

1. It is very important to stress the purely formal character of explicit christology, such as that of the Gnostic myth of the redeemer, even as one must stress the purely formal character of eschatology, or, more exactly, the apocalyptic announcement of the end of the age. Whether Jesus is conceived (with the synoptic tradition) as proclaiming the imminent coming of God's reign in such a way as to imply the decisive significance of his own witness; or whether he is conceived (with the Fourth Gospel) as explicitly proclaiming the decisive significance of his own person—in either case, one has a formal structure whose material meaning is determined solely by Jesus himself. Only he himself in his meaning for us—in the possibility for understanding ourselves and leading our lives that he decisively re-presents and authorizes—gives either the formal framework of apocalyptic or the formal framework of explicit christology its distinctive material meaning. This is why everything, in the last analysis, does indeed depend on coming to know who Jesus is (*The Point of Christology*: 42).

2. Of course, relative to the most abstract possible formulation of the religious problematic—as, say, concern about the ultimate meaning of one's existence—both the explicit christology of the Gnostic myth and apocalyptic eschatology are themselves material, rather than purely formal. But relative to Jesus, to the specific gift and demand that he signifies for human life, even these relatively material frameworks have the purely formal function of locating the significance of Jesus in the existential context of the religious problematic. They say, in effect, if you want to understand Jesus in the only really appropriate way, you must allow him to signify for you the answer to your own existential or religious question, whatever the conceptuality or symbolism in which it may be formulated. Otherwise put, you cannot really come to terms with Jesus unless you allow him to answer this existential question for you in a final, decisive way.

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