

## LOST IN TRANSLATION THE GOSPEL IN TRANSITION IN CHRISTIAN BEGINNINGS

WILLIAM R. G. LOADER

**Abstract.** Jesus Christ was not the son of Mr and Mrs Christ. A child or maybe an unsuspecting adult might be forgiven for thinking this was so, given that Christ does sound like Jesus' surname. The title, Mashiach, Messiah, translated Christ, did indeed become the equivalent of a name, its original meaning lost in translation or at least in the transition as the Jesus movement moved from its Jewish culture into the cultures of the wider world. More was at stake, however, than the shift from a title to a name. Changes which the transition entailed included a shift from corporate hopes based on restoring Israel's kingdom to universal concerns with individual salvation and the hope of heaven, from good news for the poor addressed to Israel to care for the poor primarily among believers, and from Jesus the Jewish Messiah to Jesus the Logos incarnate, and in the process the issue of continuity and discontinuity with faith's heritage, not least in the light of what became exclusive claims to salvation.

**Keywords:** Messiah, Hope, Judgement, Forgiveness, Good News for the Poor, Christology, Wisdom, Continuity and Discontinuity.

### 1. Introduction

It is an honour to have been asked to contribute to this Festschrift for Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, whose work I have known for decades, but who in recent years has been a colleague within the *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas*, where I coordinate the International Initiatives program and Karl-Wilhelm runs the Eastern European Liaison Committee, which has a set a pattern for our work across the world and modelled bringing east and west together.

The following paper seeks to take seriously in broad overview the implications of moving across diverse cultures. It does so, in particular, in relation to the cultural transition entailed in bringing what began as good news for Israel to become also good news for the wider world of the Roman Empire and beyond. The paper draws on my engagement with these issues, especially over recent decades, and so draws upon detailed research and interaction with the research of others as presented in my numerous works cited as references for this broader discussion. I offer it in part in that sense as a set of summary conclusions and as belonging to the ongoing