

According to the usual account emerging from historical-critical study, there was a development in christology whose traces can be more or less clearly discerned in the New Testament writings. Put very generally, the result of this development was such that the man Jesus, who either knew himself to be the promised king of the last days appointed by God or else was held to be such by the earliest Christian community, became a heavenly, divine being, to whom one ascribed preexistence, who was already active in the creation of the world, who became man, died, and rose again, ascended into heaven, and was there enthroned at the right hand of God. As such, he was worshipped as God by the church, was understood to hear prayers and to dispense miraculous powers, and was expected to come again, to hold judgment and to vanquish the cosmic powers, death and the devil, that are hostile to God. The course of this development, which is characterized by such concepts as, "Messiah" and "Son of David," "Son of God" and "Son of Man," "Kyrios" and "Logos," as well as by the stories of Jesus' miraculous birth, transfiguration, resurrection, ascension, and so on, is well known and need not be detailed here. Suffice it to say that its end was the injunction that "we ought so to think of Jesus Christ as of God" (2 Clem 1:1).

But now, as accurate as this account may be in principle, the important discontinuity to which it draws attention may only too easily obscure a more fundamental—and, I believe, more important—continuity. Even as the discontinuity in question is twofold—with respect to how Jesus is thought and spoken about, whether as a human being appointed by God or as a divine being who became man, and with respect to the conceptualities and terminologies employed in thinking and speaking about him, whether Palestinian or Hellenistic—so, too, is there a twofold continuity.

In the first place, whether Jesus is thought and spoken about as a human being whom God appointed or as a divine being who became man, he is in any case understood as the explicit primal ontic source of all that is divinely authorized. On the most probable reconstruction of Jesus' own ministry, he may be said to have had the same understanding of himself at least implicitly. Although he certainly appears as a man, as a prophet and teacher, and offers no

explicit teaching concerning his own person, he nevertheless implies a christology insofar as he calls for a definitive decision in face of his own word and person. This he does by implicitly claiming to have been sent by God and thus to be the explicit primal ontic source of all that is divinely authorized. Thus, whether or not he knows himself to be the Messiah is of no consequence, because in either case he definitely *implies* a christology in this sense, and when the earliest community calls him the Messiah, it but expresses in its own way that it has understood him and has made the decision for which he calls. The proclaimer has to become the one proclaimed because he is experienced implicitly, if not explicitly, to be the explicit primal ontic source of all that is authorized by God. Whether Jesus did or did not so understand himself, implicitly or explicitly, he certainly is so understood throughout the whole course of christological development from the earliest community onwards, whether he is thought and spoken of as the man whom God has made Messiah or rather as the God who assumed the nature of a man.

Then, in the second place, whether the conceptualities and terminologies in which Jesus is thought and spoken about are Palestinian or Hellenistic, they are in any case employed for no other purpose than to express just this understanding of him as the explicit primal ontic source of all that is divinely authorized. As different, even contradictory, as what is thought and said about him in these two main types of concepts and terms certainly is if it is understood as having some other (e.g., intellectual) purpose, as soon as all the different thoughts and statements are understood as more or less adequate ways of expressing one and the same understanding of him as the explicit primal ontic source of authority, the underlying continuity becomes apparent and they are seen to be “interchangeable” (Marxsen).

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