

Revised

1. To ask about the meaning of Jesus for us here and now in the present is to be related to Jesus as a historical figure as surely as to ask about the being of Jesus in himself then and there in the past.

2. This is so because, in either case, one could not ask the question at all apart from particular historical experience of Jesus--mediate if not immediate.

3. But because Jesus could not be experienced sufficiently to ask either question apart from particular historical experience, we today, who are not his immediate contemporaries or successors, could not possibly have such experience except mediately through those who were."

4. Since it is also only mediately through their experience that we can ever hope to answer either question, we must sooner or later have recourse to the witness of such immediate contemporaries or successors.

5. For all practical purposes, this means that we must eventually recur to the earliest stratum of Christian witness that we today can reconstruct.

6. The function of this earliest stratum of witness is significantly different, however, in answering each of the two questions: whereas in answering the second question about the being of Jesus in himself it functions as a primary empirical-historical source, in answering the first question about the meaning of Jesus for us it functions as a primary existential-historical authority.

7. Of course, even the earliest stratum of witness is a primary empirical-historical source for the faith and witness of the community that bore it, not for the being of Jesus in himself, for which it is at best a secondary source.

8. This explains why any attempt to answer the second question is and must be peculiarly problematic--namely, because in the absence of any primary

empirical-historical source, any control on inferences from the earliest witness to the being of Jesus in himself must first be constructed by just such inferences.

9. But whether historically authentic or not, the earliest stratum of witness is the primary existential-historical authority for the community of faith and witness constituted by it; as such it expresses the meaning of Jesus for us to which this community exists to bear witness, and it is by it, accordingly, that the faith and witness of anyone who would belong to this community or represent it must be authorized, causatively as well as normatively.

10. Whether or not the earliest witness is true, however, is an existential-historical, rather than an empirical-historical, question; therefore, any reasoned answer to it requires not only empirical-historical inquiry to reconstruct the witness and existentialist interpretation to determine its meaning but also metaphysical and moral reflection on the necessary implications of the witness for belief and action.

original

1. To ask about the meaning of Jesus for us here and now in the present is to be related to Jesus as a historical figure as surely as to ask about the being of Jesus in himself then and there in the past.

2. This is so because, in either case, one could not ask the question at all apart from particular historical experience of Jesus--mediate if not immediate.

3. But because Jesus could not be experienced sufficiently to ask either question apart from particular historical experience, we today, who are not his immediate contemporaries or successors, could not possibly have such experience except mediately through those who were.

4. Since it is also only mediately through their experience that we can ever hope to answer either one question or the other, we must sooner or later have recourse to the witness of such immediate contemporaries or successors.

5. For all practical purposes, this means that we must eventually recur to the earliest stratum of Christian witness that we today can reconstruct.

6. The function of this earliest stratum of witness is significantly different, however, in answering each of the two questions: whereas in answering the second question about the being of Jesus in himself it functions as a primary historical source, in answering the first question about the meaning of Jesus for us it functions as a primary theological norm.

7. Of course, even the earliest stratum of witness is a primary historical source for the faith and witness of the community that bore it, not for the being of Jesus in himself, for which it is at best a secondary source.

8. This explains why any attempt to answer the second question is and must be peculiarly problematic--namely, because in the absence of any primary

historical source, any control on inferences from the earliest witness to the being of Jesus in himself must first be reconstructed by just such inferences.

9. But whether historically authentic or not, the earliest stratum of witness is the primary theological norm of the community of faith and witness constituted by it; as such it expresses the meaning of Jesus for us to which this community exists to bear witness and by which, accordingly, the faith and witness of anyone who would belong to this community or represent it must be normed.

10. Whether or not the earliest witness is true, however, is an existential-historical, rather than an empirical-historical question; therefore, any reasoned answer to it requires not only empirical-historical inquiry to reconstruct the witness and to determine its meaning but also metaphysical and moral reflection on the necessary implications of the witness for belief and action.