

# A NEW EXPLANATION OF CHRISTOLOGICAL ORIGINS

A REVIEW OF THE WORK OF LARRY W. HURTADO

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## Summary

*Prof. Larry Hurtado's three-volume work on christological origins has advanced understanding in several key respects and his account is simpler than that of his predecessors. However, it remains an evolutionary, multi-stage model and it is historically problematic. He overstates the case for Jewish opposition to Christ-devotion, minimises the ethical particularity of earliest Christianity and the model suffers some serious internal tensions. His claim that religious experiences gave the decisive impetus to Christ-devotion does not reckon adequately with the implications of social-science study, is not supported by the primary texts and conflicts with the important evidence that visionary and mystical practices were frowned upon in some early Christian quarters. Hurtado presents his work as theologically disinterested. However, he endorses Lessing's radical separation of theology and history and this theologically loaded judgement seems to be reflected in the non-incarnational character of the Christology Hurtado describes.*

## 1. Introduction

Over the last thirty years Prof. Larry Hurtado has worked tirelessly on the nature and origins of early Christology. In the last few years that work has culminated in the publication of two lengthy monographs that develop the thesis first presented in a book published in 1988.<sup>1</sup> Each of

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<sup>1</sup> L. W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); idem, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus*

Hurtado's three book-length contributions to this subject has been reviewed by others.<sup>2</sup> My purpose here is to offer an appreciative critique of the cumulative case Hurtado has now made for his understanding of christological origins. As I shall indicate, there are some christological issues upon which Hurtado has not yet commented in detail. However, the broad outlines of a comprehensive historical reconstruction are now clear. Although Hurtado has now written a good deal about the development of Christology in the second-century, 'sub-apostolic' period,<sup>3</sup> I am concerned here with his treatment of the earliest decades and the New Testament material.

## 2. Hurtado's Reconstruction of Christological Origins

The principal proposals of Hurtado's account of christological origins are straightforward. Most discussion of early Christology in the last century focuses on ideas, texts and titles. Hurtado challenges us to recognise the centrality of cultic *behaviour* within and behind the texts: the earliest Christians accorded the risen Christ a complex pattern of public and corporate devotion that means they necessarily considered him divine. Jews resolutely resisted worship of anything other than the one God whilst for Greeks and Romans divinity was acknowledged through the bestowal of cultic honours to the gods' statues. Hurtado argues at length that Wilhelm Bousset and others have been wrong to explain the early Christian devotion to Christ as the product of a hellenisation of a pure Jewish faith; whether through the influx into the Christian movement of theologically 'hellenised' Jews or the movement of earliest Christianity out into a non-Jewish, Gentile world and philosophical milieu. The evidence, Hurtado argues, particularly from the Pauline material, indicates that all the contours of the Christ-cult attested in the New Testament were established in the earliest years of the 'Palestinian' Christian community that was led by Jesus'

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in *Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); idem, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> See esp. P. Rainbow, 'Jewish Monotheism as the Matrix for New Testament Christology: A Review Article', *NovT* 33 (1991): 78-91; M. Casey, 'Lord Jesus Christ: A Response to Professor Hurtado', *JSNT* 27 (2004): 83-96; W. Horbury, 'Review: *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* by Larry W. Hurtado', *JTS* 56 (2005): 531-39.

<sup>3</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 427-648.

unquestionably Jewish followers. Christ-devotion is, therefore, a fundamentally Jewish phenomenon. And the theology that it implies is best described as a new form of *binitarian* monotheism in which Jesus is not just included within the life of the one God, but also *identified with*, especially through the title *kyrios* and christological interpretations of Old Testament texts, the God who claimed Israel's unadulterated devotion. Furthermore, this pattern of Christ-devotion is everywhere in the New Testament and in other early Christian texts: there is no evidence that it was opposed by some strands or parties within the early Christian movement.

In the last thirty years much has been made of the way in which Jewish mediatorial figures (angels, exalted humans and the likes of Wisdom and the Logos) in pre-Christian Judaism anticipated the characterisation and treatment of Jesus. Hurtado sees in this material a partial explanation for the binitarian shape of earliest Christ-devotion: much that is said in Jewish sources about Jewish 'principal agents' is ascribed to Christ by his earliest followers. But there is a 'binitarian' *twoness* to early Christian 'monotheism' that represents a radical 'mutation' of monotheism for which there is no precedent in the pre-Christian Jewish world. Neither is there any precedent, Hurtado claims, for the *worship* of Jesus alongside, or as an expression of, worship of the one Jewish God. There is no evidence in pre-Christian Judaism for the worship of angels, divine mediators, exalted humans or other divine attributes. And Jesus is not worshipped as a deified hero, on analogy to the apotheosis of heroes and emperors in the Graeco-Roman world. So Christ-devotion is 'without real analogy' in its historical context. Neither was there a softening, or hellenisation, of monotheism in the pre-Christian Jewish world which paved the way for the unique and distinctive veneration of Jesus.

With these judgements about the character of earliest Christology and the shape of pre-Christian monotheism firmly in place, it is understandable that Hurtado resists the view, for which W. Bousset argued, that the treatment of Jesus attested in the New Testament must be seen as the product of a *development* in theological thinking, resulting from changes in the social, cultural, ethnic and geographical character of the earliest churches.<sup>4</sup> The evidence does not allow time

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<sup>4</sup> W. Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: Geschichte des Christusglaubens von den Anfängen des Christentums bis Irenaeus* (FRLANT 4; Göttingen, 1913); ET (from the 4th

for such a development. Christ-devotion and its binitarian monotheism are all there at the beginning, suggesting not evolutionary development, but a ‘big bang’ effect in christological consciousness. This is explained, Hurtado claims, by the most innovative part of his reconstruction, along these lines:

Within the early Christian circles of the first few years (perhaps even the first few weeks), individuals had powerful revelatory experiences that they understood to be encounters with the glorified Jesus. Some also had experiences that they took to be visions of the exalted Jesus in heavenly glory, being revered in cultic actions by the transcendent beings traditionally identified as charged with fulfilling the heavenly liturgy (e.g., angels, the “living creatures,” and so on). Some received prophetic inspirations to announce the exaltation of Jesus to God’s right hand and to summon the elect in God’s name to register in cultic actions their acceptance of God’s will that Jesus be revered. Through such revelatory experiences, Christological convictions and corresponding cultic practices were born that amounted to a unique “mutation” in what was acceptable Jewish monotheistic devotional practice of the Greco-Roman period.<sup>5</sup>

Powerful visionary experiences of the exalted Jesus then stimulated a creative ‘charismatic’ exegesis of the Old Testament and the development of christological thinking that is now reflected in later parts of the New Testament and in subsequent Christian literature. And this is a process that is reflected in recorded accounts of visionary experiences that describe the place of Jesus in the heavenly realm (e.g. Acts 7:54-56, 2 Cor. 12:1-4 and Rev. 4-5). Here Hurtado joins the voices of a number of scholars who have recently insisted that historians should pay more attention to the role of visions, dreams and other forms of religious experience than New Testament scholarship has traditionally allowed.<sup>6</sup> Hurtado thinks a number of factors led to Christ-devotion, but it is certain religious experiences that were decisive.

### ***2.1 The Strengths of Hurtado’s Contribution***

Hurtado is one of a number of scholars whom M. Hengel has identified as contributors to a new ‘history of religions school’ that is urging us to

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German ed.) *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970).

<sup>5</sup> Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 203.

<sup>6</sup> See the review in Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 64-74 and now A. Chester, *Messiah and Exaltation: Jewish Messianic and Visionary Traditions and New Testament Christology* (WUNT 207; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2007): 80-121 for a similar appreciation of visionary experiences as a factor in the development of Christology.

rethink radically our understanding of christological origins.<sup>7</sup> In many instances his critical judgements are representative of a more widely held emerging view.

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. No doubt there will be those who object to some of Hurtado's language. For some 'binitarianism' will sound like an attempt to smuggle in a fully 'Trinitarian' Christian orthodoxy. Others, by contrast, may object that the word is a theological barbarism that fails to acknowledge the genuinely Trinitarian shape of New Testament faith. But Hurtado is right to identify what others have called a *Christological monotheism* in the New Testament: a monotheism that now includes the 'one Lord, Jesus Christ' as a personal reality distinct from the 'one God, the Father' (1 Cor. 8:4-6). The Pauline corpus provides solid evidence that the followers of Jesus whom Paul encountered in Judaea believed the kind of things about Jesus that Paul himself came to after his conversion. It really is hard to find evidence in the New Testament that there were any Jewish Christians who objected to the level of Christ-devotion evident in Pauline material. The simplest interpretation of the ubiquity of a redefined monotheistic faith is that the pattern was indeed remarkably early.<sup>8</sup> Even if there are times when a high view of Jesus is presented in ways that would be particularly intelligible to a non-Jewish audience, the conceptual raw materials that have first generated this portrayal are Jewish. In an important 1983 article R. Bauckham drew attention to the significance of the worship of Jesus and the contrasting rejection of worship offered to angels in Jewish apocalyptic

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<sup>7</sup> See the back cover of the American edition of Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*; J. E. Fossum, 'The New *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*: The Quest for Jewish Christology', *SBLSP* (1991): 638-46 and Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 11-18.

<sup>8</sup> Maurice Casey offers a counterintuitive and unlikely explanation of an unquestioned high Christology in the Pauline churches (Casey, 'Response to Professor Hurtado', 91): 'Jewish Christians for whom Jesus was the central figure might, however, have been entirely happy for Gentile Christians to have more extended beliefs about Jesus than they themselves needed, and to have beliefs in such matters as the forgiveness of sins through Jesus' death incorporated into Gentile Christian services, even though Jewish Christians themselves may have believed they were forgiven when they repented'. This kind of happy tolerance amongst Christians of radically different theologies and practices may be a feature of some modern western religious life, but it is hardly imaginable for the emergent minority who followed Jesus of Nazareth amongst first-century Jews and Gentiles.

tradition.<sup>9</sup> Some continue to think that a pre-Christian Jewish willingness to venerate angels played a role in the development of earliest Christology.<sup>10</sup> But probably most specialists in the field remain unconvinced of this possibility, not just because of the paucity and contested status of textual evidence for any Jewish angel veneration, but because, as Hurtado rightly stresses, the theological contours of Jewish monotheism place severe constraint on such a practice. In any case, no one is now suggesting that a Christian adaptation of a Jewish worship of angels provides the complete and satisfactory explanation for the shape of early Christology that Hurtado rightly insists we need.

Hurtado has persuasively demonstrated a complex pattern of devotion to Jesus that includes not just singing songs to and about Jesus, but also prayer to him, invocation and confession of him, baptism and prophecy in his name and a cultic meal centred on his death.<sup>11</sup> Even if not all parts of his analysis of this pattern are persuasive, gone now are the days when discussion of early Christology could proceed purely through an examination of theological ideas and texts.<sup>12</sup> And, in his discussion of early Christian texts Hurtado offers many new and insightful proposals for interpretation and historical explanation.

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<sup>9</sup> R. Bauckham, 'The Worship of Jesus in Apocalyptic Christianity', *NTS* 27 (1983): 322-41.

<sup>10</sup> W. Horbury, *Messianism among Jews and Christians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2003): 119-27; L. T. Stuckenbruck, "'Angels" and "God": Exploring the Limits of Early Jewish Monotheism' in *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism*, ed. L. T. Stuckenbruck and W. North (London: T&T Clark, 2004): 45-70.

<sup>11</sup> See Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 100-114; L. Hurtado, '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*, ed. C. C. Newman, J. R. Davila and G. S. Lewis (*JSJSup* 63; Leiden: Brill, 1999): 187-213; Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 134-53.

<sup>12</sup> It is true that some aspects of biblical and antique cultic conventions are not applied to Jesus in earliest Christianity. But this is no reason to minimise or disregard the significance of the pattern of Christ-devotion (*pace* P. M. Casey, 'Monotheism, Worship and Christological Development in the Pauline Churches', in *Jewish Roots*, 214-33, esp. 225. There is a transformation and partial reduction of the role of biblical cultic categories in earliest Christianity that has nothing to do with whether or not Jesus Christ was himself worshipped. Certainly, there are subtle and important differences between the language used for the Lord Jesus and God the Father (see Casey, 'Response to Professor Hurtado', 90), but these articulate a complex 'binitarian' grammar, not its absence.

In other studies I have begun to set out a different understanding of the shape of Jewish monotheism to the one Hurtado adopts.<sup>13</sup> In the rest of this review I confine myself to critical comments on his analysis of the early Christian evidence and his description of the shape of early Christology.

### 3. A Non-evolutionary Model for an ‘Orthodox’ Early Christology?

Several reviewers, including M. Casey, have concluded that if Hurtado is right in his principal arguments, classic orthodox Christian views about Jesus are vindicated.<sup>14</sup> Hurtado writes of his own Christian faith.<sup>15</sup> However, he does not offer his study in the hope that it will span the ugly wide ditch between the Jesus of history and the Christ of Faith that has preoccupied so much New Testament scholarship since Gotthold Lessing (1729-81). Indeed, he sets forth his *magnum opus* as a work that is *not* theologically motivated: he sets out to present a purely historical case and in words that echo the famous dictum of Lessing that ‘the accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason’, he does ‘not believe that the religious validity of a Christian Christological conviction necessarily rests upon the time or manner of its appearance in history’.<sup>16</sup>

Casey, however, criticises Hurtado’s work as a piece of orthodox Christian apology that uses ‘evangelical rather than analytical categories’.<sup>17</sup> This charge reflects two interrelated problems that mean

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<sup>13</sup> See, in particular, C. H. T. Fletcher-Louis, ‘The Worship of Divine Humanity and the Worship of Jesus’ in *Jewish Roots*, 112-28; idem, ‘All the Glory of Adam: Liturgical Anthropology in the Dead Sea Scrolls’ (STDJ 42; Leiden: Brill, 2002); idem, ‘The Temple Cosmology of P and Theological Anthropology in the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira’ in *Of Scribes and Sages: Early Jewish Interpretation and Transmission of Scripture*, vol. 1, ed. C. A. Evans (LSTS 50; SSEJC 9; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2004): 69-113; idem, ‘The Worship of the Jewish High Priest by Alexander the Great’ in *Early Christian and Jewish Monotheism*, ed. L. T. Stuckenbruck and W. S. North (JSNTS 63; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004): 71-102; idem, ‘God’s Image, His Cosmic Temple and the High Priest: Towards an Historical and Theological Account of the Incarnation’ in *Heaven on Earth: The Temple in Biblical Theology*, ed. T. D. Alexander and S. Gathercole (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004): 81-99.

<sup>14</sup> Casey, ‘Response to Professor Hurtado’, 95.

<sup>15</sup> Esp. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 9.

<sup>16</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 9.

<sup>17</sup> Casey, ‘Response to Professor Hurtado’, 88-89.

Hurtado's work needs more careful critical consideration than it has so far received: on the one hand, most reviews of his work have been superficial and have missed its real problems, and on the other, there are times when his work lacks conceptual clarity.<sup>18</sup> My criticisms take his work on its own terms—as a synthetic set of *historical* arguments.

We start with a consideration of Hurtado's proclamation that what he offers is a more economical explanation of christological origins than alternatives: christological development was an 'exciting, dynamic' 'volcanic eruption' of new cultic behaviour,<sup>19</sup> not an *evolutionary* development, in which there is 'a divine Jesus emerging only at a secondary stage of the early Christian movement'.<sup>20</sup> This is good news for the historian committed to the value of Occam's razor (and perhaps to the Christian believer too).

However, on closer examination Hurtado's reconstruction is not as straightforward as it might at first seem. To be sure, Hurtado describes a simpler and shorter process of historical development than all previous explanations of New Testament Christology in the modern period. However, his model appears to contain at least three distinct stages and his own insistence that we pay careful attention to the role of Jewish mediatorial figures in the context of christological development would imply a more careful presentation of his model than he himself offers.

Stage 1: The historical life of Jesus. Hurtado speaks of the life of Jesus as a significant stimulus towards later Christ-devotion.<sup>21</sup> However, it is as well to recognise that, in reality and in his reconstruction, it is an historical 'stage' in the development of Christology. He nowhere denies the impression of the New Testament that there was considerable continuity in the membership of the movement surrounding Jesus in his life and the community formed after his death. He thinks that the earliest *Jewish* disciples could neither

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<sup>18</sup> Bruce Chilton encouraged Hurtado to 'hone his categories' in his review of Hurtado's first book (B. Chilton, 'Review: Hurtado's "One God, One Lord"', *Jewish Quarterly Review* 81 (1991): 447-48, esp. 448. To date the most incisive review is that by William Horbury (Horbury, 'Review: *Lord Jesus Christ*') and I expand here on several of Horbury's observations.

<sup>19</sup> Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 25.

<sup>20</sup> Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 32, cf. pp. 14-20, 25, 37 and Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 118.

<sup>21</sup> Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 117; Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 53-64; Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 134-51.



have viewed Jesus as a divine being nor could they have worshipped him during his earthly life, but their following of him expressed a strong devotion that laid the foundations for a later full-blown worship. Jesus probably intended his disciples to focus on him not just his message. However, it is possible, says Hurtado, to understand and to write an historical account of the genesis of Christology in the New Testament period whilst remaining relatively agnostic on the precise character of Jesus' aims and objectives.<sup>22</sup>

Stage 2: The earliest Aramaic-speaking Christians. After the event that the disciples came to call the resurrection, and as a result of powerful religious experiences a binitarian monotheism and Christ-devotion was adopted by the first disciples. Hurtado refers to this as the 'first' stage of christological development. The fact that he does not call the life of the historical Jesus the first stage and the period immediately after the resurrection the 'second' stage is significant, as we shall see. In this second stage the faith Hurtado has in mind is specifically a post-resurrection/exaltation faith, *not an incarnational one*: Jesus is accorded divine honours as one who has now been raised to the right hand of God, the Father. Jesus is not, at first, worshipped as a pre-existent divine being who then becomes incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>23</sup> This seems to be an historical judgement which actually reflects, or at least fits with Hurtado's endorsement of Lessing's cleavage between the Christ of Faith (whose life is allegedly recorded in the gospels) and the Jesus of History (whose identity lies beneath the gospel texts and must be reconstructed by historians).

Stage 3. Although Hurtado does not lay out the content and shape of a stage subsequent to the 'explosion' that occurred in the earliest months and decades of the post-Easter community's life, what he says in his analysis of New Testament and other early Christian material indicates that his model, in effect, entails a third stage of development in which a number of significant steps in christological thinking and behaviour were taken.

Many of his judgements about this third stage agree with those of mainstream critical New Testament scholarship. He thinks, for

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<sup>22</sup> See esp. the comments in Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 54-55.

<sup>23</sup> So, we think that G. Turner ('Review: *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* by Larry W. Hurtado', *Heythrop Journal* 47 (2006): 453-54) has misunderstood Hurtado when he says his work claims that Christianity 'was catholic and incarnational from the outset' (454).

example, that in this third stage gospel material was written up to reflect the Stage 2 development in christological thinking and to reflect the experience of conflict between the church and non-Christians.<sup>24</sup> This means that Hurtado accepts the view that has, until recently, been unchallenged that whilst the gospels are ostensibly accurate records of the life of Jesus they frequently reflect in fact the life of the early Church. This key component of the form- and redaction-critical paradigm of gospel criticism entails an allegorical reading of the texts: the veneration of Jesus by the disciples during his earthly ministry is not historical but is a kind of code for the veneration of Jesus by Christians in the early decades of the church and at times, especially in Matthew and John, we should hear ‘the risen Lord ... speaking through the earthly Jesus’.<sup>25</sup> With this retrojection into the life of Jesus of a post-Easter faith, Hurtado also sees a transition in christological content. Whereas in Stage 2 Jesus is treated simply as the resurrected and exalted Lord, now he is accorded the biography familiar to classic christological orthodoxy: the pre-existent Lord becomes incarnate in Jesus who then returns, at this resurrection and exaltation, whence he came.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, through a Spirit-inspired ‘charismatic’ interpretation of Scripture the early church discovered the life and activity of the pre-existent Lord in the Old Testament story.<sup>27</sup> For example, in John 12:41 the gospel writer (but not the historical Jesus) identifies the occupant of God’s throne in Isaiah’s vision (in Isaiah 6) with the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus.<sup>28</sup>

This account of christological development raises a number of questions. Hurtado’s account of the origin of the New Testament christological species is different in important ways to—and simpler than—once regnant theories of modern New Testament scholars. However, in the sense in which C. F. D. Moule defined an evolutionary

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<sup>24</sup> We think, therefore, that Craig L. Blomberg misreads Hurtado when he says ‘the logical implications of his volume are that the early Christian portraits of Jesus were, in fact, substantially accurate’ (C. L. Blomberg, ‘Review: Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity. By Larry Hurtado’, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47 (2004): 711-14, esp. 712).

<sup>25</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 335 (quoting from F. J. Matera, *New Testament Christology* (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, Ky., 1999): 33).

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 102 on this development.

<sup>27</sup> These three distinct stages in Christology implied by Hurtado’s model are noted by D. Burkett, ‘Review: *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* by Larry W. Hurtado’, *JAOS* 124 (2004): 128-29 (128).

<sup>28</sup> See Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 374-81.

model of christological origins (over against a merely developmental one) it appears to entail the progressive ‘accretion of ... alien factors that were not inherent from the beginning’.<sup>29</sup> Hurtado’s model lays out three distinct stages of christological development and the third has a number of subsidiary internal developments of its own. Also, Hurtado thinks a decisive, ‘volcanic’, change took place in Stage 2, but the New Testament texts do not provide a straightforward record of the content of the Stage 2 eruption since they are overlaid with subsequent development in thinking and practice. So, in one crucial respect he agrees with his forbears: the New Testament’s christological claims have distorted the history of christological development which must be reconstructed through a peeling away of the layers of textual tradition and careful reconstruction of phases in Christian practice and belief.

Two further points arise from this brief overview of the evolutionary christological development Hurtado envisages.

### ***3.1 An Early Jewish Opposition to Christ-devotion?***

First, several commentators have responded to earlier statements of Hurtado’s position by objecting that there is little real evidence, especially in the Pauline material, that the way the early Christians treated Jesus was a point at which non-Christian Jews attacked them. The objection here follows a simple syllogism. First, (a) it is asserted that Jewish monotheism could not accommodate the worship of a human being, that Christ-devotion is entirely without precedent and that it would be deemed an outrageous transgression of monotheistic taboos. Secondly, (b) it is argued that the earliest Christians were not persecuted by their fellow (non-Christian) Jews for their christological propositions or practices. (Many have found evidence for such persecution in the tradition history behind the gospel of John, but Hurtado’s chief witness for the case for an early high Christology is Paul). So, (c) James D. G. Dunn and Maurice Casey conclude from the first premise that what we have in Paul’s letters is not, in fact, Christ-devotion since that would necessarily leave (b) inexplicable.<sup>30</sup>

Hurtado agrees with the first premise in this argument. So, in reply, he counters the second premise through evidence which he alleges

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<sup>29</sup> See C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977): 3.

<sup>30</sup> J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998): 257-60; Casey, ‘Monotheism’, 224.

demonstrates substantial and widespread Jewish persecution of Christians for their Christ-devotion.<sup>31</sup> So, for example, Saul's pre-Christian persecution of the Church must have been for its Christ-devotion. Paul came, evidently, to think that followers of Jesus were bound to a particular stance on Torah interpretation, but what he says about that arose simply as a specific response to the crisis caused by 'Judaizers' attempting to make Torah observance a condition of Gentile membership of the church. Hurtado thinks that the scholarly view that the core of Paul's teaching was taken up with a Christian departure from Jewish allegiance to Torah and Temple is a legacy of a Lutheran law versus gospel theological framework.<sup>32</sup> But genuine conflict arose because of Paul's new commitment to a binitarian monotheism. There is evidence of this in 1 Corinthians 12:3 (cf. Acts 26:11), where Paul says that 'no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed (*anathema Iesous*)"'. This, Hurtado thinks 'reflects Jewish polemics directed against Jewish-Christian Jesus-devotion'.<sup>33</sup> Pauline evidence is then confirmed by material in the Synoptics and in John which reflects conflicts between the Church and the Synagogue. The accusation that Jesus is guilty of blasphemy in his forgiveness of sins (Mark 2:7) reflects later Christian Christ-devotion. And Hurtado proposes that the blasphemy charge at Jesus' trial 'not only dramatizes the theological issue dividing Jews and Christians in the time of GMark and earlier, but also reflects the actual experiences of Jewish Christians called to account before Jewish authorities for their devotion to Christ and charged with blasphemy'.<sup>34</sup> Also, the early chapters of Acts show that 'in the actions of Jewish authorities against other figures in the Jerusalem Church (e.g. 4:1-22; 5:27-42), the emphasis is upon objections to their Christological assertions and related practices'.<sup>35</sup>

In all this, Hurtado's argument for an early high Christology means that his portrayal of Christian origins suffers a serious loss. In recent decades, with the insights of the New Perspective on Paul and the

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<sup>31</sup> Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 68-70 and 152-73 (which is a slightly revised version of L. W. Hurtado, 'Pre-70 C.E. Jewish Opposition to Christ-Devotion', *JTS* 50 (1999): 35-58).

<sup>32</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 209-210.

<sup>33</sup> Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 176.

<sup>34</sup> Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 166-67. See further his treatment of the Johannine evidence (esp. Jn 9:22; 12:42) in Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 352-54; Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 70-71, 152-53.

<sup>35</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 176.

Third Quest for the Historical Jesus the *ethical* particularity of earliest Christianity has come into focus. Hurtado consistently downplays any evidence of a peculiar Christian stance on Torah, the Temple, Israel's Election and the Land. At some points, no doubt, Hurtado's arguments for a persecution of Christians for their redefined monotheism will find supporters. And for those of us who think it is was ethical differences that caused the conflict, it is not possible to exclude Christology and its implications for monotheism from the equation, since by including Jesus Christ in the identity of the one Jewish God his followers gave their ethical vision for the truly human life and the identity of God's people its absolute authority. But there are problems with every item in Hurtado's inventory of evidence for an early Jewish opposition to Jesus devotion. And his case creates grave difficulties for other parts of his account of christological origins.

There really is not much evidence for what Hurtado wants, even if we grant him his examples. Paul proclaims that he is persecuted 'for the cross of Christ' (Gal. 6:12), not 'for the throne of Christ' or some such similar slogan reflecting his Christ-devotion. There is plenty of direct evidence that both the Christian and pre-Christian Paul were taken up with questions of table-fellowship between Jewish Christians and Gentiles. By contrast, there is no direct evidence that Saul persecuted the church because he perceived Christians to be idolaters as Hurtado seems to think.<sup>36</sup> Hurtado's discussion of the *Anathema Iesus* contains a non sequitur. It does not follow that because 1 Corinthians 12:3 reflects conflict between Christians and non-Christian Jews over allegiance to Jesus that that conflict was a matter of Christ-devotion *per se*. Galatians 3:13 shows that a Jewish cursing of Jesus was a matter of his being a failed, crucified would-be messiah. In the First Century there were evidently a number of messianic and prophetic leaders who, in the eyes of the authorities threatened the Sanhedrin and Temple-state. No doubt the Sanhedrin and those loyal to it took steps to get followers of these revolutionary leaders to disavow

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<sup>36</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 94. For what follows see also the criticisms of A. Y. 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: Essays in Honor of Larry W. Hurtado and Alan F. Segal*, ed. D. B. Capes, A. D. DeConick, H. K. Bond and T. A. Miller (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007): 55-66 (58-59).

their leaders and to curse them in so doing. Such a curse never need imply that such followers worshipped their leader.<sup>37</sup>

Whether or not one finds in Paul and other parts of the New Testament a serious conflict between Jesus and his followers over Torah and Temple is not really a case of whether or not one thinks Luther's law versus gospel categories accurately grasp the character of New Testament soteriology. Hurtado does not interact with some recent scholarship that reads his 'evidence' with sensitivity to advances in our understanding of Second Temple Jewish practice and belief. For example, he does not tell us why E. P. Sanders, J. D. G. Dunn and N. T. Wright are all wrong to find in Mark 2:7 not evidence of an argument about Christ-devotion in the period of the church, but an accurate record of Jesus' behaviour which his detractors took to be a blasphemous challenge to the temple and the priesthood.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, it is far from clear that we must take the trial narrative as an allegory for the experience of later Christian trials in the way proposed. Hurtado offers no interaction with the important work of R. J. Bauckham and others who have challenged the paradigm of gospel interpretation upon which Hurtado's appeals to the gospels relies.<sup>39</sup>

Hurtado's argument for an early Jewish opposition to Christ-devotion creates two problems for the internal plausibility of the conceptual superstructure of his own historical case. First, as we have seen, Hurtado argues that there is no evidence of Christians who refuse to reverence Christ.<sup>40</sup> This is a critical point for Hurtado since he thinks universal acceptance of the worship of Christ goes to show its early origins. Many do, in fact, agree with Hurtado on this ubiquity of Christ-devotion in the New Testament evidence. But it is hard to imagine historically that we can have it both ways. If there was sharp opposition to the worship of Jesus from non-Christian Jews, then we should expect that that same opposition would naturally arise in some

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<sup>37</sup> What Paul is reported to have said in Acts 26:11 only need mean that he regretted pressuring Christians to curse Jesus; something which he himself came to view as an act of blasphemy.

<sup>38</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1985): 273-74; J. D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991): 59-62; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996): 434-35.

<sup>39</sup> R. Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>40</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 136, cf. 135-36, 155-65.

quarters of the (very Jewish) new movement, and that that natural opposition from some of Jesus' own followers would be reinforced by pressure from the wider Jewish community. The debate over table-fellowship with Gentiles illustrates the point. The evidence of Acts, Galatians and Romans is clear: some Jewish-Christian leaders in the new Mediterranean-wide mission field were not naturally inclined to follow Paul's stance on table-fellowship and, furthermore, they actively resisted it because of the pressure from their fellow Jews to remain true to established mores. *The more vociferously Hurtado argues for a Jewish persecution of Christians for their worship of Jesus, the less plausible his argument for an early and universal Christ-devotion becomes.* The evidence of the New Testament—no internal controversy over a genuine Christ-devotion and barely any evidence of a Jewish attack on Christians for that devotion—can be more simply explained if Jewish monotheism already offered categories that made Christ-devotion acceptable (if a little surprising), but Hurtado does not countenance that possibility.

Secondly, Hurtado's conviction that there was vociferous opposition to the Christian worship of the Messiah Jesus from the Jewish community is hard to square with his own acknowledgement of an apparent lack of theological or other explanation by the Christians for their behaviour. Hurtado thinks that, in the first instance, it was because they had visions and prophetic instruction in which they 'felt compelled' to worship Jesus that they did so. They did not arrive at this behaviour through a theological analysis of the internal logic of their experience of Jesus in his life, death and resurrection; the procedure adopted in classic Christian orthodoxy. 'The early Christians ... were more concerned to express their devotion to him than to provide explanations of how they came to the convictions that prompted them to do so.'<sup>41</sup> This raises questions about Hurtado's view of the role of theology and religious experience to which we shall return later. At this juncture, we are bound to wonder why it is that early Christian texts do not supply reasons or arguments justifying the worship of Jesus. The texts provide plenty of scriptural and sometimes theologically sophisticated argumentation to explain and support such novelties as the Christian experience at Pentecost (Acts 2), belief in Jesus' bodily resurrection (Luke 24 and 1 Cor. 15) and the Torah-free mission to the

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<sup>41</sup> Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 198-99.

Gentiles and the creation of a new people of God transcending Torah's ethnic boundaries (Romans and Galatians). Hurtado thinks that Jews, including the pre-Christian Saul, must have condemned the worship of Jesus as a case of idolatry.<sup>42</sup> Assuming that the early Christians did not believe that they were guilty of idolatry, why is Hurtado unable to find an apology in early Christian texts attempting to provide Jewish persecutors a rebuttal of such a charge? Again, the position Hurtado takes on one part of the historical picture creates acute tensions at another part of what is a complex historical whole: *the more he argues for a Jewish persecution of Christians for their Christ-devotion the more surprising and inexplicable becomes his inability to find any robust scriptural and theological defence of this new pattern of belief.*

### **3.2 Christ-devotion and Jewish Mediatorial Categories**

When we recognise the stages of development that Hurtado describes we are bound to ask further historical questions of the model which Hurtado has not yet addressed. In particular, Hurtado's own insistence that we set christological thinking in the context of contemporary Jewish speculation on mediatorial figures forces us to consider more carefully the christological shifts between the second and third stages of the model.

In Jewish texts we find several different types of mediatorial status or ontology:<sup>43</sup> (a) there are texts that speak of human beings who experience transformation during their life to a new, heavenly or divine identity (for example, Moses in *Sirach* (45:2) and the *Animal Apocalypse* [*1 Enoch* 89:1] and Enoch in *2 Enoch*). (b) Secondly, there are texts which describe a human being as divine in earthly life because of some pre-existent divine identity (Enoch in *1 Enoch* 37-71; Moses in *T. Moses*, Jacob-Israel in the *Prayer of Joseph*). And then, (c) thirdly, there are mediatorial figures such as Wisdom, the Logos and the Angel of the Lord who transcend history altogether as divine beings or realities prior to any appearance in history and who are not identifiable within any one human being's life.

Hurtado compares the early Christian treatment of Jesus with these kinds of Jewish mediatorial figure in a quite general way. However, his account of christological development means that in Stage 2 Jesus is

<sup>42</sup> Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 155-56, cf. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 94.

<sup>43</sup> See the categorisation observations in C. H. T. Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts: Angels, Christology and Soteriology* (WUNT 2.94; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1997): 223-24.



treated in a way that approximates to the treatment of divine human mediators in the first category (a): the human Jesus, by virtue of his resurrection and exaltation, that is revealed through visions and prophetic utterance, is now treated as a divine being (who, according to Hurtado, is unlike other figures in category (a) as one uniquely worthy of worship). Then, at the start of Stage 3, Hurtado envisages a Christology which puts Jesus among those figures in the second category (b): Jesus' heavenly, divine identity is deemed an identity he already had before his resurrection and exaltation, even before his human historical life. But in the end, Hurtado recognises that in quite a few early Christian texts that represent the full flowering of early christological development Jesus plays a role equivalent to the third category (c).

All this suggests the realities of Hurtado's evolutionary model demand deeper historical analysis of the relationship between Jewish mediatorial speculation and christological thinking. If the earliest Jewish Christians started with Jesus in the first mediatorial category, why did they develop their theology so that Jesus belonged alongside figures in categories (b) and then (c)? Did the 'revelation' they received 'in the Spirit' come in progressive stages? Or were there other theological, sociological or missiological forces at play? Because the *theological character* of the object of Christ-devotion develops, Hurtado's model also invites reflection on whether in fact the outward form of devotion changed too. For example, was the worship of the risen and exalted Lord the same as the worship of the pre-incarnate Lord to whom was predicated a role in creation itself? Hurtado does not consider the reasons given here for thinking that there would be a chronological delineation of the character of Christ-devotion. He seems to think, rather, that the form of Christ-devotion he identifies was everywhere and always believed in the early church. *If, indeed, there are no discernable changes in the form of Christ-devotion might that in fact not call into question Hurtado's model in which the content of the object of Christ-devotion changed over time?*

#### **4. Hurtado's Religious Experience Hypothesis**

In his latest publications Hurtado has provided a fuller explanation and defence of the thesis that the revolution in his disciples' treatment of

Jesus as a divine figure worthy of worship came about as a result of visions and other ecstatic experiences.<sup>44</sup> Some have found this thesis attractive.<sup>45</sup> However, there are three weighty historical objections stacked against it.

#### ***4.1 Social-scientific Theory and Historical Realities***

As Paul Rainbow pointed out in his 1991 review of Hurtado's first monograph, what we know of the role of religious experience in the formation of religious ideas and practice suggests that Hurtado has put the cart before the horse:

Human beings interpret their experiences by fusing them with transcendental schemata which they bring to bear on perception. Complex schemata may be socially based and learned, and often serve to rule out socially unacceptable interpretations of raw data. For Jews of the first century, monotheism was presupposed and formed part of such a hermeneutical grid. A vision of radiant light, like Paul had ... would be ambiguous in itself. A Jewish monotheist might understand it as an epiphany of the one God, worthy of worship; or it might be an angel or a saint in glory. The schema outlined by Hurtado—faith in one God supplemented by a subordinate divine agent—would enable a Jew to construe a vision of Christ in either way, but it cannot account for the complication of faith in one God itself which actually came about and was later expressed by the Fathers of the church in terms of hypostases. We have to look elsewhere to explain the mutation in monotheism.<sup>46</sup>

In other words, there is a *sociology of knowledge* that means the interpretation of religious experiences is constrained by existing theological categories. Hurtado has responded through appeal to some social-scientific study of religion which indicates that religious experience can, on occasion, produce new theological ideas/beliefs.<sup>47</sup>

However, the theoretical evidence he adduces does not explain the shape of Christ-devotion as he describes it. Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that there were early Jewish followers of Jesus who had religious experiences which led them to revise their understanding of Jewish monotheistic practice and belief; that a Peter or a James had

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<sup>44</sup> Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 117-22; Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 64-74. See further L. W. Hurtado, 'Christ-Devotion in the First Two Centuries: Reflections & a Proposal', *Toronto Journal of Theology* 12 (1996): 17-33; L. W. Hurtado, 'Religious Experience and Religious Innovation in the New Testament', *JR* 80 (2000): 183-205.

<sup>45</sup> For approval of Hurtado's religious experience thesis see Chester, *Messiah and Exaltation*, 80-121.

<sup>46</sup> Rainbow, 'Review Article', 86-87.

<sup>47</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 66-70 and Hurtado, 'Religious Experience'.

visions of the risen Jesus from which they drew the conclusion that monotheism was now ‘binitarian’. Unfortunately, in this case, the theory derived from comparative religion studies that Hurtado adduces does not map onto the other evidence for the historical character of the early Christian movement. The social scientific studies to which Hurtado appeals recognise that frequently a ‘religious revitalization movement’ is ‘originally conceived in one or several hallucinatory visions *by a single individual*’.<sup>48</sup> Hurtado appeals specifically to the work of Werner Stark who has shown that there are cases where a charismatic individual, a ‘minor founder’, attempts ‘to address religious needs felt by members of an established tradition, “while at the same time conceptualising the movement as an extension, elaboration, or fulfilment of an existing religious tradition”’.<sup>49</sup> In such cases,

of course, characteristically those who have sought reformations or innovations within their own religious traditions and could thus be thought of as “minor founder” figures, can be rejected by the parent tradition, which can result in new religious traditions forming out of efforts at reformation or innovation. This is likely the best way to understand what happened in early Christianity.<sup>50</sup>

How exactly Hurtado thinks this is what happened in early Christianity is not clear. In particular, he does not specify the identity of the ‘minor founder’ and the ‘parent tradition’. As it is, there are two ways that what Stark describes might map onto early Christianity. But in either scenario the evidence that Hurtado himself sets out tells against the possibility that Stark’s theory applies to first-century Christian history.

The New Testament, taken as a whole, makes Jesus of Nazareth the *founder* of the new movement we call Christianity and Judaism is its ‘parent tradition’. This parent tradition rejected the movement’s new understanding of monotheism and, according to Hurtado—rightly in our view—the earliest Christian documents are univocal in thinking a revised monotheism marked a break with the parent tradition: Christians were binitarians, non-Christians were not. When we consider the history this way, Stark’s model leads us to expect *Jesus*

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<sup>48</sup> A. F. C. Wallace, ‘Revitalization Movements’, *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956): 264-81 (270) cited in Hurtado, ‘Religious Experience’, 191 (italics added).

<sup>49</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 70 quoting W. Stark, *The Sociology of Religion; A Study of Christendom* (Vol. 4; New York: Fordham University Press, 1970): 265.

<sup>50</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 70.

*himself* to be the decisive innovator in monotheistic faith and practice; that is at Stage 1 of the movement, not Stage 2.

Hurtado, however, rejects the possibility that Jesus was the innovator of the decisive shift in understanding of Jewish monotheism that created a Christ-devotion. Instead, Hurtado appeals to the social-scientific studies on religious experience to support his hypothesis for decisive innovation at Stage 2. Those studies predict a *single* charismatic, founding figure who, as a result of religious experience, modifies the parent tradition to form a new, breakaway movement. But this does not fit the historical evidence for what happened at Stage 2 of the early Christian movement. In two respects the history of the earliest Christians, in the immediate period after the death of Jesus, fails to conform to the scenario described by Stark.

First, the primary sources give the impression that the earliest Church had a number of key leaders, in particular Peter, James, and then Paul. And we know that in other matters there was vigorous debate between these and other leaders of a movement that already had a sizeable following before the death of its founder. So, Stage 2 did not have a minor founder figure: it had many leaders, to all of whom the tradition accords powerful religious experiences (Peter, James and the other members of the twelve, Stephen, Paul, besides the ‘500’ of 1 Cor. 15:6).

Secondly, at Stage 2 the *immediate* parent tradition is the Jesus movement created at Stage 1, not the ‘non-Christian’ Judaism that nurtured all the earliest members of the movement (though it might be true to say that that provided a secondary parent tradition). The social-scientific theory to which Hurtado appeals predicts that, given this historical data, there should be those from the parent tradition, that is from among the followers of Jesus in Stage 1, who rejected the innovations of the minor founder figure at Stage 2. This means we should expect there to be evidence of some who followed Jesus in his ministry (and their subsequent disciples) who firmly rejected the binitarian Christ-devotion which others (Peter? Stephen? Paul?) created. In other words, Stage 2 should evince two forms of Christianity and some serious disagreement between them. But Hurtado insists there is only evidence for the one form, the form that worshipped Jesus within a monotheistic framework.

These two pieces of historical data that fail to match up to the social-scientific theory conspire with one another to create a highly

implausible historical scenario for which Hurtado has not yet supplied comparative, theoretical support. Hurtado wants us to believe that a *group* of early Christians had similar religious experiences and all agreed upon their interpretation even though their agreed-upon-interpretation meant, according to Hurtado, a radical and socio-politically costly *mutation* in Jewish monotheistic faith. The social-scientific evidence Hurtado cites (quoted above) suggests that we should expect rejection of the new form of faith from the parent tradition (in this case the historical Jesus movement), even if, very unusually, a *group* of leaders constituted the role of the ‘minor founder’ figure. If Hurtado were to argue, with closer conformity to the social-scientific theory, that in fact only one or perhaps two of the earliest Christian leaders had such experiences and interpreted them in a binitarian direction, then we should certainly expect there to be considerable evidence of rejection of the new mutation in monotheism from other members of the Jesus movement who wished to remain faithful to the theological categories of their founder (Jesus of Nazareth).

As it is, we should be highly sceptical of the view—which Hurtado appears to hold—that the religious experiences at Stage 2 were had by the whole community (or at least all its key leaders) and interpreted with the unanimity that created the binitarian faith that Hurtado discerns across all early Christian documents. *Hurtado has not appreciated the full force of the objection from the sociology of knowledge that Rainbow first made.* It is not enough for Hurtado to show that the sociology of knowledge principle is not rigid or absolute. He must show *that*, and explain *why*, the sociology of knowledge constraint was suspended uniformly across the whole group of early disciples.

Even if one or two came to the radical conclusion *from what they thought they saw or heard in such visions* that Jesus was now included in the one Jewish Godhead and was to be worshipped as such, most of his disciples, who either had visions themselves or who heard them reported, will have been predisposed to conclude that Jesus was simply now exalted to heavenly glory, not that he should have been worshipped. Most Jews, except of course the Sadducees and, probably, the Essenes, believed that after death and the general resurrection the righteous would live a kind of angelic life (see Mark 12:25 and parallels). If, as the primary sources claim, his followers believed Jesus

had experienced ahead of time what all the righteous would experience at the resurrection, then they naturally would think of him in these terms if they encountered him in visions. Indeed, several studies have shown that some New Testament material, for example in Acts, does depict the risen and ascended Jesus in ways redolent of angelophanies in Jewish tradition.<sup>51</sup> Many, if not most, in the nascent movement therefore will have rejected a proposal for Christ-devotion advocated by some (of their erstwhile leaders?) and would, in all likelihood, have rejected the further developments in Stage 3 Christology outlined above. There should, on Hurtado's model, be historical evidence of the existence of such followers of Jesus. But according to Hurtado there is none. If Hurtado thinks there is none because all accepted the innovation then he must explain what it was in these experiences that demanded they be interpreted one way not another and by all without any evidence of disagreement or controversy.

If we follow Hurtado's reconstruction of Jewish monotheism, there were cognitive and life-threatening obstacles to acceptance of Christ-devotion and there were other, relatively harmless, interpretations of their visions of Jesus close to hand. According to Deuteronomy 13, anyone caught leading their fellow Israelites into the worship of another god was guilty of a capital crime (Deut. 13). Hurtado follows Graham Stanton in thinking that behind several gospel passages there is the historically genuine tradition that Jesus was judged guilty, under the rubric of Deuteronomy 13, of leading people into the worship of Satan (a false god), through his 'exorcisms', and that this contributed substantially to Jesus' ultimate fate.<sup>52</sup> In this case, it is strange that Deuteronomy 13 never figures as a passage to which opponents of the early church turn, or as a passage for which the early Church thought it had to provide an apology.

There are, of course, two types of post-resurrection encounter recounted in the earliest Christian documents. There are stories of the resurrected and very bodily Jesus meeting and remaining with his disciples and there are stories of Jesus appearing in visions even

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<sup>51</sup> See C. Burchard, *Der dreizehnte Zeuge* (FRLANT 103; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970) on the Christophany in Acts 9 and further Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts*, 50-61 on the debate about Paul's vision in Acts 23:8-9.

<sup>52</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 57, cf. 151, 591 and see G. N. Stanton, 'Jesus of Nazareth: A Magician and a False Prophet Who Deceived God's People' in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ*, ed. J. B. Green and M. Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994): 164-80.

decades after his death. Luke emphasises the difference between these two modes through his ascension story, but, with the possible exception of what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8, the distinction is implicit throughout the New Testament. At one point Hurtado has a puzzling treatment of this material in which he merges the two types of stories. He then claims, not only that the former were taken to mean that Jesus had risen from the dead but also that they became the basis of the innovative belief in Jesus' physical resurrection. He speaks of a single type of 'resurrection-exaltation' experience that 'likely involved the sense of being encountered by a figure recognized as Jesus but exhibiting features that manifested to the recipients of the experiences the conviction that he had been clothed with divine-like glory and given heavenly exaltation'.<sup>53</sup> However, the experiences attested in the primary texts to which he refers cannot be so simply elided in this way. The post-resurrection appearances in Matthew 28, Luke 24, John 21 and Acts 1 all emphasise the *bodily*, human nature of Jesus' post-resurrection identity. They are not *visions* of the exalted Jesus, but meetings with the risen one. They provide little evidence that the post-resurrection appearances were the source of a new belief that Jesus was now in divine and heavenly glory or exaltation and enthronement.<sup>54</sup> And, as we shall see, there are no texts which connect visions of the risen and now exalted (or ascended) Jesus with new christological insight and innovation.

New Testament scholarship has much to learn from social-scientific study. But social-scientific models cannot be appealed to too quickly: they must be tested against the historical evidence. In Hurtado's recourse to social-scientific studies there is little attempt to correlate

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<sup>53</sup> Hurtado, 'Religious Experience', 195-96, repeated in Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 72, cf. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 117-18.

<sup>54</sup> The Matthean material provides only equivocal evidence for Hurtado's thesis. It is true that in Matt. 28:16-20 there is the strongly Christological self-claim by Jesus that 'all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me' (noted by Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 117). However, on the one hand, it is not clear that for Matthew this represents a completely new Christological reality (cf. Matt. 9:8; 11:27; 13:37-43) rather than a vindication of Jesus' claim to be the Son of Man in fulfilment of Dan. 7:13-14, and on the other, the disciples themselves worship Jesus before any new Christological information or scene is provided; they worship him simply as the resurrected Messiah and Son of Man. In Luke 24:24-34 Jesus takes on the role of the Angel of the Lord in traditions such as Gen. 18-19; Judg. 6 and 13. But this is reflected in Jesus' mysterious *disappearance*. His form is, at face value, not glorious, but thoroughly human.

the theory with historical particulars or to consider evidence that might call into question the applicability of the theory *in this case*.

Hurtado treats religious experience in early Christianity as an undifferentiated phenomenon. With the notable exception of material in 1 and 2 John (see below), he does not consider the possibility (to which we shall come shortly) that the form and content of some visionary experiences could be problematic in some quarters. He does not offer us an analysis of evidence for the historical character of religious experience in the first-century Jewish world, even though this is a subject which has received some close attention in recent decades. The Jewish apocalypses, mystical texts, passages scattered through Philo, Josephus and the Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls and in classical sources provide a wealth of material that needs to be given careful attention if we are to talk with any confidence about the likely role of religious experiences in the genesis of so important a phenomenon as a novel 'mutation' in monotheism.

Early Christianity itself also offers two important cases of development in thought and practice which offer controls against which to compare the possible role of religious experience in the development of Christology: belief in the resurrection and changing attitudes to Torah. According to one New Testament witness, the whole group of (500) believers (1 Cor. 15:6) experienced the risen Christ in a way that confirmed to them the belief of a few that Jesus had risen from the dead. Either Paul records an historical event or he records what had become well-established early church tradition. Either way, what he records is testimony to the way in which powerful 'religious experiences' (broadly defined) were deemed to offer a legitimate contribution to the development of belief in the Jesus movement. First-century Jewish followers of Jesus had many reasons to doubt the claims of a few that Jesus had risen; in particular, the general resurrection had evidently not taken place and Jesus had died on a cross (accursed under Jewish law). According to the tradition, leading individuals doubted the resurrection until they experienced it for themselves (Jn 20:24-28) and what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:6 suggests that the wider community needed to receive for themselves a religious experience for it to become the basis of a shared radical change in belief (in this case a 'mutation' in Jewish eschatological expectation). *Why are there not similar accounts of visionary*



*experiences and instruction authorising the mutation in monotheism to the doubters?*

Early Christian attitudes to Torah underwent significant development from the stance adopted during the life of Jesus by his disciples to the one in operation in the Mediterranean-wide Pauline mission, if for no other reason than that Jesus himself did not address issues such as circumcision and table-fellowship with believing Gentiles because he did not need to. Paul's letters (especially Romans, Galatians and Philippians), the Acts of the Apostles, material in the gospels and other New Testament texts all show that agreement amongst the earliest Christian leaders on matters of Torah piety was hard to achieve. Some Christians with particular allegiance to the leadership of James in Jerusalem, at least for a period, adopted a policy with which Paul vehemently disagreed.

According to Acts 10 a powerful religious experience played a decisive role in Peter's transition to a less-than-rigorous view of Torah piety. Of course, the precise role such an experience played in a complex development is hard to gauge and its impact on the early Christian community was no doubt less straightforward than Luke's account might be taken to suggest. Nevertheless, here again there is a valuable parallel to the scenario Hurtado proposes which confirms his view that religious experience *could* and *did* have a formative role in the development of earliest Christianity. However, in other ways the history of the debate over Torah piety confirms our observations about the lack of historical plausibility for what Hurtado envisages. Although religious experience can precipitate practical innovation in one 'minor founder' in earliest Christianity, namely Peter, others were not automatically persuaded. Peter's experience was not shared by others, the community had to meet, according to Acts twice (Acts 11 and 15), to address the matter in council and, judging by what Paul says in Galatians, Peter's own stance was not consistent, particularly when he came under pressure from the parent tradition to return to the old ways. Visionary experience played its part, but at least one other 'innovator', Paul, seems to have adopted a radical view on these matters, not because he had some profound ecstatic experience that told him he should, but for theological as much as practical, missiological reasons. *Why is there nothing to parallel this complex history for the development of early Christology when, as in the case of the Torah debates, Jesus had not during his earthly life, according to Hurtado,*

*pronounced clearly on the question of his divine identity? Why is there no record of a vision equivalent to the one Peter had for the development in Christology?*

It is also striking that Hurtado nowhere discusses the character and history of Jewish mysticism for the First Century that could provide fruitful comparative history for the one he proposes for the earliest followers of Jesus.<sup>55</sup> Admittedly, there is not yet a consensus that there was an active and significant Jewish mystical tradition in the First Century, or even in the first centuries of the rabbinic period. But the question has been much discussed in recent scholarship and the balance of probability has now tipped firmly in favour of those who, since the seminal work of Gershom Scholem, have believed that later Jewish mystical texts have their roots in first-century practice.<sup>56</sup> (Some of the New Testament texts that Hurtado discusses are important evidence for this view, though recently published Dead Sea Scroll texts are equally significant).<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, the later Jewish mystical tradition provides a case study that supports our cautionary comments on Hurtado's application of social-scientific theory. Rabbinic and *hekhalot* texts describe the famous case of a mystic who ascended to heaven (Elisha ben Abuya or, sometimes simply, 'Acher') where he saw the exalted and enthroned Enoch-Metatron and concluded that there are indeed 'Two Powers' in heaven.<sup>58</sup> Elisha became the parade example of the excommunicated Two Powers heretic. His story, which dates the heresy to at least the early decades of the Second Century AD confirms Hurtado's view that in the antique Jewish context religious experience could precipitate innovation that challenged existing definitions of monotheism. However, the unfortunate fate of the speculative mystic seems to illustrate what we should expect, given our understanding of the sociological constraint on knowledge: innovation derived from

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<sup>55</sup> Its absence is noted by Horbury, 'Review: *Lord Jesus Christ*', 538.

<sup>56</sup> See the review of evidence for a first-century Jewish mystical practice in C. H. T. Fletcher-Louis, 'Jewish Mysticism and the New Testament' in *The New Testament and Rabbinic Literature, Supplements*, ed. R. Bieringer, F. G. Martinez, D. Pollefeyt and P. J. Tomson (Leiden: Brill, *forthcoming*) and the recent collection of essays in A. D. DeConick, *Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

<sup>57</sup> For the Dead Sea Scroll texts demonstrating conclusively that there was a pre-Christian Jewish mysticism see P. Alexander, *The Mystical Texts: Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice and Related Manuscripts* (London: T&T Clark, 2006).

<sup>58</sup> See A. F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (SJLA 25; Leiden: Brill, 1977).

mystical experience that threatened the boundaries of Jewish monotheism was firmly rejected. There is no evidence of a new movement beginning from within emerging rabbinic Judaism, founded by a mystical devotee of Enoch dedicated to a new form of monotheism. Visionary experiences evidently did not allow that kind of innovation at least in early rabbinic circles in the periods between the revolts of AD 66-70 and 132-135.

The case of the Two Powers heresy should not, of course, be used to dictate what is possible for the earlier period, before the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and under rather different social, religious and political circumstances. Perhaps Hurtado could counter that the earliest Christians were representatives of a form of Judaism very different to the one which suppressed the mystical voices reaching for a Two Powers 'heresy'. Conceivably, we could hypothesise a community of Jesus followers notionally committed to a strict Jewish monotheism but in fact hardwired for a less cerebral, theoretical, adherence to the accepted form of monotheism.<sup>59</sup> There is no doubt that the earliest followers of Jesus moved, in one form or another, away from the precise character of cultic piety current in the first-century Jerusalem temple. Perhaps they also felt free to distance themselves from the intellectual content of their inherited faith because they privileged immediate, direct religious experience over a theology defined by tradition. Some forms of late modern Pentecostalism behave this way and are happy to innovate theologically because they value their own religious experience above traditional, 'catholic' Christian orthodoxy and the more cerebral, non-experiential conservative forms of Protestantism that dominate in the wider religious culture.

Hurtado needs to clarify his understanding of early Christian views of the relationship between religious experience and theology and their respective social locations. At times he seems to assume anachronistic divisions in first-century Jewish life and to ascribe a theological disinterest to the earliest Jewish Christians.<sup>60</sup> For example, in laying out his evidence for religious experience as the context for

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<sup>59</sup> Perhaps this is what Hurtado has in mind when he criticises Anthony Harvey and Maurice Casey for insisting on the constraining power of Jewish monotheism (Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 42-44).

<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Horbury, 'Review: *Lord Jesus Christ*', 539 has noted Hurtado's tendency to anachronistically separate intellectualism from piety when considering ancient philosophy.

christological development he envisages songs in praise of Christ as a medium for christological innovation. 'These were not the products of trained poets', but arose from a more spontaneous context of inspiration.<sup>61</sup> Whilst it is dangerous to generalise, in one case, the hymn in Colossians 1:15-20, there can be no doubt that the author of an early Christ hymn is both steeped in a complex theological tradition and indebted to a training in Hebraic scribal practices.<sup>62</sup> And whilst the Christ hymn in Philippians 2:6-11 might not rate highly by contemporary or classical Greek standards, it too articulates a complex biblical and post-biblical intratextuality. If these texts are, as Hurtado supposes, stimulated by a context of spontaneous, corporate worship (which is a thesis that has no direct evidence), they are testimony to a Christian spirituality that knows no separation between training and inspiration, ecstatic enthusiasm and sober theological reflection.

It is to be doubted that a strong case could ever be made for an early Christianity that anticipates twentieth-century Pentecostalism in its attitudes towards tradition, religious experience and the intellectual content of theology. To one degree or another the New Testament texts are deeply committed to biblical tradition, to intellectual coherence and to faithfulness to biblical theological categories, whilst being, as we shall see, rather suspicious of the role of the kind of religious experiences that Hurtado imagines drove christological development. And what evidence we have for traditions of Jewish mystical experience in Second Temple Judaism is unlikely to offer Hurtado succour. The extant texts in Josephus, Philo, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the pseudepigrapha that attest an interest in visionary experience show no evidence of a modernist, tradition-critical, anti-intellectual social location. On the contrary, much of the evidence is for an interest in visionary experiences amongst the theologically literate elite who are as much committed to biblically faithful categories as they are to direct, unmediated experience.

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<sup>61</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 73.

<sup>62</sup> See the discussion of Col. 1:15-20 in N. T. Wright, 'Poetry and Theology in Colossians in 1.15-20' in *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992): 99-118 and C. H. T. Fletcher-Louis, 'Wisdom Christology and the Partings of the Ways between Judaism and Christianity' in *Jewish-Christian Relations through the Centuries*, ed. S. E. Porter and B. W. R. Pearson (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000): 52-68.

#### 4.2 *Lack of Support for the Case in the Adduced Texts*

In various places Hurtado has appealed to a number of key New Testament texts for evidence that visions of the risen and exalted Jesus in glory, gratefully receiving the worship of the heavenly host, provided the decisive stimulus for early Christian Christ-devotion.<sup>63</sup> He is confident that these texts support his thesis. However, on close examination they provide virtually no evidence for what Hurtado supposes took place. Indeed, that they fail to corroborate Hurtado's thesis *precisely where we should expect to find support for it* means these texts, on balance, present another telling objection to the hypothesis.

For the Pauline evidence he starts with 2 Corinthians 3:7–4:6 in which he thinks 'it is quite plausible' that 'Paul draws upon his own revelatory experiences in portraying the move from unbelief in the Gospel to faith as "seeing the glory of the Lord," who is "the image of God"''.<sup>64</sup> This is possible and can be tallied to the accounts of Paul's 'conversion' in Acts. But this material nowhere provides direct support for Hurtado's principal thesis. Hurtado himself believes that Paul's Christology was the one that the early church had already adopted: his Damascus Road experience was not generative of a new kind of belief about Jesus within the Jesus movement.

In a number of Pauline texts (1 Cor. 9:1; 14:26; 12:1-4; Gal. 1:13; 2:2) Hurtado thinks references to visions show

how very much Paul (and other early Christians as well?) regarded visions and revelations as the source of cognitive content and inspiration. ... at least within some circles of early Christianity there seems to have been a religious "micro-culture" that was both receptive to visions and revelations and highly appreciative of them as sources of direction in religious matters. This reinforces the view that in these circles even major religious innovations could have been stimulated by particularly powerful experiences of this nature.<sup>65</sup>

Undeterred by the lack of explicit Pauline evidence to demonstrate the truth of his hypothesis, Hurtado nevertheless investigates a number of other texts which he thinks support it. And he thinks he can identify

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<sup>63</sup> For his discussion of these texts see Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 117-22; Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 70-74, 176; Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 192-204.

<sup>64</sup> Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 195.

<sup>65</sup> Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 197.

other evidence for the importance of religious experiences in the development of Christology at Stage 3.

He places most weight on Stephen's vision in Acts 7:54-60. He thinks that the behaviour of the Sanhedrin at Stephen's trial 'suggests that' the contents of Stephen's vision 'was taken by them as a blasphemous infringement upon the uniqueness of God'.<sup>66</sup> We should agree with Hurtado that Stephen's praying to Jesus in 7:59-60—'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit' and 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them'—exemplifies a wider pattern of Christ-devotion. However, we need to pay careful attention to the sequence of events in the drama, the precise content of Stephen's vision and the context of the story in Luke's history of earliest Christianity.

Stephen is on trial because of alleged teaching against the Temple, the Torah and blasphemy against Moses and God (Acts 6:11-14). Something at the end of his speech enrages the authorities. Commentators have sometimes struggled to identify the cause of that reaction. But it is not hard to see. Stephen uses language in 7:48 to describe Solomon's temple that echoes the language of idolatry he had used for the behaviour of the wilderness generation only moments earlier (in Acts 7:41-42): both temple and golden calf are 'works of human hands'.<sup>67</sup> Lest his point be ambiguous, Stephen accuses the authorities of being '*stiff-necked* and uncircumcised in heart and ears', language used specifically of the generation of the golden calf (Exod. 33:3, 5; 34:9).<sup>68</sup> They are murderers who have not kept Torah (7:51-53). There is more than enough here to account for their murderous reaction to Stephen's words. Although Stephen then claims his vision before the Sanhedrin rush to get him, nothing in what Luke says implies that it is the vision which leads the Sanhedrin to judge him guilty of a blasphemous modification of monotheism to be treated as a capital crime.<sup>69</sup> Stephen only prays to Jesus once his fate is sealed.

Indeed, the fact that Stephen sees Jesus *standing* at the right hand of God (vv. 55-56) tells decisively against Hurtado's supposition that here there is evidence of visions 'in which the glorified Christ was seen in

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<sup>66</sup> Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 199.

<sup>67</sup> See e.g. Dunn, *Partings*, 67. For 'works of hands' language for idols see e.g. LXX Lev. 26:1, 30; Judg. 8:18; Isa. 2:18.

<sup>68</sup> To say members of the Sanhedrin are 'uncircumcised', albeit metaphorically-speaking, is to put them outside the boundaries of the covenant people.

<sup>69</sup> Pace Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 176; Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 70.

an exalted position, and perhaps receiving cultus with God'.<sup>70</sup> Jesus does not receive heavenly worship in this vision. Neither is he *enthroned* at God's right hand—the posture which, on the Jewish evidence, we expect for a binitarian exaltation.<sup>71</sup> The standing posture is especially surprising given that Jesus is revealed as 'the Son of Man' who is otherwise pictured seated at God's right hand (Mark 14:62 and parallels). Quite why the Son of Man is standing not sitting is a question that need not detain us.<sup>72</sup> Suffice to say, the fact that he is only standing, albeit at God's right hand, tells against the theory that Luke is interested in any association (generative or otherwise) between visions of Jesus and a high Christology that entails a binitarian monotheism.

Luke's interests in this story lie elsewhere: Stephen's martyrdom is an *imitatio Christi*, that marks a decisive development from the leadership of the twelve to the mission of Paul who was present at the stoning (Acts 8:1), and it is the temple authorities—not the earliest followers of Jesus—who stand against God, against his righteous representatives, and against the Torah and the Temple which they have treated as an idol. Neither here nor in other vision stories (Acts 9:1-19; 10:1-8; 16:6-10; 18:9-10; 22:6-16, 17-21; 26:12-18; Luke 1:5-25, 26-38; 2:8-20; 4:1-13; 10:18; 22:43-44(?)) is Luke interested in making a connection between visions and the earliest Christians' distinctive, binitarian monotheism. Either this is because he does not think the former was causative of the latter (or, perhaps, he knows it was, but for some reason was embarrassed by that causality). Stephen's dying moments do not mark the beginning of a new christological consciousness since, in Luke's telling of the story, his faith is that of the apostles who had already arrived at theirs without the need for visions. To take Stephen's vision as evidence of a causal connection between visions and a mutation in monotheism is to wrench the text from its narrative context.

Next Hurtado turns to the book of Revelation.<sup>73</sup> Here, as in Stephen's vision, there is evidence of the pattern of Christ-devotion

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<sup>70</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 73.

<sup>71</sup> As Hurtado himself has noted (*One God, One Lord*, 121).

<sup>72</sup> For a list of the many possible explanations for the Son of Man's standing see C. K. Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994, 1998), esp. vol. 1, 384-85.

<sup>73</sup> In *How on Earth?*, 200, Hurtado appeals to the transfiguration to support his case for the Christologically generative role of visions. But he cannot supply any arguments for thinking that the transfiguration provides any evidence for the precise historical sequence in the genesis of Christ-devotion that he hypothesises.

that amounts to a form of binitarianism. Jesus is worshipped as the lamb alongside God in heaven. And the author sees this reality in a vision. But once again Revelation is not direct evidence for the historical sequence Hurtado supposes took place: ‘to be sure, this innovation had begun well before the writing of Revelation, so the author’s heavenly ascent vision ... can hardly be taken itself as an example of religious experience generating innovations’.<sup>74</sup> Hurtado then proceeds to claim that although ‘the particular vision in Revelation 4–5 was not intended as a disclosure of radically new information [nevertheless it] was offered to support and give vivid reinforcement to the “binitarian” devotional pattern that the original readers already knew and practiced’.<sup>75</sup> Hurtado provides no supporting arguments nor does he appeal to the work of others for this assertion. As he himself has argued, by the time Revelation was written a binitarian Christ-devotion was universally accepted in the Jesus movement. The text is written in the visionary mode, so a visual, visionary presentation of that Christology is inevitable and, of course, in one sense what Hurtado claims for the text is a truism: all New Testament texts present a Christology that they hope will support and reinforce their readers’ beliefs about Jesus. The author’s primary purpose in writing however, is the faithfulness of his readers lest they surrender their discipleship to the political and religious pressures that now, or soon will, assail them. But nothing in Revelation suggests that there was specific opposition to (a particular strand of early) Christianity *that had modified monotheism in a binitarian fashion*. So there is nothing in Revelation to suggest that visions with a binitarian content were needed to support a supposedly radical and theologically dangerous binitarianism, let alone to generate such a thing in the first place.

From Stephen’s vision to the book of Revelation the New Testament provides evidence of decades of early Christian history. For this period we have a significant number of texts that witness to early Christian visionary experience. But in not one of them does a believer or would-be believer grow in or change their faith to adopt a binitarian monotheism as a result of a visionary encounter with the risen Christ. Indeed, with the partial exception of Revelation, none of the reported visions is much interested in Christology at all. And there are many

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<sup>74</sup> Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 201.

<sup>75</sup> Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 201.



places in Paul's letters, in the history of Acts and in other parts of the early Christian corpus where such an interest might have been expressed if it ever had the significance Hurtado supposes it did. So it is going well beyond the evidence to claim, as Hurtado does, that 'the earliest traditions attribute the innovation [in Christ-devotion] to powerful experiences taken by the recipients as appearances of the risen Christ'.<sup>76</sup>

Hurtado's handling of alleged evidence for the role of religious experiences in the mutation of monotheism at Stage 2 is mirrored in his appeal to the role for similar experiences in the development of Christology in Stage 3. He is particularly confident that Johannine texts provide evidence that Christology developed as the Spirit revealed to believers, in the context of worship and scripture study, new insights into Jesus' identity that became the basis for words of, and stories about, Jesus now in the gospel text.<sup>77</sup> This notion of an early Christian 'charismatic exegesis' has a respectable place in twentieth-century scholarship.<sup>78</sup> But the evidence for it, particularly for what Hurtado makes of it, is lacking.

Hurtado thinks there is good evidence in John 14–16 for Spirit-inspired 'newly perceived truths about Jesus ... apprehended as disclosures given by God'.<sup>79</sup> But the key texts (John 14:26; 16:13-15) do not speak of the Spirit's role revealing new christological insights through visions, whether through ascents to heaven and visions of Christ in Glory, or through some other means. Rather the emphasis is on the Spirit's role: as teacher of unspecified and far-reaching revelation (14:26; 16:13-14); as revealer of future events (16:13) and as the one who reminds the disciples of the spoken, but not fully understood, words of Jesus (14:26). The Spirit's job description is clear: he is to convict the world concerning sin, righteousness and judgement (16:8-11), to comfort and instruct the disciples in all things, to *remind* them of what Jesus said (14:26-27) and to announce the things that are to come (16:13). As has been pointed out by, for

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<sup>76</sup> Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 194

<sup>77</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 377-78, 400-402.

<sup>78</sup> Hurtado appeals to D. E. Aune, 'Charismatic Exegesis in Early Judaism and Early Christianity' in *The Pseudepigrapha and Early Biblical Interpretation*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth and C. A. Evans (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993): 126-50. However, Aune does not ascribe to John the kind of creative generation of new Jesus material that Hurtado envisages (see his discussion of the Johannine texts at p. 145).

<sup>79</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 378.

example, Peter Stuhlmacher there is a quite specific Jewish-Christian understanding of remembrance here, which has nothing to do with the generation of new supposedly-historical Jesus material.<sup>80</sup> Neither does Hurtado supply evidence that what he envisages taking place in the Johannine community has any parallel or precedent in the wider Jewish culture. In the surrounding literary context Jesus is preparing his followers for the unexpected turn of events at the passion and resurrection. The Spirit is promised as one who will help the disciples understand those shocking and unexpected events. Several texts in John echo the idea in 16:13-15 that the disciples will, after his departure, recall and properly understand things Jesus said (2:17, 22; 12:16, cf. 20:9). None of these shows any interest in a high Christology or Christ-devotion, nor any evidence of revelation through some Spirit-inspired religious experience. Nowhere, in fact, does John's gospel make an explicit connection between Spirit-inspired exegesis and a process by which new christological insights were 'discovered' in the Jesus tradition or in the Scriptures. So, there is no explicit evidence for experiences 'much prized in Johannine Christianity' that led to 'a claim to Spirit revelation involving further and newer insights, including insights into the glory and significance of "the Son"'.<sup>81</sup> To postulate that there must have been such experiences in the Johannine community is at best only an intriguing hypothesis from the prior conclusion that John's Christology cannot be explained some other way.

#### ***4.3 An Early Christian Antipathy to Mystical Experiences***

Also against Hurtado's view of the role of visionary experiences in the development of Christology there is the fact that several strands of earliest Christianity express a concern that visions and associated mystical experiences should *not* receive unequivocal acceptance as a legitimate form of Christian experience and source of revelation.<sup>82</sup> There is evidence for this in Pauline, Johannine and Lukan material and it perhaps has a pre-history in Jewish tradition (see, for example, the criticism of revelation through dreams in Sirach 34:1-8).

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<sup>80</sup> P. Stuhlmacher, 'Spiritual Remembering: John 14:26' in *The Holy Spirit and Christian Origins: Essays in Honor of James D. G. Dunn*, ed. G. N. Stanton, B. W. Longenecker and S. C. Barton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004): 55-68 (59, esp. n. 16).

<sup>81</sup> As Hurtado claims, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 410.

<sup>82</sup> For what follows see Fletcher-Louis, 'Jewish Mysticism'.

In John's gospel there are a number of statements which seem to be a rejection of the view that it is possible or necessary to ascend to heaven and see God (3:13; 6:46; 12:45). A vision of God is unnecessary because anyone who has seen Jesus during his ministry has seen the Father (14:8-9; cf. 1:14-18, 51). Here revelation through vision is subordinated to revelation through the earthly life of Jesus, as Christopher Rowland explains, revelation

is not found in the visions of the mystics and in the disclosures which they offer of the world beyond, but in the earthly life of Jesus Christ. There is in the gospel narrative and its incarnational direction a definite attempt to stress that revelation is found in this human story.<sup>83</sup>

John's desire to locate the source of all revelation in the earthly life of Jesus probably partly explains the lack of visionary experiences found in other New Testament texts, including the synoptics. John's Jesus has no baptism, temptation or transfiguration—stories which could have been treated as authoritative models for any of Jesus' followers who would seek revelation in the visionary mode. John has no dream or night visions (contrast Matt. 1:20; 2:12-13, 19, 22; 27:19 and Acts 16:9-10; 18:9-10). Matthew and Luke are both happy to have angels communicate vital information to actors in their dramas (Matt. 1:18-25; 2:13-14, 19-21; 28:1-7; Luke 1:5-20, 26-38; 2:8-20; 24:1-8; cf. 22:43-44). By contrast, whilst John does not exclude angels from the post-resurrection tomb scene—two of them adopt a role subservient to that of Jesus himself in 20:11-18—otherwise, angels enter the narrative on only two notable occasions. They are there to point, mysteriously, to the revelation of the true Jacob-Israel present in the Son of Man (1:51; cf. Gen. 28) and in 12:28-29 the crowds mistake the direct, audible voice of the Father from heaven for the voice of an angel. We have already noted the lack of evidence in the Spirit material in John to support Hurtado's hypothetical visionary activity in the Johannine community. April DeConick goes further: for John, 'proleptic visionary ascents are not necessary' precisely 'because the Paraclete has come down to earth in Jesus' absence'.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> C. C. Rowland, 'Apocalyptic, Mysticism and the New Testament' in *Geschichte—Tradition—Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. P. Schäfer, H. Cancik, H. Lichtenberger and M. Hengel (3 vols.; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1996), esp. vol. 1, 406-430 (426).

<sup>84</sup> A. D. DeConick, *Voices of the Mystics: Early Christian Discourse in the Gospels* (JSNTS 157; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000): 123.

On this evidence the author of John's gospel would scarcely approve of any claim to new christological or other significant information based on visionary experiences or encounters with angels. Although this evidence for a Johannine anti-mystical polemic is a problem for Hurtado's reconstruction of earliest Christianity in general and Hurtado evidently knows of at least one scholar who adopts this view, he dismisses it without argument.<sup>85</sup> Curiously, when Hurtado turns to discussion of the christological crisis addressed by the Johannine community in 1 and 2 John he himself argues for a polemic in the epistle consistent with the stance which others think is present in the gospel.<sup>86</sup> His arguments are intriguing and they undercut not only his own treatment of John's gospel, but also a foundation of his whole theoretical edifice.<sup>87</sup>

Hurtado thinks that the secessionists against whom the author of 1 and 2 John writes were a group who 'arose in the Johannine circle(s) who based their novel christological assertions on professed revelatory experiences of the Spirit'.<sup>88</sup> As a result of those experiences they likely thought their own revelations validly superseded all previous understanding of Jesus and his significance',<sup>89</sup> and they developed a docetic Christology that presented Jesus in terms of the Jewish angelophany tradition: Jesus was more angel than fully flesh and blood human. The author of the epistles countered that his Christian readers should be careful to 'test the spirits' since not every claim to revelation could be relied upon and that only those 'that confess Jesus Christ has come in the flesh are from God' (1 John 4:1, 2).

This is not the place to enter the complex and uncertain question of the identity of the opponents behind 1 and 2 John. But if Hurtado's discussion of the role of religious experience motivating the secessionists is anywhere near the mark then two points are clear.

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<sup>85</sup> In Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 400, Hurtado interacts briefly with April DeConick's presentation of this view in her *Voices of the Mystics*. For others who discern this anti-mysticism in John see Fletcher-Louis, 'Jewish Mysticism'.

<sup>86</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 408-426.

<sup>87</sup> What follows is the sharp end of William Horbury's observation that in Hurtado's *Lord Jesus Christ* links between Jewish angelology and Christology debates that Hurtado finds in 1 John, the Shepherd of Hermas, and the *Ascension of Isaiah*, 'are not brought to the fore in the argument as a whole' (538).

<sup>88</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 415.

<sup>89</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 415.

First, the stance taken by the writer of the epistles is close to that adopted by the gospel. 1 John's opening verses stress that the core content of the gospel—eternal life made manifest in Jesus—has been seen and touched by the writer and accurately announced to his readers. What the writer commands is not new but is a return to the teaching they have had from the beginning (1:1; 2:7, 13-14, 24; 3:11, cf. 2 John 5-6). It is the incarnation—Jesus Christ *in the flesh*—that is the locus of revelation and salvation; other spirits are deceptive.

Secondly, Hurtado's discussion of 1 and 2 John now provides valuable evidence for the likely trouble that would be caused by any group of Jesus followers taking on radically new christological beliefs. Hurtado's discussion of the relationship between the secessionists and the writer of 1 and 2 John maps well onto Werner Stark's model for the dynamic between a parent group (the Johannine Christians) and a minor founder figure embarking on a new path motivated by charismatic experiences. And as we pointed out should be the case in the application of that model to Stage 2 of the Christian movement, here in the Johannine christological crisis we find clear evidence both of different parties and of their competing views of Jesus. Furthermore, Hurtado rightly points out that Jewish angelophanic traditions were available to Jewish Christians and may well explain the heterodox views of the letters' opponents. If angel traditions could create christological diversity when the Christian movement had gained some maturity, why could they not do so in the first few months and years when some, according to Hurtado, were arguing for an astounding new view of Jesus according to which Jesus is not just a resurrected saint in an angelic mode nor merely of peculiarly high angelic status? Also, if Spirit-inspired enthusiasm is responsible for the division in the Johannine community why do we not also find that in the earliest months and years of the Christian movement some, like the writer of 1 and 2 John, insisted that his followers should remain faithful to the low Christology which, according to Hurtado, they had received 'from the beginning' of the movement; that is from the period of the earthly life of Jesus?

1 and 2 John probably do contain further evidence for the stance many have recently identified in the gospel, even if some parts of Hurtado's reconstruction have to be modified. Certainly, a definite ambivalence towards charismatic experiences is also to be found in

some Pauline material.<sup>90</sup> In Colossians, which many take to be authentic and, therefore, a relatively early Christian document, the author almost certainly adopts a similar view of visionary activity to that found in John's gospel.<sup>91</sup> In Colossians the author warns his readers that they should not be tempted away from allegiance to Jesus Christ, the true image of the invisible God, by rival Jewish claims to visions and ascents to heaven in the liturgical context (2:16-23, esp. v. 18). The Colossian Christians are to be nourished by the fact that they have everything the mystical tradition offers through their participation in the mystery of Christ. A similar view of rival apostolic claims to authority is probably present in 2 Corinthians 12 if Paula Gooder is right in her recent argument that Paul lampoons himself as a failed mystic with paltry 'visions and revelations of the Lord': he boasts of an occasion when he only ascended to the third, not the seventh heaven, and from which he can report no actual vision of the Lord enthroned surrounded by worshipping angels, only 'unutterable words'.<sup>92</sup> The super-apostles who have disturbed the Corinthian Christians rely on visions and revelations, Paul does not (cf. Gal. 1:8).

There are three, perhaps four, instances of material in Luke-Acts probably reflecting a desire to limit the role of visionary activity in the life of earliest Christianity.<sup>93</sup> The Lukan account of Jesus' baptism, by comparison with the one in Mark and Matthew, excludes any suggestion that Jesus merely had a vision. The Spirit came not 'into (εἰς)' him (Mark 1:10), but 'on (ἐπί) him' (Luke 3:22) and it did so 'bodily (σωματικῶς)' in a way that all could see. At the transfiguration, Luke alone tells us that 'the disciples were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory' (9:32). Along with features of the story that reflect Luke's penchant for realism—Jesus is praying (9:29) and conversing with Moses and Elijah about his imminent 'exodus' in Jerusalem (9:31)—the arousal-from-sleep addition is best explained if Luke is keen to avoid any suggestion that

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<sup>90</sup> See e.g. M. Goulder, 'The Visionaries of Laodicea', *JSNT* 43 (1991): 15-39 and U. Luz, 'Paul as Mystic' in *The Holy Spirit and Christian Origins: Essays in Honor of James D. G. Dunn*, ed. G. N. Stanton, B. W. Longenecker and S. C. Barton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004): 131-43 (esp. 137-38).

<sup>91</sup> See the comments on the relationship between material in Colossians and contemporary Jewish mysticism in Fletcher-Louis, 'Jewish Mysticism'.

<sup>92</sup> P. Gooder, *Only the Third Heaven? 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 and Heavenly Ascent* (Library of New Testament Studies; London: T&T Clark, 2006): esp. 190-215.

<sup>93</sup> For what follows see Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts*, 28.

the disciples merely had a vision of Jesus in glory. Luke's post-resurrection narratives make much the same point. In the upper room, Jesus stands in the midst of the disciples, but he is no mere 'spirit' and they are not hallucinating: he has hands and feet and can eat (Luke 2:36-43).<sup>94</sup>

Here is material from diverse quarters in earliest Christianity that challenges Hurtado's thesis that there was a widespread and unchallenged early Christian confidence in the place for visions in matters of religious life and thought. Hurtado is right that visionary activity was widely accepted. Nowhere is it in principle deemed inappropriate: the Johannine Christians are to 'test the spirits', not deny the existence of the Spirit-realm. But Johannine, Pauline and Lukan traditions all subordinate visionary revelation to the (historical) actuality of Jesus the Messiah as the definitive content and source of all that visions might otherwise offer.

Here, then, are three historical objections that tell against Hurtado's view that visionary and other religious experiences provided a vital stimulus to the christological breakthrough that he thinks took place at Stage 2 of the early Christian movement. Our third objection—the existence of an early Christian antipathy to mystical experiences—is consistent with our second objection—the lack of support for Hurtado's case in the adduced text: the lack of textual evidence for the role of religious experiences in the generation of early Christ-devotion is consistent with the evidence, in Pauline, Johannine and Lukan material, that early Christians were reluctant to accord visionary experiences authority in any development of christological practice and belief. Furthermore, most of that evidence of resistance to an authoritative role for mystical experiences also indicates that the opponents in view were not other Christians (who perhaps did, on Hurtado's model, ground their christological thinking on visionary revelation), but that they were Jewish mystical and visionary practitioners of the kind attested in the DSS, some pseudepigrapha, Philo and later *hekhalot* texts.

Both our second and third objections to Hurtado's appeal to religious experiences conspire to reinforce the significance of the first objection. If there is in fact an absence of evidence for religious

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<sup>94</sup> Jude 9 may also reflect a wider antipathy to the role of dreams and visions amongst some early Christians.

experiences causing christological development that is consistent with a clear opposition in some quarters to such a possibility, that all goes to show that where social-scientific theory stresses the constraint of the sociology of knowledge the historical evidence in this particular case—early Christian Christ-devotion—certainly tells decisively against Hurtado's appeal to special cases where new religious developments can take place through minor founder figures breaking away from their parent movement. There are so many reasons here to think if some gave a christologically authoritative significance to visions then there should be evidence of strong objections from others. Given the views in the Johannine, Pauline and Lukan materials we should expect serious divisions over the issue within earliest Christianity.

Scholarship in the modern period has rejected much that had been unquestioned Christian orthodoxy in the pre-critical period. But on one point critical scholarship has agreed with historic theological orthodoxy: 'Christology' is a matter first and foremost of ideas, since the New Testament speaks of a particular treatment of Jesus but this was consequent upon a particular theological view of him. Hurtado reverses this order in thinking that ideas about Jesus developed as a result of early Christian devotional praxis (and that that praxis in turn was generated by distinctive religious experiences).<sup>95</sup>

The New Testament itself does, in a sense, propose a 'religious experience' as the foundation of Christ-devotion and the modification to monotheism that early Christology entailed. That is not the experience of dreams or visions but the *historical* experience of Jesus as in some sense God incarnate, dying, rising to new life and now exalted to God's right hand where he always belonged. This is clearly John's presentation of Jesus and some recent scholarship has stressed its presence also in the Synoptics.<sup>96</sup> If, as we have argued here, the New Testament nowhere in fact presents direct evidence to support Hurtado's account of religious experience in christological origins then, for his thesis to have any credence, he surely has to explain why

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<sup>95</sup> For Hurtado's explicit statements on this point see, for example, Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 5 and his criticism of those who defend the traditional view of the relationship between praxis and belief in Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 22-23. Hurtado's view is now endorsed by Chester, *Messiah and Exaltation*, 81, 105-106.

<sup>96</sup> See, for example, S. J. Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).



it is that the early Christians buried the evidence for what really happened and created so thoroughgoing an alternative story.

## 5. On Assumptions and Theological Disinterest

We have noted the way in which, in some quarters, Hurtado's work has been treated as a vindication of orthodox Christian theology. Many have, no doubt, taken particular encouragement from the fact that Hurtado's conclusions can be taken to support a theologically conservative position, since as one reviewer puts it, he does not employ a 'confessional' method, but is 'strictly historical in its approach'.<sup>97</sup> Some may argue that an historiographic approach that is confessionally detached assumes a now questionable modernist epistemology, and in places Hurtado himself seems to recognise that an absolute separation between history and theology is not possible.<sup>98</sup> However, he does present his work as a matter of historiography that is theologically disinterested,<sup>99</sup> and he criticises his forebears, particularly, W. Bousset, for historical judgements distorted by 'theological motives', including a polemic against traditional Christian theology.<sup>100</sup> He also refrains from discussion of the theological implications of his conclusions.

Despite this theologically disinterested presentation of his work, there are reasons to think that Hurtado does not in fact work with a straightforward detachment from theological concerns, assumptions and commitments. This applies both to the shape of the synthesis as a whole and to the working through of distinct stages of the argument.

### 5.1 *Theological Disinterest in Hurtado's Method?*

In his *magnum opus*—*Lord Jesus Christ*—Hurtado says a little about his own understanding of the relationship between historical scholarship and his own faith.<sup>101</sup> He has on his horizon two positions from which he tries to dissociate himself. On the one hand, he

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<sup>97</sup> N. Overduin, 'Review: How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus by Larry W. Hurtado', *Calvin Theological Journal* 41 (2006): 392-94 (394).

<sup>98</sup> L. W. Hurtado, 'Devotion to Jesus and Historical Investigation: A Grateful, Clarifying and Critical Response to Professor Casey', *JSNT* 27 (2004): 97-104 (103-104).

<sup>99</sup> Esp. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 9.

<sup>100</sup> See Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 10-11; Hurtado, 'Christ-Devotion', 24.

<sup>101</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 5-11.

disavows the theological anxiety of conservative Christians that he thinks motivates their rejection of any historical analysis of early Christology. On the other hand, he wishes to dissociate himself from ‘the simplistic zeal for theological reformation’ which has motivated much study of Christology in the last hundred years or so, by those who reject classic orthodox statements about Jesus. His ‘object ... is not to engage in ... theological questions’ about the relationship between ‘what Jesus thought of himself’ (the Jesus of history) ‘and what early Christians claimed about him’ (the Christ of faith).<sup>102</sup> It is simply to describe the latter and account for it historically.

Hurtado claims the high moral ground as an historian who wishes to study Christ-devotion ‘as a historical phenomenon that can in principle be analyzed in the ways that historians study other historical phenomena’.<sup>103</sup> However, on the same page, as we have seen, he seems to appeal to Lessing’s famous dictum that ‘the accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason’. This, and Lessing’s ugly ditch between the Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History, has had a long and influential history over the last two hundred years of New Testament scholarship. *Hurtado seems unaware of the fact that by endorsing Lessing’s dictum he associates himself with a set of theological and philosophical commitments at the outset.* For Lessing and those who have followed him the nature of reality—of philosophy and what space there remains for theology—dictates, to one degree or another, not just the limits of what history writing can say, but the very character of history and its relationship to any divine reality. Lessing’s ugly ditch does not just problematise the relationship between faith and history, *it also dictates a particular character to faith.* Faith cannot be contingent upon the accidental truths of history because, for Lessing’s enlightenment rationalism, God—the object of faith—cannot be revealed in and constituted by concrete historical particularities. And so, for Lessing, as for Reimarus before him, it goes without saying that the Jesus of history was no divine Son of God. In this philosophical tradition there are only universal truths susceptible to strictly empirical and rational investigation. The possibility, or conceptual plausibility, of a particular and unique manifestation of God in human form in time, space and history is ruled out of court *a priori*.

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<sup>102</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 9.

<sup>103</sup> Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 9.

Hurtado may well wish to distance himself from those with a ‘simplistic zeal for theological reformation’, but by apparently endorsing Lessing’s dictum he commits himself to precisely those philosophical premises that have driven theological reformation for the last two centuries.<sup>104</sup> Consideration of some defining characteristics of Hurtado’s christological synthesis suggests that in this regard Hurtado has not simply arrived at his philosophical commitments at the end of the work, but that they have, however unconsciously, moulded its formation.

As we have seen, the Jesus whom Hurtado thinks the early Christians worshipped is first and foremost the risen and exalted Jesus; the Jesus revealed through visions and prophetic word. In the first instance, the object of Christ-devotion in Hurtado’s reconstruction is not the human Jesus with a particular life in earthly space and time. As I indicated earlier, the role of the life of Jesus as a distinct stage in the development of Christology is occluded in Hurtado’s presentation of his model. The ground and source of christological origins lies not with that historical Jesus who, as presented in the extant texts, reveals that he is to be worshipped as a manifestation of the one Jewish God. And Hurtado thinks that that Christology is a later overlay onto the gospels of the developed theology of a binitarian monotheism. He is agnostic about the precise intentions, actions and identity of the Jesus of history. To the extent that the gospels now portray a divine Jesus, it is as if the gospels have been written to create the (earthly) image of the (heavenly) image of the invisible God; the Lord Jesus Christ *at one remove* from the real Lord whom the earliest Christians encountered in their visions and in their worship. And there is nothing in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus which provides the grounds for Christ-devotion: Jesus of Nazareth is not worshipped because, for example, *as a human being*, he exercised authority in the natural and spiritual worlds, or because he had in some way—that is reflected in his virgin birth or prior heavenly existence—a humanity peculiarly and uniquely divine. Neither is it clear that Hurtado thinks there was any historical connection between the early believers’ decisions to worship Jesus

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<sup>104</sup> Hurtado has little sympathy for those conservative Christians of ‘a more naïve orientation’ who have resisted an historical investigation of Christ-devotion (Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 5). Does he appreciate that their reserve has often been a matter of a refusal to sign up to the understanding of history espoused by the Enlightenment and the post-Lessing application of it to orthodox Christology?

(Christology) and their beliefs about what he achieved at the cross (soteriology), as if the passion was somehow an expression of a peculiarly divine identity. So it is really hard to see what, in Hurtado's understanding of the early Christian mindset, was the purpose of writing up in the gospel accounts of Jesus' life an earthly reflex of the exalted heavenly and divine Christ.<sup>105</sup>

In the history of modern scholarship Hurtado's is a novel construal of the relationship between the Jesus of history and the Christ of Faith. It is not entirely clear what relationship Hurtado thinks the early Church thought there was between the exalted Jesus of their visions and the divine Jesus that they created in their telling of his life on earth. But by making the heavenly, exalted Jesus who sits enthroned beyond earthly time and space the primary object of Christ-devotion Hurtado seems to concede the point to Lessing that *the character of the divine identity cannot be defined by any accidental events within historical space and time.*

Some, in the history of protestant biblical scholarship, have accommodated Lessing's dichotomy between history and faith to a pietism which prefers a personal, unmediated relationship between God and the believer. M. Kähler famously preferred the Christ of faith to any Jesus of history and R. Bultmann followed him in a preference for an existential reading of New Testament Christology.<sup>106</sup> Hurtado's Christology is similar: where the Bultmannians had a Lutheran existential experience of Christ (set over against a Jesus of history), Hurtado locates the origins and heart of christological origins in a Pentecostal visionary experience (not the Jesus of history).<sup>107</sup> And because that visionary experience is focused on a risen and ascended Christ who is only loosely related to the Jesus of history whose face is only drawn in pencil lines, it is not surprising that, as we have seen, Hurtado soft pedals on the ethical particularity of Christian existence.

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<sup>105</sup> And, of course, if it is not clear why the earliest Christians were interested in having a divine earthly Jesus, it is equally unclear whether and why Hurtado's understanding of Christian faith today should have any such interest.

<sup>106</sup> See M. Kähler, *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus* (A. Deichert: Leipzig, 1896). English Translation: M. Kähler and C. E. Braaten, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964).

<sup>107</sup> Though, unlike Bultmann, Hurtado does not speak openly of the (visionary) experience of the earliest Christians as essentially constitutive for Christian faith today.

## 6. Conclusion

We have presented reasons for thinking that parts of Hurtado's account of the origins of Christ-devotion rest on foundations that cannot support the weight he places on them. We submit, in particular, that the place he gives to religious experiences in the sudden stimulation of a new binitarian pattern of monotheism is both without clear evidence and, for other reasons, highly unlikely.

If our criticisms are anywhere near the mark, the pattern of Christ-devotion that Hurtado has identified and that he rightly dates to the earliest period of the new movement's life after Jesus' death still demands historical explanation. There remain two avenues of exploration which may yet provide the explanation that Hurtado has not yet supplied. First, there is reason to believe that pre-Christian Jewish monotheism provided a more straightforward transition to the 'binitarian' faith Hurtado describes.<sup>108</sup> Secondly, whilst Hurtado remains agnostic about the precise details of the life and identity of the historical Jesus, advances in historical Jesus research may yet anchor the explosive stimulus for the creation of christological monotheism at that *first* stage of Christian origins.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> See the secondary literature at n. 13.

<sup>109</sup> I have in mind, for example, the historical evidence discussed in C. H. T. Fletcher-Louis, "Jesus as the High Priestly Messiah: Part 1", *JSHJ* 4 (2006): 155-75 and "Jesus as the High Priestly Messiah: Part 2", *JSHJ* 5 (2007): 57-79.