

Graduate Paper for Classics 807: Early Christianity

**The Essential Christological Elements
in Early Christianity**

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“What the church of Jesus Christ believes, teaches, and confesses on the basis of the word of God: this is Christian doctrine.”¹ So Jaroslav Pelikan begins his impressive work on the history of the development of Christian doctrine. If this definition befits Christian doctrine as a whole then it ought serve at least in part for this study on early Christology which is a part of the whole of Christian doctrine. But here I want to focus on the earliest years of the church when the first documents of the New Testament were being written so the idea of the “word of God” cannot remain the same for my definition. I will then begin defining Christology as that which the church believes, teaches and confesses concerning the person Jesus Christ. Discussions concerning the orthodox creeds of Christology and the history of the development of Christology literally fill thousands and thousands of pages. These are older and newer discussions largely in the context of the early Christological and Trinitarian controversies in the church of the second, third, fourth and following centuries. These controversies fueled the development of precise and even technical language that was assumed into the creeds of the church to the rejoicing of some and more recently to the lamentation of others.

From the orthodox point of view the church’s language and creeds were a buttress and protection against the heresies and blasphemies of false teachers. The Scriptures were interpreted and used assuming a divine verbal inspiration of the apostolic documents.² Viewed as such the New Testament Gospels portray a mysterious beginning of life and ministry to Jesus. Only Simeon, Anna, and John the Baptist are portrayed as in any way understanding the importance of the early Jesus (Lk 2, John 1). Only well into Jesus’ ministry do we hear Peter’s confession of him as “the Christ, the son of the living God.” (Matt. 16:16). Even in the final days of Jesus’ life and after the crucifixion we see how much the apostles did not comprehend (Matt. 26 ff., Acts 1). Pentecost is portrayed as the time of special inspiration by the Holy Spirit when the apostles became bold public witnesses of the resurrection. It is at this time that the New Testament portrays the apostles as understanding the prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures and the

¹ Pelikan, p. 1.

² Letis, introduction.

person and work of Christ. From this point of view it is not possible to understand Jesus, the Christ, apart from the inspired apostolic witness regarding him. In later years the church referred to these apostolic scriptures in the Christological controversies. The weakness of the orthodox position as far as logic is concerned is precisely the presupposition of verbal inspiration of the New Testament which can never be logically proven to the historian. Evidence for it can largely only be given by circular reasoning with referral to these writings themselves. And it is this very point which the critical scholars exploited.

With the rise of the critical age in the 19th and 20th centuries scholars examined the Scriptures with presuppositions and world views foreign to the fathers.³ The Christology of the church and her creeds were criticized and modified not on the basis of faithfulness to the content of the scriptures but by questioning the nature of the scriptures themselves and those who wrote them. The scriptures were read in the same manner as the religious literature of the Greeks, Romans and other ancient pagans without the presuppositions of orthodoxy with an effort to place them into their historical context. Christology itself became nearly unimportant. The question of the day became: How did New Testament Christology develop? A basic outline of the development of Christology became common ground for scholars of the so called *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*.⁴ Wilhelm Bousset, Hans Lietzmann, Walter Bauer and Rudolf Bultmann are famous for their work in this area.⁵ The doctrine of this school was that the genesis of Christology was an evolutionary process.⁶ The Christian church, this school claims, cut many ideas from surrounding cultures and religions and pasted them onto her own doctrinal documents. Oral traditions and story collections played a decisive role in the formation of the New Testament and especially the gospels. After Jesus' crucifixion, Bousset claims, there was Palestinian Jewish Christianity and a Hellenistic Christianity with all their ideas mixed into the oral traditions even before Paul arrives on the scene. F. Hahn made this even more complex insisting on a Palestinian Jewish church, a Hellenistic Jewish church,

³ The tradition in critical scholarship "attempts to explain the rise of Christianity without any reference to the supernatural.", Marshall, p. 16.

⁴ "the history of religions school.", Hurtado, p. 9.

⁵ Longenecker, p. 5.

⁶ Moule, p. 1.

and a Hellenistic Gentile church.⁷ Different scholars found different emphases in these historical processes and as a result not only Christology but even the perceived process of Christological development was fragmented into as many opinions as there were scholars. But in general this school agreed that the historical Jesus lived and died saying and doing things seen and heard by his immediate Jewish followers but we are unable to know much of this Jesus because the later church took up such colorful ideas as the Jewish Messiah and the “divine man” of paganism and painted them onto the canvas of the church’s faith concerning Jesus. In this way a mythological Christ developed over a period of time and it is with this Christology in mind that later Paul and other writers looked back and wrote of Jesus of Nazareth now so mutated by mythological tales as to be unrecognizable. This is the Jesus of faith. Thus, in the view of this group whose basic views continue to dominate New Testament scholarship, the church made Jesus Son of God, the church made Jesus preexistent, the church made Jesus divine, the church made Jesus rise from the dead. It could be argued that the logical conclusion of this school has been reached in the recent publication of the Gospels by the Jesus Seminar in which the sayings of Jesus are color coded in accordance with the probability of authenticity assigned to them by a group of New Testament scholars.

With these contradictory interpretations in mind this paper examines the earliest devotional practices toward Jesus and the earliest doctrinal formulas concerning him. According to the orthodox position the essentials of Christology should appear in the church shortly after the Resurrection or even before. On the contrary according to the evolutionary ideas of Christology one would expect to see a primitive Christology in the earliest church progressively being developed with fundamentally new and more complex ideas including those of divinity, preexistence, Son of God etc. Since Paul's letters clearly show these elements already, the period of time from the Crucifixion/Resurrection events to Paul are absolutely critical. If the earlier years are years of a purely human Jesus then Paul can be understood as helping to spread the mythological Jesus into Hellenistic Christianity as a catalyst and engine in the developing Christology leaving the historical Jesus behind. But if the years prior to Paul reveal a substantially stable

⁷ Marshall, p. 25.

Christology with its essential elements then the Christological theories of the history of religions school will have failed and this with many broader implications.

The first point that should be made is not one from the New Testament but from recent studies into the Hellenistic culture in which first century Judaism found itself. It is clear now that the distinction proposed by Bousset (and followed by Bultmann and so many others) between Jewish Christianity and Hellenistic Christianity is to be given up or radically modified and even more so the finer distinction proposed by Hahn between Hellenistic Jewish Christianity and Hellenistic Gentile Christianity. Hurtado calls these “outworn assumptions and hypotheses.”⁸ A massive study by M. Hengel on the Hellenistic influences on Judaism has shown that even if it is possible to make some kind of general comments of Palestinian Judaism being more conservative than Hellenistic Judaism it is impossible to make any hard and fast distinctions between Palestinian and Hellenistic Judaism and their beliefs let alone between Palestinian and Hellenistic Christianity. “All groups in Judaism had, in one way or another, to come to terms with the all-pervasive Hellenistic culture in which they lived and the Roman Empire which formed the dominant stabilizing political force in the eastern (and western) Mediterranean.”⁹ Even beyond this, the New Testament itself shows how common travel between the Diaspora and Palestine was, for example, in Act’s report of the events at Pentecost. Paul’s travels too indicate the ease of mobility in the Roman Empire of the first century. Paul himself had been born in the Diaspora, was raised as a strict Pharisee in Jerusalem, and spent his time and labor largely in the Diaspora but also in Jerusalem. This type of mobility does not permit hard and fast divisions between Palestine and Hellenistic churches. Already in Acts 6 we see that there are Greek speaking Christians in Jerusalem itself. There were agents of the Jerusalem church sent to Hellenistic Antioch (Acts 15:22), agents from the Hellenistic churches sent to Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26f; 2 Cor. 8:19) and Peter himself seems to have traveled from Jerusalem into at least some of the Hellenistic churches (Gal. 2:11). With this level of interaction the kinds of distinctions suggested by this school seem extremely dubious. Further, the New Testament itself reports differences between the Hellenistic Gentile churches and the Jerusalem Pharisaic party. But these derive from differences in understanding the application of the Mosaic laws to the Gentiles and salvation in general.

⁸ Hurtado, p. 12.

⁹ de Jonge, p. 27.

But there is no hint of a difference in the confession of Christology which would be impossible to imagine if the Gentiles were making Jesus into a divine being contrary to Jewish monotheism. Finally, there is the question of time. There are only 20 years between the crucifixion and Paul's first letters which represent a mature Christology. There just isn't time for all these independent stages of development that these scholars propose. In summary, there is little if any evidence for and much evidence against this rather basic assumption of the of the model proposed by this school of critical scholarship. This already casts severe doubts upon their model of Christological development as evolution. The evidence of the New Testament suggests a different model.

Paul's earliest letters are dated from about 50 AD. The crucifixion occurred c. 30 AD. This points to 20 crucial years which must be examined. For the sake of argument I will assume the basic critical assessment of the New Testament authors and books. And from this vantage point, peering back into these first 20 years, we can only partially make out dimly lit objects. But there are important clues as to the Christology of those years in the New Testament. It is the thesis of this paper that the essential elements of Christology are present in confession and liturgy in the earliest period of the church. These essential elements can roughly be stated as: Jewish monotheism, recognition of the historical facts of Jesus' life and crucifixion and the ascribing to Jesus the divine name and worship as the Christ, the Son of God, and Lord on the basis of the resurrection.

What the early church believed concerning Jesus can only be known from what the church taught and confessed. The New Testament is rich with language concerning the main message of the church and her act of teaching it. The message of the church was succinctly contained in what became a technical term: εὐαγγέλιον (gospel). In the Hellenistic period this word in the plural came to indicate "good news" but in the New Testament this meaning is indicated with the singular.¹⁰ This term permeates the New Testament and is modified in various places with the genitives τοῦ θεοῦ and τοῦ Χριστοῦ (or τοῦ κυρίου) ("of God" and "of Christ") as indicating the subject and object of the gospel (Mk. 1:14; Rom. 1:1; 15:16; 2 Cor. 11:7; 1 Co. 9:12; 2 Co. 9:13; 1 Th. 3:2). The corresponding verb εὐαγγελίζομαι

¹⁰ Neufeld, p. 21.

means to proclaim good news and takes as its direct object *Christ, Jesus, Jesus and the resurrection or the Son of God*.¹¹ Related word families are κηρύσσω (κηρύγμα, κήρυξις), καταγγέλλω, ἀπαγγέλλω, μαρτύρομαι, and λαλέω. That which the church was proclaiming is the gospel, Jesus¹², the Christ¹³, or τό ῥημα τῆς πίστεως¹⁴. And that which the church was proclaiming it was also teaching.¹⁵ But the question arises: What in particular was the content of this gospel of the Christ which the church was proclaiming and teaching? Particular recurring formulas or constructions of language in the teaching and preaching of the church allow us to understand what was considered the core elements of the gospel even before the time of Paul.

The gospel which the early church proclaimed seems even from a critical viewpoint to have centered on the death and resurrection of Christ. This is often portrayed in the New Testament with bipartite formulas with different motifs of contrast such as descending/ascending, death/resurrection or death/life.¹⁶ But whatever the exact motif, in many places the basic elements of the Gospel such as God sending his Son, the Son dying, being killed or crucified, sometimes with a phrase indicating “for whom” he died, and last a phrase concerning God raising him from the dead (ἐγείρω, or ἀνίστημι) - these elements are often found together in formula type expressions. In the first sermon of Peter on Pentecost we read: “This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead” (ὁν ὁ θεὸς ἀνέστησεν) (Acts 2:23). Here we have the ideas set together that God sent Jesus, his death, and God raised him from the dead. In the second sermon of Peter in Acts we see: “You killed the author of life, but

¹¹ Neufeld, p.21.

¹² 2 Cor. 11:4.

¹³ Acts 8:5; 9:20; 1 Cor. 1:23, 2 Cor. 1:19; Col. 1:28.

¹⁴ Rom. 10:8.

¹⁵ Acts 28:31: τὰν περὶ τοῦ Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ; Matt. 4:23.

¹⁶ Neufeld, p. 46.

God raised him from the dead” (ὃν ὁ θεοὺς ἤγειρεν ἐκ νεκρῶν) (Acts 3:15). In Acts 4:10 Peter states: then know this, you and all the people of Israel: “It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.” See also Acts 10:39f. Luke indicates that the church used many different phrases and words to speak about Jesus’ death but already the phrase “God raised him from the dead” is portrayed as a set formula. But it is not just Peter in Acts who uses this basic formula. In Acts 13 Paul says: “When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead” (ὁ δὲ θεοὺς ἤγειρεν αὐτοῦ ἐκ νεκρῶν). Paul's epistles confirm this observation of the primitive preaching. Even when Paul is speaking about some other topic he will introduce these common formulae into his text. For example Paul writes in Romans 8:34: “Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died -- more than that, who was raised to life (Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦς) ὁ ἀποθανών, μᾶλλον δὲ ἐγερθείς) -- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” In 1 Thess. 4:14 Paul, writing in c. 51 AD., writes: “We believe that Jesus died and rose again.” (πιστεύομεν ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἀπέθανεν καὶ ἀνέστη). Paul’s introduction of the brief phrase “we believe that” plus this doctrinal formula in order to derive a teaching from it later in the verse indicates that Paul is speaking about a well known common teaching, even confession, accepted in his young congregations upon which other deductions might be made in regard to the Christian faith. In another early and important text Paul explicitly denotes the main content of his “gospel” which he preached writing to the Corinthians:

By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. (1 Cor 15)

Again the indications of a primitive doctrinal formula are present in the “what I received I passed on” and in the “that (ὅτι)” plus formula. Here the articles of the gospel agree with previous observations.

The contents are:

ὅτι Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ...
καὶ ὅτι ἐτάφη,
καὶ ὅτι ἐγήγερται ...
καὶ ὅτι ὤφθη¹⁷

Regarding this text Kelly concludes, “This is manifestly a summary drawn up for catechetical purposes or for preaching: it gives the gist of the Christian message in a concentrated form.”¹⁸ These essential articles appear not only in complex formulas but are also sprinkled throughout the New Testament singularly. “Died for” appears in texts like John 11:50, Rom 5:7, 2 Cor. 5:15 and 1 Thess. 5:10. The “God raised him” element appears repeatedly in Acts, also in Rom. 7:4, Rom. 10:9, 1 Cor. 6:14, 1 Cor. 15:15 and many others. So taken together these texts strongly indicate that even in the Pre-Pauline years the message of the gospel preached by the church was centered upon the core message of Jesus’ earthly life, his death, and his resurrection. But it was especially in the confession of the Resurrection that the church proclaimed something new and controversial. In the New Testament, even in those places that allow us to peer into the pre-Pauline years, the confession of the Resurrection and the living resurrected Lord is central, even assumed. The confession that ὁ δεῖ θεοῦ ἠγείρεν αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν and the church’s conclusions from it represent the content of church’s gospel that would not allow it to dwell in peace with the temple and synagogue. The experience of the resurrected Jesus related in the New Testament is the basis upon which the church came to worship and pray to Jesus confessing him to be Christ, Son of God, and Lord to which attention is now turned.

The first question at hand is whether in the earliest period the church was already addressing worship and prayer to the resurrected Christ. This is a remarkable question when taken in context of Jewish monotheism into which the church was born. The question of how monotheistic Jews could come to address prayer and worship to Jesus along side God is one that has vexed New Testament critical scholars. Critical scholars of the history of religions school were aware of most of the evidence being

¹⁷ Neufeld, p. 47.

¹⁸ Kelly, p. 17.

presented in this paper yet they felt that it was not possible for monotheistic Jews to suddenly address worship to another being apart from the Lord of the Old Testament.¹⁹ And so they developed a theory of an evolutionary Christology gathering critical ideas from Hellenistic pagan cultures. From this vantage point we would not expect to see prayers and worship addressed to Jesus until the Christological development was well along later in the first century. On the other hand, from the orthodox point of view there are beginnings of worship already in Jesus' earthly ministry. There is the mysterious visit of the μάγοι ἀπο' ἀνατολῶν shortly after Jesus' birth who fall down before the baby and offer him gifts (Matt. 2:2). This idea of worship is repeated in several miracle stories and exorcisms. The word προσκυνέω, to prostrate oneself before, appears in these texts in the Gospels and is usually translated as "to worship." In Matt. 14:33 importantly this word occurs in conjunction with the confession of the disciples that Jesus is the "Son of God." But in general this word doesn't strictly indicate what is intended here as "worship" although it might include it. The question here is when did Christian devotion change to the point of addressing hymns and prayers to Jesus "as to a god." Even in the orthodox point of view this waited until after the resurrection. But the material which allows us to view the liturgical practices of post-resurrection / pre-Pauline church is scarce. The evidence will have to be skimmed from the Pauline epistles. It is in 1 Corinthians that we get our best look at what worship was like in the Pauline Hellenistic congregations of the 50's. Paul deals with the unruly nature of the worship of the Corinthians and tries to set them on the right path in this regard. There seems to have been reading of the scriptures, preaching and prophesy, expressions of the charismatic gifts, the Lord's Supper, hymns and songs, and prayer (1 Cor. 11 - 14). In the following paragraphs I will examine the evidence for addressing Jesus with hymns and prayer in the pre-Pauline church and the implications of Paul's comments on the Lord's Supper.

In regard to hymns the evidence is not abundant. It seems to have been Jesus' practice to sing hymns to God with his disciples (Matt. 14:26). Eph. 5:19 mentions "singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" and the in the parallel verse of Col. 3:16 Christians are admonished to "let the word of Christ

¹⁹ Hurtado, p. 125.

dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” Here the context shows that the word “Lord” almost certainly refers to the risen Christ showing that at the time of these letters such singing to Christ must have been common. The existence of such hymns somewhat later is confirmed by the pagan author Pliny who in 112 AD mentions such hymns in a letter to Emperor Trajan saying that Christians “were accustomed to meet before daybreak, and to recite a hymn antiphonally to Christ, as to a god.”²⁰ Many New Testament scholars are convinced that in the New Testament we have fragments of some early “Christ-hymns.”²¹ These include Phil. 2:6-11; Eph. 5:14; 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 1:2-3.²² Of these at least Phil. 2:6-11 is generally acknowledged to be pre-Pauline by critical scholars. Hurtado gives the following summation of the New Testament evidence in regard to Christ-hymns:

There are several good reasons to think that the practice of singing hymns in Christ’s honor goes back to the earliest stratum of the Christian movement. First, the religious enthusiasm, involving eschatological joy and excitement arising from the conviction that Jesus had been exalted to heavenly glory, which generated such compositions seems to have characterized Christian groups from the very beginning. Furthermore, several New Testament passages (e.g., Phil. 2:5-11) can be taken as glimpses of the worshipping life of Jewish Christian groups. This means that the hymnic celebration of Christ cannot be restricted to gentile churches. Moreover, nothing indicates any awareness by Paul that the worship practices in his churches were essentially different from what was familiar among Jewish churches, including those in Palestine. If the worship of the risen Christ was an innovation of the gentile churches, and completely impossible and unacceptable among Palestinian Jewish Christians (as Bousset claimed), then where is the evidence of any criticism of the supposed innovation from the later groups? There is well-known evidence of differences between Paul and some in Jerusalem over other aspects of his gentile mission (e.g., circumcision of Gentiles), but there is no hint that the veneration of Christ reflected in the singing of hymns devoted to him was regarded as strange or suspicious.²³

In regard to prayer addressed to the risen Christ the evidence is not abundant but somewhat stronger.

In the gospels Jesus generally speaks of “asking” (αἰτέω) or “praying to” (προσεύχομαι) the Father.

²⁰ Pliny, *Letters*, X, as quoted in Duling and Perrin, p. 453.

²¹ Hurtado, p. 101.

²² de Jonge, p. 51.

²³ Hurtado, p. 102.

But immediately in Acts we are presented with prayers directed to the Lord (Acts 1:14; 1:24; 7:59; 9:11) meaning the risen Christ. Likewise Paul says that in regard to his thorn in the flesh, “I besought the Lord thrice” (2 Cor. 12:7). The context shows he was addressing the risen Christ who then answered, “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” For Paul concludes, “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” This proves that Paul, at least, while generally addressing prayer to God the Father, could also address prayer to Jesus as the risen Christ in heaven and report this freely in a letter to the church. Seeing that there is no indication of innovation in this matter, even from a critical point of view the evidence seems to show that Jesus was addressed in prayer as the risen Christ reigning at the right hand of the Father, that is, as one with the power and ability to hear and answer those prayers. But one phrase in particular in the New Testament brings that conclusion almost to certainty and moves the date of the beginning of this practice back to the early Aramaic speaking Christian community. In 1 Corinthians 16:34 Paul includes a one word prayer into the text of his letter: “Maranatha.” This is an Aramaic expression that could possibly be translated “Our Lord has come” but instead seems best translated, “Our Lord, come!” (Rev. 22:20)²⁴ This very important phrase indicates that already in the early Aramaic speaking Christian communities in the first decade after the crucifixion Jesus was addressed as Lord and addressed in prayer especially in regard to the eschatological hopes of the church. In the Didache, which if not itself quite early certainly contains material from early in the church and seems to have been written in Palestine, the phrase “Maranatha” appears in the context of the Lord’s Supper as part of the prayers of the liturgy (Didache 10).²⁵ This would suggest that perhaps the word played a part in the early liturgy of the church and for this reason was known even to the Greek speaking churches of Paul and perhaps used by them. It was common enough to be referred to twice in the New Testament. Taken together the evidence, even when observed from a critical viewpoint, strongly indicates that the risen Jesus was the object of prayer very early in the church even in the Aramaic speaking churches of Palestine. If the church

²⁴ de Jonge, p. 48.

²⁵ Marshall, p. 102.

sang praises to the risen Christ and addressed him with prayer yet the most amazing part of Christian devotion in regard to Jesus must be the Lord's Supper.

In 1 Corinthians 11:17-33 Paul corrects the Corinthians for their unruly practice in regard to the κυριακόν δεῖπνον (the Lord's Supper). The fact that Paul mentions that he "received" this teaching and "delivered" it to the Corinthians indicates that this institution and understanding of the Supper were well known to the earlier church.²⁶ Perhaps the reason why Lord's Supper does not receive more scholarly attention in discussing early Christology is that it seems to many critical scholars to represent a Christology that could only have developed over time and thus be a late teaching written "back into the past." Perhaps it has to do with the controversial nature of the Supper in modern theology. But in the opinion of this author it is sadly lacking attention. The mention of the Supper in the three Gospels and here show its central importance to the Christian community. It's mention here by Paul as a tradition puts its origin well before 55 AD. And at this time it is already recognized as coming from Jesus Himself. And the Christological implications of what Paul says concerning the Supper is so outrageous that Paul could not possibly have introduced such statements without the earliest precedence. Paul had known the Christian movement almost since its inception. His conversion was c. 35 AD only a handful of years after the crucifixion and he was certainly aware of the earliest Christology. That Paul could have stated such things in regard to Christ as he does here in regard to the Supper would be impossible without disturbance in the churches unless there were precedent from those earliest years. His statements here demand acknowledgment that for Paul participation in the Supper in some way includes a participation with the body and blood of the risen Christ making the church one with Him. Paul states in 10:16f.:

το' ποτήριον τῆς εὐλογίας ὃ εὐλογοῦμεν, οὐχι' κοινωνία ἐστὶν τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ ἄρτον ὃν κλῶμεν, οὐχι' κοινωνία τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐστὶν¹⁷ ὅτι εἷς ἄρτος, ἐν σῶμα οἱ πολλοὶ ἐσμεν, οἱ γὰρ πάντες ἐκ τοῦ ἐνο'ς ἄρτου μετέχομεν.

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we *being* many are one bread, *and* one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread. (KJV)

²⁶ Hurtado, p. 111.

Paul later quotes the words of institution which use the phrases “This is my body” and “This is the new testament in my blood” and draws conclusions from them. Paul writes in 11:27ff.:

Ὡστε ὃς ἂν ἐσθίῃ τὸν ἄρτον ἢ πίνῃ τὸ ποτήριον τοῦ κυρίου ἀναξίως, ἔνοχος ἔσται τοῦ σώματος καὶ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ κυρίου. δοκιμαζέτω δὲ ἄνθρωπος ἑαυτόν, καὶ οὕτως ἐκ τοῦ ἄρτου ἐσθιέτω καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ποτηρίου πινέτω· ὁ γὰρ ἐσθίων καὶ πίνων κρίμα ἑαυτῷ ἐσθίει καὶ πίνει μὴ διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα.

Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink *this* cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the body.

Apart from utter unreasonableness of the conclusion, Paul’s words would seem to demand that the Lord’s body and blood are present in the Supper claiming that one has “communion” or participation with them and that one who eats or drinks unworthily is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. What is more, even if some modern exegetes do not believe that this is what Paul meant to say, nevertheless, it is the faith of the church that is most important to my present thesis. And all indications from the earliest fathers are that the church believed the communicant in some fashion participated with and even eats the body and blood of Christ present in the Supper.²⁷ If this was the understanding of the church and the teaching of the apostle in 55 AD - and what is the evidence that points to the contrary or indicates a development in the doctrine of the Supper between Paul and Ignatius - then from the earliest days of the Aramaic speaking church Christians thought of the risen Jesus in terms unbelievable to the modern mind and equally amazing for monotheistic Jews. This in conjunction with the other evidence of Christian devotion indicates that in the earliest period Christians believed in Jesus in terms which required them react to him “as unto God.” It should be noted as a powerful independent confirmation of this that Paul noted this Christology before 35 A.D. and was persecuting the church for their unorthodox preaching and veneration of the risen Jesus. As Hurtado points out, the evidence indicates that already in the first decade

²⁷ Pelikan, p. 167ff.

after the crucifixion most of the essential elements had to have been in place.²⁸ Alongside the veneration of Jesus this includes the church's confessions of Jesus as Christ, Son of God and Lord.

In the New Testament the words ἐξομολογέω / ὁμολογέω express *praise* and *thanks*, *promise*, *admit* and *acknowledge openly*. But they also refer to the act of professing conviction as in *confessing Christ* or *confessing the gospel*.²⁹ ὁμολογία is also used six times in the New Testament referring to the confession Christ made before Pilate to be the Son of God and the confession Christians make to the “gospel of Christ.” (1 Tim. 6:11ff; 2 Cor. 9:13). The opposite is expressed with the antonym of confessing: “to deny” (ἀρνέομαι) *Christ*³⁰, *the faith*³¹, *the confession of knowing God*³² and *the name of Christ*³³. But beside this general vocabulary of confessing the Christ there are certain passages even in the earliest pages of the New Testament that show us that already at the time of Paul's first letters, only 20 years after the crucifixion, the Christology of the Church was being expressed in regular traditional formulas some of which seemed to have operated as creeds for baptismal instruction, for the liturgy and in confession to those outside the church. This would put the origination of these formulas well before Paul's letters. But before looking at the purely Christian confessions a quick aside for consideration of the monotheistic inheritance of Christianity is called for.

It could be argued that the first confession of Christendom was that which it inherited from Judaism, the Shema: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord.”³⁴ This bulwark of monotheism appears to be the only such formula in Judaism which could be truly called a creed.³⁵ Since Christianity arose as it did

²⁸ Hurtado, p. 5.

²⁹ Matt. 10:32ff.; Romans 10:8ff.; Phil. 2:9ff.

³⁰ Matt. 10:33; Mk 14:68; 1 Jn 2:22f.

³¹ 1 Tim. 5:8.

³² Titus 1:16.

³³ Rev. 3:8.

³⁴ κύριος ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν εἷς ἐστίν (Deut. 6:4)

³⁵ Neufeld, p. 35.

out of Judaism it should come as no surprise that the monotheistic content of the Shema was claimed as a given from the beginning of the church. And without doubt the early Jewish churches did not give up this confession with their conversion to Christianity. Jesus is quoted as giving the Shema and its explanation as the "first of all the commandments" in Mark 12:29. And its influence on the New Testament is found otherwise in many places especially in the substitutionary form of εἷς ὁ Θεός ("God is one", Mk. 10:18; Rom. 3:30; I Cor. 8:6; Gal. 3:20; Eph. 4:6; James 2:19).³⁶ The Christians were thoroughly convicted in their dedication to monotheism. But what is most interesting is that already in the New Testament it was necessary to somehow relate this confession with the Christological content of the other formulas then in existence, that is, the earliest Christian conviction that Jesus was to be worshiped and even granted the divine name. Questions such as "How can God be one and only He is to be worshiped and yet we worship the Father and the Son?" were to fuel the controversies out of which the Christological and Trinitarian language of later centuries developed. But in the New Testament itself there are the first beginnings of such conversations. In 1 Corinthians 8:5ff. Paul states:

ὁ ἀλλ· ἡμῖν εἷς θεός ὁ πατήρ, ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν, καὶ εἷς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, δι· οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς δι· αὐτοῦ.

But to us *there is but* one God, the Father, of whom *are* all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom *are* all things, and we by him.

And in 1 Timothy 2:5 Paul writes:

εἷς γὰρ θεός, εἷς καὶ μεσίτης θεοῦ καὶ ἀνθρώπων, ἄνθρωπος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦς

For *there is* one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

Already here we have the beginnings of relating confessions, creeds or articles of faith which at least upon later reflection may not seem to agree. Side by side we have εἷς γὰρ θεός and εἷς κύριος

³⁶ Neufeld, p. 38 ff.

Ἰησοῦς Χριστός. With earlier severe distinctions between Hellenistic Christianity and Jewish Aramaic Christianity having been set aside, these passages indicate that at the time of 1 Corinthians, around 55 AD, only 25 years or so after the crucifixion, these confessions were as established and accepted in the church as the monotheism inherited from Judaism. Discussion of these titles attributed to Jesus has been immense among scholars.

The confession Ἰησοῦς Κύριος (Jesus is Lord) clearly functioned as a confession of faith in the early church. Throughout the New Testament these words appear together as a title that has been attributed to Jesus well before the books of the New Testament books were written. But in particular there are several Pauline texts that let us view these words functioning as confession. In 1 Corinthians 12:3 Paul writes: “Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” (Κύριος Ἰησοῦς) except by the Holy Spirit.” (NIV). Here obviously Paul is not concerned only with words deemed to be dishonorable to Jesus. Paul is concerned that a very particular confession of the faith is being misused and even denied by some in the Corinthian congregation. Paul reminds them that flippancy does not have a place with this confession, indeed, no one can even legitimately confess it without the Holy Spirit (cf. Matt. 16:17). In Romans 10:8ff. Paul writes:

The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

And Paul further quotes what scholars have identified as a Christological hymn from the earlier church in Phillipians 2:11 which makes use of this confession:

⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death -- even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus

every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Paul here teaches through the words of this hymn that it is God's desire that every one confess Ἰησοῦς Κύριος. From these verses it can be concluded that this confession of Jesus as Lord played a significant role in the life of the church even before Paul's time. Upon recognition of this fact at least three questions arise: At what point in time did this confession appear in the life of the church? What functions did the confession serve in the church? What exactly was being stated about Jesus with this confession? These questions have long busied many scholars and much data applies to the answers. Among the pagans in the East the word κύριος was used as a designation for divine beings. As Marshall summarizes:

Of particular importance was the use of 'lord' to designate pagan deities, and the corresponding use of the word 'slave' to designate the worshipper. But this usage arose mostly in Egypt, Syria and Asia Minor, and represents a Greek translation of an indigenous title. In the same areas of the world rulers were also addressed by this title. During the first century the title was used for the Roman emperor ... On the whole it is probable that the boundary between humanity and divinity was blurred, so that the emperor could easily be thought of as more than human.³⁷

It was in recognition of this that Bousset suggested that it was through these pagan-Savior cults that Christianity learned to acclaim Jesus as Lord, that is, as divine, later in the first century. And Bultmann suggested that among the Jews it would have been unthinkable that "the Lord" would be applied to Jesus in an absolute sense.³⁸ However, the well established use of the confession Ἰησοῦς Κύριος by 55 AD, the phrase *maranatha* calling upon the risen Christ to return, and the frequent use of ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν (our Lord) (which is the exact equivalent of *marana*³⁹) in the New Testament point to the conclusion that this confession is pre-Pauline and indeed from Palestinian Jewish Christianity and not derived from the pagan

³⁷ Marshall, p. 97f.

³⁸ Moule, p. 36f.

³⁹ Neufeld, p. 56.

use of the word κύριος.⁴⁰ Hengel states: “One may safely dismiss the derivation of the title “Kyrios” from the hellenistic-oriental cults of the ‘Kyria Isis’ and other oriental ‘Kyrioi’.”⁴¹ But what would the meaning of this confession be? Among the Jews it appears that the practice was to use the substitute word “κύριος” for the holy unutterable name of God, יהוה in reading the Torah and in everyday speech. The argument is that the Jewish translators of the Septuagint had made such a substitution in translating the Old Testament.⁴² However, some of the oldest surviving fragments of the Septuagint use some kind of a representation of the Tetragrammaton rather than κύριος. But overall, it does appear that the Jews used κύριος as the vocalization of God’s name in the first century.⁴³ Further, in regard to the phrase “Maranatha” it was claimed by representatives of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* that the Aramaic word “mare” must mean “lord” as in “Master” since the word could not be used absolutely to represent God’s name. But evaluation of the evidence from Daniel 2:47 and 5:23, the Qumran scrolls, and the Aramaic Enoch all show this to be a false claim.⁴⁴ Still, saying that the words are capable of a certain meaning does not establish that this was the meaning in *Maranatha* or *Iesus Kurios*. Clues to the meaning intended can be found in how the Church made use of the Scriptures. In the pre-Pauline hymn of Philippians 2 quoted above a remarkable use of Isaiah 45:22ff is apparent. In this monotheistic text of Isaiah every knee is said to bow to God, the Lord, and to him alone and to take oath that “In the Lord I have righteousness and strength.” On the other hand in this hymn every knee bows at the name of Jesus which is above all names (the Tetragrammaton?) and confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord. It seems to be a rather stunning application of the divine name to the risen Christ and this in a pre-Pauline liturgical text of the church. And yet at the same time this is said to be “to the glory of God the Father.” In Romans 10:13 the text of Joel 2:32 saying “that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved” is applied

⁴⁰ Longenecker, p. 127.

⁴¹ Hengel, p. 441.

⁴² Marshall, p. 98.

⁴³ Moule, p. 40.

⁴⁴ Moule, p. 37.

by Paul to Jesus. In Heb. 1:10, a later text, the Septuagint version of a creation text in Psalm 102 is quoted again applying the divine name to Jesus “the Son.” Further, texts such as Acts 2:36 and Romans 1:1ff. show how closely the confession of Jesus as Lord is related to the content of the Resurrection and Ascension. Ἰησοῦς Κύριος is a confession of the gospel essentials ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἀπέθανεν καὶ ἀνέστη (1 Thess. 4:14). It would seem as if the confession intended not just a simple equating of ἰησοῦς and Jesus as a numerical identity but the idea that the exalted Jesus as Lord of the church (1 Cor. 1:2; Romans 10:12; cf. “our Lord”), Lord of Creation (1 Cor. 8:6), Lord of all (Acts 10:36), Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:8; James 2:1) and Lord of lords (Rev. 17:14; 19:16) should be ascribed the divine name of Lord along side of God the Father bringing with it the praise, worship and prayer appropriate to the divine name. But the emphasis in the confession was not all on “Lord.” The bipartite formulas that include ideas such as ὁ καταβας - ὁ ἀναβάς, ὁ ἀποθανών - ὁ ἐγερθεί, ὁ γενόμενος - ὁ ὀρισθεί or κατὰ σάρκα - κάτα πνεῦμα would seem to point to an equal confession of the earthly Jesus giving a contrast of the earthly and the heavenly, and yet the confession of the one Lord (1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:5).⁴⁵ But confessing Jesus as Lord was only one of the convictions exclaimed by the early Christians.

The confession of Jesus as Christ appears several times in the Gospels. Peter is found confessing “Σὺ εἶ ὁ Χριστός.” (Mark 8:29) The demons recognize who he is. Martha confesses Jesus is the Christ (John 11:27). Jesus admits to being the Christ (John 4:25; Mark 14:61). And in Acts 2:36 Peter proclaims Jesus as the Christ (Acts 2:36). From an orthodox point of view all this would indicate an early recognition of Jesus as the Christ and it’s place in the early church’s proclamation. It is in 1 John, toward the end of the first century, that we again see the formula in the classic form of a *homologia* ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ Χριστός (1 John 5:1) and the classic form of the denial ὅτι Ἰησοῦς οὐκ ἐστὶν ὁ Χριστός (1 John 2:22). From the critical point of view, examining the early Pauline epistles reveals that “Christ” has already all but become a proper name along side of “Jesus” most likely hurried by the fact that “Messiah” as a Jewish category meant little to Greek speaking Gentiles. This in itself shows the title has been used

⁴⁵ Neufeld, p. 51ff.

previous to Paul and in 50 AD has already taken on one of its final functions. So there is little indication of a confessional formula in Paul as there was for *Jesus Kurios* although the content of the confession is pre-supposed and a certain remnant of it probably appears in the “Lord Jesus Christ” phrases of Paul (1 Cor. 8:6; Phil. 2:11). But when did the title arise? There has been much scholarly debate whether Jesus used or accepted this title for himself. And although this goes beyond the scope of this paper in that the thesis only addresses itself to the earliest years of the church nevertheless a look at this debate is not without merit. The gospels list at most six possible times before the Crucifixion that Jesus made use of the term Christ.⁴⁶ Bultmann and those who follow him have dismissed all these cases as either post-Easter faith projected back onto Jesus’ life or pure legend. They then claim there is no evidence Jesus used the term. O. Cullmann on the other hand accepts the texts as mostly accurate yet claims that a proper reading of them reveals that Jesus did not lay claim to the title of *Christos* but rather declined the title.⁴⁷ Aside from Bultmann’s cavalier method of dealing with the texts it could be pointed out against his view that Jesus most likely drew upon Is. 61:1-2, a messianic Old Testament text, as applying to himself (Mt. 5:3; Mt. 11:5), several times spoke of himself as being “sent by God” (Mt. 10:40; Mk 9:37; Mt. 15:24), and was accused and crucified as “King of the Jews.”⁴⁸ It could also certainly be argued that reading Mark 8:27 as if Jesus had denied the title of Messiah is a distortion of what the text says. Returning to the early church, F. Hahn and R.H. Fuller suggested that in the earliest church “Messiah” was not used as a title for Jesus. They claim he was looked upon as the Son of Man whose return was eagerly awaited who might also be called Messiah because of the Jewish apocalyptic thought in regard to the Messiah.. The theory continues that when the church thought of the exalted Jesus the term Messiah also naturally presented itself. Then upon reflection of Jesus’ death as “King of the Jews” the title became associated with the suffering and death of Jesus. All of this supposedly occurred within Palestinian Jewish Christianity before

⁴⁶ Marshall, p. 85.

⁴⁷ Longenecker, p. 69.

⁴⁸ Dunn, p. 377.

the Gentile mission.⁴⁹ But this theory seems rather strained and offers little proof. N.A. Dahl has argued that already in the earliest period *Christos* was associated with the crucifixion.⁵⁰ Even from a critical point of view it seems widely accepted that the term *Christ* was applied to Jesus at the earliest period of the church and quite likely appeared even before the resurrection even if its meaning was not completely determined. But what then was meant by this confession? The word Χριστός literally means “anointed one” and comes from the verb χρίω meaning “to anoint.” From the New Testament data many people, even scholars, have taken for granted that the Jews of the first century were awaiting some clearly defined Messiah with a clearly defined messianic agenda. But as James Charlesworth has rather forcefully argued, this is not the case. He shows that the Old Testament does not contain the term “the Messiah.”⁵¹ Further, the pre-Christian Jewish literature back to 250 BC does not contain such a cogent focused idea of the Messiah or his actions. The messianic hopes of the Jews were real but made up of a confusing array of ideas which include the royal Davidic type Messiah, a priest figure type Messiah modeled on Moses and Aaron, and an even more unfocused idea of the Messiah as a prophet whether as Elijah, Moses or some other.⁵² In addition to the many contradictory and confusing messianic ideas a confusing array of what can be called “divine agents” appears in Jewish thought such as personified divine attributes (Wisdom, Logos etc.), exalted patriarchs and powerful primary angels.⁵³ Into this mix would have to be included the recent influence of John the Baptist. It could perhaps be successfully argued that the New Testament at least implicitly reflects this complex situation for example in Peter’s varied response to Jesus’ question: “Who do men say that I am?” Peter mentions the Baptist, Elijah and other prophets. Further, he commands people not to tell others that he is the Christ (Matt. 16:20; Mk. 8:30) and even rejects certain popular

⁴⁹ Marshall, p. 91f.

⁵⁰ Dahl, p. 392.

⁵¹ Charlesworth, p. 11.

⁵² Dunn, p. 367f.

⁵³ Hurtado, p. 17ff.

messianic ideas when the people want to make him King (John 2:24).⁵⁴ At the same time it has also been noted that Jesus only rarely admitted to being the Christ and this never at his own initiative. What is to be made then of this bewildering complex of data? What is meant by the confession *Iesus Christos*?

Neufeld summarizes:

Thus, the term *messiah*, when used in the first Christian century of the expected deliverer, might convey any of the above mentioned popular beliefs; it did not in itself convey any specific meaning, except that the one so designated was a special appointee of God, consecrated for some specific task. Therefore, the precise meaning of the title when applied to Jesus by Christian writers, must be sought from the context in which the word is used rather than from its established significance.⁵⁵

The church could do little more with the title “Christ” in this ambiguous atmosphere than proclaim Jesus as a divinely appointed agent of God unless, while confessing, the church was also teaching in such a way as to clearly define this otherwise ambiguous term. And I believe this is precisely what is seen in the New Testament. There is a rejection of current ideas regarding the Messiah as being a political king (John 6:15) and restoring an earthly kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). And on the other hand there is a defining of Jesus as the Christ who is the Son of God and as one who has fulfilled the Scriptures. When Paul presents the Gospel in 1 Corinthians 15 as a tradition he had received it is important to note that after the articles “he died” and “was raised on the third day” we have “according to the Scriptures.” This is in agreement with the kerygmatic preaching found in the early parts of Acts. In Acts 2 Peter invokes Psalm 16 and Psalm 110 as proof of Jesus’ fulfillment of the Scriptures in the resurrection and uses this to prove that he is the Christ (Acts 2:36). In Acts 3, Deut. 18:15ff and Genesis 17 are used. But the item from Jesus’ life that needed the most help in being included into the Messianic title was his suffering unto death. That Jesus should die was in itself nothing particularly amazing. But once one has proclaimed the resurrection and Jesus as the Christ, the question that seems to have immediately become problematic was why did he suffer. Already in Mark 8:31 Jesus is predicting his suffering. In Luke 24 Jesus explains to

⁵⁴ Dunn, p. 374f.

⁵⁵ Neufeld, p. 93.

his followers that the Christ had to suffer. In Acts 3:18 Peter is preaching that the Christ had to suffer according to the Scriptures. We see these ideas of suffering (παθεῖν) or dying (ἀποθνήσκω) and the Christ connected in many places in the New Testament from the earliest bipartite formulas to the later books (e.g. Luke 24:46; Acts 17:3; 26:23; Rom. 8:17; 8:34; 14:9; 1 Cor. 8:11; 15:3; 2 Cor. 1:5; Phil. 3:10; Hebr. 9:26; 1 Pet. 1:11; 2:21; 4:1) The early church obviously felt compelled to deal with this problem of the suffering Christ. The title was being defined by the church's teaching. Proclaiming Jesus as the Christ included teaching him to be the anointed one sent by God who had fulfilled the Scriptures by dying "for us" and by being raised from the dead. Side by side with this title is found another which almost seems to be a part of the confession of Jesus as the Christ, that is, Jesus as Son of God.

In examining the title Son of God as applied to Jesus one gets the feeling that he has come to the bedrock of New Testament Christology. For without it there is no confession of Jesus as Lord or Christ. Further, Luke places the origin of this title already at Jesus' birth at the announcement of the angel (Lk 1:32ff) and otherwise there is broad agreement concerning the proclamation of the Father at Jesus' baptism at the beginning of his ministry (Matt. 3:17, Mark 1:11, John 1:34ff., 2 Pet. 1:17). It is thus the only one of the main Christological titles attributed a divine origin. Its close association with the title "Christ" is seen in those locations where the New Testament writers almost make them synonyms. In Matthew's reporting of Peter's confession we have: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matt. 16:16; cf. John 6:69; Jn 11:27). Likewise the high priest asks Jesus if he is the "Christ, the Son of God." (Matt. 26:63; cf. Mk 14:61) We also find the two in parallel coming from the mouths of demons and of Satan (Matt. 4:3; Lk 4:41). And in the epistles the phrase "Jesus Christ, the Son of God" or some close variant (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:9; Rom. 1:3; Heb. 5:5; 1 Jn 1:3) occurs several times. But when did the use of this title arise. Was it used as the New Testament indicates during Jesus' life and ministry or did it first appear in the church later in the first century. The history of religions school asserts the later appearance when it says that the first century church took over ideas of the "divine man" from Hellenistic religions and applied them to Jesus and wrote them into the Scriptures. But recent research reveals that the

title “Son of God” was not commonly used to refer to the divine men of the Hellenistic religions.⁵⁶ On the other hand the idea of the Christ being the Son of God appears to have been at least a part of the already mentioned complex Jewish thought concerning the Messiah.⁵⁷ And in light of the early New Testament evidence this theory of a borrowing from the divine man idea is an extremely unlikely explanation of the facts. Even from a critical point of view there are several indications that the idea of the “Son of God” began already very early, perhaps with Jesus himself. The first is the use of the Aramaic term “*Abba*” (Mk 14:36). This phrase was used in Palestine in intimate family relationships and is unattested otherwise as being used in Jewish prayers.⁵⁸ It would seem to express Jesus’ unique and special relationship to the Father. The early use of this word and its recognition as important is also attested by the fact that Paul introduces this Aramaic phrase into his Greek epistles by referring to the Spirit of the Son in the hearts of the Christians crying “*Abba, Father*” (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15). Another important text is Matthew 11:27 (Luke 10:22) assigned by critical scholars to Q: “All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.” Even from a critical viewpoint the last part of this passage has every mark in phraseology and construction of being early and quite likely from Jesus. And though here the terms “father” and “son” may not be technical terms yet the phrase does convey the unique relationship in which Jesus stands with the Father.⁵⁹ Further Paul, in all his epistles, already applies the title “Son” without further explanation to Jesus in such a way and with such frequency that it is hard to imagine that it was not from much earlier than 50 AD. Its use in the phrase “his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:9; Rom. 1:3) indicates the use of the title alongside the other explicit confessions of the early Christians proclaiming Jesus as Christ and Lord. In the passage from Romans 1 we have an early, probably pre-Pauline, Christological idea or construction in the contrast between “made of the seed of David according

⁵⁶ Marshall, p. 113f.

⁵⁷ Moule, p. 26.

⁵⁸ Marshall, p. 46.

⁵⁹ Marshall, p. 115.

to the flesh” and “declared to be the Son of God according to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection” (cf. Rom. 9:5; 2 Cor. 5:16). The overall evidence even from the critical point of view would indicate that the idea and even the title “Son of God” as applied to Jesus played an important part in the life of the church well before Paul’s Hellenistic missions. It was one of the elements in the primitive church’s Christology. And what was the meaning of this primitive Christological element? The Gospels seem, as has been stated, to indicate the close relationship between “Christ” and “Son of God.” This is indicated further, for example, in that the title “son” occurs often in the context of “being sent” (Matt. 21:37 and parallels; John 3:16 et. al.; Rom. 8:3; Gal. 4:4). But the title “Son” also seems to cover some of the same ground as the title “Lord.” For example, the declaration of Jesus as “Son of God” occurs in the context of great miracles (Mt. 14:33; Mt. 16:16; Mk. 3:11; Mk 15:39; John 1:49) or the resurrection (Rom. 1). And so the Son is sent to suffer, be crucified and die as the Christ (Romans 8:32; Gal. 4:4; 1 Jn. 1:7) and yet the Son was raised and reigns as Lord. (1 Cor. 15:28; Col. 1:13; 1 Th. 1:10; Heb. 1:2). As Son of the Father Jesus is greater than any prophet or king (Mt. 12:41f.; Lk. 7:28; John 8:53). And it is the Father who gave his Son the office of Christ and exalted him to be Lord (Acts 2:33-36; Acts 5:31; Phil. 2:9). Moule summarizes the New Testament data concerning this title by concluding:

It is probably unrealistic to put notions of sonship into successive compartments, as though we could segregate a more or less humanistic, merely messianic use from a transcendental and theological use developing at a later state. The indications are, rather, that the words and practices of Jesus himself, together with the fact of the cross and of its sequel, presented the friends of Jesus, from the earliest days, with a highly complex, multivalent set of associations already adhering to the single word “Son.” No doubt there is development in perception. No doubt the famous phrase in Rom. 1:4, ‘declared Son of God by a mighty act in that he rose from the dead’, reflects ... the conviction that it was the aliveness of Jesus that had clinched a new understanding of his status. No doubt it was the earliest theologians of the New Testament who first sharpened the terminology. For instance, Paul though using *huios* alike for Jesus and for believers, points to the uniqueness of Christ’s sonship by using ‘adoption’ (*huiiothesia*) for the status of Christians, and ‘God’s own Son (*ho idios huios*)’ for Christ (Rom. 8:31 etc.); while the Johannine Gospel and Epistles reserve *huios* for Christ, and use words such as *teknon* for Christians. But, although a distinctiveness of status and being begins to become explicit in these various ways, the materials for it seem to be rooted in the traditions about Jesus himself.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Moule, p. 30f.

In summary then, the evidence supports the thesis that the essential elements of Jewish monotheism, recognition of Jesus' life and crucifixion as historical facts and the ascribing to Jesus the divine name and worship as the risen Christ, the Son of God, and Lord were present in the Christology of the primitive pre-Pauline church as witnessed in what she believed, taught, and confessed. From a critical viewpoint this is a rather stunning conclusion. This being said one does not deny that as time passes reflection upon these elements brought out insights of things implicit before and new language to describe these things. In fact one could characterize the Christology here as a set of beginning assertions or confessions of faith that came from the church's experience with Jesus Christ. The ascribing of the divine name and worship to Jesus leads very early, even before Paul, to the speaking of Jesus as divine, equal with God and as God (John 1:1; Romans 9:5; Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:16; Ignatius *ad Eph.* 7 & 19; *ad Rom.* 3; *ad Smyr.* 1; etc.) That Acts 20:28 can speak of 'God's own blood' is amazing and foreshadows or reflects the church's liturgy that would speak of the "God who died." And the church was steadfast in maintaining these basic assertions against the Gnostics and other sects. But as a result even within the church these uncritical statements of faith were examined and questions were asked how the human crucified Jesus and the risen divine Lord could be said to relate to each other. And when these questions were asked the road toward Nicea and later councils laid straight away before the church. In this sense we can understand most of the later Christological developments, and the trinitarian as well, as a working out, albeit with metaphysical and philosophical language, of the relationship between these basic assertions of faith which date to the earliest period of the primitive church and not to a melting-pot process of Greek Hellenistic religions. From the beginning, the gospel of the church was the teaching of the salvific deeds of the Christ; these salvific deeds led to the Christological confession of the church. The words and deeds of the Christ led at once to Gospel and Christology.

Basically, the later developments are already there in a nutshell in the Philippian hymn. This means, however, with regard to the development of all the early Church's christology, that more happened in the first twenty years than in the entire later centuries-long development of dogma.⁶¹

⁶¹ Hengel, p. 443

...

This thoroughly bold, dynamic way of thinking took place in the astonishingly short space of hardly more than fifteen years. As Paul began his great missionary journeys toward the end of the forties, it was already complete. In his letters no further christological development can be seen. The unfolding of the New Testament christology, however strange it may appear to us today, was certainly not idle speculation or haphazard mythological “wild growth.” We find rather an amazing inner consistency from the oldest Christian confession to the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel.⁶²

⁶² Hengel, p. 447.

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