

## *The 'Thou Art Peter' Pericope and the Easter Appearances*

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### I. Summary of W. Marxsen

IN a lecture included in *Der Frühkatholizismus im Neuen Testament*.<sup>1</sup> W. Marxsen established, in my opinion convincingly, that Matt. 16:17-19 is part of an originally independent pericope which Matthew has conflated with the Caesarea Philippi pericope from his Marcan Vorlage. Marxsen notes six changes in this section, which Matthew has made to the text of Mark: (1. In Matt. 16:21 "From that time" (*apo tote*) replaces the linking particle "and" (*kai*). The effect is to separate off the first passion prediction and the Lord's rebuke of Peter (16:21 ff.) and to transform the Caesarea Philippi pericope into a real "confession," from a mere introduction to a further revelation about the Messianic sufferings of Jesus as in Mark. (2. As in Matt. 13:13 the substitution of "the Son of Man" (*ton huion tou anthropou*) for "me" (*me*) in Jesus' initial question: "Who do man say that the Son of man is?" (3. In Matt. 16:14 the insertion of "Jeremiah" between "Elijah" and "one of the prophets." (4. In Matt. 16:16 the addition of "Simon" before "Peter." (5. In Matt. 16:16 the addition of "the Son of the living God" (*ho huios tou theou tou zontos*) after "You are the Christ" (*su ei ho christos*) in Peter's confession. (6. In Matt. 16:17-19, the addition of the "Thou art Peter" saying itself.

Of these changes only No. 3 appears to be completely editorial. It was apparently suggested by Mark's version, the addition of Jeremiah being made because he was the first of the writing prophets, according to contemporary canonical lists.<sup>2</sup>

All of the other changes are derived from or suggested by the independent tradition of Matthew's non-Markan source. These considerations, plus the fact that "has . . . revealed" (*apekalupsen*) now has no object, suggest that Matt. 16:17-19 is really only *part* of an independent tradition. Accordingly, Marxsen's analysis invites us to reconstruct, at least in broad outline, the contents of this lost pericope.

There are indications that it was a pronouncement story in three parts: (1. *The Setting*. From the concluding portion of the non-Markan tradition it is to be inferred that the pericope opened with a revelatory event of some kind ("the Father has revealed"—

1. Neukirchen: Neukirchner Verlag, 1959, pp. 39-54, esp. pp. 40-47.

2. So Jeremias, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, III, p. 220.

*apekalupsen . . . ho pater*, Matt. 16:17). Now Marxsen argues that the insertion of "the Son of Man" (*ton huion tou anthropou*) at Matt. 16:13 is not redactional but from independent tradition, since it ruins Peter's confession when combined with Jesus' initial question. We may therefore further infer that the content of this revelation was a manifestation of Jesus as Son of man.

2. *The Action*. Peter, in response to the revelatory occurrence, makes his confession of faith: "You are the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16).

3. *The Pronouncement*. The Lord's promise and charge to Peter (Matt. 16:17-19). Marxsen eschews any attempt to investigate the prior history of this pericope: "One can scarcely any longer ascertain where verses 17-19 originally belong unless one enters into the area of precarious conjectures" [Ed. trans.] (op. cit., pp. 46 ff.). Into this realm of "precarious conjecture" I propose now to venture.

## II. *The Prior History of the Pericope*

A Palestinian provenance for the pronouncement in Matt. 16:17-19 was established by C. F. Burney,<sup>3</sup> who translated these verses back into Aramaic, making three three-line strophes with a four-beat rhythm, and by Jeremias<sup>4</sup> who listed no less than ten Semitisms in the Greek. Both Burney and Jeremias conclude from this that the saying is authentic to the earthly Jesus. But this conclusion is premature. Aramaic features can take us back to the early Aramaic-speaking Palestinian church, but not by themselves to the earthly Jesus. That appears in this instance to be ruled out by tradition-historical criteria: (1. The concept of period of the Church is incompatible with Jesus' own perspective in the history of salvation, according to which there would be only a brief interval between the proclamation and the coming of the kingdom of God, an interval filled only by his own rejection. (2. So too is the concept of period in which Peter exercises the power of the keys. (3. The explicit Christology (Son of man—Son of God) reflects the post-Easter situation. (4. Jesus' assumption of power over Sheol belongs to the post-Easter phase of salvation history. We are led accordingly to favor the suggestion, put forward among others by E. Stauffer, that the saying belonged to the tradition of the first resurrection appearance<sup>5</sup>—that to Peter (I Cor. 15:15; Luke 24:34; Mark 16:7; cf. John 21:15-19). However, Stauffer offered this only as a suggestion, thus exposing

3. *The Poetry of Our Lord* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925) p. 117.

4. *Golgotha* (Leipzig: Eduard Pfeiffer, 1926) p. 68n.

5. First in ZKG 62 (1944), pp. 13ff. (Not accessible to me); subsequently in *New Testament Theology* (New York: the Macmillan Company, 1955), p. 31.

himself to Marxsen's charge of "precarious conjecture." The next section of this paper is an attempt to put this proposal on a firmer basis.

### III. *The Resurrection Language of Matt. 16:17 ff.*

First, there are some striking parallels of language between our pericope and Gal. 1:15,16.

#### Gal. 1:15,6

But when he . . . was pleased to reveal (*apokalupsai*; cf. v. 11) his Son (*ton huion autou*) to me, I did not confer with flesh and blood (*sarki kai haimati*) cf. "not from man," V. 12).

#### Matt. 16:16,17

You are the Christ, the Son of the living God (*ho huios tou theou tou zontos*). For flesh and blood (*sarx kai haima*) has not revealed (*apekalupsen*) . . . who is in heaven.<sup>6</sup>

To these three parallels we may add a fourth: in each case God himself is the source of the revelation ("he who had set me apart"/"my Father who is in the heaven"). In both passages there is the same contrast between "God" and "flesh and blood" as the source of the revelation. Since, as is generally agreed today, Paul in I Cor. 15:8 intends to rank his Damascus encounter with the series of resurrection appearances beginning with that of Peter, what could be more natural than for Paul deliberately to appropriate for his own in Gal. 1:15 ff. the language in which the tradition spoke of the appearance to Peter?

The occurrence of these words or phrases in these two contexts is illuminating. (1. While the verb "to/reveal" (*apokalupsai*) and the noun "revelation" (*apokalupsis*) may both be used in a general "history of religions" sense (verb: I Cor. 14:30; noun: II Cor. 14:1,7), the characteristic New Testament use is in apocalyptic-eschatological contexts, and with the following three different nuances: (a. most frequently, in a future-eschatological sense (verb: Rom. 18:18; noun: 18:19); (b. for advance disclosures of event relating to the end (noun: Rev. 1:1); (c. in the sense of realized eschatology (verb: I Cor. 2:10; noun: Rom. 16:25)). It is tempting in view of "the Son of man" (*ton huion tou anthropou*) to suggest that the tradition behind Matt. 16:17 interpreted the resurrection appearances to Peter

6. After I began to work on this paper I discovered that J. Jeremias (op. cit., p. 68) has already noted two of these parallels, viz., *apokalupsai* and *sarx kai haima*. Convinced as he is, however, of the authenticity of the sayings of the earthly Jesus, he mentioned them only to dismiss them. I believe also that *what* he was inclined to dismiss was the view that the language of Matt. 16:16, 17 is directly based on that of Gal. 1:15, 16, a view which we also reject.

as an advance disclosure of Jesus as he was to be revealed in the end, viz., as Son of man, exactly as in Rev. 1:1.

(2. The contrast, flesh and blood/God indicates an early tradition in which the so-called resurrection appearances were not properly "appearances" initiated by the Risen One, but revelatory disclosures worked by God himself as in Acts 10:41. In this sense the word "appeared" (*ophthe*) in I Cor. 15:5 ff. is to be interpreted.

(3. The occurrence of a Son of God Christology in a resurrection context would concur with primitive christological perspective, in which Ps. 2:7 was applied to the event of the resurrection (cf. Rom. 1:3; Acts 13:33).

J. Jeremias has pointed out that the future "I shall give," (*doso*), in the charge to Peter (Matt. 16:19) is the equivalent of an Aramaic imperfect, denoting not a future intention, but a present declaration of the will: it has a "voluntative significance."<sup>7</sup> Jeremias uses this as a clue to the interpretation of the stewardship of the keys: it refers not to the familiar picture of Peter as the doorkeeper of heaven, but to Peter's activity on earth as an apostle, the preacher of the eschatological *kerygma*, the response to which God will ratify at the last judgment. Jeremias of course puts the saying in the life of the earthly Jesus. But his interpretation suits much better a post-resurrection situation. If the future "I will give" (*doso*) has "voluntative significance," declaring a present intention, it declares an intention which becomes presently operative not after Caesarea Philippi, but precisely after Easter, when Peter and the Twelve launch the *kerygma*.

But is Jeremias' reference of the "binding" and "loosing" to kerygmatic activity tenable? The Aramaic terms behind *dedemenon* "bound" and *lelumenon* "loosed", viz., 'asur and serā, refer in Rabbinic usage, not to proclamatory activity, but to juridical functions.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the repetition of the charge to *all* of the disciples in Matt. 18:18 in the discourse on church discipline makes it quite clear that Matthew himself understood the binding and loosing in a juridical rather than in a kerygmatic sense. But the Johannine parallel (John 20:23), while it has the same structure (double antithetical saying,

7. *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (English Translation) III, p. 750.

8. A. Schlatter, *Der Evangelist Matthäus* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag 3) 1948, p. 511. Cf. F. Büchsel, *TWNT* II, p. 60; "The customary meaning of the Rabbinic expression is . . . to declare forbidden or permitted, and thus to impose or remove an obligation, by a doctrinal decision." Büchsel is embarrassed to assign this meaning to an authentic Jesus logion, as he regards it (p. 61), but feels compelled to do so because of the Rabbinic evidence. Our study of the history of the tradition will hopefully solve this dilemma.

each member in the form of a *Satz heiligen Rechtes*), does have kerygmatic content:

Whose sins you remit/God (at the last judgment) will remit them;

Whose sins you retain/God will retain them.

The reference here is specifically to the granting or withholding of baptism upon accepting or rejecting the *keryma* (cf. Luke 24:47; also the explicit baptismal charges in Matt. 28:19 and Ps-Mark 16:15,16). And, as will have been noticed, the Johannine saying, like the other kerygmatic-baptismal charges, has a post-resurrection *Sitz im Leben*. All this, I suggest, throws significant light on the prior history of Matt. 16:19 and Matt. 18:18. Both traditions belonged originally to post-Easter appearances, and both had originally a kerygmatic significance. In Matthew however both the context and the content have been changed: the context to the earthly ministry, the content from remission and retaining to binding and loosing, the situation from a kerygmatic to a disciplinary one.<sup>9</sup>

### III. Historical and Theological Implications

#### (1. Historical Implications

O. Cullmann,<sup>10</sup> who believes that Matt. 16:17-19 is authentic to the earthly Jesus and belonged originally to the Last Supper, saw a significant link between our passage and Luke 22:31 ff.:

Simon, Simon, behold Satan demanded to have you (plural) that he might sift you (plural) like wheat, but I have prayed for you (singular) that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren.

What the original setting of this Lucan logion is I will not here venture to decide. But it clearly has reference to the role played by Peter after Easter. As the first recipient of an appearance, he must have reassembled the Twelve for the second encounter with the Risen One, reporting to them, "The Master has been raised, and I have seen him," or words to that effect (cf. Luke 24:34). It is precisely in these two circumstances—viz., in his being the first to receive an appearance, and in his being the one who reassembles the Twelve, that Peter fulfilled his function as the Rock or stone on

9. Incidentally, this should decide the vexed question whether Matt. 18:18 applies to the Church at large, or only to the Twelve (so J. Jeremias, *TWENTE III*, p. 752). Again, the study of the tradition shows that originally the charge in its kerygmatic form belonged to the resurrection appearance to the Twelve. As a juridical charge, it is however delivered to the Church (i.e., the Church of Matthew) at large.

10. *Peter Disciple-Apostle-Martyr*, pp. 182-4.

in Mt. 18:18/21.23 see also  
A. Vigile, *Neufstages, vom  
Befestigungswort, Stedel  
Papier I (1958) S. 250-*

which the Church is built. Peter's function as stone in the earliest tradition belongs to the "once-for-all" character of the Easter events, and is discharged when he has reassembled the Twelve. Henceforth, the other function of proclaiming the *kerygma*, which extends throughout the apostolic age, he shares with the Twelve (Matt. 16:19; 18:18; John 20:23).

This consideration perhaps throws light on the location of the first appearance to Peter. It has been found difficult<sup>11</sup> to reconcile the appearance to Peter in Galilee with the traditional formula of "three days." But need Peter have got as far as Galilee before receiving the appearance? Why should the appearance not have occurred while Peter was in flight from Jerusalem to Galilee? Off the record I am tempted to suggest that perhaps there is a faint echo of this in the much later *Quo Vadis?* legend of the Lord's appearing to Peter in his flight from Rome (*Acts of Peter*. XXXV).

Again, if the appearance to Peter took place on the way to Galilee, this may be the origin of the tradition behind the saying of the Lord in Mark 14:28 and of the reference to it in Mark 16:7. We venture to reconstruct it thus as a saying of the Risen One to Peter: "I will go before you (singular) into Galilee; there you (plural, i.e., the Twelve) will see me."

## (2. *Theological Implications*)

If the resurrection appearances were apocalyptic disclosures in advance of the end, how do they differ from other apocalyptic visions, e.g., not from II Cor. 12:2 ff., which is a general "history of religions" type of revelation (*apokalupsis*), but from Rev. 1:1-18 and perhaps Acts 7:56? How do we reconcile this with Paul's claim that

11. See the observation of H. Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2, 1962), p. 129: "That the first appearance already took place on the third day in Galilee before the fleeing disciples is, because of the distance between Jerusalem and Galilee, not really possible." He must therefore postpone the first appearance to a later date. Since with most recent investigators Grass does not regard the empty tomb story as belonging to the earliest tradition of the Easter events, he is forced to fall back on a derivation of the third day from Hos. 6:2 (op. cit. pp. 136-8). The widespread use of "the third day" (*te trite hemera*) in kerygmatic formulae without any allusion to Hos. 6:2, as well as the plural "the scriptures" (*tas graphas*) in the earliest tradition (I Cor. 15:4), tell against this. It is also more probable that this phrase in both v. 3 and v. 4 qualifies the respective verbs "he died" (*apethanen*) and "he was raised" (*egerthe*) rather than the adverbial phrases "for our sins" (*huper ton hamartion hemon*) and "on the third day" (*te hemera te trite*). For both the death and the resurrection as such, a plurality of scriptures was adduced in the early Church.

his own appearance was "last of all"? It has been suggested that Paul was mistaken on this, and that there were actually subsequent appearances to others, e.g., Rev. 1:1-18. But Easter appearances must be differentiated from other apocalyptic visions, not by their nature, but by their function in salvation history. The original appearances which Paul lists in I Cor. 15:5 ff. have apostle-sending, kerygma-inaugurating, church-founding significance. These three functions stand out clearly in the "Thou Art Peter" pericope. It is here, rather than in their nature (of which we can only speculate), that their "once-for-all" character lies.

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