THE LIFE OF JESUS:
A STUDY OF THE AVAILABLE MATERIALS.¹

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SOME time ago I published² a short article on the question, Is it possible to write a Life of Christ? That article indicates the main lines along which I propose to tackle the problem before us; and I begin by giving a brief summary of its main points.

First, it must be admitted that it is not possible to write a Life of Jesus, if by that we mean something like Boswell's Life of Johnson or Morley's Life of Gladstone. The reason is simple: the materials are not available. Not a single chronological point can be fixed with certainty. The life of Jesus lasted probably between thirty and forty years: concerning at least twenty-eight of them we know precisely nothing at all. What information we have is mostly concerned with the public career of Jesus, that is, with the last period of his life, a period whose length is uncertain, but probably not less than one year nor more than about three. But there is not even enough material for a full account of the Ministry. It lasted at least a year—I should say a good deal longer—and all we know about it, including duplicate narratives, can be read in a few hours.

Secondly, there is the question of the reliability of the evidence at our disposal. This touches both the individual narratives and sayings and the order in which they are presented. Did the events narrated in the Gospels really happen just as they are described, and did the actual sequence of events correspond to the sequence of narratives? What allowances must we make for the editorial activities of Evangelists and the compilers of the sources which they used? How has the material

¹ A lecture delivered in the John Rylands Library on the 13th of January, 1943.
² Expository Times, liii (May, 1942), 248-251.
been affected—perhaps even created—by the practical needs of the Early Church? These and other questions cannot be evaded, and our materials are subject to all the varieties of criticism—textual, synoptic, and, of course, form-criticism. What is left when they have done their work depends, in any particular instance, on the scholar who is handling these tools; and we get all kinds of results from the rigidly conservative to the rigidly radical. Yet in spite of the extravagances and fads of individuals, there is a steady, if slow, progress in the scientific sifting and weighing of the evidence, and it can fairly be claimed that we are in a better position to-day to assess the evidence and make the best use of it than any previous generation of students of the New Testament; and I, for one, do not believe that further progress is barred.

That brings us to the third point, the problem of how to use what materials we have to the best advantage. My own opinion is that we must work on the lines laid down by Eduard Meyer, and set the stories about Jesus in the larger context of the history of Religion and Civilization from about 300 B.C. to about A.D. 300, from Alexander the Great to Constantine the Great, from the days when the tide of Hellenistic civilization began to flood over the East till the days when the counter-currents of missionary Christian religion swept irresistibly westwards over the Roman Empire. Within those six centuries lies a shorter period, from about 168 B.C. to A.D. 135, the period of the Jewish struggle, from the revolt of the Maccabees to the revolt of Bar Cocheba, from the ハウスド to R. Akiiba. Here the tide of Hellenism was checked, and here for the first time the world was presented with the phenomenon of the martyr. Within this narrower period lies the actual turn of the tide, the first decisive movement appearing in the missionary activities of St. Paul. Right at the critical point lies the ministry of Jesus, at the very centre where so many conflicting ideals and ambitions clash. It seems to me that the task of the historian is to try to place our pieces of evidence in their proper setting in this great context in the hope that so placed they will shape themselves into a clear and convincing portrait of Jesus and at the same time illuminate the whole period.
So much by way of introduction: now we turn to the closer examination of the materials. The first and obvious division is that between information supplied in the New Testament (primarily, of course, the Gospels, but also the other books, in particular, Acts and the Pauline Epistles), and that found in Christian, Jewish, and pagan writings outside the New Testament. It will be convenient to deal with the extra-canonical material first.

From the Christian side we have a considerable and increasing mass of Apocryphal Gospels and Agrapha. The former present some very interesting features. First of all, their scope: this can be most vividly seen if we consider the contents of Walter Bauer's great book on the subject. Bauer set out to see what sort of a life of Jesus could be written, using the Apocryphal Gospels as the material. His narrative, so composed, occupies 279 pages. Of these the first hundred are taken up by the parentage, birth, and childhood, and the last hundred and twenty with the Passion narrative; nine pages are occupied by the ministry of John the Baptist; and the whole public ministry from the Baptism to the Entry into Jerusalem and the Cleansing of the Temple occupies pp. 110-158 —forty-nine pages. The disproportion is most striking: it reflects the peculiar interests of the Apocryphal Gospels, concentrated on the birth and death of Christ or, in theological terms, the Incarnation and the Atonement. The concentration of interest on these two points is the continuation of a process which is already at work in the Canonical Gospels; for when, for example, the narrative material peculiar to Matthew is examined, it is found that the greater part of it is concerned with the birth and infancy of Jesus and with the Passion.

This limitation of interest is accompanied by peculiarities of taste. Many of the incidents related in the Apocryphal Gospels are incompatible with what is given in the Canonical Gospels. Stories are told, which are merely grotesque when

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1 Most of the more important of these are given in English in M. R. James, The Apocryphal New Testament, pp. 1-193. A very full collection of Agrapha is that of Resch, Texte und Untersuchungen, N.F. xv, 2 ed. 1906.
2 Das Leben Jesu im Zeitalter der neustamentlichen Apokryphen, 1909.
they are not actually revolting. I would add that the peculiar quality of these Apocryphal tales is not uniform: sometimes it appears to be a throwback to the primitive fascination by and dread of the supernatural; sometimes the story seems to have a definite theological axe to grind. There is all the difference in the world between the horrid stories told about the supernatural little bully of the *Gospel of Thomas* and the carefully constructed narrative of the *Gospel of Peter*, narrative composed with one purpose—to support the Docetic interpretation of the Incarnation and the Passion. But they have one thing in common: they are fiction.

The *Agrapha* are on a different footing. The most important of them are sayings attributed to Jesus, which have been preserved outside the accepted text of the Canonical Gospels. They vary in the quality of their attestation and in inherent credibility. Probably the best known and best attested is the saying attributed to the Lord in Acts xx. 35: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’. Almost equally well known is the one spoken to the man working on the Sabbath, preserved in Codex Bezae at Lk. vi. 4: ‘Man, if indeed thou knowest what thou dost, thou art blessed; but if thou knowest not, thou art cursed, and a transgressor of the law’. There are a good many more not so well known: for example, this one reported by Origen in a Homily on Jeremiah: ‘The Saviour himself says: “He that is near me is near the fire. He that is far from me is far from the kingdom”.’

It is a task of no small difficulty to decide about some of these sayings. A priori there is no reason at all why genuine sayings of Jesus should not have survived outside the four accepted Gospels; and when some of those that offer themselves are examined there seems to be nothing against them. Others again do not commend themselves at all; and there is a third group which defy decision.

We turn to the Jewish accounts. These include statements in the Talmud and later Jewish literature, and three passages in Josephus, of which one concerns John the Baptist, one Jesus,

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1 Codex Bezae = Resch No. 23; Origen, *Hom. in Jer.* = Resch No. 150.
and the third James the Lord’s brother.\(^1\) The Talmudic and later Jewish pieces resemble the Christian Apocryphal Gospels in being tendentious: they differ only in the nature of their tendencies. That of the Jewish writings is definitely hostile. Whereas many of the Christian apocryphs fabricate miracles as evidence of the supernatural character of their hero, the Jewish writings explain all the miracles claimed by the Christians as works of magic and sorcery which Jesus had learned in Egypt. While the Apocryphal Gospels continually add embroideries to the story of the Virgin Birth, the Jewish writings turn the whole thing into a scandalous tale of an intrigue with a Roman soldier. Clearly we cannot hope for much in the way of reliable data from sources of this character.

One point is worth noting: it is that the farther we go back in the Jewish tradition the more scanty the references to Jesus become. The later Jewish romances are of some size; the Talmudic references are considerably less in extent; and, when we come to the Mishnah, there are no direct references at all.\(^2\) It may well be that this paucity of references is just what we ought to expect. Both the Church and the Synagogue were well aware of the value of silence and neglect as weapons against persons, movements, and doctrines that were not approved. There is a most instructive passage in the Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius quoting Dionysius of Alexandria on the subject of heretical literature.\(^3\) The great Bishop of Alexandria says:

‘But as for me, I read both the compositions and the traditions of the heretics, polluting my soul for a little with their abominable thoughts, yet all the while deriving this advantage from them, that I could refute them

\(^1\) The Talmudic texts are edited by Dalman as an appendix to Laible’s Jesus Christus im Talmud; the later Jewish writings are published and fully discussed by S. Krauss, Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen. There is a large literature grown up around the Josephus passages: the best statement and discussion, in my opinion, is that of H. St. J. Thackeray in his book Josephus the Man and the Historian, pp. 125-153. Cf. F. C. Burkitt in Theologisch Tijdschrift, xlvii. 135-144.

\(^2\) There are a few possible veiled allusions but nothing that can be regarded as an absolutely certain reference to Jesus. The passages usually quoted in this connexion are Yebamoth, iv. 13; Aboth, v. 19; Sanhedrin, x. 1 f.

for myself and loathed them far more. And indeed a certain brother, one of the presbyters, attempted to dissuade and frighten me from becoming involved in the mire of their wickedness, for he said that I should injure my own soul; and said truly, as I perceived. But a vision sent by God came and strengthened me, and a word of command was given me, saying expressly: "Read all things that may come to thy hand. For thou art able to sift and prove each matter; which thing was originally the cause of thy faith." I accepted the vision, as agreeing with the apostolic saying addressed to the stronger: "Be approved money-changers".

It may well be the case that the Jewish authorities in the earlier period thought that oblivion would be a better ally against the new religion than any polemical propaganda they could devise.

Here we may pause for a moment by the pagan materials. The remarkable feature here is the minuteness of the quantity. If we except the brief notice in the *Annals* of Tacitus ¹ (published in the second decade of the second century), there is little or nothing of consequence. One inference may be drawn from this silence. If Jesus had, as some have imagined, actually staged a revolt against the Roman Empire, we should doubtless have heard more about him from the Roman historians. Their silence may be taken as good evidence that no such rising took place: that the Cross was a preventive rather than a punitive measure.

The famous and much-disputed *Testimonium Flavianum* runs as follows in Thackeray's translation: ²

‘Now about this time arises (or “is born”—γίνεται) Jesus, a wise man, if indeed he should be called a man. For he was a doer of marvellous deeds, a teacher of men who receive the truth with pleasure; and he won over to himself many Jews and many also of the Greek (nation). He was the Christ. And when, on the indictment of the principal men among us, Pilate had sentenced him to the cross, those who had loved (or perhaps rather “been content with”) him at the first did not cease; for he appeared to them on the third day alive again, the divine prophets having (fore)told these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And even now the tribe (or “race”—φυλον) of Christians, named after him, is not extinct.’

It is difficult to imagine what sort of Christian could have deemed it worth his while to interpolate this cool, objective,

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¹ *Ann.,* xv. 44. Auctor nominis eius Christus Tiberio imperitante per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio adfectus erat.
² *Josephus the Man and the Historian,* 136 f.
patronising, and faintly contemptuous paragraph into the text of Josephus. On the other hand, it is quite likely that the passage as it now stands is not what Josephus wrote: that, in fact, the original was even cooler and more contemptuous than the existing text, and that the features most objectionable to early Christian piety have been toned down or removed. The question has been carefully discussed by Thackeray, and I will mention two points only. First there is the crucial sentence: ὁ Χριστὸς οὗτος ἐμ. It seems to me that the statements of Origen\(^1\) that Josephus ‘did not admit our Jesus to be the Christ’ or ‘disbelieved in Jesus as Christ’ together with Jeromes’ variant reading credebatur\(^2\) point in the one direction, namely that Josephus wrote ἐνομίζετο and that some pious Christian made what appeared to him the obvious and necessary correction. If so, Josephus testified that Jesus was considered (by his followers) to be the Messiah. The second is a conjectural emendation, but a very attractive one, attributed to Heinichen and regarded with considerable favour by Thackeray. It involves reading ΤΑΛΑΘΩΗ in place of ΤΑΛΑΘΗ, with the result that Jesus becomes ‘a teacher of men who receive the abnormal with pleasure’. I should regard these two restorations as probable, and the former as practically certain.

Josephus then becomes a witness to the fact that Jesus existed, that he was regarded as a wonder-worker, that he was a teacher with unusual views, that he had a following who regarded him as Messiah, that he was crucified by Pilate on information laid by the Jewish authorities, that his followers had experiences which convinced them that he was still alive and active, and that (regrettably perhaps) the Church was still in existence when Josephus wrote.

This Jewish account of the matter can be paralleled in the small collection of evidence which Klausner extracted from the mass of Rabbinic material. The greater part of this material

\(^{1}\) Comm. in Matt., x. 17 (ed. Klostermann) τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἠμῶν οὐ καταδεξάμενος εἶναι Χριστὸν.

\(^{2}\) De uir. ill., xiii. (Migne, P.L. xxiii., col. 663).
is quite worthless for the purposes of history; but Klausner did succeed in distilling out enough to make a short narrative paragraph. It runs as follows:  

‘There are reliable statements to the effect that his name was Yeshua’ (Yeshu) of Nazareth; that he “practised sorcery” (i.e. performed miracles, as was usual in those days) and beguiled and led Israel astray; that he mocked at the words of the wise; that he expounded Scripture in the same manner as the Pharisees; that he had five disciples; that he said that he was not come to take aught away from the Law or to add to it; that he was hanged (crucified) as a false teacher and beguiler on the eve of the Passover which happened on a Sabbath; and that his disciples healed the sick in his name.’

If we set these two Jewish accounts side by side, we find that they agree on certain essential points. Both present Jesus as a wonder-working teacher, some of whose doctrine did not square with scribal orthodoxy: both agree that he was crucified. On the second of these two points Tacitus gives explicit confirmation; and it can be argued that his description of Christianity as a ‘mischievous superstition’ implies that Jesus had been a religious teacher. The common element in all three representatives of the non-Christian tradition about Christ may thus be represented by the formula (ψευδο)διδάσκαλος ἐσταυρωμένος—a crucified (false) teacher.

If now we turn from these external testimonies to the earliest ascertainable form of the canonical tradition about the ministry of Jesus, we find that this same formula will cover the basic elements discovered by Synoptic source-analysis. For what source-criticism gives us is two types of document: the narrative and the didactic. The classical representatives of the two types are Mark and Q. Now it has often been observed that in Mark a very large proportion of the available space is given to the Passion narrative, that the Passion narrative is the climax of the story and the nerve of the argument, and

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1 J. Klausner, Jesus of Nazareth, p. 46.
2 The agreement about unorthodoxy in the teaching depends on accepting Heinichen’s emendation of Josephus mentioned above.
3 Ann., xv. 44: repressaque in praesens exitiabilis superstitio rursum erumpebat, non modo per Iudaeam, originem eius mali, sed per urbem etiam, quo cuncta undique atrocia aut pudenda confluent celebranturque.
4 St. Paul, I Cor. i. 23; ii. 2; Gal. iii. 1. Χριστός ἐσταυρωμένος.
5 I think that the amount is sometimes exaggerated.
that it is the part of the Gospel which offers the most stubborn resistance to disintegration by form-critical analysis. It is natural to make the inference that in all probability the first section of the Gospel narrative to take definite and permanent shape was the story of the Passion. Q is the earliest known manual giving a systematic account of the teaching of Jesus.¹

These two primitive types of document answer to the conditions in the primitive Church. The Passion story which is the core of Mark's Gospel is likewise the core of the missionary preaching of the earliest days: 'We preach a crucified Messiah'; 'I determined to know nothing among you but Jesus the Messiah and a crucified Messiah at that'; 'Galatians . . . before whose eyes Jesus the Messiah was placarded crucified'.²

The preaching of the Cross was the means by which converts were to be made. The manual containing the record of the teaching of Jesus was necessary for the instruction of the converted in the manners and customs of the new order into which they were incorporated.

Something similar may be observed in other books of the New Testament. The ground-plan of the Epistle to the Romans gives an elaborate exposition of the Cross (with an appendix on the Jewish problem) followed by instruction in the duties of the Christian: the death of Christ for men and the life of men in Christ. The same thing may be seen elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, e.g. in Ephesians and Colossians, and also—though somewhat obscured by the exigencies of polemics—in Galatians and Philippians.

The formula 'Crucified Teacher' thus covers the earliest statements about Jesus whether pagan, Jewish, or Christian. The differentia of the Christian statements is the assertion that the Crucified Teacher is the Messiah. It is this differentia that is, as St. Paul puts it in the fifties of the first century, 'to the Jews a stumbling-block, to the Gentiles foolishness'.³

¹ I have discussed the tradition of the teaching of Jesus and attempted a reconstruction and exposition of Q in The Mission and Message of Jesus, pp. 301-440.

² I Cor. i. 23; ii. 2; Gal. iii. 1.
³ I Cor. i. 23. Foolishness (μόρφω) as opposed to σοφία. Paul's answer to the criticism of the Hellenistic world is that the crucified Messiah is not
Why a stumbling-block to the Jews? Because a crucified Messiah was a flat contradiction of Jewish convictions and hopes. The Messiah was to be the glorious vindicator of Israel and the Israelite ideal against the wicked cruelty and godlessness of the world-empires. A crucified Messiah was a Messiah defeated by the heathen empire, and that was a contradiction in terms. Why foolishness to the Gentiles? Because a crucified Messiah meant to them merely a dangerous agitator very properly dealt with by the Imperial authorities. A justly convicted criminal of this kind could not even be thought of as a potential 'saviour' or 'benefactor' of mankind.

These considerations determine the nature of the earliest Christian apologetic. To the Jewish critic it must be said that the crucified Messiah is the fulfilment of all the highest hopes of Hebrew religion. This involves an appeal to the Old Testament and the gradual accumulation of proof-texts (testimonia), a process whose earliest stages can be clearly discerned in the New Testament. This appeal to the Old Testament for the explanation of the Messianic cross goes back, in my opinion, to Jesus himself. It is taken up in the oldest parts of the New Testament. It reaches its fullest development in the New Testament in the Gospel of Matthew, which more than any other appears to be concerned to commend the Christian faith to the Jewish people.

To the Gentile world it must be said that the Cross was a miscarriage of justice; and this is precisely the point that is underlined in the Gospel of Luke, where the Passion is a martyrdom and Jesus a crucified benefactor of mankind. This appears most clearly in those parts of Luke that are peculiar to this gospel, and particularly in the 'Proto-Lukan' story of foolishness but the very wisdom of God (I. Cor. i. 24). Surely Paul in this verse is not using δύναμις and σοφία as mere abstract nouns: surely he means that Christ on the Cross is the power of God in action—one might almost say God's 'mighty act'—and the wisdom of God, God's wise purpose in the very moment of its fulfilment.

1 Cf. H. Preisker, Neutestamentliche Zeitgeschichte, pp. 189-208, and literature there cited.
3 E.g. I Cor. xv. 3; Mk. xiv. 49 (Mk. xv. 28 must be rejected on textual grounds). On the Christian appeal to the O.T. in general see G. Schrenk in Kittel's Theol. Wb. zum N.T., i. 755-761.
the trial of Jesus, in which Pilate, well aware of the innocence of the accused and anxious to acquit him, is overborne by the violent clamour of the mob.

This means that Matthew and Luke are essentially apologetic works, the one making its appeal to Jews, the other to Gentiles. At this point it may be urged that to admit that two of the Synoptic Gospels have a controversial axe to grind is most damaging to their reputation as sober historical documents. And with that we are brought face to face with the fundamental issue raised by Form-criticism. The matter can be put in this way. The Gospels show clear signs of propagandist intention. Source-criticism takes us back to earlier collections of sayings and doings of Jesus: and study of these collections seems to reveal motives at work. The collections were made with a purpose, and it can be plausibly argued that the purpose was governed by the immediate practical needs of the Christian community in preaching to the outsider, instructing the convert, defending the Gospel against its Jewish or Gentile critics. Then the vital question is: did the motives which produced these collections create the units of which they are made up or only select them from a larger mass of available material? Again, supposing that the units were selected rather than created, have they been transmitted in their original state or have they been modified in the process? And, supposing that they have been modified, were the forces that modified them foreign to the original impulse, or were they continuations of it? Do the modifications work in the direction of bringing out more clearly the original intention of Jesus or do they obscure and distort his meaning? These are questions of the highest importance which can be answered only by painstaking

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1 That the early Church had different ways of approach to Jews and Gentiles is clearly to be seen in the later apologetic literature, e.g. Justin Martyr's two Apologies and the Dialogue with Trypho; Tertullian's four works addressed to Gentiles (Ad Nationes, Apologeticum, De testimonio animae, Ad Scapulum) and one to Jews (Adversus Judaeos).

2 Strictly speaking it is not a Form-critical issue, but one of historical judgement on documents as wholes. For Form-criticism, when it attends to business, is occupied with single units of narrative or discourse studied from one special point of view; and our earliest sources except for a few Agographa and the Pericope de Adultera, are already collections of such units.
study of the documents as wholes and of the individual pericopæ. The final test is whether there emerges from the study a portrait of Jesus that will make sense of the whole mass of material, so that we can say: Jesus being like that, and his followers being what they were, this was bound to be the outcome. So far from Jesus being the product of the tradition, he is imperatively required to explain the fact that the tradition as we know it exists at all.

The service of Form-criticism is that it compels attention to four points: (a) Sitz im Leben; (b) the question of order —real, topical, or merely mnemonic; (c) the Marcan framework; (d) the historical value of individual pericopæ. On each of these matters something must be said.

(a) The question of the Sitz im Leben, the concrete historical situation to which a Gospel story or saying really belongs, is of the highest importance. As it is usually posed the question requires us to decide between a Sitz im Leben Jesu and a Sitz im Leben der alten Kirche. In most cases it would be relevant to add a third possibility, a Sitz im Leben des jüdischen Volkes. The question is not one that can be answered a priori, but only after very careful examination of each case. In particular it is necessary to be on guard against the tacit assumption, all too easily made, that the possible historical contexts of a story or saying are mutually exclusive: that if it can be shown that a saying is the mot juste for some Church situation in the fifties of the first century, it cannot also be the actual spoken word of Jesus in some situation in the Ministry. The truth is that the history of the Church and the story of the Ministry overlap. The Church was in existence almost as soon as the Ministry began. The Church in the New Testament means Peter and James and John and the rest; but we do not have to wait until after the Resurrection for that group to be formed. Further, while it is doubtless true that the first Good Friday and the first Easter introduced many new factors into the life and thought of the Church, and set many old ones in a new perspective, nevertheless there were issues that remained substantially unchanged, and many issues which became explicit in the Apostolic Age were implicit in the Ministry. Finally, before
we too hastily assume that one of the main creative tasks of the Primitive Church was the putting back of its own ideas and beliefs into the mouth of Jesus, there is one fact worth pondering. We have a considerable collection of the written works of one of the most productive minds of the Apostolic Age, St. Paul. All his letters were probably written before any of the Gospels. They abound in striking sayings, brilliant ideas, and definite expressions of belief—a magnificent quarry for any evangelist. Yet how many Pauline sayings have been put into the mouth of Jesus?

(b) We have to take account of the fact that there were certainly no journalists in attendance on our Lord during the Ministry and no stenographers taking down accurate reports of all that was said. We are, in fact, dependent on what people remembered of the things seen and heard. Now people remember a long series of things mostly in one or other of two ways; either by getting them into some sort of logical sequence or by means of catchwords. Both methods were in common use in the Rabbinical schools, and both may be seen in the Gospel material. The structure of the Mishnah is an example of the logical arrangement of a great mass of material under topical headings; and the Talmud is full of examples of catchword connexions where a word or idea occurring at the end of one section suggests the topic that will occupy the next. Similarly, in the Gospels, we have only to compare Matthew's sermon on the Mount with the parallel discourse in Luke, to see how the various topics attract to themselves other logically relevant matter; and this holds of all the great discourses in Matthew. The sayings that make up these discourses are there not because they were all spoken by Jesus on a single occasion and in the order in which they now appear, but because someone was interested in having an anthology of the sayings of Jesus on this or that topic. Similarly with catchwords. The stock example, Mk. ix. 48-50, is as good as any: v. 48 is linked to v. 49 by the word 'fire'; v. 49 is linked to v. 50a, and that to the independent saying in v. 50b by the word 'salt'. These connexions are purely verbal: the real connotation of 'salt' is different in all three cases, and the arrangement of the sayings is a pure mnemonic device.
While this arrangement of material by topics or by sound associations is obviously most appropriate in making collections of sayings, the possibility cannot be excluded that it may affect the order of narrative also. We are all acquainted with the conversational formula: 'Speaking of x reminds me of an interesting experience . . .'. This leads on to some anecdote which has no real connexion with the previous story except the mnemonic link. Or again for the purposes of character-drawing we may select incidents from widely separate periods of a man's life in order to show that his attitude to this or that changed or did not change as he grew older. We can easily imagine that similar processes may lie behind the Gospel records. For example in Mk. ii. 1-iii. 6 we have a series of disputes between Jesus and the religious authorities: did they occur in precisely that order at that time, or did someone, before Mark began to write his Gospel, make a collection of anecdotes of this sort which the Evangelist later incorporated into his work?

(c) Questions of the kind just raised bring us face to face with one of the really vital problems, that of the reliability of the Marcan framework. Any attempt at a full discussion of that problem would require a good deal of time and must be left to another occasion. For the present it must suffice to state conclusions. These are: (i) that it is no longer possible to regard the Marcan framework, in all its details, as a rigid and unalterable scaffolding, into which everything must somehow be fitted; (ii) that, while many concessions may have to be made to the disruptive criticism of Mark, it is nevertheless the case that a good deal of structure remains. When the lath and plaster is removed, it appears that there is some solid masonry underneath. The main outline is an outline of what really happened. Here we may take in Q, our other main source. Q, I believe, gives a topical order which, again in its main features, reflects the real order. Roughly speaking Mark as a whole leads up to the Cross and Resurrection: Q as a whole presupposes these events. Mark gives the realities of Christianity: Q its ideals. Mark gives the foundation on which Christian life is to be built: Q gives the plan for building on that foundation. That the two documents supplement one another, interpret one another, and reflect one another in the way they do is evidence
not only of their general reliability but also of the fact that there is the most intimate and real connexion between the life and the teaching of Jesus.

(d) On the historical value of the individual pericope Form-criticism, like other kinds of criticism, can make suggestions. But it is only one of the criteria to be employed. Within its limits it is a useful test; but it is not the only one, nor is it an infallible touchstone.

The importance of these considerations in any attempt to write the ‘life’ of Jesus is obvious. The Church preaches—and has always preached from the beginning—Christ crucified and risen. That is, the Gospel is the proclamation of a supreme act of God (a kerygma), not the memoir of a distinguished prophet lately deceased. It is a gross error to suppose that the primitive preachers of Christianity came into the world with the story of Jesus, saying to men: ‘Look at this and do your best’. The primitive kerygma is not good advice or good example but good news.

The kerygma stresses the following points:

(a) The Davidic descent of Jesus.
(b) The Ministry (in the most general terms, without details).
(c) The Cross.
(d) The Resurrection and Exaltation.
(e) The Second Coming.

These five points are enclosed in a dogmatic framework, which itself makes two further points:

(i) All this is part and parcel of God’s plan announced beforehand by the Prophets.

(ii) The way of salvation is to accept and submit to the will of God now fully revealed in Christ.

In all this the Ministry has a bare mention; but detailed account of the sayings and doings that made it up there is none.

Nevertheless, before the end of the first century we have gospels which offer a narrative of the Ministry. We have what Luke calls in his Preface a diegesis of the things that had happened, a detailed narrative that links the Ministry with the Passion. How was the transition from kerygma to diegesis made? There lies one of the most fascinating as it is one of the most vital of Gospel problems.