A CRITIQUE OF PROFESSOR CULLMANN’S HYPOTHESIS

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Professor OSCAR CULLMANN has proposed that we should shift Matthew xvi 17-19 from its Markan setting in the midst of Jesus’ public ministry near Caesarea-Philippi to a confession of Peter in the Upper Room. 1) The verses in question read as follows:

άποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῷ· μακάριος εἶ, Σίμων Βαφειάν, ὅτι σάρξ καὶ αἷμα οὐκ ἀπεκαλυφέν σοι ἄλλον πατήρ μου οὗ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. καὶ γὰρ δὲ σοι λέγω ὅτι σοὶ εἶ Πέτρος, καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτης τῇ πέτρᾳ οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, καὶ τύλικα άξιον εἶ νὰ κατασχύσωσιν αὐτῆς. δὸν σοὶ τὰς κλείδας τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν, καὶ ὃ ἐάν δήσῃς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἑσται δεδεμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, καὶ ὃ ἐάν λύσῃς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἑσται λευμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

Because these verses are not paralleled in Mark and Luke (among other reasons), CULLMANN associates them with Luke xxii 31-34:

Σίμων Σίμων, ἵδιον ὁ σατάνας ἐξητήρατο ὑμᾶς τοῦ συνάσκας ός τὸν σίτον· ἐγὼ δὲ ἐδεήθην περὶ σοῦ ἵνα μὴ ἐκλίπῃ ἡ πίστις σου· καὶ σοὶ ποτὲ ἑπιστρέψας στήρισον τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς σου. δὲ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· κύριε, μετὰ σοῦ ἔτοιμός ἐμι καὶ εἰς φυλακῆν καὶ εἰς θάνατον πορεύεσθαι. δὲ εἶπεν·

CULLMANN also thinks that Peter's confession after the feeding of the five thousand according to John vi 66-71 and the post-resurrection conversation between Jesus and Peter according to John xxi reflect a Petrine confession accurately placed by Luke in the Upper Room just before the crucifixion. 1)

Thus, a common tradition underlies all the mentioned passages. Matthew xvi, Luke xxii, and John xxi give the predominant role of Peter. Matthew xvi and John vi give Peter's confession of Jesus as Son (= "Holy One" in John vi) of God. John vi and Luke xxii give Peter's promise of loyalty in a Eucharistic setting. 2) Luke omits the confession in the Upper Room because in taking over the Markan story set in Caesarea-Philippi he mistook Peter's words as a legitimate confession instead of the diabolical statement it really was (see below). Therefore, a further confession in the Upper Room seemed redundant to Luke. John vi omits the predominant role of Peter perhaps because in the fourth gospel there is a certain competition between Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved, that is, an anti-Petrine bias. The different author of John xxi intended to make up the omission in chapter vi. By his insertion of the commendation of Peter, Matthew wanted to clear Peter of the slanderous implications of the Markan account. 3)

According to CULLMANN, Matthew's addition of the phrase "the Son of God" to Peter's confession betrays a conflation of two Petrine confessions: "Thou art the Christ" (as in Mark) and "Thou art the Son of God." 4) It was the confession of Jesus as Son of God which brought the honorific title "Peter." However, "Son of God" may be a targumic expansion by Matthew, similar to Luke's version, "the Christ of God" (ix 20). Or, since Luke's version also has the

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1) CULLMANN's presupposition is that the oral gospel tradition contained "only single units, without any chronological or geographical connections between them," so that arrangement was almost entirely the work of the evangelists (p. 181), a presupposition not entirely shared by this writer. It would be passing strange if memory of Jesus' ministry did not include some recollection of the settings of His words and deeds. Matthew's penchant for topical arrangement certainly opens the possibility that Matthew has displaced vv. 17-19, but does not by any means prove so.


3) In N.T. Essays, 101-103.

4) Pp. 177, 188; in N.T. Essays, 98 f.