

THEOLOGICAL ROUNDTABLE

A Retrospective and Prospective Roundtable on the 50th Anniversary of *Horizons*

Editor's Introduction

The College Theology Society was founded in 1954 and launched *Horizons* as its journal twenty years later. What journal of Catholic theology grounded in the spirit of *aggiornamento* of the Second Vatican Council, dedicated to cutting-edge scholarship, and passionate about pedagogy would not want its first issue to feature a contribution from someone whose work seamlessly embodies all three of these commitments? *Horizons's* inaugural issue did just this when it published Raymond E. Brown's June 1974 keynote address delivered for the annual convention of the CTS.

The editors have chosen to begin our anniversary celebration with a roundtable reflecting on Brown's article, reprinted below, "Who Do Men Say that I Am?"—Modern Scholarship on Gospel Christology." How have Brown's ideas stood the test of time? Does a place remain today for historical-critical methods in biblical studies and Christology? Do Brown's ecclesial and pedagogical charges to the members of the CTS ring true at a fifty-year remove? PHEME PERKINS and GILBERTO RUIZ offer probing and appreciative perspectives on Brown's insights that also challenge biblical scholars and theologians to a renewed cooperation in a twenty-first-century key. We hope that a refreshed reading of Brown with the assistance of Perkins and Ruiz will inspire our readers to continue the conversation.

"Who do Men Say That I AM?"— Modern Scholarship on Gospel Christology*

I trust that my choice of the topic of christology for an address to a national convention of the College Theology Society needs no explanation.

* An address given on June 1, 1974, to the national convention of the College Theology Society held at the University of Dayton.

Christology was, is, and, I suspect, always will be the single most important question in Christian theology. Of the three religions of the book, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, we Christians are the only ones who have accepted identification in terms of our stance about a person of history, Jesus of Nazareth. Although Judaism reveres Moses as the lawgiver, the designation "Judaism" suggests that primary identity is not in terms of an attitude toward Moses but in terms of relationship to the tribe of Judah and the people of Israel. Westerners persist in calling Muslims "Mohammedans," but that is by false analogy with the title "Christians." While Mohammed is *the* prophet, a Muslim is one who has accepted Islam, that is, submission to the will of Allah, as preached by Mohammed. Christians, however, are those who profess that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Christ. The question "Who do men say that I am?" stands in a central place in the tradition of the Synoptic Gospels, symptomatic of where it stands in our faith; and we Christians are those who think that, whether he understood it fully or not, Peter gave the correct answer to that question.¹

We will consider here one aspect of christology, the christology of the New Testament, and particularly of the Gospels. While, in a literal sense, christology involves the evaluation of Jesus as the Christ (Messiah), I shall use it in the customary wider sense of any traditional evaluation of Jesus, e.g., in the NT area, the evaluations of him as the Servant of God, the Prophet, the Lord, the Son of Man, the Son of God, and even God. Such evaluations are found in NT works written anywhere from twenty to one hundred years after the ministry of Jesus,² and the particular point to which I direct this paper is: How are these NT evaluations of Jesus related to the earlier evaluation of Jesus during the ministry? Did Jesus himself use these titles? Did he accept them if others applied them to him? If not, how did he evaluate himself?

In discussing the relationship of the christology of the ministry to the christology of the NT writings, I shall present a survey of scholarly and

¹ As will be pointed out, the answer given in Mark's account is different from the answer given in Matthew's account, but both agree that Peter acknowledged Jesus as Messiah. I do not accept the view that the Marcan Peter is made the spokesman of an erroneous christology which Mark is trying to correct; rather, in Mark Peter is the spokesman of an inadequate christology.

² The first NT work was 1 Thessalonians, written about A.D. 50. The last NT work was probably 2 Peter written in the first half of the second century. Give or take ten years, the Gospels may be plausibly dated as follows: Mark in the late sixties; Matthew and Luke in the eighties; John in the nineties.

non-scholarly views on the problem. I use the term “non-scholarly” without prejudice to designate views that are not held by reputable scholars writing in the field today.³ Actually, as we shall see, non-scholarly views have a wider following than scholarly views have, and for that reason we must be aware of them when we teach. In presenting the scholarly views, I am not pretending to offer anything startlingly new;⁴ rather I am showing you how one might organize chronologically and classify the results of twentieth-century scholarship pertaining to NT christology. I am hoping that this may be of use to you pedagogically and, indeed, even pastorally since misunderstandings over christology are a very divisive force in Christianity today.⁵

As you can see from the accompanying chart, I divide the scholarly and non-scholarly views into six categories, represented by columns. I admit from the start that such a categorization oversimplifies and does at least minor injustice. Therefore, if you have occasion to use these reflections in your own teaching, I invite you to introduce greater precision than is possible for me in a one-hour talk. As part of the categorization I shall use the terms conservative and liberal. A conservative christological view, for me, is one that posits a real relationship between the christology of Jesus’ ministry (or his self-evaluation) and the christology of the NT writings—a relationship that may run the gamut from identity to varying degrees of continuity. A liberal christological view is one that denies any real relationship or continuity between the evaluation of Jesus during his ministry and the way he was later preached by the Church.

To avert any guessing game as to which column I would place myself in, may I suggest a more fruitful approach to my exegetical Bingo card, namely, for you to determine in which column you belong.

³ In my outlook reputable scholars are those who have produced a body of articles that meet the publishing standards of the professional biblical journals or whose books have been favorably reviewed in such journals. Thus, I am not speaking simply about those who have biblical degrees or who teach Bible. I find it necessary to be precise here because, on the American Catholic scene in the last two years, fundamentalist newspapers and journals have had a habit of trotting out a polemicist, dubbing him a scholar, and then playing a game of “scholars are divided” in order to propose views that have no serious following in the world of biblical scholarship

⁴ For this reason there will be no attempt to equip this paper with detailed footnotes giving bibliographical background. The history recounted and the biblical views presented can be documented in the standard NT introductions.

⁵ I am presuming that many in the College Theology Society will share a pastoral concern for the Church and regard religion as more than simply a scientific discipline.

TWENTIETH-CENTURY VIEWS ON THE CHRISTOLOGY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

(A survey of opinions on the relationship between the evaluation of Jesus during his ministry and the christological evaluation of him in the NT writings composed some twenty to one hundred years later).

Views Within The Domain of Scholarship						
Non-Scholarly Liberalism	Scholarly Liberalism	Bultmannian Existentialism	Scholarly Conservatism	Non-Scholarly Conservatism		
<p>This view regards the christological question as unimportant, for Christianity is primarily concerned with how man should live. Jesus came to teach man a way of life centered on love. It was his followers who first gave any importance to evaluating him. Liberalism was popular in the Protestantism of the late 1800's and early 1900's. It has revived today in Catholicism as a reaction to the dogmatic strictness of the past</p>	<p>(Early 1900's) Liberal scholars developed a scientific methodology for detecting precise stages of growth in NT christology. They judged this growth to be a creation, distorting the historical Jesus. Christology was once necessary in order to preserve the memory of Jesus, but now modern scholarship can give us the historical Jesus without christology which should be dispensed with. Exemplified in W. Bousset's <i>Kyrios Christos</i> (1913).</p>	<p>(1920's through the 1950's) A reaction to liberalism. He further refined the scientific methodology, but rejected the liberal judgment on the invalidity of christology. Bultmann is indefinite and even agnostic on how Jesus evaluated himself. But the NT christology is functionally equivalent to Jesus' message about the kingdom, since both are a demand to accept what God has done through Jesus. Christology can-not be dispensed with.</p>	<p>(1960's and 1970's) Most scholars today are less agnostic than Bultmann about the historical Jesus and admit a continuity between the evaluation of Jesus during the ministry and the evaluation of him in the NT. Yet they continue to use with refinement the methodology for detecting growth in NT christology. The dominating motif is development in continuity. A division exists as to whether to posit an explicit christology in the ministry of Jesus (he used or accepted some titles: Son of Man, Suffering Servant, Messiah) or an implicit christology (Jesus did not use or accept christological titles).</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"> Implicit Christology Scholars such as Hahn, Fuller, Perrin; some post-Bultmannians; many Catholics of the 1970's. </td> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"> Explicit Christology Scholars such as Cullmann, Jeremias, Dodd, Taylor; most Catholics of the 1960's </td> </tr> </table>	Implicit Christology Scholars such as Hahn, Fuller, Perrin; some post-Bultmannians; many Catholics of the 1970's.	Explicit Christology Scholars such as Cullmann, Jeremias, Dodd, Taylor; most Catholics of the 1960's	<p>A failure to allow any development from the ministry to the NT. This theory posits that Jesus was christologically evaluated during his ministry exactly as he is portrayed in the Gospels (which are literal accounts of the ministry). A view held defensively by fundamentalist Protestants. Also held by Catholics until Church changes in the approach to the Bible began to affect Gospel study in the 1960's.</p>
Implicit Christology Scholars such as Hahn, Fuller, Perrin; some post-Bultmannians; many Catholics of the 1970's.	Explicit Christology Scholars such as Cullmann, Jeremias, Dodd, Taylor; most Catholics of the 1960's					

Non-Scholarly Conservatism

Accepting the usual convention that right is conservative and left is liberal, let me begin with the column on the extreme right of my chart, namely, with a conservatism that lies outside the scope of respectable modern scholarship. This conservatism *identifies* the christology of the Gospels with the christology of Jesus. Even though the Gospels were written some thirty to sixty years after the ministry of Jesus, this conservatism maintains that there has been *no significant christological development*. For instance, if in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus accepts enthusiastically Peter's confession that he is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, that acceptance reflects the self-evaluation of the historical Jesus—despite the fact that Peter's confession and Jesus' reaction are quite different in the earlier Gospel of Mark. If in the Gospel of John, Jesus speaks as a pre-existent divine figure (8:58; 17:5), he actually spoke that way during his lifetime—despite the fact that there is no indication of that in the Synoptic tradition.

This rigorous conservative view would be held by many church-going Christians, but probably with a different tonality by Protestants and by Catholics. Protestants (and this would include fundamentalists, as well as some of the main-line Reformation churches south of the Mason-Dixon line) often hold this view defensively. They know that as a result of biblical criticism the major Reformation churches have for the most part adopted a nuanced view about the NT; they know that all the major Protestant seminaries and theology schools teach biblical criticism; but they reject biblical criticism in favor of literalism. On the other hand, Catholics who are extremely conservative, even though very numerous in both the clergy and the laity, have not, at least up until the last few years, been defensive in biblical question—the vast mass of Catholics were totally unaware that there was any other view except that the Gospels reproduced literally the ministry of Jesus. The condemnations of Modernism were so rigorously enforced in the years following 1910 that no real biblical criticism in the area of the NT was ever expounded in Catholic seminaries and universities, and so both priests and laity took it for granted that the Gospels were lives of Jesus. However, as we all know, an enormous change began in Catholic circles with the papal encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943) and culminated in the Instruction of the Pontifical Biblical Commission “The Historical Truth of the Gospels” (1964).⁶ In the latter document Catholics are told that the Gospels are the

⁶ The text and a commentary by J. A. Fitzmyer appear in *Theological Studies* 25 (1964, pp. 386–408). This instruction has special force since the substance of it was taken by the Second Vatican Council into the final (1965) form of the Constitution on Revelation (*Dei Verbum*, Chapter V).

product of a three-stage development that involved many changes and that, therefore, the Gospels are not literal accounts of the words of Jesus. Moreover, the Biblical Commission stresses that the divinity of Jesus was not clearly perceived until after the resurrection.⁷ All of this teaches Catholics that there must have been a development of christology between the ministry of Jesus and the time the Gospels were written, and so rules out for Catholics an ultra-conservative approach.

This sudden change of teaching-position within Catholicism is inevitably going to produce a defensiveness among Catholics who persist in holding onto a simplistic approach to the Gospels. This defensiveness will be aggravated by the fact that the clergy ordained in the last ten years are being taught this thesis of Gospel development advocated by the Biblical Commission, a thesis which is directly opposite to the basic approach taught the clergy before the 1960's—with the result that the people often hear contradictory things about the Gospels from the pulpit, with the accompanying warning that the opposing view is, respectively, either “out of date” or “dangerously novel.” The chances are that those priests trained before the 1960's have never even heard of the 1964 Biblical Commission Instruction, and so do not know what the Church is now teaching about the Gospels, while those trained in and after the 1960's have little knowledge of the ultra-conservative views previously taught in Catholic seminaries. But we should not despair. There is still time to bring clergy and laity to understand that the “new” look in Roman Catholic approaches to the Bible is not destructive of faith and indeed is more plausible historically, something they are in a position to understand because of historical development in religion in our own times. I say that there is still time to reach the mass of Catholics unless they are falsely alarmed and their minds poisoned by the hysterical propaganda of a militant Catholic fundamentalist movement. Because such a movement exists in the United States,⁸ it is crucial that teachers of religion think of a wider audience than their own students.

⁷ The pertinent passages are sections VI through IX. Note the following statements: “After Jesus rose from the dead and His divinity was clearly perceived...” (VIII); “The evangelists relate the words and deeds of the Lord in a different order, and express His sayings not literally but differently...” (IX).

⁸ In an address given at New Orleans in April 1973 to the convention of the National Catholic Educational Association, I spoke about a dangerous pseudo-magisterium consisting of extremist right-wing newspapers and magazines that arrogate to themselves the right to designate as heretical or modernist views and books approved by the true Magisterium of pope and bishops. The address was published in full in *Origins* of NC News Service (Vol. 2, No. 43; April 19, 1973); in *Catholic Mind* (Vol. 71, No. 1275; September 1973, pp. 25-37); and in *The Month* (Vol. 235, No. 1280; April 1974,

For instance, we all know that it is relatively easy to bring open-minded college students to understand the positive possibilities of our modern biblical and theological approaches to christology. It is more difficult for the teacher to prepare them to share this understanding with parents and acquaintances, and even with clergy whose training and outlook is the non-scholarly conservatism I have been discussing. If students can be trained to communicate modern views with patience and explanation, they can greatly facilitate among Catholics a transition from a position that is no longer tenable. But if students are not taught to make allowance for the “mindset” of previous generations, they may appear as arrogant and skeptical and thus further the process of polarization in the Church. Above all, I would appeal to the college teachers of religion to counteract the fundamentalist ploy which insists that even widely accepted modern views on christology should be kept in the classroom and not allowed to be communicated more broadly lest they disturb the faithful.⁹ What is involved here are not “wild” views but views of a moderate growth in christology in harmony with the principles of Gospel development inculcated by Church documents. To claim that these views must be kept in the classroom is simply a technique of isolating the Church. From its scholars who can then be portrayed as a snobbish and irreverent elite.

Non-Scholarly Liberalism

Instead of moving in my chart to the next column and thus from an extreme conservatism to a more moderate conservatism, I would like to

pp. 531–536). Although I mentioned by name no writer, newspaper, or journal, extremist organs and spokesmen hastened to identify themselves as the object of my remarks—a classic case of the shoe’s fitting.

⁹ It is common sense that sometimes subjects are too complicated to be broached in short talks to an unprepared public and that exploratory views should be examined before wide dissemination. But it is quite different to pretend that what is taught in seminary and college classrooms is too dangerous or disturbing to be made known to the faithful. Modern biblical and theological views are time-conditioned and have an element of uncertainty, but that is no excuse for pretending that they can be ignored until some mythical future day when absolute certainty is possible. No greater certitude should be demanded of biblical criticism or of theology today than was demanded in the past when there were formulated the very views that ultra-conservatives would like to retain. The contrast is not, as some would have it, between past Catholic doctrine and modern scholarly opinion; the contrast is between past scholarly opinion accepted within Catholicism and modern scholarly opinion now finding acceptance within Catholicism. Unfortunately a naive understanding of the scope and effect of infallibility blinds many to the *fact* that Catholicism has frequently adopted scholarly opinions that it later rejected.

jump to the other end of the spectrum, namely, to the liberal extreme which also lies outside the scope of modern scholarship. Such a jump is not illogical, for it is frequently made by right-wing Christians when they recognize the indefensibility of the rigid tenets they have hitherto held. The domino theory seems to prevail in religion as well as in global politics. If, through study, an extreme conservative comes to realize that the Gospels are not literal accounts of the ministry of Jesus and that there has been development, the reaction is often to ask not “How much development?” but “How do I know that any of it is true?” From the contention that the divinity of Jesus was not clearly perceived during his ministry, the next step of literal-minded people is sometimes to conclude that therefore Jesus was nothing more than an ordinary man, except that he was more brilliant and more “charismatic.” Such an attitude means that there is *no continuity* between Jesus’ self-evaluation and the exalted christological evaluations of him found in the NT documents.

The non-scholarly aspect of this liberalism is its dismissal of the christology of the NT as unimportant. Already in the late eighteenth century there were attempts to eliminate the doctrinal sections of the NT and so to preserve just the moral injunctions of Jesus and of Paul. Today a broad christological liberalism sometimes appears in the “Christianity is love” discoveries.¹⁰ There is nothing wrong in that statement when love is understood as the *agape* lauded by Paul and John—a highly christological understanding of love which involves a judgment about Jesus as the Son of God. But the modern exponent of “Christianity is love” may be thinking much more in terms of self-fulfillment. The slogan may spring from an understanding of religion as a matter of the way one lives, no matter what one believes. I do not mean to devalue the meaningfulness of self-fulfillment or of the necessity of translating religion into practice; but I do not think that love, so understood, is an adequate definition of Christianity, for it can be found in other

¹⁰ Ironically, this may be more of a danger among Catholics than among Protestants today. Protestantism went through a major struggle with liberalism at the beginning of this century and suffered its losses then. But in the wake of Vatican II, as a reaction to exaggerated dogmatism, contemporary “liberated” Catholics have sometimes thrown aside all doctrinal content for an experiential grasp of religion. The reaction to a catechetics that overly stressed content and memory has sometimes been a total neglect of content and memory. If in the long run one must evaluate the danger presented by the two extremes, namely an ultra-conservatism and a doctrine-free liberalism, one must remember that the ultra-conservatives have money, organization, and fanatical persistence on their side. Liberalism by its very nature tends to be disorganized and ephemeral. The ultra-liberal press has either gone under or been tamed; ultra-conservatives have been buying up journals of opinion. Ultra-liberalism may well be a greater distortion of truth than ultra-conservatism, but it is much less likely to survive.

religions and among the non-religious. If it is true that there can be no Christianity without love, Christians remain those who base their love on a confession about Jesus. Every NT proclamation of the Gospel involves an evaluation of Jesus, his person and his ministry.

Scholarly Liberalism

Leaving aside the two extreme views, I would now like to turn to christologies that lie within the pale of scholarship. Designating them as “scholarly” does not mean that I think they are necessarily convincing in their argumentation; it means simply that respectable scholars hold them.¹¹ Let me begin by calling attention to a liberalism that has such a scholarly basis.

Scholarly liberalism differs from non-scholarly liberalism in several important ways. It does not dismiss the christology of the NT as unimportant. It recognizes that that NT is shot through with christology from beginning to end and that its authors claimed far more than that Christianity was a morality. Yet it is designated as liberalism because it regards the christology of the NT as a mistaken evaluation of Jesus which does not stand in real continuity with the self-evaluation of Jesus. For the liberals, the christology of the NT is a creation, nay, a *creatio ex nihilo*; and scholarly liberals have sought to trace this creative process by a careful methodology.

All scholars must admit that it was the liberals who worked out a detailed schema of the growth of thought in early Christian communities. Through their efforts we became aware of the possibility of distinctive theological viewpoints proper to the Palestinian communities of Aramaic/Hebrew-speaking Jewish Christians, to the Syrian communities of Greek-speaking Jewish Christians, to the Greek-speaking Gentile Christians of the churches of Asia Minor and Greece, and finally to communities influenced by individual geniuses such as Paul and John. Only in the past century has scholarship had the linguistic and historical data necessary for detecting such phases of Christian thought. For instance, although previous scholarship had known-Aramaic, the main bodies of comparative Aramaic literature came from several centuries before Jesus (Imperial Aramaic) or from several centuries after Jesus (Syriac and Talmudic Aramaic). To reconstruct the language of Jesus from such evidence was not unlike trying to reconstruct Shakespearian English from Chaucer and the *New York Times*. But increasingly in the last one hundred years there has become available a body of Aramaic (and of Hebrew) dating from the time of Jesus. Moreover, with the discovery of documents like the Dead Sea Scrolls we have gained a more

¹¹ See footnote 3 above.

accurate picture of the pluralistic Judaism of Jesus' time, instead of having to reconstruct the entire situation from the Pharisaic-rabbinic documents of later centuries. These discoveries, plus a sharper application of a comparative criticism of inter-Gospel relationships, have confirmed the basic methodology of the liberal scholars who flourished in the early 1900's, although some of their simplified schematizations have been qualified.¹²

However, the liberals' methodological plotting of the development of christology is one thing; their value-judgments on that development is another thing. For instance, it may be correct to observe that the title "Lord" reflected a higher christology when applied to Jesus in a Greek-speaking Jewish community as *Kyrios* than when applied to him in an Aramaic-speaking community as *Mar(an)*. The prayer *Maranatha* assures us that Jesus was called "Lord" by early Aramaic-speaking Christians, but we have no evidence that the title carried the same theological "freight" as *Kyrios* which seemingly was used by Greek-speaking Jews to render the tetragrammaton YHWH. If the use of *Kyrios* for Jesus carried overtones of the sphere of divinity, how is one to evaluate such a development of meaning? Scholarly methodology enables one to recognize the development but does not settle the question of whether such a development was a falsification or a deeper perception.

Many of the liberal scholars who wrote before World War I¹³ assumed that the new-found ability to trace the development of a higher christology indicated that a divine image had been created for Jesus. In their mind this invented christology was a *felix culpa* because only through such divinization was the memory of Jesus preserved. The historical Jesus was a preacher of stark ethical demand who challenged the religious institutions and cut through the false ideas of his time. His ideals and insights were not lost because the community imposed on its memory of him a christology and turned him into the heavenly Son of Man, the Lord and Judge of the world, indeed into the Son of God. But if in centuries past such a christological crutch was necessary to keep the memory of Jesus operative, in the judgment of the liberal scholars the crutch could now

¹² The chief qualification comes from an increasing uncertainty about the ability to regard Hellenistic (Greek) features in the christology as coming from the later levels of the NT. The Palestine of Jesus' time was thoroughly Hellenized, and some Hellenization of the Christian message may have been a feature from the very beginning. Moreover, we have become aware that various stages of the development may have co-existed, so that the process was much less linear than was formerly imagined.

¹³ Perhaps the best example of scholarly liberalism both as to method and to conclusions was Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*. The German original appeared in 1913; the English translation (Nashville: Abingdon), in 1970. The feasibility of bringing out an English edition of such an old book in a rather tight book-market may reflect a revival of interest in liberalism (see footnote 10 above).

be discarded. Twentieth-century scholarship could detect the real Jesus and hold onto him without the christological trappings. Thus the ultimate implication of scholarly liberalism (no less than of non-scholarly liberalism) was to dispense with the christology of the NT.

Bultmannian Existentialism

Since liberalism was intimately associated with an optimism about the achievements of man and his learning a correct way to live, the liberal bubble was punctured by World War I which showed that man was somewhat more adept in learning a way to die. If liberalism gave us an image of the Jesus who taught man how to live and save himself, the tragic war created a need for a more traditional Christianity based on God's salvation of man in Jesus. The reaction against liberalism found eloquent spokesmen in Karl Barth in the area of systematic theology and Rudolf Bultmann in the area of biblical study. Because Bultmann is radical, many of his opponents tend to think of him as liberal; yet his NT theology is a categorical rejection of the liberalism of the pre-war period. Of course, he continues to accept the methodology developed by the liberal scholars in classifying stages of early Christian thought (as described above) and indeed has refined the methodology further, but he does not agree that the christology detected in these various stages and traced through them is a pure creation. I find it difficult to characterize exactly the relationship that Bultmann would establish between the christology of the NT writings and Jesus' evaluation of himself, but in some of his writing at least he is agnostic about the self-evaluation of Jesus.¹⁴ Yet Bultmann would not think that the christology has distorted the import of Jesus as the liberals maintained. Rather there is a *functional equivalence* between the Church's christological proclamation and Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of heaven.

It is in this functional equivalence that we see Bultmann's existential philosophy at work. Man has hope for escape from the vicious circle of futile existence only through a delivering action of God. Jesus came proclaiming that God was acting decisively in his ministry and challenged man to accept this action of God. It is not clear to what extent Jesus uttered this challenge in terms of a christological self-evaluation, but the Church did give a christological

¹⁴ Since Bultmann's writings are prolific and stretch over a span of nearly fifty years, it is not always easy to find an absolutely consistent stance. It is worth comparing *Jesus and the Word* (German original, 1926; paperback ed., New York: Scribners, 1958) and his paper "The Primitive Christian Kerygma and the Historical Jesus" (German original, 1962; in *The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ*, ed. C. E. Braaten and R. A. Harrisville (New York: Abingdon, 1964).

evaluation when it demanded that men accept Jesus as Messiah and Lord. It is important to perceive that in such christological language the Church of the NT was equivalently offering the same challenge that Jesus offered. Thus, while the christology of the NT may not stand in demonstrable continuity with the christology of Jesus' ministry, the challenge offered by its christology stands in continuity with the challenge offered by Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus preached the kingdom; the Church preached Jesus; functionally this preaching was equivalent. For that reason it would be disastrous to dispense with the christology of the NT as the liberals had advocated—dispensing with christology would be tantamount to dispensing with the challenge that is the core of Christianity, a challenge that is primarily based on what God has done for man, rather than on what man can do for himself.

Moderate Conservatism

Bultmann's greatest influence was in the period from the 1920's to the 1950's.¹⁵ Just as Bultmann's position was somewhat to the right and more conservative than that of the earlier scholarly liberals, I would judge that most christological scholarship today is somewhat to the right of Bultmann. (Thus, while the main body of NT scholarship has actually been moving to the right during the course of this century, any change in Catholic scholarship has involved a movement to the left, since for the first half of the century it remained frozen in an extreme conservatism.) I would designate the majority position in contemporary christological scholarship as a moderate conservatism, even if some of the scholars I mention might be surprised to have themselves classified as conservatives. However, if I am right in diagnosing conservatism in christology as centered on the thesis that there is a *discernible continuity* between the evaluation of Jesus during the ministry and the evaluation of him in the NT writings, I find this thesis of continuity in most contemporary scholarly writing. Of course, this is no return to the extreme conservatism that I described as the first of my categories, for the contemporary moderates insist that there has been considerable development from Jesus to the NT writings, and they continue to employ with great precision the methodology of tracing the chronological growth of Christian thought first devised by the liberals. But they clearly posit a christology in the ministry of Jesus himself on which point Bultmann is not always definite.

¹⁵ Since Bultmann's main works were translated into English decades after the German originals, his impact on English-speaking circles was somewhat delayed. John A. T. Robinson's discovery of the import of Bultmann in *Honest to God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963) is a good example.

I would see the main christological distinction among contemporary NT scholars as centered on the question of the kind of christology detectable in the ministry of Jesus, *explicit or implicit christology*. Explicit christology is a christology evaluating Jesus in terms of the titles known to the Jews from the OT or intertestamental writings. It would be difficult to find serious contemporary support for the thesis that Jesus used of himself or accepted the “higher” titles of later NT christology, e.g., “Lord” in the full sense, “Son of God,” or “God.” (This does not mean that scholars who deny Jesus’ use of these titles are saying that Jesus was not Lord, Son of God, or God; it means simply that they regard the application of such designations to have been the result of later Christian reflection on the mystery of Jesus.) But there are serious exponents of explicit christology who think that during the ministry Jesus referred to himself or accepted designation as Messiah, or the Prophet, or the Servant of God, or the Son of Man—the “lower” titles of christology. This thesis of explicit christology was popular in the scholarship of the 1950’s and early 1960’s and is still respectable today. Among its adherents I could list O. Cullmann, C.H. Dodd, J. Jeremias, V. Taylor and most of the Roman Catholic writers on christology in the 1960’s.¹⁶

However, in the last ten years, in Protestant and Catholic writing alike, there is more acceptance of a thesis of *implicit christology* wherein Jesus did not express his self-understanding in terms of titles or accept titles attributed to him by others. Rather he conveyed what. He was by speaking with unique authority and acting with unique power. By his deeds and words he proclaimed that the eschatological reign of God was making itself present in such a way that a response to his ministry was a response to God. Yet this implicit claim to uniqueness was not phrased in titles reflecting the traditional expectations of Judaism. Among the scholars who tend toward implicit christology may be listed F. Hahn, R. H. Fuller, N. Perrin, some of the post-Bultmannians in Germany, and Roman Catholic authors of the 1970’s.¹⁷

Perhaps an example would help to illustrate the difference between explicit and implicit christology and the respective implications. Respectable scholars, especially in England, still maintain that Jesus referred to himself as the Son of Man, in particular, as the Son of Man who would return as the judge of the world. But a growing number of scholars reject

¹⁶ For a Catholic view see X. Leon-Dufour, *The Gospels and the Jesus of History* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970 abridgment of a French original of 1963).

¹⁷ See B. Vawter, *This Man Jesus* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1973). Also R. E. Brown and P. J. Cahill, *Biblical Tendencies Today: An Introduction to the Post-Bultmannians* (Washington: Corpus, 1969). A great deal of implicit christology is uncovered in modern studies of the parables and healings of Jesus.

such an explicit self-designation by Jesus.¹⁸ If he spoke of the Son of Man, he spoke of him as another figure yet to come.¹⁹ But these scholars would find an implicit christology in Jesus' statements about the Son of Man. For instance, Luke 12:8-9 claims that when the Son of Man comes, his judgment will be based on whether or not people have acknowledged or denied Jesus. Since in the long run final judgment must be based on whether or not men have acknowledged God, the centering of judgment around the acceptance of Jesus is a striking claim—ultimately a higher christology than that involved in whether or not Jesus thought of himself as the Son of Man.

I suspect that for the rest of the century scholarship will rock back and forth between explicit christology and implicit christology. (In my opinion the problem of Jesus' use or non-use of the Son of Man title is presently unresolvable, for there is simply not enough evidence about the contemporary Jewish use or understanding of this term.) But regardless of whether one detects explicit or implicit christology in the ministry of Jesus, the line of continuity to the Church's evaluation of him in the NT seems more firmly marked than was thought possible in scholarship earlier in the century. I would urge

¹⁸ The "Son of Man" problem is much discussed today and I am giving above only two approaches. Other scholars deny that there was a definite Son of Man expectation in Judaism.

¹⁹ All modern christology is based on the theory that the human knowledge of Jesus was limited. In Catholicism this theory often runs against a popular misunderstanding which would claim that since Jesus was the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, he knew, even as man, all that God would know—a misunderstanding usually accompanied with the argument that the person is the subject of knowledge and there was only one person in Jesus. Such an approach was unacceptable to the great scholastic theologians. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* III, q. 9, a. 1, ad 1, says: "If there had not been in the soul of Christ some other knowledge besides his divine knowledge, he would not have known anything. Divine knowledge cannot be an act of the human soul of Christ; it belongs to another nature." Knowledge comes through the nature, and God and man know in different ways: God's knowledge is immediate and non-conceptual; man's knowledge is through abstraction and is conceptual. Therefore divine knowledge is not simply transferable to a human mind. Precisely because of their acknowledgment of this limitation, the scholastics posited special aids to the human nature of Jesus so that he would know more than other men, e.g., beatific vision, infused knowledge. This is obviously a problem within the domain of systematic theology, and scholars like Rahner and Lonergan deny the presence of such aids. Critical biblical scholars have been unable to detect their presence; and most of us are willing to settle for the teaching of Chalcedon (DBS 301, based on Heb. 4:15) which made Jesus consubstantial with human beings in all things except sin—and therefore consubstantial with us in limited knowledge. (Hostile right-wing columnists [see footnote 8 above] have seized on this to alarm Catholics with the news that scholars are now saying that Jesus was ignorant.) Of course, a limitation of human knowledge does not mean that Jesus was not God; it means he was man.

you who are college teachers of religion to stress this positive point to your students and, through them, to a wider lay and clerical audience in the Church. Above all, please make clear that when scholars are discussing the question of explicit and implicit christology, e.g., the question of whether or not Jesus ever referred to himself as the Messiah or accepted designation as Messiah,²⁰ those scholars who think that he did not use or accept this title are not necessarily detracting from the greatness of Jesus. Indeed, a greater claim can be made for Jesus if he did not find the title “Messiah” acceptable. It may mean that his conception of himself was so unique that the title did not match this uniqueness—the Church was able to call him Messiah successfully only when it reinterpreted the title to match Jesus’ greatness. Thus, the ultimate tribute to what and who Jesus was may have been that every term or title in the theological language of his people had to be reshaped by his followers to do justice to him, including the title “God” itself.²¹

* * *

My survey has stressed both a growth in scholarship in the twentieth century and a growth in christology in the first century. Obviously the first century and the NT were only the beginning of a longer quest to understand who Jesus is, a quest that stretched through Nicaea and which continues today. The Church has rejected some answers about Jesus and has embraced others as at least partially expressing her faith.²² But as long as the Church exists, she must continue her struggle to find a still more adequate answer.

²⁰ Popular understanding of this problem is not helped by those (often polemicists) who tell people that scholars are now doubting whether Jesus knew he was the Messiah. The question is not whether Jesus knew he was the Messiah; Jesus intuitively knew who he was, and the question is whether “Messiah,” as that title was understood in his lifetime, satisfactorily described who he was.

²¹ It is another false simplification that many Catholic scholars are now doubting whether Jesus knew he was God. Once more Jesus intuitively knew who he was; the question is whether “God” as understood by a first-century Jew (namely, as the Father in heaven) could have described who Jesus was. Christians found “God” a satisfactory designation, but only after they had enlarged their understanding of the term to include the Son on earth. See R. E. Brown, *Jesus God and Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 28–38, 95ff.

²² Even the “true God of true God” of Nicaea does not end the search. The Roman Doctrinal Congregation (Holy Office) Declaration *Mysterium Ecclesiae* (1973) is most helpful in the struggle against a Catholic fundamentalism that does not realize the limited nature of dogmatic formulations. This Declaration acknowledges *limitations* imposed by the expressive power of language used at a particular time, by incomplete expressions of truth, by the fact that specific questions were being answered, and by traces left by the changeable conceptions of a given epoch.

The question posed by Jesus at Caesarea Philippi, “Who do men say that I am?” will never have an answer that exhausts the truth of his uniqueness until that day when he appears and “we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2), no longer in a glass darkly, but “face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12).

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I. “But Who Do YOU Say I Am?” (Mk 8:29a): Raymond Brown and New Testament Christology

Staking Out the Territory

Fifty years ago, Raymond Brown had already established his position as one of the world’s leading Catholic New Testament scholars. His magisterial two-volume commentary on John’s gospel remains an invaluable reference for scholars. At a time when American Catholics were still “minor leaguers” in contrast to British, German, and French exegetes, biblical theologians, Fr. Brown along with Joseph A. Fitzmyer, SJ, and Roland E. Murphy, OCarm. had produced the *Jerome Biblical Commentary* (1968) to provide a solid foothold for students in the best of historical-critical research into the books of the Bible, their history, religion, and theological concepts. Like his coeditors, Brown remained convinced that careful historical-critical study was our surest way of understanding what the Bible’s authors sought to communicate. Where that analysis unseated naïve or literalist dogmatic “proof-texting,” it requires a correction in theological argument but will not require rejection of the foundational dogmas of the church.²³

²³ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII* (AB 29; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966); Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII–XXI* (AB 29A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970); Raymond E. Brown, SS, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, SJ, and Roland E. Murphy, OCarm., eds. *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1968). Kevin Duffy observes that after 1970 Brown ceases to invoke his earlier work on *sensus plenior* and its neoscholastic language, opting instead for more pragmatic, piecemeal efforts on topics as in his work on the virgin birth. Brown presents this “historical-critical approach” as an instance of God’s “incarnational economy of salvation,” using the human with all of its limitations. While always subject to areas of uncertainty, historical study can and should rule out implausible, impossible interpretations. Kevin Duffy, “The Ecclesial Hermeneutic of Raymond E. Brown,” *Heythrop Journal* 39 (1998): 37–56.