

Jesus' Self-Understanding

(Originally published in *The Incarnation*, ed. S. T. Davis, D. Kendall, G. O'Collins 2002, Oxford: OUP, 47–61. Original pagination is retained in ***bold italicized numbers***.
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I INTRODUCTION (A): TODAY'S *SITZ IM LEBEN*

As I prepared to write this short chapter on Jesus' self-understanding, three things happened to sharpen up in my mind both why it is necessary and what it is I want to say.

The first was a review of my book *The Challenge of Jesus*.^[1] Amongst some generally encouraging remarks, the reviewer gave as his chief area of disagreement the following: 'I believe that Jesus had a much more developed self-awareness as the Son of God than Wright seems to indicate. I think Jesus' sense of oneness with the Father and sense of transcendent experience comes through in the Gospels whereas Wright depicts Jesus more as a man struggling to work out His own beliefs.' His is typical of the reaction I have had in some quarters to the thesis I proposed in *Jesus and the Victory of God*, chapter 13, and in the fifth chapter of *Challenge*, which develops the same points in other ways and which forms more of the backdrop for the present paper.^[2] My brief comment here is that, though one gets inured to these things, it is frustrating to be misunderstood at the very point where one had struggled to be clear.

The second incident was the arrival of a feature article in a major national newspaper in which the Roman Catholic writer gave a warm welcome to Geza Vermes' fourth book on Jesus.^[3] The writer ^[48] declares that there is now 'a consensus in favour of the Jewish Jesus'. Without noticing that this simply raises the question 'Yes, but which Jewish Jesus?', he then summarizes Vermes' (by now well-known) view. The 'real' Jesus, Vermes argues, was nothing like John's incarnate Word, Paul's cosmic drama of redemption, or the risen Christ of the Acts and the Synoptics. The 'real' Jesus saw Himself and, in His lifetime at least, was seen by His disciples as a devout Jewish rabbi, firmly in the prophetic tradition, obedient to the Torah though liberal in his interpretation. He was a son of God, not the son of God and He wanted His followers to have the same intimate relationship with the Father. He could not even have understood, much less taught or believed in, the Hellenistic mystery religion that had become recognizable as Christianity by the early second century.^[4]

The book, says the review, 'is a compelling interpretation of the facts supported by formidable scholarship'. And it fits, of course, with the new *rapprochement* of Christianity and Judaism that recently saw a Polish Pope visit Yad Vashem and leave a prayer of contrition at the Western Wall. Again, my only comment at this stage is to note that there are multiple misunderstandings in both the book and the review, and that unless we address them there is a vacuum at the heart of all our christological deliberations. The third incident came hot on the heels of the second, and indeed belongs with it in terms of contemporary (mis)understandings. A phone call from the BBC's flagship 'Today'

programme: would I go on air on Good Friday morning to debate, with the authors of a new book *The Jesus Mysteries*? The book claims (so they told me) that everything in the Gospels reflects, because it was in fact borrowed from, much older pagan myths; that Jesus never existed; that the early church knew it was propagating a new version of an old myth; and that the developed church covered this up in the interests of its own power and control. The producer was friendly, and took my point when I said that this was like asking a professional astronomer to debate with the authors of a book claiming the moon was made of green cheese. Just as I refused to debate Robert Funk when he came to England recently—why should I give the now moribund Jesus [49] Seminar more publicity than it has generated for itself?—so I refocused this invitation. But it speaks volumes about what the world ‘out there’ beyond our seminars and seminaries is prepared to swallow.

It is for this reason that, when I received the initial invitation to give this paper, I proposed a topic which had not been on the (long) original list. The list included, it seemed, everything in sight: Jesus in the Old Testament, pre-existence, Jesus’ birth/conception, the hypostatic union, redemption, patristic teaching, the creeds, Aquinas, and so on, finishing with Paul, Mark, Hebrews, John, and the Trinity. All wonderful topics, but unless we can say something about Jesus himself we are missing the point. We are pumping up the tyres of a car that has no engine. That is perhaps a shade too strong, but it draws attention to the point.[5]

I understand, of course, why this situation has come about. Systematicians, and indeed Pauline and Johannine scholars, have looked across the fence to see what the Historical Jesus scholars have been up to, and have decided against venturing into a jungle where so many poisonous snakes and wild beasts roam unchecked. They select, for their own farm, one or two animals that seems to be reasonably tame—and that seem to offer what they themselves want—and impart to them. Thus, for instance, Macquarrie’s heavy reliance on James Dunn.[6] The situation we now have is not just the fragmentation of our disciplines, which we all bemoan but which we seem powerless to avoid. It is a double assumption producing a double blind: first, that ‘history’ was always supposed to come up with ‘results’ that would be handed over to the systematician for incorporation in a larger scheme; second, that we now know that history has done nothing of the kind. If the systematician waits for history to produce consensus-based ‘facts’, he or she may wait in vain. In any case, the idea of the historian as the neutral [50] objective observer simply discovering fads is of course hopelessly outdated. The historian is every bit as much influenced by shifting philosophical and cultural opinion as the philosopher or systematician. Indeed, when the systematician goes in search of a historian who can be used within his project, one fears that what he is really looking for is the reflection of his own face in a mirror at the other end of the library stacks.

In particular, systematicians have been implicitly warned off looking for actual material about Jesus, in particular about his self-understanding, not simply by the perceived difficulties in discovering anyone’s self-understanding (are we to psychoanalyse them? how?), but by the power of what is said again and again, not only in newspaper articles but in the academy: no first-century Jew could think of a human being, far less than himself, as the incarnation of God. Jewish monotheism prohibits it; and even if it didn’t (If we take Alan Segal’s point about pluriformity within early Jewish God-talk), there is no actual model for it within Judaism. Hence Vermes, who is after all only saying what two generations of history-of-religions scholarship had presupposed (not usually argued). Hence, too, on the one hand, the airport-bookstall blockbusters which say that Jesus was a back-projection of mystery-religion mythology; and, on the other, J. D. G. Dunn’s well-known *Christology in the Making*, which seems to be taken more seriously by systematicians than by other New Testament scholars.[7] We still live in a climate of thought in which two propositions are assumed as axiomatic: (a) no first-century Jew could think of incarnation, let alone believe it, let alone believe it of himself; (b) no sane people (and we hope Jesus was sane, though even his family said he was

mad!) could think of themselves as the incarnate Sons of God.

II INTRODUCTION (B): JOHN, PAUL, AND BEYOND

It is basic to New Testament Christology that the human Jesus discloses in himself the being and nature of the true God. ‘No one has ever seen God’, declares John at the climax of the Prologue: ‘God the only-begotten, who is in the bosom of the Father, has unveiled [51] him’ (1:18). The well-known textual variants in the verse, and the difficulty of translating *exegesato* at the end, should not divert our attention from what is being claimed. Human beings are not granted immediate, that is, unmediated, knowledge of God, but in Jesus we see, truly and undistortedly, who God is.

Paul agrees (again we should not be distracted by questions of authorship): ‘He is the image of the invisible God’ (Col. 1:15). We don’t see God; Jesus discloses him. Paul and John, of course, develop the thought to insist that the most complete and radical disclosure of the true and living God is accomplished on the cross, revealing God’s glory (John), God’s justice (Paul), and God’s love (Paul and John in unison).

This is well known, though not in my view sufficiently pondered either by New Testament exegetes or by systematic theologians. I regard most of the debate about, for instance, Pauline Christology, as unduly defensive in the face of Dunn and other similar writers. As I have argued at length elsewhere, it is not only in one or two debatable verses, but throughout his writings, that Paul presupposes and regularly states that the human being Jesus of Nazareth is to be identified as the *kyrios* of the Septuagint, and that this identification was not something to which Jesus attained at the end of a successful, human-only career but something which made sense in terms of the identity of this human being.[8] He was *already* ‘in the form of God’: he already possessed ‘equality with God’, and did not abandon that equality nor regard it as something not his own at which he could not snatch. The proper translation of *ouch harpagmon hegesato* in Philippians 2:6, now happily adopted by the NRSV, is ‘he did not regard his equality with God as something to exploit’, something to take advantage of.[9] In other words, he already possessed it, but did not regard it as an opportunity for self-aggrandizement after the fashion of pagan rulers. When Paul speaks of the death of Jesus as the full revelation of the love of God (Rom, 5: 6-11), this of course only makes sense if the one who dies is in some way or other the embodiment of this God. When Paul draws on various Jewish traditions to say more or less exactly that in Romans 8; 3-4, 31-9, we should allow him to mean what he says, and not try to evacuate his statements because they do not [52] cohere with a particular post-enlightenment view of what he could and could not have thought.[10]

But all this means that John and Paul themselves should press us back to the central issue: if it is in the human life of Jesus of Nazareth that the living, saving God is revealed, that means that John and Paul themselves would urge us to consider Jesus himself—not merely by asking about the hypostatic union and the like (we can be sure that Jesus of Nazareth would have found that puzzling!), or by cleaning up the categories of Aquinas, Calvin, or anyone else, but by enquiring once more about the worldview and mindset of a first-century Jew possessed of a particular vocation. That is what I tried to do in *JVG*, chapter 13 (and *Challenge*, ch. 5), and I now want to highlight some aspects of the case.

III INTRODUCTION (C): OTHER NECESSARY NOTES

Four other brief preliminary comments.

1. John and the Synoptics have traditionally been held apart in Jesus-scholarship. My own Jesus-work so far has deliberately been on the Synoptics rather than on John: not because I am committed to giving John a low historical value but because I am taking

part in a complex debate, not least with writers like Sanders and Crossan, that has been conducted in an almost exclusively Synoptic frame of reference. It seems to me clear, though, that the Synoptics have, in their own way, just as high a Christology as John; see below. If I am right about Jesus himself, and about the Synoptics, this will do something towards bridging the notorious gap between the Gospels.

2. ‘Messiah’, or ‘Christ’, does not mean ‘the/a divine one’. It is very misleading to use the words as shorthands for the divine name or being of Jesus. It is comparatively easy to argue that Jesus (like several other first-century Jews) believed he was the Messiah (see *JVG*, ch. 11). It is much harder, and a very different thing, to argue that he thought he was in some sense identified with Israel’s God. In this context, the phrase ‘son of God’ is systematically misleading because in pre- and non-Christian Judaism its primary referent is either Israel or the Messiah, and it retains these meanings in early [53] Christianity (e.g. Rom. 1:3-4) while also picking up the overtones of Paul’s early, high Christology. It seems to me, in fact, that the title was perceived very early on in Christianity—within the first decade or so at least—as an ideal one for Jesus because it enabled one to say *both* ‘Messiah’ *and* ‘the incarnate one’. However, its subsequent use simply for the latter meaning, coupled with its too-ready identification with the virginal conception story,[11] make it in my view difficult to use without constant qualification in contemporary in systematic discussions.

3. The question of what precisely we mean by self-understanding must be left open for the moment. Here of all places we need a label that can then function heuristically, being eventually defined more precisely by its content. That is to say, I am engaging in a process neither of psychoanalysis, nor of romantic fiction, but of history. History seeks, among other things, to answer the question: why did this character act in this way? And among the characteristic answers such questions receive is: he believed, at the core of his being, that it was his duty, his destiny, his vocation, to do so. The study of people’s belief about their own vocation has not been made sufficiently explicit. I think it offers a way through the impasse between saying either ‘Jesus knew he was the second person of the Trinity’ or ‘Jesus was just a human being who had no thought of being divine’. But to pursue this further we must come to the substantial topic.

4. Can you have a serious Christology without having Jesus aware of it? This sounds like the sort of question one might set in a final degree examination, but it is actually a serious question facing our whole enterprise. One might suppose that the lower one’s Christology, the less Jesus’ awareness of it matters, but this is illusory: if Jesus was a human being and nothing more, part of the picture will precisely be that he was aware of being a human being and nothing more. Unless we can give some sort of account of Jesus’ own self-understanding, I simply don’t think it’s good enough to talk about two minds (or one), two natures (or one), or about the various combinations and permutations of persons and substances. Any such discussions should be grounded in Jesus himself. But when we try to talk about Jesus himself we may find that, in the first instance at least, our enquiry leads in quite a different direction.

[54]

IV THE GOD WHO COMES

With all due respect to colleagues who have argued at length for other views—I think in particular of my good friend Alan Segal—the reason scholars have not noticed the Jewish roots of very early and high Christology is that they have been looking in the wrong places. With the exception of the figure of Wisdom (see below), they have been examining models of mediators such as angels, the figure of Melchizedek, and so forth, none of which have more than an occasional or tangential relationship to New Testament Christology, and none of which seem to have figured in Jesus’ self-understanding. Nor is it relevant to the origins of New Testament Christology to examine how Jews at the time reflected on the body/soul problem. That is not the sort of thing that early Christology *is*.

There are, however, two major topics and one major theme which, though conspicuous by their absence from most relevant discussions, ought to be moved at once into the centre of the stage. The topics are Temple and Torah; the theme is that of the coming, or the return, of Israel's God, YHWH.

Take the latter first. That is, of course, the primary subject of *JVG*, chapter 13, which participants in the Incarnation Summit have read. It has recently been argued that the theme of YHWH's return to Zion is a major topic, perhaps *the* major topic of Mark.[12] Though this of course provides an easy let-out for those who want to be cautious ('it may be a theme in Mark, but surely it doesn't go back to Jesus?'). I have come to regard it as central in the thinking, the vocational self-understanding, of Jesus himself. 'The glory of YHWH shall be revealed', says Isaiah, 'and all flesh shall see it together'. Yes, says Mark: and that is what happened in and through the ministry and death of Jesus.

It appears, I think, that just as the study of christological *titles* was too wooden and limiting (to take an obvious example, 'the son of man' needs to be understood, not in terms of the title alone, but in terms of the ways in which the narrative of Daniel 7 was being read, and freshly understood, in first-century Judaism), so the study of potential christological *models* has been too influenced by the abstract, dehistoricized mode in which much systematic theology has been conducted. If we want to get into the minds of first-century [55] Jews, we should not look so much for idealized figures as for characters in a narrative.[13] The crucial narrative, as I have argued at length (*ad nauseam*, say some of my critics), is that of the long-awaited return from exile, not only Israel's return, but above all that of YHWH himself.[14] This offers a basis for a historical understanding of Jesus' self-understanding, not simply in that it enables us to say 'this happened in history', but in the sense that what Israel was awaiting was something that her God had promised to do, personally, within her history. Isaiah again: To all their affliction he was afflicted; it was no angel, but his own presence, that saved them.[15] This is not, then, a matter of an idealized figure, but of a story in which YHWH himself, in person, plays the leading role. And the burden of my song in *JVG*, chapter 13, was that Jesus understood his own vocation in these terms; that he would embody in his own actions, his own journey to Jerusalem and what he would do there, and supremely in his own death, this long-promised and long-awaited action of YHWH.

What can we say about such a self-understanding? Shocking? Yes. Striking? Very much so. Worrying, then and now? Of course. Believable in the mindset of a first-century Jew? Certainly. The proposal, which I have spelt out in that chapter is no doubt itself controversial, and needs discussion (remarkably, reviewers have managed so far to avoid it). To the suggestion, already noted, that it might be yet another projection of Synoptic or Johannine Christology back on to Jesus, I make the response I made in *JVG*, and note, in line with with my teacher at Oxford, George Caird, said about the use of 'son of man': what was thinkable for the early Jewish church must have been thinkable for the early Jewish Jesus.

If I am anything like on target this creates a context not only for understanding Jesus within his historical framework, not only for discerning the real roots of New Testament Christology (the reason, for instance, why Paul so quickly took to using the LXX [56] *kyrios*-passages for Jesus), but also for rethinking traditional systematic debates. What would it do, for instance, to questions about hypostatic union? How might it affect the use of words like nature, person, substance, and so forth? I think it might open up a flood of new possibilities; it might even slice through the denser thickets of theological definitions and enable us to talk more crisply, dare I say more Jewishly, and for that matter more intelligibly, about Jesus and about God.

Of course—and Paul already saw this—what was at stake here is not just a way of talking about Jesus, but a way of talking, and thinking, about God. Back to first principles: nobody has seen God, but Jesus—this human Jesus—has unveiled him. I think

it is a particular view of God that has stopped more (apparently) conservative Christians from embracing this kind of Christology.[16] But what I think I see in this way of telling the story is precisely a more believable first-century Jewish view of God. The roots of the incarnation lie, not in speculation about angels, not in subtle pre-Christian use of certain titles for certain figures, but in long-held Jewish beliefs about what God would one day do in person.

V THE TABERNACLING PRESENCE

For me the way in to a fresh understanding of Synoptic Christology was through puzzling over Jewish understandings of the Temple.[17] To the normal charge that first-century Jews had no idea of incarnation, I have been accustomed to respond; of course they did; think of the Temple. The Temple, from the beginning, had as its whole *raison d'être* the dwelling of Israel's God in the midst of his people, and the daily and yearly sacrifices through which fellowship with this God, and forgiveness from this God, were assured. The Temple has for too long been the forgotten factor in New Testament Theology. Omit it, and you will spend a lifetime in titles, 'figures', and other unsatisfying by-paths. Make it central, and the whole picture will come into focus.

And what has been clear, since at least the writings of Borg and [57] Sanders in the 1980s, is that the Temple was one of the main focal points of Jesus' public career. Not so much in the sense that he was always going there or always speaking about it; even if we give a high historical value to John, that is not necessarily the case. No; in the sense that it represented, on the one hand, all that had gone wrong in Judaism, all that he opposed in the name of the in-breaking Kingdom of God. It had come to stand for that failure to find its true vocation for which Jesus, with sorrow, rebuked his contemporaries. But it represented, on the other hand, in promise and hope, all that Jesus was then himself offering in his own work and actions. Forgiveness of sins, restoration into fellowship with God; Jesus was offering them to all and sundry who would believe and follow him. He was acting as a one-man Temple-substitute. If the ministry of John the Baptist was implicitly at least a counter-Temple movement, as many scholars now agree, how much more was that of Jesus. Thus, as I have often said, when Jesus came to Jerusalem the place wasn't big enough for both of them, himself and the Temple side by side. The opening charge at Jesus' 'trial' is that he had spoken against the Temple, threatening it in some way with imminent destruction. I regard it as absolutely certain that he had in fact spoken this way: though the charge is put in the mouth of 'false witnesses'; the evangelists who tell us this also tell us, at some length, that Jesus did indeed predict the destruction of the Temple. And John, differently of course but with deep underlying similarity, has Jesus say 'destroy this Temple, and in three days I will build it again'.

This, in fact, is what one might call the deep Synoptic root, of full-orbed Johannine Christology. 'The Word became flesh, and tabernacled in our midst': *eskenosen* is of course a Temple-image, and if we understand John 1:1-18 in terms of its Jewish roots, and its parallels in, for example, Sirach 24, this should not surprise us. Word, Wisdom, Spirit and ultimately Temple and Torah—these are the themes which, in Judaism, speak of the one, true and living God active within the world in general and Israel in particular, promising future decisive personal action to save Israel and the world. These are the themes of the Prologue, and of the whole Gospel; and I suggest that they are also major themes in the Synoptics. They point forward, not backward, to Paul's Temple-pneumatology (e.g. Romans 8, where the 'indwelling' of the Spirit is to be understood as a Temple-theme). And I insist that they are common to these traditions because they go back to Jesus himself.

[58] What might it do to our systematic Christologies to make the Temple, rather than theories about natures, persons, and substance, central to our reflection? I do not know. But I do know that if we were even to try we might find all kinds of new avenues

opening up before us. There would, of course, be various political repercussions; only last month I saw, on a Tel Aviv airport bookstall (next to a copy of Borg and Wright!), a book by two American fundamentalist Christians writing enthusiastically about the preparations now being made for the Third Temple, the breeding of red heifers in mid-Western farms ready for the recommencement of the Old Testament sacrificial system, and telling of how, since the Muslims regarded Mecca, not Jerusalem, as their real Holy City, there would not actually be much of a problem about Jews re-occupying the Temple Mount. We may smile at the naivety, and frown at the worrying consequences. But what we cannot do, if I am right, is address such issues without recognizing that they are essentially christological—or address Christology without recognizing that it is essentially bound up with the redemptive dwelling of Israel's God in the midst not only of Israel but also of the world.

VI TORAH, WISDOM AND JESUS

It has long been recognized that the Torah plays a role in Paul's Christology, though the way in which this is so is not usually, in my view, sufficiently carefully explored. What we have not so normally done is to see how Torah already represented an incarnational symbol within Judaism, and to explore how Jesus himself understood his vocation in relation to it. I have already said what I want to say about this, and here merely point up some consequences.[18]

Jesus, I have argued, took upon himself the role not merely of new Moses, or a new Torah (though both of these are true), but of new Torah-*giver*. If we are to take this theme seriously we will again be confronted with quite new christological possibilities. Again, we must not flatten this out into an abstract or timeless 'rule'; we must speak of the story in which Jesus and his contemporaries were living, of the role of Torah within that story, and of Jesus' self-understanding and mission in relation to that role. What might this [59] do to our normal categories of christological discussion? How would it give us a new perspective on Christology and (what we please to call) 'ethics'?

The same is true for the Figure of Wisdom. I do not think this figure is so prominent in the Gospels as has sometimes been suggested.[19] Wisdom is undoubtedly part of New Testament Christology, and from this perspective those Fathers who endlessly debated Proverbs 8 were not far from the topic. One wishes they had devoted similar energy to Temple and Torah. And the same is true also for those other often neglected themes, Spirit and Word.

VIII CONCLUSION: FROM JESUS TO CHRISTOLOGY

My case has been, and remains, that Jesus believed himself called to do and be things which, in the traditions to which he fell heir, only Israel's God, YHWH, was to do and be. I think he held this belief both with passionate and firm conviction and with the knowledge that he could be making a terrible, lunatic mistake. I do not think this in any way downplays the signals of transcendence within the Gospel narratives. It is, I believe, consonant both with a full and high Christology and with the recognition that Jesus was a human figure who can be studied historically in the same way that any other human figure can be.[20] Indeed, I have come to regard such historical study not just as a possibly helpful source for theology but a vital and non-negotiable resource: not just part of the possible *bene esse*, but of the *esse* itself. Partial proof of this drastic proposal lies in observing what happens if we ignore the history: we condemn ourselves to talking about abstractions, even perhaps to making Jesus himself an abstraction. Fuller proof could only come if and when systematicians are prepared to work with the first-century Jewish categories which are there in the historical accounts of Jesus and which shaped and formed his own mindset.

[60] It will also enable other topics in New Testament theology, notably the Christology of Paul, John, Hebrews, and indeed the Synoptics, to fall into a more appropriate place and shape. The ultimate origins of that very early, very Jewish, very high Christology which we find not only in Paul but in the (hypothetically) pre-Pauline passages are to be found, I suggest, not in an explosion of creative thought which took place after the resurrection—though there certainly was an explosion of creative thought on that point—but in the mindset of Jesus himself. And this mindset is discovered not by probing individual sayings in isolation, but in the whole tenor and aim of Jesus’ public career and teachings.

It will be noted that I have come as far as the last paragraph without mentioning the resurrection. Despite a long tradition, I do not regard the resurrection as instantly ‘proving Jesus’ divinity’. In such Jewish thought as cherished the notion of resurrection was what would happen to everybody, or at least all the righteous. It would not constitute those raised as divine beings. Nor would the ‘glorification’ of Jesus, his ascension to God’s right hand have that effect: Jesus had, in New Testament theology, thereby attained the place marked out from the beginning not for an incarnate being but for the truly human one (note the use of Psalm 8 in e.g. 1 Cor, 15: 27). But this is *not* to say that the resurrection and ascension have nothing to do with the early church’s belief in Jesus’ divinity. We must not short-circuit their thought-processes, even though the time involved for such thinking may have been very short.

My own reading of the process goes like this. The resurrection and ascension proved, first and foremost, that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. This meant, at once, that his death had to be regarded in some fashion as a victory, not a defeat, whereupon all Jesus’ cryptic sayings about the meaning of his death fell into place. Within that, again very quickly, the earliest Christians came to see that what had been accomplished in Jesus’ death and resurrection as the decisive climax to his public career of kingdom-inauguration, was indeed the victory of YHWH over the last enemies, sin and death. And with that they could no longer resist the sense, backed up again by Jesus’ cryptic sayings, that in dealing with him they were dealing with the living—and dying—embodiment of YHWH himself, Israel’s God in person. From that it is a short step—not a long haul, involving abandoning Jewish categories and embracing those of the pagan [61] world—to speaking of ‘that which was from the beginning, which we heard, which we saw with our eyes, which we beheld, and which our hands touched, concerning the word of life’ (1 John 1:1). The worship of Jesus in early Jewish Christianity, a worship which was not perceived as flouting monotheism but as discerning its inner heart, was indeed, as is now more regularly seen, the beginnings of Christian thinking about Jesus. But that worship was simply discerning, in the Jewish categories that he had himself made thematic, what lay at the heart of the vocation and self-understanding of Jesus himself.

[1] Downers Grove, 111.; InterVarsity Press, .1999; London: S’PCK, 2000. The review is by J T. Morrison in the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship faculty Newsletter for Spring 2000.

[2] *Jesus and the Victory of God* (hereafter JVG): Christian Origins and the Question of God (London: SPCK; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress. 1996), vol ii. See too my ‘The Divinity of Jesus’, in M.J. Borg and N.T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998; London: SPCK, 1999), 157-68.

[3] G. Vermes, *The Changing Faces of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 2000). The review: Daniel Johnson, 'In Search of the Jewish Jesus', Daily Telegraph, 15 April 2000. [For a different assessment of Vermes' book see G. O'Collins review in *The Tablet*, 1 July 2000, 895-7, Eds.]

[4] It is wryly amusing to note that the Daily Telegraph, though it can shock its conservative readers with views like this, cannot slap them in the face by printing He, His and Himself in lower case.

[5] A parallel phenomenon nearly occurred in the 1980s when InterVarsity Press drafted the *New Dictionary of Theology* (1988) which had articles on everything under the sun—except Jesus. I pointed this out at a late stage (I was writing the article on Paul), and wrote an article which they printed. This protest anticipates the fuller statement in *Challenge*, ch 1: it seems to be one of my missions in life to get the question of Jesus back on the agenda when people are talking about Christology.

[6] J. Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* (London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990). Similar things could be said about J. Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions* (London: SCM; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), which manages to avoid almost all contact with NT scholarship, despite the fact that it could have offered him substantial help in mounting and shaping his own thesis.

[7] J.D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (2nd edn.: London: SCM Press, 1989).

[8] See *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), esp. chs 2-6.

[9] See *Climax*, ch. 4.

[10] I am not attempting here to engage with J.-N. Aletti's fascinating and subtle chapter, but merely responding to a range of scholarship of which Dunn's work is typical.

[11] Luke 1:32 indicates a connection, but of course most NT uses of 'son of God' shows no such interest.

[12] In Rikk Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus and Mark* (Tubingen: Mohr, 1994).

[13] On the search of the 'Jewish divine mediator figures', see C.C. Newman, J.R. Davila, and G.S. Lewis (eds). *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism* (Supplements to JSJ 63; Leiden: Brill, 2000).

[14] On the controversial subject of the still-awaited 'return', see my 'comments' in C.C. Newman (ed.), *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N.T. Wright's Jesus and the Victory of God* (Downer's Grove, ILL.: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 252-61; and the essay by C.A. Evans in the same volume, 77-100.

[15] Isa. 63: 8-9. The translation is difficult but the overall meaning—that it is YHWH's own presence that saves, not that of some lesser being—is clear.

[16] See my 'In Grateful Dialogue', in Newman (ed.), *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel*, 276-7, finishing with a warning against implicitly learning the meaning of the word 'God' from somewhere other than Jesus himself.

[17] I made this more explicitly thematic in *Challenge*, ch. 5.

[18] See *JVG*, 646-6; *Challenge*, 84-5.

[19] See e.g. B. Witherington, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994); E. Schussler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (London: SCM Press, 1994).

[20] I have spelt out what I mean by 'studied historically' in e.g. *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SCPK; and Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), part II: *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (with Marcus J. Borg) (London: SPCK, 1997), ch. 2: and most recently in 'In Grateful Dialogue', in Newman (ed.), *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel*, 245-52).

Keywords: Jesus; preaching; self-understanding; Son of Man; sovereignty. Do you want to read the rest of this article? Request full-text. Citations (1). References (0). The dynamics of God's reign as a hermeneutic key to Jesus' eschatological expectation. Article. Full-text available. [Show full abstract] understanding of the natural whole influences each philosopher's interpretation of the political structures of man. A lecture on how the historical Jesus would have seen himself: divine, human, both? Delivered by Dr. Ben Witherington III, New Testament scholar and professor at Asbury University. By outlining human "self-understanding" as a historiographical question, it emphasises the determinative role in historical judgement played by the historian's assumptions about the range of possibility available to the processes of human thought. The question of self-understanding is a way of examining the continuity between Jesus and Second Temple Judaism on the one hand, and between Jesus and the rise of the early church on the other.