

*Marxsen on What Is, and Is Not, "the Jesus Business"*

There is, of course, a certain danger in the branch of early Christian tradition oriented to the Jesus-kerygma. If the event of being moved by Jesus is passed on without explicitly qualifying the one who initiates it, its eschatological character may be missed. So the parables of the kingdom, which were intended as immediate address, can be misunderstood as timeless truths about heaven and God. Or one seeks a short cut to solving one's moral problems by simply reading off the concrete and earthly conduct called for by the kerygma. This can lead to the opinion that what's required is an imitation of this conduct that "Christians," at least, have to practice. But, then, no eschatological occurrence is involved, because such imitation is a human possibility. This can then take the further turn of thinking that only where this possibility is resolutely actualized does God's will occur. So what was supposed to be eschatological existence becomes life under the law. The law may now be more severe and its righteousness exceed that of the pharisees, but with effort it can be fulfilled. And if, upon reflection, the extent of the effort required is realized, a two-level ethics can be developed, and doing the whole law can be expected and demanded of only a small circle.

"The Jesus-business" (*die Sache Jesu*) is being moved by the Jesus-kerygma; and the Jesus-kerygma, for its part, implies a christology. If this is overlooked, being moved loses its eschatological character. To be sure, it is not necessary that the christology implied by the Jesus-business become explicit. But if the Jesus-business ceases to be understood as eschatological event, it is no longer the business of Jesus.