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# Names and Numbers in Early Christianity

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**Les premiers chrétiens recoururent aux noms et aux nombres pour organiser leur pensée théologique. Ce faisant, ils poursuivaient une habitude ancrée aussi bien dans la réflexion philosophique grecque que dans les Écritures hébraïques. Sans développer une ontologie du langage, ils articulaient les mots et les chiffres sur la réalité, laissant à Dieu la responsabilité des équivalences. Le nom de Dieu et le nom de Jésus constituaient, à leurs yeux, le noyau de leur confession de foi.**

## Introduction

It is my hypothesis that the early Christians used the categories of 'name' and 'number' as theological tools.[1] Often they consciously interpreted names and numbers in a symbolic way. Even their non-reflexive usage relied on implicit conceptualizations very different from our nominalist-based thinking. They presupposed that names and numbers are inextricably related.[2] Is the Jewish and Christian confession εἷς ὁ θεός not a cogent expression combining a name and a number? Like other Jewish movements, the first churches were immersed in a multi-ethnic ocean reflecting centuries of Greek epistemology and Babylonian mathematics. It is therefore simplistic to imagine early Christian thought as influ-

1 Presidential address, SNTS Tel Aviv, 2000. I would like to thank my colleague and friend Gabriel Widmer who discussed the matter with me. He gave me also some bibliographic references, such as the articles 'Nombre' and 'Nomen (nom)', in *Les notions philosophiques. Dictionnaire* (Encyclopédie philosophique universelle; ed. Sylvain Auroux; 2 vols; Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990) 2.1755–62. I would like also to express my gratitude to Elizabeth Busky who revised my English, Anna Miller who checked numerous references for me, David Warren who read the proofs with me, and particularly to Ann Graham Brock who following the preparation of this paper revised its form and content with talent and diligence. I thank finally those auditors of my address, members of the SNTS, who gave me their reactions and comments.

2 On the contrary, in modern times, fighting an aristocratic society and Christian personalism, Lenin proclaimed that it was time to abandon names and introduce the language of numbers; see Bastian Wielenga, *Lenins Weg zur Revolution* (Munich: Kaiser, 1971); Yann Redalié, 'Conversion ou libération? Actes 16,11–40', *Bulletin du Centre protestant d'études* 26 (1974), Nr. 7, 19–31, esp. 21–2. I owe my interest in the topic of names and numbers to discussions in the 1970s with Yann Redalié.



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enced merely by Semitic, biblical thought.[3] I suggest that early Christian reflections on names and numbers not only bear witness to a strong relationship between language and reality, but also manifest a significant difference between signifier and referent. God is the master of names and numbers, thus conferring an ontological quality to any creation.[4] As the race of humans, however, is different from the race of the gods, to speak with Pindar,[5] so names and numbers are also human expressions. Accordingly a total equality between language and reality cannot be reached and remains an illusion.

Not everyone may be convinced of the importance of names and numbers in early Christianity, particularly of speculations as to their various meanings.[6] Many ancient authors, both Jews and Christians, tried to inquire concerning the name of 'God' with a will both to know and to communicate a religious knowledge. Certain that the real name of the divinity eludes human perception, they believed that God had revealed his sacred names, such as 'Lord' or 'Sabaoth', to humans.[7] For example, some manuscripts of *3 Enoch* contain an impressive list of divine names.[8] A similar interest led several ancient authors to communicate the names of angels,[9] of the

3 I agree here with James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University, 1961).

4 Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 2.25.1, insists on this theocentrism: it is God who is the master of names and numbers. In *Adv. haer.* 1.15.5 the bishop of Lyons criticizes Mark the Magician for imprisoning God in human names and numbers.

5 Pindar, *Nemean Ode VI*.1. I thank Ellen Aitken who helped me to find this reference.

6 On names see Hans Bietenhard, 'ὄνομα κτλ.', *TWNT* 5 (1954) 242–83; A. Heubeck, 'Personennamen, A. Griechische', *Lexikon der alten Welt* (ed. Carl Andresen et al.; Zürich: Artemis, 1965) 2267–8; W. Krenkel, 'Namengebung', ibid. 2056; Lazlo Vanyó, 'Nom', *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du christianisme ancien* (ed. Angelo Di Berardino; trans. François Vial; 2 vols, Paris: Cerf, 1990) 2.1759–61; on numbers see Oskar Rühle, 'ἀριθμέω, ἀριθμός', *TWNT* 1 (1933) 461–4; Peter Friesenhahn, *Hellenistische Wortzahlenmystik im Neuen Testament* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1935); Jören Friberg, 'Numbers and Counting', *ABD* 4 (1992) 1139–46.

7 See the *Prayer of Jacob*, difficult to date (1st–4th century CE); James H. Charlesworth, 'Prayer of Jacob', in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*: *Expansions of the 'Old Testament' and Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; 2 vols, New York: Doubleday, 1983–5) 2.715–23. See also the riddle on the name of God in *Sibylline Oracles* 1.137–46.

8 *3 Enoch* 48B; *Quaest. Barth.* 4.23. One knows the interest of Islam for the 99 names of Allah. For this idea see Arthur Jeffery, ed., *A Reader On Islam: Passages From Standard Arabic Writings Illustrative of the Beliefs and Practices of Muslims* (The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton and Co., 1962) 553–5.

9 *2 Enoch* 40; *3 Enoch* 17.

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fallen angels or watchers,[10] of Satan,[11] of demons,[12] of Jesus,[13] and of his disciples.[14]

Those who wished to establish such enumerations were interested not only in names but also in numbers: for instance, how many angels, how many names?[15] The numerous instances of a census in the book of Numbers is an example of this phenomenon.[16] Actually the title 'Numbers' (ἀριθμοί) is not the original one; it was given by the translators of the book into Greek. In the Hebrew Bible it is called 'In the wilderness', according to its first word. Another example is the use of a particular number, such as 12,[17] which occurs many times: it is used for the tribes of Israel, then for the 12 apostles,[18] and later by the author of the *Book of the Resurrection according to Bartholomew* for their 12 thrones and their 12 garments.[19] The evangelist Luke is not the only one interested in marking time.[20] Mark has already eagerly mentioned the exact moment of several episodes of Jesus' passion:

10 On the fallen angels, see *1 Enoch* 6.7; 69.2–14. Strangely, Kasb'el, the chief executor of the oath, has a number and a name (*1 Enoch* 69.13–14). On the watchers, associated with the angels in passages like *1 Enoch* 21.10, particularly with those in Gen. 6.1–8 that were sent from heaven, see *1 Enoch* (1.4–5; 10.9; 12; 15) as well as *Jubilees* (4.15; 7.21; 8.3). Also see *Act. Phil.* 8.11 and 11.3 for reference to these beings.

11 *Quaest. Barth.* 4.23, 45.

12 Mark 5.9.

13 As for God, the real name of the mediator remains hidden; only 'Jesus', as a name of this world, is revealed, according to *Asc. Is.* 8.7–9.5; see *Act. Thomas* 163.2.

14 From Mary Magdalene to Peter, from Paul to James.

15 On the symbolic value attributed to numbers by peoples of antiquity see Georges Ifrah, *Histoire universelle des chiffres. L'intelligence des hommes racontée par les nombres et le calcul* (Bouquins; 2 vols, Paris: Laffont, 1994) passim; Friberg, 'Numbers and Counting', 1143–5. Number speculation was characteristic of Pythagorism; see Adela Yarbro Collins, 'Numerical Symbolism in Jewish and Early Christian Apocalyptic Literature', *ANRW* 2.21.2 (1984) 1250–3; but Porphyry also may have written a work on numbers; see H. Kees, 'Porphyrios', in *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (66 vols; ed. Georg Wissowa et al.; Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1953) 43.300. Plotinus's *Enead* 6.6 deals with numbers and Augustine knew this treatise; see Olivier du Roy, *L'intelligence de la foi en la Trinité selon saint Augustin. Genèse de sa théologie trinitaire jusqu'en 391* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1966) 70 n. 1. Quintilian, *Inst. or.* 1.10.35: geometry has two divisions; one is concerned with numbers, the other with figures. Now knowledge of the former is a necessity not merely to the orator, but to anyone who has had even an elementary education.

16 The book contains also the mention of the 70 elders (Num 11.24–5), the names of the 12 explorers (Num 13.4–16), and the episode of the 12 rods (Num 17.1–11, see below n. 58). See also the Jewish reflection on the number of the biblical books.

17 According to *4 Ezra* 14.10–12, time is divided into 12; it gets older because 9½ periods have gone already.

18 Mark 3.13–19 par.; Matt 19.28 par.

19 *Book of the Resurrection according to Bartholomew* 21.8.

20 See the famous synchronism in Luke 3.1; the date of Elizabeth's pregnancy in Luke 1.36; the end of Mary's visit to her cousin in Luke 1.56; the three periods of Jesus' life and those of the history of salvation.

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the sixth hour, the ninth hour, the evening, and early in the morning.[21] The theological significance of the number 40 is well known,[22] beginning with Moses[23] and continuing with Jesus' temptations[24] and appearances.[25] The number seven, so significant for the book of Genesis, still has a special role in the book of Revelation, as seen in the seven churches (Rev 1.4), the seven letters (Rev 2–3), the seven seals (Rev 5–8), the seven trumpets (Rev 8–11), the seven cups and the seven angels (Rev 15–17).[26] Often numbers are used as a cryptic way of referring to names and people, such as the famous 666 of the book of Revelation.[27] On the other hand, names can also encapsulate numbers, as when the name of Jesus is abbreviated to the number 888 according to the Valentinian Mark the Magician.[28]

In ancient Jewish or Christian texts, when a divine message is received and written, inherent in the narrative are concerns about the name of the revealing entity as well as the individual to whom the revelation is delivered. When a reflection on a sacred legacy or history emerges in these texts, numbers may articulate periods of time and destiny.[29] When the eyes of the wise contemplate creation, including heaven and earth and its many peoples, then measure and dimension, as expressed with numbers and names, appear to justify a theological claim or defend a religious orientation.[30] Such is the case in the Wisdom of Solomon.[31] Likewise, the establishment of a holy people as the recipients of divine revelation

21 See Mark 15.25, 30, 33, 34; 15.42.

22 Other numbers were believed to be pure and for some of them to represent plenitude, like 4, 7, 8 and 10; see Friedrich Hauck, 'δέκα', *TWNT* 2 (1935) 35–6; Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, 'ἑπτὰ κτλ.', *TWNT* 2 (1935) 623–31; Horst Balz, 'τέσσαρες κτλ.', *TWNT* 8 (1969) 127–39.

23 Exod 34.28; Deut 9.9; *Barn.* 4.7–8; there are also the 40 days of the explorers (Num 14.34) and the 40 years of punishment in the wilderness (Num 14.33); see Origen, *Hom. Num.* 8.1.5.

24 Matt 4.2 par.

25 Acts 1.3.

26 See Collins, 'Numerical Symbolism in Jewish and Early Christian Apocalyptic Literature', 1221–87. *4 Ezra* 7.132–40 enumerates seven attributes of God: God is merciful, gracious, patient, bountiful, abundant in compassion, giver, and judge. The treatise *On the Origin of the World* (NHC II,5 and XIII,2) 101.24–102.2 names the seven androgynous names of the seven divine forces. The number seven is also important for the author of the *Poimandres* (*Corpus Hermeticum* 1) 9: God, called νοῦς, creates seven governors, probably the seven planets.

27 Rev 13.18.

28 See Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.15.2; see also, the first book of the *Sibylline Oracles*, analysed below, pp. 282-3 (*Sib.* 1.324–31). In *Adv. haer.* 1.15.1–3 Irenaeus gives his interpretation of the name of Jesus.

29 See Collins, 'Numerical Symbolism', 1224–49; James C. VanderKam, *Calendars in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Measuring Time* (The Literature of the Dead Sea Scrolls; London/New York: Routledge 1998).

30 Such as monotheism. See *1 Clem* 29: 'The bounds of the nations are established κατὰ ἀριθμὸν ἀγγέλων θεοῦ, according to the number of the angels of God.'

31 See Wis 11.20; C. Larcher, *Études sur le Livre de la Sagesse* (EB; Paris: Gabalda, 1969) 187, 218–21; David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982) 234–5; see below, nn. 61 and 91.

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goes hand in hand with numbers. While the author of *4 Ezra* is preoccupied with the small number of the saved,[32] others are proud to be part of the happy few; still others apply the title 'the many' to their congregation,[33] and the book of Revelation fixes the boundaries of the community at 144,000.[34]

Twenty centuries separate us from the origins of Christianity. Among the obstacles that scholars of early Christianity must overcome, the most difficult are also perhaps the most abstract. With our logic influenced by the binary system of modern technology, can we understand a mind that works according to another, probably ternary, logic?[35] Influenced by centuries of nominalist thinking, are we able to imagine another relationship between language and thought, or between names or numbers and reality?[36]

### Biblical memories

The Jewish Scriptures are clearly concerned with names and numbers. These passages of the Hebrew Bible or the Septuagint contained an authoritative teaching and a model for new speculations. The NT and the early Christian literature likewise continued and even added to this reflection on names and numbers.

At the burning bush, Moses' request to know God's name is answered with a riddle which camouflages the divine name. In the Septuagint, the Tetragrammaton is translated with the present participle of the verb 'to be', which represents a theological interpretation: ὁ ὤν, 'the one being' (Exod 3.14).[37] This understanding of God[38] was continued but modified by the first Christians. In John 8.58 the evangelist makes an allusion to this episode with Moses and gives it a christological interpretation.

32 *4 Ezra* 7.45–61.

33 See in the Dead Sea Scrolls for example 1QS 6.1–7.25; Joachim Jeremias, 'Das Lösegeld für viele (Mark 10,45)', *Judaica* 3 (1947) 249–64; Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1997) 28.

34 Rev 7.4. Absorbed by polemics, the leader of a community can disregard another group in the following way: 'And there shall be others of those who are outside our number who name themselves bishops and also deacons . . .' (*Apocalypse of Peter* [NHC VII,3] 79).

35 See Johann Mader, *Die logische Struktur des personalen Denkens. Aus der Methode der Gotteserkenntnis bei Aurelius Augustinus* (Wien: Herder, 1965).

36 The reader should not forget the importance and power of names and numbers in magic; see Fritz Graf, *Magic In the Ancient World* (trans. Franklin Philip, Cambridge: Harvard University, 1997).

37 The episode is remembered by Josephus, *Ant.* 2.264, but with no insistence on the revelation of God's name.

38 See *Celui qui est. Interprétations juives et chrétiennes d'Exode 3,14* (ed. Alain de Libera and Emilie Zum Brunn; Patrimoines. Religions du livre; Paris: Cerf, 1986). Josephus, *Ant.* 11.331, tells the story of Alexander refusing to kill the high priest of Jerusalem and showing on the contrary great interest by greeting the name of God inscribed on the golden plate of the Jewish hierarch.

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The numerous biblical attestations of the expression 'name of God', or 'Lord', witness the distance between God as a person and God as a name.[39] They confirm also the respect that is due to this hidden and yet revealed God.[40] The hallowing of God's name and the avoiding of the profaning of God's name are central to Israel's religion. Likewise the Decalogue, particularly its third command to the members of the covenant states: 'You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name' (Exod 20.7 par). Likewise, the first request of the Lord's prayer, 'Hallowed be thy name' (Matt 6.9 par.), fits perfectly into this religious framework, as does the early Christians' reverence for the 'name of God' (for example, John 17.6).[41]

According to the book of Exodus, Moses, the admired leader, needed the help of his brother Aaron (Exod 4.10–17). Greek-speaking Jews, particularly Philo of Alexandria, contemplated why such help was necessary. Philo concludes that Moses represents the experience of God's presence while Aaron represents the need for words, particularly names, to express this religious experience.[42] God as a person remains transcendent; God's real name, nature, and person cannot be known,[43] but the experience of God can be known and needs to be expressed. There is, therefore, a correlation between religious reality and religious expression. The words are so important that some texts stipulate that this spiritual experience must be expressed in Hebrew, the divine language of creation, a language thought to have been forgotten after the fall but rediscovered in the time of Abraham.[44]

39 There is a shift in the location of the name of God: in the Hebrew Bible it dwells in the ark of the covenant (see 2 Sam 6.2; see also Exod 25.8), then in the Temple (see 1 Kings 9.3; see also 2 Sam 7.13; 1 Kings 8.10–11; Jer 7.10). In the early Christian writings it dwells in the new temple, the community (1 Cor 3.16) or the believer (1 Cor 6.19).

40 Origen, *On Psalm 2*, 2, tells us that the name of God was read as Adonai by the Hebrews and as κύριος by the Greeks; see Gustav Adolf Deissmann, *Die Hellenisierung des semitischen Monotheismus* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1903); Ralph Marcus, 'Divine Names and Attributes in Hellenistic Jewish Literature', in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 2 (1931–2) 45–120; Efraim Elimelech Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (trans. Israel Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1975) 97–134; Colin H. Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt* (London: Oxford University, 1979) 29 n. 2, 30; Marguerite Harl, 'La langue de la Septante', in Gilles Dorival, Marguerite Harl, Olivier Munier, *La Bible grecque des Septante. Du judaïsme au christianisme ancien* (Initiations au christianisme ancien; Paris: Cerf and CNRS, 1988) 255–6; Martin Rösel, *Adonaj – Warum Gott "Herr" genannt wird?* (Forschungen zum Alten Testament 29; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2000).

41 See, for example, *Apocalypse of Paul* 6–12; Theodore Silverstein and Anthony Hilhorst, *Apocalypse of Paul: A New Critical Edition of Three Long Latin Versions* (Genève: Patrick Cramer, 1997) 75–85.

42 See Philo, *De migratione Abraham* 76–85; *Quod deterius potiori insidiari soleat* 75–8, 126–32.

43 Justin Martyr, *1 Apol* 61.11: 'For no one can give a name to the ineffable God: and if anyone should dare say there is one, he raves with a hopeless insanity.'

44 See *Jubilees* 12.

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According to Gen 2.19–20 the importance of naming begins with creation because God entrusted Adam with the responsibility of giving names to the animals.[45] Even for us today, bestowing names is still an important matter (a name must fit and be well chosen). If the given name seems artificial or does not fit, often a nickname is chosen that does fit. In antiquity different solutions were given to the question of the link between *res* and *verbum*. Several pre-Socratic philosophers and all the sophists thought that names were given not by nature (φύσις), but by convention (θέσις). The Stoics, on the other hand, believed in an intrinsic relationship between names and reality. Their theory of the universal λόγος invited them to insist on the natural aspect of names. The Platonic tradition chose a middle way. Names are given by convention, but they are also the way, the only way, to reach reality. They are like the shadow cast by a body. From their δόξα there is for the industrious mind a way to go back to the realm they express.[46] Philo participates in this discussion by saying that Adam played a decisive role in the first act of naming. Adam was the first and the only individual to assign the names of the animals, whereas Greeks in antiquity believed that many sages of the past had participated in this act of choosing names. Use of the figure of Adam and this episode in Gen 2.19–20 by the author of Mark probably lies behind the enigmatic sentence in the story of Jesus' baptism: καὶ ἦν μετὰ θηρίων (Mark 1.13).

It is difficult to grasp the philosophical difference between the Hebrew text of Gen 2.19–20 and its Greek translation, but there is a subtle difference.[47] The Hebrew text does not insert any category between the animals and their names; in his writings on the Septuagint, however, Philo points out a difference between the

45 The episode is mentioned in the book of *Jubilees* 3.2: 'And Adam named all of them, each one according to its name, and whatever he called them became their names.' Trans. O. S. Wintermute, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2.58; see also *Midrash Rabbah, Genesis (Bereshith)* 17.4; *Midrach Rabba,* I, *Genèse Rabba* (traduit de l'hébreu par Bernard Maruani et Albert Cohen-Arazi, annoté et introduit par Bernard Maruani; Les Dix Paroles; Paris: Verdier, 1987) 200–1. Adam knows the names of the animals while the angels ignore them.

46 See Plato, *Cratylus*; see also Bietenhard, 'ὄνομα', 245–8. The prestige of the wise ὀνοματοθέτης, the 'one who gives names', the 'namer', in the Greek philosophical tradition underlines the importance of names and naming; see Plato, *Charmides* 175b v.l.; *Cratylus* 389d v.l.; if, however, the term is not from Plato himself, it may originate from Neo-platonic circles; see Édouard Des Places, *Platon: Œuvres complètes*, XIV, *Lexique, deuxième partie* (Collection des Universités de France; Paris: Belles Lettres, 1964) 384. Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem*, in Proclus, *Opera inedita* (ed. Victor Cousin; Paris: Durand, 1864) 657 lin. 19. Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, 82 recalls a sentence of one of the two Pythagorean schools: τί τὸ σοφώτατον; ἀριθμός· δεύτερον δὲ τὸ τοῖς πράγμασι τὰ ὀνόματα τιθέμενον: What is the wisest? Number; second the establishment of names for things.'

47 See Monique Alexandre, *Le commencement du Livre, Genèse I–IV. La version grecque de la Septante et sa réception* (Christianisme Antique 3; Paris, Beauchesne, 1988) 281. I thank my colleague Gary Anderson for this reference. Unfortunately the notes on these verses in *La Bible d'Alexandrie: La Genèse* (ed. Marguerite Harl; Paris: Cerf, 1986) 105 are not developed.

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genre (γένος) and the species (εἶδος).[48] What Adam did was to name the animals according to their species, but respecting the greater category of genre. Divine in origin, the genre preceded any human action and was imposed on Adam. As Philo says, one seal can produce many prints. Human limitation can destroy the prints but cannot touch the seal.[49] Behind Adam's names that we can hear or read are the abstract categories, the genres, which are in and of God.[50]

The Hebrew Bible offers numerous examples of symbolic names, including the children of the prophets Hosea (Hos 1.3–9) and Isaiah (Isa 8.3). In Hebrew scriptures even the change of a name is significant: for example, Abram becomes Abraham, Sarai becomes Sarah, and Jacob becomes Israel.[51] The first Christian authors were likewise well aware of the significance of a name. Matthew makes clear a link between Jesus' name and his providential function. He writes about Mary and her child: 'She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins' (Matt 1.21). The change of Simon's name to Peter (Matt 16.17–18)[52] continues this biblical tradition. Moreover, Philo wrote an entire treatise on the changing of names.[53] According to him, Jacob became Israel for at least two reasons, first because as an individual he 'wrestled with God', and second because through this wrestling with God he became the representative for the collective people of God.

The distinction between heavenly and earthly also applies here. A heavenly Israel corresponds to the empirical Israel.[54] These ancient Babylonian and Greek beliefs that there exists a heavenly counterpart either to the earthly temple or to this world also found their way into the Christian faith.[55] Ignatius of Antioch

48 *Legum allegoriae* 2.9.

49 *Quod deterius potiori insidiari soleat* 78. On Adam naming the animals see further Philo, *De opificio mundi* 148–50.

50 It would be enlightening to know what the first Christians believed about naming, particularly when naming newborn believers during baptism. By calling upon them God's name and giving them new names, were they performing a sacramental action or using a ritual without ontological impact? It seems – if we can use the Pauline understanding of Eucharist (1 Cor 6.12–17; 10.14–22; 11.23–6) as an analogy – that some of them at least were convinced by the internal connection between names and reality. Adam had chosen the right names, not so much because he knew the divine genres, but because he had received the divine wisdom to know and communicate God's intention.

51 Gen 17.5, 15 and 32.27–8. Other changes of names in the Hebrew Bible: Num 13.16 (Hoseah becomes Joshua); 2 Kings 14.7 (the city of Sela receives the name of Jokthe-el); 2 Kings 23.34 (Pharaoh Neco changes the name of the King Eliakim to Jehoiakim).

52 The change from Saul to Paul in Acts 13.9 remains enigmatic because Luke mentions it but does not explain it. See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation and Commentary* (AB 31; New York: Doubleday, 1998) 499–500.

53 Philo, *De mutatione nominum*.

54 See the *Prayer of Joseph*, Fragment A, a text probably of the 1st century CE; see J. Z. Smith, 'Prayer of Joseph', in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* 2.699–705, 712–13.

55 See Heb 8.5 building on Exod 25.40; see also Rev 2.1, 8, 12, 18; 3.1, 7, 14.

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considered the bishop to be an earthly counterpart of the heavenly Father and, likewise, presupposed that the liturgy of the Church is the human counterpart of the celestial liturgy celebrated by the angels.[56] Paul,[57] a Jewish theologian, considered to be a reformist by some and a heretic by others, dared to relate the new congregation of believers to the spiritual reality of Israel.[58]

In the case of Daniel, not just a single text but the whole book is worth mentioning because of the significant use of numbers throughout: the four kingdoms of chapter 2, the seven times of Dan 4.23, 25, 32, the 'numbered, numbered, weighed, and divided' of Dan 5.25–8, the four winds and four animals (the fourth with its ten horns) of Dan 7, the several horns and the 2,300 evenings and mornings of Dan 8, the 70 years and 70 weeks of years in Dan 9, the four kings and the four directions of Dan 11, the time, two times and half a time of Dan 12.7, and the 1,290 and 1,335 days of Dan 12.11–12. This list is most relevant for our purpose because the subsequent apocalyptic literature will rely on it.[59]

One final text must be mentioned in this section. It comes from the wisdom literature and participates in the apologetic dialogue between Israel and the intellectual Greek world, illustrating along with the Greek philosophers the importance of names and numbers. Different from the Greek presupposition, however, it reverses the perspective, transforming an anthropological opinion into a theological one.[60] According to the author of the Wisdom of Solomon, it is God, the Creator of the universe and Guide of Israel, who 'arranged all things by measure and number and weight' (πάντα μέτρῳ καὶ ἀριθμῷ καὶ σταθμῷ

56 See Ign. *Magn.* 3.2; 6.1; 7.2; *Smyrn.* 8.1–2; *Eph.* 4.1–5.3; *Trall.* 7.2; *Rom.* 2.2.

57 Gal 6.16.

58 Names and numbers occur also on the garment of the high priest Aaron. The names of Israel's 12 tribes were engraved on the two stones, six on each, placed on the shoulder-straps of the ephod (Exod 28.10–14). The high priest therefore represented the people of Israel. But he also carried on his pectoral a gold tablet with the holy name of God. Inscribed on the gold tablet was the expression 'Holy to the Lord' (Exod 28.36; ἁγίασμα κυρίου in the Septuagint). The high priest thus represented God when meeting the elect people. Josephus (*Ant.* 3.162–78), Philo (*De vita Mosis* 2.109–30) and the author of the book of Revelation (Rev 21.12, 19) are the witnesses of a careful reading of Exod 28 in the first century CE. Close to Exod 28.10–14 is Num 17, a passage in which each of the 12 tribes brings a rod with its name engraved in it. Only one, that of Aaron and the tribe of Levi, will bloom the next day and show the election of this tribe for the service of God. The episode is mentioned in *1 Clem* 43 as a way of solving a crisis to avoid any kind of ἀκαταστασία, 'disorder.' This is the best way to glorify God's name, εἰς τὸ δοξασθῆναι τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ καὶ μόνου. See also *Protevangelium of James* 8-9.

59 For some discussion of numerology in Daniel see Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary* (AB 23; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978) 70, 208–17.

60 It is my conviction that this position is also the position of the NT as it is that of Irenaeus (see n. 4).

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διέταξας, Wis 11.20).[61] Likewise, the first Christians showed interest in creation and believed the world to be organized harmoniously.[62]

### Enumerations and meaningful names

The kinship between signs for words and signs for numbers is embedded in the origins of writing (as long ago as in the proto-Sumerian culture of Uruk, around 3000 BCE).[63] It will never be lost. Some Hebrew, Greek, and Roman numerals were and still are letters.[64] The selection of letters as signs for numbers[65] reflected with some exceptions the alphabetic order (α΄ for 1, β΄ for 2, γ΄ for 3, and so on). To avoid confusion, a small stroke was added to the letter to show that the letter signified a number.[66] Conversely, the name of a person not only functioned as a substitute for this person, it could also designate some of his or her belongings. In certain contexts τὸ ἐμὸν ὄνομα meant 'my account', or 'my bank account'.[67]

In glorifying God or praising God's messengers there was already in antiquity a tendency to enumerate deeds or titles with numbers.[68] A tradition behind the Gospel of John, perhaps the *Semeia-Quelle*, attributed a numeric sequence to Jesus' several signs or miracles. Traces of it are still visible in John 2.1 (the beginning of the signs), 4.54 (second sign), and perhaps 21.14 (the third time). Such a tendency, perceptible already in the *catenae* of sayings,[69] miracles,[70] or appearances stories,[71] occurs also in the lives of some apostles. The *Acts of Thomas* as well as the *Acts of Philip* organize the large material into a certain number of

61 On the importance of this verse for Augustine, see below, n. 91.

62 See Acts 14.15–17; 17.24–7; Col 1.15–17.

63 See Friberg, 'Numbers and Counting', 1140.

64 See Ifrah, *Histoire universelle des chiffres*, 1.441–621. As we have seen earlier (n. 10 above), *1 Enoch* 69.13–14 brings close the number and the name of the fallen angel Kasb'el; in *2 Enoch* 40.3 (manuscript J, longer recension): Enoch received a complete knowledge from the Lord. He says: 'For not even the angels know their numbers. But I have written down all their names.' Manuscript A (shorter recension) has a text very close to the text of J.

65 Friberg, 'Numbers and Counting', 1143: 'The oldest examples of the use of Hebrew alphabetic numerals may go as far back as the late 2d and the 1st centuries B.C. . . . The relatively late dates of these first examples suggest that the Hebrew alphabetic numeration was introduced as a result of Greek influence.'

66 See Ifrah, *Histoire universelle des chiffres*, 1.529–38.

67 Bientenhard, 'ὄνομα', 244–5.

68 On the names and epithets of the gods in Greek religion, see André-Jean Festugière, 'La Grèce, la religion', in *Histoire générale des religions*, II, *Grèce–Rome* (Paris: Quillet, 1948) 61–4; on the 12 deeds of Heracles, see Martin P. N. Nilsson, 'La Grèce, la mythologie', ibid., 233–42.

69 See Q, the *Gospel of Thomas* or the *Gospel of Philip*.

70 See the *Epist. apost.* 4–5.

71 See 1 Cor 15.3–11; John 20, 21; *Acts of John* 87–93.

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consecutive acts. Although there are some discrepancies within the manuscripts concerning the enumerating, nevertheless the presence of numbers, spelled out completely or abbreviated with letters depending on the manuscripts, indicates a compositional intention to organize the apostolic memories. It also expresses a missionary zeal: the lives of the Saviour or of his apostles do not lack order and sequence, and numbers become tools for a faith relying on divine providence. If the plural can sometimes be the means of human limitations or even sins, it can also help to express the solicitude of the many divine messengers and their continuous intention to save.

Proper names could be spelled out or – at least for some of them – abbreviated. I wish to mention here the famous *nomina sacra*.[72] It is certain that these abbreviations were not intended to save time or space. It is also clear that four names, Ἰησοῦς, Χριστός, κύριος and θεός, constituted the first and most ancient group of *nomina sacra* (occurring in the first half of the second century CE). If the belief in the ineffability of the name of God is certainly Jewish, the system of abbreviations for 'Lord' (κύριος) and 'God' (θεός) seems to be Christian in origin. To sum up, the system of the *nomina sacra* corresponds to a double theological movement. First, it offers a special way of writing the divine name detaching it from the human network. Second, it relates the Son more closely to the Father by including both of them in a sphere secluded from the realm of creation.

An early text, the *Epistle to Barnabas*, of around 100 CE, is a witness for a short form of Jesus (actually the suspension ιη which exists in the beginning beside the usual contraction ις).[73] It is certain that a theological interest lies behind this writing practice. Colin H. Roberts writes: 'It seems then that there were two lines of development, the one owing something to number symbolism, the other, perhaps with an allusion to Alpha and Omega, taking the first and the last letters.'[74] One should not forget that the *nomina sacra* were always accompanied by a superlinear stroke, so that as they read, the ancient readers could see when they were approaching a sacred name.

The first Christians were torn between imitation of other Jewish movements and affirmation of their own identity: they paid a similar respect to divine names, but added to the name of God the name of their new Master, Jesus, considered to be the 'Messiah' and the 'Lord'.[75] The fact that other, more recent christological titles, such as 'Saviour' or 'Logos', did not become part of the system of the *nomina*

72 See Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt*, 26–48, 83–4.

73 *Barn* 9.8.

74 Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt*, 37.

75 The *Didache* shows a parallel phenomenon concerning fasting: like the Jews the Christians decided to fast twice a week, but unlike their Jewish opponents they chose Wednesday and Friday; *Did* 8.1.

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*sacra* gives a clue to the early origin of the system which rapidly became universal among the early Churches.[76]

### In the name of Jesus

In a Jewish world marked by the name of God, to proclaim the name of Jesus was perceived as a new, dangerous, even blasphemous attitude. Nevertheless, the invocation of the name 'Jesus' is characteristic of the early Christian traditions.[77] The expressions 'in my name' or 'in your name' in the Synoptic, both Marcan and Q, traditions[78] are a narrative adaptation of the christological formula: see, for example, Mark 9.37 par.; Mark 13.6 par.; and Luke 10.17. The theocentric perspective, however, still dominates in the Synoptic Gospels and the term ὄνομα is associated more frequently with the Father than with the Son. The situation is different in the Pauline epistles where the christological usage predominates. Central for our purpose is the second strophe of the hymn preserved in Phil 2.6–11: 'Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth . . .' (Phil 2.9–10). In my opinion the name given to the divine messenger at the resurrection is neither 'Lord', nor 'Jesus', but an ineffable name, a hidden expression of the divine condition. 'Lord', 'Messiah' and 'Jesus' are the visible side of the Resurrected.[79] Not only does the Father possess an ineffable name, the Tetragrammaton of Exod 3.14, but so also does the Son.[80] Similarly in the Epistle to the Hebrews, Jesus, the Son, God's representative and visible presence, is exalted over all creation. His name is over all other names: 'Having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs' (Heb 1.4). One should remember the development of angelology in this period and the bestowal of power to angels in order to understand the power of this phrase.[81] The expression 'my name' is also present

76 If the date is certain, the place of origin is still debated. Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt*, 42–6 rejects Alexandria and Rome, and chooses Jerusalem for no strong reasons.

77 'Parmi les nombreux passages du N.T. contenant le mot ὄνομα, un peu plus de cent l'emploient à propos de Jésus.' Jacques Dupont, 'Nom de Jésus', *DBS* 6 (1960) 514.

78 See also Matt 7.22 as a redactional example.

79 See also Eph 1.20–1 (see particularly the expression ὑπὲρ . . . παντὸς ὀνόματος ὀνομαζομένου).

80 This conception that the name Jesus is only the visible side of the Son's real name is typical of gnostic thought; it is a vital element in Mark the Magician, Valentinian theologian: see Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.15.1. See also *Acts of John* 98.8–12 and 109.3–17; *Gospel of Philip* 11–13; *Gospel of Truth* 38.7–15; Eric Junod and Jean-Daniel Kaestli, eds, *Acta Johannis* (CCSA 1–2; Turnhout: Brepols, 1983) 2.617–21.

81 Asserting that Jesus' name is higher than the angels' names, *1 Clem* 36.2 depends probably on the Epistle to the Hebrews.

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in the Johannine literature with a strong christological weight: see for example John 20.30–1. In the book of Revelation we find a similar consciousness of the inadequacy of any human name for Jesus Christ: 'He has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself' (Rev 19.12). At the end of the second century Irenaeus adds to the existing explanations of the relationship between the name of the Father and the name of the Son.[82]

Lucien Cerfaux, Jacques Dupont and Jean Daniélou concur in their suggestions that an early Christian theology of the 'name' was a theological expression of the first community.[83] I see these hypotheses as still valid. The first Christians were confident and proud, believing in the power of Jesus' name not in a magical way but as the expression of the person himself. 'But Peter said, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk"' (Acts 3.6). This trust in the name continued in the second century in such authors as Justin Martyr (*2 Apol.* 6.6; *Dial.* 30.3; 85), Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.* 2.32.4), the scribes of NT manuscripts, who sometimes added the expression 'in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ' to their copies (see the variant reading of D in Acts 6.8), and the authors of the apocryphal *Acts of the Apostles*.[84] For these Christians, Jesus Christ had revealed a new and salvific aspect of God's person. The prayer of the psalmist, 'Save me, O God, by your name' (Ps 54.1), had been actualized in Jesus. It is therefore not surprising that etymology was applied here: Jesus would carry his name properly: 'He will save his people from their sins' (Matt 1.21).[85]

82 Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 4.17.6. The divine name that is glorified in the world is the name of the Son and through it the Father is glorified. Like a king after painting his son can say: it is my work because it is the portrait of my son and it is my personal work; see also *Adv. haer.* 2.32.4. *The Gospel of Philip* (NHC II,3) 56.3–15, 62.7–17 and 63.21–4 has three developments on the names and titles of Jesus.

83 Lucien Cerfaux, *Le Christ dans la théologie de saint Paul* (LD 6; 2nd ed, Paris: Cerf, 1954) 357–9; Dupont, 'Nom de Jésus', 514–41; Jean Daniélou, *Théologie du Judéo-Christianisme* (2 vols; Paris: Desclée de Brower, 1958–61) 1.199–216.

84 See *Act. Joh.* 83; *Act. Pet.* 16; *Act. Thom.* 33.2; *Act. Phil.* 6.20; see Sever J. Voicu's index in *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens* 1 (La Pléiade 442; ed. François Bovon and Pierre Geoltrain; Paris: Gallimard, 1997) 1747.

85 This passage of Matthew influenced the *Protevangelium of James* 14.5–6: 'But when night came a messenger of the Lord suddenly appeared to him in a dream and said: "Don't be afraid of this girl, because the child in her is the holy spirit's doing. She will have a son and you will name him Jesus – the name means 'he will save his people from their sins' " ' (trans. Ronald F. Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* [The Scholars Bible 2; Santa Barbara, CA: Polebridge, 1995] 57, 59). The spiritual meaning of the proper names contained in the Septuagint interested Philo, and those in the NT, Origen. This is the opinion of Jerome when he decided to write the *Liber interpretationis nominum Hebraicorum* (CCSL 72.57–161). It is not so sure that Jerome could really rely on one book by Philo and another one by Origen. Jerome knew often the philological etymology of a name but respected the popular, or the spiritual, one. He believed also that God had given some secret meanings to the Biblical names. See Franz Wutz, *Onomastica Sacra. Untersuchungen zum Liber interpretationis*

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This theology of the 'name' is most visible in the book of Acts.[86] It is also in this work that we find the strongest statement, namely that there is salvation to humanity only through the name, i.e. the person, of Jesus Christ. This is the argument that Luke, writing the story of the healing of the paralytic at the 'Beautiful Gate' (Acts 3.2), places on the lips of the apostle Peter when he is confronted with the Sanhedrin: καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἄλλῳ οὐδενὶ ἡ σωτηρία, οὐδὲ γὰρ ὄνομά ἐστιν ἕτερον ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸν τὸ δεδομένον ἐν ἀνθρωποις ἐν ᾧ δεῖ σωθῆναι ἡμᾶς ('There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved', Acts 4.12).[87]

Christians claim to represent the true people of God, 'those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Cor 1.2). Joel's prophecy was quoted with joy and profit: 'Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved . . .' (Joel 2.32 [LXX 3.5]; see Rom 10.13; Acts 2.21). Preaching, prayers, creeds and baptisms were performed 'in his name'.[88] The unknown or unusual expressions in Greek, τὸ ὄνομα, with the preposition εἰς, ἐν or ἐπί, refer to two parallel movements in opposite directions, a movement from the Lord Jesus Christ to the believer and a movement from the believer towards Jesus Christ and his flock.[89]

### Holy numbers

It is not necessary to wait until Origen's homilies on the book of Numbers[90] or Augustine's reflections on Wis 11.20 on measure, number and weight to realize

*nominum Hebraicorum des Hl. Hieronymus* (2 vols; TU 41.1–2; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1914–15): 'Meine "Onomastica Sacra" sind als Nachschlagewerk gedacht, in welchem über die Namen aller bislang erreichbaren Listen Rechenschaft gegeben wird' (p. viii).

86 See Dupont, 'Nom de Jésus'.

87 See also the glorification of the name of Jesus Christ in the *Acts of John* (e.g. 109), the *Acts of Thomas* (e.g. 27.2–3), the *Acts of Philip* (e.g. 7.2), the *Life of Andrew* by Gregory of Tours (e.g. 3.4), and the *Doctrina Addai* (e.g. 10). In the Christian texts it is sometimes difficult to know if the name refers to God or to Christ. In the *Odes of Solomon* the many mentions of the name (e.g. 39.7–8, 13) must refer to the Lord Jesus Christ.

88 For the prayer, see John 14.13–16 and Acts 22.16; for the preaching, see Luke 24.46–7; for the confession of faith, see Rom 10.6–13 and 3 John 17–18; for the baptism, see Matt 28.19 and 1 Cor 6.11. Even the suffering of the believers happens 'because of his name' or 'in his name'; see Mark 13.13; 1 Pet 4.13–16; Hermas, *Vis* 3.1.9–3.2.1.

89 See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (UTB 630; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1980) 135–41.

90 See Origen, *Hom Num.* 1; 4; 5.2.2–3; 7.4.4; 8.1.5; Origène, *Homélies sur les Nombres*, I, *Homélies I–X* (SC 415; ed. Louis Doutreleau; Paris: Cerf, 1996) 30–49, 98–113, 126–31, 188–9, 208–11. The following quotation manifests the importance of numbers in Origen's thought: 'Tout le monde n'est pas digne d'accéder aux nombres divins, mais il y a des règles de priorité pour la désignation de ceux qui doivent être compris dans le nombre de Dieu.' Origen, *Hom. Num.* 1.1.

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the strong impact numbers had on the Christian mind.[91] Irenaeus spent a great deal of time refuting the Valentinians, Mark and Ptolemy, and their speculations on numbers.[92] Although opposing their precise numerological elaborations, he did not object, however, to *any* use of numbers. It would be historically wrong to believe that such speculation was the endowment of the Gnostics. Similarly, as early as the book of Revelation or the *Epistle of Barnabas*, we read a symbolic interpretation of numbers and an interaction between letters and names.[93] In a text that cannot be accused of being either Gnostic or heretical, the so-called *Epistula apostolorum* (middle second century CE), we discover the following: 'We [Jesus' disciples after the miracle of the loaves of bread] were asking and saying: "What meaning is there in these five loaves? They are a picture of our faith concerning the great Christianity and that is in the Father, the ruler of the entire world, and in Jesus Christ our Saviour, and in the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, and in the holy Church and in the forgiveness of sins" '.[94]

The mystical or symbolic use of numbers probably did not belong to the elementary doctrinal and ethical teaching of the first Christian communities. But as soon as a desire to deepen the faith occurred, such a development became possible, as we see in the *Epistle of Barnabas*. This writing connects biblical exegesis (of the Septuagint) with reflections on numbers. Abraham's use of circumcision falls short, claims the author, if we understand it as a seal of the covenant, because the author is aware that other nations, Syrians and Arabs, and even priests of pagan religions, practised circumcision. Therefore – according to the author's words – a rich exegetical teaching needs to be gained from the book of Genesis. If Abraham was the first to use circumcision (Gen 17.9–14), he did so as a prophetic action inspired by the Spirit. The author adds: 'And Abraham circumcised from his household 18 men and 300.' The author draws attention to the fact that 18 in the Septuagint is mentioned *first*, distinct from the 300. It is intentional and providential: τὸ δεκαοκτώ, ιη΄ ἔχεις ’$\overline{\text{IH}}$. 'Eighteen is written IH. You have therefore Jesus.' And because the cross in the form of the τ was going to bring grace, it also reads 300 (in Greek: τ΄). It therefore refers to Jesus with the first two letters and the cross with the third letter. 'He knows this who placed the gift of his teaching in our hearts. No one has heard a more excellent lesson from me, but I know that you are

91 See Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* 4.3.7–4.6.12; see *La Genèse au sens littéral en douze livres (I–VII)* (2 vols; Bibliothèque Augustinienne: Œuvres de saint Augustin 48–49, septième série; trad., introd. and notes by Paul Agaësse and A. Solignac; Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1970–2) 1.288–97, 635–9.

92 Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.14–16; 2.20–8.

93 The apostle Paul (Gal 4.22–31) applied allegorical interpretation, a phenomenon parallel to the symbolism of numbers and the etymology of names (Gal 4.22–31).

94 *Epist. apost.* 5.

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worthy.'[95] This risky interpretation is not part of the first Christian preaching, nor is it part of the elementary ethical teaching, as we noticed.[96] The author of the *Epistle of Barnabas* believes in the divine origin of this teaching as well as in its implantation in us. The true meaning of Scripture *can* be known by the human mind, because there is a harmony between the external (the visible signs for 318) and the internal reality (the divine gift in us). But such a doctrine is not for anyone. Only the people of God, those who are worthy, can receive it and understand and enjoy it. Thus the role of the teacher is to bring into connection the Scripture and the reader, wherein a double link exists: on one side the christological content (ιη΄), on the other the pneumatological agency ἐν πνεύματι.[97] According to the author, physical circumcision could not offer the security of salvation because it did not offer the seal of the covenant. Only the work of Christ, Jesus and his cross, could establish the true covenant.[98]

Book I of the *Sibylline Oracles* is difficult to date in its present form, but I would date it in the second or third century CE. Even if the work can be considered a product of Christian propaganda,[99] its hexameters often contain doctrinal elements and in the example below a christological teaching in 1.324–331:

> δὴ τότε καὶ μεγάλοιο θεοῦ παῖς ἀνθρώποισιν
> ἥξει σαρκοφόρος θνητοῖς ὁμοιούμενος ἐν γῇ
> τέσσαρα φωνήεντα φέρων, τὸ δ᾽ ἄφωνον ἐν αὐτῷ

95 *Barn.* 9.7–9. Part of a codex, the Yale Genesis Fragment, *Papyrus Yale 1*, dated approximately 90 CE, contains Gen 14.5–8, 12–15 according to the Septuagint. The codex may have been of Christian origin. Interestingly the number 318 was not spelled out but written with letters (the passage is fragmentary but there is not enough space for the number to be spelled out). This unusual feature could open the door for such an interpretation as the one proposed by the author of the *Epistle of Barnabas*; see C. Bradford Welles, 'The Yale Genesis Fragment', *The Yale University Library Gazette* 39 (1964), Nr. 1, 1–8; C. H. Roberts, 'P. Yale 1 and the early Christian Book', in *Essays in Honor of C. Bradford Welles* (American Studies in Papyrology 1; ed. R. O. Fink *et al.*; New Haven/Toronto: The American Society of Papyrologists, 1966) 25–8; *Yale Papyri in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library* 1 (ed. John F. Oates, Alan E. Samuel, C. Bradford Welles; American Studies in Papyrology 2; New Haven/Toronto: The American Society of Papyrologists, 1967) 3–8. I am indebted to Prof. Carl Holladay for much valued advice on this fragment. See also T. E. Schmidt, 'The Letter Tau as the Cross: Ornament and Content in Hebrews 2.14', *Bib* 76 (1995) 75–84.

96 We have other traces of an advanced teaching in early Christianity. Ignatius of Antioch speaks of the three bright 'mysteries' ignored by the Prince of this world and accomplished by God in silence (Ign. *Eph.* 19.1); *Did.* 16.6 explains the three eschatological 'signs': the sign of extension, the sign of the trumpet, and the sign of the resurrection.

97 *Barn.* 9.7–8; see Ferdinand R. Prostmeier, *Der Barnabasbrief übersetzt und erklärt* (Kommentar zu den Apostolischen Vätern 8; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999) 352, 369–71.

98 See also *Barn.* 4.6–8 and 14.1–7; Prostmeier, *Barnabasbrief*, 370.

99 See Jörg-Dieter Gauger, *Sibyllinische Weissagungen. Griechisch-deutsch. Auf der Grundlage der Ausgabe von Alfons Kurfeß neu übersetzt und herausgegeben* (Tusculum; Zürich: Artemis & Winkler, 1998) 38.

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δίσσον· ἐγὼ δέ κέ τοι ἀριθμόν γ᾽ ὅλον ἐξονομήνω
ὀκτὼ γὰρ μονάδας, τόσσας δεκάδας δ᾽ ἐπὶ ταύταις
ἠδ᾽ ἑκατοντάδας ὀκτὼ ἀπιστοκόροις ἀνθρώποις
οὔνομα δηλώσει· σὺ δ᾽ ἐνὶ φρεσὶ σῇσι νόησον
ἀθανάτοιο θεοῦ Χριστὸν παῖδ᾽ ὑψίστοιο·

Then indeed the son of the great God will come,
incarnate, likened to mortal men on earth,
bearing four vowels, and the consonants in him are two.
I will state explicitly the entire number for you.
For eight units, and equal number of tens in addition to these,
And eight hundreds will reveal the name
to men who are sated with faithlessness. But you, consider in your heart
Christ, the son of the most high, immortal God.[100]

This text offers two ways of reading the name Jesus: first, by counting vowels and consonants (four vowels and two consonants, but what help is that?),[101] and second, by adding the numerical value of each letter. In this way you reach the number 888: ι΄ = 10, η΄ = 8, σ΄ = 200, ο΄ = 70, υ΄ = 400, σ΄ = 200. The text does not explain the value of this 888, but it was probably well understood by the initiated readers. It certainly meant a total plenitude, since the numeral 8 had been accepted by Christians as the number of Resurrection (the first day of the week being the eighth day).[102] As mentioned above, the Valentinian Mark also considered the number 888 to be the result of multiplication from the Tetrad, the Ogdoade, and the Decade. He also believed that this 888 is Jesus' name, a name which includes all numbers, and he went further, to make a connection with the A and Ω, another expression of the totality.[103]

Such explanations may seem artificial and far-fetched, but as scholars we first need to recognize the general interest in both the semantic value of numbers and

100 Trans. J. J. Collins, 'Sibylline Oracles', in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1.342.

101 See the Valentinian Mark's opinion according to Irenaeus, *Adv. haer*. 1.14.4: 'For Jesus [Ἰησοῦς] indeed is a symbolical name, having six letters and being known by all who belong to those who are called. The name, however, which is among the Aeons of the Fullness has many parts, being of another form and of another type; it is known by those companions [of Savior], whose Greatnesses [angels] are always with him.' Trans. Dominic J. Unger with John J. Dillon, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies*, vol. 1, Book 1 (Ancient Christian Writers 55; New York, NY: Paulist, 1992) 61. See also the acrostic poem 'Jesus Christ, son of God, saviour, cross', in *Sibylline Oracles* 8.218–50, and Augustine's comment in *De civitate Dei* 18.23. I thank Jean-Michel Rössli for this reference as well as for others to the *Sibylline Oracles*.

102 See *Sibylline Oracles*, 7.139–40; Auguste Luneau, *L'histoire du salut chez les Pères de l'Église. La doctrine des âges du monde* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1964) 325.

103 Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.15.2

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in the numeric scope of letters among people of late antiquity.[104] Modern theological criticism of such speculations, legitimate as it may be, must come second.

Any scholarly examination of ancient texts and their number speculations should also consider the so-called *flexio digitorum*. Passing from tens to hundreds was particularly important, because counting up to 99 was executed by the left hand, while counting from 100 on was done with the right hand. Remembering that the left side was considered a negative one, the passage to 100 was considered with pleasure. Juvenal, for example, celebrated the elder Nestor, who had had the privilege to live more than 100 years: 'If we have any belief in mighty Homer, the king of Pylos [Nestor] was an example of long life second only to the crow; happy forsooth in this that he had put off death for so many generations, and so often quaffed the new-made wine, counting now his years upon his right hand.'[105] It is therefore not surprising that the *Gospel of Truth* established a connection between the lost sheep and the fate of the whole flock. The shepherd not only saved the single animal but preserved or re-established the whole group: 'He is the shepherd who left behind the ninety-nine sheep which were not lost. He went searching for the one that had gone astray. He rejoiced when he found it, for ninety-nine is a number that is in the left hand that holds it. But when the one is found, the entire number passes to the right [hand]. As that which lacks the one – that is, the entire right [hand] – draws what was deficient and takes it from the left hand side and brings [it] to the right, so too the number becomes one hundred. It is the sign of the one who is in their sound; it is the Father.'[106] Even if the last sentence remains enigmatic, the interpretation of the parable manifests a strong ecclesiological component. It is as much the fate of the whole community that is at stake as the destiny of a single soul.

Should we dismiss this interpretation of the Lukan parable? I would hesitate, because it seems probable that the choice by Jesus or Q of 99 was not accidental in the original version and that the joy of the shepherd relied on the well-being of his flock as much as on the recovery of the lost sheep. I would also – to take another example – ascribe a symbolic value to the number of 'leftover' baskets of bread in both feeding miracles. The 12 baskets of the first story direct the attention

104 See H. Gericke, 'Zahlbegriff', *Lexikon der alten Welt* (ed. Carl Andresen *et al.*; Zürich: Artemis, 1965) 3297; R. Van Compernolle, 'Zahlensysteme', ibid., 3298–302; K. Vogel, 'Zahlenmystik', ibid., 3297–8; Antonio Quacquarelli, 'Nombres, Symbolique', *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du christianisme ancien* (ed. Di Berardino) 2.1761–2, who writes in particular: 'C'est pourquoi il faut se référer à des méthodes et à des usages différents des nôtres pour comprendre le passé' (1761).

105 Juvenal, *Satire* 10.247–50; quoted by Ifrah, *Histoire universelle des chiffres*, 1.139.

106 *Gospel of Truth* (NHC I,3 and XII,2) 31.35–32.17 (trans. Harold Attridge and George W. MacRae in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* [ed. James M. Robinson; 3rd edn; Leiden: Brill, 1988] 46). On this passage, see Paul-Hubert Poirier, '*L'Évangile de Vérité,* Éphrem le Syrien et le comput digital', *REAug* 25 (1979) 27–34. See also Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 2.24.6.

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to the pastoral responsibility of a Church placed under the leadership of the Twelve, while the seven baskets of the second story evoke the Church of the Hellenists and its organization of seven leaders.[107] Even if we, as modern readers, do not make sense of these numbers, other examples of numeric symbolic values, such as the two swords of Luke 22.38 and the 153 fish of John 21.11, certainly must have had a special significance for the first Christian audience.

### Unity and diversity, unity and duality

For the Platonic tradition, as well as other traditions, unity is the mark of perfection and the remaining numbers are the mark of deficiency.[108] The loss of unity is perceived as negative. Paul participates in this admiration of unity, as the First Epistle to the Corinthians makes clear. The multiplicity of so-called Lords, false gods or demons, is a negative sign. Meanwhile, the one God[109] with the one Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 8.4–6) acts as a positive sign. Unity and communion should be among the perfections of the people of God. Any kind of quarrels (ἔριδες) or divisions (σχίσματα) is painful (1 Cor 1.10–11). The apostle Paul is driven by a dream of unity.[110] Subsequently, his disciple, the author of the Epistle to the Ephesians, elaborates a theology of unity with a virulent assault against plurality.[111] The redemption in Christ is nothing less than a restoration of unity, the victory over 'the two', a fight against division present in any number other than one. Christ is 'our peace', 'he has made both groups into one' (ποιήσας τὰ ἀμφότερα ἕν)

107 Mark 6.43 (κλάσματα δώδεκα κοφίνων πληρώματα) and Mark 8.20 (πόσων σπυρίδων πληρώματα κλασμάτων ἤρατε; καὶ λέγουσιν· ἑπτά).

108 See Heinrich Dörrie, 'Platon', in *Der Kleine Pauly. Lexikon der Antike* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1979) 4.897–8. We find a short digression on the monad (ἡ μονάς) in the *Corpus Hermeticum* 4.10–11. According to the *Corpus Hermeticum* 11.9, 11 God can only be one. More than one God would be against the notion of order. The *Treatise of the Regeneration* (*Corpus Hermeneuticum* 13) 18 contains a hymn to unity and totality. Another passage of another treatise, *Corpus Hermeneuticum* 16.3, mentions also that God is one and all.

109 That God is unique is also underlined by *The Tripartite Tractate* (NHC I,5) 51.10: 'The Father is a single one, like a number, for he is the first one and the one who is only himself.' The unity itself is celebrated in *The Gospel of Truth* (NHC I,3 and XII,2) 24.28–25.20: 'It is within Unity that each one will attain himself; within knowledge he will purify himself from multiplicity into Unity, consuming matter within himself like fire, and darkness by light, death by life' (25.10–19). In the *Gospel of Philip* (NHC II,3) 63.25–30: 'The lord went into the dye works of Levi. He took seventy-two different colors and threw them into the vat. He took them out all white. And he said, "Even so has the son of man come [as] a dyer." '

110 See Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1991) 68–70, 202–6.

111 One can read the chapter of Williams James on unity and plurality: see William James, *Pragmatism* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1975) 63–80.

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and overcome hate. Israel and the nations are now reconciled. Christ fought victoriously so 'that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two' (ἵνα τοὺς δύο κτίσῃ ἐν αὐτῷ εἰς ἕνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον, Eph 2.14–15).[112] The influence of such a theology of unity is discernible, later, in the writings of Ignatius of Antioch. Christ is the 'one physician' (εἷς ἰατρός ἐστιν) Ign. *Eph.* 7.2), the 'one teacher' (εἷς οὖν διδάσκαλος, Ign. *Eph.* 15.1). Christians, as members of the body, and Christ, as its head, live in unity (ἕνωσις, Ign. *Trall.* 11.2). Thus the believer must be 'one' and possess an undivided heart (Ign. *Trall.* 13.2). The unavoidable problem of a perceived duality in God, as Father and Son, is overcome by an insistence on their perfect unity, as in the Gospel of John (John 5.19–23; 10.30; 17.11, 21–23): Father and Son are one (ἡνωμένος ὤν, 'being united', Ign. *Magn.* 7.1). The subject of unity[113] and the subsequent discounting of the perceived duality is also present in Ign. *Philad.* 3.2 and 9.1.[114]

The number two, however, is not exclusively the beginning of a disastrous plurality: it can also represent a companion to the 'one'.[115] Two can be the basis of harmony and concord: see the Jesus of the Synoptic tradition emphasizing the two major commands (Mark 12.28–34 par.; Luke 10.25–9); see the rule that a testimony receives its power from the presence of two witnesses (Deut 19.15; Matt 18.16; Rev 11.3); see the disciples who are sent two by two (δύο δύο, Mark 6.8); see the two sides of the coin in Paul's argument, the reconciliation in Christ and the ministry of that reconciliation, the work of Christ on one side and the apostolic witness on the other (ἡ καταλλαγή and ἡ διακονία τῆς καταλλαγῆς, 2 Cor 5.18–21);[116] see the two virtues celebrated by Ignatius in his letter to the Ephesians, 'faith' and 'love'. The first is the beginning, the second the end: τὰ δὲ

112 From the one God, from the Father (πατήρ), every family (πατριά) draws its name, Eph 3.14.

113 This topic of unity is also important for the author of *1 Clement*, who attacks the unhealthy divisions and claims: 'Or have we not one God, and one Christ, and one Spirit of grace poured out upon us? And is there no one calling in Christ?' (*1 Clem* 46.6). It is also present in *The Shepherd* of Hermas: avoid the divisions (διχοστασίαι) because they could take life away from you, Hermas, *Vis.* 3.9.9. See finally Polycarp, *Phil.* 11.1.

114 One is reminded of the saying: 'No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth' (Luke 16.13 par.; *GosThom.* 47); see also *GosThom.* 22 (make one out of two) and 61 (one is saved, one is lost). The *Gospel of Thomas* likes to use numbers to express a religious thought: see the criticism of the three gods in *GosThom.* 30 and the praise of the 'solitary' (*GosThom.* 75). See finally *Did.* 1.1: of the two ways, only one is good.

115 Is this positive valuation of the number two a reminiscence of the function of the dual? 'The dual is chiefly employed of two persons or things which, by nature or association, form a pair', writes Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (rev. Gordon M. Messing; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1984) § 999.

116 See *1 Clem.* 42: Christ from God, the apostles from Christ, both (ἀμφότερα) from God.

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δύο ἐν ἑνότητι γενόμενα θεός ἐστιν, 'when the two are joined together in unity it is God', Ign. *Eph.* 14.2.[117]

In his monograph on the early Christian creeds Oscar Cullmann makes a simple statement: it is not until the middle of the second century CE, more precisely in Justin Martyr, that we find a confession of faith in *three* parts.[118] The NT period, *grosso modo* in the first century, is still marked by a Christian creed in two articles, a short one devoted to the Father (in a Jewish environment there was not much to add concerning God) and a long one on the Son (the great innovation, the *skandalon*). Actually, this 'heresy' from a Jewish point of view could build upon some marginal Jewish texts which insist on a split inside the divinity and distinguish between an external and an internal aspect in God, between the hidden God and some hypostazised divine qualities (Logos, Wisdom, Spirit, Name), or between YHWH and the 'lesser YHWH'.[119]

From the beginning of the Jesus movement, however, the duality of Father–Son was not a closed, homeostatic relationship. One can see it already in the archaic saying from Q: 'No one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him' (Luke 10.22 par.). The reciprocity is not a rigid one, and the love between the two persons does not end in an exclusive narrowness, but opens to an inclusive invitation to those chosen by the Son. In the Matthean community as well as in the very different Pauline congregations the Spirit is soon added to the schema, and with the Spirit human participation is added to the divine economy: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Matt 28.19).[120] 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you' (2 Cor 13.13).[121]

117 Trans. Kirsopp Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers* (2 vols; LCL; London: Heinemann, 1919) 1.189. In *GosThom.* 11 and 22 the risk of transforming unity into duality is criticized and the goal is to transform the two into one. See in Polycarp, *Phil.* 10.1, a portion of the letter preserved only in Latin, the expression *in veritate sociati*, 'joined together in the truth'. See finally the early Christian distinction between the first and the second Testament; François Bovon, *L'Évangile et l'apôtre. Le Christ inséparable de ses témoins* (Aubonne: Le Moulin, 1993).

118 Oscar Cullmann, *Les premières confessions de foi chrétiennes* (Cahiers de la Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses 30; Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948) 27–38; see Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 13.

119 Such is the way Metatron is called in *3 Enoch* 12.5.

120 I am aware that according to certain exegetes this Matthean formulation is considered inauthentic and an interpolation; see Erich Klostermann, *Das Matthäusevangelium* (HNT 4; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1927) 232. See however *Did.* 7.3: 'Pour water three times on the head "in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." '

121 See Gerhard Delling, 'τρεῖς, τρίς, τρίτος' *TWNT* 8 (1969) 215–25. Among texts insisting on 'three', see the three Pauline theological virtues of faith, hope, and love (1 Cor 13.13); the division of the history of salvation in three periods by Luke; the three mysteries of Ignatius and the three signs of the *Didache* mentioned above at n. 96; the τρία γένη, the pagans, the Jews

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## Conclusion

I would suggest in conclusion that the faith of the first Christians rejoiced in the salvific name of the Lord Jesus Christ (see Acts 4.12), but soon included the Spirit, first as a force, then as a person. With the Spirit a relationship was also established with the human community of believers. Called to preserve their memories of Jesus, to read the Scriptures of Israel and to actualize the message in their life, these men and women, mostly Jews at the outset, realized the importance of names as a powerful and not artificial representation of an unseen reality. Trying to make sense of the creation around them, of history behind them, and of eschatology yet to come, they understood numbers to be signs, but, again, more than conventional signs, signs of a divine order and of a providential economy. Names and numbers are a gift from God that express an extralinguistic reality beyond what other words are capable of transmitting. This was culturally understood by early Jews and Christians. If we today fail to recognize the significance of names and numbers,[122] we neglect this extralinguistic reality and are vulnerable to losing a depth to our understanding of Scripture and deeper insights into its message.[123]

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and the Christians in Aristides, *Apologia* 2.1; the three virtues, faith, love and works, mentioned in *The Apocryphon of James* (NHC I,2) 8.12.14; the three Marys in *The Gospel of Philip* (NHC II,3) 59.6–11; the division of history into three aeons (the first aeon is the aeon of the soul, the second is the aeon of the flesh, the third is the aeon that is to come), in *The Concept of Our Great Power* (NHC VI,4) 38.5–48.13. See also in *Sibylline Oracles* 7.71–5 the three towers in which the mothers of God now live.

122 If names and numbers are only conventional signs, if everything is prisoner of language, if there is no extralinguistic reality, then Christians are, to speak with Paul (1 Cor 15.19), the most miserable among humans.

123 This paper is only a beginning and its author is happy to make his own the words of Origen (citation from the French translation as in n. 90 above): 'Contentons-nous d'avoir seulement approché ces perspectives plutôt que de les expliquer et de les développer; pour ceux qui sont dans les meilleures dispositions . . . il suffira qu'elles aient été indiquées et légérement effleurées.' Origen, *Hom. Num.* 4.2.1.

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