

My understanding is that the theme of your discussions this year is "Christology and Philosophy." While I entirely share your interest in this theme and am more than willing to discuss it with you in our time together, it so happens that this is not the theme in connection with which most of the critical discussion of my christological reflections has been conducted. On the contrary, to judge from practically any of the reviews of The Point of Christology that I have seen, the issues on which my work most directly bears are the historical rather than the philosophical issues that christology raises.

Accordingly, it has seemed to me only appropriate to use these brief opening remarks to react to an impression of my work to which more than one reviewer has given expression. In doing so, however, I have no interest in predetermining the course of our subsequent discussion. As I have said, I am quite open to discussing the philosophical issues on which my work also has a bearing. But I do want to take this occasion to correct what I can only regard as a seriously mistaken impression of my christological intentions, since I should not want our discussion here to be hampered by any such impression.

The impression to which I refer has been expressed with particular clarity by John Hick, in his review article in the July 1984 issue of The Journal of Religion. As is clear simply from the title of his article, Hick takes my book to raise, above all, the question of "the foundation of Christianity"; and by formulating his subtitle as the question, "Jesus or the apostolic message?" he indicates his own answer to this question in contrast

to what he takes to be mine. In his view, "There is . . . a dilemma. Either Christian faith is a response to the life and teaching of Jesus, as both traditional and revisionary christologies have maintained, though with differing views as to what Jesus in fact taught; or Christian faith is a sharing of the faith of the church and in particular of the Scripture-producing church of a generation or two after Jesus. Ogden's way with this dilemma is to make Christian faith a response to the 'apostolic' kerygma. . ." (368). Thus "Ogden is in effect proposing that we should no longer mean by Christianity the movement of continuing discipleship to Jesus Christ (who was in the view of many God Incarnate and in the view of some a supremely great human servant of God), a movement which repeatedly renews and reforms itself by reference back to the person and teaching of Jesus. Instead we should mean by Christianity a mélange of ideas, symbols, and myths expressed by second-and-third-generation Christians and should assume that these are divinely authorized. But why should we assume this? Simply because a Christian is, according to Ogden, one who makes this assumption. And, to add to the paradox, although a Christian is one who assumes that the 'apostolic' preaching is divinely authored, Ogden does not recommend that we accept that teaching as it is. We only have the New Testament mythology, and yet we are to demythologize it!" (366).

Now my reason for citing these passages is not to go into the peculiar features of Hick's criticism. I cite them only insofar as they are representative of an impression of my intentions that several critics have voiced in their reviews--to the effect that, in my view, the foundation of Christianity is not Jesus but the witness of the apostles. I should have to

say quite bluntly that, so far as I am concerned, one could get such an impression of my intentions only by ignoring statements that are pivotal in my own formulation of them. In fact, it would not be too much to say, I think, that my whole point in The Point of Christology is to show that and why the alternatives between which Hick and others insist we must choose are simply not our only alternatives. Imagine how I find myself reacting, then, when one reviewer after the other misrepresents me as doing nothing more than arguing for one of these conventional alternatives against the other!

Anyone who has read my book with care will have recognized, I believe, that nothing is more fundamental to the argument it attempts to set forth than the distinction I make between "the empirical-historical Jesus," on the one hand, and "the existential-historical Jesus," on the other. The point of the distinction, obviously, is to distinguish between two different ways of thinking and speaking about the historical figure whom we are wont to identify by the proper name "Jesus." Thus if the different terms "empirical" and "existential" serve to express the differences between these two ways, the use of the same term "historical" together with both of them is intended to indicate the one important respect in which they are the same--insofar, namely, as they have to do, not with different facts of the past, but with one and the same fact, the fact of Jesus.

In other words, in my view, to ask about the existential-historical Jesus by asking about the meaning of Jesus for us here and now in the present is to be related to Jesus as a historical figure just as surely as to ask about the empirical-historical Jesus by asking about the being of Jesus in himself then and there in the past. This is so because, as I explain in the

book, one could not ask either question at all apart from particular historical experience of Jesus—mediate if not immediate. But because Jesus could not be experienced sufficiently to ask either question apart from particular historical experience, we today, who are not his immediate contemporaries, could not possibly have such experience except mediately through those who were, and their successors. Since it is also only mediately through their experience that we can ever hope to answer either question, we must have recourse sooner or later to the witness of such immediate contemporaries, so far as we can retrieve it. For all practical purposes, this means that we must eventually recur to the earliest stratum of Christian witness to Jesus that we today can reconstruct.

I maintain, however, that the function of this earliest stratum of witness is significantly different in answering each of the two questions. Whereas, in answering the second question about the being of Jesus in himself, it functions as a primary empirical-historical source, in answering the first question about the meaning of Jesus for us, it functions as a primary existential-historical authority. Of course, even the earliest stratum of witness is a primary empirical-historical source for the witness of faith of whatever community bore it, not for the being of Jesus in himself, for which it is, at best, a secondary source. And this explains why, as I argue, any attempt to answer the second question is and must be peculiarly problematic. In the absence of any primary empirical-historical source, any control on inferences from the earliest witness to the being of Jesus in himself must first be reconstructed by just such inferences, which themselves, then, are either uncontrolled or controlled by some instance unfit to control them as empirical-historical inferences.

But whether or not it is historically authentic, the earliest stratum of witness is the primary existential-historical authority for the community of faith and witness constituted by it; and, as such, it expresses the meaning of Jesus for us to which this community exists to bear witness, and it is by it, accordingly, that the faith and witness of anyone who would belong to this community and represent it must be authorized, causatively as well as normatively. On the other hand, whether or not a witness that conforms to this earliest witness is also true or credible is an existential-historical, rather than an empirical-historical, question; and so any reasoned answer to it requires not only empirical-historical inquiry to reconstruct the witness and existentialist interpretation to determine its meaning, but also metaphysical and ethical reflection on the necessary presuppositions and implications of the witness for belief and action.

Such, briefly summarized, is the argument of *The Point of Christology* insofar as it bears on the question of the foundation of Christianity. But because this is the argument that I develop, the basic issue between it and a position such as Hick's is not at all as he represents it. It is not at all the issue of *whether* Jesus is the foundation of Christianity; it is entirely the issue of *what* Jesus is rightly said to be this foundation. Is it, as Hick and so many others contend, the Jesus whom we first come to know only more or less probably by empirical-historical inquiry back behind the witness of the apostles as well as all other Christians who follow after them? Or is it, rather, as I and a few others contend, *the Jesus whom we* already know most certainly through the same apostolic witness as well as all later Christian witnesses insofar as they conform to that of the apostles? Either way, it is clearly Jesus, and none other, with whom we have to do, even if, in the one way exactly as the other, our experience of Jesus today is and must be a

mediate, not an immediate, experience. Nevertheless, there remains the issue—and it is a rock-bottom, fundamental issue—between the kind of position Hick represents, for which the apostolic witness that mediates our experience of Jesus is forced to function as the primary empirical-historical source from which Jesus himself must still be reconstructed, and my position, for which this same earliest witness is allowed to function as the primary existential-historical authority through which Jesus is even now to be encountered. In the one case, we have to do with the empirical-historical Jesus in his being in himself then and there in the past; in the other case, we have to do with the existential-historical Jesus in his meaning for us here and now in the present.

With this much by way of correcting a mistaken impression of my position, I am open to receive your questions. And I repeat my earlier assurance that I am more than willing for your questions to focus on issues other than those highlighted by these opening remarks.