

Jesus of Nazareth. Günther Bornkamm. New York: Harper and Row, 1960.

ONE: Faith and History in the Gospels

Special character of the Gospels:

- *Record* of Jesus Christ;
- *Witness* to Jesus Christ.

The above two elements:

- Must be distinguished;
- Are intricately interwoven

Aim of the present work: "to give an historical presentation of Jesus and his message."

Two extremes to be avoided:

- Blind and uncritical approach;
- Strict historical criticism.

For the early Church, Jesus is not in the first instance a figure of the past, but rather the risen Lord, present with his will, his power, his word:

TODAY: a present appointed by God, and together with it a future made accessible by God.

In light of this NOW and TO COME accomplished and decreed by God and opened up through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, the Church understands the past in the history of Jesus before Good Friday and Easter.

A HISTORY WHICH PERTAINS TO THE PRESENT AND OPENS UP THE FUTURE.

Primitive Christian preaching: the end of the old age and the breaking in or the new world of God in salvation and judgment.

Gospels: what belongs to the best in the history of Jesus should always be investigated and understood in relation to its significance for the present time and the coming time of God's future.

Two characteristics of the tradition are explained because the earthly Jesus is for the Church at the same time the risen Lord:

1. Loyalty and adherence to the word of Jesus;
2. Freedom as to the original wording.

The tradition is not the repetition and transmission of the word he once spoke, but rather IS his word today.

The Gospel tradition has been influenced by the believing interpretation of the history and person of Jesus.

The tradition's lack of historical concern appears in its style of storytelling.

Form criticism demonstrates the connection between the entire Jesus tradition and the faith and life of the church, out of which the tradition arose and for which it was meant.

Distinction:

- "authentic": words of the historical Jesus;
- "inauthentic": creations by the Church.

Points out the interpretation of the history of Jesus in terms of his resurrection and the experience of his presence.

The tradition which first grew out of the faith of the Church is not to be dismissed as the mere product of imagination.

It is an answer to Jesus' whole person and mission.

It points beyond itself to him whom the Church has encountered in his earthly form and who proves his presence to her as the resurrected and risen Lord.

The tradition is witness of the reality of his history and the reality of his resurrection.

We seek the history IN the Kerygma of the Gospels, and in this history we seek the Kerygma; we differentiate between the two only to reveal more clearly their inter-connection and inter-penetration.

Incorrectly, critical biblical scholarship and supporters of believing tradition both are against raising the question of the historical Jesus.

But the Gospels demand enquiry after the historical Jesus.

The tradition of the Gospel is considerably concerned with the pre-Easter history of Jesus.

The Gospels proclaim that faith does not begin with itself but lives from past history.

The Church made herself contemporary with her pre-Easter Lord, and with those who first heard his message of the coming of God's kingdom.

She made herself one with those who did not already live by faith, but who at the beginning were called to obedience and faith by the word of Jesus.

She confessed that her faith can be nothing else but following her earthly Master who is yet to face the cross and resurrection.

The Gospels are at the same time the rejection of an eschatological fanaticism which denies the temporal order and proclaim the glory of God's world as already present.

And the Gospels bring before our eyes, in very different fashion from what is customary in chronicles and presentations of history, the historical person of Jesus with the utmost vividness.

They do speak of history as occurrence and event.

Each of the pericopae contains the person and history of Jesus in their entirety.

None requires explanation in terms of previous happenings.

None is directed at later events for the unfolding of what has gone before.

Precisely in this way of transmitting and recounting the person and work of Jesus, in their unmistakable uniqueness and distinctiveness, are shown forth with an originality which again and again far exceeds and disarms even all believing understandings and interpretations; understood in this way, the primitive tradition of Jesus is brim full of history.

TWO: Period and Environment

Pagan and Jewish sources: in the early days, it never occurred to the fiercest adversary of Christianity to doubt the historical existence of Jesus.

1. The Jewish people:

As a nation:

- Small and politically weak; under a long succession of foreign powers;
- Uniqueness: individuality sustained by the power of faith. Israel's religion was the vital force which slumbered beneath the surface and gave the people the possibility to rise anew even after the heaviest defeat.

2. The Jewish religion:

The history of the Israelite-Jewish religion is marked by a continuous struggle against myth.

Yahweh is the God who from the beyond creates, commands, judges, and saves.

History is the field of his revelation and of his deeds.

Israel is the people of this God.

At its beginning stand its *election* and *liberation*, which have separated it from all other nations and set its life and history on a foundation upon which no other can live.

The people no longer has its being in itself, but is dependent on this great and powerful otherworldly God, who marvelously guides and sustains, who by his law both directs and judges.

Covenant is the foundation of Israel's history and the source of its unequalled self-confidence.

The prophets recall Israel to its origin and shatter its security by the announcement of divine judgment.

The *Law* for Israel is the expression of God's sovereign will, given to the nation against their own wish or will.

It is valid solely because it is a divine command.

Israel lives by the conviction that for her all things come from God.

Israel's expectation for the future developed:

- A purely temporal hope;
- Apocalypticism.

3. Groups and Movements:

Pharisees: rigorous and uncompromising keeping of the Torah in all spheres and situations of daily life.

Formalistic legalising of the law, and a corresponding detailed technique of piety to which Jesus' message of the divine will stands in sharp contrast.

Sadducees: present a picture of "churchliness," which has become lifeless and is satisfied with its inherited position and cultic activities, and which was only too prone to laxity and to making concessions to the current regime and pagan surroundings.

Samaritans: looked upon by the Jews as religiously unclean, because of their intermarriage with pagans, but more so as followers of a satanic heresy.

Their religious vitality was already broken in the days of Jesus.

Essenes, characterized by:

- Strict community organization;
- Priesthood and hierarchy;
- Rigorous adherence to the Law;
- Apocalyptic hopes;
- Claim to be the true people of God;
- Radical break with official Judaism;
- Sectarian seclusion;
- Radical dualism of religious ideas.

Zealots: a programme for the forcible liberation of the people of God from the foreign rule, which did not shrink from violence and murder.

4. John the Baptist:

Stands right from the beginning in the light of God's redemptive plan.

His description is given wholly from the point of view of the believing community.

The *prophet* of the coming kingdom of God.

His ascetic life remind us of *Elijah*.

Desert: Since ancient times the place with which Israel's expectation of the end were associated.

Ancient belief that the end shall be as the beginning.

He calls *all* to *repentance*.

Destroys the assumption that God's chosen people and the visible Israel here on earth are one and the same thing.

Renews the message of the OT prophets of judgment.

Differs in the urgent nearness of the time of God's kingdom.

The turning away from an old godless past and the turning towards God and his coming reign.

The Messiah he announces is the judge of the world:

- For the salvation of the true people of God;
- For the destruction of those who are not prepared to repent.

It was the Christian tradition which first made John, the prophet of the coming Judge of the world, into a witness for Jesus as the Messiah.

Task and *destiny* unite John and Jesus.

John sent by God in the time of preparation for the end, and Jesus the bringer of the time of rejoicing.

John is no longer the herald of the future only, but already belongs himself to the time in which the promise is being fulfilled (MT 11.7-13).

The way to Christ and into the kingdom of God did not merely at one time – in moment of past history – lead through John the Baptist, but it leads once and for all only along that path of repentance shown by him.

Matthew expresses the connection between John and Jesus by summarizing their messages in the same words: "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

He expresses the difference by attaching the word of promise to John (3.3) and the prophetic word of fulfillment to Jesus (4.17).

THREE: Jesus of Nazareth

Rough outline of Jesus' history:

- His home is the semi-pagan, despised Galilee (town is Nazareth);

- Jewish origins;
- Parents: Joseph and Mary;
- Brothers: James, Joses, Judas, Simon;
- His mother tongue is the Aramaic of Galilee (he understood biblical Hebrew as a rabbi);
- Public ministry:
 - Follows, but does not continue, the work of John;
 - His baptism by John was of far-reaching importance;
 - Last decisive turning point: the resolution to go to Jerusalem with his disciples in order to confront the people there with his message in face of the coming Kingdom of God (death on the cross).

The world in which Jesus appears is a world between past and the future:

- Sacred tradition;
- Burning expectation.

Both are the outcome and expression of a faith in a God who is beyond the world and history.

All the characters of the Gospel present a very human appearance.

Jesus belongs to this world; yet in the midst of it he is of an unmistakable otherness:

- The secret of his influence; and
- Of his rejection.

He is a prophet; but is not completely contained in this category.

He is a rabbi; but differs considerably from the other members of his class.

There is nothing in contemporary Judaism which corresponds to the *immediacy* with which he teaches: the reality of God and the authority of his will are always directly present, and are fulfilled in him.

In the parables, Jesus draws into the service of his message the world of nature and the life of man, and those everyday experiences which everyone knows and shares, without using the established structure of sacred traditions and texts.

Directness: the immediate present is the hallmark of all the words of Jesus, of his appearance and his actions, in a world which had lost the present because it lived between the past and the future, between traditions and promises or threats, in security of anxiety, conscious of its own rights or under sentence from its own lawlessness.

Every one of the scenes described in the Gospels reveals Jesus' astounding sovereignty in dealing with situations according to the kind of people he encounters.

Perception and penetrating *insight*.

The Gospels call this patent immediacy of Jesus' sovereign power his *authority* (Mk 1.22; Mt 7.29).

This bringing to light of men as they really are happens as a matter of course, without any awkward compulsion toward self-disclosure.

Jesus' aid bears the stamp of *genuine involvement* and a passionate tackling of the situation.

The essential mystery of Jesus is making the reality of God present; he signifies that for everyone a world has come to its end, be it for salvation or judgment.

In the encounter with Jesus, time is left to no one; the past whence he comes is no longer confirmed, and the future he dreams of is no longer assured.

But this is precisely why every individual is granted his own new present. For life, world and the existence of every individual, now stand in the sudden flash of light of the coming God, in the light of his reality and presence.

FOUR: The Dawn of the Kingdom of God

1. The Hour of Salvation

Jesus' message differed from the Jewish political and apocalyptic expectations of the kingdom; all the conceptions and pictures in his message are directed with concentrated force on one thing only, and are contained in that one thing – that God will reign.

The individuality of Jesus' message lies in the directness (authority) with which he proclaims that the kingdom of God is near and calls for conversion.

God's victory over Satan takes place in his words and deeds, and it is in them that the signs of this victory are erected.

In both word and action, Jesus fastens upon today, this present moment in which are contained the decisions of the ultimate future.

2. The Hiddenness of God's Reign: God's reign is hidden from us in the everyday world of the present time, where no one is aware of what is already taking place.

Jesus' *parables* relate the kingdom of God, which is by no means familiar and commonplace, to everyday life.

The disturbing question with which Jesus begins many of his parables, "Which of you...?" is aimed straight at the hearer himself, who is gripped where he really is.

Yet in the parable a *mystery* lies hidden.

The mystery is nothing but the hidden dawn of the Kingdom of God itself amidst a world which to human eyes gives no sight of it; and this must surely be heard, believed and understood – not against a background of tradition or theory, but by the hearer in his actual world.

- Mustard seed: our task is to understand the present, in which the coming event already finds its beginning, the present in its apparent insignificance; and from it we are to demand no other signs of the splendour to come.
- Just as the earth 'of itself' brings forth fruit, so the Kingdom of God comes by its own power alone, a miracle for man, which he can only await with patience.

The hiddenness, the insignificance of the beginning, in which the promise of what is to come is nevertheless imbedded; no one ought think that he can or should help out at the small beginning, and no one ought think he can discover visible signs of what is to come.

The beginning of the Kingdom of God is an insignificant event *in* this time and world; *within* this time and world it sets an end to both, for the new world of God is already at work.

The parables are told to deny the hearer the attitude of spectator.

"He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Mk 4.9).

The hearer is the ground on which the seed falls.

The word is the fate of the hearers for time and eternity.

What unites those addressed in the *beatitudes* and pronounced blessed is that they are driven to the very end of the world and its possibilities.

They have nothing to expect from the world but expect everything God.

Tough God's kingdom be in the future, yet it breaks even now like a ray of light upon the darkness of the oppressed.

God wills to be present with us and will be with us all, in as manifold and individual a way as our needs are manifold and individual.

The coming of the Kingdom of God means the complete shaking and abolition of the standards and limitations that were sacred to pious believers.

"The last will be first."

The people who receive help from Jesus are people on the fringe of society, men who are looked upon as outcasts.

His freedom displays itself not in an abstract criticism of accepted standards, but in the way in which he makes himself accessible to those who need him.

Note: for the Jews, eating with others is the closest form of intimacy.

The parables tell of the Father's love becoming a reality in Jesus' deeds and words.

3. Repentance and Readiness

Jesus' call for repentance is similar to John the Baptist's and for rabbinic calls in Judaism, but has an ultimate urgency about it due to the fact that it is heard in view of the dawning of the Kingdom of God.

Repentance now means: to lay hold on the salvation which is already at hand, and to give up everything for it.

A decision and an action on God's part first, which comes before all action and decision on the part of man.

For the Jew, repentance leads to salvation; but now the order is reversed.

Repentance means humbling oneself before God.

If Jesus' call to salvation is at the same time a call to repentance, the call to repentance is at the same time a call to rejoice.

The joy of deliverance from death.

Wisdom consists not in being indignant but in being prepared.

He who understands the hour as he awaits God's future, holds himself in readiness, as the servants watch and wait for their master.

His waiting is not for the nothingness of the unknown, not for the silence of death, but for the Lord who has met and will meet his disciples.

4. Future and Present

There seems to be a remarkable tension between such sayings of Jesus as speak of the Kingdom of God as a future happening, and such as announce its arrival now, in the present.

Various inadequate explanations have been offered:

- Psychological;
- Biographical;
- Transmissional.

The statements about future and present ought not be separated, as is already apparent from the fact that in Jesus' preaching they are related in the closest fashion.

The present dawn of the Kingdom of God is always spoken of so as to show that the present reveals the future as salvation and judgment and therefore does not anticipate it.

The future is always spoken of as unlocking and lighting up the present, and therefore revealing today as the day of decision.

God's future is God's call to the present, and the present is the time of decision in the light of God's future.

The future of God is *salvation* to the man who apprehends the present as God's present, and as the hour of salvation.

The future of God is judgment for the man who does not accept the "now of God but clings to his own present, his own past and also to his own dreams of the future.

Those who wait in the right way are called to fulfill the will of God now with all their might.

FIVE: The Will of God

1. Jesus and the Law

The freedom of Jesus over against the law is revealed in two passages:

- i. Mt 8.15 – dietary restrictions;
- ii. Mt 19.3 – the question of divorce.

For Jesus, the will of God is present in such immediate fashion that the letter of the law may be gauged by it.

2. The New Righteousness

Jesus' proclamation of the divine will has two fronts:

- "I have come not to abolish (the law and the prophets) but to fulfill them (Mt 5.17).
- "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5.20).

The first is directed to the fanatics who wish to claim Jesus for their own as the great revolutionary, and who rush towards a dreamed-of future, right past the law of God and heedless of it. (Cf. contemporary Marxism.)

Jesus' disapproval of all fanatical disregard for the law and his basic approval of the law.

Jesus liberates the will of God from its petrification in tables of stone, and reaches for the heart of man which seeks seclusion and safety behind the stronghold of observance of the law.

A call to concrete obedience: "Not only. . . but even. . ."

The concrete directions of Jesus, in contrast to Jewish casuistry, reach through the gaps and holes for the heart of man and hit their mark where his existence in relation to his neighbor and to his God is really at issue.

There is an *immediate obviousness* of Jesus' words, which leaves no room for an "if" or "but," and which requires no justification from outside.

The first thing required of the hearer of the Sermon on the Mount is not the questioning of the possibility of its fulfillment, but rather the acknowledgment of the reality of God's will.

In the demands which he makes upon them, Jesus calls the disciples to live on the basis of God's present and in expectation of his future.

Those called to the new righteousness are liberated from the world, and yet put into the world again in a new way; as the liberated among a world which is doomed to die of its own evil and of its own good, of its enthusiasm for the future as well as of its worship of traditions, of its own laws as well as of its own lawlessness, in such a world the disciples have been called to raise high the symbols of the new righteousness, and in obedience to reckon with God's power and possibilities.

3. The Commandment of Love

Love of God and love of neighbor do not simply merge:

- Love for God consistently takes precedence;
- Love which does not really love the other person for his own sake but for the 'sake of God' is not real love.

The inseparable unity into which Jesus brings the two loves has its reason and meaning in the nature of this love itself.

The renunciation of self-love; surrender to God as a waiting and preparedness for the call of God, who calls to us in the person of our neighbor.

The story of the Good Samaritan is told from the point of view of the man who fell among thieves.

Thus the questioner, in being asked to make his neighbour's position his own, finds himself directed to himself, and learns what it means to love one's neighbor as oneself.

True love cannot justify or spare a corner for self-love.

4. Creation and World

Creation is not a matter for Jesus' speculation, rather it is immediately present in his words, in the form in which we all have it before our eyes, there in front of us, in each individual creature; in a like manner are presented the words and deeds of men.

The world is the undistorted place where man is, remote from all imaginations and dreams and especially from religious phantoms, so that no listener can understand, in terms of the world as it is, God's nature, his actions and the significance of his reign.

The world is seen in the light of the rule and will of God.

5. God the Father and His Children

The idea of God as Father was known in Greek and Jewish thought.

The nearness of God is the secret of Jesus' language about God as Father.

God is Father "to the evil and to the good" (Mt 5.45).

Immediate presence: "For your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Mt 7.8).

His goodness is evident in his attitude toward the lost.

Especially in the parable of the Forgiving Father.

Confession and petition, awakened by the father's goodness, are cut short by the same goodness.

The fatherhood of God can only be understood as a miracle, and as an event which now takes place.

"Abba" = the child's familiar address to his father here on earth; completely uncommon in religious language.

6. Faith and Prayer

Faith for Jesus has not yet acquired the meaning of the obedient acceptance of a message of salvation, nor the acceptance of the truth of a doctrine of the one almighty God, and the coming of his Messiah.

In the tradition of Jesus' sayings, faith is always linked with power and miracle

Faith as very definitely counting on and trusting in God's power.

- "I believe" – here the petitioner has indeed exceeded his own ability, and confesses a faith greater than he really has.
- "Help my unbelief" – here he who falls short of faith throws himself on the power and help of Jesus.

Signs, however, must not be demanded; that would indicate that trust and obedience have both been destroyed at the roots.

Trust and obedience are, according to Jesus' teaching, a part of "true prayer."

The command and the encouragement to pray become one (Mt 7.7f).

Difference between the Lord's Prayer and Jewish prayers:

- Simplicity and plainness, and the absence of all pompous calling on God's name;
- Completely different order of petitions:
 - Jewish prayers (the Eighteen Petitions) refer first of all to this world and then to the future;
 - Jesus' prayer begins with eschatological petitions and then moves to concern with this world.

7. The Reward of God

The reward loses the character of a payment which is owed, and becomes a mark of distinction with which the trusted servant is rewarded as a sign of even greater trust.

The idea of a reward as an inalienable part of the expectation of the last judgment places man as an individual before the heavenly judge, an expression of the abiding relevance of his temporary, earthly life to the eternal decision of God.

The idea of reward also expresses the weakness of the creature before his Creator.

The reward which is promised to him who hears God's call and obeys his will is this: that God will be for them.

Detached from deeds of merit and the claims of man, the idea of reward has become an expression of divine justice and grace, to which man is directed, now more than ever called to effort and faithfulness, and on which he must lean.

SIX: Discipleship

The fact of someone becoming (being) a disciple depends on Jesus' sovereign decision, and not on the free choice of individuals who are especially drawn to him.

Discipleship means decision, Jesus' decision as regards certain individuals, but then it means no less their own decision to follow him; it consists, in actual fact, in the determination to abandon everything and in the first instance quite literally, to follow Jesus from place to place, and to accept the fate of the wanderer with all its privations.

The disciples must be distinguished as a more intimate group from Jesus' followers in the wider sense.

The Kingdom of God is the sole foundation of Jesus' call to follow him; it imposes upon the disciples a special task, a special destiny, but also grants them a special promise.

Task: To bring peace and salvation; they are actively drawn into the service of Jesus' message and the proclamation of the kingdom's victory.

Promise: Faithfulness and unfaithfulness towards their master here on earth will receive their confirmation and answer on the Day of Judgment.

The later Church saw itself portrayed in the picture of the disciples of the past.

SEVEN: Jesus' Journey to Jerusalem: Suffering and Death

First and foremost, his journey to Jerusalem was undertaken in order to confront the people there, in the holy city, with the message of the kingdom of God, and to summon them at the eleventh hour to make their decision.

This section of the Gospels is distinguished from all earlier reports by the fullness of detail and the connection of events.

Inspired by the religious interest of the Church.

Theme: Jesus appears as the one who carries out the decrees of God and suffers in their fulfillment.

A combination of divine decrees which become meaningful in the light of God's prophecies, in spite of and in the very midst of worldly contradiction and injustice.

EIGHT: The Messianic Question

The Messianic passages of the Gospel should be regarded first of all as the Credo of the believers, and as the theology of the early Church.

NINE: Jesus Christ

The *Resurrection*: there is an undeniable tension between the singleness of the Easter *message* and the ambiguity and historical problems of the Easter *narratives*.

Easter is above all else God's acknowledgment of this Jesus, whom the world refused to acknowledge.

The *Church*: the founding of the Church is the work of the risen Lord.