

# A note on Jesus' Messianic Consciousness and 11HQ Melchizedek

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ONE of the more crucial presupposition of form critical *Leben-Jesu-Forschung* is the assumption that Jesus did not regard himself as the Messiah, nor did his disciples attribute that office to him until after the Easter event.<sup>1</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, for example, maintains that Jesus appeared as a prophet, a rabbi and even an exorcist,<sup>2</sup> but not as a king. "Moreover the synoptic tradition leaves no doubt about it that Jesus' life and work measured by traditional messianic ideas was not messianic."<sup>3</sup> Günther Bornkamm, one of the Bultmann *Schüler* associated with the New Quest, concurs with this judgment: ". . . behind the doctrinal teaching concerning

<sup>1</sup> This presupposition was basic to William Wrede's *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901). Wrede himself was one of the more important predecessors of the *formgeschichtliche Schule*.

<sup>2</sup> The synoptic presentation of Jesus as an exorcist is generally accepted by form critics as belonging to the earliest and most authentic stratum of the tradition. Norman Perrin for example, in his recent book *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1967), p. 65, states: "The evidence for exorcism as a feature of the ministry of Jesus is very strong indeed: exorcisms are to be found in every strata of the synoptic tradition, and the ancient Jewish texts regards Jesus as a miracle worker, i.e. an exorcist." Yet coupled with this recognition is an element of rationalism—the chief characteristic of the old Quest—which allows Ernst Käsemann to doubt whether Jesus actually believed in the existence of a demonic world: "It is true that throughout the Gospels there are reports of the healing of demoniacs by Jesus; and in the saying in Mark 3: 27 (= Matt. 12: 28), the authenticity of which can hardly be questioned, he claims for himself this kind of authority. It all depends in what sense he did this; whether as a magician, believing that the world is literally bedevilled (thus subscribing to a metaphysical dualism), or as one who knew the evil of the human heart and its demonic power and took possession of this heart for God." ("The Problem of the Historical Jesus", *Essays on New Testament Themes*, trans. W. J. Montague [Naperville, Illinois: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1964], pp. 39-40).

<sup>3</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel, I (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 27.

the Messianic secret there still dimly emerges the fact that Jesus' history was originally a non-Messianic history, which was portrayed in the light of the Messianic faith of the Church only after Easter."<sup>4</sup> The form-critical picture of the historical Jesus, including such elements as his unheard-of authority in interpreting the Torah, his assertion that the Kingdom of God was actually present in his words and deeds, and his claims that an individual's present relationship to himself was decisive for his future status in the Kingdom of God, makes it clear that the categories of prophet, rabbi or exorcist alone are inadequate to comprehend the claims of Jesus.<sup>5</sup> According to Käsemann, "the only category which does justice to his claim (quite independently of whether he used it himself and required it of others) is that in which his disciples themselves placed him—namely, that of the Messiah."<sup>6</sup> This admission of Käsemann places us in a peculiar dilemma. We are asked to believe that the words and deeds of Jesus surpassed all categories of Jewish conception on the one hand, and on the other, that in a period of fervent eschatological expectation he neither believed himself to be the Messiah, nor did his followers attribute that rank to him until after the Resurrection. This contradiction is labelled "implicit Christology"<sup>7</sup> and entails a greater elasticity of historical imagination than anyone less than a twentieth-century existentialist can manage.

The crux of the matter lies in the question of whether or not Jesus' earthly life was Messianic in character. The popular Anglo-American view that Jesus reinterpreted the Messianic office and used the title "Son of man" as the catalyst for this reinterpretation, while partially correct, is nevertheless not a completely satisfying answer to the problem. Jesus certainly did not appear as the mighty liberator of Israel who was the object of a substantial segment of popular expectation. This was not because he reinterpreted this aspect of the messianic office and eliminated the political implications. On the contrary, his role as world judge and redeemer would become visible to all upon his exaltation and installation as son of God in power. The most important task to be accomplished is to show which elements of Jesus' conception of himself cohere with phases of

4 Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Irene and Fraser McLuskey with James M. Robinson (New York and Evanston, Harper & Row, Publishers, 1960), p. 172.

5 Otto Betz, *Was Wissen Wir von Jesus?* (Stuttgart and Berlin: Kreuz Verlag, 1965), p. 54. Betz's opposition to the form-critical school on the point of Jesus' messianic consciousness is fully spelled out in his article "Die Frage nach dem messianischen Bewusstsein Jesu," *Novum Testamentum*, VI (1963).

6 Käsemann, p. 38.

7 R. H. Fuller, *Foundations of New Testament Christology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), p. 106.

contemporary Messianic expectation.<sup>8</sup> The recently published Dead Sea Scroll fragment 11Q Melchizedek provides at least one striking example of this type of coherence.

The fragmentary nature of 11Q Melchizedek makes proper interpretation difficult. The complex task of textual restoration can be demonstrated by reproducing three different reconstructions of line 18, that of (1) A. S. van der Woude from his *editio princeps* of the fragment, (2) M. de Jonge and A. S. van der Woude, and (3) J. A. Fitzmyer:

- (1) whmbsr hw[ph hm] syh hw[h] sr mr d[ . . .<sup>9</sup>  
und der FREUDENBÖTE: das ist der Messias. Das ist, was er sagt . . .
- (2) whmbsr hw[ph m] syh hrw[h] sr mr d[ . . .<sup>10</sup>  
'And he that bringeth good tidings': that is the anointed by the Spirit, from whom He (?) says . . .
- (3) whmbsr hw[ph hm] syh hw[h] sr dn[y]l . . .<sup>11</sup>  
and the herald is that Anointed One (about) whom Daniel said . . .

Lines 15ff. of 11Q Melchizedek constitute a *pesher* on Isaiah 52: 7 in which the *mashiach* is described as a *mbsr*, or proclaimer of glad tidings.<sup>12</sup> The significance of this Old Testament passage as a background for Jesus' central message can be more clearly seen in the

<sup>8</sup> In anticipation of what will be said below, it must be stated at this point that it was not until later in the first century that the term *mashiach* became a *terminus technicus* for the expected Davidic king. A non-technical definition of the word *mashiach* which would also be acceptable in an eschatological context would be the following: A *mashiach* is one who has been called by God and anointed with His Spirit for the task of revealing His will and person, and for the performance of certain activities in which the agency of God is evident. In the execution of this divine calling, the individual himself is subservient to the overruling purpose and will of God. It will be immediately evident that the early Christian community regarded Jesus as a *mashiach* par excellence.

<sup>9</sup> A. S. van der Woude, "Melchisedek als himmlische Erlösergestalt in den neugefundenen eschatologischen Midraschim aus Qumran-Höhle XI," *Oudtestamentische Studiën*, ed. P. A. H. de Boer (Leiden; E. J. Brill, 1965), p. 358.

<sup>10</sup> M. de Jonge and A. S. van der Woude, "11Q Melchizedek and the New Testament," *New Testament Studies*, XII (1966), pp. 302-3.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Further Light on Melchizedek from Qumran Cave 11," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXXVI (1967), pp. 27-8.

<sup>12</sup> Perhaps in combination with Isaiah 61: 1, a passage which is decisive for Jesus' own self-understanding in the New Testament (Luke 4. 17-18).

Targum of Isaiah which substitutes the phrase "the kingdom of thy God hath been revealed" for the Massoretic text's "thy God reigns."<sup>13</sup> The chief difficulty with line 18 is whether or not the substantive *mashiach* originally possessed the definite article. In van der Woude's original restoration of the phrase he included the definite article, and noted in his commentary that this was the first use of the absolute substantive "Messiah" in the Dead Sea manuscripts.<sup>14</sup> He expressed his hesitancy, however, to identify this Messiah with the expected Davidic king.<sup>15</sup> In a later article by M. de Jonge and A. S. van der Woude, the definite article was omitted in the restored text. This change was undoubtedly made through the influence of de Jonge, whose recent article, "The Use of the Word 'Anointed' in the Time of Jesus,"<sup>16</sup> concluded that the word *mashiach* before A.D. 70 was a very fluid term and need not refer to a specific future redeemer without further qualification.<sup>17</sup> In the de Jonge-van der Woude article referred to above, the *mashiach* of line 18 is interpreted as a prophetic figure, probably that mentioned in IQS ix. 11 together with the "Anointed ones of Aaron and Israel."<sup>18</sup> With or without the inclusion of the definite article before *mashiach* this conclusion is possible. It must be borne in mind that while the Qumran sectaries thought in terms of three eschatological figures, and applied Deuteronomy 18: 18-19 to the prophetic figure in 4Q Testimonia, the New Testament applied that same passage to Jesus (Acts 3: 22-23). In addition to its application to the eschatological redeemer, the word *mashiach* in the literature from Qumran could be variously understood as referring to the elect of Israel in a corporate sense (4Q Florilegium i: 19 interpreting Psalm 2: 2), or to prophets (CD ii. 12, vi. 1, and IQM xi. 7-8). If 11Q Melchizedek 18 refers to the prophetic figure of Qumran eschatological expectation, it would be the only example of the application of the word *mashiach* in the singular to that figure.

In the reconstructed text of Father Fitzmyer, not only is the definite article before *mashiach* included, but his detection of a *nun* after the final dalet of line 18 leads him to believe that the whole phrase may be referring to Messiah the Prince of Daniel 9: 25.<sup>19</sup> In our opinion it is quite likely (as de Jonge himself admits<sup>20</sup>) that the

<sup>13</sup> J. F. Stenning, *The Targum of Isaiah* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), pp. 176-7. This later Jewish tendency of substituting a substantial for a verbal phrase deserves extensive investigation.

<sup>14</sup> Van der Woude, p. 366.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 367.

<sup>16</sup> *Novum Testamentum*, VIII (1966), 132-48.

<sup>17</sup> Perhaps the principal weakness of de Jonge's article is his failure to take the evidence from the Targums into account.

<sup>18</sup> De Jonge and van der Woude, pp. 306-7.

<sup>19</sup> Fitzmyer, p. 40.

<sup>20</sup> De Jonge, "The Use of the Word 'Anointed' . . .," p. 142, note 1.

definite article did in fact precede the noun *mashiach* because of the available space in the fragment. This definite use of the term messiah, however, does not completely solve the interpretive problem. De Jonge has shown in a recent article, referred to above, that the content of the word messiah in the period from 100 B.C. to A.D. 70 was remarkably flexible.<sup>21</sup> Not until after A.D. 70, in fact, did the designation become a *terminus technicus* for the eschatological Davidic king without further linguistic qualification. In this light the phrase "reinterpreted Messiahship" becomes very inappropriate, for in order to be "reinterpreted," a concept must possess a reasonably static or constant field of meaning.

The significance of 11Q Melchizedek is that it provides the first piece of conclusive evidence before A.D. 70 that the proclamation of glad tidings could be considered a significant aspect of the messianic task. Although this announcement of the reign of God cannot be said to have been a *necessary* ingredient of the messianic office, it nevertheless belonged to the spectrum of functions which the designation *mashiach* connoted in the first century A.D. The evidence provided by 11Q Melchizedek demands that the central characteristic of Jesus' earthly ministry—the proclamation of the glad tidings of the Kingdom of God—be considered a messianic function.

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<sup>21</sup> *Supra*, note 16.