

Chapter VI

THE KERYGMA OF THE EARLIEST CHURCH: THE TWO FOCI CHRISTOLOGY

1. *The Beginnings of Christology*

(i) *The Resurrection: The Proclaimer becomes the Proclaimed*

WE are not concerned here with the historical problems which underlie the NT assertion that God raised Jesus from the dead. That within a few weeks after the crucifixion Jesus' disciples came to believe this is one of the indisputable facts of history.¹ The whole subsequent history of the church rests upon this fact, and is inexplicable without it. How the disciples came to believe in the resurrection is only slightly less certain. The claim that Jesus had appeared to Peter, to the Twelve and the five hundred brethren is contained in one of the earliest post-Easter traditions in the New Testament,² possibly going back to the year 33, i.e. within three years of the actual events recorded.

The appearances may be categorized as "visions", but in the New Testament they are understood not as merely pious experiences, but as the revelatory acts of God. That they were so is a decision which faith alone can make. That the experiences did occur, even if they are explained in purely natural terms, is a fact upon which both believer and unbeliever may agree. According to the testimony, however, what occurred in the "visions" is not merely that God produced faith in the resurrection. Rather, he revealed to them Jesus as the One he had raised from the dead. The Easter testimony asserts an act of God not merely upon the disciples but a prior act of God upon Jesus himself, whereby he has taken Jesus out of the past of history and inserted him into his own eternal now. Henceforth encounter with Jesus is not limited to those who saw him in his earthly ministry, or to his post-resurrection appearances or to the memories of

these experiences. This means that the salvation which was inclosed in the words and deeds of Jesus is not a mere past memory, but is a salvation which continues to be offered always in the here and now.

This is why the proclamation of the church is not just an extension of Jesus' own proclamation of the kingdom of God as the eschatological act of God which was beginning in his earthly ministry. It is rather the proclamation of Jesus himself as the One in whom God began to act eschatologically, in whom he acted eschatologically in the supreme crisis of Jesus' death and resurrection, in whom he continues to act eschatologically in the church's kerygma, and in whom he will consummate his eschatological action at the End. In this way the proclaimer became the proclaimed, and the implicit Christology of Jesus becomes the explicit Christology of the church.

It is true that the earliest church continued Jesus' own proclamation, ἡγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ("the kingdom of God has drawn nigh"), Matt. 10:7 par., cf. Mark 1:15. Otherwise this proclamation would not have been enshrined in Q material and Mark—for the church was not merely concerned with recording past history. Yet the very fact that it continues Jesus' own proclamation means that side by side with it the church proclaimed his resurrection. For Jesus' eschatological message had been radically called in question. An apparently unanswerable question mark had been placed against it by his crucifixion. Jesus' own proclamation could only have been continued by the vindication of Jesus and his message through the resurrection. So although the Q material does not contain the kerygma of the resurrection it presupposes it all the way through.³ The earliest church could have continued Jesus' own proclamation only alongside of its own proclamation that God had raised him from the dead.

(ii) "*The Most Primitive Christology of All*"

Jesus had declared that his own eschatological word and deed would be vindicated by the Son of man at the end. Now his word and deed had received preliminary yet certain vindication by the act of God in the resurrection. The

earliest church expressed this new-born conviction by identifying Jesus with the Son of man who was to come. He would come as his own rubber stamp, vindicating his own word and deed, as he had already done in a preliminary way in the resurrection appearances. In preserving those sayings in which Jesus speaks of the coming Son of man, the church identifies Jesus with the coming Son of man. So sayings such as Mark 8:38, Luke 12:8f. are now repeated, but on the assumption that it is Jesus who is the coming Son of man, and who will appear at the End to vindicate his word and work openly as he had already appeared in his resurrection appearances to his disciples.

The church also formed new “future” Son of man sayings. It modelled them on Jesus’ own sayings to the extent that they were couched in the third person and were circulated as sayings of Jesus—a fact, which, as Hahn pointed out,⁴ is a clear indication that sayings about the coming Son of man in the third person were embedded in the authentic tradition of Jesus’ sayings. Nowhere, apart from Acts 7:56,⁵ does the Son of man figure in the church’s own independent christological statements. We may reasonably expect that the earliest type of Son of man sayings created by the church were those which were closest to Jesus’ own sayings, i.e. sayings which spoke of the future coming of the Son of man. Since, too, the church now identified Jesus with that coming Son of man, the intention behind these creations is explicitly christological. In these new sayings Jesus is purporting to be speaking not about another figure, but about himself.

These secondary future Son of man sayings differ from the authentic future Son of man sayings in two further ways. First, they elaborate the apocalyptic imagery. Jesus himself, as we saw, introduced only the bare minimum of apocalyptic imagery. For his intention was not to give apocalyptic instruction about the future, but simply to invoke an ultimate sanction for his own word and work. The centre of gravity in his proclamation was what God was actually doing in him. The early church’s proclamation, however, is oriented to the future because it looks for the coming precisely of *Jesus* as the Son of man. It is faith in Jesus which gives rise to the apocalyptic elaboration in earliest Christianity.⁶ Therefore,

this elaboration is not due merely to apocalyptic fantasy run riot; it is an expression of explicit Christology. The second trait is the introduction of Old Testament phraseology into the Son of man sayings (which again was not characteristic of Jesus' own Son of man sayings). The reason for this was again christological. The early church had to defend its proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus as the saving act of God by "proving" it from the OT. It had also to show that the final completion of his work would likewise be the fulfilment of scripture.

The Q material contains no clear example of any secondary future sayings. Those future sayings which occur in Q are probably all of them authentic,⁷ although they may have received certain secondary modifications here and there.⁸

The Marcan material contained one genuine Son of man saying, viz. Mark 8:38. But as we saw,⁹ this saying has, compared with the Q version in Luke 12:8, undergone apocalyptic elaboration. The two other Marcan future Son of man sayings exhibit the characteristics, not of Jesus, but of the Palestinian church. Mark 13:26 is not a detached saying, but integral to the apocalyptic context in which it occurs. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the whole section, 13:24-27, has been taken over bodily from a pre-Christian Jewish apocalypse,¹⁰ including the reference to the coming Son of man. Alternatively Mark 13:26 is a new creation modelled on Jesus' own Son of man sayings. It differs from the authentic sayings not only in its apocalyptic elaboration, but also in its OT phraseology. Note the use of Dan. 7:13 ("coming on the clouds of heaven"), and the allusion to Dan. 7:14 ("with power and great glory"). The christological intention is clear—Jesus is identified with the coming Son of man. For in the face of Jesus' own Son of man sayings on the one hand and of the cross on the other, the church would neither have borrowed nor created this saying had it not believed that Jesus' word and work had been vindicated in the resurrection.

In the previous chapter¹¹ it was argued that the second part of Jesus' answer to the high priest (Mark 14:62) is a secondary formation. It combines the session at the right hand of God from Ps. 110:1 with the picture of the parousia

from Dan. 7:13. The Palestinian origin of this saying is secured by the reverential periphrasis “power” for “God”. It has frequently been argued¹² that the “coming” of the Son of man refers not to a coming from heaven, but to the coming to God in the ascension. This has support from Dan. 7:13f., where the Son of man is brought *to* the Ancient of Days. The obvious objection that the session at the right hand is mentioned before the coming is overcome by J. A. T. Robinson’s¹³ brilliant suggestion that the session at the right hand and the coming on the clouds of heaven are alternative expressions of the same thing, viz. the ascension or exaltation. Dr. Robinson proceeds to eliminate as unauthentic and to interpret all the other parousia sayings in the same way, thus eliminating the parousia from the teaching of Jesus.¹⁴

In a certain sense this elimination of the parousia is quite justified. For, as we have seen, Jesus only invoked the Son of man as the ultimate sanction, for his own word and work, and it was not his intention to speak of his *own* return. But there is a further difficulty in taking the second half of the saying as a reference to the parousia. It requires ὄψεσθε to be taken in two different senses, as Glasson pointed out.¹⁵ On the one hand, in reference to the heavenly session it must mean mental perception,¹⁶ whereas in reference to the parousia it must mean literal sight. For the parousia is essentially an event plain for all to see: “Every eye shall now behold him.” Glasson therefore proposes to take ὄψεσθε throughout the verse as referring to inward vision. But it is doubtful whether ὄψεσθε can bear this sense at all. This was brought out years ago in the discussion of C. H. Dodd’s interpretation of ἰδωσιν in Mark 9:1.¹⁷ Both parts of the reply must be visible portents and the second half must refer to the parousia, exactly as in Mark 13:26. As a visible portent, the sitting at the right hand must refer to the first act in the parousia. The Son of man is revealed first, sitting at the right hand of God, and then leaving that position and coming on the clouds of heaven. This will mean that this earliest statement about the heavenly session as yet contains no reflection about an interval (which Glasson found to be a difficulty in McArthur’s interpretation). The Palestinian church believes that it—and Jesus’ enemies—will shortly see Jesus sitting on the right hand of God and

coming on the clouds of heaven. The church believes that Jesus is now in heaven, but as yet it has not reflected upon his activity in the interim prior to his return. The end is coming too soon for that. This view of a non-active waiting in heaven we shall come across in other places in the evidence for the beliefs of the early Palestinian church.¹⁸

The special Matthean material contains one saying about the parousia of the Son of man, namely Matt. 10:23. It will be remembered that A. Schweitzer not only took this saying as authentic to Jesus, but found in it the whole clue to his interpretation of Jesus: it announced the first delay in the parousia.¹⁹ Others since Schweitzer have argued for the authenticity of Matt. 10:23.²⁰ The saying, however, clearly presupposes the post-resurrection mission of the Palestinian church.²¹ It testifies to the church's expectation of an imminent parousia in the early days of its mission. Tödt concludes his discussion of this saying:

Of great significance is the fact that this prophetic saying for primitive Christian missionaries follows close in form upon the Son of man sayings of Jesus. As a promise it is put into the mouth of the earthly Jesus and so his authority is claimed for it. The prophet hears the risen One in the words of the earthly One. Both the earthly and the risen One speak of the coming of the Son of man in the same way.²²

The secondary future Son of man sayings are clearly modelled on the authentic Son of man sayings, and express the earliest church's identification of Jesus with the coming Son of man. But what about the other classes of sayings, the present and the suffering Son of man sayings? These have to be seen alongside of the earliest church's continuation of Jesus' own proclamation. This continuation implies that that proclamation has now been validated. Certain of Jesus' sayings, in which his implicit Christology was most clearly expressed, are accordingly transformed in terms of the church's own explicit Christology. This is how the present son of man sayings (which are attested in both Mark and the Q material and are therefore quite early) apparently arose. In these sayings Jesus identifies himself in his earthly ministry with the Son of man.