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On the Jewish-Christian Doctrine of the Pre-existence of the Messiah.

BY GEORGE A. BARTON.

THE view that the Jews who lived about the beginning of our era, and the early Christians, or both, held that the Messiah was preëxistent with God, has been entertained by many scholars. Pfeiderer,¹ Weiss,² Harnack,³ Weizsäcker,⁴ Hausrath,⁵ Schürer,⁶ Sabatier,⁷ Edersheim,⁸ Bruce,⁹ Dodds,¹⁰ Briggs,¹¹ Cone,¹² Gould,¹³ Stevens,¹⁴ Charles,¹⁵ Goodspeed,¹⁶ and Somerville,¹⁷ may all be quoted in favor of this view, and these are but a few of its advocates.

Three devout and able scholars have in recent years reached the conclusion that, so far as the Gospels are concerned, no real preëxistence is taught in any of them, but an ideal preëxistence only, and, in presenting this view, at least one of them endeavors to show that the real content of the Jewish view of that period consisted of the conception of ideal preëxistence alone. The scholars to whom I refer are Beyschlag, Wendt, and our own fellow-countryman, George H. Gilbert.¹⁸ One can only admire the painstaking care which each of

¹ *Urchristenthum*, 315.

² *N. T. Theol.*, II. 334.

³ *History of Dogma*, I. 102, 197 n.

⁴ *Apostolic Age*, I. 146.

⁵ *Hist. of New Test. Times*, Div. II., Vol. I. 192.

⁶ *Hist. of Jewish People in Time of Jesus Christ*, Div. II., Vol. II. 160.

⁷ *The Apostle Paul*, 332 ff.

⁸ *Life of Jesus the Messiah*, I. 174 ff.

⁹ *St. Paul's Conception of Christianity*, 330.

¹⁰ *Expositor's Greek Test.*, I. 841.

¹¹ *Messiah of the Gospels*, 27, 301 ff., and *Messiah of the Apostles*, 179.

¹² *The Gospel and its Earliest Interpretations*, 185, 287, and 285.

¹³ *Theology of the N. T.*, 185.

¹⁴ *Pauline Theology*, 223 ff.; *Johannine Theology*, 89 ff., 115 ff.; *Theol. of N. T.*, 298 ff., 392 ff.

¹⁵ *Book of Enoch*, 134; *Book of the Secrets of Enoch*, 30; and *Eschatology*, 149 ff., 252, 262.

¹⁶ *Israel's Messianic Hope*, 262.

¹⁷ *St. Paul's Conception of Christ*, 194 ff.

¹⁸ Professor Bacon has called my attention to the fact that Dalman should

these interpreters has given to his work, the breadth of the scholarship displayed, and the delightful spirit which breathes through all which they have written. One of them, as we know, has made great personal sacrifices for his opinion. If, now, I express some reasons for dissenting from their arguments and conclusions, it is by no means because I have failed to appreciate their admirable work, to which, indeed, I am greatly indebted.

One of the common Jewish notions of the period when our era began seems to me to be set forth in the Apocalypses of Enoch and to be correctly interpreted by Schürer, Charles, and Edersheim. According to the Slavonic Enoch¹⁹ and Wisdom of Solomon,²⁰ not the Messiah only but all souls were præexistent, having been created eternally before the foundation of the world. These writers, at least, accepted the Platonic doctrine of the præexistence of souls. As Charles has pointed out, this doctrine was accepted by Philo, and was, according to Josephus, held by the Essenes.²¹ This belief is reflected in several passages in the Talmud, and seems to have been, as Charles claims, the general Jewish belief of a later period.²²

If, now, all souls were thought to have præexistence, it is not strange that præexistence should be predicated of the Messiah. Such seems to me to be the meaning of those passages of the Ethiopic Enoch, in which Enoch is represented as seeing the Son of Man in heaven, possessing an appearance like a holy angel,²³ and where he is told that "Before the sun and signs were created, before the stars of heaven were made, his name was named before the Lord of Spirits."²⁴ James Drummond and Stanton²⁵ believe the passage to

have been included among the interpreters who hold this view. In his *Worte Jesu*, 106 ff., Dalman endeavors to show that the language of Enoch 48^{ff.} is figurative, and does not imply real existence. His argument is based on the fact that, in the Talmud, Jerusalem, the temple, the throne of God, etc., are said to have had præexistence. Since these could not have been conceived to have had personal præexistence, Dalman concludes that the Messiah could not. He admits, however, that the Jews held to the præexistence of all human souls. If this is admitted, his argument concerning the Messiah seems to me to break down, for is it not clear that the Messiah would be classed with animate beings and not with inanimate things? Of the latter ideal præexistence only may have been conceived, but surely not of the former.

¹⁹ Ch. 23^{f.}

²¹ *Book of the Secrets of Enoch*, 30.

²² Weber, *Jüdische Theologie*, 212 ff., 228 ff.

²³ Eth. Enoch, 46^{f.}

²⁵ Drummond, *The Jewish Messiah*, 55 ff., 281; Stanton, *The Jewish and Christian Messiah*, 153.

²⁰ Ch. 8^{no}.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 48^{ff.}

be a Christian interpolation. In this they follow the opinions of Hilgenfeld and Volkmar, which were put forth before 1877, the date of the appearance of Drummond's work. The trend of more recent critical opinion is opposed to this view, and Charles is, I believe, right in dating this portion of the work before 64 B.C. Gilbert, however, seems to hold the older view, as he quotes Drummond and Stanton in its support.²⁶

Professor Toy, it is true, regards the statement of preëxistence in Enoch as having reference to ideal existence only,²⁷ and Gilbert urges²⁸ as a reason for this view the fact that the Assumption of Moses attributes preëxistence to Moses, of whom, he thinks, only an ideal preëxistence could be predicated. If, however, all souls were thought to have had preëxistence, of course that of Moses had it also. Moreover, as Briggs has pointed out,²⁹ the statement in Enoch that the Messiah was hidden³⁰ (concealed), implies more than an ideal preëxistence. Indeed, I am unable to see how we can hold that this conception concerning the Messiah was only ideal, in view of the fact that the souls of all were thought to have had preëxistence. The lot of the Messiah is said to have been more glorious before the Lord of Spirits than that of angels, and other heavenly existences, and it would seem to go without saying that it would be more glorious than that of ordinary mortals. If, then, they possessed preëxistence, he would possess it *a fortiori*. That this was the view of other Jewish circles is shown in passages like 4 Esdras 12³² 13^{28, 32}, and the Apocalypse of Baruch 30¹. The view is not so clearly stated in them as in Enoch, but these utterances are much more intelligible upon this view than upon any other.

Harnack thinks that the remarks of Trypho in Justin Martyr's *Dialogue* prove that this belief was not general among the Jews. It is true that Trypho is represented as saying that the Jews expected the Messiah to be a man born among men,³¹ but he also implies that he believed the Messiah would be born and concealed for a time before his appearance in his Messianic rôle.³² That other Jews held this view is shown by the Targum on Micah, which indicates that the Messiah was to be born at Jerusalem or Bethlehem and concealed

²⁶ See his *Revelation of Jesus*, 211-225, and *First Interpreters of Jesus*, 33. For the correct view cf. Charles, *Book of Enoch*, 29-32 and 106-109.

²⁷ *Judaism and Christianity*, 326.

²⁸ *The Revelation of Jesus*, 224.

²⁹ *Messiah of the Gospels*, 27.

³⁰ Eth. Enoch, 48^o.

³¹ *Dialogue*, ch. xlix.

³² *Dialogue*, ch. viii.

till the time of his appearing,³³ and is further vouched for by the description of the birth of the Messiah in our New Testament Apocalypse 12¹⁻⁶,—a passage which is demonstrably of Jewish origin.³⁴

There seem, indeed, to have been at least three Jewish views on the subject: 1. Some of the apocalypses now embedded in the Apocalypse of Baruch expected no Messiah at all.³⁵ This view must therefore have had its adherents. 2. The view of Rev. 12¹⁻⁶, of the Targum, and of Trypho, that the Messiah would be born on the earth and caught up to heaven to reappear again in the fulness of time had also its adherents. 3. The view of the Similitudes of Enoch, of parts of Baruch and of Esdras, that He preëxisted in heaven with God is also well attested. It may be true that the distinction between ideal preëxistence and real preëxistence was not kept more clearly in mind by those who held this latter view than it seems to have been by the adherents of the neo-Platonic philosophy in general, but even then a real preëxistence would have been always lurking in the background of their minds, and would, as in the passages cited from Enoch, often find expression in clear and definite form.

The Fourth Gospel, as is well known, is the only one of the four New Testament records of the life of Jesus, in which this doctrine of preëxistence finds expression. That Gospel, opening as it does with the advent into the world of the preëxistent Logos, contains a number of expressions, which are attributed by its author to Christ Himself—expressions which are understood by most interpreters as claims to a real preëxistence, but which Wendt, Beyschlag, and Gilbert understand of ideal preëxistence only. Before approaching the discussion of the meaning of these passages, it is necessary for one to form some opinion as to the freedom which the author of the Gospel allowed himself in handling his sources, and the consequent necessity of allowing for the personal equation of the author. This need not, however, detain us long, since it is admitted by nearly all recent writers upon the subject that the author of the Gospel allowed himself considerable freedom in this respect, passing frequently from narratives of facts or the reports of discourses to his

³³ Cited by James Drummond, *The Jewish Messiah*, 281.

³⁴ See the literature cited in the *American Journal of Theology*, II. 776-801, especially 790 ff.

³⁵ See Charles, *Apocalypse of Baruch*, p. lx., and the references there given. It is not certain that the author of the Book of Jubilees expected a Messiah. The Messiah is not prominent in his scheme. Cf. Jubilees, ch. xxiii.

own reflections, in a manner quite puzzling to the interpreter.³⁶ Whatever our attitude toward the Johannine question, therefore, — whether we believe the discourses or the narratives more authentic, — we shall be compelled, in interpreting the discourses, to admit the possibility that the personal equation of the narrator may be responsible for the apparent harmony between some of their statements and the conception expressed in the prologue.

With these preliminary remarks, we proceed to examine the interpretation which Wendt, Beyschlag, and Gilbert give to the most significant of these passages. The first of them occurs in John 3¹³, "And no one hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended out of heaven, even the Son of Man." Wendt holds³⁷ that this does not mean that Jesus preëxisted in heaven, but that He had a heavenly intuition or knowledge which no other man had. He argues that, if we take the term "descended" as literally applying to Jesus, we must also take the term "ascended" as applying to Him in a literal way also. This would involve an earthly existence and a miraculous ascension of Jesus previous to His ministry, which Wendt considers to be absurd. If one were forced to construe the meaning of the passage thus literally, surely another possibility would present itself. We could then, I think, hardly fail to regard it as one of the points in this Gospel where the author has passed from the report of the Master's words to his own reflections. Writing after the ascension of Christ, he might, if these were his own thoughts, thus confuse the chronology of events and make Christ seem to utter an anachronism. We are not, however, shut up to this view. Weiss³⁸ and Dodds³⁹ have given the meaning of the passage correctly in the following paraphrase: "No one has gone up to heaven and by dwelling there gained a knowledge of heavenly things: One only has dwelt there and is able to communicate that knowledge; viz. He who came down from heaven."⁴⁰ If this be the meaning of the verse, it reflects the Jewish view of the preëxistence of the Messiah, whether we regard it as a word of Christ, or as an utterance of the author of the Gospel.

³⁶ Both Wendt and Beyschlag admit that allowance must be made for the personal equation of the author when we interpret these passages. Cf. Wendt's *Teaching of Jesus*, II. 177, and Beyschlag's *N. T. Theol.*, I. 252.

³⁷ *Teaching of Jesus*, II. 166 n.

³⁸ Meyer's *Kommentar*, 8 Aufl., p. 138.

³⁹ *Expositor's Greek Testament*, I. 715.

⁴⁰ Of course the passage is in a way a paraphrase of Deut. 30¹² ff., or at least suggested by it.

Beyschlag treats the matter differently.⁴¹ He notes that, according to this passage, the preëxistent Christ was preëxistent as the Son of Man. He therefore argues: "Jesus thinks of Himself as preëxistent, not because He knew Himself to be a second God, and remembered a former life in heaven, but because He recognized Himself in Daniel's image as the bearer of the kingdom of heaven, and because this Son of Man, as well as the kingdom which He brings to earth, must spring from heaven. . . . Every one must allow that He knew that the Son of Man in that former existence was no corporeal man such as was now on the earth; and if that is granted, we have the proof that the preëxistence, though presented in a concrete way, is simply an ideal conception."

This reasoning does not seem to me to be valid. Is there no middle ground in the universe between corporeal existence and ideal existence? Is there no reality to spirit or soul? Are the two alternatives which Beyschlag gives the only existences which the thought of the time embraced? We can have no hesitation in answering in the negative. If all souls were thought to preëxist, why might not the soul of the Son of Man? If He was thus conceived, would it be strange if He, in view of His exalted mission, was conceived as enjoying the privilege of looking into the mysteries of heaven in a unique way? This would be most natural, since, as Philo conceived them, preëxistent souls filled the atmosphere, only those near the earth finding their way into corporeal forms,⁴² while the Messiah was in heaven with God.

The second of the passages is John 6⁶²: "What then if you should behold the Son of Man ascending where He was before?" Beyschlag's treatment of this passage is identical with his treatment of the preceding.⁴³ Indeed, he places the two passages side by side and interprets them in one argument, a part of which has been quoted already. His chief point is that here the preëxistence predicated of Jesus is preëxistence as the Son of Man, and must, therefore, be ideal preëxistence only. This we have already answered.

Gilbert employs the same method of interpreting this verse, but gives the argument an original turn.⁴⁴ He contends that the Son of Man cannot be supposed to have real existence here, because in the vision of Daniel⁴⁵ He is seen coming in the clouds of heaven,

⁴¹ *N. T. Theol.*, I. 253.

⁴² Cf. Philo, *De Somn.*, I. 22, and Charles, *Book of the Secrets of Enoch*, 30.

⁴³ *N. T. Theol.*, I. 252 ff.

⁴⁴ *The Revelation of Jesus*, 213.

⁴⁵ Dan. 7¹³ ff.

just as the four beasts are seen coming up out of the sea. As it cannot be supposed that the beasts had real preëxistence in the sea, since Daniel explains that they are four kings who are yet to rise, so Gilbert concludes that the Son of Man cannot be conceived as having real preëxistence in heaven. With reference to this it must be said that if souls were thought to preëxist and to swarm in the atmosphere of the earth, there is no difficulty in supposing that real preëxistence was conceived of the four kings whom the beasts typify. This objection to the ordinary interpretation of John 6⁸² accordingly breaks down.

The third of the passages in John is ch. 8⁵⁸: "Jesus said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am."

Wendt, after considering the possibility that the passage may mean that the heavenly life of Abraham extended to the time of the life of Jesus, the possibility that it may refer to the pre-mundane life of Jesus, and the further possibility that it may mean that the life of Jesus was potentially beheld by Abraham in Isaac, concludes that this utterance only means after all that the life of Jesus upon the earth preëxisted in the thought of God.⁴⁶ How, on that view of the case, Abraham could be said to see a thought of God is not clear, but such is Wendt's argument.

Beyschlag confesses at the outset that the statement of this verse may be interpreted in harmony with any conception of preëxistence which one brings to it.⁴⁷ As he himself brings with him the idea of ideal preëxistence, he naturally interprets the passage in accordance with that view, but he evidently rests his case on other grounds than those afforded by this text.

Gilbert in interpreting the passage⁴⁸ appeals to the preceding context to show that Jesus was speaking of His Messianic claim, and therefore infers that He is here speaking of His historic Messianic personality. If, Gilbert argues, this be true, the preëxistence which is claimed can be only ideal. This view does not seem to Gilbert himself entirely satisfactory, because Jesus did not say "Before Abraham was, I was," but, "I am." Gilbert accordingly finally takes the passage to mean that⁴⁹ "His Messianic personality is above time, and that His Messianic day is part of the eternal order of things." If this is the meaning of the passage, we need not spend time in differing with the interpreter, for it is as much in harmony with the idea of preëxistence which he combats as with that which he favors.

⁴⁶ *Teaching of Jesus*, II. 172-176.

⁴⁷ *N. T. Theol.*, I. 253 ff.

⁴⁸ *Revelation of Jesus*, 214 ff.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 216.

The last of the passages in question is the utterance in the prayer of Jesus, John 7^s, where he prays: "Glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." In their treatment of this passage our three interpreters are practically at one.⁵⁰ With some variations of detail, they argue that Christ based His request for glory upon the Messianic work which He had accomplished upon the earth, that He could not have been thought to have a real existence in a glory with the Father before the foundation of the world, which could be identical with the glory resulting from His Messianic work, and therefore the glory which He had before the foundation of the world must have been the ideal glory, which this Messianic work was in His earthly life to make real. This argument seems to me to miss the point by confining itself too closely to the preceding verse, and considering too little the subsequent context and the general conception with which this Gospel begins. It is true that He bases the request for glory on His Messianic work, but He interprets that work immediately after as follows: "I have manifested thy name unto the men whom thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were, and thou gavest them to me; and they have kept thy word." This language interprets that Messianic work in terms of the Logos, *i.e.*, as primarily a revelation or manifestation of God. The glory which He had won in His Messianic work was, in the conception of this Gospel, the glory of manifesting the purpose and thought of God, and was quite analogous to the glory won by the preëxistent Logos or Word in manifesting God's thought and purpose in the creation of the world. Viewed thus, the representations of this Gospel on this point become consistent from first to last, and there is no incongruity between the glory of manifesting the Father in the creation of the world, and the glory of manifesting Him in Messianic work.⁵¹

Wendt seeks to strengthen his position⁵² by drawing an analogy between the glory which was laid up for the Messiah in heaven from

⁵⁰ Wendt, *Teaching*, II. 168 ff.; Beyschlag, *N. T. Theol.*, I. 254 ff.; and Gilbert, *Revelation of Jesus*, 217-221.

⁵¹ The interesting interpretation of the Logos, given by A. N. Jannaris in the *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, and criticised by E. P. Boys-Smith in the *Expository Times*, XIII. 140 ff. (December, 1901), would not, even if accepted, seriously affect the above argument. I am not persuaded, however, that *logos* is used in two different senses in the Prologue. For a criticism of the arguments of Wendt, cf. Stevens's *Johannine Theology*, 116 ff.

⁵² *Teaching of Jesus*, II. 169 ff.

the beginning and the treasures which the righteous are said in the Gospel of Matthew⁵³ to lay up for themselves in heaven. The comparison seems to me to be inapt and, when the context of the Gospel of John is taken into account, to be quite unable to warrant the conclusion which is drawn from it.

Wendt and Beyschlag⁵⁴ seek to strengthen these particular arguments by the general consideration that Jesus according to the Gospel of John held that it was possible for disciples to have experiences which were in all respects analogous to His own. That He did not indicate that they were analogous to His own except in certain ethical features, Stevens⁵⁵ has already shown.

The conclusion seems to be warranted, therefore, that the preëxistence of the Christ is not only taught in the prologue of the Fourth Gospel, but is interwoven in the reports which that Gospel gives of the discourses of Jesus. I am quite ready to confess that this fact does not necessarily carry the thought to Jesus Himself. The view of the composition of the Fourth Gospel recently set forth by Bacon⁵⁶ commends itself to me as the most probable in the light of our present knowledge, and on that view it is quite possible, if not probable, that in the features of the Messiah's portrait which we have been discussing, and in which this Gospel differs from the Synoptists, we are dealing with the personal equation of its author.

When we pass to the Epistles of Paul, our interpreters group themselves differently. Beyschlag does not deny that Paul believed in the preëxistence of Christ, but joins the ranks of the majority of scholars, while Gilbert, so far as I have observed, stands almost alone among recent interpreters⁵⁷ in holding that the preëxistence in which Paul believed was ideal. We cannot well discuss the question without examining some of the passages in detail.

Most interpreters hold that the preëxistence of Christ is presupposed in Gal. 4⁴ and Rom. 8³, where Paul speaks of the fact that God sent forth His Son. Gilbert maintains that these passages are indeterminate,⁵⁸ and in this he is right. Taken by themselves they

⁵³ Matt. 6²⁰, etc.

⁵⁴ Wendt, *Teaching of Jesus*, II. 179 ff., and Beyschlag, *N. T. Theol.*, I. 256.

⁵⁵ See his *Johannine Theology*, 115 ff.

⁵⁶ *Introduction to the New Testament*, Ch. XI.

⁵⁷ A view closely resembling this was held in the early church by Ambrosiaster, at the Reformation period by Luther and Erasmus, and in the early part of the last century by De Wette.

⁵⁸ *First Interpreters of Jesus*, 29.

afford no ground for a certain conclusion. It is necessary to discover their meaning from more definite utterances.

The passage in 2 Cor. 8⁹ Gilbert does not find more definite. It reads, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor." Gilbert thinks that the contrast furnished by the Master's earthly career is strong enough to afford a sufficient basis for such an utterance.⁵⁹ Drummond takes a kindred, though slightly different, view, believing that the state of riches was contemporaneous with that of poverty.⁶⁰ The great majority of interpreters, such as Weiss,⁶¹ Beyschlag,⁶² Cone,⁶³ Bruce,⁶⁴ Briggs,⁶⁵ and Stevens,⁶⁶ — men of widely different schools of thought, — agree in the opinion that the earthly life of Christ affords no sufficient basis for such a contrast, and in this they appear to me to be right. The passage must be held, therefore, to presuppose that the Messiah had a preëxistent life of glory.

Cone and Bruce also understand the statement of 1 Cor. 15⁴⁷, "The second man is from heaven," to express Paul's belief in the Messiah's preëxistence,⁶⁷ while Gilbert somewhat curiously takes it as referring to Christ's body after the resurrection.⁶⁸

The classical passage on the subject in the opinion of all scholars is Phil. 2⁵⁻¹¹: "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who being in the form of God, counted it not a thing to be grasped to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men," etc. This statement Gilbert practically admits teaches the preëxistence of Christ, but, in accord with his general position, believes that the preëxistence was ideal only.⁶⁹

There runs through this utterance of Paul, as Briggs has pointed out,⁷⁰ a suggested comparison with Adam. Adam was created in the image of God, the temptation to become as a god was presented to him, he grasped at it and lost his paradise. Christ, on the other hand, was in the form of God, He did not think it a thing to be grasped at to be equal with God, but humbled Himself, taking the form of a servant, and therefore God highly exalted Him, giving Him

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 30 ff.

⁶⁰ *International Handbooks to the N. T.*, in loc.

⁶¹ *The Gospel and its Earliest Interpretations*, 186.

⁶² *St. Paul's Conception of Christianity*, 330 ff.

⁶³ *Messiah of the Apostles*, 121 ff.

⁶⁴ *Theol. of N. T.*, 393.

⁶⁵ Cone, *op. cit.*, 186; Bruce, *op. cit.*, 331.

⁶¹ *Paulinische Briefe*, 281.

⁶² *N. T. Theol.*, II. 77.

⁶⁸ *Op. cit.*, 4.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 31 ff.

⁷⁰ *Op. cit.*, 180.

the name, which is above every name, — *i. e.*, divine attributes.⁷¹ This is a part of Paul's picture of the two Adams, of which 1 Cor. 15 also contains a part.

There is, however, an important difference between the two Adams, suggested by the change of a single word. The LXX read in Gen. 1st: *καὶ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον, κατ' εἰκόνα θεοῦ ἐποίησεν αὐτόν*; but Paul does not say that the second Adam was made *κατ' εἰκόνα θεοῦ*, but that He existed *ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ*. And this is the more striking because in other passages where the contrast with the first Adam is not in his mind he calls him the *εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ*. He further, in Philippians, contrasts this *μορφῇ θεοῦ* with the *μορφῇ δοῦλου*, which Christ afterwards assumed. This difference of expression as compared with the LXX of Genesis must have been purposely adopted by Paul. Such exact scholars as Grimm,⁷² Lightfoot,⁷³ and our lamented Thayer define the word *μορφῇ* as the "external form, or that which strikes the vision." How such language could be used of an existence which was merely conceived to be ideal, certainly requires explanation. It is, I believe, more logical to find in it, as the scholars last quoted have done, the expression of a conception of the preëxistence of Christ, similar to the *Logos* doctrine of the Fourth Gospel.⁷⁴ Indeed, the presence of such a conception in Paul's mind is quite essential to justify the practical use which he makes of these statements. If the form which he conceived Christ to have laid aside, when the form of a servant was assumed, was only ideal, the example of supreme humility, which he seems to be holding before the eyes of the refractory Philippians, vanishes into thin air. The consideration which Gilbert urges, that a really preëxistent Christ would be inconsistent with the monotheism of Paul,⁷⁵ seems to me to be wide of the mark, for, as we have seen, other Jews had held a similar view without conscious detriment to their monotheism. Paul, too, believed in the risen and ascended Christ without abandoning his monotheism, and could he not as easily have believed in the preëxistent Christ? Gilbert's reasoning on this point partakes of that almost mechanical character which appears so often in his two books; it seems to presuppose that Paul could conceive of nothing intermediate between a corporeal, material existence and an ideal

⁷¹ Cf. Lev. 24¹¹.

⁷² See the Grimm-Thayer *Lexicon*, 418.

⁷³ Cf. his excursus on *Μορφῇ* in his *Philippians*, 127 ff.

⁷⁴ This view is also shared by Beyschlag (*op. cit.*, II. 78), Briggs (*op. cit.*, 179 ff.), Cone (*op. cit.*, 187), and Stevens (*op. cit.*, 393-396).

⁷⁵ *Op. cit.*, 32 ff.

existence. A spiritual existence Gilbert seems to think was inconceivable to Paul. Gould⁷⁶ is nearer right when he suggests that Paul conceived of the Spirit as the preëxistent Christ.

We must, I therefore think, hold with the great majority of interpreters that Paul held a doctrine of the preëxistence of the Messiah kindred to the doctrine of the *Logos* in the Fourth Gospel.

In addition to the passages already cited from the Epistles of Paul, Beyschlag⁷⁷ finds that the preëxistence of the Messiah is taught in Col. 1¹⁵⁻¹⁸, in which Christ is declared to be the agent of the creative acts which called the universe into being, as the *Logos* is in the prologue of the Fourth Gospel. This point seems to be well taken. Indeed, the statements of the Epistles to the Philippians and Colossians show so definitely that Paul conceived the preëxistence of Christ as real, that they compel us, I believe, to so interpret the less explicit allusions to this doctrine in the other Epistles. It would seem that the doctrine was so universally accepted by the Christians to whom he wrote, that it was never necessary to demonstrate it; while it could be used for this very reason as a fulcrum for practical exhortation.

Other writers of the New Testament also shared the view that the Messiah had a pre-mundane life. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews makes it clear that this was his view by his striking description of the glory of the Son, by whom the worlds were made, in ch. 1³, by his picture of Melchisedek, the type of Christ, as having no father or mother or beginning of life, in ch. 7³, and by his language concerning the coming of Christ into the world in ch. 10⁵. It is true that to Gilbert it is only ideal preëxistence to which reference is here made,⁷⁸ but Westcott,⁷⁹ Bruce,⁸⁰ Cone,⁸¹ and Beyschlag,⁸² hold with more reason the opposite view. We are, I think, now in a position to see that the Christian atmosphere of the age was saturated with the conception of the real preëxistence of the Messiah, so that no labored argument is needed to show that that view underlies these expressions.

One who has attentively read Gilbert's book thus far will not be surprised that in his judgment the allusions to the preëxistence

⁷⁶ *Biblical Theol. of the N. T.*, 96 ff.

⁷⁷ *N. T. Theol.*, II. 76 ff. So also Lightfoot, *Colossians and Philemon*, 116 ff., 142.

⁷⁸ *First Interpreters of Jesus*, 271.

⁷⁹ *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 4, 10, 173, 309.

⁸⁰ *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 35 ff., 240 ff.

⁸¹ *Gospel and its First Interpretations*, 237 ff. ⁸² *N. T. Theol.*, II. 308-312.

in the Apocalypse are indeterminate,⁸³ but they do not appear so to Beyschlag. The latter interpreter finds⁸⁴ in such expressions as "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last" (Rev. 1⁸), and in the application to Christ of the imagery in Daniel⁸⁵ used to describe God evidence that the author held a *Logos* doctrine of Christ's nature similar to that held by Paul, by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and by the author of the Fourth Gospel; and I cannot but believe that in this Beyschlag is right.

The conclusions to which we are led are, therefore, these :

1. The pre-Christian Jews held two views of the Messiah : one, that he was to be born on the earth and concealed for a time before his appearance ; the other, that he had preëxisted from the beginning in heaven in anticipation of the time when he could come to earth to accomplish his work.

2. The early Christians held that Jesus was the Messiah or the Christ, and generally held in accordance with the view of the Book of Enoch that He had preëxisted with God in heaven from the beginning. To this view literary expression was given by Paul, by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the author of the Apocalypse, and the author of the Fourth Gospel. The way in which these writers allude to the matter, or take it as a fixed point on which to base exhortations, makes it clear that the doctrine was so generally accepted by their readers that no argument concerning it was needed. That this view meets with difficulties if we endeavor to make it harmonize with the metaphysics of to-day, goes without saying, but I do not see how we can exegetically deny that it was held by these writers. That it is difficult to explain in detail their ideas of it, must also be confessed. How, for example, Paul could hold that Christ was originally in the form of God, and yet was exalted in consequence of His life of sacrifice on earth to a higher position than before is not clear, but we know so little of the possibilities of his metaphysics that the fact that he did so think need not on that account be denied. It is probable that in the thought of all, both Jews and Christians, there was the same confusion between the ideal and the real, between the spiritual and the corporeal, which characterizes so much of the neo-Platonic philosophy, but this shows itself chiefly in a failure to distinguish between the eternally existent Spirit which revealed God and the historical Messiah. This confusion does not, however, justify us in the view that they failed to regard either the Spirit or the historical Messiah as real.

⁸³ *Op. cit.*, 368 ff.

⁸⁴ *Op. cit.*, II, 379 ff.

⁸⁵ Rev. 1¹³.

In conclusion we should note the exact nature of the preexistence predicated of the Messiah. "Before the foundation of the world" is the favorite phrase in which the beginning of His existence is expressed. It is probable that the *ἐν ἀρχῇ* of the Fourth Gospel, which, as is generally recognized, is copied consciously from the LXX of Genesis, is intended to signify the same. Neither Jew nor Christian seems to have anticipated anything like Origen's doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son. Their thought was not yet sufficiently exact for that. They were content to think that the Logos or Messiah existed before the world began. In the New Testament His existence is pushed back to a period earlier than that of any other being except God. There is, therefore, to be noted a growth in definiteness in this respect as we pass from Jewish to Christian thought. Paul's view is more speculative than the view of the Similitudes of Enoch, and that of the Fourth Gospel more definite than Paul's.