

BOOK REVIEW

Andrew Chester, *Messiah and Exaltation: Jewish Messianic and Visionary Traditions and New Testament Christology* (WUNT, 1.207; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007); xvii + 716 pp. Hbk. US\$196.00 (€119.00).

*Messiah and Exaltation* weighs in and significantly expands upon the currently growing body of literature attempting to situate early Christology within the context of pre-Christian Judaism. Those involved in these efforts have sought to move away from the old *Kyrios* Christology models typical of the early decades of the twentieth century, which attempted to locate high christological developments within the later Gentile development of early Christianity, where polytheism and henotheism prevailed. Chester stands as one of many important contemporary forces pushing to bring the focus back upon the Jewish origins of the Christ doctrine.

The book itself is partially a compilation of Chester's previous research on the topics that it addresses. I say partially because over a third of the book consists of previously published material, leaving almost two-thirds of the volume devoted to research published here for the first time.

Approaches to New Testament Christology, including Chester's, can be classified by how they choose to define first-century Jewish monotheism. There are three configurations of Jewish monotheism in the recent literature on primitive Christology. Several scholars approach the issue from the perspective of *numerical monotheism*. These scholars (Maurice Casey is typical) argue that monotheistic belief was structured along the axis of mathematical singularity. On this model, early Jewish monotheism is rigid and inflexible, being defined by a singular numerical instantiation of the divine essence. This is, for all intents and purposes, the traditional view, and most interpreters who advocate this approach locate the origination of belief in a pre-existent Christ within the Gentile or at least non-Jewish phase of a developing

Christology. Perhaps advocated most famously by Larry Hurtado, a second view has come particularly into vogue in recent years. I would call this approach *mediatorial monotheism*. These scholars understand Jewish monotheism to be flexible enough to sometimes blur the lines between God and his mediatorial agents, including personified divine attributes, angels and exalted patriarchs. Although most—as does Chester (pp. 17-27)—attribute the third view to Bauckham, it can actually be traced back at least to E.P. Sanders, and quite possibly earlier, being later enshrined in the work of N.T. Wright. I call this third configuration for ancient Jewish monotheism *functional monotheism* because it focuses on Yahweh's identity being cast within particular exclusive or monotheistic functions, such as his role as creator, governor, revealer and covenant keeper (at least on Sanders's portrayal). Bauckham does, however, apply this insight uniquely to christological origins and Chester spends ten entire pages engaging with Bauckham's brief 79-page treatment.

Of these three approaches, Chester argues for a version of mediatorial monotheism based not in hypostatic divine attributes or angelomorphic traditions, but in Jewish messianism. This option within mediatorial monotheism is represented by a relatively smaller, but growing number of scholars. Even prior to Chester's original explorations on connections among messianism, mediators and Pauline Christology in 1991 (published in Chapter 5 of this volume), William Horbury had already begun to observe significant relationships within the development of these traditions, first writing on them in 1988 before developing his findings in a book-length treatment ten years later (*Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ* [London: SCM, 1998]). Chester references, evaluates and builds upon Horbury's important work throughout his volume. Aquila Lee has also published an important work that argues for what might be called messianic mediatorial monotheism, along the lines of Chester (*From Messiah to Preexistent Son: Jesus' Self-Consciousness and Early Christian Exegesis of Messianic Psalms* [WUNT, 2.192; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005]). Lee's work, however, although written just two years earlier and from a vantage point that parallels Chester's more closely than most, does not even make it into the bibliography. Such an oversight may be an indication that, though Chester's book was published in 2007, previously published material does not seem to have always been brought up to date—despite the usual extensive and helpful interaction

with secondary literature that can be found throughout Chester's treatment.

The aim of Chester's project seems to be a detailed exposition of all of the relevant ancient texts on (especially visionary and transformation oriented) messianism and, to a lesser degree, (especially angelic) mediatory figures, including their points of intersection. These beliefs are said to form a matrix that renders a divinely exalted messiah intelligible to Paul. Chester concludes that 'for Paul, Jesus is clearly a figure of the heavenly world, and thus fits a messianic category already developed within Judaism, where the Messiah is a human or angelic figure belonging...in the heavenly world, a figure who at the same time has had a specific, limited role on earth' (pp. 394-95). It is for this reason that we find Paul setting Jesus in relation to angelomorphic, wisdom and exalted-human traditions. The detailed analysis of the primary sources on messianism and Jewish intermediary figures makes the volume a worthwhile and important piece of research on its own. Extensive analysis and evaluation of secondary literature pertaining to primary texts and early Christology are also valuable features of Chester's project. Beyond the assessments of secondary literature, however, a thorough account of the origins of Christology appears to be only a peripheral concern, considering both the depth of treatment given to the issue relative to the amount of attention paid to Second Temple Jewish beliefs and the obscure placement of the discussions of Christology within the volume. If we restrict Christology to the study of origins, then the treatment is sparse indeed (pp. 80-121, 168-87 and 382-96), 74 pages. If we include in that number surveys of secondary literature on New Testament Christology and expand the discussion to include issues like those addressed in Chapter 9, 'The Law of Christ and the Law of the Spirit', then there is admittedly more. But the vast majority of this 700+ page book is taken up with issues and interpretation of Second Temple Jewish literature and, at this point, we find an important resource in Chester's work. There is perhaps no other work dealing with these texts so extensively and systematically, with a view toward applications to early Christology. The christological focus, nevertheless, seems secondary.

The placement of the christological discussions within the structure of the book further buries the problem of Jesus' exaltation under the debris of Second Temple Jewish views. The first discussion is at the end of Chapter 3, which focuses on transformation and intermediary

figure traditions, but at this point we are only about one-sixth of the way through the book. The second analysis of Christology assesses key resurrection texts (pp. 168-87) and the third and final major treatment of Christology occurs at the end of Chapter 5, just over half way through the book. This raises the whole issue of the structure and continuity of the volume as a single book. Chester takes something of a layered approach as he unfolds his material for the reader. Christology is not the only issue taken up in several distinct contexts within *Messiah and Exaltation*. Chester discusses intermediary figures at length in Chapter 2, only to return to a further extensive treatment of intermediary figures in Chapter 5. The sections on messianic expectations in Chapter 5 and messianic hope in Chapter 6 blend together, given the apocalyptic nature of the texts considered. There is also a question, at least in my mind, how these chapters fit together to form a coherent argument. I suppose Chester seeks to preempt this concern when he devotes his introduction to 'show why and how they belong together' (p. 1), but due to the layered and overlapping nature of the material, as well as its organization, this is often left unclear. A conclusion could have helped to clear this up by bringing together the diverse strands of tradition that Chester addresses, but the book does not include a conclusion.

The points on structure and continuity notwithstanding, the strengths of Chester's work by far outweigh its weaknesses. Chester has assembled for us one of the most substantial treatments of intermediary figures, apocalyptic tradition and messianism in the Second Temple period available. And of the mediatorial approaches, I must confess to finding the messianic brand represented in approaches like Chester's to be the most convincing since developments are explained with reference to actual traditions regarding the messiah rather than divine attributes, exalted patriarchs and the like.

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