

Marxsen allows that particular Jesus-pictures in the synoptic tradition could be so understood as to focus on the doing rather than the doer and thus as, in effect, moral (or, possibly, religious) imperatives or precepts calling for the doing. He also argues that the Gospel of Matthew is an abiding witness that the whole synoptic tradition could be organized in terms of a Jesus-picture that is to be understood in precisely this way, i.e., the picture of Jesus as a "second Moses," whose surpassing authority—by example as well as precept—is attested by his resurrection from the dead.

Another question in connection with Marxsen: if the particular Jesus-pictures comprising the synoptic tradition are as ambiguous as he allows they are, what justifies his calling them "kerygma"—not merely in the purely formal sense that they are personal address, and so a call to decision, rather than reportage, but also in the material sense that the decision they call for is the "eschatological" decision for or against one's authentic existence? More disturbing still: if even the earliest Jesus-pictures are thus ambiguous, what can one appeal to to resolve the ambiguity without begging the question? Since one cannot possibly appeal to Jesus himself, in the sense of the historical Jesus, Jesus as he was before any interpretation of him by others, to what *can* one appeal without already privileging one or the other of the two ways of resolving the ambiguity—but, again, only by begging the question, as Marxsen does, in effect, by appealing to Mark's Gospel organized around his Pauline summarium instead of to Matthew's Gospel organized around his very different Pharisaic summarium?

Bultmann argues, if I understand him, that Jesus' proclamation is proclamation of the law, albeit in a form that breaks through, or goes beyond, Jewish legalism. But, then, Bultmann nowhere argues for the difference that Marxsen argues for between Jesus and John the Baptist; in fact, he says in at least one place that Jesus points to John as eschatologically and therefore christologically significant. Thus, in Bultmann's view, Jesus simply continues John's own ministry by likewise calling for repentance in face of the coming—now imminently coming—reign of God, again, with the possible difference that Jesus' understanding of the law is more radical than John's. Bultmann is also explicit in saying that "Jesus' preaching does not develop any new ideas; but just as it has always been true of these old ideas that they

cannot be possessed through theoretical insight but must become actual solely through faithful, obedient action, so his preaching affirms, Even so is it now!"

I may add to this, then, my reflections on what was really uncertain in the early Christian community—namely, not whether it would simply be a Jewish sect, but whether it would develop into another religion of law like Judaism or rather become a new and different type of religion based on grace.

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The teaching of *Formgeschichte* that the early traditions lying behind the synoptic gospels are not reportage but "kerygma" needs to be followed with a certain caution.

The fact that the author of the Gospel of Matthew could revert to a Pharisaic understanding of Jesus and his significance confirms that there's no reason, in principle, why something similar hadn't already occurred earlier in the synoptic tradition. Nor would the fact that the reason for handing down a certain saying of Jesus or story about him was not to report but to persuade rule out the possibility that Marxsen considers, where a hearer so focuses on the *deed* called for in the saying or story as to miss the primacy of the *doer*. But what if the ones handing down the saying or story had already understood it in the same way, as an implicit imperative calling for doing a particular deed? What, indeed, if this had been the understanding of *the first disciples themselves*, the very different understanding expressed by the summaria in Mk 1:14 f. and Mt 11: 2-6 being, as Funk would presumably argue, a later, mistaken understanding of what Jesus was all about?

The point is that being tendentious and intended to persuade is one thing, being "kerygmatic" in the strict and proper sense, something else. Anything kerygmatic in that sense would indeed be tendentious and intended to persuade; but the converse statement is false: not everything tendentious and intended to persuade is *eo ipso* kerygmatic in the strict and proper sense. Matthew's gospel is no less tendentious than Mark's is. But, if Marxsen's interpretation of them is correct, Mark's is kerygma in a sense in which Matthew's isn't, because it is gospel as distinct from (even a "new," radicalized) law.

So to call the early traditions "kerygma," as Marxsen does, is really to beg a question that I now see to be rather more difficult to answer than I had realized. Perhaps one way of arguing for the answer I'd still incline to give to it is to appeal to the fact that Jesus died as a Roman criminal, very likely because he was understood by Roman authorities to be yet another of the many messianic pretenders of his age. This was hardly the fate that a rabbi could expect, whereas it is exactly the fate that could be expected by one thought to be a messianic pretender—witness the fate of John the Baptist. So,

the conclusion goes, Jesus was, first of all, an apocalyptic prophet, not a rabbi, even if a thoroughly radicalized one. And so the summaria of Mk 1:14 f. and Mt 11:2-6 appear to be much more plausible as expressing "*the* Jesus picture" in the light of which all the others are to be interpreted.

What stands in the way of drawing this conclusion too confidently, however, is that Jesus may very well have been the same kind of apocalyptic prophet that his predecessor John was, as distinct from being the enabler of eschatological existence already here and now in this old age that Marxsen interprets him as being. Indeed, Bultmann's interpretation of Jesus as proclaiming "pure Judaism" makes him appear closer to John than to Paul, somewhat as Marxsen's makes him appear closer to Paul than to John.

Perhaps what will have to be said, finally, is that there was, right from the beginning, the possibility of interpreting Jesus's significance in two very different ways, and that different individuals and communities may very well have interpreted him in both of them: some interpreting him as a radicalized rabbi along the lines of Matthew's later "second Moses"; others interpreting him as, in effect if not (yet) in so many words, "the end of the law," including the radicalized law, as the way of salvation, along the lines later worked out by Paul.

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There is a certain danger, it seems to me, of confusing two different, even if closely related, statements: (1) that the units of material comprising the earliest stratum of the synoptic tradition are instances, not of historical reportage, but of kerygma; and (2) that these units of material are instances, not of historical reportage, but of existential communication. Distinguishing these statements, of course, turns on using "kerygma" more strictly than "existential communication," although one suspects that it is often used in discussions in and about form criticism in a much broader sense, which approximates, simply, to "existential communication."

One thing at stake in trying to avoid this confusion is that then one does not have to maintain that any unit of material that is not historical reportage can only be kerygma in the strict sense of "proclamation," and thus the kind of existential communication that is, in Bultmann's term, "direct address." Even straightforward indicative statements can be a kind of existential communication insofar as they are significant for a person's self-understanding and action. All the more so, the implicitly or explicitly imperative statements comprising properly moral instruction or teaching are obviously existential communication, even if of the "indirect address" kind, and even if they have immediately to do with one's action or life-praxis, and only mediately with one's self-understanding. There is good reason to believe that some, if not, in fact, many, units of material in the synoptic tradition have their *Sitz-im-Leben* more in the context of moral instruction—by example as well as by precept—than in the context of direct religious address. Certainly, in some of these units of material Jesus appears precisely as a moral teacher, and it is entirely reasonable to infer that one of the reasons, if not the only reason, the earliest community preserved and transmitted them was to meet a felt need for authoritative moral instruction.

Even so, in the Jesus-kerygma no less than in the Christ-kerygma, Jesus *the proclaimer*, the prophet and teacher, has become Jesus *the proclaimed*. Moreover, if Willi Marxsen is right that there is no good reason to deny that at least some of the units of material in the synoptic tradition have a pre-Good Friday-Easter origin, one may infer that what lies behind them as the experience out of which they originated was the pre-Good Friday-Easter community's decision to accept Jesus' own implicit christological claim by

"following" him. In other words, all of these units of material—in their "*that*" even if not in their "*what*"—give expression to an experience of Jesus himself as of decisive significance for us and so function to summon others, also, to appropriate this significance. Thus even in the units in which Jesus is represented precisely as moral teacher and which may very well have been preserved and transmitted to meet a felt need for moral instruction, he himself is still proclaimed as, in effect, the liberating judgment of God, the primal sacrament of God's prevenient love, and not merely as a moral teacher or example, or, for that matter, not merely as a religious teacher or example, either.

One can more confidently affirm this, however, if, having restricted one's use of "kerygma" to the strict sense of "proclamation," and, more exactly, proclamation of Jesus' decisive significance for our self-understanding, one is free to allow that, in the case of these units of material, one reason for their existence, even if never the only or even the primary reason, was not kerygmatic proclamation strictly and properly so-called but another kind of existential communication.

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