REVIEW 3

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R. B. Jamieson, *The Paradox of Sonship: Christology in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London, United Kingdom: IVP Academic, 2021), 195 pp., £29.99, paperback (ISBN 9781789742848).

In this book, R. B. Jamieson tackles one of the fundamental Christological dilemmas in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "What does the author of Hebrews mean by calling Jesus the 'Son'? Is 'Son' a title given Jesus at his enthronement as Messiah, his session at God's right hand?[3] Or does 'Son' denote his eternal inclusion in the identity of the one true God?" (p. 1). In response, Jamieson suggests "we should answer 'yes' to both questions and [recognize] that the second is crucial for, not in tension with, the first." (p. 1) In other words, Jamieson sets out to advance what he claims "no modern author has offered a full-dress defence of the thesis that in Hebrews Jesus is *the Son who became Son*," and this by virtue of his incarnation state (p. 20).

More specifically, Jamieson advances the following three sub-theses that also form the logical backbone of the book:

1. 'Son' designates Jesus' distinct mode of divine existence (Chapter Two)
2. 'Son' *also* designates Jesus' appointed title at his enthronement in heaven (Chapter Four)
3. Jesus could only become the messianic Son because he is the divine son incarnate i.e. 'Messiah' is a *theandric* office (Chapter Five)

To paraphrase the third sub-thesis, Jamieson argues that "Jesus' divinity [sub-thesis 1] is a necessary though not sufficient condition for his exercise of messianic rule [sub-thesis 2]", because Jesus' *humanity* is also a criterion for his Messianic office. As such, Jamieson inserts a chapter on "The Son's *Incarnate* Mission" between the first two sub-theses which "bridges a gap both narrative and conceptual from Jesus' existence as divine Son to his appointment as messianic Son" (p. 76). In this way, the structure of Jamieson's book forms a sort of U-shaped narrative Christology that mirrors his goal set out in the introduction to follow the "[narrative] unfurling in Hebrews [from the 'narrative climax' of the exordium] as closely as possible and so to offer a satisfying account of who the Son is and how he became Son" (pp. 6–7) – this

[3] Jamieson's assumption that 'Son' is the name inherited in 1:4 (pp. 102-111; see esp. 102 note 5) is clearly the linchpin which, if false, severely damages his argument. It is the most obvious basis of the paradox of sonship as conceived by Jamieson, since he focuses the problem as found in 1:4-5. In this review, however, I grant his assumption because (notwithstanding the fact that I agree with it) I want to avoid losing the forest for the trees – or in this case even the 'soil' on which he constructs his case. As shall be seen, this is a potent analogy for my own challenge to Jamieson: I think he emphasizes the problem of Sonship in Hebrews at the expense of *Hebrews' own* central problem and inquiry: that of reconciling Jesus' royal Sonship and *high-priesthood*.

articulates Jamieson's key method in reading and interpreting Hebrews.[4]

In this way, Jamieson seeks to cut the Gordian knot of sonship in Hebrews, subverting its presupposition of a "zero-sum game" by extending the alternative both/and positions of scholars like Matera, Carson, and especially Silva (p. 7). Methodologically therein, Jamieson wants to demonstrate through his consistent employment of classical Christological concepts and reading strategies that: far from leading us away from the text (as modern biblical scholars often claim), church teaching actually "enables us to read *with the grain of the text* and to say coherently all that Hebrews says about who Jesus is" (p. 23, italics mine). Ultimately, Jamieson avers that "Hebrews and the creed tell essentially the same *story* about the same Jesus," in the sense that "the *soteriological narrative* that Hebrews both presupposes and elaborates is expressed in compact, schematic form in the ecumenical creeds" (p. 43).

I am strongly convinced by Jamieson that "the Son became the Son," and it seems to me that the reason Jamieson's study decisively moves forward the scholarship on this question unlike his forerunners is precisely because he brings in robust theological and logical concepts that biblical scholars usually shy away from or even methodologically preclude. Jamieson lends weight to his counterintuitive thesis argument by borrowing concepts and reading strategies from classical Christology like "partitive exegesis" (p. 24) by making a distinction—key to Jamieson's argument—between 'theology' (who Christ *is*) and 'economy' (what Christ has *done*), in a way that seems to tick with the logic of the text. This combination of philosophical rigour and text-centredness is an incredible methodological achievement and demonstrates the valid and vibrant benefits that modern biblical scholars might obtain in widening their horizon of exegetical possibilities.

More significantly, Jamieson's triumph is in clarifying for the reader (and the field) the scriptural backbone and corresponding '*dogmatic minimalism*' (a term borrowed from Oliver Crisp) of Chalcedon and conciliar Christology more generally (p. 151). He explains that the purpose of conciliar Christology was to avoid extreme errors and safeguard the essential *mystery* of Jesus of Nazareth's identification with the one true God of Israel, not primarily to define and exhaust the interrelation between Christ's divinity and humanity, of which as Jamieson reiterates – the council has nothing to say. This provides an important paradigm shift concerning the relationship between conciliar Christology and the New Testament, not least Jamieson's reminder that Hebrews' lack of justification for his identification of Jesus with the one true God of Israel (1:8, 10; 2:10; 3:3–4 etc.) provides one of the strongest challenges to a "basically evolutionary scheme of development" in and beyond the New Testament, starting from "low"

[4] Here Jamieson acknowledges Hays' "narrative substructure" but especially Moffitt's "proto-credal sequence" as the exegetical "jumping-off point for [his] whole project." (6n5-6)

human Christology then moving gradually towards "high" divine Christology in "full-fledged Nicene orthodoxy" (pp. 143–145). As Jamieson put it, "such careful coordination of divine and human realities [*a priori*] suggests not the rough edges of a new breakthrough but the orderly exposition of an achieved synthesis" (p. 145). But this is *precisely the problem* with Jamieson's claim that the paradox of Sonship is what Sanders calls the "central Christological conundrum" in Hebrews,[5] because what do we get instead in a more holistic reading of Hebrews as a whole, especially its central chapters? An exegetical (and legal!) justification of how the Son became *high priest* (see esp. 5:8–10, 7:14–15, 28).

Indeed, I propose that Jamieson ultimately overestimates the problem of sonship for Hebrews by failing to relate it to the more central paradox which drives Hebrews' "word of exhortation": not that Jesus somehow both *is* and *became* Son (that was the philosophical impetus of Nicene and Chalcedonian Christology), but the confession that Jesus is somehow both the Davidic Messiah (or "Son") and, at the same time and under the same law—also *high-priest*. If scholars like David Moffitt and Barry Joslin are right that the "doctrinal heart" of Hebrews is in fact the central chapters on Jesus as *high priest* in 4:14-10:23, and more specifically Melchizedek and the Mosaic Law in 7:1-10:18, then I think that Jamieson ultimately mislocates the 'central Christological conundrum' of Hebrews that serves also as its major theological construction – what might better be called the *Paradox of Royal Priesthood*. Key in this hypothetical challenge would be the priestly inclusio of 4:14-16 and 10:19-23, although the identification (perhaps for the first time in the homily) of Jesus as "Son of God" in 4.14 might suggest a closer link between the paradox of sonship and the paradox of priestly orders than presently proposed. This has major implications for what one takes to be the content of the "confession" (3:1, 4:14, 10:23) and the "solid food" (5:12, 14) that the author of Hebrews exhorts his audience to "hold fast."

This sadly undermines his secondary thesis for church teaching as an aid to read *with* rather than *against* New Testament texts, because if I am right, Jamieson's employment of conciliar Christology, though helpful for understanding how "the Son became the Son" in a logically consistent manner, ultimately detracts from the core "intra-Jewish debate" that Moffitt and others more compellingly propose as the way in which to read along the grain of Hebrews. In other words, the thrust of Jamieson's argument is anachronistic. Jamieson's mistake flows into what he conceives to be the primary question the audience of Hebrews was asking i.e. "Is it worth it to be a Christian?" and that Hebrews' corresponding one-word answer is "Christ" (p. 168). Rather, one might venture that the question is more accurately: How can we continue to faithfully hold fast to (i.e. both assent to and live out) our confession of Jesus as *high priest*? The

[5] At multiple points, Jamieson makes it clear that he thinks this paradox of Sonship is Hebrews' main problem and contention (e.g. 7n7, 147, 148).

two-word answer Hebrews seems to give is this: "indestructible life" (7:15).

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