

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTOLOGY IN THE EARLY CHURCH

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Even if *theology* (in the strictest sense of that word as 'thought about God') cannot be reduced without remainder to *christology*,¹ there is no doubt that the doctrine of the person of Jesus is of central importance in Christian thought. Traditional dogmatics have been based on the belief that the New Testament as a whole bears witness to the divine nature of Jesus as the Son of God. A full defence of this belief was provided in 1958 by Dr. V. Taylor. The conclusions of his survey of the New Testament writers were as follows: 'All the Gospels affirm the divine Sonship of Jesus Although the designation "the Son of God" does not belong to the vocabulary of the Acts, its religious values appear in the manner in which He is described The Son of God in Paul appears as a supramundane being standing in the closest metaphysical relationship to God In the mind of (John) Christ is the divine Son of God in a relationship which is fully ethical and spiritual, but also one of being and nature.'² This doctrine of the person of Jesus is not peculiar to the writers of the New Testament, but is to be traced back to an earlier period. Even if the term 'Son' is found only rarely in the primitive preaching, its meaning was expressed in the use of the title of 'Lord'. 'We must accept the testimony of our sources that it is the Lordship of Christ to which prominence was given, and infer that the idea is far richer in Christological meaning than the name "Lord" might itself suggest.'³ This view is confirmed by the fact that the idea of divine Sonship goes back to Jesus Himself: 'Within the limitations of the human life of Jesus

¹ T. Ogletree (*The 'Death of God' Controversy*, SCM Press, London (1966) 36, 57-59, 85) has demonstrated the failure of recent American writers to account for the transcendent features of the person of Jesus without reference to God.

² V. Taylor, *The Person of Christ in New Testament Teaching*, Macmillan, London (1958) 22, 31, 47, 103.

³ *Op. cit.* 197.

His consciousness of Sonship was gained through the knowledge that God was His Father, mediated by prayer and communion with Him in a process of growth and development which begins before the opening of the historic ministry and is consummated in decisive experiences of revelation and intuition. It is upon this historical foundation that Christological thinking must build.⁴

Taylor's view would seem to be that an understanding of the person of Jesus as the Son of God in a real or essential sense⁵ is to be found (1) in the mind of Jesus and (2) in the thought of the early church,⁶ and (3) that this understanding can form the basis of a modern christology. Taylor himself uses the New Testament data as the basis for a kenotic type of christology.

More recent scholarship has questioned all three of these contentions. It has denied that Jesus spoke of Himself as the Son of God, that the earliest church spoke of Him as the Son of God in any other than a functional manner, and that the ontological affirmations which are made of Him in the various parts of the New Testament are fully consistent with each other or can be understood in any other than a mythological way by the modern theologian.⁷

We are concerned here not so much with the implications of this view for dogmatic theology as with the question whether it is a true reading of the New Testament evidence. There are in fact strong reasons for questioning whether the scholars who adopt this interpretation are doing full justice to the evidence.

I. THE TEACHING OF JESUS

Our starting point must be the teaching of Jesus Himself. Can His historical person sustain the weight of christological interpretation which the early church puts upon it? The issue has been put pointedly by J. W. Bowman: '*The Church cannot indefi-*

⁴ *Op. cit.* 186.

⁵ The choice of a suitable adjective is difficult. 'Metaphysical', 'ontic', 'ontological' and even 'physical' are among possibilities used by various writers.

⁶ It is generally agreed that the New Testament writers held such a view of the person of Jesus. What is in dispute is whether their predecessors in the early church went beyond a purely functional interpretation of the person of Jesus and gave Him ontological status, even if, as Taylor shows, the full implications were not worked out.

⁷ For an exposition of this view see R. H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology*, Lutterworth, London (1965). I have reviewed this work in *Themelios* 3:2 (1966) 25-34.

nitely continue to believe about Jesus what he did not know to be true about himself! The question accordingly, of his Messianic consciousness is the most vital one the Christian faith has to face.⁸ It may be objected that we are unable to reach back by methods of scientific historical criticism to the 'Messianic consciousness' of Jesus, but both on general grounds and on the basis of specific investigations into the Gospel material we believe that this is a most pessimistic conclusion. The attempt can be made, and can be made fruitfully.⁹

In an earlier article we discussed this question.¹⁰ It emerged that Jesus was conscious of a unique filial relationship to God the Father. This was seen not merely in His use of *Abba* in prayer and in His reference to God as 'my Father', but also in His use of the terminology of sonship.¹¹ We suggested that the texts in which Jesus spoke of Himself as 'the Son' (Mt. 11:27 par. Lk. 10:22; Mk. 12:6; 3:32) were genuine in their present form. Consideration was given to other texts in the Synoptic Gospels in which the title is given to Jesus by a heavenly voice or in the cries of demons, and was argued that the evidence of these texts did not contradict our conclusion that in the use of the title by Jesus it was His awareness of a special relationship to God which was the determining factor rather than a messianic use of the title or the Hellenistic idea of the 'divine man'. Since it is often argued that the attribution of divine Sonship to Jesus was first made by the early church which regarded the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus as the act in which God adopted Him as His Son, an examination was made of Romans 1:3f. and Acts 13:33, and it was shown that the early church regarded the resurrection as the vindication of a status which Jesus had already claimed for Himself. One obvious objection to this theory is the suggestion that 'the Son' and 'the Son of God' are different christological titles, with different origins and different histories until they were eventually brought together at a comparatively late stage in the development. We submitted, however, that the evidence for this theory was extremely tenuous and that it is

⁸ J. W. Bowman, *The Intention of Jesus*, SCM Press, London (1945) 108. Quoted by M. D. Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant*, SPCK, London (1959) ix.

⁹ F. F. Bruce, 'History and the Gospel', in C. F. H. Henry (ed.), *Jesus of Nazareth: Saviour and Lord*, Tyndale Press, London (1967) ch. 6.

¹⁰ I. H. Marshall, 'The Divine Sonship of Jesus', *Interpretation*, 21 (1967) 87-103.

¹¹ See especially J. Jeremias, *Abba*, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, Göttingen (1966) 15-67. For other literature see article cited in n. 10.

most likely that Jesus' own manner of referring to Himself formed the source of the church's thought.

II. DEVELOPMENT IN CHRISTOLOGY

In this present article we propose to take a closer look at the development of christological thought in the early church in order to see whether the purely functional use of the title 'Son of God' advocated by recent scholars is a satisfactory interpretation of the evidence. In a recent article G. M. Styler has suggested that an interest in ontology is not to be found in the earliest forms of christology; it appeared only at a late stage of the development, in the period of our written documents. Consequently, 'neither "Son of God" nor "Son of man" are [*sic*] originally ontological; their primary reference is not to nature but to function'.¹² Other writers, such as F. Hahn and R. H. Fuller, have strongly emphasized that in the earliest forms of christology there was no idea that Jesus had a divine nature and that in a Palestinian milieu this idea would have been unthinkable.¹³

Now we are not seeking to establish a case that ontological considerations were of paramount importance in this early period. The question is rather whether the christological affirmations made at this point possessed any ontological significance at all, even if the full implications were not realized at the time. Was the christology of later periods a legitimate development from this period, and would the first Christians have agreed that later christology expressed what was already implicit in their own affirmations? Or were there a number of competing and even contradictory christologies in the early church?¹⁴ Did the ontological content of 'Son of God' remain constant throughout the development, or was there a significant change of meaning between the Jewish and the Gentile stages' of thought?

In order to come to grips with this problem, it will be helpful to look at three presentations of the evidence. In his highly influential book *Kyrios Christos*, W. Bousset made a pioneer

¹² G. M. Styler, 'Stages in Christology in the Synoptic Gospels,' in *NTS* 10 (1963-64) 398-409, especially 400.

¹³ F. Hahn, *Christologische Hoheitstitel*, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht (1964²) 106, 288, 304., 308. R. H. Fuller, *Foundations*, 205, 2247f.

¹⁴ Cf. R. P. Casey, 'The Earliest Christologies', *JTS* n.s. 9 (1958) 253-277.

attempt to reconstruct the christological thought of the early church. In his discussion of the title 'Son of God' he came to the conclusion that it was probably not used of Jesus in the earliest church. His arguments were as follows

(1) The title is placed on the lips of Jesus only rarely in the earlier Gospel tradition and is not an authentic part of His teaching.

2) 'Son of God' was not a Jewish title for the Messiah, and its use would have endangered the strong monotheism of Jewish piety. It is therefore unlikely that the earliest Jewish Christians would have used it in their christology.

(3) The usage in the Gospels does not come from the earliest period. The use of the title in the temptation story is Hellenistic, and the use in Mark reflects the faith of Gentile Christians. In the baptismal and transfiguration stories the word 'Son' is not used as a title.

4) In Acts the title is found but once (Acts 9:20), and it is unlikely that it would be used alongside the title of 'Servant' which has a firm place in the early tradition.¹⁵

Bousset did not discuss the use of 'Son of God' in the Hellenistic church. He was inclined to think that it was Paul himself who was responsible for a new development in the use of the title.¹⁶ For a fuller study of this period we must turn to R. Bultmann.

In his *Theology of the New Testament*, Bultmann takes up the distinction between the earliest (Palestinian Jewish) church and Hellenistic church which had been made by Bousset and W. Heitmüller.¹⁷ Unlike Bousset he believes that the title of 'Son of God' was used in the Palestinian church as a messianic or royal title. This possibility arises because Bultmann is not convinced that Psalm 2 was not already interpreted messianically in Judaism. The evidence for the use of the title is found in Romans 1:3f. (in its pre-Pauline form) and in the transfiguration story (which Bultmann regards as an Easter story based on early tradition). These texts show that 'the earliest Church called Jesus Son of God (messianic) because that was what the resurrection made him. However, unlike the later Hellenistic church

¹⁵ W. Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, Göttingen (1926³) 52-57.

¹⁶ *Op. cit.* 151.

¹⁷ W. Heitmüller, 'Zum Problem Paulus und Jesus', *ZNW* 13 (1912) 320-337.

it did not regard the earthly Jesus as a Son of God (mythological).¹⁸

In the Hellenistic church the title of 'Son' was regarded as being given to Jesus at His exaltation (Heb. 1:4), but its use now developed to refer to the divinity of Jesus. The Hellenistic idea of salvation was based on the appearance of a divine figure who suffered the fate of a man. The title of 'Son of God' aptly stressed the divinity of Jesus in this type of understanding. Its use developed under three influences, the Hellenistic idea of 'divine men', the belief in 'son-divinities', and the gnostic idea of a divine redeemer.¹⁹

Bultmann's scheme is sharpened and refined in the work of F. Hahn and R. H. Fuller. These two scholars operate with a threefold division in the early pre-Pauline church—the Palestinian Jewish (Aramaic speaking) church, the Hellenistic Jewish church and the Hellenistic Gentile church. In the Palestinian Jewish church the title of 'Son of God' was applied not to the exalted Jesus but to the returning Jesus; it was a title which denoted Jesus in His future activity as the messianic king at the parousia. It is thus used in the same way as 'Son of man', 'Lord', 'Christ' and 'Son of David' which all referred originally to the future activity of Jesus. As evidence for this view Hahn cites Luke 1:32f., Mark 14:61f. and 1 Thessalonians 1:9f.

In the last mentioned of these three texts the thought of the resurrection is already present, and in the period of the Hellenistic Jewish mission the church soon reached the stage of regarding the exalted and risen Jesus as the Son of God (Rom. 1:3f.; Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5; Col. 1:13; 1 Cor. 15:28).

One small difference between Fuller and Hahn should be noted at this point. According to Fuller, Romans 1:3f. in its earliest reconstructable form belongs to the Palestinian stage and speaks of Jesus as 'predetermined from the time of the resurrection to be the eschatological Son of God at the parousia'. This idea of Jesus being foreordained to perform eschatological functions finds support from Acts 3:20; 10:42; 17:31.²⁰

It was at this same stage that elements of the 'divine man' concept were applied to the earthly life of Jesus, and the title of

¹⁸ R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, SCM Press, London (1952) I, 50.

¹⁹ *Op. cit.* I, 128-133.

²⁰ R. H. Fuller, *Foundations* 164-167.

'Son of God' was used to designate His earthly function as the bearer of the divine Spirit. The Concept of the virgin birth was also developed at this stage to indicate that God's act of election of Jesus Went back to the time of His birth.

Finally, in the Hellenistic Gentile church came the divinization of Jesus, as reflected in the transfiguration and other epiphany stories. Jesus was now thought of as the pre-existent Son of God, and for the first time the title became an expression of His divine nature.²¹

From this brief survey of the work of representative scholars it will be apparent that there are considerable differences of detail in the schemes which they present. Bousset was so uncertain of his position that he admitted in 1916 that his conclusion that Son of God was not used in the Palestinian church was perhaps too hasty.²² But although there is a real consensus of opinion on the general process of development in the writers whom we have summarized, it is questionable whether this theory can stand up to critical analysis.

III. JESUS' VIEW OF HIS PERSON

Bousset's case rested upon the thesis that the title of 'Son of God' was not used by Jesus. We have, however, summarized above an argument to the contrary, and shown that Jesus did use the title of 'Son' to express His consciousness of a filial relationship to God the Father. The facts that Jesus had used this title, and that it was addressed to Him during His earthly life, would surely have led to the use of this title to describe Him in the early church.

But can the use of the title by Jesus be described as ontological? It certainly expresses a function. We find that the title is used to describe Jesus as the One who reveals God to men (Mt. 11:27 par. Lk. 10:22).²³ But two factors suggest that the usage is not simply functional. First, Jesus knew Himself to be the Son. He occupied a position which was distinct from that of other men, and, even if He taught His disciples to call God their Father in the same intimate manner as He Himself did, He stood on a different plane from them in His capacity of mediating this

²¹ F. Hahn, *Hoheitstitel*, 280-333. R. H. Fuller, *op. cit.* 187f, 192-197, 231f.

²² See B. M. F. van Iersel, *'Der Sohn' in den synoptischen Jesusworten*, Brill, Leiden (1964²) 10.

²³ Mk. 13:32 implies that even though Jesus is the Son 'that Hour' has not been revealed to Him.

relationship to them. He was not, however, simply exercising a unique function. For, second, the revelatory function of Jesus was dependent upon the relationship of Sonship in which He stood towards the God. The title of 'Son' and the allied use of 'Father' express a relationship of communion in which revelation takes place so that the Son is able to reveal the Father to men. We may justifiably claim that what is thus predicated of Jesus is something more than a function or a status. It is more than a function because it expresses the hidden relationship with God which enabled Jesus to act as the Revealer. It is more than a status, for the use of the title is not to express a position of high honour which demands respect and even worship (as is the case with 'Lord'), but rather to express an essential relationship to God.

We have, therefore, in the teaching of Jesus a use of the title of 'Son' which certainly carries an ontological meaning capable of rich development. It would be most curious if the early church had proceeded to use this title in a purely functional manner.

IV. THE TIME AVAILABLE FOR DEVELOPMENT

We must now observe that the length of time during which these extensive developments, stretching over as many as three stages in the spread of the church, took place is comparatively restricted. Jesus died in AD 30 at the earliest. The earliest letter of Paul which can be dated with certainty is 1 Thessalonians, which was written in or around AD 50. This means that in round figures we have to account for the postulated development within some twenty years. If in fact Galatians is earlier than 1 Thessalonians, the period is slightly shorter.

But we cannot assume that the christology which Paul expresses in either of these Epistles sprang fully developed from his mind at the precise moment of writing. In 1 Thessalonians he writes about the person of Jesus in a way which expresses a very 'high' christology. Jesus is named in close conjunction with God (1 Thes. 1:1, 3; 3:11, 13; 4:9; 5:18, 23), and the title of 'Lord' is given to Him twenty-four times. In one passage He is described as the Son of God who is to come from heaven and whom God raised from the dead (1 Thess. 1:10). If we are to include Galatians in our evidence, we have here proof that Paul

conceived of Jesus as the pre-existent Son of God (Gal. 4:4). The evidence of 1 Thessalonians, however, is adequate to give a fairly fixed date for the end of the development of a 'Son of God' christology as a means of expressing the essential nature of Jesus. We are forced to ask whether the complicated development postulated by Hahn and Fuller could have taken place in this period.²⁴

V. PRE-PAULINE CHRISTOLOGY

a. We must now consider what view of the person of Jesus was held in the church before Paul. We begin by looking more closely at 1 Thessalonians 1:10. In his discussion of this text Hahn found evidence for the use of the title of 'Son of God' to refer to the eschatological functions of Jesus, and suggested that here we have a piece of earlier mission preaching taken over by Paul.²⁵ This, however, cannot be the meaning of the text in Paul. W. Kramer's study of the use of 'Son of God' in those Pauline texts which may be regarded as containing pre-Pauline material has shown that the title is used in two ways.²⁶ It is used in formulae dealing with the resurrection and in formulae which speak of God 'giving' or 'sending' the pre-existent Son as the Saviour. With regard to the latter formulae he writes: 'This understanding of "Sonship" is distinctive in that its interest is not in any particular historical act but rather in describing Jesus' significance in terms of metaphysical and cosmological speculation, by introducing the notion of His pre-existence.'²⁷ The existence of this second class of formulae shows sufficiently that the idea of pre-existence was already present in the pre-Pauline church. We must certainly reckon with it as one of the associations present in Paul's mind when he spoke of Jesus as the Son.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:10, however, this idea is not explicit. Paul's thought is of the status of Jesus in the period after the resurrection; we note in passing that Hahn's view that Sonship

²⁴ Cf. E. L. Mascall, *The Secularisation of Christianity*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London (1956) 228f.

²⁵ F. Hahn, *Hoheitstitel* 289f. G. Friedrich ('Ein Tauflied hellenistischer Judenristen, 1. Thess, 1, 9f.' *Th.Z* 21 (1965) 502-516) has argued at length for the origin of the text in Jewish-Christian missionary teaching. He holds that 'his Son' was substituted for an original 'the Son of man' to make the hymn more intelligible to Gentiles.

²⁶ W. Kramer, *Christ, Lord, Son of God*, SCM Press, London (1966) 24a-28c = 108-126.

²⁷ *Op. cit.*, 29d, 127.

is here associated purely with the parousia is rendered untenable by the explicit mention of the resurrection.²⁸ But there is no suggestion anywhere in Paul that Jesus became the Son of God at the resurrection. Jesus did not become God's Son by being raised from the dead: it was *because* He was His Son that God raised Him from the dead. This interpretation of the resurrection is confirmed by the Hellenistic Jewish interpretation of Sonship found in Wisdom 2:13-18. There the enemies of the righteous man acknowledge that 'He professes to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a child of the Lord . . . and boasts that God is his father'. Therefore they intend to test his claims: 'Let us see if his words are true, and let us test what will happen at the end of his life; for if the righteous man is God's son, he will help him, and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries.' Paul's view of the Sonship of Jesus is thoroughly in line with this conception. The effect of the resurrection was to designate Jesus as 'Son of God in power' (Rom. 1:4), and therefore the idea of honour is bound up with the mention of Sonship, but the resurrection is not the appointment of Jesus to Sonship. Consequently Thessalonians does not in any way contradict the texts which speak of Jesus as the pre-existent Son of God.

If this is the right interpretation of this text, in its present Pauline context, there is no reason to suspect that Paul has in any way altered its meaning. We should be justified in thinking that a shift of meaning had taken place only if other pre-Pauline texts implied that Sonship was an honour conferred upon Jesus at His resurrection. This, however, is not the case.

b. We have shown elsewhere that in Romans 1:3f. the primitive form of the text is not to be understood in an adoptionist manner. Nor is it to be taken, as Fuller suggests, to mean that Jesus was foreordained to be the Son at the parousia. The evidence cited by Fuller consists of three texts. We may dismiss Acts 10:42 and 17:31 as irrelevant, for in these verses the theme is that of judgment and the future function which is foreordained for Jesus is to act as judge. There is, however, no evidence that the idea of judgment was present in the formula in Romans 1:3f., and divine Sonship is only rarely linked to the thought of judgment; in John 5:23, 27 the Son is judge because He is the Son of man. Fuller's third text apparently offers better support for

²⁸ P. Vielhauer, *Aufsätze zum Neuen Testament*, Chr. Kaiser, München (1965) 189f,

his case. He refers to Acts 3:20 where Peter speaks of God sending 'the Christ appointed for you, Jesus'. Fuller takes this to mean that Jesus has been foreordained to become the Christ at the parousia.²⁹ But the text may equally well mean that the One who has already been ordained as the Christ will return at the parousia. That this is the preferable view of the text is shown not only by the ascription of messiahship to the earthly life of Jesus in verse 18 but also by the peculiar use of ὁ μὲν in verse 20; this use is to be seen in the light of the use in verse 26 where Peter speaks of God having raised up and sent His servant to the Jews. There is accordingly no reason to adopt Fuller's novel interpretation of Romans 1:3f.

In fact, Romans 1:3f. is most plausibly understood as a statement about the nature of Jesus. If we adopt the basic minimum of wording common to all reconstructions of the text, we have two clauses in parallel to each other: ' . . . who was descended from David . . . designated Son of God . . . by his resurrection from the dead'. Since the first clause contains a statement about the nature of Jesus, we may expect a similar statement in the second clause.³⁰ He is both the offspring of David, the earthly Messiah, and the heavenly Son of God. An ontological understanding of the person of Jesus is surely implicit here.

c. Acts 13:33 has also been examined elsewhere, and it has been shown that the idea of adoption is also absent here. The theme of the passage in which the text occurs is the resurrection, and no special significance attaches to the use of the title; it occurs in an incidental manner in the quotation of a proof text from the Old Testament.

d. But the question arises whether the use of this proof text (Ps. 2:7) does not imply that the early church regarded the Sonship of Jesus as dating from His resurrection. This suggestion has also been made with reference to Hebrews 1:4f. and 5:5.³¹ In the former of these two passages Jesus is said to have received a more excellent name than that of the angels. The more

²⁹ Cf. J. A. T. Robinson, *Twelve New Testament Studies*, SCM Press, London (1962) 139-153, reproduced from 'The Most Primitive Christology of All?', *JTS* n.s. 7 (1956) 177-189. Against Robinson see E. Schweizer, *Lordship and Discipleship*, SCM Press, London (1960) 57f.

³⁰ W. Kramer, *Christ* 24a, I 08f.

³¹ B. Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic*, SCM Press, London (1961) 139-144.

excellent name is clearly that of 'Son', and the immediately following quotations from Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14 (together with the allusion to Ps. 110:1 in verse 4 and the quotation in verse 13) have suggested that we have here a line of thought parallel to that in Philippians 2:9-11; on this view Jesus is here given the title of 'Son' at His exaltation, just as in the hymn in Philippians He is given the title of 'Lord'. But it is quite certain that the author of Hebrews did not think that Jesus received the title of 'Son' for the first time at His exaltation. On this point the commentators are unanimous. The author's 'wisdom' christology shows plainly that the title of 'Son' belongs to the pre-existent Jesus.³² When, therefore, the author assembles his testimonia regarding the exaltation of Jesus, there is no suggestion that he is thinking that Jesus was now appointed as Son for the first time.

Although, therefore, the use of Psalm 2:7 is associated with the resurrection, there is nowhere any evidence which compels us to think that the early church regarded this as the moment at which Jesus became the Son of God.³³ The usage is entirely consistent with the view that the resurrection was regarded as the moment in which God openly acknowledged Jesus as His Son and exalted Him to His right hand. Indeed, when we ask what prompted the early church to use Psalm 2:7 as a proof text it seems extremely unlikely that it was read as an allusion to the resurrection and then applied to Jesus; it is much more likely that the mention of the Lord's anointed and His Son led to the application to Jesus. It was the prophecy of Jesus' person in the psalm which led the early church to see in it also a prophecy of the resurrection, and not vice versa. Consequently the use of the psalm presupposes that the early church had already formed some estimate of the person of Jesus, whether as the Messiah or as the Son of God.³⁴

VI. THE CHRISTOLOGY OF THE JEWISH CHURCH

The argument of the previous section has shown that the con-

³² O. Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, Göttingen (1960¹¹) 45 n.6.

³³ The same considerations apply to Heb. 5:5. The other references to Jesus' exalted state as the Son of God (Col. 1:13; 1 Cor. 15:28) say nothing about the moment when Jesus became the Son, nor do they show signs of pre-Pauline formulation.

³⁴ On the use of Ps. 2:7 in Acts 13:33 see also E. Schweizer, 'The Concept of the Davidic "Son of God" in Acts and Its Old Testament Background' in L. E. Keck

nection made in the early church between the resurrection and the divine Sonship of Jesus does not imply that His Sonship was thought of as beginning from the resurrection. We must now ask whether there is any evidence which speaks positively in favour of an attribution of Sonship, understood in an ontological sense, to Jesus in this period. Here we must refer again to the work of W. Kramer who has demonstrated that pre-Pauline forms are to be traced in Galatians 4:4f.; Romans 8:3, 32; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:2, 25 and possibly Romans 4:25. To these texts should also be added Philippians 2:6-8, although the title of 'Son' is not found in this passage.³⁵ Kramer holds that these forms, which express the pre-existence of Jesus, come from the Hellenistic Jewish church. On the one hand, he argues that the Jewish formulation present in the texts and the absence of any decisive allusion to the Gnostic myth of the ransomed redeemer speak against attributing these texts to the Hellenistic Gentile church.³⁶ On the other hand, the attribution of an adoptionist christology to the Palestinian Jewish church prevents him from ascribing the doctrine of pre-existence to it. The presence of Jewish wisdom speculation in the pre-existence texts indicates rather that these forms must come from the Hellenistic Jewish church, and not from any earlier stage in christological development.

Now we have already seen that the texts which Kramer adduces to support his theory of an adoptionist christology in the Palestinian Jewish church do not bear out his view. From this point of view, there is no reason why a pre-existence type of christology may not have developed in the Palestinian church. Is it possible that this happened? In investigating this question the christological hymn in Philippians 2:6-8 is of great importance. Certainly the title of 'Son of God' is not present in the passage, and this has led Fuller to argue that the hymn originally

and J. L. Martyn (ed.), *Studies in Luke-Acts*, Abingdon Press, Nashville and New York (1966) 186-193. I regret that this essay came to my notice too late for its arguments to be assessed in this article.

Consideration of the presence of ideas from Ps. 2:7 in the baptismal and transfiguration stories must be deferred; if these belong to the original form of the stories, they afford further evidence that Ps. 2 was not first applied to Jesus in view of the resurrection.

³⁵ Cf. notes 26, 27 above.

³⁶ These considerations dispose of F. Hahn's view (*Hoheitstitel*, 120f., 316) that the hymn comes from the Hellenistic Gentile church.

spoke of the pre-existent 'Kyrios' rather than of the pre-existent Son.³⁷ But it is not certain that Fuller's is the right deduction from the facts. If Kramer is right, the title of 'Lord' is not found elsewhere in association with pre-existence in pre-Pauline texts.³⁸ If what we possess here is part of a hymn originally composed for a different context, it is by no means impossible that the title of 'Son' originally stood in the introduction to the hymn, and this suspicion may perhaps receive some confirmation from the use of 'God the Father' at the end of the hymn (Phil. 2:11). In any case, however, the hymn associates pre-existence with Jesus, and provides the atmosphere in which pre-existence could be linked to Sonship.³⁹ It is noteworthy how pre-existence is taken for granted; it is mentioned almost incidentally in verse 6a in a way which suggests that the idea was a familiar one.

The question of the date and origin of this hymn is therefore vital. The matter would be simplified if we were certain that the hymn reflects Aramaic linguistic and poetic usage. This was the view of E. Lohmeyer in his fundamental study of the passage,⁴⁰ and it is defended today by J. Jeremias.⁴¹ Recently it has been attacked by Fuller. Fuller states that there are four phrases on which the case rests: (i) "in the form of God" (verse 6), which is equated with *d^emuth* or *selem* from Gen. 1:26; (ii) "emptied himself" (verse 7), which is equated with "poured out his soul" (Isa. 53:12c); (iii) "servant" (*δοῦλος*), which has often been equated with 'ebhedh Isa. 53, etc.; (iv) "as a man" which has been equated with *k^ebhar' eⁿaš* (Dan. 7:13), "one like a son of man".⁴² To these points should be added: (v) the use of participles for finite verbs, and perhaps (vi) the strophic, rhythmical and parallelistic arrangement characteristic of Semitic poetry.⁴³

(i) Fuller argues that the concept of the first man is found only in Hellenistic Judaism, whereas the Son of man is found only in Palestinian Judaism. But we do not need to look to

³⁷ R. H. Fuller, *Foundations* 231f.

³⁸ W. Kramer, *Christ* 22a-g, 94-99.

³⁹ Cf. F. Hahn, *Hoheitstitel*, 316 n.2.

⁴⁰ E. Lohmeyer, *Kyrios Jesus*, C. Winter, Heidelberg (1928) 8-11.

⁴¹ J. Jeremias, *Abba*, 207-209, 275, 308-313.

⁴² R. H. Fuller, *Foundations*, 204-214, especially 204f.

⁴³ R. P. Martin, *An. Early Christian Confession*, Tyndale Press, London (1960) I Cf. 'The Form-analysis of Philippians 2, 5-11', *TU* 87 (1964) 611-620, where P. P. Levertoff's translation of the hymn into Aramaic is quoted. Note, however, that Lohmeyer did not hold that the hymn was originally composed in Aramaic, but only that it was the composition of a writer whose mother tongue was semitic (*op. cit.* 9).

recondite 'first man' speculation in explaining the use of 'form of God' here. The most obvious parallel is with Adam, created in the image of God, who was tempted to 'be like God, knowing good and evil'. According to Jeremias parallelism between the first man and the redeemer is to be found in Palestinian Judaism as well as in Hellenistic Judaism.⁴⁴

(ii) The criticisms of Fuller and others⁴⁵ against the attempt to find an allusion to Isaiah 53:12c in verse 7 have been fully answered by J. Jeremias, whose arguments need not be repeated here.⁴⁶

(iii) The equation of δοῦλος with '*ebhedh*' has been denied for three reasons. First, 'everywhere else the Greek-speaking Christian church used παῖς ("servant") to translate '*ebhedh*'.⁴⁷ This is not strictly accurate, for in Mark 10:45 the verb διακονέω is used to express the concept of service in a text that has undoubted links with Isaiah 53, and the actual word δοῦλος is used in the preceding verse (Mk. 10:44) of the position of a disciple. Moreover, δουλεύω is found in Isaiah 53:11 to translate '*ebhedh*', and δοῦλος itself, which is used on occasion to translate '*ebhedh*' in the LXX,⁴⁸ is found in Isaiah 52:13 Aquila. Second, it is argued that παῖς was a title of honour, expressing the special relationship between God and His Servant, whereas here the title expresses humiliation. But even if this be true of the use of δοῦλος in many of its occurrences in the LXX, it is by no means the case that it carries the idea of humiliation in Paul; on the contrary, it expresses the concept of a humble rather than a humiliating service, and because it is *God's* service it confers a certain status on the one who is called to be a servant.⁴⁹ There is, therefore, no objection to the use of δοῦλος here to translate '*ebhedh*'. Its purpose here is to provide a contrast to the κύριος status later given to Jesus because He was God's obedient

⁴⁴ J. Jeremias s.v. Ἀδάμ, TDNT I, 142.

⁴⁵ G. Bornkamm, *Studien zu Antike und Urchristentum*, Chr. Kaiser, München (1963) 180; M. D. Hooker, *Jesus*, 120f.; G. Strecker, 'Redaktion und Tradition im Christushymnus Phil 2:6-11' *ZNW* 55 (1964) 63-78 (73 n.41).

⁴⁶ See n. 41. A. Feuillet, 'L'hymne christologique de l'Épître aux Philippiens (II, 6-11)', *RB* 72 (1965), 352-380, 481-507.

⁴⁷ R. H. Fuller, *Foundations* 205.

⁴⁸ J. Jeremias and W. Zimmerli, *The Servant of God*, SCM Press, London (1957) 35-42, 51f.

⁴⁹ R. P. Martin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, Tyndale Press, London 1960) 56; cf. C. L. Mitton, *The Epistle of James*, Marshall, Morgan and Scott London (1966) 12f.

servant (*cf.* Is. 53:12a). A third point made by Fuller is that in this hymn the idea of Servanthood is linked with the incarnation rather than with the earthly life and death of Jesus. This objection is nullified if we accept Jeremias' interpretation of 'he emptied himself' as a reference to the death of Jesus; even if this view is not accepted, there is no reason why this hymn should not represent a logical development of the idea of Servanthood to cover the whole life of Jesus.

(iv) The equation of 'found in fashion as a man' with Daniel 7:13 is certainly doubtful, but the phrase is decidedly strange in Greek, and it is most plausibly explained as reflecting Semitic usage, such as is found in Daniel 7:13 and elsewhere.

We conclude that the case against authorship of this hymn by a person with a Semitic mother tongue has not been made out. On the other hand, it cannot be proved that the hymn was originally composed in Aramaic. It is, however, unnecessary to go to this length in an attempt to show that this hymn comes from an early stage in the development of christology. For the distinction between a Palestinian Jewish and a Hellenistic Jewish church, which is the instrument used to effect a finer dating of material in the early period, is a most dubious one. On the one hand, we have learned that Palestine was subject to Hellenistic influences from the second century BC onwards, that Greek was spoken widely, and that Hellenistic Jews (*e.g.* Stephen in *Jerusalem!*) were present in the church from an extremely early stage. To label a concept as 'Hellenistic' is not to prove that it must have emanated from outside Palestine.⁵⁰ On the other hand, we have found no evidence in the texts that we have studied to show that they cannot have come from the Palestinian church. Nor, indeed, is there any evidence to show that Palestinian and Hellenistic Jewish Christians thought differently in matters of christology.⁵¹

There remains the objection that the earliest Christians would not have spoken of Jesus as the Son of God, because this would have conflicted with Jewish monotheistic ideas. This argument

⁵⁰ See, for example, W. D. Davies, *Christians Origins and Judaism*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London (1962) 105-108, 141; R. H. Gundry, 'The Language Milieu of First-Century Palestine. Its Bearing on the Authenticity of the Gospel Tradition', *JBL* 83 (1964) 404-408.

⁵¹ A study of chapters 2 and 3 of R. Bultmann, *Theology I*, will show how arbitrary is the division of material between the 'earliest church' and the 'Hellenistic church'. *Cf.* T. W. Manson's review in *JTS* 50 (1949) 202-206.

fails to reckon with the facts that Jesus Himself had given the impetus to this kind of expression, and that Son of God does not mean δεύτερος Θεός. On the other hand, it must be borne in mind that the use of the title of 'Son of God' was comparatively rare in the earliest stages, and Acts 9:20 links its use with Paul himself; it may well be that the early church did not make much use of it in preaching. It would be wrong to deduce from Acts 9:20 that Paul was alone in his use of 'Son of God', but it seems likely that it found little public expression in the early church.⁵²

VII. CONCLUSION

The points that have now been assembled should be adequate to show that the view of christological development in the early church held by many scholars since Bousset is exposed to grave objection. If our arguments are sound, the thought of the early church developed in the context of the self-witness of Jesus who knew Himself to be the Son of God. At a very early date the evidence of Paul shows that a christology with ontological implications had been developed. We were able to show that this christology must have developed well before the time of the earliest written evidence, and that it was a christology which was fully consonant with Jesus' consciousness of being the Son of God during His earthly life. Finally, we argued that within this period a distinction between Palestinian and Hellenistic Jewish Christianity is an unreal one, and that there is no evidence for a period in the early church in which Jesus was not regarded as being the Son of God, not merely in function but in person. It is clear that during this stage of development the ontological aspects of the Son of God christology were not developed for their own sake, but that such implications were none the less present.⁵³

If these points are valid, they show that there was not such a drastic change in meaning between the use of 'Son of God' in the Jewish church and in the Gentile church as recent scholarship has supposed. The basic idea that Jesus stood in a special relation to God in His lifetime, a relation that stretched back to the period before His birth and that was confirmed by His exaltation and resurrection, was an essential ingredient of Jewish Christian christology.

⁵² Dr. R. P. Martin has suggested to me that there may be a parallel in the scanty use of σωτήρ in the early church.

⁵³ See further O. Cullmann, 'The Reply of Professor Cullmann to Roman Catholic Critics', *SJT* 15 (1962) 36-43.