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ΣΕΙΡΑ ΔΕΥΤΕΡΑ: ΜΕΛΕΤΑΙ ΚΑΙ ΕΡΕΥΝΑΙ

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CRITERIA AND VALUATIONS IN BIBLICAL STUDIES

All scientific research, whether it falls within the range of sciences or humanistic disciplines, intends to find criteria which can help to examine, to judge and to understand the matter which is the object of inquiry. It is obvious that the criteria have to be adequate in every case in order to do justice to the matter in question.

I want to start by remarking that I let aside to a large extent the metaphysical implications of my subject. Christianity in its origins and Biblical studies of our days are treated as far as they are historical and empirical phenomena. I am aware of the fact that this implies a limitation of outlook. It gives, however, an opportunity of focusing more clearly on some questions of method which might be of a wider interest.

Biblical studies have, in the course of the last centuries, developed in various respects thanks to the critical methods of research which have gradually been tried and perfected and which are now generally applied. To a large extent these methods are identical with those which are used in ancient history and classical philology. All methods will have to be varied and adjusted with regard to the object of research. And it is always the specific character of that object which draws the attention of the observer. If we turn to the writings of the Bible and especially of the New Testament, it can easily be stated that they are singular in a specific way.

The writings of the New Testament: Gospels, Acts, the Epistles, to some extent Revelation, are practically the only sources available to reconstruct the life of Jesus and the rise of Christianity. Considered as historical sources these writings differ from documents and evidence in other historical contexts so far as they are no objective reports. They are committed to the matter which they deal with, and they intend to get those committed who read them. They are products, as

a matter of fact, of the religious activity of the first Christian generations; parts of their testimony, their teaching and preaching¹.

This being so we need not disqualify the gospels as historical sources. Almost all texts which are left from antiquity or other periods of history are to some extent and in some respect tendentious or biased. It is the task of the scholars to do their best in order to detach from the texts and to reconstruct the course of events which has given rise to the texts in question.

No texts and documents, historical, literary, religious, have been dealt with so meticulously as the writings of the New Testament. And in few areas of research the results have been so disparate and even contradictory. Fortunately there always appear signs of a certain consensus also. At every point the scholar meets with a variety of interpretations, and yet a serious exegesis is possible. This is so because all who work in this field agree that certain methods of research have to be applied. These methods have not been derived from ideas or preconceived opinions but are founded, in an inductive way, upon facts and observations. The findings which are won in this way can be checked and verified by everyone who studies the matter and has sufficient knowledge².

It must, however, be admitted that a consensus can be found mainly so far as it is a question of examination and evaluation of elements. As soon as one proceeds to a combination of elements into a more complicated picture, a factor of personal judgement comes in and leads to a differentiation of opinions and conclusions³. And this in spite of the fact that all interpretation of Biblical texts now has to use inductive ways of arguing.

The scholarly methods used for the interpretation of Biblical texts can roughly be divided into three categories of criticism: literally criticism, historical criticism and theological criticism⁴. The last-mentioned does not imply any special gnosis, restricted to guardians of a sacred tradition or to propagandists of a missionizing faith. The term is used as a designation for that kind of study which deals with the aim or

1. W. D. Davies, *Invitation to the New Testament*, London 1967, pp. 75 - 135.

2. R. Kieffer, *Essai de méthodologie néo-testamentaire*, Lund 1972. (Coniect. Bibl., New Test. Ser., 4).

3. H. Clavier, *Résurgence d'un problème de méthode en histoire des religions*: *Numen* 15 (1968), pp. 94 - 118, see pp. 111 f.

4. H. Cazelles, *Écriture, parole et Esprit*, Paris 1971, pp. 107 ff.

message of Biblical writings. It is analogous to that other kind of questioning which, in the field of English literature, tries to find out what Shakespeare had in mind when he wrote let us say Macbeth and what he wanted to tell his contemporaries in a play which seemingly takes place in a remote past.

Literary criticism, in our classification, comprises all that belongs to the daily craft of a Biblical student. There can be listed textual criticism, philological analysis, literary criticism in the traditional, more restricted sense of the term, furthermore form criticism, redaction history and the latest achievement in this field: structural analysis. All these different kinds of criticism are interdependent, and all of them presuppose some knowledge of the setting in which the writings — or the stages behind them — have come into existence and have been handed over in oral or written form.

Then we touch upon contexts where *historical criticism* is actualized. An interpretation of writings like those of the New Testament can never be based on an isolated study of these writings. They have to be viewed in the setting of their time, in the complicated system of political, religious and social history. Moreover every attempt to locate these writings, their origin as well as their purpose, in space and time, calls for a model of the historical situation and the historical development. It has to be conceived not only from an inside study of the texts but with the aid of and with regard to the wealth of testimonies which history has left behind it ¹.

The fact that Jesus has lived can certainly not be proved by archaeology, and nobody would pretend that in order to make this fact credible, evidence of so solid a kind will have to be produced. The Biblical writings are, however, studied with details which bind them with close ties to history in a palpable sense. A striking example is the famous inscription found at Delphi which enables us to date the office of Gallio as proconsul of Achaia and thus to establish a firm chronology of Paul's journeys ².

As late as last year a book was published where it is alleged, once again, that Jesus had probably never existed but can best be explained as a mythological figure ³. This specimen, written with a sincere inten-

1. A. Richardson, *History sacred and profane*, London 1964.

2. F. J. F. Jackson & K. Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity*, vol. 5, London 1933, pp. 460 - 464.

3. G. A. Wells, *The Jesus of the Early Christians*, London 1971.

tion, shows clearly the danger of an interpretation which is consistently confined and restricted to the texts in question. If the New Testament were an isolated group of writings, without connections with the world surrounding it, then it could be acceptable to explain the hero of these writings as being a mythological figure. But what we have to start from and what we have got to interpret is not only a collection of writings, the New Testament, but the undeniable fact that those who believed in Christ were organized before the end of the first century, in congregations spread over the countries around the Eastern part of the Mediterranean. In view of this evidence it seems hazardous to accept a myth as a plausible explanation of a historical phenomenon of that magnitude.

Historical criticism takes into account all we know about events and conditions of life — political, social, religious —, about moods of thinking and the development of ideas. At the same time it presupposes, as a promise for all study of history, that there are invariable components in human attitude towards life, that human beings are facing the same fundamental problems throughout the ages: the struggle for life, adaptation to and co-operation with fellow men, the desire to make existence tolerable, to find the sense of life.

This leads even to what I call, in accordance with a book recently published by the French Old Testament scholar H. C a z e l l e s, Theological criticism¹. Unlike him, however, I prefer, to use this term in a wider, somewhat more essential meaning. The reason why scholars and students have for ages and ages, devoted enormous labour and time to the interpretation of Biblical writings is, as a matter of fact, not only the interest or importance of these writings from the point of view of literature or history. It is rather the fact that they have a religious content, that they are intended to convey testimonies of religious experience and a message, or let us rather say messages, addressed to their readers and that they have been read as such throughout the ages. Theological criticism does by no means necessitate that the scholar who deals with the writings in question believes in their testimony or message. There can be found, it is true, certain analogies to for instance the advantage of having the gift of music or the sense of colours for those who study the works of M o z a r t or impressionistic paintings. But theological criticism operates in a rational and systematic way, starting from one fundamental presupposition, namely that the

1. See note 4, p. 440.

writings which are to be interpreted make sense, and that they do it in that context which is the object of religious study or, with a Christian key-signature, of theology. Theological criticism endeavours to establish as well that which is common in the outlook of the writings in question as that which makes them differ from each other. Models of historical development within primitive Christianity are often conceived not by means of purely historical criteria but on the basis of an assessment of the development of concepts and ideas in the texts as compared with one another.

Within the realm of theological criticism lie the attempts to trace the center of the religious ideas of the New Testament, its essential message. It is an undeniable fact that the answers given to that certainly legitimate question are dependent — we might be tempted to say: to a deplorably large extent — upon the question which we put to the texts. In this way we have got a series of different models of New Testament thought only in the course of this century. To mention some of the most characteristic of them: first, the proclamation of God's fatherly love and of the infinite value of the human soul, a view in accordance with the optimistic outlook of pre-war Europe; second, the challenge to an existential decision which emanates from the *kerugma*¹, the announcement, of the death and resurrection of Christ. This is in accordance with existentialistic and especially Heideggerian philosophy. Third, a somewhat confusing trend which is in accordance with the troubles and hopes of today's world: the message of the New Testament, especially of the gospels, is interpreted in terms of social and political revolution. Christ is portrayed with features taken from Che Guevara and similar heroes of our time. All these different models of interpretation have one element in common: they reflect in a distinctive way the religious or philosophic or social commitment of the interpreter or of the setting in which he works and lives.

Yet we need not feel discouraged by this subjective strain of interpretation. First; the same phenomenon can easily be noticed in the study of literature or art, not to mention political sciences. Second; the bulk of proper exegetical work is to a very small extent affected by these questions of a more general kind. Third; the models proposed by schools and currents and generations are duly criticized by other schools, other currents and new generations. Fourth; no model created

1. H. Ott, *Kerygma*, I: Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, 8rd ed., vol. 3 (1959), cols. 1250 f.

as the result of serious questioning is without use. Even if criticized and replaced by other models, it makes its specific contribution to the whole of comprehension and scholarly insight. And it shows that reality, also in a religious approach, must be viewed from different aspects and must be apprehended by means of complicated models in which different dimensions of human experience of life are duly reflected.

Having dealt at length with these preliminary points of view, I am now going to submit to you some concrete problems which can give us an occasion to make some critical reflections. There is the question of causality in historical research. In natural sciences all arguments are based on the fundamental fact of causality. Causality enables us to make experiments and to formulate laws which can be proved by experiments.

The role which natural sciences play in the modern world has to a large extent lead humanistic research to accept arguments in term of causality as a sign of a truly scientific outlook and attitude. In recent philosophical thinking, however, the notion of causality in historical research has been exposed to serious doubts. To what extent is it possible to speak, in tracing a historical process or development, of a causal connection? Even if we are convinced that a certain series of events by no means is due to mere accident. The Finnish philosopher G. H. von Wright has shown, in a recently published book based on lectures in the United States, that if we in a historical context apply the concept of causality in a strict, scientific sense we end up on trivialities¹.

One example: In the study of ancient Greek history we are used to speak of the consequences of the battles of Marathon or Thermopylai. But arguing in terms of causality in the strict sense we can only say that the armies engaged in the fights were obliged to bury their dead or that the side which was stopped could not make its way to the nearest destination which it had decided to reach before the battle was fought. As soon as we consider historical events in a wider perspective, we are left in the lurch by causality, or rather, we argue in a way which makes use of other judgements in the interpretation and understanding of historic coincidences or chains of events. And this even if we speak of an event A as the cause of an event B or of B as being the consequence of A.

1. G. H. von Wright, *Explanation and Understanding*, London 1971, pp. 132 ff.

And now an application within our special discipline. In the field of New Testament studies we usually speak of the death and resurrection of Jesus as being the cause which initiated Christian belief and gave rise to Christianity as an historic movement. And in text-books you will in this connection find a reference to that wellknown Christological formula or summary of early Christian preaching which Paul the apostle quotes in his first epistle to the Corinthians: «...that Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the Scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised to life on the third day, according to the Scriptures» (1 Cor. 15 : 3 f.). But what is said in this text and all similar texts throughout the New Testament is by no means that a man named Jesus happened to be put to death and that this mere fact is for others a reason for becoming a believer. He who had died was not whosoever but the very person who was proclaimed to have been and to be the Messiah hoped for. Further Paul says that he died «for our sins» and «according to the Scriptures». Every Biblical student knows that these qualifying determinations are interpretations which have been added as a result of the reflection thought of the early Church. It is true that the process of interpreting the death of Jesus in terms of Jewish tradition as an atonement («for our sins») or as an act of obedience to the will of God («was the Messiah not bound to suffer», Lk. 24 : 26; «he humbled himself and in obedience accepted even death», Phil. 2 : 8) was gradually developed in a church where the proclamation of this death already was a well established fact. But as far as we can go back in the analysis of sayings and formulas about the death of Jesus we realize that those who believed in Jesus as being the Christ were simultaneously convinced that his death had a meaning, that it was a death «for», «in favour of» (ὕπερ) those who had followed him or those who trusted in him. Thus all relevant passages of the New Testament can teach us that it was not the brute fact of the death of Jesus which gave rise to Christianity in terms of a causality where one fact (the coming into being of Christianity) is the consequence of another fact (the death of Christ). Rather we have to establish the connection in the following way: the first Christian believers had come to the conviction that Jesus had intended to give his life, to submit himself to the execution, and because of this conscious intention, because of this self-abandoning readiness to sacrifice life itself, his death was considered remarkable. This conviction was one of the starting-points of faith.

This way of arguing can be supported by a series of analogies. The death of a person as a mere fact can turn a claim of events into

a new direction, but in itself it has no other importance than that it is the end of a life. If the death of a warrior or a civil hero is commemorated, it is because he who died did so intentionally, willingly and consciously. As was the case with Socrates. In Biblical tradition, in Judaism of Hellenistic time before the rise of Christianity, the memory of martyrs who had sacrificed their lives for the sake of the Jewish people was held in high regard. And yet it was not their death as such but their willingness to die which was emphasized and even considered to have an atoning effect¹.

If Christ's death is said to be an atonement for sin, this interpretation still fits into what we have stated hitherto. If a sheep or a goat is sacrificed in order to bring about atonement, it is still not the animal's death as such which has an expiating force but the act as an expression of the intention of the sacrificer. This is why the offering of Isaac by Abraham is praised, in Judaism as well as in Early Christianity, as a prototype of the ideal sacrifice.

Similar statements can be made about the understanding of the resurrection in the New Testament and in Christian belief as a whole. It is not the resurrection as a fact, however we want to explain it, or even the mere conviction that Christ had risen from the dead which — in its relation to the death of Jesus — caused the historic phenomenon of Christianity. Cardinal Daniélou, has drawn our attention to the fact that in the writings of the New Testament the proclamation of the resurrection is always followed by some kind of interpretation². In the resurrection narratives of the gospel this interpretation has been laid into the mouth of one or two angels. Not the fact as such but the fact accompanied by an interpretation can thus be discovered to be the cause of a historic process. And the question where the interpretation in the final resort comes from is an important one.

Here we touch upon a criterion which deserves more attention than is usually given to it in New Testament studies. Even if we are not entitled to speak of causality, in a strict sense, we shall have to balance impulses and effects in a reasonable and credible way.

In sciences the implications of causality can be subjected to measurement. Certain processes demand a supply of energy, and we can

1. E. Bammel, Zum jüdischen Märtyrerkult: Theol. Lit. Zeitg. 78 (1953), cols. 119 - 125. N. Brox, Zeuge und Märtyrer, München 1961, pp. 132 - 173. R. Mach, Der Zaddik in Talmud und Midrasch, Leiden 1957, pp. 133, 150, 153.
2. J. Daniélou, La Résurrection, Paris 1969, pp. 23 - 38.

calculate how much is needed and where it comes from. In historical and religious contexts arithmetical operation cannot be used. And still it must be legitimate to seek for a plausible proportion between impulses and effects which we postulate in the reconstruction of a historic process. That tremendously powerful activity which has had as its results the writings of the New Testament on one hand and the rapid and unrestrainable expansion of early Christianity on the other will have to be set in an adequate relation to a personal factor from where impulses of that size can have emanated.

In historical studies in our days a decisive importance is attributed to economic circumstances, ideologies and other collective forces. And it is obvious that factors of that kind must be taken into consideration. Yet the writing of history can never be reduced to a description of social structures and of anonymous forces being at work within them. The political, cultural and even religious situation of the Mediterranean world in the beginning of our era can never be correctly pictured if certain personal factors are not duly taken into consideration. As is the case with the undeniable role that dominating personalities have played in the process of historical development. We need only mention figures such as Alexander or Augustus.

The position of Marxism in the world of to-day cannot either be explained exclusively out of those economic factors which that universal philosophy considers almighty. Marxism would not be what it is without the person of Marx and without that philosophical system which is the result of his proper gift and work. And without Lenin and his achievement to transform the Russian nation to a bastion and source of power for that movement, Marxism would not have become a power of global dimensions.

In modern Biblical studies one of the most meticulously examined and most vigorously discussed questions is that of the so called self-consciousness of Jesus. The problem is not whether Jesus has used, with reference to his proper person, the very term Messiah. Almost certainly he has not done this. But the question is whether Jesus has attributed, to his person and to his work, an importance which corresponds with the position attributed to him in the belief of the early Church or whether he was only a prophet without any marked intention. If he had no self-consciousness, he was consequently considered a saviour only because of certain experiences which some of his followers made after his death.

Examining the texts with all means of criticism scholars will arrive

at opposite answers on that fundamental question. Yet the texts, viewed only as texts, will never be able to solve that problem. At this point a valuation of the historical process and its phenomena will be necessary. Are we really ready to admit that religious movements such as Judaism, Buddhism and Islam have been launched by founders, who were dominant and highly conscient personalities, whereas Christianity is the work of groups of devoted, more or less anonymous men, whose first task was to create the picture of a saviour and who combined this picture with the memory of a teacher or prophet? Although this man was a historical person, he had, as far as he was concerned, not the slightest intention to be what nevertheless he was made after his death. I cannot find that model credible in a historical perspective. It does not justice to that unparalleled impetus which is the mark of Primitive Christianity and of the Early Church. Only an overwhelming, inspiring impression, emanating from the historic person of Jesus and transformed, it is true, by the experience of his death and resurrection, can plausibly have initiated that irresistible force in early Christian faith.

Reflections of an analogous kind can be made with regard to the problem of the unity or diversity of the writings of the New Testament. Until last century the canonical collection of gospels, epistles and other writings was considered more or less a homogenous unity. Modern research has demonstrated a variety of literary forms, language, style, ideas, outlook within these writings. These observations in their almost embarrassing multiplicity have led scholars to the conclusion that different writings or groups of writings have been created or have taken shape, independently of each other, in different congregations or parts of the Early Church. Thus it is supposed that some parts of the Church were interested in the memories which had been kept from the days of Jesus, and they wrote the gospels, each in its own way. Others were more concerned with missionary activity and confrontation, on an intellectual level, with ideas prevailing in the Hellenistic world. In such a setting Paul conceived his epistles without paying attention to the earthly life of Jesus. This model does not seem to do justice to historic reality.

Here we get aware of the necessity of a balance between analysis and synthesis in all scholarly work. For a long time analytical work has prevailed in Biblical studies. Elements of tradition, differences of thought or expression have been demonstrated with constantly refined methods. But on the other hand there are still obvious shortcomings in

our ability to synthesize these findings to models which are suited to account for historical facts. New Testament Christology, the different forms or expressions of belief in Christ as a saviour, has been successfully split up into a series of Christologies: Messiah-Christology, Son of God-Christology, High Priest-Christology, Markan, Johannine, Pauline Christology, to mention only a sample of them¹.

Now it is said that some groups of early Christians believed in Christ as Son of God, under the influence of Hellenistic religions, others in Christ as High Priest, in dependance upon Judaism, and so on. Once again results of a proper analysis are being isolated instead of being considered in relation to each other. There is no evidence, for instance, of a Son of God-Christology as an object of belief in this or that local congregation or in some part of the Early Church. It seems to do more justice to the texts if these different Christologies are understood not as separate phenomena but as keys of interpretation, expressing by means of concepts found in the milieu, different aspects of a general belief in Christ. If these various Christologies in the very beginning, as to their origin, had been disparate objects of divergent beliefs, they would not have been able to co-exist and to supply each other, without rivalry and without polemics in the writings of the New Testament and in the subsequent period of the Church. In this regard we ought to learn from natural sciences that putting a number of elements side by side does by no means imply in itself a synthesis to a consistent compound.

We shall now shortly touch upon some problems of interpretation. From an epistemological point of view we usually speak of hermeneutics. Interpretation in the proper sense of the word does not confine itself to the establishment of the original text or to the historical process which shaped the writings in their present form, nor does it aim at a presentation of the genesis of primitive Christianity and of the Early Church. Literary criticism and historical criticism are certainly indispensable at this stage of study too, but above all theological criticism is required.

As far as interpretation is concerned, the essential questions are as follows: What is the sense of the New Testament as a whole, what is the belief of early Christianity in its variety and in its central emphasis? What is the sense of different writings and of single passages, taken

1. F. Hahn, *Christologische Hoheitstitel*, Göttingen 1963. O. Cullmann, *Die Christologie des Neuen Testaments*, 2nd ed., Tübingen 1958.

for themselves and viewed in the whole context? The difficulty is that what we have called sense is a very complicated feature and that it is disastrous to interpret Biblical scriptures as if their message were a rather simple one.

All interpretation works with the silent presupposition that the texts said to readers or listeners in the time when they first were written basically the same as they say to us. We start from the assumption that we in our time still are able to understand what the author meant. We take for granted that there is a continuity of human thinking and of religious belief. Therefore all interpretation of texts from the past can be described as a dialogue. We ask questions and get answers, we start from a preliminary understanding and have to be open for corrections of that understanding and for new points of view which are given to us by the text and its context. This process of reciprocity is often called the hermeneutic circle. It would be more adequate to call it, as has done E. Coreth, the hermeneutic spiral¹; and this because this process of arguing is in fact not a *circulus vitiosus* but implies a progress to higher levels of outlook and understanding. An example of the existence of two cultures at least in the field of terminology is, I am sorry to say, the lack of references in hermeneutical literature to the fact that the «hermeneutic circle» signifies the same phenomenon which in sciences is called feed back.

A text has to be interpreted within horizons of understanding, to use the terminology of H. G. Gadamer². A valuable insight is that we have to be conscious that there are and there have to be established two horizons of understanding, one of the text in its time and context, one of the interpreter, comprehending all qualifications of the interpreter to understand, out of his time and situation, the meaning of the same text.

The horizon of understanding which is that of the text itself is especially important not so much from the point of view of understanding in general but with regard to the necessity of criticism and correction of subjective judgements made by the interpreter. We need criticism to counterbalance the two dangers which always menace Biblical interpretation: fundamentalism and arbitrariness. Fortunately certain controls are so to speak built into the material. The gospels,

1. E. Coreth, Grundfragen der Hermeneutik, Freiburg / Br. 1969, p. 103.

2. H. G. Gadamer, Wahrheit und Methode, 2nd ed., Tübingen 1965, pp. 287 - 290.

especially the synoptic gospels, show a duality of words and actions, proclamations and achievements in the ministry and life of Jesus. They balance each other and in a characteristic way shed light upon each other. This is beyond doubt a structure which in its outlines goes back to historic reality.

In using the complementary function of words and actions as a valuable means of control, we must, however, take into consideration the fact that sayings as well as acts are, to a large extent, symbolic. I confine myself to mentioning the parables among the sayings and an intervention such as the cleansing of the temple among the actions. We shall not enter into the vast field of the nature of symbolism in religious speech and religious acts, where similarities to scientific language can be found. Symbolic sayings and symbolic actions operate in different ways, and they are rightly classified as image-symbols and event-symbols¹. The parable of the lost son makes sense whether the story is true or not. The central event-symbol of the New Testament, the cross, would be nonsense if Jesus had not been executed by crucifixion. Images and events thus express a significance in different ways and are therefore not interchangeable. Moreover this duality will have to be used as a means of control in the interpretation mainly of texts taken from the gospels.

In one respect the horizon of interpretation which surrounds our texts is often being unduly restricted in contemporary exegesis. As has been pointed out previously, gospels and epistles are traced back to different milieus of origin and to separate traditions, and they are treated as if they were independent of each other and had nothing in common except some fundamental belief in Christ as saviour.

From the point of view of historical criticism it is highly incredible that there has even been a single Christian congregation which has not had access simultaneously to some form of gospel tradition, telling words of Jesus and memories of his life and death, and to a teaching and instruction which was in some way similar to that of the epistles, though certainly in more primitive forms. We begin to see — I would say again — that the epistles and their context by no means have originated independently from the gospel tradition. Quite on the contrary they reflect a fundamental process of theological thinking and

1. J. V. L. Casserley, *Event-Symbols and Myth-Symbols: Angl. Theol. Rev.* 38 (1956), pp. 127 - 137, 242 - 248.

moral instruction based precisely upon a knowledge of what Jesus had said and done.

A study of the epistles can show us how the words of Jesus were used and put into practice in the life of the Early Church ¹. The lack of direct quotations of the words of Jesus can partly be given the explanation that the Church refrained from applying them in a verbal, fundamentalistic sense. On the contrary they were alluded to, expounded and applied in a flexible way, in every case with due reference to the situation in which the interpretation took place. Normative in matters of belief and matters of life were not the words of Christ (*verba Christi*) but the kerugmatic formulas of creed and the instructions for a Christian life (*regula fidei*) of which there are numerous examples in the epistles.

Much could be said about fluctuations in the emphasis which is laid on individual and social dimensions respectively in Christian belief and Christian life, on a look through the history of Biblical interpretation in the course of this century. Following upon a period when the idea of a social gospel was equated with the optimistic conviction of progress in the sense of the word which was voluntarily adopted in the beginning of this century, there came a time when New Testament interpretation to a large extent worked from presuppositions taken from existentialistic philosophy. The name of Heidegger is famous also in the field of exegesis. The lasting merit of this existentialistic form of theological criticism is to have stressed the fundamental issue of the challenge to a decision, in the very center of human personality. This challenge emanates in fact from the proclamation of the gospel. The decision has to be made not primarily in view of a life beyond the limits of space and time but with regard to the integrity of life *hic et nunc*, in the actual situation.

Recently the existentialistic interpretation of the New Testament has been questioned so to speak from the left, by currents and bearers of ideas whose main concern is to emphasize the social implications of Christianity, now as well as in its origins. Not all of these, fortunately, dream of a theology of revolution. And it can rightly be said that some shift of the focus from individuality to social solidarity was needed.

In fact a complexity of individual and social aspects of life in close interrelation can be found already in the New Testament. It has

1. D. L. Dungan, *The Sayings of Jesus in the Churches of Paul*, Philadelphia 1971.

again and again been actualized by means of the continuous and still periodically shifting process of interpretation throughout the ages. In this way it has given its contributions to the humanizing of man and of social structures by models of thought and models of life in which human dignity and social responsibility were made perspicuous and obliging. Not even the problem of responsibility with regard to the material world is lacking in Biblical writings and Christian tradition and can be actualized in various ways in our age of pollution.

I cannot omit just to touch upon a crucial point in the process of interpreting and understanding. We have spoken of the two horizons of understanding. In what way are they connected with one another? Are there frames of reference which are common to both? As it is our task to judge whether there is a continuity in the content of the message as well as of belief corresponding to that message, we have to look for another criterion. I want to point out that there is one phenomenon which is witnessed both in the New Testament as viewed in its context and in Christianity to-day in its different manifestations: the experience of a spiritual power which liberates man by always confronting him with new and wider dimensions of individual and social life.

May I be allowed to finish with a personal remark. I happen to have been brought up in a science-minded milieu where many of the names and achievements in the history of science which have passed by during these days belonged to the topics of daily conversation. Therefore I have tried to make my survey a modest contribution to the dialogue between those who work in different fields of research and who face the increasing need of co-operation and mutual information. In this regard it may be taken as a sign of gratitude towards those who have arranged this exciting symposium.

Εἰς τὴν εἰσήγησιν τοῦ καθηγητοῦ κ. Harald Riesenfeld ἐπηκολούθησε συζήτησις, ἥς μετέσχον οἱ κάτωθι :

Bishop DEMETRIUS TRAKATELLIS :

The connection between «hermeneutic circle» and «horizons of understanding» is basic indeed. It should be noted, nonetheless, that usually by the term understanding we mean our understanding of understanding. This might be Platonic, Aristotelian, sceptic, yet it is always occidental. There are, however some other basic types of understanding such as the Hindu and the Buddhist ones, which differ radically from ours. How seriously do we take them into account in our interpretative efforts within the contemporary world ?

SAVVAS AGOURIDIS :

I wish to express my appreciation for the presentation made by Dr. Riesenfeld. There is only a point of clarification, I would like to proceed with. He spoke of the brutal fact of Jesus' death, as well as the reflective thinking of the early Church on His death in a way inherent to the process «cause and effect». I would like to know what is, for you, in this whole process, the importance attached to the life of Jesus, itself. The Gospels acquaint us with the life of Jesus. No doubt, their authors have very carefully selected the material they use; they also write from a certain angle of perspective. It is obvious, however, that they are interested in Jesus' life as a life. I am under the impression that His life, historically speaking, was very important for the origins of Christianity. Reflection, even on Jesus' life from a post-resurrection point of view, is positive and important in all four Gospels. The Gospel of John, in particular, tries to impress upon the reader that the life of Jesus was a brilliant manifestation of the Glory of God, even before Jesus' death and resurrection. Whatever the significance of reflection might be for the Evangelists in considering the life of Jesus, it is very clear to me that, inasmuch as they saw it, life had a meaning per se. I trust that this important factor in the process was not taken into due consideration by Professor Riesenfeld.

GÜNTHER BORNKAMM :

Prof. Agouridis hat die kritische Frage gestellt, ob die neuzeitliche Bibelwissenschaft die Geheimnisse der Heiligen Geschichte nicht allzu

sehr aus dem Blick verloren und die Offenbarung auf das Niveau allgemeiner historischer Ereignisse reduziert habe. Ich verstehe den Ernst dieser Frage sehr wohl, meine aber, daß in diesem beklagten Sachverhalt recht verstanden die Paradoxie (nicht zu verwechseln mit Absurdität!) sichtbar wird, die wesentlich zur Bibelwissenschaft gerade auch als einer theologischen Disziplin gehört. Das soll heißen: ihre Arbeit gilt einer bestimmten, in einen historischen Kontext verwobenen Geschichte (Menschen, Vorgängen, Texten), die wie jede andere auch mit allgemein gültigen Methoden und nach allgemein verbindlichen Kriterien erforscht sein will, egal, ob wir glauben oder nicht. Das, was Grund des Glaubens ist, zeichnet sich in dieser Geschichte nicht für jeden sichtbar ab. Pilatus und die Juden konnten Jesu Wirken und Tod als eine erledigte Episode ansehen, nicht zufällig hat darum dieses Geschehen in außerbiblischen Quellen nur eine sehr bescheidene Spur hinterlassen. Das Nein des Glaubens zu solcher Geschichtsbetrachtung läßt sich ohne Rücksicht auf die Möglichkeit solcher relativierenden Betrachtung überhaupt nicht verstehen. Allerdings hat auch der Glaube seine in den biblischen Texten bezeugten Gründe. Nach diesen zu fragen ist die bleibende, heilsame und keineswegs vergebliche Aufgabe der Theologie. Um es an einem Beispiel zu konkretisieren: Was veranlaßte die erste Christenheit dazu, den Kreuzestod Jesu als Gottes Heilshandeln an der Welt zu verstehen? Am Kreuz sind bekanntlich ungezählte Aufrührer unter den Römern gestorben. Warum und in welchem Sinn also konnte Paulus «das Wort vom Kreuz» dieses Jesus als Inhalt der Heilsbotschaft bezeichnen? Dem hat die Theologie nachzudenken.

SAYVAS AGOURIDIS:

I should like to point out one or two things, concerning what Professor Bornkamm has just told us. He approached the subject of Heilsgeschichte, in relation to the fact of Faith. I would like to underline that — as far as I understand it — any encounter with God and the fact of Faith cannot be conceived outside the Heilsgeschichte. The call of God and my response to it can only be realized in the context of faith, such as displayed by Abraham, Moses, the Prophets, Jesus, and the communion of the Saints, the Church.

Of course, there is always a risk inherent to some kind of «sacralization» of History; I fully agree with Prof. Bornkamm with regard to the danger of falling back into heathendom, of making History appear something quite different than what it actually is, through the biblical

perspective. There is, though, another peril also, equally important to aforesaid risk, i.e. to deny History and turn out the Gospel into some sort of psychology. I believe Prof. Bornkamm would agree on the general principle.

A general approach to history, from the point of view of the Gospel, is «Yes» and «No». As I see it, though, people with different traditions might formulate different propositions, or provide a different accent to «Yes» and «No».

OLOF GIGON:

Ich darf wohl als klassischer Philologe noch einige Erwägungen beifügen, legitimiert einfach durch die Tatsache, daß bekanntlich die Ereignisse des Neuen Testamentes sich nicht in irgendeiner grauen Vorzeit und in einem gänzlich abgelegenen Winkel der Erde abgespielt haben, sondern im Römischen Reich und in der uns recht gut bekannten Augusteischen Zeit. Da erhalten denn, wie mir scheint, zwei Gesichtspunkte ein besonderes Gewicht.

Zunächst wird es dann sehr auffallend, daß die berichteten Ereignisse sich gewissermaßen auf der Ebene der Beliebigkeit und Unauffälligkeit halten. In einem beliebigen Augenblick, in einer gänzlich unbedeutenden, wenn auch keineswegs unbekannten Landschaft und in einer historisch hellen Zeit läuft da ein Leben ab, das äußerlich gesehen sehr wenig Bemerkenswertes an sich hat (auch den gewaltsamen Tod eingeschlossen). Das ist das eine. Dieser Beliebigkeit aber kann man nicht einfach den Glauben der Christenheit gegenüber stellen als einen ganz auf sich selbst gestellten Glauben, wie dies im Votum von Herrn Bornkamm zum Ausdruck zu kommen schien. Es gibt noch einen anderen Faktor, auf den der Referent sehr richtig hingewiesen hat und den ich energisch betonen möchte. Es ist die reale, nachweisbare geschichtliche Wirkung Christi in den ersten Generationen nach seinem Tode. Es ist ja schließlich eine historische Tatsache, daß verglichen mit anderen geschichtlichen Phänomenen ähnlicher Art das Christentum eine erstaunliche Geschichte gehabt hat. Herr Riesenfeld hat darauf hingewiesen, wie rasch es sich schon im 1. Jhd. ausgebreitet hat. Als Philologe darf ich beifügen, daß es schon im 2. Jhd. Schriftsteller hervorgebracht hat, die den Vergleich mit allen ihren Zeitgenossen (den Zeitgenossen natürlich, nicht mit Platon!) ohne weiteres aushalten, da liegt eine Breite und Intensität der Wirkung vor, aus der man immerhin in einem gewissen Umfang auf den Rang der Ursache schließen

darf. Zweifellos ist es nicht so, daß man etwa in einer glatten Gleichung von der Wirkung auf die Ursache zurückgehen dürfte. Der Glaube bleibt immer ein Faktor, der sich nicht wegdisputieren läßt. Aber er ist auch nicht alles. Die geschichtliche Wirkung, die unmittelbar nach dem Tode Christi einsetzte, darf nicht einfach bagatellisiert oder gar einfach unterschlagen werden. In diesem Sinne möchte ich Herrn Riesenfeld nachdrücklich unterstützen.

FRITZ KRAFFT:

Verzeihen Sie mir bitte, wenn ich in die rein theologische Diskussion mit einer ganz ketzerischen Frage hineinplatze. Ich bin nämlich weder praktischer Theologe noch Systematiker, ich bin Historiker, und zwar Historiker der Naturwissenschaften. Die Theologie hat ja immer eine etwas eigenartige Stellung zu den Naturwissenschaften gehabt. Herr Verbeke ist für das Mittelalter darauf eingegangen. Das Mittelalter hatte aber den Vorteil, daß es eine fertige Naturwissenschaft vorfand, die so beschaffen war, daß es sie dem christlichen Dogma aufpfropfen und ihm anpassen konnte. Dann kam aber eine sehr kritische Zeit im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert, die Stellung zu den ganzen Fragen des heliozentrischen Systems betreffend, eine zweite starke Kontroverse zwischen Theologie und Naturwissenschaften, jetzt mit der Schöpfung ein zentrales Problem der Theologie betreffend, rankte sich um die Problematik der Evolution (Darwinismus) und der Urzeugung. Wir haben nun heute und gestern gehört, welcher Akribie und Methodik sich heutzutage die Theologie bedient. Deshalb meine ganz naïv-ketzerische Frage: Ist die Theologie heute gegen solche Mißgriffe gefeit?

HARALD RIESENFELD:

Concerning the horizons of the interpretation, which Bishop Demetrios mentioned, I would say that I want to make a plea for a wide horizon. Three weeks ago I heard professor Raimundo Panikkar, and I must confess that I was very much impressed by his attempts to combine the thinking of Christianity and of Hinduism. It is vital to open a dialogue in order to make the gospel universal. We cannot reach large parts of humanity if we do not try to establish an open view on Christianity and from Christianity upon the world.

In connection with the discussion this morning I would like to stress the need of rethinking of the problem of tradition, a process

which is seriously going on. But it is an illusion if we think that we have only to go back to the New Testament in order to find the original truth. The New Testament as well as other texts handed down to us from the past can only be read and interpreted in the light of the tradition on which we stand ourselves and in which we are rooted. A Swedish colleague of mine, professor P. E. Persson, is for the time being at work with a comparison of the theology of the Reformation and Orthodox theology towards the end of the Middle Ages. He is going to demonstrate that in many regards when Luther thought he was going back to the New Testament, he is in fact dependent upon the tradition of Christian thought in Western Europe. In many respects Catholicism and Reformation theology are much closer to each other than each of them is if compared with the Orthodox tradition. But this means that it will be extremely useful to discuss questions of New Testament exegesis from starting points in different traditions such as Orthodox, Catholic or Lutheran.

In this way we get a more concrete understanding of what the New Testament means. It is obvious that the original revelation which has been laid down in the New Testament has always a critical function towards tradition. But we have always got to balance this criticism and tradition in the sense of a continuous confrontation of the Biblical message with the reality of Christian life throughout the ages. Revelation will always have to be interpreted in the light of the problems of our world and of the time being, which now implies also the dialogue with non Christian religions and traditions.

Concerning the problems of origin I would prefer not to say that Christianity was born either before the death of Christ or after. Both periods form an inseparable whole. The person of Jesus and his words could not be interpreted in an adequate way during his earthly life. Not even the disciples were then able to believe in him. The resurrection laid the foundation of Christian faith, being a belief in Jesus as Saviour. So I would say that it is the impressions emanating from the life of Christ as synthesized and transformed and lifted up to a higher level by his death and resurrection that is the beginning of Christianity.