

Luke-Acts: Angels, Christology and Soteriology. By Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis. WUNT 94. Tübingen: Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1997, xv + 357 pp., n.p. paper.

At one level this is a fresh history-of-religions approach to the theology of Luke-Acts. More narrowly, it seeks to establish that a theology of angels has informed Luke's Christology. Fletcher-Louis is not so naive as to think that Luke's Christology is accounted for by a reductionistic appeal to angels in the Jewish backgrounds that shape Luke's work. He argues, rather, that the contribution of angels to the complex synthesis has been ignored. Borrowing a category from J. Daniélou, Fletcher-Louis proposes to apply the term "angelomorphic . . . wherever there are signs that an individual or community possesses specifically angelic characteristics or status, though for whom identity cannot be reduced to that of an angel" (pp. 14–15). So although he accepts the contention of Michaelis that there is no "angel-Christology" in early Christianity—at least as that category is narrowly conceived—Fletcher-Louis contends that "a more versatile application" of the angelomorphic is demonstrable.

After an introduction that prepares the way for angelomorphic categories in Luke-Acts, Fletcher-Louis devotes the first part of his work to an exploration of such traditions in this corpus. He tends to proceed by "initial probings" that turn back on themselves

a little later in the book. Fletcher-Louis suggests that just as Jesus' post-resurrection identity is "somatic," so his predeath earthly existence is angelomorphic. Indeed, the characteristics of the "angelic life" feature not only in Jesus but in the righteous. Such a lifestyle includes "access to status and power, an ascetic—and particularly celibate lifestyle, the readiness for martyrdom and the mode of worship centred on Jesus" (p. 106). (This last element is almost incoherent: How does this apply to both Jesus and the righteous?)

Wanting to explore how far such traditions are not merely Christian but Jewish, Fletcher-Louis explores Jewish angelomorphic traditions in the second part of his book. Here he travels rapidly back and forth between Biblical traditions and what later Jewish writers made of them: kingship, priesthood, Hecataeus of Abdera, prophets (including the "angelization" of Zephaniah), and so forth. The literature of second-temple Judaism, he contends, is replete with angelomorphic presentation of Adam, the patriarchs, Moses, and many others. "Son of man" in Daniel 7 is analyzed in similar fashion.

Part III of the book returns to Luke-Acts, re-examining the material in the light of these angelomorphic traditions. Fletcher-Louis argues that Luke redefines Jewish angelomorphism, and that this redefinition is most comprehensively synthesized out of his understanding of "son of man." "There is . . . a sense in which this title functions to conceptually embrace otherwise disjointed aspects of the angelomorphic Christ. Supremely in Lk 12:8–9, the relationship between the earthly Jesus and the heavenly Son of Man provides the parameters within which the preexistent, present and future, human and divine Jesus can be understood" (p. 248). Perhaps. But if angelomorphism applies so readily to both Jesus and to the righteous, how does it account for the universal NT perception of Jesus' uniqueness?

Despite numerous suggestive passages, the book is marred by too many fuzzy categories and a want of believable controls. While rightly insisting that there are many elements that go into Lukan Christology, Fletcher-Louis does not usually provide the analytic care that demonstrates whether a particular element springs from this or that tradition. Too often the argument sounds like "heads-I-win-tails-you-lose." In discussing Luke's portrayal of Paul, for instance, Fletcher-Louis flags Vielhauer's complaint that Acts 17:24–31 presents a Paul committed to natural theology and borrowing from pagan authors, a presentation a long way removed from the "Lutheran" Paul of the epistles. Fletcher-Louis responds: "Though Paul's argument certainly draws on pagan authors, it remains to be seen whether in fact it is essentially indebted to stoic thought, as earlier scholarship, including Vielhauer's has assumed. If, rather, Paul is reliant on a thoroughly Jewish view of humanity as angelomorphic, and in that sense 'divine,' which he has then expressed in stoic language, then that would be entirely consistent with the very Jewish picture of Paul which is painted in Acts" (p. 31).

Yet the book is important, not, I think, because of its own synthesis, but because it is one of a small number of works that is drawing attention to an element of NT Christology still inadequately explored. For instance, though he several times briefly mentions "the angel of the Lord," the possibility that this enigmatic figure contributes to NT incarnational Christology is never really explored. There is more work to do in this area.

D. A. Carson
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL