

I once criticized Bultmann's statement that "the cross is not the salvation-event because it is the cross of Christ, it is the cross of Christ because it is the salvation-event" (cf. *NTM*: 39). My reasoning: "[i]f it is through the cross that salvation actually takes place, then *in some sense* it must be equally legitimate to say it is the cross of Christ because it saves and it saves because it is the cross of Christ. When Bultmann simply denies this, he so expresses himself as to raise a legitimate question whether he does justice to the 'objective' reference of the Christian faith" (*CwM*: 148 f.).

Although I would still defend my criticism—especially given the concession that introduced my reasoning: "To be sure, the first half of the assertion does *not* need to be understood in the mistaken manner of myth or of most of Bultmann's critics on the 'right'"—I also allow that I could and should have done a better job at catching what Bultmann means and does not mean by what he says. In this connection, I've come to think that the following passage from *Jesus*: 180 indicates what he means more clearly.

There can be no question that Jesus did not refer to anything generally perceivable wherein one could become certain of God's forgiveness. He simply proclaimed it. The event of forgiveness is nothing other than his word as it confronts the hearer. For the truth of this word he offers no guarantees whatever, either in his miracles, whose significance is not to verify his word—on the contrary, he expressly rejects any legitimation by miracles (*Mk* 8:11 f.)—or in his personal qualities, which in any event seem rather to have offended his contemporaries than to have recommended him to them. . . . Nor is anything said about his metaphysical being, either in his own words as they have come down to us or in the report of the earliest community. To be sure, the earliest community did hold him to be the Messiah. But in doing so, it did not ascribe to him some special metaphysical being that gave his words authority, but, rather, confessed thereby, on the authority of his words, that God had made him the King of the community.

This passage seems to me to be as much a substantial parallel to Bultmann's statement as what he says in other places—such as, for example, *GV* 2: 252:

The decisive question now is whether and to what extent the [christological] titles intend to say something about the nature of Jesus, describing him, so to speak, objectifyingly in his being-in-himself, or whether and to what extent they speak of him in his significance for human beings, for

faith. Do they—as I can also formulate it—speak of his φύσις, or do they speak of the *Christus pro me*? To what extent is a christological assertion about him at the same time an assertion about me? Does he help me because he is the Son of God, or is he the Son of God because he helps me?

In any case, the first passage makes as clear as the second that Bultmann in no way intends to deny the “objectivity” of christological assertions in the sense—the only sense—in which I should wish to affirm it. All he wants to deny is that there is anything objective, in the usual empirical, pseudo-empirical (i.e., mythological or “metaphysical”) senses of the term embraced by his terms “objectifying,” “objectifyingly,” and so on. But, then, this leaves open the possibility that christological assertions are indeed “objective” (or “objective”!) in the sense that they can be interpreted and explicated in terms of a science—an “ontological,” as distinct from an “ontic,” science—“that is nothing other than the clear and methodical development of the understanding of existence that is given with existence itself,” and therefore “talks about existence without objectifying it into being within the world” (*NTM*: 101, 102 ff.).

My guess is that much the same interpretation would apply to Marxsen’s similar statements, although he is hardly as philosophically sophisticated as Bultmann. Cf., e.g., *NTBK*: 95: “*Nicht weil [Jesus] der Christus war, ereignete er Gott, sondern weil er Gott ereignete, nannte man ihn den Christus, den Menschensohn, den Gottessohn.*” Also 104: “*Nicht weil Jesus der Messias war, ereignete er Gott; sondern weil er Gott ereignete, wurde er der Messias genannt.*”

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The following statements of John Knox in *The Early Church and the Coming Great Church* obviously parallel those of Bultmann and Marxsen discussed in Notebooks, 29 January 2007. They also help to confirm the plausibility of the interpretation argued for there.

The situation in the early church was not that the event was regarded as the eschatological event because Jesus was believed to be the Christ, but rather that Jesus was called Christ because he had been the decisive center of what was empirically realized to be the eschatological event. The very first Christian theological question (essentially christological) was, 'What has God done?' (70).

He is 'Savior,' because the event has proved to be in fact the saving event and the community the saving community. All the earliest names of Jesus are functional names; they are ascriptions to him, as source or mediator, of the values that have been empirically received in consequence of the event and in the actual life of the community. They say only in various other ways that Jesus was Christ and Lord (73).

There is no convincing evidence that [Jesus] was called 'God' in the first century, and indisputable evidence that he was not generally called by that name; ^{it >} but it is clear that he was thought of as being related to God as no other man could be. But again this belief in the divinity of Jesus rested on the experience of the divine in the life of the community and on the recognition of the divine significance of the event. The position was not that the earliest Christians believed that the event and the community were divine because they also believed that Jesus was divine; but rather he was seen to be divine because of the way in which he was related to an event and a community whose divine significance was a matter of intimate and indubitable conviction. Must Jesus not have been divine to have been the center of so divine an event? (73 f.).

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