

Kingdom Without End:

A Note on Marcellus of Ancyra

Hamish F G Swanston

There is a suggestion in the fourth gospel that the saving lordship of Christ is finally manifest at his lifting up on the cross (cf. *John* 3.14, 8.28 and 13.32). Paul, in a letter to the Corinthian Church (cf. *I Cor.* 15.12 ff), proposed the anticipation of the general resurrection in the resurrection of Christ as the climactic moment of Christian belief. The church at Ephesus sang a hymn which celebrated the ascension as the triumphant manifestation of the Christian mystery (cf. *I Timothy* 3.16). The Apostles' Creed, following the pattern of the old Roman Creed states that Christ's glory is most tellingly declared at his return to judge the living and the dead. The credal affirmation here has set a number of theologians considering just how the eschatological judgement is related to the immediate judgement of human beings at their deaths. A deal of attention has been given to relating the future coming of the Son of Man 'on clouds of glory' to the promise 'this day you shall be with me in Paradise' (*Lk.* 23.43).

There has, however, been rather less modern discussion of how the belief, expressed in the Constantinopolitan-Nicene Creed, of Christ coming into a kingdom (or a reign) 'without end', is to be reconciled with Paul's eschatological scenario of the Son being at the end subject 'to him who put all things under him, that God may be all in all' (*I Cor.* 15.28). Is there, then, one kingdom for the Father and another for the Son? 'By no means'.

The generation gap, ever a problem in human relations, becomes more worrying yet when matters have to be arranged among divine persons. In the culture of ancient Egypt a happy appreciation of an unchanging order allowed men to speak of Horus and Osiris as always the living lord and his dead father. Osiris had never been among the living. He had, therefore, never been regarded by Horus as keeping him too long from the throne. Horus had never entertained rebellious thoughts against his father. This two-generation concept of divinity was related to a stable political arrangement. The ruler of Egypt was the presence of Horus in the land. He was himself the son of Osiris, and only at his death and consequent assumption into Osiris, was it known in whom the continuing presence of Horus would next be manifested. The theological order prevented any ambitious human son being accepted as undoubted heir to the kingdoms because no one could claim a title to the divine sonship while the only Horus was so evidently on the throne. The gods had, in settling their own relations settled the

order of the worshipping society. Other cultures were not so happy in their divinities. The Hittite stories of Kumarbi castrating Anu, which are mediated to us through the unpleasantness of Uranus and Kronos, show that some gods offered their devotees only their own domestic frustrations writ large. The tale of Noah's nakedness and the curse on Ham (cf. *Gen.* 9.20 ff) may be related to these myths of fathers rendered powerless by supplanting sons, and certainly the blessing of Shem and Japheth must have encouraged the Hebrew youth to be good boys. The historical books, however, suggest that not every prince was content to wait for the due time of their inheritance. The rebellions of Absalom and Adonijah are famous examples of such rebel sons (cf. *II Sam.* 15.6-18.15, and *I Kings* 1.5-2.25). The kings in Jerusalem seem to have realised the political advantages of the Egyptian system and at their anointings it became the custom for the choir to sing in the name of Yahweh 'You are my son, today I have begotten you' (cf. *Ps.* 2.7), and there is a resonance of Egyptian ritual at the presentation of the Horus-ruler in king Solomon's coming as a divinely wise child from the shrine at Gibeon (cf. *I Kings* 3.4-15). The effort of such rulers is to establish themselves as heirs of the gods and rule out the possibility of untimely dethronement. The good order of the divine father secures the stability of the human father. In other mythologies it is the father who will not accept the proper order of society and who keeps too long a grip on power. In a homeric tale which has elements in common with the story of Jephthah (cf. *Judges* 11.30 ff), Idomeneus returning from the war of Troy, was caught in a great storm and drowned by Poseidon. As he sank he called to the god promising Poseidon the first living creature he should meet if he were cast safe on his own Cretan shore. Poseidon accepted the offer. Idomeneus met first his own son. Mozart, in his commanding version of this story, makes perfectly clear Idomeneus' ambiguous view of his situation. He cannot bring himself to admit his own desire to live as king of his island at the expense of his son. It is only when Poseidon orders his abdication and Idomeneus yields his throne to his son that a happy ending can be celebrated. There are, of course, other tales to suggest that an aged parent may be ready to retire from governing and a vigorous young man be prepared to wait. The relations of Odysseus with his old father Laertes, who has evidently given up the government of Ithaca, and with his son Telemachus, who, at the disguised hero's return, graciously offers him his seat, present a pleasanter aspect of family order. But which, if any, of these images aids in the understanding of Christ's royal relation to his Father? Does the authoritative command 'It was said to you of old . . . but I say to you . . .' suggest the succession of a new Lord? Does the acknowledgement that 'the Father is greater than I' portend a perpetual exclusion of the Son from power? Or is there some appropriate and everlasting division of reigns?

Marcellus of Ancyra, the sixteenth centenary of whose death this year, or perhaps last, has been singularly unsung, was a determinedly paulinist theologian. Though he became famous first as a lively and erudite defender against Asterius of Cappadocia of the unscriptural

definition of the Council of Nicaea in 325 that the Word was 'of the same substance' as God, and thus was abnoxious to the Arians, his chief interest derives from his refusal to mitigate what he took to be the clear meaning of *I Corinthians* 15.28. His skill and zeal against the Arians led them to petition for his deposition by Constantine and, after the presentation of carefully selected quotations from his writings to a synod of Constantinople in 336, Marcellus joined Athanasius in exile. He returned to Ancyra on the death of Constantine but, almost immediately, was again exiled by the Eusebean party. In 341 he attended, with Athanasius, the Roman synod of Julius I, and, on the evidence of western bishops who had been at Nicaea and on his offering the old Roman Creed as the symbol of the faith he preached, he was acquitted of heresy.

Having been accepted in the west as anti-Arian, Marcellus found it not too difficult to persuade his new friends that his other doctrines were equally respectable. At the Council of Serdica in 343/344 he was restored to his see, the western bishops being satisfied that Marcellus had never declared that the kingdom of the Word would have an end, 'on the contrary he had written that His kingdom was both without beginning and without end' (*Epist. synod. Sardic. Orient.*, 2, CSEL 65, 118). But in 347 he was again deposed by Constantius (cf. Quasten, *Patrology*, III, 198), and he died in exile in 374 or 375. Athanasius and his Roman friends had already dumped Marcellus at the Council of Alexandria in 362, thinking him expendable in the cause of peace with the easterners.

Of his book against Asterius nothing has survived, not even the title, except in fragmentary quotations in Eusebius of Caesarea's *Contra Marcellum* and *De ecclesiastica theologia*, and in Acacius of Caesarea's writings against Marcellus. It is difficult, therefore, to represent his teaching with any confidence, but it is evident that he was presenting a theology of some subtlety. He held the Word to be absolutely consubstantial with God. The Word is not properly termed *Son* except during the limited operation of the incarnation (Frg. 3-6, 43, 48). After the Judgement the Word would cease to be *Son* and would be re-absorbed into the divine Monad. The reign of Christ would then be, as Paul declares, at an end (Frg. 117, 121). Marcellus recited the Roman Creed (which did not include a reference to the everlasting reign of the *Son*), with the significant omission of *Father* in the opening proposition. If *Son* were not an eternal title then neither was *Father*.

Western theologians, like Dionysius of Rome, might themselves be content with expressions of faith limited to affirmations that 'we expand the indivisible Monad into the Triad', but easterners were, after Origen, more aware of the distinct divine Persons. At the Dedication Council of Antioch, held in the summer of 341 to celebrate the completion of the golden church, the eastern bishops published a creed, as part of their defence against the ungenerous suggestion of Julius that their opposition to Marcellus smacked of arianism. In this first creed of Antioch the easterners declared that Christ 'abides king and God for the ages', and they then accepted from one of their number,

Theophronius of Tyana, as a sign of orthodoxy, his baptismal symbol complete with 'abides for the ages', following this creed with another conciliar affirmation in which the Lord is defined further as 'true Light, Way, Truth, Resurrection, Shepherd, Door'. The bishops were, in this third creed, deliberately opposing Marcellus' opinion, maintained in the controversy with Asterius (Frg. 96), that these titles were temporal images belonging only to the transitory incarnation (Frg. 43). Evidently the bishops thought it necessary to direct their energies towards the assertion of the individuating characteristics of the Son in the hierarchic Trinity. They wanted nothing to do with Marcellus' Monad. They sent delegates to announce their faith to Constans at Trèves. These, strangely, presented another creed, less deliberately eastern in its emphasis than that which had been declared at Antioch, but still affirming that Christ's 'reign is unceasing and abides for endless ages'.

This fourth creed of Antioch was expanded to the 'Long-line Creed' brought by another set of eastern delegates to Constans at Milan in 345. In the doctrinal discussions which then took place it was clear that the westerners were preparing to give up their championing of Marcellus, and they were all ready to condemn his disciple, Photinus of Sirmium. There was no one to defend Marcellus against Cyril of Jerusalem when in 348 he told his catechumenate, 'If ever you hear anyone saying that there is an end to the kingship of Christ, hate the heresy. It is another head of the dragon which has sprouted lately in the region of Galatia' (*Cat.* 15.27). The Long-line creed was made even more elaborate at the II Council of Sirmium in 351 when the easterners appended twenty-six anathemata, most of them directed against Marcellus and Photinus.

Gradually, after 375, Marcellus' original difficulty and his solution were forgotten by the orthodox, and when the Constantinopolitan Creed of 381 was adopted, in a modified form, by the Council of Chalcedon in October 451, the proposition 'Of whose kingdom there shall be no end' was no longer remarkable.

And yet, Marcellus' objections to the doctrine were not unscriptural. Those who, like Kümmel and after him Professor Pannenberg, have argued that '*I Corinthians* 15.28 is not to be interpreted chiliastically, as if after an interim period of Jesus' Kingdom, the Lordship were to be given over to the Father' (cf. Lietzmann, *An die Korinther I/II*, ed. Kümmel, p. 193, and Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie*, eng. trans. *Jesus—God and Man*, 369, note 8), have commonly supported their exegesis, which does seem to go against the plainest reading of the text, with allegations of other New Testament passages. But of those commonly cited, *Luke* 1.33 is (like *Lk.* 2.14, perhaps) concerned with the messianic reign prophesied in *Isaiah* (9.6), and *Daniel* (2.44 and 7.14), and not with the everlasting rule of the Son; *Revelation* 11.15 and 22.3, and *Ephesians* 5.5, announce a single throne for 'our Lord and his Christ', 'God and the Lamb', and 'Christ and God', and seem, therefore, rather to substantiate Marcellus' account of the divine Monad; II Peter 1.11 refers to 'the eternal kingdom

of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' and might just, I suppose be taken with that set of texts which suggest that one throne, or reign, or kingdom will be enjoyed by the Lord and his Christ, but it is more likely that the writer intends only one 'person' here, and this seems, therefore, the text most patient of an interpretation consonant with the credal proposition. Marcellus' reputation for scriptural orthodoxy might not be lost if this text were proven to go against the tenor of his theology, for *II Peter* is not now secure from accusations of being a pseudonymous work, and is almost certainly the last written of the New Testament documents. Marcellus' persecutor, Eusebius of Caesarea, while accepting the epistle's canonical status did not allow that it was written by the Apostle (cf. *Hist. Eccl.* ii, 23.25; iii, 3.4, 25.3). However the epistle is certainly canonical, and the verse announcing the 'eternal kingdom' was, equally certainly, known to both Marcellus and the bishops at Serdica. The kingdom 'without beginning and without end' which features in the conciliar rehabilitation of 343/344 would seem indeed, to be precisely the eternal kingdom of *I Peter* 1.11. Marcellus must have read 'eternal' here as a qualitative and not a quantitative term. The 'eternal kingdom' would be, in his estimate, that kingdom appropriate to the eternal God, having no beginning and no end. It would be not that kingdom of Christ which had its beginning in his soteriological triumph but that kingdom into whose divine rule the Son would be resumed at the end of his temporal revelation of the divine. The divine Monad which had at the beginning expanded into the Triad would at the ending retract into the Monad and, ceasing all voluntary subjection to the categories of time, would enjoy the eternal in simple glory. Marcellus seems to have anticipated Maurice's judgement in this matter; 'I cannot apply the idea of time to the word eternal', Maurice wrote typically to Hort in November, 1849 (cf. *Life of F. D. Maurice, II*, 18). And Maurice recapitulated Marcellus' fate. He was accused in the *Record*, the *Morning Herald*, and the *Standard*, of Sabellianism.

Not all are Sabellian who are called Sabellian. 'It is clear', says Principal Kelly, 'that Marcellus was not strictly a Sabellian' (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 241). He wasn't a loose Sabellian either. Sabellius had allowed no distinction between the Logos and the divinity in which the Logos inhered. Marcellus was clear that every act of God was done 'through the Word'. The coming forth of the Word is the way in which God effects creation and incarnation. And the coming forth of the Spirit is the way in which God effects salvation. The Word and the Spirit are eternal. Incarnation and inspiration are manifestations of the divine for a temporal purpose. Marcellus' 'economic Trinitarianism' was not unlike that of Irenaeus or Hippolytus. He was, like any orthodox Christian, anxious that the unity of divinity be fully acknowledged. That he talks of 'a single prosopon' (cf. Frg. 54, 71, 76, 77), and will not allow Origenist talk of the Logos as a distinct hypostasis (Frg. 76, 82, 83), makes him sound gratingly now on pious ears, but at Serdica the western bishops were happy to say that 'the Three have one identical hypostasis' (cf. Kelly, *op. cit.*, 242). They were happy,

too, in the evidence that Marcellus had never asserted that the Logos had a beginning.

'Nevertheless', says Professor Quasten (*Patrology*, III, 199), Marcellus 'seems to have held that the Word became Son only with the Incarnation'. Marcellus certainly held that there is no necessity in Trinitarian orthodoxy to suggest that eternal God has, beyond time, those features which manifest the divine to men in time, and that it is therefore wanton to assert, together with the eternal character of the Word's glory, the everlasting character of the Son's kingdom in the face of Paul's plain words to the contrary. Marcellus anticipated Ockham as well as Maurice, evidently.

It may be that Marcellus and Maurice, like Eusebius and Pusey, offer too unsophisticated an account of 'eternal', and that the peculiarity of the term is that it does not fit neatly into either the qualitative or the quantitative category. It may be that if we would be faithful to the meaning of *I Corinthians* 15.28 we need accept neither Marcellus' monadism nor the hierarchic trinitarianism of his eastern opponents. But we should certainly not refuse to ask ourselves for some convincing account of how the pauline pericope is reconcilable with the credal definition. At any rate, his articulation of a christological problem of some importance which, 1,600 years later has not been satisfactorily resolved, is warrant enough for regarding Marcellus of Ancyra as a theologian of real distinction.

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