ROBERT H. GUNDRY

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New Testament Essays in Support of Traditional Interpretations

Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
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Introduction

When Mohr Siebeck agreed to publish a selection of my previously published essays plus some that had not been published before, it was urged that I weave them together under a common theme. A difficult assignment, I thought, since the essays cover NT topics ranging from the biblical theological through the historical to the exegetical and from the Gospels through the Epistles to the Apocalypse. In looking over the essays, however, I detected that they all shared, more or less, the characteristic of defending traditional interpretations, usually over against new ones. Hence the subtitle, *New Testament Essays in Support of Traditional Interpretations*. These interpretations range from those in the NT itself through those in the early postapostolic church to some that have become traditional in modern study of the NT. The main title echoes the saying of Jesus recorded in Luke 5:39: "No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, *The old is better*" (KJV).

It may be thought that I support traditional interpretations because of my social location within the historic Christian faith. Well and good, but I maintain this social location because I hold that faith to be true – universally true, not just true for the confessing community to which I belong. There is room in this community, of course, for differences of interpretation so long as fundamental beliefs are not undermined. I will not try to define the line between the fundamental and the negotiable; but some of my essays, such as those that touch on questions of canon, Christology, soteriology, and resurrection, do undergird beliefs commonly accepted as of fundamental importance from the standpoint of historical theology. Readers who do not share these beliefs have their own social locations, of course. I respect those locations and hope that such readers will judge the essays herein not on the prejudicial ground of their social locations versus mine but on the ground of perceived faithfulness to the NT text. I have tried to do the same in regard to their views.

"Hermeneutic Liberty, Theological Diversity, and Historical Occasionalism in the Biblical Canon" pays homage to the Bible as a collection of documents written in and for different occasions and argues for the importance of suiting our current interpretations of the Bible to its resultant, original diversity rather than choosing a new, sleeker canon-within-the-canon or over-systematizing biblical theology at the expense of distinctive emphases found in the various parts of Scripture. Christology presents a test case.

"The Symbiosis of Theology and Genre Criticism of the Canonical Gospels" traces the history of genre criticism of the canonical Gospels, outlines the parallels between that history and developments in modern theology, and highlights the influence of the theological developments on the history and vice versa. The essay concludes that the canonical Gospels do not fit any prior literary genre very meaningfully, not even the biographical, so that the traditional titles pinned on them ever since the early Christian centuries, "The Gospel according to . . . ," suit both their uniqueness and the diversity that distinguishes them from each other. Despite the importance of the historical Jesus, moreover, the traditional Jesuses of the Gospels are theologically more important than a modernly reconstructed historical Jesus. Two addenda assess in greater detail particular examples of genre criticism (by Philip L. Shuler) and reconstruction of the historical Jesus (by N. Thomas Wright).

"The Apostolically Johannine Pre-Papian Tradition concerning the Gospels of Mark and Matthew" argues that Papias wrote ca. A.D. 110 or slightly earlier, that the elder whom Papias quotes is none other than the Apostle John, and that therefore we should accept the traditional ascriptions of Mark to John Mark and of Matthew to the Apostle Matthew and likewise accept the Petrine origin of the materials that John Mark wrote down. Talk about early tradition and the favor it deserves!

"On the Secret Gospel of Mark" takes up Helmut Koester's and John Dominic Crossan's interpretations of the Secret Gospel of Mark discovered, it is generally but not universally accepted, by Morton Smith. Both of those interpretations date the Secret Gospel of Mark earlier than canonical Mark. My analysis disputes that dating and in accordance with tradition puts canonical Mark at the start of a timeline leading to the Secret Gospel of Mark. It also offers a little noticed interpretation of the material that the Secret Gospel of Mark adds to canonical Mark, an interpretation that links up with a known development in early Alexandrian Christianity.

"Jesus' Blasphemy according to Mark 14:61b–64 and *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 7:5" harmonizes Mark's account of Jesus' Sanhedric trial with the Mishnaic rule that capital blasphemy must include a pronunciation of the tetragrammaton. It is a false appearance, I argue, that Jesus avoided pronouncing the tetragrammaton. At this point, then, the Markan and Mishnaic traditions can stand together as equally accurate and equally early.

"Matthew: Jewish-Christian or Christian-Jewish? At an Intersection of Sociology and Theology" defends the traditional view that Matthew's Gospel represents a Jewish Christianity that has broken away from Judaism over against a new view that has recently gained some popularity, viz., that Matthew's Gospel represents a Christian sect within Judaism that considered itself Judaistic, in turn was so considered by non-Christian Jews, and was thereby engaged in a struggle for dominance over Judaism.

"Salvation in Matthew" discusses various aspects of Matthean soteriology: what salvation consists in, who saves, who are saved, how and when they are saved, and the likely circumstances that prompted Matthew to write as he did concerning salvation. The discussion extends the traditional view defended in the preceding essay by saying that Matthean soteriology arose in response to non-Christian Jews' persecution of Jewish Christians that had broken away from Judaism and were therefore considered apostate.

"The Sermon on the Mount according to H. D. Betz" criticizes in detail Betz's Hermeneia commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, including the Sermon on the Plain. In that commentary he puts forward a humanistic view of Jesus' original teaching and bases this view on the novel theory that someone earlier than the evangelist Matthew composed Q by drawing on a primitive pool of Jesus' sayings, that someone then composed the Sermon on the Mount as a free-standing entity by drawing mainly on that same pool though occasionally on Q (likewise for the Sermon on the Plain), that someone substituted the Sermon on the Mount for a protosermon already contained in Q (likewise again for the Sermon on the Plain), and that without redaction Matthew incorporated into his Gospel the version of Q containing the Sermon on the Mount (likewise yet again for Luke and the Sermon on the Plain). To the contrary I argue for what by now has become a traditional view in NT studies, viz., that redaction by Matthew himself is responsible for the present shape of the Sermon on the Mount (and similarly in regard to the Sermon on the Plain in Luke's Gospel).

"Spinning the Lilies and Unraveling the Ravens: An Alternative Reading of Q 12:22b–31 and P. Oxy. 655" defends the traditional understanding that Luke 12:22b–31 and its parallel Matt 6:25–33 represent a tradition (= Q 12:22b–31) earlier than that represented in P. Oxy. 655. The opposite understanding – in favor of the Greek *Gospel of Thomas* as represented by P. Oxy. 655 – has been strongly argued by James M. Robinson and Christoph Heil. The refutation of this latter understanding includes exegeses of both Q 12:22b–31 and P. Oxy. 655.

"The Essential Physicality of Jesus' Resurrection according to the New Testament" rejects modern attempts to dematerialize the resurrection or to make it a passing accommodation to the need of eyewitnesses to see Jesus. Notwithstanding glorification, according to this essay, the NT consistently teaches that the body of Jesus that suffered death by crucifixion was raised from the dead so as to empty his tomb, that this body belongs to his very being, and that the mention in traditional creeds of "the resurrection of the flesh" corresponds to this NT teaching.

"The Inferiority of the New Perspective on Paul" criticizes E. P. Sanders' presentation of the New Perspective, as it has come to be called. In particular the essay argues against Sanders that the Apostle Paul taught staying in the new covenant by faith alone as well as getting in by faith alone, that in this respect he differed from Jewish soteriology, according to which, I argue, staying

in depends not purely on works but on a mixture of works and faith, and that for Paul good works give evidence of salvation rather than contributing to it even in part. Despite a salutary emphasis for the church on the socially unitive implications of his soteriology, then, the New Perspective looks inferior to the old one.

"The Nonimputation of Christ's Righteousness" resurrects a version of the Protestant doctrine of justification older than the one that includes an imputation of Christ's righteousness to believing sinners. The latter version arrived on the scene soon enough but not at first, and the older version has careful exegesis of the relevant Pauline texts on its side.

"The Moral Frustration of Paul before His Conversion: Sexual Lusts in Romans 7:7–25" takes the original view of Saint Augustine that that passage describes the moral frustration of a non-Christian and defends an old interpretation, viz., that Paul is describing his own (though typical) experience on coming to sexual maturity and adult responsibility in Judaism.

"Style and Substance in Philippians 2:6–11" interprets the passage more in terms of an emphasis on Jesus' crucifixion as a contrast to his exaltation than in terms of an emphasis on the incarnation as such a contrast. This emphasis on the crucifixion represents an earlier tradition in the NT than would an emphasis on the incarnation.

"The Hellenization of Dominical Tradition and Christianization of Jewish Tradition in the Eschatology of 1–2 Thessalonians" defends the traditional understanding of Jesus' return as a descent all the way to earth and rejects recent attempts to make Paul teach that Jesus will descend only part of the way, turn around in midair, and take Christians back to heaven with him.

"Is John's Gospel Sectarian?" treats the Fourth Gospel as sectarian in the sense most commonly accepted by modern sociologists. Such a treatment has become traditional in Johannine studies but is now encountering some criticisms, or is at least undergoing considerable qualifications. (Sectarianism makes "mainline" and "worldly" Christians uneasy.) My essay counters those criticisms and qualifications.[1]

"How the Word in John's Prologue Pervades the Rest of the Fourth Gospel" opposes the view that Word-Christology disappears from this Gospel after 1:18. On the contrary, the enormous emphasis that then falls on Jesus' words – an emphasis using a wide vocabulary referring to them – shows that in line with the traditionally accepted unity of 1:1–21:25 (or at least 20:31) John carries the Christology throughout his Gospel.

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[1] In large part this essay responds to a forthcoming essay by Miroslav Volf, who criticizes my earlier work on this topic but for whose abilities and work I have immense admiration. In friendly fashion he and I have discussed this topic and other matters in face-to-face conversations that at least for me have proved invaluable even when disagreements persist. Thanks to him for graciously sending me a copy of his essay prior to its publication.

"The Sense and Syntax of John 3:14–17 with Special Reference to the Use of οὕτως... ὥστε in John 3:16" examines the meaning of this locution in ancient Greek literature and concludes that in accord with its traditional meaning the Fourth Evangelist and his original audience would have understood the locution not in terms of degree (here, of God's love for the world) but in terms of an aforementioned manner (οὕτως) and a parallelistic addition (ὥστε). Thus the passage as a whole divides into a complex sentence of two main clauses or a pair of independent sentences, with the division between them occurring in the middle of John 3:16.

"Angelomorphic Christology in the Book of Revelation" argues in the first place that such a Christology crops up repeatedly in the book of Revelation, most clearly in ch. 10, and secondly that it represents an early christological tradition rather than a Christology that blossomed not till later than the NT.

"The New Jerusalem: People as Place, Not Place for People" adopts an interpretation of the city as its people rather than their place of residence just as the OT often uses place names for people rather than for geographical locations. This interpretation relates to the mutual indwelling of Christ and believers as taught in John 14–15.

These essays vary in length. Some are heavily documented, others only lightly. Without regard to length or documentation I have selected each of them according to what seems to me their value. Thus some review essays have made it into the collection, and here and there an addendum has been attached to enhance value. Never before published are the essays on hermeneutic liberty, theological diversity, and historical occasionalism and on the sectarianism of the Fourth Gospel, though the latter defends against criticism a position taken in an earlier publication. Most of the essays have undergone updating and other revision, sometimes very extensively, as in the essays on Rom 7:7–25 and the eschatology of 1–2 Thessalonians. The essay on the pre-Papian tradition represents a combination of arguments presented in my commentaries on Mark and Matthew (see below for bibliographical information) plus a new account-taking of some criticisms recently lodged against those arguments. The critique of Koester's and Crossan's treatments of the Secret Gospel of Mark likewise appeared in my commentary on Mark but, I am afraid, lies buried there in such a welter of other discussions as to have escaped the notice of even some specialists in the field. Material in the essay on Jesus' blasphemy appeared in somewhat scattered fashion in my commentary on Mark but has its true origin in a carefully concatenated paper delivered orally at an annual meeting of the SBL, and the present version contains a large amount of new material related especially to recent discussions of the same topic by Darrell Bock, Adela Yarbro Collins, and D. Moody Smith. The discussion of Matthew as Jewish-Christian or Christian-Jewish melds together previously published critiques of presentations by Anthony Saldarini and others, and the discussion of angelomorphic

Christology similarly melds together previously published and unpublished materials. The essay on salvation in Matthew includes a controversial aside on what I take to be Matthew's very uncomplimentary portrayal of the Apostle Peter. Following the defense of Jesus' resurrection as physical, and essentially so, is an addendum in which I ask Christian philosophers and scientists as well as theologians and biblical scholars who are advocating "nonreductive physicalism" what I think to be questions damaging to their view. The addendum has had no prior publication. Given the vast amount of literature recently published for and against the New Perspective on Paul, I had expected to do major revisions of the essay on that topic. But rereading the essay led me to believe that apart from some additional remarks it has retained its viability pretty much as is. The essay on the nonimputation of Christ's righteousness contains new material answering objections lodged by D. A. Carson against the original presentation. The addendum on "Abiding in the New Jerusalem" likewise contains material never published before.

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16, and 19, for which permissions were unnecessary. Permissions included the right of revision. Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

The SBL Handbook of Style (ed. P. H. Alexander et al.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999) has guided me in most matters of abbreviation, format, and such like though I have made sparing use of ibid. and loc. cit. and rejected as ugly the use of an em-dash to indicate a transition from one biblical chapter to another. Also, to a significant extent I have adopted the style of "open punctuation," have occasionally used ff. for an indefinite number of following pages, and to conserve space have usually omitted the subtitles of books.

Finally, my thanks to Mohr Siebeck for undertaking the publication of these essays in WUNT, and in particular to Prof. Dr. Jörg Frey, Dr. Henning Ziebritzki, and Mr. Matthias Spitzner. I take great delight in dedicating this volume to my wife, Lois Anne Gundry, to whose initial and ongoing encouragement and to whose constant help and love I owe whatever scholarly success the contents of the volume may represent (dedication written on the occasion of our Fiftieth Wedding Anniversary).

1. Hermeneutic Liberty, Theological Diversity, and Historical Occasionalism in the Biblical Canon

The topic of hermeneutics in the biblical canon offers a cornucopia of possible discussions not only concerning the interpretation of the OT in the NT (which interpretation itself offers multiple possibilities ranging from quotations through allusions to imagery and theological, ethical, and literary echoes) but also concerning biblical interpretation of originally noncanonical material, such as oral traditions and written sources (e.g., the Book of Jasher [Josh 10:13; 2 Sam 1:18], the Book of the Wars of the Lord [Num 21:14], the Edict of Cyrus [Ezra 1:1–4], a putative Q [cf. Luke 1:1–4], the *Assumption of Moses* [Jude 9], and *1 Enoch* [Jude 14–15]), later OT interpretation of earlier OT material (e.g., of Samuel-Kings by the Chronicler and of Jeremiah by Daniel), and later NT interpretation of earlier NT material (e.g., of Mark by Matthew and Luke and probably of Jude by 2 Peter). Thoroughness of discussion would require volumes, of course, so that the confines of an essay combine with current concerns to produce a stress on the element of liberty as characteristic of hermeneutics in the biblical canon, especially the NT canon.

Not only when it is artistic but also when it is argumentive and even polemic, hermeneutics in the biblical canon often exhibits – perhaps exhibits more often than not – a freedom that pays little or no attention to what seems by context to have made up the originally intended meaning of used materials.[1] One might say that artistry counts as argument. For example, in his polemically forged argument against Judaizers the Apostle Paul interprets the singular of "seed" in the Abrahamic covenant individualistically of Jesus the Christ ("It does not say, 'And to the seeds,' as concerning many, but as concerning one: 'And to your seed,' who is Christ" [Gal 3:16]) whereas contextual references in the OT to making Abraham's seed as innumerable as the dust of the earth (Gen 13:15–16), the stars in heaven (Gen 15:5; 22:17), and sand on the seashore (Gen 22:17) and to his becoming the father of kings and of a multitude of nations, so that his seed consists of "their generations" (Gen 17:4–7), guarantee an originally intended collective rather than individualistic singular. Paul himself reverts to the collec-

[1] So long as those who argue for the illegitimacy or impossibility of ascertaining an originally intended meaning expect me to understand their position and arguments, I will speak shamelessly of such meaning.

tive a few verses later ("then you [pl.] are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise" [Gal 3:29b]), but even there with an interpretation strange to the OT. For the promise to Abraham originally had to do with his physical seed; but Paul interprets that promise in terms of being "in Christ Jesus" and "of Christ," and this "through faith in Christ Jesus" regardless of physical ancestry (Gal 3:26–29).[2]

Again, Paul identifies "the word" that "is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (Rom 10:8b, quoting Deut 30:14) with "the word of faith which we preach, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord..." (Rom 10:8c–9) in contradistinction to "the righteousness [that comes] from the law" and rests on "doing" (Rom 10:5). Yet in Deut 30:8–20 the word that is so near as to be in your mouth and heart is nothing else than the very "book of the law" made up of Yahweh's "commandments" and "statutes" that require to be "done" and "obeyed." Paul even applies to Gentile Christians ("whom also he ['God'] called... from among Gentiles") passages from Hosea ("as also it says in Hosea, 'I will call "Not My People" [Gentiles as well as Jews in Paul] "My People," and [I will call] "Not Beloved" [again Gentiles as well as Jews in Paul] "Beloved"...'" [Rom 9:25–26]) which in Hosea refer solely to Israel (Hos 2:23; 1:10), and he immediately follows up with a quotation from Isaiah concerning the remnant of Jewish Christians that are to be distinguished from the Gentile Christians to whom he has applied the passages from Hosea ("But Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, '... the remnant will be saved'" [Rom 9:27–29, quoting Isa 1:9]).

Biblical examples of such free interpretation could be multiplied indefinitely. In Jesus' genealogy, Matthew changes the royal name "Asa" to the levitical name "Asaph" (1 Chron 3:10; Matt 1:8 according to the best textual tradition), apparently by anticipation of quoting a psalm of Asaph (Ps 78:2; Matt 13:35 – though with reference to Jesus' parables instead of Israel's history, as in the psalm); changes the royal name "Amon" to the prophetic name "Amos" (1 Chron 3:14; Matt 1:10 according to the best textual tradition), perhaps by anticipation of an allusion to Amos 3:5 in Matt 10:29; and – despite writing about "*all* the generations" from Abraham to David, from David to the Babylonian deportation, and from that deportation to the Christ – omits four generations between King David and the deportation to Babylon, probably to get a triple emphasis on fourteen as the numerical value of David's name written with three Hebrew consonants since Matthew has just identified "Jesus Christ" as "David's son" (1:1, 6–11, 17; cf. Matthew's listing eight fewer generations than

[2] C. J. Collins argues that Paul cites Gen 22:18 and that because of the singular of the pronoun "its" referring to "seed" in the preceding verse and because of an individualistic allusion in Ps 72:17 Paul's individualistic interpretation matches the original meaning of Gen 22:18 ("Galatians 3:16: What Kind of Exegete Was Paul?" *TynBul* 54 [2003]: 75–86). But Collins' view requires an unannounced shift from an admittedly collective seed in Gen 22:17a–b to a strictly individual seed in Gen 22:17c–18.

Luke does – never mind the vast differences in names – from the Babylonian deportation to Jesus). Similarly, in quoting Mic 5:2, Matthew denies Bethlehem's smallness ("you are by no means least" [2:6]) where Micah affirms or implies it ("which are little" or "Are you little? Yet..."). For Micah's demographic estimate of Bethlehem as small in population this reversal substitutes a theological estimate of Bethlehem as large in importance: Jesus the Messiah was born there. Yet Matthew has put this christianly inspired reinterpretation of Mic 5:2 on the lips of "all the chief priests and scribes of the people" (2:4), who elsewhere in Matthew function as Jesus' bitter enemies!

If we take the majority view that Matthew used Mark, Matthew turns the Sanhedrin's *dismissal* of witnesses against Jesus because their testimony proved false (Mark 14:55–56) into the Sanhedrin's *seeking* false testimony (Matt 26:59). This change forms part of Matthew's general program of heightening the guilt of Jewish leaders. By contrast, Chronicles paints King David much more flatteringly than Samuel-Kings does. In Samuel and Kings, which appear among the Former Prophets in the HB, David's faults stand out as objects of prophetic critique. But in Chronicles, written later from a priestly and levitical standpoint, the faults of David fade in favor of his preparations for the building of God's temple, where priests and levites served.

Likewise, Joshua 1–12 presents a theologically idealized picture of the conquest of Canaan by Israel, a conquest in which all Israel conquered all Palestine from the Lebanon to the southern desert and ruthlessly exterminated the entire population of Canaanites in accordance with God's command (see esp. 10:40–43; 11:16–23), so that in chs. 13 ff. the Israelites have merely to settle in their tribal allotments. But the historical reality appears in Judges, which emphatically describes the conquest as only partial (see esp. 1:1–2:5). A united body of Israel does not seize the land through a single series of major campaigns, as in Joshua; rather, we read about a variety of campaigns conducted by solitary tribes, sometimes by a pair of tribes, with mixed success and failure. Not only do these tribes fail to exterminate all the Canaanites, but also some tribes live peacefully with them. The large cities (with a few exceptions), the fertile valleys, the seaboard plain, and scattered enclaves stay in Canaanite hands. The silences and hints of less-than-total success in Josh 11:13, 22; 13:2–6 are hardly recognizable apart from a knowledge of the historical reality described in Judges and reflected elsewhere in the OT.

Whole books could be written, *have* been written, on the phenomenon of such interpretive liberty in the biblical canon. Of course, attempts have been made to minimize the phenomenon, as though it characterizes only a few passages in the Bible, and to provide benign explanations of various sorts: literary (a mere allusion may be more evocative or decorative than interpretive), typological (a symbolic interpretation does not deny an originally intended nonsymbolic meaning), theological (Jewish rejection of Jesus reorientated the meaning

of the OT toward the church), and other. But none of these explanations have succeeded in hiding from those who read without blinders that biblical writers often interpret their material with a liberty that goes far beyond original intention, distorts that material, and sometimes contradicts it, i.e., distorts and contradicts it *if* we assume a limitation of legitimate interpretation to the accurate recounting of originally intended meaning and to the application of that meaning to circumstances such as those that were originally addressed.

For Christians concerned to maintain a historically and scripturally reliable basis for their faith, the canonical phenomenon of playing fast and loose with factual data and authorial intention becomes most critical in the NT interpretation of Christ, or of what has traditionally been called his "person and work" and has more recently been called the "Christ-event." Here, then, let us spell out some theological diversity that emerges from this hermeneutic liberty.

Most Christians think that the NT teaches the heavenly preexistence of Jesus as the second person of the Trinity, his coming down to earth by way of the incarnation, virgin birth as the means of incarnation, his holy life, atoning death, and bodily resurrection, his ascension back to heaven from where he had come in the first place, his present session at the right hand of God the Father, and his future coming to raise the dead and judge the world in righteousness. The creeds of the church illustrate and fortify this understanding of NT teaching about Jesus. Take for example the old Roman Creed, forerunner of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in God the Father Almighty and in Christ Jesus, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Holy Spirit and Mary the Virgin, who under Pontius Pilate was crucified and buried; the third day he rose from the dead, ascended to the heavens, [and] sat down at God's right hand, from where he will come to judge the living and the dead...." Other creeds follow suit and add details.

But Christians have put together this creedal portrait of Jesus with bits and pieces gathered from different parts of the NT. It is a composite portrait never found at one location in the NT. Jesus' preexistence comes from here, his virgin birth from there, his ascension from elsewhere, and so on.

The canonical Gospels provide an example. Mark starts with Jesus' baptism and ends with Jesus' resurrection. Matthew starts with the genealogy and birth of Jesus and ends with his appearances after the resurrection. Luke starts with the birth of John the Baptist as well as with that of Jesus and, following appearances of the risen Jesus, ends with the ascension. John the evangelist starts with Jesus' eternal preexistence and ends with appearances of the risen Jesus following his ascension.

If we had only the Gospel of Mark we would never know about Jesus' preexistence, incarnation, or virgin birth; and we would know about his ascension only by the implication of his statement that he was going to sit at God's right hand and then return with clouds and great glory. We would know that Jesus

was God's Son at his baptism but we would not know of any earlier divine sonship. If we had the Gospels of Matthew and Luke as well as of Mark we would know that the divine sonship of Jesus dated back to his conception and birth, and we would know that his conception and birth were virginal. But we would not know that he came down from heaven as preexistent deity to be conceived and born of the Virgin Mary. For all we would know, he started to exist at his virginal conception and birth. In fact, we would naturally assume so.

If we had the Gospel of Mark alone we would think that Jesus was God's Son only because the Holy Spirit entered him at his baptism. If we had the Gospel of Matthew alone we would think that Jesus was God's Son because of a unique action taken by the Holy Spirit on the Virgin Mary, and this in fulfillment of OT prophecy (Matt 1:20–23; cf. Isa 7:14). If we had only the Gospel of Luke and its companion volume the Acts of the Apostles we would think of Jesus as God's Son because the virgin birth represents not a unique work of the Holy Spirit but a divine generation like that of Adam, father of the human race. For Luke traces the genealogy of Jesus God's son back to Adam, whom he also calls God's son (Luke 3:38), and quotes Paul as saying on Mars' Hill that God made every nation of human beings from this one (apparently Adam, God's son), so that all of us human beings are God's offspring, God's generation (N.B.: generation, not creation) in accordance with the statement of Greek poets such as Aratus of Soli, whom Paul quotes: "as also some of your own poets have said, 'For also we are his offspring [Greek: γένος, from which we get the English word "generation"]'" (Acts 17:26, 28–29; Aratus *Phaenomena* 5; cf. Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*).

Aratus, a Cilician, lived ca. 315–240 B.C. Before him, Plato had alluded ironically to earlier human beings who, doubtless knowing well their own ancestors (προγόνους, "progenitors"), declared themselves the descendants (ἐκγόνοις) of gods (*Tim.* 40D). And Dio Chrysostom of Prusa, a youth during Paul's apostolic ministry, referred to the universally recognized and innately known truth of God's kinship (ξυγγένειαν, "family relationship" or, more literally, "cogeneration") with the human race, so that we are "filled with the divine nature" and God is our "forefather" (προπάτορος [*Discourse* 12.27–28]), "our first and immortal parent" (γονέως), called "paternal (πατρῷον) Zeus" (*Discourse* 12.42). Conversely, Dio also speaks of the kinship (συγγένειαν) of human beings with the gods (*Discourse* 12.61). Furthermore, Zeus and the other gods love human beings as being the gods' relatives (ξυγγενεῖς) inasmuch as human beings are the offspring (γένος) of the gods, not of the Titans or of the Giants (other figures in Greek mythology – *Discourse* 30.26). At some expense to the doctrine of creation, in other words, Luke-Acts assimilates the Christology of divine sonship to the old, continuing, and widespread Greek notion of the divine generation of the whole human race, so that Jesus' divine sonship becomes the example par excellence of all our divine sonship.

Of the four canonical Gospels, only that of John would give us reason to believe in Jesus as God's Son because he preexisted as divine. But John would give us no reason to believe that the preexistent Son of God became incarnate through the Virgin Mary. For not only does John omit the virgin birth. He also lets stand two references to Jesus as the son of Joseph (1:45; 6:42). Even though those references may represent characteristically Johannine irony, the irony does not need to imply the virgin birth, only that unbelievers knew Jesus as the son of Joseph without knowing him as much more importantly the Son of God.

Spatially, the narratives in Mark and Matthew start and end with Jesus on earth, though there is a reference to his being in heaven later on and coming back from heaven. The narrative in Luke likewise starts with Jesus on earth but ends with his ascension to heaven. Only John speaks about a down-and-up: Jesus comes down from heaven, lives on earth for a while, and goes back up to heaven, though in John he goes back up on the first Easter Sunday, not forty days later as in Luke-Acts, and then commutes back from heaven to earth to make two or three further appearances on earth whereas in Luke-Acts the risen Jesus stays on earth forty days to make his appearances before ascending to heaven.[3]

We find the down-and-up of preexistence, incarnation, and exaltation back to heaven also in Paul's Epistles (see esp. Phil 2:6–11). But like John, he says nothing about a virgin birth as the means of incarnation. If we had only his letters we would assume that God united his deity with a Jesus born naturally of two human parents, not supernaturally by an action of the Holy Spirit on the Virgin Mary. The author of Hebrews says that all things came into being both for Christ and through Christ and that Christ partook of our blood and flesh (Heb 1:2; 2:14). So Hebrews too teaches the preexistence and incarnation of

[3] I have made an inference here, but hardly a greater one than the inferring of Jesus' ascension in Matthew and Mark from the prediction of his second coming: (1) John 7:37–39 says that the Spirit was not yet [*sc.* given] because Jesus was not yet glorified. (2) His glorification included his heavenly exaltation following the earthly ministry (see, e.g., John 17:5: "And now you, Father, glorify me alongside yourself with the glory that I had alongside you before the world existed"). (3) But Jesus bestowed the Spirit already on the evening of the first Easter Sunday (John 20:22). (4) Furthermore, on the first Easter Sunday morning Jesus told Mary Magdalene to stop touching him because he had not yet ascended to the Father, and he ordered her to go tell his disciples that he was ascending to his and their Father and God (John 20:17). (5) Only a week later Jesus invited Thomas to touch him (John 20:26–27). (6) So according to John, Jesus must have ascended in the meantime – more exactly, between his command in the morning that Mary stop touching him and his bestowal of the Spirit during the evening of the same day. Luke 24:50–51 is sometimes taken to put the ascension on the first Easter; but there is no chronological marker in that account itself. Moreover, going after nightfall from Jerusalem to Bethany and back seems unlikely (cf. Luke 24:29, 33); and Acts 1:1–11, referring back to Luke's first volume, adds many more details about the ascension, including forty days of preceding ministry by the risen Jesus. Cf. Cornelis Bennema, "The Giving of the Spirit in John's Gospel – A New Proposal?" *EvQ* 74 (2002): 201–11; idem, *The Power of Saving Wisdom* (WUNT 2/148; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 17, 30, 144, 153, 158, 205, 210–12, 253–54. Bennema is concerned to show that Jesus "gave over the Spirit" symbolically in John 19:30 and actually in 20:22 but that the Spirit was active in a limited way earlier.

Jesus but not his virgin birth. To note this omission is not to say that John, Paul, and the author of Hebrews denied the virgin birth or would have denied it had they known about it; only that they did not know about it or, if they did know about it, that they ignored it despite their speaking about the incarnation. And in this connection Hebrews' development of the incarnation into an interpretation of Jesus as our great high priest has nothing quite like it in the rest of the NT.

But there is diversity not only in *what* the NT says about Jesus. There is diversity also in the *chronology* of what it says about Jesus. For example, the preexistent Christ appears already in Hebrews and the Epistles of Paul, written at least mostly before the Gospels were written – and even earlier if in the famous passage Phil 2:6–11 Paul is quoting a Christian hymn (a popular though not undisputed hypothesis[4]). Yet the preexistent Christ fades from Mark, Matthew, and Luke to reappear not until the Gospel of John, most probably the last of the canonical Gospels to have been written.

And right among the Gospels we should note this difference, a huge one: In Mark, Matthew, and Luke Jesus proclaims the kingdom of God. He does not proclaim himself. Except for the more mystifying than clarifying phrase, "Son of Man," he does not even identify himself, at least not till Passion Week. When he calls himself the Son in relation to God his Father he appears to be praying to God or meditating to himself, not identifying himself to his disciples, much less to the multitudes ("At that time Jesus answered and said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth .... Yes, Father .... All things have been given over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; neither does anyone know the Father except the Son and the one to whom the Son wishes to reveal him" [Matt 11:27–28; cf. Luke 10:21–22]). When in Mark and Luke Peter identifies Jesus as the Christ, Jesus does not even acknowledge the identification, but merely tells the disciples (who alone are present) not to speak about him. Then he goes on to predict his death and resurrection as the Son of Man, not as the Christ (Mark 8:27–31; Luke 9:18–22). Later he delivers a glancing reference to the disciples' belonging to Christ (Mark 9:41), but he does not acknowledge his christhood and divine sonship outright till standing trial before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem the eve of his crucifixion (Mark 14:61–62).

In Matt 16:13–20 Jesus describes Peter's confession as deriving from a divine revelation to Peter. But Jesus still commands the disciples not to tell anyone that he is the Christ, nor does he himself tell anyone. And when standing trial before the Sanhedrin in Matthew he does not say, "I am," to the high priest's question whether he is the Christ, the Son of God, as he does say in Mark. Instead, he answers, "*You* have said [that I am]" (Matt 26:63–64). Why does he not say, "I am," as in Mark? Because the high priest has put Jesus under oath ("I adjure you," the high priest has said), as he has *not* done in Mark's account; and Mat-

[4] I myself doubt this hypothesis; see below, p. 286.

thew will not let Jesus violate his own teaching against oaths by making an oathful self-declaration of his christhood and divine sonship. We find Jesus' teaching against oaths not in Mark but in Matt 5:33–37 (cf. Jas 5:12). So ethics swallows up Christology by making Jesus say less about himself in Matthew than he does in Mark. In Luke 22:66–71 he refuses to tell the Sanhedrin whether he is the Christ and says that the identification of him as the Son of God belongs to their question, not to anything he has said.[5]

In John, however, this proclaimer of God's kingdom turns into a proclaimer of himself. Jesus does not merely acknowledge his special identity. He advertises it. He does not limit the audience of this advertisement to his disciples. He advertises his identity to the multitudes. He does not wait till late in his ministry to launch his campaign of self-advertisement. He starts right away. Though he uses the standard terms "Christ" and "Son of God," by no means does he confine his self-identification to these terms.[6] Rather, the Jesus of John heaps on himself one high-sounding designation after another: the one on whom the angels of God ascend and descend to and from the open heaven, i.e., Jacob's ladder (1:51), the one who himself has descended from heaven and ascended to it (3:13), the giver of eternal life (5:21), judge of the whole human race (5:22, 27), bread of life (6:35), light of the world (8:12), I AM (8:58), good shepherd (10:11), he who is one with the Father, making himself equal with God (10:30–33), the one who raises himself as well as everybody else from the dead (10:17–18 with 5:25–26), the resurrection and the life (11:25), the way, the truth, and the life (14:6).

And in addition to all these self-advertisements by Jesus, John has others recognize and advertise Jesus' identity, again from the very start, beginning with the Baptist's double declaration, "Behold, the Lamb of God" (1:29, 36). The Baptist even testifies to Jesus' preexistence: "The one who is coming after me ranks ahead of me because he existed before me" (1:15). This advertisement of Jesus' identity by others continues with the first disciples' declarations, already on the occasion of their becoming disciples, that Jesus is not only a rabbi, a teacher, but also the Messiah, the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets, the Son of God, and the King of Israel – a veritable laundry list of honorific designations straightaway in the first chapter of John's Gospel. No waiting till the middle of Jesus' ministry as in Mark, Matthew, and Luke. In fact, from the very first sign which Jesus performs in John, the turning of water to wine at Cana of Galilee – from that very first sign onward he is making public revelation of his glory as the incarnate Word who was with God in the beginning and was God (2:11: "This beginning of signs Jesus performed in Cana of Gali-

[5] See further below, pp. 98–110.

[6] In Jewish usage, of course, a messianic application of the phrase "Son of God" did not connote deity.

lee and manifested his glory, and his disciples believed in him"; cf. 1:1, 14; 9:3; 11:4, 40).

Since Jesus does not proclaim himself in Mark, Matthew, and Luke he does not tell anybody to believe in him. Instead, he tells people to believe in the gospel of God, i.e., in the good news that God's rule has come near (Mark 1:14–15: "Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God and saying, 'The time is fulfilled and the rule of God has come near; believe in the gospel"). Jesus does refer in Mark 9:42 par. Matt 18:6 to little ones who believe in him, but even that reference does not constitute a "call" to believe in him. On the other hand, since he proclaims himself all over the map in John's Gospel, there Jesus repeatedly tells people of the necessity to believe in him if they are to have eternal life: "[The crowd] said to him, 'What should we do that we might work the works of God?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom that one has sent" (6:29); "for this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life" (6:40); "for if you do not believe that I AM [N.B. the divine title; cf. Exod 3:14 and John 8:58], you will die in your sins" (8:24); "the one who believes in me will live even though that one dies, and everyone who is living and believes in me will never die" (11:25–26); "you believe in God, believe also in me" (14:1; see also 6:35; 7:38; 9:35–38; 10:38; 11:28; 12:44, 46; 13:19; 14:10–11; 16:30–31).

So a close look at NT interpretation of Jesus' person and work exposes a liberty that issues in striking diversity. Paul said that he became all things to all people that by all means he might save some (1 Cor 9:19–23). We might say that the authors of the NT made Jesus all things to all people that by all means he might save some. And this tailoring, if we may call it such, was prompted by the various and shifting circumstances of audiences that those authors had in view.

Because of persecution coming from the Roman Caesars or about to come from them on Christians living in the province of Asia the book of Revelation portrays Jesus as a conquering hero, riding a warhorse, the lion of Judah, and also a lamb, but one with seven horns with which at his return he will gore the persecutors of his people (Rev 5:1–7; 19:11–16). Matthew's church too is suffering persecution, but not from the Roman Caesars; rather, from Jewish synagogues. So he portrays Jesus as meek and mild, riding humbly on a donkey, a model of nonretaliation in accordance with his own teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:5, 38–48; 21:1–5). The superpower of the Caesars made it useless to attempt retaliation against them; so Revelation could only give hope for the future. But retaliation against the synagogues might seem feasible right now; so Matthew portrays Jesus, not in the way of Revelation, which might incite retaliation, but quite oppositely in a way designed to counteract the temptation to retaliate.

The particular circumstances in and for which Paul wrote differ from one epistle to another, but in general he wrote as the apostle to Gentiles to predominantly Gentile Christians, whose background included pagan cults such as the

mystery religions that featured a divine lord. So Paul presents Jesus as Lord of the Christian cult ("cult" in its technical sense of a system for worshiping a deity). To this end, Paul concentrates on Jesus' death, resurrection, and exaltation and pays almost no attention to the Christology of Jesus' earthly ministry and very little to that of Jesus' preexistence and incarnation. After all, the lords of the pagan cults, over against whom Paul puts Jesus (1 Cor 8:5–6: "For... just as there are... many lords, yet for us there is... one Lord, Jesus Christ") – these lords of the pagan cults did not become human beings and lead earthly lives that could have elicited very much interest from Paul in Jesus' preexistence, incarnation, and earthly ministry. But the mythology concerning those pagan lords did include their death and revival in the underworld. The Jesus of Paul goes one better by rising bodily from the dead and enjoying exaltation in heaven.

On the other hand, Luke writes for an audience of sophisticated Gentiles like the "most excellent Theophilus" whom he addresses (1:1–4), apparently God-fearers, high-minded people distrustful of polytheism and more interested in human beings than in cultic deities, in humanity than in divinity. So Luke humanizes the divinity of Jesus by drawing a parallel between the divine sonship of Jesus and the divine sonship of Adam and thus derivatively the divine sonship of the whole human race. He ascribes to Jesus an ideal human development: "Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and human beings" (Luke 2:52). That is to say, he grew intellectually, physically, spiritually, and socially – a full-orbed human development such as would have drawn admiration even in the gymnasium at Athens. He displayed precocity at the age of twelve when in the temple he amazed scholars with his understanding and answers (2:46–47). A child prodigy! As an adult, he embodied the loftiest ideals of human being. He exhibited great breadth of human sympathy – for tax collectors and sinners, Samaritans, women, widows – yet moved easily among the high and mighty and wealthy. The Jesus of Luke is cosmopolitan, attractive, approachable, convivial, the kind you would like to eat dinner with and then tarry at table for conversation and drinks till midnight, as in fact people do with Luke's Jesus in accordance with the symposiums characteristic of Greek culture.

The circumstances of John's writing differed radically. He wrote – I think it has been established well enough, though some entertain reservations – during the rising tide of Gnosticism, which denied the humanity of Jesus Christ either by making the incarnation only apparent (docetism)[7] or by distinguishing a divine spirit, Christ, from a human being, Jesus, and saying that the divine spirit came on the human being not till the latter's baptism and left before the crucifixion (Cerinthianism).[8] Yet other Gnostics said that Simon of Cyrene not only carried Jesus' cross but also died on it in place of Jesus.[9]

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[7] Ign., *Trall* 10:1

[8] Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.26.1.

[9] See esp. Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.24.4–6; 3.11.1; *Treat. Seth* VII.2 56. The argument that un-

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