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## CHAPTER XXI

# THE ORIGIN OF PAULINE CHRISTOLOGY

MARGARET E. THRALL

IN THE ACQUISITION OF HIS CHRISTOLOGICAL BELIEFS PAUL WAS PERHAPS indebted to some extent to the circles of early Christians with whom he first made contact. Moreover, the Jewish habits of thought in which he had been reared assisted him to formulate and develop them. Nevertheless, it is very likely that the experience which converted him to Christianity had a profound initial effect on the formation of his thought about Christ. His own words suggest that this was so, since in Galatians 1: 15-16 he speaks of the revelation of God's Son. His account of the event is very brief, but if the three longer accounts in Acts are taken into consideration as well, we have sufficient material to attempt to discover whether his basic beliefs about Christ can be derived from this experience. This is obviously not a new idea. Several Pauline scholars have previously made use of what information we possess about his conversion to elucidate some aspects of his Christology.<sup>1</sup> The previous treatment of the subject is in some respects unsatisfactory, however, and there are also some elements in Paul's experience which may possess a Christological significance which has not so far been recognized.

### I

Before we begin to discuss the main themes of this essay there is one preliminary matter to be dealt with. To what extent is it legitimate to make use of the accounts of Paul's conversion in Acts? There are, after all, notorious discrepancies between the Acts record of the apostle's career and his own references to his past activities. Ought we to discount what Luke has to say about Paul's experience on the way to Damascus?

To do so, I suggest, would be to indulge in unnecessary scepticism. It is not at this point but at a later stage in Acts that the difficulties of correlation become really acute. Furthermore, it is possible to make out a positive case for the reliability of Acts in the matter of Paul's conversion, as Johannes Munck has shown.<sup>2</sup> He notes the following similarities between

<sup>1</sup> The work of the following scholars will be considered in this essay: O. Michel, "Die Entstehung der paulinischen Christologie", *ZNTW* 28 (1929), pp. 324-333; L. Cerfaux, *Le Christ dans la Théologie de saint Paul* (Paris, 1951), pp. 11-12; A. Feuillet, *Le Christ Sagesse de Dieu* (Paris, 1966), pp. 17-20, 35-36, 84, 160-61.

<sup>2</sup> Johannes Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (London, 1959), pp. 13-35.

Acts on the one hand and the references in Galatians and the First Epistle to the Corinthians on the other: the description of Paul as a persecutor of the Christians right up to the moment of his sudden conversion;<sup>1</sup> the strong element of compulsion he experienced;<sup>2</sup> the allusion to Old Testament texts from the Servant passages in Deutero-Isaiah and the call of Jeremiah;<sup>3</sup> lastly, the reticence about the manner in which Jesus appeared to Paul, coupled with the assertion that Paul did see him.<sup>4</sup> Munck concludes: "It is the apostle himself who shaped the story of his conversion and call as the churches were to hear it."<sup>5</sup>

If this defence of Acts is valid, then it would be permissible to use the accounts of the Damascus experience, provided that they are not contradicted by Paul himself and that they may be directly or indirectly substantiated by his own references.

## II

Our main discussion divides into two parts. First, we shall consider some of the aspects of the Damascus experience which have previously received attention: the revelation of the risen Jesus as the Son of God and his appearance as a glorious heavenly being. Secondly, we shall discuss an element in the experience which does not immediately appear to possess Christological significance: its similarity to the calling of the Old Testament prophets.<sup>6</sup> It is possible that here we may have a clue to the origin of Paul's belief in the pre-existent Christ as the agent of creation.

Among comparatively recent writers on Paul, Cerfaux and Feuillet both agree that Paul's conviction that Christ was the Son of God derived from the moment of his conversion. He had seen Christ in divine glory, Cerfaux maintains, and the intuition came to him that this was God's Son, who was not a creature but belonged to a completely different order of reality, the divine order. The actual title Son of God was in all probability the content of the divine revelation.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Feuillet claims that the Damascus experience convinced Paul "que le Christ est le Fils de Dieu au sens strict".<sup>8</sup> Both these scholars also equate the titles Son of God and Son of Man. Jesus revealed himself to Paul, Feuillet maintains, as the transcendent Son of Man, "un être céleste et glorieux qui s'est déjà manifesté de semblable manière à Étienne martyr".<sup>9</sup> This brings us to the more extensive treatment of the subject by Michel.<sup>10</sup> He claims that Paul's pre-Christian

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13. See Gal. 1:13; Acts 9:1-2; 22:4-5; 26:9-11.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-24. See 1 Cor. 9:16; Acts 26:14.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-29. See Gal. 1:15 (cf. Isa. 49: 1-6; Jer. 1:4-5); Acts 26:12-18 (cf. Isa. 42: 6-7; Jer. 1:8).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35. See 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8; Acts 22:14; 26:16.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-29.

<sup>7</sup> L. Cerfaux, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> A. Feuillet, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19; cf. Cerfaux *op. cit.*, pp. 330-31.

<sup>10</sup> O. Michel, *art. cit.*

concept of the Messiah was that of the transcendent Son of Man who was also the image of God, the reflection of God's being. It was this figure whom he believed to have appeared to him on the way to Damascus. The brilliant light in which he was revealed was that of God's own glory. Michel thus argues that Paul's vision actualized for him his previous concept of the heavenly Son of Man. He admits that the actual term Son of Man does not occur in Paul's letters. Nevertheless, he does refer to Christ as "the Man", which may be his own version of Son of Man. Moreover, in 1 Corinthians 15:27 he applies to Christ as the messianic King the words of Psalm 8:6, which in their context refer to "man" and "the son of man".

These discussions of the origins of Paul's beliefs about Christ might seem to provide us with a sufficient treatment of the significance of his conversion experience. In one way or another, the revelation of the divine Son, affirmed by Paul himself, is combined with one of the basic elements of the accounts in Acts, the bright light in which Jesus was revealed, and quite substantial conclusions are drawn from this evidence. Nevertheless, the views we have just described are less satisfactory than they might appear at first sight. Several questions arise for consideration. Did Paul really make use of a Son of Man Christology, as Cerfaux, Feuillet and Michel explicitly claim or implicitly assume? What conclusions should we arrive at if we were to take the themes of divine sonship and of divine glory separately and to develop each theme by itself instead of immediately combining them? And is there any important aspect of Paul's thought about Christ which remains to be explained once this has been done?

It is frequently claimed that Paul did think of Christ as the Son of Man.<sup>1</sup> But the arguments used to support the claim are not wholly convincing.<sup>2</sup> It is possible that his failure to use the actual term is due to its linguistic barbarity in Greek (although one wonders whether, as a title, he would not have found it acceptable enough linguistically<sup>3</sup>). But it has yet to be proved that he employs an obvious substitute. The term *ὁ ἄνθρωπος* might serve as such, but Paul does not use it. Michel is wrong here, and the verses he quotes fail to prove his point. In Romans 5:15 the phrase we have is: *τοῦ ἐνὸς ἀνθρώπου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*. Here *ὁ ἄνθρωπος* is qualified by the addition of *εἰς*, which bears the emphasis,<sup>4</sup> and the very phrase

<sup>1</sup> Reginald H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (London, 1965), p. 233, mentions the following scholars who have held this view: J. Weiss, W. Bousset, A. E. J. Rawlinson, J. Jeremias, O. Cullmann. (Fuller does not himself share it). Frederick W. Borsch, *The Son of Man in Myth and History* (London, 1967), p. 243, mentions William Manson and A. M. Hunter. (Borsch also thinks the theory a likely one.) We may add Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (London, 1958), pp. 138-39.

<sup>2</sup> For a recent refutation, see Anton Vögtle, "'Der Menschensohn' und die paulinische Christologie", *Studiorum Paulinorum Congressus Internationalis Catholicus 1961*, 1 (Rome, 1963), pp. 199-218.

<sup>3</sup> Vögtle, *art. cit.*, p. 205, points out that in Paul's generation it is hardly likely to have been misunderstood: it occurs in all the gospels, and even Luke uses it with no more hesitation than the other evangelists.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Vögtle, *art. cit.*, pp. 208-09.

τοῦ ἐνὸς ἀνθρώπου is used in verse 19 of Adam, which shows that it is not as such a title of Christ. The other text quoted by Michel is 1 Corinthians 15:21: δι' ἀνθρώπου ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν. Here we do not even have the definite article to suggest that ἄνθρωπος might be a title. There is nothing to show that Paul meant anything more than "man".<sup>1</sup>

What, then, of the second argument employed by Michel and others? Does the application to Christ of Psalm 8:6 show that he is regarded as the Son of Man? R. H. Fuller would deny this, on the grounds that Paul only has in mind the actual words he quotes, and not the psalm as a whole.<sup>2</sup> But if he is thinking of the whole context, which does not seem improbable, then it is very likely that he saw the psalm as describing the glory of Adam before the Fall and so as a prediction of the glory of Christ, the last Adam. In other words, the psalm as a whole fits in very well with his Adamic Christology, which is well attested in the rest of 1 Corinthians 15, and we do not need to abstract the phrase "son of man" from verse 4 and regard it as evidence that Paul thought of Christ as the heavenly Son of Man.

At this point, of course, it will be claimed that Adam and the Son of Man are in reality one: the Adam myth is part of the Son of Man myth.<sup>3</sup> This is not so certain, however. It has been recently denied by Robin Scroggs, who argues against the view that Paul's Christology of the last Adam is really a Son of Man Christology.<sup>4</sup> The whole argument of his book shows that Jewish thought about Adam provides a sufficient framework for this aspect of Paul's thought, without bringing in the concept of the Son of Man.

If, then, there is really no evidence that Paul thought of Christ as the Son of Man, Michel's account of the significance of his conversion proves invalid, at least in this respect. And if there is no reason, as far as Paul is concerned, for equating the title Son of God with that of Son of Man (as Cerfaux and Feuillet do), it may be useful to look again at what he would understand by divine sonship at the time of his conversion. Similarly, if the radiant glory of his vision did not reveal Jesus to him as the heavenly Son of Man, then we need to ask what its significance was. In Feuillet's

<sup>1</sup> See D. E. H. Whiteley, *The Theology of St Paul* (Oxford, 1964), p. 117. Borsch, *op. cit.*, p. 241, thinks that while Paul avoided the title ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου as linguistically unacceptable, he also avoided the mere ὁ ἄνθρωπος because this would lose some of the nuances suggested by Son of Man: "nuances of heirship, suggestions of the idea of relationship and being a counterpart". To convey the idea of Christ as Son of Man, and to pick up these nuances, he spoke of him as the *second* Man and the *last* Adam. It is much more likely, however, that if Paul wished to convey the notion of heirship in relation to Christ he would do so in terms of the title Son of God (see Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 4:4-7). And the relationship he sees to exist between Christ and Adam is hardly that of the Son of Man to the Man in the mythical material which Borsch is dealing with.

<sup>2</sup> R. H. Fuller, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

<sup>3</sup> See Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (London, 1963), pp. 137-52, 166-81.

<sup>4</sup> Robin Scroggs, *The Last Adam* (Oxford, 1966), pp. xv-xvii, 102.

discussion, it seems to be the Son of Man concept which holds together the revelation of sonship and the revelation of glory. But if Paul did not see Christ as the Son of Man, then perhaps these two aspects of his experience may suggest two different lines of Christological development which should be considered separately.

We begin with the theme of sonship. Paul himself claims that God revealed to him his Son (Gal. 1:16). The same thing is implied in Acts 9:20, where we are told that immediately after his conversion Paul preached in the synagogues that Jesus was the Son of God.

But how would Paul have understood this? Would it immediately have suggested to him sonship in a strict or unique sense, as Cerfaux and Feuillet claim? It is very likely that, as a title for Christ, Son of God was pre-Pauline. Fuller maintains that it was derived from Jewish Davidic Messianology. It was current in the Palestinian church, where it referred to the status of Christ at the Parousia. In the Hellenistic Jewish Christian mission, the emphasis was shifted from the Parousia to belief in the present lordship of Jesus, and the term Son of God, along with other titles, was transferred to the exalted Christ.<sup>1</sup> In any case, it indicates the messianic status of Jesus, whether now or at the Parousia. Furthermore, it is likely that Paul, before his conversion, was aware not only of the messianic claims made for Jesus by the first Christians but also of this way of expressing them. There is a hint of this in Galatians 1:23, where the Christians of Judea are said to have heard: *‘Ο διώκων ἡμᾶς ποτε νῦν εὐαγγελίζεται τὴν πίστιν ἣν ποτε ἐπόρθει.* A few verses previously he has suggested that the divine sonship of Jesus is the content of his preaching (Gal. 1:16). Thus, faith in Jesus as God's Son is the belief which once he had attempted to destroy.

If the title was pre-Pauline, and if Paul before his conversion was aware of its use in Christian circles, the revelation on the road to Damascus may simply have convinced him that the title was, after all, correctly applied. The crucified Jesus of Nazareth was the messianic Son of God. Certainly at this point we have gone somewhat beyond the notion of a human Davidic prince, since Jesus is in heaven, but it is not clear that we have arrived at the position described by Cerfaux, i.e. the belief that as God's Son Christ was not a creature but belonged to a completely different order of reality.<sup>2</sup> The Christ who is now in heaven is still the Jesus who was once on earth. Did he not have a creaturely origin, whatever his present exalted state? Admittedly Paul did come to believe in the sonship of Christ in a unique sense. But it is doubtful whether this conviction derived immediately from his Damascus experience.

The other theme that demands our attention at this point is that of glory. That Christ appeared to Paul as clothed in heavenly glory may be

<sup>1</sup> R. H. Fuller, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> L. Cerfaux, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

deduced from the accounts in Acts, which speak of the brilliant light which accompanied the vision:

Acts 9:3 αὐτὸν περιήστραψεν φῶς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ

22:6 ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ περιαστράψαι φῶς ἱκανὸν περὶ ἐμέ

22:11 οὐκ ἐνέβλεπον ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης τοῦ φωτὸς ἐκείνου

26:13 εἶδον . . . οὐρανόθεν ὑπὲρ τὴν λαμπρότητα τοῦ ἡλίου περιλάμψαν με φῶς

It is generally agreed that this factor in Paul's experience is indirectly corroborated by his own remarks in 1 Corinthians 15. Christ appeared to him as raised from the dead (1 Cor. 15:8), and this form of existence is characterized by glory (1 Cor. 15:43).

What was the Christological significance of this aspect of the vision? Glory in origin belongs to God, according to biblical thought, and so one might perhaps suppose that it indicated the divinity of Christ in the strictest sense. This seems to be the conclusion drawn by E. W. Hunt in his recent book on Paul. He claims: "As Paul depicts him, Jesus shared God's nature completely." And one of the reasons given for this statement is that Paul thinks of Christ as displaying the divine *δόξα*.<sup>1</sup>

But is this the conclusion that Paul himself would most readily have drawn from what he believed himself to have seen? As we have already remarked, he was convinced that the glorious being of his vision was *Jesus raised from the dead*. This led him to see Christ as the model of eschatological humanity (1 Cor. 15:45-49), and here the theme of glory fits in very well, if Paul's Jewish background is taken into account. In both the apocalyptic and the rabbinic traditions the hope for the restoration of human nature in the eschaton is sometimes expressed through a description of the exalted nature of Adam before the Fall. One aspect of the nature of Adam was his endowment with divine glory, and the restoration of this glory is promised at the end.<sup>2</sup> Paul, we may suppose, saw the risen Christ as the fulfilment of this promise. The theme of glory, therefore, seems to offer an explanation of his Adamic Christology, his belief in Christ as the pattern and anticipation of eschatological humanity, rather than to show us how he came to believe in Christ's divinity.

We have argued that the revelation of Jesus as God's Son led Paul to believe in his messianic status, and that the revelation of his glory led to the development of his Adamic Christology. In neither case is Christ seen as divine in the strict sense, as a being who is other than a creature, and so as the unique Son of God. The one who is revealed as exercising messianic rule from heaven is precisely the Jesus who was once on earth. The bearer of divine glory is the pattern of man's existence in the eschaton. Similarly, we have no explanation as yet of Paul's belief in the pre-existent

<sup>1</sup> E. W. Hunt, *Portrait of Paul* (London, 1968), p. 188.

<sup>2</sup> See R. Scroggs, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-29, 46-58.

Christ as agent of creation. Messianic sonship and eschatological glory belong to the present and to the future. There is therefore an important area of Paul's Christological thought which our analysis of his Damascus experience has so far failed to elucidate.

### III

The second half of this discussion will be chiefly concerned with the origin of Paul's conviction that Christ is the mediator of creation. We shall also consider how he came to regard Christ as the unique Son of God. Finally we shall discuss the question of the integration in Paul's mind of the various Christological themes which we have examined separately.

The origin of Paul's belief in Christ as the Lord through whom the entire universe came into existence (I Cor. 8:6) has frequently been debated. Since our particular concern is with his Damascus experience, we shall mention only those theories which can be related in some way to his conversion.

A number of scholars have maintained that the belief arose through the identification of Christ with the figure of Wisdom.<sup>1</sup> Of these, both W. D. Davies and Feuillet offer suggestions which would provide some connexion with the Damascus experience.

According to W. D. Davies, the identification comes about because for Paul Jesus is the new Torah: "In a real sense conformity to Christ, His teaching and His life, has taken the place for Paul of conformity to the Jewish Torah. Jesus Himself - in word and deed or fact is a New Torah".<sup>2</sup> We should therefore expect that attributes ascribed to the Torah in rabbinic Judaism would be transferred by Paul to Christ. Now in Ecclesiasticus the figure of Wisdom is identified with the Torah (Sir. 24): here the Torah is regarded as the expression of the divine Wisdom. Davies claims that in Palestinian Judaism in Paul's day this identification had become commonplace. In this way the Torah was personified and brought into connexion with creation. Since for Paul Jesus was the new Torah, the way was open for him to identify Christ with Wisdom and so to ascribe to him pre-existence and creative activity.<sup>3</sup>

Now if this theory is correct, we should have an indirect link with Paul's conversion. It was this event which initially convinced him that the Law was superseded by Christ, and so might also have caused him to see Jesus as the new Torah.

The idea that he did see Christ in this way has, however, come in for

<sup>1</sup> See W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London, 1962), pp. 147-76; A. Feuillet, *op. cit.*, p. 78; O. Michel, *art. cit.*; Eduard Schweizer, "Zur Herkunft der Präexistenzvorstellung bei Paulus", *EvTh* 19 (1959), pp. 65-70, quoted by Ferdinand Hahn, *Christologische Hoheitstitel* (Göttingen, 1963), p. 315.

<sup>2</sup> W. D. Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 149-50, 168-76.

some criticism from Feuillet. The rabbinic examples cited to prove the identification of the Law and Wisdom are late, and cannot be used to show that these notions about the Torah were current in the New Testament period. Moreover, the assimilation of Wisdom and the Torah in Ecclesiasticus is only partial. The Law is simply one of the means through which Wisdom finds expression. To Wisdom alone belong pre-existence and participation in creation. And is Christ a new Law? Is he not rather the antithesis of the Law? According to Feuillet, therefore, it is doubtful whether Paul sees Christ as the new Torah. But even if he does, this would by no means lead to the identification of Christ with Wisdom, and his endowment with Wisdom's attributes.<sup>1</sup>

There seems to be some force in these criticisms. Feuillet himself offers a different explanation of Paul's identification of Christ and Wisdom, and does directly relate it to his vision on the way to Damascus. In the moment of his conversion he realized that Christ was Son of God in the strictest sense. He was therefore immediately able to identify him with the divine Wisdom who was said to have been *brought forth* by Yahweh before the mountains and the hills were formed (Prov. 8. 24-25).<sup>2</sup>

How convincing is this? There are two possible objections to Feuillet's theory. First, we have seen that the revelation of Jesus as Son of God was originally of messianic significance, and that the emphasis lay on his present exaltation and future dignity. This would not immediately suggest identification with a pre-existent figure related to creation in the past. Secondly, more simply, the figure of Wisdom is feminine. It is therefore doubtful whether the apprehension of Christ's divine sonship would lead to the adoption of Wisdom as a congruous and explanatory image.

So far we do not appear to have a satisfactory explanation of the identification of Christ with Wisdom. We have been working on the assumption that the identification was made first, and that as a consequence Paul came to ascribe cosmic functions to Christ. But it is very possible that the reverse process took place. It could have happened that the apostle first came to believe in Christ as the mediator of creation and then consequently adopted Wisdom terminology as a means of expressing this belief.

This brings us to the work of Oscar Cullmann. In the course of his discussion of the title *κύριος* he suggests a different explanation of the origin of belief in Christ's pre-existence as the agent of creation. He thinks that the early Christians were led to associate Christ with creation as a result of their belief in his present lordship. He maintains that "a backward glance from faith in the present Lord of all creation leads inevitably to the assumption that he was destined for this lordship from the very beginning, and that therefore from the very beginning he was closely related to

<sup>1</sup> A. Feuillet, *op. cit.*, pp. 192-93.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

creation".<sup>1</sup> He also thinks that this process was assisted by the application to Christ of passages in the Old Testament which speak of God as *κύριος* and refer to his creative functions. He calls attention to the quotation of Psalm 102: 25 in Hebrews 1:10.<sup>2</sup>

If Cullmann's theory may be validly applied to Paul, we should have a close connexion with his conversion. According to the narratives in Acts, *κύριος* was the title appropriate to the glorious being of his vision (Acts 9:5; 22:8; 26:15). And Paul himself uses the title when he alludes to it (1 Cor. 9:1). If the apprehension of Christ as Lord inevitably carried with it a backward reference to creation, then we may directly derive Paul's belief in Christ as the agent of creation from his experience on the way to Damascus.

This explanation seems to come nearer the truth of the matter than the other theories we have considered. In support of it we may also point out that in Paul as well as in Hebrews we have some instances of the application to Christ, as Lord, of verses in the Old Testament which have in mind God as creator. In 1 Corinthians 10:26 we have a quotation from Psalm 24:1 (LXX Ps. 23:1): τοῦ κυρίου [γὰρ] ἡ γῆ καὶ τὸ πλήρωμα αὐτῆς. The term *κύριος* here in all probability refers to Christ, since it certainly does so in the preceding verses 21-22. And in the psalm the following verse clearly alludes to God's creative activity: Αὐτὸς ἐπὶ θαλασσῶν ἐθεμελίωσεν αὐτήν. Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 2:16 we have a quotation of Isaiah 40:13: τίς γὰρ ἔγνω νοῦν κυρίου. The conclusion of the verse suggests the equivalence of Christ with the *κύριος* of the quotation. And again, the verse in Deutero-Isaiah is associated with the idea of God as creator, if it is seen in the context of the chapter as a whole (see vv. 22 and 28).

Nevertheless, it is not certain that we have here a sufficient explanation of the origin of the Pauline doctrine we are considering. As we shall see, it is in all probability connected with the idea of Christ as Lord rather than with the identification of him with Wisdom, and to that extent Cullmann sets us on the right lines. But his theory as it stands is not entirely convincing. The primary reference of the title *κύριος* is to the present exaltation of Christ. It is no doubt capable of extension backwards in time, but does it necessarily demand it? And did the application of Old Testament texts to Christ help to produce fundamental Christological concepts, or only to substantiate them? In what follows, it will be suggested that one aspect of Paul's conversion experience contained a more necessary and intrinsic backward reference than is contained in the apprehension of Christ as *κύριος* taken by itself. It was this aspect of the event which provided the impetus for the development of his belief in Christ as the pre-existent agent of creation.

<sup>1</sup> O. Cullmann, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

## IV

This intrinsic backward reference is derived from the fact that Paul's experience is seen to be analogous to that of the prophets of the Old Testament. The similarities are examined at some length by Johannes Munck.<sup>1</sup> He notes the parallelism between the train of thought in Galatians 1:15-16 and that of Jeremiah 1:4-5, both of which passages speak of God's choice of his human instrument prior to birth. It is also characteristic of the apostle and the prophets that their call was something for which they were entirely unprepared. Furthermore, there was, as we have seen,<sup>2</sup> a strong element of compulsion in Paul's experience, and to this we have parallels in Amos and Jeremiah:

The lion has roared;  
 who will not fear?  
 The Lord God has spoken;  
 who can but prophesy?  
 (Amos 3:8)

If I say, "I will not mention him,  
 or speak any more in his name",  
 there is in my heart as it were a  
   burning fire  
 shut up in my bones,  
 and I am weary with holding it in,  
 and I cannot.  
 (Jer. 20:9)

Now in the case of the prophets, it is of course God who calls them and compels them to prophesy. Similarly, in Galatians 1:15-16 it is God who has called Paul, separated him, revealed to him his Son, and entrusted him with the mission to the Gentiles. The backward reference of Paul's conversion appears to point us to the work of God, and not to the function of Christ, which is our main concern. In the accounts in Acts, however, it is Christ who speaks and reveals himself, and all three accounts designate Christ as the author of the commission to preach to the Gentiles (see especially Acts 26:17). What are we to make of this? Does Acts here plainly contradict Paul? Are the narratives in Acts in this respect unreliable? By no means. They complement, rather than contradict, Paul, and fit in very well with his general Christological position. It is characteristic of his theology to assign identical functions or attributes to God and to Christ. In Romans 8:9 the Spirit is at the same time the Spirit of God and the

<sup>1</sup> J. Munck, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-30.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 305.

Spirit of Christ; and whereas in Romans 14;10<sup>1</sup> it is God's tribunal before which Christians are to appear, in 2 Corinthians 5:10 the tribunal belongs to Christ. Let us therefore suppose that the account of Paul's experience in Acts is correct, and that in his vision it did seem to him that he was being addressed by Christ. It would be entirely congruous with his general position that he should speak of the whole experience as due to the initiative of God.<sup>2</sup>

If, then, it appeared to be Christ who spoke to Paul and commissioned him, and if at the same time this call and the overwhelming compulsion which it exerted seemed to be the call and the compulsion experienced by the prophets, then we do have here an intrinsic backward reference to some prior function exercised by Christ within the old dispensation. If to Paul the form of his vocation corresponded with that of the prophets, then, conversely, their calling must have followed the same pattern as his. If it was Christ who spoke to him and summoned him to the apostolic mission, then was it not also Christ who had addressed and summoned the prophets? In other words, was not the heavenly being revealed to him as *κύριος* on the way to Damascus perhaps to be identified in some sense with the Lord who was the author of the prophetic revelation?

A. T. Hanson has suggested that when Paul saw some situation in the Old Testament as parallel to an event in the life of Jesus or of the church, he believed that the pre-existent Christ was at work there, and so identified the *κύριος* of the Septuagint with Jesus.<sup>3</sup> If this is so, then the first few verses describing the call of Jeremiah may have acquired for him this sort of significance: *καὶ ἐγένετο λόγος κυρίου πρὸς αὐτόν, πρὸ τοῦ με πλάσαι σε ἐν κοιλίᾳ ἐπίσταμαί σε καὶ πρὸ τοῦ σε ἐξελεῖν ἐκ μήτρας ἡγίακά σε, προφήτην εἰς ἔθνη τέθεικά σε* (Jer. 1:4-5).

We have already remarked on the general parallelism between these verses and Galatians 1:15-16:<sup>4</sup> this situation in the Old Testament is reproduced in the call of the apostle to the Gentiles. In this instance, then, the Lord whose word came to Jeremiah may be identified with Christ.

It is therefore possible to argue that Paul's Damascus experience led to his identifying Christ, on some occasions at least, as the Lord who spoke to the prophets. If so, we have a clear connexion with the belief in Christ as mediator of creation. For according to the Old Testament, the word of the Lord which came to the prophets is also the divine word which called creation into existence: *τῷ λόγῳ τοῦ κυρίου οἱ οὐρανοὶ ἐστρεώθησαν* (Ps. 33:6; LXX Ps. 32:6). If the Lord who speaks in the

<sup>1</sup> There is a textual variant here: *Χριστοῦ* for *Θεοῦ*. But *Θεοῦ* has the better MSS. attestation, and *Χριστοῦ* is fairly obviously an assimilation to 2 Cor. 5:10.

<sup>2</sup> If Phil. 3:12 is a reference to his conversion, we have here the complementary reference to the action of Christ. See G. J. Inglis, "St. Paul's Conversion in His Epistles", *Theology* 34 (1937), pp. 214-28. [See J. Dupont's essay in the present volume, pp. 179 ff. Edd.]

<sup>3</sup> A. T. Hanson, *Jesus Christ in the Old Testament* (London, 1965), p. 162.

<sup>4</sup> See above, p. 313.

prophetic literature can sometimes be identified with Christ, then Christ can also be identified with the Lord by whose word the heavens were established: *εἰς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα* (I Cor. 8:6). And so, for Paul, the Christ through whom God spoke on the way to Damascus may have come to be identified with the one through whom God had spoken when he created the universe.

There is no direct confirmation of this process of thought which we have attributed to Paul. It does, however, provide an explanation of his adoption of Wisdom terminology as a means of expressing his belief in the pre-existence of Christ. For Wisdom is not only God's assistant in creation but also the medium of prophetic inspiration:

in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God and prophets.

(Wis. 7:27)

If Paul's belief in Christ's pre-existence originated in a conviction that he was in some way connected with the prophets, the Wisdom concept may have commended itself as applicable in this respect, in addition to its suitability for expressing his consequent conviction that Christ was the agent of creation.

## V

We have seen that several major elements in Paul's Christology may be derived ultimately from his conversion experience: belief in Christ as last Adam, as messianic Son of God, and as the pre-existent Lord through whom the universe came into being. But we have not yet precisely accounted for his belief in the unique divine sonship of Christ as this is implied, for example, in Romans 8:32. It is possible that belief in this further dimension of sonship may have evolved in Paul's mind through the assimilation of the *υἱός* concept to that of the divine *κύριος*. It is as the Son that Christ is represented as exercising his messianic rule in I Corinthians 15. 25-28. But the title *κύριος* would be equally appropriate as an expression of the exercise of dominion by Christ, and is so used in Philippians 2:9-11. As we have seen, *κύριος* is also used to describe Christ as the pre-existent agent of creation, the one who participates in the activity of God himself. The title *υἱός* may come to share this significance, and so may become a description of Christ as divine in the strict sense. In turn, it may then help to explain the pre-existent relationship between God and Christ.

A final question we might ask is whether Paul had coherently integrated in his own mind his belief in the divinity of Christ and his conception of him as the pattern of eschatological humanity. That this process of integration had in fact taken place is perhaps suggested by two adjacent texts

in the Epistle to the Romans. In Romans 8:32 we have a reference to the unique divine sonship of Christ: *ὁς γε τοῦ ἰδίου υἱοῦ οὐκ ἐφείσατο*. In Romans 8:29, however, Paul speaks of Christ as the model for the future existence of believers: *οὗς προέγνω, καὶ προώρρισεν συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνας τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ*. It is as the Son of God that Christ provides the pattern of eschatological humanity. Thus, his divinity and his humanity are integrated in the concept of sonship.

What does this mean? So far we have spoken of the sonship of Christ in terms of his supremacy over creation. But the reverse side of the coin is his obedience to God, mentioned in I Corinthians 15:27-28 as the continuous background and ultimate outcome of his messianic rule. It is a truism to say that in Jewish thought the ideas of sonship and obedience were very closely linked. We might equally well say, then, that for Paul it is the idea of obedience which unites belief in the divine and in the human aspects of Christ's nature. He believes Christ to be wholly obedient to God, and therefore both to participate in a unique relationship to God as his Son and also to become the model of eschatological humanity. That he does believe Christ to be supremely obedient is evidenced in Romans 5:19 and Philippians 2:8. That this quality makes possible his exercise of divine functions is not expressly stated, but it seems very likely that the element of subordinationism in Paul's Christology provides him with a means of asserting Christ's divinity without appearing to deny his faith in the one God. And it is clear that Christ is seen as the last Adam because he reverses the disobedience of the first Adam.

It follows that Paul did not suppose that when Christ became man he took on some wholly different role, as though he were an actor playing several parts. He played himself, though on a different stage. Paul does not explicitly define the nature of man. But several related passages in the Epistle to the Romans imply that the essence of genuine human existence, the form of being for which man was created, is not so much some eschatological state of glory considered in and by itself as the enjoyment of eternal life in relationship with God and in obedience to God (Rom. 5:19, 21; 6:1-11). The essence of personality is not the *σῶμα* by itself - whether genetically or eschatologically determined - but the human self existing with God and living for God as God's obedient son. If this is a fair representation of the implications of Paul's thought, for him Christ as man is fundamentally Christ as himself. Paul could not be accused of holding a crudely supernatural view of incarnation. Christ is not God dressed up as man. In some sense he is God, but he does not need to dress up and to assume an alien role. He is the revelation within time and space of God's eternal humanity.