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CONTENTS

FOUNDATIONS

(Doing theology on the basics of classical faith)

CURRENT DIRECTIONS IN CHRISTOLOGY STUDIES

By L.W. Hurtado, Assistant Professor of New Testament, University of Manitoba

(II) Modern Christologies

(Last month, Hurtado surveyed New Testament Christological Studies. In this final section, he gives an overview of contemporary thinking—ed.)

The major Protestant work attempting somewhat comprehensively to articulate a christology basically loyal to traditional categories is Pannenberg's impressive volume (1964). Moltmann's christological study is both innovative and stimulating, and is based upon a view of Jesus very close to the classical, "high" christology (1973). He is the most frequently cited author in the "liberation" christology by Sobrino (1976), and, with the latter book, Moltmann's work shows the political implications of christology. Moltmann's book is exciting reading because he shows brilliant insights into classical Christian faith and because he dares to interact with modern secular and anti-religious ideas. This is a most instructive argument for the over-arching relevance of Christology for all aspects of life and thought.

In Great Britain, several theologians have published criticisms of traditional christological views, offering examples of christological statements that reflect varying degrees of revision to what the authors consider acceptable modern religious thought. I have already mentioned the "myth" collection and to this work we should add Robinson's study (1973), which is in turn heavily indebted to the earlier volume by John Knox (1967). Three major problems prevent these scholars from accepting traditional Christian beliefs about Jesus. First, they tend to believe that the christological beliefs reflected in the ancient creeds were the result of Graeco-Roman philosophical and religious ideas which entered Christianity, corrupting earlier Christian belief. Secondly, they seem to feel that traditional belief in the incarnation is not intelligible by the standards of modern philosophical criteria (of a rigid, British-Empiricist stripe). Thirdly, and very importantly, several of them feel that it is impossible to regard Jesus exclusively as the incarnation of the divine in a pluralistic world of various religious traditions such as Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. We cannot linger here over these issues, unfortunately, but the sequel to the "myth" book demonstrates that the views of these scholars are themselves not without problems (Goulder, 1979).

To deal with these issues briefly, we may note, first, that while it is true that Greek philosophical categories were employed by the Church Fathers in dealing with the christological issues of the early centuries, it is simply historically incorrect to think that the christological affirmations of early Christianity resulted from the intrusion of "foreign" ideas into the Church.

Secondly, the notion that the incarnation doctrine is unintelligible (like a "square circle," Hick) depends upon very questionable definitions of intelligibility that sound rather quaint by more recent scientific and philosophical standards, to say nothing of the fact that the authors in the "myth" collection frequently parade a caricature of traditional Christian dogma, causing one to wonder if they really understand what they set out to criticize.

Thirdly, the contributors frequently appear as if they had only recently discovered venerable and noble religious traditions existing elsewhere in the world alongside Christianity, and their headlong rush to remove the objectionable exclusiveness of Christian faith is at times amusing and at other times pathetic. Suffice it to say that the "myth" writers are poor guides as to how to establish fruitful theological discussion between Christian and non-Christian religions, trotting out tired and quaint syncretism as the latest fashion in christology.

A much more interesting (and, I think, more productive) body of work has been done by several Roman Catholic scholars, whose books deserve recognition from all Christians. Hans Kung's now famous book (1974), though not a "christology" was greatly concerned with christological issues, emphasizing the earthly Jesus' ministry as the basis for Christian beliefs. Less well known, but very valuable is W. Kasper's study (1974), solid in scholarship and sensitive both to historical/exegetical problems and to the need to articulate Christian faith in clear language that is informed by sympathy for classical belief.

E. Schillebeeckx, however, has certainly produced the largest christology books in recent years. His first volume (700 pages!), *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (1979), was heavily devoted to his own attempt to sift through historical-critical issues of New Testament exegetes, a commendable effort for a dogmatic theologian but in this case a seriously flawed effort (see reviews by Brown, 1980; Teselle and MacRae, 1979). His second volume (925 pages!) has now appeared in English (Schillebeeckx, 1980), and, though it too is heavily concerned with New Testament exegesis, it attempts to propose a christological basis for all of Christian life, with special reference to the task of Christians in the modern world.

Another major Catholic thinker who has influenced christological discussion is Karl Rahner, though he has not produced a christology book as such. There is in English now a handy summary of his views, together with an application of them to NT data, that students will find useful (Rahner, Thusing, 1980).

Regardless of one's opinions about this or that view in any of these many books, one must agree that they collectively bear witness to the continuing importance of the historical and dogmatic issues of christology. The implications of one's christological views are enormous, and it is accurate to say that no theological student can safely ignore the issues in this vigorous discussion. They involve the center, the very heart of Christian proclamation.

In the years ahead, evangelicals must equip themselves to contribute to the discussion of both historical and dogmatic questions, and must take seriously the need to correct and enliven the often quasi-heretical, sentimentalized and deadeningly shallow christological understanding of the people in the pews.

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ACADEME

Reports from seminary classrooms, special events, and TSF chapters)

TEACHING EVANGELISM AT PERKINS: A CONVERSATION WITH DAVID WATSON

by Mark Lau Branson

Professor David Watson, an Associate Editor for TSF Bulletin, *is an Assistant Professor of Evangelism at Perkins School of Theology (a United Methodist Seminary in Dallas). Having visited his classes and benefited from many conversations, I intend here to present some of the content and methods of his teaching. Creative, scholarly, and personable, Watson should be an excellent resource person as Christians of various persuasions seek to proclaim the Good News.*

Prophetic and Personal Evangelism

Let's begin with Watson's definition of evangelism: "discerning, defining, and interpreting the gospel for communication to as many as possible, as often as possible, and in as many ways as possible." This differs from the church growth school. Watson believes that selecting an audience according to immediate responsiveness creates a situation in which "results start becoming the criteria." In comparing two evangelical authors, Watson says, "it's a very subtle difference, but Peter Wagner will affirm that we should evangelize so that people *shall* respond, John Stott will say that we should evangelize so that people *may* respond."

Personal evangelism concerns an individual sharing out of one's own experience and convictions. *Prophetic* evangelism is an announcement about the Kingdom of God, the activity of God, in our world. On the prophetic mode,

> Suppose we would take the analogy of journalism. When people pick up a newspaper, they want to see the news. They also want the right to leave the newspaper on the doormat if they wish. But if they do open it up, they want to see the news. They don't want to hear what the editor's grandmother did last week. They don't want to hear about the party in the print shop. Nor do they want to hear how well the printing press is running these days. Which, as an analogy, is exactly what the church puts out. For example, *Sojourners* and the *National Catholic Reporter* do prophetic evangelism. It says, "Those of us who belong to Christ have been given privileged knowledge. We don't expect others necessarily to agree with this. But we are under divine command to make sure they hear it." Ultimately, I believe it is the local congregation that needs to do this. The local congregations have what I call the hermeneutic of the people. In other words, the gospel must not only be interpreted through Scripture, tradition and reason. Ultimately, we have to do what Christ did, and what Wesley followed, throw it out toward many people and see what happens.

These are eschatological announcements. These are signs of the new age. We expect these signs. These signs must be interpreted according to the message of Jesus Christ. Watson cites Jesus' Nazareth sermon (Luke 4:18ff) as a New Testament example. Alfred Krass' *Five Lanterns at Sundown* (Eerdmans) is the best recent statement of this type of evangelism. Watson gave some examples:

> While I was doing graduate work, I was pastoring a small church in a rural town — a very genteel town, very picturesque. For lots of reasons, some of which were my own initiative, we found ourselves in the throes of planning the first fully integrated Easter sunrise service in the town's history. I went to my church and asked, "Can we have it in our church?" All sorts of reasons would be given concerning why it should not be in the church. The way that I approached this in the church was not to say, "Ethically this is the thing we should do." I did not say, "You'll be a racist if you don't." What I said was, "The ministers of your town have prayerfully felt the call of God to worship together this Easter. Never mind next Easter or last Easter — *this* Easter. This we feel is a message that these churches need to give to the town. Now if you prayerfully feel we should not, you have three months to tell us. But you must do so prayerfully as we have done prayerfully." They didn't have any objections.
>
> Here is another example: We were having a study group on evangelism. Halfway through a session, someone said, "Look, we have a thousand dollars in our church fund for a new