

Chapter 6

MARK

The person of Jesus is absolutely central for Mark. Such a statement may sound bland, even trite to the point of being ridiculous. As we have already said, the person of Jesus was central for all early Christians. And to say that Jesus occupies centre stage in Mark's story hardly distinguishes Mark from the other evangelists: in all the Gospels, Jesus is the central figure of the narrative. Yet it is perhaps the case that, even more than in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, the question of who Jesus is provides the central focus of Mark's narrative. The opening verse identifies who the narrative is all about ('The gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God' 1: 1); John the Baptist in Mark speaks only about Jesus in his preaching (1: 7-8);¹ the voice from heaven at Jesus' baptism speaks only to identify who Jesus is ('You are my Son, the Beloved' 1: 11). And this continues throughout the story as told by Mark. A key point in the narrative is the confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi where Peter makes his assertion about Jesus' identity ('You are the Christ' 8: 29). At Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin, a key issue is clearly the question of who Jesus is (14: 61-2); and finally, when Jesus dies, the centurion at the foot of the cross identifies and confesses Jesus as the Son of God (15: 39). Coupled with this is a prominent theme running through the whole of Mark's Gospel concerning *secrecy*. On several occasions, Jesus seeks to hide his identity and keep it secret (cf. 1: 39; 3: 11-12; 8: 30; 9: 9, etc.) The question then of who Jesus is – and perhaps who is allowed (or can) know who he is – is an absolutely central one for Mark.²

We must also bear in mind all that has been said in the introductory chapter about the nature of the Gospels as narratives, and about the fact that Mark does not write a doctrinal treatise on Christology.

Christology is of vital importance for Mark, but he presents what he wants to say in the form of a story. Mark's Christology is thus very much a 'narrative Christology'. Yet we should not lose sight of the fact that, in the telling of his narrative, key christological terms or 'titles' play an important role. Part of Mark's aim is clearly to ascribe such terms or titles to Jesus; part too of his aim may have been to give a particular emphasis or 'twist' to some of these titles, via the narrative. It may therefore be appropriate to try to approach the question of Mark's Christology via his use of key christological titles, whilst bearing in mind all the caveats we mentioned earlier about over-reliance on the use of titles in analysing New Testament Christology.

Lord

The term Lord (*kyrios*) seems to play a rather insignificant role in Mark. This is perhaps surprising, given that Mark (very probably) comes from a Hellenistic Christian milieu, and in many respects shows himself strikingly similar to Paul and Pauline Christianity. Yet *kyrios* does not seem to have been a very important term christologically for Mark. It occurs in Mark 5: 19 at the end of the story of the Gerasene demoniac ('Tell them how much the Lord has done for you'); but it is not clear if the reference here is to Jesus or to God. In Jesus' instructions to the two disciples to fetch the colt on which he will ride into Jerusalem, they are told to tell anyone who asks that 'The Lord needs it' (11: 3); but it is uncertain how significant christologically this is: the words could simply mean 'our master needs it'. Finally, there is the debate in 12: 35–8 between Jesus and the scribes about whether the Messiah can be the Son of David. Jesus, appealing to Psalm 110, claims that the Messiah must be David's 'Lord' and hence cannot be his son. Again the significance is not at all clear. The argument seems to be something of a verbal swordplay; and it is in any case not explicitly related to Jesus himself but has the form of a rather abstract discussion about 'the Messiah' in general.

These are the only instances where Mark uses *kyrios* in a potentially christological way and hence it seems that the term was not of great interest or significance for him.

Messiah

There is more uncertainty about the significance of the term Messiah/Christ for Mark. In terms of numbers of occurrences, the word

christos is relatively rare in the Gospel, occurring only seven times (1: 1; 8: 29; 9: 41; 12: 35; 13: 21; 14: 61; 15: 32). How significant the term is, and what meaning Mark attaches to the term, is not always clear. For example in 9: 41 ('whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ') the term seems to have lost all its original significance as a title and has become just a proper name. The same may also apply in the title verse in 1: 1 ('The gospel of Jesus Christ'). In 13: 21 the word refers to false messiahs; in 15: 32 it is part of the mockery of Jesus by the crowds while he hangs on the cross; and 12: 35 is part of the somewhat abstract debate between Jesus and the scribes which we have already considered briefly (cf. above).

The term does occur significantly in Peter's confession (8: 29) and in the question put to Jesus about his identity by the high priest at the Sanhedrin trial (14: 61). Further, whatever its precise significance, the word does occur in the title verse 1: 1, part of the function of which is evidently to announce to the reader right at the start who Jesus is and what categories he is to be seen in.

Yet there must remain some doubt about just how significant this is as a christological category. It is clearly one that Mark does not regard negatively.³ Yet one wonders if it expresses the most important aspect of Jesus' person for Mark. This may be indicated by two pieces of evidence. First, in the two main occurrences where Jesus is called the Christ (and in both, implicitly or explicitly, accepts the term), Jesus is immediately portrayed as going on to refer to his role as Son of Man (8: 31; 14: 62). Perhaps then, for Mark, talk of Jesus as a Messiah figure has to be qualified by reference to Jesus as a Son of Man figure.

Second, the way the story of Peter's confession is told in Mark's narrative may be revealing. The story is placed by Mark immediately after the story of the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida (8: 22–6). It is widely agreed that the two stories are deliberately juxtaposed by Mark: the healing of the blind man serves as a kind of 'acted parable' for Peter's confession, so that the man coming to 'sight' illustrates Peter's coming to the 'insight' of who Jesus is. The healing story is, however, notable for the fact that the man only comes to full sight gradually. He is healed in two stages, and after the first stage, can only see in a confused way. It may be then that Mark wishes to imply that Peter only comes to a true insight of who Jesus is gradually, and at this point in the narrative, with his confession of Jesus as Messiah, has only reached an intermediate stage.⁴ This is suggested too by the immediate sequel

to the story in Mark: here Jesus speaks of his role (as Son of Man) as one who must suffer rejection, violence and death (8: 31), a role which Peter vehemently disputes (v. 32) and which in turn evokes a stern rebuke by Jesus ('Get behind me, Satan!' v. 33). It seems that, for all Peter's correct insight in his confession, he has failed to grasp one of the most important facets of Jesus' mission. Thus for Mark, although messiahship is an important factor in the picture of who Jesus is, it may not express all that there is to say, perhaps not even the most important thing about Jesus. As already hinted at, some of this may be indicated by the use of the term Son of Man.

Son of Man

In terms of numbers of occurrences the term Son of Man is clearly of great importance for Mark, occurring as it does some fourteen times. Apart from two occurrences in chapter 2 which seem to refer to Jesus' activity in his earthly ministry (2: 10, 28), the phrase comes exclusively in the second half of the Gospel. Here it is used in two related contexts. First, it is used by Jesus to relate to his destiny of having to undergo suffering and death (cf. the three passion predictions in 8: 31; 9: 31; 10: 33, all of which are in terms of Jesus in his role as Son of Man; also similarly 9: 13; 10: 45; 14: 21, etc.). Then secondly it is used to refer to Jesus in his role at the parousia, 'coming' as the one vindicated by God and now active in dispensing judgement (8: 38; 13: 26; 14: 62).

It is quite clear that, for Mark at least, the last part of this overall picture is seen in terms of the vision of Daniel 7. Mark 14: 62 and 13: 26 clearly allude to the Danielic passage (cf. the language of the Son of Man 'coming' on/with the 'clouds of heaven'). Hence Jesus *qua* Son of Man is clearly identified with the figure who is described in Daniel 7: 13 as 'one like a son of man'.

Although it is disputed, a strong case can be made for the other main pole of Mark's language about Jesus as Son of Man being also Danielic, namely the idea of Jesus as the one who is to suffer. In Daniel 7, the 'one like a son of man' acts as some kind of representative of the 'saints of the Most High'. In Daniel's vision these correspond to the Jews suffering persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes because of loyalty to their Jewish faith and practice. Thus although the 'son of man' figure of Daniel 7 is not explicitly said to be a suffering figure, nevertheless the context in which the chapter was written suggests

strongly that the scene of vindication and triumph which it paints is one of triumph out of suffering. Thus built into the Danielic picture may be the twin idea of both suffering *and* subsequent vindication. It is just this which is reflected in Mark's picture of Jesus: Jesus *qua* Son of Man fulfils the Danielic role by being one whose destiny is to suffer but who is promised vindication after that suffering in the heavenly court.⁵

Both these features are clearly of great significance for Mark. The idea that Jesus is one who must suffer is one that dominates the Gospel. The whole narrative is structured to show in story form the gradual build-up in hostility to Jesus by others, and also the failure of the disciples to support him, so that in the end Jesus is isolated from everyone and dies alone and almost in despair (cf. the cry of dereliction in 15: 34). Yet beyond that despair there is hope and a promise of vindication by God, so that Jesus will come again at the end of time in triumph (13: 26; 14: 62).

It may be worth noting too at this point that the two Son of Man sayings in the early part of the Gospel (2: 10, 28) may also fit this pattern.⁶ Both occur in a series of five controversies (2: 1-3: 6) which illustrate the start of the build-up of the hostility to Jesus shown by the Jewish authorities, a hostility which will end in his death (cf. the death plot in 3: 6). A number of features in these stories act as pointers to the reader to the fate in store for Jesus.⁷ The references to Jesus as Son of Man may perform the same function, acting as hints to the reader of what is to come: the one who can forgive sins (2: 10) and who also is Lord of the Sabbath (2: 28) is the one who is arousing hostility and opposition and who will therefore have to go the way of the 'Son of Man' figure, the way that leads to the cross.

Seen in this light the Son of Man sayings in Mark show a remarkable coherence and homogeneity; they also clearly highlight key features of what is important about Jesus for Mark. Yet does Son of Man express the most profound truth about Jesus for Mark? Arguably not.⁸ As in all the Gospels, no character apart from Jesus uses the term. It is thus never used in any kind of confessional setting: no one ever says 'you are the Son of Man'. Nor is there any secrecy attached to the term. Quite what the significance of secrecy is in Mark is debated; but one important aspect seems to be that it provides a means by which Jesus' true identity is only revealed when it is clear that it will not be misunderstood. Yet no secrecy attaches to the term Son of Man. No one is

ever warned not to make Jesus' identity as Son of Man known to others. Finally we may note that on just two occasions in Mark, God himself speaks. In the stories of the baptism and the transfiguration, a voice from heaven says that Jesus is 'my son' (1: 11; 9: 7), implying that Jesus is to be seen as Son of God.⁹ It is then perhaps 'Son of God' that expresses a yet more profound truth about who Jesus is, and it is to this that we must now turn.

Son of God

Although not frequent in the Gospel, the term Son of God applied to Jesus occurs at key points in Mark's narrative. It (probably) occurs in the title verse 1: 1,¹⁰ whose function is in part to define for the readers the terms of the story to come:¹¹ the narrative is about the one who is the Son of God – indeed, as we shall see, the narrative to a certain extent defines what divine sonship means. The application of the 'title' to Jesus is given the backing of the authority of God himself in the words of the voice from heaven at the baptism and the transfiguration.¹² The demons recognise that Jesus is the Son of God, but their knowledge is put under a ban of secrecy (3: 11–12). Only at the Sanhedrin trial does Jesus himself acknowledge the term openly (14: 61–2). Then, in what is a climactic scene in Mark's narrative, at the moment when Jesus dies on the cross, the centurion confesses Jesus to have been the Son of God (15: 39). Despite then its relatively infrequent occurrence in the Gospel, it seems clear that Son of God is of vital significance for Mark as the term most adequately describing who Jesus is. But what does the phrase imply or mean?

We have seen in chapter 1 that the term had a very wide range of possible meanings in the ancient world. One possible meaning is reflected in the use of the phrase in Judaism to refer to a righteous sufferer, a person persecuted for his faith and his commitment (Wisd. 2–5). A background such as this would certainly explain some of the Markan references, especially the verses in the passion narrative. But it remains doubtful how far this will explain the fact that Jesus *qua* exorcist is seen as Son of God (cf. Mark 3: 11–12), or the heavy investment in the term made in 1: 1; 1: 11; 9: 7.

Another possibility is that the term is used messianically: Jesus *qua* Son of God is seen as the Messiah.¹³ A lot of the Markan evidence would appear to support this. The question of the high priest at the

Sanhedrin trial ('Are you the Christ, the son of the Blessed [i.e. God]?') places Christ/Messiah and Son of God in parallel as if they were synonymous. So too the opening title verse does almost the same.¹⁴ If at the same time a Messiah is conceived in terms of a royal figure, this would all tie in with the very strong stress that emerges in the later part of Mark's passion narrative (especially ch. 15) where it is implied repeatedly that Jesus is a 'king'.¹⁵ So, too, right at the start of Mark's passion narrative, Jesus is 'anointed' (14: 3–9). There is then a powerful strain in Mark's passion narrative emphasising that Jesus is a *royal* figure: it is as the messianic king that he goes to his death, even though the very narrative itself, by virtue of the fact that it is recounting a violent and shameful death, implies an almost complete reversal of previous ideas of what royalty and messiahship involved. It may be then that Jesus' divine sonship is seen by Mark exclusively in these royal, messianic terms.

Yet it may be that Son of God for Mark expresses more as well. We have already seen that the word 'Messiah' itself is relatively rare in Mark and does not receive an enormous emphasis. Further, as we saw, the story in 8: 26–30 may imply that Peter's confession of Jesus as *christos* is somewhat inadequate. It *may* be that it is simply the *idea* of messiahship that is inadequate, and to a certain extent this must be the case, since Mark clearly does not regard the term *christos* itself as an improper one to apply to Jesus. Yet it may also be that Mark regards (an)other term(s) as more adequate to capture the essence of who Jesus is. In one way, Son of Man may be exercising this role.¹⁶ But it may also be that Son of God, whilst in one way capable of being taken as (simply) a messianic, royal term, also carries further overtones of meaning for Mark. It may then be these that are important for Mark and hence lead to the term being used on its own, without an explicit reference to messiahship, in such key contexts as 1: 11, 9: 7 and 15: 39.

The scene at the crucifixion may provide the key. Here the centurion's confession (15: 39) is in response to the actual death of Jesus (v. 37); but that moment of death is immediately followed by the note about the veil of the Temple being torn in two (v. 38). This note about the veil is clearly meant to have great symbolic meaning for Mark, as in some way indicating the theological consequences and significance of Jesus' death. The problem is to know what that significance is, and in particular to know which veil is in mind. Two possibilities are often noted. One is that the veil is the barrier separating Jews from Gentiles – hence

its removal means the universalisation of the Gospel to encompass all people. However, it may be that what is in mind is the veil inside the Holy of Holies in the Temple. This is the veil that symbolically hides and separates God from all human beings. If then it is this veil that is symbolically destroyed in the death of Jesus, then Mark's narrative becomes an extraordinarily powerful piece of theological writing. For the narrative implies that, in the death of Jesus, the barrier preventing human beings from seeing God has been removed. God is now seen – but is seen precisely in the figure of the dead Jesus hanging on a cross. It is then this that seems to be reflected in the centurion's confession of Jesus as Son of God.¹⁷

Jesus *qua* Son of God is the one who enables God himself to be seen. (In this then Mark is perhaps closer to much later Christian claims about Jesus' divine sonship than others.) But the context is also vitally important. For not only does the centurion's confession say something about Jesus: it may also say something about God. The narrative seems to be emphasising starkly that God is to be seen in this figure of powerlessness, weakness and death. This too is what Mark's narrative has been leading up to as a climax. It is the moment when Jesus' true identity is seen in its clearest light and hence shows what it means to be 'Son of God'. But it also shows something of the God who lies behind the whole story, who defines and accepts Jesus as his Son, and who reveals himself – on the cross. The very first line of Mark's Gospel defines the terms of the story that is to come: Jesus *is* the Son of God. But what sonship means, and what 'God' means, is determined by the story itself. It is thus very much the case that Mark offers a *narrative* Christology. The story is vital and indispensable for his message. It is almost as if Mark is aware that christological terms can be multivalent. Hence he writes his story to show what he regards as the true significance of words that can be spoken. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. But the nature of kingship, sonship and of divinity, are all given a stark new meaning by Mark's story, especially by his account of Jesus' death on the cross. Mark's Jesus is perhaps closest to the 'crucified God' of some modern theologians.¹⁸

NOTES

1. In this then Mark differs from Q where John the Baptist gives his own eschatological preaching and warnings: cf. Luke 3: 7–9 par.

2. On the theme of secrecy in Mark, see my Introduction and the other essays in Tuckett (ed.), *The Messianic Secret* (London: SPCK, 1983); also H. Räisänen, *The Messianic Secret in Mark's Gospel* (ET Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991).
3. This has been denied by some who have argued that Mark is uniformly negative about the disciples in the story: cf. e.g. T. J. Weeden, *Mark – Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), who thinks that Mark is conducting something of a vendetta against the disciples in the story and, through them, against an opposition group in his own church. However, the structure of the pericope here suggests that Mark thinks that Peter's confession is not entirely wrong: the words of Peter are clearly contrasted with the views of the 'people' mentioned in vv. 27–8. Clearly they are *inadequate* – hence the implication is that Peter's viewpoint is better. Whether it is entirely right is another matter: see below.
4. Cf. E. S. Johnson, 'Mark 8: 22–26. The Blind Man from Bethsaida', *NTS* 25 (1979), pp. 370–83.
5. For a similar view, cf. M. D. Hooker, *The Son of Man in Mark* (London: SPCK, 1967). See further, pp. 216–19 below (in relation to Jesus himself).
6. For what follows, cf. my 'The present Son of Man', *JSNT*, 14 (1982), pp. 58–81.
7. E.g., in 2: 7 Jesus is accused of 'blasphemy', anticipating the charge on which he will be condemned to death in 14: 64. In 2: 20, the prediction is made that the time will come when 'the bridegroom will be taken away', almost certainly another allusion to Jesus' death.
8. For what follows, cf. J. D. Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), esp. pp. 157–66 (although I am less persuaded by Kingsbury's own interpretation of the significance of Son of Man for Mark).
9. Kingsbury rightly stresses the importance of the fact that here it is *God* himself speaking, and hence presumably expressing a 'point of view' which Mark would regard as unquestionably valid and important. This must then tell against some who have argued that Mark wishes to 'correct' a 'Son of God' Christology by his 'Son of Man' Christology: cf. Weeden, *Mark*; also N. Perrin, 'The Christology of Mark: A study in Methodology', *JR* 51 (1971), pp. 173–87, repr. in W. R. Telford (ed.), *The Interpretation of Mark* (London: SPCK, 1985), pp. 95–108.
10. The words 'Son of God' are missing from some MSS of Mark, but the importance of the term in the rest of Mark suggests that they should probably be read here as well.
11. This probably applies to the whole of the prologue of the Gospel in 1: 1–13 (or perhaps 1: 1–15): see F. J. Matera, 'The prologue as the

- interpretative key to Mark's gospel', *JSNT* 34 (1988), pp. 3–20; and what applies to the prologue applies to the initial 'title' verse even more.
12. Hence any theories that Mark disapproved of the term, or wanted to correct it, e.g. via Son of Man, are very implausible. Cf. n. 9 above.
 13. Cf. D. H. Juel, 'The origin of Mark's Christology', in Charlesworth (ed.), *The Messiah*, pp. 449–60.
 14. Though 'Christ' in 1: 1 has no definite article and is virtually a proper name: cf. above.
 15. Cf. 15: 2, 9, 12, 18, 26, 32. Some of these are said in apparent mockery, but Mark's passion narrative is shot through with a powerful use of irony and hence these mockings are probably intended by Mark to express a profound truth about Jesus.
 16. As we have already noted, talk of Jesus' messiahship in 8: 30 and in 14: 61 is immediately qualified by Mark's Jesus talking of himself as Son of Man.
 17. Cf. H. L. Chronis, 'The torn veil: Cultus and Christology in Mark 15: 37–39', *JBL* 101 (1982), pp. 97–114.
 18. Cf. especially J. Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (ET London: SCM Press, 1974), whose debt to the Markan passion narrative is clear.

Chapter 7

MATTHEW

All the general observations we have already made – about the potentially misleading picture which can emerge by focusing on christological titles alone, and about the importance of taking seriously the genre of the Gospels as stories, not doctrinal treatises – apply even more when we turn to the Gospel of Matthew and seek to identify Matthew's Christology. We must also be alive to the possibility that a neat, coherent Christology may not emerge from the Gospel. Matthew is famous (or infamous!) among the evangelists for presenting elements that appear at times to be in considerable tension with each other on key issues such as Jesus' attitude to the Jewish Law, or Jesus' attitude to Gentiles.¹ There is no space here to enter into these debates, but their very existence should alert us to the fact that the Christology which emerges from Matthew's Gospel may present at least a rather variegated picture.

With Matthew we must also be aware of the evangelist's indebtedness to his sources. Matthew is almost certainly using Mark as a source, and, as we have seen, Mark's Gospel focuses on the christological question of who Jesus is in a major way. Many of the texts that are key parts of the evidence for Mark's Christology thus reappear in Matthew. We cannot discount the significance such texts might have in Matthew simply because they are taken over from Mark. Matthew has made a conscious decision to include them and hence they contribute to the overall picture of Matthew's Christology.² But we may also note some places where Matthew changes Mark in rewriting the Markan account, and some of these changes may tell us a lot about Matthew's own concerns. Our approach here will therefore be both synchronic and

diachronic, looking at Matthew's story as a whole *and* at the way he has (at times) adapted his sources.

I start with some of the christological titles used by Matthew, but we must bear in mind that these may only give us part of the whole picture.

Son of God

Few would question the importance of the category Son of God as being of crucial significance for Matthew's Christology. Within modern Matthean scholarship, no one has done more to emphasize this than J. D. Kingsbury who, in a range of studies and using a number of different approaches to the text, has shown how the term plays a key role in Matthew's presentation of the Gospel story.³

Several of the key texts are taken over by Matthew from Mark (though, as already noted, this need not detract from their importance for Matthew as well as for Mark!). Thus, like Mark, Matthew has God himself state that Jesus is his Son at the baptism (Matt. 3: 17) and the transfiguration (Matt. 17: 5). So too Matthew has the declaration of Jesus' divine sonship at the Sanhedrin trial (26: 63) and by the centurion at the foot of the cross (27: 54). Like Mark, he has Jesus implicitly refer to himself as the Son in the parable of the wicked husbandmen (Matt. 21: 33–46, cf. Mark 12: 1–12), though Matthew then reinforces this (again implicitly) by the parable which Matthew places immediately after: here Matthew has the (Q) parable of the Great Supper (22: 1–10, cf. Luke 14: 16–24), and, in Matthew, the meal is a marriage feast by a king for his 'son' (probably intended to refer to God and Jesus respectively). In Luke the supper is an ordinary meal made by an ordinary man, and it is very likely that Matthew's reference to the king and his son here is due to MattR. Thus Matthew has significantly enhanced the Markan allusion to Jesus as God's Son.

Similar enhancement occurs elsewhere. Matthew adds to Mark an account of Jesus' birth and the events surrounding it. Here Jesus is presented as born of a virgin who conceives 'by the Holy Spirit' (1: 18), by implication then being 'Son of God'. The term itself is then used explicitly in 2: 15 where Matthew sees the return of Jesus from Egypt as the fulfilment of the prophecy from Hosea 'Out of Egypt have I called my son' (Hos. 11: 1). Later in the Gospel, Matthew changes Mark on occasions to mention Jesus' divine sonship. At the end of the

story of the walking on the water, Matthew replaces Mark's characteristic note about the disciples' failure to understand (Mark 6: 52) by saying that the disciples 'worshipped' Jesus, openly confessing 'Truly you are the Son of God' (Matt. 14: 33). In the story of Peter's confession, Matthew expands Peter's words as they appear in Mark from 'You are the Christ' (Mark 8: 29) to 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God' (Matt. 16: 16). He then follows this with the famous blessing on Peter (Matt. 16: 17–19): hence the reaction of Jesus to Peter's confession is now unambiguously positive.⁴ At the account of Jesus' crucifixion, Matthew also expands Mark on two occasions so that the mockers now explicitly refer to Jesus' claim to be the Son of God (Matt. 27: 40, 43). Matthew shares with Luke the Q saying Matthew 11: 25–7 (cf. Luke 10: 20–1) where Jesus as the Son is in a unique position in relation to God; and finally Matthew alone has the risen Jesus command the disciples to go out and baptise 'in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit' (Matt. 28: 19), placing the Son alongside God himself and the Spirit in a trinitarian-type formula that looks far more in line with later Christian orthodoxy than most of the rest of the New Testament. In view of all this evidence there can be little doubt that Son of God is a christological term of very great importance for Matthew.

Its precise significance is another matter. In some respects Matthew presents a significantly different viewpoint from that of Mark, even in relation to the texts they share in common. For example, the centurion's confession at the foot of the cross is presented rather differently. In Mark, as we saw, the centurion's confession is in direct response to Jesus' death: Jesus dies, the veil of the temple is torn in two, and the centurion makes his confession. Matthew, however, interposes between the verse about the temple veil and the centurion's confession the note about the earth being split open, tombs being opened and the bodies of the dead being seen alive by many (27: 51b–3). The centurion's confession is thus not so much a response to the death of Jesus itself, but rather to a great divine miracle of (general) resurrection. Certainly some of the starkness of Mark's account is lost in Matthew's re-telling.

Jesus' divine sonship for Matthew may have a number of facets. In one way, Jesus *qua* Son of God is the one who is supremely obedient to God the Father. The extra redactional references to Jesus as Son of God in Matthew 27: 40 and 43 in the mockery at the cross strongly echo the language of Wisdom 2 about the righteous sufferer (especially Wisd. 2: 18), so that Jesus as God's Son is seen as the suffering, righteous

person. At the baptism, Matthew prefaces the story of the baptism itself with an extra conversation between John the Baptist and Jesus, where John questions whether it is right that he baptise Jesus rather than vice versa, but is told by Jesus to go ahead so that they will 'fulfil all righteousness' (Matt. 3: 15): for Matthew 'righteousness' is clearly a key word and refers to the right behaviour, the obedience, which human beings owe to God.⁵ If Jesus here then 'fulfils all righteousness' in being baptised, he is above all being obedient to the will of God. God's declaration that Jesus is his Son at the baptism itself then confirms this. This is also shown by the Q Temptation story which immediately follows the baptism in Matthew. Here Jesus is explicitly tested by the Devil as Son of God: 'If you are the Son of God . . .' (Matt. 4: 3, 6). Each time it is a temptation to put God to the test; but each time Jesus shows himself obedient to God's word (cf. especially 4: 4).

Yet there is clearly more to Jesus as Son of God for Matthew than this. At the account of the Transfiguration, God declares Jesus to be his Son, and then immediately tells the disciples 'Listen to him!' (17: 5). Matthew here echoes Deuteronomy 18: 15 and the prediction of a prophet like Moses. As we shall see, Matthew invests some energy in presenting Jesus as a Mosaic-type figure (see below). But in any case, the picture here is not so much of a figure showing obedience as of a person to whom obedience is now demanded. Jesus is not so much the obedient, subservient one, but the authoritative teacher who must himself be obeyed. So, too, in 11: 25-7, Jesus as the Son is the uniquely privileged recipient of divine revelation. And in 28: 19, Jesus as the Son takes his place in a quasi-divine trio alongside God the Father himself and the Holy Spirit. It may be then that, to a certain extent, the term Son of God can cover more than one aspect of Jesus' person.

As already noted, Kingsbury has maintained that Son of God is a key christological term for Matthew and few would disagree with him on that. He has, however, also claimed that Son of God is in effect the one and only important christological category for Matthew, and that all other christological terms are subservient to this one. In this respect Kingsbury has not commanded quite so much support. Many would in fact claim that several other christological terms, as well as other features of Matthew's story which may not use explicit christological categories or titles, may also make an important contribution to Matthew's overall picture of who Jesus is.

In support of this we may note that the term Son of God actually

appears explicitly only once in the birth narratives, and then almost in passing (2: 15). If it is implied in the story of the virgin birth, it is only implicit: and indeed the story of the virgin birth itself is only noted almost in passing (1: 18: cf. below). So, too, the opening verse in Matthew 1: 1, which seems to function in a way similar to Mark 1: 1 in defining the key terms of the story to come and identifying the central character of Jesus, does not refer to Jesus as Son of God: Matthew 1: 1 speaks of the book of the 'genesis' of 'Jesus Christ, Son of David, Son of Abraham'. At the very least, this suggests that other terms and categories may have an important role to play in filling out the picture of who Jesus is for Matthew. We shall therefore turn our attention to some of these other terms and categories now.

Lord

It has often been noted that there are a number of occasions in Matthew where Jesus is addressed as 'Lord' (*kyrios*). Matthew takes over some of the occurrences in Mark we have already considered (though there is no parallel to Mark 5: 19); but he also has a number of additional instances where people address Jesus directly in the vocative as *kyrie* 'Lord' (or 'master'; cf. 7: 22; 8: 2, 6, 8, 21, 25; 9: 28; 14: 28, 30; 15: 22, etc.). Further, Matthew appears to restrict the use of the term either to those who are the recipients of Jesus' miraculous powers (e.g. the leper in 8: 2, the centurion in 8: 6), or the disciples and other followers of Jesus (e.g. Peter in 14: 28, 30). The vocabulary of the little scene in Matthew 26: 21-5 is characteristic and revealing. Here at the account of the Last Supper, Matthew takes over from Mark the little story of the disciples' questioning of Jesus about who will betray him; but Matthew alone adds the explicit question of Judas (v. 25). Matthew's wording here may be significant: the disciples ask 'Is it I, Lord?' (v. 22); Judas, the betrayer, is made to ask 'Is it I, *rabbi*?' (v. 25). Only the true followers of Jesus are apparently allowed by Matthew to address Jesus as *kyrios*.

The precise significance of the term is not entirely clear. We have seen on several occasions that *kyrios* is notoriously wide-ranging in its potential meaning; and certainly the vocative *kyrie* need be no more than a polite form of address, as can be seen from Matthew's Gospel itself (cf. the use of *kyrie* meaning simply 'master!' in parables such as in Matt. 13: 27; 21: 30). G. Bornkamm's often quoted claim that 'the title

and address of Jesus as *kyrios* in Matthew have throughout the character of a *divine* Name of Majesty⁶ probably goes further than the evidence on its own will allow. Certainly the uses of the term by the disciples need ('only') imply that Jesus is the true 'master' for those who acknowledge him as such. Nevertheless the use of the term is a significant part of Matthew's Christology. It is, though, also noticeable that the word is sometimes linked with the term 'Son of David' (cf. 15: 22; 20: 30, 31) by those appealing to Jesus for help, and it is to this that we now turn.

Son of David

The idea that Jesus is a/the Son of David (and also, as such, probably the Christ/Messiah) is also very important for Matthew. Matthew signals this right at the start by referring to Jesus in the opening verse of the Gospel as Son of David (1: 1); and the birth narratives which follow make this a key feature. Thus the genealogy (1: 1–16) is divided (by Matthew: cf. v. 17) into three groups of fourteen generations, with David explicitly mentioned as 'king' at a key turning point (1: 6).⁷ Moreover, the pericope which follows in 1: 18–25, often called the story of the 'virgin birth', has probably much more to do with the idea of Jesus as Son of *David*, rather than Son of God. Matthew traces Jesus' genealogy back through Joseph rather than Mary, which then creates a slight embarrassment if Joseph was not in fact Jesus' father. Hence the story of 1: 18–25, with its focus on Joseph and his obedience to the angel in taking Mary into his house, seems designed to show Jesus as being fully adopted into the true Davidic line and hence a true Son of David, almost despite the circumstances of his birth.⁸ The importance of the theme for Matthew is shown by the very next story in the Gospel, the coming of the Magi (2: 1–12): here the wise men are looking for 'the king of the Jews' (v. 2) which sends Herod into turmoil, asking where 'the Christ' should be born (v. 4), giving rise to the citation of Micah 5: 2 in v. 6 with its clear Davidic allusion that the coming ruler 'will shepherd my people Israel'.

A number of references to Jesus as Son of David occur in the rest of the Gospel. It is notable, however, that many occur in the context of Jesus' healing miracles: those in need of healing address Jesus as Son of David (cf. 9: 27; 12: 33; 15: 32; 20: 30–1). Quite what the significance of this is in Matthew's story is not clear. There is no firm evidence that

a messianic figure, a Davidic successor, would be thought of as a miracle worker. The closest one might get is perhaps a few odd references to Solomon, David's son, as an exorcist.⁹ But the parallel between this and Matthew is by no means exact (the Matthean references are not in the context of exorcisms) and the references in the Jewish texts are rather obscure.

It may be that, by emphasising this aspect of Jesus' activity under the rubric 'Son of David', Matthew is self-consciously seeking to alter other conceptions of what Davidic messiahship is all about, changing the categories from political leadership to one of obedient, merciful healing and saving activity.¹⁰ So, too, it is notable that the Son of David references in Matthew are in contexts which highlight the opposition between Jesus and the Jewish religious authorities.¹¹ Thus for Matthew, Jesus fulfils the hopes for a Davidic king in a surprising and unexpected way, a way which leads to opposition and rejection by the Jewish leaders.

Son of Man

Matthew also takes over the references to Jesus as Son of Man from both Mark and Q. Moreover, Matthew seems happy to adopt all the categories of the Son of Man sayings from his sources, including references to Jesus' present activity, his suffering and his future vindication.

It is, however, the latter group of passages that Matthew redacts and expands significantly, so that for Matthew Jesus *qua* Son of Man is placed in an even more exalted position than in Mark. For example, Mark 8: 38 speaks of the Son of Man 'coming in the glory of his father and with the holy angels'. Matthew 16: 27 says that the angels are '*his* angels', and he adds that the Son of Man will dispense judgement itself: 'then he will repay each person according to their works' (echoing Ps. 61: 13). So, too, in the next verse, Matthew changes Mark's note that some standing by Jesus will not taste death 'until they see the Kingdom of God come with power' to 'until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom' (Matt. 16: 28/Mark 9: 1). The Son of Man himself how has his own 'kingdom'.

Other references to Jesus as Son of Man in Matthew are in line with this exalted picture of Jesus. In the interpretation of the parable of the Tares (Matt. 13: 36–43: the interpretation may owe a lot to MattR), the Son of Man sows the good seed and also exercises the process of

judgement itself, sending out 'his' angels to gather the equivalent of the tares (interpreted as 'all causes of sin and all evil-doers' v. 41 NRSV) to destroy them in judgement. Similarly in the parable of the sheep and the goats, which in Matthew forms the climax of Jesus' teaching activity (Matt. 25: 31–46), the story opens with the scene: 'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory . . .', followed by the scene of judgement itself.

Son of Man ideas may also be present in the final appearance of the risen Jesus in Matthew, where Jesus says 'All authority on heaven and on earth has been given to me' (28: 17), words which echo the scene in Daniel 7: 13 when authority is given to the figure who is 'one like a son of man'. However, this must remain slightly uncertain, since Matthew does not use the actual expression 'Son of Man' here.

Matthew has thus highlighted especially the activity of Jesus *qua* Son of Man as the judge in the final judgement and given him an extremely exalted role, similar to that of God himself, and certainly going beyond the picture in Daniel 7 which seems to be primarily in terms of the Son of Man figure as one who receives a favourable judgement in the heavenly court. The enhanced role of the Son of Man figure in Matthew is closer to the role of the Son of Man figure in *1 Enoch* and *may* show a common background of thought between these two texts.¹² But in any case, it seems that 'Son of Man' is an important term for Matthew, enhancing significantly the role of Jesus beyond the Markan picture.

We have already seen noted on a number of occasions that a focus on christological titles alone is inadequate for assessing a writer's Christology. In the case of Matthew, a number of categories and factors are also clearly christologically significant, even though they do not use explicit christological 'titles'. I consider three briefly here.

Moses

It is clear that in some important respects, Matthew sees Jesus as a new Moses-type figure.¹³ Jesus' teaching is evidently of vital significance for Matthew: Matthew arranges his Gospel around five great blocks of Jesus' teaching (Matt. 5–7, 10, 13, 18, 24–5); and the importance of Jesus' teaching in general is emphasised by the final command of the risen Jesus to the disciples to make further disciples 'teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you' (28: 20). The number five

has been seen by many as possibly significant, with the five blocks of teaching corresponding (at least in general terms) to the five books of the Mosaic Law, the Pentateuch.¹⁴

Certainly, too, there are some significant parallels between Jesus and Moses in other parts of Matthew. In the birth stories, the account of the slaughter of the innocents, the flight into Egypt and the return from Egypt, all echo aspects of the story about Moses in Exodus. Matthew's extra note in the account of the Transfiguration that Jesus' 'face shone like the sun' (Matt. 17: 2) echoes the story of Exodus 34 of Moses' face shining.¹⁵ As we noted earlier, the command of the divine voice from heaven at the Transfiguration that the disciples should 'listen to him [= Jesus]' (17: 5) probably alludes to Deuteronomy 18: 15, the prediction of the coming of a 'prophet like Moses'. And the fact that Jesus' first great teaching discourse, the 'Sermon on the Mount', is on a mountain (5: 1)¹⁶ is probably intended to echo Moses' experience on Mount Sinai in going up to receive from God the Decalogue (and other laws) to bring them back to the children of Israel to give to them as their instructions for living.¹⁷

Coupled with this too is probably the very strong element in Matthew seeking to show that Jesus' teaching is in a line of continuity, not discontinuity, with the Old Testament Law. This is perhaps clearest in 5: 17, a verse which occupies a key position in the Sermon on the Mount as a programmatic statement of Jesus' teaching that is to follow: 'Do not think that I have come to destroy the Law and prophets, I have not come to destroy but to fulfil'.¹⁸ So, too, there are many instances where Matthew tries to portray Jesus' teaching as less of a threat to the Jewish Law than it appears in Mark.¹⁹ Jesus is the fulfilment of the Old Testament for Matthew, a theme shown supremely in the famous formula quotations in Matthew, and, as part of this, Matthew portrays Jesus as a new Moses figure, 'fulfilling' (though without abrogating) the first Moses – and all this despite the fact that the name 'Moses' as such is never applied to Jesus!

Wisdom

Jesus is also for Matthew in some sense the embodiment of divine wisdom.²⁰ Again Matthew rarely uses the term explicitly of Jesus. But, in 11: 19, he may well have changed the Q saying 'Wisdom is justified by her children' (cf. Luke 7: 35) to 'Wisdom is justified by her works',

echoing the reference to 'the works of the Christ' at the start of this section in 11:2. Thus the works of divine Wisdom are the works of Jesus. In Matthew 23:34, Matthew has probably changed another Q saying which in Q referred to something said by (personified) Wisdom: 'The Wisdom of God said 'I will send you prophets...' (cf. Luke 11:49); in Matthew this becomes 'Therefore I say to you, I will send you prophets...' A saying of Wisdom in the past has become a saying of Jesus himself in the present.

So, too, the extra sayings in Matthew 11:28-30 which Matthew has appended to the Q sayings in 11:25-7 (cf. Luke 10:21-2) have echoes with what is said of Wisdom in Sirach 51, especially Sirach 51:23-6. Thus, for example, the invitation 'Come to me' (Matt. 11:28) is close to Wisdom's invitation 'Draw near to me' (Sir. 51:23); and the reference to Jesus' easy 'yoke' (Matt. 11:30) is similar to the reference to Wisdom's 'yoke' in Sirach 51:26.

It is, however, not clear how important such ideas are for Matthew. Matthew only once refers to divine Wisdom explicitly (Matt. 11:19), and indeed Matthew's readers would presumably never have picked up Matthew's redactional change to Q at Matthew 23:34: we can only identify it with the aid of a synopsis. So too, even in Matthew 11:28-30 where the Wisdom motifs are perhaps strongest, Matthew never explicitly mentions the figure of Wisdom; indeed, in a number of respects, Matthew's portrayal of Jesus here is *not* explained by categories of Wisdom at all: above all the reference to Jesus as the one who is 'meek and lowly of heart' is not derivable from Sirach 51 or other Wisdom texts.²¹ Certainly, too, there is no indication that Matthew thought that Jesus might be a pre-existent being like Wisdom (cf. Prov. 8:22). At most then it seems that Matthew's redaction (especially of Q) shows a tendency to enhance the picture of Jesus so that Jesus is now identified with the figure of Wisdom,²² and so is part of the general picture whereby the Matthean Jesus 'fulfils' another strand of Jewish thought. However, this by no means exhausts Matthew's picture of Jesus which has many sides to it.

Servant

The idea of Jesus as 'meek and lowly of heart', which we noted above as not easily derivable from Wisdom ideas, is also an important theme from Matthew. It is also connected with Matthew's beliefs about Jesus

as the fulfilment of other Old Testament texts. Thus in the story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a donkey, Matthew adds to Mark the explicit note that this fulfils the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 of the 'king' coming as one who is 'meek and riding upon an ass...' (Matt. 21:5).

Probably related as well are the two formula quotations given by Matthew of the prophecies of the suffering servant figure of Deutero-Isaiah. Modern scholarship has isolated four passages in Deutero-Isaiah which seem to refer to a single 'servant' figure, the most famous of which is probably the suffering servant chapter of Isaiah 53. References to Jesus as the suffering servant are, however, perhaps surprisingly, relatively rare in the New Testament. Matthew does though have two formula quotations from the servant songs: in 8:17 he cites Isaiah 53:4, and in 12:18-21 he cites the whole of the first servant song (Isa. 42:1-4). Yet the precise nature of the way he sees these texts 'fulfilled' by Jesus is at first sight a little surprising. In 8:17 the verse from the famous suffering servant chapter is applied to Jesus' miracles, not his passion ('he bore our diseases' is taken as implying simply that he removed them, not that he bore them vicariously himself). In Matthew 12:18-21, Isaiah 42 is applied to Jesus' wish for privacy and secrecy (cf. 12:16). The emphasis thus seems to be on Jesus' meekness and lowliness here.²³

All these aspects show part of the importance of the theme of fulfilment for Matthew: the Jesus story is the fulfilment of many aspects of the Old Testament and a wide variety of texts. For Matthew this is important to show that Jesus, and Christianity, are in a line of firm continuity with the Jewish past (cf. 5:17 which is clearly programmatic for Matthew). Yet continuity does not necessarily imply identity. Continuity must imply an element of difference as well as sameness. Thus, for Matthew, in Jesus something *greater* than Solomon or Jonah is here (12:41, 42), something *greater* than the temple is here (12:6). Perhaps something of this is shown by the references to Jesus being 'with' his people, which is the final category we shall consider in this discussion of Matthew.

Jesus with his people

A vitally important theme of Jesus 'being with' his people unites the beginning, middle and end of Matthew's Gospel. In the very first

chapter, the name of Jesus is said to be 'Immanuel' (in fulfilment of Isa. 7: 14), which is explicitly translated as 'God with us' (Matt. 1: 23). This is echoed at the very end of the Gospel where the final words of the risen Jesus to his disciples are 'I am with you always, to the close of the age' (28: 20). And in the middle of the Gospel, Jesus declares that 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them' (18: 20), a saying which clearly refers to the post-Easter situation. The Jesus of Matthew thus promises his followers that he will be with them throughout their time on earth, and moreover the presence of Jesus will mean the presence of God (cf. 1: 23).²⁴ This is not necessarily the same as Chalcedonian orthodoxy, and is probably thinking in much more dynamic terms than the static terms of later Christian theologising. Nevertheless it is claiming for Jesus a uniquely exalted status, as indicated too by the trinitarian baptismal formula in 28: 19, where Jesus is placed alongside God and the Spirit. Jesus is then the place where God acts and where God is present, and there is a significant overlap between Jesus' actions and those of God.²⁵

Matthew's Christology is thus extremely rich and varied. He clearly uses several key terms (or 'titles') as important descriptors of who Jesus is. Yet he also works with these terms creatively, at times adapting their meaning and significance to bring out what he sees as key aspects of the role of Jesus. He also works with a number of other categories and concepts which are not covered by 'titles' to enhance his picture of Jesus. As with Mark, we have a 'narrative Christology' quite as much as any based on titles alone, and Matthew makes his points from the story *qua* story.²⁶

NOTES

1. Cf. e.g. the well-known problems of trying to reconcile e.g. Matt. 5.17–20 with the antitheses of Matt. 5.21–48 (on the validity of the Law), or Matt. 15: 3 with Matt. 23: 2 (on the validity of the scribal oral tradition), or Matt. 10: 5–6 with Matt. 28: 19 (on the attitude to Gentiles and the Gentile mission).
2. Cf. p. 107 above.
3. Cf. e.g. J. D. Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), chs 2–3; *Matthew* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), esp. ch. 2; 'The figure of Jesus in Matthew's story: A literary-critical probe', *JSNT* 21 (1984), pp. 3–36; *Matthew as Story* (Philadelphia:

Fortress Press, 1986), as well as numerous articles.

4. Cf. above p. 111 for the possibility that, in Mark, Peter's confession may be viewed as slightly inadequate.
5. Cf. 5: 20; 6: 33, etc. This is universally recognised in Matthean scholarship: cf. B. Przybylski, *Righteousness in Matthew and his World of Thought* (SNTSMS 41; Cambridge: CUP, 1980). Matthew's use of the word 'righteousness' may thus be very different from that of Paul.
6. G. Bornkamm, G. Barth, H. J. Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (ET London: SCM Press, 1963), pp. 42–3. (My italics).
7. The division is somewhat artificial since the last group only comprises thirteen names!
8. See K. Stendahl, 'Quis et unde? An analysis of Matthew 1–2', in G. N. Stanton (ed.), *The Interpretation of Matthew* (London: SPCK, 1983), pp. 56–66 (originally published 1960). As noted above, the virgin birth itself is noted almost only in passing in 1: 25.
9. Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 8.45–9; *Pseudo-Philo* 60.3; *T. Sol.* See D. C. Duling, 'Solomon, exorcism, and Son of David', *HTR* 68 (1975), pp. 235–52; 'The therapeutic Son of David: An element in Matthew's christological perspective', *NTS* 24 (1978), pp. 392–409.
10. D. Versepunt, 'The role and meaning of the 'Son of God' title in Matthew's Gospel', *NTS* 33 (1987), pp. 532–56.
11. See G. N. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), pp. 180–5.
12. Cf. pp. 25–6 above for the ways in which the Danielic picture was probably developing in the first century. Matthew and *1 Enoch* are also notable in both using the phrase 'throne of his glory' in relation to the Son of Man (Matt. 25: 31; *1 Enoch* 62: 3), which is certainly not very common diction.
13. The most detailed case for this in recent years has been made by D. C. Allison, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).
14. Quite how far the parallel can be taken is, however, uncertain. It is not easy to relate each specific Matthean discourse to each of the books of the Pentateuch in turn: e.g. the first discourse (the Sermon on the Mount) is more closely related to the second book of the Pentateuch (Exodus: Matthew's Jesus going up the mountain to deliver a substantial body of ethical teaching is more closely related to Moses going up the mountain in Exod. 20 to receive, and then pass on, the Decalogue.) So, too, the teaching discourses do not exhaust either Matthew's Gospel as a whole, or indeed the full extent of Jesus' teaching in Matthew (cf. Matt. 23!).
15. The specific detail of Moses' face shining 'like the sun' is found in later

interpretations of the Moses story: cf. Philo, *Vit. Mos.* 1.70; also *Pseudo-Philo* 12.1.

16. The fact that the Sermon takes place on a 'mountain' may well be due to MattR: in Luke's parallel in Luke 6, it is a sermon on a 'plain'.
17. For other possible examples of a Moses typology in Matthew, see Allison, *New Moses* (though some of his examples seem a little more forced than others).
18. There are many issues of detail in trying to interpret this verse, not least of which is how precisely to understand the meaning of the word 'fulfil' here. Nevertheless, the general thrust of the saying is clear: Jesus' teaching is *not* to be seen as destructive of the old Mosaic Law but as in a line of continuity with it.
19. There is no space to go into any detail here, though cf. Matthew's retelling of Mark's stories of the Sabbath controversies (Matt. 12: 1–14/Mark 2: 23–3: 6), the dispute on purity (Matt. 15: 1–20/Mark 7: 1–23), the teaching on divorce (Matt. 19: 1–12/Mark 10: 1–12) or on the great commandment (Matt. 22: 34–40/Mark 12: 28–34). See G. Barth, 'Matthew's understanding of the Law', in Bornkamm, Barth and Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, pp. 58–164; also R. Mohrlang, *Matthew and Paul: A Comparison of Ethical Perspectives* (SNTSMS 48; Cambridge: CUP, 1984), pp. 7–26.
20. On this, see M. J. Suggs, *Wisdom, Christology and Law in Matthew's Gospel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).
21. Cf. Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, pp. 366–71.
22. In Q Jesus may be seen as one of Wisdom's prophetic messengers: see pp. 195–6 below.
23. See D. Hill, 'Son and Servant: An essay on Matthean Christology', *JSNT*, 6 (1980), pp. 2–16. For an attempt to see much greater significance in the quotation of Isa. 42 in Matt. 12, see R. Beaton, 'Messiah and justice: A key to Matthew's use of Isaiah 42.1–4', *JSNT* 75 (1999), pp. 5–23.
24. Cf. U. Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), pp. 30–4.
25. Cf. also above on the way in which Jesus *qua* Son of Man takes on the role of judge at the final judgement.
26. Cf. Luz, *Theology*, *passim*.

Chapter 9

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

When we turn from the synoptic Gospels to the Fourth Gospel, we move in some respects into a different world. The differences between John and the synoptics have long been recognised, reference often being made in this context to the famous statement of Clement of Alexandria (early third century) that, whereas the other Gospel writers gave the 'bodily' facts about Jesus, 'John wrote a spiritual Gospel'.¹ Although the differences between John and the synoptics can perhaps be exaggerated, there can be no denying that at many levels John presents a radically different presentation of the life and ministry of Jesus. There are differences at the more superficial level of dates and places,² but there are also differences in the whole mode and content of Jesus' own teaching,³ and the area where this is most prominent is precisely the area of Christology.

In general terms, the synoptic Jesus says very little explicitly about himself: his preaching is about God, the kingdom of God, the nature of God's demands, etc. The Johannine Jesus by contrast is far more explicit about himself so that his teaching focuses on his own person far more directly. John's Jesus makes himself the object of faith far more explicitly than in the synoptics.⁴ And he teaches quite openly about himself and the importance of his own role in God's plan, supremely in the great 'I am...' sayings which come throughout the Gospel.⁵ In line with this, the beginning and end of the Gospel focus directly and explicitly on the person of Jesus. Thus the prologue of the Gospel (1: 1-18) speaks of Jesus as the Word of God; and in what is probably the ending of at least one version of the Gospel,⁶ it is stated that the book has been written 'so that you may [?come to] believe⁷ that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God' (20: 31).

So too the figure of Jesus is portrayed in a more exalted role throughout the story. Jesus is fully in control of all the events concerned. His miracles highlight his person, and indeed at times Jesus acts in order to highlight even more his activity. Thus in chapter 11, when Lazarus falls ill and dies, Jesus is portrayed as deliberately delaying going to heal him in order apparently to make the miracle of raising him all the more stupendous (11: 4, 15). John describes what appears to be a vestige of the agony scene in Gethsemane (12: 27); but in John there seems to be no real agony on Jesus' part and Jesus displays unbounded and unquestioning confidence in God. So too, in the account of Jesus' actual death, little if anything is made of Jesus' suffering. Jesus admits to thirst on the cross, but only in order to fulfil scripture (19: 28); and his final word is no agonized cry of dereliction, as in Mark, but a statement of supreme confidence: 'it is finished' (19: 30). Above all, it is in John that we get the two most explicit statements in the New Testament about the divinity of Jesus. Moreover they come at key points in the narrative – at the beginning and at the end – encompassing the whole story in a powerful *inclusio*. Thus the first verse of the prologue affirms that the Word was not only in the beginning 'with God', but in some sense also 'was God' (1: 1); and Thomas at the end of the story openly confesses Jesus as 'my Lord and my God' (20: 28). John thus presents Jesus explicitly in far more exalted terms than anything we find in the synoptic Gospels.

In terms simply of historical reliability or 'authenticity', it seems impossible to maintain that both John and the synoptics can be presenting us with equally 'authentic' accounts of Jesus' own life.⁸ The differences between the two are too deep seated and wide ranging for such a position to be sustainable. If there is a choice, it is almost certainly to be made in favour of the synoptic picture, at least in broadly general terms. The Johannine picture then presents us with a view of the Jesus tradition which has been heavily coloured and influenced by John and his own situation.

Further, it has now become clearer in recent Johannine studies that we should almost certainly think of 'John', the author of the Gospel, not necessarily as some individual writing his Gospel in splendid isolation, but as part of a community facing very real pressures and tensions.⁹ At the very least we have to take note of the existence of the three Johannine epistles, all of which are written in an idiom very similar to that of the Fourth Gospel and with much of the same highly

distinctive Johannine vocabulary and terminology. The epistles are probably not by the same author as the Gospel,¹⁰ so one must postulate at the very least one other author heavily influenced by the ideas of John. But the epistles also clearly shown the existence of a community, and in the case of 1 John and 3 John it is a community where a certain amount of disagreement and division has evidently taken place. The communal aspect is probably also indicated in the Gospel by the use of the first person plural at times: for example, in the prologue the writer states that 'the Word became flesh and *we* have seen his glory' (1: 14), probably indicating that the writer is part of a larger group. Thus the trend in recent years has been to see the Gospel not so much as the work of a particular individual theological genius (though it may be that in part), but also as the product of a particular Christian community facing its own particular problems in its own situation.

The nature of that situation may be reflected at one or two points in the story of the Gospel itself. For example, in the story of the man born blind in John 9, the story tells of the dialogue between 'the Jews' who do not accept the reality of the miracle and the man's parents (9: 18–23). In the dialogue, the parents refuse to answer the Jews' questions. This, it is said, is because 'they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue' (v. 22). Such a situation makes virtually no sense in terms of the time of the ministry of Jesus or of the earliest church.¹¹ Rather it seems to reflect a much later situation when Christian allegiance to Jesus and membership of the Jewish synagogue were regarded as incompatible and Christians were excluded from the synagogues. The same setting is implied by two other verses in the Gospel, one (12: 42) again purporting to be a reflection of the situation at the time of the narrative, the other (16: 2) being a prediction by the Johannine Jesus of what is in store for the disciples. The fact that this state of affairs is mentioned on more than one occasion suggests that it is of some importance for the writer of the Gospel. Thus many have argued (in my view convincingly) that these verses reflect the situation of the Johannine community itself. The Johannine Christians as a group have been put out of the synagogue and excluded from participating with Jews there. The story as it is told in John thus reflects more than one level: indeed it has become customary to speak of John as a 'two-level drama'.¹² The story is at one level a story about Jesus and his disciples in the 30s, but it is also a reflection of the situation of a

later Christian community, probably in the last quarter of the first century.

The precise date of any exclusion of Christians from Jewish synagogues is debated. Much has been made in the past of a version of the twelfth of the eighteen benedictions which includes a clause cursing all heretics and which has been dated by some to a decree from Jamnia c. CE 85. In recent years more doubt has been thrown on this and it is uncertain how far Christians were ever formally banned from Jewish synagogues.¹³ Nevertheless, however formal and legally binding it may or may not have been, it seems clear that the Johannine Christian community found itself thrown out of a setting where its members had thought formerly they belonged. Thus John reflects a situation of some bitterness on the part of Christians against Jews, as well as some considerable anger and rejection by Jews against Christians. It is this sense of mutual hostility that is reflected in much of John, reaching one of its most intense peaks in John 8 where the Johannine Jesus accuses the Jews of not being children of Abraham, or of God, but of the Devil (8: 44). The negative portrayal of 'the Jews' pervades the whole Gospel, and the use of the blanket term 'the Jews' to refer to Jesus' opponents in the story has led to many charges that John is in some sense 'anti-Semitic'. There is no space here to discuss the issue further, though one should simply note that John's language is the reflection of a situation of intense hostility, probably on both sides, and indeed it may be a situation which has led to deaths on the Christian side.¹⁴ Further, as we shall see shortly, John himself is very firmly convinced of the Jewish basis of his Christian convictions about Jesus. Moreover, if Christians have been expelled from synagogues, this is probably something forced on Christians by other Jews: presumably the Johannine Christians would have been happy to stay as part of the Jewish community. To use what has become standard scholarly jargon, they have moved from being 'Christian Jews' to becoming 'Jewish Christians' but it is against their own will and maybe they would have much preferred to stay as 'Christian Jews'.¹⁵

The suggestion that Christians in John's community have (probably recently) been expelled from the synagogue indicates that the situation of the Johannine community is probably a changing one. Certainly the trauma of the expulsion has led to a dramatic change in their situation. So too the (probably later) Johannine epistles let us see a further point in the changing history of the community with internal splits within

the community leading to some kind of 'schism' (cf. especially 1 John 2: 18–22). Thus the community behind John was clearly not a static or unchanging one.

Some scholars in recent years have tried to build on this and have, on the basis of the Gospel (and the epistles), postulated a number of different stages in the history of the Johannine community.¹⁶ This might be correlated with the fact that the present form of the Gospel suggests at times that it has come together in stages, and not all parts fit together entirely happily as a connected whole.¹⁷ Some quite ambitious histories of the Johannine community have been proposed, though whether we can be so precise is not absolutely certain. For some, too, this developing history is to be connected with changes in the christological beliefs of the Johannine community, so that one can distinguish between earlier and later Christologies within the Gospel.¹⁸ Such precision may be a little optimistic, though the whole issue should make us alert to the possibility that John is at times taking up earlier traditions and adapting them so that they are significantly changed in the course of the adaptation.

On any showing John is clearly using earlier traditions.¹⁹ One widely held theory is that John is using an earlier source which included the stories of Jesus' miracles, the so-called 'Signs Source'.²⁰ This is perhaps indicated by the numbering of the first two signs (the 'first' in 2: 12, the 'second' in 4: 54, though the numbering then peters out), and the conclusion in 20: 30–1 that Jesus 'did many other signs not recorded in this book'; there is also the fact that in the present form of the Gospel, the miracles are clearly taken as 'signs', that is as pointers to some deeper reality beyond themselves, usually focused on Jesus himself and often developed in a discourse following the account of the miracle. Thus the miracle story of the feeding of the 5000 in John 6 is followed by the long discourse about Jesus as the 'bread of life', clearly by the end leaving far behind the issue of real food and physical hunger.

All this suggests that, in terms of Christology, we may have to be alert to the possibility of different layers in the tradition in John, and that some ideas may have been changed and developed as they were taken up by the final evangelist. Perhaps though, in seeking to discover something of the Christology of 'John', we should respect the fact that the present form of the Gospel²¹ was felt to make sense to the author/editor responsible for it. Thus even if the final author has used earlier traditions, these traditions were felt to be still valuable and valid

enough to be included in the Gospel. In seeking to delineate 'John's' Christology I shall therefore use the whole of the Gospel as at least a potential witness to that Christology, but bearing in mind the possibility that we may see at times earlier Christologies which the evangelist may be using and which may be slightly less in tune with his own beliefs than other parts of the Gospel.

Signs and Messiahship

The fact that John may reflect a complex development of tradition history is probably shown in the use of the term Messiah/Christ. In one way, John's use of the term appears to be surprisingly undeveloped, at least when compared with some other New Testament writers. Thus John regularly uses the term as a clear title with the definite article (cf. 1: 20, 41; 11: 27; 20: 31), unlike the usage of, say, Paul and Acts where often the word Christ seems to have lost its titular sense and become virtually just another proper name ('Jesus Christ'). In one way, John thus appears to be aware of the origins of the term in Jewish expectation more than other New Testament writers. However, such an impression may be misleading and on closer inspection John's usage turns out to be rather more complex.

The usage in 20: 31, where it is said that the 'signs' recorded in John have been written so that 'you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God', has led many to claim that John's Signs Source (if it existed) may have been related to the idea of Jesus as the Messiah.²² Similarly, in 6: 15 the response of the crowds to the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 is apparently that they want to make Jesus into a 'king' (cf. too 7: 31). It is clear that the miracle stories in John are intended to draw attention positively to the person of Jesus himself as the miracle worker (in a way that is perhaps rather different from the synoptics, where the focus is rather more on the power of God at work in the miracles, and on Jesus as the channel of God's activity). Thus many have argued that the miracle stories in John may reflect an earlier stage in the history of the Johannine community, at a time when Johannine Christians still belonged to the Jewish synagogues and were trying to win over Jews to their cause by claiming that Jesus was indeed the Messiah of Jewish hopes.

Such a theory cannot, however, be maintained in such a simple form without qualification. One problem is that there is virtually no evidence

that any 'messianic' figure in Jewish thought was expected to be a miracle worker. It is thus hard to correlate the 'signs' of John's Gospel with an idea of Jesus as Messiah, at least in terms of Jewish messianic beliefs at the time.

In fact the word 'signs' is more evocative of the Moses tradition in the Old Testament, where Moses performs legitimating 'signs' before Pharaoh and the Egyptians. From Qumran we know too of an expectation of a 'prophet like Moses'.²³ And from Josephus we know of a number of popular figures in the first century who promised to be able to repeat the Mosaic-type 'signs' of deliverance such as dividing the Jordan (JW 2.259; Ant. 20.97-8, 168-9; cf. Acts 5: 36; 21: 38).

It is also the case, however, that although the language of 'signs' may relate to the Moses tradition, not many of Jesus' miracles in John are similar to those associated with Moses himself. For example, Jesus' healing and feeding miracles may show closer resemblance to the activity of *prophetic* figures like Elijah and Elisha (cf. 1 Ki. 17; 2 Ki. 4). In fact both Elijah and/or 'the prophet' (possibly the prophet like Moses, possibly simply a prophet like Elijah) are mentioned in John alongside 'the Messiah' (cf. 1: 20-2; 7: 40-2, 52; 9: 17-22). So too in 6: 14-15, when the people see the feeding miracle, their response is that Jesus is 'the prophet who is to come into the world', and Jesus hastily withdraws because he apparently interprets this as an attempt to make him a 'king' (v. 15).

In the light of this, many have argued that, although originally a number of rather diverse expectations are involved, we may see reflected here an amalgamation so that Jesus is seen as a miracle-working prophet-Messiah figure, summed up in the term 'the Messiah'.²⁴ If so, then it clearly shows that ideas of 'messiahship' have already undergone a significant shift and development.

It is, however, doubtful whether messiahship as such, or messiahship as reinterpreted via prophetic ideas (Mosaic or otherwise) and/or miracle working activity, is the most important christological idea for John. It may be that such an idea was important at an earlier stage in the history of the Johannine community, possibly at the level of the Signs Source used by John (if indeed it existed). However, by the time of the present form of the Gospel, it would seem that other ideas have been superimposed on this earlier idea. Thus the notion (and the language) of Jesus as a prophet-Messiah figure is in part retained; but it is also deepened and extended.²⁵ This can be seen in a number of ways.

In chapter 1, in the series of encounters between Jesus and various figures, some of whom are to become his disciples, each of the latter makes a christological statement. Thus John the Baptist denies that he is the Messiah, Elijah or the prophet, by implication indicating that it is Jesus who fits these categories (1: 20, 22); Andrew says 'we have found the Messiah' (1: 41); Philip says 'we have found him about whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote' (1: 45); Nathanael says 'you are the Son of God, the King of Israel' (1: 49). Yet all these seem to be surpassed by the statement of Jesus himself at the end of this series, referring to himself as the 'Son of Man' on whom the angels will (somehow) be ascending and descending (1: 51). In the story of the Samaritan woman in chapter 4, the extended conversation between Jesus and the woman seems to reflect a steadily deepening awareness by the woman of Jesus' true identity. Relatively early on she recognises Jesus as a 'prophet', in response to his (? miraculous) knowledge about her marital affairs (4: 19); but this leads on to further developments in the dialogue whereby the woman recognises Jesus as the Messiah (v. 25 – apparently 'Messiah' is something deeper than 'prophet') and then eventually as 'the Saviour of the world' (v. 42). A similar progression takes place in the story of the man born blind in chapter 9: the man's early response is that Jesus is a 'prophet' (v. 17), but this leads on to his believing acceptance that Jesus is the 'Son of Man' whom he then 'worships' (v. 38), and it is this that forms the climax of the story and the true 'insight' which the man attains. The category of 'prophet' is thus one that seems to reflect for John at best a somewhat inadequate idea of who Jesus is.

So too messiahship on its own, be it a royal messiahship or a prophetic miracle-working messiahship, does not seem to be the most adequate category for John's Christology. If Nathanael's confession in 1: 50 of Jesus as 'king of Israel' reflects royal ideas, then he is told that he will see 'greater things than these', and that Jesus is the Son of Man of 1: 51. In 11: 27 Martha confesses Jesus to be 'the Messiah, the Son of God'. So too in the Johannine account of the trial of Jesus before Pilate, where so much of the debate and the dialogue revolves around the idea of Jesus' kingship, the true issue seems to emerge precisely when 'the Jews' bring into the discussion the claim that Jesus has claimed to be the 'Son of God' (19: 7).

Similarly, for all that there are similarities between Jesus' activity and that of Moses, so that Jesus might be seen as in some sense a

Mosaic-type prophet, there are also clear contrasts drawn between Jesus and Moses. For example, in the long discourse on the bread of life following the feeding miracle in chapter 6, John's Jesus contrasts the manna given by Moses in the desert with the true 'bread of life' which the Father now gives (cf. vv. 32, 49), which Jesus himself is (v. 35) and which is also related to 'eating the flesh' and 'drinking the blood' of the 'Son of Man' (vv. 51c–8). Similarly, in the verse at the end of the prologue in 1: 17 ('the Law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ') it is hard not to hear at least an element of sharp contrast between the figure of Moses and that of Jesus.

Thus Jesus for John is not *just* a 'messianic' figure, nor indeed primarily a prophet like Moses. Rather, it is the twin categories of 'Son of God' (or perhaps just 'Son') and 'Son of Man' that are far important and seem to reflect deeper truths about who Jesus is as far as John is concerned.

It is perhaps at this point that an attempt to stick to specific christological titles, and to try to differentiate between them, probably breaks down. To a certain extent, christological categories, or 'titles', are bound to overlap in Christian usage, simply by virtue of being applied to the one person Jesus. Certainly in John, the different christological categories tend to merge into each other. Thus some of what is said of Jesus as 'Son' or as 'Son of God' applies also to Jesus as 'Son of Man', and indeed is sometimes said of (or by) Jesus without reference to any specific christological category or title at all. So too many of the things said of Jesus as Son in the bulk of the Gospel relate very closely to what is said in the prologue of the Gospel of Jesus as the Logos (Word). This is not to say that the various titles have lost all their individuality and are used with total freedom and complete interchangeability. For example, the things predicated of Jesus as Son of Man are slightly but significantly different from things said about Jesus as Son or Son of God. Jesus as Son of Man is one who 'ascends', language not normally used of Jesus as Son of God; and while Jesus as Son is often said to be 'sent' by God, this language is not used of Jesus *qua* Son of Man.

All this no doubt simply illustrates the fact that the various terms used of Jesus have different origins and hence are used to relate to different aspects of the total picture of Jesus created by the Gospel. Alternatively, we have to recognise that the final completed picture presented by John has developed out of the various constituent elements something

that is very different from anything previously envisaged or (as far as we can tell) articulated. Thus we need to bear in mind here as always the distinction between how terms and/or ideas might have been used in earlier traditions and the way in which they are used in the developed presentation of John's Gospel. It may well be that the term Son of God has its origins as a royal, messianic term and that such a usage may still be visible in John: thus in Nathanael's assertion that Jesus is 'the Son of God, the king of Israel' (1: 49), the term 'Son of God' seems to be primarily (just) a royal designation. Yet in John's overall presentation it is clear that the designation of Jesus as 'Son of God' or 'Son' is intended to say far more than this as well.

It is this 'far more' that is clearly reflected in part in the obvious offensiveness which the claims of the Johannine Jesus cause to the Jews. At one point this is apparently simply connected with the idea of Jesus as Messiah. Thus in 9: 22, the reticence of the parents of the man born blind is said to be due to the fact that the Jews had decided that 'anyone who confessed *Jesus to be the Messiah* would be put out of the synagogue'. Yet it is clear that more is at stake than simply a bald claim that Jesus was a 'messianic' figure. Such a claim must have been part and parcel of Christian claims about Jesus from the very start of the Christian movement, and yet Christians were tolerated as members of the Jewish community for many years. However, it seems clear that this verse in John has in mind the more far-reaching claims about/by the Johannine Jesus, and John's use of the word 'Messiah' had already broadened out in scope considerably.

Son of God

What is evidently much more offensive to the Jews in John is related to other factors more explicitly associated with Jesus' claim to be 'Son of God' (though in any case 'Messiah' and 'Son of God' are closely related for John: cf. 11: 27; 20: 31). It is precisely because Jesus has claimed to be 'Son of God' that the Jews seek to have Jesus condemned to death by Pilate (19: 7). In part this also relates to Jesus' origins. The question of Jesus' origins recurs at many points of the Gospel, though the answer of John's Jesus is clear: Jesus comes from 'heaven', sent by his Father (cf. 6: 41; 7: 29; 8: 23, etc. and the various debates between Jesus and the Jews in these chapters). Above all, the Jews' objection to Jesus is that by claiming to be God's Son, or by calling God his Father

in the way he does, Jesus has made himself 'equal to God' (5: 18), or has in fact made himself God (10: 33). The claims of the Johannine Jesus thus make him guilty of blasphemy in the eyes of the Jews and the struggle is literally a life-and-death one (cf. 10: 33). And indeed the claim that Jesus is 'God' in some sense is one that the evangelist himself can affirm positively (1: 1; 20: 28).

John's language about Jesus, and about Jesus as Son of God, has a number of different features associated with it. The most obvious is perhaps inherent in the word 'Son' itself. God is Jesus' 'Father' in a special way so that Jesus refers to him as 'my Father' (2: 16; 5: 17, 43; 6: 32, etc.). Further, he has been 'sent' by God, so that God is often referred to by the Johannine Jesus as 'the One who sent me' (4: 34; 5: 24, 30; 6: 38; 7: 16, etc.). Sometimes the two are combined so that God is 'the Father who sent' Jesus (5: 37; 6: 44; 8: 16; 10: 36; 12: 49; 14: 24). However, the two ideas of sonship and mission are probably originally separate.

The idea of Jesus as the one who is 'sent' certainly need not imply any very 'high' Christology. Such language is very much at home in Old Testament prophecy. Thus, for example, Isaiah offers himself as the answer to God's cry 'Whom shall I send?' with the words 'Send me' (Isa. 6: 8-9). And the idea that God has commissioned the true prophet is a fundamental belief in Jewish tradition. So too in John's Gospel itself, we may note the words of the prologue in 1: 6 referring to John the Baptist as 'a man *sent* from God'. The language of 'sending' on its own is thus probably rooted in prophetic traditions showing Jesus as a true prophet figure.

As we have seen, this idea is frequently coupled in John with the idea of Jesus as 'Son' or 'Son of God'. Whether these two phrases should be distinguished in terms of their origins is debatable.²⁶ 'Son of God', as we have seen, may have its roots in Jewish messianic traditions. The notion of Jesus as 'Son' may be based in Jesus' own use of 'Abba' ('Father') in addressing God in prayer (cf. Mark 14: 36).²⁷ Sonship language on its own need not imply any very 'high' Christology, as we have already seen in considering the synoptic Gospels, but no more than agreement with God's will and obedience to him. Sonship may imply an element of unity with God; but it is a unity based on total obedience and dependence on the part of the son to his Father. Such an idea may well be reflected in several parts of the talk of the Johannine Jesus. For example, in 5: 19-20, the language of

Jesus' words ('the Son can do nothing on his own but only what he sees the Father doing') may have as its basis a very mundane statement about human fathers and human sons: a son can only learn from his father. In this sense, and it is an important aspect for John, Jesus' sonship implies and entails his total dependence upon God the Father. Thus alongside any claim to unity between Jesus and God (e.g. 10: 30 'I and the Father are one') must be placed a note of total dependence and subordination (e.g. 14: 28 'the Father is greater than I').²⁸ Indeed there is an important sense in which, for John, Jesus' unity with God is shown precisely *in* dependence and subordination to God.

Yet there is clearly more to John's Christology than simply portraying Jesus as a prophetic figure 'sent' by God and who is obedient to God as a son to a father. John has clearly also enriched these ideas with further notions. One of these, as has become clear in recent years, is that of agency.²⁹

The idea of agency is not necessarily a religious one at all, though it clearly has similarities with notions associated with prophecy. The basic idea is that 'an agent is like the one who sent him',³⁰ so that an agent can be regarded for some purposes as the same, or 'one with', the person who sends him. Within Judaism, the principle of agency applied in a number of different settings and different contexts where an agent would represent another person. The idea is reflected in some parts of the synoptic tradition, applied to Jesus as the 'agent' of God and to the disciples as 'agents' of Jesus (cf. Luke 10: 16 pars), and the same idea recurs in, for example, John 13: 20: 'whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me' (cf. too 12: 44–5; 14: 9). In one way of course the idea is similar to that of prophecy: the prophet too 'represents' God in some way and indeed the words of the prophet *are* the words of God, so that prophetic oracles are typically introduced by 'Thus says the Lord . . .'. However, the quasi-identity claimed between an agent and the sender takes the language one stage further than anything found in prophecy. In this sense, John's language about the oneness of Jesus with the Father goes further than what is implied by the prophetic model.

Nevertheless, even when an idea of agency is added to the prophetic model, and even if these are both enhanced by ideas of sonship, we have still not fully encompassed everything that John evidently wants to claim for Jesus. Above all, there is the notion that Jesus is the *revealer*, and reveals the things of God – or rather that he reveals God himself.

In the language of John, Jesus has come *from heaven* and tells of what he has seen and heard from his Father (cf. 3: 31–2, 34; 8: 26, 38; 12: 49; 15: 15; 17: 19); indeed Jesus is himself the revelation of God, so that to have seen Jesus is to have seen God himself (1: 18; 14: 9).

Son of Man

Some of these ideas are expressed in the Son of Man sayings which John records. As we have seen, the Son of Man sayings are firmly rooted in the synoptic tradition. The Son of Man sayings in John bear some similarity to the synoptic sayings, though it is clear that they have been developed very considerably in line with John's own ideas. Perhaps the saying closest to the synoptic tradition is John 5: 27, where it is said that God 'has given him [Jesus] authority to execute judgement, because he is the Son of Man'. The language is similar to Daniel 7: 14 where the one like a son of man is given vindication and 'justice' in the heavenly court. The saying in John 5 does go further than Daniel 7 in that the Son of Man figure is now the one who actually dispenses judgement – though the same move is made by at least some of the synoptics (notably Matthew: cf. Matt. 25: 31) and may also have been made independently by the authors of *1 Enoch* and *4 Ezra*.³¹

What is more striking about the Johannine Son of Man sayings is the idea embedded in them that Jesus *qua* Son of Man is a figure who ascends to heaven to a place from which he has previously descended. 'No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man' (3: 13); 'What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?' (6: 62). There is debate about whether the prime motif in these sayings is ascension alone, 'or descending as well as ascending. Certainly the idea of the Son of Man 'ascending' in John is not unrelated to the language used by John of Jesus as Son of Man being 'lifted up' (cf. 3: 14–15; 8: 28; 12: 34). Indeed the conjunction of 3: 13 with 3: 14–15 make the link clear. But also for John, Jesus' being 'lifted up' is identified – allusively at first but by the end quite clearly – with his being lifted up on the cross (cf. 12: 33: the language of being 'lifted up' is 'to indicate the kind of death he was to die'). As we have seen, Son of Man language in the synoptic tradition is strongly linked with Jesus' suffering and death, especially in Mark (and thence in Matthew and Luke: cf. Mark 8: 31; 9: 31; 10: 33, 45, etc.). In terms of the origins of the language, it may be then that the language

of the Son of Man's being lifted up/ascending owes quite a lot to the synoptic language about the suffering Son of Man, developed by John who interprets the cross itself as Jesus' glorification and 'lifting up'.

Yet this does not exhaust the meaning of Son of Man language for John. As we have already seen, the Son of Man ascends to *heaven*, to where he has come from originally and from where he has first descended (3: 13; 6: 62). Thus Jesus as the Son of Man, by virtue of his origins, is uniquely able to fulfil the role of revealing the mysteries of heaven, and of God, to other human beings on earth. It is this idea that may also be implied by the highly enigmatic verse 1: 51 'You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man'. The language is reminiscent of the story of Jacob's dream of the ladder, with angels ascending and descending on it (Gen. 28: 12). What seems to be implied by John is that the Son of Man acts as the link by which heaven and earth are connected, the means by which the things of heaven can be revealed to those on earth. Jesus is thus the source or means of divine revelation. Certainly, too, this idea of Jesus as the one who reveals God to others is implied by John in other sayings which do not refer to Jesus as Son of Man (cf. 1: 18; 5: 17; 6: 46; 14: 6, 8–9).

It is certainly hard to derive any of these ideas from the Son of Man tradition itself. However, one notable 'parallel' (or anti-parallel) to the use of such language, especially in 3: 13, has been noted for some years now. This concerns the claims made about others by some (or about themselves) to have made mystical ascents into heaven and hence to be able to reveal the mysteries of heaven to others. There seems to have been a strong tradition associating Moses with such an ascent into heaven,³² as well as figures like Enoch, Abraham and others. We know too of developing interests in Judaism from around the time of the end of the first century of so-called 'merkabah mysticism',³³ a claim to be able to be transported to heaven as a result of meditating on the vision of the chariot (*merkabah*) in Ezekiel 1. This interest may be implied in 1 *Enoch* 14, Sirach 49: 8, and other texts such as the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* from Qumran (4Q400–7). So, too, from a little later, we hear of some rabbis who claimed to have 'entered the garden' (*t. Hag.* 2.3–4), possibly a reference to a claimed vision of the chariot throne. One of these, Rabbi Elisha ben Abuyah, was deemed to be a heretic because he thought the glorious figure he saw on a throne was a 'second power in heaven' (3 *Enoch* 16; *b. Hag.* 15a). It thus appears that Judaism at the

time of the writing of John's Gospel was developing a strong interest in such mystical visions and the claims resulting from them; but equally, this seems to have been a time when the Jewish authorities were also clamping down hard on what others evidently regarded as dangerous excesses.

It may be then that it is this background which lies behind much of the Fourth Gospel.³⁴ Certainly the claim in John 3: 13 that no one has ascended to heaven except the Son of Man becomes much more pointed when set against such a background: for it becomes a more polemical denial against possible claims by any other rival figure to have entered heaven and to be able to reveal the secrets there.

This suggested background may also help to explain a little more the vehemence of the Jewish reaction to the Christian claims about Jesus. If this were indeed a time when the Jewish authorities generally were entrenching and drawing tighter boundary lines about their religion and excluding some elements as unacceptable, then it is perhaps a little less surprising that Christianity came under the spotlight so harshly. If Christian claims by the Johannine community about Jesus as a revealer figure related to Jesus as one who could reveal the mysteries of heaven itself, or God himself, then similar reactions by the Jewish authorities to figures like Rabbi Elisha may have led to strong rejection of the Christian claims and the decision to exclude Christians from the Jewish synagogues.

Yet John does not present Jesus as *just* a latter day Moses or Enoch-figure, ascending to heaven from earth. Jesus is one who ascends to *where he was before*. Built into the Johannine scheme is therefore an idea of pre-existence in some sense, and of a pattern of descending as well as ascending. Two possible models have been suggested for such language.

According to the first, Jesus' role is described in terms very similar to those used of the figure of *Wisdom* in the Jewish tradition. We have already seen that language of Wisdom as some kind of pre-existent being was already present in Judaism (cf. Prov. 8: 22; Wisd. 9: 9) as also was language about Wisdom being sent from God (Wisd. 9: 16–17; Bar. 3: 9; 1 *Enoch* 42). It has long been recognised that much of the language of the prologue in John 1: 1–18 can be paralleled in language about Wisdom, and the same also applies to virtually all of John.³⁵ Thus John's Jesus and Wisdom act as the agent in creation (Prov. 8: 22–31; John 1: 3); both are the source of light (Wisd. 7: 26–9; John 1: 5; 8: 12),

or food and drink (Sir. 24: 19–21; Prov. 9: 2–5; John 6: 35, 51–8). Notably the language of Jesus as the Word 'coming to his own' (1: 11) and then 'becoming flesh' and 'dwelling' (literally 'tabernacled') among people on earth (1: 14) has a parallel in Sirach 24: 8 where God tells Wisdom 'make your dwelling [lit. tabernacle] in Jacob'. So, too, the long first-person discourses of Wisdom (Prov. 8; Sir. 24) are similar in some respects to the long discourses of the Johannine Jesus which are often developed out of an 'I am . . .' saying by Jesus.

The application of such language to a human being may well represent a quantum leap from the use of such language in non-Christian Judaism (though if John made such a leap he was almost certainly not the first Christian to do so: as we have already seen, the category of Wisdom was exploited christologically by Paul, the author of Colossians and Matthew). Thus some have suggested recently that another possible background for John's ideas may be that of an *angelic* figure.³⁶

The idea of God being surrounded by an angelic retinue is one that can be traced back to the earliest stages of Israelite history, as we have already seen in chapter 1. Moreover, we have also seen the way in which an angelic messenger can apparently oscillate between being someone separate from God and being God himself.³⁷ It may be then that it is this idea that also informs the total Johannine picture. Jesus in John as the one who re-presents God on earth may thus be adopting in part an angelic-type role.

Against such a view it has been noted that angels are generally only short-term visitors, and certainly Jesus for John is certainly on earth for rather longer than the average angel of Judaism!³⁸ So too, despite the real parallels which can be shown, and which justify the suggestion that John's Jesus is *like* an angel in several significant respects (and therefore 'angelomorphic'), there is still no real parallel in Judaism to an idea of an angel becoming 'incarnate'.³⁹

Maybe all this simply shows that there is no one single category to explain the Johannine picture fully. It may be then that we have to content ourselves with the fact that, in terms of previous ideas, John has taken a number of rather different, disparate notions and combined them in his portrayal of Jesus as the Son of God/Son of Man/Logos who is pre-existent with God in heaven, sent by his Father, who reveals God to those on earth, and who eventually returns to the place where he has come from. There seems to be little doubt that in this composite picture, John has made rich and varied use of Jewish materials. Yet,

as with other New Testament writers, the use made has taken John some considerable distance from the way in which such materials are used in Judaism. We have seen this in relation to John's use of the categories of messiahship and divine sonship, and his use of 'Son of Man'. Clearly for the Jewish opponents of Jesus in John's story ('the Jews', who one assumes represent the Jewish opponents of John's Christian community in John's time), this distancing has reached the point of being intolerable: the claims by the Johannine Jesus (i.e. presumably the claims made about Jesus by Johannine Christians) have become so extreme that they are regarded as blasphemous, threatening the fundamentals of monotheistic belief. Thus in John 10: 33 'the Jews' say 'it is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God'.

Nevertheless, it would seem that John believes that the claims made by the Johannine Jesus can and should be contained *within* the parameters of Judaism and within a monotheistic framework. Even the momentous claim by the Johannine Jesus 'I and the Father are one' is one which he claims can be defended within Jewish presuppositions and does not deserve the charge of blasphemy (cf. the argument of 10: 31–9 and the appeal to Psalm 82: 1). Apparently then even the claim to divinity for Jesus (1: 1; 20: 28) is one which, in John's eyes, can evidently be tolerated without prejudicing the uniqueness of God. For John, Jesus is the revealer – and to a certain extent the embodiment, or 'incarnation' (cf. 1: 14) – of the one true God. Certainly John goes out of his way to emphasise that the revelation provided by Jesus far outpasses any other rival claims to be able to reveal the things of heaven (cf. 3: 13), and even God himself (cf. 1: 18), to human beings. Yet it is precisely as the one who is obedient to the Father in everything that Jesus's unity with God is to be seen.

There can be no question that the claims made about Jesus in John are qualitatively different ('higher') than those in some other parts of the New Testament. But equally, the insistence of John that his Christian claims do not breach the bounds of monotheism forbids a neat equation of Jesus with a(n other) divine figure alongside God. The tensions and complexities of the Johannine picture undoubtedly contributed to the later disputes between Christians in subsequent christological debates, with different sides being able to appeal to different parts of John's Gospel for support.⁴⁰ That lies outside our purview here. Perhaps

we can simply note the way in which John's presentation no doubt sets the agenda for the subsequent discussion by insisting not only on the full humanity of Jesus ('the Word became flesh') but also on the final and definitive nature of the revelation provided by Jesus so that Jesus is the Son sent from the Father, the Son of Man who has ascended back to his place of origin in heaven from where he descended, the embodiment of God's wisdom and word: the one whom the true follower can and should acknowledge as 'my Lord and my God' (20: 28).

NOTES

1. Cited by Eusebius, *E. H.* 6.14.7.
2. E.g., in John, Jesus 'cleanses' the temple early in his ministry; in the synoptics it is much later. In John, Jesus is active for much longer in Jerusalem; in the synoptics, Jesus is in Jerusalem for only one final week of his life. In John, Jesus dies on the eve of Passover, in the synoptics he dies on the feast of Passover itself.
3. Instead of the short pithy sayings and the parables which characterise the synoptic presentation of Jesus' teaching, John's Jesus teaches in long discourses with none of the parables so characteristic of the synoptics. So too, categories such as the 'kingdom of God', which is so prominent in the synoptics, rarely appear in John; in turn other categories, such as teaching about 'eternal life', dominate the picture in John.
4. John 14: 1 is typical: 'Believe in God, believe also in me'; cf. also 20: 31. In the synoptics the motif occurs only in Matt. 18: 6 ('these little ones who believe in me') which is almost certainly due to MattR (the Markan parallel in Mark 9: 42 lacks the phrase 'who believe in me').
5. John 6: 35; 8: 12; 8: 58; 10: 7, 9, 11; 11: 25; 14: 6; 15: 1.
6. For a variety of reasons, many have argued that ch. 21 is a later appendix to the Gospel, written by another hand: the vocabulary is slightly different, and in any case 20: 30-1 bears all the hallmarks of the ending of a book and is rather anti-climactic when followed by a whole further chapter.
7. There is variation among the MSS of John at this point: some read a present tense *pisteuete*, perhaps implying that the aim is that people continue in their (existing) belief, others read an aorist *pisteusete*, perhaps implying that people should make a single act of belief (i.e. perhaps change their belief in a one-off act). The latter possibility might imply rather more of a missionary aim for the Gospel.
8. By 'authentic' accounts, I mean here historically accurate representations of what Jesus himself actually said and did. The *theological* 'authenticity'

of John's account is quite another matter.

9. Cf. e.g., D. Rensberger, *Overcoming the World: Politics and Community in the Gospel of John* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), ch. 1. The most influential works on John's community in recent years have been R. E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Geoffrey Chapman, 1979) (as well as his Anchor Bible commentary); also J. L. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979).
10. This issue is treated in all the commentaries on the Johannine epistles as well as the standard *Introductions* to the New Testament: cf. e.g. Kümmel, *Introduction*, 442-5.
11. All the evidence we have suggests that Jesus, and the earliest followers, remained – and were allowed and expected to remain – within the jurisdiction of the synagogue authorities.
12. The phrase was originally coined by Martyn, but has become very widely used now in relation to John.
13. Cf. the discussion in W. Horbury, 'The benediction of the *Minim* and early Jewish-Christian controversy', *JTS* 33 (1982), pp. 19-61.
14. Cf. John 16: 2: 'The hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God'.
15. Again the terminology is that of Martyn: 'Christian Jews' refers to people who were positive in their attitude to Jesus and the Christian movement but who stayed within Jewish structures, religiously and socially. 'Jewish Christians' refers to those who had left the social structures of non-Christian Judaism. In one sense, no New Testament Christian would have regarded himself or herself as a 'Jewish Christian' in this sense since all would have thought of themselves as 'Jews' still in some sense or other.
16. See the works of Brown and Martyn already mentioned. For a useful summary of the different positions, see M. C. de Boer, *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996), esp. ch. 2.
17. There is of course the well-known problem of the pericope of the woman taken in adultery in 7: 53-8: 11: this is missing from most MSS. of John, is stylistically quite unlike the rest of the Gospel and hence is almost certainly a later addition to the text. We have already noted the phenomenon of ch. 21, which seems to be a slightly redundant 'appendix' after 20: 30-1. There is another well-known problem with John 6 which seems to disrupt the narrative flow between chs 5 and 7 by suddenly transporting Jesus back to Galilee when 7: 1 then presupposes that he is still in Judea.
18. This is above all the view of Brown who correlates the linear progression of the story within the Gospel with the (supposed) historical development

- of the community and its beliefs.
19. If nothing else one should note the common points between John and the synoptics: however they are to be explained in detail, they clearly show John's use of earlier traditions (whether of the synoptics or of the sources used by the synoptics).
 20. The ablest defender of the theory is R. Fortna: see his *The Fourth Gospel and its Predecessor: From Narrative Source to Present Gospel* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989).
 21. Probably with the exception of 7: 53–8: 11 which can be excluded on text-critical grounds.
 22. Cf. Fortna, *Fourth Gospel*, pp. 226–8; De Boer, *Johannine Perspectives*, pp. 85–90; J. Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: OUP, 1991), ch. 7.
 23. In 4QTest, the text from Deut. 18, referring to the coming of a 'prophet like Moses' is quoted, apparently with respect to hopes for a future, eschatological figure.
 24. See De Boer, *Johannine Perspectives*, p. 88; Martyn, *History*, pp. 102–11; also W. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), p. 26.
 25. See M. de Jonge, 'Jesus as prophet and king in the fourth gospel', in *Jesus: Stranger from Heaven and Son of God. Jesus Christ and the Christians in Johannine Perspective* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), pp. 49–76.
 26. Cf. Ashton, *Understanding*, p. 318; De Boer, *Johannine Perspectives*, pp. 113–14.
 27. For discussion of this in relation to Jesus' own self-understanding, see pp. 220–1 below.
 28. See C. K. Barrett, '"The Father is greater than I" John 14.28: Subordinationist Christology in the New Testament', in *Essays on John* (London: SPCK, 1982), pp. 19–36.
 29. See P. Borgen, 'God's agent in the fourth gospel', in J. Ashton (ed.), *The Interpretation of John* (London: SPCK, 1986), pp. 67–78; Ashton, *Understanding*, pp. 313–17.
 30. Cf. Mek. on Exod. 12: 3; Ber. 5: 5, etc.
 31. Cf. p. 126 above.
 32. Cf. Philo, Mos. 1.158; Josephus, Ant. 3.96; Pseudo-Philo 12.1. See P. Borgen, 'Some Jewish exegetical traditions as background for Son of Man sayings in John's Gospel (Jn 3.13–14 and context)', in M. de Jonge (ed.), *L'Evangile de Jean* (BETL 44; Leuven: Duculot & Leuven University Press, 1977), pp. 243–58. Also J. D. G. Dunn, 'Let John be John: A gospel for its time', in P. Stuhlmacher (ed.), *The Gospel and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 293–322, on p. 307, repr. in Dunn, *The Christ and the Spirit*, vol. 1, pp. 345–75, on 359.

33. See C. C. Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982).
34. See especially Dunn, 'Let John be John'.
35. See e.g. B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1977), pp. 77–9; R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John I–XII* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), pp. cxxii–cxxv; Dunn, 'Let John be John', pp. 314–17.
36. Cf. J. Ashton, 'Bridging ambiguities', in *Studying John: Approaches to the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: OUP, 1994), pp. 71–89.
37. See p. 27 above. The picture of some interchange between the angel and God can be found in several texts: e.g. in Gen. 21, Hagar is addressed by 'an angel of God' in v. 17 who tells her that 'God has heard the voice of the boy [Ishmael]'; but then in almost the same breath, she is told 'I will make a great nation out of him'. (Cf. too Gen. 31: 11–13.) In Exod. 3, the 'angel of the Lord' appears to Moses in the burning bush (v. 2), yet it is God who speaks (vv. 4, 6).
38. Dunn, 'Let John be John', p. 313. Ashton's response is that John is also a short-term visitor in John's eyes (*Understanding*, p. 352)! Yet despite e.g. John 16: 16–20 and the discussion of the 'little while' that Jesus will be with his disciples, Jesus' time on earth is considerably longer than that spent by any angelic visitor in Jewish literature.
39. The one possible exception might be the *Prayer of Joseph*, a fragment of which is preserved by Origen and which appears to imply that Jacob was an angel who came down to earth and 'tabernacled' as Jacob-Israel. See the discussion by J. Z. Smith, in J. H. Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (New York: Doubleday; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985), vol. 2, pp. 699–712, with further literature cited.
40. See T. E. Pollard, *Johannine Christology and the Early Church* (Cambridge: CUP, 1970).