

DOES THE NEW TESTAMENT CALL JESUS GOD?

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THIS ARTICLE has a very limited goal; perhaps we can best make this clear by stating what the article does *not* intend to discuss. First, this article will not raise the question of whether Jesus was God. This question was settled for the Church at Nicaea, where it was clearly confessed that the Son was God and not a creature; he was "true God of true God." The recognition that such a belief is still the hallmark of the true Christian is found in the Amsterdam Confession of the World Council of Churches, which stated that the World Council is composed of "Churches which acknowledge Jesus Christ as God and Saviour." Yet, if we take for granted that Jesus was God as confessed at Nicaea, there still remains the question, to what extent and in what manner of understanding and statement this truth is contained in the New Testament. A development from the Scriptures to Nicaea, at least in formulation and thought patterns, is recognized by all. Indeed, the council fathers at Nicaea were troubled over the fact that they could not answer the Arians in purely biblical categories.¹ As contemporary scholars² have so well shown, by the time of Nicaea there had been a definite progression from a functional approach to Jesus to an ontological approach. And so, it is perfectly legitimate to push the question about the divinity of Jesus back before Nicaea and to ask about the attitude of the New Testament toward the problem.

However—and this is our second delimitation—the New Testament attitude toward the divinity of Jesus is much broader than the scope of this article. To treat such a question, one would have to discuss all the important Christological titles, e.g., Messiah, Son of God, Lord, Saviour, etc., much in the manner of full-scale works by V. Taylor, O. Cullmann, and others. Such titles are an index of the way in which the early Church confessed its understanding of what Jesus meant

¹ Athanasius, "Letter concerning the Decrees of the Council of Nicaea," esp. chap. 5, nos. 19–21 (*LNPF*, Series 2, Vol. 4, 162–64).

² Cf. B. Lonergan, *De Deo trino* 1 (2nd ed.; Rome, 1964) 104–12, 128–32, 153–54; J. C. Murray, *The Problem of God* (New Haven, 1964) pp. 40–41.

for men. Even more important, one would have to analyze the descriptions of Jesus' actions and miracles; his attitudes toward the Temple, the Sabbath, and judgment; his self-assurance in his proclamations and teaching; his sinlessness; etc. If Jesus presented himself as one in whose life God was active, he did so not primarily by the use of titles or by clear statements about what he was, but rather by the impact of his person and his life on those who followed him. Thus, the material that would have to be treated in discussing the divinity of Jesus in the New Testament is very broad in range.

It is to only one small area of this material that we confine this article, namely, the New Testament use of the term "God" (*theos*) for Jesus. Naturally, if the New Testament does use the term "God" in referring to Jesus, this is an important element in the larger question of the New Testament attitude toward the divinity of Jesus. But were we to discover that the New Testament never calls Jesus God, this would not necessarily mean that the New Testament authors did not think of Jesus as divine. There is much truth to Athanasius' contention³ that the Nicene definition that Jesus was God and not a creature "collects the sense of Scripture," and thus, as we may deduce, is not dependent on any one statement of Scripture.

The limited nature of the topic we are treating does not diminish its importance, especially in ecumenical relations. In Protestant-Catholic dialogue a preference on the part of some Protestants for avoiding the phraseology "Jesus is God" is quite evident. The above-mentioned confession of the World Council of Churches provoked considerable criticism precisely because it stated that Jesus Christ was God. Some Catholics may suspect that neo-Arianism lies behind such criticism, and yet often it came from Christians who wholeheartedly accepted the truth implied in the phraseology. The uneasiness about calling Jesus God arises on several counts.

First, it has been argued that the statement "Jesus is God" is not a biblical formulation. It is to this problem that our article will be directly addressed. At the outset we may call attention to articles by such distinguished scholars as R. Bultmann⁴ and V. Taylor,⁵ who con-

³ *Op. cit.* 5, 20: "If the expressions are not in so many words in the Scriptures, yet they contain the sense of the Scriptures."

⁴ "The Christological Confession of the World Council of Churches," *Essays Philosophical and Theological* (New York, 1955) pp. 273-90. The paper was given in 1951-52.

⁵ "Does the New Testament Call Jesus God?" *Expository Times* 73 (1961-62) 116-18.

clude that the New Testament exercises great restraint in describing Jesus as God and who do not favor the designation. Other treatments by Cullmann⁶ and A. W. Wainwright⁷ seem to be slightly more positive in their evaluation of the evidence.

Second, it has been contended that this formula does not do justice to the fulness of Christ. Taylor says: "To describe Christ as God is to neglect the sense in which He is both less and more, man as well as God within the glory and limitations of His Incarnation."⁸ This fear that an exclusive emphasis on the divinity of Christ may lead to a failure to appreciate his humanity is quite realistic. Many believers unconsciously drift into a semidocetic understanding of Jesus which would exclude from his life such human factors as trial, fear, ignorance, and hesitation. However, the answer to this difficulty lies more in the direction of emphasizing the humanity of Jesus, rather than in questioning the validity of the formula "Jesus is God." Another aspect of the fear that this formula distorts the full picture of Jesus is the contention that the formula is open to a Sabellian interpretation that would reduce the Son to an aspect of God the Father. This danger seems less real in our times than the danger of semidocetism. If anything, the tendency in our times is to emphasize the Son at the expense of the Father and of the Holy Spirit.

Third, it has been contended that this formula objectivizes Jesus. Bultmann says: "The formula 'Christ is God' is false in every sense in which God is understood as an entity which can be objectivized, whether it is understood in an Arian or Nicene, an Orthodox or a Liberal sense. It is correct, if 'God' is understood as the event of God's acting."⁹ He would avoid the danger by referring to Christ not as "God" but as "the Word of God." We may well wish to disengage ourselves from Bultmann's overstress on the functional, for we maintain that it is meaningful and necessary to ask what Christ is *in se* and not only what he is *quoad nos* or *pro me*.¹⁰ Yet, Bultmann's re-

⁶ *The Christology of the New Testament* (London, 1959) pp. 306-14.

⁷ "The Confession 'Jesus is God' in the New Testament," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 10 (1957) 274-99.

⁸ *Art. cit.*, p. 118.

⁹ *Art. cit.*, p. 287.

¹⁰ Bultmann, *ibid.*, p. 280, maintains that a knowledge of the nature of Jesus without an accompanying knowledge of oneself is so inadequate that it can be compared with what Jas 2:19 says: "The devils also believe and tremble." On p. 284 Bultmann stresses that the true NT attitude is that God is to be *encountered* in Jesus.

marks do point up the danger of neglecting the soteriological implications of the formula "Jesus is God." Once again the answer to the danger would seem to lie in the proper explanation of the formula, rather than in its rejection. Nicaea certainly did not ignore the soteriological aspect, for in the one breath it described Jesus as "true God of true God . . . who for us men and our salvation . . . became man, suffered, and rose."

Thus, it seems that the last two objections are centered primarily on the objectionable meaning that one can give to the formula "Jesus is God" and can be answered in terms of a corrective emphasis. We shall concentrate on the first objection and the scriptural justification for the formula. We shall discuss the important relevant texts under three headings: (1) texts that seem to imply that the title "God" was not used for Jesus; (2) texts where, by reason of textual variants or syntax, the use of "God" for Jesus is dubious; (3) texts where clearly Jesus is called God. We shall then evaluate the information that these texts give us about the frequency, antiquity, and origin of the use of "God" for Jesus.

TEXTS THAT SEEM TO IMPLY THAT THE TITLE "GOD"
WAS NOT USED FOR JESUS

It seems best to begin with negative evidence which is often somewhat neglected in Catholic treatments of the subject. It is quite obvious that in the New Testament the term "God" is applied with overwhelming frequency to God the Father, i.e., to the God revealed in the Old Testament to whom Jesus prayed. The attitude toward Jesus in the early sermons of Acts is that Jesus was a man attested by God (2:22) and that God preached to Israel through Jesus (10:36). Throughout most of the New Testament there tends to be a distinction between God (= the Father) and Jesus. We may illustrate this by several texts.

1) Mk 10:18. In response to the man who addresses him as "good teacher," Jesus says: "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone." The crucial phrase (*ei mē heis ho theos*) may also be translated: ". . . but the one God." Lk 18:19 agrees with Mark but omits the article before *theos*. Mt 19:17 seems to reflect embarrassment at the thrust of the Marcan saying, for it reads: "Why do you ask me about what is good?" V. Taylor¹¹ lists a number of interpretations of

¹¹ *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (London, 1953) pp. 426-27.

this Marcan verse. A frequent patristic interpretation is that Jesus is trying to lead the man to a perception of his divinity, i.e., that Jesus is showing the man what he is really (and correctly) implying when he addresses Jesus as good. One cannot but feel that such an exegesis is motivated by an apologetic concern for protecting the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus. Other interpreters stress that Jesus is trying to direct attention away from himself to his Father. This is undoubtedly true, but it should not disguise the fact that this text strongly distinguishes between Jesus and God, and that a description which Jesus rejects is applicable to God. From this text one would never suspect that the Evangelist thought of Jesus as God.¹²

2) Mk 15:34; Mt 27:46. As Jesus hangs on the cross, he cries out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" If either Evangelist was accustomed to think or speak of Jesus as God, it is indeed strange that he would report a saying where Jesus is portrayed as addressing another as "my God." Of course, this argument is weakened by the fact that Jesus is citing Ps 22:1 and thus is using a conventional form of address. However, no such explanation is possible for the similar use of "my God" in Jn 20:17: "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to *my God* and your God."¹³

3) Eph 1:17: "The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory." (See also 2 Cor 1:3; 1 Pt 1:3.) In Eph 1:3 we hear of the "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," but the abruptness of 1:17 makes an even stronger impression. Just as in the preceding examples of where Jesus speaks of "my God," these examples from the Epistles make it difficult to think that the author designated Jesus as God.

¹² We shall treat all the Gospel passages on the level of what they reflect of the Evangelists' mentality. Thus we shall not discuss two problems: (a) whether these are the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus; (b) what Jesus thought of himself in relation to divinity. We are exclusively concerned with whether the *NT* authors thought that "God" was a term applicable to Jesus.

¹³ We cannot accept the contention that in this passage Jesus is making a careful (and theological) distinction between his own relationship to the Father and the relationship of his disciples to the Father, i.e., between natural sonship and the broader sonship gained through baptism. This passage must be interpreted against the background of Johannine theology: the ascension of which Jesus is speaking in 20:17 will lead to the giving of the Spirit (20:22; also 7:38-39), which will beget the disciples anew from above (3:3) and make them God's children (1:12). Thus Jesus' Father will now become the disciples' Father, and they will become Jesus' brothers (note that the message in 20:17 is to be relayed to his *brothers*). For an understanding of the construction in 20:17, see Ru 1:16: "Your people shall be my people; and your God, my God." Cf. F.-M. Catharinet, "Note sur un verset de l'évangile de Jean," *Mémoires J. Chaine* (Lyons, 1950) pp. 51-59.

4) There are several passages that by means of immediate juxtaposition seem to distinguish between the one God and Jesus Christ. We give a sampling:

Jn 17:3: "Eternal life consists in this: that they know you, the only true God [*ton monon alēthinon theon*], and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ."

1 Cor 8:6: "For us there is *one God, the Father*, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and *one Lord, Jesus Christ*, through whom are all things and through whom we exist."

Eph 4:4-6 distinguishes between "... one Spirit ... one Lord ... one God and Father of us all." In 1 Cor 12:4-6 a similar distinction is made: "... the same Spirit ... the same Lord ... the same God"; see also 2 Cor 13:14. Formulae distinguishing between the one God and Jesus Christ continued in Christian usage even after the New Testament period.¹⁴

1 Tim 2:5: "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

Such passages closely associate Jesus the Lord and God the Father (and sometimes the Spirit as well); therefore they are useful in discussing the New Testament attitude toward the divinity of Jesus and the New Testament roots of the later doctrine of the Trinity. However, for our purposes they show that while Jesus was associated with God and called the Lord or the mediator, there was a strong tendency to reserve the title "God" to the Father who is the one true God.

5) Tangentially related to our discussion are a number of texts which seem to state that Jesus is less than God or the Father. A full-scale exegesis of these texts would be germane to a paper discussing the divinity of Jesus in the New Testament;¹⁵ it is not germane to our paper, for they do not directly involve the use of the title "God." Nevertheless, it is well at least to list them:

Jn 14:28: "The Father is greater than I." This is the third Johannine text we have mentioned in this section. It is important

¹⁴ Erik Peterson, *EIS THEOS* (Göttingen, 1926). For an example of a pertinent Jerash inscription, see *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 57 (1935) 8.

¹⁵ Needless to say, for those who believe in Nicaea and Chalcedon, these texts will be explained in a way that will not deny the truth that from the first moment of his Incarnation Jesus was true God and true man, and that the Son is equal to the Father.

to note that there are Johannine passages that do not favor the application of the term "God" to Jesus. This will serve as a balance to the emphasis below that the fourth Gospel supplies us with clear examples of such an application.

Mk 13:32: "Of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

Phil 2:5-10: "Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form (*morphē*) of God, did not count being equal with God a thing to be clung to, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant. . . . Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name. . . . that every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."¹⁶

1 Cor 15:24 speaks of the triumphant Christ of the Second Coming, who is to deliver the kingdom to God the Father. In 15:28 Paul continues: "Then the Son himself will also be subjected to Him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to everyone." Some have suggested that Paul is speaking of the Son in his role as head of the Church, but in any case "God" is reserved as the title for Him to whom the Son is subjected.

TEXTS WHERE THE USE OF "GOD" FOR JESUS IS DUBIOUS

The doubts about these texts arise on two scores, namely, the presence of textual variants and problems of syntax.

*Passages with Textual Variants*¹⁷

1) Gal 2:20: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live in faith, faith in *the Son of God* who loved me and gave himself for me."

The crucial words are *en pistei zō tē tou huiou tou theou*. Some important witnesses (P⁴⁶, B, D*, G) read *tou theou kai Christou* instead of

¹⁶ Attention is to be paid to the kenosis whereby Jesus emptied himself from a stage where he was in the form of God and equal to God to a stage where he took on the form of a servant. Also, it should be noted that in the exaltation at the end of this hymnal passage the name bestowed on Jesus is not "God" but "Lord." The "God" who exalted Jesus and bestowed the name upon him is God the Father.

¹⁷ We shall discuss only those which we think have some merit. We shall ignore, for instance, 1 Tim 3:16, where some of the later witnesses have *God* manifested in the flesh. The attestation for such a reading is not strong enough to warrant serious consideration.

tou huiou tou theou. There are two ways to translate this variant: "faith in God and in Christ who loved me and gave himself for me," or "faith in the God and Christ etc." Only in the second interpretation of this variant is "God" used as a title for Jesus. In general, critical editions of the Greek New Testament prefer the reading "Son of God" to the variant; but, in part, this is probably because the editors consider "Son of God" to be the less developed reading from a theological viewpoint and thus more original. The phrase *tou theou kai Christou* is never found elsewhere in the Pauline writings, and so is suspect. Thus, this text should not be counted among those passages which call Jesus God.

2) Acts 20:28: "The Holy Spirit has made you overseers to feed the church of God which He obtained with his own blood."

The crucial words are *tēn ekklēsiān tou theou hēn periepoiēsato dia tou haimatos tou idiou*. There are two problems: one concerns the variant reading; the other concerns grammatical understanding.

In this instance "the church of God" is the best attested reading, with support in B, S, and the Vulg. However, there is another reading, "the church of the Lord," which is supported by A, D, and some minor versions.¹⁸ This second reading removes the possibility that Jesus is called God and is thus the less difficult reading—a fact which makes it suspect. However, an argument has been advanced for the second reading on the grounds that "the church of the Lord" is a much more unusual expression than "the church of God,"¹⁹ and therefore some scribe may have tried to make the text conform to the usual expression, "the church of God." Yet, the weight of the arguments favors "the church of God" as more original. One very plausible reason why some scribes may have changed "God" to "Lord" is that a reading which has God shedding blood seems to smack of Patripassianism.

If we accept "the church of God," then it is possible that the text is referring to Jesus as God, for the modifying clause "which he obtained with his own blood" would more appropriately be spoken of Jesus

¹⁸ The reading of the Byzantine text, "the church of the Lord and God," is obviously a scribal conflation.

¹⁹ "The church of God" occurs eight times in the Pauline Epistles. "The church of the Lord" does not occur in the NT but does occur in the LXX as a translation of *q'hal YHWH*. We may mention that some interpreters see in this verse of Acts an echo of Ps 74:2: "Remember your congregation [or church] which you obtained of old."

than of the Father. However, there is another possibility: perhaps *theos* refers to the Father and *idios* refers to the Son, thus, "the church of God (the Father) which He obtained with the blood of His own (Son)." Such a grammatical expert as Moulton favors this, and Hort once suggested that the Greek noun for Son may have been lost at the end of the verse. A recent and exhaustive Catholic treatment of this discourse in Acts²⁰ translates the verse in the way just proposed. And so, even if we read "the church of God," we are by no means certain that this verse calls Jesus God.

3) Jn 1:18: "No one has ever seen God; it is *God the only Son*, ever at the Father's side, who has revealed Him."

The textual witnesses do not agree on the italicized words; there are three major possibilities:

a) [*ho*] *monogenēs theos*, "God the only Son" or, as some would translate, "the only-begotten God."²¹ This is supported by the evidence of the best Greek mss., by the Syriac, by Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen. The fact that both of the recently discovered Bodmer papyri from ca. A.D. 200 have this reading gives it great weight. Some exegetes suspect that the reading is too highly developed theologically, but we shall see that elsewhere in John Jesus is clearly called God. One cannot maintain that this reading was introduced into copies of John as part of the anti-Arian polemic, for the Arians did not balk at giving such a title to Jesus. Perhaps the only real objection to the reading is the strangeness of the affirmation that God reveals God and that only God has seen God.

b) *monogenēs huios*, literally, "the Son, the only one." This reading is supported by some early versions (Latin, Curetonian Syriac), by a good number of later Greek mss., including A, by Athanasius, Chrysostom, and many of the Latin Fathers. In three of the other four uses of *monogenēs* in the Johannine writings,²² it is combined with *huios*, and so the appearance of this combination here may be the reflection of a scribal tendency to conform.

c) *monogenēs*, "the only Son." This reading has the poorest attesta-

²⁰ J. Dupont, *Le discours de Milet* (Paris, 1962) p. 159.

²¹ However, *monogenēs* means "only, unique" (Latin *unicus*) and not "only-begotten"; the Vulgate's *unigenitus* represents anti-Arian apologetics on St. Jerome's part. For the evidence see D. Moody, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 72 (1953) 213-19.

²² Jn 3:16, 18; 1 Jn 4:9.

tion; it is found in Tatian, Origen (once), Epiphanius, and Cyril of Alexandria. Some scholars, e.g., Boismard, have favored it as the original reading, of which the above two readings would represent an expansion and clarification. However, the complete lack of attestation in the Greek copies of the Gospel makes it suspect. When one is dealing with patristic citations of the Gospel, one is never certain when, for the sake of brevity, the Fathers are citing only the essential words of a passage.

In our personal opinion, since the discovery of the Bodmer papyri, there is very good reason for accepting the first reading above as original—the reading which calls Jesus God.

Passages Where Obscurity Arises from Syntax

- 1) Col 2:2: “. . . that they may attain to all the riches of the fulness of understanding, unto the knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

Several interpretations of the italicized phrase (*tu theou Christou*) are possible:

a) “Christ” is in apposition to “God,” or at least dependent on “God”: “the knowledge of the mystery of the God Christ.” This interpretation calls Jesus God. There is no article before “Christ,” and so the two nouns may be united. However, in the New Testament there is no other instance of the formula “the God Christ.”

b) The genitive “Christ” qualifies “God”: “the knowledge of the mystery of the God of Christ.” Grammatically this offers no difficulty, and we saw above that Eph 1:17 speaks of “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ”; see also Col 1:3.

c) “Christ” is the content of the mystery: “the knowledge of the mystery of God which is Christ.” This is actually the reading in D:²³ *tu theou ho estin Christos*—a reading which reflects an early interpretation. Yet, the reading in D points up the grammatical difficulty behind this interpretation. If Paul had meant to say “the mystery which is Christ,” then he would normally have used the Greek that is

²³ There are a number of variants in the textual witnesses. Their general tenor is to distinguish between “God” and “Christ”; e.g., some add “and” between the two words or qualify “God” as the Father. See T. K. Abbott’s commentary in the *International Critical Commentary* (New York, 1916) p. 240.

in Codex D, and not the *tau theou Christou* which seems to be the original reading of the passage.²⁴ The grammatical difficulty is not insuperable, however, and an understanding of Paul's concept of "the mystery"²⁵ would incline us to accept this interpretation.

Be this as it may, the interpretations (b) and (c) are clearly preferable to (a), and therefore this text is not a good one to use in our discussion.

2) 2 Th 1:12: "So that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of *our God and (the) Lord Jesus Christ.*"

The crucial Greek words are *kata tēn charin tou theou hēmōn kai kyriou Iēsou Christou*. There are two possible interpretations of the genitives: (a) "the grace of our God-and-Lord Jesus Christ"; (b) "the grace of our God and of the Lord Jesus Christ."

The first interpretation, which gives Jesus the title of "God," is favored by the absence in the Greek of an article before "Lord," giving the impression that the two genitives are bound together and governed by the one article which precedes "God." Yet, perhaps "Lord Jesus Christ" was so common a phrase that it would automatically be thought of as a separate entity and could be used without the article. The second interpretation is favored by the fact that *hēmōn* separates the two titles; but, as we shall see below in discussing 2 Pt 1:1, this is not a decisive argument. The most impressive argument for the second interpretation is that *ho theos hēmōn*, "our God," occurs four times in 1-2 Thessalonians as a title for God the Father; and on this analogy, in the passage at hand "our God" should be distinguished from "(the) Lord Jesus Christ."²⁶ Most commentators accept this distinction, and the latest and most comprehensive Catholic commentary²⁷ says that it must be accepted. Therefore, this text cannot be used as an example of the use of the title "God" for Jesus.

²⁴ For confirmatory examples of Pauline usage in such an instance, see Col 1:24, 27; 1 Cor 3:11.

²⁵ See R. E. Brown, "The Semitic Background of the New Testament *Mysterion*," *Biblica* 40 (1959) 72.

²⁶ Exactly the same problem exists for Jas 1:1, where James is described as "a servant of God and (the) Lord Jesus Christ" (*theou kai kyriou Iēsou Christou doulos*). However, in James there is no article before *theou* to suggest that the two nouns should be bound together as "God-and-Lord."

²⁷ B. Rigaux, *Les épîtres aux Thessaloniens* (Paris, 1956) p. 643.

3) Tit 2:13: "... awaiting our blessed hope and the appearance of the glory of (the) great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

The crucial Greek words are *epiphaneian tēs doxēs megalou theou kai sōtēros hēmōn Iēsou Christou*. Three interpretations are possible:

a) "the glory of the great God and of our Saviour Jesus Christ." This interpretation, which clearly separates "the great God" and "our Saviour Jesus Christ," is not really favored by the Greek, which binds together *theou kai sōtēros*. Once again it may be argued that the absence of an article before *sōtēros* is not too important, because "our Saviour Jesus Christ" was so common a credal formula that it would automatically be thought of as a separate entity. However, the argument is less convincing here than it was above in the instance of 2 Th 1:12, where *hēmōn* broke up *theou . . . kai kyriou*. Moreover, the separation proposed in this interpretation of Tit 2:13 means that the author is speaking of a twofold glorious appearance, one of God and the other of the Saviour Jesus Christ. There is no real evidence in the New Testament for such a double epiphany.

b) "the glory of our great God-and-Saviour, which (glory) is Jesus Christ." This interpretation binds together "God" and "Saviour" but applies the compound title to the Father. Jesus Christ is taken to represent the personification of the glory of God the Father, and grammatically *Iēsou Christou* is treated as a genitive in apposition with the genitive *doxēs*. The objection to this interpretation is the same as we faced in dealing with interpretation (c) of Col 2:2, namely, that we would expect in the Greek an explanatory "which is." Otherwise, there is no real objection to the application of the title "Saviour" to the Father, for other passages in Titus (1:3; 2:10; 3:4) speak of "God our Saviour" (as contrasted with 1:4 and 3:6, which speak of "Jesus Christ our Saviour"). Nor can one object to the idea that Jesus is the glory of the Father, for other New Testament passages²⁸ identify Jesus as the bearer of divine glory.

c) "the glory of our great God-and-Saviour Jesus Christ." Here the compound title "God-and-Saviour" is given to Jesus Christ. This is the most obvious meaning of the Greek. It implies that the passage is speaking only of one glorious epiphany, namely, of Jesus Christ; and this is in harmony with other references to the epiphany of Jesus

²⁸ Jn 1:14; 12:41; 17:24; Heb 1:3.

Christ in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim 6:14–15; 2 Tim 4:1). That “Saviour” is applied to Jesus Christ rather than to God the Father is suggested by the next verse in Titus (2:14), which speaks of the redemption wrought by Jesus. Some would rule out this interpretation which gives Jesus the title of “God” because elsewhere in the Pastorals (1 Tim 2:5; see above) a clear distinction is made between the one God (= the Father) and the man Jesus Christ. However, as we have noted, in the fourth Gospel there are passages which call Jesus God along with passages which distinguish between Jesus and the one true God.

It is very difficult to come to a definite decision. Careful scholars like Ezra Abbot and Joachim Jeremias have decided against interpretation (c). Yet, Cullmann thinks that it is probable that Jesus is called God here, and the most complete Catholic commentary on the Pastorals²⁹ argues strongly for this interpretation. Personally, we are inclined to recognize interpretation (c) as the probable meaning of the passage. It is unfortunate that no certainty can be reached here, for it seems that this passage is the one which shaped the confession of the World Council of Churches in “Jesus Christ as God and Saviour.”

4)1 Jn 5:20: “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding to know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. *This is the true God and eternal life.*”

In the first sentence of this passage it is quite obvious that “He who is true” (*ho alēthinos*) is God the Father; indeed, some textual witnesses³⁰ clarify the first “Him who is true” by adding “God,” a combination that would be translated “. . . understanding to know *the true God*” (cf. Jn 17:3, cited above). This first sentence tells us that the Son has come and enabled men to know the Father, and the Christian abides in Father and Son.

The real problem concerns the opening of the second sentence in the passage *houtos estin ho alēthinos theos*. To whom does the “this” refer? C. H. Dodd³¹ suggests that “this” is a general reference to the

²⁹ C. Spicq, *Les épîtres pastorales* (Paris, 1947) pp. 265–66.

³⁰ Codex A, Vulg., Bohairic.

³¹ *The Johannine Epistles* (London, 1946) p. 140.

teaching of the Epistle. More often, however, it is seen as a reference to either "Jesus Christ" or to "Him who is true" in the preceding sentence. Grammar favors a reference to the nearest antecedent, and this would be "Jesus Christ." In this case Jesus Christ is called true God. Yet, since God the Father was referred to twice in the preceding sentence as *ho alēthinos*, one might suspect that the statement *houtos estin ho alēthinos theos* is really a reference to Him. Certainly in Jn 17:3 *ho monos alēthinos theos* refers to God the Father and not to Jesus Christ.

Can we learn something from the second predicate in the sentence, i.e., "eternal life"? Twice in the fourth Gospel Jesus is called "the life" (11:25; 14:6), while the Father is never so called. Yet, Jn 6:57 speaks of "the living Father" and makes it clear that the Father is the source of the Son's life. Thus, it seems probable that in Johannine terminology either the Father or the Son could be designated as "life," even as they are both designated as "light" (1 Jn 1:5; Jn 8:12; note that it is the Epistle that calls the Father light, while the Gospel calls Jesus light). It may be, however, that the predicate "eternal life" does favor making Jesus Christ the subject of the sentence we are discussing, for only eight verses before (5:12) the author of the Epistle stated: "He who has the Son has life."

R. Schnackenburg,³² who has given us the best commentary on 1 John, argues strongly from the logic of the context and the flow of the argument that "This is the true God" refers to Jesus Christ. The first sentence in 5:20 ends on the note that we Christians dwell in God the Father ("Him who is true") inasmuch as we dwell in His Son Jesus Christ. Why? Because Jesus is the true God and eternal life. Schnackenburg argues that the second sentence of 5:20 has meaning only if it refers to Jesus; it would be tautological if it referred to God the Father. His reasoning is persuasive, and thus there is a certain probability that 1 Jn 5:20 calls Jesus God—a usage not unusual in Johannine literature.

³² *Die Johannesbriefe*, in *Herders theologischer Kommentar* (2nd ed.; Freiburg, 1963) p. 291. He cites Bultmann as recognizing that a reference to Jesus is more likely, but Bultmann regards the sentence as an addition by an editor who imitated the style of the epistle. Important scholars who deny a reference to Jesus include Harnack, Holtzmann, Brooke, and Windisch.

5) Rom 9:5: "Of their race [i.e., the Israelites] is the Christ according to the flesh *God who is over all* blessed forever."

The crucial Greek words are *ho Christos kata sarka ho on epi panton theos eulogētos eis tous aionas*. The problem may be phrased in terms of various possible punctuations:

a) A full stop may be put after *sarka* ("flesh") as in Codex Ephraemi. The following words then become a separate sentence: "He who is God over all be [is] blessed forever"; or "He who is over all is God blessed forever." With either reading we have an independent doxology which seemingly refers to God the Father. Why Paul should stop here and introduce a doxology to the Father is not clear; for 9:1-5 concerns Christ, and one would expect praise of Christ, not of the Father. Moreover, the word order in the Greek offers considerable difficulty for this interpretation. In independent doxologies *eulogētos* ("blessed") as a predicate nominative normally comes first in the sentence;²³ here it is the sixth word in the sentence. The presence of the participle *on* is also awkward for this interpretation, for in either of the above readings it is superfluous. The construction *ho on* is normal only if there is an antecedent in the previous clause.²⁴

b) A full stop may be put after *panton* ("all"), with a comma after *sarka*. Thus one obtains the reading: "... the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all. God be [is] blessed forever." This interpretation avoids the difficulty just mentioned about the presence of the participle *on*. In the independent doxology, however, *eulogētos* still does not have the normal first position in the sentence (it is now second), and the lack of contextual justification for suddenly introducing a doxology to the Father remains a difficulty. On the whole, however, this interpretation seems preferable to (a).

c) A full stop may be put at the end, after *aionas* ("forever"), a comma after *sarka*. In this punctuation all the words after *sarka* are a relative clause modifying "Christ." Thus, "... the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever." This interpretation would mean that Paul calls Jesus God. From a grammatical viewpoint this is clearly the best reading. Also, the contextual sequence is excellent; for, having spoken of Jesus' descent according to the flesh, Paul

²³ See 2 Cor 1:3; Eph 1:3.

²⁴ See 2 Cor 11:31; Rom 1:25.

now emphasizes his position as God. The only real objection to this interpretation is that nowhere else does Paul speak of Jesus as God.⁸⁵

This passage is a famous crux, and we cannot hope to reach a decision that will be accepted by all. Distinguished scholars are aligned on both sides. Among those who think that Rom 9:5 applies the title "God" to Jesus are Sanday and Headlam, G. Findlay, Boylan, Nygren, Lagrange, and O. Michel. Among those who think that the reference is to the Father are H. Meyer, Dodd, Bultmann, J. Knox, Barrett, and Taylor. Personally, we are inclined to accept the grammatical evidence in favor of interpretation (c), but at most one may claim a certain probability that this passage refers to Jesus as God.

6) 2 Pt 1:1: "To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours in the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ."

The crucial Greek words are *en dikaiosynē tou theou hēmōn kai sōtēros Iēsou Christou*. The grammatical problem is the same as we saw in 2 Th 1:12, where we favored the interpretation "the grace of our God and of the Lord Jesus Christ," a reading that distinguished between God (the Father) and Jesus Christ. If one were to follow the analogy, one would translate here "the righteousness of our God and of the Saviour Jesus Christ." However, 2 Peter offers a parallel construction which enables us to decide that the author very probably intended both titles, "God" and "Saviour," to be applied to Jesus Christ. In 2 Pt 1:11 we hear of "the eternal kingdom of our Lord-and-Saviour Jesus Christ" (*basileian tou kyriou hēmōn kai sōtēros Iēsou Christou*). Here there can be no reasonable doubt that "Lord" and "Saviour"

⁸⁵ Already in this section we have rejected such texts as Gal 2:20; 1 Tim 3:16 (n. 17 above); Col 2:2; 2 Th 1:12; in the previous section we pointed out a number of Pauline texts which would seem to indicate that Paul did not refer to Jesus as God. The only Pauline text besides Rom 9:5 which, in our opinion, has real plausibility as an instance of where Jesus is called God is Tit 2:13. But this is in the Pastoral Epistles, which many scholars regard as deuterio-Pauline. Nevertheless, it may be argued that, whether or not they were written by Paul, the Pastorals are a homogeneous development of Pauline usage; thus the usage in Tit 2:13 may be interpreted as a continuation of Paul's own way of speaking already instanced in Rom 9:5.—We should caution that an argument based on Paul's usage or nonusage of "God" for Jesus is different from the claim that Paul was so imbued with Jewish monotheism that he *could not* have thought of Jesus as God. Such a claim assumes that Paul could find no way of reconciling two truths. Wainwright, *art. cit.*, p. 276, rightly criticizes this circular reasoning.

constitute a compound title for Jesus, and it seems logical to interpret 1:1 on the analogy of 1:11.³⁶ This passage could almost be classified in the next section of our article under texts which clearly call Jesus God.

In the second main section, we have considered nine texts where the use of "God" for Jesus is dubious. In the first subsection (passages with textual variants) we rejected Gal 2:20 and Acts 20:28 as too uncertain, but recognized Jn 1:18 as a very probable instance of where Jesus is called God. In the second subsection (passages where obscurity arises from syntax) we rejected Col 2:2 and 2 Th 1:12, but recognized in Tit 2:13; 1 Jn 5:20; Rom 9:5; and 2 Pt 1:1 instances in which in ascending order there is increasing probability that Jesus is called God. Thus, five of the nine instances must be taken seriously in our discussion. A methodological note is in order here. Often these five examples are rejected by scholars, despite the grammatical arguments in their favor, on the grounds that the use of "God" for Jesus is rare in the New Testament and therefore always to be considered improbable.³⁷ However, is not the rarity of the usage to some extent dependent on the rejection of these examples? If these five instances are joined to the three we shall cite in the next section, then the usage is not so rare.

TEXTS WHERE CLEARLY JESUS IS CALLED GOD

There are a number of passages in the New Testament which *imply* that Jesus is divine,³⁸ but we shall confine our attention to three passages that explicitly use *theos* of Jesus.

³⁶ When 2 Pt 1:2 does distinguish between God (the Father) and Jesus, another word order is used: ". . . in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord" (*en epignōsei tou theou kai Iēsou tou kyriou hēmōn*).

³⁷ Wainwright, *art. cit.*, p. 277, makes two points worth repeating. First, "Many critics have chosen a less natural translation of the Greek because they believe it was psychologically impossible for the writer to have said that Christ was God." Second, the argument from inconsistency in usage (i.e., elsewhere the writer does not call Jesus God) must be used with care, for we are not certain that the writer saw an inconsistency in only occasionally using a title.

³⁸ Besides those cited in n. 47 below, we may mention Jn 10:30, "I and the Father are one"; 14:9, "He who has seen me has seen the Father"; the absolute use of *egō eimi* in Jn 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19.

1) Heb 1:8-9: The author says that God has spoken of Jesus His Son the words of Ps 45:6-7:

⁸ "Your throne, *O God*, is forever and ever . . . and the righteous scepter is the scepter of your [his] kingdom.

⁹ You have loved justice and hated iniquity; therefore, *O God*, your God has anointed you with the oil of gladness . . . "

The psalm is cited according to the LXX.³⁹ The first question we must ask is whether *ho theos* in v. 8 is a nominative or a vocative. A few scholars, including Westcott, have taken it as a nominative and have suggested the interpretation: "God is your throne for ever and ever." This is most unlikely. In the preceding verse of the psalm in the LXX we read: "Your weapons, *O Mighty One*, are sharpened"; the law of parallelism would indicate that the next verse should read: "Your throne, *O God*, is for ever and ever." Moreover, the parallelism from the very next line in the psalm, cited in v. 8 ("and the righteous scepter is . . ."), suggests that "throne" and not "God" is the subject of the line under consideration. There can be little doubt, then, that the reading of v. 8 that we have proposed is the correct one. Cullmann⁴⁰ assures us that "Hebrews unequivocally applies the title 'God' to Jesus," and we believe that this is a true estimate of the evidence of v. 8.

V. Taylor⁴¹ admits that in v. 8 the expression "O God" is a vocative spoken of Jesus, but he says that the author of Hebrews was merely citing the psalm and using its terminology without any deliberate intention of suggesting that Jesus is God. It is true that the main point of citing the psalm was to contrast the Son with the angels and to show that the Son enjoys eternal domination, while the angels are but

³⁹ Actually, the LXX reading is a misunderstanding of the MT, but this is a problem in psalm exegesis and does not affect the meaning of the citation in Hebrews.

⁴⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 310. Perhaps there is also a reference to Jesus as God in v. 9. The translation of v. 9 we have given follows C. Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux 2* (Paris, 1953) 19 ff., in taking the first *ho theos* as a vocative and the second *ho theos* (*sou*) as the subject of the verb, thus: "O God [= Jesus], your God [= the Father] has anointed you." However, it is possible to take the first *ho theos* as the subject of the verb and the second *ho theos* (*sou*) as an appositive, thus: "God, your God, has anointed you." In the latter interpretation "God, your God" is the Father.

⁴¹ *Art. cit.*, p. 117. The type of argument Taylor advances is not implausible. For instance, Mt 1:23 cites Is 7:14 in relation to the birth of Jesus: ". . . his name shall be called Emmanuel (which means 'God with us')." We cannot be certain that, because he used this citation, the Evangelist took "God with us" literally and meant to call Jesus God.

servants. Therefore, in the citation no major point was being made of the fact that the Son can be addressed as God. Yet, we cannot presume that the author did not notice that his citation had this effect. We can say, at least, that the author saw nothing wrong in this address, and we can call upon the similar situation in Heb 1:10, where the application to the Son of Ps 102:25–27 has the effect of addressing Jesus as Lord. Of course, we have no way of knowing what the “O God” of the psalm meant to the author of Hebrews when he applied it to Jesus. Ps 45 is a royal psalm; and on the analogy of the “Mighty God” of Is 9:6,⁴³ “God” may have been looked on simply as a royal title and hence applicable to Jesus as the Davidic Messiah.

- 2) Jn 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word;
and the Word was in God’s presence,
and the Word was God.”

The crucial Greek words of the second and third lines are *kai ho logos en pros ton theon kai theos en ho logos*. The debate about the third line centers on the fact that *theos* is used without an article. Clearly, in the second line *ho theos* refers to God the Father, but in predicating an anarthrous *theos* of the Word in the third line is the author trying to suggest that the Word is somewhat less than the Father (see Jn 14:28)?⁴⁴

Some explain the usage with the simple grammatical rule that predicate nouns are generally anarthrous. However, while *theos* is most probably the predicate, such a rule does not necessarily hold for a

⁴³ We do not mean to imply that Isaiah necessarily intended ‘*el gābbōr*’ to mean “Mighty God,” but that by *NT* times this may have been the understanding of Is 9:6. In Jn 10:34 we have an instance where the *OT* reference to the judges as “gods” is interpreted as a reference to divinity.

⁴⁴ The Catholic exegete S. de Ausejo, “¿Es un himno a Cristo el prólogo de San Juan?” *Estudios bíblicos* 15 (1956) 223–77, 381–427, has made the suggestion that throughout the Prologue “the Word” means the Word-become-flesh and that the whole hymn refers to Jesus Christ in the strict sense (i.e., in the language of later theology, to the incarnate rather than to the preincarnate Second Person). The fact that Jn 1:1 is set in the beginning before creation does not militate against this, for other *NT* hymns speak of *Jesus Christ* even when they have verses which are seemingly in a preincarnational setting (Phil 2:5–7 speaks of *Christ Jesus* who emptied himself, taking the form of a servant; Eph 1:3–4 says that God chose us *in Christ* before the foundation of the world). If de Ausejo’s suggestion is true, there could be some justification in seeing in the anarthrous *theos* something more humble than the *ho theos* used of the Father, along the lines of Jn 14:28. The hymn of Phil 2:5–7 says that the incarnate Jesus had humbled himself to the form of a servant.

statement of identity (e.g., the "I am . . ." formulae in Jn 11:25 and 14:6 are followed by predicate nouns which have an article).

To preserve the nuance of the anarthrous *theos*, some (e.g., Moffatt) would translate: "The Word was divine." But this is too weak. After all, there is in Greek an adjective for "divine" (*theios*) which the author did not choose to use.⁴⁴ The *New English Bible* paraphrases the line: "What God was, the Word was." This is certainly better than "divine," but loses the terseness of the Prologue's style. Perhaps the best explanation of why the author of the Prologue chose to use an anarthrous *theos* to refer to the Word is that he desired to keep the Word distinct from the Father (*ho theos*).

Several factors suggest that we should not attach too much theological importance to the lack of the article. This first verse of the Prologue forms an inclusion with the last line of the Prologue, and there (1:18; see above) we hear of "God the only Son" ([*ho monogenēs theos*]). Moreover, as the beginning of the Gospel, the first verse of the Prologue also forms an inclusion with the (original) end of the Gospel, where in 20:28 Thomas calls Jesus "My Lord and my God."⁴⁵ Neither of the passages involved in these inclusions would suggest that in Johannine thought Jesus was *theos* but less than *ho theos*. To a certain extent, calling Jesus God represents for the fourth Gospel a positive answer to the charges made against Jesus that he was arrogantly making himself God (Jn 10:33; 5:18). The Roman author Pliny the Younger⁴⁶ describes the Christians of Asia Minor as singing hymns to Christ as to a God. The Prologue, a hymn of the Johannine community at Ephesus, fits this description, as do the similar Pauline hymns in Philippians and Colossians.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ E. Haenchen, "Probleme des johanneischen 'Prologs,'" *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 60 (1963) 313, n. 38, argues that even if the author meant to say "divine," he would not have used such an adjective, for it smacks of high literary style. This objection is too subjective.

⁴⁵ We presuppose a critical approach to the composition of the fourth Gospel, e.g., the recognition that chap. 21 is a late addition to the Gospel; the Prologue is an independent hymn that was subsequently adapted to introduce the Gospel.

⁴⁶ *Ep.* 10, 96, 7.

⁴⁷ See D. M. Stanley, "Carmenque Christo quasi Deo dicere," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 20 (1958) 173-91. Phil 2:6-7 says that before he took on the form of a servant, Jesus was in the form of God; Col 1:19 says that in the Son all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell; Col 1:15 calls him the image of the invisible God. It is generally admitted today that in these instances Paul is citing *hymns*. Colossae is in Asia Minor; many think that Philippians was written from Ephesus.

It may be well to re-emphasize what we stated at the beginning of this article, namely, that the Prologue's hymnic confession "The Word was God" does not have the same ideological content found in Nicaea's confession that the Son was "true God of true God." A different problematic and a long philosophical development separate the two.

3) Jn 20:28: On the Sunday evening one week after Easter Jesus appears to Thomas and the other disciples, and Thomas confesses him as "My Lord and *my God*."

This is the clearest example in the New Testament of the use of "God" for Jesus,⁴⁸ for the contention of Theodore of Mopsuestia that Thomas was uttering an exclamation of thanks *to the Father* finds few proponents today. Here Jesus is addressed as God (*ho theos mou*), with the articular nominative serving as a vocative. The scene is designed to serve as a climax to the Gospel: as the resurrected Jesus stands before the disciples, one of their number at last gives expression to an adequate faith in Jesus. He does this by applying to Jesus the Greek equivalent of two terms applied to the God of the Old Testament. The best example of the Old Testament usage is in Ps 35:23, where the psalmist cries out: "My God and my Lord." It may well be that the Christian use of such a confessional formula was catalyzed by Domitian's claim to the title *dominus et deus noster*.

EVALUATION OF THE EVIDENCE

The question that forms the title of this article must be answered in the affirmative. In three clear instances and in five instances that have a certain probability⁴⁹ Jesus is called God in the New Testament.

⁴⁸ Bultmann, *art. cit.*, p. 276: "The only passage in which Jesus is undoubtedly designated or, more exactly, addressed as God." This is an exaggeration, however, for it does not give proper emphasis to the probabilities or, indeed, certainties that Heb 1:8; 1 Jn 5:20; and 2 Pt 1:1 refer to Jesus as God. Moreover, it draws more attention than is warranted to the fact that *theos* is used with an article in Jn 20:28 and without an article in Jn 1:1. After all, *kyrios* as a title for Jesus sometimes has the article and sometimes does not (see discussion of 2 Th 1:12 above). C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to John* (London, 1956) p. 477, warns apropos of Jn 20:28: "The difference between the present verse and 1:1 (where *theos* is anarthrous) cannot be pressed."

⁴⁹ The neglect of these five instances is what, in our opinion, makes Taylor's and Bultmann's treatment of the question too pessimistic; e.g., Bultmann, *art. cit.*, 276: "It is only with the Apostolic Fathers that free, unambiguous reference to Jesus Christ as 'our God' begins." As we have insisted, the textual or grammatical probabilities favor the interpretation that these five passages call Jesus God. In one or the other instance the interpretation

The use of *theos* of Jesus which is attested in the early second century was a continuation of a usage which had begun in New Testament times. Really, there is no reason to be surprised at this. "Jesus is Lord" was evidently a popular confessional formula in New Testament times, and in this formula Christians gave Jesus the title *kyrios* which was the standard LXX translation for YHWH.⁶⁰ If Jesus could be given this title, why could he not be called *theos*, which the LXX often used to translate *'elōhīm*? The two Hebrew terms had become relatively interchangeable, and indeed YHWH was the more sacred term.

This does not mean that we can take a naive view about the development that took place in the New Testament usage of "God" for Jesus (nor, for that matter, in the gradual development in the understanding of Jesus' divinity⁶¹). The eight instances with which we are concerned are found in these New Testament writings: Romans, Hebrews, Titus, John, 1 John, and 2 Peter. Let us see what this means in terms of chronology.

Jesus is never called God in the Synoptic Gospels, and a passage like Mk 10:18 would seem to preclude the possibility that Jesus used the title of himself. Even the fourth Gospel never portrays Jesus as saying specifically that he is God.⁶² The sermons which Acts attrib-

may be wrong, but simply to write off all five as unconvincing and therefore unimportant for the discussion is not good method. It would be foolish to develop a theory about the NT use of "God" for Jesus that would depend for a key point on one of these five texts, but it would be just as foolish to develop a theory that would be invalid if Jesus is really called God in several of these instances. In all that follows, we intend to take these five instances seriously.

⁶⁰ We do not raise the disputed question of the origins (Palestinian or Hellenistic) of the NT usage of *kyrios*, nor do we assume that every time *kyrios* appears, it is used consciously as a translation of YHWH. But we do maintain that in general the NT authors were aware that Jesus was being given a title which in the LXX referred to the God of Israel.

⁶¹ The 1964 Instruction of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Historical Truth of the Gospels*, in section VIII (cf. THEOLOGICAL STUDIES 25 [1964] 404), recognizes that only after Jesus rose from the dead was his divinity clearly perceived. We need not think that this perception was the work of a moment; it took a long time for men to come to understand the mystery of Jesus and to give it formulation. The Arian dispute shows this clearly.

⁶² More than the other Gospels, John brings the "God problem" to the fore in the ministry of Jesus (5:18; 7:58-59; 10:30-33); this is part of the Johannine technique of spelling out the challenge that Jesus brings to men, and of making explicit what was implicit in Jesus' ministry. Yet, John does show a certain caution about anachronism and so even in 10:33 ff. Jesus does not give a clear affirmation to the charge of the Jews that he is making himself God. These disputes must be understood against the background of

utes to the beginning of the Christian mission do not speak of Jesus as God. Thus, there is no reason to think that Jesus was called God in the earliest layers of New Testament tradition. This negative conclusion is substantiated by the fact that Paul does not use the title in any epistle written before 58. The first likely occurrence of the usage of "God" for Jesus is in Rom 9:5; if we could be certain of the grammar of this passage, we could thus date the usage to the late 50's.

Chronologically, Heb 1:8-9 and Tit 2:13 would be the next examples, although the uncertainty of the date of composition of these epistles creates a problem. Hebrews cannot be dated much before the fall of Jerusalem, and many would place it even later. The date of Titus depends on the acceptance or rejection of the Pauline authorship of the Pastorals—scholarly views range from the middle 60's to the end of the century.⁶³ The Johannine writings offer us the most frequent examples of the use of the title (three in John; one in 1 John), and these writings are generally dated in the 90's. The common opinion of recent exegetes, Catholics included, is that 2 Peter is one of the latest New Testament works.

If we date New Testament times from 30 to 100, quite clearly the use of "God" for Jesus belongs to the second half of the period⁶⁴ and becomes frequent only toward the end of the period. This judgment is

the Evangelist's own time and the attacks of the Synagogue of the 80's and 90's on Christian claims about Jesus.—Jn 20:28 portrays Jesus being confessed as God one week after the Resurrection. Without necessarily questioning the Johannine tradition of an appearance to Thomas, one who would evaluate the scene critically would suspect that a confessional formula of the Evangelist's own time has been used to vocalize the apostle's belief in the resurrected Jesus. Were the title "God" used for Jesus so soon after the Resurrection, one could not explain the absence of this title in Christian confessions before the 60's. See n. 63 below.

⁶³ Most Catholic scholars will incline toward Pauline authorship, at least in that broad sense of authorship which governs the attribution of biblical books. In any case, the Pastoral Epistles are intimately associated with Paul's thought and activity; and whether or not Paul is the author, they should not be dated too long after Paul's ministry.

⁶⁴ Of course, there is a danger in judging usage from occurrence in the *NT*. *NT* occurrence does not create a usage but testifies to a usage already extant. None of the passages we have cited gives any evidence of innovating, and indeed a passage like Heb 1:8-9 seems to call on an already traditional use of the psalm. Yet, frequency of *NT* occurrence in a question such as we are dealing with is probably a good index of actual usage. Nor can we forget that the passages cited under the first main section above show that Jesus was not spoken of as God in many *NT* works. Any theory that from the very beginning Jesus was called God, but that by accident this usage does not occur till late in the *NT*, is a theory that does not explain the facts.

confirmed by the evidence of the earliest extrabiblical Christian works.⁵⁵ At the beginning of the second century Ignatius freely speaks of Jesus as God. In *Ephesians* 18, 2 he says: "Our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived by Mary"; in 19, 3 he says: "God was manifest as man." In *Smyrnaeans* 1, 1 Ignatius begins by giving glory to "Jesus Christ, the God who has thus given you wisdom."⁵⁶ We have already cited Pliny's testimony at the turn of the century that the Christians of Asia Minor sang hymns to Christ as to a God. By mid-second century, the so-called *2 Clement* (1, 1) can state: "Brethren, we must think of Jesus Christ as of God."

The geographical spread of the usage is also worth noting. If Rom 9:5 is accepted, then Paul, writing from Greece, betrays no hesitation about the acceptability of the usage to his Roman audience. (Yet Mark, traditionally accepted as the Gospel of Rome, written in the 60's, does not hesitate to report a saying of Jesus in which he refuses to be called God: see Mk 10:18 above.) If Titus is accepted as a genuinely Pauline epistle, it was probably written from Macedonia to Titus in Crete. The place of the composition of Hebrews is not known: Alexandria is a prominent candidate, and either Palestine or Rome is thought to be the destination. The Johannine works are associated with Ephesus in Asia Minor. Ignatius, from Antioch,⁵⁷ seems free to use "God" of Jesus when writing both to Asia Minor and to Rome. Pliny's statement reflects the Christian practice in Bithynia in Asia Minor. Thus, the usage seems to be attested in the great Christian centers of the New Testament world, and there is no evidence to support a claim that in the late first century the custom of calling Jesus God was confined to a small area or faction within the Christian world.

⁵⁵ Some authors cite *Didache* 10, 6, where "Hosanna to the God of David" is addressed to Jesus. However, J.-P. Audet, in his exhaustive commentary on the *Didache* (Paris, 1958) pp. 62-67, argues strongly for the originality of the reading "Hosanna to the house of David."

⁵⁶ See also *Trallians* 7, 1; *Romans* 7, 3. The reference in *Ephesians* 1, 1 to "God's blood" is reminiscent of one of the above-cited interpretations of Acts 20:28: "the church of God which he obtained with his own blood."

⁵⁷ The Gospel of Matthew is often associated with the church of Syria-Palestine. The fact that Mt 19:17 modifies Mk 10:18 and Jesus' rejection of the title of God (above, first main section) may be a witness that the custom of calling Jesus God was alive in this church long before Ignatius' time.

Is this usage a Hellenistic contribution to the theological vocabulary of Christianity? Since we have no evidence that Jesus was called God in the Jerusalem or Palestinian communities of the first two decades of Christianity, the prima-facie evidence might suggest Hellenistic origins. This is supported by the fact that in two New Testament passages "God" is intimately joined to "Saviour" as a title for Jesus (Tit 2:13; 2 Pt 1:1), and "Saviour" is to some extent a Hellenistic title. However, there is other evidence to suggest that the usage had its roots in the Old Testament; and so, if the usage is non-Palestinian, it may have arisen among converts from Diaspora Judaism. As we saw, Heb 1:8-9 is a citation of Ps 45. The confession of Thomas in Jn 20:28 echoes an Old Testament formula (although, as we pointed out, one cannot exclude the possibility of an anti-Domitian apologetic). The background for Jn 1:1 is the opening of Genesis, and the concept of the Word reflects Old Testament themes of the creative word of God and personified Wisdom. Perhaps the best we can do from the state of the evidence is to leave open the question of the background of the custom of calling Jesus God.

The slow development of the usage of the title "God" for Jesus requires explanation. Not only is there the factor that Jesus is not called God in the earlier strata of New Testament material, but also there are passages, cited in the first series of texts above, that by implication reserve the title "God" for the Father. Moreover, even in the New Testament works that speak of Jesus as God, there are also passages that seem to militate against such a usage—a study of these texts will show that this is true of the Pastorals and the Johannine literature. The most plausible explanation is that in the earliest stage of Christianity the Old Testament heritage dominated the use of the title "God"; hence, "God" was a title too narrow to be applied to Jesus. It referred strictly to the Father of Jesus, to the God to whom he prayed. Gradually, (in the 50's and 60's?) in the development of Christian thought "God" was understood to be a broader term.⁵⁸ It was seen that God had revealed so much of Himself in Jesus that

⁵⁸ Probably there was a similar development in the use of "Lord" (*kyrios*) wherever it was thought of as a translation of YHWH. Yet, *kyrios* was applied to Jesus much more quickly than *theos*. Was the more obvious danger of a polytheistic conception in the use of *theos* a retarding factor? Did the fact that *kyrios* had a range of meaning below the divine ("lord," "master") favor the use of that term? See n. 50 above.

"God" had to be able to include both Father and Son.⁵⁹ The late Pauline works *seem* to fall precisely in this stage of development.⁶⁰ If Rom 9:5 calls Jesus God, it is an isolated instance within the larger corpus of the main Pauline works, which think of Jesus as Lord, and of the Father as God. By the time of the Pastorals, however, Jesus is well known as God-and-Saviour. The Johannine works come from the final years of the century, when the usage is common. Yet, some of the material that has gone into the fourth Gospel is traditional material about Jesus which has been handed down from a much earlier period. Therefore, there are passages in John (14:28; 17:3; 20:17) that reflect an earlier mentality. We can only sketch the broad lines of such a development, but we can be reasonably confident that these lines are true.

We can, perhaps, go further and suggest the ambiance of this development. We think that the usage of calling Jesus God was a liturgical usage and had its origin in the worship and prayers of the Christian community. A priori, this is not unlikely. Bultmann⁶¹ has long maintained that the title "Lord" was given to Jesus in the Hellenistic communities as they recognized him as the deity present in the act of worship. Without committing ourselves to this theory and its implications, we do recognize the liturgical setting of some instances of the confession of Jesus as Lord, and therefore we might anticipate a similar setting for the confession of Jesus as God.

Of the eight instances of the latter confession, the majority are clearly to be situated in a background of worship and liturgy. Four are doxologies (Tit 2:13; 1 Jn 5:20; Rom 9:5; 2 Pt 1:1), and it is well accepted that many of the doxologies in the epistolary literature of the New Testament echo doxologies known and used by the respective communities in their public prayer. Heb 1:8-9 cites a psalm that was applied to Jesus, and we know the custom of singing psalms

⁵⁹ We omit from our discussion the problem of the Holy Spirit, a problem complicated by uncertainty as to when the *NT* authors began to think of the Spirit (Greek *pneuma*, neuter) as a personal factor.

⁶⁰ Here we must be acutely aware of the limits imposed on our research by the very nature of the Pauline writings. The fact that Jesus is (presumably) called God in Romans, but not in Thessalonians, *may* be accidental. (Yet, see n. 54 above.) Therefore we can speak only of what seems to be true from the evidence available.

⁶¹ E.g., *art. cit.*, p. 277.

in Christian celebrations (1 Cor 14:26; Eph 5:19). Certainly this would include Old Testament psalms that were thought to be particularly adaptable to Jesus. Thus, it is not too adventurous of Wainwright to suggest that the author of Hebrews was calling on psalms that his readers sang in their liturgy and was reminding them of how these psalms voiced the glory of Jesus. The Prologue of John, which twice calls Jesus God, was originally a hymn, and we have already recalled Pliny's dictum about the Christians singing hymns to Christ as to a God.⁶²

Perhaps, at first glance, Jn 20:28 seems an exception to the rule, for the confession of Thomas is given a historical rather than a liturgical setting. Yet, even here the scene is carefully placed on a *Sunday*, when the disciples of Jesus are gathered together. Moreover, it is a very plausible suggestion that the words in which Thomas confesses Jesus, "My Lord and my God," represent a confessional formula known in the Church of the Evangelist's time.⁶³ In this case it is not unlikely that the confession is a baptismal or liturgical formula along the lines of "Jesus is Lord."

This theory of the liturgical origins of the usage of the title "God" for Jesus in New Testament times has some very important implications concerning the meaning of this title, and, indeed, goes a long way toward answering some of the objections against calling Jesus God, such as those mentioned at the beginning of the article. For instance, it was objected that calling Jesus God neglects the limits of the Incarnation. But this objection is not applicable to the New Testament usage, for there the title "God" is not directly given to the Jesus of the ministry. In the Johannine writings it is the pre-existent Word (1:1) or the Son in the Father's presence (1:18) or the resurrected Jesus (20:28) who is hailed as God. The doxologies confess as God the triumphant Jesus; Heb 1:8-9 is directed to Jesus whose throne is forever. Thus, in the New Testament there is no obvious conflict between the passages that call Jesus God and the passages that seem

⁶² Also, see n. 47 above.

⁶³ The 1964 Instruction of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Historical Truth of the Gospels*, has recognized that the Evangelists do not always give us the *ipsissima verba* from the time of Jesus, and that they have explicated the material handed down by apostolic tradition. Barrett, *op. cit.*, p. 477, concurs on the liturgical coloring of the passage under discussion.

to picture the incarnate Jesus as less than God or the Father.⁶⁴ The problem of how during his lifetime Jesus could be both God and man is presented in the New Testament, not by the use of the title "God," but by some of the later strata of Gospel material which bring Jesus' divinity to the fore even before the Resurrection.⁶⁵ Ignatius of Antioch does use the title "God" of Jesus during his human career. This may be the inevitable (and true) development of the New Testament usage of calling the preincarnational and the resurrected Jesus God; but from the evidence we have, it is a post-New Testament development.

The liturgical ambiance of the New Testament usage of "God" for Jesus also answers the objection that this title is too much of an essential definition, which objectifies Jesus and is untrue to the soteriological interest of the New Testament. As far as we can see, no one of the instances we have discussed attempts to define Jesus essentially.⁶⁶ The acclamation of Jesus as God is a response of prayer and worship to the God who has revealed Himself to men in Jesus. Jn 1:18 speaks of God the only Son who has *revealed* the Father; Jn 1:1 tells us that God's *Word* is God. The confession of Jesus as God is a recognition by believing subjects of the sovereignty and lordship of divine rule in, through, and by Jesus: thus, Thomas' "My Lord and my God" (Jn 20:28), and Romans' (9:5) "God who is over all," and Hebrews' (1:8) "Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever." How could the confession of Jesus as God be more soteriological than when Jesus is called "our God-and-Saviour" (2 Pt 1:1; Tit 2:13)? If there is validity in Bultmann's concern that belief in Jesus must have reference *pro me*, then he can have no objection to what 1 Jn 5:20 says of Jesus Christ: "This is the true God *and eternal life*."

⁶⁴ See the passages cited in the first main section above, nos. 1 and 5. The only passage that really offers a difficulty in this connection is 1 Cor 15:24, for here Paul speaks of the triumphant Son as subject to the Father. This text needs a good deal more study in the light of Nicene Christology.

⁶⁵ E.g., the infancy narratives, which show the child of Bethlehem to have been conceived by no human father; and the fourth Gospel, in which the Jesus of the ministry makes divine claims.

⁶⁶ Even in Jn 1:1 the approach is largely functional. There are no speculations about how the Word is related to God the Father; and the very designation "the Word" implies a speaking to an audience. The fact that 1:1 is set "in the beginning" relates the Word to creation. Nevertheless, it is true to say that passages like Jn 1:1 would be destined soon and inevitably to raise questions of more than a functional nature.

Thus, even though we have seen that there is a solid biblical precedent for calling Jesus God, we must be cautious to evaluate this usage in terms of the New Testament ambiance. Our firm adherence to the later theological and ontological developments in the meaning of the formula "Jesus is God" must not cause us to overvalue or undervalue the New Testament confession.