

As John Knox, among others, has rightly argued, there are two distinguishable phases of the one event that was the coming into being of the church. In both phases, the event involved the same two components: a "person" component, "Jesus" by name; and a "community" component, called "the apostles."

In the first phase, both the call represented by the person component, i.e., Jesus, and the response represented by the community component, i.e., the apostles, were not explicitly, but only implicitly, christological—christology being merely implied, as Bultmann argues, both by Jesus' own claim for the decisive significance of his word and ministry and by the decision of certain persons to accept his claim by "following" him as his disciples. The literary evidence for this first, implicitly christological phase is what Marxsen distinguishes as "the Jesus-kerygma," whose "*what*" consists entirely in traditions concerning what Jesus himself thought, said, and did, even while its "*that*" precisely as kerygma implies the same claim for his decisive significance, only now made by his disciples, i.e., the apostles. Considering the content as well as the form of these Jesus traditions, we have every reason to suppose that the earliest of them originated during Jesus' lifetime; nor is the presumed fact that none of them was reduced to writing until much later any reason to doubt this supposition.

But if the first phase of the event involved the coming into being of a community of response to the call issued through Jesus himself, through his own word and ministry, its second phase involved the reconstitution of that community after the shattering experience of Jesus' death on the cross as a public enemy. According to the testimony of the earliest witnesses themselves, this reconstitution took place in response to a new call, also issued by Jesus himself, only now experienced through the Spirit as present and alive as the Christ of God. More exactly, it seems to have taken place through Jesus' appearance as the Christ to Peter, around whose witness, then, the scattered community of the disciples (*sc.* apostles) once again came together. But just as Jesus himself was now experienced explicitly as the Christ, as the one whom God had designated God's own eschatological emissary by raising him from the dead, so the response of the community and the call it now issued in turn through its own word and ministry was

explicitly christological. The literary evidence for this second, explicitly christological phase of the church's constitution is "the Christ-kerygma," which comprises all of the traditions concerning Jesus directly or indirectly shaped by the decisive experience of him as alive again after his death and present to the community as the Christ and by the belief in his resurrection from the dead in which this experience had early found expression. Thus the Christ-kerygma makes the same claim implied by the Jesus-kerygma, as well as, we may presume, by Jesus himself, for the decisive significance of his word and ministry, only it makes this claim now as an explicit christological claim, whether by means of mythological or legendary qualifications of the course of Jesus' life or by means of honorific predications using titles drawn from one or another form of contemporary mythology.

If, then, it is because of the decisive significance of the one event of the church's coming into being that any proper canon of the church has its unique authority and worth, i.e., because it speaks to us directly out of this event itself, bringing us an authentic record of the event as its impact was first felt, and thus giving us a kind of immediate access to the event (all this being a close paraphrase of Knox's reasoning in explaining the unique authority and worth of the scriptures [124]), we can infer that the real canon of the church, given our present historical methods and knowledge, comprises, not the scriptures or even the writings of the New Testament, but the earliest instances of these two main types of Christian witness, i.e., Jesus-kerygma and Christ-kerygma. The earliest instances of both types of kerygma may be said to be, in their different ways, original and originating and therefore constitutive Christian witness, because, although each type evidences a different phase of the event that was the church's constitution as the church, both types nonetheless evidence that one event, and they both make or imply one and the same constitutive christological assertion, the Christ-kerygma (explicitly making) the very assertion of Jesus' decisive significance that the Jesus-kerygma implies but does not explicitly make.

Of course, the earliest instances of the Jesus-kerygma are presumably earlier than the earliest instances of the Christ-kerygma. But there seems little question that the earliest bearers of the Christ-kerygma, being members of the community of response reconstituted by the experience of Jesus as alive and

present even after his death, could only have belonged to that same community of response prior to its reconstitution and thus must have already shared in the earlier phase of its coming into being evidenced by the Jesus-kerygma. Consequently, while the earliest instances of the Christ-kerygma are indeed later than those of the Jesus-kerygma and therefore are quite properly tested for their appropriateness to Jesus Christ by their substantial agreement with the earliest instances of the Jesus-kerygma, they, too, originated out of the one event of the church's coming into being and, in that decisive respect, are as formally apostolic and canonical as the earliest instances of the Jesus-kerygma. Moreover, by making explicitly the christological assertion that the Jesus-kerygma only implies, they secured the Jesus-kerygma itself against what has proved to be a perennial misunderstanding—to the effect, namely, that the Jesus whom it proclaims is simply the first and foremost member of the community of response, its primary teacher and example, instead of being the one through whose call alone, responded to in the obedience of faith, the community of response is first constituted as such, i.e., as the church.

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