

CURRENT THEOLOGY

JESUS' APPROACH TO DEATH: AN EXAMINATION OF SOME RECENT STUDIES

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Representative contemporary publications bear witness to a widespread consensus among theologians that factual information about Jesus' life is an essential ingredient in the construction of a Christology.¹ While the precise role and necessary extent of such historical knowledge is still subject to debate, increasing agreement prevails that material of this sort is needed both to grasp the content of Christological affirmations and to examine their legitimacy. Thus it is urged that Jesus' public life must be taken into consideration in the historical study of early Christology, since "Jesus' earthly ministry surely contributed heavily to the formation of Christology in the post-Easter situation."² It is likewise argued that the meaning of Christological titles in reference to Jesus cannot be understood without recourse to factual knowledge about Jesus himself, since all titles were transformed in and through their application to him;³ without such information, talk about "revelation in Christ" is "frequently lacking in content" and "Christ can readily become a symbol for whatever one thinks is most important for man at any given moment."⁴ In a similar vein, Nicholas Lash has observed that, at least in the abstract, "if I were to become convinced that Jesus did not exist, or that the story told in the New Testament of his life, teaching and death was a fictional construction ungrounded in the facts, or a radical *misinterpretation*

¹ Cf. esp. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968); Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (New York: Paulist, 1976); Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976); Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury, 1978) 176–321; Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (New York: Seabury, 1979); and Gerhard Ebeling, *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens 2* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1979). For an informative study of the role of the historical Jesus in recent Catholic Christology, cf. Brian O. McDermott, "Roman Catholic Christology: Two Recurring Themes," *TS* 41 (1980) 339–67.

² Larry W. Hurtado, "New Testament Christology: A Critique of Bousset's Influence," *TS* 40 (1979) 317.

³ Hans Jellouschek, "Zur christologischen Bedeutung der Frage nach dem historischen Jesus," *TQ* 152 (1972) 112–23; Frans Jozef van Beeck, *Christ Proclaimed: Christology as Rhetoric* (New York: Paulist, 1979) 112–14, 139–43.

⁴ Zachary Hayes, "Revelation in Christ," in *Proceedings of the Seventh Centenary Celebration of the Death of Saint Bonaventure* (ed. P. Foley; St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: Franciscan Institute, 1975) 29, 43.

tation of his character, history and significance, then I should cease to be a Christian."⁵

A position radically opposed to such views found its classical expression in the early days of dialectical theology. Commenting on Rom 1:4, Karl Barth asserted: "This is the significance of Jesus: the installation of the Son of man as *Son of God*. What he is apart from this installation is as important and as unimportant as everything temporal, material, and human can be. 'Even if we have known Christ according to the flesh, we know him that way no longer.' Because he *was*, he *is*; but because he *is*, what he *was* lies behind him."⁶ In his famous correspondence with Adolf von Harnack, Barth outlined the background of this negative assessment of the theological importance of the historical Jesus:

The reliability and communality of the knowledge of the person of Jesus Christ as the centre of the *gospel* can be none other than that of God-awakened *faith*. Critical-historical study signifies the deserved and necessary end of *those* "foundations" of this knowledge which are no foundations at all since they have not been laid by God himself. Whoever does not yet know (and this applies to all of us) that we *no longer* know Christ according to the flesh, should let the critical study of the Bible tell him so. The more radically he is frightened the better it is for him and for the matter involved.⁷

Though considerably modified in Barth's own subsequent work, views of this sort have remained influential, largely in and through the exegesis and theology of Rudolf Bultmann. While Bultmann recognized that much information about Jesus can be ascertained through critical assessment of the Gospel tradition,⁸ and was even willing to speak of a Christology implicit in Jesus' words and deeds,⁹ he nonetheless insisted that Christian theology begins with the earliest Church's kerygma that the Crucified and Risen One is God's eschatological act of salvation¹⁰ and is dependent on reference only to the fact of Jesus' existence, not to further information concerning his life.¹¹ Among the varied factors which influenced Bult-

⁵ *Theology on Dover Beach* (New York: Paulist, 1979) 84. Cf. also G. Ebeling, *Theology and Proclamation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966) 54-81.

⁶ *Der Römerbrief* (2nd ed.; Munich: Kaiser, 1922) 6; my translation.

⁷ Cited according to H. Martin Rumscheidt, *Revelation and Theology: An Analysis of the Barth-Harnack Correspondence of 1923* (Cambridge: University Press, 1972) 35.

⁸ *Jesus and the Word* (New York: Scribner's, 1934); *Theology of the New Testament 1* (New York: Scribner's, 1951) 3-26.

⁹ "The Significance of the Historical Jesus for the Theology of Paul," *Faith and Understanding 1* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) 237; *Theology of the New Testament 1*, 43; "The Primitive Christian Kerygma and the Historical Jesus," *The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ* (ed. C. Braaten and R. Harrisville; Nashville: Abingdon, 1964) 28.

¹⁰ *Theology of the New Testament 1*, 3.

¹¹ "The Primitive Christian Kerygma" 20-21, 25.

mann's position one, stressed especially in his address to the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences in 1960, is of immediate concern here: his argument that serious theological interest in the historical Jesus is precluded by the inaccessibility to historical inquiry of Jesus' approach to and evaluation of his death.¹²

In Bultmann's conception, a practically unbridgeable chasm yawns between Jesus' public life and his death. Jesus' execution at the hands of Roman civil authority resulted from a fundamental misunderstanding of his essentially apolitical religious activity.¹³ Corresponding to this lack of objective connection between Jesus' mission and his death is our lack of reliable information about Jesus' subjective approach to and evaluation of death. The three predictions of the Passion (Mk 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34) are *vaticinia ex eventu*; the logion about the Son of man giving his life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:45) is a product of the early community; and the traditions of the Last Supper, with their attribution of salvific value to Jesus' death, are aetiological cult legends, traceable back to early Christian liturgies but not to Jesus himself.¹⁴ Our knowledge is so limited that we cannot even exclude the possibility that Jesus broke down in the face of death.¹⁵ As a result of the obscurity which thus surrounds Jesus' death, theology, concerned as it must be with the cross, cannot be developed on the basis of the historical Jesus, no matter how much other factual information about Jesus might be available.

Whatever criticisms might be brought against some of Bultmann's views and presuppositions,¹⁶ it is clear that with his questions concerning Jesus' approach to death he has unerringly put his finger on a decisive issue. His arguments against the objective connection between Jesus' mission and his death can be refuted with relative ease: Jesus was put to death because of his public activity, not because of a misunderstanding; and while he was not a political activist, his message was hardly as apolitical as Bultmann presumes.¹⁷ Yet this consideration does not fully resolve the question of Jesus' subjective approach to death, though it is

¹² Ibid. 23-24.

¹³ Ibid. 24.

¹⁴ Ibid. 23; *Jesus and the Word* 213-14. Cf. also *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963) 93, 148, 152, 265-66; in this work, originally published in 1921, Bultmann does not conduct his own literary criticism of the Last Supper traditions, but relies on Albert Eichhorn, *Das Abendmahl im Neuen Testament* (Leipzig: Mohr, 1898) and Wilhelm Heitmüller, "Abendmahl: I: Im Neuen Testament," *RGG* 1 (1909) 20-52.

¹⁵ "The Primitive Christian Kerygma" 24.

¹⁶ In addition to the standard works on Bultmann, cf. Franz Schupp, *Auf dem Weg zu einer kritischen Theologie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1974) 94-100, and Helmut Peukert, *Wissenschaftstheorie—Handlungstheorie—Fundamentale Theologie* (Dusseldorf: Patmos, 1976) 21-42.

¹⁷ Cf., e.g., Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974) 126-45.

an important step in the direction of a solution; and while Bultmann's agnosticism has never been universally accepted among exegetes, it has been and is highly influential, especially as far as the Last Supper tradition is concerned.¹⁸ If this aspect of the relationship of Jesus' life and his death cannot be clarified, a serious obstacle impedes efforts to find Jesus' public life and death mutually illuminating.

Older conceptions of Jesus' approach to death,¹⁹ often based on an uncritical reading of the Gospels and on dubious views of the extent of Jesus' human knowledge, hardly represent a viable option for contemporary theology. The issue thus forms a serious problem on the boundary of exegesis and systematic theology. In an effort to contribute to its clarification, we shall first examine the writings of Heinz Schürmann, Rudolf Pesch, and Anton Vögtle, three exegetes who have carefully investigated the problem of how Jesus approached death.²⁰ Then we shall consider the positions adopted by three systematic theologians, all of whom are concerned with the relationship of dogmatic Christology and the contemporary exegetical problematic: Walter Kasper, Edward Schillebeeckx, and Karl Rahner. After this admittedly fragmentary sampling of recent opinion, we will conclude with some reflections from the perspective of systematic Christology and soteriology.

I

Heinz Schürmann

A sustained challenge to the dominance of Bultmann's views on Jesus' approach to death has been mounted in recent years by the East German exegete Heinz Schürmann, who has addressed various aspects of the issue in numerous articles.²¹ Aware that the historicity of the Gospel statements

¹⁸ For an opposing view, cf. Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (New York: Scribner's, 1966); for a survey of the literature, cf. Helmut Feld, *Das Verständnis des Abendmahls* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976) 4-76.

¹⁹ E.g., Karl Adam, *The Christ of Faith* (New York: Mentor, 1957) 343-57.

²⁰ Among the exegetes not discussed here, Joachim Gnllka ("Wie urteilte Jesus über seinen Tod?" *Der Tod Jesu: Deutungen im Neuen Testament* [ed. K. Kertelge; Freiburg: Herder, 1976] 13-50), Xavier Léon-Dufour (*Face à la mort: Jésus et Paul* [Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1979] 27-172), and Martin Hengel ("Der stellvertretende Sühnetod Jesu: Ein Beitrag zur Entstehung des urchristlichen Kerygmas," *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift "Communio"* 9 [1980] 1-25, 135-47) deserve special mention.

²¹ A complete bibliography from 1949 to 1977 has been compiled by C.-P. März ("Bibliographie Heinz Schürmann," *Die Kirche des Anfangs* [ed. R. Schnackenburg, J. Ernst, and J. Wanke; Freiburg: Herder, 1978] 633-58). Schürmann has elaborated upon his views and defended them against criticism in presentations at the August 1979 General Meeting of the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas in Durham and at the October 1979 session of the International Theological Commission in Rome. An abbreviated text of the Rome *relatio*

of Jesus concerning his death is disputed, Schürmann concentrates his attention on Jesus' conduct and on our overall historical picture of Jesus, in the hope that avoiding exclusive preoccupation with detection of *ipsissima verba* will facilitate expansion of our stock of reliable historical information. Although there has been some development in Schürmann's thought, the basic lines of his argument have remained constant; we can therefore consider his work as a whole, without sharp distinction between earlier and later expressions of his position.

Schürmann's first step is to observe that Jesus must have recognized the possibility of death as a real and present danger: the experience of weakness and possible failure was inherent in his preaching from the start;²² the execution of John the Baptist was an ominous warning; his public activity was threatening both to Herod and to the Romans; and potentially lethal tensions marred his relationship to the religious leaders of his own people. Inquiry into Jesus' attitude toward death is thus at least possible, since death could not have taken him by surprise, and some effort on his part to come to terms with its approach is clearly antecedently probable.²³

Chief among the various categories available in Jesus' religious environment and potentially suitable for finding meaning in the approaching possibility of death and for expressing that meaning to others are the theme of the violent fate of the prophets and that of the sufferings of the righteous man. While public reference to his own rejection in terms of the prophets' fate is quite plausible as part of Jesus' prophetic preaching, the theme of the righteous sufferer would have been more suitable after the termination of that preaching, in the more familiar circle of his disciples. Either or both of these conceptions may have been drawn on by Jesus. Schürmann observes, however, that neither attributes salvific

is soon to be published in Hans Urs von Balthasar's edition of the papers of the ITC session (Einsiedeln: Johannes). Expanded versions of some sections of this presentation have already been published: "Jesu ureigenes Todesverständnis: Bemerkungen zur 'impliziten Soteriologie' Jesu," *Begegnung mit dem Wort* (ed. J. Zmijewski and E. Nellessen; BBB 53; Bonn: Hanstein, 1980) 273-309; and "Jesu Todesverständnis im Verstehenshorizont seiner Umwelt," *TGI* 70 (1980) 141-60. Two additional articles, on Jesus' preaching of the kingdom of God and his understanding of death in the context of that preaching, will incorporate the SNTS lecture and the corresponding parts of the ITC presentation.—I am indebted to Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., for reference to Schürmann's *relatio* and for provision of a copy of the mimeographed text, and to Prof. Dr. Heinz Schürmann, who in a letter of March 17, 1980 provided the above information regarding publication, enclosed a summary in thesis form of his address at Durham, and authorized reference in this article to his Roman *relatio*.

²² Cf. "Jesu ureigenes Todesverständnis" 283-84.

²³ "Wie hat Jesus seinen Tod bestanden und verstanden?: Eine methodenkritische Besinnung," *Jesu ureigener Tod: Exegetische Besinnungen und Ausblick* (Freiburg: Herder, 1975) 26-33.

significance to Jesus' death, and argues that Jesus' unique relationship to God (*abba*) and his unique mission would have opened up prethematic possibilities of interpreting his death in a way far exceeding the range of any categories available in his environment, even if these categories are combined with one another and thus enriched.²⁴

Against the background formed by these possibilities, Schürmann considers Jesus' actual approach to death, with primary interest in whether or not Jesus attributed to his death salvific significance, more particularly value as vicarious atonement. Conceding that there are no assured statements of Jesus which establish beyond doubt that he attributed salvific value to his death,²⁵ but insisting that attribution of such significance would not have been incompatible with the content of Jesus' message of the kingdom of God,²⁶ Schürmann advocates a fourfold approach, in which considerations of (a) Jesus' unique mission as the eschatological representative of the kingdom, (b) Jesus' conduct, (c) Mk 14:25 ("Amen, I say to you, I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God"), and (d) Jesus' actions at the Last Supper converge to clarify his approach to death and to reflect his attribution of salvific value to that death.²⁷ We shall consider in turn each of these facets of the argument.

a) Jesus' unique role as eschatological savior is an important factor to weigh in relationship to his death. In Schürmann's judgment, however, Jesus' faithfulness to his unique mission is not in itself an adequate justification for interpreting his death as vicarious satisfaction. For the latter, active intercessory acceptance of the punishment or sin of "the many" would also be required. Nonetheless, though incomplete, this perspective is foundational for any further reflections, all of which must include consideration of Jesus' unique position.²⁸

²⁴ "Jesu ureigenes Todesverständnis" 287-88; "Jesu Todesverständnis im Verstehenshorizont seiner Umwelt."

²⁵ "Jesu ureigenes Todesverständnis" 285-86. Schürmann retains this position despite the extensive arguments of Rudolf Pesch (ibid. 286 n. 61).

²⁶ This issue is discussed at some length in both the SNTS lecture and the ITC *relatio*; it will be treated further in the two as yet unpublished essays mentioned in n. 21 above. Against Anton Vögtle ("Todesankündigungen und Todesverständnis Jesu," *Der Tod Jesu* 51-113) and Peter Fiedler (*Jesus und die Sünder* [Bern: Lang, 1976]), Schürmann stresses the inevitability of opposition to Jesus' provocative preaching, the "Christology" implicit in Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom as present (e.g., Lk 10:23), and Jesus' possibility of seeing his death as personal participation in the fate of the kingdom; on this basis he argues that for Jesus to have understood his death, in a prethematic way, as "proexistent" would not have contradicted his preaching of the kingdom. For a similar position, cf. Detlev Dormeyer, *Der Sinn des Leidens Jesu: Historisch-kritische und textpragmatische Analysen zur Markuspassion* (SBS 96; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1979) 31-33.

²⁷ Cf. esp. "Jesu ureigenes Todesverständnis" 287-304.

²⁸ Ibid. 287-90.

b) An important indication of Jesus' response when confronted with the increasing likelihood of death is to be found in his actions toward the end of his life. Jesus' mission of his disciples,²⁹ his deliberate entrance into Jerusalem, his provocative words and deeds concerning the Temple, his decision to conduct a final meal with his disciples, and his actions during that meal all seem influenced by recognition of the danger of death and bespeak anything but passive resignation in response to it. Various elements of Jesus' public preaching—his radical theocentrism, appeal for obedience to and trust in God, and insistence to his disciples on readiness for martyrdom—would inevitably have had a bearing on his approach to his own death. Arguing not only that Jesus' conduct would have been influenced by the principles he preached but more tellingly that known failure on his part to abide by these principles when confronted with his own death would have precluded the post-Easter tradition of preaching with such content, Schürmann holds that these elements of Jesus' message constitute an indispensable guide to his reaction to his approaching end.³⁰

Analogous considerations can also be applied to the question of Jesus' interpretation of his death. Certain fundamental characteristics of Jesus' life—his will to serve and requirement of love, and especially his love for sinners and demand of love of enemy—favor the presumption that he would have seen his own death in a "proexistent," intercessory, and salvific way, no matter what categories he may have used in this connection. His basic "proexistent" stance would almost of itself have produced a corresponding acceptance of death as an act of vicarious love, even if unthematically, and in a way which surpassed all available categories.³¹

c) To pursue matters further, we must turn to the Last Supper tradition, an initial dimension of which is to be found in Mk 14:25, widely recognized as an authentic logion of Jesus. Schürmann judges this part of an ancient tradition (cf. Lk 22:15–18),³² which has been influenced by later liturgical developments but nonetheless reflects with historical accuracy a prophecy of death on Jesus' part. Here Jesus expresses his complete confidence, not only that the kingdom will come despite his death, but also that he himself will share in the eschatological banquet.³³ Even apart from

²⁹ Though aware of challenges to the historicity of such a mission, Schürmann considers it to enjoy a reasonable probability ("Wie hat Jesus" 38 n. 79).

³⁰ Ibid. 33–41. The same argument is advanced by Virgil Howard, "Did Jesus Speak about His Own Death?," *CBQ* 39 (1977) 525–26.

³¹ "Wie hat Jesus" 46–53; "Jesu ureigenes Todesverständnis" 290–95.

³² "Wie hat Jesus" 42–43; "Jesus' Words in the Light of His Actions at the Last Supper," *The Breaking of Bread* (ed. P. Benoit, R. Murphy, and B. van Iersel; Concilium 40; New York: Paulist, 1969) 127–28.

³³ "Wie hat Jesus" 37, 42–43, 57, 59–60; "Jesus' Words" 128; "Das Weiterleben der Sache Jesu im nachosterlichen Herrenmahl," *Jesu ureigener Tod* 84–85; "Jesu ureigenes Todesverständnis" 295–97.

specific words interpreting his death, this passage provides evidence that at a minimum Jesus faced death without abandonment or compromise of his basic mission of proclaiming the salvific proximity of the kingdom of God.

In his most recent writing, Schürmann seeks to advance this argument one step further. In his judgment, the expectation of resurrection/exaltation present in Mk 14:25, when combined with Jesus' proexistent approach to death, implies a conception of his death itself as salvific. "When the representative of the *basileia*, the eschatological savior, dies in a proexistent manner in the course of rendering present the *basileia* and in expectation of resurrection and thus of God's ratification, then this death is also to be considered constitutive of the salvation wrought by God."³⁴

d) The fourth and final dimension of the argument is the one most stressed by Schürmann throughout his writings on the subject: Jesus' deeds at the Last Supper. By this time, the approach of death must have become an urgent concern of Jesus himself. Unlike earlier circumstances, the solemn celebration of a farewell meal provided a context in which interpretation of Jesus' approaching death was not only conceivable but "even almost to be expected, if Jesus himself had been able to wrest meaning from his failure and wished in some way to assist his disciples to wring meaning from the approaching catastrophe."³⁵

In an effort to trace his way back to the historical Jesus, Schürmann begins with the Pauline account of the early Christian Eucharist (1 Cor 11:17-26) and brackets the content of the words ascribed to Jesus as critically suspect. Analysis of the remainder of the text reveals the presence of Palestinian elements in the breaking of the bread and the blessing and circulation of the cup. The Corinthian practices of joining these two actions at the end of a meal, using a single cup and accompanying the distribution of the bread and circulation of the cup with words of interpretation, are best explained as occasioned by corresponding actions of Jesus at the Last Supper. This would account both for the existence of the unusual customs and for the concentration on them in the early Christian liturgy which, had it been free to pursue its own proclivities, would presumably have stressed the meal itself instead.³⁶ In the context of Jesus' last meal with his disciples, such actions can only be interpreted as an offer of blessing, of salvation. Similar to the symbolic acts which formed an important part of Jesus' public ministry,³⁷ these

³⁴ Ibid. 297.

³⁵ "Wie hat Jesus" 56; cf. *ibid.* 54-56.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 56; "Jesus' Words" 119-31; "Das Weiterleben" 66-96.

³⁷ Cf. H. Schürmann, "Die Symbolhandlungen Jesu als eschatologische Erfüllungszeichen," *Das Geheimnis Jesu: Versuche zur Jesusfrage* (Leipzig: St. Benno, 1972) 74-110.

“eschatological signs of fulfilment” do not merely refer to a future salvation but actualize the future they promise and confer participation in it upon the assembled disciples.³⁸

While certitude regarding Jesus' interpretation of his death is difficult to acquire in view of the nature of the available sources, his conviction that his death will not prevent the coming of the kingdom he preached lends itself to the further step of attributing salvific efficacy to that death.³⁹ In Jesus' actions at the Last Supper Schürmann finds expressed an unmistakable eschatological soteriology which, in consideration of the circumstances and of Jesus' unique role as representative of the kingdom, joins the coming of the kingdom to Jesus' death, though without specifying the manner in which his death has salvific value. These actions must have been accompanied by some verbal interpretation;⁴⁰ Schürmann considers Lk 22:19–20a the oldest accessible approximation, but emphasizes that even this text cannot be identified as Jesus' precise words.⁴¹ All of the New Testament variants have in common the specification of Jesus' gift both eschatologically and with reference to the cross, and are in principle historically accurate in this interpretation of Jesus' final deeds: the soteriological language of the words of institution in the New Testament accounts may be seen as explicitation of what is implicit in Jesus' actions with the bread and the cup. Schürmann therefore concludes that Jesus, at the end of his life, saw his death as a salvific event, and that he expressed this understanding to his disciples, at least in a veiled way, before his crucifixion.⁴² In at least this sense, the soteriological interpretation of Jesus' death, the “for” of the words of institution and of 1 Cor 15:3, has solid foundation in Jesus himself.

It remains to inquire if Jesus himself further specified the salvific meaning of his death in terms of vicarious atonement. Schürmann hesitates to give a definitive positive answer to this question. Jesus' deeds at the Last Supper leave the matter open; they could have been specified at the Last Supper as interpreting his death as vicarious atonement, but need not have been so assessed at that time. The oldest available formulation of the words of institution does not definitely contain this theme and cannot in any case be traced with certainty back to Jesus. Above all, it must be remembered that interpretation of Jesus' death in such terms was not a firm possession of the disciples in the period

³⁸ “Jesus' Words” 130–31; “Das Weiterleben” 90–96.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 88.

⁴⁰ Though present even in Schürmann's earlier work (e.g., “Wie hat Jesus” 56), this point is emphasized more strongly in his more recent writing (cf. “Jesu ureigenes Todesverständnis” 286, 298–99, 301–2, 304).

⁴¹ Cf. esp. *ibid.* 281, 302–4.

⁴² “Wie hat Jesus” 63; “Jesu ureigenes Todesverständnis” 298–301. In his recent work Schürmann formulates this conclusion more firmly than he did earlier.

immediately after Easter. Recovery of exact categories in which Jesus interpreted his death may thus be beyond our ability, but that is a secondary concern, in comparison with knowledge of his unthematic expression of its salvific character.⁴³

Schürmann's thorough analyses have much to recommend them: his attention to questions of method, caution in appeal to disputed passages, alertness to dogmatic implications, and awareness of the limitations inherent in critical historical investigation. Especially with regard to Jesus' personal approach to death, his studies rightly call into question the positions developed under the influence of Bultmann.⁴⁴ As can readily be appreciated, this is a decisive issue for systematic soteriology,⁴⁵ and Schürmann has made an important contribution to its resolution.

Nevertheless, it can hardly be claimed that Schürmann has settled all questions concerning Jesus' approach to death. First, the problematic surrounding Jesus' words at the Last Supper invites further scrutiny.⁴⁶ Secondly, Schürmann seems excessively concerned with finding foundation in the life of Jesus for interpretation of his death in terms of atonement, while not considering in equal depth the possibility of a comparable basis for one or more of the other categories (death of the righteous man, death of a prophet-martyr) used in the Passion theologies of the early Church.⁴⁷ Perhaps his particular interest in the Last Supper tradition and in the early Christian Eucharist, while legitimate in itself, has contributed to a narrowing of the inquiry. As a result, the consequences of Wilhelm Thüsing's observation that a rudimentary theology of the Passion is already present when Jesus' acceptance of death is joined to the radical call to discipleship⁴⁸ are not developed in Schür-

⁴³ Ibid. 301-5.

⁴⁴ Howard ("Did Jesus Speak" 525) agrees with Schürmann on this point but judges that Schürmann's further conclusions "that Jesus understood his death as having soteriological significance and that he communicated this to his disciples" exceed the evidence. This assessment, of course, could not take Schürmann's most recent writings into account.

⁴⁵ Cf., e.g., Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* 119. Hans Urs von Balthasar goes somewhat further in arguing that Jesus must have been conscious of his task of bearing the sin of the world, even though the manner of fulfilling that mission necessarily remained hidden to him, since "it is unimaginable outside of the experience itself" ("Crucifixus etiam pro nobis," *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift "Communio"* 9 [1980] 30).

⁴⁶ Vögtle ("Todesankündigungen" 92, 112) and Gnilka ("Wie urteilte Jesus" 36-41) argue that appeal to words of Jesus would be necessary to support Schürmann's interpretation of Jesus' actions.

⁴⁷ For a useful initial study, cf. Hans-Ruedi Weber, *The Cross: Tradition and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979); for more complete information, cf. Marie-Louise Gubler, *Die frühesten Deutungen des Todes Jesu* (Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977).

⁴⁸ "Neutestamentliche Zugangswege zu einer transzendental-dialogischen Christologie," in K. Rahner and W. Thüsing, *Christologie—systematisch und exegetisch* (Freiburg: Herder, 1972) 131. The English translation (*A New Christology* [New York: Seabury, 1980] 84) misleadingly speaks of succession instead of discipleship.

mann's work, though Thüsing's statement is quoted favorably.⁴⁹ As valuable as Schürmann's treatment is, it remains incomplete.⁵⁰

Rudolf Pesch

Rudolf Pesch's consideration of Jesus' approach to death is explicitly set in the context of a comprehensive Christological proposal diametrically opposed to the program identified with Bultmann's work. In a series of publications, Pesch has defended the thesis that the historical Jesus alone, i.e., without the need for discovery of an empty grave or for "appearances" after his death, provided a sufficient basis for his disciples' faith in him as the Messiah—including, eventually, faith in his resurrection.⁵¹ This conception, soon to be presented in more detail in collaboration with the systematic theologian Hans Verweyen, raises many issues which cannot be pursued here. One immediate effect, however, is obvious: it heightens enormously the theological significance of research concerning the historical Jesus. Concentrating particularly on the Gospel of Mark, Pesch has therefore studied the disciples' assessment of Jesus during his lifetime, examined the extent and historical reliability of the early Christian Passion narrative, and scrutinized the traditions concerning the Last Supper.⁵² It is his treatment of Jesus' attitude to his own death, significant from several theological perspectives, which we shall consider here.

The exegetical background of Pesch's studies is easily sketched. In contrast to many recent exegetes of Mark, he is convinced that the author of this Gospel is conservative in his redactional activity, relatively restrained in his modification of the traditions he inherited.⁵³ More particularly with regard to the Passion tradition, whose antiquity is recognized

⁴⁹ "Wie hat Jesus" 43 n. 101. Schürmann's concentration on soteriological interpretations, particularly evident in his earlier work, has also been criticized by Gubler, *Die frühesten Deutungen* 385–86, 391–92.

⁵⁰ For further comments on Schürmann's work, cf. Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1979) 216–19, and A.-L. Descamps, "Cénacle et Calvaire: Les vues de H. Schürmann," *RTL* 10 (1979) 335–47.

⁵¹ "Zur Entstehung des Glaubens an die Auferstehung Jesu," *TQ* 153 (1973) 201–28; cf. John P. Galvin, "Resurrection as *Theologia crucis Jesu*: The Foundational Christology of Rudolf Pesch," *TS* 38 (1977) 513–25.

⁵² Cf. esp. "Das Messiasbekenntnis des Petrus (Mk 8, 27–30): Neuverhandlung einer alten Frage," *BZ* 17 (1973) 178–95; 18 (1974) 20–31; "Die Überlieferung der Passion Jesu," *Rückfrage nach Jesus* (ed. K. Kertelge; Freiburg: Herder, 1974) 148–73; *Das Markusevangelium*. 2 vols. (HTKNT 2/1–2; Freiburg: Herder, 1976–77); *Das Abendmahl und Jesu Todesverständnis* (Freiburg: Herder, 1978).

⁵³ *Das Markusevangelium* 1, 15–32, 48–68. For a contrasting assessment, cf. Theodore Weeden, *Mark: Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971). For critique of Pesch's commentary, cf. Hans Conzelmann, "Literaturbericht zu den synoptischen Evangelien," *TRu* 43 (1978) 31, 33–34, 321–24, and Frans Neirynck, *L'Évangile de Marc: A propos du commentaire de R. Pesch* (ALBO V, 42; Louvain: Peeters, 1979).

by many commentators, Pesch argues in favor of a rather extensive pre-Markan Passion narrative, distinguishable from the remainder of Mark's material by several characteristics.⁵⁴ In his judgment, this narrative began with Peter's confession of Jesus as Messiah and ended with the angelic proclamation of the Resurrection in the opened grave of the Crucified. This pre-Markan account, which forms the core of the second half of Mark's Gospel, includes the following verses: Mk 8:27-33; 9:2-13, 30-35; 10:1, 32-34, 46-52; 11:1-23, 27-33; 12:1-17, 34c-37, 41-44; 13:1-2; 14:1-16:8.⁵⁵

Since even the pre-Markan version of the Passion narrative is influenced by theological considerations, especially the interpretation of Jesus' passion and death in the light of the motif of the righteous sufferer, the historical value of individual parts of the narrative remains open to question. (Pesch is particularly skeptical of the historical value of Mk 16:1-8.) Nonetheless, it is clear that his conviction of the antiquity of an extended Passion narrative creates a climate favorable to positive assessment of the historical value of individual passages.

For our topic, the most significant texts in Mark are the three predictions of the Passion (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34), the logion about the Son of man giving his life as ransom for many (10:45), the parable of the wicked husbandmen (12:1-12), and the account of the institution of the Eucharist (14:22-25). As can be seen from comparison with the list above, Pesch considers all of these verses, with the exception of 10:45, to be part of the pre-Markan Passion narrative. Nonetheless, his judgment as to the historical value of their content varies from passage to passage.

Like most contemporary exegetes, Pesch assesses the detailed Passion and Resurrection predictions as products of the early Church. Though part of the pre-Markan narrative, Mk 8:31-33 cannot be traced back to a corresponding historical scene; unable to stand on its own, it was composed when incorporated into the narrative, and reflects the early community's efforts to understand Jesus' passion in the light of the tradition of the righteous sufferer.⁵⁶ Parts of Mk 9:30-32, in contrast, enjoyed an

⁵⁴ "Die Überlieferung der Passion Jesu" 148-73; *Das Markusevangelium* 2, 1-27. For alternative positions on the origin of the Passion narrative, cf. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* 2 (AB 29A; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970) 787-804. For other studies of Mark's account, cf. Ludger Schenke, *Der gekreuzigte Christus: Versuch einer literarkritischen und traditionsgeschichtlichen Bestimmung der vormarkinischen Passionsgeschichte* (SBS 69; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1974), *The Passion in Mark* (ed. W. Kelber; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), and Dormeyer, *Der Sinn des Leidens Jesu*.

⁵⁵ *Das Markusevangelium* 2, 1-2; for a slightly divergent earlier listing, cf. *Das Markusevangelium* 1, 67. Pesch has recently published a popular commentary on the reconstructed primitive Passion narrative under the significant title *Das Evangelium der Urgemeinde* (Freiburg: Herder, 1979).

⁵⁶ *Das Markusevangelium* 2, 47-56; cf. also "Das Messiasbekenntnis" 181-82, 187, 29-30.

independent existence (or were joined to 8:27-30) before the text was expanded and located in its present context. Its vague and obscure prediction of suffering ("The Son of man will be delivered into the hands of men") is an authentic logion of Jesus, now augmented by addition of the remainder of the verse. Pesch considers this passage central for discussion of Jesus' approach to death, not as an interpretation of that death but as an indication of Jesus' awareness, from an unspecified time on, of what lay ahead.⁵⁷ The third prediction (10:33-34), which could also have been handed on outside of a wider context, is the most detailed and thus the most suspect from a critical perspective. This fact, together with the differences between this prediction and Mark's subsequent account as far as terminology and order of events are concerned,⁵⁸ suggests that the text is neither a historical word of Jesus nor Mark's redaction, but rather a pre-Markan text oriented on the tradition of the righteous sufferer.⁵⁹ As far as our question is concerned, the result of Pesch's exegesis of these passages is limited, though important: only a portion of one of the predictions is historical, but that passage at least shows Jesus anticipating his being given into the hands of men and communicating that anticipation to his disciples.

No further historical information about Jesus' lifetime is added by Mk 10:45, though this passage is important for the study of early Christian soteriology. The text is a later development, a comment on earlier logia, of a type which looks back upon Jesus' completed mission. Developed under the influence of the Last Supper tradition, it interprets Jesus' death in the category of vicarious atonement. Pesch suggests that the passage may have originated among Greek-speaking Jewish Christians and that it includes elements of the conception of the atoning value of a martyr's death (cf. *lytron*) as well as reflecting the influence of Isa 53 (*anti pollōn*).⁶⁰

The parable of the wicked husbandmen provides some further information. Like several other exegetes, Pesch holds that this parable (12:1-9) can be retraced to Jesus (unlike the following vv. 10-12) and interprets it as Jesus' use of the model of the violent fate of the prophets to express his eschatological claim to authority (as son). A significant factor in determining Jesus' approach to death since it displays his awareness of its imminence, the parable suggests but does not develop an interpretation of Jesus' death as the fate of a prophet.⁶¹

The most decisive texts still remain to be considered: the Last Supper narratives with the institution of the Eucharist. Since these are present in fourfold form in the New Testament (Mt 26:26-29; Mk 14:22-25; Lk

⁵⁷ *Das Markusevangelium* 2, 98-101.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 149.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 147-50.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 153-67.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 213-24.

22:14–20; 1 Cor 11:23–26), some preliminary questions must be addressed in order to determine which, if any, of these texts enables us to reach the situation of the historical Jesus the night before his death.

Pesch's first step is to eliminate Matthew's version from consideration, with the judgment that Mt 26:26–29 is a revision of Mk 14:22–25. In view of recent challenges to the validity of the two-source theory, it may be noted that Pesch argues from detailed comparison of the texts, not simply from application of a general position on the origin of the Synoptic Gospels, though his conclusion is in fact in agreement with the prevailing consensus. A number of variations in the text are typical of Matthew, though Pesch insists, in agreement with Donald Senior, that these changes do not reflect liturgical traditions of the Matthean community. As a further development of the tradition earlier deposited in Mark, the Matthean text is unsuitable for inquiry into the events of the Last Supper.⁶²

Luke's text receives more detailed examination, since its relationship to Mark is more complex. Numerous exegetes have maintained that Lk 22:15–18 is independent of Mark and represents an older narrative of a paschal meal, to which an account of the institution of the Eucharist has been appended.⁶³ Pesch, however, argues on the basis of detailed comparisons that Lk 22:15–19a is simply a rearrangement and redaction of the Marcan material, a typical procedure in Luke (cf. the predictions of Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial, and the dispute about which disciple is the greatest); it is not evidence of an independent tradition. The longer text of Luke (22:15–20) is a combination of Marcan material with the tradition witnessed by Paul; Pesch doubts the authenticity of vv. 19b–20, though this point is not essential to his argument. Thus Luke does not provide an independent source for inquiry into the history of Jesus: for that we are dependent on examination of Mark and 1 Cor.⁶⁴

Although the Pauline paradosis (1 Cor 11:23–26) is quite old, it is formulated as a cult aetiology, as instruction for the celebration of the Christian community, rather than as a narrative of the events which occurred at the Last Supper. Particularly by means of contrast with Mark, Pesch finds support for this judgment in numerous details of the Pauline text, chief among which are the addressing of the celebrating community ("for you") and the absence of Jesus' vow of abstinence or

⁶² Ibid. 364–65; *Das Abendmahl* 24–25. Cf. D. Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew: A Redactional Study* (BETL 39; Louvain: Louvain University, 1975) 76–88.

⁶³ Cf., e.g., R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* 265–66; for presentation and critique of the different positions, cf. Hermann Patsch, *Abendmahl und historischer Jesus* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1972) 64–69, 89–95.

⁶⁴ *Das Markusevangelium* 2, 365–69; *Das Abendmahl* 26–34.

prophecy of death (its place is taken by 11:26, which looks back on Jesus' death rather than forward to it) and of many other traits referring to the concrete meal situation of Jesus and his disciples. Pesch believes that the source of the Pauline account is an ancient adaptation, for liturgical purposes, of the tradition narrated in Mark, and suggests that the background of the Pauline version may lie among the Greek-speaking Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. This text is an important witness to early Christian liturgical practice, but it is not directly suited for providing access to the historical Jesus (apart from confirmation of some Synoptic material: "on the night he was betrayed").⁶⁵

We are thus left with Mark's version. As the contrast with Paul suggests, Pesch considers this narrative to have the literary form of a historical report, as an account of Jesus' prophecy of his death and interpretation of that death on the night of his arrest; it contains few if any modifications of a liturgical nature. This assessment is based in part on re-examination of the passage from the perspective of literary criticism. The beginning of v. 22 with a genitive absolute (*kai esthiontōn autōn*) has often been taken to imply that the passage has been inserted into a prior context.⁶⁶ Pesch rejects this judgment and interprets the opening words as merely giving a more specific location within the previously established framework of a paschal meal; he argues that a separate text could not have begun in this fashion and observes that the linking of scenes through such constructions is not a typical feature of Mark's redactional activity.⁶⁷ The possibility of translating the Greek text of 14:22–25 into Aramaic or Hebrew, the frequency of Semitic expressions, the smooth fit of the passage into the structure of a paschal meal, and the fact that distinctive elements of Mark's text (the prophecy of death; the addressing of the Twelve, not the Christian community; the report that all drank of the cup) refer to the pre-Easter situation of Jesus and his disciples rather than the Church's liturgical celebration also favor the text's historical quality.⁶⁸

Detailed exegesis confirms this interpretation. In the distribution of the bread, Jesus gives himself to his disciples, thus sealing their messianic community. The words over the cup designate its content as his blood and interpret this both as blood of the covenant, with evident reference to Exod 24:8, and as shed for many, an allusion to Isa 53:12. These two conceptions are not mutually exclusive; both are conceivable as words of Jesus. Pesch interprets the "many" as the whole of Israel, rather than all

⁶⁵ *Das Markusevangelium* 2, 369–77; *Das Abendmahl* 34–51, 53–69.

⁶⁶ E.g., J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words* 97, 113, 184.

⁶⁷ *Das Markusevangelium* 2, 356; *Das Abendmahl* 35–38, 68–81.

⁶⁸ *Das Markusevangelium* 2, 361; *Das Abendmahl* 81–89.

of humanity: "Jesus understands his blood, his death, the death of the Messiah, as the means of atonement. . . . His death is a dying which mediates salvation to Israel."⁶⁹ Jesus' words over the cup are in their direct intention interpretation of his coming death, and the circulation of the cup is a proleptic conferral of its saving power. While institution of the Eucharist is not directly envisioned, the Church's celebration of the Eucharist is the logical conclusion to be drawn by those who later look back upon Jesus' death as the eschatological saving event.⁷⁰

There remains the obscure prophecy of death in Mk 14:25. Here Jesus expresses his certainty of salvation beyond death. The fact that the time of death and manner of execution are not specified speaks in favor of its historical value. In Mark (unlike Mt 26:29), the issue is not renewed community with the disciples but rather Jesus' own fate, in and beyond death.⁷¹

One final objection must still be considered: the compatibility of this conception of Jesus' approach to his death with Jesus' preaching of the kingdom of God. As we have seen in our discussion of Schürmann, alleged or suspected incompatibility of these elements has often been a major factor in unwillingness to attribute to Jesus the Gospel statements which interpret his death as atoning or salvific. In Pesch's judgment, such objections are not convincing. Jesus saw himself as the "last messenger after the last messenger" (John the Baptist), who proclaimed God's offer of salvation. A new, conflict-laden situation results from his rejection: Does the definitive offer of salvation paradoxically result in definitive condemnation, due to the final rejection of grace (cf., e.g., Mk 12:1-9, the open-ended parable which speaks of the murder of the vineyard owner's son)? In this conflict, Jesus' interpretation of his death as atoning is not only compatible with his preaching of the kingdom but even required by it, for only in this way could his message of the salvific proximity of God to Israel be upheld.⁷² From this follow the disciples' renewal of the mission to Israel after Jesus' death, the introduction of baptism in his name for forgiveness of sin, and the gradual recognition of the universality of redemption with its practical implications.⁷³ The early Christian interpretations of Jesus' death are thus solidly based in Jesus' own self-understanding, provided that this is not envisioned as static throughout his life, and especially in Jesus' own final evaluation of his approaching death.

Sharper opposition to Bultmann is scarcely conceivable. It is not

⁶⁹ Ibid. 99.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 100.

⁷¹ Ibid. 101-2; *Das Markusevangelium* 2, 360-61.

⁷² *Das Abendmahl* 103-11.

⁷³ Ibid. 112-25; for related reflections on the origin of Christian baptism, cf. Gerhard Lohfink, "Der Ursprung der christlichen Taufe," *TQ* 156 (1976) 35-54.

surprising that Walter Kern, welcoming the efforts of exegetes such as Schürmann and Pesch to recover a more extensive historical basis for Christological reflection, could express a certain astonishment at Pesch's venturing to reconstruct Jesus' words at the Last Supper.⁷⁴ The attribution to Jesus of Mk 9:31, which identifies Jesus with the Son of man, inevitably introduces further complex exegetical questions into the discussion. Before considering the treatment of Jesus' approach to death in some recent systematic theology, we shall examine a quite different exegetical reconstruction.

Anton Vögtle

Anton Vögtle's study of Jesus' approach to and evaluation of death is characterized by a determined effort to provide a coherent, if inevitably fragmentary, reconstruction of Jesus' public activity and of the history of early Christianity. Rather than concentrating on the exegesis of isolated passages, Vögtle seeks to find a plausible location for individual themes within the overall picture. His conclusions, especially with regard to the interpretation of Jesus' death, differ sharply from those of Schürmann and Pesch.

An initial question is the source of Jesus' moral certitude of death's approach—a presupposition, according to Vögtle, of any interpretation of death on his part. Such certitude cannot be satisfactorily explained as a consequence of Jesus' self-understanding along the lines of the Deuteronomic tradition of the persecution and execution of prophets, the more specific notion of the fate of the messianic prophet, the theologoumenon of the righteous sufferer, or the theme of the suffering servant, for these conceptions either fail to provide certitude of death or cannot be proven to have been part of Jesus' self-consciousness. Beyond this, the last of these models, with its stress on the need for vicarious atonement, would have contrasted sharply with Jesus' public preaching of God's unconditional offer of forgiveness to repentant Israel and is therefore conceivable only after that preaching reached its conclusion.⁷⁵ A more satisfactory explanation than derivation from any of these conceptions is the view that Jesus' certitude of death resulted from gradual awareness of the implications of the mounting opposition which he faced. Still, wondering whether popular opposition to Jesus ever became so widespread as to constitute total rejection and justify the conclusion that death was inescapable, Vögtle draws attention to Jesus' openness for sudden arrival

⁷⁴ "Christologie "von innen" und die historische Jesusfrage," *ZKT* 100 (1978) 553. Schürmann himself finds Pesch's exegesis of Mk 14:22-24 unconvincing ("Jesu ureigenes Todesverständnis" 282 n. 43, 286 n. 61).

⁷⁵ "Todesankündigungen" 58-70, 109.

of the kingdom of God and argues that it is impossible to establish certitude of death on Jesus' part prior to his journey to Jerusalem. The moral certitude of death which constitutes a necessary precondition for interpretation of that death can be presumed for Holy Thursday, but not for any earlier period.⁷⁶

Unlike Bultmann, Vögtle is quite confident of our ability to recover Jesus' conduct when confronted with death. "There exists no reasonable doubt that Jesus consciously accepted his condemnation, and also that his followers could know of that fact";⁷⁷ "the tradition justifies no doubt that Jesus accepted this (death) as a divinely-willed event."⁷⁸ Beyond this, Vögtle considers Mk 14:25 reliable historical indication of Jesus' assurance that his death will not prevent the coming of the kingdom; as such, it is an example of the assistance Jesus offered his disciples in the face of the impending catastrophe. Even the words "This is my body" (Mk 14:22) enjoy considerable historical probability; if historical, their content includes expression of Jesus' free acceptance of death.⁷⁹

But the step from these convictions to the specification of Jesus' death as atoning or salvific is very great indeed. To establish that Jesus himself moved from his original preaching to the attribution of salvific necessity to his death is beyond our ability. The chief problems lie in determining whom Jesus would have envisioned as beneficiaries of his death and in finding a historically plausible way in which Jesus could have expressed such an interpretation. First of all, there is the question whether Jesus would have seen only unrepentant Israel, all of Israel, or Israel and the Gentiles as recipients of his death's benefits. In any case, some further explanation, at least to his disciples, should be expected; yet none is preserved. Above all, the application "for . . ." requires specification. The phrase "for you" (1 Cor, Lk) could well have been addressed to the Twelve in a representative capacity, but Jesus could hardly have envisioned his followers as representatives of *unrepentant* Israel; yet, without that qualification, the interpretation would be a substantial modification of Jesus' message. If the "for many" (Mk, Mt) were original and historical, it would no doubt have occupied a prominent place in the intense early Christian debates concerning the continued validity of the law. The limited role of Isa 53 in the early Christian citation of the Old Testament and the paucity of New Testament texts which attribute atoning value to Jesus' death must also be borne in mind; according to Vögtle, these facts

⁷⁶ Ibid. 53-58, 70-80.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 105.

⁷⁸ "Jesus von Nazareth," *Ökumenische Kirchengeschichte* 1 (ed. R. Kottje and B. Moeller; Mainz: Grünewald; Munich: Kaiser, 1970) 24.

⁷⁹ Ibid.; cf. also "Todesankündigungen" 88-89, 101, 111.

are hardly compatible with the presence of such material in the historical Jesus' own interpretation of his death.⁸⁰

In view of these difficulties, Vögtle turns to the possibility that attribution of salvific meaning to Jesus' death originated only after Easter. He notes that the crucifixion demanded interpretation more than any other event of Jesus' life. The attribution of prophecies of death to Jesus is thus readily intelligible, and even, in view of Mk 14:25, not lacking some historical foundation. Vögtle concludes that post-Easter origin of a soteriological interpretation of the crucifixion is exempt from many of the difficulties which beset earlier origin: the relationship of this understanding of Jesus' death to his prior preaching, the question whether his death was necessary in principle or only due to Israel's lack of repentance, the problem of grasping how salvation was made available to the Gentiles, and the various issues relating to the "for you" and "for many" are easily resolved for the post-Easter situation. In Vögtle's reconstruction, the interpretation of Jesus' death as salvific remains a valid Christian conviction, but it originates after Easter and is dependent for its origin on the experiences after Jesus' death which led to the Easter faith of the disciples.⁸¹

Vögtle's method of examining individual themes in the light of the overall history of early Christianity is certainly a legitimate and fruitful procedure; many of his questions concerning Jesus' interpretation of death pose serious problems for proponents of alternative views. Still, his own reconstruction leaves much unsettled. What sort of "Easter experience" would be sufficient and necessary to justify attribution of salvific value to Jesus' death?⁸² Is it ultimately easier to fit origin of this theme in the early days of the Church into the history of the tradition than to do the same with origin during Jesus' lifetime?⁸³ Finally, it is not clear that there is as much tension between Jesus' public preaching of the kingdom of God and the attribution of salvific efficacy to Jesus' death as Vögtle seems to presuppose. From the beginning, Jesus' person is integral to his message: in Wolfhart Pannenberg's words, "the office of Jesus was to call men into the Kingdom of God which had appeared with him."⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Ibid. 92-104, 110-12.

⁸¹ Ibid. 104-8, 112-13.

⁸² Cf. A. Vogtle, "Wie kam es zum Osterglauben?" in A. Vogtle and R. Pesch, *Wie kam es zum Osterglauben?* (Dusseldorf: Patmos, 1975) 9-131, and James P. Mackey, *Jesus: The Man and the Myth* (London: SCM, 1979) 86-94.

⁸³ Raymund Schwager ("Geht die Eucharistie auf Jesus zurück?" *Orientierung* 39 [1975] 220-23) has argued that the paucity of references in the early tradition makes origin of the theme in the early Church improbable.

⁸⁴ *Jesus—God and Man* 212.

Given this connection between person and message (not as partial content but as fundamental presupposition of Jesus' preaching), ascription of salvific value to Jesus' death no longer seems to represent an entirely new stage in conceiving the mediation of salvation. This consideration does not establish that such interpretation of Jesus' death can be traced back to Jesus himself, but, by minimizing the transition between the two conceptions, it at least makes such explicit soteriology on the part of the historical Jesus more plausible than Vögtle is prepared to admit.⁸⁵ Alternatively, of course, it could also help account for the occurrence of such a development in the early community.

II

All Christologies which place considerable stress on our knowledge of the historical Jesus find it necessary to ask at some point how Jesus faced death—an issue which becomes all the more pressing when a theology of that death is seen as the central element of soteriology. The matter has even been mentioned by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in its recent declaration concerning Jacques Pohier's *Quand je dis Dieu*.⁸⁶ Without any pretense of providing an exhaustive survey of recent authors, we shall consider in some detail the positions adopted by three major contributors to the current discussion: Walter Kasper, Edward Schillebeeckx, and Karl Rahner.

Walter Kasper

Walter Kasper's discussion of the issue, developed in the course of his published lectures on Christology, draws heavily on Schürmann's work (up to 1974) in its effort to examine the pertinent biblical passages. Though aware of the problems posed by the nature of the available sources, Kasper observes that Jesus must have foreseen the possibility of a violent end and have been led by the conflicts during his public life and by the death of John the Baptist to see his own destiny foreshadowed in the fate of the prophets. He notes that Jesus could have seen his death as salvific on the basis of available Jewish conceptions, but holds that the decisive question is whether or not Jesus actually did so.⁸⁷

Kasper initially concedes that the three Passion predictions and Mk 10:45 are highly disputed texts and recognizes that the passages treating

⁸⁵ Heinz Schürmann's recent work (cf. n. 21 above) registers a similar criticism of Vögtle's understanding of Jesus' preaching of the kingdom.

⁸⁶ Cf. AAS 71 (1979) 446: "Inter errores manifestiores huius libri notanda est negatio veritatum quae sequuntur: intentio Christi passioni suae valorem redemptivum et sacrificalem attribuendi. . ."

⁸⁷ *Jesus the Christ* 114–17. In view of the rhetorical nature of some of Kasper's formulations, it is not clear how strictly the word "decisive" is to be taken.

the Last Supper are influenced by liturgical use.⁸⁸ Yet he also observes that "if the interpretation of Jesus' death as an expiatory surrender to God for men could not be supported at all by reference to the life and death of Jesus himself, the core of the Christian faith would come dangerously close to mythology and false ideology."⁸⁹ To avoid this, he seems to consider it necessary to establish that Jesus explicitly attributed soteriological value to his death.

In an effort to support the conclusion that Jesus did in fact do this, Kasper offers a twofold consideration. He first defends the authenticity of Mk 14:25, on the grounds that it did not become part of the later liturgy. To Kasper, this logion indicates that Jesus, at the Last Supper, gave his disciples a share in the eschatological blessings, and therefore also implies an eschatological interpretation of Jesus' death: "At the last meal Jesus is looking forward, not just to his approaching death but also to the Kingdom of God which will come along with it. His death is connected with the coming of the *basileia*."⁹⁰

In a second step, Kasper maintains that efforts to show that Jesus attributed soteriological significance to his death can succeed only if a convergence between individual sayings and Jesus' general intention can be demonstrated. He then argues in two ways that this is in fact the case. First, since the kingdom of God is identical with salvation, Jesus' eschatological interpretation of his death implies a soteriological interpretation. Just as we may speak of a Christology implicit in Jesus' preaching, so too may we speak of his latent soteriology. Secondly, we may proceed from the fact that Jesus personally embodied the kingdom of God in the form of service. In keeping with this self-understanding, he must have envisioned his sacrifice of his life as a service to others. Even if he did not directly claim the title "servant of God" in the sense of Isa 53, his whole life reveals that he saw himself in this light, and much evidence suggests that he maintained this self-understanding by assessing "his death as a representative and saving service to many."⁹¹

Against this background, Kasper re-evaluates specific texts to argue that the second Passion prediction (Mk 9:31 par.) has a historical core, that the reference to ransom in Mk 10:45 has a basis in the life of Jesus, and that the allusions in the Last Supper tradition to Jesus' laying down his life for many must be allowed greater probability of being historical than is often assumed, at least as far as their central content is concerned. Still, Kasper's fundamental interest is not the exegesis of individual passages but rather the demonstration that "the substance of the later soteriological formulas is firmly grounded in the life of the earthly Jesus."⁹²

⁸⁸ Ibid. 114-19.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 119.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 118.

⁹¹ Ibid. 120.

⁹² Ibid. 121.

In development of his own soteriology, Kasper stresses the theme of vicarious or representative atonement⁹³ and assesses Anselm's theory of satisfaction as a successful articulation of this fundamental Christian notion, though he recognizes that Anselm's categories may easily be misunderstood.⁹⁴ His treatment of material from Jesus' life should be evaluated in the light of this systematic interest. While Kasper's presentation contains useful elements, it remains clouded by a certain ambiguity. His recovery of historical material from certain texts seems excessively optimistic, especially in view of the brevity of his exegesis. A tension exists between his initial insistence that the key issue is whether Jesus did see his death as redemptive, not whether he could have done so, and the later argument that Jesus must have seen himself as the suffering servant, even if direct evidence is lacking. Finally, it is not clear how the placing of Jesus' death in an eschatological context is equivalent to a soteriological interpretation of that death, for the former does not necessarily attribute to Jesus' death a positive function with regard to the coming of the kingdom of God. Kasper's treatment thus leaves open several questions which would require resolution before we could confidently assess Jesus' approach to death in the terms Kasper favors and judges necessary for soteriology.

Edward Schillebeeckx

Edward Schillebeeckx' massive *Jesus* examines exegetical issues in far more detail than Kasper's *Jesus the Christ*. Schillebeeckx' procedure is motivated in large part by his goal of presenting a narrative Christology.⁹⁵

Fundamental to Schillebeeckx' conception is his conviction that the decisive break in Jesus' public career occurred before his execution.⁹⁶ While the Gospels' predictions of the Passion do not reproduce Jesus' own words,⁹⁷ they do reflect something historical: Jesus' gradually increasing certainty of violent death as the outcome of the conflict provoked by his message. Schillebeeckx rejects Bultmann's views on Jesus' approach to death as historically untenable and insists that "from a particular moment in his career he (Jesus) must have rationally come to terms with the possibility, in the longer term probability, and in the end actual

⁹³ Ibid. 215-25.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 219-21. As Kasper acknowledges, his interpretation of Anselm is indebted to Gisbert Greshake, "Erlösung und Freiheit: Zur Neuinterpretation der Erlösungslehre Anselms von Canterbury," *TQ* 153 (1973) 323-45; for an English summary, cf. "Redemption and Freedom," *TD* 25 (1977) 61-65.

⁹⁵ For critique of this currently popular approach, cf. Bernd Wacker, *Narrative Theologie?* (Munich: Kösel, 1977).

⁹⁶ *Jesus* 294-98.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 297.

certainty of a fatal outcome."⁹⁸ Though "one can hardly maintain that Jesus both willed and sought after his death as the sole possible way of realizing the Kingdom of God,"⁹⁹ it is clear that he did not seek to evade death.

The issue of Jesus' interpretation of his death is more difficult to resolve. Schillebeeckx grants that Jesus must have pondered the matter and incorporated it into his radical acceptance of God's will. But this still leaves open the question of interpretation: Did Jesus expect the divine plan to be achieved "thanks to" or "in spite of" his death?

Drawing in part on Schürmann, Schillebeeckx tentatively suggests that Jesus envisioned his death as an act of loving service for others, a background which would account for the presence of that motif in the New Testament.¹⁰⁰ If he achieved an understanding of the meaning of his death, it is hard to believe that he would have said nothing of it to his disciples privately, though public discussion of such a topic would not have fit the basic tenor of his preaching. "Within these limits, maximal and minimal, the gospel accounts of Jesus' blessing of the bread and cup during the Last Supper, although heavily overlaid by the eucharistic observances which the Church had learned to practise in the meantime, display as their central core certain recollected facts of history."¹⁰¹

Yet Schillebeeckx considers certain parts of Schürmann's exegesis of the Last Supper narratives inappropriately influenced by dogmatic concerns. Of Jesus' words, only Mk 14:25a ("Amen, I say to you, I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine") can be judged authentic; even the following clause ("until . . .") was added secondarily. The authentic part is an announcement of imminent death and has salvific relevance in the context of Jesus' actions.¹⁰² "Despite Israel's rejection of the last prophetic offer of salvation made by God, Jesus, face to face with his coming death, continues to offer his disciples the (last) cup: this shows Jesus' unbroken assurance of salvation . . . he has come to proper terms with his death, which he evidently does not feel to be an absurd miscarriage of his mission."¹⁰³ His offering of the final cup of fellowship to his disciples is a sign that he is not simply allowing death to overtake him but has actively integrated it into his mission, and does not see it merely as something which will not prevent the coming of God's kingdom. It is a veiled sign to his disciples "that he understands and is undergoing his death as a final

⁹⁸ Ibid. 301; cf. 298-301.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 301-6.

⁹⁹ Ibid. 306.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 307.

¹⁰² Ibid. 308-9; for Schürmann's reply cf. esp. "Jesu ureigenes Todesverständnis" 274 n. 8, 298 n. 106.

¹⁰³ *Jesus* 309.

and extreme service to the cause of God as the cause of men."¹⁰⁴ That Jesus was correct in this self-understanding is, of course, not susceptible of historical proof; but that he so understood himself is not to be denied.¹⁰⁵

On this basis, Schillebeeckx argues that our lack of a certain logion in which Jesus ascribes salvific significance to his death is ultimately unimportant, since Jesus' whole life is the interpretation of his death.¹⁰⁶ Nonetheless, he holds that Jesus' approaching death remained sufficiently unexplained during his lifetime to justify speaking of it as a final prophetic sign, performed by Jesus but left for others to interpret.¹⁰⁷

In his analysis of early Christian efforts to assess Jesus' death, Schillebeeckx distinguishes three fundamental strands of interpretation: as the death of the eschatological prophet-martyr, as part of the divine plan of salvation history, and as a redemptive, atoning sacrifice.¹⁰⁸ He notes the limited basis of the soteriological interpretation in the pre-Gospel tradition,¹⁰⁹ and his general insistence on the historical and systematic importance of the conception of Jesus as the eschatological prophet¹¹⁰ would suggest preference for the first of these models. He concludes, however, that all three have foundation in Jesus' life (his criterion for the validity of Christological statements¹¹¹), if not in explicit words of Jesus. Still, these models do not exhaust the range of legitimate interpretation of Jesus' death.

Schillebeeckx' own soteriology is not developed in *Jesus*, though some indications of its main thrust are present.¹¹² Stress is placed on the negativity of death in general and of Jesus' death in particular.¹¹³ Concepts such as propitiation, substitution, and satisfaction are secondary expressions, even if they are found in the New Testament itself: "as a believer, one is bound by whatever Jesus entails, not directly by those articulating concepts."¹¹⁴ In addition, Schillebeeckx observes that not all early Christian interpretations of Jesus' significance concentrated on his death, and implies that this might be an important precedent for contemporary theology. At one point he even seems not to repudiate a further

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 311. Schürmann ("Jesu ureignes Todesverständnis" 298 n. 106, 299 n. 111) is critical of Schillebeeckx' conception of Jesus' "service."

¹⁰⁵ *Jesus* 310-12.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 311.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 318-19.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 274-94.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 291-94, 303.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 441-49, 472-99.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 43-80.

¹¹² Further biblical dimensions are developed in *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord* (New York: Seabury, 1980).

¹¹³ *Jesus* 319, 649-51.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 318. Schillebeeckx also expresses reservations about the contemporary usefulness of sacrificial terminology in *Die Auferstehung Jesu als Grund der Erlösung: Zwischenbericht über die Prolegomena zu einer Christologie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1979) 25.

possibility: "Or was the Kingdom of God to come, notwithstanding the failure of Jesus himself? Can God remain sovereignly free *vis-à-vis* his eschatological messenger, Jesus of Nazareth? Does God's word apply also to him: 'My ways are not your ways' (Isa 55:8)? Is the Kingdom of God God's corrective alternative to all that has been and is being accomplished in our history, even by Jesus?"¹¹⁵

Schillebeeckx is more thorough than Kasper in his pursuit of exegetical issues and more profound in his grasp of systematic questions. A final assessment of his soteriology is not possible at this stage of his work. Some of his judgments regarding early Christologies and soteriologies do, however, seem dubious.¹¹⁶ It may also be wondered if his historical study of Jesus' interpretation of his death is not, like Schürmann's, excessively concerned with the presence or absence of sacrificial terminology, despite the fact that Schillebeeckx' systematic principles encourage and even necessitate a broader perspective.

Karl Rahner

Karl Rahner's early essays on Christology do not pursue historical questions concerning Jesus' approach to death,¹¹⁷ though his dogmatic reflections on Christ's human knowledge and self-consciousness paved the way for treatment of such issues by envisioning development in Jesus' self-understanding and knowledge of the content of his mission.¹¹⁸ But with Rahner's transition from a more metaphysical Christology to one more oriented on the history of salvation,¹¹⁹ concern with problems surrounding the "historical Jesus" replaces the previously envisioned renewal of the medieval "theology of the mysteries of the life of Christ,"¹²⁰ and the problem of Jesus' approach to death finds a prominent place within this new framework. Rahner's most extensive reflections on the subject are located in his "first-level" discussion of Christology in *Foun-*

¹¹⁵ *Jesus* 319.

¹¹⁶ Cf. George MacRae's review of *Jesus* (*RelSRev* 5 [1979] 270-73).

¹¹⁷ Cf. esp. "Current Problems in Christology," *Theological Investigations* 1 (hereafter T.I. with volume number) (Baltimore: Helicon, 1961) 149-200.

¹¹⁸ "Dogmatic Reflections on the Knowledge and Self-Consciousness of Christ," T.I. 5 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966) 193-215.

¹¹⁹ For description of the models, cf. K. Rahner, "The Two Basic Types of Christology," T.I. 13 (New York: Seabury, 1975) 213-23; for Rahner's reflections on his own development, cf. "Gnade als Mitte menschlicher Existenz," *Herausforderung des Christen* (Freiburg: Herder, 1975) 140.

¹²⁰ Cf. "The Prospects for Dogmatic Theology," T.I. 1, 11; "Current Problems in Christology" 190-92.

dations of Christian Faith.¹²¹ Here he does not analyze individual biblical texts but summarizes exegetical positions, with the intention of addressing the issues which they pose for systematic theology.

Like other authors, Rahner distinguishes between Jesus' acceptance of death and his interpretation of death. In unspoken but evident opposition to Bultmann, he insists that Jesus' free acceptance of death can be recovered from the Gospels and forms part of our historical knowledge about Jesus. Verbal interpretation of that death by Jesus himself is, however, another matter entirely. Thus, in the third and fourth points of a thematic summary of our historical knowledge of Jesus, Rahner writes:

3. While at first he hoped for a victory in his religious mission in the sense of a "conversion" of his people, the experience grew ever stronger in him that his mission was bringing him into mortal conflict with the religious and the political society.

4. But he faced his death resolutely and accepted it at least as the inevitable consequence of fidelity to his mission and as imposed on him by God.¹²²

The concluding sixth thesis of this summary deliberately leaves open the question "whether and to what extent and in what sense the pre-resurrection Jesus explicitly ascribed a soteriological function to his death beyond what is implied in the assertion of thesis four."¹²³ Later elucidation of this theme speaks of Jesus' meeting his death freely and assessing it at least as the fate of a prophet, which did not disavow Jesus or his message of God's salvific closeness to the world.¹²⁴

At least in the context of *Foundations*, i.e., within the framework of a "first-level" fundamental theology, Rahner is prepared to leave further historical questions open: "whether the pre-resurrection Jesus himself already interpreted his death explicitly as an 'expiatory sacrifice' for the world; or whether he saw it as a necessary act of obedience demanded by the will of the Father in the sense of the 'death of a just man'; or whether such an interpretation is post-resurrection and correct theology; or whether these alternatives are too clumsy and too simple to begin with."¹²⁵ While leaving these questions open in this limited setting—Rahner rightly wishes to develop his fundamental theology with reference to a critically assured minimum—does not preclude the possibility that further historical information might be both attainable and necessary in other theological contexts (e.g., a "second-level" Christology-soteriology, or with regard to the Eucharist), a telling remark in a recent essay, to the

¹²¹ *Foundations* 176–321; for Rahner's notion of a "first-level" presentation, cf. *ibid.* 3–14, and "Grundkurs des Glaubens," *Schriften zur Theologie* 14 (Zurich: Benziger, 1980) 48–62.

¹²² *Foundations* 248.

¹²³ *Ibid.* 248–49.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* 254.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* 254–55; cf. also 283.

effect that the historical question of the institution of baptism and the Eucharist by Jesus is now quite comparable to the problematic of the dominical institution of the other sacraments,¹²⁶ suggests that the reserve implied in *Foundations* with regard to the Last Supper narratives is not merely conditioned by the immediate concerns of that volume.

Thus Rahner judges historical knowledge of Jesus' free acceptance of death "as the inevitable consequence of fidelity to his mission and as imposed on him by God"¹²⁷ to be an adequate reference point for Christian theological interpretation of Jesus' death. The final phrase, "and as imposed on him by God," was omitted in an earlier publication of the fourth thesis¹²⁸ and should be read as exegetical: whatever is the consequence of Jesus' faithfulness to his mission was imposed upon him by God and was accepted by Jesus as such. While Rahner's historical basis is more than Bultmann was prepared to recognize, it is less than that defended by Schürmann and Pesch and considerably less than the amount of historical knowledge traditionally presupposed in Catholic systematic theology.¹²⁹

Rahner's ability to content himself with this minimum—which he clearly recognizes as such—is conditioned by various elements of his theology, especially by his theology of death.¹³⁰ For Rahner, death includes both active and passive dimensions; it is at once delivery into the all-disposing power of God and definitive exercise of human freedom.¹³¹ "By freely accepting the fate of death Jesus surrenders himself precisely to the unforeseen and incalculable possibilities of his existence."¹³² This self-surrender to God—the death of the absolute savior—is the culmination of the definitive mediation of God's universal salvific will, which, to be definitive, must be freely accepted in historical tangibility, in deed and not merely in word. It is not fortuitous that this takes place in a human

¹²⁶ "What Is a Sacrament?" T.I. 14 (New York: Seabury, 1976) 136.

¹²⁷ *Foundations* 248.

¹²⁸ "Grundlinien einer systematischen Christologie," in K. Rahner and W. Thusing, *Christologie* 27. In a listing which may well be intended as an alternative to Rahner's, Walter Kern includes the point that "Jesus himself interprets the fate of death which awaits him as the salvific event of vicarious atonement 'for the many'" ("Christologie von innen" 552).

¹²⁹ For Schürmann's critique of Rahner's position, cf. "Jesu ureigenes Todesverständnis" 288–90. There seems to me to be a certain tension between the requirements Schürmann raises in this section in order to justify speaking of vicarious atonement, and his subsequent insistence that no new mediatory acts are required on Jesus' part (beyond persistence in his "preexistent" life) for his death to be salvific (cf. 292, 297–305).

¹³⁰ Cf. esp. *On the Theology of Death* (2nd ed.; New York: Herder, 1965) and "Das christliche Sterben," *Schriften zur Theologie* 13 (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1978) 269–304.

¹³¹ *On the Theology of Death* 26–31; "Das christliche Sterben" 283–93.

¹³² *Foundations* 255.

death: it could not take place otherwise.¹³³ Nor is it coincidental that the biblical passage Rahner cites most frequently in connection with Jesus' death is Lk 23:46: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."¹³⁴

To express the efficacy of this death, Rahner prefers the categories of sacramental causality: "the life and death of Jesus, or the death which recapitulates and culminates his life, possess a causality of a quasi-sacramental and real-symbolic nature. In this causality what is signified, in this case God's salvific will, posits the sign, in this case the death of Jesus along with his resurrection, and in and through the sign it causes what is signified."¹³⁵ In this conception the significance of the category of sacrifice is sharply relativized. In earlier work Rahner had maintained that a general notion of sacrifice, drawn from the history of religions, could suitably be applied to Jesus' death, with due caution and appropriate modifications.¹³⁶ His recent writings stress the danger of such a procedure, though they do not reject it as illegitimate; Rahner warns repeatedly that sacrificial terminology may encourage the inference that Jesus' death effects change in God rather than being itself an effect of God's love, and insists that terms such as sacrifice are secondary, though legitimate, ways of interpreting the significance inherent in Jesus' death.¹³⁷

This conception obviously points toward Jesus' life as a whole as decisive for interpretation of his death. Further impetus in the same direction is provided by some principles which Rahner originally developed in regard to Christian spirituality but which seem applicable *mutatis mutandis* to the question of Jesus' approach to death. In an essay on good intentions, Rahner notes the existence of virtual motives which are not explicitly and consciously objectified at the time an action is performed but which nonetheless really enter into that action as causal factors, and also draws attention to the possible simultaneity of various motives which may reside at different depths of our freedom, the existence

¹³³ Cf. "Tod Jesu und Abgeschlossenheit der Offenbarung," *Schriften zur Theologie* 13, 159-71.

¹³⁴ Cf. *Spiritual Exercises* (New York: Herder, 1965) 239; "Remember, Man, That You Are Dust," *Grace in Freedom* (New York: Herder, 1969) 114; "The Passion of the Son of Man," *Grace in Freedom* 121; *The Priesthood* (New York: Herder, 1973) 233, 237; "On Christian Dying," T.I. 7 (New York: Herder, 1971) 293; "Ideas for a Theology of Death," T.I. 13, 184; and "Was heisst heute an Jesus Christus glauben?" *Schriften zur Theologie* 13, 186-87.

¹³⁵ *Foundations* 284. For a more complete discussion of Rahner's conception of the unity of death and resurrection, cf. John P. Galvin, "The Resurrection of Jesus in Contemporary Catholic Systematics," *HeyJ* 20 (1979) 125-30.

¹³⁶ Cf. "Opfer: V. Dogmatisch," *LTK* 7 (1962) 1174-75; and K. Rahner and Angelus Häussling, *The Celebration of the Eucharist* (New York: Herder, 1968) 13-18.

¹³⁷ *Foundations* 282-85; "The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation," T.I. 16 (New York: Seabury, 1979) 211.

of personal responsibility for some motives which are consciously known only as peripheral concerns or in a very global way, and the possibility that a deliberately chosen and stated motive may be no motive at all, due to failure to influence the action. Like human knowledge,¹³⁸ human willing is a multifaceted reality. Motivation is never fully retrievable by objectified knowledge, since exhaustive self-reflection is impossible. An intention present "only" globally or virtually may in fact lie deeper and be more influential than an "actual" intention.¹³⁹

It is consistent with these elements of his theological anthropology that Rahner is more concerned with Jesus' lived approach to death than with any explicit declarations of intent which might be preserved in the New Testament. The soteriological significance of Jesus' death is inherent in his death itself, quite apart from any verbal attribution of meaning or purpose to it.

Although Rahner spends less time on direct exegesis than the other authors we have examined, he provides the most thorough theological penetration of the pertinent issues. Here, as elsewhere, his theology is constructed in such a way that it is immune from many variations in exegetical opinion. Examination of his proposed soteriology is beyond the scope of this essay,¹⁴⁰ but one serious problem should be mentioned. In early essays Rahner rightly argued, against some trends in Neo-Scholastic soteriology, that a theology of death was needed in order to interpret Christ's salvific work, since the way in which salvation is achieved has an effect on the end result.¹⁴¹ Given this principle, it seems inconsistent for Rahner to abstract so thoroughly from the circumstances of Jesus' death: it would seem that his theology of Jesus' death as the death of the absolute savior would be equally valid had Jesus died nonviolently. And this in turn raises questions about the adequacy of Rahner's interpretation, though not necessarily about its accuracy as a partial illumination.¹⁴²

III

While an attempt to propose a comprehensive soteriology would far exceed the purpose of this essay, some remarks on the significance for systematic theology of the questions we have examined may provide an appropriate conclusion.

In view of the inseparability of Jesus' person and message, it is

¹³⁸ "Dogmatic Reflections" 199.

¹³⁹ "Some Thoughts on 'a Good Intention,'" T.I. 3 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1967) 105-28.

This essay was originally published in 1955.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. esp. "The One Christ" 251-82.

¹⁴¹ "Current Problems in Christology" 192-96; *On the Theology of Death* 56-67.

¹⁴² Cf. Elmar Mitterstieler, *Christlicher Glaube als Bestätigung des Menschen: Zur "fides quaerens intellectum" in der Theologie Karl Rahners* (Frankfurt, 1975) 143-47; and H. U. von Balthasar, "Crucifixus etiam pro nobis" 32.

impossible to assess that message in abstraction from Jesus' personal fate. The death of Jesus pertains to his message, not as part of its direct content but as personal acceptance of the consequences of his preaching.¹⁴³ For this reason (among others), a soteriology which refers exclusively to Jesus' public life without consideration of his death will inevitably prove deficient.

Similarly, in view of the manifold connections between Jesus' life and his death, theological efforts to express Jesus' salvific significance must assess his death against the background of his public ministry. It is necessary to overcome the separation of Jesus' death from his public actions, operative in such otherwise diverse positions as the view that the crucifixion should be interpreted not with reference to the pre-Easter Jesus but solely from the perspective of Easter,¹⁴⁴ and the comments Karl Adam once made in a popular work on Jesus: "His ultimate object in coming was not to heal the sick nor to work miracles nor to preach the kingdom of God. These were all only the externals of his Messianic activity. The true essence of his redeemership lay in the purchase of our life by his death."¹⁴⁵ Such conceptions, whatever form they assume, deny or obscure the close intrinsic relationship of Jesus' public life and death and are therefore to be rejected.¹⁴⁶

The resulting need to interpret Jesus' death, which theology can neither ignore nor assess in isolation, against the background of his public life makes the issue of Jesus' approach to death one of utmost importance for Christology. Knowledge of how Jesus faced death, the availability of which is now widely defended with convincing arguments against Bultmann, is indispensable for the work of systematic theology.¹⁴⁷ Yet it must be recognized that there exist neither equally compelling arguments nor comparable exegetical consensus with regard to Jesus' own verbal evaluation or interpretation of his death. While it would be helpful if additional research were devoted to the possibility of tracing back to the historical Jesus interpretations of his death other than that often termed

¹⁴³ F. Schupp, *Vermittlung im Fragment: Überlegungen zur Christologie* (Innsbruck: ÖH, 1975) 16, 18-19.

¹⁴⁴ Wolfgang Schrage, "Das Verständnis des Todes Jesu im Neuen Testament," *Das Kreuz Jesu Christi als Grund des Heils* (ed. F. Vierung; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1967) 49.

¹⁴⁵ *The Son of God* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1934) 276.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Francis Fiorenza, "Critical Social Theory and Christology," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 30 (1975) 101-8. The illumination is mutual: to understand Jesus' ministry, it is necessary "that we discover what made him operate the way he did, what made him epitomize his life in the single act of going to his death" (B. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* 253).

¹⁴⁷ As Schürmann recognizes ("Jesu ureigenes Todesverständnis" 276-77, 289 n. 80), Kasper, Schillebeeckx, and Rahner all insist on this. Cf. also H. U. von Balthasar, "Crucifixus etiam pro nobis" 30-31.

"soteriological," it may well be that the nature of the available sources makes final certitude in this matter impossible to achieve.

While it is true that systematic theology cannot always rely on an exegetical consensus, which may be lacking, even on important questions, and which, when present, has often proved to be short-lived, the current state of exegetical discussion invites reflection on whether historical knowledge of Jesus' personal approach to death could provide an adequate historical basis for soteriology, even without reasonably certain historical knowledge of Jesus' interpretation of that death. This suggestion is not intended as a strategic retreat in the face of modern exegetical developments but is rather based on grounds inherent in the nature of the situation. Two major considerations point in favor of an affirmative answer to the question.¹⁴⁸

First, explicit declaration of intent on Jesus' part would be necessary for a corresponding interpretation of his deeds to be valid if and only if the meaning ascribed to those deeds were not inherent in the events being interpreted—if and only if such words on Jesus' part were necessary as a sort of performative utterance¹⁴⁹ to constitute a meaning which otherwise would not be present. This, however, is not the case with regard to Jesus' death, for that has its own intrinsic meaning as the freely accepted consequence of Jesus' faithfulness to his mission: its significance does not derive from extrinsic addition of meaning, even by Jesus himself. The validity of a theological interpretation of Jesus' death does not depend upon when or by whom it was first advanced. It is neither the case that earlier interpretations are in principle preferable to later ones, nor that later interpretations are always more comprehensive and therefore better.¹⁵⁰ Neither a model of invariable progressive improvement nor one of uninterrupted decline does justice to the complexity of theological reflection on such matters. Criteria for legitimate interpretation include foundation in Jesus' life, but not explicit presence in Jesus' words. And from the perspective of fundamental theology, even an interpretation advanced by Jesus himself would be subject to examination with reference to what is performed in Jesus' own dying, both for determination of its actual content and for demonstration of its validity.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ No consideration can be given here to the question of the historical basis needed for a theology of the Eucharist. For examination of the New Testament texts from this perspective, cf. Johannes Betz, "Eucharistie als zentrales Mysterium," *Mysterium salutis* 4/2 (ed. J. Feiner and M. Löhrer; Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1973) 186–209.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962) 4–7.

¹⁵⁰ Peter Chirico ("Hans Küng's Christology: An Evaluation of Its Presuppositions," *TS* 40 [1979] 256–72) rightly criticizes Hans Küng for implying acceptance of the first of these positions, but seems himself inclined toward the opposite error.

¹⁵¹ The situation is analogous to the application of Christological titles (Messiah, Son of man, etc.) to Jesus.

Secondly, interpretations are not necessarily mutually exclusive; nor can any interpretation claim to be exhaustive. The reality of Jesus' death remains richer and more significant than any single interpretative category is capable of expressing. Of course, some interpretations may be incorrect, unfounded, or so shallow as to be inferior to others. But there can be no question of declaring one interpretation, with its attendant categories, "right," while all others are rejected as incorrect. For this reason also, determination that one or more interpretations of Jesus' death could be retraced to Jesus himself would in no way exclude the possibility of other interpretations being legitimate.

This essay has not sought to develop a systematic soteriology, either through retrieval of the notions of atonement and sacrifice¹⁵² or by some other means; it simply considers part of the background of any such soteriology. The attraction of the cross is indisputable:

Hither then, last or first,
To hero of Calvary, Christ's feet—
Never ask if meaning it, wanting it, warned of it—men go.¹⁵³

If Christian theology is to examine and articulate the meaning of the source of this attraction, it needs and has historical access to the unity of Jesus' life and death.

¹⁵² Cf. the recent efforts of Frances M. Young, "New Wine in Old Wineskins: XIV. Sacrifice," *ExpTim* 86 (1974-75) 305-9; and *Sacrifice and the Death of Christ* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975); C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (New York: Cambridge University, 1977) 107-26; R. Schwager, *Brauchen wir einen Sündenbock?: Gewalt und Erlösung in den biblischen Schriften* (Munich: Kösel, 1978); H. U. von Balthasar, "Crucifixus etiam pro nobis" 26-35.

¹⁵³ "The Wreck of the Deutschland," *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (4th ed.; ed. W. H. Gardner and N. H. MacKenzie; London: Oxford University, 1967) 54.