10

The Person of Jesus Christ

Who is Jesus Christ? And why is he so important for the Christian faith? The Christian doctrine of the person of Christ ("Christology") sets out to explore why the little slice of human history called "Jesus of Nazareth" might hold the key to the nature of God and of human destiny. An excellent starting point for our reflections in this chapter is found in Pope John Paul II's (1920–2005) encyclical letter *Faith and Reason* (1998):

> In the Incarnation of the Son of God we see forged the enduring and definitive synthesis which the human mind of itself could not even have imagined: the Eternal enters time, the Whole lies hidden in the part, God takes on a human face. The truth communicated in Christ's Revelation is therefore no longer confined to a particular place or culture, but is offered to every man and woman who would welcome it as the word which is the absolutely valid source of meaning for human life.

The area of theology referred to as "Christology" sets out to locate Jesus of Nazareth on a conceptual map. It attempts to place him along the coordinates of time and eternity, humanity and divinity, particularity and universality, and answer the question of how an event which took place at a specific time and place can be relevant for all people and all times.

The classical Christian account of the significance of Jesus of Nazareth is framed in terms of the concept of the "incarnation" and the doctrine of the "two natures" of Christ – divine and human. Jesus Christ is referred to as "God incarnate." These ideas will probably seem strange to those new to the study of Christian theology. For this reason, it may be helpful to set the scene for the material presented in this chapter by sketching its themes, before going into them in more detail later.

As the church wrestled with the question of the identity and significance of Jesus of Nazareth, especially during the patristic period, it realized that it had to consider a wide range of models of interpretation. By the end of the fourth century, the church had made up its collective mind and decided that the only way of describing Jesus of Nazareth adequately was what has come to be known as the "two natures" formula – namely, that Jesus is "truly divine and truly human." This is often referred to as the "Chalcedonian definition," as it was fully set out by the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

This chapter sets out to explain the origins and development of this way of thinking about Jesus Christ, and how it has been understood, developed, and contextualized in the long history of Christian theology.

THE PLACE OF JESUS CHRIST IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

The person of Jesus Christ is of central importance to Christian theology. That is why this chapter is the longest in this textbook. Whereas "theology" could be defined as "talk about *God*" in general, "Christian theology" accords a central role to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is understood as the "image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1: 15), allowing us to see what God is like. There are four basic elements to the Christian understanding of the place of Jesus Christ in theology. The first is historical, whereas the other three other are more explicitly theological in character.

Jesus Christ is the historical point of departure for Christianity

This observation is relatively straightforward. It is a simple matter of historical fact that the coming of Jesus of Nazareth brought the Christian community into being. However, the interpretation of this matter is actually rather more complex. Consider, for example, the question of whether Jesus of Nazareth introduced anything new into the world. For the writers of the Enlightenment, Jesus of Nazareth did little more than republish a religion of nature which was promptly corrupted by his followers, including Paul. Rationalism thus argued that Jesus had nothing that was both *right* and *new* to say; where he was right he merely agreed with what sound human reason had always known to be the case, and if he said anything that was new (that is, hitherto unknown to reason) this would, by definition, be irrational and hence of no value.

A very different approach is associated with German liberal Protestantism (see pp. 70–1), especially as this is developed in the writings of Albrecht Benjamin Ritschl (1822–89). Ritschl argued that Jesus of Nazareth brought something new to the human situation, something which reason had hitherto neglected. "Jesus was conscious of a *new and hitherto unknown relation to God.*" Where rationalists believed in a universal rational religion, of which individual world religions were at best

shadows, Ritschl argued that this was little more than a dream of reason, an abstraction without any historical embodiment. Christianity possesses certain definite theological and cultural characteristics as an historical religion, partly due to Jesus of Nazareth.

Important though this historical consideration might be, Christian theology has generally located the significance of Jesus Christ in three specifically *theological* areas, which we shall note in what follows.

Jesus Christ reveals God

A central element of Christian theology centers upon the idea of a *revelatory presence of God* in Christ (see pp. 213–14, 230–1). Jesus Christ is regarded as making God known in a particular and specific manner, distinctive to Christianity. Perhaps the most radical statement of this conviction may be found in Karl Barth's (1886–1968) *Church Dogmatics*:

> When Holy Scripture speaks of God, it does not permit us to let our attention or thoughts wander at random. […] When Holy Scripture speaks of God, it concentrates our attention and thoughts upon one single point and what is to be known at that point. […] If we ask further concerning the one point upon which, according to Scripture, our attention and thoughts should and must be concentrated, then from first to last the Bible directs us to the name of Jesus Christ.

This conviction has been central to mainstream Christianity down the ages. As we noted earlier, the writer of the Second Letter of Clement opens his letter with the affirmation that "we must think of Jesus Christ as of God." The noted English theological writer Arthur Michael Ramsey (1904–88) makes the same theological point as Barth: "The importance of the confession 'Jesus is Lord' is not only that Jesus is divine, but that God is Christlike."

This "Christological concentration" has been the subject of considerable debate among those concerned with dialogue between Christianity and other religions, and we shall return to consider its implications at a later stage in this work.

Our concern at this stage is simply to note that, as a matter of historical fact, Christian theology has recognized that it is impossible to speak of "God" within the parameters of the Christian tradition without relating such statements to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the bearer of salvation

A central theme of mainstream Christian thought is that salvation, in the Christian sense of the term, is manifested in and through and constituted on the basis of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (see pp. 248–77). It must be noted that the term "salvation" is complex. To assert that "Jesus Christ makes salvation possible" is not to deny that other modes of salvation are accessible by other means; it is simply to insist that, within the Christian tradition, the distinctively Christian understanding of what salvation is can only be realized on the basis of Jesus Christ. We shall explore something of how Christian theology has understood both the nature of salvation (pp. 270–5) and how Jesus Christ is understood to be the basis of that salvation (pp. 251–68).

This central core of Christian belief has been the subject of some concern on the part of theological revisionists, alarmed at its potential implications for dialogue between Christianity and other religions, and we shall return to explore it at the appropriate point in this work. John Hick (1922–2012), for example, finds his pluralist approach to other religions challenged by certain highly distinctive elements of the Christian faith – including the resurrection of Christ, the divinity of Christ, and the Trinity. His proposals to eliminate these in order to facilitate his agenda of demonstrating that all faiths share the same basic features has not been well received. We shall return to this theme in Chapter 17.

Jesus Christ defines the shape of the redeemed life

A central issue in Christian spirituality and ethics concerns the nature of Christian existence, in relation to both its spiritual and its ethical dimensions. The New Testament itself is strongly "Christomorphic" in its view of the redeemed life – that is to say, it affirms that Jesus Christ not only makes that life possible but also determines its shape. The New Testament imagery of "being conformed to Christ" expresses this notion well.

The more recent rise of "narrative theology" (pp. 113–15) has given especial importance to this point. It has been emphasized that it is the narrative of Jesus Christ which exercises controlling influence over the Christian community. Christian belief, and especially Christian ethics, are shaped by the narrative of Jesus Christ, which gives flesh and substance to otherwise abstract ideas of values and virtues. The story of Jesus thus exercises a controlling influence over Christian thinking about ethics, in that the manner in which Jesus acted is seen as having continuing importance for the church today.

NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTOLOGICAL TITLES

The New Testament is the primary source for Christology. In this section, we shall explore the main Christological titles found in the New Testament, and their implications for our understanding of the identity of Christ. Why are these titles so important? For biblical writers, names convey insights about identity. The terms used to designate Jesus are the outcome of reflection on what he said, what he did, and what was done to him. Each title can be seen as adding a strand of insight to the tapestry of Christology. In what follows, we shall consider six of the main Christological titles of the New Testament, and reflect briefly on their importance.

Messiah

The New Testament's reflections on the significance of Christ are to be set against an Old Testament context. The term "Christ" – so easily treated as a surname – is actually a *title*, with a range of

meanings which can only be fully appreciated in the light of the Old Testament expectation concerning the coming of God's "messiah" (Greek: *christos*). The Greek word *christos* translates the Hebrew term *mashiah*, most familiar in its anglicized form of "messiah," with the root meaning of "one who has been anointed." Although ancient Israel anointed both prophets and priests, the term came to be primarily reserved for the anointing of a king. Within the context of ancient Israel's strongly theocentric worldview, the king was regarded as someone who was appointed by God. Anointing – that is, the rubbing or covering of someone with olive oil – was thus a public sign of having been chosen by God for the task of kingship.

The term became linked to a set of expectations concerning the future of Israel which focused on the anticipated coming of a new king who, like David, would rule over a renewed people of God. There is evidence that such expectations reached new heights during the period of Roman occupation, with nationalist feelings becoming closely linked to messianic expectations. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has cast much light on such expectations at this time. To designate any first-century Palestinian as "the anointed one" would be to make a powerful and deeply evocative affirmation of the importance of such a person.

The New Testament evidence for the use of this title for Jesus is complex, and its interpretation is open to dispute. For example, some have suggested that the Messiah was a divine figure; others have argued that this is not the case, and that the Messiah was merely one favored and acknowledged by God. However, it seems that a good case can be made for suggesting that the following four statements are plausible:

1   Jesus was regarded by some of those who were attracted to him as a potential political liberator, who would rally his people to throw off the Roman domination.
2   Jesus himself never permitted his followers to describe him as "Messiah" – something which has subsequently come to be known as the "messianic secret" (a phrase coined by the German New Testament scholar William Wrede, 1859–1906).
3   If Jesus regarded himself as the Messiah, it was not in the politicized form that was associated with Zealot or other strongly nationalist circles.
4   The contemporary expectation was that of a victorious messiah. The fact that Jesus suffered was seriously at odds with this expectation. If Jesus was a messiah, he was not the kind of messiah that people were expecting.

What, then, is the significance of the term for an understanding of the importance of Jesus? For the purpose of establishing Jesus's relation to Israel, the term is enormously important. It suggests that Jesus is to be regarded as the fulfillment of classical Jewish expectations, and lays the foundations for an understanding of the continuities between Judaism and Christianity. This issue was certainly important in first-century Palestine, and continues to be of importance in connection with Jewish–Christian relations today.

Son of God

The Old Testament used the term "Son of God" in a broad sense, perhaps best translated as "having the characteristics of God" or "belonging to God." It was applied across a wide spectrum of categories, including the people of Israel in general (Exodus 4: 22) and especially the Davidic king and his successors who were to rule over that people (2 Samuel 7: 14). In this minimalist sense, the term could be applied equally to Jesus and to Christians. Jesus himself does not appear to have explicitly used the term of himself. It is found used in this way elsewhere in the New Testament, especially by Paul and in the letter to the Hebrews. Paul, for example, stated that Jesus had "been declared Son of God" on account of the resurrection (Romans 1: 4).

Paul uses the term "Son of God" in relation to both Jesus and believers. However, a distinction is drawn between the sonship of believers, which arises through adoption, and that of Jesus, which originates from his being "God's own son"

(Romans 8: 32). In the fourth gospel and the Johannine letters, the term "son" (*huios*) is reserved for Jesus, while the more general term "children" (*tekna*) tends to be applied to believers. The basic notion appears to be that believers are enabled, through faith, to enter into the same kind of relationship as that which Jesus enjoys with the Father; nevertheless, the relationship between Jesus and the Father is either prior to, or foundational for, that between believers and God.

These observations raise an important issue, which must be noted here. Some readers will find references to "Son of God" problematic, on account of the use of exclusive language. The simple solution is to replace the masculine "son" with the more inclusive term "child." Although this substitution is understandable, it blurs a series of crucial distinctions in the New Testament. For Paul, all believers – whether male or female – are "sons of God" by adoption. The point being made is that all believers enjoy inheritance rights – rights which, under the cultural conditions of the period, were enjoyed only by male children. In view of this major cultural problem, the present work will use the traditional exclusive language forms "Son of God" and "Son of Man" to deal with New Testament Christological titles, in much the same way as the traditional terms "Father" and "Son" are retained in the earlier analysis of the Trinity (see pp. 321–3).

Son of Man

For many Christians, the term "Son of Man" stands as a natural counterpart to "Son of God." It is an affirmation of the humanity of Christ, just as the latter term is a complementary affirmation of his divinity. However, it is not quite as simple as this. The term "Son of Man" (Hebrew *ben adam* or Aramaic *bar nasha*) is used in three main contexts in the Old Testament:

1 as a form of address to the prophet Ezekiel;
2 to refer to a future eschatological figure (Daniel 7: 13–14), whose coming signals the end of history and the coming of divine judgment;

3 to emphasize the contrast between the lowliness and frailty of human nature and the elevated status or permanence of God and the angels (Numbers 23: 19; Psalm 8: 4).

The third such meaning brings out the humanity of Jesus and may underlie at least some of its uses in the synoptic gospels. It is, however, the second use of the term that has attracted most scholarly attention.

The German New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) argued that Daniel 7: 13–14 points to the expectation of the coming of a "Son of Man" at the end of history, and argued that Jesus shared this expectation. References by Jesus to "the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory" (Mark 13: 26) are thus, according to Bultmann, to be understood to refer to a figure *other than* Jesus. Bultmann suggested that the early church subsequently merged "Jesus" and "Son of Man," understanding them to be one and the same. The early church thus invented the application of the term to Jesus.

This view has not, however, commanded universal assent. Other scholars have argued that the term "Son of Man" carries a range of associations, including suffering, vindication, and judgment, thus making it natural and proper to apply it to Jesus. The British New Testament scholar George Caird (1917–84) developed such an approach, arguing that Jesus used the term "to indicate his essential unity with mankind, and above all with the weak and humble, and also his special function as predestined representative of the new Israel and bearer of God's judgment and kingdom."

Lord

The acknowledgment that "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Romans 10: 9) appears to have become one of the earliest Christian confessions of faith, serving to distinguish those who believed in Jesus from those who did not. The term "Lord" (Greek *kyrios*; Aramaic *mar*) appears to have had powerful theological associations, partly on account of its use to translate the "Tetragrammaton" – the four Hebrew

characters used to represent the sacred name of God in the Hebrew version of the Old Testament, often represented in English as "YHWH" or "Yahweh." It was regarded as improper within Judaism to pronounce the name of God; an alternative word (*adonai*) was therefore used. In the Septuagint Greek translation of the Old Testament, the term *kyrios* is used to translate the name of God.

The Greek word *kyrios* thus came to be regarded as reserved for God within the biblical literature. The important first-century Jewish historian Josephus records an important incident in which Jews refused to take part in the emperor-cult which was a central part of the civil religion of the Roman empire. They refused to address the emperor as "lord" (*kyrios*), clearly on account of their belief that this term was appropriate to God alone. The use of the term to refer to Jesus in the New Testament thus draws on this rich tradition of association, implying a high degree of identity between Jesus and God.

This trend is illustrated by a number of passages within the New Testament which take Old Testament passages referring to God and apply them to Christ. Perhaps the most significant such occurrence is to be found at Philippians 2: 10–11, a passage which is clearly pre-Pauline. Here, a very early Christian writer, whose identity will probably remain forever unknown, takes the great Old Testament declaration (Isaiah 45: 23) that every knee will bow to the Lord God and transfers it to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Savior

For New Testament writers, Jesus is the "Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2: 11). This theme is found throughout the New Testament: Jesus saves his people from their sins (Matthew 1: 21); in his name alone is there salvation (Acts 4: 12); he is the "captain of salvation" (Hebrews 2: 10). The basic idea is, at least on the face of it, quite simple: Jesus is the one who saves.

Yet this seemingly simple statement turns out to be rather more complex than it might at first seem. It must be recalled that the New Testament affirmations about Jesus Christ are to be set against a Jewish background. And for the Old Testament, there was only one who could save – the Lord God of Israel. The prophets regularly reminded Israel that it could not save itself, nor could it be saved by other nations round about it. It is the Lord, and the Lord alone, who will save, or forgive Israel's sins. This point is made with special force in some of the prophetic writings, such as Isaiah 45: 21–2:

> Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the Lord?
> And there is no other god apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior.
> There is none apart from me.
> Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth!

The New Testament use of the word "savior" to refer to Jesus thus turns out to be considerably more significant than a cursory reading might suggest. The title indicates that Jesus of Nazareth is being credited with doing something that, strictly speaking, only God can do.

This theme is also reflected in the gospel accounts of how Jesus healed a paralytic (Mark 2: 1–12). Jesus tells the paralytic that his sins are forgiven, to the outrage and astonishment of the Jewish teachers of the law watching him. Their reaction is one of disbelief: "He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone!" (Mark 2: 7). Underlying this objection is a fundamental belief of the Old Testament: only God can forgive sin. Unless Jesus was God, he had no authority whatsoever to speak those words. He was deluded, or blaspheming. Yet Jesus declares that he does have such authority to forgive, and proceeds to heal the man (Mark 2: 10–11). The resurrection of Jesus demonstrated that Jesus had the right to act in this way, retrospectively validating his claims to authority on earth.

God alone forgives sins; yet Jesus forgives sin. God alone saves; yet Jesus also saves. So what does this say about the identity of Jesus? In the full knowledge that it was the Lord God alone who was savior, and that none other than God could save, the first Christians affirmed that Jesus was savior – that *Jesus* could save. This was no

misunderstanding on the part of people ignorant of the Old Testament tradition. It was a confident statement of who Jesus had to be, in the light of what he achieved through his saving death and resurrection.

God

The New Testament was written against the background of the strict monotheism of Israel. The idea that anyone could be described as "God" would have been blasphemous within this Jewish context. Nevertheless, the noted Catholic New Testament scholar Raymond Brown (1928–98) has argued that there are three clear instances of Jesus being called "God" in the New Testament, with the momentous implications that this involves. These are:

1 The opening section of the fourth gospel, which includes the affirmation: "the Word was God" (John 1: 1).
2 The confession of Thomas, in which he addresses the risen Christ as "my Lord and my God" (John 20: 28).
3 The opening of the letter to the Hebrews, in which a psalm is interpreted as being addressed to Jesus as God (Hebrews 1: 8).

Given the strong reluctance of New Testament writers to speak of Jesus as "God," because of their background in the strict monotheism of Israel, these three affirmations are of considerable significance. Many other texts have, of course, been argued to make similar affirmations; these three have been chosen to illustrate the point at issue, partly because there is widespread assent within the community of New Testament scholars concerning their importance in this respect.

To these verses which make statements concerning the *identity* of Jesus, there may be added a series of important New Testament passages which speak of the significance of Jesus in *functional* terms – that is to say, in terms which identify him as performing certain functions or tasks associated with God. Several of these prove to be of considerable significance.

Jesus is the savior of humanity

The Old Testament affirmed that there was only one savior of humanity: God. In the full knowledge that God alone could save, the first Christians affirmed that Jesus of Nazareth was their savior. For the New Testament, Jesus saves his people from their sins (Matthew 1: 21). Jesus is understood to function as God, doing something which, properly speaking, only God was permitted to do, according to Judaism. A fish came to be a symbol of faith to the early Christians, as the five Greek letters spelling out "fish" in Greek (I-CH-TH-U-S) came to represent the slogan "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior."

Jesus is worshiped

Within the Jewish context in which the first Christians operated, it was God and God alone who was to be worshiped. Paul warned the Christians at Rome that there was a constant danger that humans would worship creatures when they ought to be worshiping their creator (Romans 1: 23). Yet the early Christian church worshiped Christ as God – a practice which is clearly reflected even in the New Testament. Thus, 1 Corinthians 1: 2 speaks of Christians as those who "call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," using language which reflects the Old Testament formulae for worshiping or adoring God (such as Genesis 4: 26, 13: 4; Psalm 105: 1; Jeremiah 10: 25; Joel 2: 32). Jesus is thus clearly understood to function as God, in that he is an object of worship.

Jesus reveals God

"Anyone who has seen me, has seen the Father" (John 14: 9). These remarkable words, so characteristic of the fourth gospel, emphasize the belief that the Father speaks and acts in the Son – in other words, that God is revealed in and by Jesus. To have seen Jesus is to have seen the Father – in other words, Jesus is understood, once more, to function as God.

These texts and themes would play a major role in shaping Christian reflection on how best to state the identity of Jesus of Nazareth. The church already knew that Christ was an authoritative

teacher; that he forgave sins; that he was the fulfillment of the hopes of Israel; and many other points. The question they had to face was simple: what conceptual framework allows these insights to be woven together seamlessly? What is the best "big picture" which makes sense of all these components? What map can be drawn which allows all these insights to be positioned? We begin our exploration of this point by considering the patristic attempts to make sense of the identity of Christ.

THE PATRISTIC DEBATE OVER THE PERSON OF CHRIST

The patristic period saw considerable attention being paid to the doctrine of the person of Christ, which became the defining issue for early Christianity, affecting – to mention only three issues – the way in which Christians related to the Roman imperial state, the way they worshiped, and their hope for the future. The debate about the identity of Christ was conducted primarily within the eastern church; interestingly, Augustine of Hippo never wrote anything of great consequence on Christology, presumably finding his time to be more than adequately occupied by debates over grace, the church, and the Trinity.

The task confronting the patristic writers was basically the development of a unified Christological scheme which would bring together and integrate the various Christological hints and statements, and images and models, found within the New Testament, some of which have been considered briefly above. That task proved complex. In view of its enormous importance for Christian theology, we shall consider its main stages of development in what follows.
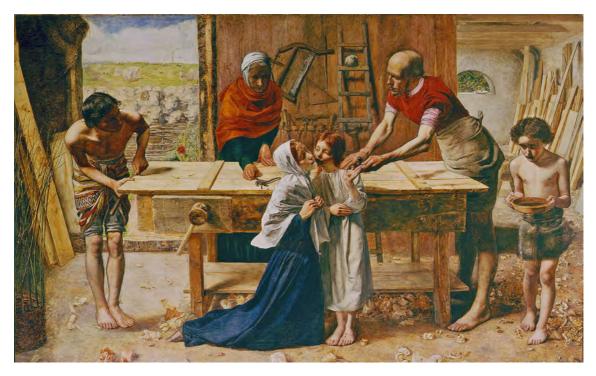
Early explorations: Ebionitism and Docetism

The theologians of the early church realized the importance of articulating the importance of Jesus Christ for the human mind, imagination, emotions, and behavior. In the course of its development in its first four centuries, the church had to deal with a number of interpretations of the identity of Jesus Christ which it regarded as failing to do justice to his significance. An improper location of Jesus Christ on a conceptual map could be fatal to Christian evangelism and discipleship. The first period of the development of Christology tended to center on the question of the divinity of Christ. Most early patristic writers were convinced that the New Testament spoke of Jesus Christ as a genuine human being. What required exploration and explanation was the way in which Jesus Christ differed from other human beings. Did he possess additional characteristics? Or did he lack some other normal human characteristics – such as being sinful?

This process of identifying the best conceptual framework within which to locate Jesus Christ proceeded cautiously. It was seen as important to explore and evaluate every conceivable possibility. One early approach was to take existing categories, inherited from the social matrices to which early Christians belonged, and treat these as appropriate to the task of conceptualizing the significance of Jesus Christ. The origins of such a trend can be seen inside the New Testament itself, in that the gospels record attempts to make sense of Jesus which are drawn from contemporary Judaism – such as interpreting Jesus of Nazareth as a second Elijah, a new Jewish prophet, or a High Priest of Israel.

Two early viewpoints were quickly rejected as heretical. "Ebionitism," a primarily Jewish sect which flourished in the early centuries of the Christian era, regarded Jesus as an ordinary human being, the human son of Mary and Joseph. Most scholars consider that early second-century Ebionitism was characterized by a "low Christology" – that is, an understanding of Jesus of Nazareth which interprets him as spiritually superior to ordinary human beings. Jesus of Nazareth was seen as a human being who was singled out for divine favor by being possessed by the Holy Spirit, in a manner similar to, yet more intensive than, the calling of a Hebrew prophet. This approach assimilated Jesus to existing Jewish categories of divine presence and activity, especially that of the prophet.

Figure 10.1   John Everett Millais's representation of Jesus of Nazareth in his parents' house (1849–50).

Source: The Art Archive / National Gallery, London / Eileen Tweedy.

Ebionitism is widely regarded as inadequate. The Swiss Protestant theologian Karl Barth argued against any Ebionite account of the identity of Jesus which treats him essentially as a heroic human being, or as a human being who was "adopted" by God. Barth interprets Ebionitism as an approach to Jesus of Nazareth characterized by a refusal to concede his intrinsic divinity, affirming only his humanity. While this is partly true, it does not really do justice to Ebionitism as an historical movement emerging from Judaism. Furthermore, Barth's approach makes it difficult to distinguish Ebionitism from Arianism (pp. 217–18), which can also be characterized as a denial of Christ's divinity.

More significant was the diametrically opposed view, which came to be known as "Docetism," from the Greek verb *dokeo*, "to seem or appear." The first explicit references to what is recognizable as a form of Docetism are found in some of the letters of Ignatius of Antioch (c.35–c.110), bishop of

Antioch in Syria, who was martyred at Rome. Ignatius is remembered mainly on account of seven letters which both exercised considerable influence in the early church and bear important witness to some of its controversies. These letters show him to be concerned about the teachings of two groups, each of which clearly had influence within some Christian churches: the Judaizers, who wished Christianity to remain within the orbit of Judaism, and the Docetists, who argued that the suffering of Jesus was illusory. Ignatius's letters to the churches at Trallia and Smyrna clearly indicate that some were arguing that Christ merely appeared to suffer. Christ "really and truly did suffer, just as he really and truly rose again. His passion was no imaginary illusion."

Docetism – which is probably best regarded as a tendency within theology rather than a definite theological position – is perhaps best understood as the tendency to conceive Jesus Christ as totally

divine, so that his humanity was merely an appearance. The sufferings of Christ are thus treated as apparent rather than real.

Docetism held a particular attraction for the Gnostic writers of the second century, during which period it reached its zenith. A good example of a Gnostic Christology is found in Valentinianism. This second-century heresy is usually attributed to Valentinus, who was born in Egypt and arrived in Rome around the year 135. Valentinus taught that Christ was a redeemer figure, who awakened the divine spark within humanity, enabling it to find its way back to its true home. In order to save those who were held captive by the body, the Savior "let himself be conceived and he let himself be born as an infant with body and soul."

Yet we need to be careful here, as early Christian sources indicate that, while some groups held that Jesus had only appeared to suffer, these are rarely described as "Docetists." Irenaeus of Lyons (c.130–c.202), for example, cites a number of unorthodox writers as claiming that Jesus of Nazareth "was a man merely in appearance"; he does not, however, refer to this as "Docetism."

Justin Martyr (c.100–c.165): the *Logos* Christology

By the end of the second century, however, other viewpoints were in the process of emerging, which would eventually eclipse this Docetic tendency. Justin Martyr, one of the most important second-century apologists, represents one such viewpoint. Justin's approach to Christology used the notion of the *logos* – a Greek term, extensively used in contemporary philosophy, which is often translated simply as "word" yet has far richer associations than this simple translation might suggest. Middle Platonism saw the *logos* as a mediating principle between the ideal and real worlds, allowing Christian theologians to explore the role of Jesus of Nazareth as mediator between God and humanity.

Justin was especially concerned to demonstrate that the Christian faith brought to fruition the insights of both classical Greek philosophy and

Judaism. Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) famously commented that Justin held that "Christ is the *Logos* and *Nomos*." In other words, Christ brings to perfection both the Jewish Law or Torah (Greek: *nomos*) and Greek philosophy, with its emphasis on the idea of the "word" (Greek: *logos*). Of particular interest is the *Logos* Christology which Justin developed, in which he exploits the apologetic potential of the idea of the *logos*, current in both Stoicism and the Middle Platonism of the period.

Justin appeals to the contemporary philosophical use of the term *logos*, generally regarded as the ultimate source of all human knowledge. He argues that the one and the same *logos* is known by both Christian believers and pagan philosophers; the latter, however, have only partial access to it through the mind, whereas Christians have full access to it, through the mind and in history, on account of its manifestation in Christ. The statement in the fourth gospel that the "word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1: 14) plays a critically important role in Justin's thought. Justin allows that pre-Christian secular philosophers, such as Heraclitus and Socrates, thus had partial access to the truth, because of the manner in which the *logos* is present in the world.

An idea of especial importance in this context is that of the *logos spermatikos* (Greek: "seed-bearing *logos*"), which appears to derive from Middle Platonism. According to this idea, the divine *Logos* (Jesus) sowed seeds throughout human history. It is therefore to be expected that this "seed-bearing *logos*" can be known, even if only in part, by non-Christians. Justin is therefore able to argue that Christianity builds upon and fulfills the hints and anticipations of God's revelation which are to be had through pagan philosophy. The *logos* was known temporarily through the theophanies (that is, appearances or manifestations of God) in the Old Testament; Christ brings the *logos* to its fullest revelation. Justin states this point clearly in his *Second Apology*:

> Our religion is clearly more sublime than any human teaching in this respect: the Christ who has appeared for us human beings represents the

Logos principle in all its fullness. […] Whatever either lawyers or philosophers have said well, was articulated by finding and reflecting upon some aspect of the *Logos*. However, since they did not know the *Logos* – which is Christ – in its entirety, they often contradicted themselves.

The world of Greek philosophy is thus set firmly in the context of Christianity: it is a prelude to the coming of Christ, who brings to fulfillment what philosophy had hitherto known only in part.

It is in the writings of Origen (c.185–c.254) that *Logos* Christology appears to find its fullest development. It must be made clear that Origen's Christology is complex, and that its interpretation at points is highly problematical. What follows is a simplification of his approach. In the incarnation, the human soul of Christ is united with the *logos*. On account of the closeness of this union, Christ's human soul comes to share in the properties of the *logos*. Nevertheless, Origen insists that, although both the *Logos* and Father are coeternal, the *Logos* is subordinate to the Father.

We noted above that Justin Martyr argued that the *logos* was accessible to all, even if only in a fragmentary manner, but that its full disclosure only came in Christ. Related ideas can be found in other writers to adopt *Logos* Christology, including Origen. Origen compares God's act of revelation to being enlightened by the "rays of God," which are caused by "the light which is the divine *Logos*." A knowledge of God is thus possible outside the Christian faith, even though this may take a fragmentary form.

Arius (c.260–336): Jesus Christ as "supreme among the creatures"

This process of exploration of religious and philosophical categories suitable for expressing the significance of Jesus of Nazareth reached a watershed in the fourth century. The controversy which forced the issue was precipitated by Arius, a priest in one of the larger churches in the great Egyptian city of Alexandria. Arius set out his views in a work known as the *Thalia* ("banquet"), which has not survived in its entirety. As a result, we know Arius's ideas through quotes found in the writings of his opponents. This means that these extracts from his works are presented in isolation, so that we do not fully understand the context in which Arius developed his ideas.

The fundamental themes of Arius's teachings can be summarized in terms of four basic statements, each of which needs a considerable amount of conceptual unpacking.

1   The Son and the Father do not have the same essence (*ousia*).
2   The Son is a created being (*ktisma* or *poiema*), even though he is to be recognized as first and foremost among created beings, in terms of origination and rank.
3   Although the Son was the creator of the worlds, and must therefore have existed before them and before all time, there was nevertheless a time when the Son did not exist.
4   The term "Son of God" is thus a metaphor, an honorific term intended to underscore the rank of the Son among other creatures. It does not imply that Father and Son share the same being or status.

One of the outcomes of the Arian controversy was the recognition of the futility, even theological illegitimacy, of biblical "proof-texting" – the simplistic practice of believing that a theological debate can be settled by quoting a few passages from the Bible. Arius's theological position was clearly grounded on biblical texts. For example, Proverbs 8: 22 speaks of God possessing wisdom at the beginning of creation. Christ is also described by Paul as the "first born" of the redeemed (Romans 8: 29). The point is that Arius chose to interpret these texts in a different manner from his orthodox opponents. Both sides of the Arian controversy were able to amass biblical texts which seemed to support their cases. The real question concerned the overall picture disclosed by the New Testament. Indeed, the Arian controversy can be argued to be about how an ensemble of relevant biblical texts is to be integrated, in that each side had no

difficulty in identifying individual texts which supported their position. Identifying the overall pattern disclosed by those texts proved to be the decisive issue.

The most fundamental Arian belief was that Jesus Christ was not divine in any meaningful sense of the term. He was "first among the creatures" – that is, preeminent in rank, yet unquestionably a creature rather than divine. Christ, as *Logos*, was indeed the agent of the creation of the world, as stated in the Prologue to John's gospel. Yet the *Logos* was itself created by God for this purpose. The Father is thus to be regarded as existing before the Son. "There was a time when he was not." This statement places Father and Son on different levels, and is consistent with Arius's rigorous insistence that the Son is a creature. Only the Father is "unbegotten"; the Son, like all other creatures, derives from this one source of being.

Arius was careful to emphasize that the Son is not like every other creature. There is a distinction of rank between the Son and other creatures, including human beings. Arius has some difficulty in identifying the precise nature of this distinction. The Son, he argued, is "a perfect creature, yet not as one among other creatures; a begotten being, yet not as one among other begotten beings." The implication seems to be that the Son outranks other creatures while sharing their essentially created and begotten nature.

Arius thus draws an absolute distinction between God and the created order. There are no intermediate or hybrid species. For Arius, God was totally transcendent and immutable. So how could such a God enter into history and become incarnate? As a creature, the Son was changeable (Greek: *treptos*). For Arius, this was inconsistent with the notion of an immutable God. Furthermore, the notion that God the Son was divine seemed to compromise the fundamental themes of monotheism and the unity of God – themes which, of course, would re-emerge as central in early Islam.

The utter transcendence and inaccessibility of God meant that God cannot be known by any other creature. Since Arius holds that the Son is to be regarded as a creature, however elevated above all other creatures, it therefore follows that the Son cannot know the Father. "The one who has a beginning is in no position to comprehend or lay hold of the one who has no beginning." In common with all other creatures, the Son is dependent upon the grace of God to perform whatever function has been ascribed to him.

Arius thus affirmed the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth, declaring that he was supreme among the creatures. Like Ebionitism, Arius declined to accept that Jesus could be said to be divine in any meaningful sense of the term. Yet Ebionitism set out to interpret the significance of Jesus within the framework of existing Jewish models of divine presence within humanity, particularly the notion of a prophet or spirit-filled individual. Arius, in contrast, sought to accommodate Jesus of Nazareth within the frameworks made available by the strict Greek philosophical monotheisms of his age, which precluded any notion of the incarnation as inconsistent with the changelessness and transcendence of God. Ebionitism and Arianism may appear to say similar things, but they begin from very different starting points and are guided by significantly different assumptions.

It is sometimes suggested that Arius developed his position on the identity of Jesus of Nazareth on the basis of a preconceived philosophical position which declared that, as a matter of principle, God could not become incarnate. There is some truth in this point, but not quite the whole truth. Arius's concerns were partly apologetic, in that he clearly believed that many were being alienated from Christianity on account of its increasing emphasis upon an idea – the incarnation – which educated Greeks were unable to accept. Arius saw his approach to Christianity, in contrast, as representing a measured and judicious amalgam of philosophical sophistication and responsible biblical exegesis.

Athanasius (c.293–373): Jesus Christ as God incarnate

So why did this strongly rational approach to the identity of Jesus of Nazareth attract such vigorous criticism? Arius's most indefatigable critic was

Athanasius of Alexandria. For Athanasius, Arius had destroyed the internal coherence of the Christian faith, rupturing the close connection between Christian belief and worship. There are two points of particular importance that underlie Athanasius's critique of Arius.

First, Athanasius argues that it is only God who can save. God, and God alone, can break the power of sin, and bring humanity to eternal life. The fundamental characteristic of human nature is that it requires to be redeemed. No creature can save another creature. Only the creator can redeem the creation. If Christ is not God, he is part of the problem, not its solution.

Having emphasized that it is God alone who can save, Athanasius then makes the logical move which the Arians found difficult to counter. The New Testament and the Christian liturgical tradition alike regard Jesus Christ as Savior. Yet, as Athanasius emphasized, only God can save. So how are we to make sense of this? The only possible solution, Athanasius argues, is to accept that Jesus is God incarnate.

1 No creature can redeem another creature.
2 According to Arius, Jesus Christ is a creature.
3 Therefore, according to Arius, Jesus Christ cannot redeem humanity.

Arius was firmly committed to the idea that Christ was the savior of humanity; Athanasius did not suggest that Arius denied this idea, but that he rendered it incoherent. If Christ was merely "supreme among the creatures," he was unable to be the savior of humanity. If Christ were only a human being, no matter how distinguished, he would be part of the problem, not its solution. Salvation, for Athanasius, involves divine intervention. Athanasius thus draws out the meaning of John 1: 14 by arguing that the "Word became flesh": in other words, God entered into our human situation, in order to change it. This idea is developed in Athanasius's classic work "On the Incarnation," in which he declares that "the human race would have perished completely had not the Lord and Savior of all, the Son of God, come among us to put

an end to death." For Athanasius, God became a human being in the incarnation, in order that human beings might become divine.

The second point that Athanasius makes is that Christians worship and pray to Jesus Christ. This pattern can be traced back to the New Testament itself, and is of considerable importance in clarifying early Christian understandings of the significance of Jesus of Nazareth. By the fourth century, prayer to and adoration of Christ were standard features of Christian public worship. Athanasius argues that, if Jesus Christ was a creature, Christians were guilty of worshiping a creature instead of God – in other words, they had lapsed into idolatry. Did not the Old Testament law explicitly prohibit the worship of anyone or anything other than God? Arius was not in disagreement with the practice of worshiping Jesus; he refused, however, to draw the same conclusions as Athanasius.

The point at issue here is the relationship between Christian worship and Christian belief. Orthodoxy maintains a view of the identity of Jesus Christ which is completely consistent with the worship patterns of the church. Christians, Athanasius argued, were right to worship and adore Jesus Christ, because by doing so they were recognizing him for what he really was – God incarnate. If Christ were not God, it would be totally improper to worship him. If Arius was right, existing patterns of Christian worship would have to be drastically altered, breaking the link with the earliest forms of Christian prayer and adoration. Arius seemed to be guilty of making the traditional way in which Christians prayed and worshiped incoherent. Though affirming the tradition of worshiping Jesus, Arius had undermined its integrity. If Arius was correct, Christians ought not to adore or pray to Christ in this way. Christ could be honored as "first among the creatures"; he should not, however, be worshiped.

We see here the fundamental characteristic of heresy: the maintenance of the outward appearance of faith coupled with the subversion of its inward identity. To focus only on the two points we have considered, Arius affirmed that Christ was

the savior of humanity and that the church should worship him, yet interpreted his identity in such a manner that neither salvation nor adoration were proper. Such a clear tension between theology and practice could not be sustained for long without causing their rupture.

The Arian controversy had to be settled somehow, if peace was to be established within the church. Debate came to center upon two terms as possible descriptions of the relation of the Father to the Son. The Greek term *homoiousios*, "of similar substance" or "of like being," was seen by some as representing a judicious compromise, allowing the proximity between Father and Son to be asserted without requiring any further speculation on the precise nature of their relationship. However, the rival term *homoousios*, "of the same substance" or "of the same being," eventually gained the upper hand. Though differing by only one letter from the alternative term, it embodied a very different understanding of the relationship between Father and Son. The fury of the debate prompted Edmund Gibbon (1737–94) to comment in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–88) that never had so much energy been spent over a single vowel. The Nicene Creed – or, more accurately, the Niceno–Constantinopolitan Creed – of 381 declared that Christ was "of the same substance" with the Father. This affirmation has since come to be widely regarded as a benchmark of Christological orthodoxy within all the mainstream Christian churches, whether Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox.

In turning to deal with Athanasius's response to Arius, we have begun to touch upon some of the features of the Alexandrian school of Christology. It is therefore appropriate now to explore these in more detail, and compare them with the views of the rival school of Antioch.

The Alexandrian school: Apollinarianism and its critics

The outlook of the Alexandrian school, of which Athanasius was a leading representative, focuses sharply on the significance of Christ as savior

(Greek: *soter*) of humanity. Jesus Christ redeems humanity by taking human beings up into the life of God, or making them divine, traditionally expressed in terms of "deification." Christology gives expression to what this soteriological insight implies. Or, to put this another way, the *identity* of Jesus of Nazareth is disclosed through the *saving actions* of Jesus of Nazareth.

We could summarize the trajectory of Alexandrian Christology along the following lines: if human nature is to be deified, it must be united with the divine nature. God must become united with human nature in such a manner that the latter is enabled to share in the life of God. This, the Alexandrians argued, was precisely what had happened in and through the incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus Christ. The second person of the Trinity assumed human nature, and by doing so ensured its divinization. God became human in order that humanity might become divine.

Alexandrian writers thus placed considerable emphasis upon the idea of the *Logos* assuming human nature. The term "assuming" is important; a distinction is drawn between the *Logos* "dwelling within humanity" (as in the case of the Old Testament prophets) and the *Logos* taking human nature upon itself (as in the incarnation of the Son of God). Particular emphasis came to be placed upon John 1: 14 ("the Word became flesh"), which came to embody the fundamental insights of the school, and the liturgical celebration of Christmas. To celebrate the birth of Christ was to celebrate the coming of the *Logos* to the world and its taking human nature upon itself in order to redeem it.

This clearly raised the question of the relationship between the divinity and humanity of Christ. Cyril of Alexandria (c.378–444) is one of many writers within the school to emphasize the reality of their union in the incarnation. The *Logos* existed "without flesh" before its union with human nature; after that union, there is only one nature, in that the *Logos* united human nature with itself. This emphasis upon the one nature of Christ distinguishes the Alexandrian from the Antiochene

school, which was more receptive to the idea of two natures within Christ. Cyril states this point as follows:

> In declaring that the Word [*Logos*] was made to "be incarnate" and "made human," we do not assert that there was any change in the nature of the Word when it became flesh, or that it was transformed into an entire human being, consisting of soul and body; but we say that the Word, in an indescribable and inconceivable manner, united personally to himself flesh endowed with a rational soul, and thus became a human being and was called the Son of man. And this was not by a mere act of will or favor, nor simply adopting a role or taking to himself a person.

This raised the question of what kind of human nature had been assumed by the *Logos*. Apollinarius of Laodicea (c.310–c.390) had anxieties about the increasingly widespread belief that the *Logos* had assumed human nature in its entirety. It seemed to him that this implied that the *Logos* was contaminated by the weaknesses of human nature. How could the Son of God be allowed to be tainted by purely human directive principles? The sinlessness of Christ would be compromised, in Apollinarius's view, if he were to possess a purely human mind; was not the human mind the source of sin and rebellion against God? Only if the human mind were to be replaced by a purely divine motivating and directing force could the sinlessness of Christ be maintained. For this reason, Apollinarius argued that, in Christ, a purely human mind and soul were replaced by a divine mind and soul. "The divine energy fulfills the role of the animating soul and of the human mind" in Christ. The human nature of Christ is thus incomplete.

This idea appalled many of Apollinarius's colleagues. The Apollinarian view of Christ may have had its attractions for some; others, however, were shocked by its soteriological implications. How could human nature be redeemed, it was asked, if only part of human nature had been assumed by the *Logos*? Perhaps the most famous statement of this position was made by Gregory of Nazianzus

(329–89), who stressed the redemptive importance of the assumption of human nature in its totality at the incarnation:

> If anyone has put their trust in him as a human being lacking a human mind, they are themselves mindless and not worthy of salvation. For what has not been assumed has not been healed; it is what is united to his divinity that is saved. […] Let them not grudge us our total salvation, or endue the Savior only with the bones and nerves and mere appearance of humanity.

The Antiochene school: Theodore of Mopsuestia (c.350–428)

The school of Christology that arose in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) differed considerably from its Egyptian rival at Alexandria. One of the most significant points of difference relates to the context in which Christological speculation was set. The Alexandrian writers were motivated primarily by soteriological considerations. Concerned that deficient understandings of the person of Christ were linked with inadequate conceptions of salvation, they used ideas derived from secular Greek philosophy to ensure a picture of Christ that was consistent with the full redemption of humanity. As we have seen, the idea of the *Logos* was of particular importance, especially when linked with the notion of incarnation.

The Antiochene writers took a very different perspective at this point. Their concerns were primarily moral rather than purely soteriological, and they drew much less significantly on the ideas of Greek philosophy. The basic trajectory of much Antiochene thinking on the identity of Christ can be traced along the following lines. On account of their disobedience, human beings exist in a state of corruption, from which they are unable to extricate themselves. If redemption is to take place, it must be on the basis of a new obedience on the part of humanity. Since humanity is unable to break free from the bonds of sin, God is obliged to intervene. This leads to the coming of the redeemer as one who unites humanity and divinity,

and thus to the re-establishment of an obedient people of God.

The two natures of Christ are vigorously defended. Christ is at one and the same time both God and a real individual human being. Against the Alexandrian criticism that this was to deny the unity of Christ, the Antiochenes responded that they upheld that unity while simultaneously recognizing that the one redeemer possessed both a perfect human and a perfect divine nature. There is a "perfect conjunction" between the human and divine natures in Christ. The complete unity of Christ is thus not inconsistent with his possessing two natures, divine and human. Theodore of Mopsuestia stressed this point, asserting that the glory of Jesus Christ "comes from God the *Logos*, who assumed him and united him to himself. […] And because of this exact conjunction which this human being has with God the Son, the whole creation honors and worships him." The Alexandrians remained suspicious; this seemed to amount to a doctrine of "two sons" – that is, that Jesus Christ was not a single person but two, one human and one divine. Yet this option is explicitly excluded by the leading writers of the school, such as Nestorius (c.386–c.451), archbishop of Constantinople. Christ is, according to Nestorius, "the common name of the two natures":

> Christ is indivisible in that he is Christ, but he is twofold in that he is both God and a human being. He is one in his sonship, but is twofold in that which takes and that which is taken. […] For we do not acknowledge two Christs or two sons or "only-begottens" or Lords; not one son and another son, not a first "only-begotten" and a new "only-begotten," not a first and second Christ, but one and the same.

So how did the Antiochene theologians envisage the mode of union of divine and human natures in Christ? We have already seen the "assumption" model which had gained the ascendancy at Alexandria, by which the *Logos* assumed human flesh.

What model was employed at Antioch? The answer could be summarized as follows:

- *Alexandria*: *Logos* assumes a general human nature.
- *Antioch*: *Logos* assumes a specific human being.

Theodore of Mopsuestia is a good example of an Antiochene theologian who held that the *Logos* did not assume "human nature" in general but a specific human being. Theodore appears to suggest that, instead of assuming a general or abstract human nature, the *Logos* assumed a specific concrete human individual. This seems to be the case in his work *On the Incarnation*: "In coming to indwell, the *Logos* united the assumed [human being] as a whole to itself and made him to share with it in all the dignity in which the one who indwells, being the Son of God by nature, possesses."

So how are the human and divine natures related? Antiochene writers were convinced that the Alexandrian position led to the "mingling" or "confusion" of the divine and human natures of Christ. To avoid this error, they devised a manner of conceptualizing the relationship between the two natures which maintained their distinct identities. This "union according to good pleasure" involves the human and divine natures of Christ being understood to be rather like watertight compartments within Christ. They never interact or mingle with one another. They remain distinct, being held together by the good pleasure of God. The "hypostatic union" – that is, the union of the divine and human natures in Christ – rests in the will of God.

This might seem to suggest that Theodore of Mopsuestia regarded the union of the divine and human natures as being a purely moral union, like that of a husband and wife. It also leads to a suspicion that the *Logos* merely puts on human nature, as one would put on a coat: the action involved is temporary and reversible, and involves no fundamental change to anyone involved. However, the Antiochene writers do not seem to have intended these conclusions to be drawn. Perhaps the most

reliable way of approaching their position is to suggest that their desire to avoid confusing the divine and human natures within Christ led them to stress their distinctiveness – yet, in so doing, to inadvertently weaken their link in the hypostatic union.

The "communication of attributes"

An issue of major concern to many patristic writers centered on the question of the "communication of attributes," a notion often discussed in terms of the Latin phrase *communicatio idiomatum*. By the end of the fourth century, the following propositions had gained widespread acceptance within the church:

1 Jesus is fully human.
2 Jesus is fully divine.

If both these statements are simultaneously true, it was argued, what was true of the humanity of Jesus must also be true of his divinity, and vice versa. An example might be the following:

1 Jesus Christ is God.
2 Mary gave birth to Jesus.
3 Therefore Mary is the Mother of God.

This kind of argument became increasingly commonplace within the late fourth-century church; indeed, it often served as a means of testing the orthodoxy of a theologian. A failure to agree that Mary was the "mother of God" became seen as tantamount to a refusal to accept the divinity of Christ.

But how far can this principle be pressed? For example, consider the following line of argument:

1 Jesus suffered on the cross.
2 Jesus is God.
3 Therefore God suffered on the cross.

The first two statements are clearly orthodox and commanded widespread assent within the church.

But the third statement represents a conclusion drawn from those orthodox statements that was widely regarded as unacceptable and unorthodox, as we noted in our earlier discussion of the idea of "a suffering God" (pp. 181–5).

It was axiomatic to most patristic writers that God could not suffer. The patristic period witnessed much agonizing over the limits that could be set to this approach. Thus, Gregory of Nazianzus insisted that God must be considered to suffer; otherwise the reality of the incarnation of the Son of God was called into question. However, it was the Nestorian controversy that highlighted the importance of the issues.

By the time of Nestorius, the title *theotokos* (literally, "bearer of God") had become widely accepted within both popular piety and academic theology. Nestorius was, however, alarmed at its implications. It seemed to deny the humanity of Christ. Why not call Mary *anthropotokos* ("bearer of humanity") or even *Christotokos* ("bearer of the Christ")? His suggestions were met with outrage and indignation, on account of the enormous theological investment on the part of Alexandrian theologians in the term *theotokos*.

Modern scholarship has called into question whether Nestorianism really was heretical, as some Alexandrian writers suggested, pointing out the highly politicized nature of the debate. Nestorius is increasingly regarded as making an entirely legitimate point, thus opening up an important theological discussion. The Antiochene defense of the humanity of Jesus Christ did not entail the rejection of his divinity. When Nestorius and others within this tradition emphasized that Jesus of Nazareth had to develop in moral goodness, and had to achieve his victory over sin *as a human being*, this was to be seen as a supplementation and enrichment of the accompanying belief that he was also divine. The scholarly review of the theological status of "Nestorianism" calls into question many judgments made by writers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and readers should be aware of this significant change in attitudes if they are consulting older accounts of this debate.

The Council of Chalcedon (451)

We conclude our analysis of the formative patristic development of Christology by looking at the definition of the Council of Chalcedon, widely regarded as a landmark in early Christian theology.

> We all with one voice confess our Lord Jesus Christ to be one and the same Son, perfect in divinity and humanity, truly God and truly human, consisting of a rational soul and a body, being of one substance with the Father in relation to his divinity, and being of one substance with us in relation to his humanity, and is like us in all things apart from sin. (Hebrews 4: 15)

This statement affirms the core themes of the doctrine of the incarnation. Jesus Christ is "truly God and truly human," being of "one substance" with God in relation to his divinity, and of "one substance" with us in relation to his humanity. This can be interpreted in terms of both the Alexandrian and Antiochene approaches, noted earlier (pp. 220–3). Chalcedon was clearly interested in laying down what really mattered while allowing a degree of latitude over how the core themes of orthodoxy were to be interpreted.

As Karl Rahner (1904–84) pointed out in a landmark essay of 1951, marking the 1,500th anniversary of the Council of Chalcedon, the definitions of the Council were to be seen not only as an end but also as a beginning. In "Chalcedon: End or Beginning?," Rahner noted that Chalcedon brought the patristic Christological debates to a conclusion, resolving some of the impasses that had arisen. Yet it also marked a beginning, in that Chalcedon did not lay down a timeless archetype to which all future theology must conform but rather provided a prototype which could serve as the basis for future discussion and interpretation. Rahner's point is important to those who find Chalcedon's use of Greek metaphysical categories – such as "substance" – unhelpful, as he stresses to later generations the need for a continuing process of interpretation of these ideas.

An important minority viewpoint must, however, be noted. Chalcedon did not succeed in establishing a consensus throughout the entire Christian world. A dissenting position became established during the sixth century, and is now generally known as "miaphysitism" – literally, the view that there is "only one nature" (Greek: *mia*, "only one," and *physis*, "nature") in Christ. (The term "monophysitism" is also encountered but refers primarily to the views of Eutyches of Constantinople, c.380–c.456.) The "one nature" in question is understood to be divine, rather than human. The intricacies of this viewpoint lie beyond the scope of this volume; the reader should note that it remains normative within most Christian churches of the eastern Mediterranean world, including the Abyssinian, Armenian, Coptic, and Syrian churches. (The rival Chalcedonian position, which recognized two natures in Christ, one human and the other divine, is occasionally referred to as "dyophysitism," from the Greek terms for "two" and "natures.")

We now move away from the patristic Christological debates and consider some developments during the Middle Ages.

MEDIEVAL CHRISTOLOGY: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE INCARNATION AND THE FALL

The medieval period was noted for its systematic exploration of the logical and philosophical aspects of most areas of theology, and Christology was no exception. Anselm of Canterbury's (c.1033–1109) treatise "Why God became Man" explored the rationality of the incarnation, focusing especially on the importance of the death of Christ. Yet other discussions took place during this important period in theological history. To illustrate the kinds of debate that took place at this time, we shall consider a theological question concerning the incarnation that intrigued this era. Was the incarnation dependent on Adam's fall – or would it have happened anyway?

The classical understanding of the grounds of the incarnation could be summarized like this: humanity fell from grace and required restoration.

This restoration required the incarnation of the Son of God, and his saving work on the cross. Therefore, if humanity had not sinned, there would have been no need for the incarnation. In fact, most Christian writers thought it pointless to speculate about what might have happened if Adam had never sinned. But not all.

Honorius of Autun (1080–1154), who was active as a theologian over the period 1106–35, argued that the incarnation was not ordained as a remedy for human sin but in order to secure the divinization of humanity. And humanity needed to be made divine, whether it remained innocent or whether it fell. As humanity required to be totally transformed in this way, the incarnation was necessary. "It was necessary, therefore, for [the Son of God] to become incarnate, so that humanity could be deified, and thus it does not follow that sin was the cause of the incarnation." A similar view is found in the writings of the Benedictine theologian Rupert of Deutz (c.1075–1130), who argued that the incarnation was the result of God's wish to dwell among his people. The incarnation can therefore be seen as the climax of the work of creation, rather than a reaction to human sin.

It fell to Thomas Aquinas (c.1225–74) to adjudicate on this debate. Clearly uneasy about the highly speculative nature of the question, he argued that the coming of Christ was the result of the fall, and declared that there was little to be gained by considering alternatives:

> Some say that the Son of God would have become incarnate, even if humanity had not sinned. Others assert the opposite, and it would seem that our assent ought to be given to this opinion. For those things that originate from God's will, lying beyond what is due to the creature, can only be made known to us through being revealed in Holy Scripture, in which the divine will is made known to us. Therefore, since the sin of the first human being is described as the cause of the incarnation throughout Holy Scripture, it is more in accordance with this to say that the work of the incarnation was ordained as a remedy for sin, so that, if sin had not existed, the incarnation would never have taken place. Yet the power of God is

not limited in this way. Even if sin had not existed, God could still have become incarnate.

We now turn to consider some of the major themes in contemporary discussion of the identity and significance of Jesus Christ. In two later sections, we shall consider the debates about "faith and history," focusing on the famous "Quest for the Historical Jesus."

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST

Older works of Christian theology often draw a sharp distinction between "the person of Christ" or "Christology," on the one hand, and "the work of Christ" or "soteriology," on the other. This distinction is maintained in this present work, for purely educational reasons, in that a full discussion of both areas could not be contained within the limits of a single chapter. However, the distinction is increasingly regarded as being unhelpful, save for presentational reasons. Theologically, the close connection between the two areas is now generally recognized. Among the considerations which led to this development, the following two are of especial importance.

First, the philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) drew a famous distinction between the *Ding-an-sich* ("thing in itself") and the human perception of this thing. Kant's argument is that we cannot know things directly but only insofar as we can perceive them or apprehend their impact. Although the ultimate philosophical justification of this assertion lies beyond the scope of this volume (and is, in any case, questionable), its theological implications are clear: the identity of Jesus is known through his impact upon us. In other words, the person of Christ becomes known through his work. There is thus an organic link between Christology and soteriology. This is the approach adopted by Albrecht Benjamin Ritschl in his *Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (1874). Ritschl argued that it was improper to separate Christology and soteriology since we

perceive "the nature and attributes, that is the determination of being, only in the effect of a thing upon us, and we think of the nature and extent of its effect upon us as its essence."

The second consideration is the growing realization of the affinities between functional and ontological Christologies – that is, between Christologies that make affirmations about the *function or work* of Christ and those that make affirmations concerning his *identity or being*. To put it simply: there is a robust link between who Jesus Christ is and what he does.

Athanasius was one of the earliest Christian writers to make this connection explicit. Only God can save, he asserts. Yet Christ is the savior of humanity. What does this statement concerning the *function* of Christ tell us about his *identity*? If Jesus Christ is capable of functioning as savior, who must he be? Christology and soteriology are thus seen as two sides of the same coin rather than two independent areas of thought.

This point was also made by Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928–2014), who stressed the way in which Christology and soteriology have had the closest of connections in Christian thinking:

> The divinity of Jesus and his freeing and redeeming significance for us are related in the closest possible way. To this extent, Melanchthon's famous sentence is appropriate: "Who Jesus Christ is becomes known in his saving action." […] Since Schleiermacher the close tie between Christology and soteriology has won general acceptance in theology: This is particularly to be seen in one characteristic feature of modern Christology. One no longer separates the divine–human person and the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, as was done in medieval Scholastic theology and, in its wake, in the dogmatics of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Protestant orthodoxy, but rather, with Schleiermacher, both are conceived as two sides of the same thing.

The importance of this point can be seen by comparing a style of Christology which stresses the humanity of Christ (especially in relation to his moral example: see p. 233) with a Pelagian soteriology (which stresses the total freedom of the human will: see pp. 330–4). For Pelagius (c.354–c.420), humanity had the ability to do right; it merely needed to be told what to do. The moral example of Christ provided this example. This exemplarist view of Christ is thus linked with a view of human nature which minimizes the extent of human sin, and the strange and tragic history of humanity in general. As the English theologian Charles Gore (1853–1932) pointed out incisively over a century ago, in an oft-quoted passage:

> Inadequate conceptions of Christ's person go hand in hand with inadequate conceptions of what human nature wants. The Nestorian conception of Christ […] qualifies Christ for being an example of what man can do, and into what wonderful union with God he can be assumed if he is holy enough; but Christ remains one man among many, shut in within the limits of a single human personality, and influencing man only from outside. He can be a Redeemer of man if man can be saved from outside by bright example, but not otherwise. The Nestorian Christ is logically associated with the Pelagian man. […] The Nestorian Christ is the fitting Saviour of the Pelagian man.
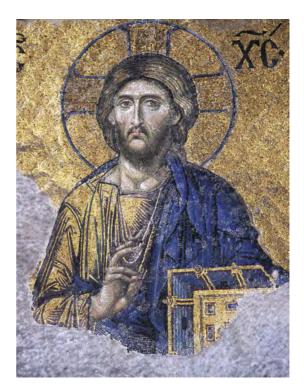
As will be clear from our earlier discussion of the views of Nestorius, we need to note that modern theological scholarship would no longer agree with Gore's characterization of a "Nestorian" Christology, nor his purely negative assessment of this approach (pp. 223–4). Yet Gore's general point remains important, in that a significant connection is established between Christology and soteriology. An exemplarist soteriology, with its associated understanding of the nature and role of the moral example of Jesus Christ, is ultimately the correlative of a Pelagian view of the situation and abilities of humanity. The ontological gap between Christ and ourselves is contracted, in order to minimize the discontinuity between his moral personality and ours. Christ is the supreme human example, who evinces an authentically human lifestyle which we are alleged to be capable of imitating. Our view of who Jesus Christ is ultimately reflects our understanding of the situation of fallen humanity.

CHRISTOLOGICAL MODELS: CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY

One of the perennial tasks of Christian theology has been the clarification of the relationship between human and divine elements in the person of Jesus Christ. The Council of Chalcedon (451) may be regarded as laying down a controlling principle for classical Christology which has been accepted as definitive within much Christian theology. The principle in question could be summarized like this: provided that it is recognized that Jesus Christ is both truly divine and truly human, the precise manner in which this is articulated or explored is not of fundamental importance. As Karl Rahner pointed out, Chalcedon did not close down Christological reflection but provided it with a new framework. The Oxford patristic scholar Maurice F. Wiles (1923–2005) summarized Chalcedon's aims and legacy as follows:

> On the one hand was the conviction that a saviour must be fully divine; on the other was the conviction that what is not assumed is not healed. Or, to put the matter in other words, the source of salvation must be God; the locus of salvation must be humanity. It is quite clear that these two principles often pulled in opposite directions. The Council of Chalcedon was the church's attempt to resolve, or perhaps rather to agree to live with, that tension. Indeed, to accept both principles as strongly as did the early church is already to accept the Chalcedonian faith.

In part, Chalcedon's decision to insist upon the two natures of Christ, while accepting a plurality of interpretations regarding their relation, reflects the political situation of the period. At a time when there was considerable disagreement within the church over the most reliable way of stating the "two natures of Christ," the Council was obliged to adopt a realistic approach and to give its weight to whatever consensus it could find. That consensus concerned the recognition that Christ was both divine and human, but *not* how the divine and human natures related to each other.

Figure 10.2 The image of *Christos Pantokrator*. The Greek term Christos Pantokrator means "Christ the Ruler of All" and was widely used in the Greek-speaking church of the later patristic period.

Source: Photo © istockphoto.

As Christian theology has expanded into a variety of different cultural contexts, and adopted various philosophical systems as vehicles for theological exploration, it is no cause for surprise that a variety of ways of exploring the relationship between the human and divine natures of Christ can be found within the Christian tradition. In what follows, we shall explore some of these approaches.

The substantial presence of God in Christ

The doctrine of the incarnation affirms the presence of the divine nature or substance within Christ. The divine nature assumes human nature in the incarnation. As we noted earlier, patristic writers within the Alexandrian school referred to

227

Mary as the *theotokos* – that is, "bearer of God" – as a way of asserting the reality of the union of divine and human substances in the incarnation.

The notion of a substantial presence of God within Christ was of vital importance to the Christian church in its controversy with Gnosticism. A central Gnostic notion was that matter was evil and sinful, so that redemption was a purely spiritual affair. Irenaeus links the idea of a substantial presence of God in Christ with the symbolic affirmation of this in the bread and wine of the Eucharist:

> If the flesh is not saved, then the Lord did not redeem us with his blood, the cup of the Eucharist is not a sharing in his blood, and the bread which we break is not a sharing in his body. For the blood cannot exist apart from veins and flesh and the rest of the human substance which the divine *Logos* truly became, in order to redeem us.

This understanding of Christology is closely linked with the image of salvation as "deification." Simeon the New Theologian (949–1022) brought this point out particularly clearly, as he reflected on the union of the human soul with God:

> But your nature is your essence, and your essence your nature. So uniting with your body, I share in your nature, and I truly take as mine what is yours, uniting with your divinity. […] You have made me a god, a mortal by my nature, a god by your grace, by the power of your Spirit, bringing together as god a unity of opposites.

We shall return to this concept later, in the course of our discussion of the nature of salvation (see p. 271).

The idea of a substantial presence of God in Christ became of particular importance within Byzantine theology and formed one of the theological foundations of the practice of portraying God using images – or, to use the more technical term, *icons* (Greek: *eikon*, "image"). There had always been resistance to this practice within the eastern church, on account of that church's emphasis upon the ineffability and transcendence of God. The "apophatic" tradition in theology sought to preserve the mystery of God by stressing the divine unknowability. The veneration of icons appeared to be totally inconsistent with this, and seemed to many to be dangerously close to paganism. In any case, did not the Old Testament forbid the worship of images?

Germanus, patriarch of Constantinople from 715 to 730, argued vigorously for the use of icons in public worship and private devotion on the basis of the following incarnational argument. "I represent God, the invisible one, not as invisible, but insofar as God has become visible for us by participation in flesh and blood." A similar approach was taken by John of Damascus (c.676–749), who argued that, in worshiping icons, he was not worshiping any created object as such but the creator God who had chosen to redeem humanity through the material order:

> Previously there was absolutely no way in which God, who has neither a body nor a face, could be represented by any image. But now that he has made himself visible in the flesh and has lived with people, I can make an image of what I have seen of God […] and contemplate the glory of the Lord, his face having been unveiled.

This position was regarded as untenable by the "iconoclastic" party (so called because they wanted to break or destroy icons). To portray God in an image was to imply that God could be described or defined – and that was to imply an unthinkable limitation on the part of God. Aspects of this debate can still be discerned within the Greek and Russian Orthodox churches, where the veneration of icons remains an integral element of spirituality.

In more recent times, the idea of the incarnation as God's substantial presence has been used as the basis for emphasizing the importance of relating the Christian faith to cultural contexts through becoming "incarnate" within culture. This point was made particularly clearly by Pope Francis (born 1936), in his 2013 apostolic

exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* ("The Joy of the Gospel"):

> Realities are greater than ideas. This principle has to do with incarnation of the word and its being put into practice: "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is from God" (1 John 4: 2). The principle of reality, of a word already made flesh and constantly striving to take flesh anew, is essential to evangelization. It helps us to see that the Church's history is a history of salvation, to be mindful of those saints who inculturated the Gospel in the life of our peoples and to reap the fruits of the Church's rich bimillennial tradition, without pretending to come up with a system of thought detached from this treasury, as if we wanted to reinvent the Gospel.

Christ as mediator between God and humanity

A major strand of Christological reflection concentrates upon the notion of mediation between God and humanity. The New Testament refers to Christ as a mediator at several points (1 Timothy 2: 5; Hebrews 9: 15), thus lending weight to the notion that the presence of God in Christ is intended to mediate between a transcendent God and fallen humanity. This idea of "presence as mediation" takes two quite distinct, yet ultimately complementary, forms: the mediation of revelation, on the one hand, and of salvation, on the other.

The *Logos* Christology of Justin Martyr and others is an excellent instance of the notion of the mediation of revelation through Christ. Here, the *logos* is understood to be a mediating principle which bridges the gap between a transcendent God and God's creation. Although present in a transient manner in the Old Testament prophets, the *logos* becomes incarnate in Christ, thus providing a fixed point of mediation between God and humanity. A related approach is found in *The Mediator* (1927), by Emil Brunner (1889–1966), and in a more developed form in his 1937 work *Truth as Encounter*. In the latter, Brunner argued that faith was primarily a personal encounter with the God who meets us personally in Jesus Christ. Brunner was convinced that the early church had misunderstood revelation as the divine impartation of doctrinal truth about God, rather than the self-revelation of God. For Brunner, "truth" is itself a personal concept. Revelation cannot be conceived propositionally or intellectually, but must be understood as an act of God, and supremely the act of Jesus Christ.

God is *revealed* personally and historically in Jesus Christ (pp. 230–1). The concept of "truth as encounter" thus conveys the two elements of a correct understanding of revelation: it is *historical* and it is *personal*. By the former, Brunner wishes us to understand that truth is not something permanent within the eternal world of ideas which is disclosed or communicated to us, but something which *happens* in space and time. Truth comes into being as the act of God in time and space. By the latter point, Brunner intends to emphasize that the content of this act of God is none other than *God*, rather than a complex of ideas or doctrines concerning God. The revelation of God is God's self-impartation to us. In revelation, God communicates *God*, not *ideas* about God – and this communication is concentrated and focused in the person of Jesus Christ as appropriated by the Holy Spirit. Although Brunner's rejection of any cognitive dimension to revelation seems overstated, a significant point is being made, with important Christological implications.

A more strongly soteriological approach to this issue is best seen in the *Institutes* (1559) by John Calvin (1509–64), in which the person of Christ is interpreted in terms of the mediation of salvation from God to humanity. Christ is, in effect, seen as a unique channel or focus, through which God's redeeming work is directed toward and made available to humanity. Humanity, as originally created by God, was originally good in every respect. On account of the Fall, natural human gifts and faculties have been radically impaired. As a consequence, both human reason and the human will are contaminated by sin. Unbelief is thus seen as an act of will as much as an act of reason; it is not simply a failure to discern the hand of God within the created order but a deliberate decision *not* to discern it and *not* to obey God.

Calvin develops the consequences of this at two distinct, although related, levels. At the epistemic level, humans lack the necessary rational and volitional resources to discern God fully within the created order. There are obvious parallels here with the *Logos* Christology of Justin Martyr. At the soteriological level, humans lack what is required in order to be saved; they do not *want* to be saved (on account of the debilitation of the mind and will through sin), and they are *incapable* of saving themselves (in that salvation presupposes obedience to God, now impossible on account of sin). True knowledge of God and salvation must both therefore come from outside the human situation. In such a manner, Calvin lays the foundations for his doctrine of the *mediatorship* of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and humanity. In order to act as such a mediator, Jesus Christ must be both divine and human. In that it was impossible for us to ascend to God, on account of our sin, God chose to descend to us instead. Unless Jesus Christ was himself a human being, other human beings could not benefit from his presence or activity. "The Son of God became the Son of Man, and received what is ours in such a way that he transferred to us what is his, making that which is his by nature to become ours through grace" (Calvin).

The revelational presence of God in Christ

As we noted earlier, the idea of "revelation" is complex, embracing the idea of a final disclosure or "unveiling" of God at the end of time, as well as the more general and restricted idea of "making God known" (see pp. 136–41). Both these ideas have been of significance in more recent theology, as the notion of a Christologically determined concept of God gained influence in twentieth-century German theology. *The Crucified God* (1972), by Jürgen Moltmann (born 1926), is an excellent example of a work which seeks to build up an understanding of the nature of God, on the basis of the assumption that God is disclosed through the cross of Christ. In what follows, we shall explore the distinct, though related, approaches to "revelational

presence" associated with Karl Barth and Wolfhart Pannenberg.

Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* may be regarded as probably the most extensive and complex exposition of the idea of the "revelational presence of God in Christ." Barth frequently emphasizes that all theology necessarily possesses an implicit Christological perspective and foundation, which it is the task of theology to make explicit. Barth rejects any deductive Christology based upon a "Christ principle" in favor of one based upon "Jesus Christ himself as witnessed to in Holy Scripture."

Every theological proposition in the *Church Dogmatics* may be regarded as Christological, in the sense that the work has its point of departure in Jesus Christ. It is this feature of Barth's later thought that has led to its being described as "Christological concentration" or "Christomonism." Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–88) illustrates this "Christological concentration" by comparing it to an hourglass, in which the sand pours from the upper to the lower section through a constriction. Similarly, the divine revelation proceeds from God to the world, from above to below, only through the central event of the revelation of Christ, apart from which there is no link between God and humanity.

It must be made clear that Barth is not suggesting that the doctrine of either the person or the work of Christ (or both, if they are deemed inseparable) should stand at the center of a Christian dogmatics, nor that a Christological idea or principle should constitute the systematic speculative midpoint of a deductive system. Rather, Barth is arguing that the act of God which is Jesus Christ underlies theology in its totality. A "church dogmatics" must be "Christologically determined," in that the very possibility and reality of theology is determined by the actuality of the act of divine revelation, by the speaking of the Word of God, by the revelational presence of God in Jesus Christ.

A more eschatological approach is associated with Wolfhart Pannenberg, especially in his 1968 work *Jesus: God and Man*. For Pannenberg, the resurrection of Christ must be interpreted within the context of the apocalyptic worldview. Within this context, Pannenberg argues, the resurrection

of Jesus must be seen as the anticipation of the general resurrection of the dead at the end of time. It thus brings forward into history both that resurrection and other aspects of the apocalyptic expectation of the end-time – including the full and final revelation of God. The resurrection of Jesus is thus organically linked with the self-revelation of God in Christ:

> Only at the end of all events can God be revealed in his divinity, that is, as the one who works all things, who has power over everything. Only because in Jesus' resurrection the end of all things, which for us has not yet happened, has already occurred can it be said of Jesus that the ultimate already is present in him, and so also that God himself, his glory, has made its appearance in Jesus in a way that cannot be surpassed. Only because the end of the world is already present in Jesus' resurrection is God himself revealed in him.

The resurrection thus establishes Jesus's identity with God, and allows this identity with God to be read back into his pre-Easter ministry, in terms of a "revelational presence."

Pannenberg is careful to stress that the "revelation" he has in mind is not simply the "disclosure of facts or statements about God." He insists upon the notion of *self-revelation* – a personal revelation which cannot be detached from the person of God. We can only speak of Christ revealing God if there is a revelational presence of God in Christ:

> The concept of God's self-revelation contains the idea that the revealer and what is revealed are identical. God is both the subject and content of this self-revelation. To speak of a self-revelation of God in Christ means that the Christ-event, that *Jesus*, belongs to the essence of God. If this is not the case, then the human event of the life of Jesus would veil the God who is active in that life, and thus exclude the full revelation of God. Self-revelation in the proper sense of the word only takes place where the medium through which God is made known is something that is not alien to God. […] The concept of self-revelation demands the identity of God with the event that reveals God.

Christ as a symbolic presence of God

A related approach treats the traditional Christological formulae as *symbols of a presence of God* in Christ, which is not to be understood as a *substantial* presence. This *symbolic* presence points to the possibility of the same presence being available and accessible to others. Perhaps the most important representative of this position is Paul Tillich (1886–1965), for whom Jesus of Nazareth symbolizes a universal human possibility which can be achieved without specific reference to Jesus.

For Tillich, the event upon which Christianity is based has two aspects: the fact which is called "Jesus of Nazareth" and the reception of this fact by those who claimed him as the Christ. The factual or objective–historical Jesus is not the foundation of faith, apart from his reception as the Christ. Tillich has no interest in the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth: all that he is prepared to affirm about him (insofar as it relates to the foundation of faith) is that it was a "personal life," analogous to the biblical picture, of someone who might well have had a name other than "Jesus." "Whatever his name, the New Being was and is active in this man."

The symbol "Christ" or "Messiah" means "the one who brings the new state of things, the New Being." The significance of Jesus lies in his being the historical manifestation of the New Being. "It is the Christ who brings the New Being, who saves men from the old being, that is from existential estrangement and its destructive consequences." In one personal life, that of Jesus of Nazareth, "essential manhood" has appeared under the conditions of existence without being conquered by them. We are, in effect, presented with a philosophy of existence which attaches itself to the existence of Jesus of Nazareth in the most tenuous of manners, and which would not be significantly disadvantaged if the specific historical individual Jesus of Nazareth did not exist.

Jesus may thus be said to be a symbol which illuminates the mystery of being, although other sources of illumination are available. Tillich here regards Jesus of Nazareth as a symbol of a particular moral or religious principle. Tillich emphasizes

that God himself cannot appear under the conditions of existence, in that he is the ground of being. The "New Being" must therefore *come from* God but cannot *be* God. Jesus was a human being who achieved a union with God open to every other human being. Tillich thus represents a degree Christology, which treats Jesus as a symbol of our perception of God.

This approach has particular attractions for those committed to interfaith dialogue, such as John Hick (1922–2012) and Paul Knitter (born 1939). On the basis of this approach, Jesus Christ can be treated as one symbol among many others of a universal human possibility – namely, relating to the transcendent, or achieving salvation. Jesus is one symbol of humanity's relationship to the transcendent; others are to be found elsewhere among the world's religions.

Christ as the bearer of the Holy Spirit

An important way of understanding the presence of God in Christ is by viewing Jesus as the bearer of the Holy Spirit. The roots of this idea lie in the Old Testament, and especially in the notion of charismatic leaders or prophets, endowed and anointed with the gift of the Holy Spirit – a notion we shall consider further in our discussion of the Holy Spirit in the following chapter. In fact, the term "messiah," as noted above (p. 209), has close links with the idea of "being anointed with the Holy Spirit." There are excellent reasons for supposing that such an approach to Christology may have become influential in early Palestinian Christianity.

On the basis of what we know of the messianic expectations of first-century Palestine, it may be argued that there was a strong belief in the imminent coming of a bringer of eschatological salvation who would be a bearer of the Spirit of the Lord (Joel 2: 28–32 is of especial importance). Even in his earthly ministry, Jesus appears to have been identified as the one upon whom the Spirit of God rested. The anointing of Jesus with the Spirit at the time of his baptism is of particular importance in this respect. An early approach to this question became known as "adoptionism"; this view,

Figure 10.3 The baptism of Christ as depicted by Piero della Francesca (c.1416–92).

Source: The Art Archive / National Gallery, London / Eileen Tweedy.

especially associated with Ebionitism, regarded Jesus as an ordinary human being, yet one endowed with special divine charismatic gifts subsequent to his baptism.

The understanding of Jesus as the bearer of the Spirit has proved attractive to many who have difficulty with the classical approaches to Christology. An excellent example is provided by the British patristic scholar G. W. H. Lampe (1912–80). In his *God as Spirit* (1976), Lampe argued that the particular significance of Jesus of Nazareth resided in his being the bearer of the Spirit of God, and thus an example of a spirit-filled Christian existence, showing "the indwelling presence of God as Spirit in the freely responding spirit of man as this is concretely exhibited in Christ and reproduced in some measure in Christ's followers."

Perhaps a more significant development of this approach may be found in the writings of the German theologian Walter Kasper (born 1933), especially in his *Jesus the Christ* (1974). Kasper does not have any particular difficulties with classical Christological models. However, he is concerned to ensure that the Holy Spirit is not ignored in a comprehensive account of the identity and theological function of Christ. Kasper therefore argues for a pneumatologically oriented (from the Greek word *pneuma*, "spirit") Christology, which does justice to the fact that the New Testament often portrays Christ in terms of the central Old Testament concept of the "Spirit of the Lord." For Kasper, the uniqueness of Jesus within the synoptic gospels resides in his spirit-filled existence. Jesus's real identity can only be accounted for in terms of an unprecedented relationship to the Spirit. This Spirit, according to Kasper, is the life-giving power of the creator, who inaugurated the eschatological age of healing and hope.

In Jesus, Kasper sees the Spirit of the Lord at work, effecting a new and unprecedented relationship between God and humanity, a development confirmed and consolidated by the resurrection. In terms of this Spirit Christology, Kasper regards Jesus as the focal point at which the universal saving intention of God becomes a unique historical person. In this way, the Spirit opens up the possibility of others entering into the inner life of God. The same Spirit who permeated the life of Jesus is now made available to others, in order that they might share in the same inner life of God.

An anxiety about this approach has been raised by Wolfhart Pannenberg. In his influential *Jesus: God and Man*, Pannenberg argues that any Christology which begins from the notion of the presence of the Spirit in Jesus will inevitably lapse into some form of adoptionism. The presence of the Spirit in Jesus is neither a necessary nor a sufficient ground for maintaining the divinity of Christ. God would be present in Jesus "only as the power of the Spirit which fills him." Jesus could, according to Pannenberg, be viewed simply as a prophetic or charismatic figure – in other words, as a human being who had been "adopted" by God and endowed

with the gift of the Spirit. As we have seen, for Pannenberg it is the resurrection of Jesus, rather than the presence of the Spirit in his ministry, that is of decisive importance in this respect.

Nevertheless, Kasper is perhaps less vulnerable to Pannenberg's critique than at first might seem to be the case. Pannenberg's anxiety is that an approach such as Kasper's might lead to a Christology which places Jesus on a par with an Old Testament prophet or charismatic religious leader. However, Kasper insists that the resurrection of Jesus is of decisive importance. Both Pannenberg and Kasper regard the resurrection as having a retroactive character. Pannenberg locates this in terms of the validation and justification of the religious claims of Jesus during his ministry. Kasper, on the other hand, sees the resurrection as linked with the work of the Spirit, and justifies this with reference to pivotal New Testament texts (especially Romans 8: 11 and 1 Peter 3: 18). The Christian understanding of the role of the Spirit is grounded in the role of the Spirit at the resurrection, which excludes an adoptionist Christology.

Christ as the example of a godly life

The Enlightenment raised a series of challenges to Christology, which will be explored further in the following chapter. One such challenge was to the notion of Jesus Christ differing in kind from other human beings. If Jesus Christ differed from other human beings, it was in relation to the extent to which he possessed certain qualities – qualities which were, in principle, capable of being imitated or acquired by everyone else. The particular significance of Christ resides in his being an *example* of a godly life – that is, a life which resonates with the divine will for humanity.

This view can be shown to be one aspect of the Antiochene Christology, which was especially concerned to bring out the moral aspects of Christ's character. For a number of Antiochene writers, Christ's divinity serves to give authority and weight to his human moral example. It is also an important aspect of the Christology of the medieval writer Peter Abelard (1079–1142), who was concerned to

stress the subjective impact of Christ upon believers. However, these writers all retained the classical conception of the "two natures" of Christ. With the Enlightenment, the affirmation of the divinity of Christ became increasingly problematic. Two main approaches came to be developed.

First, the Enlightenment itself witnessed the development of a "degree Christology," which located the significance of Jesus Christ in his human moral example. In his life, Christ was an outstanding moral educator, whose teachings were authoritative, not on account of his identity, but on account of their resonance with the moral values of the Enlightenment itself. In his death, he provided an example of self-giving love which the Enlightenment regarded as foundational to its morality. If Jesus Christ can be spoken of as "divine," it is in the sense of embodying or exemplifying the lifestyle which ought to typify the person who stands in a correct moral relationship to God, to other human beings, and to the world in general.

Second, liberal Protestantism came to focus upon the inner life of Jesus Christ, or his "religious personality," as being of decisive importance. In Jesus Christ, the appropriate inner or spiritual relationship of the believer to God may be discerned. It is the "inner life of Jesus" that is regarded as being of decisive importance to faith. The "religious personality of Jesus" is seen as something that is compelling, capable of being assimilated by believers, and hitherto without parallel in the religious and cultural history of humanity. An excellent representative of this approach may be found in Wilhelm Herrmann (1846–1922), who understood Jesus to have made *known* and made *available* something that was new, and that this is thence made known in the inner life of the Christian.

It is the "impression of Jesus" which the believer gains from the gospels that is of decisive importance. This gives rise to a personal certainty of faith which is grounded in an inner experience. "There arises in our hearts the certainty that God himself is turning toward us in this experience." Perhaps the most significant statement of such views is found in Herrmann's 1892 essay "The Historical Christ as the Ground of our Faith." In this essay, which is basically a study of the manner in which the historical figure of Jesus can function as the basis of faith, Herrmann drew a sharp distinction between the "historical fact of the person of Jesus" and the "fact of the personal life of Jesus," understanding by the latter the psychological impact of the figure of Jesus upon the reader of the gospels.

Christ as a hero

One of the most interesting developments in the history of Christology took place in England during the Anglo-Saxon era. How could the significance of Christ be portrayed in terms that Anglo-Saxon culture would recognize and appreciate? Heroic ideals were deeply embedded in this culture, both in Germany and subsequently in England. The great stories of heroes such as Beowulf and Ingelt were related with enthusiasm, and served to keep alive the heroic ideas of that culture. So great was the influence of these writings that in 797 the leading churchman Alcuin (c.735–804) wrote to his colleague Higbald of Lindisfarne (died 802) asking that Scripture and the works of the Christian fathers – not pagan myths! – should be read aloud at meals in the monastic refectories. So what better way to counter the influence of pagan heroes than to portray Christ himself as the hero above all heroes?

This literary transformation of Christ to conform to the heroic ideals of the age is best seen in the famous Old English poem *The Dream of the Rood*, thought to have been written about the year 750. (The term "rood" means "cross.") This dramatic and highly original work offers an account and interpretation of Christ's death and resurrection which represents a significant change of emphasis from the original biblical accounts of these events. In order to emphasize the momentous triumph of the crucifixion, the author depicts Christ as a bold and confident warrior who confronts and defeats sin in a heroic battle. This way of representing Christ made a direct appeal to the virtues of honor and courage, which were greatly revered in Anglo-Saxon culture at this time.

The Dream of the Rood is a remarkable piece of poetry and establishes a firm link between the heroic ideals of Anglo-Saxon culture and the achievement of Christ on the cross. The most distinctive feature of the poem is its deliberate and systematic portrayal of Christ as a hero, who mounts the cross in order to achieve a magnificent victory. The poet depicts Christ as enthusiastically preparing for combat and longing to engage with his enemies, rather than endorsing the more traditional imagery of Christ being led passively to the cross.

This active role on the part of Christ the hero is echoed by language used by the cross itself in the poem. The poet hears the cross tell its own story, particularly how it saw "the Lord of all mankind hasten with much fortitude, for he meant to mount upon me." These words tend to suggest a much more active and purposeful image of Christ than the more passive language of certain biblical passages, such as those which speak of the "Passover lamb which has been sacrificed," implying activity on the part of those who killed Christ and passivity on the part of Christ as a victim.

The poet regularly styles Christ as "the young hero" or "the warrior," avoiding the traditional language of Christian theology. Christ is portrayed as a heroic, fair, young knight in terms which echo the description of Beowulf, a much-admired mythical hero of the same era. In *Beowulf*, the central figure of the narrative is acclaimed as a "king," "hero," and "valiant warrior," possessed of "strength and vigor," "daring," and a "determined resolve." When Beowulf prepares to go into battle against Grendel's mother, he shows no concern for his own life or safety and is eager to plunge into battle. Indeed, the author of *The Dream of the Rood* seems to know little of the biblical accounts of the crucifixion, suggesting that the primary source for his ideas may have been liturgical rather than a direct knowledge of the biblical material.

Kenotic approaches to Christology

During the early seventeenth century a controversy developed between Lutheran theologians based at the German universities of Giessen and Tübingen. The question at issue can be stated as follows. The gospels contain no reference to Christ making use of all his divine attributes (such as omniscience) during his period on earth. How is this to be explained? Two options seemed to present themselves to these Lutheran writers as appropriately orthodox solutions: either Christ used his divine powers in secret or he abstained from using them altogether. The first option, which came to be known as "krypsis," was vigorously defended by Tübingen; the second, which came to be known as "kenosis," was defended with equal vigor by Giessen.

Yet it must be noted that both parties were in agreement that Christ possessed the central attributes of divinity – such as omnipotence and omnipresence – during the period of the incarnation. The debate was over the question of their use: were they used in secret or not at all? A much more radical approach came to be developed during the nineteenth century, which saw a growing appreciation of the humanity of Jesus, especially his religious personality. Thus Alois E. Biedermann (1819–85) stated that "the religious principle of Christianity is to be more precisely defined as the religious personality of Jesus, that is, that relationship between God and humanity which, in the religious self-consciousness of Jesus, has entered into the history of humanity as a new religious fact with the power to inspire faith."

The roots of this idea can be argued to lie in German Pietism, especially in the form this takes in the writings of Nikolaus von Zinzendorf (1700–60), whose "religion of the heart" laid particular emphasis upon an intimate personal relationship between the believer and Christ. It was developed and redirected by F. D. E. Schleiermacher (1768–1834), who regarded himself as a *Herrnhuter* (that is, a follower of Zinzendorf) "of a higher order." Schleiermacher's understanding of the manner in which Christ is able to assimilate believers into his fellowship has strong parallels with Zinzendorf's analysis of the role of religious feelings in the spiritual life, and their grounding in the believer's fellowship with Christ.

Nevertheless, the importance attached to the human personality of Jesus left a number of theological loose ends. What about the divinity of Christ? Where did this come into things? Was not the emphasis upon Christ's humanity equivalent to a neglect of his divinity? Such questions and suspicions were voiced within more orthodox circles during the 1840s and early 1850s. However, during the later 1850s an approach to Christology was mapped out which seemed to have considerable potential in this respect. At one and the same time, it defended the divinity of Christ yet justified an emphasis upon his humanity. The approach in question is known as "kenoticism" and is especially associated with the German Lutheran writer Gottfried Thomasius (1802–75).

In his *Person and Work of Christ* (1852–61), Thomasius argues that the incarnation involves kenosis, the deliberate setting aside of all divine attributes, so that, in the state of humiliation, Christ has voluntarily abandoned all privileges of divinity. It is therefore entirely proper to stress his humanity, especially the importance of his suffering as a human being. Thomasius's approach to Christology was much more radical than that of the early kenoticists. The incarnation involves Christ's *abandoning* of the attributes of divinity. They are set to one side during the entire period from the birth of Christ to his resurrection. Basing his ideas on Philippians 2: 6–8, Thomasius argued that, in the incarnation, the second person of the Trinity reduced himself totally to the level of humanity. A theological and spiritual emphasis upon the humanity of Christ was thus entirely justified.

This approach to Christology was criticized by Isaak August Dorner (1809–84), on the grounds that it introduced change into God himself. The doctrine of the immutability of God was thus, he argued, compromised by Thomasius's approach. Interestingly, this insight contains much truth, and can be seen as an anticipation of the twentieth-century debate over the question of the "suffering of God," noted earlier (p. 184).

The approach was also taken up with some enthusiasm in England. In 1891, Charles Gore argued that Christ had emptied himself of the divine attributes, especially omniscience, in the incarnation. This prompted leading traditionalist Darwell Stone (1859–1941) to charge that Gore's view "contradicted the practically unanimous teaching of the fathers, and is inconsistent with the immutability of the divine nature." Once more, such comments point to the close connection between Christology and theology, and indicate the importance of Christological considerations for the development of the doctrine of "a suffering God."

THE QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS

Earlier, we considered some debates about Christology from the patristic and medieval periods. Interestingly, Christology was not a major topic of controversy during the great debates of the Reformation era. Catholics and mainstream Protestants saw no reason to disagree with the Chalcedonian definition of the identity and significance of Jesus Christ, which both regarded as firmly rooted in the Bible and Christian tradition. The next major debate about Christology arose in the "Age of Reason." The rationalist assumptions of this era gave rise to suspicion of any idea of a specific human being having privileged insights or status. Rationalist writers argued that Jesus of Nazareth had been misunderstood by the early church. It was necessary to go behind both Christian tradition and the New Testament, and uncover a simpler, more plausible view of Jesus Christ, consistent with the values of the "Age of Reason." As a result, the movement that we now know as the "Quest for the Historical Jesus" got under way in the late eighteenth century.

In this section, we shall consider the history and theological significance of this "Quest for the Historical Jesus." Although this topic is of particular importance for New Testament scholarship, it clearly has relevance for theological debates about the identity and significance of Jesus Christ. We begin by considering the origins of the quest.

The original quest for the historical Jesus

The original quest for the historical Jesus was based upon the presupposition that there was a radical gulf between the historical figure of Jesus and the interpretation which the Christian church had placed upon him. The "historical Jesus" who lies behind the New Testament was a simple religious teacher; the "Christ of faith" was a misrepresentation of this simple figure by early church writers. By going back to the historical Jesus, a more credible version of Christianity would result, stripped of all unnecessary and inappropriate dogmatic additions (such as the idea of the resurrection or the divinity of Christ).

Such ideas, although frequently expressed by English Deists during the seventeenth century, received their classic statements in Germany in the late eighteenth century, especially through the posthumously published writings of Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768). Reimarus became increasingly convinced that both Judaism and Christianity rested upon fraudulent foundations, and conceived the idea of writing a major work which would bring this fact to public attention. Reimarus's *Apology for the Rational Worshipper of God* subjected the entire biblical canon to rationalist criticism. However, reluctant to cause any controversy, Reimarus did not publish the work. It remained in manuscript form until his death.

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–81) came across the work and decided to publish a selection of extracts. These "fragments of an unknown writer," published in 1774, caused a sensation. The volume contained five fragments, now generally known as the "Wolfenbüttel Fragments," and included a sustained attack on the historicity of the resurrection.

The final fragment, entitled "On the Aims of Jesus and His Disciples," concerned the nature of our knowledge of Jesus Christ, and raised the question of whether the gospel accounts of Jesus had been tampered with by the early Christians. Reimarus argued that there was a radical difference between the beliefs and intentions of Jesus himself and those of the apostolic church. Jesus's language and images of God were, according to Reimarus, those of a Jewish apocalyptic visionary, with a radically limited chronological and political reference and relevance. Jesus accepted the late Jewish expectation of a messiah who would deliver his people from Roman occupation, and believed that God would assist him in this task. His cry of dereliction on the cross represented his final realization that he had been deluded and mistaken.

However, Reimarus argued, the disciples were not prepared to leave things like this. They invented the idea of a "spiritual redemption" in the place of Jesus's concrete political vision of an Israel liberated from foreign occupation. They invented the idea of the resurrection of Jesus, in order to cover up the embarrassment caused by his death. As a result, the disciples invented doctrines quite unknown to Jesus, such as his death being an atonement for human sin, adding such ideas to the biblical text to make it harmonize with their beliefs. As a result, the New Testament as we now have it is riddled with fraudulent interpolations. The real Jesus of history is concealed from us by the apostolic church, which has substituted a fictitious Christ of faith, the redeemer of humanity from sin.

Although Reimarus found few, if any, followers at the time, he raised questions which would become of fundamental importance in subsequent years. In particular, his explicit distinction between the legitimate historical Jesus and the fictitious Christ of faith proved to be of enormous significance. The resulting "quest for the historical Jesus" arose as a direct result of the growing rationalist suspicion that the New Testament portrayal of Christ was a dogmatic invention. It was possible to reconstruct the real historical figure of Jesus, and disentangle him from the dogmatic ideas in which the apostles had clothed him.

The quest for the religious personality of Jesus

A more subtle version of this approach is linked with the rise of liberal Protestantism in the nineteenth century, particularly the writings of Albrecht Benjamin Ritschl (see pp. 70–1). The

emergence of movements such as Romanticism led to rationalism increasingly being regarded as outmoded (see pp. 139–40 A new interest developed in "the human spirit" and in the more specifically religious aspects of human life. This led to a new interest in the religious personality of Jesus. Ideas such as the "divinity" of Christ were regarded as outmoded; the idea of a "religious personality" of Jesus, which could be imitated by anyone, seemed a much more acceptable way of restating Christological issues in the modern period.

As a result, renewed attention was paid to the nature of the New Testament sources upon which the life of the historical Jesus could be constructed. It was widely believed that the new literary approach to the New Testament in general, and the synoptic gospels in particular, would permit scholars to establish a firmly drawn and lifelike portrait which would clearly bring out the personality of Jesus.

The assumption underlying this "life of Jesus" movement in the later nineteenth century was that the remarkable religious personality of Jesus, whose shape could be determined by conscientious historical inquiry, would provide a solid historical foundation for faith. The firm ground of historical truth upon which Christian faith depended was thus not supernatural or antirational (a perceived weakness of traditional Christology) but merely the religious personality of Jesus, a fact of history open to scientific investigation. The impression that he made upon his contemporaries could be reproduced in his followers of every age.

The critique of the quest, 1890–1910

Three main criticisms of the "religious personality" Christology of liberal Protestantism emerged in the two decades before the First World War; we shall consider them individually.

The apocalyptic critique

This criticism, primarily associated with Johannes Weiss (1863–1914) and Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965), maintained that the strongly eschatological bias of Jesus's proclamation of the kingdom of God called the essentially Kantian liberal interpretation of the concept into question. In 1892, Weiss published *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*. In this book, he argued that the idea of the "kingdom of God" was understood by the liberal Protestants to mean the exercise of the moral life in society, or a supreme ethical ideal. In other words, it was conceived primarily as something subjective, inward, or spiritual, rather than in spatiotemporal terms. For Weiss, Albrecht Ritschl's concept of the kingdom of God was essentially continuous with that of the Enlightenment. It was a static moral concept without eschatological overtones. The rediscovery of the eschatology of the preaching of Jesus called into question not merely this understanding of the kingdom of God but also the liberal portrait of Christ in general. The kingdom of God was thus not to be seen as a settled and static realm of liberal moral values but as a devastating apocalyptic moment which *overturned* human values (see pp. 432–3).

Where Weiss regarded a substantial part (but not all) of the teaching of Jesus as being conditioned by his radical eschatological expectations, Schweitzer argued that every aspect of the teaching and attitudes of Jesus was determined by his eschatological outlook. The entire content of Jesus's message was consistently and thoroughly conditioned by apocalyptic ideas – ideas which were quite alien to the settled outlook of late nineteenth-century western Europe.

The result of this consistent eschatological interpretation of the person and message of Jesus of Nazareth was a portrait of Christ as a remote and strange figure, an apocalyptic and wholly unworldly person. Jesus thus appears to us as a strange figure from an alien first-century Jewish apocalyptic milieu, so that, in Schweitzer's famous words, "he comes to us as one unknown."

The skeptical critique

This approach, associated particularly with William Wrede, called into question the historical status of our knowledge of Jesus in the first place. History and theology were closely intermingled in the synoptic narratives, and could not be disentangled. According to Wrede, Mark was painting

a theological picture in the guise of history, imposing his theology upon the material which he had at his disposal. The second gospel was not objectively historical but was actually a creative theological reinterpretation of history.

It was thus impossible to go behind Mark's narrative and reconstruct the history of Jesus, for the reason that – if Wrede is right – this narrative is itself a theological construction, beyond which one cannot go. The "quest for the historical Jesus" thus comes to an end since it proves impossible to establish an historical foundation for the "real" Jesus of history.

The dogmatic critique

This line of criticism, expressed by the dogmatic theologian Martin Kähler (1835–1912), challenged the theological significance of the reconstruction of the historical Jesus. The "historical Jesus" was an irrelevance to faith, which was based upon the "Christ of faith." Kähler rightly saw that the dispassionate and provisional Jesus of the academic historian cannot become the object of faith. Yet how can Jesus Christ be the authentic basis and content of Christian faith, when historical science can never establish certain knowledge concerning the historical Jesus? How can faith be based upon an historical event without being vulnerable to the charge of historical relativism? Kähler addressed these questions in his *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ* (1892).

For Kähler, Christ must be regarded as a "suprahistorical" rather than an "historical" figure, so that the critical–historical method cannot be applied in his case. The critical–historical method could not deal with the suprahistorical (and hence suprahuman) characteristics of Jesus, and hence was obliged to ignore or deny them. In effect, the critical–historical method could only lead to an Arian or Ebionite Christology, on account of its latent dogmatic presuppositions.

Many historians of Christian thought argue that the demolition of the original "quest" was so effective that an extended period of "no quest" set in, lasting until the end of the Second World War. Historically, it was generally believed that it was

impossible to disentangle the Jesus of the gospels from the historical Jesus. Theologically, many felt the quest was theologically illegitimate because Christianity is based upon faith in Christ rather than the historical person of Jesus. This inevitably reduces the perceived importance of the historical Jesus.

Considerations such as these gradually came to dominate the theological scene and may be regarded as reaching their climax in the writings of Rudolf Bultmann, to which we now turn.

The quest suspended: Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976)

Bultmann regarded the entire enterprise of the historical reconstruction of Jesus as something of a dead end. History was not of fundamental importance to Christology; it was merely necessary that Jesus existed, and that the Christian proclamation (which Bultmann terms the *kerygma*; Greek: "proclamation" or "message") is somehow grounded in his person. Bultmann thus famously reduced the entire historical aspect of Christology to a single word – "that." It is necessary only to believe *that* Jesus Christ lies behind the gospel proclamation (or *kerygma*). With such slogans, the grand generation-long retreat of Christology from historical engagement began.

For Bultmann, it was not possible to go behind the *kerygma*, using it as a "source" in order to reconstruct an "historical Jesus" with his "messianic consciousness," his "inner life," or his "heroism." That would merely be "Christ according to the flesh," who no longer exists. It is not the historical Jesus but Jesus Christ the one who is preached who is the Lord.

This radical move away from history alarmed many. How could anyone rest assured that Christology was properly grounded in the person and work of Jesus Christ? How could anyone begin to check out Christology, if the history of Jesus was an irrelevance? It seemed to an increasing number of writers, within the fields of both New Testament and dogmatic studies, that Bultmann had merely cut a Gordian knot without resolving the

serious historical issues at stake. For Bultmann, all that could be, and could be required to be, known about the historical Jesus was the fact *that* (*das Dass*) he existed.

The new quest for the historical Jesus

A "new quest for the historical Jesus" is generally regarded as having been inaugurated with a lecture in October 1953 by Ernst Käsemann (1906–98) on the problem of the historical Jesus. Despite their obviously theological concerns, Käsemann argued that the evangelists had access to historical information concerning Jesus of Nazareth, and that this historical information was expressed and embodied in the text of the synoptic gospels. The gospels include both the *kerygma* and historical narrative.

Käsemann thus points to the need to explore the continuity between the preaching *of* Jesus and the preaching *about* Jesus. There is an obvious discontinuity between the earthly Jesus and the exalted and proclaimed Christ; yet a thread of continuity links them, in that the proclaimed Christ is already present, in some sense, in the historical Jesus. It must be stressed that Käsemann is not suggesting that a new inquiry should be undertaken concerning the historical Jesus in order to provide historical legitimation for the *kerygma*; still less is he suggesting that the discontinuity between the historical Jesus and the proclaimed Christ necessitates the deconstruction of the latter in terms of the former. Rather, Käsemann is pointing to the *theological* assertion of the identity of the earthly Jesus and the exalted Christ being *historically grounded* in the actions and preaching of Jesus of Nazareth.

This theological affirmation is, Käsemann argues, dependent upon the historical demonstration that the *kerygma* concerning Jesus is already contained in a nutshell or embryonic form in the ministry of Jesus. In that the *kerygma* contains historical elements, it is entirely proper and necessary to inquire concerning the relationship between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith.

It will be clear that this "new quest for the historical Jesus" is qualitatively different from the discredited quest of the nineteenth century.

Käsemann's argument rests upon the recognition that the discontinuity between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith does not imply that they are unrelated entities, with the latter having no grounding or foundation in the former. Rather, the *kerygma* may be discerned in the actions and preaching of Jesus of Nazareth, so that there is a continuity between the preaching of Jesus and the preaching about Jesus. Where the older quest had assumed that the discontinuity between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith implied that the latter was potentially a fiction, who required to be reconstructed in the light of objective historical investigation, Käsemann stressed that such reconstruction is neither necessary nor possible.

The "new quest for the historical Jesus" was thus concerned to stress the continuity between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. Whereas the "old quest" had the aim of discrediting the New Testament portrayal of Christ, the "new quest" ended up consolidating it by stressing the continuities between the preaching of Jesus himself and the church's preaching about Jesus.

The growing realization of the importance of this point led to intensive interest developing in the question of the historical foundations of the *kerygma*. Four positions of interest may be noted.

1 Joachim Jeremias (1900–79), perhaps representing an extreme element in this debate, seemed to suggest that the basis of the Christian faith lies in what Jesus actually said and did, insofar as this can be established by theological scholarship. The first part of his *New Testament Theology* (1971) was thus devoted in its totality to the "proclamation of Jesus" as a central element of New Testament theology.

2 Käsemann himself identified the continuity between the historical Jesus and the kerygmatic Christ in their common declaration of the dawning of the eschatological kingdom of God. Both in the preaching of Jesus and in the early Christian *kerygma*, the theme of the coming of the kingdom is of major importance.

3 The Swiss theologian Gerhard Ebeling (1912–2001) located the continuity in the notion of

the "faith of Jesus," which he understood to be analogous to the "faith of Abraham" (described in Romans 4) – a prototypical faith, historically exemplified and embodied in Jesus of Nazareth, and proclaimed to be a contemporary possibility for believers.

4   Günter Bornkamm (1905–90) laid particular emphasis upon the note of authority evident in the ministry of Jesus. In Jesus, the actuality of God confronts humanity, and calls it to a radical decision. Whereas Bultmann located the essence of Jesus's preaching in the future coming of the kingdom of God, Bornkamm shifted the emphasis from the future to the present confrontation of individuals with God through the person of Jesus. This theme of "confrontation with God" is evident in both the ministry of Jesus and the proclamation about Jesus, providing a major theological and historical link between the earthly Jesus and the proclaimed Christ.

Since then, there have been other developments in the field. In the 1970s and 1980s, particular attention was directed toward exploring the relationship between Jesus and his environment in first-century Judaism. This development, which is especially associated with Geza Vermes (1924–2013) and E. P. Sanders (born 1937), renewed interest in the Jewish background to Jesus and further emphasized the importance of history in relation to Christology. The Bultmann approach – which devalues the significance of history in Christology – is widely regarded as discredited, at least for the moment. This can be seen in the new interest in the "historical Jesus" associated with what has come to be known as the "third quest."

The third quest for the historical Jesus

Since the general collapse of the "new quest" during the 1960s, a series of works have appeared offering re-evaluations of the historical Jesus. The term "third quest" has often been applied to this group of works. The designation has been called into question by a number of writers who point out that the works and scholars who are gathered together under this term do not have enough in common to categorize them in this way. Despite this reservation, the term seems to be gaining acceptance, and it is therefore appropriate to include it in this survey. Whatever the differences between its proponents, the "third quest" has a number of common elements, particularly an emphasis on the Jewishness of Jesus and the necessity of understanding him in the context of first-century Judaism, set against the backdrop of the social world of first-century Palestine.

The "original quest" approached the stories of Jesus in the light of a series of strongly rationalist presuppositions, inherited from the Enlightenment, and filtered out the miraculous aspects of the gospel narratives. The "new quest" tended to focus on the words of Jesus, stressing the continuity between the preaching *of* Jesus himself and the New Testament preaching *about* Jesus. The "third quest" seems to involve a focus on the relation of Jesus to his Jewish context as indicative of the distinctive character of his mission, and his understanding of his own goals. Among significant contributions to the "third quest," the following should be noted in particular:

1   John Dominic Crossan (born 1934) has argued that Jesus was essentially a poor Jewish peasant with a particular concern to challenge the power structures of contemporary society. In *The Historical Jesus* (1991) and *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (1994), Crossan argues that Jesus broke down prevailing social conventions, especially through his table fellowship with sinners and social outcasts.

2   In books such as *Jesus: A New Vision* (1988) and *Meeting Jesus again for the First Time* (1994), Marcus L. Borg (1942–2015) suggests that Jesus was a subversive sage concerned with renewing Judaism in a manner which posed a powerful challenge to the ruling temple elite.

3   E. P. Sanders insists that Jesus is to be seen as a prophetic figure who was concerned with the restoration of the Jewish people. In works such as *Jesus and Judaism* (1985) and *The Historical*

Figure of Jesus (1993), Sanders suggests that Jesus envisaged an eschatological restoration of Israel. God would bring the present age to an end and usher in a new order focusing on a new temple, with Jesus himself acting as God's representative.

4 The British New Testament scholar N. T. Wright (born 1948), in his series *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, offers a critical appropriation of the approach of E. P. Sanders, while retaining the idea that the coming of Jesus Christ introduced something radically new, especially in relation to the identity of the people of God. The first two volumes in this series – *The New Testament and the People of God* (1992) and *Jesus and the Victory of God* (1996) – are widely regarded as among the most significant recent writings in the field of New Testament studies.

On the basis of this brief analysis of a few writers generally regarded as representative of the "third quest," it will be clear that this iteration of the quest lacks a coherent theological or historical core. There is significant disagreement concerning whether Jesus is to be seen against a Jewish or Hellenistic background; about his attitude to the Jewish Law and its religious institutions; about his view of the future of Israel; and about the personal significance of Jesus in relation to that future. Nevertheless, the term "third quest" has found at least a degree of acceptance, despite its clear weaknesses, and it is likely to remain an integral part of scholarly discussion of this important issue.

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST: HISTORY AND INTERPRETATION

One issue that emerged as particularly important throughout the various "quests for the historical Jesus" was the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. In what follows, we shall outline some of the main positions to have developed during the modern period, and briefly note their significance.

The Enlightenment: resurrection as nonevent

The characteristic Enlightenment emphasis on the importance of contemporary analogs to past events led to the development of an intensely skeptical attitude toward the resurrection in the eighteenth century. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing provides an excellent example of this attitude. He confesses that he does not have personal first-hand experience of the resurrection of Jesus Christ; so why, he asks, should he be asked to believe in something which he has not personally witnessed?

For Lessing, being obligated to accept the testimony of others is tantamount to a compromising of human intellectual autonomy. There are no contemporary analogs for the resurrection. Resurrection is not an aspect of modern-day experience. So why trust the New Testament reports? For Lessing, the resurrection is little more than a misunderstood nonevent.

David Friedrich Strauss (1808–74): resurrection as myth

In his *Life of Jesus* (1835), David Friedrich Strauss provided a radical new approach to the question of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Strauss declared his intention to explain "the origin of faith in the resurrection of Jesus without any corresponding miraculous fact." Having excluded the resurrection as a "miraculous objective occurrence," Strauss located the origin of the belief at the purely subjective level. Belief in the resurrection is not to be explained as a response to "a life objectively restored" but is "a subjective conception in the mind": faith in the resurrection of Jesus is the outcome of an exaggerated "recollection of the personality of Jesus himself" by which a memory has been projected into the idea of a living presence. A dead Jesus is thus transfigured into an imaginary risen Christ – a mythical risen Christ, to use the appropriate term.

Strauss's distinctive contribution to the debate was to introduce the category of "myth" – a reflection of the gospel writers' social conditioning

and cultural outlook. To suggest that their writings were partly "mythical" was thus not so much a challenge to their integrity but simply an acknowledgment of the premodern outlook of the period in which they were written. Perhaps Strauss's most astute reinterpreter in the twentieth century has been Rudolf Bultmann, to whose distinctive views on the resurrection we now turn.

Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976): resurrection as an event in the experience of the disciples

Bultmann shared Strauss's basic conviction that, in this scientific age, it is impossible to believe in miracles. As a result, belief in an objective resurrection of Jesus is no longer possible; however, it may well prove to be possible to make sense of it in another manner. History, Bultmann argued, is "a closed continuum of effects in which individual events are connected by the succession of cause and effect." The resurrection, in common with other miracles, would thus disrupt the closed system of nature.

Belief in an objective resurrection of Jesus, although perfectly legitimate and intelligible in the first century, cannot be taken seriously today. The resurrection is to be regarded as "a mythical event, pure and simple." The resurrection is something which happened in the subjective experience of the disciples, not something which took place in the public arena of history. For Bultmann, Jesus has indeed been raised – he has been raised up into the *kerygma*. The preaching of Jesus himself has been transformed into the Christian proclamation of Christ. Jesus has become an element of Christian preaching; he has been raised up and taken up into the proclamation of the gospel. "The resurrection itself is not an event of past history. All that historical criticism can establish is that the first disciples came to believe in the resurrection."

Bultmann thus directs attention away from the historical Jesus toward the proclamation of Christ. "Faith in the church as the bearer of the *kerygma* is the Easter faith which consists in the belief that Jesus Christ is present in the *kerygma*."

Karl Barth (1886–1968): resurrection as an historical event beyond critical inquiry

In his early writings, Barth argued that the empty tomb was of minimal importance in relation to the resurrection. However, he became increasingly alarmed at Bultmann's existential approach to the resurrection, which seemed to imply that it had no objective historical foundation. For this reason, Barth came to place considerable emphasis upon the gospel accounts of the empty tomb. The empty tomb is "an indispensable sign" which "obviates all possible misunderstanding." It demonstrates that the resurrection of Christ was not a purely inward, interior, or subjective event but something which left a mark upon history.

This would seem to suggest that Barth regarded the resurrection as being open to historical investigation, to clarify its nature and confirm its place in the public history of the world, rather than in the private interior experience of the first believers. Yet this is not so. He consistently refuses to allow the gospel narratives to be subjected to critical–historical scrutiny. It is not entirely clear why. The following factor appears to have weighed heavily in his thinking at this point.

Barth emphasizes that Paul and the other apostles are not calling for the "acceptance of a well-attested historical report" but for "a decision of faith." Historical investigation cannot legitimate or provide security for such faith; nor can faith become dependent upon the provisional results of historical inquiry. In any case, faith is a response to the risen Christ, not to the empty tomb. Barth was quite clear that the empty tomb, taken by itself, was of little value in laying the foundation for faith in the risen Christ. The absence of Christ from his tomb does not necessarily imply his resurrection: "He might in fact have been stolen, he might have only appeared to be dead."

As a result, Barth is left in what initially seems to be a highly vulnerable position. Concerned to defend the resurrection as an act in public history against Bultmann's subjectivist approach, he is not prepared to allow that history to be critically studied. In part, this rests upon his passionate belief

that historical scholarship cannot lay the basis for faith; in part, it reflects his assumption that the resurrection of Christ is part of a much larger network of ideas and events which cannot be disclosed or verified by historical inquiry. However much one may sympathize with Barth's theological concerns at this point, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that he lacks credibility. It is perhaps for this reason that the more recent approach of Wolfhart Pannenberg has been the subject of considerable attention.

Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928–2014): resurrection as an historical event open to critical inquiry

One of the most distinctive features of the theological program of Wolfhart Pannenberg is his insistence that the resurrection of Jesus is an objective historical event, witnessed by all who had access to the evidence. Whereas Bultmann treated the resurrection as an event within the experiential world of the disciples, Pannenberg declared that it belonged to the world of universal public history.

This immediately raised the question of the historicity of the resurrection. As we noted earlier, many Enlightenment writers had argued that our only knowledge of the alleged resurrection of Jesus was contained in the New Testament. Since there were no contemporary analogs for such a resurrection, the credibility of those reports had to be seriously questioned. In a similar vein, Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923) had argued for the homogeneity of history: in that the resurrection of Jesus appeared to radically disrupt that homogeneity, it was to be regarded as of dubious historicity. Pannenberg initially responded to these difficulties in his essay on "Redemptive Event and History," and subsequently in *Jesus: God and Man*. His basic argument against this position can be set out as follows.

Troeltsch, in Pannenberg's view, has a pedantically narrow view of history which rules out certain events in advance, on the basis of a set of provisional judgments which have improperly come to have the status of absolute laws. Troeltsch's

unwarranted "constriction of historico-critical inquiry" was "biased" and "anthropocentric." It presupposed that the human viewpoint is the only acceptable and normative standpoint within history. Analogies, Pannenberg stresses, are always analogies *viewed from the standpoint of the human observer*; that standpoint is radically restricted in its scope, and cannot be allowed to function as the absolutely certain basis of critical inquiry. Pannenberg is too good an historian to suggest that the principle of analogy should be abandoned; it is, after all, a proven and useful tool of historical research. Yet, Pannenberg insists, that is all that it is: it is a working tool and cannot be allowed to define a fixed view of reality.

If the historian sets out to investigate the New Testament already precommitted to the belief "dead people do not rise again," that conclusion will merely be read back into the New Testament material. The judgment "Jesus did not rise from the dead" will be the presupposition, not the conclusion, of such an investigation. Pannenberg's discussion of this question represents an impassioned and impressive plea for a neutral approach to the resurrection. The historical evidence pointing to the resurrection of Jesus must be investigated without the prior dogmatic presupposition that such a resurrection could not have happened.

Having argued for the historicity of the resurrection, Pannenberg interprets this event within the context of the apocalyptic framework of meaning. The end of history has proleptically taken place in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This maxim dominates Pannenberg's interpretation of the event. The resurrection of Jesus anticipates the general resurrection at the end of time and thus establishes an identity between Jesus and God, which can then be read back into his pre-Easter ministry.

In the present chapter, we have surveyed some classical themes of Christology. The issues involved will probably continue to be subjects for perennial debate within Christian theology, and it is essential that the student becomes familiar

with at least some of the questions discussed here. However, these issues were largely overshadowed during the period of the Enlightenment, as questions of a more historical nature came to the fore – questions which will be considered in the following chapter.

QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER 10

1 Can Christian theology do without Jesus Christ?
2 Explore the background and significance of one of the major New Testament titles for Jesus. What are the implications of speaking of Jesus in this way?
3 Summarize the main points of difference between the Alexandrian and Antiochene approaches to Christology.
4 What theological insights are linked with the belief that Jesus Christ is "God incarnate"?
5 What is meant by speaking of Jesus Christ as "the mediator" between God and humanity?
6 Why did the "quest for the historical Jesus" get under way? What new questions did this raise? Do you think they were answered?