

A Response to Questions on "The Witness of Jesus and Old Testament Authorship"

The Commission on Theology and Church Relations has received a number of questions and comments on its recently issued study document, "The Witness of Jesus and Old Testament Authorship." The first ten pages of the document have met with little criticism. This is as it should be, for these pages present the evidence for the central thesis of the document, namely, that Jesus' divine Sonship is clearly evidenced in His use of the Old Testament as the divinely inspired Word of God by which He calls men to repentance and proclaims the kingdom present in His person and work.

Most of the questions and criticisms deal with the conclusions of the document (pp. 11-12). Some criticisms reflect a failure to read the document carefully; others, however, indicate ambiguity or a lack of precision in the document itself. In response to Resolution 2-03 of the Synod's 1967 convention, and in order to clarify the position of the Commission on this aspect of the authorship problem and foster its continued study by the church, we have attempted a response to major criticisms in question and answer form.

1. The four conclusions given on pp. 11-12 are based on the presentation of Part II. C. What relations, if any, do these conclusions have to the central thesis of the document concerning the significance of our Lord's kenosis?*

These conclusions are not based on any theory or doctrine of the kenosis but on the "witness of Jesus," that is, on what the New Testament actually records of His "references to the human authorship of Old Testament passages and books" (p. 11, bottom). The reason for discussing the kenosis at some length before dealing with the textual data is that this doctrine has often been improperly invoked so that the authoritativeness of Jesus' words is called into question.

*The term kenosis is derived from the phrase in Phil. 2:7: "He emptied Himself" (heauton ekenosen). It refers to our Lord's so-called state of humiliation, in which Jesus did not always or fully make use of the divine attributes communicated to His human nature. The term kenosis describes Jesus' whole life as a ministry of self-giving, culminating in a self-giving into death.

This happens, for instance, when it is argued that in and because of His kenosis Jesus lacked the divine capacity to distinguish truth from error, fact from fiction. On the other hand, in opposition to this distortion of the Biblical doctrine, some have so exclusively emphasized the deity of Jesus that His genuine humanity seemed to be called into question or reduced to an outward appearance only.

In order to eliminate such misunderstanding and misuses of our Lord's kenosis as it relates to His knowledge and use of the Old Testament, the document treats His kenosis with some detail at the very outset. In effect, it rejects both extremes mentioned above. It restates with care the proper understanding of our Lord's kenosis and demonstrates that from such a correct understanding one cannot draw inferences that either call into question the authoritativeness of Jesus' words or prejudge the isagogical significance of His references to the Old Testament. This significance, the document shows, must be learned from direct study of the actual texts in which Jesus' words are recorded.

2. Does the document use the kenosis of our Lord to affirm that He was "merely a first-century Palestinian Jew" in His knowledge and use of the Old Testament?

On the contrary! The document insists that in Jesus' knowledge and use of the Old Testament, as in all He said and did, He was not merely a first-century Palestinian Jew, but the incarnate Son of God, and that His kenosis was a self-giving rather than a self-diminution.

3. What does it mean that Jesus "no more 'displays' His knowledge than He 'displays' His power" (p. 12)? Did not Jesus' miracles and sayings give evidence of both His divine wisdom and power?

To be sure they did and still do! This statement, however, seeks to express the humble, slave-like deportment of our Lord during His earthly career. Jesus was not ostentatious in using either His omniscience or omnipotence. He rather used His full deity in the humble servant ministry of seeking and saving the lost.

4. Since Luke 24:25-47 contains statements made by Jesus in the state of exaltation, why was it used in a document dealing with our Lord's kenosis?

Simply in order to deal with all the major references of Jesus to Old Testament authorship. This passage suggests that the risen Lord, in the state of exaltation, used the Scriptures just as He did before His death.

5. Does the document deny the traditional view that Moses wrote the Pentateuch and that Isaiah and Daniel wrote the books that bear their names?

Not at all. It merely points out that Jesus nowhere explicitly states the precise extent of their writing. The document accepts Jesus' statements on authorship (summarized on p. 11) at their face value, but suggests that it is not clear whether these statements apply to entire Biblical books or not. With regard to Moses, the document explicitly calls him the "major originative factor, as recipient and transmitter of revelation, of the content of the books" (p. 12). This statement was intended to affirm the substantial Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, without drawing the exegetically unwarranted conclusion that Jesus explicitly teaches the Mosaic authorship of every word of the Pentateuch, and without eliminating the

possibility that the Pentateuch may have undergone some editorial revision subsequent to the death of Moses.

6. May the same line of argumentation employed in the document to affirm the Davidic authorship of Psalm 110 be used to assert the substantial Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch on the basis of John 5:39-47?

Yes. In both cases, the authorship of the person named by Jesus is basic to His argument. However, in Matt. 22:43, Jesus identifies the authorship of a specific passage, whereas in John 5:39-47 He does not explicitly state the extent of the Mosaic authorship.

7. What does it mean when the document asserts that the "indications of authorship of the passages in question is never the main thrust of Jesus' utterances" (p. 12)?

All of Jesus' utterances must be accepted as they read. The force of the statement in its context is to affirm that the primary purpose of our Lord's words is to awaken men from the death of sin to the life of salvation in His name. The statement does not question the truthfulness of any aspect of our Lord's utterances.

8. The document states that "Jesus used the designations of authorship employed by His people, without question and without comment" (p. 12). Does this mean that Jesus shared the assumptions of His time on this question, and if so, shouldn't we too?

There is little doubt that the Jews of Jesus' day held to the Mosaic, Danielic, and Isaianic authorship of the books involved. Nor does Jesus ever indicate that His views on this matter differed from His contemporaries. We are bound to everything our sinless and omniscient Lord asserted since He is the eternal Word made flesh. Yet Jesus' assertions of authorship are never so precisely expressed that they must necessarily be extended to every word of the books in question.

9. Is it possible that some of Jesus' references to Moses, Daniel, and Isaiah may be understood as referring primarily to the titles of Old Testament books or sections, rather than as designations of authorship in the strict sense?

Yes, this possibility must be acknowledged where it does not do violence to the text. However, where Jesus actually attributes authorship to these men (e.g., John 5:46, 47), that authorship must be acknowledged.

10. Doesn't the document actually teach an accommodation theory (p. 12, point 2) and thereby open a "Pandora's Box" whereby important teachings of Jesus can be explained away?

This was certainly not our intention. In this paragraph, we had the possibility in mind that "Moses" or "Isaiah" might occasionally be "book titles," and this is primarily what our terminology ("designations of authorship," "designations of Biblical books") had reference to. Some might argue that a book title would be inaccurate or inadequate if it could be demonstrated that later editorial revisions had been made in the manuscript written by the person named in the title.

For example, they would regard it as inaccurate to refer to a dictionary as "Webster," if indeed someone had edited Webster's original text. Our paragraph disagrees. It reckons with the possibility that something like this may have taken place with certain Old Testament books which continued to bear their author's names. It argues, hypothetically, that even if it could be demonstrated that Jesus used such book titles, this usage would not involve Him (or anyone else) in error or deception. It would be no more erroneous than to speak of "sunrise" or "sunset", even though, scientifically considered, the sun neither rises nor sets. Such a manner of speech is "accommodational," but it is neither erroneous nor imprecise, nor does such speech in Holy Scripture lose its character as the inspired Word of God. Our church has long recognized this manner of speech in the Bible without opening a "Pandora's Box."

11. Is there any evidence in the words of Jesus which supports the theory of multiple authorship of Old Testament books?

No.

12. Why does the document not deal with current theories of Old Testament authorship?

Because these theories are not the subject of this study, which deals only with the words of Jesus and their implications for Old Testament authorship. These theories are being considered in connection with our continued study of other aspects of the authorship question.

13. Doesn't the document overlook a great deal of evidence in both Old and New Testaments on the question of Old Testament authorship?

As the Introductory Statement explains, this document limited its data to the words of Jesus because it was concerned chiefly with the Christological aspects of the authorship question. Other Biblical evidence is currently being studied, and the results of this study, too, will be made available to the church.

We hope that other questions and criticisms pertaining to the document can be answered in the light of the above explanations. Further comments and suggestions are invited, and may be sent to the office of the Executive Secretary, Doctor Richard Jungkuntz, 210 North Broadway, St. Louis, Missouri 63102.