

One of the important questions that Maurice raises and answers is, How is Christ to be regarded? Is he to be regarded “merely as a man born at a certain time into this world, and the head of a sect called Christians,” or, rather, as Maurice contends, “as the Son, the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father”? (*The Doctrine of the Thirty-Nine Articles*: 43). Unless I’m mistaken, I raise and answer the very same question, arguing in a closely parallel, if not convergent, way in *The Point of Christology*. Consider, e.g., such passages as the following:

While there does indeed seem to be a difference in principle between even perfectly actualizing authentic existence and being the incarnation of God asserted by Nicæa and Chalcedon, these are hardly the only terms in which what is really essential in this difference may be formulated. On the contrary, . . . even in the supposedly ‘low’ christology of the earliest Jewish-Christian community, the claim made for Jesus was that he is the decisive re-presentation of God and as such belongs on the divine rather than on the human side of the relationship between God and human beings generally. But if I am right about this, the really essential difference, upheld in some terms or other by all New Testament christologies, is the difference between being merely one more authority, even the primary such authority, and being the explicit primal source from which all authority derives. Because even a perfectly authentic human existence need be no more than one authority among others, on the same level as ourselves, even if first and foremost among us, Jesus’ having actualized such an existence cannot possibly be the sufficient condition of the truth of these christologies. For the essential claim made by each of them, whatever the concepts and symbols in which it was formulated, is that Jesus is rather the primal source of all authority, on the same level as God, even if also distinct from God as this very source now become fully explicit (81).

There is also the question—to my mind, far more serious—whether the very attempt to understand Jesus himself as this norm [*sc.* the norm of appropriateness] does not implicitly deny the characteristic claim that the Christian witness makes about him by its christological assertion. Even the primary norm of appropriateness can be no more than one authority among others, as distinct from the primal source of authority by which even the primary norm alone is authorized. But what does it mean to assert that Jesus is the Christ, or any of the other things that Christians have historically asserted him to be, if not precisely that Jesus is just such a primal authorizing source, and hence infinitely more than any authority derived from this source, even the primary such authority? I submit that the deeper difficulty with the typically liberal theological answer to the question of the norm of appropriateness is that it assigns to Jesus himself, contrary to the clear intention of the apostolic witness, the role that rightly belongs rather to the apostles.

If this is so, however, the way to respond to the challenge posed by the ongoing development of historical-critical study of the New Testament is not by abandoning the early church’s criterion of apostolicity. Quite the contrary, if Jesus is rightly asserted by the Christian witness to be infinitely more than any norm, because he is the primal source of all norms made fully explicit, then the early church was exactly right in taking apostolicity to be the criterion of canonicity. It lies in the very logic of the concept of ‘authority’ that the primal *source* of authority, whether implicit or explicit, cannot itself be *an* authority, at least in the same literal sense of the word. On the other hand, and by the same logic, there belongs to the original authority authorized by its primal source, and so in this case to the witness of the apostles as explicitly authorized by Jesus, the unique role of also being the originating authority and therefore the sole primary norm or canon. This is so because it is solely through this original and originating authority that the primal source authorizing it is explicitly available precisely as such (102 f.).

[Revisionary christology] is also open to the theological objection of implying that Jesus is other and less than even the earliest christology of witness asserts or implies him to be. By making Jesus himself the primary norm of appropriateness instead of the primal source of all norms made fully explicit, one reduces him to but one authority among others, even if the primary such authority. Thus he becomes the Jesus *with* whom we believe in God, instead of the Jesus *through* whom we believe in God—one who is a mere man, on the same level as ourselves, even if first and foremost among us, instead of one who is infinitely more than a mere man, on the same level with God, even if also distinct from God as the decisive re-presentation of God's gift and demand. As far as I am concerned, it is this strictly theological implication that reveals the most serious inadequacy in the typical procedure of revisionary christology. Even if the historical objection could somehow be met by adducing primary as well as secondary sources about Jesus, there would still be the decisive objection that the Jesus attested by the Christian witness is infinitely other and more than the so-called historical Jesus (111 f.).

The other important point at which, I am convinced, I am, in my own way, trying to uphold something that Maurice is keen on is the distinction he draws between “a gospel of facts” and “a gospel of notions” (*The Kingdom of Christ*, 1:10). Unless I'm mistaken, this is his way of distinguishing—in my terms, following Bultmann—between “the *that*” and “the *what*,” and between “self-understanding/understanding of existence,” on the one hand, and “world view,” on the other. And recognizing this is also the key to making sense out of his otherwise merely question-begging and questionably meaningful statements that “creeds” are “facts,” while “dogmas” are merely “notions,” or “opinions.” Clearly, creeds are no more facts, or no less notions, than dogmas are, unless they're taken—as Maurice and I both argue they *are* to be taken—as “direct address,” the gift/demand of a self-understanding/understanding of existence, rather than the “indirect address” communicating a world view. “The most awful and absolute truths, which notions displace or obscure,” Maurice argues, “are involved in facts and through facts may be entertained and embraced by those who do not possess the faculty for comparing notions, and have a blessed incapacity of resting in them” (1:10). In my terms, “facts,” which is to say, existentially significant facts, mediate self-understanding/understanding of existence, which is something importantly different from “symbolizing ideas.” This is the conceptual background of Maurice's question about Christianity—namely, whether it “shall be a practical principle and truth in the hearts of men, or shall be exchanged for a set of intellectual notions or generalizations” (2:44).

I'm aware that this is not as well developed as it needs to be. But I trust I have said enough to make clear that, at this second point, also, the parallel, if not convergence, between Maurice's intentions and my own is very, very close. It's hard, therefore, not to think of Wilhelm Herrmann, who, as Bultmann recognized, had all, or most, of the right ideas, but remained very much in need of "the 'right' philosophy."

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