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KING'S

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RISEN, ASCENDED, GLORIFIED

JOHN M. COURT

Modern investigation in Christology, whether conducted under the auspices of Myth and/or Truth, or pursued along some independent, scarcely neutral, line, is a very large endeavour. It is much larger than it used to be, because it goes beyond the obligatory preoccupation with titles and encompasses events and their implications, contexts and their interpretations. Such a journey, even with several best-selling guide books as companions, offers many pitfalls for the unwaried.

The investigation could begin from a small sample of clearly related texts from the New Testament. The danger lies in being so concerned with the individual features and contexts of each passage that no general pattern emerges from the study. Another investigation might start by selecting a central theme of Christology. The difficulty is to relate a generalised and rather arbitrary 'model' to the particular contents of a New Testament book, so as to say of one author that he uses this model and that it is his primary concern. A third investigation might make a compromise by combining a thematic approach with pre-packaged textual examples. The danger is inherent in the connection, for the arguments may be circular or *a priori*. The whole construction may be a pious fiction.

However much I too would like to cover all the ground and avoid all the pitfalls, my present purpose must be much more modest. I offer, as a working example of methods and problems in Christology, a small group of texts that are clearly related by general theme, particular vocabulary, and direct use of Old Testament quotations: 1 Cor. 15:25ff.; Eph. 1:22ff.; Phil. 3:21; Heb. 2:7; 1 Pet. 3:22. These are the undisputed founder-members of our group, although we may find it necessary to add other associate members. But already the group is widespread and 'representative' (in the most uncontroversial sense) of different traditions in the New Testament. The most direct Pauline tradition is represented by 1 Corinthians; this is not to disparage Philippians, but as I wish to relate Phil. 3:21 to 2:6-11, this inevitably raises the question of how directly this is the responsibility of Paul himself;¹ Ephesians may be taken as deutero-Pauline; and the texts from Hebrews and 1 Peter represent two other quite different non-Pauline traditions.

Immediately, before we have made any progress, we have encountered the problem of what traditions these texts represent. The similarity in ideas expressed, wording used, and the exegesis of Old Testament proof texts, may compel us to relate these passages together as a common tradition.² This may impress us more strikingly because the passages come from such different sources. But suppose they all borrowed from Paul himself? This may seem historically implausible, and certainly incapable of proof, but it raises in turn another possibility: if Paul's most direct use (in 1 Cor. 15) gives the impression of a man using a traditional argument, perhaps all the New Testament writers borrowed it. What then is the status of this "borrowed" tradition, what is its historical source and impetus? What started as an interesting sample from a cross-section of independent and creative traditions may in fact bear witness to the fairly routine rehearsal of a traditional article of faith.

The New Testament writers themselves may not help us greatly in resolving this problem. We lack the background information and opportunity for cross-reference to enable us to decide in most instances whether the writers' treatment of a topic was an original creation, a deliberate borrowing, or his own preferred development of an inherited tradition. Sometimes the best that may be done is the rather subjective assessment of the way a writer treats a topic within the larger context of his writing. Thus the treatment of our example in Eph. 1:22 and 1 Pet. 3:22 may appear to some as brief and formulaic, a nod in the direction of tradition and not a creative development.³ If all our writers, including Paul, are borrowers of formulae or making use of their inheritance, where do we look for the origin of our tradition?

Perhaps at this point we can begin to realise such advantages as we have in the texts before us. Two Old Testament quotations (Ps. 110:1 and Ps. 8:6) are used together in (almost)⁴ all our examples. Clearly the overlapping of these quotations is the main reason why they came to be used together. But the differences between them also meant that the associations remaining from two distinct frames of reference could both be brought to bear on the new Christian use. Fortunately we can still use the differences of vocabulary in the two quotations to distinguish between them in the process of conflation.⁵ But we cannot tell for certain whether these two quotations were found together in Jewish exegesis or Christian testimony collection much before their use by New Testament writers.

We have to do with arguments from silence, the evidence of later exegesis, and plausible conjecture. It seems that Psalm 8:6 was not particularly significant (at least messianically) in Judaism⁶; Psalm 110:1 was used of the Davidic king (and of Abraham) and therefore it is likely, but not certain, that it could be used of the Messiah prior to Christian use.⁷ With Messianic implications, Psalm 110:1 would be readily available as a proof text for Christianity; was it because of the coincidence of language about subjection that Psalm 8:6 was drawn in as a supplement? Can we say that Ps. 8:6 was adopted "to fill out Ps. 110:1's description of Christ's exalted authority as Lord – a development which happened at a very early stage and left its imprint on earliest Christian apologetic throughout the first decades of Christianity"?⁸ This may involve some hypothetical collection of proof texts for apologetic purposes, or represent a conjecture about liturgical use of the Psalms in Christian worship, with implications for development in confessional formulae and catechesis.

By concentrating on the overlap between these Psalm quotations and their constructive blending in Christian use, let us not neglect what may be a key difference between them. Psalm 110:1 is a future promise; Psalm 8:6 is a past statement of evidence. Of course early Christian apologists were not particularly sensitive to considerations of tense in the quotations they used from the Septuagint and elsewhere (unless an apologetic point could be made to hang on a grammatical distinction). Yet, looking at our examples, not only can we disentangle our conflated quotations, but we can also recognise that 1 Cor. 15:25ff.; Phil. 3:21; and Heb. 2:7 have a future orientation, while Eph. 1:22f. and 1 Pet. 3:22 have a past reference. This may be an important clue, but let us not rejoice prematurely. Discussions of tenses may be notoriously unreliable in the context of eschatology

(which has the capacity to turn tenses inside out). Eschatology, however, may furnish us with another criterion for our historical investigation, alongside that of the use of Old Testament quotations. Does the original idea represented in our sample of texts presuppose a particular eschatology and can we relate it to some historical environment?

If Paul and the other New Testament writers have all borrowed this original idea, is it possible to set up a comparison between the eschatologies of the idea itself and of the wider contexts? The first requirement is a (well-nigh impossible) consensus on the eschatology of Paul, or of Hebrews. And the second requirement is a general agreement on the consistency, or lack of it, to be found in the eschatological orientation of our text examples. In response to this we find one study which emphasises the diversity of eschatological perspectives in our chosen examples, suggesting that in each instance the idea takes its colouring from the context⁹; while other commentators stress the uniformity of application, namely that these texts all relate to the past event of the Resurrection and represent an almost completely realised eschatology.¹⁰ The *Vorlage* of the Church's confession conditions all interpretation of the Psalm texts, and any eschatological differentials are eroded immediately.

What, then, might be the terms of this confession in the earliest church? Do we have sufficient evidence to reconstruct the particular beliefs about Resurrection and its aftermath, about Ascension, Exaltation to Glory and the Parousia? Modern scholars have provided, very confidently, a variety of reconstructions. It is difficult to see how any of them can be quite so confident; their conclusions very obviously depend upon the point from which they start. Does one begin from the scant clues of the Gospels (e.g., Mt. 27:53),¹¹ or from an optimistic appraisal of the historical material in the early speeches recorded in Acts, from the simple acclamation formula 'Jesus is Lord', or from a semi-creedal affirmation such as 1 Tim. 3:16? It is true that very few texts in the New Testament refer to the Ascension as a specific event, while more are concerned with its theological implications, and most are content simply to assert the idea of exaltation.¹² But does this mean that "the Exaltation . . . was originally an alternative way of talking about the Resurrection, though it slips into denoting a separate, successive act"; and that we must unhesitatingly subscribe to the "axiom of New Testament scholarship", namely that the Ascension as a distinct event is a "Schematization devised by Luke for ease in the presentation of his material"?¹³

Such historical criticism of particular texts is vital, though much hindered by presuppositions. Does a phenomenological study of the patterns of belief, preserved in such literary forms, assist our analysis or merely destroy the remaining historical parameters? For it is possible to distinguish the elements in the sequence from Resurrection to Parousia and to construct at least two scenarios applicable to given sets of circumstances for early Christian belief. The first scenario concerns the response to Jesus as an exceptional person of prophetic stature¹⁴; his death is seen as a major reversal, until there are grounds for belief in resurrection and this resurrection is interpreted as the messianic pledge of a general resurrection. The act of raising from the dead represents God overcoming for his messiah the human obstacle of death; for the human witnesses this is made known in visionary experience or some other consciousness of Jesus's continuing presence with them beyond death. If

this experience was in the first place direct and subsequently seemed less direct, and indeed was translated into spiritual terms of a sense of empowering, then it might be necessary to posit some event or events to represent the transition. The New Testament writings "tell us that Christ ascended to heaven, beside his Father, because there is no other means for our human mind to express the truth that a human being has been taken from our corruptible world and introduced into the world of God".¹⁵ But we may not say that the sense of Christ's triumph began as a spiritual concept and was developed into the myth of an historical event, without pre-judging how Jewish tradition regarded the resurrection of the dead.¹⁶

The statement of glorification in this context represents the taking up of the Messiah into the glory of God and his vindication after the earthly experiences of suffering and condemnation. The expectation that this messianic glory might very soon be universalised would be strong at first; if Jesus was the forerunner, then the End was awaited; if Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the Messianic Kingdom might delay the End for a set period. But these events, this glorification and heavenly enthronement, were undeniably the beginning of the End. And the Parousia stands for the act of universalising in glory and judgement. If Christ is to come to the world again, rather than the world come to his judgement seat, then it follows that Christ is both enthroned in heavenly glory and also stands ready to come.¹⁷ This first scenario has allowed some time for theological reflection upon what has happened, but in essence it retains the conviction of imminent consummation.

The alternative scenario has a significant difference of perspective; it can only represent the considered application to the person of Jesus of a theological pattern embracing the whole of life, death, and resurrection. The figure of a divine Revealer-Redeemer is also seen in parallel developments of gnostic systems. In itself the pattern appears to be a working out of the symmetry expressed in John 3:13: "No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man". It may not be helpful and it is certainly anachronistic to apply the label of kenoticism; even if this is defined by Philippians 2:6-11, much depends on the extent of the 'self-emptying' and the point from which it starts.¹⁸ The full symmetry of the theological pattern is obtained if one begins from the status of pre-existent glory and equality with God; the emptying proceeds by the stages of renunciation, descent, incarnation, suffering, crucifixion, death and possibly descent into Hades.¹⁹ The descent is then balanced by an ascent, equally by specified stages (such as the ascent through seven heavens of the Ascension of Isaiah). Christ rises from the dead; he may visit the souls in Hades in that glorious form in which he rises from the dead; he ascends to heaven and is enthroned or re-installed in his pre-existent state of glory. Such an ascent is the outcome of a sequence of conflicts and represents the ultimate triumph. This is itself the End and the theological pattern is complete. There may well be provision for the redeemed souls to ascend following Christ's ascension, but the scheme leaves little room and no obvious purpose to be fulfilled by the Parousia.

Both of these scenarios are clearly composite, artificial constructions, deployed in response to a question about the phenomenological study of patterns of belief. If the question of a suitable historical context is then raised, it can be said that the latter seems closer to a received body of doc-

trine while the former gives the impression of a developing theological awareness and response to events. But unless one or the other can be found intact in a New Testament document (and this is very improbable), there is no justification for asserting the historical priority of one complete pattern over against the other. But it may be possible to advance the argument by giving some historically plausible account of the process of development and construction of one or other scenario. For example, while the latter shows clear evidence of evolution parallel to salvation expectations in pagan environments, the former can be separated into significant components from Jewish tradition such as Davidic kingship, the assumption of Moses or a prophet, Daniel 7 and the kingdom inherited by the saints,²⁰ and the sacrificial/apocalyptic images of the Lamb of God.²¹

It has become obvious that the conjunction of Ascension and enthronement in glory means at least two different things, according to the larger context in which it is found. At opposite poles are the elevation of the figure of Jewish tradition with a view to future expectations, and the completion of a theological pattern, with the effective restoration to his original status, of the Redeemer/Revealer figure. Is it merely coincidental that these polarities of future and past correspond to the differences of tense in the two Old Testament proof-texts and to the two groupings of texts in our New Testament examples?

I would argue that it is no coincidence. Admittedly the verbs in the Old Testament Greek texts are only what is appropriate and natural to the contexts of promise (Ps. 110) and legal guarantee (Ps. 8). But when they are used in Christian exegesis their respective orientations correspond to the twin emphases that are in conflict (or tension) in Christian experience: the hope to which they look forward, and the past event which is the foundation of faith. It is presumptuous then to assume that either is merely a formulaic response in a given context; there is still the possibility of a creative tension at work between future promise and past event in each stage of Christian experience.

For Paul, according to 1 Cor. 15, the resurrection of Christ is the definitive past event, but the ultimate subjection of all things (v. 27) did not take place at his resurrection. Psalm 110:1 speaks to him of a future, eschatological hour of deliverance.²² "Jesus the heavenly Man is he in whom man's rightful position in and over creation is restored. But not yet; for he is still to come from heaven (Phil. 3:20f.) to transform the 'body of our humiliation' to make it like the 'body of his glory'.²³ However closely the hymn of Phil. 2:6-11 corresponds to the theological pattern of completed redemption, in Paul's use it has present implications "as the basis of his ethical appeal to the Philippians", and a future direction "in describing the goal of Christian life which he links with the Parousia".²⁴ Equally the orientation of Heb. 2:7ff. (cf. 1:13; 10:12f.) is unashamedly future; it is not just a deficiency in our sight that we cannot recognise that everything is already subjected;²⁵ nor is "not yet" the impatient exclamation of a writer who finds that the mythical scheme or theological pattern doesn't quite fit with doctrinal realities (this is to undervalue the eschatological interests of Hebrews).²⁶

The main emphasis is very different in Ephesians and 1 Peter. 1 Peter 3:22 speaks of the subjugation to Christ "as present fact, with the implication that he gained it with or immediately following his resurrection and ascension".²⁷

But there is still to be a future revelation of Christ's glory (1:7; 4:13) and 5:8 implies that not all the powers are yet subject to him. So the wider context makes clear that the (formulaic?) affirmation of faith in a past event needs qualification in some important respects. The concerns of Ephesians are ecclesiological and the parallels revealed by a comparison of 1:20-23 with 2:1-10 are informative. As H. Schlier's commentary suggests, the author of Ephesians sets "his ecclesiology as a mirror image of his christology. Both Jesus and Christians were raised from the dead (1:20; 2:1, 5) and set in heavenly places (1:20; 2:6)." "Somewhat as gnostics might have expressed it, the author of this epistle declares that Christians have already taken part in Christ's ascent into heaven."²⁸ But Paul himself would have recognised the pressures of this point of view,²⁹ while more than compensating for it by his use of the futurist terminology of apocalyptic expectation (such language is still reflected in the references in Ephesians to the age/s to come – 1:21; 2:7).

I have tried to indicate, without a full exegesis, the orientations and the eschatological tensions of these texts. Their range corresponds with the polarities of the Old Testament proof texts, of early Christian experience, and of the composite models of early Christology. I simply wish to suggest that the New Testament reveals a diversity and a fusion of Christological traditions, as well as a creative tension of eschatological emphases. The patterns and the harmonies which these reveal are no coincidence; and they provide ways for us to observe and understand the processes of growth and the reactions to the stimuli of experience, without succumbing to an overly neat and linear theory of development in New Testament Christology.

1. cf. R. P. Martin *Carmen Christi: Philippians 2:5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship*. Cambridge 1967. M. D. Hooker 'Interchange in Christ' *JTS NS* 22 (1971) 349-61; 'Philippians 2:6-11' in *Jesus und Paulus (Festschrift für W. G. Kummel)* eds. E. Earle Ellis and E. Grässer, Göttingen, 1975, pp. 151-164.

2. cf. W. R. G. Loader 'Christ at the Right Hand – Ps. 110:1 in the New Testament' *NTS* 24 (1977/8) 199-217, especially pp. 209, 217.

3. cf. the discussion in D. M. Hay *Glory at the Right Hand – Ps. 110 in Early Christianity* (SBL Monographs 18) Nashville/New York, 1973, Ch. 5.

4. Phil. 3:21 has an allusive reference to Ps. 8:6 only. Does this allusion also imply that the discussion at 1 Cor. 15:25ff. is presupposed? Alternatively the connection with the two psalms is made because Phil. 3:21 "depends on the Christology formulated by means of linking both these passages" (B. Lindars *New Testament Apologetic: The Doctrinal Significance of the Old Testament Quotations* London, 1961, p. 50).

But cf. J. D. G. Dunn *Christology in the Making* London, 1980, pp. 109f.

5. cf. G. Delling 'tassō', etc. *TWNT* 8:27-48 (Eng.).

6. cf. Delling (n. 5) p. 41.

7. cf. Loader (n. 2) p. 199; Hay (n. 3) pp. 19ff.; Strack-Billerbeck IV:1, 458f.

8. Dunn (n. 4) p. 109.

9. Hay (n. 3) e.g., pp. 45ff., 155ff.

10. e.g., Dunn (n. 4) p. 111; Loader (n. 2) p. 208.

11. For the hypothesis that the oldest tradition taught an ascension directly from the cross – G Bertram 'Die Himmelfahrt Jesu vom Kreuz aus und der Glaube an seine Auferstehung' in *Festgabe für A. Deissmann zum 60. Geburtstag*, Tübingen, 1927, pp. 187-217. In Mt. 27:53 the words "after his resurrection", reflect an attempt to combine this early ascension tradition (where the saints rise with Jesus at his death) with the later tradition of resurrection on the third day.

12. cf. P. Benoit 'The Ascension' in *Jesus and the Gospel* Vol. 1, London, 1973, pp. 209-252.

13. Lindars (n. 4) pp. 42, 45.

14. In itself this allows for ascension in the manner of Enoch, Moses and Elijah.

15. Benoit (n. 12) p. 251.
16. cf. Benoit (n. 12) pp. 226ff. cf. W. Pannenberg *Jesus – God and Man* Philadelphia, 1968, Ch. 3.
17. Acts 7:56 cf. H. P. Owen 'Stephen's Vision in Acts 7:55-6' *NTS* 1 (1954/5) 224-226; C. K. Barrett 'Stephen and the Son of Man' *Apophoreta: Festschrift für Ernst Haenchen* Berlin, 1964, pp. 32-38.
18. cf. G. Howard 'Phil. 2:6-11 and the Human Christ' *CBQ* 40 (1978) 368-87.
19. cf. R. Leivestad *Christ the Conqueror – Ideas of Conflict and Victory in the New Testament* London, 1954, pp. 269ff.
20. With due deference to the important work of P. M. Casey *The Son of Man: the Interpretation and Influence of Daniel* 7 London, 1980.
21. cf. C. K. Barrett 'The Lamb of God' *NTS* 1 (1954/5) 210-218.
22. cf. Hay (n. 3) pp. 61f.
23. Quotation from C. K. Barrett *From First Adam to Last* London, 1962, p. 76; the second sentence, not quoted in Dunn (n. 4) p. 309 n. 52, significantly alters the application he wishes to make of it on p. 111.
24. Hooker (n. 1) 1975 article, p. 156.
25. ctr. Loader (n. 2) p. 208.
26. ctr. Leivestad (n. 18) p. 299. cf. C. K. Barrett 'The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews' in *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology: Studies in Honour of C. H. Dodd* eds. W. D. Davies and D. Daube, Cambridge, 1954, pp. 363-393.
27. Hay (n. 3) p. 76.
28. Quotation and discussion, Hay (n. 3) pp. 98, 156. Cf. Col. 3:1ff.
29. e.g., 2 Cor. 5:17; 12:2ff.

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