

I've suddenly realized that I've missed an important part of the point Marxsen makes by his Bismarck illustration (*NTBK*: 77, 81). Although many Bismarck-anecdotes, he says, are not historically authentic, some of them, at least, are still historically "true," because they portray the same human being who emerges from authentic historical reports about Bismarck. So far, so good. Even reports of Jesus' sayings or deeds that are hardly authentic may nonetheless be "true" insofar as they likewise portray the same human being who appears from other reports that are authentic, or, at any rate, are assumed to be so, by those to whom we owe them.

But this is not the only, or the most important, application that Marxsen evidently wants to make of the rule thus illustrated. His overriding concern throughout his writings is with understanding the beginnings of christology and the justification of explicit christology and christologies insofar as they are capable of being justified. And it is just here that he also applies his rule, albeit, as I've said, analogously. Hence his question: Granted that the earliest Christian witness is not explicitly christological, and that therefore the same must almost certainly have been true of Jesus's own witness, what justifies any explicit christology at all, and which, if any, of all the different explicit christologies that developed later are capable of justification?

Marxsen's answer is that any explicit christology is insofar justified as it is but a way of explicating, in the concepts and terms of a particular historical situation, the christological claim made at least implicitly by the earliest Christian witness, as well as, presumably, by the witness of Jesus himself. Just as all later reports about Jesus' sayings and deeds have to be judged by their consistency with the earliest such reports, so, analogously, all later interpretations of his decisive significance for human existence—this being the function of any explicit christological formulation—have to stand comparison with the decisive significance at least implicitly asserted of him by the earliest witnesses, if not, in fact, already by him himself in his own proclamation—if only in its "that," as distinct from its "what."

This, of course, is the whole point of Marxsen's constantly arguing that explicit christology is justified—both in general and in all the many different

christologies in particular—if, and only if, it can be shown to be exactly that: *but the making explicit*, in some particular concepts and terms, of the christology already at least implied by the earliest Christian witness. In *this* sense, Christ-kerygma has to be justified by Jesus-kerygma—even if it is just as true that Jesus-kerygma ever remains open to misunderstanding as not really kerygma at all until the christology it implies somehow becomes explicit.

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