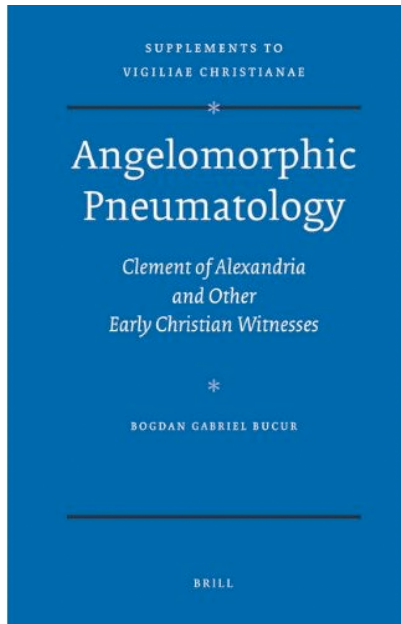


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**Bucur, Bogdan Gabriel**

*Angelomorphic Pneumatology: Clement of Alexandria and Other Early Christian Witnesses*

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Bogdan Bucur's book *Angelomorphic Pneumatology* is a revised version of his doctoral dissertation, defended in 2007 at Marquette University. It incorporates, expands upon, and connects a number of articles the author has published in recent years. Although only Clement of Alexandria is named in the book's subtitle, because Clement gets a slightly more extensive treatment, significant attention is also paid to other early Christian works and authors: the book of Revelation, the Shepherd of Hermas, Justin Martyr, and Aphrahat.

The introduction to the book explains why Clement is singled out for particular focus as the starting point for Bucur's investigation into the phenomenon of angelomorphic pneumatology, and the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the concept of seven principal angels, in early Christianity. Clement has not only left behind a substantial literary corpus, but he also explicitly claims to draw on earlier material, both oral and written. Bucur seeks to do justice to the ongoing indebtedness of Christian thought in this period to ideas rooted in earlier Jewish tradition. "The doctrine of the Spirit is fluid in the second century, and one must adopt a wider perspective, one that takes into consideration the frequent intersection and overlap between pneumatology, Christology, and angelology, labeled in scholarship as 'spirit christology,' 'binitarianism,' and 'angelo-

morphic pneumatology' ” (xxv). Bucur is aware that even such terminology ought not to be utilized uncritically, recalling in the process a number of scholarly terms and turns of phrase that were once popular but that reflected assumptions that have now been challenged and largely rejected, and have thus been discarded. Nevertheless, inasmuch as they provide a convenient shorthand that seems to do justice to the material being studied and are not allowed to impose an extraneous framework on it, terms such as “angelomorphic” and even “Jewish Christian” can still be useful.

The remainder of the book is divided into three parts, devoted to Clement of Alexandria, his predecessors mentioned earlier, and the Persian sage Aphrahat respectively. Chapter 1 begins the treatment of Clement by noting that his pneumatology is an underresearched aspect of his writings, coinciding with a neglect of those works by Clement (in particular the surviving parts of the *Hypotyposesis*) that focus attention most directly on this topic.

A key aspect of Clement’s thought relevant to his view of the Spirit and the angels is the emergence of multiplicity from the divine unity. After brief mention of the concept of the Father as “beyond epistemology” and the Son as the locus of “unity *qua* multiplicity” (28–29), Bucur turns to the use of scriptural language about the “seven eyes of the Lord” as the seven spirits, the seven first-created angels, as well as also for the Holy Spirit. Such language will appear in other authors studied in later chapters and represents a unifying thread through the book as well as through the authors surveyed. This language seems to reflect a widespread viewpoint in early Christianity, one with deep roots in early oral tradition and in pre-Christian Judaism. “The *protocists* are both ‘angelic powers’ and ‘powers of the Logos’ that mark the passing of divine unity into multiplicity, and, conversely, the reassembly of cosmic multiplicity into the unity of the Godhead” (40). Concepts that are also important in early Christology, such as bearing the divine name and being referred to as “gods,” are also part of Clement’s view of these highest angels. His hierarchical perspective on the spiritual beings who inhabit the cosmos is also interiorized by Clement as reflecting stages in spiritual progress.

“In the case of Clement, the cosmic ladder ... seems to reserve no place for the Holy Spirit: in descending order, one reads about the Father, the Son/Logos as principle of all things, and the *protocists*, the level where multiplicity sets in” (51). In Clement’s view, action is transmitted down into the human sphere as each level of the hierarchy moves and activates the one below it. While some consider this to leave no place for the Holy Spirit, others have concluded that for Clement the highest rank of angels is a conceptuality that corresponds to the Holy Spirit. Clement himself speaks of the “heptad of the Spirit” (*Paed.* 3.12.87, quoted 60). While leaving numerous questions unanswered about the *nature* of that which he is referring to, it seems clear that the *terminology* of both angel and spirit is used to refer to the next level in the hierarchy between the

Logos/Son and the further ranks of angels/spirits below. This is perhaps not that surprising, when one considers that the language of angel and spirit is used at times for the Logos/Son as well.

In exploring Clement's thought, Bucur also discusses the role played by key scriptural texts such as Matt 18:10. While the book may seem most relevant to those interested in the history of theology, those interested in the reception history of the New Testament will also find much that is of interest.

Chapter 2 looks at the larger theological framework of Clement's theology, arguing that "angelomorphic pneumatology occurs in tandem with spirit Christology, as part of a binitarian theological framework" (73). Bucur here draws on the work of New Testament scholars such as Larry Hurtado and Richard Bauckham, suggesting that the way to determine whether a monotheistic text is unitarian, binitarian, or trinitarian is on the basis of worship (74). Matters are nevertheless complicated somewhat by the fact that for Clement, as for many earlier Jewish authors, Logos and Spirit are not consistently distinguished. This section on Clement concludes by offering "angelomorphic pneumatology" as a helpful category for Clement's thought, which is also said to have embraced a "spirit Christology" and "a theological framework still determined by binitarianism," leaving somewhat open whether "for Clement the Holy Spirit is a plural entity consisting of the seven highest angels, or ... the hypostasis of the Spirit is functionally absorbed and replaced by the *protocists*, or, as I am inclined to think, ... Clement simultaneously transmits and 'sabotages' the apocalyptic imagery of his predecessors, by interpreting the *protocists* as an angelomorphic representation of the Spirit" (83).

Part 2, on Clement's predecessors, begins with chapter 3 on the book of Revelation. Here, too, a perspective that can be classified as binitarian is detected, and here, too, there appears to be overlap between the Holy Spirit (an expression not used in Revelation) and the seven spirits/angels. Christ and the Spirit at the very least overlap functionally. Chapter 4 is about the Shepherd of Hermas and begins with an observation by Carolyn Osiek, that it seems surprising that this work was never condemned for christological heresy, if its viewpoint is what most interpreters understand it to be (113–14). Discussion is offered of the meaning of key terms such as "angel" and "spirit." *Similitude* 5.6.4b–7, which is often pointed to as evidence of the work's adoptionist outlook, is singled out for special attention, and the possibility is explored that the passage ought not to be read christologically. Chapter 5 turns to the writings of Justin Martyr, noting that, like the other works and authors surveyed, Justin's writings were felt to be problematic in their subordinationism when viewed from the perspective of later theologians. Bucur notes that "Justin's references to the Holy Spirit occur mainly in Biblical quotations, or are

borrowed from catechesis or liturgy” (142). Justin’s alleged identification of Word and Spirit, *logos* and *pneuma*, is discussed, as is Justin’s famous reference in his first *Apology* to “the host of other good angels” in the midst of what would otherwise be a straightforward Trinitarian formula. Bucur concludes that “the Logos and the Spirit are, for Justin, the same reality, which presents itself in a complex and paradoxical relation of simultaneous unity and multiplicity, and with definite angelomorphic traits” (155).

Chapter 6 stands on its own as the third major section, which examines the same stream of thought as it flowed from early Jewish Christianity into the Christianity of the Syriac-speaking Eastern church, as evidenced by the writings of Aphrahat. As happened with many of the other authors and writings surveyed, so, too, Aphrahat was criticized and condemned by later Christian leaders for his statements on a wide variety of subjects. Within the context of this study, however, it is clear that Aphrahat provides a useful sense of how widespread not only certain ideas, but also key exegetical traditions, seem to have been. For Aphrahat perhaps more than for any of the other authors surveyed, the terminology of Wisdom, Word, and Spirit was used in a manner analogous to what we find in pre-Christian Jewish works, in which these denote attributes of God. In Aphrahat there is no “alteration of strict monotheism,” and a distinction is made between “Spirit” and “Christ” only in instances when it is the human being Jesus who is in view (178). While some have tried to argue that New Testament and later Christian authors always made functional statements with an awareness that “function implies essence,” Bucur suggests that Aphrahat is best understood to not be wrestling with metaphysical issues in his articulation of his views on this topic. “For Aphrahat ... the ‘problem’ of explaining the relation between the Father and the Spirit, or between Christ (whether ‘preincarnate’ or ‘post-resurrectional’) and the Spirit simply did not present itself as such” (180).

“General Conclusions” follow, focusing on (among other things) the functional overlap between Christ, Spirit, and angel in *religious experience* (192), as well as problems connected with anachronistic assessments of early authors’ theologies. Here, as at a number of other points earlier in the book, Bucur seems concerned not merely to explain the views of various ancient authors but also to defend them (and perhaps himself) from accusations of having departed from orthodoxy. The book ends with a bibliography and indexes of terms, sources, and modern authors.

From the perspective of biblical studies, Bucur’s work on this subject is extremely helpful. What shortcomings there are result largely from weaknesses in earlier scholarship on which he has drawn and built, such as ambiguity about what sort of worship (if any) clearly indicated a demarcation between divinity and everything else in this period. To the extent that terminology such as “spirit” and “angel” as well as “worship” were

multivalent, it may be that any attempt on our part to draw clear distinctions is in danger of imposing later question on texts that were not yet addressing them.

Bucur's study will certainly be useful for those investigating topics such as monotheism and Christology in the New Testament. In the course of his study, it becomes clear that it is in the "region" denoted by terms such as *logos* and *pneuma* that the transition was thought to occur from that which is beyond knowledge to that which is knowable and from divine unity to multiplicity. Yet in the process of careful investigation of sources that expound on these topics more fully than the New Testament authors, it seems clear that we are dealing with concepts that resisted reduction to a single category or term. Attempts to trace the development of Christology ought not to cease abruptly at the end of the New Testament period. By tracing threads that begin before and continue beyond the New Testament, Bucur provides a helpful broader context for understanding the origins and subsequent development of Christian Christology, pneumatology, and angelology.