In chapter eight, “New Testament Christologies,” Rausch asserts that while “Christology begins with the Easter experience of the disciples,” the fact is that “they could only express their experience in the language and symbols of their inherited tradition.” Briefly summarize what he calls the four christological “types” ((Easter christologies, 127-130; Son of God christologies, 131-137; Wisdom christologies, 137-142; and Preexistence christologies, 142-145) and where they appear in the New Testament.

**CHAPTER EIGHT: NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTOLOGIES (125)**

**Introduction:**

1. Christology begins with the Easter experience of the disciples. They had been demoralized and scattered, but their Easter experience convinced them beyond doubt that God had acted, vindicated Jesus and his message, and delivered him from the bonds of death.
2. They could only express their experience in the language and symbols of their inherited tradition. They were Jews and would have been familiar with the traditions of Jewish hope which we considered earlier, the messianic rooted in the preaching of the prophets, the Wisdom tradition, largely postexilic, and the apocalyptic. From these would come the earliest Christologies.
3. The NT offers a multiplicity of Christologies and witnesses to an obvious development in the Church’s understanding of Jesus.
   - The disciples did not immediately confess Jesus as the preexistent Son of God. But neither is it true that such a high Christology is only a later development.
   - None of the inherited symbols or figure were adequate to the disciples’ experience of the one they addressed in prayer and worship as “lord,” and so their efforts to bring their faith to expression continually overflowed the limits of their language. (126)
   - In the process, the various titles and Christologies were stretched, overlapped, and used to explain each other as the disciples came to a deeper understanding.
4. The earliest Christologies, originated in early Christian preaching, are represented by fragments, titles, hymns, and formulas embedded in later Christian texts like the letters of Paul and Acts of the Apostles.
   - Example: Romans 10:9 Paul citing a creedal formula from the early Palestinian churches, possibly a baptismal formula.
5. Christology can be expressed in various ways:
   - titles
   - perspectives of NT authors
Moments in the life of Jesus

Christological types:
- Schillebeeckx: Parousia, Divine-man, Wisdom, and Easter Christologies
- Haight: Adam, Son of God, Spirit, Wisdom, and Logos
- Rausch: Easter, Son of God, Wisdom, and Preexistence

I. EASTER CHRISTOLOGIES (127)

The earliest Christologies centered on the post-Easter Jesus, Jesus as soon to come in judgment (parousia) or reigning in God’s presence (exaltation).

A. Parousia Christology

1. Sometimes called maranatha Christology, Parousia (Second Coming) Christology represents perhaps the oldest interpretation of Jesus, originating in the early Aramaic-speaking Palestinian communities.

2. The apocalyptic perspective was adapted to portray Jesus as soon to come, bringing God’s salvation, but also as judge. (Acts 3:19-21)

3. Schillebeeckx traces to the very early Q community which lived in expectation of Christ’s imminent return, just as they prayed in the Lord’s Prayer “your kingdom come.” (127-8)

4. Two titles, both used in an apocalyptic context, are associated with this Christology, “Lord” (Mari or Maran in Aramaic, Kurios in Greek) and “Son of Man.” Lord was already a divine title in Aramaic.
   - LORD: Fitzmyer argues that Paul inherited the title “Lord” for the risen Christ from the Palestinian Jewish Christian community at Jerusalem. Some early communities prayer at their liturgies for Jesus to come, “Maranatha,” (O Lord, come) (1 Cor 16:22). So in the earliest tradition Jesus was the object of prayer, with the Sitz im Leben for this very likely being the Eucharist. (128)
   - SON OF MAN: Also appears to come out of this apocalyptic context. Since the phrase occurs only in the sayings of Jesus in the NT, many scholars hold the Jesus may have used the title of himself, based on his reflection on the expression, “one like a son of man” in Daniel 7:13. Later the Son of Man takes on a creative function (Rev. 1:17) and preexistence (John 3:13, 6:62)

B. Exaltation Christology (129)

1. Exaltation Christology sees Jesus as made Messiah, Lord, and Son of God AFTER his exaltation from the dead. (129)

2. Recognizable in Paul’s letters and in the sermons of Peter and Paul in Acts. This is comes from Greek-speaking Jewish-Hellenistic Christianity, though some texts may be based on Aramaic hymns or formulas.
(Romans 1:3-4) In this confession, Jesus is designated as God’s Son by his resurrection. The idea is that Jesus’ exaltation or resurrection was the occasion for his messianic appointment as God’s Son was widespread in early Christianity (Acts 13:33).

(Phil 2:6-11) May have been composed in Aramaic and goes back to Palestine of the late 30s.

(Acts 2:32, 36) Here is a two-stage Christology: the man Jesus has been exalted by God, made Lord and Messiah from the moment of his resurrection.

3. **Key points:**
   a) First, exaltation/resurrection is something that happens to Jesus; the agency is God’s.
   b) Second, christological titles such as Messiah, Son of Man, Son of God, and Lord are predicated of Jesus after his exaltation; in the earliest fragments they have not yet been extended into his historical life.
   c) Third, there is yet no explicit expression of his divinity. Nevertheless, adopting for Jesus the title “lord” was significant.

II. **SON OF GOD CHRISTOLOGIES (131)**
   a) If early Easter Christologies recognize Jesus as Messiah, Son, of Man, and Son of God only after his death, the Gospels see these titles as applying to Jesus during his public ministry.
   b) First, Meier says that a Christology develops out of various themes woven together in a particular work, with or without the preponderant use of a particular title.
   c) Secondly, the term “Son of God” had a number of different meanings in the OT: future son of David whom God promised to adopt (2 Sam 7:14, Pss 2:7; 89:27; the just man in the Wisdom Tradition (Sir 4:10; Wisdom 2:16-20); angels (Job. 1:6; 2:1), sometimes to the people of Israel collectively (Ex 4:22; Deut 14:1; Hos 11:1). Thus, when the NT authors use the term it does it necessarily mean what it does to contemporary Christians who usually understand it in a metaphysical sense. (131)
   d) Third, ... no other title or christological assessment “has had both the historical depth and lasting power of ‘Son of God’”. The origin seems indisputably to lie in the usage of Jesus himself,... and is already evident in Q (Matt 11:27/Luke 10:22). All the strata of the NT maintain a distinction that suggests that Jesus’ relationship to the Father is different from that of the disciples (Mk 14:36; Lk 6:36; Mark 11:2; John 20:17).

A. **Mark (132)**
   1. The Gospel of Mark opens with a twofold christological statement: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ [the Son of God]”. While Jesus is both Messiah and Son of Man who must suffer (Mark 8:31; cf 9:31; 10:33-34) for Mark, the most significant title
is Son of God, evident from its appearance at key points in his Gospel.
a) The baptism is a revelation of Jesus as God’s Son
b) The story of the transfiguration (Mark 9:2-8) again proclaims Jesus divine Sonship, underlining his authority with symbols drawn from the OT
c) At the solemn moment of his trial before the Sanhedrin, the two titles of Messiah and Son of God are again joined when the high priest asks Jesus, “Are you the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One?” (Mark 14:61)
d) It is only after his death when the centurion, ironically a non-Jew, exclaims, “Truly this man was the Son of God!” (Mark 15:39)

2. What does “Son of God” mean in Mark’s Gospel? Jesus in Mark’s Gospel is Son of God in an adopted or declared sense. (133)
a) No virginal conception, no Christmas story
b) Jesus is the beloved of God, the Messiah and Suffering Servant who would be revealed as God’s Son
c) He is Son of God in a functional rather than a metaphysical sense.

3. Still there are moments when it appears that Mark senses that Jesus’ identity goes beyond what he is able to say explicitly.
a) E.g.: walking on the water (Mark 6:45-52) draws a parallel to Job 9:11 describing God who “treads upon the crests of the sea. It is an epiphany.
b) The Transfiguration story draws a similar parallel to the Sinai theophany (Ex 24:15-18; 34:29-30).

B. Matthew (134)
1. Matthew was written probably in the mid-eighties to a largely Jewish-Christian community with an increasing number of Gentile converts. Because of the church/synagogue conflict Matthew is careful to show how the coming of the Gentiles is all according to God’s plan.
a) Presents Jesus as a rabbi or teacher who can interpret the Law with authority
b) as a new Moses, organizing his sayings into five great discourses, paralleling the five books of the Torah or Law
c) Jesus is the New Israel, the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets,
d) the Messiah in the line of David

2. But Son of God may be Matthew’s most significant Christological affirmation. “Son of Man” occurs 30 times while “Son of God” occurs between 9 and 12 times. M uses Son of Man to show Jesus as the final agent of God, and the title Son of God for “biographical purposes.” (134)
a) “Son of God “is portrayed as the Son who operates in union with the Father”, he is god’s presence in the world; God is “my Father
b) Three times Jesus refers to himself as “the Son.”
c) For Matthew, Jesus’ true identity is no longer hidden as in Mark
d) And Matthew’s infancy material includes the story of Jesus virginal conception so that he is God’s Son in a unique way, from the moment of his conception by the HS.

C. Luke (135)
1. Luke’s christology is difficult to categorize. The disciples do not confess Jesus as Son of God during his public ministry, but Luke shows them referring to him as Lord for the sake of his readers.
2. Roger Haight sees Luke as developing a Spirit Christology, a “two-stage” narrative Christology beginning with Jesus conception by the power of the Spirit, following him through his ministry and ending with his exalted reign. (136)
   a) His favorite title for Jesus is “Lord.” The key to his vision is the concept of divine visitation (Luke 7:15; 19:44) and care for humanity through Jesus in accordance with the divine plan for salvation.
   b) Luke is dependent on Mark as a major sources, and shares with Matthew the tradition of the virginal conception, though each develops the story independently. Without a human father, Jesus is “Son of God” in a unique sense, from his conception
   c) In the background is the early “two-stage” view which posits two modes of existence for Jesus, one earthly, the other heavenly. Similar versions can be found in 1 Timothy 3:16, Romans 1:3-4, and Mark 12:35-36.

III. WISDOM CHRISTOLOGIES(137)

- The Wisdom literature of late Judaism-Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Sirach, and Wisdom of Solomon-provided another rich source for Christological reflection of early Christian communities..
- Not included in the Jewish canon when it was drawn up the Pharisees at the end of the first century on the grounds of their late origin and Greek language. Sometimes called “the Apocrypha,” they were dropped from the canon by the Protestant reformers in the 16th century.
- As we saw earlier, Sophia/Wisdom is a feminine symbol, an attribute of God (Prov 1, 8, 9; Sir 34; Wis 7-9) or the personification of the transcendent God’s presence in the world.
- Wisdom theology is woven through numerous NT sources
  - Jesus himself was most probably a teacher in the Wisdom tradition
Christological fragments found in the Pauline corpus, the Fourth Gospel, and Hebrews are fundamentally expressions of a Wisdom Christological that goes back to early Jewish Christianity.

A. **Christ As the Wisdom of God (138)**

- In the first four chapters of 1 Cor, Paul contrasts divine wisdom with the human wisdom of both Jews and Greeks: “For Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:22-24).

B. **Christ As Preexistent (139)**

1. The famous hymn in Phil 2:6-11 is earlier than Paul, though he may have adapted it.
2. The language of exchange (“in the form of God/coming in human likeness”) and descent suggest a preexistence Christology. Unlike Adam, Jesus the Christ does not grasp at equality with God, the temptation to which Adam succumbs in Gen 3:5. Thus they see the hymn as representing a low Christology.
3. Other scholars see the personification of Wisdom as evidence of preexistence Christology. (139)

C. **Christ As the Image of God and Firstborn of All Creation (140)**

1. An early Christian hymn in Col 1:15-20 describes Christ as “the image of God” and “the first born of all creation.”
2. See parallels between the language of hymn and Wisdom literature on page 141.
3. The hymn is probably pre-Pauline. Indicating the priority of Christ to all things and in giving him, like Wisdom, a role in creation, is at least played a role in the development of the NT belief in his uncreated status. (141)
4. Some feminist theologians have sought to privilege Wisdom Christology over more traditional /son of God and Logos Christologies. The figure of Sophia/Wisdom “relieves the monopoly of the male metaphors of Logos and Son and destabilizes the patriarchal imagination.” (E. Johnson).

IV. **PREEXISTENCE CHRISTOLOGIES (142)**

A. **John (142)**

1. Widely recognized that the Christology of John’s Gospel is the highest in the NT. The Prologue (John 1:1-14) is heavily informed by the Wisdom tradition (Prov. 3; 8:35)
   a) From another early Christian hymn
   b) Logos has been substituted for Sophia
2. Prologue should be interpreted in light of the gospel into which is has been incorporated
   a) The portrayal of Jesus is very different from the Synoptics
b) Jesus is recognized as Messiah (Jn 1:41) and Son of God (Jn 3:15, 17; 5:20, 21, 6:40; 14:13) and proclaims opening his divine origin (Jn 8:42) and unity with the Father (10:30, 38; 14:9)
c) He repeated uses the divine formula, “I am.” Brown says this “absolute use... has the effect of portraying Jesus as divine with (pre) existence as his identity, even as the Greek OT understood the God of Israel.” (143)

B. Is Jesus Called God? (144)
1. Brown asks, “Did the NT Christians call Jesus “God” (theos)? He answers, Yes, pointing to three texts where Jesus is clearly called God
   a) Hebrews 1:8-9, where the context is Wisdom theology, the author addresses Jesus in the words of Ps 45: “Your throne, God, stands forever and ever.”
   b) The Gospel of John begins with a hymn or Prologues, proclaiming: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Words was God.”
   c) And finally in John’s Easter story of the risen Jesus appearance to Thomas in the Upper Room, he replies, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28)
2. Brown also mentions nine texts that may refer to Jesus as God, but are dubious, either because of textual variants (Gal 2:20; Acts 20:28; and John 1:18) or because of syntax (Col 2:2-3; 2 Thess 1:12; /Titus 2:13; Rom 9:5; 1 John 5:20 and 2 Pet 1:1).
   a) He ends up with eight texts that seem to confess Jesus as God, “The majority of which are clearly situated in a background of worship and liturgy.”
   b) His point is that addressing Jesus as God grows out of prayer and worship, and is primarily soteriological rather than ontological
3. Larry Hurtado has argues that the Jesus-directed “devotion” of the primitive Palestinian church effects a mutation in the Jewish monotheistic tradition which gave a “binitarian” shape to their worship by making Jesus an object of the devotion characteristic reserved for god. (144)
   o Hymns both celebrating Christ and sung to him (John 1:108, Col 1:15-20; Phil 2:5-11)
   o Prayer addressed to him
   o the use of his name, regularly invoking Jesus
   o and baptizing in the name of Jesus
   o the Lords’ supper’ confessions of faith in Jesus
   o and prophecy in the words of the risen Christ

It was this cultic veneration off Jesus which explains, at least in part, why the titles of Jesus “underwent a redefinition in early
Christian circles, coming to be used for a figure regarded as holding a heavenly and divine status.”

CONCLUSION

1. From the earliest days of the Church the disciples of Jesus interpreted their experience of Jesus in symbols and images drawn from their religious tradition, the Hebrew Scriptures and later noncanonical Jewish literature. As they struggled to express their faith, particularly through their worship, they stretched the language of their tradition and gave it new meaning. (145)

2. The NT has a rich variety of Christologies.
   a. The very early Easter Christologies (Parousia/Exaltation) show that the risen Lord was already an object of prayer
   b. Son of God Christologies are first related to the Resurrection, understood as appointment to divine sonship described in Psalm 2:7, though many scholars hold this relationship in evident in Jesus’ own words of himself as “son” and his God as “Abba.”
   c. The Wisdom tradition, with its feminine personification of Wisdom, her coming forth from God, role in creation, and mission to God’s people, seems to have played an important role in attributing preexistence to Jesus
   d. Preexistence is clearly attributed to Jesus in John, and at the end of the Gospel, Thomas confesses Jesus as both “lord” and “God” (John 20:28). But even this language can find parallels elsewhere and earlier in the NT, mostly in hymns reflecting the liturgy and prayer of the early communities
   e. CHRISTOLOGY BEGINS IN WORSHIP!