

Providing sketches and snapshots of how biblical exegesis and theological reflection remain necessary to navigate a twenty-first-century terrain should keep *Horizons* busy for its next half-century.

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II. New Methods, New Voices: Biblical Interpretation for Gospel Christology Today

My sincere thanks to Dr. Elena Procario-Foley and the editorial staff of *Horizons* for the invitation to participate in the golden jubilee of this magnificent journal. Congratulations on fifty years!

Though also a bit daunting, the charge to respond to an essay written by Raymond Brown is a meaningful one to me because I have admired and used Brown's work since my years as an undergraduate. Also meaningful to me is that Dr. PHEME PERKINS is contributing to this theological roundtable. I took a number of classes at Boston College with her (as many as I could, really), and she not only directed my undergraduate research project but wrote letters of recommendation for graduate schools and other opportunities on my behalf. I will take this forum as an opportunity to thank her publicly for her valuable teaching and mentorship through the years.

Finally, a sad note: originally my fellow respondent was to be the Rev. Dr. Donald Senior. Unfortunately, he passed away on November 8, 2022. Although I did not know him personally and had never met him, I respect his scholarship greatly. Frankly, I was astonished that the editors thought of me to respond alongside such an esteemed scholar. Many people undoubtedly miss him, and I extend my condolences to all who do. Readers of *Horizons* interested in Senior's assessment of Brown's life and work would do well to consult his splendid 2018 biography of Brown published by Paulist Press.⁷⁵ And so to Brown!

In his June 1, 1974, address to the national convention of the College Theology Society published in the inaugural issue of *Horizons*, Brown gave a succinct and characteristically elegant review of twentieth-century New Testament scholarship on the question of how the Christology of the

⁷⁵ Senior, *Raymond E. Brown and the Catholic Biblical Renewal*.

Gospels relates to how Jesus himself understood his identity during his ministry.⁷⁶ Brown created a taxonomy that presents a spectrum of views. Not limiting himself to scholarly views, Brown included on the extreme ends of the spectrum two positions that, in his words, “are not held by reputable scholars writing in the field today” and yet “have a wider following than scholarly views have.”⁷⁷ On one of those ends lies a non-scholarly conservatism that equates the Gospels’ presentation of Jesus’s self-understanding with that of Jesus himself, and on the other end is a non-scholarly liberalism that regards the Christology of the Gospels as a complete innovation with no connection to Jesus’s own self-understanding. The former, conservative view equates the Jesus of history with the Christ of faith and takes Jesus to be fully cognizant of his divine identity.⁷⁸ According to the latter liberal view, Jesus’s significance lies in his powerful moral teaching based on love; it says that doctrinal confessions about his person were invented by his followers and may now be dismissed.⁷⁹

Within these extremes Brown described three scholarly views that are necessarily more measured because they take seriously the nature of the New Testament evidence and listed these according to their chronological emergence.⁸⁰ Though Brown’s address did not develop a thesis-driven argument that made an original contribution to the scholarship of New Testament Christology per se, Brown did reach the conclusion that, at the time he delivered his address, New Testament scholarship had settled on there being “*a discernible continuity* between the evaluation of Jesus during the ministry and the evaluation of him in the New Testament writings.”⁸¹ Brown divided this scholarship into two camps: one set of scholars argues that Jesus himself used or at least accepted some of the titles applied to him during his ministry, namely those “lower” titles that do not necessarily signify divine status (e.g., “Messiah,” “Prophet,” “Servant of God,” “Son of Man”).⁸² Distinguishing itself from the view that Jesus evaluated his identity in such explicit terms by his use or acceptance of such titles is the other set of scholars who hold “a thesis of *implicit christology*” according to which Jesus’s overall

⁷⁶ Raymond E. Brown, “Gospel Christology,” 35–50. Brown eventually revised the contents of this address and published the updated version in *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 6–15. [Editor’s note: the *Horizons* article was also reprinted in the *Catholic Mind* 74 (June 1975): 21–33.]

⁷⁷ Brown, “Gospel Christology,” 36.

⁷⁸ Brown, “Gospel Christology,” 39.

⁷⁹ Brown, “Gospel Christology,” 41–42.

⁸⁰ Brown, “Gospel Christology,” 43–49.

⁸¹ Brown, “Gospel Christology,” 46 (italics his).

⁸² Brown, “Gospel Christology,” 47.

mode of conducting his ministry “proclaimed that the eschatological reign of God was making itself present in such a way that a response to his ministry was a response to God.”⁸³

Projects like Brown’s contribution to the inaugural issue of *Horizons*—namely, works that seek to present the *status quaestionis* on their chosen topic—serve a valuable purpose in scholarship. This was true in Brown’s day and is all the more true today. As difficult as it would have been to stay abreast of the literature in biblical studies when Brown was writing fifty years ago, this is all the more so the case in the decades since, as more and more scholars publish, specialization increases, and technology opens access to scholarship from around the globe at a rapidly increasing rate.

In a recent edited volume whose aim is precisely to survey the state of affairs on areas of inquiry within New Testament studies and its subdisciplines, Scot McKnight and Nijay K. Gupta identify six trends pertaining to the scholarly study of the New Testament evident in the essays collected in the volume. These are: (1) the proliferation of academic tools and methods, (2) attention to global and diverse perspectives, (3) attention to historically neglected New Testament texts, (4) a more sophisticated historical contextualization of New Testament texts, (5) increased acceptance of theological interpretations of Scripture among scholars across the academy, and (6) greater interest in reception history and the history of interpretation.⁸⁴ Taken together, these trends provide a useful heuristic by which to respond to Brown’s address. In my reflections here, I focus on the first two—the proliferation of academic tools and methods, and attention to global and diverse perspectives. The chapters by Rebekah Eklund and David B. Capes in McKnight and Gupta’s book survey current scholarship on topics that correlate with the subject matter of Brown’s address, namely historical Jesus studies and New Testament Christology, respectively.⁸⁵ I draw from these essays and enlist them as conversation partners for my reflections.

The first two trends on McKnight and Gupta’s list pertain to the increase in diversity of interpretative methods and to the diversity of scholars now ostensibly included in the scholarly conversation. Unavoidably, the year (1974) in which Brown delivered this address has direct implications for the scholarship represented in it, both in terms of the identity of the scholars and the methodologies they represent. When Brown writes of his aim to show “how

⁸³ Brown, “Gospel Christology,” 47 (italics his).

⁸⁴ Scot McKnight and Nijay K. Gupta, eds., *The State of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 1–5.

⁸⁵ Rebekah Eklund, “Jesus of Nazareth,” *The State of New Testament Studies*, 139–60; David B. Capes, “New Testament Christology,” in *The State of New Testament Studies*, 161–81.

one might organize chronologically and classify the results of twentieth-century scholarship pertaining to NT christology,” the scholarship in question is invariably the particular kind of biblical criticism that employs historical-critical methodology to analyze and interpret the New Testament evidence.⁸⁶ Although the historical-critical method would remain predominant for decades after Brown delivered his address, starting in the mid-1970s other methodological paradigms began to gain currency among biblical scholars.⁸⁷ Notable among these were synchronic approaches whose focus is the final form of the text itself, like narrative-critical analysis, and approaches that bring insights from the social sciences to bear on biblical interpretation. Also at this time, hermeneutical frameworks (especially feminist hermeneutics and liberationist hermeneutics) that punctured the presumption of objectivity presumed of historical criticism and its practitioners began to influence scholarly discourse. Though these developments in methods and hermeneutics can trace their origins to a time prior to Brown’s address, it was in the 1970s that they began to make their mark on the discipline. Their influence grew in subsequent decades.⁸⁸

McKnight and Gupta understand the proliferation of analytical approaches as bringing with it certain trade-offs. On the one hand, the diversity of methods employed “is salutary as biblical scholars learn from other disciplines.”⁸⁹ But it also results in a “microspecialization and minute fragmentation” that makes it “easy for scholars to focus on the ‘trees’ without stepping back and getting a sense for the whole ‘forest.’”⁹⁰ Doctoral studies produce specialists in narrow areas who then face teaching responsibilities that “pull them out into broader topics in Bible and theology.”⁹¹ This state of affairs makes the need for essays like Brown’s all the more pressing today, as McKnight and Gupta note with reference to their own collection when they say: “Scholars have always performed this balancing act, but now they must travel further to ‘exit the forest,’ as it were. Thankfully, books such as this one serve as a handy map for eager and inevitably

⁸⁶ Brown, “Gospel Christology,” 36. For a discussion of Brown’s commitment to the historical-critical method, see Senior, *Raymond E. Brown and the Catholic Biblical Renewal*, 59–75, esp. 60–63.

⁸⁷ For a review and analysis of these developments, see Fernando F. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 3–52.

⁸⁸ According to Senior, Brown “later in his career ... would somewhat grudgingly acknowledge the value of other methods beyond the historical-critical” but “was never at home with them” (*Raymond E. Brown and the Catholic Biblical Renewal*, 61).

⁸⁹ McKnight and Gupta, *The State of New Testament Studies*, 2.

⁹⁰ McKnight and Gupta, *The State of New Testament Studies*, 2.

⁹¹ McKnight and Gupta, *The State of New Testament Studies*, 2.

overwhelmed explorers!"⁹² It remains imperative for theologians, who constituted Brown's primary audience and who continue to be the core readership of *Horizons*, to stay informed of the various positions that the biblical studies field is considering by consulting essays like those in McKnight and Gupta's collection and in other publications with similar aims, such as the Oxford Handbook series and *Currents in Biblical Research*, a journal dedicated to summarizing research on biblical topics.⁹³

The question of "What role did Jesus himself play in shaping his followers' perceptions of him?" is a question that Capes identifies as one that still occupies scholars today.⁹⁴ It certainly warrants historical-critical methodology for its investigation. As noted previously, Brown found in scholarship a general agreement in favor of there being a line of continuity between Jesus's self-understanding and the Christology evident in the New Testament Gospels.⁹⁵ But now that other forms of analysis besides the historical-critical method have been adopted to investigate this question, can we say that Brown's measured assessment of the state of the field still stands?⁹⁶

Certainly, some scholars still argue that belief in Jesus as an exalted figure originated entirely with his followers after Jesus's death, possibly even at a rather late date.⁹⁷ But many scholars who investigate this question readily

⁹² McKnight and Gupta, *The State of New Testament Studies*, 2.

⁹³ Doing so could inure one against the sort of criticism leveled at Gerald O'Collins's *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Despite delving deeply into biblical scholarship, some scholars criticized O'Collins for adopting Richard Bauckham's views as if they represented consensus. See his discussion of the matter in Gerald O'Collins, *Christology: Origins, Developments, Debates* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015), 25–26. While Bauckham's theses on eyewitness testimony in the NT Gospels (see *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2017]) have influenced the discussion, they have yet to hold sway among many (Eklund, "Jesus of Nazareth," in *The State of New Testament Studies*, 150).

⁹⁴ Capes, "New Testament Christology," in *The State of New Testament Studies*, 162.

⁹⁵ Brown, "Gospel Christology," 46.

⁹⁶ In Brown's own updated conclusion published in 1994, he wrote "that scholarship has come to no universally accepted positions on the relationship of Jesus' Christology to that of his followers, except that the extreme positions on either end of the spectrum ... have fewer and fewer advocates" (Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 15).

⁹⁷ For example, Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (New York: HarperOne, 2014); Maurice Casey, *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God: The Origins and Development of New Testament Christology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1991). Casey, in particular, ascribes Christian deification of Jesus to the later decades of the first century.

accept that devotion to Jesus in terms that befit devotion to a divine figure equal or nearly equal to God began at a very early stage. Larry Hurtado is a prime example, and he incorporates the social sciences to examine New Testament texts for what they tell us about the religious experience of Jesus's earliest followers.⁹⁸ According to Andrew Ter Ern Loke, the view that "highest Christology" was present in Christianity at its very origins "seems to be the emerging consensus among scholars."⁹⁹ Loke too holds to this view and employs tools from other disciplines to defend it, in particular philosophy and the comparative study of religion.

Yet even if worship of Jesus as a divine figure started so soon among his followers, did the historical Jesus speak of himself in ways that would influence this early exaltation of his person? One way to explain why Jewish followers of Jesus would view him in such exalted terms is to accept that Jesus's words about himself laid the groundwork for them to think that way. This takes us into the field of historical Jesus studies, which resurged and captivated mainstream media and popular audiences in the years after Brown wrote.

As was the case with the scholarship Brown surveyed, Christological titles remain an important point of entry for investigating this matter, even if current discussion centers less on titles and more on overall patterns in Jesus traditions and their interpretation among his followers.¹⁰⁰ The methods and results of historical Jesus scholarship remain as contested as ever, but such research suggests that Jesus did use certain titles to refer to himself, in particular "Son of Man," and that his use of such titles intimates his self-understanding as a special figure in God's plans.¹⁰¹ Dale Allison, for

⁹⁸ Capes, "New Testament Christology," in *The State of New Testament Studies*, 179. See Larry W. Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2005); Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2003); Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).

⁹⁹ Andrew Ter Ern Loke, *The Origin of Divine Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 5–6.

¹⁰⁰ Capes, "New Testament Christology," in *The State of New Testament Studies*, 163.

¹⁰¹ See the overview in John P. Meier, "The Historical Jesus," in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century*, 3rd fully revised ed., ed. John J. Collins, Gina Hens-Piazza, Barbara Reid, and Donald Senior (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2022), 145–63, esp. 153–59. Eklund points out that Jesus's self-understanding as the Danielic Son of Man is of special interest to scholars and cites Dale C. Allison, Adela Yarbro Collins, and John J. Collins as in agreement that Jesus identified himself as such; Eklund, "Jesus of Nazareth," in *The State of New Testament Studies*, 153.

example, insists that “We should hold a funeral for the view that Jesus entertained no exalted thoughts about himself.”¹⁰² An important development that allows Allison to reach such a conclusion is that exalted understandings of such titles lie well within the Jewish matrix of nascent Christianity and need not have emerged solely as a result of the spread of the gospel into Greek and Roman cultural environments.¹⁰³

Thanks to this richer understanding of Jewish cultural and religious scripts in Jesus’s day along with both the results of historical Jesus research and investigations into the early nature of the development of worship of Jesus as to a god, Brown’s basic conclusion still holds: even if we can hardly say there is consensus, many scholars see continuity between Jesus’s self-understanding and that of his earliest followers. To this we can add that the trend has been to locate Christian deification of Jesus earlier in the historical record rather than later. In terms of the proliferation of methods, while historical-critical analyses have certainly informed these developments, so have other methods, notably social-scientific analysis, social memory theory, and orality studies.¹⁰⁴

But these methods can all be characterized as diachronic approaches that focus on the world “behind” the text and thus attempt to reconstruct the development of ideas before they became encapsulated in the text of the New Testament. For me this raises the question of whether the specter of Albert Schweitzer still looms in the background. Schweitzer famously concluded that quests for the historical Jesus reveal more about the questers than they do about their subject, Jesus.¹⁰⁵ Likewise, Martin Kähler saw it as impossible for the study of Jesus not to be affected by all that is at stake in interpreting his person.¹⁰⁶ I too wonder whether scholars who are wont to prove that Jesus thought of himself as an exalted figure will get the results they seek. To be clear, I do not think that this devalues the enterprise. Like

¹⁰² Dale Allison Jr., *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 304, quoted in Eklund, “Jesus of Nazareth,” in *The State of New Testament Studies*, 153.

¹⁰³ Capes, “New Testament Christology,” in *The State of New Testament Studies*, 165–76; Brandon D. Smith, “What Christ Does, God Does: Surveying Recent Scholarship on Christological Monotheism,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 17, no. 2 (2018): 184–208. For example, Adela Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human, and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2008).

¹⁰⁴ Eklund, “Jesus of Nazareth,” in *The State of New Testament Studies*, 146–49.

¹⁰⁵ Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of the Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (New York: Macmillan, 1968 [1906]).

¹⁰⁶ Martin Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ*, (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1964 [1892]).

Brown, I believe that scholars, by virtue of their expertise and the responsible application of research methods, can indeed make compelling cases for certain conclusions about Jesus or any matter of historical biblical research, conclusions that in turn can be vetted by their peers for how they account for the evidence.¹⁰⁷ But I do think that obviating the tendency to find support for foregone conclusions necessitates the presence at the table of as many scholars as possible who represent as many perspectives as possible.

This leads us to the second trend that McKnight and Gupta identify, namely that more attention is now being paid to global and diverse voices, which they rightly characterize as a major development in biblical studies.¹⁰⁸ They also correctly observe that a corollary of this attention to a greater diversity of voices is that it comes with implications for the interpretative task, namely acceptance of the fact that all research and interpretation is filtered by the identity and interests of the scholar and interpreter. McKnight and Gupta recognize that “the facile notion of ‘objective reading’ has been roundly refuted” is a value for the discipline and its practitioners.¹⁰⁹ Including marginalized perspectives in the task of interpretation helps to “‘triangulate’ meaning.”¹¹⁰ Yet despite the strides made in broadening the array of voices to whom attention is paid, McKnight and Gupta conclude rather soberly that “some fields have not been penetrated as deeply by global and diverse scholarship.”¹¹¹

McKnight and Gupta are correct to say that things have changed in this regard since the time Brown wrote. The white male Eurocentric makeup of the scholars whom Brown discussed is obvious. Reading Brown’s address now gives the impression that, when it comes to biblical studies, if one knows the biblical scholarship of western Europe, one knows the field. My interest in making this observation here is neither to denigrate Brown—who in his monumental works cited a diversity of scholarship even if that of white North American and European scholarship remains predominant—nor to denigrate his contemporaries of the early 1970s. It is easy for any generation to look back and regard themselves as more enlightened than their predecessors. Rather than do that, I make this observation with the aim of turning the “time capsule” that is Brown’s address into a mirror. Reviewing

¹⁰⁷ Senior, *Raymond E. Brown and the Catholic Biblical Renewal*, 159–65, esp. 162–63. Compare Loke’s response to the conundrum posed by Schweitzer, Kähler, and post-modernist thinkers who pose similar questions about the enterprise of studying Jesus (Loke, *The Origin of Divine Christology*, 10–11).

¹⁰⁸ McKnight and Gupta, *The State of New Testament Studies*, 2.

¹⁰⁹ McKnight and Gupta, *The State of New Testament Studies*, 2.

¹¹⁰ McKnight and Gupta, *The State of New Testament Studies*, 2.

¹¹¹ McKnight and Gupta, *The State of New Testament Studies*, 2.

Brown's address fifty years on gives us an opportunity to examine whether in practice we have advanced as far as we assume we have regarding what we think counts as biblical scholarship.

Examining through this lens the essays by Eklund and Capes in McKnight and Gupta's collection (admittedly a small sample size), the results are mixed. One could read Capes and come to the same conclusion as one could reading Brown's address: that the scholarship worthy of summarizing and re-presenting to audiences as comprising the state of the field is mainly that which is produced in Europe and North America by male scholars.¹¹² Eklund's essay fares better, not only because of the greater representation of diverse scholars in her footnotes but also because of the organization and composition of her essay, which near its end includes a section titled "The Eastern Jesus."¹¹³ She begins the section by baldly (and refreshingly) admitting that the "vast majority" of scholars discussed up to that point in her essay "are white, Western, and male."¹¹⁴ She then discusses scholars who "examine Jesus from non-Western or nonwhite perspectives," "views of Jesus from the majority or two-thirds world (especially Africa and Asia)," and "investigations of Jesus through the lens of other religions (especially Islam)."¹¹⁵ Consequently, in Eklund's contribution we more clearly see the attention to global, diverse, and marginalized voices of which McKnight and Gupta write.

So why the discrepancy between these two essays? Is New Testament Christology, unlike Jesus studies, really one of those fields that McKnight and Gupta identify as not being so influenced by scholars of diverse identities? Eklund hints at why biblical scholarship on New Testament Christology, at least with respect to the question that Brown examines in his address, seems to remain the interest primarily of Western scholarship when she writes, "Meeting the contextual needs of people is another important theme of non-Western scholarship, as it involves reclaiming the Jesus of history as poor and oppressed—and therefore a figure who shares the socioeconomic

¹¹² Again, the sample size is small, and my goal is not to single out Capes specifically but to highlight that this is a systemic issue that affects the discipline more broadly than the work of an individual scholar suggests. I invite the reader to consider the following *status quaestionis* essays and see if this trend is maintained: Sven-Olav Back, "Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ of Faith: Approaches to the Question in Historical Jesus Research," in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, ed. Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter, 4 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 2:1021–54; Smith, "What Christ Does, God Does," 184–208.

¹¹³ Eklund, "Jesus of Nazareth," in *The State of New Testament Studies*, 154–58.

¹¹⁴ Eklund, "Jesus of Nazareth," in *The State of New Testament Studies*, 154.

¹¹⁵ Eklund, "Jesus of Nazareth," in *The State of New Testament Studies*, 154.

status of large swaths of the population in the countries where these scholars live and work.”¹¹⁶ This, she notes, has long been a feature of liberation theology.¹¹⁷ As Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen puts it, the starting point of liberation theologians is not the exalted figure of Christ but rather the Jesus “who lived a real life under real human conditions,” and the foundation of their interest in the historical Jesus lies not so much in identifying “the historical *facts* of the life of Jesus” as it does with “the need to understand the *relevance* of the history of Jesus to the struggles of Latin America.”¹¹⁸ Jesus’s relevance for the oppressed peoples of the world, as Eklund notes, “arises from his solidarity with and life among the poor, and also from his advocacy for them through his confrontations with the systems that dominated and excluded them.”¹¹⁹ Although these interests do appear in Western scholarship, the difference, according to Eklund, “tends to be in application”: the non-Western scholars focus on what it means for the poor today that Jesus shows such solidarity toward the poor and oppressed rather than on reconstructing the life of Jesus in its historical context.¹²⁰

Returning to Brown’s essay, what we see here is that the scholarship Brown discussed is concerned with what Jesus thought about *himself*, an interest that continues in historical Jesus and New Testament Christology studies today.¹²¹ But the scholars Eklund highlights are interested in Jesus as a person *for others*. It makes sense that the interest in Jesus’s self-conceptualization comes from scholars based in societies that are highly individualistic, whereas the emphasis in Jesus’s solidarity with others comes from scholars from and in cultures with a more communal ethos that in all likelihood better reflects the culture of Palestine in the first century. Eklund quotes Teresa Okure to make the point that for many scholars based in such regions of the world as Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, “the Jesus produced by historical-Jesus research is a ‘privileged, westernized Jesus,’ whose Eastern roots must be reclaimed.”¹²² R. S. Sugirtharajah notes that the Jesus of Western scholarship typically

¹¹⁶ Eklund, “Jesus of Nazareth,” in *The State of New Testament Studies*, 155.

¹¹⁷ Eklund, “Jesus of Nazareth,” in *The State of New Testament Studies*, 155.

¹¹⁸ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “Christology in Africa, Asia, and Latin America,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Jesus*, ed. Delbert Burkett (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 378 (italics his), quoted in Eklund, “Jesus of Nazareth,” in *The State of New Testament Studies*, 155.

¹¹⁹ Eklund, “Jesus of Nazareth,” in *The State of New Testament Studies*, 155.

¹²⁰ Eklund, “Jesus of Nazareth,” in *The State of New Testament Studies*, 156.

¹²¹ Sven-Olav Back, “Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ of Faith,” in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, 2:1021–54.

¹²² Eklund, “Jesus of Nazareth,” in *The State of New Testament Studies*, 154, quoting Teresa Okure, “Historical Jesus Research in Global Cultural Context,” in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, 2:953–84; quotation is from page 981.

comes “wrapped up in various christological configurations” informed by Western cultural frameworks.¹²³ So perhaps the lack of discussion of scholarship from marginalized perspectives in Capes’s essay on Christology is a function of the core interests of scholars whose marginalized perspectives lead them to ask fundamentally different questions—questions about Jesus’s self-understanding not in terms of how he perceived his relationship to God, but how he perceived his relationship to the poor, marginalized, and oppressed.

I bring these reflections to a conclusion by turning to the strongly pedagogical impulse that Brown displayed in his address.¹²⁴ For the persona that Brown foregrounded in his remarks is that of an expert in the discipline of biblical studies summing up the state of things for theologians who, in turn, will educate various publics through their teaching and publications.¹²⁵ Brown’s address is thus a classic manifestation of the division of labor which Catholic biblical scholars and theologians have assumed since the Second Vatican Council, which Jean-Pierre Ruiz describes using the metaphor of a fence that divides biblical scholars and theologians as neighbors living side by side in the same neighborhood while conducting their lives and work somewhat independently of one another.¹²⁶

In this division of labor, the direction in which knowledge flows is largely from biblical scholars to theologians, who then carry out the hermeneutical task of “actualization.”¹²⁷ To be sure, this is a worthy and honorable service that Catholic biblical scholars perform for the church. And Brown undoubtedly saw this as a key facet of his own vocation as a Catholic biblical scholar.¹²⁸

But this tacit understanding of scholarly roles comes with certain assumptions that are no longer credible. As Ruiz explains, critiques of the

¹²³ R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Asian Faces of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), viii, quoted in Eklund, “Jesus of Nazareth,” in *The State of New Testament Studies*, 155.

¹²⁴ Indeed, the reason Brown included non-scholarly views is because their prevalence means “we must be aware of them when we teach”; Brown, “Gospel Christology,” 36.

¹²⁵ Note that, after articulating his conclusion that continuity between what Jesus thought about himself and what the early church believed about him “seems more firmly marked than was thought possible in scholarship earlier in the century,” Brown told his audience: “I would urge you who are college teachers of religion to stress this positive point to your students and, through them, to a wider lay and clerical audience in the Church”; Brown, “Gospel Christology,” 49.

¹²⁶ Jean-Pierre Ruiz, *Readings from the Edges: The Bible and People on the Move* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 13–23.

¹²⁷ For a theoretical articulation of Catholic biblical interpretation that presumes strict limits between the different roles played by different parties, see Angelo Tosato, *The Catholic Statute of Biblical Interpretation* (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2021).

¹²⁸ Senior, *Raymond E. Brown and the Catholic Biblical Renewal*, 77–107.

methodological assumptions of historical-critical exegesis by both scholars advocating for openly theological approaches and by feminist scholars have shown that “*all* interpretation is contextual.”¹²⁹ As a result, “the notion of ‘centrist’ biblical exegesis is illusory and ... other strategies must be sought for bringing biblical scholars and systematic theologians into productive conversations.”¹³⁰ Ruiz warns that theologians who approach their theological work assuming that biblical research is objective risk reifying the prejudices unavoidably embedded in the work of biblical scholars, including the type of work that suggests objectivity, as historical-critical research does.¹³¹ As Ruiz writes: “For better and for worse, both intentionally and unintentionally, exegetes bring more than data to the table for the consideration of the ‘other theological disciplines,’ and that fact so complicates the rules of engagement between biblical studies and theological scholarship that it leads one to wonder whether good fences do indeed make for good neighbors. Exegesis has never been *just* exegesis pure and simple.”¹³²

Looking at ways to respond to this unavoidable reality, Ruiz cautions theologians against increasing the distance between their work and that of biblical scholars. Instead, Ruiz suggests the opposite, namely that a fruitful response to this quandary calls for increased engagement between representatives of the disciplines of biblical studies and theological studies.¹³³ Such engagement would entail open lines of communication by which biblical scholars and theologians “call for—and call each other to—transparency and accountability.”¹³⁴ What Ruiz appears to have in mind here is for biblical scholars and theologians to engage in respectful critiques of one another’s academic ventures, both in terms of their theoretical underpinnings and their results.¹³⁵

To his concerns I would add that interdisciplinary cooperation between biblical scholars and theologians on projects devoted specifically to

¹²⁹ Ruiz, *Readings from the Edges*, 17 (italics his).

¹³⁰ Ruiz, *Readings from the Edges*, 17.

¹³¹ Ruiz, *Readings from the Edges*, 17–22. Ruiz is especially concerned about anti-Jewish biases in biblical research that theologians passively assume in their own constructive tasks. For another set of reflections concerning the intersection of biblical studies, Christology, and Christian anti-Judaism, see Paula Fredriksen, “What Does Jesus Have to Do with Christ? What Does Knowledge Have to Do with Faith? What Does History Have to Do with Theology,” in *Christology: Memory, Inquiry, Practice*, ed. Anne M. Clifford and Anthony J. Godzieba (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 3–17. Fredriksen’s essay stems from a keynote address she delivered at the 2002 meeting of the College Theology Society.

¹³² Ruiz, *Readings from the Edges*, 23 (italics his).

¹³³ Ruiz, *Readings from the Edges*, 23.

¹³⁴ Ruiz, *Readings from the Edges*, 23.

¹³⁵ Ruiz, *Readings from the Edges*, 23.

Christology could benefit both disciplines. Work of this sort underway in Catholic ethics provides models for similar ventures in Christology.¹³⁶ Latino/a/e theological method—based on a *teología en conjunto*—also models such collaboration, and other models of interdisciplinary collaborative efforts may be sought as well.¹³⁷ The fact that biblical studies is no longer equated with historical-critical research opens up dynamic ways for theologians and biblical scholars to collaborate on matters of Christology. Rather than seeing biblical scholars as excavators of ancient data, theologians can view them as partners in the constructive tasks pertaining to Christology. Biblical scholars are nowadays conversant in multiple modes of analysis, some of which might be more appropriate than others for addressing the Christological issues that theologians bring to the table.¹³⁸ Whatever such collaboration might look like, we are at a place in which more dynamic interactions about Christological research and reflection between theologians and biblical scholars can and should happen than in the model evidently operative in Brown's address. As Brown stated near the beginning of his address, "Christology was, is, and, I suspect, always will be the single most important question in Christian theology."¹³⁹ That to me seems warrant enough for biblical scholars and theologians to work together to understand the person of Jesus and his relevance for the world today.

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¹³⁶ Here I am thinking specifically of Daniel J. Harrington and James Keenan's *Jesus and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges Between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 2002).

¹³⁷ Rubén Rosario-Rodríguez, "Sources and *En Conjunto* Methodologies of Latino/a Theologizing," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Latino/a Theology*, ed. Orlando O. Espín (Chichester, England: John Wiley and Sons, 2015), 53–70.

¹³⁸ For example, Frank Matera's narrative approach (*New Testament Christology* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999]) might be better suited than historical-critical approaches for certain systematic explorations into Christology. Capes raises C. Kavin Rowe and Richard Hays as examples of scholars who bring other methods (narrative criticism and figural interpretation, respectively) into the study of Christology in the Gospels (Capes, "New Testament Christology," in *The State of New Testament Studies*, 176–77).

¹³⁹ Brown, "Gospel Christology," 35.