

JESUS' TRANSACTIONAL AND ECSTATIC VALUE

As well as for scores of other reasons, Albert Schweitzer is famous for saying, in various ways, "You want to know who Jesus is? He won't tell you. But if you walk with him, you will find out." If you please, call this **existential-open christology**. Negatively put, if Jesus hadn't wanted to intrigue us into making the discovery for ourselves, he would have told us flat out who he is; then he'd not have asked the question the Colloquy will center in, viz "Who do YOU say I am?" (The alternative possibility is that he didn't have a clear fix on who he was, & this uncertainty was part of his humanity [pictured, in Phil.2.7, as his divine self-emptying]. But low self-awareness correlates poorly with his high impact on his immediate followers.)

This Thinksheet touches briefly on the implicate question "Who have you discovered me to be **for you?** What are my points of tangency with your lives? What good am I to you?" The question sounds crass, as though religion were only something we are to get something out of, like money. Well, religion's not only that, but it's fanciful idealistic nonsense to preach that real religion is not that at all. You pays your money & you takes your choice, but you pays your soul & you gets your destiny: Jesus couldn't have been clearer on that.

1 Who does the NT & the church through the ages say Jesus is? I hit my library, especially the "Christology" section, with that question. I recalled lists of, & books on, the titles-names of Christ. If I were to think my way through the NT, first off I'd come to "Jesus" in Mt.1.21, where the name is explained as "for he shall save his people from their sins" (so Philo explains the name, in the form "Joshua-Jeshua," as "YHWH will save" or "the salvation of the LORD [ie, YHWH]").

2 In Jewish consciousness, **Savior** & **Lord** are almost synonyms. It is because YHWH saves (paradigmatically, the Exodus Story) that he comes to be known-owned as Lord (spelled "Lord" when the reference is to function & "LORD" when the reference is to name, YHWH-Adonai). So it is in the NT. Only God has the power-authority to forgive sins (M.2.7 L.5.21; Mt.9.3 implies the same, but v.8 praises God "for giving such authority to human beings," here [& in the other Synoptics] to "the Son of Man [Humanity]"), so Jesus somehow participates in the divine, specifically in the Lordship of the divine. Because "Lord" in the Jewish meaning includes providential protection & deliverance, the title subsumes "Savior." Accordingly, the earliest Christian confession, "Jesus is Lord," proclaims also his Saviorhood....It's oddly & sadly antihistorical for radical feminism to foist on some clergy the reversal of this foundational reality, on the flimsy argument that "Lord" is masculine but "Savior" is generic (even comical, as "Savior" is masculine, OED having "Saviouress, a female savior").

3 "Lord" comprehends not only "Savior" but also **Christ**, since strong traditions among Jesus' people expected that God's way of being Lord of the future would be through a person "anointed" (ie, "Messiah") for the purpose. Given the impact he made on his followers, Jesus' inhabiting of that eschatological title was inevitable, so much so that the title became part of his name, "Jesus Christ." In Peter's answer to Jesus' question "Who do YOU say I am?," this title appears in unadorned form in M. (8.29; + "the Son of the living God" in Mt. [16.16] & "God's" in L. [9.20]). Thus "Christ" became inclusive of both "Savior" & "Lord." **Son of God** is the one additional comprehensive title. (But Thompson's Chain-Reference Bible, Cyclopedia pp.146f, gives 103 "Titles and Names"!)

4 The useful distinction motivating this Thinksheet is that between Jesus' transactional & his ecstatic value. The terms occurred to me as I was reflecting on my recent experiences in different kinds of church. (It's natural that there be different kinds of church, as the historical Christian matrix was both rich & amorphous, & out of it developed various trajectories some of which continue till our day & some are later developments.) I'll elaborate by reference to my experience in congregations of the relevant types:

(1) One church was almost purely **transactional**. Jesus' central, almost only value was that he blocked the doom from God that would otherwise descend upon the hearers (members & visitors) severally, individually. This divine-defense theme permeates the NT (though not as much as the Quran, where "the Message" is the deliverer). It was Billy Graham's original preaching & is still his core (cf. the Quran's preachers, who are essentially "warners"). Jesus delivers believers (as the baptismal formula has it) from "sin, death, & the devil" by a transaction ("atonement" is one word for it) at once protecting against "the Wrath" & uniting the soul (individual) with God through this mediation of Jesus-Lord-Savior-Christ. I believe it, & observe that it is meaningless to those who view God as no threat to anybody.

(2) A second church made only martyrial use of Jesus' "blood" (in spite of the stronger meanings in Mt.26.28 Ac.20.28 Ro.5.9 Heb.9.14 IP.1.18-19 IJn.1.7 Rev.1.5, 5.9, 7.14, 12.11; see TC-RB Cyclopedia, pp.20ff, for extensive Scripture "chains" under "Christ Jesus"), though the primary biblical use of "blood" is transactional-sacrificial. This church I'd describe as **cool-ecstatic**, Bushnell-like in its accent on Jesus' moral example for better personal & societal living (ecstatic thus as "standing out from" what is & into what should be, a more humane world). The heart of Scripture is the Sermon on the Mount. Here are most mainline churches. More breadth than the first church, but less depth. ($\frac{1}{2}$ c. ago yesterday I was arguing with a Chicago theologian for "my faith not in an idealistic but in an ontological conception of the cosmic Christ.")

(3) You guessed it: The third church was **warm-ecstatic**. Congregants were expected to "stand out from" not only worldliness but also their usual emotional composure. Said an early American Puritan, "Our hearts in prayer must be working like a great ocean sea that sometimes cometh with great billows so that it bringeth up things that are at the bottom of it." Apollonian, but also Dionysian; community building with heart religion. But this third church did not have that balance, it seemed to me. It felt doctrinairely pentecostal-charismatic.