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## CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY BETWEEN «JESUS» AND «CHRIST». THE POSSIBILITIES OF AN IMPLICIT CHRISTOLOGY<sup>1</sup>

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### Resum

L'article argumenta la qüestió central de la relació entre el «Jesús històric» i el «Crist de la Fe», i especialment el tema de si hi pot haver una continuïtat entre el Jesús de la història i les visions teològiques posteriors, en Pau, en els evangelis i en el credo de l'Església. En primer lloc, l'autor busca els orígens d'aquesta qüestió en el pensament il·lustrat (Reimarus, Lessing) i explica les distincions entre «alta» Cristologia (amb Jesús vist com un ésser diví) i «baixa» Cristologia (enfocada en Jesús com a ésser humà), i entre una Cristologia «explícita» (que reclama els títols cristològics) i una Cristologia «implícita» (en la qual la rellevància de Jesús s'indica sense els títols tradicionals). Després, l'autor senyala la consideració novament del judaisme de Jesús i el descobriment de la pluralitat dintre el pensament jueu contemporani, que inclouen diferents conceptes de figures «messiàniques». És per això que el tema del messianisme de Jesús pot ser replantejat. Mentre en la primera recerca (Wrede,

1. Lecture delivered at the Simposi Internacional «El Jesús històric i el Crist de la fe» at the Facultat de Teologia de Catalunya in Barcelona on May 13, 2010. I am grateful to my colleagues and friends Prof. Larry Hurtado (Edinburgh) and Prof. James A. Kelhoffer (St. Louis) for reading the text and making helpful suggestions. For a more extensive argument, cf. J. Frey, «Der historische Jesus und der Christus der Evangelien» in: J. SCHRÖTER – R. BRUCKER (eds.), *Der historische Jesus. Tendenzen und Perspektiven der gegenwärtigen Forschung (BZNW 114)*; Berlin and New York: de Gruyter 2002, 273-336.

Bultmann) s'inclinaven per negar que Jesús actués com «el Messies», passant per les diferents versions que el fan aparèixer com un Messies polític i davídic, una nova comprensió en les diverses idees de «messianisme» ens pot ajudar a entendre com els contemporanis de Jesús pogueren copsar la seva figura en el conjunt de les esperances messiàniques, i com va poder ser acusat de pretendent messiànic i crucificat pels romans com a «Rei dels jueus». La utilització molt primerenca i consistent del títol «Christós» en les epístoles paulines i fins i tot en fórmules pre-paulines aporta un argument important en el fet que aquest «títol» (i per tant el «messianisme») es va originar en vida de Jesús i va jugar un paper destacat en el seu procés i crucifixió. Encara que probablement Jesús mateix no utilitzés el títol «Christós» per a referir-se a ell mateix, s'ha de plantejar si la seva imatge com a realitzador de miracles i predicador del Regne pot ser denominada també «cristològica». Sentències com la de Lc 11,20 (amb el «dit de Déu») o la resposta de Jesús a Joan Baptista (Lc 7,22-23) confirmen que ell considerava els seus actes com un signe de la presència de la vinguda del Regne de Déu i la reacció dels humans com a decisiva en el jutjament. Tot i que hi va haver una considerable transformació entre la predicació del Jesús històric i la confessió posterior, els evangelis —especialment l'Evangeli de Joan— hi ha línies de continuïtat i evolució entre Jesús de Natzaret i el Crist de la fe.

**Paraules clau:** Continuïtat, discontinuïtat, cristologia implícita, messianisme, Regne de Déu.

#### Abstract

*The article discusses the central issue of the relationship between the “Historical Jesus” and the “Christ of Faith” and especially the question whether there is a continuity between the Jesus of history and later theological views, in Paul, the Gospels, and the creed of the church. Initially, the author traces the origins of the question in enlightenment thought (Reimarus, Lessing) and explains the distinction between a ‘high’ Christology (with Jesus viewed as a divine being) and ‘low’ Christology (with the focus on Jesus as a human being, and between an ‘explicit’ Christology (with claims made by Christological titles) and an ‘implicit Christology’ (in which Jesus’ relevance is indicated without the traditional titles). Then, the author points to the reconsideration of Jesus’ Jewishness and the discovery of the plurality within contemporary Jewish thought, including diverse concepts of ‘messianic’ figures. From there, the issue of Jesus’ Messianism can be reconsidered: Whereas earlier research (Wrede, Bultmann) was inclined to deny that Jesus acted as ‘the Messiah’, since his appearance differed from the widespread view of a political Davidic Messiah, the new insight in the variety of ‘messianic’ ideas can help to understand how Jesus’ contemporaries could view his appearance in the context of messianic hopes, and how he could be accused as a messianic pretender and crucified by the Romans as the ‘king of the Jews’. The very early and consistent use of the title “Christos” in the Pauline epistles and even pre-Pauline formulae provides a strong argument that this ‘title’ (and thus ‘Messianism’) originates in Jesus’ lifetime and in his trial and crucifixion. Although Jesus himself probably did not use the title ‘Christos’, the question must be posed whether his appearance as a miracle worker and preacher of the kingdom, can also be called ‘Christological’. Sayings such as Luke 11:20 (on the ‘finger of God’), or Jesus’ answer to John the Baptist (Luke 7:22-3) confirm that he considered his own works as a sign of the presence of God’s coming kingdom and the reaction of humans as decisive in judgment. Although there was considerable transformation between the preaching of the Historical Jesus and the later confession, the Gospels, especially the Gospel of John, there are lines of continuity and development from Jesus of Nazareth to the Christ of Faith.*

**Keywords:** Continuity, discontinuity, implicit Christology, messianism, Kingdom of God.

## 1. THE PROBLEM

From the beginnings of modern theology in the period of the Enlightenment, the quest for the Jesus has been phrased in a completely new manner: Whereas traditional and dogmatic theology had been based on the conviction that the earthly Jesus actually was the Son of God, as the canonical gospels characterize him and the ancient creeds confess, and that he actually did and said what is attributed to him in the gospels, the new critical view started to question all those former convictions.

It was Hermann Samuel Reimarus, a scholar of Oriental studies from Wolfenbüttel, who expressed the most important challenge in a critical work, which had to remain unpublished during his lifetime. But with the edition of a number of fragments from Reimarus' «apology» for a rational type of religion by the enlightenment philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Reimarus' critical ideas were introduced into the discussion and caused an earthquake in the theological world. According to the well-known account of Albert Schweitzer, this was the beginning of the modern debate on the historical Jesus.<sup>2</sup> One of the fragments called «Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger» stressed the difference between Jesus' own intentions and those of his disciples. The distinction was born between Jesus' own words and the teachings of the apostles, between his own religious ideas (which Reimarus considered to be strongly eschatological) and the beliefs about him developed after his death, that is, between the Historical Jesus and the Christ of the church.

In one of his brief theological sketches, the theses on «The Religion of Christ», Lessing phrased the issue briefly but provokingly:<sup>3</sup>

- 2.. See Lessing's edition of the most important fragment on Jesus and the beginnings of Christianity: [H. S. REIMARUS], *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger. Noch ein Fragment des Wolfenbüttelschen Ungenannten* (ed. G. E. LESSING; Braunschweig, 1778). Cf. the complete edition of the work: HERMANN SAMUEL REIMARUS, *Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes* (ed. G. ALEXANDER; Frankfurt a. M.: Insel, 1972); cf. On Reimarus' theological and philosophical views see D. KLEIN, *Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694 – 1768): Das theologische Werk* (Beiträge zur historischen Theologie 145); Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009. On the relevance of Reimarus for the development of Jesus research see A. SCHWEITZER, *Von Reimarus zu Wrede. Eine Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung*, Tübingen: Mohr 1906; reworked in the 2nd edition from 1913: ID., *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung* (9th ed.), Tübingen: Mohr 1984, 56-68.
3. G. E. LESSING, «Die Religion Christi», in: J. PETERSEN – W. V. OLSHAUSEN (ed.), *Lessings Werke*. 23. Teil: Theologische Schriften 4 (ed. L. ZSCHARNACK), Berlin et al.: Deutsches Verlagshaus Bong, 1925, 352-3 (352, § 1): «Ob Christus mehr als Mensch gewesen, das ist ein Problem. Daß er wahrer Mensch gewesen, wenn er es überhaupt gewesen; daß er nie aufgehört hat, Mensch zu sein, das ist ausgemacht.»

Whether Christ was more than a human, that's a problem. That he was a true human, if he ever was, and that he never ceased to be a human, that's certain.

This is, precisely, the modern problem: Jesus' humanity is an undisputable fact for modern thought. But it has become questionable whether he actually was more than a mere human, whether he was also «the Messiah», the Son of God, or even «true God» as is claimed in the Nicene Creed. In stimulating text, Lessing adds another fundamental distinction: between «the religion of Christ» and «the Christian religion»,<sup>4</sup> that is, between Jesus' own faith and the later faith in Jesus or the veneration of Jesus. Later interpreters phrased the same issue somewhat differently and pointed to the of the gap between the «Historical Jesus» and the «Biblical Christ» (Martin Kähler)<sup>5</sup> or between earthly Jesus as a preacher of the kingdom of God and the later proclamation of Jesus as king and God himself, so that the question could be posed: «How did the preacher become the proclaimed one?» (Rudolf Bultmann)?<sup>6</sup>

Since the period of enlightenment and in the light of the emerging historical paradigm, scholars have pointed to the fundamental discontinuity between the Jesus of history (often thought to be the only «true» Jesus) and the Christ of the gospels and the creed (suspected to be a «falsified» one). The critical insights became unavoidable that the image of Jesus as developed in post-Easter times and represented in the canonical gospels and in the Christological confessions of the early church differed from what he had been in «real» history,<sup>7</sup> and that the teaching attributed to him in later times might be in contrast with or even plainly contradict his original intentions. These insights

4. Ibid., § 3-4:

5. Cf. M. KÄHLER, *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus* (Leipzig: Deichert 1892).

6. Cf. R. BULTMANN, «Die Christologie des Neuen Testaments», in: id. *Glauben und Verstehen* 1, Tübingen: Mohr 1933, 245-267 (266); id., *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 9th ed., Tübingen: Mohr 1984, 35-39.

7. Most provocatively, DAVID FRIEDRICH STRAUSS, in his two volume work *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet* (2 vols.), Tübingen: Osiander 1835-36, demonstrated the «mythical» character of the image of Jesus as given in the gospels. Since at his time the Synoptic problem was still unsolved, he primarily focused on Matthew and John, where, according to his view, the image of the Messiah from the Old Testament was used to describe the appearance of Jesus. But when the Synoptic problem had come to a better solution by the Two-Source theory and the scholarly focus shifted to Mark, it became clear that even Mark could not serve as a secure basis for historical reconstruction, but was shaped by theological concepts of a later time. This is the valuable insight from the work of William Wrede, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien. Zugleich ein Beitrag zum Verständnis des Markusevangeliums* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901), even if his precise explanation is not really convincing.

established in (at first, mostly Protestant) critical scholarship also implied a severe questioning, if not a threat for traditional theology and also for the legacy of the church — as phrased in the famous sentence of the French modernist Roman Catholic theologian Alfred Loisy: «Jesus preached the kingdom of God —but what came is the church. »<sup>8</sup>

It is, therefore, not merely a historical question but inevitably an issue of crucial theological relevance: Is there a bridge; is there some continuity between the historical Jesus and the views of Jesus as Christ and Son of God, as represented in the Pauline epistles and in the canonical Gospels? Or, is the image of Christ as developed after Jesus' death (and the Easter events) a deliberately forged one (as Reimarus had suspected)? Is it even an undue deification of a mere human figure (and thus even a paganization of the originally Jewish type of religion)? Did the later disciples make Jesus «the Messiah», the Christ and the Son of God, although in his earthly life he had never acted as nor intended to be considered a Messiah, let alone a Divine figure, but simply a human, a sage, a Rabbi or, at most, a prophet?

Any critical approach must fundamentally consider the observation that in the gospel tradition later views, developed in post-Easter times, entered and influenced the narrative image of the earthly Jesus. This is obvious from a comparison of the four canonical gospels and from the differences between the redactional level and the earlier (e.g. Q) traditions. The strongest influence of later Christological developments can be seen in the Gospel of John, where Jesus openly claims to be not only the Messiah (John 4,26) but also «the» unique Son in closest relation with «the Father» (John 5,17.19-30 etc.; 10,30); a Divine being sent from above (cf. John 3,13; 6,62 etc.); and empowered by the Father to do his Divine works (such as e.g. raising the dead and giving life).<sup>9</sup> But such a «high» Christology is already present in the earlier gospels. Even in Mark, where scholarship since William Wrede is used to find the so-called «messianic secret»,<sup>10</sup> Jesus is programmatically introduced as the «Son of God» (Mark 1,1(?).11; 9,7; 15,39). The same title is already used much earlier, in Paul (cf. Rom 8,29f.; 1 Cor 15,28; 2 Cor 1,18f.; Gal 1,15f.;

8. «Jésus annonçait le royaume, et c'est l'Église qui est venue. » (A. LOISY, *L'évangile et l'église*, Paris: Picard 1902, 153). However, unlike the common use of this *dictum*, Loisy did not intend to stress the contrast between the kingdom and the church, but rather the continuity, cf. A. RAFFELT, «Das “Wesen des Christentums” nach Alfred Loisy. Zur Interpretation und werkgeschichtlichen Einordnung seiner Schrift «L'Évangile et l'Église» *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 35 (1972), 165-199 (182).
9. Cf. John 5,21-3 and 26-7. See J. FREY, *Die johanneische Eschatologie 3: Die eschatologische Verkündigung in den johanneischen Texten* (WUNT 117), Tübingen: Mohr 2000, 357-369.
10. W. WREDE, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien*.

4,4f.; 1 Thes 1,10) and even earlier the pre-Pauline formulae.<sup>11</sup> How is this image of Christ linked with the reality of the earthly Jesus, as far as it can be reconstructed by use of historical methods? How is the «explicit» Christology in Paul and the Gospels linked with the historical appearance of Jesus? Did already Jesus express Christological claims, or, if not, were they «implied» in his message, his authority, his symbolic actions? Was there any «implicit Christology» which could lead to a later «explicit» one?

## 2. THE TERMS: «HIGH» AND «LOW» CHRISTOLOGY; «EXPLICIT» AND «IMPLICIT» CHRISTOLOGY

The two categories mentioned here and developed in critical scholarship deserve a brief comment: There is, first, the common distinction between «high» and «low» Christology. Regardless of some further details and terminological problems, «high» Christology usually denotes the view that Jesus is primarily a Divine being, that he belongs to the side of the creator, not the created beings. The motifs and titles significant for such a view are, e. g., the use of the term θεός and other phrases, claims and actions primarily linked with God's own words or activity (such as, e.g., the Johannine I-am-sayings, or the work of raising the dead), but also other titles such as «Son of God» or the motifs of Jesus preexistence and his companionship with the Father in the work of the creation. A paradigmatic text of «high Christology» is the Johannine prologue (John 1,1-18), but, as, among others, Larry W. Hurtado has demonstrated, significant elements of «high Christology» can already be found in the very early Post-Easter period,<sup>12</sup> when the risen one was venerated or praised in hymns and acclamations or when prayers were directed to him—as if he were a Divine being.

One might ask, however, how and when Jesus arrived at such a «state of being», or how and when he «became» a God.<sup>13</sup> Of course, questions like this may appear rather inappropriate or even heretical, but they cannot be prohibited or excluded, and even «orthodox» Christology arrived at a somewhat

11. Cf. the probably pre-Pauline usage in Rom 1:3; 8:3; Gal 4:4.

12. L. W. HURTADO, *Lord Jesus Christ. Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*, Grand Rapids / Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003; cf. his earlier study *id.*, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*, London: SCM, 1988 (2nd ed., Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998).

13. Thus the provoking book title by L. W. HURTADO, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?*, Grand Rapids / Cambridge: Eerdmans 2005.

«ontological» way of reflection. So the questions are almost unavoidable: Was Jesus considered to be a Divine being only after his resurrection or assumption (as the enthroned one), or was he already Divine during his earthly lifetime? If so, did he abandon or simply hide his Divinity when living as a human, let alone in his suffering and death on the cross? Or was he even a Divine being from the very beginning —as John’s prologue claims (Jn 1:1-2)? We can observe that quite early in its development, «high» Christology had the tendency to extend the Divine quality of Jesus (as it could be concluded from his resurrection and exaltation) the very beginning and thus to exclude the idea of a real change or development: Dogmatically phrased: According to this view, Jesus did not «become» a God, but he was true God from the very beginning. Not he himself did develop, but merely the views about him, the terms of Christological language. High Christology, as fixed in the Nicene Creed and the Christological dogma, is therefore reluctant against historical research and the modern idea of development.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, as we could see in the quotation by Lessing, modern historical research on Jesus started as a critical questioning of those dogmatic views, stressing historical inquiry and introducing the pattern of historical development. Thus, in contrast with the theological tradition, modern views preferred, on the other hand, the humanity of Jesus and stress his solidarity with the people who suffer, his wisdom teaching, his exemplary behavior and faith, whereas the idea that he was «more than a human» already during his lifetime (and the implication that, as true human *and* true God he could redeem humankind) became increasingly a problem.

14. This is also visible in the book of Pope BENEDICT XVI / JOSEPH RATZINGER, *Jesus von Nazareth*, Freiburg i. B.: Herder 2007, where historical research is conceded and even viewed as necessary because to the incarnational truth (ibid., 14) but soon thereafter also relativized and considered very selectively. The phrase that Ratzinger would like to attempt («den Versuch wagen», ibid., 20) to depict the Jesus of the gospels *as* the real Jesus, as the Historical Jesus in the proper sense («einmal den Jesus der Evangelien als den wirklichen Jesus, als den “historischen Jesus” im eigentlichen Sinn darzustellen», ibid., 20) plays with the famous book title of Martin Kähler (s. above, note 5) but rather with the tendency to neglect the difference between the Historical Jesus and the Biblical Christ or between the earthly Jesus and the images depicted in the canonical gospels. Thus the idea of a real Christological development is actually replaced by a harmonizing and somewhat Platonizing dogmatic view which might be appropriate for a theological meditation but cannot solve the historical problems in an intellectually satisfying manner. This is most obvious, then, in the manner he interprets the Gospel of John. Cf., for criticism, J. FREY, «Historisch – kanonisch – kirchlich. Zum Jesusbild Joseph Ratzingers», in: T. SÖDING (ed.), *Das Jesus-Buch des Papstes. Die Antwort der Neutestamentler*, Freiburg i. B.: Herder 2007, 43-53; ID. «Der Christus der Evangelien als der “historische Jesus”. Zum Jesus-Buch des Papstes», in: W. THIEDE (ed.), *Der Papst aus Bayern. Protestantische Wahrnehmungen*, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt 2010, 111-129.



As a counter term «*low Christology*» denotes all views which stress the humanity of Jesus. This is valid for a number of «Christological» titles, such as «rabbi», «teacher», «prophet», «messenger», «Son of David», or even—in the view of most scholars— «Messiah», since the most common views of an anointed or «Messianic» figure consider that figure to be a human being with political, prophetic or priestly functions, perhaps with a particular *charisma*, wisdom and authority but not as a Divine figure. This is the most common view among critical exegetes regarding the state of the earthly Jesus as a preacher, exorcist or miracle worker.

A second pair of terms also deserves consideration: the distinction between «*explicit*» and «*implicit*» *Christology*. The label «*explicit*» *Christology* is used to denote a view of Jesus Christ in which his status or claims are openly expressed by Christological titles. Explicit Christology comprises not only the statements of «high» Christology but also of a «lower» type of Christology, with titles such as *Messiah* or prophet. «*Implicit Christology*» usually denotes the idea that claims of Jesus or about him can be called Christological without being explicitly stated by use of Christological «titles». The term is almost exclusively used for Jesus' own «Christological» claims, i.e. it is dependent on the view that there is a starting point for Christological reflection in Jesus' own words or deeds where his authority or status was not explicitly marked by Christological titles or terms, but somewhat veiled or hidden, or merely phrased in enigmatic terms like «(the) Son of Man» ([ὁ υἱὸς [τοῦ] ἀνθρώπου). Thus, scholars seek to identify elements in Jesus' authentic sayings or in his behavior which may point to a particular claim of authority or eschatological function which is then said to be «implicitly» Christological—and can thus considered to be a starting point for a continuing Christological reflection by use of Christological terms and titles, i.e. for the explicit Christology in the post-Easter period.

### 3. PRESUPPOSITIONS AND CHANGES IN SCHOLARSHIP

There is, however, one important presupposition. The scholarly attention for *implicit* Christology in the words and deeds of the «historical» Jesus is only conceivable, if there was no explicit Christology on that stage, i.e. if the earthly Jesus could not *explicitly* claim to be «the Messiah», «the Son of God» or any kind of Divine being. The only Christological «title» Jesus may have used according to the majority view, the designation ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου cannot be considered as a real Christological «title» with a clearly defined mea-

ning, but rather as an enigmatic term, a riddle word which could in some cases simply mean a human being, although in other instances other semantic values might have been included. Thus if Jesus spoke about «the son of Man» (whether referring to himself or to a figure distinct from himself), he did not directly or explicitly claim a defined «Messianic» or eschatological authority. There is no need to mention here that the critical view also implies that the tales of Jesus' baptism (with the heavenly voice presenting him as «the Son of God») or the infancy stories pointing to his Divine origin by use of the motif of a miraculous birth are historically problematic and cannot be used to reconstruct a particular self-consciousness of the earthly Jesus. If this is conceded, the only starting point for Christological reflection can be some kind of «implicit» Christology in Jesus' probably authentic words and in his actions, as far as they can be critically authenticated.

This was, given some differences in detail, the predominant view of the so-called «New Quest for the Historical Jesus», most prominent in German critical scholarship and linked with the names of Ernst Käsemann, Günther Bornkamm, or Gerhard Ebeling.<sup>15</sup> Those scholars felt the need to inquire about the historical Jesus for theological reasons but also realized the wide gap between the results of historical reconstruction and the later Christological views. Thus they tried to identify elements of a particular, yet non-titular authority in the probably authentic words of Jesus.

More recent research, especially within the so-called «Third Quest»,<sup>16</sup> has pointed to the problems and shortcomings of those earlier approaches. Using the rigid criterion of double dissimilarity to secure the authenticity of at least a number of genuine sayings of Jesus, they often resulted in a rather minimalistic image of the historical Jesus. Even more problematic is that the search for dissimilarity from contemporary Judaism could lead to a view of historical «uniqueness» resulting quite easily in a rather non-Jewish image of Jesus.

15. Cf. J. FREY, «Der historische Jesus» 281-6. See basically E. KÄSEMANN, «Das Problem des historischen Jesus» *ZTK* 51 (1954), 125-153; also in *id.*, *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen* 1, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960, 187-214; G. BORNKAMM, *Jesus von Nazareth*, Stuttgart: Urban 1956; G. EBELING, «Die Frage nach dem historischen Jesus und das Problem der Christologie» in: *Die Frage nach dem historischen Jesus* (ZThK Beiheft 1); Tübingen: Mohr 1959, 14-30.
16. On this, cf. the helpful reports in this journal: G. SEGALLA, «La “Terza Ricerca” del Gesù storico e il suo paradigma postmoderno nel quadro della ricerca moderna» *RCatT* 38/2 (2008) 273-299; D. MARGUERAT, «Jésus le juif selon la Troisième Quête du Jésus de l'histoire» *RCatT* 38/2 (2008) 443-459. The term was introduced by Tom Wright in his continuation of the Stephen Neill's history of New Testament scholarship: S. NEILL – T. WRIGHT, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1986*, Oxford: Univ. Press 1987, 379.

Such a tendency had to be dismissed as historically implausible.<sup>17</sup> It was, therefore, corrected especially by a broader consideration of the Jewish background of Jesus<sup>18</sup> and by stressing the Jewish roots of early Christology. Based on such a new reconstruction, the elements of continuity between the Historical Jesus and the early post-Easter views of Christ could also be located largely within the language and thought of contemporary Judaism, whereas earlier research (influenced by the History-of-Religions School) had assumed an early hellenization or even paganization within the development of Christology. Not only Jesus but also his early followers and their convictions and *confessions* must be seen within the primary framework of early Judaism.<sup>19</sup>

The change in the scholarly perspective was also stimulated by the discovery of new sources, not at least from the library of Qumran where we can find not merely the literature of a certain Jewish group but rather an overview of the literary production within Palestinian Judaism of the two or three centuries before Christ.<sup>20</sup> Compared with the very limited amount of sources available before the discovery of the Qumran texts, we can now study a much larger number of original documents, also in Hebrew and Aramaic, from contemporary Palestinian Judaism. Most recent research, since the release and edition of the large number of fragments from Qumran cave 4 in the 1990s, has stimulated the insight that we should not focus too much on the so-called «sectarian» group-specific (or «Essene») documents (such as the *Community*

17. Cf. the criticism and modification of the criterion of double dissimilarity towards a (somewhat less rigid) criterion of double plausibility in G. THEISSEN – D. WINTER, *Die Kriterienfrage in der Jesusforschung. Vom Differenzkriterium zum Plausibilitätskriterium* (NTOA 34); Freiburg Schweiz: Universitätsverlag / Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1997.
18. Cf., e g., J. H. CHARLESWORTH, *Jesus within Judaism. New Light from exciting archaeological discoveries*, New York etc.: Doubleday 1988; JOHN P. MEIER, *A Marginal Jew. Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (4 vols.), New York etc.: Doubleday 1991ff; B. CHILTON – C. A. EVANS, *Jesus in Context: Temple, Purity and Restoration* (AGJU 39), Leiden etc.: Brill 1997; M HENGEL – A. M. SCHWEMER, *Jesus und das Judentum*, Tübingen: Mohr 2008.
19. Cf. the large number of fundamental studies on the development of early Christology by Martin Hengel, basically M. HENGEL, *Der Sohn Gottes*, 2nd ed., Tübingen: Mohr 1977; furthermore his collections in English and German: Id., *Studies in Early Christology*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1995; Id., *Studien zur Christologie*. Kleine Schriften IV (WUNT 201), Tübingen: Mohr 2006; also HURTADO, *Lord Jesus Christ*.
20. Cf., for a comprehensive evaluation of the relevance of the Qumran library for New Testament scholarship, J. FREY, «Die Bedeutung der Qumran-Funde für das Verständnis des Neuen Testaments» in: M. FIEGER – K. SCHMID – P. SCHWAGMAIER (ed.), *Qumran - die Schriftrollen vom Toten Meer* (NTOA 47) Freiburg Schweiz: Universitätsverlag / Göttingen Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2001, 129-208; Id., «The Impact of the Dead Sea Scrolls on New Testament Interpretation: Proposals, Problems and Further Perspectives», in: J. H. CHARLESWORTH (ed.), *The Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Princeton Symposium on the Dead Sea Scrolls, Vol. 3: The Scrolls and Christian Origins*, Waco, TX: Baylor University Press 2006, 407-461.

*Rule*, the *Damascus Document*, the *Hodayot* or the *pesharim*) but even more on the larger number of «non-sectarian» texts, i.e. the works which most probably originate not in the («Essene») community itself but were brought from elsewhere into that religious group and also into the library of Qumran where they were read and possibly copied by the community.<sup>21</sup> These, for the most part previously unknown para-biblical (pseudepigraphical or exegetical), sapiential, liturgical and poetical compositions have helped to develop a much broader and more variegated view of contemporary Judaism and a better imagination of what was possible and conceivable within the world around Jesus and his followers. The Qumran discoveries have especially triggered the view that there was no «normative» type of Judaism<sup>22</sup> at the time of Jesus but a larger variety of traditions and groups with widely divergent and even mutually exclusive views. Some scholars even speak of «Judaisms»,<sup>23</sup> although this might underestimate the fact that, especially in the diaspora, Jews would have recognized each other in face of the pagan world and shared numerous common elements of identity.

#### 4. THE ISSUE OF MESSIANISM

These more recent insights are of crucial relevance for the issue on which I will now focus my further considerations: the case of Messianism and the question how far Christology is rooted in some kind of «messianic» behavior or even messianic claims of the earthly Jesus.<sup>24</sup>

To start the quest for continuity here is primarily suggested from terminological reasons: «Christology», according to the precise meaning of the term, is the teaching or reflection about one who is called a, or the, *χριστός*. The

21. The particular relevance of the non-sectarian texts for studying early Christian literature is stressed in: F. GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ (ed.), *Echoes from the Caves: Qumran and the New Testament* (StT DJ 85), Leiden etc.: Brill 2009, see especially G. J. BROOKE, «The Pre-Sectarian Jesus», *Ibid.*, 33-48.

22. The term goes back to George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era. The Age of the Tannaim 1-3* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press 1927-1930), 1.125.

23. Thus especially Jacob Neusner, cf., e.g., the book title J. NEUSNER – W. S. GREEN – E. S. FRERICHS (eds.), *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era*, Cambridge: University Press 1987.

24. Cf., generally, M. HENGEL, «Jesus der Messias Israels» in M. HENGEL – A. M. SCHWEMER, *Der messianische Anspruch Jesu und die Anfänge der Christologie* (WUNT 138), Tübingen: Mohr 2001, 1-80; in English: *Id.*, «Jesus, the Messiah of Israel, », in *Id.*, *Studies in Early Christology*, 1-72; HENGEL – SCHWEMER, *Jesus und das Judentum*, 461-548.

Greek term, however, a verbal adjective from χρίω («to anoint») would not be conceivable from the normal Greek usage.<sup>25</sup> It can only be understood from the particular usage of in the Septuagint where χριστός is used as rendering of the Hebrew term משיח normally used with an object or a possessive pronoun, and mostly for Israelite kings, more rarely for the anointed priest, and once for the fathers as prophets.<sup>26</sup> Thus, when applied to Jesus, ὁ χριστός can only be understood as a rendering of the Hebrew משיח or, respectively, the Aramaic משיחא. The composite Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, later simply understood as a double name with Χριστός as *cognomen*, must therefore be explained as the rendering of an early confession, a nominal phrase: ישוע משיחא (*Jeshua Meshicha*): «Jesus is the Messiah.»

For the further emergence of Christology, the issue of Jesus' messianic claims or, at least, his of his messianic appearance is most important: Did the earthly Jesus act as «the» or «a» Messiah? Or, did he even claim explicitly to be «the Messiah», as the Gospel tradition suggests? And how can we explain that he was viewed by others in those categories, at least very soon after his death and the resurrection appearances, but probably even during his earthly life and ministry. The emergence of the confession «Jesus is the Messiah» and of the wide and consistent usage of the title in early Christianity would be hard to explain if it were not grounded in Jesus' appearance.

In John 4,26, Jesus reacts to the expectation of the Messiah expressed by the Samaritan woman<sup>27</sup> with the affirmative answer: ἐγώ εἰμι «I am he». He openly claims to be the Messiah who will decide the religious disputes and inaugurate the new veneration of God in spirit and truth. And accordingly, the whole Johannine gospel narration is full of explicit Christological claims of Jesus whose messianic identity, and even divine authority and glory is plainly revealed from the very beginning (cf. John 2,11). In the earliest gospel narration, Jesus hides his identity as «Son of God» and calls the disciples

25. HENGEL, «Jesus, the Messiah» 2, notes that «for a Greek, χριστός referring to a person would have been meaningless. Such a usage will have communicated something like [he ] who has been smeared», but this never occurs in a personal sense. ... The title χριστός as a proper name was so unusual that non-Jews confused it, by itacism, with the common slave name Χριστός, as does Suetonius in his well-known remark on the reign of Claudius. »

26. Ps 105,15 cf. Gen 20,7; cf. HENGEL, «Jesus der Messias» 2.

27. In John, the expectation of the Samaritan woman is shaped rather in Judaeian terms, as a Samaritan, she would have hoped for the «Taheb». But in spite of some particular references to the Samaritan history, the evangelist does not intend to draw a historically accurate picture of the scene. He depicts Jesus first as a clear advocate of the Judaeian side in the discussion between Judaeians and Samaritans (cf. John 4,22), but in the end he wants to overcome the issue of sacred places by reference to the worship in spirit and truth established by faith in Jesus.

(Mark 9:9), the persons healed (Mark 1,44; 5,43) and even the demons (Mark 1,34; 3,12) to be silent, so that his true identity should become publicly known only *after* his resurrection. Thus, an affirmation of his messianic identity is not given before the end of ministry. Only when Jesus is finally asked by the High Priest about his messianic identity, he answers in connection with a threatening word of judgment: «I am (ἐγώ εἰμι), and you will see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of the power and coming in the clouds of heaven» (Mark 14:62). Jesus’ messianic claims seem to be the «blasphemy» that caused him to be sentenced to death.<sup>28</sup> Regardless whether these elements of Mark’s trial scene can be trusted historically, the question arises from here: Did Jesus during his earthly ministry ever express claims like that? Or, did he act in a manner that could be understood (or eventually misunderstood) in «messianic» terms? The usage of the title Χριστός in the early confession tradition would be hard to explain without any basis in Jesus’ earthly ministry or in the events of his passion.

#### 4.1. A non-messianic Jesus?

In classical Jesus research, the acceptance of the title Χριστός by the earthly Jesus is largely denied: A hundred years ago, the leading critical scholars were convinced that Jesus had either undermined and subtly modified<sup>29</sup> the popu-

28. On the notion of «blasphemy» here, see D. L. Bock, *Blasphemy and Exaltation in Judaism and the Final Examination of Jesus* (WUNT II/106), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1998; see also HENGEL – SCHWEMER, *Jesus und das Judentum*, 597-600.

29. This was the view of Julius Wellhausen whose account of the Israelite and Jewish history ended with Jesus and the beginning of Christianity. According to him, Jesus held a view of the kingdom of God as an internal (spiritual) realm, rejected the rather outward Jewish ideas of the Messiah and directed his hope to a more inward, spiritual view. Cf. J. WELLHAUSEN, *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte*, Berlin: Reimer 1894, 315: «Das Reich, das er im Auge hatte, war nicht das, worauf die Juden warteten. Er erfüllte ihre Hoffnung und Sehnsucht über Biten und Verstehen, indem er dieselbe auf ein anderes Ideal, höherer Ordnung, richtete. Nur in diesem Sinn kann er sich den Messias genannt haben: sie sollten keines anderen warten. Er war nicht derjenige, den sie wünschten, aber er war der wahre, den sie wünschen *sollten*.» In later editions, the passage was altered, cf. the last reworking in Id., *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte*, Berlin: Reimer 1914, 365: «Wenn man dem Worte die Bedeutung läßt in der es allgemein verstanden wurde, so ist Jesus also allerdings nicht der Messias gewesen und hat es auch nicht sein wollen. Er würde für uns nicht verlieren, wenn er sich auch nicht dafür hätte halten lassen, sondern sich einfach als den Erfüller des Alten Testaments im Sinne von Mt. 5 gegeben hätte, aber unbegreiflich ist es nicht, wenn er den Namen des jüdischen Ideals sich gefallen ließ und doch den Inhalt völlig veränderte: nicht bloß beim Messias, sondern analog auch beim Reiche Gottes.»

lar view of «the Messiah» or that he had appeared and acted in a rather «non-messianic» manner. The latter view was triggered by William Wrede's work on the messianic secret, where it was suggested that the belief in Jesus as Messiah was introduced into the tradition only after the Easter events, whereas Jesus' earthly appearance had differed from the common hope for the Messiah so that it is not considered to be messianic.<sup>30</sup> The problem with this suggestion is that there is not a single text from contemporary Judaism according to which a figure would become «messianic» through resurrection.

It should be noted that Wrede's view of a non-messianic appearance of Jesus also forms the background for his influential theory of the «messianic secret». Assuming that the early Christians felt the need to cope with the divergence between the probably non-messianic appearance of Jesus and the later belief in his messianic identity, he suggests Mark or already his tradition developed the narrative scheme that Jesus always conceals his messianic identity and calls others to be silent until he finally affirms his messianic identity in the trial before the High Priest (Mk 14: 62). Notwithstanding the problem that the coherence of the different narrative motifs has been questioned in more recent scholarship,<sup>31</sup> the whole explanation only works upon the fundamental supposition that the historical Jesus actually was a non-messianic figure.

Furthermore, all these considerations presuppose that there was a firmly defined Jewish concept of «the Messiah», a «Messiasdogmatik», according to which most Jews in contemporary Palestine knew how «the Messiah» should appear and act —if he was «the Messiah»: politically in terms of the liberation from the Roman domination and the restitution of Israel. From the sources now available, however, we must say that there was no uniform image of «the Messiah» in the Second Temple period. Thus, it is also impossible to contrast Jesus with such an allegedly «normative» view of his contemporaries.<sup>32</sup> Thus, if it is true that Jesus did not act as a zealot or political liberator, this cannot preclude that contemporaries could see in him the fulfillment of certain

30. Thus WREDE, *Messiasgeheimnis*, 220. Finally, Wrede takes a very cautious, but skeptical, view. Later scholars, especially in the Bultmannian school, denied a messianic appearance of Jesus more openly. On the history of research, cf. HENGEL, «Jesus der Messias Israels», 15-34.

31. Cf. HENGEL – SCHWEMER, *Jesus und das Judentum*, 511f., more extensively F. FENDLER, *Studien zum Markusevangelium : zur Gattung, Chronologie, Messiasgeheimnistheorie und Überlieferung des zweiten Evangeliums* (Göttinger Theologische Arbeiten 49), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1991.

32. A «normative» type of Judaism emerged only much later, after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and the reformation of Jewish religious practice and belief in the Tannaitic period – and even in the Rabbinic tradition, the variety of views discussed is remarkably wide.

«messianic» hopes. If the terms and concepts of «messianic» or «Messiah» or are not so narrowly defined, there might be other concepts which could provide a link to the later confession of Jesus as »the Messiah» or «the Christ».

#### 4.2. *The use of the title Χριστός and the death of Jesus as a messianic pretender*

It is appropriate to start with the attestation in the early post-Easter period:<sup>33</sup> As we can see from the Pauline epistles and Acts, the term Χριστός was used very widely and in a rather uniform manner in the very early period of the Jesus movement. In Paul, Χριστός is used 270 times, the double name Ἰησοῦς Χριστός (or in inverted sequence Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς) 109 times. Χριστός is used as a title (with a certain stress on the «messianic» function implied) and also—quite early— as a proper name. The use as cognomen occurs «fully as a matter of course in Paul, so that it frequently replaces the name Jesus in his letters».<sup>34</sup> We can, therefore, assume that the title was understood a proper name quite soon.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, if the double name *Jesus Christos* points back to the messianic confession «Jesus is the Messiah» in its originally Aramaic form, this confession must have been rooted in and «fundamental to the earliest community in Jerusalem».<sup>36</sup>

The fact that the title Χριστός was rather common long before the writing of the Pauline epistles is also confirmed by the pre-Pauline formula tradition, especially by the formulae about Jesus' death. «Christ died for us» is used as a traditional formula numerous times in Paul,<sup>37</sup> and we may assume that the titular «messianic» notion was still included in these confessions, although it has lost its immediate significance in the context of the Pauline letters.<sup>38</sup> For the primitive Christian proclamation it was significant that the one who gave his life «for us» was not an ordinary person, but the eschatological messenger of God, the «Messiah» or, the «Christ». The tradition adopted in Luke/Acts also confirms that the term Χριστός was used—and already understood as a

33. Cf. HENGEL, «Jesus der Messias Israels», 1-17; ET: «Jesus the Messiah of Israel», 1-15.

34. HENGEL, «Jesus the Messiah of Israel», 7.

35. The «messianic» notion could disappear when the term was translated into Greek and then predominantly used in its Greek rendering, because for a Greek speaking audience, especially if they were not too well acquainted with the Septuagint, the «messianic» notion of the term was no more conceivable.

36. HENGEL, «Jesus the Messiah of Israel», 8.

37. Rom 5,8, cf. 5,6; 14,9.15; 1 Cor 8,11; 15,3; 2 Cor 5,15; 1 Thess 5,10; Gal 2,21; cf. 1 Pet 3,18.

38. Cf. also D. ZELLER, «Zur Transformation des *Christos* bei Paulus», *Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie* 8 (1993) 155-167.



proper name— long before the Pauline epistles, when it is reported that the members of the new Jewish sect in Antioch were called Χριστιανοί (Act 11,26).<sup>39</sup>

If the Christological confession that Jesus was the Messiah was firmly rooted in the early Aramaic-speaking community, it can hardly be without any ground in Jesus' earthly appearance. Given the fact that there was a personal continuity from the circle of the disciples to the earliest community, the confession may point back to the disciples' earlier perception of Jesus and, especially, to the circumstances of his deliverance and death. On the other hand, if the messianic belief was merely a post-Easter invention, added to the Jesus tradition without any ground in Jesus' earthly life, it would be hardly conceivable how quickly the title Χριστός became common and how completely the belief in Jesus as «the Messiah» or, the Christ could shape the tradition so completely that we can actually find no text where he acts in a really non-messianic manner. There is, furthermore, no attestation that a salvific figure could become «the Messiah» through resurrection.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, if Jesus had acted in a completely non-messianic manner or if he had even rejected messianic ideas, it would also be difficult to explain how he could have been put to death as the «King of the Jews» (Mark 15,26), under the charge of being a messianic pretender.<sup>40</sup>

The title «King of the Jews» is used in Mark's passion narrative in different scenes (Mark 15,2.9. 12. 16ff, 32) and in the inscription above the cross (Mark 15,26). This expression cannot be explained as a simply dogmatic interpretation. It is never used in words of Jesus' followers, and there is no attempt to defend or prove this title from Scripture. In contrast with the title Χριστός, the designation «King of the Jews» it is not a Christian Christological confession; it is also «nowhere found as a Jewish description of the Messiah».<sup>41</sup> It is rather formed from a Roman and cynically anti-Jewish perspective, which implies a mocking of not only Jesus but also the Jews. Thus it would be

39. There is no reason to doubt this piece of information. Cf. G. LÜDEMANN, *Das frühe Christentum nach den Traditionen der Apostelgeschichte. Ein Kommentar*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1987, 144; HENGEL, *Jesus der Messias Israels*, 8f.

40. The confession formula Rom 1,3f., which was sometimes adduced as an evidence for that idea, actually presupposes that Jesus was the Messiah as a son of David. He is not only made the Messiah by his resurrection. In Acts 2,36 the focus is on the exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of God, he is enthroned as *kuvriou*, the title Christ is only added here, but not in the focus.

41. Cf. already N. A. DAHL, «Der gekreuzigte Messias», in H. RISTOW – K. MATTHIAE (ed.), *Der historische Jesus und der kerygmatische Christus*, Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt 1960, 149-169.

rather strange if the early community had invented and introduced the title «King of the Jews» as the capital charge against Jesus without any precedent in history. This would have even «justified the Roman proceedings against Jesus as a rebel against the ruling state power»<sup>42</sup> and even burdened his followers with the suspicion of being rabble-rousers as well. It is, thus, rather plausible that the term gives a historically reliable hint to the original reason of the death sentence against Jesus. The term was then used as a prominent motif in the literary composition of Mark’s passion narrative, but it originates most probably in the events of Jesus’ trial and crucifixion. But how can we explain that Jesus was charged to be a messianic pretender and put to death by the Romans under such a (false) accusation?

#### 4.3. *The «messianic» element in Jesus’ ministry*

It is widely agreed that in his public ministry Jesus did not explicitly claim to be «the Messiah» by using that title for himself. Such is only attested in John, in a later stage of the tradition, where the Johannine Jesus reveals his messianic and even divine identity from the very beginning. His followers confess that he is «the Messiah, about whom Moses wrote in the law and also the prophets» (John 1,45), and he also makes himself known as «the Messiah» who is expected to come (John 4,26). On the contrary, the earthly Jesus most probably used merely the enigmatic term ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, Aramaic בר אִנְשׁ «the son of the man». This title occurs (with one exception in Acts 7:56) only in the gospels and only in sayings of Jesus, but never in the words of others or in comments of the evangelists. The very literal translation, which sounds strange in Greek, suggests that the term was probably formed quite early, when the first elements of the new message were parts of the new message were translated into Greek. It also differs notably from the form in Daniel 7:13 (MT and LXX), which makes a mere post-Easter creation quite implausible.<sup>43</sup> Regardless of the precise meaning of the term, «the Son of Man» seems to be the only «christological title» actually used by the earthly Jesus. However, in the context of the preaching of the earthly Jesus it cannot be regarded as a

42. HENGEL, «Jesus the Messiah of Israel,» 46. In Mark 15,32, the High Priests speak of the «king of Israel» when they mock Jesus and demand he should come down from the cross. In Mt 2,2 the term is also put into the mouth of pagans.

43. Ibid, 46.

«title», since it does not refer to a firmly established or even commonly shared kind of expectation.

During his public ministry, Jesus probably circumvented the title «Messiah» with regard to his own person and mission. There are, however, passages in the Synoptic Gospels where the title is used by others, primarily Peter's confession (Mark 8,29) and, in the last trial, the question of the High Priest (Mk 14,61-62). Both passages might also be influenced by a later Christian perspective, but they show at least that the quest for Jesus' true identity and authority caused by his actions could be answered by reference to not only prophetic (Mark 6:4) but also «messianic» categories. According to Mark, Jesus did not reject the term,<sup>44</sup> and at least in the scene of the trial there is some historical plausibility that Jesus reacted to the question of the High Priest with an affirmative answer and a threatening word against his accusers.<sup>45</sup> The charge of «blasphemy» and the death sentence executed later by the Romans due to a politically designed accusation are best explained by such an assumption.

In other passages, similar questions about Jesus' identity and authority are posed without the term «Messiah». Thus in the request of John the Baptizer (Luke 7,19 Q): «Are you the one who is to come, or should we wait for another?» Jesus' answer is quite affirmative and refers to his own healing and preaching activity but is phrased without any title, not even the phrase «the one who is to come»: «Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news proclaimed to them, and blessed is the one who takes no offense at me. » (Q/Lk 7:22-3). In this periscope the term «messiah» is avoided, although the question for the «coming one» aims at roughly the same idea—a figure or agent expected to come, acting towards or linked with God's eschatological salvation or restitution. Jesus' answer refers to his own works but rather to God's works which could be observed in his ministry. The enumeration alludes to a number of biblical passages,

44. Cf. HENGEL, «Jesus der Messias Israels», 65. The form without the definite article which fits better with Dan 7,13 is used only once in the gospels, in John 5:27 (cf. further Apc 1,13; 14,14; Hebr 2,6).

45. The rejection of Peter as «Satan» in Mark 8,33 is the answer to his idea that Jesus should not suffer. Any speculation about an original link with Peter's confession lacks textual foundation.

mostly from Isaiah,<sup>46</sup> which are not explicitly «messianic»<sup>47</sup> but describe what should happen in the expected period of salvation. As a number of texts from the Qumran library and also the later Targumic tradition demonstrate, contemporaries could read these distinct texts together and link them with elements of the «messianic» passages of the book of Isaiah, with the result that there was a more comprehensive view of the messianic period or even a link with the expectation of a messianic figure.

The most striking parallel has been found in the Qumran library: It is the much debated text 4Q521 frg. 2, II, 1-14, where roughly the same passages from Isaiah are adopted<sup>48</sup> and —as in Luke 7,22— even the resurrection of the dead is included. Although line 1 of the passage does use the term משיח, it is not totally clear whether «the Messiah» or other «anointed» one(s) are meant. «The heaven and earth will listen to his anointed one (or plural: to his anointed ones)» might rather refer to a prophet or the prophets.<sup>49</sup> But the precise reference of the term is not decisive, and the term is an important clue to the understanding of Jesus' answer to the Baptizer, although it does not speak of «the works of the Messiah».<sup>50</sup> The subject of the salvific acts enumerated in the subsequent lines is most certainly God himself. He «will consider the pious and call the righteous by name. Over the poor his spirit will hover and will renew the faithful with his power. And he will glorify the pious on the throne of the eternal kingdom. He who liberates the captives, restores sight to the blind, straightens the bent... He will heal the wounded, and revive the dead and bring good news to the poor.»<sup>51</sup> It is God, not the Messiah, who does these works of eschatological restoration and salvation.

But, strictly speaking, this is also true in Jesus' answer to the Baptizer: there is no claim that Jesus himself is the subject of the works mentioned; instead, it is God who makes the blind see, the lame walk, the dead alive and

46. Cf. BOCK, *Blasphemy and Exaltation*, 209-238; R. PESCH, *Das Markusevangelium* (vol. 2; 3rd ed., HThK II/2, Freiburg: Herder 1984), 436-439.442f.; HENGEL/SCHWEMER, *Jesus und das Judentum*, 597f.

47. Especially Isa 35,5-6; 61,1-2 (cf. 29,18 and 26,19-20).

48. A certain exception is Isa 61,1 where an anointing is mentioned.

49. One should add here Psalm 146; cf. also Isa 42,7 where also the opening the eyes of the blind is mentioned —and linked with the Servant of God. For the most thorough interpretation of the passage, cf. M. BECKER, «Die «messianische Apokalypse» 4Q521 und der Interpretationsrahmen der Taten Jesu», in: J. FREY – M. BECKER (ed.), *Apokalyptik und Qumran* (Einblicke 10), Paderborn: Bonifatius 2007, 237-302. Cf. also J. ZIMMERMANN, *Messianische Texte aus Qumran* (WUNT II/104), Tübingen: Mohr 1998, 343-388.

50. Cf. M. BECKER, «4Q521 und die Gesalbten», *RdQ* 18 (1997) 73-96.

51. Thus one of the first presentations of the text by J. J. COLLINS, «The Works of the Messiah», *DSD* 1 (1994) 98-112.

the poor to receive a good news. The only difference is that in Luke 7,23 these acts of divine restitution and salvation are connected with the person of Jesus: «Blessed is one who takes no offense at me.» Thus, this document of Scriptural interpretation from Second Temple Judaism (which shows no signs of a Qumran «Sectarian» origin) provides a very remarkable parallel for the way that the works of Jesus could be understood as a part of God's salvific activity in the messianic time, even if the «title» Messiah is not used. Against the background of such a reading of Scripture, it is also quite conceivable that Jesus' exorcisms and healings, together with his message of God's kingdom and grace, could be perceived by contemporaries as «messianic» works and inspire them to consider whether he might be «the one who is to come» or even to view him as «the Messiah». <sup>52</sup>

#### 4.4. *The variety of contemporary Jewish messianism*

Again, we cannot presuppose any fixed concept or even «dogmatics» of «the Messiah» in contemporary Judaism. There was rather a large number of expectations of salvation, restitution or a blessed state of being in the end time, which could be varied and linked with each other. <sup>53</sup> Even though the royal concept of a Davidic messiah <sup>54</sup> might have been the most widespread and commonly shared, included, e.g., in the *Shmone Ezre*, the daily prayer, range of ideas is very wide: The *Psalms of Solomon* (esp. 17,32-44) expect the Messiah as a teacher full of spirit and judge of his people, <sup>55</sup> apocalyptic tradi-

52. Translation according to M. O. WISE – M. G. ABEGG – E. COOK, *The Dead Sea Scrolls. A New Translation*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco 1996.

53. Another very important text can only be mentioned here: the Midrash on Melchizedek 11QMelch which adopts Isa 61,1-2 and links the «anointed» person there with an eschatological heavenly figure, Michael-Melchizedek who is God's agent in salvation.

54. On the variety of Jewish messianism cf. J. ZIMMERMANN, *Messianische Texte aus Qumran*; H. LICHTENBERGER, «Messianic Expectations and Messianic Figures in the Second Temple Period, » in: J. H. CHARLESWORTH – H. LICHTENBERGER – G. S. OEGEMA (ed.), *Qumran-Messianism*, Tübingen: Mohr 1998, 9-20; J. H. CHARLESWORTH, Messianology in the Biblical Pseudepigraph, *Ibid.*, 21-52. G. S. OEGEMA, *The Anointed and His People. Messianic Expectations from the Maccabees to Bar Kokhba*, Sheffield: Academic Press 1998; J. J. COLLINS, *The Scepter and the Star. The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other Ancient Literature*, New York: Doubleday 1995; *Id.*, «The Nature of Messianism in the Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls,» in: T. LIM (ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls in Their Historical Context*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark 2000, 199-218. Cf. most recently, J. J. COLLINS – A. YARBRO COLLINS, *King and Messiah as Son of God*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2008.

55. On this type of expectation, cf. S. SCHREIBER, *Gesalbter und König. Titel und Konzeptionen der königlichen Gesalbtenwartung in frühjüdischen und christlichen Schriften (BZNW 105)*, Berlin and New York: de Gruyter 2000.

tions such as 4 *Ezra* 13 combine the image of the Messiah with the «Son of Man» from Daniel 7 or with the idea of the eschatological judge (thus in the Enochic *Parables*). Apart from the hope for a royal, Davidic Messiah, certain circles hoped for an eschatological High Priest or for a «Prophet» like Moses (cf. Deut 18). A number of Qumran texts share a combined expectation of two messianic figures, a priestly Messiah and a political, Davidic one. Some texts could even combine the image of a messianic mediator with the idea of a saving action by God himself or by superhuman powers, angels or hypostases.<sup>56</sup> Such an idea seems to be present already in the Psalter of the Septuagint, when Psalm 109,3 (LXX) phrases (on the Messiah): πρὸ ἑωσφόρου ἐξεγέννησά σε: «before the morning star I have begotten you», so that the messianic with priestly functions (cf. V. 4) appears as an angelic or astral being.<sup>57</sup> The combination of different «messianic» motifs and traditions is already rooted in the period of the redaction and collection of prophetic writings of the Hebrew Bible, it was continued and enhanced in parts of the translation of the Septuagint (and also in the Targums) and in the composition of texts such as 11QMelch, 4Q521 and others writings from the library of Qumran. Although Josephus is relatively silent about messianism because of its political dangers and some Jewish texts of the Hellenistic-Roman period do not convey messianic ideas and, there was certainly no «messianic silence» —but rather a vast variety of expectations and speculations in the traditions and religious groups of contemporary Palestinian Judaism.

The category of Messianism should therefore be defined not too narrowly but rather broadly, including royal, prophetic, priestly and combined concepts. It cannot even be limited to purely human figures, but includes also angelic or Divine agents. In view of such a plurality of messianic ideas and concepts, the gap between Jewish messianism and early Christian Christology is certainly not as wide as has often been supposed (often for dogmatic reasons) in the exegetical debate. From the broad range of concepts, it is easily conceivable that contemporaries could interpret the acts of Jesus within the framework of «messianic» concepts and view him as «the Messiah», whereas others could use such a «messianic» impact as a reason to denounce him before Pilate as a potentially dangerous element.

56. Cf. SCHREIBER, *Gesalbter und König*, 176ff.

57. Cf. W. HORBURY, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ*, London: SCM 1998, 107: «The messiah is widely, not just exceptionally, depicted with emphasis on his superhuman and spiritual aspect.»

#### 4.5. *Messianism without use of the title «Messiah» – Jesus' «implicit Christology»*

It is only plausible that some of Jesus' contemporaries expressed such expectations, as is mirrored in scenes such as the confession of Peter or Jesus' entry in Jerusalem (Mark 11,1-10). But we cannot get certainty about how Jesus reacted to those expectations. Did he simply keep silence? Did he openly reject messianic hopes, or did he tolerate them to a certain degree, well aware about the political dangers implied? And was his way to Jerusalem, his provoking act in the temple court, his last meal with the disciples in any way linked with such a hope for the impending kingdom, or even an expectation that the «messianic» time which had begun in his works might come to completion quite soon? I cannot discuss these issues here. But if Jesus had totally rejected any kind of messianic hope (as was linked with his exorcisms and healings), it would be hardly conceivable that the title *Christos* is adopted so frequently and consistently in the early pre-Pauline confession formulae (1 Cor 15,3; Rom 6,4; 14,9). It seems much more plausible to interpret sayings like the answer to the Baptist as a tentatively true rendering of the manner in which the earthly Jesus reacted to the hopes expressed by some of his contemporaries.

Most probably he did not use the term *Messiah*, but he spoke in allusions to the Scriptures about the («messianic») time of God's final salvific activity, he was conscious that this time had begun in his time, and in the exorcisms and healings that happened, and he linked God's saving acts with his own appearance: «Blessed is the one who takes no offense at me.» Symbolic acts such as the «creation» (Mark 3,14) of the Twelve as a circle representing the eschatological people of God,<sup>58</sup> the entry in Jerusalem,<sup>59</sup> and the cleansing of the Temple could enhance such expectations among his followers and increase the fear of the temple aristocracy. Only if we take more serious the «messianic» elements of Jesus' appearance, his final execution as «king of the Jews», under the false accusation of political, «messianic» claims becomes historically conceivable.

58. Cf. J. SCHAPER, *Eschatology in the Greek Psalter* (WUNT II/76), Tübingen: Mohr 1995; HORBURY, *Jewish Messianism*, 96, who phrases with regard to some other passages from the LXX: «that the messianic king was envisaged, varieously yet consistently, as an angel-like spirit waiting to appear and be embodied».

59. Cf. Matt 19,28 and the desire of the sons of Zebedee Mark 10,35-45.

#### 4.6. *The crisis of Messianism*

On the other hand, some elements of his appearance, and especially his untimely death, must have disappointed many of those who had hoped for deliverance from the Romans and for the visible erection of God's kingdom. The belief that he was the Messiah or a messianic figure could not simply «survive» his crucifixion, since there was no concept available that the Messiah should die or even be crucified. At first, his arrest and finally his public crucifixion were unbelievable and shocking for his disciples. They escaped for fear and disappointment. The flight of the disciples (Mark 14,50; cf. John 16,32) and the return of some of them to Galilee (cf. Mark 16,7 but also Matt 28,16-20 and John 21,1-14) are one of the most undisputable facts of the history of the Jesus; from here, it becomes clear that the disciples had no religious categories to explain or cope with the events.<sup>60</sup> They could not expect that Jesus would appear again, nor that the «messianic» movement initiated by Jesus could go on without him.

The conviction that he actually *had been* the Messiah could only be established afresh by a new and unexpected event, by the Easter appearances—interpreted in an eschatological framework as a Divine intervention in favor of his messenger and, consequently, as the Divine confirmation of Jesus' messianic ministry and message in spite of his death.

On the other hand, the Easter events would not have made him a Messiah if he had not been put to death under the accusation to have messianic claims and, even more fundamentally, if he had not been viewed in messianic categories by some of his contemporaries due to his public ministry.

#### 5. JESUS' CLAIM FOR AUTHORITY AS IMPLICIT CHRISTOLOGY

The implicit Christology found in the answer to the Baptist, is confirmed by a number of other sayings in which Jesus links his exorcising and healing activity with the coming or the presence of God's kingdom, i.e. with eschatological restitution or salvation. Mention should also be made of the famous saying about the finger of God: «If I, with God's finger, expel the demons, the kingdom of God has come upon you» (Luke 11:20 par. Matt 12:28 Q).<sup>61</sup> Most

60. On this, cf. PESCH, *Markusevangelium*, 2.187f.

61. Cf. M. HENGEL, «Der Finger und die Herrschaft Gottes in Lk 11,20» in: R. KIEFFER – J. BERGMAN (ed.), *La Main de Dieu. Die Hand Gottes* (WUNT 94), Tübingen: Mohr 1997, 87-106.



scholars regard this saying as an authentic expression of Jesus' view of his ministry and time. Nowhere else is Jesus' authority over demonic powers linked so closely with the appearance of God's kingdom. In his acts, or better: in the acts, which the «finger of God», i.e. his Divine power caused to happen through Jesus as his agent or messenger, the eschatological restitution and salvation is launched, and, consequently, the time of his presence is qualified as the decisive and ultimate time of eschatological salvation.

A similar claim is expressed by the sayings in which what happens in his presence is compared with the peak moments of biblical history: In the presence of Jesus contemporaries, there is «more than Jonah» (Matt 12:41) and «more than Solomon» (Matt 12:42). These comparisons are presented within a pair of sayings full of Semitisms, and it is very implausible to explain them as mere creations of the post-Easter church. In a similar manner, Luke 10,13-15 par. Mat 11,21-24 links a threat against the Galilean villages of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum with a positive mention of the pagan towns Tyros and Sidon.<sup>62</sup> Such a consciousness that the present supersedes the time of Solomon and Jonah, together with the antithetical confrontation of contemporary skeptics with the biblical example of «pious gentiles» can be viewed as a use of Scripture which is quite typical for Jesus.<sup>63</sup> As sayings of the earthly Jesus, these sayings reflect a claim that the urgency of repentance and the splendor of God's wisdom revealed now go far beyond what happened at the climactic moments of the Biblical history. What happened now, could only be expressed with reference to Biblical categories and thus characterized as «typological» fulfillment of Biblical and contemporary expectations. The reference to the judgment and its connection with the reaction of the Jewish contemporaries to the Jesus' call for repentance reflects a unique claim for authority, without any Christological «title».

One might, therefore, ask which category could be appropriate to describe such a claim for authority. Is it that of a wisdom teacher, of a rabbi, a prophet, or maybe «the last prophet»? That he was interpreted by contemporaries in prophetic categories, is certain (cf. Mark 6,4). But this was also true for John the Baptist, and Jesus own comments on the Baptist mark a difference from him. If the Baptist was the last and greatest one of the prophets, yet even «more than a prophet» (Luke 11,9), if he was the final messenger who was

62. See also Luke 10,12 par Matt 10,15 the reference to Sodom. On these sayings cf. M. HENGEL, «Jesus als messianischer Lehrer der Weisheit und die Anfänge der Christologie,» in: HENGEL/SCHWEMER, *Der messianische Anspruch Jesu und die Anfänge der Christologie*, 81-131 (86).

63. Thus G. THEISSEN – A. MERZ, *Der historische Jesus*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1996, 320.

expected to warn his contemporaries in face of the coming day of judgment (Mal 3,23), the coming Elijah, then Jesus himself must be characterized differently.<sup>64</sup> He was more than a voice crying in the wilderness, more than a messenger to prepare the way of God—but how could his identity and authority be phrased. Even the category of «the» Messiah is not fully fitting, since it was not clearly defined, thus he could only circumscribe his claims, or use an enigmatic «title», «the Son of Man», but avoid the term «Messiah» which would have caused rather misunderstandings and, moreover, a danger for Jesus and his circle.

The eschatological urgency of Jesus' call for repentance is even unparalleled in the common views of messianic figures and agents. The claim that the encounter with his message and person has a definitive and eschatological relevance was already found in the closure of the answer to the Baptist (Luke 7,23). It is also mirrored in the difficult logion of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Mark 3,28-29), which may comment on the fact that people explained Jesus' works as works inspired by a demonic power, thus actually rejecting the saving power of the Spirit and the eschatological and saving activity of God himself. The claim that in Jesus' acts God himself is at work, is finally uttered in the saying Luke 12:8-9, «Whoever shall confess me before humans, the Son of Man shall confess him before the angels of God». Without using any «messianic» title, and without directly identifying himself with the «Son of Man», this saying expresses nothing less than that the last judicial decision on the eschatological state of humans depends on their confession of Jesus during their earthly lifetime.

## 6. FROM IMPLICIT TO EXPLICIT CHRISTOLOGY

Such an extreme claim caused various kinds of rejection among contemporaries. His followers remained largely without understanding, his family disapproved his behavior. He was charged to be a maniac (Mark 3:21), magician (Mark 3:22) and a blasphemer (Mark 2:7; 14:64) and finally delivered to the

64. What distinguished him from the Baptizer was that he viewed his own time not only in categories of expectation (of the end, the judgment or the coming of God), and the saying of the «finger of God» demonstrates that this consciousness of his own time was essentially linked with the healings and exorcisms that happened in his ministry. In Jesus' sayings, this consciousness that the time of salvation has already been inaugurated, is most closely connected with his central message, with the notion of the kingdom of God.

Roman authorities with the false but politically sensitive charge, he might be a royal pretender and as such a rebel against Roman domination.

His execution was intended to put an end to all those claims and hopes, and it actually disappointed all the expectations of his followers regarding his person. It could have been the end of the «Jesus movement»<sup>65</sup> —if there had not been some rumors about former disciples and even skeptics, who now claimed they had seen him, received personal forgiveness, a renewed commissioning, and even the gift of the eschatological spirit.

Now, and only in face of those new events, the death of «the messiah» had to be considered afresh. What had been simply shocking, had now to be reconsidered in the light of the Scriptures and also in the light of what the disciples remembered from Jesus message, his appearance and behavior, his eschatological claims and the reactions he had evoked. The former message and the expectations connected were not simply invalid (by his death). On the contrary: If God had not left his messenger in the pit, everything of his person and ministry was now validated in a completely new manner and forcefully established. Now —and only now— it was important to seek in the Scriptures for possible reasons why Jesus had to be delivered and crucified, and how God could allow his messianic messenger to suffer such a painful execution. And although there was no explicit paradigm of a «dying messiah» —not even in Isaiah 53— the confession could now issue forth «the Messiah died» and «God has raised Jesus from the dead» or, as a combined phrase, «that *Christ* (the Messiah) died... and rose again ...according to the Scriptures» (1Cor 15:3-5).

Thus, the earliest attempts of «explicit Christology» in the soteriological formula adopted and combined the message of Jesus' resurrection (interpreted in apocalyptic categories as the beginning of the eschatological resurrection) with the messianic terminology or even the title «the Messiah» (which was originally linked with the works and, finally, with the death of Jesus). But also the eschatological expectation, which could appear to be invalidated in the hour of Jesus' death, was strongly intensified through the Easter events: If Jesus' earthly mission had already happened in the awareness that the eschatological time of restitution had begun, the post-Easter disciples could have even more claimed that God's eschatological power had

65. Of course, some former followers might have venerated their hero for a certain time, remembered his teachings or continued to live as a group of disciples —as was the case with the followers of John the Baptist— but the dynamics of mission which is visible in the first years after Jesus' death and after the Easter events cannot be explained from there.

been revealed in Jesus’ resurrection, the gift of the Spirit, the new understanding of Scripture, and the beginning dynamics of mission. They were now witnesses to a new and creative Divine act, the resurrection of Jesus as the inauguration of the eschatological time.

The earthly mission of Jesus, his words and his deeds, the view of God and the idea of discipleship conveyed through him, were now considered to be confirmed and, at the same time, thoroughly transformed through the events of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Radical *discontinuity* —which should not be underestimated— was complemented by a *continuity*, formed by the memory of the former disciples and a resumption of the practice of common meals and probably also a common lifestyle, especially among the wandering missionaries of the early period. The hitherto *implicit Christology*, the claim of eschatological authority and a decisive eschatological relevance of his person, became transformed into an *explicit Christology*, based on the new consideration of how God had eschatologically acted, on the interpretation and combination of Scriptural traditions and on the awareness of the bestowal of the Spirit.

Whereas Jesus had primarily spoken of God and God’ salvific intentions, he himself could now become the object of proclamation, veneration and belief. He himself became part of the «kingdom of God» he had once proclaimed. He was the one whom God had raised from the dead and installed into his glory, whom he had justified and enthroned. Thus, the relevance and real identity of Jesus had to be proclaimed explicitly —by use of functional terms, which soon became more or less fixed as «titles». The proclaimer was now the proclaimed one, and the foremost theme of early Christian reflection was Christology.

The further development of Christology cannot be described in detail here. In the dynamics of the early Christian mission, the ongoing reflection and the encounter with the world around, a number of new ideas and concepts were integrated which were mostly taken from the variety of contemporary Jewish traditions. This development was remarkably rapid,<sup>66</sup> as we can see from the pre-Pauline traditions such as Rom 1,3-4; 1 Cor 8,6 or Phil 2,6-11: the early Christological reading of the Psalms could add new aspects of Messianism to the image of Jesus, especially the notion of his Divine sonship (Ps 2) and his

66. Cf. basically, M. HENGEL, «Christology and New Testament Chronology: A Problem in the History of Earliest Christianity» in: *Id.*, *Between Jesus and Paul*, Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity, London, SCM Press / Philadelphia: Fortress 1983, 30-47.

enthronement to the right hand of God (Ps 110,4).<sup>67</sup> The Divine name in its Greek rendering ὁ κύριος was quickly used as a «title» and even as a devotional address to the risen and exalted and glorified Jesus.<sup>68</sup> The Wisdom of which Jesus had spoken could now be taken as a paradigm for describing his own mission and appearance. In light of the idea of the pre-existent Wisdom, Jesus' true origins could now be seen in the realm of God himself, in the «beginning» of the world or a primordial state beyond (John 1:1f.).

Yet within such undisputable discontinuity, there is still an element of continuity: from the eschatological claims of the earthly Jesus, as sketched above, there is, in my view, a rather coherent line towards the unfolding of New Testament Christology, towards the view of Jesus as Son of God, as in Mark, and finally to the explicit «high Christology» of the Fourth Gospel, according to which Jesus acts and even is in closest unity with the Father (John 10:30) and that his true origin—and thus the ultimate reason of salvation—cannot be located in any episode in history, but in God's eternal being (1 John 4,8-10).<sup>69</sup>

## 7. CONCLUSION

In influential traditions of exegesis and theology, the transformation of Christology was considered an undue falsification of the «simple» gospel of Jesus, his preaching of God the Father, into a daring self-predication in which Jesus (at least in the Gospel of John) openly claims to be himself a Divine being. It was thus considered as a switch from theo-centricism to christo-centricism or, even more, a Hellenization or even Paganization of the «religion of Jesus» which was seen in a wide contrast with the later theology of Paul or the gospel writers.<sup>70</sup>

67. Cf. M. HENGEL, «“Sit at my Right Hand!” The Enthronement of Christ at the Right Hand of God and Psalm 110:1», in: ID., *Studies in Early Christology*, 119-225.

68. Cf. already the Aramaic «Maranatha» in 1Cor 16,22.

69. Cf. J. FREY, «“God is Love.” On the Textual Tradition and Semantics of a Core Expression of the Christian Notion of God», in: R. G. KRATZ – H. SPIECKERMANN (ed.), *Divine Wrath and Divine Mercy in the World of Antiquity* (FAT II/33), Tübingen: Mohr 2008, 203-227.

70. This was roughly the view of liberal theology at about 1900, and especially of the History-of-Religions school. Scholars from that school, such as Wilhelm Heitmüller or Wilhelm Bousset saw a wide gap especially between the Palestinian Jewish type of religion Jesus belonged to and the Hellenistic type of religion Paul was considered to follow.

Instead, these scholarly views deserve reconsideration if the findings of more recent research are valid that the roots and factors of Christological development in the early community but also in Paul, Mark, Luke and John are almost totally inspired from the variety of interpretations and concepts of contemporary Judaism with only few, if any, direct adoptions from the Pagan world.<sup>71</sup> There are more lines of continuity from Jesus to Paul and to the later gospel writers.

But the continuity should not only be seen in history of religions matters. There is also a theological *rationale* that links the preaching and authority of the earthly Jesus with the later proclamation of his Christological identity: if the good news of forgiveness and salvation communicated by Jesus is a reliable truth, if such salvation is thought to be a definitive, eschatologically valid one (and not only a temporary but changeable state), then it was necessary to consider from which authority Jesus could proclaim such forgiveness to the sinners (cf. Mark 2,6-10), and what was the true identity of the one who dared to act as the authoritative messenger of salvation (cf. Mark 2,1-10). Thus, the eschatological relevance of Jesus (as uttered in some of his probably authentic sayings) is the ultimate ground for the later tendency to focus on his identity and to describe it in not only functional but also ontological, yet even Divine categories. From the eschatological relevance of Jesus (or of the reaction of humans to his appearance), it appears consequent to ask for the ultimate reason of such a significance, or even for the ultimate reason of salvation which was found in the primordial will of God, in his love towards the human world (John 3:16).

Such ideas of an explicitly high Christology, phrased not before at the end of the development of the New Testament tradition, may still appear to be far away from the earlier Christological views or, even more, from the claims of the earthly Jesus. The historical paradigm forces us to acknowledge a development, and there is no honest way to escape such a consequence.<sup>72</sup> Of course, such a development is not only a linear unfolding of the earliest roots but rather a complex interaction between the tradition, the situation of the recipients, and new insights from Scriptural interpretation and theological reflection. But if such a process is acknowledged, we can also see a kind of coherence regarding the subject matter: there is a relatively consistent path from the implicit Christology, the (allegedly) «messianic» mission of Jesus

71. Cf., generally, HURTADO, *Lord Jesus Christ*, and also the works of Martin Hengel cited above.

72. This is one of the results of the critical debate about the interpretive suggestions in BENEDIKT XVI / JOSEPH RATZINGER, *Jesus von Nazareth*.

and his claim that it was God who worked in his deeds to the explicit and high Christology, according to which Jesus himself is the agent of Divine salvation who belongs ultimately to the side of the creator, not the creation. And although the expression of Christology underwent a thorough transformation through the events of Jesus death and resurrection, through the reading of the Scriptures, and the experience of the Spirit, the expression of Christology remained consistently related to its starting point, the earthly and historical person of Jesus of Nazareth in his relation with the one God and his involvement in God's eschatological salvation.