

## FROM THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST TO THE JESUS OF HISTORY: A PARADIGM SHIFT IN CATHOLIC CHRISTOLOGY

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**D**URING THE FIRST two-thirds of the twentieth century, a period in which Catholic dogmatic Christology typically restricted its attention to the content and implications of the doctrine of the early ecumenical councils,<sup>1</sup> many prominent Catholic theologians urged increased emphasis on the humanity of Christ as a means of overcoming excessive stress on Christ's divinity and of presenting Christ as a model for Christian life. Thus Karl Adam warned in 1939 of "the danger of divinizing Jesus' human nature,"<sup>2</sup> and sought in several widely read books to provide a fuller portrayal of Christ's human traits, with copious citation of the Gospels and considerable reliance on psychological considerations.<sup>3</sup> In a similar vein, Romano Guardini, while recognizing that we cannot penetrate the heart of Christ's personality, endeavored to portray concretely the reality of his earthly existence through psychological analysis of his human characteristics.<sup>4</sup>

Other theologians accented similar themes from different perspectives. Emile Mersch, seeking Christological underpinning for his effort to develop a comprehensive theology of the Mystical Body, concentrated speculatively on the perfection of Christ's human nature by the Incarnation.<sup>5</sup> Bernhard Welte offered stimulating reflections on Chalcedon's teaching that Christ is *homoousios* with us as well as with the Father.<sup>6</sup> Finally, Karl Rahner's influential programmatic essay on

<sup>1</sup> For a typical example, see Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, 6th ed. (Cork: Mercier, 1963) 125–74. Other matters of Christological moment were treated in fundamental theology and in soteriology.

<sup>2</sup> "Jesu menschliches Wesen im Licht der urchristlichen Verkündigung," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 6 (1939) 111–20, at 111.

<sup>3</sup> *Christ Our Brother* (New York: Macmillan, 1931); *The Son of God* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1934); *The Christ of Faith* (New York: Pantheon, 1957).

<sup>4</sup> *The Humanity of Christ: Contributions to a Psychology of Jesus* (New York: Pantheon, 1964; German original 1958). For Guardini's recognition of the limitations inherent in this project, see xiii–xv.

<sup>5</sup> *The Theology of the Mystical Body* (St. Louis: Herder, 1951) 197–246. The French original was published posthumously in 1944 (2d ed. 1946).

<sup>6</sup> "Homoousios hemin: Gedanken zum Verständnis und zur theologischen Problematik

"Current Problems in Christology,"<sup>7</sup> like Welte's initially published in commemoration of the 1500th anniversary of the Council of Chalcedon, lamented the hidden monophysitism of much Catholic theology and piety—orthodox in its verbal affirmation of the Chalcedonian dogma of Christ's two complete natures, yet nonetheless inclined to abbreviate the full reality of his humanity—and recommended both intensified theological reflection on the relationship of Christ's humanity to his divinity and renewed dogmatic attention to the mysteries of Christ's life. While these authors varied widely in their specific approaches to Christology, they were motivated by many common concerns and shared the convictions that theologians had unduly neglected the humanity of Christ in recent centuries and that Christian life in general and Catholic theology in particular would be enriched by enhanced attention to this important topic.

An initial fruit of the proposed accentuation of the integrity of Christ's humanity may be found in the extensive debate among dogmatic theologians in the 1950s and early 1960s on the scope of Christ's human knowledge—a discussion which also provides a clear illustration of the framework within which Christological questions were posed and addressed within Catholic dogmatics at that time.<sup>8</sup> The chief arguments raised by such authors as Engelbert Gutwenger and Karl Rahner in favor of recognizing limitations in Christ's human knowledge were speculative in nature, appealing to the finitude of his human intellect, though the compatibility of their position with modern developments in exegesis of the Gospels was also noted as a point in their favor.<sup>9</sup> As this example suggests, even the more innovative Catholic dogmatic theology of this period not only affirmed the dogma of Chalcedon but also took the terminology of that council—one person,

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der Kategorien von Chalkedon," in *Das Konzil von Chalkedon: Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Aloys Grillmeier and Heinrich Bacht, 3 vols. (Würzburg: Echter, 1951–54) 3.51–80; reprinted under the title "Zur Christologie von Chalkedon," in B. Welte, *Auf der Spur des Ewigen* (Freiburg: Herder, 1965) 429–58.

<sup>7</sup> *Theological Investigations* 1 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1961) 149–200.

<sup>8</sup> For influential treatments of the topic from an exegetical perspective in this period, see Raymond E. Brown, "How Much Did Jesus Know?" in *Jesus God and Man* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1967) 39–102; and Anton Vögtle, "Exegetische Erwägungen über das Wissen und Selbstbewußtsein Jesu," in *Gott in Welt: Festgabe für Karl Rahner*, ed. J. B. Metz et al., 2 vols. (Freiburg: Herder, 1964) 1.608–67.

<sup>9</sup> See E. Gutwenger, *Bewußtsein und Wissen Christi* (Innsbruck: Felizian Rauch, 1960), and K. Rahner, "Dogmatic Reflections on the Knowledge and Self-Consciousness of Christ," *Theological Investigations* 5 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966) 193–215; Rahner's essay was originally published in 1962. On these and other authors from this period, see Helmut Riedlinger, *Geschichtlichkeit und Vollendung des Wissens Christi* (Freiburg: Herder, 1966) 139–54.

two natures—as the reference point for its own further reflections on Christological topics. It was not without reason that Alois Grillmeier's thorough survey of contemporary Catholic Christology, originally published in 1957, was largely concerned with speculative questions about the hypostatic union.<sup>10</sup>

Apart from texts in the field of fundamental theology, which studied Jesus in relation to the foundation of faith,<sup>11</sup> such orientation on Chalcedon prevailed in Catholic Christology until about 1970. It is still evident in the venturesome Dutch Christology of the mid to late 1960s, which accented the humanity of Christ far more strongly than did its predecessors; even Piet Schoonenberg's *The Christ*, a controversial work originally published in 1969, reflects the same pattern, for though Schoonenberg reversed traditional positions on a number of issues, he remained committed to the standard set of questions.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the international multi-volume dogmatics textbook *Mysterium Salutis*, broadly representative of European Catholic theology in the decade following the Second Vatican Council, provided no thematic treatment of the historical Jesus despite incorporating an extended discussion of biblical themes into its presentation of Christology.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> "The Figure of Christ in Catholic Theology Today," in *Theology Today* 1: *Renewal in Dogma*, ed. J. Feiner, J. Trütsch and F. Böckle (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1965) 66–108. The same is true of Rudolf Haubst, "Probleme der jüngsten Christologie," *Theologische Revue* 52 (1956) 146–62.

<sup>11</sup> For a thorough study of the treatment of Jesus in this context, see Franz-Josef Niemann, *Jesus als Glaubensgrund in der Fundamentaltheologie der Neuzeit: Zur Genealogie eines Traktats*, Innsbrucker theologische Studien 12 (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1983).

<sup>12</sup> P. Schoonenberg, *The Christ* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971). For critique of Schoonenberg's thought, see the Declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Mysterium Filii Dei" (*Catholic Mind* 70 [1972] 61–64); Bernard Lonergan, "The Origins of Christian Realism," *A Second Collection* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974) 239–61; and Alfred Kaiser, *Möglichkeit und Grenzen einer Christologie "von unten": Der christologische Neuansatz "von unten" bei Piet Schoonenberg und dessen Weiterführung mit Blick auf Nikolaus von Kues*, Buchreihe der Cusanus-Gesellschaft 11 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1992). The thought of other Dutch authors in this period, chief among whom is Ansfridus Hulsbosch, is well presented and analyzed by Robert North, "Soul-Body Unity and God-Man Unity," *Theological Studies* 30 (1969) 27–60, and "Recent Christology and Theological Method," *Continuum* 7 (1969–70) 63–77. For later development of Schoonenberg's position, see his *Auf Gott hin denken*, ed. W. Zauner (Freiburg: Herder, 1986) 203–67, and "Der Christus 'von oben' und die Christologie 'von unten,'" *Trierer theologische Zeitschrift* 99 (1990) 95–124.

<sup>13</sup> See *Mysterium Salutis: Grundriss heilsgeschichtlicher Dogmatik*, ed. Johannes Feiner and Magnus Löhrer, 5 vols. (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1965–76). Rudolf Schnackenburg includes a few pages on the historical Jesus in his chapter on "Christologie des Neuen Testaments" (*Mysterium Salutis* III/1 [1970] 227–388, at 233–37); and Christian Schütz considers Jesus' baptism, temptation, transfiguration and miracles under the title "Die Mysterien des öffentlichen Lebens und Wirkens Jesu" (*Mysterium Salutis* III/2

During the past two decades the situation has changed dramatically. Such works by Catholic systematic theologians as Walter Kasper's *Jesus the Christ*, Hans Küng's *On Being a Christian*, Gerald O'Collins' *Interpreting Jesus*, Karl Rahner's *Foundations of Christian Faith*, Edward Schillebeeckx's *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, Raymund Schwager's *Jesus im Heildrama*, and Brian McDermott's *Word Become Flesh* greatly differ from one another in specific purpose, theological conception, and extent of detailed engagement with the relevant exegetical literature; nonetheless, in each case the earlier emphasis on Christ's human nature (in the conceptual pairing divinity/humanity) has yielded to a new focus on the historical Jesus (in the conceptual pairing historical Jesus/Christ of faith).<sup>14</sup> A similar emphasis is also notable in some approaches to liberation theology<sup>15</sup> and in the recent *Handbuch der Dogmatik*,<sup>16</sup> in many respects a contemporary counterpart to *Mysterium Salutis*. The doctrine of Chalcedon is still affirmed, at least by most authors, but the Chalcedonian terminology no longer establishes the vocabulary and context for Christological investigation and reflection; interest in the historical Jesus is not limited to exegetical circles, but has found a prominent place in systematic theology as well.

This shift in focus within systematic theology from the humanity of

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[1969] 58–131). The major portion of Schoonenberg's *The Christ* was prepared for inclusion in *Mysterium Salutis*, but was not published in that form.

<sup>14</sup> See W. Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (New York: Paulist, 1976) 65–123; H. Küng, *On Being a Christian* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976) 175–342; K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury, 1978) 228–64; E. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (New York: Seabury, 1979) 115–271; G. O'Collins, *Interpreting Jesus* (New York: Paulist, 1983) 35–73; R. Schwager, *Jesus im Heildrama: Entwurf einer biblischen Erlösungslehre*, Innsbrucker theologische Studien 29 (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1990); B. O. McDermott, *Word Become Flesh: Dimensions of Christology* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1993). That in *Foundations* Rahner offers an extended section on the life and death of the pre-Easter Jesus instead of treating the "mysteries of the life of Christ," as he once proposed ("Current Problems in Christology" 190–92), is especially indicative of the shift in focus. In keeping with their purposes, many of these works also include treatments of Christ's humanity, but this topic occupies a less significant place in their Christological argumentation.

<sup>15</sup> See Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1976) and *Jesus in Latin America* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987); and Juan Luis Segundo, *The Historical Jesus of the Synoptics* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985). Elsewhere, however, Segundo observes: "We say that we have faith in Jesus, when in fact we do not possess any direct trace of his life or his words. What we are really saying is that we have faith in those who were acquainted with him personally, interpreted him, and gave us their version of him" (*The Liberation of Theology* [Maryknoll: Orbis, 1976] 170).

<sup>16</sup> See Hans Kessler, "Christologie," in *Handbuch der Dogmatik*, ed. Theodor Schneider, 2 vols. (Düsseldorf, Patmos, 1992) 1.261–83.

Christ to the Jesus of history,<sup>17</sup> while generally acknowledged in recent literature, is construed in divergent ways. Some theologians, especially those writing in a more popular vein, seem to consider the transition a mere change in language without alteration of content. This presumption appears to underlie both Daniel Helminiak's apparent identification of the historical Jesus with the human Jesus in his statement that "a main concern of contemporary christology is to root Christian claims about Jesus in the historical Jesus, in the human Jesus,"<sup>18</sup> and Donald Goergan's equation of focus on the historical Jesus with concentration on the humanity of Christ.<sup>19</sup> If taken in this sense, the shift in Christological vocabulary would express no more than a preference for terminology forged in the history of modern biblical research over language redolent of patristic and scholastic theology.

In fact, however, the change in reference from the humanity of Christ to the Jesus of history reflects more than a rhetorical twist accompanying a relocation of emphasis; far from being a modification within a stable theoretical model, it is a paradigm shift necessitated by engagement with a new set of issues and distinctions.<sup>20</sup> The scope of the transition is visible in the impossibility of pairing "divinity of Christ" with "Jesus of history" or "humanity of Christ" with "Christ of faith." In Chalcedonian terms, the Jesus of history is "truly God and truly man" (DS 301); "Jesus of history" is not equivalent to "humanity of Christ," however true it remains that his human nature is more susceptible to historical investigation than is his divinity. Similarly, "Christ of faith" is not synonymous with "divinity of Christ," for in

<sup>17</sup> For discussion of the varying terms employed in the literature, see John P. Meier, "The Historical Jesus: Rethinking Some Concepts," *Theological Studies* 51 (1990) 3–24. Meier distinguishes between the real Jesus (the total reality of Jesus' life) and the historical Jesus ("the Jesus whom we can 'recover' and examine by using the scientific tools of modern historical research" [18]); he finds the term "the earthly Jesus" so ambiguous that it is better avoided as a major category or at least explained clearly whenever used (19–20). As Meier notes, however, his terminological distinctions are not employed by all authors.

<sup>18</sup> *The Same Jesus: A Contemporary Christology* (Chicago: Loyola University, 1986) 42. Equation of the historical Jesus with the human Jesus appears to be at the root of the judgment that Christology from below "cannot adequately account for the divinity of Jesus as traditionally affirmed by Christianity" (45).

<sup>19</sup> *The Mission and Ministry of Jesus* (Wilmington: Glazier, 1986) 36–37. This presumption is also reflected in the subsequent pursuit of Christological issues by both Goergan and Helminiak.

<sup>20</sup> For an analysis of the distinction, see Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970). I use the terminology to express the nature of the change, with no intention of adopting the whole of Kuhn's thought.

orthodox understanding the risen Lord does not shed his human nature in his exaltation.

In order to illustrate this terminological point, it may be helpful to consider some language employed by Pope John Paul II in *Redemptoris missio*, his encyclical on the Church's missionary task. In the course of an introductory chapter on "Jesus Christ, the Only Savior," the pope insists that "it is not permissible to separate Jesus from the Christ or to speak of the 'historical Jesus' as if he were someone other than the 'Christ of faith.'" <sup>21</sup> The impossibility of substituting references to the humanity and divinity of Christ for the references in this passage to the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith demonstrates the conceptual difference between Chalcedonian terminology and the Christological vocabulary used here by the pope: an orthodox Christian not only can but must speak of a humanity of Christ which (not "who") differs from his divinity. The point which the pope makes in this sentence, while completely compatible with the teaching of Chalcedon, addresses issues which were not at stake in the fifth-century controversies and which cannot be articulated in the terminology of that council. As this example shows, simply to observe that "whereas an older theology emphasizes Jesus' divinity, contemporary theology emphasizes his humanity" <sup>22</sup> is to understate, if not misconstrue, the sea change that has occurred in recent Christological thought.

Despite the significance of the reorientation of theological attention on the historical Jesus, many important theological dimensions of issues relative to the Jesus of history remain disputed and obscure. In an effort to clarify the theological implications of the modern refocussing of theological interest on the historical Jesus, this article will examine certain aspects of the current discussion and weigh their significance for systematic theology. More specifically, it will (1) note two major factors which have contributed to the shift in orientation from the humanity of Christ to the Jesus of history in modern Roman Catholic Christology and influenced the form which the new focus has assumed, (2) identify some questions about the historical Jesus which are of primary concern to systematic theology, and (3) conclude by suggesting two further theological issues, each related in part to exegetical

<sup>21</sup> *Redemptoris missio* no. 6: "non separare licet Iesum a Christo nec de 'Iesu historico' loqui, ac si alius esset ac 'Christus fidei'" (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 83 [1991] 255). The purpose of the pope's statement cannot be to reject all distinction between the pre-Easter and post-Easter Jesus, for that would be tantamount to denial of the crucifixion and resurrection; the encyclical seeks rather to defend the age-old Christian confession that "the Christ is none other than Jesus of Nazareth" (*ibid.*).

<sup>22</sup> Daniel A. Helminiak, "Jesus' Humanity and Human Salvation," *Worship* 63 (1989) 429.

considerations, which are highly significant for the future development of Christology. In view of the complexity of the issues, each section will inevitably be selective; in keeping with the article's primary concern, each section will concentrate on the implications of orientation on the historical Jesus for Roman Catholic systematic theology.<sup>23</sup> No suggestion is intended that research on the historical Jesus is or should be limited to a theological agenda, or that reflection on the historical Jesus exhausts the task of contemporary Christology.

#### TWO MAJOR FACTORS

Many factors have caused the shift in theologians' interest from the integrity of Christ's humanity to the Jesus of history. A general influence is the enhanced desire on the part of systematic theologians, especially in the wake of the Second Vatican Council,<sup>24</sup> to devote increased attention to biblical matters. But in principle there are many ways to incorporate biblical research into systematic theology, and there are specific reasons why many theologians choose to accent historical questions regarding Jesus instead of concentrating, for example, on the Christological thought of the various New Testament authors.<sup>25</sup> In my judgment, two developments in recent systematic theology are especially influential on this score.

#### *Integration of Fundamental and Dogmatic Theology*

Contemporary Catholic theologians typically seek to integrate into dogmatic Christology the Christological issues formerly treated in fundamental theology. In the neo-scholastic theology which prevailed in Catholic circles in the first half of this century, dogmatic theology logically presupposed that foundational Christological questions (e.g., Why believe in Jesus?) and many ecclesiological issues (including the teaching authority of ecumenical councils) had been satisfactorily resolved at the prior stage of fundamental theology. Given this basis, dogmatic Christology could begin with the doctrine of Chalcedon and dedicate itself to studying its presuppositions and pursuing its implications.<sup>26</sup>

While the neo-scholastic approach to apologetics has fallen into disfavor in recent years, the issues with which it was occupied cannot be

<sup>23</sup> Other dimensions of modern research on the historical Jesus are examined in Craig A. Evans, "Life of Jesus Research and the Eclipse of Mythology," *TS* 54 (1993) 3-36.

<sup>24</sup> "Theologia dogmatica ita disponatur ut ipsa themata biblica primum proponantur" (*Optatam totius* 16).

<sup>25</sup> Biblical Christology, of course, is also of importance for systematic theology.

<sup>26</sup> A succinct example may be found in Franz Dander, *Summarium Theologiae Dogmaticae 4: De Christo Salvatore*, 2d ed. (Innsbruck: Rauch, 1961).

dismissed as insignificant. Careful attention to questions concerning the reasons for Christian belief in Jesus is required by the Catholic understanding of the relationships of faith and reason and of faith and history, as well as by the conviction that faith, while free, is a response to reality, not the creator of its own object. Foundational Christological questions, no longer treated in isolation from other aspects of Christology, have therefore become an integral part of dogmatic theology itself.<sup>27</sup>

This alteration of the scope of Christology inevitably entails a reassessment of Christological paradigms and a reconception of appropriate points of reference for Christological discussion. While efforts in the first two-thirds of the twentieth century to unfold the implications of established Christological doctrine often concentrated on the humanity of Christ, attempts to examine the basis of Christian faith in Jesus demand greater attention to historical questions concerning his public life. Though belief does not flow automatically from an objective portrayal of Jesus, some depictions of the Jesus of history would, if accurate, make Christian faith untenable.<sup>28</sup> For this reason, the current concern of systematic theologians for Christology's historical foundations tends to promote greater interest on their part in historical-critical investigation of the life of Jesus than in studies of the redactional activity of the four evangelists or in literary analyses of the New Testament as narrative.

### *Meaning of Christological Statements*

A second factor in the shift of interest from the humanity of Christ to the Jesus of history lies in the desire of contemporary systematic theologians to reexamine the meaning of basic Christological assertions. In the past, it was often presupposed that the content of such terms as "Messiah" and "resurrection" was clear; all that seemed nec-

<sup>27</sup> For a recent study of soteriological and Christological dimensions of fundamental theology, see Perry Schmidt-Leukel, "Demonstratio christiana," in Heinrich Döring et al., *Den Glauben denken: Neue Wege der Fundamentaltheologie*, *Quaestiones disputatae* 147 (Freiburg: Herder, 1993) 81–142.

<sup>28</sup> The classical example is Hermann Samuel Reimarus (*Fragments* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971]; originally published, posthumously and anonymously, 1774–78). A recent illustration is provided by Paul Hollenbach ("The Historical Jesus Today," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 19 [1989] 11–22), who explicitly declares that the goal of research on the historical Jesus is "to overthrow (not just to avoid or to correct) the 'mistake called Christianity,'" a mistake that "is summed up in the divinization of Jesus as Son of David, Christ, Son of God, Second Person in the Trinity, etc." (19). Hollenbach refers to José Porfirio Miranda (*Being and the Messiah* [Maryknoll: Orbis, 1977]) as the source of the phrase "mistake called Christianity."



essary was to justify their attribution to Jesus. Yet such terminology is not univocal. Messianic expectations varied widely, encompassing royal, priestly, and prophetic elements, and sometimes envisioning a plurality of messianic figures; as J. H. Charlesworth has noted, "Jews did not profess a coherent and normative messianology."<sup>29</sup> Conceptions of resurrection range from resuscitation with return to the prior conditions of one's earthly life up to exaltation at the right hand of God.<sup>30</sup> An important element of the theologian's task, therefore, is to clarify the way in which Christians adopt and adapt such words in ascribing them to Jesus. As Hans Jellouschek has cogently argued, pursuit of these issues requires, among other things, recourse to factual information about Jesus' public life and death: it is the figure of Jesus which ultimately determines the sense in which what is predicated of him is to be understood, not vice versa.<sup>31</sup>

In brief, underlying the shift in theological focus from the humanity of Christ to the Jesus of history is a change in theological interest from reflection on the implications of an established formulation of faith both to examination of the Christological dimensions of the grounds for believing and to investigation of the actual content of central Christological affirmations. These twin interests also determine the precise questions concerning Jesus to which systematic theologians typically turn their attention.

#### HISTORICAL QUESTIONS SIGNIFICANT FOR SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Within the past few years, interest in the study of the historical Jesus has been underscored and stimulated, especially in the United States, by the publication of two much-discussed works by biblical scholars: the first volume of John P. Meier's *A Marginal Jew*, and John Dominic Crossan's *The Historical Jesus*.<sup>32</sup> While Meier and Crossan adopt widely different perspectives and methodologies, each operates as a historian, seeking in principle to determine what an informed,

<sup>29</sup> "From Messianology to Christology," in *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 35; see also *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era*, ed. Jacob Neusner, William Green and Ernest Frerichs (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1987).

<sup>30</sup> For this reason C. F. Evans comments with regard to the resurrection that "the principal difficulty here is not to believe, but to know what it is which offers itself for belief" (*Resurrection and the New Testament* [London: SCM, 1970] 130).

<sup>31</sup> "Zur christologischen Bedeutung der Frage nach dem historischen Jesus," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 152 (1972) 112-23.

<sup>32</sup> John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1991); John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991). Joachim Gnilka's *Jesus von Nazaret* (Freiburg: Herder, 1990) should also be noted.

unprejudiced neutral observer (if such there be—the legitimacy of the goal does not guarantee that it can be approached more than asymptotically) could say about Jesus on the basis of application of the historical-critical method to the Gospels and other relevant ancient texts. While such study of the historical Jesus necessarily examines numerous issues of little or no theological import,<sup>33</sup> other aspects of such research are bound to have repercussions on systematic theology, especially on Christology. Indeed, if such influence were not present, study of the life of Jesus would forfeit much of its theological interest, though not its legitimacy as historical investigation.

Some of the major theological presuppositions and ramifications of research on the historical Jesus have recently been explored by Avery Dulles in an instructive essay originally delivered as a lecture for a wider audience.<sup>34</sup> Arguing that “no *total* separation between history and faith is feasible,” Dulles seeks at two points in his essay to specify historical data about Jesus which are directly relevant to Christian faith. First, he observes that:

Most Catholic Christians consider themselves committed as believers to profess various facts about the earthly Jesus. While no official list is available, a good case can be made for including items such as the virginal conception of Jesus, his consciousness of his own divinity, his miraculous and prophetic powers, his redemptive intent, his institution of the Eucharist, his crucifixion, his empty tomb, and his bodily resurrection. If facts such as these were disproved, Christian faith would be seriously affected.<sup>35</sup>

Later in the essay, in a listing of some points on which historians can confirm Christian faith, Dulles comments:

Solid arguments can be made for holding that Jesus understood himself as bringing in the final age of salvation, that he chose apostles to share in his ministry during and after his own life, that he placed Peter at the head of the apostles, that he understood himself as having a singular intimacy with his heavenly Father, that he regarded his own death as redemptive, and that he was convinced that the Father would raise him from the dead.<sup>36</sup>

Neither list seems intended to be exhaustive, and the limited scope and intent of the essay preclude detailed examination of the specific items mentioned in either list. Thus, while rightly stressing the intrinsic

<sup>33</sup> In a recent comment on his work, John Meier has noted his own surprise at “how militantly untheological *A Marginal Jew* is” (“A Marginal Jew—Retrospect and Prospect,” in *Archbishop Gerety Lectures 1992-1993* [South Orange, N.J.: Seton Hall University, 1993] 17).

<sup>34</sup> “Historians and the Reality of Christ,” *First Things* 28 (December 1992) 20–25.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 22.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 24.

link between faith and history, Dulles's essay leaves open to further determination the points at which historical information about Jesus is of decisive significance for systematic theology.<sup>37</sup>

Without purporting to exhaust the matter, much less to impose an agenda on either exegetes or systematic theologians, the present section of this article will pursue this subject further by delineating five issues where historical information about Jesus is, in my judgment, of pivotal significance for the development of systematic theology: (1) the presuppositions in Jesus' own person for his preaching and public activity, (2) Jesus' understanding of his own salvific significance, (3) the coexistence of present and future dimensions in Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God, (4) Jesus' stance toward the approach of his own death, and (5) reference points in Jesus' public life and death for the emergence of the Church and the origin of the sacraments. My selection and formulation of topics overlap with Dulles's lists to some extent, but do not correspond completely to the content or the wording of either of his summaries. Each topic will be discussed in turn. Questions concerning the revelation of the resurrection are deliberately allocated to the final section of this article.

### *Personal Presuppositions of Jesus' Preaching and Actions*

An initial area of inquiry concerns the personal presuppositions and implications of Jesus' preaching and conduct. In the past, the foundations of Christological dogma were often sought in direct personal affirmations on the part of Jesus himself. Thus theologians seeking to establish the divinity of Christ typically appealed to such explicit passages as John 8:58 ("Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.") and John 10:30 ("I and the Father are one.") as evidence of Jesus' own testimony to his divine status. Biblical texts like these, especially prevalent in the Fourth Gospel, were understood as providing a solid basis for the later conciliar Christological formulations in Jesus' own teaching about himself; at times they have even been considered an essential element of theological argumentation.<sup>38</sup> Modern biblical exegesis, however, does not support ascribing such direct Christological statements to the historical Jesus.<sup>39</sup> Instead, it is widely agreed that

<sup>37</sup> The relationship of faith to historical research about Jesus has also been addressed recently by Roch Kereszty ("Historical Research, Theological Inquiry, and the Reality of Jesus: Reflections on the Method of J. P. Meier," *Communio* 19 [1992] 576–600) and Rino Fisichella (review of Meier's book in *Biblica* 74 [1993] 123–29). Both authors wish to draw faith quite directly into the process of historical investigation.

<sup>38</sup> See, e.g., L. Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* 132–34.

<sup>39</sup> Thus John Meier, while refusing to exclude the Fourth Gospel as a possible source

the Jesus of history did not make himself the direct object of his own preaching.

The lack of explicit Christological statements on the part of the historical Jesus has at times contributed to a general aversion to Christological doctrine. Thus, a century ago, despite the recognition that "It is not as a mere factor that he [Jesus] is connected with the Gospel; *he was its personal realization and its strength, and this he is felt to be still,*" Adolf von Harnack's conviction that "*the Gospel, as Jesus proclaimed it, has to do with the Father only and not with the Son,*" led in his judgment to a unitarian conception of God.<sup>40</sup> In a similar vein, Thomas Sheehan recently claimed that Peter's articulation of his acceptance of Jesus' preaching of the kingdom of God in terms which incorporated reference to the person of Jesus distorted Jesus' message by wrongly linking the kingdom of God with Jesus himself, thus paving the way for the betrayal of the core of Jesus' preaching from the very start of Christianity.<sup>41</sup>

In contrast to such concentration on the presence or absence of explicit Christological statements on the part of the historical Jesus, contemporary systematic theology typically seeks bases in Jesus' own life for Christological affirmations in a manner less direct than appeal to direct personal claims on Jesus' part. Recourse to such "implicit Christology" is necessary not only due to the lack (or paucity) of assured explicit Christological statements prior to Jesus' death and resurrection, but for more fundamental reasons as well. In isolation from implicit presuppositions, explicit verbal claims would in themselves be neither intelligible nor self-justifying. Thus, for example, apart from a clarifying context the meaning of "Messiah" would inevitably remain unclear. As Heinz Schürmann has noted, the implications of one's conduct can be less ambiguous and more profound than explicit use of even the most significant titles.<sup>42</sup>

Central to the pursuit of implicit Christology is investigation of the link between the person of Jesus and his proclamation in word and deed of the kingdom of God. An intrinsic connection between a mes-

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of historical information about Jesus, observes that precisely the sayings tradition of that Gospel "has undergone massive reformulation from the Johannine perspective" (*A Marginal Jew* 53 n. 22).

<sup>40</sup> Adolf von Harnack, *What Is Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986; originally published 1900) 145, 144; the emphasis is Harnack's.

<sup>41</sup> See Thomas Sheehan, *The First Coming: How the Kingdom of God Became Christianity* (New York: Random House, 1986) 125.

<sup>42</sup> Heinz Schürmann, *Jesu Tod—unser Leben: Ein Versuch zu verstehen* (Freiburg: Informationszentrum Berufe der Kirche, 1980) 2.

sage and its bearer is not present in all instances, though it is not unusual for envoys to be praised or blamed for tidings which they merely convey. Even the content of a prophetic oracle is often unrelated to the person of the prophet. Were this the case with regard to Jesus, then Jesus would be no more than a theologically insignificant bearer of the message; acceptance of the content of his preaching would in principle entail no stance toward Jesus himself.<sup>43</sup> In contrast, an intrinsic connection between Jesus' person and his message enables the content of his public life to provide a foundation to Christology.

Instructive illustrations of recent approaches to this issue may be found in the writings of Edward Schillebeeckx and Karl Rahner. Schillebeeckx insists that, since nothing in public history could justify Jesus' confident proclamation of the coming of God's kingdom, the source and foundation of his public activity must be sought in a personal "abba-experience" on his part, a consciousness of profound intimacy with God, the benevolent opponent of all evil;<sup>44</sup> it is in large part for this reason that "the kingdom of God is essentially connected with the person of Jesus of Nazareth himself."<sup>45</sup> In a comparable train of thought, Rahner accents Jesus' insistence that the kingdom of God has now achieved new proximity and maintains that "the pre-resurrection Jesus thought that this new closeness of the kingdom came to be *in and through* the totality of what he said and what he did;"<sup>46</sup> his message of the liberating proximity of God is thus "never separable from himself and his fate."<sup>47</sup>

As these examples imply, the relationship of Jesus' person to his message can be examined from a number of perspectives and expressed in a variety of terminologies. In whatever way it is examined, however, the link between Jesus' person and his message remains central to the discussion of Christological issues. In contrast to the importance of such questions of implicit Christology, systematic theology is relatively unconcerned with the origin of specific Christological titles.

<sup>43</sup> That such is the case is maintained by Thomas Sheehan, who finds no self-referential presuppositions in Jesus' message (*The First Coming* 68).

<sup>44</sup> See *Jesus*, esp. 256–71. Schillebeeckx does not maintain that the validity of this experience can be proven historically, but only that some such experience must be posited in order to account for Jesus' conduct; cf. John P. Galvin, "The Uniqueness of Jesus and His 'Abba Experience' in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 35 (1980) 309–14.

<sup>45</sup> *Church: The Human Story of God* (New York: Crossroad, 1990) 112.

<sup>46</sup> *Foundations* 251–54, at 252.

<sup>47</sup> Karl Rahner, "Aspects of the Episcopal Office," *Theological Investigations* 14 (New York: Seabury, 1976) 188; translation slightly modified.

*Jesus' Understanding of His Definitive Salvific Character*

Closely tied to such questions regarding the person of Jesus is the issue of Jesus' understanding of his own definitive salvific character. Here too it is impossible to proceed from such explicit assertions in the Gospels as "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (John 14:6), since Christological texts of this clarity presumably originated in the early Church. Instead, Jesus' self-assessment must be examined by considering in tandem the definitive (eschatological) significance which he claimed for his salvific message and the inseparability of that message from his person. Pursuit of this issue will entail elucidating the implications of what Karl Rahner once described as Jesus' conviction that he mediated God to others in a way in which they did not mediate God to him and that through Jesus and his public activity the kingdom of God has become present "in a new, unique and insurpassable way."<sup>48</sup> Although such convictions on Jesus' part are not self-justifying, they are indispensable reference points in any discussion of Jesus' universal revelatory and salvific significance.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, they form an indispensable component of Christian reflection on Christianity's understanding of its relationship to other religions.<sup>50</sup>

While valid ascription of a particular title to Jesus does not depend upon his personal use or acceptance of that terminology with reference to himself, and would even be compatible with explicit rejection of that title in a different historical context,<sup>51</sup> Jesus' personal self-assessment

<sup>48</sup> *Foundations* 251.

<sup>49</sup> In the words of Wolfhart Pannenberg, "the claim to uniqueness concerning the person of Jesus is bound up with his own eschatological message, especially with the eschatological finality of God's kingdom as becoming present in his activity" ("Religious Pluralism and Conflicting Truth Claims: The Problem of a Theology of World Religions," in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D'Costa [Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990] 101).

<sup>50</sup> For varying perspectives and positions on these issues, see especially John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven: Yale University, 1989); Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name?* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985); *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*; and Reinhold Bernhardt, *Der Absolutheitsanspruch des Christentums: Von der Aufklärung bis zur pluralistischen Religionstheorie* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1990).

<sup>51</sup> Erich Dinkler argues that this is the case with regard to Jesus and the title of Messiah ("Peter's Confession and the 'Satan' Saying: The Problem of Jesus' Messiahship," in *The Future of Our Religious Past: Essays in Honour of Rudolf Bultmann*, ed. J. M. Robinson [New York: Harper & Row, 1971] 169–202). While this exegetical judgment is dubious, my point is simply that if Dinkler's position is historically correct it would pose no obstacle to later Christian attribution of the title of Messiah, in a different context and with different specification of its content, to Jesus.

as God's definitive salvific representative (whether articulated in particular terminology or simply reflected indirectly in his words and deeds) is a necessary though not sufficient condition for the Christian conviction that he is *the Christ*, a salvific figure of unequalled and insurpassable religious and theological importance. While it can be legitimate to use a title to express the status of someone who did not claim that title explicitly, to conceive of a decisive salvific figure who remains unaware of such personal significance is to reduce the mediation of salvation to a subpersonal level.<sup>52</sup>

### *Present and Future Dimensions of the Kingdom of God*

A further historical issue of theological importance is the coexistence of present and future dimensions in Jesus' preaching of the kingdom of God. A century ago, various theologians accented one or the other of these dimensions to the exclusion of its counterpart. In keeping with nineteenth-century liberal Protestant theology, Adolf von Harnack envisioned the kingdom of God as a present, interior reality, dismissing the apocalyptic element in Jesus' preaching as a pardonable but theologically insignificant residue of his environment: "The kingdom of God comes by coming to the individual, by entering into his soul and laying hold of it. True, the kingdom of God is the rule of God; but it is the rule of the holy God in the hearts of individuals; *it is God himself in his power*. From this point of view everything that is dramatic in the external and historical sense has vanished; and gone, too, are all the external hopes for the future."<sup>53</sup> In sharp contrast to this conception, Albert Schweitzer conceived of Jesus as an apocalyptic preacher, whose message of the kingdom was erroneously focussed on its imminent arrival with the end of time.<sup>54</sup> In each of these interpretations, the tension between the presence and absence of salvation was resolved by eliminating one of its constituent poles.

Yet tension between the presence and absence of salvation is characteristic of Christianity. The sacraments, especially the Eucharist, are fragmentary anticipations of the future presence of salvation, and

<sup>52</sup> For an alternative position, see Schubert M. Ogden, *The Point of Christology* (London: SCM, 1982). Ogden considers it sufficient that Christian theological claims cohere with the earliest apostolic witness about Jesus ("the existential-historical Jesus"); certain knowledge about "the empirical-historical Jesus" is historically unattainable and theologically superfluous. In my judgment, this position makes Jesus' theological significance the product of the Church's faith.

<sup>53</sup> *What Is Christianity* 52-62 at 56.

<sup>54</sup> *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God: The Secret of Jesus' Messiahship and Passion* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1985; German original 1901).

the Church is the efficacious sign of a salvation not yet fully present.<sup>55</sup> Christology itself rests on an ability to identify Jesus as the Christ although even those who enjoy the first fruits of the Spirit continue to groan while awaiting redemption (cf. Rom 8:22–23). Tension between the presence and absence of salvation in Jesus' own preaching is a necessary precondition for the existence of the same tension in a Christianity which claims continuity with him and his message.

It must be acknowledged that simultaneous assertion that "the kingdom of God is among you" (Luke 17:21; present eschatology) and that "the kingdom of God is not yet among you" (future eschatology), or that salvation is simultaneously "already and not yet" present, appears at face value to be self-contradictory. The combination of such statements inevitably raises suspicion of seeking to have things both ways, of formulating claims in a manner which a priori immunizes them from possible refutation and is thus ideological in the pejorative sense. To address such problems, further theological reflection on the meaning of Christian interpretations of history and eschatology is necessary to clarify the differences in the use of the term "kingdom of God" in the two apparently contradictory statements.<sup>56</sup> The presence of both dimensions in the preaching of Jesus remains, however, a presupposition of such considerations.

### *Jesus' Approach to Death*

Soteriological reflection on the theological significance of Jesus' crucifixion is also in part dependent on access to historical information about his life. Two matters are of primary theological interest in this regard: (1) Jesus' personal approach to and acceptance of death, and (2) whether, and if so how, Jesus interpreted his death in advance and attributed salvific significance to it.

Questions concerning Jesus' personal stance when confronted with the approach of death are inescapable in soteriology. In contrast both to untroubled attribution of the Gospels' detailed passion predictions to the historical Jesus, on the one hand, and to Rudolf Bultmann's judgment that we do not know how Jesus faced death and cannot even

<sup>55</sup> For development of these perspectives on the sacraments and the Church, see Karl Rahner, "The Church and the Parousia of Christ," *Theological Investigations* 6 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1969) 295–312, and Franz Schupp, *Glaube—Kultur—Symbol: Versuch einer kritischen Theorie sakramentaler Praxis* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1974).

<sup>56</sup> See the observations of Franz Schupp, *Auf dem Weg zu einer kritischen Theologie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1974) 20–25, and of John Meier, "A Marginal Jew—Retrospect and Prospect" 24–25.



exclude the possibility that he suffered a complete collapse,<sup>57</sup> on the other, such exegetes as Heinz Schürmann, Anton Vögtle, Rudolf Pesch, and Xavier Leon-Dufour have argued in more nuanced manners that over the course of his public life Jesus must have foreseen the approach of death, and that he faced it resolutely and accepted it as entailed in fidelity to his mission. A similar position is reflected in a recent observation by Raymond Brown: "*That, in the last days of his life in Jerusalem as the leaders of his people showed unremitting hostility, both rejecting his proclamation and desiring to get rid of him, Jesus would have struggled in prayer with God about how his death fitted into the inbreaking of God's kingdom is, in my judgment, so extremely plausible as to warrant certainty.*"<sup>58</sup> These conclusions have been widely adopted by Catholic systematic theologians, to such an extent that it seems possible to speak of a consensus both on the issue in itself and on theologians' need for such historical information for the development of soteriology. As the International Theological Commission has observed: "If, for Jesus, the Passion was a failure and a shipwreck, if he felt abandoned by God and lost hope in his own mission, his death could not be construed then, and cannot be construed now, as the definitive act in the economy of salvation. A death undergone in a purely passive manner could not be a 'Christological' saving event."<sup>59</sup> Historical knowledge of Jesus' free acceptance of death is essential for soteriology, since circumventing this issue while continuing to attribute theological meaning to the crucifixion would require envisioning God as using Jesus as a passive and unknowing instrument in bringing about the salvation of the world.<sup>60</sup>

No comparable consensus prevails, however, on the more complex exegetical questions as to whether, and if so how, Jesus explicitly attributed salvific significance to his approaching death.<sup>61</sup> Like exe-

<sup>57</sup> See Rudolf Bultmann, "The Primitive Christian Kerygma and the Historical Jesus," in *The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ*, ed. C. Braaten and R. Harrisville (Nashville: Abingdon, 1964) 23–24.

<sup>58</sup> *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsamene to the Grave*, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1994) 1.234; the emphasis is Brown's. While *The Death of the Messiah* is specifically concerned with "how the evangelists understood the death of Jesus, not how Jesus understood his own death" (1.25), Brown provides a study of the passion predictions which concludes that Jesus anticipated a violent death (cf. 2.1468–91, esp. 1486–89).

<sup>59</sup> "Select Questions on Christology," in *International Theological Commission: Texts and Documents 1969–1985*, ed. Michael Starkey (San Francisco, Ignatius, 1989) 197; this text was issued in 1979.

<sup>60</sup> For an account of the major positions, see John P. Galvin, "Jesus' Approach to Death: An Examination of Some Recent Studies," *TS* 41 (1980) 713–44.

<sup>61</sup> For a succinct summary, see Heinz Schürmann, *Gottes Reich—Jesu Geschick* (Freiburg: Herder, 1983) 11–14.

getical judgments on these issues, systematic opinions on this aspect of the requisite background for soteriology vary widely. Edward Schillebeeckx, for example, while leaving various specific issues open, suggests that Jesus left his death, as a kind of prophetic sign, for his followers to interpret on the basis of his life.<sup>62</sup> In a comparable manner, Karl Rahner explicitly leaves open the question "whether and to what extent and in what sense the pre-resurrection Jesus explicitly ascribed a soteriological function to his death" beyond what is implied in the fact that "he faced his death resolutely and accepted it at least as the inevitable consequence of fidelity to his mission and as imposed on him by God."<sup>63</sup> For such lines of argumentation, questions concerning Jesus' personal interpretation of his death are at most of secondary theological significance.<sup>64</sup>

Other authors, however, consider greater specification on Jesus' part to be both accessible to historical research and essential for the development of a comprehensive soteriology. In a closely reasoned analysis, Heinz Schürmann has argued against Rahner that additional information about Jesus is needed in order to justify speaking of his death as vicarious atonement.<sup>65</sup> Raymund Schwager has also sought to ground his soteriology in detailed appeal to Jesus' own interpretation of his death.<sup>66</sup> Although these issues cannot be pursued further here, it is clear that, while interpretation of the crucifixion on Jesus' part is less decisive for systematic theology than is his lived stance in the face of death, exegetical studies of both matters may have considerable impact on the development of a systematic soteriology.

### *Origin of the Church and the Sacraments*

Systematic theology seeks a reference point in Jesus' life for the existence of the Church and the institution of the sacraments. As is the case with other, comparable instances, the explicit foundational state-

<sup>62</sup> *Jesus* 310, 311, 318-19.

<sup>63</sup> *Foundations* 248-49.

<sup>64</sup> See the clear remarks of Hansjürgen Verweyen, *Gottes letztes Wort: Grundriss der Fundamentaltheologie* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1991) 479. The point is not new. Maurice de la Taille, for example, insists that declarations on Jesus' part about the sacrificial character of his passion "did not make it a sacrifice; they were made because it was a sacrifice. Therefore it is a sacrifice apart from these declarations of fact . . ." (*The Mystery of Faith* [New York: Sheed and Ward, 1940] 1.46; for the Latin original, see *Mysterium Fidei* [Paris: Beauchesne, 1921] 1.31.

<sup>65</sup> *Gottes Reich—Jesu Geschick* 203-5. Schürmann is also critical of Schillebeeckx's treatment of these issues (204 n. 83, 214 n. 106).

<sup>66</sup> *Jesus im Heilsdrama* 109-54; see also R. Schwager, "Rückblick auf das Symposium," in *Dramatische Erlösungslehre: Ein Symposium*, ed. Jozef Niewiadomski and Wolfgang Palaver, *Innsbrucker theologische Studien* 38 (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1992) 374-84.

ments once detected in such texts as Matt 16:18 ("You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.") and Matt 28:19 ("Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.") are no longer considered historically plausible or theologically necessary as statements of the historical Jesus. As an immediate effect of this development, detailed prescriptions for the structure of the Church and for specific elements of sacramental practice, though tenaciously defended in the anti-modernist period, are no longer attributed to the historical Jesus.

Nonetheless, while a basis for the Church and the sacraments need not be sought in explicit references on Jesus' part, at least not in all cases, it remains important to have some anchoring of their origin in Jesus' words, deeds, and death.<sup>67</sup> In this regard, such matters as Jesus' calling of disciples, his constitution of the Twelve as a distinctive group among his followers, and his words and actions at the Last Supper are of considerable interest to systematic theologians. The same may also be true of the role of Simon Peter during Jesus' public life. Without some linkage in these matters between the Jesus of history and the later Church, it would appear impossible to assert continuity between Jesus and the Church or to provide any standard by which to assess the compatibility of subsequent historical developments in the Church with their normative origin.

#### TWO FURTHER ISSUES

The earlier sections of this article have outlined the contemporary reorientation of Catholic systematic theology on the historical Jesus, considered the reasons underlying this shift in focus, and identified several specific topics regarding the Jesus of history as areas of primary interest to systematic theologians. To this point, little reference has been made to historical investigation of material concerning the period immediately following Jesus' death, such as the traditions concerning discovery of his empty tomb and appearances of the risen Lord to his followers. To conclude this presentation, I will therefore comment briefly on two issues concerning the status and function of the resurrection in the development of Christology.

#### *Interpretation of Jesus in Light of the Crucifixion*

It has become common in recent Christology to emphasize the significance of the resurrection more strongly than was the case in the

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, *Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1984) 57–192; Miguel M. Garijo-Guembe, *Gemeinschaft der Heiligen: Grund, Wesen und Struktur der Kirche* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1988) 22–35; Karl Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments* (New York: Herder, 1963) 41–74.

immediate past.<sup>68</sup> In some circles, one aspect of this emphasis has been the idea that both the early Christians and we ourselves see Jesus in the light of his resurrection.<sup>69</sup> Insofar as this formulation expresses a recognition that Christian retelling of the story of Jesus occurs in retrospect and is influenced by the outcome of his life, it is surely unobjectionable. But the formulation may also be taken to imply an exaggerated stress on the resurrection at the expense of the crucifixion in identifying the perspective from which Christians interpret the events of Jesus' life and perpetuate his memory. Wolfhart Pannenberg's position that the resurrection could be understood without the cross, whereas the cross could not be understood without the resurrection, provides a case in point.<sup>70</sup> That the nature of the resurrection and its relationship to the crucifixion are much-debated issues further underscores the need for a balanced perspective.<sup>71</sup> Might it not be desirable, in at least some instances, to speak of Christians' interpreting Jesus in the light of his crucifixion? This is surely the case, for example, in the Gospel of Mark, where it is above all Jesus' way to the cross which clarifies the meaning of his personal status.<sup>72</sup>

### *Revelation of the Resurrection*

A final set of theologically important historical questions concerns the revelation of the resurrection—an issue which may extend matters beyond the immediate topic of the Jesus of history.<sup>73</sup> Such ques-

<sup>68</sup> Compare, e.g., the brief treatment in Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* 192–93 (the ascension is discussed separately [194–95]) with the extended treatment in Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* 124–60. Wolfhart Pannenberg has recently observed that recognition of the resurrection's significance for dogmatic Christology was apparently so unusual in 1964 that his emphasis on the subject at that time struck some readers as an alternative to reference to the earthly Jesus (*Systematische Theologie* 2 [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991] 385 n. 56).

<sup>69</sup> For an example, see the section on "The Light of Easter" (2.2.2.1) in the 1984 statement of the Pontifical Biblical Commission (English trans. under the title "Scripture and Christology" in Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The Biblical Commission and Christology," *TS* 46 [1985] 438–49).

<sup>70</sup> *Jesus—God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968) 246. Pannenberg's recent *Systematische Theologie* (2.385) emphasizes more strongly the relation of the resurrection to the crucifixion.

<sup>71</sup> For a discussion of modern Catholic theologies of the resurrection, see John P. Galvin, "The Resurrection of Jesus in Contemporary Catholic Systematics," *Heythrop Journal* 20 (1979) 123–45.

<sup>72</sup> See Jack Dean Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), and Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Die Person Jesu Christi im Spiegel der vier Evangelien* (Freiburg: Herder, 1993) 52–58. On the thought of the four evangelists and Paul on this matter, see Hansjürgen Verweyen, *Gottes letztes Wort* 452–65.

<sup>73</sup> The risen Jesus is excluded from such investigation on methodological grounds by

tions are relevant not only to developing the theology of the resurrection but also to reflection on the Christian conception of revelation.

The historical value of the post-Easter traditions regarding revelation of the resurrection continues to be disputed, and is likely to remain so in the foreseeable future.<sup>74</sup> Under these circumstances, Franz Schupp's proposal that theological treatments of the resurrection seek to prescind from the question of the origin of the Easter faith remains highly attractive.<sup>75</sup> Similar implications lie in Francis Schüssler Fiorenza's warning against confusing "the genetic question (how did faith in the resurrection emerge) with the foundational question (of its truth and credibility) and with the question of its meaningfulness."<sup>76</sup> It would appear, however, that such abstraction from post-resurrectional events would require increased emphasis on the theological implications of Jesus' public life, perhaps along the lines suggested by Nicholas Lash's position that "the evidence for Jesus' resurrection is the evidence of his life and teaching and the manner of his death."<sup>77</sup> It would also intensify interest in questions regarding Jesus' personal approach to death, including the issue of his confidence in his eventual personal vindication by God.

The matters at stake here may be formulated at least provisionally as follows: Given that Christian faith is neither reducible to nor completely separable from history, does our knowledge of the earthly Jesus, including his death, provide a sufficient historical reference point for Christian faith in his resurrection, or is reliable postresurrectional historical information (e.g. about the emptiness of his grave and/or his appearances to his followers) also necessary for that purpose? Or, to pose a related question from a slightly different perspective, is Jesus' resurrection part of the historically establishable ground of faith, or is it to be classified as an object of faith which is not part of that historically recognizable foundation?<sup>78</sup>

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John P. Meier, "Jesus," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. R. E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer and R. E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1990) 1328; cf. also *A Marginal Jew* 13.

<sup>74</sup> For summaries from differing perspectives, see Hans Kessler, "Christologie" 282–91, and Hansjürgen Verweyen, *Gottes letztes Wort* 441–80.

<sup>75</sup> *Vermittlung im Fragment: Überlegungen zur Christologie* (Innsbruck: Österreichische Hochschülerschaft, 1975) 30–37.

<sup>76</sup> *Foundational Theology* 28.

<sup>77</sup> "Easter Meaning," *Heythrop Journal* 25 (1984) 13.

<sup>78</sup> The terminology is based on reflections of Karl Rahner, for whom "in practice and in the concrete every ground of faith is also an object of faith, although the converse relationship is not true, that is, not every object of faith is a ground of faith" (*Foundations* 238). Rahner attributes to the resurrection a faith-grounding function (239, 279),

Pursuit of these issues, and of the matters discussed earlier in this article, will require weighing foundational theological questions from a variety of perspectives. Historical information about Jesus is but one of many elements which will need to be taken into account in such considerations. In view of the indispensability of this material, however, it is clear that study of the historical Jesus will continue to occupy a prominent place in systematic theology and that systematic theologians will need to attend carefully to the development of exegetical research in this field.

but recognizes the obstacles this conception faces even among those who profess faith in the resurrection (256).

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