

CAN CHRISTOLOGY BE AN EXPERIMENT?

In the Christian gospel, the symbol "God" and the symbol "Jesus" acquire a critical and productive force of their own: a religion which really has the effect of de-humanizing human beings—in whatever way—is either a false religion or a religion which understands itself wrongly.

This criterion of "humanizing" is not a reduction of true Christianity; in modern times it is in fact the first condition of human possibility and credibility for the Christian faith. Throughout the Bible the coming of the Kingdom of God is the coming of God as salvation for human beings, men and women. The Kingdom of God implies the criterion of humanizing people, both persons and society as well.

In the experiment of my two Jesus books,¹ I want to show that soteriology—the Kingdom of God as the liberation of people: the heart of Jesus' preaching—precedes Christology in the order of the genesis of Christological knowledge. Even the unique Easter experience is a soteriological event; only then does the question, "Who is he who is able to accomplish such things?" take on full significance. In other words, to adopt a modern Jewish distinction, explicit "Who?" religion follows after "What?" religion; from the beginning, the "Who?" Christology is already implicit in the "What?" Christology. From this point of view the soteriological question of Christology is in fact a "second-order" question because it already presupposes a first event, people's experience of salvation with Jesus.

However, precisely in considering this question it can emerge that in the order of reality, rather than in the cognitive order, the personal identity of Jesus is the foundation of his work of liberation and redemption and thus Christology precedes soteriology. I hope that it will emerge from the planned third volume of my trilogy on the experience of salvation from God in Jesus that the intrinsic link between soteriology and Christology is pneumatological.

Yet even without this third book it is already evident from my two books that it is a caricature of my views to suppose that my first book has a tendency to turn into a "future Jesuology with a concern for orthopraxis." In *Jesus the Christ*, Walter Kasper provides a Christology with an approach that is concerned from the beginning with the whole of Christological dogma. By contrast, in my two books, I want to lead believers to a Christology. Both perspectives are legitimate. One cannot absolutize one's own perspective and make it the only legitimate theological possibility which takes no account of other possibilities. There is no need for theologians to begin to make their own contribution

¹ *Jesus, An Experiment in Christology* is cited hereafter as I. *Christ, the Experience of Jesus as Lord* is cited as II. This lecture refers mainly to my *Interim Report* (New York: Seabury, 1980).

to the increasing polarization of fronts, as though one theology were more concerned than another to provide theological support for the undiluted and orthodox Christian faith. Rather, it is evident that there is a pluralism of concerns and anxieties and not a pluralism of orthodoxies.

Thus, intrinsically and of necessity, the experience of salvation (soteriology) poses for us the question of Jesus' identity (Christology). In linguistic terms, Christology can therefore be called a "second-order" level as over against soteriology understood as the experience of salvation from God in Jesus Christ.

I. REVELATION, EXPERIENCE AND INTERPRETATION

My first point is to analyze in brief the structure of human experience. What was experience for others yesterday is tradition for us today and what is experience for us today will in turn be tradition for others tomorrow. However, what once was experience can only be handed down in renewed experiences, at least as living tradition (II, 30-64). Without constantly renewed experience a gulf develops between the content of experience in ongoing life and the expression in words of earlier experiences: a gulf between experience and doctrine, between human beings and the Church. This means that Christianity is not a message which has to be believed but an experience of faith which becomes a message. Then, as an explicit message, it seeks to offer a new possibility of life experience to others who hear it from within their own experience of life.

A particular experience stands at the beginning of Christianity. It began with an experience; it began with an encounter. Some people, Jews, came into contact with Jesus of Nazareth. They were fascinated by him and stayed with him. This encounter, together with the events that took place in Jesus' life and in connection with his death, gave their own lives new meaning and significance. They felt that they were reborn, understood and cared for. Their new identity was expressed in a new enthusiasm for the Kingdom of God and therefore in a special compassion for others, for their fellowmen, in a way that Jesus had already shown to them. This change in the direction of their lives was the result of their real encounter with Jesus, since without him they would have remained as they had been, as they told other people later (see I Cor 15:17). This was not something for which they had taken the initiative; it had happened to them.

This astonishing and amazing encounter which some people had with Jesus of Nazareth, a human being of their own race and religion, became the starting point for the view of salvation to be found in the New Testament. This means that grace and salvation, redemption and liberation, need not be expressed in strange "supernatural" terms: they can be put into ordinary human language, the language of encounter and experience, above all the language of images and picture, testimony and

story, never detached from a specific liberating event. And yet, divine revelation is involved here.

In saying this much I have already indicated implicitly the fundamental hermeneutical principles of an experiment in Christology, the hinges on which the whole course of my two Jesus books turns.

A. Revelation and Experience

Revelation and experience are not opposites. God's revelation follows the course of human experiences. Of course, revelation—the sheer initiative of God's loving freedom—transcends any human experience; it does not emerge from subjective human experience and thinking; it can, however, be perceived only in and through human experiences. There is no revelation without experience. God's revelation is the opposite of human achievements or plans, but this contrast in no way excludes the fact that revelation also includes human plans and experiences. In no way does it suggest that revelation should fall outside our experience. Revelation is communicated through a long process of events, experiences and interpretations.

When Christians claim that Jesus is God's decisive revelation, they understand this in a twofold way, both objectively and subjectively. On the one hand, Christians affirm, "This is the way *we* see him." This affirmation points to the particular effects which Jesus had on the disciples who, in their own language, asserted emphatically, "We have experienced Jesus as the decisive and definitive salvation from God." On the other hand, in accordance with this self-same understanding on the part of the disciples, this affirmation also carries the implication, "We must see him like this because this is the way he is." This affirmation also says something about Jesus himself, in particular that he is God's supreme expression of himself.

According to the New Testament, it is the particular relationship between Jesus and the Kingdom of God which makes him our salvation in so far as he gives us a share in the relationship. In this way he confronts us with Israel's age-old dream: God's Kingdom as the salvation of human beings. Although the experience of salvation was primary for the disciples, this experience immediately provoked the question, "Who is the one who is able to do these things?" In other words, the New Testament speaks of the person of Jesus in such a way as to clarify how Jesus was able to do what he did. It is not the faith of the disciples which makes Jesus God's decisive revelation, although they could not have said anything about revelation without such an experience of faith. The experience is an essential part of the concept of revelation.

Thus human beings are in no way the ground of revelation; revelation is the foundation of our response in faith. The constitutive awareness of faith proves itself to be constituted. But it is human beings who claim to speak on the basis of revelation. In that case they must account for the fact that what they say from "below" really comes from "above." Otherwise we risk making our merely human words and views out to be what is called "the Word of God" that comes from "above."

B. Experience and Interpretation

The second hinge on which the experiment of my two Jesus books turns is concerned with the relationship—in human experience and therefore in the experiential aspect of revelation—between the element of experience and the element of interpretation or expression of experience.

Interpretation does not begin only when questions are asked about the meaning of what one has experienced. Interpretative identification is already an intrinsic element of the experience itself, first unexpressed and then deliberately reflected on. This further articulation is in no way an indiscriminate or superfluous elaboration. Interpretation and experience have a reciprocal influence on one another. Real love is fed by the experience of love and by its own particular ongoing self-expression. However, this growing self-expression makes it possible to deepen the original experience; it opens up the experience and makes it more explicit.

In the same way, the first experience of some people in their encounter with Jesus developed into a progressive self-expression which ultimately turned into what we call Christology. Thus a Christology (which keeps to its point) is the account of a particular experience of encounter which identifies what it experiences, that is to say, which gives a name to what it experiences.

Anyone who examines this historical process will understand that the interpretative elements in the New Testament cannot be made to our condition as it stands; in other words, the approach taken in the Bible cannot speak to us directly without an intermediary. The consequence of this is that a theological analysis of the New Testament concepts of salvation only has a chance of providing inspiration and orientation for modern people if this theological analysis can be combined with an insight into the historical and socio-political conditions of New Testament times and those of our own day which can be criticized from both sides.

In the New Testament we are confronted with a basic experience which binds all these writings together and therefore finally resulted in a canonical "New Testament": Jesus, experienced as the decisive and definitive saving event, salvation from God, Israel's age-old dream. But precisely because it is a matter of experience, these authors express this salvation in terms of the world in which they live, their own milieu and their own questionings—in short, in terms of their own world of experience. And it is evident from the New Testament that these did in fact have marked differences. That is why the scriptural testimony to the saving significance of Jesus is so varied (II, 112-628).

The question in my two Jesus books can be briefly stated: how do the various New Testament writers interpret the basic experience of Jesus which they had? For people always have particular experiences in the context of particular patterns of interpretation which lend their coloring to the fundamental Christian experience. Human beings never experience salvation in the abstract but in the context of their own lives,

and this context differs from one case to another. At the same time it is always necessary to investigate this context because the way in which the New Testament writers experienced and understood salvation in Jesus was also determined by their relationship to their present—though we find the same problems constantly recurring, albeit experienced regularly in different ways.

However, even when we have thoroughly investigated this horizon, we are still not clear. We, for our part, live in a different world. Our questions and problems are different. Even when we come up with perennial human problems, these are always imbedded in different social and cultural patterns and settings. So we cannot simply "adopt" what we find in the Bible to our own world, as though we could extract a timeless nucleus from an historical casing.

The New Testament writers never give us the Christian gospel neat; it is always colored by and with the shades of their own world. That raises the question of how far this account of their salvation in Jesus, with its personal and collective coloring, can still inspire us now and be our guide. As Christians are we bound to all the "interpretative elements," to all the Jewish and Greek experiential concepts drawn from the world of that time? The interpretative elements have accumulated steadily in the course of the Christian tradition of experience, which now extends over almost two thousand years. In every era Christians have to try to express their experience of salvation in Jesus in terms of their own contemporary experience. In that case there is a danger that Christians may now seize on certain interpretative elements from the past rather than on the reality of salvation which is being interpreted in many languages and by many tongues.

For Christians in the past, many of these explanations were a living expression of everyday experiences in their social and political milieu that are no longer part of our experience. Think, for example, of the emancipation of slaves, religious sacrifices of animals, the need to have a powerful advocate in high places, the rulers of the world (*kurioi*), and so on. One cannot expect Christians through all the ages, Christians who believe in the saving power of Jesus' life and death, to be familiar with all the "interpretative elements" or explanations. Pictures and interpretations which were once appropriate and evocative can become irrelevant in another culture.

Within our present culture, which regards, for example, the ritual slaughter of animals as repulsive, it is highly questionable whether we should go on describing the saving meaning of the death of Jesus as a bloody sacrifice to an angry God who needed it in order to be placated. In the modern situation this is likely to discredit authentic belief in the real saving significance of this death. Thus the whole hermeneutical problem lies in the transition from what was meant by an interpretative element to what it means now.

C. Interpretative Experience and Thinking in Models

This brief account of revelation, experience and interpretation would leave us with a misleading picture of the actual process of revela-

tion if we were merely arguing that every experience is accompanied by conceptual or metaphorical articulations. Since Kant and the contemporary discussions of epistemological theory centering on K. Popper, T. S. Kuhn, I. Lakatos, Feyerabend and others of the constructionist school (see the literature in II, 853ff., n. 1), the recognition has grown that the theory or model has a certain primacy over the experience. By this is meant that on the one hand there can be no experiences without at least an implicit theory and, on the other, that theories cannot be derived from experiences by induction, but are the result of the creative initiative of the human spirit.

It follows from this that even biblical or ecclesiastical expressions of faith are not purely and simply articulate expressions or interpretations of particular "immediate religious experiences," for example, supposed experiences of Jesus. More or less consciously they are also expressions of a theory. The so-called interpretative element of experience is itself in turn taken up into a more general context, that of theoretical interpretation.

In faith and theology the situation is not very different from what we find in the sciences and in everyday human experiences: articulated experiences are already conditioned by a theory. In our time it has become clear from the controversy over whether experience influences theory or theory experience that to be dogmatic about experience is as unjustified as to be dogmatic about theory. What people call a religious experience contains not only interpretation (in the sense of particular concepts and images) but also a theoretical model on the basis of which divergent experiences are synthesized and integrated.

Expressions of faith are therefore theoretical expressions as well and not simply expressions of experience. Like any theory, they set out to clarify or illuminate phenomena of experience as simply and as plainly as possible. One theory is more successful than another. Theories are human hypotheses, inventions, a "context" in which attempts are made to give facts an appropriate setting. As such, they are significant in the way that they can give a meaningful setting to data from a particular sphere as comprehensively and as simply as possible. A statement such as, for example, the Christological statement of Chalcedon, is understandable only within the current philosophical framework or the interpretational model of that time. You cannot make any sense of it outside that framework, as if the Chalcedonian statement could stand in and of itself without re-actualization.

Thus the whole of revelation is interpreted in a long process of events, experiences and interpretations, and in terms of interpretations within particular divergent models or theories. What is revealed, as expressed by believers, thus becomes an utterly human event both through the interpretative element and through the theoretical element (as a consequence of thinking in models), though it is not indebted to itself either for its own content or its own act of faith.

Therefore we cannot simply take over just as they are all the explanations of the saving significance of Jesus which have been passed

on to us. On the other hand, there is no such thing as the saving significance of Jesus "in himself," as a kind of timeless, supra-historical, abstract datum. And finally, as Christians we cannot just make what we like of Jesus, or simply see him as a cipher for our own human experiences. What we are concerned with is rather a mutually critical correlation in which we attune our belief and action within the world in which we live, here and now, to what is expressed in the biblical tradition.

This correlation requires therefore: (1) an analysis of our present world or worlds of experience; (2) an analysis of the constant structures of the fundamental Christian experience about which the New Testament and the rest of the Christian tradition of experience speak; (3) the critical correlation and on occasion the critical confrontation of these two "sources." This theoretically critical and practico-critical correlation implies also the critique of ideology and socio-political criticism because we cannot take for granted the social structures in which modern experiences occur and by which they are influenced.

In this way the constant biblical elements will structure the present-day experiences of Christians in the same way that the world in which the various authors of the Bible lived structured their Christian experience. Only then is there continuity in Christian tradition. But this continuity also requires attention to the changing horizons within which we ask questions.

D. Conclusion to Sections A, B, C

Identifying Jesus by giving him a name is a reality with two sides: a *projective* side or an element of projection: names which were already known to Jews and later also to Gentile Christians from their own religious and cultural tradition and which were projected onto Jesus (the honorific titles of which the exegetes speak such as Christ or Son of God, and also the metaphors such as living water, good shepherd and bread from heaven); and a *giving* side, an aspect of givenness, an element of offering from the Jesus of history. Jesus himself stimulates and evokes the projections by what he seemed to be from his life and death (I, 51-60). In this process of naming, priority must be conceded to the actual offer that is Jesus (I, 57 and 21).

In that case, however, the process of naming also contains a critical element. The names which are already known (Christ, Son of Man, Son of God, etc.) and therefore the expectations of salvation presented in them do not determine who Jesus is, but the other way around. Starting from the peculiar and quite specific historical existence of Jesus, the already given expectations are of course partly assimilated and yet at the same time transformed, regauged or corrected (I, 21). Pre-existent models are assumed but all models break up under the pressure of what Jesus really was, said and did.

This is not to deny the projection involved in the giving of names; but that projection is controlled and limits are set to it. Jesus is not an unknown figure onto whom people can project their needs and expecta-

tions at will. Why should we still need Jesus if we always projected onto him what we already knew from elsewhere? It is the newness that appeared in Jesus that makes us grasp at what in one sense we already know so that we can articulate this new element at least to some degree in language of our own that we can understand but at the same time shatters the meaning of the names that we already know. Jesus is the Messiah, but not the Messiah that many Jews of the time including, to begin with, Jesus' disciples had expected.

Precisely because of this tension in the names given to Jesus, these are to a great degree "interchangeable, replaceable by others, and they may die out" (I, 46). New ones can appear. Not long after the New Testament, church Fathers called Jesus "the new Orpheus" whose music raises and heals the hearts of human beings. Greek Christians in particular must have understood this very well indeed. I have noticed time and again how shocked some Christians have been when I have spoken of Christ Orpheus. "That cannot be," they seem to feel, though they take it for granted that the Gospel of John can speak of Jesus Logos. In fact the church Fathers were only following the example of the Gospel of John when it called Jesus "the Word" or Logos, but in terms of their own cultural and religious milieu. Of course none of these names is completely "innocent."

The names which the New Testament gives to Jesus (which have to be compared with the way in which Christians later in the tradition continually give "new names" to Jesus) provides us with a hermeneutical principle. On the one hand, the context of the explicit names which we give to Jesus, on the basis of a particular experience of salvation with him, lies in the world of our specific everyday experiences, that is, in our everyday experience in dealing with our fellow human beings within the changing and changed culture in which we live. On the other hand, the relevant keywords which we introduce from our everyday life and experience of the world, and which we then "project" onto Jesus (e.g. Jesus "the Liberator"), are also subject to criticism in terms of "who" Jesus really was. It can never be a question of a simple or smooth correlation between our expectations and who Jesus really was, either in the New Testament or in our own day. In other words, this correlation is achieved in *metanoia* or conversion and not in a single alignment.

Contemporary new experiences have a hermeneutical significance for our own Christian experience and knowledge just as, conversely, the specifically Christian experiences and interpretations, as they are expressed in Scripture and the long tradition of Christian experience have their own original, critical and productive force in explaining or criticizing our experiences in the world today.

The major difference between a bourgeois use of the principle of critical correlation and the use I try to make of it, above all in my second Jesus book, lies in the awareness that, as Troeltsch said, "A whole worldview lies behind the historical-critical method." Theologians come up with a significantly different kind of correlation. For example, liberation theologies reject the ideology of a neutral method. Theology is always contextualized. The real conversation partner of Western theol-

ogy has been the unbeliever, the humanist. In view of the particular theme of theology, the topic of conversation between the believing citizen and the unbeliever was whether or not God was the foundation and cause of their (civil) freedom. From Latin America we hear, "Our 'liberation' is not your 'freedom.'" The conversation partner of non-Western theology is no longer the unbelieving fellow citizen, but the fellow human being who is despised, oppressed and held in subjection: the poor person, whether believer or unbeliever, who is the victim of our self-made systems. That in fact brings to life another critical correlation and that is what I tried to deal with in my second Jesus book. Nevertheless this newly oriented principle of critical correlation does not make the theological and religious significance.

II. THE HISTORICAL STUDY OF JESUS

There is a grain of truth in Bultmann's reluctance to attach any doctrinal significance to the "historical Jesus" though, even according to Bultmann, there is a good deal of historical evidence available. The truth is that no reconstruction of historical data about Jesus can show that he is the Christ. To call Jesus "the Christ" is not the result of a scientific reconstruction; this affirmation implies a transformed self-understanding as an element of *metanoia* and renewal of life. Jesus can never be approached as the Christ in a purely scientific, objectifying manner. Unless Jesus is "received" by others in faith, he can never be the Christ for them.

In this New Testament acceptance and naming of Jesus as the Christ, the remembrance of what Jesus really was in history is also taken up into the kerygmatic narrative (which is quite different from a modern "historical" account). While presenting the account of their reminiscences of Jesus of Nazareth, the Gospels at the same time confess him as the Christ who lives among them in the church community.

However, Bultmann is wrong when he associates any theological interest in the question of the historical Jesus with an attempt to provide historical proof for the kerygma of the New Testament and the Church that Jesus is the Christ. Such an attempt is certainly illegitimate and impracticable. The historical question of the precise message and life-style of Jesus has Christological relevance precisely because Christians began from the presupposition that this is the case, namely, that even though the kerygmatic account of the Jesus of the New Testament is handed on by others, it is nevertheless full of reminiscences of Jesus' words and deeds, the life and death which compelled people to give him the names they did.

It is important, therefore, to know who this man really was in history. In such a reconstruction we are in no way concerned to rediscover historical and psychological aspects of Jesus; in fact, little can be said about them and, in any case, they are not particularly relevant for theology. Rather, it is an attempt to discover as exactly as possible the broad historical lines of Jesus' message and life-style because they exteriorize Jesus' understanding of God, humankind, the world and

their mutual relationships. After all, it was this message and these actions, the whole historical phenomenon of Jesus, which led certain people to recognize in him the Christ—the decisive salvation from God—in an act of faith which, by the same token, put them right with themselves.

An historical reconstruction is precisely a help to get more clearly into focus both the objective, evocative side and the subjective, projective side in the names which the New Testament gives to Jesus, though it is never possible to make a neat distinction between the two aspects. There is no such thing as a kind of non-interpreted "Jesus in himself" which can be read out from between the lines of the New Testament. Faith in search of historical understanding is an intrinsic consequence of the fact that Christianity is not merely concerned with a decisive message from God but, at the same time, it centers on the person of Jesus Christ, someone who appeared in our history and who, therefore, must be given a place within the whole of the history of God with us.

The history of dogma, which has a great contribution to make to the believer's understanding of a dogma, does not simply begin after the New Testament; it already began before and in the New Testament. A classically conceived Christology which does not take these problems into account will inevitably make believers jump to false conclusions. So we must tackle the problems which have arisen by investigating the critical questions as they are now posed, at least in the context of Western awareness. Real theologizing makes sense only within an historically determined, actually given awareness of a problem, which is not always the same in every context. For example, no one would claim that historical consciousness has the significance in an Asian or African culture that it does in the modern West. Moreover, once it is generally agreed that the New Testament, in its interpretation of Jesus in faith, begins from a quite specific historical person, the broad outlines of whose career can be established by historians, then in the West also at least the explicit problem of the historical questions surrounding Jesus will disappear from theology.

All this shows that theologically relevant thought is inseparable from a quite distinctive and at the same time relative temporal index. It is historically and even geographically localized. A theology written for eternity, that is, a theology stripped of historicity, would be irrelevant to people living in time. Others outside the discipline often tell the theologians what needs to be done here and now. If a theologian wants his work to be relevant, he must revise his own theological planning continually in the light of the real questions which people ask.

That is why I decided, above all in my first Jesus book, to follow the strict historical-critical method in order to discover what can be said with scientific certainty, or at least a high degree of probability, about the historical phenomenon of Jesus. In so doing I cherished the hope that it would be possible to gain a glimpse of what must have been the source of the positive and negative shock which Jesus caused his contemporaries. There must have been such a shock in view of the fact that, on the one hand, Jesus was executed and, on the other hand, after his death his

disciples were at first completely shattered and had lost all hope for Israel. Of course, I did not set out to prove the Christian faith by means of an historical analysis, something that would have been a rather absurd undertaking.

Furthermore, the term "the Jesus of history" is often used in the context of a pejorative contrast with "the Jesus of faith." People do not make this kind of contrast in other instances. For example, no disciple of Freud or Jung—in the process of putting forward a particular pattern of interpretation in the same way that Christian believers do when they take God's action in history as a pattern of interpretation—would ever make a distinction between "the historical Luther" and the "the Luther as interpreted by Freud or Jung." For them, the historical Luther *is* this Luther interpreted in Freudian or Jungian terms. Thus for Christians the Jesus of history *is* the Jesus of faith. The declaration of faith that "Jesus is the Christ" implies the claim that the Jesus of faith is the most adequate way to picture Jesus. It is impossible to base the Christian confession on historical criticism, but an historical-critical study from the perspective of the believer has something meaningful to say about this confession, not as a revelation from God, but as a particular interpretation of Jesus of Nazareth. This is the theological significance of an historical investigation of Jesus from the perspective of the believer.

Any historical reconstruction is based on a perspective and an interest. The perspective of faith is one possibility among many. I do not see why the perspective of faith should be "less objective" or "more subjective" than an historical reconstruction from other, e.g., "secular," perspectives and interests or with a so-called neutral method. Certainly the interpretation of Jesus in faith (Jesus is the Christ) must be a plausible interpretation, seen against the background of an historical-critical reconstruction of Jesus' message and lifestyle, of his life and death.

I am not in any way saying, however, that the picture of Jesus as reconstructed by historians becomes the norm and criterion of Christian faith. This would be absurd. The first Christians were never confronted with this "historical abstract," which is what an historical-critical picture of Jesus amounts to (I, 34f.). In this sense there is a difference between "the Jesus of history," i.e. Jesus himself living in Palestine in contact with his contemporaries, and "the historical Jesus" in the sense of the abstract result of an historical-critical investigation. The historical argumentative approach represents a qualitative change from the spontaneous, living story of Jesus down the ages (I, 34f.). It is not the historical picture of Jesus but the living Jesus of history, Jesus caring for the poor, who stands at the beginning and is the source, norm and criterion of the interpretative experience which the first Christians had of him.

However, precisely when we consider this structure of early Christian belief, an historical-critical investigation can clarify for us how the specific content of earliest Christian belief is constituted by the Jesus of history and has a corrective function with regard to the inadequacy of

certain later formulations. Thus an historical reconstruction can be an invitation to join the first disciples of Jesus in their *itinerarium mentis*, following Jesus from his baptism in the Jordan until his death. In that case, in the course of this history, modern readers too can arrive at the discovery, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road while he opened to us the scriptures?" (Luke 24:32). It is therefore a question of a *fides quaerens intellectum historicum* and at the same time of an *intellectus historicus quaerens fidem*.

Conclusion of Section II: What are the gains in recognizing the theological relevance of an historical study of Jesus?

The historical question about Jesus, raised on the basis of theological interest, has also resulted in a theological reevaluation of Jesus' prophetic ministry, his message and the way of life that went with it, in which of course his death and resurrection are not formalized in an isolated kerygmatic way. This is a different accent from that of the former Christology which was almost exclusively concentrated on Jesus' death and resurrection and on the "hypostatic union." In this theological reevaluation, the death and resurrection of Jesus are more closely connected, while at the same time even his death is seen as an implication of the unconditional character of his whole career: his message, his parables and his lifestyle (II, 793-802).

Moreover, this particular methodological approach makes it clear why an historical picture of Jesus remains unfinished as long as the historical circumstances of his execution, and thus the intrinsic connection between his death, his message and his whole career remain obscure (I, 294-318; II, 793-802). The fact that the disciples were so shattered and dismayed at the death of Jesus is the best historical evidence as to how high their expectations of him were before his death. This collapse itself presupposes an initial identification of the person of Jesus before his death at which time all seemed lost, when all hope for Israel had gone: "but we had hoped that he (i.e. 'Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet mighty in word and deed,' Luke 24:19b) would be the one who would redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21). Although Luke's formulation may also have been influenced by the "later" confession of Christ, it is clear that even before the Easter event the disciples had cherished extremely high expectations of Jesus. This is confirmed on the other side by the fact that the opponents of Jesus wanted to do away with him.

Another gain of the historical study of Jesus can be mentioned. Christian salvation is salvation for human beings—people with a mind, a heart, feelings, a physical body, people who are naturally inclined to develop the world in which they live, people who are directed towards one another to strengthen one another in righteousness and love and to build a society in which they can live truly human lives (II, 731-43). It follows that Christian salvation cannot be simply the "salvation of souls"; it must be healing, the making whole of the whole man and woman, the person in all his or her aspects and the society in which the person lives. Thus Christian salvation includes ecological, social and

political aspects, though it is not exhausted by them. Although Christian salvation is more than that, it is at least that.

In the course of time, Christians have all too often covered up oppression with an appeal to the general good, to love, and to mystic or contemplative attitudes in which suffering fades away in the face of God's mystical presence. This last may be true, but it would be un-Christian if it were to be the occasion for perpetuating injustice, sometimes with theological legitimation. Even now we still hear some Christians proclaiming that Christian belief is purely a matter of the heart, of personal conversion, and that Jesus called us to conversion of the heart, to inwardness, and not to the reform of structures which enslave men and women.

A closer analysis of the historical circumstances in which the Bible came into being will show us that this one-sidedness is un-Christian; it is only half of the scriptural truth. An evocative testimony to this is Luke 22:25. "Jesus said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you.'" This is put even more sharply in Matthew 20:25 and following. "Jesus said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you'" (see also Mark 10:42ff.). The torture imposed by master-servant relationships is impermissible in Christian communities. Here the New Testament clearly recognizes that the lifestyle of the kingdom of God implies not only an inner renewal of life but also a renewal and improvement of social structures in order to set human beings free.

The New Testament Christians also expressed this in practice in areas over which in fact they did have control, especially in the structuring of their own community, which as a result was experienced as a first realization of the Kingdom of God on earth, a brother-and-sisterhood, a sphere of freedom and peace, of righteousness and love. In view of their social and political circumstances, there was little or nothing that they, as a minority group, could achieve outside their own community. Their detachment from social politics was not a decision they made for themselves; it was forced on them as a result of outside pressure. Where this pressure is removed, where Christians can join others in changing society, this also becomes an urgent task for Christians that issues from the gospel of Christ itself.

I believe that there are more possibilities in the Church than we have been able to bring to realization. We fail to keep intact the unity of mysticism and politics. Mysticism or prayer without political choice is purely sentimental. And politics without meditation and prayer becomes barbaric.

In Jesus, God reveals his own being in his will to be salvation for human beings. That is why in my two Jesus books I emphasize two aspects: (1) salvation for people lies in the living God (*vita hominis, visio Dei*); and (2) God's honor lies in people's happiness, liberation, salvation or wholeness (*gloria Dei, vivens homo*). (See I, 605; II, 647: the title

and what follows.) In the man Jesus the revelation of the divine and the disclosure of the nature of true, good and really happy humanity—as ultimately the supreme possibility of human life—completely coincide in one and the same person. This fully corresponds with the tradition of Christian mysticism. This liturgical mysticism found an appropriate expression in Nicaea and Chalcedon, albeit in the conceptual terminology of the later period of the ancient world.

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