

## **THE CHRISTOLOGY OF JAMES**

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To do research on the book of James is to weary of reading Luther's dictum about its being a "right strawy epistle." That remark not only tells us more about Luther than it does the book of James, but it has influenced the interpretation of this epistle since the time of the Reformation. The book has become better known for its omissions than its affirmations. Indeed, the latter are tacitly feared as anti-Pauline and thus more often defended than declared. To be sure, what is not (apparently) in the book of James may be at first striking. There is no mention of the cross, Christ's triumph over the powers of evil, the resurrection, the gift of the Spirit, or baptism and the Lord's Supper. Most noticeable perhaps among the omissions in this NT book are frequent references to Jesus and His Christological titles.

But James must be appreciated in its own right. It does not show its best colors against the background of a Lutheran-style Paulinism. The so-called problems of the theology and/or Christology of the book of James are, it seems to me, more matters of the paradigms and methods with which it is examined than its supposed sub-Christian qualities. Seen, for example, in connection with other NT books such as Matthew and Hebrews (to say nothing of Paul under a better light) the book of James acquires a better field from which its own hues may be perceived.

Though given the form of an epistle the book of James is frequently referred to as Christian wisdom literature. However that may be in terms of genre questions, it is certainly clear that James has a very practical orientation. That is, James is concerned not so much with evangelistic questions as with issues related to the practice of the faith. Because of its orientation, therefore, the theological implications of the book are often more implicit than explicit. Though implicit, however,

the traditional theological views of the book are nonetheless very real. One does not have to look very long or very hard at the sometimes casually expressed theological categories and/or allusions in James to realize that this book is certainly worthy of a rightful place within the canon of sacred books which comprise and reflect the earliest (and normative) Christian and apostolic theology.

### *I. James and Early Christian Theological Traditions*

Though often assumed and not clearly expressed, it is clear that the practical exhortations in James are undergirded by the earliest categories and theological traditions of the apostolic church. Though by no means exhaustive, the following observations should suffice to suggest the underlying theological structures that are operative for the author of this epistle.

#### *The Use of Traditional Texts, Illustrations and Phrases*

James shares with a number of other NT writers the use of the Abraham stories as a model of faith/obedience (2:21-23). Paul of course makes extensive use of the covenant promises to Abraham (and Abraham's subsequent trust) in Romans 4 and Galatians 3. The author of Hebrews likewise finds in Abraham a very congenial model of faith, obedience and hope (6:13-20; 7:1-10; 11:8-12, 17-19). Of course, Abraham as a model of faith was not unknown in Judaism, and that alone, it could be argued, is sufficient to account for James' use of it. But, as we shall see later, James' use of the Abraham stories seems to represent a dialogue with an already existent Christian use of Abraham as a model of faith. In this connection it is interesting to note that both Jas 2:23 and Rom 4:3, in their quotation of Gen 15:6 (Ἐπίστευσεν δὲ Ἀβραὰμ τῷ θεῷ, καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην), agree in reading (against the LXX) Ἐπίστευσεν δὲ for καὶ ἐπ. While Philo also has the same reading, what we may in any case be encountering here is the traditional Christian variant of the text.

As a further example of the Christian use of OT texts in James, it may be noted that the use of Lev 19:12-18 throughout James<sup>1</sup>--though having no doubt its own unique nuances--is in a common vein with the use of that same passage in Matt 5:43-48, and especially 22:39 (par. Mark 12:31). With regard to the latter passage (Matt 22:39, par. Mark 12:31), it should be noted that the commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18) is referred to as second only to the

<sup>1</sup>See L. T. Johnson, "The Use of Leviticus 19 in the Letter of James," *JBL* 103 (1982) 391-401.

commandment of the *Shema* (Deut 6:4, 5). The exegetical tradition whereby Lev 19:18 and Deut 6:4, 5 were combined may no doubt be attributed to Jesus himself. Not only, however, was the connection not lost in either the Matthean or Markan traditions, but neither apparently was it lost in James who likewise affirms, though in separate (but not unrelated) passages, the theological implications for the Christian of both the *Shema* (2:19) and the second commandment (2:8).

Another example of traditional Christian exegesis in James is found in the joint use of the Rahab and Abraham stories. Though it is difficult to tell whether there is any literary dependence between James and Hebrews, the clear fact is that both made use of Josh 2:1-16 by way of alluding to Rahab as an OT model of faith.<sup>2</sup> Though issues related to literary dependence, dating, origin and the definition of faith/hope are very complex, what seems nevertheless to be clear is that the use of both Abraham and Rahab as models of faith is to be attested only in Christian traditions, i.e., Heb 11:8-12, 17-19, 31; Jas 2:20-26.

James also shows a number of early Christian exegetical affinities with 1 Peter. In quoting rather literally the Septuagintal reading of Prov 3:34, Jas 4:6 agrees with 1 Pet 5:5 in substituting θεός for the LXX's κύριος. This particular minor agreement (followed apparently by the author of I Clem 1:30), though theologically insignificant in terms of the meaning of the text, again illustrates the affinity of James with other early Christian materials. Similarly, Jas 5:20 and 1 Pet 4:8 reflect a common early Christian interpretive/sermonic use of Prov 10:12, where we read, "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions." The common interpretive and exegetical traditions reflected in James and 1 Peter are evidenced again in 1:10, 11 and 1 Pet 1:24 where the former clearly alludes to, and the latter explicitly quotes Isa 40:6, 7. Finally, we may note merely in passing that the use of Amos 9:12 in Acts 15:17 seems to have found further Christian use in Jas 2:7. While not exhaustive, the above instances of OT use by James in common with other traditional uses of those same passages in primitive Christianity reflect at a deep level the thoroughly Christian frame of reference within which OT Scripture was appropriated by James.

Not only in the use of Scripture does James show itself to be of a piece with other early Christian theological communities, but it is also heir to (and perhaps also the ancestor of) a number of phrases and

<sup>2</sup> Discussion of dating and literary dependence with respect to James and Hebrews maybe found in B. W. Bacon, "The Doctrine of Faith in Hebrews, James and Clement of Rome," *JBL* 19 (1000) 12-21; F. W. Young, "The Relation of 1 Clement to the Epistle of James," *JBL* 67(1948) 339-45; and D. A. Hagner, *The Use of the Old and New Testaments in Clement of Rome* (SuppNovT 34; Leiden: Brill, 1973).

expressions that seem to have been part of the common theological stock of early Christianity. Though the similarities of James with other NT books are too numerous to delineate exhaustively,<sup>3</sup> the following parallels of thought and expression between James and the Pauline and Petrine traditions of the NT will demonstrate the congenial nature of the theology of James within the framework of early Christianity.

First, taking the two traditions together, we may note that (as P. Davids in his recent commentary has shown<sup>4</sup>) there is a rather impressive similarity of thought and language that exists between Jas 1:2-4 and Rom 5:2b-5, on the one hand, and 1 Pet 1:6-7 on the other.

Rom 5:2b-5	Jas 1:2-4	1 Pet 1:6-7
3. knowing that tribulation produces perseverance	3. knowing that the testing of your faith produces perseverance	7. so that the testing of your faith, more precious than gold which perishes
4. and perseverance a tested character, and tested character hope.	4. and let perseverance have a mature result	through testing by fire,
5. and hope does not disappoint		may be found
because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit Christ who was given to us.	so that you may be mature and complete lacking in nothing.	to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus

Also, James shares with Pauline and Petrine traditions the common early Christian expression often found in baptismal and/or ethical contexts regarding the "putting off" of sin and/or the old way of living (1:21; Rom 13:12; Eph 4:22; Col 3:8; 1 Pet 2:1; cf. Heb 12:1). Finally, all

<sup>3</sup> The dated but still masterly work of J. B. Mayor, *The Epistle at St. James: The Greek Text with Introduction Notes and Comments and Further Studies in the Epistle at St. James*, 3rd. ed. (London: MacMillan, 1913), may profitably be consulted regarding the literary relationship of James to other parts of the NT and, indeed, to earlier (both biblical and non-biblical) materials. See especially LXXXV-CXXXVII.

<sup>4</sup> P. Davids, *The Epistle at James: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1982) 66. Though we do not supply the Greek texts here, even the English translations suggest an impressive similarity of thought and language.

three traditions speak of a glorious crown to be received (1:12; 1 Cor 9:25; 1 Pet 5:4; see also Rev 2:10, 3:11).

Considering the Pauline traditions alone, the following (randomly chosen) parallels of thought and expression may be noted. First, both Paul and James are convinced that it is the poor and lowly who have received the mercies of God (1 Cor 1:27; Jas 2:5). Second, though the cross and resurrection are not explicitly mentioned in James, they are surely implicit in the reference in 1:18 to the gospel as "the word of truth" (λόγῳ ἀληθείας), which reference moreover is quite common in the traditional Pauline literature and may be noted in 2 Cor 6:7 (without the article, as in James), Col:5; Eph 1:13; and 2 Tim 2:15. Third, it may be noted that Jas 1:18 refers to the people of God as "first fruits" (ἀπαρχή) and thus is of a piece with similar expressions in the Pauline literature whereby the people of God are either said to possess "the first fruits of the Spirit" (Rom 8:23; cf. 2 Cor 1:22, 5:5; Eph 1:14) or are themselves as missionary products called "first fruits" (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:15; cf. Rev 14:4). Fourth, both James (2:10) and Paul (Gal 5:3) speak of the holistic demand that is related to the keeping of the law.

Regarding the parallels of thought and language between James and 1 Peter the greetings of both works refer to the scattered people of God (1:1; 1 Pet 1:1). Second, both traditions think of the Christian as both free and a slave (1:1, 1:25, 2:12; 1 Pet 2:16). Finally, while we observed above the common use of Prov 3:34 in both Jas 4:6 and 1 Pet 5:5, what also deserves to be noted is the immediate exhortation in both subsequent contexts for the believers to submit to God while at the same time resisting the devil (4:7; 1 Pet 5:6, 8). Further parallels of thought and language between James and other NT materials could be adduced, but these are enough to demonstrate that James moves comfortably in the world of expression that was broadly characteristic of primitive Christianity.

### *The Use of an Epistolary Greeting*

The form of an epistle was the most popular form of early Christian literary communication. Though on every other ground the book of James would seem not to be an epistle, the very fact that what in other regards appears to be something akin to wisdom literature and/ or an early Christian sermon is put within the form of a letter reflects the consciousness on the part of the writer that he himself is within an established literary tradition. Other literary forms were available to our author. He chose, however, to address his readers via the form of an epistle and thus placed himself within a common (indeed, the most popular) genre tradition of early Christianity.

*Faith as an "Entry" Term*

Recent works by E. P. Sanders<sup>5</sup> and H. Raisanen<sup>6</sup> have popularized questions of "getting in" (or "entry") and "staying in" ("maintenance"). That is, Sanders and Raisanen have pointed to, especially with regard to the "righteousness" word group in the NT, the differences between Judaism and Christianity with regard to what it takes to enter into the people of God and what is required to remain a member of God's chosen ones. If it is true, as Raisanen has suggested, that "faith" was likely not used in Judaism to refer to the experience of "entry,"<sup>7</sup> then the use of "faith" in Christian literature as a word closely related to the beginning of and/or entry into Christian experience is a uniquely Christian term. In this respect it must be noted that "faith" in James is often used as a "maintenance" term (1:3; 2:1, 5). However, not only do these so-called "maintenance" references presuppose faith as an entry experience, but there are some passages which use "faith" in exclusively that way (i.e., as an "entry" term). The discussions of "hearing" and "doing" (1:1-29) and the relationship of "faith" and "works" (2:14-26) are central in this regard. The "hearing" that is but temporary--like a man who "looks at his natural face in a mirror," but quickly forgets what he looked like upon turning away from the mirror--is "self-deluding" and "worthless," being the opposite of the "humble receiving" of the word of truth which alone can "save" (1:21-26). Thus, it is exactly like the "faith" of 2:14-26 that is merely professed, but "has no works," and thus cannot "save" (2:14). The faith that saves is the faith that humbly receives "the word of truth" (1:18, 21) and proves itself by works to be that of a "doer of the word"; which is why our author can argue in the intervening passage of 2:1-13 that "your faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious One," cannot be expressed with elitism. Instead, the readers must show themselves to be "fulfillers" of the "royal law" (2:8) just as the genuine "doer" is the one who looks intently at the "perfect law" (1:25); as we will see below, both expressions, the "perfect law" and the "royal law," are tied together in synonymity by the mutually qualifying expression, "the law of liberty" (1:25, 2:12). The basic point to be made here, however, is that for James the faith

<sup>5</sup> Sanders' thought can be best traced out in four of his works: "Patterns of Religion and Rabbinic Judaism: A Holistic Method of Comparison," *HTR* 66 (1973) 455-78; *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); "Paul's Attitude toward the Jewish People," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 33 (1978) 175-87; and *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

<sup>6</sup> H. Raisanen, "Galatians 2.16 and Paul's Break with Judaism," *NTS* 31 (1985) 543-53.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 546.

that "saves" is a "humble receiving" (of the "word") which is defined in terms of "doing" and "works." Such a faith is, to use Sanders' terminology (about which I actually have some misgivings) the experience of both entry and maintenance.

### *Early Christian Eschatology*

The eschatology of James is not unlike other expressions of early Christian eschatology (which have both present and future elements) in that the blessings of heaven are already being experienced--"blessed is a man who perseveres under trial"--and yet await a final consummation--"he will receive the crown of life"--no doubt at the "coming (παρουσία) of the Lord" (1:12; 5:7). In this regard, the same imminent expectation of the Lord's return that is to be found throughout the NT (Mark 13:33-37; Rom 13:11,12; 1 Pet 4:7) maybe attested also in James (5:8). Nor is the early Christian connection between ethics and eschatology (Matt 25:31-46; 1 Cor 15:58; 1 Thes 4:18; Phil 3:17-21; Col 3:4ff.) missing in James, for the references in 5:7, 8 to the imminent return of the Lord are precisely for the purpose of exhorting moral perseverance on the part of the readers. In addition, the early Christian belief that final judgment will be based on works<sup>8</sup> (cf. Matt. 25:31-46; Acts 17:30, 31; Rom 2:5-16, 14:10-12; 1 Cor 3:13-15; 2 Cor 5:10, 9:6, 11:15; Gal 6:7; Col 3:25; Eph 6:8; 1 Tim 5:24-25; 2 Tim 4:14; 2 Pet 3:8-13; Rev 20:11-15) is also strongly implied in James (4:11, 12; 5:1-5, 9).

### *The Use of Dominical Sayings*

The authoritative status of the sayings of Jesus was a common perception in primitive Christianity. The very existence of the gospels and the communities out of which and for which they were produced is rather straight-forward evidence of the fact that the words of the Master assumed an authoritative role and function within the earliest Christian fellowships. The gospel of Matthew, especially, reflects (and no doubt also encouraged) the extensive use of the sayings of Jesus within the earliest periods of Christian confession. The fact that Matthew is regarded as--if not the first--then at least the most widespread and extensively used of the four gospels in early Christian worship reinforces this point.

Though it was a commonplace in NT studies of several decades ago to remark the paucity of references to the ministry and teachings of

<sup>8</sup> See the recent and excellent work of K. Snodgrass, "Justification by Grace--To the Doers: An Analysis of the Place of Romans 2 in the Theology of Paul," *NTS* 32 (1986) 72-93, on this very interesting dimension of NT soteriology/eschatology.

Jesus in the epistles of the NT, it is now thought entirely possible that the sayings of Jesus were so integral a part of early Christian catechism and instruction (perhaps even a part of evangelistic instruction) that they may have been presumed as familiar to many in the various churches.<sup>9</sup> How far that assumption may be pressed, however, is not certain. What is clear, at any rate, is that the epistles of the NT are not entirely without reference to the sayings of Jesus and their presumed authoritative status. For example, the use of the sayings of Jesus in the literature of the Pauline churches has been frequently observed (see 1 Cor 7:10, 9:14, 10:33 [par. Mark 10:44], 11:24, 25; 1 Thes 4:15; cf. also Col 3:16; Gal 6:2; Eph 4:17). More specifically, the impact of the traditions contained in the Sermon on the Mount upon Rom 12:1-15:7 has been often noted.<sup>10</sup> Outside the Pauline traditions we may note that Mark 13 and the apocalyptic sayings of Jesus reflected therein have certainly influenced the Revelation,<sup>11</sup> and Acts 20:35 (reporting words of Paul) explicitly cites an otherwise unknown saying of the Lord. Finally, covering a wide range of NT traditions, we may observe, as suggested by many,<sup>12</sup> that the "stone" passage of Rom 9:32, 33; Eph 2:19-22, and 1 Pet 2:4-10 are based upon the exegetical uses of Isa 8:14, 28:16 and Ps 118:22 as established already by Jesus and reflected in the synoptic traditions (Matt 21:33-46; par. Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19).

James is by no means an exception to this common early Christian practice of employing the sayings of Jesus. It is to be noted, of course, that James nowhere explicitly cites a saying of Jesus as such, but the words of Jesus are so very clearly woven into the very structure of James' instruction that we may conclude that the authoritative use and status of the dominical sayings for the author of James and his readers was an unquestioned assumption. James' use of what we call the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) is so well known as scarcely to need

<sup>9</sup> G. B. Caird, *The Apostolic Age* (London: Duckworth, 1965) 73-82; also, C. F. D. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament*, 3rd rev. and rewritten ed. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982) 177-99.

<sup>10</sup> So F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Tyn NT.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963) 228; *Paul: The Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Paternoster, 1977) 96; cf. W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge 1977) 398f.

<sup>11</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1974) 129ff.

<sup>12</sup> R. N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 202-4. The "stone" passages have also received excellent treatment in K. Snodgrass, "1 Peter 11.1-10: Its Formation and Literary Affinities," *NTS* 24 (1977) 97-106; *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants* [WUNT 27; Tiibingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1983].

demonstration.<sup>13</sup> Leaving aside the less certain instances of James' employment of the Jesus traditions found within the Great Sermon, the following represent rather clear-cut instances wherein those sayings of Jesus have found expression in the teaching material of James. Though the allusions are clearer when looked at in Greek, the following side-by-side comparison of even the English texts of the relevant passages from the Sermon on the Mount and James makes clear the similarities.

Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7)	James
5:3: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.	2:5: . . . did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom. . . ?
5:7: Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.	2:13: for judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.
5:11,12: Blessed are you when men revile you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me./Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.	1:2; 5:9, 10: Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials. . . /Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves be not judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door./ As - an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.
5:34-37: But I say to you, make no oath at all; Neither by heaven. . . /or by the earth. . . or by Jerusalem. . . / Nor . . . by your head. . . /But let your statement be, "Yes, yes" or "No, no" and anything beyond these is of evil.	5:12: But above all, my brethren, do not swear either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but let your yes be yes, and your no, no; so that you may not fall under judgment.
6:19: Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.	5:2, 3: Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten./Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the Last Days that you have stored up your treasure!
6:24: No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and	4:4, 8: You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world

<sup>13</sup> Mayor, *James* LXXXV-LXXXVII.

love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon.

6:34: Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

7:1: Do not judge lest you be judged yourselves.

7:7, 8: Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you./For everyone who asks receives; and he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks it shall be opened.

7:16,17: You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thombushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? /Even so every good tree bears good fruit; but the rotten tree bears bad fruit.

is hostility towards God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God./Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

4:13, 14: Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit."/Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

4:11, 12; 5:9: Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it./There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and destroy; but who are you to judge your neighbor?/Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.

1:5; 4:3: But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him./ You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

3:10-13,18: From the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way./Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? /Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Neither can salt water produce fresh./Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his

7:24, 26: Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon a rock. . . / And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand.

good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom./ And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

1:22-25: But prove yourselves doers of the word, not merely hearers who delude themselves./For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror;/for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was./But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does.

While numerous other allusions could be suggested, the above are sufficient to show that the sayings of Jesus are a rich part of the theology and experience of our author, a fact which places him squarely within the traditions and practices of early Christianity.

#### *The Knowledge of Pauline Traditions*

J. B. Mayor<sup>14</sup> has argued that Paul, in writing Romans, knew the book of James--a fact which, according to Mayor, accounts for certain similarities of expression, especially regarding "justification by faith" and the similar use of Abraham as a model of saving faith (2:14-26). Most scholars, of course, would no longer agree that Paul had access to James, but there seems to be little doubt that Jas 2:14-26 represents a dialogue involving Pauline traditions. It is certainly not necessary, however, to argue that James is consciously contradicting the great apostle. In fact, there is nothing in the implied theology of those whom James opposes that could be supported in the writings of Paul. The apparent similarity of the opponents' views to certain Pauline expressions makes it probable that James is in fact responding to a kind of perverted Paulinism. There can be little doubt that Pauline theology exerted an enormous influence throughout the various centers of early Christianity in the formative years of the major church traditions.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. XCI-CII.

<sup>15</sup> M. Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity*, tr. J. Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); S. Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) especially, 100-36.

Therefore, it should not surprise us that, just as Paul himself had to combat various antinomian perceptions of his theology (cf. Rom 6:1; Gal 2:15-21) so there may be standing behind the polemic of Jas 2:14-26 a kind of misrepresented Paulinism. At any rate, the point that is to be made here is that, while James does not correct misrepresentations of Paul in the way that Paul himself would have (and did), his own language and thought were nonetheless certainly congenial with certain similar expressions in Paul whereby we read that faith has its expression in lifestyle (cf. collectively Gal 5:6; 6:15; 1 Cor 7:19).<sup>16</sup>

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The point to all that has been presented thus far is relatively simple: the theology of James is not alien to the theological currents of primitive Christianity as reflected in the canonical literature. Though some scholars have treated the book of James as if it were merely a Jewish document to which a couple of traditional Christian references to the "Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1; 2:1) were added so as to give it Christian acceptability, such handling, we are convinced, does no justice to the almost unconscious use of traditional Christian materials, phrases and texts at virtually every literary stratum of the book. Moreover, the theology of James, while often more implicit than explicit, given its extremely practical bent, is nonetheless real and is evidenced in the deep structures of our author's thinking and belief. As we continue by considering the Christology of James, the implicit but nonetheless real pattern of Christian confession continues to be evident.

## II. *An Implicit Christology*

What James has to say about Christ lies for the most part beneath the surface of the practical exhortations in the book. In attempting to uncover the Christology of James, therefore, we must look not only at what James says about Christ, but at what James seems to assume about Christ in the course of his ethical instructions. The following represents a brief summary of the Christological statements that can be made as a reflection of the implicit Christological assumptions underlying the explicit paraenesis of the book.

### *Christ the Teacher and Prophet*

We've noted already the impact of the traditions contained in what we call the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5- 7) upon the thinking of our

<sup>16</sup> Snodgrass, "Justification" 85-87.

to author. There is little doubt that the teachings of Jesus had a very great impact upon James. There is more to be said in this regard but it will be deferred until we consider the explicit Christological title of "Lawgiver" as discussed below. What may be remarked here, however, is that the central (and serious) function of teaching for James (3:1) was no doubt enhanced by the teaching role our author saw modeled in the life of his Lord, a fact which, again, is reflected in the extensive use of Jesus' sayings to be found in this short work. But it was not only the content of Jesus' teaching that seems to have touched our author, since, for the author of James, teaching was no mere academic enterprise, but a task of morally compelling urgency fraught with eschatological significance (3:1). In addition to the re-interpreted legal content to which James fell heir as a Christian teacher, there was the authority, the prophetic passion of Jesus that was likewise conveyed with the teachings themselves. Literary analysis easily suggests the teachings of Jesus as a primary source for the exhortations of James. If, however, we inquire further, as to the source of James' prophetic passion and tone, we are once again thrown back upon the similar and very reasonable explanation of the historical Jesus as the originator, in this case, of the rather innovative conflation of rabbinic and prophetic roles in early Christianity<sup>17</sup> (see Acts 13:1; 1 Cor 12:28, 29; 14:26-33; Eph 4:11; cf. Acts 11:21; Eph 2:20, 3:5) and especially James (see below). For Jesus to have been regarded as both "rabbi" and "prophet" is historically unusual, to say the least, and provides the most plausible explanation for the--again, unusual--conflation in James of what appears to be wisdom literature delivered with prophetic tone. The blunt, often harsh remarks of the historical Jesus directed to either his religious enemies (Matt 12:34; 15:7, 14; 16:4; 21:31; 22:18; 23:1-36; Luke 16:15; 20:41), or, in some cases, even bitingly delivered to his own disciples (Matt 8:26; 15:16; 16:8-11, 23; 17:17,20; Luke 9:31) is, in turn, likely reflected in the often searing tone evidenced by the author of James. Just as the Master himself could call his disciples "friends" (Luke 12:4) or "little flock" (Luke 12:32) on the one hand and "unbelieving and perverted" (Luke 9:41), on the other, or could even so sternly rebuke his disciples for

<sup>17</sup> See D. E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 103-6, where the simplistic notion--which asserts that the prophetic movement ceased and was followed by the rabbinic--is certainly qualified, though the notion is itself, as Aune concedes, representative of the opinion of classical rabbinic tradition. Aune does admit that there is a relative re-emergence of the prophetic movement in and through early Christianity. Indeed, Aune argues that the rabbinic claim that the prophetic movement had ceased and was superseded by them (the rabbis) is itself an attestation of the relative resurgence of the prophetic movement in Christian circles (and perhaps elsewhere).

their moral and/or intellectual stubbornness that they were afraid to question him (Luke 9:41-45), so James seems unaware of any psychological or spiritual contradiction in his own references to his readers as both "beloved brethren" (1:16, 19; 2:5; see also 1:2, 9; 2:1, 14; 3:1; 4:11; 5:7, 9, 10, 12) and "double-minded" (4:8, cf. 1:8), "adulteresses" (4:4) who are proud (4:6), quarrelsome (4:1) and "judges with evil motives" (2:4).

Some of the problematic passages frequently encountered in the study of James with regard to the identity of those whom he so severely rebukes--i.e., are they Christians or non-Christians<sup>18</sup>--may perhaps be fruitfully advanced by taking note of this prophetic phenomenon. The seemingly incongruous nature of the various epithets is as easily explained as a derivative of the tone of Jesus (without omitting due regard for the author's own personality) as our author's hortatory instructions are of the content of Jesus' sayings.

#### *The Lord Who Heals and Forgives*

The healing ministry of Jesus seems, for our author, to have continued into the life of the early church, assuming that the anointing of the sick with oil "in the name of Lord" (5:14; cf. 2:7 which is discussed below) is a reference to the name of the Lord Jesus. If that is so, and the probability seems to lie in that direction, it would then be a work of the risen Lord in healing that is referred to in 5:15 with the expression "the Lord will raise him up." If these two references to "the Lord" (5:14, 15) are indeed references to Christ, then the promise of forgiveness for the physically stricken one who has also committed sins (5:15) would likewise seem to represent the work of the risen Lord. The Lord who heals also forgives. The healing of the afflicted sinner seems thus reminiscent of the story of the healing of the paralytic (Mark 2:1-12 and par.) wherein a similar connection between forgiveness and healing is evidenced, as is also the Lord's work of "raising" him up (5:15; Mark 2:11, 12) in response to the effective value of the faith of others (5:14, 15; Mark 2:5). It seems clear that for James the historical Jesus continues to work in the community of faith and that, conversely, the heavenly Lord who works in the worship and experience of the Christian community is not discontinuous with the historical Jesus, the memory of whom has not faded and whose words were still highly regarded.

#### *The Friend of Sinners*

The explicit reference in 2:1 to "our glorious Lord Jesus Christ" stands in the service of an exhortation against "personal favoritism,"

<sup>18</sup> Davids, *James* 76-78.

Here the injunction not to make "distinctions among yourselves, and become fudges with evil motives" by showing favoritism to the wealthy and despising the poor seems to assume the historically based gospel traditions regarding the fellowship of Christ with sinners. Though the basic theological appeal in 2:5 to the fact that God has chosen the "poor of this world to be rich in faith" is not apparently a Christological reference, when seen in the light of the explicit title that in 2:1 introduces this injunction against elitism, it suggests unmistakably that it is in fact the ministry of Jesus and His identity with the poor and outcast that is being referred to by the reference in 2:5 to God's "choosing of the poor of this world." Put another way, God's "choosing of the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom" is a theocentric description for our author of the ministry of Jesus. Seen in this way our Lord's identity with, and announcement of good news to, the poor constitutes the implicit historical and/or Christological basis of our author's ethical instruction here. Not unknown to James therefore is the Jesus who ate with sinners (e.g., Luke 5:29-32; 7:36-50) and announced the good news of the kingdom to the poor (e.g., Luke 4:18; 6:20-26; 7:22).

#### *A Wisdom Pneumatology/Christology*

In this matter the Christological implications may well seem to be very remote, but considering the fact that both the categories of wisdom and Spirit/spirit are Christological in virtually every other corner of NT theological tradition, it may at least be noted here that the category of wisdom is certainly not absent from James and--while it does not seem to imply directly a Christology--it certainly suggests a pneumatology, which itself may have had Christological undertones for our author.<sup>19</sup> The notion of wisdom is suggested in at least three contexts (1:5-8; 16-18; 3:13-18). While the term "wisdom" does not appear in the 1:16-18 passage the verbal and theological clues (where wisdom is "of God," "from above," "unwavering," and "good") provided by the other two contexts in which the term is explicitly used make it clear that here too our author is referring to wisdom.

The connection between Spirit/spirit and wisdom in the OT and other Jewish materials (Gen 41:38-39; Exod 31:3; Isa 11:2; Wisdom of Solomon 1:6; 7:7,22) is well established. Moreover, that connection is certainly not lost in the NT. Indeed, in the Pauline writings we see that wisdom, which in the OT involves the ability to live life under the will of God, is not only used in passages which draw out the implications of the divine Spirit for Christian experience (1 Cor 2:1-16; 12:8; cf. Eph 1:17; 3:5, 10, 16), but is also frequently referred to in the absence of

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 51-54.

other more explicit references to the Spirit, but in ways that are parallel to what is elsewhere the work of the Spirit in producing a life that is pleasing to God (Col 1:9; 3:16; 4:5). The synoptic traditions likewise reflect the connection between wisdom and Spirit. In Luke 11:13 we read of the heavenly Father who, even more than an earthly father, gives good gifts--in this case the Holy Spirit--to His children who ask Him. It is interesting to note that the Matthean parallel (7:11) does not refer to the Holy Spirit but simply to "what is good" as that which is given to those who ask the generous Father. Neither synoptic passage uses the term "wisdom," but certainly the obedient life of wisdom is in view. Furthermore, when read in tandem with the wisdom passages in James and the established Jewish traditions connecting spirit and wisdom, these synoptic traditions (Matt 7:11; Luke 11:13) seem much less dissimilar: i.e., the reference to the Spirit being apt in Luke, and likely implied in the more Jewishly conceived Matthew. Thus, in Matthew and James the reference to the Spirit seems implied, in Luke (like Paul) it is more explicit. In all cases, the life that is pleasing to God is in view. Whereas Paul (cf. also John) has what is often described as a wisdom Christology, James has, it would seem, analogous to the synoptic traditions reflected in Matt 7:11 and Luke 11:13, a wisdom pneumatology.

To what extent James' wisdom pneumatology reflects also a wisdom Christology is difficult to demonstrate, but it does not seem a far remove, given what we have seen already in terms of James' theocentric understanding and ethical use of the ministry of Jesus as "God's choosing of the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom" (2:5). If Paul's Spirit theology in Gal 5:22, 23 is in some way a reminiscence of the historical Jesus, then it is not too far-fetched to ask whether James' wisdom paraenesis may not likewise reflect a certain understanding of the historical Jesus and/or his life of wisdom and obedience to God.<sup>20</sup> In this connection it is interesting to note that the implicit Christology thus far uncovered in James is largely dependent on historical traditions regarding the life of Jesus. It has been assumed by some that the primary residue of the historical Jesus is found indirectly in the deposit (to be recovered by the variously applied criteria of form criticism) of his life left in the communities in the form of his teachings. While none may doubt that the teachings of Jesus exerted an enormous influence upon the theology and self-

<sup>20</sup> See Davies, *Sermon 346-49* and F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 252-61, who suggest the connection for Paul between the life in the Spirit of Gal 5: 22, 23 and the historical Jesus; note well that Paul's "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22, 23) and James' "wisdom from above" (Jas 3:17, 18) are not at all dissimilar.

understanding of early Christianity--James being a primary witness to that fact--it is nonetheless clear that the life of Jesus as event was not unimportant,<sup>21</sup> especially (see the discussion above of 2:1ff) for James. Stated in terms of some current discussions, James is not to be thought of as a way station along the trajectory of a non-kerygmatic Christology (Jesus the teacher *cum* holy man) which presumably co-existed with equal force of tradition alongside the (ultimately triumphant) canonical and/ or apostolic traditions (of the crucified Jesus who is now the exalted Lord of the cosmos) and finally emerged literarily in the Gnostic Jesus of Nag Hammadi.<sup>22</sup> For James, as we have seen above and shall also see in what follows, the exalted Lord is none other than the crucified Jesus whose life, as well as his teachings, constituted a normative basis upon which further theological insight (especially certain legal/paraenetic traditions) could be developed (see the discussion above of 2:1ff).

### III. *Explicit Christology*

At this point we must observe that whatever else may be said about the paucity of Christological references in James, they are not entirely lacking. Furthermore, whatever else one may say about the composition history of the book of James in terms of its use of Jewish sources and/ or its character as a piece of first century wisdom literature, the fact is that the text of James as we have it is explicitly Christian. Even without the traditional Christological titles, e.g., 1:1 and 2:1 (there are others: cf. 4:12, 5:9), we have seen enough from this book to know that it lies within the mainstream of early Christian confession theologically and that it has enough of an implicit Christology to suggest that, under different literary circumstances, our author could have told us much more about Christ than he did on this occasion. But the fact still remains that James is not lacking in an explicit Christology.

#### *Christ and Lord*

The two references to the "Lord Jesus Christ" (κυρίου [ἡμῶν]-- Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ: 1:1, 2:1) make use of the most characteristic and frequently occurring titles for Jesus in early Christianity. The title "Christ"--while apparently used here as something more akin to a

<sup>21</sup> See the recent study by E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), in which the author begins his study of Jesus not with the teachings, but with the facts of his life, his career, and their consequences.

<sup>22</sup> As in, for example, J. M. Robinson, "Jesus: From Easter to Valentinus (or to the Apostles' Creed)," *JBL* 101 (1982) 5-37; "The Sayings of Jesus: Q," *The Drew Gateway* 54 (1983) 26-38.

name than a title--has not completely lost contact with its Jewish roots (however good or "Hellenistic" the Greek of this document may be) as a reference to "Messiah." Though seldom used publicly by Jesus during the days of his ministry,<sup>23</sup> the title "Christ" and/or "Messiah" was one of the most popular early Christian confessions about Jesus, finding its functional roots in the ministry of Jesus, its decisive shaping *vis-a-vis* the cross of Jesus, and its supreme vindication in the fact of his resurrection from the dead. In this latter connection it was connected with the title "Lord" (cf. Acts 2:33-36; Rom 1:4; 1 Cor 1:2f.; 2 Cor 4:5; Phil 2:6-11; 3:8; Col 2:6; 3:24; 2 Thes 2:1) to form one of the earliest Christological confessions about Jesus. The background of the term "Christ" in Jewish messianism as an expression of the predominantly royal (as opposed to prophetic and priestly) hopes of prophetic/apocalyptic Judaism quite naturally brought this term into the orbit of its often closely-associated fellow term "Lord" (and both with "Son," cf. Rom 1:4; 1 Cor 15:20-28, 57; Col 1:13-20; 2:6).

The term "Lord" has been suggested by some to have arisen in the Hellenistic communities of early Christianity, but its Jewish antecedents are not to be dismissed lightly. The presence of the term in the several hymnic fragments incorporated within the NT materials suggests that the term was part of the very earliest confessions of the Christian faith and thus may well have its rise and setting within the framework of Jewish Christianity.<sup>24</sup> Whatever its provenance it seems clear that the term as such is a reference to the kingly status of the resurrected Jesus, given the early Christian belief that he had acceded to a celestial throne and was seated (as a ruling and interceding agent)<sup>25</sup> at the right hand of the Most High God. The precipitating cause for the Christian ascription of Lordship to Jesus seems to have been the belief in His resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God.<sup>26</sup> The use of both of these early Christian designations with reference to Jesus in the book of James confirms its rightly perceived status within the mainstream of early Christianity .

### *The Glory and the Name*

We place both of these explicit Christological designations together here because each reflects the early Christian tendency to use traditional

<sup>23</sup> R. N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity* (London: SCM, 1970) 63-82.

<sup>24</sup> O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, revised ed., tr. S. G. Guthrie and C. A. M. Hall (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959) 195-237; Longenecker, *Christology* 120-36.

<sup>25</sup> Acts 2:30-36; 5:31; 7:55, 56; Rom 1:4; 8:34; 2 Cor 5:10; Eph 1:20-23; 2:6; 4:8-10; Phil 2:9; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3; 2:5-9; 5:9,10; 7:24-26; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; Rev 1:5; 5:5-14.

<sup>26</sup> Longenecker, *Christology* 128-31.

names of God with reference to Christ. The term "glory" has a long pre-history in Jewish history and theology as a euphemism for Yahweh. As a word that refers, e.g., to the light that could be seen when God was present in the tabernacle in the wilderness (Exod 40:34), the temple of Solomon (1 Kgs 8:11), or Ezekiel's vision of the heavenly throne (1:28), the term "glory" itself came to mean the presence of God and thus was widely used in NT traditions as a reference to the presence of God in Christ,<sup>27</sup> and, as such, was also closely associated with both wisdom and image of God Christology in the NT.<sup>28</sup> In Jas 2:1, where τῆς δόξης is commonly translated as an attributive adjective,<sup>29</sup> and thus rendered as "our glorious Lord Jesus Christ," the reference to "the glory" may more properly be seen as a kind of substantive in its own right. That is, given the use of "glory" as a euphemism for God, and the Christian tendency to transfer traditional names of God to Christ, the passage in question could well be translated "our Lord Jesus Christ, the glory."<sup>30</sup> As to the precise import that is to be given to "the glory," if thus rendered in this reference to "our Lord Jesus Christ," there can be some debate. It could be argued that "glory" here is a straightforward reference to Jesus as the very presence of God and thus, in light of the presence of God revealed in the ministry of the Lord who had fellowship with sinners (cf. 2:5), the readers must be certain not to violate God's Christocentrically-revealed nature and/or continued presence in their fellowship by expressing attitudes of personal favoritism and snobbery. In this sense a presumption of familiarity with, if not an intended allusion to, the historical Jesus may be justifiably deduced from our author's use of "the glory." At the very least the reference to Jesus as "the glory" would seem to be a reference to His exalted status at the right hand of God.

We must note, however, that, even in this latter sense, to confess His glory is still, for our author, to refrain from a disdain for the poor. How one gets theologically from the confession of glory to the stated necessity of solidarity with the poor seems at first psychologically implausible, but, given the common early Christian association of glory with suffering (John 12:23-28; 13:31; 1 Pet 4:12-16; 1 Cor 2:8; 2 Cor

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Matt 16:27; 19:28; Luke 24:26; John 1:14; 2:11; 11:40; 12:23-41; 13:21-32; 17:5, 22,24; Acts 7:55; 22:11; Rom 6:4; 1 Cor 2:8; 2 Cor 3:18; 4:4-6; Eph 1:12, 14, 17; 3:16; Phil 4:19; Col 1:27; 3:4; 2 Thes 2:14; 1 Tim 3:16; Tit 2:13; Heb 1:3; 2:7,9; 1 Pet 1:11, 21; 4:11,13, 14; 5:10; 2 Pet 1:3, 17; Rev 5:12f.; 21:23.

<sup>28</sup> Kim, *Origin* 230f.

<sup>29</sup> So NIV, NASB, and Goodspeed. The KJV, RSV, NEB, TEV, and Living Bible seem to have opted for a compromise translation, "the Lord of glory," though even thus the adjectival sense of τῆς δόξης appears to have predominated.

<sup>30</sup> P. J. Townsend, "Christ, Community and Salvation in the Epistle of James," *EvQ* 53 (1981) 116.

4:4-18; Heb 2:5-10), certainly not impossible. Thus, the ease of transition in James from glory to humility may reflect not only James' familiarity with the profound theological juxtaposition of the cross and resurrection in early Christianity, but especially the paraenetic import of that relationship. In this way we see but another instance of what has been the pattern throughout this early Christian document, viz., explicit exhortation based upon, and itself in turn implying, a rather traditional, primitive Christian theology / Christology.

Jewish emphasis upon "the name" of God is well attested in ancient sources.<sup>31</sup> In the NT it is especially the Jewish Christian materials which reflect very great interest in "the name" as a Christological designation.<sup>32</sup> Just as references to "the name" had earlier become a way to refer to God for Jewish piety, so also the same phrase became, it seems, a reference in early Jewish Christianity to Christ himself. In 2:1, our author exhorts his readers not to pay special attention to the wealthy, for they are the ones who "blaspheme the fair name" which was invoked "over" the early Christians. This latter reference to "the name" which was pronounced "over" believers may well be a reference to baptism. Whether it was in fact the act of baptism whereupon "the name" was pronounced over the readers of James' epistle, it is nonetheless clear that we are confronted here with a Christological reference, for it was no doubt the name of Jesus which constituted the distinctive identity--the "call"--of early Christians and was, in the instances suggested by our author, "blasphemed" by their wealthy oppressors. Just as in the OT the Lord had "called" out for Himself a people to be his own chosen people (Deut 28:10), so also early Christians understood their own self identity in terms of the "Lord Jesus" by whom and through whom they had been called and to whom they were to give their allegiance. The reference in 5:14 to a prayerful anointing "in the name of the Lord" has been discussed above, but may be mentioned again here as another instance of James' use of "the name" as an unmistakable Christological reference to Jesus as the distinctive "Lord" whose "name" may be invoked over the members of the fellowship.

### *Judge and Lawgiver*

The titles "Judge" and "Lawgiver" represent perhaps the most significant, explicit Christological titles in the book of James, if significance is to be measured in terms of relatedness to the distinctive message of a given book. All would agree that the major themes of this

<sup>31</sup> Longenecker, *Christology* 41-46.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

epistle are tied up with a series of related exhortations that enjoin a certain legitimating response to the divine oracles. For example, those who would be "wise" (1:5; 3:13) must be "doers of the word," who look "intently at the perfect law. . . of liberty" (1:22-25) and thus demonstrate the saving faith that "works" and is thereby completed or "perfected" (2:14-26); or, negatively stated and applied to a more specific situation, one who is guilty of transgressing the "royal law" by showing "partiality" (2:8-13) and/or "speaking against a brother" (4:11, cf. 5:9)--thereby arrogantly assuming a posture that stands "against the law" (4:11)--will thus, as a "transgressor" of it (2:11), come under the judgment of the one true Lawgiver and Judge (4:11, 12; 5:9). In a work that for so many scholars apparently defies structure or outline,<sup>33</sup> the seemingly disparate themes of wealth and social preference, evil speech, wisdom, being a doer of the word and having a faith that works are all related at a deeper level to an authoritative entity, or entities, something variously called "the word of truth" (1:18), "the word implanted" (1:21), "the word" (1:22,23), "the perfect law" (1:25), "the law of liberty" (1:25; 2:12), "the royal law" (2:8), "the law" (2:9, 10, 11; 4:11 [three times]) and "the truth" (3:14; 5:19), and to a certain authoritative person, or persons, Someone called "Lawgiver" (4:12; cf. 2:11), "Judge" (4:12; 5:9), "the Lord of Sabaoth" (5:4) and "the Lord" (5:7, 8; cf. also 5:10, 11).

We will seek to identify the "something" and "Someone" mentioned above by beginning with the latter issue at the point in the text (5:7-11) where identification seems easiest and then proceeding backwards to the next obviously related (but more difficult to identify) "Someone" and "something" of 4:11, 12 and then to the also closely related "something" of 2:8-13 and 1:18-25.

The context of 5:1-6 is clearly eschatological. The wicked rich will answer to the Lord Sabaoth, a divine name implying wrath,<sup>34</sup> in the Last Days (5:3f.). The oppressed "brethren" are then exhorted (5:7-11) to "be patient. . . until the coming of the lord. . . , for the coming of the Lord is at hand. . . behold, the Judge is standing right at the door." The references to the *παρουσία* of the Lord in 5:7, 8 are difficult to understand except in the common and virtually technical sense given the phrase in Christian tradition as a reference to the coming of Christ, though it must be remembered that the Christophanic language and expectations of the NT, are, in a certain sense, only a special case of the

<sup>33</sup> So M. Dibelius and Ho Greeven, *James* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), cited by Davids, *James* 23.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Isa 5:9; *σαβαώθ* is used 61 times in Isaiah compared to 9 other instances in the rest of the LXX (Davids, *James* 178).

theophanic hopes of OT religion. By the same token, however, the largely theocentric language of James cannot be divorced from the author's (at least implicit) Christology, in which case *every* theocentric expression may be Christological. However that may be, the rather obviously Christological references in 5:7, 8 to the imminent coming of the Lord mandate a similarly Christological exegesis of the parallel phrase in 5:9 regarding "the Judge" who is standing right at the door" (see Matt 24:33; cf. Rev 3:20). It is the Lord Christ who comes (soon) to judge.

Though most would regard the reference to "Lawgiver and Judge" in 4:12 as strictly a reference to God--given in addition the likely allusion in 5:12b to the saying of Jesus (Matt 10:28) about fearing Him who can destroy both body and soul in Gehenna--it is certainly possible that the reference in 4:12 to "Judge" must be read in the light of 5:9 as Christological. Certainly Christ the Judge is a common early Christian motif and it should not surprise us if theocentric language is used to express it here, as is commonly the case elsewhere in NT tradition (cf. Rev 6). In that case it is Christ the "Lawgiver" whose law is both contravened and slandered by the act of judging the brother--a rather obvious possibility given the allusion here to the dominical injunction in the Sermon on the Mount against "judging" (Matt 7:1). Using this identification (i.e., a Christological one) of the "Lawgiver and Judge," we will suggest as a working hypothesis that the "law" in question here is the Torah of Jesus (apparently largely embodied for James in the Sermon on the Mount traditions). If we are right, it must be seen that "the law" is thus more than the Mosaic Law, it is the law of Israel as given and (re-) interpreted by Jesus the great Lawgiver, and as such it has a strong (though we will not say exclusively) "sayings" (of Jesus) component to it.

Continuing to work backwards, we see that the similar passage in 2:8-13 (where again there is an allusion in 2:13 to the dominical saying of Matt 7:11), regarding the "judging" of the poor man, means the guilty party is, again, a transgressor of "the law" (2:9; cf. 2:10, 11). Here it must be noted that "the law" is also variously called "the royal law" (2:8) and "the law of liberty" (2:12; cf. 1:25). Once again it seems more than plausible to assume that the "law in question here--which is transgressed by the act of showing "partiality" (2:9), and/or the equivalent sin of showing "no mercy" (2:13)--is also the saying of Jesus (Matt 7:1f.) against "judging." The further allusion here to the Matt 7:2 tradition (in 2:13), where both passages suggest that the injunction against judging will be eschatologically enforced by a final judgment that corresponds to the mercy, or lack thereof, shown in this age, confirms the connection between the references to "the law" in 4:11, 12 and those of 2:8-13.

In 2:8-13, however, a further point is made (regarding the holistic nature of the "law") that adds to our hypothesis that the "law" in James is not merely OT law but is in fact the "new law," i.e., the Torah of Jesus. When arguing that the same Lawgiver ("He who said") who forbade adultery also prohibited murder, the author's point is that to violate either ordinance is to sin against "Him." Patently of course the One who forbade such acts was God, the Giver of the Ten Commandments. But we should not fail to note that it was precisely these two of the Ten Commandments (though in the reverse order in James) that received homiletic treatment in the Sermon on the Mount traditions of Matt 5:21-32. This fact lends support to the notion that James' references to the "the law" are not to the Mosaic Law *simpliciter*, but to the Law as interpreted and transmitted for Christian tradition by the New Moses Himself. Of course, this "law" is not, precisely stated, a specific commandment, but the entire obligation (as interpreted by Christ) of the elect before God. To break, however, a specific law (or any specific law), is to be a transgressor of "the law," holistically conceived.

The "royal law" of 2:8 is likewise not to be understood as a single commandment--in this case the injunction, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," Lev 19:18--but as a larger, more comprehensive entity which is of course consistent with and/or expressed by the particular commandment of Lev 19:18, a favorite of Jesus as a summary expression of His teachings *vis-a-vis* the laws of God (Matt 5:43-48; Mark 12:31; cf. Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14). This fact further reinforces the already apparent relationship of synonymy between the three instances of "the law" in 2:9-11 and "the royal law" of 2:8 (it may also be noted that the same status of equivalence exists for the contextually parallel phrase, "the law of liberty" in 2:12). Finally, when we consider the very strong possibility (as suggested by many<sup>35</sup>) that "the royal law" is in fact a reference to "the law of the king" (where Christ is the royal personage in question), we have another significant clue that suggests the Torah of Jesus--i.e., His preaching and teaching understood as the inspired interpretation of the Mosaic Law--as "the law" for James. It is the "instruction" of Jesus that is divinely authoritative and thus may not be ignored with impunity. It is Christ's law which in James is the "law" that may be expressed by the commandment of Lev 19:18 to love one's neighbor and therefore precludes "judging" one's

<sup>35</sup> B. Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964) 29; J. B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 115; H. Jochums, "Der Herr cler Herrlichkeit," in *Christuszeugnis im Nebel des Zeitgeistes: Niciinisches Christusbekenntnis heute* Walter Kilnneth zu Ehren (ed. U. Asendorf and Friedrich-Wilhelm Kiinneth; Neuhausen/ Stuttgart: Neuhausen- Verlag, 1979) 213.

fellow (2:4, 4:11, 5:9) through the merciless acts of partiality (2:9, 13) and harsh criticism (4:11,5:9). God through Christ is the great and final Lawgiver and Judge (2:11, 4:12, 5:9).

Thus far we have argued that "the law" in James is the Torah of Jesus, i.e., the law of God (the Mosaic Law) as taught by Christ. But we hinted earlier that this Torah of Jesus was not necessarily exclusively comprised of sayings traditions from Jesus. The last passage that we will consider in this connection, 1:18-25, forces us to consider the possibility that the "life of Jesus" traditions, i.e., the events of His Christological experience, are also essential to what we are calling the "Torah of Jesus" in James.<sup>36</sup>

We have already seen that James is not unfamiliar with the historical/event traditions regarding Jesus. This fact is again confirmed when we examine the tradition critical background of the various references to "the word" in 1:18-23. The reference in 1:18 to "the word of truth" takes over, as noted earlier, a rather traditional early Christian expression for the gospel (2 Cor 6:7; Col 1:5; Eph 1:13 and 2 Tim 2:15). We may also recall 1 Pet 1:22-25 where-though the exact expression "word of truth" is not found-there is a reference-citing Isa 40:6, 7 which is also alluded to in Jas 1:10, 11--to the faithful "word of God," which is called both "the truth" and the "imperishable seed" that produces "rebirth" and is "the word which was preached to you", i.e., the gospel. The *ad sensum* parallel to this Petrine passage in Jas 1:18, where the faithful Father has "brought us forth by the word of truth," seems clear. The "word of truth" in Jas 1:18 is thus almost certainly something akin to the traditional gospel of early Christianity. Then, in 1:21, the "word of truth" from 1:18 has become "the word implanted (τὸν ἔμφυτον λόγον), which is able to save your souls," a notion again not unlike the reference in 1 Peter to the gospel as the "imperishable seed" (σποράς . . . ἀφθάρτου, 1:23) which, in yet another Petrine con-

<sup>36</sup> Certainly OT Torah is not limited to oracular (divine commandment) materials, but is also based upon historical/narrative traditions. With similar effect, our expression "the Torah of Jesus," has the dual meaning suggested by the twin life settings of Jesus and the church. That is, by "the Torah of Jesus," we are deliberately playing upon the ambiguity of the English "of" so as to refer both to the teachings derived from Jesus and the apostolic theological traditions about Jesus, particularly the apostolic reflections upon not only his words, but his life, especially the significance of the cross and resurrection events (cf. Eph 2:20; 3:4, 5, 9). In so doing we are, at worst, repeating the ambiguity of NT expression wherein it is sometimes extremely difficult to determine whether the author intends to refer to historical sayings of Jesus (Jesus tradition) or to early Christian reflections (Spirit-inspired apostolic traditions) upon the Christ event (see 1 Cor 7:25; 14:37; Col 2:6-8; 3:16; 1 Thes 4:15; 2 Thes 3:6; 1 Tim 4:1-6). At best, we are perhaps illustrating the inextricable link between the history of Jesus (including his words) and the inspired apostolic reflection upon that history. In no case do I suspect that the early church created sayings of Jesus de novo with utterly no regard for the history of Jesus.

text, can similarly produce "the salvation of your souls" (1:9). It seems clear then that our author is referring, in these "word" phrases of 1:18-23, to the rather traditional kerygma of early Christianity, i.e., the message of the cross and resurrection.

Next, it must be noted that the "word" language of 1:18-23 easily, indeed, naturally, coalesces into the "law" terminology of 1:25 (and beyond, i.e., 2:8-13; 4:11, 12; 5:7-11), suggesting thereby the synonymous relationship of those two terminological constellations. The fact that "doers of the word" (ποιηταὶ λόγου, 1:22) are likened to the man who "looks intently (ὄ . . . παρακύψας) at the perfect law, the law of liberty" (εἰς νόμον τέλειον τὸν τῆς ἐλευθερίας), and is thus a "working doer" (ποιητῆς ἔργου, 1:25), likewise argues for the synonymous connection for our author between the "word" of 1:18-23 and the "law" of 1:25. Finally, the parallel references in 1:25 and 2:12 to the "law of liberty" link the various--but equivalent--"word" and "law" references of 1:18-25 to the several "law" references of 2:8-13; 4:11, 12 and 5:7-11 in such a way that the contextually given expressions not only greatly overlap, but, in fact, appear virtually synonymous. Thus, in light of the referential identity of the "word" phrases of 1:18-23 and the "law" expressions of 1:25 (both of which, then, are to be related to the "law" passages of 2:8-13; 4:11, 12 and 5:7-11), we may not assume that references to "law" in James, i.e., what we have called the "Torah of Jesus," lack any reference to the cross and resurrection, i.e., an "event" gospel; nor, on the other hand, that the preached "word . . . which is able to save your souls" lacks didactic demand, i.e., the implications of the teachings of Jesus.

While our passage (1:18-25) seems, therefore, to begin (1:18-23) with rather traditional references to the preached word of the gospel (or an "event" oriented message) and to end (1:24, 25) with certain didactic references to "law" (a body of teaching material), such a shift is more apparent than real. While a shift of some sort undoubtedly does take place between 1:18-21 and 1:22-25, it is not a shift from gospel to law, nor even from gospel (the saving events) to Christian law (the teachings of Jesus). For our author "word" and "law" are synonymous and both suggest the saving acts and words of God through the person of Jesus Christ. Thus, the shift in our passage relates not to the authoritative norm (i.e., whether "word" or "law") to which response must be given, but to the nature of the response itself. That is, whereas in 1:21 the "implanted word" (or "the word of truth" from 1:18) must be "received in humility" (ἐν πραύτητι δέξασθε), in 1:22 the language of response becomes more obviously active, more apparently volitional, for the readers must be "doers of the word" and not merely "self-deluding hearers." The self-deluding hearer is like the forgetful man who has "looked" (κατενόησεν) at himself in a mirror but quickly

forgets his reflection upon departing. But the effective doer is one who "looks intently" at "the perfect law, the law of liberty," "abides" (ὁ παραμείνας) by it and thus will receive the eschatological beatitude of God (μακάριος . . . ἔσται). To what degree the mirror illustration may be pressed so that "the word" and the man's image and/or the mirror may be correlated is open to discussion. But what seems clear in spite of that issue is that "the word" of 1:22, 23--itself an obvious shortening of "the word of truth" and "the implanted word" of 1:18 and 1:21, respectively--has become "the perfect law, the law of liberty" of 1:25. Thus, our passage does not shift its argument from "word" (or "gospel") to "law," nor even from "getting in" to "staying in." Rather, it moves more along the lines of "proclamation" and "legitimation."

Syntactically and contextually the shift in meaning has rather clearly occurred with 1:22 (Γίνεσθε δὲ), but, again, it does not correspond to the shift in terms from "word" to "law," for the "word" complex of phrases is still being used in 1:22, 23 and the "law" complex does not begin until 1:25 (from which point it dominates the remainder of James except for two isolated references to "the truth"-terminology which falls nearer the "word" orbit of concepts (cf. again 1:18)-in 3:14 and 5:19. Thus, the terminological clues for the shift, expressed in terms of response, from saving mercy (proclaimed) to authentic salvation (received) are to be found elsewhere. The theological shift is signalled terminologically with the introduction of the catchwords for "doers" (ποιήται) and "hearers" (ἀκροαταί). It is in fact this very pair of related terms in Matt 7:24-27 that introduces the decisive criterion in the conclusion to the Great Sermon traditions in Matthew whereby the "wise man" is distinguished from the "foolish man" who "hears" the words of Jesus but does not "do" them, and thus comes to eschatological ruin. The source of both James' terminology and legitimating<sup>37</sup> criterion seems clear. But if this connection between the "hearing" and "doing" of Jas 1:22-25 and Matt 7:24-27 is correct, then we must also notice the, parallel use of the term "word" (1:18, 21-23; Matt 7:24, 26). Thus, it also; seems clear, once again--from the same source analysis--that what James means by "word" (1:18, 21-23) cannot be separated, even temporarily, from the "words" of Jesus.

Thus, we are faced with a complex of terms which suggests a rich variety of emphases. What James means by "the word of truth," or, "the word implanted," is certainly, if our earlier tradition analysis is correct, something very much akin to the apostolic "gospel." But that

<sup>37</sup> That the issue in 1:22-25 is "legitimation" seems clear from such expressions as "prove yourselves" (Γίνεσθε) and "delude themselves" (παραλογιζόμενοι ἑαυτοῦς, v.22). Indeed, "legitimation" could well be a decisive issue throughout the book. Cf. 1:26, 27; 2:14-26; 3:13.

divine word of salvation is itself likewise inextricably linked to a body of authoritative teachings which itself both proclaims a new order of life and enjoins an authentic, legitimating response of obedience. In this way the "word" and "law" of James may be very similar to the conception of the kingdom of God as proclaimed by Jesus and reflected in the synoptic (largely Matthean) traditions. For both James and the synoptics the proclamation is both gift and demand. It is the gracious announcement of God's salvation, a salvation that is embodied in the life and teachings of Jesus and received by authentic response.

What seems to have found here its final affirmation in our overall discussion is the fact that the authoritative "something"--i.e., the "word," the "law," the "royal law" and the "law of liberty"--to which an obedient response must be made--the response of an "effective doer" (ποιητῆς ἔργου, 1:25) or of "faith working with works" (ἡ πίστις; συνηγρει τοῖς ἔργοις, 2:22)--is nothing less than the Torah of Jesus: the announcement of God's merciful salvation through the appearance of Him whose gracious words and deeds constitute both the promise and demand of salvation.

#### IV. Conclusion

Perhaps we may conclude these sections on the Christology of James by suggesting that our author's work is more apparently theocentric than Christocentric, but that such a distinction, if rigorously maintained, fails to do justice to the pervasive substratum of Christology<sup>38</sup> in the book. While much of the NT could be said to contain a Christocentric theology, James has what we would call (more after the synoptic pattern?) a theocentric Christology. At any rate, all attempts to divorce theology from Christology will founder against this book, for it is God through Christ whose law must be heard and obeyed. Clearly a Christian work, this example of early Christian literature--a piece of prophetic wisdom in epistolary form--reflects an author who thoroughly familiar with certain important life of Jesus traditions, sayings of Jesus traditions, and the apostolic tradition of primitive Christianity. This author, who calls himself "James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ," is intent upon calling forth from his readers a life of true wisdom, a life that hears the word of God through the person of Jesus Christ and responds with a legitimating obedience of humility and faith.

<sup>38</sup> Regarding the implicit and/or latent Christology of James, see F. Mussner, "'Direkte' und 'indirekte' Christologie im Jakobusbrief," *Catholica* 24 (1970) 111-17; and R. Obermuller, "Hermeneutische Themen im Jakobusbrief," *Bib* 53 (1942) 234-44.

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