

CHAPTER FORTY FOUR

NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTOLOGY

Interpretations of the identity and role of Jesus

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Catrin H. Williams

Studies of New Testament interpretations of Jesus ('christology') often draw attention to a question which, according to gospel traditions, was posed by Jesus to his disciples: 'Who do people say that I am?' (Mark 8:27; cf. Matt. 16:13; Luke 9:18). The disciples report that people view him as John the Baptist, Elijah or one of the prophets, but their own evaluation of him is expressed by Peter: 'You are the Christ' (Mark 8:29). It is the variety rather than the content of the responses in this scene that merits attention for the purpose of this chapter, because it illustrates the diverse ways in which the New Testament writers sought to express their understanding of Jesus' identity and role. Before examining the christological beliefs attested in individual New Testament texts, some attempts at delineating the origins and early development of christology will be considered.

MAPPING OUT THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTOLOGY

The study of New Testament christology during the early decades of the twentieth century was dominated by scholars belonging to 'the history-of-religions school', who claimed that belief in Jesus as a divine figure ('high' christology) developed at a relatively late stage under Graeco-Roman influence. In a study entitled *Kyrios Christos* (1913) Wilhelm Bousset proposed that the early Jewish (Palestinian) Christian expectation of Jesus' imminent return (*parousia*) as heavenly Messiah was later replaced, within Gentile Christian communities, by his cultic veneration as exalted 'Lord' (*kyrios*), a title used to address pagan deities and Roman emperors within the ruler-cult. This development, it was argued, would have been inconceivable within the monotheistic environment of Jewish Christian communities. Bousset's legacy and that of his successors¹ was their assessment of New Testament christology as the product of distinct early Christian communities which did not stand in any real continuity with the self-understanding of Jesus.

Because Bousset's outline of two largely unconnected stages made no allowances for possible lines of communication between Jewish Palestinian Christian and Gentile Christian communities, his scheme was refined to include an intervening stage/pattern described as 'Hellenistic Jewish Christianity',² that is, Greek-speaking Jewish

Christians who were deeply influenced by the Greek Bible (LXX) and Hellenistic ideas. The notion of christological development in three stages allows for some overlap between, and fluidity within, early Christian communities during the decisive period between Jesus' death (about 30 CE) and the emergence of the earliest New Testament writing, probably Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians (about 50 CE), but it primarily envisages a movement from Palestine to the Jewish Diaspora to the Gentile world, and from a 'lower' to 'higher' christology. On the basis of what many regard as a historically reliable tradition about the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:1),³ Hengel proposes that, alongside their Aramaic-speaking counterparts ('Hebrews'), Greek-speaking Jewish Christians from the Diaspora ('Hellenists') played a decisive role in the shaping of exalted (pre-Pauline) christological beliefs about Jesus.⁴ The interpretation of 'eschatological-messianic scriptural passages'⁵ played a significant role in early Jewish Christian reflection on the titles and functions of the risen Christ, including his Sonship (2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:7), exaltation as Son of man (Ps. 8) and enthronement as Lord at God's right hand (Ps. 110:1).

Reflection on texts like Ps. 110:1, whose LXX version includes two occurrences of the designation *kyrios* ('The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand ..."'), suggests that attributing the (divine) title *kyrios* to Jesus need not have derived from pagan cults but can be traced back to Palestinian Jewish Christians.⁶ In addition to the use of *kyrios* as a title for God among Greek-speaking Jews (Josephus, *Antiquities* 13:68; 20:90), evidence for its Aramaic counterpart *marê*' has been uncovered in some Qumran texts.⁷ The use of *marê*', though not in its absolute form, accounts for the distinctive liturgical formula *maranatha* cited by Paul in 1 Cor. 16:22. That this transliterated Aramaic phrase is preserved in a text written in Greek suggests that it originated in the Jerusalem church as an eschatological petition for Jesus' return ('Our Lord, come'), probably within the liturgical context of the eucharistic meal (cf. 1 Cor. 11:26). Both the *maranatha* invocation and the christological appropriation of Ps. 110:1 therefore offer crucial glimpses into the emergence of a high christology within an early Jewish (Christian) setting, for to call Jesus 'Lord' was to confer upon him a title with clear divine connotations.

The distinctive use of *maranatha* in 1 Cor. 16:22 also raises important questions about the relationship between the development of christology and early Christian liturgical practices. Worship practices regarded as indicative of Christ-devotion⁸ or a cult of Christ⁹ include the singing of hymns in honour of Christ (1 Cor. 14:26), baptizing in his name or 'into Christ Jesus' (Rom. 6:3; Acts 2:38) and confessing that 'Jesus is Lord' (Rom. 10:9-13; 1 Cor. 12:3; Phil. 2:11). Because these elements are already attested in Paul's letters, the earliest New Testament writings, it suggests that a number of devotional practices (as with *maranatha*) originated at an even earlier stage among Jewish Christians. Not only does Paul cite already existing formulas (e.g., Rom. 1:3-4; 1 Cor. 15:3-5), but there are no indications in his letters that Paul's views about Christ were unique to him or indeed conflicted with those of other Jewish Christians.¹⁰ Liturgical practices, including the acclamation of Jesus as 'Lord', can therefore be cited as evidence that Christ became an object of cultic devotion alongside God.¹¹ Furthermore, the accommodation of the exalted Christ into the worship of the one God was not regarded by Jewish Christians as a threat to monotheism; rather, it attests 'the use of monotheistic language as a christological category',¹² a 'christological monotheism' which finds its clearest expression in 1 Cor.

8:6: 'Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.' Jewish Christians like Paul viewed themselves as loyal to the Jewish monotheistic faith in their worship of 'one God', but their conviction that the crucified Jesus had been exalted to heavenly glory led to his veneration as 'one Lord'.

Larry Hurtado also examines how ancient Judaism could provide a conceptual framework enabling Jewish Christians to develop their christological beliefs without compromising their commitment to the one God. Several Jewish texts, from Palestine and the Diaspora, depict God as appointing a particular figure to act as his chief agent.¹³ The category of 'divine agency' manifests itself in various forms, since a principal agent can be a divine attribute (Wisdom or Logos), an exalted patriarch (Moses or Enoch) or a principal angel (like Michael or Yahoel). The chief agent is portrayed in these Jewish texts as having a highly exalted status second only to God. And yet none of these chief agents threatens Jewish monotheism. Wisdom and the Logos are not semi-independent beings or hypostases but metaphorical descriptions of God's active involvement in the world,¹⁴ and depictions of the exalted status of patriarchs like Moses are intended to validate Jewish religious tradition and foreshadow the reward of the elect ones. Even principal angels remain distinct from, and subordinate to, God, since their authority and status are derived from the one whose majesty they serve to magnify. While the honour accorded to these figures included the use of venerative language for angels,¹⁵ there is no convincing evidence – claims Hurtado – that any of them became the object of formal worship in a Jewish cultic context.

Since 'in the exclusive monotheism of the Jewish religious tradition ... it was worship which was the real test of monotheistic faith in religious practice',¹⁶ Hurtado proposes that the inclusion of Christ as the recipient of cultic veneration produced an 'innovation' unparalleled in traditions about God's chief agent; Jewish monotheistic piety was redefined to accommodate a binitarian devotion to Jesus alongside God. This is viewed as resulting primarily from the post-Easter *religious experiences* of the early Christians,¹⁷ especially their visionary experiences of the risen Christ as participating fully in the glory and power of God (Acts 7:55–56; 2 Cor. 3:16–18).¹⁸

There have been widely differing assessments of the Jewish and early Christian material examined by Hurtado.¹⁹ The view that Christ-devotion marked a significant development in relation to Jewish monotheism is shared by others,²⁰ although they contend that truly binitarian patterns of belief in the divinity or incarnation of Jesus only occurred during the last decades of the first century CE, particularly in John's Gospel. The exclusive or strict context of Jewish monotheism is also highlighted by Bauckham²¹ in that God, as Creator and Ruler, is wholly separate from all other created reality, including intermediary figures like angels. High christology, claims Bauckham, is not an early 'mutation' (Hurtado) or a later development (Dunn and Casey), for Jesus is viewed from the outset as belonging fully within the unique 'divine identity'; he is identified and venerated as the personification of God (Wisdom, Logos) because he is included in God's creative activity and sovereign rule over all things.

Several other scholars argue, however, that antecedents or analogues can already be identified within Second Temple Judaism for the binitarian elements in early christology.²² Some focus on the Jewish understanding of the messiah as divine son (as in LXX Psalms) who is begotten and pre-existent (e.g., I Enoch 48; IV Ezra).²³ Others

posit that certain traditions about principal angels demonstrate that ancient Jewish monotheism could accommodate a second divine being alongside God. Rowland²⁴ proposes that there is evidence in certain Jewish texts of a separation of divinity involving God and his personified glory, with the latter acting as a quasi-angelic mediator (Ezek. 1:26-28; 8:2-4; Dan. 10:5-9), as further developed in the depiction of Yahoel bearing the Divine Name (Apocalypse of Abraham 10:3, 8). It has been suggested that a principal angel was regarded as the personification of the Name, thus sharing God's mode of being,²⁵ although, according to Hurtado, the Name is the medium of God's power. These different assessments of principal angel traditions demonstrate that there is clear disagreement as to whether the exalted status attributed to figures like Yahoel should be understood in functional terms alone or points to a belief in their divine nature.

The idea that visionary experiences of the risen Christ were the major impetus for the cultic veneration of Jesus requires a degree of caution. It is difficult to determine the relationship between such experiences and subsequent (textual) reflections (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8). And can one speak of visionary experiences as generating christological convictions or have they been shaped by already existing categories of Jewish patterns of belief? William Horbury has proposed that the worship of Christ finds its origins in a form of Jewish messianism in which the messiah is regarded as the embodiment of an angel-like spirit;²⁶ it was the recognition of Jesus as messianic king, initiated during his ministry and developed among the early Christian communities, that led to the acclamations, hymns and titles offered to Christ and preserved in the writings of the New Testament.

The debate among scholars on the origins of New Testament christology continues to be vigorous and illuminating. The publication and translation of important sources, particularly the Dead Sea Scrolls and Jewish apocalypses, has led to a much greater appreciation of the diversity in ancient Judaism and the significance of intermediary figures in Jewish traditions. Granted that it is difficult to delineate the precise contours of the development of christology during this early period, recent scholarship has made a decisive contribution to understanding the earliest Christian beliefs about Jesus and the factors that helped to shape them. Strong arguments have been offered in a number of studies for viewing the reverence given to Christ as a divine figure alongside God as a characteristic of the devotional practices of early Jewish Christians rather than as a later innovation attributable to Gentile believers. This was, moreover, a period marked by deep christological reflection on the Scriptures, and this enabled early Christians to express their conviction that the crucified and risen Christ had been exalted as Lord to a heavenly position at the right hand of God. These were the foundations upon which the authors of the individual writings in the New Testament developed their own interpretations of the identity and role of Jesus.

INTERPRETATIONS OF JESUS IN NEW TESTAMENT WRITINGS

Until fairly recently the study of New Testament christology has largely been approached through an analysis of the individual titles applied to Jesus, giving particular attention to their conceptual background and usage. The limitations of this

procedure are now widely recognized.²⁷ This approach not only tends to isolate the christological titles from their contexts, especially their narrative contexts in the case of the Gospels, but it can overlook other, equally significant, christological passages. This is not to deny that the New Testament authors sought to interpret Jesus in the light of already existing titles or expressions, but this is only one of many forms of christological expression adopted in the writings. A selection of New Testament texts exhibiting various emphases and a wide range of interpretations of Jesus will now be examined.

The letters of Paul

Nearly every passage in Paul's letters discloses one aspect or other of his views about Christ, although they were not written to offer a systematized discussion of christology. In each case Paul responds to specific situations arising in individual communities, and his presentation of christological themes includes emphases relevant to the circumstances of those whom he addresses. Due regard must therefore be given to the context and concerns reflected in each letter, although there is an underlying consistency in Paul's expressions of his christological convictions. What appears remarkable in this respect is that he offers very few indications of the extent of his knowledge about Jesus of Nazareth. Limited references to Jesus' earthly life include declarations about his birth under the Jewish law (Gal. 4:4) and his descent from the line of David (Rom. 1:3). The paucity of such statements does not imply that Paul has no interest in the events of Jesus' life and ministry. Rather, the citation of formulaic traditions (cf. Rom. 1:3-4), together with subtle allusions to Jesus' teaching (Rom. 12:14; 13:7-10; 1 Cor. 7:10-11; 11:23-25), suggest that Paul takes for granted that the recipients of his letters are already familiar with Jesus traditions due to earlier preaching activity carried out in their midst by Paul or other missionaries.²⁸

The central events, for Paul, are the passion, death and resurrection of Christ, as demonstrated by his appeal to the tradition he has received and handed on to the Corinthians: 'that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures' (1 Cor. 15:3-4). On the few occasions where he explicitly refers to his own call or conversion, in comparison with the detailed accounts in Acts (9:1-19; 22:6-21; 26:12-18), Paul emphasizes that this was due to a revelation of the risen Lord (Gal. 1:12, 15-16). This christophany resulted in a decisive shift in Paul's understanding of Jesus; it was an event that led him to accept the claim of the first believers that the crucified Christ had been raised from the dead, and it also brought about many key aspects of Paul's christology.²⁹

The centrality of Jesus' death and resurrection in the gospel preached by Paul means that his reflections on christology and on the salvific effects of the Christ-event are closely intertwined. This is particularly apparent in the two letters where he sets up an explicit contrast between Christ and Adam as representative figures of humankind from creation to death (Adam) and of eschatological humankind from death to life (Christ). In Rom. 5:12-21 the disobedience of Adam, which resulted in death and condemnation for all, is contrasted with the obedience of Christ, resulting in grace and the gift of righteousness. In an earlier letter (1 Cor. 15:20-22, 45-49) Paul's

interest in the Adam/Christ motif centres on Jesus' resurrection; all who are 'in Adam' die, but those who are 'in Christ' shall be made alive (15:21-22). This line of argumentation is resumed in 15:45-49, where Christ is described as 'the last Adam' who has become a life-giving spirit; he is the beginning of a new humanity and his image will be borne by those who belong to him.

A study of titles used by Paul cannot provide a comprehensive picture of his christological views, but the importance he attaches to Jesus' identity as 'Messiah (Christ)', 'Son of God' and 'Lord' certainly calls for comment. He can use the designation 'Christ' as a second name for Jesus ('Jesus Christ' or 'Christ Jesus') while also implying that the (titular) identification of Jesus as the Messiah is already well established.³⁰ The titular use of *christos* occurs overtly in some passages, especially in Rom. 9:3-5 where Paul describes the privileges received by the Jews from whom the Messiah comes.

Particularly significant are those rarer occasions where Paul speaks of Jesus as 'Son of God' (Rom. 1:4; 2 Cor. 1:19; Gal. 2:20) or 'Son' (Rom. 8:3, 29; 1 Cor. 1:9; Gal. 4:4), even describing his divine sonship as the content of the gospel (Gal. 1:15-16). These declarations are more likely to have been influenced by ancient Jewish traditions than pagan religious concepts, particularly as sonship terminology occurs frequently to denote Israel (Exod. 4:22; Hos. 11:1), the Davidic king (2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:7) and, in some Qumran texts, the Davidic Messiah (4QFlorilegium 1:10-13). The context in which sonship language is applied is important in cases like the kerygmatic formula cited in Rom. 1:3-4: 'the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh, and was appointed (NRSV: declared) to be Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord'. Jesus' earthly status as 'Son of David' is here juxtaposed with his installation as 'Son of God' by virtue of his resurrection. Scholars have long pondered whether the second part declares that divine sonship was first conferred upon Jesus at his resurrection, leading some to propose that Paul added the words 'in power' to tone down its 'adoptionist' ring.³¹ The role of this formulaic tradition as a twofold affirmation of Jesus' divine sonship, with probable echoes of Davidic traditions (2 Sam. 7:12-14), is confirmed by the way Paul prefaces the whole citation as 'the gospel concerning his Son'. Another declaration in the same letter stresses that Jesus' sonship expresses his unique relationship with God, for in his salvific death God did not withhold his own Son 'but gave him up for all of us' (8:32; cf. 5:10; Gal. 2:20; 4:4-5).

It is the title 'Lord' that receives most prominence in the Pauline writings. To speak of the risen Christ in terms of lordship is to define his relationship with all believers, and so the central confession of their faith is that 'Jesus is Lord' (Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3). Paul displays awareness of the use of *kyrios* as a designation for the 'many lords' honoured in pagan cults (1 Cor. 8:5), but, as indicated above, he probably inherited this title from Jewish Christians. He uses it for God in several scriptural citations (e.g., Rom. 4:8; 1 Cor. 3:20), but in other places he applies *kyrios*-texts to Christ himself (e.g., Rom. 10:9-13; Capes 1992). Similarly, in the second part of Phil. 2:6-11, Jesus' exaltation is described in the loftiest of terms: God has bestowed upon him the name above every name, so that all should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. The universal acclamation, 'Jesus is Lord', signifies that the exalted Christ is proclaimed worthy of the honour usually reserved for God, and the name given to him is probably God's own name (*kyrios*-YHWH) since the

cited scriptural passage (2:10) refers to God in its original context (Isa. 45:23; cf. Rom. 14:11).

The christological appropriation of a text like Isa. 45:23, which contains one of the most unequivocally monotheistic declarations in the Scriptures, signifies that Paul directly associates Christ with God.³² Depicting him in such exalted terms does not, however, conflict with the emphasis on God's sovereignty in Phil. 2:9-11, for the bestowal of the Name indicates a unique status conferred upon the exalted Christ by God himself (2:9), while those who confess Jesus as 'Lord' do so to the glory of the Father. The inclusion of Christ in expressions of commitment to the one God is graphically attested in 1 Cor. 8:6, which is widely viewed as an adaptation of the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord'). Emphasis on 'one God, the Father' is combined with a confession of the uniqueness of Christ's lordship: there is 'one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist' (8:6). Once again, to describe Jesus as 'one Lord' is not viewed as impinging on Paul's belief in the one true God. 'All things are *from*, that is originating in, deriving out of, the Father, but *through* the Son, that his by his agency.'³³

If Paul can speak of Christ in such exalted terms, even as the mediator of creation, does he envisage that Christ existed before his earthly manifestation? There is vigorous debate over this issue, because statements about God having sent his Son (Gal. 4:4; Rom. 8:3) could point to his sending from another mode of existence or, alternatively, a commissioning reminiscent of the sending of the prophets. Scholars are primarily interested in a cluster of passages where epithets and functions traditionally associated with divine Wisdom are now applied to Christ. His depiction as 'the image of the invisible God' (Col. 1:15) echoes that of Wisdom as 'the image of God's goodness' (Wisdom 7:26), whereas declarations attributing to Christ a role in creation (1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16) possess analogies in Jewish reflections on Wisdom (Prov. 8:30; Wisdom 7:22). What are the christological implications of such associations? Dunn argues that they point to a Pauline conception of Christ's pre-existence in ideal rather than personal terms, in that Jewish Wisdom traditions seek, with metaphorical language, to bridge the gap between the transcendent God and his activity in the world.³⁴ It does not necessarily follow that Paul's attribution of Wisdom's functions and epithets to Christ amounts to an unmodified transference of a fixed or ready-made model,³⁵ because the relevant passages make clear that their subject is not a divine attribute but the concrete historical figure whose personal relationship with God is highlighted by naming him 'Lord, Jesus Christ' (1 Cor. 8:6) and 'Son' (Col. 1:13).

Even more decisive is the opening line of Phil. 2:6-11, where Christ Jesus is depicted as existing 'in the form of God'. The opinion of most scholars is that this declaration expresses Christ's divine status before his earthly existence; he did not count his equality with God as something he could use to his own advantage (*harpagmos*), but rather, by becoming human and assuming the status of a slave, he humbled himself and was obedient to death (2:6-8). Dunn again argues that this passage does not attribute pre-existence to Christ but establishes an implied contrast between Adam and Jesus.³⁶ During his earthly life Christ, like Adam, bore the image of God (Gen. 1:27), but, different from Adam, he was obedient and did not seek to snatch equality with God (Gen. 3:5; with a different interpretation of *harpagmos*). According to the more widely held interpretation, the language of the first half of this passage is most

naturally read as one of movement from Christ's pre-incarnate state to his human existence and death (2:6-8). Problematic for Dunn's interpretation is the lack of clear Adamic allusions in Phil. 2:6-11; his view that 'form' (*morphê*, 2:6) is interchangeable with 'image' (*eikôn*, Gen. 1:27) does not adequately account for its repetition in 2:7 where it cannot refer to image ('taking the form of a servant').³⁷

What must be acknowledged is that Paul never seeks to explain or discuss at any length the nature of Christ's pre-existence. Indeed, to enquire about the precise nature of Christ's role as the one 'through whom are all things' (1 Cor. 8:6) or his ontological status 'in the form of God' (Phil. 2:6) and as 'Son' (Gal. 4:4) is to seek answers from Paul to questions that characterized the christological controversies of later centuries.

The Gospel of Mark

The Gospel of Mark was written during the turbulent years leading up to, or possibly shortly after, the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. At least fifteen years therefore separate the later undisputed letters of Paul from the first extant gospel account of Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection. Mark's role as a compiler or editor of existing traditions about Jesus is indisputable, but the distinctive character of his christology becomes evident in the way he shapes and structures his material. Recurrent themes and motifs can be detected, with declarations or episodes of christological import being strategically placed at key points in the narrative. The significance of the introductory declaration about 'the gospel of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God' (1:1) is thus disclosed in events located at the beginning, middle and end of the gospel (1:11; 8:29; 9:7; 14:61-62; 15:39; although 'Son of God' [1:1] is absent from some important textual witnesses). The unfolding of Jesus' identity through the flow of the narrative, especially in his responses to how others view him, has led to the description of Mark's christology as a 'narrative christology'.³⁸

Mark's first major section describes Jesus' public ministry in Galilee (1:16-8:26). Jesus' declaration that 'the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand' (1:15) finds confirmation in his activity as authoritative teacher (1:21; 6:2), powerful healer (5:25-43; 7:31-37) and exorcist (1:23-27; 5:1-20). People marvel at his authority and power, although they gain only a partial understanding of his identity and mission. Even the disciples, to whom has been revealed the mystery of the kingdom of God (4:11), fail to grasp his true significance. Their response, after Jesus stills the storm, is to ask: 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?' (4:41), and, despite the feeding of the multitude and the epiphanic character of Jesus' act of walking on the sea, the disciples are rebuked for their lack of faith (8:17-21; cf. 6:52). His unique status is, nevertheless, recognized by the demons, whose acclamation of him as 'Son of God' (3:11; cf. 1:24; 5:7) echoes Jesus' baptism where he alone hears the divine voice: 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased' (1:11, drawing from Ps. 2:7 and Isa. 42:1). The fact that the demons' open acknowledgment of Jesus' divine sonship is followed by his command for them to be silent forms a key component of the Markan secrecy motif, the so-called 'messianic secret'.

A command to silence features prominently in the account of Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, a scene which marks an important turning-point in the Markan narrative (8:27-30). When Jesus asks his disciples, 'Who do you say that I am?', Peter acts as their representative and, in the light of Jesus' miracles and teaching ministry,

responds: 'You are the Christ'. Jesus' curious response for them 'not to tell anyone about him' (8:30) does not amount to a rejection of Peter's confession; rather, he immediately qualifies it by openly predicting that he, the 'Son of man', must suffer, be rejected by the authorities, killed and then rise again (8:31; cf. 9:31; 10:32-34). In other words, Jesus emphasizes that the true meaning of his messiahship cannot be understood in isolation from his suffering, death and resurrection. While Peter is unable to reconcile this with his own concept of messiahship (8:32-33), Jesus later stresses that his messianic identity cannot be restricted to such categories as 'Son of David' (12:35-37).³⁹ In the transfiguration scene, after the divine voice declares 'This is my Son, the Beloved' (9:7), the disciples are again commanded to say nothing of this revelation of Jesus' glory until after the resurrection (9:9). Only in the light of Jesus' death can his divine sonship be openly acknowledged by others.

Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem brings about the fulfilment of his earlier predictions. The shadow of his death clearly looms over the narrative, and the Markan secrecy motif now gives way to disclosure. When the high priest questions Jesus about his identity, he brings together the two titles which have so far been kept separate (apart from 1:1): 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed?' (14:61). Jesus, for the first and only time in Mark's Gospel, unequivocally affirms his identity ('I am') and continues by speaking of his future vindication as the Son of man enthroned at God's right hand and who will return in glory (14:62; cf. Ps. 110:1; Dan. 7:13). It is at this point in the narrative, with Jesus' fate now sealed as he is charged with blasphemy (14:64), that he can publicly declare his true identity. Jesus' divine sonship is consequently acclaimed at the moment of his death on the cross, not by a supernatural being or a disciple, but by a Roman centurion: 'Truly this man was God's Son' (15:39). This marks the climax of Mark's narrative christology.

The Gospel of Matthew

Mark's Gospel was employed by both Matthew and Luke, who essentially follow its narrative outline after their infancy narratives. Identifying the distinctive christological features of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke certainly involves studying how they have modified and interpreted their sources, but it is the interweaving of themes in their narratives that discloses the true depth of the Matthean and Lukan presentations of Jesus.

Several of Matthew's key christological motifs are already set out in the four opening chapters (the infancy, baptism and temptation narratives). These chapters highlight Jesus' status as the Messiah who fulfils Israel's hopes and embodies God's will:⁴⁰ his identity as 'son of David' is explicated in an account of his genealogy (1:1-17) and legitimized by his adoption and naming by Joseph (1:18-25). That he is the long-awaited Messiah is confirmed by various scriptural prophecies fulfilled through his birth to a virgin (1:23) in Bethlehem (2:6), his return from Egypt (2:15) and Herod's slaughter (2:18). Jesus' public ministry in Galilee is described, moreover, in terms of his mission to the lost sheep of Israel (9:36; 15:24), and, after his presentation as the supreme interpreter of the Torah through his Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), the narratives about his healings are said to offer further confirmation that he is the one in whom scriptural prophecies find their fulfilment: 'He took our infirmities and bore our diseases' (8:17; citing Isa. 53:4). However, the growing hostility

of the Jewish religious leaders leads Jesus to end the parable of the wicked husbandmen by declaring: 'The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom' (21:43). The disciples form the nucleus of this 'new people',⁴¹ while the inclusion of Gentiles is described as scriptural fulfilment (4:15-16; 12:18-21) and the core of the disciples' commission after Jesus' resurrection (28:19-20). This unmistakable focus on a mission to the Gentiles, brought about by Israel's rejection of Jesus as the Messiah, is integral to what has been described as Matthew's 'inclusive story',⁴² for it mirrors the situation of the Gospel's first recipients, who probably no longer remained within the synagogue and for whom the Gentile mission was a major concern.

Matthean christology also gives prominence to Jesus' divine sonship.⁴³ There is no (Markan) secrecy motif, as demonstrated by the modification to the disciples' response at the end of the sea-walking narrative (14:33: 'Truly you are the Son of God'; cf. Mark 6:52), thus preparing for Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi: 'You are the Christ, *the Son of the living God*' (16:16, cf. Mark 8:29). How, then, does Matthew envisage and elaborate upon the significance of Jesus as 'Son of God'? It expresses his unique relationship with God, both in terms of his sovereign authority (14:33) and their mutual knowledge (11:27), but particular emphasis is placed on Jesus' filial obedience. He 'fulfils all righteousness' through his baptism (3:15), as confirmed by God (3:17: 'This is my Son, the Beloved'), and also during his testing by Satan (4:3, 6: 'If you are the Son of God ...'). His path of obedience is also one of suffering, leading to the pouring out of his blood for the forgiveness of sins (26:28), thereby echoing Matthew's earlier explanation of the name 'Jesus' (1:21: 'he will save his people from their sins'). Jesus remains obedient unto death and refuses to succumb to testing by the crowds and chief priests, who mockingly challenge him to descend from the cross (27:38-44).

Matthew, like so many New Testament writers, emphasizes that God ultimately vindicates his Son by raising him from the dead. The first words of the risen Jesus when he appears to the disciples are that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him (29:18), reminiscent of his earlier predictions of future judgement and glorious return as the Son of man. Even more striking is that the narrative ends on the same christological note as the beginning, because the prophecy of Isa. 7:14 is fulfilled in Jesus' virginal conception and in his naming as 'Emmanuel': 'God is with us' (1:23). Matthew accordingly stresses from the outset that Jesus is God's presence with his people (cf. 18:20), a theme that resonates in his final declaration to the disciples: 'I am with you always, to the end of the age' (28:20).

The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles

Luke-Acts forms a two-volume composition which emphasizes the continuation between the life and teaching of Jesus and the mission of his followers. That both 'events' realize God's salvific purpose is a characteristic feature of Lukan christology,⁴⁴ expressed through the language of God's plan or design (*boulê*; cf. Luke 7:30; Acts 2:23; 20:27) and the necessity of events (cf. Luke 9:22; 24:7; Acts 3:21; 17:3) as predetermined by God (Luke 22:22; Acts 10:42). Central to God's plan is the fulfilment of his ancient promises in Jesus, a theme firmly established in Luke's birth and infancy narratives. The story begins in the Temple, where the message that salvation

comes through the Lord's Messiah (2:26) is received by those who long for Israel's redemption (cf. 2:25, 30-32, 38). Zechariah blesses the God of Israel who has raised 'the horn of salvation' within the house of David (1:69), and the angel announces the birth of a saviour in the city of David 'who is Messiah, Lord' (2:11). The language of royal messianic hopes also characterizes Gabriel's announcement of Jesus' birth to Mary, 'he will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David' (1:32; cf. Ps. 2:7; 2 Sam. 7:12-16), although there is no doubt that Luke, like Matthew, is eager to stress that Jesus' divine sonship and lordship⁴⁵ is unique by virtue of his conception by the Holy Spirit (1:35).

Emphasis on the Son's obedience reinforces the Lukan interest in the saving plan of God. The activity of the Holy Spirit, again indicative of divine purpose, features prominently in the prelude to Jesus' Galilean ministry (3:22; 4:1, 14). Jesus announces that the scriptural passage which he reads to his synagogue audience in Nazareth (Isa. 61:1-2, conflated with 58:6) is now fulfilled in their presence (4:21). Hence Luke presents this Isaianic text as a programmatic expression of Jesus' ministry: he has been anointed with the Spirit to carry out a ministry to the poor (cf. 6:20; 18:22), a message of release to the oppressed, including lepers (5:12-16), women (13:10-17) and tax collectors (5:27-32; 19:1-10). And although Jesus himself has little contact with Gentiles (cf. 7:1-10), his mission of removing barriers of division prepares the way for the Gentile mission of the apostles (24:47) as described by Luke in his second volume.

Luke also stresses, to a far greater extent than the other gospels, that Jesus engages in a prophetic ministry.⁴⁶ Jesus' rejection in Nazareth leads him to draw a parallel between his own situation and that of the prophets Elijah and Elijah (4:24-27), while, on a more positive note, the people of Nain glorify God after Jesus raises the widow's son: 'A great prophet has risen among us' (7:16; cf. 24:19; Acts 2:22). Towards the end of the Galilean ministry, after Jesus' prediction of his rejection (9:22), the transfiguration scene includes an unparalleled reference to Moses and Elijah speaking about his imminent 'departure' (*exodos*) (9:31). This not only implies an understanding of Jesus as the prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:15-18; cf. Acts 3:22-23; 7:37) but points to his death and resurrection as a 'new exodus'.⁴⁷

A distinctive aspect of Luke's Gospel is its extended account of Jesus' journey towards Jerusalem (9:51-19:44), whose importance is indicated in the introduction: 'When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem'. This statement expresses Jesus' resolve to reach the city where his mission will be fulfilled through his death, resurrection and ascension (his 'taking up'; cf. Acts 1:2, 11, 22). During this journey Jesus declares that he must (*dei*) be on his way, 'because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem' (13:33). After the resurrection he states that it was necessary (*dei*) for the Messiah to suffer such things to enter into his glory, as written in Moses and the prophets (24:26-27). And when he appears to the disciples in Jerusalem, Jesus again draws attention to the fulfilment of what Moses, the prophets and the psalms had written about him: 'the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day' (24:44-46). In the same way as the infancy narrative announces that Israel's long-awaited salvation is realized in Jesus, the final chapter highlights that Jesus, the suffering Messiah vindicated through resurrection, is indeed the fulfilment of God's promises. Before his

ascension he instructs his disciples to act as witnesses that ‘repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem’ (24:47–48). This commission prepares for their mission, empowered by Spirit, that is narrated in the Acts of the Apostles.

Luke’s favoured vehicle for his christological message in the first half of Acts is a series of speeches delivered by Peter (2:14–39; 3:12–26; 4:8–12; 5:29–32; 10:34–43), and to these one may add Paul’s address to Jews and God-fearers in Pisidian Antioch (13:16–41). These speeches feature kerygmatic summaries⁴⁸ displaying some interest in Jesus’ earthly life (2:22; 10:37–39), but focusing primarily on his death, resurrection and exaltation. Jesus’ suffering and death are depicted as events which accord with ‘the definite plan and foreknowledge of God’ (2:23; cf. 4:28) and, together with his resurrection, are foretold in the Scriptures (2:25–32 [Ps. 16:8–11]; 13:32–37 [Pss. 2:7; 16:10]). The risen and ascended Jesus has thus been exalted to the right hand of God (Acts 2:34–35, citing Ps. 110:1) who ‘has made him both Lord and Messiah’ (2:36). This declaration could imply that *kyrios* and *christos* were titles first conferred upon Jesus by virtue of his resurrection, although the emphasis is probably on divine confirmation rather than installation. Several other titles or designations, some unparalleled, also occur in Acts, especially in Peter’s speech after the healing of the lame man: Jesus is the servant glorified by God (3:13, 26), the holy and righteous one (3:14; cf. 7:52; 22:14), the founder of life (3:15; 5:31), the prophet like Moses (3:22–25). The Jews of Jerusalem would presumably be able to appreciate the theological force of these titles, but they find no place in Peter’s speech at Caesarea where the emphasis lies on the universal significance of Jesus as ‘Lord of all’ (10:36). He is the one whose resurrection and ascension serve as a guarantee for his future role as ‘judge of the living and the dead’ (10:42).

The letter to the Hebrews

Hebrews offers one of the most distinctive interpretations of Jesus in the New Testament, although the identity of its author, like the circumstances and location of its recipients, is shrouded in mystery. What becomes clear is that this letter’s christology is integrally linked to its pastoral concerns, for readers/hearers are exhorted to hold on to their faith in a time of crisis. Appeal is made in the prologue (1:1–4) to a shared confession of faith,⁴⁹ beginning with the definitive character of God’s revelation in Jesus, his Son, compared with the ‘many and various ways’ God spoke through the prophets.⁵⁰ Jesus’ divine sonship – a major theme in this letter – is presented in cosmic terms; the one whom God has appointed heir of all things (cf. Ps. 2:8) is the one ‘through whom he created the worlds’ (1:2). Echoes of Jewish traditions about divine Wisdom can be detected in this description of the Son (cf. 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; John 1:3), especially in the claim that ‘he is the reflection of God’s glory’ (1:3; cf. Wisdom 7:26). But it is upon two further aspects introduced in the prologue that the letter will focus, namely that Christ in his atoning death has made purification for sins and has accordingly been exalted to the right hand of God (1:3). This allusion to Ps. 110:1 prepares the way for an intricately developed christology steeped in scriptural citations and allusions, and the universal sovereignty granted to the Son by means of his exaltation affirms his superiority to the angels (1:4).

The author proceeds to establish the Son's unique status over against the angels with the aid of seven scriptural proof-texts (1:5-14). In virtue of the Son's eternal rule as one designated *theos* (1:8, citing Ps. 45:6) and *kyrios* (1:10, citing Ps. 102:25), the angels are to worship him (1:6) and act as ministering servants (1:14). The Son alone is enthroned at God's right hand, as confirmed by the seventh scriptural citation (1:13, citing Ps. 110:1). The highlighting of Jesus' supremacy over the angels continues in 2:5-9; he is crowned with glory and honour because of the death he endured for all (cf. 1:3; 10:12). It was necessary for him to be made perfect through sufferings (2:10; cf. 5:8) and live in solidarity with the rest of humankind, because only one who is fully human can be a 'merciful and faithful high priest' making a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people (2:14-18).

This christological theme is taken up again in the description of Jesus, the Son of God, as a 'great high priest who has passed through the heavens' (4:14), a theme explored in detail in subsequent chapters (5:1-10; 7:1-10; 18).⁵¹ Christ qualifies for the high priestly role because of his genuine capacity to sympathize with human weaknesses, yet being himself without sin (4:15; cf. 7:26-27). Jesus' divine appointment to the high priestly office is confirmed by Ps. 2:7 (5:5-6) and by another royal psalm repeatedly cited in relation to Jesus' exaltation, but this time linked to his priesthood: 'You are a priest for ever, according to the order of Melchizedek' (110:4). The implications of this designation for Jesus are explained in an exposition of the only other scriptural passage to mention the king-priest Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18-20). The high priesthood of Jesus 'in the order of Melchizedek' is superior to the Levitical priesthood and is permanently effective (7:23-25); Christ, due to his resurrection and ascension, is eternally high priest by 'the power of an indestructible life' (7:16), interceding on behalf of those who draw near to God through him (7:25).

Unlike the repeated offerings of the Levitical priests, Jesus 'once for all' offered himself as the atoning sacrifice (7:26-27; cf. 9:14, 24-26). The high priest of the old order entered the Holy of Holies once a year to make a sacrifice for sins (9:7), but Jesus, by means of his death, has once for all entered 'the Holy Place', the presence of God (9:12; cf. 10:12). He has made the heavenly sanctuary accessible to all, for his death has opened up the way to enable those who accompany him to enter heaven itself (10:19-21). Jesus is not only the forerunner (6:20) but the pioneer and perfecter of faith (12:1-4), and his supreme example of endurance and faithfulness offers encouragement to believers in their present trials (12:5-13).

The Book of Revelation

Those addressed as 'the seven churches in Asia' (1:4) are the recipients of a letter introduced as 'the revelation (*apokalypsis*) of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place' (1:1). The Book of Revelation is therefore presented as a record of divine revelation through/of Jesus, whose decisive role in the apocalyptic unfolding of 'what is and what is to take place' (1:19) is shown through a series of heavenly visions. John experiences his first vision on the island of Patmos (1:10-20), where he encounters 'one like a son of man' commanding him to write down messages for the seven churches. This christophany depicts Jesus as a glorious heavenly being (1:12-16) whose angelic and divine attributes are described

in language drawn from biblical angelophanies and theophanies (cf. Dan. 7:9-14; 10:5-6; Ezek. 1:24; 9:2). This exalted portrayal of Jesus continues when he identifies himself to the seer: 'I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive for ever and ever' (1:17-18). The second part of this declaration confirms that the heavenly figure is the crucified and risen Christ, whose initial self-designation (cf. 2:8; 22:13) resembles God's own self-declaration (1:8; 21:6) and especially his claim to sovereignty in Isaiah (44:6; 48:12; cf. 41:4). For the author to describe Christ as 'the first and the last', and as 'the origin of God's creation' (3:14), is to associate him with God in the closest possible terms.⁵²

It is in the vision of the heavenly throne-room (Rev. 4-5) that the close connection between God and Christ is made most apparent.⁵³ It describes the worship offered by the heavenly host to God, 'the one seated on the throne' (4:8-11), in whose hand is a scroll with seven seals (5:1). John is told that the only one worthy to open the scroll is 'the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David' (5:5), a figure described with the aid of Jewish messianic designations (Gen. 49:9; Isa. 11:1, 10). What John actually sees is a Lamb standing as though it had been slain (5:6). His appearance marks the introduction of a key christological image in Revelation, for the Lamb-Messiah is the crucified Christ who has conquered by means of his redemptive death. A new song is sung in celebration of his victory; the Lamb is worthy to open the scroll because he has by his blood ransomed people for God from all the nations, and 'made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God' (5:9-10; cf. 1:5-6).

A second angelic hymn of praise to the Lamb (5:11-12) closely resembles the honouring of God the Creator (4:11), and the third hymn, sung by the whole creation, addresses them both: 'To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever'. The Lamb becomes the object of heavenly worship alongside God (5:13-14), with Christ elsewhere stating that he has 'sat down with my Father on his throne' (3:21; cf. 7:17; 22:1, 3). This is all the more significant given the references to an angel refusing obeisance from John, declaring 'Worship God!' (19:10; 22:8-9). However, there are indications that Christ's inclusion as the object of worship is not viewed as a compromise of monotheistic belief (cf. 15:3-4). Formulaic expressions such as 'before the throne and before the Lamb' (7:9; cf. 6:16) and 'the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah' (11:15; cf. 12:10; 20:6) express the close relationship between God and the Lamb, yet at the same time they retain a distinction between them.⁵⁴

Following the scene of heavenly worship, the Lamb begins to open the seals to reveal the contents of the scroll, thereby initiating the establishment of God's kingdom on earth. The Lamb's involvement in this plan of judgement and salvation means that he brings wrath upon the wicked (6:16) but leads his people to springs of living water (7:17); he stands triumphantly on Mount Zion with those redeemed from the earth (14:1-5). The text also repeatedly emphasizes the nearness of the end, with Christ himself declaring 'I am coming soon' (3:11; 22:7, 12, 20). The Lamb has already conquered by his sacrificial death (3:21; 5:5; cf. 12:11), but he will conquer again at the *parousia*, as illustrated by a vision of Christ riding on a white horse with the heavenly armies (19:11-16). Final victory will result in the new creation,⁵⁵ and so John sees a holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from heaven (21:1-2). The appearance of heaven on earth signifies the fulfilment of God's plan to establish his

universal kingdom, for his presence fills the new Jerusalem whose temple is ‘the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb’ (21:22).

The Gospel of John and the letters of John

John’s Gospel offers a summary statement of purpose in its originally intended conclusion: ‘But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name’ (20:31). Behind the two titles selected here to express the content of Johannine belief lies a distinctive christology which underpins John’s Gospel from beginning to end; its narratives and discourses are explicitly concerned with Jesus’ true identity and, in a manner unparalleled in the Synoptic Gospels, with his revelatory and salvific role.⁵⁶ The Johannine Jesus speaks openly about his origins, his relationship with the Father, and his gift of eternal life to all who believe in him. He is often depicted as defending his claims in confrontation with ‘the Jews’, a designation used primarily for the religious authorities who accuse Jesus of making himself equal to God (5:18–19; 10:33). If John, as is widely proposed, presents a two-level drama centred on the historical ministry of Jesus and the situation of ‘the Johannine community’,⁵⁷ then exalted claims about Jesus were probably at the heart of the controversies with which Johannine Christians had to contend (cf. 9:22; 12:42; 16:2).

John’s christological assertions begin in the prologue (1:1–18), where Jesus is identified with the Word (*logos*) of God. To state that the Word was ‘in the beginning’ (1:1) amounts to a declaration of timeless existence, one to which Jesus lays claim during his earthly ministry (8:58; 17:5). The opening verse clearly seeks to express the relationship between the Word and God (‘the Word was with God’), although the precise meaning of the subsequent affirmation that ‘the Word was God’ continues to be the subject of considerable debate; the absence of the definite article before ‘God’ has been interpreted to mean that, while John identifies the Word as God (*theos*), ‘it avoids any suggestion of personal identification of the Word with the Father’ (Brown 1966: 1:24). Even if the verse maintains a distinction between the Word and God, Jesus is also called *theos* in 1:18 (if one accepts the reading ‘the only-begotten, God’) and in the confession of Thomas (20:28: ‘My Lord and my God’). This is not a title claimed by the earthly Jesus, but its attribution to him at key points in the narrative expresses belief in him as the definitive revelation of God. As the vehicle for God’s self-disclosure in the world, the Word becomes flesh and reveals his glory (1:14). Since ‘no one has ever seen God’ (1:18; cf. Exod. 33:20), the revelation communicated by the Son is superior to that received in the past, for he alone is in direct communion with the Father. It is through him, the Word incarnate, that humankind receives the revelation of life (1:4), light (1:4–5), grace and truth (1:14).

Scholars who attempt to identify different christological strands in John’s Gospel usually attribute the prologue to a later stage of development, although its Logos christology determines the overall presentation of Jesus in the Gospel in its present form. The Logos title does not appear again, but the Father-Son language (1:14–18) is sustained throughout the narrative to express Jesus’ significance as the one who reveals God (Thompson 2015: 54–55). He is described as the ‘only-begotten Son’ (1:14; 3:16, 18) who is loved by the Father (cf. 5:20; 10:17) and to whom he has

‘given all things’ (3:35). The one sent into the world (3:17; 10:36) also expresses consciousness of his eternal status as Son, for when Jesus states ‘I declare what I have seen in the Father’s presence’ (8:38) he is testifying to what he, and he alone, has seen and heard in heaven before his descent to the world. Even the words and works of the Son are not his own but those of the Father (cf. 5:36; 8:28; 12:49–50; 14:10).

During his earthly life the Son speaks and acts in unity with the Father (10:30: ‘The Father and I are one’); to see him is to see the Father (12:45; 14:9), and whoever knows him knows the Father (8:19; 14:7). Because belief in Jesus leads to eternal life, the Son can declare that he, like the Father, has the power to give life (5:21). He has also been given authority to execute judgement (5:27), for all who encounter Jesus are expected to respond to him; those who believe enter the light and gain life, but those who reject him remain in darkness and face death. The coming of Jesus amounts to the judgement of this world (12:31), even though the purpose of his mission was that ‘the world might be saved through him’ (3:17). It is in obedience to the Father’s plan that he follows the path of the cross (4:34), but he does so as one who is in full control (10:18; 13:27; 18:4–8; 19:30). Jesus’ death is therefore depicted as the fulfilment of his mission to reveal the Father and to complete his salvific work: ‘It is finished’ (19:30). The ‘lifting up’ of Jesus points to this salvific death as an act of exaltation, for John takes advantage of the double meaning of the verb *hupsōō* as connoting both the physical raising up and the exaltation of Jesus on the cross (3:14; 8:28; 12:32–34). It also signifies the arrival of Jesus’ hour of glorification (12:23; 13:31), in that his death and resurrection are the supreme revelation of God’s glory and the means whereby the Son returns to the Father to the glory which was his before creation (17:5).

The significance of Jesus as God’s revelatory and salvific presence also finds expression in John’s well-known ‘I am’ declarations. On seven occasions Jesus uses ‘I am’ (*egō eimi*) in combination with an image drawn primarily from scriptural promises of divine salvation. For Jesus to declare that he is the bread of life (6:35), the light of the world (8:12) or the true vine (15:1) is to claim that he is the source and giver of eternal life. On other occasions ‘I am’ (*egō eimi*) possesses no predicate, as in Jesus’ pronouncement ‘Before Abraham was, I am’ (8:58; cf. 8:24, 28; 13:19). The key to unlock the christological significance of these ‘absolute’ statements is the use of *egō eimi* in the Greek versions of Isaiah (41:4; 43:10; 46:4; 52:6) and the Song of Moses (Deut. 32:39) to express Yahweh’s claim to unique sovereignty (Hebrew: *anî hû’*). Jesus, like Yahweh, pronounces *egō eimi* to convey his role as revealer and saviour; he exists from eternity (8:58), he is able to foretell and control events (13:19), offers salvation to those who believe in him (8:28; cf. 6:20; 18:8), although those who reject him face condemnation (8:24). The Johannine Jesus can speak in this manner because he is the eternal Word incarnate, the unique revelation of God.

One factor that led to the composition of the Johannine letters, which were probably not from the hand(s) of the author of John’s Gospel, was that certain believers had deviated from the community’s teaching by embracing a kind of ‘docetic’ christology which cast doubt on the reality of Jesus’ humanity; his divine glory was emphasized to such an extent that the significance of his earthly life and the salvific effects of his death were disputed. The first two letters of John thus reaffirm the confession that ‘Jesus Christ has come in the flesh’ (1 John 4:2–3; 2 John 7) and that he ‘came by water and blood’ (1 John 5:6). Believers are exhorted to walk in the light, for Jesus’

blood cleanses from all sin (1:7; cf. 2:1-2; 3:5; 4:10). Other pronouncements certainly resemble the christology of John's Gospel, for to state that the Son was sent by God 'so that we might live through him' (1 John 4:9) firmly echoes the Gospel's pivotal declaration that 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life' (3:16). In this respect both the Gospel and letters of John attest the central christological conviction expressed in all the writings of the New Testament, namely that Jesus, the Christ and unique Son of God, is the key to divine salvation.

NOTES

- 1 For example, Bultmann (1952) I: 26-32.
- 2 Hahn (1963); Fuller (1965).
- 3 Marshall (1990).
- 4 Hengel (1983) 40-47.
- 5 Chester (2011) 26.
- 6 Hengel (1995) 119-225; Eskola (2001) 158-216.
- 7 Fitzmyer (1979) 124-25.
- 8 Hurtado (1998).
- 9 Horbury (1998).
- 10 Hurtado (2003) 135-37; cf. Fee (2007) 163-67.
- 11 Hurtado (19982:) 99-114; (2003) 134-53, 155-216; cf. Casey (1999) 214-33.
- 12 Rainbow (1991) 84.
- 13 Hurtado (19982) 17-92; Davis (1994).
- 14 Hurtado (19982) 36-37, 46-48; also Dunn (19962) 163-76, 213-30.
- 15 Stuckenbruck (1995).
- 16 Bauckham (1993b) 118.
- 17 Hurtado (19982) 117-22; (2003) 64-74; (2005) 179-204.
- 18 On the visionary experiences of Paul as a key christological catalyst, see Chester (2007) 80-105, 119-21; Rowland and Morray-Jones (2009) 137-65.
- 19 For particularly helpful outlines of the scholarly debate, see Chester (2007) 13-45; (2011) 22-50; Fletcher-Louis (2015) 3-30.
- 20 Dunn (19962); Casey (1991).
- 21 Bauckham (1998); (2008) 1-17, 60-126, 182-85.
- 22 For example, Boyarin (2006); Fletcher-Louis (2015) 128-32, 171-292.
- 23 Yarbrow, Collins and Collins (2008).
- 24 Rowland (1982) 94-113.
- 25 Fossum (1985) 318-20.
- 26 Horbury (1998) 127-40; (2005) 3-24.
- 27 Keck (1986) 368-70; Tuckett (2001) 8-11.
- 28 Adams (2011) 96-97.
- 29 Kim (1984) Longenecker (1997).
- 30 Hurtado (2003) 99; Novenson (2012).
- 31 Jewett (2007) 107.
- 32 See also Tilling (2012).
- 33 Ziesler (1990) 35.
- 34 Dunn (1998) 267-77.
- 35 See Schüssler Fiorenza (1975).
- 36 Dunn (1996) 114-21; (1998) 281-88.
- 37 Hurtado (2005) 83-107; Bauckham (2008) 197-210.

- 38 Tannehill (1979); Matera (1999) 5–26; Telford (2011) 21–24.
- 39 Marcus (2009) 846–55.
- 40 Allison (2008) 117–32.
- 41 Stanton (1992) 10–12.
- 42 Luz (1995) 9.
- 43 Tuckett (2001) 120–23.
- 44 Squires (1993).
- 45 Rowe (2006).
- 46 Gaventa (2008) 157–59.
- 47 Tuckett (1996) 84.
- 48 Bauckham (1996) 185–217.
- 49 Isaacs (1992) 186–88; cf. Tuckett (2001) 94–96.
- 50 Bauckham (2008) 233–53.
- 51 see Hagner (2005) 247–67.
- 52 Bauckham (1993a) 54–58; Lincicum (2009) 128–33.
- 53 Koester (2001) 71–80.
- 54 Stuckenbruck (1995) 261–62.
- 55 Boxall (2002) 77–80.
- 56 Edwards (2014) 73–85.
- 57 Martyn (1979); Brown (1979).

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