

Who is the Jesus who is said to be Christ?

This, clearly, is the question about the formal identity of the subject of the christological assertion, to which I have usually responded: the existential-historical Jesus who is attested to be the Christ by the witness of the apostles and their successors.

Another way in which I have, or, at any rate, could have, answered the same question is to say that the Jesus who is said to be Christ is the Jesus who is the explicit primal source authorizing the witness of the apostles as the sole primary Christian authority—or, more exactly, the explicit primal *ontic* source of its authority, the *noetic* source of its authority being the believing experience of Jesus so understood on the part of the apostles themselves.

But if these alternative ways of answering the question are taken seriously, there can be no reason for anyone to suppose that talk of Jesus who is said to be Christ is nothing other or more than a way of speaking about some event—*any* event—of decisively re-presenting the possibility of authentic self-understanding. For even if the generally accepted empirical-historical account of Christian origins were to prove false—to the extent, say, that the explicit primal ontic source of the apostolic witness were discovered not to have been a single human person whose proper name was "Jesus"—the Jesus who is said to be Christ would still have to be someone or something such that he, she, or it could have been believably experienced by the apostles as the decisive re-presentation of the possibility of authentic existence and thus as the explicit primal ontic source of their witness of faith. In this sense, the existential-historical Jesus who is the subject of the christological assertion is and must be every bit as historical as the empirical-historical Jesus, since we can have to do with neither except through the mediation of the apostles' believing experience and witness.

Thus there is no basis for speaking even of an implicit Christian faith or witness as such except where there is particular historical experience of Jesus in his decisive existential significance. (Whether or not Bultmann is correct that *authentic* existence is not *even* possible prior to such experience, he is certainly correct that *Christian* existence is not *so much as* possible prior

to it.) What makes one a Christian is not that one has an authentic self-understanding, but that one has come to such an understanding, mediately if not immediately, through Jesus and is engaged in enacting this self-understanding in one's life-praxis by bearing witness to Jesus as the Christ.

This explains why, for a Christian, there can be no question of anything other than Jesus playing the role of the decisive re-presentation of authentic existence. However open she or he must always be to the possibility that other persons so experience someone or something other than Jesus that they are thereby brought decisively to the same authentic self-understanding, for her or him Jesus alone plays and can play this unique role.

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