

ROMANS 1:3f: AN EARLY CONFESSION OF FAITH IN THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS

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I The Form of the Confession

It is generally agreed that at the beginning of his letter to the Romans Paul cites a common confession of faith, which would have been known and recognized at Rome./1/

The traditional nature of this credal formula is indicated by six actors. Firstly, the participial construction (γενομένου ὀρισθέντος) is typical of such formulae. Secondly, the position of the verb at the beginning of the sentence is reminiscent of Semitic parallelism and therefore significant (*cf.* 1 Cor. 15:3-5; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pt 3:18)./2/ Thirdly, the parallelism in sentence construction points to careful formulation (*cf.* Rom. 4:25). Fourthly, the presence of two Pauline hapaxlegomena, ὀρίξειν (*cf.* Acts 10:42 and 17:31) and πνεῦμα ἁγιοσύνης, suggests a non-Pauline origin. Fifthly, there is the question of non-Pauline style: thus the form γίνεσθαι ἐκ is only to be found in Galatians 4:4, which itself may contain a fragment from an early Christian hymn,/3/ while the phrase ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν is elsewhere used of the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15: 12, 13, 21, 42; *cf.* also Phil. 3:11) and is not, as here,

1. See in particular C. Burger, *Jesus als Davidsson.* *Eine tradition geschichtliche Untersuchung* (FRLANT 98. Göttingen, 1970) 25ff; E. Schweizer, 'Röm 1.3f und der Gegensatz von Fleisch und Geist vor und bei Paulus', *EvT* 15 (1955) 563ff; H. Zimmermann, *Neutestamentliche Methodenlehre. Darstellung der historisch-kritischen Methode* (Stuttgart, 1967) 192ff.
2. See E. Norden, *Agnostos Theos. Untersuchungen zur Formgeschichte religiöser Rede* (Stuttgart, 1956 - 4th edition, 1923) 257.
3. See W. Kramer, *Christ, Lord, Son of God* (SBT 50. ET, London, 1966) 112ff.

connected with Christ's resurrection. The sixth factor is the presence of non-Pauline theology: nowhere else in Paul is Christ's Davidic origin mentioned (2 Tim. 2:8 is certainly another credal formula) nor is Christ's status as Son of God connected with his exaltation. We might also have expected a reference to Christ's death on the Cross if Paul had been responsible for creating the credal formula. With the possible exception of the last factor, none of the above factors would have been sufficient in themselves to indicate a non-Pauline origin. But together these six factors make it conclusive that here in Romans 1:3f Paul is drawing on traditional material.

The precise form of the original formula is difficult to ascertain. Indeed, Eduard Schweizer thinks that the absence of a reference to the Parousia may indicate that the present formula is incomplete.⁴ Doubtless the participles, now in agreement with *περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ*, were originally in the nominative case. The phrase *περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ* must be regarded as a Pauline introductory formula, possibly inserted with a view to softening the apparent adoptionism of the primitive confession. If this be the case, then Paul is here referring to Christ as the pre-existent Son (*cf.* Rom. 8:3 and Gal. 4:4). On the other hand, it may be that this was no conscious correction by Paul: his use of the title 'Son of God' could have been influenced by his expression in verse 1, where he writes of the 'gospel of God'.

The phrase *ἐν δυνάμει* is often regarded as another Pauline insertion, made to counter latent adoptionist tendencies in the confession. However, this is not a necessary conclusion, for this particular usage of *ἐν δυνάμει* is not typically Pauline; thus in none of the eleven instances in which this expression occurs in Paul does it qualify the person of Christ. The nearest parallel is Colossians 1:29, where Christ's work is described as *ἐν δυνάμει*.

4. E. Schweizer, *Jesus Christus im vielfältigen Zeugnis des Neuen Testaments* (Munich/Hamburg, 1968) 73.

The Semitic nature of the expression κατὰ πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης makes it unlikely that this and the corresponding κατὰ σάρκα should be regarded as Pauline additions.⁵ Furthermore for Paul the contrasting pair σὰρξ/πνεῦμα refers to 'the antithesis between sinful man and his behaviour and the holy God and his dealings', whereas here the contrast is at the most between weakness and power (*cf.* Is. 31:3).⁶

With ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν we move onto uncertain ground again. That it has no parallel in the preceding line might point to Pauline origin, particularly in view of the frequent Pauline association of the resurrection with the lordship of Christ (*cf.* Rom. 4:24; 14:9; 1 Cor. 6:14; 2 Cor. 4:14). However, stylistically this phrase is not Pauline, nor is the association of Christ's lordship with his resurrection peculiarly Pauline. We tend to feel that this phrase is pre-Pauline in origin.

Finally the phrase Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν is almost certainly of Pauline origin (*cf.* Rom. 1:7; 5:1, 11, 21; 7:25; 13:14; 15:6, 30; 1 Cor. 1:2f etc.). If this is correct, then we cannot accept the arrangement of A. M. Hunter - apparently presupposed by the Peshitta - whereby ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν forms a separate clause.⁷ On Hunter's arrangement there is a threefold view of the life of Christ:

- i) born of the seed of David according to the flesh (incarnation)
 - ii) appointed Son of God with power according to the Holy Spirit (baptism)
 - iii) as a result of resurrection Jesus Christ our Lord.
- The fatal objection to this arrangement, however, is the lack of a corresponding participle in the third clause.

5. πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης is an exact rendering of the Hebrew *שְׁרָרַת הַקֹּדֶשׁ* *cf.* Is. 63:10f and Ps. 50:13 (51:11) where, however, it is rendered τὸ πνεῦμα ἅγιον. The phrase is also to be found in the *Testament of Levi* 18:11: καὶ πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης ἔσται ἐπ' αὐτοῖς.
6. Schweizer, *EvT* 15 (1955) 563.
A. M. Hunter, *Paul and His Predecessors*, 2nd edition (London, 1.61) 25.

Any conclusions as to the structure of the hymn are bound to be premature, for the evidence is so limited. Probably the original credal formula was as follows:

ὁ γενόμενος ἐκ σπέρματος Δαβὶδ κατὰ σάρκα
ὁ ὀρισθεὶς υἱὸς θεοῦ (ἐν δυνάμει) κατὰ πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης
(ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν)

It will be seen that these two lines are not quite parallel: ἐν δυνάμει and ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν make the second line top-heavy. Zimmermann therefore suggested that originally there were two quite separate confessional formulae (ἐκ σπέρματος Δαβὶδ/ὀρισθεὶς υἱὸς θεοῦ ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν) both expressing the Messiahship of Jesus: these two lines were later brought together (with additions) in a Hellenistic circle where the original meaning was no longer understood. Finally, Paul took it over and added ἐν δυνάμει!./8/ We are not convinced: too much is left to conjecture.

It is tempting to omit ἐν δυνάμει and ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν and regard them as later additions, whether Pauline or pre-Pauline. But on the other hand, the fact that these lines are not exactly parallel need not worry us unduly, in so far as we are dealing with a confession, and not with a hymn. Certainly any further 'advances' on the structure of the credal formula can only be described as 'speculative'./9/

8. Zimmermann, 200f.
9. We, have in mind such radical solutions as proposed by E. Linnemann, 'Tradition und Interpretation in Römer 1.3f, *EvT* 31 (1971) 264ff (she reconstructs Rom. 113f into a five-line confession) and J. C. O'Neill, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Harmondsworth, 1975) 27 (he suggests, *inter alia*, that originally our two lines referred to the 'virginal conception').

II The Content of the Confession

In both lines of the confession Christ is set forth in 'Davidic' terms. The first line declares that according to the flesh - that is to say, within the natural sphere (*cf.* Rom. 9:5) - he is of David's seed (*cf.* 2 Tim. 2:8). This descent from David is no mere historical fact: rather, as is indicated by the second line, messianic overtones are present.

The second line declares Christ in yet more exalted terms; according to the Spirit of holiness - that is to say, within the sphere of the Holy Spirit/10/ - he is appointed Son of God in power by the resurrection from the dead. In other words, Jesus inherits the promise made to David' seed (*cf.* 2 Sam. 7:13f; 1 Chron. 17:11ff), a promise which came to be understood in terms of universal dominion: 'He said to me, "You are my son, today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession".' (Ps. 2:7f: *cf.* 89:26ff; 110:1; Is. 55:3-5) It is of interest that this association of lordship and Davidic sonship is not peculiar to Romans 1:3f in the New Testament, but is also to be found in Acts 2:24-36; 13:30-36; Hebrews 1:5ff. Indeed, in many respects Paul's sermon at Pisidian Antioch may be regarded as an expansion of the confession found here in Romans 1:3f.

We may therefore talk in terms of the enthronement of Jesus as the Davidic Son of God. As the parallelism with *γενομένου* in the first line suggests, *ὀρισθέντος* indicates a distinct second phase. It is not enough to say that *ὀρίζειν* means 'to give a clearer definition to what is already there'./11/ Jesus was not just declared

10. If *κατά* were to be understood instrumentally (*cf.* Rom. 8:11) the parallelism with the first line would break down. For another treatment of this expression, see J. D. C. Dunn, 'Jesus - Flesh and Spirit', *JTS* 24 (1973) 40-68.
11. Pace A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition. From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon* (ET, London, 1965) 18.

to be the Son of God: he was actually instituted Son of God. For a similar usage of ὀρίζειν we may compare Acts 10:42 and 17:31. Needless to say, Christ's sonship here is to be understood in functional rather than ontological terms. For that reason we prefer to speak of his 'enthronement' rather than of his 'adoption'.

Inevitably there is a contrast between the earthly and the risen Christ. However - in their pre-Pauline setting at least - we may not regard the two lines of the confession as strictly antithetical, as if corresponding to the pattern of humiliation and exaltation found, for example, in Philippians 2:6-11. The second line simply describes a more exalted state than the first: 'a person who is already of high rank is "adopted" and receives a status which is supreme.'/12/

So far we have taken it for granted that the two lines of the confession refer to the earthly and risen Lord. J. D. G. Dunn, however, argued that κατὰ σάρκα, κατὰ πνεῦμα here 'denote not successive and mutually exclusive spheres of power, but modes of existence and relationships which overlap and coincide in the earthly Jesus'./13/ On this view ὀρισθέντος refers to the baptism of Jesus. But can this really be so? In the primitive Christological traditions, the resurrection is the moment of power, as is here indicated by the phrase ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν. The unnaturalness of Dunn's exegesis is indicated by Schlier's suggestion that this phrase was added to correct any impression that the baptism or transfiguration of Jesus was the moment of adoption!/14/

12. Kramer, 109.

13. Dunn, *JTS* 24 (1973) 54.

14. H. Schlier, 'Zu Röm 1.3f', in *Neues Testament und Geschichte, Historisches Geschehen und Deutung im Neuen Testament* (Cullmann FS), ed. H. Baltensweiler & B. Reicke (Zürich/Tübingen, 1972) 214, does not regard πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης as a straight equivalent of πνεῦμα ἅγιον but instead seeks to link ἁγιωσύνη with the concepts of God's 'power' and 'glory'.

The resurrection is the moment when God's Son, who was of David's seed, became God's Son ἐν δυνάμει (*cf.* Mk. 12:35-37; also 9:1). We take ἐν δυνάμει to be adjectival in usage, qualifying υἱὸς θεοῦ which stands in contrast to the opening phrase περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ. To argue, as does M. E. Boismard, that ἐν δυνάμει is adverbial, referring to the fact that Christ was raised by the power of God, is to fail to take seriously enough the context.
/15/

Christ's appointment as Son of God in power is ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν. This short phrase has given rise to difficulties. Literally it refers to the resurrection of dead men. This has led some scholars to interpret it of the resurrection of the dead, now made possible by the resurrection of Christ, that marks him out as the Son of God. With respect to this thesis H. W. Bartsch drew attention not only to Acts 26:23 (πρῶτος ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν), but also to Acts 17:32 (ἀκούσαντες δὲ ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν: NB verse 31 refers to Christ as the one appointed (ὥρισεν) by God!) and Acts 23:6; 24:21 (περὶ ἐλπίδος καὶ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν κρίνομαι)./16/ But this is not the only possible interpretation. It could be that instead of a long-winded phrase like ἐκ τῆς ἀναστάσεως αὐτοῦ τῆς ἐκ νεκρῶν, we have here an abbreviation. However, most likely is Bruce's suggestion that νεκρῶν be taken as an instance of the generalizing plural:/17/ Christ is appointed Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead.

The precise significance of the preposition ἐξ is, sometimes questioned. However, the distinction commonly made between the temporal and causal understanding of the preposition seems here to be artificial: surely it is both at the moment of and on the basis of the resurrection that Christ enters his rule.

15. Boismard, 'Constitué Fils de Dieu (Rom 1.4)', *RB* 60 (1953) 5ff.
16. H. W. Bartsch, 'Zur vorpaulinischen Bekenntnisformel im Eingang d s Römerbriefes', *TZ* 23 (1967) 329ff.
17. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (TNTC. London, 1963) 73: see BDF §142. If this be the case, a good parallel is to be found in 2 Cor. 11:23 (θανάτοις): *cf.* also 2 Cor. 1:10 (p⁴⁶ syr) θανάτων.

One interpretation we rule out: according to Fuller, originally this second line referred to the predestination of Christ 'from the time of (ἐξ) the resurrection to be the eschatological Son of God at the Parousia./18/ But of the three texts cited by Fuller in support of this interpretation, two are plainly irrelevant (Acts 10:42 and 17:31) in so far as they speak only of Christ's future function as Judge. The third (Acts 3:20) is open to another interpretation: for there προκεχειρίσμενος probably means that Jesus has already been recognized as the previously predestined Christ (*cf.* Acts 2:36). This being so, we conclude that Fuller has failed to establish his case.

So far we have mainly considered the pre-Pauline significance of the credal formula. We have seen that within the pre-Pauline tradition which described Christ in 'Davidic' terms, these lines were understood of his lordship. It is very probable that by the addition of the phrase Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Paul indicates that he understood the formula in a similar way.

The extent of Christ's lordship is uncertain. Very commonly this confession is compared with Philippians 2:6-11, where a similar increase in power is described. It might then be inferred that, just as in Philippians 2 Christ's lordship extends over all creation, so also here. But in the light of Acts 17:31, where ὀρίζειν is found, it is more likely that the sphere of Christ's lordship is limited to the realm of men. Certainly Paul appears to have applied the formula to Christ's lordship over all men, when he links it with his commission 'to bring about obedience of faith among all nations' (Rom. 1:5).

Whatever be the precise extent of Christ's lordship in Romans 1:3f, one thing is sure: his lordship extends beyond the bounds of the church. His dominion is the world.

18. R. H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (London, 1965) 166.