

reverses the disastrous results of Adam's fall¹⁷; it is because of his obedience to God's command that Christ is vindicated and exalted and given the name of "Lord."¹⁸ But not only Christ; those who are joined to him—those who are in Christ—share with him suffering, death, resurrection, and exaltation. It is in Christ that man is restored and renewed in the image of his creator.¹⁹ And not only man. For the final result of Christ's obedience is to be worked out in terms of the entire universe, which was subjected to futility as a consequence of Adam's sin²⁰; with the final revelation of the glory of those who are, in Christ, sons of God, the creation itself will be released from the bondage of corruption which now shackles it and be renewed according to God's purpose. It is here, perhaps, that we have the germ of the idea of the cosmic Christ developed in Colossians, where Christ, ruler of the world and triumphant over the usurping powers, stands within the created order and yet over against it, at once firstborn among many brethren and agent of the cosmic salvation. It is Christ, the perfect image of the invisible God, in whom and through whom and for whom all things were created, and in whom all things hold together.

¹⁷ Rom. 5:12-21.

¹⁸ Phil. 2:5-11.

¹⁹ Col. 3:10; II Cor. 3:18.

²⁰ Rom. 8:18-22.

3

WORD, WISDOM, AND PROCESS

As a Christian I believe that Jesus Christ is of universal and decisive significance. I am committed to the belief that Jesus is Lord. As a Christian professionally and personally concerned with trends in current thought and present apologetic possibilities, I am convinced that we need a new appreciation of these truths about the Lordship of Christ affirmed traditionally in terms of word and wisdom. We need, and have the opportunity for, a new understanding of the cosmic significance of Jesus which will match our modern understanding of the cosmos. Unless this understanding of Jesus and the modern understanding of the cosmos are brought together, we shall be failing in preaching the gospel for our age. We shall also be leaving humanity to be swamped in the apparent vastness and indifference of that cosmos as we are now coming to understand it. But when I consider making some attempt to contribute to this task, I find myself faced with an extremely daunting initial question. What are the grounds for holding that speaking of Jesus in terms of word and wisdom is anything more than outmoded mythology, philosophy, and cosmology?

I do not find myself able to agree that it is good enough for me that Paul used such language, still less that the early church developed such language. Nor do I find it sufficient when, say, some Whiteheadian enthusiastically undertakes to show me

that a metaphysical view of the cosmic process allegedly (and probably largely actually) rooted in modern scientific developments positively underwrites, or is completed by cosmic assertions about, Jesus Christ. Still less am I easily cheered by Tillichian assertions that the new being in Jesus assures me that ultimate reality is both ultimate and real. The Pauline language is too much wrought out of an ancient world view for me to have any immediate conviction that it still says anything. Metaphysical language troubles me because, however neatly it coheres in itself and however plausibly it seems to correspond to generally accepted facts about the world, I always suspect that several other coherent systems using metaphysical language could be constructed. Correspondence to facts in such systems is achieved only by selection of facts and by definition of correspondence. Metaphysical systems as clues to the meaning of the universe seems to get one no further than the comment "Well, maybe," uttered in tones varying from wistful respect to skeptical scorn. This ties up with the basic worry as to whether it is proper to use terms such as "Ultimate Reality" with capital letters at all. Capital letters suggest importance and value. But the fundamental question is precisely whether the cosmic stuff of the universe is in any way interested in or capable of being related to importance and value. The possibility of making cosmic assertions of any sort on any basis seems exceedingly thin. It seems more than ever necessary, therefore, to look at cosmic assertions about Jesus as near their origin as we can get and to ask not only, "What did Paul mean?" but also, "Why did he feel himself justified in meaning this?" before we can go on and ask whether and in what way we may meaningfully use similar assertions. What follows is the merest sketch of the method and approach which the situation seems to me to require.

In Colossians Paul is addressing himself to a particular situa-

tion on the basis of a particular position which he has already reached. From that position in addressing the situation he reaches the "cosmic affirmations" which he makes about Jesus. Now I said above that the Pauline language is too much wrought out of an ancient world view for it to be *immediately* accepted as meaningful. This does not imply that it cannot be eventually accepted as meaningful; we have first to see if we can map out what I might be allowed to call the logic of the mythology.

The terms in which he makes his assertions may well come from an interplay of terms used in early Gnostic-like speculations about the universe and Jewish wisdom speculation, which is itself a mixture of Old Testament talk about the Word, language about Isis and her like, and smatterings of Hellenistic philosophy. These sources of the terminology lie in language which can properly be called mythological. For the language is used to tell stories about the universe and the human predicament, which stories draw on other stories. The language gets its force primarily from the part it plays in the stories. (For example, much of the language used in Proverbs 8 and Wisdom 7 is living and available for living use because it is language about a goddess who has an existence and power through her temples, her cult, her mythical "history," and so on.) The language does not depend for its initial force on the fact that it is a scientifically accurate description either of what did historically happen or of the way things actually are. It gets its force from the stories, and so it is mythological.

Further, one can often trace the etiology of these myths. The way in which one myth influences another can be perceived, as can the combination which a particular person makes of particular myths under the influence of his own particular philosophy so as to produce new uses of the language in the older stories. W. L. Knox does a great deal of this with varying

degrees of plausibility and illumination in his *St. Paul and the Church of the Gentiles*. But the etiology of the details of the mythological language which a man uses still does not necessarily either explain or settle what he uses this language for. The source of the language in which a man expresses himself is not necessarily the decisive clue either to what he means by the language or to the reasons which he has for meaning what he does mean. Mythological language can be as reasonably used to say reasonable things as any other language—all of which has to have some degree of symbolism and all of which takes its force from the patterns in which it is customarily used. Thus to attempt to discern the logic of the use of mythological language is to attempt to see the structure of the language's use and to see whether that structure has a reasonable basis and is used to make a reasonable and comprehensive point.

Our problem, then, is whether the language and speaking of Jesus directly or by implication as the Word and Wisdom of God has a discernible structure in its use; whether it has a recognizable basis for its use which enables us both to recognize its meaning and to judge that the meaning can be valid for us. As a pilot experiment for this type of investigation I am concerned with the first chapter of Colossians. Here the basis from which Paul starts is the preaching of the gospel concerning Jesus, the acceptance of this among those to whom he is writing, and the effects of this acceptance among them and others like them elsewhere.

The basis for Paul's preaching of this gospel lies primarily in his own experience. This fact lies behind his description of himself as "apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God" (1:1 ASV). But while his personal experience (whatever lies behind and in the "Damascus road" event) is clearly primary for Paul (cf. his perhaps overstressed claims for independence of the apostles in Galatians), that experience receives its in-

terpreting context and its validation as something more than a merely subjective and private experience from its recognizable similarity with the experience and interpretation of those apostles and others who were believers in Jesus before him (cf. e.g., Gal. 1:18-20; 2:1-10; I Cor. 15:1-11). Here it is very important to notice that it is experience focused upon, and interpretation associated with, the particular and actual man Jesus, the occurrence of his death, and the conviction of certain potentially specifiable individuals in relation to particular experience of theirs that this crucified man was alive and powerfully active. Whatever language came to be used by those believers in or, we may say, experiencers of Jesus was intended by them to be grounded in and to be growing out of these experiences; also out of the experiences which followed in the living out of lives based individually and corporately on the acceptance of the initial experiences and interpretation.

Thus, in Colossians, after his opening greeting Paul gives thanks for their initial response to "the word of the truth of the gospel which [came] to you" (1:5 ASV) and refers to the fact that this bears fruit and increases both in the whole world and among them (vs. 6). The basis for what he has to say to them lies in the message about Jesus to which they have already assented and in the experienced effects of commitment to the living out of that assent both at Colossae and elsewhere. Now the basic shape of the message about Jesus is clear enough. It is that through, and in connection with, Jesus the Father has saved us from "the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love; in whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins" (1:13-14 ASV).

This puts us squarely back to the understanding of Jesus as the Messiah in a strictly Jewish context and against an Old Testament background. "The son of his love" or "his beloved son" is a clear reference to the Baptism narrative of Mark (re-

flected in the Transfiguration narratives) where Jesus is identified or designated as the one chosen or sent by God as the Son who is to fulfill God's purpose and promise for his people manifest in his choosing of King David—and thus as the one chosen by God to bring in the kingdom of God. The power of this kingdom is manifested by the defeat of the power of darkness (cf. the defeat of the demons in the Synoptic Gospels) and the defeat of the powers of darkness is the redemption which is manifested by and effective in the forgiveness of sins. For the kingdom of God is where God establishes himself as King. Since God is known above all as the Holy and Righteous God who deals with his people in terms of holiness and righteousness, the establishment of his kingdom is to be seen when the heart of resistance to him—that is sin, unholiness, and unrighteousness—is done away with. Thus the basis of the preaching of the word of the gospel is the identification of Jesus as the Messiah. The basis for this identification of Jesus as the Messiah lies in the disciples' experience of the livingness of Jesus after his crucifixion. The meaning of this Messiahship which is identified as belonging to Jesus is drawn from the whole buildup of the Jewish experience of God leading to the expectation that he would establish his kingdom in accordance with his experienced character.

But the precise way in which this Messiahship is to be understood is defined by this discovery that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus could not have been recognized as the Messiah unless Messiahship already connoted something, something pointed to by the expectation of the Jews arising out of their previous experience of God and consequent hopes of God. But when Jesus was recognized to be the Messiah, as he was an actual person with an actual particular history including death in the service of the kingdom of God and vindication by living on the other side of death, his history and character now served

to define that recognized Messiahship. So we are led back from the hearing of the word of the truth of the gospel which is the basis in Colossians for the further elucidation of the significance of Jesus, to the basis of this word of the gospel in the history and character of Jesus. Firstly, this is understood against the background of the Jewish experience and expectation of God. Then it is interpreted in the disciples' experience that God had vindicated and interpreted this life of the crucified Jesus by bringing him alive for them and in them. The meaning of the language about Jesus is rooted firmly in the Jews' understanding of God which arises out of all that experience which produced the Old Testament. For the fact that this meaning is rooted in truth, in the way things actually are, and is not a mere story told by men about their predicament in the world we are dependent on three things. Firstly, the evidence of the actuality of the life of Jesus; then on the reliability of the disciples' testimony to the evidence for their convictions and of the evidence of their conviction; and, finally, on the fact that this word of the gospel when assented to and followed out in individual and corporate commitment does bear fruit and increase in the particular places known to us and throughout the world.

I suggest, then, that we have located the basis of Paul's language about Jesus in Colossians in the basis of the preaching of the gospel and that this basis lies in the actual life and death of Jesus understood against the Jewish expectations of God emerging from the experience of their history—with the defining dimension of this understanding provided by the discovery of the disciples that the crucified servant of the kingdom of God was in fact powerfully alive. If the disciples' discovery that Jesus was alive as a continuing power and presence central to their relationship with God was not a real discovery of an objective fact but only an attitude of theirs,

an interpretation which they put upon the facts, then we have no grounds for the further language about Jesus. In other words, the question of the objectivity and reality of the resurrection of Jesus is central to the whole logic of talking about Jesus. This is what the New Testament itself would lead us to expect. The believers who made the New Testament, or whose attitude is reflected in the New Testament, did not believe that they were simply telling a story about the world, man, and God with Jesus as a character in that story. The story they felt able to tell depended on the objective reality of the Resurrection. The logical position of the New Testament is that there would be no story to tell if it were not for the Resurrection. It does violence to the whole logic of the New Testament use of mythology to give an account of the Christian faith which seeks to represent the Resurrection as simply part and, indeed, a symbolic and mythological part of the Christian story, i.e., of the attitude which Christians adopt to the world and of the story which they tell to represent that attitude. It may be the case that the Resurrection is and can only be myth and symbol. But in that case Christianity is untrue. I am well aware that many people who profess and call themselves Christians (and whose claim as individuals to be such I would not wish to deny) would deny this. I am, however, clear that this denial of theirs is partly the result of a muddled view of the admittedly uncomfortable force of the New Testament approach and partly the result of a desire to rescue Christianity from the possibility of falsification by removing it from saying anything about the world and confining it to an attitude to the world. I fear that Christianity is much more risky than that. It does say things about the world and therefore exposes itself to the judgment that what it says is either false or nonsense.

The relevance of all this to our particular inquiry is that, if talk about the Resurrection is only symbolism and mythology,

then any cosmic language about Christ is a *fortiori* mythology and nothing more. I, however, am going to proceed from the assumption, because I believe it to be true, that the Resurrection is part of the basis of talk about Jesus and not simply talk about Jesus. I accept the testimony of the apostles that they discovered that Jesus was alive, and I do not treat this testimony as evidence simply that the apostles talked and acted as if Jesus were alive or even that Jesus' being alive consisted in the fact that the apostles so talked and acted. There is an independent fact, namely the "liveliness" of Jesus.

We return, therefore, to the assertion that the defining dimension of the understanding of Jesus which is the basis of the word of the truth of the gospel is the discovery of the disciples that the crucified servant of the kingdom of God was in fact powerfully alive. I believe that the key to the understanding of both the structure of, and the justification for, Pauline cosmic language about Jesus lies in this concept of the kingdom of God and that this can be seen as far as the language in Colossians goes from the key verses (1:13, 14 ASV—already referred to—"[God] delivered us out of the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love; in whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins"). Jesus, when his life and death are understood in the light of his resurrection, on the basis of the experience of the powerful presence of his Spirit among believers and against the background of the understanding and expectation of God as built up through the history behind and subsequent to the Old Testament, is known to be the effective focal point of the kingdom of God. Now God is already known to be the God of the whole earth, the God who "fills heaven and earth" (Jer. 23:24; cf. Isa. 6:3, etc.) Hence the scope of his kingdom is universal, hence the significance of him who is the focal point of the kingdom, "the Son of his love," is likewise universal.

In Colossae Paul is up against some persons (the precise nature of whose beliefs we do not need to inquire into) who claim that another understanding of the world and man's predicament and another story about the world is the really true one which "bears fruit and increases" and that it is the knowledge of this story (cf. *epignōsis*, *epiginōskō* 1:6, 9-11, etc.) which is vital for the fulfillment of salvation. Against this Paul uses deliberately Gnostic language but remains right in the center of the Old Testament understanding of the character of God and his dealings with men and asserts that the true fulfillment in knowledge is fulfillment in respect of the knowledge of the will of God and to bear fruit is to bear fruit in good works (cf. 1:9-10). We have to do with the fulfillment of the purpose of God who is concerned with persons and their moral fulfillment as persons (redemption—which is transference into the kingdom of God—is forgiveness of sins). Then he goes on to use the image and wisdom language of Jesus which makes cosmic assertions about him. This simply follows from the discovery, the basis of which I have already referred to, that Jesus is the Christ, the focal point of the kingdom of God, and the need to apply the implications of this discovery to a situation where another claim is being made about the proper understanding of, and reaction to, the human situation in the universe as we experience it.

Since Jesus is of universal significance because he is the Christ of the God of the whole earth, it must always be the case that any claim about the true way of life required by a true understanding of the world and man's place in it has to be confronted with this universal significance of Jesus and the content of this significance which is given by the life and history of Jesus, understood against the background of its Old Testament context and in the light of the Resurrection. Conversely, any illumination which men may validly obtain from their

own observations of, and reflections upon, their situation in the universe which can be seen to be consistent with the purpose and pattern of God's character and action as that is seen focused in Jesus can be properly used to extend an understanding of the significance of him who is the Christ of the God who is known as the God of this whole universe.

And there is a third point which refers directly to our concern about the logic of mythology. Any set of images which have been used to tell a cosmic story in some mythology or other can be validly used as part of the fruitful assertion of this universal significance of Jesus and as part of the faithful exploration of the further implications of this universal significance of Jesus. In such a use, however, great care has to be taken to ensure that the use of the mythology is controlled by the basic faithful understanding of Jesus which is determined by his place in relation to the Old Testament background, the shape of the actualities of his life and death, and the fact of his resurrection. It is exceedingly difficult at any given stage of the exploration of the significance of Jesus to determine which of two situations obtains. The first is when the current powerful and evocative mythology is being used as the servant of the further understanding of the significance of Jesus and of the consequent significance of our life in the world as we have now come to understand it. The second is when the mythology is dominating the understanding of Jesus and of our place in the world so that Jesus has become simply part of the story which we feel obliged to tell about the world, and Jesus takes his "color" from that story rather than giving his color to it. The first position is Christian, the second is Gnostic, and I see no reason to suppose either from history or from logic that we shall ever be free from the difficulties of distinguishing one from the other until the Last Day.

I would venture to suggest, however, at this present day, that Bultmann's refusal to give any weight to *historie* and to rely on *geschichte* is a modern version of just that refusal to face the risk of the involvement of the reality of God in the concrete reality of the world which is unquestionably Gnostic. (I would also maintain that Bultmann's concerns are unquestionably Christian and that his questions and investigations must be faced and dealt with, not ignored and written off, if we are to speak powerfully of the Christian faith in the modern situation). The risk of historicity is the risk of being so much a part of an actual historical situation that there is a repeated risk of seeming in every fresh historical situation to be simply part of some outmoded and now nonsensical mythology. But this risk is of the essence of "the word of the truth of the gospel." Without the basis of this historicity, taken as such on the testimony of the first apostles, in themselves and as part of the first Christian community, and of the basis of the fruit which assent to this testimony bears in committed lives "increasing in every place" we have no basis for telling any story about the world and man in the world. The approach of Paul is certainly mythological, but it is not mere mythology for it is rooted in the actualities of Jesus. It is the approach of a Bultmann or a Tillich which is, logically, mere mythology, merely a story which we choose to tell about the world although we have, ultimately, no evidence which ties it into that world but only our present consensus of opinion about "the way the world really is."

Paul, then, in Colossians is dealing with a situation in which people are telling a story about the world and man's life in it which he holds to be contrary to the understanding required by the word of the truth of the gospel as it is based in the actualities of Jesus. This story is told (of course, as the true story with consequent demands for a corresponding way of

life—one ought to accept the universe and live accordingly) by men who apparently stress that the true God is invisible (cf. 1:15—*eikōn tou theou tou aoratou*) and that there must be a proper understanding of the true wholeness of things (the *plerōma*). They apparently require, therefore, that Jesus should take his proper place in an understanding which stresses the utter transcendence of the real God and a particular view of the sum total of the realities of the world. But Paul has a gospel to preach precisely because Jesus is the focal point of the kingdom, i.e., the place where and the person in whom the purpose of God for the establishment of that state of affairs which takes its pattern from the pattern of his character is to be seen and to be encountered. Against the use of Jesus in a pattern which is false to this he therefore restates the believed truth about Jesus by saying that it is Jesus who is the "image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation" (Col. 1:15). This is simply to say that the pattern of the character of God, and therefore the purpose and pattern which underlies the whole of creation, is presented to us in, and in connection with, Jesus. And if Jesus is the focal point and person for the establishment of the kingdom of God in relation to the realities of this world then this is so.

Further it is perfectly proper to restate the significance of Jesus in relation to the realities of the world as a whole and to our life in that world in language taken from talk about the wisdom of God. For that language, however much it is language influenced by the mythology of goddesses and by particular forms of Greek philosophy, is used in the biblical and Jewish tradition to talk about the relation between the character of God, the pattern and purpose of creation, and the way in which God enables man to enter into, understand and take part in fulfilling, those patterns and purposes. Since Jesus is understood and proclaimed as the person in whom these purposes of

God are finally vindicated in the actualities of the world and since it is the experience of Paul and those with him "in Christ" that it is in, and in connection with, Jesus that the power of God to fulfill the pattern of his purposes is actually encountered in individuals and in the community life, then to talk about Jesus in wisdom language is a perfectly logical thing to do.

To fully evaluate and validate wisdom language about Jesus it would be necessary to investigate all the relevant language in Colossians and in such passages as II Cor. 4:1-6 and I Cor. 1 and 2 on these lines together with a further examination of such passages as Proverbs 8 and Wisdom 7. A similar investigation can be made of the language which talks about Jesus in terms of "Word." Here, I believe, the basic structure of the language would turn out to be not so much that of talk about the relation between the character of God and the pattern of the universe but of talk about the effective and powerful communication of God's will for, firstly, his "peculiar" people and then for men at large in the universe. Here again, the centrality of Jesus understood primarily on the basis of the recognition of his centrality to the kingdom of God would justify the application of this language to him as long as the language was used in a manner appropriate to the actualities of Jesus' life. The most famous and seminal example of this control of the language by the life of Jesus as that language is used to speak of Jesus is, of course, John 1:14—"the Word became flesh." But I fear I have no time in this present chapter to work out my own program further.

What I have been seeking to do is to begin to prepare a case for the argument that language drawn from mythology, from current stories about the nature of the world and of man's condition and possibilities in the world, can be both comprehensibly and validly used to express the significance of Jesus, providing the language can be seen to be related to the actuali-

ties of the life of Jesus and the defining understanding of the significance of Jesus which arose for the first apostles and disciples. Under such circumstances we do have a valid basis for language such as wisdom language and word language which is making assertions about the significance of Jesus in the form of assertions about the underlying pattern and purpose of the universe and about the way in which men individually and corporately can be related to that pattern. This is a perfectly valid way of talking for Christians, and it is, moreover, a way in which Christians are making assertions about the way things really are and not just talking about their subjective attitude to the universe.

The full working out of *this* program with regard to the biblical use of this language would be a preparation for two further stages in the program. The first would be to investigate the developments in the cosmic language about Jesus Christ which went on from the second century onward and is to be notably encountered in such works as the *De Incarnatione* of St. Athanasius and is reflected in the classical creeds and dogmatic statements. The purpose of this investigation would be to see how far this development is still a justifiable restatement of the centrality of Jesus related to the basis of the gospel in the actuality of Jesus, to the fruit of the gospel in the lives of the believers, and to the current understanding of the realities of the universe then prevailing.

When this part of the program is worked through, we should then be in a position to consider how Christians today are called upon to make assertions about our understanding of the realities of the universe and of man's place in that universe, once again in the light of the centrality of Jesus which is at the basis of the gospel, combined with the fruits of commitment to that gospel and our current understanding of the realities of the universe. It is here, I believe, we shall find that word

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and wisdom language needs to be related to process language for I believe that our present understanding of patterns large and small in the universe is very largely a process one. What this restatement should enable us to do is to show that the basic gospel centered on Jesus Christ gives us grounds for claiming that the process and processes of the universe are to be understood in relation to the word and wisdom of the God and Father of Jesus so that we may face these processes and be part of these processes with every hope not of disappearance into cosmic randomness but of personal fulfillment and of the fulfillment of personality.

4

NON-CHRISTIAN VIEWS OF CHRIST

Buddhism

There appears to be a growing tendency among the Western people to take an interest in the teachings of other races and not infrequently to seek a better understanding of their own Christian religious teachings in relation to other religions. Among such non-Christian religions, Buddhism is receiving great attention.

It is interesting to note that certain eminent Christian religious dignitaries are making an effort to bring about a synthesis between Buddhist and Christian teachings. Whatever be the motive in their attempts, one significant point may be stressed. If the intention of such Western writers is to bring about religious harmony among nations aiming at tolerance, peace, and the progress of mankind, this indeed deserves the highest credit. Unfortunately, however, many of the observations made by people of the caliber of the Reverend George Appleton are very misleading. It is very regrettable that many non-Buddhist Western writers are misrepresenting the facts regarding the Buddhist system of thought.

Not only the non-Buddhist writers but some of the well-known Western writers who have adopted the Buddhist religion also misrepresent these teachings, because they do not