CHRIST AND SALVATION

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In recent years there has been a spate of books on christology, which is directly related to the anxiety that many Christians feel about one of the central doctrines of Christianity, and that is the incarnation. The publication of J. D. G. Dunn’s magisterial Christology in the Making at the end of last year shows how very complex and difficult it is from the point of view of a New Testament scholar. Here the reader can see the profusion of christological ideas among the early Christians in the New Testament, which drew out the meaning of Jesus, whom they believed to be their heavenly Lord. The various strands of thought which lie behind these ways of expressing the meaning of Christ are identified. For the most part they are ideas already current in some form in Jewish religion of the time. But the application of them to Jesus is done in a highly creative manner. It is therefore true to say that New Testament christology—or perhaps one should say the christologies of the New Testament—have no precedent. Here is something new, created out of the central importance accorded to Jesus and in some way set in motion by the impact he had made on his followers. The basic propositions, such as the confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, interpret the immediate impact of Jesus after his death. I was going to say ‘after his death and resurrection’, but, as we shall see, there is a sense in which the statement that Jesus is the Christ is the resurrection rather than a consequence of the resurrection. At any rate, here is an item of christology which has its background in the Jewish religious ideas of the time, and is asserted as a direct result of what can be called the Christ-event. There are other christological ideas, however, which came in subsequently as a

1 A lecture delivered in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester on Wednesday, 14 October 1981.
result of further reflection. These may be due to the effort to understand the central beliefs more fully and to work out the logical implications of them in relation to other aspects of the contemporary world-view. The application of Jewish Wisdom speculations to Jesus, which is prominent in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel, is a case in point. It is an attempt to place Jesus in relation to God's over-arching plan of creation and redemption, and it has produced the doctrine of the incarnation. Dunn roundly asserts, in one of his summarizing sentences which he so conveniently prints in italics, that 'only in the Fourth Gospel can we speak of a doctrine of incarnation' (p. 259). But not all of the gathering wealth of christological ideas in the New Testament can be explained in this way. Some of them are simply due to the tendency, which we can see in many of the religions of the Ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman world, to ascribe to one's own divine object of worship everything that other people ascribe to theirs, like the aretalogies in the popular cult of Isis.¹

The making of christology is thus a cumulative and a complex business. But everyone realizes that the credibility of the Christian claims about Jesus stands or falls with the validity of the starting point, and the relation of that to what Jesus thought or said, or at least implied, about himself. Very few Christians could be satisfied with a christology which they know perfectly well Jesus himself would have repudiated. As there is evidence in the gospels that Jesus did not openly claim to be the Messiah, and even rejected the suggestion when it was made by others, we are here treading dangerous ground.² Needless to say, there have not been wanting those who regard the origin of Christianity as a wanton fraud on the part of the disciples, or a piece of pious make-believe, or the


astonishing result of what was really a ghastly mistake. None of these positions is in the least bit plausible, but they illustrate a real difficulty which has to be faced squarely.

At the very centre of Christian affirmation there is a miracle, the miracle of the resurrection. For some people this is no problem at all. But it must be admitted that, ever since the seventeenth century, the philosophical climate has been inhospitable to the idea of miracles. It is thus not surprising that the eighteenth-century rationalist Reimarus, taking up a hint dropped by Matthew, asserted that, after the crucifixion of Jesus, the disciples stole the body and claimed that he had risen from the dead. The understanding of miracle has changed since then, and more recent developments in the philosophy of science allow for greater breadth than the old rigid idea of cause and effect. It is unlikely, however, that the resurrection of Jesus will ever be fitted into a rational account of the universe. Moreover it can be claimed that it is not really desirable that it should be, because then it would lose its character as a miracle which points to the special activity of God. That is why most Christians swallow their hesitations and just accept it. If we do not believe that God occasionally intervenes in the world which he has made, is there any point in believing in God? And if Jesus was a man who was the focus of God's activity for the salvation of the world, can we wonder if supernatural powers were seen in him?

Such is, I believe, quite a common way of looking at the problem, but it makes an absolutely impossible basis for the critical investigation into Christian origins. The modern historian is not allowed to take leaps, and justify them on the grounds of miracle. Far too many miracles have been shown by careful investigation to be no miracles at all. Only when every side of the purported miracle has been examined with the greatest care, and all other explanations fail, can a historian bow before the facts and allow that, speaking from the limitations of our present knowledge, we must acknowledge that there is a miracle here. Precisely

1 This is the thesis of G. Vermes, Jesus the Jew (London, 1973), who sees the progress of christology in the New Testament as an illegitimate development of the Jewish titles used to refer to him in the primitive church.

this procedure has been applied in recent years to the Holy Shroud of Turin, and some eminent American scientists have claimed that the phenomena can only be explained as the result of a miraculous occurrence.¹ But many others remain unconvinced. If the verdict that a miracle has taken place is reached too early in the investigation, it inhibits further enquiry.

So I hope I may be pardoned if, for the sake of this lecture, I approach the subject of Christ and salvation without presupposing the miracle of the resurrection, as it is usually understood, at all. Let us stick to the facts which, in spite of all the difficulties that stand in the way of reconstruction of the life of Jesus, command agreement as virtually indisputable. These will include his mission as a preacher of the kingdom of God, his gathering of a group of disciples, some of whom were commissioned as missionaries (for that is the meaning of ‘apostles’), and his death by crucifixion after arrest and trial. In addition there will be the fact that some of these disciples very soon began to resume their preaching ministry, claiming that Jesus was the Messiah in heaven, and promising salvation to those who believe in him.² The object of our enquiry will be to try to uncover the experience of salvation, which impelled the disciples to make this claim. I will argue that the information which may be gleaned from the New Testament does allow a cautious reconstruction of what happened. In this reconstruction there will be no rabbit out of a hat, as if the crucial fact has been hidden for nearly two thousand years, and only just come to light. Moreover the resurrection will have its place, but not as a sort of cataclysmic and inexplicable happening which explains the whole thing, but as itself part of the explanation of the experience of salvation. This reverses the usual view, which

²In both Hebrew (yeshu’ah) and Greek (sōtēria) the root meaning of salvation is deliverance, but in both languages and cultures it acquired much wider significance. Its early Christian usage is probably indebted to Deutero-Isaiah, the prophecy from which the notion of ‘gospel’ (euangelion) is also derived. Thus it properly refers to God’s act of deliverance of his people, but in the New Testament it is always connected with Jesus as the agent of salvation. ‘This salvation makes itself known and felt in the present, but it will be completely disclosed in the future’ (Arndt-Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Cambridge, 1957), p. 809 a).
thinks of the sequence of events as Jesus' death, then the resurrection on the third day, and then the affirmation of salvation in the light of that. According to the view which I now put forward, the death of Jesus is followed by the experience of salvation, and the resurrection is part of the affirmation in which that experience is expressed.\(^1\) This makes the resurrection a theological statement rather than a physical happening, though the possibility that realization of the theological implications of the experience was aided by a miraculous occurrence is not excluded. It is neither denied nor affirmed in what I have to say. But, in common with many critical scholars, I do take a very sceptical view of the resurrection narratives of the four Gospels.\(^2\) Thus I exclude the story of the empty tomb from consideration, on the grounds that it is a legendary concretization of the assertion that Jesus is in heaven. It is a popular tradition which became current long after the initial experience, and I hold that it was unknown to Paul. The appearance of Jesus to the women, or to Mary Magdalene alone, is even more unreliable, as it is a further elaboration of the empty tomb story, found only in later strands of the gospels (Matthew and John), and again not mentioned by Paul. The appearances to the assembled apostles, however, have an important relation to the historical development, as we shall see, but the idea, found only in Luke and John, that the first of these took place on Easter night, i.e. on the third day after the crucifixion, is to be taken with a pinch of salt. According to Paul's information, which he retails in 1 Corinthians 15:3 ff., the resurrection took place on the third day, but there is no suggestion that the first appearance was as early as that. But I am already slipping into misleading ways of referring to these events. To understand them properly we have to establish the experience of salvation first.

\(^1\) This point is not new, but represents the convergence of much critical study in recent years, and corresponds with the lengthy treatment of the issue in E. Schillebeeckx, Jesus: an Experiment in Christology (London, 1979), especially pp. 379–97.

The experience of salvation in the New Testament is not easy to investigate, because there is bound to be a subjective element in assessing such a very personal matter. The Acts of the Apostles describes occasions when people were converted as a result of the apostles’ preaching and miraculous actions, but no indication is given of what went on in their minds, or how they would characterize their new life in contrast with the old. The same applies to many of the gospel episodes, where the effect of a healing miracle is told in such a way as to illustrate the process of conversion in the missionary work of the church. Jesus’ comment, ‘Your faith has saved you’, reflects the language of the church’s mission.

But we must be careful to distinguish between response to the positive teaching contained in the apostolic preaching of the gospel, which undoubtedly included reference to the resurrection, and the situation which obtained after the crucifixion but before the doctrine of the resurrection had been formulated. Does the New Testament record the experience of anyone who was in that position? The answer is yes, but it is only one man, and that is Peter. Thus it is Peter’s experience of salvation which will be our chief item of study. But we have a kind of cross-check, because there are features in Paul’s conversion which match the experience of Peter. So I shall now try to reconstruct Peter’s experience of salvation, and then relate it to the much better documented experience of Paul.

The historical materials of the life of Peter are extremely meagre. Some of them fall inevitably under the critical axe. Neither of the two epistles attributed to Peter in the New Testament can be accepted as indubitably authentic. In fact one of the counts against the authenticity of I Peter is the complete failure to indicate personal contact between the author and the sufferings of Christ, to which he so frequently refers.

1Matt. 9:22; Mark 5:34; 10:52; Luke 7:50; 8:48; 17:19; 18:42.
Peter figures quite often in Mark, and this may well be the reason for the tradition reported by Papias that Mark wrote the gospel on the basis of Peter’s preaching. Peter’s call, along with his brother Andrew, is described in Mark 1:16–18, but without the legend of the miraculous catch of fish with which Luke embellishes it (Luke 5:1–11). At this stage he is called Simon, and Mark mentions the nickname Peter only when he gives the list of the twelve apostles, along with the nickname Boanerges for the sons of Zebedee (Mark 3:16 f.). We know from Paul that the Aramaic form Kēphâ was normally used in the Jerusalem church (cf. Galatians 1:18; 2:9, 11, 14). Critical scholarship is naturally suspicious of the famous passage in Matthew 16:18, where Jesus calls Peter the rock of ‘my church’.\(^1\) I take this to be a legend in connection with the church at a particular place which Peter founded on his missionary work, probably in Syria. And I regard it as very doubtful that Jesus ever thought in terms of his church. Moreover it seems to me incorrect to regard Peter as the leader of the twelve. Mark puts him at the head of the list only because he became the leader of the church after the death of Jesus. At the time of the Galilean mission, to which Mark 6 refers, the leader of the twelve was Jesus himself. The apostles are sent out in pairs, and none is singled out above the rest. Similarly Mark’s selection of Peter, James and John as a specially intimate three may be a reflection of the three described as ‘pillars’ of the Jerusalem church, James, Kepha and John, in Galatians 2:9, though there James is the Lord’s brother (Galatians 1:19), replacing the original James, who had been put to death by Herod Antipas, according to Acts 12:2, in circumstances of which nothing is known. Thus we have to be cautious about ascribing special eye-witness status to the events in which these three appear, the raising of the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5:37), the transfiguration (Mark 9:2), and Gethsemane (Mark 14:33).

Mark also makes Peter the spokesman of the twelve. First there is his confession of faith at Caesarea Philippi: ‘You are the Christ’ (Mark 8:29), then his disapproval of Jesus’ prophecy of his death.

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and resurrection!—8:31 ff.), and thirdly his claim to have given up everything to follow Jesus (10:28). In all three cases Peter represents the rest. But the choice of him to make the confession of faith suits his cardinal position later on in the early days of the church. And his disapproval of the passion prediction may well have been suggested to Mark by Peter's famous three denials of Jesus within the passion story itself. These two items thus link up with, and may have been prompted by, two further features of the Petrine tradition which, as we shall see, really do have good claims to be accepted as historical evidence. The third saying, about giving up all for Jesus, however, takes its place alongside the experiences of the disciples in general. To make Peter the spokesman is surely a narrative device. But these experiences of all the disciples give us the broader background to Peter's special experience of salvation, the fact that he had kept company with Jesus as one of his closest friends, had listened to his teaching and tried to make it his own, and had witnessed the events which led up to the crucifixion.

Matthew adds some further details, but we have already seen reason to be cautious about the most important of them (Matthew 16:17–19), and the same goes for the rest.\(^1\) Similarly, but for different reasons, it is unwise to rely on the contribution of John.\(^2\) Luke, on the other hand, does have two items (Luke 23:31 f.; 24:34) which link up with the two points made above in connection with Petef's role in the confession of faith (Mark 8:29) and in the story of the passion (Mark 8:31 ff.). These are two major matters which are central to our purpose.

(a) We shall take the second first, i.e. Peter's denial of association with Jesus during the trial before the high priest (Mark 14:66–72). This important detail has been prepared for in the account of the Last Supper, where Jesus foretells Peter's failure


\(^2\)The references to Peter in the Fourth Gospel correspond with the same events as in Mark (the call of the disciples, John 1:41–45; Peter's confession, 6:68; the denials, 13:36 f.; 18:15–27). Peter is also singled out in order to heighten the dramatic effect of an underlying tradition in 13:6–11 (the washing of the disciples' feet) and 23 (question about the traitor). In 20:3–10 John may be building on an earlier tradition in which Peter was mentioned (Luke 24:12). Later legends about Peter are reflected in John 21.
(Mark 14:29–31). It is here that we have Luke’s first special contribution. For Luke 22:31 f. appears to incorporate a related, but independent, fragment of tradition:1 ‘Simon, Simon, behold Satan demanded to have you [plural, i.e. all of you who are gathered here], that he might sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for thee that thy faith may not fail; and when thou hast turned again, strengthen thy brothers.’ A highly significant feature of this item is that Peter is here singled out as one who will turn back from satanic influence first, and so will thereby be in a position to lead the others back too. Luke joins this to the Marcan prediction of the three denials (verse 34) by means of a transitional verse in which Peter protests his willingness to suffer imprisonment and death. This is echoed in John’s version of the same material (John 13:36–8), and may have been influenced by the subsequent tradition of Peter’s martyrdom.

Most (but not all)2 modern commentators believe that the story of Peter’s denials has a basis in fact for the simple reason that it is most improbable, in view of Peter’s later eminence, that anyone would invent it. There is no hard evidence at all of an early Christian smear campaign against Peter, aimed at blackening his character by suggesting disloyalty of this kind. The fact that Paul ‘opposed him to his face’ at Antioch (Galatians 2:11) does not contradict the respect for him which Paul shows in the same letter. On the contrary it attests Paul’s great anxiety that Peter of all people should understand the principle behind the policy which he had adopted in the mixed Jewish and Gentile congregation there. Hence Peter’s denials should be accepted as one firm factor in our reconstruction of his experience of salvation. Obviously it will highlight the element of forgiveness in that experience.

(b) The other major matter is Peter’s role in the confession of faith, which reflects his personal part in the formation of the church. The evidence for this is provided by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3–7:


For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

This is a tradition which Paul received. It clearly comes from Jerusalem, because of the mention of James. It is highly probable that Paul received it when he made his first visit to Jerusalem three years after his conversion, and consulted Peter (Galatians 1:18). It is an unadorned list of the steps whereby the church came into being. Paul has glossed it only slightly, in connection with the five hundred, where he says that most of them are still alive at the time when he is writing, which would be some twenty to twenty-five years after the event. But that is because of the special relevance of this point to his main purpose, which is to explain to the Corinthians the basis of his teaching on the resurrection.

The piece starts with two theological statements. The first concerns the death of Jesus. He died as the Christ, his death was for our sins, and it was in accordance with the expression of God’s plan in the scriptures. It is a theological statement, because it states the meaning of Jesus’ death in relation to God. And the matter of first importance is that it was as the Messiah, God’s anointed, that he died. Thus the statement incorporates the confession of faith spoken by Peter in Mark 8:29. Moreover, the fact that it was ‘for our sins’ probably implies reflection on the meaning of the death of Jesus in the light of the Suffering Servant prophecy of Isaiah 53, which explains why it is ‘in accordance with the scriptures’. But another tradition which Paul received, the Last Supper tradition quoted in 1 Corinthians 11:23–5, furnishes evidence that Jesus himself approached the possibility of death in a sacrificial spirit, making of it an offering on behalf of others. As one who was very conscious of sin, Peter is likely to have attached special value to this aspect of Jesus’ death. Thus this first theological statement expresses one facet of what may have been Peter’s experience of salvation.

The second statement is the resurrection on the third day. The verse raises numerous problems, but I shall confine myself to what is strictly necessary for the present argument. Firstly, to say that Jesus was raised is in itself a truism. The fact that the dead are, as a rule, raised is an accepted position in Pharisaic and popular Jewish belief of the time, and was certainly held by Jesus and the disciples. Belief in the resurrection of Jesus depends on belief in the resurrection of the dead in general, as Paul says quite explicitly in 1 Corinthians 15:13. The usual view was that, while the bodies of the dead lay in their graves, their souls were reserved in a heavenly place, waiting for the general resurrection at the end of the age. Secondly the statement which we are now concerned with mentions both burial and resurrection. But it does not say that the tomb was empty, nor does it say that the general resurrection was somehow anticipated in the person of Jesus. I have suggested elsewhere that what is said here about the resurrection parallels what has just been said about the death, not only in the formal structure of the two statements, but also in the process by which it was brought to expression. Here I shall put the point only very briefly. Behind the statement in the first case Jesus’ own words about his death as a sacrifice (1 Corinthians 11:24) have been correlated with a scriptural text (probably Isaiah 53) in order to prove the point that he died as Messiah. I suggest that the same holds good for the second case. Behind the statement concerning the resurrection there is another saying of Jesus. This is a saying about resurrection on the third day. As before, it has been correlated with another scriptural prophecy in order to prove that it is as Messiah that he is raised. In this case the saying of Jesus is his claim that he would destroy the temple and build it in three days (Mark 14:58), which I take to be authentic, though it is quoted by the false witnesses. We know from John 2:19–22 that

2 B. Lindars, Jesus Son of Man, chapter 4: The Passion Predictions (forthcoming).
3 V. Taylor, The Gospel according to St. Mark (London, 1966), says ‘Of the genuineness of the saying there can be little doubt’, citing Goguel, Lohmeyer, Wellhausen and Rawlinson in support of this view.
it was applied to the resurrection of Jesus, and this is corroborated by the use of it as a taunt in Mark 15:29. The scriptural passage with which it was supported is more difficult to identify, but may have been Hosea 6:2 interpreted messianically.\(^1\) Understood in this way, the tradition that Jesus was raised on the third day does not require a visible act of walking out of the tomb on that day. It is a theological statement, that he who died as Messiah has risen on the third day as Messiah.\(^2\) That means that, instead of waiting with the other souls of the departed for the final day, such as are described in Revelation 6:9–11, the soul of Jesus is raised to the position of highest honour at the right hand at God. And this is why the fundamental christological text in the New Testament is an exaltation text, Psalm 110:1: 'The LORD says to my lord: “Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool.”'\(^3\)

Various consequences follow from this basic statement. One is that, if the death of Jesus is regarded as a sacrifice for sin, it is a sacrifice that has been accepted by God, and therefore sins are forgiven. I do not need to stress how important that was for Peter. Another is that the preaching of Jesus concerning the kingdom of God is confirmed. His premature removal from the scene does not negate his message of the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God. It simply puts him in the proper position to be God's agent in actually setting it up. The task of preparing people for it therefore becomes more urgent. Instead of feeling that their work is finished, the disciples should see themselves as commissioned afresh to carry it forward. And their message will carry the added

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\(^1\) Rabbinic interpretations of Hosea 6.2 and another possible text (Jonah 1.17) have been studied by H. K. McArthur, 'On the Third Day', NTS, xviii (1971–2), 81–6.

\(^2\) There is some rabbinic evidence for the belief that the soul of a dead person did not finally leave the body until after three days. By this time the process of corruption made recognition of the person impossible. This point is an important factor in the story of the raising of Lazarus (John 11:17, 39). For the rabbinic references see commentaries on John, ad loc. and H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch (Munich, \(^3\)1961), ii. 544 f.

\(^3\) This text is quoted or alluded to more often than any other Old Testament text. For a recent very full treatment see M. Courgues, A la Droite de Dieu (Paris, 1978).
assurance that all that was foretold about the Messiah in the scriptures has been fulfilled, and he is already the heavenly lord.

According to the tradition which Paul reproduces, after Jesus had been raised on the third day, he ‘appeared’ (ἀφθηθὲ) to Peter. It is not said that the appearance was on the third day. The third day belongs to the theological statement of the resurrection, and was identified with the time of the first appearances only later, when the doctrine was expressed in the well known stories of the gospels. But it is not at all clear that appearances of the kind described in these stories, which may be loosely called ‘objective’ appearances, are meant in this more ancient tradition. Paul regards them as exactly equivalent to his own conversion experience: ‘Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared (ἀφθηθὲ) also to me’ (1 Corinthians 15:8). This might suggest that the appearance took the form of a ‘subjective’ vision. But it is difficult to think of more than five hundred people having the same vision, if it is to be regarded as a subjective experience. A third possibility is intellectual vision, i.e. realization, a moment of truth bringing intellectual certainty. Without wishing to identify myself necessarily with this third, seemingly reductionist, view, I would nevertheless assert that it is an essential constituent of each of the other two. If Jesus appeared to Peter in bodily form, he still had to understand what he saw, not in terms of resuscitation of a dead man, but in terms of the theological statement of resurrection which we actually have in 1 Corinthians 15. The same goes for a subjective vision.

The interpretation in terms of intellectual realization helps us to make sense of what happened next (1 Corinthians 15:5 ff.). We are not told when or where Peter had his experience, but I would suggest that this and the subsequent events were spread over a longer period of time than we usually assume on the basis of Acts 1:3. The place is most likely to be Galilee, as implied by Mark 14:28; 16:7, because there is a clear tendency to rationalize the resurrection stories in Jerusalem later on. After appearing to Peter, Jesus appeared to the twelve—not necessarily all twelve, if the Judas legend has a secure base in history, but as many as Peter could bring together out of the band whom Jesus had originally
commissioned for the Galilean mission. Peter somehow conveyed to them his own immense sense of renewal, and fired them to resume the missionary task. The combination of resurrection appearances to the apostles and commissioning of them as apostles is a prominent feature of the later traditions, but is also confirmed by Paul himself (1 Corinthians 9:1). The reconstitution of the twelve, perhaps incorporating Matthias (Acts 1:21–6), was followed up by a large gathering of disciples, here said to number over five hundred. Peter and the other apostles again conveyed the experience in such a way that they shared the same vision (either literally or metaphorically). And so the church began. This gathering seems to me to be much more truly the day of Pentecost than the highly stylized account which Luke has given us in Acts.

Either at the same time or some time later the decision was made to make Jerusalem the centre of operations, following Jesus' own strategy. There, where Jesus was condemned and crucified, they make the theological proclamation of the resurrection, that he who was put to death as Messiah has been raised by God as Messiah and is the heavenly lord. The tradition in 1 Corinthians 15 also tells us of two further appearances, of which we have no hint in Acts. The first is the commissioning of James the Lord's brother, who now takes charge of the community in Jerusalem. The second is the commissioning of 'all the apostles', who are, of course, not the twelve, but a fresh band of missionaries based on the Jerusalem church.

According to this reconstruction Peter holds a cardinal position in the formation of the church after the devastating tragedy of Jesus' death. This was due to his profound realization of the theological implications of Jesus' death, and his capacity to convey the same experience to others. Luke corroborates the tradition that he was the first to see the risen Christ: 'The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared ( ὁ φθανέω to Simon! ' (Luke 24:34). A further testimony is provided by Luke 24:12, which however may be an interpolation into the text of Luke: 'But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping down and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home wondering at what had happened.' This seems to be a relic of the beginnings of the story
of the empty tomb. It has been brilliantly built up by John into an appealing episode in John 20:3–10.¹

What does come out clearly from this investigation is that Peter was intensely aware of the action of God in the events which he had witnessed. God was active in Jesus in his public ministry. Peter had seen the strength of Jesus' intimate relationship with God, which is typified in the Abba (Father) address. This feature of Jesus' spirituality is preserved by Mark in the Gethsemane story, and Paul shows that it was taken over by the early church (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). Peter also knew the spirit in which Jesus faced his death, which is preserved in the Last Supper tradition. But when the test came, Peter fled off with the others, and later, when questioned, denied his connection with Jesus. This was a denial of what Jesus stood for, and therefore a denial that God was active in him. On reflection after the event, however, Peter realized that it was impossible to deny that God had been active in Jesus. His message of the kingdom remained valid, his Abba spirituality was not negated but rather enhanced by his fidelity even to death, and the death itself could in no sense be regarded as God's verdict upon him. Putting this into theological terms, Peter could say that Jesus died as Messiah in accordance with what was foretold in scripture, and was raised by God as Messiah on the third day in accordance with the scriptures. The proclamation of the resurrection is the form in which God's verdict upon Jesus is expressed over against man's. According to that verdict Jesus is the Christ.²

¹The omission of Luke 24:12 from D and some Old Latin texts was claimed by Westcott and Hort to be a 'western non-interpolation', but modern textual critics are unwilling to trust such omissions without support from manuscripts written in the east. The verse is accepted in the most recent edition of the Novum Testamentum Graece of Nestle-Aland (Stuttgart, 26/1979). The western text is notable for harmonizing changes, and the omission can be readily explained as due to the apparent discrepancy with Luke 24:34 (so I. H. Marshall, op. cit. p. 888). It is very unfortunate that this verse has been banished to the margin in both RSV and NEB.

²It has been argued by V. Neufeld, The Earliest Christian Confessions (Leiden, 1963), that 'Jesus is the Christ' is the most primitive form of the confession of faith, and the confession 'Jesus is Lord' is to be regarded as dependent upon it and equivalent to it in meaning in the first instance.
It is impossible to do justice to the experience of Peter, because the facts that have come down to us are so meagre. We can understand it as an experience of salvation, but we cannot tell precisely what was the form of the experience. It is tempting to see it in terms of Peter’s personal crisis, seeking a solution to his intense remorse at his denial of Jesus. Such an explanation seems to me no more and no less probable than the traditional one, that his understanding was aided by an ‘objective’, or at any rate a ‘subjective’ appearance of the risen Lord himself. But whatever form it took, it was evidently an enormously powerful experience, in view of its consequences in the formation of the church, of which Peter was in a very real sense the founder.

But in the case of Paul there are his own writings to help us. He has left us a brief and tantalizing account of his conversion in Galatians 1:15 f. We have already observed that Paul claimed to have had the same experience as Peter, using the same word ‘appeared’ (ophthe) in 1 Corinthians 15:8, and appealing to it as the grounds for his direct apostolic commission from Christ himself (1 Corinthians 9:1: ‘Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?’). But in Galatians 1:15 f. he says that it pleased God ‘to reveal his Son to (or in) me’ (apokalupsai ton huion autou en emoi). It is natural at first sight to understand these three references in the light of the splendid account of Paul’s vision on the Damascus road in Acts 9:1–8, which is repeated with slight variations in Acts 22:2–16; 26:9–18. But we have to allow for the fact that Luke wishes to differentiate Paul’s experience from that of the apostles, because he has made a complete break between the resurrection appearances and all subsequent visions in the story of the ascension in Acts 1. On the other hand we can see the opposite tendency in Paul’s own description, because he has every reason to make his experience identical with theirs, because of the attacks of his enemies on his apostleship. Thus we have to be cautious about the precise nature of Paul’s experience, while allowing that it was of such a kind that Paul himself felt able to regard it as belonging to the same series as the appearances listed in the Jerusalem tradition which he quotes.
The important thing is to see how it was an experience of salvation. In Galatians 1:15 f. Paul mentions three things which invite comparison with Peter’s experience. In the first place he traces the action of God long before the experience itself to the time before he was born: ‘He who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace. . . .’ The words echo Jeremiah’s call (Jeremiah 1:5) and the call of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 49:1 ff. This sense of divine destiny recalls the scriptural preparation for the death and resurrection of Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15:3 f. Secondly, it is an experience of revelation concerning Jesus, whether it was a vision in the strict sense or not. Thirdly, what was revealed was the sonship of Jesus. The primary sense in which Jesus is God’s Son is of course as the Messiah, according to recognized Jewish usage,¹ and this agrees with the meaning of the resurrection in the Jerusalem tradition. Paul mentions that he had persecuted the church out of zeal for the traditions of his fathers. But there is no hint of a personal crisis in relation to the keeping of the law. The possibility that such a crisis was a factor in Paul’s conversion cannot be excluded altogether, but it is unsafe to build on Romans 7:7–22 from this point of view.² The cardinal factor is the change of perspective with regard to Jesus himself. Paul never says why he persecuted the church, but whatever the reason was it must have related to the church’s teaching about Jesus.³ If the attitude to the law was the point at issue, then it was Jesus’ teaching concerning the law which

¹Semitic idiom requires no more than the sense of being a person who conforms to God’s ways, cf. Matt. 5:44 f.: ‘Love your enemies . . . so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good. . . .’ But in ancient Israel the king was considered to be God’s son by adoption, and this continued in the messianic idealism of New Testament times, notably in an Aramaic text from Qumran (4Q243), which includes the line: ‘He shall be hailed (as) the Son of God, and they shall call him Son of the Most High’ (text and translation in J. A. Fitzmyer, ‘The Contribution of Qumran Aramaic to the Study of the New Testament’, NTS, xx (1973–4), 393). It is in this sense that Paul calls Jesus the Son of God in Rom. 1:4, almost certainly quoting an earlier formula.

²Two recent attempts to reinstate the contention that Rom. 7:7–22 relates to a personal crisis in this way appear in Pauline Studies: Essays presented to F. F. Bruce, ed. D. A. Hagner and M. J. Harris (Exeter, 1980), pp. 80–94 (D. Wenham) and 228–45 (R. H. Gundry). Neither is convincing on this point in my view.

aroused Paul's wrath in his pre-Christian days. On this view, Paul could see perfectly well that the tendency of the teaching of Jesus was radically opposed to the Pharisaic interpretation to which he was committed. Consequently Paul's conversion leads him to a totally new attitude to the law, and this explains his inflexible opposition to the Judaizers who were upsetting the Galatians. Alternatively Paul's previous hostility may have been due to his view that, as a hanged man, Jesus was accursed of God, so that to confess him to be God's Son, his chosen Messiah, was blasphemy against God. This position can be deduced from Galatians 3:10–14. In this case Paul's conversion leads him to see, as Peter had seen, that though Jesus died on a cross, it actually was as Messiah that he died, and therefore it is as Messiah that he has been raised. The curse of the law has been broken by the greater power of God.

Thus, whether these issues were factors in Paul's conversion, or consequences which he saw as a result of his conversion, the central feature is the new estimate of Jesus as the Messiah, God's Son. As with Peter, it carries with it the conviction that God was active in Jesus, active in his life and teaching, but also and especially active in his death. This realization is characterized by a depth of feeling which we can only guess at in the case of Peter, but which is fully documented in the case of Paul. I need only refer to such famous passages as 2 Corinthians 5:18 ('God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself'); Romans 5:8 ('God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us'); Galatians 2:20 ('The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me').

*Christ and Salvation Today*

The experience of salvation, as I have tried to present it in these pages, is inseparably bound up with the realization that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and therefore he is the Lord in heaven. I have tried to show that this realization is the crucial matter for both Peter and Paul, in their different circumstances. I have also argued that, given the belief in resurrection which was widely accepted in Judaism at the time, it was natural that this should be
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expressed in terms of the resurrection of Jesus, whether there was an event which can be described as rising from the tomb or not. The resurrection is therefore not a fact accessible to historical investigation, but a theological statement, equivalent to the confession of faith, ‘Jesus is Lord’. The confession could never have been reached, if it had not been for the unprecedented idea that Jesus died as the Messiah. Jesus was put to death as a messianic claimant, and that by rights should have put an end to the claim. To make the claim in spite of his death, or indeed because of his death, entails the conclusion that a new concept of messiahship is involved. It is clear that this new concept was aided by the prophecy of the Servant of the Lord, who, according to Isaiah 53, gives his life for many. It is very likely, though the evidence is not conclusive, that Jesus understood his own destiny in the light of this prophecy. It would not be necessary for him to interpret the prophecy messianically, for if, as seems probable, he saw himself as a spokesman for God, rather than as the Messiah in the conventional sense, he could still have shaped his understanding of his destiny around this prophecy when he was faced with the risk of death in the pursuit of his mission from God. But if he fulfils the prophecy, and the prophecy is regarded as messianic, it will naturally follow that he is identified with the Messiah by those who are aware of the connection.

In the last analysis it does not matter very much whether Peter and the rest were justified in deciding that Jesus was the Messiah, for that is only a matter of words. The important thing is that they were enabled to reaffirm Jesus’ message from God and to see his death in a wholly new light, as something positive and affirmative instead of negative and destructive. Thus Jesus is both in his life and in his death the agent of God’s love for mankind. Salvation consists in the transformation of life which results when God’s

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1 This is obviously completely different from the idea in those Jewish texts, such as 2 Esd. 7:28–32, which speak of the death of the Messiah, along with the rest of humanity, at the end of the messianic age. The general resurrection then follows, in which, of course, the Messiah is implicitly included. See S. Mowinckel, He that Cometh (Oxford, 1956), pp. 325–33.

2 For Paul’s conviction that the death of Jesus is the expression of God’s love, cf. Rom. 5:8 and Gal. 2:20, quoted above, and Rom. 8:31–9. The same idea is found in John, especially 3:16; 1 John 4:9–11.
love is admitted as the key to the interpretation of life. For Peter this took the form of the sense of forgiveness, because the starting point for him was the shame of his denials. For Paul it was the universal gospel of grace, because that was precisely what his persecution of the church had attempted to deny. Another facet of the cross is the fact that the worst that men can do cannot thwart the love of God and his will for man's good. Such thoughts could be mere pious fancies, if it were not for the fact that they came to expression with extraordinary vitality in the actual events in which Jesus was the chief actor.

Christology is the science of relating the fact of Jesus to the concept of God. As a matter of history the experience of salvation came first, and it led to the confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. The fuller explication of this came later, first in the astonishing wealth of christological ideas that are found in the New Testament, and later in the doctrinal developments of fathers, councils and creeds. The current debate about the incarnation is concerned with the validity of the expressions that have been used to elucidate the central Christian experience of salvation. But the experience is primary, and the words used are necessarily related to the concepts and expectations current at the time. These have changed since the classic era of doctrinal formulation, and so the words have to be adapted and reinterpreted in greater or less degree. But the experience which they seek to express remains the same.