

## **THE MESSIAH IN THE FIRST CENTURY: A REVIEW ARTICLE**

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In October 1987 an international symposium was held at Princeton Theological Seminary on the general topic of "Judaism and Christian Origins" and with the specific theme of messianism. The papers arising from the conference have now been published under the editorship of James H. Charlesworth, who also acted as chairman of the steering committee for the conference.<sup>1</sup> The result is a major collection of essays by a distinguished group of scholars from several countries. It is therefore a significant volume in terms of both its topic and the contributors.

The book can be assessed from two angles. First, it can be seen as a set of scholarly essays offering research on important aspects of the topic of messiahship in the first century. Some of the essays deal with messianism in the narrower sense, that is, the use of the term Messiah and the associated concept of a royal or priestly Messiah in Judaism and in early Christianity. Other essays are concerned with issues that are messianic in a broader sense, such as the Son of Man. It is very important to see the narrower concept within the context of the broader one.<sup>2</sup> However, where essays in this book deal with the broader concept in a way that is not too closely related to the more specific topic, we shall pass over them fairly briefly in this review.

<sup>1</sup> *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity: The First Princeton Symposium on Judaism and Christian Origins*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. D. G. Dunn, 381.

Second, the book can also be seen as a *plaidoyer* for a particular view of Jewish messianism. Charlesworth sets out the view which it is the agenda of the book to attack: "that there was a set concept of the Messiah, and that the Jews were looking for the coming of the Messiah who would save God's people" (4 ["Jews" should be glossed to refer to "all/most Jews"]). Or again, "there is a deeply seated and widely assumed contention that the Jews during the time of Jesus were expecting a Messiah, and that they had some agreement on the basic functions he would perform" (6). It is then possible to see how Jesus fitted into this pattern, with many scholars claiming that he accepted the role of messiah but proceeded to alter the concept in various ways. The counter-thesis is that not all Jews were looking for the Messiah and those who did were not looking for the same kind of person. It follows that there was no one pattern which Jesus could have fitted and that his disciples could not have seen him as fulfilling this pattern.

The form and thrust of the book are very similar to those of another recent publication,<sup>3</sup> which is likewise concerned to document the variety in Jewish thought and contains contributions by some of the same contributors (B. L. Mack, S. Talmon, and J. H. Charlesworth, who thinks that the book "should help to turn the tide of understanding regarding messianism"). The two books need to be read in conjunction with each other since both are attempts to defend this consensus.<sup>4</sup>

### *Overview*

The heart of the book is a set of twenty-four papers (if we exclude for the moment the introduction by Charlesworth himself). They are divided into five groups: (1) Messianic Ideas and the Hebrew Scriptures; (2) Messianology in Early Judaism and Early Rabbinics; (3) "Messianism" in Social Contexts and in Philo; (4) "The Messiah" and Jesus of Nazareth; and (5) "The Messiah; "the Christ" and the New Testament. This division is arbitrary and artificial in places (How do "social contexts" and Philo form a coherent group? How do sections 4 and 5 differ from one another?). Since we are primarily interested in messianism and the relationship between Judaism and early Christianity, we shall follow a different division, first of all separating off those essays which are of little relevance to this particular theme.

<sup>3</sup> J. Neusner, W. S. Green, and E. Frerichs, eds., *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> In particular, see Charlesworth's essay, "From Jewish Messianology to Christian Christology: Some Caveats and Perspectives" (225-64) for an important complement to his presentation here. The book as a whole discusses the same areas of Judaism (Enoch; 1 and 2 Maccabees; the Maccabean period generally; Qumran; Philo; 4 Ezra; and the Mishnah).

A. *Related Issues*

A. F. Segal offers one of the lengthiest essays in the book on "Conversion and Messianism: Outline for a New Approach" (296-340). I regretfully forbear to comment on this fascinating account which is especially significant for the study of Paul, for it is really concerned with conversion in Judaism and in early Christianity and is not germane to the origins of messianism.

J. G. Heintz provides "A Thematic and Iconographical Approach" to "Royal Traits and Messianic Figures" (52-66) which is of specialized interest to OT scholars.

J. Priest provides an extremely useful summary for those interested in the topic in "A Note on the Messianic Banquet" (222-38), gathering information and references that are not easily accessible elsewhere.

The article by B. M. Bokser on "Messianism, the Exodus Pattern, and Early Rabbinic Judaism" (239-58) is concerned with the development of Jewish thought in the post-NT period and does not really affect our understanding of the earlier period which is more our concern.

Of a rather different character from the rest of the book is the contribution by R. G. Hamerton-Kelly, "Sacred Violence and the Messiah: The Markan Passion Narrative as a Redefinition of Messianology" (461-93). This is concerned with a theory about violence based on anthropology, and it is involved with theories propounded by R. Girard and B. Mack. Since it falls outside the specific area of Messianism, I leave it to one side, although again it deals with a highly significant topic.<sup>5</sup>

B. *The Son of Man*

Two papers are concerned specifically with the Son of Man and stand apart from the discussion of the Anointed One, which is the main theme of the book.

The first is by E. H. Borsch who offers "Further Reflections on 'The Son of Man': The Origins and Development of the Title" (130-44). He gives a good, brief summary of the course of recent study from the Bultmann-Fuller-Hahn consensus to the Vermes-Gasey-Lindars type of view. One quotation is interesting: "By the two toughest standards of 'authenticity' with respect to the traditions (dissimilarity and multiple attestation), the Son of Man usage has much better than a prima facie case for being taken seriously" (136). He then returns to his earlier suggestion of influences from traditions within "a baptizing sectarianism in the Palestine of Jesus' time" and suggests various avenues that deserve

<sup>5</sup> Among recent contributions to this area of discussion, see B. D. Chilton, *The Temple of Jesus: His Sacrificial Program Within a Cultural History of Sacrifice* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992).

to be followed up. Sociological investigations are needed as to why there are parallels between sayings about the Son of Man and those about early Christian wandering disciples. Was the Jesus-movement related to this sectarianism? What is the place of 1 Enoch? Is the pattern in Phil 2:6-11 with its Adamic typology related to the humbling and vindication of the Son of Man? Why are there parallels between the Synoptic and Johannine Sons of Man but framed in quite distinctive language? What is the significance of the persecution-vindication pattern? How do we deal with Luke 12:8f.? (Here Borsch comments "I frankly find it difficult to hear a speaker referring to himself by different means in the same sentence" despite his earlier suggestion of a possible modern example: "A man can't work miracles. What do you expect of me?"). All of these are suggestions for further work rather than hypothesis--as well as reminder that the author's earlier magnum opus on the Son of Man should not be forgotten!<sup>6</sup>

A. Y. Collins considers "The 'Son of Man' Tradition and the Book of Revelation" (536-68) and argues that Revelation bears witness to a very early form of the tradition, post-resurrection but earlier than the formation of "Q." This is an important piece of research, but it is tied in to a hypothesis concerning Jesus' own view of the Son of man which would find it very difficult to share, namely that Jesus thought of the Son of man as a heavenly being, possibly an angel, but with whom he did not identify himself.

### *C. The Old Testament and Judaism*

J. J. M. Roberts discusses "The Old Testament's Contribution to Messianic Expectations" (39-51). This is a helpful review which lists the material and discusses it in a fairly standard, critical manner. The conclusions reached are: 1.) The term "messiah" nowhere has a technical sense as an eschatological title. 2.) The hope of a "new David" is of a continuing line rather than of one final ruler, although some passages were open to the latter interpretation. 3.) Mythological language, drawn from royal protocol, gave a basis for the later development of more mythological conceptions of the Messiah. 4.) Jeremiah 33 and Zechariah provide the basis for the later hope of a priestly Messiah. 5.) Malachi provided the catalyst for speculation about the coming of future prophetic figures. There are interesting points here that deserve discussion.

P. D. Hanson looks very briefly at "Messiahs and Messianic Figures in Proto-Apocalypticism" (67-75) in an attempt to illumine their background in a situation of strife and tension.

<sup>6</sup> Namely, E. H. Borsch, *The Son of Man in Myth and History* (London: SCM Press, 1967).

Moving out of the Scriptures into Judaism, we start with a lengthy contribution by S. Talmon on "The Concepts of *MASIAH* and Messianism in Early Judaism" (79-115). Talmon is not easy going, but he appears to be arguing that the messianic idea is to be seen primarily in a historical setting in relation to the biblical institution of kingship; it has down-to-earth political connotations and should not be over-theologized. He sees three stages in the development of the messianic idea: historical realism in the monarchical period, conceptualization in the Second Temple Period, and idealization after 70 C.E. The Kingdom is oriented towards space--the nation-state of biblical Israel--but messianism stands within a temporal frame of reference and thus moves away towards universalism. Neither the Pseudepigrapha nor the Samaritan literature fit into this framework.

In line with a current trend which he himself has done much to foster, Talmon traces a utopian and a restorative messianism in the Scriptures and sees these two trends as significant for the further development. He is especially interested in the Qumran texts with their collegiate Messiahs. Here again he finds his twin conceptions. He reminds us that in reality few Jewish texts from the turn of the era mention the expectation of a Messiah at all. He adopts the disputed view that he is a purely human figure. The vision remained realistic, couched in terms of a return to the past.

The Dead Sea Scrolls are also discussed by L. H. Schiffman ("Messianic Figures and Ideas in the Qumran Scrolls; 116-29). He finds a variety of beliefs expressed, which may point to a historical development or to parallel approaches or, as he favors, to a combination of the two. He picks up the bifurcation detected by Talmon and also by G. Scholem between the utopian and the restorative approaches. Some Qumran texts look toward a Davidic Messiah in a restorative fashion. Other more utopian or apocalyptic passages tend to look to a priestly leader accompanied by a temporal leader.

"The Messianism of the Parables of Enoch: Their Date and Contribution to Christological Origins" is the theme taken by M. Black (145-68). He restates his thesis of the apotheosis of the Elect Son of Man: "The most significant theological result, however, of the discussion of this composite Elect Son of Man Messiah in the Parables is the recognition of the implications of his elevation to a place next to the Lord of spirits, to be seated as eschatological Judge on a judgment throne. Such an exaltation amounts, in effect, to apotheosis, similar to what I have sought to maintain for 'the one like a son of man' = 'the saints of the Most High' in Daniel, except that in Daniel the 'one like a son of man' is a symbol only, a cipher for Israel or the 'redeemed Israel,' the Remnant, whereas, the Son of Man in the Parables is both

transcendental Messiah, as well as symbol of the new Israel, the Elect One as head of the elect, but also as a cipher for the elect Israel" (161). Finally, Black discusses the date of the Parables and their possible influence on the NT. In the light of this he comments: "it is by no means inconceivable that the tradition of Enoch as the Son of Man, preserved in the Parables, was also known to Jesus of Nazareth, and similarly interpreted and applied by him to his own role in his mission as a prophet of the coming Kingdom--not in terms of an Enoch redivivus Son of Man-Messiah, but as an Enoch--like apocalyptic teacher and prophet adopting and adapting the classic Enoch tradition to the Son of Man's futurist role as eschatological Judge, but first to his earthly ministry as the Servant of the Lord" (167).

A further discussion of "Righteous One, Messiah, Chosen One, and Son of Man in 1 Enoch 37-71" follows from J. C. Vanderkam (169-91). He gives a careful survey of four phrases used here--Righteous One (1 Enoch 47:1,4), Anointed One (1 Enoch 48:10; 52:4), Chosen One (some 16-17 times) and Son of Man (16 times). The Son of Man was the object of pre-mundane election, but this does not require that he was pre-existent; hence there is no difficulty in the identification of Enoch as the Son of Man in 71:14. The four terms used are based on biblical motifs (Daniel and 2 Isaiah): "The description of Enoch in 1 Enoch 14 would have suggested a connection with the one like a son of man in Daniel 4 and the traits shared by the servant of the Lord and this one in human likeness could easily have induced the writer to combine them" (191).

D. Mendels writes on "Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities*, the 'Fourth Philosophy,' and the Political Messianism of the First Century C.E." (261-75). His main concern is to analyze Pseudo-Philo and show that it is directed against the messianism of the Zealots and Sicarii. Its author had messianic hopes but was opposed to a messiah in the present and rejected the outlook of the sectarian, guerrilla groups.

Mendels relates his discussion to some different views of what was going on in the first century. On the one hand, M. Hengel held that there was a common front against the Romans and a common messianic vision in the first century C.E. On the other hand, other scholars argue for the existence of separate groups, few of which, if any, had a messianic ideology. A special position is occupied by R. A. Horsley who thinks that local messianic groups arose around various pretenders (Athronges, Simeon, Menachem). Mendels notes that Josephus plays down first-century messianism. The inspiration for messianism was largely in terms of a Davidic figure, but it was possible to look for a future Davidic messiah and reject the "local" messiahs who had no plausible relation to the Davidic line.

He is immediately followed by R. A. Horsley (" 'Messianic' Figures and Movements in First-Century Palestine," 279-95). He is strongly critical of the way in which Christians have used the Zealots or nationalists as a violent foil to the peaceable Jesus. Rather, there are two traditions of messianic figures. There were popularly elected or approved kings (like Saul) who formed the inspiration for the first-century "kings" who led freedom movements against the Romans. There was also the Davidic tradition of imperial kingship which could easily become the means of oppression of the people. Popular messianism was opposed to this monolithic imperialism (as practiced by Rome). For Horsley it is ironic that the Christians cast the imperialist mantle on Jesus and eventually legitimated the domination of Christianity as the imperial state religion.

Finally, we come to P. Borgen, "'There shall come forth a man': Reflections on Messianic Ideas in Philo" (341-61). This essay is concerned to show that Philo looked forward to the realization of the universal features of the kingship which he associated with the role of Moses; nevertheless, what this really pointed to was "the eschatological role of the Jewish nation as being the head of all nations."

#### D. *Christian Beginnings*

The remaining essays are devoted to Christian beginnings. We start with a characteristically positive essay by J. D. G. Dunn ("Messianic Ideas and their Influence on the Jesus of History," 365-81). He argues that Jesus was influenced by current messianic ideas; he had to take account of the current view of the royal messiah, but he did not find it helpful and "may have attempted to redefine the content of the title in terms of the role he saw himself as filling" (376).<sup>7</sup> Dunn emphasizes how much Jesus himself moulded the messianic concept by his own teaching and activity. He also, incidentally, makes the very important point that to concentrate on messianic influences on Jesus is one-sided and refers to Jesus' unusual authority and sense of intimate sonship as highly important elements in the roots of his self-understanding.

N. A. Dahl ("Messianic Ideas and the Crucifixion of Jesus," 382-403) reaffirms his earlier thesis that "the crucifixion of Jesus caused a radical alteration of the concept 'Messiah.'"<sup>8</sup> He asks why the "prophet from Nazareth" was crucified by the Romans but nevertheless after his death proclaimed by his disciples as the Messiah. He reaffirms that

<sup>7</sup> In view of Dunn's acceptance of this position, it is hard to see why Charlesworth is so scathing of it with reference to G. E. Ladd's statement of a very similar position (7),

<sup>8</sup> P. 383. The reference is to his 1960 article "Der gekreuzigte Messias," reprinted in English in *Jesus the Christ* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 27-47.

“the resurrection experiences would not have led the disciples to affirm that Jesus was the promised Messiah unless he had been crucified as an alleged royal Messiah.” The term Messiah/Christ is largely absent from the sayings collections, and this confirms that it belongs inseparably to the crucifixion in early Christian tradition. Dahl raises questions about the complicated relationship between the titular and nominal uses of Christ. It is unfortunate that his essay is more a series of observations than a connected, coherent argument.

D. E. Aune (“Christian Prophecy and the Messianic Status of Jesus,” 404-22) wrestles with the interesting problem that in the letters in the NT (except 1 John 2:22; 5:1) the messiahship of Jesus is something that is assumed, whereas in the Gospels and Acts it is a matter for discussion. He asks whether the recognition of Jesus' status was “legitimated by prophetic speech or prophetic visions by early Christians during the period ca. 30-50 C.E.” (407). He notes that normally a king was marked by having been anointed, but that W. C. van Unnik argued that for Christians the mark of messiahship was possession of the Spirit of God. Thus the meaning of the term when applied to Jesus was determined essentially by Christian conceptions. He then discusses the use of oracles to legitimate kings. Various oracular legitimations of Jesus occur in the Gospels, but these are judged to be “literary dramatizations” of the status of Jesus rather than historical events. Aune then explores the thesis that behind Mark 14:62 and Acts 7: 55f. (cf. Rev 1:14-16) lies a vision by a Christian prophet concerned with the status of Jesus as the exalted and enthroned Son of Man. The proposal is speculative, as Aune admits, but it is significant that the role of visions in early Christianity is taken so seriously.

M. Hengel (“Christological Titles in Early Christianity,” 425-48) discusses a number of christological hymns and argues from them that early Christian christological thinking “was much more unified in its basic structure than New Testament research, in part at least, has maintained” (443). He holds that “Christ” figures as a title—“the Messiah died for our sins” in the formula in 1 Cor 15:3-5. “Son of Man” is regarded as a cypher rather than a title; the resurrection appearances confirmed the identity of Jesus as the heavenly Son of Man and led to his being recognized as the Son of God. The development of a high christology was completed within about 15 years.

D. H. Juel tackles “The Origin of Mark's Christology” (449-60) and offers a very traditional interpretation which finds the answer in the history of Jesus of Nazareth. In an interesting appendix he states that he found the conference largely confirmatory of his position, although he feels that many of the participants did not draw similar conclusions to his own. Rather “christology cannot be explained solely on the basis

of the history of ideas. There is no 'trajectory' within postbiblical Judaism that can account for the widespread confession of Jesus as the Christ" (460). Juel thus places himself firmly beside Dahl.

B. L. Mack in "The Christ and Jewish Wisdom" (192-221) proposes a very different approach in that he argues that Jesus himself was (merely?) a teacher in the wisdom tradition.<sup>9</sup> The understanding of him as prophet and the use of the "Son of man" figure arose in the secondary stages of the development of the Q tradition by his followers, and "high christology" was first developed by Mark. Meanwhile a "Christ cult" developed elsewhere, using a wisdom myth and hence kingly imagery for Jesus. Mark then took what he wanted from the Christ cult and added it to the Jesus traditions in order to justify the Jesus movement to which he belonged. Thus on this view we are offered an alternative to the usual apocalyptic hypothesis of Christian beginnings. It all began with "an uncommon sage."

The assessment of this hypothesis need not be taken up in this present context, since it has nothing to do with the nature of Jewish messianism and its influence on Christianity; it contends for a different strand of influence altogether. It rests on a thoroughly skeptical reading of the Gospels so far as their historicity is concerned. Its basis in a misinterpretation of the Q material, analyzing it into successive strata with different christologies, is sharply criticized in a monograph by E. P. Meadors.<sup>10</sup>

W D. Davies, co-author of the major commentary on Matthew in the ICC series, discusses "The Jewish Sources of Matthew's Messianism" (494-511). He sees various elements coming together: the coming about of a new creation in Jesus; Davidic kingship ideology; the greater Moses who works a new exodus and brings a new law; an Abrahamic strand. He thinks that the suffering motif is connected with Moses. He notes that Matthew has selected out of the variety of interpretation in Judaism, discarding what he did not want--the political territoriality and the priestly elements.

And, finally, H. Anderson explores "The Jewish Antecedents of the Christology in Hebrews" (512-35) in an essay that can be profitably compared with L. D. Hurst's book, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: Its Background of Thought*.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Cf. his contribution, "Wisdom Makes a Difference: Alternatives to 'Messianic' Configurations," in J. Neusner (et al.), *Judaisms*, 15-48.

<sup>10</sup> See E. P. Meadors, *Jesus the Herald of Salvation: A Study of Q and Mark* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck]) 1995; also "The Orthodoxy of the 'Q' Sayings of Jesus" *Tyn Bul* 43:2 (Nov. 1992) 235-57.

<sup>11</sup> Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

*Assessment*

Years ago the distinguished German Christian, Pastor Martin Niemöller, paid a visit to Aberdeen and gave a memorable address in which he told us of various episodes in his remarkable life story. At the conclusion of the address another guest, who, if I remember correctly, was a prominent figure in the World Council of Churches, gave a vote of thanks in which he summed up what the speaker had said in terms of the church and ecumenism. Even to my youthful and untutored mind it was obvious that he had an axe to grind, and as a result had very considerably shifted the focus of a sermon which had been concerned with the person of Jesus as Savior and Lord.

From the Introduction it becomes plain that the editor of this volume too has an axe to grind, and a key question is whether the rest of the contributors belong to the same axe-grinding fraternity. Charlesworth seeks to establish the existence of a consensus among the participants on a number of key issues and refers to a plenary session at the conference which endeavored to formulate some agreed positions. The general thrust of this consensus will emerge by quoting some sections of the Introduction ("From Messianology to Christology: Problems and Prospects," 3-35). Charlesworth rightly begins with definitions, and uses "messiah" to denote "God's eschatological Anointed One, the Messiah"; "messianic" is used to refer to "images, symbols or concepts either explicitly or implicitly linked to ideas about the Messiah." The helpful distinction which others (like F. Neugebauer) have made between messianology (Jewish ideas or beliefs about the Messiah) and christology (reflection on Jesus as the Christ) is also accepted.<sup>12</sup>

Charlesworth then offers a list of conclusions which in his view represent a consensus among "leading specialists" both Jewish and Christian today.<sup>13</sup> They are:

1. The term "Messiah" simply does not appear in the Hebrew Scriptures. . . Of course, the title "the Anointed One" denotes in the Hebrew Scriptures. . . a prophet, a priest, and especially a king.

<sup>12</sup> Charlesworth claims (J. Neusner [et al.], *Judaisms* 225) that he created the neologism "Messianology." He seems to be unaware of F. Neugebauer, "Die Davidsohnfrage (Mark xii. 35-7 parr.) und der Menschensohn," NTS 21 (1974-75) 81-90, who also uses the term ("Messianologie").

<sup>13</sup> It is unfortunate that the book tends to give the impression that there is something wrong with scholars who differ from the editor on these points. I take strong exception to the patronizing comment on an opinion with which the writer disagrees: "The quotation is from. . . (he) is a gifted scholar; his research is usually outstanding and precise" (19 n. 50). This kind of condescending remark is out of place.

2. The Hebrew Scriptures. . . certainly do contain some extremely important passages that were implicitly messianic, such as Psalm 2; 2 Samuel 7; Isaiah 7, 9, and 11; Zechariah 9; and Dan 9:26. These passages may be defined as "messianic" so long as this adjective is not used to denote the prediction of an apocalyptic, eschatological "Messiah."
3. These scriptures were interpreted with precisely this messianic connotation by Jews during the two centuries before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 C.E.
4. The noun, term, or title "the Messiah" appears rarely in the literature of Early Judaism or from roughly 250 B.C.E. to 200 C.E. But it is also true that in the whole history of Israel and Pre-Rabbinic Judaism "the Messiah" appears with unusual frequency and urgency only during this period, especially from the first century B.C.E. to 135 C.E.
5. Jesus' sayings reveal that his message was not about the coming of the Messiah. His preaching focused on the coming of God's Kingdom, not the kingdom of the Messiah.
6. Jesus never proclaimed himself to be the Messiah. He apparently rejected Peter's confession that he (Jesus) was the Christ, as satanic, because he did not wish for his mission and message to be judged according to human concepts of the messiah.
7. The disciples are never portrayed as asking Jesus for his views about the Messiah. Before his crucifixion in 30 C.E. they were apparently not preoccupied with speculations about the coming of the Messiah. It is far from clear what term they would have chosen to categorize him.
8. In the early Palestinian Jesus Movement, according to Acts 3:20, and in Paul's letters, "Christ" is a proper name for Jesus of Nazareth. In the Gospels it is a proper name or title (Matt 1:1; Mark 1:1; Luke 2:11; John 1:17).<sup>14</sup>

This list should be read in conjunction with what appears to be a list of resolutions agreed unanimously by members of the symposium:

- [1.] The term and the title "Messiah" in the Hebrew Bible refers to a present, political and religious leader who is appointed by God. It was applied predominantly to a king, but also to a priest, and occasionally to a prophet.
- [2.] There was no single, discernible role description for a "Messiah" into which a historical figure like Jesus could be fit (sic). Rather, each group which entertained a messianic hope interpreted

<sup>14</sup> Charlesworth, *Messiah*, 11f.

"Messiah" in light of its historical experiences and reinterpreted Scripture accordingly:

- [3.] It is inappropriate to speak of a single normative stream of Judaism in the postexilic period or throughout the period of the Second Temple. Diverse interpretations of common traditions were entertained by different groups.<sup>15</sup>

Read carefully, it would seem that these three statements do not go as far as the eight theorems that Charlesworth enunciates. We should not therefore assume that the scholars present would necessarily share his position in every detail. For example, the essay by J. D. G. Dunn summarized above appears to take a somewhat different line.

We may begin with a methodological point. Charlesworth asserts that the only sources we have for the ideas of Jews in Palestine before A.D. 70 are their writings, which he then surveys. Contrast this remarkable statement by A. F. Segal:

In violation of the usual scholarly methods, I would like to use Christian documents to explore larger issues within the Jewish community. After all, rabbinic Judaism has left us documents of uncertain origins in oral tradition from the third century and later, while the New Testament, while also having oral roots, was in written form by the beginning of the second century. *The New Testament is hence much better evidence for the history of Judaism than is rabbinic Judaism for the origins of Christianity*(299, my italics).

Granted that this statement is about rabbinic Judaism and not about earlier Jewish literature, one may still ask why it is assumed by so many scholars that the NT is no guide, or a thoroughly unreliable guide, to at least some aspects of first-century Judaism. It is interesting that it takes a Jewish scholar to say this!

We can now make some comments on this set of "agreed beliefs."

1. In the first statement the term "the Messiah" is defined as "God's eschatological Anointed One." Now of course the Hebrew term "the anointed one" appears in the Hebrew Scriptures. Charlesworth evidently wants to distinguish in English between "the Anointed One" and "the Messiah" as two different references of the same Hebrew phrase. It is generally agreed that the use of the term with an eschatological reference (i.e. to refer to a future figure) is not found (cf. 39-41).

But this generally accepted statement may be in need of some modification. In a significant essay, J. L. Mays has argued for a messianic understanding of certain of the Psalms.<sup>16</sup> He achieves this, if I un-

<sup>15</sup> Charlesworth, *Messiah*, xv.

<sup>16</sup> J. L. Mays, "'In a Vision': The Portrayal of the Messiah in the Psalms," *Ex Auditu* 7 (1991) 1-8. The whole of this issue was devoted to papers on "Christology and

derstand him correctly, by arguing that we are to see the Psalms as part of the Scriptures. He recognizes the validity of the form-critical and cult-functional research methods in studying the Psalms, but wishes to go on to a further stage of investigation. "In their transmission and shaping and collection as items in the Book of Psalms, they with all the other poetry of the Psalms 'ascended' into another genre. They became Scripture, texts whose hermeneutical context is the literary scope of the book in which they stand and the other books of Israel's Scriptures. It is in this identity that they "worked" in relation to Jesus and the community in which the New Testament was written." The significance of this statement is that as a canonical collection the Psalms existed by the time of Jesus in a form in which they were interpreted messianically, even if the original reference had been to the existing ruler of the people (or an immediate successor). It is, therefore, legitimate to claim that there was a use of the actual phrase "the Anointed One" in the Scriptures to refer to the Messiah as a future, eschatological figure. If we regard the final editing and collection of the Psalms as part of the process of composition of the Scriptures rather than as part of a subsequent process of interpretation, then Mays' verdict and approach are fully justified. On this basis Mays develops the messianic significance of Psalms 2, 8, 18, 72, 89, 110 and 132.

2. Charlesworth allows that some passages were "implicitly messianic," but says that they did not predict "an apocalyptic, eschatological 'Messiah.'" It is not clear what he means by "implicitly" in this context. He wants to rule out the idea that an OT writer literally predicted the Messiah, and to say that some passages could be read by later post-biblical authors as being true of the Messiah (on the grounds that whatever was true of an earthly king would a fortiori be true of the Messiah?) What, then, does Charlesworth make of the passage cited later by Roberts which "do in fact envision a future ruler not yet on the scene"? Even if some of these may envisage a future line of rulers described in the magnificent language of royal protocol ("He will endure as long as the sun. . .," Ps 72:5) rather than a single final ruler, the hope of a future ruler raised up by God is still present.

3. Charlesworth's third point may perhaps be linked with what Mays was saying. However, there may be a significant difference: what Mays was doing was to say that the messianic interpretation was *part of the text*--the canonized meaning, whereas Charlesworth appears to be saying that it was a separate tradition of interpretation to be traced in post-biblical sources. For Mays the point seems to be

that the messianic interpretation was in fact the meaning of the text at the point of collection and canonization of the Psalms.

4. There can of course be no quarrel with point four. Writing in 1976, on the basis of the important article by M. de Jonge, I made the same point.<sup>17</sup> However, it is important to observe that Charlesworth is in danger of confining attention to the actual use of the term, whereas the concept may often be present without the use of the term. He discusses "only documents that actually contain the noun 'Messiah' or 'Christ'" (17) in order to avoid confusion. Granted the need to be precise, it still must be emphasized that there is here a danger of drawing conclusions about the concept purely from the use of the word "Messiah," both in the OT and in Jewish literature. A passage can be in the fullest sense messianic in that it is about "God's eschatological Anointed One" even though the actual word is not used.

What is extremely difficult to establish is just how far "the Jews" held messianic expectations or indeed expectations of any kind of intervention by God in their earthly life. It has to be remembered that the amount of literature which has survived is limited and much of it is linked to individual groups. We are also dealing with a society in which oral teaching and tradition were highly significant, and in the nature of things such teaching has not survived in any systematic kind of way. Nor do we know much about how the mass of the people thought, just as is the case with the mass of ancient peoples. We can-to be sure-choose to ignore the occasional hints given by some first-century writers (Luke 2:25,38; 23:51; cf. also D. Mendels, 263).

All this means that generalizations about "the Jews" are fraught with danger. The trouble is that it is much easier to make general statements than to provide all the hedging qualifications that we should offer (evangelists find it easier to say "The Bible says that. . ." than "There are some passages in the Bible which say, more or less, that. . .").

Charlesworth's interpretation of the evidence is open to some doubt: The Samaritans did expect a "prophet like Moses," the belief which later developed into the coming of the "Taheb; but the evidence is not all as late as is suggested: John 4:25 should be taken seriously.<sup>18</sup> It is well-known that Josephus probably played down first-century messianism (D. Mendels, 261), although the significance of this is debatable (cf. R A. Horsley's essay which argues that the terms "Messiah" and "messianic" are not helpful in the discussion of Second Temple

<sup>17</sup> *The Origins of New Testament Christology* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1976) 84.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. H. G. M. Williamson in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, J. Green, S. McKnight, and I. H. Marshall, eds. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993) 724-28.

Judaism). A somewhat more optimistic view of the value of the Targums for first-century Jewish belief is held by B. D. Chilton,<sup>19</sup> and a sweeping rejection of them is hardly justified. The almost complete absence of messianology from the Mishnah (but see B. M. Bokser's essay) is explicable in a work that is essentially legal in its genre. Charlesworth's discussion of the Pseudepigrapha is flawed by his exclusion of material that possibly reflects messianic beliefs but does not use the actual word. His discussion of the Dead Sea Scrolls rightly recognizes the development and diversity present, but again tends to play down the significance of their location.

The question is whether these comments merely affect details in the presentation or suggest that the thesis needs serious modification. My view is that there is sufficient evidence to show that the concept of a Messiah did exist and was more widespread than Charlesworth allows. It is not surprising if there was vagueness about his nature and functions. What needs explanation is the similarities as well as the differences between the various forms of Jewish expectation. Moreover, there is the question posed by Charlesworth: "If most Jews were not looking for the coming of the 'Messiah,' and if Jesus' life and teachings were not parallel to those often or sometimes attributed to the coming of 'the Messiah' or 'the Christ; then why, how, and when did Jesus' earliest followers contend that he was so clearly the promised Messiah that the title 'Christ' became his proper name by at least 40 C.E. or ten years after the crucifixion?" (10). Perhaps this question is indeed the Achilles' heel of the case. Can the rise of Christian messianic interpretation of Jesus be adequately explained apart from the existence of a Jewish expectation? It may be suggested that the major weakness of this book is precisely that it offers no credible solution to this problem.<sup>20</sup> The contributions by J. D. G. Dunn and D. H. Juel both tend to assume the existence of messianic ideas as part of the equation while emphasizing rightly that it was the creative effects of the career and teaching of Jesus himself, as understood by his followers, which led to the prominence of messiahship and the new understanding of it that arose in early Christianity. Perhaps also one should pursue the hints offered by N. A. Dahl that Jesus and the early Christians went back to Scripture itself rather than to current Jewish ideas for their messianism and christology.

<sup>19</sup> *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 800-804.

<sup>20</sup> Charlesworth raises the question more fully in his contribution to J. Neusner (et al.) *Judaisms*, 251-54; here he is more hospitable to the existence and influence of "deep and variegated beliefs regarding the Messiah in which were "part of the first-century Palestine Jewish Zeitgeistn He goes on, however, to deny that Jesus or the early Christians thought of him as Messiah.

5. Point five makes a false distinction between focus on the Kingdom of God and the general content of the message of Jesus, as if focusing on the Kingdom excluded any reference to the coming of the Messiah. There is no real doubt that the focus of Jesus' message was the Kingdom of God. But if the Kingdom were to be inaugurated or ruled on God's behalf by his Agent, then there would be nothing surprising in references to the Messiah alongside references to the Kingdom. Where God's Kingdom is associated with the coming of a Messiah, there is no need to refer to it as the Kingdom of the Messiah, although this expression did come into use in early Christianity. There is a danger of establishing false alternatives here.

6. It is true that Jesus did not *proclaim* himself as the Messiah (although we should not overlook John 4:25f.). But this by no means excludes the possibility that (if he accepted this role) he could have indicated it to his disciples in ways less explicit than proclamation. In particular, the view that he rejected Peter's confession as satanic rests on an exegesis of the passage in Mark 8 which has not found support among recent commentators.<sup>21</sup> How Charlesworth can uphold this discredited theory as part of a consensus is hard to see.<sup>22</sup>

7. But why should the disciples have asked Jesus for his view about the Messiah? On the whole, they are not portrayed as asking him about anything, except for explanations of what he has just said. The fact that the Gospels contain nothing comparable with the "Who is this 'Son of Man'?" (John 12:34) in respect of "the Messiah" may indicate that they did have some understanding of what the term might connote.

8. It is true that "Christ" appears as a proper name for Jesus in much of the NT. What Charlesworth does not pursue is the question (see point four immediately above) of how and why it came to be used in this way. Somewhere the statement is made that "Christ" was not a confessional title like "Lord," but this is mistaken (cf. M. Hengel, 444-46). The evidence clearly shows that "Jesus is the Christ" and "the

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, M. D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to St Mark* (London: A. and C. Black, 1991) 202f.; J. Gnilka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (Zurich: Benzinger/Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1979) II. 18, likewise rejects this view of the passage; he regards the confession by Peter as post-Easter, but insists that Jesus had a messianic self-consciousness. Cf. also R Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium* (Freiburg: Herder, 1977) II. 34f. The position taken by D. Luhrmann, *Das Markusevangelium* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1987) 144f. is anything but clear, but even so he does not accept the hypothesis that originally 8:33 was a response to 8:29 by Jesus.

<sup>22</sup> It should, however, be made clear that elsewhere Charlesworth has committed himself quite explicitly to the statements that "some messianic self-understanding may well have been part of (Jesus') self-understanding" and that "he thought of himself as a son and perhaps... as God's son" (*Jesus Within Judaism: New Light from Exciting Archaeological Discoveries* (London: SPCK, 1989) 155, 152.

Christ is Jesus" were two forms of statement that arose in the early church.<sup>23</sup> We have evidence for the two statements "the Christ is Jesus" (Acts 18:5, 28) and "Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 2:36; 17:3; 1 John 2:22; 5:1). From the former statement we can easily see how "the Christ (namely) Jesus" could arise and from the latter "Jesus (who is) the Christ." We may have an example of the former phrase in Acts 5:42, which the NIV translates "proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ," but REB has "telling the good news of Jesus the Messiah." In any case it would seem that the currency of both "Jesus Christ" and "Christ Jesus" is best explained in terms of development from the two confessional statements.<sup>24</sup>

Where does all this leave us? It is right to recognize the variety of beliefs about the future and about a messianic type of figure in Judaism. But this simply does not lead us to the view that there was no sort of messianism for Jesus and his followers to react to. It is inconceivable that the idea was not alive. Equally it is clear that the teaching and career of Jesus gave a fresh shape to messianism.

Charlesworth is in danger of pushing a reasonable hypothesis too far to the point where a recognition of variety, diversity and development in a concept leads to the disintegration of the concept. It would seem that not all the other contributors to the book would wish to accompany him all the way. The list of three consensus statements (xv) quoted above do not go as far as Charlesworth's own iconoclastic list. With some qualifications they are quite acceptable, and they say nothing new. It follows that this book is not destined to be earth-shaking. Its value rather is as a compendium of scholarly research into different aspects of messianism conducted by Jewish and Christian scholars in concert. We can only be grateful for the mass of industrious scholarship gathered together so conveniently in this volume.

<sup>23</sup> The presentation by W. Kramer, *Christ, Lord, Son of God* (London: SCM, 1966) is not satisfying on this issue.

<sup>24</sup> There may be some analogy in Luke's use of the two orders, "Caesar Augustus" (Luke 2:1) and "Tiberius Caesar" (Luke 3:1), where we have a similar type of problem but with "Caesar" making the reverse transition from a proper name to a title.

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