

More on Marxsen's Talk about Jesus' Faith

After re-reading *Die Auferstehung Jesu von Nazareth* yet again, I've come to the following conclusions concerning Marxsen's talk about Jesus' faith.

1. On the one hand, Marxsen repeatedly uses (or implies the propriety of using) the term "Jesus' faith," and he does so without further qualifying "faith" in any way (see, e.g., in this book, 187, 191).

2. On the other hand, he's explicit in distinguishing different senses, or meanings, of "faith," which evidently require that the term be qualified in some way if it is to be used unambiguously (99, 125 f., 144); and he's also explicit in laying down the general rule that the faith of another cannot be controlled, so that one can say whether or not another actually believes, even if the other claims to believe, and he explicitly notes that this also applies historically (125).

3. Whereas a year ago (11 April 2007), I still thought that at least some of the things Marxsen says about Jesus' faith cannot be fairly interpreted as talking only, or primarily, about Jesus' faith in its expressions, or in its community-grounding (*sic!*—not, as I translated earlier, "community-building") function, I now incline to the alternative way of resolving the difficulty created by what he actually says and does not say (as summarized in 1 and 2 above). I'm inclined to say, in other words, that, although he hardly makes it easy to be sure about it—either by explicitly qualifying the term "Jesus' faith" or by explicitly saying of Jesus' faith in particular only what he allows to be sayable of another's faith in general—he very likely uses "Jesus' faith" to mean "Jesus' faith in its expressions," and so does not mean Jesus' faith "as an inner (*sic!*—better than "internal") process," but rather Jesus' faith "in its community-grounding function."

4. As for my earlier criticism of Marxsen's statement that "one very well can know the *expressions* of another faith insofar as witnesses to them are available"—namely, that it is "clearly in danger of *petitio principii*," since "whether such *expressions*

of faith as the available witnesses permit us to know are, in fact, expressions *of faith* remains precisely the question" (*Doing Theology Today*: 258)—I now see that it fails to reckon with an important ambiguity that I myself have since come to recognize. "It is one question," I have written, "whether what a person says and does is a consequence of saving faith and, in this sense, is witness [*sc.* of faith]. It is another question whether what a person says and does is experienced by another as confronting her or him with the decision of saving faith and, in this sense, is witness [*sc.* of faith]" (Notebooks: January 1993; rev. November 1993; 10 September 2003). But if this distinction is to the point, and if by "expressions of faith" is to be understood "witness of faith," not in the first sense, but only in the second, my criticism is obviated. For whether or not certain expressions express the faith of the person expressing them, they can very well be taken by another person as calling for her or his decision of faith—and therefore as, in that sense, precisely: expressions of faith.

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I must say that I've been struck during my recent re-reading of *Die Auferstehung Jesu von Nazareth* by the care with which Marxsen distinguishes more than once between "faith" and "the expressions of faith," or, alternatively, between "faith as an internal process" and "faith in its community-building function" (99, 125 f., 144). That these are, in fact, alternative, verbally different ways of making one and the same distinction seems clear enough from the contexts in which the terms occur. But, then, it is hardly less clear that the distinction is not unimportant to Marxsen, and it may even warrant considering another interpretation than I've given of many of the statements he makes about "Jesus' faith." Perhaps in them, also, he is not thinking so much of Jesus's faith as such, or as an internal process, as of the expressions of Jesus' faith, or of his faith in its community-building function.

One reason, at least, for considering such a possibility is the complete (or all but complete) absence from Marxsen's statements about Jesus' faith of any of the usual revisionary claims for its extraordinary or even unique character. Furthermore, there is at least one place where he's explicit in rejecting the problematic claim in Hebrews about Jesus' sinlessness (C-p: 47). It's also true that, for the most part, certainly, he conceives normative Christian faith, not as faith with Jesus' faith, but as faith with *the faith of the first witnesses* (cf., e.g., AJN: 129: "*Unser Glaube ist nur dann christlicher Glaube, wenn er ein Mitglauben mit dem Glauben der ersten Zeugen, mit dem Glauben des Petrus ist. Darin ist Petrus nun wirklich der Fels der Kirche.*")

On the other hand, he can say that one believes radically only when one believes "as Jesus believes and, against all appearances, entrusts *everything* to God" (191: "*Wer glaubt, glaubt nur dann radikal, wenn er wie Jesus glaubt und Gott [gegen den Augenschein] alles zutraut.*") Only a few pages earlier, however, he says, significantly, that the reason "lived faith" includes hope is not that Jesus is risen, as this is usually understood, thereby making my coming resurrection certain, but "because Jesus of Nazareth has offered the possibility of this life" (187). I find this explanation significant because he does not say, because Jesus of Nazareth himself actualized this

possibility by his own faith in God, but says, rather, because he, in effect, represented this possibility.). Also, and probably more telling, is that the only contexts in which he makes the distinction in question are those in which the faith in question is not Jesus' but Peter's.

My best judgment, then, is that not all that Marxsen says about Jesus' faith can be fairly interpreted as talking only, or primarily, about its expressions, or its community-building function, as distinct from his faith as *fides qua creditur*. Still, it seems well worth exploring just how much of what he says could be accounted for by this alternative interpretation.

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