

THE UNITY OF THE GOSPEL IN THE VARIETY OF THE CANON

The quest of the *gospel* within the *canon* is perhaps the liveliest hermeneutical issue in the literature¹ as this conference meets, and

¹ The most impressive witness of this topic's currency is the symposium offering major contributions of the past twenty years or so, with introduction and critical commentary by an illustrious contributor to the discussion: Ernst Käsemann, ed., *Das Neue Testament als Kanon. Dokumentation und kritische Analyse zur gegenwärtigen Diskussion*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1970.—For convenience of subsequent citation we shall abbreviate this symposium *NTK*, and we signal the component essays here, with their original place of publication, on which we shall draw most frequently in the pages that follow: Kurt Aland, "Das Problem des neutestamentlichen Kanons," *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* 4 (1962) 220-42 (= *NTK*, 134-58); Herbert Braun, "Hebt die heutige neutestamentlich-exegetische Forschung den Kanon auf?" in Braun, *Gesammelte Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1962) 310-24 (= *NTK*, 219-32); Hans Frhr. von Campenhausen, "Die Entstehung des Neuen Testaments," *Heidelberger Jahrbücher* VII (1963) 1-12 (= *NTK*, 109-23); Wilfried Joest, "Erwägungen zur kanonischen Bedeutung des Neuen Testaments," *Kerygma und Dogma* 12 (1966) 27-47 (= *NTK*, 258-81); Werner Georg Kümmel, "Notwendigkeit und Grenze des neutestamentlichen Kanons," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* (abbreviated hereafter *ZThK*) 47 (1950) 277-313; reprinted in Kümmel, *Heilsgeschehen und Geschichte. Gesammelte Aufsätze . . .* (Marburg: Elwert-Verlag, 1965) 230-59 (= *NTK*, 62-97); Willi Marxsen, "Das Problem des neutestamentlichen Kanons, aus der Sicht des Exegeten," *Zeit. sys. Theol.* 2 (1960) 137-50, repr. Marxsen, *Der Exeget als Theologe. Vorträge zum Neuen Testament* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, ²1969) 91-103 (= *NTK*, 233-46); Hermann Strathmann, "Die Krisis des Kanons der Kirche," *Theologische Blätter* 20 (1941) 295-310 (= *NTK*, 41-61). Two additional essays in this collection are found, and will be cited here, in English translation: E. Käsemann, "The Canon of the New Testament and the Unity of the Church," in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (Studies in Biblical Theology 41; Chicago: Alec Allenson, 1964) 95-107 (= *NTK*, 124-33); Hans Küng, "'Early Catholicism' in the New Testament as a Problem in Controversial Theology," in *The Living Church. Reflections on the Second Vatican Council* (trans. C. Hastings and N.D. Smith; New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963) 233-93 (= *NTK*, 175-204).

Additional recent literature cited here ranges beyond our topic, as stated, to the broad and vitally related problematic of New Testament hermeneutic. Monographs will be cited subsequently by author and main substantive of the title; periodical titles will be abbreviated in the form which is bracketed in

each case: Nicolaas Appel, "The New Testament Canon: Historical Process and Spirit's Witness," *Theological Studies* [ThSt] 32 (1971) 627-46; Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*. 2 vols., trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Scribner, 1952); Hans Frhr. von Campenhausen, *Die Entstehung der christlichen Bibel*. Beiträge zur historischen Theologie, 39 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1968); Hans Conzelmann, "Zum Überlieferungsproblem im Neuen Testament," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* [ThLZ] 94 (1969) 881-88; Hans Conzelmann, *Outline of the Theology of the New Testament*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Harper and Row, 1969); Hans Conzelmann, "On the Analysis of the Confessional Formula in I Corinthians 15:3-5," *Interpretation* [Int] 20 (1966) 15-25; Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963); Gerhard Ebeling, *The Word of God and Tradition*. *Historical Studies Interpreting the Divisions of Christianity*, trans. S.H. Hooke (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968); E. Flesseman-van Leer, "Prinzipien der Sammlung und Ausscheidung bei der Bildung des Kanons," *ZThK* 61 (1964) 404-20; K. Fröhlich, "Die Mitte des Neuen Testaments . . .," in F. Christ, ed., *OIKONOMIA. Heilsgeschichte als Thema der Theologie*. Festschrift für Oscar Cullmann (Hamburg-Bergstedt: Evangelischer Verlag H. Reich, 1967) 203-19; Ernst Fuchs, "Kanon und Kerygma," *ZThK* 63 (1966) 410-33; Erich Grässer, "Das eine Evangelium. Hermeneutische Erwägungen zu Gal. 1,6-10," *ZThK* 66 (1969) 306-44; Klaus Haendler, "Schriftprinzip und theologischer Pluralismus," *Evangelische Theologie* [EvTh] 28 (1968) 404-29; Ferdinand Hahn, "Das Problem 'Schrift und Tradition' im Urchristentum," *EvTh* 30 (1970) 449-68; Ferdinand Hahn, "Probleme historischer Kritik," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* [ZnW] 63 (1972) 1-17; Ernst Käsemann, "Is the Gospel Objective?" in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (cited above) 48-62; Ernst Käsemann, "The 'Righteousness of God' in Paul," and "Unity and Multiplicity in the New Testament Doctrine of the Church," in *New Testament Questions of Today*, trans. W.J. Montague (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969) 168-82 and 252-59; Ernst Käsemann, "Vom theologischen Recht historisch-kritischer Exegese," *ZThK* 64 (1967) 259-81; Ernst Käsemann, "Konsequente Traditionsgeschichte?" *ZThK* 62 (1965) 137-52; Werner Georg Kummel, "Mitte des Neuen Testaments," in P. Bonnard, et al., *L'évangile, hier et aujourd'hui. Mélanges offerts au Prof. Franz-J. Leenhardt* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1968) 71-85; Karl Lehmann, *Auferweckt am dritten Tag nach der Schrift. Früheste Christologie, Bekenntnisbildung und Schriftauslegung im Lichte von 1 Kor. 15,3-5*. *Quaestiones Disputatae*, 38 (Freiburg: Herder, 1968); Dieter Lührmann, *Das Offenbarungsverständnis bei Paulus und in paulinischen Gemeinden*. *Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament*, 16 (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1965); Franz Mussner, "'Evangelium' und 'Mitte des Evangeliums.' Ein Beitrag zur Kontroverstheologie," in *Gott in Welt. Festschrift für Karl Rahner* (Freiburg: Herder, 1964) I, 492-514, repr. in Mussner, *Praesentia salutis. Gesammelte Studien zu Fragen und Themen des Neuen Testaments* (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1967) 159-77; Franz Mussner, "Die Mitte des Evangeliums in neutestamentlicher Sicht," *Catholica* 15 (1961) 271-92; Franz Overbeck, *Zur Geschichte des Kanons* (Basel: Chemnitz, 1880, repr. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1965); James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971); Otto Rodenberg, "Zur theologischen Begründung

it seems to be the one most likely to summon both exegetes and systematians away from their segregated pursuits into spirited debate with one another.² It represents a revival of the old question of the unifying center of New Testament theologies, which the form-critical era rendered very difficult, and rather unfashionable, to pose.³ For reasons that have little to do with form-criticism, our topic may still raise a majority of Catholic eyebrows: on the one hand, because the complete coherence of gospel and canon is uncritically assumed, or, in avant-garde precincts, because the canon is considered an accident of ancient history whose berth as *locus theo-*

des Pluralismus," *EvTh* 29 (1969) 155-63; Jürgen Roloff, *Apostolat-Verkündigung-Kirche* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1965); Eduard Schweizer, "Kanon?" *EvTh* 31 (1971) 339-57; Peter Stuhlmacher, *Das paulinische Evangelium. I. Vorgeschichte*. Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments, 95 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1968); Peter Stuhlmacher, "Theologische Probleme des Römerbriefpräskripts," *EvTh* 27 (1967) 374-89; Peter Stuhlmacher, "Neues Testament und Hermeneutik. Versuch einer Bestandsaufnahme," *ZThK* 68 (1971) 121-61; Peter Stuhlmacher, "Thesen zur Methodologie gegenwärtiger Exegese," *ZnW* 63 (1972) 18-26; A.C. Sundberg, Jr., "Toward a Revised History of the New Testament Canon," in F.C. Cross, ed., *Studia evangelica* IV. Texte und Untersuchungen . . . , 102 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1968) 452-61; Klaus Wegenast, *Das Verständnis der Tradition bei Paulus und in den Deuteropaulinen*. Wiss. Monagr. z. A/NTs, 8 (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1962); Bernhard Welte, ed., *Zur Frühgeschichte der Christologie. Ihre biblischen Anfänge und die Lehrformel von Nikaia*. Quaestiones Disputatae, 51 (Freiburg: Herder, 1970).

² The segregation of exegesis among theological enterprises is especially to be lamented since it leaves exegetes talking to themselves and their labors without significant impact. So E. Käsemann, *NTK*, 336 ff., 392 f.; P. Stuhlmacher, *ZThK* 68 (1971) 121 ff., 144 ff.; *ZnW* 63 (1972) 18 f.

³ The epilogue to Bultmann's *Theology* (II, 237 ff.) is programmatic in this respect. Yet E. Käsemann, in reopening the "Problem of the Historical Jesus" in 1954 (*Essays*, 15-47), recognized that faith must ask "the question of the continuity of the Gospel within the discontinuity of the times and within the variation of the kerygma" (46). This question, though posed and answered in different ways, is common also to H. Conzelmann, *Int* 20 (1966) 15-17, and *Outline*, xiii, 7-9; Hermann Diem, "Das Problem des Schriftkanons," *NTK* 159-74, esp. 172-74; H. von Campenhausen, *NTK*, 122-23; E. Schweizer, *EvTh* 31 (1971) 344 n. 9, 346 f., 355; Horst Robert Balz, *Methodische Probleme der neutestamentlichen Christologie*. Wiss. Monagr. z. A/NT, 25 (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1967) 114 f., 200-01. For the same question in sweeping terms of the unity of the two testaments: Harmut Gese, "Erwägungen zur Einheit der biblischen Theologie," *ZThK* 67 (1970) 417-36; P. Stuhlmacher, *ZThK* 68 (1971) 154-59.

logicus cannot withstand the heat of contemporary issues. For responsible theologians of all confessions, however, the canon of Scripture remains a matter of first importance, and it is surely one on which unexamined certitudes cannot continue to prevail. The post-conciliar Church is too deeply indebted and committed to the progress of scientific historical studies to be able to pick and choose among the challenges originating in that quarter. And Scripture's use and authority has proved the most telling challenge to twentieth-century Catholicism, making countless inroads on its theology and practice, yet still stirring up the passions and prejudices of the Counter-reformation.

I. ONE GOSPEL, VARIED TRADITIONS

What, then, of this "Protestant" problematic on a Catholic agenda, the relationship between the Christian gospel and the canon of sacred literature? The concepts suggest, of course, both a disjunction and a close connection. They are to be distinguished because of the Lord's own command, which was "*go and preach the gospel,*" never "*go and write the gospel down!*" Martin Luther perceived in this the fundamental distinction between the testaments: Yahweh commanded Moses to write, Jesus commanded his disciples to preach; and so law and gospel are set apart in principle.⁴ This distinction continues to guide our conventional use of the word "gospel," by which we depict the Christian tidings as operative in human affairs much as our conference theme suggests. The "ministry of the Word" is what the term principally implies, even though it is also attached to foremost items of Christian literature. "Gospel" is primarily a spoken message, and only secondarily a written one.

Why was there ever a literary association of the term, in that case? Because what is proclaimed in the gospel is an occurrence of an increasingly remote past, by now an event of antiquity, separated from believers by gaps of time and space which oral tradition could never have spanned. Yet remote as that event became, belief per-

⁴ "Church Postil" (1522), in *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar, 1883 ff.) X-I-1, 625 ff. Cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor. Introduction to the Reformer's Exegetical Writings*, Luther's Works, Companion volume (St. Louis: Concordia Publ. House, 1959) 63-70.

sisted that God had disclosed his identity uniquely and definitively in it; hence the inescapable necessity of a canonical scripture concerning Jesus of Nazareth. The uniqueness of his existence means, after all, that "Christianity stands or falls with the tie that binds it to its . . . historical origin," which, by assigning it the character of divine revelation, we withdraw "from the relativity and transcendence of all historical events."⁵ The literary canon is thus directly related to the substance of what Christians believe; it is no accident in concept, however accidental its formation and delimitation might have been. And here we discover a dialectic which must be safeguarded in both its components: the theological necessity of the canon on the one hand, and the historical imponderables of *this* canon's formation on the other hand.⁶ No more than we can treat our sacred books as arbitrary strictures on our thinking can we ignore the contingent factors which made precisely these books canonical.

These fundamental realities of the Christian experience, the proclaimed gospel and the scriptural canon, stand in a relationship to each other which modern scholarship has complicated considerably, both because it has pointed up the variety of theological viewpoints among the New Testament authors⁷ and because it has invalidated the criteria followed *ex professo* by the early church in canonizing the twenty-seven books.⁸ That question which the

⁵ G. Ebeling, *Faith*, 28-29. Cf. also W.G. Kümmel, *NTK*, 81-85; F. Hahn, *EvTh* 30 (1970) 465.

⁶ E. Käsemann, *NTK*, 342; N. Appel, *ThSt* 32 (1971) 629; H. von Campenhausen, *Entstehung*, 384. The modern canon critique was inaugurated in the four-volume "Treatise concerning a Free Investigation of the Canon" by Johann Salomo Semler (1771-74) and has thus accompanied and demonstrated the development of scientific biblical criticism. On Semler's legacy cf. H. Strathmann, *NTK*, 45 ff.; W.G. Kümmel, *The New Testament. History of the Investigation of its Problems*, trans. S. MacLean Gilmore & Howard C. Kee (Nashville/New York: Abingdon Press, 1972) 62-68.

⁷ Cf. E. Käsemann, *Essays*, 95-107; *NTK*, 404, etc.; H. Braun, *NTK*, 222-28; H. Diem, *NTK*, 169, 171; Hans Küng, *Living Church*, 239 ff., 257 ff. (*NTK*, 178 ff., 186 ff.); W. Joest, *NTK*, 275 ff. That variety of forms belonged to the original state of Christianity, not its subsequent evolution, is the thesis of Walter Bauer, defended with new arguments and data by Helmut Koester, in "GNOMAI DIAPHOROI. The Origin and Nature of Diversification in the History of Early Christianity," in Robinson-Koester, *Trajectories*, 114-57.

⁸ K. Aland, *NTK*, 144 f.; W.G. Kümmel, *NTK*, 85 ff.; H. Strathmann,

Church must always ask,—“what is the central reality we proclaim?”—is not answered uniformly on all pages of the NT. Nor are all those pages of equal pedigree by any practicable standard, whether a problematically defined apostolic authorship⁹ or some measurement of proximity to Jesus and the eye-witnesses.¹⁰ In

NTK, 47 ff.; E. Flesseman-van Leer, *ZThK* 61 (1964) 418-19; N. Appel, *ThSt* 32 (1971) 633 ff.

⁹ W.G. Kümmel, *NTK*, 88 f. Apostolicity appears to have been urged as principal criterion of a canonical writing more in the West (Irenaeus, Tertullian, etc.) than in the East, where the rule of inspired truth seems to have prevailed (Clement, Tertullian—cf. E. Flesseman-van Leer, *ZThK* 61 [1964] 416). H. von Campenhausen has consistently refuted the common notion, however, that the norm of apostolic *authorship* ultimately decided canonical status for most NT writings (cf. *Entstehung*, 380-81; *NTK*, 121). At very least one has to admit that the four-gospel canon, with which Irenaeus replaced the Marcionite canon, gave equal weight to the students of the apostles, Mark and Luke; hence Irenaeus was correcting Marcion's emphasis on Paul as “the Apostle,” but he did not bring this to the point of exclusive canonical authorship by evangelists from among “the Twelve” (*Entstehung*, 238 f.). And even the *Muratorianum*, which took up Irenaeus's principle and with which the norm of apostolicity is usually associated, never actually cites apostolic authorship as the basis for canonical selection or exclusion (*Entstehung*, 301). It is the lack of antiquity, rather than of apostolic authorship, that disqualified the *Shepherd of Hermas* in this author's view,—at least as von Campenhausen understands him. And the guarantors of the original tradition about Jesus are as often designated “disciples” as “apostles” by him. It is the authority of those who belong to the first generation, the companions of Jesus, which endorses a writing for church use, according to this oldest Christian canon. But, of course, the Lucan concentration on the official witness of “the Twelve” (*Entstehung*, 149-50) is presupposed here as elsewhere, and the tradition's defense of the books' authority by appeal to these apostles, even indirectly, as “the only ones called and empowered by Christ himself as witnesses of his teaching and his history,” is admitted by von Campenhausen to be a triumph of the Lucan *Geschichtsbild* (*Entstehung*, 380 n. 7). And the critical onslaughts in recent years against the Lucan picture are too well known, and too convincing, to need special treatment here. Von Campenhausen's restriction of the significance of apostolicity for the Muratorian author, on the other hand, is vigorously disputed by Franz Overbeck in debate with Harnack (cf. *Geschichte*, esp. 109, 114f.). Overbeck represented the conviction that the history of the canon can be subsumed “under the exclusive dominance of the principle of apostolicity, still rather naively understood” (*Geschichte*, 95).

¹⁰ E. Schweizer, *EvTh* 31 (1971) 346: mere antiquity could not serve as the basis of canonicity, both because false understanding and tradition grew up even within considerable proximity to the saving event (as Paul's polemics show) and because later evangelists did not hesitate to revise the oldest gospel (Mk) and its tradition. Besides this, of course, is the fact that form criticism has conclusively disqualified the evangelists from any claim to eye-witness

short, modern scholarship has made the gospel a matter of critical scrutiny within the canon,¹¹—a content question (*Sachfrage*) concerning what might be called “the fundamental Christian reality”¹² or, to venture the highly controversial slogan for which the authority of Luther and Bultmann is invoked, the “canon within the canon.”¹³ We shall take up this phrase with a certain wariness, at-

status or association with the eye-witnesses. The testimony of Papias is the single basis of patristic opinion on this score, and it is widely agreed that this second-century bishop neither knew a semitic-language version of Matthew nor possessed valid information on Mark's supposed association with Peter. Whether this consequently renders the famous testimony of Papias a standard “apologetic fiction” (Kurt Niederwimmer, “Johannes Markus und die Frage nach dem Verfasser des zweiten Evangeliums,” *ZnW* 58 [1967, 172-88] 177) or requires an assessment in terms of contemporary hellenistic literary criticism (Josef Kürzinger, “Das Papiaszeugnis und die Erstgestalt des Matthäusevangeliums,” *Biblische Zeitschrift* 4 [1960] 19-38), it is quite clear that Papias cannot be accepted as a reliable witness to the real genesis of the gospels. And it does seem likely that he seeks to defend at least an indirect apostolic authority for Mark (despite von Campenhausen, *Entstehung*, 157 n. 119), “expressing the trend typical of his period—that of defending oneself against Gnosticism by appealing to the authority of a great apostle” (Willi Marxsen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968] 143). In addition, Lucan criticism seems also to have demonstrated, to the satisfaction of many, that the supposed companionship of the author *ad Theophilum* with Paul has scant support in the *Paulusbild* of Acts (despite von Campenhausen again, *Entstehung*, 47).

¹¹ H. Braun, *NTK*, 222; K. Aland, *NTK*, 145 f.; W.G. Kümmel, *NTK*, 90; W. Joest, *NTK*, 275 f.; G. Ebeling, *Tradition*, 120; E. Käsemann, *ZThK* 64 (1967) 266 f.; *Essays*, 55-58.

¹² H. Braun, *NTK*, 229. Luther's famous formula, “*was Christum treibet*,” reminds us that Scripture as canon must really function as ‘rule of thumb’ (*κανών*) for hearing “the voice of Christ” (H. Diem, *NTK*, 172 f.), rather than the voice of man, and for making it heard as well. Says E. Käsemann of the Luther Scripture principle: “*Sola scriptura* means that we stand by the whole of Scripture so as not to succumb to the individualism of persons, groups, or confessions. Yet it also means, on the other hand, that we must examine all of Scripture ever anew, and indeed from the standpoint of the individuals, groups, and confessions, to see whether and to what extent it ‘fosters Christ.’ For in matters of faith we are unwilling to consign ourselves to a *fides implicita*, but are ourselves steadfastly accountable for what we believe, refusing to surrender to ecclesiastical contingency and compromise or to the arbitrariness of institutions, any more than to our own whimsy” (*NTK*, 403).

¹³ Aside from the abundant documentation for this notion in the expected sources (E. Käsemann, *NTK*, 133, 383 ff., 403 ff., etc.; *ZThK* 64 [1967] 266 ff.; W.G. Kümmel, *NTK*, 96 ff., and in *L'évangile, hier et aujourd'hui* [loc. cit. in n. 1]; K. Aland, *NTK*, 155-58; H. Braun, *NTK*, 228-32; H. Diem, *NTK*,

tempting to understand it better, reviewing some of its exegetical support, and perhaps suggesting an appropriation of it in a carefully refined sense.

A first step towards such refinement is to observe how, long before any Christian writing had appeared, Christian theology was born in attempts to define the gospel canonically. We get a glimpse of this process when we survey the use of the term "gospel" in St. Paul, whose use of it as a *terminus technicus* was distinctive,¹⁴ and in fact inaugural,¹⁵ in the NT books. Eighty-four occurrences of the Greek root in the *corpus paulinum*, against fifty in all the rest of the NT, include 31 instances of the unqualified *to euaggelion* depicting the central Christian proclamation and its content. Such usage is without analogy in the OT and Judaism and is imitated elsewhere in the NT only by Mark¹⁶ (aside from the instance in

167 ff.; E. Schweizer, *EvTh* 31 [1971] 354 f., etc.), some approaches to it are beginning to be made by Catholic expositors. Significant examples from recent study are: G.C. Berkouwer, *De Heilige Schrift*, vol. 1 (1966), as reported in N. Appel, *ThSt* 32 (1971) 632; Rolf Baumann, *Mitte und Norm des Christlichen. Eine Auslegung von 1 Kor. 1,1-3,4*. Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen, 5 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1968) esp. 1-6, 300 ff.; cf. the related suggestions of Karl Rahner, "Theology in the New Testament," in *Theological Investigations* V, trans. K.-H. Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966) 23-41, esp. 35 ff. Expressions of hesitation and caution continue to be heard within Protestantism with respect to the pursuit of a "canon within the canon"; so W. Marxsen, *NTK*, 244 ff.; H. von Campenhausen, *NTK*, 123; E. Schweizer, *EvTh* 31 (1971) 355 f.; F. Hahn, *EvTh* 30 (1970) 468 n. 64. Most frequently heard are warnings against using the notion to form an *Auswahlprinzip* (Hahn) or with an *Einengung* of the gospel as a result (Franz Mussner, in *Praesentia salutis*, 175). Catholic hesitation on the issue, as Baumann and Mussner attest, is by no means the definitive resistance which Käsemann assumes in his critique of Peter Lengersfeld and Hans Küng (*NTK*, 371 ff. and 378 ff.). Both selections of those authors offered in Käsemann's symposium are more than a decade old, and while Lengersfeld may still maintain the canon's status as revealed dogma (*NTK*, 213), I doubt that Küng still interprets Catholicism as requiring catholicity of assent within the canon (*NTK*, 198/*Living Church*, 281ff.), for which Käsemann amusingly chides him with reminders of de facto Catholic selectivity which are unfortunately on target (*NTK*, 374)!

¹⁴ Cf. R. Bultmann, *Theology* I, 87f.; P. Stuhlmacher, *Evangelium*, 57.

¹⁵ F. Mussner, in *Praesentia salutis*, 160; Willi Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist. Studies in the Redaction History of the Gospel*, trans. James Boyce, et al. (Nashville/New York: Abingdon Press, 1969) 136 f.

¹⁶ Mk 1:15; 8:35; 10:29; 13:10; 14:9 (16:15). Cf. W. Marxsen, *Mark the*

Acts 15:7). The departure from Jewish antecedents reached controversial proportions at Rom 1:16 f., the programmatic definition of "the gospel" as the eschatological disclosure of God's righteousness apart from the law, hence in defiance of the historic distinction of the Jewish people (cf. Rom 3:21-22; 29-30). The fact that such a radical announcement could be referred to simply as "*the gospel*," without modifying epithets or specifications, suggests a familiarity with the usage among Paul's readers at Rome,¹⁷ whom he had not himself evangelized. His unique genitive constructions, *to euaggelion tou christou* and *to euaggelion tou theou*,¹⁸ are no less indicative of hard and fast usage, and he attaches them consistently to the content and norm of his missionary activity. Constitutive as the Apostle's usage might have been, therefore, with respect to the Christian sense which *euaggelion* acquired, it is doubtful that he actually introduced the term to the churches. Rather, it was fixed in hellenistic missionary speech before him, among the envoys of the church of Antioch, in fact, from whom he also inherited the radical antithesis of law and gospel which became the focus of his endeavour.¹⁹

Paul's indebtedness to the antinomian missionaries of Antioch is not confined to the technical term for their message. He also inherited confessional formulas from them, already coined in their repetitive usage, with which a kind of canonical expression of the content of the message could be delivered.²⁰ Such formulas pro-

Evangelist, 127. It is also clear that Mk is the single point of entry of this term into the synoptic tradition (*ibid.*, 125).

¹⁷ W. Schneemelcher, in E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha I*, trans. R. McL. Wilson (London: Lutterworth Press, 1963) 73.

¹⁸ "The gospel of Christ" is a uniquely Pauline expression; "the gospel of God" occurs six times in Paul, twice elsewhere (Mk 1:14; I Pet 4:17).

¹⁹ R. Bultmann, "The Significance of the Historical Jesus for the Theology of Paul," in Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding. Collected Essays*, trans. L.P. Smith (New York: Harper and Row, 1969, 220-46) 221 f.; Wolfgang Schrage, "Ekklesia' und 'Synagoge.' Zum Ursprung des urchristlichen Kirchenbegriffs," *ZThK* 60 (1963, 178-202) 197-98; Walther Schmithals, *Paul and James*, trans. D.M. Barton, *Stud. Bibl. Theol.*, 46 (Chicago: Allenson, 1965) 28ff.; P. Stuhlmacher, *Evangelium*, 74, 108.

²⁰ H. Conzelmann, *Outline*, 165 f., and *ThLZ* 94 (1969) 882 ff.; K. Wegehast, *Tradition*, 51-92; D. Lührmann, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 88-92; J. Roloff, *Apostolat*, 83-90; Von Campenhausen, *Entstehung*, 125-39, and *NTK*,

vide nuclear resumes of the kerygma at crucial points in the epistles, like I Cor 15, Rom 1, Phil 2, and furnish, in each case, the foundation of derivative theological argument which is of utmost significance for the life of the congregation being addressed. A similar type of formula at I Thess 1:9-10 sets the apocalyptic tone for the exhortations and encouragements of that letter; and here, as in the other three instances, the formula is associated with the term "gospel" in one of its typical Pauline configurations (I Thess 1:5; cp. I Cor 15:1 [unmodified]; Rom 1:1 [gen.]; Phil 1:27 [gen.]). The pre-pauline missionary heritage in the epistles, therefore, embraces a basic understanding of the Christ event in terms of the law-gospel antithesis, together with already diversified credal formulas attesting the rich cultural mixture of late hellenism, in general, and the generous syncretism of expanding Christendom, in particular.²¹

We wish to pause over these pluriform credal symbols in Paul for two reasons: first, because the paradoxical relationship of the many formulas to the one gospel derives from the special meaning that the term "gospel" had for Paul; secondly, and directly to our point, because the manner in which Paul builds his theology through interpretation of these formulas²² represents a pattern which later governed the formation of a canonical Christian literature. That is to say, a *regula fidei* for Christian proclamation was furnished originally by credal formulas, whose "canonical" function for the earliest authors was ultimately inherited by the books they wrote for their churches. Each of these points requires illustration:

112; K. Lehmann, *Auferweckt*, 36-37; F. Hahn, *EvTh* 30 (1970) 457ff.; Günther Bornkamm, *Paul*, trans. D.M.G. Stalker (New York: Harper and Row, 1971) 112ff.

²¹ "Christianity in all its diversified appearances, including its so-called orthodox developments, is a thoroughly syncretistic religion. . . ." (With respect to early Christianity in particular:) "We have to do here with a religious movement which is syncretistic in appearance and conspicuously marked by diversification from the very beginning. What its individuality is cannot be taken as established a priori" (H. Koester, in *Trajectories*, 115, 117).

²² H. Conzelmann, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, Meyerkommentar, 5. Abteilung, 11. Auflage (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1969) 293 ff., and *ThLZ* 94 (1969) 883; von Campenhausen, *Entstehung*, 134 ff.; H. Schlier, in *Zur Frühgeschichte* . . ., 55 ff.; K. Lehmann, *Auferweckt*, 42; F. Hahn, *EvTh* 30 (1970) 459.

a) First, the use of formulaic material to articulate the gospel has tempted some exegetes to view tradition and gospel as one and the same for Paul; that is, they consider that the symbols themselves, the apostolic *paradoseis*, represented the gospel in a way which was binding and permanent for the Apostle, flowing from an authority and ministry antecedent to his own.²³ This is to anticipate later developments in the understanding of canonicity according to which the growth of the NT tradition would have been uniform and organic, and Paul would truly have conformed to the Lucan portrait of him, viz. as foremost link in the chain of tradition which emanated from Jerusalem. Serviceable as this picture has been in Catholic ecclesiology and conventional catechesis, and much as I Cor 15 with its technical tradition terminology seems to support it, it has actually suppressed other perspectives which an attentive study of Pauline statements on their own terms will restore. The first chapter of Galatians, for example, seems to remove the gospel from the order of human transmission and teaching altogether (v. 12), identifying it as nothing less than the act of God revealing, and stressing the tension between revelation and tradition as the breach between the old aeon and the new.²⁴ Just as "gospel" is defined at Rom 1:16

²³ The clearest statement identifying tradition and gospel comes from H. Schlier: "Diese Paradosis ist eigentlich das Evangelium. Denn sie ist der Wesens-Kern des Evangeliums" ("Kerygma und Sophia. Zur neutestamentlichen Grundlegung des Dogmas," in Schlier, *Die Zeit der Kirche. Exegetische Aufsätze und Vorträge*³ [Freiburg: Herder, 1962, 206-32] 216). This view seems unaltered now in *Frühgeschichte*, 54. Oscar Cullmann is likewise a prominent exponent of this view, and of his writings we may cite *The Early Church. Studies in Early Christian History and Theology*, abridged ed. by A.J.B. Higgins (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966) 59-75, as well as *The Earliest Christian Confessions* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1949). In more qualified terms, but reductively in agreement with Schlier and Cullmann, in our opinion, are the statements of J. Roloff (*Apostolat*, 88 ff.) and K. Lehmann (*Auferweckt*, 40 ff.).

²⁴ D. Lührmann (*Offenbarungsverständnis*, 75 f.) cites the parallel structure of Gal 1:11 f. and 1:13-16 as stating that the gospel, as eschatological utterance, is revelation *rather than* tradition, the line of demarcation between the old and new aeons being the Apostle's crossover from a service of traditions to the "apostolate" of revelation (cf. also P. Stuhlmacher, *Evangelium*, 70 f., and Gerhard Friedrich, εὐαγγέλιον, in Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament II*, trans. G. W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964] 732). A possible antecedent in hellenism for the reference of εὐαγγέλιον to the

as δύναμις θεοῦ εἰς σωτηρίαν (cp. I Cor 9:16), so does this remarkable exordium of Gal make the gospel the saving *call* of God himself (1:6),²⁵ the powerful event in which the Creator exerts his rule over men and angels (1:8), disclosing himself as ὁ καλέσας ὑμᾶς ἐν χάριτι χριστοῦ (1:6). The gospel is consequently shown to be the event of revelation in which Christian existence is founded; it is the eschatological summons from the God of Abraham, who justifies the ungodly, "giving life to the dead and calling (καλοῦντος) into being that which did not exist" (Rom 4:17).²⁶ It is no accident

divine oracles themselves is cited by Julius Schniewind, *Euangelion. Ursprung und erste Gestalt des Begriffs Evangelium* (Gütersloh, 1927, repr. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1970) 83, who contends that such application of the term is "usual" in hellenistic sources.

²⁵ I owe much of the exegesis that follows to the splendid study of Erich Grässer, *ZThK* 66 (1969) 320 ff. I should like to add here also, in view of the spirited discussion that followed the reading of this paper at the convention, that I believe it is quite arbitrary to dilute the force of this chapter's statements because of the evident passion of its author. It is hermeneutically unsound to introduce the *Sitz im Leben* of a passage as modifying its assertions when similar modifications are not admitted elsewhere, or when the principle is not being applied consistently which Robinson states thus: ". . . primitive Christian statements cannot be understood, much less evaluated, as doctrinal statements in and of themselves, in isolation from the situation into which they spoke, and hence apart from the way they cut" (*Trajectories*, 62). I am in thorough agreement with this principle and would like to see it used consistently in NT exegesis, not arbitrarily invoked in the presence of discomfiting statements while ignored with familiar and reassuring ones. No more than the polemical soil of Paul's justification teaching should be cited to make it peripheral to Paulinism, should the circumstances of Galatians lead us to suggest, condescendingly: "Paul is not himself here," or "in view of other passages, he cannot really mean this" (!) One must rather come to terms with the fact that controversy nourished the Apostle's self-understanding thoroughly and consistently, and it is therefore to be taken as a hermeneutical factor in *all* passages of the letters dealing with the apostleship and the gospel of Paul. Precisely with reference to the term "gospel," we have already cited its probable bequest to Paul by the *controversialists* of the church of Antioch, hence we hardly think the setting of Gal 1 could be considered extraneous to the concept and thus disruptive of the pattern of Pauline usage with regard to it!

²⁶ This formula's source is, in part, the second of the "eighteen benedictions" of the Jewish liturgy (*m^oḥayyē hammētim*) and, in part, such expressions of the *creatio ex nihilo* as II Macc 7:28 and Philo, *De creat. princ.* 7 (cf. H. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* III [Munich: C.H. Beck, 1926] 212). On the formula's function in Rom 4:17 one recommends the remarkably penetrating exegesis of E. Käsemann, in *Perspectives on Paul*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971) 90 ff.

that the participial denominations of God which dominate Gal 1, ὁ ἐγγείρας and ὁ καλέσας (vv. 1. 6/15), echo Paul's memorable characterization of Abraham's God in Rom 4. Such is, after all, the Apostle's consistent picture of the deity: exercising the unconditional sovereignty that is his by calling those utterly devoid of credentials, the ungodly, just as he had created out of nothing and as he will call the dead to life! The gospel is precisely this transcendent call of God, the motion of his inscrutable will and ineffable mercy.

As God's own merciful gesture then, the gospel cannot be contained in verbal formulas²⁷ nor regulated by man's language (Gal 1:11 f.). It is not teaching learned 'about' salvation, it is the divine saving act itself, the incursion of the age of the future upon the age of the present (Gal. 1:4, 3:23);²⁸ as such it is before all tradition and creative of tradition,²⁹ admitting no criterion or guarantee outside itself,³⁰ being rather itself the source, norm, and finality of all Christian proclamation.³¹ Rival gospels urged against it, therefore, prove to be non-gospels (v. 7) on which the anathema of the world-judge is pronounced (vv. 8-9). And most startling, yet wholly co-

²⁷ "Contained" here recalls a statement which disturbed me in the essay of N. Appel (*ThSt* 32 [1971] 643): "Scripture . . . is recognized and received as canon, as authoritative, as *containing* the word of God" (italics mine). I do not wish to be captious about the sense in which "containing" is used, but this is precisely the kind of statement I feel needs revision. Understood as transcendent event of grace, conferred on God's initiative and located in the *viva vox* of the proclamation, the word of God can hardly be thought to be "contained" anywhere under human auspices. It is the notion of automatic accessibility, calculability, mastery, that I should be anxious to avoid, and I am not sure the sentence quoted could be absolved of strong suggestion along these lines. From an opposite perspective, and correctly in my opinion, the essay of E. Schweizer stresses the "Unverfügbarkeit des Wortes Gottes" in the canon (*EvTh* 31 [1971] 342), citing the fallen man's craving to be master of all he surveys, God's word included! That transcendent word is not "available" in the Scriptures, the symbols, or anywhere else; it is granted uniquely in the presence of faith's obedience! Our theological language ought to safeguard this perspective.

²⁸ P. Stuhlmacher, *Evangelium*, 63. The determining influence of the apocalyptic schema of the 'two aeons' in these Gal passages is brought out by D. Lührmann, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 75-81. Cf. also E. Grässer, *ZThK* 66 (1969) 321 n. 52.

²⁹ R. Bultmann, *Theology* II, 98; K. Wegenast, *Tradition*, 44, 50, 65 ff., 164 f.; P. Stuhlmacher, *Evangelium*, 70 f.

³⁰ E. Grässer, *ZThK* 66 (1969) 319 f., 339.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 313-15.

herent with Paul's thought, is the fact that not even his own unique person and experience can qualify as criterion or guarantee of the gospel's truth, since the Apostle himself stands with the angels under its sacral verdict: "If even we, or an angel from heaven, should proclaim a different gospel . . . , let him be anathema" (Gal 1:8). Indeed, the absence of guarantees, the annihilation of human claims and pretensions, is the essence of a gospel understood in terms of the justification of the ungodly.³² Such a message simply cannot be *kata anthrōpon*, and the so-called apostolic symbols could not guarantee secure possession of the word by him on whom that word was judgment and annihilation.³³

A certain tension, therefore, between the one gospel and the transmitted faith-formulas is a necessary consequence of taking these thoughts of Gal 1 seriously. The gospel is revelation *rather than* tradition, a reality of the new aeon rather than the old, of God's speaking and man's obedience. The chapter's assertions cannot be

³² On the force of 1:8 cf. E. Schweizer, *EvTh* 31 (1971) 347, as well as E. Grässer, *ZThK* 66 (1969) 320, 343. The relationship between criticism of the scriptural canon and the doctrine of justification *sola fide* resides in the critic's rescue of the divine word from the extraneous guarantees with which its tradition tends to surround it. This was the resolute criterion of R. Bultmann's *Sachkritik*, as he himself states (e.g., in *Kerygma and Myth* II, trans. R.H. Fuller [London: S.P.C.K., 1962] 191), and as P. Stuhlmacher assesses his contribution (*ZThK* 68 [1971] 140 ff.). Cf. also F. Hahn, *ZnW* 63 (1972) 2; G. Ebeling, *Faith*, 56 ff.; E. Käsemann, *NTK*, 405, and *Essays*, 57-58, 62, and *ZThK* 64 (1967) 273 ff.—Recent reaffirmations of the centrality of the justification tenet within Paulinism, to my mind quite conclusive: H. Conzelmann, *Outline*, 159, 214-20, and in R. Batey, ed., *New Testament Issues* (New York: Harper 'Forum' Books, 1970) 134-38; E. Käsemann, *Questions*, 168-82.

³³ It is hardly surprising that E. Käsemann should worry about Conzelmann's *Symbolforschung* as a phenomenon within the Bultmannian sphere of influence. It could turn out to be still another quest of the forbidden "certainty" (cf. previous note), with the pithy formula creating the illusion of control (cf. Käsemann, *ZThK* 62 [1965] 141). Yet so long as God's word and its tradition are carefully distinguished in the believer's mind, it does not seem illegitimate to press the never-ending pursuit of the gospel by seeking out the crucial, penetrating formula (not resting with it, of course). Käsemann himself expresses the need of something like a formula: "Man muss mit einem Satz sagen können, was Christum treibet, oder man wird überhaupt nichts Entscheidendes zu sagen haben" (*NTK*, 406; italics mine). The danger of the formula lies in its very terseness and mnemonic appeal. It can readily become a cliché without force, hence no formula can acquire a permanent existence in its own right. The quest of the gospel can stop at no such human expression.

understood otherwise.³⁴ And yet with all this, Paul was *traditor* of missionary traditions; and he understood them to articulate the "gospel" and to require his converts' faithful adherence (Gal 1:9; I Cor 11:1, etc.). Are we therefore in the presence of an irresolvable dialectic?³⁵ Must we equivocate Paul's understanding of gospel³⁶ or declare that his practice simply belies his theory? Not if we recall the analogy of his comparison between the eschatological reality of *agapē* and the noblest Christian charisms in I Cor 13. The charisms of "knowledge" and "prophecy" faded before the divine *agapē* as the transitory, partial, and imperfect, before that which is permanent, total, and full! The charisms, too, were realities of the *Endzeit* but, as endowments of those still living in the midst of the doomed aeon, they were destined to pass away with the age, while "love" is perfect and everlasting.³⁷ Yet the latter is also anticipated in the present as a possibility of the redeemed. The difference is that it represents God's reality rather than man's, while the charisms are rooted in the human situation and are differentiated according to that situation. Of the charisms, like the faith-formulas, it is the situation-reference which accounts for variety and essential limitation. Both are *ek merous* and both impermanent, while *agapē* and *euaggelion* are the reality of God breaking in upon the world of the present. The analogy is not perfect, but it helps to bring a wholly typical Pauline dialectic into focus.

To insist on the situational component of the credal formulas does not dishonor these venerable passages nor gainsay their critical—yes, even normative—function in the development of a Christian

³⁴ G. Bornkamm, *Paul*, 18-19; D. Lührmann, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 71 ff.; K. Wegenast, *Tradition*, 40-41. That *παρέλαβον* is technical tradition term in 1:12 is rightly maintained by F. Hahn (*EvTh* 30 [1970] 458 n. 30) against Wegenast (*op. cit.*, 43).

³⁵ So Erich Dinkler, in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*³ VI, 971.

³⁶ As K. Lehmann does, in my opinion, between his assertion that gospel and tradition are not one and the same for Paul (*Auferweckt*, 40), and his approving quotation of H. Schlier's statements asserting precisely that (*ibid.*, 41 f.—cf. n. 23 above)!

³⁷ On I Cor 13: G. Bornkamm, "The More Excellent Way," in *Early Christian Experience*, trans. Paul L. Hammer (New York: Harper and Row, 1969) 180-93.

theology.³⁸ It has been the distinction of Hans Conzelmann to bring them back to center stage in NT studies, against some visceral rebuttal from fellow Bultmannians.³⁹ We in turn, given our tradition, must guard against thinking of these ancient symbols as timeless doctrinal assertions, each expressing a particular aspect of the Christ-event and inviting fusion with others of its kind for a "total picture" of the gospel reality. Conzelmann insists⁴⁰ that each formula was intended to express the truth of Christ in its entirety; what it elicited was not fusion of further formulas but interpretation. The simplest of the formulas, for example: *Christ died and rose up* (I Thess 4:14), does not need the addition of other credal items; but it desperately needs interpretation, meaning comprehending appropriation in given, anthropological situations,⁴¹—a need which built a contingent audience-factor into the formulas from the very beginning. Hence the addition of *hyper hēmōn* to that simplest formula was interpretation rather than addition, its anthropological reference

³⁸ The formulas' "canonical" function is not a new insight. Alfred Seeberg had recognized it in 1903, in his *Der Katechismus der Urchristenheit*, repr. Theologische Bücherei, 26 (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1966) 55 f., and he was the first to suggest a tradition-historical analysis of the NT based on the formulas (as F. Hahn explains in his preface to the recent reprinting of the *Katechismus*). Seeberg noticed, however, that the early Christian gospel did not remain within the language-contours of the confessional formulas, and in his book *Das Evangelium Christi* of 1905 (resumed by F. Hahn in the *Katechismus* preface, pp. xvi f.), he pointed out that εὐαγγέλιον was expanded well outside the *Gedankenkreis* of the formulas by the synoptic concept of gospel. This should counsel against the facile identification of *gospel* and *paradosis* which we mentioned previously (n. 23) and remind us that the primitive expositors clearly understood the abundant hermeneutical possibilities of the transcendent word. It is therefore not an "underestimation of the *paradosis*" (Lehmann, *Auferweckt*, 42) which is to be avoided by equating *euangelion* and *paradosis*, but rather an underestimation of *euangelion* which is incurred by so doing!

³⁹ The scorn expressed in Käsemann's assessment of the *Symbolforschung* proposed by Conzelmann shows that this is a neuralgic issue among the Bultmannians (cf. Käsemann, *ZThK* 62 [1965] 137-52, against Conzelmann, *Int* 20 [1966] 15-17, 24 f.). Review n. 33 above.

⁴⁰ *ThLZ* 94 (1969) 883; also K. Lehmann, *Auferweckt*, 36.

⁴¹ Conzelmann, *Int* 20 (1966) 24: "Paul has a positive understanding of theology as exposition of the faith. The faith is formed in doctrinal sentences, to be sure, but these sentences interpret the existence of the believer. The credo is only interpreted if it is seen that the objective statement about Christ contains a statement about myself . . ." Cf. also F. Hahn, *ZnW* 63 (1972) 8.

being the congregations' commemoration of the Lord's death in a communal meal.⁴² Similar interpretative appropriation came with the variation of Christological titles, the probing of the OT Scriptures for elucidation of the event, the citation of resurrection witnesses, etc. Still more obviously situational is the appearance of syncretistic items in the symbols: the temporal dualism of Jewish apocalyptic (Gal 1:4), the dualism of the spheres of reality (Rom 1.3 f.), the varied *anthrōpos* speculations (Phil 2:6 ff.; I Cor 15:21, etc.), the Gnostic myth of the ascent (I Cor 2:8), and the like. Since these influences clearly prevailed in the human circumstances of the gospel's pronouncement, their presence in the symbols documents the tenor of certain human responses to the divine call, and shows, at the same time, the inescapable relativity of all proclamation. St. Paul can make the symbols the core of his epistolary expositions for the sake of his hearers' response, as well as to implement his own fidelity to God's word. The canonicity of the formula was therefore two-sided: *ex parte verbi*, but emphatically *ex parte hominis recipientis* as well.

Given the relativity of the formulas, then, we are not surprised to find Paul's treatment of them to be quite uninhibited by the standards of the later Church. He does not repeat them as "sacred text" but freely interpolates words of his own, altering the sense and focus of the original utterance.⁴³ His editing of the transmitted words, together with his creative, far-reaching expositions built upon the *paradoxeis*, constitutes a rather different relationship between *traditum* and *traditor* than contemporary expositors would allow themselves—in theory, at least!

b) But that brings us to the second area of our special interest regarding the ancient credal formulas in Paul. With his expositions based upon them we have arrived at the phase of a Christian *sacred literature*, albeit a literature which did not necessarily aspire to canonicity when it was written. Conzelmann's exegesis of I Cor 15 shows in detail how the language of the formula in vv. 3-5 is care-

⁴² G. Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience* (n. 37) 136.

⁴³ H. von Campenhausen, *Entstehung*, 127. K. Wegenast (*loc. cit.* in n. 20) demonstrates this in detail with reference to I Cor 15:3-5; Rom 1:3-4; 3:24 ff.; 4:25; Phil 2:6-11.

fully observed and expounded upon in the argumentation of the chapter.⁴⁴ The Christological title itself, the bipartite partnership of death/burial and resurrection/appearances, the atonement formula, even the perfect passive tense of *egeirein*, all play their precise functions in the refutation of the enthusiasts' understanding of resurrection. One must reckon also, of course, with a conscious blending of the symbol's wording with the needs of the exposition,—as certainly occurs in the adjoining formulaic material on the course of resurrection appearances (esp. v. 6b).⁴⁵ Here we witness *in concretis* the anthropological component of both the tradition's format and its literary *hermeneia*.

More impressive still is the literary product of formula exegesis in Romans 1. The traditional statements have been diagnosed at vv. 3-4, with notice taken of the parallel between this formulaic statement of the "gospel of God" (v. 1) and the programmatic gospel definition at 1:16f., which we quoted earlier and which serves as a prelude to the great epistle as a whole.⁴⁶ Given the structural parallel between the two passages, we are inclined to look for a continuity of ideas between the two, such as the one suggested by Peter Stuhlmacher.⁴⁷ Analyzing the literary framework in which Paul cast the symbol in the first verses of Rom, Stuhlmacher finds the symbol has

⁴⁴ *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (n. 22 above) 312 ff., 316 ff.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 304: the editorial insertion "most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep" should be read with the emphasis upon the some who have died rather than the many who are still alive, whereupon this observation "rebukes by anticipation" the thought that while Christ was raised from the dead, those who died after seeing him have no further hope but have come to their end altogether. "They saw the answer which the death of Jesus found by God's power, and they did not see the answer in their own death. Is this not an intolerable relationship?" (Karl Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, trans. H.J. Stenning [New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1933] 144 f., showing the anticipation of I Cor 15:17-18 in v. 6b). The force of Paul's argument is not apparent until the issue is understood as joined with the spirit-enthusiasts, who maintain that the Christian's ἀνάστασιν ἤδη γεγονέναι (II Tim 2:8; cf. J.M. Robinson, *Trajectories*, 32 ff.; H. Conzelmann, *Der erste Brief*. . . , 309 f.; R. Bultmann, *Theology I*, 169; G. Bornkamm, *Paul*, 223; E. Käsemann, *Questions*, 125).

⁴⁶ Cf. G. Bornkamm, *Paul*, 116, and the Rom commentaries of O. Michel and O. Kuss.

⁴⁷ "Theologische Probleme des Römerbriefpräskripts," *EvTh* 27 (1967) 374-89, esp. 381 ff.

been made into an effective statement of the peculiar Pauline vision of sacred history, viz. the history of God's promises, a continuity exclusively *ex parte Dei* which robs empirical history of demonstrable progression and coherence.⁴⁸ This is the perspective on which the epistle's theme of God's righteousness is based, and we meet it already in the introduction of the faith-formula as the "gospel of God," which "he announced beforehand, by way of promise, through his prophets in the holy scriptures concerning his son" (vv. 2 f.). Then follows the well-known couplet which compares Jesus' fleshly status as Davidic descendant with his exalted state in the Spirit as God's adopted Son. A critical reduction of the stature of Davidic descent is unmistakable when the added phraseology of the second statement breaks the couplet's symmetry and accents the state of adoptive sonship *en dynamei*,⁴⁹ the endowment with holy spirit which marks the real fulfillment of the ancient dynastic oracle (II Sam 7). Messianic sovereignty was consequently not achieved historically, by virtue of Davidic lineage, but was conferred *eschatologically*, by "resurrection of the dead." This departure from standard royal ideology, together with the flesh-spirit dichotomy, argues for hellenistic Jewish Christianity as the formula's original environment.⁵⁰ Moreover, with his own literary parentheses⁵¹ adding the

⁴⁸ E. Käsemann, *Perspectives on Paul* (n. 26 above) 88.

⁴⁹ P. Stuhlmacher, *EvTh* 27 (1967) 382: the phrase ἐν δυνάμει, modifying υἱοῦ θεοῦ rather than ὁρισθέντος, distinguishes the state of the Son of God after resurrection from his state preceding it, for which a contrasting ἐν ἁσθενείᾳ might be implied.

⁵⁰ Eduard Schweizer argued successfully ("Röm. 1,3f. und der Gegensatz von Fleisch und Geist vor und bei Paulus," *EvTh* 15 [1955] 563-71; now Schweizer, *Neotestamentica* [Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1963] 180-89), against Bultmann (*Theology* I, 49 f.), that the flesh-spirit antithesis belonged in the original formula and is not the editorial addition of Paul. His arguments are taken as totally convincing by K. Wegenast (*Tradition*, 71) and F. Hahn (*Christologische Hoheitstitel. Ihre Geschichte im frühen Christentum*, Forschungen z. Rel. u. Lit. des A/NTs, 83 [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1963] 252), and the consensus seems not at all threatened by Eta Linnemann, "Tradition und Interpretation in Röm. 1,3 f.," *EvTh* 31 (1971) 264-76.

⁵¹ K. Wegenast, *Tradition*, 74 f.; P. Stuhlmacher, *EvTh* 27 (1967) 382 f., 384. The parentheses by means of which Paul edits the *paradosis* into his proēm are, on the one hand, περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ (v. 3a), on the other side, Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν (v. 4b).

perspective of his pre-existence Christology (Gal 4:4), Paul has made the two Christological stages of the couplet into three stages: preexistence, earthly state, and heavenly exaltation as 'Lord.' Now the Christology of the passage is structured according to the history-of-promises schema, and the "gospel" is shown to announce the great act of divine fidelity towards the very people which had heard the prophets' voices. God's promises to the Jews were carried out in phases which were the phases of his Son's existence, and the *euangelion theou* is a comprehensive testimony of that *steadfast truth* and *fidelity* of God, his *dikaiosynē* (Rom 3:3-5), before which a self-reliant and contentious people stands condemned along with the rest of mankind. The gospel which determines Pauline missionary endeavor can now be summarized at the end of the preamble in terms of that transcendent, saving power of God, and the familiar words can be added: δικαιοσύνη γὰρ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ ἀποκαλύπτεται (Rom 1:17).

By this time the exegesis of the symbol can be seen to bring the great themes of Romans into the sharpest focus. The definitive stage of the fulfillment of the promises involved a step beyond the boundaries of Israelite history, beyond the realm of "the flesh," by the eschatological act of God's power. *Dynamis* thus qualifies the adoptive sonship in v. 4, *via* Paul's own interpolation in all probability,⁵² whereupon the definition of gospel at v. 16 echoes the symbol: δύναμις θεοῦ εἰς σωτηρίαν παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι—Jew first, according to the history of the promises, and then Greek. Typically for Paul, the privilege of the Jews is reduced to the order prevailing in the bygone epoch. To them, according to the formula's echo in Rom 9, 5, *Christos kata sarka* was born. But God's power has now extended the saving promise beyond history's barriers, since a history of man's *infidelity* has proved the inevitable obverse feature of the working out of God's *fidelity* (Rom 1:18—3:20).⁵³ In the litigation setting

⁵² So E. Schweizer, *Neotestamentica*, 180, and K. Wegenast, *Tradition*, 71. *E contra*, Miss Linnemann (*EvTh* 31 [1971] 274), and F. Hahn, *Christologische Hoheitstitel*, 252, 254.

⁵³ Cf. G. Bornkamm, "The Revelation of God's Wrath," in *Early Christian Experience* (n. 37 above) 47-70.

suggested by the juristic terms *dikaioσynē* and *dikaioσthai*,⁵⁴ the gospel becomes the announcement of God's final verdict upon history as the theatre of man's activity: it has ended in Christ (Rom 10:4), whose death has shown that God alone is faithful while man is false and his activity, hopeless. In light of that verdict, only they are righteous who relinquish their claims and illusions in the surrender of faith. The credal formula, edited into the schema of the history of the promises, looks even beyond the justification treatise to the great statement on Israel's hope in Rom 9-11, the epistle's climax. The nation of the promises became a paradigm of the condition of self-reliant mankind, foundering in disobedience and subject to God's wrath (Rom 2; 3:9; 11:32). But in this Israel demonstrated that she, like the rest of the race, had to discover her own disobedience in order to experience God in his merciful fidelity, that which marks God off from mankind (cf. Rom 11:32). She remains the people of the promises, however, and the logic of their history makes her ultimate obedience to Christ inevitable. And so Paul draws out in these late chapters of the epistle the schema which he had woven around the credal formula in the very beginning.⁵⁵

We witness in Romans, therefore, a prime instance of the "canonical" function of the primitive faith-symbols in the emergence of a Christian literature. Subsequent authors imitated this pattern of

⁵⁴ Christian Müller, *Gottesgerechtigkeit und Gottes Volk. Eine Untersuchung zu Römer 9-11*, Forschungen zur Rel. u. Lit. . . . , 86 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1964) 54, 57-64; Karl Kertelge, 'Rechtfertigung' bei Paulus. *Studien zur Struktur und zur Bedeutungsgehalt des paulinischen Rechtfertigungsbegriffs*, Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen 3 (Münster: Verlag Aschendorff, 1967) 65 f., 124-26. Urging caution in this respect: P. Stuhlmacher, *Gerechtigkeit Gottes bei Paulus*², Forschungen. . . , 87 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1966) 137-39.

⁵⁵ Cf. E. Käsemann, *Questions*, 179-80 and 186-87; *Perspectives on Paul*, 75-76. Rom 11:32 is to be read as the *history-of-promises* principle which governs the Pauline theology of justification (Chr. Müller, *Gottes Gerechtigkeit und Gottes Volk*, 47, following Käsemann). Hence even at Rom 10:3, δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ is understood as the event of God's saving power, happening in Christ, which turns even the refusal of the Jews into ultimate salvation (as Rom 11 brings out; cf. Chr. Müller, *op. cit.*, 107, 112 f.). For the relationship of this argument particularly to the proēm formula cf. P. Stuhlmacher, *EvTh* 27 (1967) 384-86.

hermeneutic after Paul,⁵⁶ as we learn from a search for formulaic material in their works. Not only did *paradosis* citation become a Deutero-Pauline convention, as we could expect and as we observe in the hymns of Col and Eph;⁵⁷ but the same practice furnishes the plan of literary composition in less predictable instances—the gospels, for example, and the Johannine apocalypse. The Synoptics display the most interesting examples of formula adaptation, representing as they do the new and distinctive literary form inaugurated by St. Mark. The kerygmatic substratum of the novel Marcan enterprise, and perhaps its underlying Christological conception also,⁵⁸ show important lines of continuity with the Pauline formularies. The pericopes of Jesus' lifetime are encountered for the first time in Mk, but this document's *specificum* is its blending of the pericopes with the story of the passion, hence the fusion of the Christological perspectives of both. As is well known, the hinges of this combination are the centrally located passion predictions, which are so many kerygmata of the kind Paul had cited, now transposed to the setting of Jesus' own speech.⁵⁹ Just as the messianic secret

⁵⁶ H. von Campenhausen, *Entstehung*, 139; F. Hahn, *EvTh* 30 (1970) 460.

⁵⁷ In addition, the Pastoral author continues the practice of citing credal formulas, but his understanding of tradition is sharply altered with respect to Paul's. II Tim 2:8 is the best example because it is so close to Rom 1:3-4. The most noticeable change is that there is now *no adaptive exegesis* of the formula accompanying it, rather it is cited as a *dictum apostolicum* to be repeated and safeguarded. The canonical function of the formula is thus strengthened at the expense of its hermeneutical function. Cf. K. Wegenast, *Tradition*, 155 ff.; M. Dibelius-H. Conzelmann, *Die Pastoralbriefe*,⁴ Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 13 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1966) 7 ff., 69 f. H. von Campenhausen cites a similar pattern of non-adaptive formula citation in the Ignatian letters (*Entstehung*, 140 n. 45).

⁵⁸ P. Stuhlmacher (*EvTh* 27 [1967] 387 f.) ventures to relate the hermeneutical procedure involving the *paradosis* in Rom 1 directly to that which produced the narrative gospel genus: "Christological *paradosis* reflecting upon the historic activity of Christ is framed and understood in light of the final revelation of God hidden in the term (gospel) and bound to it." Stuhlmacher wonders, in other words, whether the Marcan messianic secret is not the direct outgrowth of the gospel concept, with its Christological stages, which the formula of Rom 1 implements. The formula announces the secret epiphany of God in the historical Jesus, and that is the concept which then controls the Marcan composition.

⁵⁹ The best treatment of these is still that of Heinz Eduard Tödt, *The Son of Man in the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. D.M. Barton (Philadelphia:

tones down the naive enthusiasm of the miracle stories, concomitantly the passion sayings refocus the reader's attention on the true content, the "center" of faith. Working with a primitive "aretalogy" of the kind which also furnished the miracle stories of John, Mark sought to correct a concentration upon Jesus as *theios anēr*, divine thaumaturge, in much the same way as Paul countered this ideology in the "super-apostles" at Corinth (II Cor 10-13).⁶⁰ Like Paul, Mark reminds his hearers of the central reality of the cross, which removes the sheen from the great feats and acclaim of man's world, calling men away from the gratification of themselves to faith's obedience before the spectacle of the Crucified. Thus each time the passion prophecy is made by Jesus in this gospel's central section (8:31; 9:31; 10:33 f.), a related group of parenetic sayings follows it, applying the principle of the messianic passion to the nature of Christian existence (8:34 ff.; 9:33 ff; 10:35 ff.). Formula exegesis therefore weaves the vital connection between the two great bodies of gospel tradition, the pericopes and the passion narrative, creating the first literary gospel, whose *Sitz im Leben* is receiving much attention currently in the works of Marcan *Redaktionsgeschichte*.⁶¹

Faith formulas, or related *paradoseis*, likewise provided principles of organization for the compositions of Matthew and Luke. Matthew's version of the literary gospel fused the Marcan narrative with a much more ample tradition of Jesus' sayings than Mark had employed. The imperative of the Christian preacher's repeating what Jesus had preached was by no means self-understood in the early

Westminster Press, 1965) 141-221. But cf. also Georg Strecker, "The Passion and Resurrection Predictions in Mark's Gospel," *Int* 22 (1968) 421-42.

⁶⁰ Cf. J.M. Robinson and H. Koester, *Trajectories*, 48 ff. and 187 ff. A contribution to Marcan *Redaktionsgeschichte* along these very lines, provocative but excessively inventive, is Theodore J. Weeden, *Mark: Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971). While I am convinced the author is on the right track, I feel we must be careful lest a future generation criticize us in the terms we use of the 'biographers' of the last century; only instead of saying we invented struggles, conflicts, decisions, inner awakenings, etc., for Jesus and his disciples, they will be accusing us of doing it for the evangelist and his friends and foes! With Weeden one is close to a melodrama pitting Mark against his "*theios anēr* opponents"!

⁶¹ Cf. the surveys by Hans-Dieter Knigge, *Int* 22 (1968) 53-70, and Howard Clark Kee, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 90 (1971) 333-36.

churches, but it had motivated the compilers of the sayings tradition whose hypothetical literary redactions are usually referred to with the designation "Q." A directive of Jesus which might have been cited by the collectors of his sayings is recorded by Matthew at 10:7—quite certainly in the form which "Q" had contained. This was his command to go and preach "that the Kingdom of God is near," presented as part of the instructions to the disciples sent out as missionaries in Galilee. When one recalls that that announcement is none other than the capsule resume of Jesus' "gospel" presented at the beginning of Mark (1:14 f.), it becomes clear that its translation into a missionary mandate embodies a definite conviction as to the requisite content of Christian instruction.⁶² The fact that Matthew shared this conviction with the "Q" compilers stands out in his adaptations of the inaugural Marcan summary, which he has turned into a title for his discourse compositions, "*the gospel of the Kingdom*" (4:23; 9:35; cf. also 24:14). His reworking of the resume of Jesus' "gospel" thus becomes a literary plan, for his book is made up of the Marcan narrative and the great discourse collections in alternate blocks. Once again the familiar elements are present: a new community setting and requirement, recourse to oral tradition for capsule statements of faith's center, readaptation of the faith-statement *connected with the term gospel* to meet the situation at hand. Matthew's precise need seems to have been a restriction and codification of the sayings of Jesus within the protective framework of the Marcan narrative, perhaps countering the arbitrary wielding and expansion of that tradition by antinomian enthusiasts.⁶³

Finally, Luke's exploitation of the Marcan passion predictions, both as apostolic kerygmata in Acts and as the principles of transition in the twenty-fourth chapter of the gospel,⁶⁴ demonstrates anew

⁶² Willi Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist* (n. 15 above) 138-42; H.E. Tödt, *The Son of Man . . .* (n. 59 above) 248-49.

⁶³ Cf. Robinson and Koester, *Trajectories*, 71-113, 135, 166-87. On Matthew's anti-enthusiastic "front" cf. Gerhard Barth, "Matthew's Understanding of the Law," in G. Bornkamm, G. Barth, and H.J. Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, trans. Percy Scott (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963, 58-164) 159-64.

⁶⁴ Ulrich Wilckens, *Die Missionsreden der Apostelgeschichte. Form- und traditions-geschichtliche Untersuchungen*², Wissenschaftliche Monographien . . . , 5 (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1963) 111-21.

that the teaching of Jesus himself became the teaching of the Church, through the unique witness of the apostles. The studies of the Lucan edifice are too well known to need repetition here, but we are intent only upon pointing out the repetition of our pattern here as well. Nuclear statements of the gospel's essential truth furnish the core around which a literary composition is built; they therefore exercised a critical, or canonical, function for the author just as the books he wrote function for us.

This habit of reaching back to traditional statements of the gospel's central truth, and the situational factor motivating both the choice and the adaptation of the statements, are the elements we wish to carry forward from the analysis just completed to the issue of the literary canon and ongoing proclamation.

II. THE GOSPEL AND THE LITERARY CANON

Our observation of the significant association between the term "gospel" and the ancient faith-symbols of the NT has brought several important things into focus: a) the 'revelation' character of 'gospel' in Paul, and the one gospel's relationship of tension with the many and varied formulas Paul employed to express its truth; b) the basic intent of the formulas, which was to state the whole reality of salvation in capsule form; c) the fact, nevertheless, that the formulas were not accepted as "pure" expressions of the gospel,⁶⁵ in the sense of statements free from limiting situational factor and applicable *semper et ubique* with equal force. Each formula had its

⁶⁵ H. Conzelmann points out (*ThLZ* 94 [1969] 887-88) that the 'truth' of the formula depended upon its anthropological application. In its objectivity, the terse symbol could be misleading, and Corinth is again the paradigm for this. I Cor 15:1 ff. shows that there was no basic disagreement between Paul and the congregation over the statements of the credo itself. "Thus we have preached and thus you have believed" is a clear statement of the consensus. Yet the enthusiasts have clearly interpreted the formula wrongly, and it is against their error that the Apostle undertakes the correct interpretation of each element at vv. 12 ff. (cf. n. 45 above). Hence no sooner is the gospel spoken, and in being spoken rendered *paradosis*, than the admixture of human flaws and possibility of error are present. 'Pure' gospel exists only in the divine speech, not man's! For this reason E. Schweizer's essay is particularly appropriate, stressing as it does the inevitable partnership of divine Word and human resistance (*EvTh* 31 [1971] 343, etc.), hence the part that both play in any human version of the divine message, whether spoken or written.

anthropological factor built into it in the coining, hence variety in exposition did not set in first with the exegesis by the authors; d) finally, the recognition that formula-exegesis constituted the beginning of theology as a sustained and influential Christian enterprise, yielding ultimately the principle items of Christian *Urliteratur*, the expository letter and the narrative gospel. Canonical traditions therefore yielded canonical literature,—with, however, an increasingly restrictive notion of canonicity setting in with the written word.

The earliest authors' frequent recourse to symbols was based, we think, upon the fundamental recognition that *the gospel is one and indivisible*, and that its center should be conscientiously and unremittingly pursued by the believer. The authors cite the formulas because the formulas were attempts to state the whole truth,—in the words introducing the marvelous little hymn of I Tim 3:16, "the mystery of our religion." And the formulas themselves were coined by preachers who understood that without its center in focus, faith would readily yield either to the religious fashions of the moment or to man's irrepressible drive to reduce revelation to familiar and manageable proportions. A simple formula, for example, like Paul's own $\delta \lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma \delta \tau\omicron\upsilon \sigma\tau\alpha\upsilon\rho\omicron\upsilon$ (I Cor 1:18), had the power of recalling instantly the gospel's unsettling accents, which a domesticated belief, blandishing the ego with wondrous signs and trendy wisdom, would rather push off to the periphery of consciousness. Faith is not a complacent state nor a formalized self-contemplation; it is the *nova obedientia*, constantly to be renewed at the price of any and all self-reliance.

This is why a transmitted *kanōn*, whether of oral tradition or literary, cannot be equated with the word of revelation itself nor made into the formal faith-principle.⁶⁶ Such was the error of Protestant orthodoxy, which in effect betrayed what Luther had called "the manner of the NT" by equating the transcendent *verbum Dei* with the *verbum Dei scriptum*. No formula cast in human language, with its inevitable anthropological factor—hence, inevitable contingency and mutability, can confer a possession of the gospel. This is no doubt why St. Paul never cited and exegeted the same formula

⁶⁶ Cf. W. Joest, *NTK*, 264, 266. On Luther cf. n. 4 above.

twice, but varied his choice of credal and confessional statements to suit the needs of his exposition. As God revealing and calling in Christ, summoning men away from idol-making and self-deification to a different future, the "gospel" must resist the finished, secure statement. If the revealing God is truly allowed to be God, rather than a mere self-projection of the believer, then the serious theological pursuit of the "gospel" amidst the many formulations of the literary canon can never really come to rest here below. The scriptural canon, after all, is by E. Käsemann's admirable definition:

. . . the documentation, confined to early Christian testimonies, of the conflict between the Gospel and the World. It is no textbook of *pura doctrina*; neither is it purely, nor even principally, the collection of apostolic tradition qualifying as primary source in the history of dogma. And above all, it is not primarily a book of spiritual reading for private or church use. Rather it is the documentation of that historical process which once saw the gospel of the unknown God break into the world of the idols (*NTK*, 410).

When the authors of this literary canon used capsule statements to locate faith's center, they had ample precedent in Jesus' own teaching. He had taught, in fact, that God's word does not come under man's control in the *verbum scriptum* when he stated, in formulas, the central truth embodied in "the whole law and the prophets" (Mt 22:40: the great commandment; Mt 7:12: the golden rule). Confronted with this "canon within the canon," a man cannot manipulate the word then by piecing together favored items from the Scriptures or brandishing favored texts as slogans, out of context. For the nuclear formula restores the "center" and puts all else in essential, critical perspective. This example of the Lord's critique of the OT canon⁶⁷ has been willingly enough followed by the Church in modern times, as in the elimination of whole compositions of the psalter from the breviary because they represent a primitive and undignified morality. But the NT is a different matter,⁶⁸ as if a different humanity had participated in its formation. Yet are tensions less likely here between the unutterable Word, now

⁶⁷ E. Schweizer, *EvTh* 31 (1971) 340 ff.

⁶⁸ As Käsemann ironically notes, *ZThK* 64 (1967) 268.

revealed in its fulness, and the finite words chosen to give it expression? Memorable words of Bultmann remind us that the struggle of the word against the idols must rather be at its greatest pitch when revelation has come to its fullest phase:

[Scripture's] subject-matter (*Sache*) . . . is greater than the interpreting word When in exegeting Romans I identify tensions and contradictions, heights and depths, when I exert myself to show where Paul is dependent upon Jewish theology . . . or Hellenistic sacramentalism . . . , I do it to show where and how the subject-matter comes to expression, in order that I myself may lay hold of the subject-matter, which is greater even than Paul. And I am of the opinion that such criticism can only aid the clarity of the subject-matter. For the more strongly I sense that with *this* subject-matter it is a question of uttering the unutterable . . . , the more strongly I also sense, and as exegete point out, the relativity of the word. And not only the relativity of the word, but also . . . the fact that no man—not even Paul—can always speak only from the subject-matter. Other spirits also come to expression than the spirit of Christ. Hence criticism can never be radical enough.⁶⁹

This persuasive statement of the need for *Sachkritik* of the NT canon as well as the OT asserts that the *regula fidei* cuts across the statements of NT authors, constituting a "center" of the literary canon.⁷⁰ Testimonies can approach it more or less closely at given points,—as can be seen in the fact that sacred authors can even present thoughts at variance with their own major tenets. One thinks of Paul's claim to possession of an esoteric wisdom in I Cor 2:6 ff., directly following his repudiation of such media for the gospel of the Crucified (I Cor 1:18-25). Is he qualifying his original point, or mocking the pretensions of the Corinthian pneumatics, or simply being inconsistent?⁷¹ This is a *Sachfrage* and may illustrate questions

⁶⁹ Bultmann's review of the second edition of Barth's *Romans*, in *Christliche Welt* 36 (1922) 372 f., cited by James M. Robinson in *The New Hermeneutic*, *New Frontiers in Theol.*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper and Row, 1964) 30-31.

⁷⁰ W.G. Kümmel, *NTK*, 96; E. Käsemann, *NTK*, 407.

⁷¹ Cf. D. Lührmann, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 113-40, and G. Bornkamm, *μυστήριον*, *Theological Dictionary of the NT* IV, 819 f., in favor of the view that 2:6 ff. represents a mere formal accommodation to the language of Corinthian gnosis as part of its refutation. Others prefer the view that Paul

which can be posed concerning whole books, measured by their own kerygmatic foundations, or individual NT statements measured by a seriously pursued "center" of NT theology. The "gospel within the canon" is simply a pursuit of faith's essence amidst the historical diversity of faith's statements.

Because our subject is controversial, it is equally important for us to specify what we are convinced this quest is *not*. It is *not* the wielding of a principle of selection which ordains that only some canonical testimonies will be heard while others are permanently and *a priori* stigmatized. Consequently it is also *not* an *a priori* choice of acceptable ideas, lest it become the kind of illusion of mastery over the word which it seeks to eradicate. *Neither* is it instituting a dialectic between kerygma and canon, playing the one off against the other and abandoning the Church to supposedly hopeless contradictions in her sources.⁷² Finally, it is *not* a refusal to recognize legitimate developments in the concept of tradition and the structure of the Church which the revision of primitive eschatology made unavoidable.⁷³ The "gospel" would not be worth discussing at all if it required that believers deny the reality of continuing world history, returning to a formless social organization and abdicating the task of their belief's faithful transmission.

This *via negativa* in our discussion is important, for we are emphatically not intent upon establishing a tyranny of the interpreter over the canon of sacred Scripture. Our concern is to do the opposite: to destroy such tyranny in its familiar forms. In the sacred Scripture, after all, we are dealing with the perduring obstacle of the

intends to pursue a doctrine of pneumatic perfection and to present himself as spokesman of a genuine, esoteric wisdom. Cf. Robin Scroggs, "Paul: ΣΟΦΟΣ and ΠΙΝΕΥΜΑΤΙΚΟΣ," *New Testament Studies* 14 (1967-68) 33-55; H. Conzelmann, "Paulus und die Weisheit," *New Testament Studies* 12 (1965-66, 231-44) 238 ff., and *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (n. 22 above) 74 ff.

⁷² Cf. F. Hahn, *EvTh* 30 (1970) 468 n. 64; E. Schweizer, *EvTh* 31 (1971) 355; E. Fuchs, *ZThK* 63 (1966) 429. An example of hermeneutic which casts this caution to the winds, manipulating the Scriptures with painfully obvious predispositions, is John Charlot, *New Testament Disunity: Its Significance for Christianity Today* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970).

⁷³ The systematic invective of E. Käsemann against church structures, and the NT books which built them, exemplifies the opposite approach. Cf. *Jesus means Freedom*, trans. Frank Clarke (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969).

incarnation, which was revelation's great stumbling block.⁷⁴ The Word's entry into the sphere of the flesh was a most serious risk, for the flesh is the sphere of immediacy,—of the obvious, the apparent, the superficial. Man imagines himself undisputed master in this realm, and so he pretended to adjudicate the Word's appearance in Jesus of Nazareth, to all appearances a man like any other. The visible contains the illusion of clarity, of permanence, of familiarity and availability; and a complacent, self-sustaining judgment can always be made about it, such as: "*Is this not Jesus, whose mother and father we know?*" (Jn 6:42). So it is when man has words in writing: an illusion of security and comfortable availability comes with them, and by repeating them and living up to their letter one imagines he has mastered God's word. So it was with the doctors of the law in Jesus' day, who must truly have chafed at his "canon within the canon"!

This is why it would be good for our preaching if we revived the quest for the *regula fidei* in terms of the all-embracing resumé of what this confession is all about,⁷⁵—and in the sense of a *pointer to the center* rather than a guarantee. To be sure, formulas are more risky now than they were in the first century, since our abundant communications media create threadbare clichés overnight, and our own exposition is already glutted with them. Yet were we to canvass the Catholic faithful on where the "center" of their religion lies, the tabulation of results might be quite embarrassing. I suppose most would balk at the very idea of a search for the center, convinced as they are that Catholicism means global acceptance of an indeterminate number of propositions and practices, governed by the watchword: μήτε προσθεῖναι μήτε ἀφελεῖν! Small wonder that a faith so understood would be practically without impact upon real-life options. And would it not be different if the faithful were taught

⁷⁴ The happiest event in recent literary history—for exegetes, at least—is the translation by G.R. Beasley-Murray of the classic Johannine commentary by R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (New York: Scribner's, 1971). The reader of our thoughts at this point will recognize the influence of Bultmann's magnificent exegesis of John 1:14.

⁷⁵ In view of the essay of Karl Rahner reported above (n. 13), another one looks interesting which I have seen cited but have not obtained: "Die Forderung nach einer 'Kurzformel' des christlichen Glaubens," *Concilium* 3 (1967) 202-07.

to ask the question: "where does the center lie?"—and ask it again, and again?

The answers which others have proposed to this question, such as the "justification of the ungodly" by Luther and many moderns,⁷⁶ ought to be weighed seriously, and with attention to all the testimonies. Awareness should be maintained of the non-permanence of every answer, as well as of the indispensable situational component which makes any answer depend on who is doing the asking. Attended by this self-critical awareness and tentativeness, a quest for the "gospel" within the "canon" might reasonably hope to bring the "center" back into focus for many of faith's householders. And when the center is in focus, attitudes *must* change and complacency *must* yield; for real life is at long last interfered with, and a domesticated faith born of the illusion, "we have it all here," simply cannot endure.

A renewed *Symbolforschung* along these lines could therefore hope to render service to a public increasingly confused and vague about what Catholicity means. It would be a joint effort, of course, involving exegetes, historians, systematicians, and all the component ventures of a sensitive and credible hermeneutic. It would demand adequate listening to the sources, adequate "testing of spirits" in them⁷⁷ and among ourselves, then effective articulation, concerted diffusion, and so on. The effort's inevitable limitations, which make it endless in principle, are predicated upon the particular conditions of our age, the idols we carve! But so it was in the beginning also, when our canonical literature was in formation.

No, the *κανὼν τῆς ἀληθείας* is not the biblical text itself. It is that which awaits us beyond the text, in the presence of our genuine obedience and God's gracious bestowal.

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⁷⁶ E. Käsemann, *Essays*, 58, and *NTK*, 368-69, 405, etc.; H. Conzelmann, "Die Rechtfertigungslehre des Paulus: Theologie oder Anthropologie?" *EvTh* 28 (1968) 389-404, esp. 404: "*articulus stantis et cadentis theologiae*"; E. Grässer, *ZThK* 66 (1969) 338; Rolf Baumann, *Mitte und Norm* . . . (n. 13 above) 300 ff. Cf. also F. Mussner, in *Praesentia salutis*, 175 (partial acceptance).

⁷⁷ This is a favorite expression of Käsemann's depicting the quest for the 'gospel' within the 'canon' (e.g. *NTK*, 402 ff.). Cp. I Cor 12:10; I John 4:1.