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TSF BULLETIN

FEBRUARY 1981

TSF BULLETIN VOL. 4 No. 3

Formerly *TSF News & Reviews*
Published by Theological Students
Fellowship, 233 Langdon, Madison WI
53703.

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FOUNDATIONS

(Doing theology on the basics of classical faith)

CURRENT DIRECTIONS IN CHRISTOLOGY STUDIES

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

It is obvious that Christology is the central, distinguishing doctrinal question in Christianity, and so, perhaps for this reason, our time has seen a vigorous and voluminous discussion of this topic. This fact makes it difficult to do anything more than to try to cite major directions of only the most recent discussion in an article of this length. Because of the oceanic amount of literature, any such survey is likely to reflect the limitations of the reading done by whoever signs such an article. I am sure that this is true in the present case, but I hope that these articles may still prove helpful to students. I shall try to make some observations about the work of (I) New Testament specialists and (II) modern theologians on Christology. I must omit discussion of Patristics and later historical periods for want of space, and because of my insufficient familiarity with the relevant secondary literature.

(I) New Testament Christological Studies

Twentieth century NT christological study was given its agenda largely by the History of Religions school of German scholarship and especially by the work of W. Bousset (1913). The approach exemplified in this work is to study early christology as an historical phenomenon, attempting to trace stages in its development in connection with much attention to the larger Graeco-Roman religious environment. Bultmann was a pupil of Bousset and perpetuated his influence on down to the present. Elsewhere I have pointed out major faults in the positions held by Bousset and others who followed him (Hurtado, 1979) but knowledge of his work is still essential for understanding the current scholarly issues.

The bulk of more recent New Testament christological studies has been preoccupied with the New Testament titles given to Jesus, for these titles are quite properly seen as important indicators of the beliefs of those who used them. The usual approach is to study the use of the titles in question in the Jewish and pagan background of the early church, and then to try to determine their significance in whatever Christian writings are involved in the study. O. Cullmann's well-known book is the prime example of this sort of study (1957), and is also the major alternative to Bousset's book, taking contrary positions on several issues and being somewhat comparable in erudition and detailed treatment of the issues. 1963 was a rich year for "title studies," with the appearance of Hahn's book on the Synoptic christological titles, Todt's detailed study of the Son of Man title, and Kramer's work on Pauline titles. For students, Fuller's book (1965) is an accessible summary of this line of research.

In spite of the many valuable features of these books, they can all be criticized for certain significant faults. First, these studies rely heavily on the notion that the term "the Son of Man" was a well-known title for an eschatological figure in ancient Judaism, a notion that decreases in credibility as time goes by; and as this view becomes less tenable so does the assertion that there was an early strand of Christianity for which "Son of Man" was the major christological title. Secondly, much has been made of great distinctions between "Palestinian" and "Hellenistic" Judaism, without adequate attention being given to the actual evidence of the penetration of

Hellenistic culture into first-century Palestinian life. The result of this is that New Testament data has been classified neatly into overly rigid categories and the development of christology has been portrayed much more simplistically than the evidence warrants (on Jewish/Hellenistic interpretation in the immediate pre-Christian centuries, see Hengel 1973, 1976). Thirdly, these studies (except Cullmann to a large degree) all seem to assume that each christological title reflects a distinct christological view and that each title can be attached to a theoretical, early Christian group for which a given title rather fully expressed its christology. Each of these assumptions is possible but requires a strong evidence and cannot safely be taken for granted. It is my judgment that scholars have often boldly overstepped the evidence, following an overeager desire to perform an *analysis* of early christology.

Since the pioneering work of Bauer (1934) in particular, New Testament scholars have been more aware of the diversity in early Christianity, and this awareness has stimulated much recent christology study. It is not clear, however, that this study has always led to tenable conclusions. For example, the much-discussed "divine man" christology, thought by some to be both represented in some New Testament materials and based upon a supposedly ubiquitous and well-developed pagan 'divine man' concept, has been rendered more dubious by careful studies in recent years (Tiede, Holladay, Lane). As another example, the idea that there was a "Q community" with its own christology in which Jesus was seen as a teacher-prophet and little more (Edwards 1971, 1975) may itself be little more than an exercise in scholarly ingenuity (Stanton, 1973). Dunn's attempt to portray broadly the diversity in early Christianity (1977) is both helpful as a summary of much recent New Testament scholarship, and also marred by oversimplification at some points (Hurtado, 1978).

TSF BULLETIN (Formerly *TSF News & Reviews*) is published five times during the school year (October-May). Membership in TSF (\$10/yr; \$8/yr students) includes both the *TSF Bulletin* and *Themelios* (the theological journal of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, three issues). Separate subscription rates are: *TSF Bulletin* — \$6.50/yr; *Themelios* — \$4.50/yr. Bulk rates are available on request. The Student Group Rate (10 or more copies delivered to one address) is \$7/yr per person. All subscriptions and correspondence (except as noted on special order forms) should be sent to Theological Students Fellowship, 233 Langdon, Madison WI 53703. TSF is a division of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship.

Historical-critical questions about the origin of christological belief were underscored by the sensationalized collection of essays by a group of British academics, *The Myth of God Incarnate* (Hick, 1977). This book is broadly more valuable for drawing certain conclusions about the British church scene than anything else, but it has sparked not only a polemical reply (Green, 1977), and a sequel based on a discussion between the original contributors and learned critics (Goulder, 1979), but also a valuable monograph by Moule (1977) and now the major study of the origins of incarnation christology by Dunn (1980) which I received too late to be able to evaluate thoroughly for this article, though I may say that it appears to be well worth students' attention.

Other examples of major contributions to the origins of early christology and the meaning of early confessional titles include the Kittel article on "Son of Man" (Colpe, 1972) and the brilliant monograph on "Son of God" by Hengel (1975). The latter work in particular is an important corrective to questionable assertions of some scholars and is the sort of solid work upon which defensible views can be built.

In all of this discussion certain issues remain the center of attention. (1) In what ways and to what degree was the development of belief in Jesus a somewhat distinctive phenomenon, and how was this phenomenon influenced by

prepared for by religious developments in ancient Judaism of the Graeco-Roman world? (2) Can we identify stages in an evolution of christological belief and/or can we discern clearly christological beliefs of various Christian groups in the first century? (3) What is the range of any such diversity in early christology, and is there a central conviction behind the variety of christological formulations of this period? (4) How are first-century christological controversies and formulation culminating in the great Councils at Nicaea and Chalcedon? (5) In what way is the christology of the first century relevant to the continuing work of 'christologizing' in the present church scene? It is unfortunate that far too much of the scholarly literature reflects a desire to try to invalidate or defend classical Christian christological formulations by discussion of the primitive church. While this is perhaps not fully avoidable and the insights on both sides are understandable, it must be emphasized that such attempts are subtly dangerous to accurate, fair historical study and are often motivated by polemical motives. Students should find Marshall (1976) especially helpful, not only in surveying the literature, but also in providing a clear direction in addressing these issues. New Testament christology is a complex and fascinating subject and should not be left either to apologists for or to 'cultured despisers' of classical christology.

In the March issue of *TSF Bulletin* I will survey directions in modern christologies."

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TSF Bulletin does not necessarily speak for Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship on matters dealt with in its brief articles. Although editors personally sign the IVCF basis of faith, our purpose is to provide resources for and encouragement towards biblical *thinking* and *living* rather than to formulate "final" answers.

INQUIRY

(Questions, proposals, discussions, and research reports on theological and biblical issues)

WHAT IS MY CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO OTHER FAITHS?

By Charles O. Ellenbaum, Prof. of Religion, College of DuPage, Glen Ellyn, Illinois.

North American Christians live in pluralistic countries where we are bombarded daily by other world views. These include not only clearly theistic religions, but also religious world views which travel in the guise of secular humanism or scientific atheism. We can consider these world views to be religious if, with Frederick J. Streng (*Ways of Being Religious*, pp. 6f), we define religion as "a means toward ultimate transformation," and not merely as a *theistic* response to the questions of ultimacy in our lives. We need to understand clearly our own religious world view and to become aware of the other major world views which are circulating. In this way, we can enter into meaningful dialogue and evangelism. For a good introduction to the concept of world view, see *The Universe Next Door: A Basic World View Catalog*, by James W. Sire.