

Notes on Ch. 7: The Person of Jesus Christ

A. Orientation to Christology [365-70]

“We have been doing christology all along in this confessional theology. I refused to think of God first in some vaguely monotheistic sense. I refused to posit a ‘god’ whom everyone already clearly knows, or who can be identified and known in some general and/or ‘rational’ and/or universal way. If I had undertaken any of those moves, then I would have had to ask how this ‘god’ could relate to or be present in or become Jesus Christ. Rather, I started with the primary confession that Jesus of Nazareth is the definitive self-communicating presence of God. I argued that ‘who God is’ is crucially defined, clarified, and enriched by the Jesus-event. And it is because of Jesus as God’s self-revelation that Christians also claim that this is the same God as the God of Israel who self-identified to Israel as Yahweh. It is also in the light of Jesus Christ that I understood the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of the God of Israel and the Spirit of Jesus Christ. For these reasons, I argued that the doctrine of the Trinity is crucial to the Christian understanding of God. But this argument could not have been made without some understanding of how God is self-communicating—self-revealing—presence in Jesus, and hence without some christological concepts.” [365]

1. The Language of *Person* and *Work* of Jesus Christ

The doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ has to do with the *identity* of Jesus of Nazareth.

Who is this person and how is he to be identified and described?

What are the decisive descriptions, ascriptions, and predicates about him?

The doctrine of the Work of Jesus Christ is about *what Jesus does that is salvific?*

What does Jesus accomplish on behalf of us—which ‘us’?—that is salvific, hence, sin, atonement, reconciliation, resurrection.

While we can distinguish the person and work of Jesus, we must not separate them.

Hence, two basic rules of Christology:

a. **we cannot identify Jesus apart from what he does, from his acts—from his works.**

b. **what Jesus does is distinctively his as the one who he is.**

2. Jesus Christ, the Gospel, and the Heart of Christian Faith

We are dealing here with these *decisive questions*:

a. Is Jesus Christ the very essence of the Gospel *or* is Jesus the bearer of a Gospel that can be identified on grounds quite independent of historical life?

b. Is Jesus Christ the unsurpassable Savior of all *or* is Jesus Christ only the functional Savior of the church (or, of gentiles or of western life)?

c. Is Jesus Christ the definitive revealer of God and of humanity *or* is Jesus Christ only a compelling example of God’s saving disposition toward humanity and an example of right human response to God?

d. Is Jesus’ particularity essential to the understanding of God in Christian faith *or* is Jesus useful only as an illustration of general metaphysical or theological or mythological ideas we have or believe on other grounds?

I contend that Jesus Christ is to be understood as:

a. the very essence of the Gospel

b. the unsurpassable Savior of all

c. the definitive revealer of God and humanity

d. essential to the understanding of God in Christian faith

In the earlier statement of the Presiding Model of the Gospel, the following should be understood as the *incarnational narrative* at the heart of Xn faith:

Orienting Notes on Reading and Engaging *A Grammar of Christian Faith*

That the God of Israel, the Creator of all creatures, has in freedom and love become incarnate in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth to enact and reveal God's gracious reconciliation of humanity to Godself...

3. Christological Language as the Grammar of Faith

As the grammar of faith, christological language is both:

- a. the pragmatic, self-involving, existential, and ecclesial language: Jesus is my (our) Lord, and
- b. language *about* Jesus

Also, reject the common liberal assumption that we must distinguish between 1) the *facts* about Jesus, which anyone can know, and 2) the *value or meaning of* Jesus for the faithful.

Rather for the church and the believer's grammar of faith, *the facts about Jesus are already theological and historical and their grammar is already self-involving.*

Accordingly I find unhelpful and problematic the oft-proposed distinction between approaching:

- 1) christology from above, from the creeds, traditions or
- 2) christology from below, from 'historical research'.

B. Some Problems of Faith and History [370-381]

In the last two centuries endless controversies have arisen as to the bearing of 'history' on the reality and meaning of Jesus. Conceptual confusions abound. The following aims to make some distinctions that might clarify some of the disagreements, even if such distinctions do not resolve all disputes: hence:

1. Three Meanings of 'History'

History I: history as the actuality of events happening in time.

In this sense of history, events in time actually happen, whether or not someone records or remembers the events.

Making common sense *realist* assumptions: for some alleged event or events to be called 'historical' they must have happened in the sequence of finite temporality.

Of course, we have no access to past events apart from human discourses, practices, and artifacts.

History II: history as the intellectual discipline—sometimes called 'historiography'—which seeks to describe and explain the past by using so-called *empirical-scientific criteria* of what is supposedly possible and knowable.

As a discipline, it has become self-conscious primarily since the rise of the so-called Enlightenment of the 18th century.

Assumes a *naturalistic metaphysics and epistemology*—namely, that historical actuality can only be known and described by the canons and practices of the natural and social sciences. *Secular history*.

Excludes any positing of supranatural agency—nonfinite agency.

Obviously, Xn theology often relies on such research methodology in its own investigations of what happened and what was said and believed at particular points in the past and the church's past.

History III: history as the many other ways—other than as historiography—in which humans remember and talk and write about the past actualities of History I.

Different modes of literature, discourse, and consciousness, often evaluative and pragmatic.

2. On Construing Historical Actuality

The conflicts today in church and society are often about the metaphysics of actuality: much so-called historical studies in the mode of History II simply exclude any reference to any nonfinite agent in the explanation of 'what happened in actual fact'.

Orienting Notes on Reading and Engaging *A Grammar of Christian Faith*

Prime example: the question of whether Jesus was raised from the dead—something that happened to Jesus—is simply excluded by most NT ‘scholars and historians’.

Such a ‘historian’ could argue that many of Jesus’ followers did think Jesus was raised from the dead but that there is no *credible* proof that he did so rise.

3. Historiography and the Biblical Witness

Secular historians logically cannot say ‘Jesus was raised from the dead’, but can only say ‘many of Jesus’ followers came to believe that he was raised from the dead’.

4. Theology, History, and the Actuality of Jesus

Notice now the ambiguities arising in the use of the locution ‘the historical Jesus’, though not often noted in the discussions:

- a. ‘historical Jesus’ as referring to ‘the actual Jesus’ of History I.
- b. ‘historical Jesus’ as what can be asserted *about* Jesus of Nazareth by using the procedures of secular history—History II.

The practitioners of History II methodologically cannot assert anything theological about Jesus of History I, and therefore they assume that their History II Jesus is the only *credible* Jesus.

Note these diagnostic questions:

Question: is secular historiography the only legitimate way of talking responsibly and truthfully about the actual Jesus?

Related issue: can Paul be thought to have said anything of a truth-bearing character about the actual Jesus?

Question: is secular historiography the only way to make truth claims about Jesus’ historical career, his speaking and acting and being acted upon?

Question: can any set of historical predicates about Jesus, in the sense of historiography, ever add up to a theological predicate? If not, then on what basis could any theological predicates about Jesus’ actuality—not simply ‘what Jesus means to me’—be advanced?

Question: does not the modern and wide-spread distinction between a) the ‘Jesus of history’ and b) the ‘Christ of faith’ simply negate any possible *theological predicates about the actuality of Jesus*?

Notice this distinction:

- a. the *historians’ Jesus*—Jesus as he can be constructed by secular historical research.
- b. the *canonical Jesus*—Jesus as he can be constructed from the testimony of the whole of the NT. At the heart of the NT texts is the conviction that they are witnessing to an actual person—not a mythic figure—who lived in a particular time and place, yet a person already subject to theological characterization.

Without denying the usefulness and necessity of historical research in a variety of ways in the study of the NT texts, I propose that the church crucially must rely on the texts themselves to *render a character, an identity, and a historical/theological schematic of the transactions and interactions of the historical person Jesus of Nazareth.*

It is the identification of that character and identity that I designate as the *incarnational narrative of God’s work in Jesus and of Jesus’ work as the human Son of God.*

C. A Theological/Historical Schematic Narrative of the Actual Jesus [381-85]

[Readers are referred to these pages in the *Grammar* for this closely and carefully construed narrative of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth that aims to keep the theological predicates about Jesus in the narrative from the very beginning of the NT testimony about him.]

D. The Grammar of Christological Titles in the New Testament [385-393]

1. In the NT there is a continual dialectic and logic in how it construes the actuality of Jesus among:
 - a. the preceding history of Israel and Greco-Roman culture;
 - b. the course of Jesus’ life and destiny;
 - c. the church’s apprehension of Jesus.

Orienting Notes on Reading and Engaging *A Grammar of Christian Faith*

Basic point: it is not sufficient to focus on just one of these construals to find the ‘real meaning’ of the language about Jesus.

There is continuity and discontinuity.

2. The Developing Grammar of ‘Messiah’

Continuity: Israel’s various ways of construing its own life in ‘exile’ as waiting for Yahweh or Yahweh’s *anointed* to deliver them from their captivity to other nations and powers.

Call this the varied and complex trajectory of messianism in Israel’s life.

Discontinuity: Jesus is crucified by the powers, Israel is not freed from captivity, and peace does not come to Israel.

But for the church, Jesus is raised from the dead and remains a witness to another way of peace-making and hope.

3. Interlude: What is Supersessionism?

The history of Christian maltreatment of Jews and the recent history of the Jewish Holocaust has posed serious questions about so-called ‘theological supersessionism’.

But sometimes the discussion uses different meanings of ‘supersessionism’: I find there are at least two different meanings of the term.

Supersessionism 1: the belief that since most Jews during the time of Jesus (and most since) rejected him as Israel’s Messiah, God has rejected Israel as God’s people, canceled God’s covenant with Israel, and replaced or *superseded* Israel by the church, and therefore only those Jews who accept Jesus as Messiah and Savior will be saved.

Supersessionism 2: the belief that Jesus Christ is the *fulfillment* of God’s work in Israel and that Jesus Christ therefore has salvific import for the life and destiny of Israel.

I firmly reject Supersessionism 1; it should have no place in Xn theology.

But I reject the Supersessionism label for 2.

I agree with Romans 9-11, wherein Paul argues thus:

- a. that what God has done in Jesus Christ has been done *in* the history of Israel and in fulfillment of God’s intent with Israel as covenant people and therefore *for* Israel.
- b. that God is faithful in God’s promises, and God has not rejected Jewish people who have not accepted Jesus as Messiah.
- c. that a Jewish person is not making a conceptual mistake in believing that Jesus has salvific meaning for Jews; certainly Paul thought Jesus was *his* Savior and Lord, and Paul was a Pharisee.
- d. that it is not the case that Jesus Christ (and Christianity) is for Gentiles only and that Judaism is for Jews.

Yet it must be admitted that historically the most basic issue forcing the distinguishing and finally separation of synagogue and church was the issue of *who Jesus truly is* and thereby also the issue of *who God truly is*.

There is no Xn question that the God active in Jesus Christ is the God of Israel.

But the question is *whether the God of Israel does now this new act in Jesus that bears salvifically on all people, including Jews*.

As I have and will argue, however, the God the church knows in Israel and in Jesus Christ is the One whose love will not let anyone, Jew or Gentile, go into the night of death without God’s love as the final word.

4. The Dialectic of *Kyrios*

[see further 391-93]

E. Notes from Church History [393-401]

[The pages in this section of the *Grammar* are brief and compact and can be read for profitable clarity if read very slowly. My notes herein are insufficient to show just why I believe that Nicaea and Chalcedon made important but easily misunderstood grammatical affirmations and negations that are important for the life of the church today.]

1. Basic Rules of Nicaea [325 CE] and Chalcedon [481 CE]

Nicaea: presupposing the humanity of Jesus, it was concerned to affirm his basic oneness with God the Father. But did not further clarify how Jesus was both divine and human together.

Chalcedon: concerned to clarify that Jesus was both fully divine and fully human, but still did not fully clarify just how.

Formulated the following rules for the grammar of the church's Christology:

- a. Jesus Christ is one concrete historical subject, and therefore not two subjects—one human and one divine—existing side by side.
- b. Jesus Christ is truly divine, and therefore nothing may be predicated of him that subverts his true divinity.
- c. Jesus Christ is truly human, and therefore nothing may be predicated of him that subverts his true humanity.
- d. Soteriological Rule: that Jesus must be so characterized as both divine and human that his power to perform his work as Savior is not subverted.

Nicaea and Chalcedon identify the following Christological heresies:

- a. *Docetism*: that Jesus is simply God and his human life is a mere façade; ends up denying the humanity of Jesus.
- b. *Ebionitism*: that Jesus is only or merely human, completely differentiated from God; ends up denying the divinity of Jesus.
- c. *Adoptionism*: as only human, Jesus is adopted by the Father for important work but is not of the reality of the Father from the beginning of all things; the church has doctrinally thought Jesus is soteriologically important in ways not allowed by adoptionism.

The continuing stumbling block for the church after Nicaea and Chalcedon, according to Jones and many others: the church continuing to regard the following as basic to any concept of divinity—that God is impassible, immutable, and simple.

If, as Chalcedon clearly affirmed, there is only one subject in Jesus—not two, a divine subject and a human subject—then it seems enfeeblingly odd that Jesus was *acted upon* by many and finally crucified. Who, then, was the subject who was so crucified?

2. Jesus into Modernity

The following trajectories of the Protestant Reformation—the Reformed/Calvinist, the Lutheran, and the Anglican—did nothing to challenge or change the basic rules of the creeds pertaining the divinity and humanity of Jesus.

Emerging from the 18th century 'enlightenment', accents on so-called rationality and objectivity and the rise of historical-critical methodologies, Jesus gets marginalized as divine and Savior, becomes a decent and thoughtful prophet/teacher of truths available to reason and human thoughtfulness.

Kierkegaard formulated a discerning set of considerations pertaining to the importance of Jesus for Xn faith:

- a. Is Jesus akin to Socrates: appealing to the inherent rationality embedded in human moral and spiritual reflection, or
- b. is Jesus himself the one who brings and is the condition in relation to which human moral and spiritual destiny is to be reckoned, and apart from whom there is no attaining of eternal happiness.

3. Jesus and the Grammar of Mystery

The *togetherness or unity or identity* of God and human being in Jesus of Nazareth remains a *mystery*—as mystery it is the deep riches of a *person-actuality* that cannot be reduced to precise and exhaustive conceptual explanation and delineation.

The grammar of Jesus' identity is that of an incomprehensible actuality, because the unity of divine and human in Jesus Christ is *unique*—does not fit any pre-existing metaphysics or ontology.

Orienting Notes on Reading and Engaging *A Grammar of Christian Faith*

Hence, Christological reflection in the church cannot find its place by adopting this or that existing theory about God or about human being.

Rather, Christological reflection, as we saw in our development of the doctrine of God, will affect how we think about both divinity and humanity.

Upcoming: I will develop the grammar of Jesus' identity and reality in terms of both:

- i) the grammar of Incarnation—Logos Christology, and
- ii) the grammar of the Messianic Bearer of the Spirit—Spirit Christology.

These grammars are complementary only in terms of a stout doctrine of the Triune God.

F. The Grammar of the Identity of the Human Jesus as the Incarnate God [402-419]

1. Jesus the Eternal Son Sent by the Eternal Father, the God of Israel

Throughout the NT Jesus is understood as the Son sent by the Father, is obedient to the Father, is in some sense one with the Father, but Jesus is not the Father. [see the passages quoted on p. 403 fns.]

The depth grammar of this unique relationship of the Son to the Father eventuates in several further beliefs about the Son:

- a. The Son *pre-exists* his earthly life and mission: Jesus is not that sort of reality that only comes to be in being born a human.

Yet we speak of Jesus being the eternal Logos only because of what he enacted in the historical actuality of his life, death, and resurrection.

- b. The Son is also an eternal reality and therefore not a reality that is limited to a finite historical beginning and end. Implies as well that the Son post-exists his temporal life.

In trinitarian language, the coming-to-be of Jesus in time is God in the mode of being-in-act of the eternal Son.

This also transforms how we understand the God of Israel as well: God has the power to become human.

Jesus Christ is the eternal life of God in creaturely time and space.

This also transforms, though the church does not always notice it, how we speak of God's eternity—it certainly cannot mean the mere negation of temporality, of time.

Rather, God's peculiar eternity is that which is not defeated by time, does not perish in temporal ways and yet can live within the sequentiality of finite creaturely becoming.

2. Jesus is the Eternal Son Become Jewish Flesh

This is the radical Jewish particularity of Jesus of Nazareth; Jesus' Jewishness is essential to who he is; denying that it is a theological accident that God appeared in Jewish particularity. Jesus' Jewishness and the history of Israel are the focused theater of God's redemption of the world.

One of the gravest and continuing heresies in the history of the church has been its incessant inclination to relativize or minimize or even repudiate Jesus' Jewishness.

Further, in putting this emphasis on Jesus' particularity as a Jew, we thereby challenge the contemporary church's fascination with a free-floating god not so firmly identified with Israel and Jesus the Jew.

As a particular human flesh, Jesus bears the human essence and its creaturely limitations.

Jesus also bears the conditions of sin and its possibilities, but Jesus does not rebel against the Father.

We can herein invoke that choice phrase of Barth: Jesus is the "humanity of God".

God has the power to cross the radical divide between Creator and the creature and to become a creature among creatures.

I resist the inclination among some traditions to infer from Jesus that human being might become *deified*. Basic theological problem with putting it that way: it makes it appear that the basic human problem is that we are not-divine, whereas I think the basic problem is our inclination to sinning and being sinned against.

Orienting Notes on Reading and Engaging *A Grammar of Christian Faith*

Empowered this way to say *Jesus is the eternal Son born of the Jewish woman Mary*, about whom is not impermissible to call her *theotokos*—Mother of God. But this is never an assertion that stands on its own feet. [cf. pp.409-10]

Human, creaturely bodiliness is not alien to God but is assumed by God and lovingly embraced by God, not just in possibility but in concrete actuality.

3. On *Limning Kenosis and Incarnation* [412-416]

a. Remember: we are focusing in on the grammar of saying *God the eternal Son is the subject of Jesus Christ's life*.

And we are refusing to appeal to some pre-existing systematic metaphysics in order to provide a grammar for this theological point.

And with Chalcedon, we are taking with seriousness that there is only one subject in Jesus Christ.

But we can only say *the eternal Logos is the subject Jesus* if we say also that *the eternal Logos becomes this human subject*.

b. Herein, then, we will be appealing to the language of the *kenosis* tradition: that the eternal Logos *empties* himself in the Son's becoming human and becoming a slave. [Phil 2.5-11]

But we must avoid the apparent implication in the Kenotic tradition of seeming to say *that God ceases being God in becoming human*.

Rather, God the eternal Son remains God in becoming human but now truly God under the conditions of human existence and actuality.

The ancient concept of *enhypostatia*, which was never quite clearly grasped and articulated, grammatically helps us understand that the eternal Son/Logos becomes the human subject, Jesus of Nazareth.

This grammar conveys the biblical sense of the *condescension* and *humiliation* of God becoming human and enacting the life and destiny of Jesus as the One who is rejected, suffers, and dies a brutal death on a cross of execution.

Note, then, that I am refusing to start with a merely human Jesus and then worry how this human can be or become divine or how he can have anything to do with human life and destiny.

c. It can now be affirmed the grammar of *Incarnation* applies only to the grammar of the being and destiny of Jesus Christ.

Hence, *Incarnation* is not a way of talking about God's immanence in the world, nor is it primarily a way of talking about Jesus' birth by Mary.

d. Questions regarding Kenosis:

Some friends of the kenotic tradition of understanding Jesus and most critics have assumed that in the eternal Son's becoming human he also ceases thereby to be divine.

There are several defects in this critique, and most presuppose an understanding of God that is primarily focused on the traditional attributes of God: Omnipotence, Omniscience, Immutability, Impassibility, and Simplicity.

In the previous discussion of the attributes of God in Chapter 4, I advanced a critique of the way these attributes have been formulated in past theologizing. [see pp. 215-232]

When Bishop William Temple averred, "who was tending the cosmos while the Logos was incarnate in Jesus?", I have argued that Temple and many others err in having an insufficient understanding of the complexity of God's triune nature and life.

It is only when the church acknowledges there is complexity in God's being and life, that the 'becoming incarnate' in Jesus will not appear as though God ceased being God and became human. I am proposing that the appropriate way to affirm God's becoming human is to say 'the eternal Son and Logos became human', but the Father did not become human, nor did the Spirit.

4. Jesus the Unique Incarnate Word and Wisdom of God [417-19]

Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection are the incarnate Word of God and the incarnate Wisdom of God.

Jesus' actual life is the self-communicating presence of God as a human being, and is the criterion in terms of which other speakings forth, other self-communications of God are to be understood.

We are to understand that this bodily human being suffering the vulnerabilities of creaturely existence, suffering the enmity of humans and dying a human death are not finally *alien to* or *impossible for* whatever we might mean by *God, God's Word, and God's Wisdom*.

Thus, it should be evident that not only do previous historical usages of '*logos*' and '*sophia*' illuminate who Jesus is, but Jesus illuminates and transforms what these terms mean about God and humanity.

Hence, Jesus of Nazareth is the unique, singular, and unsurpassable incarnate reality of God, such that it becomes nonsense to wonder whether 'there could be another incarnation of God' or say 'that God is incarnate in the whole world'.

Hence, God the Son is not 'with' Jesus nor merely 'present to' Jesus; rather, God the Son is Jesus.

It is as the eternal and incarnate Son that Jesus Christ is who he is and is the One who does what he does.

Central Thesis of Christology:

Jesus Christ is God's free and loving self-determination to be a living human subject in Jewish flesh, and therefore is God's self-determination to-be-affected in God's actuality by the work and destiny of this particular Jewish Life and to affect in his work and destiny the being and destiny of the world.

G. The Grammar of Jesus' Identity as the Messianic Bearer of the Spirit [419-22]

1. It has often been contended by some biblical scholars and theologians that a Spirit Christology, presumably apparent in the synoptic gospels, is a stronger biblical alternative to Logos Christology and renders trinitarian theology rootless and incapacitated.

I intend to show that such a reading is unnecessary and insufficient for understanding who Jesus is and what he does that is salvific.

2. *The grammar of Spirit Christology shows how the Spirit is defining for who Jesus is and how Jesus defines the Spirit and the Spirit's further work of redemption.*

a. Jesus is conceived in Mary by the Holy Spirit.

b. Jesus' baptism by John is blessed and confirmed by the Holy Spirit: a sonship not merely of birth but of obedient vocation and action.

c. Jesus is led or driven by the Spirit into the wilderness, and encounters seductive temptations to powers incommensurate with being born of the Spirit.

d. Jesus enacts the messianic prophesy in Luke 4.18-19, which also shows the explicit political character of Jesus work.

e. As the bearer of the Spirit, Jesus is the Servant of Yahweh in Isaianic texts:

Isa 49.3,7: no command of an army, a political lightweight by worldly standards

Isa 49.6-8: he is despised and abhorred by the powerful.

Isa 50.6: an object of public aggression.

Isa 52.14: a human figure marred beyond human resemblance and he does not defend himself with the weapons and machinations of the powerful in the world. [see the remarkable reflections by Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, 1994, esp. pp. 124-134]

f. As the Messianic Bearer of the Holy Spirit, Jesus confronts and begins the defeat of the demonic powers that enslave, enfeeble, and enervate the lives of folk but he disarms without resort to violence.

Orienting Notes on Reading and Engaging *A Grammar of Christian Faith*

- g. Jesus embodies the fulfillment of the human spirit as constituted in creation by the Spirit for fellowship with God and with the neighbor in the kingdom-community of love, justice, and peace.
- h. Jesus is that unsurpassable human spirit that is at one with the divine Spirit, thus perfecting the human spirit as that which is created in the image of God.
- i. As the Messianic Bearer of the Spirit, Jesus gives the Spirit—the risen Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit on his disciples [Jn 20.22]—to the church as his Spirit.

H. Some Further Questions [422-26]

1. The particularity of Jesus as a **Jew**.

In previous epochs of church history there have been questions raised about Jesus being a Jew and seeming thereby to ask ‘why a Jew?’ and inviting thereby the question about whether the Jews are superior in some sense to Gentiles.

In reply to such questions, the church must remain clear that the election of Israel should never be interpreted theologically as somehow demonstrating that Israel is *superior* to other people in some way and therefore properly singled out for the *reward* of election by God.

Rather, the election of Israel is rooted in God’s own self-determined decision and through such election, Christianly understood, to seek the redemption of the world.

2. The particularity of Jesus as a **male**.

In recognizing that the church has in fact over the centuries used the maleness of Jesus as the linchpin of a range of beliefs about the superiority of male over female, it is altogether proper to repudiate all these attempts to use Jesus’ maleness to justify belief in a exclusively male priesthood or the need for the female to be obedient to the male—patriarchy in its various forms.

But it seems fruitless to me to somehow intend to argue that Jesus can be thought of as female—as ‘Christa’—as though only in this way can women understand Jesus as being their redeemer.

3. In short, all attempts to undermine the Jewishness or the maleness of Jesus in the interest of relativizing Jesus’ identity and his work are misguided.

Likewise, all attempts to derive some comparative superiority for being male or being Jewish are also misguided.

4. In what sense is Jesus *not* like other humans if he was “made to be sin but knew no sin”? [2 Cor 5.21]

Surely there are complex issues rambling around in the church’s treatment over the centuries of the sinlessness of Jesus.

The grammar I am proposing is this:

Jesus was “*made to be sin*” means ‘*Jesus lived under the conditions of sin*’.

Jesus “*knew no sin*” means ‘*Jesus did not know sin as a determination or object of his willing and deciding and living.*’

In construing the grammar of temptation and sinlessness in Jesus in this way, we can also be astonished at the sheer brazenness and risk of the eternal Son’s becoming human flesh even under the conditions of sin. But we embrace this sure realism about Jesus because we also embrace our astonishment at the cry of dereliction of the eternal Son on the cross: “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” [Mt 27.46]

That the triune God can endure this risk, this suffering, this radical sense of forsaken otherness within God’s Life is at the heart of the work of atonement.