

## More Obiter Dicta on Christology

The existential question is the question of how to understand the encompassing mystery of existence given an understanding of my authentic possibility and, conversely, how to understand my authentic possibility given an understanding of the encompassing mystery of existence.

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Is not God's special revelation of himself to peoples or individuals always for the sake of the salvation of the world? (Among other clear indications that the answer is affirmative, consider Is. 43:21, where God is represented as speaking of Israel as "the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise." Cf. also Ps. 96.)

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What mileage could one get out of the claim that one of the defining characteristics of a mythological view is that it makes God and human beings rivals, in the sense that it assigns to God's doing what human beings both can and should do for themselves?

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Does the "pragmatic test" of the meaning of assertions entail eliminating the difference between one christological assertion and another?--What difference would there be in my life, in my being and acting, as distinct from my speaking, or, at least, as distinct from what I might say, if I believed this assertion, instead of another?

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The whole idea that the quest for the historical Jesus is christologically necessary either because it alone can establish the real historical ground of the christological assertion, or else because it alone enables us

to verify an essential implication of that assertion is misguided.

Why? Well, because, in the very nature of the case nothing that historical-critical research could possibly establish about Jesus as himself a subject of faith and witness (that being the precise meaning of "the so-called historical Jesus") could ever be sufficient to explain the christological assertion; and because, again, in the very nature of the case, the "true humanity" that Christian orthodoxy asserts cannot be verified by anything lying within the competence of historical inquiry to establish.

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What does christology express? (This is evidently another way of asking, What is the point of christology?)

Christology obviously expresses faith in Jesus as the Christ. But this is just as obviously not all it expresses, for it also expresses what has to be the case--and, therefore, is the case--if faith in Jesus as the Christ is a warranted faith. Thus it not only expresses what Christians in fact do believe, but also what they by right--and every other human being by right--ought to believe, and, in the power of the Holy Spirit, also can believe. In sum: christology expresses what is worthy of being believed not only by Christians but by everyone else.

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Another way of getting at the point of something is to determine what is controversial that it is by way of settling.

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To what extent is the Protestant orthodox development of the traditional doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture into the doctrine of its verbal inspiration a parallel to the development of christology? On the face of

it, it would appear that it is very much a parallel.

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The sheer fact that the books of the NT as we have them represent the editing or redacting of sources makes clear that they are not themselves "apostolic" in the strict sense of the word, but, rather, a certain stage in the early history of Christian dogma (*ET*, 109).

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Curiously, Marxsen expresses the content of the earliest apostolic testimony to Jesus in a very formal way—making God happen, anticipating the verdict of the last judgment, putting persons in the situation of faith, and so on. (Admittedly, anticipating the eschatological meal by table fellowship with the outcasts is an exception.)

I should want to stress its *material*, existential meaning, rather as Braun does in speaking of the *I may* and the *I should*. Thus I should speak of Jesus representing the gift and demand of God's boundless love, and hence the possibility of existence in the radical freedom of faith working through love.

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If Jesus is fully God, "of one substance with the Father," then wherever God is, God is and must be what God is decisively through Jesus Christ. But God is, by definition, everywhere, as the primal source and the final end of all things, both actual and possible, and so God must be everywhere what God is decisively through Jesus Christ. Moreover, God must be at least implicitly revealed everywhere, wherever there is understanding; and so God is not only present everywhere as God is decisively re-presented through Jesus Christ, but God must be originally *presented* everywhere—revealed at least implicitly as *that* God.

Thus it follows from the claim made for the full deity of Jesus Christ that not only every Christian but every human being, indeed, every rational being whatsoever, is confronted implicitly if not explicitly with the gift and demand of faith working through love.

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All christological statements are properly made from the standpoint of faith (they are, indeed, the witness of faith) and are expressive of the experienced significance of Jesus, given the existential question of the ultimate meaning of human existence.

Therefore, the Jesus who is the subject of a christological assertion is the Jesus whose significance for human existence can be and is experienced. Whatever is not included therein or derived therefrom is "speculative" in the bad sense. Likewise "speculative" is any interpretation of previous interpretations which, instead of recognizing their existential meaning, treats them as objectifying descriptions or explanations, whether historical or metaphysical.

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What is the style of the Christ-kerygma? It asserts that God has done what he has done in the human existence of Jesus and then infers to the understanding of human existence that is appropriate to that divine action--so that in the Fourth Gospel the point is reached where all that Jesus reveals is that he is the revealer--the nature of his revelation being inferable only from the understanding of existence appropriate to this revelation, not from what he reveals.

The Jesus-kerygma, by contrast, asserts what God has done by representing Jesus as the gift and demand of God's love.

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What gives content to the titles or names attributed to Jesus is not just Jesus but the experiences had with Jesus by those who thus bear witness to him. These experiences are, on the one hand, the experience of something given--a challenge, a call, a gift-demand: technically, an asserted possibility of self-understanding, or understanding of oneself, vis-à-vis the experienced reality of others and the whole--and, on the other hand, the experience of positively accepting that which is experienced as given--technically: accepting the assertion of a possibility of self-understanding by thus understanding oneself. (What is properly understood by "Jesus," so far, at least as christology is concerned, is the something experienced as given.)

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What makes an actual event an eschatological event?

An actual event is an eschatological event when it explicitly authorizes eschatological existence, which is to say, when it is experienced as thus explicitly authorizing eschatological existence.

"Authorizing" here has the twofold sense of entitling and empowering.

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One authority is related to another horizontally--on the same level, vis-à-vis the primal source authorizing each of them alike.

This is true, moreover, even of the unique relation between the primary authority and any other authority.

By contrast, the relation between an authority, even the primary authority, and the primal source of authority is not horizontal, but vertical.