

This will be my final set of comments on the evaluation of How Jesus Became God by Larry Hurtado, on his blog. His review consisted of a set of positive comments, of things that he appreciated (for which I'm grateful); several misreadings of my positions, in which Larry indicates that my book was asserting a view that, in fact, it was not (he corrected those after our back and forth in a subsequent post); one assertion that I was motivated by an anti-Christian agenda and wanted to convince readers that Jesus' followers had hallucinations (I dealt with that assertion yesterday; I do not think that it is a generous reading of my discussion - especially since I explicitly stated on repeated occasions that I was \*not\* arguing for a non-Christian or anti-Christian view); and, well, this one point that I'll discuss here, on which we have a genuine disagreement. The point has to do with whether the apostle Paul understood Christ, in his pre-existent state, to have been an angelic being. Larry devotes two paragraphs to the issue; the second one I find more problematic than the first, although I disagree with the first as well (but not as strongly):

As a final criticism, Ehrman posits that the key to Paul's Christology is that he thought of Jesus as an (or the) angel (of God/the Lord). That, says Ehrman, explains how Paul could ascribe "pre-existence" to Jesus, and how, as a devout Jew, he could countenance worshipping Jesus. As the key basis for this notion, Ehrman invokes a peculiar reading of Galatians 4:14, where Paul says that in his initial visit the Galatians received him "as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus." Ehrman insists that this is to be read as a flat appositive construction, in which "an angel of God" = "Christ Jesus." But this isn't actually as compelling a claim as he thinks. Even Gieschen (on whose work Ehrman relies here) presents this reading of the construction as only a distinct "possibility." And most scholars (myself included) don't think it really works. The grammar certainly doesn't require it, and it seems more reasonable to take it as a kind of stair-step statement, "angel of God" and "Christ Jesus" as ascending categories.

I did indeed find Gieschen's argument that Paul understood Jesus as an angel prior to becoming human extremely provocative and convincing. His arguments are supported and advanced in a very interesting discussion of Susan R. Garrett in her book. No Ordinary Angel.

When Gieschen uses the term angel, he defines it as "a spirit or heavenly being who mediates between the human and divine realms" (p. 27). He shows that a large number of early Christians understood Jesus to be that kind of being; and he argues that the reluctance of NT scholars to see this kind of angel-Christology in our early sources is because they have been influenced by the views that later triumphed in the fourth century that insisted that Christ is much more than an angel. That is, they are reading later views into earlier texts.

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