine cultic worship in the form of inscriptions of Jews offering thanks to God in a temple of Pan, McGrath dismisses it as "retain[ing] the character of exceptions that prove the rule." (33)<sup>31</sup>

McGrath also makes too much of the names "Yahoel" and "the little Yahweh" (74, 122 n. 7) in saying that "the transfer of designations to God's agent (including ones that normally belong to

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<sup>29</sup> McGrath suggests that if one were to argue that this was the case then they would "have to acknowledge the widespread persistence of Jewish polytheism well into the Hellenistic age." (30) But this presses the evidence further than it can go since two funeral steles hardly constitutes "widespread persistence" and the alternative explanation of syncretism is viable (see Clinton E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae* [WUNT II/77; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1995; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996], 46-7).

<sup>30</sup> Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism*, 44, emphasis mine. Cf. Larry Hurtado, "First Century Jewish Monotheism," *JSNT* 71 (1998): 3-26, esp. 17-22, reprinted in idem., *How on Earth*, 111-33, esp. 121-29.

<sup>31</sup> In a recent post on his blog entitled "Daniel Kirk, Richard Bauckham, and Rule Proving Exceptions" (Exploring Our Matrix, 14 Dec. 2010) online at <http://exploringourmatrix.blogspot.com/2010/12/daniel-kirk-richard-bauckham-and-rule.html> accessed on 15 Dec. 2010, McGrath approvingly quotes J. R. Daniel Kirk as saying, "it made me wonder when we get to call something that falls outside our preferred paradigm an exception that 'proves' the rule rather than 'shows us that the rule has important exceptions that might undermine the force of the argument.'" (J. R. Daniel Kirk, "Divine Identity Christology" [Storied Theology, 14 Dec. 2010] online at <http://www.jrdkirk.com/2010/12/14/divine-identity-christology/> accessed on 15 Dec. 2010). I wonder the same thing with regard to the alleged exceptions that McGrath proposes.

God alone) is a frequent feature of Jewish and Christian texts from this period.” (74) First of all, two examples do not constitute a “frequent feature” and no more evidence is offered in support of this claim.<sup>32</sup> Secondly, “the little Yahweh” is a title that comes from *3 Enoch* which is *not* a text from “this period.”<sup>33</sup> McGrath is obviously aware of this (89) and even at one point says that “the use of documents dating from centuries after the time being studied would be considered methodologically suspect.” (83) So Hurtado is surely correct to say, “Given the late date of *3 Enoch*, we must be cautious about taking the ideas in it as indicative of Enoch traditions in the pre-Christian period.”<sup>34</sup>

McGrath quotes Philo *Her.* 206 in part 7 times (13 [2x], 56, 57 [2x], 69, 92) where he presents the Logos as “neither uncreated nor created,” which is then offered as evidence against the Creator/creature divide being what marked YHWH’s uniqueness. It is by no means certain that Philo’s Logos is as “blurry” as McGrath suspects. Kenneth Schenck says that “In this passage Philo puts the Logos on the created side of the equation.”<sup>35</sup> When read in context we notice that the Father is said to have given birth to *everything* and that he *gave a special gift* to the Logos to stand between the extremes. One could argue that this was not *always* true of the Logos. But even if McGrath’s case for this “blurriness” in Philo can be made, it’s a stretch to attribute to this view some sort of widespread acceptance among second temple era Jews.

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<sup>32</sup> Ironically, this is a frequent feature throughout the NT with reference to Jesus, e.g., “Lord of lords” (God: Deut. 10:17; Ps. 136:3 / Jesus: 1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16); “the First and the Last” (God: Isa. 44:6; 48:12 / Jesus: Rev. 1:11, 17; 2:8; 22:13); YHWH/Kyrios (God: Joel 2:32 [MT/LXX 3:5] / Jesus: Rom. 10:13); “I Am” (God: Isa. 41:4; 43:10, 13, 25; 45:18; 46:4; 51:12; 52:6 / Jesus: John 4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5-6, 8).

<sup>33</sup> *3 Enoch* is a late pseudepigraphical work, the “main kernel” (i.e., chapters 3-15) of which P. S. Alexander dates to between AD 450 and AD 850; see P. S. Alexander “The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch,” *JJS* 28 (1977): 156-80, here 161-62. Cf. John J. Collins, “Enoch, Books of” in *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (eds. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 317 and Craig A. Evans, *Ancient Texts for New Testament Studies: A Guide to the Background Literature* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 31, who both date the text to between the fifth and sixth century AD. Also noteworthy is A. Murtonen’s suggestion that Metatron was modeled in part after Jesus. See A. Murtonen, “The Figure of Metatrôn,” *VT* 3/4 (1953): 409-11.

<sup>34</sup> Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 55.

<sup>35</sup> Kenneth Schenck, *A Brief Guide to Philo* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 62.

## CONCLUSION

*TOTG* is an ambitious book for its size and I'd like to say that its brevity is the reason for its shortcomings. One might say that McGrath couldn't do what he set out to do simply because he didn't afford himself enough space to do it. In what space he does take up (a scant 104 pages of main text and an additional 26 pages of endnotes), McGrath fails to present compelling arguments for primary points. On a brighter note I can say that McGrath writes well, although at times it wasn't clear who his intended audience was, e.g., he goes through great pains to explain what monotheism is and is not, which assumes the reader is unfamiliar with the subject, but then he doesn't interact with key texts because they are "well-known."<sup>36</sup> But to whom are they well-known? The bibliography as well as the ancient source and subject indexes are welcomed features even if the endnotes were a chore. I want to be more enthusiastic about this work because of my respect for its author; unfortunately, the work itself won't allow it. While I can't recommend *TOTG* as a source of useful study, I think it merits engagement from scholars in the field.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See James F. McGrath, "Ecce Recensus: The Only True God Persuades a Skeptic" (Exploring Our Matrix, 20 July 2009) online at <http://exploringourmatrix.blogspot.com/2009/07/ecce-recensus-only-true-god-persuades.html> accessed on 16 Dec. 2010, where McGrath says, "As for the point that more discussion of primary source material outside of the New Testament could have been provided, I'm sure this is true. I tried to focus the most attention on *neglected* evidence, such as the statements of non-Jews about Jewish beliefs and practices, and the inscriptional and epigraphic evidence, *rather than simply revisiting texts that are well-known, and so inevitably some well-accepted understandings of primary source material were at times assumed rather than defended.*" (emphasis mine)

<sup>37</sup> I'm aware that Larry Hurtado has written a review of this work and has carried on an extended dialog with McGrath concerning it. I have not yet had the opportunity to read through this material. In my opinion it would be beneficial to see Bauckham write a formal response since he bears the brunt of McGrath's criticisms throughout this volume.