

The question posed by Jesus at Caesarea Philippi, “Who do men say that I am?” will never have an answer that exhausts the truth of his uniqueness until that day when he appears and “we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2), no longer in a glass darkly, but “face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12).

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I. “But Who Do YOU Say I Am?” (Mk 8:29a): Raymond Brown and New Testament Christology

Staking Out the Territory

Fifty years ago, Raymond Brown had already established his position as one of the world’s leading Catholic New Testament scholars. His magisterial two-volume commentary on John’s gospel remains an invaluable reference for scholars. At a time when American Catholics were still “minor leaguers” in contrast to British, German, and French exegetes, biblical theologians, Fr. Brown along with Joseph A. Fitzmyer, SJ, and Roland E. Murphy, OCarm. had produced the *Jerome Biblical Commentary* (1968) to provide a solid foothold for students in the best of historical-critical research into the books of the Bible, their history, religion, and theological concepts. Like his coeditors, Brown remained convinced that careful historical-critical study was our surest way of understanding what the Bible’s authors sought to communicate. Where that analysis unseated naïve or literalist dogmatic “proof-texting,” it requires a correction in theological argument but will not require rejection of the foundational dogmas of the church.²³

²³ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII* (AB 29; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966); Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII–XXI* (AB 29A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970); Raymond E. Brown, SS, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, SJ, and Roland E. Murphy, OCarm., eds. *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1968). Kevin Duffy observes that after 1970 Brown ceases to invoke his earlier work on *sensus plenior* and its neoscholastic language, opting instead for more pragmatic, piecemeal efforts on topics as in his work on the virgin birth. Brown presents this “historical-critical approach” as an instance of God’s “incarnational economy of salvation,” using the human with all of its limitations. While always subject to areas of uncertainty, historical study can and should rule out implausible, impossible interpretations. Kevin Duffy, “The Ecclesial Hermeneutic of Raymond E. Brown,” *Heythrop Journal* 39 (1998): 37–56.

Fr. Brown also articulated his position on other questions that are essential to this discussion of Christology. He raised the question of whether the New Testament uses “God” for Jesus in the ontological sense of later creeds. With a detailed survey of all possible passages including John 1:18 and 1 John 5:20, he insists that for the New Testament there are functional expressions in which “God” language may be predicated of Jesus, often formulated as the expressions Christians used in worship or doxology, which enables an affirmative though qualified answer to the question. Not even John 1:1 or 20:28, however, reflect the same ideological content as Nicea’s “true God.”²⁴ This article introduces reasoning to which Brown will repeatedly return in later discussions of the “what about Jesus’s earthly life and ministry” embedded as it was in the religious traditions of first-century Galilee and Judea? Explicit formulations of such later claims would not communicate anything but blasphemy. It was conceivable, however, that in Jesus’s deeds (miracles) and words Jesus presented himself as “one in whose life God is active.” So the radical binary of early-twentieth-century Protestant liberalism (and its heirs) that would locate all Christology in a post-resurrection church influenced by Hellenistic ideas about gods and their quasi-human appearances is false. There is a bridge between the risen Savior at God’s right hand and the mission and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.²⁵

An article published the previous year on the post-Bultmannians treated this question theoretically rather than exegetically. Published in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, it was partly intended to coax Catholic scholars out of a defensive posture into engaging with the exegetical work including what was being labeled the “new quest for the historical Jesus.”²⁶ Catholics have not paid sufficient attention to the “sort of faith in Jesus” that was possible during Jesus’s public ministry.²⁷ His confidence in the historical-critical approach as a way beyond the “history” on one side and “post-resurrection kerygma” on the other leads Brown to criticize both the existentialist hermeneutics and the various stripped down Jesus depictions that resulted. And as would be evident in his John commentary, Brown also insists that there

²⁴ Raymond E. Brown, “Does the New Testament Call Jesus God?” *Theological Studies* 26, no. 4 (1965): 545–73.

²⁵ Brown, “Does the New Testament Call Jesus God?,” 545–46.

²⁶ Raymond E. Brown, “After Bultmann, What?—An Introduction to the Post-Bultmannians,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 26 (1964): 1–30.

²⁷ Brown, “After Bultmann, What?,” 21. And his early career work on the Dead Sea Scrolls would inform all of his subsequent work on depicting just what that religious world and its language communicated.

is historical evidence to be found in the Fourth Gospel as well as the Synoptics.²⁸

In the 1960s, Fr. Brown had staked out the territory and ground rules for American Roman Catholic scholars to engage with historical-critical study of the biblical texts alongside Protestant and Jewish colleagues without compromising loyalty to the church. As Fr. Don Senior observed in his intellectual biography of Raymond Brown, he always engaged with issues that were of concern to the church. His approach could be described as ecclesial and incarnational. Incarnational meant that he grounded his approach in the historical, social, and cultural contexts of the biblical authors that make a historical-critical method the foundation of all other approaches, whether theological or the myriad “new methods” sprouting up in the academy.²⁹ A curious gap in the list of “Crucial Questions in Johannine Theology”

²⁸ Brown, “After Bultmann, What?,” 24–29. Brown’s work was well regarded in Protestant circles, where he was deeply engaged in ecumenical discussions and studies. It figures in the largely Protestant survey of Christology since Bousset in 1979 by Larry W. Hurtado, “New Testament Christology: A Critique of Bousset’s Influence,” *Theological Studies* 40 (1979): 306–17. To counter the Bousset effect, Hurtado highlights for future study two features of Brown’s work: 1) study of the Old Testament’s influence on New Testament Christology (and its use in second Temple Jewish sources); 2) recognition of how Jesus’s earthly ministry contributed to Christology.

²⁹ Donald Senior, *Raymond E. Brown and the Catholic Biblical Renewal* (New York: Paulist Press, 2018), 77. Throughout his life, Fr. Brown retained a skeptical attitude about the repeated claims to “new approaches” whether literary or from a social criticism or the various “hermeneutics of suspicion” approaches. In preparing the notes, a draft for an introduction to a revision of his John commentary that Brown left behind when he died of cardiac arrest at age seventy, Francis Moloney grappled with the question of how far Brown might have been willing to incorporate the subsequent literary approaches; Francis J. Moloney, “Raymond Brown’s New *Introduction to the Gospel of John*: A Presentation—And Some Questions,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (2003): 1–21. To some extent, that appeared to be the case, along with Fr. Brown’s own “social mapping” of a story of the Johannine communities and their theological modulations that he had formulated by the time he wrote the final volume of his Anchor Bible Johannine trilogy on the Johannine epistles; Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John*. Anchor Yale Bible Commentary Series, vol. 30 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982), 69–115. The significance, however, of these initial landmarks for historical criticism that aligns with emerging orthodoxy guides the sketches of Johannine communities. In painting the dissident secessionists who have broken with the elder’s authentic Johannine tradition, the key is “historical Jesus and Christology.” Brown comments: “the point of difference between the secessionists to be the salvific value of Jesus’ career in the flesh and the degree to which that career was part of his identity as the Christ, inevitably the attitude toward his death will be crucial” (77).

(ecclesiology, sacramentalism, eschatology, wisdom motifs) is Christology itself.³⁰ But in a 1967 article on the kerygma of the Gospel of John, Brown takes on Bultmann and his successors for failures to recognize that Jesus remains central to the gospel's ecclesiology, sacramental symbolism, and its overall use of such Old Testament symbols as "vine" or "shepherd." All Jewish festivals, metaphors, and signs point to Jesus.³¹ So one might reply that there is no "gap" in the commentary because the unity of Jesus and the Father is the perspective from which the evangelist views the entire historical career of Jesus.³²

To Those Who Teach Catholic Theology: Addressing Christology

Exhausting an audience with the overlong list of a speaker's accomplishments is ordinarily bad practice. Why not begin as the journal editors requested with Fr. Brown's address to the national convention of the College Theology Society on June 1, 1974? As a very young assistant professor with a Harvard PhD in New Testament, an academic specialization in gnosticism and the Fourth Gospel, not only well read in all these scholars but also having assisted Fr. Brown when he taught a two-week summer session at Boston College, I was not quite the audience to whom his remarks are addressed.³³ Fr. Brown formulates the problem in a concise set of issues that might have surprised many in the audience. Perhaps the suggestion that the "titles" used would only become a question once distinctions between the catalogue come into focus (servant of God, prophet, Lord, Son of Man, Messiah/Christ, Son of God) and are not simply "Jesus equals God" equivalents.

Brown refines the specific nuances of each of those items in the New Testament by mining both the Old Testament as well as other Jewish

³⁰ Senior, *Raymond E. Brown and the Catholic Biblical Renewal*, 121. Brown's outline for revision incorporates a section on the Johannine Jesus as Son of Man, and personified wisdom. In Brown's *Epistles*, Christology figures under the heading of reconstructing the position of the presbyter's adversaries, not in the "theological topics" (abiding, life, love, sin, truth).

³¹ Raymond E. Brown, "The Kerygma of the Gospel According to John: The Johannine View of Jesus in Modern Studies," *Interpretation* 21, no. 4 (1967): 387-400. Brown's critical summary of Oscar Cullmann finds the popular "salvation history" approach a plausible reading of Luke-Acts, but distorting the Johannine kerygma, which does not present a continuity between the Israelite traditions and Jesus (p. 395).

³² An observation that Brown makes in discussing Ernst Kaesemann; see "The Kerygma of the Gospel According to John," 397.

³³ Though I would concur with the additional rider in Brown's note 5: "a pastoral concern for the Church" and "regard religion as more than a scientific discipline."

sources, especially the writings associated with the sectarian Jewish community that composed and collected the Dead Sea Scrolls. Rather than expecting to find equivalents to the “messiah/anointed” (king or priest), “suffering servant messiah,” Son of God, or Son of Man as used for Jesus in the New Testament, by the 1970s scholars recognized that such a goal misreads the evidence. Instead, each involves a more finely tuned description to capture the linguistic and conceptual meanings suggested by each of the contexts in which it is used, much like the multiple headings in a dictionary entry. While this article indicates the existence of that research area associated with the problematic “Son of Man,” Fr. Brown defers details of Christology as “honorific titles encyclopedia” approach.³⁴ But however much scholarship may “rock back and forth” on some of the more complex cases, Fr. Brown wishes to leave his audience, “you who are college teachers of religion,” with a positive message that (1) scholarship can firm up the continuity between our New Testament witnesses to Jesus’s ministry and what the church later claimed for him; and (2) the gap between a Jewish “meaning” for a title and its later Christian usage does not warrant the radical, liberal claims that Jesus was something other—a wandering charismatic, an egalitarian socialist, an anti-imperialist prophet, and so on. What it means for Christology today is that the reality of God’s presence or activity encountered in Jesus does not match the concepts his contemporaries had at hand. The titles have to be redefined as they are used among believing communities. Or as Fr. Brown proposes, “The ultimate tribute to what and who Jesus was may have been that every term or title in the theological language of his people had to be reshaped by his followers to do justice to him, including the title ‘God’ itself.”³⁵

Anyone familiar with Raymond Brown’s massive scholarly tomes knows that “classification in multiple columns” is the foundation for analysis. In very short order in his article, the table entitled “Twentieth-Century Views on the Christology of the New Testament” makes its appearance. What follows is Fr. Brown’s classification scheme for the misguided non-scholarly views as well as a typology of scholarship from the beginning of the twentieth century with the early Protestant liberalism’s “Jesus, without Christology/the Lord” at the beginning of the century through a “Jesus” behind the earliest preaching (perhaps an equivalent effect when Jesus preaching the Kingdom

³⁴ Raymond E. Brown, “‘Who Do Men Say That I Am?’—Modern Scholarship on Gospel Christology,” *Horizons* 1 (1974): 48. [Editor’s note: references hereafter will be to “Gospel Christology.”]

³⁵ Brown, “Gospel Christology,” 49. In note 22, Brown even suggests that Nicea’s “true God of true God” did not terminate the search for adequate expression of the “who” Jesus is.

of God is compared with the church's Jesus as Lord) in mid-century to what Brown describes as "scholarly Conservatism" in the 1960s and 1970s. And while Brown occasionally will suggest "Catholics" for one or another column, the named players are all Protestants. Though I do not remember being overly surprised at the time given Brown's earlier article on the Bultmannians.³⁶ But revisiting it fifty years on, the taxonomy seems as dated as the illustrations in the cell biology I studied in college compared with slides of "molecules and cells" required of biology majors today.

At the time, I did not appreciate the relentless personal attacks from the non-scholarly or pseudo-scholarly conservatives within the Catholic Church that Fr. Brown endured, so those "framework" columns of non-scholarly liberals and conservatives seemed extraneous.³⁷ Opening with "non-scholarly Conservatives" because Fr. Brown sees Catholics as the problem while suggesting there is likely a Protestant version with its own tonality,³⁸ he illustrates the effectiveness of his insistence on attention to the details of the gospels themselves. No one can deny the divergences between them in presenting Jesus or evade the clear evidence of Christological development.³⁹ By pairing the non-scholarly conservatives with the equally "fundamentalist" turn to liberalism, Fr. Brown indicates why it is important to keep a theological perspective. Whether in early-twentieth-century Protestant liberalism or in various modern forms of Christianity as "love," self-fulfillment, or religion

³⁶ And perhaps the scholarly associations that would result in my own book on New Testament Christology coauthored with one of the names in Brown's "implicit Christology" box; Reginald Fuller, *Who Is This Christ?* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1983).

³⁷ As they do to my graduate students in New Testament Christology today, but see Don Senior's account (*Raymond E. Brown and the Catholic Biblical Renewal*, 199–230), as well as Joseph A. Fitzmyer, SJ, "Raymond E. Brown, S.S. In Memoriam," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 54, no. 3 (1998): 12–18, a section entitled, "The Unjust Criticism and Persecution of Raymond Brown"; and Ronald D. Witherup, SS, "Raymond E. Brown and Catholic Exegesis in the Twentieth Century: A Retrospective," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 31, no. 4 (2013): 15–21. I personally witnessed his distress over public criticism in a private conversation with Fr. Brown after I had published some critical disagreements with the Johannine community typology (*Community of the Beloved Disciple* [New York: Paulist Press, 1979]) in *America* magazine. The problem was not an unwillingness to engage in scholarly debate—though I did not change his mind—it was "weaponizing" the comments of another Catholic scholar by attackers.

³⁸ Over the thirty years that I have worked with parish adult faith formation, the biblical fundamentalism among parishioners is growing and now almost entirely from evangelical Protestant spouses, radio, and other media. So as a pastoral necessity, Fr. Brown's repeated instructions on how Catholics view the Bible remain urgent.

³⁹ Brown, "Gospel Christology," 42.

as private “spiritual practice,” what individuals actually believe about Jesus is indifferent.⁴⁰ Just as he opened the address by reminding his audience that alone among the three Abrahamic faiths only Christians adopted a self-designation that reflects the designation of their founder, so Brown rejects any scholarly version of Christianity that dispenses with Christology as losing its core: what God has done for humanity in Christ—no humanist program of what humans do for themselves.⁴¹ Even at the time it was published, a focal point that assigns Bultmann his own column seems rather odd for a Catholic audience that did not have a stake in Bultmann’s existentialist hermeneutic.

Its primary attractiveness for Brown’s larger project of bridging the divide between a “Jesus of history” behind the gospels and the Christ of the church’s preaching represented in the gospels is by suggesting a principle of “equivalent effect” in that decision that confronts every believer. That will not be, however, adequate bridging for Brown’s larger understanding of the theological project. Buried in the footnotes of this article, he takes on another of the ongoing flash points between the varied historical-critical approaches to the diversity and developments in New Testament Christology, Jesus’s consciousness and self-expression to others about his relationship to God. A hermeneutical given in modern Christology situates Jesus squarely in the concrete human society of the first century and that revives an older scholastic debate over whether the incarnate Son participated in the “beatific vision.”⁴² Though the explicit participation in divine knowledge would undercut Jesus’s participation in our human condition (contrary to Luke 2:52), there is no reason to exclude the possibility of an intuitive knowledge of that special relationship to God.⁴³

Filling in the Landscape

Just as the address on Christology republished in this issue represented more than a decade of writing and reflection, it only marks a stopping point in a journey in progress. To some degree even a look backward over ground covered is a bit of an encouragement to other hikers to join Fr. Brown and other biblical scholars both Catholic and Protestant in a historical-critical work in progress. It was not a manifesto highlighting the need to

⁴⁰ For the New Testament, the “love ethic” is not to be divorced from the believers’ confession about Jesus (Brown, “Gospel Christology,” 43).

⁴¹ Brown, “Gospel Christology,” 46.

⁴² Brown, “Gospel Christology,” 48n19.

⁴³ Brown, “Gospel Christology,” 49nn20–21.

pull up stakes and transition away from established patterns of investigation, scholarly argument, and social networks.

We can further appreciate some of the approaches that Fr. Brown has begun mapping out by looking at a few of his later articles as well as the guide that his audience for the address two decades earlier must have hoped for, an introduction to Christology as we find it in the New Testament.⁴⁴ Concluding that book with his evaluation of Edward Schillebeeckx's massive effort to recast a systematic theologian's answer to the question of/about Jesus by integrating results of historical-critical scholarship, Brown returns to his dissatisfaction with an unbridged dichotomy between Jesus in whom God is making the kingdom present on the one side and Christ representing second-order statements about Jesus's identity on the other.⁴⁵ Brown challenges the contrast between a theological program inaugurated by Jesus and Christology or an earlier distinction from the chart in his lecture between an "implicit" Christology in the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels to be contrasted with subsequent forms of "explicit" Christology by returning to the bridging strategy of no kerygma without continuity. He insists that there must have been indications already in Jesus's lifetime that recognized there was more to Jesus than a "God acting through" an individual. However conveyed, there must have been recognition that God is present in Jesus.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994). Chapter 2 of that book repeats the schema charted in his 1974 address.

⁴⁵ Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 149–150. For a critique of Schillebeeckx's theological hermeneutic, see Dennis Rochford, "The Theological Hermeneutics of Edward Schillebeeckx," *Theological Studies* 63 (2002): 251–67. Unlike Brown's approach, which remains focused on what is written, the biblical texts, Schillebeeckx adopts the hermeneutic that goes from the text to experience. Rochford challenges that emphasis on such categories as Jesus's "Abba" experience and an alleged "Jewish conversion model" that infer some coherence between first-century Galilean Jews and twentieth-century Europeans as well as being an incomplete version of human experience (pp. 257–260).

⁴⁶ Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 150. Not given to the philosophical side of hermeneutics, Brown does not provide a phenomenology of such experience. His emphasis remains strongly fixed on what is conveyed at the level of the text. At that level, attention to an evangelist's literary style is necessary to understanding. As Brown notes in interpreting Mark's Passion narrative: "Throughout we have seen that the Marcan PN is a skillful, effective narrative with good popular touches. The fact that seeming surrogates for the divine name were not quite accurate [Mk 14:61] would make little difference if they had the flavor of how it was thought that Jews would speak"; Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 470.

How might that recognition be conveyed in gospel narratives cognizant of the full story? The Jesus/kerygma gap that Fr. Brown seeks to bridge provides a convenient solution by either opting for a principled “impossible” to know about Jesus’s own consciousness or that of his followers. Evidently, the crucifixion was a major roadblock in expectations that Mark’s narrative somewhat awkwardly accounts for in that exchange with Peter by eliciting a top secret classification order from Jesus himself (Mark 8:30), followed up by a peculiar narrative sequence in which Jesus’s predictions of his passion and later sufferings of his followers are resisted by Peter (Mark 8:31–9:1), and then followed by a transfiguration in which Peter, James, and John hear the divine voice proclaim that Jesus whom Peter addresses as “Rabbi” to be God’s “beloved Son” (Mark 9:2–8). But the disciples are told as they descend not to tell anyone what they had seen “until the Son of Man” has been raised from the dead (Mark 9:9). The evangelist cannot tell the story without its full Christological panoply of titles or a Jesus for whom the cross is a shocking turn of events, so he threaded into the account what scholars often refer to as “the messianic secret.”⁴⁷

Fr. Brown pokes at that issue with several historical questions. Was the unanimous tradition in both the Synoptics and the Gospel of John that Jesus predicted such events as the fall of Jerusalem or destruction of its Temple; his own passion; or what is admittedly more of a stretch, that he would be vindicated by God using such apocalyptic images as resurrection, the Danielic Son of Man exalted with God?⁴⁸ On the “messiah” question,

⁴⁷ First coined in the 1901 book by Wilhelm Wrede, it influenced generations of German scholarship with a range of disagreement over whether this reticence might be a feature of Jesus’s own ministry (so Albert Schweitzer) to seeing it as the evangelist’s own work (so Bultmann). Translated into English in 1971, Wrede’s book continues to play a role in Markan studies; *The Messianic Secret*, trans. J. G. C. Greig (Cambridge: J. Clarke, 1971). For a summary of the discussion, see Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 170–72. She concludes that the various “secrecy” elements in the Gospel, including that concerning the parables of Jesus (Mk 4:10–12) are the evangelist’s literary devices, some perhaps adopted from traditions he inherited. Their purpose is to imply that during his lifetime Jesus’s own identity had been both revealed and concealed. That literary approach leaves the gap between kerygma and a historical grounding in what is/was the case about Jesus firmly intact. Fr. Brown’s theological instincts for a conservative but rigorous historical criticism repeatedly resist scholarly moves toward various forms of literary criticism as the privileged hermeneutic in gospel studies.

⁴⁸ Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 42–59. For a detailed analysis of these issues and the associated Christological titles that figure in gospel accounts of Jesus’s trial(s), see his commentary on the passion narratives; Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave*, 1:461–79.

Brown concludes that the most likely historical account has Jesus accept the “messiah” epithet with qualifications or ambivalence given the fluidity of such language and expectations in his Jewish context. It is even more certain historically that followers during his lifetime attached messianic expectations to him. For Jesus himself, not only does he neither affirm nor deny, “partly because he had his own conception of what he must do and partly because he left the ultimate manifestation of his own role in God’s hands.”⁴⁹

The more critical designation, however, “Son of God,” that is the core of Christian faith in Jesus from the outset as its attestation in Paul’s letters echoing affirmations that were widely shared among believers (for example, 1 Thess 1:10; Gal 1:16; Rom 1:3-4) is less easily parsed. Careful analysis of Jewish sources fails to produce strong evidence for its use of the Davidic royal messiah figure.⁵⁰ To build a bridge for general readers in his *Introduction*, Brown adapts the opening provided by the tradition(s) that Jesus—and early non-Jewish Christians themselves in connection with their own self-identity as “sons” (Gal 4:6)—was known to address God as “Abba” (Father).⁵¹ What may have been particular to Jesus was adapting that mode of addressing God to the new relationship of those who followed him and God, so that in expressing his relationship to the Father as “sonship” gave it a special character without “Son of God” as a self-designation.⁵² If Jesus never made such an explicit claim for himself, as appears to be the case, then it cannot be the basis for a “blasphemy” charge against him by Jewish authorities.⁵³

⁴⁹ Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave*, 1:479.

⁵⁰ Despite the later combination of “proof texts” from 2 Samuel 7:14 for “son” and Psalms 2:7 and 110:3 for “begotten by God,” which became a staple in earliest Christian arguments for Jesus’s messianic status and remain firmly embedded in our Roman Catholic liturgical celebrations to this day. The apparent example of “begotten by God” plus a Davidic messiah among the Qumran texts (1 QSa 2:11-12) cannot carry the argument against the lack of evidence from other Jewish sources and even an interpretation of 2 Samuel 7:11-14 from the Dead Sea Scrolls that does not highlight the “son” in verse 14 (4QFlor 1:7-13); Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave*, 1:481). So, Brown tells readers of his introduction that it would be “unwise” to make a case for use of “Son of God” referring to Jesus during his lifetime dependent on fragments of Dead Sea Scrolls. And for that general audience, he adds a caveat: saying that Jesus would not have referred to himself as “Son of God” is not logically equivalent to saying that the “Jesus=Son of God” is false; Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 80-82.

⁵¹ With the necessary scholarly qualifications that the once popular claims that this usage was unique to Jesus and reflects a particularly intimate way of addressing God is a complete distortion of the evidence; Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 85-87.

⁵² *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 87-89.

⁵³ Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave*, 534-35.

Though the evangelists have presented the Jewish trial of Jesus using a framework of the familiar Christological titles, they do not necessarily reflect the only option for the charge(s) against him. Instead, Brown proposes a catalogue of plausible historical items drawn from the gospel accounts. They include styles of speaking about God, about the immanence of God's kingdom, and even failure to validate such behaviors with appeal to established Old Testament paradigms such as a prophet. Couple that posture with the content of Jesus's address to the people that resulted in clashes with local religious authorities and traditions over forgiveness of sin, ingrained customs of Torah observance, and the "extras" of purity or ritual piety and the options for charges increase. It is even probable that as a layman Jesus had spoken against the Temple, possibly suggesting its demise.⁵⁴ Any significant combination from the catalogue of possibilities would be sufficient for that charge: "i.e., arrogantly claiming prerogatives or status more properly associated with God, even as the Gospels report."⁵⁵

Two decades after his address to the College Theology Society, Fr. Brown could look back on a slow, sometimes painful but clearly accomplished process of bringing Catholic scholarship to the fore in international scholarly circles, in ecumenical conversations, in the academy, and in parishes.⁵⁶ No reason was necessary for some of the "special pleading" evident in those articles from the 1960s and 1970s. But assorted variants of the Jesus-kerygma gap remained on offer.⁵⁷ And with it a new crop of exegetes whose rewriting of Jesus into a "real history" of early Christianity dispenses with the authority of the canon itself by (1) reconstructing alleged "pre-canonical sources" whose message has been distorted by their transformation into the canonical

⁵⁴ Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave*, 545–47.

⁵⁵ Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave*, 547. Or as Brown puts it in the general reader version of his results, not only is there no reason for Jesus not to have anticipated both his rejection and that God would vindicate him so that it is possible to read Mark 14:62 as close to Jesus's own mindset; Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 99.

⁵⁶ As is shown by the long list of Catholic scholars and their institutional affiliations that Brown and his coeditors gathered to produce their *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* published in 1990, to which I contributed among other entries the commentaries on the Gospel and the Epistles of John for which Fr. Joseph A. Fitzmyer served as editor rather than Fr. Brown.

⁵⁷ Even the subtle attempts that Brown makes toward bridging can go unrecognized as in Senior's presentation of Brown's big-picture project in the Passion narrative opus as the quest to determine with reasonable probability how the evangelists understood Jesus's death, not an exercise in grounding Christology (Senior, *Raymond E. Brown and the Catholic Biblical Renewal*, 145–49).

texts (G. Theissen, W. Kelber, L. Schottroff, H. D. Betz, E. Schüssler-Fiorenza) or (2) declaring non-canonical apocryphal gospels (such as *Gospel of Thomas*, *Gospel of Peter*, *Secret Gospel of Mark*) representative of true, earlier forms of Christianity (H. Koester, J. D. Crossan).⁵⁸ We cannot rehearse the intricacies of that debate with the assorted claims about Christology, religious experience, and church structure that are built into these variants. But it demonstrates another aspect to Fr. Brown's theological commitment that we have discerned in our exploration of the Christology material: the Scripture received as canon conveys the word of God.⁵⁹

Moving Forward

Raymond Brown's conservative liberalism spotlighted some ignored dust and missing floorboards in historical-critical edifices as well as poor foundations for theological assertions. When biblical scholars do all the heavy lifting of sweeping out prior conclusions about biblical language, its social and cultural contexts, and the meanings conveyed to users and listeners, they should not claim to have provided all the theology that twenty-first-century transmission of our Catholic faith requires. Some of the theological questions that surface when exegesis shakes the assumed biblical foundations require dialogue between exegetes and theologians.⁶⁰ How to frame the relationship between historical-critical accounts of Jesus and Christology remains very much on the docket for exegetes and theologians today.⁶¹ The revived "Third Quest" of the historical Jesus that originated with the post-

⁵⁸ Raymond Brown took on this typology of scholarly miscreants in his Presidential Address to the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas in 1986; "The *Gospel of Peter* and Canonical Gospel Priority," *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987): 321–43.

⁵⁹ Though he concurs with the scholarly recognition that most of our biblical writings, Old Testament and New Testament, contain evidence of compilation, scribal expansions, and use of earlier materials, Brown remained quite conservative about scholarly reconstructions of such sources from the texts we have. For his theological reflection on Scripture as word of God, see Raymond E. Brown, "'And the Lord Said'? Biblical Reflections on Scripture as the Word of God," *Theological Studies* 42, no. 1 (1981): 3–19.

⁶⁰ As in suggestions of a Lonerganian framework for the question of Jesus's consciousness from the systematic side requires engagement with Brown's exegetical queries about bridging the Jesus and kerygma gap. See Neil Ormerod and Christiaan Jacobs-Vandegeer, "Sacred Heart, Beatific Mind: Exploring the Consciousness of Jesus," *Theological Studies* 79, no. 4 (2018): 729–44. Their sketch of the differentiated human consciousness, feeling, and affectivity might fill in the gaps in an awareness of self that Brown finds lacking in exegesis that remains stuck with a "fully human Jesus" who could not affirm a unique God relationship.

⁶¹ See Jens Schröter, "Die aktuelle Diskussion über den historischen Jesus und ihre Bedeutung für die Christologie," in *Zwischen historischen Jesus und dogmatischen*

Bultmannians has produced such a multiplicity of pictures that a more nuanced theological conversation is required to understand the development of Christology. Christian faith is not possible without an understanding of the work and fate of Jesus.⁶²

Although the Jewish linguistic and religious context for the individual titles might be presented much in the manner of dictionary entries, that research has largely been completed—it is only a matter of adding one’s “usage examples” or perhaps reordering the semantic categories. Instead scholars seek to delineate the “grammar” of using such categories.⁶³ While that shift from a lexical entry paradigm to grammar paradigm or even to a culture’s inherited model stories represents a methodological advance beyond Raymond Brown’s work, he anticipated the need to recast the “Jewish” versus “Christian” dichotomy. On the one hand, Brown insisted that even in Paul’s letter to the Romans, scholars should not speak of a Gentile or non-Jewish Christianity having exceeded the founding Jewish Christians. Instead, we should consider a spectrum across the early Christian world of at least three variations on what is “Jewish” Christ believing and one Hellenizing variation that did not retain any Jewish customs. Further off the spectrum is a radical break that denigrates Jewish ritual life in Hebrews and John.⁶⁴

Emphasizing the Jewish genome of all Christian sources does not eradicate the tensions in our sources that coupled with a dualist paradigm and contributed to later antisemitism. Brown’s account of the Johannine community history sees local Jewish hostility behind the fears expressed in John 9:22

Christus. Zum Stand der Christologie ins 21 Jahrhundert, ed. Christian Danz and Michael Murrmann-Kahl (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010): 67–86.

⁶² And given the unintelligibility of such traditional ideas as “forgiveness of sins” and “cultic sacrificial death” to twenty-first-century believers, simply refining the historical Jesus picture is necessary; Schröter, “Die aktuelle Diskussion über den historischen Jesus und ihre Bedeutung für die Christologie,” 86.

⁶³ Matthew Novenson, *The Grammar of Messianism: An Ancient Jewish Political Idiom and Its Uses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). Titles do not bring a fixed program or identity with them. “Messiah” functions within a larger Jewish story of eschatological redemption. Both ancient Jewish and Christian users can employ the existing lexical resources including those of Jewish scriptures in diverse ways. Reviewing Novenson’s book, N. T. Wright suggests that this linguistic turn should incorporate a larger story that acknowledged the distinction between “messiah” and prophetic figures. A “messiah” is not one in a series, but represents the point at which Israel’s God is accomplishing what its people had long hoped for; N. T. Wright, Review of M. Novenson, *The Grammar of Messianism*, in *Expository Times* 129, no. 7 (2018): 295–302.

⁶⁴ Raymond E. Brown, “Not Jewish Christianity and Gentile Christianity but Types of Jewish/Gentile Christianity,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 45 (1983): 74–79.

and 16:1-4a.⁶⁵ And, as we have seen, he insists that Jewish authorities were involved in the death of Jesus. Larry Hurtado advocates Christian devotion to Jesus as the foundation of controversies with other Jews opposed to the high Christology expressed in that context.⁶⁶ Looking forward in the twenty-first century, scholars should embrace the challenge of Islam. How might a comparative theology express Christian understanding of Jesus as the *kairos* of history or definitive revelation of God in an Islamic context?⁶⁷

By focusing on the problematic of how religious experience and religious innovation are correlated, Hurtado's early "high" Christology already evident in Paul's epistles is grounded in experiences. The apostle did not "think out" the Christology in which Jesus is Lord or the more expressive *kenosis*/exaltation to glory encomium of Phil 2:6-11.⁶⁸ His community prayed it. The cognitive shifting to a "belief system" would not have occurred otherwise.⁶⁹ Hurtado suggests that comparison with Muhammed might illuminate how Paul comes to formulate such a radical picture of Christ. Both had experiences so at odds with the conventional religious system that they could not be accommodated.⁷⁰ Though forms of Jewish opposition to local Jesus believers probably varied from place to place, the persecution for Christ that Paul suffers and anticipates would be experienced by others is directly associated with the divine-like status of Christ.⁷¹

An acerbic dust-up in *Expository Times* between Fr. Gerald O'Collins and Paul Holloway over the latter's novel interpretation of Phil 2:6-11 as a

⁶⁵ He suggests this even leads the evangelist to a disdain for those believers who appear more concerned to live within the synagogue than confess belief in Jesus as Son of God; Brown, "Not Jewish Christianity and Gentile Christianity but Types of Jewish/Gentile Christianity," 79n16.

⁶⁶ Larry W. Hurtado, "Pre-70 CE Jewish Opposition to Christ-Devotion," *Journal of Theological Studies* 50, no. 1 (1999): 35-57; Larry W. Hurtado, "Religious Experience and Religious Innovation in the New Testament," *Journal of Religion* 80/2 (2000): 183-205.

⁶⁷ Schröter, "Die aktuelle Diskussion über den historischen Jesus und ihre Bedeutung für die Christologie," 60.

⁶⁸ This could possibly refer to Paul's citation of an earlier Christian hymnic piece, though recent commentaries make a case for this section as emanating from the Philippian community; see John Reumann, *Philippians*. Anchor Yale Bible Commentary Series, vol. 33B. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008): 365-77, or Paul himself (see Paul A. Holloway, *Philippians* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 116-17).

⁶⁹ Hurtado suggests that scholars have been slow to embrace "religious experience" in discussing the origins of Christology because academic social sciences often treat it as derivative or presume a deprivation theory explanation; ^[69] Hurtado, "Religious Experience and Religious Innovation in the New Testament," 187-92).

⁷⁰ Hurtado, "Religious Experience and Religious Innovation in the New Testament," 193.

⁷¹ Hurtado, "Pre-70 CE Jewish Opposition to Christ-Devotion," 58.

reflection of Jewish angelology illustrates how assuming that theological commitment is simply ideology knocks discussion off track.⁷² Charging Fr. O'Collins with an ideological bias that would never consider an interpretation of Phil 2:6-7 that was not an incipient affirmation of Nicea or Chalcedon, Holloway proclaims, "I do indeed disdain the imposition of anachronistic religious biases on an ancient author, no matter how longstanding, cherished, or authoritative those biases may be."⁷³ Rather than consider the possibility that Paul could have more easily responded to his visionary experience of the risen Christ as encountering a "great angel" who had previously appeared in human form than as a God-equivalent, O'Collins charged Holloway with not rehearsing the massive literature from conservative commentators. Adjudicating the exegetical debate is not at issue here, though the more traditional reading still stands especially since both parties agree that Paul wrote Philippians (ca. 61 CE) during his Roman imprisonment. But if one asks the question of how the religious narrative grammar and Paul's experience of divine revelation made sense, angels trump ontology. By the end of his life, however, the apostle has rethought a lot about the "Christ experiences" of the Spirit in believing communities. So it seems plausible that he is reaching for an alternative formulation that edges Christ over to the "God" side from that of angelic creature.

Raymond Brown's work on Christology focuses efforts where both ordinary believers and theologians might begin. How did a first-century Jewish figure Jesus of Nazareth embody what the church came to confess about him as unique, God incarnate, and the savior of humanity? Two centuries of historical-critical study of our gospel accounts of Jesus have dismantled simplistic, harmonizing, or literalistic readings. Each has a well-crafted perspective that expresses the faith of believers some decades after Jesus's death. And during that same period a deluge of new historical information about Jewish beliefs, religious practice, and history had to be assimilated. A similar explosion of material for the religious and social life of inhabitants of the Roman Empire also fueled investigation of what expressions like "Son of God" might have communicated to believers.⁷⁴ The tasks of

⁷² Gerald Glynn O'Collins, SJ, "Does Philippians 2:6-11 Present Christ as a Superior Angel?" *Expository Times* 133, no. 7 (2022): 269-74; Paul A. Holloway, "Ideology and Exegesis: A Response to Gerald O'Collins," *Expository Times* 133, no. 7 (2022): 275-83.

⁷³ Holloway, "Ideology and Exegesis," 275.

⁷⁴ Contrary to Raymond Brown's insistence upon a Jewish "lexicon" for understanding "Son of God," Adela Collins insists that "Son of God" in Mark's gospel is dependent upon Greco-Roman religious language. See Adela Yarbro Collins, "Mark and His Readers: The Son of God among Greeks and Romans," *Harvard Theological Review* 93, no. 2 (2000): 85-100; however, in her commentary, Collins's introduction, which

assimilating masses of new data and probing new analytic frameworks for understanding texts, social contexts, and religious experience have often isolated biblical scholars from theological colleagues, especially as securing a foothold in the academy often means joining departments with other specialties. Fr. Brown's ecclesial and theological focus often led to criticism of Jesus scholarship in search of headlines but may not have anticipated the multi-disciplinary situation in which many members of the College Theology Society will be teaching today's undergraduates.

Concluding Reflections

As a snapshot from 1974, Raymond Brown's address may seem as quaint as getting the latest pop song on vinyl or a tape cassette. Situated within the context of his larger legacy of meticulous historical criticism coupled with an "ecclesial hermeneutic" that was not afraid to ask discomfiting questions of both liberal and conservative scholarship and theology, it remains a model for the next half-century. Not everyone is as gifted at bringing critical insights from the "big books" of scholarship into the accessible introduction. Yet without that foundation, assimilation of the word of God in theology, ethics, as well as pastoral tasks of preaching and formation remains based on a fundamentalism about the biblical text. That fundamentalism Fr. Brown repeatedly insists has no place in a Catholic approach to Scripture.

The O'Collins versus Holloway debate might seem just another variant on the liberal versus conservative side of the house. Though Fr. Brown invited his audience to consider his chart an invitation to answer the question "What do YOU say?," taking sides was never the agenda for a Catholic ecclesial hermeneutic. Where careful historical-critical and linguistic or literary reading of the biblical texts creates a yawning gap even within the Bible itself between later theological understanding and what particular authors might have been able to convey to an audience, exegetes should not simply dismiss theology as ideology. Instead, as Raymond Brown frequently did, they look for possible ways to bridge the divide without caving into a dogmatic fundamentalism. As the contexts within which Catholic teaching and scholarship have expanded beyond institutions and conversation partners securely within ecclesial walls, bridge builders face a more complex and challenging landscape.

focuses on how the gospel fits into the ancient Greco-Roman ideas of history and narrative (Mark as "eschatological historical monograph"), eschews the category "Christology" for a label "interpretations of Jesus." That section includes extensive discussion of the Jewish context for prophet, messiah, and teacher; Collins, "Mark and His Readers," 42-79.

Providing sketches and snapshots of how biblical exegesis and theological reflection remain necessary to navigate a twenty-first-century terrain should keep *Horizons* busy for its next half-century.

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II. New Methods, New Voices: Biblical Interpretation for Gospel Christology Today

My sincere thanks to Dr. Elena Procario-Foley and the editorial staff of *Horizons* for the invitation to participate in the golden jubilee of this magnificent journal. Congratulations on fifty years!

Though also a bit daunting, the charge to respond to an essay written by Raymond Brown is a meaningful one to me because I have admired and used Brown's work since my years as an undergraduate. Also meaningful to me is that Dr. PHEME Perkins is contributing to this theological roundtable. I took a number of classes at Boston College with her (as many as I could, really), and she not only directed my undergraduate research project but wrote letters of recommendation for graduate schools and other opportunities on my behalf. I will take this forum as an opportunity to thank her publicly for her valuable teaching and mentorship through the years.

Finally, a sad note: originally my fellow respondent was to be the Rev. Dr. Donald Senior. Unfortunately, he passed away on November 8, 2022. Although I did not know him personally and had never met him, I respect his scholarship greatly. Frankly, I was astonished that the editors thought of me to respond alongside such an esteemed scholar. Many people undoubtedly miss him, and I extend my condolences to all who do. Readers of *Horizons* interested in Senior's assessment of Brown's life and work would do well to consult his splendid 2018 biography of Brown published by Paulist Press.⁷⁵ And so to Brown!

In his June 1, 1974, address to the national convention of the College Theology Society published in the inaugural issue of *Horizons*, Brown gave a succinct and characteristically elegant review of twentieth-century New Testament scholarship on the question of how the Christology of the

⁷⁵ Senior, *Raymond E. Brown and the Catholic Biblical Renewal*.