

EDITORIAL

A major modern investigation of the doctrine of the Trinity, and especially the preexistence of the Son, deals brilliantly with an issue deserving the widest attention. *Born Before All Time? The Dispute over Christ's Origin*¹ calls for “a Christology which begins with the Jesus of history and takes note of the fact that the Jew Jesus himself believed in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (494).

The plea comes from the camp of Roman Catholic scholarship of the highest sophistication. It is greeted with exclamations of joy by those of us whose tradition has long objected to the abstract Christology of the Council of Chalcedon. This journal has attempted to lay out a view of Christ which begins not with an “eternal Son” but with the man Jesus of history, a Jew who endorsed wholeheartedly the monotheistic creed of Israel (Mark 12:29ff.), proclaimed the Messianic Kingdom (Luke 4:43), died as a man and was exalted to the position at the right hand of God, his Father, prescribed by the all-important preexisting oracle in Psalm 110:1 — the *Adoni* (“my Lord [Christ]”).

It is significant that in preparation for his massive thesis Karl-Josef Kuschel was able to do work in New Testament and Jewish studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. His studies have obviously attuned his exegetical ear to the genuine voice of Jesus the Jew in Scripture. The result for the author is that the voice of Chalcedon seems alien to the Jewish Christianity of Scripture. Words like “substance” and questions about the inner-Trinitarian life of God have become remote to the task of explicating Scripture in the context of its own very Hebrew environment. Kuschel, with our tradition, wants to take seriously “those Christologies (original passion narratives, sayings sources, Synoptic Gospels) which can express the divine Sonship without preexistence” (407).

How refreshing it is to hear our author declare that “a metaphysical relationship between the Father and Son existing from eternity . . . would result in a duality in God which would not have been understood by Jewish Christians like Paul any more than it would have been by John” (408, 9)

The appearance of a heavyweight analysis of the weaknesses of traditional Trinitarianism should cause all of us interested in the Jewish roots of Jesus to redouble our efforts to extricate the Savior from the layers of matted tradition which have tended to lift him out of his native culture and transform him according to the image of Greek philosophy. Kuschel, if he is not ignored, has

¹Karl-Josef Kuschel, Piper Verlag, 1990; English translation by John Bowden, New York: Crossroad, 1992.

pioneered the way to what should become a widespread reexamination of the doctrine of God and Christ. Kuschel is right: “Compared with the total Christological witness of Scripture, the Christological dogma of Chalcedon represents a contraction. The dogma is exclusively concerned with the inner constitution of the divine and human subject. It separates this question from the total context of Jesus’ history and fate . . . and we miss the total eschatological perspective of biblical theology” (426). Precisely. We might add that the Trinitarian definition of Jesus appears to involve a diversionary tactic, directing attention away from the actual Jesus of history whose historical teaching did not become obsolete when he assumed his role as exalted “Lord Messiah” at the right hand of the majesty of God.

Perhaps Professor Kuschel might now dedicate his admirable powers of investigation to the matter of the Gospel of the Kingdom as it fell from the lips of Jesus, since, as he reminds us, the messenger must never be separated from the message. It may be that as much patient digging is needed to recover the Gospel as has been necessary to disengage the person of Jesus from the unfortunate post-biblical theologizing to which he has been subjected. This wrapped him in categories of thought which he, and his colleagues who provided the documents of the New Testament, would not have recognized. We salute Professor Kuschel for his groundbreaking work.

Anthony F. Buzzard