

16. Tiede (above, note 3), pp. 16ff.; J. A. Philip, *Pythagoras and Early Pythagoreanism* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1966), pp. 159 ff.

17. Philip (above, note 16), p. 173.

18. Cf. Westermann, *Paradoxographi Graeci*, p. i.

19. Burkett (above, note 15), p. 141.

20. Tiede (above, note 3), pp. 16ff.

21. Ludwig Bieler, *THEIOS ANĒR* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliches Buchgesellschaft, 1967), p. 5; Hans Windsich, *Paulus und Christus* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs Verlag, 1934), pp. 60-62.

22. Cf. especially Gerd Petzke, *Apollonius von Tyana und das Neue Testament, Studia ad Corpus Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti*, 1 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), for the development of the Apollonius tradition in the first two centuries A.D.

23. On Lucian's attack on Peregrinus and Alexander as *theioi andres*, cf. Graham Anderson, "Lucian: Theme and Variation in the Second Sophistic," *Mnemosyne Supplement*, 41 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), pp. 72 ff.

24. A. M. J. Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1944-54), Vol. 1, p. i.

25. Cf. E. R. Dodds, "Theurgy and its Relationship to Neoplatonism," *JRS* 37 (1947), 55-69, for the connection between the magical practices of PGM and the theurgy of Antonine philosophers.

26. John Gager, *Moses in Graeco-Roman Paganism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 137-38; 158-60.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 159-160.

PAUL'S NOTION OF MANY "SONS OF GOD" AND ITS HELLENISTIC CONTEXTS

Over the past hundred years specialists in Christian origins have put forth enormous efforts in investigating what is often called the "Christology" of various streams of emerging Christianity. How is it that adherents of the new cult came to evaluate Jesus of Nazareth as a pre-existent divine figure, a heavenly Lord, or Son of God? I want to focus on what might be called the other side of this "Christology" question, namely Paul's notion of many "sons of God," who expect a similar transformation from mortal to immortal life, and an exaltation to heavenly glory, to that of Jesus. In this regard I will stress two points: (1) the close link between a select group of "sons of God" with the status of Jesus as Son of God; (2) the cosmic role and function of such a group as God's agents in the culmination of history which Paul and his followers expected was imminent. I will conclude with a brief consideration of how such a notion, which might be called "mass apotheosis," might be set in the context of various Hellenistic ways of understanding divinity.

1. Son of God—Sons of God

In the genuine letters of Paul, there is no lack of references to Jesus as "Son of God" (*huios theou*).¹ But he refers almost as often to members of the cult as "sons of God" (*huioi theou*).² Two of the most descriptive passages are Rom. 8:14 and Gal. 3:26:

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

...For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith.

I am interested here in the connections between the one and the many, particularly with regard to cosmic destiny. Paul's most programmatic statement is in Rom. 8:29-30. There he gives a sequential outline of what he calls the plan or purpose (*prothesin* [v. 28]) of God:

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined (*proorisen*) to share the image *summorphous tēs eikonos*) of his son, that he might be the

firstborn (*prōtotokon*) of many brothers, and the ones he predestined he also called, and the ones he called he also justified, and the ones he justified he also glorified (*edoxasen*).

I will take some of the key vocabulary of this text and trace it through other texts which appear to be closely related in general theme.

I will begin with the word "predestine" (*proorizō*) which also occurs in 1 Cor. 2:7:

But we impart a secret (*mustērion*) and hidden wisdom of God, which God determined (*proorisen*) before the ages for our glorification (*eis doxan hēmōn*).

What is striking about this passage is that *proorizō* is directly connected to the idea of "glorification" here, as well as in Rom. 8:30 above, even though the vocabulary and context of this section of 1 Cor. is quite different. In both texts Paul speaks of God's predetermined plan which involved the heavenly glorification of a select group. Further, this plan is hidden from the "rulers of this age" (1 Cor. 2:8), which I take as a reference to the hostile spirits who rule the cosmos in the present evil period (see Gal. 1:4; 4:3, 9; 1 Cor. 10:20-22; 2 Cor. 4:4). He also uses the term "secret" (*mustērion*), which should be compared with 1 Cor. 15:51 (which I will take up below), where he speaks directly of the transformation (i.e., glorification) of the members of the cult as a "secret."³ It is obvious that these terms ("predetermine," "secret," "glorification") are closely related.

The next term I will consider from Rom. 8:29 is *summorphos*, which occurs elsewhere only in Phil. 3:21:

For our commonwealth exists in the heavens, from which we expectantly await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform (*metaschēmatisei*) our lowly body, into the same form (*summorphon*) as his glorious body, by the power with which he is able to subject everything to himself.

Here we have a more descriptive commentary on this central notion of glorification. It is something which is to occur at the arrival (*parousia*) of Jesus from heaven (see 1 Thess. 1:9-10; 1 Cor. 15:51). The identification of the exalted heavenly state of Jesus with that expected by believers in the cult is exact. It involves a transformation (*metaschēmatizō*) from a

lowly state (mortal) to that of glory (*doxa*). Also involved is Jesus' cosmic power to subject "all things" (*ta panta*) to himself, a concept Paul elaborates in 1 Cor. 15 when he is dealing with the identical notion of this heavenly glorification.

This transformation, taking the entire phrase of Rom. 8:29, is a "sharing of the image of his Son" (*summorphous tēs eikonos tou huiou autou*). This use of *eikōn* seems parallel to that of 2 Cor. 3:18:

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed (*metamorphoumetha*) into his image (*eikona*) from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Although the precise meaning of this verse and its context are extremely difficult, I do not think one finds here, nor in the following section of 5:1-10, any shift from Paul's basic idea that full or final transformation/glorification comes only at the *parousia* of Jesus. The thought is essentially the same as that of Rom. 8:29 and Phil. 3:21; indeed the verb *metaschēmatizō* in the latter text is parallel to *metamorphoumai* here in 2 Cor. 3:18. The connection of *eikōn* and *doxa* occurs further on in 2 Cor. 4:4. There Paul speaks of the "god of this age" (i.e., Satan), blinding the minds of unbelievers that they cannot see the light of "the gospel of the glory (*doxēs*) of Christ, who is in the image (*eikōn*) of God." Then in verse 6 he says that God's illumination of the hearts of believers brings about "the light of the knowledge of the glory (*doxēs*) of God in the face (*prosōpō*) of Christ." Paul's message is a "gospel" of the glory of this Christos, i.e., a *gnōsis* of the glory of God seen in the exalted figure of Jesus who is the *eikōn* of God. My point here is that all which is included in the idea of "Christ as the image of God" is applied in the most direct way to the anticipated future of those who believe the message.

Returning to Rom. 8:29, Paul further clarifies what he has in mind with the phrase "that he might be the firstborn (*prōtotokon*) of many brothers," which stands as an explanation of his notion of being "conformed to the image

(*eikōnos*)" of Jesus, the Son of God. The term "firstborn" occurs only here in Paul.⁴ Again, the identification of Jesus as the Son of God, with the many "brothers" who follow is direct. The idea is that God is bringing into existence a family of beings, the "sons of God," who share his heavenly *doxa*. Jesus, then, stands at the head of a new genus of cosmic "brothers" who now await their own exaltation at his *parousia*.

The verb "glorify" (*doxazō*) in Rom. 8:30 stands for both these phrases in verse 29, i.e., "to share the image of the Son" and "the firstborn of many brothers." In these two verses, 29 and 30, Paul summarizes his important idea of the "hope of the glory of God," which he had introduced in 5:1 and develops in 8:17-25. To be a "son of God," according to 8:17, is to be a co-heir (*sunklēronomos*) with Jesus. Such a relationship involves a suffering with him, which in turn leads to this "co-glorification" (*sundoxazō*). Paul frequently uses the various forms of the word "heir" (*klēronomos*).⁵ There is a close connection between the terms *klēronomos* and *doxa*, and his idea of participating in what he calls the "kingdom of God" (see 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 15:50-53; Gal. 5:21; 1 Thess. 2:12). What one inherits is the kingdom of God; when it is inherited is at the *parousia* of Jesus from heaven; how one inherits the kingdom is through a transformation from mortal flesh and blood to immortal heavenly glory.

In Rom. 8:18-25, the section which precedes vv. 29-30, Paul expands upon this vision of the future. I quote a few relevant sections, with my own emphases:

For I think that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the *glory* that is about to be revealed in us! (v. 18)

For the creation expectantly longs for the *revealing of the sons of God*.... (v. 19)

...we ourselves...groan inside waiting for our sonship (*huiiothesia*), that is, the *redemption of our bodies*. (v. 23)

The use of *huiiothesia* in 8:23 to refer to the *parousia* expectation is significant. Several manuscripts (mainly Western) omit the word, probably because it appears to contradict 8:15:

For you did not receive the spirit of bondage to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship (*pneuma huiiothesias*) in which we cry out "Abba! Father!"

In Gal. 4:4-17 Paul expresses the identical thought:

But when the fullness of time arrived, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive sonship (*huiiothesia*). And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts crying "Abba! Father!" So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir (*klēronomos*).

There is a certain tension here between present realization and future consummation, something common in Paul. Members of the cult now receive the "spirit of sonship" and are sons and heirs of God. Gal. 4:4-7 parallels this thought: the reason for the "sending of the Son" was that they might receive *huiiothesia*. But this sonship is precisely defined in Rom. 8:23 as "the redemption of our bodies." This is what Paul means by the "revealing" of the sons of God, namely their transformation, glorification and exaltation at the *parousia* of Jesus. This is his "hope" which he says is not fully seen (8:24-25).

Beginning with Rom. 8:29-30 I have strung together this rather complicated web of passages (1 Cor. 2:7; Phil. 3:20-21; 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:4-6; Rom. 8:17-25) to demonstrate that Paul is very single-minded about this central idea, even in disparate contexts. The key terms I have noted in Greek (*doxa/doxazō*; *summorphos*; *metaschēmatizō*; *metamorphoumai*; *eikōn*; *klēronomos*; *huiiothesia*) show a strikingly consistent interconnection.

I now turn to a brief consideration of 1 Cor. 15 where Paul offers his fullest exposition of this notion of the glorification of the many sons of God. What I want to emphasize is that while the occasion of Paul's discussion was some type of denial of the resurrection of the dead (v. 12), the chapter as a whole deals not so much with resurrection per se (which for the community would apply only to the minority who had died), as with transformation to immortality of both living and dead at Jesus' *parousia*. In other words, the lines of his discussion in vv. 20-28 and 35-58 apply to those alive at this expected *parousia* as much

as to those who have died. This is clear from his following declaration:

Lo! I reveal to you a secret! We shall not all sleep [i.e. die], but we shall all be changed (*allagēsometha*), in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the final trumpet. For the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable and we shall be changed. (vv. 51-52)

In this context, affirming the resurrection of the dead is Paul's way of affirming the participation of those in the cult who had died in the events of the *parousia* (he makes the same point in 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 5:9-10). "All shall be made alive," he declares, (v. 22), but clearly the "made alive" (*zōo-poiēō*) here does not refer merely to the dead being raised, but is equivalent to *allassō* in vv. 51-52 quoted above (compared his use of *zōō* in 1 Thess. 5:10). The crux of his argument involves his idea of two "Adams." He declares in verse 21: "For as by a man came death, by a man has come the resurrection of the dead." Then further in verse 45:

Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being (*psuchēn zōsan*), the last Adam became a life-giving spirit (*pneuma zōopoion*).

Paul uses the phrase "resurrection of the dead" to refer to a new reality in the cosmos—the transformation of a mortal human being to immortal, glorified, heavenly life. That Jesus is human is crucial to Paul's argument since his transformation is representative of all those "brothers" to follow. In this chapter he lists seven contrasts which specify his understanding of this move from a mortal human state to that of glorified Son of God:

First Adam

1. living being
2. perishable
3. dishonor
4. weakness
5. physical body
6. from the earth
7. image of dust

Last Adam

1. life-giving spirit
2. imperishable
3. glory
4. power
5. spiritual body
6. from heaven
7. image of heaven

Transformation involves a change from the existence characterized under "First Adam" to that under "Last Adam." The point I would emphasize here is that the terms under "First Adam" apply equally to the man Jesus and to all humankind, while those under "Last Adam" apply equally to Jesus as exalted Son of God and to the heavenly destiny of the "many" sons of God to follow. One is reminded here of the pattern expressed by Paul in Rom. 1:3-5:

The gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and appointed Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead....⁶

This text stands as a short statement of the content of Paul's "gospel" or central message, i.e., Jesus as human being/Jesus as exalted Son of God. What he expects, however, is that this process will be repeated in mass at the *parousia* of Jesus from heaven when all the "many brothers" are also transformed by the same power into this exalted heavenly immortality (recall Phil. 3:20-21). I should note here that although Paul does not use the term "sons of God" in this context, and he only refers to Jesus as "Son" one time (v. 28), he is clearly explaining the details of this secret cosmic plan of God which he refers to in passages such as Rom. 8:19 as the revealing of the "sons of God." His thought is thoroughly systematic on this point and whether he chooses to speak of "brothers" or "sons" or "children" or just to talk of "those in Christ" being transformed, the subject is the same. I have chosen to focus on the phrase "sons of God" because I think it best carries Paul's radical notion that the destiny of the Son prefigures that of the many to follow. I am not interested so much in counting exact references to the phrase "sons of God" (see note 2 below) as in getting at the content of Paul's "secret" about the destiny of this select group, and showing how it exactly parallels that of Jesus, Son of God.

This idea of Jesus being appointed "Son of God in power" implies a cosmic rule and subjugation of the hostile powers of the heavenly world. I have already noted Phil. 3:21 which speaks of the "power with which he [Jesus] is

able to subject all things to himself." The concept of "subjecting all things" is an important one for Paul. In 1 Cor. 15:22-28 we get our best glimpse at what he expected. Paul offers an extended midrash on Psa. 8:6 which is in turn related to Gen. 1:26-27 which speaks of "all things" being put under the rule of humankind.⁷ God has placed "all things under his [and by extension, glorified humanity] feet" (v. 27). His role is to destroy "every rule (*archēn*) and authority (*exousian*) and power (*dunamin*)" (v. 24). What I would stress is that this cosmic conquering role belongs not only to Jesus as Son of God, but to the "many" to come as well. In 1 Cor. 3:21-23 and Rom. 8:32 he assures the group that "all things" belong to them. They are to judge the world (*kosmos*) as well as angels, just as earthly judges and kings determine human affairs (1 Cor. 4:8). The very notion of "inheriting the kingdom of God" has to do with participating in a role of cosmic rule and judgment (1 Cor. 15:50). In summary, Jesus heads a group of transformed, immortal, glorified sons of God who have been given power over "all things" to bring about God's final purposes in history. For Jesus and the others, this conquering role is a temporary and functional one; when the *telos* comes, then all rule is returned to God (1 Cor. 15:28).⁸

2. Hellenistic Contexts

Broadly, I would relate the Pauline concept to the new cosmology which emerges in the Hellenistic period. This cosmology involves a fundamental shift in the perception of human place and is witnessed by a host of religious, philosophical and scientific texts of the period.⁹ In this cosmology the earth is the center and "lowest" level of a vast and expanded universe. It is surrounded by planetary spheres or "heavens," usually seven in number, each dominated by its respective powers. Above the highest sphere is the pure dwelling of God. God and humankind are thus separated by an interminable distance filled with intermediate, often hostile powers. Humans, dwelling at the lowest level of this vast cosmos, are no longer "at home." They are out of place. Human destiny is to dwell with God

in the highest heaven, free from the bonds of death and the mortality of the body. One often encounters the language of exile—humans are strangers and pilgrims in this sensible world. Salvation in most systems comes to mean "getting out" or "going home," and involves a release from earthly mortality and a transformed immortal heavenly existence. Whether one is dealing with a dualistic notion of humans as intrinsically immortal, but somehow imprisoned in a mortal condition; or the idea that mortal humans have the potential to obtain immortality through some kind of transformation (as in the Jewish/Pauline idea of "resurrection"), the fundamental perception is the same—the proper destiny of mortal humanity is immortal heavenly life. The fundamental rubric of Greek religion—gods are immortal; humans are mortal—remains, but the great gulf is increasingly transcended by the more general idea of apotheosis as potential not only for heroes, emperors and rulers, but for anyone and everyone. Clearly Paul's concept of many glorified sons of God is related to many Jewish texts in and around the Second Temple period, which speak of the destiny of individuals and select groups in terms of heavenly transformation, glorification or even enthrone-ment.¹⁰ Paul certainly works out of and draws upon this apocalyptic tradition. He seems to build his specific interpretation from his own midrashic development of key texts such as Gen. 1:26; 2:7; Psa. 8:3-8; 2:7; and 110:1.

Still, this body of Jewish materials must be set in its own wider Hellenistic context. In other words, Paul's notion of what I have called "mass apotheosis," despite its very Jewish/apocalyptic particularities, can best be understood in the light of a wide range of texts from the Hellenistic period, both before and after his time, which speak of human destiny in terms of immortal transformation and heavenly rule and glory.¹¹ What we see reflected in Cicero's "Dream of Scipio" (*Rep.* 6.17), Poimandres (*CH* 1.26), the so-called "Mithras Liturgy" (*PGM* 6.475-830), the account of Apuleius' initiation into the Isis cult (*Met.* Book XI), various Hekhalot materials, or even the *Sepher ha-Razim*, testifies to both the "international" character of this basic

notion of human "immortalization," as well as to the diverse ways particular systems express such a view of human life in this world. Paul is one of our best sources for this type of thinking in that we have his personal correspondence which outlines the details of his own scheme (including his striking first-hand account of his ascent to Heaven in 2 Cor. 12).¹² If one of the major objectives of comparative work is to shed light upon a way of thinking or being religious, rather than to nail down this or that "source" or "influence," then Paul is best understood in this broad context known from a vast array of texts from the Hellenistic period which testify to this fundamentally new way of understanding human place and destiny.

College of William and Mary

James Tabor

NOTES

An earlier, but somewhat different version of this paper was published as "Firstborn of Many Brothers: A Pauline Notion of Apotheosis," in the *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* (1984), 294-303. I am accepting only the letters of 1 Thess., Gal., 1 and 2 Cor., Rom. and Phil. as genuine in this study. The translations from the NT are my own.

1. Rom. 1:3, 4, 9; 5:10; 8:3, 29, 32; 1 Cor. 1:9; 15:58; 2 Cor. 1:19; Gal. 1:16; 2:20; 4:4, 6; 1 Thess. 1:10.

2. Rom. 8:14, 19; 9:26; Gal. 3:26; 4:5, 6, 7; 2 Cor. 6:18 (though probably not Pauline). In this paper I am concerned with more than the bare term "sons of God." Paul uses other equivalent terms such as "children of God" to express the same idea. The point I am making is that Paul sees Jesus as the first of a "family" of glorified beings and "sons of God" is perhaps the strongest way he expresses this idea.

3. He also uses *mysterion* for the historical purposes of God in initiating the Gentile mission and its function for the salvation of Israel (Rom. 11:25-26; 16:25-26 [if Pauline]). See also 1 Cor. 4:1; 14:2 and the deuterio-Pauline references: Eph. 1:19; 3:3-9; 6:19; Col. 1:26-27; 2:2; 4:3.

4. Since the language and thought of Rom. 8:29 are so closely linked to 1 Cor. 15:20-28, 42-58, where the phrase *aparchē tōn kekoimemenōn* is used in v. 20 as a basis for arguing that Jesus' resurrection and glorification will be followed by the transformation in Paul seems to be anticipatory, pointing toward recapitulation. Thus "firstborn" implies more than preeminence, it points to those "later born." In Heb. 2:10 the phrase

"pioneer of salvation," which refers to Jesus, is juxtaposed with the idea of God "bringing many sons to glory" (an expression which is certainly "Pauline" in meaning). The point is the same: Jesus is the preliminary figure in God's plan, the representative of the many to follow.

5. *klēronomeō* occurs in 1 Cor. 6:9, 10; 15:50; Gal. 4:30; 5:21; *klēronomia* one time in Gal. 3:18; *klēronomos* occurs in Rom. 4:13, 14; 8:17; Gal. 3:29; 4:1, 7. Compare Eph. 1:11, 14, 18; Col. 3:24 for the deuterio-Pauline development.

6. Whether pre-Pauline formula or not, and the dispute over this goes on and on, Paul is certainly willing to thus capsule his "gospel."

7. Heb. 2:5-8, also based on Psa. 8, offers a fascinating parallel to 1 Cor. 15:20-28 as well as to Rom. 8:29-30. The emphasis there is that the future world (*oikoumenēn*) belongs not to angels, but to humankind, and that Jesus is the pioneer man who has inherited "all things" and offers the same to the "many sons" that God is bringing to glory!

8. This interpretation hinges on the use of *epeita/eita* (vv. 23-24) and whether the verbs of v. 24 with the double use of *hotan* refer to what is to be accomplished in a time period between the *parousia* and what he calls to *telos*. I would translate *hotan katargēse* as "after destroying" (see RSV and NEB).

9. I owe my language here about a "new" cosmology to Martin Nilsson. Of his many important works which touch on this subject I would mention here the general account in *Greek Piety* (1969) 92-185.

10. See Dan. 12:3; 2 Esdr. 7:97; 2 Enoch 22:10; 66:7; 2 Baruch 51:10; 1 Enoch 104:2, 7; 108:13; 4 Macc. 17:5; 1QS XI 7b-8; T. Abraham 12; T. Job 33:2-9; T. Benj. 10:6-7. Even the Markan-Synoptic tradition speaks of those resurrected as angelic-like "sons of God" (especially Luke 20:36).

11. See my comparison of Paul's idea of resurrection of the dead and the ultra gnostic notion of immortality of the soul, "Resurrection and Immortality: Paul and Poimandres," *Christian Teachings: Studies in Honor of Lemoine G. Lewis*, ed. Everett Ferguson (Abilene Christian University Press, 1981) 72-91.

12. See my book, *Things Unutterable: Paul's Ascent to Paradise* (Scholar's Press, 1986).

Due to space limitations I have eliminated the vast body of secondary literature which deals with this Pauline material. I must mention, however, that I am indebted to the wonderfully insightful work of Morton Smith, especially his *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (1973) and *Jesus the Magician* (1978) and to the fascinating work of Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map is Not Territory* (1978) who has so clearly demonstrated the broad view of "Hellenization" which this study reflects.