REMARKS ON THE HUMANITY OF JESUS IN THE GOSPEL AND LETTERS OF JOHN

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The questions with which we are to be concerned arose in my mind whilst reflecting on the correct exegesis of the well-known words in John xix 5: Behold the man! Consequently, we shall begin with some exegetical observations on this much-discussed text.

The very first question which we should be asked is whether we should indeed read anything special into these words. Certainly, there remains the possibility of attaching a simple interpretation to this text without searching for a deeper, hidden significance behind the words; nor is it surprising that many an exegete has accepted such an interpretation as a starting point and some have been content to go no further. Thus it seems to me that even the conception of Weizsäcker, for example, when he translates in his famous version: “und er sagte zu ihm: Hier ist der Mensch!” whereby Pilate does nothing but declare in the most natural way: “Here is the man!”, is by no means totally excluded. Nevertheless, the context makes it probable that Pilate’s statement does express a certain reaction to the astonishing appearance presented by Jesus, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Shall we now understand and accept, as does one exegete, that these words represent an “Appell an die Menschlichkeit”; that those particular words: “Behold the man!” are designed, above all, to arouse pity? ¹ Surely it seems more appropriate to read another, a slightly ironic, inflection into the tone of the governor which ridicules the complaints of the Jews and dismisses their accusation that this man had wanted to make himself into a king as wholly ludicrous: Just look at this; this poor, pitiable man! This is the one who is supposed to want to be king! Many have argued in favour of this interpretation. To support this view is the fact that the words thus analysed,

form a logical sequel to the preceding statement in v. 4: "Here he is; I am bringing him out to let you know that I find no case against him". (cf. also xviii 38, xix 6).

This would correspond with the attitude of Pilate during the trial when, according to the gospel of John, the governor was continually attempting to undermine or minimize the claim of the Jews.¹

As mentioned before, some would have it rest at that which is, also in my opinion, not entirely unsatisfactory. Perhaps we could go back to xviii 17 where the maid on duty at the door says to Peter: "Are you another of this man's disciples?" as well as, especially, xviii 29: "What accusation do you bring against this man?" In these instances, the evangelist would indicate that outsiders, i.e. the portress and the governor, speak of Jesus with a degree of disparagement as "a man" whereby again, moreover, an element of the "anti-docetic" tendency of the gospel could be revealed. Thus, Jesus was so very much a human being that whoever is confronted by him can see nothing but a very ordinary person of whom one speaks as "that man".

Notwithstanding, much may be quoted that definitely supports a deeper significance behind the words. I do not mean in the first place the use of the ὁδῷ in the text although it does deserve attention that ἦς and ὁδῷ occur repeatedly in John (i 29, xi 36, xvi, 29, 31, i 36, 47) and then, in each case it would seem, in order to give particular emphasis to what immediately follows.² But what is more important is that we should in fact assume a link between the verse which is the subject of our discourse and xix 14: ἦς ὁ βασιλεὺς ὁμῶν. It would then seem that the evangelist wishes to bring out that he of whom was just said: "Behold the man" is now exclaimed: "Behold your king". Also with this last word, the writer in that case intends a deeper sense; that which the governor uttered with a degree of sarcasm represents a very profound truth for all who read the gospel with belief.

This last statement leads us naturally to our third argument which should, in my opinion, count heavily. It is sufficiently well-known that a number of the texts in the fourth gospel either have or are assumed to have a second meaning. Even if this kind of

² See Blass-Debrunner, "Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch", 195916, 147.