

“The Meaning of Matthew’s Confession of Jesus in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries”  
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### **Where We Stand on the Jesus Question**

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

### **The Old Christology**

Nicea followed three centuries in which matters about Jesus were up for grabs. More problems surfaced in the following centuries. More than a millennium later the Christological peace was disrupted by the Reformation Lord Supper controversy, which was only a cover for more serious differences about Christ and God. Calvin’s achievement was making Zwingli’s palatable to Luther’s followers, a process that concluded in the 1997 truce of *A Formula of Agreement*. Until the 18<sup>th</sup> century Christological controversies boiled down to explaining how

the divine and human in Jesus related to each other with the weight shifting from side to side.

### **The New Christology: Historical Questions and Their Necessity**

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

While dogmatic theology assumes the historical character of Jesus and then asks how his humanity is related to his divinity,<sup>2</sup> critical approaches do not. Divinity is outside the limits of historical research. What is a threat or at least a challenge to the church’s faith can, however, have a Luther-like hue. For the Reformer theology starts with the manger and the cross. The road to the divine begins from below, specifically the history of Israel and Jesus. Historical approaches can deteriorate into a skepticism in which Jesus is put beyond our reach, as in the

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<sup>1</sup>In November 2001 a conference was held at the University of Hamburg on the often unrecognized methodological and epistemological presuppositions behind recent historical Jesus research. These essays along with others were published in *Der historische Jesus: Tendenzen und Perspektiven der gegenwertigen Forschung*, ed. Jens Schroeter and Ralph Brucker. (Berlin: de Gruyter: 2002). For an overview in English see Andries G. Van Aarde’s review in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123/3 (Fall 2004): 560-64. Hereafter this will be referenced as *JBL*. Aarde notes that arguments for continuity and discontinuity between the history of Jesus and faith in him have equal standing and that no solution for resolving the disparity is offered (563).

<sup>2</sup>Though the dogmatic question has been superseded by the historical one, the question of how the human Jesus knew God is taken up by Thomas G. Weinday, “Jesus’ Filial Vision of the Father,” *Pro Ecclesia* XIII/2

case of David Friedrich Strauss and Rudolph Bultmann. Such negative conclusions are the inevitable results of applying principles which can be arbitrary, philosophical or both. Principles predetermine conclusions.<sup>3</sup> Dogmatics presupposes and requires history. Without it faith is suffocated by historical agnosticism. For those brought to the abyss of historical nothingness Karl Barth and Neo-Orthodoxy provided relief in a revealed Word directly from God. The downside was in this system was absence of incarnation joining earth and heaven. Questions of how the the human and the divine in Jesus relate (*communicatio idiomatum*) is rendered obsolete.

### **To the Parchments!**

Essential to knowing Jesus are the New Testament documents, which apart from their inspiration arose out of a historical process. They were not anonymous pamphlets randomly scattered in ancient seaports with the hope that a sailor on shore leave would pick them up and be converted to the Jesus movement. Rather these documents were preserved by specific communities, written by persons who were known to the communities to whom they were sent and having as their subject a man put on trial, executed and buried under official Roman auspices. They have a history and hence are historical. The *sub Pontio Pilato* of the Passion Narrative in the Gospels anchors Jesus in history (cf. Acts 4:27; 1 Tim 6:13.) The supposition is that *someone did something* within our time and space and so the door to historical research is opened. As with all historical documents, their subjects are kept at arm's length from the readers, but these documents are the entry points into the past and the doors into the theological arena. We know the Scriptures as historical documents before we confront them as theological

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(Spring 2004): 189-201.

<sup>3</sup>Bart D. Ehrman works with the principle of dissimilarity to determine probable historical authenticity in the life of Jesus. Sayings that do not support the Christian cause are more likely to be historical. *The New Testament" A Historical Introduction to Early Christian Writings*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford

ones. They are incarnational because Jesus is fully present in them to invite their hearers to himself. Thus they are sacramental in purpose (Matt 11:28). They are inspired by the Spirit who because he proceeds from Jesus (*filioque*) and sent into the world by him must speak about him through the apostles (Matt 10:20). However, a reader's acknowledgment of their divine origin does not assure the intended interpretation, but without this recognition they have no place in the church.<sup>4</sup>

In locating Jesus we begin and end with documents. Their importance for theology is evident in that the Scriptures have been altered and replaced when they were found to contradict the dogma of a particular community. Ancient and modern gnostics have produced their own scriptures. Some textual variants were accidental. Others may have arisen from the subconscious of the copyists to reflect their own biases to proselytize the unconvinced.<sup>5</sup> Rationalism resolved problems not by manipulating the texts but by reinterpreting Jesus' miracles as ordinary. Thomas Jefferson used the scissors method without the paste on the King James Version and anticipated the Jesus Seminar. Fundamentalism avoided historical concerns and shifted the origins of the biblical texts directly to the Spirit. Not surprisingly no place for the Sacraments was found in the "fundamentals" and Christology played a minimal role.<sup>6</sup> Even the hint that Hurtado has Evangelical motives [biases] does not take into account that his conclusions

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University Press, 2000), 205.

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

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

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

about Jesus arise from a critical study of the documents.<sup>7</sup>

Enlightenment scholars still set down the terms for critical scholars in reinterpreting and tampering with the Gospel texts. Literary criticism eschews these approaches in maintaining the integrity of the Gospel texts, but at the expense of failing to relate each Gospel to the others and a historical situation. The more prevalent method, so it seems, is tracing a process embedded in the New Testament documents from Jewish Christian communities to Hellenist ones. At first Jesus was regarded as an ordinary rabbi [Bultmann], an apocalyptic preacher [Schweizer; Ehrman] or an itinerant cynic peasant [Crossan] and later in the Hellenist communities he was promoted to God, on this there is general agreement. Q, a community document with proscriptions and the (Proto-) Mark, a narrative without birth and resurrection stories are seen as closer to Jesus. Paul is earlier than the Gospels. Hurtado works with this time frame, but unlike most scholars places the recognition of Jesus as divine in the earlier Jewish and not later Greek era. Scholars are taking note of this radical proposal.<sup>8</sup>

### **Overcoming a Century Long Tradition**

Hurtado advances his thesis of “Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity” in response to the views of any number of scholars especially the early 20<sup>th</sup> century German scholar Wilhelm Bousset who argued that Jesus became God in the Hellenist churches.<sup>9</sup> Bousset did not contest that the New Testament references presented Jesus as divine, but his apotheosis happened in churches whose members were predominantly former Gentiles and hence more generous than the Jews in whom they called “lord” or “god.” Monotheistic Jewish Christians at first were

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<sup>7</sup> Casey, “Lord Jesus Christ: A Response to Professor Hurtado,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 27:1 (September 2004): 90.

<sup>8</sup>David Vincent Meconi, review of *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*, by Larry W. Hurtado, in *First Things* 148 (December 2004): 50-52.

<sup>9</sup>Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans), 13-25. Hereafter referenced as *LJC*.

uncomfortable with this, but tolerated these Gentiles and in the end overcame their scruples: Jesus was in every sense and for everyone God.<sup>10</sup> This process might be compared to the adoration given to Washington and Lincoln in constructing temples for them in our nation's capitol. Bousset's ideas are more likely known to us through Rudolph Bultmann.<sup>11</sup> The publication in English in 1970 of Bousset's *Kyrios Christos* coincided with Bultmann's reign in American New Testament studies including the Missouri Synod. Accounts of Christ's birth resulted from myths of pagan gods' dalliances with women or their producing great men without the benefit of males. Resurrection could be derived from the spring revival the Egyptian river god.<sup>12</sup>

### **A Position Inadequately Summarized**

Hurtado does not ask the bare bones question of what Jesus or those who knew him thought of him, but by looking at the New Testament he concludes that the earliest Christian communities revered Jesus as divine. "In some forms of early 'popular' Christianity, Jesus almost seems to have eclipsed 'the Father.'"<sup>13</sup> He uses the liturgical argument that Christians were baptized and gathered in his name. Recognition of Jesus as divine in Jewish and not Gentile communities places this acknowledgment closer to Jesus as a historical figure.<sup>14</sup> His

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<sup>10</sup>Wilhem Bousset's *Kyrios Christos: Geschichte des Christusglaubens von den Anfängen des Christentums bis Irenaeus* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913; rev.ed. 1921). *Kyrios Christos: A History of Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus*. Tr. J.E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon 1970).

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

<sup>12</sup> Hurtado does address the issue of the virgin birth in Lord Jesus Christ. *LJC*, 313-30. Ehrman claims that Christians applied future apocalyptic expectations which involved a resurrection to Jesus. *The New Testament*, 254.

<sup>13</sup>*LJC*, 3.

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

approach looks not only at explicit texts, but at church practices they record which were already decades in use when the documents were written.

### **Common Ground for Theological and Historical Christologies**

Within a church context theological and historical Christologies must come together and this junction occurs in identifying Jesus as divine. Peter's confession has a pivotal role in the Synoptics (Matt 16:13; Mark 8:27; Luke 9:18). When Jesus is acknowledged as the Christ, he sets forth his mission as his death.<sup>15</sup> Hurtado does not examine the authenticity of such confessions, but looks at the New Testament as historical documents to show that the earliest Christians revered Jesus as divine, hence the subtitle of *Lord Jesus Christ is Devotion Jesus in Earliest Christianity*. He examines New Testament documents and others historically not from a particularly religious understanding of them or the presupposition of their divine origin. Though one suspects that his heart is synergistically involved with his head. Inspiration is beyond historical investigation, but the claims of biblical writers as the Spirit's instruments can be (Matt 10:20). Hurtado is writing neither a theology nor engaged in the quest for the historical Jesus in the technical sense, as is John Dominic Crossan is.<sup>16</sup> However, Hurtado goes to a low layer of tradition. So it is tempting to make the jump from the manuscripts into *wie es eigentlich geschehen est*. He is not writing a biblical Christology, but it is an unintended byproduct. As a historical scholar Hurtado does not limit his research to canonical Scriptures, but surveys books traditionally understood as non-canonical as Gospels of Peter and Thomas. They are classified as Hellenist and hence their definition of Jesus as divine do not serve his argument. His tongue

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Oxford University Press, 1997), 332. See his entire article 90-114.

<sup>15</sup> In John's Gospel Andrew and not Peter is first aware Jesus' mission as sin bearer and then the conviction that he is Messiah follows. The Synoptic order is reversed, but like them he is given a new name, Cephas, the Aramaic for Peter (1:36-42).

<sup>16</sup> *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991). The book jacket confidently proclaims, "The first comprehensive, determination of who Jesus was, what he did, what he said."

may be in his cheek when he compares them with the writings of the mystic, scientist Emanuel Swedenbourg.<sup>17</sup>

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

The standard *Readers' Digest* kind of story is about a parishioner apparently complementing a new pastor by asking him whether anyone had told him what a good sermon he had just preached. Modesty demanded that the young man respond that no one had. To which the parishioner quickly responded, "Then who gave you the idea?" This story can be introduced into the critical question so that Jesus is asked who told him that he was God. Like the young preacher who was overtaken with pride, according to the New Testament Jesus had said some and done things that had better be left to God and on that account he was treated like God. The issue is whether Jesus experienced such adoration or was it something when the church had become Hellenized. Hurtado argues is that this kind of thing was happening in the earliest predominantly Jewish communities. Early Christian devotion placed Jesus within the one God of Israel and so the seeds of trinitarian doctrine were planted, though Hurtado uses the word binitarian to explain this phenomenon. Traditional dogmatics holds that Jesus had a self-understanding of himself as God and was responsible for what Christians later thought of him, a view which scholars can deny but cannot be dismiss out of hand. Others conclude that there can be no certainty about Jesus' self-understanding. What is found in the New Testament about Jesus are later ecclesiastical conclusions. Without tackling Jesus' self-understanding, Hurtado concludes that the church thought of Jesus as God within a few years after the resurrection.<sup>18</sup>

This contrasts with the more widely held opinion that Jesus first received divine honors in

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<sup>17</sup> 427-87

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

congregations with a growing Gentile clientele. The argument is that adoration to pagan gods crept transformed Jewish monotheism and the Jesus religion was put on the road to Nicea.

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

### **Divergent New Testament Impressions of Jesus**

Hurtado notes that the New Testament documents preserved an assortment of impressions. The Jews, who present themselves as Abraham's children, cannot see through his

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

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

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

### **Binitarian for a While But Trinitarian at the End**

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

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<sup>21</sup>Larry W. Hurtado addresses notes that estimates of Jesus ranged from his being a messianic figure to being a bad example as a magician and agitator. *LCJ*, 56. Paul later faced Jewish agitation (76). Hereafter referenced as *LJC*.

<sup>22</sup>*LJS*, 134-53.

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

is the *Kyrios*. Jesus does not receive his own cultus, with his own occasions or holy days. . . . Pauline Christians acclaim Jesus as *Kyrios* ‘to the glory of God the Father.’” . . . There are two distinguishable figures, God and Jesus, but in Paul’s letters there is an evident concern to understand the reverence to Jesus as an extension of the worship of God.<sup>24</sup>

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

### **Counterattack from the Old Guard**

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

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

<sup>24</sup>*LJC*, 151.

<sup>25</sup>*LJC* 114; 120 n. 94.

<sup>26</sup>*LJC*, 396-402.

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

<sup>28</sup>*LCJ*, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Casey, “Lord Jesus Christ: A Response to Professor Hurtado,” 93. One of Hurtado’s critics holds to the

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

### **Jewish and Hellenist Exclusive or Inclusive Communities**

On one side of the debate are Bousset and Casey who locate the apotheosis of Jesus in the Hellenist communities in which John’s Gospel responded to an emerging gnosticism. On the other side is Hurtado who locates the recognition of Jesus in chiefly Jewish communities from which John came. He does not out of hand dismiss the influence of Greek philosophy and pagan thought among the Jews. Prevalent in Jewish communities were ideas of divine transcendence in which physical things were related to shadows.<sup>34</sup> Seeing John chiefly in Jewish terms helps

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older view that Jesus was first recognized as divine in by Gentiles in communities which were once predominantly Jewish. As the Gentiles became the majority Jewish Christians overcame their monotheism to see Jesus in the same life. It is must be asked what allowed Jewish Christians to overcome their scruples.

<sup>30</sup> Casey, “Lord Jesus Christ: A Response to Professor Hurtado,” 93. Italics original.

<sup>31</sup> Casey, “Lord Jesus Christ: A Response to Professor Hurtado,” 90.

<sup>32</sup> Casey, “Lord Jesus Christ: A Response to Professor Hurtado,” 83-96.

<sup>33</sup> Casey, “Lord Jesus Christ: A Response to Professor Hurtado,” 100-01.

<sup>34</sup> *LJC*, 419-21.

Hurtado reinforce his argument that the recognition of Jesus as divine was not a Greek thing.<sup>35</sup>

Though every seminary students is alerted to Jewish and Hellenist distinctives, these may be distinctions where the differences were already being eroded in the first century. Aramaic may have been the language of the common people, but Greek was a second language for many (most?),<sup>36</sup> as Hurtado points out. With Greek came the ideas of the Greek philosophers. Denial of the resurrection appeared first not in Corinth but in Jerusalem where the Sadducees intending to ridicule the resurrection asked about multiple marriages in the next life (Matt 22:23; Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27). Embedded in the question was the Greek philosophical belief that creation was only a temporary bleep in the divine plan in which a physical world would be replaced by a disembodied, spiritual, superior one. However, if Jewish communities combined Greek philosophy into the transcendental understanding of God, then Greek ideas in understanding Jesus as divine were already in place in Jewish communities - “first to the Jew [and almost immediately] to the Greek” (Rom 1:16). John’s community was Jewish, but what was Jewish was already Greek. The disciples’ misidentifying the resurrected Jesus as a spirit (Luke 24:37-43) may lend support this view.<sup>37</sup>

### **Use of Paul**

Hurtado follows the common view that Matthew and Luke appear after 70 (80-100?) and hence do not qualify as the earliest sources. Accordingly he gives them less attention than to Q or Mark. Written before 70 (64) Paul’s letters qualify as sources of the earliest Christianity. Hurtado anticipates the critique that Paul’s congregations were chiefly Gentile and thus do not advance his argument about Jewish congregations as the first to revere Jesus as divine. In

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<sup>35</sup>*LJC*, 417-18.

<sup>36</sup>Ruth Edwards, “Challenging Q Scholarship,” *Expository Times* 112/10 (July 2001):342.

<sup>37</sup>Larry W. Hurtado answers this in his chapter, “Other Early Jesus Books,” *LJC*, 13-25. On the week before Thanksgiving PBS had a documentary on vessels imprinted with pagan art which may have been used in

response he points out that “Paul’s own innovation or contribution was not to coin the idea that Jesus’ death and resurrection were redemptive, nor to make this idea central to early Christian beliefs.” In other words, Paul did not define the Gospel substance, but derived it from Jerusalem. His contribution was applying the Gospel’s substance to the Gentiles “without their observance of the Torah.”<sup>38</sup> He may be the most influential interpreter of the Christian faith not the guarantor of its substance. There can be no argument here.

**“How long must I see the standard [Read Q]?” (Jeremiah 4:21):  
Challenging the Unchallengeable**

Hurtado holds to the majority view that Q, like Paul, is prior to 70. In writing their Gospels Matthew and Luke made use of Q as a written document<sup>39</sup> and Mark.<sup>40</sup> His thesis that between 30-50, “Jesus was treated as a recipient of religious devotion and was associated with God in striking ways,”<sup>41</sup> would be supported by Christological evidences located in Q.<sup>42</sup> Problematic is that most Q scholars do not see a such developed Christology in Q. Among them is John S. Kloppenborg whose position Hurtado summarizes: Q focuses on Jesus’ words rather than his deeds and his future return as the son of man and not on his vicarious death and resurrection. It calls for a radical disposing of one’s possessions and detachment from ordinary family relationships.<sup>43</sup> Q is early step in the development of Christianity. To bring Q in line with his thesis that Jewish communities revered Jesus as divine, Hurtado compares it to other

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Jewish temple worship. It may be that there was no pure Jewish community at the time of Jesus.

<sup>38</sup> *LJC*, 133.

<sup>39</sup> Casey notes that Hurtado regards Q “as a single Greek document.” “Lord Jesus Christ: A Response to Professor Hurtado,” 85.

<sup>40</sup> *LJC*, 283-90.

<sup>41</sup> Without acquiescing to the existence of Q, a junior colleague commends him for “disagree[ing] with those who argue that Q proves that the early Jesus, was a rural, wandering prophet who later came to be designated as God.” Peter J. Scaer, a review of *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Early Christianity*, Larry W. Hurtado, in *Logia* 13:4 (December 2004): 52.

<sup>42</sup> *LJC*, 217, n. 1.

community regulating documents and places its use along side explicit Christological texts (Mark?). Q's implicit Christology allowed it to be incorporated independently by Matthew and Luke.<sup>44</sup> Q's humiliation and exaltation theme without reference to the resurrection is similar to Philippians 2:6-11.<sup>45</sup> Its Christological character is seen in it makes Jesus central, sees him a polarizing factor and calls "Lord." Hurtado does not see "the son of man" as a title of confession, but only an emphatic way of saying "I." It stresses Jesus' human descent. Appropriately he does not use "the son of man" self-designation to advance his argument for Jesus' divinity.<sup>46</sup>

Any number of responses come to mind. Paul's epistles presents a dogmatic Christology rather than an historical one and is a secondary source of Jewish ideas taken over into Gentile communities. He tells us that Jesus is born of woman (Gal 3:4), but she is anonymous. Jesus is David's descendant (Rom 1:3), but without the genealogy to show this as do Matthew and Luke. Mark is a primary source and a narrative but lacks birth and resurrection accounts. Hurtado seems to recognize the problem: "Mark powerfully influenced and/or rather successfully anticipated what became a popularly received shape for books about, and how Jesus was subsequently 'rehearsed' in Christian tradition."<sup>47</sup> This suggests a clairvoyant Mark provided an outline that Luke used twenty years later (80-85) and Matthew thirty years (90-100). Earlier dates for Matthew and Luke would advance Hurtado's case.

I will take Hurtado at his word that he "intend[s] no disrespect for those who dissent from this position. " If this is not invitation to critique, it is least allows safe passage through his

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<sup>43</sup> *LJC*, 222.

<sup>44</sup> *LJC*, 234.

<sup>45</sup> *LJC*, 237.

<sup>46</sup> *LCJ*, 244-57; 290-306, esp. 297.

<sup>47</sup> *LCJ*, 283.

Q arguments.<sup>48</sup> Since Q's boundaries are uncertain<sup>49</sup> and so the argument that Matthew and Luke used one form is tenuous at best. A Christological interpretation of Q means that its readers had in hand a Christological document like Mark or at least a fairly firmed up oral tradition to fill in the blanks in Q. The Q document set down the parameters for the community and Mark provided narrative details about Jesus. Can things be divided up so neatly? Merging Q and Mark must have been an extraordinarily complex task for Matthew and Luke.

Jesus' definition of his atonement belongs to a pericope calling on the disciples to serve one another. Q calls for total commitment but without an immediate cross reference to Mark, the hearer is given no reason for this sacrifice. Then there is matter that for Q "the son of man" is a literary device for "I." In the completed Gospels it takes on divine significance, especially by being coupled with the "Son of God," who comes on the clouds of heaven. Even without being joined with the "Son of God," as in Peter's confession, the Son of Man seems to be a divine designation. He offers his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Even the Q reference to "the son of man" having no place to lay his head (Matt 8:20; Luke 9:58) is startling not because Jesus is a man, but because he is divine. Rather than simple self-designation, "the son of man" is the sublime self-designation Jesus is the "Son of God. Transcendental divinity is accessible only through the one who goes to Jerusalem for crucifixion and raised by God on the third day.

Problematic is explaining the disappearance of a document which the church treasured for two or three generations until Matthew and Luke incorporated it into their Gospels. Joanna Dewey poses a similar question of why Mark survived the "canonical" cut in the face of

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<sup>48</sup> *LJC*, 217, n. 1.

<sup>49</sup> Hurtado estimates Q at 225 to 250 verses or a Greek text with 2500 to over 4000 words. *LJS* 217. Edwards argues against Kloppenborg that one particular version of Q and not multiple ones were used by Matthew and Luke. "Challenging Q Scholarship," *The Expository Times*, 342.

Matthew and Luke's massive Gospels.<sup>50</sup> Her answer is that Mark is simply a good story. One has to ask whether Mark was a better story than Q was a community book. *Didache* survived, but not Q. Q research is so advanced that it has found a place along with the canonical Gospels and Thomas in a synopsis.<sup>51</sup> Some day the majority scholarship may think otherwise. Q scholars trace how it came together with Mark to give us Matthew and Luke. *Jesus Seminar* scholars go in an opposite direction to remove the layers to get down to the bare bones Jesus. So Ecclesiastes is fulfilled, "there a time to break down, and a time to build up" (Eccl 3:3).

### **A Man Ahead of His Contemporaries**

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

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<sup>50</sup>Joanna Dewey, "The Survival of Mark's Gospel: A Good Story," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 123/3 (Fall 2004), 495-507, esp. 495-96.

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