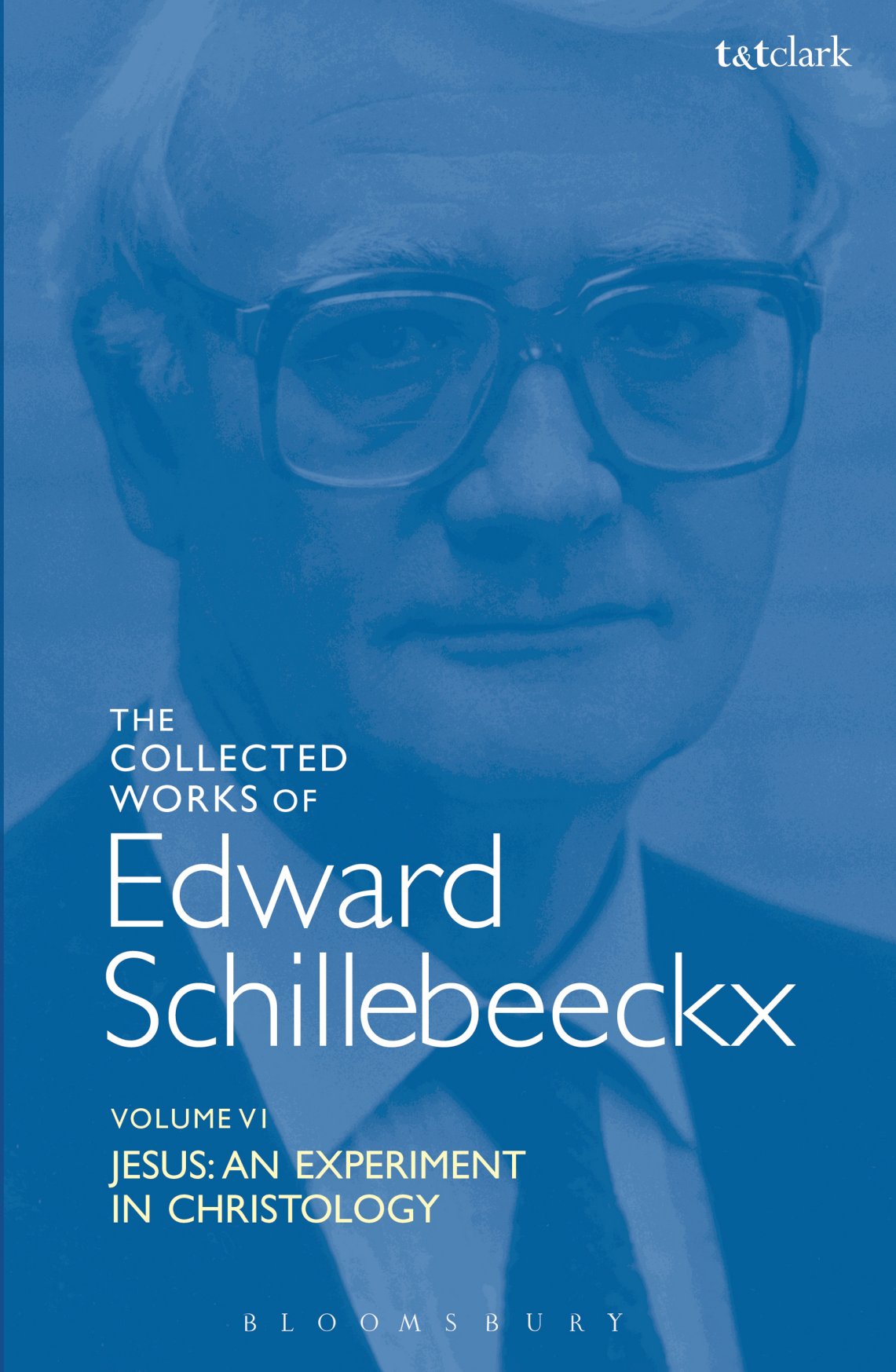

t&tclark

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF

Edward Schillebeeckx

VOLUME VI

JESUS: AN EXPERIMENT IN CHRISTOLOGY

BLOOMSBURY

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF EDWARD SCHILLEBEECKX

Series Editors:

Ted Mark Schoof and
Carl Sterkens
with
Erik Borgman and
Robert J. Schreiter

I. Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God
II. Revelation and Theology
III. God the Future of Man
IV. World and Church
V. The Understanding of Faith. Interpretation and Criticism
VI. Jesus: An Experiment in Christology
VII. Christ. The Christian Experience in the Modern World
VIII. Interim Report on the Books 'Jesus' and 'Christ'
IX. The Church with a Human Face
X. Church. The Human Story of God
XI. Essays. Ongoing Theological Quests

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF
EDWARD SCHILLEBEECKX

VOLUME VI

JESUS:
AN EXPERIMENT
IN CHRISTOLOGY

BLOOMSBURY
LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

Bloomsbury T&T Clark
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square
London
WC1B 3DP
UK

1385 Broadway
New York
NY 10018
USA

www.bloomsbury.com

Bloomsbury is a registered trade mark of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx volume 6 first published 2014

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

eISBN: 978-0-5674-2922-3

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

The original Dutch version of this book was published under the title *Jezus, het verhaal van een levende* by Uitgeverij H. Nelissen, Bloemendaal, in 1974, and translated by Hubert Hoskins & Marcelle Manley

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Most secondary literature on *Jesus: an experiment in Christology* refers to the 1979 English edition. In this new version typing errors, spelling mistakes and numerous wrong or poor translations are corrected. Therefore we recommend that reference be made to this version in the future, though it would be a service to your readers if the page numbers of the old edition (added in square brackets in the margins) are mentioned as well. The text of this new edition should be considered as authoritative.

Please note that endnotes in the original 1979 edition are converted to footnotes (with different numbering) in this new edition.

Dedicated to all my readers
– known and unknown –
and especially
Bernard Cardinal Alfrink

'That you may not grieve as others do who have no hope'
(1 Thess. 4:13)

CONTENTS

Introduction to Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx xv

Introduction to the new edition 'Jesus: an experiment in Christology' xix

Foreword xxv

WHY THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN 1
I. The story of a crippled man 1
II. The situation in outline 2
III. A challenge 15
IV. Note on exegesis and theology 18

PART ONE: QUESTIONS OF METHOD, AND CRITERIA

Section One:
Jesus of Nazareth, norm and criterion of any interpretation of Jesus 25

Chapter 1:
The believer's historical access to Jesus of Nazareth 27
§1 Structure of the offer of salvation and the Christian response 27
A. The human person, focus of manifold relationships 27
B. Revelation and *'le croyable disponible'* 31
C. The constant unitive factor 35
D. Disharmony between Jesus and the New Testament 39
§2 Jesus of Nazareth, acclaimed as the Christ, object of historico-critical inquiry 44
A. Diverse images of Jesus and Jesus as 'object' of historical inquiry 45
B. Old and new: the critical approach 47
C. Modern historiography and Jesus of Nazareth 48
D. Theological significance of the historical quest for Jesus 51

Chapter 2:
Renewed need for a post-critical, narrative history 57

Section Two:
Criteria for a critical identification of the historical Jesus 61

§1 Background against which the historical criteria must be viewed: matrix of the various criteria 61

§2 Why then search for criteria to direct the sifting process? 65
§3 Cataloguing of valid, positive criteria 68
A. Redaction history as a criterion: traditions incorporated 'willy-nilly' 70
B. Criterion of form criticism: the principle of dual irreducibility 71
C. Tradition history as a criterion: principle of the 'cross-section' 74
D. Consistency of content as a criterion 75
E. Criterion of the rejection of Jesus' message and praxis 76
§4 Frequently employed but invalid criteria 77
§5 Note on the Q hypothesis 79

Section Three:
Justification for the structure of this book in terms of the method, hermeneutics and criteria discussed 83

PART TWO: 'THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST'
By way of introduction: *euaggelion* or good news 87

Section One:
What Jesus proclaimed and how he lived 95

Chapter 1:
Jesus' message of God's coming salvation 97
§1 Prophetic and apocalyptic penitential movements in Israel 98
§2 Message and praxis of John the Baptist 106
§3 Jesus' first prophetic act: his baptism by John 117
§4 Underlying impulse of Jesus' message and preaching 120
A. God's rule directed to humaneness: the kingdom of God 120
B. The praxis of the kingdom of God: Jesus' parables 133
C. Eschatological revolution: Jesus' beatitudes 149

Chapter 2:
Jesus' Praxis 157
§1 Jesus' caring and abiding presence among people experienced as salvation from God 157
A. 'Beneficent' reality (Mk. 7:37) of God's lordship, made present in Jesus' mighty acts 157
(a) Hermeneutic horizon of Jesus' miracles 158
(b) Jesus' miraculous freedom 'to do good' (Mk. 3:4) 160
(c) Jesus' call to faith in and return to God. Faith and mighty works 170
B. Jesus' liberating and joyous dealing with people: table fellowship with Jesus 175

(a) Existential impossibility of mourning in Jesus' presence: the 'non-fasting' of his disciples 176
(b) Jesus' liberating table fellowship with his circle and with 'outcasts', tax collectors and sinners 181
(i) Eschatological messenger of God's openness towards sinners 181
(ii) Jesus as host: a bounteous gift of God 188
C. Pre-Easter fellowship with Jesus of disciples who 'go after him' 193
§2 Man's cause as God's cause: the 'God of Jesus' 203
A. Jesus liberating mankind from a constricting view of God: Jesus and the Law 203
(a) Difficulty of exegetical research 204
(b) Q traditions and Markan traditions about 'Jesus and the Law' 206
(c) The cleansing of the temple 215
(d) The law as love of God and love of one's neighbour 220
B. Jesus' original *Abba* experience, source of his life's secret, message and praxis 227
Conclusion and definition of the problem: reality or illusion? 239

Section Two:
Kingdom of God, rejection and death of Jesus 241

Chapter 1:
Rejection and death of Jesus 243
§1 The death of Jesus as interpreted in early Christianity 243
A. The eschatological prophet-martyr: contrast scheme 244
B. The divine plan of salvation: salvation history scheme 251
C. A redemptive, atoning death: soteriological scheme 260
§2 The death of Jesus, viewed in the context of his earthly life 263
A. Rejection of Jesus' message and praxis 263
B. Jesus in the face of his approaching death 267
(a) Growing certainty of a violent death 267
(b) The unavoidable question of Jesus' own interpretation 269
(c) Logion of unconditional readiness to serve 271
(d) The last supper: unshaken assurance of salvation in the face of death 274
§3 Historical legal grounds for Jesus' execution 279

Chapter 2:
Jesus' last prophetic sign: his death left for others to interpret 285

Section Three:
The Christian story after Jesus' death: the kingdom of God takes on the appearance of Jesus Christ 287

Chapter 1:
The disciples scandalized by the arrest and execution of Jesus 289
§1 Historicity and superimposed interpretation in the gospels 289
§2 The disciples scatter and reassemble: the problem entailed 297

Chapter 2:
'Why do you seek the living among the dead?' (Lk. 24:5) 299
Introduction: local and official traditions of early Christianity 299
§1 Traditions centred on the Jerusalem site of the holy sepulchre 303
A. Mk. 16:1-8: apostolic resurrection *kerygma* in the context of the 'holy sepulchre' 303
B. Mt. 28:1-10: the Markan account transposed to a polemical context 307
C. Lk. 24:1-12: the Markan narrative in the context of the (Judaeo-) Greek 'rapture' model 309
D. Rekigious experience and eschatological religious terminology 313
§2 The official apostolic tradition: 'We believe that God raised him from the dead' (1 Thess. 1:10) 315
A. 'Jesus made himself seen' (1 Cor. 15:3-8) 315
(a) A unifying formula 315
(b) Manifestation, preaching and act of faith 320
B. 'Jesus showed himself to Peter and the Eleven' 321
C. 'On the road Paul saw the Lord' (Acts 9:27): the Damascus narrative (Acts 9:22, 26) 329
(a) Acts 9: the conversion vision 335
(b) Acts 22 337
(c) Acts 26 340

Chapter 3:
The Easter experience: being converted, at Jesus' initiative, to Jesus as the Christ − salvation found conclusively in Jesus 347
§1 An account of some converts. A Jewish conversion model? 347
§2 Jesus' disciples reassembled at the historical initiative of Peter 352
§3 The experience of grace as forgiveness 357
§4 Critical question: ambiguity of the term 'Easter experience' 359

PART THREE: CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION OF THE CRUCIFIED-AND-RISEN ONE

Section One:
The gospels: general hermeneutics of the risen Jesus 367

Chapter 1:
Early Christian movement centred on Jesus: different echoes of the one Jesus of Nazareth 369
§1 Taking stock of early Christian credal trends 369
§2 Early Christian creeds and their historical foundation in Jesus 370
A. *Maranatha* or parousia Christology: Jesus, bringer of the approaching salvation, Lord of the future and judge of the world 370
(a) Basic trend of this creed 371
(b) The creed in the tradition of the Q community 375
(c) The Lord of the future in Mark's Christology 382
B. *Theios anèr* Christology (?): Jesus the divine miracle worker. Christology of the Solomonic son of David 388
C. 'Wisdom' Christologies: Jesus, the messenger and teacher of wisdom; Jesus, pre-existent, incarnate, humbled yet exalted Wisdom 393
D. 'Easter' Christologies: Jesus, the crucified-and-risen one 396
Conclusion 400

Chapter 2:
First identification of the person: link between the earthly Jesus and the earliest Christian creeds 403
§1 Existing Jewish models of end-time saviour figures 404
A. The end-time prophet, 'filled with God's Spirit', who brings the good news of salvation to the oppressed: 'God's reign has begun' 404
B. The end-time messianic son of David 413
(a) National, dynastic 'Davidic messianism' 414
(b) Prophetic sapiential 'Davidic messianism' 419
C. The son of man 422
§2 The Christian 'first option' among existing Jewish models of end-time saviour figures 434
A. Early Christianity: a Jewish interpretation of Jesus 434
B. Jesus, presumed to be the end-time prophet 437
C. Jesus, the end-time messenger from God, source of the earliest credal strands and main source of the earliest Christian use of the titles Christ, the Lord, the Son 441
D. Christian prophetic/sapiential interpretation of Jesus as the messianic son of David and rejection of dynastic/Davidic messianism 459

Conclusion 473

Section Two:
Direct hermeneutics of the resurrection in the New Testament 475

Chapter 1:
'Raised from the dead' 477
§1 Late Jewish ideas about life after death 477
§2 It was God who raised him 'from the dead' 482
§3 'The third day he rose again according to the Scriptures': Jesus' resurrection as a conclusive eschatological event 485
Conclusion 490

Chapter 2:
Resurrection, exaltation, sending of the Spirit. The parousia 493
Conclusion 503

Section Three:
From a 'theology of Jesus' to a Christology 505

Chapter 1: Theology 'raised to the second power' 507

Chapter 2: Growing reflection in the New Testament traditions 513

Section Four:
Post-New Testament reflection in the early church: christological dogma 521
Conclusion of Part Three and definition of the problem 532

PART FOUR: WHO DO WE SAY THAT HE IS

Section One:
The present christological crisis and its presuppositions 537

Chapter 1:
'Conjunctural' hermeneutic horizon of ideas and a-synchronous rhythm in the complex transformation of a culture 539

Chapter 2:
The break with tradition since the Enlightenment 545
§1 Lessing's view against the background of the Enlightenment 545
§2 Contemporary 'christological' tendencies in the wake of the Enlightenment 547
§3 Acknowledged and tacit assumptions 549
§4 Universality via historically particular mediation 552

Section Two:
A 'universal hermeneutic horizon' not amenable to theorizing 557

Chapter 1:
Unique universality of a historically particular human being 559
§1 The concept of 'human transcendence' 559
§2 Unique universality: universal appeal of 'what is worthy of man' 565
A. Definition of the problem 565
B. The *humanum* we seek 568
C. The human and the religious 569
Conclusion 573

Chapter 2:
The history of human suffering in search of meaning and liberation 575
§1 The problem of 'universal history' 575
§2 Impossibility of theorizing ultimate meaning and of a universal hermeneutic horizon 579

Section Three:
Jesus, parable of God and paradigm of humanity 587

Chapter 1:
God's saving action in history 589
§1 Historical discourse and discourse in religious language 589
§2 Revelation or God's salvation-historical acts as experienced and articulated in religious language 591
A. God's creative activity in our world: 'human person' and 'being of God' 591
B. God's saving activity in history 595
C. God's definitive saving acts in history 596

Chapter 2:
The christological problem 599
§1 Definitive salvation-in-Jesus imparted by God 599
A. *God's* message in Jesus 599
B. Salvation in Jesus or in the risen crucified one? 602
C. Intrinsic significance of Jesus' resurrection for salvation 605
§2 The necessity, difficulty and limits of a theoretical christological identification of the person 610
§3 In search of the basis of Jesus' *Abba* experience: soul of his message, life and death, and disclosure of the mystery of his life 612

Chapter 3:
Theoretical Christology, story and praxis of the kingdom of God 629
Epilogue: postscript to the story of the crippled man 632

Technical information 635
A. Explanation of some technical and unfamiliar terms 635
B. Abbreviations 654
C. Pseudepigrapha (or non-canonical intertestamentary literature) 655
D. Sigla employed (periodicals, dictionaries, series) 656
E. Bibliographical index of subjects 658
F. Index of authors 660

Introduction to

COLLECTED WORKS OF EDWARD SCHILLEBEECKX

Without a doubt Prof. Mag. Dr Edward Schillebeeckx O.P. (1914-2009) is one of the most creative and influential theologians of the 20th and 21st century. His work has been much discussed and is still widely popular in academic and pastoral circles. Schillebeeckx played a major role in theological and ecclesiastic renewal. His academic studies and scholarly pastoral books, sermons and lectures continue to inspire a wide reading public. His considerable authority as a scholar is based on extensive knowledge of the Christian tradition coupled with compassionate involvement with people and movements in church and society, especially those who are exposed to injustice and suffering.

A theologian of such exceptional stature in the Dutch language area certainly deserves enduring public attention. In 2004, therefore, on the occasion of Schillebeeckx's 90th birthday, the Edward Schillebeeckx Foundation made the first moves for the publication of his collected works. Extensive discussion followed on just what kind of publication we envisaged: a complete and comprehensive overview of his work, a critical edition of his monographs, an annotated reissue of his most innovative works and/or a selective republication of articles, including reflection on their reception. The preparatory committee − consisting of Dick Boer, Erik Borgman, Wil Derkse, Stephan van Erp, Mijke Jetten, Kristanto Budiprabowo, Frans Maas, Robert Schreiter, Ted Mark Schoof O.P., Nico Schreurs and Carl Sterkens – was soon confronted with a major problem: the sheer volume of Schillebeeckx's work. He was a very prolific writer indeed. This is borne out by the updated version of Schillebeeckx's bibliography, compiled and published by Ted Schoof and Jan van de Westelaken, which can be found on the foundation's website: www.schillebeeckx.nl. A publication of his complete works, therefore, seemed virtually impossible. Some of them had been published in one language only (mostly Dutch, but also German and French), while translations, though usually meticulously checked by or on behalf of the author, at times differed

somewhat from the original. Because of practical concerns like financial constraints and the limited availability of translations we confined ourselves to a re-publication of Schillebeeckx's major works – still a daunting endeavour.

For similar reasons we decided not to republish the original Dutch texts but only translations, although we realize that not even the best translation can adequately convey the often subtle nuances and delicate shades of meaning of the original. Various misunderstandings at Schillebeeckx's much publicized 'conversation' with Vatican authorities on Christology in 1980 illustrate this risk. It seemed logical to choose translations which would be accessible to the extensive Anglophone world. Fortunately quite a number of good translations of Schillebeeckx's publications were available. Nonetheless a great deal of the *Collected Works* were revised once more, both linguistically and substantively. The translations of volumes 1 to 5 did not require checking: that had already been done at the time of the publication of the English versions (between 1963 and 1974) by Schillebeeckx's fellow brother and assistant at the time, Ted Schoof, who, before concluding his theological education with Edward Schillebeeckx in Nijmegen, had followed the regular theology course of four years at Blackfriars, Oxford. Of the volumes 6, 7 and 11 the as yet untranslated parts were either translated or edited by Marcelle Manley. This applies particularly to volume 11, most of which now appears in English for the first time, but also to a new section in volume 7 (*Christ. The Christian experience in the modern world*). As for volume 6 (*Jesus: An experiment in Christology*), the (somewhat laboured) original translation by Hubert Hoskins was edited by Sr Joanna Dunham, and subsequently thoroughly revised and re-edited by Marcelle Manley, in such depth that she should be mentioned as co-translator. The substantive accuracy of John Bowden's original translations of volumes 7 to 10 was checked by Ted Schoof. Hence they are now published as 'authorized' versions. Volume 9 (*The church with a human face*) required such extensive terminological corrections that the earlier translation can no longer be considered reliable. In each volume the section 'How to use this book' synoptically outlines a format for references to the text.

Although many linguistic and substantive changes were introduced, we did not opt for gender-inclusive language. Present-day translations would undoubtedly have used this style, but for the sake of maximum fidelity to the original text, and for the practical reason that the English versions of volumes 1 to 5 did not require checking, we decided not to do so.

These *Collected Works* include Schillebeeckx's unquestionably major theological works. We chose them for their historical significance, theological relevance and impact on developments in theology and church communities. It was no coincidence that these works were mostly out of print. In the *Collected Works* each volume will have a short introduction providing a brief sketch of

its background, context and relevance.

The Edward Schillebeeckx Foundation is proud to present Schillebeeckx's most influential works in one readily available series. We thank the Flemish and Dutch provinces of the Dominican Order for making this publication possible. We hope its readers' enjoyment of these works will be as great as our appreciation of the support we received.

Prof. Dr Nico Schreurs
Chairman, Edward Schillebeeckx Foundation

Introduction to the new edition

JESUS
AN EXPERIMENT IN CHRISTOLOGY

Jesus: an experiment in Christology is certainly the most important of all Edward Schillebeeckx's books. It is a milestone in Catholic theology as regards both method and content. Even now its significance has not been adequately assessed and analysed.

In the wake of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) the book was written at a key point in Catholic theology. With a view to the renewal of belief, inside the church, ecumenically and in the secular sphere, Schillebeeckx proposed a revision of theological methods and goals. Scripture was to become the soul of theology and of preaching once more (Vatican II, Const. *Dei Verbum*, 24), while still maintaining the great theological tradition. This was an enormous programme and, after initial discussions, it became clear that the first thing to consider afresh was what to believe about Jesus Christ – which more than ever, for insiders and outsiders alike, forms the core of Christian identity. The neo-scholastic theology of the preceding decades did not think historically and was adamantly anti-Modernist. *La nouvelle théologie*, developed in France, did a lot of spadework. In a re-engagement with Thomas Aquinas and the church fathers it won new respect for Christian experience and spirituality. However, it never came close to consistent, contemporary biblical exegesis.

Origin of the book. – Only very few of his colleagues joined Edward Schillebeeckx, theological advisor to Cardinal Alfrink of Utrecht and the Dutch episcopacy during the Council, in pursuing the new kind of thinking that was newly required in the space between the poles of Scripture and modern secularity. He had no illusions, either during the Council or afterwards, about the magnitude of this challenge. Above all, in the first years after the Council the christological question dominated discussions at countless meetings, especially the annual meetings of the directors of the journal *Concilium*.

The paths that led to the book are wide, manifold and comprehensive. As a young lecturer in Leuven Edward Schillebeeckx was acknowledged as a

distinguished scholar of dogmatic history and Thomas Aquinas. Then, as far back as 1963, he engaged intensively with John Robinson's book, *Honest to God*. Schillebeeckx showed the first signs of his own conception of hermeneutics in an article on Paul Ricoeur in 1968 and in subsequent articles with linguistic themes in *Tijdschrift voor Theologie*, the Dutch journal that he founded. From 1968 onwards he regularly lectured on theological hermeneutics in the theology faculty at Nijmegen. It followed naturally from the synthesizing and richly constructive character of his thinking that, from the outset, he relates questions of formal and material hermeneutics, of linguistics and of history, to one another.

However, with this equipment alone Schillebeeckx could never have written this book: he still lacked one branch of knowledge, which Catholic theology had long left under the filter of dogmatic Christology. The focus was on the extremely subtle methods and results of historical-critical exegesis, also in synchronic linguistic exegesis, approaches which had emerged since the 19th century and had gained important insight into crucial systematic questions. Meanwhile exegetical discourse generally also led to unexpected, theologically and anthropologically relevant alternatives, directly affecting contemporary understanding of faith, Christ and God. Think only of Bultmann and his disciples. Slogans like 'the historical Jesus' and 'demythologization', 'miracle' and 'empty tomb' became the writing on the wall, against which Catholic dogma seemed to be on guard. How urgent these questions still are is evident in the spate of polemics which the books about Jesus by Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI) triggered as recently as 2010. To these questions Schillebeeckx worked out his own exegetically well substantiated, often original answers, showing his competence as an exegete.

According to his own account it took him three years − at least from 1969 to 1971 − not counting daily exegetical work needed for lectures, addresses and sermons. The enormous number of texts he mastered is evidenced by the bibliographies, not only of this but also of the following volume, *Christ: the Christian experience in the modern world* (Dutch 1977, English 1980): nothing published by biblical scholars at the time remained unexamined. Among the greatest achievements of this book is the skilful way in which he penetrates the firewall between exegesis and dogmatics. In this respect it parallels *On being Christian* by Hans Küng (written at exactly the same time) and *Jesus Christ liberator* by Leonardo Boff, excelling them, however, in minuteness of detail as regards both method and content.

Hermeneutical-exegetical approach. – Of course Schillebeeckx's achievement does not consist only in his formal reflections on exegesis, history and theology (41-80). Like Küng, he became a learner again as recommended by Vatican II. He learnt the craft of biblical exegesis, worked his way through mountains of

exegetical literature on first-hand interpretation of texts, on the history of the period, on the backgrounds in sociology of culture and politics, on oral reports committed to writing, their redactions, their early tradition, and on the complexities of the reception of modern exegesis. Finally he came up against the extremely sensitive and complicated questions about the historically conditioned, changing images of Jesus, the special methodological and substantive problems raised by the 'historical Jesus', and what has by now emerged as the broad consensus in biblical scholarship. Thus Schillebeeckx could finally speak competently – as an exegete among exegetes – about literally every gospel pericope (the exegesis of other New Testament books will follow in the next volume). This is an extraordinary achievement, even today, among Catholic systematic theologians. It is this penetration of firewall that ultimately explains the radical revolution in his Christology (as in Küng's and Boff's). Here the split between dogmatic and 'positive' theology is overcome, both programmatically and across a wide range of christological claims.

That split has existed in the Catholic context since 1679 when the first critical exegetical work by Richard Simon was burnt on dogmatic grounds, a theological catastrophe which was never repaired. Even today it is asserted in prominent publications that a really critical exegesis cannot comply with dogmatic demands. Readers of Schillebeeckx's book may be persuaded of exactly the opposite. In the anti-Modernist years (1864-1962) the hostility to exegesis took on downright scurrilous features. Well meant more popularising books about Jesus (Karl Adam, Romano Guardini, F.M. Willam, Giovanni Papini and Daniel-Rops) never attained a high level of biblical scholarship. Even after advances based on the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943) Catholic exegesis remained burdened by anxiety that it might undervalue or damage dogmatically binding statements. Even great thinkers like Karl Rahner never really succeeded in penetrating the world of biblical scholarship. In short, nobody knew how one should reach back, biblically, beyond the conciliar statements of the 4th and 5th centuries without losing sight of them.

In the early 1970s, then, Schillebeeckx found himself equipped with the necessary tools to take on this momentous project. It was not simply a 'Christology from below', as he himself said: even this approach presupposes a stringent hermeneutic standpoint. Schillebeeckx describes it as 'an ecclesial or collective experience which obliges people to define the ultimate meaning and purport of their lives in reference to Jesus of Nazareth' [56].

Ultimately, in the memories that have been written down, he is questioning Jesus' all-bearing identity or – if you will – Jesus' divine secret, which is to be found not in a transcendent beyond but in his life and death. Guided by this general perspective Schillebeeckx could pursue without constraint a historical-critical interpretive approach 'from below': the words, deeds and destiny of

Jesus are reconstructed on the broadest basis according to strict scholarly criteria.

Positioning this book. – Despite the massive mistrust Schillebeeckx had to face to the end of his life, the orthodoxy of this work remains incontestable, and despite repeated attempts it was never censured or condemned by the Magisterium. But the far-reaching religious and spiritual revolution accomplished in this Christology is indisputable. Understandably, it evoked fierce resistance. Now the human in Jesus no longer functions as an illustration of the divine as it used to do; rather, Jesus' words, deeds and destiny themselves become the presence of the divine. Those who see Jesus see the Father, not the other way round. Thus Schillebeeckx seeks not God himself, who always remains mediated and invisible, but rather Jesus' lived and suffered experience of God, which is in its turn universally relevant: 'We are required to be open to Jesus' own interpretive experience of the reality of God which he manifests in his humanity' [604]. 'On the other hand religious statements must have some basis in the history of Jesus; if not, they would be unrelated to reality and therefore ideological' [605].

At the same time Schillebeeckx moves away from the metaphysical categories of classical Christology. Note, he never rejected them, nor ever denied their truth. But for three reasons he relativizes them: (a) All truth is mediated through determinate relationships and thought forms, and thus must on occasion also be mediated through others [48-52]. (b) Greek metaphysics has done great things for Christology, yet has come to show serious limitations [557-582]. (c) From our present viewpoint the biblical message of Jesus is concealed rather than protected by classical Christology. Schillebeeckx makes this particularly clear in his supplementary reflections on the resurrection [644-650].

Thus the biblical sources contain no objective statements on the Jesus question which would be valid in themselves. Rather they need to be articulated by all available methods: to be translated, tested as regards their interactions, motivations and intentions, and integrated with their cultural, social and political contexts. According to this conception truth is always mediated, living and interactive; it is never static, it takes shape especially in experiences of suffering (as a universal phenomenon). This pluralism does not lead to some directionless relativism, as some people like to suggest but, on the contrary, to richness, which in a changed reality always also finds a new language.

As emerges clearly in the complex reflections on the resurrection [320-397] the key category of the book is 'experience', of course not in an empiricist or romantic sense, as if it had to do with subjective emotions and affectivity, but in a specifically hermeneutic sense. Schillebeeckx understands experience

(such as the experience of the resurrection) as the locus of an active, present truth, which is also testable and communicable. It manifests itself in the endless complexity of action and suffering, memory and hope, texts and contexts, which constantly create ever new action and suffering, new communication and new texts in changed contexts. Those who seek to analyse all this and articulate it in new ways start a process which can never be concluded. Thus Schillebeeckx never gives the impression that he has completed his christological project with this or the following book. This book is no more than a 'prolegomenon': 'This book is a prolegomenon … not because of what is actually said in it, but because of what had been my original intention: to offer a synthetic view of the contemporary problem of "redemption" and "emancipation" or man's self-liberation, partly with "liberation theology" in mind' [35]. In the introductory 'situation in outline' [19-33] Schillebeeckx acknowledges the multi-layered operations to which this approach leads.

Reception and permanent significance. – Did the book attain its goal, then, and does it today? Initially the effect was immense, for it gave answers to precisely the questions that were being discussed by Christians inside and outside the Catholic Church. Certainly, amid all the revolutionary changes, faith in Jesus Christ remained uncontested to the extent that people sought the core and the criterion of Christian belief. Yet traditional doctrine, the christological language of the early councils and its interpretations in the catechisms were increasingly experienced as unintelligible, as the product of far distant times and as dictates of authority. This book offered an extremely nuanced treatment, which took the acknowledged problems seriously and offered possibilities for innovative reflection and formulations. The book also reached many sceptics, since it is written for readers to whom 'God', 'Son of God' or 'saviour of the world' are no longer self-evident concepts. These concepts had first to be re-disclosed to them on the basis of the figure of Jesus. In addition to the original Dutch version (1974) the book appeared in German (1975), Italian (1976), English (1979) and Spanish (1981). There followed a partial translation into Japanese. There are fourteen known dissertations on the author's Christology, nearly all of them written in the 1980s.

However, many theologians, students and believers have read the book only very selectively, for it is primarily addressed to professional theologians. Its treatment of problems is extremely complex and its language is always demanding. It switches, often and almost without noticing, between the technical language of exegetes and historians, philosophers and sociologists, historians of doctrine and even liturgists. That makes all the more precious the countless passages in which the deep, faithful and actually easily understandable spirituality of the author becomes transparent, as well as his

great skill in synthesis.

In regard to the extreme complexity one further feature is to be noted. In the general theological consciousness people have certainly taken on board the great intentions of the work: here is someone taking the Christ message of the gospels without dressing it up; he is telling the story of Jesus. However, the demanding distinctions and vast body of theological reflection were only taken on board in a very limited way. In this sense one can speak of a trite, stereotypical reception in the minds of many believers. Added to this is the – saddening – fact that many anxiously orthodox theologians dare not cite a book by this 'dangerous' because disturbing author. Even the demanding books about Jesus by Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI) are relativized quite considerably by this gap. On the other hand it must be clear: in this day and age the christological questions which this book discusses so comprehensively can no longer be repressed, nor simply replaced, let alone vanquished, by neo-conservative conceptions. To keep abreast of present-day christological problems one must come to terms with this ever young book.

Hermann Häring (transl. from the German: Fergus Kerr)
Professor emeritus, Radboud University Nijmegen, Netherlands

FOREWORD

Although I regard this book as a Christian interpretation of Jesus − a Christology, however unconventional it may be − it was not written to resolve the sometimes very subtle problems that interest the academic theologian. Not that these are unimportant. But the fact is that believers are raising questions about Christ which are not ones that normally preoccupy academics. I have tried to bridge the gap between academic theology and the concrete needs of ordinary Christians or, more modestly, to shed some light on the nexus of problems presaging that gap and giving rise to the questions that seem most urgent to ordinary Christians. Even so, this calls for a certain amount of academically disciplined work and theological reflection that takes very seriously the demands of both faith and critical thinking. [005]

The book is written in such a way that the contents should be accessible to any interested reader.[1] Some effort may well be needed to follow (in Part Three) the sometimes complicated development of the − initially Jewish − interpretation of Jesus by Christians (from his death up to and including the writing of the New Testament). However, those who fancy reading this or that chapter because it may be of special interest to them are missing the essential point; for the whole was composed to enable readers as it were to share in the process whereby full-fledged Christian belief − including their own − came into being. Picking and choosing among the chapters or reading them in a different order will rob the book of its inner dynamics.

This book is only part of a more extensive christological study. The second book examines Pauline and Johannine doctrine in particular, concentrating on the various Christologies of the New Testament itself. The first book, therefore, is a 'Jesus book', not altogether ignoring the Christ; whereas the second is a 'Christ book', with due reference to Jesus of Nazareth.

It is up to the reader to judge whether this approach is successful or not; and on that score reasoned criticism of any sort is most welcome.

Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P.

[1] Theological jargon has been avoided as much as possible; but it seemed impossible at times to do without it. Therefore definitions of certain technical terms are provided at the back of the book.

WHY THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN

I. THE STORY OF A CRIPPLED MAN

We have all seen him, have we not? Day after day, always at the same old pitch, more or less unnoticed by people hurrying by, who still, sometimes with an air of boredom or surprise, sometimes with a friendly nod, will toss him a coin as they go on their way. There he squats in his small corner, alone, the familiar village cripple. So it has ever been. 'And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at that gate of the temple which is called Beautiful to ask alms of those who entered the temple' (Acts 3:2). The day came when Peter, one of the Nazarene's following, noticed him sitting there. There was an exchange of words between them. The next thing people saw was their neighbourhood cripple fully restored and walking as well as anyone. They recognized him as the one who sat begging for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; 'and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him' (Acts 3:10). Then − so Luke tells us – Peter, having first addressed the people, said to the Jewish authorities who had afterwards chosen to concern themselves with the affair: '... be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well. .. *And there is salvation in no one else,* for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:10,12).[1] [017]

In that – among early Christian writings − not even very early text of Acts we nevertheless hear an echo of early Christianity. When Luke's book of Acts has been critically dissected we are still within our rights to detect in this passage at least some resonance of early Christian proclamation, which Peter − after the execution of Jesus of Nazareth, and then only after many misgivings − felt himself permitted, nay, obliged to avow and to address to his fellow Jews: that salvation from God is given to us Jews, and therewith – although this only became clear later on − to all people, simply and solely in Jesus the Nazarene; which is to say, in the language of the New Testament, the crucified-but-risen one. That Petrine profession of belief, which in the end and on the basis of their

[1] '*Must* be saved'; in New Testament usage this 'must' signifies: the living God has provided for this, it is his divine plan for men's salvation. Hence the rendering: 'according to God's plan of salvation'.

own experience 'the Twelve' unanimously affirmed − albeit, as Scripture itself
[018] emphasizes, not without the same kind of initial doubts − actually *made* history. The Christian churches of today and even outsiders, right up to and including contemporary Jesus people who still find an experience of salvation in this Jesus after the lapse of so much time (though not without the mediating function of the churches down the centuries), are still living witnesses among us to Jesus of Nazareth and what he initiated. Without the historical factor of the church and its mediating role we today (except for a few specialist historians) would know nothing of one Jesus of Nazareth. Apart from a number of privileged historians, nobody, as things stand today, wants to bear testimony to the quite justifiably rebellious slave Spartacus, or to that grim critic of the religious culture of his time, John the Baptist. This striking difference, if not absolutely conclusive, is historically of exceptional importance. It is an arresting fact and it makes one think: What goes on here? Why this difference in aftereffect between one historical figure and another?

What strikes me especially about the vague echo to be heard here of early Christian catechesis is not that an individual − Jesus of Nazareth − had been (in the firm opinion of his disciples) unjustly put to death. In those harsh times − typical, it might seem, of the whole of human history − one problematic execution among so many was in no way remarkable. Such an event − a 'mere incident' in the daily annals of the time, which despite Acts 26:26[2] took place in an obscure and remote corner of what was then the *oikoumene* or 'whole inhabited world' − would appear to have attracted little or no attention in those days. Such instances were legion. But what did give Peter – Simon and his fellows − pause for thought was the fact that of all people this one, Jesus of Nazareth, had been done to death by all that passed for, and indeed was, the governing authority. The impression Jesus had made and the notion which Simon and company had formed of him did not square at all with the ultimate fate meted out to him by the governing power: to be handed over by his co-religionists to the Roman occupier, who sent him to a criminal's death by crucifixion. This simply did not accord with the impression Jesus had made on many of them as Jews. That is really the gist of what has since come to be known in the Christian tradition as the 'christological problem'.

[019] II. THE SITUATION IN OUTLINE

1. However much conditioned by historically concrete situations, it is individuals' capacity actually to 'make history' that provides us with a hermeneutic key to their identity. Through the movement generated by Jesus we are confronted here and now with Jesus of Nazareth. The movement which

[2] 'For this was not done in a corner' (Acts 26:26).

he set afoot remains the medium for any approach to the historical Jesus event. For me, a believer as well as a thinking person, this fact gives pause for thought, as it does for anyone who reflects without prejudice on what has actually happened in his own intimate history.

This historical process triggered by Jesus will engage our minds all the more as it becomes clear that, within two or three years after Jesus' death by execution, what have since come to be known as christological confessions of faith had already crystallized, and especially as the historical fact emerges that only three years after his death a certain Pharisee, Saul by name, became a Christian convert during his travels in pursuit and persecution of Jesus' adherents − near Damascus, which implies that there was already a fellowship of Christians in Syria at that time.[3] History shows that, within the space of five years or less, the effective rudiments of a new world religion were ready to hand: a quite extraordinary phenomenon.

All the same, this development confronts us with an extremely complex process: a story of people who found salvation, explicitly qualified as 'from God', in Jesus of Nazareth, whom they came to describe − when faced in the context of their expectant hope with this concrete historical manifestation − as 'the Christ, son of God, our Lord'.

Ideas and expectations of salvation and human happiness are invariably projected from within concrete experience and the pondered fact of calamity, pain, misery and alienation − from within negative experiences accumulated through centuries of affliction, with here and there the fleeting promise of a happier lot, fragmentary experiences of wellbeing in a story, stretching from generation to generation, of hopes unfulfilled, of guilt and evil: the 'Job's problem' of human history. Hence there eventually emerges an anthropological projection, a vision of what is held to be the true, good and happy mode of human life. This is why the human craving for happiness and wellbeing, always being submitted to critical judgement yet again and again surviving every critique, inevitably acquires − in diverse forms − the pregnant [020] nuance of 'release from' or 'deliverance out of' and, at the same time, of entering into a 'completely new world'. Thus the negative experiences of mankind contrast with and help to delineate a people's positive notions and expectations of salvation, wellbeing. From its conceptions of salvation one can, so to speak, glean the story of a people's sufferings, even when it is no longer possible to trace in other sources the precise course of those sufferings.

The striking thing about this process of ominous and also partly benign experiences is that the distinctive ideas a people have about 'salvation' are attempts to probe and interpret, not only the depth and unbounded extent of

[3] M. Hengel, 'Christologie und neutestamentliche Chronologic, in *Neues Testament und Geschichte* (O. Cullmann on his 70th birthday) (Zürich-Tübingen 1972), 45-67.

hardship, suffering, evil and death, endured and enduring, but also their causes, origin and effects. Where salvation is hoped for, it is in the express form of this expectation that evil and suffering are unmasked: in them both are put on exhibition. In the ancient world − but also in the spontaneous experience of every people − each such experience of adversity is invariably assigned a religious dimension because of the human, theoretically bottomless and practically irremovable depths of suffering involved. It is felt instinctively that, whether in theory or in practice, the ill is not to be contained within a merely human frame of reference. And so when people looked for salvation their hope was given a religious name. Reaching above and beyond themselves, they learned to expect that this good must come 'from God'. They looked for mercy and compassion at the very heart of reality, despite every contrary experience.

From a specifically historical viewpoint, for both Jew and gentile, Jesus' time was full to bursting with an assortment of hopes regarding some good thing to come, in the form of a welter of ideas culled from long centuries of fleeting promise and, more especially, of many unfulfilled expectations. The period of Jewish apocalypticism above all, from the Maccabean struggle (167 BC) and the Jewish War (AD 66-70) to Bar Kochba (AD 135), was a 'story of blood and tears',[4] from which the yearning grew: 'Enough is enough: the world must be changed − positively and radically changed!' In images difficult for us to fathom today these beatific hopes were grandly elaborated upon in apocalyptic visions. Via many and various detours of tradition and through 'international' contact with different trends and schools of thought in those days, divergent expectations of what was to come were collated. A contamination emerged of various kinds of expectations of good, quite separate in origin: a process historically so complex that it has become very hard for us to disentangle the
[021] several strands of tradition in any detail.

Within this general mood of expectancy, containing in Jesus' time the still highly active process of fusing together so many diverse ways of envisaging 'salvation', a living confrontation with Jesus of Nazareth convinced some that 'in no one else is redemption given'. Those first Christians articulated what they experienced as salvation-in-Jesus, coming from God, in entrenched images and concepts of varied origin, with which they themselves strongly concurred. These expectations they now saw fulfilled: in Jesus of Nazareth. For they felt that they were new people. In the New Testament they testified − at any rate after a few generations of Christian living and reflection upon it − to recognizing salvation-in-Jesus, at the same time extending to it their erstwhile ideas and hopes of salvation-to-come. In the gospels, therefore, it is impossible

[4] M. Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus* (Tübingen 1973[2]), 354.

to differentiate between their own expectation as such and their joyful acknowledgment of its being fulfilled in Jesus: the two strands are more or less inextricably intertwined. The question about the true nature of man and the discovery of its answer in the historical person of Jesus are correlative, at least in the sense that it is not the prior expectations that determine who Jesus is, but the other way round: starting from the peculiar and quite specific historical existence of Jesus, the existing expectations are partly assimilated, of course, yet at the same time transformed, reappraised or corrected. This indicates both continuity and discontinuity between people's questions about salvation and the historically concrete answer that is Jesus.

For us, therefore, a first reading of the New Testament presents some major difficulties. We do not live in a religio-cultural tradition that expects a messiah or a mysterious, celestial son of man; nor do we live in expectation of an imminent end of the world. The gospels confront us not just with Jesus of Nazareth but with a section of ancient religious culture. Jesus is indeed hidden beneath religious ideas belonging to that time, ideas which, if it comes to that, were not altogether alien to him – in fact, the opposite. Moreover, the original experience of salvation in Jesus is amplified in the gospels with doctrinal and practical problems of the later Christian congregations which, though initially within the Jewish fraternity (alongside many others), had gradually become detached from Judaism and were keeping up a polemic against the synagogues run by the Pharisees, while the Jews in their turn formally dissociated themselves from the Christian phenomenon in their midst, denounced it and [022]
placed an interdict upon it as being no longer authentically Jewish, and therefore 'outside the synagogue'[5] In the gospels Jesus of Nazareth has, so to speak, vanished into the background of the polemic between 'Israel' and 'the church', a problem which Jesus had never encountered in that form and perhaps had never intended. The fact is that the 'phenomenon of Jesus' shattered the hopes of salvation held in common by Jews and those Jews later known as Christians; and because of Jesus' unconventional conduct such hopes acquired a discontinuous, no longer traditional meaning. What is more, Aramaic-speaking Jewish Christians did not interpret Jesus in the same way as the Hellenistic Jews of the Diaspora with their Greek universal humanity and sense of *philanthrôpia,* of general philanthropy and openness towards gentiles. And non-Jewish Greeks, Syrians, Romans and so forth, who had had absolutely no part in Israel's hopes of salvation, naturally enough proceeded to express the salvation they had found in Jesus in quite different categories. Yet

[5] See the interpolation in the twelfth petition of the Jewish prayer of 'Eighteen Supplications': 'May the Nazarenes and heretics perish instantly. May they be expunged from the book of life and not be recorded among the righteous' (see K.G. Kuhn, *Achtzehngebet und Vaterunser und der Reim* [WUNT, 1] (Tübingen 1950), 18-21).

despite fundamental differences between the earliest local groups of Aramaic-speaking Jewish Christians, Greek-speaking congregations of Christianized Jews and Christian gentiles, they all had at least this in common: whatever the differences between them might be, they shared the culture − indeed, the Hellenistic culture − of the ancient world, especially in Galilee (but even in Judea: in important circles in Jerusalem, with its large number of Greek synagogues) which, as a practically bilingual country, encircled by the Greek cities of the Decapolis, was then held by Judea in the south to be a more or less pagan land out of which no good could come.

Whether we use its Jewish or its Hellenistic models of expectation, that antique culture is quite foreign to us. Our hopes of good-to-come have a different complexion and focus. Our conceptions of that good are different too. Quite possibly − if one may venture an a priori opinion − they should be subjected to the critique the ancient models provide; but perhaps the latter should be submitted in their turn to a modern critique. All ways of envisaging 'salvation' and all hopes regarding man's 'true mode of existence' are in any case culturally conditioned. For Christians Jesus, whom they encounter experientially as the ultimate source of salvation, is, of course, the final criterion − not the religio-cultural ideas on the subject entertained by Aramaic- or Greek-speaking Jews and Christianized Greeks. Still, the salvation those early Christians found in Jesus was couched in terms of such expectations as were current at that time, however much transformed, reappraised and corrected by
[023] the force of Jesus' own authority and historical impact. So the sheer strangeness, for us, of New Testament ideas about salvation-to-come can hardly be denied. We do not look for a celestial son of man to appear at any moment as our judge and set up a messianic commonwealth − concerning which we might well enquire anxiously, as people did then, whether Christians already dead will nevertheless have part in it (1 Thess. 4:13-17). We may be rather hasty in our judgement here. One can, after all, wait quite a time for a train that fails to come. But anyone in this day and age who has waited on the platform for a scheduled train, not just for hours but for days and weeks – in our case for centuries – and the train simply fails to materialize, can no longer psychologically maintain or substantiate this 'train expectancy'. Anyone will conclude soon enough that trains have ceased to run on this particular line. Hence the picture of Christ emerging from the New Testament is in the first instance actually weird − not just in the sense of the strange, scandalizing quality inherent in God's peculiar and divine dealings with humanity that surpass human wisdom; but strange or 'weird' in a purely human, religio-cultural sense. The objection that Jesus Christ is in fact the one who subjects our all too human conceptions to critical judgement is true enough; but it is not pertinent. The ancient ideas about salvation, by reason of which the New

Testament figure of Jesus is on the one hand rendered historically unrecognizable and, on the other, is revealed to the eye of faith in his true identity as the bringer of salvation, do not in themselves subject us to any critique, except insofar as, in their own way, they posit the criterion of Jesus as final source of salvation. Anyone who fails to see this distinction is proposing not Jesus Christ but a particular bit of religious culture as the norm of Christian faith − and that ceases to be faith in Jesus of Nazareth, whereas the basic affirmation of the Christian creed is our confession concerning *Jesus,* that is, 'Jesus of Nazareth': that he is 'the Christ, the only begotten Son, our Lord'. The overriding normative factor here is *'credo in Jesum'*: I believe in the manifestation of this concrete person, Jesus, who appeared in our history with the historical name 'Jesus of Nazareth'. In him we find final salvation, wellbeing. This is the fundamental creed of early Christianity.

Our pattern of expectation regarding salvation-for-mankind in no way resembles the ancient varieties, centred as they were on a messiah-son of David or a messiah-son of man; and just as foreign to us is the combination of those two originally independent traditions.

That in itself is a key reason why I set about writing this book: what does [024] salvation in Jesus, coming to us from God, mean to us now? After all, 'wellbeing' is a concept which linguistically, and thus in the context of human experience of reality with its social implications, is brought to life and made intelligible only through contrasting negative experiences, conjoined with at least sporadic experiences of what 'makes sense' − whence there arises a hopeful anticipation of 'total sense' or 'haleness', being whole. Who would ever call pure experience, positive experience, 'wellbeing' except against a contrasting background of very negative experiences already undergone? All along our experience has been that even out of our catastrophic Western history a utopia is growing among us. This concrete experience has been reflected in all sorts of emancipatory movements − movements intended to deliver people from their social alienation, while various scientific techniques (psychotherapeutic release; Gestalt therapy; androgogy; social work; counselling, etc.) were meant to free them from the loss of personal identity. In our day the existence of a number of factors in our lives, apart from Jesus Christ, which, as a matter of historical truth, do induce wellbeing and do heal people or make them whole, has forced itself on our awareness more than ever before. This puts the statement − till recently bandied about in some Christian circles without the slightest reservation − that 'all true salvation comes from Jesus Christ alone', in a problematic, thoroughly opaque, at the very least astounding context of implausibility.

Any critical assessment of our present-day culture reveals that this modern anticipation of future wellbeing, which especially since the nineteenth century

has staked all its hope on science and technology alone, eventually runs amok and leads to human alienation, simply because its conception of man is too restricted. This narrowed understanding, which has made science and technology, if not the exclusive, at any rate the representative values of Western culture, has actually wrought another hardship, above all in a society that gives virtual priority to economic values and to nothing else. It prompts critical appraisal of the whole modern concept of what constitutes wellbeing. Thus the view that all this is alien to the New Testament is grounded not just in a debt owed to that Testament itself but also, and just as essentially, in defective understanding of ourselves and present-day reality. That too calls for critique. There are sources of wellbeing and healing in human life that go beyond science and technology. This is the new insight achieved by science. In
[025] principle, and however paradoxically, it serves to reinstate a variety of gratuitous experiences − including religious ones − as factors in human wellbeing.

We must not forget, of course, that this anti-technological insight − in the sense that it relativizes technocracy − is itself partly the result of scientific analysis. It is a scientific insight; and as such it does not in itself validate a different, non-scientific approach to things. What is more, the circles in which this scientific perception of the extra-scientific factors in 'wellbeing' has emerged are precisely those which for the most part insist that such fulfilment is 'self-actualizing', in the sense that, while even if the religious factor − with its concomitant awareness of gratuitousness and of being centred on other people − is admittedly an essential element of human wellbeing, the source and strength of that wellbeing are situated entirely in the person without any reference to absolute transcendence. There is no place for theology in this view of things. In this perspective, therefore, theology should disappear and would do better to devote all its energies to the human sciences.

Hence it would seem that (setting aside this last ideological assertion) the religious concept of 'salvation', compared to that of the New Testament, has really been whittled down in our day: it has had to yield a lot of territory to other, manifestly effective 'salvific' agencies. This situation makes the question of what human wellbeing really consists in the focal point of all our problems today. For we realise that, while the possibility of overcoming various forms of human alienation through science and technology is perfectly real, this applies only to alienation arising from physical, psychosomatic, psychic and social types of conditioning − from the absence of liberating or the presence of inhibiting factors likely to condition human freedom, which expert and active intervention can to a large extent handle successfully. That begs the question whether there is not a more profound alienation, linked with human finitude and entanglement with nature (which, despite every attempt to assimilate and

humanize it, remains fundamentally alien and menacing) − whether, indeed, there is not some alienation wrought by guilt and sin. The human person's self-redemption would seem to be limited after all. And that raises a further problem: is it not precisely this range of deeper issues that Jesus of Nazareth specifically articulates when he speaks of a deliverance which really does liberate a person to perfect 'freedom', to an autonomy realized only in joyful bondage to a transcendent and, for that very reason, liberating, living God (Gal. 5:1).

That we must look to Jesus Christ alone for every facet of salvation, as a representative Christian tradition has often asserted, is contradicted anyway by a great many facts of modern experience. This, too, has confused a lot of Christians, who have been obliged to revise their earlier view of the historical faith on many points. That experience is another reason for writing this book and has helped to determine its form. [026]

2. There is more to it than that. In a period when Western society is no longer considered to be the world but just a small, often very pretentious constituent of a larger whole − a larger world of mankind which, furthermore, groans under the painful impact of Western aspirations and practices − the Christian claim that 'in no one else is there redemption' meets with loud protest. 'Christian imperialism' is a constant accusing cry − not least on the lips of Westerners themselves; for often enough they think they can only rediscover their identity by repudiating their own past. To some the Christian claim is suspect in that it discriminates, as they think, against non-Christian religions and cultures, or even smacks of Western colonialist one-upmanship and selfish favouritism, subjectively compensated for by an expansionist sort of missioneering on a world scale. Even this missionary consciousness has thrived on the once self-evident profession of Christ as the 'redeemer of the world'. Any current reflection on this from a Christian standpoint, therefore, must include some critical evaluation of the universality of Jesus if it is not to stand accused of ideology from the outset. On the other hand it must not dodge the question of truth or retreat into accommodation of the modern insistence on pluralism, insofar as this is bound to imply not venturing to go on being oneself and not daring to deviate from the rest.

But suppose that this happens to be the logical outcome of the gospel...?

3. There is something else that our period in particular demonstrates regarding 'Jesus of Nazareth', even if it is not, historically speaking, altogether novel: it is not just church people who take a serious interest in Jesus of Nazareth.

The gospels tell us what Jesus came to mean to a group of people known eventually as the *ekklesia* of Christ.[6] The early writings of this community,

[6] Rom. 16:16, or: '*ekklesia* of God' (1 Cor:1:2; 10:32; 16:22; 15:9, etc.).

collated in the New Testament to be read, meditated upon and studied as their
[027] book, are still today, for all conscious members of this 'Christ movement', a source of critical reflection on their life and conduct as Christians.

At the same time Jesus' concretization in literature, namely in that same New Testament, has given him form and substance. He is, as it were, objectivized in it. This puts him right in the limelight in a special way. Thanks to the transmitted documents Jesus is part of world literature and has become accessible to all. He has become 'common property'; and the New Testament is not just the exclusive book of Christendom. This piece of literature is public property and can be studied from a historical standpoint. The resultant knowledge, verifiable by outsiders, yields a view of Jesus that can also be a touchstone for the pictures that believers have formed of him down the centuries. Christians cannot spurn such a generally accessible starting-point for knowledge of Jesus as unworthy of their notice. Believers' ideas about Christ can be educated; they must be tested and, if necessary, revised in the light of it. Thus the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is universally accessible turns out to be of service to Christians' faith, not in an apologetic sense but as a critical confrontation.

Interpretation of Jesus outside the church varies greatly. The Marxist philosopher Roger Garaudy wrote: *'Rendez-le nous',* give Jesus of Nazareth back to us (non-churchgoers, even atheists); you church people can't keep *him* for yourself. Gandhi said: 'Without needing to be a Christian I can still testify to what this Jesus means in my life.' A lot of humanists, too, find guidance and inspiration in Jesus of Nazareth (as well as in other sources). In our day it is especially young people − in the Jesus movement, for instance − who are outside any church and yet find their wellbeing, inspiration and orientation in Jesus. Jesus is manifestly not the monopoly of the Christian churches. One might say that in many circles he is being 'de-confessionalized'. In India people are asking: what does Jesus mean to me as a Hindu? And elsewhere: what does he mean to me as a Muslim? Behind the Iron Curtain, too, young people are attracted to 'Jesus of Nazareth'.

Someone who attempts to size up this phenomenon straightaway on the basis of a church interpretation of Jesus runs the risk of remaining blind to precisely those elements of Jesus which many find so meaningful and inspiring, while church people have ignored them for centuries or have just not seen them. Non-church interpretations of Jesus serve to remind us that Jesus does indeed have something to say which is *relevant at a human level*, in that he
[028] speaks also to non-Christians. This raises the question of the close connection between the gospel, the religious aspect and the human being. The church's interpretation of Jesus − in him God's universal mercy has made a personal appearance among us − is perhaps given a highly modern setting. So many

people, after all, have ceased to make head or tail of God or of the Christian churches. Church people are themselves guilty in this respect. Yet the very same individuals find their wellbeing and inspiration in the man Jesus. Via a detour (if such it is), that is to say Jesus, are they, by attaching themselves to him, leaving open the question of God and the ecclesiological problem − for the time being or perhaps permanently?[7] Through a divine pedagogy of charitableness (so at least the more flexible believer will interpret the situation) the 'absence of God' is evidently 'compensated for' by the inspiration which Jesus affords to many non-church people. The image which people cannot resist forming of God, even if they acknowledge no such reality, is obviously replaced for many of them by the 'symbol' and the 'myth' of Jesus of Nazareth. For the symbolic and mythical character of 'Jesus' in all interpretations of him − especially outside the churches, and whether 'believing' or otherwise − seems to me the fundamental and most striking thing. To them Jesus becomes an 'a-temporal' model of true humanity. This non-church view of Jesus is unmistakably operative, actually at work in history. Therein lies an opportunity, but also a possible line of retreat: 'Jesus' becomes the answer, that is, the stopgap, for all our unsolved problems. Jesus people frequently give this impression, but I get it just as strongly sometimes from orthodox church people. Augustine said it long ago: *'Christus solutio omnium difficultatum',* Jesus is the answer to every problem. An apt slogan, but a dangerous one! The fact is that for many outside the churches 'Jesus of Nazareth' is made to symbolize transcendence of any sort.

At any rate this encounter with Jesus outside the churches clearly demonstrates that people as a whole want to keep open the question of authentic transcendence and at least not dismiss 'the sacred' with a categorical 'no'. It can't be denied that this may be a flight from the serious problems with which the reality of God as well as the historico-social reality of the church confronts us all. Whether (to adopt modern, neo-dogmatic jargon) it is a flight per se[8] is open to question. Mankind cannot abandon 'God', for the (to faith) simple reason that God will not abandon man and continues to 'visit' us by routes which we cannot map in advance. That in a secularized period, of all things, when God is disappearing, the world should be 'sold' on Jesus of [029] Nazareth, whether in a political context or in the dimension of *homo ludens,* whose play is aimlessly gratuitous − the tomfoolery of 'festivals' − may (no question here of *fatum,* destiny or the law of things, only of a vital chance of freedom, in whatever direction) offer an accepted or rejected prospect of grace and mercy on the part of God, who in Jesus is bent on our good, whether we

[7] See H. Bourgeois, 'Visages de Jésus et manifestation de Dieu', in *LVie*, n. 112 (1973) (71-84), 82.
[8] H. van Zoelen, 'Jezus van Nazareth: persoonsverheerlijking als 'symptoom', in *Dwang, dwaling en bedrog* (Baarn 1971), 52-67.

stray or not. No automatic rules apply here. Opportunities of 'saving health' in this contemporary situation are not to be disavowed by believers in God − I would say: not in spite of but actually because of all the criticism of religion and being sick of the churches and their God.

It is precisely this interpretation of Jesus outside the churches that constitutes a challenge for the Christian theologian. What do the 'churches of Christ' have to say to outsiders? What will they have to say after first listening to what non-church people have to tell them about Jesus of Nazareth? This was another reason for writing this book.

4. Inside the churches, too, the traditional and, despite a number of scholastic variants, nonetheless uniform Christology has fallen apart in our time. There is a nexus of christological problems, though these are not separable from what we have been discussing. Theologically speaking, the problem boils down to this: can we ascribe dogmatic significance to the earthly life of Jesus, to his message and ministry, his 'words and acts', or not? In everyday language this means: is 'Christian salvation' vested in the Jesus who lived here on earth, or solely in the crucified-and-risen one? The problem is often explicitly formulated as a dilemma.[9] Parallel with this dilemma, one finds among church-affiliated Christians a number of other mutually contrasting positions: (a) on the one hand a theology of Jesus of Nazareth, experienced as 'saving reality' and interpreted as an orientation and inspiration for Christian living in our time; on the other, a Christology that starts from the Easter message *(kerygma)* and celebrates Christ, presenting him as the Christ present in the ritual worship of the church; (b) on the one hand a this-worldly, 'low church' Christianity, which is directly oriented to the message and conduct of Jesus of Nazareth and is often on the periphery of the churches or outside them altogether; on the other, a 'high church' Christianity, which draws its life from the *kerygma* of the crucified-and-risen 'head of the church', present and
[030] operative within it today, and which tends to recoil from social and political engagement 'in Christ's name'; (c) on the one hand a total emphasis on the man Jesus as inspiration and orientation for working, not uncritically but committedly, to achieve a better world here on earth, without expressly introducing any vista of eternal life or an eschatological encounter with Christ, sometimes even explicitly rejecting it; on the other hand, a total emphasis on the God 'Jesus Christ', the Lord exalted to the Father's side, who is alive and active among us even now, is celebrated in liturgy and pours out upon us the Spirit as pledge of an eternal life to come, more or less perpendicular to our historical existence in this world, whose form passes away.

[9] We have a typical example of this dilemma in the contrast between two articles, one by G. Fohrer, 'Das Alte Testament und das Thema "Christologie" ', in EvTh 30 (1970), 281-298, the other by G. Klein,' "Reich Gottes" als biblischer Zentralbegriff', ibid, 642-670.

Two types of Christianity, based on two types of Christology. In the one case an explicit allergy to the word 'Christ' (in many recent eucharistic canons the term is on the way out), in the other an obvious, sometimes aggressive and un-Christian aversion to the word 'Jesus' (of Nazareth), as though our belief were not in a concrete person but in a gnostic mystery cult. There is no point in trying to conceal the existence of these two types. They are very much with us and are certainly acted upon, and they do not wholly correspond to the contrast between 'conservative' and 'progressive'. One can set them over against each other: on the one hand 'Jesus followers', who tend to ignore the fundamental breaking points in Jesus' life and his totally patient, submissive relationship with his Father, and on the other hand 'disciples of the Christ', who are in danger of turning him into a myth, in no way essentially connected with Jesus of Nazareth. This situation obviously has important consequences for our understanding of Scripture, theology and history, and, above all, concretely in the pastoral sphere. Contrary positions in Christology, whether explicitly stated or not, often underlie the current polarization among Christians.

But before engaging in discussion, each would do well to acknowledge the Christian status of the other. One is a Christian if one is persuaded that final salvation-from-God is disclosed in the person of Jesus and that this basic conviction gives rise to a community or fellowship of grace − even though those who accept this may still adopt different positions on what the fullness of Jesus Christ entails, that is, on how to 'fill in' the credal formula: I believe in Jesus (of Nazareth) the Christ, the only begotten Son, our Lord; I believe in Jesus as that definitive saving reality which gives ultimate meaning and purpose to my life. If one can start from the assumption that the other party accepts this, then the situation is at any rate one of dialogue among Christians [031] and, one would hope, of a Christian dialogue.

5. The theologian also has to face the (in the 'modern view' admittedly unappealing) question of truth. Having due regard to the intention of faith as well as the critical and rational posture which our status as human beings demands, the theologian realizes that − however intense concrete religious experiences may be, as well as the historical identifications of 'salvation' and human liberation − such experiences remain problematic. They can never signify for others an invitation that will compel and constrain them, even in freedom, unless it has been reasonably demonstrated that in and through such experiences and identifications of 'salvation', belonging to a particular human community, we really are in contact with the reality to which human beings in the course of history have ascribed the name of God, the creator of all that is

and is to be.[10] Much as I appreciate the significance, the unique importance, of existential experience and religious enthusiasm, I am nonetheless certain that a God who is encountered simply as '*my* God' and is avowed as such is a non-god, unless it can be reasonably − which is not at all to say mathematically or in a rationally conclusive way − shown that in this person, Jesus of Nazareth, we are actually talking about the one who liberates and yet at the same time − however incomprehensibly − is the final arbiter of meaning, the 'creator of heaven and earth'. Here if anywhere in the sphere of religion pious self-deception is a very real possibility. So religious faith in Jesus of Nazareth, a person appearing in human history, is problematic for me if the personal relationship between this historically localizable individual and the 'creator of heaven and earth', the universal factor cementing all that lives and moves − the living God − is not dear to us. I can appreciate enthusiasm for 'Jesus of Nazareth' as an inspiring human being − at the human level that in itself is quite something! But it entails no binding invitation, can bear no stamp of universal humanity, unless it can be shown that 'the creator', the (monotheistic) God of Jews, Muslims, Christians and so many others, is personally implicated in this Jesus event.

Hence what in this book might appear to be apologetic and critical is actually prompted by a concern for truth, wherever that may be found to reside − inside or outside the churches. As my study of christological belief in Jesus of Nazareth proceeded, the realization (current even in early Christianity) that such belief (like myth) contains its own justification and
[032] certitude has grown on me more and more: the 'why' of my belief in Jesus as the 'final saving good' is to be justified only in faith (in that sense faith is a storm-free zone, exempt from criticism); but the moment I speak of my faith (and I do so as soon as I have it) I have already left that storm-free zone and become vulnerable to the exigencies of critical rationality (in that sense there is no storm-free zone). That is why this book was written: in deference to the unique and irreducibly original character of believing, of exercising faith, and out of respect for the demands of critical rationality. Each can help protect the other from becoming totalitarian and detrimental to freedom.

6. Lastly there is the painful and unresolved question of the relationship between Christians and Jews. Among others, Christians share the blame for Western anti-Semitism that made possible the Nazi *Endlösung*. As theologians whose business it is to reflect on the Jewish man, Jesus of Nazareth, we cannot behave as if we knew nothing of the historical relations between Jews and Christians, cannot act as if what a few Jews did to Jesus has not been eclipsed

[10] See also W. Pannenberg, *Das Glaubensbekenntnis ausgelegt und verantwortet vor den Fragen der Gegenwart* (Hamburg 1972), 44.

long ago by what we have all done to the Jews in the course of history. Recent Jewish literature about Jesus[11] shows that after centuries of estrangement from him Jews have become aware, through their own 'holocaust' (burnt offering) at Auschwitz and elsewhere, of their solidarity with the 'holocaust' of Jesus of Nazareth. Judaism has no pantheon, but it does have a memorably noble martyrology. Many Jews now recognize that this is where Jesus belongs. As Martin Buber puts it: 'From my youth on, I have felt that Jesus was my elder brother. That Christianity has regarded and still does regard him as God and redeemer has always appeared to me a matter of the utmost seriousness which for his sake and for mine I must try to comprehend.'[12]

Theologians cannot do all that much to repair these hurtful and dramatically distorted relationships; yet they do have their own contribution to make. There is no denying that one of the hermeneutic keys to an understanding of the New Testament is the tussle between 'Israel' and the 'church';[13] but historians and theologians can make a good case that to a large extent Christianity just took over an internal Jewish critique of Israel, and that the early Christian interpretation of Jesus is really a Jewish one. The basic trends in Christianity were touched off by Jews and were firmly established long before non-Jewish, gentile-Christian influences had started to operate. So anti-Jewish feeling is quite foreign to the earliest trends in Christianity; which is why I shall keep on emphasizing it, should certain early Christian interpretations be nothing more than a Christian resumption of pre-Christian, Jewish patterns of thought and action. [033]

III. A CHALLENGE

With all these problems in mind – and still accumulating in the course of study − I have written this book as a piece of reflective thinking about Jesus of Nazareth, whom the churches of Christ, to which I belong, confess as final salvation: in Jewish terms, the Christ, Son of God and son of man; in Hellenistic terms, the Son of God in a fully ontological sense.

The intention is not apologetic, although I have no qualms about honest

[11] See e.g. Schalom Asch, *Der Nazarener* (Amsterdam 1950); M. Brod, *De Meister* (Gütersloh 1951); M. Buber, *Zwei Glaubensweisen* (Zürich 1950) and *Der Jude und sein Judentum* (Cologne 1963); Joel Carmichael, *Leben und Tod des Jesus von Nazareth* (Munich 1966); Schalom ben Chorin, *Bruder Jesus* (Munich 1967); Haim Cohen, *Trial and death of Jesus* (Tel Aviv 1968); W.P. Eckert, *Judenhasz, Schuld der Christen?* (Essen 1966); David Flusser, *Jesus* (Hamburg-Reinbeck 1968); J. Isaac, *Jésus et Israel* (Paris 1970); Ascher Finkel, *The teacher of Nazareth* (Leyden 1964); Aharon Kabak, *The narrow path* (Jerusalem 1968); J. Klausner, *Jesus von Nazareth* (Jerusalem 1952); Pinehas E. Lapide, *Jesus in Israel* (Gladbeck 1970); S. Schwartz, *La réhabilitation juive de Jésus* (Martizay 1969); see also Morris Goldstein, *Jesus in the Jewish tradition* (New York 1950), and F. Andermann, *Das grosze Gesicht* (Munich 1971).

[12] M. Buber, *Zwei Glaubensweisen,* foreword.

[13] Kl. Berger, *Die Gesetzesauslegung Jesu* (thesis of the book).

apologetics. That is to say, there is no attempt to legitimize the church's dogma or to represent it as the only meaningful and possible interpretation of Jesus consonant with reason. I establish that there are other interpretations that dismiss Jesus, others again which inspire and orient people to good purpose without any christological confession. Close attention is paid to these interpretations, even though not always spelled out in so many words. Such readiness to listen has been part and parcel of the enquiry.

As a believer I want to look critically into the intelligibility for man of christological belief in Jesus, especially in its origin. Face to face with the many real problems, my concern is indeed to hold a *fides quaerens intellectum* and an *intellectus quaerens fidem* together: that is, with the same regard for faith and for human reason I want to look for what a christological belief in Jesus of Nazareth can intelligibly signify to people today.

I say 'intelligibly', in no sense denying thereby that salvation-in-Jesus which derives from God is a mystery. What the word is meant to convey is a critical posture on the believing theologian's part, which refuses to identify the mystery of God with 'mysteries' − in the sense of 'things incomprehensible' − fabricated by human beings themselves: things that have nothing to do with the mystery of God's saving acts in history but are nevertheless often touted by some of our brothers as a 'Christian mystery', and thus unassailable orthodoxy, and who in this way bring the faith into ridicule.

That the man Jesus, in the sense of 'a human person', is for me the starting point of all my reflection I would call a sort of palisade that needs no further proof or justification. It is a truism. There are no ghosts or gods in disguise
[034] wandering around human history; only people. What is peculiar, unique about this person, Jesus − and that may slip from our grasp into depths unfathomable − is what I seek to discover; for it is a fact that this Jesus of Nazareth succeeded in touching off a religious movement that became a world religion asserting that Jesus is the revelation, in personal form, of God. Thus the question of his ultimate identity governs the whole of this enquiry. My purpose is to look for possible evidence in the picture of Jesus reconstructed by historical criticism, pointers that could direct human inquiry regarding our 'wellbeing' to the Christian tender of a reply that refers to a particular saving action of God in this Jesus; and I do so in the same sort of reaction, characteristic of the New Testament, against pre-canonical *theios anèr* Christologies, against Christology centred on a mundane god, masquerading in human form (after the Greek model), that prompted Paul and Mark, more especially, to inveigh so fiercely against it, because such views misrepresent the authentic import of the true Son of God.

Faith and historical criticism go hand in hand, therefore, on almost every page of this book. It is bound to be so, as we claim to discover salvation in

Jesus, a historical human being, manifested in a quite specific period of history. For then history and faith each has its own proper competence and angle of approach, while both nevertheless concern one and the same reality: Jesus of Nazareth, a historical phenomenon.

In faith, yet identifying myself with the doubts concerning the 'Christ of the church' − which I have heard so sharply expressed all around me in the Netherlands and everywhere else, sometimes aggressively, sometimes regretfully, partly because people are existentially unable to believe as they once did − I have set out to search for 'meta-dogmatic' clues. In the process I have moved through and beyond the church's dogma, although aware that this very dogma drove me to undertake the search, and I have pursued the clues without knowing in advance where they would take me, without even knowing whether this line of attack would not in the end be bound to fail, as some of my students contended. Even failures − especially failures, perhaps − make one wiser. There was always that possibility. As the work progressed I could not rid myself of the growing conviction that however exact a historical reconstruction of the so-called 'authentic' Jesus of Nazareth one tries to make, any historically substantiated result can only yield a Jesus image, never the real Jesus of Nazareth. What happens when the historical method is systematically applied to assess Jesus is, after all, a qualitative change imposed upon the ordinary, spontaneous apprehension or recollection of a person from the past. [035] And however well supported historically this scientifically created image may be, Jesus' first disciples were never confronted with such a likeness of him − even though it may be wholly relevant to the then living Jesus whom the churches now acknowledge as the Christ. The question of the vital continuity between the faith of the early church and 'Jesus of Nazareth' is quite different from that of the continuity between a scientifically based, historical Jesus figure and the aforesaid faith of the early church; different, but in no way extraneous or alien to it.

In a period given to hermeneutics, it goes without saying that this study neither has been nor possibly could be carried out by skipping over what twenty centuries of Christian history have told us about the churches' credal profession and actual conduct. Of course, in writing this book I took into account my earlier studies (lectures) on patristic, Carolingian, medieval and post-Tridentine Christologies, although they are not directly discussed. I confine myself to a consideration of the 'course taken by the dogma' from the start of early Christianity up to the formation of the gospels and the books of the New Testament, a period that brings us closest to Jesus but is still very reticent about the matter of identifying Jesus of Nazareth, in whom his followers, after his death, found final and definitive salvation. Initially his death either presented no problem or, where salvation is concerned, was

considered to be 'neutral'. The effect of this incubatory prehistory of the canonical 'New Testament' can be both to liberate and at the same time to provide a new focus and perspective for what many feel to be the stultified traditional Christology of our systematized Western theology. Hence the subtitle 'An experiment in Christology' is still too pretentious and premature. This book is a prolegomenon. I call it a prolegomenon not because of what it actually says, but because of what had been my original intention: to offer a summary view of the contemporary problem of 'redemption' and 'emancipation' or human self-liberation, partly with 'liberation theology' in mind.

Besides sustained reflection, the book is meant to provide constant information, if only because not every Christian can afford the luxury enjoyed by those who have been 'freed' by the community to busy themselves with these vital matters, and furthermore, because I must persist in putting on record that, for lack of well grounded information, a lot of people fall into an 'overbearing' style of Christian belief, overbearing and even un-Christian in its
[036] absolute claims, so alien to Jesus and his gospel. Much passes for 'Christian' that for anyone conversant with the New Testament in a spirit of study and prayer turns out to be essentially un-Christian. So I regard this book as an obligation owed to the community, first and foremost the Christian community, but also to all who are interested in mankind's lot and destiny.

IV. NOTE ON EXEGESIS AND THEOLOGY

In the course of more than three years' preliminary exegetical work on this book I have repeatedly been baffled, sometimes almost to the point of distraction, by a weighty problem. The fundamental stimulus behind this whole project seemed at times to lead to an impossible enterprise: there is almost no biblical pericope on which exegetes do not disagree among themselves − even though one has to admit that over the last ten years there has been growing consensus on basic exegetical problems among biblical scholars, both Catholic and Protestant. If the New Testament incorporates the first, constitutive impulse of the movement centred on Jesus in a potent testimony of faith, consciously guided and governed by what had been achieved through God's saving activity in Jesus of Nazareth, then theological reflection of any sort inevitably hinges on understanding this New Testament. Here, in human language, in words and images deriving from the social, cultural and religious idiom of the time, Christians expressed their belief in the decisive, God-given salvation-in-Jesus which they had experienced. In such circumstances, to dispense with a scientific approach to the Bible using all the methods of modern literary criticism would simply be to flout what is usually

referred to as the 'Word of God' − which in any case only reaches us through the words of religious people. If a believing community (which quite properly uses the sacred book for other purposes too, for instance in liturgical worship), wants to recover precisely what those affirmations of human faith signified at that time, it cannot do without literary criticism in its approach to the New Testament (in the context of Old Testament, inter-testament and post-New Testament literature as a whole) − unless it is prepared to ignore a fundamental belief, namely that the church itself, whether local congregation or governing authority, falls under God's judgement and lordship, being subject to the norm presented by the person and activity of Jesus of Nazareth, whom it acknowledges as 'the Christ, the only begotten Son, our Lord'. [037]

A systematic or reflective theologian is not ipso facto an expert exegete. I am very well aware of that. Yet without Scripture theologians are quite useless. Are they dependent, then, on specialist exegetes? No. But they are manifestly dependent on skilled exegesis; for, as in all branches of science, we find great diversity of opinion among exegetes. So theologians cannot arbitrarily select one of the views currently available, for instance one that fits best into some dogmatic synthesis of their own! That would be to misunderstand the basic function of Scripture in theology. So what can they do? Although not an exegetical specialist, the theologian should be able to evaluate the exegetical arguments advanced and, more particularly, to examine the postulates which lead one expert to interpret a scriptural pericope in one way and another to interpret it differently. Non-exegetical presuppositions are often the reason why opinions diverge. Hence theologians cannot simply settle for their 'preferred exegetes' (even though experience with the works of many authors often leads spontaneously to such preferences). Where there is agreement between exegetes of various schools (and by that I also mean explicitly: in various countries), the theologian will be happy to rely on it − unless here and there, over time, questions are raised, first through what is initially perceived as a solitary point of view, later as a result of other difficulties emerging in a similar context, until suddenly, in the teeth of common exegetical opinion, a commentator presents a quite novel, coherent view. I believe that, having weighed the arguments, theologians may in certain cases, contrary to received exegetical opinion, integrate this new insight − sometimes the resumption of a very old one − with their dogmatic scheme. (Quite often, as a matter of fact, the 'new' viewpoint eventually wins general approval.) Consensus among exegetes − leaving aside the presuppositions involved − does not seem to me a proper governing principle for theology. After all, exegetes themselves often draw on theological, that is, non-exegetical predilections, which the theologian is entitled to judge.

Then, of course, a theologian has to be careful about the kind of 'exegetical

slogans' that turn up in theology as in any other discipline, for instance the one recurrent in exegetical literature since M. Kähler: 'Mark is a Passion narrative with a lengthy introduction.' The thing is that slogans, while containing a grain of truth, usually miss fine points of detail.

[038] Above all, the theologian needs to object to the practice, so evident among exegetes, of exploiting one particular method alone to sanctify his convictions − the techniques of *Formgeschichte,* for example, or of an exclusive structuralism. As theologians they simply cannot rely on the results yielded by one exegetical method in isolation (which still leads to differing opinions − perhaps owing to its very exclusiveness, which, after all, harbours presuppositions of its own). Even in his day Ernst Troeltsch could say: 'A whole world view lies behind the historico-critical method.'[14] One can see in the literature how national differences in regard to exegesis often have a bearing on problems of 'method and truth', so that knowledge of these national perspectives affords a greater degree of theological 'independence', without denying some dependence on expert exegesis.

No less disastrous, on the other hand, is the dogmatic choice of a sort of 'common denominator' distilled from the available exegesis; such a procedure disregards biblical scholarship, so it cannot undergird a Christian theology. Theologians are therefore obliged to undertake detailed exegesis and cannot rely primarily on global exegetical studies (sometimes known as 'biblical theology'). Global studies only make sense if they are based on detailed studies; otherwise they often reflect the theological outlook of their authors rather than the pluralistic yet fundamentally unified New Testament interpretation of Jesus. Such a personal theological view is no foundation for a theology that aspires to be in some degree generally admissible.

In short: doing theology on a really scriptural basis is indeed a trying, laborious exercise; it means continually breaking down one's own preconceived 'syntheses' and reconstructing them; expectations are dashed, others are nurtured and grow. The synthesis itself is continually in movement; and so both the capacity to evaluate new exegetical literature and the capacity for synthesis are developed. From time to time people might accuse theologians who work in this way – who, in other words, venture too far into the field of exegesis − of committing blunders. Of course they do! Their sole defence then is that without exegesis all theologizing will be up in the air. Better to err on the proper path than to stray casually, albeit with no blemish or further defect from that moment on, onto a false track that can only lead to ideology.

[039] True, there is a distinction between exegesis and systematic theology; but in

[14] See E. Troeltsch, 'Ueber historische und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie', in *Gesammelte Schriften,* vol. 2 (Tübingen 1922²) (Aalen 1962), 729-753.

addition to exegesis as a purely critical and literary discipline, there is also a theological variety, in which one seeks to discover in Jesus and the earliest witnesses to Christian belief − in other words, in early Christianity − the definitively saving activity of God. It is this that determines the theological character of the exegesis, which is not made theological just by 'updating' it to give it current relevancy (the latter is what I call 'systematic theology'). As a matter of fact, the separation of biblical exegesis from thematic theology is relatively recent and was only completed, on a recognized basis, in the seventeenth century. Theological exegesis sets out to discover the theological dimension in the actual historical phenomenon of early Christianity; this is where the truth question first arises, not just in the Bible's 'topicality' for us today. To go looking for what is relevant to the present in the meaning of the New Testament is 'systematic theology', and this presupposes theological exegesis which scrutinizes the New Testament for God's conclusive saving activity in the emerging Judaeo-Christian religion.

Lastly, the main objection (which is very much on my mind): there is still Christian tradition, the life of the churches and, for Catholics, even the magisterium as an ecclesial function, an authoritative ministry to the church community. Indeed, without that church my quest would never have arisen! But this charism of the official ministry, in which God's Spirit is actively at work as it is in his churches, does not operate miraculously, still less through private revelations or instant lines of communication, but rather in a very historical fashion; this official ministry − up to and including the very top − is thus bound to rely on understanding of Scripture, assisted by exegesis. If, in view of the ecclesial structure intrinsic to its very nature, the ministry needs this assistance from exegetes and theologians; there can be no substitute for assistance of this kind. The same applies to the church as a community, which lives by an experience of Christ. Indeed, for theologians the living congregation or local church is a 'theological habitat', without which their searching of the Scriptures and theological reflection have nothing on which to ground themselves. Theology is not the exposition of books. But if people profess to have committed themselves in faith to Jesus, the Christ, and to have found their inspiration and orientation in him, with the living community as their setting, then I as a theologian will certainly want to know who it is they are talking about: a Jesus selected in accordance with purely contemporary fashion and present-day needs, or Jesus of Nazareth, from whom the great [040]
Christian traditions − albeit in many languages and tongues − were privileged to hear a very specific, pertinent message, which we today, with our own needs, have to pass on in creative fidelity, first and foremost by living it ourselves. The scholarship of exegetes and theologians cannot guarantee this fidelity and creativity; but among the many ecclesial and temporal factors

which serve in their respective ways to convey the guidance whereby God keeps the church on its true course as a credible hope for the world, there is a distinctive, indispensable place for exegesis and theology.

I conclude this introduction with a quotation from Y. Congar: '*Je respecte et j'interroge sans cesse la science des exégètes, mais je récuse leur magistère.*'[15]

Finally, I know that a scholarly critical approach (my standpoint in this book as a believer) is only one of many possibilities. This relativizes the whole book. Yet even this relative standpoint has its own right to existence and, in the end, inalienable pastoral value. It is with that pastoral intention − 'translatable', one hopes, by others − that the book was written, as one of many contributions to what can never be properly articulated: the life's secret of him whom I acknowledge as Jesus of Nazareth, in whom definitive and final salvation is to be found. That − and not some lack of trust in collegues − is why almost no theologians but a great many exegetes are cited in this book.

[15] Y. Congar, *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'Église* (Paris 1950), 498-499.

Part One

QUESTIONS OF METHOD, AND CRITERIA

Section One

JESUS OF NAZARETH, NORM AND CRITERION OF ANY INTERPRETATION OF JESUS

Chapter 1

THE BELIEVER'S HISTORICAL ACCESS TO JESUS OF NAZARETH

§1 Structure of the offer of salvation and the Christian response

Literature on the time of Jesus: A. Alt, *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel,* 3 vols, Munich 1953-1959; J. Bonsirven, *Le Judaisme pales-tinien au temps de Jésus-Christ,* 2 vols, Paris 1934-35; W. Foerster, *Neutestamentliche Zeitgeschichte,* vol. 1, *Das Judentum Palästinas zur Zeit Jesu und der Apostel,* Gütersloh 1964[4]; Ch. Guignebert, *Le monde juif vers le temps de Jésus,* Paris 1950; A. H. Gunneweg, *Geschichte Israels bis Bar Kochba* (Theol. Wissenschaft, 2), Stuttgart 1972; M. Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus* (WUNT, 10), Tübingen 1973[2] (1969); J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem zur Zeit Jesu,* 3 vols, Göttingen 1924, 1929, 1937; M. Lagrange, *Le Judaisme avant Jésus-Christ,* Paris 1931; E. Lohmeyer, *Galiläa und Jerusalem* (FRLANT, 34), Göttingen 1936; E. Lohse, *Umwelt des Neuen Testament,* Göttingen 1971; A. D. Nock, *Essays on religion and the ancient world,* 2 vols, Cambridge 1972; B. Reicke, *Neutestamentliche Zeitgeschichte,* Berlin 1965; M. Rostovtzeff, *The social and economic history of the Hellenistic world,* New York 1941 (=M. Rostowzew, *Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte der hellenistischen Welt,* 3 vols, Darmstadt 1955-1956); E. Schürer, *Geschichte des Jüdischen Volkes im Zei falter Jesu Christi,* 3 vols, Leipzig 1909-1911[4].

A. THE HUMAN PERSON, FOCUS OF MANIFOLD RELATIONSHIPS [044]

A person forms the focus of an extensive area. Thus one cannot pose the question, 'Who is Jesus of Nazareth?' without reference to both prior history and what happened after him. No individual can be understood (a) independently of the course of the past events that surrounded him, that undergirded and confronted him and elicited his critical response; (b) independently of his relations with those around him, contemporaries who received from him and in turn influenced him and touched off specific reactions in him; (c) independently of the effect he had on subsequent history or of what he might have intended to set in motion through his actions. In other words, an individual person is the focal point of a series of interrelations

with the past, the future and his present situation.

This applies to Jesus as well − which is why the starting point for any Christology or Christian interpretation of Jesus is not simply Jesus of Nazareth, still less the church's kerygma or creed. Rather, it is the movement which Jesus himself started in the first century of our era, more particularly because this Jesus is known to us, historically, only via this movement. A historical fact is therefore our most justifiable point of departure; namely that the gospels tell us *what a certain man, Jesus, came to mean for the life of several groups of people*. In other words, the starting point is the first Christian community − but as a reflection of what Jesus himself was, said and did. Some Jews responded to Jesus' offer of salvation with an unconditional yes. What that offer was we can infer only indirectly from reactions and other evidence recorded in the New Testament: through the prism of the christological response of the earliest Christian communities. They speak of Jesus of Nazareth 'in the language of faith'; but in so doing they are still talking about the actual Jesus of Nazareth, a concrete, historical reality which addressed them.

This is immediately apparent from the tenor of their language. These Christian congregations put the emphasis not on 'Christ died', but on '*... died for our sins',* nay, more 'died for our sins *in accordance with the scriptures*' (1 Cor. 15:3); or again, 'died, but was raised' (Rom. 8:34; 1 Cor. 15:3-4). To speak of Jesus in the language of faith is to express what the (assuredly) historical Jesus had come to signify for his disciples and how this is anchored in Jesus himself.
[045] History and empirical knowledge (information, therefore) are to be found here − but interpreted in the language of faith.

The only knowledge we possess of the Christ event reaches us via the concrete experience of the first local communities of Christians, who sensed a new life present in themselves, which they regarded as a gift of the *Pneuma,* the Spirit: an experience of new life in the ambience of the Spirit, but in remembrance of Jesus. That is why I said that the early Christian movement centred on Jesus is the inescapable, historically reliable point of departure. We cannot isolate the question, 'Who was Jesus of Nazareth?' Even a historian, asking himself this question, cannot ignore the actual impact of the man − himself part of a historical tradition or a religio-cultural situation/context − on a group of contemporaries who became his disciples on the one hand, and on the other hand on those who saw him in a quite different light, while evincing a no less extraordinary reaction − one that was to cost him his life. (It is an established fact that Jesus, having been handed over by the Jewish authorities, was put to death by the local Roman government.) So the historian is bound to ask: what manner of man must this have been who could trigger such extreme reactions − on the one hand, unconditional faith and on the other, aggressive disbelief? That the Romans, faced with the possibility of political agitation in

an occupied territory, should have crucified him says much about our human record of injustice. That the Jewish authorities should hand him over is only explicable (leaving human passions aside) if, from a Jewish viewpoint and by conventional standards, Jesus had somehow acted in a fundamentally non-Jewish fashion where religion is concerned (passing himself off as messiah is not enough to account for this: there were a number of other messianic pretenders in those days, who were not put to death for it). On the other hand there were the disciples who believed in Jesus, who responded unreservedly and positively to him and did so in such a way that after his execution they could not articulate the experience that underlay their response except by invoking the most varied, most evocative, most lofty religious ideas and codewords available in the Jewish and gentile worlds: son of man, eschatological prophet, messiah or Christ, 'son of God' (in both its Jewish and its Hellenistic meaning), 'lord' (the Jewish *mar* and Hellenistic *kyrios),* and so forth − evocative titles, some of which were meaningful for Jewish Christians but were simply unintelligible to Christians from the gentile world (e.g. son of man; messiah), reason enough for them to disappear from the Greek-speaking churches (e.g. son of man) or to lose all depth of meaning. [046]

This immediately suggests the relative character of the honorific titles. The important thing is that on the basis of their communal experiences these believers felt obliged to grasp for the loftiest titles provided by their religious and cultural milieu to verbalize something of their past experience with Jesus and their present experience arising from him. The Christian experience as the local church's communal response to what Jesus actually offered is primary; the titles, although not unimportant, are secondary; and again, even in Scripture they are interchangeable, replaceable by others, and they sometimes died out. The saving experience persisted and periodically called for appropriate expression and articulation in new social and historical situations. One might call it a 'disclosure' experience, a discovery event: a source experience (both for those who had known Jesus personally and for those who came to know about him by way of the *memoria Jesu* and the life of the local congregation); that is to say, they discovered in Jesus something which cannot be pinned down directly, empirically, but which is going to present itself as something gratuitous, *given* evidence to any open-minded person confronted with Jesus in a living community.

The structure of this community experience linking the 'new life' of the local congregation, present by virtue of the Spirit, with Jesus of Nazareth is interesting. *Pneuma* and *anamnesis,* Spirit and recollection of Jesus, are experienced as a single reality. Theologically this is explained in the New Testament in different ways: if we compare Acts with the Johannine gospel and with the initial (Aramaic) Judaeo-Christian Christology (which to some

extent can be distilled from the synoptics even now), we see that in Acts 2 the 'event of Pentecost' fifty days after Easter is an aetiological account of the pneumatic experiences of the Christian congregations over several years. In the Johannine gospel the aetiologically interpreted outpouring of the Spirit happens on Easter day, that is, it is directly associated with the resurrection, so that once again Jesus and Spirit, past remembrance and present moment, are intrinsically conjoined; the Johannine gospel defines the link between *Pneuma* and *anamnesis* (recollection or remembrance) even more precisely when it has the Lord say that when the Spirit comes he will bring all things to their remembrance (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-14). The local congregation's pneumatic experiences are intrinsically bound up with the *memoria Jesu*. There is an
[047] organic connection between the present, the here and now of the communal experience (*Pneuma*), and the Jesus-'past' (remembrance).

There is a structure to be found in and even outside the synoptic gospels, but in the Johannine gospel it is more explicitly and deliberately formulated. The formula 'Do you not remember . . .?' occurs frequently outside the Johannine gospel as well (see Mk. 8:18-19 and parallel Mt. 16:9; Mk. 14:9 and parallel Mt. 26:13; Lk. 24:6-8; Acts 20:35; 2 Pet. 1:12-15; 3:1-2). Lastly, in the eucharistic formula the church itself affirms that its liturgical celebration is carried out 'in remembrance of Jesus' (Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24-25). In other words, the church's kerygma is simultaneously a recollection of the earthly Jesus, of what he said and did. This whole book should make that clear.

So when Christian congregations reflect on their own experience they interpret it in relation both to the Spirit and to Jesus of Nazareth, so much so that these two relations initially appeared to be one: at an early stage Paul could still say, 'The Lord is the *Pneuma*' (2 Cor. 3:17). Again, the community articulated its experience of this relationship in (a) stories about Jesus (sayings, stories and parables as *memoria Jesu*), and (b) kerygmata, hymns and credal declarations, whereby in ways that differed considerably among the various local churches the gist of what Jesus signified for them was couched in the language of faith and thus could be trumpeted abroad.

The experience of the first Christian congregations, inseparably associated with first-hand contact with Jesus and later, through the *memoria Jesu,* with continuing fellowship with the Lord, is therefore the matrix of the New Testament as a written text. And thanks to that the earliest Christian congregations and their experience are historically accessible to us; they afford, at a historical level, the most reliable access to Jesus of Nazareth. What the historical Jesus has left us is not primarily a kind of résumé or bits and pieces of proclamation of God's approaching kingdom, nor a kerygma or string of *verba et facta ipsissima,* that is, a record of precisely what he did as a historical individual or a number of directives and wise sayings that can fairly certainly

be gleaned from the gospels. What he did leave behind − only through what he was, did and said, simply through his activities as this particular human being − was a movement, a living fellowship of believers who had become conscious of being the new people of God, the eschatological 'assembly' of God − not a 'sacred remnant' but the firstborn of the gathering together of all Israel, and eventually of all mankind: an eschatological liberation movement unifying all [048] people: universal *shalom*.[1]

B. REVELATION AND *'le croyable disponible'*

More or less parallel with the Protestant kerygma theology of K. Barth and especially of R. Bultmann, who opposed the nineteenth century liberal-historical quest for Jesus, Catholic theology from around 1910 to 1960, in reaction against modernism, was also dominated by *'Le donné révéle'* (title of a well-known work by A. Gardeil). Insofar as this entails a predetermined and as it were positivistically interpreted revelational datum, many now regard it with suspicion. The sociology of knowledge, and cognate (in particular linguistic) sciences, have given us more exact insight into the structure of all knowing (to which the knowledge imparted by faith, despite its irreducible character, forms no exception). This makes us realize that actuality, insofar as it is experienced and considered by us − in other words, experiential reality − is inherently coloured and partly conditioned by the social (mental and cultural) paraphernalia that we carry with us from the past into the present: the cultural pattern that informs even our inner life.[2] That is why the particular experiential reality that forms the Christian faith is not only dependent on the offer of that reality (Jesus of Nazareth), but its experience and expression − for instance, in creeds and statements of belief, in liturgy and theology − are also inherently coloured and co-determined by the apparatus of the human mind here and now, by what is technically termed the 'cultural situation context'. Hence what is reality for faith is set in the midst of history, is itself an intrinsic part of human history, is itself history and culture. Revelation and its expression in cultural history are inseparable. Revelation is always implicit in what P. Ricoeur calls *'le croyable disponible'* of a certain period, that is, the totality of generally accepted assumptions, expectations and ideologies, which nonetheless (and that is the Christian view) change inwardly in and through the fact that they become the ongoing surge of revelation. Thus the Christian from the Hellenistic *oikoumene* is in every respect more like other Romans and Greeks than his fellow Christians in 1973; even so, in an expressly Christian context the 1973 Christian is closer to the Hellenistic Christian than to many of

[1] This brief summary is borne out in the course of this book as a whole.
[2] See P. Berger and Th. Luckmann, *The social construction of reality* (New York 1966); B. Lee Woolf, *Sprache, Denken, Wirklichkeit* (Hamburg 1968[4]) (from the English, 1956).

his own contemporaries. Awareness of the fact that every religion, the
[049] Christian religion included, is conditioned by cultural-historical factors substantially moderates the absolute character of values as currently apprehended, just as it also mitigates the pressure of the past. On the other hand the gospel makes a proviso with regard to every one of its cultural expressions in kerygma, dogma, creed or theology. It is clear from the early Christian use of such honorific titles as son of man, messiah, Christ and Son of God that the Christian faith, in its very invocation of this cultural-religious legacy in which the revelation is articulated, also distances itself from that inheritance. So the Christian's response to the question of Christian identity can never be total identification with the culture − even the religious culture − which surrounds him and in which he participates; nor can his faith be identified completely with even its most official articulations, however validly and truly these may express the mystery of faith. Because of this disharmony between the mystery of faith and its articulation, conditioned by the religious culture, there is need not only for a historical approach to dogma and a hermeneutic evaluation of early Christianity and its subsequent development, but also for sociological inquiry that evaluates ideologies critically. Therefore, a new language of faith, in which Jesus of Nazareth is identified in faith, will have to display both critical reservation towards and non-identification with the dominant categories, expectations and ideologies of the present by positively invoking the help of both. In its very expression the reservations of faith are (inevitably from an anthropological standpoint) essentially cultural and formative of culture: formative, therefore, of the church. Every religious movement is ipso facto inextricably engaged in a historical and cultural process. The recurrent question here is: does it preserve a critical, creative distance from its own socio-cultural world? This may be ascertained by tracing the particular Christian variant through which it actually participates in general cultural movements, or else from the absence of such a variant.

We can see this disharmony in the earliest faith and credal structures of the New Testament. From all the complexes of tradition converging there, however diverse in origin, it becomes evident that the first Christians found salvation in Jesus − salvation that was conclusive and imparted by God. In light of this experience they named that saving reality the Christ, the son of man, the Lord, and so forth. Thus they applied certain key concepts already current in their religious culture to Jesus, concepts which were 'vacant', so to
[050] speak, and which acquired their Christian meaning only when applied to him. In the first place they were expressing their reaction to whatever they picked up concerning Jesus' person, message and ministry; thus their actual experiences before and after his death were fused together in a single image. All the same, they obviously made use of existing concepts like messiah, son of

man, and so forth which carried their own distinctive meanings − historical accretions that were not in all respects applicable to Jesus; it is also obvious that, understanding Jesus as they did to be the very essence of final salvation, they deliberately modified these concepts in the very act of applying them to Jesus by amplifying them with recollections of his life and death here on earth. It must be said, therefore, that the New Testament criterion for designating or identifying Jesus was not the meaning already attached to the existing titles, but Jesus himself. It is the disciples' way of expressing their conviction that in him they had found their final salvation; and they do so in somewhat alien conceptual terms in order to express its proper nature.

There is a pronounced tension in this faith structure. For his part Jesus himself, the individual human being, was fully caught up in a developing situation, shifting and uncertain: a very specific historical tradition, namely that of his people, the Jews, who saw themselves as the 'people of God', God's servants, witnessing to him before the whole world. Within that tradition (so interpreted), Jesus sensed that he was responsible for his own place and particular task in it. But he also saw himself confronted with different interpretations already current in his environment of what 'people of God' and 'kingdom of God' might signify − an apocalyptic, an eschatological, an ethical, a politico-Zealotic and a Pharisaic interpretation (to mention only the principal ones). Within that diversity Jesus took a very personal stand, although it was his shameful execution in particular that made his message and his chosen way of life historically ambiguous. Apart from any ecclesiastic kerygma or credal formulation, this is a valid conclusion drawn from careful historical studies of the sources. Hence one must not lose sight of the historically contingent framework of Jesus' ministry when using the language of faith to speak of him as the messiah or Christ, son of man, Lord, Son of God and so on.

It is even less permissible to render the (biblical) articulation of what Jesus said and did in those concrete circumstances absolute in a quite unhistorical way by detaching it from the historically coloured speech categories of the time in which this Jesus event was verbalized: we cannot elevate this linguistic process into 'timeless categories'. Indeed, we are warned against that − in the [051]
New Testament itself − by the multiplicity of christological dogmas and diverse formulae used to refer to the kingdom of God, redemption and salvation in Christ. For on their side, too, the earliest congregations responding to Jesus found themselves in a quite specific cultural and religious context. Not only does the language of the original creeds and kerygmata (declarations of belief) share the historical ambiguity, but the very diversity of these creeds (under pressure, nonetheless, of the reality of the historical Jesus) is likewise conditioned primarily by what to human understanding are the historical ambiguity, manifold nuances and (rationally speaking) opaque character of

this self-same 'phenomenon of Jesus'; also conditioned by the religio-cultural concepts used by the first Christians, the further development of which was triggered partly by Jesus' actual ministry.

Hence it appears that from the outset the hermeneutic problem, or the problem of understanding a christological belief in Jesus of Nazareth, centres on a conflict. The problem is, first and foremost, a critical disharmony between the 'phenomenon of Jesus', his person, message, ministry and death − a richly variegated, extraordinary and distinctive life which, taken as a whole, can be interpreted historically in diverse ways − on the one hand, and on the other, the religious and cultural expectations, aspirations and ideologies present in his environment, with its own established key concepts, employed by other people to express in historically concrete terms what they were confronted with in Jesus, and eventually to record it in the New Testament and the subsequent history of the church. The hermeneutic problem is only secondarily a matter of how we can translate that which emerges in this disharmony as a real offer of salvation in Jesus Christ in terms of our contemporary (critically appraised) culture. The disharmony inherent in every credal statement and theology explains the diversity of the numerous christological responses, in the New Testament itself and in later church history. Thus the plurality, which at bottom is 'held together' by Jesus as he lived on earth and was apprehended by other people, has a twofold origin: (a) on the one hand the various religious and cultural circumstances and traditions of those who became Christians and (b) on the other, the amazing fascination which Jesus' person, life, message and death exerted on his disciples in all sorts of ways. Even during Jesus' lifetime this last factor gave rise to many different ideas and images of him, in which
[052] impressions of the milieu in which Jesus operated or of particular aspects of his person that fascinated his contemporaries were highlighted in a special manner. The disharmony inherent in this situation was more or less bound to entail that in the course of the church's history earlier religious answers (derived from the New Testament and conciliar definitions) which epitomize the disharmony between the salvation thus offered and its concrete expression in words should assume an independent status and themselves become the direct object of christological belief. In this way they may actually obscure the reality of Jesus, calling as it does on faith to interpret and imbue it with meaning. Thus there emerges a self-centred, formalized kerygma Christology which seems to forget that what is being proclaimed is not just the resurrection of one of the many who were crucified during that period, but the resurrection of Jesus alone from the dead. In the end some proponents of a kerygma theology could just as easily posit Barabbas, the so-called good thief, or at any rate John the Baptist as background to the formal Easter kerygma. But the kerygma proclaims only Jesus; which really means that it must be intrinsically

connected with Jesus as he lived on earth − with his person, message, way of life and death. Anyone who loses sight of that turns kerygma into myth. In other words, if we are asked what is meant by the 'eschatological salvation' granted by the crucified-and-risen one, we have to point to Jesus of Nazareth himself, his person and his whole life on earth and conduct up to and including his death if we are to give it substance and content.

C. THE CONSTANT UNITIVE FACTOR

From this fundamental disharmony we can see why the New Testament as it stands presents such a motley of interpretations of Jesus that go back to the first local communities of Christians: something happens one way in Mark, differently in Matthew and Luke, differently again in the case of Paul and in the Johannine gospel. Via the gospels and Paul it is possible to reconstruct, with a fair degree of certainty, a number of yet more primitive variations: a Hebrew and Judaeo-Greek Jerusalem Christology, a pre-Pauline Christology, a pre-Markan and pre-Johannine Christology and, finally, the Christology of the Q community, where the christological confession is often less developed though never totally absent. There is no trace of a non-dogmatic representation of Jesus anywhere. To look in the synoptic or pre-synoptic material for an [053] undogmatic, as it were 'undiluted' historical core (indeed, is there such a thing?) is to hunt a will-o'-the-wisp. Jesus features only as the subject of Christians' confession. We are always coming up against the Christian movement. So the question arises: what constant factor will create unity in this variegated whole?

There are a number of well-tried solutions. I begin by indicating where the solution cannot lie.

(a) Not in the gospels or in the whole New Testament as such. The canonical writings confront us with diverse Christologies. Looking only at their terminology, I cannot see any place where a constant unitive factor might be found on this plane. Could all these biblical Christologies, taken together, be normative? Formally, of course, they can, and for Christians the assertion that the entire Bible is normative is right and proper − but in itself it gets us nowhere. What are we to do, for instance, with the just as authentically biblical Christology of the son of man, when this initially so important apocalyptic term, first conferred on the risen Jesus coming as the son of man, vanishes from other parts of the New Testament and was not even incorporated, explicitly at any rate, into the Christian creed, whereas it once constituted the entire Christology of certain Graeco-Palestinian, Judaeo-Christian local congregations as far afield as Transjordania and Syria? A thoroughly scriptural orthodoxy does not entail conferring on Jesus all the images and titles

available. In practice, formal exegetical endorsement of the entire Bible's authority (whether Catholic or Protestant) only means that a particular component or single theme in the Bible is elevated above the rest, often in accordance with an individual's own confessional bent or personal preference, religious and theological. This brings us to a second unsatisfactory solution.

(b) The constant unitive factor is not the 'gospel within the Gospel', the best of the best in the New Testament. This criterion is very subjective, of course: it usually results in selection determined by confessional allegiance, and again gives rise to pluralism among Christian exegetes. Moreover, exponents of *Formgeschichte* often support this criterion with the postulate of a single 'proto-kerygma' from which diverse interpretations supposedly followed step by step, while there is good reason to assume that the various kerygmata of the local churches subsequently coalesced in the (ecumenical) credal confession of the emerging 'great church' (see later sections).

[054] (c) For the same reasons it is impossible for the earliest picture of Jesus that we could reconstruct to function as a norm or constant unitive factor. However important the earliest tradition may be (even if there were not diverse 'earliest pictures of Jesus' in circulation from the very start), the first articulated experience of recognizing-and-remembering is not ipso facto the richest or most subtle one, although as a delimiting and admonitory factor it is still important for the evolutionary process in which people try to verbalize ever more precisely the richness of their actual experience. Later that first articulation turns out to have been imperfect after all, and incomplete compared with the impression someone actually made upon us, which is realized fully only in retrospect. Early and subsequent articulations of an experience often provide a reciprocal critique. Thus in Mark it is fairly evident (especially from structural analysis) that while he certainly believes in Jesus as the Christ and above all as the Son of God, it is always with the proviso that these concepts refer to the meaning of the 'suffering son of man'. Obviously this presupposes theological critique of one-sided representations of Jesus.

(d) Nor can Jesus' self-awareness be a unitive factor or criterion. By self-awareness − as distinct from self-understanding − I mean his psychology, his inner life and character. Of this we know very little. We can get to know quite a lot about Jesus' understanding of himself, albeit indirectly, from his proclamation of the kingdom of God, his insistence on 'discipleship', his intercourse with social and religious 'outcasts', his parables confronting the Jews with a decisive choice, and so forth. Jesus' self-understanding in his relationship with God and with other people is indeed of capital importance. But the notion of total power and authority or *exousia,* at least as applying even to the earthly Jesus, is clearly a redactional element in Mark. It is only by way of the 'disclosure' experience which the disciples underwent that we are able to

discover what gave rise to it. There is always a historically situated intermediary factor, Christian or ecclesiastic.

(e) Again, the so-called sayings and acts of Jesus (*ipsissima verba et facta*) are not to be considered a criterion and unitive factor. Even if historically authentic sayings and actions of Jesus can be distilled from Scripture, they were chosen by local Christian communities who make no mention of his other sayings and deeds. So once again it is only via their interpretive selection that we get anywhere near Jesus. What is more, even the few so-called directly historical words and deeds of Jesus appear in the gospels in an ecclesiastic context; the [055] particular context in which Jesus uttered or performed them cannot usually − and can never fully – be recovered. Without the situational context of this or that saying (except, up to a point, with parables) one can arrive at many different interpretations; and no one can determine what it 'really' means. For the same reasons Jesus' alleged 'radicalism' or the non-Judaizing character of synoptic and earlier traditions cannot be a criterion, either. The traits in question may be based on scientific postulates. Someone who starts by accepting various early Christian traditions can actually see a 'radicalizing' process in a biased emphasis on a single tradition, not yet criticized or corrected by other Jesus traditions. In other words, they are still purely hypothetical and possibly unreliable criteria. The radicalizing may just as well derive from certain local churches and not from Jesus.

(f) Lastly, no constant unitive factor is provided by credal statements and homologues in the Bible. How quickly the expression 'son of man' disappears, does it not? It does not appear in any credal affirmation. And what is the relevance of Davidic messianism for non-Jewish, Hellenistic Christians? Then again, there is both pluralism and development in these biblical confessions of faith; sometimes it would seem that Jesus only is given the status of Christ, Messiah and Lord after the resurrection; at other times the idea of 'assumption' comes into play. Jesus, having died, held 'in readiness' by God, will presently return as son of man, a judge armed with authority and power: 'Heaven had to receive him until the time of the restoration of all things,' says Acts 3:21;[3] in yet other instances we discern an incarnation Christology and a pre-existent Christ. In these credos and liturgical hymns everything cannot have the same normative value, and certainly not at one and the same time: either one must reject parts of the Bible or else arrive at an artificial compilation, a kind of

[3] Although this text in Acts has in part been influenced by the 'rapture' model which Luke employs (and in the New Testament this is something recent; see in a later chapter), the idea itself (of the *assumptio*-model) is much older. Apart from the ending added later (Mk. 16:9-20) the Markan gospel supports the view of Jesus as risen, *appointed* but not yet *inaugurated* as son of man, who is to *appear* only at the close of the age (see Th. J. Weeden, *Mark-traditions in conflict*, Philadelphia 1971; see later). Luke himself is here 'Christianizing' a speculation, familiar to the Baptist's followers, concerning Elijah (see Part Three, Section Two, n. 41).

aggregate that as such has nothing to do with the actual Scriptures. It is true, of course, that the meaning of one title eventually gets transferred to other titles, so that in the end they all become nebulous and they all try to express everything about Jesus. But in that case, what precisely does 'everything' mean? By defining something an articulation also delimits it; but if all these titles say everything, they run the risk of becoming so many meaningless, formalized expressions. Besides the liturgical credos, the pre-synoptic traditions also contain transmitted elements of the *memoria Jesu*, especially with regard to his miracles and his message of the approaching kingdom of God, as well as to his conduct and way of life. Are these less prescriptive or
[056] constitutive for the church community than the formal creeds?

From this negative result it is at once evident that a (modern) christological interpretation of Jesus cannot proceed from the kerygma (or dogma) about Jesus, and even less from a so-called 'purely historical' Jesus of Nazareth, even though a historico-critical approach, informed by an intention of faith, remains the only proper starting point. Since all these attempts have proved unsatisfactory, what is left in the way of a constant unitive factor? I would say (and that is saying quite a lot): the Christian movement itself! In other words, a *Christian oneness of experience* which does *indeed derive its unity from the one figure of Jesus*, while remaining pluriform in its verbal expression or articulation. 'You yourselves,' Paul writes to the Christians at Corinth, 'are an open letter from Christ − written not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts' (2 Cor. 3:2-3). By oneness of experience I mean not an individual or individualistic religious experience of Jesus, a sort of 'revivalism', but a community experience in the sense of an ecclesial or collective experience which obliges people to define the ultimate meaning and purport of their lives in reference to Jesus of Nazareth or, to put it in traditional and equally proper terms, which causes people to interpret Jesus' life as the definitive or eschatological activity of God in history for the salvation or deliverance of mankind. The constant factor here is that particular groups of people find their ultimate salvation imparted by God in Jesus of Nazareth. In other words, in and through that experience one can see two aspects in the life of Jesus: (a) his life has an effect on the contemporary historical situation of Christian congregations, and (b) his life is crucial for the fundamental option presented by life here on earth and therefore for eschatological communion with God. In addition we see that determining the final, definitive meaning of our own life in reference to Jesus of Nazareth is not something given or appropriated once and for all. It is a decision that a person must make over and over again in light of the circumstances, and must continually re-articulate. That is to say, one cannot formalize a kerygma, like 'Jesus is Lord'. One has to make Jesus the prescriptive, determining factor in one's life in accordance with changing

situations, cultural, social and ecclesiastic: and in that context one will proceed to live, experience and put into words what 'making Jesus the determining factor' really entails here and now. For Christians from a Jewish background the 'words' in question included Lord (*mar*), son of man and messiah; and this had far-reaching consequences for their faith and life. It might be more [057] accurate to say that they described him in that way because they felt these consequences to be meaningful for their day-to-day life 'in Jesus'. To Greek Christians those titles meant nothing; but from their Caesar cult they were familiar with *'Kyrios',* so for them it is not the emperor but Jesus who is *Kyrios.* That meant a great deal.

Thus the Jesus event lies at the origin of the experience of local congregations to which we have historical access; and it governs that communal experience. To put it differently: the constant factor is the evolving life of the 'church of God' or 'church of Christ', the church-building experience prompted by the impact Jesus had and, in the Spirit, continues to have on his followers, people who have experienced ultimate salvation in Jesus of Nazareth. Priority must be conceded to what is actually offered in Jesus; but this is embedded, vested in the assent of faith given by the Christian community, which we experience as present in our midst in history. We might say: Jesus was such as to engender precisely that typical reaction of faith which was confirmed by these local church experiences.

D. DISHARMONY BETWEEN JESUS AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

What are the implications of all this? Firstly, I would think, that one cannot see God's revelation in Jesus primarily in an infallibly inspired Bible which, as God's direct word, is alleged − on the basis of what is (wrongly) described as its literal meaning (exegetical analysis often reveals that meaning to be very different from what was at first supposed) – to be normative for us. Revelation is God's saving activity both as experienced and as expressed in words. In that verbalizing process the Old Testament plays an essential role; for Jesus is referred to in the New Testament as the prophet, the son of man, the exalted one, the Lord − all of them notions grounded in the Old Testament or in pre- and non-Christian Judaism of the post-Old Testament period. The New Testament is the Christian interpretation of what people had experienced with Jesus and were still experiencing in local Christian communities, admittedly in light of the Old Testament. This Christian exegesis of the Old Testament partly explains the multiplicity of New Testament interpretations of Jesus, which led to diverse Christologies, a process that was to continue to some extent in patristic theology.

The question arises: where is the Bible's authority located? My reply is two- [058]

pronged.

Firstly, the New Testament as a document is set in the life of a movement and gives us a close-up of that life during the specific − and lengthy − period of its initial crystallization (from the chronologically first piece of writing to the last, a period of some fifty to sixty years). This in itself shows that the New Testament has no independent authority in its own right. It is the deposit of a 'movement' which, albeit within the Old Testament scriptural tradition, existed before the New Testament writings and simply continued after them. The living church community is the normative testimony that Jesus gave us (see 2 Cor. 3:2-3). Furthermore, it is possible to view the movement revolving around Jesus − and the early Jerusalem and Palestinian congregations did so view it − as a phenomenon inside Judaism itself, even though eschatologically (in line with Old Testament traditions: e.g. Is. 2:2-5) the pagans were called (by God) to share it (Mt. 8:10-11 and parallels). But the Christian movement goes on developing in contingent, historical circumstances. Thus the witness of the New Testament turns out to be simply the deposit of particular communal experiences during that very period, which relativizes its authority.

On the other hand there is something irreplaceable, something unique in the New Testament. After all, it gives us the most direct, uniquely practicable and historically most reliable access to the original event, the Christian *movement* that took its impetus from Jesus of Nazareth. The initial disclosure experience of the first Christians, some of whom had already died by then, is presented freshly in the New Testament via reliable traditions: there are even some happenings on record that were embarrassing for the Christian communities and their leaders and so would not have been constantly in their minds. The first generations of Christians believed that this Jesus (i.e. a historical reality) is the *Christ* (i.e. a 'disclosure', expressed in a Jewish term evocative for them). They see their loftiest expectations and utopias realized concretely in Jesus. Neither Jesus nor the earliest 'church community' constitutes the fount and origin of Christianity, but both together – offer and response. No Christianity without Jesus, but equally, no Christianity without Christians. This source event – the establishment of the Christian church − does indeed have normative value: in its New Testament the early church reflects or mirrors the impact of the Jesus event on a group of people. Sustained contact with the primary response to an initial offer in history remains normative, therefore, for
[059] one's personal response. In that sense, there can be no substitute for the New Testament's authority as the church's 'charter' or foundation document. If the Catholic interpretation that the church is the sole living relic of Jesus of Nazareth, and therefore the norm for our understanding of the faith, might be called a splendid intuition of faith (being indirectly corroborated by historical criticism), then the Reformation principle of the inalienable normative value of

the biblical witnesses finds similar critical confirmation. The two interpretations merge into one: Protestants acknowledge the Bible as the 'book of the church'[4] and the dogmatic constitution, *Dei Verbum*, of Vatican II recognizes that not even the church's magisterium is 'lord' over Scripture, but is 'subject' to God's revelation as articulated by Christians in the Bible.[5] Because the congregation-based experiences deposited in Scripture are the constant factor which holds the whole New Testament with its plural Christologies together, the New Testament as a document − and in its totality at that − is to some extent part and parcel of this unitive factor. Thus the interpretive norm provided by Scripture can only be rendered more specific via the method of systematic coordination: in that way the biblical text, insofar as it actually mirrors the life of diverse Christian congregations, is the interpretive norm. Something else must be added to that. Despite internal disharmonies the New Testament affords a relatively coherent picture, which can be seen as a result of the historical effect of the one Jesus at the source of somewhat dissonant traditions on the one hand, and on the other as the expression of an 'ecumenical' desire to align the diverse original Christian traditions into a unity. For us, too, this ecumenical desire for unification, which is noticeable in the synoptics and perhaps even in pre-synoptic traditions, is, therefore, an indispensable element of the interpretive norm.[6]

All this implies, moreover, that the historical process of the Christian response to Jesus was not concluded when the New Testament canon was finally fixed. Again and again this process stands in the way of any exaggerated ascription of authority to the Bible. Even within the New Testament one Christian congregation will present a critique, through the mouth of its evangelist, of the articulation of other congregations: we see, for instance, how Matthew and Luke make free use of what is after all Markan material − classified now as 'New Testament material'. No trace of biblicism, then, in the Bible itself; rather the contrary. So how can we make a biblicist appeal to Scripture? Biblicism is unbiblical.

Thus the New Testament − in its normative value, grounded in the experience of the 'churches of Christ' − turns out to be in no sense a depository [060] of eternal, literally unalterable truths that (as regards language and expression) only need to be hermeneutically interpreted for our times. Rather it is a differentiated whole of diverse christological responses to what Jesus offers, a

[4] E.g. W. Marxsen, *Das Neue Testament als Buch der Kirche* (Gütersloh 1966), and *Der Streit um die Bibel* (Gladbeck 1965).
[5] Dogmatic Constitution 'Dei Verbum', no. 10.
[6] I see this expressed in the fact that pre-synoptic, single-item formulae, deriving from diverse local church traditions, coalesce in the New Testament into more complex formulations of belief; this is evidently the result of synthetic critique, tending towards a unitive picture of Jesus within the universal church.

diversity that is intrinsically limited by the historical offer itself and so by the *memoria Jesu,* but is nonetheless evoked by new historical situations. The transition from a Jewish Christianity to a 'gentile' one, for instance, produces a new Christology, a new 'image' of Jesus in the Bible itself − yet still within the bounds of the *memoria Jesu*. It is not just a matter of the gift of Christianity being conveyed to the gentiles; Christianity itself is enriched in the process and thus acquires a new form and aspect, a distinctive and as yet wholly new response (with new problems in its train!). Even in the biblical context, then, the conclusion is obvious: a critical relationship with present circumstances is part of the christological response to Jesus. This relationship partly determines the Christology: the 'things remembered of Jesus' remain a governing principle, but are fertilized by current issues. Later on, in a concrete situation and in terms of his Middle Platonic philosophy − generally prevalent in orthodox Christian circles too − Arius obliged the Christian community to use an originally semi-gnostic term *(homoousia,* consubstantiality) in order to preserve the *memoria Jesu* faithfully in view of the questions being asked. The church was not consistent regarding the philosophy of Middle Platonism (philosophically Arius was the most consistent); but the church was faithful to the community experience in the grip of the *anamnesis* of Jesus. Thus Christian allegiance to Jesus broke down the − even for orthodox Christians − universal self-evidence of this philosophy.[7] The 'heretics' were not infrequently the most consistent regarding the concretely given philosophical hermeneutic horizon inherent in the system itself, which Christians, too, took as their point of departure; but with the 'orthodox' the logical coherence of a philosophical system carried less weight than the *memoria Jesu Christi* as this appears, for example, in the gospels, in liturgical prayer (e.g. the third person of the Trinity) or in popular devotion (e.g. the *homoousia* of Christ with God) and the praxis (actual conduct) of local Christian churches, concretely expressed in their way of life. In that way, and at that critical moment in history, they rescued Christianity and at the same time exposed the philosophical falseness of the model currently in use. Subsequently, in a different philosophical horizon or experiential context, 'heretics' − who historically had chosen the wrong
[061] alternative − were given credit for being right when their basically Christian intention came to be detached from the obligatory philosophy of an earlier period. Often enough their heresy was not directly christological, but rather a failure to give the last word to faith instead of philosophy.

All this means that the present with its contemporary empirical models (also just a fleeting element in the onward movement of history) has to be the place where we Christians make our christological response. Proclamation and

[7] See especially Fr. Ricken, 'Das Homoousis von Nikaia als Krisis des alt christlichen Piatonismus', in *Zur Frühgeschichte der Christologie* (Quaest. Disp., 51) (Freiburg 1970), 74-99.

theology must always have a time index. The fact that our age yearns for peace and justice, for *shalom,* for liberation of what is unliberated, will rightly − and fundamentally − give our Jesus-image an articulation all its own, but within the bounds set by the 'remembrance of Jesus'. To proclaim him as the great political revolutionary is to contradict the *memoria Jesu* (as well as the results of critical study) and is simply projecting our (possibly justified) aspirations onto him. On the other hand, because the constant factor in Christianity is that Christians determine the final or ultimate meaning of their concrete history in reference to Jesus of Nazareth, the new 'exegete' of God and champion of man, the immediate significance of that life, the splendid expectations of our century − the demand for a more just world − rightly help to define our image of Jesus. Did not the first Jewish Christians also assimilate their religious and human (messianic) expectations into their Jesus image? It should not and cannot be otherwise, if the gist of the basic christological affirmation is God's definitive saving action in our history in and through Jesus, or Jesus as the definitive source of meaning of human existence in this world. If we fail to do this, we are putting our faith in a purely ideological, abstract or magical kerygma: 'Jesus is the Lord.' Hence the eschatological solidarity and unity of all human beings, of all peoples must become an exemplary, expansive and active reality in the Christian churches of today in service to the world: ' … the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.'[8]

Thus the things that people experience and expect these days are one constituent of our response to 'But whom do you say that I am?'; just as, when it came to proclaiming Jewish Christianity to the gentiles, the Hellenistic situation had a directly hermeneutic function for the question concerning the significance of the Christian gospel for gentile Christians. Otherwise how was it possible, four centuries after the New Testament had been completed, for yet another dogma − a revelational truth − to come into being, and to do so in terms of a post-biblical philosophy (Chalcedon)? Revelation as a genuine 'public disclosure' is actually accomplished only in the response of faith made [062] in a very concrete situation with its own conceptual horizon and field of inquiry. And our questions are other than those of times past.

Conclusion: Together with the reality offered by Jesus, in and through Jesus alive in the church with its living remembrance of Jesus of Nazareth, interpretation from within the current situation is a constituent of what we call God's disclosure of salvation in Jesus Christ. When we take into account the structure that characterizes the 'naming' of Jesus by Christians in the New Testament, and the way that structure changes in light of the continually

[8] Dogmatic Constitution 'Lumen Gentium', no. 1.