

THE CONCEPTION OF OUR GOSPELS AS SALVATION-HISTORY

DAVID MICHAEL STANLEY, S.J.

Jesuit Seminary, Toronto

FOR SOME time now, it has been evident that in the domain of Catholic biblical studies a new breeze has been blowing. "The breeze blows wherever it pleases," St. John informs us; and the breeze, which for well over a decade has begun to spring up to revivify Catholic scholarly endeavor, has been felt in almost every branch of scriptural research. Biblical inspiration and inerrancy,¹ the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch,² the "prehistory" of the first eleven chapters of Genesis,³ all these questions have been given quite new solutions. Among the problems that have undergone a reorientation in *NT* studies, that of the historical character of the Gospels⁴ has enjoyed a certain pre-eminence. Catholic exegetes now appear to be permitted to voice opinions upon this subject which fifty, even twenty-five, years ago would have caused considerable concern, if not condemnation.

While the professional student of Scripture rejoices at the new impetus thus given his work through the present-day liberal attitude

¹ Among the recent studies on these subjects, the following are noteworthy: P. Synave and P. Benoit, *La prophétie (Somme théologique)*, ed. Revue des Jeunes; Paris, 1947); P. Benoit, "L'Inspiration," in Robert-Tricot, *Initiation biblique* (3rd ed.; Paris, 1954) pp. 6-45; *idem*, "Note complémentaire sur l'inspiration," *Revue biblique* 63 (1956) 416-22; Karl Rahner, "Über die Schriftinspiration," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 78 (1956) 137-68; J. Coppens, "L'Inspiration et l'inerrance biblique," *Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses* 33 (1957) 36-57; Johannes Schildenberger, *Vom Geheimnis des Gotteswortes: Einführung in das Verständnis der heiligen Schrift* (Heidelberg, 1950).—I have attempted to review and evaluate the more significant contributions in a recent paper, "The Concept of Biblical Inspiration," in *Catholic Theological Society of America: Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Convention (1958)* (New York, 1959) pp. 65-89.

² Bruce Vawter, *A Path through Genesis* (New York, 1956); R. de Vaux, *La Genèse (Bible de Jérusalem)*; Paris, 1951).

³ Charles Hauret, *Origines de l'univers et de l'homme d'après la Bible* (2nd ed.; Paris, 1950); R. A. F. MacKenzie, "Before Abraham Was . . .," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 15 (1953) 131-40.

⁴ These developments have been recently reviewed in a most effective way by B. Rigaux, "L'Historicité de Jésus devant l'exégèse récente," *Revue biblique* 65 (1958) 481-522.

of the magisterium,⁵ he is also conscious that, on the part of some within the Church, there has already been a reaction to many of the views he now feels free to express. He would be foolish indeed to ignore the fact that a certain malaise has manifested itself on the part of some theologians. They are not so sure as their biblical colleagues that the effects of the twentieth-century scriptural renaissance can be called progress. There are undoubtedly some who feel, even though perhaps they do not express their fears too openly,⁶ that the old ghost of Modernism, which Pius X was thought to have laid within the household of the faith, has staged a reappearance, this time as a poltergeist.

And nowhere, I believe, is this uneasiness so strongly felt as it is with regard to the exegetes' new conception of what has always been known as the "historicity" of the Gospels. Even some of those who have come to recognize the validity of certain principles of Form-Criticism, let us say, when they are applied to the *OT* books, can scarcely repress a shudder when these same principles are allowed to operate in the study of the Gospels. The truth is, of course, that if these principles have real, universal validity, then it ought to be not only possible but necessary to apply them (due regard being had for the variety that obtains in biblical historical narrative) no less in the New than in the Old Testament.

Let me say at once, on the other hand, that there is some reasonableness in this somewhat conservative reaction we are speaking of. It is only too obvious, for instance, that between the antiquity and folkloric character of many oral traditions incorporated in the *OT* and the relatively short-lived and well-substantiated oral traditions forming the basis of the written Gospels, there is a vast and easily discernible difference. Anyone can surely see that there were no human eye-witnesses to the creation. By contrast, the Evangelists could have found a not inconsiderable number of serious-minded, sincere men to testify to the sayings and doings of Jesus of Nazareth.⁷

⁵ John L. McKenzie, "Problems of Hermeneutics in Roman Catholic Exegesis," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 77 (1958) 197-204.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 198: "At the present writing, fifteen years after the publication of the encyclical [*Divino afflante Spiritu*], opposition to creative biblical scholarship speaks only in whispers, and it no longer inhibits original work which goes beyond commonly accepted theological opinion."

⁷ That they actually did so has been convincingly demonstrated by C. H. Dodd, *His-*

We do not wish to minimize this attitude of reserve which, though rarely vocal, is certainly present in some Catholic minds. It is based really upon a fear that, because certain long-established props have been pulled out from under the structure of Catholic apologetics by the new methods, the whole edifice is in danger of collapse. I find no difficulty in granting that such a fear (undoubtedly unfounded, as I believe) has been partly caused by a few of the Catholic exegetes themselves. It is most regrettable that occasionally the Scripture scholar has, in the exuberance of experiencing his new-found freedom, displayed an entirely too negative attitude in approaching the question of the Gospels' historical character.⁸ I do not mean merely that some scholars have succumbed to the temptation to play the *enfant terrible*, shocking the genuine, if ill-informed, piety of earnest Christians. I refer rather to the iconoclastic tendency occasionally displayed by biblical experts to devote themselves to the demolition of outmoded solutions to scriptural difficulties without sufficiently calling attention to the positive values found in the explanations which they seek to substitute for them. Not all *NT* critics have shouldered their new responsibility of developing a much-needed *NT* biblical theology.

FUNDAMENTALISM

Still, granting that the new Catholic approach to Gospel criticism has not always been conducted with the delicacy and prudence it requires,⁹ we must admit that the causes for the opposition to it cannot

tory and the Gospel (London, 1938), "The Historical Tradition in the New Testament," pp. 41-74.

⁸ The most balanced and penetrating criticism of such a regrettable outlook has been made by a modern English Scripture scholar: Thomas Worden, "Is Scripture to Remain the Cinderella of Catholic Theology?," *Scripture* 8 (1956) 2-12.

⁹ Prudence does not here mean a refuge in conservatism which borders upon obscurantism. The proper approach is well expressed by J. Cambier, "Historicité des évangiles synoptiques et Formgeschichte," *La formation des évangiles* (Bruges, 1957) p. 196: "L'importance, comme aussi la délicatesse du problème littéraire, obligent à une grande prudence. L'emploi judicieux et nuancé de cette méthode littéraire plus perfectionnée dans l'étude des évangiles synoptiques oblige à constater certaines libertés que les évangélistes ont prises avec l'histoire, au sens critique et moderne du mot. Nous pensons que, et pour une intelligence plus nuancée de l'histoire sacrée, et pour épargner une crise inutile de scepticisme à nos élèves de séminaires et aux chrétiens cultivés, il faut s'essayer à leur faire prendre une conscience plus nette du problème." More recently, this same Catholic attitude has been expressed serenely by L. Alonso-Schökel, professor of the Pontifical Biblical Institute, in a trenchant review of an *OT* Introduction whose author, to say the least, has not

be laid entirely at the exegetes' door. A factor which we cannot afford to overlook is an attitude which, though characteristically Protestant, has influenced the thinking of not a few Catholics: I mean, of course, biblical fundamentalism. Fundamentalism's adherents have been chiefly found amongst certain non-Catholic sects, for the very good reason that Bible-reading has been more commonly practiced by them than by Catholics. In addition, the fundamentalist viewpoint has developed partly as a corollary of the Protestant dogma of "private interpretation," partly as a repudiation by sincere (and too often uneducated) Christians of that "historicism" to which nineteenth-century Protestant rationalism lent its patronage. Historicism which, applied to the Gospels, was known as the "quest of the historical Jesus," never won any support in Catholic scholarship.¹⁰

Can we define fundamentalism?¹¹ Essentially, it consists of a conscious and deliberate "literal-mindedness"¹² in accepting the affirma-

"moved with the times"; cf. *Biblica* 39 (1958) 502: "Cogitare videtur Auctor progressum solum vel praesertim in eo consistere debere, ut sententiae confirmetur, quae 'traditionales' ei vocare libet. Absque dubio persuasum habet, se sic fidelius Ecclesiae servire, securiorem doctrinam docere. Sed sententiae rigidiore non semper sunt securiores. Discipuli secundum spiritum huius voluminis formati, ministerium sacerdotale aggredientur muniti argumentis in illo exhibitis; ea fidelibus proponent, inter quos laici docti et intelligentes aderunt, qui cum audierint has sententias ob eiusmodi argumenta cum fide cohaerere, nonne et fides eorum in periculum adduci, vel saltem dubia in eis suscitari poterunt, quae facile evitari potuissent?"—I might point out here that the commentaries in the *Bible de Jérusalem* series on St. Matthew and St. John, by P. Benoit and D. Mollat, are fine examples of modern Catholic work on the Gospels. To them apply most appositely the remarks of my colleague, R. A. F. MacKenzie, in a review (*THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 14 [1953] 465) of several *OT* fascicules in this same collection: "These Catholic scholars, free of polemical preoccupations, are going about their own proper work, in the calm assurance that they are carrying on the centuries-old exegetical tradition of the Church, and that, in the light of faith, they can safely and profitably use modern discoveries, to achieve that fuller understanding of Sacred Scripture which the Holy See hopes and expects of them."

¹⁰ MacKenzie, *art. cit.* (supra n. 5) p. 200: "The revolt against historicism and the demand for a biblical theology in the Protestant churches has had a parallel in the Catholic Church. Here there was no revolt against historicism, because there never had been any historicism against which to revolt. But there was a stout affirmation of the 'historical character' of the Bible without any attention whatever to the study of literary forms. The purely defensive and almost entirely controversial scholarship of the era of the siege mentality had by 1943 proved its sterility beyond all question."

¹¹ John L. MacKenzie, *The Two-Edged Sword* (Milwaukee, 1956) p. 105, defines it as "the crass literal interpretation of the Bible without regard for literary forms and literary background."

¹² I say "conscious and deliberate," in order to exclude the simple faithful who, despite

tions of biblical writers without regard to the idiom, the context, or the literary form through which they are expressed. Fundamentalism is, in fact, a misguided determination to cling to a superficial meaning of the Bible at all costs—even the cost of real understanding. A form of anti-intellectualism, it is quite out of harmony with that spirit of religious inquiry (*fides quaerens intellectum*) which the Catholic Church has always sought to encourage in the faithful, and which is the ideal and the guiding principle of Catholic theology.

One pernicious effect of the fundamentalist mentality is to expose the Scriptures to serious misunderstanding and even ridicule by those who do not possess Christian faith. It can, moreover, create a harmful dichotomy between faith and reason amongst Christians in whom a well-developed literary or scientific education is combined with religious instruction that is uncritical and intellectually deficient.¹³ Indeed, fundamentalism has been known to lead to a kind of “illumination.” I am thinking of the injudicious attack by an Italian priest, Dolindo Ruotolo, made in 1941 upon Catholic biblical scholarship through a pamphlet that had to be censured by the Biblical Commission.¹⁴ Ruotolo (or “Dain Cohenel,” as he signed himself) advocated, for a proper comprehension of the Bible, giving free rein to the Spirit, “as though” (to cite the Church’s condemnation of his ideas) “all were in personal communion with the divine Wisdom and received from the Holy Spirit special personal illumination. . . .”¹⁵

DIVINO AFFLANTE SPIRITU

In his Encyclical of 1943, *Divino afflante Spiritu*, Pope Pius XII “unequivocally repudiated fundamentalism in Catholic exegesis.”¹⁶

an unconsciously ingenuous attitude towards much in the Bible, do reach the real message of the sacred text.

¹³ Worden, *art. cit.* (supra n. 8) p. 7.

¹⁴ The pamphlet, entitled “Un gravissimo pericolo per la Chiesa e per le anime. Il sistema critico-scientifico nello studio e nell’interpretazione della Sacra Scrittura, le sue deviazioni funeste e le sue aberrazioni,” was roundly condemned in a letter to the Italian hierarchy, August 20, 1941; *AAS* 33 (1941) 465–72. Its author was judged lacking in “judgment, prudence, and reverence.”

¹⁵ “. . . quasi che ognuno fosse in personale comunione con la divina Sapienza, e ricevesse dallo Spirito Santo speciali lumi individuali, come pretesero i primitivi protestanti.”

¹⁶ McKenzie, *art. cit.* (supra n. 5) p. 198.

This statement of John L. McKenzie, S. J., requires some amplification, since the fundamentalist attitude had, over a long period, become fairly firmly entrenched in Catholic thinking, particularly as regards the Gospels. It may, then, not be out of place here to recall briefly those directives of Pius XII which can provide norms for the desirable, indeed necessary, Catholic approach to Gospel studies.

Pius lays down two principles of paramount importance, which run directly counter to the fundamentalist position: (1) "the supreme law of interpretation is that by which we discover and determine what the writer meant to say";¹⁷ (2) there are only very few texts of the Bible "whose meaning has been declared by the Church's authority, nor are those more numerous about which there is a unanimous opinion of the holy Fathers."¹⁸ It may be helpful to examine the scope of these two norms, which are applicable to the study of the Gospels, in greater detail.

How does one, according to Pius XII, determine the sacred writer's meaning? It is, in the first place, by discerning "the distinctive genius of the sacred writer."¹⁹ The papal insistence upon the human character of the Bible is noteworthy.²⁰ The Encyclical makes it very clear that

¹⁷ *AAS* 35 (1943) 314: "Neque enim quemquam latet summam interpretandi normam eam esse, qua perspiciatur et definiatur, quid scriptor dicere intenderit, ut egregie Sanctus Athanasius monet: 'Hic, ut in omnibus aliis divinae Scripturae locis agere convenit, observandum est, qua occasione locutus sit Apostolus, quae sit persona, quae res cuius gratia scripsit, accurate et fideliter attendendum est, ne quis illa ignorans, aut aliud praeter ea intellegens, a vera aberret sententia.'"

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 319: "Illud enim imprimis ante oculos habeant, in normis ac legibus ab Ecclesia datis, de fidei morumque doctrina agi; atque inter multa illa, quae in Sacris Libris, legalibus, historicis, sapientialibus et prophetis proponuntur, pauca tantum esse quorum sensus ab Ecclesiae auctoritate declaratus sit, neque plura ea esse, de quibus unanimes Sanctorum Patrum sit sententia. Multa igitur remanent, eaque gravissima, in quibus edisserendis et explanandis catholicorum interpretum acumen et ingenium libere exerceri potest ac debet, ut ad omnium utilitatem, ad maiorem in dies doctrinae sacrae profectum, et ad Ecclesiae defensionem et honorem ex suo quisque viritum conferat."

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 314: "Interpres igitur omni cum cura, ac nulla quam recentiores pervestigaciones attulerint luce neglecta, dispicere enitatur, quae propria fuerit sacri scriptoris indoles ac vitae condicio, qua floruerit aetate, quos fontes adhibuerit sive scriptos sive ore traditos, quibusque sit usus formis dicendi. Sic enim satius cognoscere poterit quis hagiographus fuerit, quidque scribendo significare voluerit."

²⁰ As the last citation makes clear. Also to be noted is Pius XII's repeated emphasis upon the primacy of the *sensus litteralis*. The Encyclical *Humani generis* added a further important nuance (*AAS* 42 [1950] 569): "Immo perperam loquuntur de sensu humano Sacrorum Librorum sub quo sensus eorum divinus lateat, quem solum infallibilem de-

belief in God's primary authorship of the sacred books must not be misunderstood, so that, for example, we attempt implausible "harmonizations" of various Gospel accounts of the same episode, forcing them to agree where they actually differ in detail.²¹ The proper method, we are told, entails careful research into the inspired author's background and culture, as well as his manner of writing (sources used, literary forms employed). We must not allow ourselves to overlook the profound differences separating our modern, Occidental point of view from that of the ancient Near East. "Frequently the literal sense" of the biblical writer, the Pope warns, "is not so obvious" to us today.²² Consequently, to grasp the author's meaning, the rules of

clarant." P. 570: "Ac praeterea sensus litteralis Sacrae Scripturae eiusque expositio a tot tantisque exegetis, vigilante Ecclesia, elaborata, ex commenticiis eorum placitis, novae cedere debent exegesi, quam symbolicam ac spiritualem appellant . . ." Gustave Lambert remarked in his commentary on this Encyclical, "L'Encyclique 'Humani Generis' et l'écriture sainte," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 73 (1951) 226: "L'Encyclique 'Divino afflante Spiritu' avait cependant insisté avec toute la clarté désirable sur le *seul sens* qui se trouve *partout* dans l'Écriture et qui est le *sens littéral*. Ce sens littéral, qui est aussi le *sens théologique* des textes sacrés, est celui qui a été connu et voulu *conjointement* par l'auteur principal qui est Dieu et par la cause instrumentale (intelligente et libre) qui est l'hagiographe humain. . . . L'hagiographe, en écrivant à la manière humaine, a exprimé une pensée divine."

²¹ To quote but two examples: (1) While the Synoptics agree in placing Jesus' cleansing of the Temple at the close of His public life, indeed in its last week (Mt 21:12-13; Mk 11:15-17, where it occurs the day *after* Jesus' messianic entry; Lk 19:45-46), Jn 2:13-22 employs the episode as the inaugural act of Jesus' Jerusalem ministry. However one wishes to explain these variations (e.g., the first time Jesus comes to Jerusalem in the Synoptic Gospels, which depict His public life as a Galilean ministry chiefly, is in the last ten days before His death; hence they must insert it where they do. Jn on the other hand, whose Gospel might be considered as a commentary on Jesus' logion in Lk 13:34 par., may well be following a chronological order), the postulating of *two* cleansings of the Temple is really no explanation at all.—(2) The two stories of Judas' end (Mt 27:3-10; Acts 1:18-19) differ on three important details: Did Judas commit suicide (Mt) or die of some mysterious accident or disease (Acts)? Did the Sanhedrin purchase the "potter's field" (Mt) or did Judas himself buy it as a farm (Acts)? Whose blood led to the naming of the area Haceldama, Jesus' (Mt) or Judas' (Acts)? It seems clear that two somewhat independent traditions of the Judas-story have been preserved in the *NT*; nor does the Vulgate's ingenious harmonizing translation of Acts 1:18, "suspensus crepuit medius," resolve the problem.

²² *AAS* 35 (1943) 314: "Quisnam autem sit *litteralis* sensus, in veterum Orientalium auctorum verbis et scriptis saepenumero non ita in aperto est, ut apud nostrae aetatis scriptores"—an admirable example of papal understatement. Mt 23:9 is a good illustration of what the Pope means: "And do not call anyone on earth your father. Only one is your Father, and He is in heaven." This text, which makes many a non-Catholic scrupulous about calling a priest "Father," is probably a warning to the disciples not to imitate

grammar and philology are not always sufficient. We must invoke the aid of history, archeology, ethnology,²³ and even psychology.²⁴ Most important of all, we must study the types of literature which have survived in Near Eastern literary remains of all kinds, in order to master the modes of expression through which the sacred writers set down "what they had in mind."²⁵

As regards the variety of historical writing to be found in the Bible, the interpreter must constantly bear in mind "the special purpose, the religious purpose, of biblical history."²⁶ We shall return to a consideration of this remark when we discuss the special character of the Gospels as salvation-history.

Speaking more generally of the great richness of biblical literary forms, Pius XII states that "the sacred books need not exclude any of the ancient Near Eastern forms of expression in human language, provided they are compatible with the divine sanctity and veracity."²⁷

the scribes and Pharisees, who delighted in assuming high-sounding titles, assimilating themselves to "the Fathers," i.e., the patriarchs and other famous Jewish forbears.

²³ *AAS* 35 (1943) 314: "Nam quid illi verbis significare voluerint, non solis grammaticae, vel philologiae legibus, nec solo sermonis contextu determinatur; omnino oportet mente quasi redeat interpres ad remota illa Orientis saecula, ut subsidiis historiae, archaeologiae, ethnologiae aliarumque disciplinarum rite adiutus, discernat atque perspiciat, quaenam litteraria, ut aiunt, genera vetustae illius aetatis scriptores adhibere voluerint, ac reapse adhibuerint."

²⁴ A fine example of attention to the psychological differences between the Western and the Semitic mentality may be found in Célestin Charlier, "Méthode historique et lecture spirituelle des écritures," *Bible et vie chrétienne* 18 (1957) 7-26.

²⁵ *AAS* 35 (1943) 315: "Veteres enim Orientales, ut quod in mente haberent exprimerent, non semper iisdem formis iisdemque dicendi modis utebantur, quibus nos hodie, sed illis potius, qui apud suorum temporum et locorum homines usu erant recepti. Hi quinam fuerint, exegeta non quasi in antecessum statuere potest, sed accurata tantummodo antiquarum Orientis litterarum pervestigatione. Haec porro, postremis hisce decenniis maiore, quam antea, cura et diligentia peracta, clarius manifestavit, quaenam dicendi formae antiquis illis temporibus adhibitae sint, sive in rebus poëticae describendis, sive in vitae normis et legibus proponendis, sive denique in enarrandis historiae factis atque eventibus."

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 315: "Haec eadem pervestigatio id quoque iam lucide comprobavit, israëliticum populum inter ceteras Orientis veteres nationes in historia rite scribenda, tam ob antiquitatem, quam ob fidelem rerum gestarum relationem singulariter praestitisse; quod quidem ex divinae inspirationis charismate atque ex peculiari historiae biblicae fine, qui ad religionem pertinet, profecto eruitur."

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 315: "A Libris enim Sacris nulla aliena est illarum loquendi rationum, quibus apud veteres gentes, praesertim apud Orientales, humanus sermo ad sententiam exprimendam uti solebat, ea tamen condicione, ut adhibitum dicendi genus Dei sanctitatis et veritati haudquaquam repugnet . . ."

Thus that ingenuous apriorism habitually found in the fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible is effectively ruled out. The exegete "must ask himself how far this form of expression or literary genre employed by the sacred writer may contribute to the true and genuine interpretation."²⁸

The second basic principle of Catholic hermeneutics, viz., that only a tiny sector of the many affirmations in the Bible has received any authoritative interpretation, has been called "perhaps the most important statement of the encyclical."²⁹ The Pope asserts that the Catholic exegete must be given full liberty in his search for solutions to "many important questions"³⁰ which admit free discussion within the limits of orthodoxy. Not infrequently we meet the tendency on the part of some Catholics to cling doggedly to what they consider to be the "traditional" explanation of a scriptural passage.³¹ They sincerely feel that in this way they are being most orthodox, when in point of fact there is no such tradition, I mean, theologically significant tradition, existing.³²

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 316: "Quapropter catholicus exegeta, ut hodiernis rei biblicae necessitatibus rite satisfiat, in exponenda Scriptura Sacra, in eademque ab omni errore immuni ostendenda et comprobanda, eo quoque prudenter subsidio utatur, ut perquirat quid dicendi forma seu litterarum genus, ab hagiographo adhibitum, ad veram et genuinam conferat interpretationem; ac sibi persuadeat hanc officii sui partem sine magno catholicae exegeseos detrimento neglegi non posse."

²⁹ McKenzie, *art. cit.* (supra n. 5) p. 198.

³⁰ *AAS* 35 (1943) 319: "Hac tamen in rerum condicione catholicus interpres . . . neutiquam retineri debet, quominus difficiles quaestiones, hucusque nondum enodatas, iterum atque iterum aggrediatur, non modo ut, quae ab adversariis opponantur, propulset, sed ut solidam etiam explicationem reperire enitatur, quae et cum Ecclesiae doctrina, cum iisque nominatim, quae de Sacra Scriptura ab omni errore immuni tradita sunt, fideliter concordet, et certis quoque profanarum disciplinarum conclusionibus debito modo satisfiat."

³¹ If I may be forgiven a reference to a personal experience, I should like to cite the official summary of a discussion following a paper in the introduction to which I attempted to show that the disciples had no clear realization of Christ's divinity until after they received the revelation through the gift of the Holy Spirit. "To many, even of those present, the possibility that the apostles did not realize the divinity of Christ during His public life came as a novelty and a surprise. Concern was voiced that students might be led to conclude from this that Christ did not reveal His divinity at all. One group asked about the theological certitude of Father's position and wondered what theological note would be assigned to it. Some felt that more unanimous concurrence and greater certitude on the theological level would be necessary before such a position could be taught in class"; *Society of Catholic College Teachers of Sacred Doctrine: Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Convention (1958)* (Notre Dame, Ind.) p. 36.

³² To cite one example, Stanislas Lyonnet has pointed out in his interpretation of the

Another point clarified by this papal directive is the concept of "private interpretation." Provided it does not conflict with Catholic doctrine, any explanation of the great bulk of scriptural texts is as good or bad as the reasons given for it, and this holds good equally for the majority of the patristic opinions or those given by theologians, however ancient, as for the suggestions of modern exegetes. Indeed, today's biblical scholar may quite conceivably provide a far more satisfactory explanation of a scriptural difficulty than his predecessors.³³ Moreover, he is, through this Encyclical, invited to attempt to do so; nor is the term "new" to be used by those who differ as though it were a stigma.³⁴

With the insight provided by these hermeneutical norms, we must now examine what is meant by the historical character of our Gospels.

HISTORICAL CHARACTER OF THE GOSPEL NARRATIVES

The modern concept of history goes back ultimately to the Greeks,³⁵ who classed it among the arts under the patronage of the muse Clio. In our day, inasmuch as it is the product of the historical method, history is classed as a social science. However, the writing of history remains an art, involving, as it inevitably does, the selection and interpretation and expression in some literary form of the "remembered past."³⁶

Pentecostal glossolalia as ecstatic prayer, "De glossolalia Pentecostes eiusque significatione," *Verbum domini* 24 (1944) 65-75, that the rather common patristic opinion (viz., that the gift bestowed the power to speak foreign languages in a miraculous way) was based upon the demonstrably erroneous view that the charism was given for preaching.

³³ One recent and striking instance is the interpretation of Mt 1:18-22 by Xavier Léon-Dufour, "L'Annonce à Joseph," *Mélanges bibliques rédigés en l'honneur de André Robert* (Paris, 1957) pp. 390-97. Another is Alberto Vaccari's brilliantly simple solution of the Matthean divorce logia, "La clausola sul divorzio in Matteo 5,32; 19,9," *Rivista biblica* 3 (1955) 97-119.

³⁴ *AAS* 35 (1943) 319: "Horum autem strenuorum in vinea Domini operariorum conatus non solummodo aequo iustoque animo, sed summa etiam cum caritate iudicandos esse ceteri omnes Ecclesiae filii meminerint; qui quidem ab illo haud satis prudenti studio abhorreere debent, quo quidquid novum est, ob hoc ipsum censetur esse impugnandum, aut in suspicionem adducendum."

³⁵ Erich Dinkler, "Earliest Christianity," *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East* (New Haven-London, 1955) p. 172: "The concept of history has been given to us by Greek science and to this very day is employed by us in a Greek sense. From Thucydides to Toynbee the common and connecting assumption has been that history is a rational, intelligible continuity, an integrated nexus or concatenation, operating in a unified world, capable of investigation and illumination by historical method."

³⁶ McKenzie, *op. cit.* (supra n. 11) p. 60.

More basically, history in the modern sense is to be identified with the ancient Greeks' view of it because the intelligibility sought by the contemporary as by the classical historian is a *human* intelligibility. Both share the conviction that there is a pattern discernible in the events of the past which sprang ultimately from the mind of man, a pattern, consequently, which is recoverable by the application of the historical method (a process invented by the mind of man) and which can be represented by the art of historical writing.

"Historical writing," says C. H. Dodd, "is not merely a record of occurrences as such. It is, at least implicitly, a record of the interest and meaning they bore for those who took part in them, or were affected by them. . . ." ³⁷ And he concludes: "Thus the events which make up history are relative to the human mind which is active in those events." ³⁸ Dodd then defines history "as consisting of events which are of the nature of occurrences *plus* meaning." ³⁹

If we accept Dodd's definition, it becomes clear that the task of selecting and interpreting the facts to be chronicled is an essential part of the historian's function. While the exercise of these two will vary according as he writes cultural, political, or economic history, the historian must choose and he must interpret. Assuming, for instance, it were possible to film a battle completely, such a newsreel record would not be history but only a source for history.

Selection and interpretation, of course, presuppose some criterion of judgment. The very choice of sources will be governed by the type of history to be written. The political historian will find much of his data in government archives; the cultural historian discovers valuable material in folklore, local customs, family traditions, even legends. ⁴⁰

³⁷ Dodd, *op. cit.* (supra n. 7) pp. 26-27. ³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27. ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁴⁰ Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les légendes hagiographiques* (3rd ed.; Brussels, 1927) p. 10: "La légende est, primitivement, l'histoire qu'il faut lire le jour de la fête du saint, *legenda*." —It is the fashion, at least in clerical circles, to smile superiorly at the stories occasionally found in the second nocturns of the Roman Breviary (e.g., the heroic fasts of the infant St. Nicholas, or the marvelous prayer-feats of St. Patrick), and, indeed, in the future revision of the divine office we can expect that many of these *legenda* will be excised. However, it must be remembered that these stories constitute (and this not despite, but because of, their incredible character) the essential proof of the people's belief in the sanctity of these saints, and as such represent historical reality. *Vox populi, vox Dei*, in the age before official canonization, was the principle which justified the cultus paid to the saints. These legendary tales are the popular expression of the people's belief in the heroic sanctity of these heroes of God.

The historian's work will ultimately be judged by the correctness of his interpretation of the evidence he has unearthed. In some instances he will be led to highlight an event which in itself, or at the time of its occurrence, may have been almost insignificant. Thus the historian of the Counter Reformation will direct attention to the battle of Pampeluna, a tiny incident in a series of border skirmishes, because an impoverished Basque nobleman, Inigo de Loyola, there received the wound which led to his "conversion" and eventually to the founding of the Society of Jesus.

But before he selects and interprets the events about which he intends to write, the historian must satisfy himself as to their situation in space and time. "When" and "where" are two of the historian's most elementary queries. John L. McKenzie has called chronology and geography "the eyes of history." "If," he adds, "the modern historian cannot tell you when and where something happened, he will not call it a historical event, although he does not thereby deny that it happened."⁴¹ To anticipate our discussion of the historical nature of the Gospels, we wish to state at once that the Evangelists show a strongly marked tendency to dissociate most of the episodes constituting Jesus' public life which they record, from both time and place. While the significance of this phenomenon will appear later in this essay, it must be noted here as one indication of the distance which separates the Gospels from modern historical writing. The Evangelists' lack of interest in the specific geographical or chronological settings of many of their narratives unquestionably sets a limitation upon our attempts to prove these events "historical" in the modern sense.⁴² Jesus' earthly life, to be sure, is located in Palestine; His birth occurred "in diebus regis Herodis," his death "sub Pontio Pilato"; the dates of both events are known only approximately. As

⁴¹ McKenzie, *op. cit.* (supra n. 11) p. 62.

⁴² Thus the "historicity" of the Gospel narratives is not as simple as some apologetics manuals would lead us to think. The Evangelists' purpose was quite different from that of the historian: their aim primarily was to testify to the divine-human fact of God's intervention in human history which brought man salvation in Jesus Christ. The means they chose to express this vary from parables to eyewitness accounts; hence the supreme importance of careful attention to the subsidiary literary forms found in the Gospels. If our apologetics is to be valid, we must make it clear that the Magi-story, for instance, is not "historical" in the sense in which the narrative of the crucifixion may be called "historical."

for His public ministry, the impression given by the Synoptic Gospels is that it lasted about six months.

What, then, is the biblical conception of history, and how do our Gospels differ from "history" in the modern acceptance of the word? The biblical notion of history rests upon the belief that God has, in the past, revealed Himself in a special way within the cadre of human affairs.⁴³ Through specific events, personalities, and human utterances, God has intervened in the world of man. From this point of view, it is clear that the intelligibility to be seen in the biblical narratives is essentially that of a divine, not a human, pattern.⁴⁴ It is best described as "a Mystery," in the Pauline⁴⁵ (and Johannine⁴⁶) sense, viz., as God's revelation, in time, to men of His eternal plan for the world's salvation. This Mystery was disclosed to mankind in two stages: one incomplete and rudimentary to God's chosen people in the *OT*; the second, complete and definitive through His only Son, Jesus Christ, to the Church of the *NT*. This genre of history, which we call salvation-history or *Heilsgeschichte*, is the story of God's self-revelation to us; and its aim is obviously very different from that modern scientific history which is written without reference to the divine point of view.

Here, in fact, we have touched upon one of the profound differences between the *Weltanschauung* of modern man, the product of a dis-

⁴³ Dodd, *op. cit.* (supra n. 7) p. 30: "This is in fact the assertion which Christianity makes. It takes the series of events recorded or reflected in the Bible, from the call of Abraham to the emergence of the Church, and declares that in this series the ultimate reality of all history, which is the purpose of God, is finally revealed, because the series is itself controlled by the supreme event of all—the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ."—Cf. also Jean Daniélou's recension of Herbert Butterfield's *Christianity and History* in *Downside Review* 68 (1950) 182–90.

⁴⁴ It is this viewpoint which distinguishes all biblical history from the profane, or so-called scientific, history and indeed constitutes its superiority vis-à-vis "history" as we understand it today. This is what Pius XII has pointed out so masterfully in the passage of *Divino afflante Spiritu* cited in n. 26.

⁴⁵ That is, the divine plan of salvation as revealed in the historical process which Paul and other sacred writers call "the last times": cf. Rom 16:25; Col 1:26–27; Eph 3:8–13, etc.

⁴⁶ L. Bouyer, *Le quatrième évangile* (2nd ed.; Tournai-Paris, 1955) p. 19: "Pour lui [Jean], l'histoire est un mystère et la raconter c'est nécessairement exposer en même temps ce mystère . . . le déroulement de l'histoire humaine nous révèle le geste de la main divine qui l'accompagne et le produit."

tinctively Greek culture, and the ancient Semitic mentality. Where we moderns habitually discuss the meaning of happenings in terms of secondary or finite causality, the Semitic genius interested itself principally in God, the First Cause of all things. The attitude may strike us as somewhat naive. How many priests, for instance, after smiling indulgently at the explanation, offered by Ps 28, of the thunderstorm as the "Voice of Yahweh," turn to the newspaper or television broadcast for an analysis of the weather? They find, we must admit, that the meteorologists' pronunciamientos, couched in mythological terms of "high- and low-pressure areas," are eminently more satisfying than the insight of the Psalmist. Yet if, as the priest surely believes, God causes the weather as He causes everything else, which explanation touches the reality more profoundly? The example illustrates, at any rate, the radical difference between the two viewpoints.⁴⁷

The Evangelists propose, in their written accounts of Jesus' life upon earth, to give their readers not merely an exposition based upon ocular testimony. They aim at writing salvation-history. They offer an insight into the meaning of the Mystery of Jesus Christ, i.e., they disclose to the reader (in whom they presuppose Christian faith) something which cannot be seen with the eye or perceived by the ear: the *propter nos et propter nostram salutem*.⁴⁸ And this, we should not forget, is their primary intention. They claim to be not only eyewitnesses, but witnesses to the Good News of salvation, since their message, like the rest of the Bible, is addressed not simply to man's intellect for his information, but to the whole man for his salvation.

The twofold nature of this apostolic testimony to Jesus Christ is already consciously present in Peter's sermon to Cornelius' household at Caesarea (Acts 10:34-43).⁴⁹ The apostolic preachers are, in the

⁴⁷ Here one may well ask upon what grounds the validity of this suprahuman interpretation rests, if, as we have asserted, salvation-history is simply God's revelation of Himself. Obviously it cannot be proven (or disproven) *solely* by the use of modern historical method. For while it is quite possible to demonstrate scientifically the "historical" (in our modern sense) character of the Gospels, still the fact that God has spoken to men through books written by men is an object of faith. Faith's guarantee that these writers have infallibly expressed the revelation of Jesus Christ as incarnate Son and universal Redeemer is founded upon the supernatural fact of *scriptural inspiration*. Thus for an adequate comprehension of the Evangelists' testimony we must realize that it possesses not merely the authority of reliable eyewitnesses, but the authority of God Himself.

⁴⁸ A careful reading of 1 Jn 1:1-2 will reveal this viewpoint of the sacred writers.

⁴⁹ Another striking example is to be found in Acts 2:22 ff.

first place, "witnesses of all He [Jesus] did in the country of the Jews and Jerusalem" (v. 38), or "witnesses appointed beforehand by God, who ate and drank with Him after His resurrection from death" (v. 41). But they have the office of witnessing in a deeper, more important sense, because they have received a mandate from the risen Lord "to preach to the people and to bear witness that He is the Judge of living and dead, constituted by God and Father" (v. 42).

This same double purpose is manifest in our written Gospels. Mark, whose account reflects, perhaps more strikingly than any other Gospel, the influence of an observant eyewitness,⁵⁰ has entitled his book "the Good News of Jesus Christ, Son of God" (Mk 1:1).⁵¹ This intention of providing us with a profounder realization of Christ's divinity, with a grasp, that is, of a supernatural truth which does not fall under the observation of the senses, implies something more than ocular testimony. Even Luke, whose prologue reveals a spirit not unacquainted with "historical method," manifests to his aristocratic convert, Theophilus, his aim of writing salvation-history. True, he has "investigated it all carefully from the beginning"; he has "decided to write a connected account of it." But both the thorough examination of his sources and the ordering of his narrative have been carried out "in order that you may more clearly grasp the authentic character of the oral instructions you have received" (Lk 1:4). The term we have translated as "the authentic character" (*asphaleia*) meant "security" in the contemporary commercial and military usage.⁵² Since he is writing for a man who is already a believer, Luke aims at more than establishing the historical character of the events and sayings he records. He means to interpret their Christological significance, as

⁵⁰ A study of this Gospel reveals that its author, while providing us with some of the most vivid and detailed scenes of Jesus' public life, was innocent of anything like literary art or a creative imagination. This strange combination of two apparently contradictory qualities happily vouches for the authenticity of the early testimony of Papias that while Mark was not a disciple of Jesus himself, he "wrote down accurately all that he remembered" of Peter's preaching. Thus the liveliness of the Marcan narratives, so rich in minute detail, goes back to Peter's all-seeing eye.

⁵¹ We accept these words as authentically Marcan; cf. Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (London, 1952) p. 152.

⁵² Cf., *s.v.*, Moulton-Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources* (London, 1949).

indeed the whole of his two-volume work reveals.⁵³ The author of the fourth Gospel declares, as he reaches the conclusion of his book, that "these things have been written in order that you may persevere in your belief⁵⁴ that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God, and that persevering in this belief you may possess life in His Name" (Jn 20:31). John has, in the scene he has just described between the doubter Thomas and the risen Lord, brought out clearly the relative value of eyewitness experience and the intelligibility apprehended by Christian faith. It is obvious, from Christ's insistence that Thomas touch Him and so have the reality of his Lord's risen Body impinge upon his senses, that there can be no doubt of the necessity for eyewitness testimony. But Jesus also points out to His disciple that belief implies much more than mere seeing with bodily eyes: "Is it because you have seen me that you have believed?" Faith belongs to a higher order, providing the superior perceptiveness expressed in Thomas' "My Lord and my God." Accordingly, Jesus pronounces a new beatitude upon all future generations of Christians: "Happy those who, though they did not see, yet become believers" (Jn 20:28-29). In the eyes of the Evangelist, we of a later age are at no disadvantage in comparison with the disciples who saw and heard Jesus: we possess the *unum necessarium*, that perception of the salvific character of Jesus' earthly life through Christian faith which, if it reposes upon the Apostles' eyewitness testimony, grasps, quite as accurately as they, the supernatural meaning of that life, which is beyond the reach of mere historical investigation.

How do the Evangelists convey this "fourth-dimensional" quality of the salvation-history they write? We can only find the answer to this question (1) by appreciating the very personal manner in which each of the Evangelists has conceived the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ, (2) by investigating how he employs the various kinds of materials that have gone into the making of his book, and finally (3) by determining the manifold literary genera⁵⁵ through which he has expressed what he wishes to tell us.

⁵³ Etienne Trocmé, *Le "Livre des Actes" et l'histoire* (Paris, 1957) pp. 38-75.

⁵⁴ Note the use here of the present subjunctive, which denotes not the beginning but the continuance of an action.

⁵⁵ To those who still need to be convinced that certain literary forms are actually to be found in the Bible, we recommend Jean Levie, *La Bible: Parole humaine et message de Dieu* (Paris-Louvain, 1958) pp. 241-75.

Before attempting to illustrate our answers to these three aspects of the problem by concrete examples, we wish to make several observations of a general nature. First, it must be evident that to treat these questions thoroughly demands exact and detailed literary and historical analysis, which would be out of place here. Secondly, we must not allow ourselves to forget that there is no rule-of-thumb solution to the question of the Gospels' historicity: each narrative must be examined for itself and for the problem it presents. Thirdly, if we are to avoid the fundamentalist mentality, we must be on our guard against the superficial conclusion that, because one is forced to admit that certain details in an Evangelist's narrative (or even its general framework) are due to the literary form used or to his specific purpose, the whole story has been invented. Such a "black-or-white" attitude is simply due to the failure of a modern, Occidental mind to comprehend the Semitic view evinced by the Evangelist. Finally, it will not infrequently happen that, after the most patient literary analysis, we cannot decide with any certainty "what actually happened,"⁶⁶ and we must content ourselves with such imprecision.⁶⁷

"THE DISTINCTIVE GENIUS" OF OUR FOUR EVANGELISTS

The ancient titles which tradition has given the Gospels show that from a very early period the Christian Church was conscious that, while there is only one Gospel (*to euaggēlion*), still each of the four Evangelists has presented it according to his personal understanding (*kata Matthaion*, etc.) of it by means of those aspects of the person and mission of Jesus which struck him particularly. In fact, we may

⁶⁶ That is, "what actually happened" from our modern point of view. For the early Christians, "what actually happened" was what was recorded upon the sacred page. *Dabar* in Hebrew means both "word" and "event." It is true that frequently we can, by an investigation of the original *Sitz im Leben* of a scriptural passage, satisfy our curiosity or refute certain tendentious arguments proposed by those who content themselves with a merely natural view of the Gospels. However useful such investigation may be, it must not be forgotten that it is the meaning intended by the inspired author that has the primacy.

⁶⁷ J. Cambier, *art. cit.* (supra n. 9) p. 211: "Mais il est important de ne pas oublier que l'analyse littéraire d'une narration ne permet pas de conclure sans plus à l'affirmation ou à la négation de sa valeur historique. Celle-ci dépend d'autres facteurs, et en tout premier lieu, pour ce qui est de nos évangiles, de la qualité des témoins et de la nature de la tradition qui rapporte les dits et les faits du Christ. Le problème de l'historicité de nos évangiles est plus intimement lié à celui de la tradition qu'à la méthode des formes littéraires."

say that our four Evangelists present us with four different Christologies, if, as Oscar Cullmann has recently reminded us, we do not forget that this Christology is inseparable from the Christian *Heilsgeschichte*. Dr. Cullmann insists that "the question of Jesus in primitive Christianity was answered, not on the basis of a ready-made myth, but of a series of real facts, which occurred during the first century of our era, facts which went unnoticed by the 'history-makers' of the time. . . but which, for all that, are no less historical: the life, mission, and death of Jesus of Nazareth. . . ." ⁵⁸

Such a Christological interpretation of the history of Jesus is seen already operative in the Marcan Gospel, in many respects the least artistically conceived of the four—adhering as it does so closely to the Petrine version of the primitive preaching. ⁵⁹ Mark's principal theme is that the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ, has, in His public life, His death and resurrection, realized His vocation as the Servant of God. It is in terms of the Deutero-Isaian Suffering and Glorified *Ebed Yahweh* that Mark has couched the Gospel message. At Jesus' first appearance in his book, on the occasion of His baptism by John, the heavenly Voice proclaims Him Son of God who is also the Suffering Servant: "You are my beloved Son. In you I take delight" (Mk 1:11). The words contain an allusion to the first Servant Song (Is 42:1). Rightly called the Gospel of the Passion, Mark's book announces Jesus' death as early as the third chapter (Mk 3:6); and the passion-account occupies a proportionally large place in this shortest of the Gospels. The characteristically Marcan statement by Jesus of His life's work is expressed in terms of the Servant theme: "Why, even the

⁵⁸ Oscar Cullmann, *Die Christologie des Neuen Testaments* (Tübingen, 1957) pp. 326-27: "Die mit der Vielheit der christologischen Würtitel und Lösungen gegebene Mannigfaltigkeit, die Feststellung, dass jede der zeitlich verschiedenen christologischen Funktionen zunächst Gegenstand eines *besonderen* Titels sein kann, dass erst allmählich die Verbindung zu den andern ins Blickfeld tritt und damit dann eine *heilsgeschichtliche* Perspektive entsteht, beweist, dass die Jesusfrage im Urchristentum nicht von einem fertigen Mythos, sondern von einer Reihe realer Tatsachen aus beantwortet wurde, die sich im ersten Jahrhundert unserer Zeitrechnung ereignet haben, Tatsachen, welche von denen, die damals 'Geschichte machten', unbeachtet blieben und noch heute verschieden interpretiert werden können, aber deswegen nicht weniger geschichtlich sind: das Leben, Wirken und Sterben Jesu von Nazareth; das Erleben seiner Gegenwart und seines Weiterwirkens über den Tod hinaus innerhalb der Gemeinschaft seiner Jünger."

⁵⁹ Taylor, *op. cit.* (supra n. 51) p. 148.

Son of Man has come to act as a servant, not to be served, and to lay down His life as a ransom for all the rest of men" (Mk 10:45; cf. Is 53:5-8). Another echo of this theme is perceptible in the Transfiguration episode, which forms the literary center of Mark's Gospel:⁶⁰ "This is my beloved Son. Pay heed to Him" (Mk 9:7). Jesus' triple prophecy of His future passion is stated in terms of the Servant's mission.⁶¹

Since it is as *incarnate* Son that Jesus acts as the Servant on Mark's view, his narrative underscores the reality of Jesus' human nature to the point where the reader is almost disconcerted.⁶² Jesus can become impatient, angry, sharp in His rebukes, sensitive to His hearers' reactions, surprised at the turn of events. Yet Mark presents undeniable evidence of Jesus' divinity, while admitting implicitly that the reality of Jesus' adoption of the Servant's role hid this profound truth during His public life from all, even His chosen followers, until, at His death, even a pagan centurion could be moved to confess, "This man was really God's Son!" (Mk 15:39).⁶³ The Christian reader, however, is provided with incontrovertible testimony that Jesus is Son of God: in His forgiving of sins (Mk 2:1-11), His assertion of authority over the Sabbath (Mk 2:28), His control of even inanimate nature (Mk 4:35-41). Thus the second Gospel gives us an unmistakable picture of the Son of God who "despoiled Himself by taking on the Servant's character" and "carried self-abasement, through obedience, right up to death" (Phil 2:7-8).

The conception of Jesus and His redemptive work which dominates the Matthean Gospel is connected with the mystery of the Church, in which the Evangelist sees realized God's dominion in this world as the divine or "heavenly Kingdom." Emmanuel is Matthew's characteristic

⁶⁰ Mk 8:27-9:32, connected as it is by a chronological reference (a rare phenomenon in the Synoptic Gospels), probably pre-existed this Gospel in a written form. Dom Willibald Michaux in his analysis of the plan of this Gospel, "Cahier de Bible: L'Évangile selon Marc," *Bible et vie chrétienne* 1 (1953) 78-97, has made use of this fact to show that this complex forms the literary center of Mark.

⁶¹ Mk 8:31; 9:31 = Is 53:10-11; Mk 10:33 = Is 50:6.

⁶² The re-editing of many Marcan episodes by Greek-Matthew in the interests of edification suggests that that author was also disconcerted: compare Mk 4:38 with Mt 8:25; Mk 6:5-6 with Mt 13:58; Mk 5:30-31 omitted by Mt 9:22.

⁶³ On the meaning of this confession, cf. "Balaam's Ass, or a Problem in New Testament Hermeneutics," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 20 (1958) 55-56.

title for Jesus—a name foretold by Isaiah in his prediction of the virginal conception (Is 7:14) and explained at the outset of this Gospel as meaning “with us is God” (Mt 1:24). At the very close of his book, Matthew records the promise of the glorified Christ upon His departure from this world: “And remember, *I am with you* all the time until the end of the world” (Mt 28:20).⁶⁴ Matthew’s version of Jesus’ public life is so constructed as to bring home to us the truth that, in His Galilean ministry—particularly by His preaching⁶⁵—Jesus has begun to found that Church through which He will remain with us until the end of time. Behind the immediate reality of five long instructions, into which Matthew has grouped Jesus’ sayings, we are given a glimpse of the future Church. The sermon on the mount (Mt 5–7) is an expression of the Church’s spirit and her function; the missionary discourse (Mt 10), particularly its second half, is a prophecy of the evangelizing activities of the Church in the apostolic age (cf. Mt 10:17–42);^{65a} the instruction in parables (Mt 13) discloses the mystery of the Church, the added explanations of the sower^{65b} (Mt 13:19–23)

⁶⁴ Thus we have an *inclusio*, which gives the spirit of the whole work.

⁶⁵ Matthew’s chief interest is in the logia of Jesus. For the first Evangelist, the incident is of importance only for the doctrinal message it contains—an illustration of *dabar* as word-event.

^{65a} The wider perspective of this second part can be seen in the heightened opposition to the Gospel (16–17) both in Palestine itself (17) and in the Diaspora (18). The disciples now possess the Pentecostal Spirit (20). Mention is made of the coming of “the Son of Man” in the destruction of the Temple, 70 A.D. (23): the apostolic kerygma is preached universally (27), for the apostles have now, in the primitive Christian Church, assumed the office of the prophets (41).

^{65b} The point of the sower centres upon the harvest, i.e., the eschatological judgment: the future judgment will reveal what is decided in the present (represented by the varying fortunes of the seed). In the explanation, the original point of the sower is overshadowed by a psychological allegorization, which dwells upon the reception of the *logos* (the apostolic kerygma) by various classes of men. One type is *proskairos*, a term found elsewhere only in the Pauline writings (21), which implies an organized community against which persecution is directed (*thlipsis, diögmos*) such as Acts 8:1 describes. Another type is led to abandon the Christian faith by the *merimna tou aiönos* or the *apatē tou ploutou* (22): such will be Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11). Thus it seems probable we are dealing here with an application to her own experiences by the apostolic Church of the Lord’s teaching.—Only Mt records the explanation of the cockle. Here again, while the point of the parable (the eschatological judgment, as is indicated by the unnatural command to collect the cockle *first* (30), which contradicts the normal Palestinian practice) has been kept in the explanation, still it appears we are again dealing with an allegorical application to the Church of the apostolic age. The universal nature of the preaching here is opposed to Jesus’ habit-

and of the cockle (Mt 13:36-43) reflecting the experience of the apostolic Church; the community discourse (Mt 18) prescribes the mutual relations of the Church's members; and the prophetic description of the ruin of the Temple (Mt 24-25) gives a preview of the Church's ultimate liberation from Judaism as the necessary consequence of Jesus' exaltation through His passion and resurrection.⁶⁶ This Emmanuel-Christology is the fundamental significance, for Matthew, of the earthly life of Jesus Christ.

For Luke, Jesus is primarily the Saviour,⁶⁶ whose message of mercy and salvation provides the God-given answer to the religious aspirations of that Hellenistic world for which Luke writes. Luke sees all the events of Jesus' life as orientated towards Jerusalem, the scene of man's salvation.⁶⁷ The Lucan Infancy narratives revolve about Jerusalem and its Temple; and almost ten chapters of this book are devoted to Jesus' last journey to the Holy City (Lk 9:51-19:27). Arrived there, Luke insinuates, the disciples "tarry in the city" (Lk 24:49) until the coming of the Holy Spirit. There are no Galilean appearances of the risen Christ in Luke's story.

John's Gospel is markedly different in spirit and style, as in the episodes narrated, from the first three. John is absorbed in the contemplation of God's Son, the divine Word, or perfect expression of the Father, who becomes man to "interpret" to us the God whom "no man has ever seen" (Jn 1:18). It is most of all the sacramental quality of Jesus' actions during His public life which has impressed John:

ual practice of addressing Himself only to Jews in His lifetime (38: *ho de agros estin ho kosmos*: cf. Mt 15:24). Also the good seed is taken as a symbol of the members of the Christian Church (38b: *hoi huioi tes basileias*), which is distinguished (43) from heaven (*basileia tou patros auton*), a distinction characteristic of the Pauline letters.—Thus in these explanations recorded by Mt we have a most valuable piece of scriptural evidence that the Church of the apostolic age was already doing what the Church has ever claimed the right to do, viz., render explicit the doctrinal implications of her Master's teaching.

⁶⁶ That this discourse applies directly and *in toto* to the events of the year 70 A.D., and only typically to the end of the world, has been shown by A. Feuillet, "La synthèse eschatologique de saint Matthieu (XXIV-XXV)," *Revue biblique* 56 (1949) 340-64; 57 (1950) 62-91, 180-211.

⁶⁷ Luke alone of the Synoptics gives Jesus the title *sôtêr* (Lk 2:11; cf. also 1:69, 71, 77; 19:9; 2:30; 3:6).

⁶⁸ E. Osty, *Les évangiles synoptiques* (Paris, 1947) p. liv: "Il a représenté tous les événements de la vie du Seigneur comme *emportés par une force mystique vers Jérusalem*, le théâtre de sa passion et de son triomphe."

Christ speaks to us of God, not only by what He says, but even more forcibly by the symbolic character of His actions. His miracles are "signs" which have a supernatural meaning for the eyes and ears of faith. They are so many symbols of the Christian sacraments: of baptism, in the cure of the blind man, for instance (Jn 9:1-41), who washes in a pool bearing Christ's name, "the One sent" (Jn 9:7); of the Eucharist, in the multiplication of loaves (Jn 6:1-13).⁶⁸ John's message, in brief, directed as we have seen to those Christians who have believed without having seen Jesus upon earth, is that the glorified Christ, who lives on in the Church and in her sacraments, is the same Jesus of Nazareth whose "signs" to men revealed His unseen Father.

THE EVANGELISTS' USE OF THEIR SOURCES

An examination of how the Evangelists used the data about Jesus furnished them by tradition will reveal their utter fidelity to the reality of the sacred history, while employing considerable freedom in their expression of it. Thus, while Matthew and Luke present Jesus' temptations in the desert as a rejection of the false messianic ideal, Mark, who devotes but a single verse to the episode, portrays Jesus in the episode as the New Adam in the New Paradise.⁶⁹ The Lucan account of Jesus' visit to Nazareth, which is probably a synthesis of three visits, or of three distinct scenes connected with one visit, forms the solemn introduction to Jesus' public life in the third Gospel.⁷⁰ Again, Luke has assembled, in his well-developed travel-story of the last journey to Jerusalem (Lk 9:51-19:27), the bulk of the materials which his own independent research had unearthed.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Jn gives a popular etymology for the place-name Siloë (which really means a conduit) in order to indicate the pool as a type of the baptismal font.—The Johannine modifications of the incident of the multiplication of loaves have been dictated by the Eucharistic significance he has perceived in it: cf. "The Bread of Life," *Worship* 32 (1957-58) 477-88.

⁶⁹ This interpretation appears to me to be at least as probable as that which interprets the allusion to "wild beasts" as an indication of evil. Cf. Taylor, *op. cit.* (supra n. 51) p. 164.

⁷⁰ Mt in fact mentions two visits, one at the beginning of the public life (4:12-13), another later (13:54-58). Lk 4:16-30 is probably a composite picture, of which 16-22a corresponds to Mt 4:12-13; 22b-24 corresponds to Mt 13:54-58, Mk 6:1-6; and 25-30 is from a source not used by Mt-Mk. Cf. E. Osty, *op. cit.* (supra n. 67) p. lvi; in a different sense, Ronald Knox, *A New Testament Commentary 1: The Four Gospels* (London, 1953) pp. 131-32.

⁷¹ L. Vaganay, *Le problème synoptique* (Paris-Tournai-New York-Rome, 1954) p. 253.

Characteristic of Matthew is his compressing of his narratives. He interests himself principally in highlighting their religious meaning without too much regard for details he considers insignificant.⁷² Thus, the centurion seeking a cure for his sick "boy" comes in person to make his request (Mt 8:5-13), while Luke's version shows that the petition was actually made through two groups of intermediaries without the centurion's appearing at all (Lk 7:1-10). This same Matthean tendency to abbreviation is seen operative in the story of the raising of Jairus' daughter,⁷³ as in the incident of the cursing of the fig tree.⁷⁴

Not infrequently, we see an Evangelist assemble materials preserved in several distinct traditions and create a new literary unity out of them. John, for instance, presents in his first chapter a series of testimonies by the disciples, where we can discern a Christological rather than a simple historical purpose. By means of seven different titles given to Jesus (the Prophet, the Lamb of God, the Son of God, Rabbi, the Anointed, King of Israel, Son of Man), John sums up for us the disciples' conception of their master. At the same time, an examination of this passage shows that John here records much valuable data, viz., that Peter, Andrew, John, Nathanael, and Philip, even Jesus Himself, had originally been followers of the Baptist.⁷⁵ The synthetic character of this series of vignettes is, however, obvious from what the Synoptics, notably Mark, tell us of the disciples' slowness and difficulty in recognizing Jesus as the Messiah.

THE EVANGELISTS' USE OF LITERARY FORMS

Considered as a whole, each of our Gospels belongs to a special literary form which arose from the oral form of the apostolic preaching.

⁷² This tendency to abbreviate narrative is probably to be explained by Mt's inclusion of so many logia of Jesus, on the one hand, and by the material limitations of the ordinary scroll on which he wrote. At times, Matthean brevity leads to obscurity: to understand Mt 9:2b ("Jesus seeing their faith") one must read Mk 2:4; similarly, the incomprehensible "I repeat" of Mt 19:24 is clarified by Mk 10:23-24.

⁷³ Compare Mt 9:18-24 with Mk 5:21-43, where, by having Jairus come to say his daughter "has just died," Mt eliminates the Marcan messengers who give Jairus (who has in Mk told Jesus his daughter "was dying") news of his daughter's death.

⁷⁴ In Mt 21:19 the fig tree withers up "instantaneously"; for quite a different version, cf. Mk 11:12-14, 20-25.

⁷⁵ Another important detail: Jn 1:42 agrees with Mk 3:10 and Lk 6:14 in assigning the change of Simon's name to Peter to a quite early stage of the public ministry. Hence it becomes probable that the scene at Caesarea Philippi, as recorded by Mt 16:13-20, is a synthesis of several diverse elements.

This kerygma was a proclamation to nonbelievers of Jesus' work of universal redemption through His passion and resurrection, to which certain episodes and sayings from His public life were added. The written Gospel, as we have seen, was, on the contrary, meant for Christian readers to provide a more profound understanding of the mysteries of the faith.⁷⁶ Like the preaching, however, it attempts to express that reality which surpasses the limits of our time-space world and its experiences. Indeed, it may be said that the external historical events it records are subordinate to the infinitely more important, less easily perceptible fact that God has, in Jesus Christ, personally entered our human history. The historical happenings recorded by the Gospels are not set down solely (nor primarily) for the sake of the history they contain, but for their Christological signification. To assess fully the evangelical *genus litterarium*, we must attend above all to the dialogue between the inspired author and his Christian reader, that witnessing to Christ which, as Paul characterizes it, is "from faith to faith" (Rom 1:17), which makes the Gospel "God's power unto salvation for every believer" (Rom 1:16). Only when this is borne in mind can the historical character of the Gospels be rightly evaluated.

Incorporated under this specific form, the Gospel-form, which we have called salvation-history, we can discern many other literary forms which aid us in grasping the meaning of the Gospels' historical character. At this point it may not be inopportune to recall Pius XII's insistence upon the very wide variety of historical literary forms found in the Bible, all perfectly consonant with the divine veracity and dignity. To decide just how God should (or should not) have transmitted His revelation to us, without first putting ourselves to school to His inspired writers, is scarcely a reverent approach to the scriptural Word. No sincere Christian should attempt an apology for the divine choice of certain means of God's self-revelation.

Let me put this another way. The problem posed by the presence of certain literary forms in our Gospels is in no sense to be regarded as one of reconciling the "history" with the Christology. Once we grant the supreme truth of the Incarnation with all its consequences, the Christology *is* the history.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Thus it is a particular genre of that religious history of which Pius XII speaks in *Divino affante Spiritu*: cf. n. 26.

⁷⁷ Cullmann, *op. cit.* (supra n. 58) p. 328: "Auf doppelte Weise bildet vielmehr schon

Among the subordinate literary forms found in the Gospel narratives, we might enumerate the genealogy,⁷⁸ the eyewitness account,⁷⁹ popular traditions,⁸⁰ family reminiscences,⁸¹ externalized representations of interior experiences,⁸² and finally the midrash.⁸³ With regard to sayings and sermons of Jesus, there are some logia which undoubtedly retain the form and idiom of the speaker.⁸⁴ But there are also discourses

das Leben Jesu den Ausgangspunkt allen christologischen Denkens: in Jesu eigenem Selbstbewusstsein und in der konkreten Ahnung, die seine Person und sein Werk in den Jüngern und im Volke wachriefen."—Here we must also mention another question frequently put to the Catholic critic when he is discussing the literary form of certain Gospel narratives: "Where do you stop?" If we accept the incarnational view of Sacred Scripture proposed by *Divino afflante Spiritu*, viz., "Dei verba, humanis linguis expressa, quoad omnia humano sermone assimilata facta sunt, excepto errore" (AAS 35 [1943] 316), then the answer is clear enough. We "stop" when we have been satisfied that we understand completely the words of the inspired writer, since then we know we have grasped the divine message intended for us in this biblical passage.

⁷⁸ Mt 1:1-17; Lk 3:23-38.—Note that the biblical genealogy (of such doctrinal importance in the OT because of the messianic idea held by Israel) is an *art-form*; hence it is not to be confused with those family-trees found in modern histories or biographies, which profess to trace *all* the ancestors of a given individual back through many generations. The biblical genealogy has a religious purpose which must be discovered, in each instance, by careful analysis.

⁷⁹ Amongst the Evangelists, Mark, the faithful recorder of what the observant eye of Peter noted, has perhaps preserved the greatest number of eyewitness descriptions of scenes. Matthew is rightly regarded as having, the most frequently, transcribed the logia of Jesus so as to keep their original Semitic flavor and idiom.

⁸⁰ By popular traditions here is meant the type of story told, especially in the ancient Near East, among the people. By the nature of things, there is much more of this genre in the OT than in the NT; but they do exist in the NT, e.g., the story of the Magi (Mt 2:1-12), the two stories of Judas' death referred to above, possibly also the story of the strange happenings in Jerusalem after Jesus' death (Mt 27:51-53). For those who boggle at the suggestion that God has descended to use "the story" as a vehicle of His revelation, we recommend John L. McKenzie's masterly discussion of "The Hebrew Story," *op. cit.* (supra n. 11) pp. 60 ff.

⁸¹ To this class, I believe, belong certain elements in the Matthean and Lucan Infancy narratives; also, perhaps, the strange story preserved in Mk 3:21-22.

⁸² E.g., the heavenly Voice at Jesus' baptism, apparently heard by no one else (Mt 3:16 ff. par.); Jesus' triple temptation (Mt 4:1-11), which in Lk 4:1-13 is more "spiritual"; possibly also the Lucan annunciations to Zachary (1:11-22), to our Lady (1:26-38)—the case of Joseph's dream is clearer (Mt 1:20-21). Related to this genre are attempts to describe supernatural phenomena which defy human expression: e.g., Acts 2:3: the Pentecostal "tongues as if of fire"; Lk 22:44b: "His sweat became as it were clots of blood . . ."

⁸³ Cf. the interesting discussion by René Laurentin, *Structure et théologie de Luc I-II* (Paris, 1957) pp. 93 ff., of the midrashic examples in the Lucan Infancy narrative.

⁸⁴ These can be determined by comparing the various forms in which the saying may be represented in the evangelical tradition: the simplest and most obvious example, perhaps, is Mt 5:40; cf. Lk 6:29b.

which the Evangelist himself has constructed from Jesus' sayings and sermons; and these can even be expressed (as in the fourth Gospel) in the author's own style and terminology. There are parables which in the course of oral tradition have undergone a certain historicization⁸⁵ or allegorization.⁸⁶ At times we find liturgical texts which enshrine pronouncements of Jesus dealing with the ritual or sacramental life of His future Church.⁸⁷

While this list is by no means exhaustive, it exemplifies sufficiently the great variety of literary forms which our Gospels contain. In an essay that is already lengthy, there is room to discuss only one or two of these genres. However, a brief consideration of the genealogy and of the eyewitness account may serve to illustrate the statement of Pius XII, already referred to, that, prescindendo from divine inspiration, the pre-eminence of the Israelites in historical writing lies in the *religious* character of the history they wrote.⁸⁸

The age-old attempt to "reconcile" the genealogies of Jesus given by Matthew (Mt 1:1-17) and by Luke (Lk 3:23-38), a celebrated *crux interpretum* since the patristic age, is largely the result of a failure to understand the nature of this important biblical *genus litterarium*.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ For instance, the Matthean parable of the wedding feast (Mt 22:1-14): the detail in v. 7 is probably a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem under Titus in 70 A.D., while the addition by Mt of the guest without a wedding garment (v. 11 ff.), intended as a warning to the Gentile Christians, probably reflects the constitution of the Church which Mt knew at the time of writing (ca. 80 A.D.).

⁸⁶ It is a delicate question to determine how much or how little allegory was present in many of the parables as Jesus Himself gave them. However, it is probable that the three Matthean parables, the steward (Mt 24:45-51), the virgins (Mt 25:1-13), the talents (Mt 24:14-30), reflect the organization of the Church at the time this Gospel was written, and represent the hierarchical authorities, groups of consecrated women, and the body of the faithful.

⁸⁷ E.g., Mt 28:18-19, Mk 14:22-24, Jn 9:35-38, like Acts 8:34 ff., appear to reflect the pre-baptismal interrogation. Cf. "Liturgical Influences on the Formation of the Four Gospels," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 21 (1959) 24-38.

⁸⁸ Cf. n. 26 above.—This quality distinguishes the literature of Israel from that of her neighbors and explains the remarkable way in which the sacred writers were able to take over literary forms and even myths from their pagan contemporaries and transform them into apt vehicles which express the divine revelation.

⁸⁹ No solution that is entirely satisfactory has ever been discovered, even though some are highly ingenious: e.g., (1) Mt gives Joseph's, Lk Mary's Davidic ancestry; (2) both give Joseph's descent: Matthan (Mt) and Melchi (Lk) married the same woman in turn; then Jacob, Heli's half-brother, married Jacob's childless widow, Joseph being the issue of this union; (3) Mt gives legal Davidic descent, Lk Joseph's real ancestry; eventually, of

Once it is recognized that these genealogical tables are deliberately incomplete⁹⁰ and that, moreover, it is impossible to corroborate or explain the variations in the names of Jesus' immediate ancestry, we are in a position to ask the real question: What religious message is expressed through this obviously artificial literary construction?

Luke, who uses the ascending order, tells us at the start that people thought Jesus was Joseph's son. In reality, however—and this is what Luke is attempting to convey—Jesus was the Son of God. Luke's use of the Greek genealogical phrase, "X who was of Y," permits him to employ the same expression for Adam's relationship to God as for Seth's relationship to Adam. Accordingly the theological significance of the whole structure becomes clear. Jesus, who is "of God" in a way infinitely superior to Adam, is the New Adam whose redemptive act far surpasses in its universality Adam's sinful act and its effect upon the entire human race.

The chief purpose of the Matthean genealogy is to show the link between Jesus and the salvation-history of His people. It descends from Abraham, and employs the biblical term "generated." Matthew can thus state that Jesus is that "seed of Abraham" (cf. Gal 3:16) who inherits the divine promise made to that patriarch. He is, moreover, that member of the Davidic dynasty in whom the promise made to David (2 Sam 7:12 ff.) is realized. The extraordinary inclusion of four women in this family tree (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bethsabee, all probably of non-Jewish origin) reveals Matthew's interest in the salvation of the Gentiles.

Mark's Gospel abounds in narratives that clearly repose upon eyewitness testimony. Characteristic of such passages is their explicit reference to time and place, together with the vivid quality of their descriptive details. The story of twenty-four hours in Jesus' public life (Mk 1:21-39), that of the storm on the lake (Mk 4:35-41), or the feeding of the five thousand (Mk 6:34-44) are striking examples of eyewitness accounts. A brief but very graphic instance, which we quote here, depicts the reactions of the crowds who seek cures.

Matthat's two sons, Jacob was father of our Lady, Heli of Joseph, who thus inherited the title, since his uncle had no male offspring, etc., etc.

⁹⁰ The Matthean genealogy is schematized to obtain three series of fourteen each: in the second group, three kings, Ochozias, Joas, Amasias, are omitted (practice of *erasio nominis?*); and it is conceivable that similar omissions occur in the third list.

Because there was such a crowd, He told His disciples to have a rowboat ready for Him, to prevent their pushing up against Him. He had cured many, so all who had ailments kept thrusting themselves towards Him in order to touch Him. And the impure spirits, when they caught sight of Him, would fling themselves down at His feet and scream, "You are the Son of God!", while He kept ordering them vehemently not to reveal who He was (Mk 3:9-12).

As we read the passage, we receive the unmistakable impression of a report obtained at first hand. At the same time, this eyewitness is testifying to a supernatural reality which he knows by something more than the testimony of his senses: the divine mystery of Jesus' person. Thus we see that the Evangelists in their use of this type of material, no less than by those literary genres like the genealogy which are more artificially contrived, are engaged upon their predominating purpose, the record of the Good News about Jesus Christ, which is salvation-history.

By way of conclusion, I should like to refer to an episode in the fourth Gospel which, I believe, illustrates in a striking way this conception of *NT* salvation-history. I have in mind the scene in which a baffled Sanhedrin is resolving to put Jesus effectively out of the way. "If we permit Him to go on this way, everybody will find faith in Him. Besides the Romans will intervene and do away with both the Temple and the Nation" (Jn 11:48). To them in their quandary, Caiaphas, "as high priest of that year" (of the accomplishment of man's redemption), addresses an inspired pronouncement: "You have completely misunderstood the case. You do not realize that it is better that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish" (Jn 11:50). This remark is designated as "prophecy" by the sacred writer, not in the sense of a mere prediction of Jesus' approaching death, but in the sense of an utterance which voices the divine verdict about the nature of that death. On John's view, Caiaphas here becomes God's official spokesman. Accordingly the high priest gives expression (whether unwittingly or not, John does not tell us) to the *propter nos et propter nostram salutem*. The Evangelist's reflections upon the true significance of Caiaphas' words are of interest to our study, since they imply not only his own awareness as an inspired

writer of the nature of salvation-history, but also a conviction that, to deliver such a statement, a special divine charism is at work: "He did not say this on his own. But, as high priest of that year, he prophesied that Jesus was destined to die for the nation—indeed, not only for the nation, but that He might reunite God's dispersed children" (Jn 11:51–52).