Having surveyed the New Testament understanding and experience of the historical and risen Jesus, it would be tempting to by-pass the history of the ways in which Jesus Christ has been interpreted in order to bring the Christ mystery into immediate dialogue with our contemporary situation. However, since we carry the history of our tradition with us, it is important that we acknowledge the way that it shapes our lives and understanding. We are, if you like, part of a living, changing Jesus tradition that influences both the questions we ask and the answers we give to the Jesus event. We are part of an ongoing story.

In this regard, William Thompson highlights the importance of giving attention to the historical unfolding of the Jesus tradition:

It is simply artificial, even naively uncritical, to think that one can jump directly from the biblical inheritance into the modern period. The tradition-bound nature of our humanity and faith means that the way we experience Christianity today is, in theory and practice, at least partially the result of the entire tradition from which we spring. [William Thompson, The Jesus Debate: A Survey and Synthesis (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 299.]

This is not a matter of taking sides in the old Protestant-Catholic debate on the question of scripture versus tradition. Today, centrist biblical scholars and theologians, whether Protestant, Catholic or Orthodox, acknowledge both the normative nature of the bible and its mediation via the effective history of the Church. This does not mean that we are bound to an uncritical acceptance of the tradition. In fact, it is only by being aware of the tradition that we are then able to learn from its strengths and avoid or overturn its weaknesses.

Lest this approach be misunderstood, we may also like to say with the easter liturgy that 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow', but that our experience and understanding of this central mystery of our christian faith is always contingent or finite. Some appreciation of the historical unfolding of the interpretation of Jesus Christ enables us to recognise the ways in which culture and history always enter into our attempts to explain the christian mystery. Moreover, such explanations are closely entwined with practical expressions whether personal (liturgy and life-style), ecclesial (church life and organization) or political (relationship of church to wider society). In our discussion, we should not lose sight of this intimate connection between theory and practice.

The post-biblical approach to Jesus

'We ought to think of Jesus Christ as of God' said Clement of Rome in a late first century sermon. Beyond christian sources, Pliny the Younger writes to his fellow Romans that these 'christians' would gather to sing 'a hymn to Christ as though to a god'. It is evident, then, from sources both within and beyond christianity, that the divine status of Jesus continues to be a central affirmation of the christian movement. The theoretical and practical implications of this fact would take many centuries before reaching a point of equilibrium.

In the early christian centuries of the Roman empire, to express belief in the divinity of Jesus was not a matter of idle speculation or mere academic debate. It was a highly political and dangerous act as is
evidenced by the fact that many Christians were prepared to be—and quite often were—martyred rather than renounce their belief. After all, the Romans had already afforded their emperor with divine honours and so were not about to be troubled by a group of Christian enthusiasts keen to recognise divinity in someone else. Rome reasoned that, whatever else this incipient Christian movement's claim represented, it was a potential threat to the life and order of the empire. As history would show, it was a reasoning process that proved quite correct.

If Rome was captivated by the political implications of Jesus' acclaimed God-status, Christians themselves had their own problems in reconciling their confession of faith with both Hebrew and Greek notions of divinity. Apart from the old problem of reconciling Jewish monotheism with a divine-human Jesus, the progressive Hellenization of Christianity (that is, the deepening influence of Greek thought on Christian self-understanding) brought new problems. How could the all-powerful and unchanging God of Aristotle—and, to a lesser extent, of Plato—be in any way identified with a humiliated and crucified figure of history?

**Early debates**

Debates in the second century focus on this issue of reconciling the human figure with the divine identity of Jesus. These debates led to the final split of Christianity from Judaism which, however, did little to lessen the internal divisions within Christianity itself as it struggled to account for the human-divine identity of Jesus Christ. As we shall see, it is not just a matter of striking the right formula (seeing things aright), but also a matter of being converted to a new way of naming and experiencing the perfect divine presence in our most imperfect human world.

One of the earliest groups of faithful Jews who also wanted to acknowledge the special status of Jesus were the *Ebionites*. They recognised Jesus as God's chosen prophet who had come to put an end to the Old Testament priesthood. However, in expressly denying the virginal birth of Jesus and the pre-existence of the Son, they found themselves on the outside of accepted Christian belief and practice. Their position was not dissimilar to that of the *Moralists* who spoke of Jesus as a unique, 'moral' figure of human history, endowed with special powers, and who could serve as an example for others to follow.

Even after the separation from Judaism, Christians continued to identify themselves as monotheists. Influenced by Greek thought, the *Monarchists* and *Adoptionists* struggled with the idea of God's absolute, unchanging reality. This led the former group to speak of God's 'monarchy' and to deny any distinction between the Father and the Son. In this scenario, the divinity of the Son, Jesus, is achieved through denying his true individuality and humanity. The latter group tried to solve the problem by suggesting that Jesus was 'adopted' as God's Son and thereby was not fully or truly divine.

Another widespread movement in early Christianity was known as *Gnosticism* because its members claimed to be 'gnostics', that is, those who possessed secret knowledge. Part of their 'knowledge' involved an understanding of the material world as either evil or unreal and therefore not created by God who is both good and real. It is interesting for us to note that such a negative view of the world and creation generally has often plagued Christianity as many another religion and culture. Early Christian gnostics logically reasoned that the incarnation was not an acceptable doctrine. Their christology is best expressed by the *Docetists* who said that Jesus only 'appeared' to be human or that he took a human form in the manner of a 'costume'.

It is customary to divide these early movements into those which deny the full divinity of Jesus (Ebionites, Moralists and Adoptionists) and those that declaim Jesus' true humanity (Monarchists, Gnostics and Docetists). While this is no doubt the case, there is much more at stake in these debates, namely, the inability to understand or experience the divine as the pathos of love and compassion and the inability to understand or experience the human as the locus of genuine divinity. Neither side of these christological debates is able to breakthrough the dualistic separation of an *all-powerful* and absolutely transcendent God and a messy, changeable all *too human (= too corrupt)* created world.
In essence, these debates represent a failure to fully depth the mystery of the Hebrew God of the Old Testament and of Jesus whose pathos and world-involvement are constantly evident. They likewise represent a failure to relate to the human and creative possibilities that are manifested to us in the life of Jesus (itself based on the Jewish experience of the essential goodness of all creation that springs from God). The issue of Jesus identity really comes down to the issue of how God is, or even can be, present to the world. Certainly, this was the key-issue behind the christological debates in the second and third centuries.

Logos-christology

In fact, the Jewish notion of Logos -- God's divine Word active in creation and history--had already provided a way of expressing how divine transcendence acts in the world. The Word, understood as of God and in God, was also the means by which God created and sustained the universe. Logos is the creative word of Genesis, the prophetic word of the Jewish prophets and, in Johannine theology, the pre-existent, divine reality that becomes incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. This would seem to be an adequate Jewish model for depthing the way in which the divine mystery is especially revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

However, the very success of Christianity in spreading itself throughout the Graeco-Roman world led to the increasing pressure to explicate its mysteries and beliefs in the high intellectual Greek philosophy of the day. It so happened that Hellenistic philosophy also used the word Logos in a subtly but significantly different way to Hebrew thought. For the Greeks, Logos was the principle of unity, order and reason within the universe. It too had its origins in God but, under the influence of Platonic thought, Logos tended to be separate from God. We might say that, whereas the Jewish Logos was a non-created and fully divine power, the Greek Logos tended to be interpreted as a created, semi-divine power.

The result was a series of masterful attempts to blend the Jewish and Greek understandings of Logos to explicate how the divine reality was present in the human Jesus. However, under the increasing influence of the Greek understanding of the Logos, most of these christologies were subordinationist: that is, they were unable to account for the equality of the Father and the Son:

For Justin, the Logos was derivative of God. For Irenaeus, the Son was not quite equal to the Father. For Tertullian, the Father and the Son are of the same substance, but not equal. For Origen, the Logos is indeed an image of God, but is clearly not God. [Brennan Hill, Jesus the Christ: Contemporary Perspectives (Mystic CT: Twenty-third Publications), 218f.]

However, there was an equal problem in that many of these christologies also failed to account for the genuine humanity of Jesus. Jesus becomes a kind of 'third-entity' between divinity and humanity. We remain caught in the bind of inadequate understandings of both the divine mystery and the human reality. This is most evident with regard to the teachings of Arius (d.336).

From Arius to the Council of Nicea

Arius was one of the early Christian monks who brought matters of Jesus' divine-human identity to a point of crisis. He was probably more a popularizer of prevailing ideas than an original thinker himself. Indeed, apart from his evident preaching abilities, part of his appeal was in the fact that he lived a holy, austere and moral life. As is often the case with religious politics, it is only when ideas stir the people--to the point, it is said, that there were massive demonstrations in the streets of Alexandria--, that civil and religious authorities take note and react. And react they did, to the point of banishing Arius and calling the first full-scale Council in the church's history.

What was it that Arius and his followers, the Arians, taught that created such a stir? Arius held that the Logos was a demi-God interceding between God and the world. The Logos was not God but a creature, albeit of exalted status; nor, strictly speaking, could the Logos be identified with a purely worldly reality. This meant that Jesus, in whom the Logos was uniquely present, was neither fully divine nor truly human,
but something in between both. If Arius was only baldly declaring what had been implied in earlier teachings, history was to present him with the role of scapegoat for holding a doctrine contrary to orthodox Christian belief.

Whether we call it fate or providence, the fact is that the Arian dispute occurred at a point in history where Christian unity was considered essential for the unity of what came to be called the 'Holy Roman Empire'. The emperor Constantine, upon his conversion to the Christian faith in 312 CE, soon sanctioned Christianity with 'official religion' status. This meant that any source of inner-religious division was likely to boil over into political and civil unrest. History records that it was Constantine rather than the bishop of Rome or the patriarch of Alexandria who actually decreed the Council at Nicea in 325 CE. It was likewise the emperor Constantine who opened the Council and confirmed its decrees.

Evidently, religion and politics had become entangled to the point where matters of theological debate were significant for social harmony. Over two hundred bishops gathered at Nicea in a mood of enthusiasm and optimism. As much as anything, the Council symbolized the wonderful advances of Christianity—from a Jewish sect to a Gentile church and from a persecuted minority to the established religion of the empire—in fewer than three hundred years.

The Council also responded to the theological matter at hand: it condemned the teachings of Arius and upheld that Jesus was not a demi-God but indeed 'God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God, Begotten, not made, ...'. Most significantly, Nicea defended Jesus' divine status not just in scriptural terminology but through the use of Greek language—'homoousios' (translated 'one in substance' or 'one in being') with the Father. Effectively, Nicea established the principle of the necessity of translating the Christian message into the language and the culture of the people to whom it is being addressed. This is sometimes called the *incarnational, sacramental or missionary* principle of Christian faith which has been so significant in the ability of the church to make its message heard in diverse cultures throughout the centuries.

What, then, are we to make of Nicea's christological achievements? By affirming the full divinity of Jesus, Nicea actually saves Christianity from the excesses of Greek philosophy which held on to a totally changeless and immutable God who is somehow immune from any real contact with the created world. Because the divine mystery is fully present in the human Jesus, this works as a powerful symbol for the reality of God's pathos and love in human history. Moreover, properly understood, this links in with a notion of salvation that consists, not in flight from the (evil) world, but in commitment to a (healing) world. In these ways, Nicea reiterates the central insights of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures.

Nonetheless, Nicea's single focus on the divinity of Jesus leaves us with a most unbalanced picture. What about the other dimensions of the Jesus event such as his humanity, his life and ministry, his death and resurrection? In essence, where is the connection to the historical Jesus to be made in all this talk of divine status? It would seem that Nicea affirms Jesus’ divinity but then severs it from the concrete reality of his human existence. Neither should we forget that there are political dimensions to the Council which are related to the cause of the Roman empire: Jesus is now the triumphant, imperial Lord rather than one who sides with the oppressed, alienates the powerful, and goes to his death in a state of abject humiliation.

Evidently, one Council cannot achieve everything. Consequently, we need to read Nicea's 'high christology' in relation to the christology of the humiliated Jesus presented to us in the writings of the early Christian martyrs. This may also be a place to mention that the more masculine *Word/Logos-christology* adopted by the 'early fathers' should be complemented by more attention to the feminine *Wisdom/Sophia-christology* of the Scriptures. [ See Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 131-162; and Denis Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God* (Homebush: St Paul's, 1995), 19-68. ] It is surely significant, that as Christianity lost contact with its more radical roots, it relegated the feminine, along with the poor and outcast, to a less than central position in its life and self-reflections. In all this, there is a loss of contact with the biblical understanding of Jesus.
In any event, the Council of Nicea was a significant ecclesial and political event in Christian life and self-understanding. Its promotion of the divinity of Jesus soon affected the church's liturgy which moved away from the sense of communal meal and celebration towards the more private experience of worship. Nicea was also a symbol of the new unity of church and state. Henceforth, as Constantine had predicted, Christianity would 'play a role similar to that which the old State religion of Rome had played'. [Cited by William Thompson, *The Jesus Debate: A Survey and Synthesis* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 310.]

Moreover, the articulation of the Christian mystery would now become increasingly dependant on Greek philosophy rather than the Jewish and Christian scriptures.

Nonetheless, as history would soon reveal, Nicea does not have the last word on the issue of Jesus' identity. Its many unanswered questions were soon to flare up in a new series of controversies.

**From Athanasius to the Council of Chalcedon**

The issue that Nicea failed to address could be summarized as follows: if Jesus is both divine and human, how are these two realities united in his personhood? One answer solves the problem by simply accepting the 'other half' of Arianism (the 'half' that Nicea does not directly condemn) which states that Jesus' humanity is a 'costume' or 'mask' which he wore to conceal his real (divine) identity. This is only a solution to the extent that it dissolves the problem: Jesus is not genuinely human at all. Although this may appear to be a far-fetched kind of answer, it is actually the image of Jesus that has underpinned many a Christian theology and piety throughout the ages.

A couple of extreme examples of this solution to the issue of Jesus' identity are the following:

*For he ate, not for the sake of the body, which was kept together by a holy energy, but in order that it might not enter into the mind of those who were with him to entertain a different opinion of him.*

(Clement of Alexandria)

*Our Lord felt the force of suffering but without its pain; the nails pierced the flesh as an object passes through the air, painlessly.* (Hilary of Poitiers) [Clement of Alexandria and Hilary of Poitiers respectively, cited by Elizabeth Johnson, *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 8.]

Athanasius (d.373), who had attended the Council of Nicea as a deacon, and had subsequently been appointed bishop to the influential see of Alexandria, sought to explain Nicea's teaching on the divinity of Jesus without falling into this trap of compromising his humanity. Athanasius taught that, unless Jesus was both genuinely human and truly divine, then the purpose of the incarnation--the divinization of humanity--could not be achieved.

The approach of Athanasius and the Alexandrian School is sometimes called 'Word-flesh' christology. It begins by affirming the divinity of the pre-existent Logos which is then united to the human flesh of Jesus. To the question of whether Christ really suffered--a prospect which Hilary of Poitiers clearly denies (see the quotation above)--, Athansius says that Christ, the Word, the divine Logos does suffer 'in his body' but 'not in himself'. For Athanasius and Alexandrian christology generally the divine in Jesus always takes precedence over the human. Specifically, it does not seem to provide a place for the human 'soul' (intellect, emotions and will) of Jesus. Nonetheless, Athanasius' attempt to explicate the divine-human identity of Jesus does take us some steps forward.

An extreme form of Alexandrian teaching, which shows its inherent weakness, is evident in Apollinaris (d.390) who outrightly denies that Jesus has a human mind and soul. For Apollinaris, Christ was the 'heavenly man' who, he says, 'is neither fully man nor God, but a mixture of God and man'. For Apollinaris, the divine Logos is the human consciousness of Jesus: that is another way of saying that the historical Jesus did not have human consciousness at all. This teaching was condemned by the first Council of
Constantinople in 381 CE. Evidently, there was need for another model to explain how the divine could be present in the human Jesus. It so happened that an alternative approach was being developed—not in Alexandria, but in the rival city of Antioch.

As often happens with rival cities, not only are they divided on matters of food and custom, but they also develop their own ideologies, theologies and ways of thinking about life. Followers of the Antiochene School developed what is called a 'Word-man' christology. By beginning their reflections with the human Jesus rather than the pre-existing Logos, they hoped to safeguard the humanity of Christ. One of their chief ploys and lasting impacts was to speak of 'two natures' in Jesus Christ, one human, the other divine. Consequently, they were able to locate Jesus' real human soul in his human nature while allowing for another, separate, divine nature. If there was a problem with this approach, it is that we are still left with the issue of understanding how these two natures could co-exist in the one identity. Surely, if there were two natures, there must be two Christs!

Of course, to our ears today, all this sounds very abstract as well as being devoid of any real interest in the historical realities of Jesus' earthly life. However, we should not think that, for the ordinary Christian folk of the fourth and fifth centuries, these matters were either uninteresting or reserved for scholarly church debate. Elizabeth Johnson tells the story of one bishop going out to buy a loaf of bread and finding that 'even the baker' wanted to discuss whether there were one or two natures in Christ! [Cited by Elizabeth Johnson, Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 8.] In fact, debate was beginning to rage over this issue. One catch-cry was: 'Cut him in two who divides Christ!' [Cited by Brennan Hill, Jesus the Christ: Contemporary Perspectives (Mystic CT: Twenty-third Publications), 225.]

Unfortunately, what followed in the first half of the fifth century was a most turbulent and unseemly period in Christian history that owed as much to political intrigue as to theological argument. There were rigged Councils, banished bishops, imprisonments, ecclesiastical witch-hunts and even physical fights resulting, in one case, with the death of a bishop (Flavian, patriarch of Constantinople). The church was, in many ways, reflecting the power-play that was occurring in the Roman empire, a power-play that acted out the rivalries between East and West and eventually led to Marcion's unconstitutional seizure of the emperor's throne.

Significantly, it was Marcion, the new emperor, who called the Council to meet at Nicea to decide once and for all on this problem of understanding Jesus' identity. Fights broke out again and the Council had to be aborted. It then reconvened at Chalcedon in 451 CE. The central christological issue was how to maintain appreciation of Jesus' identification both with God and with humanity. Pope Leo I stated the matter succinctly: 'It is as dangerous an evil to deny the truth of the human nature of Christ as it is to refuse to believe that his glory is equal to the Father'. [Cited by Elizabeth Johnson, Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 9.]

In many ways, the Council of Chalcedon provided a masterful compromise of Alexandrian and Antiochene teachings. Thus, it accepted (with the Antiochenes) that there were indeed 'two natures' in Christ so that he should be understood as both 'perfectly human' and 'perfectly divine'—'one in being with Father as to divinity and one in being with us as to humanity'. Consequently, Jesus' humanity is not just a costume or mask: he had a human body that suffered and a human will that made human decisions in the face of doubt and risk.

Yet (with the Alexandrians), Chalcedon also taught that Jesus' dual natures did not in any way compromise the essential unity of his 'person' since there is only 'one and the same Christ'. Effectively, Chalcedon had 'solved' the problem of Jesus' identity by using Greek categories of 'substance', 'person' and 'nature': Jesus Christ is of the same substance as the Father and the same substance as us; and although possessing two natures, divine and human, these are united in the one person. This unity of Christ's personhood was also expressed in the Council's teaching (against Nestorius d.451) that Mary is not only the mother of Christ.
('christotokos') but, indeed, the mother of God ('theotokos'). To say otherwise, it reasoned, would be to 'split Christ'.

Following Chalcedon, two further so-called Christological Councils were held at Constantinople in 553 and 680-681 CE. respectively. Their major contribution was to refine aspects of Chalcedonian christology. Constantinople II, for example, specified that Jesus possessed two fully functioning wills, divine and human. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that christological development essentially stopped with Chalcedon. It became the benchmark upon which all further christology was measured. Moreover, it seemed that christianity was exclusively tied to the 'one person--two natures' manner of expressing who Jesus was and is.

Only in 1951, on the fifteenth hundred anniversary of Chalcedon, was there any serious attempt in Catholic theology to 'go beyond' Chalcedon. German theologian, Karl Rahner, wrote an essay entitled: *Chalcedon: End or Beginning?* [Karl Rahner, *Chalcedon: End or Beginning?* redacted as *Current Problems in Christology*, Theological Investigations 1 (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 149-200.] He spoke of the sorry and stagnant state of christology which seemed to be so opposed to new ways of expressing the reality of Jesus and his significance for our world today. He was especially critical of the fact that most Christians seemed to ignore the deep truth that Chalcedon had tried to express--Jesus Christ, Word and Son of God, was indeed genuinely human. Evidently, Chalcedon and the classical christological doctrines were in need of review.

Interpreting the doctrines today

The problem is essentially one of translating fifth century Greek language and thought into the twentieth century. To begin, we need to ask what it can possibly mean for us today to speak of 'substance' ('ousion') in either God or humanity? To our way of thinking, 'substance' is normally associated with 'inert matter' which is clearly an inappropriate and unhelpful way of describing either divine or human reality. In fact, the Greek 'ousion' is better translated as 'being'--a more dynamic, living category--than 'substance' which is passive and static. Yet, even here, we need to ask what it can possibly mean to apply the same notion--whether 'substance' or 'being'--to refer to two such totally different realities as God and humanity.

As well, our modern understanding of 'person' ('prosopon') is at odds with Chalcedon. We understand 'person' in psychological terms as the ego-centre of human consciousness, freedom and action. By contrast, Chalcedon used the notion of 'person' to describe in abstract language how there was a 'centre of divine-human unity' in Jesus Christ. If anything, to contemporary ears, this seems to devalue the human personhood of Jesus. In fact, Chalcedon had used the word 'nature' ('phusis') to describe the reality of Jesus' human personhood. But, in modern usage, 'nature' sounds more like an abstract quality than a dynamic source of human life and activity.

In the wake of these kinds of difficulties, it may be more important for us today to attempt to express the christological mystery in different language. This approach seeks to be faithful to the intentions of the classic doctrines, and yet open to the insights of contemporary psychological, historical and biblical scholarship. Today we might begin with the question of what it means to be a person and then apply this to our understanding of the mystery of the person of Jesus. Our 'answer' may look something like the following.

To 'be a person' is essentially to 'be in relationship' with the physical world of nature, with the social reality of human others and institutions, with oneself, and with the divine mystery. These are all dynamic, living, growing dimensions of what it means to be a human person. We might even say that 'personhood' is not so much who one is as who one becomes through interaction and relationship. Applying this to the mystery of the personhood of Jesus, we can recognise that he shares in all these relationships. If we can speak of a unique or superior personhood of Jesus, this does not in any way deny his full human reality. To the contrary, Jesus' uniqueness resides precisely in the fact that he lives out all these relationships--with the world of nature, with others, with himself, and with God--to a superior degree.
In fact, the classical christological doctrines can be interpreted in this light. Chalcedon’s intuition is surely to do with the reality that Jesus’ identity is a dynamic, living relationship with divinity and with humanity. His relationship with the divine mystery does not annul his genuine humanness, but crowns it. We have seen how some of the early Fathers saw the human project in terms of the ‘divinization’ of humanity; today, there is more talk of the need for ‘humanization’. The story of Jesus is the story that says divinization and humanization are not opposed projects, but different dimensions of the one human-divine process in which we are all called to play a part. Christian faith acclaims that this process has been lived most fully and completely in Jesus Christ.

This approach, then, has important implications for our appreciation of Jesus’ humanness, an appreciation that is underscored by the Second Vatican Council:

**Human nature as (Christ) assumed it was not anulled. . . . He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind, he acted by human choice, and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin.** [Dogmatic Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, article 22. ]

This understanding of Jesus is very different to the kind of one-sided power-christology that is unfortunately often associated with the classical doctrines. However, it should not be thought that a genuine appreciation of Jesus’ human status was absent from the best interpreters of the tradition. For example, Cyril of Alexandria (d.444), a strong defender of the divinity of Jesus, had this to say:

**We have admired his goodness in that for love of us he has not refused to descend to such a low position as to bear all that belongs to our nature, included in which is ignorance.** [Cited by Elizabeth Johnson, Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 46. ]

These quotations from such diverse sources as Vatican II and Cyril of Alexandria not only express belief in Jesus’ genuine and complete humanity; they also understand that it is precisely in his humanity that the divine mystery is disclosed.

Consequently, the recovery of the human Jesus is equally a new and profound disclosure of the self-emptying divine love present in his earthly life and especially symbolized in the mystery of the cross. This kenotic—‘self-emptying’—christology is expressed in an early Christian hymn:

**The state of Jesus Christ was divine, yet he did not cling to equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as we are: and being as we are, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross. . . . (Philippians 2:6-11)**

This represents a double disclosure: it alters our perceptions of the divine mystery (God is pure pathos and compassionate love); and it stretches our horizons of what it means to be human (to live one’s life in loving service of God and others even, or especially, in the face of evil and death). Properly understood, this does not glorify the evil of the cross, but shows us that God’s love in Jesus transforms evil and death into goodness and life. Such divine love is also open to those who follow in the footsteps of Jesus’ life of love and service. A kenotic christology leads to a christology of discipleship.

In fact, *discipleship christology* is more evident in the writings of the Christian martyrs, saints and mystics than in the classical doctrines of Nicea and Chalcedon. It is also more evident in the writings of some of the reformers (such as Martin Luther) who, while accepting the teachings of the Councils, focus their meditations more directly on the historical Jesus of the scriptures and the humiliated Jesus of the cross. This is a timely reminder of the fact that any set of propositions regarding Jesus Christ will always be inadequate. It is also a reminder that we need to search within the *whole* Christian tradition to find undercurrents that off-set a too dogmatic and authoritarian approach to the Christ-mystery.
On the other hand, we stand within a living Christian tradition which has, in large measure, been formed by the classical christological doctrines. They were important moments in the history of our Christian self-understanding. Consequently, we acknowledge our debt for the way in which they helped clarify the Christian mystery in their own historical context—ambiguities notwithstanding. Nonetheless, as indicated earlier, we do not merely repeat the past: ours must be a creative fidelity. Hopefully, this brief attempt to reinterpret the classical doctrines of Christ within a larger framework has provided some light for our contemporary understanding of who Jesus Christ is for us and our world-situation today.