

The Only Son of God

441 In the Old Testament, “son of God” is a title given to the angels, the Chosen People, the children of Israel, and their kings. It signifies an adoptive sonship that establishes a relationship of particular intimacy between God and his creature. When the promised Messiah–King is called “son of God,” it does not necessarily imply that he was more than human, according to the literal meaning of these texts. Those who called Jesus “son of God,” as the Messiah of Israel, perhaps meant nothing more than this.

442 Such is not the case for Simon Peter when he confesses Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” for Jesus responds solemnly: “Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.”... From the beginning this acknowledgment of Christ’s divine sonship will be the center of the apostolic faith, first professed by Peter as the Church’s foundation.

443 Peter could recognize the transcendent character of the Messiah’s divine sonship because Jesus had clearly allowed it to be so understood. To his accusers’ question before the Sanhedrin, “Are you the Son of God, then?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am.” Well before this, Jesus referred to himself as “the Son” who knows the Father, as distinct from the “servants” God had earlier sent to his people; he is superior even to the angels.

444 The Gospels report that at two solemn moments, the Baptism and the Transfiguration of Christ, the voice of the Father designates Jesus his “beloved Son.” Jesus calls himself the “only Son of God,” and by this title affirms his eternal preexistence... Only in the Paschal mystery can the believer give the title “Son of God” its full meaning.

445 After his Resurrection, Jesus’ divine sonship becomes manifest in the power of his glorified humanity... The apostles can confess: “We have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Lord

446 In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the ineffable Hebrew name YHWH, by which God revealed himself to Moses, is rendered as Kyrios, “Lord.” From then on, “Lord” becomes the more usual name by which to indicate the divinity of Israel’s God. The New Testament uses this full sense of the title “Lord” both for the Father and—what is new—for Jesus, who is thereby recognized as God Himself.

447 Jesus ascribes this title to himself in a veiled way when he disputes with the Pharisees about the meaning of Psalm 110, but also in an explicit way when he addresses his apostles. Throughout his public life, he demonstrated his divine sovereignty by works of power over nature, illnesses, demons, death, and sin.

448 Very often in the Gospels people address Jesus as “Lord.” This title testifies to the respect and trust of those who approach him for help and healing... In the encounter with the risen Jesus, this title becomes adoration: “My Lord and my God!” It thus takes on a connotation of love and affection that remains proper to the Christian tradition.

449 By attributing to Jesus the divine title “Lord,” the first confessions of the Church’s faith affirm from the beginning that the power, honor, and glory due to God the Father are due also to Jesus, because “he was in the form of God,” and the Father manifested the sovereignty of Jesus by raising him from the dead and exalting him into his glory.

450 From the beginning of Christian history, the assertion of Christ’s lordship over the world and over history has implicitly recognized that man should not submit his personal freedom in an absolute manner to any earthly power, but only to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

451 Christian prayer is characterized by the title “Lord,” whether in the invitation to prayer (“The Lord be with you.”), its conclusion (“through Christ our Lord”), or the exclamation full of trust and hope: Maran atha (“Our Lord, come!”), or Marana tha (“Come, Lord!”) — “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”