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Aquila H. I. Lee. *From Messiah to Preexistent Son: Jesus' Self-Consciousness and Early Christian Exegesis of Messianic Psalms*. WUNT II/192. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005. XII+375 pp., € 69.00.

In this ambitious book, a revised dissertation supervised by I. Howard Marshall, Aquila Lee argues that the New Testament belief in Jesus' pre-existence has its origins in Jesus' own self-understanding and in early exegesis of Psalms 2 and 110.

Much of NT scholarship has assumed that there is a gap between what Jesus thought about himself and the high Christology of the New Testament writings. A much debated feature of this early Christology is the idea that Jesus pre-existed as the Son of God before he was sent to the world. To explain the origin of this idea, many scholars assume that Jewish wisdom speculations provided the raw material for early Christians to develop their Christology. The Jewish idea that wisdom was God's agent at creation was applied to Jesus, who thereby was attributed with pre-existence. In contrast to this popular view, Lee sets out to show that there is much more continuity between Jesus' own view of himself and the high Christology of passages like Gal 4:4-6; 2 Cor 8:9; and Phil 2:6-11.

After a very informative overview of the history of research, Lee first sets out to show that the idea of a divine messiah is unprecedented in a first-century Jewish context. Recent attempts at demonstrating the continuity between Jewish thought and New Testament Christology (Gieschen, Fossum, Hannah, Horbury, et al) is unconvincing because these explanations are speculative and based on late evidence.

Lee then finds that Jesus' own sayings in the synoptic gospels reflect an unprecedented level of intimacy with God the Father. Jesus' unique sonship is first and foremost expressed in his use of *abba* ("father") as an address to God, in his calling himself "the son" (Matt 11:27 par.; Mark 13:32 cf. Matt 16:17; Luke 22:29), and in the parable of wicked tenants (Mark 12:1-12), which Lee also takes as self-referential. Lee is more cautious when it comes to the "I have come" and the "I was sent" sayings, as he does not find that these sayings provide evidence of unique sonship or pre-existence. In chapters 6 and 7, Lee discusses the significance of Psalms 2 and 110 for the Christology of the early church.

Finally, Lee discusses some of the Pauline passages that have been taken as evidence of wisdom Christology (1 Cor 1:24, 30; 8:6; 10:4; Rom 10:5-8; 11:33-36) and argues that wisdom Christology in all of these passages is secondary at best. The pre-Pauline sending formula (Gal 4:4-5) should therefore not be explained on the basis of Hellenistic Jewish wisdom speculations, but owes its origin more directly to Jesus' own self-understanding as God's son.

The scope of Lee's work is very impressive; he certainly covers much more ground than the average doctoral dissertation. His knowledge of a correspondingly wide range of secondary literature is equally enviable. The weaknesses of his work are perhaps inevitable given the comprehensive thesis he puts forward. But at several critical junctures of his argument I felt I was

being short changed. Lee insists that the title “Son of God” is of great importance for Jesus’ self-understanding (pp. 25, 180). I was therefore surprised that he does not offer any comment on the fact that this title never occurs on Jesus’ lips in any of the synoptic gospels. In that light, it is somewhat surprising that Lee does not even discuss the value of the fourth gospel for our understanding of the historical Jesus.

Without the gospel of John, it is difficult to provide compelling evidence that Jesus understood himself as God’s Son in the sense that he was of divine nature. Lee gets a lot of mileage out of Jesus’ addressing God as *abba* (Mark 14:36), an address which was adopted by the early Christians (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6). True, only Jesus uses “my Father,” whereas the disciples pray “Our Father,” but does this count as evidence of Jesus’ divine nature?

Lee goes against the tide of New Testament studies when he maintains that early Christian Christology was never adoptionistic. I had therefore expected a solid argument against the common view that the early Christians took Psalm 110:1 as evidence that Jesus became God’s Son at his resurrection, but here Lee had little to offer.

Lee’s most original suggestion is perhaps that the early Christian exegesis of Ps 2:6 determined their use of Ps 2:7, but in his argument for this position he does not advance much beyond showing the possibility of such a scenario. He does not argue for any New Testament citations or even allusions to Ps 2:6 that may bolster his case. Surprisingly, neither does he appeal to the methodological observation made by Richard Hays, that New Testament quotations intend to call attention not only to the passage quoted but to the entire context in which they originally appear. Lee’s line of argument in this chapter also appears to be inconsistent. With respect to Psalm 2, he thinks that the original use of the Psalm is very important for its use in the New Testament (p. 256), whereas the original meaning of Psalm 110 is irrelevant (p. 221, n. 72).

Lee consistently comes to conservative conclusions regarding the reliability of the synoptic gospels, but in his discussions of possible wisdom traditions in Paul, he does not even mention Col 1:15-20, presumably because he does not believe the letter was written by the apostle (p. 322). He argues well for the idea of Jesus as God’s pre-existent Son in Paul’s letters, but he seems to commit a classic error of illegitimate totality transfer when he concludes on the basis of linguistic parallels between Phil 2:7; Gal 4:4; and Rom 1:3 that Rom 1:3-4 also is a witness of pre-existence (p. 313).

All in all, I feel somewhat ambivalent about this book. It covers a lot of ground and presents an intriguing thesis, but I do not feel completely satisfied that all the steps in the argument are taken with sufficient care.

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