Exegesis and Easter

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The problems which biblical criticism creates for Catholics cannot be disposed of so summarily as Michael Dummet thinks.[1] He dismisses " most modern Catholic Biblical exegesis" on the grounds that it is "dishonest", in the sense that exegetes arbitrarily postulate ancient literary forms among which they proceed to classify parts of the New Testament they cannot take literally, without their having to admit that such parts are thus either fiction or fraud. The dishonesty lies in claiming texts as divinely inspired while refusing to take them at face value. It seems to me, however, for a start, that Mr. Dummett goes wrong on two important matters of fact.

First, as to pseudonymous writing, it is just not true that exegetes have invented the existence of such literature in order to place a document such as the Second Epistle of St. Peter within a well-known ancient literary convention, i.e. the convention of writing letters as if they were being written by some famous man already deceased. Not only was there an abundance of such pseudonymous writing in the ancient world at large but evidence for it exists in Judaism as well as in early Christianity. In spite of much research and speculation (see Kummel, page 362 for bibliography), many questions remain unanswered, particularly about the motives of such writing. The principle of pseudonymous writing was not generally questioned, though cases of forgery and fraud were certainly denounced. It should not be lightly assumed that New Testament writings are pseudonymous, but there are no grounds for asserting that pseudonymous writing was necessarily dishonest, less still for asserting that as a literary convention it never existed or was soon forgotten (think of the apocryphal Christian literature of the second century and later). That deeply Christian texts should be issued as the work of St Peter or St Paul, or for that matter of St Matthew and St John, when they may well not be their work at all, at least in any straightforward way, no doubt shocks us, but an exegete whose arguments lead him to that kind of conclusion is not committing himself thereby to the belief that such texts are impostures. Such a literary form existed, and people could distinguish between what had been written for good reasons and what was only a fraud. In early Christian circles, as a matter of fact, the tendency to speak and write under the name of others temporarily intensified. The difficulties that such inspired writing

[1] "Biblical Exegesis and the Resurrection" *New Blackfriars* February, 1977.

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1977.tb02328.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

created for the early Church are well illustrated by the long history of hesitation and doubt over accepting the Second Epistle of St. Peter. Well into the fourth century we find the historian Eusebius saying that, though it counts as among the "catholic epistles", it is not by St. Peter. The history of the formation of the canon surely shows, however, that, although the ostensible criterion for acceptance was apostolic authorship, the effective standard was consonance with sound Christian doctrine, as judged (incidentally) not by councils but by generations of use in the Church at large. It is, in any case, a *fact* that divine inspiration does not preclude pseudonymity. The Scriptures of the Old Testament are inspired in exactly the same sense as those of the New Testament (that has surely been clear since the time of Marcion), but neither Moses nor David nor Solomon wrote all, or even any great part, of what is presented as theirs.

Secondly, as to midrash: Mr. Dummett may, if he likes restrict the name of midrash to the kind of exegesis which St Paul practised, but normal usage covers a great variety of literary compositions and procedures, some of which consist in telling stories about real people, the significance of which lies in echoes of the Old Testament, in fulfilment of prophecy, and the like. A large amount of literature survives from the Jewish milieu in which Christianity was born that can only be described as theological story-telling. The most notable example is perhaps the romance of *Joseph and Asenath,* ascribed by Marc Philonenko, its most recent editor, to the hand of an Egyptian Jew writing in Greek at the end of the first century—contemporary, then, as many scholars would think, with the Fourth Gospel. There is little reason to doubt that Jospeh existed and that he married a pagan (Genesis 41:45). but the intention of the writer is to offer a theology of conversion and an initiation into mystical experience in the form of a novel. The way in which a verse of Scripture can be subjected to an "inquiry" (midrash: "inquiry", "*searching* the Scriptures") to produce something so elaborate and imaginative no doubt startles the modern Western reader, but it is not at all unlikely that large sections of the gospels originated as Christian midrash on Old Testament Scriptures.

The discovery of midrashic procedures in the New Testament may be dated to the article on midrash in the supplement to the (Catholic) *Dictionnaire de la Bible* which was contributed by Renee Bloch in 1957—posthumously, for she was killed at the age of thirty-one when the Israeli aircraft in which she was flying from Paris to Lydda was shot down by Bulgarian fighters. She lists many examples of midrashic tendencies in the New Testament. For example, she sees Matthew's story of the Magi following the star as a development of the promise that "a star shall come forth out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel" (Numbers 2 24:17)—scant basis, as we are bound to think, for such an expansive development, but it takes very little acquaintance with Jewish literature of the period to learn that just such literary constructions abound. A verse in the prophet Hosea— "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son"—is just what

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1977.tb02328.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

it would require to prompt the story about Joseph's taking the child and his mother to Egypt. And so on. It is difficult to believe that this could be so until one has looked into the kind of writing with which Matthew and his readers were familiar. It may, of course, be argued that Matthew steered clear of normal Jewish methods of argument and exegesis, but it certainly cannot be ruled out in advance, by denying the very existence of such literary models and methods, or by appealing to our criteria of literal truth, that he practised them. On the contrary, in the likely absence by his day (half a century after the crucifixion) of any hard information about the genealogy or infancy of Jesus, in the absence probably of even any serious interest in such data (that is the main point), it is not difficult to see Matthew searching the Old Testament to allow the ancient texts to guide his understanding of the phenomenon of Jesus. Matthew was interested primarily in the triumph of God in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and his exaltation in power at the right hand of the Father in heaven. He would have had no difficulty in projecting back into the infancy of Jesus a recapitulation of the history of Israel. The story of Moses and the people of Israel provided the schema which shaped New Testament understanding of the mission of Christ. Neither Matthew nor his readers would have supposed that Jesus was ever actually in Egypt–Egypt was long since one of the most powerful symbols in Jewish theology. In the case of the one in whom Israel, Moses, and many another, were being brought to fulfilment, it followed that, in some sense, Pharoah's threat to the infant Moses, and Laban's persecution of Jacob (Israel), and suchlike prefigurings, should be repeated–but if Matthew was practising the kind of exegesis so common in his day he would have written of Jesus as exiled in the land of bondage without being in the least concerned about the historical likelihood of this sojourn. As Barnabas Lindars writes (page 218), the episodes recounted by Matthew in his infancy narrative must be regarded as "portents presaging the great acts at the close of the gospel: Jesus is treated as a king, yet rejected by Herod; he is thrust out to Egypt, the house of bondage and symbol of death; but Herod's evil intentions are defeated, so that Jesus is able to return to live in Galilee"–to return, finally to the mountain in Galilee where he is represented as appearing in the great apocalyptic vision with which Matthew concludes his gospel.

This seems a bizarre way of understanding the opening chapters of St Matthew's Gospel, but only because we isolate the handful of Christian texts from the great mass of writing among which they originated. They certainly mark a new departure: Mark's invention of the gospel as a literary form is an indisputable innovation, though not without antecedents–the use of history to present theology, and the presentation of a theological case in the form of a historical chronicle, is a typical Old Testament literary device. The great discourses attributed to Jesus in the Fourth Gospel surely owe a good deal to the discourses attributed to Moses in Deuteronomy (cf Lacomara). The very idea of revising Mark surely occurred to Matthew as he re-read Chronicles–itself a re-

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interpretation of the Books of Kings. As Geza Vermes has pointed out, Christianity was created by Jews and for Jews, using Jewish methods of argument and exposition, and what may seem perverse ways of reading parts of the New Testament cease to be so as soon as they are replaced in the milieu in which they developed. It may be noted, by the way, that this is an approach in New Testament studies where German Protestant scholars lag very far behind. Here, at least, Catholic exegetes cannot be suspected of falling for existentialism, Lutheranism, etc. On the contrary, from Renée Bloch's article onwards, many of the most important developments in this field have been made by Catholic scholars or presented in Catholic publications (cf Le Déaut).

The methods of the evangelists come out clearly in the freedom with which they treated their material. That Matthew and Mark are related to one another is beyond dispute. Whether one supposes that Matthew revised Mark by considerably expanding the text, as most scholars now think, or that Mark made an abridgement of Matthew (or some earlier version of our Matthew), the differences between the two are predominantly theological. Very few of the differences are simply unaccountable–due to chance, error, or the like; fewer still seem to be intended as corrections of fact; the great majority are fairly easily identifiable as differences of theological perspective, connected often with differences of intended readership. These differences are clear in the Passion narratives. I take it that the only reason Hubert Richards has not yet written a book on the crucifixion is not, as Mr Dummett supposes, that it raises none of the problems of interpretation which the infancy stories, the miracle stories, and the resurrection stories raise, but simply because Mr Richards (doing himself some injustice) sees himself as merely popularising the results of biblical scholarship, and the fact is that study of the Passion narratives has gathered impetus and intensity only within the past decade (cf Cousin, Linneman, Schneider). There is, of course, no doubt that Jesus was put to death by crucifixion, and exegesis does not question that; but it is by no means clear that we know "what really happened", or that the first Christians were agreed on that. For instance, is it so clear why Jesus was not stoned after all (e.g. John 10:31) but crucified? Why did a man who blasphemed and thus upset the Jews finally die as a terrorist at the hands of the Romans? The gospels bear traces of the struggle to understand this. Much Christian preaching, by the way, makes sense only on the assumption that Jesus was stoned to death. Exegesis is not an end in itself.

But take, for example, the last words of Jesus from the cross. According to Matthew and Mark (with minor, though not insignificant differences), the last words of Jesus were the opening verse of Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me". He then cried aloud and yielded up his spirit (Matthew), he uttered a loud cry and breathed his last (Mark). On Luke's account, however, there was a single loud cry, which was when Jesus said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit", a verse from Psalm 31. According to John, on the other hand, the

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last words of Jesus were "It is finished", and there is no reference to any "cry". We thus have three entirely different versions of the last words of Jesus. There is no need to waste space here refuting various efforts to harmonize the three accounts (along the lines that the loud cry of Matthew and Mark could have been Luke's last words, and so on). This is surely a crux for anybody who cannot bear the thought of the early Church's placing words in the mouth of Jesus–that they were bold enough to do so even at the hour of his death. I confess to a slight shudder at the audacity of this; it seems quite unbelievable impertinence. But if the dying Jesus had a last word, it is logically impossible for all three of these utterances to be authentic. The literalist reader has to admit that two of these versions must either be mistakes or words placed in Jesus's mouth by the early Church.

It is often argued that the "cry of dereliction" as in Matthew and Mark must be the true version, on the grounds that such an utterance could not have been attributed to the dying Lord unless it was authentic. The early Church would not have handed on the story that, at the end, Jesus spoke of himself as forsaken by God, unless that was too well-known to be omitted. But this argument only works if we assume that it was a cry of dereliction–if we assume, that is, that the evangelists and the communities who transmitted this version of the last words of Jesus took them in the sense of the existentialist preacher's rhetoric about failure, final disillusionment, abandonment, and so on. It assumes also that the verse is to be taken in isolation from the general purport of Psalm 22, which, after all, is a triumphant proclamation of faith in the Lord in the midst of terrible adversity. Matthew and Mark, however, are surely presenting the facts about Jesus as a call to Christian faith, and it is inconceivable (it seems to me) that they understood these last words of Jesus as a cry of despair. They are to be taken rather as a great triumphant shout of victory as Jesus goes to meet his Father. In that sense, they would come very close to the "Consummatum est" of the Fourth Gospel, and equally close to the "In manus tuas, Domine" of St Luke. Luke must have known the text of Mark and/or Matthew, and it seems likely enough that he substituted the verse from Psalm 31 lest the last words would be misunderstood, in the wider world of the Roman Empire for which he was writing, where the Psalms were less well understood, as nothing other than a cry of despair. But the Jesus who dies with a prayer of self-surrender to the Lord fits in with the whole of Luke's presentation of Jesus–just as Mark might have been expected all along to conclude with a dramatic shout of confidence on the part of the righteous man in adversity, and just as the Fourth Gospel's consistent portrayal of Jesus as the revealer of God's wisdom and truth culminates appropriately in that deeply mysterious consummation: what God decreed has been accomplished. Three very different versions of the last words of Jesus, then, all with the same meaning, though it is differently accentuated in accordance with the distinguishable perspective of each evangelist. Whether any of them gives us his actual last words must remain an open question.

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The last words attributed to Jesus cohere so appropriately with the distinctive theological perspectives of the evangelists that one is led to conclude that each evangelist, or the tradition-bearing community to which each belonged, made his, or their, instinctive and inspired guess at what the crucified Lord must have said as he died. St John alone states that Christ's mother and one of the official disciples were present at the crucifixion and close enough to be addressed directly by Jesus. Matthew and Mark, on the other hand, clearly assume that none of the men were present, nor do they mention our Lord's mother in the list of women witnesses. They also expressly state that these witnesses were all "looking on from afar", which does not exclude their catching the exact wording of a loud shout, but which permits one to think that the evangelists were not in the least interested in establishing the historical authenticity of the last words. Even if we argue that they relied on the mishearing of the "bystanders" for their evidence, a moden historian would have to appeal to some other witness that it was in fact a mishearing. But here, as so often elsewhere, the evangelists seem confident that they have the gist of the message right, and they feel free to compose their own version of the words Jesus must have used. It is thus no surprise that, since the gospel-writers place their own words on the lips of the dying Jesus, they also conclude their gospels, each in its own distinctive fashion, with somewhat different proclamations of faith in the resurrection. It seems to me that if we do not notice the differences here we tend to diminish faith in the resurrection.

The text of Mark which we have concludes with the visit of the women to the empty tomb—at least that is how the text is usually taken. The interpretation of the women's visit to the tomb, and the history of its composition and transmission, as far as internal evidence goes, are certainly obscure. It has been argued by Pierre Benoit that St John's account of Mary Magdalen's visit to the tomb is a more primitive version of the Synoptic story. It seems simpler and much less charged with theology. Internal evidence, mostly that of the "seams", indicates that the account as we have it is a stitching together of three separate stories: Mary Magdalen's visit to the tomb (John 20:1-2, 11-13), the race between Simon Peter and the Other Disciple to the tomb (verses 3 to 10), and finally the encounter between Mary Magdalen and the gardener who turned out to be the Lord (verses 14 to 18).

The race between the two disciples is difficult to understand. Apart from a reference in the Emmaus story (Luke 24:24), the other three evangelists do not show any official examination of the state of the tomb by the apostles. Matthew and Mark in particular, with their great (if diverse) interest in the role of Simon Peter, might have been expected, if they knew of it, to place a good deal of stress on such a tradition. Even St John's account does not read like a solemn verification of the state of the tomb by those who were to be the official witnesses of the resurrection. So far as the story goes, it seems clear that Simon Peter had no revelation when he saw the abandoned linen cloths; it was the

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Other Disciple (St John himself) who "saw and believed"—and yet neither of them "knew the scripture, that he must rise from the dead" (so what did he believe?), and both "went back to their homes" (so that whatever the Other Disciple believed it did not impel him to proclaim the gospel of the resurrection). This text not only bears the marks of transmission and interpretation, however, it also communicates a powerful sense that something important is struggling to emerge here. The internal tensions and contradictions suggest that we are dealing with something that defies coherent expression. The centre of interest is surely the seeing and believing on the part of the Other Disciple. The present version of the text seems like a gentle attempt to displace the primacy of St Peter as the first witness of the resurrection in favour of the specifically Johannine testimony. That is not to say that St John invented the story to make himself out to be as good a source of the Easter message as St Peter. What it surely does mean, however, is that the tradition handed down in the Fourth Gospel about a visit to the tomb by the apostles now bears the signs of a certain tension between the Johannine circle and the communities more dependent upon the apostolate of St Peter. That is to say, the truthfulness of the New Testament writings must be sought in the very human clash of theological and ecclesiastical differences—including, sometimes, rivalry, bias, exaggeration, and the like. That "inspired" writings should be the product of such messy processes of compromise and correction (not unlike the history of the earliest Trinitarian and Christological doctrines), far from being an affront to those who believe in divine inspiration, seems to me only to make it more profoundly "incarnate" and therefore Catholic.

St John's version of Mary Magdalen's visit to the tomb would thus have read as follows:

> "Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalen came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran, and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him'... Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him'".

"*We* do not know", Mary is reported as saying, which suggests that she was not alone after all and thus that this is indeed a version of the story that occurs in the Synoptic gospels where she is accompanied by at least one other woman. When she speaks of the dead Jesus as "Lord" she is surely already using the language of Easter (Jesus is Lord", or at any rate confessing her continuing discipleship ("Rabbi"). It is worth noting that here, as in all the gospel accounts of the empty tomb and resurrection appearances, the principal disciples—the future apostles—are already gathered to-

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gether. Certainly, if we are to treat the Easter triduum as historical the disciples could not have dispersed or fled very far; they could, for instance, not have gone home to Galilee and returned in time to meet the women on their flight from the tomb on Easter Sunday morning. They must have remained in, or near, Jerusalem, and they clearly stayed *together.* That suggests that they did not lose all sense of their corporate identity as the disciples of Jesus. It suggests even that, like John the Baptist's disciples, and the followers of many another martyred prophet, they were preparing to continue his mission *before* there was any word of his empty tomb or his resurrection appearance. But the main effect of St John's account of Mary Magdalen's visit to the tomb is to leave us with a sense of her bewilderment; it is a scene of mourning, and there is no divine revelation. There is no real angelic presence, for the angels behave as if St John did not know how angels behave. They only ask a question, they proclaim nothing, they certainly do not proclaim the Easter message.

Contrast the Synoptic story. Pierre Benoit's argument is that St John's version is more primitive because it is so simple and lacking in theological overtones and religious effects. For all St John's great freedom with the sayings of Jesus in the discourses, it is generally agreed that the Fourth Gospel often preserves very early traditions which have been little affected by theologising. But how safe is it to assume that the less charged with theological interpretation a story is, the earlier the tradition must be that it represents? What is to stop us from thinking that St John deliberately played down the message of the empty tomb? He uses the story as a sandwich for the story of the rival apostles' race, and he might well play down Mary Magdalen's experience at the tomb to highlight the faith of the Other Disciple. He also uses the story to introduce her encounter with the one whom she takes at first to be the gardener but who bids her tell his brethren that he is ascending to his Father and theirs, so that, in the Johannine tradition, the Easter message is saved up for Christ himself to proclaim (thus depriving the angels of any real angelic function), and the empty tomb remains merely a place of lamentation. St John may be reporting the original tradition; he may just as arguably be read as reducing the religious significance of the empty tomb and of eliminating the angelophany—of "de-theologising" in fact.

The focal point of the women's visit to the tomb in the Synoptic versions is surely the message of the angel, or angels (Luke). None of the versions concentrates on the emptiness of the tomb or on the absence of the body, or treats either of those features of the scene as demonstrating the resurrection. Mark and Luke say that the women went to complete the burial rites. This is difficult to reconcile with the statement earlier (Mark 15: 46) that Joseph of Arimathea had apparently done everything required by Jewish law and custom—far more, in fact, than was usually done for men put to death as criminals. Matthew does not say why the women went to the tomb; it was customary then, as it is in many cultures today, to visit recent graves. All three, on the other hand, agree on the effect upon the women: "fear and great joy" (Matthew),

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"trembling and astonishment" (Mark), "they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground" (Luke). They are equally agreed that these effects are produced by the "vision of angels" (Luke 24:23). It is not the emptiness of the tomb as such but the angelophany that affects the women as a divine revelation. Mark has a young man sitting and dressed in a white robe, Luke has two men standing and in dazzling apparel, only Matthew has the traditional biblical "angel of the Lord descended from heaven, his appearance like lightning and his raiment white as snow". It may be argued that this story started as the report of a visit to the tomb which was then found empty. As we have it, however, the emphasis is surely all on the vision of angels and upon the angels' message.

The angelic message in Luke is completely different from the version given by Matthew and Mark, which again has only minor though not insignificant differences between the two. Luke's message runs as follows:

"Why do you seek the living among the dead?
Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee,
that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of
sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise".

Luke's angels invite the women to "remember", to recall the preaching of Jesus in Galilee, and to make the identification between him and the "Son of man". The content of this message is quite different from Mark's version, which, like Matthew's opens with the traditional "Fear not" from the angel:

"Do not be amazed:
you seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified.
He is risen, he is not here;
see the place where they laid him.
But go, tell his disciples and Peter
that he is going before you to Galilee;
there you will see him".

Luke wants the Easter message to be proclaimed not in Galilee but in Jerusalem; the trajectory of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome is the dominant motif throughout Luke - Acts. But the main reason for Luke's alteration of the angelic message is surely to allow him once again to use that little word "must" –*dei* in the Greek: "the Son of man *must* be delivered", and so on–which, for Luke, denotes how the destiny of Jesus fulfils the plan of God in the history of salvation, so far as it is discoverable (by "interpretation") in the Old Testament Scriptures. The message of the angels in Luke thus conforms with Luke the historian's concern with "remembering", and with Luke the theologian's overriding sense of the divine "must". Does this not seem like another instance of Luke's telling us what "must have happened"–without his vouching for historicity of detail but rather for the way the Easter message was revealed *(revealed,* hence the angels–not imagined or produced by reflection)–and revealed only as the link was perceived between the Jesus whose sayings could be remembered (the so-called "historical Jesus") and the "Son of man"?

In Matthew and Mark the message of the angel seems to focus

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1977.tb02328.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

on the closing promise: "he is going before you to Galilee, there you will see him". A study of that verse will show how much theology an apparently innocuous phrase may contain. In this case the theology is so distinctive "Markan" that many commentators treat the verse as Mark's own composition. It is impossible to be sure. The insoluble problem lies in the ambiguity of "going before"–*proagein* in the Greek. Does it mean "to go ahead", or "to go at the head", merely to *precede* or on the other hand to *lead?* On the first reading, the verse would mean that if the disciples would obey the angel's instructions and go to Galilee they would find Jesus waiting for them. On the second reading, however, Jesus would be placing himself once more at the head of the disciples and leading them–and thus the scattered flock would be gathered round the shepherd (Mark 14: 27-28), and gathered back in Galilee, the holy land par excellence for Mark and Matthew, as opposed to Jerusalem, the place of unbelief and betrayal (contrast Luke!)–Galilee of the Gentiles (Matthew 4: 15), the appropriate starting point for the world-wide proclamation of the Gospel. On that reading, the message of the angel would be so interwoven with characteristically Markan theological motifs that it becomes almost a summary of his whole gospel–and a very appropriate conclusion, for there is nothing more in the text of Mark as we have it except for a further detail about the effect on the women. Matthew, on the other hand, goes on to provide us with a magnificent vision of the risen Christ on the holy mountain in Galilee, commissioning his disciples to go forth and make disciples.

If the angel of the Lord's instruction to the women to tell the disciples that the shepherd is gathering the scattered flock (presumed again to be already together) expresses Mark's characteristic theology, and is thus his own composition, the remaining verse in the angel's message–"he is risen"–becomes no more, and no less, than the Easter message itself, in one of the most primitive formulations. Trembling, temporary aphasia, and the like, are typical biblical reactions to a vision of angels, a divine revelation. The function of Mark's angelophany is, then, to proclaim the resurrection. To place the Easter message in the mouth of an angel is to say that the grace of God alone reveals it to the Church. To this Easter proclamation by an angel Mark adds a theological supplement of his own, as we have just seen. Luke, on the other hand, contents himself with theology; according to the best ancient texts he omits the Easter acclamation from the angelic message.

That leaves us with the angel's invitation to the women to look at the place where they laid him. Now, as we have seen, the message of the angel is perhaps originally nothing other than the Easter kerygma itself–"he is risen", *egerthe,* in the form of one of these ritual acclamations which the early Christians favoured, no doubt especially at liturgical celebrations. The next step in studying the history of this particular vision of angels is to wonder whether the story was initially set in the context of a visit to the tomb. Like many a "Word of the Lord", it could well be proclaimed in more than one setting. To place it at the site of the tomb of Jesus is perhaps itself a secondary theological and even

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liturgical development. This, at any rate, is a line along which Catholic exegetes are moving (Delorme, Schenke).

A great deal turns on how we read the phrase "on the third day", or rather on whether we assume that the "third day" on which Jesus rose from the dead is also the "first day of the week" on which the women visited the tomb. The Easter triduum may, however, be a theologically motivated device, rather than a series of three days by the calendar. The text of Hosea 6 has often been cited in support of the view that the "third day" is the eschatological day, a symbol for the final coming of the day of the Lord:

"Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn, that he
may heal us; he has stricken, and he will bind us up.
After two days he will revive us; and on the third day
he will raise us up, that we may live before him.
Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord;
his going forth is sure as the dawn; he will come to us
as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth".

Now, however, since the publication of Karl Lehmann's magisterial study of the phrase, we have a Catholic scholar, drawing on targums and midrashim, as well as other relevant contemporary material, putting it beyond reasonable doubt that the "third day" of the Easter story is God's time of salvation—a theological expression—and nothing to do with the chronology of events in the days immediately following the crucifixion. Fr Lehmann says explicitly (page 345) that the "third day" is not to be treated as a symbol for the time it took for the conviction to ripen in the minds of the disciples that it was not all over with Jesus, or anything of that kind (perhaps Willi Marxsen's line). On the contrary, it means the turning -point between the old and the new age achieved by a wholly unique creative intervention by God in the case of Jesus (page 337). It means that Jesus was not allowed to remain among the dead—in *sheol*—but that he was exalted into heaven, "designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness" (Romans 1: 3), in the sense that "he was not abandoned to Hades nor did his flesh see corruption", but "being exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear" (Acts 2: 31-33), i.e. the existence and the preaching of the Church. Far from being a historical dating, the "third day" is a theological expression. The problems created for the history of doctrine by the almost immediate and complete oblivion into which the theology of the "third day" fell are mentioned at the end of Karl Lehmann's book. He was obviously as surprised as anybody to dicover where exploration of virtually unknown literatures that bear directly on our interpretation of the New Testament proved to lead.

To the question—Easter: what really happened?—it seems that we have to reply that Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, has been raised from the dead and exalted at the right hand of the Father in heaven, from where he already exercises the judgment and forgiveness which he proclaimed when he preached the gospel of the kingdom the length and breadth of Galilee. All the writings

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1977.tb02328.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

of the New Testament, some of which make no explicit reference to the resurrection, are the outcome of reflection on this essentially unrepresentable and unique event. The resurrection of Jesus thus cannot be reduced to, or even specially concentrated upon, his restoration to bodily life. Of course his resurrection could not have been spiritual in the sense that his soul alone survived. Such ideas were current among some of his Hellenistic contemporaries, and they recur in the history of Christianity, but it seems clear enough that, for the first Christians, the revelation that the crucified one had been saved from *sheol* and exalted into heaven and was now reigning as Lord could not but have meant his bodily resurrection.

But if the Easter triduum is a theological expression we are left in complete ignorance of the actual diary of events after the crucifixion. It becomes open to question if the "first day of the week", taken literally and not liturgically, was the "third day", and thus open to question if the women visited the tomb so soon or ever entered it at all (the state of the body in the Palestinian climate and Jewish taboo about opening graves become even more relevant arguments). In fact if the angelophany was originally a revelation of the Easter message ("He is risen"), as internal evidence suggests, and if there is no reason to set the visit to the tomb on the third day chronologically after the crucifixion, it becomes conceivable and even likely that the paschal angelophany was connected with the tomb at some later stage in the history of the earliest Christian faith. There is abundant evidence for Jewish respect for the tombs of holy men and martyrs. It seems likely that the early Christians showed a similar (no doubt at first fairly discreet) piety as regards the last earthly resting place of the body of Jesus. They may well have visited the site, or taken new converts on a tour of the "holy places" associated with the way of the cross. It has thus been suggested that the empty tomb narrative may reflect a liturgy at the site of the grave, at which the pilgrims would have been invited to "come, see the place where he lay", and then to reaffirm their faith in the Easter message of the angel that he had risen from the dead and was leading them in the great Church where they had found him.

Some such interpretation of the Easter angelophany seems appropriate when one turns to the great vision of the risen Christ with which St Matthew concludes his gospel. Here again it is the word of revelation that counts:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit,
teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you,
and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age".

Obviously these words are not an exact reproduction of what was said in the year 30 or thereabouts, when the Easter revelation occurred. The language is the language of a considerably later stage in the development of the New Testament Church, and the theological motifs are very characteristic of the text of Matthew which

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we have inherited—dating, then, from the last quarter of the first century. The content of the risen Lord's message is in fact a conflation and reworking of three sayings that Matthew has already attributed to Jesus: "All things have been delivered to me by my Father" (11: 27); "Go and preach" (10: 5); and "where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them" (18: 20). As far as the form is concerned, Matthew seems to have gone back to the conclusion of the Second Book of Chronicles for his model. There we read that Cyrus king of Persia was stirred up by the Lord to issue the following royal proclamation:

> "The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the
> kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to
> build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.
> Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord
> his God be with him".

Matthew, and his readers, could not have failed to understand the Easter message of the risen Lord Jesus against the background of this celebrated royal proclamation. In other words, for Matthew, the manifestation of the resurrection of Jesus is in the revelation of his sovereignty in the world until the close of the age. Divine authority has been granted to him, the house he is charged to build is the universal Church, and he will be with his people for ever – that is the content and the focus of the resurrection for Matthew, not the restoration to bodily life of the crucified Jesus (which he would have assumed, no doubt, but clearly as a minor and secondary feature of what happened).

Even more decisive than the Chronicles' model is the vision in the Book of Daniel of the coming of one like a son of Man (Daniel 7):

> "And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom,
> that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him;
> his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not
> pass away,
> and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed".

The scene with which Matthew concludes his gospel, then, cannot be reduced to the report of a meeting between the Eleven and the crucified Jesus miraculously restored to bodily life on a mountainside in Galilee, *literally*. The event that this text describes is the enthronement of the crucified Jesus as the exalted Son of man. Matthew prepares his readers for this revelation first by introducing an earthquake and other typical eschatological phenomena in his account of the death of Jesus: "the earth shook, and the rocks were split; the tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised", and so on, a signal to the reader that the death of Jesus is the inauguration of God's new age and an entirely new, creative intervention in the history of salvation; and then by introducing a second earthquake at the Easter vision of the angel: "and behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven", and so on. Matthew's readers *would* not have expected history books to record this double earthquake that particular week-end in Jerusalem, or anything of that kind. They would not have supposed that dead men

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literally walked the streets at that time. They knew how to read the kind of writing that Matthew produces so often. Here, they would undoubtedly have understood his faith in the resurrection of Jesus as faith in the identity between the Jesus who was crucified and the exalted Son of man, enthroned at the right hand of the Father, endowed with plenipotentiary authority, the effects of which could already be seen in the mission of the Church–literally, here and now, and to the close of the age, Emmanuel: God with us.

Modern exegesis, as practised by many Catholic scholars now, certainly makes faith no easier. Speculative and merely probable though many of the results are, study of the history of the formation and transmission of the Easter faith has greatly advanced since the development of form criticism, literary analysis, and sensitivity to the distinctive theological and ecclesiastical perspectives of the evangelists. This is bound to alter the ways in which New Testament writings are read. On the other hand, it would not be the first time that a major shift had occurred in the history of Bible reading. It can do nothing but good, in my opinion, if we rediscover the fullness of the Easter faith. Exegesis does not necessarily diminish the reality of the resurrection, it can reveal it more fully. But that Jesus of Nazareth rose on the third day, ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father, from where he will come to judge the living and the dead, is something that will always require faith–the gift of the Easter faith which exegesis can neither exact nor efface.

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