

THE IDENTITY OF JESUS OF NAZARETH*

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Nowhere is the tension between historically repeatable acts and a once-for-all event focused more dramatically than in the conflict over the identity of Jesus of Nazareth. Shall we explain him as the ideal model of mankind and expound divine incarnation by philosophical analysis of what is humanly possible, or shall we depict him rather in terms of the christologically unparalleled?

The Gospels provide our only significant information about Jesus' life and work. Skeptical critics thrust upon these sources tests of reliability that they do not impose upon other historical writing. If universally applied, those same criteria would in principle invalidate ancient Greek and Roman accounts that secular historians routinely accept as factual.¹

Efforts to destroy the credibility of gospels often betray a bias against the supernatural. Gerald G. O'Collins recalls "the official Soviet thesis (which appears recently to have been abandoned) that Jesus never existed and was a purely mythological figure."² Consistent Marxists would need to reject the theology-of-revolution view that the historical figure of Jesus nurtures its liberationist challenge to an alienated world. The assumptions of evolutionary naturalism likewise lead to a rejection of Jesus as in any way normative and decisive for human destiny.

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¹ Cf. A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*, (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1963).

² "Jesus, in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (M. Eliade, ed. in chief; New York: Macmillan) 8.266

Jews and Jewry

*The New Standard Jewish Encyclopedia*³ escapes the larger question of the significance of Jesus by a generalized comment that "certain sections [of the Gospels] seem to reflect ideas and situations in the developing Christian church rather than those of Jesus' own day."⁴ Were the editors to apply this complaint consistently to all the biblical data, they would need to devalue also the Old Testament whose reliability they assume. Curiously, whenever these same editors charge the evangelists with "anti-Jewish sentiment" they accept at face value the Gospel representations they so interpret.

The controversy over the identity and importance of Jesus arose initially in the context of Hebrew history and religion. This spiritual community devoutly expected a messianic deliverer, an expectation grounded in Yahweh's special prophetic revelation. The Jewish community divided in Jesus' day over Jesus' messianic role. The Gospels detail the conflict among Jesus' religious contemporaries over whether to receive or to repudiate the Nazarene as the promised messiah and divine Son of God.

The Christian church was at its beginning overwhelmingly Jewish in composition. Jews were faced by a choice that the New Testament still thrusts upon its readers, whether to affirm Jesus' divinity or to repudiate him as a blasphemer and messianic pretender. Simply to tribute him as humanity at its best was not an option.

But modern critical thought sought to eviscerate the messianic eschatology of Jesus, even his Jewishness, and to obscure his life, resurrection and ascension, and turned him instead, as Stanley Hauerwas says, into a teacher of noble ideals, "the pinnacle of the highest and best in humanity. . . civilization's very best. "It was a short step," Hauerwas, adds, "from the biblical Christ--the highest in humanity--to the Nazi Superman."⁵

First-century antagonists dismissed Jesus as either a deceiver or a megalomaniac. *Toledot Yeshu* and other early Talmudic stories cast aspersions on Jesus' origin and character. Presuming to speak for most present-day Jews, rabbi Yachiel Eckstein contends that Jesus was merely another martyred Jew, one of the many false prophets and pseudo-messiahs."⁶

³ Ed. C. Roth and G. Wigoder (London: W. H. Allen, 1975).

⁴ Ibid., "Jesus," 1042.

⁵ *Resident Aliens; Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989)

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⁶ *What Christians Should Know About Jews and Judaism* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984) 242.

In striking contrast, some recent modern Jewish leaders unhesitatingly applaud the man Jesus. Even the Jewish rebel Spinoza, while disavowing the divinity of Christ, nonetheless considered Jesus the greatest and noblest of all prophets (*Epistle 21*). C. G. Montefiore (1858-1925) and Joseph Klausner (1874-1960) paid him notable tribute. Montefiore significantly commends Jesus over the whole talmudic inheritance: "We certainly do not get in the Hebrew Bible any teacher speaking of God as 'Father,' 'my Father,' 'your Father,' and 'our Father' like the Jesus of Matthew," he writes. "We do not get so habitual and concentrated a use from any Rabbi in the Talmud."⁷ Many writers not victimized by a skeptical view of history now readily concede that Jesus towers above the stream of mankind as an individual of rare spiritual sensitivity, devotion, and compassion.

In the book *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus*⁸ Donald A Hagner acknowledges that most contemporary Jewish scholarship and Jewish-Christian dialogue still reflects long-standing differences from the evangelical view of Jesus. But he considers "remarkable and significant" the current extensive Jewish research and the evidence it gives of "a drastic change in the Jewish appreciation of Jesus."⁹ To be sure, the Jewish theological stance remains hostile to the Christian doctrines of incarnation, atonement, and the Trinity, and it refuses to connect Jesus with any significant transformation of the world-order and any new and decisive historical inbreaking of the Kingdom of God. Yet careful reading of the Gospels increasingly overcomes the ready complaint that Christianity is anti-Semitic, and it more and more elicits a sporadic acknowledgement of their claims to historical trustworthiness, as does Pinchas Lapide's admission of the resurrection of Jesus. Alongside this may be noted the clusters of secret believers in the state of Israel, and the remarkable conversion to Christ of many Jews in other lands. It is safe to say that tens of thousands of modern Jews affirm that Jesus fulfills the Old Testament prophecies and is "the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Ironically, as David Novak observes, some Jewish thinkers have judged Islam more favorably than Christianity because of Islam's supposedly stricter monotheism and absolute prohibition of images, in contrast with Christian trinitarianism and the use of images in worship by some major branches of Christianity.¹⁰ In the later Middle

⁷ *The Old Testament and After* (New York: Arno Press, 1972, reprint of 1923 ed.) 205.

⁸ Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 273.

¹⁰ "A Jewish Theological Understanding of Christianity in Our Time," *First Things* 9 (Jan. 1991) 28.

Ages, however, Jews took a more positive view, one that judged Christianity not idolatrous and which acknowledged trinitarianism to be not necessarily as a commitment to a different God than Yahweh.

The Manifold Views of Jesus

When we speak of Jesus, do we then nonetheless in fact deal simply with a man who like other founders of religion made unique claims about genuine spiritual experience? Was he a notably inspired and inspiring prophet who confronts us with a specially lively sense of the supernatural? Was he a man through whom God superlatively manifested himself, and perhaps performed works unmatched in human history?

However honorific, such views do not conclusively modify a perspective that begins and ends with man. Is Jesus then only an ancient Semite that literary embellishment has lifted from an obscure life on the outposts of Hellenistic-Roman civilization?

Is he merely a devout Jew engaged in a dispute with fellow Jews over the proper interpretation of Judaism? Is he but a Christian alternative to the Hellenic savior-gods, one fashioned in miracle stories set in Palestinian Semitic context?

Was Jesus of Nazareth, as Jane Schabert declares, a biologically natural son born to Mary through rape or seduction in a disgraceful paternity that the gospel accounts turn to glory?¹¹ Is Jesus the Wunderkind of the apocryphal gospels, a child genius who worked miracles even while at play?

Is he an itinerant Galilean Semite imaginatively sharing his people's apocalyptic hopes, or as Nietzsche contends,¹² simply a dread-filled hypersensitive type, a religiously-obsessed fanatic warning of the End of all ends?

Is he a contemplative sage offering words of wisdom as did Confucius, Socrates, and Epictetus, a majestic guru imparting universal truths about life and mortality? Was he, as speculative psychologists have suggested, extraordinarily endowed with extra-sensory perception? Is he the prophet of the "New Age" consciousness, a model of human insights creatively open to depths of divinity in one's own inner selfhood? Does he transcend the merely human as an historical presence that discloses our overlooked possibilities and enlivens our imaginative powers? Is he an invisible comrade, the lively memory of whose earthly example still supplies inspiration and courage for the facing of life's problems?

¹¹ *The Illegitimacy of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

¹² *The Antichrist* (New York: Amo Press, 1972, reprint of 1930 ed.).

Shall we say with Paul Van Buren, that Jesus is "the perfect embodiment of divine love"?¹³ Was he so venerated that his colleagues could not believe that he was dead? Is he, as Rudolf Bultmann viewed him, a man whose crucifixion cut short his earthly life but who in the church's proclamation became God and accumulated such aspects of supernatural mythology as virgin birth, incarnation, atonement, resurrection and ascension? Is he merely a literary fiction of the gospel evangelists, a mythical depiction that externalizes and objectifies an inner experience of new being? Is he rather, as Gnostics held, the phantasmal appearance that illuminates the dark world of a supreme but otherwise unknowable God? Does he, as Paul Tillich puts it, stand in complete relational participation with the Ground of all Being?¹⁴

Is the term "Christ" simply a semantic symbol for whatever satisfies human craving for a fuller life, and hence an expression serviceable to atheists and materialists as well as to biblical Christians? Does he exhibit human nature at its best, as at once the restorer of authentic humanity, and the consummator of mankind? Is he the ethical norm by whose example humans in all generations must measure virtue? Shall we with John A. T. Robinson say that he is a complete embodiment "of what was from the beginning the meaning and purpose of God's self-expression," a human person who "embodied the divine initiative and saving presence so completely that he was declared at his baptism and confirmed at his resurrection to be everything God himself was"?¹⁵ Is he, as Piet Schoonenberg portrays him, the ultimate of human-ness in whose person we find God's complete presence?¹⁶ Is Hans Kling right, that Jesus "represents *the permanently reliable* ultimate standard of human existence"?¹⁷

Is he, as L. S. Thornton suggests, founder of a new humanity that towers above mankind today even as homo sapiens now transcend the lower animal creation.¹⁸ Is he a super-Apollo, a spiritual athlete, as Renaissance art at times seems to depict him in a mediating effort to gain a Christian advantage from emerging humanism? Is he, as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin avers, the focus of cosmic evolution as its final unification and "christification" of all reality? Or is he the "political Christ"--the prophet of social revolution and catalyst for the revolutionary overthrow of social structures--as Gustavo Gutierrez would

¹³ *Discerning the Way* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980) 118.

¹⁴ *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-63) 2.148.

¹⁵ *The Human Face of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973) 77, 162.

¹⁶ *The Christ* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971) 7,136.

¹⁷ *On Being a Christian* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976) 443, 450.

¹⁸ *The Incarnate Lord* (London-New York-Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1928) 35, 367f.

have it?¹⁹ Must we, in contrast to early Latin credal christology, accommodate current Latin American alternatives like the "charismatic Christ" and the "guerilla Christ"? Is he a social humanitarian concerned for liberation of the working class, a defender of lesser, landholders against their landlords?

Is Jesus, as Pannenberg holds, not a virgin's son, but nonetheless by his resurrection attested as the eternal Son of God and manifest thereby as preexistantly sharing the divine essence?²⁰ Is Jesus, as Oscar Cullmann concedes, not only the sinless bearer of messianic self-consciousness, but one whose deity we properly affirm in view of God's distinctive revelatory activity through him, yet concerning whose divine essence and dual natures it is useless to speculate?²¹

This incomplete sampling of current views of the Nazarene, remarkable for its disagreements, leaves little doubt that modernity has blurred Jesus into history's most displaced person. In a recent book, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture*,²² Jaroslav Pelikan reflects the many diverse images and cultural understandings of Jesus through which the biblical portrait tends to lose normative theological significance. Alfred Rosenberg, the Nazi movement's official philosopher, even held that Jesus could not have been a Jew, but depicted him rather as a Nordic anti-Semite.²³ So multiform are the views of the Nazarene that an atheist is said to have jeered that "there is no god, and Jesus is his problem." As Douglas Groothuis says, "No other name has inspired greater devotion, evoked greater reverence, or ignited greater controversy."²⁴

Must we then concede with Albert Schweitzer that the historical Jesus is "to our time a stranger and enigma"?²⁵ Must we rather remind our generation of the baneful influence of alien speculative theories? Respectful mention of Jesus' name embarrasses much of our secular society. A liberal elite is prone to avoid introduction of the Nazarene as socially disruptive. The mass media seem at times to reserve the name of Jesus for use only in profanity. Yet serious discussion of the significance of the Nazarene cannot be removed from the contemporary agenda. The twentieth-century space age has set the discussion of Christ in the near-neighbor context of Buddhists, Hin-

¹⁹ *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1973).

²⁰ *Jesus-God and Man* (2nd ed., Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977) 156, 353.

²¹ *The Christology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963) 93, 266, 277, 306.

²² New Haven, Yale University Press, 1986.

²³ cr. Richard Morris, *Evolution and Human Nature* (New York: Seaview/Putman, 1983) 82.

²⁴ *Revealing the New Age Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990) 9.

²⁵ *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1910) 396.

dus, and Muslims who press the question of Jesus' identity even if some Christians prefer to suppress it.

Many scholars who reject the Chalcedonian formulation that Jesus is true God and true man, and who instead hold to a one-nature view of Jesus, nonetheless distinguish him from the entirety of the human race. Tributes paid to Jesus even by scholars who disavow the historic christological creeds not only revere the Nazarene above his contemporaries, but elevate him as well above all human beings ancient and modern. These assessments of Jesus Christ exhaust ordinary anthropological categories in explanation of him. In contrast to the inherited view of Jesus Christ as the full revelation of God in the flesh, Teilhard de Chardin holds that "Christ is not yet fully formed"²⁶ and that he will not be until we are united in co-creative union with the Eucharistic Cosmic Christ."²⁷ The universal Christ-idea or Christ-principle seems more important to Teilhard than is the Jesus of history. As James M. Houston comments, "Teilhard makes much of the cosmic Christ, but has little to say of the incarnate Christ."²⁸ Yet students of the life of Jesus repeatedly refuse to dwarf him simply to a superman like Alexander the Great, Napoleon Bonaparte, or Winston Churchill, or to a superguru like Gandhi.

The Koran and the Nazarene

Despite its nontrinitarian theology, for example, even the Koran nevertheless distinguishes Jesus from the rest of mankind by affirming his virgin birth, sinlessness, messianity, and ascension to heaven prior to the endtime resurrection of all humanity. The Koran portrays Jesus as Word of God (*Kalimah*), even if it does so in less than orthodox Christian terms. To be sure, Islam declares Jesus to be "merely a prophet, a sent one, a word" and thus excludes his divinity, whereas the Christian revelation affirms him to be *the* Sent One, *the* incarnate Word. Some Muslims assuredly welcome as a constructive contribution to interreligious dialogue only christological affirmations that preclude divine incarnation in Christ.

Yet it is all too easy, as Thomas O'Shaughnessy remarks, to level Muhammad's view of Jesus to that of simply another human being, and to ignore his intimation of a considerably higher view.²⁹ One could in fact "construct a rudimentary Life of Christ," remarks F. P.

²⁶ *Hymn of the Universe* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961) 133.

²⁷ *The Divine Milieu* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960) 131f.

²⁸ *I Believe in the Creator* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 170.

²⁹ *The Koranic Concept of the Word of God* (Rome: Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1948) 15.

Cotterell, from the reference to Jesus (Isa) in the Koran, although some materials, e.g., childhood miracles attributed to him, have an apocryphal rather than biblical basis.³⁰ Muhammad claims, of course, that the entire content of the Koran came as a divine revelation from the Preserved Tablet and not from earthly sources. It is unlikely that an Arabic version of the Gospels was available to him, and orally circulating late tradition could readily have mixed fact and legend.

While the New Testament calls Jesus Son of God twenty-five times and Son of Mary only once, the Koran uses the title Son of Mary twenty-three times. The Koran is less explicit than the New Testament on the subject of Mary's virginity, although it does not preclude this and even implies it. The Koran affirms that the conception of Jesus was through the Word of God (Sura 3:47).

Yet, as Cotterell notes, the Koran is not much interested in the events of Jesus' earthly life and ministry. We are told that Jesus had disciples and performed miracles. Alongside New Testament sources, however, the Koranic account seems often slurred and confused. The most striking difference is the Koranic notion that Jesus did not die upon the cross (Sura 4:157). The conventional interpretation is that he was translated into heaven without crucifixion and that another person replaced him (one fanciful theory nominates Judas). A rival interpretation is that he was impaled on the cross but did not die there; supposedly recovering in the tomb, he escaped to Kashmir where he allegedly subsequently died. In either case the Koran here is at odds with all historical scholarship. As Geoffrey Parrinder remarks, "No serious modern historian doubts that Jesus. . . was crucified, whatever he may think of the faith or the resurrection."³¹ Even in respect to this major historical event the Koran therefore shows itself to be less than a trustworthy guide. Parrinder discusses³² E. E. Elder's suggestion that we interpret the Koran to mean that Jesus' death upon the cross was a divine act, not a human act. But this is unhelpful, since in that event the significance of Jesus' passion is wholly ignored.

A Growing New Consensus

Any attentive reader of the Gospels will soon discover that the founder of the Christian religion differs greatly from the representations even of many philosophers, religious commentators, and social reformers who pay the Nazarene quite lofty compliments. He is, as Os

³⁰ "The Christology of Islam," *Christ the Lord* (ed. H. S. Rowden; Leicester: InterVarsity, 1982) 282.

³¹ *Jesus in the Qur'an* (Oxford University Press, 1977) 116.

³² *Ibid.*, 119ff.

Guinness reminds us, neither "the gentle Jesus meek and mild" as many project him, nor the theatrical "'Jesus Christ Superstar' with his tortured doubts and personality problems. Such views. . . are not borne out by the objective evidence of the life of Christ. . . . The radical Christ of Pasolini's film *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, the socialist Christ of much liberal activism, the Hindu Christ--these are not so much anti-Christian as unhistorical."³³ The insistent Gospel witness to Jesus has, in fact, repeatedly made itself felt over against skeptical, imaginative, and mythical portrayals that rashly discount the New Testament writings.

"Surely," as Robert F. Berkey remarks, "no issues of Christian thought have gone through more thorough analyses in this century than those problems pertaining to the New Testament affirmations of the unique, unprecedented, once-for-all character of the person of Jesus."³⁴ The outcome, moreover, contends Berkey, is that the theological climate has radically changed: a century that began with "no clear consensus" now insists that in any attempt to understand New Testament faith we must give full weight to christological affirmations and to the "once for all" significance of the person of Christ.³⁵

In 1913 Wilhelm Bousset presumed to set forth in *Kyrios Christos*³⁶ "a history of belief in Christ from the beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus." Bousset projected a pre-Pauline Hellenistic Christian community that differed from Palestinian Jewish Christians by affirming a supernatural miraculous Jesus who was to be worshipped. On Palestinian soil and in Semitic context, Bousset held, Jesus was invoked simply as 'master.' Only later, in Gentile context and under the influence of the Hellenistic savior-cults, was Jesus acclaimed as 'Lord.'

This view bequeaths as its "fundamental problem," as Hendrikus Boers observes, the notion that New Testament christology must be considered "not historically true of Jesus himself," so that the New Testament ceases to express "the truth about the historical Jesus."³⁷

Bousset sought to escape the devastating theological implications of this emphasis by contending that Jesus' teaching survives as a distinctive truth about God even when divested of certain later accretions. But Rudolf Bultmann more thoroughly applied the view that

³³ *The Dust of Death* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973) 355f.

³⁴ "Christological Perspectives: The Context of Current Discussions," *Christoological Perspectives. Essays in Honor of Harney K. McArthur* (ed. R. F. Berkey and S. A. Edwards) (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1982) 3-23.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

³⁶ Gottingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913, 1921 (Nashville and New York: Abingdon, 1970, from the 5th German edition of 1964).

³⁷ "Jesus and the Christian Faith: New Testament Christology since Bousset's *Kyrios Christos*," *JBL* 89/4 (1970) 452.

New Testament christology is a product of early Christianity. Bultmann disavowed entirely any reliable historical portrait of Jesus and declared the Gospels to be merely an expression of human self-understanding.³⁸ Herbert Braun dissolved New Testament Christology into an understanding of man mutually held by Jesus, the apostles and the earthly church, one that loses any special knowledge of Jesus in a general anthropological outlook.³⁹

Whatever we must in fact affirm about Jesus of Nazareth, his human nature must in no way be essentially impaired. The Christian doctrine of divine incarnation centers in a specific individual born in Bethlehem, reared in Nazareth, and crucified in Jerusalem. Whatever else the New Testament view of incarnation may require, the central figure of the Christian faith was during his earthly ministry, as Paul writes Timothy, nothing less than "the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5). No theory can be squared with the biblical doctrine of incarnation if it regards Jesus as an intermediate being, a demigod distinct from mankind. Nor is the notion acceptable that God merely assumed human disguise, the semblance of humanity, or even the suggestion that God for three decades merely adopted a human body and indwelt it as divine mind or spirit inhabiting a human physique. Nor is divine incarnation merely a superlative example of God indwelling mankind universally. It involves nothing less than a singular relationship of God to human nature without precedent or parallel in the realm of being or in the history of thought.

The modernist allegation that any affirmation of the divinity of Jesus Christ necessarily involves an obliteration of his humanity was already widely propagated in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Adolf von Harnack deplored suppression of the real historical Jesus by the "fictitious" preexistent Christ.⁴⁰ Harnack defined the essence of Christianity as an agenda of moral and spiritual values that Jesus the teacher had stipulated.

To preserve Christ's full humanity, John Caird, in his end-of-the-century Gifford Lectures on *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity* (1895-1896), insisted that Christ's divinity "was capable of being expressed in a human life and through the words and acts of a human personality." "Whatever of Divinity could not. . . breathe through a human spirit," said Caird, "could not be present in one who. . . was really and truly human." Christ's divinity was that "of a divine nature that suffused, blended, identified itself with the thoughts, feelings,

³⁸ Cf. *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (London: SCM Press, 1960),

³⁹ "Der Sinn her neutestamentlich Christology," *ZTK*, 54 (1957) 341-77, reprinted in *Gessammelte Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt* (1962) 243-82.

⁴⁰ *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (4th ed., Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1909) 1.704f.

volitions of a human individual."⁴¹ The result was an emphasis not on two natures united in one person, but on Christ's unitary nature, and a redefinition of divinity basically in terms of unbroken human-divine union.

This formulation inadequately states what the New Testament signifies by the deity of Christ. As John Stuart Lawton notes, it is merely an embellished unitarianism; it affirms the humanity of Christ's nature and personality yet disallows speaking of him as "personally God."⁴²

Somewhat similar was the view of William Temple, who found Christ's deity in his unity of purpose and harmonious willing with the Father.⁴³ H. R. Mackintosh hailed this view as a great theological advance.⁴⁴ But one cannot logically categorize a human being as intrinsically divine simply because he perfectly obeys the will of God, since unbroken obedience was God's intention for all humanity at the creation. An honorifically-conferred divinity fails to affirm the unparalleled metaphysical unity of Father and Son that the New Testament asserts; instead, it accommodates unitarian theism. In the apostolic witness, as Lawton remarks, "We do not simply find... a primarily moral man living a life in harmony with the will of God; in fact. . . we are told singularly little about Christ's thoughts or relationships. . . in which a man's moral character is most clearly displayed. We are presented with a figure who, in the first place, possesses and exercises divine powers--he performs miracles of healing, control over nature, and superhuman vision: above all, he enters and leaves the world in a manner in which other men cannot. This figure, moreover, makes far-reaching claims for himself: he can remit the eternal guilt of sin, he proclaims himself equal with God, and foretells that he himself will sit as judge over all men at the grand assize."⁴⁵

Despite its deep ecclesial inroads, modernistic theology failed to stifle transcendent christology. Modernism's christological inconsistency Lawton traces to a vulnerable and indeed "wrong starting-point." "In the realm of pure Christology," he comments, it is "inexcusable. . . to begin with Christ's humanity and human life, and. . . to work upwards. . . to the confession of his Deity. Those who do not begin with

⁴¹ *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity* (2 vols.; Glasgow: MacLehose, 1904) 1.14.

⁴² *Conflict in Christology, a Study of British and American Christology, from 1889-1914* (London, S.P.C.K., New York: Macmillan, 1947) 313.

⁴³ Cf. *Nature, Man and God* (Gifford Lectures 1932-34; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1934) 445f.

⁴⁴ *The Person of Christ* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913, reprint, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942) 297.

⁴⁵ *Conflict in Christology*, 323.

the fundamental Christian assumption that 'the Word was made flesh,' but . . . attempt to show how . . . a complete man as they suppose Christ to have been was united to God" cannot but end in confused and self-contradictory views.⁴⁶

Early repudiation of the modernist Jesus came not only from evangelical-orthodox expositors but on the one hand from faith-versus-reason champions of Christ's divinity paced by Soren Kierkegaard, Karl Barth, and Emil Brunner, and on the other from humanists who stressed the irreconcilability of liberal claims for Jesus' uniqueness with the scientific method which modernism professed to champion.

Kierkegaard affirmed that Christianity's towering truth--the incarnation--prompts a leap of faith that appropriates its consequences in life. By depicting the incarnation--the one solitary man Jesus Christ who is simultaneously the eternal God--as a paradox beyond the grasp of reason, Kierkegaard went beyond the early church fathers. When they wrote of the incarnation as a paradox they did not disavow all rational comprehension of its reality. By connecting God's incarnation in Christ with a sheer leap of faith to which logical tests are irrelevant, Kierkegaard needlessly sacrificed the cognitive criteria that could invalidate unacceptable religious alternatives to Christian beliefs.

Barth also unqualifiedly affirmed the divinity of Christ as the eternal Word made flesh. He sharply contrasts the Son's relation to the Father with the saints' relation to God, and decisively rejects the modernist emphasis on moral obedience as a complete definition of Jesus' divinity. To be sure, Barth's commendation also of the divinity of Scripture and of church proclamation (neither of which he considers infallible) raises problems, as does his insistence that the Logos assumed fallen human nature. Yet Barth waved aside contemporary theologians who first of all view Jesus as a Palestinian Jew, as do Caird and Temple and, more recently, Wolfhart Pannenberg. Charles Waldrop considers Barth's view Alexandrian rather than Antiochene in that he affirms Jesus Christ to be essentially and by nature divine rather than merely a fully human individual who can also be declared divine.⁴⁷ In line with this approach Sir Edwyn Hoskyns and Noel Davey likewise stress that the divinity of Jesus Christ is the forefront emphasis of the New Testament.⁴⁸

While neo-orthodoxy turned to the Bible to vindicate its claims that modernism is a heretical deviation from the central witness of

⁴⁶ Ibid., 323f.

⁴⁷ Karl Barth's Concept of the Divinity of Jesus Christ," *HTR* 74/3 (1981) 241-53, 263.

⁴⁸ *The Riddle of the New Testament* (London: Faber and Faber, 1931).

the Scriptures, naturalistic humanism struck at modernism from the left. Modernism had declared evangelical Christianity prescientific and antiscientific in view of its insistence on miraculous supernaturalism. It replaced the divine Christ by the human Jesus viewed as humanity's moral exemplar. Modernism held, in short, that following the example of Jesus' superlative devotion to the Father ideally will deliver one from inner tension and discord to an integrated personality. To the humanist the modernist regard for Jesus as the exclusive spiritual catalyst conflicts with the tentative and revisable nature of empirical observation, and that other persons and even other causes may achieve the same ends. Modernism no less than evangelicalism, the humanists protested, applied scientific method and testing only in a limited way that prejudiced its christology. It was neither modernism nor neo-orthodoxy that increasingly permeated secular university education, but rather humanism, which looked upon Jesus at best as an outstanding religious leader.

Less than a half century after Harnack and other European modernists declared orthodox christology *passé*, the World Council of Churches at its organizing assembly in Amsterdam in 1948 affirmed that Jesus Christ is "God and Savior." Although vulnerable to existential and perspectival deployment, the formulation placed christological concerns once again near the heart of ecumenical faith-and-order interests. The question was again insistently raised: May not Jesus of Nazareth, after all, be the Son of God and promised Messiah, God-beside-God, God come in the flesh in the stupendous miracle of divine incarnation?

Old Testament and New Testament

Earlier generations appealed more eagerly than ours to the predictive content of the Old Testament. Modernism with its denial of the miraculous and dialectical and existential theology with its insistence on the uniformity of nature and its internalization of miracle, disavowed predictive prophecy.

The first Christians were, as Hodgson says in a preface for the paperback edition of his Gifford Lectures, "Palestinian Jews trying to fit their faith in the risen Lord into their inherited Jewish theology."⁴⁹ Yet their inherited religion had itself supplied prophetic intimations and anticipations of the exceptional role and nature of Messiah whose coming was divinely pledged. The fact that some modern interpreters have read back into the Old Testament christological intentions and

⁴⁹ *For Faith and Freedom* (Gifford Lectures 1955-1957; London: SCM Press, 1968) l.xi.

meanings that seem foreign to it is no reason for minimizing the extensive basis which the New Testament writers, and not least of all the authors of the Gospels, found in the Old Testament for accrediting Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ. "Christian faith began," Hodgson notes, "with the acceptance of his claim to be the fulfillment of God's messianic promises given through the Old Testament prophets. Had there been no previous history of Israel, there would have been. . . no New Testament."⁵⁰

The evasion of supernatural prediction is reflected in Claus Westermann's treatment of "The Psalms and Christ" in which he sets aside messianic prophecy for what he describes as "a more profound and comprehensive" Old Testament anchoring of the Christ-event.⁵¹ But if God cannot foretell the future in specifics, can he prefigure them in generalities? The writers of the Gospels and of the Epistles unhesitatingly appealed to the Old Testament predictions of the coming Messiah.

Although Jewish and Gentile sources both supplied linguistic factors for the early Church's identification of Jesus as God-man, the Christian doctrine of Jesus Christ did not spring from a simple borrowing of existing Hebrew or Greek semantic elements. Jesus' own teaching and life impacted notably and transformingly upon Logos and Wisdom theology. Christianity's ties to Judaism, moreover, are firmer than the links that comparative religious scholars often postulate between Christianity and Greek thought. Discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls encouraged new investigation of Old Testament backgrounds, rather than of Gentile religion or philosophy as the context illuminating New Testament thought. W. D. Davies had emphasized already a generation ago that the religious background of Pauline theology is Judaic rather than Hellenistic.⁵² Recent New Testament scholarship has looked more to the Jewish and less to the Gentile religious milieu to illumine christological titles such as Lord and Son of God. This verdict, that New Testament christology has roots in the Old Testament rather than in Graeco-Roman philosophy and religion, is immensely important.

Yet Christian belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ turned even more decisively on the events and teachings of the Gospels than on pre-Christian considerations.

We cannot, of course, gloss over highly conflicting perceptions of the Gospel writings. Bultmann declares the Gospel tradition historically unreliable. He makes the early Church's creative imagination

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁵¹ *The Psalms: Structure, Content, and Message* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980) 27.

⁵² *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1948, 1967).

decisive for christology; the kerygma is confined not by historical data but by resurrection-faith. Thus Bultmann wholly severs christology from Jesus' self-understanding, from his self-disclosure, from the testimony of eyewitnesses, from a carefully controlled oral tradition, and from any reliable narrative of Jesus' life and teaching.

Contrary to Bultmann's insistence that John 20:28 ("my Lord and my God") is the only New Testament passage to designate Jesus as God⁵³, Raymond E. Brown stipulates "three clear instances" John 1:1; 20:28; Heb. 1:8) and five probable instances. The post-apostolic designation of Jesus as *theos*, Brown declares, is therefore "a continuation of a usage already begun in New Testament times."⁵⁴ Brown recognizes that the affirmation by Thomas is "strongly confessional and existential," and that "most of the other instances" are liturgical or confessional. Bultmann would take any and all such statements not as dogmatic descriptions or objectifying statements but rather as declarations of personal significance: "The formula, 'Christ is God,'" he contends, "is false in every sense in which God can be understood as an entity which can be objectified."⁵⁵

Yet an unbiased reader can hardly avoid the New Testament's ontological claims for Jesus. Some leading Scandinavian, British and American New Testament scholars pointedly reject a form-critical approach, and disavow even more especially the philosophical assumptions to which Bultmann welded it. The Swiss scholar Oscar Cullmann vigorously assailed Bultmann's form-critical method and rejected existential philosophy as tendential and destructive.

Many Swedish scholars insist that the Gospel writers preserve a professional oral tradition, while Anglo-American scholars emphasize that the New Testament need not be considered creative myth simply because it reflects the views of the early Church. The prime issue is whether claims for Jesus made by the first-century Church represent a fundamental break in the way Jesus' disciples conceived of him and in the way Jesus their teacher conceived of himself. The early Church's christological outlook no doubt discloses a development. But is there, for all that, an essential continuity between its preresurrection and postresurrection representations?

The Christological Titles

C. F. D. Moule contents that the substance of the main christological titles-Son of man, Son of God, Christ, the Lord--is present already

⁵³ *Essays: Philosophical and Theological* (London: SCM Press, 1955) 276.

⁵⁴ *Jesus, God and Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1967) 28£.

⁵⁵ *Op. cit.*, 287.

in the very thought and teaching of Jesus, and moreover, that his claims are not merely functional but ontological.⁵⁶ I. Howard Marshall similarly locates christology within Jesus' self-affirmation.⁵⁷ Martin Hengel too rejects the notion that the early Church's christology breaks decisively with Jesus' own claims.⁵⁸ The preresurrection message of Jesus, he holds, provided indispensable struts for the christology of the early Church. Despite the vigorous counterclaims of Bultmannian and post-Bultmannian critics, many scholars share this emphasis that christology begins with Jesus of Nazareth. The synoptic titles thus stand impressively linked to the "I am" declarations of the Gospel of John. Jesus' self-testimony is best considered under two aspects, the names or titles he applied to himself, and his references to his own person.

The titles Son of David, Son of God, and Messiah were used of Jesus by others, but not used by Jesus of himself. Most widely used of the titles are the Son-of-man sayings which bear importantly on Jesus' messianic self-consciousness. This title is, Berkey says, "the only presumed messianic designation that the synoptic writers have placed directly on the lips of Jesus" as used by him in the third person. Moreover, in Mark 14:62, Jesus indirectly applies the title to himself in the context of an express claim to be the Messiah. To be sure, P. Vielhauer considers all the titles inauthentic and Bultmann regards them as sheer inventions of the early church. But the Gospel evangelists indicate that, as Cullmann emphasizes,⁵⁹ Jesus wished to be understood as "Son of man."

Bultmann concedes that Jesus used this title. But he holds that Jesus referred it not to himself but to an apocalyptic figure; the early Church only later, Bultmann contends, identified this figure with the resurrected Jesus. More recent redaction critics widen the gap between Jesus' proclamation and the later Church's christological claims by removing each and every Son-of-man saying from the earliest layers of authentic Jesus-tradition. But the Gospel record depicts Jesus as being tried and sentenced for its use.

Barnabas Lindars insists that Daniel 7:13 has a collective or community sense and dismisses the claim that Jewish messianism used the term as the title of an eschatological figure.⁶⁰ Lindars holds that

⁵⁶ *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

⁵⁷ *The Origins of New Testament Christology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1976).

⁵⁸ *The Son of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976).

⁵⁹ *The Christology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959).

⁶⁰ *Jesus-Son of Man. A Fresh Examination of the Son of Man Sayings in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 158.

the Gospel writers subsequently applied the title to Jesus. But if so, the absence of a Son-of-Man christology in the remainder of the New Testament is difficult to explain. Slim though the evidence may be, there is some support for Jewish use of the title for an apocalyptic figure, but no conclusive basis for the theory that the church independently imposed the term on the Nazarene.

F. F. Bruce stresses, however, that in Jesus' day "the Son of man" was not a current title "for the Messiah or any other eschatological figure." Jesus' use was derived, he holds, from the reference in Dan 7:13f. to "'one like a son of man'... divinely vested with authority." Jesus fused this title with the figure of a suffering servant--"probably the Isianic Servant." Bruce concludes that "a 'Son of man' theology could be nothing other than a theology based on what can be ascertained about Jesus' understanding of his identity and life-mission."⁶¹

But Martin Hengel, *Der Sohn Gottes*, connects the idea of divine sonship with Jesus' own proclamation, and traces to Jesus himself the affirmation of his divine incarnation and vicarious atonement. In contrast to H. J. Schoeps and other *Religionsgeschichte* partisans who declare "the 'Son of God' belief the sole, albeit decisive, heathen premise of Pauline thought,"⁶² Hengel insists the title can be understood only on Jewish assumptions.⁶³

A J. B. Higgins insists that Jesus expected a vindication of his ministry by exaltation that included "judgmental functions traditionally associated with the apocalyptic Son of Man."⁶⁴

Bultmann had rejected--appropriately enough, but not for good reason--the modernist appeal to a non-miraculous historical Jesus behind the *Kerygma*. But he then lifted the gospel texts from an historical setting and turned them into speculative abstraction. Post-Bultmannians sought to narrow the gap between the preached Christ and the historical Jesus. But their form-critical method continued to limit the objective factuality of the Gospels, and moreover they had no interest in probing Jesus' messianic awareness. The beginnings of christology, in their view, lies not in claims made by the Jesus of history or in the pre-Eastern proclamations of disciples influenced by his life and teaching, but essentially in the early Church as a post-Easter community of faith.

⁶¹ "The Background to the Son of Man Sayings," *Christ the Lord* (ed. H. S. Rowden; Leicester: InterVarsity, 1982) 50.

⁶² *Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish History* (Philadelphia, Westminster) 158.

⁶³ Cf. W. R Long, "Martin Hengel on Early Christianity," *Religion Studies Review* 15/3 (1989) 232.

⁶⁴ *The Son of Man in the Teachings of Jesus* (New York/Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

Marcus J. Borg depicts Jesus as "a Spirit-filled," charismatically-motivated person who regarded himself as prophet and may have thought of himself as the Son of God, but did not publicly proclaim himself to be such.⁶⁵ Much the same verdict is given by Ragnar Leivestad⁶⁶ and by James H. Charlesworth.⁶⁷

There is growing acknowledgement of the need to move beyond the many contradictory critical discussions of christology to a reexamination of the New Testament documents. If contemporary Gospel studies reflect any trend, it is a resurgent interest in the Jesus of history, including larger attention to Jesus' message and works. C. F. D. Moule notes the "unexamined false assumptions behind a good deal of contemporary New Testament scholarship." Moule specially faults the notion that "the genesis of Christology . . . can be explained as a sort of evolutionary process" whereby what began with a view of Jesus as a Palestinian rabbi evolved gradually into the affirmation of "the divine Lord of a Hellenistic Saviour-cult."⁶⁸

Moule readily grants a "development" in New Testament christology. But he insists that this unfolding articulates and refines what Jesus and his followers had affirmed from the outset. With an eye on the Aramaic term *maranatha*, found in the earliest Pauline literature (1 Cor 16:22), Moule comments that one does not "call upon a dead rabbi to 'come'."⁶⁹ The term in fact echoes the longing of the community of believers for the Lord's glorious return. Moule stresses that, as the Qumran scrolls attest, the Semitic term *mar* ("Master") was used not simply of a rabbi or human master but of God or gods also. In speaking of Jesus, moreover, monotheistic Jews who spoke Greek employed not simply the term *Kurios* current in the Greek world of their day but even and especially *Kurios*--passages from the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. Reginald Fuller notes that Jesus had prepared the way for the highest sense of *mar* when during his earthly ministry he asked, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and not do what I tell you?"⁷⁰

This assertion of an apostolic continuity with Jesus' own christological claims Moule bases not mainly on Jesus' words but more broadly on evidence that "from very early days, Jesus was being interpreted as an inclusive Israel-wide-indeed, Adam-wide-person: one

⁶⁵ *Jesus: A New Vision* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987).

⁶⁶ *Jesus in His Own Perspective: An Examination of His Sayings, Actions, and Eschatological Titles* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987).

⁶⁷ *Jesus Within Judaism: New Light from Exciting Archaeological Discoveries* (New York: Doubleday, 1988).

⁶⁸ *The Origin of Christology*, 1f.

⁶⁹ "The Distinctiveness of Christ," *Theology* 76/641 (1973) 562-65.

⁷⁰ *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1965) 119.

who, as no merely human individual, included persons and communities within him, and upon whom Christians found converging all the patterns of relationship between God and man with which they were familiar from their Scriptures."⁷¹ Jesus was held obediently to fulfill the divinely given vocation in which Israel had failed. Even New Testament writers who are not explicit about the larger ontological implications nonetheless assign Jesus "more than individual implications" in their "conceptions of him as the convergence-point of all the Old Testament patterns of relationship between God and his people, and as the universal Saviour," says Moule; moreover, "Paul's understanding of Jesus is like a theist's understanding of God--that he is personal but more than individual," and even in those parts of the New Testament where Christ is conceived of much more individualistically, he is nevertheless conceived of a "definitely transcendent and divine."⁷²

"Jesus is certainly called God within the New Testament (John 20:28 and probably Tit 2:13)," Moule emphasizes.⁷³ Bruce M. Metzger holds, moreover, that Jesus was expressly being called "God" as early as the Pauline letters,⁷⁴ a circumstance that would demolish the notion that the ascription of divinity reflects a non-Jewish borrowing from pagan sources.

The person of Jesus himself, Moule contends, is one way or another the source of the remarkable estimates of him as 'the Son of Man,' 'the Son of God,' 'Messiah,' and 'Kurios.'

From an analysis of the titles of Jesus found already in the Gospel of Mark,⁷⁵ Ferdinand Hahn argues that a hellenistic Jewish Christianity existed alongside a Palestinian Jewish Christianity and a pre-Pauline hellenistic Christianity.⁷⁶ This accommodates a smoother link between Palestinian Jewish and hellenistic Jewish and hellenistic Christian belief, and implies a direct continuity between Jesus and the New Testament christology.

Donald Guthrie expounds New Testament christology on the premise that Jesus' divinity is a biblically given datum guaranteed by divine revelation.⁷⁷ His appeal to Scripture as decisive for the doctrine of Christ has the clear advantage of escaping constantly changing

⁷¹ *The Origin of Christology*, 136.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 138.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁷⁴ "The Punctuation of Rom. 9:5," *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament* (ed. B. Lindars and S. S. Smalley; Cambridge: University Press, 1973) 109.

⁷⁵ Especially Son of Man, Lord, Christ, Son of David, Son of God.

⁷⁶ *The Titles of Jesus in Christology: Their History in Early Christianity*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1963; London: Lutterworth Press, 1969; New York and Cleveland: World, 1969)-

⁷⁷ *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1981).

alternatives reflecting novel metaphysical principles or extra-canonical post-apostolic documents. But it does not of itself assure interpretations of the biblical data on scripture's own terms. The appeal to the New Testament was made, for example, by advocates of a "kenotic" christology and by proponents of a "moral union" christology, both of which comprised the deity of Jesus Christ through their imposition of tendential assumptions on the scriptural data

Karl Rahner holds that the "titles of dignity" reflect Jesus' own belief in the Johannine and Pauline teaching of the doctrine of divine preexistence of the Son-Logos and claim to have been divinely sent. But he contends that the New Testament goes beyond Jesus' witness to himself.⁷⁸ The Judeo-Hellenistic doctrine of a wisdom anterior to the world, he holds, would have led to faith in Jesus' preexistence and hence the affirmation of a divine incarnation.⁷⁹ But then, as Joseph Siri indicates, the inference is difficult to avoid that Nicea and Chalcedon crystallized a post-resurrection affirmation that Jesus is God incarnate, a view presumably not held earlier either by the evangelists before the resurrection or found in the self-consciousness or self-revelation of Jesus of Nazareth during his three year ministry.⁸⁰ The implication is that ascending theological speculation transformed headlong a more primitive view of Jesus into the doctrine of the incarnation of a preexistent Word-Son.

More recently James D. G. Dunn presumes to find a variety of christological views in the New Testament and regards the preexistent Logos subsequently incarnate in Christ as but one of these options. To be sure, Dunn shows that the Christian doctrine of Christ's incarnation was not dependent upon a Gnostic redeemer myth, contrary to some skeptics. He concedes that as a feature of the Fourth Gospel John 1:14 in affirming the incarnation of the preexistent Logos-Son sponsors a fully personal doctrine of the divine preexistence of Jesus Christ.⁸¹ Even in the text of John 1:1-13, however, Dunn finds not an emphasis on the Logos' personal preexistence, but rather only a personified utterance of God. Dunn needlessly sacrifices other substantial supports of New Testament christology. He finds no explicit doctrine of the incarnation in the Pauline writings, and contends moreover that not even Hebrews offers a fully personal doctrine of preexistence. He writes: "Only in

⁷⁸ K. Hahner ed., *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology* (6 vols.; New York: Herder and Herder, 1969) vol. 4.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Cf. *Gethsemane Reflections on the Contemporary Theological Movement* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1980).

⁸¹ *Christology in the Making. An Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (London: SCM Press, 1980).

the post-Pauline period did a clear understanding of Christ as having preexisted with God before his ministry on earth emerge, and only in the Fourth Gospel can we speak of a doctrine of the incarnation."⁸²

But G. B. Caird affirms the preexistence doctrine to be an intrinsic feature of Pauline christology.⁸³ C. F. D. Moule points out, moreover, that Dunn's sweeping dismissal of the Pauline corpus rests on questionable exegesis of such passages as 2 Cor 8:9, Phil 2:5ff. and Col 1:15ff.⁸⁴ The New Testament affirms more than that Jesus Christ embodies and discloses the nature of the invisible creative powers and the spirit of love that sustains the world Dunn's emphasis that the Pauline letters refer only to Jesus' post-resurrection status and contain no intimation of Christ's ontological preexistence and incarnation, and that even Hebrews affirms preexistence only as a conceptual idea rather than as actual personal preexistence, rests on biased aprioris in reading passages like Rom 8:3, Gal 4:4 and Phil 2:6-7, and Heb 1:2-3, 2:6-9 and 7:3.

L. William Countryman protests likewise that Dunn's argument rests on weak and highly vulnerable assumptions.⁸⁵ Dunn contends, for example, that the several New Testament christological titles (Son of man, new Adam, Son of God, etc.) depict distinct christologies, and that terms like Logos and Wisdom can mean only what pre-Christian writers meant by them. In these circumstances Dunn overlooks the possibility that christological titles may to some extent have been used interchangeably, and that Logos and Wisdom in the New Testament have significant personal overtones. What Dunn considers central in New Testament christology, Countryman adds, he expresses in language that is incompatible with the biblical texts.⁸⁶

While there is a developing christology in the New Testament, Dunn's exposition of a gradually emerging incarnational view prejudicially assigns the stimulus for incarnational theology not to apostolic revelation or to Jesus' knowledge of himself, but rather to enlarging Christian faith. The notion that in its early stages the exaltation of Jesus was distinct from belief in his divine preexistence⁸⁷ seems moreover to jeopardize the monotheism on which the New Testament everywhere insists.

Donald Guthrie responds to the recent tendency, especially among redaction critics, to find in the New Testament not an integrated

⁸² Ibid., 259.

⁸³ "The Development of the Doctrine of Christ in the New Testament," *Christ for Us Today* (ed. N. Pittenger; London: SCM, 1968) 68ff.

⁸⁴ "Reviews," *JTS* 33/1 os (1982).

⁸⁵ Review of *Christology in the Making*, CH 51/3 (1982) 335.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 335.

⁸⁷ *Christology in the Making*, 63, 1;62f.

theological perspective but rather a reflection of supposedly diverse views of the several biblical writers. Guthrie responds that the New Testament writers do not expound independent creative theologies: the corpus does not contain "a collection of different theologies rather than. . . a unified New Testament theology."⁸⁸ The unprejudiced interpreter "is not at liberty to pick and choose" from the New Testament data, Guthrie cautions, in order to conform its representations to pre-conceived theories.

Cullmann holds that the early Christian christological formulations articulate what is already presupposed in the earliest literature about Jesus. But while Cullmann insists that "christology already underlies the New Testament," he holds that christology is less interested in the nature of Jesus than in his function. He stresses that the New Testament answers the question of the function of Jesus not in terms of myth but in terms of "actual events. . . that involve his life, work, death and presence and actions after his crucifixion."⁸⁹

Reginald Fuller complains that Cullmann's disposition to view New Testament christology as almost exclusively functional disregards the latest stratum of the biblical literature, and lacks continuity with the still later patristic contribution.⁹⁰ Philippians 2, for example, is no less expressly ontological than is John 1, and should not be taken as merely the translation into Greek of earlier asserted functional activities.

To affirm Christ's personal divine preexistence is simultaneously to deny that Jesus Christ is a man who gradually became God. Although Jesus' contemporaries, even his disciples, may only gradually have perceived the deity of the God-man, he was not, for all that, a devout human being who acquired divinity in the course of spiritual development, or, was he, as D. M. Baillie adds, God or the Son of God "transformed into a human being for a period of about thirty years."⁹¹ New Testament Christianity depicts Jesus as at one and the same time both God and man.

Nothing in the Gospels indicates that Jesus arrogantly or ostentatiously displayed his deity or overwhelmed even his closest disciples by it. Yet John's Gospel records his magisterial *I am*s as overt claims. Guthrie comments that "it is difficult to escape the conclusion that in the mind of Jesus there was a connection with the great *I AM* as the name of Jehovah" in the Old Testament, particularly in view of John

⁸⁸ *New Testament Theology*, 71.

⁸⁹ *The Christology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959) 316.

⁹⁰ *The Foundations of New Testament Christology*, 247, 257.

⁹¹ *God Was in Christ. An Essay on Incarnation and Atonement* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948) 82.

8:58.⁹² An implicit christology lies in the tender term *abba*⁹³ and in the insistence on his unique sonship (cf. Matt 11:25-30), which imply that the Father and the Son share the same essential life. The conjunction of Jesus' name with that of both the Father and the Spirit supports this. His divine prerogatives, as his life and teaching make clear, include the forgiveness of sins in his own name, and the future judgment as well of all humanity.

The Resurrection and Divinity

The resurrection of the crucified Jesus holds in Christianity a pivotal importance for the affirmation of Jesus' divinity. Bultmann scorns all talk of an empty tomb or of the crucified Nazarene's bodily appearances; the only resurrection he allows occurred not in Jerusalem, but in the believer's internal response to the preaching of the apostles. The beginnings of christology for Bultmann therefore lie not in any historical ontological happening on "the third day" but in an existential event whose character is functional.

"Whether one argues that Christology began within the consciousness of Jesus, or later somewhere within the life and faith of the early Christian community," Berkey comments, "the substance of Christology is always shaped by, created by, understood through the New Testament's resounding affirmation 'He is risen!'"⁹⁴

Moule is surely right that Christianity does not rest solely or merely on "certain antecedent claims made by or for Jesus. . . but rather on the implications of his life, his actions, his teaching, his death, and most notably its extraordinary sequel."⁹⁵ The Easter verdict seems to Moule decisive because he finds it "impossible to account for. . . except as an intimation traceable only to Christ himself"⁹⁶ and because subsequent history supplies no evidence for reversing that verdict.

Can historical investigation alone, however, provide a solid basis for an irreversible verdict on the permanent aliveness of Jesus Christ? Granted that a conclusively negative verdict on the factual resurrection of the crucified Jesus would devastate Christian faith, the question remains whether empirical historical inquiry can decisively adjudicate the question of Jesus' present aliveness and high priestly ministry.

⁹² "Jesus Christ," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975) 3.569a.

⁹³ Cf. J. Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965) 9ff.

⁹⁴ "Christological Perspectives," 18.

⁹⁵ *The Origins of Christianity*, 163.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 173.

It is not to historiography--"new" or old--that we look for validation of Jesus' claim to reveal God, but only for verification that he made such a claim and worked certain acts and lived in a certain way and said certain things that seem quite inconsistent logically with any other claim. When Van Harvey tells us that "there is no one true significance of an event"⁹⁷ he arbitrarily presumes to tell us that the importance of the life and death of Jesus is not to be identified in terms of a divinely revealed meaning, and hence that the attribution of such significance to it is untrue.

Is the resurrection to be seen as a confirmation of Jesus' divine teaching and work, or is it rather the event in which christology took its rise? Michael Walsh resurrects the modernist thesis that Jesus' victory over death was a matter of faith more than a historical fact: "all that really matters is that those who followed Jesus believed the resurrection to have taken place and they acted on that belief."⁹⁸

W. H. C. Frend argues that only because Jesus was already accepted as unique could the Easter story have gained currency.⁹⁹ Surely something about Jesus' life and ministry contributed to the credibility of the resurrection reports. But the Gospels in no way support a theory that the resurrection is grounded in the disciples' psychological condition.

Peter Carnley asserts that New Testament faith in the resurrection was grounded in an encounter exempt from rational inquiry into the basis of belief.¹⁰⁰ Carnley stresses the post-crucifixion role of the phenomena of "appearance" and "presence," the former only to believers (or in Paul's case to one acquainted with Jesus), and yet sufficiently ambiguous, Carnley thinks, to allow doubt. Yet the experience is not merely private, but also "communal and publicly shared." The Holy Spirit's presence, Carnley contends, is a presence of Jesus Christ. Carnley's treatment lacks a careful statement of the particular roles of appearance, of experience and of liturgical remembrance in assuring the reality of the resurrection of the Crucified One, and he does not work out implications of the pre-Eastern ministry of Jesus contributing to this assurance.

Among current literature that goes behind psychology to a larger historical rootedness for Jesus' message and mission--although not necessarily to adequate discussion of the words of Jesus--are E. P.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 221.

⁹⁸ *The Triumph of the Meek: Why Early Christianity Succeeded* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986).

⁹⁹ *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 55.

¹⁰⁰ *The Structure of Resurrection Belief* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

Sanders's *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*,¹⁰¹ and Marcus J. Borg's *Jesus: A New Vision*.¹⁰² These works, as Borg himself comments, halt short of both direct quotation by and specific attribution to Jesus, do not argue for historical exactitude in details, and are especially interested in sociocultural implications.¹⁰³

The case for the objective historical resurrection of the crucified Jesus has been maintained not by evangelical orthodox scholars alone, but by others also who emphasize both the empty tomb and Jesus' resurrection appearances. Wolfhart Pannenberg considers Jesus' resurrection decisive for every christological concern. He does so, however, in a controversial way: in his view, the earthly life of Jesus is "kenosis"--a condition in which his divinity was imperceptible and in which his fellow-Jews could only regard him as a blasphemer.¹⁰⁴ Pannenberg speaks of "Jesus' nonmessianic ministry" as being "transformed into Christology only in the light of the resurrection," and insists, as Berkey notes, that what "divides the nonmessianic historical Jesus from the Christ of faith is not an affirmation but an event."¹⁰⁵ The resurrection he considers a real, external, nonexistential historical event, not a mythical existential reinterpretation. Yet in doing so he also sacrifices a Logos-theology. Contrary to Barth, Lawson, Moule, Guthrie, and others, he develops christology "from below." He rules out the virgin birth as legend, and derives from the Early Church the titles that the Gospels ascribe to Jesus. Divine authority was merely "implicit" in Jesus' three-year ministry; only the resurrection vindicates it. The resurrection thus displaces the incarnation as the starting-point for the discussion of Jesus' deity.¹⁰⁶

Yet Pannenberg denies revelation in the form of scriptural prophecy and insists instead that revelation is given in self-interpreting history. He critically rejects the unity of Scripture, forfeits canonical inspiration and defers to noncanonical materials, and professes to find the meaning of history in history itself, rather than in Scripture. While he contends for a unified history centered in the figure of Jesus, his critically concessive view of the Gospels leads him to depict Jesus as mistakenly expecting an imminent end of world history and leads him also to deny that Jesus portrayed himself as the coming Son of man. Instead

¹⁰¹ San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987.

¹⁰² San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987.

¹⁰³ "A Renaissance in Jesus Studies," *T Today* 45/3 (1988) 280-92.

¹⁰⁴ *Jesus-God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968).

¹⁰⁵ "Christological Perspectives," 20.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. E. Frank Tupper, *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971).

of appealing to divinely authoritative and historically reliable Scripture, he insists that Jesus' resurrection "is not made certain by faith but only by historical research" and then adds the significant qualifier, "to the extent that certainty can be attained at all about questions of this kind."¹⁰⁷

But history is in fact not self-interpreting, nor is empirical historical investigation capable of yielding more than high probability. Inspired Scripture speaks prophetically of the resurrection of the Crucified One. Jesus' disciples at first heeded neither the biblical intimations nor their Master's anticipations of that event. Yet the apostle Paul gave Jesus' resurrection due centrality (1 Cor 15:3-4), insisting both on its scriptural prediction and its historical factuality.

Although radical form-criticism and redaction criticism shroud the Gospels in historical uncertainty, archaeological discovery continues its sporadic confirmation even of the Bible's obscure details. Nonetheless, Pannenberg attaches little more theological significance to Jesus' messianic consciousness and words and deeds than do most post-Bultmannian scholars. The tradition of the resurrection appearances and that of the empty tomb, he holds, arose independently. Yet their complementarity makes Jesus' historical resurrection "very probable and that always means in historical inquiry that it is to be presupposed until contrary evidence appears";¹⁰⁸ certainty will not come until there is eschatological verification. But is it enough to say that apostolic Christianity proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus Christ merely as highly probable?

John Cobb, who accepts the historical probability of the resurrection, considers the empty tomb reports cognitively more vulnerable than the appearances. At the same time he finds confirmation of the tradition of Jesus' appearances in present-day visionary "appearances" of the dead,¹⁰⁹ a comparison that wholly misses the theological and eschatological significance of Jesus' resurrection. Cobb emphasizes that Jesus' appearances lack features usually associated with a body, but thinks the differences are minimized by focusing on one's post-mortem spiritual life rather than on the nature of bodily resurrection. Speculative considerations here override the importance of an authentic New Testament witness.

Pannenberg affirms the resurrection not only to be decisive for the recognition of Jesus' divinity, but also as ontologically constitutive of the reality of his divinity. It is the more remarkable, therefore, that he seems in the face of rival theological and exegetical expositions increasingly to shy away from Jesus' resurrection as an historical

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 99.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 105.

¹⁰⁹ "Wolfgang Pannenberg's 'Jesus-God and Man,'" *JR* 49 (1969) 199ff.

even¹¹⁰ or at least to consider all approaches to Jesus' resurrection to be merely provisional. He insists, on the one hand, that if the resurrection claim is valid it is so as an historical act in the past. Yet, on the other hand, he declares it "quite difficult to affirm this event as a fact in the same sense as other facts I presuppose that history does not require homogeneity of all events which are designated as historical."¹¹¹

Many conservatives initially hailed Pannenberg for his rejection of neo-orthodox fideism and for his insistence on divine revelation in history, and the importance of historically attested divine acts as indispensable to the Christian faith. These revelatory acts reached their climax in the history of Jesus consummated by his resurrection, attesting Jesus' divinity, emphasized particularly in the empty tomb accounts and the Pauline report of the resurrection appearances. Pannenberg questions Willi Marxsen's view that the Easter witnesses claim only to have seen Jesus who was crucified, and not to have seen him rise (because admittedly there were no human eyewitnesses of the resurrection event per se). Their reflective interpretation, says Marxsen, was that God raised Jesus.¹¹² Marxsen's approach could in principle divorce the appearances from any linkage whatever to Jesus. Pannenberg concedes that only in the eschatological end-time will we speak clearly about what happened in Jesus' resurrection. The revelation God gives in the Risen Jesus is *proleptic*--that is, an advance disclosure in Jesus the individual of a comprehensive end-time consummation; moreover, it is paradoxical and metaphorical, in short, doxological, and not given in the form of universally valid truth.¹¹³ Pannenberg holds that "the appearances reported in the Gospels, which are not mentioned by Paul, have such a strong legendary character that no one can scarcely find a historical kernel of their own in them."¹¹⁴ Such radical criticism cannot but reflect negatively on claims for Jesus' resurrection.

According to Pannenberg, Jesus' resurrection must be verifiable in principle by historical reason independently of faith. Jurgen Moltmann counters that such historical verification would require a concept of history that would anticipate the prophesied end of history, one dominated by an expectation of universal end-time resurrection.¹¹⁵ Pannenberg has modified his view to hold that in history we

¹¹⁰ Cf. Gerald O'Collins, "The Theology of Revelation in Some Recent Discussion" (Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge University, 1968).

¹¹¹ Cf. Tupper, *Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, 284f.

¹¹² "The Resurrection of Jesus as a Historical and Theological Problem," *The Significance of the Message of the Resurrection for Faith in Jesus Christ* (ed., C. F. D. Moule, Naperville, IL: Alec R Allenson, Inc., 1968) 30f.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 187, 397.

¹¹⁴ *Jesus-God and Man*, 107.

¹¹⁵ *Theology of Hope* (London: SCM Press, 1967) 82.

have only "pointers" to the resurrection and that the resurrection of Jesus will "possess and retain the character of revelation for us."¹¹⁶ But, as Avery Dulles comments, if divine promise is, as Pannenberg implies, only the anticipation of revelation, and if at the moment that Jesus becomes the fulfillment of the promise he passes beyond the limits of history," it would seem that as long as history lasts we are doomed to be deprived of revelation itself.¹¹⁷

The Jewish New Testament scholar Pinchas Lapidé grants that the crucified Jesus arose from the dead.¹¹⁸ No other explanation, such as vision or hallucination, he says, can explain the revolutionary transformation of Jesus' disciples after Easter weekend. Although Lapidé concedes the material facticity of Jesus' resurrection, he dismisses as pious fraud such narrative details in the Gospel accounts as the disciples' discovery of the empty tomb and the appearance of angelic creatures in white garments. He asserts that the resurrection experience helped advance the divine plan of salvation, and declares that Jesus could be the Messiah of the Gentiles. Yet he denies that Jesus was the long-awaited Jewish messiah or divine Son of God.

The ground and hope common to the Old and New Testaments, however, precludes any such distinction. Messiah is Saviour of the world, not simply of Jews and of Gentiles, and his third-day resurrection attests messianity in the context of the biblical hope and prospect of a final resurrection of all mankind.

Historical research by itself is incompetent to establish the New Testament's most significant statements about Jesus Christ. It may indeed attest that Jesus lived and died in Palestine, and that he "taught with authority." But it cannot confirm that he was conceived by the Holy Ghost, or that he is the eternal Logos become flesh and veritable divine Son through whom God has ushered in the last days, or that he arose from the dead never to die again, or that God has made him both Lord and Christ, or that he will return in omnipotent power and glory.

Messianic Self-Consciousness

What role has Jesus' own self-consciousness in respect to affirmations of his divinity? Unless the substance of the claims made by early Christianity can be legitimately referred back not to Jesus' contemporaries only, but also to what Jesus affirmed about himself, christology is in jeopardy. Christianity cannot persuasively claim for Jesus what

¹¹⁶ *Jesus--God and Man*, 107

¹¹⁷ *Models of Revelation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday: 1985) 65.

¹¹⁸ *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective* (Minneapolis; Augsburg Press, 1983).

he did not and does not claim for himself. We may have no access to Jesus' self-consciousness except through his words and acts as reflected in the Gospel records, but neglect of data concerning Jesus' own self-consciousness will obscure the contribution made by his own life and teaching to the attitude of the first Christians toward him.

All the gospels contain passage in which Jesus affirms his divinity (e.g., Matt 11:21; Luke 10:22; John 16:14f.; 14:26; 15:26; 16:7). The weight of the evidence is that Jesus believed that he was and is God's incomparable Son, standing in God's place with divine authority and right, and determining the destiny of human beings according to their response to his life and work. Herbert Brown nonetheless declares it "probable" that Jesus lacked any messianic self-understanding.¹¹⁹

The challenge to the divinity of Jesus Christ in the second decade of this century was projected on the ground that the historical Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels made no supernatural claims for himself. But this contention crumbled under research showing that Jesus depicted himself as the messiah of prophetic promise, and that he implied a unique relationship not only to mankind but to God.¹²⁰ Burton Scott Easton remarked that "too many moderns treat" Jesus' messianic self-consciousness "as if it were something almost any religious man might possess," for example, the fervent conviction that in the future judgment of the world one would "not be on man's side but on God's"¹²¹ would in any other figure have aroused countercharges of delusion. Leonard Hodgson stressed that what Jesus "thought of Himself involves, if it be true, such a supernatural office as justifies the beliefs about him stated in the Christian creeds, and that if these elements in His thought are set on one side, whatever remains is not the historic Jesus."¹²²

Oscar Cullmann does not hesitate to affirm that Jesus Christ believed himself to be Messiah.¹²³ Prior to the Easter-experience both "Jesus' own self-consciousness" and "his person and work" provided a starting point of christological thought. "From the moment of his baptism Jesus was conscious of carrying out God's plan."¹²⁴

As already mentioned in passing, Pannenberg considers the early Church the source of all the christological titles ascribed to Jesus; the titles therefore, as he sees it, do not directly attest Jesus' consciousness of unique unity with God. Pannenberg's rejection of the christological

¹¹⁹ *Jesus of Nazareth: The Man and His Time* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979) 26.

¹²⁰ Cf. William Manson, *Jesus the Messiah* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1943).

¹²¹ *The Gospel Before the Gospels* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1928) 160.

¹²² *And Was Made Man* (London: Longmans, Green, 1928) 67.

¹²³ *The Christology of the New Testament*, 314ff.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 317.

significance of the titles reflects the influence of questionable theological assumptions and prejudgment. The ontological structure of Jesus' divine-human consciousness he connects with a progressively developing self-understanding in intimate community with the Father's revelational presence, rather than with a Logos consciousness. While Pannenberg seeks to protect Jesus' sinlessness, he denies that he was free from error. Jesus erred, says Pannenberg, by expecting the arrival of God's Kingdom in his own generation.¹²⁵ This lack of knowledge extended additionally to his own person. His complete dependence on and unity with God, with whose will he was functionally one in pre-actualizing the coming Kingdom, did not presuppose a messianic self-consciousness.¹²⁶ Yet Pannenberg holds that Jesus' sinlessness was a consequence not of incarnation in a specially purified humanity that constituted him incapable of sin; it presupposes rather that Jesus assumed sinful flesh existentially structured by self-centeredness, but that his resurrection attests that he conquered sin under the very conditions of human existence in bondage to sin.¹²⁷ Jesus' personal community with the Father defines him as the Son of God. The resurrection of Jesus attests that God's will to establish the Kingdom governed his life and work. God raised Jesus as the One who in his mission was unreservedly dedicated to him and who self-sacrificially remained so dedicated even amid the seeming failure of that mission. The End (whose nearness Jesus proclaimed) did not come in the way in which (so Pannenberg holds) Jesus and his disciples expected—the appearance of the heavenly Son of Man, universal resurrection of the dead, the last judgment—but rather in the manner of Jesus' own singular proleptic resurrection.

Karl Hahner affirms that Jesus "knew he was indissolubly united with his God."¹²⁸ Pannenberg, like Rahner, holds that Jesus' reflective messianic self-consciousness was an aspect of his personal intellectual history, and not due to an intrinsic and historically unconditioned awareness of the divine Logos. Jesus' self-knowledge arises in relation to the Father rather than to the Logos. Pannenberg regards the Hebrew religious heritage as crucial, particularly its emphasis on the nearness of the Kingdom of God. Jesus lacked complete preknowledge, even about his own person, although he knew himself to be functionally one with God's will,¹²⁹ and knew his ego to be other than that of the Father.

¹²⁵ *Jesus-God and Man*, 226.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 334.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 354ff.

¹²⁸ *Theological Investigations*, Vol. I, *God, Christ, Mary, Grace* (14 vols.; New York: The Seabury Press, 1974) 158.

¹²⁹ *Jesus-God and Man*, 334.

Jesus' personal communion with the Father identifies him as the Son of God, and the resurrection confirms his whole activity to be in dedication to God's purpose to establish the Kingdom. Pannenberg contends that as human existence gains integrated personality through dependence on God the Father, Jesus too received his life-integrating personality in personal communion with the Father.¹³⁰ In the revelation of Jesus as the Son of God Pannenberg finds Jesus' ultimate identification with the Lordship of God, and hence his entry into kingly rule over all creation in extension of God's Kingdom,¹³¹ his headship of humanity as an aspect of cosmic reconciliation, and his eschatological consummation of the world and historical process. Although Pannenberg does not regard salvation as automatically universal, he nonetheless considers universal salvation a theological option.¹³²

James D. G. Dunn holds that much as one must acknowledge that Jesus claimed to be "the eschatological prophet" and to speak as "the final envoy of Wisdom, with an immediacy of revelatory authority that transcended anything that had gone before... there is no indication that Jesus thought or spoke of himself as having preexisted with God prior to his birth or appearance on earth."¹³³ But this verdict can be achieved only by dismissing such requests as John 8 and John 17 as late forms of tradition that cannot be traced back to Jesus.

Moule is reluctant to find in Jesus' own consciousness an awareness of divine preexistence, a hesitancy that seems strange in view of John 17:5 ("and now, O Father, glorify Me with the glory which I had with you before the world was"). Yet he retains the idea of Jesus' preexistence and thinks that John (in 1:1-18ff.) and Paul (in Col 1:15ff.) draw out "the implications of their experience of him as transcending the temporal."¹³⁴ This inference centered especially, Moule thinks, in their relation to Jesus as one who, beyond crucifixion, had without waiting for the end of history entered into absolute life. Thus the Easter-belief of the disciples that Jesus had passed through death into "life absolute, life eternal" is for Moule the decisive factor in affirming Jesus' supertemporal existence.

It is one thing to say, as Bultmann did, that Christology is the creative invention of the post-crucifixion Christian community, and very much another thing to say, as does Moule, that the resurrection-event congealed the latent Christian conviction of Jesus' transcendent status. But did not still earlier factors, perhaps including Jesus' self-awareness,

¹³⁰ Ibid., 345.

¹³¹ Ibid., 365ff.

¹³² Ibid., 271f.

¹³³ *Christology in the Making*, 253ff.

¹³⁴ *The Origin of Christology*, 138f.

already contribute to the shaping of this slumbering conviction? In conceding this latter possibility Moule goes beyond Pannenberg's insistence that: "Until his resurrection, Jesus' unity with God was hidden not only to other men but above all, which emerges from a critical examination of the tradition, for Jesus himself also. It was hidden because the ultimate decision about it had not been given."¹³⁵ Moule to the contrary stresses that the New Testament writings share a common "devotion to the person of Jesus Christ, the historical Jesus acknowledged as Messiah and Lord,"¹³⁶ a veneration that did not first emerge after Jesus' resurrection (cf. Luke 24:21).

Moule does not specifically address the question of Jesus' virgin birth, stating only that "even. . . at its most reduced level. . . [of] . . . myth, one might still maintain that it was an expression of that transcendental quality which, from the very beginning, seems to have attached to Christ. . . ."¹³⁷ But in that case might not Christ's preexistence, empty tomb, resurrection and ascension ministry be assimilated similarly to this reductionist level? Moule's declaration that the canonical writings need not as such be regarded as wholly trustworthy¹³⁸ serves only to widen doubts about historical factuality. It is not enough to reject as inadequate, as Moule indeed does, J. L. Houlden's view that the new life that early Christians found in Jesus, and their consequent experience of a new world, constrained them to view Jesus as the preexistent agent of its creation.¹³⁹ To reinforce Houlden's view only by Moule's emphasis that the first Christians "experienced Jesus himself as in a dimension transcending the human and the temporal"¹⁴⁰ insufficiently illumines the transcendent basis of that experience and the validity-claim attaching to it. The earliest Christians, Moule avers, were "driven to their conclusions by the force of what was happening to them."¹⁴¹ Yet this appeal to the implications of apostolic experience for the transcendent nature of Christ is vulnerable through Moule's failure to elaborate an adequate revelation-grounded theology of the person and work of the Redeemer.

Reginald Fuller finds in the historical Jesus more than an express basis for the apostolic *Kerygma*. He emphasizes that there exists "a direct line of continuity between Jesus' self-understanding and the church's christological interpretation of him."¹⁴² "Jesus understood his

¹³⁵ *Jesus-God and Man*, 321.

¹³⁶ *The Birth of the New Testament* (London: Black, 1966) 9.

¹³⁷ *The Origin of Christology*, 140f.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 136f.

¹³⁹ "The Place of the New Testament," *What About the New Testament? Essays in honor of Christopher Evans* (London: SCM Press, 1975) 103ff.

¹⁴⁰ *The Origin of Christology*, 138.

¹⁴¹ *Op. cit.*, 162.

¹⁴² *The Foundations of New Testament Christology*, cf. 15, 108, 254.

mission in terms of eschatological prophecy" and as actually initiating in his own words and works the expected future salvation and judgment. "Take the implied self-understanding of his role in terms of the eschatological prophet away, and the whole ministry falls into a series of unrelated, if not meaningless fragments."¹⁴³

Yet Fuller contends that Jesus never publicly proclaimed himself the Messiah, nor did he impose a christology on his disciples.¹⁴⁴ When Peter identifies him as Messiah, Jesus charges his disciples not to broadcast the news but begins to speak of his impending suffering (Mark 8:29-31). Only at the end when, condemned to die as a messianic pretender, he was asked if he was the Messiah and, about to be crucified, answered "I am" (Mark 15:2, 9, 26).

Peter Stuhlmacher insists that the explicit post-Easter christology of the Early Church is grounded in Jesus' pre-Easter self-understanding. He declares wholly unacceptable the alternative that the *Kerygma* is essentially a human product, as Bultmann and post-Bultmannians held. To ground Jesus' deity upon the faith of believers is to rest the claims of Christianity on interpretation rather than on historical actuality and substitutes superstition for truth.¹⁴⁵

The high Christology, says J. L. M. Haire, "is in the words of Jesus Himself, in His 'But I say unto you,' His knowledge of the Father, and His victory over the powers of evil."¹⁴⁶

Where it suits their purposes, mediating writers often secretly rely on a conservative rather than a critical view of the biblical accounts. And yet it is not only conservatives like R. T. France, who consider it "probable that some, and perhaps all, of the gospels were written in substantially their present form within thirty years of the events, and that much of the material was already collected and written a decade or two before that."¹⁴⁷ For France's view of early sources is here not dissimilar from that of the critical and quite radical New Testament scholar John A T. Robinson, except for France's avoidance of Robinson's vulnerable dating method.

Significance of Miracles

Once the question of historical facticity of the Gospels is raised earnestly, the subject of miracles is unavoidable. Not only do the Gospels attribute remarkable miracles to Jesus before his death and

¹⁴³ Ibid., 130.

¹⁴⁴ *The Mission and Achievement of Jesus* (Chicago: Alec R Allenson, Inc., 1954) 116.

¹⁴⁵ *Jesus van Nazareth-Ghristus des Glaubens* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1988).

¹⁴⁶ "On Behalf of Chalcedon," *Essays in Christology for Karl Barth* (ed. T. H. L. Parker; London: Lutterworth, 1956) 96.

¹⁴⁷ *The Evidence for Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986).

resurrection, but they also assign to these acts a role and importance that distinguish Jesus from other miracle-workers. As Colin Brown emphasizes, the miracles fulfill John the Baptist's prophecy of Messiah's coming in demonstration of the Spirit. The Hebrew religious hierarchy, by contrast, sees the miracles as wonders that detour the masses from orthodoxy, and in view of this call for the destruction of Jesus.¹⁴⁸

G. F. Woods thinks a high degree of probability attaches to claims for the resurrection and many New Testament miracles. Yet he emphasizes that what seems beyond human power is not axiomatically divine. Our secular technocratic age notably dwarfs the evidential value of miracles. Even if we could show that some events are not human, it does not necessarily follow that they are supernatural.¹⁴⁹ But it should be emphasized also that one will consider no event whatever truly miraculous if he disbelieves in the supernatural. An Anglo-Saxon philosophical naturalist would insist not simply that miracles have ceased in post-biblical times, but that they have never occurred. Even if he were present at the Second Coming of Christ, he might at first insist that he was the victim of a cosmic illusion or afflicted by a brain tumor. The notion that the biblical writers believed in miracles because as prescientific men they were ignorant of the laws of nature is preposterous. One is tempted to say they knew enough biology and physics to know that the virgin birth and the resurrection of Jesus were once-for-all historical acts.

But that way of putting it would only sustain the misconception that observational science can identify once-for-all events, whereas in fact it is impotent to do so. For all science knows, there may have been or may still be other virgin births and resurrections. Science in the future may even simulate biblical happenings, but such simulation would have no bearing on what occurred in Bethlehem and Jerusalem in A.D. 1-30. It is knowledge of God and his purposes rather than ignorance of science and its inferences and assumptions that explains the scriptural insistence on the miraculous in biblical history.

The New Testament does not permit us to see the universe either as a closed mechanical system of unbroken regularity or as an open haphazard chaos of only contrived predictability, or of capricious determinations by mythical divinities. The Christian theist holds that the sense of the universe is to be found in the purposive revelation of God who is personally sovereign and free in sustaining both cosmic continuities and unique once-for-all events.

¹⁴⁸ *That You May Believe: Miracles and Faith Then and Now* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).

¹⁴⁹ "The Evidential Value of Biblical Miracles," *Miracles, Cambridge Studies in Their Philosophy and History* (ed. C. F. D. Moule, London: A R Mowbray & Co.; NY: Morehouse-Barlow Co., 1965) 21ff.

One of the church fathers, Athanasius, author of *On the Incarnation*, suggests the cosmic Christ became incarnate so that those who did not recognize his works in nature would acknowledge him through his works done in the flesh. As C. S. Lewis puts it, "the Christian story is precisely the story of one grand miracle, the Christian assertion being that what is beyond all space and time, what is uncreated, eternal, came into nature, into human nature, descended into his own universe and rose again, bringing nature up with him."¹⁵⁰

Indeed, Jesus is himself the Miracle--the One who binds Satan and releases the penitent from Satan's grip. If one accepts the reality of divine incarnation in Jesus Christ, the possibility of miracles is implicit in the Great Miracle; as Colin Herner comments, it is "a natural corollary of that *Weltanschauung*."¹⁵¹ The Enlightenment hostility to miracles, he adds, arose not from "freedom from presupposition," but from contrary presuppositions.¹⁵²

The central thesis of the Gospel of John is that Jesus' works are signs of the nearing fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of redemption, and manifesting Jesus as Christ, the Son of God. The raising of Lazarus after his death and burial serves notice that Jesus has life-giving power beyond death and is a foregleam of the coming general resurrection in which Jews believed.

Yet for all that, the Gospel of Luke makes abundantly clear that the disciples did not grasp Jesus' predictions of his own third-day resurrection. In those resurrection appearances Jesus makes unmistakable connections with his precrucifixion ministry.¹⁵³ The resurrection is not to be wholly detached from the contribution of Jesus' preresurrection teaching and works to his designation as Lord.

The first Christians, as Hodgson says in a preface for the paperback edition of his Gifford Lectures, were "Palestinian Jews trying to fit their faith in the risen Lord into their inherited Jewish theology."¹⁵⁴ Yet their inherited religion supplied prophetic intimations and anticipations of the exceptional role and nature of Messiah whose coming was divinely pledged. The fact that some modern interpreters have read back into the Old Testament christological intentions and meanings that seem foreign to it is no reason for minimizing the extensive

¹⁵⁰ *God in the Dock, Essays on Theology and Ethics*, (ed. Walter Hooper, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1970) 80.

¹⁵¹ *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1989) 442.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 443.

¹⁵³ Cf. C. F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* (6 vols.; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1979) 3.159ff.

¹⁵⁴ *For Faith and Freedom*, Gifford Lectures 1955-1957 (London: SCM Press, 1968) l.xi.

basis which the New Testament writers, and not least of all the authors of the Gospels, found in the Old Testament for accrediting Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ. The Old Testament nurtured expectation of the coming 'Son of David' born in the Davidic line, the Suffering Servant, the supernatural 'Son of Man,' and the transcendent intervention of God to establish his Kingdom. "Christian faith began," Hodgson notes, "with the acceptance of his claim to be the fulfillment of God's messianic promises given through the Old Testament prophets. Had there been no previous history of Israel, there would have been. . . no New Testament"¹⁵⁵

Worship of the Risen Lord

In recognizing Jesus as the promised Messiah, his disciples subscribed to Jesus' own belief about himself, even if they only glimpsed some aspects of all that messianity meant to him. It was not worship uninformed by cognitive considerations that motivated the disciples' attitude toward Jesus. D. A. Carson thinks it premature "to minimize the Christological implications of Jesus' historical self-disclosure."¹⁵⁶ He finds many subtle claims of Jesus to deity in Matthew's Gospel alone even if full understanding awaited the resurrection.¹⁵⁷ In his quotation of Psalm 110 in which the Messiah is not only the Son of David but also David's 'Lord,' Jesus applied this title to himself (Matt 22:41-46). Psalm 110 becomes in turn the Old Testament's most quoted referent in the New Testament

The critical effort to set the Synoptics over against the Fourth Gospel in respect to affirmation of the deity of Jesus Christ was unavailing. Even the least dogmatic of the Synoptics, the Gospel of Mark, which uses the Old Testament references sparingly, nonetheless opens with two Old Testament passages (Isa 40:3; Mal 3:1) that speak of the messenger who prepares for the historical arrival of the Lord. John the Baptist heralded "the Coming One" whom the inspired prophets had foretold, and Jesus' own ministry begins with the emphasis on the Kingdom of God now "at hand" (Matt 4:7, 10:7; cf. Matt 4:23, 9:35; Mark 1:14f.; Luke 4:18-21, 4:43, 8:17).

Leonhard Goppelt says pointedly that in referring to the Kingdom Jesus" . . . was not introducing a new term. He proclaimed not that there was a Kingdom of God, but that it was now coming."¹⁵⁸ The Old Testament often depicted God as King, spoke of his sovereign rule, and

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 82.

¹⁵⁶ "Christological Ambiguities in Matthew," *Christ the Lord*, 97-126.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 110.

¹⁵⁸ *Theology of the New Testament*, 1.45.

of his future eschatological reign. Jesus claims to be David's lord (Mark 12:35-37) and he identifies himself to the high priest in terms that precipitate a charge of blasphemy. It cannot be maintained convincingly that prior to the Gospel of John, which some on that account have dated late, we find no expression of "the essential bond between Jesus and God." For, as Goppelt notes, scattered instances are found elsewhere (in the baptismal formula of Matt. 28:19, in 1 Cor. 15:28, and in Heb. 1:8):⁵⁹

More than this, the early Church worshipped Jesus not only as Lord but, as D. R. de Lacey stresses, as the "one Lord" (1 Cor 8:6).¹⁶⁰ In short, "Paul presents a 'Christianizing' of the *shema*."¹⁶¹ "To Paul the lordship of Jesus is so fundamental that there is a sense in which it challenges, or at least significantly modifies, the *heis theos* to which as a Jew he was totally committed."¹⁶² In Oscar Cullmann's words, "early Christianity does not hesitate to transfer to Jesus everything the Old Testament says about God."¹⁶³

The weight of evidence is that Jesus believed he was God's incomparable Son, standing in God's place with divine authority and right and determining the destiny of human beings according to their response to his life and work. Radical critics contended that the claims of Jesus to be the divine Son of God originated from the early Church, while they also argued that sayings of Jesus could be considered historical if they present motifs not found in earlier Judaism. Here Jesus' claim to personal divinity would surely qualify. To insist that the Church constructed the Jesus of the Gospel is like saying that a son has generated his own father.

Jesus expected both his approaching suffering and death, and beyond the grave, the Father's vindication of his obedient trust. This expectation was grounded not merely in a common Jewish belief in the appearance of an eschatological prophet, but in Jesus' own special redemptive mission. Jesus anticipated that vindication in a future eschatological Kingdom. But as Hans F. Bayer contends, he did not mistakenly expect the Kingdom to be introduced at his resurrection,¹⁶⁴ but rather interposed a significant interim between his resurrection and his return. Contrary to the inclination of many critics to dismiss such passages, Bayer stresses the authenticity of the Gospel texts in which Jesus predicts his resurrection and vindication.

¹⁵⁹ *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 1.204, n. 64.

¹⁶⁰ "One Lord" in Pauline Christology," *Christ the Lord*, 199.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 200.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 201.

¹⁶³ *The Christology of the New Testament*, 307.

¹⁶⁴ *Jesus' Predictions of Vindication and Resurrection: The Provenance, Meaning and Correlation of the Synoptic Predictions* (Tubingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1986).

Hodgson identifies himself with what he calls "the central core" of the biblical testimony, "the belief that in Jesus Christ we see God at work in the history of the world, personally incarnate for the purpose of rescuing his creation from the evil with which it had become infected,"¹⁶⁵ The Christian affirmation is not simply that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor 5:19) for, Hodgson observes, these words standing alone might be compatible with the notion that God was working more fully, but not singularly and definitively, in Jesus Christ.¹⁶⁶ Hodgson allows, however, that "our belief in Jesus as God incarnate may have appeared in His mind as no more than a conviction of messiahship."¹⁶⁷

Hodgson jeopardizes not only the beliefs of the inspired biblical writers and his own beliefs, but those of Jesus of Nazareth also, by his insistent emphasis that human thought-forms are necessarily conditioned by the age in which one lives.¹⁶⁸ Concerning Jesus, Hodgson asks: "If in Jesus Christ God was genuinely 'made man,' lived, thought and taught as the subject of experiences mediated through a body born of the Jews in Palestine not quite two thousand years ago, must we not regard His teaching as conditioned by the outlook of His time and place and racial origin?."¹⁶⁹ Hodgson's answer helps us little. On the one hand, we are told that Jesus "burst the bounds" of a limited selfhood; on the other, that "we have no experience enabling us to know the extent to which perfect self-dedication to the finding and doing of God's will in a life of unbroken communion with God in the unity of the Spirit, would enable a man to deal with his own particular circumstances in such a way as to reveal principles of universal relevance,"¹⁷⁰ But if universal principles or truths could be revealed to and in the mind of Jesus by the Spirit, why could objective truth not also have been revealed by the Spirit to divinely inspired prophets and apostles who in the biblical record profess to give us information valid for all times and places?

This faith that Jesus is the incarnate Son of God preceded the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, But it was decisively confirmed by the resurrection of the Crucified One, who brought forgiveness of sins and imparted new life by the Spirit, The Book of Acts and the New Testament epistles affirm that Christ is the personal presence of God in the community of faith. The very first Christian sermon, by

¹⁶⁵ *For Faith and Freedom*, 1.82, 2.M

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.68.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.89.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.49.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.89.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Peter at Pentecost, within weeks of the crucifixion of Jesus, stressed that Jesus is risen and ascended, that he has effected forgiveness of sins for the penitent, and that he has gifted the Holy Spirit to his followers. Messiah's redemptive mission included as its "central aim," as Hodgson observes, his forming "a fellowship of forgiven sinners"¹⁷¹ despite the fact that many Jewish religious leaders spumed Jesus because they were expecting a political messiah. Messianic cancellation of personal sin was clearly a feature emphasized by John the Baptist (John 1:29, 30) and in turn by Jesus (Mark 2:7); it had in fact been anticipated by the sacrificial system of the Old Testament economy awaiting decisive fulfillment (Heb 9:23, 26). Hodgson emphasizes that Christians can justify their belief in the incarnation not merely as a matter of subjective consciousness but as a prior objective fact "if we think of what was done as having been done by God Himself."¹⁷²

Hodgson orients belief in the divinity of Christ too much in post-apostolic considerations, however, when he remarks: "The history of the doctrine of the Incarnation in the first four centuries is the history of the Church discovering that Jesus could not have been God's Messiah and done God's saving work without Himself being God,"¹⁷³ for that "discovery" had been made much earlier. The belief that gives the Christian confession its singularly unique character, that in Jesus Christ dwelt "all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col 2:9), is an integral and definitive aspect of the New Testament teaching; it is affirmed and reiterated by the apostles who were contemporaries of Jesus. Hodgson concedes in fact that "within the New Testament period Christians were already, in practice, adopting an attitude towards Christ which implied the recognition of Him as God." But he considers it "doubtful whether these first Christians thought out the theological implications of their religious belief and practice."¹⁷⁴

That Jesus Christ was "God personally incarnate," writes Hodgson, "is the ground of the claim of Christianity to be the true religion for all mankind."¹⁷⁵ Hodgson considers that the evidence for the virgin birth and resurrection of Jesus is "as good as one can reasonably expect historical evidence to be" and that one who believes the high view of Jesus Christ is justified in accepting it at its face value."¹⁷⁶ But, in contrast to the creeds of Christendom, he thinks these doctrines can be detached from genuine faith in Jesus Christ as God incarnate.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 2.71.

¹⁷² Ibid., 2.75.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 2.70.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 2.76.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 2.70.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 2.91.

But did Jesus of Nazareth then by his own faith inspire the belief of others in his messianic sonship and divinity? Does Christian faith in Jesus Christ rest finally upon the impression of Jesus' personality and on claims he made for himself? He indicated the value and limits of the Baptist's testimony without nullifying the importance of his own messianic consciousness: "I receive not testimony from man; . . . I know that the witness he witnesseth of me is true" (John 5:34, 32).

Yet Jesus warned against claims made independently by himself or anyone else. "If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true" (John 5:31). He set his own witness in the larger context of that of the Father, of Scripture, and of his own works (John 5:32-39).

Yet for Paul and the Gentile churches it is not Jesus' public ministry but especially his resurrection from the dead that is the historically decisive point for the Christian community. The Easter faith was, to be sure, indispensably linked to the incarnation, earthly life and ministry of Jesus. New Testament theology nowhere justifies Bultmann's dismissal of the supernatural Jesus of history in the interest solely of an inner "resurrection"-encounter. Indeed, the Gospels leave no doubt that Jesus' own intimations of his impending crucifixion and resurrection seemed confusing to the disciples, and that they were both dismayed by his death and unexpectant of his resurrection. It was not their unexpected confrontation by the risen Jesus alone, but the Old Testament prophetic teaching also concerning the coming One that finally illumined Messiah's death and triumph over it in terms of divine prophecy and fulfillment.

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