

On Jesus as Decisively Re-presenting God

To what extent is my statement that Jesus is the decisive re-presentation of the meaning of God for us misled and misleading except on the understanding that the Jesus about whom it is made is the Jesus who is the subject of the constitutive christological assertion, "Jesus is the Christ"? In other words, isn't there a risk of misunderstanding (and self-misunderstanding!) involved in such formulations as "Jesus is the Christ, not because he *actualized* the possibility of faith and, unlike us, actualized it perfectly, but because he *re-presents* the possibility of faith and, for us, re-presents it decisively"? Of course, the contrast in tense between "actualized" and "re-presents" is not accidental or unintended. But it may well call for an explanation that I fear I have too often failed to provide because I was not clear in my own mind that and why it was called for.

The point is that christology *sensu stricto* always has to start with the Christian witness of faith on which it is supposed to be the critical reflection—and not with anything considered apart, or in abstraction, from this witness and the christological assertion explicitly constitutive of it. But if one starts in this way, one has no concern to show that, as a matter of empirical-historical fact, what Jesus thought, said, and did re-presented a certain possibility of self-understanding, which was then further re-presented by the earliest apostolic community in its witness of faith—however important all this may be for establishing empirical-historical continuity between Jesus' own witness and the witness of the apostles. One begins instead with a witness of faith that itself claims decisive authority for human existence, but that points beyond itself to its own moment of origin as also its abiding principle and hence as its explicit, primal authorizing source. Because it is to the ontic aspect or pole of this source that the Christian witness refers as Jesus, its claim that Jesus is the decisive re-presentation of the meaning of God for us is by way of expressing what all forms of kerygma (Jesus-kerygma and Christ-kerygma, Jesus-Christ-kerygma and Christ-Jesus-kerygma) and hence all christologies as well are simply so many ways of expressing.

Otherwise put: to say that Jesus is the decisive re-presentation of the meaning of God for us is to speak of him, not from the standpoint of empirical history, but from the standpoint of existential history and faith, which can accept the Christian witness only by acknowledging the event of Jesus as the ontic aspect or pole of its own origin and principle and as of decisive significance for human existence. This means that talk of Jesus as the decisive re-presentation of the meaning of God for us is in order only as long as it is clearly understood to be a way of asserting or confessing with the apostles and all who stand in their succession that Jesus is the event through which the meaning of God for us implicitly presented everywhere, in the experience of every woman and man, is decisively *re-presented*—to us and to anyone else who experiences the challenge of the Christian witness to her or his own self-understanding.

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