

According to Bultmann, the apostolic word, like the apostles themselves, belongs to the salvation occurrence. Indeed, Bultmann can stress, as Luther does, that what constitutes the salvation occurrence so far as Paul is concerned is the institution or legitimation of the apostolic word and ministry. Of course, it is just as true that this apostolic word belongs to the salvation occurrence as what is instituted or legitimated, as distinct from the divine/human act of instituting or legitimating it. In my language, it is the primary *authority*, as distinct from the explicit primal *source* of authority. Even so, Bultmann is also clear that this explicit primal source of authority is to be encountered nowhere else than in and through the apostolic word that it authorizes.

What I have failed sufficiently to appreciate, however, is that this apostolic word is the primary authority not only because or insofar as it has an *auctoritas normativa* but also because or insofar as it has an *auctoritas causativa*. Indeed, the orthodox notion of the apostolic word as *fundamentum fidei organicum seu ministeriale* really has to do with this word more as *auctoritas causativa* than as *auctoritas normativa* (although one would never know this from my discussion of the concept in my essay on Marxsen!). The apostolic word is, above all, the authorized word through which faith is born or reborn as from a seed and thus is "the means of generating faith and bringing about blessedness."

This means that I need to reconsider—and reformulate—my way of putting the difference between the functions of the earliest witness, depending upon the two different questions it may be used to answer. Specifically, I need to reformulate the sixth of my ten theses on the two questions that may be asked historically about Jesus and make the other indicated changes as follows:

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 just 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 even ask the question, much less answer it, 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, could not possibly have such experience except mediately through those who were (and, of course, those who have succeeded them).

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 as well as their 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 is forced to function as the primary empirical-historical source that it isn't, in answering the first question about the meaning of Jesus for us, it is allowed to function as what it is, in its proper role as the primary existential-historical authority.

7. Even the earliest stratum of witness is a primary empirical-historical source only for the witness and faith of the community that bore it, not for the being of Jesus in himself, for which it can be at best only 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 itself be reconstructed from inferences that themselves are either uncontrolled, and therefore beg the question, or are really derived from somewhere else.

9. But whether empirical-historically authentic or not, the earliest stratum of witness is the primary existential-historical authority for the community of faith and witness that in one sense constitutes it, though in another, more important sense is 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 claiming to belong to this community and/or to represent it must be authorized, causatively as well as normatively.

10. Whether or not the earliest witness is true, however, is an existential-historical, not 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 philosophical reflection to determine its truth, including metaphysical and moral reflection on its necessary presuppositions and implications for belief and action.

The earliest Christian witness is the sole primary authority for the Christian community. But although this certainly means that it is the primary norm for Christian theology in determining the appropriateness of all Christian witness, it is just as certain that this is not all that it means. The earliest witness is even more fundamentally the primary norm for Christian faith and witness. And even more than that, it is the primary authorized word by which faith is generated and confirmed. In other words, it has a primary *causative* authority as well as a primary *normative* authority. The advantage of speaking of it, therefore, as a primary existential-historical *authority* rather than as a primary theological *norm* is that not only the full scope of its normative authority but its causative authority as well can be taken into account and reckoned with.

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