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0521023009 - Jesus and the Angels: Angelology and the Christology of the
Apocalypse of John

Peter R. Carrell

Excerpt

[More information](#)

1

INTRODUCTION

Previous study of the christology of the Apocalypse

In general the study of the christology of the Apocalypse in this century has trodden well-worn paths along thematic valleys and over titled mountains largely similar to the study of christology elsewhere in the New Testament. A good deal of this study is presented in the introductory sections to commentaries,¹ or in chapters of general books about the Apocalypse,² or in the course of studies of NT christology.³ The list of articles,⁴ dissertations,⁵ and monographs⁶ specifically devoted to the christology of the Apocalypse is not overly long. For our present purposes most of the arguments and counter-arguments advanced in these studies do not concern us except in two respects. First, we are interested in what has been said in studies such as these about the divinity of Jesus Christ in the Apocalypse. Secondly, we have noted in such studies the virtual absence of reference to the question which is the

¹ E.g. Charles, i, cxi–cxiv; Beckwith, 312–7; Swete, clv–clix; Ford, 12–19. (Commentaries on the Apocalypse itself are referred to by the author's name only.)

² E.g. Scott, *Revelation*; Guthrie, *Relevance*; Bauckham, *Theology*.

³ E.g. Cullmann, *Christology*; Hahn, *Hoheitstitel*; Müller, *Messias*; Schillebeeckx, *Christ*; De Jonge, *Christology*; Dunn, *Christology*; Hare, *Son*.

⁴ E.g. Ellwanger, 'Christology'; Beck, 'Christology'; Scott, 'Behold'; Harlé, 'L'Agneau'; Schmitt, 'Interpretation'; Silberman, 'Farewell'; Rissi, 'Erscheinung'; Hillyer, 'Lamb'; Roberts, 'Lamb'; Mounce, 'Christology'; Van Unnik, 'Worthy'; Bovon, 'Le Christ'; Sabugal, 'El titulo'; Gerhardsson, 'Aussagen'; De Jonge, 'Use'; Guthrie, 'Lamb'; Carnegie, 'Worthy'; Edwards, 'Christological'; Jankowski, 'Christus'; Lohse, 'Menschensohn'; Moore, 'Jesus'; Läpple, 'Geheimnis'; Reddish, 'Martyr'; Satake, 'Christologie'; Boring, 'Narrative', 'Voice'; Slater, 'King'.

⁵ E.g. Cook, *Christology*; Carrell, 'Lamb'; Jones, 'Study'. The present author has not been able to obtain a dissertation by Engelbrecht, Johannes Jacobus, 'The christology of the Book of Revelation' (DTh. Diss., University of Pretoria, 1980 (Afrikaans text)).

⁶ Büchsel, *Christologie*; Comblin, *Christ*; D'Sousa, *Lamb*; Holtz, *Christologie*; Hohnjec, *Lamm*.

Cambridge University Press

0521023009 - Jesus and the Angels: Angelology and the Christology of the
Apocalypse of John

Peter R. Carrell

Excerpt

[More information](#)2 *Introduction*

chief concern of this monograph, namely, the possibility of angelological influence on the christology of the Apocalypse.

With respect to the question of the divinity of Christ we may note on the one side the views of scholars such as E. F. Scott who argued that it is doubtful if John regarded Christ as being 'in any full sense divine',⁷ and Maurice Casey who has argued that 'the lamb is carefully distinguished from God, and he is not said to be divine'.⁸ But on the other side the majority of scholars have had no difficulty in affirming a 'high christology' for the Apocalypse. Caird, for example, has argued that John believes that 'the glory of God has been seen in the face of Jesus Christ' (cf. 2 Cor. 4.6). Consequently, Christ bears 'all the attributes of deity' in his initial portrayal (Apc. 1.12–16), is marked by the titles of God (e.g. 22.13), and, as the Lamb, has his name coupled together with the name of God (e.g. 22.1,3). In short, 'God, once hidden from human sight, [is] now revealed in the known person of his Son'.⁹ A similar conclusion is reached by Schillebeeckx who argues that the secret name in Apocalypse 19.12 signifies that 'Revelation explicitly maintains the mystery of the eschatological identity of the person of Jesus . . . The author evidently means to suggest that the nature of Christ is intrinsically bound up with that of God himself'.¹⁰ Most recently Bauckham has argued that the pattern of 'I am' self-declarations by God (1.8, 21.6) and Christ (1.17, 22.13) reveals 'the remarkable extent to which Revelation identifies Jesus Christ with God'.¹¹ In particular, Apocalypse 22.13 (where Christ is 'the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end') reveals 'unambiguously that Jesus Christ belongs to the fullness of the eternal being of God'. Accordingly the Apocalypse implies neither an adoptionist christology, nor that Christ is understood as a second god. Thus the worship of Jesus in the Apocalypse (e.g. Apc. 5.9–13, 22.1–3), a work which is distinctly monotheistic in outlook, 'must be understood as indicating the inclusion of Jesus in the being of the one God defined in monotheistic worship'.¹²

On the question of angelological influence we note an article by Fischer which typifies the inattention of scholars to this influence.¹³

⁷ Scott, *Revelation*, 116. Cf. Swete, clv–clix; Charles, i, cxii.

⁸ Casey, *Jewish*, 142.

⁹ Caird, 289–301; cf. Boring, 102–3.

¹⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 432–62; citation from p. 443.

¹¹ Bauckham, *Theology*, 54–5.

¹² Ibid., 56–60; citations from pp. 56–7 and 60, respectively.

¹³ Fischer, 'Christlichkeit' (1981).

Cambridge University Press

0521023009 - Jesus and the Angels: Angelology and the Christology of the Apocalypse of John

Peter R. Carrell

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Previous study of the christology of the Apocalypse*

3

Writing on the Christian character of the Apocalypse, Fischer devotes a small but profound section to the christology of the Apocalypse. He perceives John to be expressing the form of Christ in four ways: (i) co-regent of God; (ii) supreme archangel; (iii) son of man-judge and (iv) the 'one sacrificing himself for us'. Yet Fischer does not develop the idea that Christ is the supreme archangel (which arises out of Apc. 12.10–12 where Christ is honoured as victor after Michael's struggle with the dragon).¹⁴

If any aspect of christological study appears to provide a starting point for our task it would be 'angel christology'. Yet, as we shall see, our starting point is better found elsewhere. Angel christology certainly existed after the first century CE (and we examine this in more detail in chapter 5 below) but the question of whether it existed in the first century CE has for the most part received a negative answer. In 1941 Werner argued that the oldest christology was in fact an angel christology.¹⁵ For example, behind the conception of Christ as 'messiah-son of man' was 'a high angelic being' (cf. 1 *Enoch* 46.3) and the son of man was represented as 'the Prince of Angels' (e.g. Mark 8.38; Matt. 13.41–2; Luke 22.43).¹⁶ Critical response to this thesis was swift¹⁷ and decisive,¹⁸ although some recent assessments have not been totally dismissive.¹⁹ In any case, Werner himself had very little to say about the christology of the Apocalypse and offers no discussion at all of key christological texts such as Apocalypse 1.13–16, 14.14, and 19.11–16.²⁰ Some speculation about angel christology in the NT has continued in recent years, mostly in connection with books such as the Fourth Gospel and Jude.²¹ Karrer, however, devotes a short but important

¹⁴ Ibid., 170.¹⁵ Werner, *Die Entstehung des Christlichen Dogmas* (Bern: Paul Haupt, 1941, 1954). We have used the ET, Werner, *Formation*.¹⁶ Ibid., 120–4.¹⁷ Michaelis, *Engelchristologie*; with vigorous response in Werner, *Formation*, 130, n. 1.¹⁸ E.g. Barbel, *Christos*, 348: 'in the NT there is no consciousness of an angel christology'; cf. Balz, *Methodische*, 208; Kretschmar, *Studien*, 220–2, and, more recently, Dunn, *Christology*, 154–8, 322, n. 106.¹⁹ E.g. Hengel, *Son*, 84; 'A real *angel christology* could only become significant right on the fringe of the Jewish-Christian sphere . . . Werner much exaggerated the role of "angel christology" in early Christianity' (italics in original). Cf. Knight, *Disciples*, 73.²⁰ Discussion of the Apocalypse does not feature in Bakker's important article, 'Christ', on angel christology.²¹ E.g. Fossum, 'Kyrios', with reply by Bauckham, *Jude*, 310–2. Knight (*Disciples*, 91), sees an angel christology in John 8.58 and 12.41; contrast with Dunn,

Cambridge University Press

0521023009 - Jesus and the Angels: Angelology and the Christology of the Apocalypse of John

Peter R. Carrell

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4 Introduction

Excursus to the question of angel christology in the Apocalypse and argues that Apocalypse 1.5 and 14.14 particularly show signs of the influence of angel christology.²² We may also note a dissertation by Brighton,²³ and an article by Gundry,²⁴ both of which will be referred to in chapter 7.

Werner's thesis and the debate it generated did not foreclose the possibility that an alternative approach to the relationship between angelology and christology might prove more acceptable. Daniélou and Longenecker avoided replicating Werner's 'extreme thesis' by arguing for 'angelomorphic christology' as a feature of Jewish Christianity. In this view the development of christology was influenced by the angelology of the OT but not to the point that Christ was designated an angel; rather, this influence led to 'angelomorphic categories' being attributed to Christ.²⁵ As we shall see, the term 'angelomorphic christology' is particularly useful for describing important aspects of the christology of the Apocalypse.²⁶

A starting point

In relation to the Apocalypse the discussion of 'angelomorphic christology' has been principally led in recent times by Christopher Rowland. In our view the best starting point for research into the influence of angelology on the christology of the Apocalypse is an observation made by Rowland in the course of his work on Jewish and Christian apocalypticism, especially in relation to angel and *merkabah* speculations within this phenomenon.²⁷ For Rowland some visions of glorious angels in Jewish apocalyptic writings seem

Christology, 154–8. Bühner (*Gesandte*, 316–433), discerns angelological influence in the background to the christology of the Fourth Gospel; note also Segal, 'Ruler', 258–9. Sanders ('Dissenting') argues for an angelic background to Phil. 2.5–11.

²² Karrer, *Johannesoffenbarung*, 147–9.

²³ Brighton, *Angel*.

²⁴ Gundry, 'Angelomorphic'.

²⁵ Longenecker, *Christology*, 26–32; Daniélou, *Theology*, 117–46; cf. Carr, *Angels*, 143ff.; Fossum, 'Jewish-Christian'.

²⁶ Note most recently Stuckenbruck, 'Refusal'. In this article Stuckenbruck indicates that more extensive treatment of angelomorphic christology in the Apocalypse is given in his forthcoming volume, now published, but not yet sighted by the present author: *Angel Veneration and Christology. A Study in Early Judaism and in the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (WUNT 2.70), Tübingen: Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1995.

²⁷ Rowland, 'Vision', 'Heaven', 'Man'.

Cambridge University Press

0521023009 - Jesus and the Angels: Angelology and the Christology of the Apocalypse of John

Peter R. Carrell

Excerpt

[More information](#)*A starting point*

5

to imply 'some kind of bifurcation in the conception of God', so that, even if the earliest Christians did not think of Christ as an angel, aspects of Jewish angelology may have provided a means for grasping how Christ could be a divine being alongside God.²⁸ Rowland's work is particularly valuable because he develops his thesis with the christophany in Apocalypse 1.13–16 as one focus.

In essence Rowland argues that Ezekiel 1.26–8, 8.2–4, and Daniel 10.5–6 disclose a trend whereby the human form of God (Ezek. 1.26–8) is separated from the divine throne-chariot and functions as 'a quasi-angelic mediator' (Ezek. 8.2–4) similar to the angel in Daniel 10.5–6. On the one hand, the form of the angel in Daniel 10.5–6 appears to have been influenced by Ezekiel, especially the theophany in chapter 1.²⁹ On the other hand, the figure in Ezekiel 8.2–4 may be compared with 'one like a son of man' in Daniel 7.13: both are heavenly figures who are spoken of in 'quasi-divine terms'.³⁰ The divine status of the Danielic son of man figure, according to Rowland, is even more apparent in Daniel 7.13 LXX which speaks of the figure coming 'as the Ancient of Days' rather than 'unto the Ancient of Days'.³¹ The LXX variant was probably responsible for the identification of the risen Jesus with the Ancient of Days in Apocalypse 1.14.³²

A similar explanation may be given for the background to the glorious angel Yahoel in *Apocalypse of Abraham* 10–11 (an apocalypse dating from a similar period to the Apocalypse). This suggests that the developments Rowland adduces were part of a broad tendency in Jewish angelology in which the conception of God is bifurcated: alongside God is another divine figure who acts in God's place with the form and character of God.³³ Thus Rowland has advanced the very important thesis that the appearances of the risen Jesus in Apocalypse 1, and of certain other glorious angels in apocalyptic literature, may be explained in terms of developments in Jewish theology and angelology, in which a glorious angel 'embodied the attributes of the glorious God whom the prophet Ezekiel had seen by the river Chebar'.³⁴

²⁸ As recognized by, e.g., Dunn, *Christology*, xxiv (whence the citation) and Hurtado, *God*, 74.

²⁹ Rowland, 'Vision', 1–5, *Heaven*, 94–101. ³⁰ Rowland, *Heaven*, 97.

³¹ This matter will be examined more closely in chapter 2.

³² Rowland, *Heaven*, 97–8.

³³ 'Bifurcating' is used by Rowland, 'Vision', 2; our explanation in the second part of the sentence draws on Rowland, *Heaven*, 97–8.

³⁴ Rowland, *Heaven*, 103.

Cambridge University Press

0521023009 - Jesus and the Angels: Angelology and the Christology of the
Apocalypse of John

Peter R. Carrell

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6 Introduction

We shall have more to say about Rowland's proposal in subsequent chapters. But at this point it is appropriate to mention briefly several related contributions in the study of angelology and christology. Segal, for example, has examined rabbinic traditions about the (so-called) 'two powers' heresy, in which, contrary to the strict monotheism of rabbinic Judaism, scripture was interpreted 'to say that a principal angelic or hypostatic manifestation in heaven was equivalent to God'.³⁵ The opposition of the rabbis to this heresy is dated by Segal to the second century CE, but with the observation that 'the rabbis' second-century opponents had first-century forebears', such as Philo's talk of a 'second god' and Paul's polemic against angelology in Galatians 3.19–20.³⁶ As far as Segal could discern, an interest in the principal angel or in hypostases which was *heretical* had not developed in the first century CE.³⁷ The interest in the glorious angel Yahoel in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, for example, is 'not clearly heretical'.³⁸

With particular reference to Samaritan religious traditions, Fossum has investigated the origins of the Gnostic demiurge. He attempts to show that the demiurge, as conceived in Gnosticism, was preceded by 'Jewish ideas about the creative agency of the hypostasized divine Name and the Angel of the Lord'.³⁹ An example of such agency is the angel Yahoel.⁴⁰ A named angel represents a shift from the stage when the Angel of the LORD was more or less indistinguishable from God: the Angel of the LORD now has personality and personal existence.⁴¹ According to Fossum this development which envisaged, or at least tended to envisage, another power alongside God predates the Christian era.⁴²

We cannot here develop a detailed criticism of Fossum's work. Nevertheless its importance, which in the present context principally lies in its claim that a 'two powers' belief may have predated the Christian era, requires that we outline a response to his approach. First, Fossum does not substantiate his claim that angels such as Yahoel 'shared God's own . . . nature or mode of being'.⁴³ Secondly, Fossum does not demonstrate that a second power alongside God such as the Angel of the LORD was worshipped in the

³⁵ Segal, *Powers*, 18. ³⁶ Ibid., 260–2. ³⁷ Ibid., 192, 196, 200.

³⁸ Ibid., 196; cf. summary remark in Hurtado, *God*, 32: 'an interest in angelic beings is one thing and the worship of them another'.

³⁹ Fossum, *Name*, v. ⁴⁰ Ibid., 319–21, 333. ⁴¹ Ibid., 337.

⁴² Ibid., 307, 318, 332. ⁴³ Ibid., 333.

Cambridge University Press

0521023009 - Jesus and the Angels: Angelology and the Christology of the Apocalypse of John

Peter R. Carrell

Excerpt

[More information](#)*A starting point*

7

pre-Christian era.⁴⁴ Thirdly, Fossum supports his argument with evidence drawn from periods later than the first century CE. It is always problematic when developments attested in later periods are read back into earlier stages of religious history.⁴⁵

Rowland, Segal, and Fossum, therefore, have explored evidence concerning the shift from strict monotheism to a kind of dualistic or binitarian position in some Jewish circles. Taking the interpretation of the status of the angel Yahoel as something of a yardstick, Segal is least inclined to see heretical developments in the first century CE, Fossum is most inclined, while Rowland sees the potential for heretical development in, perhaps even before, the first century CE.

Not unexpectedly the challenges posed by Rowland and Fossum have drawn a response. Chief among the respondents has been Hurtado who argues that principal angel figures, in common with exalted patriarchs (such as Moses and Enoch), and divine hypostases (such as *Sophia* and the *Logos*), reflect an underlying interest in the concept of 'divine agency'. Hurtado argues that divine agency 'operated within the traditional Jewish concern for the uniqueness of God'.⁴⁶ In other words, Hurtado argues, against Rowland and Fossum, that traditions concerning the chief divine agent involved no 'mutation' in the monotheistic belief and devotional practice of post-exilic Judaism. In particular, Hurtado challenges Rowland's and Fossum's understandings of the significance of Yahoel in *Apocalypse of Abraham* 10–11. The glorious appearance of this angel is not an expression of the belief that the divine Glory had become a personalized divine agent.⁴⁷ Rather, the portrayal of Yahoel is a creative attempt to show 'the visual majesty accorded to the angel chosen by God as his chief agent'.⁴⁸ The majesty of Yahoel is not evidence for 'a bifurcation of the deity'; rather it is a reflection of 'the pattern of ancient imperial regimes [which] required that the figure holding the position of God's vizier should be described in majestic terms'.⁴⁹ Positively, Hurtado advances the hypothesis that the divine agency tradition

⁴⁴ Hurtado, *God*, 38.

⁴⁵ Ibid. An extreme example of this tendency is Fossum's citing in *Name* (329–32) of the Magharian sect's teaching about the Angel of the LORD, which is attested to in tenth- and twelfth-century writings!

⁴⁶ Hurtado, *God*, 38.

⁴⁷ Fossum, *Name*, 319–20; Rowland, *Heaven*, 102–3. Rowland is more hesitant on this matter than Fossum.

⁴⁸ Hurtado, *God*, 88. ⁴⁹ Ibid., 89.

Cambridge University Press

0521023009 - Jesus and the Angels: Angelology and the Christology of the Apocalypse of John

Peter R. Carrell

Excerpt

[More information](#)

8 Introduction

contributed to the development of the earliest christology. Briefly, the exalted Jesus was understood to be the chief divine agent,⁵⁰ but a 'mutation' in belief took place whereby Jesus Christ was included in the devotional thought and practice of the early Christians as 'a second object of devotion alongside God'.⁵¹

Hurtado is not the only critic of Rowland and Fossum,⁵² but he is the one who has responded most fully to their work. At the heart of Hurtado's criticism of Rowland and Fossum, and of his hypothesis concerning the development of christology, lies the importance of worship as a test of doctrine. It is the absence of evidence for the worship of a second 'divine' being (whether hypostasis, angel, or patriarch) which cautions Hurtado against claims such as Fossum's that there were substantial modifications of monotheism in post-exilic Judaism.⁵³ Conversely, it is the worship of Jesus which sets the Christian concept of divine agency on its head compared with its Jewish counterpart.⁵⁴

Hurtado's work has been subjected to a critical review by Rainbow.⁵⁵ The details of this cannot be elucidated here, save to note that Rainbow identifies a class of intermediaries not considered as a separate category by Hurtado, namely, 'eschatological figures in the Bible' (e.g. Enoch). The importance of this category is that a figure manifestly distinct from God (i.e. not a personification), yet conceived of having 'an aureola of deity' (i.e. not a patriarch or angel), could have been considered worthy of worship. Rainbow argues that a separate category is appropriate because 'Hurtado's test of cultic veneration is not applicable to eschatological beings. No one would offer worship to a person who was still awaited in the future.'⁵⁶ Worship might be offered, however, to a person whose followers were convinced he was a now-present eschatological figure. Such conviction could have arisen if Jesus convinced his followers that he would share in the status of the one God as Messiah in the terms set forth in Psalm 110.1 and Daniel 7.13. This would explain the worship of Jesus by the first Christians. But to maintain this hypothesis it would have to be demonstrated that texts such as Matthew 26.64 *par.*, where Psalm 110.1

⁵⁰ Ibid., 93–9. ⁵¹ Ibid., 100, cf. 99–124.⁵² Cf. Dunn, *Christology*, xxiv–xxvi; Karrer, *Johannesoffenbarung*, 143–7; Kim, *Origin*, 244–6.⁵³ Hurtado, *God*, 38; cf. Dunn, *Partings*, 219. ⁵⁴ Hurtado, *God*, 100.⁵⁵ Rainbow, 'Monotheism'. ⁵⁶ Ibid., 88, n. 22.

Cambridge University Press

0521023009 - Jesus and the Angels: Angelology and the Christology of the Apocalypse of John

Peter R. Carrell

Excerpt

[More information](#)*A starting point*

9

and Daniel 7.13 are combined in the words of Jesus at his trial, are historically reliable. A tall order – as Rainbow admits!⁵⁷

When Hurtado emphasizes the importance of worship as a test for developments within or away from monotheism he acknowledges his debt to Bauckham who has examined the worship of Jesus in apocalyptic Christianity, principally in connection with the Apocalypse and the *Ascension of Isaiah*.⁵⁸ Since the worship of Jesus has less significance in an environment with a lax attitude to monotheism, Bauckham first establishes that, at least in the circles represented by the two apocalypses in question, there was a strict adherence to monotheism.⁵⁹ The evidence for this lies principally in the refusal of angels to be worshipped (Apc. 19.10, 22.8; *Asc. Isa.* 7.21, 8.5). With this evidence may be contrasted those passages which explicitly acknowledge Jesus' worthiness to be worshipped (e.g. Apc. 5.8–12; *Asc. Isa.* 9.28–32). In the present context Bauckham's discussion is particularly noteworthy because it involves the interface between angelology and christology, at least with respect to the Apocalypse (and to the *Ascension of Isaiah*). Bauckham argues that there is 'a sharp theological distinction between Christ and angels'.⁶⁰ This distinction is demonstrated in three ways.

First, Christ is worshipped and not the angels. But, secondly, this worship arises from the fact that only Christ is *worthy* to open the scroll. The angels also have a role in the implementation of the divine purposes, but no special worthiness is demanded for this role and no praise results from its fulfilment.⁶¹ Thirdly, this distinction parallels that made in respect of the giving of the revelation. Jesus 'belongs with God as giver, while the angel belongs with John as instrument' in the transmission of the revelation.⁶² Bauckham's work in this area is of great importance for the discussion of the influence of angelology on the christology of the Apocalypse as it unfolds in succeeding chapters.⁶³

All the scholars discussed so far in this section have something to say about monotheism. The work of Rowland and Fossum, for

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 88–90. For a different, but in our opinion unconvincing, set of criticisms of Hurtado see Knight, *Disciples*, 57–109, esp. p. 97.

⁵⁸ Bauckham, 'Worship'; cf. Hurtado, *God*, 38.

⁵⁹ Bauckham, 'Worship', 322–7.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 338, n. 42.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 330.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 329; cf. 330.

⁶³ Stuckenbruck, 'Refusal' offers the most significant response to Bauckham, 'Worship'.

Cambridge University Press

0521023009 - Jesus and the Angels: Angelology and the Christology of the
Apocalypse of John

Peter R. Carrell

Excerpt

[More information](#)

10 Introduction

example, has opened up the possibility that Jewish monotheism before the beginning of Christianity was at least potentially weakened to allow for some kind of binitarian or dualistic position to be held. But recently two scholars have independently promoted the view that, except for a small minority of Jews, strict monotheism *never arrived* in ancient Judaism. That is, the ancient dualism of El and Ba'al/Yahweh never lost its influence through the First and Second Temple periods.

Thus Hayman argues the startling theses that (i) 'it is hardly ever appropriate to use the term monotheism to describe the Jewish idea of God'; (ii) until the philosophers of the Middle Ages there is no discernible progress beyond the basic formulae of Deuteronomy; and (iii) 'Judaism never escapes from the legacy of the battles for supremacy between Yahweh, Ba'al, and El from which it emerged'.⁶⁴ The implications of this view for the development of early christology are obvious: since Jews effectively believed in two gods Christianity was able rapidly to develop 'towards the divinization of Jesus'.⁶⁵ In similar vein, Barker argues that the worldview of the ancient Israelite religion in which the High God had several Sons of God, one of whom was Yahweh, influenced many in first-century Palestine. Since it was believed that Yahweh manifested himself on earth in human or angelic form or as the Davidic king, it '*was as a manifestation of Yahweh, the Son of God, that Jesus was acknowledged as Son of God, Messiah and Lord*'.⁶⁶

But not all recent scholarship has been heading in the direction of Hayman and Barker. We may note, for instance, Casey's vigorous defence of Jewish monotheism as the bedrock from which Christianity was hewn with the aid of a Hellenistic chisel.⁶⁷ The difference between Casey and Barker, for example, is neatly illustrated in their differing responses to Philo's talk of the *Logos* as 'a second god' (*Quaest. in Gn.* ii.62). For Casey this 'indicates that the theoretical limit of Jewish monotheism may appear to be breached by an occasional sentence'.⁶⁸ Barker, by contrast, citing *Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesim* ii.62, states that 'Philo is quite clear what he meant by *Logos*; he was describing a second

⁶⁴ Hayman, 'Monotheism', 2. ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.⁶⁶ Barker, *Angel*, 3 (the italics are Barker's). On heterodox Judaism before the Christian era see also Quispel, 'Ezekiel'.⁶⁷ Casey, *Jewish*.⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 85; cf. Dunn, *Christology*, 220–8. For an unequivocal statement of the oneness of God in Philo see *Leg. All.* iii.81.