

Zeitschrift: Theologische Zeitschrift
Herausgeber: Theologische Fakultät der Universität Basel
Band: 16 (1960)
Heft: 6

Artikel: Discipleship und Synoptic Studies
Autor: Vincent, John J.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-878745>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 16.01.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Discipleship and Synoptic Studies.

1. *A Problematic Past.*

“Whosoever loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me . . . Whoever does not take up his cross and come after Me is not worthy of me. Whosoever would save his life shall lose it, but whosoever loses his life for My sake shall find it” (Matth. 10. 37-39 par.).

These words—the *discipleship words* of the Synoptic Gospels—and others like them, have always been either a *fascination* or an *embarrassment* to the Church. For the hermit or the monastic, for the prophet and even for the mystic, they have exercised an irresistible attraction. For some of the greatest names in Christian biography—Benedict, Francis of Assisi, Jacob Boehme, William Law, Søren Kierkegaard, Dietrich Bonhoeffer—here lay the key to the mystery of Christian existence. But for the Church in general, they have always constituted a problem. If the words are to be taken literally, then there can be but few who can be disciples. If they are to be taken symbolically or spiritually, then they plainly mean something different for us than what they meant for those who were first called. Quite apart from these difficulties, Protestant writers have always been afraid of “the suspicious, liberal ‘discipleship to Jesus’, with its possible danger to *sola fide* and *sola gratia*”.¹

It was precisely because of these theological suspicions of discipleship that the advent of biblical scholarship a hundred years ago produced what can only be called a revival in thought on the matter. If it was theology which was keeping us back from discipleship, then theology must go.

J. Weiss put the matter plainly in the Introduction to his book on Discipleship in 1895. «The more unquestioning assent to Church dogma dies out, perhaps to disappear completely, the more one must find a substitute, a way behind Church and Dogma in which man today can come into personal contact with Christ.”² We must “get back to Jesus”, so that His personality

¹ E. Fascher, *Jesus der Lehrer: Theol. Lit.zeit.* 79 (1954), 325-41, p. 340.

² J. Weiss, *Die Nachfolge Christi und die Predigt der Gegenwart* (1895), p. 1.

might impress itself upon us. The way to do this was to become His disciples, rather than to "believe" in Him. Though we cannot be to Him exactly what His first disciples were, yet He is our example and model, and we must follow Him as they did.

As far as the historical question of Jesus and His disciples was concerned, Weiss had already stated his conviction that Jesus believed that the Kingdom of God was in the near future, when a supernatural act would make Him Messiah and eschatological Son of Man.³

This "thoroughgoing eschatology" of Weiss was developed further by Albert Schweitzer, who related the Disciple idea more closely to eschatology. The disciples are not chosen to be His helpers in the work of teaching, and He did not prepare them to carry on that work after His death. "He chooses them as those who are destined to hurl the firebrand into the world, and are afterwards, as those who have been the comrades of the unrecognised Messiah, before He came to His kingdom, to be His associates in ruling and judging it."⁴

Schweitzer exposed the futility of the attempt to write a "liberal" life of Jesus. But both he and Weiss retained the assumptions of nineteenth-century optimism. For Weiss, the ethical teaching was "a penitential discipline" preparatory to the coming eschaton, but it was still urged upon preachers as the content of their preaching. For Schweitzer, it is *Interimsethik*, but still represents "an absolute ethical ideal". For Weiss, Christ is still *Vorbild* (Pattern). For Schweitzer, "not the historical Jesus but the spirit which goes forth from Him and in the spirits of men striving for new influence and rule, is that which overcomes the worlds".⁵

The coming of eschatology, therefore, did not really reduce the attractiveness of discipleship as much as might have been expected. Bruce's monumental work on the Twelve continued to be the only English volume on the subject to which the minister would turn.⁶ Latham simply applied the lessons which Bruce at

³ Ders., *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes* (1892).

⁴ A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (3rd ed. 1954), p. 353.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 399.

⁶ A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve* (1888).

times left to be deduced.⁷ The only recent work in English on the subject, published by Morton, has not really benefited from the eschatological revolution, and confines itself to dotting the "i"s and crossing the "t"s to what T. W. Manson had suggested on the subject.⁸

The point at which Morton's book is significant is that he relates the discipleship concept to the modern search for community. The disciples are disciples *together*. While it must be conceded that at times the point is laboured, it is significant.

It recalls what happened to discipleship in the hands of Troeltsch and Rauschenbusch, for whom the disciple words were no longer the rallying-point for individualism and religious devotion (as in Weiss, Bruce and the rest), but became the inspiration of the social revolution. "By living with men and thinking and feeling in their presence", Rauschenbusch wrote, Jesus "reproduced his own life in others and they gained faith to risk this new way of living. This process of assimilation went on by the natural capacities inherent in the social organism . . . When a nucleus of like-minded men was gathered about him, the assimilating power was greatly reinforced . . . But his real end was not the new soul, but the new society; not man, but Man."⁹ The eschatological sayings are the work of the Church, which was unable to recognise the humble service advocated by Jesus as the sufficient reward for discipleship.

The liberal understanding of discipleship was an over-simplification, because it attempted to bypass the theological situation in which it arose and in which it must have been described in the Gospels. It attempted to come too quickly to the point of modern "relevance". It epitomised humanistic idealism and anthropocentric optimism without providing any rational or suprarational *ground* for them. But liberalism did at least take the radical demands of the Synoptic Jesus seriously. Even when the demand is understood as being eschatologically determined, it still remained for all generations as challenge and invitation. The centrality of the cross and empty tomb may well have been

⁷ H. Latham, *Pastor Pastorum, or the Schooling of the Apostles by our Lord* (1890).

⁸ T. R. Morton, *The Twelve Together* (1956).

⁹ W. Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (1908), p. 60 f.

missed, but the importance of the words and life of Jesus was often acutely seen. Trust in the disciple's hero might lead only to pietistic activism; but faith in the Church's Lord sometimes never goes further than pietistic quietism. The "Jesus of history" at least was never a Docetic Christ. Love incarnate in the Galilean carpenter was not always the Second Person of the Church's Trinity; but He was a Man among men, Whom only the brave can follow, Whom to love was to serve.

2. *A Neglected Present*

There can be no return to Liberal so-called "Jesus of history". If there are signs of a renewed interest in the Synoptic Jesus, other methods must be used, and the former simplifications avoided.¹⁰ The approach must be not merely that of the *historian*, but *also* that of the *theologian* of the Bible. Indeed the revival of Biblical Theology in recent years stems principally from the two chief causes of the downfall of the older Liberalism—notably Dialectical Theology and Form Criticism.

Many of the insights of the Dialectical Theology should have found much of value in the Disciple concept. Unfortunately, however, the emphasis upon the sovereignty of God in Neo-orthodoxy and the consistent eschatology following Schweitzer in New Testament studies have combined to remove God from effective contact with men. The paradoxical and dialectical character of the God-man relationship is often forgotten by those who profess allegiance to Kierkegaard. The existentialist interpreters have seen in the individual's relation to God the crucial issue of Christianity. Historicity is of little interest; what matters is the soul's instant response to God's Word, the "eyes of faith". But all too often Kierkegaard's mysticism is more influential than his "this-sidedness", and the disciple's existentialist decision fritters away into a merely "religious" issue. "Faith" too often becomes a new kind of Gnosticism, which denies the incarnation and the essential this-worldliness of the Christian Life in its anxiety to preserve a God who is "wholly other".

¹⁰ Cf. N. A. Dahl, *Der historische Jesus als geschichtswissenschaftliches und theologisches Problem: Kerygma und Dogma* 1 (1955), p. 102-32

Form Criticism directed attention to the Church which wrote our Gospels, and to the traditions within the oral period between the events and the time of writing. The stories of the earthly words and deeds of Jesus are derived from a community which believed in Him as Risen Lord, coming Son of Man, and future Judge. Moreover, the stories themselves as they were handed on or written down were influenced by the changing demands of the Church's preaching, apologetic and discipline. Accordingly, it might be expected that Discipleship would have been of special interest. In what way did being a disciple mean something different in A.D. 70 from what it meant in A.D. 30 or 50? In what ways did the Church's self-understanding differ from her Lord's intention? What part did the words of Jesus inviting men to discipleship play in the later evangelism of the eleven? Are there circumstances within the later life of the Church which might have modified or exaggerated the claims of Jesus on His followers? Did the Church's conception of Jesus Himself move away from that which He taught His first disciples to have of Him?

The fact that these questions have *not* so far been *answered* may well be due to the concentration of Synoptic scholarship upon matters relating to Eschatology and Messiahship. Indeed, within recent Biblical Theology, the child of Dialectical Theology and Form Criticism, certain elements in the Synoptic tradition seem to be quite "beyond the pale". Discipleship is one of them.

Why is this? Probably for a number of reasons:

1. The preference for reading the Synoptics in the light of the Bible as a whole, more particularly in the light of Paul or Acts.
2. The suspicion of the "Jesus of history" as over against "the Christ of faith".
3. The belief that "the Gospel" dates only from the resurrection and is characterised by the gift of faith.
4. The fear that the words of Jesus have been so influenced by subsequent Church situations as to be of little value.

If this is a correct analysis of the present situation, a criticism of these assumptions should do something to justify a more constructive view.

1. The concern of Biblical Theology with the unity of the Scriptures is a natural reaction against the delight in contra-

dictions of some older critical scholars. But there are dangers in this concern for unity. If one comes to the New Testament, for example, with a "doctrine" of the People of God, of Election, or of the Covenant derived from a systematic theology of the Old Testament, there is a very strong probability that what one finds there will fit in with these doctrines. But will one find what the New Testament is striving to say? What if God's new deed overturns as well as fulfills the old? Again, within the New Testament, many recent theologians have stressed the unity of the different "varieties of religion". But what if the variety is the work of the Holy Spirit? What if the search for a "leading idea" is in fact a vain one? The "essential thing" is not so easily put into a slogan, because it neither was nor is a static thing, but relates to the *continuing deed* of God in Christ, and the unfolding mystery of the life of men with their Lord.¹¹

This unfolding mystery and continuing deed is precisely the theme of the Discipleship words. But there cannot be any fruitful theological development of this or any other element within the Synoptic tradition unless the legitimacy is recognised of taking seriously the singular and often disconnected words and events relating to such an element; and that initially only with regard to what the words mean, and then only secondarily to what they must be held to mean in the light of other concepts. There is *Heilsgeschichte* in the Synoptics: but one must not begin with a Pauline conception of *Heilsgeschichte* and then judge the Synoptic one by it. One must (as Schweitzer urged!) take the words as they stand.

Moreover, this is not a one-sided affair. Once the value of the continuing relation of men with Christ on the pattern of that of the first disciples is recognised, many other elements outside the Synoptics suddenly take on greater significance. A new "unity" emerges: it is not a static unity, but one which stems from the

¹¹ B. Reicke, *Einheitlichkeit oder verschiedene «Lehrbegriffe» in der neutestamentlichen Theologie?*: *Theol. Zeitschr.* 9 (1953), p. 401-15. A similar but more far-reaching criticism could be made against the tendency to describe New Testament theology in terms of specific words or terms, rather than the varying and distinctively Christian intention in using them. The slavish employment of the massive *Theologisches Wörterbuch* sometimes justifies such criticism.

actual life and work of the Early Church. It may well be questioned whether the popular "Thoroughgoing Kerygmaticism" based on Acts provides in itself a more reasonable or more useful vantage point.¹²

2. The *dichotomy* between "the *Jesus* of history" and "the *Christ* of faith" was furthered by the advance of Form Critical methods. It has been one of the factors which has caused the revived interest in Pauline and Reformation theology. But it has also led to a radical over-simplification of the content of the Synoptic Gospels.¹³

The dichotomy ignores the purely historical links between the pre-crucifixion disciples and the post-resurrection believers. Believing on quite false grounds that the Synoptics are without value for a doctrine of the Christian life, the modern interpreter has fallen back on the fideism of other writings. But *faith* for the twelve disciples *continued* to mean in the days of the Church what it had meant in the days of His flesh—a committal of one's life, possessions, and future in trust and obedience to the Master. It did not mean a "decision" ("existential" or otherwise) with regard to certain theological or soteriological propositions. It meant a response to the kind of life which was being manifest in Christ—either the life and destiny of Jesus in person, or else the life and destiny of His Body, the Church. In the early Church as in Jesus' lifetime, we may imagine that the discovery of Him as

¹² The attempt to come to a "kerygmatic life of Jesus" based on the Early Church's message can scarcely be said yet to have arrived at any stage at which the writing can be begun. However one may sympathise with the work of E. Fuchs, G. Bornkamm and others, it must be said that the problem to which this attempted "kerygmatic" life addresses itself is one posed by a philosophical understanding of history (however fruitful and suggestive that may be) rather than by the New Testament itself. Cf. the admirable (and favourable) treatment in J. M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1957).

¹³ One may here mention as representative writers A. Fridrichsen, who tended to make Christ so much the property of the Church as to deny His priority before and superiority over it, and also His independent existence apart from the Church's preaching, dogma and cult; R. Bultmann, for whom the merely "historical" Jesus has value neither as event nor for theology; and J. Knox, whose "Jesus of the community of believers" alone is of importance, and for whom, therefore, mere questions of Synoptic exegesis are of small importance since "faith" is without obligation to them.

"Lord" was as much mixed up in, and sometimes even secondary to, "doing the things He said". There was, in fact, as Minear has put it, "no exact discrimination between the confessions of the first disciples and those of a subsequent generation" ¹⁴, and that for the two very good reasons that "faith" belonged as much to the pre-resurrection experiences as to the post-resurrection ones, and that it was "the Jesus of history" to whom response was made in both cases. And, we may conclude, by "Jesus of history" we do not mean a chronological recital of the saving facts of His life (such as a "kerygmatic" life of Jesus would alone give us!), but the total impact of His person, ministry, teaching, miracles and passion as constituting the first group of disciples and their successors in the Church.

3. But is there *Gospel* in this *pre-resurrection* Christ? If the Gospel consists of all that God did in and through Jesus Christ, then there can be no Gospel without Him. It cannot be a matter of indifference to the content of the Christian revelation that God has been traditionally assumed to have occupied Himself for three years with the life of the man Jesus. Moreover, the "kerygmatic-theological docetism" ¹⁵ of ignoring the pre-resurrection Christ results in a denuded Gospel. The absence of social ethics or social concern in much recent theology may stem directly from this challenge to the wholeness of the picture of Christ which has come down to us. ¹⁶ Where it is asserted that the One around Whom our Faith centres was not with us redeemingly "in the flesh", but only "in the spirit" and "through faith", then the Church's retreat into "religion" is only to be expected.

The theology of Discipleship should do something to correct this escapism. Salvation is involved in the *whole life* of Jesus, and in the whole life of every one who comes into contact with

¹⁴ P. Minear, *The Kingdom and the Power* (1950), p. 80 f. Thus "the Passion story had the power to demonstrate the solidarity of all men in the sin of the original disciples".

¹⁵ Dahl (n. 10), p. 123-4; A. N. Wilder, *Otherworldliness and the New Testament* (1955), ch. 3. As far as the Gospels are concerned, the only *kerygma* we find is in the *didache*. Cf. my Didactic Kerygma in the Synoptic Gospels: *Scott. Journ. of Theol.* 10 (1957), p. 262-73.

¹⁶ A. N. Wilder, Kerygma, Eschatology and Social Ethics: *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology* [C. H. Dodd] (1956), p. 509 to 536, attempts to establish a "kerygmatic social ethic" (p. 516).

Him. The Cross and resurrection are not events in comparison with which the previous work of Jesus is unimportant prelude. Rather are they the key to understanding the earthly ministry, preaching and call to discipleship. The cross and resurrection for the disciple are not simply the object or subject of his faith, but are the content and meaning of his life, his following, his works. Indeed, the faith-works dichotomy is a false one, just as that between theology and life is false.

4. But is the Synoptic picture really *reliable*? Let us attempt a constructive statement. Because He was all that the rest of the New Testament says of Him—Pre-existent God, Reigning Lord, Coming Saviour—the Discipleship Words are necessarily charged for the Gospel writers with an authority which could not be so clearly seen in the earthly days of the Master. However, two important inferences follow. The stringent demands during the *earthly life* were seen to be precisely those which related most uniquely to the *fulfilment* of His main task and destiny, the suffering of God's Righteous Servant, the Son of Man; and, because He called the first disciples to follow Him in this task and destiny, and they failed Him, the *same mission* remained for the post-resurrection *Church*. On the one hand, the earthly life of the Lord would not have made sense without the call to discipleship; on the other hand, the life of the Church only makes sense as a sharing in the life of discipleship. The call of the Lord is the same in both cases: "Believe in My power and authority, and take up My cross." The disciple's response means the same also: surrender to the Lordship of Jesus and to the stringency of His way. In both cases too, we may add, the reward and blessedness are the same.

In considering each of the Synoptic discipleship sayings we must therefore keep *two moments* before us: (a) the moment within the earthly life of Jesus in which the radical summons is made, and (b) the moment within the Church's life when the would-be disciple is tested. However, neither of these occasions is known to us directly. In the first case (a), we must bear in mind (1) the perhaps living memory of the first disciples and others who originally heard Jesus make the demand, and (2) the period prior to our Gospels in which the sayings were handed on in verbal or written form, and employed as authorita-

tive in the life of the Christian. In the second place (b), we must consider (3) the personal intention of the particular Gospel writer in using this element in the traditions which came down to him, and (4) the meaning of the words to the Church which uses the written Gospel or for which it was written.¹⁷

This difference between speaker and audience applies also to the moment when Jesus first spoke the words. Finally, therefore, we must try to find (5) the meaning of the words for the Speaker. We cannot assume that Jesus intended the same as His hearers understood Him to intend.

3. *A Promising Future?*

If, then, the present reasons for the neglect of Discipleship cannot be sustained even within their own terms of reference, what must be the constructive basis of *further study*?

In the first place, there are a host of purely historical questions which can now be approached all over again, and which have lain dormant for decades. What is the relationship between the disciple-Master relation in the Gospels and similar phenomena in the rabbi-pupil relation in Judaism, the disciple-Torah relation in Jewish piety, the philosopher-student relation in Greek civilisation, and the teacher-initiate relation in the mystery religions? To these must now be added certain more recent questions, such as how the disciples of Jesus compare with the Qumran sectarians, the Jewish *chaburah*, the zealots, and the followers of John the Baptist.

Beyond this, however, we must not hesitate to ask theological questions also. If the legitimacy of the quest is con-

¹⁷ This is important. We do not know the *Sitz im Leben* of the Church(es) in which the Gospels were to be spoken any more than we know that of the first disciples. The words on cross-bearing might be rightly discerned as meaning certain particular things to the individual Gospel writer, but they could have been either typical of or polemical against the life of the Church for whom they were written. The new tendency to speak of *Redaktionsgeschichte* attempts to go beyond *Formgeschichte* to do what the older scholars always did—consider the “point of view of the author”: cf. W. Marxsen, *Der Evangelist Markus. Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Evangeliums* (1956), Introduction. But this may still leave the author’s purpose in relation to the Church and its understanding untouched.

ceded, there must be no limits imposed upon its possible conclusions. And its conclusions must be based on the work of scholarship. What is the relationship of Discipleship in the Gospels to the Imitation of Christ, salvation by works, the question of Law and Gospel, and the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church? I have attempted to answer these questions in a work upon which I have been engaged for some years, which is to appear under the title "Disciple and Lord".

But if we are right that historical and theological questions of this kind may now be addressed to the Synoptic Gospels without fear of ignoring the work of New Testament scholars over the last thirty years, then the way is open also for others (and even the parson who has to preach from the texts) to do the same, with reference to other questions.

Let us turn, then, to the Achilles' heel of Synoptic studies—the question: Can we ever *know what* the Speaker *said*—much less what He intended? I believe that there are very good reasons for considering that with reference to the Discipleship Words, we can.

(a) The words of Jesus addressed to or regarding His disciples have the unique advantage of depending for their reliability at the point of origin and at the points of transmission and committal to writing upon *the same people*, notably the eleven disciples. We may expect that their corporate understanding of themselves and their mission would have influenced them a little. But it is highly unlikely that they would have invented the words. Their very inconsistency suggests this—for example, the giving of powers to Peter alone which are elsewhere given to them all, the varied accounts of their eschatological status and offices, the stages at which certain demands were made by Jesus, and whether or not those demands were confined to the twelve. All this suggests the varieties of memories going back to the days spent together in Galilee.

(b) The singular and radical nature of the discipleship demands makes it extremely unlikely that they were invented by the Church. The warnings to the disciples in view of impending persecution or cosmic catastrophe, for example, obviously in their present form owe their variations to the needs of particular Churches. But it is quite clear that the radical demands could

only have survived in the various churches, many of which did not have persecution to face, if they actually in some form depended on the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus. Again, it is often claimed that the saying "Take up the cross" was a creation of the Church. When one comes to look into the matter, however, this becomes most unlikely; for if the saying was meant to inculcate a spiritual or physical repetition of Christ's passion, it is inapposite, since Jesus did not carry His own cross; and if it was meant to prepare the Christians for a martyr death, it is again unsuitable, as the punishment which they might expect to receive (as in the case of Stephen) was not crucifixion but stoning—at least so long as the Jews were the cause of their death. Indeed, one may even claim that the factors which are often regarded as being responsible for the alteration of Jesus' words by the Church would in the case of the Discipleship sayings have either not applied at all or else have contributed to their modification rather than their embellishment.¹⁸

(c) The nature of the disciple-Master relation in the Gospels is, I believe, something *sui generis*, and is not to be explained by comparison with any similar relation either in the Old Testament or in the Semitic world of Jesus' day. However, if it be assumed, with a growing number of scholars, that Jesus foresaw His own death, then it must also be assumed that He foresaw a period after His death in which the Gospel would be preached and the Church built up. Why could not Jesus have committed teaching word by word to His disciples with a view to its use in the future? And if this were possible, would not He have used the method employed by the rabbis, of making His disciples learn His teaching *by heart*?¹⁹ This is a possible clue to the fact that so many logia seem to be accompanied by absurd conclusions or "applications". It may account for the obvious fact that

¹⁸ J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (1954), p. 36—51, lists: the situation of the later Church in the Hellenistic world (where the *basic* Hebrew morality would be hard enough—cf. Paul's epistles to Corinth), the needs of the missionary situation (the preaching of Acts is notoriously unlike the Gospels), and the delay of the Parousia (with the consequent falling-off of moral earnestness). All of these would tend to *modify* the discipleship demands. But they clearly did not do so.

¹⁹ H. Riesenfeld, *The Gospel Tradition and its Beginnings: Studia Evangelica* (1959), 43-65, p. 59 ff.

the parables are much more reliable in the body of the story than in their "explanations". Is that because the "solution" was a secret one, and depended upon the disciple's ability to discern God's action in Jesus in them? ²⁰ It may also apply to some of the deeds of Jesus, which might well have been performed (or, in some cases, described in their absence) as "Acted Parables" of the drama of redemption for the benefit of the disciples, who would then go on and tell the story in its "set form" to others.

(d) Finally, the words and teaching relating to Discipleship have a strong likelihood to be reliable if, as seems to me, they are concerned with the essential kernel of the Christian *message*, which remained *the same* before and after the crucifixion-resurrection. Whether it was a legitimate development of this in Hellenistic terms to speak of a "pattern of salvation" of Humiliation and Exaltation ²¹ is a wider question, not posed by the Gospels. But it is scarcely deniable, once the assumptions of Form Criticism are made and carried through to their logical conclusion, that the kind of disciple relation which was demanded and did exist in the earthly days was also known in the early Church. Moreover, just as Jesus identified salvation with discipleship to Himself, so the early Church thought of their salvation in terms of discipleship. What exactly they meant by this cannot be settled in a moment. But the way is at least now open to ask the question.

* * *

Are not our people already in this world of Discipleship, rather than the more sophisticated theological and terminological worlds we try to persuade them that they are in? I have been recently concerned with the fact that much denominational theology not only has nothing to say to our modern world, but is also not even now based upon the experience of our members. The classic doctrines of Methodism, for instance, such as Conversion, Assurance and Perfection, are completely foreign to them. If you asked them what being a Christian meant, they

²⁰ Cf. my *The Parables of Jesus as Self-Revelation*: *ibid.*, p. 79-99.

²¹ E. Schweizer, *Erniedrigung und Erhöhung bei Jesus und seinen Nachfolgern* (1955); *Lordship and Discipleship* (1960).

would say, "Being a follower of Jesus". To this, of course, the minister immediately attempts to give a more theologically satisfactory twist ("Well, that's part of it", and so on). I wonder how far this is true of other Churches. If it is true, then is it not relevant for theology? And might we not do better to use it rather than criticise it?

Or take another hoary chestnut: "You don't have to go to Church to be a Christian." We all know the answers, and doubtless they are right. But must there not have been something in the words, attitude and life of Jesus to have given rise to so constant a tradition? We also all know there was. Discipleship to the Kingdom of God was only possible to those who would outwardly follow Him, but it was also the yardstick by which every man was to be judged, and the point at which any man, whether He "followed us" or not could attain significance and thus salvation. Discipleship is thus not a cosy by-product of salvation by faith, but the truth about every man, whether they know it (and that is the advantage—or disadvantage!—of being in the Church) or not.²² Ought we not to say so? Does not the all-availing Cross mean just that—that every man may now set about the life of Discipleship, for in it is the grace of God? Where else can the Social Gospel in our day receive its dynamic, or the Church and the world work together for the Kingdom of God? And how else can faith begin to mean what it meant in the New Testament?

Manchester.

John J. Vincent.

²² I think that D. Bonhoeffer would have developed just this line had he lived to re-write his *Cost of Discipleship* (1948-59) in the light of his thoughts about a "religionless Christianity" contained in the *Letters and Papers from Prison* (1953). As it is, the *Cost of Discipleship* remains essentially pietistic. Cf. G. Ebeling, Die nicht-religiöse Interpretation biblischer Begriffe: *Zeitschr. f. Theol. u. Ki.* 52 (1955), 296-359, p. 299 f.