

It's clear to me now that the last paragraph on p. 7 below very much needs to be rewritten and expanded in some such way as follows:

That someone, in fact, represents a certain possibility of self-understanding, together with the claim, implicit or explicit, that it is our authentic possibility, can be verified readily enough simply by appeal to particular empirical-historical experience such as anyone might possibly have. But that this representation is efficacious, in that it is experienced by an individual as confronting her or him with just such a personal decision about her or his self-understanding is not a matter of empirical- but of existential-historical experience. The individual has to experience the representation as confronting precisely her or him with this fundamental decision. Moreover, that the claim made or implied by the representation is true, that the possibility it represents is, in reality, one's own authentic possibility, also cannot be validated by appeal to any particular empirical-historical experience or procedures of verification. It can be directly validated, if at all, only by again appealing to one's existential-historical experience that it answers one's underlying existential question about the meaning of one's existence more adequately than any alternative answer. Indirectly, of course, it can also be validated more objectively by following properly metaphysical and moral procedures of verification so as to verify its necessary metaphysical and moral implications respectively, although these procedures, also, go beyond any required to verify strictly empirical-historical assertions.

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There is no reason to deny that many of the claims made or implied about Jesus in the earliest witness were understood by those who made them as empirical-historical claims. In representing Jesus as saying this or doing that, they quite clearly assumed, rightly or wrongly, that he had in fact so spoken or acted. But the thing to note is that they *assumed* this, they did not *assert* it—not, at any rate, in making or implying the constitutive christological assertion. So far as *this* assertion is concerned, all the claims they made or implied were not about what *Jesus* had said and done, but rather about what *God* had said and done and was still saying and doing precisely through Jesus, and thence through their own witness of faith. In other words, whatever their assumptions about the being of Jesus in himself as a figure of the past, their assertions all had to do with the meaning of Jesus for us as he still confronts us in the present. They were all assertions about Jesus as the decisive re-presentation of God and, therefore, as the one through whom the meaning of ultimate reality and the authentic understanding of our existence are made decisively explicit. Because this is so, the Jesus to whom the earliest witnesses point as "the real locus of revelation" (Marxsen) is the existential-historical Jesus, and therefore neither the empirical-historical Jesus nor their own witness of faith, save insofar as it is solely through their witness that this event of revelation is now accessible and continues to take place.

If this is correct, however, what can or cannot be inferred concerning the empirical-historical Jesus has no bearing whatever on the point of christology. Whether Jesus did or did not teach any explicit christology, the claim made about him by the constitutive christological assertion may still be entirely appropriate. Of course, this much has long since come to be accepted by a large number of theologians. Contrary to the shared assumption of liberals and conservatives earlier on, that christology can be included in the gospel today only if it was explicitly included in the gospel of Jesus, many theologians now recognize that there is another option between the liberal and conservative extremes. Provided that Jesus at least *implied* a claim for the decisive significance of himself and his work, whether or not he also taught an explicit christology may well be regarded as a merely empirical-historical question with no theological significance, one way or the other. But as different as this kind of a mediating position indeed is from both of the

older alternatives, liberal and conservative alike, it still completely agrees with them in the underlying assumption that christological formulations can be justified as appropriate only insofar as at least *some* empirical-historical claims about Jesus can be shown to be true. Thus even theological moderates who hold that Jesus taught no more (but also no less) than an "implicit christology" still typically insist on the theological necessity of a quest of the historical Jesus to establish at least this.

Notwithstanding their insistence, however, the appropriateness of the christological assertion is as little dependent on showing that Jesus made at least an implicit christological claim as on showing that he taught an explicit christology. Because the subject of the christological assertion is Jesus in his meaning for us, not Jesus in his being in himself, whether he did or did not imply a claim for the decisive significance of his own person has no bearing whatever on the appropriateness of this assertion. Whether he implied such a claim or not, the fact remains that what those to whom we owe even the earliest Christian witness mean in so speaking of him is the one through whom they themselves have felt confronted with such a claim and who still confronts their hearers ^{there with} through their own witness of faith.

To this extent, the claims that are made or implied about Jesus from the earliest witnesses on are not subject to any empirical-historical control. But if this position is not to be misunderstood, two things need to be clearly kept in mind.

For one thing, not all the claims that Christians make or imply about Jesus are beyond the control of empirical-historical inquiry. Quite the contrary, there is a clear distinction to be made between what the earliest witnesses *assert* about Jesus as the subject of their christological formulations and what they may very well *assume* about him in doing so. If the first of these is indeed beyond even the possibility of empirical-historical control, this certainly is not the case with the second. In fact, no empirical-historical assumption about Jesus whatever could be exempt from such control. Even the assumption that the primal ontic source that is most certainly known as explicitly authorizing Christian existence was an individual male human being whose proper name was "Jesus" can be confirmed as true only by

empirical-historical inquiry. And the same must be said for any assumptions that this man had a certain understanding of himself and his vocation, that he preached and taught certain things and performed certain acts, and that he ran afoul of religious and political authorities and was tried, condemned, and executed. All such assumptions are clearly subject to empirical-historical inquiry, and none of them can be either known to be true or shown to be false except by way of such inquiry.

The other thing that must be kept in mind is more important: all christological formulations must be justified as appropriate, and the only way to justify them is by empirical-historical inquiry. Nothing is more obvious, even in the writings collected in the New Testament, than the variety of formulations whereby the constitutive christological assertion has been expressed or implied. Moreover, if one avoids an unhistorical harmonization of these various formulations, one can hardly fail to observe that many of them are sufficiently different in certain respects to be mutually exclusive. Consequently, since all of these formulations purport to express one and the same witness of faith, it is necessary to inquire of each of them whether it appropriately does so. But if this makes clear why christological formulations all have to be justified, it is equally obvious that there is no way to justify them except by testing their claim to express the one Christian witness appropriately. And this can be done only by inquiry back behind each formulation to the formally authoritative and therefore normative witness of faith that it claims to formulate. But this clearly necessary process of empirical-historical inquiry ultimately becomes, not a quest of the historical Jesus—nor even, I may add, "a historical quest of Jesus" (Marxsen)—but rather a quest of the earliest Christian witness. Because the subject of the christological assertion is not Jesus in his being in himself, but rather Jesus in his meaning for us, it is precisely this earliest Christian witness, in which the decisive significance of Jesus is first expressed, that is the formally authoritative and therefore normative witness of faith by which the appropriateness of all christological formulations must be justified.

There is not the least question, then, that empirical-historical inquiry is theologically necessary. Furthermore, the critical step in such inquiry is so to analyze the writings of the New Testament as to reconstruct the earliest

stratum of the tradition of witness behind them. But everything depends on how one understands the final objective of such inquiry and the proper role therein of this earliest stratum of witness. Far from understanding this earliest witness as at best the empirical-historical source from which the formal norm for christological claims still has to be somehow inferred, one must understand this stratum of witness as itself the formal norm of appropriateness and the Jesus to whom it bears witness as, accordingly, the real subject of the christological assertion.

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According to the usual account today, it was the implicit claim of Jesus, to be the gift and demand of God's love made decisively explicit, to which the early church eventually responded with its explicit christological assertion. Even though Jesus hardly thought and spoke of himself as the Christ or the Son of Man, he evidently did point to himself and his words as being of decisive significance, in that, already through him, God was confronting his hearers with the gift and demand of boundless love and thus with the possibility of authentic existence in faith. Consequently, in thinking and speaking of Jesus as the Christ or as the Son of Man, the early church simply affirmed explicitly, in such concepts and terms as were available for the purpose, Jesus' own implicit claim to be the decisive revelation of God's love.

Something very like this account probably provides as reasonable an explanation as one can presently give of the origins of Christianity. By affirming that Jesus' own christology was at most implicit, it takes account of the fact that there is no explicit christology in the earliest stratum of Christian witness. On the other hand, by maintaining that Jesus' own proclamation and summons to decision at least implied a christology, it explains the apostles' faith and witness as well as the early church's explicit christological assertion as the kind of responses to Jesus that they give every appearance of having been. But whether or not this is indeed a reasonable account, it is in no way necessary to a constructive christology that would make the point of christology today. Whether Jesus did or did not imply the kind of claim of which the church's christological assertion is the explication in no way alters the fact that, even in the earliest stratum of witness accessible to us, what is

meant by Jesus—and the only thing that is meant by him in asserting or implying the christological assertion—is the one through whom God confronts all who encounter him with just such a claim. Provided, then, that this earliest witness is what, for us today, must count as the witness of the apostles, and hence as formally authoritative and the formal norm or canon for judging the appropriateness of all Christian witness and theology, the significant thing is not that Jesus at least implicitly claimed to be the Christ, however probable it may be that he did exactly that; rather, the significant thing is that what the apostolic community understood by Jesus—the Jesus to whom they themselves bore witness, implicitly if not explicitly, as the Christ—was the one through whom they had experienced, and who, through their own witness, was still to be experienced, as confronting women and men with just such a claim.

The sufficient evidence of this is that even the earliest witness of the apostles is precisely that—witness of faith to Jesus, not historical report about him. Even if Jesus did in fact assert or imply the very christological claim he is represented as making or implying in the earliest stratum of witness—and, as we have seen, one can reasonably infer that he did exactly that—still, the point of the witnesses in so representing him was not to report what he did in the past, but rather to bear witness to what he—or, rather, *God through him*—was doing in the present, not only to them, but, through their witness of faith, also to their own hearers. Jesus, they claimed, is the one through whom both they themselves and then, by means of their witness, all of their own hearers as well are decisively re-presented with the gift and demand of God's love, and thus with the possibility of authentic existence in faith and returning love. Accordingly, to accept their claim in no way requires one to assent to the truth of certain empirical-historical assertions about Jesus—to the effect that he himself asserted or implied the same claim now represented in their witness of faith. On the contrary, whatever the truth or falsity of any such empirical-historical assertions, to accept the claim represented in the apostolic witness as Jesus' claim is to accept a strictly *existential*-historical assertion—the assertion, namely, that *Jesus means love*—not that Jesus *meant* love, however true that may be also, but that Jesus *means* love, in the sense that, through him, the gift and demand of God's boundless love are

made decisively explicit as authorizing our own possibility of authentic faith and love.

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If Jesus who is said to be Christ means love—first of all, God's prevenient love for us and then, and on that basis, our returning love for God and for all whom God loves—then it must be equally appropriate to say that Jesus means freedom. Provided, at any rate, that what one means by "freedom" is the existence in and for freedom established through faith in God's boundless love, then there is no question that the christology even of the earliest Jesus-kerygma is at least an implicit christology of liberation. The Jesus to whom it bears witness is the one through whom the possibility of just such an existence in and for freedom is decisively re-presented.

As for the further question of the appropriateness of Paul's christology of freedom, which, in its very essence, is christology of the cross, the significant considerations are the following. Despite the fact that the Jesus-kerygma makes no reference whatever to the saving significance of the cross, it certainly does represent Jesus, implicitly if not explicitly, as the decisive representation of God, and thus as the one through whom God has reconciled the world to himself. By thinking and speaking of the cross, then, as the means of reconciliation, and thus as the liberating judgment of God, Paul may be said to do nothing more than make explicit the very claim already made at least implicitly in the earliest stratum of Christian witness—the claim, namely, that the Jesus who is said to be Christ is the gift and demand of God's own love become decisively explicit. But if this is a correct interpretation, even Paul's christology of liberation is far from being an instance of inappropriate "modernism" lacking all support in the apostolic witness. In fact, it is an entirely appropriate formulation, given the concepts and terms available in his situation, of the witness of the apostles to Jesus as the decisive event of God's love.

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The constitutive christological assertion is a posteriori, because it is an assertion about a historical fact—Jesus—on the basis of particular historical experience, mediate if not immediate, of this fact. But the constitutive christological assertion is also "an assertion of faith," or, better, an existential assertion. Although it could arise only after the historical fact of Jesus' appearance and on the basis of particular experience of this fact, it also expresses a certain valuation of Jesus in relation to the existential question about the meaning of ultimate reality for us—namely, the valuation that he himself decisively answers this question and therefore is the explicit primal ontic source authorizing the authentic understanding of ourselves and others in relation to the strictly ultimate reality of the whole.

This valuation, however, is not merely a subjective preference, but rather necessarily implies an objective claim—to the effect that Jesus fulfills all the conditions necessary to anyone's decisively answering the existential question and therefore being of decisive significance for human existence. Consequently, it also necessarily implies some understanding of these necessary conditions, and this "a priori christology" can and should be made explicit.

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That someone, in fact, represents a certain possibility of self-understanding, together with the claim, implicit or explicit, that it is our authentic possibility can be verified readily enough simply by appeal to particular empirical-historical experience such as anyone might possibly have. But that this claim is valid, that the possibility of self-understanding represented is, indeed, our authentic possibility, cannot be validated by appeal to any particular empirical-historical experience. It can be validated, if at all, only by appeal to *existential*-historical experience and thus to the existential experience of our own existence with others in relation to the whole; and this means only by following properly metaphysical and moral procedures of verification that go beyond all of the procedures required to verify strictly empirical-historical assertions.

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The deeper difficulty with the typically liberal answer to the question of the norm of appropriateness (i.e., deeper than the difficulty that the empirical-historical Jesus as such cannot be operationally identified) is that it assigns to Jesus, contrary to the intention of the apostolic witness, the role that rightly belongs rather to the apostles themselves, thereby tacitly denying the claim that the Christian witness makes about Jesus by its christological assertion.

The claim made for Jesus, in one way or another, by all the New Testament christologies, right from the beginning, is that he is the decisive representation of God, in the sense of the one through whom the meaning of God for us is made decisively explicit. But if this is so, it clearly will not do to exaggerate their differences from the christology of the later church councils. However "low" some of their formulations may seem to be when compared with the "high" christology of Nicaea and Chalcedon, it is quite misleading to suppose that the history of christology is anything like a development whereby one who begins by being thought and spoken about simply as a man eventually comes to be represented as God. Although the earliest explicit christology may indeed have thought and spoken about Jesus in terms drawn from Jewish religious tradition, and thus as in every way human and in no way divine, the point of such thinking and speaking was nevertheless to place Jesus on the *divine* side of the relationship between God and human beings generally, not on the human side.

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The point of the original myth of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, no less than of "the full-grown myth" of Jesus' deity as formulated at Nicaea and Chalcedon (Mackey), is to assert that the man Jesus is infinitely more than a mere man, indeed, is on the same level as God, even though also distinct from God as the one through whom God is decisively encountered. Although the earliest form of the myth is indeed cast in terms taken over from Jewish religious tradition, and thus represents Jesus as in every way human, in no way divine, its point nevertheless is to place him on *God's* side of the relation between God and human beings generally, not on the side of human beings who more or less fully believe in God. As he whom God has made Messiah

by raising him from the dead, Jesus is not merely a believer in God, not even the "original and originating" believer, but is rather the one through whom God has spoken and acted in a final decisive way to re-present the possibility of faith to all who would believe.

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The primal source of Christian faith was no more the kerygma than the historical Jesus, in the sense of a personality of the past endowed with a messianic consciousness, heroically living the life of faith, and so on. Rather, the source of Christian faith was—and is—the person of Jesus, the "that" of whose proclamation is understood to be the decisive saving act of God by all who make the decision to follow him.

But even for us today, for whom the kerygma is the *primary authority* for Christian faith, the explicit *primal ontic source* of faith is nothing other than Jesus himself. It is precisely Jesus himself as a genuinely historical event by which the kerygma today is legitimated or authorized. The kerygma today acquires its legitimation, not merely from the original and originating kerygma, but, through it, from the past event of Jesus Christ. Therefore, present preaching as well as systematic theology has need of a critical control that secures its identity in substance with the apostolic preaching—that control being New Testament theology. What must be secured if the kerygma today is to be legitimated or authorized is its identity in substance with "the apostolic preaching," not with the preaching or faith of the historical Jesus. But even the apostolic preaching is not the *primal source* from which present preaching acquires its legitimation or authorization, but rather the *primary authority* by which it is authorized insofar as it is substantially identical with the apostolic preaching. The only primal source of its legitimation or authorization is the past event of Jesus Christ, by which all preaching, including the original and originating and therefore constitutive preaching of the apostles, is legitimated and authorized.

Rightly understood, the present proclamation of the kerygma is not some other source of Christian faith to be taken in itself independently of the Jesus of history, but rather the very means by which he himself can be

experienced here and now as Christian faith's only explicit primal ontic source. Not only is the apostles' immediate experience of Jesus' person the explicit primal noetic source of their original and originating and therefore constitutive Christian faith and preaching, but even our own Christian faith and preaching today, in response to preaching authorized by theirs, has its only explicit primal source in the same kind of experience of Jesus himself. Of course, our experience of Jesus, being mediated by theirs, can only be a mediate, not an immediate, experience of him. But provided that the proclamation to which we respond is indeed authorized by the apostles' preaching, which itself arose out of their immediate experience of Jesus' person, the explicit primal ontic source of our experience, no less than of theirs, is not the kerygma, but precisely and only the Jesus of history.

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The whole meaning of the event of Jesus, so far as the New Testament writers are concerned, is expressed by formulations that, in one conceptuality and symbolism or another, represent it as the existential-historical event that is the decisive revelation of the meaning of ultimate reality for us and as such the explicit primal ontic source authorizing all that is appropriately Christian. Thus the referent of the name "Jesus" in any such formulation as "Jesus is the Christ" is not someone whom we first come to know, if at all, only more or less probably by empirical-historical inquiry back behind the original witness of the apostles as well as the later witnesses of the New Testament. Rather, "Jesus" refers to the one whom we already know most certainly through the same apostolic witness as well as all other witnesses of faith insofar as they are conformed in substance to the primary witness of the apostles.

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The essential or substantial foundation of faith is the twofold reality of God as the One who decisively becomes event for us through Jesus, and of Jesus as the one through whom God decisively becomes event for us. The truth that faith knows about this twofold reality, however, is an existential truth, and the assertions in which it formulates this truth are existential

assertions. But while the truth of faith and its assertions is thus distinct from any kind of merely intellectual or objectifying truth, there is one kind of such truth—namely, metaphysical—on which that of faith and its assertions is logically dependent, however independent it may be of such other kinds as those of the special sciences and empirical history. Were this not the case, it would be quite impossible consistently to uphold the *extra nos* of faith, in the sense precisely of its essential or substantial foundation in a twofold reality beyond ourselves.

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Christian faith in the sense in which the Christian witness understands it may be characterized formally as an existential self-understanding. But it is the only self-understanding explicitly authorized by Jesus, whom Christians assert to be the Christ, the point of their assertion being that it is also the very self-understanding always already implicitly authorized as the authentic understanding of our existence by the utterly mysterious whole of ultimate reality that they call "God." If we ask, then, for the material content of this self-understanding, the only adequate answer is that it is an understanding of oneself and others as all alike objects of the unconditional love of God, which is to say, of the all-inclusive whole of reality of which both the self and others are all parts. It is precisely the gift and demand of God's unconditional love that are decisively re-presented through Jesus, and to understand oneself as one is thereby given and called to do is to actualize the one possibility of self-understanding that is properly called Christian faith.

It is the essence of this self-understanding to be an act of obedience having a distinctive double structure: it is both trust in God's unconditional love alone for the ultimate meaning of our lives and loyalty to this same love and to all to whom it is loyal as the only final cause that our lives are to serve. Although in both aspects, the obedience of faith is a human response to God's prevenient love, its first aspect of trust is relatively passive, while its second aspect of loyalty is relatively active. Moreover, the priority of the first and more passive aspect of trust to the second and more active aspect of loyalty is absolute. It is precisely out of our acceptance of God's unconditional love in trust that we alone become sufficiently free from ourselves and all others to

be truly loyal to God's cause. It is no less true, however, that if we truly trust in God's love, we cannot fail to live in loyalty to it. Thus, while the second aspect of the obedience of faith is and must be strictly posterior to the first, there is nevertheless but one such obedience with two aspects, each of which necessarily implies the other.