

# The Christ of Creation in New Testament Theology

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The aim of this paper is twofold. In the first part we shall survey as accurately as possible within the limits of brevity the main passages of the New Testament which speak of Christ as a cosmic figure in the drama of creation. The ground will be familiar, but there may be some value in bringing it before our minds at the beginning of this colloquium. Our aim here is historical rather than interpretative. In the second part, however, an attempt will be made to discern how the New Testament writers derived their speculation about the Christ of Creation from the Jesus of History, and to ask whether the hints they have given, however rudimentary, may not be a significant guide to our thinking today.

## I

The term 'Cosmic Christ' has been used to cover both the idea of Christ as the author of creation and the teaching that the redemption won on the cross has a significance for the whole created universe. While the two belong together, for Christ is the Alpha and Omega of the same alphabet,<sup>1</sup> I propose to limit myself as far as possible to the thought of Christ's inaugural work in creation.

Much effort has been devoted to uncovering Jewish and Hellenistic ideas which may point the way to the New Testament concept of Christ as mediator of creation—the Stoic-Platonic Logos, Jewish Wisdom speculation, the amalgam of the two in Philo,<sup>2</sup> the Gnostic Redeemer myth.<sup>3</sup> It would take

<sup>1</sup> Rev. 22:12-13.

<sup>2</sup> E. Bevan, *Stoics and Sceptics* (Oxford, O.U.P.).

C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge, C.U.P., 1953), pp. 10 ff.

W. R. Halliday, *The Pagan Background of Early Christianity* (Liverpool, The University Press of Liverpool, 1925), pp. 174 ff.

O. S. Rankin, *Israel's Wisdom Literature* (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1936).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. G. Quispel, 'Der Gnostische Anthropos und die Judische Tradition', *Eranos-Jahrbuch*, 1953, pp. 195-234. R. M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1959), pp. 68 f.

too long to examine these theories, illuminating as they are.<sup>4</sup> It may suffice to say that the present writer is inclined to believe that in the Jewish figure of Wisdom-Torah and the Old Testament doctrine of creation through the Word of God we have sufficient material to form the matrix in which, under the impact of the historical figure of Jesus and his resurrection, a doctrine of the cosmic Christ could arise.<sup>5</sup> Stoic and other semi-philosophical allusions are to be found, but they are a secondary interpretation of ideas that were first formed in an authentically Jewish-Christian environment. It is more important to realize that whatever borrowings the New Testament writers may have made, their material was transformed by their claim that 'the Word became flesh'.<sup>6</sup> Our primary task, therefore, must be to look at what the New Testament actually says, and to assume that the primary influence at work (even upon older material) is the uniquely Christian understanding of God revealed in Jesus, his cross and resurrection.

## II

The ideas we are seeking to elucidate are limited to three of the New Testament writers—Paul, John and the writer to the Hebrews. The Synoptic Gospels present Jesus as the divine Lord without any hint as to his functions in creation.<sup>7</sup> For, while we may read the nature-miracles in this sense, they were not recorded with that purpose, nor so understood originally. More surprisingly, the book of Revelation, for all its exalted vision of the heavenly Christ, conspicuously fails to connect him with the work of creation, which is reserved exclusively for

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<sup>4</sup> The ground is usefully surveyed in G. V. Jones, *Christology and Myth in the New Testament* (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1956).

<sup>5</sup> On the Fourth Gospel, cf. E. C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* (London, Faber & Faber, 2nd ed., 1947), especially pp. 154 ff. E. H. Sidebottom, *The Christ of the Fourth Gospel* (London, S.P.C.K., 1961), who convincingly challenges the view that the Fourth Gospel drew upon a gnostic myth of the heavenly Redeemer and, instead, argues for a background in Jewish Wisdom literature.

On Colossians, cf. C. F. Burney, 'Christ as the APXH of Creation', *Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. XXVII (January, 1926), pp. 160 f. Also W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London, S.P.C.K., 2nd ed., 1955), pp. 151 f.

<sup>6</sup> For example, C. Spicq, who in his massive commentary has presented a most elaborate argument for the literary and stylistic dependence of *Hebrews* on Philo, comments, 'Si Hébreux est dépendant de Philon, ce ne sera sûrement pas au point de vue doctrinal puisqu'il exprime la foi chrétienne la plus orthodoxe.' (C. Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux* (Paris, J. Gabalda et Cie, 1952), Vol. I, p. 41).

<sup>7</sup> We cannot follow Cullmann in his view that in using the title 'Son of Man' Jesus may have reflected on his own pre-existence (O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, E.T., London, S.C.M. Press, 1959, p. 163).

God the Father.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, even in the missionary speeches of Acts, where some reference to the creative work of Christ as the basis of a 'general revelation' would be very congenial, we are disappointed.<sup>9</sup>

It is important, therefore, to bear in mind that any doctrine of the cosmic Christ we may find was not universal in the early Church, nor a primary dogma of the Christian proclamation. What we see, rather, is the gradual emergence of such a doctrine in the minds of the more reflective thinkers among the New Testament writers. Their teaching may be summarized under four heads:

(i) Christ as the Word or Son existed in or with God from eternity, even before his entering upon human existence in Jesus of Nazareth. Sometimes this pre-existence of Christ is alluded to without reference to his work in creation,<sup>10</sup> but frequently, as in the prologues to the Fourth Gospel and to Hebrews, and in Colossians 1, the pre-existent Christ is cast in the role of Hebrew Wisdom and associated with the Father in the creation of the world. We should add that it seems to be universally agreed that the term *protokotos* in Colossians 1:15 means not merely 'first in time' (with the possibility of an Arian Christology), but superior in status and authority to a unique degree, as the one in whom all things are created.<sup>11</sup> As such, Christ stands in a unique relationship to God, and this is our second point.

(ii) This relationship is expressed under various images which fall into three groups. In the first place, Christ is in various ways the 'image' or 'reflection' of God. Perhaps the reference is to the creation of the first man in God's image: Christ is the second Adam who renews that relationship in its perfection.<sup>12</sup> The Jewish Wisdom literature provided a somewhat different type of 'image' symbolism for Hebrews 1:3 ff.—the double symbol of the sun with the reflection of its light<sup>13</sup> and the punch for die-casting which impresses its form on the clay seal or coin. The term *hypostasis* here is probably still in its

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<sup>8</sup> Rev. 4, especially 5:11. A possible exception is the Alpha-Omega designation, originally given to the Father (Rev. 1:18; 21:6) but at the end ascribed to Jesus (Rev. 22:13).

<sup>9</sup> Just possible exceptions are the implications regarding the Lordship of Christ which may be inferred from Acts 7:56 and 10:36 f.

<sup>10</sup> John 8:57, 13:3, 17:5, 24; 1 Cor. 10:1-5; Eph. 1:3-5 (?); 1 Pet. 1:11.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon* (London, Macmillan, 8th ed., 1886), p. 144; W. Michaelis in *T.W.N.T.*, VI, p. 879; V. Taylor, *The Names of Jesus* (London, Macmillan, 1953), pp. 147-49.

<sup>12</sup> Col. 1:15; cf. 1 Cor. 15:45. Cf. O. Cullmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-74.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Wisdom 7:26, also Philo. *Apaugasma* probably means 'reflection' here rather than 'emanation'. So J. Moffat, *Epistle to the Hebrews* (I.C.C., Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1924), p. 6. C. Spicq, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 7. Cf. also 2 Cor. 4:6.

pre-philosophical phase.<sup>14</sup> It means the real nature of God without implying any metaphysical analysis of 'substance' or 'eternal essence'.

The term 'image of God' is rendered in more personal terms and in greater depth when Christ is termed the Son. While this is by no means primarily a term for Christ's role in creation, it is noteworthy that in two of the major passages on this theme (in Col. 1:13 and Heb. 1:2) Christ is so designated. For the writer to the Hebrews it is in virtue of his sonship that he is 'heir of all things' (verse 2) and addressed as the Lord who founded the earth (verse 10). In Colossians the mention of 'his beloved Son' (with perhaps an allusion to the baptism) spans both the incarnate and the pre-existent sonship of Christ, leading as it does directly into the description of his role as 'first-born of all creation'. It would, therefore, be a mistake to suppose that the divine sonship is a designation limited to the incarnate life of our Lord, although that appears to be St. Paul's normal usage, and is also implied in the Johannine prologue, where the term 'son' appears only after the statement, 'the Word became flesh' (verse 14).

The third term for Christ's eternal relation to the Father is that which characterizes the opening of the Fourth Gospel—the Logos. In view of the role of the creative word of God in the Old Testament and the development of Jewish Wisdom speculation, there is little difficulty in supposing that these are the main influences here, though the association of 'life' and 'light' with 'word' may owe something to Hellenistic infiltrations into Judaism<sup>15</sup> and doubtless Stoic or similar ideas would at first come to the mind of Greek readers. The word is a word which expresses God's purpose and brings it into being.<sup>16</sup> But just as the concept of thought is distinguishable from the mind that thinks, and a purpose distinguishable from the person whose purpose it is,<sup>17</sup> so the term Logos on any reckoning points to some distinction between the Son as the bearer of God's creative purpose and the Father who expresses his mind in him. On

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<sup>14</sup> Liddell and Scott cautiously noted, 'If this (i.e. the philosophical) be the sense in Hebrews 1:3, this would be the earliest example of the usage' (G. Liddell and A. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford, O.U.P., 7th ed., 1890). This caution has been abandoned (without any supporting evidence) by Stuart Jones and Mackenzie (*A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed., Oxford, 1940).

<sup>15</sup> E. H. Sidebottom gives a useful summary of the various views advanced in *The Christ of the Fourth Gospel*, Chapter II.

<sup>16</sup> Sidebottom (*op. cit.*, pp. 38 f.) may be right in reviving the discarded *memra* hypothesis, not because the Rabbis used *memra* to express some form of hypostasis akin to the Philonic logos, but just because *memra* was a reverential term for the divine name—and the divine name embodied the essence of deity. But the exegesis of the first two verses of the Gospel which speaks explicitly of a relationship between the logos and God becomes difficult on this view.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Isa. 55:11.

the other hand, it is also true that a man's purpose is part of himself—'he puts himself into it'—and so the Logos is 'God'—the true deity of the Word is affirmed.<sup>18</sup>

(iii) As the eternal 'image' of God, Christ is the agent or instrument of creation. To express this idea the language varies. In what seems a somewhat cruder or less reflective form, the stress is on the preposition *dia* with the Genitive. In 1 Corinthians 8:6 all things are *ek tou Theou*, but *dia tou Kyriou Iesou Christou*. So also *dia* is used in Hebrews 1:2 and 10 and John 1:3. The preposition evokes a picture like that of Proverbs 8:30, where Wisdom says, 'I was beside him like a master workman.' On the other hand, an expression more appropriate to the idea of Christ as 'image' or 'son' is found in the preposition *en* at Colossians 1:16 (compare John 1:4). The precise interpretation of this *en* has been much discussed. For Bishop Lightfoot it suggested that Christ expresses or sums up 'all the laws and purposes which guide the creation and government of the universe'.<sup>19</sup> Dibelius suggests that *en* and *dia* are in fact indistinguishable and that the real background is some form of Hellenistic, perhaps Stoic, pantheism.<sup>20</sup> In a recent article, A. Feuillet has argued that it states a solution to the problem of the one and the many similar to that developed by Origen, in which Christ shares both the unity of the Godhead and the multiplicity of the creatures, in so far as he is the exemplar on which they are all modelled.<sup>21</sup> I cannot help feeling that maybe the second is nearest the truth. There is a 'local' significance here, which may be explained not only with reference to Stoic and Hellenistic ideas but also to Jewish speculation about God as *topos* (in Philo) or as *maqom* (in the Rabbis), which ultimately goes back to *midrash* on Genesis 22:3 and 4 and 28:11. Here, for example, is Philo on the former passage:

'The Logos is called place (for reasons which will be explained hereafter). God is called place because he contains all things, but is contained by none.'<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *theos en ho logos*. The omission of the article with *theos* is largely due to the grammatical idiom of predicate nouns. It neither affirms nor excludes the idea of 'deity' as a generic term of which *ho logos* may be one instance among others. Cf. C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge, C.U.P., 1953), p. 116.

<sup>19</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 148.

<sup>20</sup> M. Dibelius, *An die Kolosser Epheser und Philemon* (3tte Auflage, H. Greeven, Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1953), pp. 13 f.

<sup>21</sup> A. Feuillet, 'La Creation de l'Univers "dans le Christ" d'après l'Épître aux Colossiens i 16a' in *New Testament Studies*, Vol. XII, No. 1, October, 1965.

<sup>22</sup> Philo, *Somn* I 11 (I 630)—quoted in J. Drummond, *Philo Judaeus* (London, Williams & Norgate, 1888), Vol. II, p. 20. Cf. other passages quoted in J. B. Lightfoot, *ad loc.* For Rabbinic speculation along similar lines, see C. G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology* (London, Macmillan & Co., 1938), pp. 20 f. W. L. Knox, *St. Paul and the Church of the Gentiles* (Cambridge, C. U. P., 1939, reprinted in 1961), pp. 163 f.

(iv) We are here on the verge of the fourth affirmation or implication about Christ's role in creation. Not only is he the agent, through whom he is also pictured as the being in whom the creation lives and moves and has its being. The allusion to the language of Acts 17:28 reminds us that many scholars have found Stoic or other Hellenistic forms of pantheism behind the all-embracing prepositions of Colossians 1—*en, dia, eis*.<sup>23</sup> Many have gone further, and claimed that originally the passage was a hymn in praise of the Gnostic Man in whom creation came to birth.<sup>24</sup> The implication is that any such assertion of cosmic function with regard to Christ is not part of the authentic Christian *kerygma* and may be disregarded in New Testament theology. Three brief remarks must suffice:

- (1) While stylistic analysis may reveal a strophic composition, this does not necessarily imply a pre-Christian (or even pre-Pauline) hymn. Attempts to show that references to the new creation in the church are secondary are particularly precarious.<sup>25</sup>
- (2) Many scholars would follow C. F. Burney in finding a purely Jewish background to the passage, as a *midrash* on the word *bereshith* in Genesis 1:1.<sup>26</sup> If so, Paul was probably responsible for composing the hymn.
- (3) Even if the hypothesis of a Hellenistic origin for the hymn proves correct, it remains true that a Christian writer thought it appropriate to apply it to Christ, and the thought is sufficiently adumbrated in 1 Corinthians 8:6 for us to accept the final form as the product of Paul himself.

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. quotations in M. Dibelius, *ad loc.*, and G. V. Jones, *Christology and Myth in the New Testament*, pp. 154 f.

<sup>24</sup> The thesis of many scholars, following E. Norden, is set out in A. M. Hunter, *St. Paul and His Predecessors* (London, S.C.M. Press, 2nd ed., 1961), pp. 123–26. It is developed in detail by E. Käsemann, 'A Primitive Baptismal Liturgy' in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London, S.C.M. Press, 1964), pp. 149–68.

<sup>25</sup> e.g. following Norden, Käsemann argued that on stylistic grounds the phrase, *καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας*, must belong to the first strophe (concerning creation): hence the words, *τῆς ἐκκλησίας*, must be a Christian interpolation. Against this analysis it may be pointed out:

(i) It provides no clause in strophe 2 to balance these words about the head of the body.

(ii) *ὅς ἐστιν ἀρχή* as the first clause in strophe 2 is far too brief to balance the opening, *ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου*.

(iii) If *καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας* is the opening of strophe 2, it corresponds closely in grammatical structure to the opening of strophe 1: *ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου* (each phrase has a nominative noun with two genitives, of which one is in apposition to the other).

(iv) The whole of *ὅς ἐστιν ἀρχή, πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν* may, then, be taken to balance (with a better match in sense) *πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως*.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. footnote 5.

The passage affirms, then, that not only was the universe created in and through Christ, but that its continued existence is in some sense 'in him' (*ta panta en autoi synesteken*). While there may be some reminiscence of Stoic language, there is also a quite fundamental difference. For Stoicism the subtle (but fundamentally material) *logos* is diffused in all things, whereas for St. Paul the relationship is reversed—all things are *in* Christ, and Christ is pre-existent. It is the difference between an immanent and a transcendent understanding of the cosmic Christ.<sup>27</sup>

That Christ is in this *continuous* relationship with creation can be found in different forms elsewhere. In Hebrews 1:3 he is described as 'upholding all things by his word of power', and in John 5:16-17 we have the significant statement, 'My Father is working still and I am working'. The implication is that the creative act of Jesus in healing a man on the Sabbath is but a reflection of the continuous, creative activity of the Father. Moreover, while not nearly so prominent as O. Cullmann has claimed, the universal working of Christ in creation is a part of what the New Testament affirms by calling him *kyrios*.<sup>28</sup>

We may summarize our survey as follows: The N.T. writers speak of Christ as a pre-existent being, the very image of God, or expression of the divine mind, in and through whom the created universe came into being. Not only so, as transcendent Lord, he sustains the universe he has created, both as its inner principle of co-ordination (*ta panta en autoi synesteken*) and its ruler. For completeness we must add (what in the N.T. takes the centre of the stage) that the evil in this universe, whatever its origin, has been decisively defeated by Christ's victory on the cross. That victory has cosmic consequences, corresponding to the cosmic role of Christ in creation, and will lead to the gathering up of all things in him in cosmic harmony in the *eschaton*.

### III

Does the New Testament permit us to draw any conclusion from this doctrine regarding the questions that particularly interest us—the status of non-Christian religions and of political and social action outside the limits of the Christian name?

All three of our major passages assert that everything came into being in and through Christ. This, it seems to me, is the fundamental understanding which enables us to speak of 'Christ in Hinduism' as R. Pannikar has done, or of 'Christ in the Asian Revolution' as do many of the thinkers associated with

<sup>27</sup> I owe this important point to F. B. Craddock, "All things in him": A critical note on Col. 1:15-20, in *New Testament Studies*, Vol. XII, No. 1, October, 1965.

<sup>28</sup> 1 Cor. 10:26; Acts 10:36 f. The same idea may be implied in John 13:3; Acts 7:56; 1 Cor. 3:21 f.; Col. 2:2 ff.; Eph. 1:20 f.; Heb. 1:8; 1 Pet. 3:21 f.; Rev. 5:13-14.

the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society. The phrase, 'all things', in Colossians 1 even includes the spiritual powers which are hostile to Christ. The natural interpretation of this antinomy is that these forces were created *in* Christ, and draw whatever strength, vitality and goodness they may have from him, even though subsequently they have rebelled against him. If, even in the case of the powers, whatever is good is of God<sup>29</sup> then *a fortiori* whatever is good in contemporary movements outside the Christian name comes from Christ—even presumably the freedom to reject him, though the rejection itself is sinful and leads to blindness.<sup>30</sup> Hence our Lord accepts the work of the independent exorcist on the principle, 'He that is not against us is for us'.<sup>31</sup> Is not St. Paul, though indirectly, making a similar claim in 1 Corinthians 3: 21 f: 'For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's.' (Incidentally, there is here again both a parallel to and contrast with Stoicism. The Greeks had said, *panta tou sophou estin*, but Paul grounds this in the universal lordship of Christ).<sup>32</sup> Perhaps the same teaching can be inferred from Colossians 2: 2 f., which speaks of Christ 'in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge'.

It is, I believe, of the first importance to remember that Paul makes this claim in Colossians with regard to the work of Christ in *creation*. It is not the case (despite Cullmann's many attempts to prove the contrary) that Paul maintains that these powers are 'in Christ' or are obedient to his purposes on the basis of his victory on the cross. To adapt vigorous if crude popular idiom, 'They are dead but they won't lie down.' There is still, therefore, need for redemption and the active appropriation of Christ's redeeming work in faith, which is *new* creation, before it can be said that all things are tending towards consummation in him.<sup>33</sup> The first chapter of Colossians is built on the contrast between the old and the new creation: in both cases Christ is *prototokos*, but they are two and not one—a vital point which was overlooked, I think, by the otherwise noteworthy paper presented by J. Sittler on this theme at the New Delhi Assembly of the World Council of Churches.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Jas. 1: 17.

<sup>30</sup> 1 Cor. 2: 8.

<sup>31</sup> Mark 9: 38-41.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. J. N. Sevenster, *Paul and Seneca* (Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1961), pp. 119 f.

<sup>33</sup> For Cullmann's view, see *Christ and Time* (London, S.C.M. Press, E.T., 1951), *The State in the New Testament* (London, S.C.M. Press, E.T., 1957), 'The Kingship of Christ and the Church in the New Testament' in *The Early Church* (Ed. A. J. B. Higgins, London, S.C.M. Press, 1956). Criticism in G. B. Caird, *Principalities and Powers* (Oxford, O.U.P., 1956), pp. 24-26; C. D. Morrison, *The Powers that be* (London, S.C.M. Press, 1960).

<sup>34</sup> J. A. Sittler, 'Called to Unity' in *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, January, 1962, pp. 177-87.

The way in which we can understand the assertion that all that is good is created in Christ is, I think, deepened by the affirmation of John 1:3-4, 'That which came into being by (in) him was life, and the life was the light of men.' This is the translation sponsored by E. C. Hoskyns (and earlier by W. Temple) and seems to me not only the most natural translation of the much-disputed Greek text, but to yield good and important sense. The affirmation that 'all things were made through him' is made more precise: if you ask, how all things, how the universe, is to be characterized, it is by the term 'life'. Not, of course, 'a living being' (which would be as the Stoics said, *zoon*) but life (*zoe*)—the dynamic burgeoning of goodness which for the Hebrews constituted the creative purpose of God.<sup>35</sup> To say 'that which came into being in him was life' means that the universe is, as it were, the overflow of the creative life of God, at work in the cosmos. Moreover, this interpretation gives some sense to the following words: 'The life was the light of men.' No doubt there is *double entendre*. A Christian inevitably applies these words (as does the body of the Fourth Gospel) to Jesus. But it is also affirmed, and this is the main point so far revealed in the prologue, that the creative purpose of God in the Logos is what brings illumination and guidance to all men. The point is made yet clearer in verse 9. However it is punctuated, this verse must refer to an illumination of all men by that Logos whose supreme expression is in Jesus: 'The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world.'

The teaching of the prologue as a whole, therefore, is that the whole universe has come into being through the logos and, therefore, whatever is good has its source in him. Moreover, it is the vitality of God which brings not merely intellectual illumination but purpose and moral guidance to the whole.

Once again, however (as in the case of Colossians, though perhaps less obviously), there are two levels of assertion. While all this is true about the creation, it is still a *fallen* creation. It is his own place, but his own people do not recognize him (verses 10-11). Hence, the true light had to come into the world in Jesus, and probably this is the force of *erchomenon eis ton kosmon* of verse 9. When Jesus is seen as the true light,<sup>36</sup> all others are seen merely as lamps whose light is kindled at that source—even the crown of the prophetic line, John the Baptist, is so described.<sup>37</sup> While, therefore, according to the prologue, the divine life is diffused through the Logos, it remains true that fullness of life only comes with the presence of the Logos in the flesh—he who has the words of eternal life (John 6:68) and who is himself the resurrection and the life (John 11:25).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. G. von Rad, in *T.W.N.T.*, Vol. II, pp. 844-50.

<sup>36</sup> John 8:12.

<sup>37</sup> John 5:35, *lychnos*. Cf. C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, pp. 204 f.

#### IV

We have left to the end the question why any such assertion should be made about the Galilean prophet, a question incidentally raised, but not answered, by R. Panikkar, when he writes, 'This passage or transit (sc. from Hinduism to Christianity) is neither a natural nor an automatic one. The dynamism of our "and" (in the phrase "Hinduism and Christianity") would be powerless if it were not activated, "actualized" by the historical dimension of Christ which belongs to historical Christianity.'<sup>38</sup> If, however, we in any way share the scientific and empirical atmosphere of our age, we must ask this question and answer it, not by *a priori* philosophical argument, but by an examination of the empirical facts. The chief of these is the life and teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus as a historical figure, interpreted in the light of a vital experience of him as living Lord and Saviour. This is the viewpoint of an interesting recent study of our problem in the light of the demythologizing controversy, G. Vaughan Jones' book, *Christology and Myth in the New Testament*. G. V. Jones, however, by limiting his range of 'empirical evidence' claims that there is no way from the Jesus of history to the cosmic Christ. If by this he means (as he appears to mean) that we could not deduce the doctrine of a cosmic Christ from the teaching attributed to Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels, he is obviously right. It is, however, arguable (and I believe both true and important) that the New Testament affirmations about the cosmic Christ arose out of the primitive Christian experience of Jesus, and was not merely an application to him of pre-existing myths. Is it possible to trace this process?

In the first place, the N.T. writers take pains to affirm the unity of the cosmic Christ with the Jesus of history. This no doubt is to state the problem rather than to solve it, but it should warn us not to make too slick a separation if we wish to remain true to the New Testament. Originally the unity (or perhaps, better, continuity) of the heavenly Christ with the earthly Jesus was affirmed solely with reference to the resurrection and ascension of the Lord. One of the most primitive sections of the N.T. is perhaps the hymn embedded in 1 Timothy 3:16, which presents the sequence of the Lord's incarnate and ascended life as one whole:

He was manifested in the flesh,  
vindicated in the Spirit,  
seen by angels,  
preached among the nations,  
believed on in the world,  
taken up in glory.

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<sup>38</sup> R. Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964), p. 60.

I suspect that we should see a double chiasmus here, reflecting the two poles of his existence, (a) the earthly and (b) the heavenly, in the pattern a b b a a b.<sup>39</sup> If so, the structure of the hymn underlines most graphically the doctrinal assertion that the earthly and the heavenly work, and their extension in the mission of the church, are *one* in the rhythmic life of redemption. Similar affirmations are made in the (perhaps equally primitive) declarations embedded in 1 Peter 3:21 and Romans 1:4, and given mythological form in the ascension story (Acts 1:9 f.). An important passage in this connection is Ephesians 4:7-10:

But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it is said:

'When he ascended on high, he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.'

(In saying, 'he ascended', what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things).

Recent commentators have rightly referred the 'descent of Christ' here to the incarnation rather than to the 'descent into Hades'.<sup>40</sup> If so, the passage affirms in a most notable way the unity of the historical Jesus and the ascended Christ. At the same time (as J. Cambier has argued) the terms 'ascended' and 'descended' are not so much to be understood literally as symbols, 'une formule universaliste, "cosmique", indiquant les dimensions de l'action salvifique du Pere ou celles de la seigneurie du Christ'.<sup>41</sup>

The next step was to affirm the unity of the historical and ascended Lord with the one in whom all things were created. That this is true of the Fourth Gospel is obvious. The book intends to record the words and deeds of Jesus as the manifestation of the creative, pre-existent Logos. But the precise way in which this is done is important. Does the author start with a somewhat Platonic world view, and see the incarnation primarily as the actualizing of the cosmological principle behind his logos-Christology? Or, conversely, is the primary concern with the history of Jesus viewed as the manifestation of God's saving acts, to which the prologue adds (as an afterthought) that this divine Son, known to us in Jesus, is also the one in

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<sup>39</sup> The commentaries give many different analyses of this hymn; cf. C. K. Barrett, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Oxford, O.U.P., 1963), pp. 64-66, and J. N. D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London, A. & C. Black, 1963). The analysis offered in the text is also assumed by N. A. Dahl (*op. cit.*, footnote 48 below), p. 433.

<sup>40</sup> So Dibelius, *op. cit.*, H. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Epheser* (Düsseldorf, Patmos-Verlag, 1962), and J. Cambier, 'La Signification Christologique d'Eph. 4:7-10' in *New Testament Studies*, Vol. IX, pp. 262-75.

<sup>41</sup> *Art. cit.*, p. 268.

whom the universe was created? J. A. T. Robinson has given good grounds for adopting the latter view: that perhaps the 'prologue' was composed considerably later than the Gospel as a whole, so that we can say, 'The narrative cannot be read merely as illustration, for the pictorially-minded, of the metaphysics. For it was not so written. The metaphysics came later—to place the narrative in a cosmic setting; not to detract one whit from its factuality, but to allow this to be seen in its ultimate depth and significance.'<sup>42</sup>

The Epistle to the Hebrews makes the same affirmation, but is less astute in concealing its inherent difficulties. No book outside the Synoptic Gospels gives a more realistic appraisal of our Lord's humanity. Yet, the cosmic dimensions of the Son's nature are blocked out uncompromisingly in the opening verses. An awareness of the problem of linking the two emerged in 2:8 ff.: the incarnation was a temporary stage in the life of the divine Son, fitting and indeed essential if he was to win salvation as a high priest who must, necessarily, be like his brethren in every respect. Later (in chapter 10) we are told that the physical body of the incarnation was required in order to furnish the sacrificial offering for sin. It must, however, be confessed that these hints leave unsolved the relation between the Wisdom-Christology of the opening and the 'pioneer' Christology, or even the high-priestly Christology of the body of the epistle.

By contrast, St. Paul seems to have been aware that to speak of a 'cosmic' Christ in creation was a daring and advanced speculation, secondary to the *kerygma*, though implied in it, and only to be imparted to those who were mature. It is very likely that precisely this is meant by the secret wisdom to which he refers in 1 Corinthians 2. What does St. Paul mean by the 'secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification'? The clue is probably furnished by the quotation of Isaiah 40:13 at verse 16. It refers to the Spirit who assisted God at the creation, now identified with 'the mind of Christ'. This is the Spirit in which Christians now share and so come to possess the knowledge that all things (even the meat offered to idols) are in the hand of Christ through whom God created all (1 Cor. 8:1-6). The secret and hidden wisdom, then, is the mature knowledge that Christ is the Creator as well as the Saviour: in this sense he is the pre-existent Lord of Glory, whom the rulers of this age failed to recognize (1 Cor. 2:8).<sup>43</sup> It is likely that St. Paul intends to make more explicit the link between the historical Jesus and the cosmic Christ in his use

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<sup>42</sup> J. A. T. Robinson, 'The Relation of the Prologue to the Gospel of St. John', in *New Testament Studies*, Vol. IX, pp. 120-29.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. W. L. Knox, *St. Paul and the Church of the Gentiles*, pp. 117 f., and G. B. Caird, *Principalities and Powers*, p. 91.

of the phrase, 'the Son of his love', in Colossians 1:5: the cosmic Christ is indeed the Jesus whom God acknowledged as the beloved in his baptism.<sup>44</sup>

But on what grounds did St. Paul or any one else affirm this? In general it is clear that it was a *consequence* of the early church's experience of salvation in Christ, or an inference from the *kerygma*. To understand this we must, I think, recall the characteristic Jewish view of God as the *living* God, that is, a God who acts, who purposes, who calls creation into being and endows it with all that is worth while.<sup>45</sup> The view was given perhaps classic expression by St. Paul who in Romans 4:17 refers to 'the God . . . who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist'.

We should also recall that originally the Hebrews came to affirm their belief in Jahweh as Creator on the basis of their experience of him in the saving history of the Exodus.<sup>46</sup> There was thus a pattern of arguing from salvation to creation, rather than a curiosity regarding the origin of things for its own sake. It expresses the lordship of God in all the affairs of the world rather than a description of the mechanics of creation.

Both these lines of thinking converge to provide a cosmological interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus, and it is this which is the starting-point of the New Testament doctrine of the cosmic Christ. In the first place, the resurrection was for the early Christians an overwhelming and unique manifestation of the power of God 'to give life to the dead and call into existence the things that do not exist'. Indeed, the way in which Paul, in this chapter (Rom. 4), leads up to the resurrection of Christ to clinch the argument suggests that so far from arguing from the story of Abraham, he was rather arguing back to it from the known fact of Christ's resurrection, and in the light of this mighty event deepening his understanding of the birth of Isaac and minting afresh his concept of God the Creator.<sup>47</sup>

Now it is true that in the New Testament the resurrection of Christ is represented (apart perhaps from John 11:25) as a work performed by the Father who raised him. However, it is

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. W. L. Knox, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. footnote 35 above. G. E. Wright, *The God who Acts* (London, S.C.M. Press, 1952), and G. F. Moore, *Judaism* (Cambridge, U.S.A., Harvard University Press, 1927, reprinted in 1958), Vol. I, pp. 374-85. *Bel and the Dragon* gives amusing expression to the way later Judaism viewed the difference between the 'Living God' and other gods. The phrase itself is not common (Jubilees 21:4 ff., Sibyll. Oracles 3:763, Ben Sirach 18:1, 3 Macc. 6:28) but the idea it expresses remained vital for the Jewish understanding of creation and providence. Cf. also 1 Thess. 1:9 f.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. W. Foerster in *T.W.N.T.*, III, p. 1004.

<sup>47</sup> This relationship to the Old Testament is paralleled by that of the author of *Hebrews*: we only know what the O.T. meant because we now have Christ. There are a few parallels to the idea of creation *ex ouk onton*—see F. J. Leenhardt, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London, Lutterworth Press, 1961), p. 123. But John 5:21 is equally significant, also John 5:26.

equally certain that in his death and resurrection Christ had won a victory over evil, and Paul and others came to see that this could only be a complete victory, dealing finally with all God's enemies and meeting the ultimate questions posed by sin and evil, if it had cosmic consequences. Hence, Jesus is the first-born from the dead, the beginning of a process of cosmic renewal, and such power could only be exercised by one who was also first-born of creation. The argument from redemption in Christ to creation in Christ was as natural for the New Testament writer as for his Old Testament counterpart.

The resurrection of Christ, therefore, is thus set forth as the supreme creative event. It is the ground for St. Paul's assertion, 'if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation' (2 Cor. 5:17), and is the origin for a whole series of parallels between the old and the new creation. These have been examined very fully in a valuable article by N. A. Dahl.<sup>48</sup> He draws attention not only to the Pauline texts we have mentioned, but also to Hebrews 1, in which he discerns a whole series of parallels between the creative work of the Son and his eschatological enthronement. Dahl finds the basis of this parallelism not only in the apprehension of the resurrection as the supreme creative act of God, but also in the late Jewish belief that 'God the Creator deals with the world, man and Israel, in a similar way as at the creation of the world. We can apply the notion of *creatio continua*, but can also speak of a *creatio actualis*: by liberating a man from disasters and bringing him into a new positive relation to himself, God makes him a new creation'.<sup>49</sup> This principle seems to me of the greatest importance if we are to take a final step in discovering on what ground we can today meaningfully assert that the whole of the created universe is 'in Christ'. From the Biblical point of view the crown of God's creation is man—we recall not only Genesis 1, but also Psalm 8. To fashion a man in freedom and breathe into him the breath of life is a far greater thing than to call out the multitude of the stars. We owe a deep debt of gratitude to Teilhard de Chardin for showing how consonant is this insight with the researches of biological science. (And, in passing, I suspect that the next great area for a Christian apologetic synthesis of this type must be the enquiry whether we can continue sensibly to assert the priority of rational being—I do not say merely mankind—in the expanding universe revealed by modern astronomy). However that may be, if the Biblical view is correct, it follows that the supreme challenge to God's purpose, and the most intricate test of his authority as creator, is the perversion of man's will in sin.

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<sup>48</sup> N. A. Dahl, 'Christ, Creation and Church' in *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology* (edd. W. D. Davies and D. Daube, Cambridge, C.U.P., 1956), pp. 422-43. Also, W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, Chapter II.

<sup>49</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 430 f.

To create and then to redeem man in freedom is the crowning example of *life* in the dynamic sense which belongs to the God of Israel. It follows that redemption is achieved in meeting and converting the will of man, in eliciting and sustaining a perfect obedience under the conditions of created existence: at the climax it was not by 'twelve legions of angels',<sup>50</sup> though the struggle was against the hosts of darkness,<sup>51</sup> but by the quiet words, 'not what I will, but what thou wilt'.<sup>52</sup> It is in the light of the Passion and Resurrection of the Lord that we learn the real meaning of the words: 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.'<sup>53</sup> The lordship of man in the universe, affirmed by Psalm 8, can only be sensibly ascribed, as the writer to the Hebrews saw, to Christ,<sup>54</sup> and it is a lordship won through and exercised in suffering and death. The paradox of the New Testament faith is that therein is the true life, and that is why the New Testament can and must speak of the cross and resurrection as inaugurating a new creation.

Now recent Protestant New Testament scholarship has emphasized, I believe rightly, that the principles of God's dealing with the world which were decisively exhibited on the cross, and known in the risen lordship of Christ, were already seen in the inaugurated eschatology of Christ's earthly ministry.<sup>55</sup> In the epigrammatic words of Ernst Fuchs, 'The so-called Christ of faith is none other than the historical Jesus.'<sup>56</sup> This means that the quality of life—the encounter of God with men which is the purpose of the world—is realized and exhibited in depth in the association of Jesus with his disciples and in his meeting with publicans and sinners. Everything else is ancillary to that kind of loving personal relationship in freedom between man and God. And that is eternal life.

In the light of this we recall certain of the affirmations about the creation: 'What came to be in him was life.' From the beginning God has been promoting, if we may so speak, that kind of life in and through the universal Logos which we see supremely and uniquely revealed in the Incarnate One. If we want to see an actual embodiment of the principles which are at the centre of God's creative purpose (*zoe*) and which reach their decisive and victorious climax on the cross, we must look

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<sup>50</sup> Matt. 26:53.

<sup>51</sup> Luke 22:53.

<sup>52</sup> Mark 14:36.

<sup>53</sup> John 1:5.

<sup>54</sup> Heb. 2:5-9.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. especially E. Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes*, Chapter I, G. Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (E.T., London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1960), and E. Fuchs, *Studies of the Historical Jesus* (E.T., London, S.C.M. Press, 1964). In a rather different way British scholars had, of course, steadily maintained the same assertion; cf. the work of W. Manson, T. W. Manson, C. H. Dodd and, more recently, W. D. Davies.

<sup>56</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 31.

at the life of Jesus. There is the image of God, and there (in Fourth Gospel terms) is the 'glory' (the very being of God, manifest to us), 'full of grace and truth' (John 1:14, 18).<sup>57</sup>

There is both continuity and discontinuity between 'life' in creation and 'eternal life' in Christ.<sup>58</sup> Continuity because it is the same purposing creator who is the author of life: discontinuity because there is need of resurrection—a renewal of life in the Son, over against the death which is the state of a fallen world.<sup>59</sup> It is in this context that we see the full significance of the description of Jesus as *archegos tes zoes* (Acts 3:15; cf. Heb. 2:10; 12:2).

I am, however, inclined to think that the most striking statement of this identity in difference between the principle of the first and the second creation is 2 Corinthians 4:6:

'For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness", who has shone in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.'

Most commentators limit the reference to the dazzling appearance of the risen Christ as St. Paul saw him on the Damascus road. In favour of this is the argument of the previous chapter—the *midrash* on the shining of Moses' face—and the usual meaning of *prosopon* in the N.T.—the face or outward appearance. There is, however, one place in the N.T., in this very letter, where the word *prosopon* means 'person' (2 Cor. 1:11).<sup>60</sup> Does not this sense fit the context much better? (i) In the first place, St. Paul has just alluded to Christ as the image of God. Whatever be its link with Genesis 1:27, when Paul applies it here and at Colossians 1:15, he is making a startling assertion about a man of his own or the immediately preceding generation.<sup>61</sup> It is of the one declared at his baptism as God's beloved that St. Paul says, he is the image of God—surely a reference to the character and form of the Lord's ministry. (ii) He speaks of the saving knowledge 'in the heart' which is

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<sup>57</sup> I have been very encouraged to find (after this paper was completed) that a similar idea of life in creation, embodied in Jesus and continued through his resurrection, is one of the key themes of Dhanjibhai Fakirbhai's recent book, *Khristopanishad* (Bangalore, C.I.S.R.S., 1965).

<sup>58</sup> I wonder if C. H. Dodd is quite right in affirming that *zoe* and the fuller term *atonios zoe* are indistinguishable in the Fourth Gospel? (*The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 144). The following might be considered contrary instances: 1:4, 5:26, 6:33, 6:35 (in connection with 1:4).

<sup>59</sup> John 5:24; 1 John 3:14.

<sup>60</sup> 2 Cor. 1:11. Evidence for this meaning from Hellenistic Greek and the papyri is given in *T.W.N.T.*, Vol. VI, p. 771.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. above on the implications of 'the Son of his Love' in Colossians 1:13. For the reference here to the historical Jesus, cf. W. L. Knox, *St. Paul and the Church of the Gentiles*, pp. 159 f. There is a closely parallel thought in 1 Corinthians 2:8 where 'the Lord of glory' or 'image of God' is the historical Jesus whom the powers could not recognize.

surely more than a supernatural vision of dazzling but supernatural splendour. (iii) That knowledge of this truth was linked with the historical coming of Jesus may be paralleled in the references to the knowledge of the fullness of Christ—he who descended—traced by Cambier in Ephesians 4.<sup>62</sup>

Is it not more likely, therefore, that St. Paul is here giving expression to the truth that the light of creation shone again in the personal existence of Jesus, his character and teaching, inseparable as they were from his saving death and resurrection? He was the image of God—in a formal sense as the second Adam, but in the material sense as 'the divine pattern of the cosmos'.<sup>63</sup> This is not only an affirmation of the divinity of Christ, but also about the nature of the cosmos.

Jesus is the *eikon*, the *charakter tes hypostaseos*, the logos. His character and dealings with men exhibit the character and dealings of God, the purposes for which he formed the universe. This faith is attested by our Lord's resurrection, in which the original life of creation is renewed and its purpose victoriously asserted in the face of sin—to sum up all things in Christ, to relate all things in the bond of that love which was perfectly manifested in the company of the Incarnate Lord. Nor should the language about Christ's sustaining role be forgotten: the universe is 'in Christ' in the sense that God is constantly and unfailingly reacting to evil and transmuting it to good in the same way as he did on the cross: for that is true life—the rhythm of the divine life—always creating the possibility of goodness in fellowship with himself: 'Thou dost show me the path of life and in thy presence is fulness of joy.'<sup>64</sup>

If it be felt that we have deserted cosmology in favour of soteriology, the charge is just. In the New Testament, the teaching of the cosmic Christ is a correlative of and subordinate to the proclamation of redemption. Yet it is, I believe, in some form or other, a necessary correlate if we are to continue in the New Testament conviction that 'whatever is born of God overcomes the world: and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God' ?<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. J. Cambier, art. cit.

<sup>63</sup> W. L. Knox, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

<sup>64</sup> Ps. 16:11.

<sup>65</sup> 1 John 5:5.