LOST IN TRANSLATION
THE GOSPEL IN TRANSITION IN CHRISTIAN BEGINNINGS

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Abstract. Jesus Christ was not the son of Mr and Mrs Christ. A child or maybe an unsuspecting adult might be forgiven for thinking this was so, given that Christ does sound like Jesus' surname. The title, Mashiach, Messiah, translated Christ, did indeed become the equivalent of a name, its original meaning lost in translation or at least in the transition as the Jesus movement moved from its Jewish culture into the cultures of the wider world. More was at stake, however, than the shift from a title to a name. Changes which the transition entailed included a shift from corporate hopes based on restoring Israel's kingdom to universal concerns with individual salvation and the hope of heaven, from good news for the poor addressed to Israel to care for the poor primarily among believers, and from Jesus the Jewish Messiah to Jesus the Logos incarnate, and in the process the issue of continuity and discontinuity with faith's heritage, not least in the light of what became exclusive claims to salvation.

Keywords: Messiah, Hope, Judgement, Forgiveness, Good News for the Poor, Christology, Wisdom, Continuity and Discontinuity.

1. Introduction

It is an honour to have been asked to contribute to this Festschrift for Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, whose work I have known for decades, but who in recent years has been a colleague within the *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas*, where I coordinate the International Initiatives program and Karl-Wilhelm runs the Eastern European Liaison Committee, which has a set a pattern for our work across the world and modelled bringing east and west together.

The following paper seeks to take seriously in broad overview the implications of moving across diverse cultures. It does so, in particular, in relation to the cultural transition entailed in bringing what began as good news for Israel to become also good news for the wider world of the Roman Empire and beyond. The paper draws on my engagement with these issues, especially over recent decades, and so draws upon detailed research and interaction with the research of others as presented in my numerous works cited as references for this broader discussion. I offer it in part in that sense as a set of summary conclusions and as belonging to the ongoing

challenge of listening and communicating across cultures, modelled so well in the present day through the work of Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr and his Liaison Committee colleagues.

2. Hope in Transition

Jesus Christ was not the son of Mr and Mrs Christ. A child or maybe an unsuspecting adult might be forgiven for thinking this was so, given that Christ does sound like Jesus' surname. The title, Mashiach, Messiah, translated Christos, Christ; in English: Anointed One, did indeed become the equivalent of a name, its original meaning lost in translation or at least in the transition as the Jesus movement moved from its Jewish culture into the cultures of the wider world.

More was at stake, however, than the shift from a title to a name. For Christ, the Christ, the Messiah, was one of the ways Jews imagined God would restore their fortunes, liberating them from the Romans and bringing about a kingdom of love and peace. While needing to distance from its sometimes military connotations of a warrior prince who like David would defeat the world's Philistines, the first Christ-believers did indeed hail Jesus as the one appointed Messiah to come who would in his own way "liberate Israel", as Luke has the disciples put it on the Emmaus Road (Luke 24:21). At the ascension Luke has the disciples similarly ask whether that was the time he would "restore the kingdom to Israel," only to have Jesus respond, not that their hopes were awry but that they should not worry about the timing, for that was in God's hands (Acts 1:7). Luke also has Peter announce that the times of refreshing would come if the people repented, as he puts it, "that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus, who must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets" (Acts 3:19–21). The notion of repentance to hasten the prospect of the breaking in of God's kingdom would not have been unfamiliar in Judaism of the day.

In the parallel accounts of the nativity of John and Baptist and Jesus, Luke has Mary and Zechariah sing songs of freedom which hail Jesus as Messiah (Luke 1:46–55, 67–79) and portrays Simeon and Anna as devout Jews also longing for Israel's and Jerusalem's liberation (2:25–38). Such faith also marks out Joseph of Arimathea, who was "waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God" (23:51). Luke has Jesus speak of his return to Jerusalem in the end time, bringing liberation (21:28), to be hailed with the words, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord" (13:35). The notion of a messianic reign, reflected also in Revelation's 1000 year reign (Rev 19:11–21; 20:1–6), and paralleled in 4 Ezra 7:26–30 and 2 Baruch 22–30; 35–40; and 53–74,[1] was still alive and well in Justin Martyr's eschatology (*Dial.* 80).

[1] All three, Revelation, 4 Ezra, and 2 Baruch envisage a two-stage eschatology, namely a messianic reign followed by a transformed manner of existence. See William R. G. LOADER, "Sexuality and

Contrary to attempts to accommodate Jesus to our contemporary preferences, I believe that the traditions about Jesus support the view that he shared a set of Jewish eschatological expectations which envisaged imminent divine intervention, resurrection, and judgement, and that the kingdom for which he had his followers pray would be good news for Israel's poor and hungry. In that sense, Luke, I would argue, reflects this eschatology, generally. Early traditions depict Jesus speaking of sharing the kingdom's government with his disciples, significantly twelve in number reflecting national consciousness (Matt 19:28; Luke 22:28–30). They also depict Jesus as embracing the prophetic hope that the nations would also come and join Israel or at least gather around it in peace (Matt 8:11–12; Luke 13:28–29; Isa 2:2–4; 25:6–10).

It accords with these expectations that the first followers interpreted Jesus' resurrection within this frame of reference. To it they applied texts like Ps 110:1 and 2:7 to affirm that God had appointed Jesus to messiahship, enthroned him as the promised Son of David, the Messiah, the Christ, God's Son, as the tradition Paul cites in Rom 1:3–5 affirms (see also 8:34; Acts 2:34–36; 5:31; 13:33; Heb 1:3–14). Time shifted the focus from future imminent fulfilment (as Mark 14:62) to his status in waiting of the one so enthroned at God's right hand (Luke 22:69), but the role remained. It defied in irony the false accusation which Pilate placed over his execution of being "King of the Jews", for so, indeed, he was or would be. Indeed, so central to their faith was this conviction that Luke tells us they became known as *Christianoi*, at least in Syrian Antioch (Acts 11:26), and have been known as Christians ever since.

However, the translation of this messianic hope, deeply rooted in Jewish tradition, into the wider world faced difficulties, perhaps not initially as the movement spread through diaspora synagogues, but certainly as it moved out of a Jewish milieu. Why would Corinthians or Romans yearn for a restored Israel with a Jewish Messiah its agent? It therefore made more sense for them to embrace the status so claimed of the enthroned Jesus in heaven, more meaningfully as Lord than as Messiah/Christ, and to affirm only those aspects of that hope which applied to them, namely the prospect of surviving the coming universal judgement. "Lord"

Eschatology: In Search of a Celibate Utopia in Pseudepigraphic Literature" *JSP* 20 (2014): 43–67, 57–64; also in William R. G. LOADER, *Sexuality and Gender. Collected Essays*; WUNT 458 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), 145–65, 157–64; and on 2 Baruch: Liv Ingeborg LIED, *The Other Lands of Israel: Imaginations of the Land in 2 Baruch*, JSJSup 129 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 185. John J. COLLINS, "The Third Sibyl Revisited," in *Things Revealed: Studies in Honor of Michael E. Stone*, eds. Esther CHAZON and David SATRAN (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 3–19, suggests that Sibylline Oracles Book 3 may also envisaging a two stage eschatology if reign of "a king from the sun" (652) refers to the future reign of a Ptolemaic king (cf. also 193, 318, 608). He identifies the figure with either Ptolemy VI Philometor (180-145 BCE) or Ptolemy VIII Physcon (145-116 BCE) (pp. 8-17); disputed, however, by Rieuwerd BUITENWERF, *Book III of the Sibylline Oracles and its Social Setting: With an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, SVTP 17 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 272–83.

was familiar from the cults and, more significantly, was the preferred rendering of the divine name. The highly exalted Jesus received the name bestowed upon him, not just "Son" as in Hebrews (1:4–5), but also the divine *kyrios*, Lord, according to the Philippians hymn (Phil 2:9–11).

The good news was then not the imminent return of the Messiah to set up his reign in Jerusalem, but that they could face their maker knowing their sins had been forgiven. Forgiveness of sins had always been central in the tradition, from the days of John the Baptist onwards, and linked with eschatological hope, "The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). Without, however, its context in hope for God's reign, it morphed into what in effect was the call: "Repent, for judgement day is coming." On the one hand, this gave it universal significance, but, in the process, it lost connection with the earlier vision of the kingdom, which had been so closely associated with Israel's hope.

The matter is, however, considerably more complex as are the results. There were changes in relation to the shape and nature of future hope, the hope of good news for the poor, how Jesus' role was understood, and how continuity and discontinuity was handled.

3. The Nature of Future Hope in Transition

Luke's portrayal of future hope coheres with what evidence suggests was the hope of Jesus, although the matter is not straightforward. While at least Revelation envisages a resurrection of the righteous to participate in the Messiah's reign for a thousand years, other traditions emphasise that resurrection is not to be seen as a raising back to normal life but as transformation of the corpse, transfigured to become a spiritual body. Already in Paul we see this distinction (1 Cor 15:35–49; 2 Cor 5:1–5) and stories about the appearance of the risen Jesus assume the same, a transformed existence with no physical remainder, hence an empty tomb, and the ability to appear and disappear. This notion of resurrection applies to the future hope of resurrection which also assumes empty tombs and transformed bodies which are no longer flesh and blood and corresponds more to what 2 Baruch in its two-stage eschatology describes as the state of being after the period of the messianic reign (51:1–13; similarly 4 Ezra 7; Revelation 20–22). Revelation distinguishes between the 1000-year reign of the Messiah on earth with the faithful resurrected and the new heaven and earth with new life in the new Jerusalem and paradise located on the new earth.

Paul, indeed, sees such transfiguration/metamorphosis applying also to those like himself still living at Christ's return (1 Cor 15:51–52; see also 1 Thess 4:13–18), suggesting that he did not embrace an eschatology which included a messianic kingdom on earth but saw Christ's reign as taking place already in his lifetime in heaven, as 1 Cor 15:25 ("For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet"). While he retains hope for Israel (Rom 11:25–36), he will have understood it as

of a different nature. The fourth evangelist also knows the tradition according to which Jesus would come to take his own to be with him in the heavenly world: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also" (14:3).

This also makes sense of Paul's not encouraging marriage in the light of the impending parousia because after it life would not be normal and, as Mark's Jesus puts it (12:25), there will be no marrying or being given in marriage, i.e., sexual relations, sexuality no longer having a role not just because of no need to procreate but because of the different nature of existence.[2] As I have noted elsewhere,[3] the more widely attested Jewish view was of an earth-based existence abounding in fertility and fruitfulness, from plants and animals to humans (e.g., 1 Enoch 5:7–9; 10:17; 2 Bar 29:1–8; 73:7; Wis 3:7–15), in part fulfilling the promise of Exod 23:26, which Philo also cites as informing his eschatological vision of abundance (*Praem.* 98–109, esp. 107). Even Luke, who envisages a Jerusalem based kingdom, nevertheless assumes that the resurrected will be like angels (20:35–36).

Possibly this was the pattern of hope from the beginning and allusions to an earthly kingdom an aberration or perhaps, a in Revelation, the resurrected were to participate in the earthly kingdom in their angelic state. In any case, we see over time a change from focus on an earthly based kingdom to focus on a heavenly one, not least as reflecting in part the transition from a predominantly Jewish milieu. There was a certain compatibility between apocalyptic understandings of the heavenly world and popular platonic thought which smoothed the transition.

There was diversity among Jewish expressions of hope and it is reflected in diversity in the writings of Christ-believers. Paul was among those for whom future resurrection was the focus of hope, the soul waiting in the interim in Hades/Sheol in semiconsciousness/sleep (1 Cor 15:51–52; 1 Thess 4:13–14), though his hope included that he would on death be with Christ (Phil 1:21–24), presumably in that state. Others embraced the view that post-mortem existence entailed consciousness. Luke's parable of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31) and his depiction of Jesus' promise to his co-crucified that he would be with him in paradise that day (so before his resurrection) (23:43) reflects such belief. Hope in both John and Hebrews assumes fulfilment of hope at death (John 12:26; 17:24; Heb 12:22–24), while at the same time holding to the traditional belief in a future resurrection of the dead (John 5:28–29; 6:39, 40, 44; Heb 6:1–2). In effect, having one's destiny determined at death significantly reduces the emphasis given to the traditional belief in resurrection and

[2] See William R. G. LOADER, *The New Testament on Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 453–67.

[3] LOADER, *Sexuality and Gender*, 152–57. See also George W. E. NICKELSBURG, "Where is the Place of Eschatological Blessing?" in *Things Revealed: Studies in Early Jewish and Christian Literature in Honor of Michael E. Stone*, JSJSup 89, eds., Esther G. CHAZON, David SATRAN, and Ruth A. CLEMENTS (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 53–71, 54–55.

judgement. The transition from focus on judgement day to destiny at death makes individual salvation all the more central. It also helped deal with the failed expectation of the imminent arrival of the Day of the Lord and Jesus' triumphant return.

Whether focused on the day of judgement or de facto judgement at death, hope came to be centred not on Israel's restoration in its land but the salvation of the individual, including therefore the incorporation of the individual into the body of the saved. Transposed into a universal framework, such hopes focus primarily on the individual or on the new community of faith. Thus, the fourth gospel envisages dwelling places and a sense of togetherness of the new family of faith of Jesus and his own in the heavenly realm. This is now a long way from what Luke portrays as hope for the restoration of Israel.

4. Good News for the Poor in Transition

The transition of hope from its Jewish focus on an earthly kingdom and the transition of expectation from imminent to delayed fulfilment had an impact on what people saw as hope and also on how they saw the present. Jesus had announced good news for the poor, addressing Israel in its need (Luke 4:16–20; 6:20–21). He also claimed that his healings and exorcisms of his fellow Jews were signs of the kingdom of God already partially breaking in (Matt 12:28; Luke 11:20). There are indications that his first followers continued such engagement. Their situation, however, became increasingly difficult, not only among their fellow Jews where they were increasingly seen as a sect, but above all when they saw themselves commissioned to take in hand the implementation of the prophetic hope of gathering gentiles to join with the people of God and share its blessings. They were a minority under pressure, even more so as they became minority enclaves in cities like Corinth and Rome.

Announcing good news to Israel in need and engaging in making it a reality in their midst through acts of compassion did not, however, become a gospel of good news for the world's poor and engagement in acts of compassion towards all fellow citizens of the world.[4] It remained focused on Israel as God's people. Rather than a simple expansion of the target audience from Israel to the world, the good news was that gentiles could now share in the blessings promised to Israel of future hope and its interim manifestations in acts of compassion by responding to the invitation to join this new manifestation of God's people. In this way these gentiles

[4] William R. G. LOADER, "What Happened to 'Good News for the Poor'? On the Trail of Hope Beyond Jesus," in *Reflections on Early Christian History and Religion*, AJEC 81, eds., Cilliers BREYTENBACH and Jörg FREY (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 233–66; William R. G. LOADER, "Good News for the Poor and its Survival," in *Jesus Left Loose Ends: Collect Essays* (Adelaide: Australian Theological Forum Press, 2021), 215–36.

could share the blessing God had promised to them through Abraham (Gen 12:1–3). They were now God's people and in that sense the outreach of love towards God's people became the mandate to love fellow Christ-believers.

Good news for the poor remained, therefore, a promise to Israel in its need but now benefitted those whom God was grafting into Israel, as Paul put it (Rom 11:17). It was good news for the poor of the world by inviting them to join with God's people. Good news for the poor, for Israel in its need, now became good news for God's people, the church. They were now God's people and in that sense the outreach of love towards God's people became the mandate to love fellow Christ-believers.

Thus, the love and compassion manifest as signs of the kingdom already during Jesus' ministry remained as markers of the Spirit in their midst, the fruit which counted foremost more than ecstatic and other gifts, as Paul reminds the Corinthians (1 Cor 13:1-13; Gal 5:22–23). The focus of that love and compassion was, however, now primarily on caring for the needy within these little communities and sometimes the needs of distant ones, such as the poor believers in Judea for whom makes a collection which he sees as symbolic of the prophetic hope of Gentiles one day coming to Jerusalem, but now already transposed symbolically into the form of their gifts of charity (1 Cor 16:1–4; 2 Cor 8–9; Gal 2:10; Rom 15:26; Acts 20:7).[5]

Poverty among members matters greatly as the author of 1 John reminds his hearers: "How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?" (3:8).[6] The command to love one another was not about being nice. It was about caring and that included caring for their well being as they often lived on the edge of poverty, something those of us living in more prosperous societies frequently fail to recognise.

Aside from their retaining the reference to Israel embodied in the term, "the poor", as they transitioned from their Jewish milieu, and so applying it to the world's poor only as they joined the people of God, it would also have been seen as unrealistic for small minority enclaves in the empire's big cities to seek to do what Jesus did in Galilee. In that sense, the transition led to a narrowing of the good news and its expression in the present to mutual love and support within these communities. That narrowing went alongside a fading of restoration eschatology and a focus on the salvation of individuals and on the church as the community of the saved and in time it would manifest itself as a narrow understanding of the

[5] On this see Margaret THRALL, *II Corinthians: Volume II: VIII – XIII*, ICC (London: T&T Clark, 2000), 503–20.

[6] On this see William R. G. LOADER, "What Happened to 'Good News for the Poor' in the Johannine Tradition?" in *John, Jesus, and History; Vol. 3, Glimpses of Jesus through the Johannine Lens*, Early Christianity and its Literature 18, eds., Paul N. ANDERSON, Felix JUST, and Tom THATCHER (Atlanta: SBL, 2016), 469–80; also in William R. G. LOADER, *Christology, Soteriology, and Ethics in John and Hebrews. Collected Essays*, WUNT 478 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022), 213–24.

good news as primarily about forgiveness and the blessing of heaven and lacking the dimensions of social justice and social change.

Indeed, this was explicable, since, for many, life in this world was a burden and so hope had to focus on escape. For some, this was ideologised into gnostic dualism where salvation was escape from this reality as the bad creation of a bad god, and for others, it was escape from one of God's lesser works of creation, the world below, to God's eternal presence, in time, understood, as noted above, as occurring as the soul survived death. The individual's forgiveness of sins, acquittal, restoration to right relationship with God, was elevated to become the apex of the good news. Thus, in the transition the wider dimension of the kingdom, of good news for the poor, of social justice and social change, was largely lost, surviving primarily as in internal ethic of in-house care for fellow believers.

It is beyond this paper to explore the attempts to re-assert a wider focus, from nations seeing themselves as Christian and, theocratically as Christendom, imposing their understanding of mutual Christian love, to monastic and other movements genuinely taking compassion beyond church boundaries to the poor of the world, to recent times when secular movements for freedom and human rights have moved many to revisit message of "good news for the poor" and embrace care not so much about another world and not narrowed to the faithful but about this world, its people and its future, including its climate. We must now acknowledge that Christian faith does not hold a monopoly on such compassion and finds itself joining hands with the many who share it across all cultures.

5. Christology in Transition

As the focus moved from the event of God's kingdom with Jesus its agent, to the person of Jesus himself, enthroned above as Lord, the image of Jesus as the Jewish royal Messiah lost traction in the gentile world. It was Wisdom mythology which helped make the transition of christology into the wider world. For it served well to highlight Jesus' present exalted status. Indeed, while the notion of messianic rule is largely lost, the notion of rule is not.[7] Wisdom mythology made it possible to celebrate that status in its own terms. Wisdom was God's firstborn and God's image (Prov 8:30–31; Wis 7:24–28). Philo follows this model and speaks of the Logos as God's "firstborn son" (πρωτόγονος υἱός: *Agriculture* 51; *Confusion* 146) or even as "God" (θεός: *Dreams* 1.229–230; *Alleg. Interp*. 3.207–208; *QG* 2.62; *Migration* 5–6) or divine (*Migration* 83). Accordingly, Jesus is acclaimed as the divine Son, with and as "God" (John 1:1–2; Heb 1:2–3, 8–9; Col 1:15–16, juxtaposed to messianic tradition in 1:17–20). Beyond highlighting just his present

[7] On wisdom mythology see Martin SCOTT, *Sophia and the Johannine Jesus*, JSNTSup 71 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992).

status, it could also acclaim him as God's co-creator (Prov 8:22; Wis 7:22), like, indeed, *as* Wisdom, God's Word (1 Cor 8:6; John 1:1–2; Heb 1:2–3). Wisdom speculation helps transition Jesus from being Israel's Christ to being one with the being of God and so lay the foundation for what later became the doctrine of the Trinity.

Wisdom mythology had also served Jewish tradition well in highlighting the authority of the Law, in part to celebrate Israel's privilege as its host (Sirach 24:8–12; Bar 4:1), or alternatively to confront its disobedience in not complying (1 Enoch 42).[8] Matthew employs this tradition to depict Jesus as Wisdom's spokesperson (11:19, 28–30), expounding what the Law required in Wisdom's name as the one designated to be the coming judge with a strong emphasis on love for one's own. Matthew was developing traditions which had spoken of Jesus as Wisdom's emissary, as the earlier form of the "Q" saying preserved in Luke 11:49–51 shows (cf. (Matt 23:34–36).

Using Logos, Word, as an alternative term for Wisdom, traditions developed, in part adapting Stoic thought,[9] which depicted Jesus not only as Wisdom's emissary, but as the one through whom, in whom, and for whom all things exist (1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:15–16; Heb 1:2–3). In the fourth gospel Jesus is Wisdom, the Word, who, as in 1 Enoch 42, had come to his own and been rejected (1:10–13).[10]

Unlike in Matthew, Jesus' identification with Wisdom as Logos in John's Gospel served not to expound the Law (cf. Matt 5:17–20), but to be its sequel which its earthly cult foreshadowed and its words predicted (John 1:16–17; 6:32). The author of Johns Gospel, thus, transfers the universal images of bread, water, light and life, from the Law to Jesus the Word. And while the author clearly embraces the ethical principles of the decalogue, as many other peoples in their own terms espoused

[8] George W. E. NICKELSBURG and James C. VANDERKAM, *1 Enoch 2: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch Chapters 37–82*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), suggest that 1 Enoch 42 was likely written to contrast with what Ben Sira claimed of Mosaic Torah (pp. 138–41). In William R. G. LOADER, *The Pseudepigrapha on Sexuality: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Apocalypses, Testament, Legends, Wisdom, and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), I suggest that the allusion to water may well also contrasting with the use of such imagery in Sir. 24:25–31 (pp. 10–11).

[9] On this see SCOTT, *Sophia*, 58–61. Peter PHILLIPS, *The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel: A Sequential Reading*, LNTS 294 (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 106–13, writes of "an amalgam between Platonic theories about 'ideas' and 'archetypes', Jewish understanding of 'the word of God' and the general Stoic understanding of divine reason" (p. 108). See also Kenneth SCHENCK, *A Brief Guide to Philo* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 59–60; Cristina TERMINI, "Philo's Thought within the Context of Middle Judaism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*, ed. Adam KAMESAR (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 95–103, 97–101; and Michael THEOBALD, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes Kapitel 1 – 12* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2009), 118.

[10] In Philo, unlike in Sirach 24 and 1 Enoch 42, Logos descended, not Wisdom/Sophia (*Dreams* 1.85–86). SCOTT, *Sophia*, 61.

such values, he now became the sole authority for ethical instruction, which, as to be expected, is focused on mutual love within the community.[11]

Creative use of Wisdom mythology made it possible therefore to develop a christology no longer limited by the cultural specificity of its messianic origins. It made the transition possible to the wider world. It also made it possible to shift from grounding ethics in Jewish Law as the embodiment of Wisdom to grounding ethics in Jesus as its embodiment. There was a transition from Wisdom as embodied in Torah to Wisdom identified with Jesus alone. This creative move thus adapted a Jewish spirituality to make it universal, namely that eternal life is to live in oneness with the Word, now a person, and in so doing to live in oneness with God.[12]

6. Continuity and Discontinuity in Transition

The claims made for Jesus, especially as reflected in the fourth gospel, go far beyond what would have been acceptable to most Jews of the time. Indeed, the claims made by Paul and the other gospel writers about Jesus would also have met with much opposition, despite these writers' claims of continuity. For some Jews this would have meant painful division within households. For others it would have been claim and counterclaim linked to group identity. That my fellow Jews reject the good news I offer would have been painful.[13]

There would be a range of emotions and a range of explanations. Like lovers who declare that they were meant for each other, destined to be together, so Christ-believers could celebrate their new found life as the elect, given and chosen by God, destined to be part of the saved community (Eph 1:3–6; John 6:39, 44–45; 17:6, 9). Conversely, such rhetoric was employed in rationalising why others rejected the gospel. They were destined to do so (John 6:44, 64–65). Or worse, they are bad people and bad people do not come to the light (John 3:19–21; 8:44). The depiction of Judas is a prime example (John 6:64; 17:12).

Such rhetoric was not the invention of these communities but an almost standard theistic response to joy and pain. We see it in the sectarian documents found at Qumran

[11] On John and the Law, see William R. G. LOADER, *Jesus in John's Gospel: Structure and Issues in Johannine Christology*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017, 443–52.

[12] William R. G. LOADER, "Competing Spiritualities: Reflections on John 6 in Global Perspective," in *Matthew, Paul, and Others: Asian Perspectives on New Testament Themes*, Papers of the Society for New Testament Studies Asia Pacific Liaison Committee Conference, Taipei, 19–21 October, 2018, eds., William LOADER, Boris REPSCHINSKI, and Eric WONG (Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press, 2019), 275–89.

[13] See the discussion in William R. G. LOADER, "Dissent and Disparagement. Dealing with Conflict and the Pain of Rejection in the Gospel according to John," *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 77.2 (2021): 1–8. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i2.6570; also in LOADER, *Christology, Soteriology, and Ethics*, 263–78.

(1QS III, 13–IV, 26).[14] It usually sits comfortably though paradoxically beside the assumption that by changing their minds, repenting, people could change categories and move from the non-elect to the elect group.

Alongside issues of joy and pain in response to mission went also competitive marketing. It enhanced one's persuasive power if one could offer exclusive advantage, as advertisers do in claiming that only their product achieves certain goals and others do not.

Processing the disaster of Jesus' shameful death included attributing to it vicarious significance, such as had been attributed to the deaths of Maccabean martyrs and the suffering servant in Isaiah 53. This could well have sat alongside other traditions which spoke of God's forgiving grace, such as is assumed in the Lord's Prayer, in Jewish tradition generally and in the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus, and does so in each of the gospels. At some stage, however, and in some circles, and I suspect in the interests of seeking to win over converts, this understanding of Jesus' death morphed into an exclusive claim that Jesus' death was the sole basis on which forgiveness and reconciliation with God, including acquittal at the judgement was possible.[15] This, for some, became *the* gospel for both Jews and gentiles. Few apparently would have seen and have seen since, that this sat awkwardly with the early traditions which affirm John's and Jesus' message of forgiveness of sins for all who repent (Mark 1:4; 2:10; Matt 3:6; 6:12, 14–15; 9:2, 6; Luke 11:4), not to speak of Israel's faith tradition (Psalm 51).

Such exclusive claims raised acutely the issue of continuity because a declaration of discontinuity is implicit in the claim that salvation and forgiveness of sins was not possible before Jesus' death or at least before his coming. Two examples of dealing with this crisis which embrace a similar solution are the fourth gospel and Hebrews. In John the pain (and anger) is still evident in its depiction of exchanges between Jesus and his Jewish contemporaries where he deems them the devil's children for rejecting him (8:44). The author depicts Jesus as far from rejecting his Jewish faith. Never disparaging it, he asserts that the Law was indeed God's gift but then describes it as limited in time and scope to being a witness and a foreshadowing of God's new and superior gift of Jesus (1:16–17). It was both temporary and limited in application to the lower order of reality, called in a non-

[14] William R. G. LOADER, "Sexuality Issues and Conflict Development in Qumran Literature," in *"Wisdom Poured Out Like Water": Studies on Jewish and Christian Antiquity in Honor of Gabriele Boccaccini*, Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies 38, eds., J. H. ELLENS, I. W. OLIVER, J. VON EHRENBROOK, J. WADDELL, and J. ZURAWSKI (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018), 232–50, also in LOADER, *Sexuality and Gender*, 223–40; Craig KEENER, *The Gospel of John. A Commentary*. 2 vols. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2005), 762.

[15] On this see William R. G. LOADER, "Forgiveness Monopoly? Identity Formation and Demarcation in the Jesus Movement," in *Tempel, Lehrhaus, Synagoge. Orte jüdischen Gottesdienstes, Lernens und Lebens. Festschrift für Wolfgang Kraus*, eds., Christian EBERHART, Martin KARRER, Siegfried KREUZER, and Martin MEISER (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2020), 351–64.

disparaging tone the "flesh" in contrast to the "spirit," the higher reality (3:6; 4:20–24; 6:63).

We see a similar use of this popular platonic apocalyptic frame of reference applied more systematically but without so much pain and anger in Hebrews. The Law provided the earthly cult, including Atonement Day ritual, to deal with ritual impurity, and as such in part reflected the heavenly reality and typologically foreshadowed the event on the basis of which alone forgiveness of sins and so reaching *teleiosis*, the goal of God's heavenly presence, was made possible (7:18–19; 9:8–12; 11:39–30).[16] The claim to continuity rests on a salvation historical perspective as in John but at the expense of a reduction of the old which scarcely can be claimed to do it justice. Much is lost in that transition.

7. Loss and Gain in Translation and Transition

Hope transitioned from below to above. Good news transitioned from being for all in Judea and Galilee to being for all who joined the movement. Christology transitioned from messianic agency to divine wisdom and word. Forgiveness transitioned from being based on God's generosity to being based on exclusive benefits available on through Christ's death. Love made its transition to all, indeed, but with gain and loss.

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[16] See the discussion in William R. G. LOADER, "Ethics in Hebrews: Faith in Danger," in LOADER, *Christology, Soteriology, and Ethics*, 367–74.

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