

puts a new and right spirit within me.'¹ The penitential psalm *par excellence*, Ps. 51 stresses the need for sincerity of heart, humility, confession to God, faith and supplication. Hence conversion and forgiveness involve a real ethical change and are not merely juridical. The verse 'blessed is he whose sin is covered'² sounds very Lutheran, but several other sayings make it clear that 'as far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us.'³

The Psalms, therefore, teach us a complete doctrine of sin as we find it in the New Testament and as we learn it today inside the Church. The only new revelation that we have—and this is essential—is that God's mercy has taken bodily form in the Person of Jesus Christ and all forgiveness comes through Him.

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THE FORMATION OF THE GOSPELS

Contemporary biblical scholarship has achieved surprising results in many fields of its large acreage, and one of its most rewarding successes has been to trace the growth of the Gospels, isolating in their development the various graftings and cross-fertilisations which finally produced such a prodigious plant. No longer are the Gospels viewed as having sprung up mushroom-like overnight. A relatively long and complicated process has been discerned before the prize fruit emerged.

It is in an attempt to trace in broad outline this process that the following pages are offered; not, presumptuously, to those who patiently labour in such fields, but to those, as it were, at the marketing end—who take their scripture from the scripturists. For purposes of convenience rather than of necessity, the growth of the Gospels will be considered as following five stages (though the unwary should be warned that such clear docketing sacrifices something of the elusive interplay of factors which made for the formation of the Gospels). In the first place we are faced with the *kerygma*, or primitive preaching which was the seed containing the traits later development would manifest. Then there is the first development in and through tradition, in the transmitting of the Christian message. This was followed by attempts at committing to writing that primitive message, and these attempts, in their turn, led to the actual formation of the Gospels. Finally, certain 'finishing touches' must be considered.

¹ 51:10

² 32:1

³ 103:12

It must be stated emphatically that the inquiry into the formation of the Gospels is nowhere near complete. Much still remains to be done—the sifting of material, the re-examination of theories, the elaboration and consolidation of stable gains. Yet the outline of this fascinating growth has been observed, and a new approach to the content of the Gospels is hardening into what must become an entrenched method.

The prime efforts of the Apostles to extend Christ's message of salvation were by preaching; writing was not their first preoccupation. Like Christ himself, they proclaimed the 'Good News.' And this apostolic message is best expressed by what the New Testament calls the *kerygma* (1 Cor. 1:21)—the content of that early missionary preaching to win to the faith those not yet of it. In that dawn of the new dispensation the spoken word was the war-head of the Christian conquest. In its pulsing immediacy the Apostles limited themselves to essentials, reserving to the *didache* (teaching) the more complete formation of their converts. Hence it is that the *kerygma* appears in the New Testament as *the* fundamental message, as the basis presupposed by all the later reflections of which it would become the object and by the diverse theologies which Paul, John and the author of Hebrews would construct on it.

We have now to inquire whether it be possible to isolate the actual content of that message.

There are two principal sources for studying the apostolic preaching: the Pauline epistles and the primitive discourses of the Acts of the Apostles. The early speeches of Peter in Acts (2:22-4, 32-3; 3:12-26; and particularly 10:36-43, which is like a ground-plan of the Synoptic Gospels) betray, by the archaism of their theology and their numerous Semitisms, that they come from written and oral sources of very ancient and often Palestinian origin. Further, their schematic character and the type of phrases occurring indicate their genesis from formularies of the primitive preaching, which formularies were a natural consequence of a message that had to be repeated time and time again.

Comparing the Pauline *kerygma* and that of the discourses in Acts, we can characterise the fundamental message of the Apostles as that of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ proclaimed as the inauguration of the era when the divine promises are realised. The latter days have arrived, even if only inceptively; the Messiah and Saviour of Israel is now enthroned; men must repent and turn to God. A frequent recourse to the ancient scriptures is noticeable, not so much to demonstrate, after the manner of apologetics, the truth of the affirmations being made about Christ, as to situate these in the full

stream of revelation and of the long history of salvation as the present fulfilment of God's long-awaited design.

In this proclamation the earthly ministry of Christ must be referred to, not only to introduce the one about whom the Resurrection is affirmed, but because in that ministry are already manifested the signs of the intervention of God bringing in the era of salvation. Hence are mentioned also the Davidic descent of Christ and the miracles by which God accredited him. In this perspective the events of the ministry are not separated from the Passion and Resurrection, but with them enter into a context which clarified their absolute and definitive value as salvific events.

And so before the Christ-Event was committed to writing, there was a period of preaching which was later to have a formative influence on the written Gospels. In the Synoptic Gospels we shall find broadening out into an arterial road of doctrine the tiny trail of theology only traced in Acts. The preaching of John the Baptist, the baptism of Christ, the beginning of the Galilean ministry, healing and exorcism, the ministry in Jerusalem, the crucifixion and resurrection—this outline served as a framework into which anecdotes of Christ's mission, power, teaching, by some incident or memorable saying, parable, etc., could be inserted.

But it should be noted that these accounts of incidents of Christ's life and his sayings were used by preachers to illustrate their teaching on Christ before they came to be written up in the Gospels. Attempts, with varying success, have been made to classify these 'units.' Perhaps a broad classification only would be permitted by our present state of knowledge. There are first of all the *sayings* of Christ which are enveloped in a description of an incident—a miracle, controversy or an episode of the life of Christ. Here the main point to be made is in the saying, and everything else is subordinate and directed to that saying. If the incident is a miracle, it is hardly described; the saying is the important thing. A good example of this is in the account of the healing of the man with the withered hand (Mk. 3:1-5). The emphasis is not on the miracle but on Christ's saying, 'Is it lawful on the sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?' Also in Christ's controversies; the dialogue is brief, incisive, destined to place in relief a saying of Christ (cf. Mt. 22:15-22 on the tribute to Caesar). Even when the saying is embodied in a description of an incident in the life of Christ, the same sobriety in the description is once more noticeable—in order to underline the saying (cf. Mt. 19:13-15, on Christ blessing the children). In accounts which deal specifically with the value of Christ's *miracles*, we find that here everything is directed towards emphasising the miracle. These accounts are

constructed after a regular fashion : circumstances of the miracle, the miracle itself, the effect produced. Details abound, to place in relief, not the saying, but the act of Christ. Then there are accounts primarily destined to sketch the *person* of Christ (e.g. Mt. 15:21-5, the incident of the Canaanite woman, which served to portray Christ *vis-à-vis* the pagans). Finally, there are *summaries and transitions* which resume the activity of Christ either in words or miracles (e.g. the account of Christ at Nazareth, Lk. 14:16-30, where Luke seems to have combined three visits to form one inaugural scene on Christ's mission of grace and its refusal from his own people).

All these accounts, which are constructed with wonderful economy, bear the marks of popular preaching and tradition in which a much repeated story is rubbed down and polished until nothing but the hard core remains in its most arresting form. The 'evangelists' (charismatics, cf. Ac. 21:8 ; Eph. 4:11 ; 2 Tim. 4:5) recounted, in their early preaching, those 'evangelical' memoirs under a form which tended to become fixed by repetition—and our Gospels in their *pericopae* are tributary to this influence.

And so the irreducible minimum of the apostolic message with its crystallised accounts of incidents from his life was to provide the constants of our Gospels, not only as regards matter, but particularly as regards doctrinal emphasis.

But in the very transmission of the Christian message, the fundamental credo was adapted to the circumstances of the hearers. Peter, speaking to Palestinian, underlines the messianicity of Jesus ; Paul, on the Gentile mission, shows Jesus as the saviour whose work has a universal character ; John, addressing persons of a more mature Christianity, was able to show the value lying beneath the events of the life of Christ.

On the rebound, the primitive Christian communities had their questions to ask on problems which arose from day-to-day preoccupations : marriage, divorce, widowhood, Jewish ritual, Jewish laws, categories of people ('publicans,' sinners, non-Israelites). These, and a host of other considerations, were influential in effecting, not only a choice of incidents from Christ's life and ministry which answered new situations in the Church, but also an interpretation of them in the light of contemporary problems. It has been thanks to recent researches that the Gospel *pericopae*—narratives, sayings, parables, etc.—have been plunged into the great stream of faith and life of the primitive Church. Some success has been achieved in segregating various formative influences from the primitive community in the production of our Gospels : preaching, apologetics, doctrine, liturgy.

The result of this intervention of the community in the formation

of traditions has an important corollary : there was a certain elaboration, or better, a penetration of all Christ did and said so that the multiform riches of that Event could be of value to the Church. Hence, it must be clearly understood that the facts and sayings so reported are not, in each individual case, to be taken as a rigorously exact reproduction of what actually happened. Note how the same event or saying is transmitted differently in many cases by the different evangelists. Further, the inevitable laws of all human testimony and of its transmission dissuade from demanding such material exactitude. In the course of transmission, many of the Gospel facts and sayings lost their original link with time and place, and it would often be a mistake to take seriously such connections as 'on that day,' 'then,' 'afterwards.'

But these remarks in no way prejudice the validity of the facts that were transmitted. The Church did not create facts ; she interpreted them. And the Holy Ghost sponsored the whole programme of the Church—tradition as well as inspiration. He guided the work of elaboration guaranteeing for the results that true inerrancy which is not so much concerned with brute facts as with the spiritual message enshrined in them.

As the first eyewitnesses began to pass away, an attempt was made to fix the traditions by writing. The previously isolated incidents tended to be grouped together, often after a chronological fashion—as in Mk. 1:16-39, which presents a rounded picture of a day at Capernaum, or in a systematic way—as in the five great sections of Matthew where related subject-matter is given together. From being small sections at the beginning, these groupings later developed into larger collections.

It seems more than likely that the very early written attempts formed small vade-mecums which could easily have served the preachers and catechists in their missionary work. The authors of these collections, tiny instalments on the Gospel, are unknown to us and nothing remains of their work except what has been incorporated into the canonical Gospels which supplanted them.

But between these collections and our Gospels there is still another factor to be considered : editions of Gospel material, 'gospels' in lower case, we might call them, which were the proximate preparation for our present Gospels. As far as can be ascertained by present studies, it would seem that this process reached a climax in two great series of edited material : one would be a Galilean ministry source and the other the Passion narrative which, though embracing more than the account of the Passion itself, would nevertheless have this as its centre of reference.

With the very writing of the Gospels after this period of editings, we come up against the thorny problem of the inter-relationship of Matthew, Mark and Luke—the *Synoptic Problem*. A treatment of this vexatious and apparently insoluble problem is outside our scope, but it has a revelancy in so far as it touches on the formation of our present Gospels. Before canonical Matthew, Mark and Luke were written, was there a 'Matthean' source comprising a Greek translation of Aramaic Matthew plus supplementary material which was pressed into service for our canonical Gospels? Or did a Greek translation of Aramaic Matthew lie at the basis of just Matthew and Luke who were also dependent on Mark? No definite solution has yet been proposed. Certainly Matthew and Luke owe something to a common written source and to Mark.

But they did not hesitate to change a source or sources common to them. The Evangelists were no mere compilers. And once more we are in the presence of another factor in the Gospel formation: intentional changes. These, like the inevitable accidents of transmission referred to above, may also give rise to differences in testimony. In many cases the editors of the Gospel consciously wished to present things in a different fashion. Before them oral tradition, whose heirs they were, had not scrupled to interpret and adapt in different ways to suit the needs of the living faith the matter under transmission.

A comparison among the Synoptics provide interesting examples of this tendency at work. Matthew and Mark in their accounts of the trial and crucifixion portray the Jews and Pilate as definitely hostile to Christ; John and Luke, on the contrary, present a crowd which is more curious than hostile, and Pilate's scourging of Jesus is more by way of precluding further demands of the Jews—death—than by way of punishment. The interpretations given to some of the parables vary considerably, e.g. in that of the Sower. Luke, writing his Gospel at a time when the Church was free from persecution, shows Christ as exhorting Christians to bring forth fruit in patience amid the trials of everyday life (Lk. 8:11-15). The other two Synoptists have a different situation in mind—a time of tribulation (Mk. 4:14-20) and of persecution (Mt. 13:18-23). Again, Matthew would answer a difficulty of the early Christians as to why the sinless Christ should be baptised by the baptism of John by giving the solution in a brief conversation between the Baptist and Christ. These and a number of other points show a certain plasticity in the handling of some details of tradition by the Evangelists.

Once more it must be recalled that just as the Evangelists received matter already elaborated by tradition in view of situations in the Church under the influence of the magisterium, that coefficient of the

action of the Holy Ghost, so too under that same influence they were empowered to sound the depth of Christ's message and apply their discoveries to all the available fields of Christian existence. The message of salvation was held to no law of diminishing returns. Further, if the Holy Ghost has not seen fit to demand from His interpreters perfect uniformity in detail, it is because He does not lay importance for the faith on material precision. We can even say that He has wanted this difference in testimony—a fact so attested by diverse and discordant traditions (e.g. the accounts of the post-Resurrection narratives) assumes deep within itself a rich dimension of truth. The Evangelists cannot be accused of having falsified with tendentious motives the facts of the Christian message; rather, those facts had found four conscientious interpreters whose efforts were accompanied and accredited by an untiring Spirit of God.

This being understood, the Gospels must be seen primarily as works of doctrine rather than as biographies. It must be understood too that a gospel itself is a literary form laid under contribution to proclaim the message of salvation. A gospel is not essentially a history. It is the announcement of salvation wrought by Christ. With matter which they certainly held as historical, the sacred authors have made a work whose centre of interest is not strictly the writing of history *ut sic*. A gospel is really the apostolic preaching, a restatement of the *kerygma* in valid historical terms. It is history certainly, but history which is clarified in the light of events; in fact, history read backwards, theologically interpreted and applied to circumstances. But this theological interpretation is not perversion. It serves to heighten implications of Christ's coming which may too easily have been lost in a mere restatement of colourless records. This was a major consideration throughout the formation of the Gospels.

But even when the Gospels were formed, and, as it were, began to enjoy the dignity of capitals, the last word had not yet been said; there were stop-press additions: a point of belief to be explained or developed, a finishing touch to be made. Hence it is that the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke, representing a maturer reflection of the primitive Church which sought to go back to the very beginning of the Christ story, were added. Mk. 16:9–20 were added to the Gospel whose lack of conclusion was as obvious as a missing tooth—a fact which an inspired author corrected.

A word finally on the Fourth Gospel. This differs greatly from the earlier three and rarely runs parallel to them. It has a problem all its own and would require an article to itself merely to outline something of its formation. Appearing long after the Synoptics it represents a more advanced stage in theological reflection. But if its elaboration

has been slow and gradual, still it contains very ancient elements and perhaps may well enshrine the primitive preaching of John.

Any study of the formation of the Gospels must floodlight the importance of the Church's tradition in interpreting the events of Christ's life. Faith is a living thing ; but its life can only be sustained by and in the Church. And her office it was, under the guiding finger of the Holy Spirit, to penetrate the mystery of Christ. There was no call for her to 'create' events—she had sufficient matter on which to ruminate. The term of her primitive reflections, which were stimulated by her everyday life of faith, is presented to us in our Gospels, in those Minutes, if you wish, which summarise the meeting of God and man.

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ESSENISM AND CHRISTIANITY ¹

The Dead Sea Manuscripts have something to offer us which is entirely new. For the first time we can through their help make ourselves contemporaries with our Lord. Till now this has never been possible. We have never been able to discover the feelings and thoughts of the contemporaries of our Lord. As a result the Gospels have been for us at one and the same time both familiar and far-removed. There is scarcely a Sunday Gospel with which we are not well acquainted ; yet despite that it could never before have been said that their language was that of our everyday life and culture. The Gospels were in fact another world to us. Clearly if we were really to penetrate their modes of expression, it was not sufficient merely to be familiar with the words of the Gospels by dint of constant repetition.

The words which our Lord used were words and expressions in constant use every day. Take for example that phrase from the Our Father : 'Thy Kingdom come.' It must be admitted that the 'Kingdom of God' is not a news item of daily occurrence in our newspapers. This does not cause us any surprise since it is not regarded as ranking in importance with the major political issues of our day. Nevertheless, if there had been newspapers at the time of our Lord, the phrase 'Kingdom of God' would have featured almost daily in

¹ From a conference given during the Biblical Week at Fribourg 1960, and translated from the French by K. Kelly.