

STUDY 1

Christ Our Prophet, Priest and King¹

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Since the time of the Reformation, it has been commonplace to speak of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King. For instance, John Newton's well known hymn, 'How sweet the name of Jesus sounds' has this verse:

Jesus, my Shepherd, Husband, Friend,
My Prophet, Priest, and King;
My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
Accept the praise I bring.

Admittedly, Newton recognised that there was far more than only those three titles or functions, more precisely, 'offices' applying to Jesus. Still, Prophet, Priest and King remain prominent when the work of Christ is being discussed. These offices appeared as early as Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260–339 AD) in his *The Church History*:

And not only those who were honored with the high priesthood, and who for the sake of the symbol were anointed with especially prepared oil, were adorned with the name of Christ among the Hebrews, but also the kings whom the prophets anointed under the influence of the divine Spirit, and thus constituted, as it were, typical Christs. For they also bore in their own persons types of the royal and sovereign power of the true and only Christ, the divine Word who ruleth over all. And we have been told also that certain of the prophets themselves became, by the act of anointing, Christs in type, so that all these have reference to the true Christ, the divinely inspired and heavenly Word, who is the only high priest of all, and the only King of every creature, and the Father's only supreme prophet of prophets. And a proof of this is that no one of those who were of old symbolically anointed, whether priests, or kings, or prophets, possessed so great a power of inspired virtue as was exhibited by our Saviour and Lord Jesus, the true and only Christ.²

Eusebius was working from the use of the word 'Christ' or 'anointed' and arguing that, since Moses was to do nothing other than represent the pattern he was shown on the mountain, his consequent anointing of Aaron as high priest was evidence that there was an anointed high priest above all. Further, his commissioning of Joshua (Gk. Jesus) as leader carried similar implications, as did the *anointing* of certain Old Testament prophets.

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations in this study are from the New Revised Standard Version.

² *The Church History of Eusebius*, book 1, ch. 3 (this translation from 'The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers—Second Series', vol. 1, Hendrickson, Peabody, 1995, p. 86). See W. Pannenberg, *Jesus God and Man* (SCM, London, 1968), p. 213, n. 6 for further examples.

Christ Our Prophet, Priest and King

It was not until Andreas Osiander (1498–1552) that this approach appeared again. He wrote:

Since Christ thus is called an Anointed One and only the prophets, kings, and high priests were anointed, one notes well that all three of these offices rightly belong to him: the prophetic office, since he alone is our teacher and master, Matt. 23:8 ff.; the authority of the king, since he reigns forever in the house of Jacob, Luke 1:32 ff.; and the priestly office, since he is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, Ps. 110:4. Thus it is his office that he is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, as Paul testifies in 1 Cor. ch. 1.³

It was John Calvin (1509–1564) who gave the most definitive exposition of the threefold office of Christ in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.⁴ Calvin's approach begins with the fact that it would be the Messiah who would bring 'the full light of understanding'⁵ concerning the salvation promised by the Old Testament prophets, and that there are three who were anointed with holy oil under the law, prophets, priests and kings.⁶ However, he sees that it is the kingship which is primary when seeing Jesus as Messiah.

JESUS THE MAN

We stand in a long line of men and women who proclaim Christ, and especially as those who acknowledge him as 'King of kings and Lord of lords' (Rev. 19:16), so we need to ask ourselves what the New Testament means by such titles. What is more, we need to know the implications that flow from them. If Jesus is King, what does that mean for us as his people, his 'brothers' (Heb. 2:11)?

If we again examine the early church, we will discover that they had many battles concerning how they should understand the person of Jesus Christ. The most prominent of the disputes took place in the 300's and is associated with the names of Arius and Athanasius. Basically, the concern of Athanasius was to defend (or, initially, to establish, since his great work, *The Incarnation of the Word*, appeared before the conflict with the teaching of Arius⁷) the deity of Jesus Christ.

A written result of the dispute is what is known as the Nicene Creed, a well known and used document in many churches even today. The main paragraph of that creed is as follows:

And [we believe] in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, Begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father, By whom all things were made: Who for us men, and for our salvation came down from heaven, And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, And was made man, And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, And ascended into heaven, And sitteth

³ Quoted in Pannenberg, *Jesus God and Man*, p. 213.

⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, book 2, ch. 15, Library of Christian Classics, ed. J. T. McNeil, Westminster Pr., Philadelphia, 1977, pp. 494 ff.

⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, book 2, ch. 15, pt. 1, p. 495.

⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, book 2, ch. 15, pt. 2, p. 495.

⁷ See Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Historical Theology: An Introduction*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1978, p. 69. A modern example of the teachings of Arius is found in the Jehovah's Witnesses, who assert that Jesus was not God in the flesh. For details, see A. A. Hoekema, *Jehovah's Witnesses*, Paternoster, Exeter, 1973, pp. 60–7.)

Christ Our Prophet, Priest and King

on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and dead: Whose kingdom shall have no end.

This creed, with this paragraph as its major focus, was intended to define the deity of Jesus Christ, especially over against the teachings of Arius. And the issues were not unimportant; the concern of Athanasius was to insist that ‘the divine humanity of Christ belongs essentially to the gospel of reconciliation’.⁸ The battle for the full deity of Christ has continued throughout the history of the church. In the words of G. C. Berkouwer:

It was not only the ancient church which conducted, with deeply religious earnestness, a battle for the phrase ‘co-essential with the Father’, but later centuries too saw a resumption of the high-points of this conflict, as is clear in the controversy with the Socinians in the sixteenth and in that with Modernism in the nineteenth and twentieth century [sic].⁹

There are generations for whom the deity of Christ has been a touchstone of orthodoxy.

But the question sometimes submerged under these debates has been, what is the priority of the New Testament? The debates grew out of people attempting to work out the implications of the preaching of the New Testament, for example, ‘Jesus is Lord’, with all that that involves. The title ‘Lord’ for Jesus means far more than ruler, especially when we consider the Old Testament background for it. It does mean ruler, and also can be understood to mean simply ‘Sir’, as in John 4:15 (‘Sir/Lord, give me this water . . .’), but there was also the fact that, for the Jews, Lord (κύριος, *kurios*) was used to translate the divine name, nowadays represented in English by *YHWH* or *Yahweh*. *Kurios* was also used to translate the Hebrew title *adonai*, which Jews said rather than say *Yahweh*. To distinguish the two words in the original Hebrew, the English Old Testament uses ‘LORD’ for *Yahweh* and ‘Lord’ for *adonai*. See Psalm 110:1 as an example.

The New Testament declaration is that ‘Jesus is Lord’ (there being no difference since the New Testament was written in Greek, not Hebrew). So a statement such as Acts 2:36 needs to be read carefully in its context.

Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.

Peter’s conclusion to his address will lead to the promise in verse 38:

Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’

In other words, ‘If you call on the name of the Lord you will be saved’, the point he made when he quoted the prophet Joel, in Acts 2:21, the passage with which he commenced the Pentecost address. Reference to Joel 2:32 will show that the ‘LORD’

⁸ Bromiley, *Historical Theology*, p. 69.

⁹ G. C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: The Person of Christ*, trans. John Vriend, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1954, pp. 155f. It is noteworthy that Berkouwer was writing this at what was generally regarded as a low point in Conservative Evangelical scholarship, when ‘Liberalism’—‘Modernism’ is an older description—seemed to hold sway.

Christ Our Prophet, Priest and King

to whom Joel is referring is the Lord, *Yahweh*, the only God of heaven and earth. The implication is strong: Jesus is *Yahweh*!

Strangely, however, The New Testament makes almost no definitive statements that Jesus is God. John 1:1, 'The Word was God' and Thomas' exclamation to Jesus in John 20:28, 'My Lord and my God!' are a fitting *inclusio* to the whole Gospel of John; they are also rare instances of such a declaration. Of course there are other statements (John 1:18; Acts 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8–9; 2 Peter 1:1 and 1 John 5:20), but honesty compels us to recognise that they are not without certain difficulties, such as they way they are punctuated, and so forth. Far stronger are the passing comments, such as this in Acts 2:36 and elsewhere, where language that is used of God in the Old Testament is used of Jesus in the New Testament. Another instance of this is in Philippians 2:10–11,

at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

It would seem hard for Paul not to have had in mind Isaiah 45:22–23,

Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. ²³By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.'

Isaiah wrote that every knee would bow to God, whereas Paul says they will bow to Jesus.¹⁰ It is obvious why people began to ask how this could be explained simply (it probably can't, although a personal encounter with God doubtless makes the questions far less significant) and why the doctrine of the Trinity eventually was formulated.

If I may summarise the issue somewhat simplistically, the New Testament assumes the deity of Jesus, whereas it seems to stress his humanity. While we must search for the allusions to deity, over and over again we are faced with strong statements concerning the humanity of Jesus. Consider the descriptions of his birth. While the means of his conception was unique, his birth was like any normal human birth (Luke 2:6–7). His childhood is only described briefly, but the account does indicate that, like other children, Jesus indeed grew and matured (Luke 2:52).

Naturally, that has provoked all sorts of questions, for example concerning Jesus' self-awareness, but the evidence forces us to see that Jesus' humanity, while real, is also unlike our own, to the extent that ours is afflicted with the effects of sin. So while we read the story of Jesus as a child in the temple, we need to enquire what hearing the scriptures read and seeing the elements of God given atonement enacted would mean to a child who was a child of faith. The simplicity of hearing that way, while not unknown to us as redeemed men and women, would have been *natural* and richly stimulating. Likewise, encountering the faults of unbelieving Israel, while being stirred to *righteous* anger (Mark 3:5), would have meant that it was 'zeal for *your* house' which would consume him (John 2:17) and not the anger of fallen man which does not work the righteousness of God (James 1:20). Jesus was described as being hungry (Luke 24:41–43), tired and thirsty (John 4:6–7), enjoying social gatherings at

¹⁰ See Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (first ed., Blackwell, Oxford, 1994), p. 279. A far more comprehensive treatment of the topic is Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Baker, Grand Rapids, 1992).

Christ Our Prophet, Priest and King

which there was feasting and drinking (Luke 7:34) and after his resurrection he firmly insisted that he was as fully human as he had been prior to his death (Luke 24:38–39).

Although praying to Jesus is somewhat common in much of Christian life today, it was not so in the New Testament. There, prayer was directed to God the Father, and that is how Jesus directed the disciples to pray (Matt. 6:9). What is more, he himself prayed to the Father (Matt. 11:25). But had someone actually prayed to ‘Jesus’ in a public setting the result might have been humorous, since the name Jesus was so common. Many in the audience could have been led to think they were the ones being addressed. In fact the index to the works of Josephus lists twenty-one people with the name Jesus.¹¹ Within the community of faith, far from the name ‘Jesus’ having a religious connotation in its own right, use of the name Jesus would always have related to the man who had been with them and whom they had known so intimately. Thus John wrote:

We declare to you what was from the beginning, *what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands*, concerning the word of life—²this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—³we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:1–3).

Also, the title ‘Messiah’ (*Christ*) was not used to imply a divine being. From the anointed high priest (Lev. 4:3) through Saul (1 Sam. 12:3) and David (1 Sam. 16:13; Ps. 2:2) onwards, the title referred to a human being anointed by God for a particular task.¹² In later, inter-testamental times, the expectation of ‘Messiah’ developed but without a change in focus.¹³ ‘Jesus Christ’ refers to the man Jesus who was the Jewish Messiah.

This is presented in Acts 2, where Peter argues that Jesus was raised from the dead (a particularly human feature?) and that since this was so, ‘God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified’ (Acts 2:36). The point, among others being made, is that a dead man cannot be the Messiah, as countless claimants before (and later) demonstrate (see Acts 5:35–39).

THE SON OF MAN

When anticipating the appearance of false messiahs and false prophets, Matthew records Jesus as saying:

¹¹ *Josephus*, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 10, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1965, pp. 279f.

¹² That even included the Medo-Persian monarch Cyrus who was also called God’s ‘shepherd’ (Isa. 44:28–45:1).

¹³ See Marinus de Jonge, ‘Messiah’ in David Noel Freedman (Ed), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4, Doubleday, New York, 1992, p. 777–88. In the light of Christian clichés, the following statement by de Jonge is valuable:

Because a central tenet of Christianity has always been the conviction that Jesus was the Christ (the Messiah expected by Israel), much attention has been paid to the study of Jewish expectations of the Messiah. The Christian focus upon the person of Jesus has led to an undue concentration on the *person* of the Messiah in Jewish thought, even in the works of recent scholars. One should realize that in the OT the term ‘anointed’ is never used of a future savior/redeemer, and that in later Jewish writings of the period between 200 B.C. and A.D. 100 the term is used only infrequently in connection with agents of divine deliverance expected in the future (p. 777).

Christ Our Prophet, Priest and King

Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look! Here is the Messiah!’ or ‘There he is!’—do not believe it. ²⁴For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. ²⁵Take note, I have told you beforehand. ²⁶So, if they say to you, ‘Look! He is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look! He is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. ²⁷For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man (Matt. 24:23–27).

The issue is ‘the coming of the Son of Man’. But who is this person and what does the title mean? I think it can be argued that ‘the coming of the Son of Man’ relates to the complete renewal of creation, so the mere presence of a person in the wilderness (the place identified in Israel with redemption) or in the inner room¹⁴ fails to see how extraordinary by contrast will be the coming to which Jesus refers.

‘Son of Man’ translates the Hebrew בֶּן אָדָם (*ben adam*), a phrase which occurs on one hundred and seven occasions in the Old Testament.¹⁵ Of those, ninety-three are in Ezekiel, and two in Daniel, with the remainder always occurring ‘in poetic couplets, always in the second line, and almost always parallel to either *adam* or *enosh*, both of which mean “man” or “human being”’.¹⁶ An example of this is Psalm 8:4:

what is man [*enosh*] that thou art mindful of him,
and the son of man [*ben adam*] that thou dost care for him? (RSV).

The uses in Ezekiel and in Daniel 8:17 are simply references to the humanity of the prophet, no doubt over against the majesty of God. The NRSV of Psalm 8:4 has:

what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

while the more recent TNIV reads:

what are mere mortals that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?

Both are accurate as far as the intention of the original is concerned. But while we may say that, the determining question is, how did the New Testament authors and speakers use the phrase?

To begin an answer to that, we should note the use of Psalm 8 within the New Testament. The most striking instance is in Hebrews 2:6–9:

But someone has testified somewhere, ‘What [is man] that you are mindful of [him], or the son of man, that you care for [him]? ⁷You have made [him] for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned [him] with glory and honor, ⁸subjecting all things under [his] feet.’ Now in subjecting all things to [him], God left nothing outside [his] control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to [him], ⁹but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.¹⁷

¹⁴ See Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary—volume 2: The Churchbook*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2004, p. 506.

¹⁵ For details, D. E. Aune, ‘Son of Man’ in Geoffrey W. Bromiley (ed.), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 4: Q–Z, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1988, pp. 574–81.

¹⁶ Aune, ‘Son of Man’ p. 574.

¹⁷ This is the NRSV modified, demonstrating that the interests of clearly representing the biblical argument are sacrificed at times by the concern for gender equality. I have also used a capital M for Man when the suggestion is of the Man as the human individual, Adam or Jesus, representing the whole race. The omission of the capital letter would suggest a male person.

Christ Our Prophet, Priest and King

There Jesus is set as the contrast to fallen, deprived humanity (cf. Heb. 4:15, ‘without sin’) and as, for now, the fulfilment of the creation of Man. Jesus is that son of man. We should see that his place as the son of man is with a view to the restoration of ‘many sons to glory’ (Heb. 2:10, AV) and that will necessitate him tasting death for everyone (Heb. 2:9). That means that there is a strong eschatological aspect to this.

Another use is in 1 Corinthians 15:24–27:

Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. ²⁵For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷For ‘God has put all things in subjection under his feet.’ But when it says, ‘All things are put in subjection,’ it is plain that this does not include the one who put all things in subjection under him.

The eschatological element is strong here, too. The resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee of the full harvest of resurrection of those in him (1 Cor. 15:20–23). But it is the use of Psalm 8:6 (lit.), ‘God has put all things in subjection under his feet’ which is significant. The reference is to ‘the son of man’ (Ps. 8:4) and so the reign of Christ is the reign of the *Man* Jesus. It is the *Man* Jesus who was raised from the dead and it is risen humanity which is the guarantee of our resurrection. What is more, the triumph is the triumph of the Man Jesus, in fulfilment of the command given to but disobeyed by Adam and those in him. That is the reason why Paul continued, in 1 Corinthians 15:42ff., to look at the resurrection body in terms of ‘the last Adam’, ‘the second man’ (vv. 45, 47).

A similar point is made in Ephesians 1:15–23, where Paul prays that the readers will be given to know the full dimensions of their hope (already spoken of in Eph. 1:9–14):

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²²And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

The power which is at work in us to bring us to the predestined goal (cf. Eph. 1:4–5) is the same power by which Christ was raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of God (v. 20). Verse 22 says that God has put all things under Christ’s feet and made him head over all things for the church. Once again, the reference to Psalm 8 reminds us that the headship of Christ, *for* the church and not merely *of* the church, is the headship of the *Man* Jesus. ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool’ (Ps. 110:1), reflected in this passage and in 1 Corinthians 15:25, is a declaration of the exaltation of Man, in the person of Jesus Christ. The day will come, when all those in him will ‘exercise dominion in life’ through [that] one man, Jesus Christ’ (Rom. 5:17; cf. Rev. 5:10, both future tenses). The Man Jesus has defeated the enemy, who is now under his feet, albeit his heel was bruised in the process, but one day soon, Satan will be crushed under our feet (Rom. 16:20)!

Christ Our Prophet, Priest and King

There is one statement in the Gospels which needs our attention in this matter, namely Mark 2:10 (and parallels): ‘But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’.¹⁸ Too often, this has been taken to imply that Jesus must be God (and of course, that is not being questioned in the overall scheme of things) because the scribes present at the healing of the man let down through the roof insisted, ‘Who can forgive sins, but God alone?’ (Mark 2:7) and Jesus had declared the man forgiven. However, there is a principle within the Gospels that has often been observed that, even in face of the Father’s revelation of Jesus as the Messiah (Matt. 16:16), Jesus’ preferred title was ‘Son of Man’ (see Luke 9:20–22). And so it was here: when Jesus responded to the scribes’ criticism he did so by claiming that ‘*the Son of Man* has power on earth to forgive sins’.

The background for this is probably Daniel 7:13–14. The context is that of fierce attacks by four beasts. One of the beasts looks like a man (v. 4—*enosh*) and the others like a bear and a leopard with the wings of a bird, which have a vicious destructive dominion. Then another beast appears, even more terrifying and dreadful than the others, and this had horns, of which one horn was especially notable for having eyes and a mouth like a human being (v. 8—*enosh*). The point being made by this vision was to highlight the fact that ‘the holy ones of the Most High’ were being savagely attacked and defeated, the attackers looking often like human beings but in reality being far more than human.

While these beasts, and especially the last beast with the horn with eyes and a mouth that spoke arrogantly, seemed so powerful and the holy ones seemed so helpless, when the Ancient One took his throne all is seen so clearly (vv. 9–12). The beasts are rendered utterly powerless by the Ancient One and the last beast put to death. Then one ‘like a Son of Man’ (RSV) is seen coming with the clouds of heaven (cf. Mark 14:61–62) and to him is ‘given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed’ (v. 14). The holy ones may be under attack but there is one to whom is given all dominion (cf. Matt. 28:18!). But there is more, for when this Son of Man receives the kingdom, then it is also truly restored to the holy ones of the Most High: ‘Do not be afraid, little flock, for it your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom’ (Luke 12:32). Thus verses 18 and 22 of Daniel 7.¹⁹ When the Son of Man has authority, then so do the holy ones of the Most High. This is the restoration of humanity (though the primary reference is to Israel, at that point) through the exaltation of the Son of Man.

KENOSIS

The word ‘kenosis’ is used to describe the ‘self-emptying’ of Jesus. It comes from the verb κενόω (*kenoō*), to empty, and is based on Philippians 2:7, the only occasion when the verb is used of Jesus. We start with such statements as those in John 17:5 and 17:24:

¹⁸ See William J. Dumbrell, *The New Covenant: The Synoptics in Context: Matthew, Mark and Luke*, The Bible Society of Singapore, Singapore, 1999, pp. 103–6.

¹⁹ Also Dan. 7:27 probably is directed to the holy ones of the Most High having an everlasting kingdom (NRSV), though it is also possible that the reference is to the Most High himself (NIV).

Christ Our Prophet, Priest and King

So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed . . . ²⁴Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

Both verses demand we admit what is called a ‘pre-existence’ of Jesus Christ. P. T. Forsyth says of this:

If there was a personal pre-existence in the case of Christ it does not seem possible to adjust this to the historic Jesus without some doctrine of Kenosis. We face in Christ a Godhead self-reduced but real, whose infinite power took effect in self-humiliation, whose strength was perfected in weakness, who consented to know with an ignorance divinely wise, and who empties himself in virtue of his divine fulness.²⁰

Just how that self-emptying by the whole Godhead in the person of the eternal Son took place is a mystery. Forsyth concludes:

If we ask how Eternal Godhead could make the actual condition of human nature His own, we must answer, as I have already said, that we do not know. We cannot follow the steps of the process, or make a psychological sketch. There is something presumptuous in certain kenotic efforts to body forth just what the Son must have gone through in such an experience. God has done things for his own which it has not entered into the heart of man to conceive. It is the miracle behind all miracle. All detailed miracle was but its expression. It is the miracle of grace. And it can be realised (little as it can be conceived) only by the faith that grace creates, that answers grace, and works by love. Let us not be impatient of the secret. Love would not remain love if it had no impenetrable reserves. Love alone has any key to those renunciations which do not mean the suicide but the finding of the Soul.²¹

Likewise, what it meant to Jesus, the man, to be God in the flesh (John 1:14) we also do not know. While we may ask questions concerning what Forsyth called the ‘theological science’ of it all,²² in the long run the only response for faith is that of worship. And that is what we see in some of the hymns of the Christian Church. For instance, in ‘Hark the herald angels sing’ there is the line, ‘Mild he lays his glory by’, and in the hymn ‘And can it be’ there is the declaration that the Saviour ‘emptied himself of all but love’. Both these come from Charles Wesley, as does the lesser known hymn, ‘Let earth and heaven combine’:

Let earth and heaven combine,
Angels and men agree,
To praise in songs Divine
The incarnate Deity,
Our God contracted to a span,
Incomprehensibly made man.

He laid His glory by,
He wrapped Him in our clay,
Unmarked by human eye
The latent Godhead lay;
Infant of days He here became,
And bore the mild Immanuel’s name.

²⁰ P. T. Forsyth, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, Independent Press, London, 1909, pp. 293f.

²¹ Forsyth, *Person and Place*, p. 320.

²² Forsyth, *Person and Place*, p. 294.

Christ Our Prophet, Priest and King

Unsearchable the love
That hath the Saviour brought,
The grace is far above
Or man or angel's thought;
Suffice for us, that God we know,
Our God is manifest below.²³

Without contesting the poet's rights, I would, however, question if there is any evidence that Christ did, indeed, lay his glory by, or if he did 'empty himself of all but love', which Wesley linked with 'He left his Father's throne above'.

These questions arise because the Scriptures also declare that:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father (John 1:14 RSV),

and:

Jesus did this [the changing of water to wine], the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him (John 2:11).

The glory was not laid aside, even if it was not recognised by unbelieving eyes.

We should now examine Philippians 2:6–11. Paul writes of 'Christ Jesus',

who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The main question to be asked is, to what do verses 6 and 7 refer? Are they statements concerning the eternal Son, pre-existent with the Father, who chose not to use his equality with God for his own ends, but rather chose to empty himself of his divine prerogatives and to take the form of a slave and to be born in the likeness of a man? The alternative would be that Paul is contrasting the attitude of Jesus with the self seeking attitude of Adam.²⁴

The answer to these questions is not simple. The language of verses 6–7 demands hard work on our part and any final certainty will probably elude us.²⁵ The alternate suggestion, that the whole passage is intended to contrast Christ with Adam, is usually examined from within verses 6–11, but I would like to begin with verse 5, 'Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus'.²⁶ My attention is drawn to the use of the title 'Christ Jesus'. If the whole passage is an exhortation to humility, then the example of Christ is given as the paradigm. But the title, Christ Jesus, as we have seen, carries its primary reference to Jesus the Man. If this is so then that would, to my mind, add weight to the second of the alternatives, namely that Paul is contrasting Jesus with Adam.

²³ *Hymns of Eternal Truth*, Sherbourne Road Church Trust, 1971, No. 60, verses 1–3.

²⁴ See James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: An Enquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, SCM, London, 1989, pp. 114–21.

²⁵ I have found Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1991, pp. 203–68 especially helpful, though I lean towards Dunn's conclusion.

²⁶ O'Brien, *Philippians*, pp. 253–62.

Christ Our Prophet, Priest and King

Admittedly, the order of the words of verse 7 is puzzling on this interpretation, with ‘being born in human likeness’ following ‘emptied himself’. But the meaning could still be that unlike Adam, who was in the image of God but wanted to exploit that to a point far beyond what was legitimate, Jesus accepted his position and willingly and freely did what true humanity should do. He made *himself* nothing and took the form of a slave. After all, he was in human likeness and form. The ‘likeness’ here may be similar to Romans 8:3, where the same word is used. The ‘man’ in whose likeness he appeared in Philippians 2:7 would then be Adam, though his was not truly *sinful* flesh as mentioned in Romans. That could go some way to account for the next phrase in Philippians 2:7, ‘and being found in human form’ (the form of a man), which would then be a reference to Jesus’ true humanity and his consequent obedience (Phil. 2:8). The point of this, then, would be that the self-emptying of Jesus is that of the Man Jesus.

Among the translations I have examined, the NASB, NRSV and RSV have, in Philippians 2:6 inserted the word ‘though’ or ‘although’ before ‘he was in the form of God’. In contrast, the NIV has the more literal, ‘Who, *being* in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped . . .’. There is no word corresponding with ‘though’ in the Greek and its insertion makes it appear that there is some sort of concession involved. A simple reading of the Greek (cf. NIV, AV etc.), on the other hand, makes it plain that his obedience and his refusal to count equality with God as something to be grasped was of the essence of his being. There was no reluctant acceptance of his destiny, rather the self-emptying was the way things really are in true humanity. Humanity is created for total submission to God. Obedience, at any level, is not a source of merit and disobedience and resistance to the authority of God is a complete denial of what it is to be a human being in the image of God. Hence Adam’s sin was not taking forbidden fruit *per se*, but wanting to be ‘as God knowing good and evil’. Good and evil are at the heart of the creation; creation is morally structured (see Ps.19:1, 7–10; cf. Ps. 97:6). The heavens declare *God’s* righteousness and it is the law of *God* which is written on the heart of man at creation (Rom. 2:15).²⁷

In the light of the de-glorifying of man in Adam’s sin (Rom. 3:23), Jesus stands as the glorious Man, the last Adam. His self-emptying did not imply that he lost anything. It was that he quite naturally took the place where God is all in all.²⁸ How could he, conceivably, do anything else?

The problem is that human beings are always on the lookout for merit, even if that means finding it in self-denial. This is the thrust of Philippians 2:1–11. Self-interest at whatever level is not for the Christian, or indeed, legitimately, for any human being, and this is so clearly seen in the truth of humanity in the one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5).

²⁷ It is this which explains the work of the new covenant, whereby the removal of guilt brings restoration of the knowledge of God and the re-writing of the law on the heart (Jer. 31:31–34); cf. Rom. 7:14–8:4 where the question is, what has happened to this man that he should now *want* to obey the law and that he should so grieve over his failures?

²⁸ The other uses of the verb κενόω (*kenoō*) in the New Testament show that at no point must the ‘emptying’ imply that something was lost. See Rom. 4:14; 1 Cor. 1:17 (though the NRSV and RSV have added the words ‘of its power’ to the translation); 9:15; 2 Cor. 9:3. Given this consistency, there is no reason why Phil. 2:7 should be the exception in Paul’s writings.

Christ Our Prophet, Priest and King

IN CHRIST

Paul wrote: ‘as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ’ (1 Cor. 15:22). Here are two Men, each the representative head of all those ‘in him’. The Puritan, Walter Marshall, summarised the issues this way:

‘For God has made man upright, but they sought out many inventions’ (Eccles. 7:29). Observe well the words of this text, and you will find that all they who have sought out many inventions, rather than upright walking, are comprehended in man that was at first made upright. And ‘man’ in the text signifies all mankind. The first Adam was all mankind, as Jacob and Esau were two nations in the womb of Rebecca (Gen. 25:23). God made us all in our first parent, according to His own image, able and inclined to do His law and, in that pure nature, our obligation to obedience was first laid on us, and the first wilful transgression, by which our first parent bereaved himself of the image of God, and brought on himself the sentence of death, was our sin as well as his, for, ‘In one man, Adam, all have sinned, and so death is passed on all’ (Rom. 5:12); because *all mankind were in Adam’s loins, when the first sin was committed*, even as Levi may be said to have paid tithes in Abraham before he was born because, when his father Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, he was yet in his loins (Heb. 7:9, 10).²⁹

All that Adam did, he did as representative of humanity. Although some protest at the notion of Adam’s guilt being our guilt, it is plain that all humanity reproduces Adam’s guilt in deeds of unrighteousness in spite of the protestations. But we must still recall that the biblical writers were fully aware of the implications of what they wrote. The Hebrew word ‘Adam’, although used of the individual in Genesis 5:1ff., is still principally a word with a universal meaning, that is, it refers to all humanity.³⁰

When we speak of being ‘in Christ’ then, we are saying that Christ was the representative Man of the restored and renewed creation. But we also need to go back to the word ‘Christ’. It is not a mere title nor a surname but is descriptive of the function of the one described that way.³¹ While the concept of a Messiah may have developed late in Israel’s life, the pattern for that concept was already well established, and that was in the person of King David. David’s significance has already been noted above.

In 1 Samuel 16, David was anointed by Samuel and that meant that he was the one anointed by the Lord.

The LORD said [to Samuel], ‘Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.’¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward (1 Sam. 16:12–13).

David was the man upon whom the spirit³² of God came mightily, for the task of kingship. We should, however, note that this description is followed, first, by the

²⁹ Walter Marshall, *Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*, Evangelical Press, Welwyn, (1692) 1981, p. 66, emphasis mine.

³⁰ Fritz Maas, ‘ādhām’ in G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (eds), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1974, pp. 79–87.

³¹ See footnote 13 above.

³² I incline to the position that ‘Spirit’ with the capital ‘S’ should be reserved for the New Testament documents. Until the incarnation of the word and the subsequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit, there was no indication that the Holy Spirit was a discrete person. Of course we can say that it was the Holy Spirit who came on David but we can only say that with apostolic hindsight. Within the Old Testament it could be said that the ‘wind’ or ‘breath’, or even the ‘presence’ of God was understood.

Christ Our Prophet, Priest and King

account of David being the one to soothe Saul's deep disquiet, and then by the account of David's encounter with Goliath.³³ The story in 1 Samuel 17 must be seen in this context.

The fight with Goliath was not the usual form of battle; it was not the weapons used but the fact that the fighting was between 'champions' that was conspicuous.³⁴ The anointing of David was followed by the story of him acting *on behalf of all Israel*. His victory was not merely an illustration of what can be done by faith; it was a representative, substitutionary victory. For Israel, the victory was vicarious. When David was victorious, all Israel participated in his victory:

Then David ran and stood over the Philistine; he grasped his sword, drew it out of its sheath, and killed him; then he cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. ⁵²The troops of Israel and Judah rose up with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron, so that the wounded Philistines fell on the way from Shaaraim as far as Gath and Ekron. ⁵³The Israelites came back from chasing the Philistines, and they plundered their camp (1 Sam. 17:51–53).

Put another way, all Israel was 'in David', in their messiah, in their anointed king. This may go towards explaining why the apostle Paul never speaks of us being 'in Jesus' or 'in Jesus Christ'. The primary issue is the Messiahship of Jesus and hence Paul's phrase is 'in Christ' or 'in Christ Jesus'. Although there are other possible elements to be considered,³⁵ the phrase could, I suggest, have this simple meaning, drawn from reference to the role of David. But of course there is the Pauline understanding that, if we are indeed 'in Christ', and that through the victory he had won, then it is because we were once 'in Adam', and through that Man's disobedience, we were dead.

Some passages from Paul are significant here. The first is Ephesians 2:1–10:

You were dead through the trespasses and sins ²in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. ³All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. ⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—⁹not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

In verses 1 and 5, the word 'through' (also in RV and ASV) represents the Greek dative case, which is translated as 'in' by the NIV, ESV etc. Whether 'through' or 'in' (an 'instrumental' or 'locative' dative?), and we can see why both are finally true, though what was in Paul's mind when he wrote we cannot say dogmatically, the point is that we are no longer dead because we were made alive with Christ. To coin a

³³ For a slightly different theological evaluation of the encounter, see Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, Tyndale Press, London, 1962, pp. 82–4.

³⁴ A similar battle took place between the champions of David and Ishbaal, described in 2 Samuel 2:12–17, though the outcome was less decisive and a full battle evidently resulted.

³⁵ For a summary, see M. A. Seifrid, 'In Christ' in Gerald F. Hawthorne, et al (eds), *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, 1993, pp. 433–36.

Christ Our Prophet, Priest and King

phrase, were ‘co-made-alive’ with Christ, just as Galatians 2:19 says we were ‘co-crucified with Christ’.³⁶ Verse 6 continues by saying, using the same verbal forms,³⁷ that we were co-raised and co-seated in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. Verse 7 says that God’s kindness towards us took place in the person and work of the Jewish Messiah, Jesus, and in the ages to come this will be shown. The point in all of this is that we were created in Christ Jesus for good works and not for those trespasses and sins in which we once walked (v. 10).

Let me make an observation here: verse 10 does not say ‘re-creation’ or ‘new creation’ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17), although that is the way the verse is usually understood. So why ‘created’ here? I would suggest the possibility that Paul has in mind something far bigger than just the work of regeneration. It is that the whole of creation was with Christ in view. That is, even Adam, the Man in the garden of Eden, was with Christ in view. As an example of this, Paul says that the unity of the man and the woman in Genesis 2:24 is actually speaking of Christ and the church (Eph. 5:31–32). Likewise, he says that we were chosen ‘in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love’ (Eph. 1:4). This holiness and blamelessness, which is in clear contrast to the nature and life of fallen humanity, was the nature of created humanity. That is how Adam was created. The good works to which Paul refers are those works which are ‘natural’ for all humanity. Any behaviour which is not of that essence should be rejected. This was expanded further in Ephesians 4:17–24:

Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds.¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart.¹⁹ They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.²⁰ That is not the way you learned Christ!²¹ For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus.²² You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old [man], corrupt and deluded by its lusts,²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,²⁴ and to clothe yourselves with the new [man], created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

I have replaced the word ‘self’ (NRSV, NIV), with the word Paul used, ‘man’ (ἄνθρωπος, *anthrōpos*). This makes perfectly good sense when it is realised that the ‘man’ referred to is either Adam or Jesus. The truth of humanity is in [the Man] Jesus (v. 21).

Then there is Romans 5:12–21. Here the contrast between Adam and Jesus, the two ‘Men’, is plain. One ‘Man’ brought death by his act of disobedience, the other ‘Man’ brought justification and life. If we ask what his ‘act of righteousness’ which accomplished justification and life was, the answer is in the following chapter. Romans 6:1–11 shows us how we benefit from this act of righteousness. The act of righteousness was the execution of ‘our old Man’ (v. 6). The benefit of that came through our being joined to Christ in that action by means of our baptism. I have elsewhere argued that the heart of baptism is submission to the one into whose name we are baptised.³⁸ That means that baptism is an act of faith. By faith we are participants in the death and resurrection of Christ, our representative Man. What is true of him is, therefore, true of us (vv. 9–11).

³⁶ συνεζωοποίησεν τῷ Χριστῷ (*sunēzōpoiēsen tō Christō*); Χριστῷ συνεσταυρώμαί (*Christō sunestaurōmai*).

³⁷ συνήγειρεν καὶ συνεκάθισεν (*sunēgeiren kai sunekathisen*).

³⁸ See Ian D. Pennicook, *The Baptism of John and Its Significance for Christian Baptism*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1987.

Christ Our Prophet, Priest and King

What, I think, should be stressed is the use of the word 'Christ'. It is not a surname, it is a function. Our 'Christ' is our representative and substitute. To say that we are 'in Christ' should add to our understanding of such famous expressions as 'substitutionary atonement' and so on. Of course there are other expressions in the New Testament, but this one at least is clear.

SO WHAT OF 'THE ASCENSION'?

The ascension of Jesus is described in Acts 1, but I suspect that a lot of our sense of the event could come from artwork and not from the text. What happened in the ascension? Was it that Jesus went upwards until a cloud made it no longer possible to see the departing figure, or was it that a cloud of the presence of God, a cloud of glory, hid Jesus from their sight? Given the promise of Matthew 28:20, I think the latter is more likely. Otherwise we may be forced to ask questions about how far Jesus went 'up', and so on.

If the cloud was indeed the cloud of the glory of God, what are the implications? The first would be that the ascension refers to exaltation and not elevation, which is what Luke continues to say in Acts 2:33 (cf. Heb. 1:3). But it is the exaltation of Jesus the Man. We may see Matthew 28:18–20 bearing this out. 'All authority in heaven and on earth' is 'given' to Jesus, just as it had been given to Adam. As the Gospel of Matthew commences with the search for 'the king of the Jews', it ends with the declaration that this Man is king of the whole of creation. That is, too, the point of Hebrews 2:5–10.

The command to make the nations his disciples is consistent with this. All the nations were 'in Adam' (Acts 17:26); it was God's intention that from Adam would come a world of nations fulfilled in worship, so that the earth would be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God (Hab. 2:14; cf. Num. 14:21; Isa. 11:9). The promise of Psalm 2:8–9, made to the anointed (messiah) son/king, is in the flow of this. Matthew 28:18–20 is a declaration of triumph: Adam at last is reigning and fulfilling the creational mandate.

And Hebrews 2 indicates that his reign over all things, by means of his tasting death, is for everyone, in order that he might bring many sons to glory. God has made him head over all things *for* the church (Eph. 1:22). The church is the body by which he fills all in all. The church is his bride, the multi-ethnic bride, described in Revelation 21.

In Christ, the glorified and exalted Man, we are glorified. Not only is he glorified, but his glorified humanity is with him seated in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:6). His reign as Man is our reign, because we reign in him. Hence Romans 8:28–30:

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. ³⁰And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

There is a glory yet to be revealed in and to us, but we have been glorified. Our hope is not of what is yet to be accomplished, but of the revelation of what already is. Hence we wait, not so much for the return of Christ, as if he were absent (contrast

Christ Our Prophet, Priest and King

Matt. 28:20), but for his appearing. We wait for the cloud of glory to be opened to our sight and for us to 'be revealed with him in glory' (Col. 3:4).

The ascension of Christ to the throne, where he now reigns, is no minor part of the story; it is the declaration that Christ has triumphed, but it is more than that alone. It is the declaration, to principalities and powers, that God in his wisdom has effected his purpose for the whole creation in Christ our conquering King.