

CHRISTOLOGY¹

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Christology traditionally designates expressions of, and reflections on, Jesus' religious significance in and for Christian faith. The term derives from systematic/dogmatic theology, where it designates a core traditional focus of Christian theological reflection. *New Testament Christology* is usually focused on the ways that New Testament writings articulate and reflect convictions and claims about Jesus.

In modern scholarly study of NT Christology, generally, there are several approaches, reflecting distinguishable questions and aims. Some studies take a pronounced historical/developmental approach, the main aim being to chart a diachronic process through which the affirmations about Jesus that we see reflected in the NT came to be formulated. Other studies focus on one or more of the honorific epithets (christological titles) applied to Jesus in the NT, such as *Christ*, *Son of God*, and *Lord*, using these as key indicators of Jesus' significance. This also usually involves a lot of attention given to any pre-Christian usage of these terms. Many studies concentrate on the christological ideas of individual NT writings/writers, the concern often being to portray the diversity of christological emphases in the NT, or to underscore the particular emphasis of a given writing/writer. Still other studies focus on one or more NT christological themes reflected across various NT writings, such as Jesus' pre-existence or redemptive death, and the main concern can be either historical/developmental or more of a reflective/theological one.

Typically, *Christology* has meant mainly beliefs and claims about Jesus, but in recent years some scholars have also emphasized the devotional practice reflected in the NT as important evidence of Jesus' exalted status. In this article, we shall survey the main types of christological material in the NT and the key emphases about Jesus that characterize the NT. In the course of this, we shall also note briefly emphases of key NT writers/writings.

A. Key NT Materials

1. Hymns
2. Confessional Formulas
3. Christological Titles
4. The Gospels as "Jesus books"
5. Devotional Practices

B. Key Emphases

1. Jesus and God
2. Jesus and God's Purposes

A. Key NT Materials

Actually, there is surprisingly little sustained exposition of Christology in most NT writings. Instead, even the earliest NT writings (letters of Paul from ca. 50 CE onward) already presuppose rather remarkable convictions about Jesus, and often these convictions are expressed in compressed forms such as hymns and confessional formulae, with which the readers are presumed to be familiar. This means that we have to date the emergence of these convictions so early that they are already taken for granted as familiar to the original readers of these texts (and, hence, in need of

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little articulation or defence). Certainly, however, the elaboration of Jesus' redemptive work in comparison with the OT priesthood and sacrificial practices in Hebrews, and the full-scale quasi-biographical narratives of Jesus' ministry in the Gospels arguably represent more extended and notable christological texts. But, though there is not much extended explanation of christology in the NT, there is abundant material indicating the centrality of the matter.

1. Hymns

It is very significant that several key passages in NT writings that explicitly articulate christological convictions are widely thought to be, or to derive from, early Christian odes/hymns. Their original use was in the context of worship gatherings, and their composition was likely prompted in settings of intense religious exaltation/inspiration. As Hengel observed, it appears that inspired songs about Jesus formed one of the earliest and most influential modes of christological expression. Several of the passages thought to preserve such songs have received considerable scholarly attention, but the primary focus here is on the NT material itself rather than a review of scholarship.

The earliest of these key passages is Philippians 2:6-11. Set in the midst of Paul's exhortations to endure suffering (1:27-30), demonstrate consideration for fellow believers (2:1-5), and live blamelessly in the world (2:12-18), these verses form a compressed narrative about Jesus' own self-humbling and obedience, and God's answering exaltation of him to a breathtaking status. Although a few have argued that vv. 6-7 were intended as a direct contrast with Adam's disobedience, most scholars take "in the form of God" (v. 6) as ascribing to Jesus some sort of pre-existent and divine-like status, from which he freely chose to descend to take "the form of a slave" and act in "human form" (v. 7). In this latter state, he further humbled himself (v. 8) and became obedient (to God) even to the point of crucifixion.

Then, in the second main part of the passage (vv. 9-11), which actually is its apex, God's exaltation of Jesus and its ultimate outcome are lyrically recounted. God has given Jesus "the name above every name" (v. 9), which must signify a participation in the very name of God. Using a remarkable adaptation of phrasing from Isaiah 45:23, the passage then heralds God's intention that all spheres of creation should acknowledge Jesus' as "Lord" (v. 11). Yet this universal acclamation of Jesus' unique status is all "to the glory of God the Father," reflecting the typical NT tendency to express Jesus' significance with reference to the one God of biblical tradition. But this early expression of christology already indicates a remarkable innovation in this monotheistic tradition, with Jesus sharing extraordinarily in divine glory, and sung praise of him forming a regular part of Christian worship.

Other hymnic passages include Col. 1:15-20 and John 1:1-18. In both of these, likewise, Jesus is closely linked with God. In John 1:1-18, Jesus is famously referred to as the *Word* (Greek: *Logos*), and in v. 1 the Word is both with God and "was God." In context, this latter phrase must mean that the Word somehow shares in divine nature or stature (not that the Word replaces the OT deity). This passage was a major factor prompting the development of Logos christology in second/third-century Christian tradition. In the Colossian passage, Jesus is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation," and is indwelt by "all the fullness of God." Both passages explicitly ascribe to Jesus a pre-existent mode (Col. 1:15; John 1:1-2) and designate him as the agent through whom God created all things. Many scholars see in John 1:1-18, especially, an adaptation of OT references to the creation-role of divine *Wisdom* (e.g., Prov 8:22-31; Wis 7:22—10:21), or suggest a certain similarity to speculations about God's Logos in Philo of Alexandria.. But, also, both of these

passages celebrate the historic/earthly appearance of Jesus. John 1:14 famously states that “the Word became flesh” (from the Latin of this text comes the traditional term *incarnation*), and “dwelt among us,” thereby in an unprecedented manner directly identifying the divine Word with Jesus. Col. 1:18-20 portrays Jesus’ crucifixion as the divinely-chosen means “to reconcile to himself all things.”

Several shorter NT passages are often thought to derive from hymns as well, including Heb. 1:3; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 3:18-22. Ironically, however, scholars often ignore the only NT passages that are explicitly identified by their author as hymnic praise directed to God and Christ, which are in Revelation, and among which 5:9-13 is crucial. Granted, the author ascribes these songs to the heavenly court, but we may reasonably assume that they also reflect (and were intended to reinforce) worship practices of the churches with which the author was acquainted. In these particular songs, the praise focuses more on the redemptive effects of Jesus’ suffering/death, an emphasis obviously linked to the author’s stated purpose that readers be prepared to endure suffering (13:10; 14:12).

In addition to the oft-studied contents of these passages, it is also significant that they evidence the devotional practice of singing about/to Jesus as a component of earliest Christian worship. Such a place for songs celebrating Jesus in early Christian worship is unprecedented in the biblical/Jewish matrix of earliest Christianity, and is itself a powerful indication of the place of Jesus in early Christian life and belief.

2. Confessional Formulae

Another important body of evidence is comprised by the compact statements commonly thought to be early christological confessions. These are characterized by structured phrasing that seems designed for easier remembrance and recitation. Such confessions likely functioned both as part of early collective worship practices, and also in other situations where believers communicated their faith and/or were arraigned before religious or civil authorities on account of it. Once again, these expressions of faith in Jesus are found in our earliest extant Christian texts (Paul’s letters), where they appear without introduction or comment, indicating a wide familiarity/usage already at the time that these texts were written.

The briefest, and perhaps the earliest, “Jesus is Lord [*Kyrios Iēsous*],” is attested in 1 Cor 12:3 and Rom 10:9, and is also reflected in a slightly fuller form (“Jesus Christ is Lord”) in the projected acclamation of Jesus by all creation in Philip. 2:11. In Rom 1:3-4, many scholars perceive this two-line balanced construction as derived from another early confessional statement, this one asserting Jesus’ Davidic descent and his divine affirmation as Son of God in his resurrection. It is also plausible that in passages such as Mark 8:29/Matt 16:16/Luke 9:20, and John 1:49 we have reflections of other early confessions of Jesus as *Christ/Messiah*.

It is widely thought that an identifying feature of some confessional expressions in the NT is the use of the Greek relative pronoun, *hos* (“[he] who”). One example is in Rom 4:25, “[he] who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.” Another instance is 1 Tim 3:16, a passage whose rhythmic structure has also led some scholars to see these lines as hymnic in derivation. Here we have a more extended recitation in which Jesus is acclaimed as “revealed in flesh,” divinely vindicated, proclaimed among the nations and exalted to heavenly glory.

In 1 Tim 2:5-6, what looks like another credal formulation includes the confession of “one God” and of Jesus as the “one mediator between God and humankind” who “gave himself a ransom for all.” Also, in still other passages such as Rev 1:5-6, the rhythmic phrasing may reflect confessional formulations and

practices, Jesus lauded here as the one “who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father.”

3. Christological Titles

Several honorific epithets (*titles*) applied to Jesus in the NT have probably been the most frequently studied evidence of early christological beliefs, sometimes to the neglect of other data. Certainly, the terms in question are significant expressions of early beliefs about Jesus. The most familiar and frequently-used titles are *Christ* (Messiah), *Son of God*, and *Lord*. Other notable but less frequent designations of Jesus include *Word* (John 1:1-14), *Image* (of God, 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15), *Lamb of God* (John 1:29), and *Savior* (e.g., John 4:42; Acts 5:31; 13:23; Eph 5:23; Philip 3:20; 2 Pet 3:2).

The confession of Jesus as *the Christ* originally both presupposed and directly laid claim to Jewish hopes for an eschatological savior-figure. In the important Jewish text, *Psalms of Solomon* 17-18, we have an idealized king and the eschatological royal heir of David’s throne, and this seems to have been the dominant form of messianic hope. The Greek word *Christos* translates literally the Hebrew word *Mashiach* (“anointed/anointed one,” “Messiah”), which by the first century had come to function as a title for this eschatological figure. So, the Christian use of the title *Christ* likely derives from the earliest setting of confession and proclamation of Jesus among Jewish circles, both in Roman Judea (Palestine) and in diaspora locations (e.g., Damascus, Antioch, Rome). Indeed, it seems very likely that even during Jesus’ own ministry his followers entertained and promoted hopes of his messianic significance, and this also best explains his brutal execution by the Roman administration of Judea as “king of the Jews” (e.g., Mark 15:26). This means that “Messiah” may be the earliest confessional title, first applied to Jesus even during his own ministry by some, and used against him by others.

There is, however, no precedent for the notion that Messiah will suffer the sort of hideous death that Jesus underwent. The radical innovation in early Christian usage of “Messiah” was to identify explicitly and emphatically Jesus’ death as integral to his divinely-ordained messianic mission, and to claim his resurrection/exaltation as God’s glorious vindication of him as Christ/Messiah. Indeed, in NT references to Jesus’ death *Christ* is used more typically than any other christological title (e.g., Rom 5:6, 8; 6:3; 1 Cor. 15:3; Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet 1:2, 19; 2:21; 1 John 2:1-2). It appears, thus, that in earliest articulations of the significance of Jesus’ death, it was specifically as the *Christ/Messiah* that Jesus died for us/our sins.

It is interesting to note subtle but significant differences in usage of *Christ* among NT writers. Of the 531 occurrences of the term in the NT, some 383 uses are in the Pauline corpus, some 270 of these (51% of total NT uses) in his undisputed letters (Rom, 1-2 Cor., Gal., Phil., 1 Thess., Philem.). This confirms that the term had already and quickly become an important item in the religious vocabulary of Christian circles. It is also clear that *Christ* is Paul’s favorite christological term. In Paul, the term is used preponderantly almost as a name, either in formulaic expressions such as “Christ Jesus” (e.g., Rom. 1:1) and “the/our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 1:7; 5:1), or by itself, as in “Christ died for our sins” (Rom. 5:8). Yet, occasionally in Paul, we see reflections of the derivation of the term as a title, with the definite article, “the Christ” (Rom. 9:5).

In some other NT writings as well, there is a notable usage of *Christ*. In particular, 1 Peter has twenty-two occurrences, mainly without the article (but cf. 3:15; 4:13; 5:1) and often in connection with references to the suffering of Jesus and of Christians (e.g., 1:11; 2:21; 3:18; 4:1, 13; 5:1). This confirms the importance of the

theme of Jesus' suffering as messianic in significance across a variety of first-century Christian circles.

By contrast, in all four Gospels (written a few decades later than Paul's letters) *Christ* is used far less frequently; and it is used rather consistently as a title (with the definite article). Yet each Evangelist employs the term with particular nuances and emphases. Mark's opening words (1:1) include a reference to "Jesus Christ," and in 9:41 Jesus' followers are referred to as "of Christ/Christ's" (*Christou este*), but thereafter the usage is "the Christ". Moreover, in all the latter cases the connections with Jewish hopes and/or with Jesus' death are clear (8:29; 12:35; 13:21; 14:61; 15:32). For Mark, Jesus is rightly "the Christ," but the author insists that what "Christ" means must be shaped very much by the events of Jesus' own ministry and passion.

Matthew both adopts a large number of these Markan occurrences, and also has interesting uses of his own. There is a small cluster of occurrences in the Matthean nativity narrative (1:1, 16-17; 2:1-4), which reflect the author's emphasis that he relates the birth of the Messiah. With over twice the number of occurrences found in Mark, it seems that *Christ* is an important title in Matthew, complementing Matthew's emphasis on Jesus' divine sonship.

In Luke-Acts, we have a substantial body of uses of *Christ* (twelve in Luke, twenty-six in Acts). About half of the uses in Acts are in formulaic references to "Jesus Christ" (e.g., 2:38), "Christ Jesus" (e.g., 18:5), or "the Lord Jesus Christ" (e.g., 11:17). Nearly all the other Acts uses are in passages where Jews are being urged to recognize in Jesus the fulfilment of messianic hopes, and in all these cases the term is used as a title. In some cases, OT texts are presented as prophecies of Jesus' messianic sufferings (2:31; 3:18; 17:3; 26:23), and in others a more general messianic claim is made (2:36; 3:20; 5:42; 8:5; 9:22; 18:28). In Luke as well, *Christ* is consistently used as a title (with the possible exception of 2:11), and Jesus is explicitly associated with Jewish messianic hopes (e.g., 2:26; 3:15; 4:41; 9:20). The distinctive Lukan scenes of appearances of the risen Jesus picture him identifying himself as "the Christ" whose sufferings and subsequent glorification are predicted in the OT (24:26-27, 44-47).

Only two of the nineteen uses of *Christ* in John are in formulaic expressions ("Jesus Christ," 1:17; 17:3). In other occurrences the term is a title, and Jewish messianic expectations are either alluded to or explicitly cited. In the all-important 20:31, the author's stated purpose is to promote faith in Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of God," indicating the title's importance. John refers to specifics of Jewish messianic hopes more than the other Evangelists, using these as a foil for the presentation of Jesus. In 1:19-28 and again in 3:25-30, John the Baptizer denies messianic claims for himself, but acclaims Jesus as "the Lamb of God" (1:29, 35) and "the Son of God" (1:34). The latter epithets are clearly messianic in import, as reflected in the accounts of disciples of John acclaiming Jesus as Messiah (1:41, 45, 49). Jewish messianic speculations are played off again in 7:25-44 against Jesus' true messianic identity, the crowd pictured as unable to perceive the truth of things. Likewise, in 4:25 the Samaritan woman, and in 12:34 the Jewish crowd refer to traditions about Messiah.

In all these passages, the author seeks to show that the people do not properly understand their own traditions and/or do not know enough about Jesus, and so dismiss him wrongly. In 9:22, the confession of Jesus as *the Christ* leads to synagogue expulsion, which most scholars take to reflect experiences of believers in the latter decades of the first century. John alone explicitly defines *Christ* as *Messiah*

(1:41; 4:25). In short, for John, Jesus' messianic status is central, and yet traditional Jewish traditions are inadequate for grasping all that Jesus' messianic status involves, and the depth of Jesus' person. In John, Jesus' messianic status is to be understood in light of his divine/heavenly sonship, and Jesus is a Messiah of truly transcendent nature.

Uses of *Christ* in the remaining NT writings basically follow similar lines. Some occurrences are in the familiar formulas (e.g., Heb. 13:8, 21; 1 John 1:3; Jude 1, 17; Rev. 1:1), and in others we have the term with the definite article and used as a title (e.g., Heb. 3:14; 9:28; 1 John 2:22; Rev. 11:15). In sum, the NT use of *Christos* reflects the deep roots of Christian faith in biblical/Jewish traditions, and the strong claim upon these traditions involved in earliest expressions of Jesus' significance.

The acclamation of Jesus as God's *Son* likewise seems to have originated in circles of believers influenced by Jewish and OT use of this expression. This term also is connected to the royal-messianic claim, and NT usage involves the royal association of divine sonship. Especially in Psalm 2, God's "anointed one" (v. 2) is the divinely-chosen king (v.6) whom God addresses here also as "my son" (v. 7), and this passage is commonly seen as alluded to in the Gospels accounts of Jesus' baptismal acclamation by God as his *Son* (Mark 1:11/Matt 3:17/Luke 3:22). In OT applications of divine sonship to humans such as the king, the connotation is not ontological divinity, but rather divine favor, a special authorized intimacy with God, and also the sense of a divinely authorized status and mission.

In the many applications of divine sonship to Jesus in John, for example, this sort of connotation is evident (e.g., 3:35-36; 5:19-20). It is also likely that traditions stemming from Jesus' own references to God as *Father* were a contributing factor. But the NT applications of divine sonship to Jesus were mainly prompted, and their connotations heavily shaped, by the profound conviction that God had raised him from death and given him heavenly glory.

This helps to explain why NT references to Jesus as God's Son often hint at something more than OT uses of this category. Paul refers to Jesus' divine sonship only a comparatively few times (seventeen in the Pauline corpus, fifteen of these in undisputed letters), and the actual expression "the Son of God" is neither fixed in form nor frequently used (four times and in varying Greek word order, Rom. 1:4; 2 Cor. 1:19; Gal. 2:20; +Eph 4:13), employed by Paul considerably less often than his many references to Jesus as *Christ* and *Lord*. Yet it is clear that Jesus' divine sonship is an important part of Paul's christology.

Eleven of Paul's references to Jesus' divine sonship are in Romans and Galatians, the two letters where Paul engages in sustained articulation of faith in Jesus in the dialogue with biblical and Jewish traditions. This strongly indicates that for Paul "Son of God" was not (contra Bousset) a religious marketing device intended to communicate to his gentile converts by referencing pagan notions of divine heroes and demi-gods. An examination of specific instances shows that Paul refers to Jesus' as God's *Son* particularly to underscore God's central role in Jesus' appearance and redemptive actions, and Jesus' unique standing, status and favor with God. For instance, in 1 Thess. 1:9-10, Jesus' divine sonship reflects his status as the resurrected, eschatological/messianic agent of salvation from divine wrath. Similarly, in 1 Cor 15:24-28, royal/messianic imagery abounds (e.g., note the clear allusion to Psa. 110:1 in v. 25). After the enthroned *Christ* has received submission of all things, then *the Son* will submit himself to God (the Father), further indicating the biblical background of the sonship category as deployed here (v. 28). In other cases, Jesus'

divine sonship emphasizes God's involvement in Jesus' redemptive death (Rom. 5:10; 8:32), or the high significance of the one who suffered for others (Gal. 2:20).

In Gal. 1:15-16, Paul represents as the cognitive import of the experience that radically changed him from opponent to proponent of the gospel God's revelation to him of Jesus as God's *Son*, and in Rom. 1:9 Paul refers to his message as "the gospel of his [God's] Son." Both passages reflect the importance of divine sonship in Paul's estimate of Jesus.

In all these cases, as with other NT uses, we have to reckon with a cognitive "backflow" from Jesus' risen and glorified status at the right hand of God enriching and extending to new transcendent levels all previous use of divine sonship for human figures. In some NT writings, *Son* is a particularly frequent and crucial epithet for Jesus. This is evident, to cite a major example, in Hebrews. Note the contrast in the opening words (1:2) between OT revelation and that given in God's *Son*, and in the following verses the comparative contrast between the angels and Jesus as God's *Son* (1:5, 8). Likewise, in 3:6, the author contrasts Moses as servant with Christ the *Son* set over God's household. In several other instances as well, Hebrews refers to Jesus reverentially as God's *Son* (4:14; 5:5,8; 6:6; 7:3, 28; 10:29). Once again, in all these occurrences, *Son* connotes Jesus' high status and authority, the full extent of which is enlarged considerably in the conviction that God has exalted Jesus to heavenly glory, Jesus' sonship far exceeding anything previously imagined in biblical tradition.

But surely the greatest emphasis on Jesus' divine sonship is in the Johannine literature. John's purpose statement, previously noted (20:31), sets out *the Christ* and *the Son of God* as the two key expressions of the faith-commitment promoted. In other passages as well, Jesus is explicitly identified as "the Son of God" (1:34, 49; 10:36; 11:4, 27) or "the only-begotten/unique Son (3:16). Indeed, Jesus' divine sonship is so central that John more typically (and distinctively) refers to Jesus simply as "the Son" (e.g., 3:17, 35-36; 5:19-26; 6:40; 8:35-36; 14:13). In John, Jesus' sonship is linked to explicit claims that he was with God from before the world (1:1-2; 17:5), and came down from heaven (e.g., 8:38) to do the Father's will for redemption of the world (3:16-18). Clearly, Jesus' divine sonship in John is enhanced radically by the revelatory work of the Paraclete, whom the author presents as revealing more fully Jesus' greater significance (14:25-26; 15:26; 16:12-15).

With twenty-two references to Jesus' as God's Son in its five chapters, however, 1 John unquestionably has the highest concentration of occurrences. Yet, whereas in the Gospel of John Jesus' divine sonship is the key neuralgic issue between believers and Jewish opposition, in 1 John the claim that Jesus is Son of God is advanced against those Christians whom the author accuses of serious declension from true faith, and who seem to have christological views at serious variance with what the author represents as the tradition "from the beginning (e.g., 1:1-4). In subsequent Christian tradition, clearly the Johannine emphasis was influential, and "Son of God" came to represent essentially a confession of Jesus' own divinity.

Lord (*Kyrios*) is the other christological title with very widespread usage in the NT. The term is most frequently applied to Jesus, and considerably less often to God. In Paul, for example, about 180 of his 200 uses of *Kyrios* refer to Jesus. Indeed, Paul's most frequent use of the term (about 100 instances) is in the expression "the Lord" (*ho Kyrios*) as a self-standing designation for Jesus, without any other name or title (e.g., Rom 14:6, 8; 16:2, 8, 11, 12, 13; 1 Cor. 3:5; 4:4-5). Clearly, "the Lord" was by itself an early Christian way of referring to Jesus. Indeed, the Greek expression appears to have had a prior equivalent in *māryā'*, used in Aramaic-speaking Jewish-Christian circles as a title for Jesus (a usage reflected in the *marana*

tha in 1 Cor. 16:22). Other NT writings confirm that “Lord” quickly became a favorite christological title (e.g., Jas. 1:1; 2:1; 1 Pet. 1:3; Jude 4, 21).

It is very interesting to note, thus, the deployment of the term in the Gospels. In Matthew, Mark and John, other than the numerous instances where the word is used in respectful address/appeal, *kyrios* only rarely appears to be used with the more significant confessional connotation (e.g., Matt. 21:3?; 22:43-45?; Mark 12:36-37?; 16:19-20 [in the “long ending” commonly regarded a scribal addition]; John 20:2, 13-18, 20, 25, 28; 21:7, 12). This pattern suggests that these Evangelists generally avoided reading back into their accounts of Jesus’ ministry the confessional language of early Christian faith. Luke, however, refers to Jesus as “the Lord” much more frequently in his account of his ministry (2:11; 7:13, 19; 10:1, 39, 41; 11:39; 17:6; 18:6; 19:8; 22:61; plus references to the risen Jesus, 24:3, 24), and thereby further attests the use of this expression as a christological formula in early Christianity.

In wider contemporary usage, *kyrios* could connote simply “master” (e.g., for the master of a slave), or more broadly a respectful stance toward a social superior, as a term of polite address (e.g., Matt. 27:63). Likely, therefore, in at least the overwhelming number of instances in the Gospels where people address Jesus with the term (usually his followers or those seeking from him some favor) it should be understood as “Sir” (e.g., Matt. 8:2, 25; 14:28; 15:22; Mark 7:28). This respectful stance if, of course, reflected in all early Christian uses of the term for Jesus; but the NT usages also witness far more profound connotations.

In illustration of this, Jesus is often referred to as “Lord” in contexts where Christian are exhorted to exhibit right behavior (e.g., 1 Thess. 4:1-12; Rom. 14:1-12; 16:2-20; 1 Cor. 6:13—7:40). In these and the many other NT instances of usage in such contexts, the thrust of referring to Jesus as “Lord” seems to be to emphasize that Christian behavior is to be obedience to Jesus as their master, his example and teachings presented as fully authoritative for them.

In NT eschatological contexts as well, Jesus is characteristically referred to as “Lord” (e.g., 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15-17; 5:2, 23; 1 Cor. 1:7-8; 4:1-5; Jas. 5:7-8; Jude 14, 21). This usage likely reflects the remarkable early Christian appropriation of the OT notion of a future “day of the Lord” to refer to the eschatological return of Jesus (e.g., 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Cor. 1:14; 2 Pet. 3:10). In these contexts as well, thus, references to Jesus as “Lord” probably connoted much more than “master”. It seems, in fact, that Jesus was ascribed the eschatological role and attributes of Yahweh. Jesus’ future appearance was seen as involving judgment of all and divine triumph over all evil. This close link of Jesus with God in eschatological hopes has some limited parallels in some ancient Jewish references to various agents of God (e.g., the “Elect One” in 1 Enoch 37-71). But the centrality of Jesus in NT eschatological hopes is much greater, more intense and more consistent than in any of these putative parallels.

This is rather strongly confirmed in Philip. 2:9-11, which portrays God as having given to Jesus “the name above every name” with the intention that all levels of creation should acclaim Jesus as “Lord”. This universal acclamation will express the recognition that Jesus has been given, and been made to share, the divine name itself, *Kyrios* here being its Greek equivalent.

Perhaps the most significant passages where Jesus is referred to as “Lord,” however, reflect liturgical settings and actions. We noted earlier the confessional use of *Kyrios* in acclamations set in the context of gathered worship (e.g., 1 Cor. 12:3; Rom 10:9-13). The sonorous references to Jesus in Paul’s letter openings and closings (“the/our *Lord* Jesus Christ,” “Christ Jesus our *Lord*”) are commonly thought

to be intended to reflect and affirm the parlance of early Christian worship, the setting in which his letters were intended to be read out. Paul refers to the sacred common meal of the Christian gathering as “the Lord’s supper” (“*kyriakon deipnon*,” 1 Cor. 11:20) and “the table of the Lord” (1 Cor. 10:21), the latter expression clearly connoting a meal with a strong worship significance, this meal directly contrasted and compared with the cult meals associated with pagan deities. In all these references, it is obvious that the “Lord” is the risen and glorified Jesus, and there is a clear transcendent connotation to the title in these instances. It is fundamental in linguistics that usage-context is crucial for the specific meaning of words. The application of “Lord” to Jesus in the context of gathered worship is remarkable, with no direct precedent or analogy in contemporary Jewish religious practices, and surely connotes the highest significance of the term as a christological title.

Among other christological titles, perhaps “the Word” (*ho Logos*), uniquely in John 1:1-14, is most familiar, and has received the largest amount of scholarly attention (cf. “the Word of God,” Rev. 19:13). Scholars frequently explore possible relationships to Greek philosophical notions of a divine Logos (here = “reason”) that pervades the cosmos and gives it an orderly operation. In Philo of Alexandria’s writings we have another interesting adaptation of the term that seems to have been influenced by Platonic tradition, Philo’s Logos portrayed as the presence and activity of God in/toward the creation. For Philo, however, the Logos is not really a separate being but instead represents that of God which is perceptible by humans in particular, God himself remaining ultimately transcendent and beyond human comprehension.

The resemblances of Greek philosophy or Philo to the Logos in John, however, are few and dim at best. More typically in recent scholarship, references to personified Wisdom in OT and deuterocanonical texts are thought to be relevant (esp. Prov. 8:22-36; Wis. 7:7—8:8; Sir. 24; Bar. 3:9—4:4). This Wisdom (personified as female) is portrayed as throne-companion of God and his associate in creation of the cosmos (Prov. 8:22-31; Wis. 8:4-6).

In these Wisdom references we certainly have somewhat closer echoes and also a more readily available body of tradition that could have been drawn upon in the John 1:1-14. For instance, note the role of the Johannine Logos in creation of the world (1:3, 10), similar to Wisdom’s link to creation. Yet, whatever the relevant background of the Johannine passage, it is clear that the christological use of Logos here represents not simply the appropriation of a term or motifs but also a significant new development.

In John we are not dealing with a conceptual category that functions to solve philosophical questions about the order of the cosmos or how God can remain transcendent while really being manifested in history. Instead, the Johannine Logos expresses far-reaching christological claims and the use of the term is thoroughly colored and shaped by the historical figure of Jesus. It is clear, for instance, that the Logos of John 1:1-14 designates the “pre-incarnate” Son of God, the Jesus of the ensuing narrative. At several other points in John, Jesus himself is portrayed as referring to his prior heavenly status (esp. 17:5). Moreover, 1:14-17 directly claims that the Logos “became flesh” (v. 14) and is thereafter known in/as “Jesus Christ” (v. 17). So, it appears that the Johannine use of “the Logos” (unique to 1:1-14) reflects an emphasis on Jesus’ significance as the uniquely full and authoritative revealer of God (esp. 1:17-18). In short, the Johannine Logos is uniquely a real person known in historical time and action, Jesus, the Son of God.

There are also a number of other christological titles or epithets less frequently found in the NT but likely of early vintage. John 1:29, 36 pictures John the Baptist

acclaiming Jesus as “the lamb [*amnos*] of God,” and note 1 Pet. 1:19, where Jesus’ death is likened to that of “a lamb [*amnos*] without blemish or spot.” In Revelation, of course, there are a number of references to Jesus as “the Lamb” (consistently *arnion*, however, this term used only in Revelation; e.g., 5:6-13; 6:1, 16; 7:9-10, 14, 17; 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 22-23; 22:1, 3). The lamb of Revelation was slain (5:6), and his blood is efficacious for his followers (12:11); and yet he also is a horned lamb (13:11) and triumphs over the forces of evil (17:14). Neither in Revelation nor elsewhere in the NT do we find a sentimentalization of suffering for its own sake!

A christological title used in the NT only a few times in Acts is *pais* (“child” or “servant;” Acts 3:13, 26; 4:27, 30). The term is also applied to Israel (e.g., Luke 1:54) and David (e.g., Luke 1:69; Acts 4:25), reflecting its frequent use in LXX Isaiah, where God’s “servant,” often Jacob/Israel (e.g., Isa. 41:8-9; 44:1-2, 21; 45:4; 49:3) and other times unspecified, plays a major role as God’s chosen instrument (42:1, 19:49:5-6; 52:13; 53:11). So, the christological appropriation of *pais* reflects the view that Jesus is now the chosen servant, the heir of David and the messianic figure who bears Israel’s hope and destiny.

But the pattern of NT uses of *pais* also suggests that although it featured in early Jewish-Christian discourse the term did not enjoy much favor in other and subsequent Christian circles. “Servant” apparently was not deemed a meaningful or sufficiently reverential way of referring to Jesus. Beyond the few uses in Acts, *pais* appears only a few more times and solely in texts that seem to preserve early liturgical usage (e.g., Did. 9:2-3; 10:2-3; 1 Clem. 59:2-4).

In 1 John 2:1, Jesus is the heavenly “advocate” (*paraklētos*), and this view is likely implied also in the John 14:16 reference to the Spirit as “another advocate”. Jesus’ role as heavenly intercessor is also mentioned in Rom. 8:34. But, of course, Hebrews develops this notion programmatically, and designates Jesus famously as the “high priest” able to act with true and final efficacy in securing redemption (e.g., Heb. 2:17; 4:14-16), his own death being the sacrifice that brings genuine cleansing from sins (e.g., Heb. 9:11-14, 23-28).

Hebrews (2:10; 12:2) also refers to Jesus as “pioneer/leader” (*archēgos*), and the same title appears in Acts 3:15; 5:31, emphasizing Jesus’ role on behalf of the elect. In this last passage we also have one of a larger number of instances where Jesus is called “Savior” (e.g., Acts 13:23; Eph. 5:23; Phil. 3:20; 2 Tim. 1:10; Tit. 1:4; 3:6;; 2 Pet. 1:11; 2:20; 3:18), a title elsewhere in the NT applied to God (e.g., Luke 1:47; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; Tit. 1:3; 2:10; Jude 25). The Greek term, *sōtēr*, appears in the LXX (e.g., Psa. 23:5 [24:5 MT]; Isa. 12:2), where it translates forms of the Hebrew verb *yēsha’* (“to save”). As Matt. 1:21 indicates, at least some first-century Christians were aware that the Hebrew and Aramaic forms of the name “Jesus” were likewise cognates of this verb. Of course, “savior” was also an epithet applied to various deities, and in various ruler-cults in Hellenistic and Roman periods. So, there were various resonances available for this title far wider than the somewhat sentimental connotation in modern popular piety.

It was once widely thought that “Son of Man” was another important christological title, and one still sees a certain residual fondness for this view among some scholars. In some earlier opinion, among ancient Jews there was a supposedly widely-shared expectation of a figure bearing this title, an eschatological figure to come from heaven. Daniel 7:13-14 is the key biblical text, but the references to “the Elect One” in 1 Enoch were also deemed crucial. According to this view, “the Son of Man” was perhaps the earliest christological affirmation, the risen Jesus seen as the heavenly redeemer expected to come in glory.

But for some time now it has been clear that there simply is no evidence that “the Son of Man” was ever actually a title for any such figure in Jewish expectation. To be sure, the human-like figure of Dan. 7:13-14 did feature in some eschatological schemes, and the Elect One of 1 Enoch may reflect an influence from the Daniel passage (along with passages in Isaiah). But neither 1 Enoch nor any other Jewish text uses “the Son of Man” as a fixed title. In Hebrew (*ben ’adam*) and Aramaic (*bar ’enosh*), “[a] son of man” is a simply way of referring to a human being, and in the OT the singular and plural forms appear often with this sense (e.g., Psa. 8:5).

“The Son of Man” appears about 80+ times in the Gospels, solely in these NT texts, and only on Jesus’ lips. It is never part of a confessional statement by Jesus’ followers, and it is never the issue in disputations about Jesus’ significance (cf., e.g., the confessional function of “Christ” in Mark 1:1, and the controversial setting 14:61). Moreover, in every instance where Jesus uses the term (even, e.g., in Mark 14:62) one can readily substitute “I” or “me” without difficulty in the sense of the statement.

In short, the fixed use of the definite article (“*the* Son of Man”) is unique to the Gospels, and carries a strong particularizing force. Indeed, this definite-singular expression appears to be a novel form, and may well derive from an equivalent Aramaic expression (*bar ’enasha*, not found in Aramaic texts of the time) that was used by Jesus as his favored self-designation. That is, the uses of “the Son of Man” in the Gospels likely reflect a distinctive feature of Jesus’ own speech that was retained out of reverence for him. But the expression did not apparently figure in early Christian confession, and certainly does not represent some supposedly early “Son of Man christology.”

In a very few cases in the NT, the term “*theos*” (“god/God”) is applied to Jesus. The unambiguous instances are in John 1:1 and 20:28. In a few other places (Rom. 9:5; Tit. 2:13; 2 Pet. 1:1) it is more difficult to be sure whether the term is applied to Jesus or designates God (the Father). In the overwhelming number of instances, however, “*theos*” refers to God, whereas Jesus is more typically referred to as the “*Kyrios*” (e.g., 1 Cor. 8:5-6). Even in John, it is clear that Jesus’ own divine status is linked with “the Father,” and that Jesus is portrayed as subservient to the Father’s will (e.g., 5:19-24). Clearly, when applied to Jesus in the NT, “*theos*” obviously connotes the highest type of claim about Jesus, and yet his status seems never intended to rival or eclipse the one God of biblical tradition. Moreover, the two applications of the term to Jesus in John may well reflect the strongly polemical setting and character of this text, which responds to Jewish charges that Jesus is unworthy of the sort of devotion advocated by Johannine Christians.

Understandably, christological titles have been the focus of much scholarly discussion, for they are certainly direct indicators of beliefs and claims about Jesus. But, contrary to some, we should not assume that the titles represent discrete “christologies,” or can be played off against one another. Characteristically in the NT, one finds a number of these titles deployed, which surely indicates that they functioned as overlapping and complementary doxological statements.

4. The Gospels as “Jesus Books”

Our familiarity with the NT Gospels should not obscure their historical significance in early Christian literary history, and their particular importance as textual expressions of devotion to Jesus in first-century Christianity. Although it is now increasingly accepted that the Gospels should be seen in the wider context of Roman-era biographical-type writings, they remain notable texts individually and collectively, comprising a distinctive Christian sub-genre. We note here how in all four of them Jesus is the authoritative voice and example, and the uniquely valid

vehicle of divine purposes. By contrast, in Jewish tradition there are collections of sayings of revered teachers, from Proverbs on through the rabbinic tractate, *Pirke Aboth*. But the Gospels are powerful literary artifacts of the early Christian view of Jesus' supreme significance as the supremely authoritative figure. The extra-canonical gospels largely confirm this centrality of Jesus (e.g., *Gospel of Thomas*, *Gospel of Philip*, *Gospel of Truth*), even if they also reflect varying versions of early Christian faith.

The Gospel of Mark is a stirring narrative that runs from Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist on through call of followers, ministry, conflict, arraignment before Jewish and Roman authorities, martyrdom and resurrection. In this fast-paced account, Jesus is fully authoritative in teaching and actions, which include healings, exorcisms and even power over nature, and he is also the sole unflawed exemplar for readers (over against the shortcomings and failures of disciples). The demoniacs are the sole earthly voices that recognize Jesus' transcendent significance (e.g., 1:24, 34; 3:11), echoing God's own affirmation of his divine sonship (1:11; 9:7) over against the limited understanding of him by disciples (e.g., 4:41; 6:52; 8:14-21, 33) and the false charges of opponents (e.g., 2:7; 3:22; 14:64). The puzzlement of Jesus' followers only functions to signal for readers the higher truth of Jesus' person (e.g., 4:41; 6:52).

Moreover, the general contours of the story-line of Jesus prefigure the Christian life presupposed and urged in Mark, from baptism through mission, opposition, the threat of martyrdom (e.g., 8:34-38), and eschatological vindication. If, as many scholars think, the opening words are the title of the work (1:1), this story of Jesus is the *archē* ("beginning/origin," "first cause") of the gospel, which is then to be preached among all nations (13:10).

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke are commonly regarded by scholars as inspired and shaped by Mark, and each can be viewed as essentially a major expansion and adaptation of a recognizably Markan narrative. This is particularly evident in Matthew, which incorporates some 90% of Mark. Both in Matthew and Luke the major expansions are birth narratives, resurrection-appearance narratives, and a large body of sayings material that is widely thought to derive from a sayings-collection referred to by scholars as the "Q" source. These expansions were likely intended to provide enriched accounts of Jesus that among other concerns addressed a desire to present more of Jesus' teaching. In addition, of course, each Evangelist inscribes his own emphases, and exhibits a certain authorial power in selecting, ordering, and altering material that appears largely to have been taken from a larger body of Jesus-tradition of first-century provenance.

Especially since the 1960s, scholars have tended to focus on the particularities of each rendition of the Jesus-story. From his genealogy onward, Matthew, for instance, emphasizes Jesus' Jewish place in the history of Israel, Jesus' fulfilment of OT prophecy, and his royal messianic significance in particular. But the distinctives of each Gospel make it all the more significant that they also exhibit a great deal of commonality, attesting a wide appreciation for a broadly similar view of Jesus among the varying readerships for which the authors wrote.

All four canonical Gospels present similar core parameters of Jesus' activities, from the John the Baptist through ministry, death and resurrection, with a disproportionate space given to the passion and resurrection events. All four set Jesus firmly in Roman-era Palestine geography, customs and people, reflecting a strong concern to tie Christian faith to a real historic figure. (Cf., e.g., the near-timelessness of the *Gospel of Thomas*.) Most obviously, and most significantly, in all four Jesus is

absolutely central, the polarizing figure the response to whom reflects one's true stance toward God's kingdom and purposes. Moreover, they all present Jesus as the Christ, God's Son, the one prophesied in the OT, the unique personal vehicle of eschatological salvation.

For all its striking distinctives, the Gospel of John fits this pattern too, a judgment reflected also in the early Christian popularity of this account and its incorporation into the NT canon. Indeed, John was probably the most influential NT writing in the development of classical christological beliefs across the first several centuries, and is rightly regarded as one of the most important christological texts in the NT. With the well-known prologue referring to the divine Word, its repeated emphasis on Jesus' heavenly origins and his uniquely direct relationship to "the Father," and the presentation of Jesus as the human embodiment of God's "glory" and "name", John explicitly presents a very high christology. The Jesus of John's Gospel himself articulates his high status (e.g., 4:26; 5:20-29; 6:35-40; 8:56; 17:1-5), and the Johannine "voice" is notably distinctive in comparison with the Synoptics. In the references to the post-resurrection revelatory/teaching activity of the Paraclete who will glorify Jesus and lead believers into all truth about him, e.g., 14:25-26; 15:26; 16:25), we probably have the author's indication of the basis and nature of this distinctive Jesus-book. Yet John, too, firmly locates the manifestation of divine glory in the historic figure of Jesus, the narrative form of the book directly indicating the centrality of Jesus' activities and his death and resurrection.

5. Devotional Practices

We have already noted the significance of hymns and the place of Jesus in early Christian worship. In addition, there are other expressions of Jesus' centrality in the pattern of early Christian devotion. These include the ritual invocation of Jesus, for which the NT appropriates the OT expression to "call upon the name of the Lord" (e.g., Rom. 10:13; Acts 2:21). This action was apparently a regular feature of baptism, but was also characteristic of the worship gathering generally. Indeed, Paul can refer to Christians simply as "all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:2; cf. Acts 9:14). The use of Jesus' name in exorcism and healing further attests the belief in his continuing efficacy as the dispenser of divine power (e.g., Acts 3:6, 16; cf. 19:13-17).

The designation of the common meal of Christian gatherings as "the Lord's supper" noted earlier further reflects Jesus' position as the divine figure with whom believers gather in the worship setting, the risen Jesus seen as the marker and identifying presence in the Christian fellowship. The typical pattern of prayers to God in the NT *through Jesus* and in his name, which is already conventional in Paul's letters (e.g., Rom. 1:8; and see John 14:13; 16:26-27) has no analogy in Jewish or pagan prayer practice, and surely further confirms Jesus' importance in the religious life of believers. In all these phenomena, we see a "binitarian" devotional pattern, in which Jesus is uniquely linked with God, not as a second or subordinate deity, and not at all at the expense of God in belief and devotion, but as the one who reflects and shares in God's glory (e.g., 2 Cor. 3:18—4:4). Although often not included in discussions of NT "christology," these elements of the devotional practice reflected in the NT are important expressions of beliefs about Jesus, beliefs expressed in religious behavior.

B. Key Emphases

It is impossible to do justice here to the richness and depth of christological emphases in the NT; so we must focus on selected key themes, which we may group under two main headings: Jesus and God, and Jesus and God's Purposes.

1. Jesus and God

As illustrated in the various christological titles already considered, in the NT Jesus' exalted status and significance is defined rather consistently with reference to God. Jesus is, e.g., the Word, the Son, the Lamb, or the Servant, of God. All of these expressions place Jesus in a unique and intimate relationship with God, and also in varying ways represent Jesus as the unique agent of divine purposes. In many cases Jesus' role as the agent of God is explicit, as in Paul's references to God having sent forth his Son (Gal. 4:4-5; Rom. 8:3-4). Likewise, in John Jesus speaks of himself explicitly (and distinctively) in such a manner (e.g., John 3:17; 5:36-37; 10:36; 17:8, 18), indicating both his own divine significance and yet also his complete subservience to God's will for him.

Indeed, in John and elsewhere in the NT even the most exalted expressions of Jesus' status involve associating him with God, as, e.g., in Paul's reference to "the glory of Christ, who is the image [*eikōn*] of God" (2 Cor. 4:4), the glory of God revealed in "the face of Christ" (v. 6). We have similar statements in Col. 1:15-20, where again Christ is "the image of the invisible God" (v. 15), and also in Heb. 1:3, with its reference to the Son as being "the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being."

NT references to Jesus' redemptive work also typically link him with God. For example, God put forth Christ as redemptive through his death (Rom. 3:24-26), God thereby demonstrating his righteousness and also his readiness to justify all who put faith in Jesus. In Christ Jesus, God has succeeded where the Law could not, sending his Son to deal with sin (Rom. 8:3-4); and it is God who gave up his Son (to death) for the sake of the redeemed (Rom. 8:32). Certainly, Jesus' own loving volition can also be referred to as central (e.g., Gal. 2:20); but behind and beneath all that he did was God's own redemptive purpose and initiative.

Jesus' resurrection and resultant exaltation likewise are typically referred to as acts of God, as in Rom. 4:24-25, where both Jesus' being handed over to death and his resurrection are ascribed to God. In his extended treatment of Jesus' resurrection in 1 Cor. 15, Paul explicitly attributes it to God (v. 15), and this emphasis is further reflected in the many references to Jesus as "raised" (passive-tense; e.g., 15:4, 12, 14, 17, 20). Moreover, Jesus' enthroned status over all things is by God's own action (1 Cor. 15:27; Philip. 2:9-11).

We noted earlier also how in NT praise and prayer Jesus is linked with God. So, e.g., in Rev. 5:9-10, the heavenly court praise the Lamb for redeeming the elect for God, and then in vv. 12-14 the crescendo of worship is directed to God and the Lamb jointly. This sort of close linkage of Jesus and God in belief and devotional practice is likely the key factor that drove and demanded the subsequent doctrinal reflection that resulted in the distinctive Christian view of God as Trinity.

In short, the linkage of Jesus with God not only defines Jesus; in the NT Jesus, in effect, re-defines God, who is now "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (e.g., 1 Pet. 1:3; Rev. 1:6). Because God's purposes are more fully and finally disclosed and achieved in Jesus, he effectively gives to Christian faith a significantly new perspective on, and understanding of God. Although (contra, e.g., Marcion, the second-century Christian teacher who rejected the OT and its deity) the God invoked in the NT is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in Jesus this God is also newly and distinctively revealed.

2. Jesus and God's Purposes

The NT also links Jesus with virtually every purpose and main activity of God. For example, as noted already, at a very early point we have reference to the pre-existent Jesus as the agent of creation (esp. 1 Cor. 8:6; and later references in Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2; John 1:3). In these references, we see a firm belief that creation and redemption are profoundly linked. Although he came “in these last days” (Heb 1:2), Jesus embodies divine redemptive purposes that were formed from the beginning of creation. This means that in the NT it is not sin that sets the agenda, God responding to it; instead, God's prior intent to redeem precedes and supervenes all else (Rom. 8:28-30; 1 Pet. 1:20-21).

Hence, the NT notion that Jesus is predicted in the OT is not simply an instance of a quaint ancient approach toward scripture (e.g., Luke 24:25-27, 45-47; 1 Pet. 1:10-12). On a more profound level, this strong link of Jesus with the scriptures of Israel reflects a strong conviction about the unity and coherence of divine purposes. In Jesus, God's promise to Abraham finds deepest fulfilment (Rom. 15:8-9; Gal. 3:16), and through Jesus all nations now are enfranchised into God's family (e.g., Gal. 3:23-29). In all this, just as Jesus re-defines God, so he effectively re-defines the elect, who are no longer restricted to those to whom the Law has been revealed, but are now all those who embrace the invitation to put faith in Jesus. Through Jesus, the unique divine Son, God now calls to adoption “many sons” who are to be formed after Christ's image (Rom. 8:29). For their part, all those who trust in Christ the divine Son are entitled now also to call upon God as “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15-17; Gal. 4:4-6).

The Law, God's former revelation, is now seen as provisional and superseded by Christ as the manifestation of God's purposes (e.g., Gal. 3:15-22). For in Jesus God has now effectively dealt with human ignorance of the Law or inability to live faithfully by it (Rom. 8:3-5). As Hebrews in particular emphasizes, the OT priesthood, sanctuary, and sacrificial rituals that formed key features of the OT approach and relationship to God are now shown to be anticipations of the ultimate priesthood and sacrifice of Jesus (Heb. 3—9). Paul emphasizes that, as wide as death in Adam's descendants, so widely available is the free gift of life in Jesus (Rom. 5:12-21). As death came through Adam, so now resurrection and eternal life comes through Christ (1 Cor. 15:20-22). The story of Jesus is tied firmly to the OT story, and Jesus is presented as the *telos* of it all (e.g., Rom. 10:4), both consummating and transcending it.

Furthermore, Jesus is also central in the NT representations of God's future purposes and actions. His resurrection is the pattern and guarantee for the resurrection of the elect (1 Cor. 15:20-23, 42-49). Indeed, although believers must await their own eschatological transformation, it is enough for the present to know that they will be made like the risen Christ (e.g., 1 John 3:1-3), who at his coming again from heaven will transform believers' mortal bodies to be conformed to “the body of his glory” (Philip. 3:20-21). Thus, the risen Jesus himself exemplifies and defines the embodied salvation that the elect are individually to receive.

The NT eschatological hope is explicitly fixed on Jesus' *parousia*, and his glorious appearance is “the day of the Lord” (e.g., 1 Thess. 5:1-11), the OT expression for God's decisive act appropriated to designate Jesus' return. It is not too much to say that in the NT all eschatological hope is linked to this event. He is the one who will return from heaven to rescue his own from “the wrath that is coming” (1 Thess. 1:10). Acting with divine authority, he will send forth the angels to “gather his elect” worldwide (Mark 13:27), and at his voice the dead will rise, for God has given

him resurrection-power and authority to execute eschatological judgment (John 5:25-29). In all these remarkable ways, Jesus is pictured as participating directly in God's eschatological purposes, fulfilling divine expectations and roles.

In the life of faith, moreover, Jesus is not only the authoritative teacher and Lord, but also the pattern. In the Gospels, he is exemplary for believers in his coming to serve and not be served (e.g., Mark 10:41-45; and cf. John 13:1-20). For Paul, likewise, Jesus is exemplary (e.g., Rom. 15:7-9), especially in his readiness to humble himself in obedience to God (Philip. 2:1-11). Indeed, Paul makes Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection powerful events with which believers are to link themselves and be radically transformed from bondage to sin to freedom for righteousness and service (e.g., Rom. 6:1-14).

It fell to Christianity of the next few centuries after the NT to wrestle intellectually with the problems of how to affirm conscientiously one God while also taking fully seriously the NT emphasis on Jesus' own divine significance. Likewise, Christians struggled with doing justice to Jesus' divine significance and the reality of his participation in human nature. In short, the richness of the NT treatment of Jesus demanded and helped to shape theological and christological debates of the first five centuries.

But the greater consistency in the NT presentation of Jesus with reference to God and his purposes has not always been preserved well in some ancient and modern popular Christian piety, in which often Jesus effectively displaced God. Likewise, liberalizing versions of Christianity have often found it difficult to do justice to the exalted status of Jesus everywhere assumed and affirmed in the NT. It is not too much to contend that the seriousness with which Christian piety and theology continue to engage questions about Jesus in light of the NT will remain a crucial indicator of their religious integrity.

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