



Collins, Adela Yarbro, and John J. Collins

King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human, and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

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Adela Yarbro Collins (hereafter AYC) and John J. Collins (hereafter JJC) have converted a series of lectures originally delivered at Oxford in May 2006 into the substance of this book and have been able to maintain the conversational feel that I have to imagine were inherent in the original presentations. But their lectures only make up 6 of the 8 chapters in this book, the two new chapters being chapter 2 (penned by JJC) and chapter 8 (penned by AYC). JJC's chapters take up the first half of the book and examine the themes of Messianism, divine sonship, and kingship in the Biblical and related ANE and Hellenistic literature. AYC's chapters take up the second half of the book and address the same themes although with a narrower focus on the NT writings.

In chapter 1 JJC examines "The King as Son of God" by looking to the concept of kingship and 'son of God' language in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Canaan (lamenting the fact that "we do not have comparable texts from ancient Canaan, the sphere that probably had the most direct influence on Israelite conceptions of the monarchy." [9]), and finally ancient Judah by way of Psalms 2 & 110, seeing the texts as presenting a derived divine kingship by way of being begotten rather than adopted.

In chapter 2 JJC examines "Kingship in the Deuteronomistic and Prophetic Literature" focusing once again on a few select texts, such as 2Samuel 7 which doesn't take up the 'begetting' language of the psalms examined in the previous chapter but is "compatible with the idea in the Psalms that the king becomes son of God on his ascension to the throne." (28) From the prophetic

corpus Isaiah 7 & 9 receive the most attention with JJC concluding that the passages were not originally messianic but lent themselves to messianic interpretations in the post-exilic period. Concerning the titles given to the king JJC notes in reference to אֵל גְּבוּר that “The divinity of the king, in whatever sense it might be understood, is not otherwise thematized in the book of Isaiah.” (41)

In chapter 3 JJC examines the “Messiah and Son of God in the Hellenistic Period” beginning with a look at Hellenistic ruler cults and the way that the monarchs were associated with divinity, i.e., it was an honor conferred on the king. He turns his attention to messianism in the LXX, specifically in Psalms & Isaiah, drawing attention to the limited but still useful evidence of the king being perceived as the Son of God, as being begotten by God, and being addressed as God. JJC contends that “if there is any influence here from the royal cults, it is indirect.” (62) He closes the chapter with a section on the Dead Sea Scrolls, in particular the “Son of God” text, in which he concludes that “[i]f there is any influence from the ruler cults here, it lies in the understanding of ‘Son of God’ as an honorific title and perhaps in the willingness to entertain the language of divinity in reference to a future king.” (73-4)

In chapter 4 JJC examines the “Messiah and Son of Man” concepts/traditions first in Daniel 7 where “one like a son of man” was probably not “originally meant to be identified with the messiah” (79) but JJC believes should be “identified with the archangel Michael.” (78) *11QMelchizedek* speaks of a heavenly deliverer; a “savior figure who was divine in some sense, while clearly subordinate to the Most High.” (86) Next to Daniel 7 the *Similitudes of Enoch* “attest to a remarkable development of messianic tradition, insofar as the word ‘messiah’ is used unambiguously with reference to a heavenly judge. . . . [This figure] differs from the traditional Davidic messiah, but he functions as king by exercising judgment.” (94) The final text examined is 4Ezra 13 which evinces a developed notion of the Davidic messiah and assimilates the Son of Man into this notion. JJC concludes that “there were clear biblical precedents for speaking of the messiah as God or son of God, and there was plenty of speculation about heavenly deliverers. There was also a tendency to conflate different conceptions of future rulers, as we see especially in the development of the Son of Man tradition.” (99)

In chapter 5 AYC examines “Jesus and Messiah and Son of God in the Letters of Paul” taking note of 1Thessalonians, for some strange reason ‘Q’, Galatians, 1-2Corinthians, Philippians, and Romans. She notes how Paul simply employs the title Christ without explaining it which suggests that his audience would have already been familiar with the title. Christ can function as both a proper name and as evidence of Jesus’ messiahship. “The terms ‘Christ’ and ‘Son of God’ recall the royal ideology in the Bible and the expectation of the messiah of Israel in Second Temple Jewish texts.” (119) She suggests that Philippians 2 is the only passage in Paul that actually points to preexistence.

In chapter 6 AYC examines “Jesus as Messiah and Son of God in the Synoptic Gospels.” The first part of the chapter is a failed attempt at refuting Simon Gathercole’s *The Preexistent Son*. Her objections were anticipated by Gathercole and addressed in his book so her refutation ends up amounting to mere disagreement rather than an overturning argument. She connects Jesus being the Son of God with his baptism and suggests that the virginal conception is a Jewish adaptation of “Greek and Roman stories about great men being fathered by deities with human women.” (137-8) She closes the chapter by reexamining the idea of a preexistent Messiah in Paul’s letters and once again confirms her findings with regard to Philippians 2.

In chapter 7 AYC examines “Jesus as Son of Man” by looking at the possible derivation of the term from a Semitic idiom as well as from Daniel 7. She believes that it’s an expression that goes back to the historical Jesus, who probably viewed himself as an eschatological prophet and “understood the book of Daniel to refer to his own time and to the near future.” (173) She concludes the chapter with a brief section on the early worship of Jesus. His followers would have identified him as the Messiah and expected an earthly rule, but “this hope was transformed by his death and resurrection into an expectation of his coming or being revealed as a heavenly messiah, the Son of Man.” (173)

In chapter 8 AYC examines “Messiah, Son of God, and Son of Man in the Gospel and Revelation of John.” In both books she finds a heavenly Messiah, who is portrayed likely (in the Gospel) or definitely (in Revelation) as the first creature of God. She’s willing to say that “both present Jesus as preexistent and as divine in some sense.” (203) In the Gospel Jesus is God’s unique son and his sonship is linked with his messiahship. In Revelation Jesus is a principal angel. Both books draw on wisdom traditions although neither explicitly mentions wisdom texts, but the Logos of the Gospel’s prologue is highly philosophical while the Logos of Revelation is not.

I wish I could say that *King and Messiah as Son of God* is an important contribution to the study of early Christology but unfortunately I can’t. The study of individual names/titles/epithets hasn’t proven very useful in overall scheme of Christological study and this book is no exception. When Mark S. Smith says on the back cover that “This volume addresses one of the most important yet difficult questions in all of the Bible—the divinity of Jesus,” I want to say “yes, this question is important, but it’s not answered in any of the epithets examined!” This is why the work of scholars such as Hurtado and Bauckham has been so fruitful; it’s moved beyond the study of titles and into the broader understanding of God by Second Temple Jews and the reception of Jesus by individuals/groups.

I have a difficult time recommending this volume to anyone, scholar and non-specialist alike. It’s not because I disagree with so much of it (I’d have no problem recommending the work of James Dunn or Maurice Casey with which I also disagree), but rather because I don’t think it presents

scholarship that moves the field forward and it's simply too technical for the non-specialist, so in the end it winds up being a book with no discernible audience. JJC's chapters are generally descriptive and present little in terms of argument therefore there's little to agree or disagree with. AYC's chapters on the other hand are full of arguments, just not particularly persuasive ones.

E.g., in arguing that Philippians 2 is the only passage in Paul that presents Jesus as preexistent she notes that other passages *can be* read without reference to preexistence but doesn't give adequate reasons why they *should be*. She exhibits a tendency to find Greco-Roman connections/influence where none exist, e.g., with respect to the virginal conception (of which she admits that there are no genuine parallels, see 137-8) and the worship of Jesus (see 174). She finds ambiguity where there is none, e.g., saying, "Whether Jesus was viewed as wisdom or as logos, whether as created or eternal, the prologue of John (1:1-18) implies that he was a preexistent figure who became incarnate." (178) While the conclusion is solid there's no doubt as to whether Jesus is presented as the logos and eternal in John's prologue; he is!

And there are some lingering questions I have about this work like: why was 'Q' (which probably never existed to begin with) given any attention in a chapter on Paul's writings? And why were writings that actually do exist and bear Paul's name ignored (i.e., Ephesians, Colossians, 2Thessalonians, 1-2Timothy, Titus, Philemon)? Why were the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation grouped together when they probably did not have the same author and don't share the same genre? And why were the epistles of John ignored when they speak so much about Jesus as God's Son? Why did Hebrews and Jude receive so little attention while the Petrine epistles were ignored completely? In all of these books we're given Christological information, and in most cases they use the very names/titles/epithets that are a main feature of AYC's examination so their exclusion makes little sense.

The positive features of this book that I can note are, again, its prose: JJC and AYC both write well and communicate clearly. I can also commend them on their interaction with a wide array of scholarship although I would have preferred to see AYC interact with the work of Gordon Fee (who receives no attention at all) and Richard Bauckham (who receives very little attention on the last page of the book), and a more substantial interaction with Larry Hurtado. JJC for his part shows an impressive familiarity with the primary and secondary literature in his field and has done a wonderful job of reminding me that scholarship exists beyond North America, Great Britain, and Germany. Other positive features related to those just mentioned are the extensive footnotes and the bibliography.