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THE ANGELS, SONSHIP AND BIRTHRIGHT IN THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

J. DARYL CHARLES*

The reader of the letter to the Hebrews is struck by the abrupt fashion with which the writer opens. Immediately he is off and running, describing the import of the Son's manifestation. The reader is further struck by the almost immediate introduction of angels. In the first two chapters *hoi angeloi* appears ten times.[1] Apart from 12:22 and 13:2, angels in Hebrews are presented almost uniformly in juxtaposition to Jesus. Although contrast constitutes a crucial tool of argumentation in much of the book[2]—Jesus is compared in chap. 3 to Moses, in chap. 5 to the high priest, in chaps. 5-7 to Melchizedek, in chaps. 8-9 to the priesthood—the comparison of Jesus to the angels is protracted. Such absorption speaks significantly to the occasion of the letter.

Why does the writer find such an extensive need for demonstrating that Jesus is superior (*kreissōn* and *diaphoros*, v. 4) to the angels? One is left with the impression that the audience was suffering from a deficient Christology, whether due to insufficient appreciation of Jesus' glorification or to a conscious and unusually exalted view of angelic powers themselves. If the readers' conception of angels precipitated a lower view of Jesus' person and ministry, he would end up being lost in the maze of innumerable cosmic principalities and powers.[3] There were no doubt many converts to the Christian faith in the first century who brought with them, or were influenced by, particular strains of sectarian Judaism. Not insignificantly, one such feature that proliferated in late intertestamental apocalyptic and extended into the Christian era was speculation with regard to the identity and role of angels.[4]

* J. Daryl Charles is a doctoral candidate at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

[1] Apart from chaps. 1 and 2 they appear in 12:22 and 13:2.

[2] Consider the uniting of major building blocks of the writer's material: *dia touto* (2:1), *gar* (2:5, 10), *hothen* (3:1), *dio* (3:7), *oun* (4:1), *gar* (4:8, 12), *oun* (4:14), *gar* (5:1), *houtōs* (5:5), *dio* (6:1), *gar* (6:13; 7:1), *oun* (7:11, 18), *kata tosouto* (7:22), *gar* (7:26; 8:7), *de* (8:1), *oun* (9:1), *houtōs* (9:6), *de* (9:11), *dia touto* (9:15), *oun* (9:23), *gar* (10:1), *dio* (10:5), *oun* (10:19), *gar* (10:26), *de* (11:1), *toigaroun* (12:1), *dio* (12:12), *gar* (12:18).

[3] Paul's letters to the Ephesians and Colossians are deliberately cosmic in scope and depict Christ's person and work in terms of their effect on the heavenly principalities. The apostle, however, is less concerned about the hierarchical arrangement of these powers than about the effects of Christ's comprehensive ministry.

[4] E.g. *1 Enoch* 6-25 (esp. 13, 20), 40, 55, 64-69; *2 Apoc. Bar.* 56; *As. Mos.* 10:2; *T. Sim.* 2:7; *T. Reub.* 2-3; *T. Dan* 6:2; *2 Enoch* 3-5, 12, 19, 20, 22; *Apoc. Zeph.* 3-4; *T. Job* 2-5; *T. Abr.*; *T. Sol.*; *Jub.* 4. Within Jewish apocalyptic mythology a frequent pattern seems to emerge: (1) War

I. ANGELOLOGY OF SECTARIAN JUDAISM

1. *Apocalyptic angelology.* Described as the "staple" of the Qumran Essenes,[5] 1 Enoch serves as a highly elaborate paradigm for the development of intertestamental angelology. The chief angels in heaven's multitiered hierarchy,[6] both good and evil, possess names (chaps. 6, 8-10, 20, 40, 69), develop strategies (chaps. 6-9), superintend nations (20:5), reveal secrets (chaps. 41-43; 46:2; 71:3), filter prayers (14:4) and confer regarding judgment (89:21). One of the seven holy angels of God is even said to live eternally (20:1). The archangel Michael[7] achieves an incomparable stature in late Judaism. Considered the chief among seven *archangeloi* he is said to have (1) mediated the giving of the Torah (cf. Gal 3:19), (2) stood at the right hand of God's throne, (3) mediated prayers of the saints, (4) offered the souls of the righteous who died, and (5) accompanied them into paradise.[8] His importance seems to reach a zenith in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (dated, like the earlier parts of 1 Enoch, in the second century B.C.),[9] where Michael's role is delineated in *T. Dan* 6:2: "Be on guard against Satan and his spirits. Draw near to God and to the angel who intercedes for you, because he is the mediator between God and men." He is described similarly in *T. Levi* 5:5-6: "And he said, 'I am the angel who makes intercession for the nation Israel, that they may not be beaten.'" In *1 Enoch* 40:6 the mediatory role of the archangel is heightened further: "And the third voice I heard interceding and praying on behalf of those who dwell upon the earth and supplicating in the name of the Lord of the spirits."

2. *The influence of apocalyptic in the angelology of Hebrews.* Having observed the glorified role of angels in Jewish apocalyptic we encounter in the letter to the Hebrews a sudden, almost unexpected depreciating of the same in chap. 1, where they are set in juxtaposition to the Son. In 1:4

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erupts in heaven, represented often in astral terms (cf. e.g. *1 Enoch* 6:25; 72-82; cf. also 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6; Revelation 12); (2) a spilling over of this rebellion to the earth; (3) ultimate vindication and punishment by the King of heaven. In Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 this pattern is vaguely hinted at.

[5] C. Daniel, "La mention des Esséniens dans le texte grec de l'épître de Saint Jude," *Mus* 81 (1968) 507. Pliny indicated the region near the northwestern Dead Sea as an Essene center.

[6] Apocalyptic Judaism knows from four to seven levels of angelic rank.

[7] The title of *archangelos*, found only in 1 Thess 4:16 and Jude 9 in the NT, would appear to be a later Judaistic development. In 1 Enoch (eighteen times); *As. Mos.* 10:2; *2 Enoch* 22:6; 33:10, Michael appears as *ho angelos ho megas*. In apocalyptic literature in general Michael is one of seven *archangeloi* (*1 Enoch* 9:1; 20:1-7; 40:9; Tob 12:15). He is described in Dan 10:13 (LXX) as *heis tōn archontōn tōn prōtōn* ("one of the chief rulers") and in 10:21 as *ho angelos* (Hebrew *śarkem*, "your captain"). As *ho angelos ho megas* he defends the sons of Israel in 12:1.

[8] Cf. L. Leuken, "Michael," in *RGG*, 4. 369-370.

[9] H. C. Kee, "The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. Volume 1: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth; Garden City: Doubleday, 1983) 775, 778.

the author states that Jesus "became superior (*kreissōn*) to the angels to the degree that (*hosō*) his name that he inherited is far superior (*diaphoros*) to theirs." The structure of 1:5-14 is rhetorical and seems to emit traces of sarcasm at times: "For to which of the angels then did (God) say" (v. 5a); "Or again" (v. 5b); "And again" (v. 6); "In speaking to the angels he says" (v. 7); "But of the Son (he says)" (v. 8); "As well as" (v. 10); "Now to which of the angels did he say" (v. 13).

Whether the writer has in view possible Essene-type Christians or ex-Qumranians[10] remains inconclusive, though intriguing. What does seem clear nonetheless is a view being entertained in which angelic spirits are unduly elevated, a perception in which Jesus has lost his preeminence.

Several additional elements in the letter might give further evidence for the hypothesis of a localized aberration with its tendency toward a distorted view of "the heavenlies."[11] The first is the central running theme of the letter: presently persevering in the faith (cf. 2:1, 3; 3:7-19; 4:1-3, 11, 14, 16; 6:1-6, 11-12; 9:28; 10:22-26, 29-32, 35-39; chap. 11; 12:1-16, 25, 28; 13:13, 15, 22). What primarily sets the apocalyptic apart from the prophetic standpoint is its radically pessimistic view of historical reality and the present aeon. The goal of the apocalypticist is to abandon this world, fleeing from it and giving up the fight of faith (note that the readers had "not yet resisted to the point of blood," 12:4).

Secondly, the audience is encouraged and reminded in 12:22-23 that they have already come (*proselēlythate*) to the heavenly Jerusalem. The scenario created here, particularly in vv. 22-24, is shaded in apocalyptic language. The heavenly scene includes (1) a "mountain"[12] (cf. Deut 33:2; Ps 48:1; Mic 1:3-4; Zech 14:4; *1 Enoch* 1:4; Rev 14:1); (2) myriads of angels (in LXX Deut 33:2; Dan 7:10; Ps 68:17; in NT Jude 14; Rev 9:16); (3) names written (*apogegrammenon*) in heavenly books (Dan 7:10; 12:1; Pss 56:8; 69:29 [LXX]; 138:16 [LXX]; *1 Enoch* 89:62; 108:7; *2 Apoc. Bar.* 24:1; Jude 4 [*prographein*]; Rev 3:5; 20:12); and (4) God as Judge (Dan 7:10; *1 Enoch* 50:4; 53:2; *2 Apoc. Bar.* 13:8; 41:6; 48:39; 83:2; Revelation 4-5).

[10] This approach is taken by C. Spicq ("L'Épître aux Hebreux, Apollos, Jean-Baptiste, les Hellénistes et Qumrân," *RQ* 1 [1959] 365-390, esp. 378-384); H. Kosmala (*Hebräer-Essener-Christen* [Leiden: Brill, 1959] 121), whose argument, however, seems a bit forced: "The attitude which expresses itself in the letter to the Hebrews is purely Essene, and no word given allows us to conclude that those who have suffered are Christians"; J. Daniélou (*The Dead Sea Scrolls and Primitive Christianity* [Westport: Greenwood, reprint 1979] 112-123); F. F. Bruce ("'To the Hebrews' or 'To the Essenes'?", *NTS* 9 [1962/63] 217-232).

[11] If this thesis is valid, the letter to the Hebrews is less a "general epistle" than it is written with a view of countering a specific and more localized distortion of the faith.

[12] In the OT one finds several strata of "mountain" symbolism, most of which lend themselves to the apocalyptic mode: (1) Sinai traditions (Exodus 19; 20:18; 24:9-11, 15-18; Deut 33:2; Judg 5:5; Ps 68:8-9, 18), (2) theophany in general (2 Sam 22:8-20; Psalm 29; 18:8-20; 97:2-3; Mic 1:3), (3) Zion traditions (2 Kgs 19:31; Psalm 46; 48; 50:1-3; 76; Isa 2:2-3; 40:9; Joel 2:1; 3:17; Amos 1:2; Mic 4:1-3), (4) Horeb traditions (Exod 17:6; 33:6; Deut 4:15; 5:2; 9:8; 28:69; 1 Kgs 8:9; 19:8; Ps 106:19), (5) Tabor traditions (Ps 89:13; Jer 46:18; Hos 5:1), (6) "holy mountain" traditions (Isa 14:13; Ezek 28:14), and (7) the temple mountain (Ps 48:1-3; Ezek 40:2). For a more detailed discussion of "mountain" imagery in the OT see R. J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1972) 107-181.

Yet a third possible hint at identifying some in the audience surfaces in the otherwise unexpected and extensive treatment given the mysterious figure of Melchizedek (chaps. 5-7). Alluded to only in Gen 14:18-20; Ps 110:4, Melchizedek was the subject of considerable messianic interest among the ascetics of Qumran,[13] doubtless due to the royal as well as priestly description accorded him in both OT references. In Hebrews 7 Judah is linked, quite ironically, to Levi ("For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood").[14]

A fourth clue is found in 13:2, the last reference to angels in the letter. Here the readers are exhorted to not neglect hospitality (*philoxenia*, "love of strangers"), by which they might chance upon the entertaining of angelic guests. Normally commentators gloss over this verse. Typical treatment of 13:2 consists of commenting on the significance of hospitality in oriental culture or noting Lot's entertaining the angels in Sodom (Genesis 19). As to the connection of the verse to the rest of the letter, few are able to offer suggestions. Jesus in Matt 5:43 cites a popular slogan rooted partly in the Torah ("You shall love your neighbor") and partly in traditions developed among the Pharisees[15] and Essenes (both of which sects derive from a common origin, *hē synagogē Hasidaiōn*):[16] "You shall hate your enemy." The Essenes refused to eat with outsiders, fearing contamination and consequent setting aside of Levitical purity. On the other hand Christians, in sharp contrast to the apocalyptic ascetics, were to be known for their *philoxenia* as well as *philadelphia*.

Lastly, not unrelated to the matter of strangers and hospitality, the writer describes God's Son as being incarnated and brought into "the inhabited world," the *oikoumenē* (1:6).[17] While the audience might tend toward abandoning the world, the Son embodied a mission aimed at people. We may have here a subtle polemic against those who not only elevated angels but also thought in terms of abandonment of the present life, both of which tendencies we see mirrored in the apocalyptic writings of the intertestamental period.

[13] For further discussion of the Melchizedek motif in QL see R. B. Laurin, "The Problem of the Two Messiahs in the Qumran Scroll," *RQ* 4 (1963/64) 39-52; A. Liver, "The Doctrine of the Two Messiahs in Sectarian Literature in the Time of the Second Commonwealth," *HTR* 52 (1959) 149-186; G. R. Beasley-Murray, "The Two Messiahs in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," *JTS* 48 (1947) 1-12; J. A. Fitzmyer, "Further Light on Melchizedek from Qumran Cave 11," *JBL* 86 (1967) 25-41.

[14] On the Melchizedek theme cf. B. Demarest, *A History of Interpretation of Hebrews 7,1-10 from the Reformation to the Present* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1976); F. L. Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1976); M. de Jonge and A. S. van der Woude, "11Q Melchizedek and the New Testament," *NTS* 12 (1965/66) 301-326; Y. Yadin, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Epistle to the Hebrews," ScrHier 4 (1958) 36-55.

[15] Thus the Pharisaical aversion to Gentiles and tax collectors, who were the epitome of one's enemy.

[16] So M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 1. 175.

[17] In Hellenism, *oikoumenē* takes the place of the ancient *polis*. It is firstly geographical, then cultural and political (H. Strathmann, "*hē oikoumenē*," *TDNT*, 5. 157).

II. SONSHIP AND BIRTHRIGHT: TOWARD A COUNTER-STRATEGY

1. *Inaugurating a polemic.* By 1:5, when the formal comparison of angels to Jesus begins, the writer has already put a distance between the angels and the Son (vv. 2-4). In 1:2 the Son is the heir of all things (*ethēken klēronomon pantōn*).[18] No angel can boast of such. Moreover the Son is described as "the radiance of God's glory," "the exact representation (*charaktēr*)[19] of his being" (v. 3). The angels pale in light of such glory. By the word of his power, the author continues, all things (*ta panta*) are sustained[20] (v. 3b). He also makes purification (*katharismon poiein*) from sins (v. 3c).[21] Furthermore the Son sat down (*ekathisen*) at the right hand (the place of honor, favor and authority)[22] of the Majesty on high (v. 3d). Finally in 1:4 the statement is explicitly made that the Son is superior to the angels. The use of *keklēronomēken* ("he has inherited") emits traces of the Son's eternality.

2. *Sonship.* The writer employs *huios* either generically or Christologically twenty-four times[23] throughout the letter. The title "Son" or "Son of God" as it pertains to Jesus' person constitutes a valuable part of this calculated polemic. Both designations dominate the Christology of Hebrews:[24] 1:12 (through the Son, God has spoken); 1:5 ("You are my Son. . . . I will be to him a Father"); 1:8 (the Son's throne endures forever); 4:14 (our profession is of Jesus the Son of God); 5:5 ("You are my Son"); 5:8 (though being a Son, he learned obedience through suffering); 6:6 (those falling away crucify afresh the Son of God); 7:3 (Melchizedek as a type of the Son of God); 7:28 (the Son is perfected forever); 10:29 (those insulting the Spirit of grace trample under foot the Son of God).

Of particular interest is 1:5, which forms the crux of the writer's argument in countering an exaggerated angelology. Herein are contained citations from two familiar OT passages. Both concern David, and both are found in a context of inheritance respecting God's chosen king: "The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you. . . . I will raise up your offspring . . . and I will establish his kingdom. . . . I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son" (2 Sam 7:11-14). "I will proclaim the decree

[18] Other occurrences of *ta panta* are in 1 Cor 15:24-28; Eph 1:3, 10, 21-23; Col 1:15-20; 2:2-3.

[19] Christ as the divine *charaktēr* makes the essence of deity intelligibly distinct, similar to Christ the *eikōn* in Col 1:15.

[20] Cf. Col. 1:17 (*ta panta en autō sunestēken*).

[21] One might ask whether this is aimed at those in the writer's audience who had been influenced by Qumran, for whom ritual purification was utmost. If not, may it have been addressing an imbalance with regard to the virtual priestly stature to which an angel such as Michael, in apocalyptic literature, had attained (cf. *T. Levi* 5:5-6; *1 Enoch* 40:6)?

[22] On the nature of "the right hand" in the OT cf. e.g. Gen 48:18; Exod 15:6, 12; Ps 16:11; 17:7; on the same in apocalyptic cf. Matt 25:31 ff.; Rev 1:16; 5:1, 7.

[23] A. Schmoller, *Handkonkordanz zum griechischen Neuen Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1982) 491-494.

[24] There are striking similarities between the prologue here and that of the fourth gospel.

of the Lord. He said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me and I will make the nations your inheritance, and the ends of the earth your possession'" (Ps 2:7-8).

The collocation of 2 Sam 7:14 and Ps 2:7 in Heb 1:5 is necessary for the writer particularly since Jewish exegesis of those texts would reject any messianic associations with "Son"[25] and thus stand in sharp contrast to early Christian exegesis (e.g. Acts 2:25-36; 3:26; 4:24-30; 8:37). Israel is called Yahweh's "son" in Exod 4:22-23, but rabbinic literature would be averse to assigning messianic interpretation to "son"-designations of the OT due to its inherent opposition to Christianity.[26] The glaring use of "Son of God" in the gospels would confirm this.

The writer in 1:5 has thus chosen two OT allusions to the "Son-king" who rules the nations in Yahweh's might. Both references mirror the filial relationship between Yahweh and David's seed. Out of this seed, dominical rights flow to the Son.[27] The writer then proceeds to comment on the Son's dominion in 1:8. His throne is everlasting, and his scepter is one of righteousness.

Lastly, very striking is the author's transfer of *ho theos* and *kyrios* (vv. 8[28] and 10[29]) from God as Creator in the OT to Jesus. Without hesitation the Son is designated as the Lord God and Creator of heaven and earth. Indeed, Christ has been given a far more excellent name (v. 4). The Son's authority has far-reaching consequences if the audience will understand his true nature.[30]

3. *Birthright.* Following the assertions about the Son in 1:5, the writer continues with a blow to those whose view of the angels is magnified: "When (God) brought his firstborn into the world he said, 'Let all the angels worship him.'"[31] The tables are turned. Over against an exaggerated view of the angels the writer stresses that it is they who worship Jesus, and none are excluded (*proskynēsatosan autō pantes*, v. 6b). Further in 1:7, 14 the angels are spoken of as *leitourgoi*,[32] "ministers." The weight of the argument thus rests on the angels as ministering servants of Jesus.

[25] S. Kistemaker, *The Psalm Citations in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Amsterdam: W. G. van Soest, 1961) 75-76.

[26] Significantly, no messianic associations are attached to 2 Sam 7:14 in rabbinic literature.

[27] Consider the notions of sonship and inheritance as they appear together in Rom 8:14-17 and Col 1:13-17. Cf. also Acts 4:23-30.

[28] Behind this statement lies a royal psalm in which God addresses the king. Cf. also Isa 9:6.

[29] The contents of Psalm 102, from which this is taken, show no difference between the Creator and the Redeemer.

[30] On Jesus as *kyrios* see O. Cullmann, *Christology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959) 234-237.

[31] This seems to be an adaptation of LXX Deut 32:43, substituting *angeloi* for *huioi theou*, and Ps 96:7, an exhortation (*proskynēsate*) for the angels to worship.

[32] The earliest appearance of *leitourgia* ("ministry") in democratic Greece was linked to the collection of monies. Eventually it came to denote any realm of public service. Later it is adapted to Israel's religious cult and becomes a technical term. Cf. H. Strathmann, "*leitourgeō* and *leitourgia* in the LXX and Hellenistic Judaism," *TDNT*, 4. 219-222.

The introduction of 1:6 combines the notions of apocalyptic and history.[33] As the apocalyptic Son of Man, whose hidden identity is in time unveiled, so the Son, veiled from history (v. 2), is brought into the inhabited world (*oikoumenē*). The writer hereby has access to the Semitic mind of his readers. The eschatological expectation is not future, however. It has been realized in the Son. And one implication of the incarnation is that the angels have been brought to worship him.

As the firstborn, *ho prōtotokos*, Jesus has precedence over others, whether brothers (2:11, 12, 17) or angels (1:5-14).[34] This precedence finds antecedents throughout the OT. Occurring some 130 times[35] in the LXX, *prōtotokos* translates *bĕkôr*, which may refer to both men and animals. The explicit command to sacrifice the firstborn of cattle is found in Num 3:41, based on an understanding of 3:13. In Exod 4:22 *prōtotokos* expresses Israel's unique and intimate relationship with Yahweh. As demonstrated in Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33, the firstborn son stood in special relationship to the father with respect to blessing. The king in Ps 89:27 is called Yahweh's firstborn; he is "exalted above the kings of the earth."[36] Perhaps the most poignant OT illustration accentuating the aspect of privilege inherent in *prōtotokos* is the episode of Esau and his "birthright" (LXX *prōtotokia*) in Genesis 25, which, not incidentally, is used in Heb 12:16 for the sake of exemplification. Esau, to whom privilege, blessing and inheritance were due, sold his *prōtotokia*.[37] He had thus forfeited the authority and blessing to which he was legally entitled.[38] Jesus, however, in contradistinction to Esau, has inherited many brethren. The Church can thus be designated as *ekklēsia prōtotokōn* (12:23).

4. *The pattern of 1:5-14.* A conspicuous pattern seems to emerge when we examine the many Psalm citations used in Heb 1:5-14. The argument in these verses stands on a triad of components. Two of these relate to a proper appreciation of Jesus' identity: sonship and birthright. The third, in a repetitive manner, hammers home the issue of the angels' subservience to the Son. In light of who Jesus is, there can be logically no other alternative: 1:5, sonship; 1:6a, birthright; 1:6b, 7, 8, 10-11, 13, 14, subservience.[39]

[33] V. Burch, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1936) 46-47.

[34] The argument is that Jesus is not merely the head of the rank of angelic powers; rather, he is totally unique, without any comparison.

[35] E. Hatch and H. A. Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint and Other Greek Versions of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1897) 977-978.

[36] Note what precedes in 89:26: "You are my father."

[37] The fundamental notion behind *prōtotokia* is inheritance and authority, not chronology.

[38] The language of Rom 8:29-30 sheds further light on the concept of birthright. Jesus is the *prōtotokos* among many brethren. These enter into divine inheritance; they are predestined, called, justified and glorified.

[39] The writer draws upon seven OT citations. Given the symbolic use of sevens and threes in apocalyptic, perhaps this belongs to a calculated scheme on the part of the writer. Seven spirits are given mankind at creation (*T. Reub.* 2:1 ff.); seven heavens comprise the heavenly hierarchy (*2 Enoch* 20:1); seven spirits of deceit are at work in the world (*T. Reub.* 2); seven evils are

III. CONCLUSION

Due to an inordinate revering of angels and subsequent depreciation of the person and ministry of Jesus on the part of the readership, the writer of Hebrews addresses a deficient Christology primarily by means of comparison. The first two chapters of the letter in particular are filled with a forceful, almost biting, polemic, in which the writer exploits the complementary notions of sonship and birthright. The repetitive use of *huios* underscores Jesus' intimate and distinct relationship to the Father. As *ho prōtotokos* the Son stands as the uncontested legal heir to all things. In view of the Son's exalted status the angels are relegated to a position of subservience, paling by comparison in the light of his glorious nature.

The posture of the angels then is one of bended knee, worshiping before the Son's throne, along with the rest of creation.

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transmitted by Beliar (*T. Benj.* 7). More to the point, seven holy angels or archangels occupy the lead positions among the heavenly hosts (*1 Enoch* 20; 81:5; 87:2; 89:61; 90:21; Tob 12:5). Hence the author, with studied precision, utilizes a sevenfold argument in order to lower the angels.