

Marxsen says, quite rightly, that the criterion for judging “Christian” talk of God “may not be simply posited, but has to be worked out and justified” (“*Christliche Ethik im Neuen Testament*: 29). But how, exactly, is this to be done?

That there is an empirical-historical aspect to doing it is clear enough. But there is also a transcendental, or a priori, aspect—analogously to the way in which there is and must be an a priori christology involved in every a posteriori christology.

It is instructive to develop this analogy. According to my a priori christology, x is truly said to be the Christ (or any of the other things functionally equivalent and interchangeable therewith) if, and only if, x is the explicit primal ontic source of the normativeness of any witness rightly taken to be normative, formally or substantially. In other words, x can be the Christ if, and only if, x is not *a* norm, not even *the* (highest or primary) norm, but is rather the explicit primal ontic *source* of all norms. The a priori criteriology, then, that would be consistent with such an a priori christology would hold that x is normative witness and hence *a* norm if, and only if, being itself appropriate to the Christ thus understood, it properly functions as *a* norm for validating the appropriateness of some or all other witnesses. If it properly functions to validate *some* other witnesses, it may be said to be *substantially* normative, and *a* norm in this sense. If, however, it properly functions to validate the appropriateness of *all* other witnesses, it may be said to be *formally* normative, and *the* norm in this sense.

But what witness does properly function as formally normative and, in this sense, as *the* norm or criterion? Clearly, the answer required by my a priori criteriology is that that witness properly functions as *the* formal norm or criterion that neither is nor could be normed by any other norm properly so-called, because it is normed immediately by the Christ. In other words, it is the original and originating and therefore constitutive witness to the Christ. Even as the Christ is the explicit primal ontic source of its authority, so it is the primary authority authorized by the Christ.

Thus, from the standpoint of my a priori christology and criteriology, the Christ and the criterion are correlative concepts that can be defined only in relation to one another. Assuming, then, that Jesus is the Christ, one may infer that the witness of the apostles, as the original and originating and therefore constitutive witness to Jesus as the Christ, is the criterion. Conversely, assuming that the witness of the apostles is the criterion, one may infer that the Jesus to whom they bear witness is the Christ.

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