

# Jesus as MESSENGER, Priest, and King

In preparation for leading, tomorrow in Cape Cod Theotalk, a discussion of pp219-44 of "Christ the Prophet: The Spirit's Living, Life-Giving Word" in Robt.Sherman's KING, PRIEST, AND PROPHET: A Trinitarian Theology of Atonement (T&TClark/04).

1 While the biblical words rendered into English as "prophet" are many, the base meaning (as emphasized in this Thinksheet's title is "messenger"). The OT's "normative" word, "navi," may have the etymon meaning "call" or "announce"--probably called to announce, i.e. as a messenger, the message being (Davie Napier, IDB in loco 896) "the divinely imparted meaning of history."

Confirmation of this basic meaning is in H.B.Huffman's "Prophecy in the Ancient Near East" (697 of IDB's Supplementary Volume): the first stated meaning is "inspired messages [my emphasis] transmitted from a deity."

2 Now let's go to the Apostolic Constitutions, "the most important collection of canons and liturgical materials in the first few [Christian] centuries," ca.AD 480. In the anaphora beginning the Eucharist proper, Jesus is (105 of W.Mitchell's EARLY CHRISTIAN PRAYERS [trd. from ed. A.Hamman; Longmans,Green/61]) "the Messenger [my emphasis] who has announced your great design, your High Priest, the Lord and King of all creatures" (the munus triplex [Jesus' threefold "office"] made much of in the Reformation). Here is ca.1/12th (!) of the prayer:

You are Knowledge that never had a beginning, eternal Sight, Hearing that did not need to be given birth, Wisdom that required no teaching. By nature the foremost, as a being unique, you are beyond the scope of number. You brought all things from nothingness into existence through your only Son, whose Father you were before time began. Father by your own will and power and goodness, without any intermediary. He is your only Son, God the Word, living Wisdom; his is that first birth which precedes every act of creation; he is the Messenger who has announced your great design, your High Priest, the Lord and King of all creatures--those with minds and those that merely have bodies. He existed before anything else and it is through him that everything subsists.

Through him, eternal God, you made all that is, and through him you administer the whole with your careful providence; for as it was through him that you bestowed the favour of being, so it was through him that you made the gift of well-being. You are the God and Father of the only Son. Through him you created first of all the cherubim and seraphim, the acons and hosts, the powers and principdoms, the dominations and thrones, the angels and archangels; and after all that, you created through him this visible world and all that is in it.

**Hermes** ([Roman] Mercury), a son (!) of Father Zeus, was herald ("keryx") sent from heaven (Olympus) (& also boundaries maker-&-keeper, & guide to the afterlife). The result ("ma") of his heralding is "keryg-ma," our Christian word for the gospel "proclamation" (Jesus as telos of both pagan Hermes & Jewish Messiah). As H.Trismegistos ("Thrice Greatest") his cult anticipated--in Cappadocia! (Ac.14.8)--the Christian Trinity.



3 Uniquely, Jesus as prophet was not only the Messenger (as in Ac.14.12 Paul was thought to be **Hermes**) but also the message--as Sherman puts it in his first sentence (p219), "the revealer and enactor of God's truth and will, indeed, the living and life-giving Word of the triune God himself (Jn.1:1)." The "praeparatio" for the gospel was not just among the Jews; paganism also provided receptacles for the Good News--here, I'm pointing to Hermes as prophet-messenger of the gods--& icon of the Wells-Fargo Pony Express, America's first mail-service. In 1890, the Fargo mansion was razed, & my maternal grandfather bought the statuary therein at the estate sale--including the icon itself (37 lbs. of solid bronze, on the beam between livingrm. & kitchen of our Craigville home--a repro of the AD 1590 Giovanni da Balogna--my photo herewith). God spoke through the prophets but came in--as Jesus (Heb.1.1-2): in Act.14.12, Zeus came with Hermes his messenger, Hermes-Paul doing the talking while Zeus-Barnabas was silent!

The year Jesus the Messenger-Message was born (or within two years of his birth), Virgil wrote the AENEID to celebrate the birth of the Roman imperium (empire) at the hands of Caesar Augustus. As the Jews had become comfortable with an inadequate view of God's kingdom & Jesus disturbed their comfort, Jupiter (Zeus) sent **Hermes** to disturb Aeneas, who'd fallen for Dido & forgotten his mission to found Rome. "Be on your way, my son," says Jupiter to Hermes (IV.297[-395]), so Aeneas will found Rome & bring the world "beneath" Rome's laws (as Jesus was to effectuate, as the Lord's Prayer says, God's will "done on earth as it is in heaven").

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(Ac.14 may be consciously anti-hermetic, the cult of Jesus (with his literature, the NT) competing with the cult of Hermes Trismegistos (with its literature, the Hermetic Books--though Ac. would be at the earliest stage of the cultic competition.)

4 Sherman's work is tightly trinitarian, maximizing correlations. The third sentence of our reading sums up so far: Jesus' "royal work" is to be "understood as done on behalf of the Father and his priestly work...understood as his own appropriate work as the incarnate Son, I now consider how his prophetic work may be understood as done on behalf of the Spirit." After referencing his evidence, he comes to this concluding support-statement (222): "the Spirit is upon, indeed, within him [as at his conception & baptism]. He becomes the Mediator of the Spirit, the door through which it becomes available to the people. In this sense, the Spirit speaks through the Son, continuing the work it had done through the prophets preceding him, and which it has continued in his name from Pentecost on. In another sense, the Son liberates the Spirit, unleashing its dynamic power....In both senses, the Son may be said to work on behalf of the Spirit, fulfilling yet one more aspect of the triune God's atoning purpose." (Underlinings, mine.)

5 In §4, did "it...its" shock you? Pronominally, Sherman never fails to treat Father & Son as personal & Spirit as impersonal, though he holds to the personal equality of the Trinity's "persons." Classic Christian theology satisfies both the Hebraic & the Hellenistic minds even though they cannot be entirely comfortable with each other (but their discomfort continues to stimulate the development of doctrine.)

6 While Hermes was an important pagan praeparatio for the gospel, the Messiah (the messianic expectation) was the essential Jewish parallel: Jesus Hermes (&, in Egypt, Jesus Osiris) were important, but "Jesus Christ" is revelation's promise-fulfillment. Jesus minorly redefined Hermes & Osiris, but majorly, by prophetic word & deed, transformed "Messiah" (the prophetic role [223] "absorbed and transcended to become but one aspect of Jesus' larger messianic role"). (Jews reject Jesus' messianic role, Jews & Christians reject Muhammad's prophetic role.) (Odd: Sherman's Index does not have any of these: God, Father, Son, Spirit, Holy Spirit, person, language, justice, Islam.)

7 224: Jesus' "authority over and...autonomy from the law." 226: "The parables reveal God's true, original, and final attitude toward and intentions for creation." 233: Christ is "the prophet of God," (in Tom Wright's latest book-title) THE LAST WORD: God has stopped speaking in the succession of prophets. 236-38: a productive comparison of the Sermon on the Mount & Gal.5.16-26. 241: Borg's "spirit person," an inadequate category for Jesus. 243-44: a helpful chart contrasting the "Socratic Way" and the "Christian Way."

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