Revisiting Christology
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What is This?
Revisiting Christology

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Abstract
This article continues the scholarly conversation about the ideas presented in the author’s major work Christology. Responding to the comments of reviewers, the article considers some of the general issues raised by the book’s approach and treatment of tradition and scholarship. It concludes by offering further reflections on four of the key constructive Christological claims made within the book.

Keywords
Christology, historical Jesus, presence, virginal conception

In The Way of Jesus Christ, Jürgen Moltmann pointed to one of the major ‘constraints’ for those who undertake such a theological project: ‘No contemporary Christology is ever completely new. Every Christology is part of a grateful and critical dialogue with the Christologies of [our] predecessors and contemporaries.’

When writing Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus, I also attended to what had gone before and to Christological input from leading biblical scholars, historians, and theologians of modern times. I planned to write my own Christology, but in a ‘grateful and critical dialogue’ with others.

In the years after the first (1995) and second (2009) editions of Christology, numerous reviewers have presented and evaluated the book. It seems worthwhile taking up dialogue with them and reacting to their questions, insights


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and corrections. Without such a response, any conversation would remain incomplete.3 The reviews raised at least four general issues that are the focus of the discussion below: the relation between the reviewer’s expertise and their expectations of the work; the degree of engagement with modernity; the contribution of liberation Christology; and the use of the latest proposals from biblical scholars.

**Expertise and expectations**

Inevitably the particular expertise and wider reading of different scholars colour and even shape their evaluations of the work. To make this point, one might single out three reviewers of Christology: James Dunn, John Parr and Lewis Ayres.

Dunn opened his review with a flatteringly positive judgement: ‘There are few who have the necessary breadth of knowledge and reading to attempt an integrated study in what have become the separate disciplines of biblical, historical and

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systematic theology. Fewer still make the attempt. And very few succeed. This is one the very few.’ As a leading New Testament scholar, Dunn appreciated that ‘fully half the discussion’ was ‘on the biblical material as such’, he judged that throughout ‘excellent use’ was made of that material, and praised the ‘unusual’ familiarity with ‘biblical scholarship’ (Dunn, 133).

Other scriptural scholars, such as George Montague, Carey Newman and Pheme Perkins, also came up with similarly positive reviews, but not all the experts proved equally happy. Parr, for example, found three problems with the section on the history of Jesus. First, it should have ‘contextualized Jesus’ ministry’ in ‘contemporary Judaism’s struggles to come to terms with the impact of Roman rule and Greek culture on Palestine’ (Parr, 304). Parr rightly called attention to the significance of the social and religious context in which Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God, but this context was not primarily Palestine as such but rather Galilee, which has been studied brilliantly by Sean Freyne, Mark Chancey and others. The quest for Jesus should not be separated from the quest for the historical Galilee. Moreover, pace the Jesus Seminar (and seemingly Parr himself), the historical Galilee of the early first century was solidly Jewish and not struggling with, let alone shaped by, the impact of Hellenistic culture. Something of the ‘impact of Roman rule’ could have featured, albeit briefly, in my presentation of Jesus’ ministry, but, more importantly, I could have included something about the different Jewish groups (and the ‘struggles’ between them) that John Meier has examined, above all, in Volume 3 of his *magnum opus*.4

Second, Parr objected to what he called my ‘imposing dogmatic categories on the Gospels’. So, Jesus’ authority becomes a matter of his ‘divine status’ rather than his insistence that he, and not his rivals, speaks and acts for God at time of crisis for Israel’ (Parr, 304–305). But should we dismiss a relatively ‘ordinary’ term, ‘divine status’, as a ‘dogmatic category’, that is to say, a fundamental philosophical concept of a doctrinal nature (such as *hypostasis*, *physis*, or *prosopon*, which emerged in later Christological controversy)? As Jesus insisted that he spoke and acted for God in ways that set him apart from others, this inevitably raises a question (that should, of course, be answered with due sensitivity to what the gospels allow us to conclude): who did Jesus think he was? Can we reach any conclusion about his sense of his own identity and, hence, of his status?

Third, Parr argued against the idea that ‘his [Jesus’] father–son language’ suggests ‘an ontological relationship rather than a particular quality of spiritual experience’. I share Parr’s concern with ‘the varying textures of human and Christian experience’ (Parr, 305), but fail to see why one should propose here a ‘rather than’.5 What might we conclude – once again, using the gospels with appropriate sensitivity – about the particular quality of Jesus’ spiritual experience? Could

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5 How could this be otherwise? Over the years I have dedicated pages to the study of human experience, religious and otherwise, and as recently as my *Rethinking*
it lead us to suggest that, beneath and behind this experience and the language in which he expressed it, there existed, in reality or in being (that is to say, ‘ontologically’), a father–son relationship?

It was out of his top-class expertise as a patristic scholar that Ayres reviewed the second edition of Christology. He appreciated my desire to engage with the biblical sources and make Christological reflection more directly scriptural. But he regretted that I did not draw more on patristic and medieval authors when ‘examining some key questions in modern debates about Christ’. He judged that I made ‘extensive use only of modern biblical scholarship’, and wished that I had introduced more, for instance, from the works of St Augustine of Hippo and St Thomas Aquinas (Ayres, 28). Let me make four points in response.

First, the importance of the patristic and medieval authors is beyond question. Yet they belong to the history of reception, and not to the origins of Christianity constituted by the history of Jesus and his apostles, which the uniquely inspired scriptures recorded and normatively interpreted for all time. To be sure, it is at their peril that theologians ignore large sections in the history of reception, and it is a disaster when they ignore the whole history of reception. But the history of reception remains just that, and should never be privileged over the history of origins.

Second, it was not only Ayres but also Parr (Parr, 304) who wanted a longer discussion of Christological developments – from the fathers of the church, through the medieval period to modern times. But, as was stated clearly in the preface to the first edition, I set myself to write my own Christology and not a complete history of Christology. In any case selectivity was necessary, if the book was not to grow beyond the proportions desired by the publishers. If Ayres reads a book I co-authored, Christ Our Priest, he may be happier about the extent to which it could incorporate the Christian tradition. Given a relative neglect of the Letter to the Hebrews and the theme of Christ’s priesthood, it was possible to present and evaluate how official teachers and theologians over two thousand years had received and understood that priesthood and our sharing in it. Even so, to do full justice to the whole Christian tradition and its reception of Christ’s priesthood would have called for much more attention to liturgical texts and practice (than we allowed ourselves) and to Christian art and architecture (which we had to neglect).

Third, when I took up such a ‘key question in modern debates’ as the relationship between the divine and the human mind of Christ, Ayres wanted me to remember ‘answers extensively developed’ by ancient and medieval authors, and referred

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specifically to Augustine’s Letter 137 (Ayres, 28). That letter certainly explores the incarnation with ‘sophistication’, but it never addresses the question of the ‘two minds’ of Christ and how they might relate. Unlike the issue of his ‘two wills’, this is a modern question and not a ‘perennial’ question; it has not been posed and answered ‘over and over again in different modes through Catholic tradition’.

Fourth, I wholeheartedly agree with Ayres that, together with the results coming from modern biblical study, ‘tradition’ is a major resource for ‘reading Scripture’, and is, in fact, ‘a commentary on Scripture’, alongside the results coming from modern biblical study (Ayres, 28). But I would add that philosophy is also a major resource. In developing, for instance, a Christology of presence, or reflecting on redemption as a work of love (as I did), theologians need to draw on philosophical resources to achieve some degree of clarity and coherence in the positions they develop. Despite the study of Platonic, Stoic, Aristotelian and other schools of philosophical thought that his work in patristics has required, Ayres never mentions philosophy and the role it has played in Christological thinking since the second century. Christian theology in general and Christology in particular have proved the greatest employment agency for philosophy the western world has ever seen.

Engagement with modernity

Unlike Ayres, Denis Carroll considered my ‘dialogue with the tradition’ to be ‘superb’, but, like George Newlands (Newlands, 783–84), he judged my ‘engagement with modernity’ to be ‘less so’. He explained that ‘the linguistic, conceptual and political questions raised from the 1960s onwards are addressed but fit uneasily to [sic: into?] the author’s scheme’. As specific examples he cited the scant attention I paid to the possibilities of Christology in an evolutionary perspective, and he queried my observation that ‘talk about his social critique and counter-cultural behaviour can submerge the religious dimension of Jesus’ activity’ (Carroll, 318).

As regards the first of these, Christology (1995) did introduce the evolutionary perspective of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Christology (2009) enlarged this slightly. Beyond question, it is high time that someone, preferably a theologian with a strong scientific background, retrieved the best insights of Teilhard and produced a full-scale evolutionary Christology, one that allows theories of evolution to illuminate the person and work of Jesus, but not a Christology that cuts Jesus down to size and forces him into a preconceived evolutionary framework. The sometimes uncritical enthusiasm for Teilhard’s writing that marked the 1960s has waned. We now need his ‘second coming’, which would exploit what he has to

8 St Augustine, Letters 100–155, trans. Roland Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2003), 212–224. Some remarks of Augustine (pp. 214, 215 and 216) strongly tell against modern ‘explanations’ of the ‘kenosis’ involved in the incarnation (see Phil 2:7), as if it entailed the Word of God abandoning his divine powers or at least temporarily ceasing to exercise them.
offer for Christian thought and action in the third millennium. In my own Jesus Our Redeemer, I showed genuine my own appreciation for what he contributes to thinking about the redemption. But both in Christology (1995) and Christology (2009), the primary aim, as stated, was to expound my own views, not to tell in detail the story of the best Christological developments, either ancient or modern, evolutionary or otherwise.

As regards the second point, I was contrasting the best work coming from research into the socio-historical context of Jesus’ ministry with the worst products in this field. To exemplify the latter, I cited Burton Mack, whose one-sided stress on social critique and counter-cultural behaviour submerged the religious dimension in the activity of Jesus and his first followers. Other names could be added, like that of Robert Funk. Anthony Saldarini, who reviewed Christology (1995) along with Funk’s Honest to Jesus, complained that Funk ‘has capitulated to the post-Enlightenment culture into which he seeks to bring Jesus’ (Saldarini, 12). One gets a measure of how far this capitulation can go when Funk endorses ‘responsible, protected recreational sex between consenting adults’. One does not need to be a raging fundamentalist to shake one’s head over Jesus being enlisted in support of recreational sex.

Nevertheless, rejecting such one-sided and sometimes bizarre pictures of Jesus in his social and political setting should not take us to the other extreme to join the latter-day followers of Rudolf Schnackenburg. In his classic God’s Rule and Kingdom, Schnackenburg wrote: ‘The salvation proclaimed and promised by Jesus in this reign and Kingdom of God is purely religious in character.’ Did Jesus take no stand on social and political issues? Here ‘political’ is not to be reduced to national, still less nationalistic, features. It refers to all matters of public and civic concern. Without going as far as Schnackenburg, John Meier assures his readers: ‘Jesus was not interested in and did not issue pronouncements about concrete social and political reforms, either for the world in general or for Israel in particular. He was not proclaiming the reform of the world; he was proclaiming the end of the world.’ In a 1998 essay that was largely a debate with Meier, I argued that Jesus ‘broke open and changed the contemporary social structures by the ways he spoke and behaved’, and I went on to spell out certain aspects of ‘his liberating work

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12 Funk, Honest to Jesus, 314.
for integral human progress’. 15 Some of that material should have been incorporated in *Christology* (2009).

Leaving aside the two specific issues raised by Carroll, I believe that he (Newlands and Charles Wilson) are correct in calling for more engagement with modernity. 16 To be sure, both editions of *Christology* address some of the issues, but they should have contained, or at least evoked, more about the cultural, political, economic and other changes (both positive and negative) that characterize modernity. 17 When we reflect today on the person and work of Jesus, we do so in a world that has seen an urbanization that has brought a widespread flight from villages to life in enormous urban centres, a unprecedented rise in the world’s population, a globalization that has radically changed the functioning of national and international economy, a revolution in communications, an exponential growth in religious and cultural pluralism (that questions the church’s mission to proclaim the gospel), ecological decay, climate change, nuclear proliferation, a greater respect for personal dignity that seeks to end a widespread denial of basic human rights, savage civil wars, and the rest. Robert Imbelli rightly wanted ‘more explicit consideration of the “pathological” elements of human experience’ (Imbelli, 27). Right at the time when I was committed to writing *Christology* (1995), I co-authored an article on what Imbelli names ‘the wilful refusal of love’, or what I would call ‘wilful hatred’. 18 Some of that material might have entered *Christology*. The best and the worst of modernity should not be neglected.

Remembering David Brown, a theological colleague whose scholarly writing persistently draws in the most valuable and challenging modern art, literature, and music, I find Carroll’s gentle reproach even more convincing. 19 Peter Bernardi may have appreciated my ‘references to artistic works’ (Bernardi, 353), yet the painters and writers I invoke, for example, in *Christology* (2009) and elsewhere, are repeatedly classical figures. It is only rarely that I cite such artists as Francis Bacon, Marc Chagall or Andy Warhol, or such authors as Chinua Achebe, Shusaku Endo, Gabriel García Márquez, Seamus Heaney, James Joyce, Iris Murdoch, Eugene O’Neill, Salman Rushdie, Dylan Thomas, Mario Vargas

16 ‘The chief difficulty with O’Collins’s position is its uneven relationship with modernity’ (Wilson, 1188).
17 See, for example, *Christology* (1995), 223, and *Christology* (2009), 227–228.
18 G. O’Collins and Daniel Kendall, ‘On Not Neglecting Hatred’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 47 (1994), 511–518. I am unaware of any response that we provoked; this lacuna serves to establish further our thesis that theologians of all kinds deplorably neglect hatred.
Llosa, or Virginia Woolf. Here, too, Christology should play itself out in counterpoint with modernity. Nevertheless, I may deserve a little credit for changing the image on the cover of *Christology*. Where the first edition displayed a classic mosaic of Christ from the Basilica of Saints Cosmas and Damian (Rome), the second edition used a wonderful modern work on Christ calming the storm, created by a contemporary Chinese artist Dr He Qi.

Apropos of modernity, Saldarini showed himself to be somewhat more satisfied than Carroll when he wrote: ‘O’Collins...gathers up modern themes, concerns and insights into a classic synthesis tuned to modern ears. The topics may be familiar and unexciting (resurrection, Son of God, Trinity, councils, divinity and humanity, virginal conception, redeemer, etc.), but the explanations are clear and attuned as much as possible to modern thought and sensibility.’ But, Saldarini added, O’Collins does not grapple with ‘questions and doubts that have confused and tormented the modern soul’, and ‘serenely assumes’ in his readers ‘a sympathetic acceptance of God, Christ, and the Christian tradition’ (Saldarini, 12). This means that ‘the task of [his] theological inquiry into Jesus remains seriously incomplete’ (Saldarini, 14). Here something comes into view that I never set myself to do in either edition of *Christology*. The subtitle was and has remained ‘a biblical, historical, and systematic study of Jesus’, and does not at the end qualify the study as also being ‘apologetical’. In his long and probing review of *Christology* (2009), James McGrath defended me on the same grounds: ‘O’Collins is writing as a Christian theologian, and historic Christian doctrine provides his theological framework. His aim is to formulate a coherent Christian view of Jesus, not to persuade skeptics to adopt it’ (McGrath, 87).

Nevertheless, Saldarini rightly pressed home the need to tackle modern questions and doubts, so as to present to troubled human beings the case for accepting Jesus as a credible answer to their search. Egan also looked for more help for the ‘marginal people’ and those who want to know how the Christian understanding of Jesus ‘actually affects’ their lives. In other books I have undertaken those apologetical (Saldarini) and pastoral (Egan) tasks, notably in *Jesus: A Portrait*. But, even there, was I largely preaching to the converted?

### Liberation Christology

A third general issue raised by several reviews concerned liberation theology. Parr noted my ‘lack of engagement with Christologies of liberation’ (Parr, 305), while Robert Moloney missed any ‘account of the contribution of liberation theology’ (Moloney, 134). They both saw that in *Christology* (1995) Jon Sobrino featured

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only twice on pages 240 and 251. The second edition gave him more entries in the concluding bibliography. Once again I might plead in my defence that I was not providing accounts of various modern schools of Christology, but writing my own Christology. If I should have written at length on liberation Christology, I should also have done so in the case of Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karl Barth, Bernard Lonergan, Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and others. But, for better or worse, I set myself to do my own work and thinking, and not to provide an adequate survey of contemporary contributions to Christology. Yet there is a little more to be said.

The courageous witness of Sobrino, Gustavo Gutierrez, and some other exponents of liberation theology (such as Ignacio Ellacuría) has always won my deep admiration. As regards liberation theology in general, I have persistently championed its place among the major ‘styles’ of theology that the Christian Church needs. As regards Sobrino in particular, I defended him against accusations made by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Nevertheless, I must admit that, apart from his aim to shape Christology on behalf of the victimized non-persons in our world and his insistence that implementing justice, peace and human solidarity will enable us to grasp the meaning of Christ’s resurrection from the dead, I have not found themes to appropriate in my own Christological thinking. I may be badly mistaken, but too much of what I read seemed derivative, and I looked in vain for a full scale development of what the suffering victims of this world themselves make of Christ’s person and work.

**Use of recent scholarly proposals**

Among other issues raised in his review of *Christology* (2009), James McGrath put the question: should systematic theologians follow, wherever possible, the consensus view when they draw on biblical scholarship? Is it ‘best to seek to be as up-to-date as possible, even drawing on recent publications that seek to challenge the consensus view, or to remain with the consensus’? He pointed out the ‘danger’ of any choice: ‘to the extent that a particular view comes to be judged unpersuasive, this will affect the volumes that drew on and built on it. This happens with consensus views as well, of course, but usually only in the longer term’. McGrath had in mind the use I made of Richard Bauckham’s ‘most recent work on eyewitness testimony of the Gospels. Bauckham’s arguments are certainly generating

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22 See, for example, O’Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology*, 323–329.
discussion, but the extent to which they will be found persuasive and considered of lasting value remains to be seen’ (McGrath, 87).

Some years ago Dan Kendall and I raised the same issue, and argued that ‘where available, the consensus of centrist exegetes’ should ‘guide systematic theology’. We went on to explain:

it is obviously ill-advised to take over into theology adventurous, even maverick, theses advanced by individual biblical scholars or a small group with its own particularist agenda. One might dub this practice rushing to apply in theology the latest thesis from the banks of the Seine or the Neckar. To some extent, Edward Schillebeeckx did just that in his 1974 Christology.

Was I doing the same by using Bauckham’s work? In my defence I plead that, as in biblical studies no general consensus exists on the origins of the gospels, I had to choose one approach. I took over Bauckham’s proposals about eyewitness testimony, using as well the widely accepted scheme of three stages in the transmission of witness to Jesus’ words and deeds: the initial stage in his earthly life when his disciples and others spoke about him; the handing on by word of mouth or in writing of witness to him after his death and resurrection; and the authorial work of the four evangelists later in the first century. Rather than planning to be ‘as up-to-date as possible’ about gospel origins, I happened to receive for review Bauckham’s major study and, somewhat to my surprise, found it convincing, or at least the most plausible version I had come across about the origins of the four gospels.

Thus far I have responded to four general questions reviewers have raised for discussion. Let me turn now to four more specific topics: my introduction of ‘presence’ as an organizing principle for Christology; the importance of the theme of Christ’s relationship to followers of other religions; the virginal conception; and the role of the historical Jesus for systematic Christology.

The significance of presence

Imbelli singled out my ‘path-breaking exploration of the theme of “presence” as a systematic category’, and argued that ‘the Lord’s continuing presence’ made Christology (1995) ‘particularly relevant for the Church’s liturgical life’ (Imbelli, 26). Ann Nickson (Nickson, 143), Pheme Perkins (Perkins, 26–27), William Portier (Portier, 154) and, even more insistently, James Heft wanted ‘further development’
of ideas about presence’ (Heft, 548), not least because that would greatly benefit deploying the resurrection as ‘the interpretative key’ for the whole of Christology (Heft, 549). Certainly more remained for me to do, ‘if the possibilities of Jesus’ presence among us are to be realized’ (Heft, 549).

In Christology (2009) I added two further themes about presence to my 1995 list of seven. Then, in an article on the liturgical presences of Christ, these aspects of presence grew to 10. In Salvation for All, I dedicated a chapter to the universal presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit. But all of that is hardly enough. Currently I am directing a doctoral dissertation on the theme of the Christology of presence, hoping that dialogue with a brilliant student may take me along the track in thinking more fully about Christ and his presence. Part of the difficulty that I have experienced towards developing further ideas about ‘presence’ has come from the lack of interaction on the part of other theologians, not to mention philosophers. ‘Interesting’ has been the standard response, but real challenges and additions to what I have written have not been forthcoming.

Ayres declared what I wrote about ‘Christ’s presence to the world in different modes’ to be ‘a powerful meditation’. He suggested that this theme could be taken forward by exploring ‘the extent to which theologians from the tradition’ have written about ‘the divine presence’ in its ‘mystery’ (and, one should add, ubiquity) (Ayres, 28). But I wished to explore the presence of Christ, not precisely the divine presence as such. Here I found little to draw from the tradition.

Several reviewers queried the ‘feminine’ dimension that I listed in my account of presence. Carroll wrote: ‘I found O’Collins’s listing of male/female characteristics and his application thereof to Christ’s presence somewhat unconvincing’ (Carroll, 318). Faced with the biblical presentation of Christ as Lady Wisdom, the homely image of the mother hen that Jesus applied to himself (Luke 13:34), and some traditional teaching about ‘Jesus our mother’, I believed that the feminine should be introduced and that this involved drawing some distinction between the feminine and masculine. Picking up the reflections of the late Walter Ong, I attempted this task, conscious that the whole area was ‘controversial and deeply conditioned by one’s own culture’. But Klyne Snodgrass may well be right: ‘presence is no more feminine than masculine, and Jesus’ reception of children or his insistence on losing life in order to find it do not betray feminine traits. They betray caring, human traits’ (Snodgrass, 257).

30 O’Collins, Christology (2009), 337–343.
34 O’Collins, Christology (2009), 338.
35 O’Collins, Christology (2009), 354.
Christ and the religious others

Heft wanted my chapter on Christ as ‘The Universal Redeemer’ to be ‘extended, given both the importance of the issue of Christ’s relationship to other religions and the amount of scholarship recently dedicated to that topic’ (Heft, 547–48). Heft himself has contributed notably in that area, not least by the book he recently edited and for which he wrote an insightful introduction.36

Heft’s suggestion led me to enlarge, for the second edition, the chapter on Christ’s redemptive impact on all humanity.37 Even more than Leslie Houlden, who wanted to hear more on ‘other faiths’ (Houlden, 15), Heft prompted me into writing two books in the area of what we might call ‘the Christology of the Religions’.38

The virginal conception

When reviewing the first edition of Christology, Montague expressed a wish to see more space given to the virginal conception (Montague, 169). The second edition has doubled the treatment of this theme, engaging with difficulties against the virginal conception and expounding further its significance in the whole story of salvation.39 I was glad to discover that Ayres found this ‘particularly helpful’.

In both editions I borrowed a distinction from some philosophers and distinguished between essential and merely common human properties, and wrote: ‘clearly, enjoying a biological father as well as a mother is a common property. But can we establish that it is also an absolutely essential property.’40 Queries coming from Dunn (Dunn, 133) and Parr (Parr, 305) suggested that I should have explained further this distinction. Medieval theology, when comparing the story of Adam’s origin (as pictured in the Book of Genesis) with the standard origin of human beings, but without introducing the terminological distinction between ‘truly essential’ and ‘merely common’ human properties, understood the first Adam to be created without originating from either a human father or mother, while Christ, the New Adam, was conceived and born from a human mother but not from a human father. Unquestionably, when retrieving today such a comparison between the two Adams, we need to recognize the mythical status of the Genesis story, and views about human origin coming from evolutionary science. Nevertheless, the medieval comparison can encourage a modern, philosophical question: does the standard origin of a living organism rule out all possibilities

37 O’Collins, Christology (2009), 328–333.
40 O’Collins, Christology (1995), 275; Christology (2009), 291.
of any other origin? Or does there, for example, exist the possibility of God making an exception for very good reasons?

**The historical Jesus’ impact on systematic Christology**

McGrath, apropos of the specific issue of pre-existence, raises a major question for those who elaborate a systematic Christology. Let me explain. He asks: ‘If, as O’Collins acknowledges, Jesus [in his human mind] did not think of himself as pre-existent, then it is unclear why one ought nevertheless to insist on this doctrine’s importance in a systematic theology for our time’ (McGrath, 87). Here McGrath risks privileging one-sidedly the public ministry of Jesus and what he said (or, at least, implied) about himself, almost as if the divine revelation through and of Jesus was completed with his life and death and there was no room for development taking place, albeit on the basis of Jesus’ own self-interpretation.

Any (normally tacit) presumption that nothing is revealed in the post-Easter situation obviously plays down the role of the risen Jesus and his Holy Spirit in illuminating the apostolic generation as to the meaning and implications of what they had experienced of the earthly Jesus (see, for example, John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13–14). The pre-existence Christology of Paul and John authoritatively went beyond the self-interpretation of Jesus through their experiencing his resurrection (that is to say, the risen One) and his Holy Spirit. That post-Easter experience was, to use McGrath’s language, ‘data adequate enough to persuade’ (McGrath, 187) apostolic leaders of the truth and importance of Christ’s eternal pre-existence.

**Concluding considerations**

This article has sampled some of the major questions raised by over 30 reviews that evaluated the first and second editions of Christology. Space precludes doggedly taking up every point, including justified criticisms. McGrath, for instance, rightly queried my citing Pannenberg to ‘settle’ the issue of whether or not Paul ‘could have envisaged resurrection without an empty tomb’ (McGrath, 87–88). Yes, rather than merely citing an eminent theologian, I should also have drawn on N.T. Wright’s magisterial study of the resurrection to establish that, for Paul, a resurrection without an empty tomb would have been unimaginable.

John McIntyre is the most notable figure missing in my conversation. In his second edition of *The Shape of Christology*, he spent a chapter in close debate with me over the philosophical exploration of the Council of Chalcedon.41 He showed where we converge and diverge in the reasons we offer for the lasting validity of the

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Chalcedonian Definition and the role it continues to play in reflecting on the person of Christ. To take up the debate with McIntyre would require another article, and, sadly, it would be a posthumous debate, as John died in 2005.

I remain grateful to all the reviewers. Hopefully the present article goes some way towards completing the conversation they initiated.

**Author biography**

**Gerald O’Collins** took his PhD at the University of Cambridge, UK after achieving his MA (1st hons) at the University of Melbourne, Australia. He taught for 33 years at the Gregorian University (Rome), where he was also Dean of Theology Faculty (1985–91). He is now an adjunct professor of Australian Catholic University and a research fellow of the MCD University of Divinity. He has authored or co-authored 60 published books, which include *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* (2011), *Believing in the Resurrection* (2012) and *A Midlife Journey* (2012).