

CHRISTOLOGY AND ECCLESIOLOGY IN THE PRISON LETTERS

Introduction

Although imprisonment is mentioned in other Pauline letter (e.g., 2Cor 11:23), the letters called prison or captivity letters are Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. In all of these Paul calls himself a prisoner or talks about his chains/his imprisonment.¹ In other words, Paul claimed to have been in captivity when he wrote these letters. The Book of Acts points to three different imprisonments of Paul, namely in Philippi (Acts 16), in Caesarea (Acts 23-26), and in Rome (28). Some have suggested an imprisonment in Ephesus, which is difficult to support.² The imprisonment in Philippi can be ruled out as the one during which these letters could have been written. The Letter to the Philippians mentions the emperor's household (Phil 4:22). Therefore, at least for Philippians Rome would be the place of Paul's imprisonment.

We distinguish two imprisonments of Paul in Rome. The first one lasted approximately two years. During this time he seems to have written the captivity letters that we are about to discuss. Although he had some liberties and lived in his own rented quarters guarded by a soldier (Acts 28:16,30), the imprisonment was a taxing experience for the apostle. Nevertheless, he left us some of the finest letters of the New Testament. After the two-year period he was released, only to be imprisoned later again and being executed.³

I. Ephesians

1. General Background

The Letter to the Ephesians claims to be written by Paul.⁴ This name is found in Eph 1:1 and

¹Eph 3:1; 4:1; Col 4:10; Philem 1:1,9,23; Eph 6:20; Phil 1:7,13,14,17; Col 4:18; Phil 1:10,13.

²For a discussion and rejection of this view, see, Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1970), 472-478.

³See, Siegfried Horn, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1960), 828-832.

⁴For further literature on Ephesians, see, e.g., Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, Marianne Meye Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 377-389; D.A. Carson, D.J. Moo, L. Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 305-342 John Drane, *Introducing the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 351-

3:1. Pauline authorship was not questioned until the 19th century. Since then many New Testament scholars have suggested that a disciple of Paul has written the letter, and they count it among the so-called deuter-Pauline epistles. Some have proposed that Paul's letters were collected and that the collection of Pauline letters was prefaced with the Letter to the Ephesians in which a Paulinist, someone who regarded himself a disciple of Paul, summarized Paul's theology.

Although the external evidence for Pauline authorship is extremely strong,⁵ it is denied based on a number of internal arguments. It is claimed that on linguistic and stylistic grounds Ephesians cannot be attributed to Paul. The close relationship to Colossians is seen as the work of an imitator. Different usage of the same words and usage of words not found in other Pauline writings, a different doctrinal emphasis, the mistaken claim that the author must have been a Gentile, and others are listed as reasons to reject Pauline authorship. But none of these objections can be maintained beyond reasonable doubt. It is, for instance, true that Ephesians is more reflective than other Pauline writings. However, this would fit very well the situation of Paul's imprisonment.⁶ We must allow an author to use different words, different meanings of words, and different concepts in different situations. And why should Paul not grow in his theological understanding and express his knowledge of the gospel and the church with somewhat new terms and concepts? Even critics admit that Ephesians is close to Paul's other epistles. Therefore, they refer to the author as a Paulinist. "When all the objections are carefully considered it will be seen that the weight of the evidence is inadequate to overthrow the overwhelming external attestation to Pauline authorship, and the

361; Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 19-48; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1970), 479-521; Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, (eds.), *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 238-249; Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002; Leander E. Keck and Victor Paul Furnish, *The Pauline Letters* (Nashville: Abindgon Press, 1989), 126-140; Andrew T. Lincoln and A. J. M. Wedderburn, *The Theology of the Later Pauline Letters* (Cambridge: University Press, 1993), 75-166.

⁵See, Francis D. Nichol, et al., eds., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), 6:994.

⁶For a detailed discussion, see, Guthrie, 490-508, and Carson, 305-309.

Epistle's own claims.”⁷

In case the prison letters were written in Rome and Paul expressed his confidence to be released soon (Philem 1:22; Phil 1:25; 2:24), his first imprisonment is the likely time. Therefore, we date them to the years 62/63 A.D.⁸

The Greek title of the first of the prison letter in the New Testament canon reads in almost all extant manuscripts and in all versions “To the Ephesians.” However, Marcion, the great heretic of the early church, used the heading “to the Laodiceans.” The idea behind this suggestion may have been that Paul’s letter to the Laodiceans mentioned in Col 4:16 was actually the letter of Paul to the Ephesians. Marcion altered biblical manuscripts and created his own limited New Testament canon. Therefore, we should be careful with him.

Yet, although there is no need to follow Marcion, we notice that some old manuscripts lack “in Ephesus” in Eph 1:1.⁹ The early church agreed that this letter was addressed to the Christians in Ephesus. Still, the absence of a specific church, to which the letter was addressed, needs to be discussed. Furthermore, the tone of the letter is impersonal. Although Paul had worked for quite a while in Ephesus and must have known many people there (Acts 19-20)—he also had a farewell meeting with the elders—before he went to Jerusalem, where he was taken into custody—he does not mention his friends there as he does in other letters.¹⁰

The basic suggestions with regard to the recipients are the following:

- (1) It was a letter for the church in Laodicea.
- (2) It was a letter sent to the church in Ephesus.
- (3) It was a circular or encyclical letter sent either to the Christian churches in general or to the churches in Asia Minor.

⁷Guthrie, 507. In Francis D. Nichol et al., eds., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1956), 5:182-183, the following statement is found: “Ernst Percy . . . has shown by an extensive study of Ephesians as compared with Paul’s other epistles that in language, style, and particularly in theological concepts Ephesians is so much in agreement with the other letters that on purely critical grounds the evidence of its authenticity is much stronger than are the arguments that may be brought against it . . .”

⁸For a discussion of date and place, see, Carson, 309; Guthrie, 515-516, 555-558; Nichol, 6:994.

⁹E.g., Codex Vaticanus, Codex Sinaiticus, and p⁴⁶.

¹⁰Compare, e.g., with Romans 16 and Phil 4.

The last two suggestions are the most plausible ones. They may even be combined. Ephesus was the most important city of the Roman province of Asia. It would have been reasonable to send a letter to this city first and then allow for its circulation in the entire area.¹¹

It is not easy to find out the special reason why Paul decided to write this epistle. Whereas in Colossians a specific heresy is addressed, nothing of that sort is found in Ephesians. Paul writes basically about Jesus and the church. Thus, we may not be able to determine precisely why Paul wrote this letter. If we look for its main theme ecclesiology, or Christ and the church, or unity have been suggested. All of them are related to each other. During his imprisonment Paul may have reflected on the church, its relation to Christ, its function and ministry, and its future. The letter he wrote is one of the peaks of the New Testament.

2. Content and Structure

After the introduction (Eph 1:1-2) Paul immediately describes the salvation that is ours through God in Jesus Christ (Eph 1:3-13). This wonderful passage assures us that we are already saved, are heirs, and have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. The next part contains a prayer in which he stresses the importance of wisdom and knowledge, especially knowledge of Jesus, before summarizing the life of Jesus from incarnation to glorification and ending with Jesus as the head of his church (Eph 1:15-23).

Having introduced the church, the apostle focuses on the individual believers and contrasts their former life with the gift of salvation and grace that they have received freely (Eph 2:1-10). Good works are the consequence of salvation not its means. The second half of the second chapter shows what the church is all about emphasizing the corporate aspect (Eph 2:11-30). However, it is Jesus who abolished the barrier between Jews and Gentiles and made the church a holy temple.

In chapter 3 Paul talks about his own ministry, namely the proclamation of the mystery now revealed and the proclamation of the riches of Christ before showing that the wisdom of God is now be made known through the church (Eph 3:1-13). Another prayer and a doxology follow (Eph 3:14-21).

¹¹For a detailed discussion, see, Guthrie, 508-514.

Chapter 4 calls for the unity of the church. Although believers have received different spiritual gifts, they are to further the building up and the unity of the body of Christ, the church (Eph 4:1-16). The rest of chapter 4 and chapter 5 consist of admonitions. The old self is contrasted with the new self and the life in the light is portrayed (Eph 4:17-5:20). Relations in the Christian family, namely between wives and husbands, children and parent, and slaves and masters are discussed (Eph 5:21-6:9). Paul does not call for a revolution but for a reformation. There is again a strong emphasis on the church.

Chapter 6 ends with the Christian armor and call for prayer, because a war between the wicked spiritual powers and us is going on (Eph 6:10-20). The letter ends with a reference to Tychicus and a benediction (Eph 6:21-24). Here is an outline of the Letter to the Ephesians:

Introduction Eph 1:1-2

- I. Doctrinal section (Eph 1:3-3:21)
 1. Doxology: Blessings of the believers (Eph 1:3-14)
 2. Thanksgiving and prayer for the church (Eph 1:15-23)
 3. The greatness of Christian salvation (Eph 2:1-10)
 4. The reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2:11-22)
 5. The privilege of proclamation (Eph 3:1-13)
 6. Prayer for the church (Eph 3:13-19)
 7. Doxology (Eph 3:20-21)
 - II. Practical Section (Eph 4:1-6:20)
 1. The plea for unity (Eph 4:1-16)
 - a. Call for unity of the church (Eph 4:1-6)
 - b. Spiritual gifts and the church (Eph 4:7-16)
 2. Newness of life (Eph 4:17-5:20)
 - a. The old life (Eph 4:17-22)
 - b. The quality of the new life (Eph 4:23-32)
 - b. Life in the light (Eph 5:1-21)
 3. The Christian home life (Eph 5:21-6:9)
 - a. Wives and husbands (Eph 5:22-33)
 - b. Children and fathers (Eph 6:1-4)
 - c. Slaves and masters (Eph 6:5-9)
 4. Christian warfare (Eph 6:10-20)
 - a. The Christian armor (Eph 6:10-18)
 - b. Prayer (Eph 6:19-20)
- Conclusion and benediction (Eph 6:21-24)

3. Some Contributions

- (1) *Theology*. H. W. Hoehner stresses that Ephesians is a Trinitarian letter in which the activity of the Trinity is found in eight passages (Eph 1:4-14,17; 2:18,22; 3:4-5,14-17; 4:4-6; 5:18-20).¹² “It is the Father to whom believers direct their prayers and the one who is over all and plans and initiates all things. It is the Son through whom believers pray and the one who carries out the Father’s plan in redemption, reconciliation, and the unification of believers. The Holy Spirit is the one who seals, indwells, and empowers believers.”¹³
- The term “father” is found ten times in the epistle. Eight times it refers to God as our Father (Eph 1:2,3,17; 2:18; 3:14; 4:6; 5:20; 6:23) surpassing all other Pauline letters. Although God is the ruler of the universe, in Ephesians he is very close to his children, and we are his “beloved children” (Eph 5:1)
- (2) *Christology*. Ephesians has a high Christology.¹⁴ We are blessed in Jesus Christ. The adoption as God’s children is ours in Jesus (Eph 1:5). All things are summed up in him (Eph 1:10). Jesus was incarnated, raised from the dead, seated at God’s right hand, all things were subjected to him, and he became the head of the church (Eph 1:20-22), which is his body (Eph 4:12). Therefore, some authors speak of a “cosmic Christology”¹⁵ or an “exaltation Christology.”¹⁶ In Christ we are made alive (Eph 2:5). He has saved us and seated us in heavenly places (Eph 2:6). We are created in Jesus Christ for good works (Eph 2:10). He is our peace (Eph 2:14). We are brought near by the blood of Christ (Eph 2:20). He is not only the head of the church but also the cornerstone of the spiritual temple (Eph 2:20). The mystery of Christ is that the Gentile believers are fellow heirs and members of the body (Eph 3:4-6). Jesus may dwell in our hearts (Eph 3:17). His love is unsurpassable (Eph 3:18-19; 5:2). He is truth (Eph 4:21). We give thanks in the name of Jesus (Eph 5:20) and love Jesus

¹²Hoehner, 106.

¹³Hoehner, 17.

¹⁴The term “Jesus” is found 20 times in Ephesians and the term “Christ” 45 times.

¹⁵See, Keck, 127, Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary 42 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), xc-xci; Lincoln and Wedderburn, 97.

¹⁶See, Georg Strecker, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 567.

(Eph 6:24). The marriage is a symbol for the relation between Christ and the church (Eph 5:21-32). Thus, Jesus is eternal and divine, the cosmic Lord and the head of the church, who loves us, has saved us, and sums up everything.¹⁷

(3) *Pneumatology*. In Ephesians more than ten direct references to the Holy Spirit are found (Eph 1:13; 2:18,22; 3:5,16; 4:3,4,30; 5:18; 6:17,18). The Holy Spirit is the guarantor of our inheritance (Eph 1:13). He indwells the new temple, the church (Eph 2:22) and has revealed God's mystery to the prophets and apostles (Eph 3:5). He strengthens us (Eph 3:16). Believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13; 4:30) and should not grieve the Spirit (Eph 4:30), who therefore must be a personality and not just an impersonal power. Christians are called to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18). The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God (Eph 6:17). The Holy Spirit has a prominent role and is indispensable for our life as Christians.¹⁸

(4) *Ecclesiology*. "The Letter to the Ephesians represent the church as the goal of the Christ event in a way that is unique in the New Testament."¹⁹ The term *ekklēsia* is found nine times in this short letter (Eph 1:22; 3:10,21; 5:23,24,25,27,29,32). But the church is also described with other terms. It is the body of Christ, and Jesus is its head (Eph 1:22-23; 4:12). It is the new person or new humanity (Eph 2:15; 4:13), the holy temple and building (Eph 2:21), God's household (Eph 2:19), and Christ's bride (Eph 5:23-32). The church has apostolic and prophetic roots and Christ as its foundation and cornerstone (Eph 2:20). Church members, the saints (Eph 1:1), are fellow citizens (Eph 2:19). Christ has brought Jews and Gentiles into one church, which is a mystery (Eph 2:11-16; 3:4-6). He has established a united church, and the unity of his church must be maintained (Eph 4:3-6). Through baptism people are incorporated into the church (Eph 4:5). Having received spiritual gifts and offices the church is "a growing and dynamic organism"²⁰ (Eph 4:7-16). Its members have been saved (chap.

¹⁷For further discussion, see, Carson, 314; Hoehner, 108-109, Lincoln, xc-xci, Lincoln and Wedderburn, 129-130; Strecker, 566-568.

¹⁸See, Hoehner, 109-110.

¹⁹Strecker, 569.

²⁰Hoehner, 111.

1) but are called to live up to their high calling (chaps. 4 and 5) and demonstrate also in their household relations that Christ is their Lord (chaps. 5 and 6). In Ephesians the church is not a local entity but the universal church. Therefore, this letter is so important. Paul wants us “to catch the splendid vision of one church, thoroughly united in the Lord, though it contains members of various races and is equipped by God to render significant service in this world.”²¹

- (5) *Unity.* The term “unity” is found twice in the book, namely in Eph 4:3 and 13. The context is Christology. But the concept of unity is not limited to these verses which contain a call to unity and the goal of unity for the church. The numeral “one” is used in a number of places to express unity. The second chapter describes how Jesus formed his church by making two groups, Jews and Gentiles, into one breaking down the barriers between them and destroying their enmity (Eph 2:14,15). Now they are one body (Eph 2:16) and have access to God in one Spirit (Eph 2:18). In Eph 4:4-8 seven times the numeral is repeated stressing the unity of the church: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father. In Eph 5:31 the marital relationship is compared to Christ and the church. As a couple becomes one flesh, so the church and Jesus do in a symbolic way. Paul “was writing to a church (or churches) consisting of Jew and Gentiles, Asiatics and Europeans, slaves and freedmen—all symbols of a disrupted world that was to be restored to unity in Christ. This would necessitate unity of person, family, church, and race. The restoration of individual unity in the life of each believer assures the unity of God’s universe.”²²

II. Colossians

1. General Background

Paul has not founded the church in Colossae, and we do not have further information of how the church came into being. Paul preached the gospel in Ephesus. It may have been there that he met Epaphras and Philemon, two citizens of Colossae (Col 4:12; Philem 1:1), who were converted and

²¹Carson, 315. Since ecclesiology may be one of the main themes of this letter, see, Hoehner, 111-112; Lincoln, xcii-xcv; Lincoln and Wedderburn, 91-126, 132-133, 137-141, 151-156, 158-161; Strecker, 568-575.

²²Nichol, 6:995; see also, Keck, 128-133.

became followers of Christ (Philem 1:19). They may have taken the gospel to Colossae. Epaphras is suggested as the possible founder of the Colossian church (Col 1:7) by a number of scholars.²³

During Paul's imprisonment Epaphras was with him. He may have visited Paul in order to inform him about the church in Colossae and solicit his counsel about the heresy threatening his home church.

The main purpose for writing this epistle was undoubtedly to help the church members in Colossae face the heresy with which they had to deal. We do not know precisely what the heresy was all about, but we can try to reconstruct it by looking at Paul's refutation.

Obviously, this false teaching was detracting from the person and status of Christ. Colossians portrays Jesus in highest terms showing his preeminence. The heresy must have downplayed the importance of Jesus. This may be a trace of early Gnosticism which developed more fully in the second century, but is also found in 1John.

Secondly, in Col 2:8 Paul warns against "philosophy and empty deception." This may point to Hellenistic elements in this heresy. Colossians also employs certain words such as "mystery," "knowledge," and "fullness" used as technical religious terms in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in Gnosticism and applies them in a new and Christian way.

Thirdly, we find angel worship (Col 2:18) and "the elements of the world" which can be understood as elementary spirits or elementary teaching (Col 2:8, 20). It would be referring to "the powerful spirit-world" or if it means "elementary teachings" and "would presumably describe a purely materialistic doctrine concerned only with this world."²⁴

Furthermore, extreme forms of asceticism may have accompanied that heresy (Col 2:16), and finally, the heresy contained Jewish elements such as circumcision (Col 2:11; 3:11) and references to feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths (Col 2:16). The "human tradition" of Col 2:8 may also be a Jewish element. Therefore, it is best to understand this heresy as a mixture of Jewish and pagan ideas. Such types of syncretism were attractive to many people at that time including some church

²³See. Carson, 335; Guthrie, 545, N.T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 22.

²⁴Guthrie, 548.

members.²⁵

2. Content and Structure

The content of Colossians is to a large degree similar to Ephesians. A major exception is the heresy dealt with in this shorter letter. After a short opening salutation (Col 1:1-2) Paul engages in thankfulness and prayer for the church in Colossae (Col 1:3-14) stressing in a remarkable way the present reality of the church members' salvation (Col 1:12-14). Then he praises the greatness of Jesus (Col 1:15-23) who is the image of God, the creator of all things for whom all things are made, the sustainer, the head of the body, namely his church, the first one, the reconciler, savior, and peacemaker. Nobody surpasses Jesus.

A section on Paul's ministry follows (Col 1:24-29), in which he mentions the "mystery" which in Colossians stands for Christ and Christ in us (Col 1:27; 2:2). In chapter 2 Paul deals with the false teaching threatening the church. The passage includes a section on baptism and stresses the divinity of Jesus. In Jesus the fullness of God dwells (Col 2:9). He is the head of all authorities (Col 2:10) and has brought about the forgiveness of our sins (Col 2:13-15). Once more his headship in relation to the church is mentioned (Col 1:11). The Colossians are warned against false forms of worship or worship with wrong motifs (Col 2:16-19).

With the third chapter the practical part starts. We find a discussion on the old life and the new life and its practical implications. The household code follows. Colossians 4:1 is better taken with chapter 3, for it is addressed to the second part of the three pairs, the masters of the slave. These pairs are found at the end of the preceding chapter—husband and wives, children and fathers, slaves and—4:1—masters. The beginning of the fourth chapter stresses prayer, thanksgiving, and graciousness.

Finally, commendations, greetings, and blessings follow and conclude the letter (Col 4:7-18). A number of names of Paul's fellow workers are mentioned. For a possible outline see below:

Introduction Col 1:1-2

²⁵For a discussion of the heresy, see, Carson, 335-337; Guthrie, 546-551; and Francis D. Nichol et al., eds., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), 7:184. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 17-26, takes a somewhat different position.

- I. Doctrinal section (Col 1:3-2:23)
 - 1. Thanksgiving and prayer for the church (Col 1:4-14)
 - 2. The greatness of Christ (Col 1:15-23)
 - 3. The ministry of Paul (Col 1:24-29)
 - 4. The false teaching and its antidote (Col 2:1-23)
 - II. Practical Section (3:1-4:6)
 - 1. The old life and the new life (Col 3:1-17)
 - 2. The Christian home life (Col 3:18-4:1)
 - a. Wives and husbands (Col 3:18-19)
 - b. Children and fathers (Col 3:20-21)
 - c. Slaves and masters (Col 3:22-4:1))
 - 3. Prayer and speech (Col 4:2-6)
- Commendations, greetings, and blessings (Col 4:7-18)²⁶

3. Some Contributions

Because Colossians and Ephesians are quite similar, the contribution these two letters make is also similar. Both are strong in Christology, although Colossians makes even stronger statements about Jesus than Ephesians does.

On the other hand, the ecclesiology of Ephesians is more developed than that of Colossians. The strong emphasis on the unity of the church is not found in Colossians.²⁷ It also seems that in Colossians Paul had in mind the universal church (Col 1:18,24) as well as an individual congregation (Col 4:15-16), whereas in Ephesians he focused on the worldwide church mainly. But both emphasize that the church is the body of Christ and Christ is its head.²⁸ Growth of the church is also stressed (Col 2:19).²⁹

Both have wonderful statements about salvation, although again Ephesians is more elaborate. In Col 1:12-14,21-22 Paul stresses the present reality of our salvation with different words. In Col 1:5 and 23 he joins the concepts of hope and gospel. His eschatology is therefore a present and a future eschatology. The future aspect occurs in Col 1:22,28; 3:4,6,24 and indirectly in Col 1:18, when

²⁶For other outlines, see, Guthrie, 559-562; Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 185-186; Nichol, 7:185; Wright, 44-45.

²⁷But see, 2:19.

²⁸See, Col 1:18,24; 2:19; 3:15.

²⁹See, Strecker, 558.

another resurrection is expected.

The ethical concerns of Ephesians are also reflected in Colossians. In Col 3 a list of vices (Col 3:5-10) and a list of virtues (Col 3:12-17) is found followed by the household code. The latter is shorter in Colossians and does not contain the comparison of the husband/wife relationship with the relation between Christ and the church. Love is also quite important in Colossians, although the respective terms—with the exception of the adjective—are not used to that extent in Colossians as they are in Ephesians.³⁰

(1) *Christology*. Many scholars believe that Col 1:15-20 is a hymn concentrating on Jesus. Here is an outline of the passage:

A	He is {	the image of God. the firstborn of creation, for in him all was made: in heaven and earth. All things were made through him and for him.
B	He is	before all things.
C	All things	hold together in him.
B'	He is	the head of the church.
A'	He is {	the beginning, the firstborn of the dead, for in him it was the pleasure for all the fullness to dwell. All things were reconciled through him to him: in heaven and earth.

This passage is indeed very important and seems to have relations to other parts of the book. A close study of the passage indicates that verses 15-16 correspond with verses 18b-20. Identical words and phrases are used. For instance, in the first passage Jesus is the firstborn of creation (1:15). In the last part, he is the firstborn of the dead (1:18b). Whereas in 1:16 all things have been created through him and for him, in 1:20 through him all things were reconciled to him. And the extent of his sphere of influence is heaven and earth (1:16,20). Therefore, some speak in this context about the cosmic Christ. “As the first strophe points

³⁰The noun “love” (agapē) is found in 1:4,8,13; 2:2; 3:14, the verb “to love” in 3:12,19, and the adjective “beloved” in 1:7; 4:7,9,14.

to the cosmic authority of Christ, the second expresses a soteriological perspective.”³¹ The middle section consists of three sentences: (1) Jesus is preexistent (1:17a). “His temporal priority to the universe” is expressed.³² (2) Jesus is the sustainer of all (1:17b). (3) Jesus is the head of the church (1:18). Thus, the passage emphasizes Christ as a preexistent divine being, as the creator, sustainer, as the one who was crucified and raised from the dead, who reconciles us, and as the cosmic Lord and Savior. The term “firstborn” stresses his dignity and does not mean that he was born.

Since Jesus is called the “firstborn,” it is argued that he is born. Two facts militate against such a view. (1) According to Col 1:16 everything is created by Jesus. Therefore, he cannot be created himself. (2) The term “firstborn” has a special meaning for Hebrews. David being the latest child becomes the firstborn--Psalm 89:20,27. The second line of the parallelism tells us that it means to become the most exalted king. See also the experience of Jacob (Gen 25:25-26 and Ex 4:22) and Ephraim (Gen 41:50-52 and Jer 31:9). The firstborn was the leader of a group of people or a tribe, the priest of a family, and the one who received twice as much of the inheritance that his brothers received. He had certain privileges and responsibilities. Sometimes, the idea of being born or being the first one did not play any role. The time element was deleted. Important was only the special rank and dignity of the person called the “firstborn”. In the case of Jesus, this term refers to his exalted position and does not tell us about a time at which he supposedly was born.

The glorious mystery of God which was hidden in the past but now revealed is Jesus Christ (Col 1:27; 2:2). In him “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). And “in him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (Col 2:9). “He is the head over all rule and authority” (Col 2:10). He has canceled our record of sins (Col 2:14). He is our life (Col 3:4). Why does Paul exalt Jesus in such a way? While he tries to show who Jesus really is, he wants his audience not to fall prey to false teaching. Real knowledge is found in Jesus, not in philosophy. The real Lord is Jesus, not the angels or other beings. What we have

³¹Strecker, 552.

³²Peter O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*. Word Biblical Commentary 44 (Waco: Word Books, 1982), 47.

in him is sufficient and cannot be offered by anyone else. On the other hand, “the Colossian hymn represents the indicative of the Christ event . . . From the presence of the saving reality there follows the imperative of ethical action.”³³

- (2) *Baptism.* Baptism is mentioned in Col 2:12. It is the Christian counterpart to the rite of circumcision (Col 2:11) and it is linked to Jesus. To be baptized means to participate in Christ’s death and be buried but also raised with Christ. In Col 3:1-4 the reference to baptism is still visible. The text does not talk about baptism directly but addresses those who have “died” (Col 3:3) and have been raised with Christ (Col 3:1). Undoubtedly these are baptized Christians. Because they were raised, they seek things above (Col 3:2), await the consummation and glory to come (Col 3:4), and live a life which corresponds to their experience of salvation.³⁴
- (3) *Opposition to all forms of syncretism.* Syncretism is very much in vogue today, but Paul was strongly opposed to it. To combine Christian ideas with Greek philosophy, human traditions, strict asceticism dishonors the supreme Lord, Jesus Christ and questions his power, sufficiency, and uniqueness.³⁵ A quite difficult passage in the discussion of syncretism is 2:14-17. Some have concluded that Paul here shows that among others the law of clean and unclean food as well as the weekly Sabbath are abolished. This seems to be a hasty conclusion. Rodríguez writes: “We can conclude that Paul is simply condemning ‘not the principle of Sabbath keeping but its perversion’ or ‘superstitious observance.’ [99] We have already indicated that such type of Sabbath observance may have been quite common outside Jewish circles. Therefore, based on Col 2:16 one cannot theorize that Paul was promoting or teaching the abolition of the Sabbath commandment. [100] He was rejecting the attempt of the false teachers to impose their views on believers concerning how to observe it. [101] They were misusing the commandment but its misuse does not invalidate the commandment

³³Strecker, 555.

³⁴See, Lincoln and Wedderburn, 48-53; Strecker, 562-563.

³⁵Wright, 43, states: “Christ is not one deity . . . among many. He is supreme over all. Monotheism has always been a scandal, as Paul well knew when he confronted Corinthian polytheism with the claim ‘for us there is but one God . . . one Lord’ (1 Cor. 8:6). This is his great claim in Colossians, too. It stands over against all idolatry, modern or ancient, and all theological relativism.”

itself.[102] “³⁶ Nothing should “be allowed to eclipse Christ, the Sun of Righteousness,” not even correct Christian doctrines, divinely ordained practices, or a Christian way of life.

III. Philippians

1. General Background

Paul’s letter is addressed to the saints in Philippi. This city was the first European place where the gospel was preached. Paul met Lydia and a group of women and later the jailer, who were converted and formed the nucleus of the church in Philippi. On his third missionary journey Paul stopped at Philippi. The letter that Paul later sent them indicates that the church was led by bishops and deacons and thus had a certain degree of organization. The Philippian Christians had sent Epaphroditus with gifts to Paul. They had a close relationship with the apostle and supported him in his ministry. After Epaphroditus had recovered from his serious illness, which brought him close to death, Paul sent him back to Philippi. The church in Philippi may have experienced some persecution and apparently had to face false teachers and their doctrines. Nevertheless, it was a caring community, and Paul was eager to meet the church members again.

The epistle is a letter from a friend to friends. Therefore, it seems difficult to pinpoint a single purpose. It may well be that Paul had in mind more than just one purpose. G. F. Hawthorne lists eight:³⁷

- (1) Paul wanted to write his friends, and when the opportunity arose that somebody could take a letter to them, he set out to write the epistle (Phil 2:25-28).
- (2) He wanted to express his gratitude and appreciation for the Philippians’ gift (Phil 4:10-20).
- (3) He wrote the letter to inform them about his situation, his suffering, the danger he was in, but also his confidence that he would be released soon and expected to be able to see them again (Phil 1:12-26; 2:24). In spite of the sad circumstances Paul portrayed an optimistic outlook.

³⁶Angel Manuel Rodríguez, “The Biblical Sabbath: The Adventist Perspective,” <http://biblicalresearch.gc.adventist.org/documents/sabbath-catholic2002.htm>; see also, Jon Paulien, “An Exegetical Overview of Col 2:13-17: With Implications for SDA Understanding,” <http://www2.andrews.edu/~jonp/colossians2.htm>; Frank B. Holbrook, “Did the Apostle Paul Abolish the Sabbath?: Colossians 2:14-17 Revisited,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 13/2 (2002): 64-72.

³⁷Hawthorne, xlvii-xlviii.

- (4) Paul felt it necessary to inform the Philippians about Epaphroditus, their representative, who served him but had been so sick that he almost died. Through the grace of God he had recovered and would see them soon (Phil 2:25-30).³⁸
- (5) Paul wrote them to warn them against false teachers, in this case obviously of a Jewish background (Phil 3:2-21).
- (6) He wanted to prepare them for persecution, suffering, and martyrdom and secure their complete dedication (Phil 1:27-30).
- (7) Although the church in Philippi may not have had doctrinal differences and problems, the church members had problems on the personal level, and their unity was endangered. Paul wanted to restore unity and true fellowship (Phil 1:27; 2:2-4; 4:1-3).
- (8) Joy plays an important role in this letter. Paul admonished the church members to rejoice even under difficult circumstances. He himself had set the example that they were encourage to imitate (Phil 2:18; 3:1; 4:4).

In addition "the phrase 'in Christ' is used repeatedly, and when joined with the thought of joy, well expresses the theme of the epistle."³⁹ All of these purposes may have played a role in the composition of the letter.

2. Content and Structure

Paul starts with greetings to the church and its officers (Phil 1:1-2). As also found in a number of other Pauline letters he then engages in thanksgiving and prayer for the church (Phil 1:3-11). Jesus is mentioned repeatedly. Then a report is given on the present circumstances in which the apostle finds himself (Phil 1:12-26). This includes not only information about his imprisonment but also shows his personal attitude toward the imprisonment. Whatever may happen to him, the goal of his life is the glorification and exaltation of Christ. Jesus is his life. A section on worthy conduct, unity, self-denial, and obedience follows (Phil 1:27-2:18). This part includes the famous christological hymn (Phil 2:5-11) to which we have to return later. The rest of the second chapter

³⁸See, Achtemeier, 392.

³⁹Nichol, 7:139.

reintroduces Timotheus and informs the readers about Epiphradotus.

In Phil 3 Paul warns against Judaizers and against worshipping one's belly. He presents the goal for which believers strive and talks about Christ's and his own resurrection and the citizenship in heaven "from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil 3:1-21). Further admonitions about unity, steadfastness, and joy in the Lord follow (Phil 4:1-9). Before Paul concludes with greetings and a benediction (Phil 4:20-22) he acknowledges the gifts of the Philippians (Phil 4:10-20). Here is an outline:

Introduction (Phil 1:1-11)

1. Salutation (Phil 1:1-2)
2. Thanksgiving (Phil 1:3-11)
- I. News about Paul (Phil 1:12-26)
- II. Exhortations to unity, self-denial, and obedience (Phil 1:27-2:18)
- III. News about Timothy and Epaphroditus (Phil 2:19-30)
- IV. Warnings against false teachers and a false attitude (Phil 3:1-21)
- V. Exhortations to harmony and joyfulness (Phil 4:1-9)

Conclusion (Phil 4:10-23)

1. Acknowledgment of gift (Phil 4:10-19)
2. Salutations and benediction (Phil 4:20-22)

3. Some Contributions

- (1) *Christology.* In this letter we find a heavy emphasis on God the Father, but especially on Jesus Christ. Paul expects the day of Christ (Phil 1:6,10; 2:16). He talks about his chains in Christ, the privilege to suffer for him (Phil 1:13, 29), and the proclamation and the gospel of Christ (Phil 1:15-18, 27). His goal is that Christ may be exalted by his life or his death (Phil 1:20). Indeed, Christ is his life (Phil 1:21), and he would like to be with Christ (Phil 1:23).

Christians are called to follow the example of Jesus in humility and service as it is portrayed in Phil 2:5-11. This so-called hymn consists of two major parts, the first one describing the activity of Jesus (Phil 2:6-8) and the second one the activity of God in favor of Christ (Phil 2:9-11). Verse 5 can be considered to be an introduction connecting Christ's experience to Paul's audience. The call for imitation refers only to the first part. Whereas this part describes the double humiliation and the faithful service of Christ which led him to the very cross, the second part describes his exaltation. In the first part some words are difficult to

understand and to interpret, but the meaning seems to be: Although Jesus possessed “equality with God and could have exploited it to his own advantage, he did not use it . . . We seem led to the view that the person lays aside the prerogatives of supreme sovereignty in order to take up the position of a servant. It is not a question of giving up divine attributes or nature.”⁴⁰ It is the famous statement about the “self-emptying” of Christ. After having stressed pre-existence, incarnation, and the cross, the exaltation follows. But was Jesus exalted to a position higher than he had before? Being God, this is difficult to see. The idea seems to be that “just as he was openly put to death, now he is openly exalted . . . and made the object of universal worship.”⁴¹

⁴⁰ Karl P. Donfried and I. Howard Marshall, *The Theology of the Shorter Pauline Letters*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 132-133

⁴¹Ibid., 134-135; see, Achtemeier, 395-396, who points out that the title Lord, which is God’s own name Yahweh, is attributed to Jesus.

5 Have this attitude in yourselves
 which was also in Christ Jesus,
 6 ■ who,
 | • existing in the form of God,
 did not regard equality with God a thing
 to be grasped,
 7 ■ but emptied Himself,
 • taking the form of a bond-servant,
 • and being made in the likeness of men,
 8 • being found in appearance as a man,
 ■ humbled Himself
 • by becoming obedient to the point {of death,
 even death on a cross.

9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him,
 and bestowed on Him the name
 which is above every name,
 10 ■ so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow {in heaven
 and on earth
 and under the earth,
 11 ■ and that every tongue will confess
 that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Paul continues by referring to the interests of Jesus Christ (Phil 2:21), which we should seek after, and to the work of Christ (Phil 2:30). We are called to rejoice in the Lord (Phil 3:1; 4:4) and count as loss for the sake of Christ whatever things were gain to us (Phil 3:7). It is more important to know Christ Jesus our Lord and gain him (Phil 3:8), the righteousness coming through faith in him, and the resurrection which is dependant on his resurrection (Phil 3:9-11). While we have not reached the goal yet and are pressing on (Phil 3:12,14), we should know that we were laid hold of by Christ Jesus (Phil 3:12). Never should we become enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil 3:18) but expect our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven (Phil 3:20). Therefore, we stand firm in the Lord (Phil 4:1) and receive his blessings such as peace (Phil 4:7), strength (Phil 4:13), provision (Phil 4:19) and grace (Phil 4:23). The phrase “in Christ” and equivalents is very important in Pauline writings and is used 21 times in Philippians. It is used in four ways: “The basis and foundation of Christian

experience lies in Jesus . . . Jesus is seen as the channel through which God carries out his work in the lives of the believers . . . Christian behavior is determined by ‘the Lord’ . . . Christians are closely linked to Christ both now and at the judgment so that what is true of him becomes true of them.”⁴² The Christian life is to be completely dominated by Jesus Christ.

- (2) *Joy and suffering.* The letter is not silent on suffering, on the contrary. Suffering is normal for Christians and is even regarded as a privilege because it is for Christ’s sake (Phil 1:29). Paul himself suffers during his imprisonment. Nevertheless, he rejoices. The note of joy and rejoicing permeates the entire letter. The word family is found 16 times in this short letter (Phil 1:4,18,18,25; 2:2,17,17,18,18,28,29; 3:1; 4:1,4,4,10). The life of Christians is a life of deep inner joy even if the external circumstances are less than ideal. Bengel suggested as the content of the letter “I rejoice, (now) you rejoice!”⁴³
- (4) *Ecclesiology.* Although the term “church” is only found in Phil 3:6 and 4:15, other terms such as “saints” (Phil 1:1; 4:21,22) refer to it. In Philippians we notice a concern for unity and peace (Phil 4:2-9). There is some quarreling in the church. There is also external pressure which may split the church. We have already mentioned false teachers, whom Paul calls dogs and evil workers (Phil 3:2). In addition, there are those whose stomach is their god. But unity is important to allow for good personal relationships among the church members, for the proclamation of the gospel, and for growth.⁴⁴ Fellowship is another crucial term in Philippians (Phil 1:5; 2:1; 3:10; cf. 1:7; 4:14-15). Fellowship means that people share with each other a common possession. It is much more than warm feelings or some time spent with each other at a social meeting. There is fellowship in the gospel (Phil 1:5) and the fellowship of/with the Spirit (Phil 3:1), even the fellowship of Christ’s suffering. Thus, fellowship extends toward the Lord and the fellow believers and creates a bond between

⁴²Donfried and Marshall, 143. For further discussion, see, pages 138-144; Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 47.

⁴³Quoted in Martin, 45.

⁴⁴See, Donfried and Marshall, 157-161.

them. It also includes a monetary aspect, namely support of each other and the church.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the church in Philippi had already some structure. People were called to serve as elders and deacons, a situation which will be addressed again in the Pastoral Epistles.

- (5) *Eschatology*. The hope of the return of the Lord runs like a thread through the entire letter and shapes the Christian community. Paul expects the day of Christ Jesus (Phil 1:6,10; 2:16). The christological hymn ends with the perspective that at a certain point in the future every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil 2:10-11). In Phil 3:20-21 the motif of Christians as heavenly citizens is introduced who are still living in a foreign land and eagerly wait for their Lord and the transformation that accompanies his coming. Finally, in Phil 4:5 Paul assures us: “The Lord is near.”⁴⁶

Conclusion

Jesus takes center stage in many NT books. The information about him differs from writer to writer. But the different aspects about him help us to establish a broader picture of him and enter into a meaningful relationship with him. Therefore, we appreciate the unique contributions by the authors of the NT.

⁴⁵See, Martin, 48-52; Donfried and Marshall, 149-152.

⁴⁶See, Martin, 46

Appendix 1: Christology and Ecclesiology in Other Pauline Literature

I. First Corinthians

(1) *Christology.* 1Corinthians makes a definite contribution in the area of Christology, the doctrine that deals with Jesus.

(a) *The Theology of the Cross.* Jesus is highlighted as the crucified Lord right in the first chapter of the letter. Paul goes even further and says: “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” The word of the cross is put center stage. Whether or not the Greek or the Jews or whoever is willing to accept this Jesus, we have to proclaim the crucified Lord. Some people prefer to stress Jesus as our example. But this is too little. An example may encourage us to live a moral life, but first of all we need to be saved before we can set out to follow Jesus. First we need the cross, and only then can we talk about the example. Which is also done in 1Corinthians when Christians are charged: “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.” Though Jesus is both savior and example, the gospel is set aside if we stress the example only. This crucified Lord has become wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption for us. He can unify the church. He is the foundation of the spiritual temple, his church.

(b) *Lord’s Supper and Christ’s Resurrection.* In addition to the first chapters of 1Corinthians, in which Jesus is found, He is dealt with in 1Cor 11 and 15. 1Cor 11 reports about the Lord’s supper and preserves Jesus’ words about the bread and the wine including his reference to proclamation and his Second Coming. In 1Cor 15 the historicity of his resurrection is claimed and eyewitnesses, who have seen the risen Lord, are listed. Thus, all major statements on Jesus are linked to his suffering and death. In the section on the resurrection Jesus is also portrayed as the first fruit and the second Adam. All resurrections past and future are dependent on him. As the first Adam has brought death to the human race, so the second Adam through his death and resurrection guarantees life and the future resurrection. In addition, the resurrection of the believers is linked to Jesus’ second coming. At least since Paul Christian Theology must therefore be a theology of the cross.

- 4) *Ecclesiology*. The doctrine of the church in 1 Corinthians is especially important.
- (a) *The Unity of the Church*. The unity of the church is significant and is stressed right from the beginning.
 - (b) *The Church as Temple*. The church is presented as the temple of God which should not be destroyed. Whereas in the OT the temple is basically the earthly sanctuary and the heavenly sanctuary, the NT adds a new dimension and interprets the temple Christologically; Jesus is the temple (John 2:19-21). Paul points out another dimension, the ecclesiological dimension. The church as well as the individual believer are the temple (3:16-17; 6:19-20), a sanctuary.
 - (c) *The Church as a Body*. Furthermore, the church is a body consisting of many members. All are needed. All are different, but united. This unique image of the church as a body stresses unity in diversity (1Cor 12:12-31).
 - (d) *Church Discipline*. The issue of church discipline is mentioned and its real meaning is revealed. Church discipline is the last means that the church has to work toward the salvation of the sinner. At the same time is church discipline a way to protect the church against the dangerous leaven of sin (1Cor 5).
 - (e) *Spiritual Gifts*. An entire section on worship issues (chapters 11-15) focuses on the church. The church has spiritual gifts. The most comprehensive lists and the most comprehensive treatment of spiritual gifts in the entire NT are found here. Spiritual gifts need to find their rightful place and should not be overemphasized.⁴⁷ There are also offices in the church. The question of leadership comes to the forefront.
 - (f) *The Lord's Supper*. The Lord's Supper is part of the worship service of the church. “. . . 1 Corinthians is also notable for being the only New Testament writing, except for the Synoptic Gospels, in which the words of eucharistic institution are cited (11.23-25).”⁴⁸

⁴⁷Cf., Keck, 95-100.

⁴⁸Victor Paul Furnish, *The Theology of the First Letter to the Corinthians*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 131. The Lord's Supper is also found in 1Cor 10:14-22.

II. Pastoral Letters

The Pastoral letters make some significant contributions to New Testament theology, but also to practical aspects such as church organization.

- (1) *God.* Although God is called Father in the Pastoral Epistles, much more frequently he appears as Savior. Six out of the eight occurrences of this designation in the New Testament are found in these letters (1Tim 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; Tit 1:3; 2:10; 3:4). We also hear about God's saving grace (Tit 2:11). In addition the verb "to save" is used with God being implied (e.g., 2Tim 1:9). But Jesus is also called Savior (2Tim 2:10,13; Tit 1:4; 3:6). Thus, there is a strong emphasis on God's initiative in saving humankind. God and Christ are associated. Whereas in 1Timothy God is called Savior, in 2 Timothy only Jesus is the Savior, and in Titus both are. In the Pastoral Letters God is also the Creator/giver of life (1Tim 4:4; 6:13), the King of the universe (1Tim 1:17), and the King of kings (1Tim 6:15). God is imperishable, unseen, the only God. He "alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light (1Tim 1:17), whom no man has seen or can see" (1Tim 6:16). Thus, God is the sovereign ruler, who seems to be far away, almost unapproachable for human beings. And yet he "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1Tim 2:4). By stressing his transcendence as well as his saving activity both God's distance and difference as well as his closeness and his interest in us are balanced.⁴⁹ It is very reassuring to read about God's goodness and loving kindness (Tit 3:4).
- (2) *Christ.* We have already mentioned that Jesus is portrayed as Savior. The title "Lord" is applied to him. "In this Letter [1Timothy] where, as we have seen, 'Savior' belongs to God, God's title, *kyrios*, is usually applied to Christ."⁵⁰ Jesus is our hope (1Tim 1:1), our only mediator (1Tim 2:5), our judge (2Tim 4:1), and we wait for his appearance (1Tim 6:14). "He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself" (2Tim 2:13). "As mediator, Christ is the immanence or appearance of the invisible God, which means that in a real sense Christ stands for God, taking over God's functions, with the focus on judging, it would seem, in 2

⁴⁹See, Strecker, 582-583; Frances Young, *The Theology of the Pastoral Letters* (Cambridge: University Press, 1994), 48-55.

⁵⁰Young, 59.

Timothy, and on saving in Titus.”⁵¹ The term “mediator” is applied to Jesus only in 1Tim 2:5 and in Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24, where a connection to the priesthood concept is found. Although the priesthood of Christ is not envisioned in the Pastoral Epistles, together with Hebrews they share an important aspect of Christ’s work, namely his role as mediator. The phrase “in Christ”⁵² points to our fellowship and union with Jesus. All three letters contain major Christological sentences or hymns that shape the respective books. In 1Timothy, chapter 1:15-16 and chapter 2:5-6 are important. 1Tim 2:5-6: “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.” The first clear and more extensive statement, however, is found in 1Tim 3:16.

<p>(Christ Jesus)</p> <p>was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit,</p> <p>seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles,</p> <p>believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory.</p>

The hymnic character is evident in the six lines structured as three antithetic parallelisms, the chiasmic structure (ab/ba/ab) juxtapose the heavenly (Spirit, angel, glory) and the earthly (flesh, peoples, world) spheres.”⁵³ The hymn starts with Jesus’ incarnation and ends with his glorification. The universality of the Christ event is underlined. In 2Tim 1:10; 2:8,11-13; 4:1 and Tit 2:13-14 other such statements are found. 2Tim 1:10: “but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and

⁵¹Young, 63.

⁵²1Tim 1:14; 3:13; 1:1,9,13; 2:1,10; 3:12,15.

⁵³Strecker, 580.

immortality to light through the gospel.” 2Tim 2:8,11-13: “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel. . . It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we endure, we will also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us; if we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.” 2Tim 4:1: “I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom.” Tit 2:13-14: “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.” The Pastoral Epistles stress Jesus’ descent, incarnation, confession before Pontius Pilate, his atoning death, resurrection, his function as judge, and his appearance.⁵⁴

- (3) *The Church and Its Offices.* The term “church” is only found three times in the Pastoral epistles (1Tim 3:5,15; 5:16), however, others terms such as “saints” and “believers” point to it. The church is described as the “pillar and support of the truth.” It is a stronghold against the positions of the false teachers. On the other hand, the church is compared to a household, which is further developed in both 1Timothy and Titus. The reference to church offices such as bishops/elders and deacons as well as the discussion of the relations to older church members, widows, and masters must be seen in this context. The image of church members as valuable or less valuable vessels belongs also to the household metaphor (2Tim 2:19-21). The church is a household which is guided by certain leaders and which should function harmoniously and as an example for the non-Christian society.

We find several lists describing the qualifications for bishops/elders, deacons and probably deaconesses (1Tim 3:1-7, 8-13; 5:17-20; Tit 1:5-9).⁵⁵ The emphasis is more on character than

⁵⁴See, Strecker, 584.

⁵⁵The women in 1Tim 3:11 can be either the wives of the deacons or deaconesses. Because qualifications for these women are mentioned, whereas the wives of bishops are not even mentioned, and because in Rom 16:1 a female deacon is found it seems to be more reasonable to understand these women as deaconesses. This view is rejected by Strecker, 588, but supported by Achtemeier, 452; and Young, 113.

on their responsibilities and duties.⁵⁶ “It is usually agreed that the elder and the bishop were identical in the church of this period. Paul does not equate them in this letter as he does in Titus 1:5-7, but he does not differentiate them either, and there is no reason for taking 5:17-19 as referring to anyone else than the bishops of chapter 3.”⁵⁷ In addition to the deacons the ministry of Timothy and Titus and Paul’s ministry as an apostle is referred to. The administrative structure of the church is necessary to maintain its goals and its unity and to provide for preaching, teaching, supervision, and administration. However, it is not mandatory or necessary and not even desirable to create a strict ecclesiastical hierarchy and assign to bishops an authority which makes them autocratic rulers. This would militate against the priesthood of all believers. The church order⁵⁸ in the Pastoral Epistles helps us with our attempts to create a church organization which is true to the New Testament example. Furthermore, leaders have great responsibilities and should be examples and models of the Christian lifestyle. Timothy in his ministry is compared to a faithful teacher, soldier, athlete, and farmer (2Tim 2:1-7). He is called to be courageous and use his spiritual gifts (2Tim 1:6-9; 2:1). His ministry includes suffering (2Tim 2:3). To a large certain extent the qualifications mentioned for church officers apply also to all of us and we should exhibit them and strive for them.

The church is the community of believers and as such it helps it’s poor and disadvantaged, for instance, the widows. However, benevolent acts on the part of the church are not to be

⁵⁶There is a distinction between the qualifications in 1Tim 3 and those in Tit 1. According to 1Tim 3:13 a bishop should not be a new convert. Such a qualification is not found in Titus, and this is understandable. The church in Ephesus was well established, but the situation was different in Crete. In a newly founded church, in which all members are new converts, one or more of them must function as bishops.

⁵⁷Carson, 375. See, however, Young, 99-111. He makes such a distinction and understands the elders in 1Tim 5 as the older community members, who are involved in teaching and preaching and also receive remuneration for their ministry. They form the presbyterion or council of elders (1Tim 4:14) which appoints the bishop. However, it is the bishop who is the leader of the church. Young works with certain assumptions. He states, for instance: “The heart of their [the Pastoral Epistles’] theology is only understood properly if their pseudonymity is acknowledged.” However, this position shapes to a large extent the results of his investigation. In Tit 1:5,7 and in Acts 20:17,28 elders and bishops are called so interchangeably. Both seem to have the same functions, and elders are paid. Even the occurrence of bishop in the singular in 1Tim 3 and of elders in the plural in 1Tim 5—see, Strecker, 588--does not necessarily militate against this view, since the discussion on bishops in 1Tim 3 is introduced with a statement in the third person singular (“whoever/if anyone,” verse 1), and it is only consistent to continue with the singular (“bishop,” verse 2).

⁵⁸See, Achtemeier, 452-453; Drane, 363-364.

misused (1Tim 5:3-16).

According to 2Tim 2:2 the gospel has to be passed on. There is a chain of witnesses which starts with Paul. He has passed on the gospel to Timothy and Titus who in turn are charged to entrust it “to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” In this way the gospel has reached us, and we are asked to pass it on to others, even if it is difficult.⁵⁹

Appendix 2: Christology and Ecclesiology in the Petrine and Johannine Letters

I. 1Peter

- (1) *Christology.* Throughout the epistle christological statements are made. They encourage and strengthen the reader.
 - (a) *The Christ--His Blood, Resurrection, and Second Coming.* In 1Pet 1:2-3 the blood of Jesus, his death, and his resurrection including the results for us are already mentioned. According to 1Pet 1:7-8 the readers of the letter love Jesus, believe in him, and seem to expect his Second Coming. The sufferings of Jesus are introduced in 1Pet 1:11 and are found again and again in the letter. However, Peter does not stop with the sufferings but points to the glory of Jesus.
 - (b) *The Spotless Lamb.* A longer christological passage is found in 1Pet 1:18-21: “knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.” Jesus is represented as the lamb which redeemed us not with silver and gold but with his blood. Jesus suffered innocently, but he was also spotless and unblemished. Peter will come back to this thought later

⁵⁹Carson, 383, stated: “The gospel is for the most unpromising of people.” In Tit 1:12-13 Paul quotes a Cretan author and agrees with him saying, “One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.’ This testimony is true” (Tit 1:12-13). Evangelism among them must have been difficult. Indeed, it is strange that even church members seemed to be addicted to wine (Tit 2:3), had a hard time to love of husbands and children (Tit 2:4), stole from their masters (Tit2:10), and were slanderers (Tit 3:1-2) to name some issues. For more information about Crete, see, Nichol 7:355-356.

and show that Jesus was sinless. Jesus death's was not an accident but was part of the plan of redemption which was laid out even before the foundation of the world. This christological statement goes on to talk about his resurrection and glorification. Therefore, we who belong to him have hope.

- (c) *The Living Stone.* In 1Pet 2:4-8 Jesus is presented as the living stone, a precious corner stone. He was rejected, and yet whoever believes in him will not be disappointed. Jesus is the foundation of the spiritual house in which we may be included as living stones.
- (d) *The Shepherd and Bishop.* After having addressed the slaves, Peter introduces another important christological argument (1Pet 2:21-25). This is probably the most explicit text on Christ's suffering in 1Peter. Slaves and servant are called to be submissive even if it includes suffering. Reason: "This finds favor with God" (1Pet 2:19). How are they able to do that? The answer is provided in 1Pet 2:21-25. Jesus is the example and Savior. Even if Christians are enslaved and bruised, they are those who are healed, healed through Christ's wounds. They do not go astray and are lost anymore. They have returned to the Lord and have found the Father's house. Jesus shepherds and guides them. This passage indicates that Jesus suffered innocently. He was completely without sin, but carried our sins to the cross. While he suffered, he did not hate nor did he desire to get revenge. He suffered for us as our substitutionary sacrifice. Other lords make their servants suffer for them. Here the Lord suffers for his servants. Therefore, Christians accept sufferings and ask the Lord to strengthen them to work through it as Jesus did. Two images stress the importance to follow Jesus. The first one is to exactly copy the lines and patterns that Jesus has written and painted. The second is to follow the path he went and the footsteps he left us.
- (e) *The King.* The next extensive christological argument is found in 1Pet 3:18-22. In both cases, in chapter 2b and in chapter 3, Peter interrupts his advice and adds an entire passage about our Lord in order to motivate Christians to live a holy life. Nevertheless, there are differences between the two passages. In the first Jesus' earthly history is emphasized; in the second a heavenly aspect is added: Jesus is the

Lord. In the first paragraph Jesus appears as a shepherd, in the second as a king. However, in both cases it is through Jesus that humans have been offered healing and salvation. In verse 18 we hear about Jesus' suffering for our sins and his death, but also about his resurrection. The last part of verse 21 again starts with Jesus' resurrection and verse 22 continues: Jesus' death was not the end. He went to heaven and reigns. Verse 18 describes the earthly aspect of the life of Jesus, whereas verse 22 describes the heavenly aspect. This is the main focus of this passage: From suffering to glorification. Jesus is the true Lord. He supports his afflicted children. Verses 18 and 22 form a kind of parenthesis in which several other verses are inserted. This insertion consists of verses 19-21. It talks about Christ's proclamation (19-20) and Christ's salvific action in baptism (20-21).

- (f) *The Suffering Christ.* 1Pet 4 mentions Jesus two times. No extensive argument is built as in the previous cases. Jesus is the suffering Christ (1Pet 4:1,13). However, his suffering is limited to the "flesh" that is his earthly existence.
 - (g) *The Chief Shepherd.* In chapter 5 Peter addresses the elders as a fellow elder and calls them shepherds. Peter along with his fellow shepherds is responsible for caring for the churches that are entrusted to them. But above all of them is Jesus the Chief Shepherd, who cares for the flock and the shepherds and who will come again and bestow the crown of glory on the elders (1Pet 5:4). In 1Pet 5:10 Jesus is found the last time. Through him we may participate in the eternal glory.
- (2) *Ecclesiology.* In chapter 2 Christ is the foundation for the spiritual house, the church. There is the people of God (1Pet 2:10) who formerly had not been a people. The judgment starts with the household of God (1Pet 4:17). The elders are called to shepherd the flock of God (1Pet 5:2). Elders point to some degree of organization within the early church. In 1Pet 2:9 the privileges of Israel are applied to the Christian community. Now the church is "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people." Along with the privileges comes the responsibility to proclaim "the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." The importance of the Christian community as the house of God

being an underlying theme throughout the letter is stressed by Elliott.⁶⁰

II. 1John

- (1) *Christology.* The major problem with the false teachers in John's churches was that they had erroneous ideas about Jesus. Therefore John emphasizes that Jesus is the Word that was in the beginning. As his gospel starts with Christ so does his first epistle. John as an eyewitness testifies that Jesus is the life (1John 1:1,2), the Christ (1John 2:22), that is, the Messiah, our advocate (1John 2:1), and the Son of God (1John 5:5). The letter refers to Christ's incarnation (1John 4:2,9) and his death (1John 1:7). His death is clearly salvific. "The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1:7). "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1John 2:2). ". . . he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin" (1John 3:5) ". . . the Son of God was revealed to destroy the works of the devil" (1John 3:8). "God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him" (1John 4:9). ". . . he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins" (1John 4:10). ". . . the Father sent his Son as savior of the world" (1John 4:14). Jesus' incarnation is clearly attested. Jesus indeed shed his blood and was not just a phantom (5:6). Whether we want to hear it or not, it is the cross of Jesus, it is the blood of Jesus that saves us—nothing else. "Saving knowledge of fellowship with God is achieved only by confessing that the Son is the atonement for sin."⁶¹ As a consequence of our relationship with him we "walk just as he walked" (1John 2:6).
- (2) *False Teachers and Testing.* The false teachers and prophets had a problem with Jesus which

⁶⁰John H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter: Its Situation and Strategy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 233: ". . . the Christian community constitutes a home for the alienated and the estranged. If, moreover, this community was to endure and grow, then it was essential that its distinctive features be preserved at all costs, even at the cost of conflict and suffering . . . Union with Christ, in turn, assured union with God and with all those who constituted the household of faith. . . The chief unsettling and debilitating experience of the addressees was a sense of homelessness in an increasingly hostile environment. In a letter of consolation and confirmation the authors respond by assuring these Asia Minor Christians that in the Christian community alle the homeless have a home in the household of God . . . The strategy of 1 Peter, therefore, was to motivate the communal self-consciousness and to mobilize the solidarity and steadfastness of the audience by appealing to them as uniquely graced and honored members of the household of God." See also, 148-150, 220-233, 282-288. On page 285 he talks about the "accentuation of the specifically familial and household character of the Christian community."

⁶¹R. Alan Culpepper, "1-2-3 John," in *The General Letters: Hebrews, James, 1-2 Peter, Jude, 1-2-3 John*, ed. by G. Krodel, Proclamation Commentaries (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 139.

let to ethical error. Obviously, these people denied that Jesus had “come in the flesh” (4:2). According to 2:22 an antichrist is one who denies that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. Smalley suggests that there were four different groups within the churches that John addressed. (a) There were faithful Christians that followed the apostolic gospel. (b) Some were Jewish Christians which did not accept Jesus as the divine Messiah. (c) Some Gnostics had problems with the humanity of Christ. (d) In addition, there were secessionists who had begun to break away from the church.⁶² Others would only suggest two groups, faithful Christians and those who had problems with the nature of Jesus.⁶³ Church history tells us that there were groups which at least partially espoused the ideas found in 1John. That is not to say that John is referring precisely to these groups. Every attempt to reconstruct the original group or groups is a conjecture. Nevertheless, it is helpful to look at movements maintaining similar ideas without claiming that the false teachers in 1John are precisely these groups. One of these movements was Docetism, a branch of Gnosticism. It assumed that Jesus only seemed to have a real human body, suffered, and died, but in reality Jesus was not human as we are. The church fathers responded by claiming that the incarnation, suffering, and death of Jesus were historical events and that Jesus had really come in the flesh.⁶⁴ Another movement was Cerinthianism, started by a certain Cerinth. His idea was that the divine Christ entered Jesus at his baptism and left Jesus before he died on the cross.⁶⁵ Thus, the human Jesus and the divine Christ were kept separate. Such teachings do not only destroy the picture of Jesus that the Bible paints but affect other doctrines, especially the understanding of the plan of salvation and the doctrine of salvation.

These old erroneous ideas are oftentimes brushed up and sold again in our days, e.g., in the

⁶²Cf., Stephen S. Smalley, *1,2,3 John*, Word Biblical Commentary 51 (Waco: Word Publishers, 1984), xxiv-xxv; John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 47-48.

⁶³Cf., Carson, 454-455. The problem with the suggestion of heretics Jewish Christians is that John must warn against sinning and admonish to keep the commandments of God. He does not quote the OT either. These observations are not in favor of the suggestion made.

⁶⁴Cf., Achtemeier, 539.

⁶⁵Cf., Carson, 453.

New Age Movement but also in Christian circles. “There is nothing new under the sun” (Ecc 1:9). 1John is very much needed because in our days the biblical testimony on the nature of Christ is being questioned again. John calls his audience not to believe everyone and not to accept uncritically new doctrines, but to test individually and corporately whether or not a doctrine is truly biblical. Discernment to distinguish truth from error is needed. “. . . John lays his emphasis on three marks of authentic Christianity, namely belief in Jesus as the Christ come in the flesh, obedience to the commands of God and brotherly love.”⁶⁶ “John’s ultimate aim in his first Epistle is to give his readers solid grounds for assurance that they have eternal life through belief in Jesus Christ”⁶⁷ as proclaimed in Scripture. It contains the possibly clearest text of Scripture about the certainty of salvation (1John 5:11-13). According to this text we must not that we are saved.

Appendix 3: Christology and Ecclesiology in the Gospels

I. Matthew

- (1) *Christology.* Matthew’s irreplaceable contribution contains the Sermon on the Mount and other large teaching blocks of Jesus. It narrates the birth narrative from Joseph’s perspective. It uses the OT extensively and shows that the NT is a fulfillment of the OT. Both belong together and find their focal point in Jesus the Messiah. The eschatological discourse (Mat 24-25) contains parables that we would not want to miss such as the parable of the ten virgins, of the talents, and of the goats and the sheep. And Jesus is Immanuel, the God who is always with us (Mat1:23; 28:20).

William G. Johnson mentions the following unique features and emphases: Jesus as royal lawgiver, king, new Moses, and the personification of wisdom; the important issue of discipleship including benefits and challenges; the better righteousness which is expected from disciples and which must match the nature of Christ’s kingdom; the church and its authority; the kingdom which has already come and yet is still to come, namely in glory; and

⁶⁶Stott, 55.

⁶⁷I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 55.

the issue of the cross, which is not just Jesus' cross but a cross for each one of his followers.⁶⁸

As already mentioned Matthew has a strong messianic interests. He quotes a lot from the OT—the LXX as well as the Hebrew text—and points to the fulfillment in Jesus. Thus, it becomes evident that OT and NT belong together, that Christianity is inseparably tied to the OT. Finally, the great commission includes all peoples and individuals on the globe (Mat 28:18-20).

- (2) *Ecclesiology*. Matthew has an interest in the church. “Matthew, alone of the Gospels, records any specific teaching about the Church. Here only does the word ἐκκλησία [ekklēsia, church] occur attributed to Jesus.”⁶⁹ The texts are Mat 16:18 and 18:17-18 in which the authority of the church is mentioned, an authority which is always dependent on God and cannot be used against his Word. The gathering of two or three in the name of Jesus and his presence with them may also point to the church (Mat 18:20), and the great commission can only be fulfilled by the church and not by some individuals.

II. Mark

- (1) *Christology*. The Gospel of Mark is a Gospel of action. The author is more interested in Jesus' deeds than in his words. There are some narrative passages placed into other narratives (e.g., Mark 5:25-35; 6:17-29). This feature is used “to produce dramatized irony . . . It is as though the author uses intercalation as a tool to address the reader's own situation. . . . intercalation serves to bring the reader at the end of the Gospel to the place where he must answer for himself who Jesus is and what his own discipleship requires.”⁷⁰

Mark has a high Christology. Jesus is the Son of God, the Son of Man, and the redeemer. Divine and human sides of Jesus are pointed to, although in a somewhat concealed manner. In a special way this suffering is stressed. He is the suffering Son of God. There is an element

⁶⁸Cf., William G. Johnson, *Religion in Overalls* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1977).

⁶⁹Ibid., 23.

⁷⁰Tom Shepherd, *Markan Sandwich Stories: Narration, Definition, and Function*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 18 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1993), 384, 387.

of secrecy which some authors call the messianic secret (e.g., Mark 1:25,34,44; 5:43; 7:36; 9:9). This is not a psychological trick intended to indirectly motivate his audience to mission. Jesus may have wanted to avoid early conflict with the Jewish leadership and misconceptions in the audience about his ministry. “Outside of Galilee (Mark 5:19; 9:27) and during the closing days in the Jerusalem area (Mark 10:52) no such restriction was needed.”⁷¹

III. Luke

- (1) *Christology.* Both Luke and John mention Martha and Mary, Annas, and a disciple named Judas in addition to Judas Iscariot. Both have an interest in Jerusalem generally and in the temple. Both speak of Satan as being active in the betrayal of Jesus (Luke 22:3; John 13:27), say that the ear that Peter cut off the slave in Gethsemane was the *right* ear (Luke 22:50; John 18:10), and tell us that Pilate three times declared that Jesus was innocent (Luke 23:4, 14, 22; John 18:38; 19:4,6).⁷²

Luke is one of the two gospels that contain Jesus’ birth narrative. However, Luke is even more detailed than Matthew is. The Gospel of Luke starts with the birth narrative of John the Baptist which is found nowhere else. This birth narrative prepares the way for the birth of the Messiah. When it comes to the birth narrative of Jesus Luke contains many details not found in Matthew.

Luke is the only gospel containing a brief spotlight on Jesus before he starts his public ministry.

Luke shows Jesus’ marked interest in people. He focuses on individuals, social outcasts, children, and the poor and disreputable. “Most of the parables peculiar to Luke centre attention on people, whereas Matthew’s focus upon the kingdom.”⁷³ This can, for instance, be seen in the birth narrative. Luke mentions Zacharias, Elizabeth, Simeon, and Anna. In other places he tells us about Mary and Martha, Zaccheus and Cleopas. Jesus does not mind

⁷¹Everett F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 188.

⁷²Carson, 120.

⁷³Guthrie, 91.

being anointed by the woman who is a sinner. He meets Zaccheus, is interested in the criminal crucified next to him, tells about the prodigal son, the two debtors and the publican. He does not share the Jewish prejudice against the Samaritans. “Luke mentions thirteen women not mentioned elsewhere in the Gospels.”⁷⁴ Jesus welcomed children, blessed them, spoke about them, and presented them as an example. Children seem to have enjoyed the company of Jesus.

Jesus came from a poor family. In his programmatic sermon in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-21) as well as in his message to John the Luke Baptist (Luke 7:22) he includes the poor. There is a beatitude for the poor in Luke 6:20. It is not poverty which is praiseworthy but the helplessness of the poor requires interventions, and their decision to rely on the Lord is honored. On the other hand, Jesus warns repeatedly against riches (Luke 6:24). Jesus dines with the Pharisees, but he also “receives sinners and eats with them” (15:2). Luke contains a number of Jesus’ parables not found elsewhere.⁷⁵

IV. John

(1) Christology.

(a) *Jesus the logos.* Right in the beginning of the Gospel of John Jesus is introduced as the logos, the word. The same term is applied to Jesus also in 1John and in Revelation. In John this logos is God. However, it is not identical with God the Father. John carefully distinguishes between the different persons of the Godhead. In his writings the concept of the trinity is expressed quite clearly. John 1:1-3 reads: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.” That the “Word” represents the

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵They are the two debtors (Luke 7:41-43), the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), the rich fool (Luke 12:16-21), the barren fig tree (Luke 13:6-9), choosing places of honor (14:7-11), the great banquet (Luke 14:16-24), building a tower and going to war (Luke 14:28-33), the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10), the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), the dishonest steward (Luke 16:1-9), the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), the unprofitable servants (Luke 17:7-10), the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8), the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18:9-14), and the pounds (Luke 19:11-27).

Son is evident from John 1:14: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.” Thus, we can substitute the term “Word” in John 1:1-3 with Jesus: “In the beginning was the Word/*Jesus*, and the Word/*Jesus* was with God, and the Word/*Jesus* was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.”⁷⁶

Some have suggested that John was influenced by Greek philosophy and especially by Philo when he talked about the Word. “The Logos-doctrine of Philo is intended to bridge the gulf between the purely spiritual God and the material world, and also to explain the presence and action of God in the soul.”⁷⁷ This is quite different from John. In Philo the *logos* is an intermediate power, which is not strictly divine. It is not the savior as it is in John. However, there are some connections between John and the theology of the Word of God in the OT, although John surpasses this OT concept. “The word of God is not merely a creative and conservational force . . . , but the bearer of salvation an new life . . . The word of God uttered at creation, through the mouth of the prophets . . . and in the law . . . has a number of functions which may very well be compared with those attributed to the Logos of John.”⁷⁸

- (b) *The Pre-Existence of Jesus.* The pre-existence of Christ is assumed in different places. According to the prologue Jesus was in the beginning with God, whenever this beginning was. In John 1:30 John the Baptist confirms: “This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he was before me.’” Jesus himself claims: “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). In the high priestly prayer

⁷⁶By using the term “God” once with article and the next time without article John differentiates between God the Father and God the Son. A literal translation would read: “In the beginning was the Word/*Jesus*, and the Word/*Jesus* was with the God, and the Word/*Jesus* was God.”

⁷⁷ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 3 vols. (New York: Crossroad, 1982, 1990, 1:486.

⁷⁸Schnackenburg, 1:483. He also discusses the proposal that John may have used an ancient myth which flowered in Gnosticism, but he concludes, 1:493: “The Johannine hymn to the Logos is, in the main, much closer to Jewish and primitive Christian thinking than to Gnosticism, and this must have been the main reason for the choice of the title Logos.”

(John 17:5,24) he again stresses his pre-existence, and there are a number of other places, in which it becomes evident that Jesus had existed prior to his incarnation (e.g., John 6:33,50-51; 8:14).

- (c) *The I-Am-Sayings*. These sayings fall into two groups. First, there is the absolute use of the expression in John. Probably the clearest is found in John 8:58: “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.” With this statement Jesus does not only claim pre-existence. Maybe the Jews would still have tolerated this idea. What was intolerable for them is that Jesus claimed divinity. The I am is God himself. The expression may go back to Isa 43:10,13 and possibly to Ex 3:14. The I am is the God of the OT, Yahweh. Even texts such as John 6:20; 18:5-6,8; and 13:19 contain and require this theological meaning. Second, there is the predicate use of the formula: “I am the bread of life” (6,35,48), “I am the light of the world” (8:12), “I am the door of the sheep” (10:7,9), “I am the good shepherd” (10:11,14), “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25), ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life “ (14:6), and “I am the true vine” (15:1,5) Even in these sayings the idea of a divine being is present.⁷⁹

- (d) *Other Christological Titles*. John uses the titles “Son of man,” “Son of God,” simply “Son,” and “God.” Jesus is the “Christ,” “the Lamb of God,” “the King,” and “the Lord”, which in some cases stands for Yahweh, namely when an OT prediction talking about Yahweh is applied to Jesus (e.g., John 1:23).

Another title is “the only Son” or “the only begotten Son.” It is suggested by some that the word *monogenēs*, “only,” points to a literal begetting of Jesus and should be translated “only begotten.” But the same term occurs also in Luke 7:12; 8:42; 9:38 and points to an only child. In Heb 11:17 Isaac is called Abraham’s *monogenēs* son. Isaac was not even Abraham’s only son, but he was the unique son, the only son of promise. There is no emphasis on birth. These texts including those of John and 1John are the only ones in the NT to use the Greek term. They suggest that the translation “only” or “unique” is to be preferred. The translation “only begotten” may

⁷⁹Cf., Elizabeth Harris, *Prologue and Gospel: The Theology of the Fourth Evangelist*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series 107 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 130-155.

have originated with the early Fathers. The Vulgate may have influenced later translations. The normal term for begotten is *gegennēka* which is found in Heb 1:5 and may point to Christ's resurrection or incarnation.

R. Brown writes: "The Synoptic emphasis on the *basileia* [kingdom] making itself felt in Jesus seems to have become in John an emphasis on Jesus who is *basileus* ("king") and who reigns. John refers to Jesus as king fifteen times, almost double the number of times that this reference occurs in any of the other Gospels. . . . If the Synoptic *basileia* is like leaven working in a mass of dough, the Johannine Jesus is the bread of life. If there is a Synoptic parable of the shepherd and the lost sheep, the Johannine Jesus is the model shepherd. If the Synoptics record a parable where the *basileia* is like the vineyard which shall be handed over to others (Matt xxi 43), the Johannine Jesus is the vine."⁸⁰ In any case, the Gospel portrays Jesus as fully divine and fully human.⁸¹

- (e) *The Miracles as Signs*. The Gospel of John contains seven particular miracles. They are called signs. But the term occurs seven-teen times in total. "The signs are important works of Jesus, performed in the sight of his disciples, miracles, in fact, which of their nature should lead to faith in 'Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.'"⁸² They are comparable to the miracles of the Exodus. They point to the saving work of Jesus. "If faith bursts forth in consequence of what is revealed in the signs, well and good: signs legitimately serve as a basis for faith (e.g., 10:38). In contrast, people are excoriated for their dependence on signs (4:48). It is a better faith that hears and believes rather than sees and believes (20:29)."⁸³
- (f) *Exaltation and Glorification of Jesus*. It has already been mentioned that the terms

⁸⁰B Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, The Anchor Bible 29 and 29A (New York: Doubleday, 1966, 1970), 1:cx.

⁸¹For more titles and a list of titles of Jesus see, George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary 36 (Waco: Word Books, 1987), lxxxi..

⁸²Schnackenburg, 1:515.

⁸³Carson, 176.

“to exalt” and “to glorify” are used in John to describe Jesus’ suffering and death. The normal word family for suffering is not employed to describe Jesus’ passion in John. What looks like a great defeat in human eyes, is the greatest victory.⁸⁴ Salvation has come, and our lives can be meaningful again.

(2) *Ecclesiology.*

(a) *The Foot Washing.* The last supper is mentioned by the Synoptics but not directly by John. Some think that the discourse on the bread of life may allude to the Lord’s supper. On the other hand, the evangelist reports that the foot washing took place and gained a special theological meaning, surpassing any normal washing of feet (John 13). Both events, the Lord’s Supper as well as the foot washing are important. The respective contexts reveals some overlap pointing to the fact that these to symbolic acts belong together. Again the different gospels supplement each other.⁸⁵

(b) *The People of God.* In John the term “church” is not used. Nevertheless, John knows the Christian community. Jesus is the shepherd and cares for his sheep. The group of disciples is characterized by love. The image of the vine and the branches may point to Jesus and his people. The farewell speeches are not found in the Synoptic Gospels. They prepare the disciples for what is to come. These farewell speeches contain large sections on the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-26; 15:26-27; 16:5-15).

(3) *Other Great Themes.* These themes are already found in the prologue and developed in the main body of the Gospel. “Unlike the teaching in the Synoptic Gospels the teaching in John tends to present abstract themes such as light, life, love, truth, abiding, which recur at intervals throughout the book.”⁸⁶ For instance, the term “light” is found 16 times in John, whereas “life” occurs 32 times in the Gospel. The word family “to love” (*agapaō*) is found 44 times not counting synonyms. Love is very important in the farewell discourses and in the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to Peter and the six other disciples. Christ’s followers

⁸⁴Cf., Schnackenburg, 2:398-410.

⁸⁵For a more detailed explanation see, Schnackenburg, 3:33-47.

⁸⁶Guthrie, 239.

are called to love each other (13:34-35; 15:12,17). Love toward Jesus is manifested by keeping his commandments (14:15,21,23-24; 15:10). Jesus loves the Father (14:31). The Father loves Jesus (15:9). Jesus loves his disciples (15:9, 12). The Father loves his children (16:27; *phileō*). And Peter is asked about his relationship to Jesus (21:15-17) as are we.

Summary

It is very interesting and enlightening to notice the different christological and ecclesiological emphases of the NT writers. Almost each book makes a unique contribution in some way or another. Of great importance are the christological hymns. Why are they found in the NT? Here are some possible reasons:

- (1) Jesus is the center of the NT. It is natural that Jesus is praised for what he has done and that his followers are reminded of his life and work.
- (2) Early Christianity had to come to grips with who Jesus was. Jewish Christians who had accepted monotheism may have had a harder time to believe in an additional person of the godhead while maintaining monotheism. They had to understand that the system of sacrifices had been fulfilled in Jesus and had become obsolete. The temple had lost its importance as had some ancient rites. In Hebrews we find that they were in danger to give up their faith in Jesus, the Messiah, and fall away from him and the Christian church. They needed to be reminded of Jesus and his achievements again and again. Although gentiles came from another background, they also needed to be exposed to Jesus as often as possible. The hymns and other christological statements may have been of great help. Some of them can be memorized easily and could have served as a confession of faith.
- (3) The early church had to wrestle with quite a number of false teachers. The NT is full of reports about different heresies. A number of them were christological in nature. The majority of the NT letter may have been written because churches had to deal with false teachers, strange doctrines, and false theological emphases which affected the unity of the church and the life style of the believers. In this context, christological statements supported the apostolic proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They may have served as correctives and may have become a standard against which it was possible to measure false doctrines.

- (4) Christological statements and hymns were also used to motivate believers to live a truly Christian life, endure evil, suffering, and persecution, and exhibit holy conduct. What else can motivate a disciple to follow Christ's footsteps if not a reminder of salvation brought about by Jesus and the exemplary life of the master!

The great number of christological titles, images, and statements highlights the life, the work, and the authority and greatness of Jesus from different perspectives and give us glimpses of Jesus' character, achievements, and activities. We do not consider them to be in contradiction to each other but rather to be complimentary. There is unity in diversity. Although some NT authors use unique titles not found elsewhere, there is also always an overlap with other authors when it comes to Christology. Thus, a NT perspective of Jesus is portrayed as well as of his church.

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