

READING REPORTS

by

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Course: New Testament 336: The Meaning of Jesus Christ
for the Early Church

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The Names of Jesus by Vincent Taylor. Macmillan & Co. Ltd., London, 1959

This little volume deals with all the names of Jesus that appear in the New Testament. The author divides his work in two major parts: I. The Principal Names and Titles of Jesus; II. Other Names and Titles of Jesus. Under the first division he considers the following names and titles: (1) Jesus, (2) the Son of Joseph; the Son of Mary, (3) Rabbi; Rabboni; Teacher; Master (4) Prophet; the Prophet (5) Christ (and related titles) (6) The Son of David (7) The Son of Man (8) The Servant (9) The Lord (10) Son of God (and related titles). The second division has four subdivisions, namely, (1) Messianic Titles, (2) Messianic and Communal Names, (3) Soteriological Titles, (4) Christological Titles Proper.

In the treatment of these names and titles the author follows a similar approach. First, he considers the possible meaning of the name or title in Hellenistic and Jewish circles. Then he presents the evidence from the New Testament. And finally, he draws conclusions as to its meaning in the New Testament.

Generally speaking, Taylor traces the origin and meaning of the names and titles to Old Testament and Jewish Intertestamental literature, and tends to minimize the Hellenic influence. However, he constantly points out that the names and titles which were most commonly used in the Gentile church were those that had religious and cultural associations in the Hellenistic world. This is especially true of the name Lord. Another point that he brings out is that the names and title of Jesus have such a rich and transcendental meaning that neither the Jewish nor the Hellenistic backgrounds are capable of providing a full

explanation of their content and import. The latter can only be grasped in the light of Jesus and the faith of the early church, and even then only haltingly.

The reader is impressed by the following facts:

1. The wide variety of names applied to Jesus. In all fifty-five names and titles are considered.

2. The prompt disappearance of some of the names and titles from general usage and the emergence of others. The title Christ is a case in point. It was used very guardedly if at all by our Lord of Himself, and then rather sparingly. As soon as Christianity moved into the Hellenistic world the title became a proper name variously joined to the pronominal adjective our, the name Jesus and the title Lord. The latter really became the title par excellence in the Gentile world.

3. The important role that worship and veneration played in the shaping of these names and titles. They did not emerge from a purely theological intent, although this is not absent, but rather from a deep faith and commitment to the exalted Christ. This is especially true of the Fourth Evangelist.

4. The superficial sound of modern attempts to give titles or names to Jesus that reflect our modern and often humanistic or pietistic interests.

5. The rich Christological import of these names and titles.

The book is intended to provide a stimulus for a Christology of the New Testament. This is exactly the purpose of Tayler. He deals with this theme in the volume The Person of Christ in the New Testament.

"This phrase now accepted as English. Improper as it is. (See Webster)."

The Person of Christ in New Testament Teaching

by Vincent Tayler. Macmillan & Co. Ltd., London, 1959

This book is divided into two major parts. The first is exegetical and deals with the Christology of each book or group of books in the New Testament: first with the Gospels, then with the Acts of the Apostles, with the Pauline Epistles, and with the rest of the books in a more or less chronological succession. A special section is devoted to the Hymn in Phil. 2:6-11. This is the traditional way of handling the Christology of the New Testament.

The second part is historical and theological and considers the Christological problem in terms of its chronological development, i.e. the divine consciousness of Jesus is considered first, then the Christology of the primitive Christian communities, ^{and} the contribution of the great writers, and finally Tayler makes his own Christological formulation.

Tayler speaks of the divine consciousness of Jesus rather than of his messianic consciousness. By this phrase he means that Jesus was conscious of being more than man, of sharing during his earthly existence in the life of Deity itself. He draws from the Gospels five arguments in order to buttress his position. These are: (1) the use by Jesus of the name 'Son of Man' with reference to himself; (2) His consciousness of being at victorious odds with Satan and the power of darkness; (3) His sovereign use of the Old Testament; (4) His teaching concerning the Spirit; (5) His conception of His redemptive ministry as the Suffering Servant of the Lord. Furthermore, Tayler maintains that the following sayings--Mark 1:11, Luke 10:22= Mt. 11:27, and Mk. 13:32--also furnish

evidence that Jesus' "consciousness of divine Sonship is the key to the presentation of Jesus we find in all the Gospels." (p. 169).

This consciousness of Divine Sonship came to Jesus under the limitation of his humanity. "It was through prayer, as well as by revelation and intuition, that He came to know Himself as Son" (179). The Synoptic Gospels give us an account of this consciousness of Sonship more in harmony with the humanity of Jesus. The Gospel of John presents Sonship "always in its noon-day splendour." The former is the more historical picture.

Taylor then considers the Christology of the primitive Christian communities. He finds that the primitive Christian communities were hardly influenced by the great writers of the New Testament. The determinative factors for their views of Christ were the Resurrection, the use of the term Lord by Jesus in parables, the use of the Old Testament, the effect of the invocation of Christ in worship, exorcism and confession at baptism, and above all the sense of union with Christ experienced in the breaking of bread. All of this made the confession of Christ as Lord inevitable. The basic concept was that of the Lordship of Christ which was meaningful for the present and also for the future.

Two Christological deficiencies are present in primitive Christian communities, namely (1) "the absence of a close connexion in Christian teaching between the Person and Work of Christ, and (2) the failure to relate the high claims made for Christ and the position assigned to him in the doctrine of God" (p. 210).

In the great writers of the New Testament attempts are made to meet these deficiencies, but only in the trinitarian formulation are the issues really met.

In the final chapters of the book Tayler endeavors to defend his own "kenetic" Christology. He follows in this respect H. R. Mackintosh and P. T. Forsyth. All three maintain that the incarnation involves some kind of depotentiation of deity. The kenosis passage of Philippians 2 is used widely but not exclusively.

As we read this book the following ideas crossed our minds:

1. The exegetical work must precede any Christological formulation. This is what Tayler has done in the first part of his book. No Christology can be based merely on philosophical or even theological a prioris.

2. There are many Christologies in the New Testament. There is the Christology of the primitive Christians and the Christologies of the great and lesser writers. Tayler points out how all the New Testament writers are indebted to this primitive formulation and how they made new advances. This variety and richness in Christological formulations is a witness to the tremendous impact of the Christ event on the first century Christians.

3. The basic position assumed by Tayler is that of the divine consciousness of Jesus. He bases his position on exegetical and Christological grounds. It is interesting to note that other scholars employ the same categories and reject that conclusion.

4. It is obvious from this book that the Christological problem is not settled within the pages of the New Testament. This was done later by the church. Even today many question the church's solution.

5. The weakest point in the whole book is Tayler's attempt to put forth his "kenetic" Christology. At least there is not a basis in Philippians 2 for a theory of depotentiation.

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The Christology of the New Testament by Oscar Cullmann. Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1959.

This volume consists of four parts. Part I deals with the Christological titles which refer to the earthly work of Jesus, namely, prophet, suffering servant of God and High Priest. Part II covers the titles which refer to the future work of Jesus, i.e. Messiah and Son of Man. Part III includes the titles which refer to the present work of Jesus, namely, Lord and Savior. And Part IV considers the titles which refer to the pre-existence of Jesus, i.e. the Word, Son of God, and God. In all, ten titles are considered in all their Christological import. However, many of the other titles given to Jesus in the New Testament are considered under these ten.

The method employed by Cullmann in dealing with these Christological titles is ~~to some extent given in~~ the fourfold division of his book. He considers successively the titles that comprise the earthly, the eschatological, the present, and the pre-existent work of Christ. However, he is careful to point out that many of the titles illuminate two or even more of the aspects of the Christ-event. In every case, the author raises the question whether the title under consideration was applied by Jesus to himself or was a creation of the primitive Christian community. Also, almost every title is examined against its Jewish and Hellenistic background, and in the light of the use made of it by Jesus and the early church. On the whole there is a tendency to give more weight to Jewish roots than to the Greek. Of course, the author thinks that exegetically and historically this is the proper thing to do.

Cullmann shows that the picture one gets from the study of New

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Testament Christology is one in which the point of reference for all Christological questions and formulations is the event of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and the perception of that event by the believing community. All Christological thought in the New Testament starts with the historical revelation and moves backwards and forwards, affirming on the one hand the pre-existence of Christ, and on the other his future coming. Furthermore, Cullmann points out that all revelation in the New Testament is conceived in terms of Christ. Thus Christ is presented as the mediator of creation, redemption and consummation. The statement, "There can be no Heilsgeschichte without Christology; no Christology without a Heilsgeschichte which unfolds in time" (p. 9), summarized well the thesis of the whole book.

Cullmann takes a position completely opposite to that of Bultmann and his followers in respect to the divine consciousness of Jesus. He maintains--on exegetical and historical grounds, of course--that Jesus was conscious of carrying out God's plan from the moment of his baptism. Jesus understood his mission in terms of Isaiah 53 right from the beginning and thought that he had come to introduce the Kingdom of God as the Son of Man. Jesus also applied ^{to himself} the concept of High Priest, and himself was conscious of being the Son of God in a special way. It was because this was so that the early church conceived of him in these terms.

Cullmann also shows the great importance that the Lordship of Christ had for the primitive church. This Lordship was over the church, the whole world and the individual Christian. This Lordship was experienced by the church in the resurrection experiences and in its experiences of worship.

There are two things that have been impressed on our minds again

and again while reading this book. One is the fact of the scholarly nature of this volume. Cullmann uses all the resources of New Testament scholarship to buttress his thesis. His knowledge of the field and its literature is tremendous; especially helpful are the footnotes.

The other has to do with the thesis concerning the divine consciousness of Jesus. How is it possible for men like Bultmann and Cullmann--both top New Testament scholars--to come to diametrically opposed conclusions? Obviously, both of them cannot be right. Are these differences to be accounted for by the fact that both of them start from different theological and philosophical presuppositions? If this is the case, can there be any objective scholarship? These are some of the questions that have passed through our minds as we read this volume.

It would seem that the question of methodology is important here. Can we rightly understand the New Testament with our present-day categories of time, space, and history? Can we accept the New Testament world-view that Christ is the center of history? Perhaps it is the answer to this question that forces scholars to draw different conclusions from the same historical material.