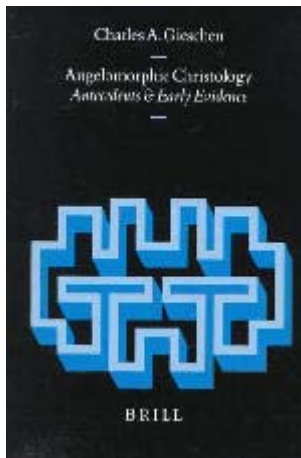


RBL 06/14/2000



Gieschen, Charles A.

Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence

Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums 42

Leiden: Brill, 1998. Pp. xvi + 403, Cloth, \$115.75, ISBN 9004108408.

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The main purpose of this study (built upon Gieschen's 1995 Ph.D. dissertation supervised by Jan Fossum, University of Michigan) is to show that motifs, themes, and concepts from Jewish angel-traditions were drawn upon in earliest Christology and had a "significant impact" in the period 50-150 CE. This basic argument has been made by Jean Daniélou and Richard Longenecker, but Gieschen here offers a much fuller discussion that should now be consulted by all interested in the earliest christological developments and the relevance of Jewish angel-traditions.

Part 1 gives a history of research, defines key terms and categories, and lays out Gieschen's approach. "Angelomorphic" Christology means the use of angel motifs but does not necessarily involve categorizing Christ as an angel. In fact, Gieschen argues, angelomorphic Christology often involved a strong distinction between Christ and angels in early Christian sources.

In Part 2 Gieschen surveys the Jewish "antecedents": "angelomorphic" depictions of God (e.g., Angel of the Lord traditions) and personified divine attributes (which Gieschen argues are sometimes "hypostases" and not merely personifications), principal-angel traditions, and angelomorphic humans (patriarchs, prophets, priest, kings, and others).

Part 3 is then devoted to the early Christian evidence, the main questions being whether, when, and what angelomorphic traditions were used in early articulations of Christology. Here Gieschen first surveys evidence from 150-325 CE (Justin Martyr,

Theophilus, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus, Origen, Novatian, Lactantius, Eusebius, *Apostolic Constitutions*). Then come chapters on the *Pseudo-Clementines*, *Shepherd of Hermas*, and *Ascension of Isaiah*, followed by studies of Revelation, John, Hebrews, and the Pauline epistles.

Gieschen's conclusions are (1) that angelomorphic traditions "were profoundly employed in earliest extant expressions of Christology," (2) that Angel of the Lord traditions in particular were very important in contributing to the linking of angelomorphic figures intimately identified with YHWH (i.e., the Angel, the Glory, the Name, the Word, Wisdom) to the fleshly Jesus who had ascended and was now enthroned," (3) that early Christians combined various antecedent traditions in formulating their Christology, and (4) that traditions about the invisibility of God were important contributors to the development of angelomorphic traditions and to early Christology. Overall, Gieschen contends that angelomorphic traditions "were some of the oldest and most significant traditions that inspired the Christology which we now find in early Christian literature, including the New Testament." Indeed, Gieschen holds that "the central root" from which various early christological traditions developed (e.g., Wisdom/Spirit/Name/Glory/Son of Man/Image/Anthropos Christologies) is "the angelomorphic tradition in which the Angel of the Lord is God appearing in the form of a man."

There is an impressive acquaintance with scholarly literature, and Gieschen also shows familiarity with a broad range of primary texts. Overall, he succeeds in confirming the relevance of angelomorphic traditions for early Christology. I intend no diminution of appreciation for Gieschen's work in mentioning some points of criticism and difference.

First, some matters of method. He advocates allowing ancient evidence to shape our categories, but his discussion of the "divinity" of angelomorphic figures fails to grant the crucial significance of cultic scruples among devout Jews in the Roman period as the key demonstration of God's uniqueness. His discussion of whether a personified attribute of God is to be taken as a "hypostasis" seems to me a bit simplistic in assuming that vivid depiction of Wisdom or Logos in personalized terms can be taken by itself as indicating that they were seen as real entities with "independent personhood." I suggest that we know what to make of the vivid depictions by looking at whether Wisdom or Logos are actually treated as entities with "independent personhood" in the religious practices, especially cultic practices, of ancient Jews such as Philo.

In the use of sources, Gieschen's view is that "if the idea in a document can be dated, there is legitimacy in using a later text as an expression and record of that idea from an earlier period" (p. 46). But this again seems insufficiently nuanced. Ideas do not in fact usually get transmitted through time intact but get adapted to each subsequent setting, and so we should expect that later sources usually attest the form of an idea current at the

time of the source. The frustrating lacunae in extant evidence from the ancient world makes it necessary to draw upon later sources as perhaps preserving ideas of an earlier time, but this must be done very carefully and tentatively. Otherwise, we run the risk of committing the historical equivalent of what in linguistics is known as "the etymological fallacy."

To show that this is not merely an abstract concern, I point to Gieschen's use of extant Samaritan texts that date from the fourth century down to the late middle ages to attest first-century Samaritan religious beliefs (e.g., pp. 303-6), and his use of *Poimandres* and the *Pseudo-Clementines* as "tradition-history" for the terms used in Phil 2:6 (pp. 337-39). Likewise, he seems to me to import into Eph 4:4-15 a technical meaning of the term *metron* from much later sources, paying insufficient attention to the actual discourse in Ephesians itself.

Though I agree with Gieschen that "angelomorphic" traditions are reflected in the NT, in some cases his zeal exceeds the warrants. For example, he spends ten pages trying to show that Gal 4:14 "is the one place in the Pauline corpus where there is an overt reference to Jesus as God's Angel" (p. 314), toward the end admitting that his assertion is only at most a "very real possibility" (in my judgment, a rather generous description at that).

But Gieschen's enthusiasm for the subject, along with the impressive erudition provided, combine to make this an engaging and valuable study, in spite my of reservations about some particular matters. A nineteen-page bibliography and indexes of ancient sources and modern authors complete this readable and virtually typo-free volume.