

Andrew Chester

High Christology – Whence, When and Why?

In der neueren Forschung über die neutestamentliche Darstellung Christi als erhöht bzw. göttlich besteht von wenigen Ausnahmen abgesehen Übereinstimmung darüber, dass dieses Verständnis sehr früh und innerhalb des Judentums entstanden ist. Es gibt allerdings keine Einigkeit über sein genaues Entstehen und das präzise Bild des voraussetzenden jüdischen Hintergrundes. Der vorliegende Beitrag bespricht diese verschiedenen Darstellungen der sehr schnellen Entstehung der hohen Christologie und betont die Wichtigkeit der Frage, warum diese erstaunliche Vorstellung entstehen konnte und wie sie am besten zu erklären ist.

Keywords: Divine Christology, Messianism, Monotheism, Intermediaries, Visionary Experience

I. Introduction

The nature and origins of high Christology have been a prominent theme in scholarship over the last decade – and indeed for much longer. Yet whereas for much of the twentieth century the dominant view was that high Christology represented something that emerged relatively late and under Gentile or pagan influence,¹ more recently it has been seen as coming about at an early stage and within a Jewish setting. The issue is still contested, however, and even where high Christology is viewed as both early and Jewish in origin, there is no one homogeneous position or agreed version of this. A brief review of some of the main accounts that have been given will illustrate important points at issue in this debate, and significant differences in perspective and method of approach.

¹ The classic statement of this position is that by W. Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: A History of Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus* (ET, Nashville 1970); the first edition of the German was published in 1913.

II. High Christology as Late

1. In a Non-Jewish Context

The major statement of this position in recent scholarship has been by Maurice Casey.² His argument, in brief, is that the confession of Christ as divine is not Jewish in origin, nor is it conceivably Jewish. It could come about only when Christianity (or one part of it, at least) had evolved into a Gentile religion, and could be unmistakably identified as such. It took decades (50 or 60 years) for Jesus, the Jewish prophet, to be turned into a Gentile God. It is certainly the case that in the Pauline corpus, Jesus is portrayed as being all but divine;³ so also Hebrews, Revelation and other New Testament writings come very close indeed to this.⁴ Yet for all these writings, still within their Jewish settings, Jewish monotheism was always the restraining force that prevented them going on to the decisive further stage of speaking of Jesus as fully divine. It was only within the Johannine community, characterized by a growing Gentile membership, and a Christology expressed in ever higher terms, that this decisive move could take place, with a final and complete break from Judaism. Hence it was at this stage (free from the constraint of Jewish monotheism), but not before, that it was possible for Jesus to be proclaimed as God.⁵

Similarly, Geza Vermes sees high Christology as not emerging until John's Gospel, in the first decade or so of the second century.⁶ A genuine picture of Jesus as he really was – a completely human, charismatic and Jewish figure, fully at home in first-century Galilee – can, in his view, still be recovered from within the Synoptic Gospels,⁷ and stands in absolute contrast to the Christ of John's Gospel and the Christian creeds. The author of John's Gospel, he thinks, may well have been a Gentile; certainly he represents a betrayal and abandoning of the true Jewishness and humanity of Jesus in favour of a Jesus now made divine.⁸ None of the rest of the New Testament, as he sees it, goes at all as far as this.

2 M. Casey, *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God: The Origins and Development of New Testament Christology* (Cambridge, UK and Louisville 1991).

3 Casey, *Prophet* (see n. 2), 97–140.

4 Casey, *Prophet* (see n. 2), 141–161.

5 Casey, *Prophet* (see n. 2), 156–159.

6 G. Vermes, *The Changing Faces of Jesus* (London 2000); here he builds on his earlier work, especially id., *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (London 2nd 1983).

7 Vermes, *Changing* (see n. 6), 147–262.

8 Vermes, *Changing* (see n. 6), 6–54.

2. In a Jewish Context

The main representative of this position is James Dunn:⁹ the focus of his work is primarily incarnation in the New Testament, but that obviously involves consideration of the point at which Jesus is seen as fully divine. And Dunn views this as happening only in the Fourth Gospel, at the end of the first century, although the Wisdom Christology in the Pauline corpus played an important part as the most immediate antecedent to this. Nevertheless, Dunn emphasizes that in the Pauline letters Christ is not to be understood as pre-existent – at least in the sense (or senses) that this is usually given in New Testament scholarship; Wisdom, certainly, is now to be seen as fully expressed in Jesus, but that does not entail belief in a pre-existent being.¹⁰ In fact Dunn sees the blossoming of a Christology of pre-existence into a vigorous and sustained exposition of the Logos incarnate as part of a more general evolution of religious thought towards the end of the first century and at the start of the second, with the conceptualization of the real pre-existence of heavenly beings manifesting itself; indeed, the Fourth Gospel stands at the centre of this. Nevertheless, although it belongs within this wider context, it is a development that takes place fully within Jewish terms.

III. High Christology as Early and Within a Jewish Context

1. An Explosive Development

The work of Martin Hengel, spanning three decades, has been of fundamental importance for the whole of the modern debate about high Christology, and the intensified and sustained interest that this has generated.¹¹ He has maintained a consistent position on this throughout, although he has developed it more fully at a number of points. Over against the view of

⁹ J.D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: An Enquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (London 1980). This is the major statement of his thesis; he has supplemented this, and developed his ideas further, in a series of essays over the following twenty years, brought together in id., *The Christ and the Spirit* (2 vols; Grand Rapids and Edinburgh 1998) esp. 3–54, 212–238, 270–423.

¹⁰ Dunn, *Christology* (see n. 9), 194–195.

¹¹ See especially M. Hengel, *The Son of God* (London and Philadelphia 1976); id., *Between Jesus and Paul* (London 1983); id., *Studies in Early Christology* (Edinburgh 1995); id., *Studien zur Christologie: Kleine Schriften IV* (WUNT 201; Tübingen 2006).

high Christology as an alien importation into early Christianity,¹² he argued that there was in fact an amazingly rapid move in the earliest Christian movement, completely within Judaism (in Palestine and around), to a position where already at that stage they held the very highest Christology. Famously, he says that more happened christologically in less than two decades at the very start of the Christian movement than in the whole of the next seven centuries.¹³ At most this development will have taken 18 years, but in all probability it had reached this position within 4–5 years (the point at which Paul entered the Christian movement).¹⁴

This extraordinary phenomenon of early Christology is rooted in Jesus' activity and close relation to God.¹⁵ Indeed, it must presuppose Jesus' claim to messianic authority and proclamation of the kingdom, as well as the disciples' certainty that God had raised the crucified Jesus from the dead; the resurrection belief on its own would not have been sufficient for subsequent christological development.¹⁶ A further important factor here was the way that the Wisdom tradition was used to explicate Jesus' true significance.¹⁷ Thus all the functions of Wisdom are now applied to Christ, and this leads naturally to his eventual identification with the Logos. It was indeed the need for the early Christians to perceive both the analogies with and also the differences from Jewish mediatorial figures that helped force them into articulating the unique saving event of God's revelation in Christ, and how precisely Christ stood in relation to God.¹⁸ Christology was forced irresistibly in this direction from the very start. So also, Jesus had proclaimed the heavenly Son of Man and Judge as bound up with his own ministry; hence in the post-resurrection period he was identified with this figure, and it thus took on some of the same kind of development, in close connection with Wisdom, that is evident in 1 En. 37–71.¹⁹

The vibrant earliest Christian mission, which began very quickly within the immediate post-resurrection period, must have been based not only on the disciples' experiences of the resurrection, and their memories of Jesus' eschatological-messianic activity and messianic claim (in some

12 As represented by Bousset and the History of Religions School, and still influential through the work of Bultmann and his followers; cf. Hengel, *Son* (see n. 11), 17–56, for incisive criticism of this.

13 Hengel, *Son* (see n. 11), 2; id., *Between* (see n. 11), 39–40.

14 Hengel, *Between* (see n. 11), 30–47, esp. 39, 42, 44–47.

15 Hengel, *Son* (see n. 11), 90.

16 Hengel, *Studies* (see n. 11), 214–217.

17 Hengel, *Studies* (see n. 11), 73–117.

18 Hengel, *Son* (see n. 11), 89–91.

19 Hengel, *Studies* (see n. 11), 104–107, 181–189.

form resembling that in Mark 14:62). It also needed to have in place eschatological-messianic scriptural passages (especially Psalms) that could be used to portray the significance of Christ.²⁰ Ps 110:1 was the most important of these: above all, and uniquely among the scriptural texts used by the early Christians, it portrays Jesus as enthroned at the right hand of God.²¹ Resurrection and exaltation-enthronement are seen as inseparable.²² So also the early Christian use of Abba, Maranatha and Hosanna all derive from the primitive Palestinian Jewish community, and can further help us understand the development of Christology from its earliest roots.²³ It is clear, then, that intensive christological reflection began with the first resurrection appearances, and developed in a stormy, indeed explosive, way.

2. Rooted within Messianism

a) Messianism and the Christ Cult A specific messianic profile (although rather different from the emphasis on this in Hengel's work) has been central for two recent accounts of the rise of early high Christology within a Jewish context. First, Horbury argues for the importance of supernatural, spiritual messianism, both within Judaism and also for the development of early Christology.²⁴ That is, the understanding of the messiah having angelic and supernatural traits, or being seen as the embodiment of an angel-like Spirit, is central to Judaism by well before the first century CE. Thus it is widely attested in biblical interpretation; so, for example, in a number of LXX texts, the messianic king is variously envisaged as an angel-like spirit, waiting to appear and be embodied.²⁵ Although some traditions, certainly, emphasize God's *sole* rule, and the messiah as a merely human figure, the spiritual, transcendent messiah can also be seen as human.²⁶ Hence messianism should be seen as a major impulse for the development of Christology and of the cult of Christ. It was acclamation of Christ precisely as messiah that allowed a very high Christology, and cult of Christ, actually to come into being. Thus it was the recognition of Christ as a messianic king

20 Hengel, *Studies* (see n. 11), 219–221.

21 Hengel, *Studies* (see n. 11), 119–226 (esp. 131–175, 181–189, 214–226).

22 Hengel, *Studies* (see n. 11), 220.

23 Hengel, *Studien* (see n. 11), 496–534.

24 W. Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ* (London 1998); see also id., “Jewish Messianism and Early Christology”, in *Contours of Christology in the New Testament* (ed. R.N. Longenecker; Grand Rapids and Cambridge 2005) 3–24.

25 Horbury, *Cult* (see n. 24), 96.

26 Horbury, *Cult* (see n. 24), 86–108.

(an understanding rooted in his ministry and becoming pervasive in earliest Christianity) that led directly on to scenes of acclamation and obeisance, hymns, and titles for Christ, found in the New Testament. The angelic-like attributes of Christ, in all this, derive from seeing him as an angel-like Spirit, or messiah, as in the Jewish texts.²⁷ It is thus clear that the way in which some Jewish sources portray the messiah as a glorious, mortal king, with spiritual and superhuman aspects, has much in common with New Testament depictions of a crucified, but spiritual and glorious, 'Christ'.²⁸ As a supernatural, spiritual messiah, Christ also had pre-existence (whether or not eternal) attributed to him.

b) Messiah and Son of God In the work of Adela Yarbro Collins and John Collins, early Christian high Christology, represented especially by belief in Jesus as *Son of God*, is to be seen as deriving from the conviction that he was the *messiah*.²⁹ To see why this was so crucial to early Christology, we need a proper understanding of divine sonship and the portrayal of the messiah in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Jewish texts. Within the Psalms in the Hebrew Bible, we find reflected the Ancient Near Eastern idea of the king as the 'divine' Son of God.³⁰ This helped give rise, in the post-monarchic period, to an 'ideal' portrayal of the king; the Hebrew Bible throughout does not impute real divinity to the king, or messiah, but it is nevertheless a powerful mode of expression.³¹ The evidence for messianic hope is greater in the Hellenistic period, with some texts giving the messianic king superhuman status. Thus the LXX Psalms do not hesitate to depict him, variously, as Son of God, begotten by God, addressed as God, and pre-existent. The Qumran texts, although more restrained, still probably refer to divine begetting and divine sonship in relation to the messiah.³² Above all important, for the divinity of the messiah in ancient Judaism, is the reinterpretation (especially in 1 En. 48 and 4 Ezra) of messianic hope in light of Dan 7:13 and the one like a Son of Man there. This reinterpretation means that the idea of the king, or messiah, as Son of God must be seen in context of the affirming of the pre-existence of the messianic king in the LXX Psalms, and the expectation of heavenly, saviour fig-

27 Horbury, *Cult* (see n. 24), 109–152.

28 Horbury, *Cult* (see n. 24), 108.

29 A. Yarbro Collins and J.J. Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK 2008).

30 Yarbro Collins and Collins, *King* (see n. 29), 1–24.

31 Yarbro Collins and Collins, *King* (see n. 29), 25–47.

32 Yarbro Collins and Collins, *King* (see n. 29), 48–74.

ures, as in 11QMelch. Thus it was that the messiah came to be portrayed as a pre-existent figure on the throne of Glory.³³

Hence the understanding of Jesus as this Son of Man was vitally important (since he had been an atypical, merely historical 'messianic' figure) for being able to see him as one who was in fact heavenly, enthroned and pre-existent. The basis and impetus for this were provided by Jesus' sayings about the heavenly Son of Man who was to come as an eschatological Judge; such sayings (especially Mark 13:26–27) very probably derive from Jesus himself, not the post-resurrection period.³⁴ It then became natural (especially in light of visions of Jesus as exalted to heaven) for his followers to identify him with this figure.³⁵ Thus the Synoptic Gospels depict Jesus as Son of Man, Son of God, and Messiah, although not as pre-existent; Paul, however, not only understands Son of God and Messiah as equivalent, but also sees Christ as a heavenly, pre-existent figure. So also, for example, John and Revelation both see Christ as pre-existent (along with other traits they ascribe to him).

3. Worship of God and Worship of Christ

The explosive nature of the emergence of high Christology (a point stressed by Hengel) is taken up as a central theme in the work of Hurtado,³⁶ and portrayed as an astonishing development – or 'mutation'³⁷ (*within* the context of Jewish monotheism) of Jewish concepts of an exalted divine agent – into a 'binitarian' schema. In fact Hurtado's central emphasis, throughout his work, is on the *worship* of and devotion to Christ as a phenomenon that characterizes the Christian movement, from its earliest stages onwards. It is this worship of Christ that makes it utterly distinctive within its Jewish context, and vis-a-vis Judaism otherwise.³⁸ Yet the forms of worship, and categories used of Jesus, are themselves entirely Jewish,

33 Yarbrow Collins and Collins, *King* (see n. 29), 75–100.

34 Yarbrow Collins and Collins, *King* (see n. 29), 101–148, 175–203.

35 Yarbrow Collins and Collins, *King* (see n. 29), 149–174.

36 L.W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord. Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Edinburgh² 1998). This basic statement of his argument has been substantially developed and expanded in his subsequent work: e.g. id., *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion* (Carlisle 1999); *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK 2003); *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK 2005).

37 Subsequently Hurtado prefers to speak of this as a 'variant form', rather than 'mutation', of monotheism: *Lord* (see n. 36), 50 n. 74.

38 See especially Hurtado, *Lord* (see n. 36); also e.g. id., *Origins*; id., *How* (both see n. 36).

and cannot possibly be explained as deriving from pagan prototypes.³⁹ All this, he admits, represents something quite astounding within the context of Jewish monotheism; hence the need to speak of a ‘*binitarian*’ development, and of a ‘*mutation*’ (or ‘*variant form*’) within Judaism. Nevertheless, this whole development *has* to be seen as taking place precisely *within* the context of Jewish monotheism – and at a very early stage in the formation of the Christian movement.⁴⁰ In fact, Hurtado wants to set the central focus for understanding early Christianity on *Christ-devotion*, not on Christology; and more generally, he argues, the emphasis in studying early Christianity should be on *religious practice and experience*, rather than beliefs and ideas. Indeed, the development to high Christology – or better Christ-devotion – is closely bound up with the experience of both Jesus and the early Christians.⁴¹ It is this that is crucial for such a rapid and unprecedented development.

4. Christ Enthroned alongside God

The central importance of Ps 110:1 for the rise of early high Christology, and the potential significance of Merkabah Mysticism for understanding this Christology, are points taken up from Hengel and given prominence in the work of Eskola.⁴² He emphasizes the need to distinguish different christological discourses (with corresponding different christological narratives) within the New Testament: especially important is the enthronement discourse (exemplified in passages in Acts, Paul and Hebrews), portraying the resurrected messiah as exalted and enthroned in heaven, and resurrection identified with exaltation and enthronement, with Ps 110:1 as a central and prominent text.⁴³ Along with this, both the resurrection discourse (Rom 1:3–4) and cultic discourse (Hebrews) set centrally Christ’s exaltation and enthronement on God’s heavenly throne.⁴⁴

The early Christians who saw Christ as sitting on God’s throne of Glory, and confessed their faith in him as *kurios*, could hardly have failed to understand him as divine. Nevertheless, Eskola argues, the focus in New Tes-

³⁹ Cf. e.g. Hurtado, *One God* (see n. 36), 22–27; id., *Lord* (see n. 36), 5–26.

⁴⁰ Cf. e.g. Hurtado, *Lord* (see n. 36), 1–4, 29–53, 134–153, 167–216, 244–257; id., *How* (see n. 36), 31–55.

⁴¹ Hurtado, *Lord* (see n. 36), 3–4, 64–74; id., *How* (see n. 36), 13–31, 179–204.

⁴² T. Eskola, *Messiah and the Throne* (WUNT II/142; Tübingen 2001).

⁴³ Eskola, *Messiah* (see n. 42), 158–216.

⁴⁴ Eskola, *Messiah* (see n. 42), 217–269; a further type of discourse – the judicial – is rather different, with the focus on the enthroned Christ as the heavenly Judge who carries out the eschatological judgment: Eskola, *Messiah* (see n. 42), 270–284.

tament scholarship on the deification of Christ, and the search for Jewish prototypes for Christ's divine status on the heavenly throne, are utterly misplaced. Instead, it needs to be realized that the key factor was Christian merkabah speculation working on subtexts such as Ps 110:1; and it is recognition of this that allows us to understand the extraordinary phenomenon of early Christology. Thus the kingship of God was seen to be realized in the Lordship of Christ, who sits on the throne of Glory; so in the New Testament, theocracy becomes christocracy.⁴⁵ But the status of God himself in this is *not* changed; what is new is the unique status of Christ, now seen as the divine ruler on God's throne. Thus confessing Christ as Lord represents the fulfilment of Jewish devotion: that is, faith in God as heavenly king.

5. Christ as Belonging within the Divine Identity

There are clear affinities between Eskola's work and that of Bauckham.⁴⁶ In fact Bauckham is even more emphatic in rejecting any kind of analogy between Jewish intermediary figures and Christ. He is also adamant in rejecting any account of early Christology that represents it as a development, however rapid.⁴⁷ Instead, Christ is to be seen as belonging fully within the divine identity from the start. That is, he is included in God's sovereignty over all things, participates in God's unique activity of creation, shares God's exaltation above all angelic powers, and is given the divine name itself. To affirm all this of Christ, within the context of strict Jewish monotheism, is also to affirm that he belongs unambiguously within the divine identity.⁴⁸ There is an absolute boundary between the one God and all created reality: Christ belongs on one side of this boundary, while angels and all other 'intermediary' figures belong equally clearly on the other. And there is no possibility of moving from one side to the other; either one belongs on the divine side, and within the divine identity, or one does not. The New Testament writers are able to identify Christ with Wisdom and Logos, since these are personifications of God, and belong integrally to the divine identity. The highest (and also earliest) Christology,

⁴⁵ Eskola, *Messiah* (see n. 42), 295–321, 361–368.

⁴⁶ R. Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Carlisle 1998). He has reprinted this, and supplemented and substantiated its argument, in *Jesus and the God of Israel: 'God Crucified' and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Milton Keynes 2008). In this later work (e.g. 152), he notes the points of affinity with Eskola's work.

⁴⁷ Bauckham, *Jesus* (see n. 46), 1–5.

⁴⁸ Bauckham, *Jesus* (see n. 46), 5–31, 152–232.

therefore, belongs completely within a Jewish context, but does not at all come into conflict with Jewish monotheism.

IV. High Christology: Themes at Issue

It is clear, then, that the recent debate has posed sharply contrasting – indeed in some cases mutually exclusive – positions. Essentially, there are four main positions that we can delineate:

- (i) High Christology represents something essentially and utterly alien within a Jewish context, such that it could not conceivably have emerged within that context, or been believed by those who still consciously identified themselves as Jews: that is, where it would be seen as simply impossible – within the context of Judaism and Jewish monotheism – for any human figure to be understood and acclaimed as God;
- (ii) high Christology emerges within essentially Jewish categories, but does so only very gradually; to depict Christ as divine was such a momentous move to make that it would necessarily have been spelt out in an unmistakable way (as in John's Gospel), not simply portrayed in terms of Adam and Wisdom, which do not in themselves carry this significance;
- (iii) high Christology emerges in Jewish categories and within a Jewish context, but it does so very rapidly indeed; thus it is to be found clearly in Paul, and very probably in pre-Pauline traditions as well;
- (iv) high Christology does not develop or evolve at all, but can be seen to be present, or inherent, from the very start.

In terms of method, (i) would appear to be the most obviously sustainable position. It respects the exclusive nature of Jewish monotheism, and gives real force to the fact that Jesus was, whatever else, a fully human (as well as Jewish) figure of the first century: very much, indeed, a vulnerable figure, subject to human frailty and weakness, and making no grandiose claims whatever for himself. Hence it is consistent with the logic of this position to insist that it was only in a *Gentile, pagan* setting, where having a multiplicity of deities, and humans as divine figures, would not be thought offensive, that this very human figure of Jesus could be turned into a divine figure and worshipped as such.

It would appear that (iv) also has logical and methodological clarity and coherence: that is, *immediately* post-resurrection Jesus is acclaimed as already, completely sharing full divine stature with God. There is thus an absolute identifying of Christ as divine from the start, with no gradual move towards this. Yet, equally, this is fully consistent with Jewish monotheism, with no incompatibility whatever, since Jesus is seen as belonging fully within the single and unique divine identity. There is a clear methodological principle evident in (ii) also. It is sensitive to the issues both of Jesus as fully human and of Judaism as non-negotiably monotheistic. Therefore it is prepared to see the unprecedented move to portraying Jesus as fully divine as possible only decades after Jesus' death, and in context of an amazing, and more general, cultural phenomenon and development at that time.

It is in fact (iii) that would appear to beg most questions at a methodological level. That is so in relation to both Jewish monotheism and also Jesus as fully human: it seems that too much is being asserted too quickly. Yet the thrust of the argument put forward, variously, by proponents of (iii) is that the problem that confronts us here is that the New Testament evidence – or a significant part of it at least – does not fit at all easily with what the logical and methodological considerations seem to demand. That indeed could be seen to characterize (iv) also: that is, it does not try to argue a case in terms of 'normal' categories, but instead for the opening up of the category of divine 'identity' in an unprecedented and unforeseeable way, yet one in which the logic and structure of Jewish monotheism are still paramount and respected. Nevertheless, proponents of (iii) want to insist, in a rather different way, that what we have in the New Testament demands that we rethink what we would normally take for granted – not as special pleading or to make an apologetic case, but because the texts themselves demand this.

It is clear, then, that questions of method, presuppositions involved and fundamental points at issue are all raised by these different approaches. That is, the apparently straightforward questions of 'whence' and 'when' high Christology appears can be seen to involve the issues, for example, of what exactly is meant by 'high' Christology; of Jewish monotheism, and how absolute and constraining it should be understood to be, and the place and significance of so-called 'intermediary' figures; of whether it is a travesty of the human, Jewish Jesus to depict him as divine; of whether this could not conceivably have happened in the first few decades of the Christian movement or in a Jewish context; of the significance of Jesus being worshipped, and of scripture being applied directly to him; and

of the significance of christological titles used of him. All these, in turn, involve yet further questions. Clearly it is not possible here to discuss any of them fully, but at least some of the issues involved need to be addressed, if only briefly.

1. 'High' and 'Divine' Christology

One question that is raised, at least implicitly, by this whole debate is what exactly is meant by 'high Christology'. For Casey, Vermes and Dunn, the crucial point at issue is when, and in what context, Jesus is actually acclaimed as *divine*. It is this that marks the *absolute* divide between Judaism and nascent Christianity, and the point of no return for the early Christians in their confession of Jesus. This emphasis on the *absolute* nature of the claims made for Christ does indeed also characterize Bauckham's argument, from an altogether different perspective.

This question is not specifically addressed, or clearly defined, in much of the debate. In fact, however, it is clear that not only main christological titles (Christ and Son of God, for example), but also a lot else in what the New Testament says about Christ, can be understood as representing an exalted, or high, Christology, but not necessarily as seeing Christ as divine. That is indeed a point that is recognized by Casey and Dunn (although emphatically denied by Bauckham), in relation to Paul, Hebrews and Revelation. Nevertheless, the majority of those who propound what I have delineated as position (iii) insist that precisely in these writings as well it is clearly the case that Christ is indeed given divine status. Hence, for those representing position (iii) at least, it is necessary to distinguish between 'high' Christology, where Christ is seen as exalted and set in special relationship with God, and 'divine' Christology, with Christ being seen as on a level with God, representing in himself the divine Glory, and sharing the divine name, attributes and activity. It then becomes important to determine how these criteria apply, above all in a few passages in Paul, where titles are applied to Christ and scripture is used to refer to him.

a) Phil 2:6–11; 1 Cor 8:6 These two texts above all are crucial to the case for Christ being seen not just as exalted but actually as 'divine' at an early (and potentially very early) stage in the Christian movement. On the one hand, Vermes argues that expressions used in Phil 2:6–11 echo mythological concepts familiar from John's Gospel and later heretical Gnostic speculation, and are better understood as an existing liturgical composition, inserted into the letter not by Paul but by a later editor in the early second

century.⁴⁹ On the other hand, Hengel sees the passage as a hymn composed not later than the 40s and representing the highest Christology *in nuce*. And indeed, Casey recognizes the potential force of this passage, and sees it as representing a very exalted Christology. But the overriding principle for him here, which must govern the understanding of it, is that Paul still sees himself as a Jew, and Jewish monotheism acts as an absolute constraint on going a stage further, and asserting Christ as fully divine. Dunn interprets the passage above all in terms of Adam Christology (and as a 'two-stage' Christology, with no concept of pre-existence involved at all), so that Christ is portrayed as exalted to the heavenly sphere, in contrast to Adam, but is not represented as being divine.⁵⁰ The overwhelming emphasis in recent discussion, however, has been on demonstrating that Christ is indeed portrayed as divine in this passage.⁵¹ Thus, negatively, a decisive case has been made against understanding it in terms of 'Adam Christology' and 'two-stage Christology', and positively for seeing Christ portrayed as pre-existent, and vv. 9–11 using a strongly monotheistic passage from the Hebrew Bible (Isa 45:23) as applying directly to Christ, giving him the supreme divine name, and depicting him as worthy to be worshipped by the whole created order.

On the further, and essentially subsidiary, question of whether 2:6–11 derives from Paul himself, or was an already existing hymn or ode (leaving aside Vermes' view of it as a proto-Gnostic, early second-century composition), the traditional view of it as being an integral part of the text as Paul wrote it has been supported recently by a small number of scholars.⁵² The strong consensus view, however, is that it was an existing liturgical composition taken over by Paul. Thus the point is made, for example, that there is a notable difference in the main focus of vv. 6–11 compared with the surrounding context: the former is primarily christological, the latter a moral exhortation and paradigm.⁵³ That indeed is a point that is strongly made by those who deny that 6–11 have any moral or paradigmatic force at all.⁵⁴ To maintain this is to miss the point of Paul's argument, and use of 6–

⁴⁹ Vermes, *Changing* (see n. 6), 78–79.

⁵⁰ Dunn, *Christology* (see n. 9), 114–121.

⁵¹ Thus e.g. Hurtado, *How* (see n. 36), 83–107; Bauckham, *Jesus* (see n. 46), 27–30, 197–210; see also (and on Phil 2:6–11 more generally) the various contributions to R.P. Martin and B.J. Dodd (eds), *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2* (Louisville 1998).

⁵² E.g. Bauckham, *Jesus* (see n. 46), 41; G.D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids 1995) 192–197.

⁵³ Cf. Hurtado, *How* (see n. 36), 104–106.

⁵⁴ Cf. e.g. E. Käsemann, "Kritische Analyse von Phil. 2,5–11", *ZTK* 47 (1950) 313–360.

11; but the underlying point does serve to strengthen the argument for seeing 6–11 as an existing composition taken over by Paul. That is, it does support his argument here, but is not as precise in its focus as we would expect if Paul himself had written it. In the nature of the case, of course, it is impossible to prove the point either way, but Hengel has made an impressive case for the importance, for the self-identity of the earliest Christian communities, of hymns being composed not only to praise Christ but also as a means of developing and formulating their beliefs in ways that they could not do otherwise.⁵⁵ Hence Phil 2:6–11 is most plausibly to be understood as a hymn or ode, belonging in the context of early Christian worship, giving praise to Christ (and indeed God) in the highest possible terms. The main issue that is affected by this is obviously the date of original composition for this Philippians passage; it forms a main basis for Hengel's argument for the highest Christology as deriving from not later than the 40s.

In the case of 1 Cor 8:6, there is no doubt that it derives from Paul himself. And again there have been strong, indeed compelling, arguments in recent discussion for Paul not only attributing Wisdom characteristics to Christ, especially sharing fully with God in the work of creation (and thus going beyond most of the Jewish Wisdom tradition), but also that he is again, as at Phil 2:6–11, interpreting a strongly monotheistic scriptural passage (Deut 6:4) to make it apply to Christ.⁵⁶ Hence the central and fundamental importance of both Phil 2:6–11 and 1 Cor 8:6, above all for the way in which they depict Christ as divine, has been established beyond any reasonable doubt in recent scholarship. The understanding of Christ as a divine figure, therefore, is unmistakably clear in Paul's writings, and can be seen as potentially going back to pre-Pauline tradition. And central to both these texts is the attributing to Christ of the supreme divine name YHWH (or κύριος).

b) The Origin and Significance of the Use of Κύριος A crucial issue for the discussion of high Christology has been whether the use of κύριος to refer to Christ derives from Gentile, and pagan, influence (as famously argued by Bousset), or is rooted within Judaism. There is also the further question of what precisely the usage signifies. On this latter point, for example, Dunn concedes that 1 Cor 8:6 appears to be a very striking usage, but ar-

⁵⁵ Hengel, *Between* (see n. 11), 78–96; id., *Studies* (see n. 11), 227–291 (esp. 262–291).

⁵⁶ E.g. Bauckham, *Jesus* (see n. 46), 26–30, 97–104, 210–218; Hurtado, *One God* (see n. 36), 97–98; id., *Lord* (see n. 36), 123–126.

gues that it probably refers simply to Christ's *present* Lordship, as affirmed in the community (as in the Hellenistic Christian formulation 'Jesus is Lord').⁵⁷ If it had really been as elevated (and hence controversial) a usage as we perceive it to be, Dunn argues, we would expect Paul to be very much more careful in what he says. The fact that he is not implies that it was not used, or perceived as controversial, in this kind of way.

It is indeed striking that Paul does not, either at 1 Cor 8:6 or Phil 2:6–11, explain at all the christological significance of what he says. The more obvious conclusion from this, however, is that those he is addressing are already familiar with this kind of claim about Christ, rather than that it has no such significance. What he says would certainly be controversial, indeed unacceptable, to his fellow Jews who are not Christians, but he is not of course addressing them. And Bousset's attempt to show that the use of κύριος for Christ developed under pagan influence from a Hellenistic 'Kurios Christos' cult has been decisively demonstrated to be untenable.⁵⁸ Hence we are brought back to the main points that have been made emphatically in recent discussion. That is, at Phil 2:6–11, not only is Christ portrayed at the start as pre-existent with God, and in the form of God, but in the climax of the hymn at vv.10–11 he is given the supreme, distinctive divine name YHWH (represented by the Greek form κύριος), using Isa 45:22–23, where YHWH proclaims himself the sole God and alone worthy of worship. This Philippians passage must then be seen as consciously and deliberately acclaiming Christ as divine and as set on the same level as God; however much it is possible to debate the precise significance of the opening of the hymn, there is no ambiguity whatever about what is being affirmed in the latter half of it. It is an early text that uses Jewish scripture, and the most distinctive designation of God (represented as κύριος), to show Jesus to be fully divine.

At 1 Cor 8:6, Paul uses κύριος in deliberately interpreting Deut 6:4 to refer both to God *and* to Christ. That is, in a context where Paul is drawing an absolute contrast between the many so-called 'gods' and 'lords' of the pagan cults, and the one true God whom Jews and Christians worship, he incorporates *Christ* into his reworked version of the *Shema* – that is, the fundamental Jewish confession of faith in the one true God. And again, Christ is given the supreme, distinctive divine name YHWH (denoted as κύριος). Paul's usage here cannot conceivably be casual or accidental; the fact that he uses the *Shema* shows that beyond any doubt. Thus

⁵⁷ Dunn, *Christology* (see n. 9), 179–183.

⁵⁸ Hurtado, *Lord* (see n. 36), 13–24 (with further literature cited there).

he makes Christ fully one with God, in the strongest possible Jewish terms, sharing in the divine name as well as the divine act of creation. Nor are these the only instances where Paul uses passages from the Hebrew Bible that speak of YHWH (LXX κύριος) to refer to Christ, as we shall see in 4:2, below. It is, however, important to draw attention at this point to the prevalent use of Ps 110:1 in early Christian traditions, and its significance for the acclamation of Christ as κύριος.⁵⁹ So also the potential importance of the use of *maranatha* (1 Cor 16:22) in early Christian worship should not be overlooked;⁶⁰ it cannot be certain that it attributes the supreme divine name to Christ, but in conjunction with the other evidence we have from an early stage, that must be at least probable.

c) Christ as Divine Image and Glory Phil 2:6 speaks of Christ being in the ‘form’ (μορφή) of God. A further main theme in the recent discussion has been related to that, but with the focus and emphasis on the way in which Paul portrays Christ as the ‘image’ (εἰκών) and the Glory (δόξα) of God.⁶¹ The most powerful and sustained expression of Christ as the visible image of God is to be found in the hymn in Col 1:15–20 (thus v. 15: ‘He is the image of the invisible God’; v. 19: ‘In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell’; cf. 2:9). The date and authorship of this passage are uncertain, but 2 Cor 4:4, 6 is indubitably by Paul. And here he speaks of Christ as ‘...the image (εἰκών) of God’, and of ‘...the Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ’. That is, for Paul, Christ is the very embodiment and visible form of the God who cannot be seen, and of the *kabod* – the manifestation of the Glory of God.

d) Hebrews and Revelation Nor is it simply Paul who portrays Christ as divine. This is very clearly what we find, for example, in Hebrews and Revelation as well.⁶² Thus Heb 1:2–4 depicts Christ as active in the divine work of creation, as reflecting the divine Glory, and as having the supreme and distinctive divine name. And Christ’s divine status is made abundantly clear in the immediately following 1:5–12, where a whole sequence of scriptural texts is made to refer to him: thus, for example, 1:6 applies to Christ a verse that speaks of the angels worshipping God, while in

⁵⁹ Cf. especially Hengel, *Studies* (see n. 11), 137–175, 214–225.

⁶⁰ See Hengel, *Studien* (see n. 11), 496–534, and further literature cited there.

⁶¹ Cf. especially C.C. Newman, *Paul’s Glory Christology: Tradition and Rhetoric* (NovTSup 69; Leiden 1992).

⁶² For discussion of this, see e.g. Bauckham, *Jesus* (see n. 46), 38–39, 141–142, 233–253; Hurtado, *Lord* (see n. 36), 497–504, 590–594.

1:10–12 it is a passage depicting God's eternal existence as well as his whole act of creation. Rev 1:12–16 reads more like a *theophany* than a christophany, while in 5:6–14, the Lamb on (or beside) the divine throne is worshipped in the same terms as was God in chapter 4, and finally both God and Lamb are worshipped together, with the same doxology of praise.

e) Conclusion What has emerged from recent discussion, then, is a very strong emphasis on the way that Christ is portrayed, in several strands of the New Testament, as divine, within a Jewish context and in quintessentially Jewish terms. The clear (though not unanimous) scholarly consensus is that, despite all the problems it creates for our understanding of early Christianity, a Christology that portrays Christ as divine emerges very early, in distinctively Jewish terminology and within a Jewish context.

2. Worship of Christ, and Scripture Applied to Christ

The phenomena of Christ being depicted as worthy of worship, and of scriptural passages, which in the Hebrew Bible refer to God, now being applied explicitly and directly to Christ, form an integral part of Phil 2:6–11; and that is so for 1 Cor 8:6 as well, as far as the use of scripture is concerned. So also, as we have seen, Heb 1:5–12 uses scriptural passages that speak of God in the highest terms to now refer to Christ, while Rev 1:12–16 uses allusions to several scriptural passages in a similar way, and in 5:6–14 Christ is worshipped along with God and in the same way and on the same level as God.

The importance for high, or divine, Christology, of both these phenomena has been stressed in recent discussion. As far as the worship of Christ is concerned, this has been the case above all in the work of Hurtado.⁶³ It is, however, a point that has been constantly emphasized, for example by Hengel,⁶⁴ who has argued that hymns and psalms sung to or about Christ are as old as the earliest Christian community in Jerusalem and its common worship. There will have been divinely-inspired songs along with the singing of Psalms from the Hebrew Bible in a new way: above all, here, Psalm 110 took on significance. Hurtado also stresses that the cultic prac-

63 Thus e.g. Hurtado, *One God* (see n. 36), 11–15, 99–114; id., *Origins*; id., *How*; and especially id., *Lord* (all see n. 36). The work of Horbury, *Cult* (see n. 24), does also (although with a rather different kind of argument) set worship of Christ as central for the understanding of early Christology. Important also is the earlier work of R.J. Bauckham, "The Worship of Jesus in Apocalyptic Christianity", *NTS* 27 (1981) 322–341.

64 Hengel, *Between* (see n. 11), 79–96; id., *Studies* (see n. 11), 227–292; id., *Studien* (see n. 11), 185–258.

tice of devotion to Jesus and worship of him goes back (as far as the evidence allows us to see) to the earliest Judean Jewish Christian circles, as well as the Pauline Christian communities.⁶⁵ Thus there was calling on the name of Jesus, baptism in the name of Jesus, and Jesus' name used in healing and exorcism, along with, in the Pauline communities, the 'Lord's Supper' as a Christian cult meal, prayer through, and at times to, Christ, hymns about, and perhaps to, Christ, prophecy understood as inspired by Christ, and Jesus invoked and acclaimed as Lord.

There has been criticism of Hurtado's work, especially on the grounds that all we really have evidence for in this earlier period (including Paul) is *reverence* for Jesus, and not worship in any meaningful sense.⁶⁶ It is certainly the case that the evidence is at best patchy for the first decade or two of the Christian movement, and relatively late, for example, for hymns being sung *to* Christ, rather than simply about Christ. Nevertheless, it is difficult to make sense, for example, of Phil 2:6–11 except on the basis that it is assumed and expected that Christ will be acclaimed and worshipped in the same way as God (and that this will itself be to the glory of God); and Hurtado makes a sustained, cumulative case for there being some kind of cult of Christ in Christian circles in Palestine as well as in the Pauline communities.

The central importance of Jewish scripture being applied to Christ, and interpreted in terms of Christ, has been strongly reinforced in recent discussion. This does indeed overlap with the focus on worship of Christ, as we have seen with Phil 2:6–11, and as is also evident, for example, from the significance of Ps 110:1 (and other Psalms used in early Christian worship) for early high Christology.⁶⁷ In recent work, the focus has been especially on the use of strongly monotheistic scriptural passages to refer to Christ, and on passages where the supreme divine name YHWH is interpreted as denoting Christ.⁶⁸ Thus, overall, it has been made clear in recent discussion that for Christ to be worshipped, within a Jewish context and with the kind of praise that a Jew would address to God, and for Jewish scripture portraying the one true God to be applied to Christ, does indeed enor-

⁶⁵ Hurtado, *Lord* (see n. 36), 134–153, 155–216.

⁶⁶ Thus e.g. M. Casey, "Monotheism, Worship, and Christological Developments in the Pauline Churches", in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism* (ed. C.C. Newman, J.R. Davila and C.S. Lewis; Leiden 1999) 214–233.

⁶⁷ Thus especially Hengel, *Studies* (see n. 11), 119–225.

⁶⁸ Thus e.g. Bauckham, *Jesus* (see n. 46), 186–221; D.B. Capes, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul's Christology* (WUNT II/47; Tübingen 1992); C.J. Davis, *The Name and Way of the Lord: Old Testament Texts, New Testament Christology* (JSNTSup 129; Sheffield 1996).

mously substantiate the case for seeing a divine Christology as deriving from within Judaism and from very early on.

3. Monotheism and Intermediary Figures

It is thus clear, both from the review I have given of the recent debate (sections II and III), and also the themes and issues discussed in IV.1–2, that monotheism is an issue of central importance for the question of high Christology. Thus the nature of Jewish monotheism is made a point of fundamental methodological significance by Casey on the one hand and Bauckham on the other. *Both* insist that Jewish monotheism must be understood in an *absolute* sense. For Casey, it is specifically a *constraining* force, and as such governs the conclusions we can reach: that is, it would be absolutely impossible for Christ to be depicted as divine within a Jewish context, precisely because this would be anathema to the monotheistic faith. For Bauckham, it has *exclusive* force, so that monotheism entails an absolute divide between God and all created reality.⁶⁹ Yet the New Testament is able to depict Christ as divine, and in no sense compromise this monotheism, precisely because it shows Christ to belong fully *within* the divine *identity*.

Both these arguments appear impressive, logically and methodologically, as I noted above; both, however, are problematic. It is indeed interesting to note how setting Jewish monotheism as the central point of reference, and determinative criterion, can lead to completely opposed and contradictory conclusions. This fact serves already to alert us to the question of whether to portray Jewish monotheism in this way is to give an adequate account of it. Thus it has to be said that it is misleading to portray it, as Casey does, as a rigid constraining force. Equally, however, Bauckham gives a too monochrome and exclusivist account of it. The consequence in both cases is that important questions and possibilities are closed off. Thus Casey has to deny the clear implications of his own assessment of the evidence, by maintaining that Paul, Hebrews and Revelation all *have* to stop (just) short of affirming Christ as divine, and that this stage could only be reached in John's Gospel and in completely non-Jewish terms. As we have seen, the way that Christ is represented in Paul's letters (and comparably in Hebrews and Revelation) as having the supreme divine name, as having strongly monotheistic scriptural passages applied to him, and as being worthy of worship, shows this position to be untenable. The vast majority

69 Cf. Bauckham, *Jesus* (see n. 46), 1–17, 60–126, 182–185.

of Jews who encountered the Christian movement in the first century were indeed unwilling to accept even that Jesus was the messiah, let alone that he was divine. But the fact that at least some Jews could accept this, and yet still retain important aspects of their Jewish identity, shows Casey to be working with a flawed methodological principle.

Bauckham's position demands there to be an absolute divide between God and all created reality. It is thus a completely black-and-white picture; there are, and can be, no grey areas. Hence Christ is, and must be, always completely within the divine identity; there is no possible alternative to this. One consequence of this is that both Jewish monotheism and New Testament Christology are very neat and self-contained categories. The reality, I would want to argue, was more variegated and open-ended. Thus, for example, in the case of the so-called Jewish intermediary figures, Bauckham asserts an absolute divide between Wisdom, Logos and Spirit, which are to be seen as personifications of God and as belonging fully within the divine identity, and all exalted angelic and human figures, who belong fully and absolutely outside the divine identity. Yet this is simply not tenable. The exception he cites (that of Enoch in 1 En. 37–71) is more than damaging to the absolute nature of his argument, but in any case, Philo's depiction, for example, of the Logos as an archangel shows that no such absolute distinction can hold.⁷⁰

Further, both Bauckham and Eskola disparage the way that intermediary figures have been used in the debate. Thus Bauckham says these figures have been given a subordinate divine or semi-divine status, and seen as providing a category where early Christian views of Jesus' exalted status could easily fit, while Eskola pours scorn on the simplistic way New Testament scholarship uses these exalted angelic and human figures as prototypes for the interpretation of Christ's exalted status. All this, however, misrepresents the place intermediary figures have in the discussion. As Hengel says, comparison with such figures could never *explain* the phenomenon of the origin of Christology as a whole; it will always be necessary to think in terms of an unparalleled innovation. To be aware of apparent parallels, or analogies, however, will always serve to sharpen awareness of the deep differences and new elements in primitive Christianity.⁷¹ This seems to me an altogether defensible approach. Indeed, I have argued that the early Christians, struggling to make full sense of the extraordinary

70 Cf. A. Chester, *Messiah and Exaltation* (WUNT 207; Tübingen 2007) 22–25, 45–50, 92–93, 119–120.

71 Hengel, *Son* (see n. 11), 58–59, 89–90; id., *Studies* (see n. 11), 115–116.

nature of Christ, as this had been revealed to them, may well, within their Jewish context, have found knowledge of such traditions helpful in enabling them to articulate the significance of Christ in terms of the similarities, but above all the decisive differences, vis-a-vis these figures. Hence if we are prepared to see Jewish monotheism not as an absolute, constraining or exclusive, force, but as potentially more fluid (especially in apocalyptic, visionary and mystical traditions), then we may be able to do more justice to the Judaism of the first century, and also to the various kinds of christological depiction we find in the New Testament. This perspective may allow us to make sense, for example, of those places in the New Testament where Christ is portrayed as (highly) exalted, but not as divine.

4. High Christology: When?

Very high, or 'divine', Christology is, then, seen as emerging extremely early; but how early exactly? *When* precisely does this come about? Most of those involved in the whole debate do not really engage with this question in any detail. For both Bauckham and Eskola it is clearly very early indeed; thus Eskola appears simply to collapse Christ's resurrection and his exaltation to the divine throne in heaven into each other. Bauckham, for his part, says "the earliest Christology was already *in nuce* the highest Christology", and he speaks also, for instance, of "an early christological schema" and "very early christological reflection";⁷² but he is not more precise than that. Hurtado also emphasizes the very early emergence of this phenomenon; thus, for example, he says that Jesus-devotion was evident "from the earliest days of Jewish Christianity",⁷³ but is not any more specific.

It is really only Hengel who has attempted the difficult task of constructing a specific time-scale for this whole momentous development. Thus, as we have seen, he has always maintained that the decisive development must have occurred in less than two decades from the death and resurrection of Jesus, and that the apotheosis of Christ must therefore have taken place no later than the 40s CE.⁷⁴ The main reason for this is that the Christology in Paul's letters shows no real signs of development, and must therefore have reached that form by the end of the 40s at the latest. Subsequently, however, Hengel has tried to go further and be more precise still: that is, he has argued that the 4–5 years following the death and res-

⁷² Bauckham, *Jesus* (see n. 46), 184, 199, 200.

⁷³ Hurtado, *How* (see n. 36), 20.

⁷⁴ Hengel, *Son* (see n. 11), 2.

urrection of Christ (c. 31–35 CE) represented an extraordinarily rapid missionary expansion in the earliest Christian movement, and that very plausibly the development of Christology ran parallel to this, since it would have been needed for the missionary message, and would itself have helped give rise to the mission.⁷⁵ At any rate, he argues, the real problem for the origin of earliest Christology lies in these 4–5 years; it is simply not possible to demonstrate a more differentiated chronological sequence for christological development, since the overall period involved is much too short.

Whether it is possible to be as precise as this must be doubtful. There is too much that cannot be specified with any certainty about this very early period; nor do we know how much of a role Paul himself played in all of this. Nevertheless, if we grasp the full significance of Phil 2:6–11, and see it as a hymn already known within the early Christian movement and taken over by Paul, then it could hardly be later than some point within the 40s CE. And even leaving that aside, the fact that Paul, in 1 Cor 8:6 (from the early-mid 50s) depicts Christ as divine, but apparently has no need at all to argue for this, would again suggest that Hengel's basic point is certainly correct: the decisive christological development must have taken place by the 40s CE and no later.

5. Method and Presuppositions

As I noted at the start of this section, there are presuppositions involved in all the approaches to the question of 'whence' and 'when' very high, or divine, Christology emerged. These presuppositions are easier to detect in some cases than others, but they are present throughout. The main question with all of them is whether their way of assessing the evidence is justifiable, or whether the presuppositions intrude too much. There is also the further, closely related and potentially important point that Dunn raises: that is, that we should not assume that the christological meaning that we naturally see, in light of later doctrinal developments and formulations, is how particular passages or expressions may have been intended by the writer or would have been understood by those who read it. Hence it is important to respect the specific context of usage, and the limitations that this may entail.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, it is clear that this caution can itself have misleading effects: that is, for example, it may too easily be used

⁷⁵ Hengel, *Between* (see n. 11), 42–47.

⁷⁶ Dunn, *Christology* (see n. 9), e.g. 13–22, 170–176; id., *The Christ* (see n. 9), 1,270–278, 290–303.

to close off what is potentially unprecedented usage at a very early stage. Hence whenever we encounter very striking christological passages and expressions, we need to ask *why* this might have been said and what could have given rise to it, if it does indeed really mean what it most obviously appears to.

The fundamental differences in method and approach that are evident in the recent debate inevitably give rise to fundamentally different conclusions. Thus it is immediately evident that the recent debate has exhibited examples of what have been termed 'evolutionary' and 'developmental' approaches to Christology.⁷⁷ These terms are not entirely satisfactory, but they can at least serve to point to the essential difference: that is, whether divine Christology can only be seen as something utterly *alien* and unacceptable within the Judaism from which it ultimately derives, or whether it should be seen as a development (however unprecedented) *within* Judaism. The approach we find in the case of Bauckham (and indeed Eskola) in fact corresponds to neither of these: thus it maintains that divine Christology certainly manifests itself *within* Judaism, and in *Jewish* categories; but it cannot be seen in any sense as a *development*, however rapid.

These different approaches and methods are bound up, as we have seen, with a number of questions: not least, those concerning monotheism and intermediary figures, the attributing of the supreme divine name, and worship, to Christ, and applying to Christ Jewish scripture that speaks of *God* in the highest terms. The divide between developmental and evolutionary approaches corresponds, of course, to the divide between seeing very high Christology as a phenomenon emerging at a very early stage within a *Jewish* context and using Jewish concepts, and seeing it instead as a late (late first century or early second century) phenomenon, at a stage when this Jewish messianic movement must have been turned (or perverted) into an utterly alien, Gentile cult of a divinized Christ. It is easy to recognize the fundamental differences in approach and understanding here, and why they should be maintained so strongly. Yet, as we have seen, the problem the evolutionary approach appears to run up against is the sheer force of the evidence from within the New Testament itself. The methodological principle underlying the approach of Bauckham (and comparably Eskola) is clear, and the position is cogently and powerfully stated. In the end, in fact, the differences vis-a-vis much of the 'developmental' position, at least as far as date and Jewish setting

77 For this, see C.F.D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge, UK and New York 1977) 1–10.

are concerned, are very much minimal. Yet for Bauckham, clearly, there are very important points of *principle* involved. Whether his approach is able to give a *differentiated* enough account of how the variety of christological positions and modes of expression emerged within the early Christian movement (and *why* they should do so in different ways) is altogether unclear to me. That, by contrast, is something that the developmental approach can and does allow for.

This is, of course, only to scratch the surface of these very large issues. They will continue to be debated, and divergent positions will continue to be held. It should be emphasized again, however, that what is not affected significantly is the substantial agreement within recent discussion that high (or divine) Christology emerges at an *early* stage and from within a *Jewish* setting. The development of Christology may be held to have its culmination and climax in the Fourth Gospel, and it is possible to debate whether that still belongs within a Jewish context or not. But what we find in John's Gospel does not radically, or indeed significantly, change or add to what we can already see elsewhere within the New Testament. That in turn means that we are confronted with the question of what could possibly have given rise to so momentous a phenomenon at so early a stage. And that leads us into our final section.

V. High Christology: Determinative Factors

We are, that is, still left with the further question of precisely *why* it was that this astounding development came about, and why it could happen so quickly. The question of 'why' is raised much less in recent (as indeed older) work on early Christology than are those of 'when' and 'whence'. But it is, I would argue, a question that is important to ask – whether or not we can answer it satisfactorily. The claim that the early Christians made (within a decade or two at most after Jesus' death) that this humiliated, crucified figure was to be understood as fully divine, is so astounding and utterly unprecedented that the questions of why and how, as well as when and whence, force themselves on us in considering this whole phenomenon.

In fact these questions are touched on, implicitly at any rate, in some of the discussions of New Testament Christology that I have referred to already. For Casey and Vermes, implicitly at least, it is to be seen primarily in negative terms, with the way that Christianity evolves into an alien religion within a Gentile setting as the main cause. For Dunn, it was because one

part of the Christian movement became caught up in a cultural and conceptual evolution, which caused the concept of the real pre-existence of a heavenly redeemer to become genuinely thinkable. For Hengel, it is because Jesus, known for his close sense of relationship with God, is seen as the messiah and believed to have been raised from the dead, and familiar passages of scripture are understood as unmistakably pointing to his significance. For Yarbrow Collins and Collins (and for Horbury, to an extent), it is because Jesus is seen as Messiah and Son of Man, and can therefore be brought into conjunction with the understanding of the exalted, supernatural messiah in Judaism. Bauckham does not give any reason; the suggestions offered by Hurtado and Eskola are taken up below.

Some at least of these are potentially important factors that could help give rise to very high Christology: Jesus' sense of intimate relationship with God, and sonship of God; Jesus being understood as messiah and Son of Man; Jesus as fervently believed to have been raised from the dead; the use of key scriptural texts and passages that could encapsulate and explicate his significance and be used to venerate him. Indeed, they can all be seen, in one way or another, as *necessary* to the development of the astonishing beliefs held about Jesus so soon after his ignominious death. But whether they can, individually or collectively, be held to constitute a *sufficient* cause for the claims the early Christians made about Christ is another matter. It would be possible to argue a case, if for example Mark 14:62 represents something close to an authentic saying of Jesus. That is, the early Christians might have responded to the extraordinary event (however precisely understood) of Jesus having been raised from the dead, by taking up what Jesus had himself pointed to, and especially by using Ps 110:1 in order to do so. Again, however, whether this can actually constitute a plausible explanation in and of itself is by no means clear.

It may be, then, that what was needed was a catalyst, to set these various facets in motion and to give them a sharp focus and point of reference. There are indeed one or two possible pointers in this direction in some of the works that I have considered, particularly with reference to specific experiences, of various kinds, that the very early Christians had, as central and instrumental for the move to a very high Christology at a very early stage. Thus Hurtado, with the major emphasis of his work on the worship of Christ, in relation to a 'binitarian mutation' of Jewish monotheism, criticizes Eskola and Bauckham for, as he sees it, setting the worship of Jesus as secondary, both logically and historically, to theological convictions about

Jesus' high status and significance.⁷⁸ In fact, he argues, these expressions of devotion to Jesus were motivated by powerful, revelatory experiences that Jesus' followers had, after his death, that brought with them the conviction that God had given him unparalleled heavenly honour and glory.⁷⁹ Thus also more generally he stresses the importance of religious experience for the early Christians;⁸⁰ and specifically, for the belief in Jesus as divine, he draws attention to their resurrection and visionary experiences of Christ. Moreover Eskola, although thus criticized by Hurtado, and also giving an over-schematized account of early Christology, and too disparaging an assessment of the significance of intermediary figures, does in fact note the potential importance for Paul of his visionary experiences.⁸¹ These, he argues, need to be understood as merkabah visions of Christ on the divine throne of Glory, as for example at Galatians 1 and 2 Corinthians 12. That is, for Paul to have seen the exalted Christ on the throne of Glory would have been of crucial importance for his Christology. So also Yarbrow Collins draws attention to the potential importance of visions of Jesus as exalted to heaven for the rise of high Christology.

I have myself argued, independently, for visionary experiences (and not least those of Paul) within early Christianity as having potentially vital significance for the very rapid emergence of so high a Christology, as also for some of the most striking features of this kind of portrayal of Christ (using terms such as Glory and Image of God).⁸² There are further examples of this kind of approach: thus, for example, Hengel had already pointed briefly in this direction,⁸³ and Seyoon Kim gave this perspective a central place in his argument.⁸⁴ Along with these, there is important and illuminating discussion by, for example, Segal,⁸⁵ Rowland and Morray-

⁷⁸ Hurtado, *How* (see n. 36), 22–25.

⁷⁹ Hurtado, *How* (see n. 36), 29–30.

⁸⁰ Hurtado, *Lord* (see n. 36), 64–74; id., *How* (see n. 36), 29–30, 179–204.

⁸¹ Eskola, *Messiah* (see n. 42), 182–202.

⁸² Chester, *Messiah* (see n. 70), 80–105, 119–121.

⁸³ Hengel, *Son* (see n. 11), 89–90.

⁸⁴ S. Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* (WUNT II/4; Tübingen ²1984); cf. also id., *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel* (WUNT 140; Tübingen 2002) 13–19, 165–213.

⁸⁵ A.F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven 1990) 34–71; id., “The Risen Christ and the Angelic Mediator Figures in Light of Qumran”, in *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. J.H. Charlesworth; New York 1992) 302–328; id., “Paul and the Beginning of Jewish Mysticism”, in *Death, Ecstasy and Otherworldly Journeys* (ed. J.J. Collins and M. Fishbane; Albany 1995) 95–122; id., “Paul's Thinking about Resurrection in its Jewish Context”, *NTS* 44 (1998) 400–419. Cf. also S. Meißner, *Die Heimholung des Ketzers: Studien zur jüdischen Auseinanderset-*

Jones.⁸⁶ Whereas Eskola begs a number of questions in his use of Merkabah and throne-mysticism material, and does not for example distinguish apocalyptic from merkabah traditions, the much more sophisticated discussions of this material by these scholars serves to reinforce the case for taking these various traditions seriously, as an integral part of any reconstruction of why and how so exalted a Christology arose so rapidly. Although Christology is not the primary focus of these works, they nevertheless demonstrate the importance of mystical, visionary Jewish traditions, represented by both apocalyptic and Hekhalot texts, for enhancing our understanding of the New Testament. And what can be seen as formative aspects of early Christology, as for example Paul's 'Damascus Road' and other visionary experiences, are an important part of this.

The potential significance of Paul's 'Damascus Road' experience has been stressed by a number of scholars.⁸⁷ It is difficult to be certain about the exact detail of this: the accounts in Acts can certainly not simply be taken at face value, while Paul touches only briefly on it in his account in Gal 1:12–16. Nevertheless, where Paul speaks here of 'a revelation (ἀποκάλυψις) of Jesus Christ' (v. 12) and of 'his Son being revealed (ἀποκαλύψαι) in me', it is argued that this is best understood as denoting a Christophany that Paul experiences – a revelatory vision of the resurrected and exalted Christ in glorious form, that serves as the basis for Paul's apostolic commission. Along with this, it has also been argued that what Paul says in 2 Cor 4:4–6 also refers to this Damascus Road Christophany.⁸⁸ That is, where he speaks (v. 4) of 'the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image (εἰκὼν) of God', and (v. 6) of 'the light of the knowledge

zung mit Paulus (WUNT II/87; Tübingen 1996) 141–213; Newman, *Glory* (see n. 61), 164–212.

⁸⁶ C. Rowland and C.R.A. Morray-Jones, *The Mystery of God: Early Jewish Mysticism and the New Testament* (CRINT 12; Leiden 2009); also important are earlier publications by both authors: thus e.g. C. Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London 1982); id., "The Vision of the Risen Christ", *JTS* 31 (1980) 1–13; C.R.A. Morray-Jones, "Paradise Revisited (2 Cor 12:1–12): The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul's Apostolate, Part 1: The Jewish Sources", *HTR* 86 (1993) 177–217; id., "Paradise Revisited (2 Cor 12:1–12): The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul's Apostolate, Part 2: Paul's Heavenly Ascent and its Significance", *HTR* 86 (1993) 265–292; id., "Transformational Mysticism in the Apocalyptic-Merkabah Tradition", *JJS* 43 (1992) 1–31; id., *A Transparent Illusion* (JSJSup 59; Leiden 2002).

⁸⁷ Thus e.g. Kim, *Origin* (see n. 84), 50–66, 100–136; Rowland, *Open* (see n. 86), 375–378; Newman, *Glory* (see n. 61).

⁸⁸ Cf. e.g. Kim, *Origin* (see n. 84), 5–11, 229–233; Segal, *Paul* (see n. 85), 59–61; Newman, *Glory* (see n. 61), 219–222; Chester, *Messiah* (see n. 70), 86–88.

of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ', he is alluding to his visionary experience of Christ embodying the divine Glory (or *kabod*) and image.

There is an interestingly different assessment of the evidence by Morray-Jones.⁸⁹ He argues that Paul's 'Damascus Road' experience was not an ascent into the heavenly world by Paul, and did not provide the basis for his apostolic commission. Instead that crucially formative experience is to be found in 2 Cor 12:1–12. This is to be understood as a visionary ascent to the heavenly world, and heavenly temple, and the holy of holies (or 'paradise') at the centre of it. And although again Paul refrains from giving much real detail of his experience, what he refers to is clearly also his merkabah vision of the enthroned and glorified Christ. This corresponds to what Acts reports at 22:17–21, and (as both Acts 22 and 2 Corinthians 12 make clear) is what gives him his apostolic commission and authority. In Galatians 1, by contrast, Paul does not see Christ enthroned in the heavenly world, but instead experiences an appearance, and descent, of Christ, as the divine Glory (or *kabod*).

Whatever we make of this argument, at very least it alerts us to the importance of 2 Corinthians 12. And indeed, Paul's reference, in 12:2, to 'visions and revelations of the Lord' shows clearly that Paul had at least several visions of the exalted, glorified Christ. This point, in conjunction with the references to specific visions in Galatians 1 and 2 Corinthians 12, is important. Whereas in much New Testament scholarship the significance for Paul of his visionary experiences has very often been denied, or been made marginal at most,⁹⁰ within more recent scholarship there has, as I have noted, been much more of a tendency to set it centrally and see it as fundamental and formative for Paul, and for his understanding of Christ. And, as has also been recognized, Paul is by no means alone in this respect within early Christianity.⁹¹ Hence if Christ has actually been seen as seated on the divine throne in heaven, alongside God, and representing in visible form the full divine Glory, then the extraordinary move to portraying him as divine, on a level with God and bound up with God, may become more intelligible.

It would indeed be possible to argue a case for high Christology as emanating simply and solely from such post-resurrection visions – however their status as visions, and the 'truth-content' of what is claimed to have

⁸⁹ See especially Rowland and Morray-Jones, *Mystery* (see n. 86), 341–419.

⁹⁰ Cf. e.g. D. Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians* (ET, Philadelphia 1986) 177–183; R.P. Martin, *Second Corinthians* (Waco, TX 1986) 387–424; E. Best, *Second Corinthians* (Atlanta 1987) 116–121.

⁹¹ Cf. Chester, *Messiah* (see n. 70), 99–102, with reference to further discussion.

been seen, are evaluated. But it is important to emphasize that if such visions and mystical experiences are indeed seen as potentially important for the emergence of early Christology, they must be brought integrally into relation with the various other factors I have noted already: that is, it is Jesus, understood as standing in close relationship with God, and believed to be the fulfilment of Jewish hopes for a messiah and the one who is bringing in the divine kingdom, and to have been raised from the dead, who is now seen alongside God and embodying the divine Glory. It remains, of course, a momentous and astounding phenomenon that Christ could ever be portrayed, and understood as divine, in this way. Yet we at least thus have a clear basis and framework to help us begin to make sense of why and how the early Christians could articulate so high a Christology at so early a stage, in a Jewish context and in language that Jews would reserve for God.

In conclusion, then, it is clear that although there is and will continue to be real and deep divergence in the accounts we are given of when very high (or divine) Christology emerged, and in what setting, there is in fact a substantial consensus for seeing it as very early and from within a Jewish context. We can, therefore, give a clear answer to the questions of 'whence' and 'when', whatever the differences in the detail here might be. It is much less easy to answer the question 'why', and it is indeed a question that has been addressed much less often and much less clearly. Nevertheless, here too we are able to see real progress within recent discussion of the issue.

Andrew Chester
Faculty of Divinity
West Road
Cambridge CB3 9BS
Great Britain
anc1000@cam.ac.uk



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