

According to the Jesus-kerygma, as Marxsen interprets it:

Even now, in the present, Jesus authorizes eschatological existence, being himself so engaged with the boundless, indiscriminate love of God as to be free to love boundlessly, indiscriminately in return. So, at any rate, is Jesus experienced by those to whom we owe the Jesus-kerygma.

Consequently, the later identification of Jesus as Messiah or Son of Man but makes explicit the experienced claims of the earthly Jesus himself. The early community asserts that, in their encounter with Jesus, their own ultimate future is already anticipated as gift and demand.

In their encounter with Jesus, immediately or mediately, persons are put in the position of believing and, believing, they allow God to be God for them, to help them.

This encounter is an eschatological occurrence, because, through Jesus, what is expected to happen only at the end is already occurring as gift and demand requiring decision. In this sense:

Jesus makes God happen.

Jesus makes God present to persons and persons present to God.

Jesus is called Messiah or Christ (or any of the other things functionally equivalent and so interchangeable therewith) because he makes God happen, because he puts persons in the situation of faith.

Although Jesus is represented in the apostolic witness as himself a witness to God's coming reign, he is nevertheless understood as the one in and through whose word and deed the reign of God has already decisively broken in as God's rule—as God's own offer of communion with Godself, which we are each called to accept through faith and repentance.

For the oldest kerygma, the important thing is thus to witness to the event of Jesus' making God happen.

From the standpoint of the witnesses to whom we owe the Jesus-kerygma, Jesus is he through whom God has happened and continues to happen to them, through whom they are again and again put in the situation of faith. (To make God happen is the same as to make God immediately present.)

Characteristic of the Jesus-kerygma lying behind and expressed in the synoptic gospels is the gradual introduction of titles—"Messiah," "Son of Man," "Lord"—although such titles as well as other expressions of explicit christology are still relatively rare.

The great difficulty with the Jesus-kerygma, however, is that the experience of Jesus' making God happen could only too easily become a general truth, with Jesus being the founder of a religion—the teacher and exemplar of a new possibility—instead of the actualizer of God's coming near. Easter, however, meant that the earliest community exercised, not the first, but the second, of these two options. (I should prefer to say, with Bultmann, that Easter simply *confirmed* a still earlier exercise of the second option that Jesus' disciples had already made by their decision to "follow" him.)

"What Jesus had brought," "what had come to expression in (or through) Jesus"—are both ways of expressing what Jesus was experienced to have done by his followers, regardless of whether he in fact did it, or intended to do it.

The various explicit qualifications of Jesus are, in one sense, *unhistorical*, since Jesus does not seem to have so qualified himself—or, at any rate, was not experienced to have done so by the earliest witnesses. But in another sense, these qualifications still have support in what Jesus actually did—or, better, what had actually been done through Jesus as he was experienced by those witnesses. On the other hand, these qualifications are legitimately made and used only to the extent that they so express what was done through Jesus as to make God happen

yet again and to put persons in the situation of faith anew. Also, these qualifications are, in fact, an encoding, as it were, of what has been done through Jesus; and so they always require to be decoded before they can function in this way. The great danger, however, is that the qualifications will not be decoded, but rather allowed an independent place in the developing tradition as well as treated as descriptions instead ^{as} of the interpretations (or “secondary historicizings”) they really are.

Although the Jesus-kerygma does not expressly call for faith *in* Jesus, it is evidently formulated in and out of the faith brought about, or evoked, *by* Jesus.

The content of the Jesus-kerygma is precisely *Jesus*—not simply his proclamation understood as so many general truths detached from, or merely exemplified by, him himself.

By means of the Jesus-kerygma, persons who have become engaged with Jesus pass on what they have experienced in and through him in order thereby to call others into the same way of being engaged with him. At first, they do not reflect on Jesus himself in their kerygma—in this, presumably, following Jesus himself, whose authority was concretized implicitly in what he said and did, rather than formulated explicitly as a demand for faith in his person. But because this Jesus-kerygma arises in and out of the faith that Jesus evoked, there’s no reason not to call it Christian faith. It is a faith that believes Jesus, even if it does not believe in him.