

Chapter 1

Renewing the Quest for the Historical Kerygma

The world is approaching a significant anniversary. The Christian faith has made itself known for almost two thousand years. To say it rose from humble origins hardly describes the unlikeliness of its beginnings. The first followers of Jesus represented a diverse group: fishermen, tax collectors, prostitutes, members of the Sanhedrin, revolutionaries, Pharisees, adulteresses, respectable women. Jesus had only a brief ministry of about three years before his execution by the Romans on a charge of sedition. When the uncertain political circumstances of the day turned against him, the crowds and closest associates of Jesus turned their backs on him. One of his intimates sold him into the hands of his opponents, and all but a handful of the other closest followers scattered.

THE PROBLEM OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

One can readily understand how a successful, charismatic leader might have left a powerful legacy by gathering a great following over the course of many years and by creating a movement to carry on the mission, as Mohammed did. Likewise, one can appreciate how a teacher like Buddha prepared a generation of disciples who stood committed to carry on his teachings. In a rarer case, when the message of the thinker gains recognition as being of such value to the culture that the entire political/cultural system appropriates it, a philosophical position may form the basis for society, as happened with Confucius.

As one accounts for the presence of the Christian faith after two thousand years, all of the foregoing dynamics have played a part in its survival at various stages in different places and times. The

difficulty comes in appreciating how the Christian faith survived the death of Jesus. Unlike Mohammed, Jesus did not overthrow the political/religious power of his day. Unlike Buddha, Jesus did not leave a group of disciples committed to carrying on his teachings. On the contrary, at his death the disciples fled. Unlike Confucius, Jesus did not enjoy the approval and sanction of his culture and its power structure.

Quite candidly, the Christian faith comprises a collection of assertions about Jesus, any one of which would render it ridiculous, and the cumulative effect seems utter foolishness. Saul of Tarsus, one of the earlier persecutors of the followers of Jesus, who after his conversion became one of the primary proponents of Jesus, acknowledged that he asked people to believe foolishness (1 Cor. 1:18–25). When Porcius Festus, Roman Procurator of Judea (ca. 60–62), heard Saul's account of his faith (by then known as Paul), he declared him a madman (Acts 26:24). Two thousand years later, the Christian faith seems even more absurd.

Remarkably, the early followers of Jesus had already rejected the absurdities of his teaching before his death. They excised whatever did not conform to their expectations and theological presuppositions. They liked Jesus as a faith healer and preacher who drew large crowds. They liked Jesus as the embodiment of the long frustrated national hope for the revival of the kingdom of Israel. They liked his talk about heaven and his victory over demons. On the other hand, they did not like his talk about dying. Neither did they understand his talk about the resurrection. They accepted the concept of resurrection, but it was supposed to happen at the end of time. Like most religious people, they expressed a preference for the supernatural as long as it happened in a different time and a different place. When Jesus died, their faith in him as a leader also died.

The twentieth century has witnessed an earnest and deliberate effort on the part of Christian theologians to make the Christian faith conform to a modern worldview that has no place for what cannot be explained through scientific observation. A variety of theories for the origin of religions and the interpretation of biblical literature has developed from the point of view of faith as well as skepticism. The understanding of Scripture at the hands of different schools of thought presents a variety of conceptions: for example,

a record of God's saving acts, a reflection about an encounter with God, a literary construction to meet the needs of a particular group of people, and a projection of psychic need. Such approaches have developed in order to make the Christian faith acceptable to the twentieth century mind and relevant to the contemporary situation.

To an amazing degree, the modern mind with its disdain for the supernatural shows a common methodology with the ancient mind and its love of the supernatural. Both share an emotional inability or unwillingness to deal with what does not conform to preconceived notions of how things should be. The misdirected faith of the first followers of Jesus had to die before a faith could emerge that saw life and reality from a new perspective. In that sense, modern theology has not performed a particular service to the world by helping people maintain their own preconceived notions about the nature of life and reality. The Christian faith must begin with the honest confession that it is total foolishness from the perspective of everyone's worldview. Only then can one proceed to an assessment of whether this foolishness is true. As the world approaches the two-thousandth anniversary of Jesus' death, any examination of the Christian faith must come to grips with the absurd message that the followers of Jesus began to spread after his execution. Then one must wonder why a reasonable person would believe such things.

To begin, the apostles declared that Jesus had risen from the dead. The idea of resurrection had common acceptance in the ancient world. Many Jews, especially the Pharisees, expected a general resurrection at the end of time, though this expectation differed from themes of rising in other Near Eastern religions. The resurrection theme in the ancient nature and fertility religions accounted mythologically for the changing seasons, from the death of winter to the new life of spring. The Baal cult of ancient Canaan featured the death of Baal at the hand of Mot and his subsequent rising through the efforts of his consort/sister Anath, who mutilated Mot and scattered his parts on the fields. Tammuz and Ishtar played the same role in Babylonia. Osiris and his consort Isis carried out the same fertility myth in Egypt. The theme of resurrection also figured prominently in the mystery religions of the Roman Empire, in the mythic accounts of the regional and popular deities, particularly of

Asia Minor. Though they shared the idea of resurrection, these cults described dramatic episodes that happened "once upon a time."

Instead of a primordial setting in conflict with a monster like Mot, Jesus "suffered under Pontius Pilate." The Romans executed him publicly outside the walls of Jerusalem. The events surrounding Jesus took place in a historical setting with which the people of his day were familiar. J. R. R. Tolkien, scholar of Norse mythology and writer of fanciful tales, readily admitted the mythic elements surrounding Jesus, but added that in the case of Jesus, the myth really happened.¹ He reasoned that the universal presence of the dying/rising myth served a divine purpose in preparing the world to receive such a fanciful idea when it happened in a particular place and time.

What the world knows of Jesus comes from those followers who, in the moment of crisis, fled from him because the Jesus they believed in was lost. Jesus left no written records. Instead, he charged his disciples with the responsibility of bearing testimony to what they knew, like witnesses in a court trial. Those who heard the testimony played the part of judge. They believed the testimony of the witnesses, or they did not. What the early followers of Jesus told people when they gave testimony, then, comprises a helpful key to understanding why people then, or at any other time and place, would choose to believe and follow Jesus.

The followers of Jesus prefaced their testimony by calling it *good news*. In the vernacular Greek of the first century, the term used was *euangelion*, which, when anglicized, becomes *evangel* (from which the word "evangelism" comes). Literally, then, evangelism means telling good news. The expression entered the English language as the Old English word *godspel* and survives today as *gospel*. The gospel is the good news about Jesus that his followers told people.

Why did the story of Jesus have the status of good news? More importantly, why would someone receive it as good news personally so as to change his or her worldview and become a follower of Jesus? To answer these questions, one must determine what the followers of Jesus included when they gave testimony of what they had heard and seen and of what this gospel meant. The remainder of this study proposes to identify the elements of the gospel and their meaning. Two thousand years later, however, one cannot

ignore a related question. In a highly organized, technological world, which looks to science for the verification of all knowledge and adheres to a value neutral morality, does the gospel still mean anything?

In searching for the central elements of the gospel, a distinction appears between the Christian faith and the actual form Christianity has taken in different places and times. The gospel precedes the development of tradition, dogma, or even church organization and hierarchy. All of these grew out of the gospel, and they immediately began to appear in the early church. But these elements exist only as servants of the gospel. When Peter preached the first gospel sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), he did not hold the office of Bishop of Rome, he had no vestments, and he had no liturgical calendar or prescribed color for the season of Pentecost. He certainly did not subscribe to the idea of celibacy, if the presence of a wife bears any evidence in that regard.

On the Day of Pentecost, fifty days after the ancient Feast of the Passover, when Jesus had been executed, Peter publicly declared why the scattered disciples of Jesus had come back together. He explained why the ones who had feared any association with Jesus fifty days before now identified themselves openly and publicly as followers of Jesus. The occasion for the speech or sermon leaves modern commentators with the embarrassment of dealing with yet another supernatural setting. After forty days of appearing to the disciples in resurrected form, Jesus told his followers to remain in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came upon them. After this parting word, he vanished out of their sight. Ten days later, as the group of gathered disciples met, the promise of Jesus happened. Luke describes a sound like a rushing wind, accompanied by tongues like fire that rested on everyone as a visible manifestation of their possession by the Holy Spirit. In contrast to the torment of those poor wretches described as "demon possessed," these followers of Jesus were "God possessed."

No doubt the experience of Pentecost sealed the faith of the disciples in Jesus. With his resurrection, they still wondered whether Jesus might now restore the ancient kingdom of Israel (Acts 1:6). This view of the Messiah and his work saw salvation as a possession or commodity to which someone held title. With the coming of

the Spirit, however, the disciples entered the new age they had not anticipated. Salvation meant incorporation into the kingdom of God, which occurred as the Holy Spirit swallowed them. They understood that incorporation into the kingdom meant incorporation into the King. Until Pentecost, Jesus and the resurrection were wondrous events outside them. At Pentecost, however, the followers of Jesus became a part of the body of Christ. All of these ideas found expression in the writings of the New Testament.

Luke described the phenomenon of the disciples speaking “in other tongues” as a result of the Spirit’s coming. The rushing sound and the noise of the speaking drew a large crowd of holiday visitors to Jerusalem who, according to Luke, could understand the disciples in the native languages of the countries throughout the empire from which they had come. In this setting, Peter delivered the first gospel message (Acts 2:14–40). Significantly, Luke mentions that the explanation of the disciples’ experience came in response to the question, “What does this mean?” The subsequent discourse by Peter explained what the events of the gospel meant for the crowd in Jerusalem.

THE QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL KERYGMA

In this century, C. H. Dodd set the agenda for analyzing Christian evangelism in New Testament times. His 1935 lectures, later published as *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Development*, sought to identify the essential elements of a gospel formula that he believed the apostles commonly proclaimed.² Dodd began by examining Paul’s writings, based on his interpretation of 1 Corinthians 1:21: “It pleased God by the foolishness of *preaching* to save them that believe” (KJV). Dodd demonstrated that the *kerygma*, the word rendered “preaching” in the King James Version, signifies the content of preaching or the message preached, not the act of delivering a sermon.

Dodd equated *kerygma* with the gospel and made a radical distinction between it and the teaching of the early church, which he designated as *didache*. To those outside the church the apostles proclaimed *kerygma*; to those inside the church they proclaimed *didache*. In more contemporary terminology, Dodd attempted to demonstrate an apostolic distinction between evangelism and discipleship.

In order to find the most primitive form of the apostolic message, Dodd went to the writings of Paul, but immediately he met an obstacle. As writings to his churches, the letters of Paul constituted *didache*. Nonetheless, Dodd found support for his thesis in the distinction Paul drew between foundational precepts and matters of deeper maturity (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2–6; 3:10ff.). In his letters, Paul addressed the implications of the gospel that lead to maturity; thus, fragments of the *kerygma* appear throughout the Pauline writings as the basis for specific instruction.

The most obvious of these passages is 1 Corinthians 15:3b–5, where Paul reminded the Corinthians in what terms he preached the gospel to them:

that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,
that he was buried,
that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,
and that he appeared to Peter. . . .

Paul went on to catalogue a series of resurrection appearances. Having stated enough of the gospel to remind the Corinthians of the centrality of the resurrection for their faith, he then proceeded in the remainder of this long chapter to elaborate the doctrine of resurrection. As far as Paul was concerned, the gospel included, at the least, the facts related to the death of Christ for our sins and his resurrection. But did it include more?

As he further explored the writings of Paul, Dodd concluded that the gospel Paul proclaimed also included as major themes:

the return of Christ as Lord and Son of God who intercedes for us (Rom. 10:8–9; 14:9; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1)
the return of Christ for judgment (Rom. 2:16; 14:10; 1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Thess. 1:9–10)
the fulfillment of Scripture (Rom. 1:2)
Christ as Son of God and Son of David (Rom. 1:3–4; 8:31–34)

Dodd made it clear, however, that his treatment of the gospel revolved around his concern for realized eschatology.³ Thus, he was working to establish an eschatological formula sanctioned by the early church.

In searching for actual examples of how the apostles preached, Dodd naturally turned to the book of Acts. In the first four speeches of Peter from Acts 2–4, Dodd identified six major points and several subpoints to Peter’s message:

1. The age of fulfillment has dawned (Acts 2:16; 3:18; 3:24).
2. This has taken place through the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, which was described with proof from the Scriptures to attest:
 - a. His Davidic descent (Acts 2:30–31; cf. Ps. 132:11)
 - b. His ministry (Acts 2:22; 3:22)
 - c. His death (Acts 2:23; 3:13–14)
 - d. His resurrection (Acts 2:24–31; 3:15; 4:10).
3. By virtue of the resurrection, Jesus has been exalted at the right hand of God, as messianic head of the new Israel (Acts 2:33–36; cf. Ps. 110:1; Acts 3:13; 4:11; cf. Ps. 118:22; Acts 5:31).
4. The Holy Spirit in the church is the sign of Christ’s present power and glory (Acts 2:33; cf. Joel 2:28–32; Acts 5:32).
5. The messianic age will shortly reach its consummation in the return of Christ (Acts 3:21; 10:42).
6. The *kerygma* always closes with an appeal for repentance, the offer of forgiveness and of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of “salvation,” which Dodd interpreted as “life of the Age to Come” for those who enter the new community (Acts 2:38–39; cf. Isa. 62:9; Joel 2:32; Acts 3:19, 25–26; cf. Gen. 12:3; Acts 4:12; see also Acts 5:31; 10:43).⁴

Dodd argued that this summary of the apostolic preaching formed the outline for the preaching of Jesus as described by Mark in Mark 1:14–15. That outline had three parts:

1. The time is fulfilled—referring to prophecy and fulfillment of Scripture.
2. The kingdom of God has drawn near—referring to the ministry, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ.
3. Repent and believe the gospel—referring to the appeal for repentance and the offer of forgiveness.⁵

Without commenting on whether the apostles based their preaching on the model of Jesus or whether Mark had modeled the preaching

of Jesus on the apostles, Dodd saw the similarity as supportive of his view that the gospel circulated as a formula in the early days of the church.

Dodd noted several differences between the preaching of Peter, which he called the Jerusalem Kerygma, and the preaching of Paul, which he called the Pauline Kerygma. The Jerusalem Kerygma did not refer to Christ as the Son of God, nor did it assert that Christ died for our sins or that the exalted Christ intercedes for us. Dodd speculated on how the shift of emphasis may have arisen and whether the changes represented a change in theology or merely a change in terminology. This line of thought fit well with his theory of the development of the gospel away from its apostolic origins.

Though laying out all the elements of his reconstructed gospel, Dodd fell into the same path as generations of his predecessors. He singled out the aspect of the *kerygma* that appealed to him the most, arguing that his study of the apostles' preaching drives one to think of "resurrection, exaltation, and the second advent as being, in their belief, inseparable parts of a single divine event."⁶ The apostles were not so much concerned with an "early advent" as with the "immediate advent" experienced through the Holy Spirit. Dodd's discussion formed a forum for expounding realized eschatology.

Dodd has come under severe criticism for several major features of his argument. (1) He assumed the reliability of Acts as a faithful example of the primitive preaching, rather than as a literary creation of Luke. (2) He argued for a fixed formula for the *kerygma*, which took on a creedal dimension. (3) He argued for a rigid distinction between *kerygma* and *didache*. On these points, scholars have argued for over fifty years, but a proper understanding of the ministry of evangelism requires yet another examination of the subject. (4) In his discussion another issue requires attention: the role of the Holy Spirit in the formulation of the gospel.

RELIABILITY OF ACTS

Martin Dibelius argued that the speeches in Acts were compositions by the author, but that they represent what the author understood the apostolic message to be.⁷ The apostles' message did not concentrate on the biographical details of the life of Christ. Instead, they emphasized "what faith longed to hear and . . . what was likely

to impress and convert unfaith, vis. that here it was God who spoke and who was at work."⁸

Bo Reicke argued that the similarity between sermons in Acts rests on a real tradition rather than on later constructions by Luke.⁹ According to this scholar, the preaching of Jesus fell into four basic form traditions shared in common with the Jewish community. The apostles then adopted the forms of preaching they had learned from Jesus. One of these forms, missionary preaching, followed a form designed to persuade, which included thesis, proofs, and conclusion. Jesus provided the primary topics that comprised the early apostolic preaching that followed this pattern:

1. Thesis: Jesus was the Servant and the Lord.
2. Proofs
 - a. His life showed him to fulfill these titles.
 - b. Scripture bore witness to him.
 - c. He was raised from the dead.
 - d. The miracles demonstrated the power of his resurrection.
3. Conclusion: Everybody must turn to the Lord, including the Gentiles.¹⁰

Because of the similarity in form of the apostolic sermons but the slight differences in theology and development, Reicke suggested that these early sermons preserved the original tradition of the apostles rather than the creativity of Luke.¹¹

Bertil Gärtner took strong exception with Dibelius over the reliability of Acts as historically substantial of the early preaching. He maintained that the church still living at the time of the writing of Acts, which had heard the apostolic preaching, would have insisted upon reliability.¹² Furthermore, any similarity between the sermons does not rest on Lucan composition, but on Peter and Paul's having the same message to deliver. Gärtner believed that shades of difference among the sermons reflect particular theologies, such as, the "older" Christology of Peter or concern for justification with Paul.¹³ Gärtner discounted Dibelius's categorization of ancient historiography and suggested that the latter's failure to understand ancient historiography led to a flawed understanding of Acts as a literary creation by Luke.

C. S. C. Williams joined Gärtner's criticism of Dibelius. He accused Dibelius of failing to take seriously the extent of disagreement among scholars over the degree to which ancient historians freely composed or relied on factual material in their reports of speeches.¹⁴ The position of Dibelius assumed a monolithic approach to writing history by the ancient historians. Michael Green has identified the variety of approaches pursued by Thucydides, Lucian, Livy, Cicero, and Philostratus, suggesting how unsafe it is "to argue from other writers as to what Luke could or could not have done in his speeches."¹⁵ Rather than a Gentile approach to history, Williams argued that Luke would more likely have followed a Jewish model for history. Such an approach would have included the rabbinic method of memorization to preserve important words or sayings.¹⁶ By regarding Acts as simply a literary-theological document without historical substance, Dibelius and others presumed that the ancient historians had no interest in presenting the content of what would have been said on significant occasions.

Dibelius does not stand alone in viewing the sermons in Acts as literary creations of Luke. Hans Conzelmann credited Luke on this account with being "the first Christian author consciously to try to conform to the standards of Hellenistic literature."¹⁷ He believed the sermons in Acts represent Luke's attempt to imitate the style of Thucydides.

C. F. Evans insisted that Luke had greater freedom to write as he pleased in composing Acts since a model did not yet exist in the church for writing that kind of book.¹⁸ This argument falls, however, in a comparison with the four Gospels. Though they were a different kind of book, speeches comprised a major part of them. Evans also held that the speeches of Acts must be Luke's composition rather than the preserved tradition of what was said by the apostles because Evans had difficulty envisioning the *Sitz im Leben* of the church that would have preserved and repeated the apostles' words. He further argued that no one would remember a speech twenty, thirty, or forty years after it was heard unless it was repeated, and he found no evidence for such repetition in the church.¹⁹

Evans therefore followed Dibelius in his method. In assessing the individual sermons, one must view them as part of one large composition, *The Acts of the Apostles*. Luke composed the speeches

to illustrate his overall theme. As examples of this kind of composition, Evans referred to the commissioning by Christ (Acts 1:8) and Paul's sermon in Athens (17:22–31). The commissioning of Christ would not have been preserved by any of the fragmentary traditions that Luke used, because Evans could not imagine a case calling for the preservation of such material. The presence can only be explained, in his judgment, as a composition by Luke.²⁰ Evans makes a similar case for Lucan composition of Paul's sermon in Athens. While Paul may be speaking in character for Athens, the words do not seem appropriate for him.

Though he had no knowledge of Aramaic, Evans undertook to refute C. C. Torrey's theory of the Aramaic background of the speeches in Acts. Evans compared passages in Acts said to come from Aramaic sources with passages from Luke's Gospel with similar form and structure in his attempt to prove that the Aramaisms were not present.²¹ In actuality, however, this strange approach tends to confirm rather than refute the theory of Aramaic backgrounds, since the speeches in the Luke all have an Aramaic context. R. A. Martin's subsequent analysis of the passages has demonstrated that the poor Greek of these passages translates into good Aramaic, suggesting that Luke relied on preserved Aramaic sermons for the early speeches in Acts.²²

Rather than supporting the idea of a common *kerygma*, Evans' other presuppositions led him to conclude that the similarity between sermons in Acts resulted from Luke's literary style. A comparison of Peter's sermon on Pentecost with Paul's sermon at Antioch of Pisidia suggested to Evans that "Luke is operating with a stereotyped form which is current as the apostolic preaching in his own day, rather than with historical reminiscences of what the apostolic church in Jerusalem actually preached."²³

THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE FORMULATION OF THE GOSPEL

Critical study of the New Testament in the twentieth century has tended to neglect at best or deny at worst God's role in the composition of the books that became the New Testament. This attempt to avoid the transcendent arises from a legitimate concern to maintain objectivity in study, but such concern collapses in the face of the

enormity of subjective presuppositions scholars bring to their study concerning what could or could not have happened two thousand years ago. Even worse cases of subjectivity arise when scholars attempt to reconstruct a life situation in the early church that would have called for the church to construct miracle stories or ascribe claims to divinity by Jesus.

In the case of the Acts of the Apostles and the effort to reconstruct the gospel as the apostles preached it, one school of scholarly thought has concluded that Acts cannot reveal how the apostles preached because Luke constructed it as a literary work to express his own theological concerns. Others argue for the acceptance of the material in Acts as the legitimate tradition of the church and an accurate representation of how the apostles would have preached. Neither approach seems entirely satisfactory, however, since neither grapples with the place of God in the development and preservation of the gospel. Historians, scientists, political scientists, grammarians, musicians, and the full range of academic disciplines have the luxury of pursuing their research with respect to the finite world. By positing the existence of God, however, the disciplines of theology cannot with integrity study their areas without thinking about God.

The Role of the Witness

The role of the witness plays a critical part in the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. Luke's Gospel begins by attributing his and other Gospel narratives to the testimony of witnesses (Luke 1:1–4). It concludes by describing the instructions of Christ to his followers that they should be witnesses to the fulfillment of Scripture, his death, his resurrection, the call for repentance, and the offer of both forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit (24:44–49). The Acts of the Apostles begins with Jesus' final instructions to his followers in which he promised them the power of the Holy Spirit and charged them to be his witnesses (Acts 1:8). The book closes with Paul in Rome declaring to the Jews "the kingdom of God and [trying] to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets" (28:23), while the preaching and teaching go on unhindered. In other words, the substantial internal evidence of Luke's writings indicates his methodology, which concentrates on preserving the testimony of witnesses.

Furthermore, Luke, more than any other New Testament writer, paid attention to details of setting and confirmation. These details add credibility to his witness. He dated the birth of Christ “while Quirinius was governor of Syria” (Luke 2:2). He set the beginning of John’s ministry “in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas” (3:1–2). Only Luke gave the age of Jesus when he began his ministry as “about thirty years old” (3:23). Luke also had a habit of including names of people: Mary, called Magdalene; Joanna, the wife of Cuza, Herod’s steward; and Susanna (8:2–3); Simon the Pharisee (7:40); Zacchaeus (19:1–10); and Cleopas (24:18), in addition to names also cited in the other Gospels.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke’s citation of names increases dramatically in relation to the enlargement of the field in which the story unfolds. The life of Jesus from birth to ascension took place in a small geographical area with a small number of followers. In Acts the story spreads throughout the Hellenistic world to the very capital of the empire. All along the way Luke documents names and “addresses” of people who heard the testimony and believed. The internal evidence of Acts indicates how Luke would have come by so many sermons and sermon fragments years after their delivery.

The Conversion Testimony

C. F. Evans and other skeptical critics can imagine no situation in the life of the church that would have led to the preservation of the sermons in Acts. The experience of the church from the time of Paul to this very day, however, suggests why the sermons would have been remembered and repeated. At one place Luke described Paul’s conversion (Acts 9:1–30). In two other places Luke described how Paul gave testimony of his conversion experience: first before the crowd in Jerusalem (22:1–21), then before Agrippa (26:1–23). Converts to faith in Christ remember the circumstances of their conversion until they die. What is more, converts tend to obey the command of Christ to be his witnesses. External evidence of this phenomenon fills volumes of Christian devotional literature of the last two thousand years, including such classics as Augustine’s *Con-*

fessions, Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* (which he allegorized as *The Pilgrim's Progress*), and C. S. Lewis's *Surprised by Joy*.²⁴

While Peter, Paul, Philip, and certainly Stephen would not likely have remembered what they preached precisely on a given occasion, they would have known generally that they had preached Christ. With only that to go by, Luke would have had to resort to literary license. Luke had no such handicap, however, when writing his account of how the church fulfilled its commission to bear witness to Christ. Just as the apostles remembered the words of Christ, the converts would have remembered the words they heard from the apostles (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1). Of the three thousand converts on the Day of Pentecost who returned to the corners of the empire after their pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Luke undoubtedly encountered many in his travels who shared their testimony of how they had met Christ through the gospel on Pentecost when Peter preached.

The church did not preserve the debates, sermons, or discussions that accompanied the appointment of the seven deacons, the election of a twelfth apostle, or the Jerusalem Council. Only brief statements by the participants survive. If Luke's writing pattern had exercised freedom in constructing speeches, he would surely have fortified those episodes with some Thucydidean monologues. But he does not. This suggests that the speeches and sermons in Acts do have a historical base in Luke's research.

The concept of the witness that Luke forthrightly accentuates explains both the preservation of the sermons of the apostles and the origin of the apostolic *kerygma* tradition. But witness alone does not fully explain it. The disciples witnessed many things Jesus said and did during his ministry, but they understood little or none of what happened in their midst. They did not understand the parables, the Transfiguration (Mark 9:6), talk about a resurrection of Jesus (Matt. 17:9; Mark 9:9; John 11:24), talk about the coming passion (Matt. 17:23; Mark 9:31–32; Luke 9:22, 44–45; 17:25; 18:31–34), or their place in the kingdom (Luke 22:24–27). What they had witnessed of Jesus did not have meaning nor did it meet with understanding among the disciples until after the resurrection.

All four Gospels bear testimony to the fact that the disciples had not expected the resurrection. Though singled out for his articulation of the denial of Jesus, Peter spoke for most of the other

disciples whose absence from the crucifixion and burial belied the disappointment of their expectations. Prior to the resurrection the disciples had more expectation than faith. Luke described how understanding commingled with faith as they met their risen Lord. In his description of the resurrection appearances, Luke explained the origin of the apostolic *kerygma* tradition.

When Cleopas and the other unnamed disciple met Jesus on the road to Emmaus, they recited the basic events in the ministry and death of Jesus (Luke 24:19–24). They knew of his teachings and miracles and of how the power structure of the establishment had conspired his death. They even knew the stories of the resurrection that had begun to circulate that day. They had information, but they did not know the meaning of it. After the two disciples told Jesus the news of the crucifixion and the rumors of the empty tomb, Jesus replied, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” (Luke 24:25–26). Luke then adds that “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (24:27).

Luke makes clear at the end of his Gospel that the message the apostles declared in Acts had its origin in the teaching of Jesus between the resurrection and the ascension. The teaching that occurred during the resurrection appearances also reiterated what he had taught during his ministry, but what the disciples had not comprehended. The passion predictions by Jesus stand as ironic examples of the disciples’ inability to understand what was happening. The Synoptic Gospels record three such episodes:

Episode	Matthew	Mark	Luke
1.	16:21–23	8:31–33	9:22
2.	17:22–23	9:30–32	9:44–45
3.	20:17–19	10:32–34	18:31–34

At the empty tomb, the Synoptic Gospels contain an angelic message to recall what Jesus had said:

“He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.” (Matt. 28:6)

“But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”
(Mark 16:7)

“Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’”
(Luke 24:6–7)

In all three cases, the evangelists emphasize that the disciples had not grasped the meaning of Jesus’ death nor anticipated the resurrection, even though they had heard of it from him. Confused by many things their master had said, the death and resurrection predictions seem to have passed out of their thoughts until something happened to make them remember.

Luke wrote that Jesus did not leave the work of preserving his Gospel to memory guided by chance. Instead, Jesus taught his disciples during his resurrection visits the meaning of all that had happened concerning him.²⁵ Luke gave the substance of this teaching in the last verses of his Gospel:

He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24:44–49)

In other words, Luke clearly describes a gospel tradition that originated with Jesus during his resurrection appearances. The command to be witnesses came as a command to be witnesses “of these things” that Jesus recapitulated and the meaning he ascribed to them.

Before undertaking the responsibility of a witness, however, the disciples received the further instruction to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father, who would clothe them with power (Luke

24:49). The Holy Spirit forms the final critical link in the origin and preservation of the Gospel. While Luke emphasizes this dimension of the gospel, he does not stand alone. In the Great Commission recorded by Matthew, the activity of going, making disciples, baptizing, and teaching is framed by (1) the declaration of Christ's supreme authority in heaven and on earth, and (2) his promise to always be with his disciples as they fulfilled this command (Matt. 28:18–20).

The origin and preservation of a gospel tradition by the early church has been described as a sociological phenomenon by many critical scholars during the twentieth century. Efforts to reconstruct the life situation of the church focus on the survival needs the church would have had that might have prompted a particular tradition. Efforts at analyzing the mind of the authors focus on the attempt to discover the creative theological contribution of that author as he responded in faith to the situation in the church. In contrast to this approach, the New Testament seems to present the Holy Spirit as the dominant "life situation" of the church out of which the gospel witness emerged.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus told the disciples that the Holy Spirit "will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). This concept of the role of the Holy Spirit in the witness to Christ finds a parallel in Luke, where Jesus said,

When you are brought before the synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say. (Luke 12:11–12)

These passages acknowledge both creativity in the gospel message and the preservation process while ascribing both processes to the Holy Spirit. By calling to remembrance the circumstances related to Christ, the Holy Spirit maintains the objective basis for good news, rooted in what Christ said, what he did, and whom he represented himself to be. On the other hand, the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit takes the truth of Christ expressed by the gospel to impact each person, culture, and age in a creative, personal way.

A GOSPEL FORMULA

Martin Dibelius, who had examined the subject before Dodd, agreed generally that a formula or formulas preserved the gospel in the early church. He declared that regardless of which sermon one reads in Acts, “the work of Jesus is presented in brief formulas testifying to the divine plan of salvation.”²⁶ The nature of early Christian preaching would have sounded like Peter’s message to Cornelius. It began with the baptism of John as signaling the new era and went on to include the death of Christ, his resurrection, details about his deeds and works to substantiate who Jesus was, the fulfillment of prophecy, the forgiveness of sins, the exaltation, and the return for judgment.²⁷

A. M. Hunter argued that the *kerygma* had three main headings: the fulfillment of the prophecies of Scripture, a presentation of the life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus, and a summons to repent and accept the forgiveness of sins in Jesus.²⁸ Hunter allowed that the presentation of the second point would also include such matters as the dawning of the new age, the Davidic descent, good deeds and works of power, and the return of Jesus as Judge and Savior. Hunter found this *kerygma* in the Gospels and the letters of the New Testament, though it was often restated, as Hebrews does with Platonic imagery, for a particular audience.²⁹ Hunter believed that the gospel must “be restated in terms intelligible to modern men and women for whom the technical terms of Jewish eschatology—the conceptions of the Kingdom and the Messiah and the Two Ages—mean little or nothing.”³⁰

T. F. Glasson proposed a *kerygma* containing five points:

1. Fulfillment of Scripture
2. The death of Christ
3. The resurrection of Christ
4. Forgiveness of sins
5. Apostolic witness³¹

In this construction, he deliberately omitted any reference to the return of Christ in glory to judge the world. To support his view, he pointed out that Acts 2, 3, 5, and 13 do not make reference to the judgment.³² At most, the coming of Christ is part of the promise of

what God will do. Since the apostles could not bear witness to a future event, they could not preach the return of Christ as part of their message. Glasson also deleted the Holy Spirit from the gospel because reference to the Spirit does not appear with the frequency of reference to the apostolic witness sighted five times in Acts (2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:40–41; 13:30–31).³³ Glasson defined the *kerygma* as a “proclamation of certain facts about Jesus, particularly the Resurrection; and this was certified by witnesses.”³⁴

Bertil Gärtner held that the missionary preaching contains recurring ideas that seem to reflect a formula “embodying the salient features of God’s redeeming action through Jesus Christ. . . .”³⁵ He went on to identify seven elements of this formula:

1. The ministry of Jesus, his suffering, death, and resurrection
2. Prophecies being fulfilled
3. Jesus as the Lord and Messiah, exalted to the right hand of God and bestowing the Holy Spirit
4. The apostolic message directed also to the Gentiles
5. The expectation of the advent and the judgment of the Lord (the eschatological motif)
6. The exhortation to conversion
7. The bearing of witness³⁶

Gärtner drew his conclusions in the context of a study of Paul’s sermon in Athens, a sermon Dodd had oddly ignored in his study. In Athens, Paul’s sermon included four elements that Dodd did not treat: natural revelation, God, idolatry, universalism and the divine plan of salvation.³⁷ Nonetheless, Gärtner agreed with Dodd’s categories enough to say that only the latter part constituted *kerygma* and offended the sensibilities of the Athenians.³⁸ Gärtner did offer the observation that Acts holds four different kinds of missionary sermons, including preaching to Jews, preaching to Gentiles, the type of Stephen’s defense, and Paul’s farewell speech at Ephesus.³⁹

Ethelbert Stauffer contended that missionary preaching represented the liveliest and most original form of preaching for the early church, but that for all its freedom of expression, it had a “dogmatic center” with the *kerygma*. In his preaching, Paul labored to reproduce this “official” version of the gospel formula “word for word.”⁴⁰ Stauffer also pointed out that the relationship between Christ and

the one and only God received attention in the early preaching (Acts 14:15; 17:23ff.; 22:14; 24:14; cf. Rom. 3:30; 16:27; 1 Cor. 8:4; Gal. 3:20; 1 Thess. 1:9; Phil. 2:11; 1 Peter 4:19; Jude 25).⁴¹ This observation by Stauffer, combined with Gärtner's identification of the elements of the Athens speech, raises serious question about the need to include another element about the one God in the *kerygma*, a question to be addressed later.

Floyd Filson's list of elements for inclusion in the *kerygma* only numbered four, but his third point about the historical Jesus had nine subpoints! For the most part Filson mentions items already introduced, though he makes it a special point to emphasize the importance of the historicity of Jesus.⁴² A point he adds focuses attention on John the Baptist as preparatory to the coming of Christ as a common feature of early preaching (Acts 10:37; 13:24–25).⁴³ The crucial matter Filson insisted upon was the resurrection, as the title of his study suggests.

In a later study, Filson distanced himself from Dodd though still holding basic agreement about the gospel message in the first decades of the church. Filson moved away from using the term *kerygma* because in it one loses sight of the kingdom of God as the focus of preaching, seen in how God has established his rule through Christ. Filson held that the use of an esoteric Greek term that never occurs in Acts as the “algebraic x which vaguely points to the gospel” did not help clarify matters.⁴⁴ H. J. Cadbury had even less regard for the technical use of *kerygma* in his remarks, “When a term from a foreign language is employed in such matters it often seems to the simpleminded to give the concept a validity even greater than if plain English was used.”⁴⁵

With Rudolf Bultmann, the question of the historical origin of the preaching became irrelevant for he only cared that the preaching of the death and resurrection of Christ were the word of God. In rejecting the “quest for the historical *kerygma*,” he did not reject the idea of an apostolic message so much as the discipline of modern historical research as a tool for evaluating the Bible. In a sense his radical approach to criticism is a rejection of any form of criticism. He argued that the resurrection cannot be proven or accepted on historical grounds; it can only be appropriated by faith.

Bultmann recognized a basic *kerygma* similar to that identified by other scholars of his generation, but he argued that it was shrouded in the mythological worldview of the first century.⁴⁶ The idea of a preexistent divine Being appearing on earth as a man, atoning for sin in a sacrificial death, abolishing death, vanquishing demonic forces through a resurrection, and returning to the right hand of God as Lord and King only to return one day soon to complete redemption and judge the world all smacked of mythology. Though he viewed the *kerygma* as a mythological construction that spoke to the needs of its day, he would not abolish it with Harnack and the older liberals; rather he sought to interpret it.⁴⁷ Furthermore, he criticized the philosophers for thinking that humanity can do anything about its fallen condition because it is total.⁴⁸

Bultmann further criticized liberalism and the history of religions school for disregarding the person of Jesus, whom the New Testament presents as “the decisive event of redemption.”⁴⁹ The love of God is only an abstract idea unless God reveals that love. That is why, for the Christian, faith means faith in Christ, for God demonstrated his love in Christ.⁵⁰ Bultmann declared that “he who formerly had been the *bearer* of the message was drawn into it and became its essential *content*.”⁵¹ The first preachers of the gospel were concerned to show that the cross had meaning because of the significance of Jesus; thus, they told about the Jesus they had known. The cross had meaning for Bultmann, however, because of its inseparable unity with the resurrection.⁵² Yet, Bultmann declared that “an historical fact which involves a resurrection from the dead is utterly inconceivable!”⁵³

Thus, Bultmann disagreed with Glasson, Gärtner, and others who had made the apostolic witness an element of faith, since the apostles could not have witnessed what did not happen. More importantly for his approach, however, faith can never come as a result of proof; otherwise it would not be faith. In his existential system, “Christ meets us in the preaching as one crucified and risen.”⁵⁴

Ernst Käsemann followed Bultmann’s lead and asserted that those who hoped to demonstrate a unity of early *kerygma* and tradition are “trying to maintain that the *kerygma* includes the recital of facts as mediated by the tradition.”⁵⁵ Käsemann held that the church modified the tradition to meet the challenges represented in

changes of time and place, which led in turn to variations in the *kerygma*, though the early church held fast to the same profession of faith throughout the changes.⁵⁶ While the Gospels tell the life of Christ, Käsemann insisted that only the “Cross and the Resurrection” had any real importance for the early church.⁵⁷

Käsemann concluded that neither miracles, nor the tradition of the church found in the canon of accepted Scripture, nor the historical Jesus sought by scholarly criticism can give security to faith. Instead, only the Holy Spirit can enable a person “to come to Christ and believe in him as Lord.”⁵⁸ When he looked at the New Testament, he saw so wide a variability in the form and content of the *kerygma* that the evidence compelled the recognition “not merely of significant tensions, but, not infrequently, of irreconcilable theological contradictions.”⁵⁹ This variability demonstrated for Käsemann that primitive Christianity had a variety of confessions by the time of the writing of the New Testament, which constantly replaced one another in dialectic fashion, mutually delimiting one another.⁶⁰ Though he recognized that the gospel serves as the foundation for the church, he declared that “the question, ‘What is the Gospel?’ cannot be settled by the historian according to the results of his investigations but only by the believer who is led by the Spirit and listens obediently to the Scripture.”⁶¹

In his comparative study of 1 Corinthians 15:3–5 and 1 Timothy 3:16, Edward Schweizer examined the passages as “creeds” or kerygmatic formulas. He suggested that 1 Corinthians 11:23–25 has the same creedal concern as 1 Timothy 3:16 and that Philippians 2:6–11 has the same creedal concern as 1 Corinthians 15:3–5.⁶² He further suggested that both strands could have emerged from an even earlier creed like one he identified as beginning with Romans 1:3. Both passages concern what God did in Christ, but 1 Corinthians 15:3–5 stresses the death and resurrection, while 1 Timothy 3:16 stresses the incarnation and exaltation.⁶³ Schweizer resolved the discrepancy by citing the cultural context in which the gospel found expression. The death and resurrection of Christ spoke to the problem of the Palestinian Jew: “How may I get rid of my sins, how shall I get through doomsday?” The incarnation and exaltation spoke to the problem of the Gentiles in the Hellenistic world: “How

may I be freed from the powers of a blind fate? How may I obtain access to the heavenly, divine world?"⁶⁴

Schweizer's study suggests that different elements of the gospel speak to different issues of human existence. The elements of the gospel an evangelist might employ in presenting Christ and the message of salvation depend, to a great extent, on the kinds of fundamental questions that plague a person or culture. This conclusion has profound implications not only for New Testament criticism, but more immediately for how a Christian presents Christ to a non-believer anywhere in the world on the eve of the twenty-first century. Schweizer asked pointedly,

... since the Japanese people do not think in ontological terms, must we convert them first to our Greek thinking or to Western thinking as a whole in order that the gospel might be preached in these terms?⁶⁵

Alternatively, in preaching the gospel, Christians ought to present Christ as the answer to the problem of a person who does not understand that problem as one of sin. The loneliness and meaninglessness of modern life represent nothing else than a contemporary nomenclature for the old biblical term "sin."⁶⁶

The Christians of the New Testament church spoke specifically to the particular issues of life and expressed the gospel in terms that communicated with their audience, regardless of the cultural context within or beyond the Roman empire.⁶⁷ When the evangelists moved outside the context of a Jewish community, they no longer bound themselves to the language of the people of the covenant, wrapped up as it was with a remote time, place, and tradition. Instead, they employed language that communicated the same message, but to a people who never knew the Law or the Prophets.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, they retained the basic elements of the *kerygma*, even where they did not have the same meaning. For the modern church, Schweizer warned of the danger associated with only retaining those elements of the gospel that suit her. Different elements of the *kerygma* speak with different power in different ages. The church does not have the liberty to discard what it considers out of date or difficult to understand.⁶⁹

C. F. D. Moule took a similar track to Schweizer. He proposed that Christianity in apostolic times took many forms throughout the empire and beyond. Factors such as geography, socio-economic standing, educational background, cultural setting, religious environment, and local politics played a part in shaping the way Christianity expressed itself in a given locale. Though the New Testament writings reflect a wide variety of theological perspectives, the *kerygma* gives “coherence to all the diversity within the New Testament.”⁷⁰ Particularly, the affirmation of the incarnation of Jesus and his resurrection maintain this coherence.

The New Testament letters reflect the strong sense of responsibility the church felt for receiving, preserving, and handing on the authentic gospel message (cf. 1 Cor. 11:23; 15:1; Gal. 2:2; Col. 1:5–6; 1 Thess. 2:2–4; 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 2:8; Heb. 2:3; James 1:18, 21; 1 Peter 1:23–25; 1 John 2:20, 27–28; Rev. 2:25).⁷¹ In spite of the variability observed by such commentators as Käsemann, the various writings of the New Testament “speak with a remarkably unanimous voice of a single Gospel and of one Lord.”⁷² In fact, Moule argues, this *kerygma* became the basis for evaluating the legitimacy of writings for inclusion in the canon:

Judged by this standard, any estimate of Jesus which did not acknowledge his historical existence and his real death would be out; so would any which did not acknowledge the resurrection and the decisiveness of his fulfillment of God’s plan of salvation outlined in the Old Testament.⁷³

This standard excludes the writings of Gnostic dualism as well as a variety of other unorthodox views that emerged in the first centuries of the life of the church. Moule contends that the application of this test may be found in 1 and 2 John.⁷⁴

Ralph P. Martin carried even further the idea that the one gospel found multiple expressions. As the church spread into the Hellenistic world, the bearers of the gospel faced the problem of translating the message of Christ into terms with which the common person could identify and understand, while clearly demonstrating how Christ met the deepest needs of life.⁷⁵ Martin identified what he considered the greatest needs of the Hellenistic age:

1. freedom from evil spirits
2. freedom from the bondage of archons (spiritual powers) and the rule of “destiny” and “necessity”
3. deliverance from sin, mortality, and finitude⁷⁶

In 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, the forgiveness of sins was a burning issue for the community in Corinth. In Philippians 2:6–11, however, the problem that demanded attention was the “purposelessness of existence and the conquest of those agencies which tyrannized over Hellenistic man.”⁷⁷ In Philippians the gospel provides the basis for explaining how God in Christ has all authority and power, thereby assuring the meaningfulness of life.⁷⁸ Martin contended that interest in prophecy and the concern over estrangement from God have little appeal today, but the questions that lie behind the fears of the ancient world persist into the modern age.⁷⁹

While Dodd’s critics appear to be correct that the *kerygma* did not exist as a fixed formula, Dodd was correct to the extent that the *kerygma* existed as a fixed content upon which the early Christians drew when proclaiming their faith in Christ.

PREACHING AND TEACHING IN CONTEXT

When C. H. Dodd began “the quest for the historical *kerygma*,” he sought to identify a gospel creedal formulation acknowledged by the apostles. Any deviation from this formulation constituted “development” or the introduction of new theological views by an author. The primary theological idea he attacked as a new development was the idea of a future return of Christ. Dodd wrote from what many would call a conservative point of view to establish a tradition that went back to the early church. Rudolf Bultmann wrote from what many would call a liberal point of view, in order to free the gospel from tradition altogether. Both shared a presupposition, however, one that is common to many who study the New Testament, that the New Testament is a human book full of traditions about what people believed or taught about Jesus long ago. From this perspective, any differences in the gospel message or nuances in theological formulation occur as a result of the personal quirks of the authors of the New Testament books.

If, on the other hand, the Holy Spirit actually guided the apostles in what they said and how they said it, one might expect a change in the expression of the message without an alteration in its substance. Rather than reciting a creedal formula, the apostles presented Jesus Christ, the Savior. They said enough about him to set him apart, to indicate in what sense he is the only Savior, and to explain from what and to what he saves. Presenting Jesus in the Hellenistic world required the translation or transformation of terminology wed to the Jewish context, such as the substitution of "Christ" for the term "Messiah."⁸⁰

In moving beyond the Jewish context to the nations, more than terminology needed attention. The gospel had assumed several fundamental elements that Peter did not have to elaborate in Jerusalem. He could assume a common understanding and belief in the Creator God, who upheld the universe by his power. This represented not only the religion of the Jews, but also their worldview. The Creator God had taken the initiative to provide salvation for his creatures. To this end, God had spoken by the prophets to prepare Israel for the appearing of the Messiah. Floyd Filson has criticized C. H. Dodd's study of the apostolic preaching in Acts for concentrating his analysis on the messages that appear in a Jewish context while ignoring Paul's messages in the pagan settings of Lystra (Acts 14:15-17) and Athens (17:22-31).⁸¹ In these settings, Paul first had to proclaim the Creator God who made the heavens and the earth. Filson observed:

In a world of polytheism and idolatry it was necessary to present the basic message of monotheism, the one God who is Creator, Lord, and Judge, and under whom all life is lived. It was necessary to state clearly man's moral responsibility before God, and in doing this the Resurrection and the final judgement were proclaimed.⁸²

This theme forms the prologue to John's Gospel as well as to Hebrews. It figures prominently in Paul's letters, particularly in Romans 8, Ephesians 1, and Colossians 1.

In Jerusalem Peter spoke of Jesus as Lord (Acts 2:36). He never referred to him as "Son of God" the way Paul did in Damascus after his conversion (9:20). Though Paul used the terminology "Son of

God” in his writings (Rom. 1:4; 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:19; Gal. 2:20), he more frequently used the term of preference of Peter in Jerusalem, which had constituted the confession of Thomas: “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28). Rather than a “theological development,” the “Son of God” terminology constituted the effort to express to the Gentiles what “Lord” meant to the Jews.

For centuries, the Jews had refrained from speaking the holy name of Yahweh, the Lord God Almighty, who redeemed Israel from Egypt and declared his name to Moses. When the rabbis came to the holy name in Scripture, rather than speak it, they substituted the word *Adonai*, the Lord. Modern translations of the Hebrew Scriptures maintain this tradition by writing the name Yahweh as “LORD.” Instead of a low Christology, by using the divine title when referring to Jesus, Peter expressed the highest of Christologies.⁸³ The title “Lord” ascribed to Jesus had its origin in Palestine in the Jewish community, as the ancient Aramaic prayer *Maran atha*, “Lord, come” (1 Cor. 16:22), indicates.⁸⁴ The confession “Jesus is Lord” meant something to those who understood what Lord meant. The Gentile world, however, had many lords. The term “Son of God” expressed for the Gentile the divine relationship that “Lord” conveyed to the Jews.

In Jerusalem, Peter never stated specifically that Christ died for our sins. Paul stressed this meaning of the death throughout his writings. Instead of a theological development in the understanding of the atonement, the difference between Peter and Paul reflects the cultural difference of their audiences. In Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, Peter could assume a common understanding of sin and its remedy. In the shadow of the temple, the pilgrims that day understood better than any that the Law of Moses prescribed that forgiveness of sin only came through sacrifice. Peter proclaimed the death of Jesus that took place at Passover, and he proclaimed forgiveness of sins in Jesus’ name. The details did not require explanation, for the understanding of an atoning sacrifice had formed over a thousand years of the consciousness of Israel.

In the Gentile world, however, Paul had a formidable problem. The Gentiles offered sacrifices to their gods, but sacrifices served as bribes to enlist the aid of a god or to pacify an offended deity. Paul had to explain the moral demands of a holy God and the signifi-

cance of the death of Jesus with respect to the problem of human sin. Without the preparation of the Law and the Prophets, the Gentile world required explanation that the Jewish community did not need.

Paul indicated in the strongest of terms that the apostles felt no freedom to alter the terms of the gospel. His manner of presenting the gospel to Gentiles came to him by way of revelation from Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:6–12). Peter also claimed divine revelation as the basis for his message to the Gentiles when he had his vision in Joppa before witnessing to Cornelius (Acts 10:9–16, 19–20, 28, 34–35). Philip received similar guidance in witnessing to the Ethiopian eunuch as he expounded the fulfillment of Scripture in Christ (8:26–29). Likewise Ananias received divine counsel before witnessing to Saul when he demonstrated the power of the Holy Spirit (9:10–17). By divine revelation, Stephen of all the apostles bore witness to the exaltation of Christ to the right hand of the Father and the freedom his reign has given to those in persecution (7:56). In each case, however, the revelation did not alter what the witness had received of the gospel. Rather, the revelation amplified and gave deeper meaning to particular aspects of the gospel.

Instead of the rigid distinction C. H. Dodd drew between *kerygma* and *didache* expressed by evangelism and discipleship, the New Testament seems to imply that the gospel cannot be separated from the meaning ascribed to it in the apostles' teaching. The gospel simply declares that Christ died for our sins, but the meaning of this declaration includes deliverance, redemption, cleansing, forgiveness, and justification. Those who have faith receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, but the meaning of this declaration includes regeneration, adoption, assurance, sanctification, and empowerment.

Salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ who has the power to save. The gospel is God's instrument of revealing Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:16–17). The evangelist does not have the freedom to conform the gospel to the expectations of any person or culture. Rather, the evangelist has the responsibility to demonstrate what the gospel of Jesus Christ means to each individual and culture. For Paul it meant freedom from the curse of the law, but to the Gentiles he addressed in Colosse it meant freedom from the "elemental spirits of the universe" (Col. 2:8 NRSV). For Stephen the gospel offered hope to die, but to the Philippian jailer it offered hope to live (Acts 16:29–31).

As the church prepares to enter the third millennium of its mission on earth, the same Holy Spirit that guided the apostles moves in its midst to bring the gospel to a world suffering from the consequences of sin. The challenge now as then involves presenting Christ as the Savior to a world of different people and cultures. Whether the message focuses on the fulfillment of Scripture in Christ as it did when Philip witnessed to the Ethiopian, the Creator God as it did when Paul spoke at Lystra and Athens, the challenge to faith as it did when Paul witnessed to the Philippian jailer, or the gift of the Holy Spirit as it did when Paul taught in Ephesus, the message addresses the gospel to the world's experience of the effects of sin and presents Christ as the only Savior.

CONCLUSION

Jesus Christ formed the sum and substance of the apostolic message. People who joined themselves to the fledgling band of disciples did so because they had joined themselves to Jesus Christ. The message presented Christ as the one who answered life's deepest questions; thus, he came through the message as a Savior. In presenting Christ, the apostles told the significant aspects of Christ and demonstrated their saving import. Though the apostles used different terms in different settings, they spoke about the same basic matters, telling of Christ from eternity, through earthly ministry, to eternity.

When the apostolic *kerygma* focused on the death of Christ, the apostolic *didache* for that person related the significance of the other saving activity of Christ. When the apostolic *kerygma* focused on the fulfillment of Scripture in Christ, then the apostolic *didache* for that person related the significance of the other saving activity of Christ. Thus, the New Testament contains no single formula of the gospel, though the many instances of gospel proclamation and teaching form a consistent pattern.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul's discussion of resurrection indicates the relationship between gospel proclamation and teaching about the implications of the gospel. Paul began by reminding the Corinthians of the terms in which he preached the gospel and cited the death for sins, the burial, and the resurrection, all according to

Scripture. Instead of a declaration of the definition of the gospel, however, the passage shows how the gospel formed the foundation for all apostolic teaching. Paul laid out only enough of the gospel to lay a foundation for the subject he had to address. Resurrection was the issue in Corinth that required addressing.

The good news of Christ requires both *kerygma* and *didache*. The *kerygma* establishes Christ concretely as the decisive act of God for the salvation of the world and preserves the historical and eternal claims of Christ. The *didache* unfolds the significance of the *kerygma* for salvation. Thus, while the apostles “preached” the gospel, the New Testament describes their methodology in terms of “teaching.” This ministry of presenting Christ revolved around several basic elements:

1. The Creator God	Salvation came as a work of the Creator who has the right to all creation and who exercises authority over all creation.
2. The fulfillment	Jesus came to fulfill Scripture rather than to abolish the faith of Israel, and stands in continuity with all God had spoken by the prophets as the culmination point of Israel’s relations with the God of Creation.
3. Son of God/ Son of David	Jesus stood uniquely related to God and humanity, which suited him alone to be the Savior, as demonstrated by his teaching and demonstrations of power.
4. Death for sins	The death of Christ came as the plan of God for salvation from sin, rather than as an unfortunate mishap.
5. Resurrection	God raised Christ from the dead as a demonstration of his Lordship and victory over sin and death, revealing his power to save.
6. Exaltation	Christ reigns at the right hand of God, providing immediate access to God for all who abide in him.
7. Gift of the Holy Spirit	Christ sends the Holy Spirit to live within all who have faith in him.

8. Return for judgment	Christ will return to bring this age to an end, judge the nations, and complete redemption.
9. Response	The good news always expected the decisive response of repentance and faith.

Throughout the centuries, these simple foundational elements of the faith have grown into the body of systematic theology and dogma. By the third century, the church had begun to develop a gospel formula in the form of creeds. In their earliest form the creeds summarized the basic teachings about Christ, but over time they grew longer as the church added to them in response to theological controversies. The final form of the Nicene Creed was twice the length of the final form of the Apostles' Creed as the church sought to clarify, amplify, define, and set the boundaries for the orthodox faith.

The Apostles' Creed reads like many of the twentieth-century reconstructions of the *kerygma*. It does indicate how the emphasis of teaching had shifted. In the early apostolic preaching, the apostles stressed the descent of Christ from King David. The Apostles' Creed of a church now long removed from Palestine and the Jewish world did not speak of the Davidic descent and all its messianic implications. Instead, it stressed the virgin birth. Both the Davidic descent and the virgin birth, however, struck at the human nature of Jesus in counterpoint to his relationship to God the Father Almighty.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth: and in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost; born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgive-

ness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.⁸⁵

The Nicene Creed follows the Apostles' Creed in basic outline, but devotes a major exposition to what is meant by Son of God. The development of the creeds illustrate how the church has added the theological discussions, speculations, and debates to the gospel in each successive generation.

The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in the Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten son of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made; being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made: Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And He shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified: Who spake by the prophets.

And I believe in one Christian and apostolic church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins, and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.⁸⁶

Each element of the gospel became the foundational element for the major doctrines of the church over time as the church attempted to address the issues of life and culture through the centuries. The basic elements of the gospel identified above have their corollary doctrine in the body of systematic theology:

Gospel Element	Doctrine
Creator God	God, Providence, Creation, Grace, Humanity, Natural revelation
Fulfillment of Scripture	Inspiration/Specific revelation
Son of God/Son of David	Incarnation, Christology, Ethics
Death for sins	Justification, Atonement
Raised from the dead	Resurrection
Exaltation	Lordship, Ecclesiology
Gift of the Holy Spirit	Regeneration, Sanctification, Adoption
Return for judgment	Eschatology, Theodicy
Response	Conversion

Throughout the centuries theologians have tended to organize their theological systems either around one of these elements or around a related group of these elements (see Fig. 1-A). Thomas Aquinas, for example, oriented his theology around the Creator God and the doctrine of natural revelation. Martin Luther oriented his theology around the death of Christ for our sins and the doctrine of justification. John Wesley oriented his theology around the gift of the Holy Spirit and the doctrines of sanctification and regeneration. Karl Barth and Carl F. H. Henry oriented their theologies around Christ as the fulfillment of Scripture and the doctrine of specific revelation. Reinhold Niebuhr oriented his theology around the Creator God and the doctrine of humanity. Walter Rauschenbusch oriented his theology around Christ as Son of God and Son of David and the doctrine of the incarnation. Rudolf Bultmann oriented his theology around the response to the gospel and the doctrine of conversion. Dietrich Bonhoeffer oriented his theology around the exaltation and the doctrine of the Lordship of Christ. C. I. Scofield oriented his theology around the return of Christ and the doctrine of eschatology. John Calvin oriented his system around the Creator God and the doctrine of grace.

Though most of these figures would acknowledge the truth and reality of most of the elements of the gospel here identified, their theological agenda gives entirely different nuances to the meaning of the gospel. Each approach has tended to explain the entire gospel in terms of one particular doctrine. In the past century, Protestant evangelicals have tended to equate preaching the gospel with explaining the doctrine of justification with the parallel tendency to equate salvation and justification. Salvation certainly includes justification, but it also includes regeneration. The twentieth century has witnessed the strange phenomenon of evangelical gospel presentations inquiring if someone is “born again” or would like to have eternal life. Rather than explaining how to be born again or receive eternal life, however, the presentation explains how to receive forgiveness of sins and the imputed righteousness of Christ. This theological abridgment of the gospel has emerged as evangelical Christians have avoided reference to the Holy Spirit for fear of Pentecostal or charismatic expression.

If the gospel is the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ, it must be free to address more than the issue of justification.⁸⁷ For the person experiencing the conviction of sin as guilt, which includes a significant number of people in the United States, justification is the issue and the death of Christ should be stressed. People experience conviction of sin, however, in other terms than guilt over transgression. This experience is particularly true for those who have never known the law. The gospel demonstrates how salvation extends to whatever way the Holy Spirit is convicting of sin, righteousness, and judgment.

The remainder of this study will explore each element of the gospel described here from a biblical as well as historical/theological perspective, in order to demonstrate how the gospel has addressed the ultimate spiritual issues of people in different times and cultures. The study will suggest how each element of the gospel addresses ultimate issues of life concerning which the Holy Spirit convinces people of sin. In this regard, bearing witness to Christ by proclaiming good news to people laboring under sin will always be a spiritual exercise. It involves the willingness to care about people as Christ cared, to listen for how the Holy Spirit is convicting them of sin, and to rely on the Holy Spirit to give guidance

FIGURE 1-A

Kerygma	Doctrines	Theologian or Movement	Evangelistic Issue
Creator God	God Creation Humanity Providence	Augustine Aquinas Calvin Process Theology	Purpose Grace Identity Value Ecology
Fulfillment of Scripture	Revelation Inspiration	Justin Martyr Tertullian Origen Wycliff Hus Luther Evangelicalism	Continuity Faithfulness of God Nature of God Authority Epistemology
Son of God/Son of David	Incarnation Christology	Irenaeus Athanasius The Early Councils Black Church Theology The Social Gospel Liberation Theology Barth Brunner	Reliability of God Compassion of God Identification of God Reconciliation Acceptance Love Example Physical Need
Death for Sins	Atonement Justification [The Lord's Supper]	Celtic Church Anselm Transubstantiation Protestantism	Redemption Relationship Love Substitution New Beginning Purification
Raised from the Dead	Resurrection [Baptism]	Early Christian Worship Eastern Orthodoxy	Hope Victory Freedom Personhood Eternal Life

Exaltation	Ecclesiology Lordship	Martyrdom Monasticism Church Government Bonhoeffer	Prayer Signs and Wonders Worthiness Personal Relationship	Martyrdom Tradition
Gift of the Holy Spirit	Pneumatology Sanctification Regeneration Adoption	Filioque Controversy Eastern Orthodoxy Western Mysticism Protestant Awakenings	Transformation Holiness Empowerment Guidance Application of Salvation	
Return of Christ	Eschatology Theodicy	Montanus Sibylline Literature Savonarola Joachim of Fiore Münster Anabaptists Fifth Monarchy Men The Third Rome Dispensationalism	Chaos Accountability The Problem of Evil Rescue Justification Perseverance and Reward	
Human Response	Conversion Election Predestination Grace Faith Repentance	Baptism Penance Sola Fide Pelagius Erasmus Reformed Theology Bultmann Revivalism	Jesus Christ	

in demonstrating how Christ saves from the manifestation of sin in a person's life. Finally, suggestions will be made as to the kind of ministries that best address the issues each element of the gospel satisfies.

NOTES

1. C. S. Lewis, *They Stand Together*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Macmillan, 1979), 425.
2. C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Development* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 14–15.
3. *Ibid.*, 13, 31, 36ff.
4. *Ibid.*, 21–24.
5. *Ibid.*, 24.
6. *Ibid.*, 33.
7. Martin Dibelius, *The Message of Jesus Christ*, trans. Frederick C. Grant (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), 129.
8. *Ibid.*, 128.
9. Bo Reicke, "A Synopsis of Early Christian Preaching," in *The Root of the Vine*, ed. Anton Fridrichsen, et al. (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), 129.
10. *Ibid.*, 138–39.
11. *Ibid.*, 140.
12. Bertil Gärtner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation* (Uppsala: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1955), 33.
13. *Ibid.*
14. C. S. C. Williams, *A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1957), 37.
15. Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 67.
16. Williams, *Commentary on the Acts*, 38.
17. Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 218.
18. C. F. Evans, "The Kerygma," *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 7 (April 1956), 27.
19. *Ibid.*, 28.

20. *Ibid.*, 30.
21. *Ibid.*, 37–38. See C. C. Torrey, *Documents of the Primitive Church* (New York: Harper, 1941) and *The Composition and Date of Acts* (New York: Kraus, 1969).
22. R. A. Martin, "Syntactical Evidence of Aramaic Sources in Acts i–xv," *New Testament Studies* 11: 1 (October 1964), 38–59.
23. Evans, "The Kerygma," 41.
24. For a recent overview of some of the more prominent conversion testimonies, see Hugh T. Kerr and John M. Mulder, eds., *Conversions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).
25. F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostle*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952). C. H. Dodd reached a similar conclusion to account for the early church's way of using Old Testament texts to support their claim that Jesus was the Messiah: "But the New Testament itself avers that it was Jesus Christ Himself who first directed the minds of His followers to certain parts of the scriptures as those in which they might find illumination upon the meaning of His mission and destiny. . . . To account for the beginning of this most original and fruitful process of rethinking the Old Testament we found need to postulate a creative mind. The Gospels offer us one. Are we compelled to reject the offer?" C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* (London: Nisbet & Co., Ltd., 1953), 110.
26. Dibelius, *The Message of Jesus Christ*, 129.
27. *Ibid.*, 130–31.
28. Archibald M. Hunter, *The Message of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1944), 29–30.
29. *Ibid.*, 35.
30. *Ibid.*, 36.
31. T. F. Glasson, "The Kerygma: Is Our Version Correct?" *The Hibbert Journal* 51 (October 1952–July 1953), 129, 132.
32. *Ibid.*, 131.
33. *Ibid.*, 129.
34. *Ibid.*, 130.
35. Gärtner, *The Areopagus Speech*, 30.
36. *Ibid.*, 30–32.
37. *Ibid.*, 72.
38. *Ibid.*, 47.
39. *Ibid.*, 35.
40. Ethelbert Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, trans. John Marsh (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 235–36.

41. Ibid., 243.
42. Floyd V. Filson, *Jesus Christ: The Risen Lord* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1956), 44.
43. Ibid., 46.
44. Floyd V. Filson, *Three Crucial Decades: Studies in the Book of Acts* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox, 1963), 34.
45. H. J. Cadbury, "Acts and Eschatology," in *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology*, ed. W. D. Davies and D. Daube (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1956), 313.
46. Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch, trans. Reginald H. Fuller (London: SPCK, 1953), 2.
47. Ibid., 12.
48. Ibid., 29.
49. Ibid., 14–15.
50. Ibid., 32.
51. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), 1.33.
52. Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, 38.
53. Ibid., 39.
54. Ibid., 41.
55. Ernst Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes*, Studies in Biblical Theology 41 (Naperville, Ill.: Allenson, 1964), 17.
56. Ibid., 21.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid., 62.
59. Ibid., 100.
60. Ibid., 103–4.
61. Ibid., 106.
62. Edward Schweizer, "Two New Testament Creeds Compared," *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation*, ed. William Klassen and Graydon F. Snyder (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), 170.
63. Ibid., 171.
64. Ibid., 172.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid., 173.
67. Ibid., 174.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid., 175.

70. C. F. D. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 165.

71. *Ibid.*, 176.

72. *Ibid.*, 177.

73. *Ibid.*, 155–56.

74. *Ibid.*, 156.

75. R. P. Martin, *Carmen Christi* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1967), 304.

76. *Ibid.*, 309.

77. *Ibid.*, 301.

78. *Ibid.*, 302.

79. *Ibid.*, 311.

80. J. N. Sanders, *The Foundation of the Christian Faith* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952), 114.

81. Filson, *Three Crucial Decades*, 40–41.

82. *Ibid.*; cf. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1.65; Hans Conzelmann, "The Address of Paul on the Areopagus," *Studies in Luke-Acts*, ed. Leander E. Keck and J. Louis Martyn (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 228.

83. See also Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 31.

84. Hunter, *The Message of the New Testament*, 41.

85. Ivan L. Bennett, ed., *The Hymnal: Army and Navy* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1942), 28. William J. Abraham has gone so far as to argue that the creeds hold equal authority with Scripture because of their summary of the gospel. See his *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 145–52.

86. Bennett, *The Hymnal*, 28.

87. Ben Johnson has also argued that the gospel addresses the ultimate questions of life. See *Rethinking Evangelism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 47–49.