

Martin Hengel “Christ and Power”

The following ten points summarize our reflections, which have encompassed a broad span of periods and issues:

This summary is in the back of the book on “Christ and Power” after 80 pages of discussion.

1. If we proceed from Max Weber’s definition quoted in the Introduction, then we would say that the power of Christ is able to “carry out [its] own will despite resistance,” but that this in no case can happen through external coercion, but only through genuine persuasion of the person addressed, *sine vi humanan sed verbo*—“without human power, simply by the word.”
2. Jesus’ power was displayed as he proclaimed God’s lordship over humanity. This happened in his announcement of God’s love to all the “godless” and lost. Through his authoritative word and his helping deed he gave them a new, meaningful life.
3. Therefore this power of Jesus stands in irreconcilable opposition to every metaphysical glorification of human, political powers, and in the same way to the claim of a theocracy that by appeal of God’s lordship wants only to press its own demand for power.
4. As a logical consequence of his outwardly offensive and unavailing announcement of God’s lordship Jesus goes to his death. His suffering becomes the sign of God’s solidarity with the powerlessness of the righteous in their suffering, and thus the foundation of the life-creating power of the gospel.
5. The early church’s messengers relied solely on the power of this word and on the risen Lord’s promise that stood behind it. Jesus’ way of suffering gave them assurance of reconciliation with God and at the same time shaped the external form of their ministry.
6. There existed from the beginning in the early church a dialectic between the apostolic authority established through appearances of the risen Lord and the free charism of the Spirit. Adherence to the truth of the gospel was the standard by which each was evaluated. Even after the institutionalization of ecclesiastical authority the charismatic corrective survived.
7. When the persecutions began, the Christians still remained loyal to the political authorities. Nevertheless they emphatically had to reject emperor worship. They lived in the hope that after a final intensification of the ungodly hubris Christ would

transform the world and establish his now-hidden kingdom for all to see. Jesus' passion gave them the certainty that the kingdom of this world, despite all the persecutions, was deprived of its power through the kingdom of Christ.

8. Together with this, however, the expectation developed that the entire Rome empire would convert to the Christian faith. With the inauguration of the Constantinian era this hope appeared to be fulfilled. To be sure, through its participation in the power of the state there arose for the church the new threat that it would lead to a metaphysical overvaluing of a Christian empire, and that with the aid of the power of the state it could compel acceptance of its message. The "political Christ" became the bearer of a new ideology of the empire.

9. The Reformation not only broke with the power claims of the ecclesiastical hierarchy but also attempted through the two kingdoms doctrine—which evolved from Augustine and today is much debated—to abolish the unholy mingling of secular and spiritual power. Thereby, of course, the danger arose of the complete separation of the two realms, whereby the politico-social realm would be left own autonomies.

10. In contrast to that, Luther and the confessions from the Reformation era stressed that the lordship of Christ extends into the secular realm through the service by Christians. The power of Christ takes shape through the true worship of Christians in the everyday world. Here is the foundation for responsible ethical living by Christians in their secular callings.