NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTOLOGY — OR NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTOLOGIES?

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What the issue really is

The question in our title seems very simple and easily answered. Here is a matter of supreme theological importance; does the NT speak with one voice, or with several voices, on it? Reflection and investigation, however, show it to be more complex. In the Epistles and Revelation we encounter the Christology of the writers. So we have simply to discover whether or not one Christology formed the sub-structure of their various christological statements. The Gospels and Acts also show us the Christology of their writers, but in addition they record sermons revealing the Christology of Jesus and of preachers like Peter, Stephen and Paul. This prompts an important historical question: have the sermons been correctly reported or have they been influenced by the Christology of the writers of these books?

This is important for Acts but absolutely crucial for the Gospels. Christology is central to the Christian message. How serious it would be, then, if it could be shown that the Christology of the Christian Church, expressed by the NT writers and later in the great Creeds, is quite different from that of Jesus himself!

Moreover, at least one major NT writer, Paul, claims to base his thought on the common tradition of the church, given to it by Christ and presumably represented in the early Christian preaching recorded in Acts. Some elements of a Christology may be discerned in these sermons. There are also of course sermons by Paul himself recorded there.

The history of the issue

Chalcedon and the challenge of Strauss

Until the 19th century it was generally assumed that the NT had one Christology and that this was firmly based on our Lord's own view

1 Especially in 1 Cor.15:1–11.
of himself. This affirmed belief in his full deity and perfect humanity and their perfect unity in one Person without the loss of any qualities proper to either nature. The classic historical expression of this is found in the Definition of the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451).²

The Enlightenment, when all traditional beliefs were subjected to rational criticism, produced a major work devoted to Christology. In his book David Strauss issued a most radical challenge.³ To him the NT accounts of Jesus are largely mythological, so that the records of his teaching about himself are unreliable. The early church put into his mouth words reflecting its own beliefs, not his.

Later writers reacted to the challenge of Strauss in more than one way.

Some said it was Paul who had muddied the waters and invented the Church Christology. The Gospel accounts, they said, had been 'Paulinised'. They published books with titles like 'Jesus or Paul?'. Someone has said of writers of this genre, 'By their lives of Jesus you shall know them!'. Adolph Harnack declared that the gospel Jesus preached had nothing to do with the Son but everything to do with the Father.⁴ The record of the christological teaching of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel was widely regarded as most unreliable and it was thought that the best sources for discovering the Christology of Jesus weree Mark and Q.

Then W. Wrede asserted that Mark's Gospel, too, was unreliable, for it places emphasis on the 'Messianic Secret', in passages where Jesus warns people not to say whom they knew him to be. Jesus, Wrede said, did not actually teach his Messiahship, and these passages were a stratagem of the Gospel author to cover up this fact.⁵ Writers with a little more respect for the Gospel sources held that many of the sayings traditionally thought to teach a high Christology had been misinterpreted by Christian commentators and that they meant something less than they appeared on the surface to mean.

**Ritschlian Christology and James Denney**

Many Gospel scholars of this period belonged to the Ritschlian school. They were not really concerned if ontological statements about himself from the lips of Jesus were denied to him or re-interpreted. This was because, following Kantian philosophical

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principles, they held a 'value-judgement' Christology. To them his real significance is that he did as man what we would expect God to do. Whether he was actually the God-Man or not, they could neither affirm nor deny, on philosophical grounds. So they had a functional rather than an ontological Christology. In this they were followed somewhat by Oscar Cullmann in his major work, *The Christology of the New Testament*.

A writer largely critical of Ritschlianism was James Denney. In *Jesus and the Gospel*, he argued that the NT writers all had the same basic attitude to Jesus, no matter how differently they expressed this. He went on to demonstrate that this was firmly grounded in the self-consciousness of Jesus. The first of these tasks is superbly accomplished in his first 104 pages. For all the writers, Denney shows, Jesus was a true Man but was also 'on the divine side of reality'. The second is also well done, but in the course of it Denney deals with current issues of gospel criticism, which have changed their shape somewhat since his day.

**The challenge of Bousset**

The History of Religions School maintained that Hellenism was the main source for alien ideas entering Christianity. This school's main christological work was Wilhelm Bousset's *Kyrios Christos*. He argued that these influences predated Paul, being present already in the Christology of the Antioch church he contacted soon after his conversion.

Three fairly brief but important books emerged to combat this. Hoskyns and Davey showed that there is no non-supernatural, no merely human, Jesus in the NT. He had been diligently sought but never found, simply because he was not there! C.H. Dodd identified one basic Kerygma as the sub-structure for the whole NT. This has obvious implications for Christology. A.M. Hunter showed that Paul's teaching and his Christology are firmly based on the beliefs of the early apostolic preachers.

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6 A brief but useful bibliography of works on the Ritschlian Theology may be found in the article, 'Ritschl, Albrecht (1822–1889)', by Colin Brown in J.D. Douglas (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 850.


The challenge of Bultmann

The ultimate in reductionism was reached in the theology of Rudolf Bultmann. He was sceptical both about the historical and the theological elements in the NT. He was uncertain about the historical truth of all but a very few items in the Gospels, notably the crucifixion, the triumphal entry, and possibly the baptism. He dubbed as mythology the theological elements, including the resurrection.

Is this identical with the view of Strauss? No. Strauss considered the mythology valueless, while Bultmann, who followed the Existentialist philosophy of Martin Heidegger, affirmed its uses. It consisted of so many ways of facing the reader with the existential challenge of Jesus to an authentic existence, one in which we realistically confront death before it comes. The disciples encountered this challenge through his presence among them and it confronts us today through Christian preaching.\(^\text{13}\)

Bultmann’s radical historical scepticism dissatisfied some of his most able pupils, who sought somewhat painfully to build up a more solid picture of the historical Jesus.\(^\text{14}\) They did not however put much theological flesh on the historical bones, nor was the question of the relationship of the NT Christology or christologies to his own teaching very fully addressed.

Karl Barth and the Barthian School generally were much more positive theologically. Following Kierkegaard, they tended to unite the Christology of Jesus and that of the NT writers, but showed less certainty on the historical issue, which often interested them less.\(^\text{15}\)

Some more recent developments

Three volumes written about twenty years ago set the agenda for the next two decades or so. We will deal with them in their historical sequence.

The Myth of God Incarnate,\(^\text{16}\) was a radical symposium that continued Bultmann’s extreme scepticism about the doctrine of the Incarnation.

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\(^\text{13}\) There is a helpful chapter on Bultmann’s Christology, ‘The Kerygmatic Christology of Rudolf Bultmann’ by H.D. McDonald, in H.H. Rowdon (ed.), *Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology Presented to Donald Guthrie* (Leicester: IVP, 1982), 326-40.

\(^\text{14}\) J.M. Robinson surveyed this movement in his *A New Quest for the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM, 1959).

\(^\text{15}\) The primacy of theology rather than of history is shown in Barth’s positive attitude to the virgin birth. ‘The reason is not that it is mentioned in the Bible. The reason why Barth accepts it is that in his opinion it is in conformity with the whole New Testament’s view of the Incarnation’. (K. Runia, ‘Karl Barth’s Christology’ in H.H. Rowdon, ed., *Christ the Lord*), 302.

J.D.G. Dunn in his *Christology in the Making,*¹⁷ promoted the view that NT Christology developed from quite simple ideas to the full Incarnationism of the Fourth Gospel's Prologue. He particularly disputed the idea that other NT writers believed in the pre-existence of Jesus, arguing against this understanding of passages usually held to teach this. He does however maintain, especially in the second edition (1989) and some later articles, that this is an unfolding of what already existed in seed-form in the earlier Christology, 'the recognition of what had always been true of Jesus and only awaited the eye of faith to see with increasing clarity'.¹⁸

There is another side to Dunn's Christology. He stresses the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit and draws very close to a binitarianism in which his nature as divine appears to depend on the nature of the Spirit indwelling him. He says, for instance, 'The Spirit was the “divinity” of Jesus ... so Jesus became the personality of the Spirit'.¹⁹ Later he repudiated this,²⁰ but still seems to toy with the idea. Writing of his even more recent work, Max Turner, summarising without agreeing with his thought, says, 'In earliest Christianity and Paul, the Spirit is not so much under Jesus' lordship, as stamped with his personality; and since this does not break the mould of Jewish analogies it does not entail a full divine Christology'.²¹

Finally there was I.H. Marshall's *The Origins of Christology.*²² This cogently argues both that NT Christology is fundamentally one, despite terminological differences, and that it goes back to Jesus himself. This was also the view of C.F.D. Moule in his book, *The Origins of New Testament Christology.*²³ Moule says,

*Was the process ... comparable to the apotheosis of a Heracles from hero to god? Or was it, rather, that the successive descriptions and evaluations of Jesus constituted only new insights into what was there from the beginning, and new modes of expression for an original datum?*²⁴

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²⁰ In an article, 'Rediscovering the Spirit', *Expository Times* 94 (1982), 14–16.
²⁴ Moule, *Origin of Christology,* 22.
His own view was very definitely the latter.
Both Dunn on the one hand and Marshall and Moule on the other think in terms of development, but with one major difference, for Moule and Marshall argue that, right from its start in the teaching of Jesus the NT has a Christology of the deity of Jesus.

We may say then that the three main positions today are as follows:

- NT Christology is deeply influenced by a mythology alien to the theology of the OT and of historical Judaism. This is often paired with the idea that Jesus did not himself teach such a Christology.
- The NT writings reveal variety on a line of development, which did not begin with a doctrine of Incarnation but led to it eventually and, perhaps, inevitably.
- NT Christology, in all its essentials, is the Christology of Jesus with its implications spelled out more fully in various ways. This does not exclude development but sees it as application of the same basic truths in various new ways.

Crucial Issues in the Debate

In 1981, S. Kim wrote of ‘the tumultuous sea of present NT scholarship concerning the development of NT Christology’.25 The tide from this sea shows no sign of ebbing and so it is quite impossible to cover or even touch everything. Instead we will select some particularly important issues.

The teaching of the Fourth Gospel

There is wide agreement that this teaches a full incarnational Christology. Dunn has argued powerfully for such an interpretation of John 1:14.26 This finds contextual support in what is probably the true reading of John 1:18, ‘God the only-begotten’. So much else in the Gospel serves to confirm and expound that basic Christology.

The same is true of the Johannine Epistles, widely believed to be at least from the same school if not the same author as the Gospel. I.H. Marshall says,

‘the same concept of incarnation as is in the Gospel is present in 1 and 2 John, and indeed is the principal christological idea in these Epistles. The concept of incarnation fundamentally shapes the Christology of the Johannine Epistles and forms the key idea around which John’s other statements can be logically organised’.27

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26 Dunn, Christology in the Making, 241.
It is central to 1 John’s introduction (1:1–4), determining how we should understand what follows, including the importance of recognising that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (1 John 4:2). This also is important in 2 John 7. In fact in the Johannine Epistles these christological affirmations are considered so central that to deny them is serious heresy. Is this feasible if the teaching was comparatively new? Surely not!

Casey places the Christian break with the synagogue after AD 70, and says it accounts not only for the anti-Judaism of a late work like the Gospel of John but also its teaching about the deity of Jesus. The church now saw itself as more Gentile than Jewish, so that it could adopt a Gentile-type theology. He says, ‘This Gentile self-identification was a necessary cause of belief in the deity of Jesus, a belief which could not be held as long as the Christian community was primarily Jewish’.26

The Fourth Gospel’s criticism of Judaism can however be otherwise understood. It is somewhat akin to the OT prophetic criticism of Israel, which was internal to the community. This is especially pertinent if this Christology has at least a basis in that of Jesus, the prophet of Galilee, himself. Certainly this is allied to universalism in the Fourth Gospel, but there are wider concerns in the prophets, for instance in Jonah, Amos and in the Isaianic Servant Songs. Moreover, there is so much in this Gospel that is thoroughly Jewish.

**The teaching of Paul about the pre-existence of Christ**

Pre-existence is an essential implication of incarnation. Dunn is convinced that the full incarnation doctrine is found only in the Gospel of John and he argues against its assumed presence in Paul’s writings.27 In this respect he is more radical than many earlier critics, who certainly held Paul to be an incarnationist, although also less radical because he personally shares John’s Christology.

He says that texts in Paul regarded as teaching pre-existence (e.g. Phil. 2:5–11) actually refer to the human self-sacrifice of Jesus or to the way God’s creative power was manifested in him. What can we say to this? Marshall says, ‘Despite his attempts to justify his position, it is very dubious whether he has succeeded in purging the non-Johannine literature of the concepts of pre-existence and incarnation’.28 We will seek to see why this is.

Philippians 2:5–11 is obviously a key passage. Dunn says it contrasts Adam and Jesus and refers to our Lord’s rejection of

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27 E.g. Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 211, 212.
temptation, not to pre-existence or incarnation, but Kim has well countered this in his work, *The Origin of Christology*. He emphasises the theological bearing of Paul's conversion, obviously the starting-point for Paul of a true Christology. Jesus to him was the exalted Christ in glory, and the wonder was not so much that Jesus was the glorious Lord, but that the glorious Lord had become Jesus of Nazareth.

Marshall points out that 'being found in fashion as a man' (Phil. 2:7), is strange language if Jesus had never been anything else. He points out that 2 Corinthians 8:9 has the same basic thought differently expressed, and that Paul often describes heavenly glory as 'riches' (cf. Phil. 4:19; Eph. 1:18; 3:16; Col. 1:27).

When Paul writes about Jesus being 'sent' for certain purposes, this is usually taken as a reference to his pre-existence. Instead, Dunn points to Mark 12:6 and says that 'sent' there is unlikely to refer to pre-existence as the servants too are 'sent'. Marshall, however, argues that Galatians 4:4 should not be read in the light of Mark 12:6. Paul says Jesus was sent, 'born of a woman', such a strange expression if he was never more than a man. In Paul's sentence this follows the sending, strongly suggesting pre-existence. Also, if he was never more than a man how can we account for the references to his physical body in Colossians 1:22 (cf. 2:9) and Ephesians 2:16? Why state anything so obvious?

Marshall also says,

*Neither Colossians 1:22 nor 2:9 taken by itself necessarily points to the personal pre-existence of the divine Being incarnate in Jesus, but this thought is demanded by the language of the 'hymn' in 1:15-20; here it is extremely difficult to take the language to refer to anything other than the personal activity of the One who is the image of God in creation; Dunn's attempt to make the wording mean merely that the power which God exercised in creation is now fully revealed and embodied in Christ is quite unconvincing.*

In relation to 1 Timothy 3:16, Marshall says,

*Although no subject is expressed ... the language is based on that used elsewhere to describe how the Son of God was incarnate. The thought is of an epiphany in human form and the implication is that a divine or heavenly subject is intended.*

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32 It is a major theme of his book (see n. 25 above), but see especially his very thorough argumentation in ch. 6.
34 Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 36-44.
Max Turner argues that ‘Lordship of the Spirit’ (e.g. in 2 Cor. 3:17, 18) does imply a Divine Christology, and such a Christology of course integrates well with pre-existence.\(^{38}\)

A useful contribution to the debate is an article by R.T. France that does not actually mention Dunn.\(^{39}\) He points to a number of passages in Paul’s letters where ‘the same divine function is credited sometimes to God and sometimes to Jesus’. These include Colossians 1:16, 17 (cf. Rom. 11:36), 2 Corinthians 5:10 (cf. Rom. 14:10–12), Colossians 1:13 (cf. Col. 4:11) and many other passages.\(^{40}\)

**The alleged ‘adoptionism’ of the Primitive Christian preaching in Acts**

This has often been alleged, especially for the earliest Christian sermon in Acts 2.

So, for instance, John Knox says there is a primitive adoptionism in the NT, giving Acts 2:36 as an example. He says this adoptionism did not last long, because in Acts 2:23 there is an implicit affirmation of pre-existence, and it is only a short step from the belief that Jesus existed in God’s mind and purpose to the concept of personal pre-existence.\(^{41}\) Macquarrie remarks, ‘I myself am inclined to argue that we may equate pre-existence in the mind of God with real pre-existence’.\(^{42}\) This however sounds like Platonism or Berkeley’s idealism and is open to question.

Marshall points out that in Acts Jesus is also God’s Son (9:20; 13:33) and that this is why he, the Holy One, does not see corruption, but is raised to new life (2:27). He considers the reason why the Incarnation as such is not discussed in Acts is because the birth narrative at the start of the 2-volume work was intended ‘to provide the background for subsequent christological statements’.\(^{43}\)

In fact, John Knox holds that the NT contains a number of incompatible Christologies.\(^{44}\) Colin Gunton has pointed out however that Knox’s basic presupposition is that to hold to the divinity and

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\(^{44}\) This is a major theme of his book.
the humanity of Jesus at the same time is impossible. Once grant this possibility, and his arguments seem thin indeed.\(^{45}\)

John Robinson, in an essay, 'The Earliest Christology of all?'\(^{46}\) saw several different christological positions in the sermons attributed to Peter. Acts 2 he viewed as adoptionist, an interpretation against which we have already argued. He did not however consider adoptionism to be the earliest Christology. This is rather that found in Acts 3:20, 21, where Jesus, he says, is only the Christ-elect until his second advent. Verses 19–21 read,

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\text{Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.}
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Robinson's position however depends on dismemberment of the sermon, for verse 18 reads, 'But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer'. Jesus is here plainly designated the Christ in respect to his sufferings.

But what was the earliest Christian confession? Our evidence for this is not restricted to the sermons in Acts. There is the Aramaic term \textit{maranatha} in 1 Corinthians 16:22. Divided as \textit{maran atha} this means 'Our Lord comes' while as \textit{marana tha} it is 'Our Lord, come!' A devotional rather than a theological phrase is often considered the more likely, but this is perhaps disputable and is not crucial in the debate.\(^{47}\) This phrase must have come from the earliest Aramaic-speaking church, which means that Jesus was confessed as Lord very early indeed. This fits the evidence of Acts, and finds support in Stephen's prayer in Acts 7:59. It is the nail in the coffin of Bousset's theory. So it seems virtually certain that 'Jesus is Lord' (Rom. 10:9) was the characteristic theological affirmation of the early church about Jesus.

\section*{The Christologies of the Synoptic Evangelists}

These post-date the earliest preaching, but they are best taken here because of the need to relate them to the teaching of Jesus himself.

The Synoptic Gospels possess a remarkable sobriety in their language and this is powerful evidence for their integrity. There is no attempt to glamorise the Person of Jesus or to bring excessive

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\(^{46}\) J.A.T. Robinson. 'The Most Primitive Christology of all?' \textit{Journal of Theological Studies} 7 (1956), 177-89.

\(^{47}\) See, however, L. Hurtado, \textit{One God. One Lord} (London: SCM, 1988) for a powerful presentation of evidence that the NT church worshipped Jesus as God.
emotional force to bear on the readers of the Passion story. In presenting the physical fact of the crucifixion, Mark simply says, ‘they crucified him’ (Mark 15:24), Luke ‘there they crucified him’ (Luke 23:33), while the words of Matthew 27:35, translated ‘when they had crucified him’ (NIV), actually constitute a prepositional phrase, giving them an even lowlier syntactical status. How amazing this is when we consider how central the cross is to NT theology!

The phrase ‘Son of God’ occurs in each of the Synoptics and in most significant contexts, for instance the Baptism, Temptation, Transfiguration, Trial, Crucifixion. One passage which is substantially parallel in two of them (Matt. 11:25–27; Luke 10:21, 22) seems Johannine and yet the textual evidence is very firm. In each of them, too, the Day of Questions closes with the challenge of Jesus as to the status of the Christ and his assertion that David called him ‘Lord’.

R.T. France, writing of the many passages where Jesus assumes divine functions for himself, says,

All this ... is evidence not of a formal claim to divinity so much as an assumption of a divine role which is the more impressive because it does not require argument or defence, and which occurs in a wide variety of Gospel traditions, Synoptic as well as Johannine.48

At the moment, we are citing this as evidence, not so much for the beliefs of Jesus about himself as of the beliefs of the Gospel-writers about him.

In addition, it is worth pointing out that Matthew and Luke record the Virgin Birth early in their accounts of the life of Jesus and in such a way as to make it clear that they regarded this as the birth of a divine Person. In this way they established a theological context for his life and ministry. Mark does not do this, but his first chapter appears to lay special stress on his exalted status as ‘Son of God’, ‘Lord’ and ‘Holy One of God’.

Don Carson notes that Matthew 1:1 uses the anarthrous phrase, ‘Jesus Christ’, following the more usual style of the Epistles than the Gospels, which normally prefer the article. This shows his initial verse to be confessional rather than purely historical. He goes on,

But whenever he describes the events of Jesus’ ministry, during which ‘Christ’ was never a name in any real sense, he uses a titular form ... In short Matthew ably distinguishes between his own linguistic practice and christological understanding, and that enjoyed by the disciples during the days of Jesus’ ministry.49

The beliefs and teaching of Jesus about Himself.

This is the crucial issue. Cullmann wrote, The early Church believed in Christ's Messiahship only because it believed that Jesus believed himself to be the Messiah'.\textsuperscript{50} We will concentrate on several issues here:

The teaching ministry of Jesus

Not even the most radical sceptics have denied a teaching ministry to Jesus. Not only was he a teacher but his teaching was often very memorable, either because of its form (in parables or pithy sayings) or its repetition, or its startlingly original nature, especially in giving a new interpretation to well-known OT material. So it would be most surprising if a great deal of it was not remembered in verbatim or near-verbatim form. In ancient times and especially among the Jews, memorising was important in the life of a great Teacher's disciple.

The role of Jesus as eschatological Prophet

There is much interest in this just now. This was, of course, the emphasis of the Consistent Eschatology school of Albert Schweitzer and Johannes Weiss a hundred years ago, and it has come into prominence again in the work of the Jesus Seminar and of Tom Wright. The Jesus Seminar has largely come to sceptical conclusions on the basis of it,\textsuperscript{51} while Tom Wright, knowing much of their work, is much more positive.\textsuperscript{52}

He maintains that to think of Jesus in this way is the best initial model for understanding him, but that we must study very carefully how he functioned in this role. He not only proclaimed God's judgement and salvation but both symbolised and, very importantly, actually effected them in his actions. So the cleansing of the temple was an actual judgement, even if it foreshadowed other judgements; the healing and exorcising miracles and ultimately the cross itself produced real blessing and salvation. In effecting and embodying such judgement and such salvation Jesus was actually embodying God himself. He says, for instance, that when Jesus offered forgiveness, such a practice had the effect of 'a private individual approaching a prisoner in jail and offering him a royal pardon, signed by himself'. He evidently believed 'he had to do and be, for Israel and the world, what, according to Scripture only YHWH himself could do and be'.

Anthony Thiselton develops a somewhat similar approach in applying speech-act theory to the sayings of Jesus. The whole Bible from Genesis 1 onwards testifies to the speech-acts of God, and

\textsuperscript{50} Cullmann, Christology of the New Testament, 8.
\textsuperscript{52} N.T. Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1996).
Jesus appears, through his speech-acts, to be identified as God. In christological terms, "My son, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5; Luke 5:20; cf. Matt. 9:2) depends on a state of affairs about the identity, role and authority of Jesus'. Thiselton says the same applies to his speech/acts of exorcism.\(^{53}\)

*The filial consciousness of Jesus*

Much of the discussion about the Christology of Jesus centres on this. In his discussion of 'Abba' as used by Jesus, Joachim Jeremias showed that Jesus possessed an intimate personal awareness of filial relationship to God which was quite unique, going much beyond anything in the OT or in later Judaism. It was linked to his messianic consciousness, but not submerged in it. It is not so much that because he was the Messiah he was God's Son, as vice versa. Here is a divine person taking up an historical role.

We may add that some at least of his sayings in which he calls himself 'Son of God' could hardly be inauthentic. This is especially true of his words in Mark 13:32, which have caused problems for Christians down the ages and so could hardly have been the creation of the church. Often it is the difficulties of the Gospels that witness to their authenticity. The same is true of the four accounts of the day of Christ's resurrection from the dead.

*His use of the term 'Lord'*

The use of this term of himself is very rare in the words of Jesus, and is practically confined to the event at the close of the Day of Questions. It is however supported by a passage where he declares, 'the Son of Man is Lord of the sabbath (Mark 2:28; cf. Matt. 12:8; Luke 6:5). It was a monumental claim to assert lordship over the God-instituted sabbath. We should weigh passages rather than simply count them, and the Day of Questions passage is especially important, representing the virtual closing of his public teaching ministry.

The two terms 'Son of God' and 'Lord' are particularly exalted christological titles. The first appears to dominate the opening of his ministry in each Synoptic Gospel, and is important both in the baptismal and temptation narratives. The second has a controlling place at the close of his ministry as recorded in each. They therefore form a kind of *inclusio*. 'Son of God' comes across to us as a divine title emphasising the relationship of Jesus to the Father and 'Lord' as one underlining his relationship to the world and to human beings. This is peculiarly fitting, and there is no good reason, apart from strong historical scepticism, for denying either.

Conclusion

The historical/theological issue

Martin Hengel makes a very good point when he says,

The basic question of New Testament Christology is: How did it come about that in the short space of twenty years the crucified Galilean Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, was elevated by his followers to a dignity which left every form of pagan-polytheistic apotheosis far behind? Pre-existence, Mediator of Creation and the revelation of his identity with the One God: this exceeds the possibilities of deification in a polytheistic pantheon.54

Sometimes the simplest answer to a question is the best. Here it is that the Christology of the NT writers follows that of Jesus, simply bringing out its implications in some significant ways. C.H. Dodd, in ‘According to the Scriptures’, where he shows that the NT writers uniformly interpret the OT in terms of Christ, argues that such hermeneutical unity which was at the same time original, must show the influence of a powerful creative personality and says we need look no further than Jesus himself.55 The same is true for the essential unity of the NT in the teaching it has about the nature of his Person.

The practical implications

What then are the practical implications for us today? If Jesus, in his full deity and true humanity, is central to the teaching of the NT and to his own, then Christian preaching should be as clearly ‘preaching Christ’ as that in Acts was. Moreover, we have the comforting assurance that this Man understands so fully what human life (with all its joys and sorrows) involves, while at the same time we are challenged to accept his Lordship over all life’s practical affairs and, in the power of the Holy Spirit, who indwelt Christ, to take up our cross daily and follow him.