

## Second Thoughts on *The Point of Christology*

24—I should have said that what the passage as a whole (Mt 16:15 ff.) authorizes is not the *existence* of Peter, but rather the confession, or *witness*, of Peter. For, as I go on to say, it is "because of his confession" that Peter is the rock on which Jesus will build the church, etc. True, I do speak of "Peter, the representative disciple." But there is nevertheless a diversion in speaking of his existence instead of keeping everything sharply focused on his witness.

56—Instead of saying that for "the *existential*-historical Jesus" the earliest stratum plays the role of "theological norm," I should say that it plays the role of "existential authority." Cf. also 63, where the last sentence should be rewritten as follows: "Far from understanding this earliest witness as at best the historical source from which the existential authority for theological claims still has to be inferred, I have contended that this stratum of witness is itself this existential authority and that the Jesus to whom it bears witness is, accordingly, the real subject of the christological assertion."

56 f.—What does the analogy developed here establish if not that, for me, as for Schleiermacher (however inconsistently), Jesus "is known as the indispensable 'whence' of the common life of the Christian community" (Walter Lowe, on Schleiermacher's christology)? I, in fact, say as much later on when I say that "Jesus himself may and must be defined (in the only really significant meaning of 'Jesus' for Christian faith and witness) as the explicit primal source whence the original and originating witness of the apostles derives its primary authority" (103). The difficulty with Schleiermacher's christology is that he does not consistently proceed within the limits imposed by this as his starting point in developing what must be said about the person of Jesus—just as, in his doctrine of God, he does not remain within the limits imposed by his starting point in the feeling of absolute dependence in developing all that must be said about the being of God (as Harvey long since demonstrated).

121—In saying here that "what is meant by Jesus" in the earliest stratum of witness accessible to us—"and the *only* thing that is meant by him—is the one who makes or at any rate implies such a claim [*sc.* as is explicated by the

church's christological assertion],” I naturally presupposed—unfortunately without doing so explicitly!—the distinction made earlier between what the earliest witnesses “*assert* about Jesus in speaking of him as the subject of their christological formulations” and what they “*assume* about Jesus in so speaking of him”(59; cf. 61 f.). The only thing that is meant by Jesus in asserting or implying what the christological assertion makes explicit is that “Jesus *means* love, in the sense that through him the gift and demand of God's boundless love are made fully explicit as authorizing our own possibility of authentic faith and love” (122).

122—The “existential-historical assertion” to which I refer here is not properly formulated as “Jesus means love,” but rather in some such terms as, “The Jesus who means love is the explicit gift and demand of God,” or “The Jesus who means love is the meaning of strictly ultimate reality for us made fully explicit.” Accordingly, the last sentence in this paragraph should be rewritten as follows: “On the contrary, whatever the truth or falsity of any such empirical-historical assertions, to accept the claim represented in the apostolic witness as Jesus' claim is to accept a strictly existential-historical assertion—the assertion, namely, that the Jesus who means love is the explicit gift and demand of God and thus authorizes our own possibility of authentic faith and love.”—Cf. my statement on 129 f. that “the assertion they [*sc.* christological formulations] either make or imply is the existential-historical assertion that the understanding of existence explicitly authorized through him [*sc.* Jesus] is one's authentic possibility of self-understanding in relation to ultimate reality.”

161-164—If there is anything in my writings that makes clear how very much I can benefit from Apel's and Habermas' efforts, it is the discussion here of the effects of historical consciousness. Viewed from the standpoint of their writings, I am in fact making a distinction here between the *ideal* community of communication, of active subjects, on the one hand, and the *real* society and culture, with its distinction between the few who are active subjects and the many who are passive objects, on the other. But how much more adequate my discussion would have been had I been able to make this distinction explicitly. Among other advantages, I could have expressly adverted to the role of psychoanalysis as well as critique of ideology as means

whereby persons are enabled to become really the active subjects they always already are ideally. Yet another advantage is that I could have made clear the *two* principles of any viable emancipatory strategy: (1) survival; and (2) emancipation.

Concerning *The Point of Christology*:

1. The book fills in the christological outline set forth in *Christ without Myth*.

2. Even so, it is not anything like the usual christology. Rather, as its title indicates, it asks about "the *point* of christology," on the assumption that either the meaning or the truth of christology, or both, are problematic, and that doubly—because of the usual revisionary christology no less than because of traditional, "orthodox" christology.

3. Thus it seeks to do two things: it *talks about* the point of christology, i.e., the kind of meaning and truth that the christological assertion does and does not have (Chs. 1-4); and it *makes* the point of christology in the way, or at the level, proper to a christology of reflection, in such a way as to accept full responsibility for the credibility as well as the appropriateness of the proposed formulation, given the specific requirements of these two criteria in our theological situation today (Chs. 5-8).

4. So far as the first part is concerned, the crucial chapter is Ch. 2; and in the second part, Ch. 6 is crucial with respect to appropriateness, Chs. 7 and 8 with respect to credibility, theoretical and practical respectively.

5. Thus it may be said to set forth an alternative revisionary christology at the reflective level that tries to take seriously the results of ongoing historical critical study of scripture and tradition as well as the urgent practical as well as theoretical questions of contemporary women and men.

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xi—" . . . a critical inquiry into the *point* of all such doctrinal formulations"

1 f.—"[T]he witness to Jesus as the Christ" is "christology in the primary sense of the word," while "either the process or the product of critically reflecting on [this] witness" is "christology in another, secondary sense."

4—" [T]he principal task to which this book is offered as a contribution" is "to further the effort in our situation today toward a christology of reflection that will be fully critical. . . ." Alternatively, it is "to help develop a christology of reflection that, again in our situation, will be credible as well as appropriate . . . ." More simply still, it is "to make the point of the christology of witness as theology today is given and called to make this point."

5—But "one can make the point of christology today only by also talking about it."

14—"The specific problem this book is an attempt to solve . . . is whether there can be such a thing as a revisionary christology that is not problematic in this same way [*sc.* as all or most other revisionary christologies, past and present]."

What do I seek to do in *The Point of Christology*?

What I seek to do is to work out the proper construction (or construal) of christological formulations—analogously to Matthew Arnold's effort in *Literature and Dogma* and Rudolf Bultmann's in "*Neues Testament und Mythologie*."

In the first four chapters, I work this construction out *formally*, by analyzing the logical structure of christological formulations, i.e., by distinguishing the christological assertion they formulate, the question they answer, the subject they are about, and the conditions of their being true. In the second four chapters, then, I work this construction out *materially*, by formulating the christological assertion (as distinguished in the first four chapters) in the terms in which it would need to be formulated today to be both appropriate and credible.

In doing this, of course, there are all sorts of special questions that I do not discuss, such as, for example, the meaning of talk about the resurrection of Jesus. But such a discussion is hardly necessary, anyhow, once one understands my construction of christological formulations in both their formal and their material meaning. Talk about Jesus' resurrection is simply one among a number of ways of formulating the christological assertion of his decisive significance for human existence. Therefore, to understand formally what any such way involves and materially how one would most appropriately and credibly formulate the christological assertion today is to understand all that anyone needs to understand in order to understand talk of Jesus' resurrection.

As for the polemic that is partly explicit, partly implicit, in my argument, it is directed throughout to a mistaken construction of christological formulations and of the assertion they formulate—analogously to Arnold's polemic against the "literary misapprehension" of orthodox theology and Bultmann's polemic against the "objectifying" conceptuality of traditional theology in both scripture and tradition. I find it significant that Arnold and Bultmann both recognize that the usual revisions of orthodoxy do not succeed in locating the real problem because they share the same

underlying assumptions—just as I argue that, although the usual revisionary christology may give a different answer to the traditional christological question, it nonetheless assumes that the traditional question itself is the right question.

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