

of Christology; development, on the other hand, is an organic unfolding, like the transition from bud to flower. The statement of Christology, therefore, did not take the church farther from the fact of Jesus but into it more deeply. Just as Boers' historically couched contention requires critical assessment from the standpoint of Christology, so Moule's theological assertion requires historical confirmation. Neither can be undertaken in this context, however.

It suffices to point out that the unwanted outcome of concentrating on origins is that the historical link between Jesus and Christology has grown weaker rather than stronger. The clearer this result became, or threatened to become, the more vigorously the historical question was pursued, either by attempting to show that Jesus did use certain Christological titles of himself, or that what they express agrees with his Christology which was implicit in his sense of identity and authority expressed in his use of 'abba' and 'amen' respectively. The more relentlessly such efforts were pursued, the more difficult it actually became to show that Jesus had used *any* title for himself, or why the early church acknowledged his sense of authority by developing precisely these Christologies. Indeed, the one title with which Jesus might have been comfortable—'prophet'—had no future except in certain strands of Jewish Christianity—but they are not represented in the New Testament.¹ In a word, if the legitimacy of Christology depends on establishing historically the continuity between the historically reconstructed Jesus and the Christology of the church, then the turn to history alone has not only made suspect all Christology which goes beyond that which was in the mind of Jesus but continued historical work is unable to resolve the dilemma.

(c) The consequences of turning to history are most evident in the preoccupation with Christological titles. Indeed, it is often assumed that New Testament Christology is a matter of history of titles. Probably no other factor has contributed more to the current aridity of the discipline than this fascination with the palaeontology of Christological titles. To reconstruct the history of titles as if this were the study of Christology

1. According to John Knox, early Christian non-use of 'prophet' for Jesus reflects the fact that this title had been appropriated by the disciples of John the Baptist. 'The Prophet' in the New Testament Christology', in R.A. Norris (ed.), *Lux in Lumine* (Festschrift N. Pitterenger; New York: Seabury, 1966), pp. 22-24. It is more likely, however, that the major strands of early Christianity found 'prophet' incapable of embracing the soteriological correlates which they wanted to express.

is like trying to understand the windows of Chartres cathedral by studying the history of coloured glass. In fact, concentration on titles finally makes the Christologies of the New Testament unintelligible as Christologies, and insignificant theologically. Renewing the discipline of New Testament Christology requires, therefore, liberating it from the tyranny of titles—though obviously they cannot be ignored. Three considerations, at least, warrant this claim.

To begin with, title-dominated study of New Testament Christology reflects an inadequate view of language, because it assumes that meaning resides in words like 'Lord'. Just as this assumption misled Vincent Taylor when he wrote that 'the question, who Jesus is, is approached best by considering how men named Him, for it is by His names that He is revealed and known',¹ so an alternative pointed James Barr in the right direction when he declared that 'it is in sentences that real theological thinking is done'.² Furthermore, where titles dominate the scene, the difference between a word and a concept is blurred. A word is identical with a concept only if it is a technical term which has no synonyms. Barr is essentially correct, as Friedrich more or less conceded,³ when he complains that because Kittel's Dictionary has not thought out this difference, its writers sometimes talk about concepts when they should be discussing words.⁴ This confusion can be found also in Hahn's influential monograph,⁵ which gave a new legitimacy to this approach, despite the searching criticism pressed by Vielhaue.⁶ Next, concentrating on titles actually hampers the effort to

1. V. Taylor, *The Names of Jesus* (London: Macmillan, 1953), p. 1.

2. J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 234.

3. G. Friedrich, 'Begriffsgeschichtliche' Untersuchungen im Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament', *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 20 (1976), pp. 151-77. Friedrich, under whose leadership Kittel's project was completed, also defends the dictionary against Barr's criticism by noting that Kittel followed L. Weisgerber (1927) who contended that word and concept are interrelated. Friedrich's views on the need for a New Testament concept-lexicon are found in 'Das bisher noch fehlende Begrifflexikon zum Neuen Testament', *MfS* 19 (1972/73), pp. 127-52.

4. Barr, *Semantics*, p. 209.

5. F. Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1969), especially the chapter on 'Christ'.

6. P. Vielhaue, 'Ein Weg zur neutestamentliche Christologie?' *Evt* 25 (1965), pp. 24-72; 'Zur Frage der christologischen Hoheitstitel', *TLZ* 90 (1965), pp. 569-88.

understand Christology in the New Testament texts. This can be seen in the following five considerations. (1) Concentration on titles cannot deal adequately with christologically important passages in which no title appears, whether they be narratives or sayings in the Gospels or discursive arguments in the Epistles. The Gospels often refer simply to 'Jesus' just as the Epistles use 'Christ' as a proper name; in Matthew the Jesus-Moses theme never gets expressed in a title. So strong has been the influence of titles, however, that frequently scholars have supplied them as if the creators of the text had forgotten to include them. For instance, the concluding scene in Matthew, highly important for the Christology of this book, does not mention any title but is 'missing' title in order to read the story in terms of the Danielic 'Son of Man', others in terms of 'Son of God'.² In the case of the miracle stories, a 'title' has been introduced which never appears in the New Testament at all—*theios anēr*.³

(2) The title-dominated approach does not, and perhaps cannot, deal adequately with the plurality of titles in a given text. Just as the Christology of no major New Testament book coincides with a single title, so it is not the aggregate of titles either. Moreover, the texts show neither embarrassment over the many titles,⁴ nor concern to do what their modern interpreters find necessary—instruct the reader about the relation of one title to another.⁵

(3) More important, concentrating on titles can lead one to miss the Christology which is in the text. For example, because Paul uses

1. See, e.g., J.P. Meier, 'Salvation History in Matthew: In Search of a Starting Point', *CBQ* 37 (1975), pp. 210-12.

2. So J.D. Kingsbury, 'The Composition and Christology of Mt. 28.16-20', *JBL* 93 (1974), pp. 573-84.

3. Although the phrase *theios anēr* is absent from the New Testament, its use in recent scholarship is unclear; sometimes it is used virtually as a title, at other times as a category (like 'hero'), a motif, an image or a concept. For an assessment of its role, see J.D. Kingsbury, 'The "Divine Man" as the Key to Mark's Christology: The End of an Era?', *Int* 35 (1981), pp. 243-57. Kingsbury calls it a concept.

4. M. Hengel observed, 'The multiplicity of christological titles does not mean a multiplicity of exclusive "christologies" but an accumulative glorification of Jesus', *Christology and New Testament Chronology*, in *Between Jesus and Paul* (London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), p. 41.

5. See, e.g., J.D. Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), ch. 2.

'Christ' virtually as a proper name (except for Rom. 9.4), neither the etymology of *Christos* nor the history of pre-Christian messianic hopes and messianic claimants is relevant for his construal of Jesus. Nothing the Apostle says about the identity and significance of Jesus for the revelation of God's righteousness depends on a christological title. In fact, concentrating on titles does not lead one into Paul's Christology but right past it.

(4) Titular Christology tends to see but half of the christological hermeneutic—that half in which titles are supposed to do the interpreting, namely, of the person and event called 'Jesus'. This is rather odd, since the pre-Christian history of the titles shows that none of them (except 'prophet') really fit Jesus. It is not surprising that scholarship has been unable to show that he applied them to himself. Consequently, the other half of the christological hermeneutic needs to be brought into view—that the Jesus-event interprets the titles. This is obvious in John (e.g. 7.40-43), but it is no less true elsewhere as well (e.g. Mk 9.30-32), but the customary focus on titles will not disclose it. Interestingly enough, the point of this paragraph is tacitly acknowledged by all those treatments of the material which contend that Jesus, in applying titles to himself, simultaneously reinterpreted, 'spiritualized' or transformed them.

(5) In title-dominated study of New Testament Christology, the identity and significance of Jesus in relation to the Old Testament is objectified and concentrated in a way that short-changes the truly significant christological issues. Title-dominated Christology has nothing to contribute, for example, to understanding Paul's dictum that 'Christ is the *telos* of the law' (Rom. 10.4), however *telos* be understood. The author of Hebrews understands this point intuitively, for he not only allows the Jesus-event to reinterpret the title 'priest', but his understanding of why the earthly cultus is now obsolete does not turn on the titles used (Heb. 10.1-10). In fact, it is hard to see what the title clarification of the complex and important, though widely neglected, issues epitomized by the rubric, 'Christ and the Old Testament'.

The third reason why the study of New Testament Christology must be liberated from the tyranny of titles should now be clear: it bypasses Christology itself, because it does not respect either its formal grammar or its material contents (the correlations). Instead, it deals with matters pertaining to Christology in a piecemeal way. In light of the nature of

Christology, as outlined above, concentrating on titles tells us little that we need to know in order to understand the Christologies in the New Testament, and helps us even less to think christologically. An alternative is needed, and to that I now turn.

The Way Ahead

First of all, a more adequate approach will concentrate on its proper subject matter by respecting the grammar of christological discourse. To do so is not to introduce the old loci system because what will be sought is not a set of doctrines but a systemic grasp of the way the correlates of Christ and God, world, and the human condition are expressed or implied. Nor does an explicitly christological approach require that historical and philological questions be abandoned; what is required is that Christology is not confused with historical reconstruction of the history of ideas but is free to be what it claims to be—Christology. Otherwise the study of New Testament Christology will continue under the illusion that the history of ideas pertaining to Christology is Christology.¹ Attending to the correlates of Christology is, moreover, particularly appropriate to the New Testament because this literature consistently expresses the identity and significance of Jesus in relation to something else—doxology, parenesis, cult narrative, etc. There are no sections of the New Testament devoted to Christology as a discrete topic in its own right. Attending to the syntax of the significance of Jesus is therefore not an attempt to impose an alien structure on the texts but a way of ordering the relational character of Christology as it appears in the New Testament.

In the second place, the study of Christology in the New Testament should be just that—Christology as it appears, or is implied, in the New Testament. It is the Christology of this particular corpus of texts that must remain central. This deliberate concentration on these texts has a number of consequences, three of which deserve to be noted here.

First, a focus on texts, or in the case of Paul (and to some extent of John as well) a corpus of texts, keeps in view the fragmentary character of Christology in the New Testament.² Because the Christology of

1. See also E. Giltgammann, *Der leidende Apostel und sein Herr* (FRLANT, 90; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), pp. 46, 196 for similar observations.

2. E. Käsemann called attention to the fragmentariness of the material in 'The Problem of a New Testament Theology', *NTS* 19 (1973), pp. 241-43.

a text, or corpus of texts, cannot be equated with the Christology of the writer, one should speak of the Christology of persons only in carefully circumscribed contexts. Given the occasional character of the New Testament texts, as well as their several genres and functions, a text's Christology is but a partial expression of what the writer thought about Jesus' identity and significance. Just as there is no reason to think that any Evangelist wrote into his Gospel everything he knew about Jesus, so there is no reason to think that he expressed completely his construal of Jesus' identity and significance in the particular narrative that now bears his name. So too, there is no adequate reason to equate the Christology of a text or of its sources with the Christology of a particular group. To assume that the Christology of distinct communities, and then to assume that each community had but reconstruct diverse groups is surely an unwarranted procedure. What is characteristic of communities is their capacity to affirm multiple and diverse Christologies simultaneously. It is more likely that various Christian communities had different configurations of Christologies. In any case, the point is that the Christology of individual authors and fragments which cannot be assumed to be representative cross-sections of how the identity and significance of Jesus were construed. Centring on the Christology of New Testament texts is an essential way of remembering how much is unknown and remains unknowable.

Secondly, a focus on texts will deal with the text or corpus of texts as they actually exist and, so far as possible, with what they were designed to do. Historical questions customarily treated in introductions, including those of genre, are indeed important because the form and function for which the text was created affected what the writer emphasized and neglected. The current use of literary, discourse and rhetorical analyses accords with this insistence that what must remain in focus is the thought-structure and argument of the text as we have it. Respect for genre entails exploring, for instance, the ways in which narrative creates both possibilities and constraints, which are different from argumentative discourses or the vision reports of apocalypses.¹ For example, the fact that in John the

1. For a thought-provoking exploration of narrative Christology, see M. Eugene Boring, 'The Christology of Mark: Hermeneutical Issues for Systematic Theology',

protagonist of the story articulates in the first person singular elements of the author's Christology (the 'I am...' form) which a discourse would express in the third person singular ('he is...') poses an interesting question for Johannine Christology: what is the significance of the fact that the disciples do not confess that Jesus is the light, the door, etc. but that instead Jesus proclaims himself in these terms? That is, what is the difference for Christology between Christian predication and Christ's own self-proclamation? That is probably a more fruitful question for understanding John's Christology than asking where the *Ego-emi* sayings come from. In a word, the central questions to be pursued and answered are: what is the overall construal of Jesus' identity and significance in the text? What is the structure of this Christology and to what extent are the logical correlates expressed? What degree of coherence and completeness does this Christology have? It is the structure and dynamic of a given Christology that should become clear. What is in view here comports with E.P. Sanders' call for a systemic grasp of Paul's theology.¹ A systemic approach will make it clear that a text's Christology is not simply the sum of its parts but a construal of Jesus which must be seen as a whole.

Thirdly, concentrating on the Christology of existing texts in a systemic way makes it manifest that the decisive questions are not the origin of Christology or of particular Christologies. Concretely, it keeps in focus the true subject matter—the construal of Jesus' identity and significance—precisely because inquiry is not deflected into the historical question of whether Jesus' self-interpretation is its origin. Jesus' own construal of his identity and significance is indeed a valid historical question in its own right. Christology, however, brings to expression the Christian construal of Jesus as the focal point of a network of theological correlations. Because the religious and theological significance of Jesus emerges only when one reflects on this event in relation to God, the world and the human condition and its resolution, it is of but secondary importance whether this understanding was derived from Jesus himself (derivation must not be confused with consonance). Neither the effort to understand a Christology, nor to discern its

capacity, nor to assess its validity depends on a historian's success in tracing it to the mind of Jesus. Nor, conversely, may a Christology be disallowed because it did not occur to Jesus to avow it. In other words, the Christology of the critically reconstructed historical Jesus is not part of the Christology of the New Testament.¹ The historical relation between Jesus' self-interpretation and the early Christian interpretations of Jesus is another matter.

The New Testament texts have their own ways of making the Jesus-event central to their Christologies, and studying these texts should identify and illumine those ways. Here too, one must guard against introducing modern categories which obscure one's vision and skew the agenda. In this regard, the term 'earthly Jesus' is almost as alien to the texts as 'historical Jesus'. Paul has been falsely accused of having no interest in Jesus, allegedly being preoccupied with the exalted Christ, because his modern interpreters assumed that they already knew what an interest in Jesus would, and should, look like, and so they did not ask sufficiently how Paul himself viewed the matter. What a text includes in the word 'Jesus' (or in the phrase 'Jesus Christ') is exactly what the study of the New Testament Christology should reveal, just as it should clarify why the text does not draw out this is not to imply that the texts made no distinctions within the 'Jesus event' at all. Rom. 1.3-4 is but one way in which distinctions were made.) Even the current emphasis on the identity of the earthly Jesus and the exalted Christ is not really appropriate for texts which never separated them to begin with. In other words, the subject matter of New Testament Christology can be said to have two poles: the one is 'Jesus', and the other concerns how the various correlations between Jesus and God, the world and the human condition affect the content of this 'Jesus'. The study of New Testament Christology should expose why this polarity exists and how it works itself out in the texts. Renewing the study of New Testament Christology entails not only

Sem 30 (1984), pp. 125-53 (136-45).

1. See E.P. Sanders, 'Patterns of Religion in Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: A Holistic Method of Comparison', *HTR* 66 (1973), pp. 445-78; *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; SCM Press, 1977), pp. 12-18.

1. A clear instance of a well-known work based on exactly the opposite point of view is Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971); volume 1 of this unfinished work bears the title 'The Proclamation of Jesus'. Even if one were to grant that Jeremias has reconstructed accurately the teachings of Jesus as well as Jesus' understanding of his mission, that reconstruction is precisely *not* part of the theology (and hence of the Christology) of the New Testament.

attending to the grammar of Christology and a deliberate focus on the New Testament texts, but also, in the third place, a somewhat different approach to the plurality and diversity of the Christologies in the canon. What is in view here does not 'solve' the problem of diversity by shifting into the historical mode which, as in the creation of trajectories, for example, turns generic similarities into genetic relationships; nor does it proceed theologically in order to unify the several Christologies by integrating them into a common conceptual structure as in Cullmann's *Heilsgeschichte* scheme, or in Herbert Braun's reduction of all Christologies to a single anthropology. Rather, what is envisioned keeps the various Christologies in a focus that is itself christological, and does so in several respects.

First, a systemic analysis indicates that there are two basic types of Christologies in the New Testament; the one works with pre-existence, and the other does not.¹ The possibilities and limitations of each example, what sort of anthropological questions of each. For range and depth of the human condition which each allows to become visible? What are the dangers of each type? Which type is more amenable to an adequate view of the relation between Jesus and the Old Testament? Is there any correlation between a type of Christology and the social identity and location of the people who espouse it? Here too, inquiring who first spoke of Christ's pre-existence is no substitute for trying to understand what doing so entails.

Secondly, a christological approach to the diversity of New Testament Christologies will pursue the consequences of the canon's juxtaposing precisely these Christologies. The incompleteness of these Christologies is not such that each simply complements the other, as in a jigsaw puzzle. Even if the virgin birth can be harmonized with the incarnation, at many other points the tensions are simply too great. What needs attention is the ways in which the diverse Christologies

1. The common distinction between two-stage and three-stage Christologies also relies on pre-existence as the key. There are, of course, other ways of classifying New Testament Christologies. For example, one can group them according to the genre in which they are found (doxological materials, terse formulae, narratives, etc.), or according to what they emphasize in the Christ-event (e.g. the character of Jesus' public mission, herald of the Kingdom, death). The advantage of using pre-existence is that it keeps in focus the shape of the event as a whole.

interact with each other. It is ironic that although historical criticism was developed largely to overcome the church's integrative interpretation by emphasizing the particularity of each text in its own historical context, the result of historical work shows in detail how New Testament texts embody a continuum of interpretation, and an interaction of traditions and texts with the communities that used them. Unless one thinks early Christians lived in isolated groups where only one Christology prevailed, one must assume that diverse Christologies interacted with each other almost from the start, even though they do not refer to each other explicitly. The point is that juxtaposition of diverse Christologies in the canon is not an arbitrary, unfortunate imposition by ecclesiastics but a rather natural outgrowth of what had been occurring for some time. After all, the vexing problem of John and the Synoptics¹ was not created by the canon. To put the matter differently, what is true of each Gospel, where elements of diverse Christologies, logically incommensurate with each other, now interact in the overall construal of Jesus' identity and significance, is true also of the New Testament as a whole. This interaction of existing texts deserves to be explored.² Meaning, after all, is not limited to the moment of a text's creation or to the aims of the author. It is generated also by the contexts in which the texts exist and function, including the context of the canon.

Thirdly, a major christological issue posed by the plurality of New Testament Christologies concerns the identity of Jesus—how do we know that it is the same Jesus who is being construed? Paul's accusation that his opponents in Corinth preach 'another Jesus' (2 Cor. 11.4) shows that this question is continuous with the New Testament itself. To ask whether the diverse Christologies construe the same Jesus is to seek criteria for discerning what is constitutive about his identity. At this point, the limits of christological exegesis become evident because the criteria of Jesus' identity cannot be found by exegeting one more New Testament text. Here a sustained conversation with fundamental

1. See the four essays on the subject in D. Moody Smith, *Johannine Christianity* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1984), pt. 2.

2. Concern for this question is one of the themes in B.S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

3. In formulating this issue I was stimulated by the programmatic article by R. Knierim, 'The Task of an Old Testament Theology', *HBT* 6 (1984), pp. 25-57.

The renewal of the study of New Testament Christology will be the work of many minds, just as it will require the raising of explicitly christological issues, some of which this essay has identified and formulated, albeit in an abbreviated way.

INDEX OF REFERENCES

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