

- **Does Acts 2:36 Represent an Adoptionist Christology?**
- **Le Texte d'Actes 2.36 Énonce-t-il une Christologie Adoptionniste?**
- **Repräsentiert Apg. 2,36 eine adoptionistische Christologie?**

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RÉSUMÉ

Nombre de commentateurs considèrent que dans le texte d'Actes 2.36, comme aussi en Rom 1.4, on trouve exprimée une christologie adoptionniste. Cette interprétation est liée à la question de savoir si le discours de Pierre (qui contient cet énoncé) est une tradition préluccanienne ou une composition de Luc lui-même. Roloff, par exemple, adopte la première hypothèse, car le texte serait en contradiction avec la christologie de Luc selon laquelle Jésus était déjà l'oint pendant son ministère terrestre. Cette étude examine les termes clés du verset. L'emploi du mot 'Seigneur' ne permet pas de trancher, et les avis sur le terme 'Messie' sont très partagés (voir Roloff contre Pesch). Le mot 'fait' doit être considéré avec soin. Il a probablement le

sens de 'manifesté' (cf. 1 Sam 12.6, LXX). Cela correspond à la manière dont Athanase comprenait le texte.

L'auteur soutient que le texte d'Actes 2.36 doit être interprété en fonction du contexte du discours de Pierre dans son ensemble, et comme sa pointe finale. Les allusions aux Psaumes 16 et 110 indiquent que le terme 'Seigneur' doit être compris dans un sens messianique. D'autres allusions à l'A.T. sont évoqués à l'appui de cette interprétation (Ps 2; 2 Sam 7.12 ss.), de même que les versets 22 et 23 d'Actes 2.

Pour conclure, le texte d'Actes 2.36 doit être compris, non pas comme indiquant le moment où Jésus serait devenu le Fils de Dieu, mais comme parlant de son intronisation, ou de la manifestation publique de ce qu'il est.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Viele Kommentatoren sehen in Apg. 2,36 (und Röm. 1,4) eine adoptionistische Christologie vertreten. Die Interpretation der Stelle hängt mit der Frage zusammen, ob die Rede des Petrus (aus der der Vers stammt) eine präluccanische Tradition oder eine Komposition des Lukas ist. Roloff vertritt z.B. erstere Position, da die Stelle Lukas' eigener Theologie widerspricht, nach der Jesus bereits zu Beginn seines Lebens der 'Gesalbte' war. Der vorliegende Artikel

untersucht die Schlüsselbegriffe des Verses. So ist bezüglich des Begriffs 'Herr' keine endgültige Entscheidung möglich, und auch zum Ausdruck 'Messias' gehen die Meinungen stark auseinander (vgl. Roloff und Pesch). Der Begriff 'machte' erfordert sorgfältige Erwägungen und sollte wohl als 'machte bekannt' verstanden werden (vgl. 1. Sam. 12,6 LXX), was mit Athanasius' Verständnis des Textes übereinstimmt.

Es wird aufgezeigt, daß Apg. 2,36 im Kontext der gesamten Rede, und zwar als deren Klimax, zu verstehen ist. Die

in der Rede enthaltenen Anspielungen auf Ps. 16 und 110 sind wesentlich für das ihr eigene messianische Verständnis des 'Herrn', zu dessen Unterstützung weitere alttestamentliche Anspielungen (Ps. 2; 2 Sam. 7,12ff.) angeführt werden, wie z.B. in Apg. 2,22–23. Folglich sollte

Apg. 2,36 nicht in dem Sinne verstanden werden, daß es den Zeitpunkt angibt, an dem Jesus zum Sohn Gottes wurde, sondern eher im Sinne einer Art Inthronisation bzw. öffentlichen Demonstration, daß er der 'Herr' und 'Christus' ist.

Rudolf Bultmann expressed a view which is widespread among scholars of the New Testament when he affirmed in his *New Testament Theology*: 'Acts 2:36 and Rom 1:4 . . . show that in the earliest Church, Jesus' membership was dated from the resurrection.'¹ In the recent ICC volume on Acts, C. K. Barrett adopted Bultmann's view on this verse.² This is such a widespread view that most scholars do not even discuss the possibility that the verse may mean something else.

Most scholars argue that Acts 2 is a composition of the author of Luke-Acts. For example, Ernst Haenchen asserts that 'Peter's speeches go back to Luke himself'.³ However, scholars generally agree that there are traditions in Peter's speech at Pentecost earlier than the writing of Acts. According to Martin Hengel, in Luke's redactional work the titles in his terminology 'have been chosen deliberately'. Hengel asserts: 'In Acts 2:36, as in Rom 1:3f., there are hints at an archaic adoptionist christology: through the resurrection God has made Jesus *kyrios* (Ps 110:1) and *christos*, "Lord" and "Anointed"'.⁴

Jürgen Roloff also holds that Acts 2:36 is an old tradition.⁵ According to him, that the verse is not Lukan can be seen in the fact that it contradicts Luke's own Christology. For Luke Jesus was the Anointed One and Lord already in his earthly life (see e.g. Lk 2:11; 3:22; 4:18). In Acts 2:36 Luke gives place to an older idea 'derzufolge Jesus erst auf Grund der Erhöhung zum Christus und Herrn geworden ist'. Haenchen argues along similar lines. However, he notes that 'Luke had no

intention, in verses 22, 33, 36, of outlining an older Christology'.⁶ Luke 'understood traditional statements in terms of contemporary doctrine'.

Let us briefly examine the question afresh: Does Acts 2:36 mean that according to early Christians Jesus was made Messiah at his resurrection? Or, to put it in another way, Did the early church believe that God 'adopted' Jesus as his 'son' through his resurrection?

1. The origin of the term 'Lord'

There is a disagreement among scholars with regard to the origin of the term *kyrios*. The majority of scholars seem to argue for a Hellenistic background of the term. Roloff argues that it is an anachronism to see Peter at Pentecost as interpreting Joel 3,5a of the 'Lord Jesus'. Peter must have spoken in Aramaic whereas that interpretation was only possible later, on the basis of the Greek *Septuagint*.⁷

However, Hengel, who maintains a Hellenistic origin of the term, points to evidence in Qumran 'that *mare* was also used in Palestinian Judaism in the absolute form as a designation of God'.⁸

R. F. Zehnle rejects the possibility that the term *kyrios* could come from 'the martitle of the Aramaic-speaking church'.⁹ His argument is that 'the only known milieu for *mar*-sayings is the eschatological expectation of the Aramaic-speaking community; Acts 2:36 certainly does not fit into this milieu'.

J. C. O'Neill suggests a way out of the difficulties by affirming on the one hand that: 'The title κύριος for Jesus originated in the Aramaic-speaking Church,' and on

the other hand that: 'The way the title is used in Acts, however, shows that the author was writing when the Aramaic origins had long been forgotten'.¹⁰

I agree with the view that the Aramaic-speaking early Christian community worshipped Jesus as 'Lord'. One may argue that the little evidence we have (1 Cor 16:22, Rev 22:20, Did 10:6) does not exclude the possibility of a wider use of the *mar*-title. It can also be argued (against Zehnle) that Peter may well have regarded his speech at Pentecost as an 'eschatological event'.

However, the origin of the term in itself does not answer the question whether or not Acts 2:36 is evidence for an adoptionist Christology. We can only distinguish levels of likelihood of this theory. If the 'Hellenistic' origin thesis were right then the adoptionist theory would be more likely, because the lateness of the title might correspond with the slowness of Christians to see God's Messiah in Jesus. If the 'Aramaic' origin theory were right then it is less likely that Acts 2:36 expresses an adoptionist view, because there is only a short period 'available' to posit the development in the Christology of the early Christians. If Acts 2:36 is a record of a real speech of Peter at Pentecost then the adoptionist theory is even less likely. One may argue that Peter confessed Jesus to be the Messiah in Jesus' earthly life (although this is highly disputed), so he may have made that application of Joel 3:5 and Ps 110:1 to Jesus at Pentecost. Here I can only speak of levels of likelihood, because much depends on exegetical decisions with regard to the Gospel material.

2. The term 'Messiah'

It is widely accepted that the term 'Christ'-'Messiah'-is used as a title in Acts 2:36 (see e.g. Zehnle 1971, 68). However, one of the most hotly debated issues in New Testament scholarship is: When and by whom was the term first applied to Jesus? Two quotations may indicate the divergence of opinions with regard to one

and the same passage: Mk 8:27ff. Roloff affirms: 'Der irdische Jesus hatte diese in starkem Maße mit irdisch-politischen Implikationen belasteten Titel weder für sich beansprucht, noch dessen Anwendung auf ihn durch seine Anhänger toleriert'.¹¹ Rudolf Pesch holds: 'Daß Jesus als von Gott durch Zeichen und Wunder als Messias ausgewiesen gilt, entspricht der alten Überlieferung in Mk 8:27-30'.¹² Pesch adds with a reference to a quotation in Peter's speech in Acts 2: 'Die Messianität Jesu ist den ersten Zeugen Voraussetzung zum Verständnis seines (sühnenden) Todes und der Theo-Logik seiner Auferweckung, für die sich in Ps 16,10 ein Anhaltspunkt finden ließ'.

3. The term 'made'

It is interesting that very few commentators discuss the translation possibilities of *poieesen*. Most adopt the most obvious first meaning, 'made'. However, this is not the only possibility. Pesch suggests: 'Machen' kann in 36 das schöpferische Auferweckungs- und Erhöhungshandeln bezeichnen, wie die Christen nach Eph 2,10 als mit Christus Auferweckte und in den Himmel Versetzte Gottes *poiäma* sind'.¹³

We may add that 'made' may mean 'made known'. It does not necessarily express the idea of coming into existence for the first time. This possibility is present in texts where somebody appoints or installs somebody else in an office. The verb *poieoo* seems to be able to carry this meaning even in an absolute sense, i.e. without the addition of the phrase that would express what a person was installed or appointed in. For example, in 1Kg 12:6, LXX, (1 Sam 12:6) Samuel's reference to God's action probably has the meaning, God 'appointed' (so e.g. RSV) Moses and Aaron (as leaders). In Mk 3:14 *poieoo* most likely means that Jesus ordered, appointed (TSV),—perhaps chose—the Twelve.

In both cases one may argue that the subject—God and Jesus, respectively—knew beforehand whom he would appoint

or instal in an office at a certain point of time. For God, Moses and Aaron were 'leaders' before they actually became leaders. For Jesus, the Twelve were his chosen apostles even before he called them to himself.

It is worth noting that Athanasius took the term *epoiesen* in Act 2:36 to mean 'He [i.e. God] manifested [*apedeikse*] Him [i.e. Jesus]'.¹⁴

4. Towards a solution

In my opinion a solution of our problem may be achieved if we do not isolate verse 36 from its context. This does not mean that we decide the question whether verse 36 is 'Lukan', or whether it contains earlier tradition. If we think of the passage as Peter's speech (at least in its origins) then it is natural to view verse 36 in the context of his speech. If the speech is the work of the author of Luke-Acts then it is still more probable to think that the author intended a climax in verse 36 than to think that he did not see a contradiction between the material he was using and his own knowledge from elsewhere.

I think it is more likely that the author did not think he was using adoptionist material. I would argue that the following observations may point in this direction.

a. The Old Testament background of the passage

Johannes Munck pointed to the quotation of Ps 16 (LXX 15) in Peter's speech in Acts 2:27: 'It is at any rate difficult to disregard that God . . . would not let his *Holy One* see corruption or let him leave his soul in the kingdom of the dead'.¹⁵ It may be argued that this Psalm quotation, applied to Jesus, suggests that Jesus was Messiah even prior to the resurrection.

G. Schille not only thinks that the term 'Messiah' in Acts 2:36 is an 'association' with the quotation of Ps 16, but he holds that the term 'Lord' in Acts 2:36 refers to the other Old Testament quotation in the passage: Ps 110 (LXX 109). Referring to this Psalm, Schille affirms: 'Der Psalm

redete als Krönungshymnus vom Eintreten Gottes für seinen Gesalbten gegen dessen Feinde. Die erste Christenheit hat das auf Christus bezogen'.¹⁶

Pesch even tries to promote that connection by translating also the *kai* before *kyrion* (and not only the one between the two titles):¹⁷

Petrus zieht die Schlußfolgerung aus dem Schriftbeweis für die Erhöhung Jesu; mit sicherer Gewißheit soll (und kann) 'das ganze Haus Israel' erkennen, daß Gott diesen Jesus 'auch zum Herrn' (von dem Ps 110, 1 spricht) gemacht hat . . .

I note that the exegesis of Ps 110 is highly controversial. For example, Sigmund Mowinckel emphasises that the new king was always 'adopted' by God at the king's enthronement.¹⁸ However, one may argue that the person of the new king was often foreseen by God or even predetermined by him prior to the actual enthronement. God presented to the nation at the enthronement the one whom he had already regarded as king. Mowinckel's words leave this interpretation as a possible one: 'Anointing was an act which first and foremost ratified the king's status as the chosen of Yahweh, and as duly installed. . . . That one of the king's sons (usually the eldest) whom Yahweh had designated by an oracle was conducted in solemn procession to the holy place, where the ceremony took place "before Yahweh"'.¹⁹

Hans Conzelmann points to Acts 4:25f where Ps 2 is quoted. He argues that the combination of the terms 'Lord' and 'Messiah' in Acts 2:36 was evoked by their usage in Ps 2.²⁰ However, we have to note that the difficulties mentioned above with regard to Ps 110 apply also to Ps 2. Here I briefly point to the problem of the term 'I have begotten' in Ps 2. It is clear that it cannot be taken literally not only because of the subject, Yahweh, but also because of the fact that the enthronement does not happen to an infant. It is possible that the terms means: today 'I present you'; 'I lead you forward into the public'.

As another Old Testament reference we may note that Acts 2:30 alludes to 2 Sam 7:12ff. Mowinckel sees in this Old Testa-

ment verse a connection to Pss 110 and 2:21

... it is the style and content of such anointment oracles that furnish the material which the tradition used when, in the legend of Nathan, it makes Nathan pronounce such promises to David. The historical core here is that Yahweh's covenant with the king and his 'decree' at the anointing was expressly understood to be a renewal of 'the favours promised faithfully to David' and of the covenant with him.

In my opinion the expectation that the Messiah should come from the descendants of David does not favour the 'adoptionist' view. The idea is more probably that God knows who his Messiah will be (from the descendants of David) even before the Messiah appears than the idea that the Messiah will appear as any other human being and that then God will adopt him. In this latter case the Davidic descent would lose its importance.

b. Phrases apart from the Old Testament allusions

Munck pointed to Acts 2:22: '... God vouched for Jesus by *powerful deeds*'.²² The reference in this verse is made to Jesus' earthly life. If the 'powerful deeds' may be seen as a reference to 'messianic' deeds then this verse may be an argument against the 'adoptionist' reading of verse 36.

Finally, Acts 2:23 may be an argument against the adoptionist view when it affirms with regard to Jesus that he was 'delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God' (RSV). Although it is difficult to determine at what point God appointed and knew beforehand that Jesus would be 'delivered up', it is sufficient for the present argument to note that these terms refer in this context to a time prior to Jesus' resurrection.

To sum up, there seems to be evidence in the contexts of Acts 2:36 that this verse is not likely to reflect an adoptionist Christology. It rather speaks of an 'enthronement' where, by his resurrec-

tion, Jesus is shown to the 'public' what he always had been in God's view. In this sense of 'Inthronisation' I agree with Pesch:²³

In 36 scheint noch die in der von Paulus Röm 1,2f aufgenommenen Tradition bezeugte alte Christologie von der Inthronisation des auferweckten Messias als Menschensohn und Gottessohn durch. Der von Gott als Messias beglaubigte Jesus ist durch seine Kreuzigung nicht widerlegt worden, sondern seit seiner Auferweckung als 'Herr und Messias' in die ihm zukommende Machtstellung zur Rechten Gottes eingesetzt worden.

It may be worth pointing out that whereas Hengel saw in both Acts 2:36 and Rom 1:3f hints at an adoptionist Christology (see above), Pesch does not find an adoptionist Christology in either of these two passages. We may note that this passage is a 'very old' confession 'further developed' by Paul. Cullmann argues:

Jesus is the 'Son of God' from the beginning. At least this appears to be Paul's understanding when in v.3 he makes 'Son' the subject of the whole two-part confession. But since the resurrection, the eternal divine sonship manifests itself *ἐν δυνάμει*; the Son of God becomes the *Kyrios*.

This line of argument may support Pesch's understanding of both Acts 2:36 and Rom 1:3f. These passages—contrary to the opinion of Bultmann and many other scholars—do not have to be understood as showing traces of an adoptionist Christology.

Thus Acts 2:36 should not be taken with the surface meaning as 'God "made" Jesus Messiah at Jesus' resurrection'. Rather, it should be understood as Athanasius understood it long ago:²⁵

... the Father has *made* Him Lord and King in the midst of us, and towards us, who were once disobedient; and it is plain that He who is now displayed as Lord and King, does not now begin to be King and Lord, but begins to show His Lordship, and to extend it even over the disobedient.

- 1 Bultmann, R. *Theology of the New Testament*. Vol. I, 1952, London: SCM Press, p. 27.
- 2 Barrett, C. K. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*. Vol. I, 1994, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, pp. 151–152.
- 3 Haenchen, E. *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*. 1971, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p. 185.
- 4 Hengel, M. *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity*. 1979, London: SCM Press, p. 104.
- 5 Roloff, J. *Die Apostelgeschichte*. 1988, Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, p. 60.
- 6 Haenchen, p. 187.
- 7 Roloff, p. 55.
- 8 Hengel, pp. 103–105.
- 9 Zehnle, R. F. *Peter's Pentecost Discourse: Tradition and Lukan Reinterpretation in Peter's Speeches of Acts 2 and 3*. 1971, Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, p. 69.
- 10 O'Neill, J. C. *The Theology of Acts in its Historical Setting*. 1961, London: S.P.C.K., p. 129. I note that the chapter on the titles is omitted from the revised edition in 1970, see p. xi.
- 11 Roloff, p. 60.
- 12 Pesch, R. *Die Apostelgeschichte*. 1. (EKK, V/1) 1986, Zürich: Benziger Verlag, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, p. 127.
- 13 Pesch, p. 128.
- 14 Second oration against Arianism, section 12; in English: in Newman, J. H. (transl.): *Select Treatises of St. Athanasius in Controversy with the Arians*. (Freely translated by J. H. Newman) vol. 1, 1881², London: Pickering and Co., p. 263; in Greek: in Bright, W. (introd.): *The Orations of St. Athanasius against the Arians According to the Benedictine Text*. 1873, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 80: "... ἐν μέσῳ ὑμῶν ἐποίησεν, ἵσον τῷ εἰπεῖν, ἀπέδειξε." (I am indebted to Professor J. C. O'Neill of New College, Edinburgh, for the references to 1 Sam 12:6, Mk 3:14 and Athanasius.)
- 15 Munck, J. *The Acts of the Apostles*. 1986, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, p. 18.
- 16 Schille, G. *Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas*. 1984², Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, p. 114.
- 17 Pesch, p. 124.
- 18 Mowinckel, S. *He That Cometh*. 1956, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p. 78.
- 19 Mowinckel, p. 63.
- 20 Conzelmann, H. *Die Apostelgeschichte*. 1963, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), p. 30.
- 21 Mowinckel, S. *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*. 2 vols. 1962, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, vol. I, p. 63.
- 22 Munck, p. 18.
- 23 Pesch, p. 128.
- 24 Cullmann, O. *The Christology of the New Testament*. 1963², London: SCM Press, pp. 291–292.
- 25 See n. 14 above: in Newman, pp. 263–264.

THE RECOVERY OF MISSION *Vinoth Ramachandra*

In recent years the term 'religious pluralism' has come to be used not only in a descriptive sociological sense but also as theologically prescriptive. Within this new paradigm, traditional Christian understandings of Christ, conversion, evangelism, mission etc. have been radically re-interpreted. *The Recovery of Mission* explores the pluralist paradigm through the work of three of its most influential Asian exponents, subjecting each to a theological and philosophical critique. From biblical, patristic and contemporary theological writings, it argues for the uniqueness and decisiveness of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. The author seeks to show that many of the valid concerns of pluralist theologians can best be met by rediscovering and re-appropriating the missionary thrust at the heart of the gospel. The book ends with suggestions, challenging to pluralists and conservatives alike, as to how the gospel needs to be communicated in a multi-faith world.

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