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Apologetics (Christology)

Apologetics can be understood as the philosophical, theological and historical demonstration of the *truthfulness* of Christian theological claims.

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Apotheosis: the elevation of a human to the rank of a god. Christianity, even in its earliest formulations, decidedly is not an apotheosis!

“If Jesus *did not* rise from the dead, he was a false prophet and a charlatan whom no rational person should follow. Conversely, if he *did* rise from the dead, this event confirmed his radical claim” (Habermas, 2004, 27).

Second-Temple Judaism and Monotheism

Israelite experiences in the Persian period, and Antiochus IV’s attempts to impose religious and cultural assimilation “concretized” traditional Jewish piety to the exclusivity of the God of Israel. Although angelic figures formed a part of the God’s entourage, they were not granted cultic worship. God, alone, reserved that space.

Not a Jewish tragedy

“He died on the cross for having done the wrong thing (caused a commotion) in the wrong place (the Temple) at the wrong time (just before Passover)” (Hurtado citing Geza Vermes, 2003, 57).

Early Christian claims and confessions to Jesus’ messianic significance is best explained by Jesus’ crucifixion as a royal-messianic pretender. Royal as a pretender to overthrow Roman rule and occupation, and messianic as equal to the God of Israel (Hurtado, 2003).

Too Soon to Admit Pagan Accretions or Influence

Paul’s letters are the earliest extant writings. His conversion is estimated between 2 to 5 years after Jesus’ resurrection, yet in his earliest writing he

includes cultic worship Aramaisms that predate Jesus’ crucifixion, such as *Cephas, marana tha*.

Indeed, “the binitarian devotional pattern [i.e., God and Jesus Christ] began so early that no trace is left of any stages of development (Hurtado, 2003, 136).

“Such an extremely early and short period of time does not allow for an evolutionary process of multiple states, with pagan religious influences seeping in and having their supposedly crucial effect across several decades (Hurtado, 2005, 37).

However, “the origins of the cultic worship of Jesus” cannot be attributed to Pauline Christianity—it predates Paul’s conversion experience.

The strident monotheistic, anti-polytheistic of ancient Jewish devotion to the God of Israel precludes Jesus’ simply being added “as another or new deity alongside the one God” (Hurtado, 2005, 51). The move to a binitarian form of monotheism was a radical departure of conventional devotional practice.

John’s prologue, positing the Word as the one through whom all things are created, identifies the Word “as the unique agent through whom God’s creation of all things took place” (Hurtado, 2005, 52).

Despite the binitarian feature of early Christian devotion, Second-Temple Jewish monotheism prevailed among Christian devotees in maintaining that “God is ‘one’”.

In contrast to other contemporary religious options, earliest Christian faith required exclusivist adherence.