

There is no exact parallel—such as, arguably, there should be—between Marxsen's answers to the two questions, "What makes Christian ethics 'Christian'?" and "What makes Christian dogmatics 'Christian'?"

Whereas he allows that Christian dogmatics is "Christian" insofar as it expresses, in its time and place, and thus in the concepts and terms understandable therein, the same understanding of existence originally evoked by Jesus in his encounter with the first community, he argues that Christian ethics is "Christian" only insofar as it expresses "eschatological existence"—not in the sense that it, too, in its way, expresses the same self-understanding that dogmatics expresses, but in the sense that the actor performing the action it calls for is her- or himself a "Christian" living eschatological existence, or, as he can also say, "living 'christologically'" (cf., e.g., *"Christliche" und christliche Ethik*: 243).

It is not at all apparent, however, why there should be any such difference between belief, on the one hand, and action, on the other—or, by analogy, between the formulations of belief, on the one hand, and the specifications of action, on the other. Granted that being a Christian is not simply a matter of believing what a Christian rightly believes or doing what a Christian rightly does (since one can believe what a Christian believes and do what a Christian does even though one is not a Christian!), still, if one is a Christian, in that one understands oneself as one is given and called to do decisively through Jesus, one thereby implicitly believes certain things to be the case even as one implicitly acts in a certain way and does, or refrains from doing, certain things.

True, any formulation of one's beliefs, like any specification of one's actions, will always be in the concepts and terms, or within the possibilities and limitations, of one's particular situation as a human being. Consequently, any analysis of beliefs or actions always has to reckon both with the self-understanding of which they are respectively the necessary implications *and* with the particular historical situation in terms of which they are formulated or specified. But there is as much reason to say that certain actions do, or do not, specify the action necessarily implied by Christian faith as to say that certain beliefs do, or do not, formulate the belief that such faith also

necessarily implies—always allowing for the fact that any specification of action, like any formulation of belief, must perforce be done in some particular historical situation with its possibilities and limitations.

16 January 2005