

As many times as I have read it, I remain uncertain about just what Marxsen's point is in "*Grenze der Möglichkeit christologischer Aussagen.*" Some formulations, at least, would seem to indicate that his point is to accept and argue for one kind of christology ("christology from below"), while rejecting and arguing against another kind ("christology from above"), namely, because the first remains within the limit of possible christological assertions, while the second goes beyond that limit. Among the formulations that appear to call for this interpretation are those right at the beginning of the essay that appear to associate "christology from above" with an incarnationist christology in danger of not taking seriously the *vere homo* of the human being Jesus, and "christology from below" with an adoptionist christology having the opposite difficulty of stopping with the man Jesus and never reaching the *vere deus*, and so never attaining any christology at all.

But there are other indications that Marxsen's real point is different. The choice he calls for is not really a choice between two kinds of christology, but a choice between two ways of proceeding in doing christology—one of which begins, as it should, with the experience of Jesus' activity out of which all christological formulations have arisen; the other of which begins, as it should not, with certain christological formulations—namely, those deemed to be "right," e.g., because of the dogmatic decisions of the church at Nicaea and Chalcedon. That this is the choice he really calls for seems to me the best way to take his concluding statement: "It is a 'mortal sin' of theological work to take assertions that have arisen in one direction and to argue with them in the opposite direction." The choice here, obviously, is between two ways of "arguing" theologically, or christologically. And this same choice is evidently called for when he says, "One may not make what others have formulated as the *consequence* of their faith into the *foundation* of the faith of those who come later" (12).

But if this is his point, what, exactly, is "the limit to the possibility of christological assertions"? I take it that the limit in question is to be understood in some such way as this: whereas any assertion argued for by beginning with the experience of Jesus' activity remains within the limit to the possibility of christological assertions, any assertion argued for by beginning instead with certain "right" christological formulations goes

beyond this limit and so is not "a christologically possible" assertion. "[I]f one takes assertions that have arisen as a consequence of faith and turns them around, then christology from below becomes christology from above. And with this, one goes beyond the limit to the possibility of christological assertions, because one uses a statement that is possible always only as a second statement as a first statement" (12). Here, too, the choice is not between different statements, or different kinds thereof, but between different "uses" of statements—one of which uses second statements as second statements, thereby remaining within the limit to the possibility of christological assertions, the other of which (mis)uses second statements as first statements, thereby exceeding the limit.

Still, I wish I could be more certain than I am that I haven't somehow missed Marxsen's point.

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