

Chapter 2

THE UNITY OF THE CHRIST

KYRIOS Christos! This confession bears within it the whole dualism of Christology as we have interpreted it on the basis of the titles of Jesus. Equally it affirms the unity of the Christ. In fact, the Christological dualism of the New Testament in no way compromises the unity of the Christ. "There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God" (Eph. 4: 5-6).

How shall we explain, theologically, the essential unity of the Christ? Two equally wide possibilities might tempt the Christian. To establish the unity of the Christ, we might be tempted, in face of Christological dualism, to subordinate one of the two affirmations to the other; to prefer, for example, Christological institutionalism to Kyriological event; or, on the other hand, event to institutionalism; or again, to understand one of the two affirmations as the negative expression of the other, as a background of darkness intended to make the light more striking. To establish thus the unity of the Christ would be tantamount to introducing arbitrarily into Christological dualism a scale of values inspired not by the New Testament, but by our preferences, our fears or our prejudices as historians or confessional theologians. It would be equivalent to introducing "Yes" and "No" into the heart of the New Testament witness. Now, "the Son of God, Christ Jesus, He who was announced in your midst by our mediation" was not Yes and No. He was an emphatic "Yes". All the promises of God are confirmed and fulfilled in Him. That is why, by His means, Amen is said to God, for His glory, by us (2 Cor. 1: 19-20). Christological institutionalism and Kyriological event are equally positive elements between which we may not choose, and which we may not subordinate the one to the other.

Further, we might be tempted to consider these two fundamental Christological affirmations as a thesis and antithesis and to seek to establish the unity of the Christ by their synthesis. But the New Testament itself does not offer such a synthesis,

rather it forbids it absolutely. It is impossible to transcend the Son of David and the Son of Man in order to set up, beyond the dualism, a unity which the New Testament does not represent apart from the dualistic elements which constitute it. The unity of the Christ to which the New Testament bears witness is a living unity, the unity of a Person at one and the same time past, present and future, whose anatomy we may analyse but whose actuality we cannot control. To establish an arbitrary synthesis would be nothing but claiming to dominate the Person of Jesus and reducing it to the state of an object of investigation.

Does this mean that we cannot know the unity of the Christ? No, but we can do so only by remaining in our place as disciples of Christ, without claiming to pierce the secret of the mystery of His living unity. To remain in our place as disciples will mean not to pretend to resolve the Christological dualism on the lower plane of an arbitrary selection nor on the higher plane of a transcendent synthesis, but to see how the unity of the Christ is manifested through this duality. Since we are incapable of any but a partial knowledge (1 Cor. 13: 9) we cannot resolve the duality. On the contrary it is on its basis alone that we can know the unity of the Christ. We shall therefore take our stand successively on the plane of Christological institutionalism and on that of Kyriological event. From the Christological point of view, we shall see what vistas are opened upon Kyriological event. From the standpoint of Kyriological event we shall be enabled to see what new light is shed upon Christological institutionalism. Thus, from lateral perspectives, as it were, we shall be able to study how the ineffable unity of the Christ is manifested. The narrow road which forces us to respect the mysterious unity of the ever-living One (Rev. 1: 18) can alone lead us to the contemplation and knowledge of His life.

I. THE CHRIST IS THE LORD

We take as our starting point here Christological institutionalism, such as we have described it in the preceding chapter. We are faced by the contrasting aspects of the New Testament affirmation: Jesus is the Christ. From the point of view that we are adopting, we are looking towards the Kyriological event in

order to discover how the Christ is the Lord and how His unity thus stands revealed.

(i) *Conception and Birth*

The Christological institution which, according to the New Testament, exists at the moment of the conception of Jesus is constituted by the Davidic ascendancy of Joseph, Son of David and heir of the promise made successively to Abraham, to David and to the Kings of Judah (cf. Matt. 1: 1-17). It is Joseph who bears the divine promise of the Messiah. Now, Jesus will be conceived outside of the dynastic succession of David (Matt. 1: 18, 20, 25; Luke 1: 34-35). If it is admitted with Luke (3: 23-38) that Jesus is linked to David through Mary,¹ it will be noted, on the one hand, that the carnal ascendancy of Jesus through Mary is not identical with that of the Kings of Judah, sole bearers of the promise; on the other hand that the natural Davidic heritage, through Nathan, does not any the more engender Jesus without the intervention of the miracle of the Virgin Birth. However it may be, neither natural heredity nor racial, national and dynastic antecedents have in themselves the power to give birth to the Messiah whom they promise and foreshadow. Joseph is sterile. Jesus will only be the Christ because at the same time, through the intervention of the Holy Ghost, He will be the sovereign Lord.

The sovereignty of the Holy Ghost over the natural, racial, national and dynastic ancestry of the Messiah is shown already, in the genealogy of Matthew, by the oft-noted emphasis on four of the women who are ancestors of Joseph: Tamar (Matt. 1: 3) Rahab (Matt. 1: 5) Ruth (Matt. 1: 5) and the wife of Uriah (Matt. 1: 6). These four women reveal a divine intervention in the Messianic ascendancy whether because they are strangers to Israel (Rahab and Ruth, perhaps also Tamar and the wife of Uriah),² whether because they manifest the power of God to achieve its effects in spite of the sin of those who bear the promise.³ The intention of Matthew is plain: these four women are *typi Mariae*.⁴ In Mary will be repeated once and for all, summing up and completing all the previous ones, a final miraculous intervention of the Spirit of God in the history of Israel.

It is in the light of these considerations that we shall read the declarations of Jesus concerning His family: Matt. 12: 46-50=Mark 3: 31-35=Luke 8: 19-21. Jesus does not disown His family but maintains that it cannot claim to have a privileged relation with Him merely in virtue of the fact that it is united with Him by the bond of the flesh. The only relation He recognizes is that of faith. Now His family, at least at that moment, had not faith and considered Him to be beside Himself (Mark 3: 21). Similarly in John 2: 4: Jesus does not disown His mother, but gives her to understand that she is not yet aware of the mystery of His mission and begs her to leave Him at liberty, in a way moreover which does not break off fellowship. In Luke 11: 27-28 there is no opposition between the two clauses. Jesus does not declare that His mother is not blessed (cf. Luke 1: 41-45). He affirms only that if she is blessed it is not because she has given birth to Jesus, but to the extent to which she hearkens to and obeys the Word.⁵ It is not enough to know Jesus according to the flesh; one must perceive in Him the intervention of the Spirit of God, one must know His works (cf. John 9: 3-4, 10: 25-38, 14: 10-12).

Jesus therefore is not the Christ automatically in virtue of His heredity. He is so in virtue of the sovereign initiative of God from the moment of His conception. Faith in Him involves the recognition of that initiative. He is the Christ because He is the Lord.

(ii) *The Ministry*

According to the New Testament, Christological institutionalism implied that the Messiah would reign, in the first place, and specifically over the Jews (Luke 1: 32 ff., 1: 54 ff., 2: 11, 2: 34, 2: 38, 19: 14, 27; Matt. 22: 7) at Jerusalem (Matt. 21: 5=John 12: 15; Matt. 21: 9=Mark 11: 9-10=Luke 19: 38=John 12: 13) and that His works would be public, visible (John 7: 3-4) in the Christological forum of Judaea with its centre in Jerusalem.⁶ Now Jesus begins His ministry in Galilee of the Gentiles (Matt. 4: 12, 15) i.e. outside the domain which is specifically that of the Christ or, at least, on its extreme periphery. From the point of view of Christological institutionalism, this is an extraordinary fact and the Gospels emphasize

its absolute contradiction to current Messianic ideas (cf. John 1: 46, 7: 41-42, 7: 52; Matt. 2: 23).

The interpretation of Matt. 2: 23 is difficult and debatable. Two questions arise: (a) Is the connection which Matthew establishes between Nazareth and Ναζωραῖος a possible one? (b) In what sense are we to understand the fulfilment of the prophecy? (a) Some people⁷ deny that Ναζωραῖος means the people of Nazareth. They base their opinion on the fact, which is generally admitted, that the Aramaic term (as the Syrian translations show) had a cadec and not a zain, and that the cadec is transliterated in Greek by a sigma and not by a zeta. What is more, they call attention to the omega, which, they claim, it is impossible to explain if Ναζωραῖος comes from Nazareth. Taking these philological difficulties in conjunction with the mention, in Epiphanius,⁸ of a pre-Christian sect called "Nasaraioi", it has sometimes been supposed that the term in Matt. 2: 23 suggests the connection of Jesus with a pre-Christian sect.⁹ Lidzbarski¹⁰ seemed to confirm this theory when he connected—not without reason—the term Ναζωραῖος with "nasoraja" which he found in Mandaean texts and which denoted in his opinion, a pre-Christian Jewish sect. These theories are clearly insubstantial. Philologically, with Lagrange¹¹ and Schlatter¹² we may recall the fact that the zeta can be used to render the cadec and with Schaeder¹³ that the omega, as well as the alpha, can be used to transcribe a Semitic sheva, even a simple one. Furthermore, Epiphanius himself distinguishes the "Nasaraioi" from the "Nazoraioi", the latter term denoting with him a sect which derives its name from the primitive Christians.¹⁴ Finally, very clear Mandaean texts¹⁵ apply indubitably the term "nasoraja" to Christians. All in all, there is no real difficulty in supposing that Ναζωραῖος, just like Ναζαρηνός, means the people of Nazareth. In any case, every time that this word is used in the New Testament, it is undoubtedly synonymous with Ναζαρηνός.¹⁶

(b) In what sense are we to understand the fulfilment of the prophecy? Neither Nazareth nor its people are named in the Old Testament, nor in Josephus, nor in the Talmud. Thus either the assertion ὅτι Ναζωραῖος κληθήσεται is a pun¹⁷ (but what?) or else, in the thought of Matthew, it does not constitute

a citation. For there is no reason at all to attribute it to a lost prophecy. What quotation or, since it is a question of "the" prophets, what Old Testament idea might be in question here? Two suggestions have been made. There is a pun on *Ναζωραῖος* and *nésar* (Is. 11: 1) which is itself combined with the closely related idea of *sémach* (Jer. 23: 5, 33: 15; Zech. 3: 8, 6: 12). The method *Al-tiqri* (Do not read) borrowed from Rabbinical exegesis permitted in fact such combinations.¹⁸ And a curious text¹⁹ seems to have preserved the memory that Jesus was called *nésar*. But Schaeder observes²⁰ that such a pun would be utterly incomprehensible in Greek—the language in which Matthew unquestionably wrote his Gospel.²¹ He prefers to interpret the pun on lines which would make it intelligible to Greek readers. He thinks he finds the correct rendering in *Ναζωραῖος*—*Ναζιραῖος* (Judges 13: 5, 7) especially as an ancient tradition, attested by Tertullian, associated the Hebrew *nazir* with the Greek *Ναζιραῖος*.²² But this raises fresh difficulties. Either we must understand *nazir* in the general sense of elect one, prince (cf. Gen. 49: 26; Deut. 33: 16; Amos 2: 11-12) but then the pun disappears in Greek or else we must understand *nazir* in the technical sense of Nazirite, in which case it is hard to see how the term can be applied to Jesus who has nothing of the Nazirite about Him (cf. Matt. 11: 19=Luke 7: 34).

Since none of these interpretations is satisfactory, we may agree²³ that there is no quotation properly speaking, but that the phrase is explanatory in intention; in fact He was to be called a Nazarene (alluding to the nickname which the Jews as a matter of fact gave to Jesus and to the Christians, cf. Acts 24: 5). We have then this extraordinary thing: Matthew considers a Nazarene Christ to have been prophesied in the Old Testament. According to him, the whole cycle of prophetic testimony bears witness to the fact that Christ will begin His ministry elsewhere than in the sacred domain of Judah and Jerusalem in which the divine promises nevertheless are focused. The humility which such a location implies shows how Jesus accomplishes the prophecies which relate to the humility of the promised Servant.

Galilee and Nazareth are not in the Gospels mere

geographical terms. They are places which have a theological significance. They symbolize the deeply unofficial character of Jesus, the sovereignly unorthodox way in which He is the promised Messiah. Hence the importance of the mention of Galilee and Nazareth in the Passion narratives (Matt. 26: 69=Mark 14: 67; Luke 23: 6; Mark 14: 70=Luke 22: 59; Matt. 26: 71; John 18: 5, 7). According to all the standards of Christological institutionalism it is quite extraordinary, it is comic, that a Galilean, coming from Nazareth, should claim to be the Messiah. John has emphasized this point by including the title Nazarene on the *titulus* (John 19: 19). We have already pointed out that the Messianic claim of Jesus would not in itself have been an adequate reason to condemn Him. If He was condemned, it was because of His self-identification with the Son of Man, the heavenly power seated at the right hand of God. But a further reason, as we are now in a position to realize, was that His Galilean humility seemed in no wise to correspond to the Messianic glory which He claimed. It is not as Messiah, but as Galilean Messiah that He was condemned.

Furthermore, Jesus opposes to the publicity expected from the works of the Messiah His famous Messianic secret so often noted. What has been less often noted is that this secrecy characterizes precisely the Galilean ministry. Several times Jesus casts out demons because the latter had recognized Him (Mark 1: 23-25=Luke 4: 33-35; Mark 1: 34=Luke 4: 41; Mark 3: 12, 5: 19=Luke 8: 39;²⁴ Matt. 9: 30). Or again Jesus forbids His disciples to say that He is the Christ (Matt. 16: 20=Mark 8: 30=Luke 9: 21; cf. Matt. 17: 9=Mark 9: 9). All such passages refer to the Galilean ministry.

How different it is with the Jerusalem ministry! The passages which refer to it never contain any injunction to secrecy. On the contrary, in the one Jerusalem healing miracle, according to the Synoptics (Matt. 21: 14) Jesus encourages the children who confess His Messiahship (Matt. 21: 15-16). Hence, from the start, secrecy was the outstanding mark of the Galilean ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. His Messiahship would be authentic only if it were manifested through the scandalous mystery which enwrapped the Servant and the Son of Man working incognito in Galilee of the Gentiles.²⁵