THE HUMANITY AND DIVINITY OF CHRIST
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A STUDY OF PATTERN IN CHRISTOLOGY

BY

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Dedicated, in love and hope, to two god-children, Peter Anders Edman and John Samuel Robinson, and to John Smith Prather Beeland, whom I baptized, and to their parents, with the prayer that all of us may continue Christ’s faithful soldiers and servants unto our life’s end.
INTRODUCTION

My purpose in this essay is limited and comparatively simple: I wish to lift up for consideration the several ways in which the early Church dealt with what has always been the central problem of christology, namely, the humanity of Christ, the divine Lord, and in this way help, if I may, to clarify our own thoughts about him. By ‘the humanity of Christ’ I mean, quite plainly, the fact or apparent fact that Jesus was a man.

The propriety of such an undertaking may be challenged, and perhaps a few words of justification are appropriate. Someone may ask: ‘Is what you have just said true of the primitive christology? Was the early Christian concerned with the issue of the humanity (or divinity) of Jesus? Have you not brought to the New Testament an essentially modern problem? And are you not, therefore, in danger of distorting what its writers were meaning to say by forcing them to answer a question they did not confront or consider?’ This critical reaction is not merely hypothetical. An actual reader of the opening chapters of this book has said to me: ‘I have the feeling that ‘humanity–divinity’ is not the right exegetical frame of reference. This is not wholly with the grain of the documents.’

I see the truth and feel the force of this objection; and yet I do not regard it as fatal. It is true that the words ‘humanity’ and ‘divinity’ (or ‘human’ and ‘divine’) hardly appear in the New Testament, and never in a christological connection. But too much can easily be made of the presence or absence of particular words. The
realities to which, for us at least, these words answer were undoubtedly present from the beginning—namely, the man Jesus most surely remembered and the heavenly Lord most surely known—and the age-old problem of christology is implicit in that fact. For how could he be both? And since there was never any lack of certainty and clarity about his present exaltation, the question was bound to be concerned mostly with his nature and career as a man. It can be argued that among the New Testament writers—certainly among all but the very latest of them—this question was not consciously asked or answered. But this does not mean that the more significant writers did not have their own characteristic ways of thinking about the nature and meaning of the human life of Jesus, and that these ways were not in part determined, whether they knew it or not, by their belief in his divine Lordship. In a word, the later preoccupation of the Church with the problem of how Jesus could be both God and man was not a development new and alien, but represented a continuation of a process of reflection which began surely as early as Paul’s time, however strange the terms of later discussions would have seemed to him, or even the existence of the discussions themselves.

We are concerned in these chapters entirely with the Church’s thought, and not at all with the problem of Jesus’ own understanding of his nature and role. Such ideas as I may have on the latter theme are presented in my book The Death of Christ, and I am intending neither to alter nor to develop further what is set forth there. As

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1 Several chapters of this book were presented at the Bangor Theological Seminary as the Francis B. Denio Lectures and the first of them in a somewhat different form was published in the Alumni Bulletin of that institution. I am grateful to the editor of the Bulletin for permission to make some use of that lecture in this publication, as well as to the President, the faculty, and others at Bangor for many courtesies at the time of my visit.
a matter of fact, christology in the distinctively Christian sense must, almost by definition, be thought of as a post-resurrection development, an aspect of the Church’s thought about how, and through whom, it came to be. In any case, we shall be concerned with it only as such.

The book falls into two nearly equal parts. The first three chapters will be primarily historical and if they stood alone might, for all their brevity, presume to some such title as ‘Christology in the New Testament’. The same descriptive phrase (as distinguished from, say, ‘The Christology of the New Testament’) might perhaps be applied to other books of mine which also deal with this same general theme but make no attempt, either separately or together, to do so in a systematic or exhaustive way.¹ The qualification indicated in this last clause will obviously apply, with special aptness, to the present brief book. We shall not be examining one by one the titles of Jesus (as Taylor, Cullmann, and Hahn have done)² or any particular title (with Otto, Duncan, Bowman, Manson, both W. and T. W., Hooker, Zimmerli and Jeremias, Tödt,³ and many others); nor shall I be

¹ I have in mind here particularly The Man Christ Jesus (1941), Christ the Lord (1945), On the Meaning of Christ (1947), the three being now published together as Jesus: Lord and Christ (New York: Harper and Row, 1958); The Death of Christ (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958), already cited; and The Church and the Reality of Christ (New York: Harper and Row, 1962). I presume to mention these books because the present work so constantly presupposes them.


attempting anything like a systematic treatment of the several writers of the New Testament in their chronological order (in the manner of Rawlinson)\textsuperscript{1} or of the christology of any single writer (as MacNeill\textsuperscript{8} has done for Hebrews and Brückner, Andrews,\textsuperscript{9} and others have done for Paul). My purpose is both more simple and more general. I wish to suggest and defend a way of understanding the structure of the New Testament christology as a whole, a way of seeing the pattern of its development. And we shall seek this understanding, as I have said, by following as a kind of clue the changing ways in which Jesus’ humanity was interpreted and emphasized.

The latter half of the book will be concerned primarily with the problem of how the modern Christian is to think of the human Christ, and with the continuing meaning and relevance of this same structure or pattern. Here the limits of my purpose and the absence of any pretentions to comprehensiveness and adequacy will be, I hope, even more apparent. In both sections of this discussion I shall be trying to indicate a path through a large and complicated field, not to survey the field as a whole, much less to explore its several parts. But to say this is not to disparage the importance of the undertaking. Is not a viable path what we most need? Knowing the facts is useless unless one also sees how to walk among them.


