

# THE FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIANITY

## CHAPTER 5:

### INTERPRETING THE RECORDS OF RESURRECTION

## IMPORTANT NOTICE:

This course is a revised translation of the work “I Fondamenti del Cristianesimo” written by Rev. Piero Ottaviano and Didaskaleion.

The course is divided into units with a logical sequence. Therefore we suggest you to read them following their progressive order.

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## 5 INTERPRETING THE RECORDS OF RESURRECTION

In this section we shall see:

- The ways the accounts of the resurrection have been interpreted over centuries.
- An introduction of their interpretations according to:
  - non Christian Jews
  - the critical school
  - the mythical school
  - tradition

### 5.1 THE QUESTION: THE ACCOUNTS' HISTORICITY

From ancient records concerning Jesus' resurrection, we understand that two opposite opinions stood out:

- a remarkable group of (Christian) documents report that Jesus rose from the dead; but as for facts, there are - other than substantial meetings - also remarkable discrepancies and contradictions
- other documents (the Jewish ones) report that the Christians stole Jesus' body and deceived people by saying that he had risen.

Now, anyone seriously trying to focus on the question concerning the actual resurrection of Jesus ought to ascertain the documents' reliability so as to possibly pass judgment of historicity, which, in turn, may be:

- positive: as importance is attached mainly to the meetings
- negative: the various discrepancies and contradictions are regarded as more probative.

In the former case the discrepancies existing within the records (all of them giving an account of the same fact) have to be explained; whereas in the latter case it will be necessary to explain not only the meetings but also how the idea could arise that a man-God might rise from the dead (particularly among Jews, who are so refractory to any temptation to relate any man - not even Moses - to the only and transcendent *JHWH*).

The verdict of historicity is not grounded on texts, but on their **interpretation**, which also implies one's personal life experiences.

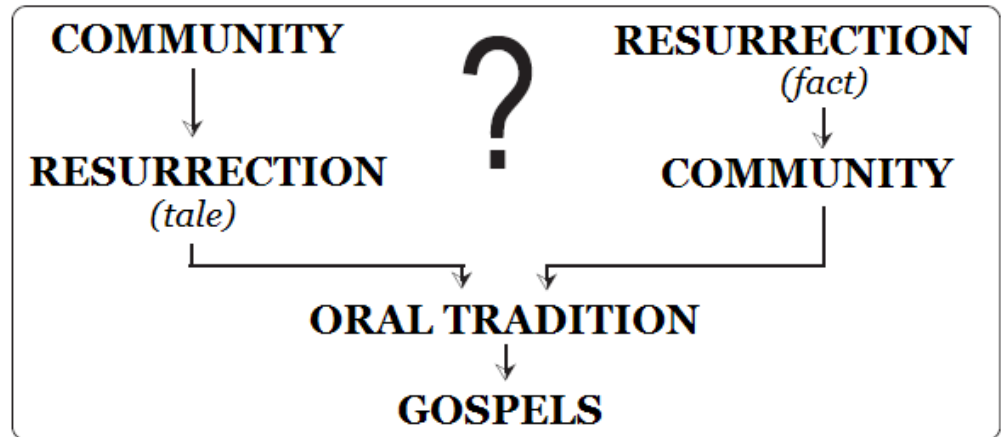
This is what the ticklish question of the text's pre-comprehension is all about. When it comes to text expounding, both reading and interpretation are affected by the expounder's background.

Anyway, one thing is clear: only either of these statements is true:

- Jesus has risen
- Jesus has not risen

But which one? Namely:

- Either it was the early Christian community to conjure up - probably out of good faith - the case of Jesus' resurrection, and then preached it as the foundation of Christianity;
- or it was the resurrection itself - an actual fact - which had the disciples, who had dispersed after Jesus' death, come together again and led them to found the community.



In order to achieve deeper understanding and to be able to make a personal and meditated choice after due reflection, it is advisable to inquire after the answers which have been given to this question over the centuries.

This is why we need to get the information discussed in the following paragraphs.

## 5.2 THE RECORDS' INTERPRETATION

Long before our time a great many people have been reading the accounts about Jesus' resurrection and have given, in turn, different interpretations.

That is no surprise! That a dead man should rise again is against all ordinary experience (we are not saying that it is an impossible statement, for we do not know what is possible or impossible in history).

**Therefore, resurrection is a difficult event to acknowledge.**

Anyway, when reading the relevant reports, one has the feeling that the witnesses report such event as if it were real.

What shall we think of the early Christians, who claimed to be eye witnesses<sup>1</sup> of the resurrection? Are they trustworthy or unreliable?

Let us examine the various stands in detail. Please find below a synthesis of the various interpretations which have been given over the centuries:

<sup>1</sup> Actually the apostles never reported seeing Jesus rise from the dead, but seeing him resurrected. Therefore, they would not claim to be witnesses of the resurrection, but witnesses of the Resurrected.

Jesus' resurrection either is:

1. **just a tale** as told by Jesus' followers:
  - out of **bad faith**: they have stolen his body and then deceived people. (*Non-Christian Jews*)
  - out of **good faith**: they got misled
    - in appraising the facts that they saw (*Critical school*)
    - in interpreting the Apostles' words (*Mythical school*)
2. **a fact** that actually happened (*traditional interpretation*)

Now let us examine the various stands in detail.

### 5.3 INTERPRETATIONS AGAINST HISTORICITY

If one does not want to accept the early Christians' testimony by accepting its most manifest - and at a first glance, most obvious - meaning, then a convincing explanation has to be found as regards the testimony itself. Two explanations are possible:

1. the Christians' **bad faith**: i.e., they made up everything
2. the Christians' **good faith**: i.e., resurrection was reported as a fact, but it actually never happened. The Christians have simply got mistaken.

1. The early Christians' bad faith: a hint as to their acting out of bad faith was first dropped by some (obviously, non-Christian!) Jews, starting at least in A.D. 80-85: "*The followers of Jesus stole his body and deceived the people by saying that he had risen from the dead*" (cp. Matthew 27-28; Justin and the Jewish Talmud).

2. The early Christian's good faith: the theory about their acting out of good faith is not coherent with their behavior. **We can hardly believe that such people would dare testify with their own death to a statement that they knew to be false.**

Anyway, somebody might object that some apostles might have acted out of bad faith (namely, only a few of them, let's say two or three), whereas all the rest (that is, the ones who would even die for their convictions) might have been deceived by those few.

It might be so; but no records whatsoever have ever been found supporting such theory. Therefore, granting the witnesses' good faith, another question then arises: *how can people relate about events which have never happened just out of good faith?*

Expounders trying to tackle this question are likely to belong to either of two main groups - or schools - which are ever present in history, namely: The *critical school* and the *mythical school*.

## 5.4 THE CRITICAL, OR RATIONALISTIC SCHOOL

### 5.4.1 THE ORIGIN OF THE PROBLEM AND ITS SOLUTION AS PROVIDED BY THE RATIONALISTS.

That the evangelic accounts hold contradictions is nothing new; already in ancient times a lot of expounders, also Christian ones, had been questioning about the problem. One for all the treatise by St. Augustine "De Consensu Evangelistarum" (approx. 400 A.D.), meant to demonstrate that the contradictions contained in the gospels were just apparent and could not affect the accounts' fundamental agreement.

The matter was then revived with more scientific awareness starting from the 1700's, as a great number of authors called rationalists started questioning the gospels' historicity once again, on the basis of a detailed critical analysis of the gospels, as expounded in various writings - often entitled "Life of Jesus" -.

Rationalist authors worked between the 1700's and 1800's, as great achievements in the field of "exact science" (mathematics and physics) and of natural science alike (chemistry, biology, medicine) had brought the intellectuals of that time to reach two convictions:

- *Infallibility of sound reason*: since scientific achievements are the results of reason being applied to various fields of research, rationalists concluded that reason - when used in the right (=sound) way - leads man to get full possession of the truth.
- *Inviolability of the laws of nature*: human reason had demonstrated that the world is ruled by eternal and unchanging iron laws, which are in force forever and everywhere and cannot be broken without affecting the order of the world.

From these two convictions, two inferences would depart:

- *Negation of the supernatural*: the supernatural is a dimension man has no experience of and about which nothing can be said. The supernatural does not exist, and even if it did, it would absolutely not interfere with man's situation.
- *Negation of miracles*: miracles, as a matter of fact, are exceptions to the laws of nature, which are - by definition - inviolable. Therefore, miracles are impossible, no matter whether they are reported to have happened: they simply cannot happen. It was just out of ignorance about scientific laws and lack of criticism that ancient people would believe in miracles.

The following passage by Reimarus (1694-1768) well explains such belief:

*"Creation is God's only miracle: other miracles are impossible, for they would be nothing but amendments, or alterations, of a work which, having been made by God's hands, has to be considered perfect. God cannot but want the world to be preserved whole and unchangeable. Therefore, if miracles are impossible, so are also supernatural revelations, for they would be miracles themselves."*

*("Treatise on the Mainstay of Natural Religion")*

If such criteria are to be applied when reading the gospels, then one gets all too predictable results. Any mention about miracles is nothing but the intervention of the evangelists' faith wrenching history. The historian's task is therefore to eliminate the "faith" element from

the texts (*sacred history*) in order to restore the facts as they actually occurred (*actual /pure history*).

Such ideas are well explained throughout the following excerpt from the drama "The Trial of Jesus" by Diego Fabbri (1955):

*"That collective miracle as just been reported by Peter the fisherman (the miracle of the loaves and fishes, editor's note) could be refuted in countless ways. There was a crowd, he said, a horde of people... But, in the end, what of a crowd? How many could they ever be? And who can tell that each one of them had no little provisions of his own - just as all poor people are expected to do as they leave for a trip (bundles, cornets, bags with provisions). And as little provisions as there were, everyone would have enough, once they had been shared in common. The few loaves and fishes were all that the disciples had. Finally, everyone ended up eating from what he had brought. What of a miracle? (...) I am not making up anything, I am simply giving an interpretation, a logical and rational explanation".*

According to rationalists, what is good for miracles is also good for "the" miracle, namely the Resurrection. They regard it as nothing but a story having no historical foundations, which might have been originated by:

- either an **actual deception practiced by the apostles** who, for fear of falling into ridicule after Jesus' death - it clearly meant the end of their worldly ambitions - took his body away during the night and then spread the news that he had risen. Such accusation, which had already been brought against the Christians by the Jewish chiefs, was later revived by Reimarus, who was the first to put the gospel to the test of reason.
- or as a result of a **mistake of the apostles**, whose good faith would not keep them from misinterpreting the facts (Jesus' actual death, the empty sepulcher, the apparitions) from which they simply deduced resurrection. See, for instance, the following couple of excerpts from the work of Ernest Renan:

*"Early on Sunday morning the women started for the sepulcher: Mary of Magdala arrived there first. The stone at the entrance had been removed and Jesus' body was no longer lying there where it had been placed. In the meantime, within the Christian community the strangest rumors started spreading. The cry "He has risen!" arose suddenly among his disciples. To such an extent would their love get them so easily to believe. What had happened? We shall examine this topic by reporting the Apostles' account and we will enquire after the origin of the legends accounting for the resurrection. To the historian, Jesus' life ended with his last breath; but in his disciples' hearts and in the hearts of some devout women-friends he had left such a vivid memory that he went on living and comforting them for several weeks thereafter. Was his body stolen? Was it ever-credulous enthusiasm that would later on cause a series*

*of stories to arise, by which it has been tried to establish faith in the resurrection? Any contradictory records lacking, we will never know.*

*Anyway, we note that Mary of Magdala's strong imagination played a capital part in such context. Oh, divine power of love! Oh, sacred moments when a woman dazzled by passion may raise a God to the world!"*

*(Renan, "Life of Jesus", I Corvi, 1975).*

*"The main group of the apostles gathered round Peter. That happened in the deep of the night. Each one was telling his own impressions and relating about what he had heard say: it was commonly accepted that Jesus had risen. As the two disciples (the ones who were back from Emmaus, editor's note) came in, the others hastened to tell them about "Peter's vision". As for the two, they started reporting what had happened to them along the way and how they had recognized him (Jesus) by the way he had broken bread. Everybody's imagination was most lively. The doors were locked, due to both fear of the Jews and to the fact that after sunset Eastern towns are still; at certain moments the hush was so deep that every accidental sound was interpreted according to the universal expectation. Expectation is likely to create its very object. In a moment of stillness, some soft breath of air gently touched the bystanders' faces... In those fateful hours any gust of wind, any squeaking window, any incidental whisper would be well enough to make the peoples' belief freeze for centuries. Apart from the gust, it seemed to them that they heard some sound. Some reported hearing the word "Shalom", "happiness", or "peace", which was Jesus' ordinary greeting, by which he would reveal his presence to them. There could be no doubt, then: Jesus was there, there he was, among the assembly. That was his dear voice: everybody would recognize it."*

*(Renan, "The Apostles", Dall'Oglio, 1966)*

#### **5.4.2 THE SURVEYS AS MADE BY THE RATIONALISTS: THEIR IMPACT AND THE LISTENERS' SUBSEQUENT FIRST REACTIONS.**

The results of the research made by the rationalists would in their own time be regarded as considerably impressive. The rationalists' way of reading the gospels sounded in fact absolutely new for those times.

Their influence on religious practice soon became clear and, as a result, mainly in Germany, the churches – whether Catholic and Protestant - started being deserted.

It was undoubtedly thanks to the rationalists that biblical exegesis improved greatly: by considering the gospels more like ancient documents than just inspired texts, they succeeded in polishing up their interpretation, clearing it of layers of pietism and sentimentalism accumulated over centuries. It was just thanks to the rationalists'



contribution that we can nowadays apply to the gospels the same method which has been applied to all other kinds of literature.

However, in the early 1900's, scholars started showing more and more evident reaction to such method of appreciation, as a result of various observations:

1. The analysis of all the "Life of Jesus"es which were issued throughout one century revealed that their respective authors would each reconstruct quite a different profile of Jesus, which would often cause rationalists to disagree with one another. Hence the first, most serious consequence: the infallibility of reason started being questioned. Actually, if reason were infallible, and if that had to apply to all mankind (such presupposition being absolutely undisputed among rationalists), then reason should have brought all rationalists to the same conclusions. But fact would actually belie all that. This *first doubt* caused another one to arise concerning the actual possibility to tell with certainty true history from sacred history on the basis of reason, namely, to tell the raw facts from their interpretation. This *second doubt* was confirmed by experience: no witness, impartial and honest though he may be, ever relates about the actual fact: at most he is liable to relate about the way he saw them, which always implies - in any historic record - a subjective factor - which nowadays scholars have to take into account -. By claiming to have - in all historic accounts - the facts separated from the interpretation given by the writer, one runs the risk of wrenching the document itself.
2. The figure of Jesus as portrayed by rationalists was mainly that of a preacher of morals - morals of illuminist kind, often coinciding with the expounder's -. But then, could any eighteen-century morals, or religiousness, be ascribed to a man who lived in the first century A.D.? It started being questioned whether the reconstructions made by rationalists - in spite of their pretended historicity - be actually lacking historical sense.

In short, they started suspecting much of what the various "Life of Jesus"es would claim to be arbitrary and the so-called "principle of reasonableness" pleaded by rationalists to be actually nothing but the criterion by which the features matching each writer's personal outlook about Jesus had to be accepted as true, while un-matching features had to be interpreted.

Please note this ironic comment made by Charles Perrot in his essay "Jesus and History" (1981):

*"...Whereas other, though refuted by today's specialists of biblical criticism yield to such a mirage as the pretended rationalism of the "historicist" kind, or to so-called parapsychologic explanations. They actually plunge themselves into the story as reported in a given account and, as soon as it does not match their own ideas, they easily and gladly re-write it to become another one! So they would claim, for instance, that one morning Jesus went out for a walk on the shore... and his disciples, seeing him from afar, believed that he was walking on the water!"*

All these remarks were gathered in an important essay by Albert Schweitzer: "From Reimarus to Wrede: History of the Research about the life of Jesus". This essay, issued in 1913, is a formal obituary about the whole rationalist output, from which only Reimarus and Wrede - according to Schweitzer - would escape (respectively the list's first and last).

To the insiders, this message was all too clear: when tackling the "question about Jesus" it was useless to insist on a method that had by then worn out. One had to try some other way.

## 5.5 THE MYTHICAL SCHOOL

### 5.5.1 R. BULTMANN'S NEW APPROACH TO THE GOSPELS.

Schweitzer's challenge was accepted by Rudolf Bultmann, the founder of the "School of Form's History" (Formgeschichtliche Schule), also known as Mythical School.

By reviving the polemics against rationalists opposed them by means of a statement made by St. Paul: "Even if we have known the Christ in the flesh, now we do not know him in this way." (II Cor. 5:16). As a result, Bultmann deduced the reason why the rationalists' search had failed.

They failed because they claimed to use the gospel as though it were a history text book, whereas - according to what was related by St. Paul - one clearly understands that all books of the New Testament - thus including the Gospels - are books for faith, having been written by believers and being meant for believers in order to strengthen their -already existing- faith.

The Gospels' main and exclusive goal is catechesis; as a result, evangelists are not so much interested in the "archaeological" process of redevelopment of Jesus' character, but in preaching about him by introducing him as the Christ, the Son of God and the Savior of mankind.

As a result, it is not within the Gospels that we can possibly find the Jesus of history - namely the Galilean prophet who lived in Palestine in the 1st century A.D. and was crucified during the rule of Pontius Pilate - but the Christ pertaining to faith, namely Him who definitely fulfilled the promise of salvation made by God to all men. Jesus lived indeed as a real person, but the faith he has been made object of has totally taken him away from history - so much so that "neither word or deed ascribed to him can be proved to be historical".

If all this is true - thus Bultmann concludes with - whoever claims to be able to recover Jesus' life on a Gospel basis is in for the search of the only thing which is not to be found within the Gospels, and, even if the reconstructions made by rationalists were reliable, they would not mean much to believers, for the latter would simply skip history, as a result of their own faith.

It is no use objecting that, lacking some history, one is at a loss know what faith ought to be grounded on; in fact Bultmann - as a Lutheran - was firmly convinced that faith's main feature is to inspire man despite rational and historic evidence alike; as a result, it is

founded on neither (which is irreparably corrupt as a result of original sin and, consequently, unable to attain truth) nor history, but on itself alone, being a gift from God.

However, if the Gospels' object is faith, one should not disregard the fact that it was expressed in such a way that could be clear to people of the first century A.D., not only in a different context, but also in a world far off from ours: today's man has a scientific outlook, while our ancestors used to have more of a mythical one. In order to be able to tell the difference between mythical and scientific outlook, let us quote one small example. We all know that thunder is an effect of an electrical discharge caused by the meeting of two strata of air having different potentials: this is the scientific explanation for the word "thunder". But as our ancestors -who knew nothing about it- heard a crash of thunder, they would think that it was "the devil going for a ride" or "the Saints playing bowls": such explanations of the phenomenon were of the mythical kind.

Since our ancestors' outlook no longer corresponds to ours, it is up to the scholars who study the New Testament to demythologize the apostles' preaching and provide for its cultural restyling by re-writing it in a more comprehensible way for today's people.

By this means Bultmann eventually succeeded in telling what the apostles said from what they actually meant to say within the *Kerygma* (the preaching of Christian faith).

What is really important to believers is the latter aspect; the style that the apostles used is linked to their culture and their early listeners' - and to the idioms pertaining to the language they spoke -.

By applying all this to their preaching that "Jesus has risen", Bultmann finally concluded that believers do not so much care about establishing whether this is a historical fact; what they are mostly interested in is the apostles' preaching, whose true and eternal value does not rest on the fact that they report an event which has truly happened, but on the fact that they cause man to face a radical choice: to believe or not to believe.

In other words, Bultmann believed that, by such a statement as "Jesus has risen", the apostles meant to tell their listeners, "Now, through our words, Jesus is asking you to trust him completely". Compare the following text by R. Bultmann:

*"Very often (...) it is said that, according to my interpretation of the kerygma, Jesus must have risen within the kerygma. I agree with such formula, which proves to be true only on condition that it be understood correctly. It is thereby assumed that the kerygma itself is an eschatological event: it states that Jesus is truly present in the kerygma, the latter being his Word reaching the listener in the kerygma. If it were not so, any speculation about the Risen's way of being, any tale about the empty tomb and any paschal legend - although they might be holding some historical elements and might be true according to the symbolism of their contents - becomes worthless. The meaning of the paschal faith being that we should believe in the Christ as present in the kerygma".*

*(Vehältnis, 1960, page 27)*

Following this outlook, the preaching of Christ (the resurrection) is the definite actualization of Jesus' preaching (the Kingdom of God): as a matter of fact, it already held the exhortation to a radical choice:

*"It is worthwhile giving up everything for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Man is faced with a great dilemma: whether to choose the Kingdom of God and lay down everything for its sake"*

*(R.Bultmann, "Jesus", Queririniana, Brescia).*

To any such objection as: "How is it that the apostles would not limit themselves to simply repeating Jesus' preaching, just like disciples of any other master would usually do?" he would retort that:

*"...the earlier community would (in a clearer and clearer way) regard the story of Jesus as the decisive eschatological event, which, being such, cannot be relegated to the past, but is ever present in the preaching (...). If the mere report of Jesus' preaching (...) makes the past become present in such a way that it puts the listener (or the reader) before a decision for (or against) the possibility to be counted in - such as the one as disclosed to us by the historical figure called Jesus - then Jesus' kerygma demands one's faith in Jesus as present therein, namely, in the Jesus who, unlike the Jesus of history, has not simply promised salvation, but has already given it to us." (Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1960)*

In other words, if the preaching about the Kingdom of God is a promise, the preaching about the resurrection underlines that the promise has been definitely fulfilled.

By this theological interpretation, Bultmann would settle the captious objections made by rationalists, who would maintain that Jesus had indeed preached the Kingdom of God and, as a result... the Church was born.

Even more significant is the following text by W.Marxen, a disciple of Bultmann's, which well synthesizes what has been said so far about the mythical school:

*"Within the historic survey of our texts we have not come by Jesus' actual resurrection, but the early community's faith after Jesus' death. Such faith is a reality which can be ascertained through its expressions. We have also come by the affirmation that this reality took place through a miracle. And the fact that we have come to it through a miracle is conveyed by the representation of Jesus' resurrection. If this attainment of faith is experienced like a miracle and if its miracle-like appearance is conveyed by saying that "Jesus has risen", then such affirmation corresponds to the one made also by the early communities. Nevertheless, we might wonder whether this is the only way to express it. Considering today's confusion, we might even wonder whether it has to be expressed this way at all, since nowadays chances are many that it would hardly be understood. This is the reason why I should propose another way of formulating it: "The cause of Jesus goes on", or "he is still coming today". What I am interpreting here is the actuality of my getting to faith. There is no reality without interpretation; but the latter conveys the miraculous features of reality, God's - or Jesus' - priority in my faith which is coming true".*

This speech of Marxen's is very clear: the actual miracle rests in the faith, not in the resurrection. Nay, understanding the *kerygma* on the basis of the latter means running the risk of "misunderstanding".

However, it was then Bultmann's - and his disciples' - business to try and explain how such "misunderstanding" as faith in the resurrection as an actual event could ever have arisen: such faith, historically substantiated, is as a matter of fact a true distortion of the apostle's original preaching.

According to Bultmann, the origin of such misrepresentation dates back to the crucial momentum of Christianity's spreading among the pagans. In fact, as long as the early community would address to the Jews, the metaphoric meaning of the preaching about resurrection - which was originally formulated in Hebrew or Aramaic - used to be clear to everyone: such an idiomatic sentence as "Jesus has risen" was peculiar to the Semitic language and both who pronounced it and who heard it knew perfectly well that it should not be understood in a literal way, for it was just a "myth", namely, a figurative speech meant to convey some other actuality.

But as Christianity spread among the pagans, who were mainly Greek-speaking, the peculiarity about the resurrection was translated in a literal way - as it was customary to in ancient times -. As a result, the metaphoric value of the original Semitic idiom was lost and the Greek eventually ended up understanding that "Jesus has risen" in the actual historic sense, not in the mythical sense. In other words, Bultmann maintained that the second Christian community - the Greek one - misinterpreted the Hebrew - or Aramaic - idiom that the apostles used when they expressed their own faith in Christ.

### 5.5.2 REMARKS ABOUT BULTMANN'S METHOD

Various objections were moved to Bultmann:

1. In the first instance: his total giving up any historic-chronological placing of the events concerning the man Jesus: the latter had undoubtedly been idealized by the evangelists, but one could hardly believe that such idealization could be so radical as to make a person totally disappear from history so short time after his vicissitudes. The one who first realized such difficulty was a pupil of Bultmann's, Ernest Kasemann, to whom we owe the processing of a series of criteria through which it is possible to go up to the historical figure of Jesus and be in a position to state quite precisely the actual historicity of this or that saying or work of Jesus'. In fact, even a brief study on the present essays about the question of the historical figure of Jesus would reveal that no scholar would share Bultmann's radical skepticism any longer.
2. Bultmann's implicit relinquishing history causes another inconvenience, being unable to explain historically how such an idea - nay, a myth - about an incarnate God could ever have occurred within Judaism. Bultmann tried indeed to explain this, but his explanation was not so convincing.
3. Paul of Tarsus, who was culturally bi-lingual for he knew perfectly well both Greek and Semitic languages, in I Cor. 15,6 reported Jesus' resurrection like an actual fact; he even had scruples about précising that many among those who had

witnessed Jesus' apparitions were still alive at the time of his writing about the fact (thus meaning to say: "Don't you believe me? Then go and ask them!"); now, if ever there was anybody perfectly able to seize the... figurative meaning of the preaching about the resurrection, Paul was indeed the one! Now, paradoxically, it was Paul -the apostle of the people- himself the cause for the misunderstanding about that preaching!

### 5.5.3 A RESUME

According to both schools - that of criticism and that of mythology - no resurrection has happened and, anyway, it is not important to know whether it actually did: it was simply a misinterpretation made - out of good faith - by the early Christian community.

- According to the critical school the mistake occurred in the first Christian community (the apostles) who misinterpreted the facts that they had seen.
- According to the mythical school, the mistake occurred within the second Christian community (the Greeks), who misinterpreted the Hebrew/Aramaic idioms used by the apostles.

Both theories, meaning to keep up with the Christian communities' good faith, are the only possible ones, since the mistake could not but occur in either community (the Jewish or the Greek one).

No mistakes could possibly occur thereafter, since:

- Greek language was never given up;
- After the New Testament had been coded into a canon, no other misinterpretation could have been added, owing to the fact that it was constantly being read by the communities.

## 5.6 AN INTERPRETATION FAVORABLE TO HISTORICITY

The school of tradition, formed by Catholics, Orthodox and several Protestant, has always interpreted these texts according to their most direct meaning. It therefore accepts the historicity of Jesus' resurrection, deeming the convergences within the various accounts as more important than the discrepancies and contradictions. It followed three directions:

### 1. Objections to opposite theories:

- to the Jews and all the backers of bad faith: *Could anybody give up his own life for a cause he knows to be false?*
- to both the schools of criticism and mythology: *In order to keep their stand they both had to assume a tardy dating of the Gospels, which was to be eventually denied through archaeological findings.*
- to the critical school:
  - It clings to the optimistic faith in the infallibility of human reason. But is human reason truly infallible? - For its assumption that the laws of Nature are absolutely immutable. Is it so?

- How could it so easily assume the deification of a man by means of the Jews (that shows poor knowledge of Jewish mentality);
- to the mythical school:
  - It denies any historic and chronological dating of the events concerning the man Jesus. Is it ever possible that the evangelists could get to idealize anybody so radically so short time after his vicissitudes?
  - Mythology is even less likely than criticism to be in a position to give a historical explanation as to how such a theory (nay, a myth) could ever arise from Judaism that a God should incarnate. (Lack of historic information)
  - How could such testimony as Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians (verse 15,6) be explained? After all, he had a perfect knowledge of Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic and he actually wrote that "...He appeared to more than 500 brothers at a time, most of whom are still alive, while others have died?".

Wouldn't we follow the same procedure today, when having to explain some facts?

## 2. Clues brought out in favor of the Christians' reliability:

- a. Although the early Christians wanted indeed the resurrection to be believed, they never gave accounts of it. They reported first seeing Jesus alive, then dead and then resurrected. They **never claimed** that they actually saw him rise.
- b. Without invoking resurrection it would be **difficult to explain**:
  - Why the apostles would get to believe in Jesus again, after the tragedy of his death (Hebraism did not positively preach about immediate resurrection after death);
  - Why the apostles would so thoroughly engage themselves to preach that Jesus had risen. What more could they do? Who made them do that? Was it all just out of fanaticism?
  - How is it that the apostles would not have the courage to die for Jesus as they were younger, whereas they had the nerve to lay down their life for him as they grew old?
- c. **Paul's conversion**: How would we possibly explain it - after all that Paul had said and done about Jesus - had he not been sure that he had truly seen Jesus resurrected?
- d. The fact that it was the Christian themselves who, although they were aware of the contradictions contained within the Gospels (the first disputes already arising in the 2nd century), would **never approve of the attempts made to try and settle them**. In fact, this is the reason why the Gospel according to Peter has never been accepted as canonical, although it surely tried to remove the discrepancies from the evangelic accounts?
- e. The "fact" that so many other people have received their words and believed them, after having doubted for a while. This means that the Christians were considered **trustworthy** people.

## 3. Explanations proposed for the discrepancies occurring within the texts:

Before being written down, the facts were spread by word of mouth for some decades; now, oral traditions may cause details to get altered.

- The gospels are books for faith, written by believers and intended for believers: their goal is not to make anyone believe, but to strengthen a newborn faith; therefore, they do not so particular about historical details.
- Ancient peoples used to have a different outlook on history: they were not so much particular about the chronicles' accuracy as about the demonstration of the truth of the theories they were maintaining
- It still so happens today that the way the same event is reported by more witnesses often turns out to be contradictory, or at least discrepant (at least as regards the fact's details). To prove this statement, suffice to compare the sundry accounts of one single event as given by different newspapers. Very often, the criterion testifying for the reciprocal independence of more witnesses is the very fact that each account has a peculiar lay-out, each holding discrepancies as for the details being highlighted.
- Man (who is a finite creation) has his attention focused mainly on details that impress him most. Therefore he cannot be totally objective.
- As regards the fundamental preaching - resurrection - early Christians would mainly gather details enabling them to answer back should any critical objections arise among the listeners - who, in turn, were never of the same kind varying from one circle to another and would each time show different interests and requirements. Evangelic accounts hold several hints expressly meant to refute any possible objection coming from the opposite party. Therefore, such accounts would hold the details which could best answer to ever different objections.

Considering these principles, the various discrepancies encountered within the accounts of the resurrection can be quite easily explained.

## 5.7 BRIEF RESUME

Outlook of the different opinions on the resurrection:

for the Jews	it never happened	Bad faith of the first Christians
For the Critical school :	it never happened	Good faith of the first Christians
For the Mythical school:	it is irrelevant whether it happened: the main thing is what it means to one's faith	
For the Traditional school:	it truly happened and is fundamental to faith	



DEBATES ABOUT RESURRECTION:

OBJECTIONS	THE GOSPEL' ANSWERS
<p>Was Jesus truly dead?</p>	<p>YES :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• three women saw him die</li> <li>• his side was pierced with a spear</li> <li>• his legs had not been broken</li> <li>• a male disciple was also there</li> </ul>
<p>Concerning the tomb:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Why wasn't Jesus placed in a common tomb, like any executed man?</li> <li>2. Could the women have mistaken the tomb?</li> <li>3. Why Should the women go to the sepulcher on Sunday?</li> <li>4. Is the women's testimony valid?</li> <li>5. The sepulcher was open: had the body been stolen?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for Jesus' body and obtained it.</li> <li>2. NO, they are the same ones who had been there on Friday evening.</li> <li>3. to complete the burial (Mark and Luke) or to see the tomb (Matthew).</li> <li>4. YES, two male disciples were also there to control the tomb.</li> <li>5. NO: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• it was a angel who roll the stone (Matthew)</li> <li>• Jesus appeared to the women (Mt and Jo)</li> <li>• the arrangement of the linen (Jo 20)</li> <li>• some guards had been posted there.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
<p>Concerning Jesus' apparitions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. was it truly Him?</li> <li>2. was it a ghost?</li> <li>3. did he appear in Galilee or in Jerusalem?</li> <li>4. where is Jesus now?</li> <li>5. why does not he appear now?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. YES: first the Apostles doubted, then they recognized him (Thomas); they recognized his wounds, too.</li> <li>2. NO: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He ate and drank with them</li> <li>• they touched him (Luke; 1 John 1)</li> <li>• many people saw him (they were more than 500 - 1 Cor. 15)</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. Both (John, 21)</li> <li>4. At the right hand of God</li> <li>5. He appeared only to chosen witnesses (Acts 10, 41); now he is to be recognized in the Eucharist (Luke 24, 35); he will finally appear to everybody (Acts 1, 11)</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Why don't the Jewish chiefs believe?</li> <li>2. Why don't the Jews believe?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. They would have to admit that they killed an innocent (Jo 9)</li> <li>2. They will eventually believe (Rom. 9-11)</li> </ol>