

The House of Bishops' Theological Group has considered Dr Martin Davie's work on the uniqueness of Christ and is content for it to be made available to Members of General Synod for their information

+ Michael Roffen
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A Church of England approach to the unique significance of Jesus Christ

Introduction

This paper is intended as a theological resource for General Synod members and others wanting to think further about the issue of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in the light of the Private Member's Motion by Mr. Paul Eddy asking:

That this Synod request the House of Bishops to report to the Synod on their understanding of the uniqueness of Christ in Britain's multi-faith society, and offer examples and commendations of good practice in sharing the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ alone with people of other faith and of none.

On the basis that Church of England theology needs to be rooted in Scripture, but also needs to take into account the Catholic Creeds, the Reformation formularies and contemporary theological reflection, the section begins by looking at how the uniqueness of Jesus Christ is understood in the Bible. It then looks in turn at what is said about the uniqueness of Christ in the Creeds and the Chalcedonian Definition, the historic formularies and in recent material from the Church of England and the Anglican Communion.

I The Biblical witness to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ

According to the witness of the Old and New Testaments, the LORD,¹ the God of Israel, is unique because He is the one true God, the creator of the universe and the ruler of history. In Jesus Christ this one true God has come in person to fulfil the promises of salvation that He made to the people of Israel. Although these promises of salvation were given in the first instance to Israel they extend beyond Israel to the whole of humanity and the whole of creation.

(a) The uniqueness of the LORD

The uniqueness of the LORD is something that is affirmed constantly in the Old Testament. A selection of verses from various parts of the Old Testament will demonstrate this point.

¹ In accordance with the normal practice in English translations of the Bible this paper will use the term 'the LORD' to refer to the Tetragrammaton, YHWH, the name of the God of Israel revealed to Moses at the time of the Exodus as described in Exodus 3:14.

Deuteronomy 4:35 'To you it was shown so that you would acknowledge that the Lord is God; there is no other besides him.'

1 Samuel 2:2 'There is no Holy One like the Lord, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.'

1 Kings 8:60 '...so that all the peoples of the earth shall know that the Lord is God; there is no other.'

Nehemiah 9:6 'And Ezra said: "You are the Lord, you alone; you have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. To all of them you give life, and the host of heaven worships you."'

Psalm 86:9-10 'All the nations you have made shall come and bow down before you, O Lord. For you are great and do wonderful things; you alone are God.'

Isaiah 45:5-6 'I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no god; I gird you, though you do not know me, that men may know from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the Lord and there is no other.'

Five points about the Old Testament witness to the uniqueness of the LORD are highlighted by these verses.

The first point is that the Old Testament does not simply affirm an abstract monotheism. That is to say, it does not simply affirm that there is one God rather than many. In the words of the Old Testament scholar and missiologist Chris Wright:

It is important to realise that in the Old Testament this monotheistic faith is not merely a matter of arithmetic. That is, what Israel were to learn from their encounter with God in history was not merely that there was only one deity, not many. The point rather was who that God was. *Yahweh is God.*²

The second point, which comes out in the quotation from Nehemiah, is that a key part of the uniqueness of the LORD is that he is the sole creator and sustainer of all things. This is a point that is made in narrative form in the creation narratives in Genesis 1 and 2 and that is also confessed at length in Psalm 104.

The third point, which comes out in the quotation from Isaiah, is that the other key part of the uniqueness of the LORD is that he is the sole ruler of history. The point that is being made in Isaiah 45:5-6 is that by raising up Cyrus King of Persia to overthrow the Babylonian empire and allow his people to return home from exile the LORD is making clear that it is he and no one else who determines the course of history.

This is a point that is made repeatedly throughout the Old Testament. It is the LORD and not the nations, their rulers, or their gods who determines what takes place. The paradigmatic example of this is the exodus from Egypt where, in line with his

² C. Wright, *The Uniqueness of Jesus*, London: Monarch, 2001, pp.98-99.

promises to their ancestors, The LORD demonstrates his power over Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt by setting his people free, thus causing Moses and the people of Israel to ask: ‘Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendour, doing wonders?’ (Exodus 15:11).

The fourth point, which comes out in the quotation from Deuteronomy, is that because the LORD has shown himself to be the unique God, Israel (and in due time the whole world) needs to acknowledge this reality. It is this requirement to acknowledge the uniqueness of the LORD that underlies the first and second commandments in which the people of Israel are commanded to have no other gods besides the LORD and not to make idols for themselves (Exodus 20:2-6, Deuteronomy 5:6-10).

It is not the case, as some scholars have suggested,³ that these commandments commit Israel to the exclusive worship of the LORD while allowing room for the existence of other gods. In the Old Testament context the logic behind these commandments is that there is no god and no idol that can compare with the LORD and that therefore Israel is called to respond appropriately to this fact by worshipping the LORD alone.

The fifth point, which comes out in the quotations from I Kings 8, Psalm 86 and Isaiah 45 is that Israel believed that one day the uniqueness of the LORD as the only true God would be universally recognised. The writers of the Old Testament were well aware that the LORD’s uniqueness was not universally acknowledged in their day, but they believed that one day it would be.

Whilst both Jews and Christians have traditionally affirmed on the basis of the verses listed above and others like them that the LORD alone is God, this affirmation might seem to be challenged by verses such as Exodus 15:11 and Psalm 95:3, ‘For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods,’ which *prima facie* seem to acknowledge the existence of other gods alongside the LORD.⁴ In response to this apparent challenge to the uniqueness of the LORD what needs to be noted is the way in which the Old Testament uses the term ‘gods.’

Firstly, the term is used to refer to a class of heavenly beings (variously referred to as gods, sons of God, sons of the Most High, holy ones, watchers, the host of the LORD, or the host of heaven) who, as Richard Bauckham puts it, ‘accompany YHWH as warriors or attendants, and...assemble in YHWH’s presence in heaven.’⁵ It is these heavenly beings (who are what later Christian theology would call ‘angels’) that are referred to, for example, in Psalm 89:6-7: ‘Let the heavens praise your wonders, O Lord, your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones. For who in the skies can be compared to the Lord, a God feared in the council of the holy ones, great and awesome above all that are around him?’ As Bauckham further notes:

³ See, for example, N MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of ‘Monotheism’*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003.

⁴ This is a point made in JFA Sawyer, ‘Biblical Alternatives to Monotheism,’ *Theol* 87 (1984), pp.172-80.

⁵ R Bauckham, ‘Biblical Theology and the Problem of Monotheism,’ in C Bartholomew, M Healy, K Möller, R Parry (eds), *Out of Egypt – Biblical theology and Biblical interpretation*, Milton Keynes and Grand Rapids; Paternoster/Zondervan, 2004, p.212.

...these 'gods' are not independent powers but servants of YHWH who no more qualify his unique status than do human beings who worship and obey YHWH. YHWH's retinue are the attendants of an absolute monarch, whose sheer numbers evidence his greatness and whose constant praises serve precisely to define and to proclaim his transcendent uniqueness.⁶

Secondly, the term is used to refer to the gods worshipped by the nations around Israel. These 'gods' are consistently dismissed by the Old Testament as simply 'idols,' the creations of the imagination and craftsmanship of fallen human beings, who cannot be compared with the LORD, the one true creator God. We can see this, for instance, in Psalm 96:4-5: 'For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be revered above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.' It is the fact that gods of the nations are idols that provides the link between the first two commandments and forms the basis of the withering critique of the gods of the nations in Psalm 115:3-8, Isaiah 44:9-20, 46:1-7 and Jeremiah 10:1-11.

The Old Testament thus acknowledges the existence of other 'gods,' but it also makes clear that the character of these 'gods,' whether they are heavenly beings or merely idols, is such that they cannot be compared to the LORD, the only one to whom the term 'God' rightly belongs and, as such, the sole legitimate object of Israel's worship.⁷

There are also passages in the Old Testament that talk about a battle between the LORD and the chaos monsters (Rahab, Leviathan, the Sea). An example of such a passage is Psalm 74: 13-14:

You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the dragons in the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan: You gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.⁸

It has been suggested that such texts are explicitly and embarrassingly polytheistic⁹ in that they show the LORD in conflict with other supernatural powers. However, to quote Bauckham again, from the Old Testament perspective these texts have completely the opposite significance:

The idea that there are powers opposed to God which God must defeat is part and parcel of the traditional monotheistic religions, along with, of course, the conviction that God is unquestionably able to defeat such powers of evil and can be expected to do so in the end...YHWH's defeat, restraint or taming of chaos (in a variety of texts) does not, in the perspective of Jewish monotheism, put his sole deity in doubt, but precisely demonstrate his sole deity.¹⁰

⁶ Ibid p.212.

⁷ The term 'gods' is also used of human judges in Ps 89:6. The point here is that judges are called to perform a godlike function in upholding justice not that they are actually divine beings.

⁸ See also Job 3:13, Isa 27:1.

⁹ Sawyer, art.cit., p. 176.

¹⁰ Bauckham, op.cit. p.215 For a further discussion about the relationship between YHWH and the other 'gods' see C J H Wright *The Mission of God*, Leicester: IVP, 2006, pp.136-42.

(b) *The promises of YHWH.*

As well as affirming that the LORD is the one true God, the Old Testament also testifies that he has made a series of promises to Israel and through Israel to the world.

The biblical narrative declares that in the beginning the LORD created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1-2). The first human beings, Adam and Eve, are made in his image to rule the world on his behalf, but they rebel against him. This rebellion is followed by judgement on Adam and Eve and on the serpent who has led them astray, but in the midst of this judgement there is a first sign of hope in Genesis 3:15. In this verse the LORD tells the serpent that the 'seed' of the woman will bruise his head.

As David Atkinson comments:

The serpent is cursed by God, and there is a promise that though the woman will die, her seed will live to bruise the serpent's head (3:15). The picture is that through a man, the servant who has been instrumental in the downfall of a man will itself be crushed.¹¹

The issue of how this will take place is not addressed in Genesis 3:15 itself, but on the basis of the biblical narrative as a whole Christian theologians have traditionally viewed this verse as the *protoevangelium*, the first promise in the Bible of the saving work of God in Christ. To quote Atkinson again:

No doubt the author could not look on the day of which the New Testament speaks, nor of the 'Proper Man' (Luther) in whom a new humanity is born. But we can now stand within Genesis 3 and look forward in the knowledge that the power of evil, hidden behind the all-too-subtle mask of the serpent, will one day be exposed, and overcome, on a cross outside a city wall. On that day, Christus Victor will 'disarm the principalities and powers,' making 'a public example of them.' [Col 2:15] On that day the sting of death will be drawn and the Last Enemy defeated. [1 Cor 15]¹²

In the early chapters of Genesis, however, there at first seems to be no sign of any movement towards the effects of the rebellion of Adam and Eve being overcome. On the contrary, the human race, with isolated exceptions such as Enoch and Noah, goes from bad to worse. Finally, in response to an attempt by the people of Babel to build a tower reaching up to heaven, the LORD scatters the nations and confuses their language so they lose the ability to communicate with each other. (Genesis 3:1-11:9).

As Gerhard von Rad observes in his commentary on Genesis, the LORD's judgement on Babel is unaccompanied by any of the signs of grace that have accompanied all the previous acts of divine judgement in Genesis and this raises the question as to whether the story of his dealings with human race has now reached the end of the line:

The story about the Tower of Babel concludes with God's judgement on mankind; there is no word of grace. The whole primeval history, therefore

¹¹ D Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1-11*, Leicester: IVP, 1990, p.97.

¹² *Ibid*, p.97.

seems to break off in shrill dissonance and the question we formulated above now arises even more urgently: Is God's relationship to the nations finally broken; is God's gracious forbearance now exhausted; has God rejected the nations in wrath forever? ¹³

The answer to this question is provided by the story of the call of Abraham, a story in which the LORD tells a man called Abraham, who comes from Ur of the Chaldees in what is now Iraq, to migrate to the land of Israel and promises that he will be a source of blessing to the nations that have been scattered:

Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the ones who curse you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Gen 12:1-3).

In the account of the subsequent history of Abraham's descendants, the people of Israel, in the rest of the Old Testament we then find this original promise to Abraham re-expressed and re-defined in relation to three key turning points in that history.

First, at the time of the Exodus the people of Israel are told by the LORD at Mount Sinai that he has rescued them from Egypt that they might be a missionary people bringing His blessing to the world;

...if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the people. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. (Exodus 19:5-6)

As Chris Wright explains, what this statement means is that:

God confers on Israel as a whole the role of being his priesthood in the midst of the nations. As the people of YHWH they would have the historical task of bringing the knowledge of God to the nations, and bringing the nations to the means of atonement with God. The Abrahamic task of being a means of blessing to the nations also put them in the role of priests in the midst of the nations. Just as it was the role of the priests to bless the Israelites, so it would be the role of Israel as a whole ultimately to be a blessing to the nations. ¹⁴

Secondly, shortly after the establishment of the Israelite monarchy, King David receives the promise of an everlasting dynasty (2 Samuel 7) and on the basis of this promise a king of David's line is seen as the one in whom God's rule of justice and peace will be established in all the world and in the whole created order (see Psalm 72, Isaiah 11:1-9, Zechariah 9: 9-10). In addition, as NT Wright notes, the Davidic capital of Jerusalem and the temple established there by Solomon at the LORD's command are seen as:

¹³ G Von Rad, *Genesis*, London: SCM, 1972, p.153.

¹⁴ Wright, *The Mission of God*, p.331.

...symbolising and embodying the promise that through Israel the world would receive the restoration, the reconciliation with the creator that it so badly needed.¹⁵

For this last point see Isaiah 2: 1-4, Micah 4 :1-3 and Isaiah 25:6-8.

Thirdly, the conquest of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BC, the end of the Davidic monarchy, and the destruction of Solomon's temple lead people to ask what the LORD was doing and whether he still has a future for his chosen people. As Lamentations 5 v 22 asks the LORD, 'hast thou utterly rejected us?' In the face of this questioning, prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel declare that the disaster that has taken place was the LORD's punishment for the sins of his people (Isaiah 40: 1-2, 43:20-28, Jeremiah 7:16-20, Ezekiel 36:16-19), but that there is still hope for the nation and through them for the world.

In the case of Isaiah this hope is bound up with a mysterious servant figure who will fulfil Israel's vocation of being a light to the nations and will redeem them from their sins through a ministry marked by vicarious suffering (Isaiah 42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-9, 52:13- 53:12). In the case of Jeremiah it involves the LORD making a new and better covenant with His people to replace the one made through Moses that His people have broken (Jeremiah 31:31-34). In the case of Ezekiel there is a vision of a rebuilt Jerusalem and a restored temple from which the river of life flows out to create a second Eden (Ezekiel 47:1-12).

Alongside these promises we also find in chapter 7 of the book of Daniel the description of a mysterious human figure 'one like a son of man' who comes to the LORD and is given universal and everlasting dominion over the nations:

And to him was given and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away; and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. (Dan 7:13-14)

There are two points to note here. The first is that the authority exercised by the 'son of man' is not an alternative to that exercise of authority by the LORD which is the key theme of the Book of Daniel. Rather, the universal and everlasting authority exercised by the 'son of man' is the authority of the LORD exercised through him. The second is that the word translated in English as 'serve' is a word that is only used elsewhere in the Old Testament to refer to the worship of God. The 'son of man' receives the worship of the nations, not as a rival to, but as an expression of, the worship of the LORD.

All these promises, the original promises made to Abraham, to the people at the Exodus and to David, the renewed promises made at the time of the exile to Babylon, and the promise of the exercise of universal sovereignty by the 'son of man' on behalf of the LORD, remain unfulfilled during the remainder of the history of Israel recorded in the Old Testament.

¹⁵ N T Wright, *New Tasks for a Renewed Church*

Israel does not become a source of universal blessing and even after the return from exile she constantly fails in her vocation to be a holy nation (see Isaiah 56-66, Haggai and Malachi). The Davidic line is not restored after the exile and so the promise that a Davidic king would exercise worldwide dominion remains unfulfilled. The nations do not come in pilgrimage to Zion as predicted by Isaiah and Micah. The figure of the suffering servant remains a puzzling enigma. There is no new covenant. A second Eden does not follow from the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its temple under Ezra and Nehemiah.

In terms of the original promise in Genesis 3:15, the serpent remains uncrushed by the seed of the woman.

(c) *The coming of the kingdom*

In the time between the end of the Old Testament period and the coming of Jesus the promises remained unfulfilled, but in spite of this fact the Jewish people remained committed to the belief that the LORD was the one true God and that one day what had been promised would take place.

It is sometimes suggested that in what has come to be known as ‘second temple Judaism,’ that is to say the Judaism that developed between the rebuilding of the temple by Ezra and its destruction by the Romans in AD 70, belief in the uniqueness of the LORD was qualified by a belief in various kinds of intermediary figures, principal angels, exalted humans such as Enoch, and personified divine attributes or functions such as the LORD’s Wisdom or Word, that had a semi-divine status. However, as Richard Bauckham argues in his book *God Crucified* the evidence does not support this suggestion.

With one exception, angels and exalted human beings are carefully distinguished from God. In spite of their importance, they remain creatures that exist to serve God and they may not be worshipped. The one exception is the depiction of the Son of Man in the *Parables of Enoch*, a Jewish work from the late first century BC or the early first century AD. In this work, which draws on Daniel 7, the Son of Man will exercise judgement on behalf of the LORD on the day of judgement and he will also be worshipped.¹⁶ However, as Bauckham notes, even in this case:

His inclusion in the divine identity is partial, since he plays no part in the work of creation or indeed the divine sovereignty until the future day of judgement, and therefore his inclusion in the divine identity remains equivocal.¹⁷

Furthermore, the Son of Man in Enoch is also the exception that proves the rule:

...he is the only such equivocal case, which shows, by contrast, the absence in other cases of any of the criteria by which Second Temple Jews would consider a heavenly figure to share the divine identity.¹⁸

¹⁶ See 1 Enoch 61:8, 62:2, 5, 69:27, 46:5, 48:5, 62:6,9.

¹⁷ R Bauckham, *God Crucified – Monotheism & Christology in the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999, p. 20.

In the case of the LORD's Word and Wisdom, who are described as participating in the LORD's creative activity,¹⁹ what are being described are aspects of the LORD's own identity. To quote Bauckham again:

In a variety of ways they express God, his mind and his will in relation to the world. They are not created beings, but nor are they semi-divine identities occupying some ambiguous status between the one God and the rest of reality. They belong to the unique divine identity.²⁰

The existence of ideas about the LORD's Word and Wisdom show that Jewish writers from the second temple period were able to envisage 'some form of real distinction within the unique identity of the one God'. However this did not mean that they were 'abandoning or in any way compromising their Jewish monotheism.'²¹ There was a clear distinction between the LORD and everything else, but as aspects of his being the LORD's Word and his Wisdom were on his side of the divide.

Overall the picture is clear. Jews of the second temple period held, in continuity with the Old Testament, that the LORD was the unique God, that his uniqueness consisted in the fact that he was the creator and ruler of all things and that as the unique God he was the only legitimate object of worship.

The belief that the LORD was faithful to his promises meant that second temple Judaism was also marked by the hope that the LORD would exercise his kingly power by intervening in history to liberate his people from their enemies, bring about the resurrection of the dead for blessing or judgement and inaugurate an era of universal peace and justice. The precise details about when and how the LORD would intervene were matters of controversy, but the hope that he would intervene was widespread.

This hope was expressed in a number of ways. There was the idea of a return from exile when the prophecies associated with the return from Babylon would finally be fulfilled. There was the idea that 'this age' would be succeeded by 'the age to come' when the LORD's power and justice would be fully manifested. Finally, there was the idea of the coming of the kingdom of God.

As N T Wright explains, the term 'kingdom of God' was only used sporadically, but when it was used it was as a:

...crucial shorthand expression for a concept that could be spoken of in a variety of other ways, such as the impossibility of having rulers other than Israel's god, or the divine necessity of reversing the present political situation and re-establishing, Israel, Temple, Land and Torah. This complex concept picks up and joins together the whole social, political, cultural and economic aspirations of the Jews of this period, and invests it with the religious and

¹⁸ Ibid, p.20.

¹⁹ See, for example, Psalm 33:9, Proverbs 8:30, Wisdom 7:22-8:1, Sirach 42:15, 4 Ezra 6:38, 2 Baruch 56:3-4, 2 Enoch 33:4.

²⁰ Bauckham, *God Crucified*, p. 21.

²¹ Ibid p.22.

theological dimension which, of course, it always possessed in mainline Jewish thinking.²²

It is this understanding of the coming of the LORD's kingdom that lies behind the language about the coming of the kingdom of God that we find in the Gospels. In Mark 1:14-15, for example, we are told that after the arrest of John the Baptist:

Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe in the good news.'

What this means is that Jesus was proclaiming that the hoped for intervention by the LORD was at last taking place. The LORD's kingly rule was breaking into the world to put things to rights and Jesus was summoning people to respond to this fact with repentance and faith.

It is the belief that the LORD's kingdom is breaking in that also lies behind all the other aspects of Jesus' life and ministry.

- In the story of the Magi in Matthew, the Magi come looking for one who has been born king of the Jews and likewise in the birth narratives in Luke's Gospel the birth of Jesus from the Virgin Mary is seen as the answer to the prayers of those like Simeon and Anna who are looking for the fulfilment of God's promises to Israel. (Matthew 2:1-12, Luke 2:25-38)
- The miracles are signs of the kingdom because they are demonstrations of God's kingly rule in action. The LORD, the creator God, is at work putting his broken creation to rights and so the sick are healed, the dead are raised, the hungry are fed and the demons are cast out. (Matthew 11:2-6, Luke 4:16-19, 11:20).
- The parables are instruments of the kingdom in the sense that through the parables people are confronted with the reality of the kingdom and are challenged to live in accordance with his reality and as people respond or fail to respond to these parables so they respond or fail to respond to what the LORD is doing. (Matthew 13:1-53, Luke 15:1-32)
- Jesus' meals with tax collectors and sinners are a declaration that the LORD's kingdom is open to anyone who is willing to turn from their sins and accept Jesus' message and occasions where they can begin to share now in the life of that kingdom (Mark 2:13-22, Luke 15: 1-32, 19:1-10).
- The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew and the Sermon on the Plain in Luke are declarations about what it means to live in the light of the kingdom. (Matthew 5:1-7:28, Luke 6:17-49)

²² N T Wright, *The New Testament and The People of God*, London: SPCK, 1992, p. 303.

- The prayer that Jesus taught his disciples, the ‘Lord’s prayer,’ is a prayer that the LORD will complete the bringing in of his kingdom. (Matthew 6:9-13, Luke 11:2-4)
- Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem riding on a donkey is intended as a fulfilment of the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9-10 about the coming of Israel’s true king to inaugurate the LORD’s rule of universal peace.(Matthew 21:1-11) The cleansing of the Temple which then followed was a sign that this coming would mean a final act of judgement and redemption by God involving the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans (Matthew 21;12-17).²³
- The key titles ‘Messiah’ and ‘Son of Man’ used to describe Jesus in the Gospels (see for example Matthew 16:13-38 and 27:63-68) are both related to the coming of the LORD’s kingdom. The term Messiah (literally meaning ‘anointed one’) was used to refer to the person who would be anointed by the LORD to bring in his kingdom and the term Son of Man refers to the description in Daniel 7:1-14 of a human figure who receives universal dominion from the LORD on behalf of God’s people.

The term ‘kingdom of God’ is used much less frequently in John’s Gospel than it is in the other three. However, the story of Jesus’ meeting with Nicodemus in John 3:1-21 makes it clear that John’s language about receiving eternal life in his equivalent of the language about entering the kingdom of God used in the other Gospels. John is thus describing the same idea as the other Gospels, the LORD’s decisive intervention is now taking place and people are being challenged to respond to it, but he prefers to use other language to describe it. Furthermore, the story in John 18:33-38 about Pilate’s questioning Jesus about whether he is the ‘King of the Jews’ makes it clear that Jesus was understood to be proclaiming an alternative kind of kingdom to that of Caesar.

As well as making clear that the Jewish hope for the coming of the LORD’s kingdom was now being fulfilled was at the heart of Jesus’ ministry, the Gospels also make it clear that Jesus believed that the climax of the coming of the kingdom would be his death and resurrection.

Matthew 16:21-23 and the parallel passages in Mark and Luke make it clear that this belief was shocking to Jesus’ disciples. This is not surprising. In the words of Tom Wright:

...nobody in this period supposed that the Messiah would have to suffer, let alone die. Indeed, that was the very opposite of normal expectations. The Messiah was supposed to be leading the triumphant fight against Israel’s enemies, not dying at their hands. This why, having come to the view that their extraordinary leader was indeed God’s anointed, the disciples could not imagine that he meant it literally when he spoke of his coming death and resurrection. Resurrection was something which, in Jewish belief, would

²³ For the significance of the entry into Jerusalem and the cleansing of the Temple see NT Wright *Jesus and the Victory of God*, London: SPCK, 1996, pp.489-510.

happen to all God's people at the very end, not to one person in the middle of history.²⁴

If we ask why Jesus saw things differently, the answer is that he understood his vocation as the Messiah in the light of the teaching of the Book of Isaiah.

In Isaiah 40-55 there is an account of how the LORD will show that he is the one true God. As Bauckham explains, these chapters:

...look to the day when the God of Israel will demonstrate himself to be the one and only God in the sight of all the nations, revealing his glory and salvation in the deliverance of his people, so that all the ends of the earth will acknowledge him as God and turn to him for salvation. It is in his great act of eschatological salvation, the new Exodus, that the one and only God will demonstrate his unique deity universally. This is also the coming of his kingdom, announced by the messenger who brings good news (the Gospel) of salvation, saying to Zion, 'Your God reigns' (Isa 52:7; cf 40:9). The one God implements his universal sovereignty in the new Exodus which demonstrates his deity to the nations.²⁵

As we have already noted, these chapters contain a series of references to a mysterious servant figure who will fulfil Israel's vocation of being a light to the nations and will redeem them from their sins through a ministry marked by vicarious suffering and in Isaiah 52:13-15 the prophet also declares that this suffering will lead to exaltation in the sight of all the nations:

Behold my servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. As many were astonished at him – his appearance was so marred beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the sons of men – so shall he startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been told them they shall see, and that which they have not heard they shall understand.

According to the Gospels, Jesus understood his vocation to be that of the Isaianic servant from the outset of his ministry. We can see this in the account of Jesus' baptism in which the voice from heaven declares 'Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased' (Mark 1:11). These words are a fusion of words from Psalm 2:7 which describe a king of Israel who has been given authority by the LORD to rule over the nations and Isaiah 42:1 which introduces the servant for the first time. To quote F F Bruce, this fusion indicates that Jesus Messiahship:

...was to be realized in terms of the portrayal of the Servant, humble, obedient, suffering, accomplishing His mission by passing through death, and committing his vindication confidently to God.²⁶

²⁴ NT Wright, *Simply Christian*, London: SPCK, 2006, pp.91-92.

²⁵ Bauckham, *God Crucified*, pp.48-49.

²⁶ F F Bruce, 'Messiah', in J D Douglas et al (eds), *The New Bible Dictionary*, Leicester: IVP, 1980, p.818.

The fact that Jesus understood his ministry in terms of the Servant explains the predictions made by Jesus in the first three gospels that the Son of Man will suffer and die, but be raised on the third day and that he will give his life as a ransom for many (see Mark 8:31, 9:9-11, 9:31, 10:33, 10:45 and the parallel passages in Matthew and Luke). What makes best sense of these predictions is if Jesus believed that the exaltation of the suffering Servant referred to in Isaiah 52:13 was the same as the coming of the Son of Man to the LORD to receive the kingdom in Daniel 7²⁷ and the exaltation of the Messiah to the right hand of God in Ps 110:1. This would explain Jesus' use of Psalm 110 to refer to himself in Matthew 22:41-46 (and also the way in which the Psalm was applied to Jesus by the early Church – see for example Acts 2:33, 5:31, Heb 1:3) and his reference to Daniel 7:13 in answer to the high priest's question about whether he was the Messiah (Mk 14:61-62). It would also explain why he believed that God would raise him from the dead. To be exalted to God's right hand in order to rule over the nations he would have to be raised from the dead.

A combination of Isaiah, Daniel 7 and Psalm 110 also explains the passages in John's Gospel which talk about Jesus' death in terms of the lifting up of the Son of Man and the Son of Man being glorified (John 3:14-15, 8:28, 12:23, 12:32-34, 13:31-32). Jesus' suffering involves his being literally lifted up on a cross, but because the suffering of the Servant/Son of Man also means his being exalted to the LORD's right hand it can also be described as the point at which he is lifted up in the sense of being exalted. Furthermore, the suffering of the Servant/Son of Man can also be described as his glorification because his exaltation is the point where he is glorified by the LORD (Isaiah 52:13) and as such is the point at which the LORD's glory, the revelation of who the LORD truly is, is revealed to the nations (Isaiah 40:3).

In summary, to quote the words of Pope Benedict in his book *Jesus of Nazareth*, what the Gospels tell us is that:

Jesus, while on the one hand identifying himself with the coming judge of the world, also identifies himself ...with the suffering and dying Servant of God whom the Prophet foretells in his Songs. The unity of suffering and 'exaltation,' of abasement and majesty, becomes visible. Service is the true form of rule and it gives us an insight into God's way of being Lord, of 'God's Lordship.' In suffering and in death, the life of the Son of man becomes sheer 'pro-existence.' He becomes the Redeemer and bringer of salvation for the 'many': not only for the scattered children of Israel, but for all the scattered children of God (cf Jn 11.52), for humanity. In his death 'for many' he transcends the boundaries of place and time, and the universality of his mission comes to fulfilment.²⁸

(d) *Jesus' divine identity*

In his book *Jesus the Christ*, H E W Turner writes as follows:

²⁷ Andrew Angel notes that the Gospel writers' use of the definite article before the term 'Son of Man' is an emphatic usage that refers to a particular son of man and that in context the son of man that is meant has to be the son of man described in Daniel 7. See A Angel, *Chaos and the Son of Man*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2006 and his unpublished article *Like a Bad Penny – The Son Of Man, Again!*.

²⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, London: Bloomsbury, 2007, p.332.

There is an important scholastic principle that ‘operation follows being’ (*operari sequitur esse*). This calls attention to the need to offer an adequate ontological grounding for unity in activity and operation. The functional cannot replace the ontological as the final target for Christology.²⁹

What Turner’s observation means is that we have to ask not just what we can learn from the New Testament about what Jesus’ activity, but also about who Jesus’ identity. Was he and is he simply a human being, or was and is he something more?

(1) *The Synoptic Gospels*

If we begin to answer this question by looking at the Synoptic Gospels we find seven ways in which they declare that Jesus is not simply a human being, but one who shares the identity of the LORD.

First, the overall contents of the Synoptic Gospels point us to an identity between Jesus and the LORD since, as we have already indicated, they describe the ministry of Jesus in terms of the activity of the LORD himself. In the words of Walter Kasper, the witness of the Gospels is that in Jesus: ‘...we meet God and his glory. In him we come into contact with God’s grace and judgement. He is God’s kingdom, God’s word and God’s love in person.’³⁰

Secondly, in all three Gospels we find a description of the ministry of John the Baptist in which his ministry is described in terms of Isaiah 40:3 with its description of a prophetic vocation to prepare the way for the coming of the LORD (Matthew 3:1-12, Mark 1:1-8, Luke 3:12-17). However, the one who comes is Jesus, with the implication being that the coming of Jesus *is* the coming of the LORD predicted by Isaiah. The point is reinforced in Mark 1:2 with a reference to Malachi 3:1, a verse in which the LORD says that he is sending a messenger to prepare the way for his coming in judgement and blessing.

Thirdly, in the Synoptic Gospels we find a number of statements by or about Jesus which state that he has come with a particular purpose. Thus we read in Mark 1:24 that the demons in a man with an unclean spirit call out ‘What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?’ Thus also, Jesus declares in Luke 12:49 ‘I have come to cast fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled.’³¹

As Simon Gathercole argues,³² these kind of statements correspond to the use of the formula ‘I have come + a statement of purpose’ in Jewish literature to describe the way in which angels and also the prophet Elijah are sent from heaven to earth to perform particular tasks. In the light of this Jewish literary tradition the best way to

²⁹ H E W Turner, *Jesus the Christ*, London: Mowbrays, 1976, p.94.

³⁰ W Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, London and New York, Burns & Oates/Paulist Press, 1976, p.103.

³¹ The other relevant texts are Matthew 8:29, Matthew 9:13/ Mark 2:17/Luke 5:32, Matthew 5:17, Matthew 10:34/Luke 12:52, Matthew 10:35, Matthew 20:28/Mark 10:45, Luke 19:10.

³² S Gathercole, *The Pre-existent Son*, Grand Rapids & Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006.

understand the statements in the Synoptic gospels about Jesus' coming is to see them as statements that Jesus has come from heaven to undertake his task of bringing in the kingdom.

Furthermore, if Jesus has come to earth from heaven to undertake this task it follows that he must have had an existence in heaven prior to this coming. The idea of Jesus' pre-existence is also reinforced by Jesus' lament over Jerusalem in Matthew 23:37-39 in which the words 'How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings and you were not willing!' make most sense if they are seen as referring to the whole history of Israel and therefore as implying Jesus' pre-existence. The image of a hen gathering her brood under her wings also echoes the description of the LORD's relationship with Israel (see Deuteronomy 32:11, Psalms 17:8, 36:7, 91:4).³³

Fourthly, there are a number of places in the Gospels where the issue of Jesus' identity is raised in such a way as to lead the reader to make the identification between Jesus and the LORD.

Thus in Mark 2: 1-12 the scribes respond to Jesus telling a paralytic that his sins are forgiven by asking 'Why does this man speak thus? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?' Rather than answer this question directly, Jesus then heals the paralytic as a sign that 'the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins' and in reporting this story the conclusion Mark wants his readers to draw is that in Jesus as Son of Man the LORD is present to offer people forgiveness.

Thus also, in Mark 4:35-41 we have the story of Jesus stilling the storm on the Sea of Galilee and we are told that the disciples 'were filled with awe, and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him.' In the Old Testament authority over the waves of the sea is one of the attributes of the LORD (Psalms 65:7, 89:9, 107:29) and so the reader is being alerted to the fact that Jesus has just demonstrated his identity with the LORD. The point is made even more clearly in Matthew's account of Jesus walking on the water, which concludes with the statement that 'those in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.' (Matthew 14:33). If Jesus is the legitimate object of worship then the term 'Son of God' here must involve identity with the LORD.

At the end of both Matthew and Luke the risen Jesus is the object of worship by the disciples (Matthew 28:17, Luke 24:52) and the point just made applies in these cases also.

Fifthly, in Matthew 11:27 and in the parallel verse in Luke 10:22 we are told about Jesus' statement 'All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father and know one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.' As Tom Smal comments, this verse tells us that:

The Father has committed all things (*panta*) to the Son. He does not speak, act or give himself to be known apart from his Son. The Father has not lost the

³³ Ibid., pp. 210-227.

initiating control in revelation, because at every point the Son looks to him; he exercises his sovereignty, however, in essential communion with the Son, who is the agent and medium of the enactment and revelation of his will among men.³⁴

In addition, this verse makes clear:

...that the relationship of Father and Son is not only the way in which the knowledge of God reaches us, but is itself an essential and constitutive part of what we know. To know God is to know the Father through the Son and the Son through the Father. Jesus is not just the prophet of God who speaks of and points to a truth of which he is the adventitious and inessential mouthpiece, so that it could be as well revealed through some other spokesman, without itself being altered. Jesus, however, is not in that sense the mere minister of God's truth, he is an essential part of its content. To know God is to know this relationship between Father in heaven and Son on earth.³⁵

Furthermore, Jesus goes on to say 'Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls' (Matthew 11:28-29). As Smail notes, this statement implies the same Christology as the previous prayer:

Many can say, Go to God, but only Jesus can say come to me, for to come to him *is* to come to God. The Father is *Kurios*, Lord of heaven and earth and Jesus is meek and lowly, yet from the midst of the humility and humanity there ring out the accents of the divine authority that he shares with the Father.³⁶

What we see in these verses then, is that the relationship between Jesus and the one he called Father is a relationship that exists within the identity of the LORD. The LORD's identity includes the Father and the Son.

Sixthly, all three Gospels record that people were astonished at the authoritative nature of Jesus' teaching (Matthew 28-29, Mark 1:22, Luke 4:32) and if we look at this teaching what we find is that Jesus' teaching is not based on the citation of previous authoritative interpreters of the Scriptures, nor on having a 'word of the Lord' like the prophets. Rather, Jesus' speaks on his own authority and in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew it is made clear that Jesus' words have a higher authority even that that of the Torah, the law given by the LORD to Moses. The point that is being made implicitly is that Jesus words have authority because they are the words of one who shares the identity of the LORD.

This is a point that is noted by the Jewish scholar Jacob Neusner who argues in his book *A Rabbi talks with Jesus*, that Jesus' attitude to the Torah as recorded in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere makes him want to ask Jesus 'Who do you think you are? God?'³⁷

³⁴ T A Smail, *The Forgotten Father*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1980, p.52.

³⁵ Ibid, pp.52-53.

³⁶ Ibid, p.53.

³⁷ J Neusner, *A Rabbi talks with Jesus*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000.

Seventhly, Matthew's Gospel is carefully constructed so that the name given to Jesus at the beginning of the Gospel, Emmanuel – God with us (Matthew 1:23) – forms an *inclusio* with the statement of the risen Jesus in Matthew 28:20 'I am with you always, to the close of the age.' The point that St. Matthew is making by this literary device is that the one who is with the Church throughout its mission is the one who can rightly be described as God.

The identity of Jesus with the LORD is also underlined in the final section of Matthew's Gospel by the fact already noted that he is the object of worship, by the fact that he shares the LORD's universal authority and by the fact that along with the Father and the Holy Spirit he is included in the one divine name into which the nations are to be baptised.

(2) *The Fourth Gospel*

In John's Gospel we find the same emphasis on Jesus' identity with the LORD as in the Synoptic Gospels, but we find it expressed in a different fashion.

First, in the prologue to the Gospel (John 1:1-18) St John describes Jesus as being the LORD's 'word.' As many commentators have noted, the term 'word' (or in Greek *logos*) was one that was important in both in Jewish theology and Hellenistic philosophy. St John is therefore using a term that will help both Jewish and Greek readers to understand who Jesus is.

In the words of John Marsh:

The prologue gives an outline of the 'history' of the divine Word. It begins with the same words as Genesis 1, and yet does not restrict in any way the 'Word' to God's uttered speech, or even to his creative action. Rather, in the manner of rabbinic Judaism it conceives of the Word, as Judaism thought of the Law or Wisdom, as with God before his creative acts took place. Or, in Hellenistic terms, it sees the Logos as the satisfying rational principle for understanding the universe. The Word may thus be likened to the eternal purpose of God, giving meaning to the whole of existence; and by insisting that such a purpose was, in his sense of the phrase, *in the beginning with God*, John seeks to convey to his readers of every age the conviction that what took place as divine action in the life of Jesus Christ was not some 'afterthought' of God, but the true embodiment in a personal historical life of the whole purpose of God, and of all the meaning of the universe.³⁸

In John 1:1 St John declares 'the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' In this verse St. John explicitly identifies the Word as 'God' (by which he means the LORD) an identification that is repeated in John 1:18 'No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart who has made him known.' and in John 20:28 in which St Thomas confesses the risen Jesus to be 'My Lord and my God.' However, by declaring that the Word was 'with God' and omitting the Greek definite article St John also makes clear that Word is not the whole of God. As R V G Tasker

³⁸ J Marsh, *Saint John*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968, p.97.

puts it, the ‘Word does not by Himself make up the entire Godhead; nevertheless the divinity that belongs to the rest of the Godhead belongs also to Him.’³⁹

As was noted earlier in this paper, one of the key aspects of the uniqueness of the LORD in the Old Testament is the fact that the LORD is the sole creator and sustainer of all things. As part of its identification of the Word with the LORD the prologue to John’s Gospel declares that the Word shares in the LORD’s creative activity. As Marsh notes, the opening words of John 1 echo the opening words of the creation account in Genesis 1 and John 1:3 then goes on to say that ‘all things were made’ through the Word and that ‘without him was not made anything that was made.’

Secondly, in John’s Gospel there is a series of seven sayings in which Jesus says of himself ‘I am’ (John 4:26, 6:20, 8:24, 28, 58, 13:19, 18:5,6,8⁴⁰). In addition there is a series of fourteen sayings in which Jesus uses the term ‘I am’ in conjunction with some other self description. One example is John 8:12 ‘I am the light of the world’ and the others are John 6:35, 41, 48,51, 9:5, 10:7, 9,11,14, 11:25, 14:6, 15:1,5. In the Old Testament the term ‘I am’ is used seven times (Deuteronomy 32:29, Isaiah 41:4, 43:10, 13, 46:4, 48:12, 52:6) and ‘it serves to declare in the most concise of forms, the uniqueness of God, equivalent to the more common ‘I am YHWH.’’⁴¹

As Bauckham notes, the series of seven absolute ‘I am’ sayings:

...comprehensively identifies Jesus with the God of Israel who sums up his identity in the declaration ‘I am he.’ More than that, these sayings identify Jesus as the eschatological revelation of the unique identity of God, predicted by Deutero-Isaiah.⁴²

The second series of ‘I am’ sayings relates to the second point made by Bauckham in this quotation. These sayings serve as a commentary on the activity of Jesus in the fourth Gospel, making clear what is implicit in the Synoptic account, namely that the activity of Jesus is nothing less than the self revelation of the LORD in the person of Jesus. For example, the raising of the dead occurs in both the Synoptics and John, but in John the raising of Lazarus is accompanied by the declaration ‘I am the resurrection and the life’ which is short hand for ‘I am the LORD, the God who raises the dead and gives eternal life, present among you in the person of Jesus.’

Thirdly, in the fifth of the absolute ‘I am’ sayings Jesus claims pre-existence. ‘Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am’ (John 8:58). To quote Marsh again, in this saying Jesus laid claim ‘...not only to be the Jewish Messiah in history, but a being whose real existence was in eternity, although he was now in the flesh in time.’⁴³ This claim ties in, of course with the pre-existence of the Word described in the prologue to the Gospel.

Fourthly, in John 10:30 Jesus claims unity with the LORD with the words ‘I and the Father are one.’ It has sometimes been argued that the unity spoken of in this verse is

³⁹ R V G Tasker, *The Gospel According to St John*, London: Tyndale Press, 1960, p.45.

⁴⁰ The seventh saying is repeated twice.

⁴¹ Bauckham, *God Crucified*, p.55.

⁴² Ibid pp.55-56.

⁴³ Marsh op.cit p.371.

a unity of will and activity rather than of being. It is true that the context of this verse is the statement about the unity in activity and power of the Father and the Son in keeping believers safe in their possession of eternal life. However, as B F Westcott notes, the unity of power between the Father and the Son itself points to a unity of being between them:

It seems clear that the unity here spoken of cannot fall short of unity of essence. The thought springs from equality of power (my hand, the Father's hand); but infinite power is an essential attribute of God; and it is impossible to suppose that two beings distinct in essence could be equal in power.⁴⁴

Fifthly, in John 17:11 and 12 Jesus talks about 'your name' which the Father has given him. As Larry Hurtado observes, in Old Testament passages such as Exodus 3:13-16 and Deuteronomy 12:11, 'the divine name is an important way of making statements about God's activity, presence, character and being.'⁴⁵ Furthermore, in Isaiah 52:5-6 part of the LORD's promise for the future is that a day will come when 'my people shall know my name; therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak.' In the light of this Old Testament material, declares Hurtado:

To speak of Jesus as invested with the divine name, as coming in and with the name of God, as given the name, and as manifesting God's name in his words and actions was to portray Jesus as bearing and exhibiting God in the most direct way possible in the conceptual categories available in the biblical tradition, and within the limits of the monotheistic commitment of that tradition.⁴⁶

As he goes on to say:

To think of Jesus as being given the divine name (Jn 17:11-12) is fully consonant with, and also explains, other features of Johannine Christology. Obviously he is thus able to make the divine name known (17:6, 26) in his own actions, which he also performs in the name of the Father (10:25), and in his words as well, which are also the works of the Father who 'abides' (*menon*) in him (14:10 see also 12:49-50). Moreover, of course, the idea that Jesus has been given the divine name accounts for the Johannine Jesus' frequent use of the divine self-referential formula *ego eimi* (I am) which is virtually a synonym for God's name in Isaiah and probably in ... John. Furthermore, the statements in John 14:9-10, 'whoever has seen me has seen the Father' and 'I am in the Father and the Father is in me,' are likely to be taken as reflecting and cohering with the idea that Jesus has been given the divine name, and in some direct sense embodies it on earth.⁴⁷

The idea of Jesus possessing the divine name also coheres with the identification of Jesus as the new Temple. In the Old Testament the distinctive thing about the Temple in Jerusalem was that it was the dwelling place of the LORD's name, the place where

⁴⁴ B F Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John*, London: John Murray, 1924, p.159.

⁴⁵ L Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ – Devotion to Jesus in earliest Christianity*, Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003, p.382

⁴⁶ *Ibid* p.385

⁴⁷ *Ibid* p. 385

the LORD was present in the midst of his people. In John's account of Jesus' cleansing of the Temple in John 2:13-25, John tells us that Jesus' statement 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up' (John 2:19) actually refers to Jesus' body and its resurrection on the third day (John 2:20-22). The point is clear. Jesus' body has replaced the Temple as the dwelling place of the name, the place where the LORD is present with his people.

This idea is also suggested in John 1:14 where the statement that 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us' literally means that the Word 'tabernacled' amongst us. Jesus is the place in which the LORD's Word dwells among the LORD's people in the same way that the tabernacle was the place in which the LORD dwelt amongst his people prior to the building of the first Temple.

(3) Son of Man and Son of God.

If we now compare the accounts of Jesus' identity given in the Synoptic Gospels and in John's Gospel what we find is that these accounts give the same answer to the question 'who is Jesus?' In both the Synoptics and John Jesus shares the identity of the LORD. He is the LORD dwelling in a human being and thus what he says and does the LORD says and does.

It is this presence of the LORD in Jesus that is expressed when Jesus is described in the Gospels as the Son of God.

In the Old Testament the term Son of God does not necessarily carry overtones of deity. As we have noted, angels are described as 'sons of God' (Job 1:6) and the term is also used of Israel collectively (Hosea 11:1) and of the Davidic king (2 Sam 7:14). Against this background, the use of the term Son of God by the writers of the New Testament does not of itself imply that they are identifying Jesus with the LORD.

In the Gospels, however, it is clear that the term is used in a specific sense to describe the unique relationship that Jesus has within the Godhead with the one he calls his Father and it is this unique relationship that is referred to at the key moments in the Gospels where Jesus is described as the Son of God (see, for instance, Matthew 3:17, 4:3,5, 16:16, 27:54, Mark 3:11, Luke 1:34, John 1:34, 49, 3:16-18, 20:31). This point is made explicit in John 5:17-24, where the claim that Jesus is the Son of the Father is understood to be a clear claim to equality with the LORD.

As was noted above, in the Gospels the term Son of Man is used to describe Jesus as the human figure who carries out the role of the servant figure in Isaiah by bringing in the LORD's kingdom through a ministry marked by suffering and death and who is then exalted to the right hand of the LORD to rule over the nations in accordance with Daniel 7:14. The term Son of God serves to show the other side of the coin. It shows that the full picture is not that of a human being exalted to the throne of the LORD, but the LORD himself coming in humility to bring in his kingdom as the Son of Man. In the words of Hurtado, Son of Man 'designates Jesus operating in the

human/historical sphere' and Son of God 'discloses the higher significance of who this human figure really is.'⁴⁸

(4) *The rest of the New Testament*

If we move on from the Gospels to the rest of the New Testament it is clear that Jesus is seen as someone who was truly human.

We see this, for example, in Galatians 4:4 where we read that 'when the time had fully come God sent forth his Son, born of woman born under the law,' in Philippians 2:7 where we read that Christ Jesus 'emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men' and Hebrews 2:14 where we read 'since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature.' In 1 John 4:2-3 we are told that 'every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not of God.

It is important to note, however, that in both Philippians 2 and Hebrews 2 Jesus' humanity is something that Jesus took upon himself. In line with the 'I have come' sayings in the Synoptics and the prologue to the Fourth Gospel, the picture we have in Philippians and Hebrews and in the New Testament as a whole is that of Jesus as a pre-existing divine figure who takes human nature upon himself in order to fulfil the saving purposes of the LORD.

Jesus' divine identity is affirmed in the New Testament outside the Gospels in a number of different ways.

Firstly, there are four passages, Romans 9:5, Titus 2:13, Hebrews 1:8 and 2 Peter 1:1, where Jesus is explicitly called 'God.'⁴⁹ It is probable that Philippians 2:6 should also be added to this list since just as the parallel term 'likeness of men' in verse 7 means that Jesus became truly human so the statement that he was in the 'form of God' in verse 6 means that he shared the divine nature prior to the incarnation.⁵⁰

Secondly, in 1 Corinthians 8:6, Colossians 1:15-16, Hebrews 1:2-3, and Revelation 3:14, Jesus is described as participating in the LORD's unique role of creating and sustaining all things.

In addition to the role it gives Jesus in relation to creation, 1 Corinthians 8:6 is interesting for two further reasons.

(a) It represents an expansion of Deuteronomy 6:4, the fundamental Old Testament affirmation of the oneness of the LORD to include Jesus. Deuteronomy 6:4, known as the *shema* because of its opening word in Hebrew, reads 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord Our God is one Lord.' In 1 Corinthians 8:6 St. Paul expands this formula to include

⁴⁸ Ibid. p.306.

⁴⁹ In each of these cases the interpretation of the text is disputed, but in each case the attribution of the term God to Jesus remains the most probable reading. For discussions of these texts see A Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament*, London: SPCK, 1962 and M J Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament use of Theos in reference to Jesus*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992.

⁵⁰ For the interpretation of this passage see Bauckham, *God Crucified*, pp 56-58, and the literature cited there.

both God the Father and Jesus ‘yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.’⁵¹

(b) In I Corinthians 8:6 St. Paul refers to Jesus as ‘Lord.’ The Greek word for Lord, *kurios*, was used by Greek speaking Jews as a way of referring to the LORD, the God of Israel,⁵² and the term seems to have been taken over very early by the Christians as a way of affirming the identity of Jesus with the LORD whilst also distinguishing him from the Father, for whom the term God was generally used.⁵³ As well as 1 Corinthians 8:6 we can see this usage, for example in Romans 1:7, 2 Corinthians 13:14, James 1:1 and 1 Peter 1:3. The saving confession ‘Jesus is Lord’ in Romans 10:9 is thus a confession of Jesus’ identity with the LORD.

Thirdly, Jesus is also described as sharing in the LORD’s unique sovereignty over all things. In accordance with what seem to have been Jesus’ own expectations, the New Testament outside the Gospels teaches on the basis of Psalm 110:1 and Psalm 8:6 that the exalted Jesus is Lord over all things (Acts 10:36, 1 Corinthians 15:27-28, Ephesians 1:22, Philippians 3:21, Hebrews 1:2, 2:8).

The sovereignty of the exalted Jesus also extends to the angelic powers. We can see this in Ephesians 1:21 where we read that Jesus has been exalted ‘far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come’ and in 1 Peter 3:22 where we read that Jesus ‘has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities and powers subject to him.’ The superiority of Jesus over the angels is also emphasised in Hebrews 1:4-14 and it is significant because, to quote Bauckham:

...if Jesus is superior to the angels, participating in the divine sovereignty, this means, precisely for Jewish monotheistic conceptuality, that he is included in the unique identity of the one God.⁵⁴

Fourthly, in line with what we have already seen in John 17:11-12, in Philippians 2:9 and Hebrews 1:4 Jesus is said to have been given ‘the name that is above every name’, that is to say, the name of the LORD. As we saw when looking at John 17, for Jesus to be given the divine name means that he participates in the identity of the LORD. In line with this we read in Acts 2:7-21, 38, 9:14, 22:16, Romans 10:9-13, 1 Corinthians 1:2, and 2 Timothy 2:22 about the first Christians ‘calling upon the name of the Lord’. This is originally an Old Testament phrase meaning to invoke the God of Israel by his name the LORD (as in Joel 2:32 ‘all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered’ which St. Paul quotes in Romans 10:13) but in the New Testament it means

⁵¹ For St. Paul’s expansion of the *shema* in this verse see Ibid, pp.36-40.

⁵² The term *kurios* had a variety of meanings in first century Greek. It could, for instance, simply mean ‘sir’. However, it is this Jewish usage that seems to have shaped the way that the term was used by the Early Church to refer to Jesus.

⁵³ The early use of the term is reflected not only in the use of the term ‘Lord’ by St. Peter on the day of Pentecost as reported in Acts 2:36, but also the use of the Aramaic term ‘*Maranatha*’ (‘Come Lord Jesus!’) in 1 Corinthians 16:22 a term which preserves the usage of the original Aramaic speaking Church.

⁵⁴ Bauckham, *God Crucified*, p.33.

invoking Jesus ‘as the divine Lord who exercises the divine sovereignty and bears the divine name.’⁵⁵

Fifthly, and in line with the practice of invoking Jesus as Lord, Jesus is described as the object of worship. We find references to prayer to Jesus, both individually and together with God the Father (Acts 7:59, 9:10-15, 1 Corinthians 16:22, 2 Corinthians 12:8-9, 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13, 2 Thessalonians 2:16). We also find in Philippians 2:9-11 and Revelation 5:1-14 that Jesus is the object of universal worship by the whole created order. The passage from Philippians is particularly significant in that it is a deliberate re-working of Isaiah 45:22-23. As Bauckham explains:

This passage in Deutero-Isaiah depicts – indeed it is *the* passage in Deutero-Isaiah which depicts – the eschatological demonstration of YHWH’s unique deity to the whole world. This is the point at which the one Creator of all things and Sovereign over all things proves himself to be so, acknowledged as both only God and only Saviour by all the ends of the earth which turn to him in worship and for salvation. The Philippians passage is therefore no unconsidered echo of an Old Testament text, but a claim that it is in the exaltation of Jesus, his identification as YHWH in YHWH’s universal sovereignty, that the unique deity of the God of Israel comes to be acknowledged as such by all creation. Precisely Deutero-Isaianic monotheism is fulfilled in the revelation of Jesus’ participation in the divine identity. Eschatological monotheism proves to be christological monotheism.⁵⁶

Sixthly in the Book of Revelation we find a set of three parallel phrases applied both to God and Jesus.

In Revelation 1:8 God says ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega.’

In Revelation 1:17 Jesus says ‘I am the first and the last.’

In Revelation 21:6 God says ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega the beginning and the end.’

In Revelation 22:13 Christ says ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.’

As Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet it is clear that all three phrases are regarded as equivalent and they are all modelled on two declarations by the LORD in Isaiah 44:6 and 48:12, ‘I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no God’ and ‘I am He, I am the first, and I am the last.’ In Isaiah the declaration ‘I am the first and I am the last’ expresses the fact that the LORD ‘precedes all things as their creator and as the Lord of history brings all things to their eschatological fulfilment.’⁵⁷ Revelation says this is also true of Jesus. In the words of Bauckham:

⁵⁵ Ibid p.34

⁵⁶ Ibid p. 53.

⁵⁷ Ibid p. 54

Revelation thus includes Christ both protologically and eschatologically in the identity of the one God of Deutero-Isaianic monotheism. Indeed, it is to Christ rather than to God that it attributes the specifically Deutero-Isaianic form of the title, 'the first and the last,' on which the other two forms are variations. Once again, Deutero-Isaianic monotheism is interpreted as christological monotheism. God proves to be not only the first but also the last, the Omega of all things, when his kingdom comes in that coming of Christ towards which the whole book of Revelation is orientated.⁵⁸

(e) Jesus is the LORD and the LORD is Jesus

To summarise where we have got to so far, what we have seen is that according to the biblical witness

- The LORD, the God of Israel is the only God there is and his uniqueness is shown in the fact that he alone is the creator, sustainer and ruler of all things.
- The LORD has made a series of promises of blessing to his people and through them to the world.
- The LORD has fulfilled these promises by bringing in his kingdom in person in Jesus who is a human being, but also emmanuel, God with us, the divine Word made flesh.

What all these three points mean is that Jesus is the LORD and the LORD is Jesus.

Jesus is the LORD not in the sense that he is the LORD without remainder (a point which we have already noted in relation to John 1:1 and to which we will return), but in the sense that he possesses all the identifying characteristics that mark out the LORD as the one true God. He possesses the divine name and he has created, sustains and rules all things in heaven and earth. As such he is the proper object of universal worship.

The LORD is Jesus in the sense that the identity of the LORD is definitively revealed by his presence in Jesus. This means two things.

Firstly, the LORD is indeed the God described by Isaiah 40-55, the God who fulfils his purposes of blessing and thus reveals his glory among the nations through a ministry marked by obedience, humility, suffering and death. As Karl Barth observes:

If in faith in Jesus Christ we are ready to learn, to be told, what Godhead, or the divine nature is, we are confronted with what is and always will be to all other ways of thinking a mystery, and indeed a mystery that offends. The mystery reveals to us that for God it is just as natural to be lowly as it is to be high, to be near as it is to be far, to be little as it is to be great, to be abroad as it is to be at home.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Ibid p.54.

⁵⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV.1*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956, p. 77.

Secondly, the identity of the LORD involves a set of inter-personal relationships. As we have previously noted, the LORD's identity as revealed in Jesus involves both Jesus and the one he calls his Father. Furthermore, according to the witness of the New Testament, it also involves the Holy Spirit.

As Smail notes, for instance:

It is impossible to make any sense of the Jesus of the gospels if we treat him as a solitary individual whose significance is in himself. From first to last, from the twelve-year-old boy in the temple who even then knows he is about his Father's business, (Luke 2:49) through the agonized man in Gethsemane wrestling with Abba's will and purpose (Mark 14:16) to the dying man on Calvary committing himself and his cause into his Father's hands (Luke 23:46) – from the very beginning to the very end, Jesus is who he is and does what he does entirely on the basis of his relationship to his Father; in Johannine terminology he is the Word whom the Father utters and the Son whom the Father begets and bears. (John 1).⁶⁰

In addition, it is equally true that Jesus:

...is who he is and he does what he does in the power of the Holy Spirit whom he both receives from his Father and gives to us. It is through the creative activity of the Spirit that he is conceived and takes human shape in Mary's womb (Luke 1:35); in his baptism the Holy Spirit is given to him to anoint him for his messianic ministry that is thus inaugurated (Luke 3:22), as he himself confesses in his programmatic statement 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me...' (Luke 4:18)

In the witness of John the Baptist, as recorded in John's gospel, Jesus is portrayed as at once the recipient, the residence, and the bestower of the Holy Spirit. 'And John testified, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove and it remained on him. I myself did not know him but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' (John 1:32-33) All this is in the context of the evangelist's incarnational Christology, as the next verse makes clear. 'And I myself have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.'⁶¹

The LORDS identity as revealed in Jesus is thus a threefold identity. The LORD is simultaneously the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. That is why at the end of Matthew's Gospel the one divine name into which disciples are to be baptised is 'the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 28:19). To quote Bauckham once more:

...in Christ God both demonstrates his deity to the world as the same unique God his people Israel had always known, and also, in doing so, identifies

⁶⁰ T Smail, *Like Father like Son*, Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005, p.67.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* pp.67-68.

himself afresh. As the God who includes the humiliated and exalted Jesus in his identity he is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, that is, the Father of Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Spirit of the Father given to the Son.⁶²

The uniqueness of Jesus Christ has to be understood in this Trinitarian context. According to the testimony of Holy Scripture, Jesus uniqueness consists in the fact that he was and is the human being who bears the identity of the LORD as God the Son and who as such fulfils the promises of universal blessing given by the LORD in the Old Testament by performing the role of the servant of the LORD portrayed in Isaiah 40-55.

(f) The universality of the work of Christ and the mission of the Church.

As W A Visser't Hooft notes, it can seem that 'the New Testament is almost exclusively concerned to concentrate everything on one centre, on one single person, one divine event, in a formidable reduction of the rich variety of human possibilities to an exceedingly narrow faith.'⁶³ However, as he goes on to argue, the other side of the picture is that in Romans 5, where everything focuses down on Jesus as the second Adam:

...this narrow door opens on the wide horizons of a true universalism. The chapter concerning the uniqueness of Christ is also the chapter concerning the many, concerning all men (vv.18 and 19). Paul's preoccupation with the one Saviour does not make him forget humanity. On the contrary, the one leads inevitably to the many.⁶⁴

Furthermore, says Visser't Hooft;

This togetherness of the one man with mankind is found in many New Testament passages. Romans 5 repeats three times that the one man has come to save the many (or all men). According to 1 Tim. (2:5) the one mediator wins freedom for all mankind. Heb. 9.28 speaks of Christ who has been offered once to bear the sins of many, and 2 Cor. 5.14 has the shortest and simplest formulation: 'one died for all.' What is the relation between the one and the many? It is all included in the little word 'for.' One has carried the burden of all, suffered for all, died for all. The second Isaiah had already proclaimed this. 'He bore the sins of many' (53.12). Jesus himself had described his mission as giving his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10. 45; 14.24). And, though he confined his mission during his life to the people of Israel, the clear implication of his teaching concerning the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 8.11), concerning the universal role of the servant of God (Matt. 12.18), and the Son of Man (Matt. 25.31 ff) is that after his death salvation is to be proclaimed to all men. John (12.32) gives the explicit statement: 'I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself.'

⁶² Bauckham, *God Crucified*, pp.76-77.

⁶³ W A Visser't Hooft, *No Other Name*, London: SCM, 1963, p.98.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, pp.98-99.

In Ephesians 1:9-10 St. Paul extends the significance of the saving work of Jesus even further, declaring that it embraces not just humanity, but the whole of creation:

For he (the Father) has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set out in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

In the words of F F Bruce in his commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians:

This is the grand purpose of God which embraces all lesser aspects of his purpose within itself - the establishment of a new order, a new creation, of which Christ shall be the acknowledged head.⁶⁵

The Church has a dual function in relation to the reconciling work of Jesus Christ. To quote Visser t'Hooft again, first of all:

It must in its own life manifest the universality which characterises the new reconciled humanity. It represents the one new man (Eph. 2.15). In it the old dividing walls have been broken down. Christ 'is all and in all' (Col. 3.11) and the Christian family is 'all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3.28). This oneness and universality is not merely a desirable quality of its life, it is an essential part of its mission. Eph. 4 is not a counsel of perfection; it is description of the nature and mission of the Church. The unity of the Spirit is to be maintained, because it is the necessary expression of that uniqueness, that unity and that universality which characterises the Church as the new humanity.⁶⁶

Secondly, the Church is called to be

...the messenger of God's universal offer of reconciliation. The 'all', who are one in Christ, exist for the sake of the 'all' for whom Christ died, but who do not know or acknowledge him. The appeal which God makes to humanity is made through ambassadors, through 'us' (II Cor. 5.20). They are to make 'disciples of all nations' (Matt.28.19). Through them the prophecy is realised that 'their voices has gone out to all the earth and their words to the ends of the *oikoumene*' (Rom 10.18 based on Ps 18.5). The realised universalism stands in the service of the wider universalism of the history of salvation which continues. Christ is the centre of two concentric circles, the circle which represents the Church and the circle which represents humanity. The smaller circle must become wider and wider. The situation remains dynamic. The divine act on which reconciliation depends happened once for all and is unrepeatable, but the ministry of reconciliation is to go on until the end of time. The Church is the missionary Church, because it is the instrument of God's world embracing plan of salvation. In the Epistles to the Colossians and to the Ephesians the full implications of the Church's place in that plan become visible. Since the work of Christ has cosmic dimensions, the Church

⁶⁵ F F Bruce, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, London: Pickering and Inglis, 1961, pp.32-33.

⁶⁶ Visser't Hooft, *op.cit.* p.101.

itself has a cosmic role to fulfil. How shall it do this, unless it manifests universality, both in its own life and in its active missionary concern for all mankind and for the reconciling of all things to God?⁶⁷

In the Old Testament the LORD, the unique God, promises universal blessing. In the New Testament this promise is fulfilled through the reconciling work of Jesus Christ and the mission of the Church is to be the instrument through which this blessing begins to be made effective within history.

This understanding of the reconciling work of the LORD and of the Church's role in relation to it raises the question of those whom the Church's mission does not reach.

It has often been believed in the history of the Church that those who have not consciously put their faith in Jesus and/or become part of the Church through baptism are lost forever and this belief still continues to be held by many Christians today. The strength of this belief is that it takes seriously the witness of the New Testament that Jesus is the sole source of salvation and the obligation laid upon the Church to seek to bring as many people as possible to faith and baptism so that they may become part of God's new community and begin to enjoy now a foretaste of the salvation that will be fully revealed at the end of time.

However, this belief seems not to take sufficiently seriously the biblical witness to the LORD's desire to bless all nations and his sovereign freedom to save those outside the visible people of God. It also fails to take into account the evidence of the grace of God at work outside the Church uncovered by the Church's missionary activity.

As Chris Wright argues, 'if pressed to its theological limits' the belief that there is no salvation outside the Church:

...would mean that in the end, the elect of God (that is, those who constitute the final number of the redeemed inhabitants of the new creation) will be a subset of those evangelised by us. It would be saying that only those who have been evangelised can be saved, but not all who are evangelised actually are saved; so the total number saved by God will be smaller than the total number evangelised by us. And that seems to restrict the operation of God's grace to the limits of the operation of our human evangelistic efforts.

It seems to me that the Bible gives us grounds to believe that the reverse will be true. That is, those who have responded to explicit Christian evangelism will be a subset of the finally elected and redeemed. For God operates in his sovereign grace to reach out to and touch people to the ends of the earth and at all times in history. The history of Christian mission has many examples of encounters with people who had an experience of, or some revelation of, the saving grace of God even before Christian missionaries arrived, and who therefore welcomed the news about Jesus with open arms. What the Old Testament prepares us to expect - namely the appearance of God-fearing

⁶⁷ Ibid. pp.101-102.

people in the most unlikely places (even among the enemies of God's people)- is replicated in the history of cross-cultural mission.⁶⁸

As he goes on to say:

Part of the implication of affirming that 'salvation belongs to our God' is to leave it up to him whom he chooses to save. Deuteronomy 29:29 reminds that there are secret things that belong to the law alone. Paul reminds us that the Lord knows those who are his (2 Tim. 2.19).

- We know that all human beings need to be saved, for we are otherwise dead in our sins and under condemnation for our wickedness.
- We know that God sent his Son into the world to save sinners.
- We know that God longs to bring people to salvation, 'For I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live' (Ezek. 33:11).
- We know that God has provided the way of salvation, through the blood of Christ shed on the cross for our forgiveness.
- We know that those who put their faith in Christ can be sure of their salvation. But we should not stray into dictating to God the limits of salvation, or claiming that we know for certain what the eternal destiny of those of who have died actually is, for only God is their Judge.⁶⁹

(g) Conclusion

Thus far in this paper we have offered an account of the biblical witness to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, showing how the uniqueness attributed to Jesus Christ in the New Testament is not a contrast to, but rather a fulfilment of, the uniqueness attributed to the LORD in the Old Testament. On this reading of the biblical material, what the Bible is telling us is that the LORD, the one creator and ruler of all things, who exists eternally as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, has become incarnate in Jesus Christ to fulfil his creative purposes by liberating both human beings and creation as a whole from their captivity to sin and death.

Anyone who knows about biblical scholarship will be aware, of course, that this is not the only possible reading of the biblical material and that there are many biblical scholars who would challenge much, if not all, of what has been said in this paper thus far.

It is not possible in a paper of this length to engage with their alternative readings of the biblical material or to show in detail why the reading that is offered here is to be

⁶⁸ C Wright, *Salvation belongs to our God*, Leicester: IVP, 2008, p.176. Wright's full argument can be found on pages 164-179. A similar point is made by Bishop Michael Naziir-Ali in his Chavasse Lectures *The Unique and Universal Christ* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008, pp.118-119).

⁶⁹ *Ibid* pp. 177-178.

preferred. What can be said, however, is that the reading of the Bible which has been put forward in this paper provides a coherent account of the biblical material and, as the references show, it can claim the support of many reputable mainstream scholars. Furthermore, as we shall go on to see, its account of who Jesus is is the one that is reflected in the Catholic Creeds and in the Anglican formularies and more recent Anglican thinking about the uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

II. The witness to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in the Creeds and the Chalcedonian Definition

During the Patristic period the Church upheld the witness of the New Testament to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

There were Fathers such as St. Justin Martyr and St Clement of Alexandria who emphasised that all human beings could have access to some knowledge of God through the universal presence of God's Word or Reason (the Greek word *logos* could mean both). According to them it was this knowledge of God that led to the elements of truth in Greek philosophy and poetry and also led people like Socrates to criticise pagan religion.

However, belief in this universal revelation did not lead these Fathers to call into question the unique significance of Jesus Christ. On the contrary, they argued that, as prophesied by the Old Testament and testified to in the New, the divine Word and Reason were incarnate in Jesus Christ who suffered, died, rose and ascended to set us free from sin and death. It was in Jesus that the divine Word and Reason were thus fully revealed and all who wanted to live lives that were truly in accordance with them therefore needed to live as disciples of Christ within the fellowship of the Church.⁷⁰

The Church of England, like the Western Church as a whole, has seen the Nicene, Apostles and Athanasian Creeds and the Chalcedonian Definition as authoritative summaries of the Patristic witness to Christ.⁷¹ Having looked at the biblical witness to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, we shall therefore go on to look at what is said about this subject in these texts, considering them in the order of their production.

(a) The Nicene Creed

The Nicene Creed is a fourth century creed of unknown origin that is known as the 'Nicene' Creed because its theology expresses the belief in the full and eternal deity of God the Son that was upheld by the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. It seems to have been used as a theological resource by the Second Council of Constantinople in 381 AD, although it was never formally endorsed by that Council as its statement of faith.

⁷⁰ See St Justin Martyr *First and Second Apologies* in *The Ante Nicene Fathers*, vol 1, Edinburgh and Grand Rapids: T&T Clark/Eerdmans, 1996, pp. 163-193 and St Clement of Alexandria *Exhortation to the Heathen*, and *The Instructor* in *The Ante Nicene Fathers*, vol 2, Edinburgh and Grand Rapids: T&T Clark/Eerdmans, 2001, pp. 171-298.

⁷¹ Unlike the Catholic Creeds, the Chalcedonian Definition is not referred to in either Article VIII or Canon C.15 and has never been used in the Church of England's liturgy. However, as we shall see below, it has nevertheless historically been accepted by the Church of England as an authoritative statement of the Patristic witness to the humanity and divinity of Christ,

At the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD it was seen as expressing the belief of those who had taken part in the Second Council of Constantinople and on that basis it was accepted as a summary of orthodox Trinitarian theology and became the creed recited at the Eucharist in both the Eastern and Western halves of the Church.⁷²

The Nicene Creed as a whole affirms the belief of the Church in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and in its section on God the Son it declares that ‘we believe’:

...in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all time, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not created, of the same essence as the Father, through Whom all things came into being, Who for us men and because of our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became human. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried, and rose on the third day, according to the Scriptures, and ascended to heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father, and will come again to judge the living and dead. His kingdom shall have no end.⁷³

The purpose of this section of the Nicene Creed is to explain the identity of the Jesus to whom the New Testament bears witness, the Jesus who was born, suffered death, and rose again for our salvation, who is seated at the Father’s right hand and who will come again to judge the living and the dead at the end of time. The way it explains his identity is a response to the teaching of an Alexandrian presbyter called Arius that the Son of God was an angelic being called into existence by God out of nothing in order to mediate between God and the world.⁷⁴

In the face of Arius’ teaching, the Creed affirms:

- Jesus Christ is ‘Lord’ and ‘Son of God.’ Both of these terms are being used in their New Testament sense as affirmations of Jesus’ divine identity. He is the Lord who is identical with YHWH, the Lord of the Old Testament and he is Lord because he is ‘Son of God’ the one who exists in a unique filial relationship with God the Father within the life of the Godhead.
- As the Son he was ‘begotten from the Father before all time.’ The term ‘begotten’ is used as a contrast to ‘created’ and, as Barth says, it ‘denotes the bringing forth of God from God, whereas creating denotes only the bringing forth of the creature by God.’⁷⁵ All other creatures (angels included) are created by God out of nothing, but the Son comes forth from God himself. Furthermore, as an event within the life of God, the begetting of the Son took place ‘before all time.’ This means that the Son;

⁷² For the origins and subsequent history of the Nicene Creed see J N D Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3ed, Harlow: Longman, 1972, Chs X-XI.

⁷³ Text in J H Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*, rev ed, Oxford: Blackwell, 1973, p. 33.

⁷⁴ For details about Arius and his theology see R Williams, *Arius, Heresy and Tradition*, rev ed, London: SCM, 2001.

⁷⁵ K Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 1.1, London and New York: T&T Clark, 2004, p.433.

...did not come into being in time as such, that He did not come into being in an event within the created world...Jesus Christ does not first become God's Son when He is it for us. He becomes it from eternity; He becomes it as the eternal Son of the eternal Father.⁷⁶

- Because the Son comes forth from God he shares the same divine nature as the Father. Hence he is described as 'light from light, true God from true God...of the same essence of the Father.' All three terms are used here to affirm that whatever is true of God the Father in respect of his divine nature is true also of the Son. In the words of Martin Luther:

...in these words 'tis powerfully taught that Christ is one true God with the Father, equal to him in all things, without distinction, except that He is from the Father and not the Father from Him.⁷⁷

- As the one who possesses the divine nature the Son is the one 'through whom all things came into being'. He is the creator and not, as Arius taught, a creature.

As Kasper notes, the purpose of all these statements is to affirm that 'the Son belongs not to the side of the creatures, but on the side of God'⁷⁸ and in affirming this the Nicene Creed remains faithful to the New Testament witness to the identity of Jesus with YHWH within the life of the Holy Trinity.

Although this does not come out in the creed itself it is important to realise that the reason that those who opposed Arius were so adamant that Jesus had to be seen as belonging not to the side of God rather than the side of the creatures was a concern about salvation. The point that they made was that in the end only God can save because only God can give us eternal life through union with himself and therefore if the Christian claim that Jesus brings us salvation is true then Jesus has to be God.⁷⁹ As John Burnaby puts it in his commentary on the Nicene Creed:

To acknowledge with the Creed that our Lord is of one substance with the Father, is to acknowledge that what God gave in the giving of his Son was himself – and that nothing less than God's giving of himself could bring into this world of change, sin, and death the power of his endless life.⁸⁰

(b) *The Chalcedonian Definition*

As well as being challenged by the teaching of Arius to define its belief in the deity of Jesus, the early Church was also challenged by the teaching of a number of different theologians to clarify its understanding of the relationship between Jesus' deity and his humanity. On the one hand, there were theologians who so stressed the unity between Jesus and God that the integrity of Jesus' humanity seemed to be called into question. On the other hand, there were theologians who so stressed the distinction

⁷⁶ Ibid, p.427.

⁷⁷ M Luther *Die drei Symbola oder Bekenntnis des Glaubens Christi*, 1538, cited in Ibid, p.441.

⁷⁸ Kasper, op.cit. p.176.

⁷⁹ For this point see St. Athanasius *On the Incarnation of the Divine Word*.

⁸⁰ J Burnaby, *The Belief of Christendom*, London: SPCK/National Society, 1959, p.76.

between Jesus human and divine natures that Jesus seemed to be portrayed as two different persons, one human and one divine, existing side by side.⁸¹

Neither of these approaches was seen by the Church as a whole as compatible with the biblical witness and so finally, after a long period of debate, the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD produced a definition of who Jesus was that was intended to rule out both of them. The definition runs as follows:

Following then, the holy fathers, we unite in teaching all men to confess the one and only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. This selfsame one is perfect both in deity and also in human-ness; this selfsame one is also actually God and actually Man, with a rational soul and body. He is of the same reality as God as far as his deity is concerned and of the same reality as we are ourselves as far as his human-ness is concerned; thus like us in all respects, sin only excepted. Before time began he was begotten of the Father, in respect of his deity, and now in these 'last days,' for us and on behalf of our salvation, this selfsame one was born of Mary the Virgin, who is God-bearer, in respect of his humanness.

We also teach that we apprehend this one and only Christ-Son, Lord, only begotten- in two natures; without confusing the two natures, without transmuting one nature into the other, without dividing them into two separate categories, without contrasting them according to area or function. The distinctiveness of each nature is not nullified by the union. Instead, the 'properties' of each nature are conserved and both natures concur in one 'person' and in one *hypostasis*. They are not divided or cut into two *prosopa*, but are together the one and only and only-begotten Logos of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus have the prophets of old testified; thus the Lord Jesus Christ himself self taught us; thus the Symbol of the Fathers has handed down to us.⁸²

In this definition the 'holy fathers' are the Fathers who were present at the Second Council of Constantinople and the 'Symbol of the Fathers' is the Nicene Creed, which the definition is intended to supplement.

The first paragraph of the definition is intended to be a gloss on the teaching about Jesus contained in the second article of the Nicene Creed (that is what is meant by 'following the holy fathers'). The paragraph teaches that:

- There is only one Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Jesus Christ is both fully divine and fully human, the only distinction between Jesus and all other humans being that Jesus was without sin (see Hebrews 4:15).
- Jesus' full humanity means that like all other human beings he has both a body and a rational soul. This point is intended to rule out the teaching of a man

⁸¹ These have come to be known as the 'monophysite' and 'nestorian' heresies respectively. For details of the debate about the person of Christ see J N D Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5ed, London and New York: Continuum, 2006, Chs XI and XII.

⁸² Leith, *op.cit.*, pp.35-36.

called Apollinarius that in the case of Jesus the Word took the place of a human soul.

- In respect of his deity Jesus was begotten of the Father before all time. In respect of his humanity he was born of the Virgin Mary.
- As his humanity and deity are inseparable it is correct to call Mary the ‘God-bearer.’

The second paragraph goes on to define more closely what it means to say that Jesus is both fully divine and fully human. It teaches that as the Son of God become Man Jesus is a single person who has two natures, one divine and one human, that are neither confused with nor separated from each other. This, it says, was what the Old Testament prophets who predicted the coming of the Messiah taught, it was what was Jesus himself taught and it was the teaching that was handed down by the Fathers of the Second Council of Constantinople.

As in the case of the Nicene Creed the key point about the definition of Chalcedon is its fidelity to the biblical witness. To quote Kasper again:

...the Christological dogma of the Council of Chalcedon constitutes, in the language and in the context of the problem at that time, an extremely precise version of what, according to the New Testament, we encounter in Jesus’ history and what befell him: namely in Jesus Christ, God himself has entered into human history, and meets us there in a fully and completely human way. The dogmatic profession of faith that Jesus Christ in one person is true God and true man, must therefore be regarded as a valid and permanently binding interpretation of scripture.⁸³

Kasper goes on to say, however, that:

Compared with the total Christological witness of Scripture, the Christological dogma represents a contraction. The dogma is exclusively concerned with the inner constitution of the divine and human subject. It separates this question from the total context of Jesus’ history and fate, from the relation in which Jesus stands, not only to the Logos, but to ‘his Father,’ and we miss the total eschatological perspective of biblical theology.⁸⁴

Kasper is clearly right when he says that the Chalcedonian Definition does not reflect all that the Bible says about Jesus. However, the point is that it was never intended to. The Fathers at Chalcedon assumed that their definition would be read in the wider context of the whole biblical message and the whole tradition of Patristic thought summarised in the Nicene Creed and would be understood in that light. They were attempting to answer one very simple question, ‘How are we to understand the Jesus to whom the Bible and the Nicene Creed bear witness?’ and, as Kasper says, their answer to this question has permanent validity because it safeguards the basic point

⁸³ Kasper op.cit. p. 238.

⁸⁴ Ibid p.238

that in the human being Jesus of Nazareth God himself has entered into our history without either the deity or the humanity being compromised in any way.

Although this is not a point that is made in the Chalcedonian definition itself, it is important to link the Chalcedonian insistence that Jesus is simultaneously fully human and fully divine with the statement in Genesis 1:26-27 that God made human beings in his image and likeness. What this statement suggests is that human beings are created to be like God and, this being the case, for God to come and live as a human being does not mean the abolition or curtailment of human nature, but rather its proper fulfilment. In fact, it would be true to say that Jesus was the one true human being because he is the only person thus far in whom the human capacity and vocation to reflect the likeness of God has been properly fulfilled.

(c) The Athanasian Creed

The Athanasian Creed is a statement of Trinitarian theology which seems to have been produced in the area of Lerins in Southern France around 500 AD. It is named after St Athanasius, the great champion of Trinitarian orthodoxy in the fourth century and its purpose was to expound the teaching of the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedonian definition in the face of the Arianism of the Ostrogoths and Visigoths who had invaded Western Europe at the beginning of the fifth century.⁸⁵

The first half of the Athanasian Creed expounds the doctrine of the Trinity, stressing that the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit are equal in all respects as regards their deity with the only distinction between them being that the Son is begotten from the Father and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.

The second half then goes on to look at the issue of Christology. In this connection it declares that:

...the right faith is that we believe and confess: the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man;

God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds: and Man, of the substance of his Mother, born in the world;

Perfect God and perfect Man: of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting;

Equal to the Father, as touching his godhead and inferior to the Father, as touching his manhood.

Who though he be both God and man: is not two, but one Christ;

One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh: but by taking of the Manhood into God;

One altogether, not by confusion of substance: but by unity of Person.

⁸⁵ For the origins of the Athanasian Creed see J N D Kelly, *The Athanasian Creed*, London: A&C Black, 1964.

For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man: so God and Man is one Christ.

Who suffered for our salvation: descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead.

He ascended into heaven, he sitteth on the right hand of the Father, God Almighty: from whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.⁸⁶

Like the Chalcedonian definition, this section of the Athanasian Creed teaches that the Jesus to whom the New Testament bears witness is one person who is both truly human and truly divine, having his divinity from the Father and his humanity from the Virgin Mary. It also declares that the incarnation did not mean that God ceased to be God and became human, but that in Jesus human nature was taken up into the life of God.

(d) The Apostles' Creed

The Apostles' Creed is a statement of faith of the Western Church that probably attained its present form in South West France in the seventh century, but has its origins in a series of Western creeds going back to the Old Roman Creed of the Second Century.⁸⁷

Like the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds, the Apostles Creed is a Trinitarian statement of faith in three articles and the second article declares 'I believe':

...in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended to hell, on the third day rose again from the dead, ascended to heaven, sits and sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty, thence he will come to judge the living and the dead.⁸⁸

Unlike the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds the Apostles Creed does not go into details about the relationship between the Son and the Father. However, from the second century onwards the term 'only Son' was used to refer to the eternal pre-existence of the one whom became incarnate of the Virgin Mary.⁸⁹ Moreover, since the Apostles Creed attained its present form in the era of Nicene orthodoxy what it says about the person of Christ will have been intended to be understood in the context of the belief that the Son fully shares the deity of the Father.

The phrase 'his only Son' will therefore have been intended as a shorthand way of referring to Jesus as the eternal Son who is begotten from the Father and therefore shares his deity. In this context the word 'Lord' is also a reference to Jesus' deity and means that Jesus shares the Lordship that belongs to the Triune God, YHWH, the Lord God of Israel. As Charles Cranfield notes in his commentary on the Apostles

⁸⁶ Text from the *Book of Common Prayer*.

⁸⁷ For details see Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, Chs IV-VI and XII-XIII.

⁸⁸ Leith, *op.cit.* p.24.

⁸⁹ See Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, pp. 142-143.

Creed, the presence of the word ‘our’ before ‘Lord’ expresses the further thought that ‘Christ has claimed us for his own and by his saving work has taken possession of us, and we respond by personal commitment to him in trust, loyalty and obedience.’⁹⁰

Like the more detailed accounts of the person of Christ in the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds and the Chalcedonian definition, the opening words of the second article of the Apostles Creed serve to specify the identity of the object of the New Testament witness. The person whose career is summarised in the remainder of the second article is, the creed says, none other than God himself.

When the Apostles Creed says that Jesus ‘descended to hell’ the term is not used to describe the place of eternal punishment, but as a general description of the place of the dead, the *sheol* of the Old Testament or the *hades* of Greek thought.

When we look at all four statements of faith together what we find is that is that they all express in their different ways the fundamental New Testament witness that YHWH, the God of Israel, has made himself know as the God who is three in one, and that the Word of God, God the Son, took human nature upon himself in the womb of the virgin Mary at the incarnation, suffered, died and rose again for our salvation, rules over the nations at the right hand of the Father and will come again in judgement at the end of time.

It is by expressing all this that the creeds express the uniqueness of Jesus. It is because this is who Jesus was and who he is that he was and is unique.

III The witness to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in the historic formularies.

The historic formularies of the Church of England, the *Thirty Nine Articles*, the *Book of Common Prayer* and the *Ordinal* attached to the *Book of Common Prayer*, bear the same witness to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the Bible and the Creeds.

(a) The Thirty Nine Articles

The *Thirty Nine Articles*, which reached their final form in 1571 but which are a revision of the *Forty Two Articles* of 1553, begin with a series of four articles that are concerned with the Trinity and the person of Christ. These articles run as follows:

1. Of faith in the Holy Trinity

There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

2. Of the Word, or Son of God, which was made very man

⁹⁰ C E B Cranfield, *The Apostles Creed*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993, p.24.

The Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance: so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and manhood, were joined together in one person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God and very man, who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile His Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men.

3. Of the going down of Christ into Hell

As Christ died for us, and was buried, so also is it to be believed that He went down into Hell.

4. Of the Resurrection of Christ

Christ did truly rise again from death, and took again His body, with flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith He ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until He return to judge all men at the last day.

The first of these articles was necessitated by the denial of the doctrine of the Trinity by some belonging to the radical wing of the English Reformation. Thus a visitation of the Diocese of Canterbury in 1556 during the reign of Mary Tudor uncovered several unitarians including one William Prowtynge or Powting who declared:

...that it is no article of our faith, that there is one God and three Persons, but one God Almighty: in whom he believeth and saith, that Christ is not almighty of himself, but received all power from his Father, and is made God over all things unto us. And saith, that he was not God of the same substance of God from the beginning. And as for the Holy Ghost, he saith, that he believeth that he is not God, but believeth he is the Spirit of God the Father only, given to the Son, and not God of himself...⁹¹

In response to this sort of thinking, which concerned the English Reformers just as much as it did the Catholic authorities under Queen Mary, Article I re-affirms the Old Testament belief that there is only one God. It then goes on to describe the characteristics of this God and to declare that within the unity of the one God there are three person, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Because all three persons are equally God they possess the same divine substance and the same divine power and they are equally eternal.

The second article is also a response to those on the radical wing of the English Reformation. We can see the sort of thinking to which the article is a response in what is known as the *Reformatio Legum Ecclesiasticarum*. This was a book containing Archbishop Cranmer's proposals for reforming English Canon law, which was presented to Parliament in 1553 but never actually authorised.

⁹¹ Text in John Strype, *Ecclesiastical Memorials*, III (i) pp. 540-541 cited in C J Clements, *Religious Radicalism in England 1535-1565*, Edinburgh and Carlisle: Paternoster/Rutherford House, 1997, p.155.

Section 2 of the *Reformatio* is entitled *De Haeresibus* ('concerning heresies') and the fifth part of this section sets out heretical views of the person of Christ:

Concerning the double nature of Christ there is a pernicious error which takes different forms. Some are of the sect of the Arians, holding that Christ is man in such a way as to deny that he is God. Others consider that he is God in such a way that they do not recognize him as a man, and concerning his body, they pretend that he assumed one of a divine nature from heaven, and fell into a virgin's womb, rather as if he were in transit through Mary and flowed through her as through a canal or a tube. Some say that the body was often reincarnated here on earth. All of which errors are to be corrected by the authority of Holy Scripture in such a way that Christ is to be accepted as the eternal God in his higher nature, and therefore as the equal of God the Father, but that in his human nature he has a body, made and manifested in time, not more than once, not of any matter other than the true and sole substance, of the virgin Mary, which body indeed, just as it was made only once, so also it was lifted up on the cross for our salvation only one single time, and there offered to God the Father, and was circumscribed by the limits of finitude just as other human bodies are.⁹²

In Article 2 Cranmer takes his own advice. The article follows the Definition of Chalcedon by declaring that Jesus is one unified person with two natures, one divine and one human. As the divine Son, it says, he is eternally begotten from the Father and shares his nature, while his human nature comes to him from the Virgin Mary. The article then goes on to say that it was as the God-man, the Word made flesh, that Christ suffered and died to offer the perfect sacrifice for sin that we might be reconciled to God.

The third article follows the Apostles Creed in underlining Jesus' true humanity by stating that after his death, while his body remained in the tomb, his soul, like the souls of all other humans, went to the place of the dead. Cranmer's original article in the *Forty Two Articles* of 1553 was longer than the present article. It had an additional sentence that read:

For the body lay in the sepulchre until the resurrection: but His ghost departing from Him was with the ghosts that were in prison or in hell, and did preach to the same, as the place of St. Peter doth testify.

The word 'ghost' here means 'soul' and the 'place of St Peter' is 1 Peter 3:18-20 which describes how after his death Jesus went and preached to 'to the spirits in prison' who had been disobedient to God in the time of Noah. This additional sentence was dropped when what became the Thirty Nine Articles went through convocation in 1563 because of controversy about precisely what the descent to hell involved.⁹³

⁹² G Bray (ed) *Tudor Church Reform*, Woodbridge: Church of England Record Society/Boydell Press, 2000, p.191.

⁹³ For details of this controversy see E CS Gibson, *The Thirty Nine Articles*, 6ed, London: Methuen, 1908, pp.159-162.

The fourth article is also concerned with Jesus' true humanity. In this case the article defends the belief that after the resurrection Jesus' body was still a human body in the sense that it had all the necessary characteristics of such a body. This belief was based on the accounts of the resurrection in Luke 24:36-42⁹⁴ and John 20:19-29 and the reason it is mentioned in Article 4 is because of the threat from those religious radicals who taught that Jesus' resurrection body ceased to be human at the ascension. As the *Reformatio Legum Ecclesiasticarum* notes:

Some resuscitate the delusion of Eutyches concerning the body of Christ (and) assert that the Word was changed into the nature of flesh, which they claim was immediately once more turned back and absorbed into the divine nature as soon as it was taken up into heaven from the dead.⁹⁵

The implicit argument that underlies what is said in the article is that this teaching is wrong because it was the same human body described in Luke 24 and John 20 that was taken up into heaven in the manner described in Luke 24:50-51 and Acts 1:6-11. That is the significance of the word 'wherewith' in the penultimate clause of the article.

The final clause of the article rounds it off by including the biblical and creedal teaching that the same Jesus who ascended will return as judge of all men on the last day.

Articles 1-4 cover the same ground as the statements about Jesus contained in the creeds and what they do is re-assert the teaching of the creeds in response to contemporary challenges to this teaching. The reason that they do this is set out in Article 8, 'Of the Three Creeds,' which declares that:

The three Creeds, Nicene Creed, Athanasius' Creed, and that which is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, ought thoroughly to be received and believed; for they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture.

For the Anglican Reformers the basis for correct thinking about Jesus was the witness of Scripture and the teaching of the three Creeds was to be accepted because it was in accordance with this witness. The three Creeds are mentioned here because they were the Creeds recited in the services of the new Book of Common Prayer. Although the Definition of Chalcedon is not mentioned here it is clear from the correspondence between the teaching of Article 2 and the teaching of the Definition that it too was regarded as authoritative for the same reason.

In addition to Articles 1-4 there are two further articles that are relevant to the issue of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, Article 15 and Article 18.

Article 15 is entitled 'Of Christ alone without Sin.' It declares that:

⁹⁴ It is in Luke 24:39 that the term 'flesh and bones' used in the article occurs.

⁹⁵ Bray, *op.cit.*, p. 191. Eutyches was a monk of the fourth and fifth centuries whose teaching was condemned by the Council of Chalcedon.

Christ in the truth of our nature was made like unto us in all things, sin only except, from which He was clearly void, both in His flesh and in His spirit. He came to be the lamb without spot, Who by sacrifice of Himself once made, should take away the sins of the world: and sin, as S. John saith, was not in Him. But all we the rest, although baptized and born again in Christ, yet offend in many things: and if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

The background to this article is the teaching of some of those on the radical wing of the Reformation that believers could be free from all sin in this life. As John Hooper wrote to Heinrich Bullinger on June 25 1549:

They contend that a man who is reconciled to God is without sin, and freed from all stain of concupiscence, and that nothing of the Old Adam remains in his nature; and a man, they say, who is thus regenerate cannot sin.⁹⁶

In response to this teaching the Article follows the Chalcedonian definition in affirming that in his humanity Jesus was like us in every way except for the fact that he was without sin. It supports the claim that Jesus was without sin with references to Hebrews 2:15-16, John 1:29 and 1 John 3:5 and then stresses that sinlessness was unique to him and is not a characteristic of anyone else, even of those who have been born again in baptism.

Article 18 is entitled ‘Of obtaining eternal salvation only by the name of Christ.’ It states that:

They also are to be had accursed that presume to say that every man shall be saved by the law or sect which he professeth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that law and the light of nature. For Holy Scripture doth set out to us only the name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be saved.

It is often thought that this Article addresses the issue of the salvation of those who belong to religions other than Christianity, but that is not, in fact, the point of the article. The title of the Latin version of the article is *De speranda aeterna salute tantum in nomine Christi* (‘Of hoping for eternal salvation only in the name of Christ’) and as W H Griffith Thomas points out in his commentary on the Articles:

The title of the Article both in Latin and in English shows that there is no reference whatever to the heathen, but only to those who are acquainted with the Christian religion.⁹⁷

The reference in both titles is to those who have knowledge of Christ and the issue which the article tackles is whether such people should hope for, or can obtain, salvation otherwise than by putting their trust in him. As Charles Hardwick explains

⁹⁶ H Robinson (ed), *Original Letters relative to the English Reformation*, vol I , Cambridge: Parker Society/CUP, 1846. Letter XXXIII , p.65

⁹⁷ W H Griffith Thomas, *The Principles of Theology*, London: Church Book Room Press, 1951, p. 259.

The eighteenth article is levelled at a philosophical theory of the rationalistic school of the Anabaptists, who contended that if men were sincere in following out their own systems, their deliberate rejection of the Saviour of the world would prove no obstacle to their salvation.⁹⁸

The *Reformatio Legum Ecclesiasticarum* summarises the teaching of this rationalistic school as follows:

Horrible and insane is the daring of those who maintain that salvation may be hoped for in every religion and sect which men have professed, as long as they strive as hard as they can for innocence and integrity of life according to the light which has been put in them by nature, for plagues of this kind are condemned by Holy Writ. For there the one and only name of Jesus Christ is commended to us, that all salvation may come to us from him.⁹⁹

The problem with this teaching is that it brackets out Jesus Christ altogether. It declares that what saves people is their own moral striving guided by the light of nature. In response both the article and the *Reformatio* cite Acts 4:12 'there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved' as a summary of the overall New Testament teaching that salvation is a gift given to human beings by God in Jesus Christ and that those who deliberately reject this gift (as some of the Anabaptists apparently did¹⁰⁰) cannot hope for eternal life (see John 3:16-21).

It is important to note that the stress in Article 18 that salvation is available only through Jesus is in reality the reverse side of the teaching of Article 2 that Jesus gave himself as a sacrifice 'not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men,' the teaching of Article 15 that Jesus 'came to be the lamb without spot, who by sacrifice of Himself once made, should take away the sins of the world' and the teaching of Article 31 that: 'The offering of Christ once made is that perfect redemption, propitiation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, both original and actual.' If this teaching is true then there is no place for any other saviour for the simple reason that there would be nothing for that saviour to achieve. Jesus has done all that needs to be done. As we have already noted with reference to the teaching of the New Testament, the uniqueness and universality of Jesus thus go together. Jesus is the unique saviour because the salvation that he has achieved is universal in its scope.

(b) The Book of Common Prayer and the Ordinal

The *Book of Common Prayer* and the *Ordinal* reached their final form in 1662, but most of the material they contain was the work of Archbishop Cranmer and other English Reformers in the previous century. They affirm in their own ways the same beliefs about the unique significance of Jesus Christ that are set forth in the Articles.

⁹⁸ C Hardwick, *A history of the Articles of Religion*, London: George Bell & Sons, 1895. p.101.

⁹⁹ Bray op.cit., p.197.

¹⁰⁰ In the letter to Bullinger noted above Hooper writes about those who are daring enough 'not only to deny that Christ is the Messiah and Saviour of the world, but also to call that blessed seed a mischievous fellow, and deceiver of the world.'

- Provision is made for the constant re-affirmation of the uniqueness of Christ by means of the recitation of the Apostles, Nicene and Athanasian Creeds.
- The Trinitarian nature of God, and therefore the deity of the Son as part of the Trinity, is affirmed:
 - in the collect for Trinity Sunday
 - in the use of the three creeds, which affirm a Trinitarian faith
 - in the *Book of Common Prayer* Catechism which teaches a Trinitarian understanding of God
 - in the fact that baptism is ‘in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost’
 - in the fact that glory is given to ‘the Father, Son and Holy Ghost’ at the end of Psalms and on other occasions
 - in the fact that the services of Morning and Evening Prayer and the Burial Service close with the use of the Trinitarian ‘grace’ from 2 Corinthians 13:14.
 - in the fact that blessings are given in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.
 - in the fact that in the litany (prayers of supplication) mercy for sinners is sought from the Holy Trinity.
- The terms ‘Son, ‘Lord’ and ‘Christ’ are constantly used to refer to Jesus in their traditional Christian sense. That is to say, Jesus is the Christ, the one who is anointed by God to fulfil his promises and bring in his kingdom, because he is the Lord, the one who shares the identity of YHWH, the Lord God of Israel, as the eternal Son of the Father.
- In the Prayer Book Catechism those being prepared for confirmation are taught to profess their faith ‘in God the Son, who hath redeemed me and all mankind’ and in the prayer of consecration in the service of Holy Communion we are told that in his death on the cross Jesus made ‘a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.’
- There are constant references to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, his ascension to the right hand of the Father and his coming in judgement. For example, the *Te Deum Laudamus* in the service of Morning Prayer declares:

When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death: thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

Thou sittest at the right hand of God: in the glory of the Father.

We believe that thou shalt come: to be our Judge...

In response to the challenges to traditional Christian thinking offered by religious radicals at the time of the English Reformation, the historic formularies offer the same witness to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the Bible and the creeds.

The English Reformers were faced with the teaching of those on the radical wing of the Reformation who denied the Trinitarian nature of God, and either Jesus' deity or his true humanity, and who claimed that it was possible to reject Jesus and still be saved. In the face of this teaching the English Reformers remained steadfastly committed to the belief that the one God is the God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that God the Son took human nature upon himself from the substance of the Virgin Mary at the incarnation and that he suffered and died for the salvation of the world, rose again, ascended to the right hand of the Father and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

IV The witness to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in recent material from the Church of England and the Anglican Communion.

(a) The background to this material

The questioning of the doctrine of the Trinity to which the Reformers responded in the Articles continued in the eighteenth century. At the beginning of the century there was a controversy about the doctrine of the Trinity within the Church of England that was prompted by the publication in 1712 of a book entitled *The Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity* by Samuel Clarke, who was a leading philosopher and also a chaplain to the Queen. In this book Clarke looked in detail at the biblical material relating to the Trinity and suggested that what this material showed was that the traditional belief that all three persons of the Trinity possessed equally all the attributes of God, and in particular the attribute of self-existence, was mistaken, because in fact the Son and the Holy Spirit were secondary divine beings who were not self-existent, but were dependent for their existence on the Father and were subordinate to him.

The book caused much controversy, with Clarke being accused of Arianism, and although Clarke himself eventually promised not to speak or write further on the subject of the Trinity the controversy continued for some time with his arguments being answered by, amongst others, Daniel Waterland in his book *A Vindication of Christ's Divinity*, which was published in 1719.¹⁰¹ Although the controversy eventually died down the question of the doctrine of the Trinity remained a feature of the life of the Church of England during the rest of the eighteenth century. It showed itself in proposals for a revision of the *Book of Common Prayer* which would have involved the omission of the Athanasian and Nicene Creeds and the re-phrasing of all specifically Trinitarian formulas and in the Feathers Tavern Petition of 1772 which sought to replace subscription to the Thirty Nine Articles by the clergy with a simple declaration of belief in the Bible.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ The fact that Waterland's work was published in 1719 seven years after Clarke's original work and was then followed by *A Second Vindication of Christ's Divinity* in 1723 indicates how long the controversy continued.

¹⁰² For this debate see N T Wright 'Where shall doctrine be found?' in *Believing in the Church*, London: SPCK, 1981, pp.125-129.

However, the Church of England as a whole remained committed to the orthodox Nicene understanding of the Trinity, with the influence of liberal thought being countered by the influence of the High Church and Evangelical movements, both of which accepted the Trinitarian teaching contained in the Articles and Book of Common Prayer.

The influence of liberal thinking began to grow within the Church of England during the second half of the nineteenth century in response to the challenges to traditional Christian theology posed by the development of the natural sciences, the growth of biblical criticism and general changes in religious sensibilities and philosophical thought reflecting the influence of an Enlightenment worldview which held that if there was a God then he was not a God who would act in the world in the way described by the Bible.

In terms of thinking about Jesus what the growth of liberal thinking meant was a growing emphasis on the human figure of Jesus as this could be uncovered by historical research, a growing questioning of the historicity of the biblical miracles, including the virgin birth and the resurrection, and a growing emphasis on the immanence of God in creation and therefore the unity rather than the distinction between God and humanity.

All these aspects of liberal thinking can be seen, for example, in *Lux Mundi*, a collection of essays published in 1889 by a group of Church of England theologians who sought to combine openness to new ways of thinking with loyalty to the Catholic tradition of the Oxford movement.¹⁰³

When they were published the essays were controversial, with particular disquiet being caused by the essay by the editor, Charles Gore, on 'The Holy Spirit and Inspiration.' This essay tackled the issue of how to respond to the issues raised by biblical criticism and, in particular, considered the question of how to respond to the fact that Jesus held views about matters such as the authorship of Psalm 110 and the historicity of the story of Jonah that biblical criticism had shown to be mistaken. Gore's solution to this problem was to suggest that at the incarnation the Son of God temporarily laid aside certain divine attributes including omniscience and thus voluntarily restricted himself to the limitations of first century Jewish thought. In Gore's words 'He wills so to restrain the beams of his Deity as to observe the limits of the science of his age, and He put himself in the same relation to its historical knowledge.'¹⁰⁴

Gore's suggestion that the incarnation of the Son of God made him subject to error was contrary to traditional Christian thinking about the matter. However, the fact that Gore was wrestling with the issue of what the incarnation involved and the fact that the subtitle of *Lux Mundi* is 'a series of studies in the religion of the incarnation' both indicate that the basis for the thinking of the contributors to the collection was a commitment to the traditional belief that Jesus was the incarnate Son of God.

¹⁰³ C Gore (ed), *Lux Mundi*, London: John Murray, 1889.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p.360.

The end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries saw the emergence of a group of more radical liberal theologians who went beyond the position taken by the contributors to *Lux Mundi*. They argued that the way to understand Jesus was not to see him as being, in the traditional sense, God incarnate, but rather to see him as the human being in whom God has been most supremely revealed. At the conference of the Modern Churchmen's Union on the subject of 'Christ and the Creeds' held at Girton College, Cambridge in 1921 this understanding of Jesus was expounded, for example, by Hastings Rashdall.

Rashdall's paper at the conference was entitled 'Christ as Logos and Son of God.' In it he argued that divinity and humanity were not to be regarded as mutually exclusive terms. There was a certain continuity of nature between God and humanity and this made it impossible to say that God was incarnate in Christ and not in anyone else. What was significant about Christ was that he was the human being in whom God's self-revelation had been 'signal, supreme, unique.' This meant, declared Rashdall:

That we are justified in thinking of God as like Christ, that the character and teaching of Christ contains the fullest disclosure both of the character of God himself and of his will for man – that is...the true meaning for us of the doctrine of Christ's divinity. The ancient doctrine of the Logos expressed in the language of a bygone philosophy the truth that in Jesus the world has received its highest revelation of God: and it must be remembered that in the teaching of Augustine and the Schoolmen the Logos is not a separate mind or Person in the sense of a centre of consciousness, but a distinguishable activity of the one and only divine Mind.¹⁰⁵

In the last two clauses of the quotation Rashdall puts forward a Unitarian rather than a Trinitarian view of God. As he sees it there is one, single, undifferentiated divine mind and it is this mind that has been revealed through the human being Jesus of Nazareth.

(b) Doctrine Commission reports

Doctrine in the Church of England

The teaching given at the Girton Conference and the protests this teaching evoked from bodies such as the English Church Union, together with the need to address differences within the Church of England over issues of ecclesiology and sacramental theology, formed the background to the appointment by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in December 1922 of the Archbishops' Commission on Christian Doctrine. The task given to this Commission was:

To consider the nature and grounds of Christian doctrine with a view to demonstrating the extent of existing agreement within the Church of England and with a view to investigating how far it is possible to remove or diminish existing differences.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵H Rashdall, 'Christ as Logos and Son of God', *The Modern Churchman* 11 (1921-1922), quoted in *Doctrine in the Church of England*, London: SPCK, 1982, p. XXIII.

¹⁰⁶*Doctrine in the Church of England*, p.19.

The report of the Commission, *Doctrine in the Church of England*, was finally published in 1938. In this report the Commission declines to go down the Unitarian route suggested by Rashdall and the Girton Conference and instead affirms the witness of the Bible, the Creeds and the historic formularies to the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ and the Trinitarian nature of God.

The chapter in the report which is concerned with these issues is entitled 'Redemption in Christ.' The chapter begins with an affirmation of the traditional Christian belief in the divinity of Christ:

Christianity is distinguished among the religions of the world by the place which it gives to its founder. It has regarded Jesus Christ as not merely the supreme prophet of God, but as Himself essentially one with God. It is exactly this which has given to its doctrine of God its special content and its sharpness of outline, from which much of its spiritual power has been derived. It is this which has given to the central doctrine of the Incarnation its quality as a doctrine of Divine self-sacrifice (e.g. 'though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor,' 2 Cor. 8:9, cf Phil. 2:6-8) ; it is this which has given to the Cross the significance which Christian experience has always found in it; and it is in this that Christians have found the justification of their sense of personal communion with Jesus Himself, and of their conviction that it is through Him that the Holy Spirit is given.

Christians have from the beginning recognised Jesus of Nazareth as 'Messiah' and 'Son of God.' This belief was held by those who had been in closest association with Him, and the historical evidence satisfies us that it corresponds with His own conviction as to His Mission.

Such a claim involves the belief that the creative and redemptive purpose of God for Israel and for Mankind was, and is to be, fulfilled in and through Him, and that we are not to 'look for another' who might bring a revelation and redemption which can supersede what has been given in Christ.¹⁰⁷

The chapter follows this opening affirmation with a brief overview of the debates about Christology in the history of the Church and a brief exploration of the issues raised by the traditional beliefs that Jesus was perfect, sinless and pre-existent. It then goes on to declare that the important thing that needs to be asserted is that:

...our Lord is in the full sense Man and in the full sense God. The Divine Word found utterance through prophets and religious leaders; in Jesus Christ 'the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.'

The union of divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ inaugurated a new era for mankind. It made and makes possible the new fellowship of man with God. About this S. Paul uses the language of spiritual exaltation. God has 'raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places' (Eph. 2:6). There is a new spiritual manhood in Christ Jesus which Christians are able to share (cf. Col. 3:9, 10 for the contrast between the 'old man' and the 'new').

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. p.72

He also speaks it as a new creation is: 'If any man is in Christ there is a new creation' (2 Cor. 5:17). It is this which gives to Christianity its character of finality and its note of triumph, although the created universe awaits still the fulfilment of the Divine purpose 'to sum up all things in Christ' (Eph 1:10).

By virtue of the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ, Christians are able to share His life. Yet the Christian does not hope to become another Christ. For him Christ is the one, and the necessary, mediator. Christ's access to the Father was direct; we have our access to the Father through him. He leads; we follow. He redeems; we are redeemed. As, drawn by him, we share his life, we can also, as members of His body, fulfil His purpose in the world. Our hope is that we may be as Jesus, not that we may be Christs; for this hope is fulfil only as we draw our life from Him. The true relationship is expressed in the prayer to the Father attributed by the Fourth Evangelist to our Lord on the threshold of the Passion: 'I in them and thou in me' (John 17:23). For the realisation of this we rightly hope, not through our achievement but through His: 'We know that if He shall be manifested we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is' (1 Jn. 3:2).¹⁰⁸

Reflecting the importance traditionally given to the Chalcedonian Definition in Anglican theology, the report states that although the members of the Commission do not believe that the Church is bound to the 'metaphysic or psychology' underlying the language of the Definition they nevertheless believe themselves: 'to be affirming in our Report that which was affirmed in the language of its own time by the Council at Chalcedon.'¹⁰⁹

On the subject of how Jesus redeems us, the report states that:

...the Cross is a 'propitiation' and 'expiation' for the sins of the whole world. Christ, by the submission of His sinless life to the consequences of sin, created the conditions in which God care and does take the penitent sinner into the full fellowship of his kingdom and treat Him as His child. The redeeming love of God, through the life of Jesus Christ sacrificially offered in death upon the Cross, acted with cleansing power upon a sin-stained world, and so enables us to be cleansed. This is the meaning of such symbolic language in the New Testament as the phrase 'they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb (Rev. 7:14).

Thus the Atonement, though it issues from the eternal immutability of the Divine Love, truly inaugurates a new covenant, that is, a new system of relations between God and man.¹¹⁰

At the end of the chapter the report looks at the doctrine of the Trinity. It argues that the doctrine had three roots in the lives of the first Christians. There was 'the traditional Jewish belief in and worship of one God,' there was 'the experience of the Person of our Lord both in His earthly life and as risen from the dead' and there was

¹⁰⁸ Ibid pp.78-79.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid p.81

¹¹⁰ Ibid p.93.

‘the influx of the Holy Spirit as power upon their lives.’¹¹¹ The doctrine of the Trinity that emerged in the early Church was not an exercise in abstract speculation but ‘an attempt to ‘preserve the full value of this threefold experience in its distinctive elements and at the same time to assert the sole and unique supremacy of the one God.’¹¹²

Furthermore, the report declares:

The doctrine that thus sprang from experience has proved capable of meeting demands which arise in the sphere of metaphysical thought and has furnished a basis for those philosophic conceptions of the Divine being which are most adequate to their theme. If God be the supreme good He cannot be less than personal: yet we cannot think of Him simply as a Person, a lonely sovereign enthroned above the universe: if He be One, yet His unity must be such as to comprehend and not exclude plurality; if He be Love, his love must be such as to give scope for self- bestowal within his own being.

Thus the revelation of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is not to be regarded, on Sabellian¹¹³ lines, as merely relative to our experience, but gives us knowledge of the real Being of God. The purpose of the doctrine of the Trinity is to express and to safeguard the fullness of this revelation.¹¹⁴

What the report says is not entirely conservative in that it seems to accept a range of views on the issues of the historicity of the Virgin birth and whether belief in Jesus’ resurrection involves accepting as historical the New Testament accounts of the empty tomb and Jesus’ appearances to his disciples. However, on the central issue of the uniqueness of Jesus the report stands foursquare with the Bible the Creeds and the formularies, affirming that he is the Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity become incarnate for the salvation of the world.

However, *Doctrine in the Church of England* did not mark the end of the debate about whether the Church of England should continue to affirm the doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation. In the 1960s and 1970s a number of senior Church of England theologians, such as John Robinson, Geoffrey Lampe and Maurice Wiles argued in a series of works¹¹⁵ that these doctrines were not the best ways to make sense of the biblical witness or Christian experience. The clearest expression of this renewed tendency towards Anglican unitarianism was the publication in 1977 of *The Myth of God Incarnate*, a book of essays in which Wiles and four other Church of England theologians joined with two Free Church theologians in arguing that the incarnation was a ‘myth’ in the sense that we noted earlier in the work of John Hick. That is to say, it was a way of expressing the beliefs and experiences of the early Christians rather than a factual statement about either Jesus or God. Furthermore, it was a way of

¹¹¹ Ibid., p.97.

¹¹² Ibid, p.98.

¹¹³ The Sabellian heresy in the early Church held that although God was experienced as being threefold this experience did not reflect what God was like in his own eternal being.

¹¹⁴ Ibid p.98.

¹¹⁵ See J A T Robinson, *Honest to God*, London: SCM 1963 and *The Human Face of God*, London: SCM 1973, G W H Lampe, *God as Spirit*, Oxford: OUP, 1977 and M F Wiles, *The Remaking of Christian Doctrine*, London: SCM, 1975.

expressing these beliefs and experiences that was neither necessary nor helpful for Christians today.¹¹⁶

The argument put forward in *The Myth of God Incarnate* was challenged by other Church of England theologians¹¹⁷ and in sequence of three reports from 1987 onwards the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, which had been created in the 1960s, argued, at first rather cautiously, but later much more robustly, in favour of the traditional Christian position.

We Believe in God

The 1987 report *We Believe in God* has two chapters that look in turn at ‘The God of Jesus’ and ‘The God of the Disciples.’ The first of these chapters seeks to express what Jesus himself taught about God in a way that will ‘command agreement even amongst the most cautious scholars.’¹¹⁸ It concludes that:

The God of Jesus is the God of the Old Testament, personally involved in his creation, holy and one. In him justice and love are held together. His ultimate triumph over evil is sure. Through his Spirit he is the author of all zeal for goodness in humankind. His ears are open to the prayers of his servants, who can speak to him in their hearts.

Jesus must have appeared his contemporaries as a visionary, a charismatic prophet concerned with the renewal of religion at a time of great perplexity. Working under a great sense of urgency, he declared that the triumph of God's love was imminent and that this would be primarily a time of blessing for the oppressed. Renewal is a matter of the heart and the springs of action. It requires a vital relationship with God, whom Jesus teaches is followers to address as Father. Suffering is the test of this relationship, but it cannot destroy the assurance of the ultimate providence of God.¹¹⁹

If this is what Jesus himself taught about God, the question that then arises is how Jesus came to be identified with God. The chapter on ‘The God of the Disciples’ tackles this issue, arguing that the traditional Christian doctrine of God as developed by the Church Fathers was rooted in the first Christians’ experience of Jesus as the risen and exalted Messiah and Son of God and their expression of this in terms of an identification of Jesus with God’s Wisdom or Word:

From the very first the disciples proclaim that he was risen and exalted as the Messiah and Son of God. Thus the cross was seen to be the act of God's love, assuring a final outcome in the salvation of all who believed. In making this proclamation, they set Jesus so high, far above the ranks of angels, that the right-hand God himself, that there was a well-nigh irresistible pressure to ‘make him equal with God,’ as the opponents of the Christian message were not slow to point out (John 5:18, 10:33). Yet this pressure could never lead to the conclusion that Jesus was a second god, because it was the love of God

¹¹⁶ J Hick (ed) *The Myth of God Incarnate*, London: SCM, 1977.

¹¹⁷ See, for example M Green (ed), *The Truth of God Incarnate*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1977.

¹¹⁸ *We believe in God*, London: CHP, 1987, p.81.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 85-86.

himself that had been demonstrated in him, and which had become accessible through him .

In fact the way to a resolution of the difficulty had been prepared by the personification of the attributes of God within the Jewish religious tradition. The Christian idea the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, for example, is not fundamentally different from that of the Spirit of Yahweh in the Old Testament. although, as we have seen, it has been greatly enriched as a result of experience. Similarly the Wisdom or Word of Yahweh was available to express God in relation to his creation, especially in salvation history and in the law considered as God's gift. By seeing Jesus first as the expression of God's Wisdom (Paul) and then as the actual embodiment of his Word (John), the unique role of Jesus in the history of salvation could be given a theological explanation by those who were aware that through him they were incorporated into God's kingdom as his children and already shared in the gift of the Spirit which belonged to the kingdom. Thus God, the God of Israel, is also known as the Father of his crucified and redeeming Son, and in the distinguishable person of his sanctifying Spirit. But precisely because these are, theologically speaking, also functions or attributes of the one God, the unity of God is not impaired.

The beginnings of Christian doctrine the New Testament are varied and tentative, and it remained for the Church Fathers to work out the implications of them. But the Christian doctrine of God is not speculative theory. It is an attempt at understanding a profound religious experience, centred in the life and teaching of Jesus. It is an experience which is superbly captured in the words of Paul's greeting at the close of 2 Corinthians (13:14) 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.'¹²⁰

What is said in the 1987 report arguably fails to do justice to what the Gospels have to say about Jesus' own identification of himself with the LORD, but what the report does do is to make clear that the traditional Christian doctrine of God is not simply 'speculative theory,' but is rooted in the biblical witness to the God who is made known in the crucified and resurrected Jesus.

In addition, the report contains a chapter entitled 'God as Trinity: An Approach through prayer' which argues that reflection on the Christian experience of prayer as witnessed to by St. Paul in Romans, 1 Corinthians and Galatians leads to 'the necessity for thinking in some sort of Trinitarian terms' because:

Through prayer God can be recognised both as the creative power on whom all depend for their existence, and also as the one who in the dereliction of Christ's cross is disclosed as enduring in patient weakness, and coming perilously close to defeat. The Spirit who prays in us and is known in prayer is indeed Lord and Lifegiver, but also the one who cries 'Abba, Father' with us in doubt and in darkness and in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Ibid pp.101-103.

¹²¹ Ibid, pp. 118-119 and 121.

We believe in the Holy Spirit

In its 1991 report, *We believe in the Holy Spirit*, the Doctrine Commission looked at the topic of the Holy Spirit in response to a general growth in interest in the doctrine of the Spirit in the Western Church and also in response to the emergence of the charismatic movement as an important part of the life of the Church of England. Chapter 4 of this report is entitled 'The Spirit and Jesus' and this chapter the Commission rejects the proposal from Lampe and others that we should view Jesus as the supreme human embodiment of the divine Spirit.

It argues instead that we should view the presence of the Spirit in Jesus within a traditional Trinitarian and incarnational framework. Because Jesus is the incarnate Son his human response of love and obedience to the Father through the Spirit is the expression in our history of the loving response of God the Son to God the Father through the Spirit within the eternal life of God.

...in him God's calling to the world and the world's response to God are fused together: there is no gap between the first and the second. The human yearning of Jesus to give himself to the Father and see God's will done (e.g. Luke 12:50) is completely at home with God's own yearning to bring the world back home (to God). In Jesus, God is at work in the longing for God. It is this idea that has led Christians from the earliest days of their faith to say that Jesus of Nazareth can't be spoken of only in terms of a human identity; he embodies or represents something about God. This is the origin of the doctrine of the incarnation, the Christian belief that in Jesus the source of his acts and indeed of his very being from moment to moment is the eternal Son or Word of God. If God acts decisively in the life of Jesus, God is a God who acts not only in giving but also in responding: God acts to heal us and to call us and to re-create through an act of responding, through the loving self-surrender of Jesus to his Father's purpose; if we take this seriously, we must conclude that God's life is not just an act of pure giving but also somehow includes the receiving and giving back of love. Jesus is able to live out the life he does, not because he has invented the kind of human life that best pleases God by his own imagination, but because his humanly obedience and love are borne along, shaped and sustained, from the first moment of his existence, by the eternal reality of God's loving response to God's own love, God's delight in God. Jesus is the reality of God's love for God passed through the prism, we might say, of a suffering and struggling human reality

So Jesus is a 'Spirit-filled' human being, one in whom God's Spirit has achieved a masterwork, a wholly consistent life of loving freedom towards God; but he is thus because what is being formed and shaped in Jesus' human life is the likeness of an already existing perfection, God's loving answer to God's own generosity. The Spirit shapes in Jesus the life of the everlasting Word. It is this life, of course, which the Spirit seeks to shape in all of us; but before we are free to grasp it, to hear God's summons to be daughters and sons of a divine parent, we must be set free and have our eyes opened by a life that shows both the divine call and the possibility of living out of a full response to it, and which takes away, by the great absolution pronounced in cross and

resurrection, the fear and slavery of sin which keeps us from our true vocation. As the incarnate Word, Jesus both receives the Spirit, energizing the life of the eternal Word in this specific human body and soul, and gives the Spirit, pouring out the gift he has been given. He gives freely because he has received wholly; he has authority to give because he is himself caught up in God's own generosity.¹²²

The Mystery of Salvation

The third report in the sequence, the 1995 report *The Mystery of Salvation*, argues that, as the Fathers rightly saw, there is an inextricable connection between the Christian understanding of salvation and the Trinitarian nature of God:

Just as Christians cannot talk about salvation without talking about God, so they cannot talk adequately about salvation in Christian terms without talking about God as Trinity. The God to whom salvation is necessarily related is the God of Jesus Christ: God the Father God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. We can see this at once if we put in trinitarian terms the main point we have been making about salvation: that God does not just give us various gifts such as forgiveness or immortality, but gives us, in and with these gifts the gift of himself. This point is most emphatically made in the New Testament when it is said that God gave his Son (e.g. Jn. 3:16; Rom. 8:32) and gives his Spirit (e.g. Jn. 14:16; 11:17; Rom. 5:5). These phrases mean of course that God gives himself to us in self-giving life. In the incarnation and death of Jesus the Son, God *gave* himself *for us* in the once for all historical event which constitutes our salvation and as the indwelling presence of the Spirit in our lives God continually *gives* himself *to us* in our present experience of salvation. To use the fully trinitarian terms, the Father gave his Son for us (e.g. Jn. 3:16; Romans 8:32; Eph. 1:22), the Son gave himself for us (e.g. Mk. 10:45; Jn. 6:51; Gal. 14: 22; Eph. 5:25; Tit 2:14), the Father has given us the Spirit (e.g. Acts 5:32; 1 Thess. 4:8; 1 Jn. 3:24), and the Son has given us the Spirit (cf. Acts 2:33). With this divine self-giving all other aspects of salvation can be taken for granted: 'He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? (Rom. 8:32).

The formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity in its classical form as a result of the debates of the patristic period took place in close continuity with this New Testament emphasis. The doctrine insisted that all three trinitarian persons are truly and equally God, because it is as these three that God gives himself to us in salvation. If the incarnate Son Jesus were less than truly God or if indwelling Spirit were less than truly God, salvation would be jeopardised. It would not be God's gift of himself. The gift of the Son would be a gift of something less than God himself, and the gift of the Spirit would be a gift of something less than God himself. The divine activity in salvation—the gift of the Son and the gift of the Spirit—would not be the activity of divine self-giving that the New Testament witness sees in it. Salvation would only be the receiving of certain good things from God—forgiveness, immortality, and so

¹²² *We believe in the Holy Spirit*, London: CHP, 1991, p.64.

on-not the experience of the self-giving love of God. This argument from the nature of salvation was the really decisive argument for Nicene orthodoxy against all the more less Arian positions in the fourth century controversies.¹²³

This means, says the report, that ‘ The doctrine of the Trinity, properly understood, is not a speculative prying into the eternal mystery of God,’ rather it is the affirmation that:

...God in his own divine self really is such that God can share himself with his creation. God is not only the utterly other, who infinitely transcends creation; God can also be deeply and intimately present within creation, as the Spirit, and God can also be one of us, a genuinely human person, as Jesus Christ the Son. Therefore God can and does open his own life for his creation to share. Moreover, because God is Trinity God can share his life even with those created beings, ourselves, who are alienated from God and opposed to God. As incarnate Son and indwelling Spirit, God enters our situation of evil, suffering and mortality, shares with us the pain of alienation, bears for us the pain of overcoming our enmity and healing our estrangement, sustains us in the struggle to be truly human, redirects our life towards the Father as the source and goal of our being. The New Testament summary narratives of trinitarian self-giving imply all this. It is as Father, Son and Holy Spirit that God can and does save us.¹²⁴

As well as affirming the traditional Christian belief that Jesus is the second person of the Trinity who became incarnate and died for our salvation the report also affirms the biblical and creedal witness that Jesus descended to hell and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Concerning the former it declares:

In Jesus the divine gracious freedom coincided with our human obedient freedom to the point of death itself. The Apostles Creed confesses that he descended into the place of the departed. That is the meaning of the term hell in that particular clause of the creed, although there is also Christian truth in the understanding that God in Christ freely chose to go to the point of utter estrangement from the Father, so that, we might say paradoxically, for the sake of the love which is his nature, God chose the darkness of the utter absence of love. In this understanding, the cry of dereliction from the cross, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ signals the ‘descent into hell’ in which the love of God plumbs the farthest steps of alienation and apartness from God. Not only the cry of dereliction, but also the silence of Holy Saturday express the cost of Christ’s saving work. Loves redemption encompasses the dead and contends victoriously with the powers of evil.¹²⁵

Concerning the latter it states:

¹²³ *The Mystery of Salvation*, London: CHP, 1995, pp.40-41.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 43.

¹²⁵ *Ibid* pp.192-3.

In the creed, we confess our hope that Christ ‘will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.’ Our human destiny, and that the world, is centred on Christ himself. When God remakes the whole world, as he has promised, Jesus Christ will be personally present as the living heart and focus of all.¹²⁶

The New Testament pictures of this event, it explains:

...are not intended to provide literal depictions of the event, as though Jesus were (for instance) a traveller returning to the earth. They refer, in the far more profound language of biblical imagery, the manifestation in this world of that which is already true of Jesus Christ in heaven, that is, that dimension of reality which is immediate to God. In that dimension, Jesus is already victorious over all evil, ruling over all things, mediating the Father's love for the world and embodying the true response of humankind to that love. When God creates the ‘new heavens and the new earth,’ this same Jesus will be manifest as the victor, the Lord, the mediator and the high priest of all creation.¹²⁷

(c) Ecumenical Agreements

Since the late 1980s the Church of England has entered into a series of agreements to move towards closer unity with a number of other church in this country and overseas. These agreements have each involved a statement of the faith that the Church of England shares in common with the other church or churches involved and in every case the Church of England has stated its commitment to the belief that Jesus is true God and true Man and that in him God loves the world and has acted to save it.

The Meissen agreement of 1988 between the Church of England and what were then the Evangelical Churches of West Germany and the German Democratic Republic declares:

We accept the Niceno-Constantinopolitan and Apostles’ Creeds and confess the basic Trinitarian and christological dogmas to which these creeds testify. That is, we believe that Jesus of Nazareth is true God and true man, and that God is one God in three persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.¹²⁸

It also prefaces its affirmation of the doctrine of justification by stating:

We believe and proclaim the gospel that in Jesus Christ God loves and redeems the world.¹²⁹

These two statements are then repeated with only slight changes in the 1992 Porvoo agreement between the British and Irish Anglican churches and the Scandinavian and Baltic Lutheran churches,¹³⁰ in the 1995 Fetter Lane Common statement agreed by

¹²⁶ Ibid p.193

¹²⁷ Ibid pp. 193-194.

¹²⁸ The Meissen Agreement, Para 15 (i) in The Meissen Agreement Texts, London: CCU, 1992, p.16.

¹²⁹ The Mesissen Agreement, Para 15 (vi) in *ibid*, p.18.

¹³⁰ *The Porvoo Common Statement*, London: CCU, 1993, p.18.

the Church of England and the Moravian Church in Great Britain and Ireland¹³¹ and in the 1999 Reuilly Common Statement agreed by the British and Irish Anglican churches and the French Lutheran and Reformed churches.¹³²

In similar fashion, the covenant agreed in 2001 between the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain declares that the two churches involved both accept the traditional belief of the Church in:

The triune nature of God Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who creates, sustains, redeems and sanctifies;

The incarnation of the eternal Word of God, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth who is truly human and truly divine - son of Mary and Son of God;

The atoning death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the fulfilment of God's saving purpose;

The final appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, the judgement of the world by him, the eternal consequences of rejecting God's mercy offered in Christ, the final triumph of God's kingdom of righteousness and love and the new creation.¹³³

Two further ecumenical statements which have recently been welcomed by General Synod have also expressed the same faith in the triune nature of God and in the incarnation and saving work of God in Jesus Christ.

Firstly, the agreed statement *Growing Together in Unity and Mission* produced by the International Anglican Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission declares that Anglicans and Roman Catholics rejoice to be able to affirm as one the faith set out in the Apostles Creed and then states that:

We confess together that we are the graced recipients of the wholly unmerited gift of God's self-revelation in Christ. Our profession of faith springs from this gift, as also does our solemn responsibility to go out and share what we have received (cf. Matthew 10.8; 28.18-20). We proclaim that Christ is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1.15). He, the unique mediator between God and humanity, took flesh, suffered and died on the Cross for us, and was raised to life by the Father through the power of the Spirit, so that we in turn might have life through the same Spirit (cf. Romans 8.11), partake in the divine nature (cf. 2 Peter 1.4), and so reflect the glory of God (cf. 2 Corinthians 3.18). By the will of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit, Christ has redeemed the world once and for all (cf. Colossians 1.20-22). We are deeply united in joyful thanksgiving to the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In liturgical celebrations, we regularly make the same trinitarian profession of

¹³¹ *Anglican Moravian Conversations*, London: CCU, 1996, p.17.

¹³² *Called to Witness and Service*, London: CHP, 1999, p.26.

¹³³ *An Anglican Methodist Covenant*, Peterborough and London: Methodist Publishing House/ CHP, 2001, p.37.

faith in the form of the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.¹³⁴

Secondly, the 2006 report of the International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue, *The Church of the Triune God*, basis its ecclesiology on the fact that the Church participates in salvation by means of its participation through Christ in the Trinitarian life of God:

God's life is a dynamic, eternal and unending movement of self giving. God is the primary gift of the Father's love: the Father gives himself in generating a son and causing the Holy Spirit to proceed. God is also the perfect response to the gift of the Father: the Son or Word mirrors the Father and returns the gift of love. God is too the free outflowing of the Father's self giving: in the economy as salvation the Holy Spirit offers a share in the divine life to created beings. This means that creatures may be drawn by grace into the Son's relation with the Father. It also means that the Father's gift of the Spirit to us makes the Church a 'Spirit bearing body', so that the Spirit is manifested in the entire life of the Christian community, in sacramental action, in the mutual relation of believers, and in the lives of holy persons.

The economy of our salvation begins and ends with the Father. The ground of our salvation therefore lies in the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Holy Trinity. To be saved means to be recognised and identified not through human relationships, but through entry into the relationship that allows Christ to call the Father his Father and allowed allows us too to call the Father our Father. At the heart of this understanding of soteriology is filiation, identified in the language of the new Testament as adoption (*huiiothesia*) (Romans 8.15 and 23) and in that of the Greek Fathers as divinisation (*theosis*). Here the Spirit forms the believer in the likeness of Christ. The crucial link is made in Galatians 4.6 'And because you are sons, God has since Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying 'Abba, Father!'' God gives us the Spirit of Jesus, who is the Son of God. Our ability to use the language of Jesus in calling God 'Abba' is the sure hope of transformation of the whole of our creatureliness, the whole of our relatedness to each other and the rest of creation. To be in the relation that enables us to call God 'Abba' is to be delivered from slavery. Since it is the Spirit who communicates the possibility of calling God 'Abba,' we may speak of the Spirit as the outpouring into that which is not God of the divine relationship of gift and response shown to us in Jesus' relation to the Father.¹³⁵

(d) Statements about Christianity and other faiths

As well as engaging in the development of its ecumenical relationships, the Church of England has also been engaged in the development of its relationship with those of other faiths and this has raised the question of what we can say theologically as Christians about these other faiths and their adherents and the question of what basis there is within Christian theology for engaging in dialogue with them.

¹³⁴ *Growing Together in Unity and Mission*, London: SPCK, 2007, pp.12-13.

¹³⁵ *The Church of the Triune God*, London: Anglican Communion Office, 2006.

These questions are addressed from a Church of England perspective in the 1984 report from the Board for Mission and Unity *Towards a Theology for Inter-Faith Dialogue* and in the Doctrine Commission report *The Mystery of Salvation* to which we have already referred.

Towards a Theology for Inter-Faith Dialogue suggests that the basis for interfaith dialogue is provided by the biblical pointers that:

The Triune God is a God who moved in creation into a relationship with all that is created; who as the Word, is incarnate in Jesus and yet encountered in other places; and who as Holy Spirit, present in the Church and in the lives of baptised Christians, is also active among those of other faiths and cultures. It is the same God whose saving grace is at work outside the Church as well as within it.

These ‘powerful biblical pointers,’ it says:

... must inform a Christian understanding of our relationships with those of other faiths. What would be contrary to the biblical witness would be the abandonment of a defining loyalty to Jesus Christ as the one in whom God was reconciling the whole world himself and any proposal that this message of reconciliation through Christ need no longer be offered to those of other faiths. The inclusive invitation of God goes now, as always with the demand for exclusive loyalty to his Anointed.¹³⁶

In its chapter on ‘Christ and World Faiths’ *The Mystery of Salvation* explores what we can learn from the Bible that is relevant to this issue and ‘the witness of those who have lived closely with other faiths over a long period.’ It declares that:

It is incompatible with the essential Christian affirmation that God is love to say that God brings millions into the world to damn them. The God of Love also longs for all to come into relationship with him, and this is his purpose in creation. When he chooses certain peoples, such as Israel, or certain persons such as the prophets or Apostles, he chooses them not for exclusive privilege or salvation, but for a purpose in the expression of God’s self revelation and showing of his saving love for all.¹³⁷

However, it also goes on to affirm that the way that God will achieve his loving purpose in creation is through Jesus Christ .

Ultimately, we believe, and that is why we are Christians, that it is through Jesus Christ that God will reconcile all things to himself. How that will come about, we can only be agnostic about, whether it is through some real but unconscious response to the Christ within them now, or whether it is in response to some eschatological revelation, or by some other means.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ *Towards a Theology for Inter-Faith Dialogue*, London: CIO, 1984, p.27.

¹³⁷ *The Mystery of Salvation*, p. 173.

¹³⁸ *Ibid* p. 181

If we think of salvation in the broadest sense as encompassing all that heals and enhances human life then clearly aspects of salvation are available in many ways, not only explicitly through Jesus Christ. In the ultimate sense, salvation is defined by having Jesus Christ as its source and goal. To use the terms we deliberately put aside earlier, this pluralism and this exclusivism are reconciled, not in some form of inclusivism in the usual sense but eschatologically, in the final purposes of God. To recognise the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as constitutive of salvation as well as revelatory, as Christians do, is to anticipate that he will prove to be the definitive focus of salvation in its fully comprehensive meaning. It may be too that our understanding of Christ will itself be enhanced when people of other faiths are gathered in.¹³⁹

Because this is the case, because ‘ultimate salvation is found in Christ’ it follows that:

...mission remains the central task of the Christian Church. The task is to proclaim by word and to display in action that God has created a world that is good, and that we are responsible for that creation; that the kingdom of God, the kingdom of justice and peace, has already begun in Christ, and that we can be assured of its future consummation through him; that the gift and assurance of salvation and eternal life is available now, and the mark of this life is love. We deny the fullness of that love if we deny the truth and goodness which Christ, as Logos, and God by the Spirit, can also inspire in those of other faiths and of none. We believe that God has chosen to provide the fullest revelation of himself in Christ, and the fullest revelation of his love for all humanity in the cross and resurrection. Hence we naturally pray that God will bring all people, including those of other faiths, to explicit faith in Christ and membership of his Church. This is not because we believe that the God revealed in Christ is unable to save them without this, but because Christ is the truest and fullest expression of his love, and we long for them to share it. In the Lord’s words in St John’s Gospel, ‘I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly’ (John 10.10).¹⁴⁰

What we see in these statements is the conviction that the traditional Christian belief in the Trinitarian nature of God and in the incarnation of God in Christ provides the proper basis for a Christian engagement with those of other faiths. We see this same conviction in the reports on interfaith relations produced by the 1988 and 1998 Lambeth Conferences and in the report *Generous Love* produced by the Anglican Network for Inter Faith Concerns for the Lambeth Conference of 2008.

The statement on ‘Christ and People of Other Faiths’ produced by the Dogmatic and Pastoral Concerns section of the 1988 Lambeth Conference begins by declaring that:

The very life of God is a ‘being with.’ This was true in the beginning, it is true today, and will be the source of the greatest joy at the in the time. Creation itself is an act of ‘being with’; there never was a time nor a place when this fundamental affirmation about God was not true. There is not a single person

¹³⁹ Ibid.p.184

¹⁴⁰ Ibid p. 184

whose very being is not a manifestation of this truth that God is, by nature, a 'being with'. The Son or Word, the longing of God to share the divine life with others, was the one through whom all things were made. The Word who became incarnate in Jesus *is* the unquenchable desire of God to be with us (Emmanuel). The incarnation is itself the definitive expression of this longing on the part of God.¹⁴¹

The intimate relationship between God and humanity which we know in the person of his Jesus is the fundamental paradigm of God's relationship with the world. It is for that reason of the Bible proclaims that God's purpose since before creation has been to sum up all things in Christ, so that Christ might in the end present them to the Father, that God might be all in all (Eph. 1.10, 1 Cor 15.24-28).¹⁴²

This means that the 'exclusive' truth of God's relationship with Jesus is also 'inclusive' because all of humanity and all of creation is caught up in the relationship between the Father and the Son.

The statement acknowledges the reality of human estrangement from God and the fact that people have often said 'No' to God. However, it says, this does not mean that we should overlook the work of God in those who have not yet explicitly said 'Yes' to Jesus Christ:

...There are those who said 'Yes' to God before the gift of his Son. We believe, with the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, that their positive response to God could receive its full reward only in the reality of the incarnate Lord; but their fidelity was acceptable and accepted. This is not strange if, as we confess, all things have by God's will been appointed their fulfilment in Christ since before the foundation of the world. There are important Christological issues at stake here. We wish to continue to affirm, with the Creeds of the early Church, the Lord assumed the fullness of our humanity. The 'scandal of particularity' is bound up with the universal significance of the particular person we confess as saviour. It involves us in proclaiming that the God whose Word of love became fully incarnate in Jesus is the God of all creation. There is much in him which we shall see to be his only in the fullness of time.

The same is true of the counsel, challenge and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Jesus warned that the Spirit was want to blow where it willed. The gift of the Spirit to the Church of Pentecost is again remarkable precisely because the Spirit who is given is the universal Spirit of God. Any interpretation of the person of Christ or of the Spirit of which diminishes the universality of their presence or of their work ultimately diminishes the significance of the reality of the Church. To deny that the Lord of the Church is the one who is universally of the Lord of creation, in presence, in sharing, in communication

¹⁴¹ *The truth shall make you free*, London: ACO, 1988, p. 92 (Report of the section on Dogmatic and Pastoral concerns on 'Christ and people of other faiths.' Para 42).

¹⁴² *Ibid.* p.92, para 43.

as well is in power and judgement, runs the risk of turning the God and Father of our Lord into a tribal God.¹⁴³

In his contribution to the Inter-Faith report of the 1998 Lambeth Conference entitled 'Embassy, hospitality and dialogue' Michael Nazir-Ali argues that it is possible to hold that God has revealed himself through nature, conscience and even human religiosity (see Acts 14:17, Romans 2:15 and Acts 17:22-31). On the other hand, he says:

...it is also possible to hold that we can recognise God's revelation in these other ways precisely because he has revealed himself definitively in the call, the liberation and the history of his chosen people and, supremely, of course, in the living, the dying and the rising again of Jesus of Nazareth. This history of God's judgement, as well of his as of his salvation, is the canon or the touchstone by which are able to recognise God's revelation in other ways.¹⁴⁴

As he sees it, the basis for Christian dialogue with people of other faiths is the Christian belief in God as Trinity. Dialogue is possible because all human beings bear God's image, because the Spirit is at work everywhere inspiring people to respond to God and produce the fruits of the Spirit and because, as the early Christian apologists such as St. Justin Martyr and St. Clement of Alexandria saw:

God has not left human beings on their own in trying to interpret the universe. The Logos, the eternal Word of God, who provides coherence to the universe (makes it a universe), and who is incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, also in enlightens the hearts and minds of all human beings (John 1:9). The early Christian apologists identified the Logos with the divine reason which holds the universe together and which provides order and stability to human societies. Its illumination may be seen in the work of those philosophers who sought to understand the world in a rational way and who taught that it was part of human destiny to use reason as a way of participating in the divine work. Although the poets were seen as possessed with falsehood, nevertheless they were sparks of divine reason even among them, and the apologists follow Paul in trying to demonstrate the Christian God from the poetry of their time. The morality of the Stoics and Platonists is also recognised as reflecting the light of the eternal Word. Even the famed Sibylline oracles are seen as witnessing to the truth revealed by Christ. This is not to say that these apologists were indifferent to the distinctiveness of the Christian faith or that they endorsed everything in Gentile religiosity. Far from it, in fact they were very critical of most popular and even philosophical religion. The apologists were, however, recognising the light of Christ whatever they saw it and used it to make their case.¹⁴⁵

The report *Generous Love* also argues that the Triune nature of God is the basis for Christian mission amongst those of other faiths. It declares:

¹⁴³ Ibid. p.93, paras 46-47.

¹⁴⁴ M Nazir-Ali, 'Embassy, Hospitality and Dialogue: Christians and People of Other Faiths,' in *The Official Report of the Lambeth Conference 1998*, Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 1998, p.316.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, pp.320-321.

We believe that through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth the One God has made known his triune reality as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The boundless life and perfect love which abide forever in the heart of the Trinity are sent out into the world in a mission of renewal and restoration in which we are called to share. As members of the Church of the Triune God, we are to abide among our neighbours of different faiths as signs of God's presence with them, and we are sent to engage with our neighbours as agents of God's mission to them. Thus:

We seek to mirror the Father's generous love.

The God who has created our world is generous in grace and rejoices in diversity – 'O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all!' He has created all men and women in his image, and he wishes all to enjoy that fullness of life in his presence which we know as salvation. God cares for each person with a parental love; called to be perfect as our Father is perfect, we know that we must show that same love and respect to all.

We proclaim Jesus Christ as the one who shows us God's face.

Jesus Christ the Son of God shows us 'the radiance of God's glory'. He opens for us the way to the Father and we wish others to walk that way with us; he teaches us the truth which sets us free, and we wish to commend that truth to others; he shares with us his risen life, and we wish to communicate that life to others. Our witness to Jesus as Lord must be attested by Christlike service and humility if it is to be heard and seen by our neighbours as the good news of the Kingdom.

We celebrate the work of the Holy Spirit made known through the fruit of the Spirit.

It is not for us to set limits to the work of God, for the energy of the Holy Spirit cannot be confined. 'The tree is known by its fruits', and 'the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.' When we meet these qualities in our encounter with people of other faiths, we must engage joyfully with the Spirit's work in their lives and in their communities.¹⁴⁶

We will maintain our presence among communities of different faiths as we celebrate Jesus as the way, the truth and the life for us and for all people.¹⁴⁷

(e) The Canons and the liturgy.

Further evidence that the Church of England remains committed to the traditional belief that Jesus is unique because he is truly divine and truly human, the Son of God who became incarnate for the salvation of the world, is provided by the Church's

¹⁴⁶ The Anglican Communion Network for Inter faith concerns, *Generous Love: the truth of the Gospel and the call to dialogue*, London, 2008, p.p.7-8.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.15.

Canons and authorised liturgies. These provide the basic framework for the Church's life and witness and they uphold the same Trinitarian and incarnational theology as the Scriptures, the Creeds and the historic formularies.

The Canons

Canon A5, 'Of the Doctrine of the Church of England,' declares that:

The doctrine of the Church of England is grounded in the Holy Scriptures and in such teachings of the ancient Fathers and Councils of the Church as are agreeable to the said Scriptures.

In particular such doctrine is to be found in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordinal.

What this Canon tells us is that Trinitarian and incarnational theology of the Articles, the Prayer Book and the Ordinal, based on the teaching of Scripture and the witness of the orthodox Fathers and Councils, remains the doctrinal foundation of the Church of England.

Canon C15 is entitled 'Of the Declaration of Assent'. It contains the declaration of assent to the doctrinal inheritance of the Church of England made by all the clergy and by some authorised lay ministers of the Church of England at the time when they begin their ministries or when taking up new ministerial appointments.

This Canon begins with a Preface that runs as follows:

The Church of England is part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church worshipping the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It professes the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation. Led by the Holy Spirit, it has borne witness to Christian truth in its historic formularies, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer and the Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons. In this declaration you are about to make will you affirm your loyalty to this inheritance of faith as your inspiration and guidance under God in bringing the grace and truth of Christ to this generation and making Him known to those in your care?

In response to this Preface the person making the Declaration of Assent then replies:

I, (Name), do so affirm, and accordingly declare my belief in the faith which is revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds and to which the historic formularies of the Church of England bear witness; and in public prayer and administration of the sacraments, I will use only the forms of service that are authorised or allowed by Canon.

This Canon tells us two things. First, the God worshipped by the Church of England is the God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is he who is the 'one true God.' Secondly, the faith of the Church of England is the Trinitarian and incarnational faith

of the Scriptures and the Creeds, to which the historic formularies bear witness. It is this faith to which those making the declaration of assent declare their loyalty.

It is important to note that the doctrinal authority given to the Thirty Nine Articles in the Canons must be presumed (in the absence of any statements to the contrary) to extend to what is said about the Virgin Birth and the bodily resurrection in Articles 2 and 4. As *Doctrine in the Church of England* notes, there are those in the Church of England who question the historicity of the New Testament accounts of Jesus' birth and resurrection. The official doctrine of the Church as whole remains clear, however. An integral part of the uniqueness of Jesus is his birth from a virgin and his bodily resurrection.

The Liturgy

The Church of England has two authorised forms of liturgy. There is the liturgy contained in the Book of Common Prayer and the 1662 Ordinal and there is the liturgy contained in the various services of *Common Worship* that have been authorised since 2000. As we have seen, the *Book of Common Prayer* and the 1662 Ordinal contains the same theology of the Trinity and the incarnation as the Thirty Nine Articles and the same is also true of the liturgies contained in the various volumes of *Common Worship*.

In these liturgies provision is made for the regular recitation of the Nicene and Apostles Creeds, God is regularly referred to in Trinitarian terms and, as in the *Book of Common Prayer*, the language used about Jesus describes him as the incarnate Son of God who came in humility to be our saviour and will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.

Two clear examples of the way in which *Common Worship* describes Jesus in traditional terms are the collects for the first Sunday in Advent and for Christmas Day. These collects run as follows:

The Collect for the first Sunday in Advent

Almighty God,
 give us grace to cast away the works of darkness
 and to put on the armour of light,
 now in the time of this mortal life,
 in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility;
 that on the last day,
 when he shall come again in his glorious majesty
 to judge the living and the dead,
 we may rise to the life immortal;
 through him who is alive and reigns with you,
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 one God, now and for ever.

The Collect for Christmas Day

Almighty God,
 you have given us your only-begotten Son
 to take our nature upon him
 and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin:
 grant that we, who have been born again
 and made your children by adoption and grace,
 may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit;
 through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
 who is alive and reigns with you,
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 one God, now and for ever.

Both collects are slightly updated versions of the collects for the same days in the *Book of Common Prayer*, thus indicating the high degree of liturgical continuity between the *Book of Common Prayer* and *Common Worship*. If we look carefully at what they say about Jesus we find that he is referred to by the traditional Christological titles of 'Son', 'Christ' and 'Lord.' He is described as being 'One God' with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and the three phases of his ministry which are described in the New Testament and summarised in the Creeds, his coming in humility as a human being through his birth from a virgin, his resurrection and reign at God's right hand and his coming again in glory, are all affirmed.

V Where we have got to

In this report we have taken a long historical journey from the Old Testament to *Common Worship*. What we have seen in the course of this journey is as follows:

In the Old Testament The LORD, the God of Israel is the unique God. He alone creates, sustains and rules the world. From the time of Abraham onwards the LORD promises that he will bring blessing and renewal to a world marred by human rebellion against him.

In the New Testament Jesus is seen as unique because in him God has come to the world in person, taking human nature upon himself and dying on a cross in order to fulfil his promises and bring in his kingdom. Reflection upon the presence of the LORD in Jesus and on Jesus relation through the Spirit to the one he called Father led the New Testament writers to view the LORD not just as a simple monad, but as a unity consisting of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. .

In the Patristic period the New Testament account of the uniqueness of Jesus was challenged by theologies that denied either his true deity or his true humanity. The Fathers eventually rejected these theologies and expressed the core of the New Testament teaching about Jesus in the Nicene, Athanasian and Apostles Creeds and in the Chalcedonian Definition.

At the Reformation the New Testament and Patristic witness to the uniqueness of Jesus was challenged by English religious radicals who questioned both Jesus deity

and his true humanity and also suggested that it was not necessary for those with opportunity to do so to have faith in Jesus in order to be saved. In its three historic Reformation formularies the Church of England rejected these challenges and upheld the teaching of the New Testament, the Creeds and the Chalcedonian Definition.

From the eighteenth century onwards the Church of England's traditional view of the uniqueness of Jesus has been called into question by those who have asked whether the New Testament really teaches the equality and distinction of the persons of the Trinity whether it makes theological sense to continue to affirm the doctrine of the incarnation and whether we should continue to believe in Jesus' virgin birth and bodily resurrection. In the face of this questioning the Church of England has continued to uphold its traditional teaching in all these areas.

The Church of England, and Anglicans more generally, have also taken the traditional doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation as their basis for interfaith dialogue, holding that Jesus is the source of salvation for all people everywhere (whether they are yet aware of the fact or not), but also holding that Christians are called to be God's instruments in bringing people to explicit faith in Christ and to membership of his Church.

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