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A Review of
Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ:*
Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity

James W. Voelz

It is a privilege to interact with a scholar I have come to know on a personal level, Larry Hurtado, and to be involved with a review of his fine and masterful work *Lord Jesus Christ*.¹ This work will provide a real cornerstone for current discussion of the topic of Christology among us and far beyond.

As far as my interaction with Larry's tome is concerned—and it is a tome, being some 650 pages of text without bibliography and indices—I will proceed as follows: I will begin with a **Summary** of the main points (in my estimation) of the work, which will be followed by a section of **Explication**, which will attempt to put "meat on the bones," as it were, giving the bases of the assertions detailed in the summary which precedes. Section three will provide **Expansion**, that is, it will focus on six aspects of the book's presentation, aspects which seem to me to be of particular importance, comprising either data or argumentation, aspects which dare not be overlooked. Section four will, then, seek to sketch out **Challenges**, aspects of the book's presentation which, in my opinion, challenge the standard outlook of traditional Christians, in general, and of us Lutherans, in particular. This is, in many ways, the most important section of my presentation; it will, I hope, promote further reflection. Finally, a brief **Conclusion** will seek to bring some closure.

¹ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2003). All page citations within parentheses in this review are to this book.

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I. Summary of *Lord Jesus Christ*

It is difficult to summarize the book *Lord Jesus Christ* (hereafter *LJC*), if only because of its incredible scope. It seeks to deal with the understanding and practices of the earliest Christians relative to Jesus, and it considers evidence both from literary sources—canonical and non-canonical (the Gospels of Matthew and Thomas), extant and hypothesized (Acts and Q)—and from non-literary sources (martyrdom and the copying habits of scribes), from early sources and from those well into the second century (1 Thessalonians and the writings of Valentinus), and it ranges in its interest over the specific, stated topic (namely, the devotion to Jesus in earliest Christianity), but along the way it gives summaries of the story lines of every Gospel and provides a synopsis of the doctrinal systems of the less-than-orthodox fully one century later in time. Indeed, the summary provided of the state of the question relative to the Son of man (290–306) and to the Gospel of Thomas (452–479) is worth the price of admission alone.

What the book contends is astonishing, really. Hurtado writes:

. . . the belief that Jesus is, in some unique and meaningful sense, divine is a feature of Christian devotion from the earliest observable stages. Though the term “god” . . . is applied to Jesus only a few times in New Testament writings . . . , in other very eloquent ways first-century Christians treated Jesus as sharing God’s attributes, and as worthy of the sort of reverence otherwise to be reserved for God. (637)

In other words, Hurtado asserts that Jesus was understood to be, and was worshiped as, divine by Christians from a time virtually immediately following the resurrection. It is important to note that there are three important parts to this affirmation. The first concerns beliefs, the second worship, and the third dating. He writes:

- Concerning belief:

Amid the diversity of earliest Christianity, belief in Jesus’ divine status was amazingly common. There “heresies” of earliest Christianity largely presuppose the view that Jesus is divine. (650)

- Concerning worship—and this can easily be seen as his primary contention:

The devotional practice of earliest Christianity was particularly foundational for doctrinal developments Christians were proclaiming and worshipping Jesus, indeed, living and dying for his sake, well before the doctrinal/creedal developments of the second century and thereafter (649-650)

- Concerning early appearance of those beliefs and worship practices—and this is very revolutionary when compared to the general view of scholarship for centuries:

Moreover, devotion to Jesus as divine erupted suddenly and quickly, not gradually and late, among first-century circles of followers. More specifically, the origins lie in Jewish Christian circles of the earliest years. Only a certain wishful thinking continues to attribute the reverence of Jesus as divine decisively to the influence of pagan religion and the influx of Gentile converts, characterizing it as developing late and incrementally. (650)

We may note that, according to Hurtado, the belief in Jesus' divinity was not only early but also widespread (650).

II. Explication

What is the basis for Hurtado's astonishing assertions? How do we know that the earliest Christians regarded Jesus as divine, that they worshiped him as divine, and that this was an early phenomenon in history? We need to put some meat on the bones of this skeletal theological structure, and we can do so on the basis of Hurtado's extremely careful and detailed reading of canonical and non-canonical texts.

We know the early Christians regarded Jesus as divine, and that in two ways. First, titles and designations were applied to Jesus in the sources, significant numbers of which were reserved for God or Yahweh in the Old Testament, and were given to no other beings (whether human, angelic, or deistic) in those documents. *Kyrios* is the best and most important example. Hurtado states:

Clearly, *Kyrios* characteristically functions in Paul's letters as a christological term. But that makes it all the more important to note that Paul also refers to God as *Kyrios*. The certain passages where Paul does this are citations of the Old Testament, and *Kyrios* is there the translation/substitute for *Yahweh*: Romans 4:8 (Ps. 32:1-1), Romans 9:28-29 (Isa. 28:22; 1:9) Even clearer as evidence that

Kyrios was a part of Paul's own vocabulary for God are the several other citations of the Old Testament where Paul supplies an explicit reference to God as *Kyrios* for which there is no direct equivalent in the Old Testament passages: Romans 11:3 (1 Kings 19:10), Romans 12:19 (Deut. 32:35) So it is remarkable that, in other citations of Old Testament passages which originally have to do with God, Paul applies the passages to Jesus, making him the *Kyrios*: Romans 10:13 (Joel 2:32), 1 Corinthians 1:31 (Jer. 9:23-24), 2 Corinthians 10:17 (Jer. 9:23-24) These applications of Old Testament *Kyrios* passages to Jesus connote and presuppose the conviction that in some profound way he is directly and uniquely associated with God. (111-112)

Related to this is the bestowal of the divine name on Jesus. For example, John 12:13 (citing Psalm 118:26) applies the name of Yahweh to Jesus: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Also worthy of special note is ascription of δόξα ("glory") to Jesus: the declaration that he manifested God's glory (John 17:12; 389), shared glory with the Father (John 17:5; 379), and was glorified by the Father (John 7:31; 380). This ascription of glory to Jesus is especially significant since Yahweh declares specifically in Isaiah 42:8 and 48:11 that he will share his glory with no other.

Second, the functions or descriptions of activity ascribed to God or Yahweh in the Old Testament were applied to Jesus in the New Testament sources. One may think of the two storm scenes in Mark, which Hurtado calls epiphanic, that is, Jesus is "pictured in actions deliberately likened to God's" (285). When the disciples ask after the stilling of the storm in 4:35-44, "Who then is this, that even the wind and sea obey him," this is a rhetorical "hint at the right answer, that Jesus has shown godlike superiority over the elements" (285-286; see Psalm 107:29). When Jesus walks on water in 6:45-52, he is clearly depicted in the same way as is Yahweh in Job 9:8 (286; see also Psalm 77:19). We may note also that the dispensing of the Holy Spirit (John 20:22) is itself the prerogative of Yahweh and of no one else in Jewish tradition (398, note 100). But the best example may well be Philippians 2:10-11: "In order that at the name of Jesus every knee may bow of beings in heaven and on earth and subterranean, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." This appropriates Isaiah 45:23-25, which originally proclaimed a universal submission to Yahweh, and portrays "the eschatological acclamation of Jesus as *Kyrios* 'to the glory of God the Father" (112).

We know the early Christians worshiped Jesus as divine, principally because they called upon his name (whether directly or as “the Lord”), acclaimed him as Lord (from his resurrection), and prayed to the Father in his name. Significant is the calling upon the name of Jesus as one calls upon the name of the Lord/Yahweh (see Acts 9:14, 22:16, 7:59). Hurtado observes:

... in history-of-religions terms, the cultic acclamation/invocation of Jesus is a remarkable innovation. It represents the inclusion of Jesus with God as recipient of public, corporate cultic reverence. That is, we are dealing here with an innovation precisely in the area of religious behavior that was most sensitive in Roman-era Jewish tradition about protecting the uniqueness of the one God. (199)

Even more significant is the use of the phrase “call upon the name of the Lord” (Acts 2:21) to refer to calling upon the name of Jesus, when the Old Testament source for the expression (Joel 2:32 [MT 3:5]) has as its referent Yahweh and him alone:

It is . . . an absolutely . . . stunning move . . . for early Christians to have taken the biblical expression that means the cultic worship of God . . . as referring also to cultic acclamation/invocation of Jesus . . . There can be no doubt that this phrase was adopted to refer to the specific invocation of the name of Jesus, both in corporate worship and in the wider devotional pattern of Christian believers (e.g., baptism, exorcism, healing) . . . (181-182)

This gives clear indication of the understanding which lies behind the acclamation of Jesus as Lord in the Aramaic expression *marana tha* (1 Corinthians 16:22) or in the Greek phrase Κύριος Ἰησοῦς (1 Corinthians 12:3).

We know that all of this occurred early in the appearance of the Christian faith, because evidence occurs in all strata of the earliest sources, and because the evidence seems, in the rhetoric of the sources, virtually always to be presupposed. As far as strata are concerned, the so-called hymn of Philippians 2:6-11 contains material which almost surely antedated Paul, as did the Aramaic phrase *marana tha*, which Paul cites to a Greek-speaking, largely Gentile congregation in Corinth (110), but evidence is also to be found in Paul’s own compositions (for example, 1 Corinthians 12:3), plus in the so-called Q material shared by Matthew and Luke, also in the book of Acts (2:21), in the Gospels (with the depiction of

Jesus and their address to Jesus as Lord throughout), and, certainly, in the book of Revelation.

As far as New Testament writers presupposing the evidence are concerned, Hurtado states:

Interestingly, nowhere in Paul's letters does he give us anything like a systematic or comprehensive presentation of his christological beliefs. In fact, other than the passages where he found it necessary to explicate the implications of these beliefs for the admission of Gentiles (e.g., Galatians 3:10-4:7), or where he sought to promote behavior shaped by beliefs about Christ, Paul characteristically seems to *presuppose* acquaintance with the christological convictions that he affirms, and most often he expresses them in brief, somewhat formulaic terms. (98)

The hymn of Philippians 2 is a perfect example of this facile presupposition. Although Hurtado focuses on Paul here, it applies throughout the New Testament as well.

We may ask, finally, what the cause of all of this was: the understanding, the worship practices, and the time frame. The provocative answer put forward in *LJC* is that it was due both to powerful post-resurrection religious experiences, and to the pondering of scriptural texts. Allow me to quote Hurtado in full:

According to the earliest traditions, very soon in the "post-Easter" setting Jewish followers of Jesus had experiences of "seeing" Jesus as uniquely resurrected to eschatological existence and heavenly glory. Of course, these Jewish believers brought to their experiences an acquaintance with their scriptures, and a confidence that these sacred writings contained God's redemptive purposes and could help them make full sense of their religious experiences. In a dynamic interaction between devout, prayerful searching for, and pondering over, scriptural texts and continuing powerful religious experiences, they came to understand certain biblical passages in an innovative way as prefiguring and portraying God's vindication of Jesus. These "charismatic" insights into biblical passages in turn shaped their understanding of their experiences, reinforced their confidence in the validity of these experiences, stimulated their openness to further experiences of Jesus' exalted status, and helped shape these subsequent experiences. (184-185)

This answer is provocative especially to us Lutherans, because of the anti-*Schwaermer* orientation of our historic position, a point to which I will return (see IV below).

III. Expansion

In this section, I will seek to focus on six points in *LJC*, comprising both arguments and data, that, in my mind, are key and dare not be overlooked. The first three are theological in focus, the next three hermeneutical.

Hurtado argues – and rightly so – that the early Christians saw Jesus as divine, because the designations and descriptions previously applied to God, or Yahweh, were applied by them to him. From this it is apparent that the understanding of the early Christians was firmly rooted in the Old Testament. This is, in fact, a key point in the presentation of *LJC*. All of the New Testament documents and their thinking are properly seen as closely connected to the Old Testament, not only in finding Jesus there – the early Christians found him there in at least three different places: in Old Testament texts seen as messianic predictions, in Old Testament types which foreshadowed Jesus, and in Old Testament theophanies, seen as preincarnational manifestations of the Son of God (566) – but also in affirming both the God and the *Weltanschauung* of that testament. For them, the God of the Old Testament was the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the world which he created was good and worth the trouble to redeem. Significantly, second-century-heretical or non-proto-orthodox documents cut their version of Christianity loose from that connection, seeing the god of the Old Testament as quite other than the God and Father of Jesus Christ, a vain and stupid creator deity, and the world as a tragic, “vain, and pointless realm to be treated with disdain” (559). On such affirmations and outlooks one’s understanding of salvation rests, as either the overcoming of evil which despoils the good creation for the sake of the heirs of the divine promise, or as a retrieving by an alien intruder into a worthless realm of fellow divine beings “whom he came to reawaken to their true identity and destiny” (566). Only in the former scheme does – can – the resurrection make any sense at all.

It seems to be true that only as a Christian community remains rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures and the older testament will its theology have a chance to avoid the ravages of Platonism and/or the life-denying impetus of extreme asceticism.

Relatedly, for Hurtado, the early Christians' Old Testament orientation brought monotheistic considerations to the fore, and that in two ways. First, in the Old Testament, no one possesses the glory of God, the name of God, and is worshipped as God except God, that is, Yahweh (see II above). Thus, for Jesus to receive such descriptions and worship is to understand him as divine. Second and concomitantly, Jesus cannot be understood as divine in terms of being a separate or second deity, because there is no other god; di-theism is not allowed, including versions involving apotheosis (that is, the making into a god a human being, a thought common in Greek and pagan contexts). Thus, Jesus must be understood in relation to the Father and in unity with him. Hurtado puts it in an intriguing way in his investigation of the Gospel of John:

Jesus' significance is always expressed with reference to God "the Father" in GJohn. At the same time, GJohn insists that proper obedience to, and reverence of, God now requires that Jesus be explicitly included with God as recipient of faith and devotion. This means that "the Father" is now defined with reference to Jesus, through whom in a uniquely full and authoritative measure the Father is revealed. (390)

In other words, any duality can and must be found in God himself.

Given these points, a so-called binitarian view (to use Hurtado's favorite phrase) emerged. In this view, Jesus shares full divinity with the Father, including his name and his glory, but his nature and status is still to be understood in relationship to the Father, (for example, finally every tongue will confess that "Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"). Heresies, especially those of the second century AD, released the tension caused by such rigorous monotheism, normally resulting in a polytheistic understanding.

The difficulties, if I may use the phrase, of monotheism remind us that our theological formulations are always and will ever remain, paradoxical, with antinomous understandings of God and his nature, the nature and work of Jesus, and the like. Contemporary physics only supports this antinomous view.

Also relatedly, the previous critical orthodoxy position of Wilhelm Bousset, in his book *Kyrios Christos*, concerning the rise of Christianity is unsustainable. Hurtado has demonstrated this convincingly. It is not right to understand the rise of (proto) orthodox Christianity in terms of a development from simple to complex, from Jewish to Gentile, and from

low to high Christology, with pagan thought providing much of the impetus for later beliefs and formulations (via Paul). An overarching consideration here is whether or not the Greek words of the early documents are invested with Greek and pagan meaning or whether their semantic content is essentially Hebrew (124). Responding to Bousset's work is, in many ways, the *raison d'être* of *LJC* and could be the first point of consideration, but I am choosing to subordinate it to the discussion of the place of the Old Testament and Jewish thought in early Christian belief and piety.

The book engages in an extremely careful reading of documents and is a model of doing so. One may cite Hurtado's observation that in letters in which Paul argues concerning inclusion of the Gentiles (for example, Romans and Galatians), there is no apparent dissension on the matter of high Christology (206), allowing the implication to be drawn that all sides "shared in revering Jesus as Messiah and Lord . . ." (206), or that the phrase "Jesus Christ" or "Christ Jesus" would have functioned to distinguish the Lord from his namesake, Moses's successor, Joshua Ἰησοῦς (99), and that the varying positions of the two terms indicate that "for Paul and others . . . Christos had not simply been reduced to a name . . . but instead retained something of its function as a title" (99-100). Perhaps best, however, is his observation pertaining to Paul's conversion:

Prior to his conversion experience, Paul saw Jewish Christian beliefs and practices as so improper and dangerous as to call for urgent and forceful action to destroy the young religious movement. He said his own conversion specifically involved a "revelation" of Jesus' significance that produced a radical change in him, from opponent to devotee (e.g., Gal. 1:12; 2 Cor. 5:16). So far as we can tell, immediately after this experience he espoused the remarkable "high" Christological claims and "binitarian" devotional practice The only things he refers to as novel and unique about his own Christian religious stance are the convictions that he is personally called to obtain "the obedience of the Gentiles" to the gospel, and that Gentiles are not to be required to take up Jewish observance of Torah as a condition of their salvation and their full acceptance by Jewish believers.

I submit that the most reasonable inference from these things is this: what drew the intense ire of the pre-conversion Paul against Jewish Christians was not (as has often been alleged . . .) their supposed laxity of Torah observance or an unseemly association with Gentiles;

instead it was the Christ-devotion that is basically reflected in what he embraced and advocated after his conversion. The religious zeal of Saul the Pharisee against Jewish Christians is best accounted for as provoked by what he regarded as their undue reverence of Jesus. (175–176)

This careful analysis demonstrates the propriety and necessity of reading documents on what I call in my hermeneutics book reading on Level 3: signifiers and conceptual signifieds are read, not for what they tell you about the topic to which they are related, but for what they tell about the beliefs, understandings, assumptions, and background of those who wrote and/or received them.² I might note that we do this constantly in isagogics, when we conclude, for example, that the readers of Matthew's Gospel were unlikely to be pagan Gentiles with no acquaintance with the Jewish faith, because Matthew quotes the Old Testament scriptures frequently, also speaking of their fulfillment. Examples abound in *LJC*; here are some of the most obvious (in addition to the three just mentioned):

- writing Jesus' name and titles as *nomina sacra* in manuscripts (that is, a stylised abbreviation normally reserved for names and titles of God himself) gives the implication that the copyists understood Jesus to be divine (625–627),
- preserving the Son of man idiolect of Jesus in the Gospels gives the implication that the church had such a profound reverence for Jesus that they preserved this odd linguistic usage (304–306), and,
- perhaps most important—and what is argued throughout the book and has been mentioned above—the fact that Paul and other authors advance no argument for their astonishing positions regarding the person and nature of Jesus implies that they presupposed that the audience was acquainted with their convictions (98).

We should not be afraid to engage in this kind of reading on Level 3. Indeed, it is helpful when one considers the issue of the sacraments and the New Testament text. Applying the last point mentioned, (that is, advancing no argument implies a presupposition of acquaintance with a given position), we may note that Titus 3:5–6 presupposes an acquaintance

² James W. Voelz, *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World*, Second Edition (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 165–167.

on the part of the recipients with a doctrine of baptism which entails rebirth and the action of God, not one which sees it simply as a dedicatory or symbolic rite: "By his great mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit" No argument is advanced. The same may be said of the real presence of Jesus in the Lord's Supper. In 1 Corinthians 10:16, Paul does not teach; rather, he asks—and from the Greek we know that he expects the answer "Yes,": "The cup of blessing which we bless, it is the common sharing of the blood of Christ, isn't it? The bread which we break, it is the common sharing of the body of Christ, isn't it?" What he says is assumed to be the common understanding.

Relatedly, the book engages in a literary reading of the texts. They are treated as literary compositions, and thus we are presented with a New Testament book's focus and argumentation, and especially with a Gospel, with its story line, characters, setting, and so on. This enables the trenchant observation by Hurtado, namely, that genre actually facilitates a given view of Jesus, with the revelation dialogues (books such as the Gospel of Thomas or the Gospel of Truth) which are different in their view from the canonical Gospels:

It is arguable that the development of revelation dialogues as a kind of early Jesus book specifically represents efforts to counter and supersede the well-known narrative Gospels and their portrayal of Jesus. As a series of statements and mini discourses of Jesus in reply to queries from disciples, the revelation dialogue genre facilitated very different portrayals, which dispense with major features of the narrative Jesus books, such as Jesus' historical location in Roman Judea/Palestine, miracle stories, and the presentation of his significance in relation to Israel and the Old Testament. The genre readily facilitated the delivery of, and focus on, ideas attributed to Jesus. . . . In these texts Jesus' role is essentially that of revealer and exemplar (481–482)

A literary approach enables narratives especially to be read on Level 2: the deeds depicted by the signifiers are themselves read for significance.³ I have already cited three examples: the fact that Jesus walked upon the waters (Mark 6) shows that he is God, because in the Old Testament Yahweh is described as treading upon the waves (Job 9); the fact that Jesus can and does dispense the Spirit—an act unparalleled in Jewish traditions

³ Voelz, *What Does This Mean?*, 156–165.

for redeemer figures—signifies that he is divine (398); and the fact that Jesus will receive universal submission (and be confessed as Lord) at the end of days (Philippians 2:9–11) signifies that he shares divinity with Yahweh, of whom those characteristics are predicated. Further examples abound in *LJC*, but here are three more: the fact that Jesus is portrayed as existing before the creation of the world in the Gospel of John signifies his “radical preeminence” (364); the fact that the Lamb receives heavenly worship along with God in the book of Revelation signifies that he is divine (592–593); and the fact that Jesus is conceived without a human father signifies that he trumps all biblical precedents and is “the most momentous of all” (328–329).

We, too, should not be afraid to engage in this kind of literary reading, especially as we engage in the interpretation of narrative. To do so is not to engage in speculation, as some have styled it; it is to engage in the interpretation of signifiers which reside on Level 2—signifiers which simply are non-verbal.

Relatedly, again, but worth a separate point, is the matter of narrative as genre and the handling of it in *LJC*. This refers not so much to interpretation on Level 2 but to the general understanding of the nature and function of narrative and of its hermeneutical importance. A narrative world is assumed for virtually all documents of the early Christians, and not only for the so-called Jesus Books of the New Testament canon (262–263). This includes the letters of Paul (247, note 71), so-called Q (246–247), and also the revelation dialogues (483), which are non-canonical. There is always an “enabling narrative” in the background, even for the canonical Gospels (267–269)—a nice structuralist touch! Indeed, it is noted that, in the specifics of the case, the narrative inherent in the Gospel of John is congruent with that of the synoptic Gospels (356–357), as is the narrative latent in Paul. From this Hurtado draws the highly important implication (a Level 3 reading!) that an *a priori* oral narrative was alive and well among the earliest Christians (357, 272), a narrative widely known. In Hurtado’s view, Mark is groundbreaking in putting the narrative into writing for the first time in history (272)—a view I would dispute but is certainly worthy of further discussion.

Finally, I will end this section by relating *LJC* to two gigantic works of late twentieth-century New Testament study, Hans Frei’s *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* and E.P. Sanders’s *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. Key theses of both are confirmed by *LJC*, in my view. On the one hand, Frei pleads for a literary reading of the New Testament, especially the Gospels,

and *LJC* provides exactly such.⁴ It reads the New Testament literarily, and, in so doing is able to apprehend its message. Ironically, in so doing – and not by seeking to reconstruct prior versions or sources (what Frei laments about traditional critical Gospel studies) – it is able also to reconstruct the state of earliest Christianity by then reading on Level 3. Sanders, on the other hand, believes that Paul's conversion experience led him to a new view of Jesus and to a radical reformation of his prior beliefs. That new view led him to see Jesus as the solution to man's plight, however that plight might be conceived.⁵ That view also led him to reject the law as the means of getting right with God, because it was not a solution that consisted of Jesus.⁶ *LJC* confirms this position. Paul's revelational experience with the risen Christ caused him to reconfigure his background (89). Now, Jesus, not the Torah, was seen as the means of salvation (89), and the Gentiles were understood to be full heirs with the Jews (96). None of this was simply a deduction from a reading of the Old Testament scriptures. Hurtado's *LJC*, then, is an impetus for all of us to reread these two monumental minds, Frei and Sanders, and to reconsider the basic ideas they put forward and develop.

IV. Challenges

Finally, it seems to me that Hurtado in *LJC* presents all confessional Lutheran Christians everywhere with several important challenges. I will enumerate five. The final two challenges relate to points that I have not raised before in this presentation.

First, *LJC* demonstrates, I am convinced, that experience is an important factor in religious understanding, that it is difficult to take the position that all experiential factors are *Schwaermerei* (see II above). Lutherans are generally suspicious of experiential factors, but they need not be, for Luther himself underwent a radical reformation both of his understanding of his status before God and of the meaning of important texts of the Scriptures, largely as a result of his inability to assuage his guilty conscience (he needed a solution to this existential plight, a solution many others did not need). How are we, as Lutherans, to understand the role of

⁴ Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 10–11, 280–281.

⁵ E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 442–447.

⁶ Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 475, 482.

experience as we seek to understand God, his work, and our Christian life? Have we, in general, been too suspicious of its role?

Second, the approach taken in *LJC* understands the books of the New Testament as the visible tip of a much larger iceberg, as it were. In Hurtado's view, a prior and large-scale Christian understanding of Christ, including his history, person, nature and work, is assumed by the written texts. Put in his own terms, the narratives of the New Testament assume a larger enabling narrative and a larger contextual understanding, all of it mainly oral. What does this mean for people who assert a position of *sola scriptura* and of *scriptura scripturam interpretatur*? How does the larger prior understanding relate to the *regula fidei* of early Christian communities? How does it relate to the general issue of Scripture and tradition? What is, in fact, our final authority in matters of faith and life?

Third, can we comfortably affirm, along with the full divinity of Jesus, the subordinationist emphasis (394) found both in the Gospel of John and throughout the New Testament (a result of monotheistic hegemony derived from a proper Christian embracing of the Old Testament)? In the end, all will be "to the glory of God the Father." How does this impact classical Christology? Need we pay more attention to Cappadocian understandings? Does this suggest that the addition of the *filioque* to the Nicene Creed was a mistaken move by the western church? In an important way, this issue impacts our understanding of the concept of the image of God.

Fourth, *LJC* argues that the meaning of the death of Jesus for our sins is contextual (131): in the tradition of Jerusalem Christians, the redemptive interpretation was a christological apologia for how Jesus' death formed part of God's purpose; for Paul it gave a basis for the salvation of the Gentiles apart from the law (for the so-called Q source it was chiefly an example [242]). Is there a single meaning of Jesus' redemptive death and resurrection, or are there only meanings thereof? Relatedly, what does it mean that theological formulations are rhetorical?

Fifth, if it is true that, for the earliest Christians, both cross and resurrection were always understood as a united redemptive event (188), and, indeed, that the resurrection was key in (re)forming the disciples' understanding of the meaning of Jesus' death, what does this mean for the centrality of the cross and, in Lutheran circles, for the centrality of a theology of the cross? What is meant by such a theology? We may note that, while Paul begins 1 Corinthians with an emphasis on the crucified

Christ (2:2) and the preaching of the cross (1:23) when he explicates the gospel in chapter 15, the resurrection is the point of emphasis, not Christ and him crucified.

V. Conclusion

The heart of New Testament theology is Christology. Christians understand Jesus as, and worship Jesus as, true God and true man, and there is every reason to believe that they did so from earliest times, certainly very soon after Easter. Larry Hurtado lays out the evidence for this in abundant detail in *LJC*. But this is not simply a fact to be noticed or observed, a fact which is something of interest to our minds. It is a truth, a truth which impacts our very lives. The confession of the early Christians of a high Christology, and the putting of that Christology into practice via their strong worship practices, brings strong affirmation to the validity of the Old Testament, to the goodness of the created order (including our human bodies), and to the surety of our salvation in the one in whom and for whom all things have been made. We thank Larry for this outstanding monograph and look forward to helpful contributions from him in the coming years.