“WHO IS COMPARABLE TO ME IN MY GLORY?”
4Q491 FRAGMENT 11 (4Q491C) AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

by

J.C. O’NEILL
Edinburgh

The boldest and best of our present-day historians of the idea of the Trinity, Martin Hengel, traces the impulse “to think of God in a way which is open to trinitarian terms” back to Jesus’ self-understanding. However diligently they search for Jewish antecedents, none of these historians is ready to take account of the evidence that Jews before Jesus already thought of God as three-in-one and of the Messiah as the eternal Son of God who was to be born a man. Further evidence in support of this thesis has turned up from Cave Four at Qumran. This speaks of a man who was exalted to heaven to receive an incomparable name. Far from the New Testament’s giving evidence that such an idea was a new development, the two prominent passages in which the same theme appears, John 3 and Hebrews 1-2, show that a traditional motif has simply been applied to Jesus of Nazareth.

1. The Fragments from the Dead Sea

A figure who asserts his incomparability is spoken of in three fragments from Cave Four at Qumran. His glory is incomparable, and

---

1 M. Hengel, Studies in Early Christology (Edinburgh: Clark, 1995) ix.
3 Cf. Phil. 2:9, which means that God publicly bestowed on Jesus the Name above every name.
4 M. Baillet, the editio princeps of 4Q491 Fragment 11, Qumrán Grotte 4 III (4Q482-4Q520) (Discoveries in the Judaean Desert VII; Oxford: Clarendon, 1982) 26-29, Plate VI; text and translation, and for the thesis that it described a human figure that ascended to heaven: M. Smith, “Ascent to the Heavens and Deification in 4QMα”, Archaeology and History in the Dead Sea Scrolls: The New York University Conference in Memory of Yigael Yadin (ed. L.H. Schiffman; JSPsup 8; JSOT/ASOR Monographs 2; Sheffield: © Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, 2000 Novum Testamentum XLII, 1
besides him no one is exalted (4Q491 frag. 11 line 13 [= 4Q491c line 6]). He asks the rhetorical questions which expect the answer, No one: “And who is comparable to me in my glory?” (line 15 [= line 8]); “And who will attack me when I open my mouth? And who can endure the flow of my lips? And who will confront me and retain comparison with my judgment?” (line 17 [= line 10]). Earlier he had said there was no teaching comparable to his (line 16 [= line 9]). In 4Q427 frag. 7 column 1 he states that no one associates with him, and to his glory no one compares (lines 10-11). In 4Q471b he asks who will be like me among the gods (lines 3, 5), who can endure the flow of my lips (line 5) and who can be compared [to my glory] (line 8).

This emphasis on incomparability in teaching and in judicial conflict makes it unlikely that the figure is a corporate entity (4Q491 frag. 11 lines 16-17 [= 4Q491c lines 9-10]; 4Q427 frag. 7 col. 1 line 9[?];