Journal Title: Pro ecclesia
Volume: 24
Issue: 1
Month/Year: 20150101
Pages: 37-

Article Author:

Article Title: Frei's later Christology: radiance and obscurity

Imprint: ND:cat_docdel

Call #: BX 1751.2 .A1 P764
Location: 12

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Hans Frei died much too young, leaving behind him a body of published work as compelling in its content as it was slender in its magnitude. Even more so, he bequeathed a trove of materials at least as rich to be worked through, made sense of, and grappled with in their details and implications. The twenty-five years since Frei's passing has inspired numerous attempts to sift and clarify, explicate and extrapolate, expand upon it, and of course, to critically assess its strengths and weaknesses. Frei's work evokes interest from so many different directions—theological and hermeneutical, of course, but also sociological, philosophical, literary, and historical. In my judgment, this is one of the reasons that Frei's work has remained so compelling for several generations of students in the twenty-five years since his death.

The title of my essay gestures toward both the radiance and obscurity of the role of Christology in Frei's later work. The role of Christology in Frei's later work has been rightly characterized as its most pivotal dimension. In an article that perhaps most precisely differentiates Frei's later work from that of his friend and colleague, George Lindbeck, Mike Higton pinpoints the force of Frei's Christological focus and objectives as one of the points at which Frei and Lindbeck most starkly diverge. As Higton has stated it, in Frei's later work, the Church's taking the narrative reading of the Bible as primary is not to say that "the Church mastered the Bible," but rather, precisely by taking a narrative reading as primary

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rather than an allegorical or purely symbolic one, the Church allowed the Bible to stand over against it as an independent norm which it could not control.” Higton continues:

This isn’t just a contingent fact of history, said Frei. It came about precisely because Christians looked to the unsubstitutable man Jesus of Nazareth as their source and norm, and so learned to read their scriptures in such a way as to take them to be about that historically specific man. . . . [Moreover]

. . . this narrative reading is coherent with, informed by, and ultimately only intelligible on the assumption of, an incarnational theology.3

This passage sketches well the central Christological orientation in Frei’s later work.4 And yet, it is precisely this orientation that is, at times, obscured by the multidimensionality that so fully comes to the fore in the final decade of Frei’s life and work.

Arguably, it is the multidimensionality of Frei’s work during the 1980s that makes it tantalizing to a wide-ranging array of readers. The interest generated by Frei’s engagement with literary theorists, his wrestling with the concept of “narrative,” his increasingly explicit—but intrinsically ad hoc—uses of Wittgenstein and Clifford Geertz that have drawn the largest share of attention. Even those who have broached the significance of the role of Christ in Frei’s later work have done so in a quite condensed fashion.5

In what follows, then, I aim to deliberately hold open the question of the extent to which there is development in Frei’s Christological orientation that occurs as an accumulative effect emerging across several of his latest occasional writings. I propose to do this by way of close exposition and commentary upon these arguably least-attended-to essays and lectures. I aim, moreover, to expand and unpack the multiple senses in which, as Higton rightly puts it, the emergence of the orientational role of the literal sense was not the Church’s “mastering the Bible,” nor simply a felicitous accident of history. I propose to elucidate the Christological bases upon which Frei’s account articulated and justified the Bible’s orientation “as an independent norm which [the Church] could not control.”

2. Ibid., 92.
3. Ibid.
4. Other treatments of Frei’s work in which the priority of his Christological concerns features prominently include Charles Campbell’s Preaching Jesus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); Ben Fulford foregrounds Frei’s Christology in the constructive engagement he stages between Frei and Gregory of Nazianzus in Divine Eloquence and Human Transformation (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013); see also my Toward a Generous Orthodoxy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.) For a recent effort to expand Frei’s thinking and work in the direction of scriptural reasoning, see Jacob Goodson, Narrative Theology and the Hermeneutical Virtues: Humility, Patience, Prudence (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015).
5. Higton constrains his treatment of Christology in Frei’s later work to all of a page and half (91–92) in the essay above. George Hunsinger’s exposition of the later work, and Frei’s account of Christ therein, appears as an epilogue to the otherwise meticulous critical exposition of Frei’s Christology in The Identity of Jesus Christ. See his “Afterword: Hans Frei as Theologian,” Theology and Narrative (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 257–64. Material from this volume is hereafter cited in the text as TN.
Frei's Alexander Thompson Memorial lecture delivered at Princeton Seminary in 1986, "Conflict in Interpretation," exemplifies the kind of complex integration of interests characteristic of Frei's work throughout his career. There he devotes extensive attention to the lessons to be gleaned from literary critics who have come to attend to biblical narratives, among whom British literary theorist Frank Kermode is an exemplar. Kermode arrived at the categorical claim that the relationship between text and truth is irreducibly variegated, that the meaning of the text is ultimately indeterminate—it yields multiple, indeed irreducibly diverse, interpretations. This, according to Kermode, makes "outsiders" of even those who take themselves to be "insiders" to a particular interpretive community. For Christian reading communities, this would mean that the separateness of what is written and what is written about positions Christian readers, those following Jesus, as merely a different variation of outsiders. "World and book are hopelessly plural, endlessly disappointing," Kermode writes. "[O]ur sole hope and pleasure is in the perception of a momentary radiance, before the door of disappointment is finally shut on us." The ultimate indeterminacy of interpretations, the narrative's multiplicity of potential implications for ways of being in the world, results finally in Hegel's "night when all cows are black," and in the final analysis, the text makes outsiders of us all.

The position is a bracing one, and in many ways it captivated Frei—enough so, at least, that Frei engaged Kermode's position in detail, meticulously unpacking and commenting upon several lengthy passages from *The Genesis of Secrecy.* And while Frei finally parts company with such claims about the interpretive indeterminacy, and thus, ultimate obscurity of the biblical narratives, he pauses to derive an important cautionary insight here for Christian readers. The history of biblical interpretation in the modern era is littered with an array of efforts all too eager to move "from text to truth or from language to reality." Such efforts either conceptualize the adequacy of the text in terms of how it is taken to simply point to what it implies, whether that be the spiritualized sense of what "is hidden within" it, or the literalism of ostensive reference that slides down the slope of either historical-critical skepticism or the infallible certainties of fundamentalism.

How does Frei respond? Frei casts his lot with the Protestant Reformers in identifying the biblical text as "the Word of God" on one hand, and thus "sufficient," but simultaneously warning against an overdetermination of the biblical text as capturing without remainder that to which it refers, that which it portrays (either through the kind of ostensive reference in which the sentences putatively "mean" in virtue of referring

to their subject matter or by providing a linguistic point of departure from which to "thrust . . . beyond the literal shape" to "language transcending reality," for instance, by way of their metaphorical extravagance to "a mode of being in the world"). In short, the text is sufficient, but we dare not make an idol of it.  

To expand this point Frei invokes the concept of "witness"—the text is adequate in its witnessing to the Word of God. In fact, he says, the text's authority derives from its witness to the Word of God, "rather than from," he clarifies, "any inherent divinized quality."  

This witness occurs in and through the literal sense of the text, which Christian traditions of scriptural reading and interpretation (at least, Frei says, through the end of so-called precritical interpretation) recognized as authoritative, and indeed, orientational for their interpretive practices.  

What is the warrant for this authority of the literal sense? That the emergent tradition took it to be authoritative? That the literal sense happened to find common use, and eventually authoritative influence, in the Christian community? Is common use in the Christian communal tradition of reading what makes the ascriptive mode authoritative—"that it is this story about this person as agent and patient"; "that 'Jesus'—not someone else or nobody in particular—is the subject, the agent, and patient of these stories is . . . their crucial point, and the descriptions of events, sayings, personal qualities, and so forth, become literal by being firmly predicated of him"?  

On one hand, Frei points out that the Reformers differ from the early church in that they consider the literal sense to be sufficiently "perspicuous" in itself to conduct agreement, and thus not in need of "authorization from the interpretive tradition." And while Frei clearly understands himself to be following the Reformers, it is the multiple ways that he finds Karl Barth carrying forward the legacies of the Reformation that lead Frei to historically situate and sociologically contextualize the interwoven relationship of text and tradition—to reconceptualize them together (text and tradition in the sense of sociocultural object-directed practice that extends historically over time). Frei seeks to relate the two seamlessly, yet not without distinction (without, that is, collapsing one into the other or synthesizing the two). Coming to this position occurs as a lengthy even leisurely development over the course of Frei's thinking and writing, markedly between his overreliance upon the literary genre of "realistic narrative" in the Identity of Jesus Christ and the work in the final decade of his life in which he turned to the practices of "literal reading."  

9. Ibid., 163.  
10. Ibid.  
13. Elsewhere I have made the case that this process did not occur (as has often been portrayed) as a sudden break between his early and later work, or a "turn away" from his earlier work, but is better characterized as a shift of focus that takes the form of an expansion "from Word alone to Word and Spirit." See Springs, Toward a Generous Orthodoxy, chapters 2, 7-8.
So, for instance, while Frei says that it was not “logically necessary” that the literal sense became the plain sense (the orientational or primary sense) of Scripture for the tradition, at the same point he indicates how the “rule of faith” or “rule of truth” emerged among early followers of Christ (albeit informally) not as framework imposed externally, but derived from the emergent formation of tradition. This appears in passages of Frei’s “Literal Reading” essay that are easy to pass over as insignificant. Indeed, compared to the extensively rigorous attention received by Frei’s consistently ad hoc appropriation of tools and insights from nonreductionist social science, or his references to narrative and engagement with literary theory, comparatively, these passages of the essay (and comparable passages that have the appearance of interrelation when Frei’s latest writings are viewed in intertextual perspective) remain in obscurity.14

Nicholas Wolterstorff claims that Frei was not concerned with how or why the literal sense became the plain sense for the Christian tradition. Frei’s concern, as he sees it, is with the sense that happened to become authoritative for the tradition. The literal sense, according to Wolterstorff, was the sense that the Christian community found most beneficial.15 And yet there is far more at stake than the ostensive starting point that

14. Frei, “The ‘Literal Reading’ of Biblical Narrative,” TN, 121–24, at which point Frank Kermode again appears as one of Frei’s key interlocutors.

15. Wolterstorff, Divine Discourse, 219–20. Having ascribed the norm of “beneficial” to Frei, Wolterstorff then puzzles over what “beneficial” might mean. Frei nowhere uses the word “beneficial,” nor makes the claim that the “beneficilaty” of a particular textual sense provides the warrant for the Christian community’s taking the literal sense to be authoritative. Wolterstorff’s characterization on this point finds an echo in the work of John Allan Knight, who ascribes to Frei the position that “literal reading is the proper one because it is the one the church has found useful in pursuing its form of life.” See Knight’s Liberalism vs. Postliberalism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 281–82. In effect, Knight follows Wolterstorff on this point, though admittedly, Knight’s criticisms diverge widely from Wolterstorff’s in that he sees this claim as the result of what he argues is Frei’s status as a “full blown follower of the later Wittgensteinerian” (and this in terms of the deeply methodological reading of the later Wittgenstein found in Scott Soames’s Philosophical Analysis and the Age of Meaning, Vol. II, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). On this basis Knight concludes that that “Frei’s... commitment to a Wittgensteinerian understanding of meaning... gives to the community the role of the ultimate arbiter of the meaning of any and all biblical texts.” While addressing the full depth of the problems with this reading would take me too far afield from my present objective, suffice it to say I find myself fully persuaded by the reservations about Knight’s reading of Frei gently raised by Ben Fulford in his “Review of Liberalism vs. Postliberalism: The Great Divide in Twentieth-Century Theology,” Journal of Theological Studies (2014), 65(1): 363–67. For entrée into the controversies surrounding Scott Soames’s treatment of Ryle and Wittgenstein (among others) upon which Knight predicated his critical strategy, see Michael Kremer’s review of Scott Soames in Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century, vol. 1: The Dawn of Analysis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) and Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century, vol. 2: The Age of Meaning (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews (September 19, 2005): https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/24868-book-1-philosophical-analysis-in-the-twentieth-century-vol-1-the-dawn-of-analysis-book-2-philosophical-analysis-in-the-twentieth-century-vol-2-the-age-of-meaning/, accessed March 11, 2014. See also Michael Beaney, “Critical Notice: Soames on Philosophical Analysis,” Philosophical Books, vol. 75 no. 3 (2006), 255–71 (esp. 262–63).
happened to accrue in the Christian tradition of reading and interpretation. "Ruled reading"—what comes to be formally articulated in the "rule of faith" or "rule of truth" by the end of the second century—appears in Frei's account of how the literal sense became plain (authoritative, traditional) for the early Christian community. He demonstrates how such reading would retain central significance (though its significance was conceptualized differently at different points in time) into the contemporary era of the Christian church (even, that is, through the period at which the narrative surface of the texts about Jesus were considered to be reports or evidence which referred to purported ancient events).

Frei seeks to hold together the Christian tradition of scriptural reading and interpretation, what the text portrays of Jesus, and how it portrays that. Informal rules which prefigured the formal articulation of the "rule of truth" are central to Frei's conception of how Ruled reading came to be central to that authority of the literal sense. He points out that it did this "right from the beginning," and again, in what he calls the ascriptive (as opposed to descriptive) mode—"That 'Jesus'—not someone else or nobody in particular—is the subject, the agent and patient of these stories is said to be their crucial point, and the descriptions of events, sayings, personal qualities, and so forth, become literal by being firmly predicated of him." 16 This is the sense in which the text witnesses to the Word in a way that makes—or ought to make—the literal sense orientational for whatever other interpretive approaches or readings are addressed to the witness of Scripture. Yet Frei is not content to descriptively explicate this process as it likely unfolded, and does not belabor his exposition of that process. In fact, he is as vexingly sparse in his treatment of the details of this emergent unity of text and tradition in the early church as he is provocatively suggestive in his passing comment that while the literal reading became the plain reading for the Christian tradition, it was not "logically necessary" that it did so. 17 This is significant because it aids in illuminating the role, albeit understated in Frei's work, of what Katherine Greene-McCreight identifies as the "verbal sense." 18

Frei sketched an analogue to the verbal sense in the terms of attending to both the literary-literal and grammatical/syntactical features of

17. Katherine Greene-McCreight has done work in accounting for the processes by which the literal sense of Scripture came to have the authoritative influence that it did in the early Christian community, how that opened up space for considerable flexibility and creativity within the encompassing normative framework in the church's interpretive practices. See her Ad Litteram: How Augustine, Calvin, and Barth Read the Plain Sense of Genesis 1–3 (Peter Verlag, 1999).
the text, as well as the use of the text in context. In fact, Frei describes and endorses an account of the literal sense that entails both the grammatical/syntactical (traditionally referred to as the "verbal sense") and the literary-literal ("not only as use-in-context but as unity of grammatical/syntactical sense and signified subject"). Note how this characterization integrates constraints upon the literal sense exerted by the "grammatical/syntactical relation between the narrative sequence and what it renders descriptively" (i.e., what Frei much earlier in his career had mistakenly assimilated reductively to the general category of "realistic narrative") along with concerns about "use-in-context." In short, the text does not mean whatever the community takes it to mean (e.g., whatever uses the community makes of the text vis-à-vis its interests and purposes, or sense of its "mission"). In other words, in no way does Frei's account grant the community "the role of the ultimate arbiter of the meaning of any and all biblical texts." While the literal sense did not emerge as the plain sense for the early church as a matter of "logical necessity," it emerged nonetheless as that reading from which the rule of faith/rule of truth derived, and which the rule of faith/rule of truth further exerted constraints upon in framing what could count as truthful interpretations of Scripture. The literal sense became plain (e.g., authoritative, the traditional sense) because of what the literal sense ascribes to Jesus—what it claims in witnessing to the lordship of Jesus Christ. In fact, on Frei's account, the literal sense became authoritative as plain (i.e., as the entry level to which the other senses of the text and unavoidable external categories are accountable) in so far as it was recognized as true. As Frei put it, "The singular agent enacting the unity of human finitude and divine infinity, Jesus of Nazareth, is taken to be itself the ground, guarantee, and conveyance of the truth of the depicted enactment."

Note that Frei's description of the literal sense does not preclude asking and exploring, as possible, the factuality or the character of the truth-claims. Indeed, here we see the significance of Frei's retention of "historical reference" in that conclusive evidence against the resurrection could prove to be decisive. On this point, William Placher is especially helpful in his exposition of Frei's approach:

The stories capture through narrative a person's identity. Reading these stories, one learns who Jesus is—that is, one learns both the characteristics of his human life and the fact that that human life was somehow the self-revelation of God. Many of the episodes serve as biographical anecdotes, "true" if they illustrate his character authentically even though the particular incident they narrate never happened, and the overall shape of the

narrative portrays something of Jesus' identity. . . . Historical evidence, on this account, can refute faith. Theological reflection on the logic of the narratives as identity descriptions works out what themes or particulars of the story are crucial to Jesus' identity and, if historical evidence persuasively refuted the relevant claims, one would have to give them up—either give up this sort of theological project or give up being a Christian.\textsuperscript{22}

In principle, then, the claims of Scripture are falsifiable. However, if they are true, then they witness to events that defy exhaustive explanation or speculation (i.e., the miracle of Christ's resurrection).

Of course, Frei goes further to identify the text as an object around which Christian communities' scriptural practices cohere. This is the basis on which Christian communities' scriptural practices are answerable to the features of the text. The text, Frei says, "is not inert but exerts a pressure of its own on the inquiring reader." In other words, its uses in the sociolinguistic community of the Christian church are accountable to what the text portrays (i.e., most centrally and nonnegotiable, its witness to the life, death, and resurrection of the Jesus Christ). This adds a further dimension to Frei's account of why and how it was the literal sense that came to be taken as orientationally authoritative (i.e., "plain"). To recognize this text as Scripture is to recognize the condition of subordinating oneself to that to which the text witnesses (i.e., what it literally ascribed to this particular person Jesus—"occurrences, teaching, personal qualities and religious attributes"\textsuperscript{23}).

Now, within the parameters provided by Scripture's orientational witness, there was sometimes wide-ranging disagreement about how to understand and interpret this text. But notice that, on Frei's account, these disagreements emerged precisely because scriptural text "resisted" any reading by Christian communities that purported to exhaustively interpret it ("there can be no non-residual reading, no complete interpretation" because a "good enough text has the power to resist," Frei puts the point\textsuperscript{24}). For this reason, when such readings conflict and inspire controversy, the task of reading and consulting Scripture is not one where the readers take a vote to determine which account they agree to be authoritative. Rather, Frei describes this process as sitting down and holding each other accountable to "the features of the text." The features of the text are part and parcel to the practices of reading, consulting, and understanding Scripture. Moreover, understandings and interpretations are accountable to those features. Thus, Frei explains, "When we disagree in our interpretations of a text, it is well to check on what each of us is doing, but it would be silly to do that and not pay attention to the features.


\textsuperscript{23} Frei, "Theology and the Interpretation of Narrative," 145.

of the text or act as though it had none or as though they varied simply as our reading of them varied."\textsuperscript{25}

Given these constraints, as well as the normative constraints constitutive of the practices of reading and sense-making ("when we disagree... it is well to check on what each of us is doing"), the text does not say whatever some reader or community of readers takes it to say; its features do not simply vary as readings, or uses, of them vary. In other words, whatever some community of readers takes to be an authoritative reading of the text is accountable to the features of the text, as well as the norms constitutive of the practices in which reading and consulting this text occurs. Textual meaning is not determined simply by what some reader or community takes them to say, or however a community decides to use them. In fact, on this view, in virtue of the resistance of the textual features and normative constraints that are constitutive of practices of reading and consulting texts—and to which, Frei says, readers and interpreters hold one another accountable—the individual reader or community of readers may be wrong in how it uses Scripture; she or they may be wrong on the meaning that emerges as a result of their uses of the text. And this objective dimension of the scriptural practice and use means that one may be wrong not simply in virtue of disagreeing with the community's agreement upon the text's significance and beneficial or "useful" use.

On the bases of the complex warrants above, what Frei identified as the minimal agreement about reading the Scriptures in the Christian tradition framed wide-ranging diversity of interpretations and disagreements, and facilitated multiple approaches. Frei wrote,

First, Christian reading of Christian Scriptures must not deny the literal ascription to Jesus and not to any other person, event, time or idea, of those occurrences, teachings, personal qualities and religious attributes associated with him in the stories in which he plays a part, as well as in the other New Testament writings in which his name is invoked.... Second, no Christian reading may deny either the unity of Old and New Testaments or the congruence (which is not by any means the same as literal identity) of that unity with the ascriptive literalism of the Gospel narratives. Third, any readings not in principle in contradiction with these two rules are permissible, and two of the obvious candidates would be the various sorts of historical-critical and literary readings.\textsuperscript{26}

As we saw above, Frei identified the distinction between, yet interdependence of, the dual warrant of text and tradition for the authority of the literal sense in the early church. He had pointed, further, to the sufficient "perspicuousness" by which the Reformers thought "what the text says" through its literal rendering is adequate and authoritative in virtue of its

\textsuperscript{25} Frei, (Types, 86-87).
\textsuperscript{26} Frei, "The 'Literal Reading' of Biblical Narrative," TN, 145-46.
mode of witness to the Word. Here I would like to return for a moment to the point at which I left off my explication of Frei’s Princeton Seminary lecture of 1986. For Frei comes to the crux of the 1986 lecture by holding forth this question: “And is that Word which is witnessed to, is that not the truth, at once ontologically transcendent and historically incarnate?” He then gestures to Barth, in succession to the Reformers, as one who most insisted on this dual claim about Scripture. Frei continues with some of the most decisive lines in his later writings:

What is written is the Word of God. The divine touch on it is not that extravagance by means of which what is written, the word, might be transformed into that about which it is written. Christians do have to speak of the referent of the text. They have to speak historically and ontologically, but in each case, it must be the notion of truth or reference that must be re-shaped extravagantly, not the reading of the literal text. Any notion of truth such that that concept disallows the condescension of truth to the depiction in the text—[any notion of truth that disallows the truth's] own self-identification with, let us say, the fourfold story of Jesus of Nazareth taken as an ordinary story—has itself to be viewed with profound skepticism by a Christian interpreter. The textual world as witness to the Word of God is not identical with the latter, and yet, by the Spirit’s grace, it is “sufficient” for the witnessing.

On one hand, this paragraph comes as a burst of radiance in the wake of Frei’s meticulous engagement with Frank Kermode’s claim about the ultimate obscurity of the Gospel narratives in the pages that precede it. Here we catch a full glimpse of how concentrated Frei’s account is: reference, history, ontology—each of which must be reshaped by the literary-literal reading of the text, and even more basically, “the condescension of truth to the depiction in the text.” And yet, at the same time, this passage confronts readers with a brevity and density that cries out for further illumination. These lines come across provocatively freighted with background that remains to be elucidated and unpacked. What is clear is that Frei takes himself to have gestured toward his own account of the literal sense in which the technical and conceptual implements that readers bring to their readings of the text—as indeed they must—are nonetheless bent toward, conformed to, and oriented by the witness of the text to which the literal sense makes a primary contribution. What of “truth”? Truth does—indeed, must—condescend to the depiction of the text. And yet, at the same time, these words are fit for witnessing to the Word. What does this reflect of Frei’s later Christology?

Frei gives his readers little else to go beyond the above passage from “Conflicts in Interpretation.” And so it is with the above remarks in view

27. Frei, “Conflicts in Interpretation,” TN, 163.
that I turn to Frei’s remarks in response to the evangelical theologian Carl F. H. Henry for some intertextual illumination. Indeed, at several points in the secondary literature on Frei’s work, these remarks have been cited as perhaps his clearest on these topics in his later work.29

Frei’s claim about “the condescension of truth to the depiction in the text” echoes in his response to Henry’s critique of what he called “narrative theology” in a series of 1985 lectures at Yale. So Frei:

The truth to which we refer we cannot state apart from the biblical language which we employ to do so. And belief in the divine authority of Scripture is for me simply that we do not need more . . . Even if I say that history is first of all the facts—and I do have a healthy respect for evidence—I come across something else. Is Jesus Christ (and here I come across the problem of miracle) a “fact” like other historical facts? Should I really say that the eternal word made flesh, that is, made fact indeed, is a fact like any other? . . . [Y]es, ‘Jesus’ refers, as does any ordinary name, but “Jesus Christ” in scriptural witness does not refer ordinarily; or rather, it refers ordinarily only by the miracle of grace. And that means that I do not know the manner in which it refers, only that the ordinary language in which it is cast will miraculously suffice.30

Frei’s explicit concern in such passages is his conception of how the biblical text refers beyond itself, and in rebutting Henry’s notorious charge that, for Frei, the world of the biblical text is discrete and self-contained, putatively referring to nothing beyond itself.

And yet his response to Carl Henry parallels closely Frei’s description “the condescension of truth to the text.” For even as the text refers to the earthly Jesus (either as history-like “identity descriptions” testifying to who Jesus is,31 or referring to specific occurrences that happened in some form or fashion along the lines of what the biblical text portrays32) the very notion of reference is conformed to, and oriented by, the textual witness by which the risen Lord encounters and makes himself plain to us here and now, and this, Frei says, “by the miracle of grace.”33 We have here a claim, tentatively stated, admittedly unsystematic, still somewhat inchoate, that Scripture gives us not just any witness, or a witness among other possible witnesses, but “the witness without parallel.” It is the in-

31. Again, see, Placher as quoted above, Narratives of a Vulnerable God, 92–97 (here 92, 93).
dispensable means by which Jesus encounters us in the mystery of the resurrection. In this we find further illumination of “the condescension of truth to the depiction in the text.“

And yet even these remarks call for further elucidation. In fact, the degree to which these lines illuminate what I describe as the orientational—and, indeed, high—Christology in Frei’s latest writings are further illuminated by a little article written just before Frei’s death. This is an article far less attended to in the literature. The article was published the year following Frei’s death in the *Journal of Anglican and Episcopal History* under the title “How It All Began: On the Resurrection of Christ.” There, Frei has this to say (I will quote these all-too-frequently unattended-to passages at length):

The mystery to which the New Testament accounts testify—or which they render for us as texts inadequate yet adequate—is the continuity of the identity of Jesus through the real, complete disruption of death. He is the same before and after death. We know nothing of a reversal of the physical conditions of full death once it has set in; moreover, we also know nothing of a human identity that is not physical. The New Testament accounts do not invite us to speculate on a specific solution to the quandary of a live physical presence after death, nor do they answer the question of how the person raised can be one with the One who raised him from the dead. The point of the stories is simply to bear witness to the fact that Jesus, raised from the dead, was the same person, the same identity as before. That is the central Christian affirmation, vigorously reaffirmed both in the Creeds and in this article with its stress on the physical nature of the risen Jesus—a physicality that is indispensable if he is to be efficacious on our behalf. The great Patristic saying, “What he did not assume [i.e., anything less than full humanity], that he could not save” is as true of him in the resurrection as in his life before death. That, stated straightforwardly, is what affirmation that the resurrection happened in the first place to Jesus, not to the Christian community, is all about. It is Jesus Christ who remains capable of saving us in our mortal condition, who continues to be efficacious on our behalf. In his full and constant identity as Jesus of Nazareth, he is God’s Word in our midst. He remains himself. . . . Even more startling than the continuity of the identity of Jesus through death and resurrection is the affirmation associated with it in Christian faith: his identity as this singular, continuing individual, Jesus of Nazareth, includes humankind in its singularity. He is the representative and inclusive person. . . . The miraculous rise [of faith out of unfaith] . . . is accounted for by the miraculous inclusion of us all vicariously in the singular identity of Jesus, the fact that it was his very identity, his being, to give himself efficaciously on our behalf. He enacted his identity on the cross and it was confirmed in his resurrection. He was and is what he did for us. Because

34. Frei, “Response to “Narrative Theology,”” 212.
we are comprehended in his self-identifying action ("we were there") and his resurrection includes us, he is the ground of our faith and the source of its arising in us through the New Testament message, as it did in the early Christian community... [T]he message and miracle of faith are accounted for by the very character, and are therefore a function of Jesus' being and his resurrection from the dead; and so Jesus and faith, as well as reality and text, belong together as the miracle of resurrection. (204-5)

While avoiding the temptation to overread this passage, I find it to shed further light on the more obscure passages from writings and lectures that I sifted above. Does Frei here demonstrate any further development toward the kind of "high Christology" that he took himself to be articulating as far back as his "Remarks on a Theological Proposal"?36 To put the questions differently: in what sense do his remarks here move beyond the Christological account that Frei set forth in The Identity of Jesus Christ?

What are the crucial differences and points of expansion? Notice the difference in the "pattern of exchange." Here Professor Hunsinger has meticulously unpacked the ways that what Frei took to be a "high Christological" account in Identity left many things unspoken, and perhaps altogether unattended to—at least in so far as Frei took himself to be articulating a "high Christology." For instance, in Identity the "pattern of exchange" is "unidirectional." In other words, while Frei persistently says that Jesus takes on the guilt of others in exchange for his own purity, Frei does not explicitly say anything regarding the opposite direction—in which Jesus's purity become the purity of others before God. "Yet without such a movement in the opposite direction, how can Jesus' self-sacrificing purity... have universal meaning and saving power, not symbolically but realistically, and therefore as a finished, unrepeatable, and vicarious work?"37 Do we get a sense from Frei's exposition of the fourth article above of how Frei's thinking came to respond to such a concern?

We have here the emphasis upon Jesus as a particular and unsubstitutable human being, and fully human identity, that Frei emphasizes time and again throughout The Identity of Jesus Christ. Frei's language about Jesus "enacting his identity" I take to be consistent with Frei's claim that "individual, specific, unsubstitutable identity of Jesus" is available in what Jesus did (i.e., who he is, is in what he did; "the person is in the work, and the work is in the person"). We also have a distinct statement about the inclusion of humanity in Christ's humanity, and thus in his crucifixion and resurrection as well (as Frei puts it, "we were there"). Clearly, Frei does not go so far as to state anything close to the claim that in Christ's "exchanging his purity for our guilt, his purity becomes ours

before God."38 What he does say is that "[Christ's] full self-identification with us is perpetual and not temporary. . . . [which] entails the consequence that we are judged and are to be judged by none other than the one who is our saving representative. . . . [O]ur common Judge is no ruthless stranger appearing suddenly out of an eternal nowhere but the one who bore the universal burden on our behalf, both when we were victimized and when we were victimizers."39

Secondly, what he says follows the Creeds in affirming, as Frei puts it, "the eternal identity of Christ and God" (205). Does this evince some identifiable motion away from the distant echoes of adoptionism that haunted Frei's use of intention-action description in The Identity of Jesus Christ—particularly the impression created there that it is not until Christ's resurrection that God's presence fully coincides with that of Jesus?40

If we identify some significant difference on these points between Frei's account in The Identity of Jesus Christ and passages such as these, it must be admitted that here Frei is explicitly incorporating attention to the Creeds and the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England as the bases for these claims. And that contrasts with the restrained hermeneutical basis that he focuses upon in The Identity of Jesus Christ.

In fact, some might raise the concern that the article that I am belaboring here (aside from being a mere five pages, and again, a condensed series of paragraphs) is, fundamentally, Frei's exposition and elucidation of Article 4 of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England—the article on the resurrection of Jesus. That being the case, we should not be surprised that Frei writes here of the resurrection with a pointedness perhaps not paralleled anywhere else in his writings. However, an inquirer might press, do we really have grounds to take this as Frei's articulation of his own position? Could such a concern be one of the reasons that this piece of Frei's has received relatively so little attention by those who have worked either to charitably explicate, or to finally set aside, Frei's work in the intervening twenty-five years?

In my view, the passage above is exemplary of the recurring patterns in Frei's scholarship, and nicely models Frei's thinking in microcosm. In this passage—and throughout the piece itself—Frei explicates the fourth article by way of an ad hoc methodological formation of types—of four different kinds of views of the resurrection of Christ. The first view Frei identifies as "mythological," in which resurrection symbolically reflects the rise of faith in the followers of Jesus, whatever Jesus's own personal fate. There was despair, and now there is faith. Frei's second view is a kind which posits the New Testament accounts as "an absolutely accurate record of the things that actually happened when Jesus was raised

38. This concern is raised by Hunsinger, TN, 248.
from the dead." The third view Frei describes "spiritualizes" the New Testament accounts as so-called resurrection appearances. In short, these accounts are not to be taken literally. Whether the reports are true or false (e.g., Was the tomb physically empty? Were the physical details of the resurrection as the text depicts?) are not matters of importance. Of this type, Frei says, the reality is more important than the text, and the two are not that closely related.

Frei's articulation of the fourth view is saturated with the language and phrasing that runs throughout his own writings in the final two years of his work. Here the texts are taken to "mean what they say, so that their subject is indeed bodily resurrected Jesus." Here "the miracle of the resurrection...is [taken to be] a real event...[Though] human depiction and conception are [ultimately] inadequate [to depict and account for it]...the literal description is the best that can be offered...Text and reality are adequate, indeed, indispensable to each other but not identical..." and again, "[T]he literal account of the text is adequate to the reality of the events by divine grace." In short, Frei's characterization of the fourth type is less Frei tipping his hand than it is Frei laying his cards out on the table. In other words, this is Frei's view, articulated far more clearly and succinctly than in his response to Carl Henry, or in the dense passages in the final paragraphs of his Princeton Seminary lecture of 1986. And while Frei does not explicitly endorse it in first-person terms here, the pattern of exposition apparent here recurs strategically throughout his work.

Clearly, Frei's stated purpose is to elucidate the key claims, points of contrast, and similarities of each type vis-à-vis the others. And yet by virtue of the ad hoc typological exercise, Frei simultaneously, and subtly, executes a polemic. In other words, Frei is not merely laying out an array of views for the reader to survey, and perhaps be edified by this exercise in explication and elucidation. Frei takes pains to demonstrate how the view that may bear closest affinities with his preferred view on crucial points has its ostensive strengths accounted for and its terminal deficiencies overcome by his own. The first view—the mythological view or a Bultmann—is both "embraced" and then "reversed" by the fourth view. Both view a "vital connection (though not identity) between texts and reality of the resurrection"; and for both, the "miracle of the resurrection is the miraculous rise of faith out of unfaith" in the present and future, as we see it in the past in virtue of the text's testimony. And yet, in the first view, Jesus and the rise of faith are represented as a function of the message. In the fourth view, faith arises from Jesus's being and his resurrection from the dead—and so, says Frei, "Jesus and faith, as well as reality and text, belong together as the miracle of resurrection." It is in the subtlety of this

42. Ibid., 203.
43. Ibid., 205.
polemic that Frei's own position finds succinct and powerful articulation in a roundabout way. Here we have a somewhat clearer characterization of what Frei means when he invokes the notion of "Christology" in his writings at the time of his death.

Clearly, it is safe to say that these passages (along with those collected and posthumously set forth in Types of Christian Theology) are "of a piece" with Frei's earlier claims. Do we not see here some evidence of a more developed, more robust Christology? Admittedly, Frei gives us very little to go on in these writings and lectures at the time leading up to his untimely passing. And I do not aim to press such a case too far on the basis of such slender passages, albeit passages freighted with content to be unpacked and explicated at the point that Frei died. Nonetheless, such passages—especially when read across Frei's late writings and lectures, and in light of their cumulative effect—evince important development and enrichment of Frei's Christology—Christology which was a motivation, and which he labored to maintain as an orientational concern from his earliest essays until the time of his death.