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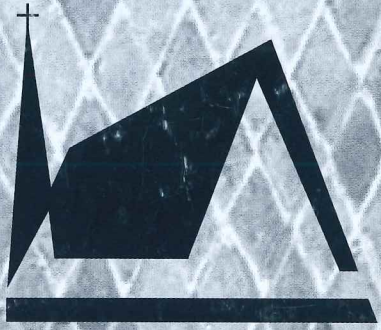

# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY

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# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY


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# Confronting Current Christological Controversy

Charles A. Gieschen

For most of us, the term *christological controversy* conjures up a lengthy list of challenges concerning the person and work of Christ that arose in the first centuries of Christianity. We think of teachings that were branded as heretical by church bishops and councils, such as Docetism, Ebionism, Monarchianism, Gnosticism, Sabellianism, Arianism, Apollinarianism, Nestorianism, Eutychianism, Monophysitism, and Monothelitism.[1] We are certain that these were the big christological controversies but are equally confident that they were resolved by the church councils that took place between the fourth and eighth centuries, especially those at Nicea in AD 325 and Chalcedon in AD 451. We view these challenges from a rather distant and triumphant post-Easter perspective: "The strife is o'er, the battle done."[2]

Despite the seriousness of these early heresies and the clarity of confession that arose from the crucible of conflict, they neither marked the end to christological controversies, nor even the climax. The past two centuries, in fact, have witnessed christological controversies that rival and surpass those early ones.[3] What is the basis for this bold assertion? Many of those early controversies concerned the true humanity of Jesus, especially the relationship of the humanity to his divinity, but *not* a denial of his divinity.[4] The current situation is much worse: the divinity of Christ as true God is incessantly questioned or denied. Therefore, although Jesus'

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[1] For a discussion of these controversies, see Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in the Christian Tradition: Volume 1, From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, 2nd ed., trans. John Bowden (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), and also the short summary in David P. Scaer, *Christology*, Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics VI (Fort Wayne: International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, 1989), 10–20.

[2] These are the opening words of the Easter hymn "The Strife is O'er, the Battle Done."

[3] For example, see the essays in *Crisis in Christology: Essays in Quest of Resolution*, ed. William R. Farmer (Livonia: Dove Booksellers, 1995).

[4] Larry Hurtado notes that it was especially "proto-orthodox" Christians that regarded Jesus' humanity as crucial for his redemptive work; *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 150.

*Charles A. Gieschen is Professor of Exegetical Theology and Chairman of the Department of Exegetical Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.*

historical existence as a human is acknowledged by most scholars, serious discussion about the two natures of Christ has ceased among those who deny his divinity. This study, therefore, will argue that the church can defend the divinity of the Son by showing, through rigorous historical research, that the formative period for the identification of Jesus within the mystery of the one God was the two decades that followed his death and resurrection as evidenced in the worship of Jesus by Jews. Furthermore, this study will set forth four often underappreciated theological categories that should be used in defending the divine identity of the Son.

## I. The Current Controversy Concerning Jesus' Divinity

Let us begin with a very terse overview of the past two centuries of christological controversy in order to set the stage for where the church finds herself at the start of the twenty-first century. Although there were several post-Enlightenment scholars who were products of the rise of rationalism and the scientific method that sowed the seeds which blossomed into modern christological controversies, it is perhaps best to begin with David Friedrich Strauss. In his 1835 book *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined,* Strauss approached the Gospels from the perspective that they should be read as religious texts and not as historical texts.[5] The point of his attack was the miracle stories, especially the resurrection of Jesus. He characterized the miracle accounts in the Gospels as mythic presentations that symbolized the truth that Jesus is the Messiah. He is the first to make the distinction between the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history. In his view, Christ's deification took place within the early church long after the death of Jesus. Although this early book was optimistic for the viability of Christianity after his attack on the historical foundation of Jesus, he offered this pessimistic assessment a few decades later:

> The founder [of Christianity] is at the same time the most prominent object of worship; the system based upon him loses its support as soon as he is shown to be lacking in the qualities appropriate to an object of religious worship. This, indeed, has long been apparent; for an object of religious adoration must be a Divinity, and thinking men have long since ceased to regard the founder of Christianity as such.[6]

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[5] David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined,* ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. George Eliot (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972).

[6] David Friedrich Strauss, *The Old and the New Faith,* trans. G. A. Wells, 2 vols. (Anherst: Prometheus Books, 1997), I. 54.

This historical skepticism, which ceased to regard Jesus as divine, characterized those who followed Strauss during the latter half of the nineteenth century. After they scraped the Christ of faith off the pages of the four Gospels, the image that remained was Jesus as an ethical teacher.

The accurateness of this research on Jesus was challenged by Albert Schweitzer at the beginning of the twentieth century in *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*:

> The Jesus who came forward publicly as the Messiah, who reached the ethic of the Kingdom of God, who founded the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, and died to give His work its final consecration, never had any existence. He is a figure designed by rationalism, endowed with life by liberalism, and clothed by modern theology in an historical garb.[7]

Although Schweitzer debunked the simplistic portrait of Jesus painted by his predecessors and pointed instead to understanding Jesus as an apocalyptic visionary who was tragically martyred, he was even more skeptical than others about what could be known of Jesus. The complete dissembling of the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith, however, climaxed two decades later with Rudolf Bultmann. After applying his criteria of authenticity to Gospel traditions, he stated: "We can, strictly speaking, know nothing of the personality of Jesus. But this does not really matter, for it is not the historical Jesus that concerns us, but the kerygmatic Christ."[8]

Bultmann went on to become the dominant voice in twentieth-century scholarship on the Gospels. He had been influenced by the work of Wilhelm Bousset, whose name is synonymous with the well-known *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* (the History-of-Religions School).[9] Bousset had sought to use his vast knowledge of comparative religions to explain how Jesus came to be confessed as divine. He understood this confession as a late first-century development that resulted from the contact of Jesus' followers with the imperial cult, mystery religions, and Oriental religion outside of Palestine. Although Bousset died at a relatively early age,

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[7] Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, trans. J. W. Montgomery (New York: MacMillan, 1970 [German original 1906]), 398.

[8] Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (Berlin: Deutschebibilothek, 1926), 147.

[9] See Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus*, trans. J. Steely, 5th ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970). The first German edition was published in 1913.

Bultmann endorsed Bousset's flawed developmental model and extended its life through much of the twentieth century.[10]

The closing decades of the twentieth century have witnessed a renewed interest in the relationship between the historical Jesus and the depictions of him in the Gospels, but this interest is still characterized by historical skepticism. The now infamous Jesus Seminar consisted of a group of scholars who voted on the historical probability of individual sayings and actions of Jesus from individual Gospels, including the Gospel of Thomas.[11] Several of these scholars have produced monographs, but none has captivated as much popular attention as John Dominic Crossan's *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Peasant.*[12] He prides himself on his methodological rigor which leads him to conclude that Jesus was a poor, illiterate, peasant leader who led a social movement against the established religious and political powers of his day. Similar recent studies depict Jesus as a cynic teacher or an apocalyptic prophet, usually far short of one who is the divine Son, although serious voices have been raised against such portraits.[13]

Two major paradigm shifts have occurred in the study of Jesus over the past two centuries. First, a very conscious and sharp separation of the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith has occurred in scholarship. The conclusion has been drawn that the Gospels teach us much about the Christ of faith but very little about the Jesus of history. This historical skepticism is seen in the movement from historical approaches to various literary approaches over the last half of the twentieth century.[14] Recent commentaries on the Gospels are no longer dominated by source criticism,

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[10] For Bultmann's endorsement of Bousset's flawed approach, see *The Theology of the New Testament*, 2 vols., trans. Kenneth Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951 and 1955), I: 52.

[11] Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and The Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus Really Say? The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: MacMillan, 1993). For a helpful critique, see Jeffrey Gibbs, "The Search for the Idiosyncratic Jesus: A Critique of the Jesus Seminar's *The Five Gospels*," *Concordia Journal* 20 (1994): 368–384.

[12] John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991).

[13] For example, see Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996).

[14] Especially prominent among literary approaches to the Gospels over the past few decades is narrative criticism. This shift to the use of narrative criticism was seen first in the study of the Gospel of John; R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

form criticism, or redaction criticism. While some celebrate this change, with it has also come a growing lack of engagement with the history of Jesus as interpreters increasingly focus exclusively on the literary artistry of the narrative. The historical research that has survived tends to focus on the social context of the evangelists and their communities, not Jesus. David Scaer warns us that we must not ignore the history of Jesus himself: "For those who have no firm confidence in the historicity of Jesus, a true Christology is impossible."[15] Second, the evolutionary or developmental model for understanding Jesus Christ has become firmly entrenched among New Testament scholars and theologians.[16] This model presents Christology as gradually developing from understanding Jesus as a prophet in AD 30 to asserting that he is a divine being who is one with God in a few New Testament documents of the late first century (for example, the Gospel of John) and finally to confessing him to be "of one substance with the Father, very God of very God" at Nicea in the fourth century.[17] This is a modern form of Adoptionism.

## II. The Search for Historical Evidence of Jesus' Divine Identity

There have been three basic responses from within the church to these controversies. One response has been to follow the consensus. Even as Christmas and Easter articles in *Newsweek* and *Time*, TV network specials, and fiction like *The DaVinci Code* have all popularized the conclusion that the divinity of Jesus was a creation of the later church, some within Christianity deny his incarnation and physical resurrection. Another response has been to ignore these controversies as scholarly rubbish that does not merit Christian response. More than a few have chosen this path: Let the academy discredit its Jesus and the church adore her Lord. The third response has been to challenge these controversies by refuting assertions claiming to be historically trustworthy. Since many Christians will be mesmerized by sensational scholarship, Christian scholars must respond. Even as we confess the Nicene Creed, we must defend the divine identity of Jesus through careful and credible historical research in the Scriptures that are the living foundation for this confession.

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[15] Scaer, *Christology*, 16.

[16] I am using these terms as synonyms. Some scholars distinguish between the use of these two terms; for example, see C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 2-3.

[17] For example, see Maurice Casey, *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God: The Origins and Development of New Testament Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991).

Historical research has identified the earliest extant evidence for identification of Jesus with the one God of Israel. This was not a development that occurred over the first few centuries or even over the course of the first century. The evidence points us to the earthly ministry of Jesus and the two decades that followed, namely between AD 30 and 50. Despite the divergent dating of New Testament documents by scholars, we can be certain that the first ones were written no later than the early 50s. They contain evidence that Jesus was worshipped, which is very significant evidence for his divine identification. Such worship, moreover, must predate the documents themselves. In light of this, consider this provocative assertion by Martin Hengel, the highly respected New Testament scholar who taught many years at Tübingen:

> . . . *one is tempted to say* that more happened in this period of less than two decades than in the whole of the next seven centuries, up to the time when the doctrine of the early church was completed. *Indeed, one might even ask whether the formation of doctrine in the early church was essentially more than a consistent development and completion of what has already been unfolded in the primal event of the first two decades, but in the language and thought-forms of Greek, which was its necessary setting.*[18]

Hengel's statement stands against the sea of scholarship that has eroded the understanding and confession of Jesus' divine identity. Historians must deal with the evidence that Jesus was worshipped as Lord by Jews already in the earliest years of Christianity, and not only by Gentiles in the final decade of the first century.

### III. The Worship of Jesus

The most important evidence for Jesus' divine identity is the worship of him by Jews prior to the first New Testament writings. The First Commandment testifies that worship of any being other than YHWH is idolatry (Exodus 20:3–6). For first-century Jews to worship Jesus and to reflect this veneration in their writing, they would first need to believe that the fleshly Jesus is within the mystery of YHWH, otherwise they would be practicing blatant idolatry. Although the New Testament documents undoubtedly nurtured future worship of Jesus, these documents did not

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[18] Martin Hengel, *The Son of God: The Origin of Christology and the History of Jewish-Hellenistic Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 2, his emphasis; see also his "Christology and New Testament Chronology," *Between Jesus and Paul*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1983), 30–47.

create or commence such worship; they reflect, rather, the worship of Jesus that existed *prior* to their composition.

Larry Hurtado has defended this thesis in his *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity.*[19] In this volume he demonstrates that devotion to Jesus arose in the first decade or two after Jesus' death and resurrection, was intense, and was widespread among monotheistic Jews.[20] Hurtado resifts the historical sources in order to show that Jesus' position in prayers, hymns, confession, baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the Gospels, all understand "the reverence given to Jesus as an extension of the worship of God."[21] After reviewing the evidence for the multiple ways devotion was shown to Jesus in the early decades of Christianity, he then offers these conclusions:

> Moreover, devotion to Jesus as divine erupted suddenly and quickly, not gradually and late, among first-century circles of followers. More specifically, the origins lie in Jewish circles of the earliest years. Only a certain wishful thinking continues to attribute the reverence of Jesus as divine decisively to the influence of pagan religion and the influx of Gentile converts, characterizing it as developing late and incrementally. Furthermore, devotion to Jesus as the "Lord," to whom cultic reverence and total obedience were the appropriate response, was widespread, not confined or attributable to particular circles, such as "Hellenists" or Gentile Christians of a supposed Syrian "Christ cult."[22]

The Gospels contain some testimony that Jesus was even worshipped during his earthly ministry. For example, Matthew records the posture of worship (προσκυνέω) towards Jesus being taken by different individuals on different occasions: the visit of the Magi (Matthew 2:11), those who seek a miracle (Matthew 8:2, 9:18, 15:25), the mother of the Zebedee brothers (Matthew 20:20), the women at tomb after the resurrection (Matthew 28:9), and the disciples after the resurrection (Matthew 28:17). The significance of προσκυνέω as implying actual veneration is made clear by its use in the temptation narrative where Satan requests that Jesus take such a posture before him (Matthew 4:9). Even if such evidence is dismissed by critical

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[19] It should be noted that Hurtado prefers the nomenclature of *devotion* over *worship* because it is broader and more inclusive of the type of evidence he discusses.

[20] See further the reviews of Hurtado's book by James Voelz and David Scaer that follow this article.

[21] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ,* 151.

[22] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ,* 650.

historians as reflecting later Christian practice, these texts remain solid evidence that Jesus was indeed being worshipped by Jews prior to the composition of Matthew. Like most literary traditions, these presuppose actual practice.

### IV. Underappreciated Categories for the Divine Identity of Jesus

Based upon the evidence of the worship of Jesus by Jews, which was both very early and extensive, this question arises: What were the theological categories that allowed for the identification of Jesus within the mystery of the one God of Israel, YHWH, which must have taken place prior to, or in conjunction with, the actual worship of Jesus? There are two categories that have been traditionally used as support for Jesus' divine identity. First, Jesus did divine deeds during his earthly ministry (for example, miracles), the foremost being his own resurrection from the dead.[23] It is difficult to overstate the role that Jesus' resurrection played in confirming his divine identity. It must be realized, however, that the primary deed of Jesus upon which New Testament writers focus much attention is his death. The significance of the death of Jesus for his divine identity is expressed well by Richard Bauckham:

> The profoundest points of New Testament Christology occur when the inclusion of the exalted Christ in the divine identity entails the inclusion of the crucified Christ in the divine identity, and when the Christological pattern of humiliation and exaltation is recognized as revelatory of God, indeed as the definitive revelation of who God is.[24]

Moreover, New Testament documents evince that many of the other deeds of Jesus were understood primarily in relationship to YHWH's past deeds in the history of Israel; the same God is understood and presented to be acting in both. Second, the divine titles which are given to Jesus are a category frequently used as support for the identification of Jesus within the mystery of YHWH.[25] Here κύριος ("Lord") and θεοῦ υἱός ("Son of

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[23] For example, see especially N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God Volume 3 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2003).

[24] Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 46. My use of the "divine identity" nomenclature is influenced by Bauckham.

[25] For an important discussion of Jesus' titles, see Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, rev. ed., trans. Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963).

God") usually receive pride of place. Less frequent are discussions about the significance of Jesus possessing the divine name (transliterated "YHWH") or Jesus' use of ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ("the Son of man") as testimony to his divinity and preexistence (and not his humanity as an offspring of humans).

Within these two broad divisions are theological categories that are marginalized in discussions of the divine identity of Jesus. Four such underappreciated categories that were important among first-century Jewish Christians are: Jesus' Death as Universal Atonement; The Son's Preincarnate Existence; Jesus' Possession of the divine name; and Jesus' Self-Identification as the Son of Man. Each of these will now be examined for important historical evidence that testifies to the divine identity of Jesus as YHWH.

*Jesus' Death as Universal Atonement*

The passion narratives dominate the presentation of Jesus in the four Gospels. Even skeptical historians have difficulty denying the crucifixion of Jesus. A natural question arises: If the church was out to transform the human Jesus into the divine Christ as critics allege, why would they focus doggedly on the crucifixion as central to understanding him? It is noteworthy that historical research often attacks the reliability of miracle accounts in the Gospels. If miracles are so important to the identity of Jesus, why do the Gospels depict Jesus discouraging those who are healed from speaking about them (for example, Mark 1:44)? The Gospels, instead, focus on the necessity of Jesus' death and resurrection as his definitive work: "From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Matthew 16:21).[26]

The message of a crucified God was scandalous to Jews and foolishness to the Hellenistic world, yet it took center stage in the preaching of the apostles (1 Corinthians 1:18–25). For Paul this message was the creed of first generation Christians: "For I handed over to you as of first importance

[26] See also Matthew 17:22–23, 20:17–19, as well as parallels in Luke (9:22; 9:44; 18:31–33) and Mark (8:31; 9:12; 10:33–34). John records Jesus pointing to his own death in a different manner, using language such as the destroying of his temple (2:19), the coming of his hour (2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1; 17:1), the lifting up of the Son of man (3:14; 8:28; 12:32–34), the glorification of the Son of man (7:39; 12:23; 13:31), the giving of his flesh (6:51), and the laying down of his entire being (10:11, 15, 18).

what I also received, that Christ died on behalf of our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Nils Dahl has made this important observation about Jesus' death:

> The end of Jesus' life stands at the heart of the gospel; this historical Jesus, like the kerygmatic Christ, is the crucified Messiah. There is no gap between the historical Jesus and the preaching of the church; rather, there exists a close and inseparable connection.[27]

The connection is the death of Jesus. This tradition which Paul received contains the phrase ὅτι Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ("that Christ died on behalf of our sins"). This pre-Pauline formula reflects an early and nevertheless complex understanding of Christ's death as substitutionary atonement. Rather than understanding the death of Jesus as having to do primarily with Christ's humanity, it is apparent that many early Christians viewed Jesus' death as the ultimate revelation of his divinity. While it was certainly noble martyrdom, it was primarily understood and proclaimed as universal atonement.[28]

The interpretation of Jesus' death as universal atonement is visible in synoptic Gospel texts that use the language or imagery of both Passover (Exodus 12 and 24) and the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16).[29] The theme of atonement is presented already in Matthew's baptismal narrative with Jesus' words to John the Baptist: "It is necessary for us *to fulfill all righteousness*" (3:15).[30] This statement is probably a reflection of Isaiah 53:11, "By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities."[31] This theme is made explicit when Matthew explains Jesus' healings in terms of atonement with a quotation that calls to mind all of Isaiah 53: "This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, 'He took our infirmities and bore our diseases'" (Matthew 8:17 quoting Isaiah 53:4). Both Matthew and

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[27] Nils Alstrup Dahl, *Jesus the Christ: The Historical Origins of Christological Doctrine*, ed. Donald H. Juel (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 44.

[28] Peter J. Scaer traces the theme of a noble death in Luke's passion narrative; *The Lukan Passion and the Praiseworthy Death* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005).

[29] See John Kleinig, *Leviticus*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004).

[30] David P. Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew: Jesus Teaches the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 245-263.

[31] Pilate's wife even refers to Jesus as the "righteous man" in Matthew's passion narrative (27:19).

Mark include important testimony of Jesus himself to his atoning work: "The Son of man came not to be served, but to serve and give his entire being as a ransom [δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον] in the place of many [ἀντὶ πολλῶν; that is, the masses of humanity]" (Matthew 20:28; see also Mark 10:45). Luke lacks this explicit statement, yet he uses Exodus-Passover imagery in his interpretation of Jesus' death as the eschatological release from captivity. This is signaled already in Jesus' programmatic sermon in Nazareth (note the use of ἄφεσιν and ἀφέσει in Luke 4:18–19), and reinforced in his transfiguration account (note the use of τὴν ἔξοδον αὐτοῦ in Luke 9:31). Luke, however, introduces atonement already in the *Benedictus*: "he made payment for his people [ἐποίησεν λύτρωσιν τῷ λαῷ αὐτοῦ]" (Luke 1:68). Atonement language characterizes the words Jesus spoke in the Passover context of the Last Supper in each of the synoptic Gospels, especially in Matthew: "This is my blood of the covenant poured out for many [that is, the masses of humanity] for the forgiveness of sins" (26:28; see also Mark 14:24 and Luke 22:20).[32] It appears that Isaiah 53:12 (MT) may be part of the background for the pouring imagery used here: "because he [the servant] poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sins of many."

John's Gospel combines his depiction of Jesus as the Passover Lamb with atonement imagery and language. John the Baptist announces him to be "the Lamb of God who takes away [ὁ αἴρων] the sin of the world" (John 1:29, 36). The universal—even cosmic—scope of Jesus' death is emphasized several times (John 2:16; 4:45). Jesus is then crucified on the Day of Preparation when all the lambs are slaughtered for the Passover Feast (John 19:14). John's quotation of Exodus 12:46 at the close of his passion narrative identifies Jesus as the eschatological Passover sacrifice (John 19:36). Jesus understands his death as substitutionary atonement: "I am the noble shepherd. The noble shepherd lays down his entire self [τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ] on behalf [ὑπέρ] of the sheep" (John 10:11). Substitionary atonement is also clearly presented in the irony of Caiaphas's statement: "It is better for us that one man die on behalf of the people [ἵνα εἷς ἄνθρωπος ἀποθάνῃ ὑπὲρ τοῦ λαοῦ]" (John 11: 50, 52). John's first epistle is

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[32] Exodus 24:8 is the background and source for "the blood of the covenant" language. This understanding of Jesus' death is driven home by Matthew's focus on blood in the narrative of Jesus' trial and death: Pilate washes his hands of "this man's *blood*" (27:24); the people say "his *blood* be upon us and on our children" (27:25); Judas confesses: "I have betrayed innocent *blood*" (27:4); and the "Field of *Blood*" is purchased (27:8).

even more explicit with universal atonement language: "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous one. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins [αὐτὸς ἱλασμός ἐστιν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν], and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world [καὶ περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου]" (1 John 2:1-2).

The writers of the New Testament Epistles also focus on this theme. Paul calls Christ our "Mercy Seat sacrifice [ἱλαστήριον]" (Rom 3:25), but in another place writes "for Christ our Passover [τὸ πάσχα ἡμῶν] has been sacrificed" (1 Corinthians 5:7b). 1 Peter also combines the unblemished lamb of Passover with the sacrifice and sin-bearing goats of atonement: "Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18-19); and "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we die to sin and live to righteousness" (1 Peter 2:24-25). The depiction of Christ as the Passover Lamb whose blood gives atonement purity is front and center in the book of Revelation. There the Lamb who has been "slaughtered" now stands (Rev 5:6; 13:8) and "has loosed us from our sins by his blood" (Revelation 1:5). With his blood he "purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9). They who have washed their robes and made them "white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:14) have conquered "by the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 12:11). Finally, there is the classic evidence of understanding Jesus' death as universal atonement in Hebrews. Two examples will suffice. "[Christ] has appeared, once for all, at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26). "When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:12).[33]

This stark evidence demonstrates that Jesus' crucifixion on Passover was being interpreted in light of the Day of Atonement already during the first three decades of Christianity. This interpretation took place for some early

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[33] Alongside this understanding of Jesus' death as atonement is a profound interpretation of this event as his enthronement. When the theme of enthronement surfaces in the New Testament, many think it synonymous with Jesus' exaltation following resurrection; see Martin Hengel, "Sit at My Right Hand!: The Enthronement of Christ at God's Right Hand and Psalm 110," *Studies in Early Christology* (London: T&T Clark, 1995), 119-225. What is striking is that several New Testament texts interpret Jesus' death as a kingly enthronement (see also the discussion of the Son of man below).

Christians through the atonement language of the servant song in Isaiah 53.[34] Consider this brief portion of the song:

> Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:4–6)

More examples of the influence of Isaiah 53 upon the interpretation of Jesus' death as atonement can be added to those mentioned above. First, the influence of Isaiah 53 is clearly visible in Paul's succinct summary of Christ's work in Romans 4:25, "He was handed over [παρεδόθη] on account of our trespasses, and raised for our justification." The παρεδόθη of Romans reflects its usage in the Greek text of Isaiah 53:6 and 53:12 (twice). "Raised for our justification" is probably echoing Isaiah 53:11: "After the anguish of his life he shall see light; the righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous." This verse from Isaiah is also echoed in Romans 5:15–19. Second, one can point to the influence of Isaiah 53 on the mysterious interpretation of Jesus' death in 2 Corinthians 5 that climaxes in verse 21: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we become the righteousness of God." Third, Isaiah 53 and 45 are also the quarry from which the great Philippians hymn was cut.[35] If Paul is incorporating an already extant hymn, as some scholars hold, then the use of Isaiah in interpreting Jesus' death was already well-established. Fourth, the Septuagint text of Isaiah 52:13 with its use of ὑψωθήσεται and δοξασθήσεται shows that this servant song is the source of the interpretation of Jesus' death throughout the Gospel of John where these verbs are on the lips of Jesus (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32–34; 7:39; 11:4; 12:23; 13:31).[36] John's use

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[34] For further discussion of this, see Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher eds., *Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources*, trans. Dean P. Bailey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004). The huge and early influence of Isaiah upon early Christian exegesis is being increasingly acknowledged by scholars; for example see Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken eds., *Isaiah in the New Testament* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2005), and more broadly J.F.A. Sawyer, *The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[35] Ralph P. Martin, *Carmen Christi: Philippians ii.5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 211–213 and 255–257.

[36] Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 63–68.

of ὁ ἀμνὸς ("the lamb") is probably dependent on the use of this noun in the Septuagint of Isaiah 53:7 (John 1:29, 36). Finally, Otfried Hofius even argues Isaiah 53 is the referent of κατὰ τὰς γραφάς ("according to the Scriptures") in the pre-Pauline creedal formula quoted above (1 Corinthians 15:3–5).[37]

How early then do we have such an interpretation of Jesus' death as the universal divine atoning action of God? The Gospels point us to Jesus viewing himself as the Isaianic servant who gives his life on behalf of others: "Instead, whoever wants to be welcomed as great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be servant of all. For even the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give his entire self as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:43b–45; see also Matthew 20:28). While acknowledging that the early church interpreted Jesus' death as universal atonement before it was expressed in NT writings, we can go one step further back and attribute this basic understanding to Jesus himself. Peter Stuhlmacher connects the dots for us in this manner:

> The earthly Jesus himself understood his witness and his approaching death in the light of the tradition already given to him in Isaiah about the vicariously suffering Servant of God. He understood the suffering laid upon him as an event in which God's will was fulfilled.[38]

This profound interpretation of Jesus' death appears to have played an early and significant role in confessing and worshipping Jesus as Lord. These texts testify that early Jewish Christians understood that the human Jesus was not exalted to the status of YHWH following his resurrection, but showed forth that he is YHWH specifically in the total giving of self for the world at his crucifixion. The weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper was one other early and important impetus for this interpretation of Jesus' death. The recounting of a passion narrative set the stage for the Eucharist in early celebrations "that proclaimed his death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26) and the words "this is my blood of the covenant" were being spoken decades before they were included in the Gospel accounts (1 Corinthians 11:23).

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[37] "The Fourth Servant Song in the New Testament Letters," *Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources*, ed. Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher, trans. Dean P. Bailey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 177.

[38] "Isaiah 53 in the Gospels and Acts," *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources*, ed. Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher, trans. Dean P. Bailey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 153

*The Son's Preincarnate Existence*

The second christological category that merits further attention is the evidence of the Son's existence prior to the incarnation. Sometimes this category is simply labeled "The Preexistence of Christ," focusing narrowly on textual testimony to the Son's existence prior to creation as well as his participation in creation (for example, John 1:1-4; Colossians 1:15-20).[39] Although this evidence is important, also very crucial for discussion of the divine identity of the Son is evidence that he existed within the mystery of YHWH during the history of the patriarchs and Israel that is prior to the conception of Jesus. Because scholars have generally agreed that early Jewish Christians had a monotheistic understanding of YHWH, their challenge, as Richard Bauckham has stated, was to identify Jesus within this one God: "[God's] identity in Jesus must be consistent with God's identity in the Hebrew scriptures."[40] This is certainly correct, yet it may be helpful to conceptualize the situation in a different manner. Once Jesus is confessed to be Lord (YHWH), he became definitive for understanding YHWH in the Old Testament scriptures as well. The question then became *not* "How does one fit Jesus in with the God of the Hebrew scriptures?" but "How does one fit God (our Father) in with our Lord (the Son) who is active and speaking in the Hebrew scriptures?"[41]

The theological foundation in the Old Testament for the understanding that the Son is central to the identity of YHWH is the tension between the theophanies of YHWH and the testimony that one cannot see YHWH and live (Exodus 33:20).[42] A legitimate question arises: If one cannot see YHWH and live, and yet people are seeing YHWH and not dying, then who is the visible image of YHWH that is being seen? The Old Testament texts provide some assistance to our understanding of this phenomenon by often using a distinct title for the form of YHWH that people see: he is

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[39] For a broader, helpful discussion, see Douglas McCready, *He Came Down From Heaven: The Preexistence of Christ and the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005).

[40] Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 47. On the monotheism of early Christians, see the essays in Loren T. Stuckenbruck and Wendy E.S. North eds., *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism*, JSNTSup 263 (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2004).

[41] This question reflects the common Pauline language that identifies the Father as *God* and Jesus as *Lord* (for example., Romans 1:7).

[42] I previously discussed this in "The Real Presence of the Son Before Christ: Revisiting an Old Approach to Old Testament Christology," *CTQ* 68 (2004): 105-126 (esp. 115), and *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence*, AGJU 42 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 51-123.

labeled variously as the Angel of YHWH, the Name of YHWH, the Glory of YHWH, or the Word of YHWH. There is some distinction between this visible form of YHWH and YHWH's unveiled presence, even though this form of YHWH is certainly not separate from YHWH. Careful study of these theophanies leads to the conclusion that it is best to understand each as a hypostasis of YHWH, namely an aspect of YHWH that is depicted with independent personhood.[43] These theophanic traditions testify both to the immanence and transcendence of YHWH as well as the complexity of the oneness of the God of Israel. Given this understanding of the mystery of YHWH that exists in the Old Testament, what kind of testimony do we find in early Christianity to the Son's existence as YHWH before the conception of Jesus?

Not only do we find testimony in the New Testament to the Son's existence prior to creation, but we also find evidence that the theophanic traditions were being interpreted christologically.[44] Some examples from the Gospel of John will suffice to support this assertion. A christological interpretation of theophanic traditions is very evident in the Prologue of the Gospel of John: "No one has ever seen God at any time, the only begotten Son[45] from the position alongside the Father, made him known" (John 1:18). God is seen repeatedly, but it is "the only begotten Son" who is actually seen and has revealed the mystery of YHWH, not only after the incarnation, but also before it. This statement by John appears to be founded upon the teaching of Jesus found later in this Gospel: "Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; this one has seen the Father" (John 6:46). In light of this, John records that Jesus himself acknowledged that as the Son he interacted with Abraham (John 8:56–59). He describes Jesus' bringing the disciples' boat safely to harbor with words that identify the Son with the divine act of delivering Israel across the Reed

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[43] For a defense of using this hypostasis nomenclature, see Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 36–45. Many critical scholars view these labels as attempts to spiritualize earlier beliefs about YHWH's appearances; see, Walther Eichrodt, *The Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967) II.23–45.

[44] For a further discussion of this topic, see Gieschen, "The Real Presence of the Son Before Christ" and especially Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*.

[45] There is a text-critical question here. My preference is for reading υἱός ("Son") rather than the more difficult θεός ("God"), but neither variant changes the understanding that the "only begotten" is the Son.

Sea (John 6:21; Psalm 106:30 LXX).[46] John makes it clear that the same YHWH who promised that he himself would come one day as "shepherd" to his people (Ezekiel 34:11-16) has come in Jesus who says, "I am the noble shepherd who lays down my entire being on behalf of the sheep" (John 10:11-18). He even states that Isaiah saw the Son in his call vision (John 12:41).

A prominent example in John of the identification of Jesus as YHWH who spoke in the Old Testament is the absolute ἐγώ εἰμι ("I am") sayings of Jesus.[47] Even though these sayings are often overshadowed by the study of the seven predicate nominative ἐγώ εἰμι sayings and the seven signs, they are actually a more significant testimony to Jesus' divine identity because of their relationship to the self-discourse statements of YHWH in the Old Testament.[48] There are seven absolute sayings:

> Jesus said to her [the Samaritan woman], "ἐγώ εἰμι the one who is speaking to you." (4:16)
>
> But he said to them [the disciples in the boat], "ἐγώ εἰμί do not be afraid." (6:20)
>
> "You [the Jews] will die in yours sins unless you believe that ἐγώ εἰμι." (8:24)
>
> "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will realize that ἐγώ εἰμι, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me." (8:28)
>
> "Amen, amen, I tell you, before Abraham was, ἐγώ εἰμί" (8:58)

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[46] For an even more striking example of identifying Jesus as YHWH in this incident, see the use of Job 9:8 LXX in Mark 6:48; see further Richard B. Hays, "Can the Gospels Teach Us How to Read the Old Testament?", *Pro Ecclesia* 11 (2002): 402-418.

[47] Similar absolute forms of ἐγώ εἰμι in the synoptic Gospels that draw on the Old Testament self-disclosure formula are found in Mark 6:50 and 14:62 as well as Luke 22:70 and 24:39 (compare, Mark 13:6 and Luke 21:8; see also Matthew 28:20).

[48] Richard Bauckham, "Monotheism and Christology in the Gospel of John," *Contours in the Christology of the New Testament*, ed. Richard Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 148-166; see also David Mark Ball, *"I Am" in John's Gospel: Literary Function, Background and Theological Implications*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996). Because of the obvious relationship between the absolute and predicate nominate ἐγὼ εἰμι sayings in John, it is probable that the latter at least alludes to Jesus as YHWH and possessor of the Divine Name (6:35, 41, 48; 8:12, cf. 9:5; 10:7, 9; 10:11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1).

> "I tell you this now [Judas's betrayal], before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you believe that ἐγώ εἰμι." (13:19)
>
> "Whom are you looking for?" They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "ἐγώ εἰμι" Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, "*ἐγώ εἰμι*" they stepped back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I told you ἐγώ εἰμι So if you are looking for me, let these men go." (18:5-6, 8)

Much of the past research asserting that the background for these absolute Johannine sayings is to be found in Old Testament divine disclosure statements, especially as found in the Septuagint text of Isaiah 40–52, has been confirmed by the impressive work of Catrin Williams.[49] Williams, however, cautiously steers clear of the relationship between the Septuagint translation of these disclosure statements and its translation of the explanation of the divine name in Exodus 3.14: אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה ("I am who I am") is rendered ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὤν ("I am the one who is"). This relationship has been demonstrated by previous scholarship.[50] If these absolute ἐγώ εἰμι sayings were not closely related to the divine name, why does one cause the Jews who heard it to reach for stones (8:59) and another cause his arresting party to fall to the ground (18:6)? Even though this formula in John should not be understood simplistically as the divine name that Jesus has been given (17:6), nevertheless these absolute sayings are very closely related to it and function as a way of indicating that Jesus is the possessor of the divine name, as will be discussed below. The message these absolute sayings convey is bold: Jesus' seven self-declarations are a complete revelation of YHWH who discloses his identity

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[49] Catrin H. Williams, *I am He: The Interpretation of 'Anî Hû' in Jewish and Early Christian Literature*, WUNT II.113 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 255–303.. There are nine divine disclosure statements in the MT and seven in the LXX: אֲנִי אֲנִי הוּא (Deuteronomy 32:39) אֲנִי הוּא (Isaiah 41:4; 43:10, 13; 46:4; 48:12; 52:6. אָנֹכִי אָנֹכִי הוּא (Isaiah 43:25; 51:12) and ἐγώ εἰμι (Deuteronomy 32:39; Isaiah 41:4; 43:10; 45:18) ἐγώ εἰμι ἐγώ εἰμι (Isaiah 43:25; 46:4; 51:12). Bauckham notes that John has seven absolute ἐγώ εἰμι sayings, but in the last occurence in Gethsemane it is spoken three times (for a total of nine).

[50] For example, Sean M. McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos: Rev. 1:4 in its Hellenistic and Early Jewish Setting*, WUNT II.107 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 171–176.

with the same phrase the same number of times in the Old Testament. Jesus is thereby fully identified with YHWH.[51]

This understanding of the Son as YHWH who is visible and speaks in the Old Testament is summarized succinctly with these words of Jesus in John:

> "You search the Scriptures . . .; it is they that bear witness to me . . .. Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; it is Moses who accuses you, on whom you set your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?" (John 5:39, 45-47) [52]

Does this mean that since the Father is unseen, he was somehow unknown to patriarchs and prophets? No, because what Jesus said to Philip also applies to his preincarnate existence: "The one who has seen me, has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

### *Jesus' Possession of the Divine Name*

The primary area where interpreters have long acknowledged some relationship between Jesus and the divine name, YHWH, is in explanations of the frequent title κύριος ("Lord") that is ascribed to Christ in the New Testament.[53] One typical basis for asserting a relationship between these two is the pre-Christian practice by translators of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek of rendering יהוה with κύριος.[54] Although there have been some skeptics, the early confession κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός ("Jesus Christ is Lord") can be seen to reflect Jewish identification of Jesus with YHWH.[55]

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[51] Bauckham, "Monotheism and Christology in the Gospel of John."

[52] For a similar christological reading of the Old Testament, see Luke 24:25 and 2:444-447.

[53] For example, Christopher M. Tuckett, *Christology and the New Testament: Jesus and His Earliest Followers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 19-22.

[54] Albert Pietersma, "Kyrios or Tetragram: A Renewed Quest for the Original Septuagint," *De Septuaginta: Studies in Honour of John William Wevers on his sixth-fifth birthday*, ed. Albert Pietersma and Claude Cox (Mississaug, Ontario: Benben Publications, 1984), 85-101; see also McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos*, 60-61.

[55] This is widely understood as the foundational confession or creed of the early Christians; esp. Romans 10:9, Philippians 2:11 and 1 Corinthians 12:3 (cf. John 20:28). Wilhelm Bousset argued in the early twentieth century that this title and confession was adapted by Christians like Paul outside of Palestine under influence from Hellenistic understandings of κύριος and κυρίοι; see his *Kyrios Christos*. Although many challenged Bousset over the years, his theory held considerable sway until the important study by Joseph Fitzmyer, "The Semitic Background of the New Testament Kyrios-Title", *The*

Discussion of the divine name in early Christology usually fades fast after one reads beyond the important κύριος title because scholars argue that interest quickly shifted to the personal name Jesus.[56] Pre-Christian texts from the Old Testament and late Second Temple Jewish literature, however, testify to interest in the figure who possesses the divine name or Tetragrammaton.[57] Because the early Christian evidence has been presented in detail elsewhere, the discussion that follows will be limited to the Gospel of John in order to illustrate the importance of the divine name as a theological category used to express Jesus' divine identity.[58]

The Gospel of John unambiguously asserts that Jesus shares the name of the Father: "I have come in my Father's name [ἐγὼ ἐλήλυθα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ πατρός μου], and you do not receive me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive" (5:43). "I have come in my Father's name" has been interpreted as asserting that Jesus has come by and with the authority of the Father. Although there is certainly a relationship between the word *name* and authority, this statement signifies a more intimate connection: Jesus has come as the one who possesses and shows forth the divine name. This Gospel depicts Jesus demonstrating what his true name is by what he says and especially by what he does: "The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness to me" (10:25b; see also 14:10–11).

John depicts Jesus as the embodiment of the divine name of the Father, to the extent that Jesus even prays, "Father, glorify your name [πάτερ, δόξασόν σου τὸ ὄνομα]" (12:28). This is not simply a pious prayer that God's name be honored through Jesus' sacrifice; it is the identification of Jesus as the one who possesses the divine name. This indicates that he can simply be identified as the Name, much like the visible manifestations of YHWH in Deuteronomy and Jeremiah. This personal identification of the divine

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*Semitic Background of the New Testament* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1997), 115–142. This is a revised and expanded version of "Der semistische Hintergrund des neutestamentlichen Kyriostitels," *Jesus Christus in Historie und Theologie: Neutestamenliche Festschrift für Hans Conzelmann zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. G. Strecker (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1975), 267–298.

[56]This is the understanding of Hurtado; *Lord Jesus Christ*, 381–392.

[57] Charles A. Gieschen, "The Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology," *Vigiliae Christianae* 57 (2003): 121–127.

[58] The evidence is presented in Gieschen, "The Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology," 115–157. The discussion of John that follows is a slightly revised form of material from this article. A significant text not discussed below is the use of Psalm 110 in the synoptic Gospels in order to testify to the pre-existence of the Son as David's Lord with the LORD (Matthew 22:41–46; Mark 12:35–37; Luke 20:41–44).

name as Jesus is supported by the parallel announcement that comes shortly before this prayer: "The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified" (12:23). The "Son of man", therefore, is also known as "your [the Father's] name."[59] That "your name" could be understood in this way by the intended readers of this Gospel is apparent from the use of τὸ ὀνόμα as a title—indeed the only title—of Jesus in 3 John: "For they departed on behalf of the name [ὑπὲρ γὰρ τοῦ ὀνόματος ἐξῆλθον] and have accepted nothing from the heathen" (v. 7).

The Gospel of John most clearly presents Jesus as the possessor of the divine name in the prayer of Jesus at the close of the farewell discourse (John 17):

> I revealed your name to those you gave me from the world. (17:6a)
>
> Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, in order that they be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. (17:11b)
>
> I made your name known to them and will continue to make it known. (17:26)

Several conclusions can be drawn from these petitions. First, the repeated use of the personal pronoun makes it evident that the name discussed here is the divine name of the Father, to whom this prayer is directed.[60] Second, the divine name was given to the Son (17:11b). Based upon the testimony in this prayer that the Son received the Father's glory before the foundation of the world (17:24), the giving of the divine name is also understood to have taken place before creation.[61] Third, Jesus has made the

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[59] The relationship between this divine name tradition and the prominent Son of man sayings in John can be understood in light of traditions like those in 1 *Enoch* 37–71 discussed above. It is apparent that this Gospel challenges some of the Jewish understandings of the Son of man figure in its portrait of Jesus; see Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 63–79.

[60] Most commentators argue that here "name" denotes the "revealed character and nature of God" rather than the divine name; see Williams, *I am He*, 280 n. 85. Gilles Quispel argues that these verses refer to the Divine Name that was hidden, but has been revealed by Jesus; see "John and Jewish Christianity," *John and Qumran*, ed. J.H. Charlesworth (London: Chapman, 1972), 148–155.

[61] This conclusion is also based upon the identification of the preexistent Word as the divine name in both the prologue and the farewell prayer; see discussion below and Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 271–280.

divine name, which is normally a hidden mystery in this world, known to his disciples. Fourth, the divine name that was revealed to the disciples by Jesus has protecting power (17:11b). This power is especially reassuring to the disciples because earlier in the farewell discourse Jesus gives some emphasis to how much they will suffer "on account of my name" (15:21), a theme that is also found in Acts (5:41; 9.16; 15:26; 21:13).

This power of the divine name for the one who believes in the true identity of Jesus (that he is YHWH) is a subject that is explained several times earlier in the farewell discourse (14:12-13; 15:16; 16:23-24; 16:26). Here is but one representative example:

> Amen, amen, I say to you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name [ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου], I will do it, that the Father be glorified in the Son; if you ask anything in my name [ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου], I will do it. (14:12-13)

This certainly does not refer to using the personal name Jesus as some kind of theurgic formula, but asking in the confession that Jesus' true name is YHWH, a word of power.

Testimony to the vital importance of knowing the name possessed by the Son is frequent in John. Already in the prologue, this bold assertion is made:

> But to all who received him, who believe in his name [τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτου], he gives power to become children of God. (1:12)

It is noteworthy that the focus is not only believing in Jesus, but specifically believing in his name (that is, his true identity as YHWH in the flesh). In light of Jesus having the divine name of the Father as discussed above, "believe in his name" here should be understood as trusting that Jesus possesses the divine name and, thus, he is identified as being within the mystery of YHWH. This idea is also expressed in the reaction of the disciples to Jesus' sign at Cana: "Many believed in his name" (2:23). Knowing the true name of Christ is the source of life according to the thematic conclusion of the Gospel: "in order that, because you believe, you have life in his name" (20:31). Conversely, the lack of belief that Jesus possesses the divine name brings eschatological judgment: "he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (3:18).

The prominence of the divine name in Johannine Christology is further accentuated by seeing its relationship with λόγος ("Word") theology in this Gospel. The λόγος Christology of the prologue is widely recognized (1:1, 14), but its source is often sought solely in wisdom tradition rather than in angelomorphic traditions where the theophanic figure who possesses the divine name is called "the Word" or "the Word of God".[62] In light of the prominent focus of the prologue on the Word's involvement in creation (1:3) as well as Jewish evidence linking creation to the divine name, there is a firm foundation for the conclusion that the divine name is central to John's understanding of ὁ λόγος.

It is also important to note that the λόγος tradition is found in John beyond the prologue, even though it often fails to be noticed. It is natural to expect this Gospel, with its dominant prologue on "the Word," to continue this theme in some way in the body of the narrative. Although one does not find further examples of ὁ λόγος after the prologue, λόγος is found in the singular form modified by a personal pronoun in chapters 5, 8, and 17.[63] For example, Jesus states in the polemical dialogue of chapter 5: "Neither his voice have you ever heard, nor his image have you ever seen, and his word you do not have abiding in you [καὶ τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔχετε ἐν ὑμῖν μένοντα]" (5:37b–38a). Based upon the reciprocal relationship between the terms *word* and *name* in the prologue, and the prominence of name theology elsewhere in John as discussed above, including in this immediate context (5:43), the referent of "his word" in 5:38 should be interpreted to be "his name" rather than "his communication or teaching." The sense of the sentence is this: These Jews have obviously never heard the voice of YHWH nor seen the image of YHWH nor had the name of YHWH in them, otherwise they would not be rejecting Jesus (in whom one hears YHWH, sees YHWH, and has the divine name revealed). The technical understanding of λόγος here as "name" is confirmed in part by the observation that the immediate context (5:47) uses a plural form of ῥήμα—not λόγος—to refer to words in the sense of teachings: "But if you do

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[62] For a corrective, see Jarl E. Fossum, "In the Beginning was the Name: Onomanology as the Key to Johannine Christology", *The Image of the Invisible God: Essays on the Influence of Jewish Mysticism on Early Christology*, NTOA 30 (Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schwiez and Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Göttingen, 1995), 109–133.

[63] Even though this theory has much merit, John 14:23–24 does not fit neatly into the puzzle because it shifts between λόγος (singular), λόγοι (plural), and λόγος (singular). Even here, however, keeping "my word [name]" could be understood as the key to the keeping "my words [teachings]".

not believe his [Moses's] writings, how will you believe my words [πῶς τοῖς ἐμοῖς ῥήμασιν πιστεύσετε]?"

This technical usage of λόγος is especially dense in the polemical dialogue of John 8:

> If you abide in my word ['Εὰν ὑμεῖς μείνητε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῷ ἐμῷ], you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth, and the truth will free you. (8:31)
>
> I know that you are seed of Abraham, yet you are seeking to kill me, because my word finds no place in you [ὅτι ὁ λόγος ὁ ἐμὸς οὐ χωρεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν]. (8:37)
>
> Why do you not understand my speech [διὰ τί τὴν λαλιὰν τὴν ἐμὴν οὐ γινώσκετε]? Because you are not able to hear my word [ὅτι οὐ δύνασθε ἀκούειν τὸν λόγον τὸν ἐμόν]. (8:43)
>
> Amen, Amen, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word [ἐάν τις τὸν ἐμὸν λόγον τηρήση], he will surely not see death unto the ages. (8:51)
>
> But I know him [that is, God/the Father] and I keep his word [καὶ τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ τηρῶ]. (8:55)

The identity of Jesus is a central question throughout John, including this chapter. As demonstrated earlier, it is belief "in his name" that brings life. The sayings here about "my word", therefore, can be better understood if their referent is interpreted as Jesus' name rather than his teaching. For example, this approach enables one to make sense of John 8:43. "Why do you not understand my speech? Because you are not able to hear my word" (that is, "If you confessed my word, my name, to be the divine name, you would receive and understand my speech as the speaking of YHWH"). Understanding 8:31 in the sense of "abide in my name" fits better with the organic and personal union described later with the same verb "Abide in me, and I in you" (15:4). Furthermore, "keeps my word" in 8:51 fits better with the soteriology of the rest of the Gospel if understood in the sense of "confesses my name", rather than in the sense of "obeys my teaching".

This reciprocal relationship between the terms *word* and *name* in John is woven tightly together in the prayer of John 17 at the close of the farewell discourse, a prayer that returns the reader to the central themes of the prologue:

> I revealed your name [Ἐφανέρωσά σου τὸ ὄνομα] to those you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word [καὶ τὸν λόγον σου τετήρηκα]. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words [τὰ ῥήματα] that you gave to me I have given to them.[64] (17:6–8)
>
> I have given them your word [τὸν λόγον σου], and the world hated them. (17:14)
>
> Sanctify them in the truth; your Word is truth [ὁ λόγος ὁ σὸς ἀλήθειά ἐστιν]. (17:17)

This evidence from John is meant to confirm the important role of Jesus' possession of the divine name in his divine identity. These texts clearly reflect that long before the Nicene Creed confessed the Son to be of "one substance with the Father," first-century Jews were confessing the full identification of the Son with the Father on the basis of the divine name they share.

### *Jesus' Self-Identification as the Son of Man*

Much about Christ's divine identity has been discussed to this point with little reference to the many titles of Jesus that typically dominate discussions of Christology. Although critical scholars tend to see many of the titles of Jesus as the reading of later confessions back into the earthly ministry of Jesus, "the Son of man" (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου) is one title that makes it through the sieve of their criteria of authenticity.[65] This title is found primarily on the lips of Jesus in the Gospels (except John 12:34), and is frequent in all four Gospels.[66] It is clear the Son of man is not a confessional title of the later church since it is not the content of the major confessions in the Gospels, but is Jesus' public self-designation used during his earthly ministry as he established the kingdom or reign of

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[64] That the reader is to understand "word" here in the sense of "name" is alluded to by the careful switch from the singular τὸν λόγον (17:6) to the plural τὰ ῥήματα (17:7) in consecutive sentences.

[65] For a good summary of the philological issues, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The New Testament Title 'Son of Man'," *A Wandering Aramean: Collected Aramaic Essays*, SBLMS 25 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), 143–160. For discussion of the history of scholarship on the subject, see Delbert Burkett, *The Son of Man Debate: A History and Evaluation*, SNTSMS 107 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[66] It is found 30 times in Matthew, 14 in Mark, 25 in Luke, and 12 in John; see Douglas R. A. Hare, *The Son of Man Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).

God.[67] Scholars have found it difficult to understand the meaning of this self-designation, largely because of attempts to escape the huge shadow cast by the use of a similar phrase in Daniel 7:13 (MT בַּר אֱנָשׁ LXX: υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου). This title has not been used extensively by Christians after the New Testament, except mistakenly as a designation for the human nature of Jesus.[68] This understanding of the title is still promulgated in some hymns.[69]

Absolutely crucial to understanding the significance of this title as revelatory of Jesus' divine identity is seeing the influence of Daniel 7:13 on the later use of this title among first-century Jews, including Jesus.[70] It must be remembered that Daniel 7:13 was not a marginal text in first-century Judaism and Christianity. Both its relationship to the depiction of YHWH as the enthroned likeness of "the man" in Ezekiel 1:26-28 as well as its significant influence upon later apocalyptic texts like 1 *Enoch* 37-71, the book of Revelation (1:13; 14:14), and 4 *Ezra* 13 testify to its importance.[71] Grouping the Son of man sayings into three neat categories can be helpful for study purposes (for example, Earthly Son of man sayings, Suffering Son of man sayings, and Eschatological Son of man sayings), but rigid categorization can distract from understanding how these sayings function together within each Gospel. Just as it is obvious that Daniel 7:13 played an important role in understanding several of the eschatological Son of man sayings in the Gospels (for example, Matthew

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[67] See Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew*, Proclamation Commentaries, Second Edition (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 33-65.

[68] See the discussion in Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, 188-192.

[69] See the understanding that the referent of "Son of man" is Christ's human nature (in apposition to "Son of God" which refers to Christ's divine nature) as expressed in the hymns "Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted" (stanza 4) and "Beautiful Savior" (stanza 4).

[70] Contrary to the assessment of Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 290-306.

[71] 1 *Enoch* 37-71 is especially important testimony concerning how the Son of man of Daniel 7 was being interpreted among first-century Jews as a preexistent person within the mystery of YHWH who would bring deliverance on the last day; see James C. VanderKam, "Righteous One, Messiah, Chosen One, and Son of Man in 1 Enoch 37-71", *The Messiah: Developments in Early Judaism and Christianity*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 169-191. For the close identification of the Son of man with the Ancient of Days in these chapters, see Charles A. Gieschen, "The Name of the Son of Man in *1 Enoch*," *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man: Revisiting the Book of Parables*, ed. Gabriele Boccaccini (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming in 2006).

25:31), it is also simplistic to argue that Daniel 7:13 plays no role in the origin and interpretation of the earthly and suffering Son of man sayings.

What was puzzling for Jesus' followers was not that he speaks of himself as the Son of man, but specifically how he speaks of himself as the Son of man. The Son of man is not only seen enthroned in heaven at the end of time, but—most importantly—on earth upon the cross in time (for example, Matthew 24:64; John 12:23, 32–34). Interpreters are so familiar with the depiction of Christ enthroned that some fail to see the profound theological significance of enthronement as identifying Jesus within the mystery of YHWH.[72] The so-called earthly and suffering Son of man sayings show how Jesus redefines some Jewish Son of man expectations in light of humiliation (Psalm 8) and suffering (the servant songs of Isaiah). Oscar Cullmann reflected upon this redefinition process decades ago and explained it in this manner:

> One may ask why Jesus preferred the title Son of Man to that of the ebed Yahweh rather than the reverse. This becomes quite understandable when we consider that the Son of Man idea is more comprehensive. It both refers to Jesus' future work, and at the same time, with regard to his work as the incarnate one, visualizes his humanity as such. It was therefore more appropriate to subordinate the ebed Yahweh concept to that of the Son of Man. Jesus did this in such a way that the vocation of the ebed becomes, so to speak, the main content of the Son of Man's earthly work. As soon as the Son of Man concept was applied to the earthly life of Jesus, the two central Christological titles, Son of Man and Suffering Servant of God, have to come into contact.
>
> Both the 'Suffering Servant' and the 'Son of Man' already existed in Second Temple Judaism. But Jesus' combination of precisely these two titles was something completely new. 'Son of Man' represents the highest conceivable declaration of exaltation in Judaism; ebed Yahweh is the expression of the deepest humiliation. . . . This is the unheard-of new act of Jesus, that he united these two apparently contradictory

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[72] See Richard Bauckham, "The Throne of God and the Worship of Jesus," *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference of the Worship of Jesus*, edited by Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila, and Gladys S. Lewis, JSJSup 63 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 43–69.

tasks in his self-consciousness, and that he expressed that union in his life and teaching.[73]

Much like the parables (Matthew 13:10–17), the Son of man sayings reveal Jesus' true identity to those who believe in him, but are at the same time confusing to those who reject him (that is: How can this man be the preexistent, end-time Son of man promised by Daniel?). As Jack Kingsbury asserts, to those who do not receive him for who he actually is, he will remain an enigmatic son of man (that is, "a human offspring") who will be vindicated at the end and shown to be the Son of God (Matthew 26:63–64).[74]

Jesus, therefore, does not dismiss Jewish Son of man expectations based upon Daniel 7 in many of his sayings, but he reshapes and redefines these expectations by pointing to his crucifixion as that place where the Son of man will be revealed and the cosmic reign foretold in Daniel 7 begins (Matthew 26:64), a reign that will be consummated on the Last Day (Matthew 25:31). The Gospels present a radical interpretation of Daniel 7 by Jesus, not only in the so-called earthly and suffering Son of man sayings, but especially in presenting the crucifixion as the commencement of the Son of man's eschatological enthronement and reign. This makes all of the Son of man sayings important historical evidence testifying to Jesus' divine identity.

### V. Conclusion: Controversy Clarifies Confession

Let us return to the two central paradigm shifts that are at the root of current denials of the divinity of Jesus. First, we have seen that models positing a linear development in Christology from early simple confessions (Jesus is a prophet) to later exalted ones (Jesus is God) are flawed and need to be discarded. The confession of Jesus as one who is within the mystery of the one God of Israel took place early and is necessarily prior to the worship of Jesus among Jews, which in turn existed in advance of the earliest documents of the New Testament. This is not to be simplistic and assert that the divine identity of Jesus was completely articulated before the ascension. The first two decades, indeed, were formative, and the expression of the identity of Jesus as the incarnate Lord continued in the decades and centuries beyond AD 50. It was not, however, an evolutionary development from the human Jesus to the

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[73] Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, 160–161.

[74] Kingsbury, *Matthew*, 61–65.

divine Christ over the course of decades, much less centuries. In light of evidence like that presented above, Richard Bauckham draws this perceptive conclusion:

> . . . we can see that the New Testament writers are already, in a deliberate and sophisticated way, expressing a fully divine Christology by including Jesus in the unique identity of God as defined by Second Temple Judaism. Once we recognize the theological categories with which they are working, it is clear that there is nothing embryonic or tentative about this. In its own terms, it is an adequate expression of a fully divine Christology. It is, as I have called it, a Christology of divine identity. The developmental model, according to which the New Testament sets a christological direction only completed in the fourth century, is therefore seriously flawed.[75]

Second, the early identification of Jesus within the mystery of the one God of Israel and the subsequent worship of Jesus point us to the necessity of not neatly dividing the Christ of faith from the Jesus of history, but grounding the former in the latter. As was argued above, it is especially the centrality of the death of Jesus by crucifixion in early Christian proclamation that points us to an organic relationship between these two as one reality. Hoskyns and Davey expressed it this way in the midst of the historical skepticism of the past century:

> For any historical reconstruction which leaves an unbridgeable gulf between the faith of the primitive church and the historical Jesus must be both inadequate and uncritical: inadequate, because it leaves the origin of the church unexplained; and uncritical, because a critical sifting of the evidence of the New Testament points towards the life and death of Jesus as the ground of primitive Christian faith, and points in no other direction.[76]

If we have learned anything from the history of the early church, it is that controversy did not weaken the church, but clarified her confession of the one Triune God. The important question that Jesus asked his disciples at Caesarea Philippi was not "Who do men say that I am?" but "Who do

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[75] Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 77–78.

[76] E. Hoskyns and N. Davey, *The Riddle of the New Testament* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), 170.

you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15). Current controversy, precisely because it drives us to sift the historical evidence anew, can serve to strengthen the clarity of our confession in order that we declare with conviction, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Matthew 16:15), and even "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

# A Review of
# Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*

**James W. Voelz**

It is a privilege to interact with a scholar I have come to know on a personal level, Larry Hurtado, and to be involved with a review of his fine and masterful work *Lord Jesus Christ*.[1] This work will provide a real cornerstone for current discussion of the topic of Christology among us and far beyond.

As far as my interaction with Larry's tome is concerned—and it is a tome, being some 650 pages of text without bibliography and indices—I will proceed as follows: I will begin with a **Summary** of the main points (in my estimation) of the work, which will be followed by a section of **Explication**, which will attempt to put "meat on the bones," as it were, giving the bases of the assertions detailed in the summary which precedes. Section three will provide **Expansion**, that is, it will focus on six aspects of the book's presentation, aspects which seem to me to be of particular importance, comprising either data or argumentation, aspects which dare not be overlooked. Section four will, then, seek to sketch out **Challenges**, aspects of the book's presentation which, in my opinion, challenge the standard outlook of traditional Christians, in general, and of us Lutherans, in particular. This is, in many ways, the most important section of my presentation; it will, I hope, promote further reflection. Finally, a brief **Conclusion** will seek to bring some closure.

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[1] Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK; Eerdmans, 2003). All page citations within parentheses in this review are to this book.

*James W. Voelz is Professor of Exegetical Theology at Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, Missouri.*

## I. Summary of *Lord Jesus Christ*

It is difficult to summarize the book *Lord Jesus Christ* (hereafter *LJC*), if only because of its incredible scope. It seeks to deal with the understanding and practices of the earliest Christians relative to Jesus, and it considers evidence both from literary sources—canonical and non-canonical ( the Gospels of Matthew and Thomas), extant and hypothesized (Acts and Q)—and from non-literary sources (martyrdom and the copying habits of scribes), from early sources and from those well into the second century (1 Thessalonians and the writings of Valentinus), and it ranges in its interest over the specific, stated topic (namely, the devotion to Jesus in earliest Christianity), but along the way it gives summaries of the story lines of every Gospel and provides a synopsis of the doctrinal systems of the less-than-orthodox fully one century later in time. Indeed, the summary provided of the state of the question relative to the Son of man (290–306) and to the Gospel of Thomas (452–479) is worth the price of admission alone.

What the book contends is astonishing, really. Hurtado writes:

> . . . the belief that Jesus is, in some unique and meaningful sense, divine is a feature of Christian devotion from the earliest observable stages. Though the term "god". . . is applied to Jesus only a few times in New Testament writings . . . , in other very eloquent ways first-century Christians treated Jesus as sharing God's attributes, and as worthy of the sort of reverence otherwise to be reserved for God. (637)

In other words, Hurtado asserts that Jesus was understood to be, and was worshiped as, divine by Christians from a time virtually immediately following the resurrection. It is important to note that there are three important parts to this affirmation. The first concerns beliefs, the second worship, and the third dating. He writes:

- Concerning belief:

  > Amid the diversity of earliest Christianity, belief in Jesus' divine status was amazingly common. There "heresies" of earliest Christianity largely presuppose the view that Jesus is divine. (650)

- Concerning worship—and this can easily be seen as his primary contention:

> The devotional practice of earliest Christianity was particularly foundational for doctrinal developments . . . . Christians were proclaiming and worshiping Jesus, indeed, living and dying for his sake, well before the doctrinal/creedal developments of the second century and thereafter . . . . (649–650)

- Concerning early appearance of those beliefs and worship practices—and this is very revolutionary when compared to the general view of scholarship for centuries:

> Moreover, devotion to Jesus as divine erupted suddenly and quickly, not gradually and late, among first-century circles of followers. More specifically, the origins lie in Jewish Christian circles of the earliest years. Only a certain wishful thinking continues to attribute the reverence of Jesus as divine decisively to the influence of pagan religion and the influx of Gentile converts, characterizing it as developing late and incrementally. (650)

We may note that, according to Hurtado, the belief in Jesus' divinity was not only early but also widespread (650).

## II. Explication

What is the basis for Hurtado's astonishing assertions? How do we know that the earliest Christians regarded Jesus as divine, that they worshiped him as divine, and that this was an early phenomenon in history? We need to put some meat on the bones of this skeletal theological structure, and we can do so on the basis of Hurtado's extremely careful and detailed reading of canonical and non-canonical texts.

We know the early Christians regarded Jesus as divine, and that in two ways. First, titles and designations were applied to Jesus in the sources, significant numbers of which were reserved for God or Yahweh in the Old Testament, and were given to no other beings (whether human, angelic, or deistic) in those documents. *Kyrios* is the best and most important example. Hurtado states:

> Clearly, *Kyrios* characteristically functions in Paul's letters as a christological term. But that makes it all the more important to note that Paul also refers to God as *Kyrios*. The certain passages where Paul does this are citations of the Old Testament, and *Kyrios* is there the translation/substitute for *Yahweh*: Romans 4:8 (Ps. 32:1–1), Romans 9:28–29 (Isa. 28:22; 1:9) . . . . Even clearer as evidence that

> *Kyrios* was a part of Paul's own vocabulary for God are the several other citations of the Old Testament where Paul supplies an explicit reference to God as *Kyrios* for which there is no direct equivalent in the Old Testament passages: Romans 11:3 (1 Kings 19:10), Romans 12:19 (Deut. 32.35) . . . . So it is remarkable that, in other citations of Old Testament passages which originally have to do with God, Paul applies the passages to Jesus, making him the *Kyrios*: Romans 10:13 (Joel 2:32), 1 Corinthians 1:31 (Jer. 9:23–24), 2 Corinthians 10:17 (Jer. 9:23-24) . . . . These applications of Old Testament *Kyrios* passages to Jesus connote and presuppose the conviction that in some profound way he is directly and uniquely associated with God. (111–112)

Related to this is the bestowal of the divine name on Jesus. For example, John 12:13 (citing Psalm 118:26) applies the name of Yahweh to Jesus: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Also worthy of special note is ascription of δόξα ("glory") to Jesus: the declaration that he manifested God's glory (John 17:12; 389), shared glory with the Father (John 17:5; 379), and was glorified by the Father (John 7:31; 380). This ascription of glory to Jesus is especially significant since Yahweh declares specifically in Isaiah 42:8 and 48:11 that he will share his glory with no other.

Second, the functions or descriptions of activity ascribed to God or Yahweh in the Old Testament were applied to Jesus in the New Testament sources. One may think of the two storm scenes in Mark, which Hurtado calls epiphanic, that is, Jesus is "pictured in actions deliberately likened to God's" (285). When the disciples ask after the stilling of the storm in 4:35–44, "Who then is this, that even the wind and sea obey him," this is a rhetorical "hint at the right answer, that Jesus has shown godlike superiority over the elements" (285–286; see Psalm 107:29). When Jesus walks on water in 6:45-52, he is clearly depicted in the same way as is Yahweh in Job 9:8 (286; see also Psalm 77:19). We may note also that the dispensing of the Holy Spirit (John 20:22) is itself the prerogative of Yahweh and of no one else in Jewish tradition (398, note 100). But the best example may well be Philippians 2:10–11: "In order that at the name of Jesus every knee may bow of beings in heaven and on earth and subterranean, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." This appropriates Isaiah 45:23–25, which originally proclaimed a universal submission to Yahweh, and portrays "the eschatological acclamation of Jesus as *Kyrios* 'to the glory of God the Father" (112).

We know the early Christians worshiped Jesus as divine, principally because they called upon his name (whether directly or as "the Lord"), acclaimed him as Lord (from his resurrection), and prayed to the Father in his name. Significant is the calling upon the name of Jesus as one calls upon the name of the Lord/Yahweh (see Acts 9:14, 22:16, 7:59). Hurtado observes:

> . . . in history-of-religions terms, the cultic acclamation/invocation of Jesus is a remarkable innovation. It represents the inclusion of Jesus with God as recipient of public, corporate cultic reverence. That is, we are dealing here with an innovation precisely in the area of religious behavior that was most sensitive in Roman-era Jewish tradition about protecting the uniqueness of the one God. (199)

Even more significant is the use of the phrase "call upon the name of the Lord" (Acts 2:21) to refer to calling upon the name of Jesus, when the Old Testament source for the expression (Joel 2:32 [MT 3:5]) has as its referent Yahweh and him alone:

> It is . . . an absolutely . . . stunning move . . . for early Christians to have taken the biblical expression that means the cultic worship of God . . . as referring also to cultic acclamation/invocation of Jesus . . . . There can be no doubt that this phrase was adopted to refer to the specific invocation of the name of Jesus, both in corporate worship and in the wider devotional pattern of Christian believers (e.g., baptism, exorcism, healing) . . . . (181–182)

This gives clear indication of the understanding which lies behind the acclamation of Jesus as Lord in the Aramaic expression *marana tha* (1 Corinthians 16:22) or in the Greek phrase Κύριος Ἰησοῦς (1 Corinthians 12:3).

We know that all of this occurred early in the appearance of the Christian faith, because evidence occurs in all strata of the earliest sources, and because the evidence seems, in the rhetoric of the sources, virtually always to be presupposed. As far as strata are concerned, the so-called hymn of Philippians 2:6–11 contains material which almost surely antedated Paul, as did the Aramaic phrase *marana tha*, which Paul cites to a Greek-speaking, largely Gentile congregation in Corinth (110), but evidence is also to be found in Paul's own compositions (for example, 1 Corinthians 12:3), plus in the so-called Q material shared by Matthew and Luke, also in the book of Acts (2:21), in the Gospels (with the depiction of

Jesus and their address to Jesus as Lord throughout), and, certainly, in the book of Revelation.

As far as New Testament writers presupposing the evidence are concerned, Hurtado states:

> Interestingly, nowhere in Paul's letters does he give us anything like a systematic or comprehensive presentation of his christological beliefs. In fact, other than the passages where he found it necessary to explicate the implications of these beliefs for the admission of Gentiles (e.g., Galatians 3:10–4:7), or where he sought to promote behavior shaped by beliefs about Christ, Paul characteristically seems to *presuppose* acquaintance with the christological convictions that he affirms, and most often he expresses them in brief, somewhat formulaic terms. (98)

The hymn of Philippians 2 is a perfect example of this facile presupposition. Although Hurtado focuses on Paul here, it applies throughout the New Testament as well.

We may ask, finally, what the cause of all of this was: the understanding, the worship practices, and the time frame. The provocative answer put forward in *LJC* is that it was due both to powerful post-resurrection religious experiences, and to the pondering of scriptural texts. Allow me to quote Hurtado in full:

> According to the earliest traditions, very soon in the "post-Easter" setting Jewish followers of Jesus had experiences of "seeing" Jesus as uniquely resurrected to eschatological existence and heavenly glory. Of course, these Jewish believers brought to their experiences an acquaintance with their scriptures, and a confidence that these sacred writings contained God's redemptive purposes and could help them make full sense of their religious experiences. In a dynamic interaction between devout, prayerful searching for, and pondering over, scriptural texts and continuing powerful religious experiences, they came to understand certain biblical passages in an innovative way as prefiguring and portraying God's vindication of Jesus. These "charismatic" insights into biblical passages in turn shaped their understanding of their experiences, reinforced their confidence in the validity of these experiences, stimulated their openness to further experiences of Jesus' exalted status, and helped shape these subsequent experiences. (184–185)

This answer is provocative especially to us Lutherans, because of the anti-*Schwaermer* orientation of our historic position, a point to which I will return (see IV below).

### III. Expansion

In this section, I will seek to focus on six points in *LJC*, comprising both arguments and data, that, in my mind, are key and dare not be overlooked. The first three are theological in focus, the next three hermeneutical.

Hurtado argues—and rightly so—that the early Christians saw Jesus as divine, because the designations and descriptions previously applied to God, or Yahweh, were applied by them to him. From this it is apparent that the understanding of the early Christians was firmly rooted in the Old Testament. This is, in fact, a key point in the presentation of *LJC*. All of the New Testament documents and their thinking are properly seen as closely connected to the Old Testament, not only in finding Jesus there—the early Christians found him there in at least three different places: in Old Testament texts seen as messianic predictions, in Old Testament types which foreshadowed Jesus, and in Old Testament theophanies, seen as preincarnational manifestations of the Son of God (566)—but also in affirming both the God and the *Weltanschauung* of that testament. For them, the God of the Old Testament was the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the world which he created was good and worth the trouble to redeem. Significantly, second-century-heretical or non-proto-orthodox documents cut their version of Christianity loose from that connection, seeing the god of the Old Testament as quite other than the God and Father of Jesus Christ, a vain and stupid creator deity, and the world as a tragic, "vain, and pointless realm to be treated with disdain" (559). On such affirmations and outlooks one's understanding of salvation rests, as either the overcoming of evil which despoils the good creation for the sake of the heirs of the divine promise, or as a retrieving by an alien intruder into a worthless realm of fellow divine beings "whom he came to reawaken to their true identity and destiny" (566). Only in the former scheme does—can—the resurrection make any sense at all.

It seems to be true that only as a Christian community remains rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures and the older testament will its theology have a chance to avoid the ravages of Platonism and/or the life-denying impetus of extreme asceticism.

Relatedly, for Hurtado, the early Christians' Old Testament orientation brought monotheistic considerations to the fore, and that in two ways. First, in the Old Testament, no one possesses the glory of God, the name of God, and is worshipped as God except God, that is, Yahweh (see II above). Thus, for Jesus to receive such descriptions and worship is to understand him as divine. Second and concomitantly, Jesus cannot be understood as divine in terms of being a separate or second deity, because there is no other god; di-theism is not allowed, including versions involving apotheosis (that is, the making into a god a human being, a thought common in Greek and pagan contexts). Thus, Jesus must be understood in relation to the Father and in unity with him. Hurtado puts it in an intriguing way in his investigation of the Gospel of John:

> Jesus' significance is always expressed with reference to God "the Father" in GJohn. At the same time, GJohn insists that proper obedience to, and reverence of, God now requires that Jesus be explicitly included with God as recipient of faith and devotion. This means that "the Father" is now defined with reference to Jesus, through whom in a uniquely full and authoritative measure the Father is revealed. (390)

In other words, any duality can and must be found in God himself.

Given these points, a so-called binitarian view (to use Hurtado's favorite phrase) emerged. In this view, Jesus shares full divinity with the Father, including his name and his glory, but his nature and status is still to be understood in relationship to the Father, (for example, finally every tongue will confess that "Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"). Heresies, especially those of the second century AD, released the tension caused by such rigorous monotheism, normally resulting in a polytheistic understanding.

The difficulties, if I may use the phrase, of monotheism remind us that our theological formulations are always and will ever remain, paradoxical, with antinomous understandings of God and his nature, the nature and work of Jesus, and the like. Contemporary physics only supports this antinomous view.

Also relatedly, the previous critical orthodoxy position of Wilhelm Bousset, in his book *Kyrios Christos*, concerning the rise of Christianity is unsustainable. Hurtado has demonstrated this convincingly. It is not right to understand the rise of (proto) orthodox Christianity in terms of a development from simple to complex, from Jewish to Gentile, and from

low to high Christology, with pagan thought providing much of the impetus for later beliefs and formulations (via Paul). An overarching consideration here is whether or not the Greek words of the early documents are invested with Greek and pagan meaning or whether their semantic content is essentially Hebrew (124). Responding to Bousset's work is, in many ways, the *raison d'ete* of *LJC* and could be the first point of consideration, but I am choosing to subordinate it to the discussion of the place of the Old Testament and Jewish thought in early Christian belief and piety.

The book engages in an extremely careful reading of documents and is a model of doing so. One may cite Hurtado's observation that in letters in which Paul argues concerning inclusion of the Gentiles (for example, Romans and Galatians), there is no apparent dissension on the matter of high Christology (206), allowing the implication to be drawn that all sides "shared in revering Jesus as Messiah and Lord . . . " (206), or that the phrase "Jesus Christ" or "Christ Jesus" would have functioned to distinguish the Lord from his namesake, Moses's successor, Joshua'Ιησοῦς (99), and that the varying positions of the two terms indicate that "for Paul and others . . . Christos had not simply been reduced to a name . . . but instead retained something of its function as a title" (99–100). Perhaps best, however, is his observation pertaining to Paul's conversion:

> Prior to his conversion experience, Paul saw Jewish Christian beliefs and practices as so improper and dangerous as to call for urgent and forceful action to destroy the young religious movement. He said his own conversion specifically involved a "revelation" of Jesus' significance that produced a radical change in him, from opponent to devotee (e.g., Gal. 1:12; 2 Cor. 5:16). So far as we can tell, immediately after this experience he espoused the remarkable "high" Christological claims and "binitarian" devotional practice . . . . The only things he refers to as novel and unique about his own Christian religious stance are the convictions that he is personally called to obtain "the obedience of the Gentiles" to the gospel, and that Gentiles are not to be required to take up Jewish observance of Torah as a condition of their salvation and their full acceptance by Jewish believers.
>
> I submit that the most reasonable inference from these things is this: what drew the intense ire of the pre-conversion Paul against Jewish Christians was not (as has often been alleged . . . ) their supposed laxity of Torah observance or an unseemly association with Gentiles;

> instead it was the Christ-devotion that is basically reflected in what he embraced and advocated after his conversion. The religious zeal of Saul the Pharisee against Jewish Christians is best accounted for as provoked by what he regarded as their undue reverence of Jesus. (175-176)

This careful analysis demonstrates the propriety and necessity of reading documents on what I call in my hermeneutics book reading on Level 3: signifiers and conceptual signifieds are read, not for what they tell you about the topic to which they are related, but for what they tell about the beliefs, understandings, assumptions, and background of those who wrote and/or received them.[2] I might note that we do this constantly in isagogics, when we conclude, for example, that the readers of Matthew's Gospel were unlikely to be pagan Gentiles with no acquaintance with the Jewish faith, because Matthew quotes the Old Testament scriptures frequently, also speaking of their fulfillment. Examples abound in *LJC*; here are some of the most obvious (in addition to the three just mentioned):

- writing Jesus' name and titles as *nomina sacra* in manuscripts (that is, a stylised abbreviation normally reserved for names and titles of God himself) gives the implication that the copyists understood Jesus to be divine (625-627),

- preserving the Son of man idiolect of Jesus in the Gospels gives the implication that the church had such a profound reverence for Jesus that they preserved this odd linguistic usage (304-306), and,

- perhaps most important—and what is argued throughout the book and has been mentioned above--the fact that Paul and other authors advance no argument for their astonishing positions regarding the person and nature of Jesus implies that they presupposed that the audience was acquainted with their convictions (98).

We should not be afraid to engage in this kind of reading on Level 3. Indeed, it is helpful when one considers the issue of the sacraments and the New Testament text. Applying the last point mentioned, (that is, advancing no argument implies a presupposition of acquaintance with a given position), we may note that Titus 3:5-6 presupposes an acquaintance

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[2] James W. Voelz, *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World*, Second Edition (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 165-167.

on the part of the recipients with a doctrine of baptism which entails rebirth and the action of God, not one which sees it simply as a dedicatory or symbolic rite: "By his great mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit . . . . " No argument is advanced. The same may be said of the real presence of Jesus in the Lord's Supper. In 1 Corinthians 10:16, Paul does not teach; rather, he asks—and from the Greek we know that he expects the answer "Yes,": "The cup of blessing which we bless, it is the common sharing of the blood of Christ, isn't it? The bread which we break, it is the common sharing of the body of Christ, isn't it?" What he says is assumed to be the common understanding.

Relatedly, the book engages in a literary reading of the texts. They are treated as literary compositions, and thus we are presented with a New Testament book's focus and argumentation, and especially with a Gospel, with its story line, characters, setting, and so on. This enables the trenchant observation by Hurtado, namely, that genre actually facilitates a given view of Jesus, with the revelation dialogues (books such as the Gospel of Thomas or the Gospel of Truth) which are different in their view from the canonical Gospels:

> It is arguable that the development of revelation dialogues as a kind of early Jesus book specifically represents efforts to counter and supersede the well-known narrative Gospels and their portrayal of Jesus. As a series of statements and mini discourses of Jesus in reply to queries from disciples, the revelation dialogue genre facilitated very different portrayals, which dispense with major features of the narrative Jesus books, such as Jesus' historical location in Roman Judea/Palestine, miracle stories, and the presentation of his significance in relation to Israel and the Old Testament. The genre readily facilitated the delivery of, and focus on, ideas attributed to Jesus. . . . In these texts Jesus' role is essentially that of revealer and exemplar . . . . (481–482)

A literary approach enables narratives especially to be read on Level 2: the deeds depicted by the signifiers are themselves read for significance.[3] I have already cited three examples: the fact that Jesus walked upon the waters (Mark 6) shows that he is God, because in the Old Testament Yahweh is described as treading upon the waves (Job 9); the fact that Jesus can and does dispense the Spirit—an act unparalleled in Jewish traditions

[3] Voelz, *What Does This Mean?*, 156–165.

for redeemer figures—signifies that he is divine (398); and the fact that Jesus will receive universal submission (and be confessed as Lord) at the end of days (Philippians 2:9-11) signifies that he shares divinity with Yahweh, of whom those characteristics are predicated. Further examples abound in *LJC*, but here are three more: the fact that Jesus is portrayed as existing before the creation of the world in the Gospel of John signifies his "radical preeminence" (364); the fact that the Lamb receives heavenly worship along with God in the book of Revelation signifies that he is divine (592-593); and the fact that Jesus is conceived without a human father signifies that he trumps all biblical precedents and is "the most momentous of all" (328-329).

We, too, should not be afraid to engage in this kind of literary reading, especially as we engage in the interpretation of narrative. To do so is not to engage in speculation, as some have styled it; it is to engage in the interpretation of signifiers which reside on Level 2—signifiers which simply are non-verbal.

Relatedly, again, but worth a separate point, is the matter of narrative as genre and the handling of it in *LJC*. This refers not so much to interpretation on Level 2 but to the general understanding of the nature and function of narrative and of its hermeneutical importance. A narrative world is assumed for virtually all documents of the early Christians, and not only for the so-called Jesus Books of the New Testament canon (262-263). This includes the letters of Paul (247, note 71), so-called Q (246-247), and also the revelation dialogues (483), which are non-canonical. There is always an "enabling narrative" in the background, even for the canonical Gospels (267-269)—a nice structuralist touch! Indeed, it is noted that, in the specifics of the case, the narrative inherent in the Gospel of John is congruent with that of the synoptic Gospels (356-357), as is the narrative latent in Paul. From this Hurtado draws the highly important implication (a Level 3 reading!) that an *a priori* oral narrative was alive and well among the earliest Christians (357, 272), a narrative widely known. In Hurtado's view, Mark is groundbreaking in putting the narrative into writing for the first time in history (272)—a view I would dispute but is certainly worthy of further discussion.

Finally, I will end this section by relating *LJC* to two gigantic works of late twentieth-century New Testament study, Hans Frei's *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* and E.P. Sanders's *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. Key theses of both are confirmed by *LJC*, in my view. On the one hand, Frei pleads for a literary reading of the New Testament, especially the Gospels,

and *LJC* provides exactly such.[4] It reads the New Testament literarily, and, in so doing is able to apprehend its message. Ironically, in so doing—and not by seeking to reconstruct prior versions or sources (what Frei laments about traditional critical Gospel studies)—it is able also to reconstruct the state of earliest Christianity by then reading on Level 3. Sanders, on the other hand, believes that Paul's conversion experience led him to a new view of Jesus and to a radical reformation of his prior beliefs. That new view led him to see Jesus as the solution to man's plight, however that plight might be conceived.[5] That view also led him to reject the law as the means of getting right with God, because it was not a solution that consisted of Jesus.[6] *LJC* confirms this position. Paul's revelational experience with the risen Christ caused him to reconfigure his background (89). Now, Jesus, not the Torah, was seen as the means of salvation (89), and the Gentiles were understood to be full heirs with the Jews (96). None of this was simply a deduction from a reading of the Old Testament scriptures. Hurtado's *LJC*, then, is an impetus for all of us to reread these two monumental minds, Frei and Sanders, and to reconsider the basic ideas they put forward and develop.

## IV. Challenges

Finally, it seems to me that Hurtado in *LJC* presents all confessional Lutheran Christians everywhere with several important challenges. I will enumerate five. The final two challenges relate to points that I have not raised before in this presentation.

First, *LJC* demonstrates, I am convinced, that experience is an important factor in religious understanding, that it is difficult to take the position that all experiential factors are *Schwaermerei* (see II above). Lutherans are generally suspicious of experiential factors, but they need not be, for Luther himself underwent a radical reformation both of his understanding of his status before God and of the meaning of important texts of the Scriptures, largely as a result of his inability to assuage his guilty conscience (he needed a solution to this existential plight, a solution many others did not need). How are we, as Lutherans, to understand the role of

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[4] Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermenutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 10-11, 280-281.

[5] E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 442-447.

[6] Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 475, 482.

experience as we seek to understand God, his work, and our Christian life? Have we, in general, been too suspicious of its role?

Second, the approach taken in *LJC* understands the books of the New Testament as the visible tip of a much larger iceberg, as it were. In Hurtado's view, a prior and large-scale Christian understanding of Christ, including his history, person, nature and work, is assumed by the written texts. Put in his own terms, the narratives of the New Testament assume a larger enabling narrative and a larger contextual understanding, all of it mainly oral. What does this mean for people who assert a position of *sola scriptura* and of *scriptura scripturam interpretatur*? How does the larger prior understanding relate to the *regula fidei* of early Christian communities? How does it relate to the general issue of Scripture and tradition? What is, in fact, our final authority in matters of faith and life?

Third, can we comfortably affirm, along with the full divinity of Jesus, the subordinationist emphasis (394) found both in the Gospel of John and throughout the New Testament (a result of monotheistic hegemony derived from a proper Christian embracing of the Old Testament)? In the end, all will be "to the glory of God the Father." How does this impact classical Christology? Need we pay more attention to Cappadocian understandings? Does this suggest that the addition of the *filioque* to the Nicene Creed was a mistaken move by the western church? In an important way, this issue impacts our understanding of the concept of the image of God.

Fourth, *LJC* argues that the meaning of the death of Jesus for our sins is contextual (131): in the tradition of Jerusalem Christians, the redemptive interpretation was a christological apologia for how Jesus' death formed part of God's purpose; for Paul it gave a basis for the salvation of the Gentiles apart from the law (for the so-called Q source it was chiefly an example [242]). Is there a single meaning of Jesus' redemptive death and resurrection, or are there only meanings thereof? Relatedly, what does it mean that theological formulations are rhetorical?

Fifth, if it is true that, for the earliest Christians, both cross and resurrection were always understood as a united redemptive event (188), and, indeed, that the resurrection was key in (re)forming the disciples' understanding of the meaning of Jesus' death, what does this mean for the centrality of the cross and, in Lutheran circles, for the centrality of a theology of the cross? What is meant by such a theology? We may note that, while Paul begins 1 Corinthians with an emphasis on the crucified

Christ (2:2) and the preaching of the cross (1:23) when he explicates the gospel in chapter 15, the resurrection is the point of emphasis, not Christ and him crucified.

## V. Conclusion

The heart of New Testament theology is Christology. Christians understand Jesus as, and worship Jesus as, true God and true man, and there is every reason to believe that they did so from earliest times, certainly very soon after Easter. Larry Hurtado lays out the evidence for this in abundant detail in *LJC*. But this is not simply a fact to be noticed or observed, a fact which is something of interest to our minds. It is a truth, a truth which impacts our very lives. The confession of the early Christians of a high Christology, and the putting of that Christology into practice via their strong worship practices, brings strong affirmation to the validity of the Old Testament, to the goodness of the created order (including our human bodies), and to the surety of our salvation in the one in whom and for whom all things have been made. We thank Larry for this outstanding monograph and look forward to helpful contributions from him in the coming years.

# Recent Research on Jesus: Assessing the Contribution of Larry Hurtado

David P. Scaer

Especially striking in Larry W. Hurtado's pace setting book *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Early Christianity,* is his assessment of the New Testament which requires a date between AD 30-50 for revering Jesus as divine. For dogmatic theology this has significant consequences, even though the christological question was settled by Nicea in AD 325. A settled attitude may be a disadvantage, if it renders historical pursuits irrelevant. It is comparable to doing a crossword puzzle with the confidence that the answers are only a few pages away in the back of the magazine. Answers in hand give a sense of security. Students given the answers before the test generally do better than those without them. We avoid historical questions to our own detriment. Historical investigation is not detrimental to faith. By placing the recognition of Jesus as divine so close to his earthly ministry, as Hurtado does, it is tempting to suggest that he did and said things that led those who knew him to conclude that he was divine. Each subsequent generation struggles with the Gospel records.

## I. The Old Christology

Nicea followed three centuries in which matters about Jesus were up for grabs. More problems surfaced in the following centuries. More than a millennium later the christological peace was disrupted by the Reformation Lord's Supper controversy, which was only a cover for more serious differences about Christ and God. Calvin's achievement was making Zwingli's palatable to Luther's followers, a process that concluded in the 1997 truce of *A Formula of Agreement.* Until the eighteenth century, christological controversies boiled down to explaining how the divine and human in Jesus related to each other with the weight shifting from side to side.

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*David P. Scaer is Professor of Systematic Theology and Chairman of the Department of Systematic Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.*

## II. The New Christology: Historical Questions and Their Necessity

Enlightenment scholars redirected the christological question from how the divine and human in Jesus related to the other to finding him in history. Each quest for the historical Jesus—and we are on the third—continues to be overtaken by another. Like the crusades to Jerusalem, Jesus is found, lost, or never discovered. Conclusions once offered as most certain and supported by the majority of scholars are overturned by newer scholars. Just when the apples are secure, the cart tips over and the fruit is placed in another basket.[1] In the 1960s, Bishop Pike and more recently Bishop Spong have popularized this research to show what a friendly man Jesus was. It is almost a spectator sport, if the consequences are not so serious for faith. In the first century the church called for a confession that Jesus was the Christ. Two thousand years later the primary issue is coming to a firm conviction about the place of Jesus in history.

While dogmatic theology assumes the historical character of Jesus and then asks how his humanity is related to his divinity, critical approaches do not.[2] Divinity is outside the limits of historical research. What is a threat or at least a challenge to the church's faith can, however, have a Luther-like hew. For the Reformer, theology starts with the manger and the cross. The road to the divine begins from below, specifically the history of Israel and Jesus. Historical approaches can deteriorate into a skepticism in which Jesus is put beyond our reach, as in the case of David Friedrich Strauss and Rudolph Bultmann. Such negative conclusions are the inevitable results of applying principles which can be arbitrary, philosophical or both. Principles predetermine conclusions.[3] Dogmatics presupposes and

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[1] In November 2001 a conference was held at the University of Hamburg on the often unrecognized methodological and epistemological presuppositions behind recent historical Jesus research. These essays along with others were published in *Der historische Jesus: Tendenzen und Perspectiven der gegenwaertigen Forschung* ed. Jens Schroeter and Ralph Brucker. (Berlin: de Gruyter: 2002). For an overview in English see Andries G. Van Aarde's review in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123/3 (Fall 2004): 560-564. Van Aarde notes that arguments for continuity and discontinuity between the history of Jesus and faith in him have equal standing and that no solution for resolving the disparity is offered (563).

[2] Though the dogmatical question has been superceded by the historical one, the question of how the human Jesus knew God is taken up by Thomas G. Weinday, "Jesus' Filial Vision of the Father," *Pro Ecclesia* XIII/2 (Spring 2004): 189-201.

[3] Bart D. Ehrman works with the principle of dissimilarity to determine probable historical authenticity in the life of Jesus. Sayings that do not support the Christian

requires history. Without it faith is suffocated by historical agnosticism. For those brought to the abyss of historical nothingness Karl Barth and Neo-Orthodoxy provided relief in a revealed Word directly from God. The downside in this system was the absence of an incarnation joining earth and heaven. Questions of how the human and the divine in Jesus relate (*communicatio idiomatum*) is rendered obsolete.

### III. To the Parchments!

Essential to knowing Jesus are the New Testament documents, which apart from their inspiration arose out of a historical process. They were not anonymous pamphlets randomly scattered in ancient seaports with the hope that a sailor on shore leave would pick them up and be converted to the Jesus movement. Rather these documents were preserved by specific communities, written by persons who were known to the communities to which they were sent, and have as their subject a man put on trial, executed, and buried under official Roman auspices. They have a history and, hence, are historical. The *sub Pontio Pilato* of the Passion Narrative in the Gospels anchors Jesus in history (cf. Acts 4:27; 1 Timothy 6:13). The supposition is that *someone did something* within our time and space, and so the door to historical research is opened. As with all historical documents, their subjects are kept at arm's length from the readers, but these documents are the entry points into the past and the doors into the theological arena. We know the Scriptures as historical documents before we confront them as theological ones. They are incarnational because Jesus is fully present in them to invite their hearers to himself. Thus they are sacramental in purpose (Matthew 11:28). They are inspired by the Spirit who because he proceeds from Jesus (*filioque*) and sent into the world by him must speak about him through the apostles (Matthew 10:20). However, a reader's acknowledgment of their divine origin does not assure the intended interpretation, but without this recognition they have no place in the church.[4]

In locating Jesus we begin and end with documents. Their importance for theology is evident in that the Scriptures have been altered and

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cause are more likely to be historical. *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to Early Christian Writings*, 2nd ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 205.

[4] Robert W. Jenson states: "But I have to come to believe that already churchly reading of the Bible requires a doctrine of inspiration;" "A Second Thought About Inspiration," *Pro Ecclesia* XIII:4 (Fall 2004), 394.

replaced when they were found to contradict the dogma of a particular community. Ancient and modern Gnostics have produced their own scriptures. Some textual variants were accidental. Others may have arisen from the subconscious of the copyists to reflect their own biases to proselytize the unconvinced.[5] Rationalism resolved problems not by manipulating the texts but by reinterpreting Jesus' miracles as ordinary. Thomas Jefferson used the scissors method without the paste on the King James Version and anticipated the Jesus Seminar. Fundamentalism avoided historical concerns and shifted the origins of the biblical texts directly to the Spirit. Not surprisingly no place for the sacraments was found in the fundamentals and Christology played a minimal role.[6] Even the hint that Hurtado has evangelical motives [biases] does not take into account that his conclusions about Jesus arise from a critical study of the documents.[7]

Enlightenment scholars still set down the terms for critical scholars in reinterpreting and tampering with the Gospel texts. Literary criticism eschews these approaches in maintaining the integrity of the Gospel texts, but at the expense of failing to relate each Gospel to the others and a historical situation. The more prevalent method, so it seems, is tracing a process embedded in the New Testament documents from Jewish Christian communities to Hellenist ones. At first Jesus was regarded as an ordinary rabbi [Bultmann], an apocalyptic preacher [Schweizer; Ehrman] or an itinerant cynic peasant [Crossan] and later in the Hellenist communities he was promoted to God, on this there is general agreement. Q, a community document with proscriptions and the (Proto-) Mark, a narrative without birth and resurrection stories are seen as closer to Jesus.

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[5] Ebionites and Gnostics produced their own set of biblical documents. Eighteenth-century Rationalist theologians kept the documents but reinterpreted the miraculous as ordinary. Resurrection became resuscitation. Thomas Jefferson took the bold step and subtracted what was embarrassingly miraculous out of the Gospels. In an attempt to remove the distinctiveness of male and female as divinely ordered, feminism has produced its own bibles, biblical interpretations and liturgies.

[6] Jenson states: "The great flaw of the Old-Protestant doctrine of inspiration, particularly as it sought to enable Christian reading of the Old Testament, it was itself too little christological, that it did not reckon systematically with the very presence of Christ in the Old Testament whose authenticity it intended to support;" "A Second Thought About Inspiration," 396.

[7] Maurice Casey, "Lord Jesus Christ: A Response to Professor Hurtado," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 27 (2004): 90.

Paul is earlier than the Gospels. Hurtado works with this time frame, but unlike most scholars places the recognition of Jesus as divine in the earlier Jewish and not later Greek era. Scholars are taking note of this radical proposal.[8]

### IV. Overcoming a Century-Long Tradition

Hurtado advances his thesis of "Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity" in response to the views of any number of scholars especially the early twentieth-century German scholar Wilhelm Bousset who argued that Jesus became God in the Hellenist churches. [9] Bousset did not contest that the New Testament references presented Jesus as divine, but his apotheosis happened in churches whose members were predominantly former Gentiles and hence more generous than the Jews in whom they called "lord" or "god." Monotheistic Jewish Christians, at first, were uncomfortable with this but tolerated these Gentiles and in the end overcame their scruples: Jesus was in every sense and for everyone God.[10] This process might be compared to the adoration given to Washington and Lincoln in constructing temples for them in our nation's capitol. Bousset's ideas are more likely known to us through Rudolph Bultmann.[11] The publication of an English translation in 1970 of Bousset's *Kyrios Christos* coincided with Bultmann's reign in American New Testament studies, including the Missouri Synod. Accounts of Christ's birth resulted from myths of pagan gods' dalliances with women or their producing great men

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[8] David Vincent Meconi, review of *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*, by Larry W. Hurtado, in *First Things* 148 (December 2004): 50–52.

[9] Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans), 13–25.

[10] Wilhem Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: Geschichte des Christusglaubens von den Anfangen des Christentums bis Irenaeus*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913; rev.ed. 1921). *Kyrios Christos: A History of Belief in Christ from the Beginings of Christianity to Irenaeus*, Trans. J.E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon 1970).

[11] An apocalyptic preaching Jesus was glamorized by attributing to him a virgin birth, miracles and resurrection. Former pagans could do no less for their new object of devotion. Bultmann worked to reverse the apotheosis of Jesus by demythologizing the miraculous from texts and giving a Jesus with German upper middle class tastes. He wanted a larger hearing for Christianity. If northern European church statistics are a barometer, he failed.

without the benefit of males. Resurrection could be derived from the spring revival of the Egyptian river god.[12]

## V. A Position Inadequately Summarized

Hurtado does not ask the bare bones question of what Jesus or those who knew him thought of him, but by looking at the New Testament he concludes that the earliest Christian communities revered Jesus as divine: "In some forms of early 'popular' Christianity, Jesus almost seems to have eclipsed 'the Father.'"[13] He uses the liturgical argument that Christians were baptized and gathered in his name. Recognition of Jesus as divine in Jewish and not Gentile communities places this acknowledgment closer to Jesus as a historical figure.[14] His approach looks not only at explicit texts, but at church practices they record which were already decades in use when the documents were written.

## VI. Common Ground for Theological and Historical Christologies

Within a church context theological and historical Christologies must come together and this junction occurs in identifying Jesus as divine. Peter's confession has a pivotal role in the synoptics (Matthew 16:13; Mark 8:27; Luke 9:18). When Jesus is acknowledged as the Christ, he sets forth his mission as his death.[15] Hurtado does not examine the authenticity of such confessions, but looks at the New Testament as historical documents to show that the earliest Christians revered Jesus as divine, hence his subtitle: *Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity.* He examines New Testament documents and others historically, and not from a particularly religious understanding of them or the presupposition of their divine origin, though one suspects that his heart is synergistically involved with

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[12] Hurtado does address the issue of the virgin birth in *Lord Jesus Christ* (313–330). Ehrman claims that Christians applied future apocalyptic expectations which involved a resurrection to Jesus. *The New Testament, 254.*

[13] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ,* 3.

[14] It is not problematic that Gentile communities could come to revere Jesus as God (this is not the point of contention), but how this was accomplished in the monotheistic Jewish communities. If God is one, how can Jesus also be God? Robert W. Jenson addresses this question dogmatically: "The Old Testament displays throughout its narrative *personae* with the same structure, in which the narrative alternates between identifying some personal entity as the Lord and differentiating that same entity from Lord;" *Systematic Theology* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 332.

[15] In John's Gospel, Andrew and not Peter is first aware of Jesus' mission as sin bearer and then the conviction that he is the Messiah follows. The synoptic order is reversed, but like them he is given a new name, Cephas, the Aramaic for Peter (1:26–42).

his head. Inspiration is beyond historical investigation, but the claims of biblical writers as the Spirit's instruments is not (Matthew 10:20). Hurtado is writing neither a theology nor engaged in the quest for the historical Jesus in the technical sense, as is John Dominic Crossan.[16] However, Hurtado goes to a low layer of tradition. So it is tempting to make the jump from the manuscripts into *wie es eigentlich geschehen est.* He is not writing a biblical Christology, but it is an unintended byproduct. As a historical scholar, Hurtado does not limit his research to canonical Scriptures, but surveys books traditionally understood as non-canonical, such as the Gospels of Thomas and Peter. They are classified as Hellenist and hence their definition of Jesus as divine do not serve his argument. His tongue may be in his cheek when he compares them with the writings of the mystic, scientist Emanuel Swedenbourg.[17]

### VII. Where Did the Idea Come From That Jesus Was God?

The standard *Readers' Digest* kind of story is about a parishioner apparently complimenting a new pastor by asking him whether anyone had told him what a good sermon he had just preached. Modesty demanded that the young man respond that no one had. To which the parishioner quickly responded, "Then who gave you the idea?" This story can be introduced into the critical question so that Jesus is asked who told him that he was God. Like the young preacher who was overtaken with pride, according to the New Testament Jesus had said and done some things that had better be left to God, and on that account he was treated like God. The issue is whether Jesus experienced such adoration or was it something that occurred when the church had become Hellenized. Hurtado argues that this adoration was happening in the earliest, predominantly Jewish-Christian communities. Early Christian devotion placed Jesus within the one God of Israel and so the seeds of trinitarian doctrine were planted, though Hurtado uses the word "binitarian" to explain this phenomenon. Traditional dogmatics holds that Jesus had a self-understanding of himself as God and was responsible for what Christians later thought of him, a view which scholars can deny but cannot dismiss out of hand. Others conclude that there can be no certainty about Jesus' self-understanding; what is found in the New Testament about Jesus

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[16] John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991). The book jacket confidently proclaims, "The first comprehensive, determination of who Jesus was, what he did, what he said."

[17] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ,* 427-487.

are later ecclesiastical conclusions. Without tackling Jesus' self-understanding, Hurtado concludes that the church thought of Jesus as God within a few years after the resurrection.[18] This contrasts with the more widely held opinion that Jesus first received divine honors in congregations with a growing Gentile clientele. The argument is that adoration to pagan gods transformed Jewish monotheism, and the Jesus religion was put on the road to Nicea.

The analogy of the parishioners' question to the preacher about his sermon is not as trite as it might first seem. Peter's confession in the Gospels does not come out of nowhere, but it is the disciples' response to Jesus asking them about what others thought of him. This presupposes that some were already asking the question and sharing their impressions with others including the disciples, who even before being asked by Jesus found these answers unsatisfactory.[19] A request for evaluation from one's peers carries the risk of finding out the truth about oneself and this is precisely what Jesus wants from his disciples. At another level the evangelists want this response from the hearers of their Gospels. Then, as now, opinions about Jesus must be weighed and compared, they were, are, or will be hardly unified. Hearers' responses may not be the final standard in what the writer intended. Speaking for the twelve, Peter says that Jesus has a special relation to God, not merely as a prophet but as the Christ. According to the synoptic arrangement the cross has already been put into view (Matthew 10:38; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23), but the disciples who recognize the divinity of Jesus are adverse to coming to terms with crucifixion.[20] Jesus' question to Peter is put before every man, and this question set the agenda for Nicea, Constantinople, Chalcedon, and Ephesus.

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[18] Maurice Casey, one of Hurtado's critical respondents, holds that in a seminal sense Jesus may have been responsible for the later Christology, but does not say he deliberately intended this; "Lord Jesus Christ: A Response to Professor Hurtado," 27:1 (September 2004):93.

[19] Classic Rationalists suggested that Jesus had a vocational crisis and to relieve his self-uncertainty asked his closest associates to help define his life's mission. Inclusion of the account might be that without specific instruction, identifying Jesus as the Son of God could not be expected. This was the case with John the Baptist (Matthew 11:2–5; Luke 7:18–23).

[20] This episode appears midway in the synoptic Gospels, but it is more likely that it occurred shortly after Jesus had recruited the twelve as indicated in John. Apart from locating it in the time line of Jesus' life, what this all meant did not dawn on the disciples until after the resurrection.

### XIII. Divergent New Testament Impressions of Jesus

Hurtado notes that the New Testament documents preserved an assortment of impressions. The Jews, who present themselves as Abraham's children, cannot see through his humanity and imply that even it was contaminated by an illegitimate birth. Pharisees, scribes and chief priests follow in line. Others of Abraham's offspring accepted his special relationship with God as a prophet but could not come to grips with his divinity. These moderating Jews may have found their way into the Council of Jerusalem and were likely the forerunners of the Ebionites who appreciated Jesus' miracles but not his divinity. A commitment to Jesus meant cutting off their Judaic apron strings. Ostracization from the societal life of the synagogue was too high a price to pay. Jewish Christians struggled with whether they wanted to be more Jewish or Christian. These fringe believers were probably represented by those who suggested that Jesus was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or another of the prophets (Matthew 16:14; Mark 8:28; Luke 9:19). Jesus reminded them of these departed worthies. They were right, as far as they went, but they could not cross the threshold into recognizing Jesus as divine. [21] Among these failures, the faith that Jesus was divine took form in Jewish Christian communities.

### IX. Binitarian for a While But Trinitarian at the End

Worship of Jesus within Jewish monotheism is called binitarian, and is demonstrated by such honors given Jesus as the inclusion of his name in the prayers, invocations, confessions, baptisms, the Lord's Supper, and hymns.[22] For Hurtado the term binitarian is not intended to abridge trinitarian doctrine, but describes the challenge the first Christians faced in describing how the God who was in himself a pantheon of one could tolerate the introduction of another person.[23] Inclusion of Jesus in divine

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[21] Hurtado notes that estimates of Jesus ranged from his being a messianic figure to being a bad example as a magician and agitator; *Lord Jesus Christ*, 56.

[22] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 134–153.

[23] In defense of the term binitarian, it should be noted that the post-apostolic church had to answer first how the man Jesus could be God without disposing of his humanity or falling into polytheism. Casey seems to suggest that after much resistance Jewish monotheists were persuaded by once polytheistic Gentiles to allow Jesus divine honors; "Lord Jesus Christ: A Response to Professor Hurtado," 93. Fitting the Holy Spirit into the trinitarian equation had to wait for Constantinople in 381, though his presence along

worship is startling, but the real challenge is that the crucified is confessed to be the *Kyrios*: "Jesus does not receive his own cultus, with his own occasions or holy days . . . . Pauline Christians acclaim Jesus as *Kyrios* 'to the glory of God the Father.' . . . There are two distinguishable figures, God and Jesus, but in Paul's letters there is an evident concern to understand the reverence to Jesus as an extension of the worship of God."[24]

Hurtado's avoidance of trinitarian language to include adoration of the Spirit along with the Father and Jesus may come from his desire to keep his work within strict historical boundaries. This is understandable. However, if baptism in the name of Jesus is a reason for divinity, the data for recognizing the Spirit as divine is already there (John 1:33-35). 2 Corinthians 13:13, which Hurtado references because of the phrase "the Lord Jesus Christ," also has "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit."[25] If binitarian explains one step in adjusting Jewish monotheism, Hurtado presents sufficient evidences that the Spirit received like honors and hence trinitarian views of God are already there by AD 50.[26]

### X. Counterattack from the Old Guard

Maurice Casey is polite but not unexpectedly critical in his response to *Lord Jesus Christ*.[27] In a counter-response, Hurtado points out that Casey places the divinization of Jesus at the end of the first century, even later than Bousset did.[28] Casey represents the older critical view that Gentiles (Hellenists)—not Jewish Christians—were responsible for the worship of Jesus as divine, but he holds that Jesus as a "sufficiently powerful figure to be a genuine cause of subsequently Christological development."[29] This means that Jesus wittingly or unwittingly had something to do with the later recognition that he was divine. Casey holds that Jewish Christianity

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side of Jesus and the Father would allow for the argument that he was considered divine already during apostolic times.

[24] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ, 151.*

[25] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ,* 114; 120 n. 94.

[26] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ,* 396–402.

[27] Hurtado was the more gracious in his follow up: "Devotion to Jesus and Historical Investigation: A Grateful, Clarifying and Critical Response to Professor Casey," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 27/1 (September 2004): 97–105.

[28] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ, 7.*

[29] Casey, "Lord Jesus Christ: A Response to Professor Hurtado," 93. One of Hurtado's critics holds to the older view that Jesus was first recognized as divine by the Gentiles in communities which were once predominantly Jewish. As the Gentiles became the majority Jewish Christians overcame their monotheism to see Jesus in the same light. It must be asked what allowed Jewish Christians to overcome their scruples.

came to revere Jesus when "the restraining factor of Jewish monotheism was removed" by increased Gentile membership.[30] For him, Hurtado's binitarianism is almost a retrofitted trinitarianism enforced upon New Testament evidences.[31] Casey implies that Hurtado has evangelical motives in his scholarship.[32] He argues that divine references to Jesus may not prove as much as Hurtado claims. For example, in Second Temple Judaism such divine functions as eschatological judgment were given to Enoch without putting limitations on Jewish monotheism. Hence Jesus as judge would be no more divine than Enoch.[33] Casey's argument overlooks that Jesus gives similar authority to judge to his disciples (Matthew 19:28) without making them objects of devotion. Christians are also described as reigning with Christ (2 Timothy 2:12). Casey implies that Hurtado has camouflaged a religious agenda in historical guise; Hurtado's touch is that of the "historical" Esau, but the voice is unmistakably that of the "evangelical" Jacob.

### XI. Jewish and Hellenist: Exclusive or Inclusive Communities?

On one side of the debate are Bousset and Casey who locate the apotheosis of Jesus in the Hellenist communities in which John's Gospel responded to an emerging Gnosticism. On the other side is Hurtado who locates the recognition of Jesus in chiefly Jewish communities from which John came. He does not out of hand dismiss the influence of Greek philosophy and pagan thought among the Jews. Prevalent in Jewish communities were ideas of divine transcendence in which physical things were related to shadows.[34] Seeing John chiefly in Jewish terms helps Hurtado reinforce his argument that the recognition of Jesus as divine was not a Greek pheonomena.[35]

Though every seminary student is alerted to Jewish and Hellenist distinctives, these may be distinctions where the differences were already being eroded in the first century. Aramaic may have been the language of the common people, but Greek was a second language for many, if not

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[30] Casey, "Lord Jesus Christ: A Response to Professor Hurtado," 93, italics original.
[31] Casey, "Lord Jesus Christ: A Response to Professor Hurtado," 90.
[32] Casey, "Lord Jesus Christ: A Response to Professor Hurtado," 83-96.
[33] Casey, "Lord Jesus Christ: A Response to Professor Hurtado," 100-101.
[34] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 419-421.
[35] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 417-418.

most,[36] as Hurtado points out. With Greek came the ideas of the Greek philosophers. Denial of the resurrection appeared first not in Corinth but in Jerusalem where the Sadducees intending to ridicule the resurrection asked about multiple marriages in the next life (Matthew 22:23; Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27). Embedded in the question was the Greek philosophical belief that creation was only a temporary bleep in the divine plan in which a physical world would be replaced by a disembodied, spiritual, superior one. However, if Jewish communities combined Greek philosophy into the transcendental understanding of God, then Greek ideas in understanding Jesus as divine were already in place in Jewish communities: "first to the Jew [and almost immediately] to the Greek" (Romans 1:16). John's community was Jewish, but what was Jewish was already Greek. The disciples' misidentifying the resurrected Jesus as a spirit (Luke 24:37–43) may lend support to this view.[37]

## XII. Use of Paul

Hurtado follows the common view that Matthew and Luke appear after AD 70 (80–100?) and hence do not qualify as the earliest sources. Accordingly he gives them less attention than Q or Mark. Written before AD 70, Paul's letters qualify as sources of the earliest Christianity. Hurtado anticipates the critique that Paul's congregations were chiefly Gentile and thus do not advance his argument about Jewish congregations as the first to revere Jesus as divine. In response he points out that "Paul's own innovation or contribution was not to coin the idea that Jesus' death and resurrection were redemptive, nor to make this idea central to early Christian beliefs." In other words, Paul did not define the gospel substance, but derived it from Jerusalem. His contribution was applying the gospel's substance to the Gentiles "without their observance of the Torah."[38] He may be the most influential interpreter of the Christian faith, not the guarantor of its substance. There can be no argument here.

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[36] Ruth Edwards, "Challenging Q Scholarship," *Expository Times* 112/10 (July 2001): 342.

[37] Hurtado answers this in his chapter, "Other Early Jesus Books," *Lord Jesus Christ*, 13-25.

[38] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 133.

## XIII. Challenging the Unchallengeable: "How long must I see the standard [Read Q]?" (Jeremiah 4:21)

Hurtado holds to the majority view that so-called Q, like Paul, is prior to AD 70. In writing their Gospels, therefore, Matthew and Luke made use of Q as a written document[39] and Mark.[40] His thesis that between AD 30–50, "Jesus was treated as a recipient of religious devotion and was associated with God in striking ways,"[41] would be supported by christological evidences located in Q.[42] Problematic is that most Q scholars do not see such a developed Christology in Q. Among them is John S. Kloppenborg whose position Hurtado summarizes: "Q focuses on Jesus' words rather than his deeds and his future return as the son of man, and not on his vicarious death and resurrection. It calls for a radical disposing of one's possessions and detachment from ordinary family relationships."[43] Q is an early step in the development of Christianity. To bring Q in line with his thesis that Jewish communities revered Jesus as divine, Hurtado compares it to other community regulating documents and places its use along side explicit christological texts (Mark). Q's implicit Christology allowed it to be incorporated independently by Matthew and Luke.[44] Q's humiliation and exaltation theme without reference to the resurrection is similar to Philippians 2:6–11.[45] Its christological character is seen in that it makes Jesus central, sees him as a polarizing factor, and calls him "Lord." Hurtado does not see the Son of man as a title of confession, but only an emphatic way of saying "I;" it stresses Jesus' human descent. Appropriately he does not use the Son of man self-designation to advance his argument for Jesus' divinity.[46]

Any number of responses come to mind. Paul's epistles present a dogmatic Christology rather than an historical one, and are a secondary

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[39] Casey notes that Hurtado regards Q "as a single Greek document;" "Lord Jesus Christ: A Response to Professor Hurtado," 85.

[40] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 283–290.

[41] Without acquiescing to the existence of Q, Peter Scaer commends him for "disagree[ing] with those who argue that Q proves the early Jesus, was a rural, wandering prophet who later came to be designated as God;" see his review of *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Early Christianity*, in *Logia* 13:4 (December 2004): 52.

[42] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 217, n. 1.

[43] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 222.

[44] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 234.

[45] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 237.

[46] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 244–57; 290–306, esp. 297.

source of Jewish ideas taken over into Gentile communities. He tells us that Jesus is born of woman (Galatians 3:4), but she is anonymous. Jesus is David's descendant (Romans 1:3), but without the genealogy to show this, as do Matthew and Luke. Mark is a primary source and a narrative, but lacks birth and resurrection accounts. Hurtado seems to recognize the problem: "Mark powerfully influenced and/or rather successfully anticipated what became a popularly received shape for books about, and how Jesus was subsequently 'rehearsed' in Christian tradition."[47] This suggests a clairvoyant Mark provided an outline used by Luke twenty years later (80–85) and by Matthew thirty years later (90–100). Earlier dates for Matthew and Luke would advance Hurtado's case.

I will take Hurtado at his word that he "intend[s] no disrespect for those who dissent from this position."[48] If this is not an invitation to critique, it at least allows safe passage through his Q arguments. Since Q's boundaries are uncertain, the argument that Matthew and Luke used one form is tenuous at best.[49] A christological interpretation of Q means that its readers had in hand a christological document like Mark or at least a fairly firmed up oral tradition to fill in the blanks in Q. The Q document set down the parameters for the community and Mark provided narrative details about Jesus. Can things be divided up so neatly? Merging Q and Mark must have been an extraordinarily complex task for Matthew and Luke.

Jesus' definition of his atonement belongs to a pericope calling on the disciples to serve one another. Q calls for total commitment but without an immediate cross reference to Mark; the hearer is given no reason for this sacrifice. Then there is the matter that for Q "the Son of man" is a literary device for "I." In the four Gospels it takes on divine significance, especially by being coupled with the "Son of God"(for example, Matthew 26:63–64). Even without being joined with the "Son of God," the Son of man seems to be a divine designation. He offers his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Even the Q reference to the Son of man having no place to lay his head (Matthew 8:20; Luke 9:58) is startling, not because Jesus is a man but because he is divine. Rather than simple self-designation, "the Son of man" is the sublime self-designation that Jesus is the "Son of God."

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[47] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 283.

[48] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 217, n. 1.

[49] Hurtado estimates Q at 225 to 250 verses or a Greek text with 2500 to over 4000 words (*Lord Jesus Christ*); while Edwards argues against Kloppenberg that one particular version of Q and not multiple ones were used by Matthew and Luke ("Challenging Q Scholarship," 342).

Transcendental divinity is accessible only through the one who goes to Jerusalem for crucifixion and raised by God on the third day.

Problematic is explaining the disappearance of a document which the church treasured for decades until Matthew and Luke incorporated it into their Gospels. Joanna Dewey poses a similar question of why Mark survived the canonical cut in the face of Matthew's and Luke's massive Gospels.[50] Her answer is that Mark is simply a good story. One has to ask whether Mark was a better story than Q as a community book. The *Didache* survived, but not Q. Q research is so advanced that it has found a place along with the canonical Gospels and Thomas in a synopsis.[51] Someday the majority scholarship may think otherwise. Q scholars trace how it came together with Mark to give us Matthew and Luke. *Jesus Seminar* scholars go in an opposite direction to remove the layers to get down to the bare bones Jesus. So Ecclesiastes is fulfilled: "For everything there is a season . . . : a time to break down, and a time to build up" (3:1, 3).

### XIV. A Man Ahead of His Contemporaries

As diverse as Judaism was, it rested on a fourfold foundation of monotheism, election, covenant (focused on Torah) and land (focused on the temple), but the real issues were Torah and monotheism. By finding a place for Jesus in Jewish monotheism, Hurtado has opened a door with that community. He has swum against the prevailing currents of scholarship in locating a well-developed Christology at the well springs of the Jesus movement in the Jewish community. His arguments may prove to be the most significant advance in New Testament studies in our times. By recognizing and developing christological themes in the New Testament, he has provided a gold mind for preachers and broadened the biblical substance for dogmatical Christology. Now is my time to assume the role of colporteur and urge you to obtain your own copy of his *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity.* This investment will reap large rewards in this age and the one to come.

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[50] Joanna Dewey, "The Survival of Mark's Gospel: A Good Story," *Journal of Biblical Literature,* 123 (2004): 495–507, esp. 495–496.

[51] *The Critical Edition of Q,* ed., J.M. Robinson, P. Hoffmann, and J.S. Kloppenborg (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2000).

# Lukan Christology: Jesus as Beautiful Savior

Peter J. Scaer

Larry Hurtado's *Lord Jesus Christ* is breathtaking in scope, cataloguing and analyzing early devotion to Christ in material ranging from the earliest Christian documents to such later works as the infancy Gospel of Thomas and the Shepherd of Hermas.[1] Those of us who aspire to membership in the Early High Christology Club will forever owe a debt to Hurtado, whose work will surely serve as a touchstone and launch-pad for decades to come.[2] Naturally, even the most positive reviewer will indulge in a few quibbles. I would note that Hurtado privileges Pauline Christology, devoting to it the first full analytical chapter of his work. And if my math is correct, he includes 77 pages on Johannine Christology, leaving just 65 pages for the three synoptics, of which only seven are allotted to Luke. Given the fact that the Lutheran tradition has tended to privilege the Gospel of John and letters of Paul, many of us may feel right at home with Hurtado's presentation.

If, on the other hand, one or another Gospel predates Paul, then priorities should be shifted. Indeed, Hurtado's own scholarship points the way. If, as Hurtado maintains, devotion to Jesus emerged "phenomenally early,"[3] there is less reason to think that the Gospels are themselves a later historical development. Who knows? We might just want to start an Early Gospel Club, as well as an Early High-Ecclesiology Club. In any case, the Jesus tradition certainly predates Paul, as does the confession of our Lord's chief disciple. As such, to discuss the Epistles before the Gospels seems like putting the cart before the horse, or robbing Peter to pay homage to Paul. Here is one instance where, I sympathize—I am almost embarrassed to say—with John Dominic Crossan, of Jesus Seminar fame, who states; "Start with Paul and you will see Jesus incorrectly."[4] In one way or another, the life and teaching of Jesus must come first. Furthermore,

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[1] Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2003).

[2] An informal group of NT scholars, of which Hurtado is a founding member.

[3] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 2.

[4] Hurtado quotes Crossan's, "The Birth of Christianity," xxvii, in *Lord Jesus Christ*, 85.

*Peter J. Scaer is Assistant Professor of Exegetical Theology, at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.*

recognizing the canonical and theological primacy of the synoptics in any presentation of Jesus, this study will, highlight and supplement Hurtado's discussion of Christology in Luke's Gospel.

## I. Introduction

Confessional Lutheran piety, at least in its present form, tends towards the didactic. With a growing and welcome emphasis on catechesis, hymns such as "Salvation Unto Us Has Come" are enjoying a minor renaissance. Popular American Lutheranism, on the other hand, often gravitates towards hymns that are more easily accessible, and often not distinctively Lutheran. In its most mind-numbing and malignant form, this piety expresses itself in such songs as "Shine, Jesus, Shine." More benignly, many folks would rather sing "Rock of Ages" than "A Mighty Fortress." And Wesley's "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today" would easily win a popularity contest over Luther's, "Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands." As newly-minted seminary graduates soon discover, people are often less concerned with how Jesus saves, than with the fact that he saves. For some, this disconnect is a cause for consternation and hand-wringing. Happily, within the hymnal there is a place for teaching and adoration, liturgy for confession and exultation, a time for explaining the way in which Jesus' death merits our salvation and a time for simply basking in the cross's glow by gazing upon our Savior's beauty. In the end, hopefully, there is compromise and combination, with a diet of hymns that is varied in tone and intensity.

And so also it is with the Gospels. Each Gospel, varying in tone and intensity, makes a distinctive contribution in our understanding of Jesus. Matthew's Gospel serves as the indispensable foundation for the church of Christ. The scribal apostle organizes the teachings of Jesus into five sections, and in doing so offers the most orderly and catechetical presentation of the Christian life.[5] From Matthew, we learn of the virgin birth and the truth of the resurrection. We are introduced to the atonement, the theological basis for our salvation. As the church's teacher, the first evangelist leads us to pray our Lord's Prayer, and name our Triune God. Understand Matthew on a basic level, and you are ready to be confirmed. Mark, on the other hand, is a bold preacher of the cross. As Richard Burridge puts it, Mark portrays Christ as an untamed lion; he is

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[5] Richard Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 33-64; see further David P. Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew: Jesus Teaches the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004).

like the Aslan of C.S. Lewis's *Narnia Chronicles*. For those asking themselves "What Would Jesus Do?" Mark is a shock to the system, reflecting the fact that Jesus' actions are often unpredictable, even strange. As we look for glory, Mark cautions us that the Lord often appears to us behind masks, and that our God is the crucified one. On the other hand, the Evangelist John furthers our understanding of Jesus by plunging us into previously unfathomed theological depths, and lifting us up, on eagles' wings, to unchartered spiritual heights. John depicts Jesus as an alien, who has come to us from realms of glory, and whose true identity is a mystery to be unraveled. John also offers an intimacy not found in the other Gospels. Here we meet Jesus one-on-one, as does his Beloved Disciple, and are attached to him as branches to a vine. With the woman at the well, we come to see baptism as Christ's living well that springs within us. We come to see that in Holy Communion we also rest our heads in the bosom of our Lord. John leads us into the mysteries, where we see that the Christ and the sacraments are one, and that through the sacraments Christ becomes one with us.

So also the Evangelist Luke offers a distinct and necessary contribution to our understanding of Christ. While Matthew teaches us, Mark preaches boldly, and John counsels us into quiet contemplation of deep spiritual matters, Luke the artist paints a pleasant portrait of our Lord. For Luke, Jesus is the prototype of a new humanity: the new and true Adam who fully expresses what it means to be created in God's image. Luke would have us know that Jesus has blazed a path to heaven on our behalf, and has presented himself as a model to follow.

I would like to build on what Larry Hurtado has to say about the third Gospel. He concludes, perceptively I believe, that "Luke is an endearing rendition of Jesus."[6] The spirit of the Lukan nativity is better captured by "Away in the Manger" than "Of the Father's Love Begotten." The simple hymn "Let Us Ever Walk With Jesus" expresses much of the essence of Lukan Christianity. We are pilgrims, following in the footsteps of our Lord, joyfully taking up our crosses, always looking forward to our home above. Indeed, from the sweetness of the Lukan Christmas to the story of the prodigal son, and from Jesus' healing ministry to his saving the thief on the cross, Luke would have us know that the face of our Lord is one of compassion. To be sure, Luke recognizes that the Christian life is one of rigorous discipleship, of daily taking up our crosses and following in the

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[6] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 346.

footsteps of our Lord (9:23), but Luke would have us know that Jesus is indeed worth following. Though the way of the Christian life is not easy, we can live in joy. The path to heaven is now wide open, even as our Savior's arms are also. Therefore, we should take heart, and be of good courage. Even in dying, the clouds are parted, and the vision of Christ, now seated at the right hand of God, is placed before our eyes (Acts 7:55). To put it more simply, Luke's presentation of Jesus encourages us to sing "Beautiful Savior."

### II. Jesus as Savior

In fact, it is striking to note that Luke is the only one of the synoptic Gospels in which Jesus is specifically called "Savior". In the Matthean infancy narrative, for instance, we are told that the child will be named Jesus, for "he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21), but the Christ-child is never given the title "Savior." From the perspective of the Matthean nativity, Jesus' salvation is depicted as a future event accomplished through the cross. Matthew, as teacher, wants us to understand how exactly the cross works. He leads us to the atonement.

Luke's lowly shepherds, on the other hand, are told, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (2:11). This is the stuff of which Christmas pageants are made! The angel's message is one of joy, as is the response of the shepherds. Explanation must wait for another time. Good news and doxology are the order of the day. We are invited to find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes. Not only will Jesus save his people through his death, but even now, the infant-child is the Savior. Upon seeing the infant, Simeon sings, "Now, release your servant, . . . for my eyes have seen your salvation" (2:29). Salvation is already here. Already today, we have reason to rejoice.

Indeed, one of Luke's favorite words from Jesus' ministry is *today*. In his inaugural sermon at Nazareth, Jesus said, "Today, scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). When Jesus healed the paralytic, the amazed crowd responded, "We have seen extraordinary things today"(5:26). Again, when Jesus meets Zacchaeus, he expresses urgency in saying, "I must stay at your house today." He further interprets his visit to Zacchaeus's house, saying, "Today salvation has come to this house" (19:9). Finally, and most famously, he comforts the thief of the cross: "Today you will be with me in paradise" (23:43). For those of us frustrated by the purgatory of waiting and delay, Luke is our Gospel, and Jesus is our Savior.

### III. Jesus as Holistic Healer

We live in a therapeutic culture, characterized by what some have disparaged as the "Oprahfication" of society. Feelings trump facts. Holistic medicine is the order of the day. As many people visit psychiatrists, therapists, and counselors as frequent the physicians. As is often the case, society has a point. Life is greater than the sum-total of its biological components. People naturally seek not only eternal salvation, but liberation from all that ails them physically, spiritually, mentally, and emotionally. To the person who is suffering here and now, the thought of eternal life can seem distant. Luke's Gospel speaks to the heart of a world such as ours.

Mary's song captures this notion of holistic salvation, and sets the theme for the entire Gospel: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46). God the Savior will now work through the Son who, to borrow a phrase from Richard Bauckham, shares his identity as Savior.[7] And as Savior, he comes to reverse all that has gone wrong. The God who comes in Christ has not come simply to save our souls, but he is the one who favors the lowly, shows mercy to his servants, scatters our enemies, exalts those of low estate, and fills the hungry with good things. This is the simple yet profound theology of the great reversal in Luke.[8] Those who weep are encouraged to laugh (6:21), and those who place their head at Jesus' feet are lifted up, and given a life of peace (7:50). Indeed, when Jesus defines his own ministry, he describes it in holistic terms. Quoting from Isaiah, he says that he has been anointed "to preach the good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, and to release the oppressed" (Luke 4:18-19). Jesus' words offended the people of Nazareth, yet when read to us today, his message sounds almost like a campaign speech. Luke would have us know that Jesus comes not only to forgive sins, but to make everything right. He comes to seek and save those who are lost. Matthew would have us know that Jesus has offered his life as a ransom for the many (Matthew 20:28). Luke, realizing the implications of this theological data, wants us to know that because he died for the many, our Savior cares for each and every one of us. Indeed, this Savior shows partiality to those in distress, leaving behind the 99 sheep (the many) in order to recover the

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[7] For Bauckham's discussion of divine identity Christology, see *God Crucified: Montheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

[8] For discussion of this Lukan theme, see Arthur A. Just, Jr., *Luke 1:1-9:50*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1996), 85-86.

one (Luke 15:1-7). He not only has mercy upon the multitudes, but he singles out the widow who has lost her only son (7:12), and pays special homage to another poor widow who has only two copper coins to put into the plate (21:2). Jesus has a soft spot in his heart for the helpless infant (Luke 18:15). The poor, maimed, and blind are received into the hospitality of the heavenly banquet (14:21) Tellingly, while Matthew teaches us that the poor in spirit are blessed, Luke cuts through the theological jargon, and states more directly, "Blessed are the poor" (6:20). The Christian community, as we see in the book of Acts, continues this work. The apostles offer not only the forgiveness of Christ, but all Christians sell their goods for the sake of the poor (Acts 2:44; 4:32). Through the apostles, Christ continues his works of healing and restoration.

Thus, Luke's notion of salvation is thoroughly holistic. As Ben Witherington summarizes, "Luke's concept of salvation has social, physical, and spiritual dimensions."[9] That is to say, Luke preaches a type of full-gospel salvation which involves not only the forgiveness of sins, but all the benefits that come with it. To turn a phrase, Jesus helps those who cannot help themselves.

### IV. Jesus as Benefactor

Having uncomfortably agreed earlier with a statement by Crossan, I am now happy to say here a word against him. As Hurtado notes, Crossan's 1991 work *The Historical Jesus,* "portrays Jesus as proclaiming a 'brokerless kingdom' of unmediated divine acceptance, who intended no special role or significance for himself."[10] In other words, Crossan would have us believe that the essence of Jesus' teaching is that each of us has direct access to God, apart from any middle-man, including himself. To the contrary, the third evangelist would have us know that Jesus is the unique broker and mediator through whom God works.

Tellingly, Peter summarizes the ministry of Jesus in this way, "He went about doing good and healing all under the power of the devil, because God was with him" (Acts 10:38). Jesus is the one who does good, because he is the one through whom God works. The key words here are "doing good" (εὐεργετῶν). This is the language of benefaction. The moniker *benefactor* (εὐεργέτης) was a technical term in the Greco-Roman world.

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[9] Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles A Social-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 143.

[10] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ,* 58.

Benefactor was an honorary title, given to those whom we might call today civic-minded. For the Greek orator Demosthenes, the term *savior* is synonymous with such words as benefactor and friend. He calls King Philip of Macedon, for instance, "The Friend, Benefactor, and Savior" of the Thessalonians (*On the Crown*, 43). Benefactors built bathhouses, aqueducts, temples, and synagogues. They provided food and festivals for the poor. Amid violence, benefactors offered protection to widows, orphans, and all those who could not defend themselves. They provided legal help and medical care to those who could not otherwise afford it.[11] Of course, nothing comes without a price, and every gift has strings attached. Among equals, people invite friends over for dinner with the thought of having the invitation reciprocated (Luke 14). So also, in return for their largesse, wealthy benefactors expected honor, praise, and glory. Even as today, the rich have buildings named in their honor; few public structures in West Virginia do not bear the name of Senator Robert Byrd.

In Luke-Acts, Jesus presents himself as the ultimate benefactor and mediator of God's gifts. As God's broker, he has the authority to forgive sins and make the paralyzed to walk (Luke 5:24). By raising the dead, the people come to see that through him "God has visited his people" (7:16). In his exalted state, he sits at God's right hand (2:34). As Peter preaches, "There is salvation in no one else" (Acts 4:12).

Closely related to the word benefactor, is the term *friend*. Thus, for example, the centurion in Luke 7 is a friend of the Jews, for he built a synagogue for them. Again, we are told that during the trial of Jesus, Herod and Pilate became friends (Luke 23:12). Here, the term does not mean buddy, or companion. As Halvor Moxnes writes, "Friendship was not so much an emotional attachment as a form of social and even political contract based on reciprocity. Well-placed members of the elite in the center could provide their "friends or clients in the province with access to the central administration."[12] A friend is one who can do favors for you. And the scandal is that Jesus becomes a friend of tax-collectors and sinners (6:34; 15:1-2; 19:1-10). In Luke, Jesus brokers the gifts of God to those who cannot offer him anything in return. In the book of Acts, the apostles play

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[11] For a discussion of benefication see Jerome Neyrey, *Render to God: New Testament Understanding of the Divine* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), esp. 82-106.

[12] Halvor Moxnes, "Patron-Client Relations and the New Community," *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (ed. Jerome Neyrey: Peabody, MA: Henrickson, 1991), 245.

the role of broker, doing good works of healing, in the name and by the power of Jesus (Acts 4:10–12).

### V. The Lord's Supper as Benefaction

It has been said that Luke does not have a theology of the atonement, omitting Christ's claim that he would offer his life as a ransom for many. However, it is interesting to note that in the words of institution, it is only Luke who includes the words "for you" in respect to both the bread and wine. In Luke, Christ says, "This is my body, given for you" (22:19). And again, he says, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (22:20). Though Luke may not explain the inner-soteriological significance of the Supper, he wants the hearer to know that the Supper is the ultimate gift from the true benefactor.

Immediately after recounting the Last Supper, Luke alone records a dispute that arose among the disciples concerning greatness. Jesus, the supreme benefactor, proceeds to redefine benefaction, saying, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as the one who serves" (22:25). In the old world, the rich give money to be honored by the poor. In the new age, the poor are honorable. Now that Christ has turned the world upside-down, it is the duty of the rich to give to the poor, and to make friends with the weak. And in making friends with the poor, they will be honored not by the poor, but by God. Even so Christ was honored by God for making himself a servant and thus offering his benefits for us.

### VII. Christ, the New Adam

In the hymn "Beautiful Savior," the congregation acclaims Jesus as the "Son of God and Son of Man." Admittedly, calling Jesus the "Son of Man" is awkward, for Jesus applies it to himself in the state of humiliation. Still, the hymn rightly wants to say that Jesus is both fully God and fully man. So also, Lukan Christology proclaims Jesus to be the true Son of man (namely, Adam).

Now, when most of us think of Christology, we think of the climactic moment when Jesus asked Peter, "Who do you say that I am?" To this Peter responded, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Or else, we recall the centurion at the foot of the cross concluding, "Surely, this was the Son of God" (Matthew 27:54). For those of us in the Early High Christology Club, these moments represent the pinnacle of

confession. Strangely, Luke does not make hay of either of these christological confessions. In Luke, Peter does not call Jesus "the Son of God," but simply confesses that he is the "Christ of God" (Luke 9:20). Likewise, the centurion at the cross does not specifically confess Jesus as "the Son of God," but instead exclaims: "Surely, this man was righteous" (Luke 23:47). Does this mean that Luke soft-played Jesus' divinity? No, he simply has other fish to fry.

Some would say that Luke wishes to emphasize the humanity of Jesus. Of course, to say that Jesus was a man is in itself a necessary statement, especially when in debate with Docetists, in whatever guise they may take. Indeed, the Lukan narrative takes pains to show that the resurrected Christ is no disembodied ghost. Most of Jesus' opponents, however, had no problem ascribing humanity to the person of Jesus. His enemies relished referring to him as a carpenter's son, unlike them, and as "Jesus of Nazareth," an earthly citizen of an undesirable town.

Luke makes a higher theological point. Luke adds to our christological wealth by demonstrating that not only was Jesus a man, but he was also the true, representative, and righteous man. As the man, Jesus represented and embodied all mankind. When we think of Adamic Christology, we usually turn first to St. Paul, and to such passages as Romans 5:12–21, where Paul compares and contrasts the one man Adam, by whose sin death entered into the world, with the one man Jesus Christ, through whose death many will be made righteous. Or else, we recall what Paul has to say in 1 Corinthians 15; namely that death came into the world through one man, so also the resurrection of the dead comes through one man. We should note, however, that this Pauline theology is built on a foundation shared by Luke. While Matthew traces his genealogy back to Abraham and David, thus emphasizing Jesus' Jewish credentials, Luke's genealogy is traced back to the first man (Luke 3:38). As Hurtado notes, Luke's genealogy stresses "the universal significance" of Jesus.[13] Genealogically, Jesus is the Son of Adam, the Son of God.

Adam through his disobedience showed that he was not truly God's son. Jesus is the true Son of God, not simply ontologically, but because he actually fulfills the will of his Father. Immediately following the genealogy, Luke records the story of the temptation in the wilderness, underlining the point that this second Adam has indeed been obedient and

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[13] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 343

righteous on our behalf and in our stead (Luke 4:1-13). Time and again, Jesus is faced by temptation and trial, and each time he overcomes. Throughout his life, he serves as the prime exemplar of righteous living, devoting himself to prayer. In willing obedience, he faces the cross with courage and purpose. On the Mount of Olives, where Jesus is victorious over temptation, he once and for all turns back Satan (Luke 22:39-46). On the cross, he offers his life in willing obedience to the Father, into whose hands he commends his Spirit (Luke 23:46). The centurion rightly calls Jesus "righteous," for as the righteous man, he is both our substitute and example. He is the true Adam. Paul makes all of these points by theological argumentation; Luke makes these points by telling the story of Jesus.

### VII. Christology of Resurrection

In Luke-Acts, the death of Jesus is necessitated by the Scriptures, and the resurrection is brought about by the power of God. The resurrection in particular is depicted as an act of vindication by God on behalf of his servant. At Pentecost Peter preaches, "This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up loosing the pangs of death" (Acts 2:24). Again, in Acts 5:30, Peter declares, "The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on the tree." Likewise, Paul preaches: "They asked Pilate to have him put to death . . . but God raised him from the dead" (Acts. 13:29-30).

Considering the fact that Luke was a companion of Paul, there is strikingly little talk about justification by faith in Acts. Instead, the topic, again and again, is the resurrection. Peter preaches the resurrection, as does Paul. The closest link to the book of Acts we may find in Paul's letter to the Romans is where he introduces his gospel by saying that Jesus was "declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection of the dead" (Romans 1:4). We may also consider Romans 4:25, where Paul states that Christ was "raised for our justification."

The point to note is this: Luke does not, as does the Evangelist John, emphasize Jesus' power to raise himself. Instead, he notes that God has raised him, thus vindicating him. This does not mean that Luke has a lower Christology; instead, he is emphasizing a Christology which undergirds his soteriology. The one who is raised is precisely Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified one. And because God acts on his behalf, he will

act on ours. As N.T. Wright puts it, "God's raising of Jesus from the dead is the sign that salvation is found in him alone."[14] Resurrection, for Luke, is primary justification. Justification by faith may be the heart of the Christian faith, but Luke would have us know that the resurrection of Jesus is the foundation. Subjective justification rests upon the objective justification accomplished in Christ's resurrection.

### VIII. Christology of Ascension

The Gospel of Matthew ends tying up all the loose ends. Jesus rises from the dead, and then promises to remain "Emanuel, God with us" unto the end of the age. Luke, however, finishes telling the story of the Apostles' Creed by recording Jesus' ascension into heavenly glory. The glory that Jesus possesses is given by the Father. As Peter says, "The God of our fathers glorified his servant Jesus whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate"(Act 3:13). Even Jesus' heavenly title and status is a gift from God. In Acts 2:36, for example, Peter says, "God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ." In light of such formulations, some have attributed to Luke a kind of naive adoptionism or subordinationism. Those schooled in Nicene theology rightly ask: But wasn't Jesus Lord and Christ before the ascension? Of course, the answer is yes. Yet again, Luke has another point to make. The one who reigns at the right hand of God is not simply the second person of the Trinity, but Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus, the representative man, is raised into heavenly splendor. From his place of exaltation he comforts Stephen, calls Paul, and watches over his entire church. Through his ascension, the clouds of heaven are opened, not simply for God to speak or descend, but for man to rise heavenward. Luke's Gospel, then, is not more primitive or simplistic, but it is actually an exalted theology of man's nature that has been assumed by Christ.

### IX. Conclusion

And so it is, that the Gospel of Luke is a Gospel of encouragement for all of us who are members of the human race. Hank Williams concluded, "No matter how I struggle and strive, I'll never get out of this world alive." Or, if you prefer, the preacher offers an equally pessimistic word of discouragement: "All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all

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[14] N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 454.

return. Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth?" (Ecclesiastes 3:21). Who knows? Luke knows. And he tells us that someone has indeed made it out of this world alive and helps us to see that Jesus is our Beautiful Savior.

# Entering Holiness: Christology and Eucharist in Hebrews

Arthur A. Just, Jr.

There are some in our circles who believe that there is an over-emphasis on sacramental readings of New Testament documents. They are concerned that some exegetes see baptism in every reference to water, and the Lord's Supper at any reference to food or table fellowship. No doubt there are abuses in reading too much into texts, yet there are legitimate reasons why sacramental readings are occurring at this time.

For one, there is increased recognition of the significance of baptism and the Lord's Supper as foundational in the life of the New Testament church. To borrow a phrase from Richard Hays, the "narrative substructure" of the New Testament witness was handed down to the first-century saints through its liturgical life, that is through preaching, catechesis, baptism, and the Lord's Supper. [1] The absence of sacramental readings occurs on both extremes of the hermeneutical spectrum. One brief example will illustrate this point. For the higher critics, the sacraments reflect an early catholicism that resulted from the delay of the parousia, a development particularly evident to them in Luke and Acts. For conservative Reformed exegetes, their inability to see the intimate relationship between Christology, sacramentology, and eccesiology likewise obscures their view of a sacramental sub-structure for the post-Pentecost church. Like the higher critics, their interpretation tends to ignore that the recipients of New Testament documents are liturgical Christians who have been thoroughly catechized, baptized into Christ, his death and resurrection, regularly hear the word read and preached, and receive the Lord's body and blood as members of a eucharistic community. This community knows the end of the story: that Christ has gone to the cross, risen, ascended, and is continually present in the church through the Spirit in the gospel and the sacraments. Curiously, for both the higher critics and the conservative Reformed exegetes, the church as a liturgical community that receives the

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[1] Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

*Arthur A. Just, Jr., is Professor of Exegetical Theology, Dean of the Chapel and Director of the Deaconess Program at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.*

Scripture as a kerygmatic word is not a significant factor in their interpretation of the Gospels or the Epistles.

Having said this, most scholars today acknowledge that the church was baptizing and celebrating the Lord's Supper from the beginning. Our honored guest speaker at the 2005 exegetical symposium, Larry Hurtado, in his book *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity,* openly acknowledges that "it is commonly accepted that a sacred meal that signified religious fellowship of participants was a characteristic feature of Christian circles from the earliest years."[2] What is remarkable, however, in a book devoted to the "religious beliefs and practices" of early Christians,[3] is that Hurtado has so few references to the Lord's Supper, and the eucharistic devotional life of early Christians does not seem to influence his reading of texts as much as one would expect. This is even more remarkable in light of his subtitle, "Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity," and his short monograph entitled *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion.*[4]

This myopic reading of the New Testament apart from the sacraments is particularly evident in interpretations of the Epistle to the Hebrews. This essay will show how the Christology of Hebrews suggests a eucharistic reading of this Epistle; that is, to understand the high-priestly Christology of Hebrews is to affirm that the hearers believed that this Christology was enfleshed at the altar. The hermeneutical lens for this study will be sacramental, which is to say it will reflect a lively sense of inaugurated eschatology:

> Inaugurated eschatology demonstrates how Christology, sacramentology, and ecclesiology come together. To sum up the theological themes of [Hebrews]: The Lord *(Christology)* is present *(sacramentology)* in his church *(ecclesiology)* both now and not yet *(eschatology)*.[5]

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[2] Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 493

[3] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ,* 493.

[4] Larry W. Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). See below for one notable exception on Hebrews 12.

[5] Arthur A. Just, Jr., *Luke 1:1–9:50,* Concordia Commentary, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1996), 3.

## I. The Eucharist in Hebrews

The general consensus among critical scholars and conservative exegetes today is that Hebrews contains few, if any, references or allusions to the Lord's Supper. Craig Koester, in his monumental commentary on Hebrews for the Anchor Bible series, develops in detail the social setting of Hebrews, first looking at the history of the community through three phases: (1) proclamation and conversion, (2) persecution and solidarity, and (3) friction and malaise.[6] These three phases accurately reflect what a careful reading of Hebrews yields, namely, a community that is formed by its initial hearing of the gospel (phase 1) rallies as a community under persecution as its commitment to that proclamation is strengthened (phase 2), and then, what may be the occasion that prompted the letter, it experiences a period of stagnation when the persecution lessens but still lingers as they realize that living in this persecuted state will be their life (phase 3). Koester continues his investigation of the social setting by profiling the community and its context, focusing first on the Christian community itself, and then placing that community in both its Jewish and Greco-Roman subcultures. Again, his analysis is impressive and resonates with a careful reading of the text.

Koester acknowledges that this letter is written to a house church that understands itself as a family, with God as Father and fellow members as brothers and sisters in Christ. This community is constituted by baptism, through which each believer receives an identity in Christ.[7] He notes that "the author apparently envisioned his 'word of exhortation' (Heb 13:22; cf. Acts 13:15; 1 Tim 4:13) being read to a small 'gathering' of Christians (Heb 10:25; cf. 1 Thess 5:27; Col 4:16; Rev 1:3) who would later have occasion to greet 'all the saints' in their area (Heb 13:24)."[8] He envisions that Hebrews could be considered a sermon or homily, even though he acknowledges that "little is known about the contours of Jewish and Christian preaching in the first century."[9] There is no doubt that Hebrews is a remarkable

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[6] Craig Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* Anchor Bible 36 (New York: The Anchor Bible, Doubleday, 2001), 64–79

[7] Koester, *Hebrews,* 66–67.

[8] Koester, *Hebrews,* 74.

[9] Koester, *Hebrews,* 81. Attridge notes that "the text is often identified as a sermon or homily. That judgement has been substantiated by formal parallels with Hellenistic-Jewish and early Christian tests that may be judged to be, or to be based upon, homlies." Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews : A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 14.

literary text, fully engaged in the three aspects of Aristotle's rhetorical persuasion: logic, emotion, and character.[10] Throughout his commentary, Koester continually shows how, through the proclamation of a performative word, the hearers are formed, nurtured, and encouraged. His focus on the word of God as constituting and formative reflects a clear understanding of how Scripture preached and embodied in community was central to both Jewish and Jewish Christian communities.

There is much to be commended here, and yet, when it comes to seeing the Hebrews community as a eucharistic one, Koester either ignores or discounts such a possibility:

> Hebrews refers to Christian baptism but makes no clear mention of the Lord's Supper. Interpreters have debated whether he might have woven allusions to the meal into his speech, and three viewpoints have emerged. Of these, the most viable is the third, which finds no allusions to the Lord's Supper in Hebrews.[11]

This is not simply a matter of whether or not references to the Lord's Supper occur in Hebrews, (which Koester, among many others, dismisses), but whether the house churches that receive this homily are regularly celebrating the Lord's Supper. As a homily, Hebrews is a liturgical text that is intended to be preached as a performative word in the context of a worshipping assembly where Christ is present bodily as he comes to the hearers in their ears through the proclaimed word and in their mouths through the Lord's Supper.

Within the academy, however, not all commentators on Hebrews eschew a liturgical setting for this Epistle. Albert Vanhoye, in his remarkable analysis of Hebrews in *Structure and Message of the Epistle to the Hebrews,*

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[10] See Koester, *Hebrews,* 87–92.

[11] Koester, *Hebrews,* 127. The other two viewpoints are: "1. Some detect favorable allusions to the Eucharist . . . 2. Others propose that Hebrews takes a critical stance toward the Lord's Supper. They read Hebrews' silence about the Lord's Supper more negatively, as a hesitation about the sacrament, either because listeners evinced a misguided trust in ritual or because the meal obscured the once-for-all significance of Christ's death." For an erudite defense of the second position, and his withering critique of Swetnam's position, see Ronald Williamson, "The Eucharist and the Epistle to the Hebrews," *New Testament Studies* 21 (1974–75), 300–312. His conclusion in this article, however, is worth noting: "It seems, then, that there is little or no evidence in Hebrews of involvement, on the part of the author or of the community of Christians to which the epistle was addressed, in eucharistic faith and practice."

describes Hebrews as a priestly sermon and presents a persuasive chiastic structure of the entire Epistle that climaxes at 9:11 when the author describes Christ "as HIGH PRIEST of the good things to come."[12] Vanhoye offers a brief commentary on the entire Epistle, beginning with the observation that the context of Hebrews is liturgical. It is to be heard as a kerygmatic sermon, transforming and forming its hearers:

> The Priestly Sermon (Heb 1,1-13,21) has been composed to be read aloud before a Christian assembly, doubtless like the one which St. Luke describes in Acts 20, 7-8 or St. Paul in 1 Cor 14,26. The Christians have come together to hear the Word of God, to sing, to pray, and also, quite likely, to celebrate the Eucharist (cf. Acts 20,7; 1 Cor 11,20). Let us slip into their midst and hear the preaching addressed to them. It is as valid for us as it is for them.[13]

## II. Entering Holiness through the Body of the Risen Lord

To observe how Hebrews is as valid to us as it is to them is to encounter the concept of holiness and what it means to enter the presence of God. One of the core values of first century Judaism was God's holiness. The presence of God's holiness in creation and the temple was central to how Israel mapped its world. As Jerome Neyrey expresses it: "Jesus as the cornerstone of the true temple becomes the new center of the map and all holiness is measured by proximity to him."[14]

Where Jesus is, there is God's holiness. For the Jews, to enter or approach God's holiness is to enter eschatological space. The language of approaching God's holy presence runs throughout the Hebrews homily, beginning with the paraenetic transition in Hebrews 4:14-16. Harold Attridge notes in his commentary that this section contains "two hortatory subjunctives, 'let us hold fast' and 'let us approach,' that exemplify the two types of exhortation found throughout the text." [15] He expands on the significance of the exhortation to approach God's presence:

> At the same time, the addressees are called to a more "dynamic" virtue, to movement in various directions. They are summoned, in

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[12] Albert Vanhoye, *Structure and Message of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Roma: E. Pontificie Instituto Biblico, 1989), 40a-40b.

[13] Vanhoye, *Structure and Message*, 45.

[14] Jerome Neyrey, "The Symbolic Universe of the Luke-Acts: 'They Turned the Word Upside Down,'" *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, ed. Jerome Neyrey, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 293.

[15] Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 22.

> terminology probably derived from the cultic sphere, to "approach" (προσερχώμεθα) the throne of God to find mercy and aid; to strive to "enter" (σπουδάσωμεν . . . εἰσελθεῖν) God's rest (4:11); to "carry on" (φερώμεθα) to maturity. The final two paraenetic movements, which describe the "approach" that has already taken place (12:18, 22), also contain calls to movement, not to entry or to a cultic approach but first "to run the race" (τρέχωμεν τὸν . . . ἀγῶνα), which is but another way of encouraging endurance (12:1).[16]

One cannot underestimate the programmatic nature of the hortatory subjunctive "let us approach" (προσερχώμεθα) in Hebrews 4:16 for a eucharistic reading of Hebrews: "Therefore, let us with boldness approach the throne of grace, in order that we might receive mercy and find grace for help at the right time."[17] James Swetnam, in his article "Christology and the Eucharist in the Epistle to the Hebrews," echoes Attridge's comments concerning the significance of approach (προσέρχομαι) and enter (εἰσέρχομαι) in "the spatial approach to describe coming to union with God" that in Hebrews "suggests some underlying consistency of liturgical theology."[18] He goes on to state:

> The ultimate goal of the addressees is God's Rest into which they are to "enter in" (Chapters 3 and 4). But before this definitive entrance into God's Rest there is the liturgy of "approaching" God, a liturgy couched in the imagery of the entrance of the Old Testament high priest into the Holy of Holies. The Christians are reminded that Jesus as the new high priest has definitively entered into the new Holy of Holies and they are urged to approach God's presence by doing likewise. Various interpretations can be made as to what Christian reality the author had in mind. But . . . it seems not unnatural to think of him as referring to the eucharist as a means of approaching God's presence through Jesus on the Christian journey which eventually will end with entrance into eternal life: entering into the Christian Holy of Holies and thus the presence of God available in this life through the means offered by Jesus' risen body prefigures

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[16] Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 22.

[17] Koester, *Hebrews*, 5.

[18] James Swetnam, "Christology and the Eucharist in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Bib* 70 (1989): 90.

> entering into the definitive Rest of God to which entering the Holy of Holies is intrinsically ordered.[19]

The significance of "approaching" God (προσέρχομαι) is particularly evident n Hebrews 12 at that climactic moment when the hearers are told that they have not approached Mt. Sinai (12:18—οὐ γὰρ προσεληλύθατε) but they have approached Mt. Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22—ἀλλὰ προσεληλύθατε). Here προσέρχομαι is used for entering the presence of God, taking the dative of the place entered.[20] Most translations render this as "you have not approached" (or "have approached in 12:22) to indicate that this is a punctiliar durative, indicating that "the action, and the relationship it symbolizes, has begun and is still in effect."[21] As Attridge pointed out, Hebrews has used this word to suggest the worship of God, the most significant experience a human being might have in his relationship with God (compare 4:16; 7:25; 10:22; 11:6) To approach God or to enter into his presence brings with it eschatological consequences.[22]

Swetnam and Vanhoye are part of the minority of scholars who interpret Hebrews eucharistically. Swetnam notes what we previously observed in Koester's comments, namely:

> The subject of the eucharist in the Epistle to the Hebrews is one of the minor points of disagreement in contemporary New Testament studies. It is minor because relatively few people are in favor of seeing any allusions at all to the eucharist in the letter, *and even these few regard the allusions as quite secondary to the main purpose of the document.*[23]

This last comment, that any allusions to the Eucharist are secondary to the main purpose of the document, is at the heart of the issue for those who desire to read New Testament documents sacramentally. Not only will we argue that there are allusions to the Eucharist in Hebrews, but the very homily itself is eucharistic in its purpose and intent. Swetnam's

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[19] Swetnam, "Christology and Eucharist," 92–93.

[20] See Walter A. Bauer, *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Second Edition, translated, revised and augmented by William Arndt, Felix Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 720.

[21] Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 372.

[22] See the use of ἐγγίζω in the Gospels, which bears a similar eschatological connotation.

[23] Swetnam, "Christology and Eucharist," 74 (emphasis mine).

approach is to connect the Christology of Hebrews with the Eucharist, the very thing that is missing in most New Testament exegesis today because interpreters do not recognize that Christ's ongoing bodily presence in his church is at the center of the life of the communities that receive the New Testament. As Swetnam says of his own approach:

> There will be no "proofs" offered—the material does not seem to lend itself to a presentation which issues in certitude. All that will be claimed is that the hypothesis of the importance of the eucharist gives a coherence, relevance, and depth to the letter which is otherwise lacking.[24]

Swetnam's analysis takes us in surprising directions. Instead of approaching the topic by assessing passages that might be eucharistic, he analyzes Hebrew's understanding of completion by observing the theological significance of τελειόω, which he defines as "definitive, God-willed fulfillment or completion."[25] His purpose is to show that in Jesus there is completion, particularly in Jesus' body at the resurrection.

> Now it was precisely the body which made Jesus liable to death (2,14), so it must be the body which must be changed in some way if death is to be permanently avoided. Hence it is the body which is brought to "completion" if he is to attain the definitive state willed for him by God . . . . It is the transformation of the body which is crucial; just as Jesus needed a body of blood and flesh to overcome death by means of death (2,14), so he needs a body which has overcome death to be forever available to those who need his intercession (7,24-25) . . . . At the resurrection Jesus was given a body commensurate with his high priestly need of immortality, the words, "You are my Son, today I have given you birth" become stunningly apposite: at the resurrection Jesus finally and fully became the "Son" which his divinely-appointed role in the drama of salvation demanded that he be.[26]

Completion in the resurrected body of Jesus leads Swetnam to connect this to the Eucharist through Hebrew's high-priestly Christology,

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[24] Swetnam, "Christology and Eucharist," 74.
[25] Swetnam, "Christology and Eucharist," 76.
[26] Swetnam, "Christology and Eucharist," 77-79.

particularly Hebrews 9:11–12, the central verse for Vanhoye in his chiastic structure of the priestly homily:

9:11 Χριστὸς δὲ
παραγενόμενος ἀρχιερεὺς τῶν γενομένων ἀγαθῶν
διὰ τῆς μείζονος καὶ τελειοτέρας σκηνῆς
οὐ χειροποιήτου
τοῦτ' ἔστιν
οὐ ταύτης τῆς κτίσεως,
9:12 οὐδὲ δι' αἵματος τράγων καὶ μόσχων
διὰ δὲ τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος
**εἰσῆλθεν** ἐφάπαξ εἰς τὰ ἅγια
αἰωνίαν λύτρωσιν εὑράμενος.

9:11 But Christ,
having-then-come [as] high priest of the good things to come,
*through* the greater and more perfect ***tent***,
not made-with-hands, that is, not of this creation,
9:12 and not through [the] blood of goats and calves,
but *through* his own ***blood***,
**entered** once-for-all into the sanctuary,
having found an eternal redemption.[27]

This passage is significant because Christ's entrance through the "more perfect tent" is through himself, his own blood, that is, his body. Swetnam suggests that because "more perfect" modifies "tent" which signifies "body," the body here is Jesus' resurrected body that has been made complete and is "now cultically empowered to stand before God in the definitive role assigned him in the Holy of Holies (εἰς τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων)."[28] Since σκηνή may be understood as either "tent" or "body,"[29] and τὰ ἅγια has two possible meanings, "holy things" or "the sanctuary", namely the "Holy of Holies,"[30] Swetnam draws the following conclusion that forms the crux of his eucharistic reading as it relates to Hebrews' high priestly Christology:

> Based on the parallelism between the two sets of words with twofold meanings, the point would then be that just as Christ's "completed",

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[27] Translation from Vanhoye, *Structure and Message*, 94.
[28] Swetnam, "Christology and Eucharist," 81.
[29] Swetnam, "Christology and Eucharist," 82.
[30] Swetnam, "Christology and Eucharist," 82.

> i.e., risen body was the "means" of entering the sanctuary, thus replacing the outer tent, so the sanctuary/Holy of Holies into which he enters is really a corresponding reality, the "holy things" of Christianity. These "holy things" seem to be referred to at 8,3 with the words "gifts and sacrifices" (δῶρά τε καὶ θυσία"). Their old dispensation counterparts are referred to in 8, 4 (δῶρά) and 9,9 (δῶρά τε καὶ θυσίαι). Given the fact that Jesus offered himself (9,26.28), these "gifts and sacrifices" of the new dispensation are Jesus himself.
>
> What all this complicated imagery adds up to seems to be this: that for the addressees the glorified body of Christ which they come into contact with as the eucharistic body is the concrete means given to them by Christ the new high priest of entering the Holy of Holies, i.e., God's presence. Even at 9,24, where Christ is portrayed as entering into "heaven itself" (εἰς αὐτὸν τὸν οὐρανόν), heaven is viewed under the formality of God's presence (νῦν ἐμφανισθῆναι τῷ προσώπῳ τοῦ θεοῦ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν) when it is contrasted with the ἅγια of the old dispensation. Just as the Holy of Holies of the desert tabernacle was considered as the place of meeting between God and his people, *so the Christian fulfillment of this "antitype" (9,24) involves the place of meeting between God and his people, but in Christ. No reader of this epistle as it was first written would have been able to grasp this subtle symbolism without the aid of an oral tradition against which the epistle would have been interpreted.*[31]

This oral tradition, of course, is the homiletical, catechetical, and liturgical traditions that articulated for the people of God the biblical faith in their ecclesial life, a faith that reflected a Christology that holds that the person of Jesus is always present according to his divine and human natures. Wherever Jesus is present, he is present in the flesh or bodily. This is why Larry Hurtado, in his book *Lord Jesus Christ,* considers Hebrews as one of the tributaries of second-century Christianity and "the 'two natures' conception that figures prominently in the Christology of orthodox Christianity in the second-century and thereafter."[32]

Swetnam's argument sweeps us along, but is he right? In contrast to his reading of τελειόω in Hebrews, C. Koester notes that τελειόω and its derivatives apply to both Jesus and those who are in Christ, and that these two applications frame the epistle, namely:

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[31] Swetnam, "Christology and Eucharist," 82–84 (emphasis mine).
[32] Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ,* 500.

> "Now it is fitting for him, for whom all things and through whom all things exist, in bringing many sons [and daughters] to glory, to make the pioneer of their salvation complete (τελειῶσαι) through sufferings." (2:10)[33]
>
> ". . . and the assembly of the firstborn, who are registered in heaven, and a judge, who is God of all, and the spirits of the righteous, who have been made complete (τετελειωμένων) . . ." (12:23)[34]

For this completion to happen to Jesus and to us, "two barriers must be overcome: sin and death."[35] Koester clearly sees how this completion happened in Jesus and continues to happen to us, but he does not recognize that this completion happens at the Eucharist:

> Hebrews will speak of completion as a present reality for those whose consciences have been cleansed by Christ's self offering (10:14).
>
> If purification removes sin from the conscience and if sanctification puts a person in a proper condition to approach God, then completion is the positive relationship that results from these actions. Although completion finally means everlasting life in God's presence, Hebrews can say that those who are sanctified by Christ have already been made complete in the sense of being brought into right relationship with God (10:14), and this completeness is exercised when they actually approach God in prayer (7:18-19). Such a relationship corresponds to God's new covenant promise to write his laws on human hearts, so that people might be wholly obedient and that God might be their God and they might be his people (8:10-12).[36]

For Koester, prayer—not the Eucharist—is how we experience this completeness. No one would want to discount the value of prayer in responding to God's gifts of the holy things, but in prayer there is no encounter with Christ in his body, namely with his flesh and blood. That only happens sacramentally, especially in the Eucharist. Swetnam's reading of Hebrews is bloody and Koester's is bloodless. If we follow

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[33] Translation by Koester, *Hebrews*, 4.
[34] Translation by Koester, *Hebrews*, 13.
[35] Koester, *Hebrews*, 123.
[36] Koester, *Hebrews*, 123.

Swetnam, our completion comes from our communion with fleshly body and blood, with Christ acting on behalf of us and in us, as we approach the altar as the Holy of Holies. If we follow Koester, our completion comes from our inner urgings to approach Christ and lay before him our thanksgivings and petitions. Both are important, but if Swetnam is correct, the "gifts and sacrifices" are Christ himself and not our response. What is remarkable here, however, (and this is true of many exegetes), Koester takes us there christologically, but he falls short in delivering the goods sacramentally. He does not make the move to the Eucharist because, for him, early Christian communities should be understood more as communities of prayer than as eucharistic fellowships. Even in his final comments about τελειόω he sees the eschatological ramifications of Hebrews that would lead one to the Eucharist:

> Completion is the consummation of humankind in an eternal relationship with God, in which people share Christ's glory (2:10), enter God's rest (4:9-10), see the Lord (12:14), and join in the festival gathering in the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22).[37]

We now turn to this "festival gathering in the heavenly Jerusalem" by looking at two passages in Hebrews that yield a eucharistic reading that augments the previous analysis.

### IV. Entering Holiness through the Purification of Sins: Hebrews 1:1-4

1:1 Πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως πάλαι
**ὁ θεὸς** λαλήσας τοῖς πατράσιν ἐν τοῖς προφήταις
1:2 ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων **ἐλάλησεν** ἡμῖν ἐν υἱῷ,
ὃν ἔθηκεν κληρονόμον πάντων,
δι' οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνα":
1:3 ὃς
ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ
χαρακτὴρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ,
*φέρων* τε τὰ πάντα τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ,
καθαρισμὸν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν *ποιησάμενος*
**ἐκάθισεν** ἐν δεξιᾷ τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν ὑψηλοῖς,
1:4 τοσούτῳ κρείττων γενόμενος τῶν ἀγγέλων
ὅσῳ διαφορώτερον παρ' αὐτοὺς
κεκληρονόμηκεν ὄνομα.

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[37] Koester, *Hebrews*, 123.

1:1 On many occasions and in various ways long ago
**God**, having spoken to the fathers through the prophets,
1:2 in these last days **has spoken** to us by a Son
whom he placed an heir of all things,
through whom also he created the ages;
1:3 who
*being* the radiance of glory and (pre-existence)
the impress of his substance,
*bearing* all things by the word of his power, (pre-existence/incarnation)
(humiliation) after *having made* a purification of sins (incarnation/atonement)
(exaltation) **sat down** at the right hand of the Majesty on high
1:4 having become as superior to the angels
so much different than them
as the name he has inherited.

Many call the first four verses of Hebrews the exordium, or introduction, that draws the hearers into the homily.[38] It is a periodic sentence written in sublime Greek through which the author is demonstrating his literary talents.[39] As a christological homily, Hebrews begins by describing the person and work of the Son in his pre-existence, incarnation, atonement, and exaltation. A full Christology is contained in this periodic sentence.[40] Although Hebrews' high priestly Christology is not introduced in this prologue, the foundation for that Christology is laid here. The Son now speaks for God (the Father) to the hearers of Hebrews, replacing the speaking of the prophets who spoke long ago to the fathers. God's speaking through his Son is an eschatological act, occurring in "these last days," for when the Son speaks the end is upon us (1:2—ἡμῖν), the hearers of this homily. With the incarnation of the Son, the end has begun but is not yet. The hearers have all the blessings of the endtimes, even though they may not be experiencing these things in their day-to-day life. In the Son, God's actions on behalf of humanity reach their completion, but the full experience of this completion is still in the future.

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[38] Vanhoye considers only the first four verses to be the exordium: *Structure and Message*, 23. Koester argues that 1:1 to 2:4 constitutes the exordium which he describes as "an introduction that was designed to make the audience receptive to the rest of what the speaker had to say," *Hebrews*, 174–176.

[39] Here Hebrews follows Luke whose prologue alerts his hearers that he is capable of writing in the finest Greek prose.

[40] See Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence*, AGJU 42 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 295–301.

The Christology develops quickly through two verses (1:2-3) as God's speaking in the Son receives its authority by a description of the Son as the heir of all things (1:2), a theme that frames the exordium since the author concludes by describing the name that the Son inherits (1:4). The Son's speaking is performative, first as that which brought creation into being (1:2—"through whom also he created the ages"), next as the one who keeps all things in creation together (1:3—"bearing all things by the word of his power"), and then as that which cleansed a creation whose fall is manifest in sins (1:3—"having made a purification of sins"). The Son is also described as the radiance of the Glory (1:3) and possessor a "more excellent name (1:4); both of these descriptions identify the Son within the mystery of the one God of Israel.[38b] These Christological titles and acts show the Son's preexistence, incarnation, and atonement. The humiliation of the Son is seen in his making a purification for sins. The Son's speaking and acting leads to his exaltation where he sits "at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (1:3).

If this letter is a homily delivered in the context of a liturgical rite that begins with the reading of the Word of God and climaxes with the Eucharist, the author of Hebrews may be suggesting this by the very manner in which he structures his prologue. The Word of God that creates and sustains all things becomes incarnate so that he might act in that creation as the one who in the atonement makes purification for sins. The Word made flesh not only acted in creation at the cross to purify us from our sins, but continues to act in his creation by forgiving sins at every Lord's Supper. The reference to "making purification for sins," then, may refer not only to the atonement, but also to the Eucharist, where the atonement continues in the life of the community. Vanhoye seems to suggest this as he describes how the exordium of this priestly homily is to be heard in the context of the liturgy where the action is in the Lord's Supper:

> The Sermon is clearly connected with the liturgy of the Word of God. The preacher is well aware of this: we grasp it immediately, for his first words evoke the theme "God has spoken to us" (1,2). . . . The liturgy of the Word is not all there is to the matter, for God is not content simply to speak: he has acted. He has intervened in an active way in our history. The Word of God is closely linked to this action which gives the Word all its validity. The Christian liturgy has two parts, inseparable the one from the other, one which proclaims the word, the other which makes present God's action. This action of

> God is his victory over sin and death, a victory gained through the passion of his Son. The beginning of the Sermon faithfully reflects this reality, for in one matchless sentence it presents in quick succession the Word of God and the mystery of Christ and ties them close together. Reduced to its main parts the sentence affirms that "God has spoken to us in his Son . . . who . . . having brought about the purification from sin is seated at His right." From now on the word of God reaches us in its fullness, because it has found its perfect form thanks to the incarnation of the Son of God, who is "splendor of His glory and imprint of His being" (1,3). From now on the action of God transforms our existence, for it unfolds for us completely and definitively in the glorifying Passion of Christ. It follows that for us the word of God and the action of God are inseparately linked to the mediation of Christ. It is in Christ that God speaks to us, it is in Christ that God saves us.[41]

Hebrews is especially interested in the rites of atonement and purification in the tabernacle and how they have been superseded and rendered obsolete by the death of Jesus. If the climax of Hebrews is 9:11–14 where Jesus, the high priest of the good things to come passes through the more perfect tent through his own blood to purify our consciences from dead works, then the question to be asked by a first-century Christian is: How do I now receive this purification of my sins from Jesus' death if the sacrificial rites of the Old Testament are now nullified? We know how God speaks to us today in his Word, but where is his action among us? To echo the language of Hebrews 10 and 12: How do I draw near to the holy places through the blood of Jesus; how do I approach God's presence on Mt. Zion?

Two possible answers from Hebrews would be baptism, described as enlightenment (6:4) that comes from "our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (10:22), or prayer, as Koester suggests in his comments on 4:16 where prayer is the primary way for Christians to "draw near to the throne of grace" (see also 7:18–19 and 10:22 where prayer is also significant for Koester). If however, the readers of Hebrews are an ecclesial community that regularly celebrates the Lord's Supper, where the sacrificed body and blood of Christ on behalf of sins is offered to them in this sacred meal for the forgiveness of their sins, would they not see the Eucharist as central to how they now receive

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41 Vanhoye, *Structure and Message*, 45–46.

the purification of sins that Christ accomplished for them through his death?

The final verse of the exordium may support a eucharistic reading of "purification of sins." The Son is described as "having become superior than the angels." Both the word for superior (κρείττων) and the introduction of angels (τῶν ἀγγέλων) suggest a eucharistic reading in light of the climactic moment in Hebrews 12:22–24 where both words are used for the final time in the Epistle: the hearers approach Mt. Zion with its myriad of angels (μυριάσιν ἀγγέλων, πανηγύρει) in festive gathering, and with Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant (καὶ διαθήκης νέας μεσίτῃ Ἰησοῦ) whose sprinkled blood speaks in a superior way to Abel (αἵματι ῥαντισμοῦ κρεῖττον λαλοῦντι παρὰ τὸν Ἄβελ).

C. Koester, along with many other commentators, has asked the question "why angels play such a prominent role in the first chapter of Hebrews?"[42] He answers his own question by describing three ways in which the superiority of Christ to angels relates to the rest of Hebrews. His third observation relates this to Hebrews 12:22–24:

> The body of the speech concludes with the announcement that the listeners have "approached Mt. Zion and the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem, and myriads of angels in festival gathering" (12:22). The gathering of angels is not only for Jesus, who is God's firstborn in a singular sense (1:6), but for all the "firstborn" children of God (12:23). The festive opening section of the speech anticipates its depiction of the final celebration in the city of God, which is the destiny of the faithful.[43]

Why could this reference to angels here in Hebrews 12 refer not only to the final eschatological feast, but the ongoing anticipation and foretaste of that feast at the church's eucharistic repast? The superiority of Christ to the angels is resolved at the Lord's Supper where angels join the saints in Christ whose bodily presence in bread and wine offers purification of sins through blood that speaks better than the blood of Abel. As will be argued later, Hebrews 12:18–24 is climactic for Hebrews' eucharistic theology.

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[42] Koester, *Hebrews*, 200.

## Entering Holiness on Mt. Zion: Hebrews 12:18–24

12:18 Οὐ γὰρ **προσεληλύθατε**
ψηλαφωμένῳ
καὶ κεκαυμένῳ πυρὶ
και γνόφῳ καὶ ζόφῳ καὶ θυέλλη
12:19 καὶ σάλπιγγος ἤχῳ
καὶ φωνῇ ῥημάτων,
ἧς οἱ ἀκούσαντες παρῃτήσαντο
μὴ προστεθῆναι αὐτοῖς λόγον,
12:20 οὐκ **ἔφερον** γὰρ τὸ διαστελλόμενον,
**Κἂν θηρίον θίγῃ τοῦ ὄρους,**
**λιθοβοληθήσεται·**
12:21 καί,
οὕτω φοβερὸν ἦν τὸ φανταζόμενον,
Μωϋσῆς **εἶπεν,**
**Ἔκφοβός εἰμι καὶ ἔντρομος.**
12:22 ἀλλὰ **προσεληλύθατε**
Σιὼν ὄρει
καὶ πόλει θεοῦ ζῶντος,᾽Ιερουσαλὴμ ἐπουρανίῳ/,
καὶ μυριάσιν ἀγγέλων, πανηγύρει
12:23 καὶ ἐκκλησίᾳ πρωτοτόκων ἀπογεγραμμένων ἐν οὐρανοῖς
καὶ κριτῇ θεῷ πάντων
καὶ πνεύμασι δικαίων τετελειωμένων
12:24 καὶ διαθήκης νέας μεσίτῃ
᾽Ιησοῦ
καὶ αἵματι ῥαντισμοῦ κρεῖττον λαλοῦντι παρὰ τὸν᾽Αβελ.

### Translation

**12:18** For **you have not approached**
a thing palpable
and a burning fire
and darkness and gloom and tempest
**12:19** and a sound of trumpets
and a voice of utterances,
which those having heard begged
that a word no longer be given to them,
**12:20** for **they could not bear** the command,
"Even if a beast touch the mountain,

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[43] Koester, *Hebrews*, 200–201.

*it will be stoned;"*

**12:21** and
so fearful that which was made visible
**Moses said,**
"I am afraid and trembling."

**12:22** But **you have approached**
Mount Zion
and the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem,
and myriads of angels in festive gathering
**12:23** and an assembly of firstborn registered in the heavens
and God, a judge of all,
and spirits of the righteous who have been made complete,
**12:24** and a mediator of a new covenant
**JESUS**
and blood of sprinkling speaking in a superior way to Abel.

This is a discrete section from 12:18–24 that is composed of two periodic sentences (12:18–21 and 12:22–24). They are parallel in that both begin with προσεληλύθατε, a perfect tense verb that indicates an action has begun (or has not begun) and has a continuing result. In the first section, the Hebrews' hearers are told that they have not approached a place that is described like Mt. Sinai; in the second section, they are told that they have approached Mt. Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. In the first sentence, fear is the theme that carries through the rest of sentence, showing that the Israelites first are afraid of the command that even a beast would be stoned on the mountain. This fear is then confirmed by Moses who says "I am afraid and trembling" (12:21).

In contrast, the second sentence has a series of words and phrases that describe the place the hearers have entered, Mt. Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and the circumstances surrounding that place, the myriads of angels in festive gathering and the spirits of the righteous who have been made complete. The sentence concludes with Jesus, whose presence defines the place as well as the community of saints and angels who dwell with him in this place of festal assembly. Both sections end with speaking. Moses speaks of fear and trembling in the first sentence; Jesus' blood speaks better than the blood of Abel in the second.

Mt. Sinai, then, creates fear; Mt. Zion is the place of Christ's presence whose blood speaks of purification and cleansing.[44]

The author of Hebrews, therefore, comes to another climactic moment in his homily by describing the approach of his hearers to the presence of God on Mt. Zion.[45] To highlight this approach, he compares it to the Israelites who could not approach Mt. Sinai because of their fear of God's presence that could bring instant death. By using the perfect tense for his hearers' approach to Mt. Zion, it is clear that this movement into God's presence has already begun here on earth. Clearly Mt. Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, is not a specific place in Israel but is wherever Christ is present according to both his divine and human natures. When Hebrews' first-century hearers ask themselves, "where is this place?" their immediate response must be where Christ *speaks* for his Father and *acts* for his Father. That place is the liturgy where Christ's performative word brings purification of sins through preaching and the Eucharist. The inaugurated eschatology of the New Testament encourages us to consider that our approach to God's presence in Jesus begins already now in the church's eucharistic life even as it will reach its consummation when we fully experience Christ's presence at the heavenly feast.

There can be no argument that this passage refers to the final feast on the Last Day in heaven, especially by the phrase "heavenly Jerusalem" (12:22–Ἰερουσαλὴμ ἐπουρανίῳ). Yet in Christ's bodily presence among us now, heaven is on earth, so that Mt. Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem where the exalted Christ now sits at God's right hand

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[44] Vanhoye relates the presence of angels in the first two chapters with Hebrews high-priestly christology: "We add that the insistence on the angels, which at first sight can seem rather odd, is intelligible in the light of this orientation. For it was their capability as mediators which attracted the attention of the believers of this period. Were not the angels the beings best situated to serve as intermediaries between men and God? Jewish tradition gave them this role. Certain texts even assign to the most elevated among them the dignity of a heavenly high priest. By implicitly opposing such claims our author shows without stating it that Christ is much better qualified than any angel to fill the role of high priest. Son of God, he enjoys with his Father a relation much more intimate than any angel (1,5-14). Brother of men, he is much more capable of understanding us and of helping us (2,5-16). The angels assuredly have their place in the realization of the design of God, but it is a subordinate place (1,14). The glorified Christ is of incomparably more worth than they. He is for us more than a simple intermediary, for it is at the deepest level of his being that he is become for us, through his Passion, the true mediator between God and man;" *Structure and Message*, 49.

[45] Koester notes that "Arrival in the celestial city marks a climax in Hebrews;" *Hebrews*, 548

(1:3) exists at the altar where the myriad of angels in festive gathering join the assembly of the firstborn and the Spirits of the righteous who have been made complete. Here God is judge as to who is worthy to enter this presence now at the eucharistic feast even as, at the parousia, he will judge who will be invited to the eternal banquet of the Lamb in his kingdom that has no end. Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, pours out the blood of the covenant into the eucharistic cup that speaks better than Abel's blood. Here in this cup a purification of sins takes place through forgiveness.

Hebrews 12:22–24 shows that the superiority of Christ to the angels helps the hearers understand that angels now take their proper place as beings who prostrate before him (1:6), serving as his cult ministers before his throne (1:7) and as ministering spirits for his saints who are about to inherit salvation (1:14). In Christ's suffering and death; however, he momentarily makes himself subordinate to the angels in order that, by tasting death for all, his blood as a sacrifice for all might speak better than the blood of Abel's sacrifice. This blood of the new covenant that gives access to the eternal feast first gives access to the eucharistic table where "with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify your glorious name, evermore praising you and saying: 'Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of Sabbaoth. *Heav'n and earth* are full of your glory.'"

Hebrews 12:22–24 is the origin of this language from the Proper Preface that leads to the singing of the Sanctus from Isaiah 6 and Psalm 118. What is most curious about the phrase in the Sanctus—"heaven and earth are full of your glory"—is that Isaiah does not include "heaven" in his record of the words of the seraphim, but has only "the whole earth is full of his glory" (Is. 6:3, *ESV*). It is the church that added "heaven" to the Sanctus. The reality of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper demanded that the church acknowledge that heaven and earth are joined together in the breaking of the bread and the eucharistic cup. Larry Hurtado not only supports this reading, but shows how clearly Hebrews 12, which he describes as speaking "of participation in the community of Christian believers in awesome terms,"[46] is both eucharistic and eschatological. For Hurtado, Hebrews 12 is describing the worship of Christians in the first century and the worship of Christians now:

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[46] Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship*, 50.

> As the "holy ones" (saints) of God, believers saw their worship gatherings as attended by heavenly "holy ones", angels, whose presence signified the heavenly significance of their humble house-church assemblies. It is this sense that Christian collective worship participates in the heavenly cultus that finds later expressions in the traditional words of the liturgy: "Wherefore, with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we do laud and magnify your glorious name." . . . The point is that in their sense of their worship gatherings as an extension of and participation in the idealized worship of the heavenly hosts, and in their view of their gatherings as graced with God's holy angels, they express a vivid transcendent significance pertaining to these occasions.
>
> Collective worship was also experienced as having a strong eschatological significance. In fact, for religious groups with a strong sense of heavenly realities and eschatological hopes, worship is logically seen as the occasion when heavenly realities come to expression on earth and when foretastes of eschatological hopes are experienced in the present. . . . Consequently, just as worship can be the occasion in which heaven and earth are specially joined, the earthly worship setting thus acquiring a transcendent dimension, so worship can be seen by devotees as a present, albeit provisional, realization of conditions hoped for permanently in the age to come.[47]

### V. Entering Holiness: A Preliminary Word

There is still much to be done in determining the full extent of Hebrew's eucharistic theology. More may be gained in this effort by taking a less defensive approach—that is, trying to prove through proof-texts that Hebrews is referring to the Eucharist—and instead demonstrate how a eucharistic interpretation provides answers to many of the questions Hebrews raises.[48] Such study must grapple with the relationship between Christology, sacramentology, and ecclesiology in this homily. As such, it will demand that we take seriously the liturgical context of Hebrews as an Epistle written for Christians who regularly celebrated the Lord's Supper.

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[47] Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship*, 52–53

[48] See Swetnam, "Christology and the Eucharist," 93