



Review of Colleen M. Conway, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco Roman Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xii + 254 pp.

Marc Beard

Colleen M. Conway explores the connections between the images of Jesus in the New Testament and conceptions of idealized masculinity in the Greco-Roman world in this provocative new book. Conway's study adds gender analysis to the array of other investigations of Jesus, showing how the writers of the New Testament construct and explore Jesus' masculinity. What they say about Jesus reveals much about their concerns over gender as well as about important social and cultural details concerning the relationship between Jesus' gendered portrayals and the broader Greco-Roman society. Conway argues that the New Testament contains responses to Greco-Roman ideas of manhood and she explores this thesis by examining the Gospels, the Pauline Epistles, and the book of Revelation. The intersections, according to Conway, show how the writers of the New Testament dealt with cultural ideas of masculinity and responded to them in ways that helped shape the development of ideas not only about Jesus, but also Christianity. Conway adds a new resource to investigations and analyses of gender in the New Testament, and also freshly applies gender theory and masculinity to early Christian writings about Jesus.

Conway's sources are broad and wide-ranging, drawing not only from works on gender but also from postcolonial theory. It is at the meeting point of these two frameworks that she constructs her arguments about the New Testament. Conway is interested in the concept of hegemonic masculinity, the accepted and dominant cultural idea of masculinity usually associated with an elite group and held up as ideal in comparison to other forms of masculinity. Conway argues that early Christian writers accepted as well as opposed Greco-Roman hegemonic ideas, at times even mimicking them in order to promote Christianity. According to Conway, one of the ways Christianity legitimated itself was by imitating the prevailing cultural ideas of masculinity, occasionally smoothing over some of the disconnects between Christianity and Greco-Roman culture, while at other times resisting and subverting the dominant culture. Conway explores constructions of gender hierarchies, the disconnect between biology and gender, and how ancient masculinity was "learned": one trained oneself to be a man rather than being born one. Among the men she studies regarding hegemonic masculinity we find Caesar Augustus, Philo's Moses, and Philostatus's Apollonius of Tyana.

Turning to the New Testament texts themselves, Conway notes, for example, how Paul overcame the potentially humiliating and emasculating crucifixion of Jesus by emphasizing how Jesus went willingly to his death, making this voluntary bravery the mark of a true man. In doing so, Paul helped to transform Jesus' death into an act of masculine heroism. Conway then devotes a chapter to each of the four

Gospels and explores, for example, how Jesus has been portrayed as an ideal man and representative of masculinity in relation to other humans, although he remained subordinated to God. She also argues that associating Jesus with Sophia, from the perspective of Greco-Roman gender, is not necessarily an act of feminization. She points out that many of the teachings of Jesus as recorded in Matthew that are viewed as countercultural may not be distinctive when seen from the perspective of a gender analysis, as, for example, turning the other cheek, which reflects ideal masculine notions of self-control. For each of the Gospels, Conway shows in detail how the masculinity of Jesus is portrayed in light of the dominant culture. An exception we may find in the book of Revelation: its use of images of military might when portraying Jesus deviates from standard ideas of masculinity, like the emphasis on violent vengeance, which contradicts notions of disciplined self-control. What all the texts have in common, though, is that they make a conscious use of hegemonic masculinity as a way of dealing with imperial Rome and of asserting an image of Jesus both as a new man and a Roman man. Jesus may at times mimic or reflect the values of Greco-Roman masculinity, but he also differs from traditional masculinity in subtle ways.

Conway's analysis is adept and insightful, but I believe her arguments could be made stronger by paying more attention to the context of the texts she is dealing with. In her chapter on Paul, for example, she includes both the letters generally accepted to be authentic and the Deutero-Pauline letters, but she needs to make a sharper distinction between the world in which Paul was writing and the world of the pastoral epistles. The same could be said for her analysis of the Gospels: a discussion of the different settings, audiences, and authors of the texts would flesh out the differing portrayals of masculinity she identifies. Conway does this fairly well in her chapter on Luke, but I was left wondering about the other Gospels. In her chapter on Revelation, more context would have helped to explain why the masculinity of Jesus is portrayed in such violent and vengeful ways and how this is related to Christian resistance to Roman imperialism.

Overall, however, *Behold the Man* is a valuable contribution to both gender and New Testament studies. Conway carefully explains the connections between these early Christian texts and the broader cultural ideals of manhood. Her arguments and analysis provide a deeper look into the ways that the authors of the New Testament portrayed and constructed Jesus, not just as a divine figure but also a man.

Marc Beard
St. Mary's College of Maryland/USA
e: marc_beard@yahoo.com