

E. P. Sanders uses the term, “the viceroy of God’s kingdom,” to interpret the early Christian community’s understanding of Jesus’ role in the history of salvation. Upon reflection, such usage seems to me apt, not only historically, but systematically as well.

According to the dictionary, “viceroy” designates a person appointed to rule a country or province as the deputy, or representative, of the sovereign. The cognate terms, “vicerealty” and “vicereignty,” thus refer to the dignity, office, or period of office of such a deputy, or representative, ruler.

Assuming the imagery of “reign” and “rule” so used as to yield the notion of “God’s reign” or “God’s rule,” one could certainly do worse than to apply the term “viceroy of God” to Jesus, as functionally equivalent to, and interchangeable with, other christological titles. Indeed, Paul’s distinction between “*theos*” and “*kyrios*” appears to express precisely the distinction between the sovereign ruler and the viceroy of the sovereign, through whom, as through a deputy or representative, the sovereign rules. Of course, Paul is careful to make clear that there is no difference in jurisdiction of the sovereign and the viceroy; the extent or range of the rule in both cases is strictly universal and all-inclusive—“*all things*” (1 Cor 8:6 ff.). Even so, the vicerealty, or vicereignty, is limited to the period between the viceroy’s appointment to the office and his surrender of it (Rom 1:4; I Cor 15:24-28).

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