

THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH: BIBLICAL CRITICISM FOR ECUMENICAL DISCUSSION

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AMONG THE CONSTANT, necessary concerns of all committed members of the Church is that of remaining faithful to our origins and to the purpose for which we exist, while adapting ourselves institutionally and individually to the requirements of our own times.¹ When we study the origin and purpose of the Church, we are concerned not only with factors which the sociologist and the historian can measure but with the matter of divine will and divine intervention as well, and in order to reckon either with that divine intervention or with those sociological and historical factors we have to turn to the writings constituting the New Testament. In doing so, however, we are faced with the fact of variety in situations and viewpoints within the New Testament itself, with questions of development reflected in the New Testament itself, and with the problem of development in the very formation of the New Testament writings from the traditions lying behind them. In addition to these ordinary problems attached to all New Testament study, there is the particularly delicate problem of distinguishing the normative from the relative—a matter in which theological and confessional bias tends to form our judgments. An ecumenical meeting is an excellent place in which to ask certain questions related to biblical study. What did Jesus himself do toward founding the Church and its institutions, and what arose rather in the Christian community after his resurrection and ascension? In those things which arose or were shaped in the Christian community after Christ's exaltation, is there continuity with the mission of Jesus on earth? And can reflection on the New Testament and its formation produce some criteria for judging evolution in ecclesiastical institutions and practice, whether the evolution in question is one from the situation before the death and resurrection of Christ to that obtaining afterwards, or one of development in the primitive Church before the close of the period covered by the canonical writings, or one of development after the New Testament period?

¹ The present essay is based upon a paper presented and discussed in the first meeting of the mixed study commission established by the Roman Catholic Church and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, which met in Rome in April 1970. Since the author participated in the meeting also as the Catholic consultor appointed for that initial meeting by the Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity, he feels particularly obliged to state clearly that the essay's contents should not be taken to be the expression of any positions officially adopted in any quarter.

In many cases a definite and convincing answer to such questions, asked in view of a particular problem, is not possible—not, at least, to the extent that the answer is acceptable to all schools of thought and to representatives of all theological and ecclesiastical traditions. In what follows here we shall first review the Church's origin, purpose, and mission as they appear in the light of contemporary critical biblical scholarship; then, by way of conclusion, we shall make some remarks and ask some more questions, on the basis of the biblical survey and its results, with the problems of ecumenical discussion specifically in view. Many of the biblical problems aired are debatable, and so are the concluding remarks. The purpose of this paper, though, is that of provoking a mildly and helpfully cathartic confrontation between diverging theological positions on the one hand and certain aspects of biblical scholarship on the other.

DID JESUS OF NAZARETH FOUND THE CHURCH?

That Jesus himself, in the days of his active ministry on earth, founded the Church as an organization with a hierarchical structure (or at least with some kind of a given structure) to remain unchanged throughout all subsequent history is taken more or less for granted by not a few of us. Most of us are also familiar with views attributing to Jesus before his death and exaltation the establishment of a particular sacramental system, already well defined, with seven sacraments for example (no more, no less), or with only two sacraments (no more, no less). Such views are actually exaggerations of historical reality: either they push back into the life of Jesus structures which are really the result of a long process of development, or, conversely, they deny validity to whatever cannot be demonstrated to have been established by Jesus before his death, or at least before his ascension.

It is clear that the earliest Christians, not long after the resurrection and ascension, saw themselves and much that they were doing as a faithful continuation of something started by Jesus while he was still on earth. In their view, at least as it appears especially in the Gospel according to Luke and in the Acts of the Apostles, the group of disciples remaining together after the resurrection and ascension received a massive gift of the Spirit, in whose power they began to spread the message of Jesus, first in Jerusalem and the surrounding region, then out in the world at large, on the risen Lord's own instructions (Lk 24:47-49; Acts 1:8). They thus constituted a community of the Christ, or the Messiah (Acts 2:32-36; 3:13-15, 20 f.; 5:30 f.; 7:55 f.; 9:4 f.; 10:37-43; 13:27-31), and the importance they attached to continuity with a mission entrusted to them by Jesus is evident in the message or kerygma

which the apostles proclaimed (cf. Acts 2:22 f.; 3:13-18, 22 f., 26; 4:10, 27 f.; 5:29-32; 10:26-40; 13:23-30; 1 Cor 15:1-7; Rom 8:34; 10:8 f., etc.). The "Twelve" or the apostles were important as guarantors of this tradition (cf. Acts 1:13, 15-26; 1 Cor 15:5-8), and even the sacramental life, in baptism (Mt 28:19) and the Eucharist (1 Cor 11:23-25), was considered a mandate of Jesus.

But to what extent was this developing society having Jesus Christ as its cornerstone and the apostles and prophets as its foundation (Eph 2:20) actually founded by Jesus, and to what extent was it something that developed after his resurrection and ascension? For that matter, to what extent were even the relations of direct continuity envisaged by the primitive Christians authentic? Were they not perhaps also a construct of the primitive Christian community? Indeed, scholars are by no means lacking who see a clear break in continuity between Jesus' own work and intentions and the actual origin of the Church as such after the resurrection. These scholars are religious men, and their work is done in a spirit of rigorous historical criticism put at the service of a faith which is not unreasonable. Their arguments can be of real value in an ecumenical discussion, because they cut through confessional and traditional bias, without necessarily undermining Church order and practice.

The critical scholar who has perhaps produced the most thoroughly reasoned and the most influential work on the question whether or not the historical Jesus, i.e., Jesus before his death and exaltation, actually founded the Church is Werner George Kümmel.² According to Kümmel, the Church did indeed grow from the nucleus of Jesus' disciples, but not in the way Jesus planned, since the apostolic Church's own understanding of itself entailed a certain realization of eschatological goods here and now, in the Church, before the second coming of Christ, while Jesus himself saw an anticipation of those eschatological goods only in his own person on earth, not in anyone else, and not in any group. The Second Coming was very soon to happen, and the group which became the Church, after the ascension, was essentially, in Jesus' mind expressed in his preaching, to be a group waiting for that imminent coming and the fulness of the last age. The Church as possessor of eschatological goods in a qualified way here and now, through the presence of the Spirit, turned out, in other words, to be something more than Jesus himself had in mind, according to Kümmel. Kümmel's position, and one's way of judging it, depends in part on a serious Christological

² *Kirchenbegriff und Geschichtsbewusstsein in der Urgemeinde und bei Jesus* (2nd ed.; Göttingen, 1968) and "Jesus und die Anfänge der Kirche," *Studia theologica* 7 (1953) 1-27.

question: that of the historical Jesus' psychological awareness of himself and his mission, and of the future, a question which falls outside the limits of our present discussion.³ Be it noted that even in Kümmel's view the Church grew out of the nucleus of Jesus' disciples, despite the discrepancy between what Jesus had in mind and what the Church considered itself to be.

Like Kümmel, Hans Conzelmann⁴ and Ernst Haenchen⁵ see a break in continuity between the historical Jesus and the early Church as we see it reflected especially in the Gospel according to Luke and depicted in the Acts of the Apostles, because the historical Jesus expected the Parousia to be nigh, while the early Church very quickly began to develop an idea of itself more in conformity with the realization that the Parousia was less nigh than had been expected, and less in conformity with what Jesus himself had expected and had provided for. Jesus, according to Conzelmann and Haenchen, did not provide for a period "of the Church" between the time of his own life on earth and the moment of his own return at the not too distant end of the present age; his strongly eschatological and ethical message of conversion in preparation for the coming goods of another aeon showed little interest in this world, and hence little interest in an institutional Church, established with both feet solidly in this world, losing sight of the coming aeon, increasingly interested in organizational matters and less concerned with the ethical message of Jesus—a church, in other words, characterized by those traits of what the Tübingen School in the last century somewhat disparagingly called "Early Catholicism." But whereas the Tübingen School placed the onset of "Early Catholicism" roughly in the early second century, Conzelmann and Haenchen see the same traits at the very beginning of the Church as an organic society, as traits bringing their influence to bear on the formation (and partial deformation) of the traditions of Jesus and his message. They find the process evident already in the Gospel of Mark, and very much evident in Luke and in Acts. If this is so, then, as in Kümmel's view, the origin of what later came to be the Church can be ascribed to Jesus' own activity in gathering around himself a group of disciples who continued to be faithful to

³ Cf. R. E. Brown, "How Much Did Jesus Know?—A Survey of the Biblical Evidence," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 29 (1967) 315-45; F. Mussner, "Wege zum Selbstbewusstsein Jesu: Ein Versuch," *Biblische Zeitschrift* N.F. 12 (1968) 161-72. The dependence of our ecclesiological question on the broader Christological question has been stressed by O. Kuss, "Hat Jesus die Kirche eigentlich gewollt?" *Münchener theologische Zeitschrift* 18 (1967) 42-48.

⁴ *The Theology of St. Luke* (New York, 1961) and "Gegenwart und Zukunft in der synoptischen Tradition," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 54 (1957) 277-96.

⁵ *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen, 1959).

him even after his departure from this world, but the origin of the Church as an organic institutional society cannot be ascribed to him.

Are Conzelmann and Haenchen with their approach, or Kümmel with his, right in distinguishing between what Jesus did and intended and what the apostolic Church came to be and came to think of itself? One might object, in favor of the Church's foundation by Jesus before his death and exaltation:

1) That Mt 16:18 f. clearly shows Jesus' intention to found an organic society, the *ekklēsia*, or church. But many scholars will not accept this;⁶ for there are reasons—not conclusive reasons but good reasons—for doubting that Mt 16:17–19, at least as it now appears, is an authentic logion of Jesus,⁷ and even when the element of the *ekklēsia* has been accepted as part of an authentic logion of Jesus, it has still been questioned that *ekklēsia* here refers to the general Church of more advanced apostolic times.⁸

⁶ A survey of those accepting or rejecting the logion's authenticity, together with their more important reasons, was made a few years ago by J. Betz, "Die Gründung der Kirche durch den historischen Jesus," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 138 (1958) 152–83 (cf. esp. pp. 153–56).

⁷ Among the principal reasons given today against the logion's authenticity are its lack of conformity with Jesus' announcement of the imminent coming of the kingdom (in which the Church would have no function to fulfil), the apparently modest role of Peter in the original community in Jerusalem, and the fact that the double sense of "church" implicitly required in Mt 16:18 (building/group of men) is easier to account for in Greek than in Aramaic. In addition, there is the fact that Mt 16:17–19 is found in a passage where Matthew (and Luke) seem to be following Mark, but neither Mark nor Luke has anything parallel to it. Since, moreover, it can be argued that Mt 16:19, which entrusts the function of "binding" and "loosing" to Peter, is developed from Mt 18:18, which entrusts the same function to the disciples in general, one might conclude therefrom that all of Mt 16:17–19, of which v. 19 is an integral part, was formed in a relatively late stage in the formation of the Synoptic Gospels.

Many of the arguments in favor of the logion's authenticity are philological, and new philological evidence has been adduced from Qumran: cf. O. Betz, "Felsenmann und Felsengemeinde," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 48 (1957) 49–77, and H. Kosmala, *Hebräer-Essener-Christen* (Leiden, 1959) pp. 63–65. There is, in addition, the difficulty of explaining Simon bar Jonah's sobriquet "Peter" and the other traditions on Peter if the logion and its authenticity are rejected.

A Vögtle, "Messiasbekenntnis und Petrusverheissung," *Biblische Zeitschrift* N.F. 1 (1957) 252–72; 2 (1958) 85–103, and his "Jesus und die Kirche," in M. Roesle and O. Cullmann, eds., *Begegnung der Christen* (the Otto Karrer Festschrift; Stuttgart–Frankfurt, 1959) pp. 54–80, admitting the adventitious situation of Mt 16:17–19 at Caesarea Philippi, before Jesus' death, argues for the logion's being an authentic logion of Jesus in a post-resurrection appearance. Similar, in this respect, is the position of R. H. Fuller, "The 'Thou Art Peter' Pericope and the Easter Appearances," *McCormick Quarterly* 20 (1967) 309–15.

⁸ Because the word *ekklēsia* in its only other Synoptic occurrence (Mt 18:17) refers not to the Church universal but to the local church.

2) That the institution of the Eucharist by Jesus just before his death presupposes the intention of founding a community in which the eschatological goods of salvation are to be made sacramentally present and available in the time between his ascension and the Parousia. Rudolf Bultmann is not followed by many scholars in denying the authenticity of the account of the institution of the Eucharist by Jesus,⁹ but there are scholars who do not see in the Synoptic account any clear notion of a specifically sacramental sense given by Jesus himself to a repetition of the Last Supper in this aeon.¹⁰ Kümmel, while admitting both the authenticity of the account and Jesus' intention that the disciples repeat the meal as a means of communion with him personally during the short time between his death and the Parousia, retains his insistence that in Jesus' own view the eschatological goods of the coming kingdom break into this world only in the person of Jesus himself, and Kümmel denies any value to the account of Eucharistic institution as evidence that Jesus intended to found a church.¹¹

3) That Jesus' intention to send the Spirit, or his Spirit, after his death and exaltation entails a conscious intention to found the Church, since the divine intervention in the evolution of the Church after the ascension is presented in the New Testament as the outpouring or descent of the Spirit. This, however, does not convince everyone. The idea of the role of the Spirit in Acts is just the sort of thing Conzelmann, and especially Haenchen, would attribute not to Jesus but to the primitive Church explaining itself. In the fourth Gospel it is clearly Jesus who intends to send the Spirit, but much of what the author of the fourth Gospel has Jesus saying about the Spirit looks like the result of theological reflection in the early Church.¹² In a logion found, diversely, in Mt 10:20, Lk 12:12, and Mk 13:11, Jesus promises his disciples the aid of the Spirit when they have to respond in judgment before future adversaries; yet, there are those who hold the form of the logion found in Lk 21:15, with the promised aid coming from Christ rather than from the

⁹ R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Oxford, 1963) pp. 265–66. He refers to the earlier works of A. Eichhorn and W. Heitmüller.

¹⁰ E.g., H. Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper* (Leiden, 1953) p. 58. Lietzmann does admit such a sense in 1 Cor 11:24, 25, but he explains it as a concept derived from those attached to the Hellenistic memorial meals for the dead. There is, of course, a certain Eucharistic sacramentality to be found in the fourth Gospel, surprisingly enough denied at times but defended and put into perspective by R. E. Brown, "The Johannine Sacramentary Reconsidered," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 23 (1962) 183–206 (Brown, *New Testament Essays* [Milwaukee-London, 1965] pp. 51–76). But even the mildly radical historical critics are skeptical about the value of the fourth Gospel as a source of material on the historical Jesus.

¹¹ Kümmel, *Kirchenbegriff und Geschichtsbewusstsein*, pp. 36–37.

¹² Cf. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John* (London, 1955) p. 74.

Spirit, to be closer to the original form.¹³ If so, then it is difficult to prove Jesus' intention to found the Church by appealing to his intention to send the Spirit which set the Church in motion.

PROBLEM OF HISTORICAL CONTINUITY RESTATED

Before going any further, I should like to point out that the preceding exposition of arguments is not an attempt to prove that Jesus did not found the Church. It is an attempt to show why one cannot prove, with critical methods, that he did found the Church, or that he did intend to found the Church, as it actually turned out to be. If we ask ourselves how much that matters, the answer will depend largely on the amount of importance one wants to give, theologically, to the role of Jesus before his death and exaltation in shaping ecclesiastical institutions and practices. Most of us, probably all of us, attach a great deal of importance thereto, in principle. But therein lies a danger of which those of us who bear the burdens of theological responsibility must ultimately become aware: if the legitimacy of ecclesiastical institutions and practices should have to stand or fall on the basis of an act of direct establishment by Jesus before his death (or even before his exaltation in glory), then the maintenance of that legitimacy would be perennially menaced by critical historical study, because the required acts of direct establishment by Jesus cannot be demonstrably proven. For most of the concrete details of a given Church order the required acts are not even very likely. To become aware of this understandably causes discomfort at first, but the discomfort is a salutary one. It makes us reassess the problem of the Church's foundation, in terms that actually allow us to accept the legitimacy of ecclesiastical institutions and of Church order, with reasons that are more solid (critically) and more supple—and from a theological viewpoint more profound.

No one seriously questions the reality of the apostolic Church. It was certainly in existence, with a notion of its own reasons for existence, in the community of Jerusalem immediately after our Lord's exaltation, and there is no need to document its propagation afterwards. When the primitive Church claims to be founded by Christ, this is hardly a pure figment, without any historical justification, but what kind of justification does it have?

At this point we can profitably introduce a distinction between: (a) a juridical continuity based on a founder's will expressed in a positive act or decree of erection, and (b) a dynamic continuity in which a sociologically definable group, gathered together initially by the founder,

¹³ Cf. C. K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition* (London, 1947) pp. 130–32.

maintains its existence in conformity with the founder's mission among his original disciples.

The first type of continuity is the kind which the confessional apologist tends to postulate as the basis for Church order and sacramental practice today. If one takes Mt 16:18 f. as a composition of the primitive Church, then he has to take that text as evidence that the primitive Church, too, was concerned with the establishment of a quasi-judicial basis, constituted by a direct mandate of Jesus. In principle, we accept the validity of the primitive Church's constructions, at least when we find them evident in New Testament texts; so that should hold true, too, for a text like Mt 16:18 f. Nevertheless, we cannot really be satisfied unless we are sure that there is some kind of authenticity in the primitive Church's claim to be founded by Christ. If we are to have this kind of assurance, we must find some way of penetrating the primitive Church's own view of its relations with its founder, in order to see some support for that view in the things that Jesus himself said or did in view of the future Church. We could take a fundamentalist approach to this kind of problem, but the results would convince only fundamentalists. We could take an apologetic, maximalist approach, but the results still would not convince those whose technical biblical-historical training or general cultural background has made them coolly critical. We know from experience that with either a fundamentalist approach or an apologetic, maximalist approach our psychological starting point is such that we will almost inevitably force the issue and claim things which really cannot be claimed. We could state with the dialectic theologians of this century that faith and our response to God's message are the things that matter, and that we need not bother ourselves too much with the things that preoccupy historical critics, but what if our faith—in the divine foundation of the Church, for example—should be deprived of any historical basis?¹⁴

In fact, neither the primitive Church's awareness of its foundation by Jesus on earth, nor our acceptance of that fact, is historically groundless. We may not be able to prove the existence of a positive quasi-judicial act of establishment posited by Jesus in his earthly lifetime,

¹⁴ We are confronted here with a particular aspect of a more general problem: that of the relation of the kerygmatic proclamation in the primitive Church to the preaching of Jesus himself. For a survey of the work that has been done in grappling with the problem, along with fresh observations on the issues involved, cf. J. M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London, 1959), and the same author's "Kerygma and History in the New Testament," in J. P. Hyatt, ed., *The Bible in Modern Scholarship* (New York-Nashville, 1965) pp. 114-50, with the responses by D. M. Stanley (pp. 151-59) and F. V. Filson (pp. 160-65); also R. H. Fuller, *The New Testament in Current Study* (London, 1963) pp. 33-67.

but we have material from which we can conclude (1) that the primitive Church is indeed the organic continuation of a group of men, existing in Jesus' lifetime, and (2) that this group was faithful after the resurrection and ascension of Christ to the mission he preached on earth.

Few would seriously deny that Jesus had disciples in his lifetime. There is even a fairly good consensus among scholars today that he founded that nucleus called "the Twelve," and that these disciples who persevered in their fidelity even after his death were the nucleus of what came to be the Church.¹⁵ Anything that seems to reflect the early Church's own view of itself is most suspect, of course, as far as attribution to the historical Jesus goes, and this not without reason.¹⁶ But even if we should take a minimalist position critically, we should still have material allowing us to see fulfilment in the Church of the mission given by Jesus to his followers during his own lifetime on earth.

KINGDOM OF GOD AND CHURCH'S PURPOSE AND MISSION

Even those most skeptical about our ability to isolate authentic words of the historical Jesus generally accept the kingdom of God as the main idea in Jesus' own proclamation, and the logia on the kingdom in the Synoptic Gospels, accordingly, as fundamentally authentic.¹⁷ This is not the place to examine all the Synoptic material representing Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God and the other statements

¹⁵ Cf. B. Rigaux, "Die 'Zwölf' in Geschichte und Kerygma," in H. Ristow and K. Matthiae, eds., *Der historische Jesus und der kerygmatische Christus* (Berlin, 1964) pp. 468-86. We should not forget that W. G. Kümmel himself denies only a *direct* connection between Jesus' intentions and the reality of the apostolic Church. He admits that in the belief of the earliest Christians, expressed in the New Testament, the death and resurrection of Christ constitute an eschatological act of God which completed the mission of Jesus (itself a mission from God), that the exaltation of the risen Christ made possible the actual constitution of the eschatological community, rooted already in the events of Jesus' life on earth, and that the very fact that the Church as such could exist only after the resurrection is also an element of divine disposing. In such a view, both the Christological question and the question of development and continuity are subordinated to the principle of divine guidance in the origin of the Church.

¹⁶ "Although one may well assume that the founder of a sect has something in common with the sect he founds, [the historical-critical] method is not able to reach whatever area of overlapping there may have been between Jesus and the Church. The method can affirm the historicity only of that part of Jesus in which he is least 'Christian.' For its 'historicity' depends upon the demonstration that it does not present the Church's view and consequently could not have originated there" (Robinson, *A New Quest*, p. 100).

¹⁷ Cf., e.g., R. Bultmann, "The New Approach to the Synoptic Problem," *Journal of Religion* 6 (1926) 357-58; P. Vielhauer, "Gottesreich und Menschensohn in der Verkündigung Jesu," in W. Schneemelcher, ed., *Festschrift für Günther Dehn* (Neukirchen, 1957) pp. 51-79.

about the kingdom found in the New Testament.¹⁸ We can simply recall here certain aspects of that proclamation which are important for an understanding of the purpose and mission of the Church. And lest any-

of the Church in the world, he includes the statement that the risen Christ appeared to the apostles within an interval of forty days, "speaking about things having to do with the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). Afterwards, in the missionary activity of the early, growing Church, the kingdom is proclaimed and men are called to it (Acts 8:12; 20:25; 28:31), but along with this is an important and new element, necessarily lacking in Jesus' own preaching of the kingdom: the proclamation about the risen Christ himself (Acts 5:42; 8:5, 12, 35; 9:20; 11:20; 17:18). The risen Christ is now in glory, and God has "exalted him at His right hand as Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and the remission of sins" (Acts 5:31). At the same time, men are exhorted to repent and to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of their sins, with the assurance that they will then receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) which has been poured out upon the society of the disciples at Pentecost. Salvation, repentance, and the remission of sins—elements of Jesus' own preaching of the kingdom—are being preached as a part of the mission of the Church, but it is the exalted Christ, presented in the mission to Jerusalem and the surrounding region as the expected Messiah, who is the Saviour and who gives that repentance and remission of sins. Those who accept the message of the kingdom and of Christ the Lord receive the Spirit, and thus a certain anticipation of the goods of the kingdom already here on earth.

The kingdom of God is not the same thing as the Church. The Church is a corporate, organic society of men, dynamically united with the exalted Christ and infused with the power or *dynamis* of the Spirit. The kingdom is not a society of men on earth; it remains essentially eschatological and transcendent, and its cosmic universality is wider than the limits of the Church.²⁴ Nevertheless, the purpose and mission of the Church are specified by its relationship and responsibility to the kingdom. Just as Christ had come announcing the kingdom of God, calling to repentance and to belief in the good news (Mk 1:14 f.), promising the eschatological goods of the kingdom, so did the primitive Church occupy itself with preaching about the kingdom (along with preaching about the crucified and exalted Christ who reigns and bestows the gifts

to Lk 24:46 f.: "And he said to them: 'Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and should rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.'" It is obviously the principal activity described in the Book of Acts, and it is evident in the Pauline epistles. Moreover, since Jesus saw his own mission on earth as one of establishing the kingdom among men, there is continuity between this mission of the historical Jesus himself and the same mission in the Church.²⁵ Just as Christ's own work of healing the sick and casting out demons was related to the message of the kingdom and to the relief of suffering, all within the wider notion of salvation belonging to the kingdom, so does the mission of the disciples appear in Mt 10:7 and Lk 10:9 as a mission both of announcing the kingdom and of healing. No matter how the "breaking of bread" in Lk 24:35 and then in various texts of Acts is to be understood, one cannot deny that certain communal meals were somehow related to the Last Supper, with its eschatological note of the kingdom, expressed in Mk 14:25 and parallels.²⁶ All these elements appear in the Lucan summaries of life in the primitive Christian community of Jerusalem (cf. Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-35; 5:12-16). And according to Mt 16:18 f. it is the keys to the kingdom of heaven that are given to the rock on which the Church is to be built.

The concept of the people of Christ the Lord, forming the Messianic assembly which is a preliminary stage of the kingdom to be realized perfectly in the imminent dissolution of the present age, seems to be the essential concept of the general Church in the New Testament. The churches in the local sense in the New Testament exist as societies or communities in which the Messianic people, still living in this age and on this earth, are organized for promoting the growth of the kingdom, for living the life of the kingdom in its preliminary stage, and for enjoying the kingdom's anticipated benefits.

CONCLUSIONS; SUGGESTIONS FOR ECUMENICAL DISCUSSION

By placing our emphasis on the sense of the Church with its organization and practice, in continuity with Christ's mission, we find ourselves in a position of strength which enables us to be prudently supple without losing our self-assurance. We are on reasonably solid footing critically. Our acceptance of our own type of Church order can be made, perhaps, with more realistic assurance, and at the same time we are

²⁵ Cf. B. E. Gärtner, "The Person of Jesus and the Kingdom of God," *Theology Today* 27 (1970) 32-43.

²⁶ And so, as E. Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (10th ed.; Göttingen, 1937) p. 310, remarks, the kingdom lies hidden in the Eucharistic celebration, as it lay hidden before in the person of Jesus, until it is perfectly manifest in the end of time.

less absolute in defending our own particular systems at the expense of those differing from our own. The gain for ecumenical discussion is evident.

The question whether or not Jesus, before his death and exaltation, founded the Church as we know it—as an institution with a given structure and a given sacramental system and so on—cannot be given an affirmative answer based on *historically certain* evidence. That question, in other words, despite the interest it has for all of us, does not make a very good starting point for a critically grounded ecclesiology, for it leads to an impasse. For that matter, even if that question could be given an affirmative answer, based on critical certitude of a sort, would the result really be a very good starting point for an ecclesiology that is genuinely theological? Excessive concern with that sort of question can all too easily lead to a sterile juridicism in evaluating the Church, its institutions, and its practices. The Church does have Jesus as its founder, though not in a strictly juridical sense. The brute fact of an institution's "canonical erection" tells us little about that institution's purpose and meaning. In this respect, the real question of importance is whether or not the Church in its development is faithful to the purpose and mission which Jesus proclaimed to his disciples. This approach leads us to give due attention not only to the words and acts of Jesus during his lifetime on earth, but also to the living reality of the apostolic Church, and even to the vitally evolving Church of later times.

If all sides in the ecumenical discussion are fully willing to accept the positive importance of the primitive Church, then there is plenty of room for constructive ecumenical discussion of a text like Mt 16:18 f., even if we accept it as a composition of the primitive Church—found, of course, in a canonical New Testament text. May I quote here a sentence found in the important book about Jesus produced by Günther Bornkamm, one of the leading exponents of the "post-Bultmannian" school today? "Certainly," he says, "the words of Mt 16:18 f. form, in any case, a testimony to the founding of the Church on the resurrection of Jesus, and to the consciousness of the early Christians that they were the community of the end of time, against whom the powers of the underworld can achieve nothing."²⁷ Both Catholic and non-Catholic exegeses today are much closer than they used to be in their interpretation of this text and in perceiving its meaning for the Church. It is in the specific problem of determining how the promise made to Peter is actually to be realized in the life of the Church that disagreement remains, and dialogue can enter. Another, even more specific, question is that of extending the role of Peter to other pillars of the Church, or to

²⁷ G. Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (London, 1963) p. 187.

the occupant of a particular see. These two specific problems, however, remove us from the field of exegesis. It is good for the exegete to admit that, as part of his contribution to the dialogue.

A displacement of our emphasis—away from a narrow and limited search for acts and words of the historical Jesus to which we can give quasi-juridical value—may also lead us to reopen the old discussions about what is normative in a given case and what is relative. The faithful disciples did accept Jesus and his message; after his exaltation they spread the message and sought to bring others to believe in the Lord. Their way of life and their organization corresponded to a purpose and mission determined by the exigencies of the kingdom. The very fact that they took pains to establish this correspondence shows that they were aware of that fundamental norm of continuity. And yet, we know that in the primitive Church there was a synchronic diversity (between local churches) and a diachronic diversity (as Church order evolved) evident in the New Testament books themselves.²⁸ The same diversity is evident synchronically between various churches today, and diachronically between all churches today and the various local churches constituting the Church universal of earliest times. The New Testament books—all of them, and not just the demonstrably authentic logia of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels—provide a canonical norm and control for our belief and for our understanding of our goal and purpose. On specific matters of organization and structure, however, are they meant to provide norms other than precisely those of conformity with the essential message of the proclamation of Jesus and its realization in this world? Questions of institutional organization, rule, and interior discipline appear less a matter of the kind of dominion and rule entailed in the kingdom (which is not of this aeon anyway) than of the sociological exigencies of a society of men who live for the kingdom and enjoy its first fruits, but who live nevertheless in this world, subject to the organizational necessities of any human society. In the earlier New Testament period the Parousia was felt to be close at hand, and even when the New Testament period came to a close the nearness of the heavenly

²⁸ Cf. M. M. Bourke's presidential address delivered at the thirty-first general meeting of the Catholic Biblical Association of America, published as "Reflections on Church Order in the New Testament," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30 (1968) 493-511. B. H. Streeter, in the epilogue to his *The Primitive Church* (New York, 1929), concludes that "whatever else is disputable, there is ... one result from which there is no escape. In the Primitive Church there was no single system of Church Order laid down by the Apostles. During the first hundred years of Christianity, the Church was an organism alive and growing—changing its organisation to meet changing needs. Clearly in Asia, Syria, and Rome during that century the system of government varied from church to church, and in the same church at different times. Uniformity was a later development; and for those times it was, perhaps, a necessary development" (p. 267).

Messianic *eschaton* was still felt. Questions of continuation in succeeding generations were not of much importance in New Testament times, simply because the imminence of the Parousia made the succeeding generations themselves seem unlikely. Mt 16:17-19 with its words to Peter says nothing about successors to Peter, and apostolic succession in general is not yet reckoned with in the New Testament, except, it seems, in the Pastorals. As the apostles died, provision for ecclesiastical government and for men responsible for the faithful transmission of the apostolic proclamation was apparently taken care of naturally, by a kind of common consensus in individual churches, and sooner or later some kind of rough consensus was reached in Christendom as a whole, in ways and on models natural to the situations in which the churches found themselves.²⁹

As a part of this process, the development of the bishop of Rome's role in the Church universal took place. That role, not always quite the same in every era, and the fluctuating consensus surrounding it have not always been based on Mt 16:17-19, as our Church historians point out. Mt 16:17-19 must certainly enter a modern ecumenical discussion of that role, but such discussion stands to gain by remembering that the promise made to Peter is made in function of the link between Church and kingdom, by seeking the significance of that link for the structures of the Church, and by accepting the fact that the text itself neither provides for nor excludes a certain kind of role given by consensus to the occupant of a certain office in the Church. In the foundation of the Church that was not determined, but its eventual determination (and modification) was not precluded. Perhaps a new general consensus about roles in the Church can be found whose precise nature we cannot now foresee.

In the history of sacramental practice, too, we find evidence of that synchronic and diachronic diversity which we have noted in the case of Church government. Perhaps the ecumenical discussion of sacramental systems, too, can profit if those participating in the dialogue are not so much concerned with proving or disproving the juridical establishment of this or that element of the system by the historical Jesus and more concerned with the function of sacramental rites in the whole context of the Church's purpose and mission. Even the question of episcopal, sacerdotal, and diaconal orders today is one of sacramentality or non-sacramentality as well as one of institutional organization.

²⁹ On the ecumenical questions arising from diverse ecclesiologies in the New Testament itself, cf. the two papers on "Unity and Diversity in New Testament Ecclesiology" by E. Käsemann and R. E. Brown, read to the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order in Montreal in 1963 and published in *Novum Testamentum* 6 (1963) 290-97 (Käsemann) and 298-308 (Brown).

Fundamentally the sacraments, too, exist in virtue of the tension between the kingdom (essentially eschatological, heavenly, transcendent) and the Church (a society of men in this world, enjoying a share in the goods of the kingdom). Clearly this is the case with baptism in the New Testament, a rite enabling those who repent and believe in the Lord to live in him, to enjoy those first fruits of the kingdom here on earth, and later to enter the kingdom in its perfection. The Eucharist, too, was early understood in the light of the gift of salvation and of the eschatological kingdom. For that matter, confirmation—especially as it is understood in the Christian Orient with its rites of chrismation—has to do with the initial eschatological gift of the Spirit, and rites of penance are concerned with that “remission of sins” which the primitive Church saw as one of the gifts of the kingdom announced by Jesus—a gift bestowed in baptism but not to be possessed perfectly except in the heavenly kingdom itself. Sacramental rites of anointing realize two signs of the kingdom together: healing of the sick and forgiveness of sins, an association which is retained more explicitly in the Christian East (e.g., in the Orthodox *euchelaion*) than in the Christian West.³⁰ Both the proponents of seven-sacrament systems and those of two-sacrament systems may find it worth while to re-examine their sacramental theologies in the light of Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom and its effects in the Church.³¹

In any event, development and new arrangements by new common consensus can still be provided for, and a certain amount of contemporary diversity can be accepted, without violating the norms for the Church’s purpose and mission derived from the New Testament writings. The historical criticism practiced in contemporary biblical scholarship obliges us to take tradition more seriously while preventing us, at the same time, from thinking that we have to attribute to the historical Jesus—or even to the apostolic Church—every detail handed down in tradition. Tradition, too, however we understand it, is a topic for ecumenical discussion; on that topic, as on so many others, the biblical scholar is far from having the last word.

³⁰ Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, pp. 15–16, notes this association of healing and forgiveness, as something which the primitive Palestinian church wanted to trace back to Jesus. It is interesting to note that he says there are “analogies” to this in Mt 16:19 and 18:18, without saying just what he has in mind.

³¹ Not even baptismal and Eucharistic practice and interpretation in the primitive Church coincided entirely with those of any given church today. A real theology of sacramentalism had not yet taken shape in the first century of the Christian era. For an objective, well-informed treatment of what is known of sacramental practice and interpretation in the earliest Christian communities themselves, cf. C. F. D. Moule, *Worship in the New Testament* (London–Richmond, 1961) pp. 9–60.