

*Der Sohn Gottes: Die Entstehung der Christologie und die jüdische-hellenistische Religionsgeschichte.* By Martin Hengel. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1975, 144 pp., DM 19,80 paper.

This important book from the prolific pen of Martin Hengel is an expansion of his inaugural address at Tübingen University delivered May 16, 1973. The subtitle and the first chapter reveal the problem to which he addresses himself. In the spring of A.D. 30, a Jew was crucified in Jerusalem on what was basically a political charge. Yet within 27 years (the chronology is Kümmel's), a Christian church in Philippi was being taught to sing a hymn that confessed this Jew's messianic identity and pre-existence and affirmed that he was *en morphē theou*. And the hymn itself was undoubtedly earlier.

In his second and fourth chapters, Hengel sketches in critical opinion from Harnack to Schoeps. Hengel rejects all reconstructions that postulate that Paul was so influenced by Hellenistic thought of one variety or another that he transformed the simple *Jewish* preaching of Jesus into what we now recognize as Christianity. Those of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* specify that the dominant influence on emerging Christianity was a new *Kultusfrömmigkeit* which received its impress from the mystery religions and especially from Gnosticism. They thus dissociate themselves from Harnack's theories about the speculative-philosophical interests of Greek (pagan) Christians. Nevertheless they concur that Christianity as expounded in Paul is "im Grunde eine ganz neue Religion gegenüber dem palästinensischen Urchristentum" (Bultmann). If their analysis is correct, we must choose between Jesus and Paul. And nowhere do such reconstructions have more influence than in the study of the early development of Christology.

In the third chapter, Hengel examines the use of "Son of God" in the epistles he takes to be genuinely Pauline. He agrees with Bousset that the fifteen occurrences appear at high points in Paul's presentation. But against Bousset and with Kramer, Hengel insists the title is not a Pauline creation. This pushes it back to earlier times. The title "Son of God" is connected with the mission of the pre-existent Son into the world, his surrender to death, and his role as the mediator of creation. Either these things sprang up within a *Jewish* setting, or else Christianity was paganized unbelievably early.

So far Hengel has traversed well-worn ground. His fifth chapter, however, contains much that is new and thought-provoking. Here he examines both Hellenistic and Jewish literature to discover how *ho huios tou theou* (or *huios theou*) is used. Classical Greek usage is closely bounded by ideas of physical descent; a more extended meaning occurs only at the periphery of the expression's semantic range. Its meaning is further limited, both in the classical and Hellenistic periods, by the fact that the more extended significance is usually taken over by *pais*. The *paides Dios* of Hellenistic nature-religions form no bridge to the primitive Christian consciousness of *one* son of *one* God. In the mysteries there are no rising and dying "sons of God"; and as for the dying gods Attis, Osiris, and Adonis, they began their existence when born on the earth and thus lack the essential pre-existence and *Sendungsmotiv*. Because full-fledged mystery religions cannot be traced to sources earlier than the second century, Bultmann is guilty of "eine phantastische Konstruktion, die den religionsgeschichtlichen Hintergrund der frühen syrischen Gemeinden nicht erhellt, sondern verdunkelt." In a similar way, Hengel dismisses alleged parallels among the "divine men" in the Gnostic redeemer myth and in the Hermetica.

By contrast, the idea of "son" in the OT is regularly used to express all kinds of relationships—including one's relation to the state, to God, to a people or calling, of angels, of God's people collectively, and of the Davidic king (Hengel

notes that the "today" of Psalm 2:7 precludes a merely physical relationship and, far from being a foreign concept, probably relates to enthronement). Intertestamental Judaism expanded yet further the multifaceted possibilities of *huios theou*. Hengel provides multiplied scores of references to the apocryphal and pseudepigraphic literature, the Talmuds, Philo, and the Dead Sea scrolls. The expression is made to refer to—*inter alia*—wisdom, charismatic miracle-workers, the kingly Messiah, angels, the king's son, and Metatron.

The sixth chapter provides us with Hengel's reconstruction of the development of early Christology. Beginning with the confession in Romans 1:3 f., Hengel allows for an alleged *Urform* that omits any nuance of pre-existence, although he concedes that Paul saw that pre-existence was involved. The two points of the confession are grounded in the earthly Jesus, born of the seed of David, and in the resurrection event, in which God raised Jesus (*horistheis* is a typical *passivum divinum*). The question is, Why does this confession call Jesus "Son of God" instead of "Lord," "Messiah," or "Son of man"? Hengel replies, "Der Titel Sohn Gottes schliesst—wie kein anderer im Neuen Testament—die Gestalt Jesu mit Gott zusammen." Hengel offers several *historical* arguments to justify this conclusion. The next step, which sees Jesus as pre-existent, sent, and the mediatorial Creator, developed within Palestine/Syria among Greek-speaking *Jewish* believers driven from Jerusalem by early persecution. That such themes developed from heathen influence is, according to Hengel, "höchst unwahrscheinlich." Rather, the further development of Christology depended on inner necessity. To preach Jesus as the fulfillment of God's eschatological purposes necessarily raised the question of his relationship to other elements of the *Mutterreligion*—angels, wisdom, temple service, other mediators of revelation, and ultimately Torah. "Fulfillment" presupposes priority of purpose, and pre-existence is not far away. Pre-existence leads to the "descent" motifs, and hence to the "legends" of a miraculous birth. Absolute authority on the part of Jesus calls in question the permanence of Torah. In short, by appealing to inner necessity Hengel is attempting to explain the rise of early Christology in the same way Klaus Haacker tries to explain Johannine Christology (cf. his *Die Stiftung des Heils* [Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1972], although Hengel makes no mention of Haacker's work).

Hengel's final two chapters discuss the "Son" in Hebrews, especially with respect to angels, and a few theological consequences of the study, including the fact that, for Christians, the entire revelation of God is at stake.

I welcome this penetrating study as an excellent antidote to much (especially German) contemporary scholarship. Its main point is surely correct: Pauline Christology finds its most believable *Mutterboden* within a Jewish setting, not a pagan one. Besides minor points of disagreement, my reservations are twofold. (1) I do not share Hengel's historical skepticism about several events that the New Testament writers are content to think of as historical. (2) At one point (p. 67), Hengel argues that intertestamental Judaism expanded the semantic range of *huios theou* precisely during the period when Judaism was clashing with, and being influenced by, paganism. This, he thinks, provides the crucial background. Unfortunately he does not explain what difference this confrontation makes, and it is difficult to see it intuitively when he has done such a thorough job of discrediting alleged pagan parallels. It sounds like a tipping of the hat to the main theme of his *magnum opus*, *Judaism and Hellenism*, namely the interpenetration of the two during the period 300 B. C. to A. D. 100. I sense a fairly major inconsistency. Perhaps Hengel will put us further in his debt by clarifying this point for us in future publications.

The production is marred by a lack of indices.

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