THOUGHTS ON PARADIGMS

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Category: Controversies

One of the most striking things about the early church is the way in which they (eventually) were willing to try new things and to break out of the strait-jacket of Christianity's Jewish roots.

In an earlier post, today, I commented on the furore that has been created by the decision of the CEB to translate the term usually translated as "Son of Man" as "Human One". Elsewhere, I have looked at the issues involved in the translation of a parallel term.

The argument is sometimes made that while terms such as "human one" might be acceptable linguistically, there has been too much theological and emotional history tied up in the use of "Son of Man" and we should not use something different, even if it is a good translation.Â Being a moderately conservative type, I have some sympathy with this process. However, rereading Acts in preparation for some talks has given me some pause for thought. Here is something I wrote a little over a year ago on the subject of Acts 11:19 ff:

> *At first glance, it seems as though Antioch marks just another step in the process of the Jesus movement becoming more open, but in fact, Antioch marks a paradigm shift: a complete break with the past. In this short passage we see two very significant things happening.*
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> *The first is that the Greek believers who started telling other Greeks about Jesus didnâ€™t tell them about Jesus the Messiah, they spoke about the Lord Jesus. This may only seem like a small thing, but it has huge consequences. Messiah was a Jewish term and would mean almost nothing to Greeks, so the disciples found a Greek term: Lord, to use in its place. The miracle at Pentecost told the disciples that any language could be used for the Gospel and now these Greek believers are putting that lesson into practice. In order to explain the message of Jesus they dropped the sacred term Messiah and used the easily understandable word â€˜Lordâ€™ instead. They taught about Jesus according to the context in which they found themselves. Because the believers had basically lived in a Jewish context up until now, they had never had to do anything like this before. But this little group of Greek disciples were now starting to use and develop the principles of cross-cultural mission.*

What happens in this setting is that the Greek speaking disciples in Antioch stopped using the term "Christ" or "Messiah" and started using "Lord" a much better known term in their context, not to say our own. Even today, the term "Christ" is confusing. Many people assume that Christ is part of Jesus name (he is the son of Mr and Mrs Christ), rather than a title. When push came to shove, the early disciples stopped using a common title which was widely misunderstood, even though it had long historical and sacred roots.

I am not saying that we should do the same in any and every situation. However, I do believe that we have a good, Scriptural, example of using a common language term rather than a religious one in order to make things better understood. I wonder if the Christians at Antioch would have said "Son of

Man" or "Human One".

Just a thought.