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The Development of Early Christology

David Wyman

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY CHRISTOLOGY

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Bridgewater State University

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CONTENTS

1 Introduction	2
Pliny and Ignatius – How can we explain these texts?	2
2 Preliminary Consideration: First Century Jewish Monotheism	5
3 Evolutionary Model	6
Wilhelm Bousset and James D.G. Dunn	6
4 Christ in the New Testament: The “Big Three” and the “Johannine Christ”	14
Introduction	14
1 Corinthians 8:6	14
Colossians 1:15-17	18
Philippians 2:6-11	23
The “Johannine Christ” Compared to the Earliest Christ	32
5 Chronology	38
Paul: Date of Letters and Chronology	38
Brief History of the Early Jerusalem Church	40
6 Jesus Devotion in Earliest Christianity	48
Prayer	49
Invocation and Confession	50
Baptism	51
The Lord’s Supper	52
Hymns	52
Prophecy	53
Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament	53
Nomina Sacra?	54
Summary	55
7 Paul and Jerusalem	57
Common Creedal Confessions	57
Aramaisms and Historical Interaction Between Paul and Jerusalem the Church	62
A “Conspicuous” Silence	71
Summary	75
8 Conclusion	75
Appendix A: Yahweh Texts with Jesus as Referent	77
Appendix B: Category of Divine Identity	80
Bibliography	85
Index of Ancient Sources	88

Introduction

Pliny and Ignatius – How can we explain these texts?

Around 112 CE Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia-Pontus, wrote to the emperor Trajan concerning the trials of Christians in his region. Christianity had spread not just in the cities but also into the villages and rural regions (Pliny 10.96.9).¹ The temples Pliny observed were left almost completely deserted. Christians caused a negative economic effect on the buying and selling of meat. The temple priests could not sell the sacrificed meat to the vendors in the market because Christians refused to eat sacrificed meat. Demand for meat declined so that the priests could not make the profit of selling it to wholesale merchants (Pliny 10.96.10). To find out if the individuals accused were Christians he ordered them to call upon the gods, do reverence to and worship the image of the emperor and the deities, and curse Christ, a thing that he is told genuine Christians would not do (Pliny 10.96.5). If individuals who complied with his commands and said that they were former Christians, Pliny would ask them to explain their former practices so that Pliny would see if they stood trial for the name “Christian” alone or for some actual crime associated with it. He writes that among their practices was that they would meet before daybreak on an appointed day “to recite a hymn antiphonally to Christ, as to a god” (Pliny 10.96.7).

There are a number of striking features to this letter. First, geographically Christianity had spread throughout Bithynia-Pontus, even into the rural areas, with a serious economic effect by 112 CE. This is around eighty years after the birth of that small Jewish sect in Jerusalem 28-33 CE. Second, a mark of true Christians was that they did not worship or do obeisance to any other deity, did not make pagan temple sacrifices, and refused to curse Christ. Presumably the

¹I use the translation in Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church: Fourth Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3-4.

majority of people living in this region were Gentiles, yet they adopted the exclusive monotheism characteristic of Judaism (through Christianity) and the devotion to Christ characteristic of the earliest Christians. Thus, part of becoming a Christian was repudiating the mentality of polytheism and adopting a specifically Christian monotheistic mentality. Third, it gives a glimpse into one of the ways that Christians revered Christ. They recited “a hymn antiphonally” in a way the pagans saw exalted him to the status of “a god.” The act of singing a hymn gives *context* to how they viewed Jesus and this is how pagan onlookers could infer the status attributed to Christ by Christians. But the precise *content* of those antiphonal hymns remains a mystery given only this data.

But a letter from Ignatius of Antioch just five years earlier could give some insight into the possible content of those hymns mentioned by Pliny. On his way to martyrdom in Rome to face the beasts around 107 CE Ignatius of Antioch wrote a series of letters to churches along the way. He dispatched one to a church in Ephesus. In this letter he combats a number of false teachings and warns the Ephesians to avoid false teachers who “have a wicked and deceitful habit of flaunting the Name about, while acting in a way unworthy of God” (Ign. to Eph. 7).² He then sets forth a corrective by way of common reminder in the form of a Christological hymn-like statement.³ It reads:

There is only one physician – of flesh yet spiritual, born yet unbegotten, God incarnate, genuine life in the midst of death, sprung from Mary as well as God, first subject to suffering then beyond it – Jesus Christ our Lord (Ign. to Eph 7).

Other statements in his letter give this hymn a broader Christological context. He writes of “Jesus Christ, our God” (Ign. to Eph. Intro), “Christ, who was “descended from David according

² Thos who believe Christ only seemed (δοκέω) to take human flesh but in reality did not. I use the translation in Cyril C. Richardson, ed., *Early Christian Fathers* (New York: Touchstone, 1996) 89-90.

³ Many scholars see this passage as a hymn and Maxwell Staniforth translates it in hymnal form in *Early Christian Writings*, trans., Maxwell Staniforth (London: Penguin Books, 1968), 63.

to the flesh” and is Son of man and Son of God” (Ign. to Eph. 20), “our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived by Mary, in God’s plan being sprung both from the seed of David and from the Holy Spirit” (Ign. to Eph. 18).⁴ He quotes liberally from the Christian scriptures, both Old and New Testaments.⁵ A generation after the death of the last apostles an elder in Asia Minor draws heavily from the writings of his believing predecessors to support his own Christological position and to exhort his fellow believers in Ephesus. Ignatius clearly believes in the deity and humanity of Christ, the incarnation of the Son, that he is of the seed of Mary and of God. The God-man suffered, bled, and died. He refers to the creed-like Christological formula of Romans 1:3 twice, and this may indicate his knowledge that it was indeed a creed of sorts. It is very likely that the passage in verse 7 was sung as a hymn because of its condensed form, Christological content similar to other “Christ hymns,”⁶ and existence of the practice among contemporary Christians such as those in Bithynia-Pontus.

Two contemporary sources, one hostile and one Christian, geographically separated, attest that Christians sang hymns to Christ and wrapped up in the content of the hymn is the exalted Christ as true deity.⁷ The historian must explain these texts. Why do these phenomena seem so widespread? How do Gentiles come to adopt this view of Jesus as true deity while also maintaining monotheism? There are two broad approaches historians take. The first approach argues that the worship of Jesus as (a) God occurred because Gentile influence came into an

⁴ Importantly, he also mentions “God’s blood,” important to combat Docetism since they believe Jesus did not die on the cross because he did not possess a real physical human body (Ign. to Eph. 1).

⁵ He makes clear reference to John 6:33, Prov. 3:34 (Ign. to Eph. 5), Rom. 8:5, 8 (Ign. to Eph. 8), 1 Thess. 5:17, Col. 1:23 (Ign. to Eph. 10), 1 Tim. 1:5 (Ign. to Eph. 14), Matt. 12:33 (Ign. to Eph. 14), Ps. 33:9, 1 Cor. 3:16 (Ign. to Eph. 15), 1 Cor. 6:9-10 (Ign. to Eph. 16), 1 Cor. 1:20 (Ign. to Eph. 18), Rom 1:3 (Ign. to Eph. 18, 20), Rom. 6:4 (Ign. to Eph. 19).

⁶ E.g. Phil. 2:5-11.

⁷ Hymns were also sung to the Father about and through Christ. Ignatius mentions that the love of the Ephesians is like a hymn to Christ and then mentions also that they should sing this love in unison to the Father through Christ (Ign. to Eph. 4).

originally “pure” Christianity that did not believe in a truly divine Jesus. Gentile influence is usually (though not always) argued to have occurred gradually over the course of many decades. The Gospel of John, some argue, represents the pinnacle of Christological development in the first century, when Christians for the first time incorporated Jesus into their conception of true deity. This is often described as an “evolutionary” model. The second view argues that the earliest Christians, Jew and Gentile, believed Jesus was true deity. This common belief spread organically and all subsequent Christological development is based upon of that original belief.⁸ This is the “originalist” approach. This paper will argue that the evolutionary view seriously lacks explanatory power given the relevant data. The evidence compels the conclusion that a “high” Christology of Jesus as true deity occurred among the first believers in Jerusalem.

Preliminary Consideration: First Century Jewish Monotheism

Observant Jews of the first century melded together practice and belief. They self-consciously worshiped the one true God and sought to obey him exclusively.⁹ Their use of the Shema, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD [Yahweh] our God, the LORD [Yahweh] is one” (Deut 6:4) and the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17; Deut. 5: 6-21) evidence this understanding of self-conscious exclusive monotheism. Observant Jews would recite the Shema twice daily (Josephus, AJ. 4.8.13).¹⁰ Jesus taught that the Shema is the greatest commandment, as did the scribe who agreed with him. (Mark 12:29-30). Decades after the death of Jesus, the apostle Paul reaffirmed the centrality of monotheism and the implications for Christian worship (e.g. 1 Cor. 8-10). Jews

⁸ This view nicely explains Docetism and Ebionism as derivative of the same source. Docetism: Jesus was divine, but not really human. Ebionism: Jesus was human, but not divine.

⁹ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 3.

¹⁰ See also, Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1988), 69-70.

and Christians (who were originally predominantly Jewish) of the first century sought to conduct their entire lives with reference to obedience to the one Yahweh.

Evolutionary Model

Wilhelm Bousset and James D.G. Dunn

Much of nineteenth and twentieth-century scholarship, influenced by the “History of Religions School,” dealt with this by postulating an evolutionary model of Christology. That is, while Jesus was not initially thought of as divine after his death, over the next few decades with the influx of Hellenists (Greek-speaking Jews) and Gentiles syncretism set in and Jesus gained the status of deity through apotheosis like other pagan demigods and divinized heroes. Indeed, “common to all of the evolutionary proposals is the claim that the worship of Jesus as divine cannot have been a part of the devotional pattern that characterized earliest strata and circles of Jewish Christians.”¹¹ The most influential proponent of an evolutionary model was Wilhelm Bousset, whose *Kurios Christos* (1913) argued along those lines. Bousset’s impressive scholarship and the intuitive difficulty of acknowledging that a group of first-century Jews in Jerusalem worshiped a recently crucified man as divine alongside God contributed to the widespread influence of the evolutionary model. Bousset has not been without his critics, who argue that his model presents an inadequate picture of early Christianity and contains serious flaws.¹² A brief critique of the model Bousset proposes is appropriate.

Bousset did have positive methodological influences. He emphasized the importance of Jewish and pagan backgrounds and the development of Christology.¹³ Jewish and pagan

¹¹ Larry W. Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 15.

¹² Larry W. Hurtado, “New Testament Christology: A Critique of Bousset’s Influence,” *Theological Studies* (1979): 306-17. See also Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), esp. 5-18.

¹³ Hurtado, “Critique,” 307.

backgrounds provide necessary data to inform the political, intellectual, cultural, and religious contexts of the development of Christology in a given geographic or demographic region. Not an entirely separate category is examining how Christology developed over time. Tracing historical development of Christology remains foundational in order to understand how Jesus was viewed (e.g. Messiah, deity, Lord, Christ) and why they occurred in given contexts. Despite his methodological contributions his basic explanation possesses serious problems.

The division of earliest Christianity (pre-Pauline) into Jewish Christianity and Hellenistic Christianity proves central to Bousset's model. He argues that apocalyptic Son of Man Christology characterized the early Palestinian community and that the title κύριος (Lord) could only have entered through a non-Palestinian, dominantly pagan religious setting.¹⁴ This bifurcation proves simplistic and inaccurate. The linguistic evidence shows that a multilingual setting in early Palestine with the influence of Greek in all sectors of the population.¹⁵ This Hellenizing influence in the Palestinian-Jewish setting makes it almost impossible to rid it of Hellenistic influence in the first century. Since even well after Pauline influence Jewish Christians dominated the entire Church and his letters reflect a well-developed Christology that predates him,¹⁶ any conception of a pre-Pauline "purely" Hellenistic-Gentile community fails.¹⁷

Bousset argues that the title "Son of Man" was not a self-designation used by Jesus, but it was a well-known eschatological title of a heavenly figure that the first followers of Jesus attributed to him as a confessional title.¹⁸ The implication is that early believers felt free to take popular cultural titles and figures and then attribute them to Jesus whether he did so himself or

¹⁴ Hurtado, "Critique," 307.

¹⁵ Hurtado, "Critique," 308-9.

¹⁶ See below.

¹⁷ Hurtado, "Critique," 309. Paul lists names in a number of closing greetings to his epistles. The names show explicit Jewish dominance, see: Rom 16:1-23; 1 Cor. 16:12-19; Col. 4:7-16; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; Titus 3:12-13.

¹⁸ Hurtado, "Critique," 310.

not. Both these assertions are problematic. First, “Son of Man” bears no significance as a title or connotes any well-known figures of the time. In fact, no living Jew in the time of Jesus and the following decades, other than Jesus, was ever identified with the Danielic Son of Man figure (Dan. 7:13-14).¹⁹ Second, early Christians did not incorporate it into any confessional statements. This suggests it was not a well-known title in first-century Judaism of a heavenly figure that early Jewish Christians then gave to Jesus.²⁰ On the contrary, the evidence indicates that Jesus used the title “Son of Man” as another way of speaking about himself as Messiah in a way unique to his time.²¹

In short, Bousset argues that the title “Lord” represented the “Hellenization” of Christianity by a later (by a few years) stage of Gentile Christianity. Summarized, his views on the title “Lord” include the following. (1) The title is characteristic of Pauline literature, not the material reflected in the Gospels. (2) It was characteristic of the mystery cults for their cult deities. (3) It does not come from an Aramaic milieu because “Mar” (Lord) was never used as a suffix for a divine title. (4) Even if Aramaic-speaking Jews referred to Jesus as “Mar,” it did not possess any divine connotations.²² A brief response to these assertions is due. The title “Lord” reflects the Jewish religious vocabulary as opposed to the pagan usage. This is seen in “maranatha” in 1 Cor. 16:22 that Paul adopts from his Aramaic-speaking predecessors. Early Christians used the nomen sacrum “Lord” (ΚΣ) that adopted Jewish scribal habits of writing the divine name YHWH in a special way (see below). Likewise, Greek-speaking Jews used the title

¹⁹ Ben Witherington III, “Jesus as the Alpha and Omega of New Testament Thought,” in *Contours of Christology in the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 25.

²⁰ Hurtado, “Critique,” 310.

²¹ Hurtado, “Critique,” 311-12. For a discussion on Jesus and the title “Son of Man,” see Paul Barnett, *Jesus and the Rise of Early Christianity: A History of New Testament Times*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1999), 162-170.

²² Hurtado, “Critique,” 312-13.

κύριος (Lord) in place of the Tetragrammaton when reading the biblical texts aloud.²³ It is clear that Paul draws from the Old Testament for his usage of “Lord” and not from the pagan religious cults of the day. This is also seen in his usage of Lord with reference to Jesus in a number of strongly monotheistic and Jewish-colored texts (e.g. Phil. 2:9-11; 1 Cor. 8:4-6). Thus, the title “Lord” comes from the Jewish religious vocabulary and not the pagan use in mystery cults or emperor veneration.

The reappraisal of Bousset has driven some to opt for different types of evolutionary models that possess significant differences. One significant proponent of an evolutionary approach is James D.G. Dunn, who argues that Jesus worship did not occur among the earliest Christians but instead arose towards the end of the first century among the community reflected in the Gospel of John.²⁴ I will focus on the argument set out by Dunn in his book, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*²⁵ In his endeavor to determine the *whom* of earliest Christian worship Dunn asks the question of whether Jesus was included. He approaches the question in several ways,²⁶ three of which are: (1) Was Jesus a monotheist? (2) What does it mean that Jesus is Lord? (3) Was Jesus called god/God?²⁷

Dunn sees the question of whether Jesus was a monotheist as relevant because it probes whether Jesus himself would have approved of his followers if they worshiped him. The factors of Jesus’ upbringing by pious Jewish parents who recited the Shema regularly, attended synagogue, and familiarity with the Temple rightly lead Dunn to conclude that, not surprisingly,

²³ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 21.

²⁴ James D.G. Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus: The New Testament Evidence*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).

²⁵ I will focus mainly on chapter 4 since it contains the longest and most substantial in scope.

²⁶ Dunn, *Worship*, 92-146.

²⁷ Dunn also includes sections on Jesus as Logos/Wisdom of God/life-giving Spirit, the worship of the Lamb in Revelation, and Jesus as the last Adam, mediator, and heavenly intercessor.

Jesus was a devout Jew who believed that “God is one.”²⁸ The Shema shaped Jesus’ own theology fundamentally, and humans owed obedience to the God of Israel alone because he was alone the ruler over all. In short, Jesus was indeed a monotheist.²⁹ According to Dunn, Jesus made three distinct impressions on his followers. (1) Jesus was God’s son in a unique way by addressing God as “Abba,” and the earliest Christians adopted this usage. (2) Jesus possessed a large degree of self-asserted authority even to the level of spokesman for God.³⁰ (3) Jesus spoke of himself as the Son of Man with reference to Daniel 7:13-14 in a way that in some degree challenged the status and authority possessed by God alone.³¹ So, Dunn concludes that Jesus was a monotheist and thus presumably would not accept worship. He also left his disciples with an impression that in him God uniquely revealed himself and they could come before God through Jesus as an older brother of sorts.³² His conclusion is unsurprising and would meet little resistance, but the usefulness of the question remains dubious. Of course Jesus was a monotheist, what else would he have been – a pagan, an atheist, a rogue deity? While Dunn reaches fairly sound conclusions he stops short and does not give the rest of the evidence in the Gospels its due. Thus, he effectively shortchanges the Gospels and draws unduly limited conclusions on Jesus’ own self-understanding and impression on his disciples.

Dunn discusses several passages where Old Testament texts that refer to Yahweh are “repurposed” by applying them to Jesus (Rom. 10:13; 1 Cor. 1:2; Phil 2:5-11; 1 Cor. 8:6). He rejects the notion that Paul believes that Jesus is Yahweh and instead takes the position that Yahweh has given Jesus unique saving power, that he occupies a place at his right hand, or that

²⁸ Dunn, *Worship*, 94-5.

²⁹ Dunn, *Worship*, 96-8.

³⁰ Dunn, *Worship*, 99-100. He notes the “You have heard it said...but I say...” sayings of Matthew 5 and how Jesus often prefaced his sayings with “Amen” instead of closing with it as evidence of this self-asserted authority.

³¹ Dunn, *Worship*, 100-101. Dunn sees Mark 14:61-64 as the most important reference where Jesus is charged with blasphemy.

³² Dunn, *Worship*, 101.

the exalted Jesus embodies and executes that saving power.³³ While noting that the incorporation of Isaiah 45:21-23 in Philippians 2: 5-11 as a reference to Jesus is “astonishing,” he resists the conclusion that Jesus is to receive worship as God receives worship. Instead he suggests that the confession of Jesus as Lord in the way in which obeisance to God was expressed and that Jesus was on the divine side of the act of worship to the one God.³⁴ Dunn believes Paul (1 Cor. 8:6) has incorporated Jesus into the Shema. Jesus is addressed as Lord as not in terms of “Divine Identity,” but as mediating agent through whom everything and every believer have being.³⁵ The title “Lord” in statements like “the God . . . of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 1:3; Eph 1:3) does not so much identify Jesus with God but instead it distinguishes Jesus from God.³⁶ He connects this with 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 where the Son, after all things are subjected to him, will then be subjected to the Father. This indicates then that any honor and glory due to Jesus the Lord is ultimately an expression to God.³⁷ Dunn’s approach to the Yahweh texts is, much like his discussion of whether Jesus was a monotheist, again inadequate and shortchanges the evidence. The attribution of Yahweh texts to Jesus suggests a more revolutionary usage than Dunn allows, especially in light of the context in which they are used. The wide range of cultic practices with reference to Jesus (e.g. prayer, baptism, hymns, invocation/confession) indicates that the earliest Christians made room in the unique identity of God for Jesus.³⁸

The question of whether Jesus was referred to specifically as “God” (θεός) necessarily comes into the discussion of early Christology and Jesus-devotion. The syntax of Romans 9:5,

³³ Dunn, *Worship*, 105.

³⁴ Dunn, *Worship*, 105-7.

³⁵ Dunn, *Worship*, 109. This is contra Bauckham who argues that the only possible way Paul can maintain monotheism here is to include Jesus in the unique identity of the one God (Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 28).

³⁶ Dunn, *Worship*, 110. Dunn complains that Bauckham simply ignores this material and Hurtado only refers to it briefly.

³⁷ Dunn, *Worship*, 111-12.

³⁸ See below for a more detailed discussion.

Dunn concedes, strongly suggests that one should read the text as a doxology to Christ as God. But he suggests an alternative reading that opens up the possibility that it is a doxology to God (the Father), but he ultimately decides that the passage is unclear as to whom it is directed.³⁹ He then argues that one should understand Titus 2:13, which calls Jesus “our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,” as envisioning Jesus as the visible manifestation of the invisible God rather than as God or a god “as such.”⁴⁰ Jesus as “Emmanuel, God with us” (Matt. 1:23), “the Word” and “God” in John (John 1:1; 18, 20:28), and “God” as indicated by Hebrews application of Psalm 45:6-7 to Jesus, refer to the “godness” of Jesus as that which fully represents God and that which makes God known and present (Heb. 1:8-9).⁴¹ Much of Dunn’s argumentation seems to confuse categories by equating God “as such” with “the Father,” and thus limiting (once again) the category of God. No doubt “God” was the dominant title used for the Father throughout the New Testament corpus, but its application to Jesus in a few instances shows that the New Testament authors had a fuller understanding of the term than Dunn allows. This forces him to push Jesus out of the category of God in terms of divine identity.⁴² Part of the problem, I think, is that Dunn misunderstands the category of divine identity.⁴³

That Dunn’s approach is seriously flawed is shown not least by his inconsistency in answering his own question, “Did the first Christians worship Jesus?” That is, he states, “‘Generally no, or ‘Only occasionally’, or ‘Only with some reserve’” and then “Christ seems to have been thought of [...] in at least some degree the object of worship, but also as the enabler or

³⁹ Dunn, *Worship*, 132-33.

⁴⁰ Dunn, *Worship*, 133.

⁴¹ Dunn, *Worship*, 134-36.

⁴² Dunn also fails to discuss the significance of the Granville Sharp Construction in Titus 2:13 and does not even mention 2 Peter 1:1, which also contains the construction.

⁴³ For an explanation of the category of Divine Identity, see Appendix B.

medium of effective worship.”⁴⁴ He later states that the evidence “discourages an unequivocal ‘Yes’, and points at best to a qualified ‘Yes’, or perhaps more accurately a qualified No!”⁴⁵ This tension leads Dunn to characterize that the question as “too narrow and may be misleading” and “rather naïve.”⁴⁶ He tries to develop more focused questions, but in the end he decides to answer the original so-called “narrow”, “misleading,” and “naïve” question. His basic conclusion is:

The dominant answer for Christian worship seems to be that the first Christians did not think of Jesus as to be worshipped in and for himself. He was not to be worshipped as wholly God, or fully identified with God, far less as a god. If he was worshipped it was worship offered to God in and through him, worship of Jesus-in-God and God-in-Jesus.⁴⁷

Had he used the more focused questions he proposes, his conclusions may have been more focused as well. Dunn lets his worries about “Jesus-olatry” skew his conclusions by not recognizing Jesus-worship as real worship simply because it is always with reference to God the Father.⁴⁸ His conclusions seem to stem from viewing worship of Jesus “as such” (“real” worship?) as necessarily replacing worship of God the Father or worshipping Jesus apart from God.⁴⁹ Worship of Jesus need not replace God in order to qualify as worship. One must not import foreign definitions of worship into the first century Jerusalem milieu; rather, one should let the historical context determine the nature of worship to a first-century Jewish monotheist. A related critique involves his assumption that monotheism, to be monotheism, must be in some

⁴⁴ Dunn, *Worship*, 28.

⁴⁵ Dunn, *Worship*, 59.

⁴⁶ Dunn, *Worship*, 57-8.

⁴⁷ Dunn, *Worship*, 146.

⁴⁸ Dunn, *Worship*, 147. Indeed, “Jesus-olatry” may be a real concern in some churches, but Dunn lets his concern for it dominate his thinking to the degree that it skews his conclusions.

⁴⁹ Dunn, *Worship*, 58. He indicates that the question “Did the first Christians worship Jesus?” implies that “the issues was whether Jesus had somehow replaced a remote God, so that worship was now to be directed to him, perhaps even to him rather than to God.”

sense unitarian. This no doubt influences his concern for “Jesus-olatry” and definition of worship.⁵⁰

Christ in The New Testament: The “Big Three”⁵¹ and the “Johannine Christ”

Introduction

Three Pauline Christological texts oblige the historian to reconsider the entire evolutionary scheme: 1 Corinthians 8:6, Colossians 1:15-17, and Philippians 2:6-11. I call them the “Big Three” because they represent the clearest and most concentrated expressions of Pauline Christology and display an incredibly exalted view of Christ. If these texts share the supposedly unique characteristics attributed to Jesus in Johannine Christology, then the evolutionary view is seriously undermined. In that case, the historian must either reformulate the evolutionary scheme *ad hoc*, or shift to a fundamentally different approach by considering the explanatory power of originalist view.

1 Corinthians 8:6⁵²

Paul instructs the Corinthians regarding a number of issues related to idolatry and Christian worship practices in 1 Corinthian 8-14. His first concern is about “food offered to idols” (1 Cor. 8:1). Apparently some Christians had been eating food sold in the market that had been offered to idols or they were even accepting invitations to dinners in pagan temples (1 Cor. 8:10). Some Christian did this in good conscience because they “know that an idol has no real existence” and “that there is no God but one” and thus felt no compulsion to abstain from eating

⁵⁰ For a closer discussion of Dunn, see Nick Norelli, review of *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?: The New Testament Evidence*, by James D.G. Dunn, Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth, http://rdtwot.files.wordpress.com/2010/07/book-review_dunn_did1.pdf.

⁵¹ Hebrews 1:1-14 could also get included in this to make it the “Big Four,” but I limit my primary exegesis to the Pauline corpus because this paper primarily focuses on Paul and the implications of his Christology on the understanding of earliest Christology as a whole.

⁵² The most likely date for 1 Corinthians is 55 CE while Paul was in Ephesus. See D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2005), 447-448.

the meat (1 Cor. 8:4). Others, with a weak conscience, however, were “defiled” when they ate sacrificed meat or saw other believers eating sacrificed meat (1 Cor. 8:7). Paul responds by redirecting the issue to love of God and love of neighbor based on the Shema (Deut. 6:5). That is, loving God characterizes Christians, not merely theological knowledge.⁵³ Loving God entails complete rejection of any flirtation with idolatry and devotion to God the Father and Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 8:6). There is also a social aspect to loving God that is brought out by the love of neighbor. That is, if a “strong” believer by eating sacrificed meat wounds the conscience of another believer, that “strong” believer sins against his brother (1 Cor. 8:12). Paul exhorts the Corinthians that if eating certain food makes a brother stumble then refrain from eating it (1 Cor. 8:13).

Paul, in the midst of his instruction, contrasts the fact that there is only one God to the fact that the surrounding pagan religions possess many gods. He disdainfully references the pagan deities as “so-called gods in heaven or on earth – as indeed there are many gods and many lords” in Greco-Roman religion (1 Cor. 8:5). The full contrast with Christian belief and devotion is brought out in verse 6:

Yet for us there is one God, the Father,
 from whom are all things and for whom we exist,
 and one Lord, Jesus Christ,
 through whom are all things and through whom we exist (1 Cor. 8:6).

ἀλλὰ ἡμῖν εἷς θεὸς ὁ πατὴρ
 ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν,
 καὶ εἷς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς
 δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς δι’ αὐτοῦ.

Paul sharply distinguishes Christianity and the exclusive belief in one God and one Lord from the polytheism of pagan religion. It is clear that he incorporates the exclusive monotheistic

⁵³ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, “1 Corinthians,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 716. There is reciprocal relationship between loving God and theological knowledge.

confession of Israel, the Shema, which Jesus emphasized two decades before Paul (Mark 12:29-30). Yet in 1 Corinthians, Paul recasts the Shema to include the historical person Jesus Christ in that affirmation of monotheism. He reassures the Corinthians that their theology is correct, that there is only one God over against the many pagan gods and lords.⁵⁴ But at the same time Paul insists that the “one God” of the Shema includes the one Lord. The key words “Lord,” “God,” and “one” are taken from the Shema in which both “Lord” and “God” refer to the deity who is “one.” Paul has identified “God” as “the Father” and “Lord” as “Jesus Christ” and has added an explanatory phrase to each.⁵⁵ “God” is “the Father” “from whom are all things and for whom we exist,” and the “Lord” is “Jesus Christ” “through whom are all things and through whom we exist.” Because Paul rearranges the words already present in the Shema and does not *add* the word “Lord,” he consciously maintains monotheism while at the same time he avoids ditheism (two gods).⁵⁶ The impact is clear: “in this one text Paul has simultaneously reaffirmed strict Jewish monotheism and embedded Christ within the very definition of that one God/Lord of Israel.”⁵⁷ As in the Old Testament posits loyalty to Yahweh was central to the Jewish identity, Paul asserts that loyalty to Yahweh for Christians entails loyalty to God the Father and to the Lord Jesus Christ.⁵⁸

The use of Greek prepositions elaborates Paul’s adaptation of the Shema. He does this by describing the relationship between the named figure, whether the Father or Jesus Christ, and all creation, and then between the named figure and believers. Regarding the Father, “all things”

⁵⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study*, (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 91.

⁵⁵ Ciampa and Rosner, “1 Corinthians,” 717.

⁵⁶ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 28.

⁵⁷ Ciampa and Rosner, “1 Corinthians,” 717.

⁵⁸ I am not saying that Paul asserts that Yahweh is some different figure than God the Father or Jesus Christ. Rather, God that Father is Yahweh, and the Lord Jesus is Yahweh. That is, they are distinct persons, but share the same divine nature.

were created by him and he is the goal or purpose of believers. But regarding Jesus Christ, “all things” were created through him and believers live through him. Paul uses the preposition εἰς with reference to Jesus in Colossians 1:16 and Hebrews 2:10. This demonstrates that the Father and Son overlap in their function as goal or purpose of believers (and in Col. 1:16 of all creation). Paul explicitly identifies the Father as the source and Jesus Christ as the agent in the creation of “all things.” That is, “all things” were created by God the Father and through Jesus Christ. This places Jesus at the beginning of Genesis 1 as one who preexisted the created order as a divine person.⁵⁹ Furthermore, the assertion that Christ is an agent of creation seems quite unnecessary, since there is nothing Christological at stake.⁶⁰ Paul does not try to demonstrate or prove Christ’s creative agency; rather, “he simply assumes it by assertion.”⁶¹ One implication to this is that he also assumes that the preexistence of Jesus is uncontroversial and presupposed among the churches to which he writes. Indeed, the preexistence of Jesus and his role as agent in creation is so central to the person of Jesus that Paul incorporates it into the primary traditional Jewish monotheist creed.

Summary

Paul presents Jesus as Christ and Lord, agent of creation who existed before all things, and, along with God the Father, the person whom Christians owe complete devotion. He does this by reformulating the Shema Christologically. Jesus and the Father are distinct figures, but Paul is able to affirm them both in an exclusive monotheistic passage because they share the

⁵⁹ Dunn rejects that preexistence of Christ is in this passage. He asserts that it is Divine Wisdom that is preexistent and that Christ is the embodiment of that Wisdom. The problem with this view is that this ignores what Paul actually says, i.e. *Jesus Christ* is agent of creation. See Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 126. Fee strongly rejects the notion that Paul identifies Christ and personified Wisdom in this passage and in his letters as a whole. See Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 93, 595-619.

⁶⁰ Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 92.

⁶¹ Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 92.

same divine nature.⁶² If Jesus was not by his nature true deity, how can Paul identify him as the one Lord of Shema? Additionally, this passage exemplifies the Christological exegesis that early Christians practiced as a part of their devotion to Jesus alongside God the Father (see below). That is, Paul takes an Old Testament text about Yahweh and interprets it by identifying the historical person Jesus Christ as Yahweh. This text demonstrates that Paul was not just an avid monotheist, but included Jesus in his monotheistic confession. Given that Paul and the earliest believers had substantial agreement about the gospel (see below), the Christology in this passage must hark back to the original Jerusalem community. This seriously undercuts the evolutionary contention that it took until the end of the first century for Jesus to gain recognition as divine.

Colossians 1:15-17

Authorship

The opening of the letter to the Colossians attests that the author is “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus” (Col. 1:1). It also ends with the author stating, “I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand” (Col. 4:18). But since the nineteenth century many scholars have questioned the authenticity of this letter as a Pauline epistle. The three main objections to Pauline authorship are its language, theology, and its relation to Ephesians.⁶³ It is argued that since Colossians contains many hapax legomena (words occurring only once in the New Testament), the language supports the assertion that Paul did not write it. Such an objection to Pauline authorship carries little weight partly because the phenomenon of hapax legomena occurs in the rest of Paul’s letters. The difference of vocabulary may also partly be accounted for by the specific occasion of the letter and the need to oppose this specific heresy. The theological objection to Pauline authorship focuses on the absence of the characteristic Pauline terms “justification,” “law,” and “salvation.”

⁶² Or, as Bauckham argues, God and Christ share the divine identity because they are both portrayed as sovereign over all creation and creator of all creation. See Appendix B.

⁶³ My line of argumentation basically follows that of Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 517-521.

This argument undercuts its own aim though, since surely if somebody wanted to write a pseudonymous Pauline letter they would at least include the key Pauline doctrines. So the argument may actually be used as an argument for Pauline authorship. Likewise, the “cosmic Christ” in Colossians (esp. Col. 1:15-20) is already seen in the undisputed letters (1 Cor. 8:6; Phil 2:10). Finally, some argue that Pauline eschatology in Colossians differs from the undisputed letters because it is a “realized eschatology” (Col. 2:12-13; 3:1). This argument, however, is based on a misreading of the text. While the language differs slightly, it parallels Romans 6:1-14 quite well as an exhortation that Christians should live the “resurrection life” of faith until their transformation to a state of glory. Some scholars argue that a single author would not produce two letters, Colossians and Ephesians, with such similar content. Is it so far out to consider that a single author could deal with similar issues for different audiences? It is curious indeed to reject the authorship of one letter because it resembles another. Overall the objections prove highly subjective and leave little or no room for Paul to have new thoughts given new situations and problems. Pauline authorship is also supported when one compares the named people in Colossians and Philemon, an undisputed letter. Greetings are sent from Aristarchus, Mark, Epaphras, Luke, and Demas in both letters (Col. 4:10-14; Philem. 23-24). Also, the slave Onesimus, who is the main subject of the letter to Philemon, is referred to in Colossians as “one of you” (Col. 4:9) and in Philemon as “our fellow soldier” (Philem. 2). Thus the named persons in Colossians strongly support Pauline authorship. One might argue that a pseudonymous letter would try to include names mentioned other Pauline letters. If that is the case, then why did they not include key Pauline doctrines as well? Pauline authorship provides a much more consistent and straightforward explanation of the objections than positing some

group of pseudonymous writers. In light of these considerations, doubting the Pauline authorship of Colossians is difficult.

Dating

The most likely date for this letter is in the late 50s or if from Rome 60/61 since Colossae would have been leveled by an earthquake in 60 or 61 CE (cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 14.27). Whether from Rome or elsewhere it is clear that Paul wrote Colossians during one of his imprisonments (Col. 4:10, 18). Christology found in this letter therefore represents genuine Pauline Christology situated some 20-30 years after the death of Christ in 33 CE.

Exegesis

Before exegesis of versus 15-17 begins, one must understand the broader context of the letter and the immediate context that precedes it in versus 9-14. Broadly, a false teaching was infecting the church in Colossae associated with “philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition” (Col. 2:8). It appears that some people required certain cultural practices that vilified the physical body and promoted asceticism (Col. 2:16-23). In the context that immediately precedes the passage, Paul remarks that he prays to God that the believers in Colossae might fill up in knowledge of God’s will and spiritual wisdom and understanding in order “to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord” and increase in the knowledge of God (Col. 1:9-10). He then urges the Colossians to give thanks to God the Father because, not only has he qualified the Colossians to share in the “inheritance of the saints,” he has delivered believers from the “domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” in whom they have “redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:11-14). So the occasion of the “hymn” that follows is an exhortation to give thanks to the Father with regard to the person and work of the Son. The “hymn” then expounds on the Son’s person and work. It reads:

¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God (εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ ἀοράτου), the firstborn of all creation (πρωτότοκος πασῆς κτίσεως). ¹⁶For by him all things were created (ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα), in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him (τὰ πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται). ¹⁷And he is before all things and in him all things hold together (καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν).

The first things asserted about the Son regard his relation to God the Father and to all creation. That is, he is the image (εἰκὼν) of the invisible God and the firstborn (πρωτότοκος) of all creation. Paul elsewhere talks about Christ, “who is the image of God” (εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ) and who makes the glory of the unseen God known (2 Cor. 4:4-6). Through the incarnation the Son, who was sent by the Father into the world (Gal. 4:4), alone bears the image of God perfectly that the first Adam defaced (Gen. 1:26-27; 3:1-24).⁶⁴ He is able to perfectly bear the image of God precisely because he is by his nature deity (Col. 1:19; 2:9). The next line concerns the relationship between the Son and all the created order. “Firstborn of all creation” refers to “supreme status above all created beings.”⁶⁵ While “firstborn” sometimes denotes temporal priority (e.g. Luk. 2:7; Heb. 11:28), the primary focus here is the preeminence and privileged status of Christ over the created order.⁶⁶ This reflects the use of the word “firstborn” in the Old Testament where Yahweh regards Israel and Ephraim as his “firstborn” (Ex. 4:22; Jer. 31:9).⁶⁷ Seen in the Greco-Roman context, it also indicates that he is the heir who inherits the power and authority of his Father over creation. This is like the one who is legal heir, “firstborn,” who receives the inheritance of the father.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 301.

⁶⁵ David W. Pao, *Colossians and Philemon: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2012), 95.

⁶⁶ Temporal priority is present, but secondary. The term “firstborn” is also used by Paul in Rom. 8:29 and he likely derived it from Ps. 89:27 (Ps. 88:28 LXX).

⁶⁷ Since, obviously, Israel was not the first nation to exist on the earth.

⁶⁸ Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, 95.

Paul moves on to describe the unique role that the Son played in creation. The translation “by him” (ESV) interprets ἐν αὐτῷ (“in him”) in an instrumental sense. But it is best to let “in him” stand as the translation and view the phrases “through him” (δι’ αὐτοῦ) and “for him” (εἰς αὐτὸν) as explaining the “in him” that precedes them. The scope of the authority of the Son spans the entire creation whether heaven or earth, visible or invisible. Nothing exists outside his authority. He is the divine agent of creation (δι’ αὐτοῦ) and the goal or purpose of the created order (εἰς αὐτὸν). Paul attributes these two prepositions to God the Father and his relationship to “all things” (τά πάντα) in Romans 11:36, but here he attributes both of them to the Son.⁶⁹ Similarly in 1 Corinthians 8:6 Paul asserts that believers live for the Father (εἰς αὐτόν) (see above). That is, he is the goal. But in Colossians 1:16 Paul gives this position of goal to the Son.

The last line of the “hymn” reiterates the role of the Son in creation by stating that he *is*, not “was,” “before all things” (αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων). The temporal sense of πρὸ remains due to Pauline usage elsewhere.⁷⁰ It also denotes his supremacy over all creation.⁷¹ Thus the phrase emphasizes both his preexistence and preeminence over all creation. This is because he is the agent of its very existence.⁷² The final phrase, that “in him all things hold together,” enhances this supremacy of the Son as preexistent Creator and sovereign sustainer.

Summary

The Christology in this “hymn” attributes to Jesus a place outside the created order. He is agent of creation, goal of creation, existing prior to creation, and sovereign over creation. For Jewish monotheists to attribute these functions to a man recently crucified is without precedent.

⁶⁹ Romans 11:36 reads, “For from him [God the Father] and through him (δι’ αὐτοῦ) and to (εἰς αὐτὸν) him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”

⁷⁰ Cf. Rom. 16:7; 1 Cor. 2:7; 4:5; 2 Cor. 12:2; Gal. 1:17; 2:12; 3:23; Eph 1:4; 2 Tim. 4:21; Titus 1:2.

⁷¹ Pao, *Colossian and Philemon*, 98.

⁷² Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 303.

Such exalted Christology found within three decades of the death of Jesus coming from the pen of Paul, an ardent Jewish monotheist whose Christology aligned with the original Jerusalem church (see below), poses serious problems for an evolutionary model. Paul attributes to Jesus here functions of Yahweh precisely because of his divine nature. It is no wonder that the earliest Christian devotional pattern included two figures, Jesus the Son and God the Father (see below).

Philippians 2:6-11⁷³

Introduction

It is important to consider the text of Philippians 2:6-11 in its context rather than its Christology in isolation. The preceding chapter situates the passage as an ethical exhortation in which Paul exhorts the congregation in Philippi to humility. After he explains that his imprisonment has served to advance the gospel (Phil. 1:12) and his desire that Christ get proclaimed (Phil. 1:18), he entreats them to live their lives “worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Phil. 1:27).⁷⁴ They should live in unity for the sake of the gospel even in the face of violent opposition like he himself has encountered (Phil. 1:27-29). He remarks that belief in Christ and suffering for his sake have both been granted to them (Phil. 1:29). Such language is reminiscent of Jesus’ teaching that following him will entail suffering (Mark 8:34-35; cf. Mat. 5:10-11). Then he turns the discussion to offer words of encouragement and comfort (Phil. 2:1-2). This immediate context provides significant guidance to the exegesis of verses 5-11. Paul states in verse 3-4, “Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3-4). It is crucial to understand the following Christological passage in the context of Paul’s exhortation to act with *humility*. In terms of Christians in Pauline communities, the social status

⁷³ The date of Philippians is sometime in the mid-50s to early 60s depending on which imprisonment from which Paul wrote. See Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 506-507.

⁷⁴ The likely date for this epistle is 61 CE during his Roman imprisonment.

of believers is a level playing field. For Paul there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, all are one in Christ (Gal. 3:28; cf. Col. 3:11). Paul's overall ethical instructions regarding humility concerns putting aside rights that one already possesses. The Corinthians have the right to eat meat, but only if they do not harm the conscience of the weaker brother (1 Cor. 8-10). Humility entails counting others, who are equal in status, more significant than oneself and considering their interests in addition to one's own interests. Paul then illustrates what true and supreme humility looks like through the example of Christ Jesus:

⁶who, though he was in the form of God,
 did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,
⁷but emptied himself,
 by taking the form of a servant,
 being born in the likeness of men.
⁸And being found in human form,
 humbled himself
 by becoming obedient to the point of death,
 even death on a cross.
⁹Therefore God has highly exalted him
 and bestowed on him the name
 that is above every name,
¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus
 every knee should bow,
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹and every tongue confess that
 Jesus Christ is Lord,
 to the glory of God the Father.

⁶ὅς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων
 οὐχ ἄρπαγμὸν ἠγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ,
⁷ἀλλ' ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν
 μορφὴν δούλου λαβών,
 ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος
⁸καὶ σχήματι εὐρεθείς ὡς ἄνθρωπος
 ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτὸν
 γενόμενος ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου,
 θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ
⁹διὸ καὶ ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ὑπερύψωσεν
 καὶ ἐχαρίσατο αὐτῷ τὸ ὄνομα
 τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶν ὄνομα,
¹⁰ἵνα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ

πᾶν γόνυ κάμψη
 ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων
¹¹καὶ πᾶσα γλῶσσα ἑξομολογήσεται ὅτι
 κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός
 εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ πατρός.

Many scholars argue that this passage preserves a pre-Pauline hymn that Paul incorporates to make an ethical application for the believers in Philippi.⁷⁵ Whether or not he takes a preexisting hymn here or composed this originally, it does not matter with regard to this point: Paul does not argue for this Christology. Rather, he expected that his readers affirm the Christology in this passage based on what they already knew and affirmed about Jesus.⁷⁶ If they did not affirm this Christology, that Jesus was equal in status with God (divine) and humbled himself through the incarnation, Paul makes a rather ill informed and vain ethical illustration of humility to the community in Philippi. Thus the Christology in this hymn dates back at least to the founding of the church in Philippi sometime in the 40s CE. Paul's own conversion took place around one year after the death of Jesus (c. 34 CE) and it was during that early period his Christology took shape and hardened. Therefore, the Christology in this hymn traces back to the convictions of the earliest Christians.⁷⁷

Exegesis

Overall, there is a two-part structure passage of verses 6-11. It is in narrative form in which events take place in sequence. The two principal actors in the narrative are Christ and God the Father. Jesus is the subject of all the verbs in verses 6-8, but he is to object of all the verbs in

⁷⁵ Hurtado argues that “its highly compressed phrasing and its syntactical structure” are among the prominent features that signify that verses 5-11 are a hymn. He believes Paul incorporates a preexistent hymn. Bauckham believes that this is a Pauline composition. See Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 84; Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 41.

⁷⁶ Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 87.

⁷⁷ For a more detailed examination, see below.

9-11 while God is the subject.⁷⁸ Paul's use of Isaiah 45:23, a strong exclusively monotheistic Old Testament text, demonstrates that the conceptual scheme and interpretive standpoint readers must bring to this passage is that of the biblical Jewish tradition.⁷⁹ Any attempt to read into the text proto-Gnosticism or Roman pagan religion fails to take the text seriously and robs it of its historical and exegetical context.

The "who" (ὅς) links the content of the "hymn" with the historical figure from verse 5, "Christ Jesus." He, though he existed in the "form of God" (μορφῆ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων), did not seek to take advantage of that equality he had with God (οὐχ ἀρπαγμὸν ἠγήσατο).⁸⁰ In 6a, Paul does not use the normal verb "to be" (εἰμί). He uses the less frequent term ὑπάρχω that in this case seems to carry the full weight of its meaning,⁸¹ "to exist (really)." He uses the participle ὑπάρχων instead of the finite verb because Christ's always "being" so.⁸² One must also note the temporal contrast between the present participle ὑπάρχων in 6a and the aorist participle λαβών in 7b. This indicates that before Christ took the form of a slave he already existed in the form of God.⁸³ In this passage Paul presupposes the personal preexistence of Christ "in the form of God."

One of the key exegetical questions is then, what does μορφῆ θεοῦ (form of God) mean? To start, one must note that the phrase "being equal with God" (τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῶ) is here equivalent to or linked to "being in the form of God."⁸⁴ So "form of God" entails some sort of

⁷⁸ Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 90.

⁷⁹ Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 95.

⁸⁰ It is best to take ἀρπαγμὸν as part of an idiomatic expression with the verb ἠγήσατο. And since it is a predicate accusative, it is appropriate, when compared to literature outside Philippians, to translate ἀρπαγμὸν "as something to take advantage of." See Gerald F. Hawthorne, "In the Form of God and Equal with God (Philippians 2:6)," in *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Know Press, 1998), 102. See also, Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 96.

⁸¹ Hawthorne, "In the Form of God and Equal with God," 97.

⁸² Hawthorne, "Form of God and Equal with God," 97. Εἰμί occurs over 200 times in the New Testament, while ὑπάρχω occurs only 60 times.

⁸³ Hawthorne, "Form of God and Equal with God," 97.

⁸⁴ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 123.

equality of status with God before the incarnation. But Dunn and some others see here an allusion that amounts simply to Adam Christology.⁸⁵ The argument largely hinges on the semantic overlap between μορφή θεοῦ (form of God) and εἰκὼν θεοῦ (image of God) from Genesis 1:27.⁸⁶ He argues that since the contrast with Adam is in the context of an allusion, the fact that the words “form” (μορφή) and “image” (εἰκὼν) are different carries less weight against the Adamic reading at this point. Allusion then allows him to make an “imaginative jump” to bridge the gap between μορφή θεοῦ and εἰκὼν θεοῦ that is necessary for the Adamic reading.⁸⁷ So the interpretive implication of the Adam-Christ contrast is that while Adam grasped to “be like God” (Gen. 3:5), Christ did not grasp at such a status.⁸⁸ Is such a reading warranted though? Before one makes the “imaginative leap,” one should note that words acquire their specific meanings with relation to other words in phrases and sentences.⁸⁹ One major problem in envisioning Adam Christology here is that μορφή θεοῦ is never used elsewhere in any allusion to Adam in the Septuagint or any other pre-Pauline writing.⁹⁰ That alone severely restricts the argument that Paul contrasts Adam and Christ here. Appealing to allusion or “an awareness of how allusion functions”⁹¹ in order to sidestep serious critique becomes exponentially harder when the allusion has no basis in previous writing. It makes a rather unproductive allusion. There is also an immediate contextual consideration that militates against the Adamic reading. Remember that Paul, by the example of Christ, is illustrating to the Philippians how to act with *humility*. Dunn seems to ignore that it is not humble to not want to be equal with God. That is

⁸⁵ Bauckham believes, and for good reason, that reading Adam Christology in this passage has proved to serve as a red herring.

⁸⁶ James D.G. Dunn, “Christ, Adam, and Preexistence,” in *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Know Press, 1998), 77.

⁸⁷ Dunn, “Christ, Adam, and Preexistence,” 75.

⁸⁸ Dunn, “Christ, Adam, and Preexistence,” 76.

⁸⁹ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 121; *How on Earth?*, 98-99.

⁹⁰ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 122; *How on Earth?*, 98-100.

⁹¹ Dunn, “Christ, Adam, and Preexistence,” 75. I de-italicized the words.

simply refraining from blasphemy and foolish hubris. If Adam chose to not eat of the fruit, it would have been a right act of obedience and submission to God by not replacing God with himself as the ultimate arbiter of truth. It would not have been an act of humility. So if Jesus chose to not grasp at equality with God, and had no right to or was not equal with God in the first place, then the exaltation of Christ in 9-11 for refrain from blasphemy seems blatantly unwarranted. Does Christ really receive the divine name YHWH, “the name above every name” (Phil. 2:9), because he “humbly” refrained from committing blasphemy?⁹² When one looks not just at the lexical meaning but also at the context in which this “hymn” is set, exegetical problems become much easier to solve. This brings us back to the point that “form of God” (μορφῆ θεοῦ) and “being equal with God” (τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ) inform each other. Here μορφῆ refers to that which really and fully expresses the being that underlies it.⁹³ The phrase as a whole, ἐν μορφῆ θεοῦ, should be seen against the backdrop of the glory of God by which God was pictured in the Old Testament and intertestamental literature.⁹⁴ The passage pictures the preexistent Christ, equal with God the Father not simply in external appearance, but “as clothed in the garments of divine majesty and splendour. He was in the form of God, sharing God’s glory.”⁹⁵ This reading does much more justice to the concept of humility.

⁹² Even if one accepts the thesis that the passage presents an Adam-Christ contrast, one need not reject that the passage presents the preexistence of the divine Christ. The preexistent Christ would contrast with Adam completely. While Adam sought a status to which he had no right (to be like God), Christ voluntarily put aside the status (equality with God) to which he had every right and indeed already possessed. See Lincoln D. Hurst, “Christ, Adam, and Preexistence Revisited,” in *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Know Press, 1998), 84, 90.

⁹³ Hawthorne, “Form of God and Equal with God,” 101.

⁹⁴ Hawthorne, “Form of God and Equal with God,” 99-100, 101.

⁹⁵ P.T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, in NIGTC (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1991), 210-11, as cited in Hawthorne, “Form of God and Equal with God,” 101. This corresponds to John 17:5, “the glory I had with you before the world began,” and Hebrews 1:3, “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.” See also, Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 42.

He has equality with God and there is no threat of losing that equality; the issue is his attitude to it.⁹⁶ Instead of holding on to that equality, Christ made a voluntary act of self-humiliation. Paul demonstrates this by using the reflexive pronoun ἑαυτὸν (himself) and the aorist active verb ἐκένωσεν (he emptied). Christ did this by taking on the form of a slave (μορφὴν δούλου λαβών).⁹⁷ The two parallel states of existence imply the Christ was in a prior/preexistent state as a person.⁹⁸ That is, Christ moves from state A, form of God (μορφῆ θεου), to state B, form of a slave (μορφὴν δούλου), by a voluntary act (ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν).⁹⁹ His act of self-emptying in 7a parallels the act of humbling himself when in human form in 8b. Given the parallel, if his act in the form of a man was voluntary, then his act in the form of God was also voluntary.

While he was in the form of a man, he obediently humbled himself to the point of death, “even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:8). Christ’s plunge into humiliation continues to the lowest level of human shame. The death he suffered was “like a slave or common criminal in torment, on the tree of shame.”¹⁰⁰ It is this humiliating, shameful, and tortuous death that brings forth the last agonizing consequence of “taking the form of a slave” (μορφὴν δούλου λαβών).¹⁰¹ Indeed, this type of death stands in starkest contrast possible to the beginning of the hymn where Christ

⁹⁶ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 41.

⁹⁷ I am taking λαβών as a participle of means. That is, Christ “emptied himself” by means of taking on “the form of a slave.” For discussion, see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), 630.

⁹⁸ Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son*, 25.

⁹⁹ Dunn argues that the passage envisions Christ as Wisdom and not Christ preexistent as a divine person. See Dunn, “Christ, Adam, and Preexistence,” 78-9. Dunn repeatedly reads Wisdom into Christological texts, especially in Pauline literature, but does so without warrant. For a critique of Wisdom Christology, see Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 595-619.

¹⁰⁰ Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion: In the ancient world and the folly of the message of the cross*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 90.

¹⁰¹ Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 62.

shares equality with God clothed in divine glory in the form of God as a divine person.¹⁰² The “hymn” depicts this sequence as a whole, the incarnation and the whole life lived, as the quintessential example of humility.

In response, indicated by the conjunction “therefore” (διὸ), God highly exalted him (ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ὑπερύψωσεν) and bestowed on him “the name that is above every name” (ἐχαρίσατο αὐτῷ τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πάντων ὀνομάτων). God’s response vindicates the obedience and humility of Christ.¹⁰³ This name is the divine name, YHWH, substituted by κύριος in the Greek that reflects the Septuagint representation of the divine name. Apparently Paul and the Philippians have no problem that Jesus shares the divine name. It is important to note that Jesus remains a distinct figure from God the Father, yet they share the divine name. This should not surprise anyone familiar with the earliest Christian literature from the first century. The earliest Christians believed that Jesus possessed equality with God in his pre-incarnate state (Phil. 2:6; cf. Jn. 1:1; 17:5), was an agent in the creation of “all things” (Col. 1:15; 1 Cor. 8:6; cf. Jn. 1:3), and their pattern of devotion to him reflected a pattern that was previously restricted to God himself (see below).

As a result, the entire creation will confess the Lordship of Jesus to the glory of God the Father. Paul has worked into the text Isaiah 45:23 as a “Christological midrash” or Christological exegesis.¹⁰⁴ Isaiah 45 as a whole contains strong monotheistic statements and it is in the section of Isaiah often known as “the trial of the false gods” (Isa. 40-48). Yahweh states, “I am the LORD [Yahweh], and there is no other, besides me there is no God” (Isa. 45:5), and “I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness. I make well-being and create

¹⁰² Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 62.

¹⁰³ Moisés Silva, “Philippians,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 837.

¹⁰⁴ Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 92.

calamity. I am the LORD [Yahweh], who does all these things” (Isa. 45:6c-7). Yet Paul, when he works Isaiah into the “hymn,” applies the universal declaration of worship not to God the Father, but to Jesus (Phil. 2:11).¹⁰⁵ The text of Isaiah 45:23, Yahweh speaking, reads:

By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: ‘To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.

κατ’ ἐμαυτοῦ ὀμνύω ἢ μὴν ἐξελεύσεται ἐκ τοῦ στόματός μου δικαιοσύνη οἱ λόγοι μου οὐκ ἀποστραφήσονται ὅτι ἐμοὶ κάμψει πᾶν γόνυ καὶ ἐξομολογήσεται πᾶσα γλῶσσα τῷ θεῷ (LXX)

Paul is not only stating the intention of God in exalting Christ, but that he will certainly carry it out. He does not directly or formally quote the OT here, “but has worked that quotation into his text by making it the purpose of the exaltation, the subjunctive is required after ἵνα.”¹⁰⁶ But is this worship future or present? The future-or-present dichotomy is a false one; rather, it is both future and present.¹⁰⁷ In a future sense all people “in heaven and on earth and under the earth” will recognize the Lordship of Christ (Phil. 2:10). Either in subjection or voluntary submission, all will bow the knee. In the present, the exaltation of Christ means that Christians recognize that Christ is Lord and worship him in the life of the church.¹⁰⁸ For Paul and his readers the worship of Jesus did not compromise Jewish monotheism. On the contrary, Jesus Christ, who bears the divine name of the one Lord Yahweh, receives worship “to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:11).¹⁰⁹

Summary

¹⁰⁵ This is not to say that Jesus is worshipped to the exclusion of God the Father, but the worship of Jesus redounds to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:11).

¹⁰⁶ Wallace, *Grammar*, 474.

¹⁰⁷ Larry J. Kreitzer, “When He at Last Is First!,” in *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Know Press, 1998), 119.

¹⁰⁸ Larry J. Kreitzer, “When He at Last Is First!,” 119-120.

¹⁰⁹ Silva, “Philippians,” 838.

This passage narrates the sequence of events from Jesus' preexistent state clothed in divine glory, his incarnation, to humiliation to the point of death, and finally his exaltation by God. Paul places this "hymn" in the midst of ethical instruction to humility. This demonstrates that the christological narrative in the "hymn" was known and accepted by the Philippians. Within the passage one finds Christ by his very nature deity and thus equal with God (Phil. 2:6). He voluntarily set aside his divine glory and took on human nature (Phil. 2:7). While on earth, he humbled himself to a death on a cross like a common criminal or slave (Phil. 2:8). But God vindicated his obedience by exalting him and giving him the name above every name, the divine name Yahweh (Phil. 2:9). Christians in the present recognize his Lordship and worship him to the glory of God the Father as a preview of the universal exaltation that will occur in the future (Phil. 2:10-11). Earliest Christians gave Jesus an exalted place that amounted to divine status and did so readily while they maintained their strict Jewish monotheistic roots and simultaneous worship of God the Father. Neither God nor Jesus was worshipped to the exclusion of the other, but with reference to each other. Most often, Jesus was the *content* and *occasion* of worship, while God the Father was the ultimate recipient. Such a radical innovation evidences that Christians, from the beginning, defined God with reference to Jesus, and Jesus with reference to God. Both figures bore the divine name, YHWH, yet remained distinct persons.

The "Johannine Christ" Compared to the Earliest Christ

Introduction

The objective of this section is to demonstrate that the highest Christology in the Gospel of John is already found in the earliest Christian literature. This is not an exhaustive Johannine Christology; rather, it is a treatment of selected texts that aptly represent the whole. Most scholars date the composition of the Gospel of John between 80-95 CE. Although there is a

(rising?) minority who have disputed the conventional date and argue for a pre-70 CE date, I will simply grant the later date for the sake of argument. It is often argued that the author(s) of John, writing after many decades of Christological development, produced a Gospel with the “highest” Christology. In this view, John represents the apex of Christology, where Jesus finally “becomes true deity.” But is this the case? Or are all the supposedly unique features of Johannine Christology already definitional of the Christian movement since its inception? The exegesis of 1 Corinthians 8:6, Colossians 1:15-17, and Philippians 2:6-11 above provide the chief examples that the earliest Christology was in fact the “highest” Christology. The supposed Johannine Christological distinctives, like Christ as true deity, as creator of all things, and as bearing the divine name Yahweh, all occur prior to common dating of the Gospel of John

By his Nature True Deity

The Gospel of John opens with the famous line:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος (Jn. 1:1).

The Word (ὁ λόγος), later identified as pre-incarnate unique Son Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:14, 17-18), already existed however far back one pushes time. The imperfect tense of the verb εἶμί (ἦν) indicates that the Word had an on-going existence in the past, that there was not a point in time when the Word was not. The Word existed “face to face” with (πρὸς) God. There are two distinct figures here, the Word (Jesus Christ) and God (the Father). John 1:1c then states that, “the Word was God” (θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος). Is John saying that the Word and God in John 1:1b are identical/convertible figures? Is it the Word = God and God = The Word?¹¹⁰ First one must keep

¹¹⁰ Such an interpretation would amount to a form of Sabellianism or modalism (i.e. God takes successive forms, the Father, then the Son, then the Spirit). The Gospel of John is the least likely place to find modalism. See Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 268.

in mind the previous clause, that the Word and God are distinct and in communion.¹¹¹ So, immediate context suggests that “the Word” and “God” are not the same person or equivalent expressions. If in John 1:1c θεὸς should be definite, and therefore equate as convertible “the Word” and “God,” it would mean that “the Word” is the Father. This clearly militates against the rest of the Johannine Prologue and the entire Gospel of John.¹¹² Grammatically and theologically (in the Gospel of John and the NT as a whole) the most coherent reading of John 1:1c is that θεὸς is qualitative.¹¹³ That is, the Word is by his very nature true deity. He had all the qualities and attributes that “God” of 1:1b had from eternity yet he was distinct from the Father.¹¹⁴ This construction was the most concise way John could have stated those two truths.¹¹⁵ The “High Priestly Prayer” of Jesus provides additional information about the preexistent state of Jesus. Christ prays to the Father:

And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed (Jn. 17:5).

Jesus was clothed in divine glory (δόξα) with the Father in eternity past. The Gospel of John clearly expresses the conviction that Jesus preexisted the creation of the world where he shared divine glory in communion with the Father.

That Christ was true deity yet distinct from the Father, however, is not unique or new to the Gospel of John. Paul and his churches believed that the preexistent Christ existed in the “form of God” and was equal with God prior to his incarnation clothed in divine glory (Phil. 2:6-7). Indeed, he is “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15) who “is before all things” (Col.

¹¹¹ This is consistent throughout the Gospel of John. God (the Father) and Jesus are not the same person, although they are united in their purpose (e.g. Jn. 5:19-23; 6:37-40; 10:22-30).

¹¹² See especially Jn. 1:14-18.

¹¹³ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 266-69. Reading θεὸς as indefinite or definite poses serious problems.

¹¹⁴ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 269.

¹¹⁵ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 269.

1:17) and “in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col. 2:9). Paul even reworked the Shema to include Christ (1 Cor. 8:6). The author of the book of Hebrews, writing before 70 CE,¹¹⁶ calls the Son “the exact imprint of his [God’s] nature” (Heb. 1:3). Thus the earliest Christian literature attests to the belief in the deity of Christ. If author(s) of John wrote toward the end of the first century, he does not add deity to Jesus; rather, he wrote consistently with the wide breath of Christian literature written before him.

Creator of All Things

In the Prologue of John, Jesus is also depicted as the agent by which all things were created. It reads:

All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν ὃ γέγονεν (Jn. 1:3).

There is no ambiguity in this text. The Word, pre-incarnate Jesus, was the one through (διὰ) whom “all things” (πάντα) were created. His role as agent in creation is not unique to John, though. When Paul incorporates the Lord Jesus into the Shema he recognizes that “all things” (τὰ πάντα) were created through (διὰ) him (1 Cor. 8:6). Paul uses the same preposition διὰ to refer to Jesus as creator of “all things” (τὰ πάντα) in Colossians 1:16, but also uses the prepositions ἐν (in, or by) and εἰς (for) with regard to his role in creation. Two of those three prepositions (διὰ, εἰς), as noted earlier, were attribute to the Father’s role in creation in Romans 11:36. The author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 102:25-27, a text that describes Yahweh’s as the unique creator, with reference to Jesus. Well before the close of the first century Jesus was acclaimed as the creator of all things in the earliest Christian literature.

Jesus Bears the Divine Name

¹¹⁶ Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son*, 31-33.

John presents the deity of Christ through Jesus' use of the phrase "I am" (ἐγὼ εἰμί). It occurs on four primary occasions:

I told you [Jewish authorities] that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins (ἐὰν γὰρ πιστεύσητε ἐγὼ εἰμί) (Jn. 8:24).

Jesus said to them [Jewish authorities], "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am" (πρὶν Ἀβραάμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί) (Jn. 8:58).

I am telling you [disciples] this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he (ἵνα πιστεύσητε...ἐγὼ εἰμί) (Jn. 13:19).

Jesus said to them [chief priests and Pharisees], "I am he" (ἐγὼ εἰμί). [...] Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he" (ἐγὼ εἰμί) (Jn. 18:5-6).

The consistent use of the phrase "I am" (ἐγὼ εἰμί) on the lips of Jesus and the context of each passage suggests that John attributes to Jesus claim to the divine name Yahweh. John likely connects the use of ἐγὼ εἰμί back to the Septuagint and draws from it. The key Septuagint texts that use the phrase to identify Yahweh reside in Isaiah. Yahweh is the speaker in each of the texts.

Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD [Yahweh], the first, and with the last; I am he (ἐγὼ εἰμί) (Isa. 41:4 LXX).

"You are my witness," declares the LORD [Yahweh] [...] that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he (ἵνα...πιστεύσητε...ἐγὼ εἰμί). Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me (Isa. 43:10 LXX).

Even to your old age I am he (ἐγὼ εἰμί), and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save (Isa. 46:4 LXX).

Notice especially the parallels between John 13:19 and Isaiah 43:10. There is a strong grammatical parallel. With the extraneous words set aside, they both use the phrase ἵνα πιστεύσητε ἐγὼ εἰμί (so that you may believe I am). There is also a contextual parallel. In Isaiah 40-48, Yahweh challenges the false gods. One of his challenges is that they display their knowledge of future events, something only Yahweh can do (Isa. 41:21-22). In John, Jesus

explicitly tells his disciples that he tells them future events so that they may believe that ἐγώ εἰμι (Jn. 13:18-19). John would have been hard-pressed to state his purpose, that Jesus claimed that he is Yahweh, more forcefully.

The application of Yahweh texts to Jesus stretches back to the earliest Christian literature, though.¹¹⁷ As seen above, Pauline communities presupposed that Jesus bears the divine name and that all people owe him worship (Phil. 2:9-11). Thirty to forty years before John, Paul reworked the Shema, the traditional Jewish expression of Yahweh's divine uniqueness, to include Jesus (1 Cor. 8:6). He did so without violating monotheism and amidst strong anti-polytheistic statements. Peter, in his Pentecost speech, applies Yahweh texts to Jesus (Joel 2:28-32 in Acts 2:17-21, Ps. 16:8-11 in Acts 2:25-28). The opening chapter of Hebrews draws from Yahweh texts and applies them to Jesus. The author, using Yahweh texts, asserts that angels must worship Jesus and attributes to him the creation of the heavens and the earth (Deut. 32:43 in Heb. 1:6, Ps. 102:25-27 in Heb. 1:10-12). These verses represent only part of the rich body of material that predates the common date of John that attest to the application of the divine name to Jesus. The phenomenon occurs throughout the entire New Testament. This suggests that the application of the divine name to Jesus developed not over the course of many decades of theological reflection, but within the earliest period after the execution of Jesus (see below).

Conclusion

When compared to the Gospel of John, the earliest Christian literature portrays Jesus in an equally exalted fashion. They both evidence the belief, even presuppose, that Christ was true deity, preexistent Creator, and bears the divine name, YHWH. The earliest Christology is the highest Christology. Concepts often thought unique to the Johannine corpus had been present

¹¹⁷ See Appendix A for an extensive list of the New Testament use of Yahweh texts.

already certainly in Paul and in the early Jerusalem community (see below). Pauline Christology completely undercuts the common evolutionary approach that posits that John first attributes deity to Christ. Therefore, evolutionary proponents must severely revise their thesis *ad hoc* to account for these glaring anomalies, or they must consider their thesis fundamentally flawed and reconsider their entire framework for discussing the historical development of Christology. The originalist position offers a compelling explanation that renders the evolutionary approach unnecessary and unwarranted.

Chronology

Paul: Date of Letters and Chronology

The chronology of the life of Paul, known before his conversion as Saul of Tarsus, indicates a rapidly formulated and early ‘high’ Christology and devotional practice toward Jesus normally reserved for God (the Father) alone. Paul wrote his first letters around 48-50 CE and continued writing letters for approximately the next 15 years until ca. 65 CE.¹¹⁸ Thus, a scant 15 to 20 years separate the death of Jesus and the first Pauline letters.¹¹⁹ This period witnesses a development that indicates, in terms of content and time, a “high” and rapidly formed Christology.¹²⁰ And since Paul presupposes a fully developed Christology throughout his letters, this indicates a prior knowledge by his readership and his own prior knowledge before he

¹¹⁸ L. C. A. Alexander, “Chronology of Paul,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. G.F. Hawthorne and R. P. Martin (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 115-123; Barnett, *Rise*, 19-20; Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 359-70. I will work with the reasonable assumption of Pauline authorship of all 13 epistles attributed to him. Paul’s first visit to Corinth can be dated solidly to 50 CE from where he wrote 1 Thessalonians, see Barnett, *The Birth of Christianity: The First Twenty Years*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 24-25.

¹¹⁹ For discussions on dating the death of Jesus, see Barnett, *Rise*, 19-20; Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 126-7. The two most plausible dates are Nisan 14/15 30 CE or Nisan 14 33 CE. The current discussion will work not assume a particular date, but take into account the relative aspect of importance and how it impacts chronology in general.

¹²⁰ Hengel states that the time span is so short (between the death of Jesus and Paul’s first letters) that the Christological development that occurs in that time period “can only be called amazing.” Martin Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity*, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1983), 31.

founded some of those churches in the late 40s to which he wrote.¹²¹ One must consider the important conclusion once considering Pauline chronology. The letters of Paul fully *presuppose* Jesus as Messiah (Christ), Lord, and Son of God and a devotional pattern that accords Jesus a reverence that treats him as divine.¹²² Indeed, “in essentials more happened in Christology within these few years [between Jesus’ death and Paul’s first letter] than in the whole subsequent seven hundred years of church history.”¹²³ Because of the explosion of devotion to Jesus that took place early and was widespread by the time Paul set out on his Gentile mission, in the main Christological beliefs and devotional practices he advocated, Paul acted as a transmitter of tradition not an innovator.¹²⁴

But once one also takes account of the conversion of Paul,¹²⁵ which occurs at most a few years after the crucifixion of Jesus,¹²⁶ even more astonishing realizations arise.¹²⁷ Since Paul claims continuity and fellowship with the original Jerusalem church and visited the Jerusalem apostles, and we have no reason to doubt his truthfulness,¹²⁸ one must conclude that the fully developed Christology in the Pauline letters exhibits the same basic content and form as that which began in the original Jerusalem community (see below). Before moving on to the

¹²¹ Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul*, 31. Hengel states that, “when he founded these communities, we must assume that all the essential features of Paul’s christology were already fully developed towards the end of the 40s, before the beginning of his great missionary journey in the West.” An examination of the Pauline corpus vindicates this assumption.

¹²² Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 33. See also, Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 98.

¹²³ Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul*, 39-40.

¹²⁴ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 216.

¹²⁵ The term ‘conversion’ is an appropriate designation because of the radical nature of Paul’s change from a vehemently anti-Christian Pharisee to a spirited proponent of Christianity. It was not a mere ‘call’ as some might say, but the ‘call’ to preach to the Gentiles is certainly wrapped up in the conversion. See Barnett, *Paul: Missionary of Jesus*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 54-75; J. M. Everts, “Conversion and Call of Paul,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 157-163; Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 93-6.

¹²⁶ It was most likely about one year after Jesus’ death, either 31 or 34 CE, with an upper limit of about 3 years.

¹²⁷ Paul’s most extensive account is in Galatians 1:11-2:21, but he also writes about it Philippians 3:1-11 and 1 Cor. 15:8-10. For the accounts by Luke in the book of Acts, see Acts 9:1-31; 21:37-22:21; 26:1-32, the latter two of which are written as speeches of Paul.

¹²⁸ Indeed, such assertions by Paul could readily prove false upon examination by his contemporaries.

implications of Paul's early conversion and content of his letters that indicate continuity with the earliest Christology, I will briefly trace the emergence of the earliest community of Christians in Jerusalem¹²⁹ in order to give historical context to the emergence of the new Jewish sect.

Brief History of the Early Jerusalem Church

Before Pentecost the number of believers numbered about 120, mostly Galileans and included "the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers," headed by the Twelve.¹³⁰ This new Jewish sect was headquartered in the "upper room" in Jerusalem.¹³¹ When Pentecost came, the 120 broke out in ecstatic speech that attracted not a few foreign Jews who had visited Jerusalem for the feast whose origins according to the Acts account spanned Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, Egypt, North Africa, Italy, Crete, and Arabia (Acts 2:9-11). Peter addressed them and urged his fellow Jews to seek salvation through the recently raised Davidic Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. It is likely that some of them who became believers, those who "received [Peter's] word" and were baptized (Acts 2:41), numbered about three thousand according the book of Acts, returned to their homelands and therein established Christian communities while others joined the Jerusalem community. That those baptized departed without any instruction other than Peter's speech is unlikely. The desire for baptism presupposes knowledge of at least the central teachings necessary for baptism itself and a desire to know them more adequately. It is therefore

¹²⁹ Though they were not yet called "Christians", the term is appropriate given that they were followers of Jesus of Nazareth who they proclaimed as Messiah, i.e. Christ.

The use of Acts as a historical source is necessary for reconstructing the birth of Christianity, as it is the only narrative source regarding the years between Jesus and Paul, and bears the marks as a reliable history given ancient historiographic methods. Though, its use must be tempered with critical caution. See Barnett, *Rise*, 208-210; Barnett, *Birth*, 187-205.

¹³⁰ Acts 1:13-15. For a historical reconstruction of the Jerusalem community and its scattering, see Barnett, *Rise*, 195-228. I generally follow that reconstruction there. The Twelve consisted of the original 11 minus Judas and with the addition of Matthias, who had "accompanied [the Twelve] all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among [them], beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us" in order to serve as an eyewitness to his resurrection (Acts 1:21-22). Luke puts "Peter and John and James" at the top of the list, which indicates their importance even within the Twelve.

¹³¹ Barnett, *Rise*, 196. Barnett notes, "archaeological research has revealed a number of large houses in Jerusalem; the existence of "the upper room" where one hundred and twenty people could meet is not inherently improbable."

likely that those who returned to their homes abroad did not do so immediately after Pentecost, but stayed for at least some further instruction in “the faith.”

Given that those who were baptized first “received [Peter’s] word” it stands to reason that this “word” included propositions regarding the identity of this Jesus of Nazareth character and what he did that demands a believer’s obedience and praise. Looking at the content of the Pentecost speech and early Acts Christological material (as well as Pauline material) indicates that a person needed to affirm Jesus of Nazareth as “Christ” and “Lord” exalted at the right hand of the Father in fulfillment of Old Testament texts, not least of which were Psalm 110, 16, Joel 2, and Isaiah 53.¹³² Bound up with this Jesus whom God raised was repentance and the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). Their time in Jerusalem, however brief, included a devotion to “the teaching of the apostles,” “fellowship,” “the breaking of bread,” and “the prayers” (Acts 2:42). The catechesis of new believers likely took the form of a more condensed “creed-like” formulation something like the condensed Christological affirmations in Romans 1:3-5, Galatians 4:4-5, or 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 (see below).¹³³ A case in point is Paul’s baptism and catechesis by the disciples at Damascus after which he proclaimed Jesus as “the Son of God” and “that Jesus was the Christ” (Acts 9:20, 22). This episode indicates that in early Christian conversions baptism and catechesis went together. Therefore those who were baptized and returned to their homes departed with the basic Christological beliefs taught by the apostles in Jerusalem.

The growing Jerusalem community would meet at “Solomon’s Colonnade” in the Temple and listen to the teaching of the apostles (Acts 3:11; 5:12-13). Their continued involvement in the temple evidences that it was a consciously Jewish sect (Acts 6: 8-9; 22:19; 26:11). They also

¹³² Other early christological exegesis of Old Testament texts in the first chapters of the Acts narrative include Deuteronomy 18, Psalm 118, 2, and Daniel 7.

¹³³ I am not arguing that the creed-like affirmation of those baptized on Pentecost were the exact same as any of those 3 texts; rather, that they possess similar fixed form and content.

met at their homes for “the breaking of bread” as instituted by Jesus himself. While the “Hebrews,” who spoke Aramaic and likely knew some Greek, and “Hellenists,” Greek-speaking Jews who likely knew some Aramaic, met together at the temple to worship together and receive instruction from the apostles, “the Hellenists lived in their original homes and continued to attend their Greek-speaking synagogues while the Hebrews were based at the upper room.”¹³⁴

The apostles supported the widows of both groups at first (Acts 2:44; 4:32-5:2), but with the constant influx of new believers, particularly Hellenists, over time the community grew too large for the management of the Twelve. Eventually the community split into the Hebrews headed by the apostles, and the Hellenists headed by seven officers appointed to care for them.

Underlying the split was a linguistic difference no longer bridgeable as the community grew and from which the widow-support problem probably derived. The Aramaic-speaking and Greek-speaking Jewish Christians would have held worship in their respective languages, the Hebrews based in the Upper Room and the Hellenists at their homes and synagogues. Gathering as a single community at the Temple would have grown increasingly difficult to continue given the constant influx of new Greek-speaking Jews and that, in the long run, edification in a service held in a foreign language would not have measured up to the standard of proper service.¹³⁵ So, the holding of services in Greek apart from the Temple meetings led to the formation of a

¹³⁴ Barnett, *Rise*, 208. The influence of Hellenism makes the “Hebrews” knowledge of some Greek highly likely as it would be necessary in a community so permeated with Hellenistic culture since Alexander the Great in the 4th century BCE even with strong Jewish nationalism. The Hellenists, as residents of Jerusalem, would doubtless know some Aramaic, contra Hengel who judges it “much less likely that we could expect Diaspora Jews who returned to Jerusalem to have learned Aramaic” because it was a “barbarian language” to even Diaspora Jews (Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul*, 11).

The terms “Hebrews” and “Hellenists” comes from Luke 6:1 (see also, Acts 9:29) where the author references the complaints of the Ἑλληνισταί against the Ἑβραίοι, which are relatively rare terms and must indicate a linguistic difference between the Jews in Jerusalem in Luke. See, Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul*, 6-11.

¹³⁵ Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul*, 14.

“second community” in Jerusalem.¹³⁶ Alongside this is the simple dictum that, in general, eschatological enthusiasm and economic common sense contradict each other.¹³⁷ So the attempt to provide for the widows of both the “Hebrews” and “Hellenists” would have initially had organizational difficulties that contributed to the difficulty in maintaining such provisions as the number of believers grew. Thus the attempt to provide for a growing number of believers whose primary language differed would have led to those in charge of the dispensing of goods and money, the Twelve, to naturally focus on their Aramaic community primarily and the Hellenist community secondarily. The Hellenists felt the effects of secondary treatment and no doubt the Twelve felt the effects of pulling continued “double duty” having to provide both groups that would affect their “preaching the word of God” (Acts 6:2). Appointing seven Hellenist “men of good repute” alleviated the duties of the Twelve and at least in theory facilitated better provision for Hellenist widows. It is important to note that this split was not primarily theological, less so Christological; rather, it was due to *practical* reasons.¹³⁸

Therefore Christology arose not between a multiplicity of *rival* “Christologies” of separate Christologically competing Aramaic-speaking versus Greek-speaking Jewish communities; rather, a well-formed single original Christology emerges from a mixed and multilingual singular community in Jerusalem that spreads outward rapidly into other mixed communities in Caesarea, Damascus, Antioch, and other locations in Syria and Palestine.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ It does not follow that the two communities ceased communication altogether. The untranslated cries of prayer “Abba” and “maranatha” in Pauline texts, which he presupposes the practice thereof by his readership, evidences quite to the opposite.

¹³⁷ Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul*, 16. The believers in these communities may have quite deliberately lived hand to mouth per Jesus’ command (Luk. 11:3; Mat. 6:11).

¹³⁸ Though Acts indicates a possible eschatological element to the split regarding the necessity of the Temple and Jerusalem, and the Law of Moses. See Barnett, *Birth*, 71.

¹³⁹ Though I must note, I am not erasing any and all distinctions between Aramaic-speaking, bilingual Jews, and Greek-speaking Hellenists, but I am simply pointing out that exclusivity between them was not foundational for theology, especially Christology; rather, controversy regarding the law emerged primarily after the fairly unified Hebrew-Hellenist original Jerusalem community.

That is, “we have no evidence that the two ‘communities’ [Hebrew and Hellenist] were strictly separated; quite independently, the letters of Paul and Acts show that the opposite was the case.”¹⁴⁰

The Hellenists in Jerusalem served as a launching pad to the Gentiles as they were expelled from Jerusalem by the persecutions led by Saul. The separation from the mother community in Jerusalem intensified concern to bring Greek-speakers to the Christian movement.¹⁴¹ Through the medium of the Greek language the Jerusalem Hellenists provided the bridge between the Aramaic Jerusalem community and the rest of the Greek-speaking world by translating early teachings from Aramaic to Greek¹⁴² or untranslated Aramaisms came into the subsequent Hellenist and Gentile communities such as “Abba” and “Maranatha.”¹⁴³ Thus, though active only a brief time before the scattering, the Jerusalem Hellenists were “the ‘needle’s eye’ through which the earliest Christian kerygma and the message of Jesus, which was indissolubly connected with it, found a way into the Graeco-Roman world.”¹⁴⁴ In so doing, the Hellenists bridged the gap between Jesus and Paul by translating the Jesus traditions into Greek and paving the way for his gospel free from ritual law and cult.¹⁴⁵

During this overarching period of the Jerusalem community, temple authorities occasionally arrested and imprisoned various apostles. The authorities beat them and warned them not to “speak in the name of Jesus” before they released them (Acts 4:1-22; 5:17-40). Soon though, despite the advice of the influential Gamaliel (Acts 5:34-39), major persecution broke

¹⁴⁰ Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul*, 40. Hengel rightly posits that, “the ultimate roots of the Greek-speaking Jewish-Christian community may already go back to the group of followers of Jesus himself,” e.g. John Mark, Barnabas.

¹⁴¹ Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul*, 16.

¹⁴² E.g. 1 Cor. 15:1-11; Rom. 1:3-5; Gal. 4:4-5.

¹⁴³ Abba: Gal 4:6; Rom. 8:15; Maranatha: 1 Cor. 16:22.

¹⁴⁴ Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul*, 27.

¹⁴⁵ Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul*, 29.

out, headed by the Pharisee Saul of Tarsus.¹⁴⁶ This wave of persecutions scattered the Jerusalem community throughout surrounding cities (e.g. Damascus, Antioch). Since a general outline of the early Jerusalem community has been established, it is now easier to proceed in drawing out some implications and then expounding on its Christology and devotional practices that will provide more depth to the nature of the Jerusalem community.

The reason for the persecutions by temple authorities against the early believers sheds some light on the place of Jesus in the Jerusalem community. Was there something distinctively offensive about this new sect that warranted their destruction? While Dunn argues that the persecution arose because of violations of Halakhah traditions, but his conception does not match the data.¹⁴⁷ The book of Acts gives some insight: consistently the temple authorities would command Christians not to “speak in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:17-18; 5:28, 40). Such proclamations of the apostles to “repent and be baptized [...] in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38),” “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk (Acts 3:6, 16),” “by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth [...] this man is standing before you” (Acts 4:10), “there is no other name under heaven [...] by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12), “signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus” (Acts 4:30), indicate the centrality of “the name of Jesus” in the teaching and public preaching of the apostles. Luke writes that Paul had “authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your [Lord Jesus’] name” (Acts 9:14). This indicates that recognizing those who “call on the name” of Jesus, a phrase normally reserved for YHWH (Joel 2:32), was in some way connected to the reason for their persecution. The temple authorities had some measure by which to identify Christians, that is, if they “call on the name” of Jesus, then they violate the law of Moses in a serious way related

¹⁴⁶ I treat Paul’s persecutions in more depth below.

¹⁴⁷ Dunn, *Origins*, 113-116.

to that action of calling. The letters of Paul provide additional evidence relevant to determining why the persecutions occurred.

Paul reveals some important autobiographical information in his letters, in particular regarding his former life as a Pharisee, before the appearance of the Lord Jesus that caused a radical shift in his view of Jesus. In his letter to the Galatians, he attests to his pre-conversion life:

For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers (Gal 1:13-14).

Further, in his epistle to the Philippians, he states that he was:

Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless (Phil 3:5-6).

Paul attests to himself as characteristically a “persecutor of the church,”¹⁴⁸ violently opposing the early community of Jesus followers. No viable reason exists to doubt the truthfulness of Paul regarding his former life as a Pharisee; rather, he uses his established past, known to his readership, to make theological application by example of his own life. This betrays no hint of dishonesty. The author of Acts uses the martyrdom of Stephen to characterize the depth of the persecution Paul inflicted on the early believers, making him complicit in the death of Stephen and the scattering of the original Jerusalem community (Acts 7: 57-8:3; 9:1-2). Importantly, Paul persecutes *fellow Jews* and he describes it in language that connotes harsh, violent actions that harken back to the anti-Jewish violence of Antiochus IV “Epiphanes” (4 Maccabees 4:23; 11:4). The zeal of Paul echoes Phinehas of the Hebrew Bible (Numbers 25:1-13), where Phinehas killed a fellow Jew for idolatrous association with other gods and peoples,

¹⁴⁸ See also, 1 Cor. 15:9.

serious religious crimes.¹⁴⁹ What could merit such opposition by Paul? If “those against whom Saul of Tarsus directed his zeal were engaged in some kind of behavior sufficiently outrageous and radical as to call for strong measures” such as idolatry, apostasy, seduction by a false prophet, and perjury, violent opposition seems a characteristically zealous response.¹⁵⁰ Thus, Paul appears to have been protecting “the religious integrity of his ancestral religion against what he regarded as inappropriate, even dangerous developments manifested in early circles of Jewish believers in Jesus.”¹⁵¹ Though Paul does not explicitly state the impetus for his persecution of the early followers of Jesus, it is likely that chief among his reasons are the outrageous claims about Jesus and reverence to him.¹⁵² The persecution of Jews by Jewish temple authorities and Paul combined with the consistent characterization of the earliest Christians as those who “call on the name of Jesus” suggest that the motive to persecute concerned the claims and practices of the earliest Christians about Jesus.

Jesus Devotion in Earliest Christianity

The earliest observable forms of Christian worship possessed a “binitarian” or “dyadic” shape that show that Christians offered religious devotion and worship to God (the Father) and Jesus.¹⁵³ The word “worship” is itself subject to a certain degree of semantic range in both English and Koine Greek.¹⁵⁴ I use the term “worship” to mean “the actions of reverence intended

¹⁴⁹ Hurtado, *How on Earth*, 169.

¹⁵⁰ Hurtado, *How on Earth*, 169.

¹⁵¹ Hurtado, *How on Earth*, 34.

¹⁵² Hurtado, *How on Earth*, 34. Elsewhere, Hurtado remarks that, “the opposition to the early Jesus movement was heavily concerned with denial and refutation of its message, practices, and claims for Jesus” (Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 76). He cites Galatians 3:13 and argues that this may well be Paul turning contemporary Jewish insults that Jesus was an cursed by God by using “cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” into a theological illustration of the redemptive work of Christ on the cross (Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 34-5).

¹⁵³ The Spirit was also bound up with this devotion as an agent of divine power as a mode of divine enablement and presence. See, Larry W. Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 63-4.

¹⁵⁴ In the New Testament the words used for worship are λατρεύω/λατρεία, θρησκεία, λειτουργέω/λειτουργία, προσκυνέω. Their usage has semantic overlap, but προσκυνέω, the most frequent of the terms, tends to have a

to express specifically religious devotion of the sort given to a deity in the cultures or traditions most directly relevant to earliest Christianity.”¹⁵⁵ Because the earliest Christian worship was consciously shaped by Jewish scruples about maintaining exclusive worship to the one true God of the biblical tradition, the earliest devotional practices involved a “two-ishness” that did not violate monotheism. Christians included Jesus alongside God (the Father) in their devotional pattern in a way that intended to maintain exclusive monotheism.¹⁵⁶ One must note that none of the features of the earliest Christian religious devotion individually provide conclusive evidence that the earliest Christians treated Jesus as true deity; rather, the wide range of devotional practices taken together give force to the phenomenon that is Jesus devotion.¹⁵⁷ Not only are there no real analogies for the devotional pattern as a whole let alone any single one of the devotional aspects.¹⁵⁸ An important corollary to this is that this pattern of devotional practices functioned to identify their devotional life and acted as distinguishing marks of a known religious movement.¹⁵⁹ These factors give context to the Christological statements found in the New Testament, but let us now proceed to outline the specific devotional practices.¹⁶⁰

(1) Prayer.¹⁶¹ While prayer in the New Testament is usually addressed to God the Father, prayers are often offered “through” Jesus (e.g. Rom 1:8) or in Jesus’ name (e.g. John 16:23-

wider semantic range that ranges from obeisance to respected human figures to a deity/God. See, Hurtado, *Origins*, 65-68.

¹⁵⁵ Hurtado, *Origins*, 69.

¹⁵⁶ Hurtado, *Origins*, 69-70.

¹⁵⁷ Hurtado, *Origins*, 72.

¹⁵⁸ The only possible partial analogies to prayer to Jesus or ritual invocation come from Jewish “magical” materials See, Hurtado, *Origins*, 72.

¹⁵⁹ Hurtado, *Origins*, 73.

¹⁶⁰ The categories are not always mutually exclusive (e.g. the confession that “Jesus is Lord” can fit in the category of confession and, when appropriate, fit into the category of OT Christological exegesis).

¹⁶¹ Hurtado, *Origins*, 74-76; *Lord Jesus Christ*, 138-40.

24).¹⁶² Paul sometimes uses pray-wish expressions that include God the Father and Jesus that evidence their belief that Jesus has the power to direct hearts (1 Thess. 3:11-13; 2 Thess. 2:16-17; 3:5). These expressions likely reflect actual prayer practices. The salutations that often feature in Pauline epistles indicate that Jesus is a source of “grace and peace” alongside the Father (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:3; Gal. 1:3; Phil. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:2). In the case of the benedictions he is usually invoked alone as the source of grace (Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 16:23; Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:23; 1 Thess. 5:28; 2 Thess. 3:18). And since these letters were read out loud to the congregations it shows that they reflect liturgical practices and characteristics of these groups. Thus in the earliest decades such practices that invoked Jesus alongside God as source of blessings was common and uncontroversial among believers. There is also evidence of prayer to Jesus alone. Paul references his appeals to “the Lord” in 2 Corinthians 12:8-9. Though this incident was likely private prayer, his recitation of the incident to his readership suggests that they were familiar with similar prayer appeals to the Lord Jesus. Luke records the event of Stephen’s death where he cries out to Jesus in direct prayer (Acts 7:59-60). Once again, this personal prayer indicates that among Luke’s readership such a prayer was uncontroversial. He likewise records that the pre-Pentecost community, to replace Judas in the Twelve, prayed to Jesus as Lord to providentially guide their casting of lots (Acts 1:24). The content of the various prayers to Jesus in the earliest New Testament material attributes divine prerogatives to him as the risen Lord who has power to dispense divine blessings and providentially guide events in space and time.

¹⁶² This is novel as far as we can tell since there is no identifiable parallel of ancient Jewish prayer practice (Hurtado, *Origins*, 74).

(2) Invocation and Confession.¹⁶³ The invocation “Maranatha” in 1 Corinthians 16:22 takes prime place because of it is an untranslated Aramaic phrase written in Greek for a Greek-speaking Christian community. This shows that this expression was familiar among this community. Paul did not create this phrase, but he inherited it. The cry evidences that almost from the beginning of the early church Christians came to believe Jesus in terms of Psalm 110:1 that he is Lord seated at the right hand of the Father to whom they pray.¹⁶⁴ This appeal to Jesus has no known parallel in Jewish religion and such a place given to Jesus is a role otherwise reserved for God.

The place of Jesus as Lord alongside God the Father intensifies when put in their wider context in which confessions occur. For example, Romans 10:9-13 evidences a Christological confession that “Jesus is Lord” and identifies this confession with Joel 2:32 that states “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” The Old Testament passage is a direct reference to Yahweh. Paul uses it in direct application to the exalted Jesus who is “Lord of all” who bestows the divine “riches” to those who call on his name (Rom. 10:12).¹⁶⁵ This resembles the “Carmen Christi” in Philippians 2:5-11 in which God bestowed the “name above every name” (“LORD” (κύριος) in Septuagint, i.e. YHWH) on Jesus and universal recognition of his Lordship will occur (Phil. 2:9-11).¹⁶⁶ 1 Corinthians 12:3 also evidences the confession that “Jesus is Lord” in contrast with the unbelieving confession that “Jesus is accursed.”¹⁶⁷ This confession is done in the context of the presence of the Spirit and is in the context of liturgical

¹⁶³ Hurtado, *Origins*, 76-81; *Lord Jesus Christ*, 140-43.

¹⁶⁴ Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 121-22.

¹⁶⁵ In the Old Testament, “to call upon the name of the LORD” is a ritual act of worship (Hurtado, *Origins*, 79). Jesus here exercises the divine prerogative. See Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 257-59.

¹⁶⁶ Joel 2:32 is also applied to Jesus in the Pentecost speech of Peter in Acts 2:21. The Philippians 2 passage uses Isaiah 45:23 in application to Jesus. The future universal recognition of his Lordship presupposes the current recognition of his Lordship by believers. See above.

¹⁶⁷ The confession reads κύριος Ἰησοῦς while the parallel denial of Jesus reads ἀνάθεμα Ἰησοῦς.

concerns of Paul in the broader frame of the letter (1 Cor. 12-14). Given that just a few chapters before Paul reworks the Shema to include Jesus as Lord, this confession presupposes that “Jesus is Lord” is a phrase associated with the Old Testament devotion to Yahweh.

When Paul addresses how the Corinthian church should deal with a sexually immoral man, he commands that when they are “assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus” they should deliver the man over to Satan “with the power of our Lord Jesus” so that he might be saved “in the day of the Lord” (1 Cor. 5:1-5). The eschatological coming of Jesus refers to the OT expression of God’s salvific appearance. Believers gather in his name for disciplinary judgment and his name has the power to effect that disciplinary action. Each of these phrases shows that Jesus possesses divine functions otherwise associated with God.

(3) Baptism.¹⁶⁸ The primary rite of initiation, baptism, involved the invocation of the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38, 41; Acts 8:16; 10:48; Acts 19:5). Luke variously formulates it as “in the name of Jesus,” “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” and “in the name of Jesus Christ.” Matthew formulates it as a triune confession of the three divine names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt: 28:19). Paul speaks believers as “baptized into Christ” which marks them off as property of Jesus (Gal. 3:27-29).¹⁶⁹ No parallel to such a practice exists in Jewish proselyte practice or entrance rites. Using the title “Lord” in the baptismal formula of the entrance rite indicates that Jesus was regarded in ways similar to God and such a baptismal use of this title carries the force of a divine title. Thus Christian baptism involved coming under the power and authority of Jesus as Lord.

¹⁶⁸ Hurtado, *Origins*, 81-3; *Lord Jesus Christ*, 143-44.

¹⁶⁹ Paul explicitly mentions or alludes to baptism into Christ in a number of other passages (Rom. 6:1-11; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 10:1-4; 12:12-13; Eph. 4:4-6; 5:25-27; Col. 2:11-12; Titus 3:4-7).

(4) The Lord's Supper.¹⁷⁰ This exclusive Christian fellowship meal, mentioned by Paul as "the Lord's supper" (1 Cor. 11:20), was a cultic occasion that was a part of the devotional pattern Paul inherited (1 Cor. 11:23). Paul refers to it in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 where he corrects misbehavior and in 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 where he compares and contrasts it with the cult meals of the pagan deities of Corinth. He associates the "bread" and "cup" with the redemptive death of Jesus that constitutes a "new covenant" and his eschatological return (1 Cor. 11:23-26). Partaking of "the cup of demons" (i.e. pagan deities) and "the cup of the Lord," Paul warned, may provoke the Lord (Jesus) to jealousy, hearkening back to Yahweh in the Old Testament (1 Cor. 10:20-22). Provoking the Lord by "drinking in an unworthy manner" could have serious consequences of judgment (1 Cor. 11:27-32). Jesus plays a role similar to the deities of the pagan cults and of God. Again, no analogy exists for such a role in Jewish religious circles in the Second Temple period.

(5) Hymns.¹⁷¹ Explicit reference of Christian hymns occurs in 1 Corinthians 14:26, Colossians 3:16, and Ephesians 5:19-20. Paul talks about "singing and making melody to the Lord," "giving thanks to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," and "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph. 5:19-20). A similar instruction occurs in the Colossians 3:16 passage. Thus hymns were sung to Jesus and to God the Father and Jesus serves as the content and occasion for the worship. The most common passages recognized as hymns are profoundly Christological (Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-20; 1 Tim. 3:16). The celebration of the work and significance of Jesus serve as the content of early Christian hymns and indicate that such hymns were characteristic of worship rather than simply occasional. Old Testament texts color the Christology of the hymns, especially Psalm 110 where Jesus is exalted at the right hand

¹⁷⁰ Hurtado, *Origins*, 83-86; *Lord Jesus Christ*, 144-46.

¹⁷¹ Hurtado, *Origins*, 86-92; *Lord Jesus Christ*, 146-49. See also R.P. Martin, "Hymns, Hymn Fragments, Songs, Spiritual Songs" in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 419-423; and Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul*, 78-96.

of God. The common story of these hymns are that Jesus, the preexistent one, “made himself nothing” (Phil. 2:7) in the incarnation and his death where he is then raised up to the right hand of God where he pacifies the hostile powers of the universe, enthroned as cosmic Lord who received the right to rule humanity and to judge from the Father. No wonder Pliny wrote that Christians reported singing hymns to Christ as to a god (see above). The Christological focus of early Christian hymns is distinctive compared to any Jewish religious group of the period.¹⁷²

(6) Prophecy.¹⁷³ Among the features of the early Christian worship assembly was prophetic speech (1 Cor. 12:10; 14:1-5, 24-5, 31; Rom. 12:8; Eph. 4:11).¹⁷⁴ It is important that prophecy lays claim that one speaks under direct divine inspiration for the deity, that is, speaking the words of the deity.¹⁷⁵ In the New Testament, Jesus is depicted as being a source of such oracles, thus he functioned in the way Yahweh and his Spirit did in the Old Testament. A number of passages indicate prophecy linked to Jesus in the New Testament (2 Cor. 12:9; 1 Thess. 4:15-17; possibly 1 Thess. 4:2 and 2 Thess. 3:6, 12; and 1 Cor. 14:37-8 Paul appears to claim prophetic authority). No divine agent figures take such a role in prophecy in any contemporary Jewish group. Combine this with the concern about false prophecy (Deut. 13:1-5) and the phenomenon becomes even more extraordinary.

(7) Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament.¹⁷⁶ The very act of Christological exegesis of Old Testament texts is a cultic devotional act because of its programmatic inclusion as a feature of devotion to Jesus. The corporate recognition of Jesus fulfilling Old Testament

¹⁷² In the Old Testament Psalter there were psalms praising kings (e.g. Ps. 2; 42; 110), but such a concentration of the figure of Jesus characteristic of early Christian worship offers a major degree of difference at the least. See, Hurtado, *Origins*, 89-90.

¹⁷³ Hurtado, *Origins*, 93-4.

¹⁷⁴ By prophetic speech I mean, “oracles delivered as revelatory speech” (Hurtado, *Origins*, 93).

¹⁷⁵ Hence the Old Testament phrase, “Thus says the LORD [Yahweh].”

¹⁷⁶ For a broad and in-depth survey of the New Testament use of the Old Testament, see *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007).

texts, especially those that associate Jesus with Yahweh and attribute to him divine status and functions, within the other devotional practices indicate that Christological exegesis was central to early Christian devotion. Since the Christological exegesis of the Old Testament is so pervasive, I will give the most prominent example.¹⁷⁷ Early Christian use of Psalm 110 as a Christological text depicting Jesus as Davidic Messiah and Lord goes back to the interpretation of Jesus himself (Mat. 22:41-45; Mar. 12:35-37; Luk. 20:41-44)¹⁷⁸ and pervades the rest of the New Testament as the central Old Testament text (Acts 2:32-36; 5:31; 7:55-56; Rom. 8:34; 1 Cor. 15: 25-27; Eph. 1:20-23; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22). The collective force of the texts in their various New Testament contexts view Jesus as *seated* at the right hand of God with all things subjected to him on the earth and in heaven whether angels, authorities, or powers, and that he shares the name (“Lord”) and attributes of Yahweh. Such exegesis has no real parallel in Second Temple Jewish literature and it unequivocally qualifies Jesus for inclusion in the divine identity of Yahweh.¹⁷⁹

(8) Nomina Sacra?¹⁸⁰ Instead of writing out in full the words Κύριος (Lord), Ἰησοῦς (Jesus), Χριστός (Christ), and Θεός (God), Christian scribes wrote abbreviated forms known as the nomina sacra (“sacred names,” sg. nomen sacrum).¹⁸¹ To form a nomen sacrum a scribe used

¹⁷⁷ Other important OT texts include Joel 2:32 (Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:13); Deut. 6:4 (1 Cor. 8:6); Psalm 102:25-27 (Heb. 1:10-12)

¹⁷⁸ For further explanation that the widespread use of this Psalm originated with Jesus, see, Barnett, *Rise*, 168.

¹⁷⁹ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 21-3. See Appendix B.

¹⁸⁰ J. Harold Greenlee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism: Revised Edition*, (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 20-21; Philip Comfort, *Encountering the Manuscripts: An Introduction to New Testament Paleography & Textual Criticism*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 199-253; Larry W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 95-134; *Lord Jesus Christ*, 625-27.

¹⁸¹ The nomen sacrum for πνεῦμα (Spirit) is also attested widely in the earliest MSS, but may have developed slightly later (Comfort, *Manuscripts*, 199). Other nomina sacra entered into the manuscript tradition over time for the Greek words for “Son,” “Father,” “Mother,” “Savior,” “cross,” “man/person,” “heaven,” “David,” “Israel,” and “Jerusalem.” For the list in Greek, see, Greenlee, *Textual Criticism*, 20. For the specific manuscript evidence for the nomina sacra, see, Comfort, *Manuscripts*, 214-53. The nomina sacra did not originate out of a concern for saving space, adaptation from documentary texts, or influence from Greek literary texts. See, Hurtado, *Artifacts*, 99-101.

either contraction or suspension and placed a line over the word. With contraction the scribe writes the first and last letters while the letters in between drop out. For example, KC was written instead of κύριος and XC instead of Χριστός. Suspension is when the scribe writes the first two letters of the word and the rest of the letters get “suspended” and thus drop out. For example, IH was written instead of Ἰησοῦς and XP instead of Χριστός.¹⁸² More precisely the first nomina sacra were actually nomina divina, “divine names.”¹⁸³ They registered religious devotion *visually* for early Christian scribes.¹⁸⁴ Although the use of nomina sacra may have been influenced by Jewish scribal practices of treating the Tetragrammaton, the divine name of Yahweh (YHWH), differently than all other words, the particular scribal techniques are uniquely Christian phenomena.¹⁸⁵ While our manuscript evidence only goes back so far, whenever the words “Lord,” “Jesus,” “God,” and “Christ” occur in the earliest manuscripts they appear as nomina sacra.¹⁸⁶ Because of their consistent appearance of these four nomina sacra in the earliest manuscripts and in the different geographic textual traditions, that at least one of the nomina sacra (perhaps all 4) originated in the autographs provides a possible explanation as to their universal proliferation thereafter.¹⁸⁷ At this point, though, more manuscript evidence is required to turn “possible” into “probable.” Such universal practice from the second century onward with regard to “Lord,” “Jesus,” “Christ,” “God,” and “Spirit” indicates that while the text of the New Testament was in its earliest stages it was copied according to a sort of universal standard.¹⁸⁸

Whichever nomen sacrum developed first, whatever early point they entered the textual tradition,

¹⁸² Sometimes a combination of contraction and suspension was used, e.g. IHC for Ἰησοῦς.

¹⁸³ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 626.

¹⁸⁴ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 627.

¹⁸⁵ Hurtado, *Artifacts*, 120. Hebrew and Greek MSS of the OT show that the Tetragrammaton was treated in a special way. For a more detailed account of how Jewish scribes used the Tetragrammaton, see, Comfort, *Manuscripts*, 206-11.

¹⁸⁶ Comfort, *Manuscripts*, 199, 214.

¹⁸⁷ Comfort, *Manuscripts*, 211.

¹⁸⁸ Comfort, *Manuscripts*, 214.

Jesus is given devotion to the same degree as God and it is one that reflects the Jewish treatment of the Tetragrammaton.¹⁸⁹ While the evidence does not compel one to believe that this type of Jesus devotion originated in the earliest Christian circles, it is highly conducive to such a view. At the very least it indicates a remarkable reverence for Jesus as divine sometime in the earliest stages of the textual tradition of the New Testament.

Summary

Despite the fact that two figures, God and Jesus, received Christian devotion in programmatic fashion, I must also reiterate that Christians maintained Jewish scruples about exclusive monotheism and did not see themselves as worshipping two separate deities. One is not worshiped to the exclusion of the other. Early Christians did not simply throw their exclusive worship away to make room for Jesus. They maintained exclusive worship to Yahweh and believed God required that Jesus be worshiped¹⁹⁰ and that Jesus deserved such worship because of his person and work. The content and occasion of worship is usually Christological, but the worship of Jesus is always bound up with the worship of the Father and redounds to his glory (see esp. Phil. 2:9-11). Maintaining monotheism with two figures is seen by the way Paul reworks the Shema in “binitarian” or “dyadic” fashion.¹⁹¹ They rejected pagan deities and instead worshiped “one God, the Father” and “one Lord, Jesus Christ” without violating Jewish monotheistic scruples (1 Cor. 8:4-6).¹⁹² The name Yahweh is consistently associated with God

¹⁸⁹ Comfort argues that the nomen sacrum for “Lord” may have been first, but Hurtado argues that the nomen sacrum for “Jesus” as first has the most explanatory power. See, Comfort, *Manuscripts*, 206-11; Hurtado, *Artifacts*, 111-20.

¹⁹⁰ Hurtado makes this point on numerous occasions. See, Hurtado, *Origins*, 97; *How on Earth?*, 29-30.

¹⁹¹ Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 48-53; *Origins*, 95-7; *Lord Jesus Christ*, 152-53.

¹⁹² Bauckham refers to this as “Christological Monotheism,” that monotheism is viewed in terms of Christology and that Jesus is included in the divine identity in a way that maintains monotheism. He argues, rightly I believe, that the only way for Paul to maintain monotheism by including Jesus in the Shema is that if Jesus is included in the divine uniqueness. See, Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 26-30.

the Father and Jesus through their dual inclusion in the constellation of Christian devotional practices.¹⁹³

Paul and Jerusalem

Common Creedal Confessions

In the main, Pauline Christology substantially agrees with that of the Jerusalem community that preceded him. Three creed-like passages in Pauline literature supports this assertion, 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, Romans 1:3-5, and Galatians 4:4-6. Paul tells the Corinthians, “the gospel which I preached to you, and which you *received* [...] I *delivered* to you as of first importance, what I also *received*” (1 Cor. 15:1-3, italics mine). He describes the content of that gospel (1 Cor. 15:3-8) in creedal form. Such a creedal formulation served the function of a “summary drawn up for catechetical purposes or for preaching” that “gives the gist of the Christian message in a concentrated form.”¹⁹⁴ Three main considerations support the reading of this passage as a creedal statement. The repetition of ὅτι (“that”) four times indicates a fixed set of propositions; the vocabulary is rare for Paul; and, as already noted, the material gets introduced as “received” and “delivered,” which are “semitechnical terms for the transmission of “holy words” of the faith, both Jewish and Christian.”¹⁹⁵ The content reads:

- (1) That (ὅτι) Christ died on behalf of our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, (v. 3)
- (2) that (ὅτι) he was buried, (v. 4)
- (3) that (ὅτι) he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, (v. 4)
- (4) that (ὅτι) he appeared to Cephas then to the Twelve then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers¹⁹⁶ [...] then he appeared to James then to all the apostles [...] and he appeared to me [Paul] (v. 5-8).

¹⁹³ The Holy Spirit in the NT is seen as the OT Spirit of Yahweh.

¹⁹⁴ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1972), 17. For similar brief Pauline ‘creedal formulae’, see also, Rom. 1:3-5, 8:34; 2 Tim. 2:8.

¹⁹⁵ R.P. Martin, “Creed,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. G.F. Hawthorne and R.P. Martin, (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 191.

¹⁹⁶ Paul states that most of these “five hundred brothers” are still alive, though some have “fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:6).

This provides a link between the beliefs of Christians before the conversion of Paul and those of Christian Paul and his communities, showing them as essentially the same, which certainly includes the centrally important Christological beliefs contained in this passage and a devotional pattern that coincides with them.¹⁹⁷ This “received” Christological creed parallel’s Luke’s summary of Peter’s speech in Caesarea (Acts 10:39b-43):

- (1) They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, (v. 39)
- (2) but God raised him on the third day (v. 40)
- (3) and made him to appear [...] to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses (v. 40-41)
- (4) [...]. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name (v. 43).

Jesus’ burial, resurrection, and appearances form the central historical Christological beliefs. But the practice of “Christological exegesis” of the Old Testament Scriptures provides meaning to those historical occurrences for the earliest Christians. The twice-repeated phrase in the 1 Corinthians 15 text reflects this practice, “in accordance with the Scriptures” and the phrase in Acts, “to him all the prophets bear witness.” Old Testament Christological exegesis and the appearances of the risen Christ undergird and support the Christological propositions of the substitutionary death of Christ and “that he was raised on the third day.” Historically, the “teaching” (διδαχή) of Peter and the other apostles (e.g. Acts 2:42) likely serve as the source of the “received” Pauline creed. But in order to establish a stronger historical connection some other Pauline texts deserve consideration.

A similar condensed creed-like statement occurs in Romans 1:3-5, which reads, “concerning his [God’s] son”:

- (1) who was descended from David according to the flesh, (v. 3)

¹⁹⁷ By this I do not mean that the beliefs and practices were exact ‘photocopies’; rather, there exists the same basic content and form between those who “passed on” and those who “received,” e.g. Jesus the Davidic Messiah is exalted to and sitting at right hand of the Father, believers sing psalms of/through the risen Christ to God, and they refer to Jesus as “Lord.” The last clause, the appearance to Paul, can be seen as a Pauline addition.

- (2) who was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, (v. 4)
- (3) Jesus Christ our Lord, (v. 4)
- (4) through whom we received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith *on behalf of his name* among all the nations... (v. 5)

The material about the resurrection serves as an overlap with the material from 1 Corinthians 15, but in Romans 1:3-5 Paul relates other information, namely that Jesus, the Christ, was of Davidic lineage and was declared Son of God and believers now call him their Lord. Of particular note is also the use of the phrase “his name” in reference to Jesus that was also typical of the early Jerusalem community (see above). Basically all of the Christological information in Romans 1:3-5 is present in Peter’s speech at Pentecost.¹⁹⁸ Here are the parallel Christological affirmations:

Fulfillment of Scripture	Rom. 1:2	Acts 2:25-26
Jesus’ descent from David	Rom. 1:3	Acts 2:20
Jesus’ special relationship w/God	Rom. 1:2	Acts 2:31
Jesus’ resurrection	Rom. 1:4	Acts 2:32
Jesus as Lord	Rom. 1:4	Acts 2:36
Coming of the Spirit at that time	Rom. 1:4	Acts 2:17 ¹⁹⁹

Such agreement defies coincidence and must be connected in some way, especially given the short time frame and personal connection between Paul and Jerusalem Christians (see below). It is reasonable to conclude that Pauline Christology is closely connected to and in line with “the teaching” (διδασχί) of the apostles in Jerusalem frequently mentioned in the early chapters of Acts (Acts 2:42; 4:2; 5:21, 42).

¹⁹⁸ Absent from Peter’s speech is the specific title “Son of God.” This title stems from Jesus himself and is no doubt included in Petrine and early Jerusalem Christology. The “Johannine Thunderbolt” supports this view. It reads, “All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22). It is called the “Johannine Thunderbolt” because it is a Synoptic passage pregnant with Johannine Christology. The Lukan parallel varies slightly at this point, reading, “no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son...” The four Gospels are littered with evidence for Jesus’ belief in his unique Sonship, but some of the primary texts include Peter’s confession (Matthew 16:16), Martha’s confession (John 11:27), Jesus’ teaching of the Parable of the Tenants (Mat. 23:33-46; Mar. 12:1-12; Luk. 20:9-18), and Jesus in front of the high priest before his death (Mat. 26:63-64; Mar. 14:61-62; Luk. 23:67-70).

¹⁹⁹ This table is slightly modified from Barnett, *Birth*, 91.

One additional creed-like statement will suffice and it is from Galatians 4. It reads, “but when the fullness of time had come”

- (1) God sent forth [ἐξἀπέστειλεν] his son, (v. 4)
- (2) born of a woman, (v. 4)
- (3) born under the law, (v. 4)
- (4) to redeem those who were under the law, (v. 5)
- (5) so that we might receive adoption as sons (v. 5). And because you are sons,
- (6) God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”... (v. 6)

Paul uses the word “sent forth [ἐξἀπέστειλεν]” with reference to the sending of Jesus as opposed to just the verb “sent” [ἀπέστειλεν]. This verb seen in light of the similar text of Romans 8:3, which states that God sent “his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh,” strongly suggests that this text presupposes the heavenly preexistence of Jesus as a person prior to his birth “of a woman.”²⁰⁰ Aside from the use of the verb “sent forth,” two other considerations indicate that Paul assumes that Jesus preexisted as the divine Son. (1) In verse four there is “the otherwise unnecessary clause γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός (“born” of a woman); and (2) “the use of the participle γενόμενος (*having come to be*) rather than γεννώμενος, the ordinary verb for “birth.”²⁰¹ Like in the 1 Corinthians and Romans 1 creeds, the propitiatory death of Jesus “to redeem those who were under the law” comes into a creed-like formula here in Galatians 4. The context of Galatians firmly establishes that Paul, when he says Jesus was sent “to redeem,” writes about redemption in Galatians 4:5 in light of his previous assertion that:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree (Gal. 3:13).²⁰²

Thus contained in Galatians 4:5 is the substitutionary death of Christ and it once again receives a prime place in creedal formulations.²⁰³ Immediately after the creed, Paul draws out further

²⁰⁰ Simon J. Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 28-9.

²⁰¹ For fuller discussion, see Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 211-220.

²⁰² Paul references the Old Testament text of Deut. 21:23 here.

meaning for his readers. Believers, having been adopted by God as sons, the Spirit of his Son now abides in their hearts and cries, “Abba! Father!” (Gal. 4:6). Paul uses the word “Abba,” an Aramaic term mediated through the “teaching” of the apostles to Paul that ultimately stems from Jesus (see below). The fact that Paul can use fixed creedal forms handed down to him and to his audience to make theological points shows that the early Christian community, starting in Jerusalem, understood itself as tied to certain identifiable beliefs about who Jesus was and what he did that were then “delivered” and “received” to those who became Christians in a reliable manner.

Given that Pauline Christology bears the marks of a Christology received from the mother church in Jerusalem, the question arises then, when, where specifically, and from whom in particular did Paul acquire his Christology? Though Paul certainly possessed some knowledge of “The Way” while he persecuted it, his first formal catechetical instruction occurred, after the appearance of Christ to him on the road to Damascus, in Damascus (Acts 9:8-22).²⁰⁴ Paul was baptized in Damascus (Acts 9:18), before which he would have certainly received some catechetical teaching regarding “the faith,” as well as after baptism during his stay there. This is evident by the fact that Luke records that, after a stay in Damascus with the disciples there “for some days,” Paul went into the synagogues in the city and proclaimed that Jesus was “the Son of God” and “the Christ” (Acts 9:19b-22). Pauline Christology in his letters confirms the Lukan narrative that Paul proclaimed that Jesus was Son of God and the Christ after his conversion (see above). A man named Ananias was among those “disciples in Damascus”

²⁰³ Some might say that this issue is soteriological (concerning the doctrine of salvation) and not Christological. But to argue that is to miss the point, soteriology and Christology necessarily inform each other. Soteriology has everything to do with the person and work of Christ.

²⁰⁴ Barnett, *Paul*, 73-5; Barnett, *Birth*, 87. This is not to ignore whatever information Paul received in his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus that caused him to radically change his view about Jesus, but to focus on the formal catechetical origins of his Christology.

who would have initially instructed Paul in the faith and baptized him (Acts 9:10, 17-19a). Thus Paul here proclaims that Jesus is Son of God and the Christ, beliefs he received from Christians in Damascus. The conversion of Paul pushes two major features of Pauline Christology, Jesus as Son of God and Christ, and the initiation rite of baptism back inside a year from the time of the death of Jesus. Where else would the Damascus believers have received their Christology and devotional pattern but from believers who had come from Jerusalem? There is no viable alternative to the assertion that Damascus Christology and Jesus-devotion reflected that which originated in Jerusalem.

Aramaisms and Historical Interaction Between Paul and the Jerusalem Church

Furthermore, the use of ‘Abba,’ ‘amen,’ and ‘maranatha’ by Paul displays this unity between Aramaic and Greek-speaking communities and the dependence of Paul upon the earliest believers for his Christology and devotional practice.²⁰⁵ One might argue, though, that this similarity need not indicate shared or derived Christology or devotional practices but Paul might merely have adopted some of the cultural language present in the intellectual and religious environment. This approach provides an explanation for Pauline Aramaisms that connects to the Jerusalem predecessors directly or indirectly, but also leaves room for a large degree of Pauline theological and liturgical innovation. But is this a viable explanation for the Pauline Aramaisms? Such a minimalist approach must ignore a large body of evidence to the contrary that demonstrates Paul’s concern for maintaining ties with the Judean churches and apostles that preceded him. Looking at the broad demographic of the earliest Christians and the association between Paul and major and minor figures from the Jerusalem churches provides a wider historical context that helps explain the Pauline use of Aramaisms.

²⁰⁵ Paul uses ‘Abba’ in Rom. 8:15, Gal. 4:6, ‘maranatha’ in 1 Cor. 16:22, and ‘amen’ in Rom. 1:25; 9:5; 11:36; Gal. 1:3-5; Eph 3:21; Phil. 4:20; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16; 2 Tim. 4:18; 1 Cor. 16:23-24; Gal. 6:18; 2 Cor. 1:20.

Along with the four Gospels, the book of Acts indicates that the earliest Christians were predominantly Jews. Some of these figures include Jesus' mother, Mary (Mat. 13:55; Mar. 6:3; Luk. 1:27; Acts 1:14), the Twelve, namely, Simon/Peter, Andrew, John and James Zebedee, Philip, Thomas, Matthew, Bartholomew, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddeus, Simon the zealot, and Matthias (replaced Judas Iscariot) (Mat. 10:2-4, Mar. 3:16-19, Luk. 6:13-16, and Acts 1:13), other women, e.g. Mary Magdalene (Mat. 27:56, 61; 28:1; Mar. 15:40, 47; 16:1; Luk. 8:2; 24:10; Jn. 19:25) and Salome (Mar. 15:40; 16:1), James the brother of Jesus (Mar. 6:3; Mat. 13:55), Barnabas (Acts 4:36-37; 13:1), Stephen (Acts 6:5-6), and Saul/Paul (Acts 8:1; 9:1-31, etc.). Pauline evidence supports that the leaders of the early Jerusalem community were Cephas/Peter, James "the Lord's brother," and John Zebedee (Gal. 1:18-19; 2:9). Other evidence suggests that many of Paul's associates were Jewish Christians, prominent of who were Priscilla (Prisca) and Aquila (Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19; Acts 18:2), Apollos (1 Cor. 16:12; Acts 18:24), Herodian (Rom. 16:11), Lucius, Jason, Sosipater (Rom. 16:21), and Barnabas (Gal. 2:13).²⁰⁶

At least two implications can be drawn by this dominant Jewish demographic of identifiable figures in the first few decades of the Christian movement. First, it is strong reason to reject the notion that the rise of devotion to Jesus as true deity, witnessed in the earliest Christian circles, came about via massive influence or appropriation of pagan religious ideas and practices.²⁰⁷ Although that view that Christians appropriated pagan religion is not widely found among professional historians, it deserves brief consideration because it still finds a surface level possibility and has been the subject of many a popular author. Jewish reactions to Hellenism under the Hellenistic kingdoms in the third and second centuries BCE support the rejection of

²⁰⁶ For a more extensive discussion and lists of names in the Gospels and in Palestine during this time, see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 39-92. For early Christian demographics, see Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 38-42.

²⁰⁷ Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 39.

that position. It is true that some Jews, usually in the upper echelons of society, assimilated to certain Hellenistic cultural and religious practices under Ptolemaic and Seleucid rule. Such influences included the lingua franca Koine Greek, philosophy, dress, and dining customs. It did not follow, though, that these cultural adaptations signaled that those Jews were ready to adopt pagan religion.²⁰⁸ There is no evidence that Jews who embraced their ancestral religion at the same time embraced pagan religion by adding other deities other than the one God of Israel. Likewise there is no evidence that they were ready to accept the idea that deified humans should share in the reverence reserved for God alone.²⁰⁹ While under Hellenistic administration Jewish apocalyptic thought along with adherence to the law of Yahweh, temple participation, and celebrations of great saving events, came to define the corporate life of the Jewish covenant people. This conservative reaction to Hellenism sharpened after the accession of the Seleucid king, Antiochus IV, in 175 BCE.²¹⁰ Antiochus IV introduced overt Hellenism and launched an attack on the fundamentals of the Jewish ancestral religion. He inserted his own Hellenizing puppets as high priests (e.g. Menelaus), and an altar dedicated to Zeus was erected on the alter in the temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem on which pigs were sacrificed. The actions of Antiochus provoked a variety of Jewish reactions and eventually the Jews revolted. Led by the Hasmonaean Judas “Maccabeus” they defeated the Seleucids and rededicated the temple. Subsequent Hasmonaean elites succumbed to Hellenism and corruption, but the other Jewish groups withdrew their support from them.²¹¹ Stark aversion and opposition to Hellenism with regard to religion characterized the Jewish people, even in the Diaspora, throughout the Hellenistic and Hasmonaean periods, and it continued into the Roman period.

²⁰⁸ Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 40; Barnett, *Rise*, 50.

²⁰⁹ Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 40.

²¹⁰ Barnett, *Rise*, 50-51.

²¹¹ Barnett, *Rise*, 52-63.

The earliest Christians continued this consistent affirmation of explicit monotheism and sharp rejection of pagan notions of religion (e.g. polytheism). Paul commended the Thessalonians for their faith and how they “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:8-9). This demonstrates that early Christians rejected their pagan practices and religion to turn to the one true God and his Son Jesus. Indeed, rejection of pagan religion with their gods and lords was requisite in order to enter Christian fellowship. In 1 Corinthians 8-10 Paul addresses Gentile converts in Corinth about surrounding pagan religious setting, indicative of the sort issues Gentile converts would have faced throughout cities of the Roman world outside Judea.²¹² He strongly directs them to shun any overt pagan religious activity. Paul in the strong monotheistic passage of 1 Corinthians 8:4-6, states that pagan idols, the many “so-called gods” and lords, have no real existence but “there is no God but one.” This is right before he reconstructs the Shema to include the one God, the Father, and the one Lord, Jesus Christ (see above). Becoming a Christian involved explicit rejection of pagan deities. Participation in pagan religious practices was not consistent with the service of the one true God and Paul made this known with explicit teaching for Christians to “flee from idolatry” since “what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God” (1 Cor. 10:14, 20). The “cup of the Lord” and “the cup of demons” were incompatible (1 Cor. 10:21). Paul also speaks of former pagans who were once “enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak” (1 Cor. 12:2). The earliest Christian evidence clearly displays an antithesis between Christian monotheism and pagan religion in belief and practice. Thus there was no room for the incorporation of pagan practices let alone pagan deities or deified men. These possible pagan analogies to Jesus

²¹² Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 44.

devotion, the deities, deified heroes/humans, or emergence of new deities, fail because they require the “logic” of pagan polytheism.²¹³ Christian rhetoric and devotional practices exclusively focused on two figures that shared divine attributes and the exalted status of the one God, namely, God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.²¹⁴ Clearly the earliest Christians consciously sought to remain faithful to their monotheism and displayed hostility to pagan religious practices and its range of deities and deified people.

The author of Acts narrates a few additional examples in the first few decades of the early church from the missionary activity of Paul. In Lystra, some of the native people began to proclaim that Paul and Barnabas were like the gods Hermes and Zeus, respectively (Acts 14:12). When the temple priest came to offer a sacrifice, the apostles tore their clothes and protested to the crowd, they cried out, “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, [...] you should turn from these vain things to a living God who made the heaven and earth and the sea and all that is in them” (Acts 14:14-15). Paul and Barnabas rejected pagan religion on the basis of the exclusivity of one true God. There is a clear distinction in the mindset of paganism and mindset of Christianity, hardly conducive to syncretism. In Athens Paul conversed in the marketplace with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. While at the Areopagus he declared that,

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needs anything, [...] we ought not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man (Acts 17:24-25a, 29).

²¹³ Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 46.

²¹⁴ Deeply embedded in earliest Christian thought and practice regarding the Godhead was also the Holy Spirit. He is mentioned in a number of “tripartite” formulas and statements alongside God the Father and the Lord Jesus, e.g. Mat. 28:19; Rom. 1:1-4; 5:1-5; 14:17; 15:17, 30; 1 Cor. 2:10-16; 6:11, 13-20; 12:3, 4; 2 Cor. 1:21; 3:3; 13:14; Gal. 3:11-14; Eph. 1:3, 11-13, 17; 2:18-22; 3:3-7, 14-17; 4:4-6, 30-32; 5:18-20; Phil. 3:3; Col. 1:6-8; 1 Thess. 5:18; 2 Thess. 2:13-15; Tit. 3:4-6; 1 Pet. 1:2; 4:14; Heb. 10:29; Jud. 20. For discussion, see Kelly, *Creeds*, 22-23.

There is a distinct difference that Paul maintains between the one God who is Creator and Sovereign over all things and the deities “formed by the art and imagination of man.” Luke narrates that when a number of people became believers in Ephesus they repudiated their old practices in “magic arts” and demonstrated this by publically burning the books of the magic arts (Acts 19:18-19). That becoming Christian entailed repudiating pagan religion wholesale is demonstrated by the concern of the pagan craftsmen that their trade would founder and the goddess Artemis might be deposed if Paul kept persuading people that “gods made with hands are not gods” (Acts 19:23-27). Pagan reaction against Christianity evidences that there was a sharp distinction between the two forms of religion, Christianity allowed worship for only one true God, and this qualitative difference posed an economic threat to the reigning religious paradigm. Narrative evidence strongly supports that Pauline Christianity, much less Judean Jewish Christianity, did not incorporate pagan religion into their beliefs and cultic practices; rather, syncretism was roundly rejected and condemned.

Second, the strong Jewish demographic with identifiable figures is strong reason to accept that Paul had extensive personal contact with the Jerusalem community. The nature of their association confirms what the creedal formulations suggest, that his Christological beliefs and devotional practices aligned with theirs. Paul, when he wrote to the Thessalonians ca. 50 CE, commends them because “they were imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea” (1 Thess. 2:13-16). Context reveals that the imitating done by the Thessalonians refers to suffering persecution from their fellow Thessalonians like the Judean churches suffered persecution on account of their fellow Jews (Acts 4:1-22; 5:17-40; 8:1). The main point here is not necessarily the content or nature of the imitation, rather that Paul refers to the Judean churches in order to point to a commendable standard of practice. In the same letter Paul also

notes that the Thessalonians “became imitators of us [Paul, Silvanus, Timothy] and of the Lord” because they “received the word in much affliction” and thus became an example to believers in Macedonia and Achaia (1 Thess. 1:6-7). So imitating Paul and his associates, the churches in Judea, and the Lord Jesus is commendable. One might object that Christology is now in view here, but merely persecution by fellow kinsmen. But is it likely that Paul commends the Thessalonians for imitating Judean churches but at the same time teaches a fundamentally different or novel Christology? Given the creedal overlap and extensive personal contact with Jerusalem Christians, such a position is highly dubious to maintain without strong evidence to support it. Paul presupposes in the letter that a basic solidarity and unity in belief between these three represented by a unit of propositions he calls “the word of the Lord” and “the word of God” (1 Thess. 1:8; 2:13). In Galatians Paul also writes that there were “churches of Judea that are in Christ” before his conversion and he presupposes that they shared a common “faith” with him (Gal. 1:22-23). At the end of his letter to the Romans, Paul gives a long list of believers who he asks the recipients of the letter to greet for him. Among these individuals are fellow Jews Andronicus and Junia. Importantly, Paul provides brief but significant details that Andronicus and Junia “are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me” (Rom. 16:7). Since Paul became a Christian around one year after the death of Jesus, Andronicus and Junia became Christians even before that in the infancy of the Jerusalem church under the “teaching” of the apostles. That they associated with Paul having been instructed in the faith before him by the original apostles, however this occurred historically, indicates that Paul legitimately carried the apostolic message that preceded him and that lesser known figures like Andronicus and Junia acknowledged this fact.

Paul was personally familiar with the Jerusalem apostles, having met with some of them on a number of occasions. In his letter to the Galatian churches Paul references that “those who were apostles before me” were originally located in Jerusalem (Gal. 1:17). Among those apostles were the “pillars” of the Jerusalem church and leaders of the gospel to the Jews, “James and Cephas and John” (Gal. 2:9). These three gave Paul and Barnabas “the right hand of fellowship” to go to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:9).²¹⁵ Elsewhere, he shows his more than surface knowledge of the Jerusalem community by knowing that “the other apostles and Lord’s brothers and Cephas” were married (1 Cor. 9:5). His meetings with them would have likely provided him with this personal information about the marital status of the Jerusalem apostles. The book of Acts combined with the letters of Paul indicates that Paul visited Jerusalem at least five times.²¹⁶ Paul mentions two, the first visit took place three years after his conversion (Gal. 1:18) and the second fourteen years later (Gal. 2:1).²¹⁷ Acts narrates five visits: (1) after his conversion (Acts 9:26-28); (2) a “famine visit” (Acts 11:30; 12:25); (3) a visit involving the issue of circumcision (Acts 15:1, 5); (4) a brief visit following his second missionary journey; (5) a visit after his third missionary journey that involved bringing the collection to the Jerusalem church, his arrest, imprisonment and appeal to Rome (Acts 21:17-25:12).

Paul’s account of his first visit in Galatians around 37 CE parallels the passage narrated in Acts 9:26-28. Here Paul befriended Barnabas and met with Peter and James, the Lord’s

²¹⁵ James, Cephas, and John are no doubt part of the group in Jerusalem Paul calls “those who were apostles before me”, as he identifies Cephas and “James the Lord’s brother” as apostles when he visited Jerusalem after three years in Damascus, Arabia, and Damascus again (Gal. 1:17-19).

²¹⁶ For a more detailed discussion, see Robert Stein, “Jerusalem,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. G.F. Hawthorne and R. P. Martin (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 464-473.

²¹⁷ There is dispute as to whether Paul meant 14 years after his conversion or 14 years after the first Jerusalem visit. The latter view is more likely given that in Galatians 1:18, 21; 2:1 there are three “then(s)” (ἐπειτα). Paul in other instances when he uses this term, except one, ties what follows to what preceded (1 Cor. 15:6, 7, 23, 46; 1 Thess. 4:17; the exception is 1 Cor. 12:28). So it is best to see this passage as referring to 14 years after the first Jerusalem visit. For this view, see Stein, “Jerusalem,” 466-67. For the opposite view, see Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 361-63.

brother in private for fifteen days. To repeat the oft-cited phrase, they surely talked about more than just the weather. The verb ἵστορησαί suggests that Paul went there to “acquire information” from the apostles (Gal. 1:18). It is likely that he received some of the traditions at this meeting that he then also delivered among which were that Peter and James were both married (1 Cor. 7:10) and the accounts concerning the appearances of the Lord Jesus to them (1 Cor. 15:5, 7).

The second visit that Paul mentions (Gal. 2:1-10) parallels the Acts 15 “Jerusalem Council” that involved a group that was teaching the necessity of circumcision for salvation (Acts 15:1).²¹⁸ For Paul there were two key issues at stake, one was the primary theological issue of justification before God and the other issue was his own apostleship. The council, which included James and Peter, recognized with Paul that circumcision was not necessary for salvation and thus salvation was through grace alone. The Gentiles only needed to believe in order to be justified. The council recognized salvation through grace alone because the Spirit had come upon the believing Gentiles, which confirmed their acceptance by God (Acts 15:7-9, 12, 14). The council issued a decree to the churches in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia that advised them to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols, non-kosher meat, and sexual immorality (Acts 15:29). This was not a theologically driven decree, but one that sought to promote sensitivity between the Gentiles and Jews in those locations where the social intercourse was likely more tense than elsewhere.²¹⁹ Paul reflects this attitude with his own practice and instruction concerning “weaker” brothers (Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 8-10). Therefore there is no reason to doubt that Paul supported the decree.

The second issue for Paul at the council was the vindication of his own apostleship by the Jerusalem leaders. They not only acknowledged his message, but also his divine calling as

²¹⁸ For a more detailed discussion of the Jerusalem Church Council, see Stein, “Jerusalem,” 468-71.

²¹⁹ Stein, “Jerusalem,” 471.

apostle to the Gentiles. Having a common faith with the Jerusalem leaders, Paul can then say, speaking of the *same* gospel, he “had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised” in the way that Peter “had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised” (Gal. 2:7). This apostleship to the Gentiles did not limit Paul to speaking to only ethnic Gentiles; rather, it should be understood as a primarily geographic distinction. That Paul was based in synagogues in his Gentile mission and that his churches contained both Jewish believers (Rom. 2:17-3:20; Rom. 16:3; Acts 18:2) and Gentile believers (Rom. 1:5, 14; 11:13-16, 25-31; Gal 5:2; Eph. 2:11-22) supports this view. Without the foundation previously established – that Paul and Jerusalem had the same gospel message – Paul would have no reason to confront Peter and “oppose him to his face” because Peter’s “conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel” (Gal. 2:11, 14). What gospel? It is the gospel of Christ that they held in agreement, the one with which Peter and others on this particular occasion did not act in accordance. Paul knew that Peter understood the gospel in the manner Paul himself did and that Peter, who knew he was wrong, nevertheless acted hypocritically.

A “Conspicuous” Silence

It is important to note here the conspicuous silence on Christological controversy related to divinity of Christ or devotion to Jesus.²²⁰ There is never a notion of controversy between Christians regarding these issues. While arguments from silence are often rightly rejected, there is good reason to believe that this one has weight. One has reason to expect that if the divinity of Christ or if cultic devotion to Jesus was a contentious issue that controversy would certainly show up in the early decades. Paul was clearly not shy when important theological controversy arose. He did not hesitate when confronted with disagreement even with leaders of the Jerusalem

²²⁰ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 165-67.

church (Gal. 2:11-14). Since Paul never offered a defense regarding devotion to Christ to his fellow Jewish Christians, especially given the exclusive Jewish monotheism at that time, one must draw the conclusion that there was no such disagreement over devotion to Christ. This is especially striking given his association with the known leaders of the Jerusalem church and with lesser-known figures like Andronicus and Junia who were “in Christ” before Paul and knew the Jerusalem apostles well.

If those self-proclaimed devotees to the Judean leaders who are called “super-apostles” that Paul mentions in 2 Corinthians, who proclaimed “another Jesus,” found Paul’s Christology and devotional practices objectionable, then Paul would surely have defended himself against their claims (2 Cor. 11:4-5). But Paul defends neither the exalted status of Jesus nor the cultic reverence given to him.²²¹ One must conclude that other issues were at stake in Corinth, e.g. tolerance of sexual immorality (1 Cor. 5:1-12), readiness to go to court against other believers (1 Cor. 6:1-11) and causing other believers to stumble by eating food offered to idols (1 Cor. 8:1-13). Once again the evidence indicates that Paul agreed in his Christology and pattern of devotion to Jesus with the believers before him, which included those based in the mother church in Jerusalem. Furthermore, the Judaizers who had no hesitation to require Gentiles to perform the Jewish tradition of circumcision in opposition to Paul would surely have qualms about correcting Paul regarding the exclusive devotion to the one God of Israel if they believed devotion to Jesus was inappropriate.²²² Thus the statement that Pauline Christianity radically departed from the beliefs and practices before him must answer to the historical data before it is asserted. When the relevant data is considered, there is no reason to believe that there were major Christological or

²²¹ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 166.

²²² Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 167.

devotional differences. In fact the evidence indicates the exact opposite, that Paul maintained the basic Christology and devotional practices that he received.

To Paul the collection for the Jerusalem church was a task of great importance indicated by the fact that he mentions it at length in his letters to the Romans and Corinthians (Rom. 15:25-33; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8-9). He spends years collecting and needs many people to organize such an endeavor. At minimum the collection was an act of love designed to meet a serious need in the Jerusalem church pressed upon them because of the lasting economic consequences of the famine mentioned in Acts 11:28-30. Second, the collection would serve as proof of the Gentile faith through a demonstration of love. It also served to demonstrate Jew-Gentile unity and that the body of Christ was one. Third, the collection symbolized the “first fruits” of the offering of the Gentiles to God (Rom. 15:16) and it symbolized that the Gentile world had come to faith in God.²²³ Through the “collection for the saints” Paul shows his faithfulness to the Jerusalem church as fellow believers and his desire to remain in unity with the original faith of the apostles by supporting them financially.

There was certainly a degree of theological diversity in the early church, but the question is, were there infrastructure and mechanisms in place by which correct teaching could be confidently delivered and received that started with the original followers of Christ? The various Christological creedal statements and formulations functioned as control mechanisms.²²⁴ Christology, within the first few years, began to harden into Christological formulas and summaries and thus obtained fixity that could survive geographically and temporally as it was dispersed from the center, Jerusalem. This is why the reader continually comes across creed-like

²²³ Stein, “Jerusalem,” 472-73.

²²⁴ Though not the only control mechanisms.

slogans, catchwords and phrases, by the time the New Testament writers started writing.²²⁵ These creeds and formulas did not form haphazardly. They formed when provoked by particular situations such as the catechetical instruction that preceded baptism. Other occasions included the different styles of preaching by various teachers, the day-to-day polemic against outsiders, whether heretics within or pagans without, liturgy with regard to expressions of faith, hymns, prayers, and devotional cries. Formal correspondence between church leaders with their congregations was also occasion for brief confessional formulas.²²⁶ These various situations helped determine the style, substance, and structure of the formulations. For example, some circumstances may have called for a binitarian formula and others a Trinitarian one.²²⁷ The controversy settled by the “Jerusalem Council” indicates that there were other mechanisms in place to deal with theological controversy. Early church leaders addressed issues of major controversy that primarily involved whether Gentiles needed the law imposed on them. The question is by what standard did they adjudicate these issues? It was their common faith and the testimony of the Spirit to the validity of that message. The absence of controversy over Jesus devotion or Christology is a notable silence, especially given Paul’s propensity to deal with major theological controversies.

Given these historical and demographic considerations, it should be understood that the transliterated phrases served “to unite believers across linguistic and cultural lines in a shared devotional practice” that reflect a devotional pattern that originated among Aramaic-speaking Jewish Christians in Judea/Palestine and then was promoted among Greek-speaking Pauline

²²⁵ Kelly, *Creeds*, 13.

²²⁶ Kelly, *Creeds*, 13-14.

²²⁷ Kelly, *Creeds*, 14-15.

churches.²²⁸ This not just an adoption of vocabulary terms but also the meaning and function of the words that were specific features of devotional life. It is a “*shared religiousness*” that indicates that Paul sought to align the Christological terminology and devotional practices of his converts with those of earlier circles of Jewish Christians.²²⁹

Summary

Credal statements demonstrate that Pauline Christology and Jerusalem Christology overlapped in its essential features. They both regarded the historical figure Jesus of Nazareth as Christ, from Davidic lineage, their Lord, and uniquely appointed by God (the Father). The exegesis of 1 Cor. 8:6, Col. 1:15-17, and Phil. 2:6-11 (see above) provide a richer context and meaning to the terms of overlap in the credal formulations. That is, the earliest Christians, aided in part by Christological exegesis of Old Testament texts, understood that Christ was Yahweh incarnate, agent in creation and the goal of all things. Reliable transmission processes developed and Paul received catechetical instruction in Damascus around 34 CE, about one year after the execution of Jesus. Paul’s extensive personal contact with the Jerusalem apostles and lesser-known figure (e.g. Andronicus and Junia) confirms his alignment with them on Christological matters in the main. Certain Aramaic terms made their way into Pauline liturgical practices from the believers before him as a way to reflect the shared devotional life and thought with his Jerusalem predecessors. Given these factors, the Christological alignment between Paul and his predecessors is not surprising, but expected and confirmed.

Conclusion

Amazingly, monotheistic Jews incorporated into their conception of Yahweh a recently crucified man named Jesus of Nazareth. To explain the hymn to Christ as a god in Bithynia in

²²⁸ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 110-11.

²²⁹ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 111.

the beginning of the second century and Ignatius' belief in Jesus as true deity does not necessitate an evolutionary process whereby Gentile inclusion brought about a massive influx of pagan religion or decades of theological reflection. Not only is the evolutionary view unnecessary, it is also unwarranted given that the "highest" Christology is already present among the earliest Christians. In fact, the greatest period of Christological development took place among the Jerusalem community in the earliest weeks and months after the death of Jesus. The inclusion of Jesus into the Christian devotional pattern took place first in the context of exclusivist monotheistic Jews who self-consciously maintained that monotheism. Yet they incorporated Jesus into their understanding of that monotheism that indicates that the early Christians did not limit their understanding of Yahweh to a unitary view. Paul acts as the key cog in the discussion of Christological development and Jesus devotion who connects the original Jerusalem Christology that emerged in the early 30s with the Pauline communities in the 50s and 60s CE. This primary development arose not over the course of many decades of syncretism, but in the weeks, months, and first few years after Jesus' death. Christology did not develop in a vacuum. And since identifiable figures pervaded earliest Christianity, in Jerusalem and abroad, any account for the development of Christology must do so with reference to the historical figures associated with it. Identification of the primary [and secondary] historical figures like Paul, Peter, and James, demonstrate that the geographical and demographic movement from Jerusalem and primarily Jewish to surrounding cities and Gentile inclusion occurred in a manner in which the main Christological beliefs and devotional practices were passed on through reliable processes. The originalist position rests on strong historical grounds for an early and "high" Christology that seriously cripples the entire evolutionary approach.

Appendix A: Yahweh Texts with Jesus as Referent²³⁰

Paul

(1) Quotations that include κύριος²³¹

Rom. 10:13	Joel 2:32
1 Cor. 1:31	Jer. 9:24
1 Cor. 2:16	Isa. 40:13
1 Cor. 10:26	Ps. 23(24):1
2 Cor. 10:17	Jer. 9:24
2 Tim. 2:19 ²³²	Num. 16:5

(2) Quotation to which Paul adds λέγει κύριος (the Lord says)

Rom. 14:11	Isa. 45:23
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(3) Quotation not including κύριος

Rom. 9:33	Isa. 8:14
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(4) Allusions including κύριος

1 Cor. 8:6	Deut. 6:4
1 Cor. 10:21	Mal 1:7, 12
1 Cor. 10:22	Deut. 32:21 (κύριος not in LXX)
2 Cor. 8:21	Prov. 3:4
Phil. 2:10-11	Isa. 45:23
1 Thess. 3:13	Zech. 14:5
1 Thess. 4:16	Ps. 47:5 (LXX 46:6)
2 Thess. 1:7	Isa. 66:15
2 Thess. 1:9	Isa. 2:10, 19, 21
2 Thess. 1:12	Isa. 66:5
2 Thess. 3:5	1 Chr. 29:18
2 Thess. 3:16	Num. 6:26
2 Tim. 4:14	Ps. 62:12 (LXX 61:13); Prov. 24:12
2 Tim. 4:17	Exod. 34:5

(5) Stereotyped OT phrases that include κύριος

“To call on the name of the Lord”

²³⁰ The content of this Appendix is taken from Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 186-190, 219-221. For Yahweh texts with reference to God the Father in Paul, see pages 189-90.

²³¹ Κύριος is the representation of the divine name, YHWH, in the Septuagint.

²³² Contra Bauckham, who has 2 Timothy texts as a non-Pauline Yahweh text.

1 Cor. 1:2 (cf. Rom. 10:13); 2 Tim. 2:22 Joel 2:32; Zeph. 3:9; Zech. 13:9; Jer. 10:25.

“The name of the Lord” (other uses)

1 Cor. 1:10; 5:4; 6:11; 2 Thess. 1:12; 3:6; Col. 3:17 Gen. 12:8; Mic. 4:5; etc.

“The day of the Lord”

1 Cor. 1:8; 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2 Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; Amon 5:18; Isa. 13:16, 9; etc.

“To serve the Lord”

Rom. 12:11; 16:18; Col 3:24 1 Kgdms. 12:20; Ps. 2:11; 99 (100):2; 101(102):22

“The word of the Lord”

1 Thess. 1:8; 4:15; 2 Thess. 3:1 Isa. 2:3; etc.

“The fear of the Lord”

2 Cor. 5:11; cf. Col. 3:22 Isa. 2:10, 19, 21; etc.

“The Spirit of the Lord”

2 Cor. 3:17 Judg. 3:10; 6:34; etc.

“The glory of the Lord”

2 Cor. 3:18; cr. 2 Thess. 2:14 Exod. 24:16, 17; 40:34, 35; etc.

“The command of the Lord”

1 Cor. 14:37 Deut. 11:27-28; etc.

“The Lord is near”

Phil. 4:5 Ps. 34:18 (LXX 33:19); 145:18 (LXX 144:18)

New Testament Outside Paul

(1) Quotations that include κύριος

Matt. 3:3	Isa. 40:3
Mark 1:3	Isa. 40:3
Luke 3:4	Isa. 40:3
John 1:23	Isa. 40:3
Acts 2:21	Joel 2:32
Heb. 1:10-12	Ps. 102:25-27 (LXX 101:26-28)
1 Pet. 2:3	Ps. 34:8 (LXX 33:9)
1 Pet. 3:10-12	Ps. 34:12-16 (LXX 33:13-17)

(2) Quotations to which the authors add κύριος

1 Pet. 1:24-25	Isa. 40:6-8
Jude 14	1 En. 1:9

(3) Quotations that do not include κύριος

Eph. 4:8 Ps. 68:18 (LXX 67:19)
 1 Pet. 2:8 Isa. 8:14
 Rev. 1:17; 22:13 Isa. 44:6; 48:12

(4) Allusions that include κύριος

Luke 1:76 Mal. 3:1
 Eph. 6:19 Ps. 27:6 (LXX 26:6)
 Jas. 5:7 Hos. 2:3

(5) Allusions not including κύριος

John 12:41 Isa. 6:1 (LXX)
 1 Pet. 3:14-15 Isa. 8:12-13
 Rev. 2:23 Jer. 17:10
 Rev. 22:12 Isa. 40:10

(6) Stereotyped OT phrases that include κύριος

“To name the name of the Lord”

Acts 19:13 Isa. 26:13; Lev. 24:16; Amos 6:11; etc.

“To call on the name of the Lord”

Acts 9:14, 22:16 Joel. 2:32; Zeph. 3:9; Zech. 13:9; Jer. 10:25; etc.

“The name [of the Lord] invoked over” people

Jas. 2:7 Amos 9:12; 2 Chr. 7:14; Jer. 14:9; etc.

“The name of the Lord” (other uses)

Acts 9:29; 10:48; 19:17; 21:13; Gen. 12:8; Mic. 4:5; etc.
 Eph. 5:20; Jas. 5:14

“The day of the Lord”

2 Pet. 3:10 Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; Amos 5:18; Isa. 13:6, 9; etc.

“The way of the Lord”

Acts 18:25; cf. the absolute use Isa. 40:3
 of “the Way” (Acts 9:2; 18:25-26;
 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24: 14, 22)

“The world of the Lord”

Acts 8:25; 13:44, 48, 49; Isa. 2:3; etc.
 15:35, 36; 16:32; 19:10

“To serve the Lord”

Acts 21:19 1 Kgdms. 12:20; Ps. 2:11; 99 (100):2; 101(102):22; etc.

“The fear of the Lord”

Acts 9:31

Isa. 2:10, 19, 21; Prov. 1:7; etc.

Appendix B: Category of Divine Identity

Recently in New Testament scholarship the category of “divine identity” has been proposed.²³³ Essentially, the divine identity consists of two distinctive characteristics: (1) the relationship between God and Israel, and (2) the relationship between God and all creation as Creator and sovereign ruler. The category developed out of the concern for clarity in the relationship between Second Temple Jewish Monotheism and New Testament Christology. Generally two positions have been dominant in understanding this relationship. In the first approach Jewish monotheism is “strict” in that it was impossible to attribute real divinity to any being other than the one God of Israel. Thus, the early Jewish Christians could not have attributed real deity to Jesus. The second approach denies a strict monotheistic character by focusing on intermediary figures, principal agents, personified divine attributes, and exalted humans that possess semi-divine or subordinate divinity to the one God.²³⁴ So in effect the former forces Jesus completely out of divine status in the earliest Christology while the latter puts him into an Arian-like status.²³⁵ Both essentially disallow divine Christology in the full sense of the word divine. The category of divine identity recasts the debate by arguing for both “strict” Jewish monotheism and that Christ is included in the unique identity of the one God.²³⁶

²³³ Richard Bauckham proposed the category of Divine Identity in his book *God Crucified* (1998). He has since developed it further in *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (2008).

²³⁴ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 2.

²³⁵ Arianism asserts, among other things, that Jesus the Word is a created being with a beginning and thus not truly deity. Their catchphrase was, “there was when he was not.” The Council of Nicaea was specifically directed at condemning Arianism. See Kelly, *Creeds*, 205-62.

²³⁶ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 3. As a result, the various intermediary and principal agent figures are judged inadequate to provide a place for the way Jesus is included in early Christology. See below.

Divine identity concerns itself with *who* this one God of Israel is in terms of personal identity, though not necessarily the precise modern definition of personal identity.²³⁷ It attempts to replace the Greek categories of functional and ontological that make it possible to separate divinity and divine functions with specifically Jewish categories of thought that identify Yahweh.²³⁸ There are two main categories of identifying features of the God of Israel: (1) those that identify God in his relationship with Israel and (2) those that identify God in his relation to all reality.²³⁹ The revealed name of God, YHWH, and his participation in the history of Israel in which he revealed his character identify him. Thus, the acts of God and his revealed character combine to show a consistent identity of the one called YHWH. In relation to all reality the two unique characteristics of YHWH are that he is Creator of all things and sovereign Ruler over all things.²⁴⁰ One need only look to the centrality of “Deutero-Isaiah” (esp. Isa. 40-48) in the Second Temple Period to see this exclusive identity of YHWH.²⁴¹

Exclusive worship, then, signals the distinction between YHWH and all other reality in the praxis “on the ground,” so to speak. He alone must be worshipped because he alone is Creator and sovereign over all things. It is important to note that this worship is not the distinguishing factor of the God of Israel; rather, worship is a recognition and response to the distinguishing factors that are the unique divine identity.²⁴² Since Jews understood the divine

²³⁷ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 7. Compared to Greek philosophical terms identity concerns *who* someone is while nature concerns *what* a thing is. The focus is not numerical oneness or ontological sameness (Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 6).

²³⁸ Though indeed “identity” is not how Jews spoke of God as Bauckham recognizes, he argues the concept is there.

²³⁹ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 7. Bauckham focuses heavily on the second.

²⁴⁰ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 8-11. These two characteristics do not exhaust who YHWH is, but are the consistent Jewish response when asked what set him apart from all other reality. God acted alone in creation and any participation in his unique sovereignty is ruled out by strictly subordinating other heavenly beings as servants.

²⁴¹ Bauckham provides a lengthy list of passages that cover a large portion of the Second Temple Period that consistently characterize God as sole Creator and unique Sovereign in footnotes 8-15 on pages 9-10 in *Jesus and the God of Israel*.

²⁴² Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 11-12. That is, his unique identity is what requires exclusive worship and worship of other beings is inappropriate because they are not included in the divine identity.

identity of YHWH as occupying an absolutely unique category as the impetus for worship, the unique identity of God and exclusive worship of him are corollaries that reinforce each other.²⁴³

This leads naturally to the question of intermediary figures and their place in (or out of) the divine identity. Broadly, two distinctions separate intermediary figures: angelic or human figures with an important role in the rule of God over the world, and personifications or hypostatizations of aspects of God himself (e.g. Wisdom, Word). Principal agents, in this view, do not provide a precedent for Christology because most of the arguments for a heavenly viceroy who is in charge of the cosmos next to God have been mistakenly manufactured. In fact, such a figure appears in very few Jewish texts. Exalted angels are always depicted as servants of God and explicitly refuse worship when given to them.²⁴⁴ On the other hand, personifications of God's Word and God's Wisdom are aspects of the identity of God. They express God and belong in the unique identity.²⁴⁵ Thus real distinctions exist within the divine identity itself without compromising monotheism. Monotheism does not equal unitarianism in the Second Temple Jewish understanding of the identity of the one God.

Jesus in the New Testament is included in the divine identity. First, he participates in the sovereignty over all things. The widespread usage of Psalm 110:1 with reference to Jesus throughout the New Testament shows all things subjected to Jesus (e.g. Acts 2:34-35; Heb. 1:13; Mar. 12:36; 1 Pet. 3:22; 1 Cor. 15:25). Second, he participates in the creation of all things. As seen above, a number of New Testament texts attest that Christ was agent of creation before the beginning of the world (e.g. 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15-17; Jn. 1:1-5). Third, the writers of the New Testament consistently apply the divine name YHWH to him. Hebrews 1:4 and Philippians 2:9

²⁴³ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 12.

²⁴⁴ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 14-16. Bauckham mentions one exception found in the *Parables of Enoch*. A future eschatological figure (Son of Man) will be placed by God on God's throne to exercise judgment and receive worship. This figure is only a partial since he does not participate in creation or divine sovereignty.

²⁴⁵ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 16-17.

are the most prominent examples. Also, the phrase “call upon the name of the Lord” refers to Jesus (mostly) in the New Testament (e.g. Acts 2:21, 38; Rom. 10:13), a phrase that references Yahweh in the Old Testament (e.g. Ps. 80:18; Joel 2:32; Zeph. 3:9; Zech 13:9). Last, worship of Jesus occurs.²⁴⁶ This includes the programmatic devotion to Jesus alongside God the Father (see above) and a number of instances other instances where Jesus receives worship (Phil 2:9-11; Rev. 5:13-14; Mat. 28:17). Since these phenomena occur in the entire New Testament corpus it stands to reason that the “highest possible Christology – the inclusion of Jesus in the unique divine identity – was central to the faith of the early church even before any of the New Testament writings were written.”²⁴⁷

The Christology of divine identity has not been without its detractors though. Dunn believes the term “identity” confuses rather than clarifies because of its varied usage in the modern world.²⁴⁸ He charges Bauckham with facilitating Modalism²⁴⁹ and asserts that the authors of the New Testament are explicit that “Jesus is not the God of Israel. He is not the Father. He is not Yahweh.”²⁵⁰ Dunn’s first critique largely stems from his own confusion. Bauckham clearly defines what he means by “divine identity.” The problem with his charge of Modalism is that the statements, “Jesus is not the God of Israel,” “not the Father,” and “not Yahweh” are not equivocal statements. Jesus can be both the God of Israel and Yahweh without being the Father. His critique seems to falsely equate the categories of unitarianism and monotheism.

²⁴⁶ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 18-31.

²⁴⁷ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 19.

²⁴⁸ Dunn, *Worship*, 142.

²⁴⁹ A form of Monarchianism that regarded the Godhead as a monad that expressed itself in three successive forms – first as Father, then Son, and then Spirit. It was roundly regarded as heresy. See J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, (New York, New York: HarperOne, 1978), 115-123.

²⁵⁰ Dunn, *Worship*, 142.

The other concern Dunn espouses is a bit more founded. It remains unclear as to how the category “divine identity” produces any advantages to functional and ontological categories other than that it purports a greater fidelity to Jewish modes of thought.²⁵¹ Functional and ontological categories, however, provide an adequate framework with which to deal with the relationship between God the Father and Jesus (and the Holy Spirit). While the category of divine identity is fine, one need not eschew “functional” and “ontological” categories altogether in order to make sense of New Testament Christology.

²⁵¹ Dunn, *Worship*, 143. Norelli, Review of *Worship*, by Dunn. http://rdtwot.files.wordpress.com/2010/07/book-review_dunn_did1.pdf.

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Index of Ancient Sources

		41:4	35	13:55	62
		41:21-22	35	16:16	58
		43:10	35,	22:41-45	53
		36		23:33-46	58
		45:5	29	26:63-64	58
		45:6-7	30	27:56	62
		45:21-23	10	27:61	62
		45:23	25,	28:1	62
		29		28:17	82
		46:4	35	28:19	50,
				65	
		Jeremiah		Mark	
		31:9	20	1:1-12	58
		Daniel		3:16-19	62
		7:13-14	7, 9	6:3	62
		Joel		8:34-35	22
		2:28-32	36	12:1-12	58
		2:32	44,	12:29-30	4, 15
		49, 53, 82		12:35-37	53
		Zephaniah		12:36	81
		3:9	82	14:61-62	58
		Zechariah		15:40	62
		13:19	82	15:47	62
				16:1	62
		Intertestamental		Luke	
		4 Maccabees		1:27	62
		4:23	45	2:7	20
		11:4	45	6:13-16	62
		New Testament		8:2	62
		Matthew		10:22	58
		1:23	11	11:3	42
		5:10-11	22	20:9-18	58
		6:11	42	20:41-44	53
		10:2-4	62	24:10	62
		11:27	58	John	
				1:1	11,
				32-33	
				1:3	29,
				34-35	
Old Testament					
Genesis					
1:26-27	20				
1:27	26				
3:1-24	20				
3:5	26				
Exodus					
4:22	20				
20:1-17	4				
Numbers					
25:1-13	45				
Deuteronomy					
5:6-21	4				
6:4	4,				
15, 53					
6:5	14				
13:1-5	52				
21:23	59				
Psalms					
2	52				
16	40				
16:8-11	36				
42	52				
45:6-7	11				
80:18	82				
89:27	21				
102:25-27	34,				
36, 53					
110	40,				
51, 52, 53					
110:1	49,				
81					
Isaiah					
40-48	29,				
36, 80					

1:1-5	81	4:1-22	43,	13:1	62
1:14	32	66		14:12	65
1:17-18	32	4:2	58	14:14-15	65
1:18	11	4:10	44	15:1	68,
8:24	35	4:12	44	70	
8:58	35	4:17-18	44	15:5	68
11:27	58	4:30	44	15:7-9	69
13:18-19	36	4:32-5:2	41	15:12	69
13:19	35	4:36-37	62	15:14	69
16:23-24	47-	5:12-13	40	15:29	69
48		5:17-40	43,	17:24-25	65
17:5	28,	66		17:29	66
33		5:21	58	18:2	62,
18:5-6	35	5:28	44	70	
19:25	62	5:31	53	18:24	62
20:28	11	5:34-39	43	19:5	50
		5:40	44	19:18-19	66
Acts		5:42	58	19:23-27	66
1:13	62	6:1	41	21:17-25:12	68
1:13-15	39	6:2	42	21:37-22:21	38
1:14	62	6:5-6	62	22:19	40
1:21-22	39	6:8-9	41	26:1-32	38
1:24	48	7:55-56	53	26:11	40
2:9-11	39	7:57-8:3	45		
2:17	58	7:59-60	48	Romans	
2:17-21	36	8:1	62,	1:2	58
2:20	58	66		1:3	3, 58
2:21	53,	8:16	50	1:1-4	65
82		9:1-2	45	1:3-5	40,
2:25-26	58	9:1-31	38,	43, 56, 57-58	
2:25-28	36	62		1:4	58
2:31	58	9:8-22	60	1:5	70
2:32	58	9:10	61	1:7	48
2:32-36	53	9:14	44	1:8	47
2:34-35	81	9:17-19	61	1:14	70
2:36	58	9:18	60	1:25	61
2:38	40,	9:19-22	60	2:17-3:20	70
44, 50, 82		9:20	41	5:1-5	65
2:41	39,	9:22	41	6:1-11	50
50		9:26-28	68	6:1-14	18
2:42	40,	9:29	41	8:15	43,
57, 58		10:39-43	56	61	
2:44	41	10:48	50	8:29	21
3:6	44	11:28-30	72	8:34	53,
3:11	40	11:30	68	56	
3:16	44	12:25	68		

9:5	10,	8:6	9,	15:23	68
61		13, 13-17 , 14, 18, 21, 30,		15:24-28	10
10:9-13	49	32, 34, 36, 53, 74, 81		15:25	81
10:12	49	8:7	10	15:25-27	53
10:13	9,	8:10	13	15:25-33	72
53, 82		8:12	14	15:46	68
11:13-16	70	8:13	14	16:1-4	72
11:25-31	70	8-10	4,	16:12	62
11:36	21,	23, 65, 69		16:12-19	6
34, 61		8-14	13	16:19	62
12:8	52	9:5	68	16:22	7,
14	69	10:1-4	50	43, 49, 61	
14:17	65	10:14	64	16:23	48
15:16	72	10:14-20	51	16:23-24	
15:17	65	10:20	64		
15:30	65	10:20-22	51	2 Corinthians	
16:1-23	6	10:21	64	1:3	10,
16:3	62,	11:17-34	51	48	
70		11:20	51	1:20	61
16:7	21,	11:23	51	1:21	65
67		11:23-26	51	3:3	65
16:11	62	11:27-32	51	4:4-6	20
16:20	48	12-14	50	8-9	72
16:21	62	12:2	64	11:4-5	71
		12:3	49,	12:2	21
		65		12:8-9	48
1 Corinthians		12:4	65	12:9	52
1:2	9	12:10	52	13:14	65
1:3	48	12:28	68		
2:7	21	14:1-5	52	Galatians	
2:10-16	65	14:24-25	52	1:3	48
4:5	21	14:26	51	1:3-5	61
5:1-5	50	14:31	52	1:11-2:21	38
5:1-12	71	14:37-38	52	1:13-14	45
6:1-11	71	15:1-3	56	1:17	21,
6:11	65	15:3-8	56	68	
6:9-11	50	15:1-8	56	1:17-19	68
6:13-20	65	15:1-11	40,	1:18	69
7:10	69	43		1:18-19	62
8:1	13	15:5	69	1:22-23	67
8:1-13	71	15:6	56,	2:1	68
8:4	14	68		2:1-10	69
8:4-6	8,	15:7	68,	2:7	70
55, 65		69		2:9	62,
8:5	14	15:8-10	38	68	
		15:9	45	2:11	70

2:11-14	71	1:27	22	1:16	16,
2:12	21	1:27-29	22	21, 35	
2:13	62	1:29	22	1:17	33-
2:14	70	2:1-2	22	34	
3:11-14	65	2:3-4	22	1:19	20
3:13	59	2:5	25	2:8	19
3:23	21	2:6	25,	2:9	20,
3:27-29	51	29, 31		34	
3:28	23	2:6-7	33	2:11-12	50
4:4	20	2:7	25,	2:12-13	18
4:4-5	40,	28, 31, 52		2:16-23	19
43		2:8	28,	3:1	18,
4:4-6	56,	31		53	
59		2:5-11	9,	3:11	23
4:5	59	10, 49, 51		3:16	51
4:6	43,	2:6-8	24	4:7-16	6
60, 61		2:6-11	13,	4:9	18
5:2	70	22-31 , 23-24, 25, 32, 34,		4:10	19
6:18	48,	74		4:10-14	18
61		2:8	28	4:18	17,
		2:9	27,	19	
		31, 81			
Ephesians		2:9-11	8,	1 Thessalonians	
1:3	10,	27, 28, 36, 49, 55, 82		1:1	6
65		2:10	18,	1:6-7	67
1:4	21	30		1:8	67
1:11-13	65	2:10-11	31	1:8-9	64
1:17	65	2:11	30	2:13	67
1:20-23	53	3:1-11	38	2:13-16	66
2:11	70	3:3	65	3:11-13	48
2:11-22	70	3:5-6	45	4:2	52
2:14	70	4:22	61	4:15-17	52
2:18-22	65	4:23	48	4:17	68
3:3-7	65			5:18	65
3:14-17	65	Colossians		5:28	48
3:21	61	1:1	17		
4:4-6	50,	1:6-8	65	2 Thessalonians	
65		1:9-10	20	1:1	6
4:11	52	1:11-14	19	1:2	48
4:30-32	65	1:15	29,	2:13-15	65
5:18-20	65	33		2:16-17	48
5:19-20	51	1:15-17	13,	3:5	48
		17-22 , 19, 20, 32, 74, 81		3:6	52
Philippians		1:15-20	18,	3:12	52
1:2	48	51		3:18	48
1:12	22				
1:18	22				

1 Timothy		Revelation	
1:17	61	5:13-14	82
3:16	51		
6:16	61	Post NT Sources	
2 Timothy		Josephus	
2:8	56	Ant. 4.8.13	4
4:18	61	Pliny	
4:21	21	10.96.5	1
Titus		10.96.7	1
1:2	21	10.96.9	1
2:13	11	10.96.10	1, 3
3:4-6	65	Ignatius of Antioch to	
3:4-7	50	Ephesians	
3:12-13	6	Intro	2
Philemon		5	3
2	18	7	2
23-24	18	8	3
Hebrews		10	3
1:3	28,	14	3
34, 53		15	3
1:4	81	16	3
1:6	36	18	3
1:8-9	11	19	3
1:13	53,	20	3
81			
1:10-12	36		
2:10	16		
8:1	53		
10:12	53		
10:29	65		
11:28	20		
12:2	53		
1 Peter			
1:2	65		
3:22	53,		
81			
4:14	65		
Jude			
20	65		