

Among the ways in which Marxsen talks about "Jesus' working," "Jesus' cause," "what came to speech in Jesus," and so on is to say that Jesus placed (or places) persons in "an eschatological relation." Such talk raises two questions for me, which I formulate and answer as follows.

1. Why is a relation properly "an eschatological relation"?

A relation is properly "an eschatological relation" because one of its two terms is a self that as such must decide, in every moment, to understand its own unique existence either authentically or inauthentically, and its other term is ultimate reality in its meaning for us—whether implicitly presented or explicitly re-presented as well.

2. By what is one placed in an eschatological relation so understood?

One is placed in an eschatological relation so understood by ultimate reality itself in its meaning for us—whether implicitly presented or explicitly re-presented as well. Because ultimate reality is universal and ever-present, a self is always already, and therefore originally, placed in an eschatological relation at least implicitly, the meaning of ultimate reality for us being implicitly presented to any self simply as a self through, as Paul says, "the things [God] has made" (Rom 1:20). But because the meaning of ultimate reality for us can also be re-presented explicitly, a self can be specially, and even decisively, placed in an eschatological relation (not by, but) *through* whatever, or whoever, re-presents this meaning, whether primally, primarily, or secondarily. In this case, the self is still placed in an eschatological relation only *by* ultimate reality itself, even if also ital through its re-presentation(s), whether merely special or also decisive.

N. B.: These answers to the questions assume: (1) that a self as such exists understandingly, understanding itself and ultimate reality generally and leading its life accordingly, freely and responsibly; (2) that the meaning of ultimate reality for us is determined by the structure of ultimate reality in itself—by a relation, in John Post's term, of "nonreductive determination"; and (3) that being placed in an eschatological relation is not

the same as existing eschatologically, or authentically. Roughly speaking, being placed in an eschatological relation is the same as being *called*—implicitly or explicitly—to eschatological, or authentic, existence. But since a self is *chosen* only through its own choosing, actually existing eschatologically, or authentically, is a function of its freely and responsibly accepting the call so to exist.

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In my *Auseinandersetzung* with Schüssler Fiorenza (in the Appendix to "The Authority of Scripture for Preaching"), I remark that "it is not accidental that the term 'faith' plays practically no role at all in [her] lexicon." The reason for this, I explain, is that she "shows not the least awareness that the possibility of existing and acting [morally and politically as Jesus acted, or calls us to act] is not just a human possibility, or even the most radical form of such a possibility, but is rather an *eschatological* possibility for which one must first be set free by the prevenient action of God's love accepted through obedient faith."

The question I need to pursue is just how the distinction made in this explanation between "just a human possibility" and "an *eschatological* possibility" is related to other, ostensibly similar or parallel distinctions I've been wont to make. I refer to such different distinctions as those between God's commandments and God's command; God's specific gifts and demands through destiny and relation to neighbors and God's integral gift and demand of authentic existence; penultimate transformations and ultimate transformation; life-praxis and self-understanding as respectively the categorial and the transcendental levels of action or of living understandingly and so on.

(An early such distinction occurs in my sermon, "'And This Will Be a Sign for You,'" where I argue that, although the event of Jesus Christ and the event of John Kennedy's assassination are, in important respects, exactly alike, in that the deeper meaning of both "depends on us," on "how we choose to live," the two events are, in another respect, "radically different."

To begin with, the event of Jesus is attested by Christian faith and witness as having a kind of significance that the other event neither has nor should be supposed to have. The question Jesus Christ poses for us is not the question of our responsibility for some particular sphere of life—say for the social and political order that is so important for our welfare in this world. No, the question he raises is the infinitely more momentous question of our total understanding of ourselves as persons; it is the existential or religious question of whether we are to seek the final meaning of our life in what we ourselves are and have and do, or are to receive that meaning utterly and completely as a gift. In other words, the significance of Jesus Christ is to present us with the possibility of faith in God's love—in fact, he himself actually *is* that love, happening in our midst as an event and demanding our decision.

Corresponding, then, to this difference in the events themselves, there is also a difference in the possible responses to them. We give the event of Jesus Christ a future in our lives not by performing some particular act—say, by

overcoming our apathy and indifference and accepting our responsibility to vote. No, Jesus Christ comes to dwell in us only when we so respond to his total gift and demand that not only our acts, but ^{our} ~~are~~ very persons are totally transformed. 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments'; and 'this is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you' (Jn 14:15, 15:12). Because what encounters us in Jesus Christ is the very love of God himself, we realize the significance of that event only when we ourselves become free to love. ✎

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