

THE PREEXISTENCE AND PREINCARNATIONAL CHRIST



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INTRODUCTION

The Apostle John began the Gospel with a remarkable revelation, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1.1)¹ He reinforced this with, “That which was from the beginning...” (1 John 1.1), which corresponds with the Genesis account that begins with, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Finally, Paul declares this about Jesus, “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Col 1.16f)

The biblical evidence supports the pre-existence of Christ and His eternal nature as the second person of the Triune God. The aim of this work seeks to provide the framework for a theological construct of Christ as endless and eternal by presenting evidence of His precreation existence as the Logos, His pre-incarnational presence in the Old Testament, and finally preexistent expressions within Johannine and Pauline literature through a lens of both creation and the Trinity.

The resulting framework provides a theology concerning the pre-existence and pre-incarnational Christ as revealed in scripture. The importance of this research supports the primacy of Christ's redemptive work as the metanarrative of God's revelation preceding creation itself. Belief in a preexistent Christ is foundational to Christian doctrine as it validates other doctrines significant to every believer, such as the doctrine of salvation. Both Old and New Testaments disclose the unique deity of Christ as he works in creation and covenant to fulfill His purposes throughout all eternity, past, present, and future. Finally, as a major pillar of Christology, affirmation of the pre-existence belief in Christ reinforces the Christian understanding of the incarnation, resurrection, and atonement—all essential for the claims of Christianity.

PRECREATION EXISTENCE AS THE LOGOS

The word pre-existence is defined as “existence in a former state or previous to something else, *specifically*: existence of the soul before its union with the body.”ⁱⁱ The assertion with Christ is that He existed prior to the incarnation as the Son, being fully God Himself. His pre-existence is a historic position throughout Christian history, to include the early church, as Bramm states, “It has been standard teaching in historic Christology that the Logos, the Son, existed before the incarnation. That the Son so existed before the incarnation has been called the pre-existence of Christ.”ⁱⁱⁱ The New Testament establishes the theological framework in that, “...Christ is referred to as the *Logos* of God.” In light of these scriptural affirmations, it is imperative for Christians that the incarnate Logos should primarily be worshiped as the cosmic Christ, not only as the self-sacrificing preacher of righteousness from Galilee.^{iv}

The term Logos has been defined differently throughout the ages. The word is both philosophical and theological in nature as explained:

The term is a Greek word, often simply translated “word” but with a range of meanings that includes reason, rational principle, logic and even a divinely ordered structure. In Greek philosophical thought, it referred to the rational matrix of creation, the “soul” of the universe, sometimes personified as a quasi-divine entity. The apostle John, in his Gospel, combined the philosophical concept of the Logos with Hebrew wisdom tradition (such as Ps 33:6 and Prov 8:22-31) to speak about the divine nature of Jesus Christ, which pre-existed his human nature.⁷ In the incarnation, the divine Logos or Word of God came to be embodied in a human being (Jn 1:14).^v

The presence of the Son, as second person of the Trinity, also transcends the New and Old Testament. In his ontological existence, as the Logos also reveals, He is not bound by time itself. Barth notes, “Everything we shall say later about the supremely positive and comprehensive relation of fulfillment and promise between His time and His times before and after, rests wholly on the fact that it is always intrinsically and supremely His time...He is the Lord of time.”^{vi} The proposition of Christ as timeless affirms His Deity; He exists with the Father and Spirit with no beginning and no end, placing him outside of the time and spatial world as we know it.

In John’s revelation of Christ as the Logos, he is disclosed as “light” and as “life.” The description of Jesus as both the revelation and redeemer reveals His distinct work within the God-head yet distinguishes Him from the Father. John’s use of the term Logos also denotes a correlation between the Word spoken at creation and Christ’s presence at the beginning.^{vii}

By way of introduction in his gospel, "John's connection of Jesus and Genesis is so plain as to hardly need emphasis...suffice it to say for now that the mentions of the Word, the creation, life, and light all draw the reader back to the early chapters of Genesis, and invite him or her to read Jesus' story in light of God's larger purposes in creation."^{viii} John proclaims the Logos existed in the beginning. The writer follows the declaration of creation as Genesis 1.1 states, "In the beginning God created..." and in John 1.1, he asserts that all things "came into being through Him." As St Maximus asserts, "he is the beginning and cause of all things...by his gracious will he created all things visible and invisible out of non-being...the Logos whose excellence is incomparable, ineffable, and inconceivable in himself is exalted beyond all creation and even beyond the idea of difference and distinction."^{ix}

His handling of prepositions declares the essence and existence of the Logos, "In the beginning *was* the Word and the Word *was with* God, (πρὸς τὸν θεόν) and the Word *was* God." (καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος) (John 1.1). The Gospel asserts the unity of the Father and Son as Jesus Himself confirms, "I and the Father are one." (John 10.30). Throughout the New Testament, this unity is visible in the work of revelation, redemption, and creation. The *Word*, preexisting prior to the incarnation, is now revealed as the Son in John 1.14. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

The word Logos (λόγος) certainly prompts debate concerning the usage of the noun. One could translate it as God's spoken words that brought forth creation, the message by which design and life came into being. Further study, however, reveals the Logos as the Word Himself. The λόγος is actually best comprehended through the predicate θεός (θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος)^x, which conveys the more appropriate understanding that "the Word was divine"^{xi} and the Logos was "in the presence of God," that is, in intimate, personal fellowship with him."^{xii} Firmly debated in the First Council of Constantinople (381), the council decreed, "we know that he was before the ages fully God the Word, and that in the last days he became fully man for the sake of our salvation."^{xiii} Prior to this council, the Nicene Creed confirmed Christ's unity, pre-incarnation, and pre-existence with the Father as stated, "the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven."^{xiv}

The eternal generation of the Son is a critical doctrine concerning Christ's preexistence. In relationship to the doctrine of the Trinity, "eternal generation provides the basis both for the equality of the Son to the Father as well as the distinction between the Father and the Son."^{xv}

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed affirms that Christ was “begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father.”^{xvi} The confirmation of the nature of Christ reaffirmed that the Father communicated an equal and eternal divine nature with the Son and that while there is distinction, there is no division or disunity between the two.^{xvii} Augustine addresses this issue when he states,

“Through generation, “the Father bestows being on the Son *without any beginning in time*” (*De trin.* XV.47, 432, italics added). Thus, the Son is coeternal with the Father...the Son is begotten by the Father in an equality of nature. The Father did not beget a “lesser Son” who would eventually become his equal...the Father “begot [the Son] timelessly in such a way that the *life* which the Father gave the Son by begetting him is co-eternal with the *life* of the Father who gave it.”^{xviii}

The text that Augustine quotes is found in John's Gospel and states, “For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself” (John 5.26). Here, the Son has life-giving power as does the Father. There is only one God as the creed reminds us. Jesus has both life in Himself and has been granted this by the Father. Proverbs 8:22-25 and Psalms 2:7 both support the Biblical warrant for eternal generation, while the broader description in John 5 also presents an economic working on the incarnate Son.^{xix} The relationship of the Father and Son is captured throughout the New Testament and presents opportunities for debate among scholars. Grudem uses the distinction of roles to argue for the eternal nature of the Father and Son within the economy to maintain the unity of the Trinitarian doctrine.^{xx}

Aquinas also speaks to this subject as he responds to Augustine's statement: “Before the world was, neither we nor yet the mediator of God and man, the man Jesus Christ, existed.”^{xxi} Aquinas qualifies this statement that the human nature Jesus began at the incarnation, but the person, the “subsisting subject, one hypostasis, and one person...must stand for an eternally subsisting subject; and beginning to be is not incompatible with its eternity.”^{xxii} Aquinas is also responding to the Arian heresy in saying that there was not a time he, in subsistence, did not exist. Rather, “The man Christ Jesus did not exist before the world was in being, in his humanity.”^{xxiii}

The doctrine of pre-existence is primarily a Christological argument as it relates to the nature of Christ Himself. Historical Christianity seemingly solved this debate, but recently some post-enlightenment scholars reveal a departure from the pre-existence of Christ as a necessary doctrine. Rudolf Bultmann, for example, makes the claim that the pre-existence is “not only irrational but utterly meaningless.”^{xxiv} McCready responds to this perspective with, “Unless Christ preexisted his earthly life, the language of incarnation is nonsense. For Christ to have become flesh, he first must have existed as other than flesh. A non-incarnational christology . . . must be either utterly different from traditional Christology or it must be internally inconsistent.”^{xxv} To challenge the pre-existence of Christ, generally begins with questions of His Deity and impacts all Christological doctrines that follow.

Often, the questions that arise originate in arguments concerning Christ's incarnational representation as God and His hypostatic union. These positions are one coherent theological system, and they all stand together or fall by removing any component of this systematic framework.

A non-Trinitarian viewpoint does not necessitate the pre-existence of Christ as it does not require a coeternal and coequal nature of the Godhead. Examples of this position include historical figures, such as Arius, who would deny that the Father and Son were of the same substance. Arius would later be condemned in the Constantinople council for his heretical views. As previously noted, the deity of Christ and His pre-existence are sister doctrines that cannot be divided. McCready emphasizes, concerning this subject, "all the facets of Christian belief are interrelated."^{xxvi} In his controversial statements, none are more incriminating than His denial of Christ's nature accompanied with His pre-existence. Arius writes, "We are persecuted also because we said, he is from nothing. We spoke thus because he is neither a part of God nor (derived) from any (prior) substance...we are persecuted because we said, 'the Son has a beginning, whereas God is without beginning'."^{xxvii}

Alternate views of Jesus as Logos and pre-existent challenge the orthodox position and present differing ideas of the identity of Christ. One view includes the Spirit Adoptionist position that sees Christ as anointed and fully obedient to God's law but only a human. The next view is the Angel Adoptionist position, which also believes Jesus is human, but is indwelt by a heavenly being. The Hybrid Gnosticism position viewed Jesus as a form of a lesser deity, an offspring of gods and only disguised as a human. The final alternative is Docetic Gnosticism, which also viewed Jesus as a lesser deity, an offspring of gods but not human, merely an illusion. Each of these views attempt to redefine the nature of Christ essentially denying his true essence as revealed in scripture.^{xxviii}

Recognizing the pre-existence affirms the doctrine of the deity of Christ; to do otherwise denies His nature. By affirming the Trinitarian relationship, the question of pre-existence is a muted argument for Jesus, as God, not absent from the Father nor the act of creation. His deity places Christ and His divinity outside the created world and identifies Him as Co-Creator. Clearly, the New Testament authors reference Christ's pre-existence and assumes this premise as it relates to His identity with the Father. Paul and John are the primary advocates through their writing, and their declarative statements are treated later in this paper. In addition to these advocates, there is evidence that "pre-Pauline quotations within the Pauline epistles are evidence that the majority of the earliest Christians did believe in a Logos Christology within the context of the doctrine of the Trinity."^{xxix}

God's redemptive plan, even before the foundation of the world (Eph 1.4f), was that Christ would carry out the purposes of His will, ultimately bringing about God's plan to bring all things under Him in the fullness of time. (Eph 1.9) The salvific work of the incarnated Son is rooted in the premise that the Triune God demonstrates through the incarnation a fulfillment of God's eternal plan predestined prior to creation. As McCready notes, "people might gain a greater appreciation of the immensity of God's love for us in Jesus Christ. But that can't happen until we know Jesus Christ as the pre-existent Son of God who became incarnate for us and for our salvation."^{xxx} To reject the pre-existence of Christ nullifies the incarnation and questions the very validity of the Son's redemptive work on the cross and covenantal work established through His death and resurrection.

PREINCARNATIONAL PRESENCE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The affirmation of the doctrine of the Trinity clearly presumes Jesus had no beginning and has no end, as He is God. Therefore, Christianity then proports that the God of the Old Testament was, in fact, the essence of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. All three are present and actively involved in the unfolding purposes and redemptive plans of humanity. Malone explains, "God's actions in the Old Testament are often considered to be executed by all three members of the Trinity of the Trinity together."^{xxx} Thus, all three equally engaged in the affairs of humankind in both the Old and New Testament. Jesus Himself references this co-equal identity and activity when He tells His disciples, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." (John 14.9)

Christ was not only present at creation, but His presence was expressed through the unfolding of God's progressive revelation that pointed towards the Incarnation. Christians have strived to identify Christophanies throughout the Old Testament. Malone argues, "A strong commitment to a unified salvation between Old and New Testaments can lead thinkers from these traditions [the Reformed and Presbyterian confessional traditions] to emphasize Christophanies."^{xxxii}

Some scholars refute that the physical presence of Jesus is evident or even necessary as His presence was expressed within the Trinity.^{xxxiii} There is still a predominate view among many Christians that Christ is manifested in the Old Testament in passages that refer to the Angel of the Lord. One verse is regularly offered as a proof text to prove the point, "Moreover, the angel of the Lord said to her, 'I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count.'" (Gen 16.10). The reference appears to denote that this Angel has the ability to give life. Only God possesses this ability.

Clearly, at times, scripture also reveals that the Angel of the Lord and God are separate and distinct. (as read in Zech 1.11-13). Context, as a hermeneutical principle, guides the interpretation and resulting question of the identity of the Angel of the Lord. Upon consideration of the texts in question, one may suggest that it is: 1) simply an angelic, created being that acts as a messenger of the Lord, 2) God Himself that is taking the form of a man, or 3) Jesus, as a Christophany, revealing Himself, not as Messiah, but as an instrument and representative of the Godhead.

Another term that is debated is the use of the word *Lord*. As with other titles that could be simply references to God, the word *Lord* is often attributed to Christ in key Old Testament passages. The Lord יהוה is seen as physically present with Abraham as He was about to bring judgement upon Sodom. Abraham appears to declare that the Lord present with Him possesses the authority to judge the earth. ²⁵Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are *treated* alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" (Genesis 18.25). The New Testament clear attributes this role to Jesus alone, "For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son." (John 5.22).^{xxxiv}

Another consideration is the correlation between God in sending the angel and the authority given to the angel in representing His will, "Behold, I am going to send an angel before you to guard you along the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. ²¹Be on your guard before him and obey his voice; do not be rebellious toward him, for he will not pardon your transgression, since My name is in him." (Exodus 23.20f). Similar language flows through the New Testament, "We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." (1 John 4.14).

Prophetic references and foreshadows of Jesus are found throughout the Old Testament. As Gieschen suggests, "The primary understanding of Christ in the Old Testament is one of prophecy, not presence."^{xxxv} Few evangelical theologians argue the Old Testament points to Christ, but still, some scholars seek to prove that the pre-incarnate Christ is physically present, advocating, "Christ spoke in OT times to Moses, to David, and to Isaiah, proclaiming a gospel of faith in himself, and commissioning them to preach this faith and that Israel could have recognized Christ at certain points in OT history, and even that certain individuals did recognize him."^{xxxvi} In a theological debate on Faith in the Old Testament, Blackham, made this claim, "Did Adam know Christ? Of course, who else was it that walked in the Garden and spoke to him? In saying that I am in no way trying to impose the NT onto the OT. John Owen, the great 17th century Puritan theologian, in his 10th introductory essay to his commentary on Hebrews, argues precisely this point from an examination of the Hebrew text of Genesis 3."^{xxxvii}

In the search for proponents of Christophany, John Owen surfaces as he appears to disclose a view that Christ is physically present in the Old Testament.

It was so represented and made known under the Old Testament, in his *personal appearances* on various occasions unto several eminent persons, leaders of the church in their generations. This he did as *ap̄roeludium* to his incarnation. He was as yet God only; but appeared in the assumed shape of a man, to signify what he would be. He did not create a human nature, and unite it unto himself for such a season; only by his divine power he acted the shape of a man composed of what ethereal substance he pleased, immediately to be dissolved. ^{xxxviii}

Owen does not propose that it is the same body of the incarnational Christ of the New Testament but rather a human form that he indwells for temporary purposes. Essentially, Owen would argue that the fullness of Christ's revelation does not occur until His incarnation. In addition, Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg is considered a champion of this position through his work, *Christology of the Old Testament*.^{xxxix}

The Biblical descriptions in the Old Testament reveal that, at times, God appears to manifest Himself in the form of a man. In Genesis, the story of Jacob wrestling with God ends with, "So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." (Gen. 32:22-32) While interpretive views vary concerning with whom Jacob wrestled, the Son is a possible consideration. Opponents argue that God cannot be seen, as he invisible and "God is spirit" (John 4:24a); however, as Malone points out in three of his chapters, God can disclose Himself in whatever form and fashion He chooses, to include the image of a man that is not Jesus.

The simple conclusion is the Bible lacks clear and compelling evidence that Christ is physically present in the Old Testament. Hermeneutical problems prevent claims, with complete certainty, that Jesus is revealed as Christophany. As interpreters, it would serve well to follow this rule, "...interpreters must exercise extreme caution to avoid an undue Christianizing of the OT. The early church had the tendency—one continued by Protestants after the Reformation—to read NT theological concepts into OT passages. We must avoid this error; our first task is always to understand each text on its own terms—as its writer and readers would have understood."^{xl}

There is clear evidence of Theophany, and when God reveals Himself to others, Christ, as second person of the Trinity, is present as well. For whatever reason, God chose not to disclose the person of Christ in the Old Testament. To require Christ to be present is unnecessary for unity of the Old and New Testaments, as the Old Testament still points to the coming advent of the messiah and the mystery of His will being unveiled at the appropriate place in time. (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47)

PREEXISTENT EXPRESSIONS WITHIN JOHANNINE AND PAULINE LITERATURE THROUGH A LENS OF BOTH CREATION AND THE TRINITY.

John's gospel and his epistle are the clearest and most definitive biblical texts concerning Christ's pre-existence. Both John and Paul also provide clear expressions of the unity within the trinity and the relationship between Christ and the Father. Large portions of scriptural support for the hypostatic union are derived from these two authors. Within New Testament literature, the biblical evidence that supports Christ's deity and pre-existence is consistently presented and supported.

Beginning with John, his gospel provides tremendous self-revelation from Jesus Himself and explicit references to His identity as God, second person of the Trinity. Jesus evoked anger because of his preincarnation declaration, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am." (John 8:58). We see the same language God used to reveal His name to Moses, "God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM'", and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'." (Ex 3:14) Wellum conveys, "The 'I am' is in a category by Himself as the eternally self-existent being who alone is sovereign, omniscient, and omnipotent..."^{xli}

Jesus also claimed deity when He used phrases previously spoken to distinguish God Himself as revealed in John's account of the apocalypse, "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, 'Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades'." (Rev 1:17-18). His usage of the phrase 'first and the last' references the same connotation as His usage of the phrase 'Alpha and Omega.' (Rev 1:8). This language is also used when God describes Himself, "Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god'." (Isa. 44:6) Even the prophecies of Christ's coming in Isaiah declare His deity and unity with the Father, "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace." (Isa. 9:6)

The Biblical evidence of Jesus' pre-incarnation existence is revealed throughout the gospel. John quotes Jesus saying, "No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven." (John 3:13). John the Baptist preaches the importance of the origin of the Messiah, "He has come from above and is greater than anyone else.

We are of the earth, and we speak of earthly things, but he has come from heaven and is greater than anyone else." (John 3.31). Later, Jesus claims reaffirms His origin as it is connected with His purpose, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." (John 6.38) Jesus continues to reiterate to His listeners this same theme:

I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; (John 6.51a)

What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? (John 6.62)

And He was saying to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. (John 8.23)

And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him." (John 8.29)

Jesus continually identified Himself as having the power and attributes of God, even in His human form. Barth recognizes, "the humanity of Jesus is not merely the repetition and reflection of His divinity, or of God's controlling will; it is the repetition and reflection of God Himself, no more and no less. It is the image of God, the *imago Dei*."^{xlii} John quotes the Lord, "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" (John 7.24) The language is familiar throughout scripture, as water is a symbol of life, and God is often viewed as providing it to sustain others. In Jeremiah 2.13 and 17.13, the text refers to God as the source of living water. Jesus commonly refers to Himself as the source of water and life, as we see later in John, "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life'" (John 14.6a) and "Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, 'Rivers of living water will flow from his heart'." (John 7.38). John is clear that the way to life is only through the Son, as he states, "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life." (1 John 5.12).

As the giver of life, Jesus declares, "For the bread of God is that which comes down out of

heaven, and gives life to the world." (John 6.33). Not only is He the source of life, but creation as

well, as John declares, "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." (John 1.1). Papandrea claims that, here, John is making use of the philosophical concept of the Logos with Hebrew tradition as he is referencing Proverbs 8.22-31 and Psalm 33, "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, And by the breath of His mouth all their host."^{xliii}

The Apostle Paul's theological treatise provides the framework for understanding the nature of Christ and His working within creation and in unity with the Father to carry out the purposes of His redemptive plan in the world. In His letter to Titus, Jesus is unambiguously assigned the title 'God' by Paul, "looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." (Titus 2.13) Could this description simply refer to the Father and the Son? Commentators argue the Greek confirms that Jesus alone is being given the title of God here, as explained, "the joining of two nouns by καί with one article, as here, usually designates one thing or person (see BDF §276.3; Robertson, *Grammar*, 786; idem, "Greek Article")...the words "God and Savior" (θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος) are found together as a title designating one person in the Greek usage of the period."^{xliv}

Jesus' own words, actions, and even miracles reveal His divine nature and function as God. While in human form, Jesus, the creator, maintains sovereignty over creation. When Jesus calmed the storm, his disciples exclaimed, "And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'" (Mark 4.41) As McDonough comments on this event, "A Jesus who affirms the natural world, however, is a long way from a Jesus who created the natural world. It is the memory of Jesus' mighty works in the world that spurred the development of the doctrine of his agency in creation. Nowhere is this clearer than in the accounts of the so-called nature miracles."^{xlv} Jesus, as the Son of God, possesses all the attributes, power, and characteristics of God Himself. His ability to control creation, bring life from death, forgive sins, and know the hearts and minds of men reveals His divinity. Certainly, the disciples came to know the identity of Jesus as Peter proclaimed, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Perhaps after Jesus controlled the wind and the seas, "Echoes of the creation of the world may have been heard by some, since the controlling of the chaos waters was an integral part of the initial ordering of the cosmos."^{xlvi}

Paul also refers to His divinity elsewhere in Phil. 2:6, 2 Thess. 1:12, Heb. 1:8, and seen clearly in 2 Pet. 1:1,11. He amplifies it when he claims, "To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen." (Rom. 9.5). One commentator, however, notes, "The Christology implied is without parallel in Paul. Where Paul elsewhere ascribes universal lordship to Christ there is a clear note of theological reserve."^{xlvii} As with other verses that point to statements of Christ's deity, the nuance of the grammar becomes critical in translation and interpretation. Looking at popular versions of the English Bible, translators determine the theological meaning by their rendering of the text such as:

"The NIV follows the punctuation that places a comma before the final statement and understands it as a relative clause with "Christ" as the antecedent. Other translations use a full stop instead of a comma, which separates the final statement and makes it refer not to Christ but to God the Father.

The NEB has, "May God, supreme above all, be blessed forever!" (cf. GNB, RSV, NAB, Moffatt, Goodspeed). The NRSV has reversed the position of the RSV and translates, "From them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever." This reading of the text clearly affirms the deity of Jesus of Nazareth.^{11 xlviii}

Jesus specifically claims rights and entitlements reserved for God Himself. Perhaps, the prerogatives taught by Jesus incited the Jews to claim he was blasphemous. Peter attributed the right for Jesus to receive glory as written here, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity." (2 Peter 3:18) Yet, God declares, "I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other." (Isa. 42:8,11). As Wellum notes, "Jesus understood Himself to be the eternal Son in unique relation to the Father, and the only man to share the authority and power of God Himself."^{xlix}

Scripture is also adamant that God alone is to be worshipped. Worship of any other is idolatry. Jesus Himself agreed by stating, "For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve'." (Matt 4:10). Yet, as Matthew discloses, Jesus allowed His disciples to worship Him, "And behold, Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him." (Matt 28:9). This worship expands beyond His disciples. Even the angels are included as revealed in Hebrews, "And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, 'Let all God's angels worship him.'" (Heb. 1:6). Ultimately, John's revelation conveys that all the heavenly host will worship Him and give Christ the Lamb glory and power and honor, among those rights due only to God. (Rev. 5:11-14) To clarify the nature of the Trinity in the worship of Jesus, Wellum responds, "This shift to Jesus, however, does not mean that Jesus becomes a rival object of faith. Rather than replace God as the one worthy of our trust for our salvation, Jesus reveals Himself to be God in the flesh, divine yet distinct from the Father."^l

The evidence within the New Testament is overwhelmingly in favor of affirming the deity of Christ and His divine nature as God. His involvement in creation and pre-existence is revealed throughout the apostles' writings and letters to the churches. As McDonough writes, "the life-giving Word of creation and re-creation is a commonplace in New Testament writings, from James (1:18, 21) to Paul (Phil. 2:16) to Peter (1 Pet. 1:23) to the Synoptics (esp. the Parable of the Sower)."^{li} To separate the person of Christ as the Son from creation and pre-existence redefines the Christian understanding of the Triune God. Sonderegger states, "God is supremely, gloriously One; surpassingly, uniquely, One. Nothing is more fundamental to the Reality than this utter Unicity."^{lii} While the thesis of this section aims to examine the New Testament literature concerning the deity of Christ and his involvement in creation, Levering makes a defining point, "although everything in the doctrine of creation relates to Christology and trinitarian theology, not everything in the doctrine of creation need be explicitly grounded in Christology and trinitarian theology, not least because Christ is, in His divine nature, the one simple creator God."^{liii}

CONCLUSION

The evidence of Christ as pre-existent is a cornerstone doctrine as it relates to Christology. Removing this theological framework of Christ as endless and eternal and you have unraveled Christianity as revealed in the Bible and as understood throughout church history. The early church councils debated the person and nature of Christ to affirm His deity. Early doctrinal formation, expressed in the creeds of the councils, made explicit agreement to His precreation existence as it is systematically tied to the doctrine of the Trinity. Across the ages of church history, theologians have confirmed by presenting reasonable scriptural evidence of His precreation existence as the Logos. The author of Hebrews presents, "He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life." (Heb. 7.3)

Jesus' pre-incarnational presence in the Old Testament continues to be debated and remains an exegetical exercise for theologians to wrestle with ambiguous language that may be too unclear for bold proclamations. Unintended inferences may appear if readers approach the Old Testament with the knowledge of New Testament revelation without an appropriate hermeneutic. While there is no threat in seeing Christ's presence, not identity, revealed in the Hebrew writings, it is an unnecessary theological position to maintain the unity of the canon and God's salvific plan as it finds its fulfillment in time.

Finally, the New Testament supports pre-existent expressions within both Johannine and Pauline literature through a lens of both creation and the Trinity. Paul, in no uncertain terms, discloses the truth of Jesus' nature and person of the Godhead when writing "For in him [Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily." (Col 2.9) The New Testament consistently reveals a preexistent Christ in unity with the Father and Spirit, as Paul shares, "yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist." (1 Cor 8.6). The revelation of God's Word unveils the unique deity of Christ as He works in creation and covenant to fulfill His purposes throughout all eternity, past, present, and future.

END NOTES

- ⁱ Unless otherwise specified, all Bible references in this paper are to the New American Standard Bible, Updated Edition (NASB) (La Habra: Foundation Publications, 1995).
- ⁱⁱ "Preexistence." Merriam-Webster.com, Merriam-Webster, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/preexistence. Accessed 4 Feb. 2019.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Bernard Ramm, *An Evangelical Christology: Ecumenic and Historic* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 1993) 47.
- ^{iv} Vladimir de. Beer, "The Cosmic Role of the Logos, As Conceived from Heraclitus until Eriugena." *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 59 no. 1-4 (2014), 13-39.
- ^v J. L. Papandrea, *The Earliest Christologies : Five Images of Christ in the Postapostolic Age*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 87.
- ^{vi} Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics. On Humanity — III.2*. (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2004), 440.
- ^{vii} This is a deeper Biblical discussion that requires more exegetical work than this paper allows; thus, this author highlights that, "B. M. Newman and E. A. Nida have advised translators, this expression should not be read merely as connoting that the Word was in the presence of God but rather that there existed a kind of interactive reciprocity between the Word and God. A similar expression occurs in 1 John 1:2, where eternal life is first personalized as being pros ton patera, "with [or toward] the Father," and then made known on earth through the Son." G. L. Borchert. *John 1-11*, NAC, Vol. 25A. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 103.
- ^{viii} Sean M. McDonough, *Christ As Creator: Origins of a New Testament Doctrine*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 20.
- ^{ix} Maximus the Confessor. *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*. Yonkers, (NY: St. Vladimirs Seminary Press, 2003), 54-55.
- ^x Bruce M. Metzger, "The Jehovah's Witnesses and Jesus Christ: A Biblical and Theological Appraisal." *Theology Today* 10/1 (April 1953): 75. Metzger defends this analysis with Colwell's rule "The opening verse of John's Gospel contains one of the many passages where this rule suggests the translation of a predicate as a definite noun. The absence of the article [before theos] does not make the predicate indefinite or qualitative when it precedes the verb; it is indefinite in this position only when the context demands it..."
- ^{xi} Maximillian Zerwick, Mary Grosvenor. *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*. (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1974), 285.
- ^{xii} Ernst Haenchen, R. W Funk, Ullrich Busse. *John: A Commentary on the Gospel of John*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 109.

^{xiii} Norman P. Tanner, ed. First Council of Constantinople – 381, Translation taken from Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0381-0381,_Concilium_Constantinopolitanum_I,_Documenta_Omnia,_EN.pdf.

^{xiv} Rick Brannan, *Historic Creeds and Confessions*. (electronic ed.) (Oak Harbor: Lexham Press, 1997).

^{xv} Keith E. Johnson, What Would Augustine Say to Evangelicals Who Reject the Eternal Generation of the Son? *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 16.2 (2012): 33.

^{xvi} Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. http://web.mit.edu/ocf/www/nicene_creed.html.

^{xvii} Johnson defends his use of the word "Communicate" as an important theological statement, "The term "communicates" is crucial. Fundamental to the definition offered above is the Trinitarian distinction between "person" and "essence." As Zacharias Ursinus explains, "The sum of this distinction between the terms Essence and Person, as applied to God is this: Essence is absolute and communicable— Person is relative and incommunicable." Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism* (4th ed.; trans G. W. Wil- lard; Cincinnati: Elm Street, 1888), 130. The essence of the Son is not "generated." It is communicated. What is "generated" is the personal subsistence of the Son." Johnson, 36.

^{xviii} Johnson, 29.

^{xix} More references can be viewed within these texts: John 1:1-3, 10; 5:19, 21; 14:6; Rom 5:1, 11; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph 1:3-14; 2:18; 4:6; Col 1:16; 3:17; Heb 1:1-2; Jude 25.

^{xx} Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Bible Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 251.

^{xxi} Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 50. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 35.

^{xxii} *Ibid*, 37.

^{xxiii} *Ibid*, 37.

^{xxiv} Rudolf Bultmann "New Testament and Mythology," in Craig A. Evans (ed), *The Historical Jesus: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies*, Volume 1, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 328.

^{xxv} Douglas McCready, *He Came Down From Heaven: The Préexistence Of Christ and the Christian Faith*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 238.

^{xxvi} McCready, 236.

^{xxvii} Christopher Stead, "The Word From Nothing," *The Journal of Theological Studies*. Oct Vol. 49 Issue 2 (1998): 671.

^{xxviii} *Ibid*, Papandrea, *The Earliest Christologies*, 129.

^{xxix} *Ibid*, Papandrea, *The Earliest Christologies*, 86. For Papandrea's description of pre-Pauline material and its relevance for Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity, see James L. Papandrea, *Trinity 101: Father, Son, Holy Spirit* (Liguori, MO: Liguori, 2012), 27-50.

^{xxx} *Ibid*, 9.

^{xxxi} Andrew Malone, *Knowing Jesus in the Old Testament*. (Nottingham, U.K.: Intervarsity Press, 2015), 23.

^{xxxii} Ibid, 72.

^{xxxiii} Malone provides the clearest arguments against a Christophany in the OT among recent published works in his 2015 Text, *Knowing Jesus in the Old Testament*.

^{xxxiv} Other references identify the Son as the judge of the earth such as, 2 Cor 5.10, Acts 17.30-31, Matt 19.28, John 5.27, John 9.39, John 12.47-48, Rev 19.11.

^{xxxv} Charles A. Gieschen, "The Real Presence of the Son Before Christ: Revisiting an Old Approach to Old Testament Christology." *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, 68 no 2 Apr 2004, p 105-126.

^{xxxvi} Anthony T. Hanson, *Jesus Christ in the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1965), p.46.

^{xxxvii} Paul Blackham, The Blackham – Goldsworthy Debate, "Faith in Christ in the Old Testament" 23 March 2001. <http://www.theologian.org.uk/bible/blackham.html>. Blackham debated Graeme Goldsworthy, Lecturer in Biblical Studies at Moore College, Sydney Australia.

^{xxxviii} Andrew Malone, "John Owen and Christophanies". *The Reformed Theological Review*, 63 no 3 Dec 2004, p 138-154.

^{xxxix} Wilhelm Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1970).

^{xl} William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., eds. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 17.

^{xli} Stephen Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ*. Foundations of Evangelical Theology. (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2016), 167.

^{xlii} Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics. On Humanity — III.2*. (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2004), 219.

^{xliii} J. L., Papandrea, *The Earliest Christologies: Five Images of Christ in the Postapostolic Age*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016).

^{xliv} G. W. Knight, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1992), 323.

^{xlv} McDonough, 25.

^{xlvi} Ibid.

^{xlvii} J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, Vol. 38B. (Dallas: Word, Inc., 1998), 529.

^{xlviii} R. H. Mounce, *Romans*, Vol. 27. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 196-197.

^{xlix} Wellum, 152.

^l Wellum, 169.

^{li} McDonough, 22. In addition to John's Gospel, some scholars believe there is a veiled reference to the preexistence of Christ in Luke's opening chapter. Gathercole "believes that there may be a theology at work in Luke-Acts, though he notes that most scholars have been unwilling to accept this." Simon Gathercole, *The Pre-existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006), 221-7.

^{lii} Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation: Cosmos, Creatures, and the Wise and Good Creator*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 12.

^{liii} Ibid.

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