

APOLOGETICS

REASONS FOR HOPE

*By the faculty of
Christendom College:*

Warren H. Carroll, Ph.D.

William H. Marshner, Ph.D.

Jeffrey A. Mirus, Ph.D.

Kristin M. Popik, Ph.D.

Edited by Jeffrey A. Mirus

Christendom College Press
18825 Fuller Heights Road
Triangle, Virginia 22172

ISBN: 0-931888-01-8

NIHIL OBSTAT:

Rev. Cornelius O'Brien, *Censor Deputatus*
July 12, 1978

IMPRIMATUR:

✠ Most Rev. Thomas J. Welsh
Bishop of Arlington
July 12, 1978

© Christendom Educational Corporation 1978
Christendom College Press

4.

The Authenticity of the New Testament

In order to examine Christ as the ultimate Revelation of God, and to prepare for a consideration of his teaching, purpose and divinity, one must establish the authenticity of the documents which give us our information about his life. And when one inquires about the authenticity, historicity or reliability of the New Testament, there are at least three different fields of research about which one might be asking. These are the textual, the literary or form-critical, and the theological fields.

If the question is one of textual authenticity, one studies the degree of disharmony among the oldest Greek manuscripts, tries to date those manuscripts, and consults the ancient translations (Syriac, Latin, Coptic, etc.). On this terrain, one resolves the question of authenticity affirmatively if the best textual witnesses are old enough, independent enough, and yet close enough in their readings to give one a reasonable confidence that the text one has represents what Mark, or Luke, or Paul actually wrote. One is attempting to prove unreasonable, in other words, the hypothesis of widespread textual tampering or corruption.

*textual
authenticity*

If the question is one of literary and form-critical authenticity,

*literary
authenticity
-form-criticism*

one is interested in the age, genre and provenience of Aramaic and Greek oral traditions, in the date of composition of the 27 books which comprise the New Testament, in their literary and cultural dependencies, and in the stages of their editing or redaction. One resolves the question of authenticity affirmatively this time, if the evidence supports the view that these books and traditions are pretty much what they claim to be—writings of the Apostles and their immediate associates, having behind them a continuous oral tradition, originally Palestinian, both of the ministry of Jesus and of the first disciples' teaching. One is attempting to prove unreasonable, in other words, the hypothesis that this or that book is a late forgery, or that the New Testament writings as a whole are several generations removed from the events of Christ's life, or that the oral traditions behind the written documents have no plausible connection to the historical Jesus.

Finally, if the question is one of theological authenticity, one is examining the Gospel portraits of Jesus, the earliest evidence of Christian preaching in the Acts of the Apostles, and the theological syntheses of Paul, John, Peter or others. One wishes to see whether these theologies cohere with one another, whether they in turn cohere with the earliest preaching, and whether that in turn coheres with an historically defensible portrait of Jesus. One resolves the question of theological authenticity affirmatively if one shows that the ideas presented in the New Testament *could be* true and divinely revealed—that is, if one shows that the historical Jesus was or could have been substantially as the Gospels portray Him, that the early preaching was not a hermeneutical fantasy but could have been both a continuation and a true proclamation of Christ's own work, and that the several New Testament theologies are not the creations of private faith but draw upon, obey, support and explicate a central, authoritative tradition. One is attempting to prove unreasonable, in this case, the hypothesis that the theological ideas of different New Testament writers contradict each other, or that those ideas are at variance with primitive teaching or with Jesus' original message, or that New Testament Christianity as a whole represents a quasi-mythical transfiguration of the historical Jesus.

As we shall see, the second and third of these questions of authenticity are often lumped together, in a way which hardly serves the interests of clarity.

None of the three questions can be settled at one stroke, so to speak. Each involves innumerable problems of detail, which require specialized erudition if one is even to peruse the massive literature on them, much less resolve them. Nevertheless it should be possible for the non-specialist interested in defending his or her Faith to acquire a grasp of the "lay of the land" in each area. Intrinsic apologetic interest, as well as the competence of the present writer, mandates a cursory look at the textual issue, a somewhat longer look at the literary-historical issue, and a thorough look at the theological one.

The New Testament certainly does not lack textual witnesses, having been copied more times than any other work of world literature. In whole or in part, the Greek text can now be studied from 76 papyri, 250 majuscule or uncial manuscripts (all capital letters, the older form of written Greek), 2,646 miniscules, and 1,977 lectionaries.(1) In so large a body of texts, it is not surprising that the number of variations should be enormous—about 250,000 at last count—of which only a handy selection are noted in even the largest critical editions. Nevertheless, only a handful of these variations, appearing in the best manuscripts, need to be taken at all seriously.

The vast majority of all manuscripts present a form of the text sometimes called "common" or "Koine", which became fixed about the time of St. John Chrysostom. Standardized at Constantinople, it was copied throughout the Middle Ages and served as the "textus receptus" for the printed editions of the 16th and 17th centuries. It represents a careful and reverent revision of the text traditions which preceded it, here and there smoothing out the language, securing perspicuity, and harmonizing variants. Were it the only text-form in our possession, we should not be in very bad shape. But we do have older and better forms.

All New Testament text scholars have agreed for well over a hundred years that, in general, the oldest and best form of the text is what is now usually called the "neutral" text. It is the text-form

presented in the two great fourth-century uncial codices on which all modern editions are substantially based: Codex Vaticanus, preserved in the Vatican Library, and Codex Sinaiticus, discovered by Tischendorf in St. Catherine's monastery on Mt. Sinai in 1849, and currently in London. Substantially the same text-form appears in the fifth-century uncial, Codex Alexandrinus.

The readings of the "neutral" text are occasionally (in fact very rarely) set aside in favor of a reading preserved in the so-called "Western" text-form, for which our best witness is the sixth-century Codex Cantabrigiensis (also called Codex Bezae after the fact that it was once in the possession of the scholarly Calvinist reformer, Theodore Beza). It is an ancient text-form, cited by Cyprian and Irenaeus, the basis for the pre-Jerome Latin version (called "Itala"); but it is usually popularizing, harmonizing and full of glosses.

The antiquity and authority of the "neutral" text has recently been given the most dramatic kind of vindication. A papyrus codex was sold by a Coptic family in Egypt to a Western collector in 1955; it proved to contain almost all of the first 14 chapters of St. John's Gospel (minus, of course, the pericope of the woman taken in adultery, John 7:53-8:11, already known to be a later interpolation from its absence in Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, etc.) plus fragments of chapters 15-21. In a first communication on the papyrus, K. Aland was able to announce an agreement among the papyrologists that the manuscript was written around the year 200 A.D. "with utter certainty." (2) Dubbed "Papyrus Bodmer II" and usually represented by the *sigulum* "P66", the document is thus one of the oldest textual witnesses known, and far more extensive than any of the others of comparable antiquity. Precisely because the amount of text preserved is large, it has been possible to relate P66 to the known text-forms. The result of this comparison has been to prove that P66 is a witness to the "neutral text", which is thus almost 200 years older than previously was demonstrable. The already prized text of Vaticanus and Sinaiticus is thus shown to have existed prior to 200.(3)

Thereby hangs a revolution in textual scholarship. Previous to this discovery, scholars believed that the "neutral" text, although

the best available, was not particularly primitive but represented a scholarly purge of older, freer, and more careless texts. By shattering this theory, P66 opens the possibility that we are very close indeed to the New Testament autographs—closer, at any rate, than had ever before been supposed. No work of Greek or Roman antiquity has textual witnesses like this—not Virgil, not Caesar, not Plato. These secular works are known solely from medieval manuscripts, and often from a single copy! Clearly, those who doubt the authenticity of the New Testament have no case to make on textual grounds.

The problem of literary authenticity is less severe than is usually thought; in fact, it is beginning to reach the vanishing point. One may say that the problem has a fame out of all proportion to its merits.

The reason for this lies in the fact that "Biblical criticism" burst upon the consciousness of Europe just at the time when its conclusions were most radical. F.C. Baur, professor of Church History and Dogmatics at Tuebingen from 1826-1860, rejected the traditional attribution of all but five of the New Testament books, placing the origin of many of them in the mid-second century. David Friedrich Strauss, in 1835 with his *Das Leben Jesu*, and Ernest Renan, in 1863 with his *Vie de Jesus*, created sensations by denying with elegance and erudition the miracles and the divinity of Christ. The Victorian Age was the high-point of Western fascination with archaeology, classical literature, comparative mythology, semitic philology, ancient history, epigraphy, papyrology, and almost every other discipline ancillary to Biblical criticism. Never before or since could Max Mueller's lucubrations on Sanskrit have enjoyed a mass audience! It was an age in which historico-critical inquiry, perceived as undermining the foundations of culture and traditional faith, was read with genuine excitement by non-specialists. And after the turn of the century, especially after the first World War, when accumulating evidence began to overthrow conclusion after radical conclusion of the Victorian savants, the world was no longer listening, having found in war and revolution more pressing concerns. The retractions have never caught up with the mistakes.

For example, at the turn of the century, nothing was considered more certain than the late date, incipient gnosticism, and mystical indifference to history of the Gospel of John. The reasons for a late dating (95-130) were essentially two: traces of gnostic dualism and high Christology (e.g., pre-existent divinity). Then came the discoveries at Qumran, popularly known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. The dualism of light and darkness and many other Johannine expressions turned up in the scrolls. John is thus linked, not to Hellenistic movements of the end of the century, but to a Palestinian essenism of the beginning. In 1954, R. Gyllenberg was able to show that the fourth Gospel knows the true character of John the Baptist's ministry better than the Synoptics, and that Johannine Christianity was more archaic than Synoptic Christianity.(4) As to the "high" Christology of incarnate Logos, it is no "higher" than the pre-Pauline hymn quoted in Philippians 2:6-11;(5) it has solid and obvious roots in the Old Testament tradition of a personified Wisdom (Proverbs 8:12-16, 20-21, 22-36; Sirach 24:1-21), and affinities with the Synoptic tradition are far from lacking.(6) Numerous individual studies have argued the historicity of various details given by John: the plurality of trips to Jerusalem, an early Judean ministry, exact topographical references, the chronology of the Passion. Today the very least that a scholar will say is that Johannine tradition contains genuinely old "elements" of the highest historical value. But some are going further and demanding a revision downward of the long-standard dating of the Gospel's publication. Conventionally assigned to the 90's, some are willing to place it *before* 65.(7)

This remarkable turn-around on John's Gospel is only an especially dramatic instance of what is in fact the general trend. If one were to take the dates assigned to all New Testament books by a consensus of the going scholarship at 50-year intervals, from 1850 to the present, one would find a constant pattern of reduction and contraction. For the last 20 or 30 years, there has been no real doubt that every book of the New Testament belongs to the Apostolic or immediately sub-Apostolic period, was circulated well before the end of the first century (with the possible exception of II Peter or Jude), and faithfully reflects the Christianity of Palestine,

Syria, or the early Gentile missions. Even the conventional synoptic datings (Mark to about 70, Greek Matthew and Luke to around 85) are fundamentally compatible with early Patristic tradition and with the claims of orthodoxy. If one could date these works no earlier, and could reduce the claims of pseudonymity no further than is now standard (the Pastoral Epistles, II Peter, and perhaps Jude), a Catholic could at least live with the situation. But in fact further reductions may well be possible.

From a theological point of view, the most decisive events of the first century were undoubtedly the Incarnation, the Resurrection, Pentecost, the opening of the Gentile mission, and the conversion of Paul. But set aside, for a moment, the Faith. From a secular-historical point of view, what was the most world-shattering event for early Christianity? After the crucifixion, one would have to list the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. A moment of upheaval for the Jerusalem Mother-Church, a stunning defeat for Christianity's Jewish opponents, a thing to see as the fulfillment of prophecy (and for which to find or invent prophecies) if there ever was one, and, with the cessation of Temple sacrifices, a theological vindication which no Christian writer, committed to the thesis of the transcendence of sacrifice on the cross of Christ, could resist crowing about—only where is the crowing? Not once, in the entire New Testament, is the fall of Jerusalem mentioned as a past event.(8) And the prophecies of it, themselves few, are so vague and general that, for once, the standard critical charge of "prophecy-after-the-event" looks forced and unconvincing. Why should Luke, writing a history of the early trials of Christianity in 85, even if he *does* cut off his narrative with the events of 65, nevertheless in so many mentions of Jerusalem and its leaders never once so much as allude to the catastrophe which he must have known overtook them? Why should the Evangelists, having allegedly "retouched" so much else, not have made fully explicit the warnings of Christ on the city's future? Why should John, whose enmity towards the Jews is the sharpest of any New Testament writer, not have played his trump card? Quite the contrary, why does he almost go out of his way to relate sayings about the Temple to the Lord's own body? And why, above all,

does the author of Hebrews, writing to Jewish Christians still attracted to the old covenant's sacrifices, not spare himself the trouble of long exegetico-theological arguments and pronounce the obvious: God Himself has abolished the sacrifices, in full view of the Roman world? These oddities are almost inexplicable unless perhaps, just perhaps, all of these works were written before 70. Intrigued by this possibility, John A. T. Robinson, who is certainly no theological conservative (besides being a reputable New Testament scholar, he is also the *Honest to God* Robinson), has reopened the problem of literary dating in a way which has not been done for more than a century. He writes:

Indeed what one looks for in vain in much recent scholarship is any serious wrestling with the external and internal evidence for the dating of individual books (such as marked the writings of men like Lightfoot and Harnack and Zahn), rather than an **a priori** pattern of theological development in which they are then made to fit.(9) In fact ever since the form critics assumed the basic solutions of the source critics (particularly with regard to the synoptic problem) and the redaction critics assumed the work of the form critics, the chronology of the New Testament has scarcely been subjected to fresh examination. No one since Harnack has really gone back to look at it for its own sake or to examine the presuppositions on which the current consensus rests. It is only when one pauses to do this that one realizes how thin is the foundation for some of the textbook answers and how circular the arguments for many of the relative datings. Disturb the position of one major piece and the pattern starts disconcertingly to dissolve.

That major piece was for me the Gospel of John.... I have wondered more and more whether it does not belong much nearer to the Palestinian scene prior to the Jewish revolt of 66-70.

But one cannot redate John without raising the whole question of its place in the development of New Testament Christianity. If this is early, what about the other gospels? Is it necessarily the last in time? Indeed does it actually become the first?—or are they earlier too? And, if so, how then do the gospels stand in relation to the epistles? Were all the Pauline letters penned, as has been supposed, before any of the gospels?...

It was at this point that I began to ask myself just why **any** of the books of the New Testament needed to be put after the fall of Jerusalem in 70....(10)

In good control of the literature of the last 150 years, Robinson goes on to consider in detail the possibility he has raised for each book—details for which the present writer hopes to have whetted the reader's appetite.

Now it is quite beside the present purpose to endorse Robinson's conclusions (all the Synoptics before 60 and perhaps as early as the 40's, James in the late 40's, Paul's letters as usual but the Pastorals in the mid-50's, the Apocalypse in late 68, etc.), congenial as they may be. But it is vital to insist upon the validity—and more than the validity, the unconditional necessity—of Robinson's guiding rule: assumptions about the course of theological development cannot be used to determine the datings which are inferred from them. On the contrary, such assumptions must themselves be tested in the light of independent data, preeminent among which are objectively established datings.

Observance of this one rule, by scholars of the past hundred years, would have altered the face of New Testament studies beyond recognition. Theories which have achieved worldwide influence and credence under the guise of objective scholarship would have been recognized for the theological constructions they really were. Look: if you need a theological premise (e.g. that Jesus was not divine nor messiah, or that Jesus had no explicit consciousness of such dignities and never claimed them, or that perception of the Jesus of history as the Christ of faith required such-and-such theological stages) in order to render fully persuasive a literary, form, or redaction critical conclusion, then that conclusion is a function of theology and not of historical criticism. I say this, not as a theologian jealous of his territory, but as one who has read widely enough in the philosophy of science to have grasped at least the fundamentals of theory construction and empirical confirmation.⁽¹¹⁾ Allowing a theological assumption to supply a crucial part of the plausibility of the theory (in this case, an ordering and dating of texts and oral traditions) which in turn is supposed to confirm the theological assumption is the very antithesis of fruitful method—unless the assumption can be proved true independently of the theory (which of course is not the case in these instances).

This is why, to one familiar with the structure of genuine science, the vast majority of New Testament scholarship has such a peculiar look: it is all theory and little or no confirmation. One cannot tell where the data-to-be-explained end and the theory begins, nor where the theory ends and the data-which-confirm-it begin. Nothing seems to count as a datum until the theory tells you what you are seeing. Hence the "facts" become a function of the theory, viewpoint, "insight," or hermeneutical stance adopted. No wonder one so often feels, in reading Bultmann or one of his imitators, that the very "plausibility" of the view being presented, that is, the intuitive sense of insight or intellectual excitement which the view offers, is (and is intended to be) the primary justification for it!

(I realize that with Dilthey, Gadamer, and others, such shabby procedures are given a high-brow rationale as "the hermeneutics of understanding" or "the method proper to the *Geisteswissenschaften*" [roughly translated, the humanities]; I cannot take the time to attack this pseudo-methodological rationale here, nor its analog in the philosophy of science, which is Thomas Kuhn's now largely discredited theory of "radical meaning variance"; I merely note these meta-theories in order to register disagreement with them.)

With these observations, I am at the transition point to my third topic, the theological authenticity of the New Testament, which (I am arguing), due to the failure to observe Robinson's rule, has rarely been perceived clearly enough as an independent topic. If that rule had been observed, there would be almost no question today of the literary authenticity of the New Testament; for insofar as this issue is gotten clear of the the theological one, it is rather surprising to most people how conservative are the views of competent scholars today and how supportive of traditional positions.⁽¹²⁾ More to the point: if the rule had been observed, the effort to sort gospel pericopes into form-critical genres would have gone ahead quite well, but the effort to sort them *chronologically*, by dating and placing the oral traditions behind them, would have been given up as hopeless. For, as anyone who takes the trouble to read the literature for himself can see, there simply are no

Pericope - a short passage

criteria for this historical sorting other than theological-development-pattern assumptions.(13) And of course it is just this kind of form-history which continues to give New Testament scholarship its reputation for radicalism or, indeed, unbelief.

Take a concrete illustration. There are several sayings of Jesus in the Synoptic tradition which speak of a figure called "the Son of Man." If we leave out of account those contexts in which the phrase seems merely to translate an Aramaic idiom for "a man", "a fellow", the remaining sayings fall into two sorts: those which speak of the Son of Man as a heavenly, transcendent figure, who is to come at the eschaton and vindicate those who have accepted Jesus, and those which speak of the Son of Man in his present, earthly work and passion. For short, one classifies these as "future" Son of Man sayings and as "present" Son of Man sayings. It is a much disputed question whether Jesus ever called Himself the Son of Man and hence whether any of these sayings is authentic. Please have a look at how the dispute goes.

Bultmann, who is famous for accepting very few sayings as authentic, is nevertheless convinced of the genuineness of the *future* Son of Man sayings. Here is a parade case (Mark 8:38):

For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

And here is perhaps the same saying as Luke has it from *Q* (an early collection of Jesus' sayings) (Luke 12:8f):

And I tell you, every one who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God; but he who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God.

Because substantially the same saying is thus found both in Mark and in *Q*, there is already reason to think it old. But Bultmann's real reason for accepting the saying is that here Jesus seems rather clearly to speak of the Son of Man as an apocalyptic figure *quite distinct from himself*.(14) Bultmann thinks that, whereas

Jesus never identified Himself with that coming Son of Man, the early Church did make that identification as a result of the resurrection experiences. Thus the confession or preaching of Jesus as the Son of Man belongs to the post-Easter faith of the community. Therefore, all the sayings in which Jesus does seem to identify Himself with the Son of Man (the present Son of Man sayings, e. g., Matthew 8:20 and parallels) are known to be created or at least "retouched" by the early Church. It also becomes possible to argue that, in the light of the post-Easter identification, sayings in which Jesus had originally spoken of himself as "I" (e. g., Mark 8:27) were reworded to make Him call himself the Son of Man (Matthew 16:13) and, *vice versa*, sayings in which Jesus had originally spoken of the Son of Man as distinct from Himself (e. g., Luke 12:8f) were reworded to make Him speak of Himself as "I" (Matthew 10:32f).⁽¹⁵⁾

Thus argue Bultmann and certain of his pupils.⁽¹⁶⁾ To the obvious objection that Jesus can hardly be God's decisive and eschatological act in history, if He and His work have to be vindicated by still another figure who is yet to come, H. Toedt makes the rather lame answer that "while there is not a Christological identity between Jesus and the Son of Man, there is a soteriological continuity between the work of the one and the work of the other."⁽¹⁷⁾ Hence after Easter the Church could come to see them as identical. And Fuller makes the additional answer that, whatever the difficulties, Mark 3:38 and Luke 12:8 must be taken as genuine and as distinguishing Jesus from the Son of Man, because it is a "primary criterion of tradition history" (no less) that "sayings which conflict with the post-Easter faith of the Church are *prima facie* authentic"⁽¹⁸⁾

Such an answer simply will not do for certain more radical pupils of Bultmann. Since God's presence in Jesus is supposed to be final, there is no room for another Son of Man between Jesus and the coming Kingdom.⁽¹⁹⁾ So the only thing to do is to reject all the Son of Man sayings as post-Easter creations of the Church. Jesus never called Himself by that title, but the early Church expected Him to come again as such (thinking perhaps of the figure in Daniel 7). Hence even the future Son of Man sayings are

oracles of early Christian prophets.

Meanwhile, there is another school altogether (E. Schweizer and J. A. T. Robinson) which, also embarrassed by the prospect of another Son of Man figure coming after Jesus, takes the opposite line from Bultmann. Jesus did call Himself the Son of Man (perhaps in the neutral, Aramaic sense); the *present* Son of Man sayings are to be accepted as genuine, and the future ones rejected as creations of the Church!(20)

Now, before the reader gets impressed by the free debate and diversity of opinion among respected scholars, it would be well to note the premise which is common to these otherwise contradictory opinions and which alone serves to make any of them plausible. The premise is that Jesus could not have uttered Mark 8:38 or Luke 12:8 and had Himself in mind as the coming Son of Man. Why not? Well, because for the historical Jesus to proclaim His own return in glory implies either infused knowledge of His Identity or else rampant egomania. The latter is distasteful (as well as historically improbable, since great world religions really don't get founded by crackpots), while the former is that perfect orthodoxy which it is "fundamentalism" to confess.

In other words, for this perfectly typical form-critical debate, in which logia are assigned a dating before or after Easter, the decisive and common premise is a sheer theological assumption. Instead of its being the case that form-critical research provides evidence on what one ought to think about theological claims (which is surely the situation an honest inquirer should prefer), it is the case that theological presuppositions shape, guide, and provide "evidence" for the form-critical research.

Of course, the theological presupposition behind the positions of Bultmann, Bornkamm, Kaesemann, Vielhauer, Schweizer, Robinson, Fuller, *et al.*, is one which I do not happen to share. (As a dogmatic theologian, I am compelled to accept the infused knowledge as a consequence of the hypostatic union both by sheer logic and by ecclesiastical authority.(21)) But the point here is not to vindicate one theology or another but to demand of New Testament scholars (what we have every right to demand) that they clearly separate their theological premises from their

objectively scholarly premises, so that it may become clear what depends logically upon what, and so that, whenever putatively form-critical and hence neutrally scientific conclusions depend in fact upon theological premises, those conclusions may be rejected by a theologian, if need be, as faulty theological constructions without his incurring the undeserved opprobrium of un-scientific obscurantism; and so that, whenever the theological authenticity of the New Testament (as I have defined that concept above) appears to be put in doubt by "scientifically controllable evidence" (to borrow a phrase from R.E. Brown), and yet that evidence is in fact, if traced to its premises, a theological construction, the perplexed believer may be able to see easily that what he has before him is not a conflict of faith with reason, nor of older theology with newer science, but of one theology with another—the theology of the Church which produced the Testament with the theology of the scholar who is studying the Testament.

Now, once matters are put in this way, the many challenges which have been brought against the theological authenticity of the New Testament begin to show what (*I think*) is their true face. Behind the facade of history and philology—or, for that matter, behind the facade of pious rhetoric—each is a theology rivaling that of the New Testament itself. I mention the pious rhetoric because it is too often forgotten that theologies which present rival claims to the theological trajectory of the New Testament are not necessarily rivals on the Left. There are also rivals on the Right—ancient fundamentalisms which demanded of Jesus miracles in His childhood, modern fundamentalisms which demand from divine inspiration a kind of newspaper historicity for the Gospels which they plainly do not have, and which the Church of the first centuries plainly did not demand of them, or it could not have canonized them.

The present writer remains to be convinced that any of the well-known challenges to the theological authenticity of the New Testament is at bottom much more than a rival (and rather uninteresting) theology; and if this is true, one can propose a fairly efficacious way of dealing with them. Having pointed out their

theological character, one can challenge them not only on the level of theology but also on the level of history, as explanatory failures. Let me illustrate.

Among the offending premises which I have been calling 'theological', the most common sort consists of those which say that in this or that particular the historical Jesus could not have been as the Gospels present Him. And since the Gospels are now well recognized as theologically shaped and intentioned documents, this is tantamount to saying that the Jesus of history could not have been as the early Church believed and confessed Him to be.

One objects to such a premise by observing that the faith of the early Church is, for the historian, a fact. It needs to be explained as much as any other fact. How explain it, except by admitting that the historical Jesus must have been at least *enough* like the Christ of faith to have rendered the latter figure plausible to a great many people who had known the former?

It is usually answered that, while there is admittedly some tenuous (perhaps mysterious) continuity between how the historical Jesus behaved and how the Church subsequently described Him, nevertheless the vast majority of early Christians did not know Jesus; therefore their faith-statements do not need to be explained in terms of Jesuanic fact but are very often to be explained in terms of the concerns of the early Church. Hence the tendency to explain "inauthentic" logia and "unhistorical" pericopes as reflecting the spiritual, organizational, or polemical needs of this or that Christian community. Spot the "life-situation" in which a story was told and re-told, and you spot the reason for any unhistorical features the story is alleged to have.

On the contrary (I should rejoin), the community shapes and adapts the tradition only if there is a community. Why is there a Christian community in the first place? John the Baptist was a remarkable and compelling religious figure, who collected disciples and announced the Kingdom; why was there no "community" after *his* death to preach, missionize, and create gospels? Or if there was, why did it not endure long enough to leave a mark in history?

The obvious counter-thrust is to point to the Resurrection. Thanks to the resurrection experiences, the disciples' conception of Jesus was radically transformed, so that they acquired not only a motive for community-building but also a perspective from which to re-interpret and "re-touch" the memories of Jesus's earthly ministry.

There is (I sur-rejoin) a see-saw here. The existence and faith of the primitive Christian community is not self-explanatory and, in order to explain it, one needs either a spectacular historical Jesus (the see) or else at least a spectacular resurrection (the saw) and maybe both. Monumental effects need a potent cause. A Palestinian Jewish community which not only forms but grows contagiously in the face of opposition, and not only believes but believes things new and startling, and has the courage to reject all the more plausible options (Jesus a great prophet, Jesus Elijah brought back, Jesus Messiah but not divine), and not only preaches but in the name of its preaching stands firm against all the most similar and seductive contemporary movements (essenism, zealotism, early Jewish gnosticisms of docetic or angelolatrous flavor, Hellenistic mystery cults), and not only grows but leaps across cultural, moral and religious abysses to form purely Gentile communities—such a thing is a monumental effect. It will be understandable how such an effect could have come about if (on the one hand) the historical Jesus was, at least among his intimates, a spectacular miracle-worker, exorcist, preacher and expounder of the Scriptures, so mysteriously gifted as to give rise to the wildest conjectures about His Identity—substantially as the Gospels portray Him; then (if you *insist*) the resurrection experiences might have been a little bit "iffey", subjective, refined, conceptual, and faith-presupposing (as the critics portray them)—and still have been enough to energize those disciples to do all they did. Alternatively, the same monumental effect will be understandable if (on the other hand) the Resurrected Jesus was spectacularly real, objective, stunning, technicolor, evidentially irresistible to anyone who saw Him—substantially as the Gospels portray Him; then (if you *insist*) the previous life of Jesus might have been sufficiently ordinary, on a

normal human scale, that very little of what He actually said and did was worth remembering "straight" (so to speak) without being retouched and reinterpreted in the light of his Easter promotion—substantially as the Gospel critics portray Him. I am speaking now purely out of a sense of how history works. Given a reasonable view of human events, I can understand (find intelligible) the rise of Christianity on either of these hypotheses. But what I cannot understand—and what I defy anyone to understand—is how the Christianity visible in the New Testament could have existed if the critical portrait is right on both sides of the see-saw—if neither the public life nor the resurrection were compellingly spectacular. There is a limit to how much unconfirmed faith, no matter how sincere, can make people accomplish.

It will be objected that this argument, thanks to its sweeping generality, is not a refutation of any of the *precise* difficulties scholars advance (think of the difficulties for the traditional picture of a "Messianic secret" advanced long ago by Wrede). Hence it may be interesting and in a certain way thought-provoking, but it can hardly be of scientific value.

This objection fails to distinguish between theory and meta-theory, that is, between the detailed problems and solutions which are the contents of a science, and the broader norms of coherence and cogency without which (I mean: in violation of which) a 'solution' cannot count as a solution. The argument just advanced is not a refutation *inside* New Testament scholarship of this or that literary, historical or form-critical theory; it is a challenge *to* New Testament scholarship on the level of meta-theory. It is a challenge to show how certain theories can explain the most obvious aspects of what they have to explain, if taken seriously.

For example, if the historical Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah during his public ministry, or never claimed to be the coming Son of Man, and if both claims are "interpretations" of Jesus which became plausible to a select group of His erstwhile disciples, after His death, on the basis of their resurrection experiences, in short, if all of that is the theory, how does it explain

the facts that (a) the much larger group of His erstwhile disciples, who did not see the resurrected Jesus, did not forthwith reject these interpretations as false to the One whom they had followed, and (b) the small group holding these novel interpretations was able to constitute itself, without further ado, as *the* Christian community? Why, in other words, do the Gospels, the Acts, the Epistles, and other early sources yield clear evidence of Apostolic polemics against the Jews (who from the beginning had rejected Jesus) but no evidence whatever of what must have been, if the theory is correct, the far more crucial polemic of the Apostolic clique against the vast majority of Jesuanic disciples (who, faithful to the Master Himself, denied that He was Messiah or Son of Man)? And the point of this question is only sharpened by the fact that we do have evidence of Apostolic-Christian polemic against Jewish Christians who denied (not the Messiah-ship but) the Lordship or divinity of Jesus.

In a nutshell, the existence and faith of the early Christian Community is faithfully portrayed in the New Testament documents (no one any longer denies this point; their literary authenticity confirms it); therefore the existence and faith of that community is a kind of massive fact which has to be explained; an explanation is a sufficient condition, which in turn is the set of necessary conditions; therefore, a *critical* theory of what the historical Jesus was like and how the Christian interpretation of Him came to be formed must be a *sufficient condition* for that massive fact just mentioned. I have argued that the critical theories which compromise the theological authenticity of the New Testament are not only themselves theological constructions (rival options for a Christian or neo-Christian faith) but also incredible constructions because, as theories, they fail to explain the data of the case.

Such are my basic contentions; until they are proved wrong, I see no reason to believe that there is any convincing solution to the problem of Christian origins other than the New Testament's own solution: the divinity of Jesus Christ and the historicity of the Faith which proclaims that divinity.

NOTES AND SUGGESTED READING

- 1 Kurt Aland, **Kurzgefasste Liste der griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments**, I Gesamtuebersicht (Berlin, 1963).
 - 2 K. Aland, "Papyrus Bodmer II" in **Theologische Literaturzeitung** 82 (1957) 164.
 - 3 Heinrich Zimmermann, "Papyrus Bodmer II und seine Bedeutung fur die Textgeschichte des Johannes-Evangeliums" in **Biblische Zeitschrift** n.f.2. (1958) 214-243.
 - 4 R. Gyllenberg, "Die Anfange der johanneischen Tradition" in **Neutestamentliche Studien fuer R. Bultmann** (Berlin, 1954) 144ff.
 - 5 See the standard commentaries (Dibelius, Lohmeyer, Beare, etc.) and the article "Pais theou" in G. Kittel, **Theological Dictionary of the New Testament**, V.
 - 6 See the famous "Johannine Logion" which may have belonged originally to Q and is now found in Matthew 11:25-30 (cf. Luke 10:21-24); A. Feuillet, "Jesus et la Sagesse divine d'apres les Evangiles Synoptiques" in **Revue Biblique** (1955) 161-185; M.J. Suggs, **Wisdom, Christology and the Law in Matthew's Gospel**.
 - 7 John A.T. Robinson, **Redating the New Testament** (Philadelphia, 1976) 352ff.
 - 8 Contrast this strange reticence with the Epistle of Barnabas, chap.16.
 - 9 Robinson is alluding here to the theological development-scheme which is standard among the Bultmannians and which is supposed to begin with "Palestinian Jewish Christianity", run through "Jewish Mission" and "Gentile" Christianities, and terminate with "emergent Catholicism". Along the way Christ is progressively divinized (mythologized), and church order is progressively hierarchicalized. For sharp recent criticisms of the whole quasi-evolutionary scheme, see I.H. Marshall, "Palestinian and Hellenistic Christianity: Some Critical Comments" in **New Testament Studies** 19 (1972-3) 271-287; "Early Catholicism" in R.N. Longenecker and M.C. Tenney, eds., **New Dimensions in New Testament Study** (Grand Rapids, 1974) 217-231; Martin Hengel, "Christologie und neutestamentliche Chronologie" in H. Baltensweiler and B. Reicke, eds., **Neues Testament und Geschichte: Oscar Cullmann zum 70. Geburtstag** (Tuebingen, 1972) 43-67.
- What annoys Robinson is that this scheme of theological development is assumed a priori and then used to sort and date the New Testament books, rather than using the independently ascertainable dates of the books to check the validity of the scheme.
- 10 Robinson, **op. cit.**, 4ff.
 - 11 For a decent orientation, see Karl Popper, **The Logic of Scientific Discovery** (New York, 1965); Hans Reichenbach, **Experience and Pre-**

- diction** (Chicago, 1938); Wesley Salmon, **The Foundations of Scientific Inference** (Pittsburgh, 1967); D. Shapere, "Plausibility and Justification in the Development of Science" in **The Journal of Philosophy** 63 (1966) 611-621; H. Margenau, "What is a theory?" in **The Structure of Economic Science**, ed. S.R. Krupp (Englewood Cliffs, 1966); R. Braithwaite, **Scientific Explanation** (Cambridge, 1953); Carl R. Kordig, "Discovery and Justification" forthcoming in **Philosophy of Science**.
- 12 For instance, in Synoptic studies, it is freely admitted that the long-maintained primacy of Mark, and the literary dependency of Matthew and Luke on Mark, is not only not conclusively proved but is recently very much up in the air again.
 - 13 For an almost candid admission of the point, see E.B. Redlich, **Form Criticism** (New York, 1938) 77-80; R.H. Casey, **Quantulacumque** (London, 1938) 115; B.S. Easton, **The Gospel before the Gospels** (New York, 1930) 81. Lists of the most influential works employing form-criticism are readily available in Bible dictionaries and up-to-date introductions to the New Testament.
 - 14 Rudolf Bultmann, **Theology of the New Testament I** (N.Y.: 1951) 30.
 - 15 I am indebted for this account to Reginald H. Fuller, **The New Testament in Current Study** (New York, 1962) 37-43.
 - 16 Guenther Bornkamm, **Jesus of Nazareth** (N.Y., 1960) 206; Heinz E. Toedt, **The Son of Man in the Synoptic Tradition** (London, 1965).
 - 17 Paraphrased by Fuller, *op. cit.* 38.
 - 18 *Ibid.*, 42.
 - 19 Thus Ernst Kaesemann and Hans Conzelmann; see especially Philipp Vielhauer, "Gottesreich und Menschensohn in der Verkündigung Jesu" in W. Schneemelcher, ed., **Festschrift fuer Guenther Dehn** (1957) 51-79. The bibliography is in Fuller, *op. cit.*
 - 20 E. Schweizer, **Zeitschrift fur neutestamentliche Wissenschaft** 50 (1959) 185-209; J.A.T. Robinson, **Jesus and His Coming** (London, 1957).
 - 21 Cf. the decree, **Lamentabili sane exitu**, propositions 34 and 35; Denziger-Schoenmetzer 3434f.