

On A Priori Christology

How far could one go toward developing an appropriate a priori christology if one were to say that all christological predicates ("Christ," "Lord," "Son of God," etc.) properly function to identify the subject of which they are predicated as the explicit primal ontic source of all that is divinely authorized?

My guess is, pretty far. For consider:

1. Clearly, revelation, which is surely a central concept for any a priori christology, must be analyzed in terms of the distinction between implicit and explicit primal source of all that is divinely authorized. (Actually, one could say that this distinction is parallel to that between original and ^{deceptive} divine revelation. But I should think that one could reasonably argue that the second distinction is only verbally different from the first.)

2. The concept, "explicit primal ontic source of all that is divinely authorized," is sufficient to interpret the widest variety of christological predicates, from the earliest Jewish ones, which do not entail any claim that Jesus is divine, to the later Hellenistic ones, which do entail a claim for his divinity. For clearly, whether conceived as nondivine or as divine, the explicit primal ontic source of all that is divinely authorized is on a qualitatively different level from anything and everything authorized thereby. Thus if, as nondivine, it is represented as in turn being authorized by a more ultimate source, the concept of authorization is no longer being used univocally with its use to characterize the authorization of subordinate sources of authority (i.e., authorities) by the explicit primal ontic source. Rather, it is being used *analogically*, with the result that the nondivine explicit primal ontic source of all that is divinely authorized nevertheless belongs, not on the human side of the relation between God and human beings generally, but on *God's* side, in a way in which none of them, whatever her or his authority, may be said to do. (I am thinking here especially of Klaus Berger's analysis of the way in which the same concepts and terms are used to define the role of apostles that are used to define the role of Christ. My point is that, in the nature of the case, the terms may be the

same, but their uses in the two cases, and hence the concepts they express, are *not* simply the same but sufficiently different to be analogical.) So, too, even in cases where, although divine, the explicit primal ontic source is nevertheless represented as in some way subordinate (e.g., as "Lord" in relation to "God [the Father]"). If it is understood to be somehow "sent," "commissioned," or "delegated" by the high God, the concept of being sent, commissioned, delegated, etc. is an analogical, not a univocal, concept.

3. But it seems just as clear to me that this concept of an explicit primal ontic source of authority is also capable of interpreting all merely implicit christology—whether Jesus' own or that of the earliest church, as attested by the Jesus-kerygma. For the test of whether christology is present, implicitly if not explicitly, is whether Jesus is at least implied to be just such ^{such} a source of authority, either by a call to decision or by the response to such a call.

26 June 1980; rev. 1 March 1999