

'The Kerygmata has no value for Christians today'. Evaluate this view.

1. The Kerygmata is the content of the preaching of the Early Church. It can be seen in Paul's writings and also in the speeches in the Acts of the Apostles. Dodd identified 6 main elements:
 1. The Age of Fulfilment has dawned, the "latter days" foretold by the prophets.
 2. This has taken place through the birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
 3. By virtue of the resurrection, Jesus has been exalted at the right hand of God as Messianic head of the new Israel.
 4. The Holy Spirit in the church is the sign of Christ's present power and glory.
 5. The Messianic Age will reach its consummation in the return of Christ.
 6. An appeal is made for repentance with the offer of forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, and salvation.

Even though these are the basis of key theological concepts of Christianity, they have little or nothing to do with modern practice. Indeed it is doubtful that most Christians would even be able to say what the content of the Kerygma is. However, many Christians as part of their weekly worship recite the creed, and the creed contains the essence of the elements of the Kerygma. It is true they may not refer to the kerygma as such, but the content would certainly be known through the creed. It forms the basis of most Christian's beliefs. For many Christians the creed is understood as referring to historical events and forms the basis of faith.

Nevertheless, Christian life is about action and the Kerygmata does not have much relevance to daily living. As Dodd said "The New Testament writers draw a clear distinction between preaching and teaching." For many Christians, especially charismatic Christians the focus is on more recent divine revelation. God continues to reveal himself and new teaching is also considered to be revealed through the Roman Catholic Church. Clearly some Christians would challenge claims of God revealing above and beyond the Bible since they regard God's word in the Bible as final and sufficient. Others would go further and challenge the Bible as God's inspired words since they argue that the kerygma contains error. Namely that the early Christian community expected the imminent return of Christ but this has still not happened. Further attack has come from scholars such as Bultmann who argued the Kerygmata were not statements of historical truths. Bultmann stated that "The kerygma is incredible to modern man, for he is convinced that the mythical view of the world is obsolete." They are full of mythological language. He argued for the need to demythologise for "...the importance of the New Testament mythology lies not in its imagery but in the understanding of existence which it enshrines." Joseph Fletcher believed that essentially Jesus' message was agape.

Perhaps the statement that the Kerygmata has no value is an overstatement. However its value at least seems limited. The Christian life is about action and so it is the didache not the Kerygma that is

important.

2. The very language of the Kerygmata indicates that it is not of value to Christians today. It can no longer be seen as expressing historical truths. Our understanding of the world and the universe has rejected such statements as “Jesus being exalted to the right hand of God” and “the return of Christ”. Even if they were not rejected as historical truths, they focus on theological concepts and not on everyday living. The Christian faith is about living life. Therefore it is the teaching that is important not the Kerygma.

In any case, it is doubtful that many Christians even know what the Kerygma is so it cannot be of much value. Rather than unreliable and mythological stories written 2000 years ago, many Christians today believe that God speaks to them in the present day or speaks through the Church. Others challenge the view of the Bible as God’s inspired words since they argue that the kerygma contains errors. Namely that the early Christian community expected the imminent return of Christ but this has still not happened. Rather than focus on myth, people like Joseph Fletcher argue that the essential message of Jesus is agape (love). It is this that is the heart of Christianity not a set of mythological stories.

Some may try to demythologise the Kerygma statements but that is not how the early church understood them so the demythologised understanding of them is unlikely to be what they meant when they were originally written down.

Comments

The first example is the better example of the two. A number of scholars are referred to in a relevant context and there are a number of relevant quotations that are attributed. The structure of the debate shows a process of reasoning. It responds to points made and raises counter points which are then addressed. The argument reaches a conclusion that is supported by the discussion. However, there is material in the answer that is irrelevant – namely the list of the 6 elements that Dodd identified. It would have been better just to allude to them as does the second example answer.

The second example has no mention of any scholars apart from Fletcher. It does have some biblical quotes from the Kerygma but there are no quotes from scholars. All the material is relevant and reasons a case to support the statement. Some of the points needed developing to make clear how they supported the statement. However, the most serious weakness is that it is only one-sided. There are no challenges to the points made and no positive case for the view that the Kerygmata has value for Christians today. There is no reference to understanding the Kerygma in terms of an existentialist approach following the work of Bultmann.

‘The kerygmata are not historical statements but myth.’ Evaluate this view with reference to Christianity.

Bultmann argued that the Kerygmata was myth rather than history – a challenge that affected the very foundations of the Church. He saw the Kerygma as embedded in a world view that implies a three-storied universe of heaven, earth and hell. He also saw it influenced by Jewish apocalyptic thinking and Gnosticism. Bultmann’s approach was not to eliminate the mythology but to interpret it or as he

expressed it, to “demythologise” it. For Bultmann that meant discovering the existential meaning behind them, and this meaning is valid for all time since human nature remains the same even though world views change. The kerygma is about the existential understanding of human life. Many would see that this Christian understanding of human life is detached from its basis in history, i.e. from the historical person of Christ. Christianity becomes a philosophy of existence.

In response, Bultmann’s appeal to Gnosticism has been challenged on grounds of its dating. The Gnosticism is post Christian rather than pre-Christian and so could not have influenced the New Testament. Equally the claim by Bultmann that the New Testament is not interested in the facts about Jesus has also been challenged. The scholar Stanton has argued that there are objective facts about Jesus in the Kerygma. Paul’s theological message is given objective grounds which are the historical facts that Paul uses as support. Both Cullmann and Pannenberg have emphasised that God is known not in existential moments of decision but in God’s self-revelation by his historical acts.

So the debate between myth and history is one between subjectivity and objectivity. Faith needs an “empirical anchor” (Macquarrie). Christian faith is faith in a God who acted in history.

QUOTES:

1. “The reality of God is not that of the idea but of the concrete happening.” (Bultmann)
2. “Bultmann retreats from revelation as an historical event into an abstract philosophy of life.” (Thielicke)
3. “Does not Christ become an outworn myth of ever decreasing importance?” (Thielicke)
4. “That God is creator means that man’s action is not determined by timeless principles but rather by the concrete situation of the moment.” (Bultmann)
5. “The resurrection is no more than the pictorial symbol of an encounter, not an event in its own right.” (Thielicke referring to Bultmann’s view)
6. “Bultmann means that although in a myth a man appears to be describing the world, he is in fact really describing his own existence.” (Henderson)
7. “...the importance of the New Testament mythology lies not in its imagery but in the understanding of existence which it enshrines.” (Bultmann)
8. “We are left wondering why the event of Christ is not myth like everything else.” (Thielicke)
9. “We know almost nothing about the historical Jesus, and we need to know almost nothing.” (Bultmann)