JESUS IS THE ETERNAL SON OF GOD

By David Abernathy[1]

1 Introduction

In recent decades there has been a trend among missionary Bible translators working among Muslim people groups to avoid the use of the phrase "Son of God" in translations of the New Testament. This is because of the negative and often extreme reaction of many Muslims toward that phrase. The Qur'an severely anathematizes anyone who would dare to say that Jesus is the Son of God, guaranteeing that they will go to hell, and possibly even cause the earth and heavens to shake (Qur'an 4:165, 5:18, 6:101, 9:30, 19:35, 88–92, 17:111, and 23:91). Muslims have traditionally taught that the phrase "Son of God" can only mean that Christians believe that God would have produced offspring by a physical union with a human woman. In some parts of the world, at least, it seems nearly impossible to convince devout Muslims that any other meaning is even possible, thus pre-empting any possible understanding to the contrary. The presence of the offending term could prevent the translated text from ever getting a hearing in these places. Much less would it transform the thinking of the readers, unless a significant change in understanding can be brought about through a deep move of the Holy Spirit working through evangelists, radio broadcasts, witnessing Christians, and other means.

Missionary Bible translators have long operated under the premise that if the reading audience gets little meaning, no meaning, or wrong meaning from a passage, then the wording of the passage must be altered in order to solve the problem. Consequently, some translators have opted to use different wording for "Son of God" in order to avoid the wrong meaning many Muslims might attach to the phrase. Justification for this is based in part on the idea that "Son of God" is a metaphor and, as such, a suitable equivalent can be found as a substitute. Because the Qur'an does use the terms "Messiah" (*al Masih*) and 'Word' to refer to Jesus, some translators, wanting to avoid the reaction that the prohibited term "Son of God" causes, have chosen to use ei-

[1] David Abernathy has worked in Mexico, Kenya, and Nigeria. Most of his time is spent in the US doing exegetical research, but he travels to Nigeria several times a year where he serves as a consultant in translation workshops. He has also taught Hebrew, Greek, biblical exegesis and sociolinguistics in Kenya.

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ther "Messiah" or "Word" in place of "Son of God". The problem that immediately presents itself, even to non-scholars, if the offending phrase "Son of God" is removed, is that historic Christian understanding has always held that the phrase "Son of God" means that Jesus actually *is* God's Son, and has been for all eternity. This is true in the fields of scholarly theology and exegesis as well as in preaching and worship. Changing the phrase to "Messiah" or "Word" or anything else fails to communicate the reality of this eternal Father-Son relationship.

2 The meaning of the term "Son of God"

2.1 Metaphorical or metaphysical?

One of the arguments some use for substituting different wording for "Son of God" is that the term is considered a metaphor. As such, it can be altered to communicate the same intended meaning, whatever the meaning of the metaphor is determined to be for the context. The rationale behind this is that since Jesus does not have a divine mother, he cannot literally be the Son of God. Thus, it is assumed that the only other option is that he is Son only in some metaphorical sense. That is, if the sonship is not literal/physical it can only be metaphorical. No third category is recognized.

But when talking about the persons of the Trinity there is a third possible category, and that is the *metaphysical*. Christ's sonship is a metaphysical and essential[2] sonship that is eternal and real; it *is the essence of who he is eternally* (Carson 1991: 162; 1984: 109, 345; Schnackenberg 1995: 310; Harris 1992: 87; Guthrie 1981: 313; Marshall in Michel 1986: 646; Vos 1953: 193; Morris 1981: 13). As St. Hilary of Poitiers put it, 'He is the "the only-begotten, perfect, eternal Son of the unbegotten, perfect, eternal Father"' (Hilary, *De Trinitate* 3.3). *The statement that "God sent his Son" means that Jesus was already the Son of God when he was sent; that is, Jesus is the Son of God in an eternal sense*. For explicit statements regarding Christ's eternal preexistence as the Son, see Carson 1991: 111; Cranfield 1955: 58, 1975: 382; Lenski 1936: 37; Hodge 1886: 252, 1878: 334, 1872-73: I, cha.6, sec. 6, C,1,3; Hendriksen 1981: 42; Harrison 1976: 14, 87; Giles 2006: 7, 309, 311; Bloesch 1978: 128; France 1985: 96; Moo 1996: 48–49, 478–480; Murray 1968: 280; 1982: 69–70; Schreiner 1998: 38, 402; Fitzmyer 1993: 484–485;

[2] Some scholars use the term "ontological," but this term can have philosophical meaning that touches on issues not discussed here, so I have avoided it except where citing those scholars who specifically use it (e.g., Carson, Erickson, Blomberg, Torrance, O'Collins, Frame).

Stott 1994: 48–50, 219; Ridderbos 1975: 69, 77; Ladd 1974: 160; Fung 1988: 182; Bruce 1982: 195; 1986: 157; 1977: 199; Garland 1999: 377; George 1994: 301; Burton 1977: 217; W. Lane 1991: 12, 26; Charles 1990: 174; A. Lane 1982: 275–276; Morris 1988: 302; Sanday and Headlam 1971: 8, 192; Godet 1969: 298, 329; Verseput 1987: 540, 545; Beasley–Murray 1987: lxxxii, 51; Harris 1992: 87, 101; Schenk 1997: 99; Oberholtzer 1988; 84; Meier 1985: 179, 188; Marshall in Michel 1986: 645, 646; Stern 1992: 21; Bauer 1992: 775; Burke 1984: 1034; Guthrie 1981: 314, 316, 317; Bavinck 1977: 305, 307; Grudem 1994: 547; Hughes 1977: 37, 55–56; Miller 1988: 6; Stein 1992: 87; Vos 1953: 162–163; Geisler 2003: 291; Geldenhuys 1977: 77, 147; Sproul 1986: 42; Vanhoozer 2000: 67; Walvoord 1969: 38, 41; Erickson 1991: 232, 2009: 135; D. Kelly 2008: 132; O'Collins 1999: 62; Frame 2002: 710, 660-61. For additional, though less explicit support, see also Akin 2001: 183; Blomberg 1992; 417; Watts 1990: 84; W. Mounce 2006: 669; Köstenberger 2004: 500; Tasker 1960: 189; Hurtado 1993: 900, 902; Müller 1993: 710; Yarbrough 2008: 189, 278; Balchin 1982: 213; Warfield 1916: 371. This is only a partial listing of scholars who acknowledge the eternal and metaphysical nature of Christ's divine sonship; it could be much longer.

The church has always understood Christ's sonship in this way. This goes far beyond a metaphorical understanding. If it were a matter of metaphor, it would be a comparison derived from a more basic reality, which in this case would be human relationships. Human relationships would be the starting point, and the divine relationships would be described in terms of the human. This implies that God is somewhat at a loss for ways to describe aspects of his being, and can only draw from human experiences to do so. But we should think of it exactly in reverse. Just as a computer hard drive must be formatted before data can be written to it, so also the human experience and personality has been stamped with certain patterns that enable us to conceptualize important aspects of the essential nature of God. God has made us in such a way that we can know him truly, though not completely. He has established means whereby we can learn about his eternal nature and intra-Trinitarian relations: it has to do with the very pattern in which we are made, as persons created in his image. The Father-Son relation is an eternal pattern, inherent in the very nature of the persons of the Trinity, and is one that he has built into our own human experience in order to teach us something about himself.

In Ephesians 3:14–15 (NIV) Paul says, "I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name". What Paul is saying, though without elaborating on it further, is that earthly fatherhood has its origin in God himself. Most of the confessions of faith of the Refor-

mation assert that the Son is eternally begotten of the Father, as do many of the ancient creeds of the church. Most of the doctrinal statements of those mission organizations, Christian academic institutions, or denominational church bodies that are conservative enough to have a doctrinal statement will assert in one form or another that God exists eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If God exists eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit then fatherhood and sonship are an eternal aspect of their relationship, so God is Father eternally, and Jesus is Son eternally.

2.2 Metaphor, archetype, and inherent sonship

Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck said that when we refer to God as Father we are not using a metaphor, as though fatherhood is primarily an attribute of humanity, pertaining to God only in a secondary or derived sense. Rather, he says, the relation is reversed: "God is Father in the real and complete sense of the term."[3] His fatherhood pertains to his very eternal essence, and fatherhood on earth is but a dim reflection or shadow of God's eternal fatherhood. The eternal character of God's fatherhood then implies the eternal character of Christ's divine sonship (Bavinck 1977: 305, 307; Murray 1982: 66). Human fatherhood and sonship are, by comparison, only faint copies of the eternal Father-Son relation between God the Father and God the Son (Tenney 1981: 196). The nouns "Father" and "Son" have their proper Biblical meaning only in relation to the other; that is, the Father is called that as the Father of the Son, who is the Son of the Father (Jenson 2004: 204; Murray 1982: 66).[4] In regard to Jesus' revelation of himself as being one with the Father in John 10:30, Bauckham comments:

> 'The terms "Father" and "Son" entail each other. The Father is called Father only because Jesus is his Son, and Jesus is called Son only because he is the Son of his divine Father. Each is essential to the identity of the other. So to say that Jesus and the Father are one is to say that the unique divine identity comprises the relationship in which the Father is who he is only in relation to the Son and vice versa.' (Bauckham 2008: 106)

[3] Athanasius, commenting on Eph 3:15, said, "God does not make man his pattern, but rather, since God alone is properly and truly Father, we men are called fathers of our own children, for of him every fatherhood in heaven and earth is named" (*Contra Arianos* 1.23).

[4] Calvin likewise, citing Augustine, says that Christ is called 'God' with respect to himself, but 'Son' with respect to the Father; the Father is called 'God' with respect to himself, but 'Father' with respect to the Son (*Institutes* I, xiii, 19).

Consequently, only God is father in the fullest sense; he was the first father. Bavinck goes on to conclude that whoever refuses to honor God as Father shows more disrespect toward him than the one who does not acknowledge him as creator. D. Kelly says that it is significant that both the Apostle's Creed and the Nicene Creed mention the fatherhood of God before speaking of him as creator; that is, he was always Father, but he was not always creator (D. Kelly 2008: 449). This understanding of God's eternal fatherhood is nothing new; Athanasius elaborated this point in the fourth century in his fourth discourse against the Arians.[5]

So instead of seeing "Son of God" as a metaphor drawn from human experiences and relations, we should understand the phrase in terms of a prototype or archetype. This is an original pattern rooted in God's eternal nature that was stamped upon humanity at the time of creation, giving humankind many, though not all, of those features of Christ's own sonship (which, for humans, would include "daughtership" as well). This original Father-Son relationship is the basis upon which our own understanding and experience of human father-son relationships are based. So the divine fatherhood and sonship are not conceptual constructs that have their origin in human relations and experiences; human experience of fatherhood and sonship (that is, the parent-child relation) derives from the eternal pattern of relations in the Trinity. God has so made us that everyone experiences what it means to be a son or daughter, and most people experience what it means to be a parent. Our psychological "hard drives" are formatted to understand intuitively certain aspects of God's eternal being. We also see the concept of archetypes used in the epistle to the Hebrews in which the writer says that the earthly tabernacle was a "copy" that corresponded to a heavenly reality (Heb 9:11, 23). Likewise, he says that Melchizedek, as a priest and king, is "like" the Son of God. He is not using the Jewish tabernacle as a pattern, saying that heavenly realities are similar in certain ways, or taking Melchizedek as a pattern and saying that Jesus' ministry is like his in certain ways; he is doing exactly the reverse. The earthly tabernacle and the earthly priest-king Melchizedek display certain similarities to the eternal heavenly realities.

Perhaps one more observation would be in order concerning the question of "Son of God" being a metaphor, and the frequency with which particular metaphors are used in the Bible. We have already said that the Father-Son

[5] Athanasius said, "It belongs to the Godhead alone that the Father is properly father, and the Son properly Son, and in them, and them only, does it hold that the Father is ever Father and the Son ever Son." (*Against the Arians: Discourse Four, Ch. VI, section 21*. http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf204.xxi.ii.i.iv.html).

relation has its roots in God's eternal nature, and has been imprinted upon humanity to enable us to understand essential truth about God. It is also true that the Father-Son-Son of God conceptual cluster, which occurs several hundred times in the New Testament, has far more frequency and a much more widespread distribution than is normal for Biblical metaphors. The Biblical authors don't tell us that Christ's sonship is a metaphor; *they describe it as though it were a fact*.[6] Hence we don't need to assume that the term "Son of God" must be metaphorical, and the only possible alternative to understanding it in a literal/physical sense. There is an eternal and metaphysical sense in which Jesus is the divine Son, the Son of God, and this is how the church has always understood it.

2.3 Divine sonship as prototype for humans becoming God's sons and daughters

Numerous scholars comment on the fact that it is Christ's essential sonship that is the avenue to human beings gaining a similar status as sons and daughters of God. The mission of God's Son was to bring others into the status of a relationship with God as his children (Ladd 1974: 458). It is Jesus' uncreated, natural, eternal sonship that makes all the other sons of God possible (Bloesch 1978: 126).[7] Hurtado notes that in Paul's view God's purpose in sending his Son was that we might become sons by adoption (1993:905–906; see also O'Collins 1999: 62). In Romans 8:29 and Gal. 4:4–6 Paul shows that it is through the work of the preexistent Son whom God sent into the world to die for us that we can be adopted as God's sons (Marshall 1980: 778; Erickson 1991: 35). The Son leads other sons to salvation as well as to the inheritance that is inherent in sonship, both his and theirs (Schenk 1997: 98, 102). This means that Jesus, as the divine Son whose sonship is not derived from another, is the prototype and the agent of granting others the right to be God's sons as well; the sonship of Christians is derived from his own sonship and patterned after it (Hurtado 1993: 905–906; Schenk 1997: 99), and the pattern of that sonship is essentially obedience (Bauer 1992: 774). Jesus mediates for them a new relationship with God, bringing them into the same intimate relationship with God whereby they may call him "Abba" (Marshall 1967: 90;

[6] This is also true of the sonship of believers. 1 John 3:1 (NIV) says, "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"

[7] Calvin notes that although God was never Father to either angels or men, but only with regard to his only begotten son, he nevertheless enables sinful men to become God's sons by free adoption through Christ, who is the son of God by nature, and who by his eternal generation always possessed sonship (*Institutes* II, xiv, 5).

Blomberg 1997: 405). Through him, the Son of God, every believer is accepted in him as a child of God and can call his Father their Father as well (Geldenhuys 1977: 130). Staniloae says that "The revelation of the Trinity, occasioned by the incarnation and earthly activity of the Son, has no other purpose than to draw us after grace, to draw us through the Holy Spirit into the filial relationship the Son has with the Father," which he characterizes as a relationship of eternal love and communion (Staniloae 1994: 249, cited in Kelly 2008: 261).

That new relationship is essentially one of love. D. Kelly says that through the incarnation the Son of God revealed the heart of God to the human race and, on their behalf and in their place, gave the perfect filial responses required by God so that they could know the Father as the Son knows him (D. Kelly 2008: 178). Bruce characterizes the process this way: "The Son and the Father exist together in an eternal relationship of reciprocal love, and all those who are united to the Son through believing in him are welcomed into this relationship: the Father of Jesus becomes their Father too" (Bruce 1986: 167). In other words, our own union with God "depends upon the intimate union of the Father and the Son" (Sanday and Headlam 1971: 389; see also Vos 1953: 200–201).

Hughes says that Christ's exaltation and enthronement in heaven mark the completion of his redeeming mission to our world. However, at the same time it is a "begetting" in and with him of our fallen humanity in the sense of the regeneration and rehabilitation of humankind. Christ's "sonship is now our sonship, his inheritance is now our inheritance, his exaltation is now our exaltation" (Hughes 1977: 55-56). In fact, the Son's appointment at the ascension as heir of all things in Heb. 1:2 is best understood as the culmination of what had been God's plan all along. This plan of the Son's relation to humankind was a plan formed before creation began, touching on everything about them, including their origin, history, and destiny (Miller 1988: 6). In other words, the salvation that believers have been granted, as part of God's eternal plan in which they become his own sons and daughters, was brought about through the perfect Son, whose sonship now becomes a model of their own.

2.4 The nature of Christ's eternal sonship

Understanding Christ's sonship, as the church has always done, as an eternal sonship naturally leads to the question of what sonship would mean in the eternal sense. Unfortunately, it is much easier to describe Jesus' divine sonship in terms of his rule over creation or of his earthly life and mission, be-

cause that is the reality in which we exist, than to describe his eternal sonship. In fact, much of Paul's discussion of Christ's divine sonship could be said to focus on soteriology, that is, on his role as savior (Marshall in Michel 1986: 643–644; Marshall 1980: 778; Fee 1987: 45 fn 48). The exalted Christology of Col. 1:15–20 begins with *hos estin*, "who is," referring to the phrase "his dear son" in the previous sentence, and spells out what his sonship means as Lord over all created things. Likewise, the exalted Christology of the first chapter of Hebrews is an elaboration on "his Son" in 1:2. But even this chapter speaks mostly of the Son in terms of his rule over his creation and his full representation of God toward all creation.

On the other hand, the Bible says little about the eternal preexistent relation of the persons of the Trinity one toward another, prior to and without reference to anyone or anything else. These things are by their nature very difficult for us to conceive of or talk about. But we do know some things. The Bible does reveal God as triune, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each of the members of the Trinity is deity; each is eternal; each is personal. The relationships of the persons toward one another are therefore eternal, and they are characterized by love (1 John 4:8).[8] Importantly, the relationship of two of those persons is a Father-Son relation. In his high priestly prayer in John 17 Jesus describes that relationship between himself and the Father in terms of a *glory* that was given by the Father to the Son, and which consists of their oneness with one another (17:22). It is described also in terms of the Father's *love* for him prior to the creation of the world (17:24). The term "sonship" used with reference to Jesus expresses a unity of nature, unique intimacy and close fellowship between him and the Father (Tenney 1981: 196).

Jesus also said in John 5:27 and 6:57 that *his life derives from the living Father* who sent him. This could possibly be seen as referring to his incarnation, his earthly existence.[9] However, the overall context may actually incline the other way. As Carson says, it seems to be saying that in some sense, even in his pre-incarnate eternal existence, his life is derived from the Father; just as God has life-in-himself as a divine attribute, so also he granted that divine attribute to the Son, and did so in an eternal sense, not just as a function of the messianic mission. Consequently these verses have been used as support for the concept of the eternal generation of the Son (Carson 1991: 257; see also

[8] Erickson describes the Trinity as a society or complex of persons within which love binds and unites each of the persons with each of the others "so closely that they are actually one" (Erickson 2000: 58).

[9] See for example, Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Part One, Chapter VI, sec. 6B.

Köstenberger 2004:189; Morris 1995: 282–83).[10] Herein we may see part of the rationale for the statement by the creeds and confessions that Jesus is *eternally begotten* by the Father. While it is by no means clear what eternal begetting might mean, the assertion that he is *begotten* communicates that in some sense the relationship is a Father-Son relationship, and that in some sense the Son derives his eternal existence from the Father, but the fact that the begetting is *eternal* makes it clear that he has no origin or creation, that he never began to be.[11]

Two of the ecumenical creeds assert that he is eternally begotten of the Father, as do various confessions of the Reformation, including the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles, the Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 and the Westminster Confession. In addition, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession and the Lutheran Formula of Concord all profess Christ's eternal sonship. As we said before, almost any denominational church body, Bible college or seminary, or mission agency conservative enough to have a doctrinal statement will have in their statement something to the effect that God exists eternally in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[12] Some church bodies will affirm allegiance to the Ecumenical Creeds. So, if God exists eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Father-Son relationship is an eternal one, and not primarily a designation of Jesus' messianic mission as Christ, savior, or savior-king.

[10] See also Hilary of Poitiers *On the Trinity* 2.11, Augustine's *Homilies in John, Tractate*19.11.

[11] For a synopsis of the philosophical and theological difficulties involved with the idea of eternal begetting or generation, see Erickson 2009: 179-184, 251. Erickson says that the concept lacks biblical warrant and does not make sense philosophically, and should be eliminated from theological discussions of the Trinity (2009: 251). He points out that Calvin refrains from delving into the idea of eternal begetting, considering the idea foolish and of little profit (*Institutes* I, xiii, 29). In his systematic theology Grudem recommends discontinuing the use of the language of eternal begetting of the Son for contemporary theological formulations (Grudem 1994: 1234). Frame, on the other hand, is willing to retain the term "eternal generation" but admits that it is difficult to say that it means anything more than that the Father is eternally Father and the Son eternally Son, which Erickson, Grudem, and Calvin also affirm (Frame 2002: 712-714).

[12] This would include Wycliffe Bible Translators US, UK, Canada, and International, SIM, New Tribes Mission, and the Lausanne Covenant statement of faith, to which various evangelical groups subscribe.

3 The historical development of christological and Trinitarian doctrine

3.1 The creeds, the Trinity, and the Son

At the very end of the gospel of Matthew Jesus gives his apostles their marching orders, using an aorist imperative: they are to make disciples of all nations. Then using two present participles in an imperatival sense he tells them what that consists of: baptizing and teaching them everything he had taught them. As for baptism, it was to be in the name (singular) of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is the only place in Scripture where a member of the Trinity speaks objectively to name the persons of the Trinity, and for good reason it has become the normative Trinitarian formula. In the book of Acts there seem to be variations in the baptismal formula, but it is not known whether that is a matter of abbreviation on Luke's part for literary reasons, or, more likely, that the formula had not been standardized yet.

In any event, in the *Didache*, which is a church manual of instruction written toward the end of the first century or the beginning of the second century, the formula given for baptism was the same as that expressed in Mat 28:19: "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." Even today that formula is used, not only in the west, with Roman Catholics as well as Protestants, but also in the east, with Orthodox, Coptic, Maronite, Roman Catholic, and other communions. In other words, the use of that Trinitarian formula is almost universal, and always has been.

Early Christian writers told their readers that it would be by the *regula veritatis* (the "rule of truth" or "rule of faith") that they would be able to recognize the true Church that alone could lead them to a saving knowledge of God. This *regula veritatis* was in fact the Trinitarian baptismal formula of Mat 28:19. "This threefold formula was useful not only as a symbol for entrance into the household of faith, but it also served as a safeguard for orthodox belief against the alternative teachings of heretics within the Church" (D. Kelly 2008: 427). Kelly comments that "this prime baptismal formula has served as the heart of the basic Trinitarian theology of the Christian Church from the beginning of its life and mission to the world" (D. Kelly 2008: 451). It was the use of the baptismal formula in Mt. 28:19 that ultimately gave us the creeds.[13] This was true both in the western, Latin tradition, culminating in the Apostles' Creed, but also in the east, culminating in the Nicene-

[13] See D. Kelly (2008: 427–33), for further elaboration of how the trinitarian formula of Mt. 28:19 was used as the core of Christian teaching, the *regula veritatis*, by Irenaeus, Theophilus of Antioch, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, Hippolytus of Rome, Cyprian, Dionysisus of Alexandria, and Novatian.

Constantinopolitan creed (J. N. D. Kelly 1972: 89–91, 96, 121), which grew out of various other creedal traditions, such as the Caesarean creed and others. It is natural that creeds would arise out of the most primitive form of baptismal confessions because candidates for baptism had to be catechized and had to be able to profess the faith into which they were being baptized (J. N. D. Kelly 1972, 206; Schaff http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds2.iii.i.x.html). In the early third century Hippolytus records a baptismal interrogation that included a three-fold profession of faith, corresponding to the three persons of the Trinity (Martin 1964: 61).

The creeds stated, but did not elaborate on, the doctrine of the Trinity as well as the doctrine of Christ's nature. With regard to the idea that the creeds evolved from Paul's statement about "one God…one Lord" in 1 Cor 8:6, J. N. D. Kelly says that many early creeds show the influence of it, but many others are entirely free from it, and it is probably not the nucleus of the developed confessions. "The Lord's Trinitarian baptismal command was the creative model on which the baptismal questions, and so baptismal creeds, were constructed. Where hints of the Pauline text occur we may suspect that they were imposed as an inspired after-thought upon material much more primitive" (J. N. D. Kelly 1972: 203–204).

The creeds not only tell us how the early church conceived of and named the Trinity; they also tell us something about how people understood who Christ was. The old Roman creed, which is the predecessor of the Apostles' Creed, seems to clearly imply that Christ was the Son of God and that as the only-begotten, he pre-existed as Son (J. N. D. Kelly 1972: 148). This creed also has as its nucleus the command given by Christ to the apostles in Mt. 28:19. In the formula "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" we have the heart of the Christian gospel: God, who is a Father, revealed himself in history through one who was at the same time both God and man, and who continues to operate in the lives of those who follow him by his Spirit. "In this is the uniqueness of Christianity" (Latourette 1997: 135).

Some ancient creeds used "Word" instead of "Son", such as that of St. Macarius, or the creed developed by the heretic Arius in his bid to be reinstated into the church. But creeds that had "Son of God" or "only begotten Son of God" were more common. Some that contained the phrase "only begotten Son of God" were the creeds of Jerusalem (third and fourth century), the Alexandrian creed (early fourth century), and the creed of Mopsuestia (late fourth century). The creed of Antioch (early third century), and the Apostolic Constitution of Syria (late fourth century) say "only begotten Son." The reconstructed prototype of the Eastern creeds says: "And in one Lord Je-

sus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, who was begotten from the Father before all ages…" (J. N. D. Kelly 1972: 197). The Caesarean Creed, dated in the early fourth century and being an immediate predecessor to the Nicene formula, described Jesus Christ both as the Word of God as well as the only begotten Son, begotten of God the Father before all ages. Because of the Arin controversy, the part about his being the Word of God was dropped from the Nicene Creed. But very little about the Nicene creed was new; it contained no abrupt changes from the long creedal traditions that preceded it (J. N. D. Kelly 1972: 205).

3.2 The Word, the Son, and Marcellus

During the first three centuries after the apostolic era many of the early church fathers made considerable use of the term Logos in their writing and thinking. This was natural, given the ties they had with Greek philosophical tradition, and the natural tie that the term had with those traditions. Yet they also continued to use the term "Son of God" or "Son" liberally in their writings. We can see this in the works of Justin Martyr (Apology), Clement of Rome (Epistle to Diognetus, chapter 9), Athenagorus (Plea, chapters 10, 24), Ignatius (Letter to the Ephesians, chapter 20), The Martyrdom of Polycarp (chapter 14), Irenaeas (Against Heresies, chapter 3), and others (see Richardson 1970). Yet it is important to realize that, while they could speak freely and often about Christ as the Word or Logos, what made that sensible and workable, as opposed to a philosophical abstraction, was that they also fully conceived of him as the eternal Son. But when that concept is removed, problems crop up, eventually leading to a serious christological deficiency, as happened in the case of the otherwise orthodox Marcellus of Ancyra.

Marcellus lived during the theologically turbulent fourth century when the debates with the Arians were raging, along with other battles between East and West that were less doctrinal than personal, cultural and political. Marcellus was one of the more respected and influential theologians of his day, and was a signer of the Nicene canons. However, he never promoted the Nicene creed for reasons we shall soon see. Unfortunately Marcellus' most enduring legacy came from reaction to his teaching that prior to the incarnation Jesus existed as Logos but not as Son, which catalyzed the development of Trinitarian dogma. Many interpreted his views as a new variation of the old modalist heresy. His ideas also gave additional fuel to the speculations of the Arians, though not intentionally. His views were rejected in the twenty-six anathemas of the First Sirmian Creed in 351, mainly because of how he applied his analogy of mind and word to the Logos, and because of the diffi-

culty of conceiving how a word could have an eternal existence. Then Marcellus himself was condemned as a heretic at the Council of Constantinople in 381 (Toom 2007: 97), and a year later at a council called in Rome by Pope Damasus. One of the twenty-four anathemas from that council stated that "if anyone denies that the Father is eternal, that the Son is eternal, and that the Holy Spirit is eternal, he is a heretic."[14]

The crux of his error had to do with how he conceived of the eternal Logos in distinction from the Son of God. For him, the Logos was eternal, but did not become the Son of God until the incarnation, meaning that he did not acknowledge Christ as a personal, preincarnate Son (H. Brown 1984: 121), which is one of the reasons for which he balked at promoting the Nicene creed (Toom 2007: 99). Of course, the notion of self-sacrifice inherent in the idea that God gave his son is robbed of force if that sonship is regarded as beginning with the incarnation (Vos 1953: 221). But Marcellus had reasoned that the Logos existed as Word, but not as a *hypostasis*, which was what the theologians of the day called a personal entity.

But to proceed on the presupposition that Christ was eternal Logos without also seeing him as eternal Son leads naturally to the question of how such an entity can exist, not only as a person, but as anything real at all. A word exists only potentially in the mind until you say it, but then once it is said, ceases to exist except as a memory. That is, without the concept of a fully personal and eternal Son relating to a fully personal and eternal Father in an eternal Father-Son relationship, the inevitable conclusion will be, or appear to be, a form of modalism or adoptionism – both of which had already been condemned as heresies. In fairness to Marcellus we must say that he was not fully a modalist or an adoptionist in the original sense of those terms, but in the end we must also agree with the conclusion of the council of Constantinople that a son-less Trinity is conceptually and theologically unworkable, since it is difficult to conceive in what way a Logos would be personal. It should also be apparent that the idea of the Son not existing eternally as Son is inconsistent with the broad witness of the New Testament as well, especially John's gospel.

The following century saw the council of Chalcedon, in the year 451, which dealt further with the two natures of Christ, the divine and the human, in the one person. This was the last major council that dealt with Trinitarian and christological issues. For the most part, christological and Trinitarian

[14] John Calvin, dealing with a similar error taught by Servetus and others, says that Jesus did not become Son of God at the incarnation, but is so by virtue of his deity and eternal essence (*Institutes* II, xiv, 6).

doctrine was now defined, though many of the same heresies would continue to recur throughout history. The Chalcedonian creed, like several others before it, affirmed that Christ is God the Word but, like all others before it, primarily described Christ using the term "Son," which is its most common as well as the first descriptor used of him. It also affirms the Son as only-begotten (or unique – *monogene*) and as begotten before all ages of the Father, which is essentially the same as what the Nicene Creed and most other eastern creeds before it had said. So with regard to affirming Christ's eternal and personal sonship there was nothing new in the Chalcedonian creed.

3.3 Summarizing Trinitarian doctrine at Toledo

The eleventh Council of Toledo was held in 675 in Spain. In it the council drew together and restated what had been articulated in earlier ecumenical councils concerning the Trinity, and also carried out some other administrative business. It was a small council, with only seventeen bishops in attendance, and did not have a significant impact on church theology or practice. What significance it does have may lie in the fact that the bishops, well aware of the advance of Islam through North Africa and with the near certainty that the Islamic invasion would soon sweep through the Iberian peninsula as well, articulated a clear Trinitarian statement. Their statement, which was made with the Islamic unitarianism fully in mind, is the same as what the church had always confessed. They said: "The Father is eternal, and the Son is also eternal. If he was always Father, he always had a Son, whose Father he was, and therefore we confess that the Son was born from the Father without beginning" (Hardon, http://www.therealpresence.org/archives). In other words, they saw Christ's sonship as eternal and metaphysical. Christian orthodoxy has seen it this way ever since, just as it always had from the beginning of church history.

One interesting variant on communicating the idea of the Trinity, if not of conceptualizing it, arose as the Muslim advance swept through the Christian world. In dialogue, at least, with Muslims, Christians would sometimes speak of the Trinity as "God, his Word, and his Spirit," avoiding the contentious matter of Father-Son language that is so odious to Muslims. An example of this occurred in 781 when the Nestorian patriarch Timothy I of Adiabene was invited by Mahdi, the caliph, to debate theology. The debate lasted for three days, with neither side being a clear winner. Timothy was able to avoid irritating the caliph and others over the issue of Christ's sonship by saying that as a man he was born of a virgin, but from God he was born as light is from the sun, or as a word is from the soul. He also likened the Trinity to a three de-

narii gold coin which is one in its material, but three in the number of denarii, but then also admitted the limitations of drawing parallels between physical and spiritual things (Moffatt 1998: 349-352). This was wise, because the trajectory on which he was moving was taking him toward sub-Trinitarian positions (such as modalism) that had already been defined as heresies by previous councils. In fact, any illustration of the Trinity will be heretical for the simple reason that the Trinity is unique, and nothing else anywhere corresponds to it.[15]

Timothy described the Trinity in the language referred to above, as "God, his Word, and his Spirit", terms which are not offensive to Muslims. Nor is this description offensive to Christians, provided it is not the primary way we talk about the Trinity because each of the terms *does* apply to the persons of the Trinity when spoken of individually. But when used as a Trinitarian formula it is readily apparent that the most essential element, which is the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son, is missing. This is an element that has always been at the heart of our understanding of the Trinity. Speaking of the Trinity as Timothy did brings us back to the problem Marcellus faced: how a Word could be a person, eternally existing and exercising personal relationships with the other two members of the Trinity. Christians can easily conceive of the Word as an eternal person due to the fact that they know him primarily as eternal Son, so the conceptual problem does not arise for them. But without the Father-Son relation at the center, the Trinity would be something other than what Christians have always understood it to be. For all intents and purposes, it is not the biblical Trinity.[16]

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[15] Timothy's most difficult question was not about Christ's sonship or the Trinity; it was whether or not Muhammad was a prophet of God. To that question he replied that Muhammad had turned people from idolatry and urged them to live righteously, which is what prophets do, so he should be respected as a prophet. In this he was being more diplomatic than faithful to Christian truth, because Muhammad's doctrine about God, the Trinity, the fall of man, the sinful human nature, the deity of Christ, his atoning sacrifice, his resurrection, justification by faith, and various other crucial issues are fundamentally incompatible with historic Christian orthodoxy. Muslim background believers and expatriates working in the Muslim world often find this one of the most difficult challenges they have to deal with, since criticism of Muhammad is viewed as a capital offense within Islam. In my view, Timothy's response to the caliph's question is not a good option for the reasons just described, but, there is really no easy answer to the caliph's question that will satisfy both the Muslim and Christian belief systems.

[16] Even today some have described the Trinity as God, his Word, and his Spirit, with the second and third being emanations from the first, and with no interpersonal relationships between the three members. This is a form of modalism. It also does not explain why Jesus could say that the Father loved him before the foundation of the world (Jn 17:24).

4 "Son of God" in Biblical theology

4.1 The Messiah as the Son of God

We may ask at what point in time believers of the first century came to understand the implications of the messianic sonship. To what degree had pre-Christian Jewish theology applied the title "Son" or "Son of God" to the Messiah? If they did, in what sense did they understand him to be that? And was the use of the term by early Christians in continuity with existing Jewish belief, or did it represent a fundamental discontinuity, a dramatic shift from existing Jewish belief?

It is unclear how widely the term "Son of God" was known or used in pre-Christian Judaism. Köstenberger (2004: 84) says that "Son of God" was a messianic title in Jesus' day. Collins describes several fragmentary texts from Qumran, 4Q246 and 4Q174 (known as the "Florilegium") that use the title "Son of God." There is some question about the interpretation of 4Q174, but it appears to associate the term Son of God with the expected Messiah, as 4Q246 does more clearly. He concludes that it should not be surprising that the Davidic Messiah could come to be called "Son of God," though he admits that the relevance of the Qumran text to early Christianity is complex (Collins 1993: 35–38). In evaluating the Qumran evidence Guthrie admits that it is slight, but suggests that "Son of God" was beginning to be used in a messianic sense (Guthrie 1981: 302–303). Marshall (in Michel 1986: 637) concludes that attention was being paid in Judaism to God's fatherly relationship to the Messiah as his Son, as described in 2 Sam 7:14.[17] France (1985: 240) likewise believes that there is some evidence in first century Judaism for the idea of the Messiah as Son of God (see also Nolland 1989: 163). Bock interprets the data from Qumran to indicate that the title "Son of the Most High" in Luke 1:32 would be natural for a Jewish setting, and that it gives some indication of describing a regal figure (Bock 1994a: 14).

Bauer agrees that the idea of the Messiah as Son of God was not totally foreign to Palestinian Judaism. He believes that the Messiah was not primarily understood in those terms because the Jewish people did not use the phrase itself as a typical messianic designation. He notes that there is a near total absence in the literature of Palestinian Judaism of a connection between messi-

[17] A first-century Jewish text known as 4 Ezra (2 Esdras) chapter 14, line 18, has God speaking of the Messiah, who is preexistent in heaven, as "my son." 4 Ezra is difficult to interpret, since it is a composite drawn from both Jewish and Christian authors, and apparently was also apparently edited subsequent to the first century. It is hard to know in what way this passage may or may not have been influenced by Christian beliefs. See Barrett 1987: 318-320.

anic expectations and the title "Son of God" (1992: 770–771). According to Moo, the rabbis did not use "Son" as a messianic title (1996: 45, fn 27; see also Newman and Stine 1988: 82). Hurtado agrees, saying that there is no unambiguous evidence that the title "Son of God" was used as a messianic title. It is also difficult to say just how widely messianic expectations included the idea of divine sonship (1993: 901; see also Ellis 1974: 263). Longenecker (1970: 95, 97) agrees with Reginald Fuller (1996: 1051–1052) that the phrase "Son of God" was just beginning to be used as a title for the Messiah in pre-Christian Judaism, and that the Qumran texts indicate that at least some people were beginning to apply the idea of sonship to the Davidic Messiah. Consequently, the title was available for early Christians to use as they tried to understand who Jesus was. Keener likewise says that in at least some circles the term "Son of God" was being used to interpret 2 Sam 7:14 with reference to the Davidic Messiah, but that it was not a common designation for the Messiah in that era (Keener 2003: 295–296; see also Ladd 1974: 161).

It is also important to consider the relative significance of the evidence from Qumran. While these texts from the intertestamental period do provide insight into first century Jewish understandings, especially regarding how they may have interpreted Old Testament texts, we must recognize that these intertestamental texts are relatively few in number and some of them are fragmentary. Therefore, there is a limit to how far we should go in revising our understanding of canonical texts or christological terms in light of them. As Moo comments, the most important factor in interpreting the meaning of the term "Son of God" is Jesus' own understanding and teaching about his unique relationship to the Father (Moo 1996: 45 fn 27). It would be an understatement to say that through his teaching and works of power Jesus revolutionized many of the ideas and understandings that his disciples had held prior to their knowing him, and especially in light of his resurrection.

B. B. Warfield asserts that in fact the doctrine of a superhuman Messiah was native to Judaism even before the beginning of the Christian era (1916: 377; see also Collins and Yarbro Collins 2008: x–xiv). He agrees with Hermann Gunkel that the Christology of the New Testament was simply the Christology of the pre-Christian Judaism before it. "He who reads the Old Testament, however cursorily, will not escape a sense, however dim, that he is brought into contact in it with a Messiah who is more than human in the fundamental basis of his being, and in whose coming Jehovah visits his people in

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some more than representative sense" (1916: 392).[18] He also points out that the messianic hope was at the heart of Israelite religion throughout the ages, and that the prophets themselves "attribute a divine nature and ascribe divine functions to the Messiah" (1916: 405). This is not to say that messianic ideas were necessarily uniform or that various strands of messianic belief were even held in a coherent and consistent way within the thinking of any group. But the various strands of belief certainly came together. They were fulfilled in Christ in a way that no one was prepared to comprehend fully until after the resurrection, but which was consistent with Scripture and not inconsistent with much of Jewish belief and general expectation. The notable exception was the expectation of deliverance from political and military oppression. While there was little development of any form of Trinitarian doctrine prior to the resurrection of Christ, the idea that the Christ was the preexistent Son of God and of divine status himself was not an insurmountable obstacle to the minds of many Jewish people who knew and believed their own Scriptures.[19] As Watts has said, the early Christians claimed that Jesus was the fulfillment of *all* such expectations no matter how diverse (1990: 85).

4.2 Four senses of Christ's divine sonship

Geerhardus Vos has outlined four different senses in which the designation "Son of God" is applied to Jesus in the New Testament. These four aspects are not mutually exclusive, but are in fact integrally related to one another. One is the moral and religious sense in which Jesus lived as an obedient Son of God in terms of his perfect faith and character (Vos 1953: 141–142). When Jesus says that the peacemakers will be called "sons of God", he is speaking of this moral and religious sense of sonship. But in a greater way, Jesus proves himself to be God's Son by the way he lived, showing God's character and nature and being obedient to him as a faithful son. Commentary on this aspect of sonship pervades the exegetical literature, especially with regard to Jesus' temptation in the wilderness where the real issue was not whether Jesus was the Son of God, but what kind of Son he would be.

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[18] It is worth noting that in the gospel accounts and Acts, mostthe majority of the time whenthat human beings refer to Jesus as the Son of God it occurs in the context of something supernatural that has happened (John 1: 48-49; Mat 14:32-33; 27:54), or a supernatural revelation (Mat 17-18; John 1:33-34; Acts 9:20), or where someone hopes that something supernatural will happen (John 11:25-27), or as a challenge to do something supernatural (Mat 27:43-43).

[19] Some have said that there was an incipient pre-Christian Trinitarian understanding involving God, his Wisdom, and his Spirit, but to what degree this belief was held among first century Jews is unclear.

A second sense of Jesus' divine sonship that Vos defines is the nativistic sense spoken of in Luke 1:32, 35 in which the birth of Jesus, who will occupy the messianic throne of his father David, is not on the basis of human paternity, but is by divine action.[20] Some interpreters focus primarily on this aspect, especially with regard to Luke's gospel (Green 1995: 55–56; see also Talbert 2002: 20, 49, and Van Bruggen, 1999: 142–150, who see the divine sonship entirely in the nativistic sense), De Kuiper and Newman indicate that this is the meaning of "Son of God" in Matthew and Luke (1977: 433). In Luke's gospel the nativistic aspect of Jesus' divine sonship is tied to the genealogy which is traced all the way to Adam, who is also said to be a son of God in the sense that his existence was directly due to the action of God, and not of human parentage.

A third sense of sonship is the messianic sonship. A few scholars, particularly those who are not conservative, view this as the primary meaning, or even the only meaning of the term "Son of God" in the gospels, especially the Synoptics. They interpret it as being an adoptive sonship in keeping with Ps 2, Isa 42:1, or 2 Sam 14:7. De Kuiper and Newman understand this adoptive sense to be the meaning of the term in Mark's gospel (1977: 433; see also Yarbro Collins 1999: 393–408). Most conservative interpreters view the messianic sonship as being based on the fourth sense, the eternal sense, which is discussed below. Because the Messiah must act as an absolute representative of God and is promised dominion over the ends of the earth (both in Psalm 2 and in Revelation), only a Son in the highest sense can adequately fulfill the messianic office, Vos says, because a world ruler in such a comprehensive sense as the Old Testament prophecies describe him needs to be super-human (Vos 1953: 190, 192). Christ's messianic sonship expresses his eternal sonship in a definite historical situation.

Vos says that the primary meaning of "Son of God" is the pre-temporal and eternal relationship of the second person of the Trinity to the first, as Son to a Father. This is a sonship existing from all eternity past, before the foundation of the world, and which would exist even if the world had never been created. *This*, he says, is what is primarily meant by the statement, "This is my Son," given by the voice from heaven at Christ's baptism and at his transfiguration, though the other aspects of sonship are necessarily included as well, albeit in a subsidiary sense. Vos calls this eternal sonship the Trinitarian

[20] This is not to say that the angel's statement about Jesus' sonship is to be limited only to the nativistic aspect. All aspects of his sonship are interrelated. The angel, of course, as a supernatural being, knows of the eternal aspect of Jesus' sonship.

sense. Ladd, who follows Vos' four-aspect paradigm for Christ's sonship, calls it the theological sense (1974: 160).

4.3 Eternal sonship the basis of messianic ministry

As Vos comments, it is this eternal sonship that qualifies the Son for the messianic sonship, which is simply the eternal sonship expressed in history. Only a Son in the highest possible sense could fulfill such an office, particularly in view of the fact that it involves inheriting God's rule over the world, and such a world ruler must of necessity be superhuman, as was mentioned above (Vos 1953: 190–192).

It is crucial here not to make the mistake of assuming that divine sonship is equivalent to being the Messiah; far more is involved. *It is the eternal sonship that is the basis for the messianic sonship* (Vos 1953: 190; Verseput 1987: 538, 548; Murray 1982: 68; Ladd 1974: 163–166; Marshall 1967: 99; Longenecker 1970: 95–96, 1994: 484–485; Stein 1992: 84; Ridderbos 1975: 69; Liefeld 1984: 831; Lenski 1936: 35; W. Lane 1974: 57–58; Nolland 1989: 166; Bruce 1983: 55; O'Collins 1999: 46). *That is, Jesus is the Christ by virtue of being the Son of God; he is not the Son of God because he is the Christ.* Being the Son of God means more than being the Messiah; the two are not the same (Moo 1996: 45 fn 27; Nolland 1989: 163-64, 2005: 158; Bock 1994b: 108; Schnackenberg 1995: 310, 312; Köstenberger 2004: 582; Cranfield 1955: 62; Turner 2008: 404; France 2002: 50; Godet 1969: 298, 329; Keener 2003: 296–297; Edwards 2002: 15; Gundry 1993: 974; Ellis 1974: 159).

5 "Son of God" in the New Testament

5.1 Son of God Christology in the epistle to the Hebrews[21]

The overall theme of the epistle to the Hebrews is stated in the very beginning (1:2), which is that *God has spoken to us through his Son.* From this one basic assertion flow all the exhortations which follow throughout the epistle. The author begins with basic doctrinal assertions about the Son of God, which is the subject matter of the entire first chapter, and especially the first five verses. The first four verses, which comprise one sentence in the Greek text, represent one of the highest Christologies in the New Testament and form the heart of the Christology of this epistle. The designation "Son of God" domi-

[21] Much of the material in this and the following two sub-sections is excerpted from an article I published in *Davar/Logos* journal in 2004.

nates the Christology of the epistle (Charles 1990: 175). It occurs with reference to Jesus no less than thirteen times.

This christological emphasis is not unlike that in other New Testament books. Christology was of paramount importance to first century Christians, and was not the exclusive interest of later councils. The importance of Christology is shown not only in statements made about Christ, but also in the fact that many of those statements are found in the introductory paragraphs of the New Testament books in which they occur. In Col 1:13ff Paul says that the Son is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col 1:15–17 NIV). This is not drastically different from the assertions of Hebrews 1.

Likewise the synoptic gospels leave no question in their opening chapters that Jesus is more than a mere man or a good prophet. In Mark 1:1 he is the Son of God.[22] Early in Matthew, Jesus is a descendant of David, conceived by the Holy Spirit, and called Immanuel, "God with us" (1:20, 23). As Gundry says, although in late Judaism the term "Son of God" may have meant no more than the Messiah adopted by God as his vice-regent, in Matthew's narrative the account of the virgin birth and the title "Immanuel," convey a stronger connotation: the Son of God is essential deity (Gundry 1982: 330).

In Luke Jesus is likewise presented as being born of a virgin, with the explanation given by the angel at the annunciation that he would be the "Son of the Most High" and "the Son of God" (1:32, 35). Clearly, the writers of scripture felt it very important to make clear from the outset that Jesus was more than a man: he was the Son of God, the agent of creation, God in the flesh. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews does not depart from this practice, and it is not unreasonable to say that he consciously follows a pattern of the New Testament era in which the writers make bold and clear assertions about the Son as a foundation for all that is to follow. He begins with a high christological statement about the Son, and then proceeds to describe how the Son is superior in every way to the major figures in Jewish religion, as well as to all its religious institutions. In other words, the status of the exalted, divine Son of God is the leverage by which the writer urges the readers not to revert to outmoded Jewish religious forms.

[22] Some manuscripts omit 'the Son of God'. UBS includes it with a C rating.

5.2 Psalm 2 and the theology of sonship in Hebrews

The New Testament refers to Ps 2 more than any other, next to Ps 110, as a proof-text for Christ's messianic role. Therefore, we should give serious thought as to how the sonship of Ps 2 corresponds to Christ's sonship, and how the New Testament authors apply the passage in their discussions of that sonship. It is worthy of notice that the New Testament does not use the begetting terminology of this passage to refer either to Jesus' preexistence or to his birth (Watts 1990: 82). Paul uses Ps 2:7 in his address to the Jewish congregation in the synagogue at Psidian Antioch in Acts 13 to announce Christ's victory over death as the basis for the gospel *as demonstrated by the fact of his being raised from the dead.* That is, in New Testament preaching and exegesis, the "today" of "today I have begotten you" is not a reference to Christ's preexistence (Watts 1990: 82), but to his resurrection (Hagner 1983:32; De Silva 1994: 42; Hughes 1977: 54; Guthrie 1983: 73). Paul says, "What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: 'You are my son; today I have become your Father'" (Acts 13:33 NIV). Although in Rom 1:3–4 he does not elaborate on the concept to our total satisfaction, it seems evident that he is portraying Christ as the descendent of David who has been appointed (*horisthentos*) Son-of-God-in-power by the resurrection from the dead (Moo 1996: 48; Schreiner 1998: 42; Cranfield 1975: 62; Fossum 1992: 134).[23]

Heb 1:3–5 takes the same line of thought; in discussing the exaltation and enthronement of the Son (whom he has already designated as deity by virtue of being the creator of the universe), the writer cites Ps 2:7 as the proof that Christ has the name that is higher than that of any angel, and no doubt that name or designation is "Son of God" (Schenk 1997: 93). This is confirmed by how he uses Ps 2:7 to establish the superiority of Christ's priesthood in 5:9 where he says that it was after Christ was made perfect (i.e., by his exaltation) that he became the source of eternal salvation. This is also suggested, though not proven, by the statement in 7:16 that he became a priest on the basis of an indestructible life, a probable reference to the resurrection.

5.3 Ps 2 and the theology of sonship in other parts of the New Testament

No doubt Paul had Ps 2 in mind as he wrote Rom 1:3–5. This speaks of the Son of God becoming the son of David through the incarnation (1:3), then be-

[23] English versions translate *horisthentos* variously: "declared" (NIV, NRSV) "designated" (NJB), "shown" (NLT, TEV), or "proved" (ISV), but this word is not used in this sense anywhere else in the NT. "Appointed" is the normal usage and should be retained.

ing appointed the Son-of-God-in-power through the resurrection (1:4), and whom Paul was calling the Gentiles to obey (1:5).[24] That is, just as his *physical* existence as son of David in 1:3 has an historical beginning, so also his enthronement in heaven as the descendant of David who became the Son-of-God-in-power – with due emphasis on the phrase "in power" – has an historical beginning, which is the resurrection. The eternal son, who alone was qualified to be the true messianic Son of God, was born of a virgin as a descendant of David, lived a pure and holy life as God's child as no one else could, was crucified, resurrected, and exalted, and was appointed Son-of-God-in-power.[25] He who always was the Son became, in a new and comprehensive sense, the Son enthroned, with all authority in heaven and earth given to him (Mat 28:18). From that position of authority he commands the evangelization of the nations and invites them to take refuge in him lest he destroy them with the iron rod of judgment.

That the apostles and the New Testament church were willing to say that there was a sense in which Jesus "became" the Son of God through the exaltation does not imply that he was not considered the Son of God prior to the exaltation, as "although being Son" in Heb 5:8 makes clear.[26] Thus the "today" of the begetting refers not to the presumed eternal begetting of the Son of God, as Augustine understood it, but to the day of his resurrection, ascension and exaltation to the right hand of the Father (Hughes 1977: 54). The exaltation to God's right hand then becomes the moment in salvation history when Christ is enthroned as Son in the inheritance of his royal office (Schenk 1997: 99). As F. F. Bruce says, "he who was the Son of God from everlasting entered into the full exercise of all the prerogatives implied by his sonship when, after his suffering had proved the completeness of his obedience, he was raised to the father's right hand" (1964: 13). It was the title of Son *as Davidic heir* that was conferred at his exaltation, even though he has always been the eternal Son of God and in full possession of deity (Oberholtzer 1988: 84). Although the author clearly understands that Jesus is the preexistent Son of God,

[24] Garlington (1994: 290) comments that Satan's temptation of Christ in the wilderness to bow down to him, in order to possess all the kingdoms of the world, was a "direct assault on his right as the Davidic Son to command the obedience of the nations (Gen 49:10; Num 24:17-24; Ps 2:8)." Garlington also develops the idea that in the temptation in the wilderness the Son of God recapitulated the trials and failures in the wilderness of Israel as God's Son.

[25] In a similar vein, Augustine said, "While remaining God, he who made man took manhood." That is, he became what he never was while remaining what he always had been (*Homilies in John*, Tractate 17.7).

[26] Ellingworth (1993: 114) notes that the author may not have distinguished the exaltation from the resurrection.

the incarnation, passion and exaltation brought him into a new dimension in the experience of sonship, such that the enthronement becomes the occasion at which the title "Son" was conferred upon him (W. Lane 1991: 26). The eternal Son of God, who had become a man, was now the exalted human Messiah, enthroned eternally as the messianic Son of God in keeping with the glory of his preexistent eternal sonship.

5.4 "Son of God" in the Gospels

The Church did not come to an understanding of Christ's deity and of the Trinity by a process of slow evolution, as some critical scholars are inclined to think; it began in the New Testament era itself and with the writers of the New Testament, especially the writers of the gospels. The titles "Son" and "Son of God," and Jesus' self-revelation connected with them, are at the heart of the evangelists' understanding of his deity and of the Trinity. A. N. S. Lane has said that the church developed its understanding of the Trinity through God's actions for our salvation as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Church came to know the second person of the Trinity as "Son" because of the relation Jesus the man enjoyed as Son to the Father. Since God's revelation of himself in history is true to his real being, the church was then able to draw conclusions about God's eternal being as Trinity through what they saw manifested among them in history. The New Testament writers came to believe in the deity of Christ, Lane says, and then were able to draw reasonable conclusions about him as preexistent divine Son, and thus begin to think in terms of the Trinity. That is, the starting point for Christology was the historic Christ; they then worked from Christology to Trinity, not the other way around (A. N. S. Lane 1982: 275–276). With this Torrance agrees, saying, "The incarnational and saving self-revelation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit was traced back to what God is enhypostatically and coinherently in himself, in his own eternal being as Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (Torrance 1991: 199, cited in D. Kelly 2008: 450).

Even from the beginning the church did not hesitate to use the title "Son of God" to indicate the supreme place occupied by Jesus (Ladd 1974: 168). Turner believes that a divine Christology developed even in the earliest days of the post-resurrection church, and especially because of what they concluded on the basis of the resurrection. He says that, although Jesus clearly revealed himself as someone with a unique relationship of sonship to God, it was not so clear that he was God the Son – at least not at first. But once he was recognized as God the Son, his own statements could be understood as having claimed exactly that. The primary stimulus that brought about that

change in the disciples' understanding was the resurrection, which enabled them even in the period prior to his ascension to recognize his divinity, as Thomas did when he confessed Jesus as Lord and God (John 20:31) or as the disciples did when they worshipped him on the mountain in Galilee (Mat 28:17) (Turner 1982: 173, 190). In commenting on Mat 28:19 Blomberg also cites the resurrection as being the event that caused the eternal aspect of Jesus' sonship to become apparent. He says that after the resurrection the term "Son of God" begins to be used in a way similar to how it is used in later Trinitarian formulas, in an ontological sense, showing equality with deity, in which the Son is "God's ontological equal and one part of the Godhead itself" (Blomberg 1997: 408).[27]

We should not underestimate the significance of Jesus' divine sonship in the gospel accounts; it is of paramount importance. Marshall calls it "the supreme category of interpretation of the person of Jesus in the gospels", one in which the category of his messiahship occupies a subordinate place (Marshall 1967: 99). Bauer goes so far as to say that "Son of God" may be not only the "foremost category" in each of the gospels, but possibly the most significant christological title in the entire New Testament (Bauer 1992: 769). It is likewise for Longenecker, who comments that, just as Jesus' filial consciousness undergirded all he did, so also the evangelists had a lively consciousness of Jesus' unique sonship, a consciousness that served as the foundational conviction for all they wrote. The synoptic evangelists, he notes, edited and arranged their material, each in his own way, to try to communicate to their readers the importance of Jesus' sonship. It was as if to say, "To understand Jesus, one must see his divine sonship as basic to all that he did!" (Longenecker 1994: 476, 484–485). Regarding the pervasive interpretive importance of the term "Son of God" Schnackenburg points out that, just as "Son of God" stands at the center of Paul's christological statements (e.g., Gal 1:16, 2:20, 4:4; Rom 1:3–4, 8:2, 32), so also it pervades the gospels: from the gospel of Mark, where the picture of Jesus is suffused with the divine sonship, to

[27] In reality, all the major Christian doctrines are interdependent; to have an adequate doctrine of salvation, there must be an adequate Christology, which in turn presses for a satisfactory special theology of the Trinity (H. Brown 1984: 150-152). Murray agrees with this assessment, and says that a faith and confession that is not "conditioned by the faith of God as Trinity, and by the intra-divine and intrinsic relations involved in Jesus' identity as the eternal Son, does not provide the Christology the biblical revelation demands. The true Christology is one that has its starting point and finds its basis in Christ's intrinsic sonship and therefore in its Trinitarian correlatives" (1982: 80).

the gospel of John, where the concept of the Son of God is a theme running throughout. He concludes that it was in the title "Son of God," that the early church found an enduring way to express the deepest essence of who Jesus is and what is his significance for us (Schnackenburg 1995: 310, 312). It is also worthwhile to point out that in addition to the large number of allusions to Jesus' sonship there are in the NT (and in all but two of the NT books), it appears at the most critical moments in his life and ministry: the annunciation, his baptism, the temptation, the only account of his boyhood (in the temple), the transfiguration, his high priestly prayer, and his crucifixion.

5.4.1 Interpreting the gospel authors' intended meaning of "Son of God"

Before delving into the use of the term "Son of God" in the gospels we should first mention that interpreting this term, or any other term, involves interpreting meaning on multiple levels. What a speaker in the gospel account means by "Son of God" is not necessarily what Matthew intended to communicate, or expected his readers to understand. A variety of players in the drama use the term – soldiers, disciples, the high priest, God, Satan, demons, angels, and even Jesus himself. What one person means is not necessarily what another means. It can be a politically charged term; for some, it is an epithet used for mockery (Mat 27:40). For others, it has an entirely different tone: it can be a focus of worship (Mat 14:33) or of fear and awe (Mat 27:54). With supernatural beings, it takes on other dimensions: it expresses deep affection on the part of God the Father (Mat 3:17; 17:5); it provokes terror on the part of the demons (Mark 3:11), and it becomes the focal point of temptation for Satan (Mat 4:3ff).[28] Our interpretive task is to determine how the gospel writer intended it to be understood by his audience, and although we may know little about the reading audience, nevertheless it is a task which we can effectively carry out by evaluating and drawing conclusions from the literary clues in the gospel account itself. The authors of the four gospels did not "write" the story in the normal sense of creating it, as with fiction. Rather, they served more or less as gatekeepers, choosing what material to bring into the account, then choosing how to arrange it and how to shape its final form. The gospel accounts, while conveying real events and dialogues, are shaped by the evan-

[28] In Matthew's gospel, all of Satan's temptations of Jesus revolve around him being the Son of God. The temptation in the desert follows the Father's attesting at the baptism that Jesus is his Son, and focuses on what that means. Immediately after Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, Satan speaks through him to try to divert Jesus from the road to the cross, and Jesus issues a sharp rebuke. The last clear temptation comes through the mockery of the high priest, telling him to come down from the cross if he is indeed God's Son.

gelists' literary purposes. Therefore, to determine the "meaning" of the terms "Son of God" and "the Son" in the gospels, we primarily focus on what each evangelist is intending to communicate to his reading audience.[29]

Obviously, by the time of the writing of the gospels, the evangelists and their audiences knew a lot more about Jesus than the people in the gospel events did at the time those events were transpiring. In the case of the nativity stories, it had been no less than sixty years since the events had occurred; in the case of most of the rest of the events in the gospel accounts it had been at least thirty years, if not more. The events of Jesus' life, what he taught, the miracles he did, and especially the resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, augmented by serious theological reflection in the light of those factors over three or more decades, precipitated dramatic changes in how people understood Jesus and the titles used to describe him. We cannot limit our understanding of the terms "Son of God" and "the Son" to what first century Jews might have thought prior to the incarnation, or even during the story itself. One of the themes that runs throughout the gospels is the idea that Jesus was not understood, even by his closest friends, until after the resurrection and, more importantly, in light of it. It changed everything, including what they understood by the term "Son of God".

5.4.2 "Son of God" and "the Son" in Matthew's gospel

In Matthew's gospel, as in all the gospels, Jesus usually refers to himself by the cryptic title "Son of Man", probably to avoid having the crowds draw conclusions about his mission and intentions. This would have created a politically charged situation that would detract from his real mission. We don't find Jesus using the term "Son of God" of himself in the synoptic gospels. However, he *does* refer to himself as "the Son" in three key contexts (11:27, 24:36, and 28:19) and, as Erickson says, when Jesus uses the simple term "the Son" in the synoptics, he does so in contexts which "strongly suggest that it is God the Father to whom he is the Son" (Erickson 1991: 20; see also Erickson 2009: 116). Two of those, 11:27 and 28:19, are of central importance for understanding Jesus' own consciousness of what his divine sonship meant.[30] As

[29] While the gospel writers had a particular audience in mind as they wrote, we should also bear in mind that they knew, and hoped, that many other people whom they did not know would also read it, potentially including some from outside the main social, ethnic, and religious parameters of the audiences they were primarily addressing.

[30] Commenting on Mat 11:27 and Luke 10:22, T. F. Torrance notes that the bishops meeting at Nicaea "were convinced that the relation of the Father to the Son and of the Son to the Father constitutes the basic ontological relationship or reciprocity in the Godhead in which all the lan-

we can see from the obvious juxtaposition of the two terms in Mat 11:27 "the Son", as elsewhere, obviously corresponds to "the Father," who is God, and consequently means "Son of God" (Blomberg 1992: 432; Carson 1984: 345; Hagner 1993: 319; France 1982: 27; Ladd 1974: 164; so also for the parallel passage in Luke 10:22: Nolland 1993: 573; Ellis 1974: 158–159; Marshall 1978: 437; Bock 1996: 1011–1012; Green 1997: 422; Liefeld 1984: 940; see also Erickson 2009: 116). For the use of "the Son" for "Son of God" in other contexts see Gundry: 1993 704–795; Garland 2003: 712; Yarbrough 2008: 189; Fossum 1992: 136.[31] Our interpretive task with Matthew's gospel is to look beyond what the term "Son of God" may have meant in the immediate communication situation in which it occurred and determine how Matthew intends it to be understood in the overall context of his account.

Verseput (1987: 532) tells us that the title "Son of God" is programmatic for Matthew's gospel, meaning that it is the key motif for understanding Matthew's literary and theological purpose. Of course, Matthew and his reading audience already have in common the understanding that Jesus is the Son of God (1987: 537), so it is not hard for his readers to follow where Matthew is taking the story line. Carson agrees, saying that as Matthew's readers move through the text of the gospel, they know things that people of Jesus' day did not know, since many christological truths were only understood after the resurrection and exaltation; they can now see the deeper truths that even those involved in the events in the gospel account who confessed Jesus as the Son of God could not have understood. Carson says that what those people who confessed Jesus as "Son of God" meant by it may have been no more than "Christ". Even the understanding of that title was probably woefully lacking, because it lacked any understanding of the Christ as the Suffering Servant, or of an ontological connection with Deity. Matthew's readers, on the other hand, can see the deeper truths that even those in the gospel accounts who confessed Jesus as the Son of God could not have understood (Carson 1982: 111–113).

If Jesus' identity as Son of God is programmatic for Matthew's gospel, the way the theme is introduced is through certain questions about Jesus that run throughout the account. In 13:56 the people of his own hometown ask,

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guage of the gospel is finally rooted and shaped…That is to say, a mutual relation of knowing and being exists between the Father and the Son in the Godhead" (Torrance 1999: 111–12, cited in Kelly 2008: 443). In other words, it is in and through the Father – Son relationship that God has most clearly revealed himself to us.

[31] There is no support in the exegetical literature for the idea that "the Son" in this or any other context is an abbreviation for "Son of Man".

"Where did this man get these things?" The crowds ask, "Can this be the Son of David?" (12:23), and later, "Who is this?" (21:10). In 11:2–3 John the Baptist asks if Jesus is the one they are waiting for, or is another coming (that is, is a greater one coming, or are you *the One*). Jesus himself asked the question "What do you think about the Christ? *Whose son is he*?" (22:42). A particularly significant question was that of the disciples the first time Jesus calmed the storm: What sort of man is this? (8:27). Nolland describes this as a category question, not an identity question; that is, what is the nature of this person? And the way Matthew words the question, he says, is designed to guide the reader to what the correct answer would be (Nolland 2005: 372). It is answered, he says, in 14:33 at the second calming of a storm on the lake, where the response of the disciples is to worship him. This builds on the question that was spoken at the first such event: they know that Jesus has acted as only God can act, and that they are in the presence of God, so they worship him saying, "Truly, you are the Son of God " (Nolland: 2005: 603).

Likewise Garland comments that when the disciples confess Jesus as Son of God at the second calming of the storm, they are answering the question raised in 8:27 at the first such event. Then they had asked, "Who is this that the wind and the sea obey him?" Now they have their answer, which is also the answer to all the questions raised by others in Matthew's gospel account, whether by John the Baptist, the crowds, or the people in his hometown (Garland: 2001: 160). Commenting on the passage about the calming of the storm in Mat 14:32–33, Blomberg agrees with this assessment. However, he notes that even at that point there is still much that is lacking in the disciples' understanding. Nevertheless, however much they understood, Matthew is focusing on the positive aspect of their confession, which is that it is the proper answer to the question of who Jesus is: he is the Son of God (Blomberg 1992: 236). In Matthew then, "Son of God" has "an expanding sense," meaning that as time progresses, people grasp more and more of who and what Jesus is, based on what he says and does (Nolland: 2005: 603).

Even Peter, whose confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God in Mat 16:16 stands as what Turner calls one of the christological high points of the gospel, immediately goes on to prove just a few verses later that he still has a lot to learn about Jesus' nature and mission. At least he recognized part of the truth; as Turner also notes, if Peter's confession is one of the high points, the high priest's angry demand has to be the low point (Turner 2008: 404). It is worth noting that for Matthew, whose initial reading audience was Jewish, confessions of Jesus' divine sonship by Jesus' Jewish disciples and by Peter in particular are found at the mid-point of the account, in

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chapters 14 and 16. However, the gospel of Matthew is "bookended" at the beginning and end of the gospel with professions by Gentiles of Jesus' true identity. The magi come at the very beginning, seeking the King of the Jews, that is, the Messiah.[32] At the end of the account the centurion and the detachment of soldiers assigned to execute Jesus acknowledge that he is the Son of God. At about the center point we have Peter confessing that Jesus is the Christ (the King of Israel) and the Son of God. The two titles of course are not the same, as we have seen earlier. He is the Christ by virtue of having always been the Son of God. However much Peter may or may not fully comprehend what he is saying, Matthew is using Peter's profession to make his central point. But it is profession of the non-Jewish soldiers that seems to be the climactic point of the gospel.

We might well ask what the soldiers meant when they professed that Jesus was truly God's Son. Commentators have different views on this. Nolland says that we don't really know what the centurion meant, but what we can say is that he was picking up on what he had heard from those who mocked Jesus. They were claiming that Jesus was a deceiver, but the centurion could see that he was not that; therefore he concludes that Jesus actually must have been whatever he and his followers said he was. Of course for Matthew and his readers, Nolland tells us, the soldier's confession climaxes the gospel account of this one who was affirmed to be the Son of God at his baptism (2005: 1220–1221). In contrast to the mockery from the high priest and others who, Nolland says, probably meant no more than "Messiah" by the term "Son of God", Matthew sees a fuller though ironic sense in the soldiers' confession, which is more than Messiah. Jesus has a special status and relationship with God (2005: 158). Regardless of what the centurion may have understood this to mean, Matthew intends the reader to see the true interpretation of what has happened (France 1985: 402). As Gundry notes, Matthew as well as Mark intended their readers to understand that Jesus was *the* Son of God (Gundry 1982: 578).

A few final remarks about Matthew's view of Jesus' divine sonship would be in order, particularly relating to Jesus' commissioning of his disciples to go into all the world in Mat 28:18–20. Although Matthew's gospel is addressed primarily to a Jewish audience, we see him return here to a theme with which the gospel began, which is the mission to the Gentile world. In the second chapter of his gospel Matthew relates the arrival of magi, probably Zoroastri-

[32] In discussing the worship offered by the magi, Turner (2008: 81) notes that throughout Matthew's gospel Jesus is presented as Son of God, Immanuel, so it is "not surprising that Jesus is frequently worshiped as God the Son".

ans, to worship him who is born king of the Jews. At the climax of the crucifixion account he tells of the centurion and his detachment of soldiers acknowledging that this Jesus really was God's Son. Matthew closes his gospel with Jesus' charge to go to all the world with the message, together with the assurance that he indeed has all authority in heaven and on earth, and that he will always be with them. His command is, specifically, to *disciple* all nations, and he summarizes how that is to be done: by baptizing them in the name (singular) of "the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," and then teaching them all that Jesus himself had taught the disciples. This baptismal formula, as we have seen, has been used by the Church from the very earliest days not only for baptism, but for baptismal catechesis, and eventually as a basis for building creedal formulations, eventuating in the ecumenical creeds.

Several things are worth noting about that formula. Blomberg comments that the ontological aspect of Jesus' sonship becomes apparent after the resurrection, and is especially articulated in Mat 28:19. Of the term "Son of God" he says that after the resurrection the term is used "approximately as in later Trinitarian formulas in which Jesus becomes Son of God in the sense of God's ontological equal and one part of the Godhead itself" (1997: 408). He also says, 'The singular "name" followed by the threefold reference to "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" suggests both unity and plurality in the Godhead. "Here is the clearest Trinitarian "formula" anywhere in the Gospels"' (Blomberg 1992: 432). Keener agrees; concerning the Trinitarian formula in Mat 28:19 he says that it places Jesus on the same level as the Father and Spirit. This makes explicit what is implicit in the accounts in Acts that describe people being baptized in Jesus' name, which is that Jesus is divine. He also says that "it certainly climaxes Matthew's emphasis on Jesus' deity and authority" (Keener 1999: 717; see also Verseput 1987: 541). As Bjork puts it, Matthew's Trinitarian baptismal formula is "one of the most arresting and important phenomena of primitive Christianity," stunning because of the proclamation that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are to be worshipped and glorified together as one God, blessed forever. He further notes that this explicit Trinitarian text is also one of the most explicitly missional texts; the divinely initiated mission that prompted the sending of the eternal Son ends with God's own people being sent (Bjork 1997: 117-119).

5.4.3 "Son of God" and "the Son" in Mark's gospel

Mark's gospel is introduced by the words, "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God". Lane calls this "a programmatic confes-

sion" for the entire gospel (W. Lane 1974: 576). In other words, Mark's gospel is about *the Son of God.* We see it from the first verse, in the heavenly voice at Jesus' baptism, by the terrified imploring of the demons in 3:11 and 5:7, by God's announcement at the transfiguration in 9:4, and of course by his own executioner, the centurion in 15:39. France comments that the fact that the term "Son of God" is in the heading of the gospel tells us that it surely means more than just Messiah, which comes just before it. "Son of God" expresses a divine sonship that Mark's readers would already have known about and recognized. It is the center of Mark's Christology (France 2002: 50).

Edwards believes that "Son of God" is without question the most important title that Mark uses to refer to Jesus, defined at the beginning of the gospel as well as at its ending, and with the centurion's climactic confession. He calls the term "the theological keystone of the gospel of Mark" (Edwards 2002: 15, 50). Edwards elaborates on this theme, noting that while it is announced that Jesus is Son of God at the beginning of the gospel, as the gospel unfolds we see what kind of Son he is. He is acclaimed as the Son of God by God as well as by demons – the light and dark side of the spiritual world. But until his death on the cross no one fully understands what "Son of God" really means, because it is the cross that is the supreme revelation of what that means. It is in the cross, Edwards says, that God meets humanity, and the cross is thus the birthplace of faith, as it was for the centurion (Edwards 2002: 483). He believes that the centurion's confession is meant by Mark in the full Christian sense. The soldier knew what Jesus was accused of by the Jews. The fact that Jesus had been crucified was proof that the centurion was not acclaiming him as a "divine man" in the pagan sense. Rather, the man was given the ability by divine revelation to have the faith to see that Jesus is the Son of God (Edwards 2002: 480, 481).

Whether or not that is true of the centurion's confession, Lane says that Mark intends his readers to recognize a truly Christian confession in what the centurion confessed, despite the fact that they are aware that the soldier did not know all that they knew. His confession is a complement to Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ in 8:29, and a climax to the programmatic statement in 1:1. He also sees a correspondence, on the one hand, between the rending of the sky and the proclamation that Jesus is God's Son in chapter one, and the tearing of the temple veil and the confession that Jesus is the Son of God on the other in 15:38 (W. Lane 1974: 576). As Keener observes, in Mark as in Matthew, the centurion's confesysion fulfils the "Son of God motif" (Keener 1999: 688). We can be sure that, whatever the centurion meant, Jesus' divine sonship was at the heart of the message Mark was conveying.

Schnackenburg observes that in Mark the title "Son of God" is mentioned in the important passages, and especially the centurion's confession, where it is "the crystallization point for the whole understanding of Jesus". The gospel is framed, he says, by the profession of Jesus as the Son of God. Within the body of the account the demons imploring Jesus in 3:11 and 5:7 show his divine status and power as Son of God.[33] And although the title "Son of God" does not capture all aspects of Mark's Christology, it can be considered at the heart of his estimation of who Jesus is (Schnackenburg 1995: 45, 49). Although "Son of God" can mean no more than "Christ" to some who use the term such as the high priest (14:61), when it is augmented by the accounts of healing, miracles, exorcisms, powerful teaching, forgiving sins, the supernatural events that accompanied his death, and of course by the resurrection, Mark is using the phrase to prompt thoughts of Jesus' divinity in his Roman readers (Gundry 1993: 34).

5.4.4 "Son of God" and "the Son" in Luke's gospel

When we examine how Luke uses the term "Son of God" we find some differences from how Matthew and Mark use it. The primary difference is that no human being, other than Jesus himself, acknowledges his divine sonship.[34] Luke reports the more abbreviated form of Peter's confession of Christ, as does Mark, and reports the centurion only saying that Jesus was a righteous man. Whether or not this is all the centurion meant by the term "Son of God" as reported in Matthew and Mark is questionable. Luke has attempted to show that the trial itself was a miscarriage of justice, so such a statement would certainly be in keeping with that theme. Moreover, it is naïve to think that the centurion and the other soldiers would say only one short sentence about Jesus in view of all that happened. The fact that the highest, and supposedly most dignified leaders in Israel would attend his execution to mock him is certainly unusual. Although Luke does not report this, the centurion may also have known about the incident reported in John's gospel about what disturbed Pilate – that Jesus might actually be more than human. In any event, he definitely saw the three hours of darkness. All those things taken

[33] Wessel comments that in Mark 5:7, when the demon calls Jesus the Son of the Most High God, the title implies that the demon recognized Jesus' deity (1984: 657).

[34] In Acts only Paul acknowledges Jesus as Son of God, in 9:20. Bock (2007: 365) says that while Paul's use of "Son of God" in Acts 9:20 has a messianic thrust, it probably means full sonship, given the fact that he had seenof his having seen the glorified Jesus whom Stephen had preached as the Son of Man at God's right hand just before Stephen died. He notes that Paul's developed understanding of "Son of God" is shown in Rom 1:3-4, 8:3.

together would certainly prompt more than one short sentence on the part of the execution squad. Luke has simply chosen to report only one aspect.

However, this does not mean that the title "Son of God" is unimportant in Luke, or that it only has the connotation of "Messiah." Bock says that, at least early in his account, Luke does in fact present Jesus as Son of God in messianic terms. In his early uses of the title "Son of God" Luke is not seeking to make the deeper christological point about Jesus' divinity. Later he will make it clear that "his messiahship and sonship have even greater connections, which transcend Jesus' earthly sonship ties". He is not just making that point in the early part of the narrative; rather, he lets the reader see who Jesus is one step at a time (Bock 1994a: 125, 439). Stein also sees Jesus' divine sonship as being at the heart of Luke's literary and theological purpose; this is to show his readers, who already know about Jesus, that he was Son of God, Christ, and King even before he was born. Jesus' sonship is important in Luke; even in the temptation, which focuses on what God had said at the baptism, the temptations are directed at his sonship. That is*, it was as God's Son that he was tempted* (Stein 1992: 87, 144, italics mine). Regarding the relation of the term "Son of God" to "Messiah", Nolland says that, when applied to the Messiah, the term "Son of God" would speak of his exalted status and relationship with God upon which his messianic mission would be based. "Jesus' sonship involves more and is more fundamental than anything that can be contained in normal messianic categories" (Nolland 1989: 164).

We may still ask, however, why Luke has abbreviated the confessions of Jesus' sonship by Peter and the centurion. I would point out something that I have not seen mentioned in the exegetical literature, yet seems important, which is the possibility that while Luke does bring testimony to Jesus' divine sonship into the account, it is always given by supernatural beings: the angel at the annunciation, the voice of God at Jesus' baptism, Satan in the wilderness temptation, demons being exorcised (8:28), and the voice of God again at the transfiguration. Why would Luke do this? Ethel Wallis has described the gospel of Luke and Acts as two "epistles" to Theophilus that have one literary macrostructure. The unifying theme, in terms of rising tensions, peaks and falling tensions, is opposition to Jesus and his ministry (Wallis 1992: 225–251). I have attempted to show elsewhere that within this macrostructure of opposition and conflict in Luke-Acts there is a high correlation between the actions of the Holy Spirit through Jesus (or his apostles) and the work of the world of evil spirits, whether Satan, or demons, or people, who are driven by Satan and the demons, usually expressed in irrational rage and violence (Abernathy 2001: 223–236). That is, Jesus' own actions, and his actions through

his representatives, are as the Divine Warrior, and the Holy Spirit is directing the battle. This understanding of Luke's literary purpose, if it is correct, would be consistent with his decision to report only supernatural testimony to Jesus' divine sonship. The Son of God is the divine warrior in the spiritual plane, and the knowledge that supernatural beings have of the meaning of his sonship will be qualitatively different from the incomplete and partially skewed understanding that humans have or could give witness to.

5.4.5 "Son of God" and "the Son" in John's gospel

John has been called "the gospel of the Father and the Son," and for good reason. Jesus calls God "Father" over one hundred times in John alone, and refers to himself or is referred to as Son about thirty times. As Ladd says, in John's gospel Jesus' sonship is the central christological idea. The gospel account is written so that people may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, but more than Messiah; he is the Son of God, and as Son of God, he partakes of deity. This Father-Son relation, which is woven throughout the fabric of John's gospel, is a relationship that is characterized by Jesus being the object of divine love, having an exclusive knowledge of the Father and the power to mediate not only life, but God himself as well (Ladd 1974: 283–285). Tenney describes sonship in John's gospel as expressing close fellowship and intimacy between the Father and Jesus, as well as unity of nature. It is the fact that he shares the Father's nature that enables him to reveal God (Tenney 1981: 196, 38). On the unity and intimacy between the Father and the Son, Bruce comments that, "The relationship which the Father and the Son eternally bear to each other is declared to be a co-inherence or mutual indwelling of love. Jesus is in the Father; the Father is in him. And the purpose of Jesus' coming to reveal the Father is that men and women may…be drawn into this divine fellowship of love, dwelling in God as God dwells in them" (Bruce 1983: 14).

Of the title "Son of God" in John, Raymond Brown says that it appears that John intends to give the title "Son of God" a more profound meaning than did others of his day, and certainly the readers of his gospel would have already become accustomed to a more profound meaning. He seems to intend to include a confession of the divinity of Jesus (Brown 1966: 88). John's purpose, stated in 20:31, is to bring people to believe that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God, which Brown says means more than just "Messiah" as shown by Thomas' confession of Jesus as "Lord and God." If "Son of God" were not more than "Messiah", John's purpose statement would be anticlimactic. He goes on to say that Jesus is the only one who has an absolute right to the title "Son of God". Once a person recognizes the Father in him,

he/she can understand what the name and quality of "Son" are (Brown 1970: 1060–1061). Morris holds a similar view; concerning John's purpose statement for the gospel following the account of Thomas' confession, John is showing two important things about the content that faith must have: one is that Jesus is the Messiah, and the other is that he is the Son of God. The two terms used together indicate the highest view of the person of Jesus, one that must be seen in light of what Thomas has just said; John saw in Jesus the very incarnation of God (Morris 1995: 756).

On the relation of the titles "Son of God" and "Christ" in John's gospel, Köstenberger says that they are close, but are not synonymous. The title "Christ" related mainly to Jewish messianic expectations. While "Son of God" has messianic connotations, it goes beyond that to accent Jesus' relationship with God as the Son of the Father. He is the sent Son (Köstenberger 2004: 582). Carson agrees, saying that while there is a messianic sense in the title "Son of God" in John, it also expresses a relationship of oneness and intimacy between Jesus and the Father that is metaphysical and not just messianic (Carson 1991: 162). Likewise with Harris: Thomas' confession in John 20:31 necessarily involves belief in his deity. The Son possesses the divine nature, and is God by nature, and that intimate and eternal knowledge of God qualifies him to reveal God's nature and character (Harris 1992: 102-103). As Harris puts it, whereas the sonship of believers is an adoptive sonship, Christ's sonship is essential; both before and after the incarnation he was in complete intimate fellowship with the Father (1992: 87). Bruce takes the same view. He says that the sonship expressed in Jesus' role as Messiah was grounded in his eternal sonship (Bruce, 1983: 55). So also does Schnackenburg, who believes that Nathanael and Martha were confessing that Jesus was more than Messiah when they called him "Son of God". John, he says, does not see the category of Messiah as being sufficient for expressing who Christ really is for his readers. The confession that Jesus is Son of God surpasses that (Schnackenburg 1995: 310). "Jesus' divine sonship, in addition to his messiahship and closely connected with it, is the main bearing column of the early Christian confession of Christ" (1995: 311-312).

It is difficult in fact to escape the connotations of deity in the title "Son of God" as it is used in the gospel of John. As was already mentioned, Ladd says that as Son of God he "partakes of deity" (Ladd 1974: 286). Keener also sees more in the title "Son of God" than a claim to be Messiah; it has at least

some implications of deity (Keener 2003: 297).[35] Hurtado concurs with this assessment of John's use of the term, acknowledging that "Son of God" was John's preferred way of referring to Jesus as divine, and of heavenly origin, and as Jesus himself used it, was a claim to divinity (Hurtado 1993: 902). "Son of God" is used to indicate that he is divine in nature (McRay 1996: 411).[36]

A discussion of John's use of "the Son" and "Son of God" would not be complete without at least some mention of Jesus' prayer in John 17. In 1:14 John has already linked "glory" with the Father's *monogenes* (literally, "one and only" or "unique one," but in this case the "one and only" who came from the Father is obviously the Son). Then in 11:4 he links the restoring of life to Lazarus with the Son being glorified. In 12:23 and 13:31 Jesus says that the Son is about to be glorified, speaking of his own death, but as John's readers know, it is a death that brings life. Now in John 17 Jesus prays, as the Son to the Father, that the Father will glorify the Son so that the Son would glorify him. The way that will happen, of course, is through his death, but Jesus goes on to speak of it in terms of his giving life to others. Then he speaks of the glory he always had with God, a glory that he asks God to grant to Jesus' disciples as well, which is the glory of being one with him and the Father. It is the most intimate – and passionate – prayer of Jesus in the Bible. As D. Kelly has said, in Christ's high priestly prayer his saving work for humanity is expressed in terms of the "eternal love and glory between Father and Son that are conveyed from the very heart of the Father to them" (2008: 273). It is indisputably a transaction between Father and Son, borne of mutual interests and culminating in mutual glory and a drawing of new sons and daughters into the oneness and glory of the eternal Trinity.

5.5 Christology of the Son of God in the epistles of Paul

Paul does not often refer to Jesus Christ as God's Son. However, the idea is there and it is definitely a concept of central importance for him; he often uses the title in key places in his letters (O'Collins 1999: 59). If we were to judge

[35] Even Pilate seemed to distinguish between what it might mean for Jesus to be Messiah and what it might mean for him to be Son of God. When Jesus told him that his kingdom was not of this world, Pilate knew that he was no threat. But what *did* trouble Pilate was the statement that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid than ever, and began to try to release him (John 19:8, 12).

[36] Osborne, commenting on John's use of the term in Revelation, says that it connotes the unique filial relationship between the Father and the Son, but also connotes majesty and divinity (2002: 153). Tasker says simply that in John "Son of God" means "God the Son" (1960: 87).

only from a statistical standpoint, we could also say that the phrase "the righteousness of God" was unimportant to him, since it occurs only about ten times, all but two of them in Romans. But it is significant because it occurs in those passages in Romans that state the central theme of the letter. Paul does not often mention the kingdom of God or Jesus in his role as Messiah, but this does not mean they are unimportant to him (Ladd 1974: 449-450). We could also say that the title "Word" (Logos) as applied to Jesus occurs in only two verses of John's gospel, once in 1 John and once in Revelation, and never in any clear reference by any other New Testament author. Yet its importance hardly needs to be mentioned, as it has gripped the imagination of Christian theologians, scholars, and preachers throughout the centuries.

So, statistical occurrence is not the measure of theological importance. Marshall says it well when he observes that, statistically speaking, the 15 occurrences of the "Son of God" theme in Paul would seem to make it relatively unimportant (only one tenth of the number of times he calls Jesus "Lord"). But he goes on to say that Paul uses this title for Jesus when he sums up the content of the gospel and for important statements generally, such as in contexts about Christ's relationship with God, and in traditional statements about "God sending his preexistent Son into the world" to die for us. Marshall also notes that Paul uses the title "Son" especially to bring out the fact that it is through his work as a Son that believers are adopted as God's sons (Marshall 1980: 778). As we mentioned earlier, when Paul discusses divine sonship he is usually focusing on soteriology, the Son's role as savior (Marshall in Michel 1986: 643–644; Marshall 1980: 778). Fee also remarks that when Paul uses the term "Son of God" he is thinking primarily of the soteriological significance of the term (Fee 1987: 45 fn 48).

Barclay comments: "It is to be noted that again and again this statement that Jesus is the Son of God occurs at the very beginning of Paul's letters as if by it he struck what was for him the keynote of the Christian gospel" (Barclay 1958: 56). Schnackenberg says that the theme of Jesus as the Son of God stands at the center of Paul's christological statements, such as those in Gal. 1:16, 2:20, 4:4; Rom. 1:3-4, and 8:3, 32 (1995: 312). Ridderbos (1975: 77) goes even further: for Paul, he says, "Christ's being the Son of God is none other than being God himself."

I will not add much to this other than to make a few observations of my own about how Paul uses the term. One is that when he says that "God sent his Son" it is apparent that he is already Son when he is sent. This appears to be a near universal consensus among conservative scholars (see section 1:1). Secondly, for Paul the fact of God giving up his Son as a sacrifice is the ulti-

mate proof of his divine love. "For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life" (Rom 5:10 NIV). "He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?" (Rom 8:32 NIV). For Paul, believers are adopted as sons through the eternal Son, and their destiny predetermined by God is to become conformed to the image of his Son (Rom 8:29). And, as noted earlier, Paul's view of God's intent in sending his Son was that believers might become God's adopted sons (and daughters) (Hurtado 1993: 905-906).

A final brief word would be in order about Paul's exalted Christology in Col 1:15-20. As we mentioned above in section one, the passage begins with *hos estin*, "who is", referring to the phrase "his dear son" in 1:13, and spells out what his sonship means as Lord over all created things:

Christ's representation of God *as being himself God*
15 He is the *image* of the invisible God
19 In him all the *fullness of God* was pleased to dwell

Christ's preeminence
15 He is the *firstborn* of all creation
16 All things have been created *for* him
17 He himself is *before* all things
18 He is firstborn from the dead that he might come to have *first place in everything*

Christ's governing, sustaining, and reconciling the created order
16 All things in heaven and on earth were *created by him* and for him.
17 In him *all things hold together*
20 Through him God was pleased to *reconcile* to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross

Christ as head of the church
18 He is the *head of the body, the church*; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead

So despite its relative infrequency of occurrence, the fact that Jesus is God's Son is at the heart of Paul's theology, just as it is at the heart of his gospel.

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6 Some final reflections on Jesus' divine sonship

The author of Hebrews tells us that God's enduring plan is to bring many sons to glory (Heb 2:10). He goes on to say that Jesus is not ashamed to call believers his brothers because they are from the same "one," whether that means from the same Father (NRSV) or family (NIV) (Heb 2:11). There is an organic, familial relation with God that goes to the heart and core of everything. Our hope of glory is to have Christ in us (Col 1:27), and it is Jesus' sonship that is our access to glory (John 17:5, 22). Our destiny is to be conformed to the image of God's Son (Rom 8:29). We are made in God's image, and the reason we can become conformed to the image of his Son is that we are made according to an archetypal Father-Son pattern that is inherent in the Godhead itself, and which has significance both for our human existence through natural birth as well as for our spiritual existence through spiritual rebirth as God's children. As C. S. Lewis said in his sermon, "The weight of glory", we are on a journey toward home. I believe that if we delight ourselves in the Lord, he will give us the deepest desires of our heart, and our deepest desire – in our journey toward home – is to live in close, loving relationships which, in our earthly existence, are most deeply experienced in family relationships. God is Father, eternal Father. We who believe in his Son are his sons and daughters, moving toward the glory of eternal oneness with him, in conformity to the character of his Son.

To summarize, what could we say is the theological and practical value of the concept of Christ's eternal, divine sonship? Here are some of those treasures.

- Jesus' sonship, and his union as Son with the Father, is the avenue of union with God for humankind (see John 17, especially vv.1–2, 21–22). Jesus grants human beings access to relationship with God similar to that which he himself has: a relationship that is unequivocally expressed by his use of the term *Abba*, "Father", in prayer. Because Jesus is the Son of God, his followers may also become sons of God who can likewise address God as "Father". His sonship is the basis of our own sonship (Rom 8:14–17) and the basis of our own adoption as God's children (Gal 4:4–5). In Christ's high priestly prayer his saving work for humanity is expressed in terms of the "eternal love and glory between Father and Son that are conveyed from the very heart of the Father to them" (D. Kelly 2008: 273).

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- Jesus' sonship is the basis of God's sending the Spirit to his children. The Spirit God sent into their hearts is a spirit of sonship (Rom 8:15) because it is the Spirit of God's Son (Gal 4:6).
- Jesus' sonship is the basis of his high priestly ministry which provides us access and acceptability with God (Heb 4:14). It is also the basis of his eternal priesthood, in which he continually engages in intercession for his people (Heb 7:25–28).
- It is *as the Son* that Jesus has full authority to reveal God (Mat 11:27). His sonship also completes God's revelation which comes through him (Heb 1:1–2).
- It is God's willingness to sacrifice *his Son* that is the basis for our assurance of the depth of God's love for us and the permanence of God's acceptance of us (Rom 8:32; 1 John 4:9-10).
- Jesus' sonship is the basis for granting believers true freedom (John 8:36).
- It is into the kingdom *of God's dear Son* that we have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness, and it is in that Son that we have redemption (Col 1:13-14).
- It is conformity with the likeness of him *as Son* that is our eternal destiny (Rom 8:29).
- It is as the Son that he gives eternal life to whomever he chooses (John 5:21, 6:40).
- It is Jesus' identity as Son that is the basis of his authority to judge; it is what terrified the demons, guaranteeing to them their doom. And it was Jesus' sonship that Satan chose to attack in the temptation, indicating that it was the one thing he most wanted to challenge and, if possible, divert and distort into something self-serving (Mat 4:3–6).

In short, Christ's eternal identity *as Son of God* is at the heart of our faith and is fundamental to our existence as believers. As Murray puts it, John 3:16 implies that the faith by which believers are saved is faith directed to him in his character as the Son, just as it is faith in him as the Son of God by which they live (Gal 2:20). He says further, "The rudiment of faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior is that he is the Son of God. His sonship belongs to his identity, and a faith or confession or proclamation that is not conditioned by what he is in this specific character falls short at its center and thereby robs the Savior of the honor that is intrinsically his." (Murray 1982: 62–63)

APPENDIX ONE
NOTES AND QUOTES FROM SCHOLARS ABOUT JESUS' DIVINE SONSHIP

Bock (1994b: 108): Although in some contexts Luke uses Son of God as another way of saying Jesus is the king or the Christ, ultimately it expresses Jesus' unique relationship to God the Father.

Brown, Raymond (1970: 1061): Jesus is the only one who has an absolute right to the title "Son of God"; when someone sees the Father in Jesus, they understand what the name and quality of the Son are.

Carson (1984: 109, 345): At his baptism Jesus is presented as Messiah, but also as suffering servant, representative of the people, and the very Son of God in an ontological sense.

Carson (1991: 162): In the title "Son of God" there is a messianic sense, but it also expresses a relationship to God that is metaphysical and not just messianic.

Cranfield (1955: 62): Speaking of the voice from God at Jesus' baptism, Cranfield says "Son of God" is not to be explained in terms of messiahship, nor is messiahship the primary category here.

Erickson (1991: 232): The term "Son of God" and the references to preexistence cannot be taken in a general way (that is, as functional but not ontological). They are deeply imbedded in the NT…the passages in the NT that speak of a real incarnation form the organizing principle of the Christology of the NT writers, a Christology that is not just a matter of functionality, but which "has its ontological basis in Jesus' unique, pre-existent Sonship."

Guelich (1989: 34) : "My son" at Jesus' baptism focuses not on a messianic title, but on a filial relationship.

Gundry (1993: 974): We should not equate kingship with divine sonship.

Guthrie (1981: 313, 317-318): He is essentially a son, and his sonship is an essential relationship that could not be altered by the incarnation.

Harris (1992: 87): Christ's sonship is essential; both before and after the incarnation he was in complete intimate fellowship with the Father.

Köstenberger (2004: 504): "Son of God" and "Christ" are closely related, but they are not synonymous. "Christ" related mainly to Jewish messianic expectations. While "Son of God" has messianic connotations, it goes beyond that

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to accent Jesus' relationship with God as the Son of the Father. He is the sent son.

Ladd (1974: 283): "Jesus' sonship is the central christological idea in John." John's gospel is "written that people may believe that Jesus is the messiah, but more than messiah; he is the Son of God."

Marshall, cited in Michel (1986: 646): The title "Son of God" expresses "the metaphysical or essential relationship between Jesus and his Father."

Moo (1996: 45 fn 27): The use of "Son of God" Rom. 1:3-4 is not so much messianic as ontological, and means more than Messiah.

Morris (1988: 302): In Romans 8:3 where it says God sent *his own* son, the word "own" is important, pointing to the close unique relationship between the Father and the Son. God was not sending some remote messenger, but his own son. Whereas believers are sons by grace, he is a Son by nature.

Murray (1982: 69): Christ's sonship is preexistent, pre-temporal, and transcendent.

Nolland (1989: 163): "Son" and "messiah" are not the same.

Schnackenburg (1995: 310): In Matthew's gospel for Peter to confess Jesus as Messiah is not enough; a full confession includes Jesus' divine sonship. "Son of God" goes beyond other confessions. For Nathanael it went beyond king of Israel, the king of salvation; more than that, he was the Son of God. Martha likewise shows that her concept surpasses messianic expectations: he is not just the Messiah, he is the Son of God. Likewise John's purpose statement goes beyond Jesus just being the Messiah, he is also the Son of God. "Jesus' divine sonship, in addition to his Messiahship and closely connected with it, is the main bearing column of the early Christian confession of Christ" (311). From the gospel of Mark, where the picture of Jesus is suffused with the divine sonship, to the gospel of John, the concept of the Son of God is a theme running throughout (311-312). Son of God also stands at the center of Paul's christological statements (Gal 1:16, 2:20, 4:4; Rom 1:3-4, 8:2, 32). In this title Son of God the early church found an enduring way to express the deepest essence of who Jesus is and his significance for us (312).

Eternal divine sonship is the basis for the messianic ministry

Bruce, (1983: 55): The sonship expressed in Jesus' role as Messiah was grounded in his eternal sonship.

France (2002: 50): Messiah and Son of God are not the same, though some first century Jews saw it that way and interpreted 2 Sam 7:14 and Ps 2:7 messianically. But in a heading to the gospel of Mark (1:1) "Son of God" surely means more than Messiah. It reflects the understanding of Jesus' divine sonship that Mark's readers would have recognized, and is the center of Mark's Christology.

Godet (1969: 298, 329): In Rom 8:3, "His *own* son" has to mean more than just "Messiah". He would not send "his own Messiah".

Kistemaker (1984: 30): The Son was Son before he was messiah. The Son was present at creation (29). He is eternally begotten (37).

Ladd (1974: 163-164, 166): Sonship and messianic status are not synonymous; sonship is prior to his messianic status and is the basis of it. Sonship is more than a filial consciousness; it involves a unique relationship between God and Jesus.

Lane, William L. (1974: 57-58): Jesus' sonship is more than being messiah. It transcends that, and is to be understood in the highest sense. His sonship is the basis for his messianic mission.

Lenski (1936: 35): Sonship is not the same as messiahship, but the basis of it. Jesus' sonship is eternal. We cannot say that his sonship starts with his birth or with his exaltation. Both his incarnation, in which he entered a state of humiliation for his saving work, and his exaltation rest on his existence as Son of God from all eternity.

Liefeld (1984: 831): "Luke sees the messianic vocation as a function of God's Son, rather than seeing sonship as just an aspect of messiahship."

Longenecker (1970: 94-96): We don't need to assume that "Son of God" and "Christ" are synonyms. The NT writers were aware of their different connotations. Jesus' most basic understanding was his consciousness of his divine sonship, and it was based on that consciousness that he undertook the messianic mission. The disciples on the other hand first understood him as messiah, and based on that were able to conclude that he was the Son of God.

Longenecker (1994: 485): Jesus' filial consciousness undergirded all of his ministry, and was the base from which he operated as he carried out his messianic calling.

Marshall (1967: 99): "Jesus is the Messiah because he is the Son of God, not vice versa. Sonship is the supreme category of interpretation of the person of Jesus in the Gospels, and messiahship occupies a subordinate place." The fundamental point of Jesus' self-understanding is his filial relationship to God, and it was on the basis of this that he undertook the role of Messiah; he did not conclude that he is the Son of God because he is Messiah (1967: 93).

Marshall (1978: 68, 155-156): Messiahship is grounded in divine sonship.

Murray (1982: 68): If we think of messianic sonship, this sonship came after the "giving" mentioned in John 3:16, and was the result of it. He was the Son before he was sent.

Nolland (2005: 158): A messianic element is included in his sonship, but 'even in connection with the Messiah "son" is not simply another word for "messiah": sonship refers to a special status and relationship with God which the Messiah may experience. It is sonship as status and relationship which ties together the different strands involved in identifying Jesus as Son of God.'

Nolland (1989: 163): Luke's understanding of Jesus' sonship cannot be contained in normal messianic categories, as it involves more and is more fundamental. Sonship is the exalted status and relationship with God that is the basis of his messianic rule.

O'Collins (1999: 46): 'Even if historically he never called himself *the only* Son of God, Jesus presented himself as *Son* (uppercase) and not just as one who was the divinely appointed Messiah and in that sense *son* (lowercase) of God. He made himself out to be more than just someone chosen and anointed as divine representative to fulfill an eschatological role in and for the kingdom. Implicitly, Jesus claimed an essential, 'ontological' relationship of sonship toward God that provided the grounds for his functions as revealer, lawgiver, forgiver of sins, and agent of the final kingdom. Those functions (his "doing") depended on his ontological relationship as Son of God (his "being")."

Ridderbos (1975: 69): "God sent his Son, and this sending does not create the sonship, but presupposes it." Paul "makes the line of redemptive history go back to Christ's preexistence."

Turner (2008: 373, 404): The disciples worship Jesus and confess him as God's Son when they see him do things that only God can do. Jesus' status as

Messiah is *linked* to his divine sonship, but that would imply that there is a distinction.

Vos (1953: 190): Jesus' role as Messiah is predicated upon the fact of his divine sonship. He is not the Son of God by virtue of being the Messiah; he is Messiah precisely because he is the divine Son, and only someone who is the Son in the highest sense could fulfill the messianic office. His messiahship is based on a prior sonship.

Vos (1953: 163): "Jesus carries into his messianic life much of the content of his filial life, and yet this does not justify the complete identification of the two relationships. His filial status covers the whole extent of his messianic function, but we cannot say *vice versa* that his filial status, as to content and dignity, is exhausted by his messiahship so that 'Son of God' would here figure as a mere messianic title."

Sonship as archetype or prototype

Bavinck (1977: 305, 307): God's fatherhood is the archetype of human fatherhood, and pertains to his very eternal essence; he is Father in the most real and complete sense of the term. With him fatherhood is a primary attribute, whereas with men it is derived or secondary. Likewise, the sonship of the Son is essential and eternal, because the eternal character of the divine fatherhood implies the eternal character of the divine sonship.

Hurtado (1993): Jesus as the divine Son is both the prototype and the agent of granting others the right to be God's Sons as well; the sonship of the redeemed is patterned after his (1993: 905). The sonship of Christians is derived whereas, "Jesus is the original prototype, whose sonship is not derived from another" (906). (Here Hurtado is talking about spiritual sonship, but could be logically extended to natural sonship as well.)

Sonship the foremost category for understanding Jesus

Bauer (1992: 772): Each of the four gospels gives much attention to Jesus' divine sonship, and it may be that "Son of God" is the most pre-eminent christological title.

Ladd (1974: 168): In the early church "Son of God" could be freely used to indicate the supreme place occupied by Jesus.

Marshall (1967: 99): In the Gospels sonship is the paramount category by which to interpret who Jesus is and one to which his role as Messiah is subordinate.
Marshall (1980: 774): It is in the title "Son of God" that we find the fullest expression of who Jesus is.

Meier (1985: 188): In the epistle to the Hebrews, Son is *the* title of Jesus which embraces all the rest; all other statements about him are rooted in the idea that he is the Son of God.

Murray (1982: 80): A faith and confession that is not "conditioned by the faith of God as trinity, and by the intra-divine and intrinsic relations involved in Jesus' identity as the eternal Son, does not provide the Christology the biblical revelation demands. The true Christology is one that has its starting point and finds its basis in Christ's intrinsic sonship and therefore in its Trinitarian correlatives."

Warfield (1916: 371): In Hebrews the exalted name that he inherits is Son, and "God" and "Lord" are "explications of the content of that one more excellent name."

Sonship is associated with deity

Bauckham (2008: 265): For Mark the title "Son of God" "indicates Jesus' unique relationship to God as one who participates in the divine identity." (2008: 106) "The divine identity comprises the relationship in which the Father is who he is only in relation to the Son and vice versa."

Bloesch (1978: 126): "His sonship is rooted in the fundamental nature as uncreated and eternal."

Blomberg (1992): In Mt. 27:54, Matthew sees in the centurion's confession "further support for Jesus as the unique Son of God, in some way on a par with deity" (422). Blomberg contrasts the high priest, who sees "Christ" and "Son of God" as synonymous (402), with Peter who grasps Jesus' unique relationship with the Father (251).

Blomberg (1997: 408): The ontological aspect of Jesus' sonship becomes apparent after the resurrection, and is especially articulated in Mat 28:19. Of the term "Son of God" he says that after the resurrection the term is used "approximately as in later Trinitarian formulas in which Jesus becomes Son of God in the sense of God's ontological equal and one part of the Godhead it-

self". In other words, even in the New Testament, the term Son of God is used in an ontological sense, showing equality with deity. It is *not* merely a title for the Messiah.

Blomberg (1992: 432): On Mat 28:19 Blomberg says, 'The singular "name" followed by the threefold reference to "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" suggests both unity and plurality in the Godhead. Here is the clearest Trinitarian "formula" anywhere in the Gospels.'

Brown, Raymond (1966: 88): It appears John intends to give the title "Son of God" a more profound meaning than others of his day, and certainly the readers of his gospel would have already become more accustomed to a more profound meaning. He seems to intend to include a confession of the divinity of Jesus.

Brown, Raymond (1970): John's approval of Thomas' "Lord and God" statement shows how John understood "Son of God" (1061). In John 20:31 he states that his purpose is that people would believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and thereby have eternal life in his name. Coming as it does after Thomas' confession of Jesus as Lord and God, he would not then state that his purpose in writing was to bring about faith in Jesus only as Messiah. John's use of Thomas' profession that Jesus is Lord and God shows how John understood "Son of God" (1060).

Bruce (1986: 159): As the Son, he is the very expression of the Father, because "he shares the essence and nature of that one living and true God."

Bruce (1983: 14): "The relationship which the Father and the Son eternally bear to each other is declared to be a co-inherence or mutual indwelling of love. Jesus is in the Father; the Father is in him. And the purpose of Jesus' coming to reveal the Father is that men and women may…be drawn into this divine fellowship of love, dwelling in God as God dwells in them."

Burke in Elwell, Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (1984: 1034): "The major theological point brought out by Jesus' divine sonship is his own divinity."

Carson (1984: 109): Christ's virginal conception hints at ontological sonship.

Ellis (1974: 263): In Luke 22:70, "Son of God may have the connotation of deity", since a messianic claim would not carry the charge of blasphemy.

Erickson (1991: 231): The scribes and Pharisees did not see Jesus' use of the term "Son of God" and his claim to forgive sin to be a functional claim only, but as blasphemy.

Erickson (2009: 116): "The Jews saw Jesus' self-designation as the Son of God as a claim to deity or equality with God."
Erickson (1991: 35): "He is uniquely God's son. He is God's own son (Rom 8:3, 32), and the Son of his love (Col 1:13). He was not merely a man in history, but a divine person. He pre-existed and was active with the Father in creation (1 Cor 8:6)."

Erickson (1991: 627): "Jesus believed himself to be, and was affirmed by the New Testament writers to be, the Son of God, fully divine in the same sense and to the same degree as God the Father."

Frame (2002: 660-61): "Clearly, Jesus' unique sonship implies his ontological deity." "Jesus' sonship describes his eternal nature."

Grudem (1994: 547): In the NT the 'title "Son of God" when applied to Christ strongly affirms his deity as the eternal Son in the Trinity, one equal to God the Father in all his attributes.'

Gundry (1993: 34): Although "Son of God" can mean no more than Christ, as with the high priest, Mark uses the phrase to prompt thoughts of divinity in his Roman audience, augmented by the accounts of healing, miracles, exorcisms, powerful teaching, forgiving sins, by the supernatural events that accompanied his death, and of course, by the resurrection.

Gundry (1982: 330): Though many Jews may have considered "Son of God" no more than a purely human messiah, Matthew's use of "Immanuel…God with us" and the account of the virgin birth "demand in Matthew the stronger connotation of essential deity."

Harris (1992: 102-103): The Son possesses the divine nature, and is God by nature, and that intimate and eternal knowledge of God qualifies him to reveal God's nature and character. The acknowledgement that Jesus is Messiah spoken of in John 20:31 necessarily involves belief in his deity.

Hendriksen (1973: 178, 215, 216): Jesus is God's Son in the deepest, Trinitarian sense of the term. He is the Son by eternal generation, fully sharing the divine essence. The Son has been the Son for all eternity.

Hendriksen (1981: 473): When Paul speaks of the "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" in Rom 15:6, "God" emphasizes Christ's human nature, but "Father" focuses on his divine nature, his Trinitarian sonship in which he is on a par with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Hodge (1886: 18): '"Son" designates the divine nature of Christ…Christ is called the Son of God because he is consubstantial with the Father, and therefore equal to him in power and glory. The term expresses the relation of the second to the first person in the Trinity, as it exists from eternity. It is therefore, as applied to Christ, not a term of office, nor expressive of any relation assumed in time. He was and is the Eternal Son.'

Hodge (1872-73: Part One, Chapter VI, sec. 6c): "His being the Son of God proves he is God...If sonship implies equality with God, it implies participation of the divine essence."

Hurtado (1993: 902): In John the term "Son of God" was the preferred way of referring to Jesus as divine and of heavenly origin and, as Jesus himself used it, was a claim to divinity.

Keener (1999: 716-717): The baptismal formula in Mat 28:19 calling for baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit placed Jesus on the same level with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Biblical and Jewish tradition considered them divine, making explicit what is implicit in the accounts in Acts that describe people being baptized in Jesus' name: "that is, that Jesus is divine." The implication is that Jesus is divine, which climaxes Matthew's emphasis on the deity of Jesus that began with him being called Immanuel in 1:23. Then in footnote 341 Keener says, "Jesus' divinity is explicit in Luke's theology of baptism in Jesus' name."

Keener (2003: 297): The term "Son of God" in John's gospel means much more than messiah; it has at least some implications of deity.

Ladd (1974): As Son of God, he partakes of deity (286). He is Son of God because he is God and partakes of the divine nature (160).

Marshall, cited in Michel (1986: 644-46): Since Paul sees Jesus as God's Son during his earthly life, and that it was as God's Son that he died, it is apparent he did not give up his divine nature when he assumed human nature. That is, he retained his divine nature on earth as being the Son of God. In John's Christology the Son is preexistent, and his sonship describes a metaphysical or essential relationship between him and his Father. It is also a relationship

of mutual love and filial obedience. The term "Son" also expresses that Jesus is the savior, but for John, he is Messiah and savior because of his metaphysical relationship with God.

McRay (1996: 411): "Son of God" is used to indicate that he is divine in nature.

Mounce (1991: 160-161): Peter's confession that Jesus is the Son of the living God is not just a christological confession. Mounce agrees with Gundry that "Son of God" connotes essential deity, and a unique and intimate relationship to his heavenly Father.

Murray (1982: 71, 77, 79): When Jesus speaks in Mat 11:27 about the knowledge the Father and Son have of one another, he is claiming to have an exclusive and intensive knowledge that only deity can have, and that it is in his identity of Son that he has this knowledge. 'The title "Son" is charged with deity and it is that import that gives character to the confession of Jesus as the Son of God.' His intrinsic sonship constitutes equality and identity with God.

Nolland (2005: 603): When in Mat 14:33 the disciples confess that Jesus is the Son of God and "worship" him (here it is not just giving obeisance), they know they are in the presence of God, and are encountering God; so they worshipped God in worshipping the Son of God.

Osborne (2002: 153): For John the term "Son of God" in Rev 2:18 emphasizes the unique filial relationship between the Father and the Son, but also connotes majesty and divinity.

Ridderbos (1975: 77): For Paul, "Christ's being the Son of God is none other than being God himself."

Tasker (1960: 87): In John, "Son of God" means "God the Son."

Tenney (1981: 196, 38): In John sonship "expresses the unity of nature, close fellowship, and unique intimacy between Jesus and the Father. Human fatherhood and sonship are only a faint copy of the relation between God the Father and God the Son." As Son of God, sharing the nature of the Father, he is able to reveal God.

Turner, David L. (2008: 81): "Throughout Matthew, Jesus is presented as the Son of God, Immanuel. Thus it is not surprising that Jesus is frequently worshiped as God the Son."

Wessel (1984: 657): In Mark 5:7 when the demon calls Jesus the Son of the Most High God, the title implies that the demon recognized Jesus' deity.

Yarborough (2008: 180): In Revelation "Son of God" refers to Jesus' divinity and oneness with God. It is a divine sonship.

APPENDIX TWO
NICENE, CONSTANTINOPOLITAN, AND CHALCEDONIAN CREEDS

Note: square brackets [ ] indicate the portions of the 325 text that were omitted or moved in 381, and *italics* indicate what phrases, absent in the 325 text, were added in 381

Nicene Creed AD 325
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicene_Creed

> We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father [the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God], Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made [both in heaven and on earth]; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; he suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost.

Constantinopolitan Creed AD 381
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicene_Creed

> We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker *of heaven and earth, and* of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, *begotten of the Father before all worlds (æons)*, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate *by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary*, and was made man; *he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate*, and suffered, *and was buried*, and the third day he rose again, *according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father*; from thence he shall come again, *with glory*, to judge the quick and the dead; *whose kingdom shall have no end*. And in the Holy Ghost, *the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets. In one holy catholic and apostolic Church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen*.

Chalcedonian Creed AD 451

> We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach people to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul

and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.

Athanasian Creed (Quicumque Vult)

10. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal.
30. For the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man.
31. God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and man of substance of His mother, born in the world.

APPENDIX THREE
EXCERPTS FROM DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS

Abstract of principles of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008 (where Robert Stein and Thomas Schreiner teach)

> The Trinity: God is revealed to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit each with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence or being.
> The Mediator: Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, is the divinely appointed mediator between God and man.

Southern Baptist doctrinal statement (a.k.a. "The Baptist Faith and Message")

> God: The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.
> God the Son: Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.

Denver Seminary Statement of Faith (where Craig Blomberg teaches)

Denver Seminary is committed to the great truths and abiding fundamentals of the Christian faith. Each year trustees, administration and faculty are required to affirm and sign Denver Seminary's doctrinal statement without mental reservation.

> THE TRINITY - We believe in one God, Creator and Sustainer of all things, eternally existing in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
> JESUS CHRIST - We believe that Jesus Christ is God's eternal Son.

Doctrinal statement of Fuller Theological Seminary

> I. God has revealed himself to be the living and true God, perfect in love and righteous in all his ways, one in essence, existing eternally in the three persons of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
> V. The only mediator between God and humankind is Christ Jesus our Lord, God's eternal son.

Doctrinal statement of Ridley Theological College in Melbourne, Australia (of which Leon Morris was principal from 1964 to 1979)

> As an Anglican evangelical college, we uphold the fundamental truths of the Christian faith, including: The unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in

the Godhead. God's gracious provision of redemption from the guilt, penalty and power of sin only though the sacrificial death, as our representative and substitute, of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God.

Doctrinal Statement of Dallas Theological Seminary (where Darrell Bock teaches)

We believe that the Godhead eternally exists in three persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—and that these three are one God, having precisely the same nature, attributes, and perfections, and worthy of precisely the same homage, confidence, and obedience.

Doctrinal statement of London School of Theology (Max Turner, Peter Cotterell, Donald Guthrie, R. T. France, John Balchin and others have taught there).

We believe that the Lord our God is eternally one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
We believe that the Father's holy love is shown supremely in that he gave Jesus Christ, his only Son, for us… We confess Jesus Christ as Lord and God, the eternal Son of the Father.

Trinity International University Statement of Faith (Don Carson and Grant Osborne would hold to this as members of the faculty)

We believe in one God, Creator of all things, infinitely perfect and eternally existing in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Westminster Seminary holds to the Westminster Confession, and also the system of doctrine confessed in the Three Forms of Unity (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort).

Wycliffe Bible Translators USA

We believe in one God, who exists eternally in three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Wycliffe Bible Translators UK

We believe in one God, who exists eternally in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

Wycliffe Bible Translators Canada (From statement of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada)

There is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Wycliffe International

We believe in one God, who exists eternally in three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Statement of Faith for SIM

There is one God who exists eternally in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

New Tribes Mission

We believe in one God, eternally existing in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Lausanne Covenant (to which various evangelical organizations subscribe)

We affirm our belief in the one-eternal God, Creator and Lord of the world, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who governs all things according to the purpose of his will.

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