

## A NOTE ON 1 CORINTHIANS 15:3-5

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### I. INTRODUCTION

There are many examples of traditional elements preserved within the later text of the NT. A large percentage of these occur within the Pauline epistles. In this paper I wish to share some insights into the life of the apostolic Church gained through an examination of one of the formulae preserved by Paul:

For I handed down to you at first that which I also received:  
that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures;  
and that he was buried;  
and that he arose on the third day according to the Scriptures;  
and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve (1 Cor 15:3-5).

### II. FORMGESCHICHTE OF THE PASSAGE

The majority of modern Biblical scholars agree with Kloppenborg that the passage between vv 2 and 12 of 1 Corinthians 15 "contains a pre-Pauline confessional/kerygmatic statement."<sup>1</sup> However, they debate the extent, origin and function of the statement. Any one of three characteristics might indicate that a given NT passage is likely to be traditional: (1) The passage should be an insertion into the text; (2) it should show evidence of composition by a person other than the author of the text; (3) it should contain evidence suggesting that the passage is in fact traditional. We will use these characteristics to test the validity of Kloppenborg's statement about the passage under examination.

In this paper the term "insertion" is used to indicate a grammatical relationship between two parts of a text. An insertion is sometimes, but not always, a later addition to the text. In 1 Cor 15:1-2 Paul reminds his readers of the gospel that he had proclaimed to them at an earlier time. He does not begin to expound on it, however, until v 12. The intervening nine verses include a statement of the basis of the Christian faith (3-5), a list of Christophanies seemingly appended to that statement (6-8), and a discussion of Paul's apostolic calling and authority (9-11). Verses 3-11 are grammatically unrelated to vv 2 and 12. It would make good sense to read v 2, skip vv 3-11, and continue with v 12. This indicates that vv 3-11 represent an insertion into the essay on bodily resurrection.

The first part of the insertion contains a large amount of non-Pauline vocabu-

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<sup>1</sup>J. Kloppenborg, "An Analysis of the Pre-Pauline Formula 1 Corinthians 15:3b-5 in Light of Some Recent Literature," *CBQ* 18 (1956) 351.

lary. Jeremias<sup>2</sup> has adequately discussed this matter and concluded that the quantity of non-Pauline vocabulary and syntax in vv 3b-5 is so great that Paul is very unlikely to have been the original author of this part of the insertion.

The internal structure of this insertion of originally non-Pauline material suggests that it is traditional. The contents—Jesus' death and resurrection and evidence for both—are suitable for the teaching or proclamation of the faith. The form, *parallelismus membrorum*<sup>3</sup>—two long lines similar in length and structure, each followed by a short line, both of which are similar in length and structure—is rhythmic and flowing. This form is conducive to recitation and memorization, both of which are necessary for the proper functioning of creeds and catechisms. Most significant, however, is Paul's use of the terms *paredōka* and *parelabon* in v 3a to describe the method of transmission of the statement. Arndt and Gingrich<sup>4</sup> cite several examples of the use of these terms in the NT and patristic literature to indicate clearly the transmission of tradition. Jeremias<sup>5</sup> has suggested that they are translations of the technical rabbinic terms *qibbēl min* and *māsar lē-* for the presentation and receipt of tradition. The comments of Jeremias on this point are probably correct since Paul is thought to have had both classical Greek and traditional rabbinic education.

### III. TRADITIONGESCHICHTE OF THE PASSAGE

It is fairly easy to determine the extent of the pre-Pauline tradition preserved in 1 Corinthians 15. Each article of the creed begins with *hoti* ("that"), and the four are connected by *kai* ("and"). The structure of the passage changes after v 5: Each of the Christophanies listed after the one to Cephas is introduced with a temporal conjunction rather than with *hoti*. In addition, inclusion of the entire list into the creed would destroy the creed's *parallelismus membrorum* and switch its function from concise statement of the basis of the faith to apologetic for the resurrection (which is what Paul was trying to do in chap. 15). Thus it may be assumed that the creed began with the first *hoti* in v 3 and ended at the latest with *dōdeka* ("twelve") in v 5. Verse 3a, which describes the method of transmission, is definitely a Pauline introduction.

*Ophthē* ("he appeared") followed by a list of witnesses is standard syntax in both vulgar Greek and the LXX,<sup>6</sup> so it is reasonable to assume that "to Cephas" was originally part of the creed. Whether "then to the twelve" was also an integral part of the creed is open to speculation, however. This addition makes the fourth line significantly longer than the second (its parallel). Also it is connected somewhat clumsily to the rest of the line by *eita* ("then") when *kai* would have been much smoother and more natural. "He appeared to James, then to all the

<sup>2</sup>J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (New York: Scribner's, 1966) 101-102.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 102-103.

<sup>4</sup>BAG 615 (sec. 3), 619 (2,b,γ).

<sup>5</sup>Jeremias, *Eucharistic* 103.

<sup>6</sup>Kloppenborg, "Analysis" 353, 358.

apostles" (v 7) would have been adapted to parallel the statement within the creed rather than vice versa, so this is not an acceptable explanation for the use of *eita*. All we may be sure of is that if "then to the twelve" is an addition to the creed it is a pre-Pauline addition. *Dōdeka* is a non-Pauline word, and the twelve were presumably some of the apostles, so if the phrase had been Pauline it would have been redundant and unnecessary.<sup>7</sup>

The development of the creed from earlier formulae is taken for granted by most scholars. The process of the development, however, is a subject of debate. Fuller<sup>8</sup> argues for a combination of four traditions (death, burial, and resurrection clauses and list of Christophanies) while Kloppenborg<sup>9</sup> suggests an expansion of a single proclamation of the death and resurrection. Both of these hypotheses have weaknesses, however. Fuller is unable to explain the possible reasons for existence of independent burial and appearance formulae, and Kloppenborg is unable to think of a stimulus that might have resulted in such a great expansion of a single tradition (handed down verbatim ideally or with minor variations actually).

There are at least two types of formulae preserved in the NT: One, identified as the "died-arose" type in this paper, proclaims the death and resurrection of Jesus; the other, identified as the "arose-appeared" type, proclaims (or at least strongly implies) the resurrection and at least one post-resurrection appearance. The "died-arose" type is preserved in its Hellenistic form, "Jesus/Christ died and arose," in the Pauline literature (1 Thess 4:14; 2 Cor 5:14-15; Rom 8:34; 14:9), the Johannine literature (Rev 2:8) and 1 Pet 3:18; the Semitic form, "God raised Jesus from the dead," is preserved by Luke in Acts (3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 13:34; 17:31). The "arose-appeared" formula is preserved by Luke in an insertion into the Emmaus road narrative (Luke 24:34) and in combination with Lucan redactions and probably also with a formula of the "died-arose" type in Acts 10:40-41; 13:30-31.

If the pre-Pauline creed is divided into two equal sections, two statements—"Christ died . . . and was buried" and "(Christ) arose . . . and appeared"—are obtained. With the exception of a burial clause in place of the "arose" clause in the first statement, the two are remarkably similar to the "died-arose" and "arose-appeared" formulae discussed above. This fact leads to speculation that the pre-Pauline creed came into existence as an attempt to preserve two traditional proclamations by placing them into a framework that would allow its contents to be recited and memorized easily. If this is the case, hypothetical steps in the development of the creed would be as follows: (1) existence of two proclamations of the "died-arose" and "arose-appeared" types; (2) combination of the two proclamations into one longer proclamation: "Christ died and arose and arose and appeared to Cephas"; (3) replacement of one of the "arose" clauses with a burial clause (eliminated redundant clause and perhaps combatted docetic heresy by identifying the crucified Jesus and the risen Christ as one and the same and

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 358.

<sup>8</sup>R. H. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 14.

<sup>9</sup>Kloppenborg, "Analysis" 363.

the death of this being as genuine and total); (4) addition of "then to the twelve" to "appeared" clause, if not original; (5) additions of "for our sins according to the Scriptures" to "died" clause and "on the third day according to the Scriptures" to "arose" clause; and (6) addition by Paul of introduction (v 3a) and *hoti* at the beginning of each clause "in order to highlight each statement of the creed."<sup>10</sup>

#### IV. ORIGIN AND *SITZ IM LEBEN* OF CREED

Jeremias<sup>11</sup> has argued for Semitic and Conzelmann<sup>12</sup> for Hellenistic origin of the creed. Since their discussions of the evidence for both positions are widely available, I will not repeat their arguments. It is sufficient to state Conzelmann's conclusion, which is the more attractive of the two, that even if the contents of the creed are Semitic in origin the creed itself developed in a Hellenistic Christian milieu strongly influenced by the style of the Hellenistic synagogue.<sup>13</sup> Leon-Dufour<sup>14</sup> has suggested that a likely milieu would be Antioch shortly before the time of Paul's visit there (c. A.D. 42). Wilckens' date<sup>15</sup> of c. 50 (also at Antioch) is probably too late since Paul first preached at Corinth in 49-52.<sup>16</sup>

The form of the pre-Pauline formula suggests that it was used mainly as a creed for worship and instruction. A desire to preserve the contents of two kerygmatic statements by consolidating them into an easily recited and memorized formula was probably the stimulus that led to the development of the creed, and since recitation was part of the liturgy and memorization was part of the teaching-learning process it was possible to accomplish this function with the same consolidation.

Kloppenborg has suggested that "proclamation must be the principal setting for the formula."<sup>17</sup> There is no reason that the formula could not have been used for proclamation, but it was probably too long and sonorous and not catchy enough to have been very effective for that purpose. The form of the creed, similar in some ways to that of the so-called Apostles' Creed, which is still recited regularly in the liturgy of several denominations, is perfectly suited to recitation (liturgical use) and memorization (catechetical use).

<sup>10</sup>J. Murphy-O'Connor, "Tradition and Redaction in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7," *CBQ* 43 (1981) 584.

<sup>11</sup>Jeremias, *Eucharistic* 102-103.

<sup>12</sup>H. Conzelmann, "On the Analysis of the Confessional Formula in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5," *Int* 20 (1966) 18-20.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>14</sup>X. Leon-Dufour, *Resurrection and the Easter Message* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, 1974) 6.

<sup>15</sup>U. Wilckens, "The Tradition-history of the Resurrection of Jesus," in *The Significance of the Message of the Resurrection for Faith in Jesus Christ* (ed. C. F. D. Moule; London: SCM, 1968) 57.

<sup>16</sup>W. Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 5.

<sup>17</sup>Kloppenborg, "Analysis" 367.

## V. CONCLUSION

At the end of his insertion into the essay on bodily resurrection (v 11), Paul claims that his gospel is the same as that proclaimed by the other apostles. A comparison of the creed that Paul preserved with other early proclamations preserved in the NT clearly indicates that this is the case. All of the traditional statements proclaim the gospel of Jesus the Christ, and all are similar in the information they present as the basis of the Christian faith.