

1. I see more clearly now than before that my issue—or, at any rate, one of my major issues—with the usual christological options, classical and revisionary, is with the a priori christologies that they respectively presuppose. What I take to be the third question that a formal analysis of the christological assertion has to clarify—namely, the question as to the conditions that have to be fulfilled in order for an appropriate formulation of the christological assertion to be credible—is, in effect, the question of what a priori christology is rightly presupposed by an a posteriori christology that claims to be credible as well as appropriate. (There is thus a close parallel between the analysis of the second question, as the question about the formal identity of the subject of the assertion, and the analysis of this third question—even as both of these analyses closely parallel the analysis of the first question about the question that the christological assertion answers.)

2. Assuming that a necessary condition of any a posteriori christology's being credible is that its application to Jesus of the a priori christology that it presupposes can be grounded somehow in common human experience, one has a basis for evaluating alternative christological options. If the application of a given a priori christology to Jesus can, at least in principle, be experientially grounded, the resulting a posteriori christology has a clear advantage over any such christology, the application of whose a priori christology to Jesus cannot, even in principle, be grounded in common human experience.

3. A problem, however, with both of the usual christological options, revisionary as well as classical, is that their claims as to the conditions that must be fulfilled in order for the christological assertion to be credibly or truly asserted are, in the nature of the case, groundless, because they cannot be sufficiently grounded in experience to warrant asserting them.

4. That and why this is so in the case of the usual revisionary christology I have demonstrated in *The Point of Christology* and other writings. According to this usual view, Jesus can be truly or credibly asserted to be the Christ, etc. if, and only if, he was uniquely man of God, i.e., was perfectly obedient to God, faithful

to God, conscious of God, or what have you. But in the nature of the case, that this was really so of Jesus can never be established either in fact or in principle. No experience of Jesus that anyone could possibly have could warrant making this assertion about him. Therefore, the particular a priori christology that the usual revisionary approach argues from cannot be shown to apply to the particular case of Jesus any more than to any other particular case.

5. But the same is true of the very different a priori christology from which classical christology typically argues in holding that Jesus can be credibly or truly said to be the Christ if, and only if, he was uniquely God in man. Here, too, there is no way of experientially grounding the application of such a christology to Jesus, any more than to any other person or event. This becomes evident as soon as one recognizes that any attempt thus to apply it is a special case of the same kind of reasoning by which one has to proceed in order to establish that an event is a miracle, in the usual sense of a divine intervention, a unique exercise of divine causality, over and above that exercised in any event whatever. Granted the occurrence of an event sufficiently unusual to allow for the question whether it has been uniquely caused by God, by way of just such a special divine intervention, the difficulty is that there is no convincing argument that the answer to this question should be affirmative. Just as one could have all the experience of Jesus that a human being could conceivably have and still not be able to say that his was a life of perfect obedience, perfect faithfulness, and so on, so one could never find any grounds in even the most exhaustive experience of Jesus that can be conceived for saying that he himself and what he thought, said, and did was uniquely caused by God. To be able to read this *out of* one's experience of Jesus is to have first had to read it *into* one's experience—or, in other words, to argue in a circle, assuming the very thing one purports to be establishing. So in the case of classical christology, also, what one finds is an a priori christology being asserted of Jesus without there being any grounds in experience sufficient for asserting it.

6. By contrast, the a priori christology for which I, in effect, argue is such that its application to Jesus, or to anyone else, can in principle be experientially

grounded. Jesus can be experienced claiming to be the decisive re-presentation of the meaning of ultimate reality for us —if not immediately, then mediately, through the prior experience of others. If, then, his claim is valid, if the meaning of ultimate reality for us is, in fact, the meaning that he decisively re-presents, then he can be experienced to be the Christ, assuming that what it means to be the Christ is to be the decisive re-presentation of the meaning of ultimate reality for us. In other words, according to my a priori christology, *x* is truly or credibly said to be the Christ if, and only if, the possibility of existence that *x* is experienced as re-presenting is, in fact, the possibility of authentic existence, given the structure of ultimate reality in itself as implicitly presented in our experience of our existence simply as such. But whether Jesus is the Christ in this sense, whether the possibility he decisively re-presents is our authentic possibility, can be grounded in principle by our experience of him and of the existential truth about human existence as mutually confirming.

7. Of course, the claims of the usual christological options can also be grounded in this same experience insofar as these claims are understood to be relatively inadequate and misleading ways of saying what my a priori christology allows one to say of Jesus—namely, that he is the decisive re-presentation of the meaning of ultimate reality for us. On the other hand, in the usual sense in which they are understood, both of the usual claims could be false even though the christological assertion itself could still be true. (There is, obviously, a parallel here to how one properly understands traditional claims for the divine inspiration and inerrancy of scripture, or, for that matter, claims about the infallibility of the church and the irreframability of its teachings. As long as all such claims are regarded as explanations of a peculiar kind, they are experientially groundless. On the other hand, they can be seen to be grounded in experience, at least in principle, as soon as they are understood, not as explaining the occurrence of certain facts, but as expressing the decisive existential significance of these facts, even if in relatively inadequate and misleading ways.)

8. All of this scarcely goes beyond the level of insight already attained by Bultmann's analysis of what christological formulations are and are not all about.

Already in his analysis there is the clear recognition that the christology implied by Jesus' summons to decision for or against his word/person cannot take the form of "theoretical observation at all," either as "speculation about a heavenly being" or as "the construction of a so-called messianic consciousness." (In parallel passages, Bultmann speaks of the second, significantly, as "a character sketch of [Jesus'] personality as having a messianic consciousness," or as a view of "his person as a 'personality,'" "in terms of his character as a hero.") Without so much as mentioning "a priori christology," Bultmann is, in effect, talking about precisely that—rejecting the two usual options, both "transcendentalist" and "modern," and clearly implying a third option, according to which an adequate christology is a matter of explicating the decision for a person or event, of obedience to the demand re-presented by the person or event, of obedience that lets one's own situation be disclosed as new through the person or event—in short, a christology that itself, as he says, is, in the first instance, witness or personal address.

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