

One commonly speaks of "the indicative/imperative of Christian faith." But what is the "imperative" (singular) of Christian faith?

The only proper answer, it seems to me, is that it is a twofold imperative: first, to entrust oneself solely to God's never-failing loyalty; and then, second, to live in loyalty solely to God and thus to all to whom God is loyal. Only in the context of this single, twofold imperative does it make sense to talk about "imperatives" (plural) that call for specific ways of acting and/or specific actions.

Clearly, to proclaim the gospel is not only to state an indicative, but also to issue an imperative. This is evident, for example, from 2 Cor 5:18 ff., where Paul not only states that "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself," but also says, "Be reconciled to God!" True, the imperative thus formulated is addressed to the Christians at Corinth, and thus to those who have already responded to it earlier, at some point in the past. But, clearly, the same imperative must have been addressed to these persons even before they became Christians, since it is only by understanding themselves in accordance with it that they could ever have become Christians at all. Bultmann brings this out effectively when he says, "In the significance that belongs to it, the historical event of the cross has created a new historical situation; the proclamation of the cross as the salvation event asks its hearers whether they are willing to appropriate this meaning, whether they are willing to be crucified with Christ" (*NTM*: 35 f.). Therefore, while it is true, in a sense, as Marxsen says (e.g., 169; cf. 171 f.), that "imperatives" in the plural are addressed only to persons who are already changed, i.e., are Christians, this is not true of the singular imperative, in the context of which alone it makes sense to talk about such plural imperatives. On the contrary, *it* is addressed to all persons, because God's reconciling action through Christ involves reconciling *the world* to himself, every member of which can thereby be appropriately asked whether she or he is willing to appropriate the meaning of the cross, or to be crucified with Christ. (In point of fact, even the plural imperatives, if valid, could be addressed to non-Christians, if it is true, as Marxsen, for one, contends, that there is no specifically Christian content to the moral imperatives that are binding on Christians [cf. 190 f.])

If one considers, then, the various Pauline "paradoxes" that Marxsen formulates, all of which do indeed seem to be addressed to Christians, there would appear to be at least two ways of understanding them. Thus, for

example, "If we live by the Spirit, then let us also walk by the Spirit" (Gal 5:25), can mean *either* an exhortation to those who *are* Christians, i.e., have been so in the past, also to *become* what they are by once again both entrusting themselves to God's loyalty and living in loyalty to God in return; *or* an exhortation to those who have entrusted themselves to God's loyalty also to live in loyalty to God and to all to whom God is loyal.

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