

Christology and the Historical Jesus

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A full discussion of the Christology of the New Testament is something which could fill volumes, and since "of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh" (Eccl. 12:12), and because time for preparation and presentation of this paper is limited, I will intentionally limit its scope. Thus I will seek to point up issues and present a portrait of N.T. Christology without sketching in all the detail.

I will begin by dealing with the contrast between Greek thought, in terms of which the Christology of the fourth century creeds was developed, and Hebraic-early Christian thought, in terms of which the Christology of the N.T. was expressed. Here the manner in which God was presented in the O.T. and Judaism will be discussed to indicate the possibilities it offers us in understanding the relationship between the Father and the Son and consequently the Son as God. Then we will proceed to the beginnings of N.T. Christology in the impact of Jesus and His proclamation, move on to the Christology of the primitive Church, and then to the Christological views of the great Christian writers: Paul, John, and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

The importance of any discussion of Christology becomes immediately apparent when one considers how many theological areas are effected by it. The lines between Christology and Soteriology, Eschatology, Ecclesiology and Anthropology are thin indeed, for it is the Christ of our "ology" who saves us, is Lord of history, in whom the Church is formed, and who patterns our human existence.

I. Greek and Hebraic Thought

G.A.F. Knight, in his monograph A Biblical Approach to the Doctrine of the Trinity, says that it is one of the tragedies of Church history that in the great formative days of Christian theology the Church and the Synagogue should have been such bitter enemies.¹ Thus those involved in the controversies disdained the study of the O.T. in Hebrew and the help of the Jew in understanding it. It was the Greek translation of the O.T., the Septuagint, which after the Apostolic period was primarily the Bible of the Christian Church, and it was from this translation that the Church did its theologizing. Thus Greek thought came at the early Church not only from the contemporary Hellenistic context which addressed questions to it, but also from the Septuagint which had been strongly influenced by it. Both the questions asked (e.g., about a precise definition of the relation of the Son to the Father in terms of substance and the combination of the two natures in Christ) and the material from which the answers were forged (e.g., the Septuagint) were affected. That this should be so is to an extent a natural part of the mission enterprise of the Church as she moves from one culture to another. The Church had to speak to the Greek mind. However, the Hebraic-New Testament treatment of Christology should have qualified to a greater extent the answers given on Greek intellectual soil.

The characteristics of the Hebraic mentality have already been made common knowledge by such works as Pederson's Israel. One becomes aware that the difference between the Hebraic and Greek mind was more than a contrast between concrete and abstract thinking. It involved quite a different approach to God and things ultimate. Dom Gregory Dix in Jew and Greek has characterized one of the decided contributions of Syriac (Hebraic) culture as the idea of the "living God."² Whereas the Greek sought to understand his world and that which was beyond largely from within life by use of his rational faculties, the Hebrew started with his idea of the living God and sought to understand life from his vision of God. The Greek, of course, had his gods and mythologies, but they were almost a part of his world, within the Cosmos. That which was ultimate, which was behind and above the gods, dark and inscrutable Fate, was inaccessible from the Cosmos.

¹ G. A. F. Knight, A Biblical Approach To The Doctrine Of The Trinity, Scottish Journal of Theology Occasional Papers No. 1; Edinburgh, Oliver and Boyd, 1953; p. 2.

² Dom Gregory Dix, Jew and Greek, A Study In The Primitive Church; N.Y., Harper and Bros., 1953; pp. 10f.

The Greek mind, then, with its objective search for order within the Cosmos developed a sensitivity to form which was not a part of Hebraic mentality. "To the Greek eidōs ('form'), the right arrangement of parts in a whole, is the vehicle of significance and meaning."³ This form and order it sought to express in its architecture, poetry and sculpture. Dix indicates that one only has to contrast Greek and Hebrew poetry or Greek and Hebraic architecture (e.g., the Parthenon and Solomon's Temple) to note that the two cultures might be contrasted in the terms "form" and "formless". The purpose of the Temple was worship, and its form was important only as it contributed to this purpose. The purpose of the Parthenon was beauty and every individual aspect of it contributed to its total form. Interestingly enough, as far as the use of art forms to represent divinity is concerned, it was the feeling of the Old Testament that the "idol" (eidolon - "a little piece of form") should be completely rejected.

The reason for this "formlessness" of the Hebrew was that he saw the living God as beyond this world, yet active in its history as the prime cause of all things. Thus the explanation of this world is not to be found in terms of the order of the Cosmos, but in terms of the God who is its creator and sustainer: a personal God who is not merely a rational principle and is to an extent unfathomable just because he is personal and holy. Paul, after wrestling with the problem of the destiny of Israel, concludes by saying:

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor.
(Rom. 11:33-34)

In his very words he draws upon Isaiah 41:13 which speaks of the greatness of God and the impossibility of representing him in any type of image.

The difference between the Greek and Hebraic concepts of God comes out clearly in the treatment of the Name of God in the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew text. It is usually considered by modern scholarship that the verbs in Exodus 3:13-14 are in the Hiphil and should be translated "I bring into being what I bring into being." The Septuagint renders this by ego eimi ho on, or "I am he who is", or "I am the Being." The dynamic, living God had become a God of "being".

One can readily see how the concerns of the Greek mind would raise questions about God which would have to be answered in metaphysical terms and would be concerned about precise order and relationships. The Hebraic mind would think more in terms concrete, functional and historical (what God does in history and particularly "Salvation History").⁴ Not only would it describe God in somewhat different terms, but would always realize the ultimate indescribability of God, as indicated above, and would be satisfied with saying less and saying it less precisely. This was quite true of early Christology.

The Hebrew saw God as a "unity in diversity". God was one, as every good Jew confessed in the Shema (Deut. 6:5). But the word for "one" here (ehadh) does not mean a monad, but one in the sense that a man and his wife shall be one (same word) flesh (Gen. 2:24). That God's oneness was a "unity" rather than a singularity helps to account for various representations of God as God's activity and presence in history is dealt with. The word of God has a concrete nature, represents God and is agent of creation (Gen. 1). God is present in God's Name, Face (Ex. 33:14-23), Spirit, and in Angels (Gen. 22:11-18), Gen. 32:24-30). Wisdom in Proverbs 8 and in the later Wisdom literature seems personified and represents God in the creation of the world. God's Name, Face, and, in later Judaism, schechinah (glory) dwelt in the Temple so that although God dwelt in heaven, God was also with God's people. In all of these God was present in fullness (qualitatively) and not in totality (quantitatively). Thus one does find a basis in the Old Testament for treating the idea that God was in Christ Jesus without destroying the "oneness" of God or even raising a question as to the precise metaphysical nature of Christ's relationship with the Father. To say that the fullness of God was in him was as far as one need go, and it is to be noted that when the early Church began to explain the significance of Christ it did so by utilizing such terms as "Word", "Wisdom", and "Glory".

³. Ibid., p. 12.

⁴. G. Ernest Wright, God Who Acts; Studies in biblical Theology No. 8, London, S.C.M., 1952. Wright says that biblical Theology is essentially a recital of the redemptive acts of God in history. pp. 38f.

II. The Beginnings of New Testament Christology

Perhaps the division of the Christology of the New Testament which follows will be questioned: that of the beginnings of Christology in Jesus, then the Christology of the early Church followed by the Christology of the great New Testament "theologians". However, it seems fairly clear that much of the New Testament contains material at these three levels. The Gospels, for example, contain material which comes from Jesus, which has been transmitted by the early Church, and which was finally used by the writers of the Gospels. Individual portions of the material may come purely from one of these sources (e.g., an editorial comment of the evangelist or a saying transmitted with little change from Jesus) or it may be affected at any or all of the various levels. In the Epistles there would not be a great deal of material from Jesus himself, though the events of his life and some of his sayings are reflected. The majority of the materials here would reflect the life of the early Church and the individuality of the writer.

The question might also be raised as to whether it is legitimate to separate the various writers from the early Church and give them individual distinction. This is done for two reasons. First, most of them are separated by some time from the earliest Church and thus it would be natural to look for stages of thought previous to their own. Secondly, even though they were undoubtedly affected by the Church of which they were a part, nevertheless it is true that they also stood out as creative individuals and exercised a creative influence back upon the tradition and Church. Thus their thought cannot be seen merely as a part of the thinking of the Church contemporary to them. In fact, it is the contention of Vincent Taylor that the full assimilation of the ideas of these writers by the Church had to wait for the second century.⁵

To begin with the historical Jesus in Christology is to take a clear stand against the radical historical skepticism and philosophical predisposition of some in the Bultmann school where Christology is only very loosely related to the historical Jesus. Ernst Kasemann in his 1953 lecture at Marburg to a group of Bultmann disciples rightly called attention to the fact that we cannot afford to find ourselves committed to a mythological Lord.⁶ We must seek a continuity between the historical Jesus and the Church's proclamation. Paul, in indicating the continuity between the historical resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of the believer said: "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain." The same is true of the historical Jesus as a whole in relation to the Church's proclamation about and faith in him.

Christology may be related to the historical Jesus in two ways. First, it may be the result of the impact of the historical Jesus upon the early Church, but yet not necessarily dependent upon what he thought about himself. This is somewhat the approach of the New Quest for the historical Jesus. It would be difficult indeed to deny that Christology is not partially the response to the uniqueness of Jesus. He spoke with authority, he healed, he proclaimed that the Kingdom was at hand and in his person and proclamation persons seemed to sense the shift of the "ages." Few at this time doubted that he was human. (Note the disciples answer to Jesus' question, "Who do men say that I am?" All of the suggested figures are human.) To doubt his humanity was left for those who stood further from his life.⁷ It was the more-than-the-ordinarily human in Jesus that needed explanation and caused persons to ask questions and be filled with wonder. It was this impact which caused early Christian theology to be primarily Christology.⁸

Secondly, Christology may be related to the historical Jesus through the promulgation in the early Christology of Jesus' own self-understanding. Some scholars would say that we cannot know with any surety Jesus' own self-understanding. Though we have to recognize the problems involved in Gospel studies and in entering into the mind of any historical figure through secondary sources, yet the problem is often overstated.

The treatment of Jesus' self-understanding is usually done in terms of his use of contemporary religious titles in application to himself. This can, in a sense, be misleading for Jesus is not the sum-total of any

⁵. Vincent Taylor, The Person Of Christ In New Testament Teaching; London, Macmillan and Co., 1958; pp. 190ff.

⁶. Ernst Käsemann, "The Problem Of The Historical Jesus; 1953.

⁷. See I John 4:2.

⁸. Oscar Cullmann, The Christology Of The New Testament; London, S.C.M. Press, 1959; pp. 1-2. Translated from the German. It should be noted that in the early creeds the major attention was given to the second article.

combination of various terminologies. Rather is he himself, ie., an event and a person who transcends any contemporary terminology but has to be expressed within them if he is to be contemporarily understood. The inadequacy of terminology becomes clear when Jesus finds himself compelled to redefine some of the terms used by those of his time, e.g., Messiah. Yet though words and terms may seem inadequate we have no other way of speaking about him, and this was one of the means by which he portrayed his own significance. Let us then take a brief look at such terms as Messiah, prophet, Servant, Son of Man, and Son of God.

These terms are essentially functional and not metaphysical or ontological. In fact all New Testament Christology is primarily functional instead of ontological.⁹

Jesus seems to have studiously avoided the term "Messiah". Only at two points in the Synoptic tradition does Jesus accept the title (at Peter's Confession and in his trial), but even here Jesus only accepts and does not assert it. The reason for this was the meaning which the term held for those of his day. It was customarily used to describe the deliverer who would come from the lineage of David to restore Israel. Its connotations were primarily political, and the Messiah was a human figure. That the early Church was able to apply "Christ-Messiah" to Jesus so that it almost became his name is evidence of the way this term was transformed by the events of Jesus' life and death. It is only after the fact of his death that the term could be used without the possibility of misunderstanding. Jesus' reinterpretation of it in the light of his death had offended Peter (Mark 8:31-33) and continued to be a stumbling block to the Jews (I Cor. 1:23).

The term "the Prophet" had special meaning for Jesus' day. Prophecy had essentially died out within Israel and for this reason prophecy became a subject of eschatological expectation. Thus Judaism looked to the coming of the eschatological prophet who would be the fulfillment of all earlier prophecy.

In some circles there may have been the idea that this true prophet has appeared at various times in history since Adam.¹⁰ With some, especially the Samaritans, the words of Deut. 18:15 were utilized to indicate a Moses-like figure. Others thought that Elijah would return. The currency of this idea of the prophet comes out in the answer the disciples give to Jesus' question about whom men say he is (Mk. 8:28), or in the Johannine tradition which strongly reflects it. It is, however, to be noted that none of the evangelists utilize this in their own Christology. Thus this reflects Christology in some areas of the early Church. To what extent does it reflect the thinking of Jesus?

It is the feeling of Alan Richardson that much of the tradition in the Gospels reflects the Exodus-Mosaic deliverance pattern of the Pentateuch.¹¹ The origin of this he assigns to Jesus. It would seem to me that this would mean that Jesus probably utilized the idea that he was the "prophet like unto Moses" of Deut. in order to portray his significance. In his reinterpretation of the Mosaic Law and in the Manna (Feeding) miracles he portrays himself as one greater than Moses (John 6), but the fact that he would see himself in this way at all would indicate that he expected to be a herald of the final age and execute a deliverance as did Moses. He was assuming Moses' place, and more. This would not make him more than human, but it would certainly indicate his vast significance as he understood it.

Jesus' use of the idea of the suffering Servant of II Isaiah seems to be basic to his self-understanding. One has only to regard his sermon in the Nazareth synagogue (Lk. 4), his words to John the Baptist's query if he was the one who is to come (Matt. 11:2-6), his saying at The Last Supper about being reconed with transgressors (Lk. 22:37), and the passion sayings in the Gospel of Mark to see the extent to which the idea of the Servant pervaded his thought. This concept would not indicate his divinity, but it would express well the nature of his mission ending in a death for sin (Is. 53:10-11) and would provide for his vindication and exaltation (Is. 53:12). Besides, it would identify him with Israel who in Isaiah was the Servant.

The term "Son of Man" was clearly used by Jesus of himself. In the Synoptic Gospels it appears only on the lips of Jesus and never in the comments of the evangelists. The only difficulty here is in the much debated question as to how Jesus understood this term. It could just be Aramaic for "man" (see Psalm 8 for son of man

⁹. Ibid., pp. 3ff.

¹⁰. Ibid., p. 16.

¹¹. Alan Richardson, An Introduction To The Theology of the New Testament; N.Y., Harper and Bros., 1958; pp. 167-8, 20-22.

as a periphrasis for man), or it could be Aramaic for the indefinite pronoun which might be translated into English as "one". Then it is used a good deal in the book of Ezekiel where it is a means by which God addresses the prophet. In Apocalyptic literature it was used of a heavenly deliverer and judge (Similitudes of Enoch, though scholars now doubt the date of this section of Enoch), but in the Old Testament Apocalyptic book of Daniel it is a corporate concept used to describe God's people, the saints of the Most High (Daniel 7:13-18, where the term is "a son of Man"), in contrast to the previous beast-like kingdoms. Besides this, Cullmann points out, as in non-Jewish thought there existed speculation about a divine Original Man, so this thought may have existed in Judaism.¹² It may have been felt that divine Original Man would come to redeem man. It is interesting to note that Philo saw two Adams in the creation stories, designating Gen. 1 as a description of the creation of a Heavenly Man, after the pattern of which earthly Man in Gen. 2-3 was created in Platonic fashion. In the Apocalypse of Esdras (II Esdras) there is "the Man" whom God has been keeping hid for the ages and who is God's son (Remember that son of man is a paraphrasis for man.) This "Man" or "Son of Man" figure in Apocalyptic was a pre-existent, heavenly figure though this was not originally so of this figure in Daniel and Ezekiel (But note that the figure "like a Son of Man" in Rev. 1, with the form of the title and description borrowed from Daniel and Ezekiel, is portrayed as a heavenly figure.). Some of Jesus' sayings certainly reflect Apocalyptic thought and though he qualifies the term Son of Man heavily by the Servant concept (Mark 8:31) one could allow that his use of it indicates he felt that the significance of his life was only properly understood in terms of a heavenly origin, his coming to establish a Kingdom and act as eschatological judge. Thus here we have in Jesus' own usage a term which has about it a heavenly aura. It may also be true that through the use of this term in Daniel Jesus identifies himself with Israel which in Daniel is the "son of man."

The term "Son of God" is difficult to trace to Jesus' own self-understanding because of its importance in the Christology of the early Church. Consequently there is always the possibility that someone has read this back into the historical Jesus. Though in Gentile circles this title might carry the connotation of divinity, that is not necessarily so in Jewish circles. In Jewish thought angels, the king, the Messiah, and the Jewish people could be called the son or sons of God. The breadth of this term as it is used calls to mind the basic idea of being a "son of" someone or something: namely, that one would then partake of the character of or represent in some way the one he was a son of. This Biblical idea of sonship is well portrayed in the gospel of John. In John 10:37 Jesus answers to the accusation that he has committed blasphemy by calling himself the Son of God, "If I am not doing the works of the Father, then do not believe me." John understands Jesus' Sonship as unique and indicates so by the application of the adjective "only-begotten". Did Jesus also understand his Sonship as unique? The "Johannine thunderbolt in the Synoptic sky", Matt. 11:27 ("No one knows the Father except the Son"), does not necessarily imply so. We might mention the divine voice to Jesus at his baptism, but this is a conflation of Is. 42:1 and Ps. 2:7, the first of the Servant Songs and the Royal-Messianic coronation Psalm. This would signify Jesus' Sonship in terms of his being the royal Messiah -- perhaps reinterpreted in the light of the Servant of Isaiah. In Mark and Luke this is a purely private experience and the words, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased", may correctly reflect Jesus' understanding of his mission at this time. However, we do not have Jesus' unique Sonship asserted here.

It would seem to me that one of the most effective arguments for Jesus' own consciousness of his unique Sonship is presented in connection with his use of the term "Father" of God. G. Kittel, in Die Religionsgeschichte und das Urchristentum, maintains that in Aramaic the possessive suffixes (your, their, etc.) were used of anyone's father but his own.¹³ When he spoke of his own father he would not say "my father" (*abi*) but simply "father" (*abba*). However, Jewish piety felt that this practice indicating familiarity was not proper when addressing God, and consequently when God was addressed as "my Father" the form with the suffix (*abi*) was used. When Jesus addressed God he frequently did so as *abba*, simply "Father". It is true that he taught his disciples also to do so, but Jesus' initiation of this practice must have stemmed from a sense of a unique relationship with the Father.

If we are correct in our interpretation of Jesus' self-understanding we see him regarding himself in terms largely functional, expressive of his mission in relation to God's coming Kingdom. That he would view himself as the Moses-Prophet, the Servant and the Son of Man was perhaps, in the Jewish mind, a clear way of asserting his oneness with God. To the Jew oneness was dependent on functional unity as we have seen in the discussion

¹². Cullmann, op. cit., pp. 142ff.

¹³. Discussed in H.D.A. Major, T.W. Manson, and C.J. Wright, The Mission and Message Of Jesus; N.Y., E.P. Dutton and Co., 1938; p. 460.

of the term "Son of God". He would not think in terms of ontological unity. In the light of this it is evident that the idea of Jesus subordination to the Father which comes out so clearly in the Johannine tradition is often misunderstood. The Jehovah's Witnesses use these passages to indicate that Jesus is less than the Father. In the Jewish mind there was no better way of asserting that he was one with the Father. To be one with God was to do God's work. Jesus' identification of himself, perhaps with some qualifications, with the great deliverer figures of Jewish thought indicates the unique relationship which he bore to God's work and consequently to God. This, coupled with Jesus' use of the term Abba, "Father", provides a decidedly effective argument for his understanding of his uniqueness in his relation to the Father. To ask the historical Jesus to understand himself in terms more than functional is to refuse to take the Incarnation with sufficient seriousness. It may be that Jesus' use of the term "Son of Man" indicates that he felt he came from God before his human life, but even if this does present an argument for his pre-existence, it does not argue for his understanding of his ontological divinity.

III. Christology in the Early Church

The Christology of the early church would naturally be expected to follow some of the lines indicated by Jesus himself, and this it does seem to do. The use of the Moses-Prophet idea is utilized to explain Jesus' significance in certain traditions which underlie the Gospel of John (John 6:14), in the early part of Acts in sermons of Peter and Stephen (Acts 3:22, 7:37), and in the later Gospel of the Hebrews and the Preaching of Peter. Thus one may say that this idea continued in Jewish-Christian circles.¹⁴

Whereas the portrayal of Jesus as Prophet in Acts appears conspicuously only in the first portion of the book, this is also true of the application of the Suffering Servant to Jesus. In Acts 3-4 one finds the term pais tou Theou four times and after this it appears in no other New Testament book, much less in Acts. Phil. 2:7 concerning Jesus' assuming the form of a servant may also reflect this idea, although the term for "servant" here is not the usual one used for the Isaianic Servant in the Septuagint. Of course, the early Church's emphasis on Jesus' death would always have been reminiscent of the idea of the Servant.

Use of the term "Son of Man" appears only at one point in Acts, Acts 7:56, and here on the lips of Stephen, one of the Hellenists in the early Church. It is the suggestion of Cullmann that this title was utilized especially among the Jewish Hellenists and the group represented by the Gospel of John.¹⁵ Its use in the Gospel of John and in Paul will be discussed later. At this point I would like to call attention to a passage in Paul, Phil. 2:5-11, which because it probably is an earlier Christological hymn reflects an earlier level of thought about the Son of Man than exists in Paul.

Phil. 2:5-11, when considered carefully, is strongly reminiscent of the figure of the Son of Man. The words en morphe theou, "in the form of God" are reminiscent of Gen. 1:27, for morphe may be the equivalent of "image". Also, the story of one who "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped" is the exact opposite of Adam who sought to be as God. (Note that the serpent said, "You shall be as God".) In some Jewish thinking the figure of Adam, "Man", is identified with the Son of Man (see above). This identification was easy not only because of ideas of a divine Original Man current in some Hellenistic and perhaps Jewish circles, but also because Son of Man could be translated as "Man". There are problems in the interpretation of this passage, but its essence might be expressed like this:

Being in the image of God, he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant and being found in semblance as a man. He humbled himself, obedient to God even to death. Therefore God exalted him.

Several of the elements of this hymn are quite striking. First, there is no unequivocal indication that Jesus originally was equal to God. Secondly, the word used for human form, "schema", indicates mere outward appearance and thus does not strongly stress his real humanity. Thirdly, the exaltation of Christ spoken about may assume that he did not originally have this position. Thus the hymn, which may be a poor Christological description according to Paul's ideas, is actually a good description of the Son of Man figure as one in the image of God who comes to earth for man's salvation and is eventually exalted. Paul uses it at this point because he is

¹⁴. Cullmann, op. cit., pp. 38ff.

¹⁵. Ibid., pp. 165, 183ff.

not using it for Christological purposes. The problem of Christ's exaltation is one which came to bother the early Church and in Hebrews Christ exalts himself (1:3) and assumes the position of Lordship which was previously given him as a Son. In my mind, then, we have in Phil. 2:5-11 a piece of early Christological material, perhaps influenced by Jesus' portrayal of himself as both Son of Man and Servant, and yet not completely assimilated to Christological thinking which would more carefully define Christ's relation to man and God.

The term Messiah, or Christ, was applied quite broadly to Jesus, though of course it was redefined in the light of Jesus' death. Since many of the titles had their Old Testament support, the events of Jesus life were seen to be in accord with Scriptures (I Cor.15:3-4).

By the nature of the above it may be seen that the Christology of the early Church was somewhat unreflective and varied. It utilized the ideas which came to it, both from Jesus and in terms of its religious environment, and was primarily interested in Jesus' function. Vincent Taylor indicates that among the limitations of this early Christology, two stand out:

- 1) the absence of a close connexion in Christian teaching between the Person and Work of Christ, and
- 2) the failure to relate the high claims made for Christ and the position assigned to Him to the doctrine of God.¹⁶

One of the primary concerns in this early Christology was for Christ as a focus of worship. Converts were baptized "in the name of Jesus", in the Lord's Supper they remembered his death, became conscious of his living presence, and looked forward to his coming again; in the earliest creedal statement which we have, they confessed that "Jesus Christ is Lord." In this context the term "Lord" probably came into use. Jesus had used it of the Messiah in Mk. 12:35-37 when he quoted from Ps.110, but we do not find it on his lips in application to himself. It is a term of exaltation, and it is often connected with the exaltation of Christ. For example, the previously discussed hymn in Phil.2:9-11 says:

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil.2:9-11)

What does it mean to say that the exalted Christ was worshipped as Lord? In Hellenistic culture the term "Lord" has a breadth of meaning from merely "sir" to an indication of divinity, such as in its application to the Roman Emperor or the savior figures of the mysteries. One possible derivation of the term is from the Septuagint where Kurios, "Lord", is the translation of the sacred Tetragrammaton. Thus "Lord" is equivalent to "Yahweh". Here one is also reminded of the "I am" sayings in John which is thought by some scholars to be a use of the divine name, Yahweh. The great and climactic confession of all confessions in John 20 is where Thomas exclaims, "My Lord and my God." To worship Jesus as Lord then may mean to worship him as God. One might think that this would pose problems for the Jewish monotheism of the early Church (Paul seems to wrestle with this in I Cor. 1 where he carefully indicates that only God is the source of what comes in Christ; Christ is not the source.) Perhaps for most a definition of the relationship of Christ to the Father was not necessitated if one could say "Lord, God" to him and was not concerned about the implications of this for the definition of God. I would like to think that this was true also because to the Jewish mind subordination meant oneness with God, being God's Son. To me this provides an explanation of such a passage in Paul as I Cor. 15:27-28 where Paul states that when all things are subjected to Christ, "then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one."

IV. The Christology of the Great Christian Writers

The Christology of the great Christian writers must be seen against this background of earlier varied and somewhat unreflective thought. However, they did not just stand on the shoulders of those who had gone before, but the oral tradition about Jesus would also have confronted them with Jesus in some sense (e.g. I. Cor. 15:107, 11:23-26) and they had their own religious experience and theological insights (Paul's religious experience and the insights which came from it figured prominently in his theology). This provided them with

¹⁶. Taylor, op. cit., p. 210.

the raw material for their thinking. The occasion for the forging of a more developed Christology came in the pressing need for an apologetic in the developing mission of the Church. Consequently, the Person of Jesus was defined more carefully to support the function which he performed. Both his divinity and humanity were maintained against a type of Proto-Gnostic speculation which sought to deny both his unique divinity and his humanity. His relationship with the Father was also dealt with more carefully, but always within Jewish terms which spoke of the fullness of God in Christ and not about their ontological relationship, and usually within functional terms.

Perhaps the thought of the Gospel of John and I John will serve as a good case in point. Within the Gospel we find a strong dependence upon a Son of Man and a Son of God Christology, with some traces of other emphases. The idea of the Son of Man is clearly dependent on that which comes to the author in Judaism and from Christ and early Christianity (particularly the narrative material seems to represent this earlier tradition). The author follows the implication of the Synoptic sayings of Jesus that the Son of Man must suffer, but moves the exaltation of the Son of Man from the future, where it seems to be in the Synoptics, to the present (5:22). Thus John moves much of the future work of the Son of Man into the present, though not completely losing sight of his future work (John 6:40). John even utilizes the idea of the pre-existent divine Man who descends from heaven to earth and then ascends to heaven in glory (3:13, 14:1-4).

The idea of the Son of God comes out in the many Father-Son sayings of the Gospel. Its emphasis is largely functional, emphasizing that Jesus is sent by his Father and does his Father's work. However, pre-existence is also joined to the idea of Sonship (8:54-59). Thus John is drawing out more fully the implications of these Christological terms.

Both John and Paul seem to have been faced with an incipient or Proto-Gnosticism and thus felt the necessity of asserting Jesus' unique divinity over against a system that contained a Pleroma of angelic beings between God and the world. They also felt it necessary to clearly state Jesus' humanity over against thought which dualistically denied the possibility of the divine having anything to do with the material world.

John evidently utilized both the Son of Man and Son of God concepts in his tradition about Jesus' life to emphasize Jesus' functional divinity. A most important statement of Jesus' humanity and divinity is to be found in the Prologue to his Gospel, a Prologue which is a midrash of Gen. 1 and modeled on Sirach 24. The latter reminds us of the importance of understanding Jewish description of Wisdom for grasping the language of early Christology.

It should be noted from the outset that the approach to both the question of Jesus' identity and that of his relationship to the Father are approached along functional lines: "Who is Jesus and what is he in relation to God that he is able to do what we believe he has done?"

In the Prologue John says that Jesus is the Logos, the Word, and in doing so draws upon a concept which had its meaning for both Jew and Greek. The various uses of the term in Greek and Hellenistic-Jewish thought (Philo) may be summed up by saying that it was usually understood as indicating a Mediator between God and the world. Of course, this is an over-simplified statement. However, with the strong flavor of Jewish thought in John and the reminiscences of the creation story in the Prologue, it is better to look for the meaning of this term on Jewish soil.

In the Old Testament the Word of God is understood either as the creative or prophetic word. Since the "word" in Hebrew thought had a concrete existence, it was not difficult for the Jew to understand that God's Word had a real existence once it was uttered. Moreover, in the Wisdom of Solomon 9:1-2, the Word of God is identified with divine Wisdom which in the Wisdom literature is personified and understood to have had a part in the creation of the world. Thus in Jewish thought both Word and Wisdom are mediators between God and the world in God's revealing, creating and saving activity. Both the Word and Wisdom represented God in God's active presence in the world.

That John then should call Jesus "Logos" clearly identifies him as one of whom "God" may be predicated. John proceeds to say "In the beginning the Word already was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," following this by another "He was in the beginning with God." Thus "with" exists on both sides of the statement that the Word "was" God. One cannot then confuse the Word with God even though God

may be predicated of the Word. This definition also has a functional purpose, for Jesus as Word and creator of the world brings Life and Light. The author uses Jesus' relation to God and the created world in order to indicate that he indeed can bring Life and Light which ultimately are only God's to grant. This is necessary to support the major thesis of his Gospel in 20:31 that "you may have life in his name." Note that the purpose of his coming is also spoken about in the functional terms of giving persons the "right to become the children of God."

The last four verses of the Prologue emphasize the function of the Word as Light in indicating that only he is able to make God known. This is why it is said that his glory is "a glory as of the only-begotten of the Father." No one else can so portray God. But what is it that he portrays? The key comes in the words "grace and truth" of which it is said that Jesus is full--from which fullness we all receive. The key to these two words lies in a pair of Hebrew words which mean "God's loving kindness and faithfulness". Thus that which Jesus so fully portrays is God's saving purpose, and from this "fullness we all have received, grace upon grace." This harmonizes well with what we find in the body of the Gospel.

John's clear assertion of the humanity of Jesus comes out not only in his assertion that "the Logos became flesh" (1:14), but also in the description of Jesus preserved particularly within the narrative material as one who becomes hungry, thirsty, tired, and weeps. In I John 4:2, John makes the confession that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" the test of orthodoxy. He rightly feels that neither Jesus' divinity or humanity may be sacrificed. Yet there is no discussion of the relationship of the two natures. The both are asserted for historical (this is the way Christ was experienced) and theological reasons.

Paul's defense of the divine in Christ is perhaps best stated in his letter to the Colossians (which I believe Paul wrote) where he probably draws upon terms applied to Jewish Wisdom to indicate the primacy of Christ over any other spiritual being. The concern of the great Christological passage in 1:15-20 is set in the context of God's offer of redemption in the Son and thus it is used to indicate that this may occur in him. In so doing Paul relates Christ to creation, thus subordinating all other created spiritual beings to him, and indicates that "in him all the fullness of God was please to dwell," adding in the same sentence, "and through him to reconcile to himself all things." Paul also shows use of the ideas of the Son of Man (in the form of the Second Adam), Son of God, and perhaps also traces of interest in the figure of Moses and the Servant. Thus Paul stood within the streams of early Christology, yet felt, as did John, the necessity of the further clarification of Jesus' being of God, his divinity. Paul's statement of Jesus' humanity is, as with John, both for historical and theological reasons. He was aware of the tradition concerning the historical Jesus, but also the humanity of Jesus was necessary to his argument that Jesus took upon himself the curse of the Law (Gal. 4:4-5) and that since all died through the sin of one man, so all will reign in life "through the one man Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:17).

Time does not permit a discussion of the Christology of Hebrews, but suffice it to mention that the description of Christ in the first chapter which sounds like it may also reflect a description of "Wisdom", together with his strong emphasis upon Jesus as Son of God and High Priest, serves to indicate Jesus' function. This would also be true of his emphasis on Jesus' humanity (e.g. 2:14-18).

Though we feel ourselves going in the direction of a more coherent theology as we move from the early Church to the great Christological writers, we are still impressed by the variety of thought which exists. This leads me to assert that the New Testament writers were wrestling with the significance of an event the compass of which lay beyond any existing terminology. The impact of this event, the historical Jesus in his life, death and resurrection, was still unfolding within the Church and was being interpreted under the guidance of the Spirit. However, the Spirit's guidance was not mechanical and the terms were, as all language must ultimately be, inadequate. Christians were struggling, by the use of this concept and that, to embrace what they had found in Christ. Their terms said much, but they always stood in awe of the event behind their terms and not of their terms themselves.

In conclusion it would seem proper to point up some issues which have been raised rather than summarizing what has already been said.

When working with the Christology of the New Testament one has the feeling that one is dealing with an open-ended process which moves on beyond the New Testament Canon and the early Church. The Church must continue to speak about her Lord in every generation and consequently will refine her thought and perhaps even

express it in new terminologies when she moves from one culture to another. What are the limitations that she must place upon this process? Should she remain with Biblical terms? Should she remain with a largely functional Christology and shun the ontological distinctions? If she makes ontological distinctions can they be in any sense final, keeping in mind the Biblical Epistemology which stresses knowledge of God through revelation and the ultimate unknowability of God in Godself. If the Church in the statements made at Nicea (Constantinople) and Chalcedon was forced to move from Biblical terminology to answer the questions being asked, what should we do with this terminology in our day? In this paper answers have been given to some of these questions, but for the sake of the clarification of ideas that always results from discussion, it is good to state the questions.

As previously noted, one of the striking elements of the New Testament Christology is its variety. Evidently the early Church felt that this was legitimate, for it included it all in its Canon. Since Christology evidently affects Soteriology and Ecclesiology, several areas in which there are some Protestant-Catholic differences, would not a fuller appreciation of all aspects of New Testament Christology (e.g. Christ as Prophet and High Priest) both help us to draw closer together and also to appreciate the legitimacy of differences?

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The reader is also referred to relevant articles in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the bible (4 vols.) and Gerhard Kittel's Theologisches Worterbuch zum Neuen Testament (8 vols.), which has been translated as Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.