The Resurrection in Recent Western Theology

J. C. HINDLEY

Perhaps no single question in the whole range of Biblical study involves more and more diverse types of enquiry than the interpretation of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. In addition to the regular questions of exegesis, and problems of historical enquiry which tax the historian's powers to the limit, we must also consider with sensitivity the very stuff of Christian living as it is known in the heart and mind of the believer, and beyond that again, problems of philosophy, epistemology and theology which pass out into ultimate mystery. The presuppositions of the scholar in many fields colour his approach to the problem of the Resurrection, and one of the most delicate questions, once he becomes aware of this, is to determine how far he permits those presuppositions to determine, or to be challenged by, what he discerns in the New Testament witness.

The aim of this paper is not to provide detailed accounts of what various recent New Testament scholars have said so much as to open up the various lines of enquiry, and discern the various options which recent discussion put before us. It may, therefore, be best to organize our material according to the various types of enquiry concerned, moving from the strictly exegetical through the historical to the philosophical and theological. We should also add, by way of preliminary, that we have taken the main concern to be with the primary resurrection, that of the Lord himself.

Exegetical Studies

I take it that the aim of exegesis is to determine precisely what the Bible says, whether we find the result acceptable or (as it may be) grotesque to modern ways of thinking. There is no doubt that a very common strain of thought in India, both inside and outside the Church, regards the Resurrection as a piece of puranic legend: a rather cheap and sentimental ending to the story, as well as a crude and totally unbelievable distortion of the true relation of the body, or personal existence

itself, to Ultimate Reality. We have to recognize at the outset, however, that such thoughts are totally at variance with the New Testament. Sir Edwyn Hoskyns is reported to have shocked some of his listeners in Cambridge by beginning his lectures on New Testament Theology with the passages about the resurrection.[1] Yet what may have seemed strange in the 1920s is widely accepted by N.T. scholars today. The whole New Testament is governed by the conviction that the Lord is risen, and the life and thought of New Testament Christians were determined by their experience of that reality.

This point of view is evident in a number of important recent studies. Floyd V. Filson deliberately took this as the orientation for his exposition of N.T. Theology under the title, *Jesus Christ the Risen Lord*, and a number of recent more detailed studies have made the same point. The proclamation of the Resurrection was the central concern of the earliest community. It is embedded in the earliest strata of the New Testament, not merely the speeches of Acts, but in such formulae as 1 Cor. 15:3–5 and 1 Tim. 3:16. These passages take us back to the sources of the tradition, and both of them concur in declaring that the same Jesus who had died is now living and active.[2] Similarly, Barnabas Lindars in his important book, *New Testament Apologetic*, showed how Old Testament texts, particularly Ps. 110:1, were used in connection with the fact of the Resurrection to establish the Messiahship of Jesus.

In arguing in this way, Lindars is giving a more precise analysis of what has been taken as proved by many New Testament scholars since the time of William Wrede: it was only with the Resurrection that Jesus was fully recognized as Messiah, and so God's appointed Saviour. Indeed, this is true, even if indirectly during his lifetime Jesus' 'messianic secret' was recognized by some of his intimate disciples. For even they all forsook him and fled at the Cross, and only found faith in the Lord to restore their shattered hopes, after his return from death.

The extent to which this Resurrection faith moulded the tradition about our Lord's own words, and came to overlay the reports in the Synoptic Gospels is a matter of keen debate at the present time. Many would agree with the latest exponent of Rudolf Bultmann's approach in this matter, when he argues that while Jesus looked forward to some one other than himself as the eschatological Son of Man, it was in the light of the Resurrection that the disciples came to say that Jesus

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[1] A. M. Ramsay, *The Resurrection of Christ* (London, 1945), p. 7.

[2] Cf. Ed. Schweizer, 'Two New Testament Creeds Compared' in W. Klassen and G. F. Snyder, *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation* (London, 1962).

himself is none other than this Son of Man, the glorious judge and redeemer who is to come at the end of time.[3]

The exegesis even of the Gospels, then, in the opinion of modern scholars, shows that their presentation of Jesus is determined by the Resurrection. The New Testament evidence suggests that Jesus would hardly have been remembered, let alone worshipped as Saviour and Lord if he had not risen from the dead. There would also be widespread agreement with the thesis of the first three chapters of the most recent book on the resurrection (Neville Clark's *Interpreting the Resurrection*) that the Resurrection fits into the pattern of Old Testament and Inter-testamental thought in many important respects, and must be understood against that background. Neville Clark marshalls the evidence with masterly brevity to show that for the Hebrew, man is understood as unity of body and soul: there can be no separation between the two, and, therefore, no life after death understood as a continuance of the 'soul' part after the 'body' part has decayed. For life, and that means life at its highest, life in relation to God, is embodied life. In the second place, from the time of the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes onwards, the Jews became so pessimistic about the possibility of realizing their national hope in this world (yet where else could they realize it ?) that they began to believe that God would break into the course of human history to establish his New Age. In the term beloved of scholarly specialists, this is the Eschatological Hope of Jewish visionaries who wrote the Book of Daniel and the many similar Apocalyptic books that came after it.

Against this background, the resurrection was seen not only to vindicate the claims and divine status of Jesus. It was seen also to embody the life-giving power of God which enabled the embodied personality of Jesus (and so in principle, of all men) to triumph over the disintegrating power of death. Furthermore, it was taken to be precisely the evidence of the in-breaking power of God which inaugurated the New Age of Apocalyptic hope. The New Age of God had indeed arrived with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and hence the powers of the New Age—the outpouring of the Holy Spirit prophesied by the prophet Joel—were now available to men.[4]

I am aware that the world of Jewish Apocalyptic seems singularly remote and even crude to men in twentieth-century India. Many of its details we can, indeed, ignore. But the essential message preserved by it (in continuity with the Old Testament which went before it) whether it be true or false,

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[3] H. E. Tödt, *The Son of Man in the Synoptic Tradition* (E.T., London, 1963). Also A. J. B. Higgins, *Jesus and the Son of Man* (London, 1964), and R. H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (London, 1965).

[4] Acts 2:14–33.

is, it would seem, of continuing relevance. It is the firm faith (shared by the Semitic Jews and the Aryans of Iran) that the life which counts, and which counts in eternity, is bound up with personal existence in this world: that the values of individual and corporate existence are given by God, can be transformed by him within the bounds set by time and space, and will be preserved by him to his glory. As the inauguration of the New Age the life, death and resurrection of Jesus was seen to confirm this faith, as well as to raise the Bearer of it to the Right Hand of God.

When we move to the rest of the New Testament, we find that this conviction implicit in the Gospels is made explicit. For St. Paul in particular this has been demonstrated by a brief article by the Protestant scholar, J. Jeremias,[5] and by a weighty and thorough book by the Roman Catholic scholar, D. M. Stanley.[6] Stanley demonstrates that not only is Paul's personal religion dominated by his living experience of the Risen Christ, but his doctrinal teaching also stems from his experience of the resurrection. The converted Pharisee finds a new dimension in his idea of God—as the one who raised Jesus from the dead. Moreover, it was on the Damascus road that Jesus was revealed to him as the Son (compare, especially, Gal. 1:16). Christology, therefore, and also the theology of Justification of Believers in Christ as the New Adam, take their rise from the experience of the Resurrection. Finally, Paul's doctrine of the Spirit, and the whole conception of the eschatological New Creation flow from the life-renewing power of God made known in the resurrection of Jesus.[7]

Historical Enquiries

So much for the theological importance of the Resurrection in the New Testament. But we cannot avoid the question, Did it happen? Granted that the N.T. writers attached this meaning to what they believed had happened, we feel it can only be relevant for us if what they believed was true. And the instinctive test we wish to apply is the test of historical enquiry. What can the scientific historian tell us about the Resurrection?

One of the major debates in Western theology has revolved precisely around this question. It was argued long ago by David Hume that no historical evidence could possibly establish

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[5] J. Jeremias, 'The Key to Pauline Theology', *Expository Times*, Vol. LXXVI, pp. 27 ff.

[6] D. M. Stanley, *Christ's Resurrection in Pauline Soteriology* (Rome, 1961).

[7] Cf. also N. A. Dahl, 'Christ, Creation and the Church' in W. D. Davies and D. Daube (ed.), *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology* (Cambridge, 1956). Cf. J. C. Hindley, 'The Christ of Creation in New Testament Theology', *The Indian Journal of Theology*, July–Sept. 1966, Vol. XV, No. 3.

a 'miracle', on the ground that we weigh all historical evidence by our experience of 'normal human life'. As, Hume argued, in current experience 'miracles do not happen'; it is always easier and more rational to believe that the witnesses were mistaken than to believe that when they report a 'miracle' they are speaking the truth. Hume has had many followers among those who consider that 'modern man' cannot believe in the miraculous. His arguments, however, are well answered by Alan Richardson in the chapter on our subject in his Bampton Lectures, *History, Sacred and Profane.*[8] Hume relied on an idea of the regularity and knowability of 'laws of nature' which scientists today do not hold. He also ignored the special character of historical enquiry, which distinguishes it from enquiry in the natural sciences. For while the latter are concerned to discover and state 'laws' or hypotheses which cover a multitude of facts with one uniform causal principle, historical enquiry is concerned with human beings and their actions: in history, therefore, every situation is unique, because it is the product of the interplay of human wills. It is impossible to determine in advance of the evidence what may or may not have happened. It is equally (and this we must admit) impossible to 'prove' historical statements in the sense that scientists 'prove' their generalizations. Belief in historical statements, rather, is proportionate to the evidence. We may well grant with Hume that the kind of evidence required for believing in the Resurrection would be very special, because obviously the Resurrection, whatever it was, was a very special kind of event. But we cannot say that on principle such evidence would be impossible to obtain. A similar argument, I think, lies behind the complex and abstract thesis of R. R. Niebuhr's *Resurrection and Historical Reason,* where it is shown that historical knowledge is to be distinguished from both scientific knowledge and *a priori* philosophical necessary truths. Historical enquiry has to accept the fact of uniqueness and freedom over against causal law. If this approach is applied to the Resurrection, then we shall go on to say (as Niebuhr does) that we are here dealing with the uniqueness and freedom—the 'grace' of God himself. But that is to anticipate and assume a certain religious commitment which the historian as such may not permit himself.

It remains true that a number of scholars continue to maintain that on the strictest historical principles there emerge grounds for saying that something like the Resurrection happened: when all allowance is made for the subjective element in the historian's work it may still be, in Richardson's words,[9]

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[8] A. Richardson, *History, Sacred and Profane* (London, 1964). An excellent philosophical answer to Hume is found in Ninian Smart, *Philosophers and Religious Truth* (London, 1964), Chap. II.

[9] Op. cit., p. 195.

that 'traces of the past point towards the resurrection of Christ as the most coherent explanation of the evidence'.

This approach has recently been revived in Germany by the celebrated essay of Heidelberg's Professor of Church History, H. F. von Campenhausen. In a way which Professor C. H. Dodd long ago made familiar to English readers[10] von Campenhausen stresses that St. Paul's testimony in 1 Cor. 15 must rest on his conversations with Peter and others in Jerusalem within 10 years of the events (as recorded in Gal. 1:18). Moreover, the 1 Corinthians pericope clearly implies a knowledge of the Empty Tomb tradition. Now, in itself, to prove the tomb was empty does not prove that the resurrection occurred. Many other explanations of an empty tomb are possible. But two other considerations are relevant. In the first place, the disciples were convinced that they had met and talked with Jesus after his death: for first-century Jews such a conviction could not possibly emerge from a belief in the 'spiritual' continuance of Jesus beyond death, because, as we have already seen, in Jewish tradition the distinction between soul and body would have been unintelligible.[11] In the second place, and more importantly (again an old argument, forcibly stated in English by F. Morison 30 years ago in *Who Moved the Stone?*), von Campenhausen points out that either the Jews or the Romans could easily have rid themselves of the nuisance caused by the Christians by producing the body, and so completely refuting the assertion that he had risen. Why did they not do so?[12] Again, other explanations than the 'orthodox' one are possible. On the other hand, even so subtle a philosopher, as Donald Mackinnon of Cambridge, is inclined to give weight to 'the apparent inability of the opponents of the early Christian preaching to silence the message of the Resurrection once for all by producing Christ's remains'.[13]

Other recent writers, again appealing to historical criteria, are inclined to lay much more stress on the actual faith of the early Church as itself a piece of historical evidence of a highly compelling kind. What was it that changed the dispirited disciples into powerful evangelists who 'turned the world upside down'? This is the point emphasized by Alan Richardson, and very carefully worked out by C. F. D. Moule in his most recent volume, *The Phenomenon of the New Testament*. The early

[10] C. H. Dodd, *About the Gospels* (Cambridge, 1952, reprinted 1958), pp. 17 f.

[11] So apparently von Campenhausen. Cf. also the long footnote 52 in W. Künneth, *The Theology of the Resurrection* (London, 1965), p. 94. However, *Wisdom* 3:1 and other passages might cause us to qualify this statement, but it is probably true for Palestinian Judaism.

[12] Unfortunately von Campenhausen's article is not available to me, and I have relied on the full report of his views in S. C. Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861–1961* (Oxford, 1964).

[13] G. W. H. Lampe and D. M. Mackinnon, *The Resurrection* (London, 1966), p. 84.

Christians, says Moule, had no reason for distinguishing themselves from Judaism except their belief about Jesus, and the belief was rooted in the resurrection. If the resurrection did not happen, then the beginnings of Christianity still await explanation.

One might also note in passing that both C. H. Dodd and C. F. D. Moule have attempted to salvage something of historical evidence from the confusions of the Gospel resurrection narratives.[14] Certainly it has always seemed to me that too much is made of the discrepancies of the narratives in the Gospels, and there is much to be said for Moule's comment, 'the appearances in Jerusalem and Galilee will represent, not different conceptions of the Christian mission, but simply the conception of Jesus showing himself wherever his friends happened to be at the time'.[15]

I hope I have said enough to show that the older forms of apologetic along the lines of historical explanation are by no means dead. And it is important to remind ourselves of this at a time when the headlines are being stolen by various forms of existentialist interpretation in the name of 'modern man' and what he can, or cannot, find believable. At the same time, all the scholars I have mentioned are agreed, in the words of Alan Richardson, that 'Christian theology has never suggested that the "fact" of Christ's resurrection could be known apart from faith'. What seems to be at issue, therefore, is not the question whether historical research can 'prove' the resurrection—all are agreed that it cannot; but rather, whether historical research is an important element in the total situation which disposes a man to faith, or maintains him in faith. Before trying to mark out the guidelines for deciding this question, we must look at the distinguished group of scholars who, in one way or another, hold that historical enquiry is irrelevant. Their views may be characterized by the term, the Existentialist Emphasis.

Existentialist Emphasis

Most famous among such scholars, and most difficult to grasp, is, of course, the late Rudolf Bultmann of Marburg.

It would probably be fair to say that Bultmann's concern is not with 'what actually happened', as a matter for scholarly speculation, but with the question, 'What does it mean to believe in the resurrection?' In an important sense he is concerned to defend the faith of the multitudes of Christians who have never heard of historical scholarship, and who have

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[14] C. H. Dodd, 'The Appearances of the Risen Christ' in D. E. Nineham (ed.), *Studies in the Gospels* (Oxford, 1955). C. F. D. Moule, 'The Resurrection Appearances in the Light of Festival Pilgrimages' in *New Testament Studies*, Vol. IV (October 1957), pp. 57 ff.

[15] Op. cit., pp. 59 f.

certainly not conducted the delicate analyses of von Campenhausen to ascertain 'the facts'. They nevertheless have 'known Christ and the power of his resurrection'. And, Bultmann claims, they are truly in line with the teaching of St. Paul and the rest of the New Testament. Historical enquiry is, in his view, irrelevant to faith in the resurrection. It becomes known in the moment of faith. Thus, in his exposition of St. Paul he writes:

> 'Nothing preceding the faith which acknowledges the risen Christ can give insight into the reality of Christ's resurrection. The resurrection cannot—in spite of 1 Cor. 15:3–8—be demonstrated or made plausible as an objectively ascertainable fact on the basis of which one could believe. But in so far as it or the risen Christ is present in the proclaiming word, it can be believed—and only so can it be believed.'[16]

A little later in the same passage he writes:

> 'It is as the risen Christ that Christ is present in the apostle; for in bearing about in his body the dying of Jesus, Paul is manifesting in his body the life of Jesus' (2 Cor. 4:10 f.) Through the apostle, Christ is demonstrating his power to the hearers: 'For as he was crucified out of weakness but lives out of the power of God, so we, too, are weak through him, but we shall live out of the power of God toward you' (2 Cor. 13:4)—i.e. the risen Christ himself encounters the hearer in the apostle.[17]

I have let Bultmann speak for himself at some length out of his positive exposition in the *N.T. Theology* rather than from the more familiar (if not notorious) essay on demythologizing, because it is only fair to see that behind the awkward negations of the latter, Bultmann has a very positive concern to ensure that belief in the resurrection never becomes a dead article of abstract speculation, but must be part of the stuff of the Christian life. It is meeting Christ here and now, so that the eschatological act of God in and through this man becomes real for the believer. So in his Gifford Lectures Bultmann wrote:

> 'Jesus Christ is the eschatological event not as an established fact of past time but as repeatedly present, as addressing you and me here and now in preaching.'[18]

Bultmann, then, is not interested in empty tombs, or angelic appearances. He is concerned with what he sees as the central N.T. emphasis, that the Risen Christ addresses, challenges and transforms men *now*. He is thus known in

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[16] R. Bultmann, *The Theology of the New Testament*, Vol. I (E.T., London, 1952), p. 305.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 306.

[18] R. Bultmann, *History and Eschatology* (Edinburgh, 1957), p. 151.

experience, and if that is true for the man who is made a new creation in faith, then the historical questions do not matter.

Bultmann's stress on the existential encounter with the Risen Christ, primarily through the preaching, is a very individual matter, and his theology as a whole has been widely criticized on this score. Very different is the understanding of the resurrection found in the scholar to whom we now turn, the American John Knox, who in many other ways has developed views remarkably similar to Bultmann's.

Like Bultmann, John Knox is sure that the only proof of the resurrection, and the only real meaning it can have for modern man, is in the experience of the Christian. But for him, that experience is not so much the individual response to the preaching of the Word, as the life of the community of the Spirit—the Church. In his book, *The Church and the Reality of Christ*, John Knox argues with great subtlety that the Resurrection is to be understood as the knowledge of the Spirit of Christ in the Church. This is the historical reality which can be known, and which is so intimately bound up with being a Christian that to deny it is to deny what the Christian knows to be the very stuff of his experience in the Church.

To the obvious rejoinder that such a presentation seems to have no necessary connection with Jesus of Nazareth, Knox replies with a careful and suggestive analysis of what is meant by 'memory'. The Church, he says, is the community of memory and the Spirit, and he suggests that memory (in the sense he defines it) can be a communal experience and an avenue to genuine knowledge. To put Knox's own very American illustration into Indian form, we could argue as follows: In 1903 or thereabouts, the Mohan Bagan football team in Calcutta defeated the British Army team, although the latter were armed with football boots and the former were barefoot Bengali lads. This great achievement has become part of the folk memory of Bengal: through periodical references to it (on anniversaries of the great occasion and such like) even I, as a foreigner, feel that I have shared in that event. It is perhaps not too much of a strain on language to say it is part of my 'memory'. Somewhat similarly the Church over the generations 'remembers Jesus' as well as knowing him as the Lord in their midst. So Knox writes: 'The Church in its essential and distinctive nature is the historical body in which this memory of the human Jesus and this experience of him as the divine Lord are fused or welded into an indivisible whole. One cannot remember Jesus (as the Church remembers him) without realizing that one also knows him now as Lord and Christ: but one cannot so know him without also remembering him as man and Master.'[19]

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[19] J. Knox, *The Church and the Reality of Christ* (London, 1962), p. 65.

In the assurance of present experience, Knox is prepared to say (with what seems to me a simple logical muddle) that the Resurrection is not a 'historical occurrence' in the sense of an observable incident, because it was not observed. It is historical in the sense that it belongs to the existence of the Church, and it is objective because what the Church has is an experience of knowing, where 'the concrete object of knowing is as real as the knowing itself'.[20]

It seems to me that both Bultmann and Knox have stressed vital elements which must never be lost sight of if we are truly to believe in the resurrection. They are quite right in saying that the resurrection is not merely an intellectual counter to be used in our theological constructions, or merely a spooky event shrouded in the mists of the past. These things, in themselves, are irrelevant to life today and untrue to the deepest Christian experience which, whether in individual response or in the community of the Church (and most of us, no doubt, would want to say 'in both of these'), knows the Lord as a present Reality.

At the same time, both Knox and Bultmann must face the question whether in their negative statements they have really done justice to the N.T. witness, or whether it is possible to avoid the recurrent query, Did something of quite shattering significance happen 'on the third day' or did it not? While these existentialist interpreters give a good account of the epistemological question, how do we *know* about this event, they cannot avoid the ontological question, did it really happen, or are we speaking merely about states of our experience, changed outlook, new self-understanding, etc.

The Ontological Question

Bultmann's language is almost irresponsibly ambiguous, but it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that when pressed he will say that after the crucifixion nothing whatever happened upon the stage of history beyond the emergence of certain beliefs and experiences in the minds and hearts of the disciples. Thus in the essay on 'New Testament and Mythology' he writes: 'Faith in the resurrection is really the same thing as Faith in the saving efficacy of the cross . . . How do we come to believe in the saving efficacy of the cross? There is only one answer. This is the way in which the cross is proclaimed. It is always proclaimed together with the resurrection. Christ meets us in the preaching as one crucified and risen. He meets us in the word of preaching and nowhere else. The faith of Easter is just this—faith in the word of preaching.'[21]

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[20] J. Knox, *The Church and the Reality of Christ* (London, 1962), p. 70.

[21] H. W. Bartsch (ed.), *Kerygma and Myth*, Vol. I (London, 1953), p. 41.

Criticism of Bultmann's position at this point has, it seems to me, been well developed by W. Künneth,[22] but perhaps I may be permitted to expound Bultmann's view by reference to a conversation which I was privileged to have with Professor Bultmann in Marburg in 1962. I reproduce here the notes which I made immediately after leaving the great man's house:

Q: How did the first disciples become Christians at all?

A: They were so impressed by the teaching of Jesus that they committed themselves to him, and could not believe, after his death, that he was really gone.

Q: You would say they affirmed this on the basis of their consciousness of his preaching and faith in his message, despite the offence of the cross?

A: Yes.

Q: Would you think we can know enough about the first disciples' 'experience' (in the widest possible sense) to analyse this, and so define more closely by what process they became Christians?

A: I am not interested in that question. We cannot know much about what happened two thousand years ago. What I want to know is, how the Word addresses me now?

A similar uncertainty about the reality of the Easter Day event hangs over John Knox's analysis. He himself acknowledges that it would be impossible to refute the view that the experience of the Church as the memory of Christ is 'simply the result of the suggestive power of an idea'.[23] But even on his own terms, the points made by R. R. Niebuhr (against, I take it, an earlier form of Knox's view) are worthy of consideration.

J. Knox suggests that the Christ event is to be interpreted as the coming into existence of the Church, and, therefore, the distinction between what happened to and in Jesus and what happened in and to the earliest disciples seems to become faint if not non-existent. In reply, Niebuhr makes four points: (1) The Gospels themselves are not merely a declaration of the resurrection reality, but came into existence as response to something which happened previous to and apart from them. (2) The existence of the Apostolate as a body of witnesses points to the same fact: they do not witness to their present experience, but to an event in the past. (3) Does it make historical sense to say that the Church arose spontaneously in and through the discovery of the Spirit, or rather does not the N.T. evidence force us to say that the Church itself was a *response* to the mighty act of God in raising Jesus from the dead. After all, the N.T. never speaks of the 'Spirit' as the one who rose, even

[22] W. Künneth, *The Theology of the Resurrection*, pp. 40 ff.
[23] J. Knox, op. cit., p. 65.

though it is the Spirit of and in community. Rather, the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ which also transcends the community, and bears witness to Jesus. (4) The eschatological hope of the Church is based, not on its present experience, but on its awareness that once already in the past God has dramatically intervened in raising Jesus from the dead.

Thus R. R. Niebuhr joins hands with C. F. D. Moule (though his language is very different) in suggesting that the only historical explanation of the existence of the Church and the evidence of the N.T. is as a response to some mighty event in the past to which the name Resurrection is to be given.

If these considerations are not adequate to divert Bultmann and Knox from their subjective existentialism, then I suspect we should have to say that, whatever their intentions in the matter, in practice they would fall easy victims to the type of analysis which modern positivistic philosophy offers. The modern philosopher would press the question, what precisely is being said by these two scholars over and above the statement that certain expriences happen in the consciousness of believers? In other words, it is at least doubtful whether a purely existentialist analysis can stop short of the theological conclusion reached by one of the most fascinating and brilliant of recent treatments—the atheistical 'theology' of Paul van Buren. In his lengthy discussion of the resurrection in *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel,* van Buren rejects the idea of physical resurrection, as incompatible with modern scientific understanding of the world, and goes on to analyse the meaning of the resurrection for the Church in some such terms as these. The Resurrection Appearances meant, in fact, a new discernment of the significance of Jesus, and a new experience of sharing in the freedom which had been his. So, says van Buren, 'we might say that, on Easter, the freedom of Jesus began to be contagious.'[24]

We thus find a large and serious group of thinkers claiming that the answer to the ontological question, What actually happened?, is either irrelevant or simply negative. The more conservative among us may well ask why do these thinkers believe that they can still be reckoned as Christians, and indeed the pioneers of the true exposition of Christianity for the modern age? It is perhaps time to pause and ask, what are the basic motives behind this type of interpretation and what is really at issue between the new and the old types of approach.

It seems to me that the representatives of radical theology have been moved (no doubt in varying proportions) by two major considerations. On the one hand, there is the conviction (expressed forcibly in Bultmann's demythologizing essay) that whatever subtle philosophical answers may be given on the

[24] Van Buren, op. cit., p. 133.

question of miracles, modern man simply cannot believe in them: in van Buren's words, 'we can no more silence the questions concerning the changes in cells at death which spring to our mind when we read the Easter story of the Gospels, than we can deny that we live in the twentieth century.'[25] A reference to John 16:39 ('by this time there will be an odour, for he has been dead four days') suggests that this remark is not quite so trenchant as its author supposed. Nevertheless, the objection is there and it is important: twentieth-century man cannot believe in miraculous resuscitation.

It is in response to this problem, on the part of those who are convinced that some kind of 'objective' happening is required to account for the rise of the Church that led to the famous 'telegram from heaven' theory, which has recently been restated by Prof. G. W. H. Lampe of Cambridge.[25] He holds that the Resurrection indeed happened as an objective event: but it did not involve the resuscitation of the corpse of Jesus. It rather meant the appearance in objective vision of the Risen Lord to his disciples: in bodily form, indeed, but in a body which was a 'spiritual body' of the type described by St. Paul in 1 Cor. 15—a kind of spiritual body which did not involve the disappearance of the 'flesh-and-blood "framework"'.[26] Lampe also feels that this is a better way of accounting for the fact that the story of the empty tomb appears to come into the tradition at a later stage (although, as we have seen, this is disputed). In place of a physical resuscitation we have an objective vision through which God declared that Christ could not be holden of death. This position seems neatly to meet the modern scientific sceptic on the one hand, and existentialist subjectivism on the other. It avoids both the scientific difficulties of resuscitation and the historical and theological difficulties of holding that all that happened was a change in the outlook in the disciples (however much this change may be dignified with the label 'the eschatological event').

It may well be wondered whether this half-way house is really an improvement on either of the other two views. After all, mysterious talk about a 'spiritual body' is no easier for the scientist than the more obvious miracle of resuscitation, and the existentialist theologian may well wonder whether it ensures (any more than the resuscitation theory) that the Resurrection will be truly understood as a life-renewing encounter with the present Lord.

But it is here we must mention the radical theologians' second and (I think) more profound motive for challenging traditional orthodoxy. Not only does the 'orthodox' view run counter to what modern scientific man can believe, it is quite

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[25] Lampe and Mackinnon, op. cit.
[26] Op. cit., p. 46.

irrelevant to a true religious and theological understanding of the meaning of Resurrection. The challenge is put trenchantly by Ronald Gregor Smith. Having plainly stated his view that 'the bones of Jesus lie somewhere in Palestine',[27] he poses the question, 'We might well ask, what is it that the would-be orthodox hope to prove by insisting upon an object of faith in terms of a visible, bodily, attestable resurrection?'[28] To ask for such a 'resurrection' is, in Gregor Smith's view, to ask for a miraculous proof in place of the faith in God's historical act in Christ of which the New Testament speaks.

The Theological Issue

We here come, I think, to the theological heart of the whole matter. For Gregor Smith, as for other radical theologians whether in Germany or America, faith is primarily a belief that God addresses men in and through the words and deeds of Jesus, whether the stress is on the Word of the Cross (as in Bultmann's theology) or on the historical Jesus (as in the post-Bultmannian movement). In Bultmann's widely accepted formulation, 'The proclaimer becomes the proclaimed', and the problem of the 'resurrection', therefore, is to demonstrate the continuity between the Church's *kerygma* and the historical Jesus. 'Secular Christianity' is the Christianity which finds in the historical word and example of Jesus the challenge of God to human life and the hope of renewal for human society. In such an understanding of faith, the only role we could attribute to an 'objective resurrection' (if the short-hand phrase will be allowed) is as a kind of proof or guarantee that Jesus really was and is God's word to men. And we might agree with the implication of Gregor Smith's challenge, that we do not want this kind of authentication. (We might, but I am not sure that we should. I have been struck by the way that here in India not only popular apologetic, but also such thinkers as P. Chenchiah and in our own day, M. M. Thomas, have laid stress on the resurrection as the final guarantee of the Christian position in very much this fashion).

But is Gregor Smith's understanding of faith true to the N.T. or to Christian experience? May it not be that something has dropped out—even the vital heart of the whole matter. This I think is the consideration that underlies the somewhat abstruse and (at first sight) irrelevant remarks of Prof. D. M. Mackinnon in his reply to Prof. Lampe. It is indeed surprising in a work on the 'Resurrection' to find so much space taken up in Mackinnon's chapters with the work of Christ in his earthly ministry and the cross. But Mackinnon's point is that the Gospel of Incarnation and Atonement proclaims, not only

[27] R. Gregor Smith, *Secular Christianity* (London, 1966), p. 103.
[28] Op. cit., p. 105.

that Jesus' teaching and example are God's word to us, but also that in and through the life and ministry of Jesus God was at work, in the process of redeeming the world, turning its disruptive forces into the path of re-integration, and so acting for man's redemption that our forgiveness and our very life *depend* upon what was there done once for all. Thus Mackinnon writes: 'If we say that we suppose the sense of that work (viz. of Christ) to reside in the end in a definitive declaration of the ways of God with men, made in man for men, we will, I suspect, incline towards a view that diminishes the element of uniqueness we attribute to Christ's resurrection. If, on the other hand, we suppose something done here once for all, we will not be surprised to find in the manner of the Amen spoken to that work an element of the unique.'[29]

If we may simplify, and so inevitably distort, Mackinnon's extremely sensitive and profound analysis, he may be taken to be urging three points which the existentialist theologians seem to have overlooked or rejected: (1) Christian hope and Christian life depend for their preservation upon an objective atonement, 'something built into the structure of the world'.[30] That is the theological need. (2) A Christian philosophy of the world needs to assert that its very processes (both in human and non-human realms) are to be transformed from inside. That is the sociological need. (3) A proper way to decide such questions is not to look for superficial 'miraculous' proofs, but it is to be willing to respond empirically to what is factually given. For the first of these two considerations, Mackinnon implies, the physical resurrection is a necessity, and criteria of assessing evidence implied in the last principle do, in fact, lead to the more 'orthodox' conclusion. If I may anticipate the paper on 'Indian views', it is extremely significant to my mind that P. D. Devanandan and M. M. Thomas both echo (and indeed carry further) the position taken by D. M. Mackinnon. Thus M. M. Thomas has written: 'What makes Christianity the "pillar and ground" of a genuine personal humanism in the Asian situation is precisely those parts of the Christian faith which the traditional spirituality of Asian religions and the ideologies of secular humanism reject most, that is the message that God has acted in a unique way in a secular historical event, namely, the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, to inaugurate his Kingdom, and that the ultimate consummation of the Kingdom is the summing up of all things in his person.'[31]

It seems to me that without something like the orthodox view of 'resurrection' as New Creation, this view of history and society, or of the individual's transformation through the

[29] Lampe and Mackinnon, op. cit., p. 84.
[30] Op. cit., p. 110.
[31] M. M. Thomas, *The Christian Response to the Asian Revolution* (London, 1966), p. 117.

power of Christ, is impossible. Whether, of course, the evidence taken as a whole, and by 'evidence' I mean to include not only the historical considerations with which this paper began, but the Church's and the individual's experience of divine grace, and the manifestation of that New Life in empirical forms, is such as to lead us to continue in this kind of resurrection faith is, I confess, by no means clear. I am fairly clear, however, that it is this faith, and not the radical existentialist substitute which can properly be called Christian. For it is this faith which has led to the world view, and in particular to the Christology, which is enshrined in the Church's creeds, and by which hitherto its life has been governed.[32]

If such faith is a continuing possibility, then it is likely to acknowledge something like classic formulation in the last book to which I wish to refer: W. Künneth's solid study, *The Theology of the Resurrection.*

This is a work of dogmatic theology, rather than historical enquiry or Biblical exegesis. It does, however, deal with the themes we have been considering, and brings to bear upon them a quite fresh point of view. Künneth rejects both the merely historical and the existentialist view of the resurrection. He takes seriously the objections to historical enquiry as method: not that it cannot uncover anything (in fact, according to Künneth, it does support the tradition of the empty tomb). However, it cannot demonstrate that the result of its quest is what the New Testament and the Church mean by resurrection. For the Resurrection, while it certainly, in one sense, took place on the first Easter Morning, is a 'primal miracle' which transcends history and so is beyond the reach of historical enquiry. It is even more clear that the existentialist account is inadequate, for it speaks, in the ultimate analysis, of a change in the believer rather than the mighty cosmic act of God.

But how can such language have any meaning, particularly in the modern age? Künneth is nothing if not bold. He suggests that most discussions of the matter have taken their criteria of judgement from some view of the world, whether philosophical or scientific, which is held on other grounds. If, however, as the New Testament implies, the resurrection is 'the establishing of a new reality of life' by the creative act of God, then the resurrection itself must govern our criteria of thought. So, writes Künneth, 'the reality of the resurrection does not allege the existence of a criterion of reality outside of, and in abstraction from, itself, but rather demands the adoption of a criterion and standpoint based on the reality of the resurrection.'[33]

[32] Compare the percipient remarks of Ian Henderson in his book, *Rudolf Bultmann* (London, 1965), pp. 32 f.

[33] W. Künneth, *The Theology of the Resurrection* (E.T., London, 1965), p. 72.

Künneth goes on to make a careful distinction between the primal miracle (Urwunder) itself and the signs which point to it, viz. the resurrection appearances of Jesus and the empty tomb. Neither of these are to be understood as constituting, or even proving, the resurrection. They are in the nature of signs set up for faith, which point towards the primal miracle, which is prior to them, and in a unique category, not even to be compared to the other miracles recorded in the N.T.

Having rejected every kind of rational understanding or historical proof, Künneth finally has to answer the question, how any man might come to hold such a view, and not surprisingly he holds it is through the miracle of faith, mediated through the preaching. 'To the miracle of the resurrection there inevitably corresponds the miracle of faith.'[34]

This is powerful stuff for preaching and for theologizing, and would seem to come closer to what is implied in the New Testament than most of the views we have been considering. It certainly coincides fairly closely with the exegetical studies with which we began this paper.

However, one may still wonder what conclusions are to be drawn and what is the upshot of the whole matter. I confess that I find the choices before us very puzzling, and each has its own difficulties. The purely historical approach is admitted by all to be inadequate, if not positively misleading: for it brings us at best to a series of historical phenomena which may or may not signify what the Church has meant by the Resurrection. The existentialist analysis is, on its own terms, irrefutable: it speaks of real and relevant experiences which contemporary man can begin to understand and appropriate, but it seems to reduce the full Christian understanding of the world and of history to a recipe for a limited range of personal experiences (or even a programme of virtually humanist self-help). The theological positivism with which we concluded, while challenging and powerful as a piece of *a priori* construction, seems to have no grounding in the empirical world at all. It is no doubt likely that the trouble in each view arises from its one-sidedness. Certainly in discussions of this subject in German theology one is aware of a strong tendency to believe that one 'cause' and one 'cause' only has to be isolated, and all other approaches rejected. In fact, I suspect, the stance of faith is bound to be much more complicated than that, and we should probably learn from all the points of view discussed, and seek for some composite understanding of the mutually complementary roles of 'faith' and 'evidence', 'history' and present experience, 'objective event' and 'subjective appropriation'.

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[34] Op. cit., p. 99.

Whether such a composite understanding can vindicate itself, not only in terms of the Western discussion, but in relation to the Indian environment, and further, whether such an established resurrection faith can form the basis of the creative Christian message for India in the way that M. M. Thomas has suggested, is perhaps the cardinal question for Indian Christian thinkers. For it may well be that on the answer to this question the whole future stance of Christianity in this country depends.