



# Christian Origins and the Language of the Kingdom of God

*Associate Professor Michael L. Humphries B.A. M.T.S. Ph.D.*

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Traditionally, scholars have traced the origin of Christianity to a single source—the kingdom of God as represented in the message of the historical Jesus. Through a rhetorical critical analysis of one of the most important texts in early Christian literature (the Beelzebul controversy), Michael L. Humphries addresses the issue of Christian origins, demonstrating how the language of the kingdom of God is best understood according to its locative or taxonomic effect where the demarcation of social and cultural boundaries contributes to the emergence of this new social foundation.

The Beelzebul controversy exists in two versions— Q and Mark—and thereby allows the study to engage the import of the kingdom language at the point of juxtaposition between two distinct textual representations. This makes it possible to deal directly with the issue of the disparity of texts in the synoptic tradition. Humphries suggests that these two versions of the same controversy indicate two distinct social trajectories wherein the kingdom of God comes to mean something quite different in each case but that nevertheless they demonstrate a similarity in theoretical effect where the language contributes to the emergence of relatively distinct social formations.

Humphries establishes the Q and Markan versions of the Beelzebul controversy as relatively sophisticated compositions that are formally identified as elaborate *chreiai* (a literary form used in the teaching of rhetoric at the secondary and post-secondary level of GrecoRoman education) and that offer an excellent example of the rhetorical manipulation of language in the development of social and cultural identity.

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