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New Testament Christology in its Hellenistic Reception*

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This survey provides a sort of 'counterpoint' to the way in which the history of research has actually gone. In reaction to the 'Religionsgeschichtliche Schule', nowadays the Jewish origins of NT Christology are usually pointed out. But when we pay attention to its 'reception' in Greco-Roman culture, some of the old findings may still prove useful. This article seeks to check this, taking into account especially the alternative models of explanation offered by the 'New Religionsgeschichtliche Schule'.

On asking the right questions

The programmatic writing of the 'Religionsgeschichtliche Schule', H. Gunkel's book *Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verständnis des Neuen Testaments*,[1] considered early Christianity a 'syncretistic religion' with Hellenistic and oriental influences, the mixing bowl being 'late Judaism'. Reacting to this movement most twentieth-century exegetes, especially after World War II, underlined its thorough Jewishness and its continuity with the Hebrew Bible. Suffice it to mention M. Hengel[2] as one of the most prominent exponents of this trend. He employs a kind of double strategy to avoid the contrasting tags 'Jewish–Palestinian' vs. 'Hellenistic' and to avoid the thesis of a substantial Hellenization of Christianity. On the one hand he points to the penetration of Hellenism which had already taken place in the Palestine of Jesus' time and to the early co-existence of a 'Hellenistic' wing with the Hebrew community of Christians in Jerusalem. On the other hand this group, according to Hengel and

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1 H. Gunkel, *Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verständnis des Neuen Testaments* (FRLANT 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, ²1910); see his conclusion on p. 95.

2 M. Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus* (WUNT 10; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], ³1988); idem, 'Zwischen Jesus und Paulus', *ZTK* 72 (1975) 151–206; idem, *Judaica et Hellenistica: Kleine Schriften I* (WUNT 90; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1996).

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A. M. Schwemer,[3] was also very influential in the mixed community of Antioch which therefore should not be considered 'creative' in Christology. In any case, the 'Hellenists' are supposed to have addressed not Syrians, but Greeks. And these were not just pagans, but – as is now usually pointed out – to a large extent Godfearers, prepared for a message whose background was Jewish. Thus Hengel wants to demonstrate that what seems to divide most Jews and Christians, namely Christology, was basically Jewish and in no way syncretistic, provided one conceives of Judaism as sufficiently rich and creative.[4] In this last view he joins a recent movement which was called by one of its leaders 'The New Religionsgeschichtliche Schule'.[5] There, a new way is proposed to reduce the distance between Hellenistic Christianity, openly confessing the divinity of Christ, and Judaism: this Judaism was not uniformly monotheistic, but there were always currents which recognized in the principal angel a 'second god'.[6] This goes with the attempt to show that traditions about angels had a significant impact on the early expressions of Christology.[7]

On the other hand, in the area of Christology, a development conditioned by Christianity's departure from its linguistic base in Palestine is undeniable. The theological discussion bears only on the question of whether this development was from seed into plant or if we have to do with a real mutation, conditioned by the changed environment.[8] Two commonly accepted examples of this would be

3 M. Hengel and A. M. Schwemer, *Paulus zwischen Damaskus und Antiochien* (WUNT 108; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1998), esp. 285–6, 300–12, 416–33.

4 Cf. his lecture, originally given in Tel Aviv in 1997: 'Das früheste Christentum als eine jüdische messianische und universalistische Bewegung', *Judaica, Hellenistica et Christiana: Kleine Schriften II* (WUNT 109; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1999) 200–18, esp. 209.

5 Cf. J. E. Fossum, 'The New *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*: The Quest for Jewish Christology', *SBL.SP* (1991) 638–46.

6 Representative are M. Barker, *The Great Angel* (London: SPCK, 1992) and J. E. Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord* (WUNT 36; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1985). Critical is L. W. Hurtado, *One God One Lord* (London: SCM, 1988), and, from another point of view, P. G. Davis, 'Divine Agents, Mediators, and New Testament Christology', *JTS* 45 (1994) 479–503; for a valuable assessment cf. L. W. Hurtado, 'What Do We Mean by "First-Century Jewish Monotheism" ', *SBL.SP* (1993) 348–68.

7 Cf. the history of research in C. A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology. Antecedents and Early Evidence* (AGJU 42; Leiden/New York/Köln: Brill, 1998) 7–25. Gieschen gives a systematization of his master J. E. Fossum's work; he fails, however, to prove that the angelomorphic nature of abstract nouns like 'the name', 'the glory of God' was fixed already in Paul's time. Cf. the review of S. Vollenweider, *TLZ* 124 (1999) 146–8, who is not convinced of the basic concept; D. D. Hannah, *Michael and Christ: Michael Traditions and Angel Christology in Early Christianity* (WUNT 2. 109; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1999) thinks these elements of minor importance for emerging Christology.

8 Cf. J. D. G. Dunn, 'The Making of Christology – Evolution or Unfolding?', *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ* (ed. J. B. Green and M. Turner; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994) 437–52, with representative works for both models.

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the use of the titles 'Son of Man' and 'Christ': the Aramaic idiom 'son of man' was used in Greek translation only in words of Jesus (except Acts 7.56), not in christological confessions. Ignatius of Antioch misunderstands it as an expression of Christ's human nature (*Eph.* 20.2). The letter of *Barnabas* even affirms that Jesus was not the son of a man, but of God (12.10). The Greek translation of the Hebrew *māšiaḥ* lost its titular force in the combination with Ἰησοῦς and was treated as *cognomen*; confusions with the proper name Χρηστός are attested (Sueton, *Caes.* 5.25.4; Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.2; Justin, *1 Apol.* 4.5). Later authors like Luke (4.18; Acts 4.27; 10.38), Justin (*2 Apol.* 6.3) and other apologists (Tertullian, *Apol.* 3.5; *Ad Nat.* 1.3.8–9; Theophilus 1.12; Lactantius, *Inst.* 4.7.5–7) had to explain the titular meaning by the verb χρίειν or by OT formulations like 'the Anointed one of the Lord'.[9] These developments can be explained by the fact that neither the literary context of 'Son of Man' (Dan 7)[10] nor the OT promises of a Davidic Messiah were present for ordinary Greek hearers. The eschatological or 'heilsgeschichtliche' background was not so relevant for them as for the early Christian community.[11]

This is all well known. But we can draw from it two principles for our further inquiry: 1. The use of the christological titles remains significant, but their change of meaning implies that they are only indicators of wider conceptions which need further elaboration.[12] 2. The 'Religionsgeschichtliche Schule' (in this respect the 'new' one is no different from the 'old') inquired into the origins of ideas, the 'influences' on a certain author, which can be reconstructed by the tradition history method; now the focus of interest for any exegete interested in the history of religion has shifted: he or she looks more for the presuppositions of understanding for the implied reader and moreover for any potential contemporary reader.[13]

9 Cf. Luke 2.26; 9.20; 23.35; Acts 3.18; Justin, *Dial.* 7.3; cf. 39.7. Against M. Karrer, *Der Gesalbte* (FRLANT 151; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), who postulates sacral associations of Χριστός within the Greek world too and wants to understand it as an appositional 'Appellativ': see D. Zeller, 'Zur Transformation des Χριστός bei Paulus', *JBT* 8 (1993) 155–67, 156–9. I intended more than a 'modification', as M. Karrer, *Jesus Christus im Neuen Testament* (NTD.E 11; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998) 140 n. 198 takes it. For the whole complex see B. Lang and D. Zeller, 'Messias/Christus', *NBL* 2 (1995) 781–6.

10 Yet the archaizing book of Revelation presupposes this context (1.13; 14.14); Justin quotes it in his *Dial.* 31.

11 Cf. briefly R. Bultmann, *Das Urchristentum im Rahmen der antiken Religionen* (Zürich/Stuttgart: Artemis, 1949) 192–3.

12 Cf. the critique of the titular approach by L. E. Keck, 'Toward the Renewal of New Testament Christology', *NTS* 32 (1986) 362–77, 368–70.

13 See the important contribution of J. Kügler, 'Die religionsgeschichtliche Methode. Anmerkungen zu Karlheinz Müllers methodologischer Konzeption', *BN* 38/39 (1987) 75–84 and his 'Religionsgeschichtliche Methode', *NBL* 12 (1998) 341–4; cf. my article 'Ägyptische Königsideologie im Neuen Testament? Fug und Unfug religionswissenschaftlichen Vergleichens', *Studien zur Religionsgeschichte des Neuen Testaments* (FS K. Berger; ed. A. von Dobbeler, K. Erlemann and R. Heiligenthal; Tübingen: Francke, 2000) 541–52. However, we

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Instead of deriving the Christian message from other religious currents, we have sought to inquire into the conditions of its reception. About these we can guess from the cultural environment. Since we seldom have direct reactions to the NT writings, later echoes and interpretations by 'real readers' of pagan origin (e.g. Ignatius, the apologists, etc.) can illuminate how they were received. In this we have to reckon with misunderstandings which are significant in their own way. Thus we expand the concept of 'reception' drawn by W. Iser through that of H. R. Jauss.

1. The development of belief in Jesus as κύριος

While W. Bousset contended that cultic veneration of the κύριος first arose in Hellenistic Christianity, today it is generally agreed that, along with the Aramaic acclamation *Marānā' tā'*, it probably goes back to the primitive community. The Lord who here is invited to come is not only the familiar rabbi of the disciples (so possibly Luke 6.46) who during his lifetime also could be addressed by the individual adherent as *mārî,* but the Exalted One, whom his community is longing for in its prayer. Otherwise he could not be invoked at all.[14] He is expected to come with his heavenly glory. Recently, the observation of L. Cerfaux,[15] that 'Our Lord' corresponds to the designation of kings in Semitic inscriptions and therefore implies royal dignity, has been confirmed by the late H. Merklein, who again drew attention to the Nabatean attestations,[16] and by Hengel-Schwemer, who assembled a host of examples from Syria/Arabia for an absolute use as well.[17] The bilingual communities took up this liturgical phrase (1 Cor 16.22; *Did.* 10.6); it is echoed still in the stereotyped phrase 'our Lord Jesus Christ' of the NT letters. The Greek-speaking Christians confessed Jesus, the risen one, as Lord absolutely (1 Cor 12.3; Rom 10.9). But some Jewish Christians already refused the title 'Son of David' for their transcendent κύριος (Mark 12.35–7; cf. *Barn.* 12.10–11).

The idea associated with the title varies inasmuch as Christ's dominion is extended: it now not only embraces the community, but also the spiritual powers

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will not limit our inquiry to the reader envisaged in the structure of the text itself (W. Iser), but broaden the perspective to the average contemporary recipient. One sometimes wonders, for example, whether he could follow the biblical argumentation of Paul, whose letters according to 2 Pet 3.16 contain difficult passages.

14 For this and the following cf. D. Zeller, 'Kyrios', *DDD* (2nd edn) 492–7; M. Frenschkowski, 'Kyrios', *RAC* (forthcoming).

15 L. Cerfaux, 'Le titre Kyrios et la dignité royale de Jésus' (1922/23), *Recueil Lucien Cerfaux* (BETL 6/7; Gembloux: Duculot, 1954) 1.3–63, esp. 15–17.

16 H. Merklein, '*Marānā* ("unser Herr") als Bezeichnung des nabatäischen Königs', *Von Jesus zum Christus. Christologische Studien* (FS P. Hoffmann; ed. R. Hoppe and U. Busse; BZNW 93; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1998) 25–41.

17 Hengel and Schwemer, *Paulus,* n. 796.

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of this world,[18] and – in an attempt to legitimate the universal mission (Rom 10.12; Acts 10.36) – all humanity. In Rom 14.9 even the dead are included. Therefore in Phil 2.10–11 all beings in the three zones of the world have to acclaim Jesus Christ as Lord.[19] While the dignity of the Messiah was originally confined within an Israelite horizon,[20] the reign of the κύριος now transcends national borders and achieves cosmic dimensions.

This position of the Exalted One in Phil 2.9 is described as having the 'name above every name'. In recent decades it has become fashionable to identify this name with the unutterable Name of God, Jahweh, which, in public readings of the LXX and probably in the text itself, was replaced by κύριος.[21]

> I am not convinced of this. Can we presuppose this linguistic knowledge in former pagans? The definite article makes one think of a concrete name; but why does Paul not spell out more clearly that God gave to the Obedient One his own name? In the parallel passages Heb 1.4–5; Hermas, *Sim.* 9.14.5 (cf. Rom 1.4) the distinguishing name is that of the Son. Paul certainly does not intend to identify Jesus simply with Jahwe;[22] nevertheless Jesus receives a godlike status, as the allusion to the passage Isa 45.23 originally extolling Jahwe's unique godhead[23] makes clear, though the text still distinguishes between God who bestows the name and Jesus Christ whose honours ultimately are related again to God (v. 11 end).

Now, because in Jewish mystical treatises angels can be named after Yahweh their king (cf. *Apoc. Abr.* 10.4; *3 Enoch* 10.3), an angelic Christology mediating between

18 This may be due to the application of Ps 110.1 and Ps 8.7 to the exalted Christ; cf. 1 Cor 15.24–8; Eph 1.20–2; Heb 1.13; 2.5–9; 1 Pet 3.22.

19 O. Hofius, *Der Christushymnus Philipper 2,6–11* (WUNT 17; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 2nd enlarged edn 1991) 20–5, 53–4, 122–50 interprets these verses as referring to the angelic hosts in heaven, the living and the dead. But the magical papyri and the *Testament of Solomon* also know of demonic powers on earth and below earth; therefore ἐπίγειοι and καταχθόνιοι hardly can be limited to human beings. Neither are there only demons in view. Cf. U. B. Müller, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Philipper* (THK 11/I; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1993) 90–113, esp. 108–9.

20 Paul in certain places (Rom 9.5; 15.7–8) betrays awareness of this horizon, but reduces it to a preliminary phase κατὰ σάρκα (cf. Rom 1.3–4).

21 Already Hofius, *Christushymnus*, 27–8. In his addenda on pp. 109–13, he points to a late rabbinic parallel (MidrPss) for 'the name above every name'. In terms of *Traditionsgeschichte*, one has to reckon with the fact that the *acclamatory* κύριος in v. 11 is the successor of the Aramaic *mārê* which is attested as a designation for God, but never functions as substitute for the tetragrammaton as does *'ᵃdônāī*.

22 Thus Barker, *Angel*, 220–1, who assumes that Jahwe is the second god, distinct from Elyon. This surely is not the case in the underlying text, Isa 45.21–3, and wherever κύριος is read instead of the divine name. Nor does J. Fossum in his review of Barker, *JTS* 45 (1994) 187–91, accept this distinction for early Judaism; he, however, maintains without supporting argument that κύριος means the principal angel.

23 In Rom 14.11 the quotation probably refers to God as in the LXX; see D. Zeller, *Der Brief an die Römer* (RNT; Regensburg: Pustet, 1985) 226–7.

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Jewish and Christian conceptions was postulated.[24] It is, however, doubtful that late texts like *3 Enoch*, which actually is dated between the fourth and sixth centuries CE, can illuminate the understanding of the giving of the name. First of all, it is not an angel that is so exalted, but a human being. It is true that Metatron too, who receives the name of a 'lesser Jahweh' (*3 Enoch* 12.5) and a position superior to the angels, was formerly Enoch.[25] But the conferring of the name presupposes his initial transformation into an angel.[26] In Phil 2 such an intermediary state is missing: Christ is immediately elevated above all beings, including the angels.

When we try to examine the way the encomiastic text Phil 2.6–11 might have been received in a community made up mainly of former pagans, angelological speculations become irrelevant; there are closer models that come to mind. As W. L. Knox demonstrated decades ago to this society,[27] the deification of men because of their merits (cf. the διό in v. 9) was a standard model in the Greco-Roman world. A famous example is Hercules who because of his labours deserved the stars (Seneca, *Herc. Oet.* 1–103). His career is exemplary for the Stoic–Cynic sage, in a similar way to that in which Christ's self-humiliation is recommended as an example for Christians (Phil 2.5). According to Epictetus, *Diss.* 2.16.44, Hercules cleansed the world from injustice and lawlessness in obedience to his father Zeus. Diod. S. 4.15.1 says that Zeus honoured Dionysus and Hercules alone with the name of 'Olympians' because of their efforts on behalf of humanity.[28] It is true that the exaltation of the obedient and devout man after his self-abasement is a well-established biblical theme, effective also in Luke 14.11 and its rabbinic parallels.[29] This may be important for the origin of the motif. But in Judaism self-abasement is not compensated for by godlike status. At best the suffering pious is counted

24 Cf. Fossum, *The Name*, 292–301. I will not enter into the far-fetched Adam speculations which Fossum also adduces to illustrate Phil 2.6–11.

25 From *1 Enoch* 70–1, however, we can infer that this tradition in the first century CE was still in the making.

26 Cf. P. Schäfer, *Hekhalot-Studien* (TSAJ 19; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1988) 272–5.

27 W. L. Knox, 'The "Divine Hero" Christology in the New Testament', *HTR* 41 (1948) 229–49. The concept of 'hero' is misleading, because Hercules from hero becomes a god. See H.-A. Shapiro, 'Hêrôs Theos', *ClW* 77 (1983) 7–18. W. Schenk, *Die Philipperbriefe des Paulus* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1984) 206–9 pays attention to the Hercules analogy. Müller, *Philipper*, 113 objects that there is no comparable self-abasement. But a descent from heavenly existence is not found in his sapiential model either. It is true that the Hercules analogy does not cover the structure of the whole christological text, but anyway we guess that there is a combination of two models.

28 Cf. A. J. Malherbe, 'Herakles', RAC 14 (1988) 559–83, 571f.; D. E. Aune, 'Hercules and Christ', *Greeks, Romans, and Christians. Essays in Honor of A. J. Malherbe* (ed. D. L. Balch, E. Ferguson, W. A. Meeks; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 3–19, who instead of Phil 2 treats the similar case in Hebrews.

29 Cf. Müller, *Philipper*, 103–4, 106. The hymnic text certainly wants to do more than to illustrate a sapiental commonplace.

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among the 'sons of God' (Wisd 5.5). Because the addressees were probably already acquainted with the apotheosis of deserving men they may have found the biblical idea in its present form still more plausible.[30]

> There is some evidence for this kind of reception: 1. For pagan minds death strictly speaks against the divinity of a person. The paradox can only be resolved through the model of apotheosis.[31] Therefore, Justin, *1 Apol.* 21 appeals to 'sons of Zeus' – among others Hercules – with a destiny comparable to that of the Logos: they were – at least some of them – born from a human mother, died and went to heaven. Only their way of life was different from that of Christ. Therefore the pagan model can be applied only to him: 'We, however, were taught,[32] that only those are immortalized who lived saintly and pleasingly before God'. 2. In addition we can guess that those Christians in Thessalonica and Corinth who apparently accepted the resurrection of Christ without drawing from this any consequences for their own resurrection (1 Thess 4.13–14; cf. 1.10b; 1 Cor 15), must have interpreted Christ's resurrection as an exceptional event, a personal exaltation.[33] This understanding was at hand in a text like Phil 2.6–11 which avoids resurrection language. Here we have a rare opportunity to check the issue of reception within the Pauline letters.

Furthermore, because of his cosmic dominion, the Christian κύριος entered into competition with gods imported from Egypt and the Orient which often bore the title κύριος too. In this regard the investigations of W. Bousset and W. Foerster have been borne out: the titles κύριος or κυρία are rarely applied to the traditional Greek deities,[34] but quite often characterize the sovereignty of Egyptian, Syrian and Thracian gods.[35] In her aretalogies Isis is praised as the lady not only of

30 Some commentators, maybe, would reject the analogy, because – to demonstrate the pre-Pauline character of the text – they emphasize that nothing is said about the salvific significance of Christ's self-humiliation. But this can be easily supplied from Rom 5.19: Christ became obedient to overcome the disobedience of the many.

31 Cf. C. H. Talbert, 'The Concept of Immortals in Mediterranean Antiquity', *JBL* 94 (1975) 419–36; idem, 'Biographies of Philosophers and Rulers as Instruments of Religious Propaganda in Mediterranean Antiquity', *ANRW* 2 16.2 (1978) 1619–51, 1626–39; some necessary corrections in D. E. Aune, 'The Problem of the Genre of the Gospels: A Critique of C. H. Talbert's What is a Gospel?', *Gospel Perspectives II* (ed. R. T. France and D. Wenham; Sheffield 1981) 9–60.

32 As the following makes clear, this refers to Christian instruction. Similarly, Origen, *c. Celsum* 3.22–21 corrects the pagan model of apotheosis. Arnobius, *adv. nat.* 1.38 uses it for an *a fortiori* conclusion to Christ.

33 Cf. D. Zeller, 'Hellenistische Vorgaben für den Glauben an die Auferstehung Jesu?', *Von Jesus* (n. 16), 71–91, esp. 82.

34 I would not go so far as to assert that the Greek mentality was reluctant to accept such a submissive attitude. But cf. W. Pleket, 'Religious History as the History of Mentality: The "Believer" as Servant of the Deity in the Greek World', *Faith, Hope and Worship* (ed. H. S. Versnel; Leiden/New York/Köln: Brill, 1981) 152–92, esp. 171–8.

35 In addition to the material set out in my 'Kyrios' (see n. 14) for Syria, see now Hengel and Schwemer, *Paulus*, n. 795.

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the land of Egypt, but of the whole world, dominating heaven, earth and underworld;[36] Sarapis evolved from a chthonic deity into a cosmocrator. These deities were deemed mighty as modifiers of human destiny and had a deep existential impact on their believers, as is testified by Aelius Aristides' encomion on Sarapis (*Or.* 45):

> Everything everywhere is given to us through you and because of you whatever we most wish to receive (14); By whatever human life is granted (διοικεῖσθαι) and saved, this is the work of Sarapis (16).

These gods are not all mystery gods, as is sometimes asserted,[37] but they are propagated by a strong and impressive minority in a henotheistic manner with εἷς or μέγας acclamations.[38] Therefore it is tempting to see these competing deities in the background of 1 Cor 8.5–6. Here Paul, in view of his christological amplification of the εἷς θεός formula in v. 6cd, already in his concessive phrase v. 5 introduces 'many lords' alongside the 'many gods'. Convinced that these are two different groups, J. Weiß[39] proposed differentiating between the old popular gods and the innumerable new ones invading Greece from the Orient and called κύριοι as other commentators also noted.[40] This would fit well into the context: not only is the encompassing salvific role of a God like Sarapis expressed with διά + gen. (cf. v. 6d), and εἷς or μέγας acclamations are frequent in their cults, but also the eating of idol meat is abundantly attested in this context. Certainly of course sacrificial meals are no speciality of Sarapis, as the large dining rooms in the Corinthian temple of Asclepios show. Paul speaks in general terms of idol worship and we probably should not expect from him the knowledge a modern historian of religion has.[41] However, from our point of view – the reception – these obser-

36 Cf. M. Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte der Isis- und Sarapis-Religion* (SubEpi 12; Hildesheim/Zürich/New York: Olms, 1985) 1.3; 20.24; K. Koch, *Geschichte der ägyptischen Religion* (Stuttgart/Berlin/Köln: Kohlhammer, 1993) 565 cites a hymn from Philae. On the obelisk of Benevent, Isis is called the mistress of heaven, earth and underworld. Cf. Plutarch, *Mor.* 367*a*: ἡ κυρία τῆς γῆς θεός, Apuleius, *Met.* 11.5: *elementorum omnium domina . . . regina manium, prima caelitum*; 11.7: *orbis totius domina*; 11.25: *te superi colunt, observant inferi.*

37 E.g. Bultmann, *Urchristentum*, 193; G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 373: 'The term *kyrios* . . . is the normal title for the deities of the mystery cults'. His example is Sarapis, who however is seldom attested in the context of secret rites.

38 See D. Zeller, 'Der eine Gott und der eine Herr Jesus Christus. Religionsgeschichtliche Überlegungen', *Der lebendige Gott* (FS W. Thüsing; ed. T. Söding; NTA.NF 31; Münster: Aschendorff, 1996) 34–49, 44–7.

39 J. Weiß, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, [10]1925) 22.

40 H.-J. Klauck, *1. Korintherbrief* (NEB; Würzburg: Echter, 1984) 61; Fee, *Corinthians*, 373; J. Kremer, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (RNT; Regensburg: Pustet, 1997) 174.

41 Rightly W. Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (EKK VII/2; Solothurn/Düsseldorf: Benziger – Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1995) 240–1; C. Wolff, *Der erste Brief des Paulus*

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vations remain valuable. The Egyptian cults had increasing importance in Corinth,[42] therefore a confrontation between these almighty saviours and the only Lord, 'through whom we [are redeemed]', seems inevitable. G. Theißen[43] coined the term 'Überbietungssynkretismus' for the impact this kind of competition had in the formation of Christology.

> These conclusions, however, would be weakened by the philological arguments O. Hofius recently brought to the fore.[44] In his judgement the pagan εἷς acclamations and 1 Cor 8.6 are barely comparable; above all, the duplication of εἷς-phrases[45] is explained by reference to Deut 6.4 LXX κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν κύριος εἷς ἐστιν. The εἷς θεός would be split into the Father and the Lord. This use of Deut 6.4, which runs quite against its intention seems improbable. κύριος in 1 Cor 8.6 is not the substitute for Jahwe. Paul or his tradition clothed their monotheistic confession in a Hellenistic form moulded not on Deut 6.4 but on Xenophanes,[46] as is often the case in Hellenistic Judaism. Therefore, the 'one Lord' is not included in the 'one God',[47] though without doubt κύριος in v. 5 is an equivalent of θεός. To be sure, there are LXX phrases like 'the day of the Lord' or 'those invoking the name of the Lord' with κύριος originally replacing the divine name and

an die Korinther (THNT VII/2; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1982) 6 refers to the parallel formulation Deut 10.17. Paul, generally, perceives pagan cults only in a confused way, but in Rom 1.23 at least he betrays knowledge of Egyptian animal veneration. However, the introduction of foreign and new gods could strike a Jewish observer, as Jos., *Ap.* 2.251–4 shows.

42 Cf. D. E. Smith, 'The Egyptian Cults at Corinth', *HTR* 70 (1977) 201–31; they reached their peak, however, only in the second century CE. The Christian mission would look for adherents in the same milieu of poor immigrants as these cults did, while the descendants of the colonists were more devoted to the Roman gods and the Imperial cult: see D. Engels, *Roman Corinth* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago, 1990) 101–2, 106–7, 114–15.

43 G. Theißen, *Die Religion der ersten Christen* (Gütersloh: C. Kaiser – Gütersloher, 2000) 75. On pp. 83–90 he finds in the worship of the emperor the most stimulating challenge for Christology – which in my view is less evident.

44 O. Hofius, ' "Einer ist Gott – Einer ist Herr". Erwägungen zu Struktur und Aussage des Bekenntnisses 1. Kor 8,6', *Eschatologie und Schöpfung* (FS E. Gräßer; BZNW 89; ed. M. Evang, H. Merklein and M. Wolter; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1997) 95–108. Hofius induces me to think over again the grammatical constructions of the texts quoted in my essay 'Der eine Gott' (n. 38).

45 Hofius takes εἷς as subject; but since v. 6 is antithetical to v. 5, I would prefer the usual attributive understanding: 'but for us there is only one God, the Father . . .'.

46 fr. 23 (Diels-Kranz) with initial εἷς θεός, too. This I maintain, though I should rather distinguish between an attributive and a predicative εἷς. Both occur in the expression of Jewish and Christian monotheistic faith: see Hofius, ' "Einer ist Gott" ', 96–7. In the Sarapis acclamations εἷς is usually taken as a predicate, but there is also an attributive use: cf. Ael. Arist., *Or.* 45,21; Iul., *Or.* 4, p. 175, 23 (Hertlein) and εἷς θεὸς Σέραπις. See O. Weinreich, 'Neue Urkunden zur Sarapis-Religion' (1919), *Ausgewählte Schriften I* (Amsterdam: Grüner, 1969) 410–42, 432e), 434.

47 This 'binitarian' understanding of Hofius, ' "Einer ist Gott" ', 108 does not correspond to the strict parallelism of v. 6.

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which Jewish-Hellenistic Christians transferred to Christ. This is due to the fact that Christ assumed the divine functions of judge and saviour.[48] But in the context of 1 Cor 8 Jesus Christ as Lord is not compared with Jahwe, but with the many κύριοι. The Corinthians could well put their only Lord in contrast to pagan gods. They probably would not think thereby of the emperor, though from Claudius onwards and especially in Nero's time the title κύριος more often is applied to him. But it lacks a religious meaning which it got only in the combination *dominus et deus* introduced under Domitian. Moreover, the statement that there are *many* lords (v. 5) does not match the Roman emperor. Neither is the latter in mind in the 'so-called gods, be it in heaven, be it on earth' (v. 5), because the expression describes worldwide dominion (parallel to ἐν κόσμῳ in v. 4); here, Hofius's hint at Deut 4.39 is helpful.[49] Nevertheless, texts like 1 Cor 8.5–6 could become relevant in the situation of martyrdom; they contain a potential relevance for Christians when the traditional pagan cult is interwoven with the acknowledgement of the emperor as κύριος and they are confronted with this claim.[50]

2. A celestial being appearing on earth

In our analysis of the hymnic text in Phil 2 we have not yet considered vv. 6–8. Here the depth of Christ's condescension is measured against his former divine status. Because his former being like God and his postmortal exaltation to a lordship comparable only to God's dominion are not put into relationship, I would suggest that two different models are combined here. Christ's move from divine to human status is expressed by the terminology of *metamorphosis* which is customary in the secret epiphanies of gods on earth. There, they appear in human form, sometimes in the shape of poor beggars.[51] As I have tried to show this

48 Though ambiguities and confusions between Jesus and God are typical for later NT writings: see D. Zeller, 'Jesus', *DDD* (2nd edn) 467–73, 471–2. Barker, *Angel*, chs 10–11 quotes late texts without discrimination.

49 Hofius, ' "Einer ist Gott" ', 107.

50 Cf. Rev 17.14; 19.16; *Mart.Pol.* 8.2; *Mart.Scil.* 6; Tert., *Apol.* 34.1.

51 Cf. F. Pfister, 'Epiphanie', *PRE.S* 4 (1924) 277–323. This is formulated with μορφή in the famous prologue of Eur., *Bacch.* 4, 54. Following M. Dibelius, *An die Thessalonicher I II. An die Philipper* (HNT 11; 3rd edn; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1937) 74, I argued for this background in my essay 'Die Menschwerdung des Sohnes Gottes im Neuen Testament und die antike Religionsgeschichte', *Menschwerdung Gottes – Vergöttlichung von Menschen* (ed. D. Zeller; NTOA 7; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag/Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988) 141–76, esp. 160–3; T. Söding, 'Erniedrigung und Erhöhung', *ThPh* 67 (1992) 1–28, 17–18 has accepted my proposal and evaluated its theological implications. S. Vollenweider, 'Die Metamorphose des Gottessohns', *Das Urchristentum in seiner literarischen Geschichte* (FS J. Becker; ed. U. Mell and U. B. Müller; BZNW 100; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1999) 109–31 developed the 'epiphaniale Motivfeld' with some new parallels from Greco-Roman literature. Meanwhile the motif of the 'hidden epiphany' in both pagan and biblical texts has been set out by M. Frenschkowski, *Offenbarung und Epiphanie II* (WUNT 2.80; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1997).

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complex of motifs is perceptible in Christian formulations of the incarnation (besides Phil 2.6–8 cf. 2 Cor 8.9; for Rom 8.3 ὁμοίωμα, Heb 2.17 ὁμοιωθῆναι cf. Acts 14.11),[52] though it is not totally suitable, first because it implies only an external change, and second because the hidden stay of gods on earth did not end with death, but with self-disclosure.[53] Even more remarkably, this complex of motifs can also be applied to mortal human beings, especially to rulers and wise men: their activity, even their whole life, is seen as the appearance of a god in human existence. Usually it has a salvific purpose. Recently, M. Bockmuehl[54] has discarded this solution because most of the pre-Christian Greek texts relate explicitly or at least implicitly to the classic legends of Greek mythology. But I think that the historical applications do not refer to concrete myths; they sometimes only allude to the general possibility of gods walking on earth, as stated already in *Od.* 17.485–7. Of course, the motif in itself is mythological; but Jews had no problem with speaking of angels in human form.[55] Philo explains the theophany in the three men of Gen 18 by an explicit appeal to Homer.[56] This could facilitate the Christian adoption of the model; but its application to historical persons[57] has far more precedents in the pagan milieu. Therefore I am sceptical about an angelomorphic Christology as our 'missing link', as proposed by Vollenweider.[58] In any case, it does not fit with the way the story continues. In Christian use, the surrendering of divinity has the hard consequence of death. Therefore, the epiphanic model has to be complemented by an apotheosis. Now God's action answers Christ's renunciation. Similarly in Johannine Christology: Jesus gave glory to his

52 U. B. Müller, *Die Menschwerdung des Gottessohnes* (SBS 140; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1990) 46–8 did this for John 1.14; for Phil 2.6–8 see his *Philipper*, 93–4.

53 Cf. my studies on the transfiguration: 'La métamorphose de Jésus comme épiphanie (Mc 9, 2–8)', *L'évangile exploré* (ed. A. Marchadour; LD 166; Paris: Cerf, 1996) 167–86; 'Bedeutung und religionsgeschichtlicher Hintergrund der Verwandlung Jesu (Markus 9:2–8)', *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus* (ed. B. Chilton and C. A. Evans; NTTS 28.2; Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 1999) 303–21.

54 M. Bockmuehl, 'The Form of God' (Phil. 2:6). Variations on a Theme of Jewish Mysticism', *JTS* 48 (1997) 1–23, 7. The author rightly stresses the visual connotation of μορφή but fails to provide a model for the exchange of the forms. Indeed he sees no exchange at all when he – following a suggestion made by C. F. D. Moule – wants to translate v. 6a as '*since* he was in the form of God' (p. 21). But the adversative participle is typical for the divine epiphany, as I pointed out in 'Menschwerdung', 173 n. 101. Further examples: *Hymn. Homer.* 19.32; Philo, *Abr.* 118.

55 Cf. Gen 18; Tob 5–12; Ez 8.2; Dan 8.15; 10.16, 18; *Apoc.Abr.* 10.5; *Jos.As.* 14–17.

56 Cf. Philo, *Somn.* 1.233; *Quaest. in Gen.* 4.2; in *Abr.* 113, 118 the guests are transformed angels.

57 For this only one Jewish example can be cited, the second century *Prayer of Joseph*. Here Jacob embodies the angel Israel, representative of the people of God.

58 Vollenweider, 'Metamorphose', 11; he therefore wants to localize the text in a Greek-speaking Jewish-Christian milieu participating in a large measure in the oldest Palestinian stratum of Christology.

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Father on earth, therefore he expects that God will glorify him at the hour of his death. This, however, is the glory he already had before, staying at the Father's side (John 17.4–5). This was not so explicit in Phil 2. Jesus through his exaltation reaches the place he came from (cf. John 16.28); for this idea there are impressive analogies in Roman descriptions of the destiny of rulers.[59]

> As NT scholars know, the conception of a Christ revealing his divinity in a human existence varies with the biblical authors. In Paul, it is only in his resurrection that Jesus' glory becomes manifest, though he pre-existed as Son of God. In Mark, the revelation of his true essence during his lifetime is concealed by the 'messianic secret' which is definitively lifted only after the resurrection. The Fourth Gospel shows the glory of the Logos incarnate already in his earthly activity; but the Son of Man has to be lifted up in order to reveal his divine origin. That the epiphanic model could catch on with Christians from a Hellenistic milieu is evident from texts of the first half of the second century. We find it in the Pastorals,[60] in Ignatius of Antioch,[61] in the letter of Barnabas,[62] in the Christian additions to the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*,[63] and in apologists like Tatian.[64] The formulation (quite often 'appeared in a man's clothing', 'in the flesh', or similar expressions) does not seem to depend directly on Phil 2.6–8. Its persistence is the more amazing in that it could easily be misunderstood in a docetist manner and is favoured in gnostic texts like *Asc. Isa.* 10–11; *CH* 4, fr. div. 21.9–10. The assimilation to pagan language is evident if simply θεός or an equivalent is the subject of the incarnation, as in the examples quoted from Ignatius, *TestXII* and Tatian; in Clem. Alex., *Protr.* 1.8.4, 'the merciful God' is supplied as subject of Phil 2.6. Origen, *c. Celsum* 1.68 simply speaks of 'God manifested in a human body to benefit our race'. This is pure Greek language.

In the NT, however, there is no specific title connected with the incarnation. Of course, in the Johannine prologue, the pre-existent divine being is identified as the Logos. Since in Alexandrian Judaism this is the male counterpart of personified Wisdom, wisdom associations have been correctly found in John 1.3, 10–11, 14.[65] As in Pauline and deuteropauline texts, pre-existence and the role in creation

59 Cf. Cic., *Rep.* 6.13 and other texts quoted in Zeller, 'Menschwerdung', 167–9.

60 Cf. 1 Tim 3.16; 2 Tim 1.9–10; Tit 3.4; K. Läger, *Die Christologie der Pastoralbriefe* (HbThS 12; Münster: Lit., 1995); A.Y. Lau, *Manifest in Flesh* (WUNT 2.86; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1996); H. Stettler, *Die Christologie der Pastoralbriefe* (WUNT 2.105; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1998).

61 Ign. *Eph.* 7.2; 19.3.

62 *Barn.* 5.6; 6.7, 9, 14; 12.10.

63 *T. Sim.* 6.5, 7; *T. Iss.* 7.7; *T. Zeb.* 9.8 (ms. bdg); *T. Naph.* 8.3; *T. Ben.* 10.7. The 'walking with men' in *T. Jud.* 24.1; *T. Dan* 5.13 is suspect, too. Cf. also the Christian insertion Bar 3.38.

64 *Or. ad Graecos* 21.1. He explicitly appeals to two mythological examples.

65 Cf. H. von Lips, 'Christus als Sophia? Weisheitliche Traditionen in der urchristlichen Christologie', *Anfänge der Christologie* (FS F. Hahn; ed. C. Breytenbach and H. Paulsen; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht) 75–95, 88–92. For the Fourth Gospel it does not matter that the Logos in Philo is also an angel.

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may have been taken over from wisdom speculation. Even the idea that Wisdom is refused and searches for a place in which to dwell seems influential in the prologue. In Sir 24 she takes her seat in Israel, but her concretization is the law, not human flesh. The idea of incarnation in a concrete man apparently is not anticipated in the wisdom tradition.[66] It is significant that all attempts to find in Phil 2.6–11 an illustration of the way of embodied Wisdom[67] fail to derive this crucial motif from wisdom literature. Therefore I think early Christians resorted to the model of epiphany, which however had to be adapted to a man who really died. In the NT world, phantasies about people coming from heaven, sent by the gods, were widespread.[68] For this reason the stereotyped expression 'God sending his Son' with a saving purpose, coined in a Jewish-Christian Hellenistic community, need not necessarily recall God's sending of Wisdom (Wis 9.10), as many have assumed following E. Schweizer.[69] The recipients were accustomed to the idea that the supreme god sent divine propagators of civilization,[70] philosophers[71] or other important people.[72]

66 This is rightly noted by J. E. Fossum, 'In the Beginning was the Name', *The Image of the Invisible God* (NTOA 30; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag/Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995) 109–13. Philo often interprets Aaron allegorically as Logos. This is the case also with Moses, whom *Migr.* 23–4 calls 'the lawgiving Logos'. But since Joseph cannot follow Moses in a tangible sense, here Moses represents the Law, precisely Ex 12.11 quoted § 25.

67 After D. Georgi, more recently B. Witherington, *Jesus the Sage. The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994) 261–6. But as for 1 Tim 3.16, a Christ hymn which starts immediately with the manifestation in flesh, he admits that its sapiental character is less strong (p. 275). And on John 1.14 he remarks with J. D. G. Dunn: 'it is the idea of the Word taking on human flesh (not historical form of just any sort) that makes the Logos Hymn stand out from its sapiential background' (p. 286).

68 Cf. *Sib.* 3.286; 5.414; Cic., *Imp. Cn. Pomp.* 14.41; Quint. *fr.* 1.7; Liv. 8.6.9; Vergil, *Ecl.* 4.7; Plin., *H.N.* 26.13; ironically Iuv. 2.40; 11.27; an inscription considers Caracalla *sideribus delapsum in terram* (cf. *ANRW* 2.16.2, 1097; the last three words, however, are supplied). Cf. Eus., *H.E.* 4.6.2 from Bar Kochba. The expression is devalued into a stock phrase: Min. Fel. 23.12.

69 E. Schweizer, 'Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Hintergrund der "Sendungsformel" Gal 4,4f; Röm 8,3f; Joh 3,16; 1 Joh 4,9', *Beiträge zur Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Zürich: Zwingli, 1970) 83–95, 92.

70 Plat., *Prot.* 322c; Sext. Emp., *Adv.Math.* 2.32; Dio Chrys. 30.27.

71 Plat., *Apol.* 31ab; Att. fr. 1.32ff; Epict., *Diss.* 1.24.6; 3.22.23, 46, 56, 59; 4.8.31.

72 Rulers: Calp. Sic., *Buc.* 4.142; Menander (*Rhetores Graeci* [ed. L. Spengel, Leipzig: Teubner, 1853–4] 3.370.21–3). Equivalent to 'send' is 'to give, to donate', cf. Plin., *Pan.* 80.4 and my 'Menschwerdung', 172 n. 100.

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3. Various understandings of 'Son of God'[73]

(a) *Paul and John*

The term 'Son of God' that we met in the mission formula in the Pauline or Johannine contexts means a being in close intimacy with God from all eternity; 'sending'or 'giving' his Son, the Father engaged himself in the work of redemption. Already in Rom 1.3–4 this transcendent concept of sonship appears superior to the messianic one that is transparent still in the traditional parallelism, as this Davidic 'Son of God' reigning powerfully from the resurrection onwards is superior to a political Messiah, who according to recently deciphered texts in Qumran could be called 'son of the Highest' or 'firstborn son' too.[74] Anyway, the tradition taken up in Rom 1.3–4 at least allows us to recognize the Jewish roots of the title. But for a preexistent Son of God there is no parallel in Palestinian Judaism. Therefore again, as in the case of the Logos, a line of tradition was reconstructed from Alexandrian Judaism to the Greek-speaking community. Because attributes and functions of the 'Son' in Heb 1.2–3 or the 'firstborn' in Col 1.15 are identical with those of the personified Wisdom or the Philonic Logos who is called πρωτόγονος, there are good reasons to surmise that those Christians – be it in Antioch or already in Jerusalem – in their christological predications were inspired by wisdom theology. Thus from the Davidic representative of divine power grew a universal mediator in creation and redemption. He had to be 'God' because only as such could he convey eternal life to his believers (cf. John 1.1–4; 20.31; 1 John 5.20; Ign. *Eph.* 7.2; 19.3). This unique 'Son of God' for former pagans must have eclipsed the sons of Zeus like Hermes or Dionysos whom their father sent to men to bring them cultural gifts for their temporal life. That does not exclude the possibility that he could be seen in line with them.[75]

(b) *The Gospel of Mark*

The Markan 'Son of God' seems to limp behind the conception current in Pauline or Johannine communities. There is no open hint at his pre-existence[76]

73 Cf. M. Hengel, *Der Sohn Gottes* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1975, ²1977), and more recently U. B. Müller, ' "Sohn Gottes" – ein messianischer Hoheitstitel Jesu', *ZNW* 87 (1996) 1–32.

74 In addition to the quotation of 2 Sam 7.14 in 4Q174 iii 11, now the 'Son of God' in the much disputed fragment 4Q246 is related to the Messiah-king by J. J. Collins, 'The *Son of God* Text from Qumran', *From Jesus to John* (FS M. de Jonge; ed. M. de Boer; JSNTSup 84; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993) 65–82; J. Zimmermann, *Messianische Texte aus Qumran* (WUNT 104; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1998). Both point to the parallel in 4Q369 fr. 1 ii. This seems to undermine the thesis of Müller, 'Sohn Gottes', 1–6, that the title was avoided in Judaism because of its use in the ruler cult.

75 Thus Arnobius, *Adv. Nat.* 1.38 compares Christ with Dionysus, Demeter, Asclepius and other 'inventors' and concludes that Christ is to be honoured still more.

76 Cf. the cautious interpretation of Mark 1.2–3 by M. E. Boring, 'Markan Christology: God-Language for Jesus?', *NTS* 45 (1999) 451–71, 464: 'While interpreting this in terms of a Markan doctrine of "pre-existence" claims far too much, this disembodied, timeless voice imparts in advance a transcendent dimension to the figure who first appears in the narrative at Mark 1.9,

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or at his participation in creation. Since in Mark the titles 'Christ', 'Son of God', and 'Son of Man' are put into interrelation and mutually illuminate one another,[77] the sonship of Jesus is conceived in a messianic sense (most clearly in Mark 14.61), but the 'Christ' whom Peter confesses (Mark 8.29) is also the 'Son of Man' suffering and coming with the glory of his Father (Mark 8.31, 38; cf. 14.62) and the 'beloved Son of God' (Mark 9.7; cf. 1.11); the transfiguration reveals that he from his origin belongs to the heavenly world.[78] Thus, the predication 'Son of God', which in contrast to other titles is pronounced by the voice of God and by demons,[79] certainly has a leading hermeneutical function and means more than a human king, adopted by God. In the mouth of the centurion (Mark 15.39) it finally summarizes the secret of 'this man'. The traditional messianic spectrum of meaning is enlarged because 'Son of God' appears now also in the context of miracle-working (3.11; 5.7; it probably is expected as the right answer to the disciples' question in 4.41) and teaching (9.7).[80] Here, Jesus attempts to do what in the Bible only God can do,[81] he claims for himself divine authority – as in his forgiving sins (Mark 2.5–7, 10). How can we explain this phenomenon in the perspective of Religionsgeschichte?

Davis in his perceptive article takes this as proof that Mark ascribes to Jesus 'genuine' 'intrinsic divinity'.[82] In Davis's opinion, Mark's immediate background is the Christology we know from the Pauline letters; he simply projects it into the earthly life of Jesus. Boring, however, warns against imposing anachronistic, un-Markan categories on the Gospel and stresses that the narrative genre chosen by Mark allows the holding together of contrary perspectives in tension, but also implies certain limitations.[83] I would like to add that 'Son of God', like 'the Holy One of God',[84] still

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"from Nazareth" (not "from heaven")'. For L. Schenke, 'Gibt es im Markusevangelium eine Präexistenzchristologie?', *ZNW* 91 (2000) 45–71, Mark presupposes the pre-existence of Christ.

77 See C. Breytenbach, 'Grundzüge markinischer Gottessohn-Christologie', *Anfänge der Christologie* (FS F. Hahn; ed. C. Breytenbach and H. Paulsen; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991) 169–84 with earlier literature.

78 Cf. my articles quoted in n. 53. Following M. Dibelius, I interpreted the story as disclosure in the frame of a hidden epiphany.

79 As P. G. Davis, 'Mark's Christological Paradox', *JSNT* 35 (1989) 3–18, 13 observes, adding still 'The Holy One of God' in Mark 1.24.

80 That in Jewish tradition David and Solomon were known for their exorcisms, the latter for his wisdom too, may be a point of contact, but does not adequately explain the supernatural power Jesus possesses as 'Son of God'. Though 4Q521 comes close to Jesus' response to the Baptist in Matt 11.2–6, it is God who performs the miracles in fr. 2 ii 12–13, fr. 7.6, as in the passages from Isaiah alluded to in Matt 11.5 (except the bringing of the good news to the poor).

81 This is evident in his walking on the sea (cf. Job 9.8 LXX). Davis, 'Paradox', 10 notes that in the Markan dichotomy between God and human beings, Jesus is found on God's side: 'Jesus appears as surrogate for God'.

82 Davis, 'Paradox', 12–13.

83 Boring, 'Christology', cf. his conclusions 470–1.

84 J. Fossum 'Son of God', *DDD* (2nd edn) 788–94, 792, because of the correspondence between

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keeps its relational character and would be overinterpreted in terms of essence. Anyway, the title encompasses more than in the OT–Jewish context from which it is derived. Was the miracle-working and teaching Jesus modelled on the example of the antique θεῖοι ἄνδρες? This solution, once popular for Mark or at least his traditions, has fallen into disrepute in recent years.[85]

D. S. du Toit and others rightly insisted on the semantic diversity of the lexemes θεῖος, δαιμόνιος, θεσπέσιος; θεῖος ἀνήρ rarely conveys an ontological meaning; it is not a technical term for miracle-workers though there is a line of tradition neglected by du Toit where prophetic knowledge is owed to a god-given constitution (θεῖα φύσις); such men are occasionally called 'divine'. In the first century CE we can note a revival of an archaic type of miracles: Apollonius of Tyana averts plagues from cities in a similar way to that recounted of Abaris, Epimenides, Pythagoras and Empedocles. Insofar as the last two and Apollonius also propagate a doctrine, those men therefore offer at least an analogy to the strange combination of teaching and healing activities we find in the Markan Jesus.

When the disciples in Mark 4.41 formulate the question: 'Who is this whom storm and sea obey?', we certainly should not supply: a θεῖος ἀνήρ. Mark's term 'Son of God' better expresses the unique relation of Jesus to the one God of Israel (Mark 12.29, quoting the *Sh^{e}ma'*), the 'Most High' (Mark 5.7), compared with the pagan gods. As B. Blackburn and others have noticed, in the stilling of the storm and in Jesus' walking on the water, OT God-language has been transferred to Jesus.[86] So much for the origin of the motif and the intention of the author! But the historian of religion goes on to ask: in what religious climate was it possible and acceptable to ascribe to men divine faculties which are some kind of inherent equipment? For other miracles one can appeal to prophetic examples, but for power over the elements and walking on the sea we have to admit that the best precedents are found in pagan literature.[87] As Boring puts it: 'the issue is whether the Hellenistic

these titles in Mark 3.11; 5.7 and 1.24, tries an angelological explanation which, however, does not do justice to the singular formulation.

85 Cf. the bibliography in D. Zeller, 'Mensch, göttlicher', *NBL* 2 (1995) 764–5. Add A. Pilgaard, 'The Hellenistic *Theios Aner* – A Model for Early Christian Christology?', *The New Testament and Hellenistic Judaism* (ed. P. Borgen and S. Giversen; Åarhus: Åarhus University, 1995) 101–22; D. S. du Toit, THEIOS ANTHROPOS (WUNT 2.91; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1997). Cf. my review: *TLZ* 123 (1998) 62–4, and my contribution to *Christianity and Classical Culture* (FS A. J. Malherbe; ed. J. T. Fitzgerald and others; forthcoming), 'The Θεῖα Φύσις of Hippocrates and other Divine Men'. Boring, 'Christology', 458 accepts θεῖος ἀνήρ as a modern label to designate a general religious type.

86 In his *Theios Anēr and the Markan Miracle Traditions* (WUNT 2.40; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1991) Blackburn treats these events under the heading 'The Assimilation of Jesus to Yahweh'; cf. my critique in *ThRv* 88 (1992) 377–9.

87 Cf. A. Y. Collins, 'Rulers, Divine Men, and Walking on the Water (Mark 6:45–52)', *Religious Propaganda and Missionary Competition in the New Testament World* (FS D. Georgi; ed.

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world was familiar with a figure filled with supernatural power manifest in divine wisdom and/or miraculous deeds, a figure who was more than merely human but less than a fully fledged god'.[88] It is true that θεῖος is not used in the NT to describe the intermediary position of Jesus, but in the Gospel of Mark there are devices by which Jesus' divine sonship is recognized that have astonishing parallels in the biographies of such men. Thus, Pythagoras reveals his golden thigh for a moment to his follower Abaris after he acknowledged his master's identity with the Hyperborean Apollo, thereby confirming Abaris's confession. It is tempting to compare this with the sequence in Mark 8.27–9.8.[89] Another example is the centurion's acclamation in Mark 15.39. Its content certainly is not to be read in a pagan sense ('Truly, this man was a son of a god'); nevertheless it seems remarkable that it was provoked by the circumstances of Jesus' death. Omens at a corpse in the pagan world could elicit the veneration of a dead man as hero.[90] Thus, even if the christological kerygma Mark wants to communicate has Jewish roots, the way he does it shows consideration for his non-Jewish readers as represented in the pagan centurion.

Against the comparison of the Markan Jesus with the so-called θεῖοι ἄνδρες it has been objected that these are not termed 'Son of God'. Insofar as this title presupposes a monotheistic faith, this is not surprising. But it is true that in the context of miracles the provenance of these men from a god is not highlighted.[91] There are only texts of the second century CE in controversy with Christianity or from Christian authors in which thaumaturgy and the claim to divine origin are connected.[92] This at least points towards the direction in which Mark's original mixture was received. The proper place, however, where hints at a supernatural origin are to be expected are not the deeds of adults but the infancy legends. There the mighty performances of athletes or rulers, the extraordinary wisdom of

L. Bormann, K. del Tredici and A. Standhartinger; NovTSupp 74; Leiden/New York/Köln: Brill, 1994) 207–27.

88 Boring, 'Christology', 458.

89 As I did in my 'Métamorphose', 181–3.

90 Already E. Klostermann, *Das Markusevangelium* (HNT 3; 2nd edn; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1926) 187 quotes Plutarch, *Cleom.* 823e: a big serpent surrounding the head of the crucified Cleomenes inspires religious awe before this man, obviously dear to the gods and of higher nature; the people of Alexandria call him a hero and a son of the gods. A similar case is reported by Herodotus 5.114.

91 Here, the article of W. von Martitz, 'υἱός', *TWNT* 8 (1969) 335–40, 339–40 was influential. Blackburn, *Theios Anēr*, 102–3 adduces only two late magical papyri with a Christian sound that arouses suspicion. But cf. Aelianus, *V.Hist.* 4.17, who introduces a series of miracles with the phrase 'Pythagoras taught the human beings that he was born from higher semen than from human nature'.

92 Celsus in Origen, *c. Celsum* 1.50, 68; Justin, *1 Apol.* 30. Itinerant prophets claim to be 'God', 'the Son of God' or 'the Holy Spirit': cf. Origen, *c. Celsum* 7.9; Abgar looks upon Jesus, because of his miracles, as God who came down from heaven or as the Son of God: cf. Eusebius, *H. E.* 1.13.7. Note the Syriac ambience of these texts!

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philosophers, or the inspired work of some artists is put down to the superhuman manner of their conception.[93] Though the attribute θεῖος does not by itself denote the generation by a hero or a god, such stories are told about the best candidates for this category.[94] Therefore, we now turn to the first chapters of Matthew and Luke, where υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ gets a new meaning.

(c) *The infancy stories of Matthew and Luke*

In Luke 1.31–5 the angel twice announces that the child to be born of Mary will be called 'Son of the Highest' or 'Son of God'. A double understanding of the title has been detected. First, Jesus will be the great king, sitting on the throne of his father David. This is in line with the Israelite king and the Messiah whose divine sonship – in contradistinction to the Pharaoh – is not conceived in physical terms.[95] Second, Jesus' being 'Son of God' is grounded in the activity of the power of the Most High effective in his conception which excludes the participation of a human father (cf. v. 34). Thus, 'Son of God' here signifies the physical descent from God represented through his Spirit. Luke clothes this in cloudy biblical images. In Matthew, the angel says it more bluntly: 'What has been generated in her, is from the Holy Spirit' (1.20). The preposition ἐκ usually introduces the male part in statements of generation and birth; it is also used for gods having intercourse with mortal women.[96] Though the virgin birth in Matthew has as its primary effect that

93 Already Origen, *c. Celsum* 1.37 is well aware of the etiological function of these antique traditions. I gathered them in ch. 3 of my still unpublished contribution to *ANRW* 2.26.4, 'Die Geschichten von der Kindheit Jesu (Mt 1f; Lk 1f) und die antike Religionsgeschichte'.

94 For Pythagoras cf. Porphyrius, *Vita Pyth.* 2; for Apollonios cf. Philostratus, *Vita Ap.* 1.6. It is true, there is a certain tension to the representation of an epiphany applied to Pythagoras (the Hyperborean Apollon), Empedocles (by himself: Diels-Kranz B 112), and Apollonius (Philostratus, *Vita Ap.* 1.4: Proteus). Against von Martitz, 'υἱός', 339 it does not matter that these people are not titled υἱός but παῖς (Iamblichus, *Vita Pyth.* 10; Philostratus, *Vita Ap.* 1.6). The traditions about Alexander the Great, acclaimed 'son of Zeus' by the oracle in Siwa, demonstrate the equivalence of both terms: cf. Plut., *Alex.* 27.9 with Strabo 17.1.43; Dio Chrys. 32.95; cf. Pausanias 2.26.10, who explains a Homeric Ἀσκληπιοῦ υἱόν by θεοῦ παῖδα.

95 The recent attempts to draw a line of tradition from Ancient Egypt to Luke are not convincing. Following H. Merklein, 'Ägyptische Einflüsse auf die messianische Sohn-Gottes-Aussage des Neuen Testaments', in *Geschichte – Tradition – Reflexion* (FS M. Hengel; ed. H. Cancik, H. Lichtenberger and P. Schäfer; Tübingen, Mohr [Siebeck], 1996) 3.21–48, the 'influences' are mediated only through the OT; J. Kügler, *Pharao und Christus?* (BBB 113; Bodenheim: Philo, 1997) however wanted to show that Egyptian royal ideology reached the NT via Hellenistic Judaism. For this, see my criticisms in 'Königsideologie' (n. 13).

96 Cf. G. Mussies, 'Joseph's Dream (Matt 1.18–23) and Comparable Stories', *Text and Testimony* (FS A. F. J. Klijn; ed. T. Baarda *et al.*; Kampen: Kok, 1988) 177–86; W. Bauer, *Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (6th edn by K. and B. Aland; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1988) s. v. ἐκ 3a. To his examples add Ilias 21.198; OGIS 655.2; *P.Oxy.* 1453; Plutarch, *Thes.* 6.1; Dion. Hal. 2.48.3. A parallel to Matt 1.18 is found in Pausanias 2.26.4.

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God is with His people (cf. 1.23), it also seems to determine the meaning of 'my Son' (2.15).

As everybody knows here, it is hard – and one could not expect – to find precedents for this 'mythical' idea in the Bible[97] or in Judaism. It is true that in Philo's allegorical exposition (esp. *Cher.* 40–52) the conception of the Patriarch's wives is interpreted as God's work. Thus, extending a Platonic thought (cf. *Symp.* 206b), the divine origin of virtue is illustrated. This seems not directly relevant to our text. More to the point, however, is the fact that this interpretation matches the literal understanding of the miraculous fertility of these women in the *Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesin* often neglected by research. To Gen 16.1 Philo comments

> that the conceiving and bearing might be not so much through union with a man as through the providence of God. For when a barren woman gives birth, it is not by way of generation but the work of the *divine power*. (3.18, trans. R. Marcus, LCL)

Gen 17.17 is explained:

> And so, if a centenarian and [a woman] of ninety years produce children, the element of ordinary events is removed, and only the *divine power* and grace clearly appear. (3.56)

Here, we have an important parallel to Luke's 'power of the Most High'. As the Greeks glorified their heroic ancestors with legends of divine generation, so Hellenistic Judaism could ascribe the progeny of the Fathers to God's power and providence. Another example is offered in the ending of Slavonic *Enoch* (recension A). Here, the sterile and very old Safanim conceives Melchizedek without sleeping with her husband Nir. Nir, after a vision, finally praises God because 'by his word he has created a great priest, in the womb of Safanim, my wife' (71.30).[98] M. Delcor[99] has shown the impact of Greek myths in this episode which probably originated in Alexandrian Judaism. Thus we can imagine how Jewish Christians in Syria after the time of Paul got hold of the idea and applied it to Jesus' conception. It functioned, however, as an etiology for a unique relation to God, 'Son of God' thereby receiving a new nuance. I think that this etiology could work only in a Hellenistic environment where the participation of a god in generation increases the 'input' of divinity in the future child.[100] No wonder that later apologists and/or

97 The essay on Isa 7 LXX of M. Rösel, 'Die Jungfrauengeburt des endzeitlichen Immanuel', *JBT* 6 (1991) 135–51 suffers from serious flaws. It is not proved that the παρθένος as such conceives and gives birth.

98 F. I. Anderson in *OTP* 1.209. C. Böttrich, in *JSHRZ* 5.7, translates: 'Gepriesen sei der Herr, der Gott meiner Väter, der mir gesagt hat, daß er in meinen Tagen einen großen Priester erschaffen hat im Mutterschoß der Sopanima, meiner Frau'.

99 M. Delcor, 'La naissance merveilleuse de Melchisédeq d'après l'Hénoch slave', Κεχαριτωμένη (FS R. Laurentin; Paris: Desclée, 1990) 217–29, 218–19.

100 A crude example is Ael. Aristeides, *Or.* 5 (Dindorf): that Zeus passed three days and nights

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their Jewish adversaries associate with this christologoumenon Greek myths[101] or legends about 'divine men',[102] naturally always pointing out also the differences.

This assumption is confirmed when we pay attention to the literary form of these scenes which at first sight are bathed in a biblical atmosphere. In reality the authors conform to the literary conventions of Hellenistic readers. We have learned to see the genealogies, the announcements of birth, the proclamation of the birth with the miraculous omens, the various prophecies about the child in Luke, the preservation of the newborn in Matt 2 and the early manifestation of his φύσις in Luke 2.41–52 as τόποι of an encomiastic biography, more exactly a royal biography.[103] The rhetorician Menander recommends for the encomium of a ruler whose descent is not particularly prominent:

> Many judging by outward appearance descend from men, in truth, however, they are sent by god and truly are emanations of the Higher One ... (example: Hercules). Thus our King also seems to come from men, in reality he has a heavenly descent ...[104]

This is exactly the solution Luke finds for the problem of the double fatherhood of Jesus which is resolved by Matthew through adoption. Jesus was 'believed to be the Son of Joseph', but – as the reader of the childhood stories and of the preceding baptismal scene knows – he was the 'Son of God' (Luke 3.22–3).

> Generation by God or his agent, the Spirit, and the epiphany of an originally pre-existent divine being are incompatible; they want to say the same thing, but use different representations. However, both models coexist in the legends about Pythagoras or Apollonius[105] and in various testimonies of emperor veneration;[106] both conceptions are later brought together in Christian authors of the second century (Ign. *Eph.* 7.2; Aristides 15.1).

Again, it has been surmised that Luke contrasts the newborn 'saviour', 'Christ, the

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with the mother of Hercules is motivated by his intention to bring as much as possible of his nature into generation.

101 Cf. Justin, *1 Apol.* 21; *Dial.* 67.2; 69; Origen, *c. Celsum* 1.37; Tertullian, *Apol.* 21.8–9, 14.

102 Origen, *c. Celsum* 6.8 (Plato, Pythagoras).

103 See my 'Kindheitsgeschichte Jesu', *NBL* 2 (1995) 476–79; D. Zeller, 'Geburtsankündigung und Geburtsverkündigung', *Studien und Texte zur Formgeschichte* (ed. K. Berger, F. Vouga, M. Wolter and D. Zeller; TANZ 7; Tübingen: Francke, 1992) 59–134.

104 Cf. L. Spengel, *Rhetores Graeci* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1853–4) 3.370.21–8. The pattern is adopted for example by Isocrates, *Hel.* 18; Plutarch, *Alex.* 28.2; Heliodorus, *Aeth.* 3.14.2; Porphyrius, *Vita Pyth.* 2.

105 See above, n. 94.

106 Cf. the etiology for Augustus being believed to be the son of Apollo in Sueton, *Caes.* 2.94.4 with Horatius, *c.* 1.2. In the year 48 BC the cities of Asia greeted G. Caesar as 'the manifest god, originating from Ares and Aphrodite, and the common saviour of human life' (*Sylloge*, 3rd edn 760). Here, probably the distant origin via Romulus and Anchises is meant.

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Lord' (Luke 2.11) whom the reader knows as 'Son of the Highest', with the Augustus mentioned in the context, who got similar honorific titles in the emperor worship, especially in the Greek East.[107] It has been noted that the designation *divi filius* which is given to the (often adoptive) son of a deceased emperor received among the gods, if translated into Greek with θεοῦ υἱός has a different ring.[108] But not all emperors had a divinized father, and not all those called *divi filius* asked for divine honours. For example, Tiberius, whose tax coin was stamped with *DIVI AUG. F.*, does not cause scandal (Mark 12.15–16). The title *divi filius* or θεοῦ υἱός only legitimates the successor of a consecrated emperor without divinizing him. In most cases this becomes clear by the addition of the father's name.[109] It is true that in Egyptian documents the title θεοῦ υἱός for Augustus is sometimes combined with Ζεὺς ἐλευθήριος[110] and the formula θεὸς ἐκ θεοῦ is twice attested.[111] This could suggest the traditional Egyptian designation of the Pharaoh as 'Son of Re'. But for Greeks, it is the epiphany as god that adds divinity to the descent from a divinized father, as in inscriptions from Greece and Asia too. As in the parallel case of κύριος a conflict between Christology and imperial ideology is only potentially contained in the use of the same title. Therefore, when Paul opens his letter to the Romans with the 'good news of God's Son, enthroned in power' (Rom 1.3–4), this in my view need not evoke in its readers the memory of the recent derisory apotheosis of Claudius, while the Son of God would be appointed 'in reality'.[112]

Suggestions like these proceed from the assumption that the Christian message primarily puts its recipients in opposition to their pagan environment. This

107 Cf. more recently Kügler, *Pharao*, ch. V. I think this unlikely for various reasons set out in my 'Geburtsankündigung', 128–30. I will limit my remarks here to 'son of god'.

108 S. R. F. Price, 'Gods and Emperors: The Greek Language of the Roman Imperial Cult', *JHS* 104 (1984) 79–95, 84. He proves his case only for inscriptions in which the emperor at the same time bears the title θεός. Clauss, *Kaiser und Gott. Herrscherkult im römischen Reich* (Stuttgart/Leipzig: Teubner, 1999) now tends to blur the distinctions introduced by more sceptical historians.

109 This was not necessary in the first application of the title *divi filius* to Augustus; however, it is not unique to Augustus as T. H. Kim, 'The Anarthrous υἱὸς θεοῦ in Mark 15,39 and the Roman Imperial Cult', *Bib* 79 (1998) 221–41 maintains. See the exceptions in his own material p. 227 (SB 8317) and in nn. 34 and 36.

110 Cf. P. Bureth, *Les titulatures impériales dans les papyrus, les ostraca et les inscriptions d'Égypte* (PapyBrux 1; Brüssel: Fondation Égyptologique Reine Elisabeth, 1964), in 8 from 20 cases.

111 Cf. H. Heinen, 'Vorstufen und Anfänge des Herrscherkultes im römischen Ägypten', *ANRW* 2.18.5 (1995) 3144–80, 3165–6. Cf. the parallel Egyptian naming of Augustus on the Kalabscha portal as 'Kaisar, the god, the son of the god'.

112 Thus 'wahrscheinlich' G. Theißen, 'Auferstehungsbotschaft und Zeitgeschichte', *Auferstehung hat einen Namen* (FS H.-J. Venetz; ed. S. Bieberstein and D. Kosch; Luzern: Exodus, 1998) 59–68, 64–5. All assumptions of hints of polemic against the emperor and the emperor cult in Romans have to struggle with the open demand for loyalty in 13.1–7.

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certainly is true, but it may be only one side of the coin. I have tried to show that the pagan mentality that we presuppose in the readers of some NT writings does not simply play a negative role in the reception of the gospel. The hymnic text Phil 2.6–11 activates cultural models of thinking, for example, the hidden epiphany of gods in concrete human beings as well as the apotheosis of deserving men. That historical persons could be sent from heaven to accomplish a salvific work for mankind was a category current at the time which could lend more plausibility to the Pauline and Johannine mission formulae. In confronting the One Lord with the many pagan κύριοι (1 Cor 8.5–6), Paul indirectly elevates the Jewish Messiah to the level of these saviour-gods. Similarly, the reshaping of the messianic 'Son of God' in Mark could appeal to readers who thought it possible that miracles and teaching testifing to the divine qualities of extraordinary men. That divinity is conferred through a generation excluding a human father and that this descent befits a royal figure seems to be a conclusion that would have been easy to grasp for pagan readers of the infancy stories.

'Son of God' here implies also a physical connotation. This is only a striking example of how Christology was transformed on its way from Jewish soil through Jewish Hellenists to a predominantly Hellenistic community. It was a process of communication following its intrinsic logic, importing at the same time opposition and accommodation to the Greco-Roman world, a process in which elements of the original signification were lost and new meaning was acquired. As a result I dare to suggest that some findings of the old 'Religionsgeschichtliche Schule' are more useful in illustrating this process of reception than the angelological links which the so-called 'New Religionsgeschichtliche Schule' postulates to connect Christianity with Judaism.

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