

## Chapter 1

# Reforming Christology

In every generation Christian theology is faced with the task of articulating the intuitions of the biblical tradition about the significance of Jesus Christ in a way that engages its own cultural context. This task feels especially daunting and dangerous in the context of interdisciplinary dialogue with contemporary sciences such as evolutionary biology, cultural anthropology and physical cosmology, which question the coherence and plausibility of many traditional christological formulations. However, as we reflect on the philosophical shifts that have shaped the conceptual space of late modern discourse about human life in the cosmos we may find that these challenges also provide theology with new opportunities for explicating and clarifying the Christian experience and understanding of Jesus Christ. This book is my attempt to show that engaging in this interdisciplinary endeavor is both possible and promising.

The task of reforming Christology will indeed require the *reconstruction* of previous doctrinal formulations, as it has throughout church history. Many traditional depictions of the person, work and coming of Christ are shaped by assumptions about humanity and the world that no longer make sense in light of contemporary science. One way of responding to these challenges would be to try to insulate theology from science, defensively maintaining one's favored ancient or early modern doctrinal formulation. Or one might try to insulate science from theology, defensively reducing the human longing for redemptive transformation to one's favored disciplinary explanation. Extreme responses are often the easiest. However, the more difficult reconstructive response, which attempts to maintain the integrity of theology while integrating relevant scientific and philosophical insights, will also be the more rewarding. As we will see in the following chapters, reconstructing Christology has always been an important part of the ongoing reformation of the Christian church.

This brings us to a second sense in which this book aims at *reforming* Christology. The study of Jesus Christ ought to have a reformative effect on contemporary life. An articulation of Christian doctrine should not only help us make sense of our experience in the world; it should also facilitate the reformation of our ways of living in the world. Many traditional formulations of Christology rely so heavily on ancient concepts of substance or medieval

concepts of jurisprudence that they seem irrelevant to the concrete concerns that shape late modern culture. Yet, the human longing to understand and be understood, to love and be loved, to hold and be held onto in healthy relations with others is as strong as ever in contemporary life. One of the functions of christological discourse is to illuminate the origin, condition and goal of these desires. Bringing Christology and science into explicit, concrete dialogue will have a disturbing effect on many of our comfortable assumptions about our life together, but this is an important part of any deeply transformative process.

It is important to face the fears that we bring to such an endeavor. Some theologians will be concerned that discussion of particular claims about Christ may offend the pluralist sensibilities of the interdisciplinary community, while others will be anxious that serious engagement with science will simply render implausible some cherished christological formulations. Some scientists will worry that talking about Jesus in public will undermine their reputation among their colleagues, while others will suspect that religionists are encroaching on their territory. Some laypersons will fear that any change in inherited formulations brings the destruction of faith itself, while others will wonder whether maintaining the centrality of Christology is really worth the effort.

How can we enhance the desirability of the reconstructive task of interdisciplinary dialogue without obscuring the real terror that it sometimes brings? Part of the problem is the way in which we have imagined the relation between the disciplines. Theology and science have often been depicted as enemies, sometimes as friends, and occasionally as disinterested acquaintances. These are quite obviously *inter-personal* metaphors for *inter-disciplinary* relations. Nevertheless, such similes can have a powerful heuristic function. The complexity of the relations between disciplines and disciplinarians calls for different ways of interacting in varying contexts, which means that no single metaphor will fit every situation. We may sometimes need to be friendly, sometimes antagonistic, sometimes to leave the other alone. Indeed there may be some dialogues in which the partners are both amicable and inimical during the same conversation.

Accepting a default image of interdisciplinary engagement, however, has an effect on the way one approaches the dialogue. I would like to suggest an interpersonal metaphor that is rarely considered appropriate (if considered at all) for the interaction between the disciplines. Is it possible that we might think of theology and science as *lovers*? Like the other metaphors, it has its limitations – most obviously its sexual innuendo. However, there are ways in which this simile can help us make sense of and even facilitate our interdisciplinary affairs. First and foremost, comparing theology and science to lovers provides us with a way to make sense of our mutual fear

and fascination. We fear existential encounters that we cannot control. This inability to control the other, which evokes trembling in the presence of the beloved, is ingredient to true love. The risk of losing control is part of the delightful experience that binds lovers together.

Lovers are fascinated by their differences, as well as their shared interests. Self-discovery and discovery of the other are reciprocally related for lovers, as they search together for new ways of understanding one another and their place in a shared cosmos. A good lover delights in learning from the beloved and rejoices when the beloved experiences a transformative insight. However, real love takes hard work at mutual interpretation. Mature lovers do not spend all their time gazing into each other's eyes, blind to all faults. They are willing to confront one another for the sake of illumination and transformation. This interpersonal metaphor elicits an image of shared delightful terror in the other that promotes mutual understanding. In this sense, the disciplines of theology and science must learn to become better lovers.

Objections will arise from members of both disciplines. Some will object that if Christology (or theology) marries the science of today it will become a widow tomorrow, or soon be forced to seek divorce. This is a rather strange attitude toward marriage. Does one partner's transformation require the dissolution of the relationship? Tension arises in any relation in which one person is open to the transformative experience of discovery and critical interpretation while the other is not. Moreover, why should we assume that marriage is the only possible construct within which the delightful terror of love can emerge and grow? Theology once had her fair share of suitors. The problem today is not so much the danger of getting married to a particular science, as it is the unlikely prospect of getting a date. Isn't the former queen of the sciences even allowed to flirt a little? Many theologians and scientists find the prospect of serious engagement purely terrifying. The metaphor of disciplinary lovers may open up new ways of looking at each other, new ways of facing our fear that enhance mutual fascination and release us from our obsession with controlling one another.

Of course even lovers who are interested in learning together may still get annoyed with each other. Probably what annoys scientists the most is when theologians try to prove claims about Jesus by appealing to scientific theories or discoveries, or when they attempt to use specific christological beliefs to fill in alleged gaps in scientific knowledge. Probably what annoys theologians the most is when scientists try to protect their allegedly neutral fields of inquiry by dismissing all religious belief as delusional, or when they attempt to reduce religious experience to factors that may be wholly explained by their own disciplines. Although readers may find themselves

perturbed by what follows for other reasons, I have attempted to avoid these particularly annoying habits.

How can these interdisciplinary lovers strengthen their relation to one another without one discipline alienating or becoming co-dependent on the other? One way is to attend to the mediating role of *philosophy* in this dialogue. Theology and science are both guided by a love of knowledge, and reflecting together on the way in which philosophical categories shape our inquiry can facilitate a deeper level of interaction. We are dealing here with a reciprocal triangular mediation. We should not imagine that philosophers do their work and then scientists and theologians are left to figure out how it helps (or hurts) them. Nor should we think of science as simply providing facts, which then must be dealt with by philosophy and theology, nor of theology as a finalized set of assertions which may or may not be engaged by the other disciplines. Theology, science and philosophy all search for ways of making sense of the human experience of life in the cosmos, often shaping each other in ways that are not immediately obvious; our attention will be on the interwoven dynamics of this reciprocity.

Throughout the course of this book we will concentrate on ways in which particular categories have shaped this reciprocal mediation. In this sense we are engaged in *philosophical* theology, which in my view is dialectically linked to *systematic* theology as part of a broader dynamic process (cf. Shults, 1999, 206–11). Although issues related to the interpretation of the biblical tradition will be woven throughout our discussion, our focus in this context will be on the ways in which these interpretations have been (and are) shaped by the triangular mediation of Christology, philosophy and science. In the remainder of this introductory chapter, we will explore three different ways of configuring the reciprocal relations among these disciplines.

### **Jesus Christ and the Philosophy of Science**

The “philosophy of science” involves critical reflection on the relations among and self-understanding of organized fields of study. This form of inquiry analyzes the nature, process and outcome of inquiry itself, which requires abstraction from particular disciplines in order to attend to broader epistemological and hermeneutical issues. In cultures where universities play a significant role in public discourse, philosophers of science often focus on what counts as academic or positive knowledge (*Wissenschaft, vitenskap*) and how it is properly acquired, formulated and defended. The self-understanding of theology is shaped by this debate, even (or especially) when the response of theologians is one of attempted self-isolation from the threat of interdisciplinary discourse.

Does the study of Jesus Christ involve the acquisition of new knowledge and, if so, how ought such knowledge to be formulated and defended? This question may feel threatening for those who continue to operate within the assumptions of early modern philosophy of science. Before the Enlightenment, the themes that are now treated by science and theology were often self-consciously integrated as part of a holistic understanding of the world. The split between these disciplines had already begun to emerge in the late middle ages, but during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries it was widened into a chasm. Increasingly, theology was associated with “faith” in distinction from science, which was associated with “reason.” Whereas theology might be passionate and subjective, science was supposed to be neutral and objective. Truly “scientific” conclusions are those deduced from empirical analysis and experimentation that could be repeated by any dispassionate rational individual; nomological proofs were increasingly privileged over ideographic observations. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century this ideal contributed to the hardening of a separation between the “natural” sciences and the “human” sciences.

The dichotomies at the heart of this approach to the philosophy of science created an atmosphere in which some educators began to argue that theology should be excluded from the academy. Some theologians responded by trying to emulate the “hard” sciences (e.g., logically deducing propositions from “data” posited in the Bible) while others attempted to refigure theology as a “soft” science (e.g., merely interpreting the narrative or drama of church history). Others gave up on the idea that theology was a “science” at all. Each of these decisions affected the way in which the theologians understood the task of (or need for) acquiring, formulating and defending “knowledge” of Jesus Christ.

In the following chapters we will explore several concrete examples of the deleterious effects of this early modern view of “science” on the self-understanding of theology in general and on the task of christological reconstruction in particular. The main purpose of this sub-section, however, is to point to three developments within *late modern* philosophy of science that have shaped the contemporary conceptual landscape in a way that provides new opportunities for reforming Christology in dialogue with other disciplines.

The first development has to do with the growing appeal of *relationality* as a heuristic category in the philosophy of science. I have rehearsed this history in more detail elsewhere (Shults, 2003; 2005), but it is important to review it again briefly because understanding this shift is crucial for clarifying the task of reconstructing Christology in late modern culture. The suppression of the concept of *relation* goes back to Aristotle, whose influential philosophy of science privileged the concept of *substance* in human knowledge. In his

*Categories* he argued that knowing a thing involves defining its substance (or essence). We may also be interested in describing the way in which the thing is related to other things, but such relations are only “accidental” – not “essential” to knowing its thingyness.

The category of relation appears in Aristotle’s list of categories but (like the others) it is subordinated to the category of substance. He was not alone here. “Relation” does not even appear on Plato’s list, although he does include “the different” as we will see in chapter 2. The concept of *ousia* (substance) also played a central role in Plato’s metaphysical distinction between perceptible and intelligible reality. Although the Stoics placed more emphasis on relationality, their typical listing of four categories exhibits the same prioritization: substance, quality, disposed in a certain way and disposed in a certain way in relation to something else. The demotion of relationality in ontology was mirrored in the epistemology of these ancient Greek philosophical schools.

As we will see in our exploration of the historical development of Christology, this privileging of the category of substance dominated patristic and medieval theology (and philosophy). Over the centuries, however, the difficulties with a theory of knowledge (and predication) that failed to attend sufficiently to the relations between things became increasingly evident. Alongside the rise of modern empirical science, philosophers like Locke and Hume began to recognize that *scientia* – knowledge of reality – requires more than simply defining the substances of things. Understanding the relations in which a “thing” is embedded is necessary for understanding what it is.

By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century Kant found it necessary to reverse Aristotle, making “substance and accidents” a sub-category of the broader category “of Relation.” Hegel emphasized the concept of relationality even more, challenging the basic separation between substance and accidents. For him “absolute relation” is the highest category in objective logic. This intuition played itself out in various ways in other 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophical proposals, such as C.S. Peirce’s “new list” of categories, in which scientific knowledge is parsed in terms of three “classes of relations.” For our purposes here, the details of these proposals are less important than the major conceptual shift they illustrate in the philosophy of science.

This turn to relationality can also be traced in the history of the development of the philosophy of logic and mathematics, which shape the underlying structure of argumentation within the natural sciences. As Ernst Cassirer has shown in his *Substance and Function* (1923), the concept of a “thing” with its “attributes,” which was essential to Aristotelian logic and dominated mathematics throughout most of the early modern period, proved to be unsuitable for the analysis of complex systems of logical *relations*. Defining the concept of “number” in generic (substantial) terms hindered

the discovery of the way in which constitutive differentiated relations among numbers open up new possibilities for analysis (e.g., infinitesimal calculus, set theory). Eventually the category of substance lost its hold in meta-mathematics and was increasingly replaced by the concept of *function*. Once “freed of all thing-like being,” the peculiar functional character of logical concepts was revealed. Cassirer demonstrates how shifting from reliance on the *generic* concept to the *relational* concept made it possible for Gauss to develop the theory of imaginary numbers, for Dedekind to offer an explanation of the irrational numbers, and for Cantor to use generating relations for the production of transfinite numbers.

As we will see in our case studies below, this shift had ramifications beyond pure mathematics. Physicists soon discovered that the natural world could be more adequately explained using relational concepts. So Einstein’s field equations for general special relativity, for example, are based on the use of functional relations. Quantum physics pressed philosophers of science even further, leading them to challenge the adequacy of substance/attribute predication theory to make sense of the entanglement phenomena discovered at the subatomic level. Here reality itself resists the abstraction associated with the category of “thing” (substance), and physicists increasingly appealed to inherently relational and dynamic modes of talking about what “happens between” and within the unpredictable flow of “interphenomena” (cf. Reichenbach, 1988 [1944], 21, 176–7; Bohm, 1981, 28–47). The biological and social sciences have also progressively paid more attention to the constitutive function of relations within complex organizational systems in order to make better sense of the world.

In the chapters that follow we will attempt to clarify the challenges and opportunities that this philosophical turn to relationality creates for the task of articulating a Christian understanding of the significance of Jesus Christ today. As we will see, substance categories played a dominant role in many traditional formulations of Christology, sometimes obscuring the importance of interpreting the *relation* of Jesus Christ to God, humanity and the cosmos in these doctrines. As we theologians overcome our addiction to “substance abuse” we may find that we are able to recover some of the relational resources in the biblical tradition in creative ways that facilitate a healthier engagement with the efforts of our colleagues in the other disciplines.

A second development in the philosophy of science that is of particular relevance for the reconstructive task of Christology is the late modern emphasis on the *contextuality* of all scientific inquiry. The positivist notion that scientific theorizing involves objective analysis of data that are simply given (posited) has been criticized as an impossible and inappropriate epistemic ideal. All data are theory-laden. In other words, our experience of “the world” is always and already interpreted through our linguistic

categories and shaped by our participation *within* a world of shared meaning schemes. Knowledge is not simply acquired by deducing universally true propositions from self-evident facts accessible to all rational observers. Our interpretive and explanatory efforts are immersed within and mediated by our participation in overlapping socio-linguistic contexts composed of dynamically interacting hermeneutical structures.

Philosophers of science have described the contextuality of disciplinary activity in various ways, referring to the “paradigms” (Kuhn, 1996), “research programs” (Lakatos, 1980), or “traditions” (MacIntyre, 1988) that guide our inquiry. Acknowledging the contextuality of theory-construction does not cripple science. On the contrary, the “fiduciary component” or “personal coefficient” (Polanyi, 1962) of knowledge is what motivates the scientific enterprise. Personal commitment and intellectual passion are an impetus for the pursuit of knowledge. This does not entail subjectivism or relativism. Participating self-consciously within a particular paradigm ought to be balanced with an openness to distance ourselves from our research program and humbly enter into transversal hermeneutical encounters with other traditions.

Traditional formulations of Christology have been shaped by their contexts throughout church history, as the following chapters will show. Critical awareness of this social embeddedness grew more intense during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Sarah Coakley has demonstrated the influence of Ernst Troeltsch’s call for a *Christ Without Absolutes* (Coakley, 1988) on theological engagement with the social sciences in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Those who reacted violently to the claim that doctrine is always socially located and responded by attempting to insulate theology from culture illustrated (ironically) the very dynamic they were trying to deny. In light of these broader philosophical developments, Wesley Wildman argues that we should aim for *Fidelity with Plausibility* (1998), insisting that the contextuality of doctrine requires a “modest” rather than an “absolute” Christology. Yet, as both Coakley and Wildman point out, giving up the hubris of absolutism does not mean giving up on the intelligibility of Christian belief in (for example) the incarnation. It does mean, however, reformulating our explication of faith in Christ in ways that self-consciously engage the plausibility structures of our own contexts.

This may initially appear threatening to Christology, but this new conceptual space actually opens up opportunities for concrete interaction with the other sciences. The harsh dichotomy between faith and reason that created a barrier to dialogue can be refigured as a dialectical dynamic in which and out of which all our inquiry operates. Faith and reason are interwoven within every contextualized form of human inquiry. Making a rational judgment involves committing oneself to a belief, and faith involves making judgments about what is trustworthy. To believe something or to

trust someone requires some knowledge of that thing or person. To know something or someone requires some level of commitment, a fiduciary connection to that which is known.

Christology is no longer forced to choose between beginning “from below” or “from above.” Neither of these is really possible. Every judgment made about the significance of Jesus Christ is embedded within a context already mediated by one’s interpreted experience of a tradition. Rational assessment of the historical Jesus operates within a web of beliefs about the relation of God to the world. Belief in divine revelation arises within a particular social context and is conditioned by particular linguistic conventions. Instead of asking whether we should begin with rational proofs and *add* faith when we hit a mystery, or whether we should begin with our fideistic commitments and then *add* reasonable arguments only when pressed, theologians can begin within the relationality in which “faith” and “reason” are mutually constituted.

The appeal to contextuality can help us escape the horns of this dilemma by exposing the bull beneath it: we cannot abstract ourselves from our christological inquiry and find an Archimedean point from which to observe the relation between an alleged “above” and “below” and choose between them. Christology is articulated “from within” one’s interpreted experience of being related to God (cf. Shults, 1999, 166–77, 252). If one presupposes a dichotomy between faith and reason, such a claim will appear to fall on one side of the dilemma. Beginning with(in) the relationality that constitutes the dialectical relation between faith and reason can help us see that the intellectual efforts of every discipline (including Christology) operate in a dynamic tension between dwelling within our interpreted experience of being bound in relation and seeking ever more adequate interpretations of those experienced relations.

This brings us to the growing appeal for *interdisciplinarity*, the third development in the philosophy of science that bears on the task of reforming Christology today. We will have many opportunities to explore examples of this development in the following chapters, but our purpose at this stage is simply to show how the opening up of conceptual space for the kind of dialogue in which this book participates is closely connected to the late modern emphasis on relationality and contextuality.

One of the characteristics of the scientific method is the careful analysis of discrete phenomena, and this quite naturally led to specialization among and within the sciences. However, attention to specificity has sometimes led to a disciplinary myopia, turning the methodological reduction appropriate to a particular field into a material reductionism that fails to see the insights of other disciplines. Although one still finds this tendency in some circles (cf. Stenmark, 2001), the broader recognition of the relational complexity

of the world and the contextual limitations of each field of inquiry has contributed to an increased openness toward interdisciplinary engagement.

This is particularly clear in the burgeoning global conversation among theologians and scientists. To use Ian Barbour's well-known taxonomy, more and more participants in this interdisciplinary field are moving beyond models of conflict, independence and even dialogue, and embracing the more complex task of integration (cf. Barbour, 1990; 2000). Much of this interaction has focused on the methodological and theoretical dimensions of the integrative process. As Mikael Stenmark points out in *How to Relate Science and Religion* (2004), we should also pay attention to the social and teleological dimensions of these disciplines. In other words, healthy mediation between the fields will require closer attention to their different social practices as well as the different goals that guide these practices. As theologians we can enhance our interdisciplinary dexterity by making explicit the way in which these dimensions operate in our own contexts.

This transgressing of boundaries between disciplines does not mean the erasure of differentiation between fields of inquiry. Each discipline has its own domain of expertise, which requires methods of analysis that are appropriate to the phenomena. During the early modern period, it was often assumed that the kind of mathematical analysis associated with disciplines like physics was the most "scientific," and other sciences struggled to accommodate themselves to this ideal. However, this form of deduction alone is not sufficient for understanding (for example) biological organisms or human cultures. A fuller and more adequate interpretation of our experience of the cosmos requires the integration of insights from a variety of disciplines. The growing appeal for interdisciplinarity will make it easier to integrate our explication of concepts like space and time with our understanding of concepts like person and community – all of which impact Christology.

We cannot explore the connection between the disciplines as though we were outside of them looking in, objectively considering the possibility of relating them. This is not simply because we are (usually) trained in only one discipline, or even because our participation with a traditioned field of inquiry affects the way we "look." There is an even deeper reason why no such neutral vantage point exists: the relations among disciplines are always and already mediated by their mutual differentiation. This differentiation is not something that is "accidental" to the "substance" of the discipline. Every mode of organized human inquiry is constituted by its differentiated relations to other modes of inquiry, and every participant in any one of these modes is inextricably caught up within that discipline's distinctive way of differentiating itself. As we develop the capacity to accept differences while acknowledging appropriate attachment relations, we can participate

in healthier forms of interdisciplinary engagement (cf. Shults and Sandage, 2006, 13–36).

Christology is interdisciplinary whether we like it or not. The question is not whether science (and philosophy) will shape our interpretation of Jesus Christ, but whether we can self-critically explicate this mediation in a way that engages our own culture. As we will see, earlier christological formulations engaged the anthropological and cosmological assumptions of (for example) 4<sup>th</sup> century Neoplatonic science or 17<sup>th</sup> century mechanistic science. The context out of which and for which this book is written is early-21<sup>st</sup> century interdisciplinary dialogue. Relational categories play an important illuminative and generative role in this interdisciplinary context. Yes, this creates challenges for some traditional ways of articulating the significance of Jesus Christ. But it also provides new opportunities for *reforming* Christology in a way that recovers and refigures some of the radically relational intuitions of the biblical tradition.

### **Philosophy and the Science of Jesus Christ**

This brings us to another dimension of the reciprocal triangular mediation of Christology, science and philosophy. If we use the term “science” to refer to organized modes of contextual inquiry operating within historical traditions, then we may think of Christology as the *science* of Jesus Christ. This mode of inquiry has its own history of methodological and material debates, which are wrapped up within the broader discipline of theology. To borrow a phrase from Thomas Aquinas, theology is the science that is interested in understanding God and all things under the aspect of their relation to God (*sub ratione Dei*).

In light of the shifts in the philosophy of science since the middle ages, we should perhaps say: understanding God and all things from within our interpreted experience of being related to all things in God. Several scholarly monographs in recent years have outlined the major developments in biblical scholarship and historical theology that have shaped the discipline of Christology (e.g., Hurtado, 2003; O’Collins, 1995; McIntyre, 1992; 1998; Schwarz, 1998; Glebe-Möller, 1989). Our focus will be on philosophical developments that have shaped the discipline.

One of the ways in which philosophy plays a role in the “science of Jesus Christ” is the *material* shaping of its formulations. We will explore several examples in more detail in the case studies below, but it is important at this stage to underline the special mediating significance of the philosophical concepts of *humanity* and *divinity* in Christology. The way in which we understand Jesus’ relation to us and to God will be structured by these

concepts. Under the influence of substance metaphysics, anthropology often began with a definition of a human person as an individual substance of a rational nature. The philosophical dichotomy between material substance and immaterial substance was the basis of the distinction between soul and body in the individual person. Many theologians assumed that the substance of all human souls is corrupted because of the historical “Fall” of Adam and Eve. As we will see, these anthropological assumptions play a powerful role in many traditional christological formulations. Although these categories are problematic for exegetical reasons as well, in this context we will focus primarily on the philosophical and scientific developments that have rendered them implausible.

Our concepts of God are not merely philosophical but they are at least philosophical, and these ideas shape Christology. How one interprets *divine* knowing, acting and being will shape one’s understanding of the identity, agency and presence of Jesus Christ in relation to God. During the early modern period many theologians began with the concept of God as a rational causative substance. As an immaterial substance, untouched and untouchable by the material world, God was depicted as a single subject whose intellect and will are the first cause of all predetermined events. These philosophical assumptions about divine nature canalized discussions about the relation between God and the finite intellect and will of the human nature of Jesus.

Three late modern trajectories in the doctrine of God have transformed the broader theological context within which Christology may now be explicated (cf. Shults, 2005). The first is the retrieval of divine Infinity, of a way of speaking of God not as an immaterial substance (defined in differentiation from material substance) but as an intensively infinite presence from, through and to which finite creaturely differentiation is constituted. The 20<sup>th</sup> century revival of trinitarian doctrine, which begins with the constitutive relationality of the divine persons rather than the idea of God as a single subject, is a second trajectory that provides resources for resolving some of the conceptual difficulties of the christological tradition. The third is the renewal of eschatological ontology, wherein reliance on the idea of God as an efficient first cause is replaced by an understanding of creaturely temporality as absolutely dependent on the arrival of divine Futurity. In the following chapters, we will explore ways in which these trajectories have opened up new conceptual space for christological reconstruction.

Philosophical categories also play a *methodological* role in the science of Jesus Christ, shaping decisions about the organization of themes. In other words, categorical mediation is already at work in the very ordering of the loci of Christology. For example, in many early modern Protestant presentations of Christian theology the locus of Christology “proper” was limited to the doctrine of the incarnation. Explicating the significance of Jesus Christ began

with a statement of who he *was*. This was then followed by a treatment of the doctrine of the atonement, which explained what Jesus *did*, typically understood as something accomplished in the past (such as a judicial decision or transaction). Exploration of the way in which that soteriological (salvific) transaction applies to us now (in the present), was usually delayed to a later locus that dealt with the “work” of the Holy Spirit.

This organizational structure is based on a distinction between the *person* (substance) and the *work* (function) of Christ. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century many theologians suggested that we ought to begin with the function of Jesus, with the way in which his activity has a redemptive effect on us. This was partially in response to the demise of substance metaphysics and partially in response to the rise of historical criticism. This “liberal” approach was met with consternation by “conservatives” who did not want Christology to be *only* about how Jesus was related to us, but about his *real* human and divine substances.

Should theology begin with the person or the work of Christ? As we saw above, the presuppositions that seem to force a choice between substantialist and functionalist Christology have been challenged by the turn to relationality. Once we recognize that functional relations are constitutive for the “substantiality” of any dynamic reality it becomes clear that this is a false dichotomy. These conceptual shifts provide us with an opportunity to develop a more integrative presentation of christological doctrine.

Another way in which philosophical categories have registered an effect on the organization of themes in Christology is less obvious. Linear concepts of absolute time and deterministic models of causality in the early modern period contributed to the exclusion of discussions of the future of Jesus from the loci of Christology (and even soteriology). While sometimes the resurrection and the “state of exaltation” were treated in proximity to the doctrines of incarnation and atonement, the way in which Christ mediates the arrival of the eschatological presence of God was usually left until the analysis of the “last things” at the end of a dogmatic treatise (cf. König, 1989). We will return to the material impact of early modern assumptions about space, time and causality on Christology in chapter 4. The main point here is that these philosophical categories had a methodological impact, splitting apart some aspects of the relation between Jesus, God and us and excluding them from the presentation of Christology (proper).

Why has Jesus’ relation to the future (his “coming” or “parousia”) so often been isolated from treatments of his person and work? The philosophical assumptions guiding many formulations of these latter loci are partially responsible for this segregation. The task of making sense of the experience of being confronted by a real presence that mediates the arriving reign of God has no immediate relevance for a doctrine of the incarnation that is limited to

a discussion of the way in which the person of Jesus was constituted by the union of human and divine substances in the past.

In the same way, many soteriological theories focused so narrowly on a legal transaction that was accomplished on the cross (in the past) that the resurrection (ascension and coming) of Jesus played a small role (if any) in the doctrine of the atonement. This division of themes not only disintegrates what is united in the biblical witness, it also promotes an abstract Christology that has no immediate connection to a central aspect of the religious experience of practicing Christians – the real eschatological presence of Jesus Christ as the mediator of abundant life in the Spirit of God.

As a first step toward a more holistic presentation of these themes I have incorporated a treatment of the doctrine of the *parousia*, as well as the *incarnation* and the *atonement* in this book on the reciprocal mediation of Christology, philosophy and science (Fig. 1.1).

Incarnation and Evolutionary Biology (Chapter 2)	Atonement and Cultural Anthropology (Chapter 3)	Parousia and Physical Cosmology (Chapter 4)
A Shared Interest in Knowing	A Shared Interest in Acting	A Shared Interest in Being
Epistemology & Noetic Desire	Ethics & Moral Desire	Metaphysics & Aesthetic Desire
The Identity of Jesus Christ	The Agency of Jesus Christ	The Presence of Jesus Christ

**Figure 1.1 A Matrix for Christological Inquiry**

One of the main benefits of this way of organizing the themes is that it facilitates a concrete dialogue between christological doctrine and particular sciences, making explicit the reciprocal relation between theological presentation of the significance of Jesus Christ and scientific clarification of the dynamic structures of the world. It also provides a matrix within which we can attend to some of the philosophical interests and existential concerns shared by theologians and scientists in these fields.

One of the limitations of this thematic organization is that it does not offer an integrated presentation of these dimensions of Christology. However, as I hope to make clear in the final section of each chapter, the concepts of the

identity, agency and presence of Christ commend themselves for the task of integration in the context of a broader systematic presentation of Christian doctrine (cf. the Epilogue). In the context of our current project, however, this matrix facilitates our interest in highlighting the philosophical mediation between the sciences and theological interest in Jesus' way of knowing, acting and being in the world.

## Science and the Philosophy of Jesus Christ

How might the study of Jesus Christ shape inquiry in other scientific disciplines? Alongside the rise of positivism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century there emerged a popular “warfare” reading of the history between science and religion. On this model, science has nothing to learn from theology. As historians of science have shown over the last few decades, however, theology has often had a positive influence on science, both formally through patronage and inspiration and materially through its own analysis of concepts such as space, time and causality (e.g., Brooke, 1991; Grant, 1996; Lindberg and Numbers, 1986; cf. Foster, 1934). We will have the opportunity to observe several examples of this material influence in the following chapters.

However, it is important to be clear how theology should *not* influence science. It is not the business of professional theologians to tell professional scientists how to do their empirical work. Theological symbols have no place in mathematical formulae, and religious concepts should not be inserted into gaps in scientific theories. This is why attending to the role of *philosophical* mediation is so important. Even this could easily be misunderstood. By referring to the “philosophy of Jesus Christ” in this final introductory sub-section I do not mean to imply that Jesus developed a philosophical system of propositions that can play an immediate role in, for example, explaining quantum phenomena or biological evolution.

As Figure 1.1 indicates, however, theology and science do share an interest in knowing, acting and being, and (as we shall see) they also share many of the same philosophical categories in their efforts to make sense of human life in the world. Moreover, as human persons living in the world participants in all of these disciplines share existential concerns that shape their longings for truth, goodness and beauty. In the case studies below we will observe several examples of this reciprocal mediation, but Einstein provides a particularly salient illustration. He never tried to hide his interest in theological questions, such as whether God played dice, and was straightforward about the importance of existential concerns: “the ideals which have lighted my way, and time after time have given me new courage to face life cheerfully, have been Kindness, Beauty, and Truth” (1954, 9).

Scientific inquiry that dismisses the religious longing of the human spirit produces a sterile rationality that is not worth having, and theological inquiry that evades contemporary science produces a sterile faith that is not worth having.

As we have seen, shifts in the philosophy of science have created a new milieu in which the disciplines are not forced away from each other as they were in early modernity, in which we can acknowledge our own contextual concerns and explore shared interests in the complex relations in which we find ourselves searching for more adequate explanations of our experience in the world. The exponential growth of scientific knowledge has led to technological advances that raise concerns about ecological destruction, and many scientists are becoming more interested in pursuing the truth in ways that also sponsor the flourishing of goodness and the appreciation of beauty. The science of Jesus Christ can respect the integrity of the other sciences, while also participating in a philosophical field of discourse about such things as the limitation of human reason, the importance of ethics in research and the significance of the aesthetic dimension of our life together.

In the context of the following chapters the *philosophy* of Jesus Christ refers to his way of knowing, acting and being in the world in relation to God and his neighbors. In addition to facilitating interaction with science on the field of shared existential concerns, this use of the term also serves a *theological* function. It reminds us of the New Testament emphasis on following the *way* of Jesus Christ. The book of Acts suggests that the religious movement that emerged after the resurrection of Jesus and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost was initially called “the Way” (19:23, 22:4).

Theology has too often given in to the temptation to allow propositional statements about Jesus to function as idols, distracting us from what he himself taught – a way of life that rightly orients us to God and our neighbors. As we will see, this “philosophy” of life is shaped by a particular way of being related to the divine Spirit. Attending to this relationality can facilitate the integration of pneumatological concerns into a presentation of Christology. In other words, focusing on the way in which Jesus lived in relation to the Spirit, which transformed his experience of understanding, valuing and embracing others, contributes to the task of *reforming* Christology.

But what can we really know about the philosophy of the man Jesus of Nazareth? It is beyond the scope of this project to engage in detail in the findings of the ongoing quests for the historical Jesus. However, at least two developments in this arena of biblical scholarship are particularly important at this stage of the argument. First, the vast majority of participants in the more recent (“third”) quest have acknowledged the extent to which earlier quests for the historical Jesus were driven by naïve hermeneutical assumptions. Across the spectrum of biblical scholars, one finds a general

consensus that it is not possible (nor even desirable) to engage in the search in a wholly detached and neutral way (e.g., Crossan, 1991, xxxiv; Theissen and Merz, 1998, 13; Wright, 1992, 6–14; cf. Padgett, 2003, 137–61). We can (and should) try to offer warrants for our interpretation of the textual “objects,” which may be criticized in the broader academic community, but we should (and can) also try to make explicit how we as “subjects” of the interpretation are shaped by our contexts.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries many scholars responded to historical criticism by making a strong distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith (cf. Kähler, 1964 [1896]). In order to transgress the boundaries of this dualism, which is based on the modernist dichotomy between reason and faith discussed above, I will often use the terms “Jesus” and “Christ” interchangeably in the following case studies. This is not meant to imply that they mean exactly the same thing, nor that all christological titles should be conflated; rather, it serves the rhetorical function of underlining my argument that our theological interest should be in the whole event of the dynamic relations between this man and God (and the rest of us). We can acknowledge our passionate commitment to offering plausible explications of our experience of these redemptive relations.

A second development in the search for the historical Jesus has a more immediate material impact on our current project. Despite the variety of positions among biblical scholars, all but the most skeptical agree that, whatever else we can say about the man Jesus of Nazareth, his life was characterized by a revolutionary way of relating to his neighbors and a particularly intimate way of relating to God. Embedded within his Jewish context, under the domination of Roman occupation, Jesus actively challenged the religious segregation of the “impure” and “sinners,” and the political oppression of the poor and imprisoned. Whatever term we choose to emphasize as we point to this way of relating to his social context (e.g., cynic, prophet, revolutionary, healer, sage), historical scholarship strongly suggests that what distinguished the way of Jesus was his active attempts to participate in the transformation of the powerful structures that crushed the helpless and hopeless.

The most commonly accepted authentic sayings of Jesus in the earliest layers of the New Testament suggest that this way of relating to his neighbors was reciprocally related to his sense of the intimate presence of the One he called “Father.” Here too scholars use different terms to describe this way of relating to God. For our purposes, it will suffice to illustrate this briefly by pointing to the work of Marcus Borg, who refers to Jesus as a “spirit person” (1987, 25–75). The way in which Jesus functioned as a “mediator of the sacred” indicates that his self-understanding was shaped by his participation in the experiential tradition of early Jewish *mysticism* (Borg, 1994, 31–6).

Of course Christian systematic theology will also want to account for and incorporate the later layers of interpretation in the New Testament witness about Jesus' relation to God, but this insight from critical textual scholarship is especially relevant for our current task: exploring how Jesus' way of life (his "philosophy") plays a mediating role in theological engagement with the sciences.

Some might object at this point that bringing Jesus' *mystical* experience of the divine Spirit into the interdisciplinary dialogue is irrelevant (at best) and inappropriate (at worst). In this introductory chapter I have attempted to show how developments in the philosophy of science challenge the assumptions behind such objections, and in the chapters that follow I will attempt to demonstrate how conceptual shifts in late modern philosophy open new space for an integrative understanding of human inquiry that incorporates the passionate desire for a transformational experience of ultimate reality.

At this point, I simply remind readers that *many* of the great scientists throughout human history were mystics, *most* of the great philosophers were mystics, and *all* of the great Christian theologians were mystics. As we escape from the strictures of early modern notions of science (and philosophy) we may be able to recover the methodological humility and imaginative resources of the mystical tradition(s) as we engage contemporary science. Such an engaging recovery of the "mystical" will require *critical* appropriation; articulating Christology in a way that tends to the intensification of human desire for spiritual transformation in relation to God and other persons can utilize the dynamic and relational categories of contemporary social science without depending on particular construals of Jesus' relation to Jewish mysticism or affirming later (especially Neoplatonic) forms of mysticism that denigrated embodiment and avoided practical communal engagement (cf. Shults and Sandage, 2006).

By way of preview, the matrix in Figure 1.1 provides an outline of the pattern that will be followed in the presentation of each case study. Each chapter begins with a brief introduction to a philosophical interest shared by the relevant disciplines (knowing, acting or being). These philosophical issues are explicitly connected to the existential desire that shapes these aspects of human life. The bulk of each chapter is an exploration of the philosophical challenges and interdisciplinary opportunities that face the task of reforming Christology in connection with particular scientific developments.

Brief overviews of the development of christological doctrine are offered in each case study, in order to illustrate the way in which material decisions in philosophy have shaped formulations throughout church history. The next step in each chapter is the identification of some key interdisciplinary proposals that have taken advantage of the opportunities provided by late modern philosophical shifts to articulate the significance of Jesus Christ in

ways that engage contemporary science. The final section of each case study offers some programmatic suggestions for building on these resources as we participate in the ongoing task of reconstructing Christology.

By bracketing the chapters with treatments of the existential dimensions of our shared interdisciplinary space, I am explicitly attempting to emphasize the need for a *reformativ*e Christology. Christians believe that participating in Jesus' way of knowing, acting and being in the world is transformative. Like every generation before us, our task is to articulate our understanding and experience of this transformation by engaging the plausibility structures of our own context. This endeavor is sure to provoke shock and even terror among many participants of the dialogue. My hope is that it will also evoke a sense of fascination with and appreciation for the way in which weaving together insights from different disciplines can enhance our self-understanding. Embracing the trembling delight that overwhelms us in this ongoing struggle to make sense of our experience in the cosmos may also help us become better interdisciplinary lovers.