

*Reflection on the Epigraph from Luther (in The Point of Christology)*

By definition, the historical Jesus is the merely human Jesus, who is in principle one *with* whom we exist, act, believe, witness, or whatever—one who thus stands on the same level as ourselves. This, then, is why "it is not enough, nor is it Christian" to appeal to the historical Jesus.

Nor can it be enough when this appeal is to the historical Jesus who was first and foremost among believers in God and witnesses to God. For even this Jesus is, at the very most, one who stands on the same level with us. In this sense, "it is not enough, nor is it Christian, to preach the works, life, and words of Christ as historical facts."

"Far less is it enough or Christian," then, to appeal to the historical Jesus who was merely the moral personality, the social reformer, the pacifist, or the revolutionary. For in all these cases, what is really being taught is, at best, "the laws of men and the decrees of the fathers," or the current equivalent thereof. "Nothing at all" is said, in effect, about the historical Jesus our sources most plausibly warrant our reconstructing; instead, one's own ideal of human existence is simply projected onto Jesus as though it were his. (I'm assuming here that Luther's contrast between Christ, on the one hand, and "the laws of men," etc., on the other, has its usual purpose of contrasting the law of God, as expressed in the Ten Commandments and the *nova lex*, with merely human laws either not based in God's will or contrary thereto.)

I can appreciate in this connection both what Schmithals means in saying that the historical Jesus is nothing but law and is "exchangeable," or "replaceable," and why Luther is so insistent that Christ is, first of all, a "sacrament," or "gift," only secondly, an "example."

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