

On Remembering Jesus

1. Perhaps one must say that, just as there is memory and there is memory, in general, so there is memory of Jesus and memory of Jesus, in particular. In other words, even as there is a distinction to be made between what is *empirical*-historical and what is *existential*-historical, as well as the further distinction between what Christians may *assume* about Jesus and what they *assert* about him in making or implying their constitutive christological assertion, so there is a distinction between what they remember about him in one sense of “remembering Jesus” and what they remember about him in another sense of the same phrase.

2. In one sense, remembering Jesus may be said to belong to the essential structure of Christian faith as such (and, for that matter, to the essential structure of the form of Christian *unfaith* constituted by any explicit rejection of the Christian witness that really rejects it). For what is Christian faith? It is coming to explicit faith in God by experiencing, immediately or mediately, the gift and demand of God’s love decisively through Jesus. But this means that to be a Christian, in the sense of having such Christian faith, is *eo ipso* to remember Jesus as the one decisively through whom one either immediately or mediately so experienced the gift and demand of God’s love as to have come to faith. Why? Because what faith means by “Jesus”—and the *only* thing it means in asserting him to be the Christ, i.e., to be of decisive significance for human existence—is the one decisively through whom one either immediately or mediately so experienced the gift and demand of God’s love as to come to the explicit faith in God that is Christian faith.

3. But if *this* “remembering Jesus” belongs to the essential structure of Christian faith itself, it is otherwise with what may be called “remembering Jesus” in another sense of the phrase. This is not a remembering of the event of one’s own coming to faith and of the one decisively through experience of whom, mediately or immediately, one alone came to it, and which, in that sense, is its ground. Rather, it is a remembering this, that, or the other thing about the

ground of faith independent of what faith itself and as such essentially remembers about it in remembering its own coming to be. Thus it is remembering, say, that the ground of faith was an unmarried male human being whose given name was "Jesus," that he said this sort of thing or that, acted in these ways rather than those, and so on. As likely as it is that some such remembering belongs, mediately if not immediately, to the experience of every Christian believer, it cannot be said to belong to the essential structure of Christian faith itself. Moreover, it is entirely corrigible by empirical-historical research in a way in which the remembering Jesus that does belong to the essential structure of faith cannot possibly be corrected.

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