

Die Entstehung der paulinischen Christologie
Martin Brückner
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The author justifies the publication of this treatise by calling attention to the singular fact, that since the appearance of H. Schmidt's *Paulinische Christologie* in 1870 no monograph on the Apostle's Christological teaching has been written. This is correct so far as Germany is concerned. With Somerville's work, certainly a creditable production in English, the author seems not to be acquainted. To Schmidt's method and to the method generally pursued by writers on Paulinism in unfolding the Apostle's Christological teaching, he objects that it is too psychological and dialectic and too little historical. Neither as a Pharisee nor as a Christian Paul ever was a systematic theologian. There is a sense in which we could readily subscribe to this judgment, but when it is carried to the point of burdening the Apostle with palpable contradictions in the most fundamental aspects of his teaching we cannot but express our dissent. Paul was too much of a theologian for that. Still, as a corrective against the assumption of Holsten and others, that the whole Pauline Gospel was the product of a dialectic process in the Apostle's mind, the antithesis, "not psychological but historical," misleading though it may easily become, can render service. We believe that Dr. Brückner has in the work before us made a valuable contribution to our knowledge of the Pauline Christology by raising the distinct question, How much in the Apostle's view of Christ was taken over into his Christian teaching from his Jewish belief as held before the conversion? To have clearly formulated this problem and concentrated attention on it is a merit in itself, altogether apart from the conclusions reached in the attempt to solve it. In these conclusions themselves we can but partly follow the author. They may be briefly stated as follows: The whole metaphysical groundwork of Paul's conception of Christ, including His preexistence, His possession of the *μορφή θεου*, His being identical with the Spirit, His origin as the primordial man, the *πρωτοτοκος πασης κτισεως*, His mediatorial activity in creation and under the old covenant, all this was an inheritance from his Jewish past. As a Jew already he invested the Messiah whom he expected with all these transcendent attributes. In this kind of Christology, which Paul had in common with the Apocalyptic writers of the age, so far at least as its main outlines were concerned, there was no need and no place for a human birth of the Messiah, inasmuch as the preexistence applied to the body as well as to the pneuma. The preexistent One was to be revealed, suddenly to appear. Consequently the facts of Jesus' human birth and earthly life, with which Paul at his conversion was confronted in accepting the Messiahship of Jesus, constituted an element not only new but discordant with his previous Christological belief. Paul solved this problem by conceiving of the earthly life as an episode in the heavenly existence of the Son of God, to which he had voluntarily subjected Himself for the sake of mankind. This in so far modified the original conception of the preexistent Messiah, as ascribing to him this act of voluntary self-denial gave to His heavenly life an ethical content, which to the mind of Paul it had not previously possessed. But apart from this the earthly life remained a mere episode, for the historic details of which, as distinct from its beginning in the incarnation and end in the crucifixion, the Apostle felt no interest. His conception of the post-existent glorified Christ virtually coincides again with his original idea of what the Messiah was as such from the first. Especially the functions of Christ at the Parousia are such that Paul the Pharisee might have affirmed them as well as Paul the Christian.

We believe that there is an important element of truth in this construction. It appears to us beyond doubt that Paul before his conversion ascribed preexistence to the Messiah. The various attempts

to explain the idea of preexistence as an inference from his conception of the human and glorified Christ, among which the author criticizes especially that of Holsten, are one and all unsatisfactory. But there is a vast difference between granting this and admitting that the whole content of the Apostle's subsequent exalted conception of the preexistent Son of God was a Jewish inheritance. In the Jewish Apocalypses, whose Christological ideas the author so carefully and luminously reviews, there is nothing that could be put on a line with the *μορφή θεου* of Phil. 2. The gulf between the two is only apparently filled by the assumption that 1 Cor. 15 teaches the preexistence of Christ as a Spirit-man, and that in Phil. 2 the *μορφή θεου* must be interpreted in accordance with this, so as not to exclude but to include the ideal man bearing the image of God. But this interpretation of Phil. 2 seems to us to run contrary to the sharp contrast which the Apostle here draws between the *μορφή θεου* and the *μορφή δούλου* or the *ομοιωμα ανθρωπων*, a contrast which compels us to assume that the two were mutually exclusive in his view. Brückner thinks it is sufficient in answer to this to point out that in 1 Cor. 15 the *ανθρωπος εξ ουρανου* stands in as sharp a contrast to the *ανθρωπος ψυχικος*, and yet the former appears as a true man. But it is something totally different to contrast two forms of humanity and to contrast the form of God with the likeness of man. In our opinion Phil. 2 positively excludes that in Paul's Christian view the preexistent Christ had been a man. This, of course, leaves full room for the possibility that his Jewish conception of the Messiah had been that of a preexistent man. If we may assume this, it will involve that the general notion of preexistent was common to the pre-Christian and the Christian period of the Apostle's belief, but that the concrete content of this notion changed from belief in a preexistent man to belief in a preexistent God. Whoever accepts Phil. 2 as Pauline and interprets its statements at their full value, and is not ready to believe that between the writing of 1 Corinthians and Philipians Paul changed his Christology on this important point, is bound to hold that the *ανθρωπος εξ ουρανου* in 1 Cor. 15:47 designates not the preexistent but the glorified Messiah, an exegesis which seems to us, even apart from every comparison with Phil. 2, the more plausible one. In general it may be said that the author has not sufficiently discriminated between what Paul affirms of the exalted Christ, as he is constituted in virtue of the resurrection, and what he predicates of the preexistent Christ. He takes throughout for granted that the pneumatic character of the Pauline Christ and the pneuma-doctrine in the entire range of its Christological application were a pre-Christian acquisition of Paul. It would not have been a superfluous task to furnish the proof for this. Certainly there is a considerable distance, as Brückner himself admits, between the Spirit-endowed Messiah of the Apocalypses and the *κυριος* who is *το πνευμα* of Paul, and it is at least a possible view that the progress from the one position to the other was made in connection with the conversion of Paul and on the basis of his Christian experience, rather than under the influence of Hellenistic thought during his Judaistic period.

Our main objection to the author's position is that it cannot be reconciled with the Apostle's own explicit statements concerning the origin of his gospel. Paul more than once emphatically affirms that this gospel, and that not merely in general but specifically in its Christological center, was supernaturally revealed to him in such a high sense that its introduction into his consciousness was a creative act of God, resembling in its immediateness the first creation of light. We shall not do justice to this representation, if we confine the revelation of which it speaks to the mere fact that Jesus was the Messiah, or to the further fact that the Messiah Jesus had passed through an earthly life of humiliation. The context of the passages shows that the general structure of the Christology must have been involved, and that particularly the *πνευμα*-character of the exalted Christ must have formed Part of the content of this revelation. Furthermore, Paul in 2 Cor. 5:16 affirms, as Brückner

correctly interprets, that before his conversion he had a *κατα σαρκα*-knowledge of the Messiah. This can hardly be confined to the national limitation of the Messiah's significance, as the author seems to think it can, but must have affected also the whole nature and character of the Messiah, so that the recognition of his being *pneuma* is here represented as a Christian attainment of the Apostle which his conversion first made possible. On this point it would be well to compare the author's statements carefully with the opposite conclusions reached by Feine in his recent treatise *Das gesetzesfreie Evangelium des Paulus*.

It was obviously in the interest of the hypothesis the author seeks to establish to approximate the Judaistic consciousness of Paul as much as possible to his later Christian consciousness, not only on the point of Christology but also in other respects. The central significance of faith (of course not in its antithesis to works), the tendency to universalism, despair of the law-method of salvation, exemption of converted Gentiles from law-observance, the necessity of suffering for the Messiah—all these ideas are assumed to have been present in a more or less developed form in the mind of the pre-Christian Paul. To assert this becomes almost unavoidable where the Christology is believed to have so closely resembled that of the fully-matured gospel of the Christian period, for the Christology and these various soteriological principles are most intimately connected. But for this very reason the unlikelihood that the Pharisee Paul ever harbored such ideas, becomes a weighty argument against attributing to him a Christology of which they would have been the almost necessary correlates. In one place the author reasons that Paul never had to wage any controversy with his Judaistic opponents regarding the nature of the Christ, and that, therefore, the Christological views of the higher type of Judaism cannot have been different from his. Here we must take issue with him on the question of fact. In our opinion the opponents against whom Paul defends himself in 2 Corinthians had extended their attack upon his gospel to its Christology. The Christological line of defense here adopted by the Apostle renders it necessary to believe this.

Another respect in which the author's theory leads him into extravagant but none the less from his point of view consistent statements concerns the Apostle's understanding of the earthly life of Christ. We are told that Paul looked upon this as a suspension of his Messiahship. "For Paul the man Jesus was not the Christ at all" (p. 48). The silence of the Apostle on the details of the earthly career of Jesus, Brückner believes, may have sprung from the knowledge on Paul's part of the fact that Jesus had been particularistic in His views and conduct, and therefore could be quoted on the side of his opponents and not on Paul's side. And this particularism in the mind of Jesus Paul is said to have explained from the subjection of Christ to the law, which would thus become a subjection, not merely to the law as a rule of life, but likewise to the law as a limitation of knowledge and spiritual insight (p. 42). As an alternative explanation the author suggests the hypothesis of Wrede, viz., that Paul's silence on the details of the Gospel-tradition can be accounted for from the simple fact that this Gospel-tradition in the main did not yet exist. On the other hand, elsewhere he very pertinently remarks that the selection of precisely *twelve* Apostles, vouched for by 1 Cor. 15:3, furnishes a strong argument in favor of the Messianic interpretation of Jesus' life.

The chief source of the advanced Apocalyptic Christology which Paul inherited is found in the character of the work attributed to the Messiah during the later period of Judaism. This work consisted largely in the conquest of superhuman spiritual powers, and in order to make the Messiah equal to its requirements it was necessary to make him superhuman. The author carries this principle

extensively into the interpretation of the Pauline soteriology, which in his view was on the whole a doctrine of the redemption of the world from demoniacal and angelic powers. This is done in a very one-sided manner, and so as to obscure almost entirely the ethical and direct Godward reference of the work of Christ. Even in such a passage as Rom. 8:1 a reference to these angel-powers is found. Nay, an attempt is made to establish a connection between them and the σαρκ as the principle of sin. The ματαιοτης and φθορα of the creation, of which Rom. 8:20, 21 speak are explained as having in Paul's mind this demoniacal background. It is no wonder that with such premises the author finds the center of the Pauline doctrine of the atonement not in the vicarious death of Christ, but in His death as a virtual abolishment of the σαρκ.

Though not friendly to the psychological method of tracing the genesis of Paulinism, Dr. Brückner does not refrain from utilizing his theory on behalf of an explanation of the conversion of Paul. We confess to having found this an obscure section in a book otherwise written with extraordinary lucidity. If we understand him correctly, the author means that the universalistic tendency inherent in the advanced Christological views of the Pharisee Paul conflicted with the national-particularistic scope of his traditional Messianic expectations. In the discord between these two principles lay the inward preparation of Paul for not only accepting but rather eagerly seizing upon the death of the Messiah as the great event by which the scope of his entire work could be shown to have been denationalized. The fatal objection to this is that there is not a single fact or statement in the sources to which such an explanation can appeal for support. It is a construction wholly suspended in the air.

We have found it necessary to take exception to the greater part of the author's conclusions. Were his view correct, then even more than has been hitherto asserted Paul, or, more properly speaking, Jewish Apocalyptic and Jewish Hellenism through Paul, would be the chief founders of Christianity. No wonder that Dr. Brückner in his Preface claims to have demonstrated the independence of the Christian religion in its essence from historical facts. Paul himself would have admitted neither the conclusion nor the premises from which it is drawn. The main content of what the book represents him to have simply carried over from his Jewish past, the Apostle firmly believed to have received from divine revelation. And what was revealed to him he regarded as the interpretation of veritable history in the strictest sense of the word, and made it the basis of a religion which itself was nothing but a historical drama interacted between heaven and earth. His Christology was not the result of fitting the facts of the earthly life and death of Jesus into a previously given doctrinal scheme of what the Messiah had to be, but the Spirit-guided interpretation of a solid body of facts which lay involved as in a nucleus in the appearance of the exalted Christ, vouchsafed to him at his conversion.