

Week 5: From the 'Religion of the Incarnation' to the 'Myth of God Incarnate'

- Ch. Gore (ed.), *Lux Mundi*, London 1889.
- R. Morgan (ed.), *The Religion of the Incarnation*, Bristol 1989.
- J. Hick (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate*, London 1977
- M. Green (ed.), *The Truth of God Incarnate*, London 1977
- M. Goulder (ed.), *Incarnation and Myth. The Debate Continued*, London 1979

Incarnation II

- Christianity as the ‘Religion of the Incarnation’ – the thesis of the Lux-Mundi group:
- Incarnation the centre of Christian theology:
- ‘Christianity is a religion of a Person. It propounds for our acceptance Jesus Christ as the revealer of the Father. The test question of the Church to its catechumens has never been: “Dost thou believe the Bible?” but “Dost thou believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?”’

Incarnation III

- Incarnational truth is the fundamental test for Christianity:
- ‘If Christ be God, the Son of God, incarnate, as the Creeds assert, then Christianity is true’.
- → Notion of divine immanence in the world.
- Emphasis on sacramental theology.
- Rapprochement with scientific and historical research (concept of ‘evolution’)
- Kenotic theology / divine passibility.

Incarnation IV

- Counter-thesis by *Myth of God Incarnate* (MGI):
- Christianity does not stand or fall with 'Incarnation'.
- Incarnation one of various forms of speaking about Jesus.
- 'The Nicene definition of God-the-Son-incarnate is only one way of conceptualizing the Lordship of Jesus, the way of the Graeco-Roman world of which we are the heirs, and in the new age of world ecumenism which we are entering it is proper for Christians to become conscious of both the optional and the mythological character of this traditional language'.

Incarnation V

- Incarnational Christology meant that that this was ultimately perverted, as it made the divine Logos the subject of Incarnation.
- Consequence: 'full humanity' of Jesus is maintained in theory, but eclipsed in practice.
- No viable Christological theory forthcoming because of immanent tensions.

Incarnation VI

- Is it unreasonable to suppose that the contents of Christ's human mind will include not only that experimental knowledge which is acquired by him in the course of his development from infancy to manhood in a way substantially the same as, though immeasurably more consistent and unimpeded than, the way in which we acquire ours, but also an infused knowledge which is directly communicated to his human nature from the divine Person who is its subject, and which is a participation in the divine omniscience and is limited only by the receptive capacity of human nature as such? (from E.L. Mascall, *Christ, the Christian and the Church*, 1946, 56-7)

Incarnation VII

- Wiles' reply is this:
- 'That quotation ends with a rhetorical question expecting the answer "No, it is not unreasonable". But the only answer that I can give is "Yes, it is unreasonable". The argument seems to me to have reached a conclusion far beyond anything that the evidence could conceivably justify'. (5)

Incarnation VIII

- Instead: Christology contains 'metaphorical' statements about Jesus expressing his unique representation of divine love.
- Practical consequence: believer is called to imitate this attitude.
- This metaphorical use of Christological titles was metaphysically misconstrued into the 'myth' of God Incarnate.

Incarnation IX

- ‘The real point and value of the incarnational doctrine is not indicative but expressive, not to assert a metaphysical fact but to express a valuation and evoke an attitude. The doctrine of the incarnation is not a theory which ought to be able to be spelled out but – in a term widely used throughout Christian history – a mystery. I suggest that its character is best expressed by saying that the idea of divine incarnation is a mythological idea. [...] The truth of a myth is a kind of practical truth consisting in the appropriateness of the attitude to its object. That Jesus was God the Son incarnate [...] gives expression to his efficacy as saviour from sin and ignorance and as a giver of new life; it offers a way of declaring his significance to the world; and it expresses a disciple’s commitment to Jesus as his personal Lord’ (178).

Incarnation X

- Hick et al. rightly emphasise the immediate connection between Christology and his relation to the believer.
- Yet they reduce this relation to an instance of 'example' and 'imitator'.
- Soteriology has always implied more:
- Encounter with Jesus changes human beings.
- This change enables them to act differently.
- Thus: Christ is first sacrament, then example (Augustine).

Incarnation XI

- MGI: Incarnational Christology must be incoherent → based on assumption that the predicate 'divine' is added to a 'mere' human being.
- 'Christology' has always seen Jesus in light of his death and resurrection.
- Pannenberg: Christology 'from below' must not neglect that even in the 'historical Jesus' God comes into play.