

Reading Log for ST502 Systematic Theology II Van Horsen

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Jaroslav Pelikan *Jesus through the Centuries*

27. August 1993

Chapter 1 The Rabbi

An attempt by Pelikan to put Jesus in the right perspective as a Jew in the Judaistic culture in the first century. He emphasizes common techniques used by Jesus and the Rabbis like the expression of theological truths in questions or parables although Jesus' parables have their special slant. He concludes with the thought that much of Anti-Semitism in this century would have been avoided would we have kept in mind the Jewish origin of Jesus.

Analysis:

The chapter is outstanding for its lack of material from the early period of the first century. Much could have been said about the characteristics of Hebrew thought and tradition. Material is available from Qumran of which only rare bits of information were incorporated. Certainly in the references to the Sermon on the Mount a reference to the Scroll of Blessings found at Qumran would have been in place. His style is wordy and does not come easily to the point.

Chapter 2 The Turning Point

Jesus here is set forth as a turning point in history (Maybe? At least the church made it up that way). He speaks about the delay of the Parusia that should have caused a crisis in Christianity but somehow did not. Furthermore Christianity caused a new interest in the writing of history with the decisive event of Jesus Christ as the turning point. Everything is now dated from Christ's birth. Ironically even the enemies are now dated reckoning from that point in history.

Analysis:

It gets worse. I have the impression that Pelikan does not know what he is talking about and that what he is somehow able to convey is totally insignificant. I would stop reading this book if it would not be required and demand my money back from the bookstore.

Chapter 3 The Light of the Gentiles

Here Pelikan traces the way Christians argued in the Graeco-Roman world of the first centuries after Christ in order to defend and promote faith in Jesus Christ. They found "types" of Christ in the pagan literature like Plato and other classical writers. They did a special exegesis of these writings to show that Christ was even anticipated by other cultures. In many respects the exegetical methods were questionable.

Analysis:

Finally something is there. It is very helpful to see how Christian apologetes could see Christ in pagan scripture and how they contextualized the faith accordingly. Weird as some of the exegesis is, that was customary at that time and should not lead to total discrediting of the apostolic writers. Pelikan has a very negative attitude to this technique, yet there are numerous examples of people in our times unable to cope with written texts and doing strange kinds of exegesis and we do not totally reject them.

August 28, 1993

Chapter 4 The King of Kings

The role of Christ as King is traced in this Chapter. First Christ was only seen as a spiritual king not from this world, but later in the Roman Empire and throughout the Middle Age this developed into Christ the King from which the authority of all earthly kings is derived.

Analysis:

It is interesting how the view of Christ changed and how it was incorporated in the political system. It is left for us to wonder how much of this phenomenon is due to political opportunism on the part of the ruler or to their sincere faith.

Chapter 5 The Cosmic Christ

Christ is the Logos and therefore also a symbol for the rationality of God and of the World. This means that the world can be understood by reason enabling Science to develop. In Christ the Logos expressed himself incarnate in this world. The Logos is the basic foundation of our world and the ultimate goal.

Analysis:

Here definitely strands of Process Theology appear. The role of the Logos is expanded beyond the common understanding to see a basis for the development of science here. Christ is the agent of revelation about the cosmos and therefore furthers understanding and science. The connotation of Logos with reason or wisdom is expanded beyond the historical use of the term and is therefore speculative.

Chapter 6 The Son of Man

Jesus applied the title Son of Man to himself denoting apocalyptic associations in the Jewish culture. Later a shift occurred and the term Son of Man was used to denote the human nature of Jesus in contrast to the term Son of God referring to the divine nature.

Analysis:

Some interesting thoughts are brought to view like Jesus the key to the mystery of Christ, Blaise Pascal's thoughts, original Sin and ending up with the virgin birth. I really do not know how all of this works together. There is no clear-cut message but a fragmented presentation of diverse things here.

Chapter 7 The True Image

Christ is a picture of true humanity and at the same time a true image of God the Father. The Eucharist is a picture of Jesus that we practice continually in our churches. Since God created an image first this is to be used to justify the making of images and icons. The Hebrew Bible is filled with wordy images of God, there is little difference in visible images.

Analysis:

This is an defense of the use of Christian icons and paintings to communicate characteristics of Christ. It is interesting to see this struggle that ended with the use of images in the Church. Sadly the whole issue is presented in a muddy one sided way. But this all would belong into a different book since the view of Christ is barely touched.

Chapter 8 Christ crucified

The Cross was becoming in itself more and more important in society and began to have magical function. It would work against demons, give victory and so on. The meaning of Christ's death could be understood with Anselm as God's way of making grace for sinners possible.

Analysis:

The stress here is on the role of the cross in the past, the use and role of it. This gives some good insights, yet again Christ's person is almost completely missing. Pelikan discusses around him focusing instead on the cross. The book does largely miss its main topic.

Chapter 9 The Monk who rules the World

Being a monk developed as a Christian ideal of being like Jesus over time. This became so strong that higher posts in the church were largely required to be filled by celibate persons usually meaning a monk. Thus the ones separating from the world gained dominance over the church who dominated in turn the world.

Analysis:

Interesting thoughts. I have never seen it that way that the church was dominated by those who wanted to forsake the world and the secular church. This is a quite unique Christian solution to people leaving the mainstream of a group. Christ was seen as the ultimate monk in a large part of the history of the church.

Chapter 10 The Bridegroom of the Soul

Here the mystical elements of a believer's relationship to Christ are surveyed. The Song of Songs played an important role in being a model for the oneness of a believer's soul with Christ.

Analysis:

The mystical is clearly an important element of Christian living, although there are dangers as indicated by Pelikan. That the Song of Songs was read in the Monasteries is very interesting and brings to light a deep longing for unity and communion with God.

Chapter 11 The Divine and the Human Model

Here the concern is about Francis of Assisi and his influence on Christianity. Francis imitated Jesus in his life, meaning he emphasized the human identification with Christ over the common notion of Christ as divine and being beyond the reach of humans.

Analysis:

I did not realize that Francis of Assisi had so much influence on Christianity. The imitation of Christ is an important concept that brings faith down to earth into our daily lives. Christ's divinity is often far from daily living.

August 29, 1993

Chapter 12 The Universal Man

The Renaissance went back to the Greek sources for the New Testament and tried to get rid of the distortions of Jesus through the translations into Latin and misinterpretations of the church. Together with the rediscovery of the Greek philosophers Jesus developed to the archetype of the ideal man.

Analysis:

It is interesting to see how Jesus fit into the expectations of that time to see him as a philosopher as the ideal human being. It is sad that this again suffers through Pelikan's way of presenting the material in confusing the reader with side trips into other contemporary issues that fascinated himself but are distracting the reader.

Chapter 13 The Mirror of the Eternal

Humanism sparked the Reformation which insisted on the authority of the original texts over against the tradition in the church. Luther's translation especially contemporizes Jesus as a 17th century person and

made the humanity visible again. Calvin and Luther had divergent opinions on the role of faith for government. Calvin insisted that government had to further the Christian cause and had to legislate in a Christian way.

Analysis:

The role of Luther's language to communicate Lutheran thought is amazing. I did not realize that Luther's crude language was such a tool for this purpose.

Chapter 14 The Prince of Peace

Here Pelikan surveys different opinions toward Christians and war or Christians in public office. Luther separated Christian ethic in private life and in public duty. Christ's commands on the Sermon on the Mount are valid for private life but not for public duty. That way a Christian could fight in war since this was a public duty.

Analysis:

Here Pelikan gets to the point! This seems to be one of his areas of interest. He tries to argue for the applications of Christian ethics for the whole life not only for private affairs. His argument is very weak though. His presentation of the basic arguments from scripture point more to a difference for public office although not in the extreme form of Luther's view.

Chapter 15 The Teacher of Common Sense

This deals with the period of the "cleansing" of the Gospels from the miraculous. Through censorship the pure common sense was distilled from the Gospel. It is noteworthy that even Thomas Jefferson was active in this area.

Analysis:

The description makes evident on what kind of background the "Quest for the historical Jesus" grew. We have now outgrown this period of extreme rationalism and can see the special bias conditioned by that time.

Chapter 16 The Poet of the Spirit

After the period of rationalistic censorship a counterreaction resulted in the rise of Romanticism since there was a need for poetic knowledge. Jesus developed to be a poet, the supreme Poet active through the Spirit.

Analysis:

It seems that this counterreaction to rationalism is still going on and that various forms of reacting to it are found. Most exemplary are the charismatics, Pentecostals, and the early youth-nature movement in the beginning of the century in Europe.

Chapter 17 The Liberator

In the prior chapters Jesus was made conformant to the contemporary thought. Here Jesus is the revolutionary that sets people free. Examples are the civil war on the issue of slavery and the Indian way to independence through passive resistance of Mahatma Gandhi. Passive resistance is traced back to the Sermon on the Mount.

Analysis:

Pelikan has a weird form of arguing the conflict about biblical interpretation on the issue of slavery. The deciding factor in favor of abolition was a "feeling" based on popular views of the person of Jesus and the Christian ideals.

Chapter 18 The Man Who Belongs to the World

The Christian Missions in the 19th and 20th century did help many nations to become literary but also disregarded their cultural heritage. Christianity develops more and more to be contextualized for each nation. Missionaries attempt first to understand what the other nations valuable contributions are. Jesus now belongs to the world in that all religions combine their best.

Analysis:

Contextualization is necessary but not to the obliteration of the biblical message. Pelikan's tendency is to advocate syncretism. Christianity is based on the uniqueness of Christ. Syncretism means that Christ is no longer unique and thus this would not be Christianity anymore.

235 Pages

Otto Weber *Grundlagen der Dogmatik* Vol II

Note: I read this book in German. There might be some confusion with my expressing special theological terms in English.

30. August 1993

Chapter 1 Aufgabe und Erkenntnisweg der Christologie

In the first chapter Weber discusses the foundations for approaching Christology. He shows that neither the approach from below nor above is sufficient to approach this but that a combination is necessary. He is especially criticizing the recent modern attempt to do Christology based on ideas and principles that are imposed on the New Testament expressed also in "Historical Criticism". Christology can only be done in not exaggerating the cognate parts to discern the whole.

Analysis:

A very helpful new view of the historical-critical method as I know it from home. Weber is very comprehensive but gets into the danger of being incomprehensible since his presentation gets too complex. Yet he produced lots of useful arguments to get a hold of destructive liberal theology and exposes their subjective methods.

31. August 1993

Chapter 2 Das Biblische Christuszeugnis

In a very thorough way the characteristics of the biblical witness in all different aspects are presented without regard for possible conflicts in them. Weber has the opinion that it is not possible to present them in a different way. In the later part of the chapter the problem of historicism is the main issue especially concerning the resurrection. Most scholars claim that this cannot be historical since a resurrection would be something contrary to regular history.

Analysis:

The attempt of Weber to let the biblical witnesses in many aspects be different from each other is remarkable. He truly does not subject the text his own reasoning or to a firm philosophic system but accepts the incomprehensibility of the matter and describes various aspects (or themes) of the New Testament without putting them into abstractions which might force something on the text.

1. September 1993

Chapter 3 Die Kirchliche Christologie

Weber traces the development of Christology through the history of the Church. Christology developed as a response to heresies. Different aspects of Christology (like the human and the divine nature) could

never be reconciled with each other and the church always tended to emphasize one over the other depending on the heresy currently faced. The charge of docetism is made against a large group of modern theologians since they like to think of Christ as an "idea" and not as a concrete person in history.

Analysis:

The charge of docetism was made by Weber also in the preceding chapters. Here it really sticks. Idealizing Jesus and thereby censoring the New Testament so that it fits one's own presuppositions makes Jesus not the real Jesus but a Jesus that conforms to one's own standard of divine and hence is not human anymore.

2. September 1993

Chapter 4 Kritik und Neugestaltung der Christologie

The real Christ is superior to all attempts of describing Christology in any kind of logical attempts. Therefore Christology must be paradoxical. In a common form of a paradox the truth on one side conditions a falsity on the other side. This is not the case with paradoxical Christology. Instead the truth on one side and the truth on the other coincide and do not falsify each other. The decree of Chalcedon was paradoxical and this is the only form possible. Christology finally is an aid to experience Christ himself.

Analysis:

Weber's theory of the paradox effectively prohibits attempts of modern scholarship to put Jesus into some kind of box. God is incomprehensible by all our thoughts, that is the way it is and that is what all human attempts to develop a Christology show.

Chapter 5 Jesus Christus, der Wirker des Werkes.

Central focus here is the Office "Amt" of Christ and the work of Christ in the Reconciliation "Versöhnung". After discussing and surveying New Testament data concerning reconciliation Weber sees the major importance here in the teaching of substitution ("Stellvertretung") for us. Yet he modifies the understanding of substitution to be "inclusive". We are in him participating in Christ's work. We are in his area of power. His death is also our death to the world and judgment on us. Similarly his resurrection is also affecting us. A polarization between Jesus as the one giving and us as the ones receiving cannot be archived.

Analysis:

I am struck by the massive amount of work Weber brings into each detail of his teaching. His conclusions concerning "Versöhnung" are especially helpful since this touches a lot of other elements of reconciliation found in non-substitutionistic theories. There is the recapitulation most importantly which was emphasized by the early church fathers.

3. September 1993

VII. Abschnitt: Das Werk des Heiligen Geistes

Chapter 1 Der Geist des Vaters und des Sohnes

The Spirit effects the word to us and opens up our understanding. It is the spirit of sonship who prepares us for the inheritance. He is the reality of the spiritual kingdom of Christ and enables us to resist the powers of this world. We cannot effect that ourselves but the Spirit is effecting that what we cannot in us. For example repentance.

Analysis:

This is a powerful understanding of the Spirit. He enables us yet does not force us on his ways. Essentially the Spirit is working in all that affects us in our relationship with God. I never thought that a book about Systematic Theology could be spiritually encouraging like that.

Chapter 2 Der Gerechtfertigte Mensch

Paragraph 1 Der Glaube

Faith is understood as obedience to something that we do not carry within ourselves. Faith hears and obeys. Faith lives toward its fulfillment that is outside of us. Faith expresses trust in the one facing us which is God.

Analysis:

I wonder how this fits in with the biblical expression that the Spirit is within us. In that way we should carry something within ourselves. Weber has a too strong point on obedience and -- although he is arguing against it -- leaves the impression of us being in total control by God.

Paragraph 2 Die Rechtfertigung

Justification in Christ means that God has submitted his judgment and has gotten his right and sin has come to its end. God's right judgment has really been performed. Christ has been made to sin thereby disempowering sin. Therefore one who believes in Christ receives his condemnation together with his effective acquittal. The believer takes part in death and in the life of Christ.

Analysis:

Weber sees a danger of seeing justification as improving a human's attitude. This opinion of Christ as a morally improving force has found widespread acceptance even in non-Christian circles and is kind of neutral. Weber's insight is that this is not justification in the sense meant by the Bible, but an education program that causes the Christian message to be dead. I think this is helpful in dealing with a lot of "Christian" tendencies to morally "improve" humans (examples could be found in a large scale in the current political correctness movement in the world and even at Fuller).

Chapter 3 Der Mensch Gottes

Paragraph 1 Zuspruch und Anspruch

Good works are fruit but not an automatic outpouring from faith. They follow the act of justification but are not equal to justification. Sanctification follows justification, yet sanctification is more in the purpose of God than justification (teleological supremacy). Sanctification is the work of God in the human, but is then -- too -- the human's own experience and deed. Sanctification does not make a human being accomplish more than what he received in justification.

Analysis:

Sanctification does allow a human to accomplish more than being justified. In several places Paul talks about the rewards that await us for things that we did here (Phil, 1 Thess, also Rev 14). Since sanctification is more in the purpose of God than justification it follows that a believer accomplishes more of the purposes of God by certain acts of sanctification. Of course again the question arises who is responsible for these acts since sanctification is the work of God but also the humans deed.

Paragraph 2 Gottes gutes Gebot

The Law is not abolished and is still working in being proclaimed. Yet it does not work salvation but is necessary as a *paidagwgo* "ei" *Cristi*. Where the gospel replaces the law there it loses its being and dignity. The healing disturbedness can only be produced by the law. Similarly the gospel cannot be changed into another law to produce a new law. This resulted in "Schwärmertum" in the past. Similarly

today there are groups calling for the change of society with the same approach. This pulls the gospel out of its eschatologic connectedness and causes it to lose its power. The good command is the gospel, the law paves the way for one to accept the good command. God's proclaimed love here makes us as the receiving ones, debting him in a different sense.

Christians should live not according to a law but according to a "Paränese". Paränese is not like the law, it does not proclaim principles but love. This being principle-less enables it to be concrete for specific situations. There is no evasion possible like the Jews practiced with the Torah. Paränese is free of dependency on special circumstances in history.

Analysis:

The definition and usage of his word "Paränese" is nebulous and oscillating back and forth between law and grace. Perhaps that is also the strength of that word. It has a danger of reverting into principles to "reeducate" society and has a slant of Paul Jewett's "progressive Revelation" which makes the biblical message highly context sensitive and allows a major redefinition of biblical assertions like the role of male and female (Which was Jewett's reason for developing it).

456 Pages

4. September 1993

St. Anselm

Proslogium

The Proslogium is a kind of tract on the characteristics of God written in a direct worshipful address of God. God is exalted because of all his features. The writer is a wretched creature whose little mind tries to grasp some understanding of the majesty of God. The intend stated in the introduction is to show the existence of God. The way Anselm does this is by building a paradox on the possibility of imagining the greatest being possible and the reality of such a being which would be greater than that. The rest of the tract is describing certain problematic characteristics of God and giving a logical understanding of them.

Analysis:

I find the proof for the existence of God not convincing at all. How can my imagination have anything to do with the real existence of God? It would have been better had the author removed this part of the tract and focused solely on the characteristics of God. Apart from that brain-screw at the beginning the rest is very instructive to read and is a kind of worship of God which is also spiritually edifying.

Monologium

This is more of a proof of the existence of God than the Proslogium. This part is much more comprehensive. Anselm starts out with reason. From that he argues for the existence of a supreme being and a creation and then tries to find characteristics for the creation. From the thoughts of God he deducts the existence of the word and continues surveying that. The supreme being is incapable of change and static. Humans must love him. This being is not body but Spirit since the Spirit is superior to the body and God is the superior one. God must have created the world in order to express himself otherwise he would not be intelligent and therefore not be God. He then argues for the sonship of the word from the creator and the Spirit and thus is able to develop the full blown Trinity and cover the Augustinian Filioque. He discusses the Trinity but ultimately has to stop since reasoning only leads to contradictions which can only be accepted as a mystery beyond the human comprehension.

The discussion then turns to the human and his relationship to the supreme being. Since the mind is the item of a human most similar to the supreme being. The more we strive for understanding the supreme

being the more we become equal to him. Thus the purpose of our creation is to love God. This striving for God is the same as faith in God for Anselm.

The human mind - if one is a believer - strives for goodness for incorruptibility, truth, blessedness. This will God grant because he is good and because he has constructed humans in this way. But the infidels despise the supreme being and dwell in misery not loving the creator and therefore will dwell in eternal torment since all human souls are immortal. In effect Anselm has given a complete Systematic Theology in a relatively short text.

Analysis:

Anselm's honesty is admirable. He subjects himself to the teaching of the church and tries to make sense out of all. In the midst of the Monologium he comes to a point where all his thoughts result in contradiction. There he freely acknowledges that here the limits of his reasoning are reached.

There is definitely a Platonic background showing up in the concepts of the immortal soul and the argument for a static supreme being that -- at least in some places -- looks incapable of love or affection because of its stability. There is the picture of the unmovable mover.

In many ways Anselm gives very easy understandable ways to argument for an understanding of the Trinity. These are especially fit for laity since they are not based on special theological doctrine.

Anselm's book here is an example how understandable modern Systematic Theologies should be! Above all I like his being subject to the teaching of the church and not acting as the supreme know-it-all.

September 5, 1993

Cur Deus Homo

Book First

In this first section Anselm shows that man is condemned by the justice of God. That God cannot bypass sin without denying his being as God. The issue of the incarnation is touched in the beginning. God was not lowered in the incarnation (no Kenosis!). Christ died of his own free will not compelled by God, yet the death was in the course of obedience to God. He maintained justice and truth and that was the reason for his being slain.

The dignity of God demands that there is justice. If God would not punish the offenders then he would not be true to himself, he would lie. A lying God is no God at all. So it is incompatible with God's very essence to skip sins. God must be satisfied by the punishment of the offender since he disturbs the order and beauty of the universe.

Some speculation on fallen angels and man making up for them follows. Man will be lifted in the positions of these angels and therefore must have conquered sin like the other angels when the evil ones fell. This is only possible through the atonement.

Man must make up by conquering sin through death while staying sinless, yet no man can do so since man is born in sin. If that man would be taken over in death by the devil, the devil would take what belongs to God and thus the devil is "despoiled".

Compassionate forgiveness is incompatible with the "Divine justice". Punishment is required as recompense for sin. So without Christ everyone is condemned based on pure Anselmian reason.

Analysis:

An amazing work of art. Some things I think to be totally speculative like the thing with the fallen angels and man lifted up to their position. Scripture says that we shall be lifted up higher than the angels (Hebrews). But again I enjoyed the natural plain language and reasoning used. The subjection to scripture and to the teaching of the church and to authority over all! And it is enjoyable to read a work that is not politically correct and still is able to use sexist language and sexist examples to illustrate points. I got a feeling of normality again. Again we have the Platonic idea of the unmovable mover used to justify several points like the "Divine justice".

Book Second

The second book focuses more on the atonement and the necessity of the atonement. Man -- as created by God -- is not mortal. Only sin corrupted him so that he became mortal. Therefore Jesus as an uncorrupted man was not mortal and could give his life of his own choice since he did not have to die. The Savior -- in order to satisfy God -- must be both human and divine, yet these two natures are totally separate lest they form one mingled nature. He was born by a woman by a divine act. God already had made man out of nothing and women out of man. He wanted to show that he also could make a man out of a woman. Christ maintained his holiness in his life and that was the reason for his death. By choosing to maintain holiness he had to choose death and give his life. His death was sufficient for many since any injury inflicted on him was extremely unjust because of his sinlessness. Therefore his sacrifice was greater than any sin that could be committed by man.

Analysis:

This runs quite along the same line as the first book. Some points in the atonement are clarified but some issues remain in muddy water like the problem of the necessity or the free choice of Christ's death. Did God compel Christ to die? There are some elements of Mariology here. The virgin was cleansed through faith in Christ before Christ's death building a paradox in time. The ideal of a pure virgin is communicating that sexuality in itself belongs to the sinful world.

I cannot find the passage of the virginity of Eve as mentioned in the lectures. Instead Anselm seems to refer to the virginity of Adam. Anselm is referring to the woman (Eve) that was made from a virgin like Jesus. It is undeniable that Adam was a virgin before the creation of Eve.

Gaunilo's In Behalf of the Fool

These are some doubts on the part of Gaunilo on the validity of Anselm's reasoning about the existence of God. A special problem is Anselm's way of concluding from an existing thought to the reality of a thing. Gaunilo illustrates this with an example on a lost island with the greatest treasure. Since we can picture this in our mind therefore it exists according to Anselm's method.

Anselm answers these doubts with a longwinded list of refutations.

Analysis:

I did not see much value in Anselm's proof of the existence of God since his notion of the "greatest" is unclear and the conclusion from thought to existence does not convince me. I think Gaunilo's doubts here are certainly valid and his way of presenting them is very polite and strategically well done.

Anselm's answer is largely a philosophical messing around with terms and conclusions that do not add much to his prior arguments.

328 Pages

Louis Berkhoff *Systematic Theology*, 4th Ed. 1938 Eerdmans Publishing Co., Michigan
See Book Report

738 Pages