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The Problem of 'History' in the Gospels in the Light of the Vatican's Constitution on 'Divine Revelation'

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The present paper is mainly an attempt to trace out the main lines of the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church towards the much discussed problem of 'history' in the Gospels as it has been recently promulgated in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation. I should like to make a reference to the nature of this document of the Second Vatican Council. Of the 16 documents of the Council only four are called 'constitutions'; the others are called either 'decree' or 'declaration'. The 'constitution' is, with regard to importance, far above the 'decrees' and 'declarations'. Moreover, we may note that of the four constitutions one is a mere 'constitution' (on Liturgy), another one is a 'pastoral constitution' (on the Church in the modern world), whereas there are only two 'dogmatic' constitutions—one on 'Divine Revelation' and the other on 'the Church'.

We shall see in the following pages the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on the nature of 'history' in the Gospels. The purpose of the paper, therefore, is only to see how far the Roman Catholic Church has already come in this matter. It may not be so far as it should have come; but the fact that it has already come a long way, and that too after a problematic beginning, is a sure and encouraging sign that the doors of the Roman Catholic Church are open to all genuine advances in Scripture studies.

On 20th June, 1961, the Holy Office of the Roman Catholic Church, now called 'Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith', released a *Monitum* which gave some strict warnings to those who call into question the genuine historical and objective truth of the Scripture, not only of the O.T., but also of the N.T., specifically in regard to the words and deeds of Jesus

Christ.¹ It was a warning, not an instruction or a decree advocating or condemning any specific view. Moreover, it had a predominantly pastoral concern for the anxiety and doubts created among the clergy and laity by indiscriminate views on Scripture.

However, this *Monitum* was a sequel to the heated controversy between the progressive Jesuit-run Pontifical Biblical Institute and the conservative Lateran University in Rome,² a controversy occasioned by an article of Father Alonso Schökel in an Italian periodical *Civiltà Cattolica* titled: *Dove va l'esegesi cattolica?* (where is Catholic exegesis heading?).³ These developments at last resulted in the suspension from their teaching assignments given to two of the *Biblicum's* New Testament scholars, M. Zerwick and S. Lyonnet. (We have to recall here that they resumed their teaching office after two years).

As usual, discussions started among Roman Catholic exegetes concerning the scope and implications of the *Monitum*.⁴ A conservative writer in the *American Ecclesiastical Review* was happy about the *Monitum* because it was an 'unusually strong directive' and 'a slap on the wrist of those who tend to stray too far to the left in the search for innovation and novelty' and suggested that 'for some the *Monitum* is never sufficient and therefore stronger action must be taken'.⁵ Cardinal Ruffini invited the scholars to reflect if it is not the lack of humility and

¹ This *Monitum* was published in *Osservatore Romano* on 22nd June, 1961.

² A. Romeo, 'L'Enciclica "Divino afflante Spiritu" e le "opiniones Novae"', *Divinitas*, 4 (1960), 387-456; 'Pontificium Institutum Biblicum et recens libellus R. mi D. ni A. Romeo', *Verbum Domini*, 39 (1961), 3-17.

³ L. Alonso Schökel, 'Dove va l'esegesi cattolica', *Civiltà Cattolica*, 111, No. 2645 (1960), 449-460; cf. *L'Ami du clergé*, 71 (1961), 17-22; *New Testament Abstracts*, 5 (1960-61), 127; *Herder-Korrespondenz*, 15 (1, Oct., 1960), 45; J. A. Fitzmyer, 'A recent Roman Scriptural Controversy', *Theological Studies*, 22 (1961), 426-444.

⁴ G. T. Kennedy, 'The Holy Office *Monitum* on the teaching of Scripture', *American Ecclesiastical Review*, 145 (1961), 145-151; W. L. Moran, 'Father Kennedy's exegesis of the Holy Office *Monitum*', *Am. Ecc. Stud.*, 146 (1962), 174-180; G. T. Kennedy, 'A reply to Father Moran', *ibid.*, pp. 181-191; J. C. Fenton, 'Father Moran's prediction', *ibid.*, pp. 192-201; *Herder-Korrespondenz*, 15 (1961), 287; *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 23 (1961), 269; E. Galbiati, 'Un dissidio tra gli esegeti? A proposito di una recente polemica', *Scuola Cattolica*, 89 (1961), 50-53. J. A. Fitzmyer, art. cit. in note 3.

⁵ G. T. Kennedy, art. cit. in note 4, pp. 145, 148. He refers to the 'erroneous concepts of form criticism and historical method and their nefarious application to the sacred text. The pre-occupation with literary form has been the bane of traditional scholars. Undoubtedly, literary forms having parallels in non-Biblical material have shed light on the text. Pre-occupation with them has been a curse. One is often reminded of the blind man in the darkened room looking for the black cat that is not there. The literary form method of interpreting Scripture, while helpful, is subtly dangerous and should be used almost as an exception to the rule' (italics in text). Father Moran qualified it as the 'sheerest nonsense', art. cit., p. 176.

obedience which put them in danger of losing the faith.⁶ But to a balanced observer it was evident that the *Monitum* was not a condemnation of modern Biblical studies, for they are praised in the first clause of the *Monitum*; rather it was a warning against circulating views and opinions which popularized these serious studies without due caution and reverence to the Word of God.

The *Monitum* was much less an accusation levelled against the Professors of the Biblical Institute. As a matter of fact, the Cardinals of the Biblical Commission, with whose agreement the Holy Office issued the *Monitum*, had already expressed their solidarity with the Biblical Institute as early as 5th March, 1961. In the meanwhile expressions of sympathy and agreement were sent to the Biblical Institute from all parts of the world, also from important leaders of the Roman Catholic Church.

Moreover, it is to be noted that the insistence of the *Monitum* on the 'genuine historical and objective truth of the Sacred Scripture' was not to advocate a fundamentalistic approach to the Bible; rather it meant the truth formulated by the sacred authors according to various literary *genres*. The *Monitum* in no way wanted to discourage Roman Catholic exegetes from studying the historical background of the Scripture and from using modern critical techniques developed by non-Catholic scholars. In fact, it was in line with the freedom and encouragement extended to Catholic exegetes by Pius XII in his encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, the *Magna Carta* of modern Catholic Biblical studies. It was, however, felt in many circles that Catholic exegesis was going to suffer a setback, and the fear was all the more growing when the council of Vatican II started in 1962 with its problematic schema of the 'Sources of Revelation'. (To this point we shall come later).

When the flames of the controversy had come down and the atmosphere had been once again cleared of its dark clouds, the Pontifical Biblical Commission in Rome issued an elaborate 'Instruction on the historical truth of the Gospels' on 14th May, 1964.⁷ This document once again cleared up many misconceptions cherished by the conservative camp, and it may be considered as a landmark in the study of the Gospels for years to come. For it opened up new vistas of research and investigation for Roman Catholic exegetes, particularly regarding the problems connected with the 'truth of the events and sayings' of Jesus recorded in the Gospels. It specified the type of history the exegetes have to look for in the Gospel narratives. After calling the attention of exegetes to the basic fact of the

⁶ E. Card. Ruffini, 'Literary genres and working hypotheses in recent Biblical studies'. *Am. Ecc. Review*, 145 (1961), 362-365; *idem.*, 'The Bible and its genuine historical and objective truth', *ibid.*, 146 (1962), 361-368.

⁷ *Instructio de historica Evangeliorum veritate*, *Osservatore Romano*, 14th May, 1964, p. 3.

need of a mutual charity and a spirit of harmony among themselves, the instruction laid down certain principles which exegetes, professors of Scripture, preachers, popular writers and directors of Biblical associations should follow.⁸

An analysis of this instruction shows clearly that it does not in any way commit the Catholic scholars to a mere literalness in the matter of the historicity of the Gospels. Moreover, it does not contain a condemnation of any specific modern opinion about their historical value. It is true that the instruction catalogues in some detail questionable presuppositions of many Form Critics. But this is done with the specific purpose of clearing the way to a recognition of the positive values of the method of Form Criticism itself. To be sure, this document can be considered as the first official statement of the Roman Catholic Church which openly acknowledges the method of Form Criticism and frankly admits the distinction of the three stages of tradition in the Gospel material which has emerged from a Form-Critical study of the Gospels.

A word must be said about the very title of this instruction: *Instructio de historica Evangeliorum veritate* (Instruction about the historical truth of the Gospels). This could create some confusion for a casual reader, as if it is repeating once again the cautioning language of the *Monitum* of June 1961. It is evinced by certain outright remarks made by newspapers on the occasion of the publication of this instruction: 'Vatican cautions students of Bible—rejects as dangerous and invalid any conclusions not arising from faith—inquiry limits defined—modern historical methods accepted if scholars are wary of "prejudices"', wrote *The New York Times*.⁹ But a careful analysis of the text of the instruction reveals that the important word in the title is not the word 'historical'. It is to be further observed that par. 3 of the instruction, which states the problem which was the major concern of the *Monitum* of 1961, omits the word 'historical': '... in many publications circulated far and wide, *the truth of the events and sayings* recorded in the Gospels is being challenged'. It would appear that the omission of the word 'historical' in this context is intentional and significant. For in the text of the document this word 'historical' is used only once, and that too in a sentence in which concern is expressed regarding a certain philosophical and theological presupposition of the Form-Critical method, such as the denial of the existence of a supernatural order and the intervention of a personal God in the world through revelation. Otherwise the phrase 'historical truth' does not occur in any of the positive directives. It follows from

⁸ For a commentary on this instruction of J. A. Fitzmyer, 'The Biblical Commission's instructions on the historical truth of the Gospel', *Theological Studies*, 25 (1964), 386-408; A. Card. Bea, *The Study of the Synoptic Gospels: New Approaches and Outlooks*, London, 1965.

⁹ *The New York Times*, 14th May, 1964, p. 37.

these observations that the Biblical Commission is far more concerned with sketching in broad outlines the nature and character of the Gospel truth rather than in once again repeating and reasserting that the Gospels are historical.¹⁰

That this was a major and sure step of the teaching office of the Roman Catholic Church became evident by the recent promulgation of the 'Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation' by Vatican II.¹¹ This document briefly but clearly repeats the main principles discussed in the instruction on the historical truth of the Gospels. It is true that this document treats many other subjects, such as the meaning of Scripture and Tradition and their mutual relationship, the inspiration and interpretation of Scripture, the role of the Holy Scripture in the life of the Church.¹² We are here concerned only with the problem of how the Council understands and explains the 'historical truth of the Gospels' against the background of dynamic understanding of divine revelation and the history of salvation, which may be considered as a great contribution of Vatican II towards Biblical studies in the Roman Catholic Church.

However, it must be remembered that this precious document is the result of a series of controversies and discussions that have had to play their role for years in the Council. The great storm that was created in Rome and abroad as a result of an ultra-conservative scholastic type of theological approach presented in the draft, 'On the sources of Revelation', is too well known to be touched upon here. In fact, the history behind the *schema* on 'Divine Revelation' is to a great extent the history of the Council itself. This document clearly reveals as does no other the ecclesial and theological road which the Council has travelled since its first session in 1962.¹³ If the present constitution is so important for its Biblical, theological and ecumenical aspects, it is simply because of the courage and determination of many Fathers in the Council to face realities as they are. The main issue of the Council and of the *schema* on 'Revelation' was whether the Catholic Church wanted to express herself in a dead and forgotten language of a past century or in a living and dynamic language of our century.

The greatest offensive point of an early *schema* was not only its insistence on the 'two sources of revelation', namely 'Scripture and Tradition', which became widely known, but also its definitively conservative and fundamentalistic stand against all

¹⁰ Cf. J. A. Fitzmyer, art. cit. in note 8, pp. 387-388.

¹¹ *Constitutio dogmatica de Divina Revelatione*, 18th November, 1965.

¹² For a commentary on this constitution see 'Dogmatic Constitution of Revelation', *Herder Correspondence*, 3 (1966), 40-44; G. H. Tavard, 'Commentary on "De Revelatione"', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 3 (1966), 1-35.

¹³ In fact, this Constitution was one of the first to be proposed to the discussion, and one of the last to be voted upon. The definitive text voted by the Fathers of the Council represents the fifth official draft.

advances of Biblical studies. In fact, the first draft of the *schema*, 'On the sources of Revelation', contained also two paragraphs which incorporated the terminology of the *Monitum* of June 1961, and levelled anathemas against those who would call in question the genuine historical and objective truth of the words and deeds of Jesus *prouti narrantur*.¹⁴

It is from these unfavourable precedents that the present document took its form and contents. It explains in no ambiguous terms the nature of history that Catholics have to look for in the Bible. The Bible is primarily and *per se* the narration of the history of salvation in the form of a message, a *kerygma*.¹⁵ Moreover, behind the written word we have always to look for the preaching. This is true both of the O.T. and the N.T.: 'The plan of salvation foretold by the sacred authors, recounted and explained by them, is found as the true Word of God in the books of the O.T.' (par. 14).

The meaning of history in the Bible, therefore, is to be understood and explained in the context of divine revelation and the history of salvation. This is equally true of the Gospels. We shall see briefly how these points are envisaged in this document.

'HISTORY' AND THE HISTORY OF SALVATION

What is the nature of 'history' in the Bible? The concept of history we have goes back to the Greeks, for whom history was a rational, intelligible continuity, an integrated nexus or concatenation, operating in a unified world, capable of investigation and illumination by historical method.¹⁶ As a result, history is classed as a social science. But historical writings are not merely a record of events and occurrences. As C. H. Dodd puts it, 'it is, at least implicitly, a record of the interest and meaning they bore for those who took part in them, or were affected by them . . . The events which make up history are relative to the human mind which is active in those events.'¹⁷

In line with this understanding of history as consisting of events which are of the nature of occurrences plus meaning and interpretation, the document emphasizes the fact that history in the Biblical narratives is to be understood as the history of salvation. The Biblical notion of history rests upon the belief that God has revealed himself in a special way within the cadre of human affairs. What we have in the Bible is the story of God's words and deeds. It is through these words and deeds that God revealed himself, 'the deeds manifesting and confirming

¹⁴ Cf. J. A. Fitzmyer, art. cit., p. 398, note 19.

¹⁵ It is in this light that chapter V, 'Sacred Scripture in the life of the Church', is presented.

¹⁶ Cf. E. Dinkler, *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East*, New Haven, London, 1955, p. 172.

¹⁷ C. H. Dodd, *History and the Gospel*, London, 1938, pp. 26-27.

the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them' (par. 2). Revelation therefore is not simply the utterance of God, a mere *locutio Dei* conveying a list of propositions about God and human conduct: rather it is the totality of God's deeds and words in history, whereby he makes himself known to man and at the same time redeems him. As a result, revelation is a dynamic history in which God is active for the salvation of mankind.¹⁸

In the process of the history of salvation God gradually reveals himself down the ages, through the Patriarchs, and then through the prophets, until Jesus Christ in the fullness of time completes the redemption of mankind. The coming of Christ and his redeeming work cannot be considered simply as a particular phase of the history of salvation, rather it is the central point¹⁹ and the age of eschatological expectations which will never be surpassed or superseded by a new revelation, but leads on to the perfect fullness of revelation in the second coming of Christ. He it is who 'perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making present and manifesting himself; through his words and deeds, his signs and wonders, but especially through his death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of truth' (par. 4). Thus the meaning and significance of history for the Bible follow closely from the very nature of the history of salvation.

This step towards understanding revelation in the context of the history of salvation is to be seen against the background of the traditional explanation of the same by earlier Councils of the Catholic Church, especially the Councils of Trent and Vatican I. The former explained revelation in these words: 'The purity of the Gospel, which, after it was formerly promised through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, first promulgated personally, then through his disciples ordered to be preached to every creature as the source of all saving truth and moral discipline.'²⁰ For the Council of Vatican I revelation implied the natural knowledge of God as the principle and end of all creation to which God, out of his infinite goodness, has added a supernatural revelation by which he may be known rapidly, with firm certainty and without error.²¹ Both these statements are characterized by a certain

¹⁸ Thus the former Catholic position of understanding revelation primarily as a set of doctrine has given way to explaining it as God's action in history. History is the place of revelation because revelation happens in and through history. Cf. R. Latourelle. 'Revelation, history and incarnation' in *The Word Readings in Theology*, New York, 1964, pp. 27-63; F. Schillebeeckx, 'Revelation in word and deed', *ibid.*, pp. 255-272. The more extensive study of R. Latourelle, *Théologie de la Révélation*, Bruges, 1963 (Eng. tr. *Theology of Revelation*, New York, 1966).

¹⁹ Cf. O. Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, London, 1962, pp. 121 ff.

²⁰ Cf. *Denzinger-Schönmetzer*, No. 1501.

²¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, No. 3004.

dogmatic pre-occupation that revelation is primarily a set of doctrine.

HISTORY OF SALVATION AND THE 'HISTORY' IN THE GOSPELS

Because the Bible is primarily the narrative of the history of salvation, it follows that the Gospels are essentially concerned with what happened with the coming of Jesus Christ. The writings of the New Testament are the perpetual and divine witness to the realities related to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, a revelation that was accomplished in deeds as well as words. The Gospels are the main witness to this revelation and therefore they have a special pre-eminence all their own.

Coming to the very nature of the Gospels, the constitution expressly states that they are the consolidation of the preaching of the apostles.²² All the same, they are a faithful tradition of what Jesus Christ, while living among men, really did and taught. But we have to see here a process of the formation of the Gospels. In the light of the resurrection and by the coming of the Holy Spirit the apostles and their associates were introduced to a much more clear understanding of the mission of Jesus Christ and they explained in their preaching the significance of the words and deeds of Jesus.

The tradition that was formed around this message about Jesus was kept alive and handed on by word of mouth or in writing. It is this tradition which forms the background of the four Gospels as the main witness for the life and teaching of Jesus. Therefore the Gospels are truly historical because they 'faithfully hand on what Jesus Christ really did and taught'. But we have to understand that the four written Gospels are indelibly marked and shaped by the original proclamation of the 'Good News', because they are the ultimate expression of this *kerygma*; for it is in the context of the preaching about Jesus that the external form of the Gospels took its origin. The Evangelists wrote the Gospels by bringing together the various traditions about Jesus, by reducing some of them to a synthesis, explaining some things in view of the situation of their churches.²³

²² Cf. *Constitution*, par. 19.

²³ Cf. C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments*, London, 10th ed., 1963, pp. 36-37; D. M. Stanley, 'New understanding of the Gospels' in *The Bible in Current Catholic Thought*, ed. by J. L. McKenzie, New York, 1962, pp. 169-183; A. M. Hunter, 'The *Kerygma* and the Gospels' in *Faith, Reason and the Gospels*, ed. by J. H. Heaney, Westminster, 1961, pp. 146-150; B. M. Ahern, 'The Gospel in the light of modern research' in *Contemporary New Testament Studies*, ed. by Ryan, S. Minnesota, 1965, pp. 131-138; A. Vögtle, 'The growth and nature of the Gospels' in *The Bible in a New Age*, ed. by L. Klein, London, 1965, pp. 59-111; L. Cerfaux, *The Four Gospels*, London, 1960; V. T. O'Keefe, 'Towards understanding the Gospels', *CBO*, 21 (1959), 171-189; X. Léon-Dufour, *Les Évangiles et l'histoire de Jésus*, Paris, 1963, passim; A. Stock, 'From *Kerygma* to Gospels' in *Kingdom of Heaven*, New York, 1964, pp. 21-40.

We see therefore that the historicity of the Gospels is firmly held, but the genuine advances in their analysis and interpretation, which the method of *Formgeschichte* has made possible, are also acknowledged. It is no more a question of using the literary form method of interpreting Scripture 'as an exception to the rule'.²⁴ What is important to note is how the text closely follows the instruction of Biblical Commission, adopts a positive attitude, and avoids condemnations of other systems of thought. To be sure, it points out the dangers involved in an uncritical application of new methods, but leaves the door open for further research. It is to be further observed that with regard to the historicity of the Gospels—especially certain portions of them, such as the accounts of Christ's infancy—individual Fathers urged the Council to defend the historicity of these with more vigour. Only a warning was given that imprudent exegetes were offending the sensibilities of the faithful.²⁵

What we notice here is the fact that the historicity of the Gospels is not as simple as some conservatives would lead us to think. Their authors' aim and purpose were completely different from those of the modern historian. Their primary aim was to testify to the divine-human fact of God's intervention in human history which brought man salvation in Jesus Christ. In order to express this fundamental fact of Christian faith, the Evangelists have chosen narratives of varying type—eyewitness accounts, sayings, parables. We may even find midrashic interpretations, discourses which the sacred writer himself has constructed from Jesus' utterances and sermons, liturgical texts, etc. Moreover, we notice that they show a strongly marked tendency to dissociate most of these episodes of Jesus' public life which they record from both time and place. It is one indication of the distance which separates the Gospels from our modern historical writings. We have therefore to conclude that the Evangelists' lack of interest in the specific geographical or chronological settings of many of their narratives sets limitation upon our attempt to prove all the events 'historical' in the modern sense of the term.²⁶ They do propose to give a narrative that is based upon ocular testimony: however, it is important to note that they aim principally at writing a salvation history, which entails testimony to something that lies beyond the competence of any

²⁴ Cf. note 5 of this paper.

²⁵ It may be observed that some last-minute changes were introduced to the constitution at the insistence of a resolute minority. One such change was regarding the 'historicity' of the Gospels. From 'Holy Mother Church teaches and affirms constantly that the four Gospels in question transmit faithfully what Jesus did and taught' now there stands: 'Holy Mother Church teaches and affirms that the four Gospels, whose historical value she asserts unhesitatingly, transmit faithfully what Jesus did and taught . . .'

²⁶ Cf. D. M. Stanley, 'The Gospels as Salvation History' in *The Apostolic Church in the New Testament*, Westminster, 1966, pp. 238-277.

eyewitness. Their main aim was to offer their readers an insight into the meaning of the mystery of Christ. The document has succeeded in emphasizing this point.

That the Council was not merely concerned with a statement on the historicity of the Gospels is evinced by its treatment on the effect of inspiration. The traditional concept of inerrancy as the effect of scriptural inspiration is left out on account of its negative tonality. It prefers to stress positively the teaching of truth. The truth in question is that truth which God wanted put into the Sacred Writings for the sake of our salvation.²⁷ So the truth of the Bible is not any truth, but a 'truth of salvation'—a salvific truth, and not necessarily a truth in merely historical, philosophical, or scientific matters. In this respect also the constitution has far surpassed traditional approaches and insists on the salvific character of the truth contained in the Scripture, which is more important than a mere historical accuracy.

Thus the 'Constitution on Divine Revelation' shows how effectively the Council has already helped theology and Biblical studies to shake off a narrow, intellectual and scholastic approach to the truths of faith and to interpret revelation and the history of salvation in existential terms.

In all these new approaches what we notice is the attempt of the Roman Catholic Church towards understanding the true nature of 'history' in the Bible, in general, and in the Gospels, in particular. As we have seen, it is the result of a decisive battle fought during the past couple of years. Although it all started with the unhistorical attitude of those conservatives who wanted to defend a wrong concept of history in the Bible, and especially in the Gospels, now it has resulted in the elucidation and official approval of the genuine concept of history in the Gospels. It is true that before receiving its final approval the constitution had to overcome much resistance from conservative circles, weather many storms and even survive shipwreck. All the same, it was worth the trouble. The Council has made a splendid contribution to the study of Scripture in the Roman Catholic Church.

This is in line with recent discussions on the significance of history for salvation, which came up as a reaction to extreme Bultmannianism.²⁸ Demythologization and 'dehistorization' are not the last words we have to say to the Gospels. The Gospels as well as the other books of the Bible are rooted in history in so far as they are bearing witness to a past in the history of salvation. This past is not an indifferent period of time for us, rather it is our past which made our present possible and meaningful.

²⁷ The expression 'truth of salvation' was changed to 'truth . . . for our salvation', for the former was not sufficiently clear !!

²⁸ Cf. H. Riesenfeld. *The Gospel Tradition and its Beginnings—A Study in the Limits of Formgeschichte*, London, 1957.

The interest of exegetes in 'history' in the Gospels or in any other book of the Bible is not for its own sake, rather their importance is based on the general context of the history of salvation.

As O. Cullmann has recently pointed out,²⁹ the relation of history and *kerygma* is not an 'either-or' but a 'both-and'. It is the event that is interpreted and preached. The task of the primitive Christian community was not to create a history to suit a *kerygma*, but to interpret history to make it a proclamation. What we have to do now is not to peel off the myths to arrive at the *kerygma*, but to understand these 'myths' in order to get into the real significance of a historical event with its scandal and offensive point. 'Christianity is the revelation of Divine Truth from beyond all history and all time, but it is so, only because it is the only fully historical religion. It is the only religion which actually depends entirely upon history.'³⁰

I may conclude this paper quoting a passage from C. H. Dodd. 'The conviction remains central to the Christian faith, that at a particular point in time and space, the eternal entered decisively into history. An historic crisis occurred by which the whole world of man's spiritual experience is controlled. To that moment in history our faith always looks back. The Gospel is not a statement of general truths of religion, but interpretation of that which once happened.'³¹

²⁹ *Heil als Geschichte: Heilsgeschichtliche Existenz im Neuen Testament*, Tübingen, 1965.

³⁰ G. Dix, *Jew and Greek: A Study in the Primitive Church*, London, 1953, p. 5.

³¹ C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, London, 1961, p. 151.