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# The Theological Approach to the Historical in the New Testament *Kerygma*

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## A. WHY IS THIS APPROACH A THEOLOGICAL ONE ?

There is a new quest of the historical in the New Testament on the field of Protestant Bible research.

What is the background of this new quest in the development of Protestant theology ? Giving an answer to this we immediately think of the modern methods of historic research in general. The Pali Canon of Buddhism, the Vedic Literature, etc., have come under the microscope of modern historic research. The various sources of the writers, the literary strands, the faith of the author, his tendency—all these have come under the purview of modern historico-criticism. The Christian theologian is questioned: Can the Bible be excluded from this research that is extended to all works of world literature ? It cannot ! On the contrary Christian faith itself calls for constant self-criticism by recollecting its very basis again and again. Christian faith has to be constantly aware of what is its real basis and what is not.

In today's discussion of this problem one point is very often being overlooked: before modern historic research and criticism were born, the seed for this modern development in Protestant Biblical theology was deeply seated in the theology of the Reformation time. The new quest of the historical in the New Testament cannot be separated from the specific, theological approach to it. The new quest of the historical in the New Testament will be misunderstood and will be misused, if it is not seen in its close connection with—and even more—in its origin in Reformation theology.

Martin Luther pointed back to the Bible as the only norm of preaching. 'Faith comes from what is heard' (Rom. 10:17), i.e. not the written but in the first instance the proclaimed word, the spoken word, is the medium by which God addresses us. What then is the role of scripture ? Scripture, being the written fixation of the earliest Apostolic preaching of the

Church, becomes by this origin qualified to be the only means of testing the Church's proclamation and life of all times regarding its originality. Does the Church stick to her genuine task? That is a question which can be answered only with the Scripture in hand. By this question the Christians are faced with the task to find the proper explanation, the right exegesis of the Bible.

But here the question arises: what is the *right* exegesis? Within the Bible we find tensions and even contradictions. Already Luther discovered them clearly and dealt with them in the introductions which preceded the individual books in his translation of the Bible. This discovery led him to the valuation of the individual Biblical scriptures and to searching for the proper norm of an expository interpretation of the Bible. What is this norm? Luther answers: The Bible is true as far and as much as it promotes Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 2:2), and Christ bears witness to God's absolute will of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19).

This implies that the truth of the Bible does not lie in any detail one likes to choose in it, i.e. not for example in the accuracy of a historic date, of a figure or of the distance between two places. The truth of the Bible is not mechanical. It lies in this one central topic, Jesus Christ. Therefore, this book is also not like a flat table, where everything is levelled down to equal importance. There are deep places and high places, there is the highest mountain peak, Jesus Christ, from where one can overlook everything. It is not a sacred code like the Talmud or the Qur'an where every paragraph is of the same standard. Christ is the heart of the Bible, but there are also parts on the margin of this book, being rather distant from this heart or even separate from it. (Think of one example only, the Book of Esther, in which there is no mention of God at all).

There is of course a fundamental difference between the approach to any phenomenon of human history and the approach to this central topic of the Bible. That Napoleon had been living, that he had done this or that in this or that place and time, is proved by written historic documents and is made known by the writings of the historians. But if we look at Peter's Sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2), then we see that the picture of Jesus, its essential genuineness, is proved 'in demonstration of the Spirit and power' (1 Cor. 2:4).

We would know very little about Jesus of Nazareth, if we had to depend only upon the brief remarks about him found in the Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, and the Roman historian, Tacitus. Why? These writers did not take any interest in his person. Only those who were moved by his words and deeds in their spirit have delivered to us his portrait. Some of those who purposely want to oppose the Christian spirit are going even so far as to reject the historicity of his crucifixion and

more than this, as is the case in the Qur'an, although Jesus' being sentenced to death under Pontius Pilate is reported even by Tacitus. That means that finally there is no other approach to the history of Jesus than through faith.

Jesus is real to me—even much more real than any other historic figure—because he occurs in my life as *the* powerful word, as God's word of love and forgiveness, and because this word works in my heart with a spirit that claims the totality of my life. The New Testament says, he is the exalted, the resurrected one (Acts 2:33). Being seized by his word I experience his presence in a unique, incomparable way. To preserve this word it has also been written down and is delivered to me in this form by others. But it carries weight, is real, is genuine not by virtue of the deliverer, not by virtue of the written letter as such, but by virtue of the promise in this word and by virtue of the spirit and faith that is brought about by it.

This word can have this power and authority only because it is not born in my poor, presumptuous heart. For the believer this word comes in no other way than as the great surprise, as that which he can never claim or produce himself. That means that this word is not born in the development of human history. It comes from beyond history. The theologian says: it is absolutely transcendent. But its coming implies that it occurs *in* history and *with* history, it implies the existence of a speaker, of an author, and if it is really a living word, then it presupposes a speaker who also acts according to his word. 'The word became flesh' (John 1:14).

The word of God's love and reconciliation in action—that is the basic subject of a Christian theology. The theologian has to show forth this root of the Church's message, this heart of the Bible, and has to examine critically all theologies before him, beginning with that of the Evangelists, Paul, John, etc., up to the present time, whether their theology is really an unfolding of this *kerygma*, whether their proclamations are branches really growing out of this root. He will have to bring to light what there is, the very kernel, and what are the various means and ways of expression in the New Testament *kerygma*. How far have these forms of expression properly served the one Gospel, and how far do they still do that now?

At this point the historico-critical method of research that is known also from other fields of research is employed in the theological task. The faith in the divine word, contained in the Bible, does not do away with the fact that there are in it the human words in which and amongst which the divine word, Jesus, is confessed.

God's word in the mouth of man! That means that the Bible is a document grown in history, and God's word, this word of forgiving love through Jesus, has to be discovered within this history. So the historico-critical method is not a secular

principle that is imposed on Bible research, but it is the faith in the crucified and resurrected Jesus, it is this faith itself that calls for such a critical approach to everything that is meant to serve him.

## B. HISTORIC RESEARCH AT WORK IN THE SERVICE OF NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

If it is the task of a theologian in the New Testament field to bring to light what is the very kernel of the *kerygma* of the Church, then also the historian, being employed in the task, will have no other aim before himself. But he formulates the question in his own way: What has priority within the Christian *kerygma*? What was first?

Searching for an answer let us consider certain formulations that are adopted in the New Testament. Our question regarding each of them will be: What do they say about the uniqueness of the Christian faith? Do they in itself bring out the unique character of the Christian message or are they only secondary, depending on other innermost layers of the *kerygma*?

(1) Jesus is the Messiah, the king of the ending time. This designation does not have its origin in the New Testament but in the Old Testament and in late Judaism. It varies from meaning God's final messenger, coming in connection with a cosmic catastrophe, to the meaning of a political king who will restore the ancient kingdom of David in an idealized form. Bar Kochba, for instance, was believed to be the Messiah in A.D. 132. So when we find this designation with Jesus it implies a reinterpretation of the term which can be understood only from other features of the New Testament Jesus portrait. This new interpretation cannot be brought out of the term itself.

(2) Jesus is proclaimed as 'the son of God'. We immediately think of Ps. 2:7, 89:27 f., 2 Sam. 7:14 and other passages. The king of Israel was in his enthronement adopted as the son of God. Another comparison might be the Pharaoh of Egypt or the Japanese Tenno, whose dynasties were believed to be of direct divine descent. Both types of understanding, the Old Testament-Biblical and the extra-Biblical have different implications. Is Jesus the adopted son or a divine man, or is he the son of God neither in the one nor in the other but in a third sense? The answer to this does not lie in the word 'son of God' itself. It has to be found by reference to the specific character of the *kerygma*.

(3) Jesus said to him: 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life . . .' (John 14:6). These three terms will occur in almost all the major religions of the world and they will get their colour from the very context of the respective religion in which they are found. They say nothing about Jesus unless they are seen in connection with basic features of the *kerygma*.

(4) The author of the letter to the Hebrews argues in chapter 9 that when Jesus, being without sin (*see* 4:15), sacrifices his life, it becomes the sacrifice that is really worthy before God.

There had been other Jewish martyrs who had suffered the same amount of torment and death for their faith. We think of the old scribe Eleazar and the seven brothers and their mother in 2 Maccabees 6:18 ff. About them it is said in 4 Maccabees 17:22: 'They became the antipose to the sin of the nation; and the Divine Providence saved Israel, aforesaid afflicted, by the blood of those pious ones, and their propitiatory death.' These martyrs have laid down their lives for not eating pork, being faithful to the Jewish law.

What was the witness of Jesus when he laid down his life? Only in connection with his witness will his death get the significance it has got in the Christian *kerygma*.

These four points, to which we could add more, are just to show us the process of selection in searching for the fundamental layer of the *kerygma*. What does remain as the basis on which all other statements of the *kerygma* will rest? For describing this elementary character, this focus of the *kerygma*, I like to use the word 'dimension'.

Is there real originality? If such originality were not there, then the historian would declare Christianity a Jewish sect, a variety of Judaism. The following will show that these dimensions, when kept inseparably in relation to each other, are not derivable but spontaneous.

The Christian *kerygma* is called Good News, because it reveals God's love as the core of his nature in an absolute and universal sense. Love is a term found in the language of many religions. The unique relation of God's love to the basis of the Christian *kerygma* is indicated by the four dimensions into which this love extends.

(a) *God's promise to restore the life of his creation to full communion with him (Soteriology)*

(1) It is under the impact of God's radical demand (*see b*)—revealing man's sin down to the very root of his existence—that God will effect man's salvation. That means that he establishes communion with man through his forgiving grace alone. That sin reaches so far is known to Old Israel at the highest points of the prophetic movement: 'Woe is me! for I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips . . .' (Isa. 6:5). It is this background against which the Gospel of forgiveness is sounded. The one who says: 'God be merciful to me, a sinner!' is accounted righteous (Luke 18:9-14). The 'prodigal son' says, 'I am no longer worthy to be called your son', and he experiences the kindness of the father (Luke 15:21 f., also 15:7-10).

As the Gospel clearly reveals God's will to restore man's communion with him against the barrier of sin, so this Gospel strengthens the hope that God will remove also the other barrier: he will make an end of the world of physical distress and destruction. He will resurrect man for participation in God's life. Here the early New Testament *kerygma* refers to the traditional expressions of this hope in the Old Testament, e.g. Isa. 35:5 f. (in Matt. 11:5). 'Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy . . .' In the Old Testament this promise refers to the whole of creation (Isa. 35:6 b f., 11:6-9, etc.). This faith carries special weight when facing death: 'I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God' (Mark 14:25, also 12:26 f.).

In contrast to the apocalyptic literature, the New Testament *kerygma* refrains from painting in the details of *how* resurrection may be effected. It only emphasizes *that* it will be and that it aims at the unrestricted communion with God (Mark 12:25).

(2) This promise of God and this hope has a real basis, because it occurs (*see c*), it is proclaimed in authority and becomes an event which induces faith; and this event is the final and conclusive event in God's history. Here lies the difference of the Gospel from the Old Testament which points into the future only: 'With everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer' (Isa. 54:8 b). As this act of God is final it is not a particular and temporary but a universal and eternal, forgiving grace, a *total* love that is revealed in the Gospel. It is total, because it is based on the absolute promise, given to man through the mouth of God's final representative. This love, being capable of overpowering sin and distress in our heart, occurs concretely when this prayer is granted to us: 'Our Father . . .' (Matt. 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4). This direct simple address implies that he is near at hand as he listens to and understands the prayer as a father, being near to his child, is expected to understand it (*see also* Matt. 7:7 ff.; Luke 11:5 ff., 18:1 ff.).

(b) *God's will to reveal radically the genuine nature and purpose of man's life (Nomology)*

(1) The basic issue of the *kerygma* was the totality of God's love. Accordingly also the demand of God, also his claiming man's life for communion with him, cannot be understood other than as a total, a *radical* demand. What counts before God is not only the verifiable deed that is done. God sees beyond the fulfilment of the letter of the law into the heart, he sees the anger, name-calling, evil desire and insincerity (Matt. 5:21 ff.). Other old laws, such as concerning divorce, retaliation, limitation of love to the neighbour in one's own community alone—laws which were once meant to restrict arbitrary action but are now

conceived by man as concessions, defining an area of leeway for permissive acts—are understood as superseded. God demands the whole of man (Matt. 25:14–30). 'The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light' (Matt. 6:22 f., also Mark 7:6 f., 15). If God's claim goes so far, then man cannot raise any claim before him, but must become before God like a child, who completely depends upon the parents (Mark 10:15, also Mark 2:17 a; Luke 17:7–10, 16:15, 18:9–14; Matt. 20:1–15). No one is better than another (Luke 13:1–5).

What is the centre of gravity in the demand of God? As God's own nature is revealed as absolute love the double commandment of love combines both, the love that God wants from man for himself and man's love for his neighbour, and in both cases love is understood as absolute: Love 'with all your heart' and not less than you would love yourself! (Mark 12:28–34). Both sentences are like two sides of one coin. As the communion with God is based on his forgiveness so also the communion with the neighbour can be based on forgiveness alone (Matt. 5:43–48, 18:21 ff.; Luke 7:47; Matt. 6:12–14 f.). All this will mean complete surrender to God: 'Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it' (Luke 17:33). Life in communion with God has its reward in itself.

This radicalism of God's demand, the vigour of his claim, indicates that his aim cannot be only a temporary but must be an eternal communion with man. The integrity of this eternal communion is in question now when man reacts to the demand of God. 'If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire' (Mark 9:43, also 45, 47, 10:21; Matt. 6:19 f., 8:11, 10:28, 12:36).

(2) What is true regarding God's promise is also true regarding his demand: this demand is not merely an idea but is proclaimed, it occurs (*see c*). But this radical demand alone would not induce faith as in the very end it shows sin and makes guilt manifest (Rom. 3:20). It is the message of forgiveness that wins the hearts and so carries the *kerygma* through the world. Therefore the close connection of the words 'Repent, and believe in the Gospel', which we find in the summary of the *kerygma* in Mark 1:15.

On the other hand embracing the Good News can take place only in radical renunciation toward the world. 'No one can serve two masters' (Matt. 6:24). 'No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God' (Luke 9:62). For this kingdom one must be ready for any sacrifice (Matt. 13:44 ff.; Mark 10:25; Luke 14:15 ff., 28 ff.). The demand occurs now and it calls for real doing now as the parable of the two sons points out (Matt. 21:28 ff.).

But renunciation does not mean withdrawal from the world.



As far as the *kerygma* represents the divine demand it challenges me here and now, when its word points to God's ordinances, to the very structure of my day-to-day life. This is the meaning of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29 ff.). We have not to search for the presence of the demanding Lord, but this demanding Lord is before us immediately like the wounded man that is lying on the way along which the priest and the Levite had to go. God is present in the need and distress of the neighbour whose mere existence challenges us to serve him. What we do to the neighbour we do to him and what we don't do to the neighbour we do not do to him. (Compare the double commandment of love, Mark 12:28 ff.). As obedience to God has to prove itself in the concrete situation of meeting the neighbour, the God of the total demand is present in one's life through him.

(c) *God's action to meet man with the kerygma, inducing faith and making it finally decisive for his communion with him (Eschatology)*

(1) All that has been said so far about the total promise of the Gospel would remain within the sphere of a mere thinking, an idea of what could or should be, unless and until the God of this Gospel goes into action, meets man with his eschatological offer. Man cannot say the Good News to himself. The coming of the Kingdom cannot be enforced by man: 'The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground . . . The earth produces *of itself*' (Mark 4:26 ff.). The *kerygma* refers to Jesus of Nazareth. According to it, it is he who offers this salvation in the name of God as the final call now. This implies his authority to do so, and this implication caused a Christology, a theology about his person to come into existence.

Now the promise goes out and now the communion of God and man takes place with those who believe in it, and that means at the same time with those who believe in him. 'Blessed are the eyes which see what you see!' (Luke 10:23 f.). 'The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them' (Matt. 11:5). 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied' (Matt. 5:3 ff., also Luke 6:20 f., 10:18; Mark 2:18 f.). 'But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons; then the kingdom of God *has come* upon you' (Luke 11:20, also Mark 3:27).

(2) The same holds good regarding God's total demand. It is not an idea of a demand, it is the divine demand in action through Jesus that calls for a decision. As he in his preaching, in his acting, in his own person signifies this eschatological, total demand of God, the decision for it amounts to a decision for Jesus himself. 'Blessed is he who takes no offence at me' (Matt. 11:6). 'You have heard . . . but I say to you . . . (Matt. 5:21 f., see also Luke 12:8 f.; Matt. 8:22; Luke 14:26).

The very fact that Jesus had disciples who made their decision for him by leaving their homes (Mark 1:16 ff., 2:14) does not mean that God's kingdom grows only in this way. 'Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother' (Mark 3:35). God's reign takes place wherever and whenever man responds to God's challenge in the hardships and sufferings of this world, bearing 'his own cross' (Luke 14:27).

Jesus' call for decision is the eschatological call, so also he pronounces the eschatological judgement for those who do not respond to it. 'The queen of the South will arise at the judgement with the men of this generation and condemn them; for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold something greater than Solomon is here' (Luke 11:31 f., *see also* Matt. 23:1 ff.; Mark 12:38 ff.; Luke 6:24 ff.).

The summary of what has been said so far about the *kerygma* is given in the word of Mark 1:15:

'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand'—God meets.

'Change your mind (repent)!'—God demands.

'And believe in the Gospel'—God promises.

(d) *God becomes present in my life for his communion with me (Realization)*

The phrase 'to bear one's own cross' most probably arose in the time of the Zealots who for the sake of their faith would have to reckon with being crucified (*see* Genesis, Rabbot-Midrash 56, 36 c). But when Jesus himself was crucified the cross became a unique catastrophe. Does it not imply that God abandons with Jesus, with his guarantor, the whole *kerygma*? Now by an actual obstruction the faith in God's absolute love and in the rightfulness of his total demand, i.e. the faith in the full realization of God's eschatological presence in this world of sin and destruction, is challenged, is put into question. 'We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel!' (Luke 24:21).

(1) God answers the question in the event of Easter. Jesus was 'raised' (Acts 2:32). This means at first that God pronounces his 'yes' about Jesus' way despite the cross (Acts 2:24). And secondly it means that God—true to his promise—in his absolute love and despite man's sin, reaching its climax in the crucifixion of his eschatological messenger, 'presents' Jesus anew—and once for all time. 'If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved' (Rom. 10:9).

In the light of the resurrection the believer realizes that Jesus was 'delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God' (Acts 2:23). Jesus 'was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification' (Rom. 4:25, compare Isa. 53:5). What does this mean?

God's wrath has given men up to their own 'base mind' (Rom. 1:28) which brought about a world of 'tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword' (Rom. 8:35). However, this is not clearly realized by men, at least not everywhere and not at all times, and 'in his divine forbearance God had passed over former sins' (Rom. 3:25 *b*). But now God allows Jesus to suffer the consequence of sin, holding him up as an example: 'For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin . . .' (2 Cor. 5:21 *a*). God's aim in doing this is to put Jesus' life forward 'as a mercy-seat' by his blood (Rom. 3:25 *a*=*hilasterion*), i.e. as 'the place of reconciliation'. As the proclaimer of God's absolute love to man and as the proclaimer of man's absolute love to God Jesus consummates this twofold witness by sacrificing his blood, his life for it. God looks at me—I look at him—in terms of Jesus' cross and resurrection, being the divine eschatological saving act.

This means at the same time that by cross and resurrection also the authority of Jesus' person is confirmed. His resurrection amounts to his *exaltation*: 'God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified' (Acts 2:36 *b*, also Rom. 1:4).

By this faith in the realization of the absolute love of God in my life here and now, the powers of physical distress and destruction are also vanquished in my heart: 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?' (1 Cor. 15:54 *f*., also Rom. 8:38 *f*.). 'He who raised the Lord will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence' (2 Cor. 4:14). This hope is extended to the whole of creation: it 'will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Rom. 8:21).

(2) Regarding God's total demand it has to be said at first that God remains true to this demand, which is fulfilled in the obedience of Jesus. This obedience finds God's approval in his resurrection (Phil. 2:8 *b f*.). This means for us: 'So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God . . .' (Rom. 6:11, also 1 Cor. 5:7), because those who belong to Jesus 'have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires' (Gal. 5:24).

The same holds good regarding the body and its distress. 'We wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies' (Rom. 8:23 *b f*.). This redemption begins now: 'For in this hope we were saved'.

(3) All that has been said about the cross and Easter as divine eschatological saving act would not become my concern, here and now, unless and until the God who exalted Jesus becomes personally present, acting with me. We are really aware of the Easter event only when we are aware also of Pentecost and we are aware of Pentecost only when becoming aware of the divine spirit, working in us here and now. 'Being exalted

at the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear' (Acts 2:33). Wherever and whenever this happens salvation becomes a present event. 'Now is the day of salvation' (2 Cor. 6:2 *b*). *Now* Jesus is crucified and raised, *now* I am crucified and raised with him.

How does the spirit work? In what way does salvation become a present event for me? It is *in*, *with*, and *under* the *word*! God was 'placing amongst us the *word* of reconciliation' (2 Cor. 5:19 *b*, also John 15:3, 17:14 *a*, etc.), and 'faith comes from what is heard' (Rom. 10:17 *a*). Like the eschatological word of God that 'became flesh' in Jesus Christ (John 1:14) the sacraments as the 'visible word' (Augustine) have the promise that the Lord in his crucifixion and resurrection will become truly present, deal and commune with the believer through them (Matt. 28:19 *f*.; Rom. 6:4; 1 Cor. 11:23-26).

With this last chapter about God, becoming present with me in word and sacrament, this outline of the New Testament *kerygma* has reached the point where a nearly two thousand years' old history becomes *my* history. The historical of this *kerygma* is what it is as it affects and changes the history of my life here and now. We become aware of the Jesus of the past only when we are met by the living, the resurrected Jesus in his present word here and now.

This fact involves another important feature of the Christian *kerygma*. It has both continuity as well as discontinuity. The discontinuity is given by the ever new situation into which this *kerygma* is pronounced. This causes not only the growth of new expressions and new theological terms but also the formulation of new Jesus—words. The development of the *kerygma* up to the lofty heights of the Trinitarian and soteriological dogmas of the Church and the Gospel of John with its new Jesus—words, formulated in the spirit of the resurrected one through the mouth of the confessor, are prominent examples for the creative nature of the *kerygma* and for the reality of the risen Lord, working in his Church here and now.

But what is the safeguard that this *kerygma* will preserve its identity under the constant changes of human mind and thinking? How can the unity within the necessary diversity be maintained? How will the new words of the resurrected one prove their genuineness?

The continuity of the *kerygma* throughout the history of its proclamation lies in those four dimensions. It is by this analogy of faith alone that unity is preserved in all diversity. Whether in Asia or in Europe, whether in the first century or in the twentieth century the Christian *kerygma* will always be there where the message of God's absolutely and universally forgiving love and his radical demand call for a final decision, under the power of the crucified and resurrected Lord.