Jesus, Paul and Matthew, Volume Two

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To and From Jerusalem

By

Andries Van Aarde

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Dedicated to Salomie Webb and Joseph Walker,
and to Ethan Webb and Kylie Webb

Justification Report

This book reflects on the trend in biblical scholarship that contrasts the vision of the historical Jesus with that of the apostle Paul on the one hand, and contrasts the vision of Paul with that of the evangelist Matthew, on the other. In the latter view, the ethos of Jesus is based on the metaphor 'kingdom of God', whereas the focus of Paul is on divine grace and the acceptance of that grace by the believer through faith. Matthew is then seen as a 'scribe' who deliberately transformed the law-free Pauline gospel back towards adhering to conventions of the first-century Jerusalem temple cult. These interpretations amount to discontinuity in both content and substance between the peasant Jesus, the apostle Paul and the scribe Matthew. The contribution of this book to scholarship is the argument against such positions of extreme discontinuity. The book agrees with the idea of discontinuity in content, but argues for continuity in substance. The book explores the dialectic discontinuity – continuity, while taking into account the anti-empire trend in both the gospel of Jesus and the Jesus tradition in the gospel material. The specific original contribution to scholarship is the illustration that continuity in substance – though discontinuity in content is admitted – carries forward into formative creedal Christianity. In this period, the theological influence of Athanasius of Alexandria, who played an important role during the First Council of Nicaea in 325 CE, was significant. He described the shared substance as divine wisdom, justice and mercy. Though the contexts of Jesus, Paul and Matthew were diverse, all three subverted the 'bio-politics' of the day and envisioned Jesus-followers as a fictive family network. The book takes the form of a biographical journey of the author, analogous to the parabolic story of the travellers to Emmaus from and to Jerusalem (Luke 24) and that of the African eunuch (Acts 8) on his way back from Jerusalem to Africa. The target audience of the book would be specialists in the field of New Testament scholarship as well as scholars in Graeco-Roman, Hellenistic-Semitic and Rabbinical literature. Material formerly published by the author has been substantially reworked and updated. This reworking represents more than seventy percent of the contents. A similarity analysis confirms that the work contains no plagiarism.

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Table of Contents

Jesus, Paul and Matthew,
Volume Two:
To and From Jerusalem.

Gratitude

This research forms part of the research project at the Durban University of Technology: 'Gender Justice, Health and Human Development', with Prof. Dr Cheryl Potgieter as project leader.

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Volume Two is dedicated to my daughter, Salomie Webb, her friend Joseph Walker, and her children, Ethan Webb and Kylie Webb for their love and inspiration. These volumes are about sharing divine wisdom, justice and mercy irrespective of personalities and circumstances.

Chapter One
To and from Jerusalem

This is a book by a Caucasian male from Africa who has the freedom to contemplate Jesus with joy. This story will be told in the final chapter. The book concludes with autobiographical reflective notes that end with a quote from Johann Sebastian Bach's[1] cantata *Jesu, joy of man's desiring* ('Jesu, meiner Seelen Wonne'), for me the most beautiful piece of music and lyrics (see Chapter 7.2): 'Holy wisdom, love most bright. Drawn by Thee, our souls aspiring. Soar to uncreated light … Hark, what peaceful music rings, where the flock, in Thee confiding, drink of joy from deathless springs.'

Living with such joy is miraculous grace.

Every story of a Jesus-follower is a 'miracle-in-parable', a metaphoric narrative *about* Jesus. The book illustrates this by means of the story from the Acts of the Apostles. It is a story about a person whose culture forbade him to worship God in the temple. It is a story of intersection of race and gender. It is the story of an African eunuch who was doomed to be a slave in service of African rulers, without any hope of ever being free. Yet, it is also the story of the 'miracle-in-history' that he was liberated by the Spirit of God to discover the significance of Jesus and take the gospel message back to Africa.

The story of the eunuch begins in the Acts of the Apostles when the first Jesus-followers in Jerusalem, both male and female, were persecuted and fled (Acts 8:1-3). They first fled to lands where they hoped to be accepted (Judea) and then to lands where they had no hope of being accepted (Samaria). A man named Saul, who became Paul, was one of the persecutors of men and women (Acts 8:3) (see Brittany Wilson 2015:241-261).

The book is about the journey of Jesus-followers to and from Jerusalem. Jerusalem was synonymous with hierarchy. People, place, calendar and diet were categorised according to importance, acceptability and purity. Through these holiness codes people were declared acceptable (righteous) or unacceptable (sinner) before God. These codes can be described as 'bio-politics', where biological categories determined all. In this context Jesus of Galilee lived as a revolutionary healer.

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1 Johann Sebastian Bach [1716] 1723, 'Bach-Werke-Verzeichnis' (BVW) 47, in Boyd 1999.

The book is about the apostle Paul who was transformed (μεταμόρφωσις) to become an apostle in unison with the kingdom ethics of Jesus. As persecutor, he had the same name as that of Israel's first king, Saul (cf. G.A. Harrer 1940:22). The peasant boy, David, succeeded Saul to be king of Israel. In the Jesus tradition, Christ-followers honoured the peasant boy Jesus of Nazareth as the 'Messiah' (the 'Christ'), 'son of David' (Mark 10:47; Rom 1:13-4; 2 Tim 2:8). In the Pauline tradition, the names 'Jesus Christ' became 'Christ Jesus'.

Could the name change from 'Saul' to the *cognomen* 'Paul' (Παῦλος – Gal 5:2) coincide with Paul's turn-around from the 'traditions of his fathers' (Gal 1:14), so that Israel, according to him, became transformed to be the 'Israel of God' (Gal 6:16)? The author of the Acts of the Apostles (9:4; 22:7; 26:14) emphasised that the vocative of the heavenly voice, 'Saul, Saul' (Σαοὺλ Σαούλ), was spoken in 'Hebrew tongue' (τῇ Ἑβραΐδι διαλέκτῳ – Acts 26:14). Could it be that Hieronymus (Jerome) (*c.* 347–420 CE) had it correct in his *De Viris Illustribus* 5 (*On Illustrious Men*) that Paul became inspired by what happened during his first 'gospel journey' when he encountered Lucius Sergius Paulus in Cyprus (Acts 13:6-12)?

'Paullus' (alternative spelling) was the Proconsul of Cyprus under the Roman Emperor Claudius (*c*. 44–46 CE). Barnabas and John Mark accompanied the apostle to Cyprus and in Paphos they successfully overcame the opposition by the 'magician and false prophet from Judea', Bar-Jesus (Elymas) who tried to prevent the Proconsul (ὁ ἀνθύπατος) from responding positively to the apostle's kerygma of the 'word of God' (Acts 14:7). Sergius Paulus of Cyprus was the first Roman of stature to begin 'to put with awe his trust in the teaching about the Kyrios' (τότε ἰδὼν ὁ ἀνθύπατος τὸ γεγονὸς ἐπίστευσεν, ἐκπλησσόμενος ἐπὶ τῇ διδαχῇ τοῦ Κυρίου). Because of his encounter with 'Saul', the Roman Proconsul, who became 'curator of the Tiber' in Rome in 47 CE, began to honour Jesus of Nazareth on an equal footing with the Emperor (Acts 13:12).

After his Damascus experience 'Saul', together with Barnabas, travelled 'from Jerusalem' and for a while stayed with, among others, Simeon 'called Niger' (Συμεὼν ὁ καλούμενος Νίγερ – Acts 13:1) in Antioch from where they were 'sent on their way by the Holy Spirit' to Cyprus (Acts 13:4). Could it be that the converted *Saul* became inspired by the spiritual awe and conversion of the Roman Sergius Paulus in such a way that he adopted the name *Paul* right at the beginning of his gospel journey from Jerusalem into the world? (See Harrer 1940:27-28.) Does the name change refer to what Paul calls a 'new creation' (καινὴ κτίσις – Gal 6:15, which was brought about because of 'Christ Jesus' (Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς – Gal 5:6)? Is this the

reason why he quoted the 'oldest baptismal creed' (see Stephen Patterson 2018) of the earliest Christ-followers in Galatians 3:26-29?

> So in Christ Jesus (ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ) you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ (εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε) have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ). If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

This is also a book about the scribe, Matthew, who experienced 'rebirth' (παλιγγενεσία) and traversed boundaries of gender and race. It is a book about the peasant Jesus, the apostle Paul and the scribe Matthew from the perspective of their Graeco-Roman environment. The healings of Jesus brought about a paradigm shift. Those who were healed were people who had been traumatised by the bio-politics of the time. Imperial exploitation and religious codes that rendered people impure and therefore unacceptable before God led to intra-familial conflict. The result of this was indescribable trauma and demonisation, ascribing adversity to external forces called demons. People lost their land, their subsistence. If they succumbed to disease they were cast out of households and communities. In that context healing (of trauma) and exorcism (of demons) were two sides of the same coin. Jesus, the revolutionary healer, was an exorcist. Through his healings people were again accepted into spaces of fellowship. Jesus created a fictive kinship, the family of God, where everyone could be a child of God, where everyone could belong.

However, among the early Jesus-followers there were two movements that did attach religious significance to bio-politics (see Volume 1, Chapter 1). For the gnostic-minded group the divine element in human beings should be freed from the body and the cosmos in order to be united with the divine. For the Ebionites, on the other hand, the presence of God could only be experienced in the biological family. The biological family of Jesus was central to them and legends of this family abound in their writings and reception of history of their documents. Both groups disappeared (cf. Karen King 2013:455), the Ebionites mainly because of Roman persecution and the 'Gnostics' mainly because of creedal Christianity.

The book is about God's wisdom that was embodied by Jesus. God's wisdom is divine justice and mercy for all, irrespective of gender, ethnicity and religion. The question of the book is: did Paul and Matthew succeed in retaining this substance as they proclaimed the gospel in their own idiom?

An even more critical question is: what happened after the execution of Jesus and after the New Testament was canonised? Did creedal Christianity succeed in continuing the substance embodied by Jesus?

Chapter Two
Perspectives

2.1 Jesus and Ovid

From Celsus to Paul to Jesus to Ovid

Both Paul and Matthew believed that Jesus-followers of next generations could share the God-consciousness of Jesus. For Paul it entails the discernment of what God's will is by transforming one's heart in conformation to Jesus' vision (Rom 12:2). For Matthew it entails 'being perfect' (τέλειος / 'complete' / 'with integrity') as God is 'perfect' (Matt 5:45). With 'being perfect' (quoted by Matthew from Lev 19:18), Jesus meant 'being compassionate' (οἰκτίρμων / 'merciful'), according to Sayings Source Q (see Luke 6:36). In Matthew (1:23), God-consciousness is expressed by means of the notion of Ἐμμανουήλ, 'Emmanuel' (quoted by Matthew from Isaiah 7:14). Matthew (1:23) translated 'Emmanuel' as 'God-with-us' (ὅ ἐστιν μεθερμηνευόμενον Μεθ' ἡμῶν ὁ Θεός). This expression 'I am with you' (ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν) is proffered by Jesus at the end of Matthew's gospel story (Matt 28:20) to all who proceed to learn and conserve that which Jesus required (διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν). According to Matthew (23:9), these adherents of the Jesus ethos form a new fictive family who do not have anyone on earth who ought to be called 'father', except the heavenly God (πατέρα μὴ καλέσητε ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς· εἷς γάρ ἐστιν ὑμῶν ὁ Πατὴρ ὁ οὐράνιος).

In different words, but in continuation with the same substance, according to Paul (Rom 8:12), Jesus-followers are kin to him, that is 'brothers and sisters' – in a spiritual sense and not biological (οὐ τῇ σαρκὶ τοῦ κατὰ σάρκα ζῆν). In this 'new' family Jesus is 'co-heir' (συνκληρονόμοι Χριστοῦ), in other words a fellow-sister and a fellow-brother (Rom 8:17). In some sense, Jesus is the 'elder brother' in this fictive family (cf. Leonardo Boff [1978] 1980:242-245): 'The Spirit of God [and of Christ Jesus] testifies with our spirit that we are God's children' (Rom 8:16). In Paul's thinking, Jesus-followers are God's 'adopted children'.

Paul's use of the concept 'adoption' is borrowed from Graeco-Roman culture. In the next section of the chapter, I will explore the common Graeco-Roman background of Paul's view on 'adoption'. I will show that,

despite the commonality, Paul remained an individual with a peculiar and creative new disposition, namely that it is Godself who adopts human beings as children of God. Yet, it is not the notion of adoption that distinguishes the Jesus-followers from their contemporaries in Graeco-Roman literature, but the 'status' of the two groups: peasantry over against nobility. The matrix of this distinctiveness goes back to the praise of either the *apotheosis* of Caesar or the *apotheosis* of Jesus of Nazareth. One can see this difference in the way in which 'transformation' of earthlings into children of the divine is articulated by Paul and Matthew, on the one hand, and for example, Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*, on the other hand. Calling Jesus and his followers 'children of God' instead of 'children of Caesar' and his noble associates, triggered resistance during the period of 'formative Judaism' and 'formative Christianity'. Increasingly, from the 2nd century onwards, Paul's contemplation on the unity between Christ Jesus and the next generation of Jesus-followers became a cruel reality.

According to Paul, the heritage of which Jesus-followers are co-heirs with Christ Jesus, does not only warrant that one shall share the glory of being a renewed creature – in Paul's terms (Rom 8:17), sharing in Jesus' honour – but that one also shares in Jesus' sufferings (εἴπερ συνπάσχομεν ἵνα καὶ συνδοξασθῶμεν). Subsequently, the life stories of martyrs among Christ-followers had begun to become part of world history in a time of fierce Roman imperial suppression. Consequently, from the 2nd century CE, 'Christian' apologists began to defend their loyalty to the Jesus ethos. One example is that in around 248 CE the church father of Alexandria, Origen, while he was living in Caesarea Maritima, wrote an apologetic work against the Greek philosopher Celsus who defamed Jesus-followers because they refused to worship the Roman Emperor (probably Marcus Aurelius) and to support the Emperor's warfare. Celsus, therefore, accused them of being unpatriotic (cf. Joseph Trigg 1983:235).

The apologetics of Origen was only preserved in Greek with the title Κατὰ Κέλσου. In 1453 the first Latin translation, titled *Contra Celsum*, was produced by the Latin Patriarch of Constantinople (later a Roman Catholic cardinal), Basilios Bessarion (1403–1472), and printed in 1481 (Trigg 1983:255). The work of Celsus, Λόγος Ἀληθής, *The True Discourse*, probably written between 175–180 CE (see J.G. Cook 2000:24), is only known to us from the quotes by Origen in his *Contra Celsum*.

From the perspective on this second-century defamation of Jesus-followers, this chapter aims at retelling Ovid's story of Perseus who was conceived virginally and reflecting on the possible reason why Celsus

thought that the Jesus-followers unjustifiably mirrored this Greek hero, child of Zeus, in their depiction of Jesus.

According to the myth, Perseus was the abandoned son of Danae by Zeus. This story was not only really familiar in the first-century Graeco-Roman world, but also came to mind when philosophers of that period reflected on what Christ-followers said about Jesus, child of God. Divine births in the mythological narratives of the gods and the emperor cult form the background against which Luke represented the birth of Jesus in light of the Hellenistically interpreted traditions from the Hebrew Scriptures concerning the holy men of God (see Chapter 6.2).

The idea of being adopted as God's child is a recurrent theme in Graeco-Roman and Hellenistic-Semitic literature (see Chapter 2.2). For Paul, one is called 'child of God' because of one's participation in Jesus' son-ship of God. However, for Celsus, it is unthinkable to compare Jesus the Galilean with the heroes of the Graeco-Roman world (Cook 2000:27). The birth stories of the Greek and Roman divine heroes and their wonderful deeds are simply more impressive than the origins and miracles of Jesus. It cannot be ignored that in Celsus' list of comparisons, the story of the fatherless Perseus, son of Danae, is the first in the series mentioned (Celsus, in J.D. Crossan 1994:74-75).

> First, however, I must deal with the matter of Jesus, the so-called savior, who not long ago taught new doctrines and was thought to be a [child] of God … . This savior, I shall attempt to show, deceived many and caused them to accept a form of belief harmful to the well-being of mankind. Taking its root in the lower classes, the religion continues to spread among the vulgar: Nay, one can even say it spread because of its vulgarity and the illiteracy of its adherents. And while there are a few moderate, reasonable and intelligent people who are inclined to interpret its belief allegorically, yet it thrives in its purer form among the old myths of the Greeks that attribute divinity to Perseus, Amphion, Aeneas and Minos [where there is] equally good evidence of their wondrous works on behalf of mankind and they are certainly no less lacking in plausibility than the stories of your [Jesus]-followers. What have you done by word or deed that is quite so wonderful as those heroes of old?

Intended to be a vilification, Celsus wanted to know how the Jesus-followers could dare to compare with the Greek myths, the saving acts by an illegitimate peasant child Jesus, who was believed to be divinely conceived.

Myths as emptied realities

In Volume One, Chapter 2, we have seen that Christian theologians and exegetes of the New Testament do not hesitate to admit that the nativity traditions about Jesus should be considered as legendary and mythical in nature.[1] Parallels between Jesus and the Greek heroes do not need to be regarded as something that discredits either Jesus or Christianity. Myths are cultural phenomena[2] and it is by illuminating ancient texts, that mythology is understood from the perspective of the sociology of knowledge. Sociology of knowledge is a modem theory according to which the interrelatedness between the social world and the symbolic world can be elucidated.[3] Seen from a modern Western perspective, this association is about the relationship between the 'natural world' and the 'supernatural world.' For the people living in a 'pre-scientific' Mediterranean context, these 'worlds' were not really separated. This context has often been described as a 'mythological' mind-set, distinct from the 'scientific' mind-set.[4]

Modern people live existentially by myths as well. Yet, with the peculiar first-century Mediterranean worldview in mind, we need to determine how myths work. The writer-philosopher-anthropologist Roland Barthes (1957) describes the function of myth as 'to empty reality' and fill the 'emptied history' with 'nature'. What does it mean? The intention of the myth is to use an image from nature to confirm the reality of reality. This articulates the reality of human beings in their relationship with the world of the gods.

Such a cultural-anthropological perspective attempts to be aware of the distance between the ancient and the modern and consequent cultural differences. It would therefore be a hermeneutical fallacy to interpret the ancients, their conception of time (pertaining to a pre-industrial, advanced agrarian Mediterranean world with the focus more on the present than either past or future) from a mono-cultural, contemporary Western perspective (which is oriented towards the future). Visions or heavenly auditions with

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1 See, among others, J.P. Meier (1991) and M.J. Borg (1992).

2 For example, Carl Jung's and Mircea Eliade's respective analyses of myths as archetypes of the cultural conception 'patriarchy'. See M.J. Meadow (1992:187-195).

3 See P.L. Berger (1973); P.L. Berger, & T. Luckmann (1975) and H.C. Kee (1989).

4 Rudolf Bultmann (1965:180) describes this distinction as follows: 'Mythos ist der Bericht von einem Geschehen oder Ereignis, in dem übermenschliche Kräfte oder Personen wirksam sind (daher oft einfach als Göttergeschichte definiert). Mythischen Denken ist der Gegenbegriff zum wissenschaftlichen Denken. Das mythischen Denken führt bestimmte Phänomene und Ereignisse auf übernatürliche, auf "göttliche" Machte zurück.'

visions have power over people in the circumstances of their present-day lives, though it happens through a lens towards the future. The people of Jesus' time regarded these phenomena as 'natural'.[5] Through apocalyptic auditions and visions, everyday experiences are projected into an imaginary world. In other words, 'reality' is 'emptied' (see G. Salyer 1995).

The imaginary world consists of imageries by analogy of everyday experiences, in other words 'emptied history' is filled with 'nature'. Crises in life are often made bearable by living in such 'alternating states of consciousness' (J.J. Pilch 1996). Bruce Malina says: 'While [first-century Mediterranean] people are defined by others and because of others, they are in fact unable to change undesirable situations, hence the need for divine intervention (B.J. Malina 1991). Or as another scholar, with regard to a totally different context, notes: '(Barthes) shows that myth transforms history into nature by stealing language from one context then restoring it in another so that it appears like something "wrested from the gods", when in fact it is simply recycled language' (G. Salyer 1995:267).

As 'emptied realities', myths are therefore not absolute taboos with regard to historiography. Historically, they should be treated in a different way than those discourses that refer 'directly' to psychical data. Mircea Eliade (1963:1), a renowned scholar in the field of anthropology and religion, begins his book, *Myth and reality*, with these words:

> For the past fifty years at least, Western scholars have approached the study of myth from a viewpoint markedly different from, let us say, that of the nineteenth century. Understanding their predecessors, who treated myth in the usual meaning of the word, that is as 'fable', 'invention', 'fiction', they have accepted it as it was understood in the archaic societies, where, on the contrary, 'myth' means a 'true story' and, beyond that, a story that is a most precious possession because it is sacred, exemplary, significant.

For Carl Jung (1956:181), the human mind tends to express symbolically that which is poorly understood intellectually. He argues that potential for formulating archetypal meanings is present in all humans before language is acquired. It seems that the archetypes are like templates for organising the universal themes that recur in human experience, such as a fatherless child

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5 Referring to B. Saler, 1997, 'Supernatural as a Western category', Pilch notes that 'theologically significant usages of the supernatural' were only introduced into the theology of Western Christendom when the works of Pseudo-Dionysios were translated into Latin in the 9th century CE.

who becomes a heroic figure. In different cultures and at different times an archetypal content, according to Jung, will be symbolically expressed in somewhat different ways, but will still reflect the basic human experience underlying it. Eliade's formulation is 'almost identical psychologically' (Eliade, in Meadow 1992:188). For him myths give sacredness, or religious meaning, to physical objects and human acts. 'They are thus exemplary models, human acts through which one relives the myths that give meaning to religious life. Reliving the myth abolishes time and puts one in touch with the real' (Meadow 1992:189).

Only against this background of what it means to live by myths, one can understand the church father Origen's defence against the philosopher Celsus' attack on followers of Jesus. The crucial issue is not that the life of Jesus is seen as *mythical* and compared with the *myths* about the Graeco-Roman heroes, as if the conception 'mythical' is the reason for the defamation. The issue that 'touches the real' is the difference between the intention conveyed by the *myth* of Jesus' birth story and that conveyed by the *myth* of Perseus' birth story. The latter is narrated by Publius Ovidius Naso (43 BCE – *c.* 17/18 CE), known in English as Ovid, who lived during the reign of Emperor Augustus (F. Millar 1993), and who authored his *Metamorphoses* around 8 CE. In this epic poem, consisting of 15 books, Ovid narrates the 'transformations' of human beings encountered in Graeco-Roman mythology from the beginning of the cosmos to the *apotheosis* of Julius Caesar (see P. Knox 2009). In the *Metamorphoses*, the myths of these heroes consist of their transformation in new bodies, such as trees, rocks, animals, flowers, and constellations.[6] These human beings, deified in some way or another, were mortals who were often vulnerable to external influences.[7]

Ovidius Naso (Ovid) was a Roman senator, one of the *domi nobilis* (Millar 1993:6) and member of the *equester ordo* (Millar 1993:8). He rejected, however, his senatorial career because of personal choice, but never stopped honouring the Augustan regime, its 'values and historical claims' (J. Griffin 1984:189). According to Suetonius (*Vita Divi Augusti* 31.5) (Millar 1993:2, n10), he demanded of himself conduct in compliance

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6 For example, Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3.59-597 (in Michael Simpson 2001:57): 'But so as not be stuck forever in the same place, I soon taught myself to pilot a ship, and I begin to observe the stars, the rainy constellation of the Olenian She-Goat, Taygete, the Hyades, and the Bear and I learned the winds and where they came from and the harbors best for ships.'

7 See the episode where Perseus turns the Ethiopian king Cepheus to stone, Ovid, *Metamorphose*s 5.1-249, in Simpson 2001:310).

with the Augustan 'principles of succeeding ages' (Millar 1993:3). In his *Facta et Dicta Memorablia* (see Millar 1993:4) he said of Augustus' son, Emperor Tiberius, 'You therefore do I invoke in this undertaking, Caesar, in whose power the common will of gods and mankind wished the government of sea and earth to be, by whose celestial providence the virtues, of which I am about to speak, are fostered, and vices are most severely punished.'[8]

Ovidius shared the consulship with 'Imperator Caesar Divi filius in the year of Actium' (Millar 1993:7) and was actively involved in the Senate with the proposal that Augustus be honoured as '*Pater Patriae*' (Suetonius, *Vita Divi Augusti* 58) (Millar p. 7). In his *Fasti* (II.127-128), he wrote about Augustus: 'Reverend father of the fatherland [*sancta pater patriae*], the senate and we, the equites, gave you this name.' In this same passage, Millar 'goes on to a laborious comparison of Augustus, first to Iuppiter and then to Romulus'. With regard to the deification of Augustus, he referred to 'Father Mars and Father Caesar': 'of the two of you, one is a god, and one will be' [*nam deus e vobis alter est, alter eris*] (Ovidius, *Ars Amatoria*, 202-203, in Millar p.7). Specifically in his *Metamorphoses* (cf. Ovidius, *Tristia* II.555-562), he lauded the transformation of Augustus: 'We sang too, though the final touch was missing from the undertaking, of bodies transformed into new appearances [*in facies corpora versa novas*], If only you would … have a few lines from this work read to you: a few, in which starting from the first origin of the world I spun out a work down to your times, Caesar. Then you will see how much heart you put into me and with what wholehearted support I sang of you and yours' (in Millar 1993:8). Denis Feeney[9] emphasises 'Ovid's brilliant retelling of *myths of transformation* culminate in the deification of Julius Caesar and the prospective deification of Augustus' (my emphasis). Looking forward to the accession of Tiberius, he concurs in his *Metamorphoses* with the propaganda of the *Pax Romana*:

> Peace once brought to the earth, he [Julius Caesar] will turn his mind to civil justice, and, most just law-makers, will carry laws, and by his own example will control morals; and looking ahead to future ages and coming generations will order offspring born of a saintly wife to bear both his name and his cares; nor till in old age he has matched the years of Nestor, will he touch the ethereal seat and the stars that share his blood. Meantime, make this soul snatched from the murdered body into a star, so that for ever over

8 Translation from Latin, in Millar (1993:4; see Y. Malakov 1984:437).
9 D.C. Feeney (1991, Chapter 5) in Millar (1993:8).

> the Capitol and forum Divius Iulius may look forth from his lofty temple (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* XV.832-42; Latin and English translation in Millar 1993:8-9).

According to Millar (1993:14), the language of the *Metamorphoses* is unambiguous: Augustus dead, but Tiberius heir of the *cognomen* 'Imperator', continued in a fictive, non-biological way – through transformation which led to a next transformation – the Imperial house. In a poem on the deification of Augustus[10], and reflection on the delayed accession of Tiberius, entitled *Getico sermone*, Ovidius said: 'For I taught how, though father Augustus had been mortal in body, his spirit departed for heavenly abodes [*nam patris Augusti docui mortale fuise corpus, in aetherias numen abisse domos*]: that one matched his father in virtue, who offered the reins of empire [*esse parem virtute patri, qui frena rogatus saepe recusati ceperit imperii*] …' (Latin and English translation in Millar 1993:15). These poetic words resonate with what Ovidius wrote in *Fasti* (I.529-536) in 14 CE, referred to by Millar (1993:15) as a prophecy of the rule of the Augusti:

> Time will be, when the same one will protect you and the globe, and sacrifice will be offered by the god himself, and the guardianship of the land will remain with the Augusti [*et penes Augustos*[11] *patriae tutela manebit*]: it is the gods' will for this house to hold reins of empire [*hanc fas imperii frena tenere domum*]. Hence the grandson of a god and son of a god, though he may himself refuse, will carry his father's burden with celestial mind; and just as I shall one day be sanctified with perpetual altars, so shall Iulia Augusta become as new deity.

Millar's comment on the poet's prophecy demonstrates the intention of the myths of the transformations ('metamorphoses') that Ovid had in mind: 'Here too, Ovid's perceptions were specifically prompted from Rome, and from the inmost circles of the "Augustan aristocracy" ' (Millar 1993:15).

In light of such adulations of mortals transformed into deities and 'prophecies' of enduring nobility of aristocratic power and imperial rule, the myth of Perseus in the *Metamorphoses* (IV.604-805), is not only an echo of Hercules, son of God,[12] but it also echoes the 'Augustos' as sons

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10 Written in Gothic. See Stephen Murphy (1997).

11 The term *Augustos* refers to 'the emperor successors of Augustus' (Green 2004:243).

12 Cf. L. Fulkerson and T. Stover (2016).

of God. Quite understandably so, for the philosopher Celsus, it is simply unjustifiable that Jesus-followers could dare to compare the peasant Jesus with Perseus, son of Zeus, by means of their narrations that Jesus was conceived virginally and performed miraculous deeds – while the great Roman poet from the nobility, Ovidius Naso, in his *Metamorphoses*,[13] one of the most renowned epics about transformation in antiquity, narrated the virginal conception and apotheosis of Perseus as the mythical resemblance of the 'Augustos' who were transformed by the gods into deities.

Ovid's Perseus

The mythological legend of Perseus is a model of a fatherless son becoming a hero. According to the myth, Perseus was the abandoned son of Danae by Zeus. Danae was the daughter of King Acrisius of Argos. The king was warned by prophecy that a son born to his daughter would kill him. So, he shut her away in a brazen tower. (According to another version, it was in an underground chamber.) There, through a narrow window, Zeus went to her in the form of a shower of gold and she became pregnant. Danae called her son Perseus. In an act of dynastic politics, Acrisius enclosed the son and his mother in a chest and set it afloat on the sea. Acrisius' name means 'ill judgment' and Perseus means 'the destroyer'.

Cultural-anthropological studies have shown that resource competition among individuals and families in pre-industrial societies, that is, competition for other valuables besides land and geopolitical power, was one of the reasons for infanticide (see M. Dickemann 1984:427-438). Acrisius was threatened by the oracle; he denied his vocation of fatherhood and he absented himself from the child Zeus provided. It is ironic that the very attempt to ensure an oracle's prediction would not come true caused it to happen as foretold. By getting rid of a male heir, Acrisius weakened his line and thereby harmed himself (A. Pirani [1988] 1989).

Zeus was the 'god of illegitimacy', and he appeared whenever that which was 'legitimate' needed to be called into question.[14] The implication

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13 Ovid [8 CE], *Metamorphoses* IV.V, in M.M, Innes (1955); cf. G.M. Kirkwood ([1959] 1966). Also see Perseus, in *Lexicon Iconographischen Mythologiae Classicae*. A version of the myth is also to be found as 'The doom of King Acrisius', in William Morris's, 1868, *The earthly paradise* and *Andromeda*, written by Charles Kingsley (1858). See also A. Pirani ([1988] 1989).

14 See, for example, the story of the infidelity of Coronis after she was impregnated by Apollo, son of Zeus, and Zeus who interfered to safeguard Coronis who was destined to die on a funeral pyre as punishment (see Chapter 2.2).

is that the divine and the human cannot be separated. Though humans do not always realise it, there is a higher meaning to their bodily existence in the world. Against human heartlessness, Zeus combines divinity and humanity. The child that results from this union will carry forth this spirit. According to the myth, Acrisius did not believe that it was the work of Zeus.

The myth gives an indication of what awaits a person who is burdened with restoring meaning and value to human life. 'Every single mother and fatherless son is playing our drama of a society in need of a new father, as surely as Mary and Jesus did' (Pirani op. cit. p. 13, 14, 18). The chest (compare to this the 'death basket' in which the endangered child, Moses, was set afloat) floated to the island of Seriphus. A fisherman named Dictys, the brother of Polydectes, the king of Seriphus, found the chest. He rescued the endangered mother and son, and gave them shelter. Polydectes tried without success to force Danae into marrying him. However, the protection of Perseus, who was growing into manhood, hindered him in his pursuit of Danae. To get rid of the son, Polydectes sent Perseus off on a quest to bring back the head of Medusa – according to Ovid (*Metamorphoses* IV.770), a 'snaky-haired monster.' Medusa was one of three winged sisters, the Gorgons, whose heads were wreathed with serpents instead of hair. The Gorgons had the power to turn whoever looked upon them into stone. The goddess Athena, who hated the Medusa and who was responsible for the serpented heads of the Gorgons, aided Perseus in various ways. She gave him a brightly polished shield so that he could see Medusa's head reflected in it and not face her directly. Hermes, the son of Zeus and Maia, daughter of Atlas, was the messenger of the gods and the guide of travellers. He guided Perseus to the cave where the three Graeae ('Gray Ones'), sisters of the Gorgons, dwelt. These women were gray from birth and had among them just one tooth and one eye. Perseus seized the communal tooth and eye and would not give it back until the 'Gray Ones' told him how to find certain nymphs who could act as helpers. They had the equipment he needed to perform his commission. Thus Perseus was able to behead the Medusa.

During an eventful return trip, Perseus rescued Andromeda, the daughter of Cepheus and Cassiopeia, the king and queen of Joppa in Philistia. King Cepheus was of Ethiopian origin. Andromeda was sacrificed to a sea dragon to appease the furious Poseidon. After Perseus had slayed the monster he was rewarded with Andromeda's hand in marriage. Ovid (*Metamorphose*s 5.1-258) recounted that Cassiopeia and Cepheus were filled with joy: they greeted Perseus as their son-in-law, calling him the saviour and preserver

of their house.[15] Perseus and Andromeda returned to Seriphus, where Polydectes was still harassing Danae. She, fearing Polydectes' violence, took shelter in a temple with the fisherman Dictys. There Perseus found them. Polydectes was petrified when Perseus showed him Medusa's head.[16] The fisherman Dictys succeeded his deceased brother and he became the king of Seriphus. Perseus, Danae, and Andromeda set out for Argos. On hearing of their approach, Acrisius fled to Thessaly. (According to another version, it was Larissa.) Later Perseus went to Thessaly (or Larissa) to participate in athletic contests. These were the funeral games that the king (of Larissa) held in honour of his dead father (Pirani [1989] 1989:101-107). At the games, Perseus threw the discus that was diverted by the wind and killed Acrisius, who was there as a spectator.

Perseus refused to succeed Acrisius as king of Argos. He established himself elsewhere as king and father of a new dynasty, the Tiryns. Thus he became the model of the destroyer of patriarchy and, at the same time, as the 'father of outsiders,' the saviour of the endangered woman. Pirani (1989:95) puts it as follows:

> Perseus does not look back – but he does go back, to the beginning – by way of Seriphos to Argos ... His first concern is with his mother and Polydectes: he goes back to the place in which he grew up but could not come to manhood: something must be resolved there. His second concern is with his origins, the place, the mystery of his birth. The myth doesn't clarify the extent of Perseus's knowledge of his relationship to Acrisius. It is unlikely that he knows of the oracle's prediction. There is a feeling, created by the silence of the myth, of some unknown guilty secret being tracked down. Was it maintained in silence by Danae? Perhaps Perseus has doubts about his patrimony, cannot believe his mother's story about Zeus – or whatever she has told him – and he suspects incest, rape, illegitimacy?

Perseus' return to the 'fatherland' can be seen as his search for kinship and ancestry. The loyalty shown to a blood-bond can be very strong. As adults, adopted and illegitimate children often attempt excessively to reconnect with the missing father or the original parents. As is often the case with such children, Perseus was proffered a kinship relationship in an imperfect way. He was thus separated from his origins – a common occurrence in times of social upheaval and restructuring (Pirani 1989:97). Nevertheless, the image

15 See portrayal in art history, T. Puttfarken (2008:22).
16 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book V, in H. Mifflin ([1993] 2017).

of Danae and Dictys in the temple is a powerful symbol. Perseus needed affirmation, which he received from the man who played a positive role in his life. Dictys, 'the father in the temple' (Pirani 1989:97) who had saved Perseus at birth, now became a father figure. The temple added a spiritual dimension to the qualities he brought to Perseus' life.

Jesus and common Greek thinking

Myths of virginal conceptions, ascensions to heaven and being adopted by the gods are almost 'recycled language.' In this regard, Seneca's tragedies of Hercules' adoption (see next section of this chapter) and Ovid's story of Perseus' conception are most striking. These stories were not only very familiar in the first-century Graeco-Roman world, but also came to mind when (Gentile) philosophers of that period reflected on what Christians said about Jesus, child of God.

In Philippians 2:9-11, Paul uses the designation 'Lord' (Κυρίος) to describe the crown of Jesus' redemptive work: 'God gave him ... the name which is above each name, so that in the name of Jesus ... each tongue would confess: "Jesus Christ is Lord".' Similarly, the designation 'son' is a metaphorical label with which the resurrected Jesus is addressed. Thus we read, for instance, in Hebrews (1:4) that the 'most excellent name' that God gave the exalted Jesus when God lifted him above the angels, was the designation 'son'. In the Shepherd of Hermas (*Similtudes* IX, 14, 5) we learn that the 'name Son-of-God is firm and supports the whole world' (cf. R. Bultmann [1958] 1968:130).

The two names *Lord* (Κυρίος) and *Son-of-God* (Υιός του θεού) belong together (Bultmann 1968:125). Son-of-God refers to the divine nature of the Κυρίος who is honoured as a cultic figure. Inversely, Κυρίος refers to the status and function of the figure called Son-of-God. It was in 'Hellenistic Christianity' that the label Κυρίος was first given to Jesus to express his divine nature. Previously, Jesus was already called Κυρίος by 'Aramaic-speaking Christ-followers, but for another reason. In the synagogue, teachers of the law were called 'Rabbi' (cf. E. Schürer [1884-1924] 1979:327). The Aramaic-speaking Christ-followers, influenced by Greek idiom, translated the word 'Rabbi' (ῥαββί – from Hebrew רַבִּי and in Aramaic מריא), meaning 'master of the Torah' and often referred to in the Jesus tradition with the term δάσκαλος, 'teacher'. In the Jesus tradition, the term Κυρίος is also found as reference to Jesus as 'teacher /master of the Torah', for example in Matthew (Sand 1974:167; Van Aarde 1994a:62). According to F. Hahn ([1963] 1974:295-308), 'Hellenistic Christians' used the label 'son-of-God' as part

of their 'missionary' message. In the Hebrew Scriptures, this name referred to a messianic king (Thompson 1999:323-374; Cohn-Sherbock 1977:4-5). Now it attained a new meaning.

For Christians today it seems that 'son-of-God' applies uniquely to Jesus in an ontological way in terms of Jesus' relationship within the Trinity. However, in the Hellenistic environment, it was commonly used for people who were considered divine. At this stage, the metaphor 'son-of-God' started referring to the divine being of Jesus (Hahn 1974:293-295). Jesus was distinguished from the human sphere on the basis of his divine nature. The metaphor thus pertained to a confessional function. With the confessional metaphor 'son-of-God' the claim was being made that Jesus had a divine origin and was filled with divine power.

To Christ-followers embedded within the Israelite tradition, the idea that a messianic figure could be represented as being subject to suffering was offensive. However, to 'Hellenistic' Christ-followers, such a representation regarding a son-of-god figure was not an obstacle, but a 'mystery' (Bultmann 1968:131). This paradoxical mystery consisted of the fact that a figure, divine in being, appeared in human form and accepted the fate of suffering as a human. This can be seen in the Christ-Hymn quoted by Paul in Philippians 2:6-11 (see Volume 1, Chapter 3.4). For them the divine origin and power of the son-of-God were not belied by his humanness. One way in which divinity and humanness came together was in a child conceived through sexual intercourse of a deity with a mortal human. This is a legacy from the Greek tradition. The lives of people who were born as a result of such a union were characterised by heroic acts and spiritual contributions to humanity – benefactions far beyond ordinary human measure (Bultmann 1968:132).

Many divine figures known in the Hellenistic period, claimed to be 'sons-of-god.' Some of them were honoured in cults. In these cults, the combination of divinity and humanness was not an issue. In New Testament times, a way in which divinity and humanness came together was the idea of 'sons-of-gods' (cf. M.J. Harris 1992:28, n38). This was a legacy from eastern Hellenism and, initially, from ancient Eastern mythology. The sons-of-gods were honoured in the cults of the mystery religions. They were taken to be saviour figures of redemption. The myths about them recounted how they suffered the human fate of death but again rose from death.[17] Worshippers could partake in redemption if they experienced the god's death and resurrection in the form of rites.[18]

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17 Cf. e.g. the dying and rising Osiris myth in Egypt (R.E.Witt 1971:36-45).

18 The origin of these divine figures lies in ancient fertility religions.

The figure of the redeemer in Gnostic myth is related to these 'mysteries.' Some of the 'Christians' who came from the heathen world made the birth and death of Jesus comprehensible by making use of the concepts 'sonship-of-God' and the 'Gnostic redemptive figure' who comes from above. Thus we read that the writer(s) of the Gospel of John say(s) the following about Jesus: 'Such is God's love for the cosmos: He gave his "only begotten" Son' (John 3:16). In the Gospel of John, Jesus says on the eve of his death: 'I was born for this and entered the cosmos for this' (John 18:37). In 1 John 3:16 we read: 'In this way we know what love is: that man, Jesus Christ, the son-of-God (cf. also 1 John 3:23), gave his life for our sake' (my paraphrase of the original Greek). In this kind of statement we see that the paradoxical concept of a divine being (a 'son-of-god') who became human and suffered a human fate may be related to the Gnostic idea of a redeemer who entered from above into the cosmos here below. The conceptualisation of Jesus as son-of-God varied in Hellenistic Christian circles, depending on which tradition – that of the Greek mythological or that of the Eastern mythological-Gnostic 'son-of-god' – more greatly influenced it.

The synoptic gospels in essence do not represent the Gnostic type, but that Jesus as the son-of-God *reveals* his divine authority (cf. Bultmann 1968:133; Betz 1968:114-133; Koester 1971:158-204). This is a mode of representation that fits into that part of Christian thought that was determined by Israelite views. Within this structure, the 'power' manifested in the life of the divine figure is attributed to the Divine Spirit. This is a phenomenon that, according to Hellenistic interpretations, also appeared in the lives of 'holy men of God' found in the Hebrew Scriptures, like David and the prophets. To those Christ-followers influenced by Israelite thinking, this served as an analogy for their confession that the Christ was the son-of-God.

The faith assertion found in the Markan report about Jesus' baptism can be seen as an illustration of this conviction.[19] Paul, therefore, did not see Jesus as a miracle worker (Bultmann 1968:134). In a certain sense, these two types were mutually exclusive. Making sense of this paradox one needs to think in terms of what 'DNA in antiquity' entails (see Chapter 6.2). For the earliest Jesus-followers the peasant Jesus forms the matrix of the fortune

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19 According to Mark (1:9-11), Jesus manifested himself as son-of-God when, on his baptism, he was filled with the Spirit of God. Bultmann points out that this same view appears quite clearly in the 'Western' manuscript tradition of Luke 3:22 up to Augustine (*inter al*. the Latin version of the fifth-century Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis [D], Justin, Clement, and Latin documents by a number of Western church fathers. According to this tradition, a voice came from heaven that said, in the words Psalm 2:7, 'You are my son; today I have begotten you'.