

"WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?" Matthew 16.15 Mark 8.29 L.9.20**ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS**

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Gabriel Fackre & I, the theological consultants to the Colloquies, have been getting suggestions toward a Colloquy-Planning-Committee-adopted **guidelines statement**, necessarily brief. This Thinkseet is my personal starting-place. Material in this type is commentary, not my suggested text.

Translation? Jesus spoken colloquial Aramaic, & "that" is not colloquial American: NRSV should not have used it. Greek could have as easily said "that" as can English, but the Greek of all three Gospels has no "that." Whence came it, then, into NRSV? Translation-committee stuffiness. (Maybe Matthew didn't use "that" anywhere? He did in v.20: "THAT he is the Christ." But unlike v.15, v.20 is an indirect quotation from Jesus.)....Here the question is not dynamic equivalence, for we have the direct equivalence of the colloquial in Greek & American. (I credit Melvin Hartzler with this felicitous statement of the principle of colloquialism: Granted clarity, "concise is nice, verbose is gross." And it can hardly be argued that adding "that" increases clarity.)....Don't appeal to tradition, that "that" is "the way we learned it"! You probably learned also the bad grammar "whom," which obtained in all English translations till RV 1881. ("Whom" is pollution from the Greek, which requires the objective-accusation case in the construction used in the Gospels. But what of the fact that "who" feels wrong to me? A worse-than-worthless fact, a pesky nuisance I thank God the young-uns aren't bothered with....Why is "YOU" capitalized in this Thinksheet's title? To represent the Greek of the Synoptics, all of which begin Jesus' question with "And [or "but"] you,....?" The emphasis is of course inherent in the context, but it's odd that the logion is not enough respected to persuade most translations to include the two introductory words. NIV well has "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" (Almost no recent translations have "that," & almost all of them have an introductory phrase representing the accent on the audience, viz the disciples [Greek plural "you"], though it's Peter who answers.]...."But what about you?" first appears, according to my research, in Phillips. NEB has "And you," as do a number of others (including NIV, noted above; I think these all to be under Phillips good influence). The Living Bible is as unreliable as usual: "Who do you [it.] think I am?"--entirely missing the confessional force of the pericope: Jesus is not calling for religion in his followers' hearts but rather for statements of faith on their lips.

NOTE on current translations: While I always look everything up in NIV '78, REB '89, & NRSV '89, I find the first most reliable, though for inclusive language the last is best (though it often strains to be pure from sexism--eg when it uses "mortals," instead of "people," to render the Greek generic for which there's no English equivalent [eg, M.10.27]).

To every generation of his disciples and his churches, Jesus asks this question. As the Synoptic contexts show, Jesus is curious about what others say about him but is intensely concerned with how his own disciples put together what they see, hear, feel, and think about him and with what in consequence they say about him. He keeps listening for our answers as we follow him. And if we follow too far off, we no longer can hear the question, and it dies into our old answers, which then forget they are answers and believe they are statements merely to be believed in whatever shape contemporary needs and wants give them. We then listen to nearer voices and busy ourselves with answering them.

Participants in the colloquy are asked to hear and answer Jesus' question afresh in their personal, family, church, community, and world lives. A splendid resource for personal and group study is Jaroslav Pelikan's JESUS THROUGH THE CENTURIES: His Place in the History of Culture (Harper & Row, 1985).

The planning committee asks that preparation, papers, and Colloquy group papers channel through the following **questions**. To Fritz Perls' "Don't push the river, it flows by itself," I replied, "Your beloved Vienna was made by five channelings of the Danube."

1 What about me personally: who am I saying Jesus is? Of the rich range of biblical and postbiblical titles and other designations of him, which do I actually speak most? where? Why these?

2 Of Jesus' titles, only "Christ"-Messiah became a part of his name: "Jesus the Christ" became "Jesus Christ." The early Christians put it 540 times in the New Testament. What weight should it have now in our saying who Jesus is?

the past
3 The present shapes the future by controlling: the stories we tell the children become the blueprints for tomorrow's world. What shall we tell the children to say as to who Jesus is?

4 Our founding UCC documents are orthodox in Christology. In light of current social changes, should any of this be revised? replaced? supplemented?