THE CALL TO FAITH OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS: QUESTIONS FOR THE CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF FAITH

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OF WHAT VALUE or importance for Christian faith is knowledge about the historical Jesus? This is one of the most critical questions that has emerged from the development of historical-critical methods beginning in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries and continuing to the present day. It is a question that is crucial not only for biblical scholars but for anyone engaged in theology or even generally concerned about religion. This essay views it as basically a question in fundamental or foundational theology, for it asks about the relationship between history and faith.

On this issue various positions have been taken, but as a useful categorization one may speak of "three schools"[1] which characterize the present scene. First, there is the "Historical-Certainty School," which insists on the possibility and indispensable necessity of historical certainty about Jesus of Nazareth. This certainty may be based not only on historical research itself (as in the work of Joachim Jeremias) but also on the infallibility of Scripture and/or on the authority of the Church (as in various forms of fundamentalism), or even on one's personal experience of Jesus in faith (subjectivism). Second, there is the "Historical-Risk School," which recognizes the tentative, probability character of historical research, but affirms that faith is tied to a concrete, contingent historical event. This is the position of the "new quest"—especially as exemplified in the work of Gerhard Ebeling—and it is the position that will be developed in this essay. Third, there is the "Immune-from-Historical-Research School," which maintains the theological dichotomy between history and faith, i.e., that it is illegitimate from the nature of faith to base that faith on the contingencies of history. In simplified form, this is the basic position of Rudolf Bultmann against which the "new quest" has reacted.

A basic conviction of this essay is that Christianity is deeply rooted in history. Any attempt to cut Christianity off from its historical roots would be the destruction of Christianity itself. Christian symbols have maintained their power through the centuries not simply because they continue to evoke a response of the whole person, emotional and volitional

[1] This terminology is taken from the analysis of Harvey K. McArthur, "From the Historical Jesus to Christology," *Int* 23 (1969) 190–206.

as well as intellectual,[2] but even more profoundly because they are rooted in the concrete, personal history of a particular individual, Jesus of Nazareth. The cross is a "charged symbol,"[3] because it evokes a whole range of meanings that speak to the most profound depths of human experience. But it is even more poignantly the personal experience of a man who was condemned as a blasphemer, was executed as a rebel, and died as one cursed by God (Gal 3:13).[4] Not only does the Resurrection, as the vindication of Jesus, interpret the cross, but even more critically the cross interprets the Resurrection, for it was *this man*—in his concrete, historical particularity—whom God raised from the dead.

If we are to speak of faith within the contemporary world—and faith here is taken in the uniquely religious sense that derives from the Judeo-Christian heritage[5]—then we must interpret the contemporary existence of faith in the light of that "creative linguistic event"[6] which is its historical root. It is precisely contemporary consciousness which makes such an approach indispensably urgent, for we live in a world that has become aware of the historicality of human existence as never before. Theologians writing today increasingly demonstrate that one cannot do theology if one seeks to avoid the historical questions.[7] Admittedly, this is an intellectual framework that has arisen from the development of

[2] Symbol is to be understood here not in the steno or literal sense of a one-to-one correspondence between sign and thing, but in the tensive or evocative sense of embodying more than can simply be articulated rationally See the discussion of this in Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia Fortress, 1976) 22–23, 29–32 The distinction between a steno and a tensive symbol comes from Philip Wheelwright, *Metaphor and Reality* (Bloomington Indiana University, 1962) See also Avery Dulles, S J , *Myth, Revelation, and Christ* (Washington Corpus, 1968) 1–7

[3] Suzanne K Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (Cambridge Harvard University, 1942)

[4] Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (New York Harper & Row, 1974) 126–53

[5] Gerhard Ebeling, "Jesus and Faith," in *Word and Faith* (Philadelphia Fortress, 1963) 207, speaking of the word "faith" in the context of the history of religions, says "the view that the fundamental religious relationship is 'faith' is by no means a general element in the language of religion, but rather belongs to a limited area in history " As he develops it, the religious use of faith has its roots in the Old Testament and Late Judaism but achieves an "unusual intensity" in the New Testament

[6] Ebeling's key question is expressed as follows "to what extent and at what more exactly definable historical point in Christianity could some kind of creative event have taken place in the linguistic realm where the concept of faith is concerned?" (ibid 216–17) It is here that he seeks to grasp "the decisive difference between Judaism and Christianity" (ibid 223)

[7] A glance at any number of recent Christologies will make this point eminently clear I list here some that have been especially influential in my thinking Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man* (Philadelphia Westminster, 1968), Peter C Hodgson, *Jesus—Word and Presence* (Philadelphia Fortress, 1971), Piet Schoonenberg, *The Christ* (New York Herder & Herder, 1971), Moltmann, *Crucified* (n 4 above), Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (New York Paulist, 1976), Hans Kung, *On Being a Christian* (New York Doubleday, 1976)

historical-critical methods, principally in the nineteenth century.[8] In the light of that development, we bring to our primary sources, the biblical texts, a question that was not in the minds of the first-century authors. Nonetheless, it remains a legitimate and necessary question insofar as it touches the roots of our contemporary understanding of reality. The Christian faith makes claims that have consequences, both present and future, for the whole world. It is of the very nature of that faith, and hence a hermeneutical necessity, continually to engage that world in the spheres of its own legitimacy. This was true for the Fathers of the Church who engaged the Hellenistic mind. It is true for us today who must engage an increasingly secularized and historicized world.

Another important assumption of this essay is that historical consciousness is not simply reducible to historical-critical method. By historical consciousness I mean quite simply that one cannot take a standpoint outside of history in order to understand. We always stand within history, and our human knowing consists basically in viewing the world and ourselves in it from a certain perspective. *Christian* faith can be called one such perspective. Hence this essay strives to remain within historical consciousness as the unavoidable and inseparable condition of knowing anything in this world. But if this is so, then it is important to make a clear differentiation between "history" and "faith." On the one hand, faith itself is a historical phenomenon, which is to say that it properly belongs *within* the historical process as the appropriate and indispensable stance of human beings confronted with a world that has "not yet" arrived at its consummation. Without some form of faith commitment, being human at all is not possible, as we shall see. In this sense faith is constitutive of the human precisely *as* historical. On the other hand, faith is not reducible to "history" as that term is used by contemporary historians. History in this sense is a human science and/or art with very specific methodological rules. Here it is not a question of some theory or other about the nature of history but rather of an analytical description of what historians do when they actually do history.[9] Much of the confusion between historians and theologians arises from the use of the word "history" on different levels. There are certain things that a historian, by reason of his method, cannot call history, e.g., virginal conception, nature miracles, resurrection. This is not to make a judgment one way or another about their actuality, but simply to say that such

[8] For an interesting account of this development which has implications for all theologians, not simply Protestant, see Gerhard Ebeling, "The Significance of the Critical Historical Method for Church and Theology in Protestantism," in *Word and Faith* 17–61.

[9] For an excellent description of what contemporary historians do when they do history, see Van A. Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1966) 38–101. Particularly noteworthy is his emphasis on the "quality" or "texture" of assent.

judgments are beyond the limits of historical-critical methodology. A historian can deal with the phenomenon that shortly after Jesus' death certain of his disciples claimed that he was alive and with the effect of this claim upon subsequent history. But the historian cannot verify the truth or falsity of the claim itself. Whether or not Jesus was actually raised from the dead simply transcends the criteria of assent to which the historian subscribes. Its verification lies in a different dimension.

In the light of these two assumptions, viz., that Christianity is essentially historical, in such wise that it would become something else if it were divorced from its historical roots, and that, contrary to the widespread positivism of the nineteenth century, historical consciousness cannot simply be reduced to historical-critical method, this essay proposes to explore the question by differentiating between two quite distinct senses of faith: that of the historical Jesus and that of Christian understanding. This will be developed in two stages. First, it will be necessary to establish the theoretical grounding of the importance of history for *Christian* faith by further articulating the relationship between the two. Then, granted this importance theoretically, Jesus' own use of "faith" in his historical ministry, as that is recoverable through the methods of at least one "movement" within contemporary biblical criticism, will be examined. The purpose of this second stage, finally, is to ask how such knowledge of the historical Jesus questions or challenges our *Christian* understanding of faith in the contemporary world.

IMPORTANCE OF HISTORY FOR FAITH

Norman Perrin has made a critically important contribution to this discussion by introducing a third dimension into the classical distinction between *der historische Jesus* (history) and *der geschichtliche Christus* (faith).[10] He maintains that there are three different kinds of knowledge. First, there is "historical knowledge," which is essentially descriptive. This is the kind of knowledge established by scientific methodology. It is "neutral" in the sense that it is open to any critical observer and is subject to revision. Second, there is "historic knowledge," which has two dimensions: the meaning a past event can have in its own context and the meaning it can have insofar as the past assumes direct significance for the present, i.e., "speaks to our condition." Such knowledge in this

[10] Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) 234–48. Perrin sees this threefold distinction as a clarification of Rudolf Bultmann's position, which he places in the center as over against those on the right (e.g., Joachim Jeremias), who tend to see historical knowledge as somehow directly constitutive of faith knowledge, and those on the left (e.g., Karl Jasper, Schubert Ogden), who tend to reduce in one way or another faith knowledge to historic knowledge. However, Perrin moves beyond Bultmann and closer to the "new quest" in his delineation of the positive and negative roles that historical/historic knowledge plays in relation to faith knowledge.

second sense can be highly selective, depending upon the perspective taken, but it is still open to any critical observer as part of the total phenomenon, whether the observer personally takes the same stance or not. This distinction of historic knowledge from historical knowledge and faith knowledge is important, for it overcomes the dichotomy between fact and meaning that troubles the position of Martin Kähler and, later, of Rudolf Bultmann. Such a dichotomy is a mystery to secular historians and it arises from the tendency to identify historic and faith knowledge. Thus there is, thirdly, "faith knowledge," which, unlike the first two, is not open to any neutral observer. It is particular (as grace both for the individual and for the community which shares it) and concrete (as recognition of the "special worth" of only one person, viz., Jesus). These two dimensions indicate that faith knowledge is essentially interpersonal, an I-Thou relationship. Moreover, faith knowledge is transhistorical insofar as it introduces the idea of God's activity and it may or may not be related to historical/historic knowledge.

Following Perrin's basic line, I would maintain that for a Christian the primary relationship to Jesus is one of faith which arises in response to proclamation. Proclamation here must be understood in an inclusive sense: it not only refers to word and sacrament in a more strictly ecclesial sense, but to any human experience which can contribute to a religious "awakening" on the part of an individual. Such experiences evoke in us a faith-image of Jesus which is constituted by a mixture of historical reminiscence, myth, legend, idealism—the complex mixture of needs that comes to expression as "religious" experience. It is my contention that historical knowledge, including both the "historical" (fact) and "historic" (meaning) dimensions and clearly distinct from faith knowledge, has a *subordinate but indispensable* role to play here insofar as it contributes to the formation of this faith-image. Perrin lists three functions of historical knowledge in relation to faith knowledge. I only summarize them here, for their verification depends upon the second stage of this essay.

Positively, history can be *a* source (but not the only or major source) for the necessary content of faith. What would our faith-image of Jesus be like if we had only the letters of Paul? The genius of the Evangelists was that they rooted their own proclamation of the risen Lord in the words and deeds of the earthly Jesus and thereby gave concrete content to that proclamation. For example, Luke makes the theological point that the risen Lord is the same person whom the disciples knew prior to his death by appealing to the experience of the earthly Jesus: he was the one who walked with them on the way and explained the Scriptures to them, who sat at table with them and broke bread for them (Lk 24:13–35).

Negatively, history can act as a check on false or inappropriate faith-

images. Each age tends to create Jesus in its own image. The best answer to those today who would co-opt Jesus into various revolutionary movements is an appeal to historical/historic knowledge.[11] This negative function strikes me as the most important, because it means that we can have some critical control on excesses and possible misdirections or deviations, especially within Christianity itself. For example, if salvation through faith, even based on interpretation of the NT itself, has taken on an exclusivist connotation, so that only those who belong to a particular in-group can be saved, then such a notion needs to be rethought in the light of Jesus' own ministry to the outcast as a direct confrontation of the exclusivist notions of his day. This negative function assumes primary importance in our understanding of the relationship between Jesus' own understanding of faith and contemporary Christian understanding of faith.

Directly, history can be relevant to faith insofar as we can stand in a relationship to the teaching and person of Jesus similar to the memory-impression of the early Church, i.e., a believer in any age can hear the message of Jesus proclaimed into his or her situation. This is valid though misleading if one were thereby to reduce Jesus only to what we can know of him through historical-critical method. A basic principle of Christian theology is put well by Reginald Fuller: "The church's Christology was a response to its total encounter with Jesus, not only in his earthly history but also in its (the church's) continuing life."[12]

The implication of the above assertions is twofold: on the one hand, Jesus "as he really was" cannot simply be identified with the figure of Jesus as reconstructed by critical historiography; on the other hand, the Jesus of history whom faith affirms cannot be separated from such work. There is no immunity from historical research nor is there immunity from doubt through historical certainty. Harvey K. McArthur's criticism of the "Historical-Risk School," viz., that the absolute quality of faith becomes dependent upon the relative, probability character of historical research, misses what is to me the vital point: faith itself, qua historical, is the risk.[13] Faith does not give us the kind of certainty that would either

[11] An excellent example of the effectiveness of this approach is to be found in Martin Hengel, *Was Jesus a Revolutionist?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

[12] Reginald H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (London: Collins, 1965) 16.

[13] What I am opposing here is the idea that faith has an absolute quality over against and in opposition to any involvement in the human and historical. It is true that, for Bultmann, faith is a risk in the sense of a naked step into the abyss, but it possesses an absolute quality over against the human and historical in that it is its own verification (as an experience of the activity of God inspiring one to affirm the God who gives life in the face of the overwhelming abyss of Jesus' death on the cross). It is my contention that faith is a risk precisely because it draws us ever more deeply *into* the human and the historical.

remove all doubt and risk from the commitment one makes or remove one from involvement in the historical in making the commitment. Yet it does give us certainty, the kind of certainty that allows us to trust in a promised future. It is the appropriate and indeed necessary stance in a "not yet" world, i.e., in a world that is itself historical as it moves toward its future consummation.

Nor should this surprise us, for it is *analogous* to the common experience of every human relationship. It is only by appeal to analogies derived from ordinary human experience (ordinary language) that we can begin to understand what the word "faith" means; so let us look more closely for a moment at what I consider to be the prime analogate: I-Thou relations. Interpersonal relationships and therefore, I submit, being human at all would be impossible without some form of faith commitment that allows us to affirm the other even though all the evidence is not, nor ever can be, in. When two people meet each other, they go through a kind of historical-critical process in getting to know each other (name, background, interests, etc.), but if they are to move beyond a merely superficial relationship to something more deeply human, there comes a point at which they must be able to make a faith commitment to each other. A person will have reasonable grounds for making such a commitment on the basis of what is known about the other person, but the commitment itself transcends the kind of evidence which would prove to oneself or to anyone else that such a commitment should be made. The moment of trust is a moment of transcendence, a willingness to step "beyond" what can be strictly proved and make a fundamental affirmation of the goodness of another person. As such, it is a great risk to oneself, because it is at that very moment that one is the most vulnerable.

Moreover, once the commitment is made, a kind of historical-critical process continues to be operative in the relationship. Should the initial commitment prove to be false or misguided by what is learned subsequently, such knowledge can either destroy or at least radically alter the character of the relationship.[14] It is in this sense that faith must always be open to, and will always be seriously conditioned by, the results of biblical criticism. It is not that I wait breathlessly for the latest results. My commitment is a firm one, but it is also a living one, and that implies room for growth. My relationship to Jesus, my image of him, is far different today than it was twenty-five years ago. There are many reasons for that, not the least of which is a personal study of biblical criticism.

In other words, God is to be found not in opposition to but at the very center of our humanness qua historical.

[14] This, I believe, is what Bultmann has done in effect. He has radically altered the character of Christian faith by shifting the focus from the person of Jesus to the kerygma understood as the proclamation of God's activity on the occasion of Jesus' death.

This common experience of every human relationship can be said to be analogous to *Christian* faith insofar as that faith affirms God's activity as the freely-given origin that makes the relationship possible. However, this should not lead to a dichotomous way of thinking. Christian faith is a particular gift given freely to those to whom it is given, but on a deeper level the divine activity makes not just Christian faith but any human faith possible. The whole of creation is gift. Hence it would be a mistake to see the divine as being in competition with the human, somehow alienating us from our humanness; rather, it is union with the divine that makes our humanness possible at all.[15] If this is so, then faith in whatever form it may be experienced is not peripheral to the human condition, an epiphenomenon, something superadded to human nature; some form of faith is, I submit, constitutive of what it is to be human. It properly belongs *within* history, and in this sense it is a historical phenomenon, but at the same time it is that which enables us to transcend the inevitable limitations of scientific historical knowledge.

The particular gift that is Christian faith allows one to affirm the divine activity as identifiable with the person of Jesus, an affirmation that in itself is simply beyond the limits of historical-critical methodology but at the same time makes the concern of the "new quest"[16] for the person of

[15] For a development of this idea, see Schoonenberg, *Christ* 7. It is the leitmotif of his entire book. The fundamental insight—whether one is speaking of God in relation to creation in general or in relation to the more particular covenant gift of grace or in relation to the person of Jesus—is that God is not competing but fulfilling. The unity to Schoonenberg's approach lies in the creative intention of God, who from beginning to end intends only the good of creation. Any concept of God that would see Him as somehow alienating us from our own humanness is antithetical to this approach. It is Schoonenberg's contention that many false dilemmas in theology have been created by setting up just such an opposition. The phrase "union with the divine" (which is mine, not Schoonenberg's) has, then, analogous application to creation in general, to graced individuals in particular, and to Jesus in his uniqueness. The point being made here is that every human being, regardless of the particular manner in which the experience may come, must enter into a *faith relationship* with God simply to be human. However, as will be seen in Jesus' parabolic teaching, the divine initiative works in and through created reality—not apart from or parallel to or in competition with the being and activity of creatures, but at their very center, i.e., at what constitutes them as created. For a profound metaphysical treatment of this idea, see John H. Wright, S.J., "Divine Knowledge and Human Freedom: The God Who Dialogues," *TS* 38 (1977) 450–77.

[16] The programmatic discussion of this movement is found in James M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM, 1959). Both Perrin, *Rediscovering* 230–34, and Harvey, *Historian* 187–94, are critical of Robinson's interest in "Jesus' transcendental selfhood." This interest pinpoints the central problem of a new quest. Bultmann himself warns that "self-understanding" must be distinguished from "self-consciousness," and he accuses Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling especially of confusing the two. "Self-understanding" refers, in this context, to the understanding of existence of which Jesus, in his words and deeds and even in his fate, was the bearer. "Self-consciousness," on the other

Jesus eminently justifiable. Faith must always be interpersonal, a willing response to a loving word. If Jesus is God's Word, then encounter with him, whether mediated historically or mythically or mystically, is indispensable to the nature of Christian faith. Historical knowledge is a subordinate but necessary medium to image forth this Jesus to whom we respond in faith. Thus Jesus himself is and always has been decisive for Christian faith. As Willi Marxsen puts it, Christology begins at the point where the relationship to Jesus is one of faith (following Gerhard Ebeling, this occurs in the earthly life of Jesus: we are always dealing with the response of believers) and it develops at the point where the believer proclaims Jesus.[17] The function of this proclamation is to mediate *Jesus'* self-understanding, a self-understanding not detachable from Jesus himself. One of the more intriguing questions that arises in this connection is whether Jesus himself used the term "faith" and, if so, what he might have understood by it in the context of his ministry. It is to this that we now turn. The results of our investigation, if accurate, will raise a number of questions about our contemporary understanding of *Christian* faith. At this point we cannot presume that Jesus' own use of faith is simply the same as Christian faith.

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hand, refers to Jesus' own appropriation of that understanding, his own attitudes, the decisions which he himself made—all of which must be inferred from his words and deeds. Harvey criticizes Robinson sharply at this point for wanting to put the heaviest kind of historical assent on that which can least bear it. The most difficult and tenuous kind of historical judgment is that which tries to infer motives from one's action and speech, and even worse, the self underlying those motives. It is even more difficult in the case of Jesus, for we have no writings from him, no chronology of his life, and hence no real way of knowing if he ever changed his mind. While this criticism is valid, it should be noted that the above distinction between self-understanding and self-consciousness can be made too rigid and artificial if it implies that one's words and deeds tell us nothing at all about the person who is speaking and acting. In fact, it is only through words and deeds that interpersonal relations are possible at all. Within the limitations this implies, the method of the new quest does allow one to speak historically of the person of Jesus.

[17] Willi Marxsen, *The Beginnings of Christology: A Study in Its Problems* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969) 44–57, asks why the primitive community did not separate the preaching of Jesus from Jesus. He seeks to locate the beginnings of Christology in the call to faith of the historical Jesus as Ebeling analyzes it (we will consider this in greater detail later) and the development of Christology in the shift of Jesus' first followers from preaching his message to preaching his person to others. If there is to be continuity between the two, then such proclamation must remain true to Jesus, i.e., mediate *his* self-understanding. Hence Marxsen locates the "break" between proclaimer and proclaimed prior to Easter: "The break lies at the point where a believer proclaims Jesus' words and deeds" (ibid. 70). While critical of Marxsen's understanding of the Resurrection and of the initial and later stages of Christological development, I would endorse as basically valid the point that the beginnings of Christology lie in the historical ministry of Jesus and that the development of Christology occurs when his followers seek to preach him to others.

JESUS' USE OF "FAITH" IN HIS HISTORICAL MINISTRY

In the last section we dealt with the legitimacy of historical knowledge given the nature of faith. But there is the further question of the possibility of historical knowledge given the nature of our sources. My purpose at this point is not to enter into a long justification of the methods that make the quest of the historical Jesus possible, but simply to employ the results of a number of contemporary exegetes whom I have found convincing.[18] What emerges is an interesting correlation in Jesus' earthly ministry between proclamation (word) and healing (deed). On the one hand, "kingdom of God" is his comprehensive term for the blessings of salvation insofar as it denotes the divine activity at the center of all human life; on the other, "faith" is his human, experiential term for salvation itself insofar as it denotes the human response, universally valid, of openness, acceptance, and commitment. These two dimensions must be seen as inseparable if one is to understand Jesus' notion of faith. They frame what follows.

It is generally agreed today that the phrase "kingdom of God," as used by Jesus, is not a static concept that would point literally to a specific place or time but is a dynamic symbol intended to evoke the concrete

[18] The footnotes that follow will give the references to those works that ground exegetically the claims made in the body of the text I would certainly agree with the major criticism that Norman Perrin and Van Harvey bring to bear on James M Robinson (cf n 16 above), viz , that one must establish the facts if one is to talk about their meaning The "new quest" cannot dispense with the logic of rational assessment, as Harvey points out What could be called "new" is the stress upon the final aim of history (though not the only possible aim), i e , its humane significance which can profoundly affect one's own understanding of existence Hence formal criteria are employed, the most fundamental being that proposed by Ernst Kasemann in 1953 (derived from the work of Bultmann), viz , the criterion of dissimilarity It should be noted that, even for Bultmann, the linchpin of his system was not the relative possibility of historical knowledge but the illegitimacy of such knowledge given the nature of *faith* We have already addressed that issue It is true that Bultmann was extremely skeptical about the results of the quest, but Kasemann, Bornkamm, Fuchs, Ebeling, *et al* have modified that skepticism on the basis of usable criteria The criterion of dissimilarity is purposefully skeptical for the sake of method It asks what can be established as a solidly grounded *minimum*, and so it must be supplemented by other criteria, e g coherence, multiple attestation, Aramaisms, etc (for a useful discussion of the various criteria, see Perrin, *Rediscovering* 15–53) Without discussing these methods in detail, I would simply emphasize that the *results* of such methods give us only greater or lesser degrees of probability and so are always open to revision (Ernst Troeltsch's principle of criticism) This is in harmony with our analysis of faith as involving risk What can be said is that, while the results are not absolute, there is a certain consensus of opinion represented by the NT scholars referred to in the footnotes Moreover, such results are useful to the systematic theologian, as is evidenced in the Christologies of the authors listed in n 7 above Any systematic Christology must, therefore, always be open to new developments in historical knowledge

activity of God among His people.[19] Three fundamental emphases characterize this teaching of Jesus. First, the kingdom is eschatological, i.e., it is a symbol for the final and definitive activity of God on behalf of His people. Insofar as Jesus' usage focuses upon the concrete activity of God in the particular here-and-now situation of the people he addresses, I would characterize his use of the symbol as prophetic rather than as apocalyptic.[20] Second, "kingdom of God" is Jesus' own comprehensive term for the blessings of salvation; and third, it is spoken of as "coming" rather than as "established." This means that there is a tension between the present realization of the kingdom and its future consummation. In Fuller's terms, "the message of Jesus proclaims the *proleptic presence* of the future Kingdom of God. . . . Jesus does not offer teaching about the future, but enforces the decisiveness of the present for the future."[21]

Yet the remarkable, indeed startling, aspect of Jesus' message is not whether the kingdom is present or future but where one is directed to look if the symbol is to be understood at all. It is not a matter of apocalyptic signs or of messianic pretenders. "The kingdom of God is in your midst!" (Lk 17:20–21). Do not look away from your human life to discover the activity of God. God is acting at the very center of human life and human experience. When an individual, concretely and personally, experiences liberation from the power of evil that holds him in thrall, "then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Lk 11:20 par.). And it comes in a surprising way, for it demands an openness to the gift that those who consider themselves justified by their own efforts cannot understand. It is the tax collectors and the prostitutes, those outcasts

[19] Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 32–40. For the three fundamental emphases, see his *Rediscovering* 54–63.

[20] Jesus, as the eschatological prophet whose ministry was characterized by the return of the quenched Spirit, employed apocalyptic imagery, but not in the manner of an apocalyptic "seer" who seeks a one-to-one correspondence between the symbols of the past (usually involving extensive quotation of previous texts considered to be sacred and so revelatory) and literal events in the future (seeking to know exactly when, where, and how the coming moment will take place), thus reducing the symbols of the past to literal signs of the future. Rather, Jesus employed such imagery in the manner of a prophet who speaks for God in completely symbolic language that is evocative of the divine activity but that does not pretend to have determinate knowledge of the course of events intended by God. On Jesus as prophet, see Fuller, *Foundations* 125–31. Fuller (139 n. 82) regards the classical treatment of Jesus as prophet to be that of C. H. Dodd in *Mysterium Christi*, ed. Bell & Deissmann (London: Longman, 1930) 56–66. See his other references, especially C. K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition* (London: SPCK: 1947) 94–99. See also Ben F. Meyer, *The Man for Others* (New York: Bruce, 1970) 55–70; Raymond E. Brown, "Jesus and Elisha," *Perspective* 11–12 (1970–71) 85–104; Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* 1: *The Proclamation of Jesus* (New York: Scribner's, 1971) 76–85.

[21] Fuller, *Foundations* 104.

whom the self-righteous can only castigate as "violent intruders" (*hoi biastai*), who are "grasping" the kingdom (Mt 11:12; cf. Mt 21:31b).[22]

Jesus challenged his hearers to a radical reversal of their expectations and their values. He did this through such symbolic actions as table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners and through a number of proverbial sayings, but his favorite way of expressing what he meant by the kingdom of God was in telling stories.[23] According to C. H. Dodd, "At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought."[24] Jesus talked about things that were familiar to his listeners, the ordinary, everyday human experiences that made up his own life and the lives of his contemporaries. In this way he drew the listeners into the story so that they would begin to identify with the various experiences or characters. But frequently the story would take an unexpected turn, the ground would shift, the familiar become unfamiliar and strange, and the listeners would find themselves confronted quite simply with themselves, with their own presuppositions and prejudices. For example, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, one can imagine the listeners identifying with the man in the ditch, watching the priest and the Levite pass by as one would expect, and thinking that now a good layman, perhaps a Pharisee, will come by and help the man. And when Jesus said "But a certain Samaritan came by . . . ," and then went on to elaborate his actions in terms of unheard-of generosity, suddenly the whole focus of the story shifted from the man in the ditch to the question whether one could conceive of a Samaritan acting in this manner. A whole set of presuppositons and prejudices in regard to Samaritans was being called into question. It is important to note here that in Jesus' parables the application was usually left open. It was up to the listeners to hear the parable and to respond to it freely in the concrete conditions of their own lives. The later allegorizing (characteristic of Matthew) and moralizing (characteristic of Luke) were legitimate attempts to apply the parables in specifically Christian ways in the early Church, but it was

[22] For the exegesis, see Perrin, *Rediscovering* 63–77, and compare his new emphasis upon symbol in *Language* 42–46. For the interpretation of *hoi biastai*, see Jeremias, *Proclamation* 111–12.

[23] On proverbial sayings, see Perrin, *Language* 48–54. On parables, see Perrin, *Rediscovering* 82–130, and, for an excellent summary of current developments, Perrin, *Language* 55–56, 89–193. Two recent authors who have greatly influenced me are Robert W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and the Word of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), and John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

[24] C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London: Nisbet, 1936) 16. See the excellent analysis of the implications of Dodd's description in Funk, *Language* 133–62.

precisely the openness that the parables had to diverse concrete situations that made such later interpretations possible.

It cannot be emphasized enough at this point that the focus of Jesus' parables is not on himself or even on God, but the world of his listeners, a world indeed to which he belongs. In saying this, I am not denying the centrality of the Father for Jesus and the importance of Jesus himself for his listeners. But this makes it all the more remarkable that the medium chosen by Jesus to communicate the activity of God is to tell stories about the ordinary, everyday experiences of God's people. The point is that the listeners must enter into *this experience*, the experience of the parabolic world, in order to discover the activity of God, an activity indeed *in the midst* of his people. Hence the parable of the Prodigal Son is not an allegory about God the Father, although it can be used in this way. It is fundamentally a story about how fathers treat sons and sons treat fathers, yet it is not simply a good story. Jesus is saying, in effect, that if you would know what it means to call God Father, then you must enter more deeply into the human relationship of father-child. God is not to be experienced at a distant remove from that relationship but at the very center of such relationships. It is like the central petition of the Lord's Prayer, with its unusual simultaneity of divine-human action: "Forgive us our offenses as we *herewith* forgive those who offend us." One could say theologically that in the order of causality God's forgiveness is primary and it is God's prior forgiveness of us that makes it possible for us to forgive one another, but in the order of discovery it is only in our actual forgiveness of one another that we can experience and hence know what it means to say that God forgives us.[25] To repeat a point made earlier: the divine is not in competition with the human, somehow alienating us from our own humanness; rather, it is union with the divine that makes our humanness possible at all. Hence it is only in and through that humanness, the gift of life that God has given to each of us, that we can discover the divine. Norman Perrin summarizes the message of Jesus this way: "The challenge of the message of Jesus was to recognize the reality of the activity of God in the historicality of the hearer's existence in the world, and especially in the experience of a 'clash of worlds' as the hearer came to grips with the reality of everyday human existence."[26]

If the focus of the parables is upon the world of the listeners, then, in Robert Funk's terms, "Strictly speaking, Jesus belongs to the penumbral

[25] For the translation and interpretation of this petition, see Perrin's fine analysis in *Rediscovering* 151–53. He summarizes it well on p. 153: "In the context of God's forgiveness men learn to forgive, and in the exercise of forgiveness toward their fellow man they enter ever more deeply into an experience of the divine forgiveness." See also Jeremias, *Proclamation* 201.

[26] Perrin, *Language* 196.

field (the zone of partial illumination, that which is caught out of the corner of the eye), while God and Christ belong to the umbral field (the zone of perfect shadow)."[27] Early Christianity, especially Paul, brought the umbral field into the visible field. Jesus, as belonging to the penumbral field, stands in a more immediate relationship to the parabolic world, and that in a twofold way. First, as the "witness to the kingdom," he himself belongs on the side of the hearers. He belongs to the same ordinary, everyday world and he must hear the claims the parables make as standing over against himself and outside his control. This is the force of his use of *amēn* (he first hears what he proclaims) and of his identifying himself with what he says not only by speaking in the first person ("Amen, I say to you . . . ") but also by laying his life on the line through such striking symbolic actions as breaking the Sabbath, driving the sellers out of the Temple, and celebrating the presence of the kingdom by eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners. Second, as the "language-event of the kingdom," he is the one who uniquely brings it to expression through the above-mentioned words and deeds and so makes it happen.

With this in mind, let us turn to the correlation between Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom and his use of the world "faith" in his healing ministry. In one of his finest essays,[28] Gerhard Ebeling seeks to establish the "peculiar structure" of Jesus' view of faith. He sees the central importance of faith in its religious sense as peculiar to the Judeo-Christian heritage but, in tracing the history of the concept from the Old Testament through Late Judaism into the New Testament, he is seeking that creative linguistic event which might help us to grasp the decisive difference between Judaism and Christianity. He finds it in Jesus' own distinctive use of the word both in the logion about faith that moves mountains and in those healing stories that focus on faith as the central and decisive factor. These data make it "very probable that Jesus affirmed a connexion between faith and the event of healing—and that, too, in a thoroughly unusual way—and that this became an element in the form of the healing stories in the Synoptic tradition. It has thus

[27] Funk, *Language* 246 n. 64. Funk, like Perrin, is influenced in his terminology, especially here the contrast between sharp and soft focus, by Philip Wheelwright, *The Burning Fountain* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1968). Funk's concern at this point in his book is to demonstrate that while Paul brings the umbral field of the parables into view, he does not submit to the danger of fragmenting the totality of significations of the parabolic world into objects, thereby losing that world, but successfully preserves the intentionality of that foundational language by bringing it into the world of his listeners through that most radical "clash of worlds" represented by the cross. That is, Paul does in his situation what Jesus did in his and thereby remains true to Jesus. See his whole discussion of the phenomenology of parable and letter, 224–49.

[28] Ebeling, "Jesus" 201–46. Both Perrin, *Rediscovering* 130–142, and Marxsen, *Beginnings* 44–57, have high praise for this article and make extensive use of it.

nothing to do with a particular wording, but only with the peculiar structure of this concept of faith."[29] In expounding this peculiar structure, his treatment is remarkably similar to Funk's view of the relationship of God and Jesus to the parables as they focus on the listener. I will discuss these three elements in the order in which Ebeling treats them.

God (and, I would add, the Christ understood as properly revealed in the act of raising Jesus from the dead) belongs to the umbral field here as well. It is true that God is the context, the ultimate ground, for everything that Jesus said or did, but then it is even more astonishing that faith is used here absolutely and in such a completely nonreligious way.

> Jesus does not speak in this context of God. He does not exhort to faith in God, nor does he ask what sort of views of faith and what sort of ideas of God the people have with whom he has to do in these encounters. He imputes faith to the Samaritan, the Syro-phoenician woman, the Gentile nobleman irrespective of any confession of faith—and such faith, too, as he has not found in Israel. If the faith in question here is really faith towards God, then it is manifestly directed concretely towards God in concrete encounter with him.[30]

Jesus, likewise, belongs to the penumbral field in the twofold manner mentioned above. As the "witness to faith," as the one who brings it on the scene and awakens it in others, he must have that which he offers and bring it into play, even though he never speaks directly of his own faith. On the other hand, it is remarkable that the Synoptic Gospels, unlike John, never have Jesus speak of himself as the object of faith (except Mt 18:6). Jesus is presented as the one who has the power to awaken faith in others.

> The whole point of all these healing stories is surely that Jesus in a peculiar way awakened confidence, hope, courage in the people concerned, that something went out from him which drew them to him. Add to that that he did not merely awaken faith, but also ascribed this faith to those who had no idea what was really happening to them, told them as it were to their face: You just do not know what has really happened—*hē pistis sou sesōken se!* Such a concrete imputation of faith is without parallel.[31]

[29] Ebeling, "Jesus" 231. The logion about faith moving mountains is found in Mt 17:20 with an independently parallel saying that makes the same point about the improbable power of faith in Lk 17:6. The healing stories where faith is central include the paralytic (Mk 2:1–12 par.), the woman with the issue (Mk 5:25–34 par.), blind Bartimaeus (Mk 10:46–52 par.), the two blind men (Mt 9:27–31), Jairus' daughter (Mk 5:21–24, 35–43 par.), the epileptic (Mk 9:14–29 par.), the nobleman at Capernaum (Mt 8:5–13 par.), the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mt 15:21–28), the ten lepers (Lk 17:11–19), plus the similar story of the woman's forgiveness (Lk 7:50). One could add the explicit connection between faith and healing made by Mt 13:58.

[30] Ibid. 233–34.

[31] Ibid. 235.

It is true that the situation of the people involved is conditioned by the physical, personal presence of Jesus, but, as we shall see, this does not necessarily imply a call to discipleship.

Like the parables, the focus of Jesus' use of faith is on the concrete existence of the believer. The remarkable thing is that the people involved in these stories do not necessarily belong to a tradition of faith nor are they asked to recite a creed. Faith is used here in a much more fundamental sense, one I would characterize as constitutive of what it is simply to be human. Ebeling speaks of the concentratedness of human existence, of the fact that it is one's own personal existence, one's own faith ("It is *your* [sing.] faith that has saved *you* [sing.]") that is involved, and that not in a partial but in a total way.

> ... the blind man who cries out to Jesus, the Syro-phoenician who does not give up praying for her daughter—all these figures are outstanding in this: that they are totally involved, totally concerned, not merely half-heartedly interested in what now happens or fails to happen, but rather, just like the dog watching intensely for the morsel that falls from the table, they are concentrated on one single point with every nerve of their being tense with attention and expectation.[32]

Ebeling then elaborates upon six structural aspects of this view of faith: "existence in certainty," "bringing about the future," "participation in the omnipotence of God," "encounter with the man Jesus," "being related to a concrete situation," and "salvation itself." While drawing upon his analysis, I prefer to discuss what is involved in terms of openness, acceptance, and commitment.[33]

The most fundamental condition that makes faith of any kind possible is openness to the gift. The people whom Jesus could not touch in his ministry were precisely those who were self-righteous, those who figured that God owed them something because of their accomplishments. The paradox is that they were in the greatest need precisely because they refused to recognize their need. The people whom Jesus did touch in his healing ministry were those who, in very concrete and personal ways, were being overwhelmed by the massive realities of sickness and death. They were experiencing their own helplessness and powerlessness; they seemingly had ground only for despair but, as a paradoxical consequence, they could be open to the free gift because they had nothing to cling to.

[32] Ibid. 239–40.

[33] This terminology is borrowed from John H. Wright, S.J., "The Meaning and Structure of Catholic Faith," in this issue of *TS*. He speaks of "openness" as the precondition of faith, and of "acceptance" and "commitment" as moments within faith. I prefer to speak of these three dimensions as inextricably intertwined. Wright does recognize, however, that openness must continue to be operative in the faith experience. It should also be noted that I am using these terms to describe faith as fundamentally and universally human, whereas Wright is restricting the terms to his analysis of Catholic faith.

Faith finds its ground here not in despair but in the ability, in the face of the abyss, to hope against hope.

Such faith involves as inextricably intertwined not only the recognition of one's need but the acceptance of one's neediness, of one's dependence on another. Faith is always interpersonal. To accept the truth about oneself is to accept the gift of life in all its relationships. Such acceptance enables one to reach out beyond oneself, to transcend the enclosed world of oneself and to rejoice in the gift that others can be and are to that self. In the healing stories such faith always depends on the encounter with Jesus, but it is worth noting again that Jesus always places the emphasis on the personal faith of the individual involved. "It is *your faith* that has saved you." Believing itself, understood simply as the ability to reach out beyond oneself in the face of one's need, has power. Thus acceptance should not be understood as submission or resignation but rather as power, as the ability to embrace the gift of life as it is given to one, in all its concreteness and particularity, and to affirm it in such wise that it opens up new possibilities for the future. Such faith is "participation in the omnipotence of God"; more strikingly put: "the essence of faith is participation in the essence of God."[34] As human beings, we exist only in participation in another. From the Christian perspective, this willingness to reach out beyond oneself and to trust another is only possible because of the divine activity at the center of all human life. Such faith is "salvation itself," as Jesus makes clear by the association of *pistis* and *sotēria* in the phrase *hē pistis sou sesōken se* ("It is your faith that has saved you."). Faith itself is the power that saves. "For where there is faith, there, by definition, one way or another, existence becomes whole, is healed."[35] In the healing stories faith itself is the miracle. But is this adequate? We must still ask the question: To what—or, better, to whom—does faith commit us?

I have placed great emphasis on what I consider the key to Ebeling's treatment: the importance of the concrete situation. In my own terms, I

[34] Ebeling, "Jesus" 242. Ebeling argues as follows: if the essence of faith is participation in the omnipotence of God, then the essence of faith is participation in the essence of God, for "the thing in which faith participates belongs inseparably to faith itself" (ibid.). The power of God is known in our experience of absolute powerlessness, manifest above all in the cross (1 Cor 1:18, 25). The cross is the supreme manifestation of the essence of God as love, a point which Ebeling develops further in *The Nature of Faith* (London: Collins, 1961) esp. chap. 11, "The Power of Faith" (128–37). Only faith ascribes to God such power. The conclusion I draw from this is that faith does not give us information about God but gives us God Himself in His very essence; for it is finally, as Ebeling says, the experience of being loved. The power of faith gives us a different relation to God, the world, and oneself. "In what way different? One could simply say, in that he knows that he is loved. For faith comes from and goes to being loved" (ibid. 137).

[35] Ebeling, "Jesus" 245.

would say that faith, analyzed here as Jesus' own distinctive usage, commits us, at the most fundamental level of human existence, to embrace the gift of life as it is given to each one of us, in our own concreteness and particularity, and to live that gift to the full. Not all are given the same gift. Each one is called to live his or her own gift, not someone else's. There is a natural tendency to interpret Jesus' use of faith immediately as a call to discipleship.[36] There is no question that Jesus called certain individuals to follow him and that others, like Bartimaeus, spontaneously "followed him on the way" (Mk 10:52). But in most of the healing narratives there is no indication that those who were healed became his disciples. Nor, I submit, is there any necessity to think that they did. Have we not always understood *Christian* faith as the free gift of God's grace that calls a particular individual into a communal relationship called "church"? The mystery has always been to reconcile the particularity of God's call in sovereign freedom with the universality of God's love. What I am suggesting is that God, in His creative love, gives to each and every person throughout the whole of human history a very particular gift: his or her own identity. In a word, God gives us ourselves and calls us to be ourselves, a self we cannot be except in personal response to the divine initiative. As human history shows, this call is shaped in myriad forms, because each one is given that call within the concreteness and particularity of one's own situation.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FAITH IN THE MODERN WORLD

It should be clear by now that the analysis offered here raises a number of questions about our contemporary understanding of Christian faith. Historical knowledge, as we have seen in the first section, has a subordinate but indispensable role to play in relation to faith knowledge. If what I have presented in the second section concerning the earthly ministry of Jesus is valid, it raises critical questions for three interrelated terms in Christian discourse: salvation, Christology, and discipleship (ecclesiology). As a conclusion to this essay, I pose them here as questions in need of much further development.

We have seen that "kingdom of God" is Jesus' comprehensive term for the blessings of salvation insofar as it denotes the divine activity at the center of all human life, and that "faith" is his human, experiential term

[36] Perrin does this in his interpretation of Ebeling's data, *Rediscovering* 139–45. He describes Jesus' challenge to faith in terms of recognition and response: recognition that God is active in Jesus' ministry, and response in terms of absolute trust and complete obedience. This could all be interpreted in the more generic way that I am proposing, but Perrin characterizes it as the "challenge of discipleship." I am limiting the term "discipleship" to those who are called specifically for the purpose of continuing the mission of Jesus in their own preaching, teaching, and healing (cf. Mt 10).

for salvation itself insofar as it denotes the human response, universally valid, of openness, acceptance, and commitment. The first question can be posed in terms of the primacy of salvation. In the light of world history—the untold numbers of people who have never had any contact with Christianity and the growing awareness today of the validity of religious experience outside and independently of Christianity—must we not rethink the universalism of God's salvific love? The genius of early Christianity, the decisive difference from Judaism that finally allowed it to become a new religion in its own right and not merely a sect, was its ability to transcend differentiations into Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female (Gal 3:28), and to proclaim a higher unity in Christ Jesus that would exclude no one. The news was so good and created such an exuberance and enthusiasm that it was only natural and right to seek to share it with the whole world as it was then known, i.e., a world primarily circumscribed by the Mediterranean with Rome at its center. But the world has proved to be much larger, both in its geographical extent and in the complexity of its history, than could have been imagined by those early Christian missionaries. The same applies to us today in terms of the galaxy we live in, let alone the universe.

In our contemporary context, enlightened by our historical knowledge of Jesus, are we being called to return to the universalism of Jesus, which, in its respect for the gift of life given to each, transcends even Christianity? Here a distinction may be in order between Christianity as a *religion* which has a particular history and structure that has embodied both good and evil, and Christianity as a *vocation* in the Spirit of Jesus that is continually striving to bring to expression the truth that claims all people, Christian and non-Christian alike.[37] In this sense Jesus stands in judgment on any form of exclusivism, whether it be found in Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, or anywhere else. But if this is so, then our second question becomes: What is the point of Christology?

In the context of our contemporary understanding of reality, can the Christian today maintain at one and the same time the universalism of Jesus, which transcends any exclusivist notions of salvation, and the

[37] It could be argued, particularly on the basis of such texts as Mt 28:16–20, Mk 16:9–20, etc., that the call to universal discipleship could come about only after the Resurrection, when Jesus was established as universal Lord. I would agree with such an interpretation. There is certainly a profound difference between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith in the light of the transformative event of Jesus' resurrection. However, such an interpretation must also take into account the subsequent developments of Christian history vis-à-vis world history and the contemporary experience of non-Christian religions. What I question, then, is not the truth within Christianity that claims *all* people, but the claim that all people must realize that truth only within a particular historical community that seeks to embody it. In other words, what does it mean, in the light of contemporary experience, to "make disciples of all nations"?

claim for the absolute uniqueness of Jesus himself which Christology has traditionally made about him and which has always been *correctly* understood as of the very essence of Christianity? A number of Christologies have been appearing recently,[38] and this phenomenon may well be symptomatic of a current crisis in Christian identity. Christology is certainly the crucial and critical question for understanding Christian faith. But it would seem that Christology is rooted in soteriology and must always remain so. To be true to Jesus, to be in continuity with what he stood for, is to recognize that he proclaimed not himself but the kingdom of God. Christology must always be in service to that fundamental proclamation of salvation. The issue for Paul in his proclamation of the cross, as for Jesus in his proclamation of the kingdom, has always been the same: the righteousness of God in history, the actuality of unconditional grace.[39] At this level of identity one can say that the proclamation of Jesus' death and resurrection has the same intention as Jesus' own proclamation: to open us to the free acceptance of God's freely-given and overwhelmingly generous love that commits us to life itself at the deepest level of our humanness.

But the early Church understood another level of identity as inseparable from this message: the personal identity of Jesus himself. The same Jesus who proclaimed the kingdom of God is now proclaimed as Christ and Lord. Now identity involves a crucial difference: Jesus himself is the message. It is my personal conviction that only an identity in being with the divine can adequately ground the Christian *claim* that Jesus is unique among all the savior figures in human history. But this only sharpens the difficulty I am proposing. I have sought during the course of this essay to maintain a distinction between Jesus' open and universal call into the kingdom and his particular call into the special fellowship of being a disciple. Does this distinction offer a clue to resolve the present conundrum? It might if one viewed Christology as a very specific and explicit response of *disciples* to the mystery of Jesus' whole life (which mystery is revealed definitively in the light of the Resurrection). Every Christology is a very human attempt to bring to expression the mystery of Jesus as a person, a mystery which continually transcends the human expression. The purpose of any Christology, then, is not to perpetuate itself but to offer a true and valid (though necessarily limited) articulation of the mystery of salvation as embodied in the person of Jesus. This mystery, which Jesus embodies most fundamentally in his relation to his Father,

[38] See, for more recent examples, the works of Moltmann, Kasper, and Kung (n. 7 above), as well as that of E. Schillebeeckx soon to be published in English; also the challenge to traditional Christology in England by John Hick, ed., *The Myth of God Incarnate* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), and the reply of orthodoxy by Michael Green, ed., *The Truth of God Incarnate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977).

[39] Moltmann, *Crucified* 174–77.

is for all persons. The articulation of it is an attempt to make it available, to bring it into consciousness, but this can take place in a multiplicity of Christologies. Not only in the subsequent history of Christianity but already in the NT itself such a multiplicity exists. I am not suggesting that one Christology is as good as another—a kind of Christological relativism—for Christians must continually discern and differentiate in order to deepen their grasp of the truth.[40] But I am suggesting that Christology is a second-order level of reflection about that truth and hence is always a "speaking toward" it (*intendere*) without ever fully "grasping" it (*concipere*). Such second-order level of reflection must always be in service to that which is more fundamental and primary, viz., the offer of salvation to each and every person within the concreteness and particularity of the gift of life that is given to each.

This brings us to our third and final question: What is the point of discipleship? The answer, it seems to me, lies in the notion of mission. Jesus calls certain individuals into a closer relationship with himself in order to give them a mission just as he was given a mission from the Father. The mission is fundamentally the same: to help bring the kingdom to its full realization, i.e., to enable each and every person in the concreteness of his or her own situation to embody that most fundamental human value which Jesus embodied and without which humanness is impossible: union with the divine. The primary value is the kingdom which Jesus proclaimed, and the Church (the community of Jesus' disciples) functions in service to a world in which that kingdom is in process of being realized. One who is called to be a Christian, then, is called to proclaim the God revealed in Christ (*kērygma*), to embody that proclamation in community (*koinōnia*), and to be in service to the world striving to enable all human beings to embody in their own personal lives the values of the kingdom (*diakonia*).[41] The primary attitude that would emerge from this schema would be to respect the gift of life as God gives it to each one and to nurture that gift. God's "community-forming love"[42] may not be restricted to the Church. The broader perspective is world community.

[40] Frances Young, "A Cloud of Witnesses," in Hick, *Myth* 38, remarks: "If we admit the primacy of soteriology, we inevitably open the gates to a multiplicity of christologies, rather than insisting upon one to which all are expected to conform." While recognizing such a multiplicity, I would not subscribe to her indifference in the face of this diversity. Such diversity calls for dialogue that the truth may appear. The question of being—of Jesus' identity in being with the Father—must be addressed, for it is a question of truth. However, this makes the problem as I propose it much more difficult for me than for Frances Young.

[41] Richard P. McBrien, *Church: The Continuing Quest* (New York: Newman, 1970) 73–85.

[42] Robert T. Sears uses this term to describe the Church in his debate with Roger D. Haight, who, with a different ecclesiological orientation, describes the Church as a "community-primarily-in-service-to-the-world" in the issue entitled "Why the Church?" (*TS* 37 [1976] 620–82).

It is clear that these questions are the *Brennpunkte* of contemporary theology. I only raise them as questions without attempting to answer them here. The thesis of this essay is that such questions cannot be seriously discussed without careful attention to the results of historical criticism. The image of Jesus that emerges from such study is fruitful in both its positive and negative implications. Above all, it cautions us not to assume too readily that we have always and everywhere embodied his Spirit in that body which we call Church.