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The Birth of the Trinity: Jesus, God, and Spirit in New Testament and Early Christian Interpretations of the Old Testament

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A Christology of Incarnation and Enthronement: Romans 1:3-4 as Unified, Nonadoptionist, and Nonconciliatory

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Abstract: Fresh purchase on well-worn problems in Romans 1:3-4 can be gained by paying careful attention to neglected details in reception history. It is argued that the pre-Pauline material in Rom 1:3-4—despite considerable scholarly opinion to the contrary—is unredacted, nonadoptionist, and nonconciliatory. A more accurate assessment of the christology of Rom 1:3-4 finds that after his resurrection, Jesus, who was in fact the preexistent Son of God, was appointed to a new office described as “Son-of-God-in-Power,” not adopted. It can also be shown as probable—although this has rarely been noted—that the author of the proto-creed (and hence Paul also) intends to refer to Mary’s instrumental contribution in bringing the preexistent Son into fleshly existence with the compact phrase τοῦ γενομένου ἐκ σπέρματος Δαβὶδ (“who came into being by means of the seed of David”). The christological foci are the two transitions in the divine life of the Son, entering human existence and being installed as Son-of-God-in-Power—what later tradition would call the incarnation and the enthronement.

Key Words: christology • incarnation • creed • Mary • reception history • resurrection

AN INNOCENT AND UNSUSPECTING READER of Romans is blissfully unaware that a swampy exegetical and theological morass awaits at the very gateway of the letter. Romans 1:3-4 is a potent and invaluable witness to the taproot of the earliest church’s christology, yet it is so tersely stated that its theological richness is difficult to extract. In Rom 1:3-4 Paul gives a description of the content of the gospel—a description that is beautifully styled and theologically pregnant, yet frustratingly laconic. The result has been considerable controversy over its source,

redaction, and theology. Since the true content of Paul's gospel itself is at stake, a proper unpacking of his tightly compressed statement is urgent—doubly so since, as I contend, this fundamental passage has been misconstrued by recent scholarship in a number of ways. The text along with the standard *NRSV* translation—which can and indeed *must* be improved—is as follows. I have placed in bold the most critical details that I will discuss:

περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ τοῦ γενομένου ἐκ σπέρματος Δαβὶδ κατὰ σάρκα, τοῦ ὀρισθέντος υἱοῦ θεοῦ ἐν δυνάμει κατὰ πνεῦμα ἀγιοσύνης ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν, Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν

the gospel concerning his Son, **who was descended from David according to the flesh** and was **declared to be Son of God with power** according to **the spirit of holiness** by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom 1:3-4)

For a host of reasons (to be mentioned briefly later) this passage has been judged by the vast majority of scholars to be pre-Pauline in origin with a variety of proposed *Sitze im Leben*, such as confession, credo, hymn, and liturgy—although I prefer to call it simply a “protocreed.”¹ Likewise, there is broad-based agreement that Paul has made some redactional modifications to this received material.

In what follows, first, I will briefly review the basic evidence for the pre-Pauline origin of Rom 1:3-4 as well as the extent of the preformed material—here agreeing with the consensus. Second, I will reconstruct the manner in which redactional hypotheses regarding the growth and function of these verses have advanced in general, giving special attention to Robert Jewett's proposal as a recent and comprehensive example. Third, I will argue that the widely accepted redactional hypothesis is fatally flawed, contributing to a scholarly distortion of Paul's gospel and a deficient assessment of his christology. Fourth, I will undertake a detailed examination of several crucial but frequently misconstrued exegetical details in Rom 1:3-4, gaining new leverage on old problems by looking at the reception history of this text.² Over against the dominant scholarly opinion, I believe that I am

¹ For “creed,” see Archibald M. Hunter, *Paul and His Predecessors* (rev. ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961) 24; for “hymn,” see David J. MacLeod, “Eternal Son, Davidic Son, Messianic Son: An Exposition of Romans 1:1-7,” *BSac* 162 (2005) 76-94, here 81-93, esp. 81; for “liturgy,” see Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 10. The only certain description of the setting in life is evangelistic proclamation or kerygma, since 1:3-4 modifies εὐαγγέλιον in 1:1. I will refer to the pre-Pauline material in Rom 1:3-4 as a protocreed, signaling that its creedal status in Paul's day is unclear, yet that its concepts and language impacted later creedal formulations—on which see, e.g., J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (London: Longman, 1950) 13-23, 62-99.

² For a helpful survey of the ancient reception history of Rom 1:3-4, see Joshua W. Jipp, “Ancient, Modern, and Future Interpretations of Romans 1:3-4: Reception History and Biblical Interpretation,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 3 (2009) 241-59. Among other aims, Jipp seeks to show that ancient interpreters deployed Rom 1:3-4 primarily to show that Christ had two natures—being both fully divine and human. I seek to go beyond Jipp (who expressly states that his

able to show that the pre-Pauline material in Rom 1:3-4 is most likely *unredacted*, *nonadoptionist*, and *nonconciliatory*. Moreover Rom 1:3-4 is theologically focused on *two transitions* in the divine life of the Son, *entering* human existence and *being installed* as Son-of-God-in-Power—what later tradition would call the incarnation and the enthronement.

I. The Presence and Extent of the Pre-Pauline Material

The first issue that must be addressed is the nature of the alleged pre-Pauline material in Rom 1:3-4. Would it not be simpler to view it as Paul's own formulation *in toto*? Although certainty cannot be achieved, there are a number of well-rehearsed and weighty reasons why it is probable that Paul used a source in Rom 1:3-4,³ the most important of which include the following: (1) Paul certainly used a source at least once elsewhere in a closely related passage—1 Cor 15:3-5—because there Paul himself affirms that he received (παραλαμβάνω) and transmitted (παραδίδωμι) the kerygmatic material that he quotes;⁴ (2) participles stand at the head of the subordinate clauses (i.e., v. 3b and v. 4a), which is common for such protocreedal formulations;⁵ (3) the parallelism between various clauses and elements gives the whole a solemn intonation appropriate for corporate use;⁶ and most vitally (4) there is a high density of words and expressions that are uncharacteristic of Paul.⁷ Thus, Paul's use of pre-Pauline material in Rom 1:3-4 should be regarded as strongly probable, as almost all scholars, myself included, agree.⁸

intent in exploring these modern and ancient readings “is not to critique” them [p. 247]) by including early reception history in the probability calculus precisely as a means of assessing the modern historical-critical consensus regarding the original meaning of the protocreed and Paul's appropriation of it. As such, I think Jipp's results complement mine even though our aims are quite different.

³ For a fuller list of possible reasons, including those rationales that I deem valid (listed here) as well as many others that are not very convincing, see Robert Jewett, “The Redaction and Use of an Early Christian Confession in Romans 1:3-4,” in *The Living Text: Essays in Honor of Ernest W. Saunders* (ed. Dennis E. Groh and Robert Jewett; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985) 99-122, here 100-102.

⁴ For παραδίδωμι in the sense of transmitting tradition, see Mark 7:13; Luke 1:2; Acts 6:14; 16:4; 1 Cor 11:2, 23; 2 Pet 2:21; Jude 3. For παραλαμβάνω, see Mark 7:4; 1 Cor 11:23; 15:1; Gal 1:9, 12; Col 2:6; 1 Thess 2:13; 4:1; 2 Thess 3:6.

⁵ This is suggested by, e.g., Werner Kramer, *Christ, Lord, Son of God* (trans. Brian Hardy; SBT 50; London: SCM, 1966) 108; cf. 2 Tim 2:8, Ignatius *Smyrn.* 1.1, and perhaps 1 Pet 3:18.

⁶ In the subsequent structural outline, compare Rom 1:3b with 4a, 3c with 4d, and 3d with 4c.

⁷ Especially “was appointed” (ὀρισθέντος), “Son-of-God-in-Power” (υἱοῦ θεοῦ ἐν δυνάμει), and “spirit of holiness” (πνεῦμα ἁγίωσύνης), all of which do not occur elsewhere in the Pauline corpus.

⁸ Exceptions to the scholarly consensus include, e.g., Christopher G. Whitsett, “Son of God, Seed of David: Paul's Missionary Exegesis in Romans 1:3-4,” *JBL* 119 (2000) 661-81; J. M. Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of ΥΙΟΘΕΣΙΑ in the Pauline Corpus* (WUNT 48; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992) 229-36; V. S. Poythress, “Is Romans

Second, granted that Rom 1:3-4 contains pre-Pauline material, what is the extent of this material? For ease of discussion with Jewett, whose thesis I will soon be engaging as the representative par excellence of the redactional hypothesis, I replicate below his structural outline of Rom 1:3-4:⁹

- 3a περι τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ
- 3b τοῦ γενομένου
- 3c ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυὶδ
- 3d κατὰ σάρκα,
- 4a τοῦ ὀρισθέντος υἱοῦ θεοῦ
- 4b ἐν δυνάμει
- 4c κατὰ πνεῦμα ἀγιωσύνης
- 4d ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν,
- 4e Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν

Almost everyone, myself included, is in agreement that περι τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ (“concerning his Son”) in v. 3a is Paul’s own language, with the transition to the received proto creed in v. 3b indicated by the arrival of the participle.¹⁰ The tidy parallelism comes to an end at v. 4e with Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν (“Jesus Christ our Lord”), which again should be viewed as Paul’s own language, as the presence of the first person plural signals (“our Lord”—note that the first person plural continues in v. 5). Moreover, Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν appears twenty-six times (with slight variations in form and word order) in the seven undisputed letters, so this phrase is highly characteristic of Paul. Thus, v. 3a (περι τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ) and v. 4e (Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν) are Paul’s own formulations by means of which he encases the pre-Pauline material, which stretches from v. 3b to v. 4d.

II. The Growth of the Redactional Hypothesis

Now that the plausibility of the existence of pre-Pauline material in Rom 1:3-4 has been delineated, we come to one of the questions of most central concern to this article: Did Paul or any other party intentionally modify this proto creed—perhaps in order to eliminate or otherwise reconcile theological opinions held in the pre-Pauline church that were regarded as dangerous, disharmonious, or otherwise unpalatable? This is where I begin to part company with the majority.

1:3-4 a Pauline Confession After All?” *ExpTim* 87 (1975–76) 180-83; and MacLeod, “Eternal Son,” 82 nn. 31-32.

⁹ Jewett, “Redaction,” 100; also found in idem, *Romans: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) 98.

¹⁰ A dissenting opinion can be found in Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (2 vols.; London: SCM, 1952) 1:49, who thinks that περι τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ is part of the received pre-Pauline material. This is unlikely, however, in light of the position of v. 3a outside the parallel structure and the presence of the participle in v. 3b.

Redactional proposals with respect to Rom 1:3-4 have proven popular in the last several generations of biblical scholarship, and the most important stages in the developmental history of this theory can very briefly be sketched as follows.¹¹

While Bultmann's idiosyncratic inclusion of Rom 1:3a (περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ) in the proto creed has not generally been followed, his intimation that the key to understanding the proto creed is the development from Jewish to Hellenistic Christianity has decisively impacted later proposals.¹² In particular, Bultmann suggested that v. 3d (κατὰ σάρκα) and v. 4c (κατὰ πνεῦμα ἀγιωσύνης) were not original to the proto creed. Contrary to Bultmann, Eduard Schweizer accepted v. 3d and v. 4c as original to the proto creed but suggested that "in power" (ἐν δυνάμει, 1:4e) was a Pauline addition intended to upgrade the caliber of divine sonship; hence it was not in the original proto creed.¹³ Yet Schweizer accepted Bultmann's basic developmental hypothesis, seeing the emphasis on Davidic sonship as characteristic of Jewish Christianity, but the flesh/spirit dualism as indicative of Hellenistic Christianity. But the unlikelihood of Paul's penning the phrase "Spirit of holiness" (πνεῦμα ἀγιωσύνης) made it difficult for some to follow Schweizer's exact proposal. Subsequently, Reginald Fuller would push beyond both Bultmann and Schweizer in proposing an even more slender original proto creed while nonetheless still accepting the basic developmental *Sitze im Leben* proposed by Bultmann: τοῦ γενομένου ἐκ σπέρματος Δαβὶδ // τοῦ ὀρισθέντος υἱοῦ θεοῦ ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν.¹⁴

In the interest of space, and because it is the most recent, comprehensive, and critically informed version of the redactional hypothesis, a compressed presentation of Jewett's redactional thesis follows in the next section, which will ultimately serve as a test case in certain regards for the hypothesis as a whole.¹⁵ Jewett argues that Paul deliberately modified the traditional material he received in Rom 1:3-4 in order to promote reconciliation between the strong and the weak factions in the Roman churches.¹⁶ As part of this claim, Jewett sides with Ernst Käsemann, James D. G. Dunn, Bart Ehrman, and many others in arguing that the pre-Pauline

¹¹ For a more comprehensive survey than is possible here, see Jewett, "Redaction," 103-13.

¹² Bultmann, *Theology*, 1:49-50.

¹³ Eduard Schweizer, "Röm 1:3f und der Gegensatz von Fleisch und Geist vor und bei Paulus," *EvT* 15 (1955) 563-71.

¹⁴ Reginald H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (New York: Scribner, 1965) 165-67.

¹⁵ Jewett's original proposal can be found in his *Paul's Anthropological Terms: A Study of Their Use in Conflict Sayings* (AGJU 10; Leiden: Brill, 1971) 95-116, 136-39, 160-63. Subsequently he has slightly modified his position. In his initial reconstruction, ἐν δυνάμει was deemed to be part of the received tradition, but in his new construal it is regarded as a distinctively Pauline addition. In "Redaction," 113-20, Jewett details his updated redactional hypothesis, and this is further distilled but not modified in his *Romans*, 97-98, 103-8.

¹⁶ See Robert Jewett, "Romans as an Ambassadorial Letter," *Int* 36 (1982) 5-20; idem, "Ecumenical Theology for the Sake of Mission: Rom 1:1-17 + 15:14-16:24," in *Pauline Theology*, vol. 3, *Romans* (ed. David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 89-108.

christology on display here was both adoptionist and uninterested in the notion of the virgin birth in its original unredacted form¹⁷—views that I do not believe stand up to careful scrutiny.

III. The Redactional Hypothesis—Robert Jewett’s Proposal

Jewett seeks to reconstruct a plausible historical setting for the proto creed, arguing that the most convincing reconstruction that can take into account the unique theology and contradictory elements within the proto creed involves *three stages* of development.

Stage 1. Jewett claims that the original proto creed was Jewish Christian with an adoptionist christology:

- 3b τοῦ γενομένου
 3c ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυὶδ
 4a τοῦ ὀρισθέντος υἱοῦ θεοῦ
 4d ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν.

Thus reconstructed, the original proto creed affirmed that Jesus, who was neither preexistent nor born of a virgin, was born into the family of David in accordance with the messianic promise; yet on the basis of his resurrection Jesus was adopted and installed in a position of authority as the heavenly Son of God.

Stage 2. Yet, according to Jewett, this original Jewish-Christian proto creed was subsequently redacted by the Hellenistic community as follows (additions underscored).

- 3b τοῦ γενομένου
 3c ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυὶδ
 3d κατὰ σάρκα,
 4a τοῦ ὀρισθέντος υἱοῦ θεοῦ
 4c κατὰ πνεῦμα
 4d ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν.

The addition of the spirit–flesh antithesis created a temporal bifurcation between Christ’s resurrection and the general resurrection of the dead, events that Jewett

¹⁷ Just to mention a few of the more prominent scholars who hold the adoptionist view with respect to this proto creed, consider Bultmann, *Theology*, 1:49-50; Käsemann, *Romans*, 11-12; James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980) 33-36; Adela Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human, and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) 117-18; Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (New York: HarperOne, 2014) 218-25. Note that Ehrman deems adoptionist terminology perfectly accurate but prefers “exaltation christology” (pp. 230-32). Regarding a broader analysis of adoptionist christology, see n. 52.

claims had been previously “fused together as one event ushering in the new age” in the original protocreed.¹⁸ Moreover, the qualification of Jesus’ birth into the Davidic line as *κατὰ σάρκα* (“according to the flesh”) was intended by the Hellenists to downplay the significance of Jesus’ Jewish messiahship and Davidic origins.

In a similar vein, so Jewett’s reconstruction alleges, the Hellenists were motivated to qualify the language about adoption as son of God with *κατὰ πνεῦμα*, because this signaled that “the redemptive power of Christ derives from his spiritual authority rather than from his Davidic origin.”¹⁹ In short, according to Jewett, the addition of *κατὰ σάρκα* denigrated Jesus’ Davidic messiahship by associating it with the sphere of fleshly existence, while the addition of *κατὰ πνεῦμα* enhanced Jesus’ divine office by connecting the latter with the sphere of spiritual existence.

Stage 3. Finally, Jewett finds that, in addition to the framing in v. 3a and v. 4e, Paul has made two significant additions of his own (underscored) to the protocreed in order to further his own conciliatory agenda:

- 3b τοῦ γενομένου
 3c ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυὶδ
 3d κατὰ σάρκα,
 4a τοῦ ὀρισθέντος υἱοῦ θεοῦ
 4b ἐν δυνάμει
 4c κατὰ πνεῦμα ἀγιοσύνης
 4d ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν.

¹⁸ Jewett, *Romans*, 105; cf. idem, “Redaction,” 115. Here Jewett relies on several suspect studies (such as H.-W. Bartsch, “Zur vorpaulinischen Bekenntnisformel im Eingang des Römerbriefs,” *TZ* 23 [1967] 329-39, here 330-35; and James D. G. Dunn, “Jesus—Flesh and Spirit: An Exposition of Romans 1:3-4,” *JTS* n.s. 24 [1973] 40-68, esp. 56) that argue that the phrase ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν in the protocreed is primarily intended as a reference to the *general* resurrection from the dead rather than as a *specific* reference to Christ’s own resurrection. Yet all of the other statements in the protocreed (e.g., coming into human fleshly existence as a Davidide, being appointed to the office of “Son-of-God-in-Power”) refer to specific Christ events. Thus, to posit that ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν in Rom 1:4 refers to the general resurrection is special pleading and ignores the immediate context. Moreover, the expression ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν in Acts 26:23 (the only other occurrence of the exact phrase in the NT) introduces the bifurcation by way of an explicit temporal qualification that is lacking in the case of Rom 1:3-4, making a direct comparison problematic. Acts 26:23 reads εἰ παθητὸς ὁ χριστός, εἰ πρῶτος ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν φῶς μέλλει καταγγέλλειν τῷ τε λαῷ καὶ τοῖς ἔθνεσιν (“that the Christ would suffer, that he would be *first* of the resurrection from among the dead ones, to proclaim light both to the people and to the nations”). No one should dispute that Christ’s resurrection is viewed by Paul (and other early Christians) as the firstfruits of the general resurrection (cf. Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 6:14; 15:20-23; 2 Cor 4:14; Matt 27:51-53); what is dubious is the claim that the phrase ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν in Rom 1:4 cannot refer to Christ’s specific resurrection as the first stage apart from an inherent fusion with the general resurrection.

¹⁹ Jewett, *Romans*, 106; idem, “Redaction,” 116.

Drawing from 1 Thess 3:13 and 2 Cor 7:1, Jewett argues that the Pauline addition that transformed *κατὰ πνεῦμα* to *κατὰ πνεῦμα ἀγιωσύνης* was designed to curb libertinism in the Hellenistic wing of the Roman churches. On the other hand, according to Jewett, with the addition of *ἐν δυνάμει* to the participial phrase *τοῦ ὀρισθέντος υἱοῦ θεοῦ*, Paul sought to counter “the adoptionism of the original confession by asserting that Christ was appointed by the ‘power’ of God prior to the resurrection.”²⁰ In this manner Jewett suggests that *ἐν δυνάμει* contains a temporal nuance by means of which Paul subverts the adoptionism of the Jewish-Christian group by claiming that Jesus was appointed as son of God *before* his arrival on earth, not by virtue of his resurrection as the Jewish-Christian faction would have it.

In sum, Jewett stresses above all that the most significant feature of the proto-creed is its composite nature, inasmuch as it evenhandedly incorporates elements that are the distinctive contributions of both the Jewish-Christian and Hellenistic-Christian groups; meanwhile it also corrects certain excesses manifest in both parties. For Jewett, therefore, Paul’s treatment of the proto-creed is inclusively pluralistic and irenic, intentionally devised to unite the factious Jewish-Christian and Hellenistic-Christian parties under one tolerant banner in support of Paul’s anticipated mission to Spain.²¹

IV. Assessing the Redactional Hypothesis

Everyone, I think, would agree with the principle derived from Ockham’s razor, so the real question becomes: Is the complexity in Jewett’s hypothesis, or the redactional hypothesis writ large, warranted by the data, or can a simpler and, thus, preferable solution be obtained? In the next several subsections I will contend, drawing in part on overlooked evidence from reception history, that Jewett’s three “contradictions” or points of tension that purportedly demand the redactional hypothesis—that is, the alleged denigration of Davidic descent, the supposed problematic term “spirit of holiness,” and the apparent heightening of adoptionism in the expression “in power”—are all illusory.²² This shows, I would argue, decisive weaknesses not just in Jewett’s specific proposal but in the entire redactional theory. The whole proto-creed can be more convincingly explained as one unified pre-Pauline source that *supports* rather than undermines the preexistence of the Son of God and the virgin birth.

A. *Is κατὰ σάρκα Derogatory in Romans 1:3?*

Foundational to the redactional hypothesis is the assertion that *κατὰ σάρκα* is a slight—that is, when the proto-creed describes the Son, saying, *τοῦ γενομένου ἐκ*

²⁰ Jewett, *Romans*, 107, which slightly modifies idem, “Redaction,” 118.

²¹ Jewett, “Redaction,” 118-20; idem, *Romans*, 108.

²² Jewett, *Romans*, 103-4.

σπέρματος Δαυὶδ κατὰ σάρκα, the value of Jesus' Davidic ancestry is being negatively assessed.²³ I would argue, however, that this claim rests on faulty exegesis for three reasons.

1. τοῦ γενομένου—"Who Came into Existence"

First—and this point is vitally important—despite much scholarly opinion to the contrary,²⁴ τοῦ γενομένου, inasmuch as it pertains to the flesh, is *not* best translated here as "who was born" or "who was descended," implying the ordinary human birthing process, but rather as "who came into existence," so it is unlikely that Jesus' purely human origins are being denigrated by the author (or authors) of the proto creed in any case. Of course it must immediately be affirmed that γίνομαι (which is usually glossed "to become" or "to come into being") can and does sometimes entail ordinary natural reproduction in the classical era, in the LXX, and in other relevant Hellenistic literature of our time period.²⁵ Yet it should also equally be acknowledged that in Paul—and in the rest of the NT for that matter—it is extremely rare for γίνομαι to refer to natural reproduction alone; rather, the emphasis is normally on *change in status or mode of existence*.²⁶ An inspection of

²³ See, e.g., Dunn, "Jesus—Flesh and Spirit," 40-68, esp. 49, who, like Jewett, judges that σάρξ is derogatory in Rom 1:3.

²⁴ The majority of scholars and translations, regardless of religious or denominational affiliation (or lack thereof) use "born," "descendant," or "Nachkommenschaft" terminology (or something similar) to render γενομένου in Rom 1:3—e.g., *NAB*; *NASB*; *NET* (New English Translation); *NIV*; *NRSV*; *NLT* (New Living Translation); *ESV* (English Standard Version); *LUT* (Luther Bible); *ELB* (Elberfelder Bible); John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; 1968; repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 6-8; Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer* (3 vols.; EKKNT; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978-82) 1:65; Käsemann, *Romans*, 4, 11-12; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 33; New York: Doubleday, 1993) 234; Jewett, *Romans*, 104. Exceptions include C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975-79) 1:59; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 46; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans* (2 vols.; WBC 38; Dallas: Word, 1988) 1:12. Difficult to classify are William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (5th ed.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902) 6, who correctly emphasize state of being but simultaneously assert that the best gloss is "born."

²⁵ For classical examples of γίνομαι as entailing ordinary birth, see LSJ def. I.1; for instances in the LXX, see Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009) def. 2.b (e.g., Gen 4:18; 11:28; 21:3; 24:4); for possible Hellenistic instances, see BDAG def. 1 (e.g., Wis 7:3 and Tatian 26.2 are definite examples, but Sir 44:9 and Justin 1 *Apol.* 13.3 are plausible but less than certain).

²⁶ In the NT (667 total instantiations) there is only one probable example (Matt 21:19), one plausible example (John 8:58), and a couple very doubtful examples (e.g., John 1:12; Jas 3:9) in which γίνομαι is used with primary reference to the natural reproductive process, excluding the seven undisputed letters of Paul. Internal to Paul there are only three occurrences of γίνομαι (out of 118 in the seven letters) that BDAG identifies as plausible references to the natural birthing process—Rom 1:3; Gal 4:4; and 1 Cor 15:37 (Phil 2:7 could perhaps be added)—and in all of these

Gal 4:4-5 and Phil 2:7, the closest semantic analogues in the NT to the use of γίνομαι in Rom 1:3, proves helpful.

Galatians 4:4 is highly relevant to Rom 1:3 and equally controversial: ὅτε δὲ ἦλθεν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου, ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ, **γενόμενον** ἐκ γυναικός, γενόμενον ὑπὸ νόμον. I would translate as follows: “but when the fullness of time arrived, God sent his Son, **having come into being** by means of a woman, having come into being under the law” (Gal 4:4). Paul speaks of God sending his Son once the fullness of time had arrived, which certainly suggests that, for Paul, the Son already existed prior to the arrival of this fullness of time (cf. Rom 8:3; 2 Cor 8:9; 1 Cor 15:47), that is, during the time when humanity *en masse* was enslaved to “the principles of the world” (τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου) (Gal 4:3). Moreover, “having come into being under the law” (Gal 4:4) suggests that the Son’s true origin is outside the era of the Mosaic law, but that his arrival under law is what allows him to redeem those who are under the curse of the law (Gal 3:13).²⁷

Similarly Phil 2:6-7, which also is widely regarded as pre-Pauline in origin, speaks of Christ Jesus as “existing in the form of God” (ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων) and “being equal to God” (τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ), but nonetheless as “taking the form of a slave” (μορφήν δούλου λαβών), that is, “**coming into being** in the likeness of humankind” (ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων **γενόμενος**) and “being found in human shape” (σχήματι εὑρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος).

Accordingly, the emphasis with respect to γίνομαι in both Gal 4:4 and Phil 2:7 appears to be on *change of status from a heavenly mode of existence to an earthly one* rather than on ordinary human birth—although of course the natural birthing process is almost certainly presupposed as the mode by which this change in status was actualized. In fact, using the NT as the database, it is roughly fifty

cases I judge that this meaning is probably not primary but secondary, emphasizing change in state instead. In 1 Cor 15:37, τὸ σῶμα τὸ γενησόμενον (“the body that will be”) probably just refers to a future state, not implying anything about the process of reproduction. The other possible cases are discussed later in this article. Paul clearly uses γίνομαι with regard to changing state or status numerous times (e.g., Rom 2:25; 4:18; 6:5; 7:4; 9:29; 11:5, 17, 25; 15:8; 1 Cor 3:18; 4:9; 9:20, 22; 13:11; Gal 3:13; cf. Col 1:23; etc.), and other occurrences probably fall into this category (e.g., Rom 7:3, 13; 10:20; 15:16; 16:7; etc). In contrast, γεννάω is the favored term for natural reproduction in Paul (seven times).

²⁷ Ehrman argues that Jesus was regarded by Paul as a preexistent angel (*How Jesus Became God*, 252-54, 267-69). Part of his reasoning is that Paul’s statement “born from a woman, born under law” in Gal 4:4 is otherwise puzzlingly bizarre, for, “What other option is there, exactly?” (p. 267). To which I would respond, why not the obvious, the incarnation of the *Son*? Ehrman’s solution is historically improbable because it overemphasizes an idiosyncratic detail capable of several competing explanations in Gal 4:14 and downplays inappropriately an obvious category that is ubiquitously and unambiguously present in Paul’s letters—Jesus is consistently regarded by Paul not as an angel but as God’s Son (e.g., Rom 1:3; 1:9; 5:10; 8:3; 8:29; 1 Cor 1:9; 15:28; 2 Cor 1:19; Gal 1:16; 2:20; 1 Thess 1:10; etc.).

times more likely that the author of the protocreed would have used γεννάω rather than γίνομαι if the author's intention was to signal merely "natural human birth," which the author emphatically did *not* do.²⁸ Thus, "change in status" from pre-existence to human existence is far and away the most likely intended primary meaning of τοῦ γενομένου for the author of the protocreed in Rom 1:3, and this even if—as is undoubtedly the case here—the mechanism envisioned for the change in status is the natural birthing process.

In short, if the author had wanted to denigrate Jesus' Davidic human origins by stressing ordinary birth, then γεννάω would have been a more likely choice than γίνομαι; hence, it is not probable that Jesus' Davidic ancestry is being negatively assessed. Rather it is more likely that the author is emphasizing that God's Son experienced a dramatic change in status or mode of existence.

2. ἐκ σπέρματος Δαβίδ—"By Means of [Mary] the Seed of David"

Second, David's ancestry is not being negatively evaluated, because unless we are to regard the author of the protocreed as idiosyncratic vis-à-vis the rest of the earliest church, then in all likelihood ἐκ σπέρματος Δαβίδ ("by means of the seed of David") in Rom 1:3 should be construed instrumentally, referring (albeit somewhat obliquely) to *Mary's contribution* to Jesus' human production and family lineage—although this has rarely been observed.²⁹ Indeed, comparison with Gal 4:4 is instructive again, inasmuch as the Son is there said to have "come into being *by means of a woman*" (γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός). Note well that *only the female role is mentioned—and that instrumentally*—not the male role as might be expected in antiquity. This is highly unusual, but explicable if the virgin birth is latent in the background.

Furthermore, I suggest that we can find additional confirmation in reception history that an oblique reference to Mary's contribution is intended in the phrase ἐκ σπέρματος Δαβίδ in Rom 1:3. Methodologically, until quite recently modern biblical studies has been intensely focused on finding the pure source and original wellspring of whatever phenomenon happens to be the subject of investigation, laboring under the belief that if the origin and developmental prehistory can be recovered, then the phenomenon in question can be fully explained and understood

²⁸ The NT as a whole can reasonably be used as a database to assess the probability of γίνομαι vs. γεννάω for an unknown NT author such as that of the protocreed. Excluding Rom 1:3; Gal 4:4; and Phil 2:7 because these are the very instantiations under debate, there is only one fairly certain occurrence and one plausible occurrence of γίνομαι as "to reproduce naturally" in the NT (see n. 26) whereas there are ninety-seven fairly certain occurrences of γεννάω as "to reproduce naturally." Thus, assuming for the sake of argument that the semantic context would have equally permitted either instantiation, γεννάω is about fifty times more likely to have been selected to refer to normal human reproduction than γίνομαι.

²⁹ Wilckens is an exception (*Römer*, 1:60).

(what might be termed the genetic fallacy).³⁰ In the haste of modern biblical scholarship to cast off the burdensome shackles that traditional readings of the Bible were felt to have imposed, there has been a general failure to appreciate that legitimate historical-critical control *must* take into account not just developmental origins but also *the subsequent influence* of any given text. Textually speaking, if A impacted B which impacted C which impacted D which impacted E, then C is most thoroughly illuminated not just by uncovering C's relationship with A and B but also by the manner in which C influenced D and E. Moreover, since historical reconstructions always involve partial historical records from which extrapolations must be made, sometimes it is the case that A and B cannot be adequately recovered, only D and E, so that our best hypothesis for the meaning of C must be formulated exclusively by working backwards from D and E.

Although the point has not been sufficiently appreciated, we have this basic situation with regard to the expression ἐκ σπέρματος Δαβὶδ in Rom 1:3, which, as part of a pre-Pauline Christian proto-creed, has no previous Christian precedent (i.e., the A and B, if they ever existed, are lacking)³¹ but did cause a ripple effect in later Christian texts (i.e., we have D and E), which on purely historical-critical grounds *must be* considered in any attempt to reconstruct the most likely meaning.³² In line

³⁰ On the quest for pure origins and the concomitant casting off of dogma in NT research, see the remarks by Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861–1986* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) 4–34.

³¹ I use the terms “Jewish” and “Christian” while issuing the caveat that these terms are anachronistic in the pre-Pauline context. Rather, in this period it would be better to speak only of Jews who affirmed Jesus as Christ and Lord and those who did not, with some fluidity existing between the groups. For discussion, see Pamela Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not a Christian: The Original Message of a Misunderstood Apostle* (New York: HarperOne, 2009). Since there is no agreed-upon nonanachronistic nomenclature, the terms “Jewish” and “Christian” are retained here.

³² Looking at *Jewish* pre-Christian and coeval uses of ἐκ σπέρματος Δαβὶδ (and thematically related constructions) is of some value in this case—see, e.g., 2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7; *Pss. Sol.* 17.21; 4Q174 1.10–12, and the discussion in Donald Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 61–77. Yet it must be acknowledged regarding Rom 1:3–4, that any such *Jewish* prehistory is more historically distant than concurrent and subsequent *Christian* uses of this same phrase, since a specific man (Jesus) and specific situations (the events surrounding his death, resurrection, and ascension), are the concrete referents in the latter but not in the former. Coeval Christian interpretations are, much like Rom 1:3–4, frustratingly laconic or may not reflect a Christian perspective at all (cf. the identification by the confused crowd in John 7:42). Yet it is methodologically weak to presume an adoptionist christology on the basis of alleged Jewish parallels (as does, e.g., Dunn, *Christology*, 35–36) in coeval passages such as Mark 1:11 and par.; Heb 1:5 (esp. in light of 1:8–12!); Acts 13:33; and John 7:42, when such a presumption lacks an adequate basis in the immediate context and flies in the face of reception history. An oblique reference to Mary in Rom 1:3 makes good sense of the more general Jewish background of a fulfillment of the Davidic promise, since Mary also was a Davidide (Luke 3:23 [possibly, if “as was supposed” indicates that Mary’s lineage rather than Joseph’s is in view in Luke]; Justin *Dial.* 100.3; Irenaeus *Epid.* 36). Yet, given the concrete new Christian circumstances in view

with the idiomatic quality of this phrase,³³ ἐκ σπέρματος Δαβίδ was in fact understood from the earliest reception of Rom 1:3-4 to refer to *Mary's* human contribution to Jesus' lineage. As evidence, consider how Irenaeus juxtaposes Rom 1:1-4 with Rom 9:5 and Gal 4:4-5 (all of which he directly cites) in order to affirm that these texts plainly indicate

one God, who did by the prophets make promise of the Son, and one Jesus Christ our Lord, who was of the seed of David according to his birth *from Mary* [*qui de semine David secundum eam generationem quae est ex Maria* || τὸν ἐκ σπέρματος Δαβίδ κατὰ τὴν ἐκ Μαρίας γέννησιν]; and that Jesus Christ was appointed the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of Holiness, by the resurrection from the dead, as being the first begotten in all the creation; the Son of God being made the Son of man [*Filius Dei hominis Filius factus* || τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀνθρώπου Υἱὸν γεγονότα] . . . (Irenaeus *Haer.* 3.16.3)³⁴

Thus, not only does Irenaeus construe ἐκ σπέρματος Δαβίδ as referring to *Mary's* lineage, but he also affirms that these texts announce preexistence, since the "Son of God was made the Son of man." Likewise in *Haer.* 3.22.1, Irenaeus uses Rom 1:3-4 and Gal 4:4 (cf. *Haer.* 3.16.7 on Gal 4:4) as evidence that the preexistent Son was really born of a woman and truly took on human flesh.³⁵

As additional evidence, consider the closely related text in Ignatius's *To the Ephesians*: "Our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived *by Mary* in accordance with the economy of God—on the one hand by the seed of David, but on the other by the Holy Spirit" (18.2).³⁶ Here Ignatius is probably in touch with a pre-Pauline tradition similar to that evidenced in Rom 1:3-4, rather than dependent on Rom 1:3-4 itself, making Ignatius a valuable witness to the way similar ἐκ σπέρματος Δαβίδ protocredal material was understood to refer to *Mary's* contribution in the

here, the early Christian reception history is nonetheless a better historical-critical control in determining the precise meaning in Rom 1:3.

³³ See Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 234. As direct proof that σπέρμα refers not solely to the transfer of male semen but also to the production of offspring by a female, consider, e.g., Gen 16:10 and 24:60 (where τὸ σπέρμα σου refers to Sarah's and Rebekah's offspring respectively).

³⁴ The Latin text and proposed Greek reconstruction are according to the critical edition edited by Adelin Rousseau and Louis Doutreleau (10 vols.; SC 100, 152–53, 210–11, 263–64, 293–94; Paris: Cerf, 1965–82). The English translation is from ANF.

³⁵ For additional references to *Mary's* contribution to Jesus' Davidic lineage, see n. 32. For Jesus as a Davidide more generally, see, e.g., Matt 1:20; Rom 15:12; 2 Tim 2:8; Ignatius *Smyrn.* 1.1; *Rom.* 7.3; *Eph.* 20.2; *Did.* 9.2; 10.6; Justin *Dial.* 45.4; 54.2.

³⁶ Ignatius *Eph.* 18.2: ὁ γὰρ θεὸς ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς ὁ Χριστὸς ἐκνοφορήθη ὑπὸ Μαρίας κατ' οἰκονομίαν θεοῦ ἐκ σπέρματος μὲν Δαβείδ πνεύματος δὲ ἀγίου (Greek text of Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers* [2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992]). Ignatius *Trall.* 9.1 also lends a bit of support, inasmuch as Jesus is described as "of the family of David, of *Mary*" (τοῦ ἐκ γένους Δαβείδ, τοῦ ἐκ Μαρίας). Meanwhile Ignatius *Eph.* 7.2 declares that Jesus is "both of *Mary* and of God" (καὶ ἐκ Μαρίας, καὶ ἐκ θεοῦ).

earliest church.³⁷ Evidence from later periods of reception history could be added, although it is mixed.³⁸

So, although not decisive on its own, the earliest reception history does suggest that, in Rom 1:3, ἐκ is best viewed as instrumental (“who came into being *by means of* the seed of David as it pertains to the flesh”), since the prepositional phrase gives the mechanism by which the change in status transpired. Vitaly, this result, obtained through analysis of the reception history, is reinforced in a magnificent fashion when the balanced syntactical pairing in Rom 1:3-4 is examined. That is, an instrumental meaning for ἐκ in Rom 1:3—τοῦ γενομένου ἐκ σπέρματος Δαβίδ (“who came into human existence *by means of* the seed of David”)—precisely preserves the parallelism with τοῦ ὀρισθέντος . . . ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν (“who was appointed *by means of* the resurrection from among the dead ones”) in 1:4, which is more clearly instrumental.³⁹

Moreover, it is quite simply not true, as Jewett and Ehrman claim, that Paul nowhere else shows interest in Jesus’ Davidic lineage.⁴⁰ On the contrary, in Romans itself Paul quotes an Isaianic text pertaining to Jesus’ Davidic origins and the future resurrection (15:12). Moreover, in 2 Tim 2:8 either Paul (the solution I favor) or an early Paulinist indicates in a decidedly positive fashion that Jesus Christ is “from the seed of David” (ἐκ σπέρματος Δαβίδ). All of this makes it unlikely that the author of the protocreed looked down upon Jesus’ Davidic origins.

In summary, and anticipating the potential objection that identifying an implied reference to Mary’s role in ἐκ σπέρματος Δαβίδ simply reads a solution backward into the text, it should be affirmed that (1) there is linguistic evidence for this claim in the unusual choice of γίνομαι in Rom 1:3, especially in light of Gal 4:4 (γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός—“having come into being by means of a woman”) and Phil 2:7 (ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος—“having come into being in the

³⁷ W. R. Inge gives this his second lowest rating (c) in terms of the probability that here Ignatius directly reflects acquaintance with Rom 1:3-4 (“Ignatius,” in *The New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers* [ed. Oxford Society of Historical Theology; Oxford: Clarendon, 1905] 63-83, here 70). A similar judgment is reached by Paul Foster, who sees no evidence that Ignatius is anywhere dependent on Romans in any of his epistles (“The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch and the Writings That Later Formed the New Testament,” in *The Reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers* [ed. Andrew F. Gregory and Christopher M. Tuckett; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005] 159-86, here 172).

³⁸ For example, Tertullian (*Carn. Chr.* 21-22) and Epiphanius (*Pan.* 2.2.1) both clearly take Mary as the seed of David; meanwhile Origen (*Comm. Rom.* 1.5.1-4) seems to favor the notion that the seed of David refers to Jesus as the legally adopted son of Joseph. See Jipp, “Ancient, Modern, and Future Interpretations,” 248-54, esp. 249-50.

³⁹ On the structure, see my analysis in section IV.C. The participial phrase that heads the second clause in Rom 1:4, τοῦ ὀρισθέντος, emphasizes a transition in the status of the Son as facilitated *by God*—that is, it is a so-called “divine passive.” On Jesus’ existence in the realm of the dead, see, e.g., Rom 4:24; 14:9; 2 Cor 4:14; Gal 1:1; 1 Thess 1:10 (cf. Acts 2:24-32; 1 Pet 3:18-20; Rev 1:18).

⁴⁰ See Jewett, *Romans*, 98, esp. n. 21; Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*, 222.

likeness of humankind”); (2) the earliest Christian reception history is *the best* historical-critical control we have in this particular case; (3) the earliest reception history favors construing ἐκ σπέρματος Δαβίδ as an oblique reference to Mary’s role; and (4) there is structural evidence that supports an instrumental reading construing ἐκ σπέρματος Δαβίδ as “*by means of* the seed of David,” because it preserves the instrumental parallelism with ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν (“by means of the resurrection from among the dead ones”). So, I am claiming that it is the earliest reception history, in conjunction with linguistic, parallel, and structural evidence, that ultimately tips the balance of probability in favor of a reference to the virgin birth.

3. κατὰ σάρκα—“As It Pertains to the Flesh”

Third, and continuing here with reasons why it is unlikely that κατὰ σάρκα is derogatory in Rom 1:3d in the way advocates of the redactional hypothesis would like to assert, the κατὰ σάρκα qualification is not inherently pejorative; rather, here it signals that Jesus truly and fully entered into the sphere of human existence—a point I will defend directly below. In other words, Rom 1:3 is a statement about the reality of what subsequently would come to be termed *the incarnation*, not a denigration of Jesus’ Davidic origins.

The sphere of the flesh is associated with physically oriented human existence, especially human fragility, bodily appetites, and material decay, a point that commands widespread consent.⁴¹ Yet the implications with respect to Rom 1:3 are *not* that κατὰ σάρκα should be taken as a negative qualification of Davidic descent.

The raw lexical data show that κατὰ σάρκα can be either pejorative or non-pejorative. Out of the seventeen occurrences of κατὰ σάρκα in the seven letters, five do not include any obviously derogatory connotations in context: Rom 1:3; 4:1 (“Abraham our forefather according to the flesh”); 9:3 (“those of my own race according to the flesh”); 9:5 (discussed subsequently); and 1 Cor 10:18 (“Israel according to the flesh”). Ten occurrences are more clearly negative. Two occurrences are ambivalent but probably not pejorative (Gal 4:23, 29; see subsequent discussion). In the broader Pauline corpus, Eph 6:5 and Col 3:22 are not pejorative (“masters according to the flesh”). See also the neutral or perhaps even positive use of κατὰ σάρκα in the close parallel to Rom 1:3 in Ignatius *Eph.* 20.2: “Jesus Christ, who was of the family of David according to the flesh, being the son of man and the Son of God” (Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ, τῷ κατὰ σάρκα ἐκ γένους Δαβείδ, τῷ υἱῷ ἀνθρώπου καὶ υἱῷ θεοῦ).⁴²

There are three passages in the seven undisputed letters of Paul that contain κατὰ σάρκα and that stand topically in very close connection to Rom 1:3. The first

⁴¹ See Eduard Schweizer, “σάρξ,” *TDNT* 7:98-151, esp. 125-35 (on Paul); also see James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 62-73.

⁴² Greek text according to Holmes; cf. Ignatius *Rom.* 7.3; *Smyrn.* 1.1.

two occurrences, Gal 4:23, 29, can be lumped together inasmuch as the sense is the same in both instances. With regard to the procreation of Isaac and Ishmael, Paul states:

The one was born by the means of the slave girl κατὰ σάρκα, but the other by means of the free woman through the promise [δι' ἐπαγγελίας]. (Gal 4:23)

But just as at that time the one who was born κατὰ σάρκα persecuted the one [born] κατὰ πνεῦμα, so also now. (Gal 4:29)

The parallelism in 4:23 between δι' ἐπαγγελίας, which is instrumental, and κατὰ σάρκα strongly suggests that the latter includes an instrumental sense as well—that is, it is implied by Paul that the domain of the flesh includes the instrumental power to procreate. Accordingly, J. Louis Martyn fittingly suggests that κατὰ σάρκα in Gal 4:23, 29 be glossed “by the power of the flesh” or “as a result of the power of the flesh” (cf. 2 Cor 5:16).⁴³ What is stressed here in Galatians by Paul with his κατὰ σάρκα language is the natural reproductive capacities of the fleshly body of Hagar and normal physical descent, which is contrasted with “spiritual” birth according to God’s promise—a birth that transcends normal, physical categories. Thus, while the contrast between flesh and promise/spirit in Gal 4:23, 29 might appear at first glance to denigrate the flesh, closer inspection reveals that Paul is simply referring to natural reproductive abilities and physical descent. Any pejorative edge to κατὰ σάρκα derives from the fact that Paul’s opponents in Galatia happen to be the physical descendants of Abraham rather than from an alleged notion that, for Paul, natural procreation and the possession of a human lineage are themselves evils.

The third passage is Rom 9:5, in which Paul employs κατὰ σάρκα in terms of Christ’s human ancestry from Israel (ἐξ ὧν ὁ Χριστός τὸ κατὰ σάρκα, “from whom is the Christ according to the flesh”). Note that this passage almost certainly speaks of Jesus’ human lineage in a *positive* fashion inasmuch as Paul is rehearsing the marvelous privileges that his compatriots “according to the flesh” (cf. κατὰ σάρκα in 9:3) enjoy—adoption, glory, the covenants, the establishment of the law, cultic worship, the promises, the patriarchs, and the Christ. Thus, Rom 9:5 lends a hefty weight of probability in favor of a nonpejorative interpretation of κατὰ σάρκα in Rom 1:3.

In summary, contrary to the conclusions of much recent scholarship, the first clause of the protocreed is not derogatory—quite the opposite. It assumes the preexistence of the Son of God but does not dwell on this, concentrating instead on the Son’s *transition* to the weak, frail, decaying state of fully embodied human existence within the messianic line of David. Thus, it is evident that Rom 1:3 is

⁴³ J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 33A; New York: Doubleday, 1997) 435.

not denigrating Jesus' Davidic ancestry as such.⁴⁴ An appropriate gloss of Romans 1:3 is, "who came into human existence by means of the seed of David—an existence characterized by physicality with all its limitations," with it tacitly understood that *Mary* is the seed of David who *instrumentally* brought this Son of God into human existence.

B. Does πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης in Romans 1:4 Require Multiple Sources?

Now moving to a critique of the second argument for a redacted proto creed. According to Jewett, the phrase πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης ("spirit of holiness") cannot be sufficiently explained without hypothesizing multiple sources lest one be reduced to putting forward "implausible explanations."⁴⁵ So the question is, Does the phrase "spirit of holiness" demand the view that the proto creed is a redactional composite?

It is telling that Jewett himself gives no justification for his assertion regarding the manner in which "spirit of holiness" compels the composite redactional hypothesis. Rather than a demonstrable *conclusion*, it would appear that here Jewett's claim is an *assumption* built on Bultmann's influential intimation that the proto creed reflects incompatible Jewish-Christian and Hellenistic-Christian concerns—a main plank of the redactional hypothesis when considered as a whole. Furthermore, one wonders if Jewett's suggestion that κατὰ πνεῦμα was inserted into the Hellenistic redaction but that Paul added the genitival qualifier ἁγιωσύνης can be accepted within the bounds of Jewett's own proposal without self-contradiction. Paul is thereby made to be the ultimate author of the phrase πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης, one of the very expressions Jewett uses to argue that the proto creed does not derive from Paul!⁴⁶

Be that as it may, there is nothing implausible about the appearance of the phrase πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης in a pre-Pauline block of material that derives from one author or party. The phrase appears to have Semitic origins,⁴⁷ which is not to suggest that it could not appear in a proto creed with purportedly Hellenistic elements under the guiding hand of one author or one party. Scholarship has more than amply demonstrated the manner in which Judaism and Hellenism had interpenetrated each other in the early Christian era,⁴⁸ making Bultmann's hypothesis of

⁴⁴ So also Wilckens, *Römer*, 1:65; Käsemann, *Romans*, 11. Cranfield aptly suggests the neutral gloss "as a man" for κατὰ σάρκα in Rom 1:3 (*Romans*, 1:59-60).

⁴⁵ Jewett, "Redaction," 106.

⁴⁶ Compare Jewett, *Romans*, 98 (affirming that πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης is non-Pauline) with idem, *Romans*, 106 (arguing that Paul appended ἁγιωσύνης to πνεῦμα).

⁴⁷ See שך קדש in Ps 51:13; Isa 63:10-11. This phrase also shows up frequently in the Dead Sea Scrolls (fifty-four times according to my BibleWorks search; e.g., 1QS 8.16; 9.3). For discussion, see Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994) 480 n. 19.

⁴⁸ Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine in the Early Hellenistic Period* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974).

multiple communities an unnecessary complexity. It is better to take πνεῦμα ἁγιοσύνης as a Semitic term for the Holy Spirit,⁴⁹ intended as such both at the level of the source and at the level of Paul's reappropriation of the source.⁵⁰

C. Does ἐν δυνάμει Counter an Original Adoptionism?

The third rationale that Jewett gives is that a composite source is needed in order to explain "the apparent heightening of adoptionism in the expression 'in power,'" which Paul then seeks to subvert.⁵¹ But this rationale assumes what it is trying to prove, because there is no good reason to posit that the original protocreed lacked ἐν δυνάμει, nor is there any real evidence in favor of an original adoptionist christology here apart from the redactional hypothesis itself.⁵² On the contrary, there is suggestive structural evidence internal to Rom 1:3-4 that militates against the redactional solution, and I submit this as an additional yet critical piece of infrequently observed evidence that stands against this hypothesis. The lack of balance that results under the redactional proposal favors taking ἐν δυνάμει as a modifier of υἱοῦ θεοῦ rather than τοῦ ὀρισθέντος. This dissymmetry can be seen by comparing Jewett's structural outline with my own. In essence, Jewett structures Rom 1:3b-4d as follows:

⁴⁹ The phrase πνεῦμα ἁγιοσύνης found in Rom 1:3 is very rare, occurring only in *T. Lev.* 18:11 (καὶ πνεῦμα ἁγιοσύνης ἔσται ἐπ' αὐτοῖς) and on a Jewish amulet (see Erik Peterson, "Das Amulett von Acre," in idem, *Frühkirche, Judentum und Gnosis: Studien und Untersuchungen* [Rome: Herder, 1959] 346-54 esp. 351-52).

⁵⁰ Since Rom 1:3 is part of the protocreed received by Paul, we cannot surmise that the more typically Pauline πνεῦμα ἅγιον (Rom 5:5; 15:13; 1 Cor 6:19; 2 Cor 13:13) has been deliberately avoided. So also Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:64; Wilckens, *Römer*, 1:65; Moo, *Romans*, 50; Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 482-84. Dissenting opinions are expressed by Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, 9; Käsemann, *Romans*, 11; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 236. Meanwhile Jewett argues that ἁγιοσύνης is a Pauline redaction, thus denying that "Holy Spirit" is intended by Paul's source; however, he also suggests that with his redaction Paul intended to assimilate the πνεῦμα of the original protocreed to the Holy Spirit theme in the letter (*Romans*, 106-7).

⁵¹ Jewett, *Romans*, 103.

⁵² It has often been claimed that Rom 1:3-4 in conjunction with other texts (esp. Mark 1:11 and par.; Acts 2:32-26; 13:32-35; Heb 1:5-6; 5:5) indicates that the earliest christology was adoptionist and morphed into a higher christology over time. See John H. Hayes, "The Resurrection as Enthronement and the Earliest Church Christology," *Int* 22 (1968) 333-45 (who summarizes the consensus view); Barnabas Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic: The Doctrinal Significance of the Old Testament Quotations* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961) 139-44; Dunn, *Christology*, 33-36, 46-60, 251-58; Yarbrow Collins and Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God*, 10-15, 117, 127; Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*, 211-46, esp. 218-25. Yet, not only does this adoptionist conclusion misconstrue Rom 1:3-4 (as I have argued here), but it also, in my judgment, consistently misreads other crucial texts, failing to recognize the assumptions of prosopological exegesis in antiquity. For further details, see esp. my treatment in chaps. 2 and 6 of Matthew W. Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity: Jesus, God, and Spirit in New Testament and Early Christian Interpretations of the Old Testament* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

- 3b Participle
- 3c ἐκ clause
- 3d κατά clause
- 4a Participle + υἱοῦ θεοῦ
- 4b ἐν δυνάμει
- 4c κατά clause
- 4d ἐκ clause

I would argue, however, that a more plausible structural arrangement preserves the ABBA pattern (ἐκ, κατά, κατά, ἐκ) in the subordinate clauses by construing ἐν δυνάμει as part of the participial phrase, combining v. 4a and v. 4b into one line as follows:

- 3b Participle
- 3c ἐκ clause
- 3d κατά clause
- 4ab Participle + υἱοῦ θεοῦ + ἐν δυνάμει
- 4c κατά clause
- 4d ἐκ clause

In other words, contra Jewett, it is probable that ἐν δυνάμει modifies υἱοῦ θεοῦ rather than τοῦ ὀρισθέντος since this preserves the ABBA pattern. The result is that “Son-of-God-in-Power” should be taken as a unified expression—that is, it is *a title or an informally descriptive quasi-title designating the name of the office to which the Son has been appointed*. Although this exact title is found nowhere else in the Pauline corpus, which is further evidence that Rom 1:3b-4d as a whole is pre-Pauline (and probably indicates that it is an informally descriptive title), similar ideas are present elsewhere in Paul’s letters (e.g., Rom 8:34; 2 Cor 4:14; Phil 2:5-11; cf. Eph 1:20; Col 3:1), especially in Rom 15:12, where the raising up (resurrection) of a Davidide leads to his universal rule: “The root of Jesse will come, even the one who will rise [ὁ ἀνιστάμενος] in order to rule over the nations; the nations will hope upon him.”⁵³ This shows Paul’s essential congeniality toward concepts manifested in the protocreed.

If my analysis is correct, then there is no ground for claiming that the proto-creed was originally adoptionist or subsequently redacted in order to soften the adoptionism by making it seem as if Jesus was appointed Son of God prior to or in conjunction with his resurrection, as Dunn, Jewett, Ehrman, and others have argued. Rather, for the author of the proto-creed—and this is my central theological conclusion—the resurrection event was the occasion at which the Son of God, who was in fact already deemed the preexistent Son of God before the resurrection

⁵³ Romans 15:12 cites Isa 11:10 LXX. On the numerous connections between Rom 1:3-4 and 15:12 and the likelihood of an intentional resurrection-based double entendre with ἀνιστάμενος, see the outstanding discussion by J. R. Daniel Kirk, *Unlocking Romans: Resurrection and the Justification of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) 39-55.

event, was appointed to a new office that was able to be described by the phrase “Son-of-God-in-Power.”

D. Does Pauline Redaction Fit with the Missional Purpose in Romans?

One final point of general consideration also weighs against the redactional hypothesis. If, as most scholars (including Jewett and myself) agree, one of Paul’s aims in writing Romans is to solicit the aid of the Roman churches in order to support Paul’s anticipated Spanish mission, then how likely is it that Paul would have placed an idiosyncratically redacted proto creed at the head of his letter? Lest he risk being labeled a maverick, is it not much more likely that he would have placed a *widely held* proto creed in his *exordium* in order to certify to the Roman churches that he belonged within the same theological orb as the founders and leadership of the church at Rome?

V. Summary

In conclusion, a proper assessment of Rom 1:3-4 is critical—indeed Paul’s gospel itself is at stake. This study has found that the redactional hypothesis and its accompanying theology cannot be sustained. The simplest explanation that takes into account the data is that Paul incorporated a unified pre-Pauline composition into Rom 1:3-4 and that Paul respected the integrity of this proto creed in his appropriation of its contents. The proto creed affirms that the preexistent Son of God came into the world by means of the seed of David, implying Mary’s contribution; yet, on the basis of the resurrection he was subsequently appointed to a new office described as Son-of-God-in-Power. The best literal translations of Rom 1:3-4 will de-emphasize or eliminate references to birth or descent, declaration, the adverbial “in power” in association with the allegedly declarative action, and spirit. Instead, such translations will speak of the Son entering fleshly human existence, installation or appointment, Spirit, and the “in power” will be attached to Son of God as part of the title. I suggest the following as an apt literal translation:

[the gospel] concerning his Son, who as it pertains to the flesh came into existence by means of the seed of David; who as it pertains to the Spirit of Holiness was appointed Son-of-God-in-Power by means of the resurrection from among the dead ones—Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom 1:3-4)

A comparison with the *NRSV* translation (the text is given in the introduction) and other standard translations shows that the modifications required, should my proposal be accepted, are weighty. An interpretative paraphrase brings out the compressed theology and serves as a convenient final summary of my proposal:

The gospel concerning the Son of God, who was brought from preexistence into human existence by means of the Virgin Mary, the seed of David, as it pertains to the

flesh, that is, to the fleshly realm characterized by human physicality with all its limitations. This Son of God was installed into a new office—Son-of-God-in-Power—as it pertains to the realm dominated by life in the Holy Spirit—by means of his resurrection from among the dead ones. This Son-of-God-in-Power is Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom 1:3-4 paraphrased)

VI. Implications

If my proposal is accepted, then how might this reconfigure how one assesses Christian origins, early christology, and Paul's purposes in Romans? First, Rom 1:3-4, which due to its pre-Pauline nature is quite possibly the earliest Christian christological reflection attested anywhere, should *not* be used as evidence for an original Jewish-Christian adoptionist christology.⁵⁴ The christology displayed here affirms that, after his resurrection, Jesus, who was in fact the preexistent Son of God, was appointed to a new office described as "Son-of-God-in-Power," not adopted. Second, Rom 1:3-4 should not be utilized as evidence in reconstructing a diverse, multitiered theological history of the pre-NT church split along Jewish and Hellenistic lines. On the contrary, it points toward a kerygmatic consensus in the earliest church. Third, not only is the basic redactional proposal untenable, so also is the hypothesis that Paul uses his epistolary opening in Rom 1:3-4 to reconcile the Jewish-Christian and gentile-Christian factions in the Roman house churches. This reconciling theme does not emerge in a direct and distinctive fashion until Paul begins to differentiate between various people groups in Rom 1:14-17, at which time he speaks of faith as that which provides a new common ground of salvation.

So, if Paul's purpose is not to promote human-to-human reconciliation directly in his citation of received, traditional material in Rom 1:3-4, then what is his aim? Although I am unable to develop the argument fully here, I would contend that Paul is setting before the Romans a narrative summary of what Paul regards as the universal gospel of the earliest church.⁵⁵ As such, the proto creed stresses two crucial *transitions* in the divine life of God's Son, his transition from preexistence to fleshly human existence as a member of the Davidic clan and his subsequent installation into the office of "Son-of-God-in-Power." Or, as later tradition would term it, the focus is on *incarnation* and *enthronement*. Paul lays out this summary of the gospel in his epistolary opening because all of his purposes in Romans are intimately related to this gospel, although not all of his purposes are directly announced in the summation of the gospel itself.

⁵⁴ Contra those cited in n. 17, among others.

⁵⁵ For my fuller development of the idea, see Matthew W. Bates, *The Hermeneutics of the Apostolic Proclamation: The Center of Paul's Method of Scriptural Interpretation* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012) 80-94, esp. 85-86 on the universal dimension.