

How much could one make of the claim that, even as for the Greeks, what is decisive is who God *is*, so for the Jews, what is decisive is what God *does*? Perhaps this question should be asked slightly differently: How much could one make of the claim that, even as for the Greeks, what is decisive about a thing is what it *is*, so for the Jews, what is decisive about a thing is what it *does*? In any case, what I want to be able to say is that the doctrine of the trinity is implied by Christian faith and witness as such only conditionally, not unconditionally.

The crucial question christologically, given that the question christology answers is also and most fundamentally the existential question, is not whether Jesus is man or God, but whether Jesus is *an* authority, even, possibly, *the* (primary) authority, or the explicit primal ontic *source* of authority. Clearly, the earliest explicit christologies, whose assumed concepts were such as “Christ,” “Son of Man,” “Son of God,” “Son of David,” “King,” etc., intended to assert that Jesus, although a man, is indeed the authorizing source, even though, given their concepts, they did not and could not say that Jesus is God. In fact, relative to the conceptual assumptions of these earliest christologies, the question whether Jesus is God didn’t so much as arise. Consequently, they can’t be rightly interpreted as “low” christologies that answered it negatively—any more than Paul, say, can be rightly interpreted as a subordinationist in his christology simply because he speaks of Jesus as the one Lord *through* whom are all things and *through* whom we exist, as distinct from the one God the Father *from* whom are all things and *for* whom we exist (1 Cor 8:6 ff.). But this means that, relative to these same assumptions, there neither was nor could have been any doctrine of the trinity, even though the motives that, given other conceptual assumptions, eventually led to the doctrine need by no means to have been absent. (Of course, the question of their presence or absence is about as difficult as the question of the presence or absence of subordinationism in the christology of Paul.)

The conceptual assumptions of the doctrine of the trinity allow for a plurality of distinctions with respect to the being of God, understood relatively to one another as higher and lower, greater and less, and so on. Given such conceptual assumptions, together with the Christian belief that Jesus, though

truly a man, is not a mere authority, not even the primary authority, for Christian existence, but, rather, the explicit primal, ontic source authorizing it, the orthodox doctrine of the trinity is the predictable form that this belief will take.

Another way of saying this is that the doctrine of the trinity not only necessarily presupposes radical monotheism, but also assumes a monotheism involving more or less distinct divine hypostases, through which the one God is effectively related to the world, and the world to this one God. Jewish radical monotheism, accordingly, simply could not have provided the conceptual assumptions of Christian trinitarianism.

In any case, Geertz's principle is confirmed: the explicit, primal ontic source called "Jesus (the) Christ" authorizes an understanding of one's own existence in relation to ultimate reality and an understanding of ultimate reality in relation to one's own existence. Thus it authorizes, by implication, both an ethic and a metaphysic, each implying the other and sustaining its authority.

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