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Change in Christology: New Testament Models and the Contemporary Task

Throughout most of the modern period there has been an intense interest in the subject of doctrinal (and in particular Christological) development in both the New Testament and the later Church. The purpose of this paper is to review different models of development which have been suggested, and to suggest a way out of the impasse between the two major views which have predominated this field of study. The three views which we shall be considering may be summarized as follows: Firstly, there is the syncretistic view of development, which suggests that changes in doctrinal formulation have occurred primarily due to the influence of contact with new religions or cultures; in other words, doctrine is said to have developed by accretion from outside. Secondly, there is the organic view of development, which considers the changes which have occurred in doctrinal formulations to have been an outworking of the implications of what was present in the system of belief from the beginning. Lastly, we will be considering the view that changes in doctrine are due to pastoral concerns, in the sense that new formulations arose as traditional doctrines were applied to, or defended in, new situations.

The first viewpoint we have mentioned, the syncretistic model, is perhaps best known through the work of scholars like Wilhelm Bousset and the History of Religion School. This viewpoint is not short of modern defenders, such as Maurice Casey, whose recent work, *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God*,¹ sums up well the way in which this model is conceived to work. As Christianity moved outside its original Jewish setting, it slowly ceased to be a Jewish phenomenon. As more and more Gentiles joined the movement, the character of its beliefs became steadily less and less Jewish. A number of other scholars have suggested that Samaritan beliefs played a similar role in the transformation of Christian doctrine.²

It cannot be denied that there is a certain amount of plausibility about this viewpoint, and that there is thus at least some truth in it. The differences between, for example, the Sermon on the Mount and the creed of Nicaea are striking, and are to a large extent to be attributed to a change in the culture or setting of Christianity, as it moved from Palestinian soil

1. Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 1991.

2. So e.g. R. E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1979; Michael Goulder, "The Two Roots of the Christian Myth", in John Hick (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate*, London: SCM Press, 1977, pp. 64-86; idem., "The Samaritan Hypothesis", in Michael Goulder (ed.), *Incarnation and Myth. The Debate Continued*, London: SCM Press, 1979, pp. 247-250.

and established roots among philosophically minded Greeks. It can hardly be said to be implausible to argue along these lines: Jews were strict monotheists; Gentiles were polytheists; *therefore*, the affirmation that Jesus is divine must be a Gentile phenomenon.³

However, despite its apparent plausibility, this model of doctrinal development suffers from certain difficulties. Firstly and most importantly, this model does not do justice to the continuity which exists in doctrinal development. The earliest Christians were Jews, and already within the first generation we find Jewish Christians making striking affirmations concerning Jesus.⁴ Also, there seems to be a continuity traceable in certain areas – right the way through from Jesus to the Gospel of John, such as in the use of Wisdom language, imagery and categories.⁵ Even in the latest strata of the New Testament, we find Christians who have a strongly Jewish self-identity and who are working for the most part with Jewish motifs and imagery. The predominance of Jewish modes of thought continued even after Christianity had been transplanted to Gentile soil,⁶ and this is due to the fact, largely ignored by many advocates of this model, that conversion implies that the adoption of beliefs is primarily one way, that is, it is primarily the convert who adopts the beliefs of the group to which he or she is converting. In light of these points, the syncretistic model appears to be an inadequate explanation of the phenomenon of doctrinal development.

The organic model is generally associated with more conservative scholarship, and has been championed in recent years by scholars such as C. F. D. Moule and James Dunn.⁷ This view obviously does better justice to the continuity between earlier and later stages of development, since

3. Modern reformulations of this approach generally tend to avoid the now discredited Jewish vs. Hellenistic approach, while focusing on the fact that there were genuine differences of religion and culture between most Jews and most Gentiles.

4. As Martin Hengel has noted in a famous phrase, "more happened in this period of less than two decades than in the whole of the next seven centuries, up to the time when the doctrine of the early Church was completed" (*The Son of God*, London: SCM Press, 1976, p.2). See also my article, "Johannine Christianity – Jewish Christianity?", in *Koinonia* VIII.1 (1996), pp. 1-20.

5. Cf. James Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, London: SCM Press, 1989, ch. 6; Gese, Hartmut, "Wisdom, Son of Man, and the Origins of Christology: The Consistent Development of Biblical Theology", *HBT* 3 (1981), pp. 23-57; Martin Hengel, "Jesus as Messianic Teacher of Wisdom and the Beginnings of Christology", in *Studies in Early Christology*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995, pp. 73-117; Ben Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994. See further our discussion below.

6. This point becomes very clear in Jean Daniélou's book, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964, where even Gentile Christian authors who demonstrate apparently anti-Jewish tendencies (such as Ignatius) are still found to hold beliefs which are formulated for the most part in Jewish categories and images. Cf. especially chapter I.

7. C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology*, Cambridge University Press, 1977; Dunn, op. cit.; see also Dunn's review of Casey in "The Making of Christology – Evolution or Unfolding?", in Joel B. Green and Max Turner, *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994, pp. 437-452.

this continuity is at the heart of this model. In the view of these scholars, the later formulations are simply an unfolding of what was present *in nuce* in the original Christ event. There are numerous recent studies which may be appealed to as an illustration of the way continuity can be traced between various stages.⁸

However, it may be said in criticism of these views that they fail to provide a plausible catalyst or explanation for these developments. When one compares the Johannine portrait of Jesus with that of the Synoptics, for example, one cannot help but feel that the development which has taken place in the intervening period, while a development out of the earlier beliefs and formulations, is also something more than this; that is to say, the development or change seems too great to be explained simply in terms of what will happen 'naturally', in the absence of stimuli, to doctrines and beliefs. Thus we find Raymond Brown, a scholar who considers that the later developments were a valid outworking of and expression of who Jesus understood himself to be,⁹ still appealing to what in terms of our present discussion would have to be classed as a 'syncretistic' stimulus, in order to explain why John developed his Christology in the distinctive manner that he did.¹⁰ We have already seen the difficulty with such syncretistic explanations: they fail to do justice to the continuity in doctrine, especially those which took place within the New Testament period, and the fact that the later stages are just as Jewish as the earlier.¹¹ We are thus left with a problem confronting these two major views of Christological development: the one provides an explanation without doing justice to the evidence of continuity, whereas the other, while more accurate as a description of the course which development followed, fails to provide a convincing explanation as to *why* such (often quite drastic or striking) changes occur in Christian beliefs.¹²

This leads us on to the third model which we will be considering, what we have classed as a 'pastoral preaching' model, for want of a better term, because it suggests that development occurs due to an interaction between tradition and environment, and more specifically the application of Christian beliefs and traditions to the needs of a particular Christian

8. In addition to Dunn, *Christology*, see also Hengel, *op. cit.*, and Gese, *op. cit.*

9. "Did Jesus Know He Was God?", *BTB* 15 (1985), pp. 74-79; See also his *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994, ch. 10 and *passim*.

10. See his *Community of the Beloved Disciple*, pp. 34ff.

11. Brown's proposed appeal to Samaritanism as a stimulus to the development of Johannine christology also flounders on the lack of clear evidence for Samaritan beliefs in this period, and the essential similarity of what is found in Samaritan sources with what is found in Jewish sources of a similar date. On this issue see further the work of Wayne Meeks on this subject, particularly *The Prophet-King*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967, p. 219, 318f; and "Moses as God and King", in Jacob Neusner (ed.), *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of E. R. Goodenough*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968, p. 364.

12. This is not really a criticism in many cases, since many of the studies of Christology which we have classed as proposing an 'organic' model were concerned only with the course which the development took and not with the causes of that development. Nevertheless, it is important that the question 'why' be addressed and answered.

community. A number of scholars have proposed models along these lines, although often using somewhat different methodologies and approaches.¹³ What these various suggestions have in common is their conviction that doctrine takes on new shapes and forms as it is used to respond to new needs, new questions and issues, and new settings. In the work of Maurice Wiles,¹⁴ the emphasis is on *conflict* in particular as a stimulus: as challenges arose from within or from outside the community, the need to argue for and think through more fully the implication of these particular beliefs was greatly increased.

This view has an obvious advantage over the previous two which we have had opportunity to consider, because it holds to both a continuity in development and to a change in setting as an explanation of the development. Another significant advantage of this view is that it has been expounded as a sociological model in the work of two significant scholars in the field of the sociology of knowledge. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann.¹⁵ Berger and Luckmann have made important contributions to the study of how human worldviews are constructed and maintained, and it is their work on the *defence* of worldviews which most interests us here. They refer to the process by which societies are maintained against factors which threaten their existence as *legitimation*. Legitimation refers to the action of apologetic and polemic which the upholders of an ideology or worldview engage in as a means of defending the plausibility structure of their beliefs. Reinforcing beliefs may be likened to reinforcing a building: in the process of strengthening a structure which has come under increasing stress and has been weakened thereby, the structure is expanded and additions are made which, although originally intended simply to preserve the original structure, actually cause it to take on a new shape. Thus, in the case of Christology, when different views and interpretations arose of ambiguous aspects of the canonical evidence, or when questions which had not previously arisen began to be asked, the need to defend a particular view or belief necessitated clearer definition, the finding of proof texts and supporting scriptures (often ones which had not previously been related to the question of Christology), and other such activities which in fact proved to be not merely a defence of the beliefs, but an expansion of them as well.

We may now turn to the New Testament to see whether this last model does justice to the evidence found there, and for this purpose we may focus in particular on one stream of Christology which we have already

13. The term 'pastoral preaching model' is taken from Jerome Neyrey, *Christ is Community*, Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1985, p. 271. Similar models, in that they focus on development as occurring as Christian tradition and belief is related to new concrete situations, are proposed by Wayne Meeks, 'The Social Setting of Pauline Theology', *Interpretation* 37 (1982), pp. 266-277; and Maurice Wiles, *The Making of Christian Doctrine*, Cambridge University Press, 1967.

14. *Op.cit.*, p. 19.

15. *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, London: Allen Lane/Penguin Press, 1967, ch. 2.

mentioned above, namely the use of wisdom language. This area has been the focus of much recent interest,¹⁶ and we need not review the subject in detail: our main concern will be to determine, to whatever extent possible, whether conflict and the rise of new issues in the Christian community appear to have been important factors in spurring on the developments which occurred in the use of this language and imagery.

There is general agreement that, in pre-Christian Judaism, 'Wisdom' (and analogous terms such as Word and Spirit) did not refer to a separate being from God, but to the Wisdom (or Word or Spirit) of God himself, personified and thus spoken of as if it had an independent existence and even personality.¹⁷ Granted, Wisdom is frequently spoken of as a creature of God, just as Philo refers to the Logos as a 'second God'.¹⁸ However, here we are clearly dealing with a metaphorical way of 'buffering' God's transcendence. God, it was believed in Hellenistic thought,¹⁹ did not interact directly with the world, and yet Jews believed that God had come into contact with them and revealed himself to them. In order to maintain these two contrasting beliefs, 'figures' such as Wisdom came to be of great importance, for they could be spoken of as separate, subordinate figures or as none other than God himself, depending on what needed to be emphasized. Wisdom was thus primarily a metaphor, a way of speaking about God.²⁰

The starting point for tracing the development of the specifically Christian use of wisdom language for Christology is Jesus himself. Apart from the more general fact that Jesus often spoke in proverbs, riddles, parables, and other such modes of speech characteristic of the wisdom schools,²¹ we have several instances in which Jesus is presented in the Synoptic Gospels as speaking as if with the voice of Wisdom, as Wisdom's spokesman.²² Jesus' famous words, 'Come to me, all who are

16. So much has been written on this subject, that detailed bibliographical references cannot be given. In addition to the works already cited by Dunn, Gese, Hengel and Witherington, the interested reader is referred to the articles on the subject in numerous recent dictionaries for additional bibliography.

17. Cf. the evidence and discussion found in Dunn, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-176; Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord. Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*, London: SCM Press, 1988, ch. 2; Christopher Rowland, *Christian Origins*, London: SPCK, 1985, pp. 35ff.

18. Cf. Karl-Josef Kuschel, *Born Before All Time?*, London: SCM Press, 1992, pp. 195ff; Gottfried Schimanowski, *Weisheit und Messias*, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1985, pp. 105ff.

19. Judaism in New Testament times had already been subject to Hellenistic influence for several centuries, as the work of Martin Hengel has shown. See his *Judaism and Hellenism*, London: SCM Press, 1974; *The 'Hellenization' of Judaism in the First Century after Christ*, London: SCM Press, 1989.

20. There may, of course, have been individuals, in particular among the common people, who understood Wisdom as literally a second figure alongside God, but the only views we can know of with certainty are those expressed in the literature of the time, and it is the view found in that literature which we have outlined here.

21. On this see especially the recent work of Ronald A. Piper, *Wisdom in the Q Tradition. The Aphoristic Teaching of Jesus* (SNTS Monograph Series, 61), Cambridge University Press, 1989.

22. Especially in the Q material. Cf. Witherington, *op. cit.*, pp. 211-236.

weary and heavy laden...' (Matt. 11:28-30) appear to allude to the sort of language used of Wisdom, such as is found in Sir. 51:26, where the author encourages the readers to "put [their] necks under her [i.e. Wisdom's] yoke", and in neighbouring verses, to 'draw near' and to 'find rest'. The different versions of one of Jesus' sayings found in Luke 11:49-51 and Matt. 23:24ff suggest that at least Matthew identified Jesus' voice here with that of Wisdom. When we remember that the Spirit and Wisdom were not clearly distinguished at this stage, but were almost interchangeable ways of speaking about God in his interaction with the world and with man,²³ then the emphasis at the start of all four Gospels (and throughout Luke and John in particular) on Jesus being filled with the Spirit is also significant.²⁴

However, in Jesus' own teaching we do not find any evidence that he identified himself with *pre-existent* Wisdom, i.e. with a figure existing with God in heaven prior to his appearance on earth. However, when we move on to study slightly later literature in the New Testament, we can see a significant change in precisely this area. A major hymnic passage which describes Christ in wisdom language is to be found in Colossians 1:15-20.²⁵ Whether this hymn is pre-Pauline, Pauline or post-Pauline need not concern us here. What is important here is that this passage uses wisdom language to declare Christ's supremacy, attributing to him a role in creation. Wisdom was spoken of as the image of God, firstborn, one who existed before creation and through whom all things were brought into existence.²⁶ Even a cursory reading of such passages from early Jewish literature as Baruch 3:9ff and Sir. 24 makes clear that wisdom language and imagery form at least a major part of the background to Col. 1:15-20. Here then, as in the Gospel material we have surveyed already, we are in the realm of wisdom motifs. Yet there are important differences as well which must be accounted for, since it can hardly be denied that the Colossians hymn goes further than anything in the Synoptic Gospels in its daring use of wisdom language.

23. So e.g. Dunn, *op. cit.*, p. 266; C. H. Talbert, "'And the Word Became Flesh': When?", in Abraham J. Malherbe and Wayne A. Meeks (eds.), *The Future of Christology: Essays in Honor of Leander E. Keck*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993, pp. 45f.

24. For more detailed discussion of the subject of the relationship between Jesus and wisdom Christology, the reader is again referred to the excellent recent studies by Hengel, Gese and Witherington which have already been cited frequently above. In the *Similitudes of Enoch*, we also find the Messiah described as embodying or being filled with God's Spirit, the Spirit of Wisdom. This was apparently a widespread theme not only in early Christianity, but also in contemporary Judaism.

25. On this passage, in addition to the commentaries, see N. T. Wright, "Poetry and Theology in Colossians 1:15-20", in *The Climax of the Covenant*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991, pp. 99-119; Dunn, *op. cit.*, pp. 187-194; also James Dunn and James P. Mackey, *New Testament Theology in Dialogue*, London: SPCK, 1987, pp. 54-64; P. Beasley-Murray, "Colossians 1:15-20: An Early Christian Hymn Celebrating the Lordship of Christ", in D. A. Hagner and M. J. Harris (eds.), *Pauline Studies: Essays Presented to Prof. F. F. Bruce on his 70th Birthday*, Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1980.

26. Cf. references in Dunn and Mackey, *op. cit.*, pp. 56f.

Can the differences be accounted for by the fact that new issues had come to the fore since Jesus' time? The present writer is not alone in believing that they can. In Paul's time the main controversy in the Christian church appears to have been over the ongoing place of the Torah in Christianity. This is important for our discussion, since the two inter-testamental passages which we cited in the previous paragraph both go on, after a long description of personified Wisdom alongside God and of her involvement in creation, to identify this personified Wisdom of God with the Torah!²⁷ In this context the point which the Colossians hymn would be understood to be making is that all the things that the Jews attributed to the Law, including describing it as the very embodiment of God's own Wisdom, were to be found, not in Torah, but in Christ. This reading of the hymn makes good sense in the context of Colossians, which appears to be concerned about many of the same sort of issues as Galatians.²⁸ The conflict over the Torah seems likely to have spurred on the creative use of wisdom language, and thus provides a plausible explanation of this stage in the development of wisdom Christology.²⁹

However, it must be stressed that here we are still dealing with metaphorical language. This becomes clear if we compare the closely related epistles Colossians and Ephesians.³⁰ Nearly every portion of Colossians has a parallel, however small, in Ephesians. The hymnic material in Col. 1 is often considered an exception to this, but this is not a necessary conclusion. On the contrary, it would appear that the material in Eph. 1 concerning God's eternal plan to bring all things together in Christ, and our election in Christ, is an expression in prose of what is expressed in poetic language in Col. 1:15-20. The assertion that Christ is before all

27. Cf. Bar. 4.1: "She is the book of God's commandments, the Law that stands for ever"; Sir. 24:23: "All this is no other than the Book of the Covenant of the Most High God, the Law that Moses enjoined on us".

28. Note the similarities of language between Colossians and other letters (such as Galatians and Romans) in which Paul is arguing against opponents who would compel Gentile Christians to be circumcised and submit themselves to the yoke of the Torah. For further discussion of the background of Colossians see Morna Hooker, "Were there False Teachers in Colossae?", in B. Lindars and S. S. Smalley (eds.), *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament: Studies in Honour of C. F. D. Moule*, Cambridge University Press, 1973, pp. 315-331; James D. G. Dunn, "The Colossian Philosophy: A Confident Jewish Apologia", *Biblica* 76 (1995), pp. 153-181.

29. See further W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, London, SPCK, 1948, ch. 7; also Wright, op. cit., p. 118. Perhaps the fact that Matthew in particular uses Wisdom language, as we have seen above, is connected to his presentation of Jesus as a new Moses, in the context of debate between his community and the leaders of the synagogue.

30. There are three possible relationships between the two epistles: they may both be Pauline; one may be Pauline and the other not; they may both be post-Pauline. Which of these is in fact the case does not affect the validity of this comparison, since there is obviously a very close relationship between the two letters: either they are the work of the same author, or the one is the work of someone who was deeply influenced by the work of the other, and thus represents the earliest interpretation we have of the other (it is generally agreed that, if the latter type of relationship exists, Ephesians is the later of the two). For further on this see Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Word Biblical Commentary), Dallas, Texas: Word, 1990, pp. xlvii-lvi; C. L. Mitton, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951.

things and that all things were created 'in him' is a poetic way of expressing that it was God's eternal purpose that all things should find their fulfilment 'in him'.³¹ This is similar to the use of pre-existence language in the rabbinic writings, where certain things exist in the mind of God, in God's eternal plan.³² In particular, if the passage is Pauline (or earlier), then it would seem unlikely that a literal pre-existence and involvement in creation is intended.³³

The situation is different however when we arrive at John's Gospel. In John, we find what began as a metaphor beginning to be understood much more literally. Whereas the prologue to the Gospel, which uses the same sort of wisdom language as the Colossians passage,³⁴ could be understood, if taken on its own, in a metaphorical way, we find throughout the Gospel a presentation of Jesus as one who is conscious of being the Son of Man who quite literally came down from heaven, and who thus can reveal to human beings what he has seen there. It would seem likely that here too the development which has taken place can best be explained in terms of the conflict setting in which the Fourth Gospel was composed.

It is generally accepted that a controversy with 'the Jews' (i.e. with the local synagogue of which the Johannine Christians had been a part but from which they had now been expelled) lies in the background of the Fourth Gospel, and it is further largely agreed that Christology formed the focus of this conflict.³⁵ Two pivotal points in the conflict³⁶ were Jesus' qualifications to be revealer (frequently in contrast with Moses) and the exalted status attributed to Jesus by the Johannine Christians (which, in the eyes of the community's Jewish opponents, was blasphemous). The former controversy is summed up in the Jewish objection found in John 9:29: "We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from", and the latter in that found in passages like

31. Cf. G. B. Caird, *Paul's Letters From Prison*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976, pp. 175-178.

32. This is not to propose a hard and fast distinction between 'real' and 'ideal' pre-existence, since existence in the mind of God appears to have been considered perhaps even more real than earthly existence. However, even in later literature (e.g. *The Shepherd of Hermas*) the pre-existence of Christ is paralleled by the pre-existence of the Church. See also the language of 'election' before the foundation of the world in 1 Peter 1:20, and also Caird, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

33. For a detailed discussion of the development of the doctrine of Christ's pre-existence, see Dunn, *Christology*, and Kuschel, *op. cit.* Despite objections, Dunn's view that Paul did not himself have a pre-existence Christology, or at least did not have one which was intended to be understood as anything other than a metaphor, appears very likely to be correct.

34. A wisdom background is generally accepted. In addition to the commentaries, cf. John Ashton, "The Transformation of Wisdom. A Study of the prologue of John's Gospel", *NTS* 32 (1986), pp. 161-186; D. Moody Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John*, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 17-20.

35. So e.g. Brown, *Community*, pp. 40-47; J. L. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1979², *passim*; John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991, pp. 162-181.

36. Whether these issues were the centre of debate simultaneously or at different times in the history of the community is difficult to know with any certainty.

John 10:33: "Though you are only a man, you claim to be God". In this context, the Johannine Christians needed to engage in legitimation in order to defend their worldview. It would seem plausible to suggest that this controversy and John's distinctive developments of the Christological tradition are connected. Traditions in Judaism (and perhaps also in Christianity) which used the language of pre-existence in reference to the Messiah or Son of Man³⁷ could be taken literally and appealed to to bolster the claim that Jesus, as Messiah, is the revealer of heavenly things. Unlike Moses, whom some claimed had ascended to heaven from Mt. Sinai, and whom all Jews believed had there received revelation from God, the Son of Man had pre-existed in heaven, and thus was able to reveal God and heavenly things in a way that no other could (cf. John 3:13). And Jesus, as the one in whom the Spirit, Wisdom or Word of God had come to dwell in a decisive and permanent way, could thus be said to be God incarnate, the incarnation of one who can be spoken of as separate from God and yet is none other than God himself, and thus worthy of honour alongside the Father. That these were the issues confronting the community which produced the Fourth Gospel, and that these were among the ways in which they sought to respond to the objections and issues raised by their Jewish opponents, seems almost beyond question. It thus seems valid to assert that here too, conflict and the ensuing legitimation can provide an explanation of the direction in which these Christological traditions were taken up, used and developed in the Johannine community.

We have thus seen in the brief examples which we have considered from the Pauline and Johannine circles how the interaction between beliefs and traditions on the one hand, and the issues confronting the Church in its setting and environment on the other, can provide a viable explanation of the way doctrine develops, one that does justice both to the continuity between earlier and later stages and also to the amount of significant difference which must be explained in terms of some catalyst or causative factors.

From the beginning, we have noted the difficulty of finding a single term or title under which our model of development may be classified. Although it is definitely necessary for clarity of definition, and thus there is a need for one term (such as 'pastoral preaching') to be found which will distinguish this model from others, it would seem that there are many ways in which this model may be described. Firstly, this model is a *developmental* model,³⁸ in that it emphasizes that there is a definite and direct continuity between the earliest and latest stages of the development, at least within the New Testament period. This is not to say that they are simply saying the same thing; but if there is one thing that is becoming

37. Although, again, probably not originally intended to be taken entirely literally, or at least not thinking through the logical implications of a literal understanding of such language.

38. In the sense given to this term by C. F. D. Moule in his important work on this subject, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-11 and *passim*.

clear to more and more people today, it is that to say the same thing or make the same point in a new context, it is frequently necessary to say something quite different. And in a world in which heavenly beings, Wisdom, pre-existence and other such concepts were current, and what today would be deemed 'mythological' modes of expression were the norm, the developments and differences between the earliest and latest stages of New Testament Christology would not have appeared as great as they do to us. These expressions certainly should be considered to have been, in the context of their age, a valid, if not indeed a necessary, re-expression of the impact of Jesus. This is not to suggest that we must use the same terminology and concepts today, but simply that, just as certain concepts are useful for expressing the significance of Jesus for people today, images and motifs like Wisdom and pre-existence were useful for accomplishing the same purpose in the setting in which they were first used.³⁹

This model may also be classed as an *evolutionary* model, in the sense that it does have striking similarities to the dynamic process involved in biological evolution through natural selection, for evolution through natural selection suggests precisely that an interaction between genetic heritage and environment occurs. On the one hand, the genetic inheritance of the organism provides a limiting factor in a similar way to the function of tradition in the process of development: evolution does not involve sudden changes from one type of organism to another, but rather proposes that slight modifications occur which push the organism in a particular direction out of the many possible directions it could take. On the other hand, the environment acts as a selecting factor, making certain developments likely to be preserved as fruitful, while making others unlikely to continue or to lead in useful directions. In a parallel way, the environment in which Christianity finds itself provokes a greater emphasis and deeper reflection on certain aspects of Christian belief, drawing forth and encouraging certain tendencies rather than others.⁴⁰

However, a couple of clarifications should be made. 'Evolution' is often used pejoratively to refer to views which suggest drastic changes in Christology.⁴¹ Evolution does produce major changes over long periods of time, and it would seem fair to say that in some ways Christian doctrine has changed quite drastically over the centuries. However, the evolution of quite different types of animal might be better compared to the changes which have taken place in the concept of God between the patriarchal period and our time, than to the development of Christology within the

39. The development which is posited here is not necessarily linear, and there is no suggestion that there is a clear move either from better to worse or from worse to better. All that is being said is that developments take place which make Christianity better suited for, and thus more likely to survive and succeed in, a new environment.

40. In terms of the analogy we used earlier, here we have the appearance of a rather different kind of animal, but through a process not of transplantation from outside, but of development out of what the animal already has.

41. Cf. Moule, *op. cit.*; Dunn, "Making of Christology".

New Testament period. In the New Testament period of Christological development, and even in the developments which took place up until the Council of Chalcedon, we do not have anything that would appear to be justifiably regarded as the appearance of an entirely new species. It would thus seem legitimate to class our model as evolutionary, provided this term is understood as we have outlined here.

More importantly, we should point out that here we are seeking to elucidate one theory by appeal to another, which is obviously a rather precarious course of action. All that is being done here is to draw an analogy between two different models of development in two different fields, and to note that they are similar *inasmuch as they both posit an interaction between environment and heritage as producing and directing development, rather than either one or the other*. The analogy should not be pressed, and provided its limitations are clearly recognized and kept in mind, the parallels can still perhaps be helpful and illuminating.

We have also noted from the beginning that this model has been classed as a pastoral preaching model. This phrase is used because it captures that the authors of the various New Testament documents were not simply repeating tradition, but also drawing out implications from it in order to answer questions, settle doubts and defeat opponents among the Churches for which they wrote. Tradition never stands in isolation from the setting in which it is taken up and applied to the lives of individuals. Likewise, as we have already noted, this model is a sociological model, inasmuch as it relates to a specific model of the way in which worldviews and ideologies develop. However, it must be stressed that this model is not sociological in a reductionist sense, like many of the earliest works in the field of the sociology of religion, but rather in the sense that it recognizes that theological reflection never takes place in a vacuum, and is never isolated from a specific cultural-historical context.

Whichever of these terms one may feel most appropriately captures the most significant aspects of this model, what is most important is that we appear to have found a model which does justice to both the continuity and difference which is to be found between the various stages of the history of the Church's Christology, and indeed other doctrines as well. This model is not just of historical interest, but has important significance for the work of theology today,⁴² inasmuch as it would seem a valid conclusion that we today, in order to be faithful to the message of Jesus, need to relate it to our culture, setting and worldview, just as the various New Testament authors did in their own times and contexts. This model is also useful inasmuch as, while it sets forth the task facing us, it does not claim

42. New Testament scholars have recently received a challenge from the Finnish scholar Heikki Räisänen, in his *Beyond New Testament Theology*, London: SCM Press, 1990, concerning the need for co-operation between students of the New Testament and systematic theologians, and the need for biblical scholars to take the further step of discussing what the implications of their historical study might be for contemporary theology. This article is intended as one small attempt to begin responding to that challenge.

that one particular type of conclusion (e.g., 'liberal' or 'conservative') must always be the necessary outcome of the task of theology as outlined according to this model. If the conclusions were obvious and the answers clear-cut, dialogue and discussion among theologians of different backgrounds and presuppositions would not be as urgent as they in fact are. Hopefully this article will provide a useful outline of the way theology was being done in New Testament times, and thus provide a canonical foundation for those seeking to wrestle with their Christian heritage on the one hand and their modern setting on the other.