

THE CASE FOR SPIRIT CHRISTOLOGY

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OVER THE PAST twenty years or so various essays have appeared which deal with Spirit Christology.¹ The purpose of this study is to summarize the ground that has been gained, and at the same time to make the case for Spirit language in Christology. By a Spirit Christology I mean one that "explains" how God is present and active in Jesus, and thus Jesus' divinity, by using the biblical symbol of God as Spirit, and not the symbol Logos. It is the contention of those who propose such a thoroughgoing Spirit Christology that it expresses in a more adequate way for our time what has been expressed through a Logos Christology.²

We can begin the discussion by describing the situation in which Christology is being written today as one that makes Spirit Christology attractive. Ours is an historically conscious period, and a Christology that does not betray an historical consciousness as its presupposition will not be credible. As a consequence of this historical consciousness, Christology today begins overwhelmingly with a consideration of Jesus and proceeds throughout to underline and even stress the humanity of Jesus. Clearly this stands in reaction against an overly abstract portrayal of the identity and status of Jesus. Positively this point of departure relies on the data of the Synoptic Gospels in which Jesus is portrayed as a human being who was related to God,

¹ Some essays that may serve as an introduction to Spirit Christology are the following: James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (London: SCM, 1975); idem, *Christology in the Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980); Olaf Hansen, "Spirit Christology: A Way out of Our Dilemma?" in *The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church*, ed. P. Opsahl (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978) 172-203; Norman Hook, "A Spirit Christology," *Theology* 75 (1972) 226-32; Harold Hunter, "Spirit Christology: Dilemma and Promise," *Heythrop Journal* 24 (1983) 127-40, 266-77 (this essay is hostile to Spirit Christology on the basis of a reading of scriptural and early Christian sources); G. W. H. Lampe, "The Holy Spirit and the Person of Christ," in *Christ, Faith and History*, ed. S. W. Sykes and J. P. Clayton (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ., 1972) 111-30; idem, *God as Spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977); Paul W. Newman, *A Spirit Christology: Recovering the Biblical Paradigm of Christian Faith* (Lanham, Maryland: Univ. Press of America, 1987); Philip J. Rosato, "Spirit Christology: Ambiguity and Promise," *TS* 38 (1977) 423-49.

² Rosato's essay cited in the last note does not propose a thoroughgoing Spirit Christology but seeks to integrate themes from this Christology into the classical Christological and trinitarian frameworks. A summary of the problems involved in Logos Christology can be found in Newman, *A Spirit Christology* 1-27.

whom he called Father, through prayer and obedience to the mission of God's reign. In the framework of the Gospels Jesus related to God interpersonally. But in the framework of the Logos Christology that led up to and away from Chalcedon, Christology had the problem of safeguarding the humanity of Jesus which tended to be slighted by, if not completely swallowed within, the divine person who walked the earth. Today the problem is the opposite: we know that Jesus was a human being, but what is not clear and what requires careful "explanation" is the idea that he was divine. The question of what this divinity, which must be affirmed, can possibly mean is a major Christological problem today, and the way Jesus' divinity is to be expressed or formulated is an open question.³

That this is a genuinely new and open question appears at several junctures where historical consciousness has had its impact. At one end of the history of Christian thought the New Testament displays a genuine pluralism of understandings of Jesus.⁴ In principle, Scripture thus makes a variety of meanings for the divinity of Jesus available to us. Regrettably, in our own time, many responsible and historically conscious Christologies do not even address the issue in ontological terms, but are satisfied with weak metaphors as distinct from stronger symbolic language that has ontological import. Also today interreligious dialogue especially raises the question of the status of Jesus relative to other savior figures. The openness of this question of how Jesus is to be compared in principle with other religious media is a corollary of the vast amount of writing that deals with it, the diversity of opinion, and the lack of a consensus on some of the most basic points of the discussion. More generally one has only to underscore the concomitants of historical consciousness: a sense of the changes that theological understanding has always undergone to meet new historical situations and problems; a sense of the distinction between a basic

³ It is sometimes implied that the shift that has occurred in Christology can be reduced to one of mere emphasis, that the humanity and divinity of Jesus stand together as parallel attributes so that at any given time one or other may receive more attention. This is not true, and it would be far more accurate to see in this shift the groundwork for a possible revolution in Christological thinking. For the historical approach to Jesus has transformed the Christological problem itself. See Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Seabury, 1978) 285–93 on the epistemological and logical distinctions between the affirmations of Jesus' humanity and divinity.

⁴ We must speak not of the kerygmatic Christ but of "kerygmatic Christs—diverse understandings and presentations of 'the Christ of faith' within first-century Christianity" (James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977] 216).

faith commitment and its ability to be expressed differently in different historical contexts; a conviction that the historical development of theology and doctrine cannot have somehow stopped at any point in history. In sum, our context for the discussion of Spirit Christology is a genuinely open one.

The exact question to be entertained here is often called the Christological question, that is, within the context of a more general understanding of the discipline of Christology. This narrowly defined and formal Christological question deals with the identity of Jesus in terms that run parallel to the development of the doctrines of Nicaea and Chalcedon. The question concerns the status of Jesus, considered ontologically, or in terms of being, relative to the being of God and the being of humans. The hypothesis underlying the case for Spirit Christology is that in our historically conscious context this Christology is more adequate than the Logos Christology that has dominated Christian thought since the end of the New Testament period. The argument here, however, will not entail a consistent polemic against Logos Christology. The aim is to develop a positive and constructive account, one which only occasionally and for purposes of clarification contrasts the position here with that of a Logos Christology. The point is thus not to affirm that a Logos Christology has been or is wrong but to characterize a Christology that is more adequate to our situation.

It should be clear that it would be impossible to make this case in a brief space without being somewhat schematic. The development of any Christological position is extremely complex, and this prohibits a comprehensive development of a position that included thorough argumentation at each stage. My aim is rather to bring the many elements that recommend a Spirit Christology together into a compact statement. I will treat these elements in the following order. First, I outline the requirements of Christology. Second, I will provide an outline of the theological framework within which this discussion unfolds. Third, I will try to synopsize the resources for a Spirit Christology in terms of the symbols, categories, and principles with which it works. And finally I will discuss the areas of interpretation or reinterpretation to which Spirit Christology gives rise.

THE REQUIREMENTS OF CHRISTOLOGY

Theology has become pluralistic in a somewhat pronounced way in our day. It thus becomes necessary to clarify at the outset the methodological presuppositions that shape this essay. In what follows I shall outline a number of general premises of theology that come to

bear on Christology. The number of the premises that are selected is not meant to be exhaustive.⁵

A first methodological premise for Christology might be called its apologetic style. This means that Christology must explain the status of Jesus in a way that justifies Christian experience of him. Christians relate to Jesus as the Christ or Messiah. In more general terms, they find their salvation from God in him and through him. This relationship to Jesus calls out for explanation, and one could designate systematic Christology as this explanation. Such an explanation is not so much a proof or demonstration of a position as a thematization or reasonable account of the identity and role of Jesus that corresponds to or accounts for the way Christians relate to him. In a way the most basic task of Christology can be understood in terms of this requirement: Christology is the statement of the identity of Jesus in such a way that it explains why Christians find their salvation from God in him. Theology must never take for granted the extraordinary claim that is being made when one says that one finds salvation from God mediated by this particular human being.

A second requirement of Christology is the need to be faithful to biblical language about Jesus: Christology must take into account and be shaped by the New Testament accounts of Jesus and the experience that underlies them. This is no more than the general theological premise that Scripture is normative for the Church and thus for its self-understanding or theology. This requirement has had an explicit role in the recent development of Spirit Christology, because the New Testament positively recommends it and because some of the Christological positions to which a Logos Christology has led cannot be squared with New Testament data.

Third, Christology must be faithful to the great Christological councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon. These two councils of the patristic period of the Church in a way set the parameters within which the Christological problem has been defined and Christology itself, narrowly conceived, unfolds. These councils are almost universally accepted by mainline Christian churches to provide a kind of common creedal language: Jesus is truly divine and truly human; Jesus is consubstantial with God (Nicaea) and consubstantial with us (Chalcedon).

Fourth, Christology needs to be intelligible and coherent; it can only

⁵ Many of the conceptions of theological method, which are no more than enumerated here and in the next section of this essay, have been developed more fully in my *Dynamics of Theology* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 1990). In this discussion I am thus bringing a general discussion of theology to bear on the narrower discipline of Christology. Newman provides another set of criteria for an adequate constructive theology, some of which overlap with these (*A Spirit Christology* 62–67).

fulfill its apologetic task by being a critical discipline. The intelligibility of a Christological position normally flows from its being placed in critical correlation with our present-day situation in the world, including the world of intellectual culture and knowledge. This mutual encounter of the language of faith and present-day experience creates a situation of mutual questioning; faith calls cultural values and ideas that are taken for granted into question; and what we know from our experience of the world today calls into question accepted formulas of belief and calls out for their reinterpretation.⁶ The need for coherence, then, means first of all that an integrated self-understanding is imperative for Christians; we cannot live in two worlds whose meanings are ontologically at odds with each other, or which do not communicate at all. Coherence has a second dimension as well: Christology, as one source of doctrine among many, must be coherent with the theological interpretations of other doctrines. All of these aspects of the critical side of Christology as a discipline will be seen to feed into a Spirit Christology in a positive way.

Fifth, a contemporary Christology must respond to contemporary problems. This exigency is really no more than a specification of the preceding dimension of Christological method. I isolate it here to provide the example of the problem of the relation of Jesus to other savior figures and other religions. Very often this issue is discussed as a corollary of a Christology that has already been determined, or as a special question to be handled once the narrowly defined Christological question has been answered. When this occurs the requirements that Christology be apologetic, critical, responsive to Christian experience, and in dialogue with an historical context or situation have been sidestepped. Religious pluralism is part of the point of departure of a Christology which begins with Christian life and experience in our world today. But the Christian's view of the world today includes a relatively new appreciation of the universality of God's grace mediated historically apart from Jesus Christ, and, with this, a positive appreciation of other religions as possible bearers of God's salvation for whole multitudes of people. This forms an a priori context for Christological thinking.

A sixth and final criterion of Christology will be its ability to stimulate and empower Christian life. In the measure that it does not animate Christian living it is also, by definition, irrelevant to Christian life. Along the way I will show the measure in which a stress on

⁶ A good straightforward description of such a method of correlation is that of Hans Küng, "Towards a New Consensus in Catholic (and Ecumenical) Theology," in L. Swidler, ed., *Consensus in Theology?* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980) 1-17.

the humanity of Jesus is dictated by this criterion of relevance for a Christian spirituality that is construed generally as life in the world. It will also become apparent that Spirit Christology is able to guarantee that the humanity of Jesus is not compromised in the clear affirmation of Jesus' divinity. Spirituality is a major area in which the fruitfulness of Spirit Christology comes to the fore.

These methodological criteria, when they are taken together, represent a first effort to explain the logic underlying the need to shift to a Spirit Christology. Each one of these methodological requirements provides in its own way a reason for thinking of the identity of Jesus in terms of the presence and operation in him of God as Spirit. But these methodological principles are not sufficient for defining the logic of this essay. One must also take into account the general conception of the structure of Christology that is operative here.

THE STRUCTURE OF CHRISTOLOGY

In this section I will lay out briefly the conception of the structure of Christology which provides the context for the narrower Christological question. By the structure of Christology I mean the prior understanding of how God is encountered in this world and how Jesus functions within this process. This context, which is usually supplied in fundamental or foundational theology, is at work in any Christology in an a priori way and is obviously crucial for appreciating what is going on in it. What follows, then, defines the background theory within which the Spirit Christology that is proposed here is situated. It, too, reflects the requirements of historical consciousness.

It may be laid down as a first premise that all human knowledge is bound to the world and to sensible data. This anthropological and epistemological thesis implies that all human knowledge is historically mediated, and this applies as well to knowledge of God. This does not mean that human freedom lacks tendencies and dynamisms that impel it towards transcendence, or that there may not be vague transcendental experiences of absolute being or "the holy" that have no defined or categorical shape. But this only shows the point of the thesis: if there is to be a content or conception of transcendent reality, it must be historically mediated. The content of all knowledge of God, however it be conceived as coming about, will be shaped by some historical medium or media. Conceptualization of the transcendent is necessarily reflected through some form of knowledge of this world.⁷ His-

⁷ This theory is expounded by John E. Smith, in *Experience and God* (New York: Oxford Univ., 1968) 68-98. It does not really undermine what is called mystical experience. But despite the seeming immediacy of such experiences, the view presented here

torical religions are organized around such public historical media of the experience of God.

The medium through which religious experience takes place may also be called a symbol, making all religious knowledge symbolic knowledge.⁸ A symbol is that through which something else is made present and known; a symbol mediates a perception and knowledge of something other than itself. This characterization of religious knowledge as symbolic can be justified on the basis of a phenomenology of religious experience. God is not present to human consciousness as an object of this world; God is infinitely other than any finite object. Yet God's infinite transcendence is such that God is also immanent to all things that God holds in existence by creation. Thus when one experiences God in any finite situation or medium or symbol, God is experienced as utterly transcendent, beyond the symbol, and other than the symbol. Yet one must also say that insofar as God is experienced in and through any given symbol, God is present to the symbol and through it to human consciousness.

The religious symbol itself, therefore, has a double dimension ontologically and it functions dialectically; it contains two contrary and yet mutually conditioning dimensions. Since God is both present to and transcendent of any finite symbol, the symbol both makes God present and points away from itself to a God who is other than itself. This dialectical quality of symbols can be expressed in even sharper terms: the symbol both "is" and "is not" that which it symbolizes and makes present; and the symbolized both "is" and "is not" the symbol. This dialectical quality of symbols too is justified on the basis of a phenomenology of how symbols mediate; the meaning of "dialectical" is drawn from the very process and experience of symbolic religious mediation. This quality, it will be seen, is absolutely crucial relative to the narrow Christological question. The doctrine of Chalcedon mirrors this dialectical structure.

Given this framework, then, it may be said that Jesus is the histor-

says that this is really a "mediated immediacy." This means that although the experience may be described as entailing "immediate" contact with God because God is immediately present to the subject, still, when God's presence takes on any definite contours or content, this reflected knowledge of God will be mediated. And, ultimately, this mediation is through our contact with the sensible reality of the world.

⁸ The view of symbol presented here is drawn especially from the writings of Paul Tillich and Karl Rahner. Two representative sources of their views are Karl Rahner, "The Theology of Symbol," in *Theological Investigations* 4, trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966) 221-52, and Paul Tillich, "The Meaning and Justification of Religious Symbols," in *Religious Experience and Truth*, ed. Sidney Hook (New York: New York Univ., 1961) 3-12.

ical medium that stands at the source of Christianity and its central symbol. Here the image of a center is taken literally; Jesus is the dead center of Christian faith because, as a human being, he is the historical symbol that focuses Christian faith in God. God approaches Christian faith in Jesus; Jesus is a revelation of God. Christian faith approaches God through Jesus; Jesus is the medium, the way of the Christian, to God. All other Christian symbols are related to the person of Jesus as periphery to center whether they actually derive from him historically or not. Although this view is stated here in an analytical and propositional way, it is also descriptive of what occurred in the formation of the early Church and New Testament literature: Jesus was the center.⁹

The foundational basis for Christology consists in a religious experience and interpretation of Jesus. The New Testament contains a large number of different titles for Jesus, interpretations of his identity, and conceptions of what he did.¹⁰ But one can generalize the experience that underlies them all: all who became Christians experienced Jesus as the mediator of God's salvation. "A fundamentally identical experience underlies the various interpretations to be found throughout the New Testament: all its writings bear witness to the experience of salvation in Jesus from God."¹¹ The metaphor of underlying is appropriate here; the experience of Jesus as salvation bringer is prior to and the basis of the various interpretations of his identity and how salvation was won. This priority need not be conceived as a chronological priority, as though it were formless and inarticulate before taking shape through symbolic mediation and expression. Rather the priority here may be seen in the ability to generalize it: a saving encounter with God mediated through Jesus is distinguishable from the large variety of different articulations of the "how" and "why" of it.

In this view, then, one may lay down two axioms about the nature and structure of the discipline of Christology. First, Christology is the interpretation of Jesus that has its foundation in the experience of salvation that is mediated in and through Jesus. Christology is about Jesus; and the narrow Christological question will deal with the status of Jesus before or in relation to God and human beings. And the premise for this whole reflection is the fact that this Jesus is somehow experienced to be the symbolic mediator of God's salvation. The second

⁹ Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* 369–70.

¹⁰ For a development of a variety of New Testament Christologies, see Dunn, *Christology in the Making* passim, and *Unity and Diversity* 33–59, 203–31. Edward Schillebeeckx also describes four basic strands of Christology in *Jesus: An Experiment In Christology*, trans. Hubert Hoskins (New York: Seabury, 1979) 401–38.

¹¹ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Seabury, 1980) 463.

principle builds on the first: it says that that which Christology must explain about Jesus is contained in the experience that he is the bringer of God's salvation. In other words, Christology today does not attempt to explain other Christologies. The analysis of the New Testament itself and its pluralism of Christologies show that no one Christology can be the norm for Christology generally. Rather, that which is normative for all of them is that on which they are based and which they implicitly attempt to explain: *on the basis of his being experienced as the real embodiment or symbol of God's salvation*, who is this Jesus of Nazareth? The norm for Christology is the experience of salvation itself and not any previously articulated Christology. And this experience is shared by both the Christians represented in the New Testament and Christians today.¹²

From this it follows that all Christology is based upon and presupposes some view of salvation. Once again, one should not necessarily think of this priority as developed theories of salvation, expressed as propositional premises, from which various Christologies are deduced. Rather one should say that implicit in any conception of the person of Jesus lies a conception or at least a tacit view of the meaning of salvation. This explains the standard view that soteriology is the basis of Christology and that the point of Christology is the salvation it points to and mediates.¹³

Since a conception of salvation plays such an important role in any Christology, it will be necessary at least to name without developing the view of salvation that lies behind this essay. Jesus is savior because he symbolically mediates and makes God present to the world in a "visible" and "tangible" way.¹⁴ In this symbolic mediation, Jesus is a

¹² Dunn asks the following question: Given the pluralism of kerygmata in the New Testament, can it function in any way as a norm? His conclusion is that by analysis and abstraction one can determine a substratum of unity, of sameness, within a set of common elements: Jesus is the center; there is a call to faith in God as mediated by Jesus; there is also a promise of grace or salvation from within this relationship (*Unity and Diversity* 30). Thus, although there is more to be said about this issue than can be said here, the norm that the New Testament and doctrine generally provide is existential, and this existentiality is not finally able to be circumscribed by propositional statements of belief.

¹³ This last point is made forcefully by Schubert M. Ogden, "The Point of Christology," *Journal of Religion* 55 (1975) 375-95, and in his book-length study, *The Point of Christology* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982).

¹⁴ The words "tangible" and "visible" are put in quotation marks here to signal that now and henceforth they are to be taken dialectically. Since they refer to the functioning of an historical symbol, they both render visible and do not render visible, render tangible and do not render God tangible. Whenever this dialectical understanding is forgotten, whenever only one side is focused upon, one always ends up with distortion.

revealer of God; salvation consists in a revelation of God. Jesus is also a revealer of what it is to be human; salvation consists in Jesus' being an exemplar of the *humanum*.¹⁵ All of this, however, should not be thought of in extrinsic or external categories, as though Jesus merely spoke about God without rendering God present, or that Jesus is a mere model of how to live without being an empowering agent of the disciple. In both of these descriptions, but in terms of the dialectical and ontological description of a religious symbol, this view of how Jesus saves approaches the idea of "Incarnation." It remains to be seen, however, what the meaning of Incarnation might be.¹⁶

In sum, this short synopsis of a conception of the logic of Christology may serve as a framework for developing a Spirit Christology. In providing the background theory for a Spirit Christology, it will help to respond to innumerable questions before they arise. We move now to a more explicit consideration of the topic at hand.

THEOLOGICAL RESOURCES FOR A SPIRIT CHRISTOLOGY

The discussion now moves to a more direct consideration of the constitutive elements of a Spirit Christology. More pointedly, this section deals with the theological symbol, the Spirit of God, or God as Spirit, that will be used to respond to the narrow Christological question. We begin with a first characterization of the Spirit from the Hebrew Scriptures.

The Biblical Symbol, Spirit

The biblical symbol, the Spirit of God, refers to God. God as Spirit, or the Spirit of God, is simply God, is not other than God, but is materially and numerically identical with God.¹⁷ God as Spirit is God. But God as Spirit refers to God from a certain point of view; it indicates God at work, as active, and as power, energy, or force that accomplishes

¹⁵ To relate this conception to other New Testament and patristic notions of salvation, beside the exhaustive study of Schillebeeckx, *Christ* 81–626, one may consult Stanley B. Marrow, "Principles for Interpreting the New Testament Soteriological Terms," *New Testament Studies* 36 (1990) 268–80, and Michael Slusser, "Primitive Christian Soteriological Themes," *TS* 44 (1983) 555–69.

¹⁶ Lampe remarks that a conception of salvation goes a long way to determine a Christology. In this light he makes a distinction between a salvation that happens all at once in a point of time and a salvation that is essentially a process that is coterminous and continuous with creation and history. The conception of salvation postulated here is consistent with the second of these, which is Lampe's own view; see *God as Spirit* 14–15, 32–33. See also Newman, *A Spirit Christology* 9–10.

¹⁷ Lampe analyses the pre-Christian concept of Spirit in *God as Spirit* 41–60. Newman's account, which is more hermeneutical, is found in *A Spirit Christology* 69–94.

something. Thus God as Spirit refers to God, as it were, outside of the immanent selfhood of God. God as Spirit is God present and at work outside of God's self, in the world of God's creation. God as Spirit is like the wind; one does not see the wind, but one feels its presence; the wind is not tangible, but is a force which one sees in its effects. So too, the metaphorical symbol of God as Spirit expresses the experience of God's power and energy in creation; this power is seen in its effects. The verbal or conceptual symbol points to the way God is present in the world.

What does God as Spirit do? The effects of the Spirit are many. God's Spirit is not so much a distinct agent of creation but the creative power itself of God. God as Spirit is life-giving; where there is life, it comes from God's being actually present and sustaining that life. God as Spirit is responsible for remarkable events in the world. God as Spirit inspires human beings and is thus responsible for the dramatic saving events that are accomplished by God's agents.

It is important to underscore the metaphorical and symbolic character of this term Spirit, and this can be highlighted by comparing it with other symbols of God's presence in the world such as God as Word, or God as Wisdom, or the hands of God. In one respect these are different symbols, for they are different words and different metaphors. One could analyze a number of specific characteristics of each metaphor and by contrast show the different nuances and subtleties communicated by each of these symbols. For example, the Word of God is also responsible for creation: God speaks, commands, or utters God's Word, and it comes to be. God as Wisdom underlies all of creation and especially the right ways of human life. Each of these metaphors contains imaginative virtualities that reveal aspects of God. But in another respect all of these symbols are basically the same insofar as they point to the same generalized experience of God outside of God's self and immanent in the world in presence and active power. The differences of the symbols simply express the many characteristics of this primitive datum. This sameness is not merely arrived at by abstraction and generalization of a common dimension of religious experience, for in many instances in the Scriptures the symbols appear to be interchangeable.¹⁸

¹⁸ Lampe, *God as Spirit* 37, 115–6, 179; Newman, *A Spirit Christology* 79; Dunn, *Christology in the Making* 131, 266. From a biblical standpoint one could say that Logos Christology really is Spirit Christology, for the symbol Wisdom can be identified with God as Spirit (Wis 1:7, 7:25) and Wisdom provides a scriptural context for the meaning of Logos. See Addison G. Wright, "Wisdom," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*

In some instances these metaphorical symbols in the Hebrew Scriptures are personified and this personification became a very significant factor in the development of Christological and trinitarian doctrine. Personification, of course, is a figure of speech. The literal meaning of a personification, i.e. the meaning intended by its author, is not that the hands of God are really God's hands, or that the Word of God is something really distinct from God. When the metaphorical character of personification is not respected, when it becomes hypostatized, i.e. conceived as objective and individual, in the same measure the power of the symbol tends to be undermined. The symbol is made to point to something distinct from God, which then acts as an intermediary between God and the world.¹⁹ God's transcendence and immanence in the world become separated and competitive; God, as holy and transcendent, cannot be mixed up in this world but needs a messenger, an angel, a Word. This goes against the very intention of the symbol as referring in its first instance simply to God. In order to preserve this primal quality of the biblical symbol Spirit, against the tendency of objectifying a personification, I use the phrase God as Spirit.

To sum up: The metaphorical symbol God as Spirit, first, refers simply and directly to God. Second, it points to God as immanent in the world. And in the measure in which God is personal and is present in human beings one may think of that presence of God as personal presence. Third, God as Spirit points to God as active. God's personal presence is also power, activity, force, and energy within the world and within people.

Jesus and the Spirit

Can one say anything about Jesus and his experience of God as Spirit? Despite all the difficulties of getting back to Jesus, James Dunn thinks that one can make some general assertions about Jesus' experience of God in terms of God as Spirit. Dunn tries to show that the

(Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1990) 513 ff.; PHEME PERKINS, "The Gospel according to John" (ibid. 951 ff.). This historical work corresponds with a theoretical understanding of religious language as symbolic and metaphorical. Although this cannot be developed here, it leads to the view that Christologies that explain Jesus by distinguishing and objectifying religious symbols such as Logos, Spirit, Wisdom, and so on, and assigning them different tasks, misinterpret rather fundamentally the character of religious language. Also, from this point of view, an explanation of Jesus' divinity that uses both Spirit and Logos language is redundant.

¹⁹ The concept of an intermediary should not be confused with the idea of a medium developed earlier. The notion of a medium is an anthropological and epistemological category. The notion of an intermediary coming from God to the world is a cosmological category.

source of Jesus' convictions and self-understanding, his authority, and some of his powerful actions all stemmed from an experience of God as Spirit present and at work in his life.²⁰

There are several places where these facets of Jesus' career seem to be reflected in the Synoptic Gospels. Jesus was undoubtedly a healer and an exorcist. Some passages indicate that Jesus was aware that whatever power he exercised was to be attributed to God as Spirit at work through him, and that others recognized this in these terms. "His power to cast out demons was the Spirit of God."²¹ This power of God as Spirit at work in the world is closely associated with the kingdom of God, and Jesus' sense of mission too is understood in terms of anointing and empowerment by the Spirit. The Synoptics also lead one to understand the presence and action of God as Spirit in his life as the ground of Jesus' sonship and to look upon "consciousness of sonship and consciousness of Spirit as two sides of the one coin."²²

In all of this Dunn is attempting to make general statements about Jesus' consciousness. He speaks in terms of Jesus' experience and awareness. On the other side, it is notoriously difficult to get into Jesus' mind; at best we can establish probabilities on the basis of some reckoning of the historicity of the language that is used. Dunn's conclusions then may be taken as broad generalizations about the contours of Jesus' self-understanding. These have, moreover, a certain a priori plausibility. The assumption must be that Jesus had some experience of God. And the term for God being experienced in one's life is God as Spirit. One does not have to judge the intensity of this experience or the kind of empowerment by the Spirit or how it was actually manifested in order to arrive at some solid historical conclusions. What seems to be established is this: that Jesus experienced the power of God as Spirit in his life; that he was aware of this in these terms; that this empowerment was manifested in his actions; that these empowered actions were construed as the ruling of God; and that people recognized this even during his lifetime.

This implicit Christology, however, is no more than that. The point here is not to establish a full-blown Spirit Christology during the life of Jesus in Jesus' self-understanding or others' understanding of him. I will argue later that one must assume that Jesus' experience of the Spirit was analogous to our experience of the Spirit. The point is sim-

²⁰ Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* 41–67. See also Newman, *A Spirit Christology* 103–37.

²¹ Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* 52.

²² *Ibid.* 66. See also Lampe, *God as Spirit* 26–31. Newman is convinced that "Jesus' language of the Reigning of God could be transposed legitimately into language of God's active presence as Spirit" (*A Spirit Christology* 116).

ply to see foundations and establish points of continuity between Jesus and later Christological interpretation of him. Dunn, it seems to me, establishes a basis for later interpretation of Jesus in terms of God as Spirit at work in him.²³

Jesus and the Spirit in the Early Communities

The symbol of the Spirit for God acting immanently in the world and in people remains substantially the same in the New Testament writings as in the Hebrew Scriptures. But in the wake of the events of Jesus' life and death, and within the framework of the experience of Jesus as alive, as with God, and as God's mediator of salvation, the Spirit is experienced in a new way as being poured forth in the abundance of eschatological salvation through Jesus. God as Spirit is thus thoroughly reinterpreted.²⁴ The saving Spirit of God is as it were let loose in a final, climactic, and saving way through the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus and is vividly experienced in the communities of the Jesus movement that became "Christian." The Spirit is experienced; the Spirit is grace; the Spirit is salvation. The effects of the Spirit in the community and the individual lives of its members can be named: they are faith, love, forgiveness, redemption, justification, sanctification, adoption by God, reconciliation, freedom from sin, illumination, liberation, empowerment, and charismatic gifts of service to the community.

How are we to characterize the Spirit Christology that is reflected in the New Testament writings? Once again James Dunn provides a sketch.²⁵ This Spirit Christology must be seen as developing in two stages and thus having two distinct dimensions. The one we have seen: this is Spirit Christology that sees Jesus during his life time as one in whom God as Spirit was at work. The second stage or dimension of Spirit Christology applies to the risen Jesus, the Jesus alive, with God, and called the Christ. In this stage there is at times a kind of identity or conflation of Christ risen and the Spirit. This can be seen from two points of view. On the one hand, one can say that Christ is the Spirit. Sometimes, especially in Paul, the risen Jesus and the Spirit seem to be identified; Christ is spoken of as though he were the Spirit. With the Resurrection Jesus, as it were, functionally becomes God's life-giving Spirit. On the other hand, the Spirit is the risen Jesus. This means that

²³ See Dunn, *Unity and Diversity* 213–17.

²⁴ Lampe, *God as Spirit* 62.

²⁵ Dunn, *Christology in the Making* 129–62. For Lampe's analysis of the concept of God as Spirit in relation to Christ, especially in Paul, Luke, and John, see *God as Spirit* 5–10, 61–94.

Jesus identifies the Spirit, because it was God as Spirit that was at work in Jesus. One does not know the true Spirit of God except through Jesus, that is, through the mediation of Jesus.

In all of this one sees Jesus and the Spirit placed in close conjunction with each other. First, God as Spirit is at work in Jesus' life, and, then, in the case of Jesus risen, the conjunction tends towards identification. God as Spirit was at work in Jesus so that, after his death, when he is experienced as alive and with God, Jesus is still closely mixed up with the very experience of God as Spirit in the primitive community. Jesus identifies and specifies what is of the Spirit. This correlates with the theory that all experience of God must have an historical medium to take on content.

At this point one must ask whether one has enough data here to begin to think of a full-scale Spirit Christology. This question must be placed against the background of the radical pluralism of New Testament Christologies. Whether one investigates the titles of Jesus, or confessions about him, or the views of what he did for our salvation, or the fundamental models within which his identity was construed, or the symbols used to express God present and at work in him, all of these ways of framing the question yield varieties of conceptions many of which are incompatible with others. One has to begin with the recognition that there "is no single coherent understanding or presentation of Christ which meets us after Easter."²⁶ On the basis of this pluralism Dunn criticizes Lampe's Spirit Christology as reductionistic; it fails to take into account the second stage of the Spirit Christology of the New Testament and to see that one comes closest to Jesus by considering all the New Testament Christologies.²⁷

In response to this criticism it may be recalled that the task of systematic theology is not to recite the New Testament but to interpret it, and to do so in terms that are comprehensible in our own world. Moreover, insofar as it is systematic, this task is bound by the principle of internal coherence; it cannot simply repeat contradictory notions. More positively, Spirit Christology seeks to present a consistent interpretation of Jesus in a way analogous to the Logos Christology that has ruled Christian consciousness since the second century. But unlike the Logos Christology which tended to place other Christologies in a shadow, a Spirit Christology can be understood as a basis for considering, interpreting, and appropriating other New Testament Christologies. Spirit Christology should be understood as functioning not in an exclusive but in an inclusive way. God as Spirit working in the life of

²⁶ Dunn, *Unity and Diversity* 216.

²⁷ Dunn, *Christology in the Making* 266-7.

Jesus can form the basis for the multiple interpretations of him by explaining why he was the Wisdom of God who spoke and even represented God's Word.

Beyond the historicity of the experience of the Spirit of God at work in Jesus, another reason, also internal to the New Testament, recommends Spirit Christology. The symbol of the Spirit more forthrightly makes the claim that God, God's very self, acted in and through this Jesus. This stands in contrast to the symbols of God's Word and Wisdom which, insofar as they became personified and then hypostatized, tend to connote someone or something distinct from and less than God that was incarnate in Jesus even though it is called divine or of God. By contrast the symbol of God as Spirit is not a personification of God but refers directly to God, so that it is clear from the beginning that nothing less than God was at work in Jesus.²⁸

Experience of God as Spirit Today

At this point I should develop how the symbol God as Spirit is meaningful today. This is essential for a number of reasons. Without some experience of God as Spirit today the symbol would be meaningless. One needs a paradigm for understanding the operation of God in Jesus, one which bears an analogy with our own experience. In other words, one must try to mediate the meaning of traditional doctrines in terms of common human experience.²⁹ Also one needs some appreciation of the paradoxical character of this experience if it is to illumine the dialectical tension in the doctrine of Chalcedon.

Relative to the first point one finds a remarkable convergence between the language of God as Spirit in the New Testament and the theology of grace of Karl Rahner.³⁰ Grace is God's personal-being-

²⁸ Although this cannot be demonstrated here, in some respects the symbol Logos, insofar as it moved from being a divine personification, i.e. a recognized figure of speech, to an hypostatization, i.e. the identification of a distinct, objective, and individuated mode of being, caused the problem of subordinationism that Nicaea finally attempted to resolve. In other words, the subordinationism that is typical of the Christology from the second to the fourth centuries was dictated by the symbol Logos itself when its metaphorical character was neglected and it became objectified. See Lampe, *God as Spirit* 12–13, 41, 132, 140–44; Dunn, *Christology in the Making* 161.

²⁹ For a brief statement of this principle of analogy underlying hermeneutical theory see Haight, *Dynamics of Theology* 172–3. "Common human experience" does not refer here in the first instance to actual experience in any statistical sense, but to experience that is common because it is structurally indigenous to the human and thus virtual or possible at any given time. Thus one understands sight as indigenously human even though some may be born blind.

³⁰ For a discussion of the correlativity of the notions of "Spirit" and "grace" in Paul, see Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* 201–5. An account of Karl Rahner's theology of grace is found in *Foundation of Christian Faith* 116–33.

present to personal creation outside of God's self. Grace is God's self-communication to human beings, a gift of self which is at the same time a presence to and implicitly being active in the human spirit or freedom that is every person. And this grace or God as Spirit can be experienced and in fact is commonly experienced in this world. But this is to be understood dialectically; because this experience is always mediated, it cannot be experienced directly or clearly differentiated from natural movements of the human spirit. Beginning with the classic statement of Paul,³¹ the whole history of the theology of grace bears witness to the paradoxical tension between God as Spirit and human freedom; notions of cooperative grace make this explicit.³² D. M. Baillie has shown how this has a bearing on the question of the humanity and divinity of Jesus.³³ The paradox is precisely that one is more oneself, more autonomous, more self-possessed, the more one is within the possession of God and buoyed up by God's power.

To summarize, one finds theological resources for a Spirit Christology at every juncture of the Christian tradition: in its pre-history reflected in the Jewish Scriptures; in the New Testament portrait of Jesus and its theology of the saving influence of the risen Jesus; and in the tradition of the theology of the Spirit that has been carried by the theology of grace right up to the present.

CRITICAL POINTS OF INTERPRETATION

We now take up the crux of the argument, the interpretation of Jesus in terms of a Spirit Christology. I shall do this by addressing seven problems that seem to be nodal points of interpretation, or re-interpretation, because there will always be a kind of implied comparison with Logos Christology. It should be recalled that, although this contrast is implicitly operative, and occasionally will be referred to, the goal is not to develop that comparison. Space does not allow the kind of treatment that all of these issues deserve. The point here is simply to draw together the arguments for a Spirit Christology and to

³¹ Gal 2:19–20. See Reinhold Niebuhr's development of this theme and the paradoxes it contains in *The Nature and Destiny of Man 2* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964) 107–26.

³² The more human existence, in the context of an historical consciousness, becomes understood as freedom released in history, the more this religious language of cooperative grace becomes directly relevant to our self-understanding. No one today understands the human in terms of an abstract and complete human nature whose qualities can be definitively enumerated. Human existence is freedom, which is self-actuation and creativity or the power to destroy, and which is exalted in the measure that the cause to which it commits itself is lofty and worthy.

³³ D. M. Baillie, *God Was in Christ* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948) 106–32.

show constructively that such an account is orthodox according to the criteria of theology.

The Divinity of Jesus

The issue of the divinity of Jesus was decided by the Council of Nicaea in 325. The question, then, is whether a Spirit Christology conforms to the doctrine of Nicaea. The Council of Nicaea and its Christological decree were primarily negative: the enemy was the doctrine of Arius, and the canons of the council's creedal decree, which indicate the precise points at issue, are essentially a negation of Arian doctrine. For Arius, that which was incarnate in Jesus, namely, the Logos of God, was, strictly speaking, less than God. In a variety of ways the Nicene creed affirms that the Logos is not less than God. The whole burden of the controversy, as indicated by Athanasius' defense of the creed afterwards, shows that the positive meaning of "being of the same stuff or substance of God" has to be interpreted against this negative background.

It is important, too, for establishing a Spirit Christology, to show why Nicaea does not entail a ratification of the symbol Logos. This appears from the simple fact that both Arius and the Alexandrian party shared this symbol in common. Because they agreed on an incarnation of the Logos, because they shared this subject matter of the debate, which was not Jesus directly but this Logos itself, it was never an issue of the debate at all. The issue was subordinationism, which had been around for a long time, even in the New Testament, and was only now being faced universally in these terms. And behind this issue lay a conception of salvation that was effected in and by Jesus upon which they did not agree. From all this it follows that the precise doctrine of Nicaea is not an affirmation of the Logos itself, but of what is entailed in this Incarnation. Thus the doctrine of Nicaea can be paraphrased in this way: not less than God was present to and operative in Jesus.

Now it seems clear from what we have seen of God as Spirit that this doctrine can in principle be conveyed equally well through this symbol. I say in principle because in fact the symbol Spirit can be construed in such a way that it conveys this doctrine more clearly and forcefully than does Logos. In fact, because of its having become personified, and then hypostatized, Logos was quite extensively understood as being less than God or the Father. As was indicated earlier, the symbol Logos itself caused the problem which Nicaea had to overcome. But in principle there is nothing affirmed by the doctrine of Nicaea that cannot also be affirmed in terms of God as Spirit. God as Spirit is God and thus not less than God.

Can the divinity of Jesus be asserted in the same manner as in the doctrine of Chalcedon with its formula of one person and two natures? It can, but some of the theology of the past attendant upon that formula would be modified. For example, given historical consciousness and the Christological problematic today, we spontaneously accept Jesus as a human person. Therefore, as long as these natures are not conceived in a static and abstract way, one can say that Jesus was one human person with an integral human nature in whom not less than God, and thus a divine nature, is at work.³⁴ By contrast, however, the logical exchanges that were allowed by the communication of the properties of each nature to the one person do not work with a Spirit Christology. These are too abstract, inattentive to the concrete person of history, and, in the end, result in statements that are nondialectical. The communication of properties breaks the tensive and dialectical structure of Christology. Thus, one cannot say undialectically that Jesus is God, nor that he is merely a human being, because the doctrine is that Jesus is both truly human and divine.

When one asserts the divinity of Jesus with a dynamic Spirit Christology, this divinity is asserted, as Lampe says, "adverbially."³⁵ This means that God, and not less than God, is really present to and at work in Jesus, and that this is so in such a manner that Jesus is a manifestation and embodiment of the reality of God. The transition of interpretation moves along a line from a static and abstract ontology of God conceived in terms of a divine nature to a conception of God as personal, dynamic activity who is personally present as Spirit. Newman hesitates to call Jesus divine for fear of undermining his humanity: "It is to be clearly stated that the presence of the Spirit in Jesus did not make Jesus in himself divine."³⁶ This account is followed by an understanding of God's being present to Jesus not ontologically but functionally. While I appreciate and agree with the intent of Newman here, I believe that his language is not sufficiently nuanced. The distinction between God's ontological and functional presence to Jesus does not really work. In contrast, the ontology of symbol presented earlier al-

³⁴ Historical consciousness prevents one from saying that Jesus' being a human being really refers to an integral but abstracted human nature that has as its principle of existence, not a human existence, but a divine person or hypostasis. The suggestion, then, is that one speak of two natures in one human person. Lampe writes that "Spirit christology must be content to acknowledge that the personal subject of the experience of Jesus Christ is a man. The hypostasis is not the Logos incarnate but a human being" ("The Holy Spirit and the Person of Christ" 124). For a discussion of this issue, see Schillebeeckx, *Jesus* 652-69.

³⁵ Lampe, "The Holy Spirit and the Person of Christ" 124.

³⁶ Newman, *A Spirit Christology* 179; see also 180-2.

lows a truly dialectical language that preserves the point of Newman's argument and that of the doctrine of Chalcedon which is truly dialectical. This leads us to the question of the meaning of Incarnation in Spirit Christology.

The Incarnation

Another critical point of interpretation regards the compatibility of the language of God as Spirit with that of Incarnation. Of course this will depend upon what one means by Incarnation. And with the clarity that historical consciousness has conferred relative to Jesus' being a human being in all things substantially like us, many things about the meaning of Incarnation too can be clarified. One is that one cannot really think of a preexistence of Jesus. It was natural and inevitable that an understanding of Jesus as God's salvation bringer drift backwards toward preexistence.³⁷ But one cannot think in terms of the preexistence of *Jesus*; what is preexistent to Jesus is God, the God who became incarnate in Jesus. Doctrine underscores the obvious here, that Jesus is really a creature like us, and a creature cannot preexist creation. One may speculate on how Jesus might have been present to God's eternal intentions and so on, but a strict preexistence of Jesus to his earthly existence is contradictory to his consubstantiality with us, unless we too were preexistent.

Given the starting point of Christology with Jesus, Incarnation has to be interpreted in such a way that it does not undermine the humanity of Jesus. This is, of course, what Logos Christology has often done and what Spirit Christology seeks to undo. The idea of God as Spirit at work in Jesus suggests minimally inspiration and maximally possession. But these extremes can and should be avoided. Jesus was empowered by God's Spirit; the Spirit of God is God present, and thus a presence, a power, a force, an energy, so that Jesus is an embodiment of God as Spirit. But this is not an impersonal power that takes over and controls, but precisely God who works within human freedom, not from outside and dominating nor from inside and taking over, but actualizing freedom to its full capacity. These themes are more dynamic than in the case of an hypostatized Logos who becomes incarnate. The symbol of God as Spirit is such that it more easily conveys an

³⁷ See Dunn, *Unity and Diversity* 228; see also Lampe, *God as Spirit* 114–5. The problem with a notion of the preexistence of Jesus is that it is incompatible with the doctrine of Chalcedon that Jesus is consubstantial with us. See Lampe, "The Holy Spirit and the Person of Christ" 119. The point of the doctrine of preexistence is that salvation in and through Jesus comes from God; this is the point of Nicaea; and this point is sustained and explained by Spirit Christology.

Incarnation that does not negate Jesus' humanity or take it over; the Spirit enhances Jesus' freedom rather than acting in its stead.³⁸

Frequently the presence of God as Spirit to Jesus is contrasted to what is depicted in a Logos Christology as inspiration to real Incarnation. But this need not be the case; there simply is no intrinsic reason for this antithesis. The effect of God's Spirit is surely also inspiration, but it has just been characterized in sturdier terms. There is no reason why God's personal self-communication, presence, and activity in Jesus should not be understood as an ontological Incarnation, so long as Incarnation is not taken to mean that Jesus' humanity is negated.³⁹ Nor need this Incarnation of God as Spirit be understood in an adoptionist sense, even though one might suspect that there is a legitimate sense in which this could be done since it is a conception with New Testament roots. But in contrast to adoptionism, one may think of the presence of God as Spirit to Jesus from the first moment of his existence.⁴⁰ In all of this, Incarnation takes on the meaning given it by the dynamics of the Synoptic Gospels and is not made to conform to a speculative model.

Jesus and Salvation

A Spirit Christology is able to substantiate the notion of Incarnation and at the same time protect Jesus' genuine humanity. A consideration of the notion of salvation reinforces the necessity of keeping the humanity of Jesus to the fore. It should be noted, however, that the argument here is circular because the notion of salvation has not been debated but simply defined as a presupposition of this essay.⁴¹

³⁸ This very basic point is insisted upon by all who propose a Spirit Christology. It is one of the elements that recommends a Spirit Christology most highly. See Newman, *A Spirit Christology* 176–7; Lampe, "The Holy Spirit and the Person of Christ" 117–8; Hook, "A Spirit Christology" 229.

³⁹ It must be recalled that very often in Christian literature this negation of Jesus' being a human being is exactly what is meant by the Incarnation of the Logos. This is especially evident in descriptive or narrative accounts of Jesus. The real actor in history is not a human being but is a divine actor, is God, in a human disguise, because the abstract human nature is no more than a passive instrument of God acting. The divine hypostasis has absorbed the human being Jesus; the divinity of Jesus is not God at work in and through a human being, and a "real presence" in that activity, but a God acting in history in a manner that is conceived undialectically.

⁴⁰ Lampe, "The Holy Spirit and the Person of Christ" 125–6; Hook, "A Spirit Christology" 228.

⁴¹ Newman presents a theological analysis of salvation in terms of God as Spirit and Jesus' role in mediating this salvation in *A Spirit Christology* 139–70. It would not be a distortion of his view, I think, to characterize Jesus' salvific role as revelatory and exemplary through his dynamic embodiment of God as Spirit.

From the various notions of salvation that appear in the New Testament and early Christian theology we have proposed that a revelational and exemplary theory of salvation best corresponds to current historical consciousness and the sense that God's salvation has been operative since the beginning of human history. Speaking historically, salvation did not begin with Jesus. Rather Jesus saves by being the revealer of God and God's salvation which God as Spirit has effected from the beginning, the revelation of what human life should be, and the empowering example of life for disciples. Jesus saves, then, not only by mediating God as Spirit and thus empowering a saved life, but also, from the point of view of the Christian, by being followed. But Jesus can only be followed by human beings insofar as he is also a human being. Imitation of Christ, which constitutes Christian salvation, requires a focus on Jesus' being a human being like us, because human beings could not follow Jesus if Jesus were simply and undialectically divine. Jesus, then, as the new Adam, the firstborn of many, and the pioneer of our salvation, goes before us as a human being. Spirit Christology, in guaranteeing the humanity of Jesus, preserves this dimension of salvation which unites it with Christian spirituality. The salvation revealed in the Resurrection that is eternal life bends back to become effective in this world. Final salvation in Resurrection is the climax of a life that follows the pattern of Jesus.⁴²

Jesus and Other Humans: Qualitative Difference?

Having protected Jesus' humanity with a more dynamic view of Incarnation and salvation, we now run into the other side of this question: Is Jesus qualitatively different from other human beings? An incarnational Logos Christology preserves explicitly the uniqueness of Jesus in this sense of his qualitative difference from all others.⁴³ What is to be said here on the basis of a Spirit Christology?

In a Spirit Christology one can and should retain the uniqueness of Jesus in the very measure that one views him as a normative manifestation of what God is like and the pattern of what human existence

⁴² See Newman, *A Spirit Christology* 179.

⁴³ See Lampe, "The Holy Spirit and the Person of Christ" 120, 126-7. It may be noted in passing that, in the context of the discussion of Jesus in relation to the mediations of transcendence of other religions which follows, it is sometimes said that Jesus is unique in his individuality. But this is not a relevant assertion; all people are individuals and unique in this sense. There must be some "qualitative" uniqueness at stake for the term to have any relevance. The problem is how to conceive of this qualitateness.

should be. But a Spirit Christology may or may not hold a qualitative difference between the union of God with Jesus and the union of God with other human beings, depending upon what one means by a qualitative difference. To common sense, some of the clearest examples of qualitative differences are those between kinds of being, such as the differences between inorganic and organic beings, or between vegetative, animal, and human life. If these are illustrations of qualitative difference, it becomes questionable that such a difference should be affirmed between Jesus and other human beings. For "qualitative" here takes on the meaning of "substantial," or "essential," and such a qualitative difference appears to be directly contradictory to the doctrine of the consubstantiality of Jesus with other human beings. In other words, this meaning of "qualitative" refers to an essential level or kind of being. Thus on this understanding qualitative difference from us and consubstantiality with us are contradictory notions. A qualitative difference between the union of Jesus and of other human beings with God would mean that Jesus was not consubstantial with us, not the new Adam, not the firstborn of many, nor the pioneer of our salvation, nor imitable by us. All of these doctrines indicate that Jesus is one of us and that we are not unlike Jesus in the offer of God's presence to us.⁴⁴

And yet the prevalence of this idea of qualitative difference indicates that there is something here that should be preserved, and it will be with a Spirit Christology. Two reflections will make this clear. The first begins with the ambiguity of the notion of a qualitative in relation to a quantitative difference. In our current age of discovery through empirical and quantitative methods it is becoming more and more difficult to distinguish between a qualitative and a quantitative difference between things, even in terms of their level of being. Is it not possible that qualitative differences may be understood quantitatively? and that in some cases differences of quantity or degree or intensity might make up a qualitative difference? in short, that differences of degree may constitute a qualitative difference?⁴⁵ If one says that the Spirit of God, which is God, is present to Jesus in a complete way, or in a fully effective way, in a most intense manner, need one say more? In short one may understand that God as Spirit was present to

⁴⁴ Newman, *A Spirit Christology* 182–3.

⁴⁵ In this usage, which may be associated with the scholastic notion of quality, the term qualitative stands over against the idea of "substantial," "essential," and "of nature." It indicates a difference of quality but not of substance. But it does not in any way exclude the possibility that quality may be constituted by quantity.

Jesus in a superlative degree and this is sufficient to convey all that was intended by a qualitative difference.⁴⁶

Secondly, one may also understand the uniqueness of Jesus in terms of his vocation, mission, and appointment by God to be the firstborn of many. These terms are congruous with the New Testament; they correspond with the anointing with God as Spirit and the mission of the kingdom of God to which Jesus was loyal. These notions, then, are not merely extrinsic; they determine the inner identity of Jesus. And they, together with the degree to which God animated Jesus' life, are both sufficient to define his uniqueness and necessary to explain it.⁴⁷

Jesus and Other Salvation Bringers

The thesis here is that Spirit Christology facilitates the discussion of the relation of Jesus Christ to other religions and mediators of salvation from the Christian standpoint. The reason for this is that it can account for present-day Christian attitudes towards other religions and towards Jesus Christ in a fully orthodox way.

It is important to bear in mind that that which has to be accounted for in Christology is the experience of Christians relative to Jesus, what is being called here the "attitude" or the existential commitment of Christians. This is what the New Testament and the whole history of Christology express; Christologies are formulations that express, or explain, or identify who Jesus is on the basis of the experience of faith that Jesus bears God's salvation. This very same experience is today modified by an historical consciousness and a conception of God mediated by Jesus that allow, in principle, that as God has acted in our behalf through Jesus, so too God can act towards non-Christians through other media. In this situation, what has to be accounted for in relation to Jesus is twofold: first, one must show that not less than God acts for salvation in Jesus, that this salvation is universally relevant for the whole of humankind, and that in this sense Jesus is normatively true for the whole human race. That is to say, if one maintains that Jesus is normative for one's own salvation as a human being, one

⁴⁶ Hook, "A Spirit Christology" 229. This presence of the Spirit to Jesus, Hook adds, is the equivalent of Incarnation. Lampe too explains the "qualitative" difference of the union of God with Jesus from that with others in terms of degree. He describes Jesus' response to God as total; and the assumption must be that that is possible by God's total initiative toward Jesus. This "perfect" union between God and Jesus does not in any way undermine the limitations of Jesus' being a human being, with the exception of sinlessness, which is symbolic for the totality of Jesus' response to God. Lampe, *God as Spirit* 23-24, 111-2. It should be noted that this conception entails speculative reconstruction; although it is stated in historical terms, it is not historically given.

⁴⁷ Newman, *A Spirit Christology* 185-6, 205.

must, by the principle of noncontradiction, assert that Jesus is universally relevant and normative for all human beings.⁴⁸ But, second, the explanation of the status of Jesus must be such that it not be exclusive. It must also allow for the possibility of other savior figures of equal status and who may also reveal something of God that is normative. Indeed, if God is as Jesus reveals God to be, i.e. universal savior, one must expect that there will be other historical mediations of this salvation.

I shall not at this point develop the difficulties that beset Logos Christology in accommodating this present-day sensibility. In fact, most of the literature that deals with Christology in the context of interreligious dialogue does not address the formal Christological problem at all, or, when it does, it does so in passing. This discussion often remains on the level of a description of Christian attitudes toward Jesus: Should Jesus be considered absolute savior? a constitutive and normative savior figure? a universally normative but nonconstitutive savior? one savior figure among others?⁴⁹ Despite the effort of some patristic authors to view salvation through the Logos as more universal than its mediation through Jesus, Logos Christology developed into an exclusivist pattern: *nulla salus extra Christum*. What Schineller calls constitutive Christologies and others call inclusivist Christologies are Logos Christologies that see a universally available salvation constituted and caused by Jesus Christ.⁵⁰ Another pattern of Logos thinking, one that seeks to preserve the value of other savior figures, speaks in terms of multiple Incarnations of Logos.⁵¹ These efforts appear highly speculative, gratuitous, and redundant within the context of historical consciousness. Quite simply, they do not appear credible.

⁴⁸ One would also have to define as closely as possible that in which the normativity of Jesus lies. It is certainly not sufficient merely to assert that Christ is normative.

⁴⁹ This typology of positions is taken from J. Peter Schineller, "Christ and Church: A Spectrum of Views," *TS* 37 (1976) 545–66. This typology is superior to one that is quite prevalent and appears, e.g., in the writings of Paul Knitter, John Hick, Alan Race, and Gavin D'Costa. This latter distinguishes between the exclusivist, the inclusivist, and the pluralist positions. What this typology fails to acknowledge is that Schineller's nonconstitutive but normative position falls between the second and third categories of this latter scheme, and that this position of Schineller's may be combined with elements of the pluralist position to satisfy the requirements of both sides of Christian sensibility today.

⁵⁰ Karl Rahner's essay, "The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation," *Theological Investigations* 12 (New York: Seabury, 1974) 161–78, is a good example of a constitutive but inclusive Christology.

⁵¹ See Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany*, rev. and enlarged ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1981).

With a Spirit Christology one can identify the status of Jesus in such a way that the experience of God's salvation that is mediated through him is explained. Not less than God is at work in Jesus in such a way that God's universal love is mediated, made present, real, and public in the world and explicit in the life of any person who responds to God in Jesus through faith. Spirit Christology differs from Logos Christology only insofar as it negates the negation that often accompanies it, i.e. the exclusion of the possibility that God might also be at work in other mediations of salvation. The point here is not to adjudicate other religions, or to determine the measure in which God as Spirit is manifest in them, but simply to acknowledge the possibility. In an historicist framework and on the basis of a Spirit Christology one also confesses that Jesus is an ontological mediation of God that is decisive, definitive, final, and even absolute, provided that these determinations are not construed exclusively, as negating the possibility that God as Spirit is at work in other religions. There are no positive grounds in principle for this negation. On the contrary, Jesus, by embodying God and so revealing God as boundless love, provides the most solid ground for finding God as Spirit at work in all religions, despite the human distortions and sin that equally affect all religions.

What then is the basis for and the meaning of a real but not exclusive assertion of the decisiveness, definitiveness, finality, and even absoluteness of Jesus as God's medium of salvation? The meaning and logic of these predicates is found in the existential relationship of the believer to Jesus. God's salvation is mediated to the Christian through Jesus. But this means, by definition, that Jesus is the norm of what the Christian experiences of God.⁵² The very logic of this experience, i.e. from within itself, is simple, decisive, definitive, final, and absolute. But there simply is no reason on this basis to make these characteristics into competitive statements about other mediations of God except at the point where they contradict each other. If there is to be a resolution of such contradictions, which are frequently more apparent than real, it will come through dialogue, even though the partners in dialogue will at the outset undoubtedly postulate the outcome of the dialogue differently.

⁵² This seems to be the position of Lampe in "The Holy Spirit and the Person of Christ" 127-8 and in *God as Spirit* 112-4, 180-2. For his part, Newman does not favor the predicates "absolute" or "final" applied to Jesus because history is open. Yet he is willing to retrieve these categories when they are placed squarely in the context of historicity and their meaning is conflated with the idea of truth (*A Spirit Christology* 205-9). It may be that the point of all of these predicates may be found in the conviction that what Jesus represents and embodies is true. "The claims for Jesus' absolute deity are a pre-critical way of expressing personal commitment to him" (ibid. 209).

Worship of Jesus

The question of Christian worship of Jesus is crucial to Christology. Historically, Christians worshipped Jesus, thus revealing their attitude toward Jesus as toward a divine figure, and this formed the life situation out of which the conciliar doctrines about Jesus emerged. Moreover, Christology today must account for how Christians continually relate to Jesus in prayer and worship. The question, then, is this: With the new emphasis on the humanity of Jesus, is a Spirit Christology, which protects this dimension, able to account for worship of and prayer to Jesus? The question is similar to the issue of Jesus' divinity, but it is posed here in existential terms.

The first response to this problem can be put in terms of principle: one cannot, or at least should not, relate to Jesus undialectically. One cannot relate to any religious symbol undialectically because the tension described earlier defines the nature of a religious symbol as such. There is always a temptation or an implied effort to break this dialectical tension in Christology, but in every case, in the measure one does so, in like measure is the figure of Jesus as the Christ distorted. When this principle is applied to the question of prayer to and worship of Jesus, it results in the following tensive formula: One does not worship or pray to Jesus insofar as Jesus is a human being and creature; rather one worships and prays to God in and through Jesus. This language of prayer through Jesus, of going to the Father through the Son, has a long liturgical tradition. This reflects the dominant pattern of the New Testament. Although Lampe finds some isolated instances of prayer to Jesus in the New Testament, the predominant idea is that worship is through Jesus because Jesus is the medium of our worship of God. Spirit Christology underlines this.⁵³

This statement of principle, however, is itself probably inadequate without reference to what it represents, namely, an existential relationship. And this relationship unfolds as a dynamic human process of being related, a praxis of praying, an action of defining oneself in relationship to God in and through Jesus. But a phenomenology of this existentially-being-related would bear out its dialectical quality. For example, it would be difficult to distinguish a description of Christian worship in the terms of the doctrine of Chalcedon from a description in terms of a Spirit Christology. According to Chalcedon Jesus has two natures which are distinct, unmixed, and unconfused; this is a dialectical conception. In this framework one would not say that one worshipped the humanity of Jesus or Jesus insofar as he was human, but

⁵³ Lampe, *God as Spirit* 162-6.

rather insofar as he was divine, insofar as he bore or embodied Logos.⁵⁴ Spirit Christology allows an analogously descriptive account. Jesus is the real symbol who bodies forth God as Spirit at work within him; Jesus as symbol participates in God as Spirit, mediates God, and thus makes God present. Thus the Christian act of worship directed to the human being Jesus is one that moves through Jesus to its mediated object which is God. But this God is not simply up there, out there, and now separated from Jesus. This God is revealed and encountered by the Christian precisely in and through Jesus. Christian prayer is theocentric, but addressed to a God who is known by the Christian through a focus upon Jesus. Thus this view of prayer and worship corresponds to what was said about salvation and Christian spirituality as discipleship which is empowered by God as Spirit who is mediated by Jesus.

The Trinity

At first sight, the doctrine that seems to be most influenced by a thoroughgoing Spirit Christology is that of the Trinity. If one sees the functional equivalency of the symbol of the Spirit and that of Logos or Wisdom, and substitutes the one for the others, has one not cut the ground away from the development of the doctrine of the immanent Trinity? Although there needs to be a good deal more work on this issue, and a great deal of historical and theological resources need to be exploited further, still something can be said here in principle and without extended development to show the compatibility of Spirit Christology with the trinitarian structure of Christian self-understanding and Christianity itself.⁵⁵

First of all, that which is essential to Christian existence and thought structure is what has been called the economic Trinity. For the structure of Christianity is the mediation of God to human beings in history through Jesus and the continued experience of God as Spirit in the world which is also identified by Jesus. This is the essential structure of the Christian movement, and it is enshrined in the New Testament. Trinitarian language, understood as language that reflects this foundational structure of mediation of God as Spirit through Jesus, is intrinsic to Christianity; it defines Christian experience.

Given this basis, it is important to take note of the relation of what is called the doctrine of the immanent Trinity to the language of the economy of how God deals with us as found in the New Testament. By

⁵⁴ "It is, in fact, impossible to distinguish prayer to Christ from prayer to God conceptualized in terms of God's self-disclosure in Christ" (Lampe, *God as Spirit* 166).

⁵⁵ See Newman, *A Spirit Christology* 187–203, for his reflections on the doctrine of the Trinity in the light of a Spirit Christology. The discussion here is not based on Newman.

the doctrine of the immanent Trinity I mean the formula that emerged at the end of the fourth century to the effect that God is one in nature, but God is also Trinity, for there are three distinct persons in this one Godhead. What is the impact of historical consciousness on the relation between these two dimensions of trinitarian thought? First of all, the economic Trinity is distinct from the doctrine of the immanent Trinity. Despite Rahner's axiom about the identity of the economic and immanent Trinity,⁵⁶ which is useful, it must also be insisted that the two doctrines are epistemologically distinct, since the latter could only be known through the former, and logically distinct, for the former does not necessarily entail the latter.⁵⁷ Second, the doctrine of the immanent Trinity does not appear in the New Testament, not even implicitly, because it is not necessarily entailed there, even though in fact the doctrine developed by reflection on the New Testament. Third, this development occurred on the basis of premises that are no longer so clearly available to us, such as, for example, how the text of Scripture mediates revelation. Fourth, the point of this development was to reflect the doctrine of the economic Trinity and guarantee it, as it were, with ontological undergirding. But, fifth, the doctrine of the immanent Trinity has no status or standing independently of the experience of the economic Trinity, which corresponds to the dynamics of Christian experience itself.

In the light of this attempt to describe the logic of the doctrine of the Trinity, which cannot be developed further here, we can at least see how a Spirit Christology relates to it. First in importance and foundationally, a Spirit Christology guarantees an economic Trinity because it reflects exactly the New Testament language of the economy of God's saving action through Jesus. Therefore, secondly, it expresses in clear fashion that which is the very point of the doctrine of the immanent Trinity, and that is to reinforce ontologically that no less than God really acted for our salvation in Jesus, and that what is experienced in the Christian community today as Spirit is no less than God. But, thirdly, the speculative language of how three persons exist and are related within the life of the Godhead is not directly reflected in Spirit Christology. This has been a source for continued speculation through the course of Christian history. More speculation will be needed to

⁵⁶ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970) 21–24.

⁵⁷ See R. Haight, "The Point of Trinitarian Theology," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 4 (1988) 191–204, esp. 201–2 and n. 12. One can add the following logical argument: everything that can be asserted of God on the basis of there being three distinct persons in the Godhead can also be asserted of God if these persons were not distinct, with the exception of threeness itself.

design an appropriate language about a Trinity within the absolute mystery of God's inner life.

CONCLUSION

I conclude by summarizing the reasons why Spirit Christology is a viable one.

Spirit Christology satisfies the requirements of the discipline. It thematizes Christian experience of Jesus and "explains" the meaning of Jesus' being the bringer of God's salvation. It is faithful to the dominant New Testament language with respect to the narrow Christological problem. It is also faithful to the great Christological councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon, affirming with the first that not less than God was in Jesus, and with the second that Jesus is consubstantial with us. It preserves the strictly dialectical relationship between Jesus' being human and divine. This Spirit Christology is intelligible and coherent with other human experience today—with historical consciousness generally, with the stress on Jesus being a human being, with the experience of the analogy between Jesus and other media or institutions which mediate God's salvation in other religions—while at the same time preserving incarnation, and Jesus' divinity, mediation of God's salvation, universal relevance, and universal normativity. Spirit Christology meets the criterion of empowerment because it provides the grounding for discipleship in establishing the consubstantiality and continuity between Jesus and us, between Jesus' and our being empowered by God as Spirit. In a Spirit Christology it becomes plain that the salvation mediated by Jesus is closely bound up with the way one lives in the Spirit; this salvation thus has a bearing on our lives in history. There is thus a strict coherence between Christology, the life of grace, ecclesiology, and Christian spirituality.

The case for Spirit Christology is made against the background of the pluralism of Christologies found in the New Testament. This implies that one Christology cannot rule to the exclusion of others. But at the same time systematic theology must adopt a center of gravity and strive for consistency and coherence. This is possible in this case because Spirit Christology is open enough to include themes from other Christologies that are deemed essential to understanding Christ. The thesis here is that a thoroughgoing Spirit Christology is a viable option today. Although this has been a constructive statement, it is clear that it stands over against the background of the Logos Christology that is in place. Although this comparative argument has not been drawn out to any degree, it has been implicit throughout. This essay therefore ends with the hypothesis that a Spirit Christology is more relatively adequate to Christological data in our time than is a Logos Christol-

ogy. This does not mean that a Logos Christology is impossible today, as long it remains conscious of the metaphorical and symbolic character of Logos language. Yet even within the context of religious symbolism, the language of Logos is strained by certain data that Spirit Christology can more adequately accommodate. This is seen most pointedly at two precise foci: the Chalcedonian doctrine of Jesus' consubstantiality with us, and the Nicene doctrine of the reality of no less than very God at work within him for our salvation. But this is the very core of the narrow Christological issue.

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