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JESUS, ASTEROIDS, AND THE DINOSAURS

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65,000,000 years ago, so they're saying, an asteroid hit "us" so hard that earth's biocategories were radically altered, the most spectacular change being the extinction of the dinosaurs. **The Jesus Event** (John Knox's "The Christ Event") has had a not less radical effect on the noocategories (constellations of ideas) of his followers, & to a lesser extent on the wider cultures (eg, the West's idea of "the person" was given its earliest shape by the struggle--resulting in the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity--to comprehend Jesus as "**Son of God**").

This Thinksheet looks at the categorical stress between the NT & the end-of-the-second-century developed Christology, which was to become orthodox (ie, t.c. [theologically correct--yes, on the model of p.c., the current "politically correct"]). My focal point is the NT-&-beyond metaphor, "Son of God," which appears as a United Church of Christ theological standard (in our Constitution) as "The United Church of Christ acknowledges as its sole head, Jesus Christ, Son of God and Savior."

1 By second-century's end, Jesus had **filled all the reservoirs** of meaning in the Mediterranean world.

For the **Jews** who had become followers, he was the prophetic-priestly-royal Messiah-Christ, projected as "the desire of all nations." The historical paradigm, constitutive of the prolog & cycles in Judges (the parabola of covenant, apostasy, oppression, repentance, deliverance [or, to be assonant: ratification, rebellion, ruin, repentance, restoration, rest]), was to be consummated in a messianic age of shalom (total prosperity in history's denouement of "peace" & "rest"). Of course most Jews saw in Jesus failure & death, not resurrection & fulfilment. In Jewish doctrine, Torah is latent in creation, patent in Moses: in Christian doctrine, the messianic age is latent in Jesus' resurrection & to be patent in his return. As some Jews saw Torah as preexisting in creation, some (then almost all) Christians saw/see Jesus as preexisting in creation: the former formed a receptacle for the latter.

But the ontological sense (in contrast to the merely poetic sense) of the preexistence idea was **Greek**, & influenced Jewish-&-Christian wisdom literature & Christian doctrine. From Plato, the Stoics, & the early Neoplatonists, the Christians took, & filled with Jesus, additional reservoirs, such as divine complexity, incarnation, & the cosmic hierarchy. Without the Jews' linear-cumulative sense of history & profound sense of suffering as having salvific potential--two additional reservoirs Jesus filled for the Christians--the Greeks could not bear comparable gifts to the Christchild.

As for the **Romans**, their imperial government--first an advantage to the Christians, then a threat--their central receptable-gift was the imperial headship (Kyrios [Emperor-Lord] Caesar, "Lord Jesus"). Parallel with Soter Caesar, "Jesus Savior." As for "Son of God," that title preexisted, but was used by, imperial Rome. Besides, "Savior" was a common appellation for deities in mystery cults from the East, including Greece.

I repeat the point of this §: The early Christian heart (devotion) & mind (theology) exuberantly filled with Jesus, the water of life, all the idea-pools the Christians encountered in Palestine & "to the ends of the earth" (Ac.1.8). Some view this as promiscuous intellectual imperialism, but it's primary impulse was not intellectual; & it's more accurate to say that the Christian experience of Jesus as resurrected Lord was itself so vast a reservoir as to be able to contain the Jewish, Greek, & Roman (& wider, in today's Third World theologies) goodies. Or to use my water metaphor, all the pools feed into Lake Jesus.

Or, with the early Christians themselves, we can--& I do--see the receptacles as *praeparatio evangelii* ("preparation for the gospel"), yearning prayers answered by God's sending, indeed coming as, Jesus.

2 But in this accumulative process, does the historical Jesus the man get buried under a pile of titles? And are some of the titles so misfitting as to corrupt his original image, the impressions he made on his contemporaries? Here we must

admit that the records cannot satisfy our historiographic hunger to encounter him *an sich*, in himself as he was: the records aim to present him as he is, the resurrected Lord, "declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit [fn., "Spirit"] by resurrection,...Jesus Christ our Lord" (Ro.1.4 NRSV, which by footnote here gives you the option of seeing the Trinity). We can't dig out that 65,000,000-year-old meterorite or that 2,000-year-old historical Jesus. As a rabbi once put it to me, "Tough luck for both of us: we can't get back to the original Moses, & you can't get back to the original Jesus." But the Jesus Seminar, & other scholars, are trying to; & we must not make the situation sound too bleak: the more we learn of his environment, the clearer our picture of him & of his earliest impact in history.

3 Historical uncertainities + ontological options should = christological **humility**, which is (conveniently) a Christian virtue. (How this virtue feeds other virtues & starves vices is the theme of a just-published Temple U. book, Norvin Richards' HUMILITY: A UNIQUE PHILOSOPHICAL EXAMINATION OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMBLE. Serendipity: same press, same time, Wm. Jos. Gavin's WILLIAM JAMES AND THE REINSTATEMENT OF THE VAGUE: A STUDY OF THE CONCEPT OF VAGUENESS IN THE WORK OF WILLIAM JAMES. Neither book deals with Christology; but both nudge us to modesty in our claiming as we stand before the majesty & mysteries of life & construct our meaning-world, using all we are & have, including our will to know, to believe, & to persuade.)

4 Now to the focus on the **"Son of God"** metaphor, from "high" (maximum receptacles) to "low" (minimum receptacles) Christology. The lowest Christology is really not a Christology at all: Jesus is a mere man, with no more ontological connection with God than that of any other human, though having a superb, perhaps even supreme, doxological connection (praise of God in devotion & in obedient living). One step up, Jesus became the unique Son of God. The last step up, Jesus always was the unique Son of God. This last is the position of "the ancient creeds" & "the Protestant Reformers" & thus of the United Church of Christ (from whose Constitution, these quotations).

5 But the middle position, that Jesus became the unique Son of God, has never completely disappeared. The reason is simple: The NT provides more support for it than it does for the developed orthodox teaching. Your choice: The NT presents (a) what should be the orthodox position, (b) a heterodox position (false teaching), or (c, my view) the pre-orthodox position (the oncoming orthodox position, in the generation after the NT, developing from NT trajectories). I must rule out the traditional notion that the NT's christological position is predominantly orthodox. That posture can be maintained only by eisegesis, the proleptic reading back of a later stage into an earlier (& thus anachronism). Devotion, yes; scholarship, no. A close parallel is Luke's statement (24.27) that "all the [OT] Scriptures" speak about Jesus: devotion, yes; scholarship (critical hermeneutics), no. And I'm not demeaning *lectio divina*, the devotional-spiritual reading of sacred texts! It should be the main way of reading Scripture for all the devout, including scholars.

6 To put this another way, the NT is almost entirely **pre-trinitarian.** Eg, Paul does not hesitate to say "the Lord is the Spirit" (2Cor.3.17 NRSV) & "the Son...will...be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all" (1Cor.15.28 NRSV). Not all the NT loci can be read trinitarianly, but all loci seeming to teach the Son's preexistence can be read nontrinitarianly, without the ontological preexistence of the Son. The Christian Connection churches, founders of Craigville, left open the unitarian-trinitarian question that was ripping up a lot of ecclesiastic territory in 19th-c. America, though some of their preachers were biblical unitarians (as distinguished from the transcendental unitarians who split away from the Congregationalists). A vigorous biblical-unitarian group, the Church of God General Conference, now publishes a quarterly, A JOURNAL FROM THE RADICAL REFORMATION: A TESTIMONY TO BIBLICAL UNITARIANISM (The Radical Reformation, Box 100,000, Morrow GA

30260). This church & its truly scholarly journal are in the "churches of Christ" tradition of "Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent." Eg, p.14 of I.4 (summer/92): "What is not clearly stated in the New Testament ought not to be erected into sacred dogma."

7 **Origins** forever afflict & stimulate humanity, especially leaders in religion, philosophy, science, & history. Almost all cosmologists today agree on the "myth" (cosmic story) of a primordial burst of energy (Big Bang), but are stymied with the question of the origin of order (explosions produce chaos, not cosmos); & biologists can't reconcile entropy with evolution, the bioprocess spinning off increasingly complex, orderly entities. And how did **the Jesus bang** produce the church & THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION (title of Jeroslav Pelikan's five-vol. work compared in the NYT as a work of genius at the level of Salisbury Cathedral or Chartres)? For cosmology, biology, theology, & all other areas of human thought, the ancient Stoics theorized the λόγος (logos) as cosmic word-reason-principle (not person) forever winning against entropy, the forces of chaos, disintegration, death. Christian literature first incorporates logos in the poem (quoted? created?) which begins the Gospel of John, which (1.14) applies the idea to Jesus (who is thus the Word), who preexists (at least in the sense that the logos preexists all emergents) & who incarnates (enfleshes) the logos principle--or, on the "high" reading, makes his entry into history as a person in continuity with his pre-entry nature (he was a person before his birth--which I think, but the passage itself does not force this conviction even though "this one" is masculine, not neuter: Jn. here, as the NT everywhere, is concerned with interpersonal relationships, not metaphysics).

Note my double analogy: I've spoken of two bangs in the "history" of the cosmos, the big one (the priordial explosion) & (which appears in my Thinksheet title) the little one (the dinosaur-destroying implosion). Jesus exploded into history, then the ideas about him (including titles) imploded into "the history of christology." We should not despair over, but rejoice in the riches of, all the fragments from all these explosions & implosions. For us Christians, Jesus is the cosmos of organizing logos; & the fact that the idea-trajectories about him in & beyond the NT are mutually irreconcilable should not distress us. If we can't put all the pieces together in science, why should we imagine we should be able to do so in theology?

8 A further analogy: Imagine yourself going on a trip, a journey, a tour, a cruise with, in turn separately, each NT title for Jesus--especially, I'm suggesting here, the **Son of God.** I've been given, for my 75th birthday, a cruise through the Panama Canal. Loree & I will enjoy it in itself, without much reference to our past travels. Your spirit will be one with the early Christians' if you can praise-pray the Jesus titles one at a time, using them as mandalas of the mind, as study-&-meditation foci. You don't need theological dictionaries, NT theologies, commentaries, though they help; all you need is your Bible & concordance. The unity you come to, through this process of spiritual formation, is a unity of devotion, not of intellection. In intellectual formation, we should strive to make coordinated sense of life, including of our religion; but we should bear in mind that this process is as secondary as family management is to love; & that Christian thinking's primary sphere of discourse is the Christian community, where it is judged as to (1) its accuracy in representing the Christian experience (as, eg, "Son of God" for Paul refers fundamentally to his Damascus-road conversion), adequacy as an aid to worshiping God "with all your mind," & general human & specific cultural relevance to witness & work in the world (the conceptual plausibility-credibility of the kerygma [the Christian message] as preached, taught, & argued as [to use a later conclusion] Christians in the formative years & centuries of the Faith "outthought" their neighbors). What persuades outsiders, however, is more often the way we Christians **live** our private, communal, & public lives than the way we **think.** In ritual & righteousness we live a Story-shaped vision ever renewed by the lives & thoughts of the faithful, toward whose witness (in & beyond the Bible) our attitude is primarily appreciative, only secondarily critical.

9 This attitude is **antiexcisional.** It's question is not, What must I throw out because I don't believe it? Rather this question: How can I, when faced with something I can't believe, suspend my disbelief sufficiently to hear God speaking to me through what my mind cannot assent to (in my own & other traditions)? Without this suspension, nobody'd ever get converted to any way of seeing-&-living-in-the-world (ie, any religion, any life-commitment). Why not? Because every world-story, ie myth (positive sense), is, seen from outside, nonsensical (which is a circular statement: one is "outside" in the sense that one's way of making sense is other than the way insiders make it). So Einstein's sardonic remark, setting the customary & the creative against each other: "Common sense is the particular set of prejudices one has acquired in one's culture by age eighteen."

Two illustrations of this point:

In **1903**, Otto Pfleiderer said this (11ff) in THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CONCEPTION OF CHRIST (G.P.Putnam): Many, "instead of inquiring into the whole content of the New Testament idea of Christ, emphasize only the phases of that conception which are acceptable to the thought of to-day--overlooking all other phases and adding much of their own invention in order to construct an ideal of Christ in accord with modern taste. Such procedure is in these days most common and in great favour," having produced "a long succession of romances commencing with Renan's LIFE OF JESUS," replacing "the simple ethic of myth" with "the romance of sentiment and reflection." The book aims to excise nothing from the Christian Story but to illumine (as the subtitle has it) ITS SIGNIFICANCE AND VALUE IN THE HISTORY OF RELIGION. This, more than 1/3rd c. before Cadbury's THE PERIL OF MODERNIZING JESUS.

Eighty years later, in **1983**, the jacket of Rosemary Radford Reuther's SEXISM AND GOD-TALK: TOWARD A FEMINIST THEOLOGY (Beacon) asks "Can women be saved by a male savior?" Rightly (in my opinion) preaching gender egalitarianism transcending patriarchal bias, she hunts for & finds in the biblical traditions (jacket) "usable and authentic intimations of divinity within the traditional Jewish and Christian understandings of God." But she proceeds reductively, excisionally (eg, p.135): "Once the mythology about Jesus as the Messiah or divine *Logos*, with its traditional masculine imagery, is stripped away, the Jesus of the synoptic Gospels can be recognized as a figure remarkably compatible with feminism." Why remarkable, except in praise of her knife & hermeneutic agility? After emasculating Jesus, why should she be surprised to find the remainder "compatible with feminism"?

I credit Christian excisionists with the motive of wanting to improve the communication of the gospel & thus its power in church & world. But the actual result, as I've studied it in history & observed it through six decades, has been to impoverish the Story & reduce its impact. The "NT only" folks (including the "biblical unitarians" I'm saying, in this Thinksheet, as good a word for as I honestly can) excise the preexistence of Christ &, with it, the Trinity; some excise the Virgin Birth; some excise Jesus' "unique" (Jn.1.14,18; 3.16,18) sonship to the Father; some.... I believe this slash-&-burn mentality, this excisional-critical attitude, is erroneous (as violating the devotee's spirit) & pernicious (in its effects on the mind & community of the Church).

10 Instead of slash-&-burn, critical consciousness can be used to increase appreciation by discerning, enjoying, & exploiting differences which strict logic would see only as contradictions. Eg, Jesus' preexistence & the Virgin Birth are **on different tracks** & so do not collide. (Yes, I'm off my cruise ship & onto a train.) Logically, the situation would be this: With preexistence, who needs a virgin birth (whose function is to impregnate humanity with deity & so produce a unique Son of God)? Or with the Virgin Birth to explain Jesus' divinity, who needs preexistence? If we shift from the Jewish accent on the interpersonal (God/humanity, person/person) to the Greek fascination with ontology ("being" &"becoming"), think of the contradictory readings we can come up with on such a passage as Gal.4.4 NRSV: "God sent his Son, born of a woman." Is the Soning of Jesus to be seen as "being" (preexistence) or as "becoming" (possible readings of his birth [Mt. & L.], his baptism [M.], his resurrection [Ro.1.4]?

Retroactively & in isolation, these readings, instead of contending among themselves for dominance (in the Greek mode), all support one another in illumining (in the Jewish mode) that Jesus re-presents, is the presence of, God's loving attention to humanity & sacrifical intention to reestablish & deepen relationship with us, on condition of our repentance and faith-trust. The gospel is the point! As scholar, I am patient with, even enjoy, the often puzzling details; as Christian, I am impatient to get on with living-telling-defending the Story together with my fellow-believers & also alone. (And I hope our new hymnal won't knock out "The Son of God goes forth to war." For there is a war on out there, a war among the world-stories, a recruiting war. NOTE: Russia's minister of education says that in his country, the only noticeable progress in the religious education of the public is being carried on by American Protestant evangelicals.)

11 The NT's interest in "Son of God" is "**Son** of God" (his unique-essential relationship to & with us): the thinkers of the later early church concentrated on the "Son of **God**" (Jesus' relationship with God, culminating in the 4th-c. doctrine of the Trinity, the Son in relationships with Father & Spirit; & the 5th-c. fully developed orthodox doctrine of Christology, the nature of the Son's own being).

Almost all of this doctrinal development was apologetic (for the benefit of insiders, Christians) & polemic (as attacks on rival stories, especially where intrusive of the Christian community) projections or trajectories from NT analogies & metaphors. Eg, "I am the **light** of the world" (Jn.8.12), the metaphor dominating lections & hymns in last Sunday's worship, during which I thought of how Athanasius (arguing for preexistence, against Arius) used Sun/radiance to prove Son/radiance-of-Father--"nor can we conceive of the Word of the Father as external to Him....the whole Being of the Son is proper to the Father's essence, as radiance from light, and streams from fountain....the Father is in the Son, since the Son is what is from the Father and proper to Him, as in the radiance the son, and in the word the thought, and in the stream the fountain" (NPNF 2nd series 4.321-97). We sang the 4th-c. hymn to Jesus, "O Splendor of God's Glory Bright." During Teknon Time (the Children's sermon), the pastor exhibited a box (made for the purpose by an artist-parishioner) showing the world-globe on its front. When he turned on the internal light, the congregation could see an image of Jesus reflected from the box's rear through its front). Again, "I am the light of the world" (cp. "a light to the nations," Is.49.6, read in our worship).

Yes, Athanasius' victory over Arius was not free from politics. But the former had the metaphor-better of the latter, whose "There was a time when he [Jesus] was not" & other Greek abstractions could not compete. Soul-battles are won by story-analogy-metaphor, not by abstract logic. It's even true in the natural sciences, where the cogency of analogy wins the day.

12 In this Thinksheet I've been expounding certain attitudinals:

(1) The **pleroma** principle. As "the earth is the Lord's & the fulness [Heb.n.fem., used of a pregnant woman] thereof" (Ps.24.1 KJV; TEV, "The world & all that is in it belong to the Lord"; LXX, πλήρωμα *pleroma*, Vulg. *plenitudo*; in 1Cor.10.26 NRSV, "the earth and its fullness are the Lord's"; I translate as "all it holds"). A world-imperial claim for a small nation's deity! Psychologically, the devotional attitude is that one's object of devotion fills its category without remainder (as in courtship, "You are the only one [for me]"; in worship, "You alone are my God"). Since romance & religion create expansive feelings in the heart, this attitudinal could be called the expansive principle; but my focus here is on the resultant implied negative: the actor falls short of nothing in devotion, the actee is experienced as potentially falling short of nothing in supply. For his disciples, the Lord Jesus expanded into Jesus the LORD (Jn.20.28: "'My Lord and my God!'"). We believers see this as expansion into realization (a coming to real-ize, to make real for ourselves, what the situation, the objective reality, is): unbelievers see it as an expansion beyond reality, off into illusion.

When I go for max on christology in my worship & my devotional study, I am not distressed by intrusive logical perceptions of contradition (a distress my

mind needs to experience when in critical mode, that "heart & mind, according well, may make one music"). If when in devotional mode you fall into doubt, stop that! Yes, you can (though our culture has programmed you not to)! Study "doubt, n. & vb.," in your concordance. Of course you're to use your mind critically, discerningly, discriminately (as Daniel [5.12,16, Heb. "knots" for him to untie]; cf. ICor.2.14, 11.29, 12.10). But your devotion to your Lord is to be uncritical, doubt-free, without inner division (Mt.14.31, 28.17), without reasoning (1Ti.2.8, διαλογισμός *dialogismos*, "lifting up holy hands without...doubting [NRSV "argument"]")....But this principle should not operate as a counsel of obscurantism, to hinder the movement of the mind from custom to creativity. When the heaven-voice told Peter to "kill & eat" unclean animals (Ac.10.13), he was at first "greatly puzzled" (NRSV vs.17; KJV, "doubted"), then transposed from animals to people (vs.28 NRSV): "God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean." Jewish dietary laws had social-cohesional value (as, formerly, RC no meat on Friday, only fish); but Christians, as Peter, see them as prejudice-promoting (cf. the condemnation of economic prejudice in Jas.2.4, *dialogismos*).

Hellenistic Judaism, in incorporating the pleroma principle, set the syncretistic style for early Christianity. The virgin birth of leaders was a pagan notion, but the LXX Jews may have come to believe that Messiah would be born of a virgin (Heb. "young woman" becoming, in the Gk. of Is.7.14, "virgin," almost three cs. before Jesus). The Judaism into which Jesus was born was split between a community of content ("We can live with it [the Roman occupation]," said the Sadducees) and communities of discontent (the moderates, Pharisees; & the radical messianists such as the Qumranists & the Zealots). Jesus' was one of the radical-messianist movements, his impact so huge as to startle minds out of familiar grooves all across the spectrum of Jewish opinions & parties &, especially postresurrectionally, of the nonJewish world. In touch with the small print of people's lives, he also could & did challenge the headline-makers. Experiencing him as God's "YES!" (2Cor.1.19) to "God's promises" (next vs.), they named him Messiah-King-CHRIST, (prior vs.) "the Son of God, Jesus Christ"; (subseq. vs.) "it is through him that we say the 'Amen' [Heb., YES!], to the glory of God." Vv.21f convey two convictions: Christians have, through Christ, a messianic anointing (Messiah-Christ = "anointed one"); & the full-coming or completion of Kingdom Come is already within us (in the sense that the wedding is in the engagement ring, which is one meaning of the Gk. here): "God...has anointed us, by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first installment." While the yes-saying here is Paul's, its spirit was a general characteristic of the earliest Christians, what I'm here calling the pleroma attitudinal or principle. We are not surprised, then, that Paul can be, intellectually, "all things to all people" (1Cor.9.22, "that I might by all means save some") without worrying whether the ideas he inhabits with Christ are themselves inter-reconcilable. This being the case, it's a hermeneutic error to press down too hard on, to try to get too much out of, every particular idea. We must ask to what degree, in the case of a particular idea, is Paul's mind invested? Obviously, it's completely invested in some, moderately invested in others, & in a few only marginally invested. (So it is with all thinkers, especially syncretists like Paul, who was a Christ-syncretist [not a pan-syncretist].)

Preexistence as a 3rd-class-investment instance in Paul: Do some passages clearly express this idea? Yes: 1Cor.8.6, 15.47-49; Gal.4.4; Phil.2.7. But if we think of Paul as thinking far more like a Jew than like a Greek philosopher, nothing here requires Jesus' personal preexistence, to say nothing of equality with God (Willi Marxsen, IDBS 151: "no intention of expressing an equality of nature [with God] in the sense of later metaphysics"; Paul "is not interested in metaphysics or cosmic speculation"). In the Jewish sense of Torah-Word as preexisting (as the Logos in Jn.'s prolog), Jesus preexists & becomes incarnate. The metaphysical question is whether he preexisted as what we'd call a person in, or alongside of, the Person of God. The gnostic, in contrast to the biblical Christians, reveled in such speculations, & could wonder whether Jesus

preexisted as a fetus in God! In dealing with God as Person or personal, philosophical theology continues in the gnostic vein. I am a strongly convinced personalist, but I'm making here the point that the NT is nonspeculative: it is descriptive of Christian experience (usually all available materials, especially Jewish, in the describing) & proclamative of the Christian message (again, using all materials available--Jewish, Hellenistic Jewish, & pagan). To expect the NT to answer metaphysical questions is tantamount to a fundamentalist's wanting the Bible to answer geological-cosmological questions: it's a distorting overdemand oddly parallel with the knownothing overclaim that revelation stops with the NT ("Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent."). Overdemands & overclaims dishonor the word of God by elevating piety above truth.

I could show, for the rest of the NT, what I've shown for Paul. The common theme that God "sent" Jesus need not imply "from heaven," as it continues God's sending the prophets. Eg, A.T.Hanson (THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD, SCM/82, 83) says He.1.2 "could be rendered, 'He has in the last days spoken to us in the mode of Son,' which would imply that sonship only began at the incarnation."

Better Jewish/Christians relations can be a side-benefit of a more historical exegesis of Scripture, avoiding postbiblical eisegesis. Eg, the Hebrew of Ps.110.1--NRSV, "The LORD [YHWH] says to my lord"--cannot permit the traditional capitalization (as in KJV) of the second "lord," a capital letter which provided false entry to the notion of an intratrinitarian conversation between the Father & the Son. NRSV here shows how a state-of-the-art biblical translation often closes the door against false entries, against eisegesis parading as exegesis.

I must adduce one more instance of what we should read with Jewish eyes, not Greek. Col.1.13-15: God's "beloved Son....is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him [NRSV fn., "Or 'by'"] all things...were created...created through him and for him." Seven things, twice says the Babylonian Talmud, preexisted creation: the Torah, repentance, Paradise, Gehenna, the throne of glory, the temple, and the name of the Messiah. (All world-stories include preexistence, reponding to the panhuman question What was there before there was anything?) How natural, inevitable, it was for the early church to see its Lord as filling with his "fullness" (Jn.1.16; Col.1.19, 2.9) the Jewish ship of preexistence ("pleroma" being the ordinary term for a full cargo & the full complement of crew). Again, Bereshith Rabba begins with a description of the Torah as God's blueprint for creating the world, Torah & wisdom together. Jewish biblical & postbiblical wisdom literature personify *chokmah* (fem.) as consultant in creation (Prov.8.27-30: Wisdom's preexistence, & function in creation as "a master craftsman"; followed by the Jesus Sophia [Gk., "wisdom"] tradition). Prov.8, Col.1, & Jn.1.1-18 are an historical-literary flow. And for us Christians, "Jesus" is the preexistent "name of the Messiah." But to the Jew, the idea of a preexistent *person* was, is, a blasphemy against monotheism. Though our fullblown doctrine of the Trinity has Greek-philosophical ways of protecting the divine Unity, we Christians have never been able to convince Jews that the protection is adequate. Increasing numbers of eminent Christian scholars agree (1) that the personal preexistence of Jesus, even if true, is not a necessary reading of the biblical loci, & (2) the orthodox doctrine of personal preexistence tends toward docetism (the idea that the preexistence of the Lord compromises his incarnation: was he really human if he was divine before he became human?).

Finally, in the NT there's no neat correlation of titles & functions. Eg, you can't go to the dictionary for "Son of God" & read into Jesus whatever you find. The movement is in the opposite direction. The historical Jesus / resurrected Lord as experienced in heart & church is read into all the titles appropriated to the praise of God through Jesus in the Spirit. The primary Christian referent of each title is Jesus, not its diachronic or synchronic meaning-in-world. But it's probably safe to say that Ps.2.7 ("You are my son; today I have begotten you.") is the literary origin of the connection of "Son of God" with the messianic tradition. Having acquired that tradition, "Son of God" becomes the most inclusive title for Jesus with the possible exception of "Lord." Thus the first line of this Thinksheet: "Jesus Christ, Son of God and Savior."....The

ancient Christians' functional appropriation of titles in the atmosphere as well as in the heritages models our doing the same, as when from a minor medieval tradition we call Jesus our Mother. Luther & Watts, in appropriating current pop tunes, added vitality to Christian worship & thus to Christian life. What, in today's atmosphere, is appropriable for vitality & without pollution?

Two concluding caveats: (1) The personal preexistence of the Son of God need not imply equality with the Father; & (2) The impersonal preexistence of the Son of God need not deprive Jesus of anything the NT says about him after the incarnation. Since I'm a trinitarian, is not all this discussion merely academic for me? Academic, but not merely. The academy has its place at the Christian round-table, & anti-intellectualism should have no place.

(2) The **Jesus-only** principle has been implied time & again in the above discussion of the pleroma principle. It's paradoxical that we Christians are at once called to magnanimity-generosity of spirit toward all, even enemies, and also to broad intellectual-&-cultural appreciations, yet to narrowness of devotional commitment: "Jesus only" (Mt.17.8, M.9.8; "alone," L.9.36), "no other name" (Ac.4.12), "name above every name" (Phil.2.9); the 140,000 of Rev.14.1 had written on their foreheads only "his name and his Father's name"; and in his baptism, as at his transfiguration, he's identified as the God-pleasing Son (Mt.3.17, M.1.11, L.3.22); & in Jn.1.29-34, Jn.Baptist, recognizing Jesus' Spirit-baptism as superior to his own water-baptism, says "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!....this is the Son of God" (NRSV fn., "Other ancient authorities read 'is God's chosen'"). This teaching is devotional before it is theological, an act of self-"giving" (Lat., *devotio*, a vow given) before an act of reflection. It's a Christian <u>theological standard</u>, but heresy-hunting & ex-communication shoud be under control of the third attitudinal,...

(3) The **kenosis** principle. As our Lord "emptied himself" (Phil.2.7; TEV, "gave up all he had"), we Christians should see intellection (our ideas) as servant of, to be emptied into, action (Gal.5.13 NRSV: "through love become slaves"). More than on what we thought, the judgment will be on what we did.