

Whether, or to what extent, christology began and developed in exactly the way in which the later Marxsen argues it did is not easy to decide. It is at least plausible that christology did indeed begin by qualifying the *activity* of Jesus as decisively significant before proceeding to qualify the *person* of Jesus, as the agent of that activity, as decisively significant.

But whether this distinction between *what* the earliest witnesses saw and heard and *whom* they saw and heard is as clear and sharp as Marxsen takes it to be may well be questioned (although it certainly seems significant that, with one or two exceptions, the materials of the synoptic tradition right up to the gospels themselves do not call for faith in Jesus himself, as distinct from the faith that Jesus releases or that he offers and calls for). The mere fact that Bultmann can point, not to the activity of Jesus, but to his "person" as the decisive datum for the origins of christology is at least some indication that the distinction can hardly be made hard and fast.

Either way, however, Marxsen's essential insight seems sound. Christology began with the experience of Jesus in action—or, if you will, of the event ("*that*") of Jesus—as of decisive significance for human existence, because it decisively re-presented the gift and demand of God's rule of love. Whether or not this experience was expressed, first, by qualifying Jesus' activity, and only later, by qualifying his person, the point of all such qualifications is the same: to confess the decisive significance of Jesus *and* his activity, or of Jesus' activity *and* Jesus himself, as the decisive re-presentation of the meaning of God for us, in such a way as thereby to offer others the same experience and to call them to make the same confession.

Marxsen's essential insight, in short, is that, whether we speak of Jesus' "activity," or rather of his "person," as christologically decisive, we must take pains to understand that the proper referent of the one term as surely as the other is not the being of Jesus in himself, but the meaning of Jesus for us.

30 August 1999