The pluralism that influences every aspect of our lives today also has an impact on the discipline of christology. This is what I shall explore in the following pages. It may be necessary, however, to begin with a description of how pluralism is conceived here, for the term means different things for different people. Thus, at the very start, are we made aware of the problem in which we find ourselves entangled; pluralism is internal to our existence today, and the very meaning of pluralism is subject to a variety of different interpretations. Three reflections will help describe how I am using the term pluralism, the first consisting in a formal definition, the second indicating its indigenous character, the third situating it in a larger intellectual context.

First, pluralism means differences within a wider unity. And in this case, I take its referent to be human beings and their cultures and ideologies. The pluralism I am discussing obtains among people and their worldviews, understandings, ideas, values, and correlative behaviors. Pluralism, as I understand it, presupposes a larger unity. For example, there have always been different religions in the world of human beings, but in the past they were either intrinsically hostile to each other or geographically isolated; they went their separate ways without knowledge or concern of the others. I do not understand this as a pluralistic situation because the common ground, the unified framework, the shared field of interaction was minimal or nonexistent. The other as other was unknown or dismissed or something to be conquered and absorbed; it was not recognized as a genuine other. By contrast, the gradual movement toward greater unity and interaction among all peoples in our one world is creating a genuinely pluralistic religious situation. People of various different religions are being forced to live and work together with one another. An analogous reflection could be made with respect to the various Christian churches within the great
church. Pluralism, therefore, means that real, solid, and persistent differences obtain between people, between their views, between who they think they are as human beings, between the ways in which they act, and thus between the peoples as such. But these differences are not pure differences; they are not complete, because they subsist within a larger unity of interaction, of the race, of a region, of a society, of loyalty to a country, of a religion, of religion as such, and so on. One must call the differences that constitute pluralism analogous, partly different, but sharing some larger aspect in common. This means that at some level one can find commonalities, however deep or shallow their roots, among the differing parties.

Secondly, pluralism is an element of the human condition. It is not something that will disappear or go away. Wherever there are more than one human being, one has pluralism. What has emerged in the modern period is a conscious awareness of differences among human beings, indeed, a heightened sense of and sensitivity to differences. This occurs in both fear and hostility to the other and in love and attraction toward the other. It is implied in a quest for one's own or one's group identity. In all of these cases, pluralism is a given that impacts our thinking and being.

The third point of clarification pertains to the context of pluralism itself. A newly recognized pluralism refers to an aspect of a larger field of perception and understanding. This larger arena might be called a certain shared intellectual culture that is undergoing rapid change today, even as our world is rapidly changing. Postmodernity is the name that is often given to this emergent intellectual culture in the west. Whether or not the name corresponds to a threshold crossed and leading out of modernity, there are new aspects of intellectual culture today which are shared by all reflecting and inquiring people, and which are having their impact on theology. All are familiar with some elements of postmodernity. Historical consciousness presumes the situated character and thus the individuality of all human perspectives that govern understanding. This historicity lies behind pluralism. The social and temporal determinants of human thought encourage a sense of relativity and the new awareness of radical differences among people. A new view of physical reality, of both inanimate nature and human beings, is currently being opened up by various sciences and completely upsetting our imaginative worldviews. A new sense of the density of evil has
been left in the wake of this past century of war and mass murder. Pluralism, then, is a leading edge of a broad shifting intellectual culture that demands new theological interpretations.

A serious change in intellectual culture must have an influence on theological understanding; sometimes this can be a dramatic shift, as in the transition of Christianity from the Jewish world to the Greek world, and the shift from being the religion of a tiny minority in Europe to the official religion of an Empire. But rather than simply describe this impact, my intention is to propose some ways in which christology can adjust to this new culture, even as Nicaea adjusted to Greek intellectual culture by adding the term consubstantial to the Christian creed. That one word is a symbol representing a massive inculturation and reinterpretation of first century scriptural self-understanding. What follows, then, is a constructive, reflective proposal that argues the thesis that the New Testament prescribes pluralism in christology. This thesis is meant as a premise and theological support for essays in christology that are inculturated and thus diverse from one another. The thesis will be argued in the terms of the following syllogism: The New Testament is normative for christology. But the New Testament contains a pluralism of christologies. Therefore pluralism in christology is normative for the church.

*The New Testament is normative for christology.*

Christology, like theology generally, is a normative discipline. It does more than describe; it proposes what it takes to be authentic Christian self-understanding. One of the sources and norms for Christian theology is scripture. The question concerns what the New Testament says about pluralism in christology.

I will not dwell on the proposition that the New Testament is normative for christology for it virtually enjoys universal acceptance. The New Testament is the very source of almost all of our information about Jesus of Nazareth and the first layers of interpretation of his historical person and mission. It is a direct witness to the theological interpretation of Jesus by first-century Christians. But it may be useful to mention that the way one understands and applies this normativity is important and carries consequences. Modern and neo-orthodox theology have added considerable nuance to the understanding of the
relation between scripture and revelation; propositional revelation, revelation as objective information about God, and proof-texting have been largely discredited. We must think historically in terms of a variety of different communities and authors bearing witness to their faith in Jesus Christ and expressing themselves in religious symbolic language. The New Testament gathers together in one book or section of the Bible the testimonies of different and separate, or loosely bound together, communities. Bringing this testimony to bear on present-day understanding requires hermeneutical expertise. But the premise that it should be brought to bear authoritatively on christology today is shared by most Christians.

But the New Testament contains a pluralism of christologies.

The second term of the syllogism is that there is a pluralism of christologies in the New Testament. Although this is a common enough observation today, I shall try to demonstrate this pluralism by characterizing three different christologies. How many distinct christologies does the New Testament contain? I suspect one will never arrive at a consensus on the exact number of different christologies or any standardized criteria to measure the differences. The point of choosing three, and these three, is simply illustrative. These christologies are significantly different from each other, and yet each of them is important because the language used to characterize Jesus has had an impact on Christian consciousness. The first is the Son of God christology of Mark; the second is the Spirit christology of Luke; and the third is the Logos or Word christology of the Prologue of John’s gospel.¹

Jesus Christ as Son of God in Mark The meaning of Jesus’ title, “Son of God,” escapes exact definition. It is subject to many connotations and clearly differs in its meaning in different authors, for example, Mark and John. It is an example of a title that contains different christologies which cannot be homologized. I shall direct attention to Son of God in Mark’s gospel, but in a narrow analysis that only reveals one aspect of Mark’s christology. It may be noted that Son of God not only interprets Jesus Christ, but the Jesus Christ of the whole of Mark’s gospel also interprets

¹. Note that these christologies are not the only ways in which the gospels of Mark, Luke, and John respectively understand Jesus Christ.
the meaning of Son of God. I will consider the five most important texts in which Son of God appears in Mark (Mk 1:1; 1:11; 9:7; 14:61; 15:39).

The gospel of Mark begins with a title, or a summary of its contents: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mk 1:1). This is Mark's thesis or his identification of Jesus. Jesus Christ is Jesus Messiah, and thus at the outset one has a connection between Jesus as the Son of God and his being Messiah. This will be confirmed with Mk 14:61.

Mark 1:11 concludes the tersely narrated scene of Jesus' baptism by John at the beginning of his public ministry. After his baptism Jesus sees the Spirit descend upon him and hears the voice from heaven: "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased." This declaration is modeled upon Ps 2:7 where, to the newly enthroned king of Israel, God says: "You are my Son, today I have begotten you." The sense of sonship here is by special adoption as God's own agent. The idea of Jesus being the "beloved" son is taken by commentators on the basis of frequent usage to suggest that Jesus was uniquely loved and a chosen one.

Twice in the course of Jesus' exorcisms Mark has the evil spirits recognize Jesus' true identity. In crying out they say: "You are the Son of God" (Mk 3:11), and they address Jesus as "Son of the Most High God" (Mk 5:7). But the story of Jesus' transfiguration (Mk 9:2–8) is a more significant text as elements of the story accrue to the connotation of Son of God. On the mountain before Peter, James, and John Jesus' garments became glistening and intensely white, thus reflecting God's glory. And two of Israel's most important religious figures appear in testimony to him. And finally God's presence makes itself felt in a cloud from which God speaks: "This is my beloved Son; listen to him" (Mk 9:7). Jesus' authority, already established at his baptism in Mk 1:11, is enhanced by further manifestations of God's presence to him and by the religious lineage he continues.

During the course of the passion narrative, Mark has Jesus led before the high priest: "and all the chief priests and the elders and the

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cribes were assembled” (Mk 14:53). During this interrogation the high priest stood up and asked Jesus directly: “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” (Mk 14:61). Here the linkage between being Messiah and Son of God is explicit. Son of God or the Blessed is used “in order to fill out the meaning of the term ‘Christ.’ For Mark, however, the phrase ‘the Son of God’ was itself a title—indeed, the title which best expressed Jesus’ identity—and he uses it here as though it were equivalent to ‘Christ.’ In this way he is able to link his belief that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah with the confession that he was the Son of God….” 5 But what does this say about the status of the Son of God, since messiahship was a human office? In the context of the question of the high priest Son of God “connotes divine appointment rather than divine nature.”6

Finally, at the end of his life, indeed, the moment after Jesus dies on the cross, Mark has the centurion, who stood facing Jesus, exclaim: “Truly this man was the Son of God” (Mk 15:39). It is generally agreed that the sense of “Son of God” should be read through the intentionality of Mark and not the centurion. One thing is certain, Mark closes Jesus’ life with the same designation found in the “title” and the inauguration of Jesus’ ministry at his baptism. The title thus embraces the whole of Mark’s presentation of Jesus’ life. In sum, Jesus was Son of God, and for Mark this means one specially chosen and adopted and loved by God, designated to be Messiah, filled with God’s presence and power as Spirit, which the evil spirits readily recognize, and thus endowed with final authority in the tradition, superseding Moses and introduced by Elijah as was expected. Despite his suffering and death, Jesus was the Son of God. This is a two-stage christology. Jesus shared in God’s power which was present to him and worked through him. But messiahship defines Jesus’ status of Son of God in functional rather than metaphysical categories.7 The meaning of Son of God “was certainly not in the later fully developed [sense of] Christian theology.”8 In the end, one cannot say exactly everything that Son of God entails in Mark, but at least it means “a unique relation to God.”9

5. Ibid., 360.
8. Ibid., 654.
9. Gundry, Mark, 975. One should also be attentive to the accrued sense of Son
Jesus Christ as empowered by the Spirit in Luke  

I turn now to Spirit christology in Luke. I want to emphasize the limits which both terms impose on this sketch. Spirit christology is only one aspect of Luke's presentation of Jesus Christ, but it is a foundational aspect. Joseph Fitzmyer counts fifteen distinct titles of Jesus used by Luke, and, when they are all predicated of the same person, their meanings begin to qualify each other. Luke's gospel is only one representative of Spirit christology in the New Testament, but it is a major one. Paul and John contain developed, nuanced, and complex languages of the Spirit with regard to Jesus in his lifetime and resurrected. Luke's Spirit christology is also complex, because it cuts across the titles of Jesus and Luke's view of Jesus' salvific work. But despite this extension and wealth of meaning, one can get an idea of Luke's Spirit christology adequate for our purpose from a series of texts representing the period of Jesus in the gospel and the period of the church in Acts. By Spirit or Holy Spirit Luke assumes the meaning from Jewish tradition: "God's active, creative, or prophetic presence to God's world or God's people."11

The first text, from the infancy narratives, is a crucial element of the annunciation story. After the angel announces to Mary that she will bear a son, and Mary wonders how, the angel says to her: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (Lk 1:35). In Luke's view, then, God as Spirit was active in the very coming into existence of Jesus. The verbs "coming upon" and "overshadowing" are vague, figurative terms; there is no question of physical begetting here. But at the same time God and not Joseph is the agent of Jesus' conception. With this move Luke is, as it were, moving back Jesus' of God that comes from the whole gospel of Mark mentioned earlier. Mark communicates clearly that God was present to and at work in Jesus' "exorcisms, miraculous healings, nature miracles, magnetic attraction of crowds, predictive ability, overpowering authority in teaching, irresistible skill in debate, exercise of divine prerogative of forgiving sins, dying to the accompaniment of supernatural events, and being raised from the dead..." (p. 34).


11. Fitzmyer, Luke, 228; also 350, 484.
sonship from his resurrection and his baptism to his very conception. Moreover, the idea of Son of God is given a new meaning associated with God's direct action.\textsuperscript{12}

We move now to the Lucan account of Jesus' baptism, which Luke borrows from Mark but renders distinctively his own. After Jesus was baptized and was praying, heaven opened "and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased" (Lk 3:22). With the phrase, "in bodily form," Luke calls attention to the descent of the Spirit implying its importance. That importance lies in its being God's anointing of Jesus for his mission. In Acts Luke has Peter relate "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:38). The verse is almost a self-contained christology that comments on Jesus' baptism. The Holy Spirit is God's own power; Jesus' ministry of healing and exorcism are by God's being with and working within him. Thus the promise in Is 42:1 that God would bestow the Spirit on God's servant is fulfilled: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations." In this way the anointing at Jesus' baptism equips Jesus with God's power for his ministry. What is going on here is more than the adoption of a king.\textsuperscript{13}

According to Luke, after his baptism Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit" (Lk 4:1), and after his temptation in the wilderness, he began his ministry "in the power of the Spirit" (Lk 4:14). This active presence of God gives authority to his teaching and power to do wondrous good works as is seen in the next two texts.

The first full account of an incident in this ministry deals with his returning to Nazareth, reading in the synagogue, and commenting on the text from Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set


at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Lk 4:18–19). With a dramatic turn, Luke has Jesus sit and draw to himself the absolute attention of those present. He speaks: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4:21). This is a powerful, comprehensive declaration by Luke. In declarative terms Luke's statement says "the fulfillment of Scripture is to be found in the person of Jesus himself, who has been anointed with the Spirit and appears as the eschatological prophet—a figure who is to be identified with the Messiah and the Servant of Yahweh."¹⁴

The next text comes from the account of the "Beelzebul Controversy" (Lk 11:14–23). Here God as Spirit enables Jesus to act with power. After performing an exorcism, someone says that Jesus "casts out demons by Be-el'-zebul, the prince of demons" (Lk 11:15). Jesus responds with a taught logic: his power cannot be of Satan, for then Satan would be destroying himself. The alternative is the positive power of God. Signs do not need further signs. "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Lk 11:20). The "finger of God" is God's power, the equivalent of the Spirit of God (Ex 8:19). This generally recognized authentic saying declares that the kingdom of God is arriving now, in Jesus' very works. Where Satan's power is overcome, there is the kingdom of God.¹⁵

I conclude with a series of texts from Acts which, when presented together as a narrative, communicate the connection between the risen and exalted Jesus and God as Spirit. First, before he ascends, the risen Jesus promises the bestowal of the Spirit: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Sama'ria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This promise is fulfilled at Pentecost when "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). In the speech which follows Peter comments on what has happened by citing the prophet Joel: "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh..." (Acts 2:17ff; Joel 2:28–32). The sending of the Spirit is the eschatological event beginning the new time preparatory to the day of the Lord. The position of Jesus Christ in this economy is also stated by Peter: "Being

¹⁵. Ibid., 471, 475–76.
therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear” (Acts 2:33). Jesus Christ risen and exalted has been made Lord and Messiah and is now the one who pours out the Spirit.\textsuperscript{16}

In sum, Luke’s Spirit christology is a two-stage narrative. It represents Jesus as a human being coming to be by the power of God as Spirit, and anointed by the Spirit as one whose public career is empowered and authorized by God. After his death, resurrection, and exaltation God as Spirit is poured forth into the community to empower it to continue Jesus’ inspired mission to the ends of the earth.

\textit{Jesus Christ as the Logos of God} No biblical text has had more influence on the development of christology than the Prologue to John’s gospel. Here Jesus Christ is presented as the Logos of God incarnate. I cite only a few of the most relevant verses of Jn 1:1–18 in order to recall the whole and focus the analysis.

(1) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (2) He was in the beginning with God; (3) all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. . . . (14) And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.

Because of its distinctiveness and importance, not to mention its soaring beauty and transcendence, this text is the subject of continuous, extensive study and debate. Most agree that one can distinguish a hymn, perhaps composed within the Johannine circle,\textsuperscript{17} from the final redaction of the gospel. But there is disagreement on some very fundamental issues. Some see the structure of the Prologue consisting in a long chiasm that “descends” and then “ascends.”\textsuperscript{18} Others see it as consisting in a three-part summary of the history of salvation.\textsuperscript{19} Still oth-

The precise subject matter is also debated: some see the hymn directed toward Logos or Sophia, who then becomes incarnate (v. 14); others read it from beginning to end as referring to the Word incarnate in Jesus; still others want to hold both at the same time. The background or context for reading the hymn is also disputed. All agree that there are strong parallels with the wisdom tradition. A comparison with the hymns in Philippians and Colossians would show analogous patterns of development from being with God, descent into the world, and ascent to God's sphere. But are the parallels with the wisdom tradition enough to sustain a hymn about Logos? Some striking parallels with the thought of Philo, for example, suggest a broader background that includes Hellenistic influences for reading this christology. This raises questions of how such a Greek influence was brought to bear. Despite these and other differences of expert interpretation, however, a brief commentary on the verses cited can show the distinctiveness of the christology contained in this hymn.

On one reading, the opening verses are about the Logos: in the beginning, at the dawn of creation, the Logos simply was. This Logos appears to be distinct from God because it was with God or in God's presence. This Logos shared the character of God, for it was "God," but not the Father nor Yahweh, and yet without there being two Gods. This Logos, in the beginning, was the agent of God's creating. How did the Logos cause creation? There are several parallels from Jewish scripture. Creation is by the word of God: "And God said" (Gn 1:3). "By the word

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22. For example, Brown minimizes the influence of Hellenistic literature in general and Philo in particular on the Prologue (Brown, John, Ivii–Iviii, 519–20). But a good case for considering Philo and "the tradition of Hellenistic Jewish biblical interpretation and speculation" as part of the background for reading the Prologue is made by Thomas H. Tobin, "The Prologue of John and Hellenistic Jewish Speculation," Catholic Biblical Quarterly, 52 (1990), 252–69.

23. The central figure of the Prologue is the Logos, and Logos does not appear as a christological title in the Gospel (Brown, John, 19). The counter view: "As the Gospel is wholly concerned with Jesus, so the prologue is wholly taken up with him" (Beasley-Murray, John, 5).
of the Lord the heavens were made” (Ps 33:6). God is the one “who hast made all things by thy word” (Wis 9:1). But the word also causes by being the model or exemplar of reality, for in many respects the Logos here performs the same functions as Sophia. One also finds close parallels with Philo’s commentary on creation in Genesis: the Word of God is the agent of God by whom the universe came into being. Dunn is convinced that Logos in Philo is not a distinct or real being acting as an intermediary of God but a metaphor for God’s reaching out to the world. Despite that, the early verses of the Prologue give an impression of just such a personification become individualized or hypostasized. But not all accept this interpretation.

We jump forward to verse 14 which reaches back to verse 1 by inclusion: (1) the Word was, (14) the Word became; (1) the Word was with God, (14) the Word dwells among us; (1) the Word was God, (14) the Word became flesh. The poetic device brings out quite forcefully that the point is incarnation. All three contrasts reinforce the central and dramatic essence of this christology that the Sophia-Logos of God has become visible. For the term “flesh” is forcefully direct; it emphasizes the materiality of human existence and that God’s revealing Logos is really available: “we have beheld his glory” (14). And the Logos does not enter into or take on flesh, but “became” flesh: another touch of startling realism that underlines incarnation. The creative Word which came to the prophets has now become personal in Jesus. Jesus is therefore divine Sophia-Logos, preexistent, but now come among human beings. Jesus Christ is therefore the mediator, for this is the character of the Logos in creation. But by incarnation Jesus Christ becomes the mediator of a new creation.

Despite its parallelism with other wisdom christologies, Dunn believes that the christology of the Prologue is new and distinctive. The writer is the first “to conceive clearly the personal pre-existence of the Logos-Son and to present it as a fundamental part of his message.” In other words, this is the first three-stage, incarnational christology

27. Ibid., 524.
29. Dunn, Making of Christology, 249.
in which Jesus Christ is identified as one who preexisted as a personal Logos-Sophia, and who as one continuous subject became a human being. The development was made possible, first of all, by the wisdom christologies which projected Jesus back into the sphere of God's intelligence and wisdom as one who was foreknown and planned. In John personified-wisdom language is combined with Son-of-God language with the result that Sophia-Logos began to be thought of in realistic, individual personal terms. These developments were aided by cultural conditions that included speculation about heavenly beings. Whether or not Dunn's timetable or his interpretation of wisdom hymns are correct, it is plausible that the Johannine hymn both resembles the other wisdom christologies and transcends them in the direction of an explicit statement of the incarnation of an hypostatized being. But when interpretation sees the referent consistently tied to Jesus, this seems less-likely.

Let me conclude the presentation of these three New Testament christologies with a brief reflection from the point of view of a systematic theologian. For some time now biblical scholars have been clear about the fact of the pluralism of christologies in the New Testament. What is significant in this pluralism for theologians is not simply the fact that the New Testament portrays different understandings of Jesus Christ, but more importantly, the irreducibility to each other of many of these different christologies. In some cases if one accepts integrally one christology, one may not be able to accept another integrally. For example, if one limits the meaning of Son of God to what is found in Mark's gospel, one will have a very different christology than John's Son of God christology which is influenced by his Word or Logos christology. If one accepts the integral christological witness of Luke's writings, one cannot at the same time accept the christology of the Prologue of John's gospel. The differences between these christologies are real and at certain points they exclude each other. For example, Mark's Son of God christology is a two-stage christology; Jesus is not a preexistent figure. On one reading of John's prologue, and certainly as it came to be interpreted, one has a preexistent Logos who assumes flesh to become Jesus of Nazareth. Luke's too is a two-stage christology, and yet God as Spirit is responsible for the coming to be of Jesus. John's is a Logos-sarx

30. Ibid., 245.
christology, and an incarnation christology. The christologies of Mark and Luke represented here are *homo assumptus* christologies; God dwells in and empowers a human Jesus.

There is no question of contradiction here because these christologies represent holistic religious experience and interpretation of Jesus Christ expressed in symbolic language. It would be practically impossible to line up the presuppositions, perspectives, and other variables of such witnesses in order to determine strict contradictions. The epistemology of religious knowledge does not easily yield contradictions. Moreover, despite their differences, these christologies share commonalities. All three are based on the experience of an encounter of God in Jesus, and all implicitly affirm that Jesus is the mediator of salvation from God. The sense of the idea that one cannot integrally hold together at the same time some New Testament christologies, for example, the Son of God christology of Mark and the Logos christology of John, is to indicate the real differences between them at certain points. To establish pluralism it is sufficient to note sharp differences in the common understanding that Jesus is the mediator of salvation from God.

*Therefore pluralism is normative for christology today.*

Since the New Testament is normative and pluralistic, it seems to follow that the New Testament prescribes pluralism in christology. This conclusion, however, does not follow in a self-evident way by the force of the logic of the terms as given. It holds only if scripture is normative in that particular respect. It is. The logic of the syllogism works because the reasons for the pluralism in the New Testament are paradigmatic and obtain as well today. New Testament christologies differ because they are historical: the texts making up the New Testament were written by different authors, representing different communities, writing for different audiences, facing different problems. These different communities had different cultures, with different traditions, interests, and styles of speaking and understanding. Also, the subject matter, Jesus, displays any number of different facets of religious mediation. Historically, then, each New Testament text is historically situated and contextualized; it is the product of the inculcated interpretation and appropriation of Jesus of Nazareth. The logic of the syllogism, then, is the following: christology should be a pluralistic discipline today be-
cause Jesus Christ must be interpreted and culturally appropriated by particular communities today even as he was in the formation of the New Testament. To summarize the point in a sharp phrase, the New Testament does not merely tolerate a situation of pluralism in christology, it prescribes it.

A number of consequences for the discipline of christology flow from this formal recognition of pluralism as intrinsic to christological interpretation. I shall mention two. The first is that one christology cannot be used as an exclusive standard to measure another christology. This flows from the very nature of pluralism; if it were not the case, neither in principle would there be pluralism. The New Testament helps to illustrate this. One cannot say that Luke’s christology is heterodox on the basis of John’s christology or vice versa. No one faults Luke’s christology because it is not the same as that of John. This has bearing on the exercise of authority in christological matters. In a pluralistic situation one cannot consider one christology as exclusively authentic and valid so that all others must conform to it. This does not mean that all christologies are equally legitimate. Nor does it imply that certain standards and norms cannot be established to govern all christologies; they can. But it does imply that authority must appeal to more than simply, the citation of an objectively defined christology.

The second consequence is the other side of the equation: the norms of christology must be intrinsic to the discipline of theology generally and christology in particular. The New Testament pluralism in christology is also helpful in explaining how standards for christology may be developed. All New Testament christologies share in common a positive intent: they all interpret Jesus as the bearer of God’s salvation. The intrinsic norms of the discipline of christology are found in this phrase. An adequate christology must be faithful to the historical person of Jesus. It must be intelligible in terms of the language of the community and its tradition. It must explain in a relatively adequate manner how it can be said that Jesus is savior, that is, the bearer of salvation from God. And, finally, it must do this in a manner that empowers Christian life of discipleship. As in the New Testament, when a christology fulfills these functions, when it gives a relatively adequate, systematic, or coherent account of Jesus being the mediator of God’s salvation, it is orthodox.

As inculturation proceeds gradually and quietly in different cultures
throughout the world during the twenty-first century, in a new self-conscious manner that it never possessed before, an actual pluralism of christology will begin to emerge in formal terms. As this occurs, it will be good to analyze further and more carefully what was going on in the formation of the christologies of the first century and the manner in which they cohere in the New Testament. As the explicit awareness of actual pluralism becomes more acute, so too will the instructive normativity of the New Testament on this issue bear fruit. ~