

Israel's God and Rebecca's Children

Christology and Community
in Early Judaism and Christianity

Essays in Honor of Larry W. Hurtado
and Alan F. Segal

edited by

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<http://members.verizon.net/vze3xycv/Jerusalem/confFirstRevolt.htm>

Figure 18.2 is found at
<http://homepages.luc.edu/~advandel/jerusalem/views/titusArch.htm>

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*In memory of Donald H. Juel (1942-2003)
an absent but never forgotten founding member of EHCC*

Chapter 1

How We Talk about Christology Matters

April D. DeConick

A miscellany of categories and descriptors has come to dominate our discussions of Christology over the years, labels and definitions we have inherited from our predecessors: “adoptionist,” “high” versus “low,” “subordinationist,” “incarnational,” and so forth.¹ While there is nothing inherently wrong with such theologically sympathetic labels, I fear that they have done more to hamper our understandings of early Christology and its development from the New Testament to Chalcedon than they have aided us. They represent post-Nicene mentalities and, in essence, have boxed us into artificial Catholic and Protestant corners.

If a Christology has been described as “adoptionist,” it also has been understood to be “low” because, by the definition of “adoptionist,” Jesus is not God, but is a man adopted by God at his baptism. Because it is found in our earliest gospel, Mark, we tend to see this Christology as early and connect it with “low” christological titles such as “prophet” and “Messiah.” If we talk about “incarnational” Christology, we frame it as “high” because, by the definition of “incarnational,” God becomes the human Jesus. Because it is discovered in our latest New Testament gospel, John, we tend to view it as a “later” development and associate it with titles like “Logos” and “Sophia.”

As for the material that does not fit neatly into either of these categories—Paul’s testimonies, the virgin birth stories, and angelic associations—we just do not seem to know what to do with it. So we attempt to carve out some kind of in between language to include it—“preincarnational,” “on the verge of divinity,” “angelomorphic,” “theomorphic,” “functional,” “ontic,” and so on. Then we have that really thorny evidence that has been nearly impossible to manage in this model—early

references suggesting devotion to Jesus and early passages attributing the divine Name to Jesus. This evidence has sparked heated debates about whether such a thing as "early high Christology" could have existed, a discussion entirely dependent on the works of Alan Segal and Larry Hurtado to whom this volume and this essay are dedicated.² This discussion has stressed the old model to the point of fracture. Furthermore, the model completely fails us in our discussions of second, third, and fourth centuries Christology. If the Ebionites, for instance, are adoptionist, then what do we do with the fact that they believed without reservation that Jesus was God? Or Arius? He is explicit in his letters that even though the Son will always be a Son subordinate to the Father and a creature like the angels, he is still God.

The construction of an alternative model is needed, I believe, to move us beyond the fractures and corners that have trapped us. Rather than making the starting point of this new model (as it was with the old) definitions sympathetic to post-Nicene theology, I think the new model must be built coherently and consistently out of the textual evidence gleaned from New Testament period literature. At the same time, it must make sense out of the later christological debates that led to Chalcedon, debates largely trying to explain the biblical evidence in terms beyond the biblical. When this is done, it is evident that certain geographical centers developed peculiar christological descriptors that were attended by equally peculiar soteriologies, so that it becomes possible to reconstruct three metaparadigms that dominated the Christian landscape for centuries (and frankly still do).

The Impulse toward Christology

What exactly happened between the years immediately following Jesus' death and the composition of John's gospel is anything but certain. What is most certain, however, is that Christianity either was initially very diverse or became so very quickly. I tend to favor the latter because the literary evidence supports the fact that most, if not all, of the varieties of early Christianity formed post-Jerusalem, including the *Gospel of Thomas* and *Quelle*.³ The only references I know that might marshal some evidence for pre-Jerusalem forms of Christianity are found in Mark 9:38–41 and Acts 18:24–19:7. The first is a reference to a nondisciple casting out demons in Jesus' name and presumes an apocalyptic worldview. In Acts, we are told about Apollos, a native Jew from Alexandria, who brought a version of Christianity to Ephesus that taught a baptism

for cleansing of sins, not for the reception of the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus. This form of Christianity also seems to be known and criticized by the author of the Gospel of John. This is very interesting and may be evidence for an early variety of pre-Jerusalem Christianity. Or it may represent a very early moment in the mission of the Jerusalem Church before baptism with the Holy Spirit had developed in their praxis. The latter appears to me to be the better solution, especially given John's familiarity with it and indirect references to it in Mark 1:8, Matthew 3:11, and Luke 3:16.

So although it is certainly possible that early pre-Jerusalem forms of Christianity took root, if they did, they did not leave a big enough imprint in our texts to recover their footsteps with any certainty. It looks like the formation of Christianity in Jerusalem took place very early. Since mission work appears to have been a large part of its agenda, the Christian message and praxis were dispersed geographically and were translated under a number of other influences into the varieties we find in our literature. Paul's personal correspondences indicate that for decades following Jesus' death the church in Jerusalem was powerful enough and respected enough to be considered the authority in all matters Christian. Jerusalem controlled much of the discourse, something which Paul confronted when he broke away from Antioch and began preaching his own agenda.

When did Christianity begin? Certainly no singular point of origin or one event mobilized all others into some linear or romantic progression, as Luke would lead us to believe in Acts. A complex of impulses worked together to bring about the formation of Christianity. The christological impulse to give meaning to the troubling death of Jesus appears to me to have been one of these foundational impulses, given the allusions and interpretations of his death across the early literature. Jesus' death was very troubling for his first followers caught unawares by his crucifixion. Why had their prophetic leader been killed as a criminal? Why did God allow this to happen? What did it mean that Jesus was appearing to his closest followers even after his death? Where was Jesus now? What would happen next?

These and other similar questions captured their attention for quite some time, as we can infer from their writings. And being first-century Jews living in Palestine under the harsh imperial rule of Roman colonizers, their responses were not only shaped by their religious, cultural, social, and political expectations, but earlier expectations were remolded and older traditions given meanings in such a way that *only* made sense

within their present crisis. Their communal memory had been severely threatened. The connection between their past and their present had ruptured. This situation is one that sociologists and anthropologists have shown forces communities to transform their social memory—their beliefs, expectations, and hopes—in such a way that their present crisis is explained or averted, and the crisis is avoided in the future.⁴

One of the main ways that communities succeed in this remodeling, is hermeneutically, healing the fissure seamlessly by shifting or developing explanatory schema and practices which change the original cognitive holdings of the group. But that is not all. Both baseline traditions and their understanding of contemporary events are reinterpreted so that the offending cognitions are dampened, expunged, or forgotten. The contemporary event becomes the foil through which the past is remembered and retold. The new hermeneutic controlled by the contemporary event becomes the lens through which traditional texts, rituals, and beliefs are now filtered and understood.

An equally significant impulse toward the creation of Christology appears to have been religious experience, a point that, thankfully, Larry Hurtado has discussed at some length in terms of social scientific studies.⁵ This religious experience is evidenced in our literature by reports drifting from the first followers that they were having visions of Jesus after his death. This impulse toward reflectivity was a retrospective and hermeneutical process that resulted in christological developments almost immediately in the tradition.

The Jerusalem Paradigm

Although we may not be able to recover the very first attempts at making christological sense of Jesus, we can construct from the literature three general paradigms that resulted from this process, the earliest model having its roots in the Jerusalem church under the leadership of Jesus' brother James. This paradigm spread quickly north and east into Antioch and eastern Syria. It formed the foundation for continued speculation and the later development of the two other paradigms, as we will see later.

Resurrected from the Dead

The early Christian literature showcases this reflective and hermeneutical process well, and, in the case of explaining Jesus' postmortem appear-

ances, reports two responses, the one typical and the other not so typical. The typical response is recorded in Luke: Jesus' followers thought they had seen his ghost (Luke 24:37). But as conventional as this explanation is, it is not the one that they embraced. Instead, they interpreted the appearances as religious experiences bolstering their Jewish beliefs and eschatological expectations—that the end of the world was at hand, just as they remembered Jesus had taught them (Mark 9:1; *Gos. Thom.* 111.1). Jesus had been resurrected from the dead as the first of the righteous heroes released from their graves (1 Cor 15:20; Matt 27:52-53).⁶

So his appearances were explained in terms of the glorified eschatological body to be raised out of the grave at the end of time. It was an angelic body, a heavenly body, a glorified, imperishable form whose flesh and blood had been transfigured into a nature and a body that was immortal. It could be described in terms of a body of gigantic portions (*Gos. Pet.* 10:39-40), unrecognizable at first (Luke 24:13-31; John 20:14), able to walk through doors (John 20:19) but still be touched (Luke 24:39; John 20:27), eat fish (Luke 24:42-43), break bread (Luke 24:30), vanish into thin air (Luke 24:31), and float up into the sky (Acts 1:9). The conventional explanation—it was his ghost—was dismissed in favor of an explanation that worked to align the community's memory of Jesus' teaching about the Eschaton's imminence and its memory of the Jewish eschatological dream with the challenge that present circumstances dictated. The proclamation that Jesus was "raised from the dead" must have entered the liturgy very early indeed (e.g., Acts 2:24; 2:32; 3:15; 4:2; 4:10; 4:33; etc.). This old Jerusalem teaching emerges in a liturgical passage in Romans 1:3-4, when Paul reminds his audience that he preaches "the gospel concerning the son, who was descended from David according to the flesh, and designated Son of God in power according to the Holy Spirit by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord. . . ."

Righteous One

At the same time that this interpretation of the postmortem appearances was becoming the accepted communal hermeneutic, the standard, other questions about Jesus were being discussed among the first Christians in Jerusalem. Why had Jesus died the way he had? If Jesus had been resurrected from the dead, what did this mean about his identity while alive? It would not have taken more than seconds for these Jews to attach this event to the traditions of the righteous men of Israel, particularly the

Maccabean martyrs who died horrific deaths while maintaining their innocence and faithfulness to God and his laws. Alan Segal discusses this christological identification at length in his already classic work on resurrection.⁷ These martyrs were the faithful, the holy ones, who would be rewarded by God in the last days for their righteousness by being bodily resurrected and returned to Paradise (2 Macc 7:9; 7:23; Wis. Sol. 3:1-9; 4:20-5:6; 5:15-16). As long as a righteous man lived, God had promised that he would not destroy the world, a covenant shaped by their memory of the Noah story.

It appears that one of the first Christian titles attached to Jesus was "Holy and Righteous One" (Acts 3:14; 7:52), a title which also is given to his brother James ("the Just"), the person who emerges as the leader of the Jerusalem Christians following Jesus' death. These early Christians concluded that, just as the deaths of the Maccabean martyrs had atoned for the sins of Israel (2 Macc 6:12-16; 7:38; 4 Macc 6:27-29; 17:20-22), so too the martyrdom of the Righteous One, Jesus, provided repentance to Israel and the forgiveness of its sins (Acts 5:31). The primacy of this title is certain, I think, given the fact that it is one that later Christians (like the author of Acts) no longer applied to Jesus. So the association of Jesus' death with Jewish martyrdom patterns probably was not late or original to the author of the Gospel of Mark as has been suggested.⁸ It was, in fact, an association made quite early in the tradition by the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem and reused by Mark in his gospel story.

This association brought with it a complex of other traditions that Jesus' followers also used to explain the difficult fact that Jesus had suffered and died unexpectedly as a criminal condemned by Rome. Associated with these Maccabean stories were the Psalms of Lament (e.g., Pss 22, 35, 69) and the Songs of the Suffering Servant (Isa 52:13-53:12), songs about the suffering of righteous Jews at the hands of foreign oppressors or from illnesses. So they understood Jesus' sufferings to have been foreshadowed in the Laments as part of God's plan. Interpretation of the Laments in this way influenced early on how the story of Jesus' passion was remembered and retold, as is frequently attested in the Synoptics, John and the *Gospel of Peter*. The Songs of the Suffering Servant appear to have been an early "proof text" used by missionaries as they tried to convert people to the faith (Acts 8:32-33; cp. Matt 8:17, 26:19; Mark 15:28; Luke 22:37; John 12:38; Rom 10:16; 1 Pet 2:22-24).

The creation of this new hermeneutic allowed the first followers of Jesus to conclude that God had meant for Jesus to suffer and die, that they had simply failed to recognize until now that this had been foretold

in the scripture. Jesus was God's Righteous Holy One who had carried out God's plan to redeem Israel through his death. Because of his faithfulness, Jesus had been resurrected and exalted to God's right hand in heaven, something which also had been forecast in the Psalms (Acts 2:23-36; cf. Ps 16:8-11; 110:1; 132:11). His resurrection set into motion the events of the Eschaton. Judgment was sure to be swift.

Prophet-Like-Moses

While this new hermeneutic was developing, the first followers of Jesus were also trying to make sense of Jesus' life and teachings. There is no doubt that the early followers of Jesus understood him in prophetic terms, as a prophet in a long line of Jewish prophets who had been rejected (Acts 2:23; 3:17-18; 7:51-53; Mark 6:4-5; Matt 13:57-58; Luke 4:23-24; John 4:44). I imagine that this reflected Jesus' own self-understanding since it is multiply attested in all layers of the tradition (i.e., Matt 13:57; Mark 6:4; Luke 4:23-24; John 4:44; Gos. Thom. 31; cp. Acts 7:52). By applying Psalm 118:22, the "rejected stone which has become the head of the corner," they provided further scriptural proof for their burgeoning speculations (Acts 4:11; Mark 12:10-11; Matt 21:42; Luke 20:17; 1 Pet 2:4-8; Gos. Thom. 66).

Whether or not Jesus understood this role in terms of a prophetic Messiah or whether its identification was only made by the first Christians themselves is difficult to know. Clearly, very early in the tradition, he was identified with a particular prophet, the Messianic Prophet-Like-Moses predicted in Deuteronomy 18:15-16 (Acts 3:19-26; 7:51-53), an identification which undergirds independently the Synoptic tradition (Mark 6:4; 6:15; 8:28; Luke 4:24; 7:16; 9:8; 13:33; 24:19), the Gospel of John (1:19-27; 4:19; 4:25; 6:14), and Hebrews (3:5). The identification of Jesus with this figure gave him messianic credentials as the prophet who would come in the last day to restore God's Law to its original intent, preparing the faithful for the final Judgment.⁹

The stories of the descent of the Holy Spirit at Jesus' baptism worked to explain his "anointing" as God's prophet, a concept also supported by their investigation of scripture (cf. Wis. Sol. 7:27). So Mark's gospel again preserves this old tradition that Jesus was installed into his prophetic office at his baptism, possessed by God's Spirit as were all the prophets before him. This means that the oldest tradition portrays him as fully human, but his soul augmented with God's Spirit. This characterization of Jesus is sympathetic with the earliest understanding of his birth.

Matthew and Luke preserve genealogies that trace Jesus' lineage through his father Joseph, genealogies that Matthew and Luke conveniently rewrote later in light of the myths of the virgin birth (Matt 1:16; Luke 3:23). Jesus' biological connection to Joseph is an early concept retained by the Ebionites, eastern Jewish Christians who carried on in the second century many of the main aspects of the earlier Jerusalem tradition.

The identification of Jesus with the prophet-like-Moses provided another paradigm to talk about his exaltation since Jewish tradition contained a significant amount of speculation that Moses had been given an exalted position in heaven, even seated on God's throne as his viceroy and mediator (cf. *Sir* 45:1-5; *Test. Mos.* 1:15; *Ezek. Trag.* 68-69; *Philo, Vit. Mos.* 1.155-59; *Sac.* 9; *Post.* 27-31; *Gig.* 49). In the Samaritan tradition, there is an enormous amount of evidence that Moses is so exalted and glorified that he was vested with God's Name.¹⁰ This type of Jewish speculation about the exaltation of patriarchs and their investiture with the Tetragrammaton was not uncommon. We see it also with Enoch (*1 En.* 37-71; *2 En.* 22.5-10; 24:1-3; *3 En.* 10-12) and Jacob (*Prayer of Joseph* quoted by Origen, *Comm. Joh.* 2.31).¹¹ It is very important to the development of Christology because, I believe, it is how Jesus' exaltation, very early in the tradition, was linked with his investiture of the Divine Name, "Jesus is Lord (=Yahweh)" (Κύριος Ἰησοῦς: i.e., 1 Cor 12:3; Phil 2:9-11; Rev 17:14; 19:16; cf. Acts 2:38).¹²

Angel of the Lord

Once the link had been forged between Jesus' exaltation and the investiture of the Divine Name, there was no turning back. His resurrected angelic body could be none other than that of the Angel of the Lord, God's principal angel and bearer of his Name and Image, and connected to his *kavod* or Glory (i.e., Matt 18:15; 18:20; 28:19; John 1:12; 2:23; 3:18; 5:43-44; 10:25; 14:10-11, 12-13; 12:28; 15:21; 17:6, 11, 26; 20:31; Acts 2:21; 2:38; 5:41; 9:16; 15:26; 21:13; Phil 2:9; James 2:7; Heb 1:4, 13:15; cf. Acts 2:17-21, 38; 9:14; 22:16; Rom 10:9-13; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Tim 2:22).¹³ With this identification, his exaltation and enthronement as God was complete since, in Jewish tradition, this particular angel is God's visible manifestation and, as such, he is either indistinguishable from God or operating with God's power and authority.¹⁴ It was this early identification that was invoked at the initiatory rite, baptism (Acts 2:38), and healings (Acts 3:6, 16; 4:30; cf. 16:18; 19:13, 17) because it was this Name that had power.

This association also brought with it the attribution of the title "Judge," created through a peshet of images from scriptural passages. An interpretation of Zechariah 3:1-7, Isaiah 66:15-16, and Malachi 3:1-5 fostered the opinion that at the Eschaton a great angel of Yahweh would judge the world with fire. Such images related to Jesus are found embedded in several early Christian texts (Luke 12:49; *Gos. Thom.* 10; Matt 10:34; Luke 12:51; *Gos. Thom.* 16:1-3; Rev 8:5; 19:11-16; 2 Pet 3:7-14). Our earliest liturgies contained references to Jesus as the "Judge of the living and the dead" (Acts 10:40, 42). Paul knows this tradition well, referencing to Jesus as the eschatological Judge (whom he does not know as the "Son of Man") in his letters (Rom 2:16; 14:10; 1 Cor 4:5; 11:32). This line of thinking is born out in the *Pseudo-Clementine* literature associated with the Ebionites. Jesus is appointed by God as the greatest of the archangels, the "god of princes, who is Judge of all" (*Ps.-Clem. Rec.* 2.42).

Possession Christology

Looked at collectively, this evidence means that the first followers of Jesus developed within the first decade of Christianity what can be called "Possession Christology," the schema that understands Jesus to have been born a complete human being to human parents. Mary and Joseph are his biological parents—just as Matthew's and Luke's genealogies relate—and is preserved by a branch of the Ebionites in the second century (Eus., *Ecccl. Hist.* 3.27; 6.17; Hipp., *Ref.* 7.22; Epiph., *Pan.* 30.2.2; 34.6). At his baptism, the Holy Spirit descends, taking up residence in him (εἰς: Mark 1:10), possessing him.

Jesus is a full human being, body and soul, possessed by the Holy Spirit, sometimes God's Wisdom. This anthropology is quite natural in the ancient world where human beings were constantly bombarded with spirits, mostly demonic, attempting to possess their souls and corrupt their bodies. Guardian or holy spirits were a blessing, since they aided people from otherwise succumbing to demonic invasion.

As God's Prophet, Jesus called the people to repentance, taught people how to interpret correctly and follow the Laws so that they could live righteously (as he did) and be prepared to stand before God at the Judgment. Ultimately, he was rejected and suffered a horrific death as foretold in the scripture, a death that atoned for the past sins of Israel. Immediately before his death, the Holy Spirit left him. But because of his righteousness and faithfulness, God resurrected him from the dead, transforming his physical body into an angelic body and exalting him to

God's right hand as the principal angel of Yahweh, vested with the powerful Name and enthroned as God. In this capacity, he will return to Judge the living and the dead. As a result the doctrine of the Second Coming was born, as well as the divinization of Jesus. Jesus was not divine during his lifetime, but a human being possessed by the Holy Spirit, exalted to divinity after his death.

A Behavioral Soteriology

This christological pattern was developed by the Jerusalem Christians within ten years after Jesus' death, and it had ramifications for ritual performance and soteriological beliefs. Baptism, the initiatory ritual, was performed by invoking the Name, cleansing the initiate from past sins so that the soul could receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38-42). There is evidence that the anointing ceremony was a later addition to the original baptism ceremony, creating a ceremony apart from baptism for the reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17). The later Ebionites preserve this understanding of baptism and so develop daily baths as a means to cleanse themselves from postbaptismal sin. The cleanliness of the soul was of utmost importance because a purified soul was a prerequisite for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit aided the person—just as it did Jesus—to live righteously in imitation of Jesus and his teachings, so that, after death, the person would be resurrected as a glorious immortal being, like Jesus. The human being attains immortality by imitating a divine being, conforming his or her soul (with the help of the Spirit's indwelling) to the sacred template.

This emphasis on perfecting oneself through righteous living is the undercurrent sustaining soteriological claims in the Gospel of Matthew (cf. 5:48), as well as the thesis of the epistle of James (1:4) and the older sources retained by the authors of the *Didache* (1-6) and the *Epistle of Barnabas* (18-21). Although it is conventional to date James to the beginning of the second century—because it is not mentioned by our earliest church fathers—this is unreasonable given the letters' content, which promotes the old Jerusalem soteriological pattern of righteous life. The epistle's content fits into the religious landscape of the early Jerusalem church, concerned about Paul's rebellious agenda which promoted that "faith," rather than one's responsible and moral actions, leads to "righteousness" and justification (Jas 2:14-26). In my view, a date no later than 60 C.E. is justifiable for the composition of James's epistle.

As for other ritual activities, apparently the first performances of the Lord's Supper—the thanksgiving meal or Eucharist—were joyous occasions, celebrating the imminent return of Jesus and anticipating the heavenly Messianic banquet. This performance of the meal is preserved in Mark 14:25 and Matthew 26:29 ("Truly, I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new in the Kingdom of God"), as well as the old formulae in *Didache* 9 ("Maranatha"; cf. 1 Cor 16:22; Rev 22:20). The meal may also have had a covenantal aspect, affirming the Christians as the New Israel through the death of the Righteous One, Jesus (Luke 22:14-18). Paul, too, is aware of this performance-type since he tells us that every time the eucharist is celebrated, Christians proclaim the death of the Lord "until he comes" and presents the "cup" as the "new covenant" (1 Cor 11:25-26). He is uncomfortable, in fact, with the festive party nature of the eucharist meal as the Corinthians were celebrating it, and works to turn its performance into more of a wake, during which Jesus is mourned, than a banquet anticipating his return (1 Cor 11:17-22).

The Antiochean Paradigm

If Jesus had been exalted to the right hand of God as the principal Angel of Yahweh, what did this suggest about the appearances of this angel in scriptural stories that took place prior to Jesus' birth? This logical question must have crossed the minds of the early Christians who were familiar with the Jerusalem Paradigm. To judge exactly when the first Christians raised this perplexing question is difficult, but certainly the answer was discussed in literature associated with Antioch. The answer was known also by Paul, who was at one time a primary leader and missionary for the Antiochean Church. So I think it safe to say that this paradigm was developed and promulgated by Antiochean Christians in western Syria and eventually taken up by Paul and the communities in Asia Minor and Greece before becoming the dominant meta-paradigm in Rome and the West.

Born of Woman (or Virgin)

If the first Christians believed that Jesus had been elevated to the status of God's Namesake Angel, then passages about this Angel in the Jewish scripture (cf. Gen 16:7; 22:15; Exod 3:2-14; 23:20-21) must have been intriguing, indeed! The Antiochean Christians must have reasoned, if

Jesus had been exalted at his death, becoming the Angel of Yahweh, who was the Angel of Yahweh before Jesus was born? The only logical solution would have been "Jesus." Since the scriptures clearly related that the Angel existed before Jesus' earthly advent, the Antiochean Christians concluded that this Angel must have descended from heaven and somehow embodied Jesus at Jesus' conception or birth.

We find in Paul's letters the old Antiochean hymnal fragments relating that Jesus had been "in the form of God" and "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped," a likely reference to an angel, probably the Angel of the Name. This divine being "empties" himself and is "born in the likeness of men" (Phil 2:5-7). Jesus is the "image of the invisible God, the first-born of creation" (Col 1:15). In Jesus, "the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col 1:19). The references to "form" and "image" and "first-born of creation" all carry angelomorphic connotations.¹⁵ Paul himself relates that "God sent forth his son" and he was "born of woman" (Gal 4:4), a concept mentioned elsewhere in his letters as well (Rom 8:3). Paul's use of the word "son" in this regard probably reflects the association between angels and sonship in Judaism.¹⁶ Although this incremental shift occurred in Antiochean Christianity prior to Paul, it appears to have had an enormous impact on early Christian traditions after Paul and developed in fascinating directions.

In this regard, we might recall the fragment from the *Gospel of the Hebrews*. It relates that the Father summoned the angel Michael and gave to him the Power called Christ. Michael descended into the world and was "called Mary." So Christ was in her womb "seven months" (Cyril of Jerusalem, *Discourse on Mary Theotokos* 12a). The tradition as it stands appears to be bowdlerized, altered in its transmission so that it has become nonsensical. But what might it have been? A teaching that the angel Christ descended into Mary's womb at the time of quickening with the assistance of Michael? It is noteworthy that the ancients believed that angels helped deliver the child's soul into the womb at the time of quickening or before (cf. Clem. Alex., *Ecl.* 50.1-3; Maim., *Guide* II 6, Munk 2, 17ab; Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* illuminations). So there appears to be an allusion to this belief in the Hebrew fragments. This teaching, in fact, aligns with what we know of some Ebionites who taught that Christ "was not begotten of God the Father, but created as one of the archangels" and that "he rules over the angels and all the creatures of the Almighty" (Epiph., *Pan.* 30.16.4-5). This branch of the Ebionites thought that Jesus was "born of a virgin and the Holy Spirit" (but denied his preexistence as "Logos" or "Sophia"; see Eus., *Eccl. Hist.* 3.27). This

type of teaching appears to have been possible because "spirits" and "angels" functioned sometimes as equivalents in Jewish and Christian thought, as well as an Angel as the Spirit.¹⁷ The same appears to be the case for the word Power (*Dynamis*).¹⁸ This ability to understand "spirit" as "angel," who like a demon can possess a human being, is likely the result of a synthesis between Jewish angelology and ancient beliefs about spirit or demon possession. The angel, since it could be described as a spirit, took on activities, such as possession, of spirits.

The Ebionites further developed this idea by teaching that this angel's advent as Jesus was not unique, but one in a long line of prophets beginning with Adam.¹⁹ The Ebionites taught, according to Epiphanius, that the son acquired a Power from God at the time he "put on Adam," as well as the subsequent bodies of the patriarchs (Epiph., *Pan.* 34.6). This teaching appears to be known in Syria since the language of cyclic embodiment is also found in the Syriac *Acts of Thomas*. The Christians argue here that Christ, the Great Power, put on the first man (cf. Symmachians in Marius Victorinus, *ep. ad Gal.* 1.15; *Ps.-Clem. Rec.* 1.28.4).

It appears to me that this christological shift in Christian Judaism to possession in the womb was forced by hermeneutics. If the Angel of Yahweh existed before Jesus' advent, then this Angel who was God's "equal" in terms of bearing his Name and functioning as his manifestation on earth, must have descended and been embodied in the human Jesus. The human Jesus, a complete man with body and soul, was possessed by this Angel at the moment of his conception or quickening.

The virgin birth stories, in fact, appear to be similar (but not identical) adaptations of this story, that a divine being possessed a fetus in the womb. The story of womb-possession is very prominent in Luke's gospel, which parallels John the Baptist's conception to Jesus'. Of the former's conception, Luke relates "he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15; πνεύματος ἁγίου πλησθήσεται ἔτι ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς αὐτοῦ). When the process of Jesus' conception is explained by the angel Gabriel, it is in these words: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (Luke 1:35; πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σέ καὶ δύναμις ὑψίστου ἐπισκιάσει σοι· διὸ καὶ τὸ γεννώμενον ἅγιον κληθήσεται υἱὸς θεοῦ). If we reread Jeremiah 1:5—"Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations"—and Isaiah 49:1—"The Lord called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named

my name"—and even Galatians 1:15—"when he who had set me apart before I was born"—we see in the Lukan virgin birth narrative an attempt to understand Jesus' birth in light of his prophetic career, that in him the Spirit was indwelling even in the womb, that the descent of the divine angel or spirit occurred long before his baptism, even as early as his conception because he was God's Prophet chosen before his birth.

In the Gospel of Matthew the relationship of Jesus to the Holy Spirit is framed in terms of agency with the prominence of the preposition ἐκ. Mary is found "having [a fetus] in her womb from the Holy Spirit" (Matt 1:18; ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχουσα ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου). This appears to me to be yet another incremental shift in this christological pattern, moving the theology from spirit possession at conception to divine parentage, a shift that may have made more sense to Hellenistic audiences familiar with stories of gods siring heroes. Since the embodiment of the Spirit has occurred at conception, it is significant that both Matthew and Luke independently shift the Markan baptism account of possession of the Spirit "in" Jesus (εἰς: Mark 1:10), to "upon" (ἐπ': Matt 3:16; Luke 3:22).

The person who has preserved the paradigm shift in its entirety, incorporating both the Angel of Yahweh traditions and the virgin birth stories, is the early second century Roman teacher, Justin Martyr. In his writings, we find the survival of the teaching that the manifestations of the Angel of Yahweh according to the scriptures were essentially manifestations of Jesus before his birth.²⁰ The son is the Angel of Yahweh who speaks from the burning bush, visits with Abraham, wrestles with Jacob (Justin Martyr, *Dial. Trypho* 59.1; 56.1-23; 58.4-13). He appears to Joshua as a warrior angel (62.5). Justin says with conviction, "Therefore, neither Abraham, nor Isaac, nor Jacob, nor any man saw the Father . . . but only him who, according to his [God's] will, is both God, his son, and angel, from the fact that he ministers to his purpose. Whom he also has willed to be born through the virgin, and who once became fire for that conversation with Moses in the bush" (Justin Martyr, *Dial. Trypho* 127.4). The great Angel of Yahweh embodied the man Jesus, born from a virgin womb.

Embodiment Christology

Hermeneutics appears to have forced a shift in the Jerusalem paradigm, particularly in terms of Jesus' origin as a divine being. If he were Yahweh's angel upon exaltation at his resurrection, then he must have preexisted as this angel whose activities are recounted in the scripture. Already at his conception or quickening, he embodied the angel or spirit. So he was a

complete human being with his own body and soul that functioned as a container or vessel for the resident angel or spirit.

The rest of the Jerusalem paradigm remains intact, however. At Jesus' death, he returns to heaven and is (re)installed. His exaltation at his resurrection to the Name above all names continues to reverberate in this literature (Rom 1:3-4; Phil 2:10-11; cf. 1 Cor 15:20-22; Phil 3:20-21). As this great angel, he will be revealed in the heavens, descending with "a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God" (1 Thess 4:16). He will come "with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (2 Thess 1:7-8). He will usher in God's Kingdom after he destroys his enemies (1 Cor 15:24-28). He will sit in the Judgment seat and mete out rewards and punishments (1 Cor 8:6). This tradition is carried on in Ebionism. According to Epiphanius, the Ebionites taught that Christ was "created like one of the archangels" and was appointed by God to rule over the future age (Epiph., *Pan.* 30.16.2-4).

A Sacrificial Soteriology

The Jerusalem paradigm taught that Jesus' transformation into a glorified, divine being happened as the result of his righteous actions and piety, which brought about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and his gradual perfecting. Thus at death, God raised him and exalted him, giving him a transformed body and angelic role. True, this idea was Jewish apocalypticism gone wild, but it made perfect sense given the environs and conditions. It also meant that anyone who imitated Jesus, particularly in terms of righteousness and piety, could expect a similar gradual transformation and eventual resurrection.

This soteriology worked until Jesus was considered to be born already special, already embodying an angel or spirit, a condition the rest of humanity could not imitate. Jesus did not work for his divinity, but had it from the womb of Mary. This meant that the road to salvation had to shift as well. It had to engage the power of the divine Jesus rather than that of the human, promising redemption because of a divine action rather than a human one. This shift occurred on several levels, but the most prominent was the full engagement with martyrological interpretations of Jesus' death in terms of atonement, particularly as Mark relates it in his gospel. The Christians developed the Jerusalem Christology in this regard, which as we saw earlier, explained Jesus' death in terms of

patterns of the Jewish martyrs, patterns which included beliefs about the efficacy of their deaths for sin atonement, especially for Israel's disobedience and sins against the Torah.

This shift, however, does not mean that the behavioral soteriology from the Jerusalem paradigm vanished or was replaced by the divine redemptive action. What happened was a fusion of the two soteriologies so that the sacrificial emerged dominant while the behavioral receded to the background. In many ways, this shift disabled the behavioral—if a divine action redeemed the human being, then what was the benefit of good behavior? Paul faces and tries to explain this very problem in Romans 12–13, where good behavior is the *outcome* of a person's redemption and transformation, rather than the *cause*.

The earliest development of this shift can be traced in Paul's letters, particularly in Romans (e.g., 3:23–24; 4:24–25; 6:23) where he assumes that God operates as a great judge and lawmaker. The penalty for breaking God's laws is death. Since all humans, Jews and Gentiles alike, have broken his laws, everyone is guilty in God's courtroom. Everyone receives the death penalty. The solution Paul teaches is the heavenly righteous man Jesus, who did not sin and did not deserve the death penalty. But he dies anyway. His undeserved death provides vicarious payment for everyone else's death sentence. This efficacious atonement is not something earned by deeds or piety, but rather a benevolent act accomplished by Jesus. I might mention that this act was understood in cosmic terms, as part of God's plan at the end of time to defeat Satan and his army of angels that have been battling against the archangels since the beginning of time. The defeat of these powers began when they crucified Jesus (1 Cor 2:6–7; Col 2:15; cf. 1 Cor 15:23–28).

The believer reaped the benefits of Jesus' death through participation in ritual activities. According to Paul, the initiate actually was baptized into Jesus' death (Rom 6:1–11; cf. Col 2:12–15). This shift in the meaning of baptism developed the older form of baptism as it had been earlier performed by those Christian Jews from the Jerusalem Church by insisting that one was united with Christ, that the spirit one received was not any holy spirit, but Jesus' own spirit (Gal 2:20; 4:19; 1 Cor 1:12–13; 2 Cor 4:11; Phil 2:5; Rom 8:29). Because the person possesses Jesus' spirit, the person has become Jesus, even now participating in his death and atonement (Phil 3:1–21; Rom 8:15–21). Instead of the convert paying the death penalty for his own sins, he shares Jesus' death. So through Jesus' death, the penalty for the convert's sins was paid (2 Cor 5:16–21; 1 Cor 6:20; 15:2). The person has been resurrected provisionally by partaking

in Jesus' resurrection, although the full glory of the resurrected body could only be wholly achieved at the eschaton (2 Cor 3:18; Phil 3:12, 20–21). In this way, the believer was experiencing a bodily transformation as the old mortal body of sin was being replaced (Rom 12:1–2).

Given this interpretative trajectory, the meaning of the Eucharist also had to shift. The Jerusalem model understood it to be a meal that they were sharing with the exalted Jesus who was called to "come" (e.g., 1 Cor 16:22, *maranatha*) and sit at their table to sup with them. The joyous meal was anticipatory of the great Messianic banquet, which they believed would be hosted by Jesus at the Eschaton. For Paul, whose writings reveal another interpretation, the Eucharist is about ingesting the sacrificed body of Jesus (1 Cor 10:1–5, 16–17) and a memorial service for his death (1 Cor 11:23–26). The meal became a reperformance of his death, a sacrificial meal to which all were invited. The believer, by ingesting his sacrificed body, repeatedly and regularly shares in that death and its atoning benefits. as Paul writes, "Consider the people of Israel. Are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar?" (1 Cor 10:18).

The Alexandrian Paradigm

This paradigm is preserved by the author of the Gospel of John, and it becomes the dominant hermeneutic in Alexandria by the mid-second century. At about the same time, a version of this paradigm also emerges in east Syrian literature like the Gospel of Thomas. Consequently, it is not at all clear where it originated. Was it conceived in Syria and transported to Alexandria or vice versa? One of the difficulties I face in answering this question hinges on the fact that the geographical location of the Gospel of John has never been worked out to my satisfaction. Its traditional location as a gospel written in Ephesus appears to be based on very slim evidence interpreted from Acts 19:1–7, that the followers of John the Baptist were present in Ephesus and were converted to Christianity there. This is connected with the Johannine polemic against John the Baptist (John 1:6–8; 1:19–34; 3:22–36; 5:36) and the conversion of many of the Baptist's believers (10:40–42). Although this makes some sense, is it not equally likely (based on the same argument) that the Gospel of John could have been written in Alexandria? How did the Christian Baptists come to be in Ephesus? A Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, had received instruction about Jesus based on scriptures, while knowing only the baptism of John. He moved to Ephesus (Acts 18:24) where he spoke openly (and with some success) in the synagogue

before the arrival of Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:25-28). So the Christian Baptists in Ephesus may have originated out of Apollos's mission from Alexandria, which could place the authorship of John in Alexandria rather than Ephesus.

Pretemporal Jesus

Retrospective thinking about Jesus is at its height in this paradigm. Jesus is not a great Angel or a spirit who descends and embodies a human being in the womb. His preexistence is moved a step back, to a time *before* creation. He is God's Logos, his Reason. He is with God before the world is created (John 1:1-2) and is involved in creating the world before he *becomes flesh* (σὰρξ ἐγένετο) (John 1:3; 1:14). This language (ἐν σαρκί) is also present in the Gospel of Thomas (*Gos. Thom.* 28: P.Oxy. 1.13).

Since the work of J. Rendel Harris and Rudolph Bultmann, there has been much discussion about how this preexistent figure can have its roots in Sophianology.²¹ Although there are many uncanny parallels between these traditions, it remains to explain the identification of the Logos with God who existed from the beginning.²² As a result, Jarl Fossum has offered an alternative explanation, one that makes an enormous amount of sense given the development of the three paradigms I am suggesting. He shows us that the Johannine author could be relying on traditions about the Angel of Yahweh who is indistinguishable from the Tetragrammaton. The Name of God in Jewish traditions, Fossum demonstrates, was understood to be a hypostasis of God's eternal nature, and, thus, equivalent to him. It helped with creating the world and was present in the Angel of Yahweh.²³ If Fossum is correct (and I think he is), then what we are seeing in this paradigm is retrospective thinking about the embodiment model. Jesus' identification with the Angel of Yahweh is pushed back pretemporally, from preexistent to precosmogonic.

Another aspect of Jesus' pretemporality must be mentioned. The Logos' cohabitation with God means that he alone "saw" God (John 1:18; 6:46; cf. 5:37). This exclusive vision has made the Logos extraordinarily special. He not only is the only one who truly knows the Father because he is the only one who has seen the Father, but he also participates in and is God (John 1:1). Once the Logos has descended from heaven (John 3:13, 31-32; 7:29; 8:23; cf. 17:5) and "tabernacled" with us, he, as Jesus, can claim that "the Father and I are one" (John 10:30) and "believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me" (John 14:11). Jesus has God's Name and, thus, is one with God (John 17:11).

This Christology appears to me to result from the fusion of traditional Jewish thinking about the Angel of Yahweh, the Name, and Hellenistic cosmogony, particularly the origin of the rational aspect of the human being. The synthesis of these traditions results in the Johannine portrayal of the pretemporal Jesus that embraces elements from the previously independent traditions: he is God's Reason and at the same time he is the Angel of Yahweh. The Logos and Angel traditions conflate in such a way that the Reason of God takes on the characteristics of the Angel of Yahweh.²⁴

Ensoulment Christology

Is the descent of the Logos into the flesh not equivalent to the descent of the Angel or Spirit into the human Jesus as was the case in the embodiment paradigm? The short answer is, "No." His descent is not described in terms of a divine being assuming a full human being, a person with his own body and soul. His descent is described in very different terms, that is, as the descent of the Reason of God into human flesh, so that the Logos becomes a human being. This means that God's *psyche* descends into the flesh and functions as the soul of Jesus. The divine aspect is not an appendage to Jesus' soul; it is Jesus' soul! One of the reasons for the fusion of Logos language with Angel of Yahweh traditions must be due to the fact that the paradigm is using the christological platform that it has received from the embodiment model while embracing a different anthropological argument—that Jesus' soul was God's Logos. The word "Logos" was appropriate because it would have been understood by the Hellenistic populace to describe a substitute *psyche*. God's Reason is ensouled in Jesus.

What is the result of his descent? Literally, it means God is walking around on earth as a human being. It is fascinating to me how the Johannine author preserves a play on this tradition by presenting us with a Jesus whose body is the New Temple in which God's presence dwells.²⁵ He is the Glory (δόξα or כבוד)—God's manifestation, visible in his person (John 1:14), his signs and wonders (John 2:11; 11:40; 17:4) and his crucifixion (John 12:23, 28; 13:32; 17:1, 5). In 1:14, the claim is made, "We have seen his Glory, the Glory of the Only Begotten from the Father." The background of this vision may be found in Moses' vision of the Glory in Exodus 33:18-34:8.²⁶ But because this is an ensoulment paradigm, the *kavod* is made to assert characteristics of Reason, characteristics that would otherwise be foreign to its tradition, that is, it is made to

function as Jesus' soul. It is personalized, so that a particular person becomes the earthly visible manifestation of the hidden God (John 1:18). Remarkably, this paradigm says that God has been manifested in history.

Transmutative Soteriology

Because the Christology is such that God and flesh meet, forming an extraordinary sacred human being, the goal of this paradigm is for all humans to experience the same transmutation, a perfecting that alters their humanity in the same way that it had altered Jesus'. This process is truly a process of personal transmutation and *theosis*; as many of the Eastern Church Fathers grasped, "God became man so that man can become God."

How did the devotee achieve this transmutation? Largely, it is accomplished through the sacraments, although the Gospel of Thomas also allows for contemplative activity that leads to transforming visionary experiences.²⁷ Initially, it begins through baptism when one is "reborn of water and spirit" (John 3:5). The baptism is a rebirth; the person's soul literally is born anew. Those who developed this interpretation of baptism must have operated within the thought-world of middle Platonism, seemingly arguing that their postbaptismal souls were no longer in the degraded state associated with their first birth (John 3:4). This appears to have been achieved by the purificative effects of the water ritual, as well as the infusion of the soul at the same time with a holy spirit (John 3:5-8). It is fascinating how the language of baptism in John is a language of birth, not of the flesh, but of the spirit (John 3:6). The water is "living water" that wells up to "eternal life" (John 4:7-15). The result is a new creation, a transmutation of person.

This transmutation is maintained through the devotee's participation in the Eucharist. In John 6, the Johannine author is not speaking about cannibalism, eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the historical Jesus. Rather the devotees consume a sacred or divinized body, the extraordinary body of God on earth. His body is "the bread of life," which has "come down from heaven" (John 6:35, 41, 51). This heavenly bread is his "flesh," and if the devotee consumes it, he or she will live forever (John 6:51). This is expanded to include Jesus' blood that must be drunk by the faithful in order to have life everlasting (John 6:53-55). The incorporation of the sacred body worked like divine medicine, immortalizing the person over time. The devotee literally has incorpo-

rated Jesus, and the result is his or her transmutation or immortalization (John 6:56).

This mystical understanding of the Eucharist can be characterized in the catchphrase "at-one-ment" in contrast with the sacrificial model of "atonement." The devotee incorporates the sacred elements to imitate the ensoulment of Jesus, since at the moment of consumption a unification between God and the human is experienced. When this happens regularly, a process of transmutation is undergone, and eventually *theosis* will be achieved.

Results

Paradigms are only successful if they have heuristic value. The value of the model I have set in place here is that it neither depends upon theologically sympathetic labels nor does it serve to justify or condemn them. The model recognizes the incremental development of traditions fostered by the communal memory of living religious groups whose experiences influence their preservation. At all times, the model operates within the parameters of Second Temple Judaism and requires no mutation of thought or practice—no unique moment—to explain *how* Christology quickly developed and how, almost immediately, Jesus became God.

This model helps expose the fact that the Christians within the first few years following Jesus' death had exalted him and identified him with Yahweh's Angel. Because he had Yahweh's Name and Power, this identification ultimately allowed for his worship. The relatively quick growth of three different christological Paradigms appears to result from the intersection of hermeneutics and experience, forcing Christians in various locales to update their collective memories, to make present sense of their receding past and burgeoning future.

Last, the model is very useful as a device to examine later christological developments and understand the conflicts involved. In the case of Arius, for instance, it shows us a man influenced by two of the paradigms—the old Jerusalem and the Alexandrian. Although he is an Egyptian priest in the Alexandrian diocese, Arius himself implies that Lucian of Antioch was his teacher as well as Eusebius of Nicomedia (*ep. ad. Euseb. Nicom.* 5; cf. Alexander, *ep. ad. Alex.* 35-36; Philostorgius, *hist. eccl.* 1), who, in turn, was a pupil of Paul of Samosata, a Dynamic Monarchianist familiar with the Jerusalem Paradigm. In fact, this old

Paradigm formed the basis of Paul of Samosata's Christology. Jesus was understood by him to be a human being (Eusebius, *hist. eccl.* 7.27.2). The divine element that came to dwell within the righteous man Jesus was the impersonal Logos, God's rational power (Epiphanius, *haer.* 65.1.5-8). This possession and eventual union of God's Logos with Jesus' soul came about because Jesus' human will desired it. The more obedient Jesus was to God's commandments, the more he conformed himself with God's Logos until he achieved complete union with it and attained full divine status. In this way, the morally perfected man was *homoousios* with the Father (Athanasius, *de. syn.* 45; Hilary, *de. syn.* 81; Basil, *ep.* 52.1). Jesus' perfecting provided the template for all believers to use. If they conformed their wills to God's, following Jesus' example, they would become divine themselves.

Now Arius's understanding of Christology is based on this teaching, but it has distinct differences due to the fact that Arius was familiar also with the Alexandrian Paradigm and its high regard for the pretemporal Son. About this Son, Arius taught that he was a "creature" (κτίσμα or ποίημα) whom God made from nothing (Arius, *ep. ad. Euseb. Nicom.* 4-5). He was an entity separate from God's Logos and Wisdom, and distinct from the Father's *hypostasis* (Arius, *ep. ad. Alex.* 4). This explanation is probably an allusion, couched in philosophical garb, to the old Jerusalem teaching that Jesus was the Angel of Yahweh. Given this, it should not surprise us that an Arian at a conference admitted that the Son might have fallen as the angel Satan did (Alexander, *ep. en cyc.* 10).

Arius's genius, in my mind, is that he welded Paul of Samosata's teaching about the moral development of Jesus into the Alexandrian Paradigm. Thus, it is the pretemporal Son who conforms his own will or Logos to that of the Father's, perfecting himself before time. This welding brought with it also the behavioral soteriology of the Jerusalem Paradigm. Believers, Arius thought, could conform to God's will, just as the Son had done, and progressively over their lifetimes become divine themselves.

As for the human Jesus, Arius preferred the Alexandrian Paradigm, insisting that the perfected spiritual Son who had conformed himself to the Logos, took the place of Jesus' soul. Because the Son as the Logos was a creature, he was susceptible to change. So Jesus could be ignorant at times, grow in wisdom, and need help with temptation.

History has unfairly remembered Arius as a heretic priest who thought Jesus was a demigod. As we have seen, this is a far cry from the truth. For Arius, Jesus was God, but became so through a complex

process of conformation of his will, a conformation that we can imitate. As such, Arius's Christology and Soteriology are closer to earlier Christian expressions than those of his orthodox contemporaries like Alexander and Athanasius, who rely completely on the later Alexandrian Paradigm. My *doktorvater* once told me that if I wanted to learn about the earliest forms of Christianity, I should study the heretics, because many of their views represent early Jewish thinking that, within this developing Christian landscape, has grown out-dated or become a liability, views that many second century Christians were replacing with what they considered to be fresher perspectives from the Gentile population. With Arius, this appears to be the case. It may also be true for Nestorius who resurrected certain aspects of the old Jerusalem Paradigm himself. Perhaps really to understand the earliest forms of Christianity, it is necessary to step away momentarily from our orthodox post-Nicene heritage and grasp the forbidden fruit.