has had, unfortunate theological consequences, especially if it is construed, with the aid of penal imagery, in terms of God's visiting upon the human Jesus the penalties owed by others. A theologically intolerable doctrine of penal substitution can be avoided if the other shift in the meaning of the sacrificial gift is also stressed. A New Testament expression of the second metaphorical transfer is given in Eph. 5: 2: 'Christ loved us and gave himself up as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.' The gift, as the Letter to the Hebrews stresses so strongly, is not the imposed death of a beast, but the voluntary self-giving of Jesus. And the giving is not simply the death, but the death as the completion of a life in obedience to God. Jesus offers to the Father the human life that the others of us have failed to live. But to what end? We return to the point made earlier by George Caird's remark about human abhorrence for sin considered as pollution. 'It is for this reason that the New Testament so constantly employs the language of sacrifice to declare the benefits of the Cross . . .' Hence 'the imperative need of those whom sin has defiled is that which can cleanse the conscience from dead works (Heb. 9: 14)' (17). But how can this be conceived to happen? We return to the matter of relationships.

Two relationships in particular are under consideration here. The first is that between God and his rebellious people, broken by the sin that erects a barrier between the two and so disrupts fellowship or communion. The second is that between Jesus and his Father. The second, particular, relationship is that which reorders and so takes up into itself the first. How can this human life, this sacrificial career, take other human beings up into its reality? A full answer would involve detailed attention to the claim that the life of Jesus is also and at another level, so to speak, the life of the recreating Word, but that is the work of another whole paper. Suffice it to say here that the crucial link is to be found in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that is the source of Jesus' self-giving humanity, and that same Spirit which enables believers to share in the one reordering sacrifice. Indeed, does not Paul use sacrificial language of the Spirit also: 'We ourselves, who have the *first-fruits* of the Spirit . . .' (Rom. 8: 23); my emphasis)?[9] The sacrifice of Christ is to this end: that God should, in him and through the Spirit, reorder to himself his alienated creation. That is the glory of Christ, both in the New Testament and in eternity.

[9] I owe this point to C. Brown, 'Sacrifice', *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 3 (Exeter, 1978), pp. 415–38 (417).

18. Christ as Agent

A. E. HARVEY

THE study of Christology has traditionally concentrated on the implications of the *titles* by which Jesus was most commonly addressed or designated in the New Testament, such as Messiah, Son of God, or Son of man. Less frequently, attention has been given to words or concepts which occur only occasionally or by implication in the New Testament, such as λόγος, mediator, or *victor*. Very occasionally, a word makes its appearance whch appears to have no basis in Scripture but which may be held to be implied by it. In ancient times such a word was ὁμοούσιος. Recently, another newcomer has made its appearance: Christ the *Agent*.

The word 'agent' seems attractive to modern theological writing because it appears to offer a way of describing the person and work of Christ without the encumbrance of theological jargon. To say that Christ was 'God's agent' is to use a language that is familiar to people living in the modern world, that bypasses traditional theological embarrassments, and yet enables the unique claims of Jesus to be understood. At this level, the term works as an analogy, or 'model', and those who use it need not be pressed to offer a precise definition. But it has recently been argued that the use of the term has historical justification, in the sense that the concept of 'agency' can be discerned as underlying some of the language used of Jesus in the New Testament, and that therefore a study of the institution of agency in that culture can actually throw light on the early history of Christology. If this project is successful, it might have the further implication that the word 'agent' should be more systematically explored in Christological thinking today.

It is important at the outset to distinguish between ancient and modern conceptions of 'agency'. In contemporary English, the words 'agent' and 'agency' refer as much to a field of activity as to a legal relationship. In current parlance a 'land agent' is one who is professionally occupied with the buying and selling of land. Admittedly he will normally do this on behalf of a client, and consequently will act as someone else's 'agent' in the strict sense; but the connotations of 'land-agency' are less to do with the procedures by which he is authorized to act for his clients than with his professional knowledge about the value

of land and buildings. But in ancient agency the terms we are concerned with—שָׁלִיחַ and ἀπόστολος[1]—have a different connotation. Here, all the emphasis is on the 'sending out', that is, the authorization of the agent. His field of activity is not indicated (though it may have to be defined for legal purposes). The question raised by a שָׁלִיחַ is, 'Whom does he represent?'—not (as with a modern agent), 'What is he expert in?'

A further significant difference lies in the definition of an agent's function. To us, the essence of an agent is that he should *act*. We appoint an agent to do something on our behalf which otherwise we should have to do for ourselves. What we do *not* need an agent for is to *say* things for us: we can do this ourselves by letters or messages. An agent is required only when actions or procedures have to be carried through on our behalf. Communicating our intentions through another person (a messenger) is something different from having our interests promoted by an agent. But in the Jewish culture this distinction was less important;[2] indeed the legal refinements which were placed upon the practice of agency in the post-biblical period[3] embraced the activities of the messenger as well as those of the agent; for there were many occasions on which the utterance of a word or words by the principal's representative might incur legal consequences just as much as the performance of an act. This point becomes particularly important when these categories are applied to religious phenomena. On the modern western model of agency it would be natural to think of a spokesman for God (a prophet) as doing something essentially different from an agent of God (such as a miracle worker or healer); and this distinction underlies all but the most recent scholarly work on the subject.[4] But in fact it can be shown that 'the secular concept of "messenger", which influenced the concept of prophecy, underwent further development in post-biblical Judaism and became juridically defined in terms of Representation. The result was a new interpretation of the nature of prophecy as communication from God.'[5]

The book from which this quotation is taken is *Der Gesandte und sein*

[1] The fundamental, and extremely influential, work on these terms was done by K. H. Rengstorf in his article on ἀποστέλλω κτλ. in Kittel's *Wörterbuch*, i (Stuttgart, 1933), 397 ff.

[2] J. A. Bühner, *Der Gesandte und sein Weg im 4. Evangelium* (Tübingen, 1977), 271–5, contrasts the Roman distinction between *nuntius* and *mandatarius*. But this appears not to be correct: a *nuntius* could pronounce words for his sender which created contractual obligations; and in any case *mandatarius* is not strictly an 'agent' (R. W. Lee, *Elements of Roman Law* (London, 1944), 351). The appropriate term in commercial transactions would be *institor*, cf. Max Kaser, *Römisches Privatrecht*[8] (Munich, 1974), 59 (Ulpian D. 14. 3.1a).

[3] Bühner, op. cit., 181 ff.

[4] Which has followed Rengstorf's distinction between certain individual *shelushim*, such as Moses or Elijah, and prophets in general (art. cit., 419).

[5] Bühner, op. cit., 190–1.

Weg by J. A. Bühner, published in 1977. This book is the first major study to have been devoted to the Jewish law of agency in relation to the New Testament, and in my opinion it makes a conclusive case for understanding much of the language used of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel as drawn from juridical practice. Jesus is 'sent' by the Father under conditions which clearly imply his authorization; the sphere of his authorized activity on behalf of his Father is clearly defined (that is, those activities, such as creation and judgement, which are peculiarly God's sphere); his activity conforms to the maxim that 'a man's agent is like himself',[6] and also to the (lesser known) maxim that an agent cannot work to his principal's disadvantage;[7] and he returns (as an agent must) to his Father-principal at the discharge of his agency. Again and again the Johannine Father–Son terminology is illumined by this agent-model; in particular, the 'oneness' predicated of the Father–Son relationship is convincingly (in my view) explained in terms of a functional identity of authority rather than of a personal or mystical relationship;[8] and though it is recognized that the origins of this emphasis on Father and Son may well lie further back in the tradition represented by the Synoptics, the presentation of the Son as the Father's agent *par excellence* (which was empirically the case in ancient Middle Eastern commerce) is likely to be the product of the evangelist's innovative mind.

This conclusion is one to which (though after far less extensive research) I had tentatively come myself[9] before Bühner's book was published, and had incorporated in my own thinking on Christology[10] before I had the opportunity to study his arguments in detail.[11] I therefore greatly welcome his results as confirmation of my own thinking, though I recognize that it would be premature to regard them as fully established until further scholarly discussion has taken place. However, it is not too soon to explore some of its wider implications. These have to do, ultimately, with the way in which language which appears to have a precise reference to human institutions may be used in a much looser and more figurative sense with respect to the things of God—a topic to which I am privileged to make a small contribution in a

[6] *m. Ber.* 5. 5 and many Talmudic texts.

[7] Qid. 42b etc.

[8] As against the 'juridical mysticism' suggested by Théo Preiss, *Life in Christ* (London, 1954), 25 and P. Borgen, 'God's Agent in the Fourth Gospel' in *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough*, ed. J. Neusner (Leiden, 1968), 137–48.

[9] A. E. Harvey, *Jesus on Trial* (London, 1976), 88–92.

[10] A. E. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History* (London, 1982), 161 ff.

[11] I do not of course claim any originality in this: Preiss and Borgen (see above, n. 8) had already pointed the way, though without sufficient attention to the refinements of the legal institution.

memorial volume to one who wrote about it so lucidly in the last of his books that was published in his lifetime.

The first requirement is to meet the obvious objection to this whole line of argument that there is apparently no reference to 'agent' or 'agency' in the entire New Testament, and therefore that to regard the concept of agency as a factor in New Testament Christology is artificial if not actually misleading. To this the following points can immediately be made:

(1) the Hebrew word שָׁלִיחַ is well attested in Mishnah and Talmud as the correct name for the person bound by the legal conditions of agency;[12]

(2) the Greek equivalent for שָׁלִיחַ was *ἀπόστολος*;[13]

(3) John 13: 16: 'the slave is not greater than his master nor is the *ἀπόστολος* greater than he who sent him.' The two clauses are parallel, and require that *ἀπόστολος* should refer to a secular institution as familiar as slavery. The correct translation is therefore 'agent'—and this is in fact how it was taken by Origen,[14] Chrysostom,[15] and (in his paraphrase) Nonnus.[16] It is true, of course, that there may be a deliberate ambiguity: the Christian *ἀπόστολος* ('apostle') is not greater than he (Christ) who sent him. But in its context the primary reference must be to the familiar institution of agency.

It must be allowed therefore that the word 'agent' was used by the author of the Fourth Gospel, and in such a way as to prove that he was familiar with the concept of agency. The work of Bühner has offered a strong case for believing that he was also familiar with the basic technicalities of the Jewish law of agency, and that he exploited this terminology in order to clarify the relationship of Jesus with his heavenly father. But we have now to face the question why he did not go so far as to *call* Jesus an agent, *ἀπόστολος*.

Bühner himself suggests two answers to this question.[17] First, by the time the Gospel was written the term *ἀπόστολος* had already been adopted into the Christian vocabulary to refer to those who have ever since been known as 'apostles'. Secondly, the term suffers from that restriction of meaning which follows from the emphasis we noted at the outset on the moment of 'sending'. That Jesus had been sent and authorized by his Father was indeed an important feature of his agency, but it was by no means the only one or even the most important one: his 'works', his teaching, his judging, and the prospect of his return to his sender were equally important, and the word *ἀπόστολος* would not have seemed appropriate to convey the full range of this agent's activity. These answers may well be correct; but I would myself take them a stage further, and in so doing indicate certain lines of enquiry which lie well outside the scope of Bühner's pioneering study.

[12] Rengstorf art. cit. n. 1 above, 414 ff. For a bibliography on the Jewish law of agency, cf. Bühner, op. cit., 181 n. 1.

[13] Eus. *Is.* 18: 1–2 etc.

[14] *Jo.* 32: 17.

[15] *Is. interp.* 1: 1.

[16] *par. Jo.* 13: 16.

[17] pp. 265 f.

I would suggest, first, that the model in the evangelist's mind was not just any agent, but the agent who is the principal's son. A son, after all, was the best agent a man could ever have, and the one whose credentials were most likely to be accepted.[18] If moreover he was an only son (*μονογενής*) who could expect to receive the entire inheritance, and if he was in good standing with his father (*ἀγαπητός*), so that there was no risk of his father disinheriting him, then he could be relied on absolutely to promote his father's interests ('to seek his glory'), for in the long run these interests were the same as his own: he would inherit them all. Such a son, speaking and acting in his father's absence and claiming his father's authority to do so, would be assumed without question to be his father's agent (indeed in law, if his actions were to the advantage of his father, this would constitute him an agent whether he had been formally appointed or not). It follows that simply by calling Jesus 'son' in relation to his Father's work and purposes the evangelist made it perfectly clear that he was also the Father's agent. It was not necessary to spell the matter out; and there were many reasons (not least the pressure of the existing tradition) for preferring 'son' as a *title* to agent.

But this leads on to some wider questions. What could have been the *religious* reasons for calling anyone God's 'agent' in the first place? The essence of agency is that it provides a means by which business can be done in the absence of the principal. And why should the principal be absent? The usual reason is practical. My business is growing, I want to open a subsidiary in another town, but I cannot be in both places at once. So I must find an agent whom I can trust (and who will be trusted by my customers) to run my subsidiary for me. Or the reason may be physical disability. Tobit has a debt to collect in a distant country, but is too old to make the journey himself; so he sends his son Tobias as his agent. But whatever the reason, the agent is needed to carry on business when his principal is necessarily absent.

What then is implied by the use of the agency model in respect of God? That God is absent! In one sense this is surely illegitimate. Again and again in the Bible we read that God is 'with' his people, he is

[18] Mark 12: 6. Cf. Harvey, op. cit. n. 10 above (1982), 186 ff.

'present' at certain times and places, and through his Spirit he intervenes in human affairs without any need of the services of an agent. But in another sense some agent or intermediary is absolutely necessary, if God is to be *God*—that is, a devouring fire, one whom to see is to die, the Lord of heaven and earth whose holiness is such that his creatures, for their own sake, cannot encounter him face to face. 'No man has seen God at any time': this is not just an unfortunate shortcoming of human history, to be made good at some time in the future. It is a necessary attribute of God that his creatures cannot see him and expect to survive. Such interventions as he makes in the affairs of men, and such manifestations as he offers of his nature and power, have to be adjusted to the capacity of human beings to witness them without being overwhelmed. God must therefore make use of intermediaries in his dealings with us. These might occasionally be supernatural—angels, or freakish phenomena in weather and firmament. More often they were men, acting and speaking in one way or another as God's representatives, God's 'agents'. They were employed because God was absent, and must necessarily be so lest he should burn us up by his unveiled presence.

We may best approach this aspect of the matter by way of the Letter to the Hebrews. Of all the New Testament writers, the author of Hebrews had the most intense perception of the unapproachable majesty and terror of God. The image which possessed his mind, and to which he returned again and again, was of the dark mysterious chamber in the Temple, the Holy of Holies, where God was deemed to be more nearly present than anywhere else on earth, and to which even the priests in their state of ritual purity had no access, but only the High Priest, once a year, and that without any permanent change being effected for the general body of worshippers. How then could Christians claim to have a new intimacy with this awesome God? How could they dare to stand in his presence when the entire Mosaic dispensation seemed designed to keep them at a safe distance from that electric presence within the sanctuary? Could it be that Jesus had done what the High Priest could never do, had 'gone through' that final curtain into the Holy of Holies, and taken his new brothers with him so that they could now have *confidence*—παρρησία—in the very presence of God?

The author, as we know, found his answer in the notion that Christ is the High Priest to whom the whole of Scripture points. God remains in principle majestic, unapproachable, but Christ has enabled us to traverse the distance and enter his presence. The importance of this for our purpose is that it is one of the solutions—but not the only one—which the New Testament offers to the problem of the necessary distance

between God and man. God cannot draw too close to human beings lest he should annihilate them; humans cannot draw too close to God in his holiness because of their sin. Yet Christians have this extraordinary intimacy with God, this sense of assurance in his presence. One way of explaining it is by the High Priest model. In the old dispensation, the High Priest was the one human being who, after a period of isolation and elaborate purification, was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies and stand in the presence of God. But this dread privilege was ineffectual: the essential sinfulness which separates man from God remained, the people were still kept as far as ever from the Presence, and the whole procedure had to be gone through all over again the following year. Yet it was not to be imagined that an institution validated by Scripture was purposeless and obsolete. Could it be that its true meaning and intention was now revealed by one who had achieved the purpose for which it was instituted—who had penetrated permanently into the divine presence, decisively going through the curtain which separated man from God, and enjoying such solidarity with his own people that he could take them with him and impart to them the confidence they needed to stand before God?

The author to the Hebrews was the only New Testament writer to approach the problem in terms of the High Priesthood; but the conception of Christ as one who overcomes the necessary distance between God and man is not confined to this epistle. The question, after all, was an old one; and it was often asked in the context of our future destiny. We shall all stand before the judgement seat of God, and nothing we sinners have done for ourselves can avail to give us confidence at that dread moment. If we are to survive, we shall need someone to speak for us, and this is the function of the 'paraclete' who might represent the merits of the patriarchs, our own good deeds, or simply some heavenly being whom God will have designated for the purpose.[19] It should occasion no surprise that Christians should have sensed that they have such a 'paraclete' in Jesus (1 John 2: 1). But the real problem comes, not so much with man drawing near to God, but with God drawing near to man. How can God make his will and his nature known to human beings without coercing them into obedience or annihilating their moral freedom? How can he both reveal himself as God and protect his creatures from the ultimate sin of blasphemy which they will commit if they do not instantly acknowledge him?

There is a passage of Josephus which bears closely upon this question. In a speech of Herod to his Jewish troops, reference is made to the

[19] Cf. Harvey, op. cit. n. 9 above (1976), 108–9.

disgraceful act of their Arab enemies, who put to death the Jewish envoys who had come to sue for peace,

> even though the Greeks have declared heralds to be sacred and inviolable, and we have learned the noblest of our doctrines and the holiest of our laws from the messengers [δι' ἀγγέλων] sent by God. For this name can bring God's presence to men and reconcile enemies one to another.
>
> (*Ant.* 15. 136, tr. R. Marcus (Loeb, 1963).)

This passage has been the subject of scholarly discussion with regard to the question of the ἄγγελοι:[20] did Josephus know of the doctrine that the Law was mediated by angels, or does the word here simply mean 'messengers' and refer to the prophets? More important for our purpose is the following sentence: τοῦτο γὰρ τὸ ὄνομα καὶ ἀνθρώποις θεὸν εἰς ἐμφάνειαν ἄγειν . . . δύναται. The context is admittedly rhetorical: Herod is being made to use all the arguments at his disposal to stir up animosity against 'the Arabs'. But Josephus is undoubtedly drawing upon his own perceptions when he suggests, as a ground for the Jewish abhorrence of violence done to a messenger, that 'this name' (that is, that of the office of herald or messenger) 'can bring God into manifestation for men'. What kind of 'manifestation' is this? Clearly, for Josephus, there could be no question of any person, or even an angel, presenting a visual impression of God. In another place (*Ant.* 15. 425) he uses the word ἐμφάνεια for signs of God's intervention, such as freakish variations of the weather. In the case of messengers of God, he is evidently referring to those who speak or act with divine authority. We are in the world of Deut. 18: 18–20, the prophet like Moses whom to disregard is to disregard God himself; or of the מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה, a heavenly being with whom God identifies himself for the purpose of carrying out a particular intervention in the affairs of men. Whether the intervention is by word or deed is immaterial; it is thus (in this culture) that God is 'brought into manifestation'. In either case (according to subsequent rationalization[21]) we have to do with 'God's agent'.

For the Greeks, the sacrilege (ἱεροὺς καὶ ἀσύλους εἶναι τοὺς κήρυκας φαμένων) of killing envoys was easily identified and avoided: heralds of peace bear visible marks of their sacred office. For the Jews it was a more dangerous matter. Anyone might come forward and claim to be speaking with the authority of God. Amittedly, the penalty for making such a claim falsely was death, and this would certainly eliminate the likelihood of frivolous impersonations. But the mere assertion of the claim entailed the necessity of judgement. If the claimant was genuine,

[20] Cf. W. D. Davies, *HThR* 47 (1954), 135–40, who argues that ἄγγελοι can mean 'prophets'.
[21] Bühner, op. cit. n. 2 above, 275 ff.

he must be obeyed; if false, he must be punished. Failure to react one way or the other was tantamount to blasphemy.[22] It was thus an important matter to know how to assess a man's claim to be 'God's agent'. But how could this be proved? In civil matters, the appointment of an agent does not appear to have been a formal or public act:[23] the agent could not point to the moment of his authorization as evidence for his power to act on behalf of his principal. Rather it had to be asked what 'sign' the agent had of his authority (such as the bill to be presented to the debtor, compare Tobit 5: 3), and how far his character and 'works' were consonant with his alleged mission. The same principles applied in the case of an agent of God. Intimate knowledge of his principal's affairs and methods would be a 'sign' of authenticity—he must be, in some sense, a 'man of God'; and he must be working to God's advantage (his 'glory'). If he was a true agent, then he had a right and a duty to do what God would be doing; if false, he would be committing blasphemy. To put it another way: the entire question would turn on his 'authority' to say and do things in which God had an interest. And this, in the synoptic as well as the Johannine traditions, was the question raised again and again by the utterances and actions of Jesus.

As soon as an agent's credentials were authenticated, he became (so far as the transaction in hand was concerned) 'like' the principal himself: it was *as if* the principal was present. So with God's agent: as soon as one was convinced that he was really authorized by God, it was *as if* God was present—and there could be no limit to the transactions which the agent might undertake on God's behalf; he would certainly be involved in those which were specifically associated with God, such as forgiving, healing, and judging. To do other than acknowledge and yield to God's presence in his agent would therefore be nothing less than blasphemy, and presumably attract instant punishment from God himself—we are back with the problem of how God can draw near to us without annihilating us. How can God's agent *prevent* instant 'judgement' taking place at the moment of his appearance?

We have seen that in the case of a man's agent there were certain procedures to be gone through in order to establish his credentials. Until that had been done, there was no obligation to treat with him as if his principal were present; only when his authorization was established would legal consequences follow from his words and actions. The same would apply to God's agent. His appearance would force a third party to come to a decision on his credentials. Time must be allowed to ask appropriate questions—to challenge his 'authority' or ask for

[22] Harvey, op. cit. n. 10 above (1982), 59, 170 f.
[23] Bühner, op. cit. n. 2 above, 181 ff.

'signs'. His claims would be open to discussion; in the nature of the case it would be difficult to define what would count as decisive proof. Indeed it would be in everyone's interest to keep the question open for a while. To accept the claims meant to acknowledge the agent's authority over the whole of one's life; to reject them placed one under the obligation to procure the death of the blasphemer.[24] An interval of testing offered a merciful respite. It is (at least in part) under the scheme of such an 'interval' (between the making of the claim and its recognition or rejection) that the Fourth Gospel presents the appearance of Jesus—God's 'agent'.

But not only (I believe) the Fourth Gospel. In Josephus's perception (as we have seen) the same principle of communication/agency applied both to 'bringing God into manifestation' and to 'reconciling enemies with one another' (*πολεμίους πολεμίοις διαλλάττειν*). When therefore we ask what model of activity Paul had in mind when he wrote that 'God was in Christ, reconciling [*καταλλάσσων*] the world to himself' (2 Cor. 5: 19), or that God was pleased to 'dwell in him and to reconcile [*ἀποκαταλλάξαι*] everything to himself through him' (Col. 1: 19–20), it is only reasonable to think that the agency model was the one which occurred most naturally to him: God was 'in' Christ in the sense in which the principal is in the agent, bringing about reconciliation between hostile parties. But the same model offers (I believe) the best explanation for the significant reserve with which, throughout the synoptic tradition, the title Son of God is used of Jesus in his lifetime. If I may be allowed to repeat the conclusion I have argued for elsewhere,[25] 'To have said of a person who appeared to speak and act with absolute authority that he was "Son of God" was to say much more than that he was innocent or pious; it was to acknowledge him to be God's actual representative on earth, to whom the same homage and obedience would be due as if one were suddenly in the presence of God himself.' Just as a man's son, in the father's absence, once his credentials had been established (such as that he was not in dispute with any brothers over his inheritance, or that he was in good standing), would be assumed to be speaking and acting as his father's agent, so to acknowledge Jesus as the only and beloved 'Son of God' during his lifetime would have been to accept him as God's authorized agent, entitled to homage and absolute obedience. For the most part only heavenly beings or demons would have been in a position to draw this conclusion. It was a sure instinct of the evangelists that human beings would hardly have taken the risk. It was only after his death and

[24] Deut. 18: 18–20.

[25] Op. cit. n. 10 above (1982), 165.

resurrection to the right hand of God that a safe 'distance' was restored across which Jesus could be acknowledged by believers as Son of God—God's plenipotentiary agent, whose enemies are now being abased beneath his footstool, while those who acknowledge him seek (with his aid) to conform their lives to the pattern which he has been authorized to lay down for them.

How far will this concept of 'agency' take us? In the end, perhaps it all depends on what we mean by 'God'. For the Jews, the term was highly exclusive: only one being could possibly be called 'God', and since that being was lord of the universe no casual intercourse with him was conceivable. Elaborate safeguards were necessary in situations where human beings might find themselves in close proximity to God, whether here and now in the Temple (or in sanctified daily living) or after death. It is instructive (and important for understanding the development of Christology) to compare the use of the term 'God' in Greek culture. Here, far from being an exclusive name, it was a predicate with a wide range of application.[26] There were already many 'gods', and no difficulty was felt about adding to their number a human being—an emperor or a philosopher—who seemed particularly worthy of the description. Such 'gods' hardly needed an 'agent': they could move about themselves among the affairs of men, and only flagrant dishonour to their persons attracted serious penalties: human beings need not be mortally afraid of meeting a god in the street.

It was between these two poles in the understanding of the term 'god' that Christology underwent its early development. From the Greek side there was no problem about calling Christ *θεός*: it was the natural thing to do, indeed the problem was rather that this familiar word did not say *enough* about Jesus. To distinguish him from all other 'gods', it was necessary to define his divinity in relation to the one God in whom the Jews believed. From the Jewish side, on the other hand, the problem was rather that to call Jesus 'god' would have been to say far too much. In their culture, the term could not refer to any being other than the one God. Jewish Christian writers and later Greek theologians therefore started from totally different linguistic conventions. The Greeks needed to refine the general term 'god' in order to say something uniquely significant about Jesus. The Jewish Christians could not match this by seeking to *extend* their exclusive use of 'god'; instead, I have suggested that they leaned towards a kind of functional identity between Jesus and God, and that some of them found in the concept of 'agency' a useful model for doing so. Their efforts were soon submerged in the flood of Greek speculation, which took it for granted that Jesus

[26] Cf. S. Price, 'Gods and Emperors', *JHS*, 104 (1984), 79 ff.

should be called 'god' and sought to define the precise sense in which this should be done. The Fourth Gospel itself was promptly enlisted in this task, and the functional origin of much of its Christological language was lost to view. But today, when the supremacy of Greek philosophical categories in Christian theology is beginning to be called into question, the possibilities of an agency Christology may once again be found to be a stimulus in the endless search to find human words adequate to express the nature of Christ.

19. 'A Light to the Gentiles': the Significance of the Damascus Road Christophany for Paul

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I

One of the most striking, and at the same time most puzzling features of Paul's writings is the way he speaks of his conversion. The fact that he thinks of it as his *commissioning* rather than as a conversion has of course often been noted. So, for example, John Knox: for Paul 'its major significance lay in the fact that the experience made him a witness of the Resurrection and thus qualified him to be an apostle (referring to 1 Cor. 9: 1, 15: 8 and Gal. 1: 11–17). But he never cites it as the explanation (although it was undoubtedly the occasion) of his Christian life.'[1] What is even more striking, however, is the fact that he understood his commissioning from the first as having the Gentiles in view. This is not presented as a deduction or a corollary which Paul drew from some *other* conviction given to him in or brought home to him by the encounter on the Damascus road. It belonged to the central conviction itself. The primary purpose of the risen Christ's appearance was to send him to the Gentiles.

The evidence on the point is quite clear. Gal. 1: 15–16—*ὅτε δὲ εὐδόκησεν (ὁ θεὸς) . . . ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐμοί, ἵνα εὐαγγελίζωμαι αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν* . . . . The force of the *ἵνα* should not be diluted. So far as Paul was concerned, God's purpose in revealing his Son in Paul (that is, on the Damascus road) was to commission Paul as apostle to the Gentiles. And though it has often been argued that this full significance of the Damascus road Christophany may only have come to him later or grown within Paul's conscious thought over a period,[2]

[1] J. Knox, *Chapters in a Life of Paul* (London, 1954), 117; see also e.g. J. Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (London, 1959), 11–35; Wilckens (below n. 12), 12; M. Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul* (London, 1983), 53; K. Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (London, 1977), 7–12; J. Blank, *Paulus: Vom Jesus zum Christentum* (München, 1982), 20; Kim (below n. 17), 56; H. Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Philadelphia, 1982), ii. 100. The perennial attraction of speculation on the psychology of Paul's conversion, though renounced regularly in the above, is attested by J. G. Gager, 'Some Notes on Paul's Conversion', *NTS* 27 (1980–1), 697–704, who suggests that Paul's compulsion to engage in Gentile evangelism was part of Paul's attempt to reduce 'post-decision dissonance'; but here as elsewhere Paul's own assertions should be given greater weight than our speculative reconstructions.

[2] e.g. Dupont (below n. 11): 'He did not claim that Christ had given him the command to evangelize the Gentiles and there is nothing to allow us to imagine that this injunction was given