



This article introduces a post-doctoral research project on prayer to Christ in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles. The project is situated in the RCEC and makes an important contribution to our study of early Christian spirituality and liturgy.

***“Glory be to you, my Jesus.”
Prayer to Christ
in the Apocryphal Acts
of the Apostles***

The title of this article is taken from a prayer of the Apostle John to Christ. It is found in chapter 43 of the Apocryphal Acts of John,¹ a Christian narrative from the middle of the second century C.E. The Acts of John (AJ) is one of the five so-called major Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles (AAA), the other four being the Acts of Andrew (AA), Paul (AP), Peter (APe), and Thomas (Ath).²

Hans-Josef Klauck writes that “no one disputes that the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles offer us an invaluable insight into the history of piety and theology in the second and third centuries.”³

¹ *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation*, edited by J. K. Elliott (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 323.

² A. F. J. Klijn, *Apocriefe handelingen van de apostelen: Buitenbijbelse verhalen uit de vroege kerk* (Kampen: Ten Have, 2001), 18: “De keuze voor deze vijf is gebaseerd op historische gegevens, volgens welke deze Handelingen de oudste zijn.”

³ Hans-Josef Klauck, *The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 7.

The AAA contain about one hundred (references to) prayers to Christ, which include both private and liturgical prayers to Christ.

The following prayer of the Apostle Thomas, for instance, is a Eucharistic prayer to Christ:

“Jesus, who have deemed us worthy to partake of the eucharist of your holy body and blood, behold, we are emboldened to come to your eucharist and to invoke your holy name; come and commune with us” (Ath 49).⁴

With regard to the AAA, Hugh A. G. Houghton states, “Most prayers are addressed directly to Jesus.”⁵ How remarkable that is becomes obvious when one compares the AAA with the canonical NT.

Here, most prayers are addressed to God, the Father (cf. Mt 6:9). In the entire NT, only less than ten unambiguous (references to) prayers to Christ are found (cf. Jn 14:13-14; Acts 7:59-60; 1 Cor 16:22; 2 Cor 12:8; 1 Tim 1:12; Rev 22:20).

Thus, it can clearly be stated that direct prayer to Christ is **distinctive** of the AAA.

⁴ *Apocryphal New Testament*, 467.

⁵ Hugh A. G. Houghton, “The Discourse of Prayer in the Major Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles,” *Apocrypha* 15 (2004): 177.

Up to now, however, the numerous prayers to Christ found in the AAA have not been studied in depth, but neglected by scholars of early Christianity. This neglect is due to the Austrian liturgical scholar Josef Andreas Jungmann (1889-1975).

In his seminal study of early Christian liturgical prayer to Christ,⁶ Jungmann comes to the following two conclusions with regard to pre-Arian Christianity:

First, private prayer to Christ was rare. Second, liturgical prayer to Christ did not exist in the official church. It was established only in the fourth century C.E. as a reaction to Arianism.

Jungmann is well aware of the many (liturgical) prayers contained in the AAA. However, instead of studying these prayers in detail, he dismisses them as Gnostic/heretical and thus irrelevant for his investigation.⁷ Many scholars of early Christian prayer basically agree with the findings of Jungmann.⁸

⁶ Josef Andreas Jungmann, *Die Stellung Christi im liturgischen Gebet*, Photomechanischer Neudruck von Liturgiegeschichtliche Forschungen Heft 7-8 mit Nachträgen des Verfassers, Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen 19-20 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1962).

⁷ Cf. Jungmann, *Stellung Christi*, 146-151.

⁸ Cf., Adalbert Gautier Hamman, *La Prière dans l'Eglise ancienne*, *Traditio Christiana* 7 (Berne : Peter Lang, 1989), XIX ; Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 140, 618.

However, an increasing number of recent (liturgical) scholars criticize the neglect of and request an in-depth investigation of the prayers to Christ found in the AAA.⁹

With regard to the position of Jungmann and others, Paul Bradshaw, for example, speaks of “a disinclination to admit into court any testimony that might point to a conclusion that the scholars a priori had decided was simply not true of what they thought of as mainstream Christianity.”¹⁰

The research project introduced in this article responds to Bradshaw and others by admitting the AAA and their prayers to Christ into court. The project attempts to study carefully all prayers to Christ found in the AAA.

The methodology is twofold: (1) A historical-critical study of the prayers will demonstrate, for example, to what extent they have been influenced by the OT, the NT, Early Judaism, Greco-Roman magic, Gnosticism, etc.

(2) A narrative-critical study of the prayers will reveal the characters mainly associated with as well as the conflicts and contexts that particularly motivate prayer to Christ.

This twofold approach will also shed light on the theology of the prayers to Christ in the AAA. It will become obvious, for example, to what extent these prayers are expressions of theological concepts like monotheism, modalism, and christomonism.

By studying the prayers to Christ in the AAA, the research project will show to what extent Jungmann’s thesis regarding pre-Arian liturgical prayer to Christ needs to be modified.

According to the RCEC mission statement, it is our goal “to chart the formation of early Christian identity along different dimensions (creed, spirituality, liturgy, church order etc).”

By studying the prayers to Christ in the AAA, the project makes a promising and worthwhile contribution to our study of early Christian spirituality and liturgy.

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⁹Cf., Bryan D. Spinks, “The Place of Christ in Liturgical Prayer: What Jungmann omitted to Say,” in *The Place of Christ in Liturgical Prayer: Trinity, Christology, and Liturgical Theology*, ed. Bryan D. Spinks (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 1-19.

¹⁰ Paul Bradshaw, “God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit in Early Christian Praying,” in Spinks, ed., *Place of Christ*, 59.

Gerber, Daniel and Pierre Keith, eds. *Les hymnes du Nouveau Testament et leurs fonctions. Lectio Divina 225. Paris: Cerf, 2009, 490 p.*

Between 27-30 August 2007, the *Association catholique française pour l'étude de la Bible* held its 22nd congress at Marc-Bloch University in Strasbourg, France. This collection reproduces in slightly edited form all the contributions to that colloquium, including 12 conferences and 12 seminar papers, plus an article on 2 Timothy 2:8, 11-13 by M. Gorgues (159-178), all in French. In addition to surveying the *status quaestionis* of the study of "hymns" in the New Testament (article T. Osborne, 57-80), the articles focus on two main questions:

- (1) the relation of such texts to their surrounding narrative or discourse context and
- (2) how they function within that context.

Broadly speaking, the presentations may be placed in three categories: texts from the New Testament itself, texts or issues at the time of the NT or prior, and texts and concerns later than the NT. This review highlights only conclusions of various articles relevant for early Christianity, referring the reader to the publisher's site for complete titles

[\[http://www.editionsducerf.fr/html/fiche/fichetm.asp?n_liv_cerf=8347\]](http://www.editionsducerf.fr/html/fiche/fichetm.asp?n_liv_cerf=8347).

New Testament texts.

At least 12 articles deal with specific NT passages or documents, although not thereby treating every alleged "hymnic" passage. Surveying use of the Psalms in the Gospel of Matthew, G. Claudel (267-280) finds that most originate in Q. Regarding function, Jesus reflects both the spirituality of the Psalms and the character of God. Psalms references play a significant role in Matthew's passion narrative

(279-280). Three articles give attention to the Lucan Canticles: one on the *nunc dimittis* (D. Gerber, 83-98) and two treating the overall text of Luke 1-2 (T. Osborne, 281-94 and N. Siffer, 295-308). Gerber underlines the theological contributions of the Simeon canticle, while Osborne and Siffer show the multiple contributions in both form and content the "songs" make to Luke-Acts. According to J.-M. Severin (309-23), the prologue to the Gospel of Luke functions as a "paratext", introducing yet veiling the main Christological emphases of the Gospel.

Six other articles treat passages from the epistles, and one hymnic material in Revelation. Refusing the attribution "hymn" to the "lyrical composition" of 1 Corinthians 13, C. Focant (99-118) argues that it should be viewed as an elaborate "rhetorical digression", yet linked to other subjects in the letter. In contrast, C. Reynier (119-136) analyses Ephesians as "hymnological extension", complex of references and terms that together communicate its essential message. E. Cuvillier (137-57) opts for an anthropological reading of Philippians 2:6-11, which nevertheless at its heart is soteriological and ethical, relating readers to Christ. A. Dettwiler (325-40) notes the function of Colossians 1:15-20 has been little studied and proposes its application in the letter to reconciliation, Christ as dwelling place of God, and authority over all creation. For M. Gorgues (159-78), the interaction between apostolic and baptismal contexts best describes the function of 2 Timothy 2:8, 11-13. After surveying previous research, J. Schlosser (179-208) identifies passages with "hymnic" elements within 1 Peter 1:3-2:10. M. Morgan (209-238) examines most hymnic material in Revelation, concluding for specific elements present in early Christian worship: emphasis on praise and a dual focus

on both God and Christ. She also shows how the material has been well integrated into the current dramatic narrative.

Other relevant articles.

Students of early Christianity should equally give attention to J-N Aletti's proposal (239-80), reminding readers how "rhythmic prose" texts (his alternative to poetic or hymnic) can have multiple functions, not only within but also outside of the NT. Y. Lehmann (19-37) replaces early Christian hymns in their larger context of antiquity, showing that they belong to a long social-literary tradition. Finally M. Metzger (445-60) examines the "hymnic pieces" in the early Christian collection known as the *Apostolic Constitutions*, which reflect diversity in origins and functions of this type of material. Some resembles closely the Psalter or NT, while others show more development, yet still conforming to biblical tradition.

In general the conference achieved its goal of focusing on function rather than origin of NT hymnic materials. Some authors, however, value the latter more highly than others. Varied positions taken on questions of genre, source and even proper terminology for describing these texts justify Osborne's contention that many of the previous "assured results" no longer convince. At the same time, fascination for the form, content and function of these texts in their various settings remains, as well as interest for their intertextuality. This along with early Christian use of these texts is a place for further research. It is to be regretted that, in a spirit of faithfulness to the original papers, more editing was not done either in the order or form of each article to bring them into line with each other. A bibliography and ancient text index would also have been helpful.

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