

## *On "Truth"*

"Truth" may be said to have both a logical and an ontological meaning, in that it is properly used to qualify both a belief insofar as it is warranted by reality and reality insofar as it warrants a belief. So the two senses of "truth" are correlative.

Within this correlation, however, logical truth depends on ontological truth, rather than the other way around. What one believes about reality depends for its logical truth on what is real in a way in which what is real does not depend for its ontological truth on what one believes about it.

For this reason, the Christian belief that Jesus is the Christ depends for its (logical) truth on his really being the Christ in a way in which his really being the Christ does not depend for its (ontological) truth on Christians believing that he is. Otherwise put: unless certain things are really the case, the belief that Jesus is the Christ is and must be false, whereas these same things could very well be the case in reality even if there were no belief that Jesus is the Christ.

In this sense, or to this extent, any christology that is at all adequate is and must be an ontological christology. Provided the utterance, "Jesus is the Christ," expresses not only a belief but a belief that is true, certain things are and must be really the case that warrant this utterance as expressing a true belief. But the crucial question is what, exactly, these things are. My answer may be briefly summarized as follows:

"Jesus is the Christ" expresses a logically true belief and Jesus is the Christ is ontologically true reality, provided that the word explicitly re-presented decisively through Jesus is the word implicitly presented in existence as such by the encompassing mystery. This means, on the one hand, that the Jesus who is believed to be the Christ is the decisive re-presentation, or presenting again, a second time, explicitly through concepts and symbols, of the same gift and demand of faith in God that never cease to be present in our existence as soon

and as long as we exist and act humanly at all. It means, on the other hand, conversely, that the possibility of authentic faith implicitly presented to each of us in our actual existence is none other than the possibility of faith in God explicitly re-presented to all of us through Jesus Christ.

My contention is that, if this identity is and must be really the case if “Jesus is the Christ” is to be logically true and Jesus is the Christ ontologically true, this identity, nevertheless, is the sufficient as well as the necessary condition of such christological truth. (One reason for contending this is that the earliest christological titles, as Klaus Berger has argued, were used precisely to express the decisive authority of Jesus as *the* prophet of God, etc. To be sure, I find it necessary to think and speak of Jesus as more than *an* authority, even *the* authority, because he is, in reality, the explicit, primal, ontic *source* of authority. But Willi Marxsen makes a point similar to Berger’s when he argues, less objectionably, that all the christological titles re-present Jesus as, in one way or another, “the mouth of God.”) Thus, for example, neither Jesus’ own believing the word that I believe through him nor God’s specially intervening to propose that I believe it through him is a *sufficient* warrant for my believing it. Jesus could be mistaken in his belief, and, as Luther says, not even God’s saying something is so is sufficient to make it so. On the other hand, neither Jesus’ believing the word I am to believe nor God’s specially intervening to propose it is a *necessary* warrant for my believing it. Even if Jesus didn’t believe it, I can and should believe it, provided it is worthy of belief; and the same is true whether or not God specially intervenes to propose it for my belief.

The question I need to reflect on further is whether, or to what extent, both the Alexandrian and the Antiochene christologies as well as the Chalcedonian settlement that tried to compose their differences and express their legitimate motives are excluded by the preceding line of thought, in much the same way in which, arguably, virgin birth and preexistence as well as sinless existence are also excluded. My suspicion, certainly, is that they are, indeed, excluded—that, understood simply as (seriously inadequate) ways of asserting that the Christian witness here and now confronting me is authorized by God, in that its primal

authorizing source is God's own gift and demand made fully explicit, all these ways of talking about Jesus are more or less adequate and important, and even legitimate; whereas insofar as they are understood to assert anything other or more than this, what they assert is, at best, neither necessary nor sufficient to warrant the truth of the christological assertion and, at worst, illegitimate, insofar as it can only mislead as to the true character of faith and its ground.

n. d.; rev. 25 September 2002; 19 July 2006