

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION: THE APPROACH TO NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTOLOGY

I. Theological Presuppositions

CHRISTOLOGY is the doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ. In traditional dogmatics, Christology (the doctrine of Christ's person) precedes soteriology (the doctrine of Christ's work). Logically this is the true order. It was because he was who he was that Jesus Christ did what he did. But for the New Testament it is the other way round. In the New Testament men are first confronted by the history of Jesus of Nazareth—by what he said and did—and they respond to it in terms of a Christology, a confession of faith. Through what he does they come to see who he is.

Thus Christology is essentially a response to a particular history. It is a confessional response. For men confess their faith in what God has done in Jesus Christ in terms of a Christology. It is a kerygmatic response. For the disciples of Jesus proclaim Jesus by means of Christology as the one in whom God has acted redemptively.

Since it is men's response to Jesus, it follows that Christology is not itself a part of the original revelation or action of God in Christ. Jesus does not hand out a ready-made Christology on a plate. As we shall see, he had his own self-understanding. But the church's Christology never consisted in simply repeating that self-understanding—although, as we shall seek to show, there is a direct line of continuity between Jesus' self-understanding and the church's christological interpretation of him. The church's Christology was a response to its total encounter with Jesus, not only in his earthly history but also in its (the church's) continuing life.

2. *The Plan of this Book*

Since Christology is men's response to Jesus of Nazareth, it follows that the church made its response in terms of whatever tools lay to hand. Hence the next three chapters of this work deal with the tools of Christology, with the terms, images, concepts and patterns which the church picked up and used for its christological response. These tools were derived from the three successive environments in which the early church was operating—Palestinian Judaism (chap. II), Hellenistic Judaism (chap. III), and the Graeco-Roman world (chap. IV).

Since Christology includes men's response to the earthly history of Jesus of Nazareth, chapter V will deal with that history. We are not concerned here to write a "life of Jesus"—for such an enterprise is now generally acknowledged to be impossible. But we are concerned with what can be known of the words and works of Jesus, and with what these words and works disclose about his own self-understanding.

The church's christological response to Jesus of Nazareth begins with the disciples' belief in resurrection. Chapter VI will therefore consider the effect of the resurrection faith on the disciples' assessment of Jesus' work and mission, and from that will go on to examine the christological responses of the earliest Palestinian church, as it took up and used the tools investigated in chapter II.

Chapter VII proceeds to trace the christological response of the Christian mission in its preaching to Greek-speaking Jews, who were nourished in the Judaism of the LXX. In this mission the Greek speaking missionaries used the tools investigated in chapter III.

Chapter VIII then traces the christological formulations of the Gentile Mission, which picked up and used the tools examined in chapter IV.

3. *Critical Presuppositions and Methods*

Since we are dealing with the "Foundations of NT Christology" we shall not take the story as far as the Christology of NT writers themselves. We are concerned rather with the christological foundations of their theology. Never-

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theless, much of what is commonly treated under the Christology of the NT theologians will come up for treatment, or at least be briefly indicated.

Our New Testament documents, as they have come down to us, are not only written in Greek but are almost without exception the products of the gentile mission, either of the missionaries themselves or of the churches they founded. What can be known of the historical Jesus (chap. V), of earliest Palestinian Christianity (chap. VI), and of the early Hellenistic Jewish mission (chap. VII), has to be extracted by applying critical methods to documents which emanate from the gentile mission. Even in chapter VIII we are concerned not so much with the finished products of the NT theologians (i.e. the evangelists and the authors of the epistles), as with the christological presuppositions which underlie their theology. Consequently we are dependent in chapters V through VIII upon critical analysis and reconstruction in order to differentiate between the theology of the writers themselves and the traditions which they incorporate into their writing.

In principle, then, all of the NT material may provide evidence for any of the chapters V through VIII. In practice however, only the gospels (and almost exclusively the synoptics) provide the materials for chapter V, since only they include the words of and (with a few exceptions) authentic memories of the deeds of the historical Jesus. For chapter V through VIII the gospels again provide materials, and for chapters VI through VIII the Acts and the Epistles, including to a slight degree (for chapter VI) the Revelation.

The critical presuppositions and methods which enable us to distinguish between the various strata of tradition in this document must now be briefly indicated.

We assume¹ that Mark is our earliest gospel, and that it was written between 65 and 70, later rather than earlier in that five-year period, but certainly not later than 70. Matthew and Luke were written after 70, and probably not later than 100, Luke (together with Acts) almost certainly towards the end of the first century. Matthew and Luke are essentially expansions of Mark, and both use a common non-Markan tradition conveniently (though misleadingly in so

far as it tends to suggest a single written document) known as Q. Both Matthew and Luke also incorporate special traditions of their own, designated “special Matthew” and “special Luke” respectively. It is a fallacy to suppose that Mark and Q, because they are ostensibly earlier than the attestation of the two other layers (special Matthew and special Luke) necessarily represent a more primitive tradition. The traditions in Mark and Q have passed successively through the Palestinian and Hellenistic stages. All four traditions in the synoptics have therefore been tested by methods other than purely literary analysis. The available methods for testing these traditions are those of traditio-historical criticism. These methods include form-criticism, but comprise other tests as well. Form-criticism proper enables a distinction to be drawn between the tradition and the redaction of the pericopes. Since our concern in chapter V is with the words of Jesus and with his deeds only in a very general way, it is only with the parables that the form-critical method in the strictest sense comes into play. Here we can distinguish between the parables as Jesus spoke them and the re-interpretation they have undergone in the church.²

As regards the sayings of Jesus, traditio-historical criticism eliminates from the authentic sayings of Jesus those which are paralleled in the Jewish tradition on the one hand (apocalyptic and Rabbinic) and those which reflect the faith, practice and situations of the post-Easter church as we know them from outside the gospels.³ When this is done, it is still necessary that authentic sayings of Jesus should be conceivable as developments within Palestinian Judaism. They should use its categories, and if possible reflect the language and style of Aramaic. Such features as *parallelismus membrorum* offer valuable additional confirmation. On the other hand, these later features are not sufficient by themselves to establish the authenticity of dominical sayings. If sayings do not pass the other tests, they must be accounted creations of the earliest Palestinian church. Form-criticism has made it fairly certain that the passion narrative took shape very early in the Palestinian church as a continuous story. This does not mean to say that it is to be taken as it stands as straightforward history. From the very first it was shaped in accord-

ance with the doctrinal and apologetic concerns and with the liturgical practices of the earliest church. Among these are the christological elements, and the fulfilment of scripture. Such elements become important in chapter VI, where we are concerned with the earliest Palestinian church. But they must be kept out of chapter V, where we are concerned with the historical Jesus.

We assume that the fourth gospel was written not by John the son of Zebedee but by an unknown Hellenistic Christian of the second generation, perhaps in Ephesus. Its date is highly uncertain, but we would place it towards the end of the first century. It appears to have been written entirely independently of the synoptists, including Mark. Its narrative pericopes are apparently based on oral traditions which originally existed in similar form to those of the synoptics. Its discourses as they stand are the compositions of the evangelist, but enshrine logia which go back in some cases to the earliest Palestinian, and in many cases to the Hellenistic Jewish stratum.

The use of LXX in OT quotations affords a highly important clue for the identification of the Jewish Hellenistic stratum of the gospels. This must be applied with some care, for it is always possible that an earlier Hebrew quotation from the Palestinian stratum has been deliberately altered to conform with the LXX. But there are passages where the use of the LXX is pivotal to a narrative or an argument (e.g. Mark 12:35-37). Here the material in question must be assigned to the creativity of the Hellenistic Jewish Christian community. A second helpful criterion in identifying the Hellenistic Jewish stratum in the gospels is linguistic. Where a term or phrase is demonstrably impossible in Aramaic or Hebrew, the tradition concerned must be assigned to the Hellenistic Jewish stratum. Lastly, where traditions manifest the theological perspective of what we know elsewhere about Hellenistic Jewish Christianity from the sources outside the gospels, this too must be assigned to that stratum. These criteria are applied to the gospels in chapter VII.

The materials we wish to use from the Book of Acts in chapters VI and VII occur almost entirely in the speeches. These pose an unsolved problem in tradition history. At one

extreme there are those who hold⁴ that Luke took the missionary speeches in his early chapters from an Aramaic source, and that they represent, not indeed what Peter actually said on these specific occasions, but a fair example of the kerygma. At the other extreme there are those⁵ who regard the speeches in Acts as free compositions of the author and reflections of the kerygma current at the time when it was written. An intermediate position is represented by E. Schweizer,⁶ who argues that while the bulk of the speeches as they stand are compositions of the author, they nevertheless enshrine traditional formulae, particularly in the christological parts. This is the view adopted here. Where it can be shown (as in Acts 3:20–21a and Acts 2:36) that the formulae in question exhibit a substantially different Christology from that of the author of Luke-Acts elsewhere (e.g., in the redactional elements in his gospel) it is certainly safe to conclude that the Christology in question is pre-Lucan. An auxiliary criterion is the occurrence of non-Lucan terms and phraseology. We have then the further task of assigning this pre-Lucan Christology to an earlier stratum of the tradition, and this is done by comparing it with what we know otherwise of the earlier Christologies.

In chapters VI through VIII, and especially in chapter VIII, substantial use is made of the epistolary literature of the New Testament. The epistles normally ascribed to St. Paul are accepted as genuine, including 2 Thessalonians and Colossians. Ephesians and the pastorals are assumed to be deutero-Pauline. Hebrews and the Catholic epistles without exception (including James and I Peter) are taken to be sub-apostolic.

Since we are not concerned in this work with the theology of the epistolary writers themselves, but the christological traditions which provide the foundations for their theology, it is necessary to identify the points at which they make use of traditional material. E. Norden did some valuable pioneering work in detecting traditional formulae,⁷ and E. Stauffer has furnished additional criteria in a valuable appendix to his *New Testament Theology*.⁸ Use has been made of the following criteria, especially in chapter VIII:

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1. Contextual dislocations.
2. The continuance of the formula after its content has ceased to be relevant to its immediate context.
3. Formulae frequently use terms and phrases not characteristic of the author.
4. Formulae frequently begin with the relative pronoun ("who").
5. Formulae often show a preference for participles rather than finite verbs.
6. Formulae frequently exhibit a rhythmic style and can be arranged in lines or strophes.
7. Formulae are concerned with basic christological assertions.

Once the presence of a formula has been established, it then becomes necessary to locate it in the tradition. This is done chiefly by identifying the christological terms and patterns it employs, and linking them up with the tools and patterns investigated in chapters II–IV.

Where previous writers, working with traditio-historical methods, have already assigned traditions to particular strata and where their assignation is accepted, reference is given to the earlier work, and the location in the tradition merely stated. Where a particular author has proposed a new assignation which has not won general acceptance and that assignation is accepted here, his arguments are summarized. Where new assignations are proposed in this book, or where the present writer disagrees with a previous assignation, the arguments are presented in full.

NOTES ON CHAPTER I

1. For the reasons behind these critical assumptions see my *New Testament in Current Study*, London: S.C.M. Press, 1963, pp. 86–91, and New York: Scribners, 1962, pp. 72ff.

2. Cf. J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, London: S.C.M. Press, 1954, pp. 20–88, esp. p. 88, on "the laws of transformation".

3. For these criteria of authenticity cf. H. Conzelmann in *RGG*³, art. "Jesus Christus", vol. III, col. 623. Cf. *NT in Current Study*, pp. 40f. (American ed., pp. 32f.) on the limitations of this method, which however remains the only relatively certain method available to distinguish between authentic sayings and church formations. The criteria offered

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by J. Jeremias *ET* 59, 1958, pp. 333-334 are auxiliary ones. Used alone they can only establish Palestinian origin.

4. So J. de Zwaan in *The Beginnings of Christianity*, ed. F. Jackson and K. Lake, London: Macmillan, 1922, vol. II, pp. 30-65. De Zwaan is followed by C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1949⁷, pp. 19f.

5. So M. Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, London: S.C.M. Press, 1956, pp. 165-174; D. E. Nineham in *Studies in the Gospels* (R. H. Lightfoot memorial), ed. D. E. Nineham, Oxford: Blackwell, 1955, pp. 228f.; the literature mentioned in J. M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (*SBT* 25) 1959, pp. 58f., n. 1; U. Wilckens, *Die Missionsreden der Apostelgeschichte* (*WMANT* 5), 1961, pp. 32-71.

6. E. Schweizer, *ThZ* 13, 1957, pp. 1-11, cf. H. Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1962¹, p. 100.

7. E. Norden, *Agnostos Theos*, Leipzig: Teubner, 1929, pp. 380-387.

8. E. Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, London: S.C.M. Press, 1955, pp. 338f.