

Epilogue

In this Epilogue, I first want to explain how the foregoing book fits into my own larger research and publishing programme on earliest Jesus-devotion over the past thirty-five years or so, and then also comment briefly on how scholarly discussion has proceeded on key matters, especially since the 1998 edition. I should also note that the voluminous endnotes contain both bibliographical references and also, often, further comments additional to the discussion in the Epilogue itself.

The Setting of One God, One Lord

My own probing of historical questions about early Jesus-devotion began in 1970s, not long after my PhD.¹ At that point, the dominant schema about when and how earliest belief in Jesus developed was (at least for many in the field) still shaped very much by Wilhelm Bousset's classic study, *Kyrios Christos*.² The two essential contentions in Bousset's book were (1) that the emergence of the "Kyrios-cult," that is, treating the risen/exalted Jesus as rightful recipient of corporate worship, was perhaps the most significant development in early Christianity, and (2) that this could not have happened in the "primitive" (original) circles of Jewish Jesus-followers in Jerusalem and Roman Judea, but, instead, took place first in places such as Antioch and Damascus, where the influence of pagan cults devoted to various gods and divinized heroes was sufficiently strong to prompt believers in such locations to treat the risen Jesus in an equivalent manner. As I showed in an article published in 1979, however, various scholarly developments had by then already showed that Bousset's positions and assumptions on certain key matters were then no longer tenable, and I urged that it was necessary to develop a new historical schema.³

For example, Bousset assumed (along with many other scholars of his time and subsequently) that "the Son of Man" was a familiar title in ancient Jewish tradition that

¹ My PhD thesis (1973) was a study in NT textual criticism, later published in a slightly revised form: Larry W. Hurtado, *Text-Critical Methodology and the Pre-Caesarean Text: Codex W in the Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981). So, the turn to research on early "Jesus-devotion" was a subsequent project after PhD work. I have maintained a keen interest in text-critical matters (with occasional publications in the subject), but since the late 1970s most of my time has been devoted to historical questions about early "Jesus-devotion."

² Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ From the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus*, trans. J.E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970; reprinted with a new Introduction by me, Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013). This translation was made from the fourth German edition (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964), essentially a reprint of the second German edition of 1921. The first edition appeared in 1913.

³ Larry W. Hurtado, "New Testament Christology: A Critique of Bousset's Influence," *TS* 40 (1979): 306-17. A German translation appeared later: "Forschungen zur neutestamentlichen Christologie seit Bousset: Forschungsrichtungen und bedeutende Beiträge," *Theologische Beiträge* 11 (1980): 158-71.

designated an eschatological figure who would appear from heaven to execute God's final redemptive programme. On this assumption, Bousset then posited confidently that in the "primitive" circles of believers in Jerusalem and Roman Judea their confession of Jesus was that he is "the Son of Man," supposedly a well-known title and category in second-temple Jewish tradition, and he distinguished this confession sharply from the place given to Jesus in what he called the "Kyrios-cult," which (as noted already) he posited as developing secondarily. But, at least from the early 1970s and thereafter, it has become increasingly accepted among scholars familiar with second-temple Jewish traditions that Bousset's crucial assumption was incorrect. There is no evidence that "the Son of Man" was a familiar and recognized title (or figure referred to by this expression) in second-temple Jewish tradition, and there is also no indication that it served as a confessional title (and certainly not the key one) in the earliest years of the young Jesus-movement.⁴

Probably the most crucial feature in Bousset's schema, however, was his corresponding claim that references to, and the devotional treatment of, Jesus as "Lord" (*Kyrios*) reflected in NT writings represented a second-stage (but still very early) "Hellenization" of the original faith of the "Primitive Palestinian Community."⁵ In his view, this simply could not have happened in those earliest Aramaic-speaking circles. But, despite Bousset's efforts to sidestep the matter, earlier critics of his work judged it fairly clear that in fact Aramaic-speaking circles of Jesus-followers also had referred to the risen Jesus as "Lord" (*Mārêh*, as reflected crucially in the Aramaic acclamation/invocation, "*maranatha*," that Paul cites in 1 Cor. 16:22).⁶ Moreover, by the 1970s there was further reason to regard Bousset's stance on this matter as dubious. In particular, data from Qumran confirmed that the Aramaic term, *Mārêh*, could be used with reference to God, that is, as a divine title, equivalent to the use of the Greek term *Kyrios*.⁷ So, it was no longer tenable to posit (as

⁴ See the recent multi-author volume, '*Who Is This Son of Man?*' *The Latest Scholarship on a Puzzling Expression of the Historical Jesus*, eds. Larry W. Hurtado and Paul Owen (London: T&T Clark, 2011), and my own view of key matters, "Summing Up and Concluding Observations," 159-77. In another essay, I have pointed to the assumptions about "the Son of Man" that Bousset affirmed as comprising a prime example of an influential fallacy in NT studies: "Fashions, Fallacies, and Future Prospects in New Testament Studies," *JSNT* 36 (2014): 307-12 (esp. 299-324).

⁵ Esp. Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, 119-52, and my critique and citation of various scholarly works in "New Testament Christology," 312-16. In this matter, Bousset essentially agreed with, and perhaps depended on, an essay by one of his Göttingen colleagues in the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, Wilhelm Heitmüller, "Zum Problem Paulus und Jesus," *ZNW* 13 (1912): 320-37, reprinted in *Das Paulusbild in der neueren deutschen Forschung*, ed. K. H. Rengstorff (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964), 124-43.

⁶ See the works that I cite in my Introduction to the 2013 reprint of Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, xii-xiv.

⁷ E.g., J. A. Fitzmyer, "The Semitic Background of the New Testament Kyrios Title," in *A Wandering Aramaean: Collected Aramaic Essays* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), 115-42; *id.*, "New Testament Kyrios and Maranatha and Their Aramaic Background," in Fitzmyer, *To Advance the Gospel: New Testament Studies* (2nd

Bousset and some subsequent scholars did) that any application of the term *Mārêh* to Jesus in Aramaic-speaking circles could not reflect a quasi-divine view of him. Indeed, however remarkable it may be, various evidence suggested strongly that the provenance in which devotion to Jesus as “Lord” first emerged was in circles of Jewish believers in Roman Judea, including circles of Aramaic-speaking believers.⁸

For this and other reasons, therefore, in the research that lay behind *One God, One Lord* (hereafter, *OGOL*), I directed my attention mainly to the Jewish matrix of the young Jesus-movement, looking “up-stream” (so to speak) from the standpoint of earliest Christian circles, to try to detect resources that might have been drawn upon and adapted in the earliest expressions of devotion to Jesus. That is why most of the book is given to discussing Jewish traditions that might have served as these resources. My main concern was to examine earliest Jesus-devotion in the context of these second-temple Jewish traditions, exploring in some detail both how earliest Jesus-devotion arose in that Jewish context (as it evidently did), how it may have drawn upon those Jewish traditions, and also (albeit more briefly) whether/how devotion to Jesus may have comprised a distinctive and novel development or “mutation” among those Jewish traditions.

With *OGOL* as my initial and foundational study, across the following years I addressed various texts and issues pertinent to the aim of developing a full-scale study of early Jesus-devotion that I hoped might be considered an equivalent to Bousset’s classic.⁹ My efforts toward this aim came to fruition fifteen years after *OGOL* with the appearance of *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* in 2003.¹⁰ But *OGOL* was my first major publication-step toward that goal, and it remains foundational in some respects for

ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 218-35. Actually, there were data available much earlier that refuted the notion that *Mārêh* could not connote a divine status, as cited by Martin Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul* (London: SCM, 1983), 162-63 (n.43).

⁸ I refer to “Roman Judea,” designating what later came to be called “Palestine.”

⁹ E.g., in addition to studies of particular texts that appeared before *OGOL*, I cite the following: entries on “Christ,” “God,” and “Gospel (Genre)” in *DJG*; “Lord” and “Son of God” in *DPL*; “Christology” in *DLNTD*; “Philippians 2:6-11,” in *Prayer from Alexander to Constantine: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Mark Kiley (London: Routledge, 1997), 235-39; “First-Century Jewish Monotheism,” *JSNT* 71 (1998): 3-26; “Christ-Devotion in the First Two Centuries: Reflections and a Proposal,” *TJT* 12 (1996): 17-33; “The Binitarian Shape of Early Christian Worship,” in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus*, eds. Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila, Gladys S. Lewis (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 187-213; “Jesus’ Divine Sonship in Paul’s Epistle to the Romans,” in *Romans and the People of God*, eds. Sven K. Soderlund and N. T. Wright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 217-33; “Pre-70 C.E. Jewish Opposition to Christ-Devotion,” *JTS* 50 (1999): 35-58; “Religious Experience and Religious Innovation in the New Testament,” *JR* 80 (2000): 183-205; “Paul’s Christology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul*, ed. J. D. G. Dunn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 185-98.

¹⁰ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). In the Preface to the 1998 edition of *OGOL*, I referred to the larger work as figuring prominently in my writing plans, but it took longer than I had anticipated to produce it.

that larger 2003 book and for my other publications on early devotion to Jesus that have appeared since *OGOL*. These later works do not supersede or render redundant *OGOL*, but instead build upon it and extend the investigation further.

In subsequent publications, and especially in *Lord Jesus Christ*, I then turned to focus more broadly on the ways that devotion to Jesus was expressed in early Christianity, focusing on early Christian evidence and looking “down-stream” (to continue the metaphor) from the earliest data (especially in Paul’s letters), tracing the nature of Jesus-devotion across particularly the first century and a half or so (roughly 30-170 CE). But, to repeat the point for emphasis, the main judgements presented in *OGOL* served (and remain for me) among key premises for my subsequent analyses of the early Christian evidence. So, for any full attempt to engage and assess my work on earliest Jesus-devotion, I urge that *OGOL* remains essential.

Influential Works Drawn On

To be sure, as will be clear from the abundant notes in my 1979 article and all my subsequent publications, the work of various other scholars was (and remains) essential for mine. Among very early influences, I would include prominently works by Martin Hengel. His little book, *The Son of God* (1976), was particularly instructive and even inspiring as a model of vigorous and well-informed scholarly analysis.¹¹ In this study, Hengel posed a concise but cogent and direct challenge to the historical schema developed in the early twentieth-century *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* (history of religion school) and advocated influentially by Bousset and subsequent scholars (such as Bultmann), in which belief in Jesus as divine was the product of influences from pagan religious groups, especially the so-called “mystery religions.”¹² The basic thrust of Hengel’s study was that belief in Jesus as “Son of God” and “Lord” much more likely arose among early Jewish circles of the Jesus-movement, and drew primarily upon biblical and Jewish connotations and uses of the categories of divine sonship and related notions.

An earlier and still smaller publication by Hengel was, for me, at least as influential, if not more so, particularly in framing my historical approach to the questions about when and how exalted views of Jesus first emerged and developed: “Christology and New Testament Chronology: A Problem in the History of Earliest Christianity.”¹³ In this compact and

¹¹ Martin Hengel, *The Son of God: The Origin of Christology and the History of Jewish-Hellenistic Religion* (London: SCM; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976; German original 1975).

¹² On the various “mystery cults” of the Roman period, see now Jan N. Bremmer, *Initiation into the Mysteries of the Ancient World* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), which is also rich in references to other and earlier work.

¹³ The essay appeared originally in German: “Christologie und neutestamentliche Chronologie: Zu einer Aporie in der Geschichte des Urchristentums,” in *Neues Testament und Geschichte: Historisches Geschehen*

closely-argued essay, Hengel laid out clearly the key chronological data that we must take account of (and that had often been ignored by scholars) in engaging historical questions about earliest christological beliefs. Pointing particularly to evidence from Paul's letters, and emphasizing the commonly-accepted dating of these texts (ca. 50-60 CE), Hengel showed that widely-used schemes then popular in scholarly discussion involving multi-stage christological developments in the first century CE (Bousset's scheme and others deriving from his) simply did not fit this evidence. Already in Paul's uncontested letters (the earliest written scarcely twenty years after Jesus' crucifixion), we see presupposed and traditional a rather impressive body of christological beliefs (and, I would add, a remarkable constellation of devotional practices in which Jesus was central). In my own discussion of "Early Christology and Chronology" (*OGOL*, 3-6), the influence of Hengel's powerfully-argued essay is obvious.¹⁴ In subsequent publications as well, I have reiterated this crucial observation that we are dealing with explosively rapid and utterly remarkable developments, the most crucial ones likely taking us back to the earliest years of the "post-Easter" Jesus-movement.¹⁵

I have reservations about a few of Hengel's other claims in the essay, such as his notion that christological developments in the crucial first twenty years or so "took place above all in the *Greek-speaking* Jewish Christian communities" (emphasis mine) in various cities.¹⁶ To be sure, Greek-speaking Jewish believers were likely the crucial early agents of the *spread* of the Jesus-movement, but I am not so sure that they in particular were especially responsible for significant christological developments. Instead, I suspect that the initial eruption of Jesus-devotion should be linked closely also with Aramaic-speaking Jewish believers as well as Greek-speaking ones. But, whatever the case, Hengel's more important chronological argument (the main thrust of his essay) remains valid and forceful.

und Deutung im Neuen Testament, Festschrift Oscar Cullmann, ed. H. Baltensweiler & Bo Reicke (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1972), 43-67, reprinted in Martin Hengel, *Studien zur Christologie, Kleine Schriften IV* (WUNT 201; Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 27-51. The English translation appeared in Martin Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul* (London: SCM, 1983), 30-47. In this Epilogue I cite the English translation.

¹⁴ In his recent analysis of Hengel's christological work, Roland Deines notes that the argument laid out in this essay "featured regularly in all of Hengel's writings," and can be judged Hengel's "second major christological contribution," which Hengel himself saw as "fundamental": "Pre-Existence, Incarnation, and Messianic Self-Understanding of Jesus in the Work of Martin Hengel" in Roland Deines, *Acts of God in History*, eds. Christoph Ochs and Peter Watts (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 421 (407-45).

¹⁵ E.g., Larry W. Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 32-38.

¹⁶ Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul*, 40. But cf. his qualification of his statement in the rest of the paragraph, noting, "The part in this played by the Aramaic-speaking community in Jerusalem (or Galilee) is not to be taken lightly . . ."

Other scholars' work as well was important, in particular drawing my attention to worship practices as especially important indicators of the significant innovation involved in earliest Jesus-devotion. Prominent among them, I cite an essay by Richard Bauckham in which he pointed to the significance of the depiction of worship given jointly to God ("the one seated on the throne") and Jesus ("the Lamb") in Revelation 5. As Bauckham showed, this is striking in light of other passages in Revelation where the author clearly shows familiarity with, and acceptance of, a rather strict exclusivity of worship to be given to God alone. That is, Revelation condemns worship of "the Beast" (e.g., 14:9-10) and also has the seer forbidden to worship his angel guide, who orders him to "worship God!" (19:10; 22:9), and yet the same author explicitly and approvingly depicts the ideal/heavenly worship as given both to God and to Jesus.¹⁷

This essay helped to confirm for me the importance of worship as a criterion of religious behaviour, and also underscored the significance of the striking inclusion of Jesus with God as co-recipient of worship in NT writings.¹⁸ On this matter, the historical importance of cultic devotion given to Jesus, Bousset and the old *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* were correct. But they erred in how, when and where they saw this cultic devotion first emerging. My own view allies with that expressed many decades ago by Johannes Weiss (a contemporary of Bousset), who judged that the treatment of Jesus as recipient of cultic devotion commenced in the earliest circles of Jewish believers, and he characterized this as "the most significant step of all in the history of the origins of Christianity."¹⁹

To cite another early resource, I should also mention Alan Segal's 1977 study of references to "two powers" heresies in rabbinic traditions.²⁰ These rabbinic references

¹⁷ Richard J. Bauckham, "The Worship of Jesus in Apocalyptic Christianity," *NTS* 27 (1981): 322-41. Bauckham later produced an enlarged version: "The Worship of Jesus," in Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 118-49. Loren Stuckenbruck subsequently developed this line of analysis of what he called a Jewish angelic "refusal tradition" further in: *Angel Veneration and Christology*, WUNT 2/70 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995).

¹⁸ Well into writing *OGOL*, I came across an essay by R. T. France that placed a somewhat similar emphasis on early Christian worship practice, although there are also some significant differences in our views: "The Worship of Jesus: A Neglected Factor in Christological Debate?" in *Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology Presented to Donald Guthrie*, ed. H. H. Rowdon (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), 17-36.

¹⁹ Johannes Weiss, *Earliest Christianity*, trans. F. C. Grant (2 vols.; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959; German 1917), 1:37.

²⁰ Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (SJLA, 25; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977). Segal wrote an endorsement for the 1988 edition of *OGOL*, and again for the 1998 reprint edition. At some point after I read *Two Powers in Heaven*, Segal and I became acquainted and, over ensuing years, good friends. It was an honor to be with him the joint honorees of a *Festschrift* put together by colleagues: *Israel's God and Rebecca's Children: Christology and Community in Early Judaism and Christianity, Essays in Honor of Larry W. Hurtado and Alan F. Segal*, eds. David B. Capes, April D. DeConick, Helen K. Bond, and Troy A. Miller (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), and it was a great sadness at his death a few years later.

condemn certain Jewish “heretics” (*minim*), who are effectively accused of positing and reverencing two divinities, thus violating the “monotheistic” emphasis of ancient Jewish tradition. I found particularly intriguing Segal’s proposal that the earlier references seemed to concern two complementary divine beings, and that the Jewish “heretics” in question might well have been Jewish Christians. In any case, it seemed that the object of criticism in these texts was not simply a version of Jewish messianism, but something that amounted to a more substantial development (and, importantly, a Jewish development) that was regarded as a dangerous and unacceptable heresy. Moreover, given Jewish concerns about exclusivity of worship, it seemed to me likely that these rabbinic critiques may well have been prompted by what some Jews saw as dangerous devotional practices as well as heretical teachings.

So, in the research that led to *OGOL* I explored second-temple Jewish traditions with a view to finding resources that earliest Jewish believers in Jesus might have drawn on in understanding the place of the risen/exalted Jesus and in shaping their devotional practices. The key positions from which I worked were these: (1) second-temple Jewish tradition as the primary and immediate matrix in which earliest Jesus-devotion emerged, (2) Jewish concerns about the uniqueness of the one God (“monotheism”) are the context in which to view earliest christological claims and devotional practice, (3) earliest devotional practices in which Jesus featured centrally form the key and most noteworthy development, and (4) historical factors that prompted and shaped earliest Jesus-devotion should be identified.

Major Results

As indicated in the Introduction to *OGOL* (p. 2), the major historical question it addresses is “How did the early Jewish Christians accommodate the veneration of the exalted Jesus alongside God while continuing to see themselves as loyal to the fundamental emphasis of their ancestral tradition on one God?” As I recall now, it was only slowly, and with some surprise, that my research led me to judge that, although there were conceptual resources in ancient Jewish tradition that were likely drawn upon by earliest believers, there was not really a full analogy or precedent for the intensity and nature of the cultic expressions of devotion to Jesus. So, I concluded that, although it emerged initially in the variegated Roman-era Jewish tradition, early Jesus-devotion also comprised “a somewhat distinctive ‘mutation’ or innovation” in that historical context.²¹

I emphasize that in its initial stage early Jesus-devotion was a distinguishable type of ancient Jewish tradition, distinguishable, even distinctive; but earliest Jewish believers saw

²¹ *OGOL*, 2.

themselves as still Jews and not at all as apostates or converts to some new religion. To my mind, this attitude continued to characterize Jewish believers such as the Apostle Paul all through his extended and dedicated labors to bring about “the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles” (Rom. 1:5). To be sure, however, for these first Jewish believers, Jesus was God’s new revelation that re-defined in significant ways their understanding of God’s purposes, and also how they were supposed to express their devotional responses.

In the Preface to the 1998 reprint edition, I reviewed scholarly discussion in the ten years following the initial publication of *OGOL*. I noted some major criticisms that had been directed against the views I defended in *OGOL* (x-xvi), indicating why I did not find them persuasive, or at least as demanding any significant revisions in the book. In what follows, I carry that review forward, focusing here on how major positions taken in *OGOL* have featured in further scholarly discussion, especially since 1998.

Before doing that, however, I want to note (with some candid satisfaction) some broad effects of the emphases laid out initially in *OGOL* and in subsequent publications. For example, it now appears that there is a sizeable (and probably still growing) recognition among scholars in Christian Origins that the historical setting in which Jesus was first acclaimed as uniquely bearing divine honor and status was in circles of Jewish believers, including Aramaic-speaking circles in Roman Judea (Palestine). Indicative of this, I cite a recent review of developments in scholarly discussion of early christological beliefs by Andrew Chester, who noted this newer direction in scholarly opinion:

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.²²

A bit later in his discussion, considering a key Pauline text, he judged,

... 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.²³

²² Andrew Chester, “High Christology—Whence, When and Why?” *EC* 2 (2011): 22-50 (citing 38).

²³ Chester, “High Christology,” 39.

As another indication of long-term effects of the positions I advocated initially in *OGOL*, I cite a recent and large discussion of my work by Crispin Fletcher-Louis. Although most of his essay comprises a virtual fusillade of critical allegations (which, unfortunately, seem largely directed against incorrect representations of my views on a number of specific matters), he does grant that I have contributed to “urging us to rethink radically our understanding of christological origins,” and he notes that in a number of matters the critical judgements I have advocated are now “representative of a more widely held emerging view.”²⁴ In particular, he further judged,

The onus is now on those who would argue against Hurtado’s view that a high Christology is a very early, essentially Jewish and widespread, if not a thoroughgoing, feature of earliest Christianity.²⁵

In a still more recent engagement with my work, Richard Bauckham (who himself has been a major contributor to analysis of origins of Jesus-devotion) observes that, prior to the initial publication of *OGOL* in 1988, the view that “already in early Jewish Christianity Jesus was accorded divine status and divine worship” held “a rather marginal position in NT scholarship,” but is now “a well-recognized position with which many would broadly agree.”²⁶ He goes on to state graciously,

... that it is no longer unusual to seek the origins of high Christology within early Jewish Christianity is in large measure due to *OGOL*, supplemented by Hurtado’s numerous subsequent publications on the subject.²⁷

Indicating “a sense of solidarity with Hurtado in the midst of current controversy” (over issues about Jesus-devotion), Bauckham finds it “very significant that the key arguments of *OGOL* are still being vigorously discussed,” and judges that the continuing debate on these issues is “one of the most important for our understanding of earliest Christianity.”²⁸

²⁴ Crispin Fletcher-Louis, “A New Explanation of Christological Origins: A Review of the Work of Larry W. Hurtado,” *TynBul* 60 (2009): 161-205 (citing 164-65). Because I consider his description of my views to be seriously erroneous on a number of matters, his critique often seems to me to fall wide of the mark. Cf. my response: L. W. Hurtado, “The Origins of Jesus-Devotion: A Response to Crispin Fletcher-Louis,” *TynBul* 61 (2010): 1-20.

²⁵ Fletcher-Louis, “A New Explanation,” 165.

²⁶ Richard Bauckham, “Devotion to Jesus Christ in Earliest Christianity: An Appraisal and Discussion of the Work of Larry Hurtado,” in *Mark, Manuscripts, and Monotheism: Essays in Honor of Larry W. Hurtado*, eds. Chris Keith and Dieter T. Roth (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 176-200 (citing 176). I regard Bauckham’s summary of key emphases in my work, especially in *OGOL*, as overall commendably accurate and concise (176-82).

²⁷ Bauckham, “Devotion,” 176-77.

²⁸ Bauckham, “Devotion,” 177.

It may well be immodest to cite these comments from other scholars; but, to take their statements in good faith, it is obviously encouraging to find one's efforts to shape scholarly discussion and opinion regarded by others in the field as to some significant degree successful. There are, to be sure, critics on various issues, as will be clear in what follows; but it does appear that *OGOL* has at least contributed to shaping the agenda, making certain issues the focus of greater scholarly investigation and debate than was the case prior to the publication of this book.

Ongoing Debate

There certainly are critics of positions advocated in *OGOL* and others of my publications, indicative of the increased attention now given to the relevant matters. I focus here on discussions that have appeared since the 1998 edition, and also I engage publications that I deem particularly noteworthy. Just as that reprint edition of *OGOL* appeared, there was "The International Conference on the Origins of the Worship of Jesus" held in St. Mary's College (St. Andrews, Scotland, 13-17 June 1998). The organizers of that conference commendably sought to bring together important scholars holding various views, and those differences of opinion and emphasis are reflected in the important volume that emerged from that conference.²⁹ The conference and the volume testify to the importance of the subject and, I was told by the organizers, also to the stimulus to scholarly discussion of it stemming in part from *OGOL*. I cannot comment on every contribution to that volume, but at various points I will address particular ones that more directly engage my own work.

Ruler Cults Influence

I begin with critical engagement with my emphasis that the earliest eruption of Jesus-devotion was essentially a novel development within the variegated second-temple Jewish tradition. For reasons already given here, I have focused very much on resources within that tradition and on factors that may have helped to generate that novel development. But some scholars have queried whether early Jesus-devotion was quite as novel as I contend, proposing that there were precedents in second-temple Jewish tradition, and others have contended that other factors, in particular influences from ruler-cults of the time may need to be taken into account.

Adela Yarbro Collins has advocated the influence of ruler-cults in a couple of essays engaging questions addressed in my own work. The first of these essays is her contribution

²⁹ *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus*, eds. Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila, Gladys S. Lewis (JSJSup 63; Leiden Brill, 1999).

to the multi-author volume that developed out of the 1998 conference on the origins of the worship of Jesus held in St. Andrews.³⁰ In this essay, she first agrees that the origin of the cultic veneration of Jesus seems “to belong to the first stage of reflection on the person of Jesus in relation to his death,” i.e., in circles of Jesus-followers in Roman Judaea. She also agrees that religious experiences that had for recipients a revelatory effect were an important factor. Nevertheless, she proposes that, because of the presence of pagan temples and associated practices in some parts of Roman Judaea, Jewish Jesus-followers living there would have been “familiar with polytheistic religious beliefs and practices, at least to some extent.”³¹ She then urges,

Thus we, as historical critics, should take seriously the likelihood that non-Jewish Hellenistic and Roman traditions, as well as Jewish traditions, shaped the religious experiences, ideas and writings of especially the Greek-speaking Jewish followers of Jesus in the period immediately following his death. It is plausible to me that such groups adapted non-Jewish religious traditions deliberately and consciously as a way of formulating a culturally meaningful system of belief and life.³²

In her view, the conceptual point of contact (so to speak) for the appropriation of ruler-cult influences was “the acclamation of Jesus as the [royal] Messiah,” which, she posits, arose “extremely early, probably already in the lifetime of Jesus.”³³ That is, this initial and prior belief that Jesus was royal Messiah was then augmented or reinterpreted and adapted in earliest circles of Jesus-believers after his execution, under the influence of beliefs and practices stemming from pagan cults, especially cults devoted to the Roman emperor. To cite her own statement of her thesis,

. . . the combination of visions of the risen Jesus (an internal factor) and the Roman imperial cult (a factor in the cultural environment) led to the worship of

³⁰ Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Worship of Jesus and the Imperial Cult,” in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus*, eds. Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila and Gladys S. Lewis (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 234-57. William Horbury, likewise, has contended that Jewish traditions of reverence of (Jewish) kings was a factor in generating early cultic devotion to Jesus: *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ* (London: SCM, 1998). But, to my mind, he blurs the distinctions between the kind of venerative *language* applied to kings in ancient Jewish texts and the actual *devotional practices* that so quickly characterized (distinctively) earliest Christian gathered worship.

³¹ Yarbro Collins, “The Worship of Jesus,” 241-242.

³² Yarbro Collins, “The Worship of Jesus,” 242. She also notes that some might find it more likely that earliest Jewish believers appropriated pagan religious ideas “unreflectively,” citing, as an example, Dieter Zeller, “Die Menschwerdung des Sohnes Gottes im Neuen Testament und die antike Religionsgeschichte,” *Menschwerdung Gottes – Vergöttlichung von Menschen* (NTOA 7; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 141-76.

³³ Yarbro Collins, “The Worship of Jesus,” 240.

Jesus. Thus, the imperial cult was a catalyst in the origin of the worship of Jesus.³⁴

An immediate question, however, is why early Jewish believers felt it necessary or even legitimate to appropriate so readily pagan ideas and practices that, so far as other evidence indicates, Jews of the time more typically regarded as ridiculous at best and, at worst, positively blasphemous.³⁵ Yarbrow Collins proposes simply that early believers refused to worship the emperor and chose instead “to venerate Christ, who represented the one true God.”³⁶ That early believers typically refused to worship the emperor (and other pagan deities) and instead revered the one God and Jesus seems, of course, to be the case.³⁷ But to state *that* they did so does not account for *why* they did so. I see no necessary or even logical connection between refusing to worship the emperor and other pagan deities and choosing to include Jesus in the worship given to God in the remarkable pattern of devotional actions that I have specified. After all, Jews collectively were supposed to avoid giving cultic reverence to any deity or divine hero, including the emperor (and in Roman practice were exempted from having to do so). Yet they did not respond by treating their own heroes (e.g., Moses or other biblical heroes) or other beings such as high angels as legitimate objects of cultic worship.³⁸ So how would the avoidance of worshipping pagan deities and rulers dispose circles of Jewish Jesus-believers in Roman Palestine in the earliest period of the young Jesus-movement to appropriate the very ideas and practices that they regarded as

³⁴ Yarbrow Collins, “The Worship of Jesus,” 251. Dieter Zeller, “New Testament Christology in Its Hellenistic Reception,” *NTS* 47 (2001): 312-33, proposed that, whatever the originating factors, Roman-era pagans would have viewed christological claims in the context of ruler-cult ideology and practices. Even if so, however, this does not engage the question under discussion here about what may have prompted and shaped these christological claims and the relevant devotional practices.

³⁵ Consider, for example, Philo’s discussion of deified emperors in *Embassy*, e.g., 117, where he characterizes the idea as “the most grievous impiety.” And note also his extended criticism of the worship of any created entity in *Decalogue* 52-65.

³⁶ Yarbrow Collins, “The Worship of Jesus,” 257.

³⁷ There was no legal requirement to take part in emperor-cult, even for Gentiles. And, of course, Jews were specifically exempted from participation in emperor-cult, and so did not actually have to “refuse” to take part. This further raises a question about how much emperor-cult would have exerted pressure on earliest circles of Jewish believers to produce a Jesus-cult in response to it. “The absence of any Empire-wide requirement to acknowledge the emperor as a living deity meant that an ideological clash wherever Jews resided was by no means a foregone conclusion”: James S. McLaren, “Jews and the Imperial Cult: From Augustus to Domitian,” *JSNT* 27 (2005): 275 (257-78).

³⁸ Contra William Horbury, “The Cult of Christ and the Cult of the Saints,” *NTS* 44 (1998): 444-69, the veneration given to the righteous dead by ancient Jews does not compare sufficiently with early Christian Jesus-devotion to make the former explanatory of the latter. In my view, Horbury defines “cult” so broadly that it ceases to be an analytic category.

repellent? Moreover, it is not actually clear how much pressure from, or familiarity with, the specifics of pagan beliefs and worship practices there was in Roman Judaea.³⁹

In a later publication likewise she simply states that, in light of imperial cults, “it is not surprising that Jesus was viewed as a god and that worship of him became an alternative to the worship of the emperor.”⁴⁰ But, again, that hardly seems an adequate answer to the question. Indeed, it seems to me to beg the question (i.e., presuming the very thing that must be demonstrated). For, to my mind, in light of the ancient Jewish reluctance to worship *any* figure other than God (as demonstrated in *OGOL*), it is entirely surprising that early Jewish believers so quickly, readily and programmatically included Jesus in their worship practice. Granted, by the second century CE (and perhaps even a few decades earlier), we know that worship of the emperor was explicitly contrasted with worship of Jesus, as reflected, for example, in Pliny’s famous letter to Trajan (*Epistles* 10.96). But that is a comparatively late stage of things (and the impetus for the direct counter-posing of emperor-cult and Jesus seems to have come as much or more from Roman authorities as from early Christians). The crucial point is that there is no evidence that emperor-cult played a role in the *initial* stage and locations in which the intense Jesus-devotion taken for granted already in Paul’s letters first erupted.

In her more recent essay engaging my work, there seems to be a subtle, though perhaps not really significant, difference in emphasis and argumentation.⁴¹ I cite her concluding words:

The idea of the divinity of Christ, in a limited sense, did emerge early and did have important precedents in biblical and Jewish traditions. But the successive reformulations and elaborations of this idea, and probably the earliest expressions of it as well, surely owed a great deal to interaction with and the

³⁹ Actually, it is not all that clear how much familiarity with, or pressure from, pagan worship there was in Roman Palestine in the early first century CE. As James McLaren noted, sites devoted to the imperial cult were located in cities with majority/significant pagan population (Caesarea Maritima, Caesarea Philippi, and Sebaste), not in areas such as Galilee or Judaea where Jews were dominant: “Searching for Rome and the Imperial Cult in Galilee: Reassessing Galilee-Rome Relations (63 B.C.E. To 70 C.E.),” in *Rome and Religion: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on the Imperial Cult*, eds. Jeffrey Brodd and Jonathan L. Reed (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 129 (111-36).

⁴⁰ Adela Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 174.

⁴¹ Adla Yarbro Collins, “‘How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?’: A Reply,” in *Israel’s God and Rebecca’s Children: Christology and Community in Early Judaism and Christianity*, eds. David B. Capes, April D. DeConick, Helen K. Bond and Troy A. Miller (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 55-66.

influence of non-Jewish Greek and Roman ideas and practices, not least among them ruler-cults and imperial cults.⁴²

That is, in this later essay she seems to distinguish a bit more a “limited sense” of Jesus’ divine status (which she does not define) in the earliest circles of Jesus-followers from some more robust and developed sense that grew across the first century (and thereafter). But the vagueness of what this distinction represented makes it difficult to engage her argument. Moreover, as I have argued from *OGOL* onward, the specific phenomena of earliest-attested Jesus-devotion (which take us back into the first few years) collectively represent a rather robust and impressive cultic reverence for Jesus, and hardly seem to me to reflect a “limited sense” of Jesus’ status.

In more recent personal communication over the question of how Jewish believers (such as Paul) could have embraced cultic reverence to Jesus, Yarbrow Collins has pointed to “postcolonial theory,” specifically the notion that colonized/oppressed peoples/groups can sometimes adopt features of the oppressive/colonizing power. Thus, she suggests, early Jewish believers could have appropriated (or could have been influenced unreflectively by) ruler-cult beliefs and practices, framing a Jesus-cult as a countering response.⁴³ To be sure, as Hengel and others have shown, “Hellenization” was very much evident in Roman-era Palestine as well as in diaspora sites.⁴⁴ But the evidence of this Hellenization among Jews indicates typically a more *selective* appropriation of “Hellenism,” accepting Greek language, and such things as Greek dining posture, literary genres, and certain conceptual categories, but firmly rejecting pagan religious notions (such as apotheosis) and attendant cultic practices.⁴⁵

⁴² Yarbrow Collins, “How on Earth,” 66.

⁴³ See, e.g., Peter Childs, and Patrick Williams, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory* (London: Routledge, 1996).

⁴⁴ E.g., Martin Hengel, *The “Hellenization” of Judaea in the First Century After Christ* (London: SCM Press, 1989).

⁴⁵ E.g., Hengel, *The “Hellenization” of Judaea*, 54, affirmed “the possibility that much more intellectual development was *possible*” than sometimes assumed, but then noted as “*impossible*” any move resembling “a blatantly pagan cult” (emphasis his). On the other hand, he urged that “the whole development of christological doctrine *could* have taken place completely within Palestinian Judaism,” for “even a christology of pre-existence and of the Son of God is intrinsically not ‘Hellenistic’ or even ‘un-Jewish’ nor ‘un-Palestinian’.” This is very similar to the position advocated in *OGOL*. See also, e.g., John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996); and also John J. Collins, *Jewish Cult and Hellenistic Culture: Essays on the Jewish Encounter with Hellenism and Roman Rule* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), who, granting the cultural influence of Hellenism upon Jews, insisted, “Nonetheless, I submit that the most striking thing about the Jewish encounter with Hellenism, both in the Diaspora and in the land of Israel, was the persistence of Jewish separatism in matters of worship and cult. There was a limit to Hellenization, which is best expressed in the distinction between cult and culture. That distinction was extraordinary in the ancient world, but it would be paradigmatic for both Judaism and Christianity in later phases of Western history” (43).

As noted already, in our earliest Christian texts (the undisputed letters of Paul), there is actually scant indication of a direct counterposing of cultic reverence for Jesus against the imperial cults, suggesting that emperor-cult may not have been quite as crucial in the earliest years as Yarbro Collins proposes.⁴⁶ In 1 Corinthians 8—10, for example, Paul’s most extended discussion of pagan cults in comparison with early Christian worship, there is only a blanket rejection of pagan deities (“many gods and many lords,” 8:5) and of any participation in offerings to them. As Peter Oakes has observed, “For most Christians, the imperial cult was probably a less pressing issue than other cults in which they had previously participated.”⁴⁷ Yarbro Collins has contended that Philippians 2:6-11 (which she takes to be a composition by Paul, not the remnants of an early Christian “hymn/ode”) was inspired by (and shaped in response to) prose hymns and encomia praising the Roman emperor.⁴⁸ But the only clear allusion in this passage is to Isaiah 45:22-23, which makes for a comparison of Jesus’ exalted status with that of God, not the emperor. In his recent analysis, Peter Oakes likewise sees little indication of a directly intended contrast/competition between Christ and Caesar in Philippians 2:6-11.⁴⁹

Moreover, although divine sonship was an important claim of successive Roman emperors, Paul’s references to Jesus’ divine sonship are concentrated in the two epistles where he was primarily engaging issues and questions pertaining to his Jewish tradition (Romans and Galatians), not in epistles such as 1 Corinthians, where he was more focused on guiding his gentile converts in negotiating their existence in pagan religious environments.⁵⁰ That is, Paul’s deployment of references to Jesus’ divine sonship does not seem to represent the intention of making a particularly direct contrast. In short, to put it mildly, there does not seem to be a lot of evidence supporting the notion that earliest christological claims and devotional practices were particularly prompted by, or (in the earliest decades) shaped in

⁴⁶ Yarbro Collins has argued that Philip 2:6-11 may have been inspired by prose hymns/encomia in honor of the emperor (“The Worship of Jesus,” 240-51), and that the narrative of the passage resembles Roman ideas of apotheosis. David Seeley made a similar argument previously: “The Background of the Philippians Hymn (2:6-11),” *JHC* 1 (1994): 49-72. But the only explicit indication of inspiration/influence evident in the passage is the adaptation of Isa 45:22-23, i.e., the universal obeisance to YHWH adapted/expanded to include a universal obeisance to Jesus. That readers (modern or ancient) could view Philip 2:6-11 as contrasting with the universal claim to obeisance of the emperor hardly comprises an indication that the passage was composed to make such a contrast, much less that imperial ideas and practices were decisive in prompting and shaping the ideas reflected in the passage.

⁴⁷ Peter Oakes, “Re-mapping the Universe: Paul and the Emperor in 1 Thessalonians and Philippians,” *JSNT* 27/3 (2005): 313 (301-22). On the other hand, I find his claim that “everyone” participated in the imperial cult an exaggeration (314). As he himself notes, participation may have been popular, but was not enforced or obligatory (311-12).

⁴⁸ Adela Yarbro Collins, “Psalms, Philippians 2:6-11, and the Origins of Christology,” *BibInt* 11 (2002): 361-72.

⁴⁹ Oakes, “Re-Mapping the Universe,” 319.

⁵⁰ E.g., Hurtado, “Jesus’ Divine Sonship in Paul’s Epistle to the Romans.”

response to, Roman-era ruler cults.⁵¹ As I have proposed in previous publications, there is later evidence suggesting the influence of emperor-cult upon christological claims, specifically in reaction against imperial claims, in Christian texts of the late first century CE and thereafter.⁵² But, again, the question is whether emperor-cult was *formative* in the *initial* stage of Jesus-devotion.

I also find it disappointing that in addressing the question of what kind of significance and status the risen Jesus held in earliest circles of believers she treats somewhat cursorily what seems to me to be the most important evidence. She explores *ideas* and possible similarities between some of the attributes ascribed to Jesus (e.g., pre-existence, glorious appearance) and those ascribed to various figures who function as what I have called “chief agents” of God. On the basis of these particular similarities, she seems to think that earliest Jesus-devotion was not all that unusual or remarkable. These similarities, however, are not in dispute; indeed, I drew extended attention to them myself in *OGOL*. Nor is it in dispute that Jesus’s divine status is expressed (both in beliefs and in devotional practices) with reference to God, Jesus typically functioning, not as a second deity, but as the unique chief agent of the one God.⁵³

But she only briefly mentions, and then drops from her discussion as ambiguous and less significant, the data that I think are more overtly indicative of a more remarkable development, the devotional practices reflected in our earliest sources.⁵⁴ In *OGOL* and subsequent publications I have repeatedly pointed to a striking constellation of devotional practices in which the exalted Jesus is central, and for which we have no precedent or parallel in second-temple Jewish evidence.⁵⁵ These devotional practices were apparently characteristic of earliest circles of believers. Indeed, they appear to have been the defining features of their corporate worship.

⁵¹ Consequently, granting a number of other good points in his study, I find some of Michael Peppard’s claims about the supposed influence of emperor-cult excessive: *The Son of God in the Roman World: Divine Sonship in Its Social and Political Context* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Cf. my review: <http://larryhurtado.wordpress.com/2013/01/17/the-son-of-god-inand-the-roman-empire-a-review-essay/>.

⁵² Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 74-77, drawing on my article, “Christ-Devotion in the First Two Centuries,” esp. 24-25, 34-35.

⁵³ So, her brief discussion of “What is meant by ‘divinity?’” (“How on Earth,” 57) seems to me beside the point.

⁵⁴ Yarbro Collins, “‘How on Earth,’” 57. She briefly admits that the “Lord’s Supper” counts as “a corporate and cultic or liturgical event,” but expresses doubt about whether the other actions I have listed do. She gives no justification for her doubt, but, surely other practices, such as the ritual confession/acclamation/invocation of Jesus, for example, also qualify. Moreover, instead of seeing that these practices are redolent with meaning in themselves, she seems to think that it is more important to probe various conceptual questions, such as “What is meant by ‘divinity?’” This reflects a failure to recognize that in the ancient religious setting, it was precisely worship of a given being that most clearly expressed its divine status.

⁵⁵ E.g., *OGOL*, 93-114.

For example, we have indication of the ritual acclamation and/or invocation of Jesus, perhaps to constitute the gathered worship event. That this practice emerged first in Aramaic-speaking circles is reflected in the oft-cited “*maranatha*” in 1 Corinthians 16:22, and Paul refers to a similar acclamation/ritual-confession of Jesus as “Lord” in Romans 10:9-13 (and more allusively in 1 Cor 12:3). It is highly significant that in the Romans passage Paul also adopts directly the biblical statement, “Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord [ἐπικαλέσεται τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου] shall be saved” (v. 13, from Joel 2:32) to describe this action, thereby making the ritual acclamation of Jesus equivalent to (or now the necessary means of?) ritually acclaiming/invoking YHWH.⁵⁶ Indeed, in 1 Corinthians 1:2, Paul alludes to the same ritual action, using the same core phrasing, “all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,” as the straightforward and concise definition of believers universally: They are those who engage in this ritual action of invoking/acclaiming Jesus as their divine Lord.⁵⁷ It is remarkable that for Paul to “call upon the name of the Lord” now means “to call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.”

I repeat my standing contention that the centrality and programmatic place of Jesus in this ritual and in related devotional practices that featured in earliest corporate worship represent collectively a novel and significant “mutation” in otherwise-attested Jewish worship practice, a striking “dyadic” devotional pattern in which Jesus features centrally along with God. I submit that it is important to recognize the historical significance of these phenomena of earliest Christian devotional/worship practice. It is methodologically backwards to set these practices aside (or treat them as ambiguous) and focus instead almost entirely on putative parallels of appellatives or honorific attributes in assessing what place Jesus held in earliest circles of believers.⁵⁸

To sum up at this point, I agree with Yarbrow Collins that the claim that Jesus is Messiah was central from the very earliest moments of the young Jesus-movement (and, indeed, that the roots of this claim probably lay in the time of Jesus’ ministry, and that it was likely the basis for his crucifixion). But I see no evidence that this messianic claim led to some conscious or unreflective adoption of ruler-cult beliefs and practices in the earliest years, and so I cannot support her proposal that this is the explanation for the nature of the religious experiences that were a major factor in shaping earliest Jesus-devotion. To be sure,

⁵⁶ See, e.g., Carl J. Davis, *The Name and Way of the Lord* (JSNTSup, 129; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1996).

⁵⁷ The phrasing, ἐπικαλέσεται τὸ ὄνομα, may perhaps be translated simply as “whoever calls out the name” (of Jesus). See, e.g., W. Kirchschräger, “ἐπικαλέω,” *EDNT* 2:28-29.

⁵⁸ I hasten to note that, in making this criticism, I do not mean to single out Yarbrow Collins. The error that I allege is, in my view, all too common in scholarly studies of earliest Christian circles.

the claims for Jesus form an interesting parallel with the claims for the Roman emperors, especially in the late first century and thereafter, and the emperors, too, were given cultic worship. This is important to note in trying to read NT texts in their original historical context. But it is a mistake to take these parallels as indicative of the factor that initially *prompted and/or shaped* cultic devotion to Jesus and the accompanying christological claims of the earliest texts.⁵⁹

Divine Humans in Jewish Tradition

From another quarter entirely, both Margaret Barker and Crispin Fletcher-Louis (with modest differences in their arguments) have claimed that notions of apotheosis and the worship of particular human figures, especially the Judean king and the Jewish High Priest, were native to second-temple Jewish tradition. So, they contend, the worship of Jesus developed because Jesus was seen to fit (ideally) the roles in question.⁶⁰ Fletcher-Louis (who seems to me to have given the best defence of this view) has contended that

there are insuperable barriers to Jewish Christians remaining monotheists and worshipping Jesus if, as it is assumed, such worship is utterly foreign to Jewish theology and devotional behaviour.⁶¹

Agreeing, therefore, that the worship of Jesus does go back to the very earliest circles of Jewish believers, he proposes that this cannot have been such a major innovation as I have judged. In his essay in the St. Andrews conference volume, he cites several texts as reflective of second-temple Jewish tradition in which this or that human figure receives worship, and he contends that this practice is treated in these texts as appropriate and acceptable.⁶²

⁵⁹ Here, I align myself with the old master, Adolf Deissmann, who is again influential in the renewed interest in reading the NT in its imperial context, and who observed that “a polemical parallelism between the cult of the emperor and the cult of Christ” arose, not from the one borrowing from the other, but “where ancient words derived by Christianity from the treasury of the Septuagint and the Gospels happen to coincide with solemn concepts of the imperial cult . . .”: *Light from the Ancient East* (ET; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1927), 342 (and more broadly 338-57). Similarly now, see the balanced discussion by Peter Oakes, *Philippians: From People to Letter* (SNTSMS 110; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 129-74, who cogently argues that Roman-era readers would have seen comparisons and contrasts between Christ and Caesar, for example, in Philip 2:6-11; but Oakes demurs from claiming that emperor-cult was a causative factor in generating the christological claims of the passage.

⁶⁰ E.g., Margaret Barker, “The High Priest and the Worship of Jesus,” in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers From the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus*, eds. Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila and Gladys S. Lewis (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 93-111; and in the same volume, Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, “The Worship of Divine Humanity As God’s Image and the Worship of Jesus,” 112-28.

⁶¹ Fletcher-Louis, “Worship of Divine Humanity,” 112.

⁶² The texts he highlights as particularly probative are these: several passages in *I Enoch* (46:5; 48:5; 52:4; 62:6-9); *Life of Adam and Eve* 12-16; Hecataeus of Abdera’s account (in Diodorus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 40.3.6) of the Jewish high priest receiving obeisance from the Jewish people; texts that refer to Alexander the Great giving obeisance to the Jewish high priest (Josephus, *Ant.* 11.331; b.*Yoma* 69a); and Sirach 50.

In an earlier publication, however, I have reviewed his argument and the texts he cites, concluding that they do not actually show cultic worship given to the figures in question, and, more crucially, also pointing out (as Fletcher-Louis agrees) that none of the texts gives any indication that any human figure was worshipped in the actual cultic practice of any known second-temple Jewish groups.⁶³ I am not alone in my judgement about his argument, as reflected in a number of other studies.⁶⁴ So, I am bound to say that Fletcher-Louis' attempt to solve the historical problem does not succeed.

The early eruption of a remarkable Jesus-devotion does really seem to be a genuinely noteworthy and novel development, in which a second and distinguishable figure (Jesus) is included uniquely in the devotional practice of earliest circles of Jewish Jesus-followers. The evidence shows, however, in this particular instance, there were not “insuperable barriers” to this among earliest Jewish believers. I submit that this was because they were convinced that in giving Jesus this remarkable reverence they were in fact obeying God.

“Monotheism”

To turn to another key matter, some other scholars have continued to question whether second-temple Jewish tradition was really “monotheistic,” and have urged that “monotheism” is not a suitable term. Indeed, one might judge that in the years since the initial publication of *OGOL* “monotheism” has been a topic of renewed interest among scholars of early Jewish and Christian traditions, and of the ancient world more broadly.⁶⁵ We even have recent studies devoted to what is sometimes called “pagan monotheism,”

⁶³ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 37-42.

⁶⁴ E.g., Bauckham, “Devotion to Jesus Christ,” 185-86; and, e.g., Peter Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels: Angelology and the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (SNTSMS 95; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Kevin P. Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels: A Study of the Relationship Between Angels and Humans in Ancient Jewish Literature and the New Testament* (AGJU 55; Leiden: Brill, 2004); Andrew Chester *Messiah and Exaltation: Jewish Messianic and Visionary Traditions and New Testament Christology* (WUNT 207; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 58-62.

⁶⁵ E.g., the multi-author volume, *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism*, eds. Loren T. Stuckenbruck and Wendy E. S. North (London: T&T Clark, 2004). Note also the following studies of the early roots/stages of the “monotheistic” stance affirmed later in second-temple Jewish texts: Fritz Stolz, *Einführung in den biblischen Monotheismus* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996); Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (JSOTSup, 265; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); Stephen L. Cook, *The Social Roots of Biblical Yahwism* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004); Nathan MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of Monotheism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); but cf. Richard Bauckham, “Biblical Theology and the Problems of Monotheism,” in *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, eds. Craig Bartholomew, et alia (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004), 188-96. And now there is the detailed study of the origins and history of “one god” and “only god” formulas in Greek, Jewish and early Christian sources: Darina Staudt, *Der eine und einzige Gott: Monotheistische Formeln im Urchristentum und ihre Vorgeschichte bei Griechen und Juden* (NTOA, 80; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012).

which, on close examination, however, is something quite different from the stance affirmed in early Jewish and Christian texts.⁶⁶ As the term “ancient Jewish monotheism” appears in the sub-title of *OGOL* and at a various other points in the book with reference to ancient Jewish tradition, questions about the propriety of the term are of obvious relevance. I confine my discussion here to studies pertaining to Roman-era Jewish tradition, specifically with a view to that tradition as the matrix in which earliest Jesus-devotion emerged.

Probably the most cleverly worded challenge to use of “monotheism” to characterize ancient Jewish and Christian traditions was in an essay by Paula Fredriksen, in which she called for the “mandatory retirement” of the term.⁶⁷ Essentially, Fredriksen makes the same point as earlier scholars, such as my former Edinburgh colleague, Peter Hayman, which is that ancient Jews and Christians, as well as ancient pagans, accepted that there were many divine beings (“gods”), whereas the definition of “monotheism” typically is belief that only one deity exists.⁶⁸ To cite a typically colourful and concise statement by Fredriksen, “My point, quite simply, is that ancient monotheists were polytheists.”⁶⁹

To my mind, on the one hand, it is a fair point that the dictionary meaning of “monotheism” (the term a relatively modern coinage) scarcely fits the ancient world-views in question. For example, Paul refers to “the god of this world” (apparently meaning Satan), and seems to accept that the pagan idols do really represent spirit-beings, whom he can designate darkly as “demons” (1 Cor 10:20). On the other hand, to stay with Paul for a moment further, note his disdain for the many “*so-called* gods” (1 Cor 8:5) of the Roman religious environment, which suggests that, however he saw them “ontologically” (so to speak), he distinguished them rather sharply from the “one God, the Father,” the maker of all things (1 Cor 8:6). Likewise, note his description of his (former pagan) converts in Thessalonica as having turned “to God [NB: τὸν θεὸν] from idols to serve a true and living

⁶⁶ E.g., the multi-author volumes, *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, eds. Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999); *Götterbilder, Gottesbilder, Weltbilder: Polytheismus und Monotheismus in der Welt der Antike*, eds. Reinhard Gregor Kratz and Hermann Spieckermann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006); *One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire*, eds. Stephen Mitchell and Peter Van Nuffelen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); *Polytheismus und Monotheismus in den Religionen des Vorderen Orients*, eds. Manfred Krebernik and Jürgen van Oorschot (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2002); and cf. John A. North, “Pagans, Polytheists and the Pendulum,” in *The Spread of Christianity in the First Four Centuries: Essays in Explanation*, ed. William V. Harris (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 125-45; Alfons Furst, “Paganer und christlicher ‘Monotheismus’. Zur Hermeneutik eines antiken Diskurses,” *JAC* 51 (2008): 5-24.

⁶⁷ Paula Fredriksen, “Mandatory Retirement: Ideas in the Study of Christian Origins Whose Time Has Come to Go,” *SR* 35 (2006): 231-46, also published in *Israel’s God and Rebecca’s Children: Christology and Community in Early Judaism and Christianity*, eds. David B. Capes, April D. DeConick, Helen K. Bond, Troy A. Miller (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 25-38, esp. 35-38. I cite here this latter publication.

⁶⁸ Peter Hayman, “Monotheism - A Misused Word in Jewish Studies?” *JJS* 42 (1991): 1-15.

⁶⁹ Fredriksen, “Mandatory Retirement,” 37.

God” (1 Thess 1:9). In short, though Paul (with a good many other ancients) thought that there were multiple “divine” beings of various sorts, he seems also to have held the one God of Jewish tradition as in something of a category of one apart from all others, and certainly the only deity worthy of worship, by him or anyone else. This seems to be evident in Paul’s rhetoric, and, as I see it, even more firmly in what he regarded as mandatory worship practice.

So, frankly, I find it a bit of a red-herring to point out that the modern dictionary definition of “monotheism” does not apply. Fredriksen alleges that in scholars’ use of “monotheism” in analysis of ancient religion “the definition [only one deity exists] remains constant,” and this “is a large part of the problem,” and in the context of this claim I am one of those cited.⁷⁰ But this seems to me inaccurate and unfair, at least as regards my own work. I cannot find in my various publications any indication that I assume that ancient Jews and Christians denied the *existence* of other “divine” beings. My consistent point, instead, has been that the issue was whether such beings were rightly to be worshipped.

I also have to say that it is just a bit tedious to have to make these basic points here, having done so repeatedly in publications over many years now, beginning with *OGOL*. As I have again indicated in a recent journal article, “ancient Jewish monotheism” was neither “pagan monotheism” (many deities presided over by one high deity, all of them deserving of worship, or one divine notion or being of which all the specific gods are expressive, all of again them worthy of worship), nor was it the “monotheism” of typical modern dictionary definition.⁷¹ The key distinguishing factor, and the most blatant expression of “ancient Jewish monotheism” was not in denial of the existence of other divine beings but in an exclusivity of cultic practice.⁷² Fredriksen rightly points to indications that ancient Jews acknowledged the existence of the deities of the nations (whether as “demons,” fallen angels, lesser/minor deities, etc.), and also that there were Jews (especially in Diaspora cities) quite ready to show various kinds of what she calls “respect” and “courtesy” for their pagan

⁷⁰ Fredriksen, “Mandatory Retirement,” 35. Note her reference just a few lines earlier to “big books and long articles . . . analysing the sudden and early development of high christological claims by imputing an austere and exclusive monotheism to late Second Temple Judaism,” my book, *Lord Jesus Christ*, among the works cited in the accompanying endnote.

⁷¹ Larry W. Hurtado, “‘Ancient Jewish Monotheism’ in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods,” *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 4 (2013): 379-400. This article builds on and amplifies the stance I espoused in an earlier article: “First Century Jewish Monotheism,” *JSNT* 71 (1998): 3-26.

⁷² E.g., Larry W. Hurtado, “Monotheism,” in *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*, eds. John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 961-64; *id.*, “Monotheism, Principal Angels, and the Background of Christology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, eds. Timothy H. Lim and John J. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 546-64 (esp. 546-50).

neighbors and toward their deities.⁷³ But, as she also concedes, *respect/courtesy* toward pagan deities in Diaspora social settings, maybe, but not cultic *worship* of pagan deities, which Roman-era Jews typically regarded as idolatry: vain worship at best, and the most heinous of sins at worst.⁷⁴

Wolfgang Schrage's study of "monotheism" in Paul is wide-ranging and yet impressively concise.⁷⁵ Along with surveying briefly the OT background and the second-temple Jewish context, Schrage also discusses how Paul's references to "one God" functioned in his letters and larger theological emphases.⁷⁶ He reaches basically similar conclusions to mine on most matters, judging, for example, that the various types of "intermediary" beings in ancient Jewish tradition (e.g., high angels, OT heroes, "hypostases") did not reflect any real erosion of emphasis on the uniqueness of the one God. Likewise, Schrage insists, the exalted place of Jesus in Paul's beliefs and devotional practice were fully compatible with his traditional commitment to this one God, for Jesus Paul consistently defines Jesus' high status in relationship to God.⁷⁷ He also rightly urges that for Paul devotion to Jesus extended beyond the worship setting, all of the life of the believer considered in service to God and Jesus (a matter to which I return later in discussing Chris Tilling's work).

"Divine Identity"

Beginning in the late 1990s Richard Bauckham has argued also that the religious discourse/rhetoric of ancient Jewish texts shows a concern to express what he calls an "exclusive" monotheism, in which the one God is distinguished from everything else, even other divine/supernatural beings.⁷⁸ Granting that "Traditional monotheism in the Jewish,

⁷³ Fredriksen, "Mandatory Retirement," 37-38, and in her more extended discussion of Jewish Diaspora conduct: "How Later Contexts Affect Pauline Content, or: Retrospect Is the Mother of Anachronism," in *Jews and Christians in the First and Second Centuries: How to Write Their History*, eds. Peter J. Tomson and Joshua Schwartz (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 17-51.

⁷⁴ I must also note that Fredriksen's alignment of Justin Martyr with Valentinus and Marcion in distinguishing between the creator-deity and the high deity ("Mandatory Retirement," 37) is clearly incorrect. Instead, e.g., in *Dial.* 56, Justin identifies his "high deity" (God) as "the Maker and Father of all things," and refers to "another God and Lord subject to the Maker of all things," identifying the latter as the pre-incarnate Son, Jesus.

⁷⁵ Wolfgang Schrage, *Unterwegs zur Einzigkeit und Einheit Gottes: Zum "Monotheismus" des Paulus und seiner alttestamentlich-frühjüdischen Tradition* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2002).

⁷⁶ Schrage, *Unterwegs*, esp. 43-90.

⁷⁷ Schrage, *Unterwegs*, esp. 150-58.

⁷⁸ Richard Bauckham, "The 'Most High' God and the Nature of Early Jewish Monotheism," in *Israel's God and Rebecca's Children: Christology and Community in Early Judaism and Christianity*, eds. David B. Capes, April D. DeConick, Helen K. Bond and Troy A. Miller (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 39-53. This essay draws upon his earlier discussion in *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998), esp. 1-22, republished in his book, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Milton Keynes:

Christian, and Islamic traditions has always accepted the existence of vast numbers of supernatural beings,” he contends that these other beings are typically considered “creatures, created by and subject to God,” and so “no more a qualification of monotheism than the existence of earthly creatures is.” Complaining of a misunderstanding that “has recurrently muddied the waters of recent discussion of early Jewish monotheism,” he insists, “The key question is how the uniqueness of the one God is understood,” and he posits that early Jewish texts typically reflect a view of the one God’s uniqueness “in terms of an absolute difference in kind from all other reality.”⁷⁹ This difference, he argues, was characteristically expressed by portraying the one God as “the only sovereign ruler over all things, while all other beings are his creatures, subject to his will.”⁸⁰ Consequently, he insists that in these Jewish texts what he terms the unique and exclusive “divine identity” of the one God is precisely that this deity alone is the universal creator of all else, and the sovereign ruler of all.⁸¹

In Bauckham’s view, the exclusive worship of the one God (which he terms “monolatry”) “corresponds” to, and is the “recognition” of the concept of the “unique identity” of God.⁸² Bauckham then proposes that the further key conceptual move made in early circles of Jesus-believers was to include the risen/exalted Jesus within this “unique identity of God.” This involved ascribing to Jesus a role in the creation of all things and in “God’s unique sovereignty over all things,” and also identifying Jesus “by the divine name which names the unique divine identity” (i.e., ascribing to Jesus the title, “Lord,” as the Greek equivalent of *YHWH*), and, then, portraying Jesus as accorded worship.⁸³

Bauckham sees this conceptual move of including Jesus within the “divine identity” as “central to the faith of the early church even before any of the New Testament writings were written,” and he insists that “this high Christology was entirely possible within the understanding of Jewish monotheism we have outlined.” Moreover, he posits this conceptual move over against any scholarly proposal about the relevance of various “intermediary figures” in ancient Jewish tradition (my proposal about “chief agent” tradition the object of

Paternoster, 2008), 1-17. I have offered an appreciative and more extended discussion of his proposals in an essay: “Worship and Divine Identity: Richard Bauckham’s Christological Pilgrimage,” In *In the Fullness of Time: Essays on Christology, Creation, and Eschatology in Honor of Richard Bauckham*, eds. Daniel M. Gurner, Grant Macaskill, Jonathan T. Pennington (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 82-96.

⁷⁹ Bauckham, “The ‘Most High’ God,” 40.

⁸⁰ Bauckham, “The ‘Most High’ God,” 49; and similarly, *God Crucified*, 10-11.

⁸¹ Bauckham’s sets out what he means by “the unique divine identity” of the one God in *God Crucified*, 6-13.

⁸² Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 25-26.

⁸³ Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 26-27. In pp. 28-40, he makes his case more fully.

his criticism). Indeed, he describes any such a notion about the relevance of these figures as “almost the exact opposite of the truth.”⁸⁴

I agree that the NT writings reflect a remarkably close association of Jesus with God, e.g., the pre-existent Jesus posited as “in the form/status of God [or a god/deity?]” (ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ, Philip 2:6), and as the agent of creation (1 Cor 8:6; Heb 1:2), the risen Jesus exalted to a unique status that seems to involve sharing the divine name and receiving universal obeisance (Philip 2:9-11), and biblical texts that originally referred to *YHWH* applied to Jesus (e.g., Rom 10:13 et al.). Essentially defined as a combination of unique attributes, actions and status, Bauckham’s “divine identity” category seems to me to have a certain usefulness as a conceptual label for this. But I have a couple of reservations about his other claims. I think that Bauckham’s critique of the idea that “chief agent” traditions are relevant for a historical analysis of earliest christology is somewhat wide of the mark, and perhaps is even directed at a straw man.

Granted, as I noted in *OGOL*, none of the various “chief agent” figures in second-temple Jewish texts gives us a full precedent or analogy for the more thoroughgoing way that the exalted Jesus was linked with God’s in early Christian devotion, and neither individually nor collectively do they represent a major mutation in ancient Jewish monotheism comparable to the cultic veneration of the exalted Jesus.⁸⁵ That is, contrary to some scholarly assertions, these “chief agent” figures do not reflect some major shift or erosion in “ancient Jewish monotheism” in second-temple Judaism. Crucially, the one God continued to be the exclusive recipient of cultic worship. Instead, my point (as stated several times in *OGOL*) has been that the variety of “chief agent” figures and the roles that they play suggests an underlying or more fundamental notion, a “chief agent” tradition or conceptual category, of which the figures in second-temple Jewish texts are particular expressions.

Moreover, I do not recognize my claims as being addressed in Bauckham’s insistence that these figures were not “of any *decisive* importance,” and that it is mistaken to regard them as “*the key* to understanding the Jewishness of early Christology” (emphasis mine).⁸⁶ I have posited that the “idea that God might have a chief agent prominent over all other servants of God and associated with him particularly closely,” was “relevant” and “served the early Christians in their attempt to accommodate the exalted Jesus alongside God.”⁸⁷ In

⁸⁴ Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 27.

⁸⁵ *OGOL*, 19-22. See also, e.g., *How on Earth*, 46-48.

⁸⁶ Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 4

⁸⁷ *OGOL*, citing 17, 50.

support of this suggestion, I pointed to a number of NT texts in which Jesus is portrayed as exalted by God to heavenly glory and status and seems to function as the chief agent of God (Acts 2:33-36; Rom 1:1-4; 1 Thess 1:9-10; 1 Cor 15:20-28; Philip 2:5-11; 1 Cor 8:1-6), contending, thus, that we likely see in these texts indications of *a creative and novel appropriation* of Jewish “chief agent” tradition.⁸⁸

In short, along with arguing that a Jewish chief agent tradition “provided the early Christians with important conceptual resources for accommodating the exalted Christ,” I also specifically noted that this tradition “was not in itself sufficient cause” of the “mutation” in Jewish devotional practice that we see evidenced in NT texts. Instead, I posited that this “new development in religious devotion . . . was the result of religious experiences and their aftermath,” these experiences including the effects of Jesus’ ministry and also experiences of the risen and exalted Jesus.⁸⁹ Also I designated as “a key factor” in the eruption of earliest Jesus-devotion “the pre-Easter ministry of Jesus and its effect upon his followers,” the religious experiences of the risen/exalted Jesus incomprehensible historically apart from the “powerful and lasting impression” of Jesus himself.⁹⁰

So, on the one hand, I think that Bauckham has over-simplified (and so distorted) my proposal about ancient Jewish chief agent tradition, and, on the other hand, has also underestimated the historical relevance of this tradition. For it seems to me, still, that in various NT texts the depiction of Jesus *vis-à-vis* God is (in one way or another) as God’s unique and chief agent. Even the pre-existent Jesus through whom all was made, to whom all spheres of reality are to bow, who shares the divine name, to whom various biblical “*Yahweh* texts” apply, and who is included programmatically in the corporate devotional practice of early Christian circles is, nevertheless, also thereby in all these roles the unique agent of the one God. Even in texts such as the Gospel of John, where Jesus is the divine Logos and unique expression of God (e.g., John 1:18), Jesus is also distinguished from God (“the Father”) and he is referred to as in service to God, Jesus’ status conferred by God (e.g., 5:19-24).

I also think that, in contrast with his earlier work, Bauckham’s more recent emphasis on the concept of “divine identity” may involve underestimating the historical significance of

⁸⁸ *OGOL*, 93-99.

⁸⁹ *OGOL*, 115.

⁹⁰ *OGOL*, 116, and more fully in *Lord Jesus Christ*, 53-64.

the early Christian devotional practice.⁹¹ As noted already, he now refers to the worship of Jesus as a reflection of the prior conceptual inclusion of him in the “divine identity,” as if the former were a corollary or logical consequence from the latter. But, as I have indicated in a previous publication, it seems to me that this is an inadequate explanation for the remarkable devotional pattern in question.⁹²

The strength of Roman-era Jewish sensitivity to compromising the uniqueness of the one God was especially expressed in worship-practice. Indeed, this sensitivity seems to me to have been so strong that I think that the sort of “mutation” in devotional practice that we see reflected already in Paul’s letters is unlikely to have erupted so readily unless early circles of Jesus-followers felt that God now *required* that Jesus be so revered. That is, I do not think that the devotional pattern in question developed as a kind of “theological inference” in which Jesus was first posited in the various roles that comprise Bauckham’s “divine identity,” which then generated the thought that it would be appropriate to worship him.⁹³ Instead, as I proposed in *OGOL* (and have reiterated and developed subsequently), it seems to me that various powerful religious experiences likely generated the new conviction (which likely came to recipients of these experiences as a revelation) that God specifically requires that Jesus be given cultic reverence, and be included in the worship given to God.⁹⁴ It bears remembering, after all, that the fundamental basis for the exclusivist worship practice of ancient Jewish tradition was the firm conviction that it was a commandment of God (e.g., Exod 20:4-6; Deut 5:6-10), not an inference from some set of concepts. I remain persuaded that the conviction that God required Jesus to be revered would have been both necessary and sufficient for the “dyadic” mutation in Jewish tradition reflected in early Jesus-devotion.

The Embodied Return of God

In a part of his recent, massive study of Paul’s theology, N. T. Wright engages questions about the origins of Jesus-devotion, offering what he calls “a major new proposal.”⁹⁵ After reviewing appreciatively the work of various other scholars, and affirming

⁹¹ Moreover, Bauckham seems to me to have shifted somewhat from his emphasis on the importance of cultic/devotional practice expressed in his earlier publications. Cf., e.g., “The Worship of Jesus in Apocalyptic Christianity.”

⁹² Hurtado, *How on Earth*, 22-30. See also the critique of Bauckham’s “divine identity” thesis by Chester, *Messiah and Exaltation*, 17-27.

⁹³ See my criticism of what I take to be Bauckham’s position in *How on Earth*, 22-25.

⁹⁴ *OGOL*, 117-22; *How on Earth*, 29-30; and most fully in *Lord Jesus Christ*, 70-74. I take Philip 2:9-11 as reflecting the conviction that God now requires Jesus to be revered, and we appear to have a still more explicit statement expressing this conviction in John 5:23 “that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the son does not honor the Father who sent him.”

⁹⁵ N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (2 vols.; London: SPCK, 2013), 644-56. See my review of this large work in *Theology* 117 (2014): 361-65, and my more extended critique of his “embodied return”

particularly Bauckham’s “divine identity” thesis, Wright presents his own proposal as “a significant step beyond it,” offering “a larger perspective altogether,” specifically, that earliest Jewish believers saw Jesus as the personal return of Israel’s God as king. Wright contends that this notion “that *Israel’s God, having abandoned Jerusalem and the Temple at the time of the Babylonian exile, would one day return,*” (emphasis his) and return “in person,” was central in second-temple Jewish tradition.⁹⁶ Wright then urges that the decisive development was that earliest circles of Jesus’ followers came to believe that in Jesus, “supremely in his death and resurrection,” this personal return of God had happened. Jewish “chief agent” traditions were irrelevant, and the sort of revelatory experiences that I have highlighted were “important but essentially secondary.” Instead, “What matters is the pre-Christian Jewish ideas about Israel’s God,” specifically, this notion of God’s personal return. Earliest believers, thus, felt “compelled to use Jesus-language for the one God.” This is “the very centre of the early Christian innovation.”⁹⁷

Even if, however, for the sake of argument, we grant that the hope/expectation of a “personal return” of God (as distinguished from the eschatological appearance of an agent-figure such as Messiah) circulated widely in second-temple Jewish tradition (and I am not sure that this is in fact the case), it is not so clear to me that this notion really best captures what we have reflected and presupposed in Paul. To be sure, as others have noted, Paul links Jesus with God in remarkable ways. For example, there is the appropriation of “Yahweh texts” to refer to Jesus, as in Romans 10:13.⁹⁸ Likewise, there is the linkage (“overlap”) of Jesus and God in Paul’s eschatology analysed by Kreitzer.⁹⁹ Further, as I have argued in *OGOL* and subsequently, there is the unprecedented inclusion of Jesus along with God in earliest Christian devotional/worship practice. But, at the same time, Paul also reflects a distinction between Jesus and God, rather consistently describing Jesus as what I take to be the unique agent, vehicle, expression of God’s purposes: e.g., the unique divine Son sent forth by God (Gal 4:4), God’s “image” (*eikōn*, 2 Cor 4:4), and the one *through whom* God created all things (1 Cor 8:6). In any case, I do not see places in Paul where he refers to Jesus as the returned *YHWH*. Yet, if this notion was so central and crucial (as Wright contends),

emphasis: “YHWH’s Return to Zion: A New Catalyst for Earliest High Christology?” in *God and the Faithfulness of Paul: A Critical Examination of the Pauline Theology of N. T. Wright*, eds. Christoph Heilig, J. Thomas Hewitt, and Michael F. Bird. Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2016. Pp. 417-38.

⁹⁶ Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, esp. 653.

⁹⁷ Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 654-55.

⁹⁸ David B. Capes, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul’s Christology* (WUNT, 2/47; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992; *id.*, “YHWH and His Messiah: Pauline Exegesis and the Divine Christ,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 16 (1994): 121-43.

⁹⁹ Larry J. Kreitzer, *Jesus and God in Paul’s Eschatology* (JSNTSup, 19; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987).

we should expect to have rather explicit evidence of it. But, I have to say that Wright's attempt to show the notion in his discussion of several Pauline texts seems to me unpersuasive, depending too much on the prior judgement that it must be there.¹⁰⁰

Moreover, Wright does not really explain *how* earliest believers might have come to see Jesus' death and resurrection as God's personal return. That does not seem to have been an obvious understanding of these events! Not even Jesus' resurrection would so readily signify that he was God come in person. Yet, on any *historical* account, surely accounting for such a view of these events and of Jesus would be important. That Wright simply posits this doctrinal *concept* (Jesus as God's personal return) as prior and key to everything, and that he treats revelatory experiences and the worship of Jesus as essentially secondary and uncomplicated consequences, seem to me to reflect more the (understandable) efforts of a theologian to organize beliefs into some larger coherent structure than an historical analysis of the phenomena and processes in question.

Worship of Jesus?

The proposal that in earliest texts Jesus is revered in ways that amount to worship has certainly remained a contentious matter. In his contribution to the 1999 St. Andrews conference volume, Maurice Casey laid out an argument that the christological developments reflected in the Pauline letters were not perceived by Paul or his earliest readers as "a breach of Jewish monotheism," and so do not give us "the historical origins of the worship of Jesus, though some steps in that direction have been taken."¹⁰¹ There are a number of particular points in his essay that could receive further discussion, but I focus here on what seems to be the major concern. The argument of Casey's essay comprises a basic syllogism: (1) The worship of any other being than the one God was a "breach" Jewish monotheism;¹⁰² (2) there is no indication in Paul's letters that he thought he had breached monotheism or that he considered himself a Jewish apostate in this matter;¹⁰³ so (3) however remarkable and unprecedented the reverence given to Jesus in Pauline churches, it cannot have been worship, and the reverence given to Jesus cannot comprise "a significant cause of christological

¹⁰⁰ Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 656-89.

¹⁰¹ P. M. Casey, "Monotheism, Worship and Christological Developments in the Pauline Churches," in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers From the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus*, eds. Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila and Gladys S. Lewis (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 233 (214-33). See also his review-essay on my 2003 book: Maurice Casey, "Lord Jesus Christ: A Response to Professor Hurtado," *JSNT* 27 (2004): 83-96; and cf. my reply: "Devotion to Jesus and Historical Investigation: A Grateful, Clarifying and Critical Response to Professor Casey," *JSNT* 27 (2004): 97-104.

¹⁰² Casey, "Monotheism," 214-18.

¹⁰³ E.g., Casey, "Monotheism," 231.

development.”¹⁰⁴ Q.E.D.! In my view, however, each of the components in Casey’s syllogism is open to question.

Casey’s first premise allows only for only two alternatives, either the strict maintenance or a “breach” of ancient Jewish monotheism; but these are not the only options to consider, and so this premise begs the question. We know from the history of religions that the beliefs of “parent” traditions can undergo significant reconfigurings or “mutations” as well.¹⁰⁵ Sometimes, to be sure, these mutations are rejected by the majority in the parent tradition as unacceptable and incompatible with the tradition, and the mutation becomes a separate religious movement. But the point is that the mutations often (or even typically) emerge initially *within* the parent tradition. This is basically what I propose as a model for the eruption of earliest Jesus-devotion, and Casey did not even consider it.

Casey’s second premise is, therefore, likewise fallacious. If, as I propose is the case, Paul and other early Jewish believers were convinced that the one God had exalted Jesus to a unique heavenly status and, importantly, now required Jesus to be given cultic reverence as obedience to God’s acts and will (as reflected, e.g., in Philip 2:9-11; Rom 10:9-13), then, of course, they would not perceive themselves to have “breached” Jewish “monotheism.” We should, thus, hardly be surprised that there is no such indication in Paul’s letters. Instead, they will have believed themselves to be obeying the one God, and, indeed, doing so on a more informed basis than fellow Jews who did not recognize Jesus’ high status and join in reverencing him (as seems to be reflected in Paul’s references to fellow Jews as “hardened” and unable to see “the glory of the Lord” in 2 Cor 3:12—4:4).

So, given what I think are fallacies in the first two steps of his argument, Casey’s conclusion is obviously open to question. It is interesting that when he considered the actual phenomena of early Jesus-devotion, Casey often recognized that something new and unprecedented was at work. For example, he granted that the “*maranatha*” echoed by Paul reflected “an invocation of genuine importance,” showing that “Jesus was already more central to his followers than any particular intermediary figure was to Jewish people as a whole.”¹⁰⁶ To cite another example, in considering Philippians 2:6-11, Casey grants (in what seems to me curious phrasing) that Jesus here “is indeed on the verge of deity,” such that

¹⁰⁴ The phrasing quoted from Casey, “Monotheism,” 229.

¹⁰⁵ As discussed in my essay, “Religious Experience and Religious Innovation.”

¹⁰⁶ Casey, “Monotheism,” 224.

Jews would feel “that it needed to be legitimated.”¹⁰⁷ But Casey’s syllogism seems to me to have kept controlling his conclusions unhelpfully.

I submit, however, that if we develop our conclusions more inductively, instead of deductively from dubious prior premises, we can recognize what I call a significant “mutation” in ancient Jewish devotional practice and beliefs. In the eyes of early Jewish believers such as Paul, this was not a “breach” in Jewish commitment to the one God, not idolatry or the worship of a second deity, but the obedient reverence of Jesus as the unique Lord whom God requires to be given such reverence.

I turn now to consider James McGrath’s book, *The Only True God*.¹⁰⁸ I have a mixed verdict on it. On the one hand, McGrath judges (rightly in my view) that we can apply the term “monotheism” to second-temple Judaism, provided that we take adequate account of the actual beliefs and practices of Jews of that setting. Noting that “the sacrificial worship of the one God without images was the make-or-break issue,” he emphasizes that, nevertheless, Jewish concern to assert God’s uniqueness was able to accommodate “significant diversity.”¹⁰⁹ On the other hand, I think that he poses the wrong question and (consequently) reaches an incorrect conclusion about the nature of the beliefs and practices of earliest Christian circles.

McGrath states as his main aim to determine when and how Jews and Christians became “divided over the understanding of God’s oneness.”¹¹⁰ Then, working through various NT writings from Paul’s letters through later ones, he urges that Jesus became “fully divine” and that the “parting of the ways” between Jews and Christians over beliefs about God happened only in the second century CE and thereafter, and he further ascribes these developments to an emerging doctrine of divine creation “*ex nihilo*.”¹¹¹ But the question that frames his inquiry is inappropriate and question-begging. The proper question is not when Jews and Christians “divided” over their respective understandings of God, but when and how Jesus was first treated as bearing divine honor and revered accordingly.

But proceeding with his curious question, and finding no indication in NT writings that the authors were conscious of a major break with the ancient Jewish emphasis on one God, McGrath then wrongly judges that there cannot have been any significant “mutation” in

¹⁰⁷ Casey, “Monotheism,” 226.

¹⁰⁸ James F. McGrath, *The Only True God: Early Christian Monotheism in Its Jewish Context* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009). See my extended review available online: <https://larryhurtado.files.wordpress.com/2010/07/mcgrath-reveiw-essay1.pdf>.

¹⁰⁹ McGrath, *The Only True God*, 35-36.

¹¹⁰ McGrath, *The Only True God*, 2.

¹¹¹ McGrath, *The Only True God*, 91-96.

which Jesus was treated as sharing in divine glory and in the worship given to God. But, of course, NT writings continue to affirm God's uniqueness, and do not register any breach with this fundamental emphasis in ancient Jewish tradition. Whether Paul or later texts such as the Gospel of John, NT authors continue to deny any compromise of God's uniqueness in their reverence for Jesus, and claim instead that they are actually obeying the one God in their novel "dyadic" devotional pattern. Moreover, even in the second and third centuries CE, Christian writers maintain this stance.

Similarly to Casey, McGrath seems to presume in advance that the ancient Jewish religious tradition could not have accommodated the sort of development that I (and others) have posited as already taken for granted in Paul's letters, i.e., that Jesus cannot have been treated as genuinely sharing divine glory and worthy of cultic reverence. That is, he seems to allow for only two options: Either an unremarkable maintenance of, or a departure from, the sort of "monotheistic" stance reflected typically in second-temple Jewish texts. He, too, seems not to consider another option, that early Jesus-devotion (even treating Jesus as partaking in divine glory) could have emerged as an *innovative* development *within* Jewish "monotheistic" tradition. In short, I think that he begs the question, making a prior (and too restrictive) view of what "ancient Jewish monotheism" could or could not include determinative of what he then finds in the relevant NT texts. In fact, a remarkable "mutation" in ancient Jewish monotheism, including particularly the unprecedented innovation in beliefs and devotional practice reflected already in Paul's letters *did* originate among Jewish circles. So, at least initially, treating Jesus as sharing divine glory and worthy of cultic devotion *was* obviously a development *within* second-temple Jewish tradition.

I also think that McGrath's analysis of various NT and extra-canonical texts is strained and unpersuasive, and his handling of relevant evidence selective.¹¹² For example, despite granting that in Revelation 5:8-14 and 7:9-17 worship is pictured as rightly "offered to God and the Lamb," McGrath fails to recognize how unprecedented and remarkable this is, precisely in the context of other known expressions of second-temple Jewish tradition.¹¹³ Again, to be sure, in these and other NT texts, the reverence given to Jesus is not presented as in conflict with or detracting from the primacy of God in beliefs and worship. Instead, these texts reflect a devotional stance in which Jesus is *included* in the worship of God, as the divinely-appointed *Kyrios* to whom God now requires cultic reverence be given. In

¹¹² For several examples, see my online review: <https://larryhurtado.files.wordpress.com/2010/07/mcgrath-reveiw-essay1.pdf>.

¹¹³ McGrath, *The Only True God*, 73-76.

considering how to characterize the devotion given to Jesus in NT writings, McGrath simply repeats that the Greek verb *proskynein* can have a variety of connotations, and so does not in itself indicate worship offered to a deity. That is both correct and beside the point. McGrath does not really engage the constellation of specific devotional actions that I have itemized over many years now as comprising a novel and “dyadic” devotional pattern (but I should acknowledge that he is by no means alone in doing so).

Another scholar who has addressed recently what to make of the reverence given to Jesus in earliest Christian texts is James Dunn, particularly in his book, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?*¹¹⁴ Dunn indicates that the book was written particularly in response to studies by Richard Bauckham and me, and he also registers his agreement with us “on the great majority of the texts and issues.” But he also states his concern to emphasize the complexity of the data, which, he urges, point to an answer to the question whether “first Christians” worshipped Jesus such as “‘Yes, but to be noted also . . .’, rather than a simple ‘Yes’.”¹¹⁵ I have written an extended review of Dunn’s book available online in which I engage him on a number of specific texts and issues, so I confine myself here to what I think are a few key points for the present discussion.¹¹⁶

First, I note that there is a substantial agreement between us on numerous texts and issues relevant to the larger question he addresses. Indeed, it is sometimes difficult for me to tell whether apparent disagreements are matters of substance or (at least sometimes) semantics. For example, from *OGOL* onward, I have repeatedly emphasized that the reverence given to Jesus reflected in the NT and other early Christian texts did not make this an alternative or competitor to the worship of God. Instead, Jesus was included in the worship-practices of early circles of believers in response to what they saw as the actions and will of the one God, and in response to the will of the one God. So, they intended their worship of Jesus as “an affirmation of the sovereignty and glory of God.”¹¹⁷ Jesus was not worshipped as a separate or second deity. The NT does not reflect “di-theism,” but instead what I have referred to in various publications as a “binitarian” or “dyadic” pattern of

¹¹⁴ James D. G. Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus? The New Testament Evidence* (London: SPCK, 2010).

¹¹⁵ Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?* 3-4.

¹¹⁶ <https://larryhurtado.files.wordpress.com/2010/07/dunn-was-jesus-worshipped-review.pdf>.

¹¹⁷ *OGOL*, 100. See also, e.g., Larry W. Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 5; *How on Earth*, 48-53; *Lord Jesus Christ*, 50-53; and, most recently, *God in New Testament Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 49-71.

worship.¹¹⁸ In their beliefs and devotional practice the circles reflected in the NT placed Jesus *in relationship to the one God*, as the unique agent and expression of the one God, the unique Son, the image of God, etc. So it is not clear to me how I (and Bauckham) may have simplified matters too much, or that Dunn has highlighted better the complexity involved.

Actually, instead of correcting anything that Bauckham or I have written, it seems to me that Dunn's discussion is really directed against what he sees as the danger in some contemporary "popular" versions of Christian piety, in which Jesus is the only recipient of worship, and Jesus is worshipped to the exclusion of God.¹¹⁹ Dunn refers to this as "Jesus-olatry," using this term "as in an important sense parallel or even close to 'idolatry'."¹²⁰ I broadly sympathize with his critique, but I fear that his concern to counter this "Jesus-olatry" may have led him to over-simplify matters himself when it comes to characterizing the NT data.

For, although in the course of his discussion of various NT texts he grants that Jesus seems to be worshipped along with God (e.g., in Rev 5:9-14) or at least is given reverence that looks very much like worship, he concludes on a more negative note, judging that "by and large the first Christians did not worship Jesus as such."¹²¹ Does "by and large" mean that sometimes early Christians did worship Jesus, but usually they did not? In any case, I suppose that "did not worship Jesus as such" means that early believers did not worship Jesus apart from God, as a rival to the worship of God. If so, however, as I have already indicated, that is hardly under dispute from me or from Bauckham.

The key question is not whether Jesus was worshipped instead of God, or "in his own right" as another deity alongside God. The proper questions are whether Jesus was included uniquely in the sort of reverence that was otherwise reserved for God, and whether Jesus shared in the sort of reverence that in ancient Jewish and Christian circles was typically denied to any other figure (than God). As I think I have shown in *OGOL* and subsequent publications, the answer to these questions is a resounding "yes."

¹¹⁸ I have come to prefer "dyadic" because it does not seem to have the theological history and overtones that "binitarian" has, and which led some scholars to presume (incorrectly) that I imputed into NT texts some later theological conception anachronistically.

¹¹⁹ Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?* esp. 147-51.

¹²⁰ Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?* 147.

¹²¹ Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?* 150. Cf. his admission that in the NT Jesus is "in at least some degree the object of worship" (28), and note his ambivalence about NT references to "calling upon" Jesus, granting, on the one hand, that this was "evidently a defining and distinguishing feature of earliest Christian worship" (36), but then judging that it is "not quite so obvious or clear cut" that this practice was typical (37). On Rev 4—5, in one place he grants that worship in 5:9-14 is given both to God and "the Lamb" (131), but in another reference to the text (42) he demurs from treating 4:11; 5:9-13 as "hymns," preferring to characterize them as "shouts of praise," even though in 5:9 says that the elders "sang a new song."

I also register an example of what may be either a matter of substance or semantics (though I suspect the former). Note Dunn's phrasing in his statement that for earliest Christians the worship of Jesus was "*a way of worshipping God*" (emphasis mine), which may or may not mean that worshipping Jesus was, for early believers one way among others.¹²² I think, however, that it would be more accurate to say that the remarkable way that Jesus features in early Christian worship is presented in NT writings (to cite my own phrasing in a previous publication) "not as something optional but as *mandatory*, as obedience to 'God'," and that this "dyadic" devotional pattern involving Jesus programmatically was now *the requisite way of worshipping God* (as reflected, e.g., in Philip 2:9-11).¹²³

In sum, Dunn's book is in some respects a useful review of some of the relevant data, but is not really a successful rebuttal or corrective of the work that Bauckham and I have offered. Moreover, in its own way the book does not reflect or nuance adequately the complexity of the kind of devotional pattern attested in NT writings, because Dunn was so anxious to counter the "Jesus-olatry" of certain kinds of popular Christianity that he somewhat over-simplifies matters.

The "Christ Relation" in Paul

I turn now to consider the recent monograph of a comparatively younger scholar, Chris Tilling, which includes a wide-ranging critical (indeed, sometimes unduly caustic) survey of prior scholarship and also his own distinctive proposal for judging that in Paul's letters we have a "divine christology."¹²⁴ With regard to my own work, Tilling combines some appreciative comments with a rather sharply-worded critique. Perhaps the heart of his criticism is that my emphasis on the historical importance of the worship of Jesus does not do adequate justice to all the ways that Jesus features in the sort of christological discourse that we see in Paul's letters.¹²⁵ In particular, Tilling observes that Paul speaks about "the relation between believers and the risen Lord, and he does so by using the sort of language and themes which Second Temple Judaism used to speak of the relation between Israel and YHWH." Tilling also urges (as his main thesis) that this "YHWH-relation pattern of data is

¹²² Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?* 6. Cf. his statements later in the book that the distinctive Christian affirmation is "that God is *most effectively* worshipped in and through . . . Jesus" (146, emphasis mine), and that "the most (only?) effective worship . . . is expressed in Christ and through Christ" (151).

¹²³ E.g., Hurtado, *God in New Testament Theology*, 64, and also, e.g., 71.

¹²⁴ Chris Tilling, *Paul's Divine Christology* (WUNT, 2/323; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

¹²⁵ There is a similar emphasis in Schrage, *Unterwegs*, 158-67.

the appropriate context in which to understand the emergence of early Christology. . .”¹²⁶ He contends that the constellation of beliefs and practices that I refer to as “Christ-devotion” (or “Jesus-devotion”) should be subsumed under what he calls “the *Christ-relation* pattern of data” (emphasis his).¹²⁷

On the one hand, Tilling rightly draws attention to the various ways that Paul refers to a relationship with the risen Jesus, one that resembles the kind of relationship to God that we see expressed in OT texts, perhaps especially in the Psalms. For example, I think that it is difficult (except perhaps for the most jaded soul) to read Paul’s statements in Galatians 2:19-20 or Philippians 3:7-11 without noting the intensity of his feeling and his utter dedication expressed in them. Further, I agree that the similarity of Paul’s “Christ-relation” discourse to biblical discourse about the relationship of believers to God (YHWH) supports Tilling’s emphasis that we see a “divine christology” in Paul. That is, this “Christ-relation” discourse is one of several bodies of data in Paul (and other NT writings) that reflect the early Christian view that the exalted Jesus shares remarkably and uniquely in attributes and roles otherwise ascribed solely to God. So, certainly, if the aim is to map fully Paul’s christological discourse and his religious life, then extended attention should be given to how Paul describes his relationship (and that of other believers as well) to Jesus, not only in worship but in the whole of life.¹²⁸ Tilling has served this need well in his monograph.

I am not so confident, however, that this “Christ-relation” category can so readily subsume as much of the other data as Tilling claims. It is not clear, for example, whether the category subsumes, or (as I think) simply complements, the novel reading of certain biblical “*Yahweh* texts” as referring to Jesus, as analysed particularly by Capes.¹²⁹ Nor is it clear that the “Christ-relation” discourse can easily subsume the crucial phenomena that reflect the novel and remarkable place of Jesus in earliest Christian corporate worship, or why Tilling proposes that the “Christ-relation” discourse pattern should subsume these devotional phenomena. To be sure, Paul can refer to the whole of the life of believers as the sphere of their “spiritual worship” to God (Rom 12:1-2), and so Tilling is right to observe that what Paul expected of believers extended well beyond the “cultic” worship that comprises the gatherings of the *ekklesias*.¹³⁰ Tilling appropriately cites as support Schrage’s comment that

¹²⁶ Tilling, *Paul’s Divine Christology*, 72.

¹²⁷ Tilling, *Paul’s Divine Christology*, 57.

¹²⁸ As I have myself indicated in *Lord Jesus Christ*, e.g., 133-34 (Paul), and 512 (later NT texts).

¹²⁹ Capes, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts*.

¹³⁰ One of the valid criticisms of my 2003 book, *Lord Jesus Christ*, was that I did not adequately address the wider dimensions of early Christian “devotion” in daily life. I have attempted to atone for this in a chapter, “To

for Paul the praise of God includes the entirety of one's bodily existence.¹³¹ But, that the whole of life can be seen as an extension of worship hardly means that worship itself is, or should be, thereby subsumed under the "Christ-relation" discourse, especially if our concern is to grasp the historical process by which Jesus came to be treated as rightful recipient of worship. In short, although Tilling presents this "Christ-relation" category somewhat polemically as superseding almost all previous scholarly work on earliest Jesus-devotion, to my mind Tilling's work is more of a complementary study that helpfully draws attention to an important body of christological discourse in Paul.

For I continue to maintain that in the ancient Roman-era setting, and especially in the ancient Jewish tradition, "cultic" worship (i.e., actions intended as such) was the "red-line" issue. As shown in *OGOL* (and in numerous other studies), Roman-era Jews typically balked at giving worship to any figure other than the one God, whether the pagan deities and heroes, their own heroes, or any of their own God's heavenly retinue. So, in historical terms, the programmatic place of Jesus in earliest Christian worship is unprecedented and remarkable, indicating a major "mutation" in (though not initially a departure from) second-temple Jewish tradition, and, I contend, this devotional pattern most overtly signals the divine status accorded to Jesus in earliest circles of believers. Contra the claims of some (cited somewhat uncritically by Tilling), angels were not given worship in circles of devout Jews, and even the scenes of the future obeisance to be given to the Chosen One in the Similitudes of *1 Enoch* do not refute my stance on the matter.¹³² The obeisance given to the Chosen One is that of conquered gentile rulers, not the gathered worship of believers (*1 Enoch* 55:4; 62:1-9). Moreover, and more crucially, there is no indication that these literary scenes produced or were accompanied by a devotional practice among second-temple Jewish circles in which this Chosen One was a recipient of the sort of reverence given to Jesus in earliest Christian

Live and Die for Jesus: Social and Political Consequences of Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity," in my book, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?* (56-82).

¹³¹ Schrage, *Unterwegs*, 159.

¹³² Cf. Chester, *Messiah and Exaltation*, 109, who claims, "Beyond doubt angels were venerated and worshipped by at least some Jews in the early centuries BCE." But the works that he cites in support do not actually back up his rather excessive claim. Cf. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology*, who finds the use of "venerative language," but not any cultic worship of angels. Similar results are offered also by Clinton E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface Between Christianity and Folk Belief At Colossae* (WUNT 2/77; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995) in his study of various "magical" material, showing the occasional appeal to angels by individuals (typically, along with God) in times of crisis, but no evidence of angels receiving worship in circles of Jews. Still more recently, Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), reaches the same conclusion, esp. 51-62. Chester rests his claim heavily on passages in *Joseph and Asenath* and in *Life of Adam and Eve* (112-15), but I have given reasons for doubting what he makes of them (*OGOL*, Preface to 1998 edition, x-x1), and in any case neither is now safely to be presumed as of Jewish provenance (as noted by Bauckham, "Devotion to Jesus," 184-86).

circles. The Jesus-devotion that we see already taken for granted in Paul's letters is a genuine innovation.¹³³

One further observation about Tilling's study: Similar to my view of Wright's proposal, Tilling's too seems to me to reflect more an effort to organize a Pauline "christology" than to address the relevant historical issues about the origins of Jesus-devotion with which I have been concerned. For example, Tilling wants to subsume the worship of Jesus under his "Christ-relation" category of Pauline discourse, but he does not explain how the one may have developed from the other. Surely, however, in historical terms it is more likely that the earliest relevant convictions were that God had exalted Jesus to heavenly/divine glory and now required him to be revered accordingly (e.g., Rom 1:1-4; Philip 2:9-11; Acts 2:36). Then, I propose, from this initial conviction there quickly sprang up the devotional practices that I have discussed. And then also, as early believers saw Jesus as sharing God's glory and installed as the "Lord" to whom they were obliged, there developed among them a view of their whole life in relation to the exalted Jesus and to God (e.g., Rom 14:7-9). This would seem to me a reasonable hypothesis, however one might choose, for theological purposes, to organize the various data indicative of beliefs and practices constitutive of devotion to Jesus (in Paul or other NT writings).

Religious Experience

My proposal that powerful religious experiences of revelatory force and content formed an important factor in the early and rapid eruption of Jesus-devotion has continued to generate some interest and some critique. I have pursued the matter further myself in several publications that have appeared since the 1998 edition of *OGOL*, perhaps most fully in a section of my 2003 book, *Lord Jesus Christ*.¹³⁴ In that discussion I propose that these experiences likely included visions of the risen/exalted Jesus, perhaps receiving heavenly worship (as reflected in Rev 5:1-14), also inspired utterances in the form of prophetic oracles

¹³³ Note a similar judgement by Bauckham, "Devotion to Jesus Christ," 183-85, although he cites Tob 11:14 as "the only indubitable example" of angels "honoured along with God in worship," and 11Q14 1 ii 5-6 also as another "plausible" instance (183). I find neither text a persuasive case. In Tobit 11:14 Tobit blesses God and God's name "for ever," and also blesses "all your holy angels," an impromptu action hardly comprising anything like the pattern of devotion offered to Jesus in corporate worship. The same goes for 11Q14. The speaker in this text blesses Israel "in the name of God Most High," blesses God's "holy name for centuries," and then also "all his holy angels," proceeding to declare that "God is with you and [his holy] angels [are] in the midst of your Community." Such "blessing" statements are hardly equivalent to the phenomena of early Christian Jesus-devotion. Although Chester claims that "at least some Jews could accommodate another figure to be worshipped as well as God," he grants that the way Jesus features in the beliefs and devotional practices of earliest Christian circle goes "beyond anything that we know of from the Judaism of the time" (*Messiah and Exaltation*, 116).

¹³⁴ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 64-74.

and odes (perhaps particularly important as early expressions of christological insights), and what we might term “charismatic exegesis” of biblical (OT) texts that involved new readings of these texts that supported a high view of Jesus and the devotion to be given to him.

In an article published in 2000 and a follow-up article published more recently, I have pointed to a wider history-of-religions basis for recognizing that revelatory experiences often are crucial in the appearance of new religious movements and major innovations in religious traditions.¹³⁵ I must admit that some scholars early on expressed scepticism or dissatisfaction about the efficacy of such experiences in generating and shaping earliest Jesus-devotion.¹³⁶ But, for reasons given in the Preface to the 1998 edition of *OGOL* (x-xi), I do not find their objections persuasive.

I am glad to point now to Andrew Chester in particular as an ally of sorts in ascribing an important role to revelatory experiences.¹³⁷ He judges that “it is the early visionary experiences of the resurrected Jesus, as transformed and set alongside God in the heavenly world, that are crucially important for the development of christology.”¹³⁸ As well, Chester proposes that we should take account of references in the Gospels that suggest that Jesus himself had visionary religious experiences, and so “Jesus’ own visionary experiences, and the visionary experience others have of him within his lifetime, will have been centrally important in enabling the early Christians to make the claims they do about him.”¹³⁹

In *OGOL* (115-16), and then more fully in *Lord Jesus Christ* (53-64) I posited Jesus’ own ministry and its impact as one of four crucial “forces and factors” that prompted and shaped the eruption of the Jesus-devotion that is reflected in NT writings. In particular, I argued that Jesus must have been seen during his ministry, at least by some of his followers, as Messiah (or Messiah-designate), and that this was likely also the basis of the charge that led to his crucifixion. Along with a good many other scholars, this seems to me still the best explanation for that crucifixion and for the immediate and prominent place of the Messiah-claim in the beliefs and proclamation of earliest circles of believers. My own particular

¹³⁵ The essay mentioned as forthcoming in the Preface to the 1998 edition of *OGOL* appeared subsequently: “Religious Experience and Religious Innovation in the New Testament”; and now my follow-up essay, “Revelatory Experiences and Religious Innovation in Earliest Christianity.” *ExpTim* 125 (2014): 469-82. For further bibliographical coverage, see Mark Batluck, “Religious Experience in New Testament Research,” *CurBS* 9 (2011): 339-63.

¹³⁶ In addition to Paul Rainbow’s article cited in the Preface to the 1998 edition of *OGOL*, “Jewish Monotheism as the Matrix for New Testament Christology: A Review Article,” *NovT* 33 (1991): 78-91; see also Horbury, *Jewish Messianism*, 119; Fletcher-Louis, “A New Explanation of Christological Origins?” 178-88.

¹³⁷ Chester, *Messiah and Exaltation*, 116-19.

¹³⁸ Chester, *Messiah and Exaltation*, 120.

¹³⁹ Chester, *Messiah and Exaltation*, 120.

emphasis was on the polarizing influence of Jesus upon his contemporaries, generating both followers and opponents, among the latter some who were mortally opposed to him. That is, during his own ministry, Jesus had already become “the issue,” which helps account for why he was also then so central from the outset in the discourse and experiences of early circles of believers in the “post-Easter” period.

But Chester goes farther in specifying the possible impact of Jesus’ own ministry, urging that Jesus himself had visionary experiences such as we have reported in the Gospels (e.g., Mark 9:2-8), and that Jesus’ healings and exorcisms and other manifestations of divine power working through him were also important phenomena contributing to the “post-Easter” developments.¹⁴⁰ He may well be right, and I am happy to cite his proposal as worth further thought. Chester also emphasizes, however,

But the fact that Jesus had been seen as embodying the full divine glory in himself within the heavenly world remained utterly remarkable, and held, I would want to argue, a special significance of its own. It was completely without precedent; hence the implications inevitably had to be worked out.¹⁴¹

That is, whatever Jesus’ own religious experiences, the intensity and level of phenomena (revelatory experiences) ascribed to early circles of Jesus-followers beginning soon after his execution amount to something novel, and generated some novel developments in religious beliefs and practices as well.

On the other hand, in an article largely affirming the results of my 2003 book, *Lord Jesus Christ*, Steven Richard Scott, nevertheless, objected to the proposal that “mystical” (his term) experiences could introduce any substantial modification in a religious tradition. So, agreeing that earliest Jewish believers worshipped the risen Jesus along with God, Scott insists that they must have drawn upon elements in the Jewish tradition that already reflected a similar “binitarian” (his term) view and devotional practice.¹⁴² This he then claims to show in the *Similitudes* of *1 Enoch*. Scott contends that the messianic figure of the *Similitudes* (“the Chosen one”) is to be understood as a second divine figure, the embodied “Name of the Lord of Spirits,” who is distinguishable from, and a unique manifestation of, the Lord of Spirits. Thus, he proposes that “the *Book of Similitudes* is in a sense a paean to the binitarian

¹⁴⁰ I cite here an unduly overlooked study probing Jesus’ own religious experience, James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (London: SCM; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), esp. 11-92. Note also Graham H. Twelftree’s study of an often-ignored topic: *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993).

¹⁴¹ Chester, *Messiah and Exaltation*, 120.

¹⁴² Richard Steven Scott, “The Binitarian Nature of the *Book of Similitudes*,” *JSP* 18 (2008): 55-78, esp. 58.

nature of God: God as the Ancient of Days and God as the Young Hero” (the “Son of Man” of the *Similitudes*).¹⁴³ Scott further claims (without supporting argument or evidence) that John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed the coming of “the Son of Man” (“the Yahweh aspect of God”), and after Jesus’ death his followers had visions of him “as this humanlike figure.”¹⁴⁴ So, essentially, earliest christological claims involved identifying Jesus as this supposedly well-known figure in ancient Jewish thought.

The crucial premise for Scott’s study seems to be that “mystical” (his term) experiences cannot contribute to a significant modification in a religious tradition, but this seems to me to beg the question. For, as indicated earlier in this discussion, I think that the history of religious innovations indicates that Scott’s premise is faulty. To repeat a point I have already made, religious innovations do typically draw upon a “parent” tradition; but these innovations can also involve significant changes, sometimes of such substance that other adherents of the parent tradition may regard them as unacceptable.

So, if we allow that genuine innovations in religious traditions are possible, and approach the references to “the Chosen one” in the *Similitudes* without needing to find a “binitarian” view of God, I suggest that the sort of reading of them proffered by Scott will seem forced and dubious. To be sure, “the Chosen one” is an exalted figure, who has been predestined for his eschatological role, is installed on a glorious throne indicative of divine authorization, and will receive the obeisance of all nations. But it goes far beyond the text to portray this figure as a second divine being alongside God. Moreover, and again the crucial point, there is no indication in *I Enoch* or any other ancient Jewish text that “the Chosen one” received worship, even in the circles of those who produced and used the *Similitudes*.

Still more recently, Christopher Barina Kaiser has offered the rather more novel proposal that for the earliest Jewish believers, the crucial revelatory experiences were specifically visions of *YHWH* “in a glorious anthropic (humanlike) form and that (at some point) they recognized the face and voice as those of their teacher.” Kaiser emphasizes that these disciples “did not see Jesus as *YHWH* (as most often stated),” but instead “they saw *YHWH* (the Lord in embodied form) as Jesus.” So, the earliest Christian confession “was not primarily that ‘Jesus is Lord’—a formula that by itself . . . suggests some sort of elevation from below.” Instead, the earliest confession and proclamation was that “The Lord is Jesus.” Thereafter, however, the sort of duality of God and Jesus developed that we see reflected in

¹⁴³ Scott, “The Binitarian Nature,” 74.

¹⁴⁴ Scott, “The Binitarian Nature,” 75.

the NT.¹⁴⁵ These early “Kyriocentric” visions “morphed into stories about the risen Jesus,” and the more familiar “binitarian traditions” such as we see in various NT texts such as Revelation 5.¹⁴⁶ That is, “the binitarian formulas and visions of the New Testament must have been secondary in the historical sense,” resulting from “the synthesis of Kyriocentric visions with traditions about Jesus’ prayers to his *Abba* (‘Father’) and his teachings about his Father in Heaven.”¹⁴⁷

With due appreciation for Kaiser’s focus on the importance of early revelatory experiences, I do not find his specific theses persuasive.¹⁴⁸ The major problem is that there is no evidence extant that supports his claims. Kaiser urges that the originating confession was then (rather quickly) superseded by the sort of discourse that we see everywhere in the NT, in which Jesus’ high status is described with reference to God, involving what I have termed a novel “dyadic” scheme, leaving no trace of the supposed originating confession.¹⁴⁹ But this effectively seems like a learned version of the “I have an invisible friend” claim, i.e., an assertion that, by definition, is not subject to ordinary tests for corroboration.¹⁵⁰

It seems, moreover, that Kaiser’s main basis for his proposal is his assertion that, otherwise, we have a “dilemma” (to cite the term from the sub-title of his book): “How could deity Christology arise among pious Jews whose tradition consistently opposed the exaltation of any living human being to equality with God?”¹⁵¹ That is, he posits a problem for which supposedly there is no other plausible solution. In principle, of course, one can argue for a given hypothesis that it offers a solution to some problem for which there is otherwise nothing on offer, or that the hypothesis is superior to the others on offer. But here we encounter another problem with Kaiser’s study: Despite the impressive body of research reflected in his book, he does not engage adequately all the major alternative views and show that his conjecture is superior to them. Instead, in a few pages he briefly rejects proposals by N. T. Wright (resurrection-appearances as “leveraged” into “a deity Christology”), Maurice Casey (“polytheistic gentile influence” across several decades), and Margaret Barker (NT confessions drawing upon a supposedly ancient Jewish di-theistic view in which *YHWH* is a

¹⁴⁵ Christopher Barina Kaiser, *Seeing the Lord’s Glory: Kyriocentric Visions and the Dilemma of Early Christology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 9.

¹⁴⁶ Kaiser, *Seeing*, 139 (n. 1.), 8, and 135-36.

¹⁴⁷ Kaiser, *Seeing*, 8.

¹⁴⁸ See also my online review of Kaiser’s book: <https://larryhurtado.wordpress.com/2014/07/21/kyriocentric-visions-and-the-origins-of-jesus-devotion/>.

¹⁴⁹ See my discussion of NT discourse about God and Jesus in *God in New Testament Theology*.

¹⁵⁰ Kaiser has a short section, “How to Test the Conjecture” (10-12), but he never really confronts the main problem, that he has no evidence to corroborate his conjecture.

¹⁵¹ Kaiser, *Seeing*, 1.

junior deity under God Most High).¹⁵² Kaiser's limited critique of these various proposals has some cogency, so far as it goes. But his discussion of available proposals is incomplete.

Readers will understand my puzzlement that my own proposal is not laid out or adequately engaged. Kaiser's endnotes and bibliography show that he consulted a number of my publications, and so I am surprised that his only consideration of my proposal is in an endnote where he simply cites a couple of other reviewers who have demurred at the idea that religious experiences can generate a significant modification in a religious tradition.¹⁵³ As I have indicated in several publications, however, I find such objections indicative of a limited acquaintance with the data of major religious innovations, and so unpersuasive.¹⁵⁴

In any case, I submit that Kaiser has not really shown the absence of a satisfactory alternative proposal, which he claims as the supposed justification for his own. To repeat the point for emphasis, my proposal is that earliest believers had various religious experiences (including, but not confined to, visions) that generated the conviction that the one God had exalted Jesus to heavenly glory and now required Jesus to be given cultic reverence. I submit that the advantage of my proposal over Kaiser's is that at least it rests upon texts in our earliest Christian writings, and does not require the more elaborate scenario that Kaiser projects in which we have to imagine some major shift from an earlier view for which no traces now remain.

Conclusion

As reflected in the length of the foregoing discussion, scholarly interest in the topics addressed in *OGOL* has certainly not abated since the 1998 reprint edition, but has mushroomed instead. It is no small encouragement that *OGOL* initially appeared at the early stage of this growing interest, and, indeed, seems to have had a continuing role in stimulating it. I am particularly pleased that younger scholars as well as more senior ones have been drawn into the ensuing discussion, as evidenced in the number of PhD theses addressing various related issues.

It is also encouraging that over the years since the first appearance of *OGOL* there has developed a groundswell of scholarly judgement that reflects some of the main positions put forth in the book. In particular, the remarkable Jesus-devotion reflected already in Paul's

¹⁵² Kaiser, *Seeing*, 3-8. Granted, his endnotes reflect a good deal of closer engagement with various matters, but, still, his discussion seems inadequate for establishing that his own proposal is necessary or even more plausible.

¹⁵³ Kaiser, *Seeing*, 18 (n. 46). Citing comments from William Horbury's review of *Lord Jesus Christ* in *JTS* 56 (2005), 538 (531-39), and from Scott, "The Binitarian Nature," 58, 60.

¹⁵⁴ I refer again to studies and example cited in my article, "Religious Experience and Religious Innovation in the New Testament."

letters did not first emerge under the influence of a “pagan” environment in Diaspora cities such as Antioch, or in some incremental process largely driven by the influx of converted Gentiles. Instead, this Jesus-devotion erupted initially among Jewish circles of Jesus-followers in Roman Judaea, and astonishingly early and quickly. Congruent with this is the strong likelihood that the christological beliefs and devotional practices that Paul echoed and affirmed were shared between his (largely) Gentile churches and the Jewish churches of Judaea. So, contra Bousset (and those who have subscribed to his schema), the cultic invocation/acclamation of Jesus as “Lord” commenced in these Judaeian circles, and among Aramaic-speaking believers as well as Greek-speaking Jewish Jesus-followers.

Moreover, the high status of Jesus in earliest beliefs and devotional practice seems to represent a novel development in the Jewish religious matrix in which it first appeared. Although (as I contend) early notions of Jesus’ status vis-à-vis God drew upon traditions about various “chief agent” figures in ancient Jewish tradition, nevertheless, the Jesus-devotion reflected already in Paul’s letters comprises a significant further development, a novel “mutation.” This is reflected most dramatically in the novel “dyadic” pattern of devotional practice already presumed in Paul’s letters.

To be sure, this Epilogue also reflects continuing differences and debates among scholars over certain issues. Sometimes, these differences seem to me to arise from some scholars misunderstanding the views of others, sometimes from insufficiently examined prior assumptions, and sometimes, perhaps, from other factors. But none of us sees perfectly, especially when we are trying to understand such a remarkable and distinctive phenomenon as early Jesus-devotion in its ancient historical context, which separated from us by many centuries, and by differences in languages and cultures. In this limited engagement with them, I cannot hope to persuade those who disagree with me. But I do hope that I have indicated with some clarity why I hold my own views and why I find some other views unpersuasive. I hope also that I have represented the views of others, especially those with whom I disagree, with basic accuracy.

I have tried to include all the major issues that were treated influentially in *OGOL*, selecting also what I think are leading exponents of the main positions on these issues. So, because they do not concentrate directly on these issues, there are many other studies of various related topics, including major studies of NT christology, that I have not included

here.¹⁵⁵ What to include is, of course, a judgement call; but I hope that I have not been reckless or guilty of overlooking some major work. In any case, although on some major matters there may now be a developing majority-view, I am confident that scholarly investigation and debate about these and other pertinent issues will continue.

¹⁵⁵ Among them, pride of place should probably go to the massive study by Gordon Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007).