

# CHAPTER 7

## CHRISTOLOGY

### A. Christology from Above or Below

Christology deals with the work and person of Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, the basic affirmation of faith is “Jesus is the Christ” (1 John 5:1) or “Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2:11). When Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do men say that the Son of Man is?,” Peter replied, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Mt. 16:13-17). Christology began with that confession.

There have been two approaches to Christological doctrine: Christology from below or from above. Christology from below starts with Jesus of Nazareth, who was born at a certain time and lived in a specific place. He was a Palestinian Jew, a carpenter and a rabbi, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate in 30 A.D. That is, he was not a myth but a man. So it is necessary to discover the historical Jesus.

The second approach, Christology from above, stresses the unique significance of Jesus *Christ*. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. For the New Testament the Jesus of history was of minor importance. Paul and the Gospels stress the role Jesus was chosen to play—he was the Messiah the Jews had been waiting for. God brings salvation to all mankind in the name of Jesus Christ. Through faith in him we

are made new creatures. Through commitment to him, our disordered lives are recreated in God's image. He is our Way, our Truth and our Life. So Christians have not been especially concerned with the man Jesus, but rather with the Lord and Savior who atones for their sins, mediates between men and God, and reconciles the creation with the Creator. Jesus Christ is a word-event which affects all history, not simply 1st century Judea. Christianity proclaims the full historicity of one crucial saving event: Jesus Christ.

## **B. The History of Christology**

### *1. The Early Period*

The earliest Christology developed in three stages.<sup>1</sup> First there was the concept of Jesus as the Messiah, as held by the original Palestinian Christians. This idea was expanded during a second stage, when the Christian movement attracted Hellenistic Jews. Finally, there was the Christology of the Gentile churches. All three stages can be found in the New Testament, and the variety of Christological emphases there is due to the fact that the Palestinians, the Hellenistic Jewish Christians and the Gentile churches had quite different concepts of the mission of Jesus.

a) Palestinian Christians interpreted Jesus' ministry in the light of his eschatological preaching. He came proclaiming the imminent advent of the kingdom of God. He was the herald of the coming Son of Man, who would inaugurate the long-awaited Messianic age. When the Jews rejected Jesus and the Roman procurator crucified him, God raised Jesus from the dead, and invited him to sit next to Him, at His right hand. But the Palestinian Christians refused to give up their original eschatological faith; they were sure that Jesus Christ would soon return in glory to establish the kingdom of God. His

second coming in power would complete his messianic mission, validate his teachings and usher in the new aeon. Hence, the Christian hope was symbolized by the prayer, "Come, O Lord!" (1 Cor. 16:22). When the parousia occurs, the Messiah will defeat the powers of evil and rule the earth as God's representative.

b) When Christianity spread beyond Palestine into the synagogues of Hellenistic Judaism, Christology was altered in response to the new situation and the delay in the parousia. Previously Christians had not paid much attention to Jesus' earthly ministry, because they expected him to return quickly. When the parousia did not occur, Christians began to emphasize the teachings and deeds of Jesus as a standard for their own lives. They also prepared a complete account of Jesus' life and work for those who had never had the opportunity to see or hear him. As the eschatological hope faded, Christians stressed the continued work of the risen Christ in the church. Jesus was no longer thought of as the Messiah-elect; he was now considered to be already enthroned as the Messiah in heaven. So Jesus was given a new title, *Kyrios* (Lord), to indicate his exalted status.

c) Rather quickly, Christianity attracted non-Jews, and soon became a predominantly Gentile faith. Greeks and Romans had no interest in the Jewish concept of a Messiah, or the hope for Israel's political liberation. For Gentiles, religion was supposed to free men from bondage to fate and death. Therefore, in the Fourth Gospel—the most Hellenistic of the Gospels—Christ does not proclaim the coming of the apocalyptic kingdom of God. Rather, he calls himself the Way, the Truth, and the bearer of words of eternal life (John 14:6). Jesus Christ is a supernatural, pre-existent being who descends from heaven, defeats the powers of evil, and ascends to heaven again (Phil. 2:6-11; 1 Pet. 18-22). Rudolph Bultmann identifies this concept of Christ with the Gnostic myth of a celestial re-

deemer who becomes incarnate to liberate men from demonic subjugation.<sup>2</sup>

Gentile Christians reinterpreted Christology along these lines, saying that Christ existed prior to his earthly ministry. He emptied himself of his supernatural powers, took on the form of a servant and became a man. Through his sufferings and death, Christ reversed the effect of Adam's sin. After the resurrection, he ascended into heaven and became the head of a new chosen people. According to Phil. 2:6-11, Jesus Christ was equal to God but "made himself nothing" (emptied himself) in the incarnation (this is called the kenotic view). The Logos doctrine is another prominent example of how Christology was Hellenized.

A major shift took place when a Gentile church replaced early Palestinian Christianity. The Jewish-Christian period defined Jesus' work in functional terms: what he did rather than who he was. As a result of the Gentile mission, Christ was described ontologically, i.e. in terms of his being or unique nature. Yet this change raised serious metaphysical problems: How could Jesus Christ be both God and man? As soon as that question was asked, the long and bitter Christological controversies of the patristic age became inevitable.

Before considering these controversies, the New Testament presentation of Jesus Christ should be clarified. According to all the Gospels, Jesus was the Messiah. But he was not simply an "anointed one," like the ancient Jewish priests, kings and prophets. Jesus was also the Son of God. Notice that the New Testament never says Jesus is God, only that he is the Son of God. To identify Jesus with God the Father would be heretical from the standpoint of the early church. At the same time, by calling Jesus the Son of God and the Logos, the New Testament prepared the framework for the later creeds.

From the beginning, there was a tendency to make Jesus purely human or purely divine. It was only with great difficulty

that the church maintained the two-nature theory (that Jesus had both a divine *and* a human nature). Jewish Christians, later called Ebionites, insisted that Jesus was a man who had been called by God and raised to a position of honor at the resurrection. Docetics, on the other hand, declared that Jesus was wholly divine and only appeared to be human. The Council of Nicaea compromised between the Ebionites and Docetics by decreeing that Jesus Christ was both human and divine.

Modern theologians are not satisfied with the Christology of Nicaea (325) and Chalcedon (451). But it is necessary to know what happened at the ecumenical councils in order to understand later church history and theological developments.

## 2. *The Nicæan Controversy*

A doctrinal controversy started in Alexandria, where a leading church elder named Arius proclaimed that Jesus was not God, but was created by God, and was only close to Him, rather than identical to Him. Therefore Jesus Christ and God were not equal; Jesus was not truly God but rather an intermediary between God and man. (This doctrine is called *subordinationism*, because it gives up in principle the divinity of Christ). His pious and logical presentation convinced many people that Arius' teaching was true.

The patriarch of Alexandria realized the danger of this theory, yet he gave Arius considerable opportunity to explain his views and correct his mistakes. First in private consultations, next in local meetings of churchmen in the city, and finally in large synods of bishops, he gave Arius a chance to express his opinions. Arius remained firm in his teaching; he even taught his followers in poems and songs, so that considerable controversy arose between the Arians and their opponents. The controversy spread beyond Egypt. Finally, the Emperor Constantine sent a letter to Alexandrian Christians saying that the problem did not seem to be important, so they should not let it cause

any more trouble. The Spanish bishop Hosius carried the letter to Egypt, where he discovered that the problem had become extremely serious. Returning, he urged the emperor to convene a council of bishops to settle the issue.

Thus, a council was summoned to meet in the city of Nicaea in May of 325. For the first time in Christian history bishops representing the whole church gathered, numbering 318 in all. They came from Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, Egypt, Africa, Spain and Rome. Also present were hermits and Christians who had suffered torture under persecution. Pagan philosophers came to view the proceedings out of curiosity.

At Nicaea a slender man with a pale face, weak vision and curly hair, wearing a sleeveless hermit's robe, gave his speech with an impressive voice and fascinating logic; this was Arius. There was present another man with brown hair, a young deacon of fluent speech, sitting beside the bishop of Alexandria. He was the bishop's secretary, and had been brought by him to the council. Though he was young, his name was well-known because he had already written two books. His name was Athanasius.

In the front of the assembly room was a throne and on the throne was a Bible. In the front corner of the hall was a gold-plated chair in which Emperor Constantine sat, wearing a purple robe encrusted with jewels. In his opening speech he begged the entire council to carry on its meeting in peace and harmony. Nevertheless, discussion soon became enflamed and the debate was lengthy.

The bishop of Alexandria and his followers made the first speeches, appealing to the Bible and the Apostles' Creed. Arius immediately arose and presented his case—using exactly the same passages, but interpreting them differently. Each party had to find a word which would express its doctrine clearly and unmistakably. What Athanasius wanted to say was that Christ was God; the Son and the Father were of the same

nature; and they shared the same substance. His followers used the Greek word *homoousion* (of the same substance, consubstantial) for this concept. To express their belief, some Arians used the word *homoiousion* (of like nature).

Finally the council settled the issue; Bishop Alexander and Athanasius won. Arius and his followers were banished—temporarily. Books containing Arian views were burned. Athanasius received much praise from most of the bishops and aroused hatred from his enemies. A year later he became Patriarch of Alexandria and for a time he could exhort his followers, write books and live in peace. Shortly after, his life became a long adventure and struggle for faith.

Emperor Constantine and his successors gradually changed their minds and began to favor Arius, while severely persecuting Athanasius. Athanasius was sent into exile five times by hostile emperors who were influenced by false accusations and plots against him. Sometimes he had to seek the protection and sympathy of the bishop of Rome. Once he was even banished to the city of Treves in western Germany. Many times he sought refuge with monks in the Egyptian desert. Moving from one hermitage to another, he depended upon monks he had befriended when he held power.

Arius and his supporters gained power in the Church and Athanasius sorrowfully sent secret letters to his friends, encouraging them not to give up their faith. Once when he was conducting a worship service in a church, soldiers surrounded the building, broke up the meeting, burned the altar and holy veil and massacred some of the worshippers. The bishop barely escaped. But the most painful thing for Athanasius was to see friends leaving him and accepting the Arian creed—not because they believed it, but because of persecution.

Forty years later Athanasius again became the bishop of Alexandria. At last he could come back to his own city, administer the churches of Egypt, designate his successor, and die

in peace. Thus at the last minute he saw his views triumph. But the greatest victory came after his death, when in the 6th century his beliefs were formulated as an official creed named after him.

Arius was also a man who stood firm for what he believed; he too lived long enough to see his ideas accepted by many church leaders. Before Athanasius came to power, Arius had been condemned by the patriarch of Alexandria and excommunicated for heresy, but Bishop Alexander was unable to keep Arius from preaching in his church. Arius had powerful friends, such as Bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia, a close advisor to the emperor, and Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, the famous church historian, as well as many of the best biblical scholars in Antioch, the leading center for scriptural studies. Synods in Asia Minor and Palestine voted to support Arius against his bishop.

Constantine had told Bishop Alexander that he should not be concerned about Arius' views because they involved only secondary matters. At the Council of Nicaea, however, Arius was condemned, banished from Egypt and sent to Asia Minor in exile. In 327, at the Second Council of Nicaea, Arius presented a confession of his faith without any of the controversial phrases, and he was readmitted to the church. Constantine politely requested Bishop Alexander to restore Arius' old position in Egypt. Alexander died before the order was carried out and his successor Athanasius used every possible method to keep from obeying the emperor.

In order to celebrate the 30th anniversary of his reign, Constantine convened a council at Jerusalem to take part in the dedication of his newly-built Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The bishops voted to reinstate Arius and soon afterward the emperor banished Athanasius to exile in Treves, Germany. Realizing the troubled conditions in Egypt, Arius stayed in Constantinople, where he died suddenly in 336.

Arianism did not die with Arius. For a time friends of



Arius controlled the patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch and Constantinople. Emperor Constantius, Constantine's son and successor, was opposed to Athanasius and favored Arianism. Even the Pope, Liberius, was banished for supporting Athanasius. When they were driven out of the Roman Empire, Arian missionaries spread their ideas among the German tribes which overran western Europe, Spain and North Africa. Only the fact that the French were Nicæans under Charlemagne kept all of western Europe from going Arian.

During the Reformation Arian ideas reappeared and took root in Poland and Hungary. In the 18th century many leading people were Arians—Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and Sir Isaac Newton, for example. In the 19th century leading Arians (now called Unitarians) included Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. From the time of Arius on, the church has not been able to silence completely those who believe Jesus is not God, not equal to God, and not the same substance as God, but subordinate to Him.

What then is the real difference between Arian and Athanasian Christology? Arius believed it was important to assert the supremacy and superiority of God. God the Father was higher than the Son and was his Creator. The Son was a secondary being, created by God the Father at a time prior to the creation of the universe. The Son was superior to man because he was created before man, was the first-born of creation, the only-begotten Son, the instrument which God used to create the world and the mediator between God and man.

Athanasius attacked Arius on two points. First, Arius' view of Christ did not make him fully divine. He was only a creature, not of the same substance as God, and was not His equal but only His servant. Hence, even if a believer became one with Christ, he was still not one with God.

Secondly, Athanasius criticized Arius' doctrine of Christ

for not making the Son truly human. Christ was neither really God nor really man, but only a bridge from one to the other. If Christ were not truly God he could not save us; if he were not really man but only a creature between God and humanity, he could not understand us, sympathize with our predicament, share our troubles or carry our sins. Athanasius said Christ must be completely, thoroughly human in order to redeem us. For him, Arius' Christ was not truly human as well as not truly divine.

The Council of Nicaea had been convened to decide on matters of faith and order, the first of many such councils. Since the whole Church was represented it was called an "ecumenical" or "general" council.

### 3. *After Nicaea*

Nicaea was supposed to solve the Christological problem, but all it did was raise new controversies. According to Nicaea, Jesus Christ has two natures, human and divine, united in a single person.

Most of the Christological debate after Nicaea was due to the conflict between theologians from the biblical school at Antioch and the philosophical theologians of Alexandria. The Antiochans insisted upon the humanity of Jesus, and were inclined toward an adoptionist Christology.<sup>3</sup> They held that the unity of God and Christ was a complete harmony of wills, rather than identity of substance. The Antioch school stressed the moral unity of the Father and the Son rather than their ontological identity. They interpreted the Nicæan creed to mean that Jesus always had a human nature as well as a divine one. These two natures were never fused into one, but forever remained distinguishable. As a man, Jesus had to eat, got tired and experienced suffering; he was divine because the power of God entered into him and worked through him. Hence, the Antiochans stressed the necessary distinctions between Jesus Christ and God.

Arius had been connected with Antioch, so Nicaea was a blow to the Antiochan biblical scholars. However, Antiochan theology had many influential spokesmen, one of whom was the ecumenical patriarch at Constantinople, Nestorius. Nestorius provoked the next major Christological controversy by his criticism of the use of the term *Theotokos* (God-bearer) to describe Mary. Nestorius declared that Mary was not the mother of God, but only the mother of Christ. His enemies seized upon this issue to cause trouble. They wanted to oust him from the most important church in the empire and replace him with one of their friends. If Christ was truly divine, as Nicaea declared, then it was logical to praise Mary as the bearer of God. Forced to defend himself, Nestorius explained that the human Jesus provided a body for the indwelling Logos. He was condemned for not believing Christ was God.

In spite of the condemnation and deposition of the ecumenical patriarch, Nestorianism spread widely. For purely political reasons, Rome sided with Alexandria, to weaken the authority of the patriarch of Constantinople. Yet this high-handed treatment of Nestorius permanently wrecked the unity of the church. Nestorians set up their own churches and sent missionaries into Persia, India and China. To this day there are still Nestorians in Syria, Iraq and southern India.

Cyril, patriarch of Alexandria, a subtle theologian as well as a very ambitious churchman, denounced Nestorius. Cyril insisted that there was "one (divine) nature of God incarnate." According to him, Christ was fully God, and not a human being.

Cyril's view turned out to be as troublesome as Nestorius'. His doctrine grew out of the Hellenistic concept of salvation. According to this view, salvation means deification. Cyril agreed with Athanasius that God became man so that man could become divine. Hence, it was imperative to insist upon Christ's full divinity. Believers overcome corruption and transitoriness

through mystical and sacramental union with Christ the God-man.

Both the Antiochans and Alexandrians accepted the two-nature concept of Christ decreed by Nicaea. However, they differed over the relationship of the human Jesus to the divine Christ. The Antiochans said that the Logos and Jesus' human personality were united like two boards glued together; the Alexandrians replied that the Logos became flesh as fire heats and permeates a piece of iron, turning it red-hot.

Having won twice, at Nicaea and Ephesus, the Alexandrians further developed their emphasis upon Christ's total divinity. Eutyches of Alexandria began teaching that Jesus was of one substance with God but not of one substance with man. When the Logos became flesh, Christ had only one nature and that nature was divine. This view was called Monophysitism and it prevailed in Egypt. But Rome opposed Alexandria, and Pope Leo I condemned Monophysitism. At the Council of Chalcedon (451), the followers of Eutyches were denounced and deprived of their pulpits. At this council it was declared that Christ is perfect in his humanity, and perfect in his divinity. Chalcedon was supposed to finalize Christology and bring theological harmony to the church. It failed miserably. A small minority accepted the Chalcedonian creed, but most Egyptian Christians remained Monophysites. Today there are still Monophysite (Coptic) churches in Egypt and Ethiopia. However, the Chalcedonian formulation was accepted by John of Damascus, who systematized Eastern Orthodox theology, and it was defended by Thomas Aquinas.

#### *4. Protestant Views*

Generally speaking, the Protestant Reformers based their Christology on the ecumenical creeds of Nicaea and Chalcedon. Luther, for example, affirmed that Jesus Christ was true God as well as true man. Yet, unlike the patristic theologians and

medieval scholastics, he accented the appealing humanity of Jesus. Repeatedly Luther stated, "All I know about God, I know from the human Jesus."

Calvin made a major addition to Christology by defining Jesus' messianic work as a threefold office of prophet, priest and king. As prophet, Christ brings revelation from God. As priest, he sacrificially atones for the sins of mankind. As king, he defeats Satan and establishes God's rule over the entire creation. Calvin's threefold explanation of Christ's mission was a return to the Old Testament messianic concept.

Lutheranism divided the work of Christ into two stages: a period of humiliation and a time of exaltation. Some Lutherans defended what was called the *kenotic* view: Christ emptied himself of his godlike qualities when he became man, humbling himself. Others maintained the *cryptic* view: Christ did not give up his divine powers, but merely concealed them temporarily.

The Age of Reason brought about a crisis in Christology. Spokesmen for the Enlightenment such as Jefferson and Voltaire separated the human Jesus from the Christ of dogma and superstition. For them, Jesus was only human: a great teacher or a moral hero. They were unitarian rather than trinitarian, so they had no need for the two-nature theory. Once they cast aside New Testament legends like the virgin birth and physical resurrection, Jesus' divinity vanished.

Liberal theology had no sympathy for the historic creeds, and rejected Chalcedonian orthodoxy. Schleiermacher<sup>4</sup> went beyond the notions that Jesus was simply a great ethical teacher or a religious genius. According to him, Christ is the archetype of mankind, the pattern God intended every human to be. Christ is the second Adam and represents the crowning purpose of all creation. Everyone is moving toward the goal of Christlikeness.

Schleiermacher defined Jesus as the ideal man. Jesus was a

realization of total God-consciousness; he relied completely upon God. He and God the Father were truly one, exactly as God intends for all humans.

Man is intended to advance through three stages of consciousness, according to Schleiermacher. At the beginning and on the lowest level, an individual possesses merely an "animal consciousness." He lives almost instinctively and is subject to the basic biological drives for food, shelter and sex. As man becomes more human, he reaches a higher level: the realm of "sense consciousness." At this stage, we live in a world of subject-object relationships. Man is subject; everything in the world is object. Animals have no self-consciousness, so they are never subjects. Each man must adjust to his external environment. His senses give him information about the world outside and help him to control his responses to it.

However, there is a higher stage—the stage of God-consciousness. This was the peak of human development reached by Jesus. God-consciousness means the ultimate ideal of complete harmony, total unity, filial dependence upon God's goodness, and blissful communion with Him.

According to Schleiermacher, sin keeps most men from reaching God-consciousness. Because of defects of character and deficiencies of will, we rise no higher than the state of sense consciousness. That is why Jesus came. His whole purpose is to lift us gradually to the ideal level of God-consciousness.

Albrecht Ritschl reinterpreted Christology very differently from Schleiermacher. Following Kant, he saw man primarily in ethical terms. We are responsible to the moral law and we achieve God's purpose for creation when we act ethically. Jesus and God the Father were morally united, so they were completely one in will. The human Jesus realized God's will for men, and therefore he has the value of God for us. Jesus proclaimed the divine kingdom of righteousness, the rule of God in the human heart. God loves us as His children when we

dedicate ourselves to the kingdom by practicing the law of brotherly love. Since God provides the moral standard, we become one with Him by striving to build His kingdom of justice, love and peace upon the earth.<sup>5</sup>

### C. Emil Brunner's Christology

Emil Brunner has developed a modern Christology. He deals first with the work of Christ, then with his person. The New Testament titles for Jesus describe the work God does through him for mankind. He is Son of God not metaphysically, but because God grants His authority to him. Also, Jesus is Lord because he has the authority to rule over the church. All these titles are functional rather than ontological.

Like Calvin, Brunner says that Jesus was the Messiah because of his threefold office of prophet, priest and king. Christ was a prophet because of his teachings. He proclaimed two things: a new demand for righteousness and the gift of the coming kingdom of God.

As a priest, Jesus atones for man's sins, but this atonement includes his entire life, not simply his death on the cross. Jesus' whole life reveals the merciful God stretching out His hands to His lost creation. Jesus actively fulfilled the Law because of his sacrificial love. The cross reveals the unconditional love of God, and at the same time it discloses our actual situation, our need for justification.

Besides being prophet and priest, Jesus the Messiah has a kingly office. Jesus proclaims the coming kingdom. He conquers the forces hostile to God. Henceforth, Christ rules through love and the free obedience of his followers. However, Christ is only potentially the divine ruler over all men. He has the right to be Lord over all, because God appointed him; but his true dominion will not be fully established until the end of history.

Brunner begins his Christology with the human Jesus. Meeting the man, we come to knowledge of God. Jesus shared our common humanity. He was a creature, as we are. He was subject to all the natural laws of growth; he suffered ordinary human limitations. Jesus was tempted, but the New Testament nowhere shows him succumbing to temptation. His knowledge was limited; he could not predict the future—for example, the date of the coming kingdom.

Yet Jesus was not merely a man like ourselves. He was wholly one with God's will. He personified divine love; sin played no part in his life. More importantly, he claimed messianic authority.

Brunner denies Jesus' virgin birth, saying that this idea was not part of the original Christian kerygma; the apostles, Paul, and John never mention it. In addition, Matthew 1 and Luke 1 are primarily legendary rather than historical passages.<sup>6</sup> Jesus is the God-man, because he reveals God to us, because he reconciles us to God, and because he makes us trustful servants of God. This means that God was in Christ. If Jesus is the Revealer in his person, then he must be God. If Jesus is really Reconciler and Lord, then he is God. In Jesus Himself, speaking and acting in His person God Himself is present.<sup>7</sup>

Brunner denies the physical resurrection and ascension of Jesus. What mattered most to the original disciples was not the empty tomb, but their meeting with their risen Lord as a spiritual reality. This body of flesh is not destined for eternity. But we shall indeed be given a spiritual body, Brunner writes.<sup>8</sup> For him the resurrection of the body means the continuation of the individual personality after death.

#### **D. Conclusion**

Modern theologians generally agree that Christology should



be based on the Jesus of history rather than the creedal doctrines; Jesus was a human being and not an incarnate God. Thus Hans Küng states that we need to consider Jesus today from the standpoint of his Jewish contemporaries and his 1st-century Palestinian environment. Jesus' Jewish disciples were attracted to the man of Nazareth. Because they listened to his teachings and watched his actions, they raised the question of his relationship to God. To use contemporary language, the original followers of Jesus had a Christology from below rather than from above.

This oldest interpretation of Jesus was functional and not ontological. Jesus was a human being chosen by God for a divine mission. If he was called to be the Messiah, his mission was to inaugurate the kingdom of God on earth. This required the subjugation of Satan and the restoration of divine authority over mankind.

After Jesus' death, it was natural for legends to be developed around him. Bultmann and others stress the need for demythologizing the New Testament. Jesus' physical resurrection is an unhistorical as his virgin birth. Many biblical scholars separate the genuine appearances of the risen Jesus from the unreliable reports of the empty tomb. Paul never refers to the empty tomb; nor does any New Testament writer apart from the Gospels. The resurrection appearances were important. They restored the faith and enthusiasm of the disciples who were terrified and shocked by the crucifixion. As for the empty tomb reports, Küng describes those as "legendary elaborations of the message of the resurrection."<sup>9</sup>

Schleiermacher pointed out that Jesus should be seen as the new Adam. He represented what all men should be and could be. He came to fulfill the potentialities of human nature. His trust and faith in God never wavered; his obedience to God was absolute to the very end. He became one with his Father in heart and in will. And on the basis of that complete

dedication, Jesus carried out his mission until his enemies killed him.

Jesus was truly human, so he must have had a father and mother; the virgin birth story is a legendary accretion to the historical sources. Jews never believed that the Messiah would be born miraculously. The famous passage in Isaiah has been misinterpreted. As the New English Bible and other modern translations show, the prophet predicted “A young woman is with child, and she will bear a son, and will call him Immanuel” (7:14). Throughout Jewish history, none of the messianic pretenders have claimed to be supernaturally conceived. Furthermore, our oldest New Testament sources do not support the virgin birth myth. Paul never mentions it, nor does Mark, the oldest Gospel. Throughout Jesus’ entire ministry, neither a follower nor an opponent refers to anything unusual about his birth.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

- 1 Reginald H. Fuller, *Foundations of New Testament Christology* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1965).
- 2 Rudolph Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in Its Contemporary Setting* (New York: World Publishing, 1972), pp. 163-165.
- 3 Jesus was a human being whom God adopted as his son at the baptism or the resurrection. Christ became Lord when God raised him from the dead and invited him to sit beside Him.
- 4 Schleiermacher (1768-1834) is considered to be the father of modern theology, because he:
  - a. stressed the immanence of God;
  - b. stressed religious experience rather than biblical revelation;
  - c. said theology must be revised to fit the modern mind—if any of the traditional doctrines (i.e., original sin, virgin birth, physical resurrection, blood atonement, infallibility of the Bible) seems unreasonable, we should discard it; and
  - d. stressed the humanity of Jesus; he is what we should all be.

- His main works are *On Religion* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1969); and *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1968).
- 5 Albrecht Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (Clifton: Reference Book Publishers, Inc., 1966).
- 6 Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, pp. 353-356.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 336.
- 8 Emil Brunner, *Dogmatics*, Vol. III: *The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith, and the Consummation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), pp. 412-413.
- 9 Hans Küng, *On Being A Christian* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1976), pp. 363-366.