

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Indian Journal of Theology* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ijt_01.php

The Problem of History in the New Testament

A Discussion in the Indian Context

MATHEW P. JOHN

I have chosen this theme with the awareness that there are some questions here that are vital to Christianity. It is not to be expected that satisfactory answers can be easily found for profound questions. But clarification of the question itself is in some way a contribution to the quest for the answer or solution and what follows is only an attempt to understand the 'Problem of History in an Indian Context'.

It is not necessary to argue the point that Biblical faith is in some sense peculiarly involved with history. This is true of both the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. A great many of the difficulties that have arisen in connection with the study of the Old and the New Testaments have their foundation in this involvement. Not very long ago many devout people were perturbed when they were compelled to face the fact that the creation stories of Genesis could not be taken as the usual type of historical narrative. The fact that the Bible opens with these stories, and that, because of our natural tendency to begin to read any book at its beginning even when we may not go very far, may have had something to do with the emphasis that was placed on the creation stories in the science v. religion controversy. It will perhaps help the thoughtful reader of the Bible to remember that the creation stories were written after some of the other parts of the Torah, and that instead of being a scientific-historical account of the origins of the universe, it is a looking back from, a pushing back of, an understanding of the covenant made by God, who is the only God—and therefore God of other nations as well as of nature.¹

Before going further it is necessary to raise the question about the meaning of history. I shall not try to quote or coin a satisfactory definition of history at this time, but in the course

¹ See M. P. John: Three Bible Studies. *Religion and Society*, XI, 4 (1964).

of our paper various ideas and themes that contribute to a comprehensive understanding of history may emerge. It is likely that, for many, von Ranke's definition of history as an accurate account of things as they happened may appear to be almost self-evident. But a little reflection will show that an accurate account of many events of the past is not really history. Accurate knowledge of 'natural' events where human will and choice are not active belong to the realm of science and not to that of history. Even archaeological knowledge of pre-literate cultures, though it refers to 'human' events, is to be reckoned as pre-history rather than as history proper.

If a monster computer could be designed to collect and record all human events, that would not be history. It may be a chronicle, and may provide source material for the historian. A historian has to choose and relate. Behind his choice and relating, he has his assumptions regarding what is important and what is not. In the choice itself as well as in the inter-relating and narrating, interpretation plays a part. So, while the distinction indicated by the German words *Historie* and *Geschichte* is certainly useful, in reality the difference seems to be more a matter of emphasis than of substance. A comparable distinction seems to be implied, at least in some contexts, between the two English adjectives 'historical' and 'historic'. The latter term seems to imply importance, significance, etc., while the former stresses the 'past' character.

It is obvious that the Gospels were not written as compilations of accurate but irrelevant facts. They were written because of an awareness of the significance of the events narrated. The old quest of the historical Jesus was, relatively speaking, based on the assumption that bare facts of history were capable of being recovered, while the new quest starts with the awareness that it is impossible to go behind the Gospels, to escape from the interpretative work of the New Testament writers, and produce an account of things 'as they actually happened'. As Zahrnt following Kähler puts it, 'The "recollection of the days of his flesh" and the "recognition of his eternal significance and of what we have in him" are so "inseparably" intertwined in the New Testament that we cannot penetrate further. We cannot force a way through the primitive Christian testimony to Jesus Christ and get back to the "Jesus of History" in himself, nor can we separate the interpretation and proclamation of the historical facts from the facts themselves so as to leave ourselves with the latter, bare and unadorned.'²

Zahrnt dissociates the 'new quest' entirely from attempts like that of Stauffer in 'Jesus and His Story'. The new quest, according to him, 'knows that we have Jesus only in the *kerygma* and therefore only in faith. It tries only to seek the history in the *kerygma* and the *kerygma* in this history, thus

² Heinz Zahrnt: *The Historical Jesus*, p. 83.

demonstrating the connection between Jesus' proclamation and the proclaiming of Jesus'.³

Here it may be necessary to sound a warning that in our recognition of the inner meaning we may fail to give the legitimate place to the outer event. We have to recognize that the 'unit of experience is always an outer event plus an inner meaning'.⁴ The relation between the objective and subjective has been called a standing problem in any work of significant history.⁵ This is certainly a problem in the work of the Evangelists also. The Gospel writers were preservers and transmitters of the factual tradition as well as interpreters of the Person and Work of our Lord, at the same time.⁶ The Christian historian must seek a historical basis sufficient to bear the weight of 'the web of significance', as H. E. W. Turner calls it, 'that he attaches to the Gospel event'.⁷

To quote again from Turner: 'An Evangelist is neither merely a recorder nor simply an interpreter; he is both in one. There were Christian minds as well as Christian pens behind the Gospels, but these Christian minds interpreted what they received and did not simply bombinate in a historical vacuum. The creativity of the Evangelists (however it expressed itself) fell within a tradition, whether written or oral, which was factually concerned with our Lord Himself'.⁸ We have to emphasize not only the point that the Evangelists transmitted, rather than created a tradition, but also the fact this tradition took the form of a Gospel—a narrative of incidents. It is significant that the dominant tense of the Gospels is the past.

Our discussion has to be in the Indian context whether the title says so or not. I am glad that there is to be a full paper and discussion on the theme, 'The Significance of History to Hindu Life and Thought' later in our conference.⁹ We often hear that Hinduism sets no value on history and that this is seen in the lack of proper records of our past. This I believe to be a rather superficial and external view. The type of historiography that developed during the last century in Europe is certainly not found in ancient India. We do not have even the type of history written by Herodotus. And yet there is a linking with, and a reverence for, the past which is certainly a form of historical living. The great importance given to the chain of

³ Heinz Zahrnt: The Historical Jesus, p. 101.

⁴ Cf. 'An historical event is an occurrence *plus* the meaning which it had for some portion of the human race.' C. H. Dodd: The Bible Today, p. 49; and 'The unit of experience is always an outer event plus the inner attitude; for the outer event has meaning only in the light of that inner attitude and that inner attitude has power to transform the worst into the best.' H. Wheeler Robinson: Two Hebrew Prophets, p. 56.

⁵ H. E. W. Turner: Historicity and the Gospels, p. 48.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁹ By Dr. S. J. Samartha.

teachers and students, the emphasis on genealogy and caste, the monuments raised, and many other similar items are expressions of a concern with history though they are inadequate and disappointing in a modern historian's quest for sources.

The usual contrast that is drawn between Hebrew and Greek views of history, the former linear and the latter cyclic, is familiar to us. It may be that the contrast is too sharply drawn. There is certainly a view that approximates to the cyclic view of history in Ecclesiastes, a part of our canonical Old Testament. And while the cyclic view of the total history of the universe is present as a philosophic assumption, it is doubtful whether it was present in the actual practitioners of the art of history writing in Greece. Some Indian scriptures provide a table of *Yugas*, *Mahayugas* and *Kalpas*, each smaller unit repeating itself within the larger like days in the year.¹⁰ A closely parallel thought is implied in the idea of transmigration as well as in the Buddhist Anattavada.

A recent Christian writer has gone to the extent of saying that 'The Greeks had no conception of history; for them history was cyclical and their golden age was in the past.'¹¹ This is certainly begging the question, but such a sharp statement is perhaps helpful to bring home to us the truth that there is something unique in the Christian view of history. This distinctive view of history is implied in the assertion that Christianity is a historic religion. The distinction between ethnic religions on the one hand which do not look back to a specific founder and a beginning in time, and such religions that have a founder and a beginning, is only one aspect of this. In this sense Islam and Buddhism are historic religions.

The contrast between the many cult legends that were popular in the Mediterranean world at the beginning of the Christian Era and the Gospels was that the events of the Gospel *happened*. 'The basic difference between the Gospels and the cult legends which we find elsewhere in antiquity is their interest in history . . . it *happened*. Here, then, we have not the eternal event of myth, but unique unrepeatable history; not an idea, but a happening; not a cultic drama, but history in earnest; not metaphysics, but eschatology; not a symbol, but Word; not an outlook, but faith.'¹²

Attempts to define Christianity primarily or solely in terms of certain central ideas like that of Ritschl¹³ or Harnack

¹⁰ Aitareya Brahmana, 7:14; Mahabharata ii, 12, 826 ff., etc.

¹¹ A. Richardson: The Bible in the Age of Science, p. 43.

¹² H. Zahrnt: *Op. cit.*, p. 79.

¹³ 'Christianity is the monotheistic, completely spiritual and ethical religion, which, based on the life of its Author as the Redeemer and Founder of the Kingdom of God, consists in the freedom of the children of God, involves the impulse to conduct from the motive of love, which aims at the moral organization of mankind, and grounds blessedness on the relation of sonship to God as well as on the Kingdom of God.' Justification and Reconciliation, p. 13.

(‘Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man’) will have some pedagogic value, but miss the importance of the *given* in the Christian Gospel which ‘stands or falls with the testimony and the understanding that in the life and teachings of Jesus we meet the reality and meaning of God’.¹⁴ The belief that God did something unique and unrepeatable in Jesus Christ, in the days of Pontius Pilate, makes the attempt to gain knowledge of *our origins* imperative. To trace one’s family tree may be an interesting hobby, but for the Christian the search for the origins is inescapable because his own being a Christian is inseparably bound up with the reality of those events. The New Testament, especially the Gospels, are not a collection of teachings, truths or principles which are eternally valid and independent of particular historical events. The Gospels claim to be records of certain events and the Epistles presuppose these events.

The fact that all these books are ‘documents of faith’, written by believers and for believers or for those whom the writers expected to become believers, does not exempt us from the responsibility of historical investigation. The Gospels have a double character. They are documents of faith as well as documents of history. They are source books for the faith of the Primitive Church as well as narratives of the life and ministry of Jesus. It is theoretically possible to approach them from either of these points of view, but the two approaches are not mutually exclusive but supplementary to each other.¹⁵

If we accept this double character of the Gospels, the question whether they are reliable witnesses to the events that they profess to narrate is inescapable. The theological trend which denies the possibility of any real knowledge about Jesus of Nazareth beyond the fact that He was, seems to be already passing. The end product of the old liberal quest of the historical Jesus was unsatisfactory. So, too, the denial of the need for that quest. Now we move into the era of the new quest, which takes history even more seriously. For the old quest, the essential element of history seems to have been its ‘pastness’. For the new quest the essential element of history is its meaningfulness, relevance and our real involvement in it. But the need of the quest is once again generally accepted.¹⁶

To seek the answer to the question how far the Gospels—Synoptics and Fourth—are reliable is only part of our responsibility in discussing the Problem of History in the New Testament in the Indian setting. It is to be questioned whether we have as yet paid sufficient heed to the fact that the most important books of our Scriptures are in the form of ‘Gospels’. As H. E. W. Turner has pointed out, they are ‘documents which are

¹⁴ Nels Ferre: *The Given for Christian Theology*. ‘Interpretation’ (Richmond, Va.), XX I, p. 35 (1966, January).

¹⁵ Cf. H. E. W. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

¹⁶ For a critical but conservative estimate about the reliability of the Gospel events, see Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

without parallel in the range of historical documents'.¹⁷ And it is essential in a scientific enquiry that the tools we use, the questions we ask, must be suitable to the documents which we are studying. 'It is fatally easy to ask the wrong questions and thus to obscure the answers which the Gospels themselves provide to historical enquiry.'¹⁸

This character of the Gospels may be traced back to the Old Testament. There too we have the combination of that which belongs to the historical realm and that which belongs to the faith of the nation. At the beginning of his great book on the history of Israel, Martin Noth makes the following point: even those who are unable to accept many of the assumptions and conclusions of that book, will find this acceptable. 'The authenticity of that (historical) reality is not affected by the circumstance that in its history we also meet an element beyond the range of human understanding, things that cannot be ascribed to known causes and effects. An element of the inexplicable is in fact present in *all* human history and is bound to be present not merely because it is not even remotely possible to embrace the whole profusion of cause and effect even in the historical present, let alone in the past, and least of all in the remote past, but above all because history is not merely a constant repetition of complicated concatenations of cause and effect if we believe that God is really active in history not simply as a *pröton kinoun* but as the ever-present Lord working within the superficial interplay of cause and effect. Inevitably therefore there is an element of mystery, of the 'unhistorical', in all human history which makes its presence felt on the frontiers of all historical knowledge.'¹⁹ The failure to see this relationship between the Old Testament and the New results in the complete separation of the two, making the Gospel stand, as it were, like Melchizedek, 'without father or mother or genealogy' to be made up to date and authentic by a non-historical, existential interpretation. For Bultmann, for instance, the Old Testament is 'nothing but a history of failure'.²⁰

I mentioned above that the New Testament Epistles presuppose the Gospel events. It is the Gospel *events* that bind together the Gospels and Epistles in one New Testament. The Gospel writers recorded events that had decisive religious significance for them. These same events challenged the Epistle writers to theological interpretation. This is how Christian Theology comes into being. 'It is this inseparable interconnection between religion and theology with historical fact that justifies the description of Christianity as a historical religion; and this is part of its distinctive genius.'²¹

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 35.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Martin Noth: *The History of Israel*, pp. 1-2.

²⁰ H. Zahrnt, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

²¹ C. H. Dodd: *The Gospel and Law*, p. 8.

Thus for Christianity divine revelation is inseparably bound up with historical events. In spite of the prevalence of a type of theology that tends to be sceptical about the possibility of knowing anything definite about the historical Jesus, we have to affirm that for any faith that is really Christian the historic revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth is the corner-stone and any question about that historical person is important. Historical investigation by itself can never prove the revelatory character or value of the event. The confession that Jesus Christ is Lord is not, and cannot be, the inescapable conclusion of a historical enquiry into the life and work of a first-century figure. At the same time the revelation that is given in that figure cannot be detached from him. It is the continuing task of theology to understand and express the historic revelation in such a way that its once-for-all, unrepeatable, given character and its permanent revelatory immediacy are held together in tension.²²

The main tenets of the Form-critical School of N.T. Scholars are well known. We are concerned here with the distinction that they draw between Jesus of History, the unknowable 'that' of the Christian Gospel and the Christ of Faith, the meaning that the early Church gave to this person. They tell us that it is possible to find a *sitz im leben* in the history of the Primitive Church for each of the stories in the Gospels. John Knox goes to the extent of saying that 'there is always a gap between what the Gospels tell us about Him and what the subsequent events tell us He was'.²³

With the recognition of the theological character and interest of the Gospels, it has become increasingly difficult to find this gap. If there is a gap, it is between the supposed picture of Jesus of Nazareth, the Jesus of History that is arrived at by methods of scientific historical criticism (and the assumptions of the critic) on the one hand and the Jesus Christ of faith as pictured in the Gospels and Epistles on the other. We are told again that there is a gulf fixed between the Christ of faith that is known to us through the testimony of the Primitive Church and the historical reality which no man can know. The comforting aside is added that it does not matter very much since such historical knowledge would be 'knowledge after the flesh'.

This kind of statement of the form-critic appears to be obvious and self-evident and irrefutable when we first hear it and we are impressed by the array of arguments that flank it.

²² 'In the New Testament tradition the history of Jesus and the *kerygma* are indissolubly intertwined. The work of theology must match this situation. It has always a twofold task; it must seek the *kerygma* in history, and history in the *kerygma*. Its task is therefore study and proclamation. The two belong together; one is impossible without the other.' H. Zahrnt, *op. cit.*, p. 145. See also pp. 28-29.

²³ John Knox: *The Man Christ Jesus*, p. 68.

It seems to have some similarity to Kant's idea that we can know only *phenomena* and not the *noumenon*. The strength of the argument appears comparable to the logical strength of solipsism.

The Form-critic and the Gospel student who emphasizes the *kerygma* to the detriment of history, seem to be standing within an epistemological enclosure; the faith of the Primitive Church is within the enclosure, but Jesus of Nazareth is outside. It seems that only a leap of faith can enable one to move from the faith of the Church to the Jesus of history.

If there is such a gap is it not the creation of those who assume that there is a radical discontinuity between the faith of the Primitive Church and the event that is its cause? If a leap of faith is necessary, is it not the same kind that the child makes when it assumes the existence of an external world of people and things? Let it be emphasized that we are not assuming the possibility of a knowledge of Christ independent of the preached Christ. Our point may be made by saying that the Gospel stories have a double *sitz im leben*, one within the lifetime of Jesus and the other within the life of the Primitive Church. The Gospels are both 'primary sources of the life of Jesus and Church documents in which the significance of Jesus for the Christian community can be discerned'.²⁴ If it is right to assert as Prof. John Knox does 'that it is *Jesus as he was remembered and interpreted* who is alone important for the Christian community',²⁵ it is equally necessary to say that what was remembered and interpreted by the Christian community was the historical person Jesus of Nazareth. This can be, and must be, done without separating the fact and its meaning, for neither is available without the other, nor is it necessary to create an artificial barrier between the person of Jesus of Nazareth and the faith of the early believers. We can agree with Knox when he says: 'the event of Jesus Christ *was* precisely that totality of fact and meaning—of fact responded to, remembered and interpreted—which is indubitably set forth in the New Testament.'²⁶ We cannot discard the historical quest without being, in the long run, faithless to the Gospel which takes a form of historical narrative. We cannot escape the responsibility laid on us by this historic form without weakening our faith.

The question 'Did it happen thus?' is one aspect of our problem. And much of the energies of the scholars in the past has been devoted to this question. Historical events offer a certainty that is not available in any other mode. The question that children ask on hearing fairy stories, 'Did it happen?' or 'Is it true?' is based on a deep human sense of values.

²⁴ H. E. W. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

²⁵ Criticism and Faith, p. 37 (*italics author's*).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

What happened cannot be controverted.²⁷ This kind of reliability is one of the consequences of historical certainty.

We have to ask whether we can find a further significance in the historical event that is the foundation of the Christian Church. We ask not only 'Did it happen so?' but 'Why did it have to happen?' Here I believe we come close to the mystery of time. Augustine has said, 'If anyone asks me what time is I cannot say: If no one asks me I know very well.'²⁸ Aristotle's definition that 'Time is the measure of motion and motion is the measure of time'²⁹ is not particularly illuminating or helpful for our purpose. Time is not merely 'that which prevents things from happening together' (Bergson), but time is that which makes any happening possible at all. Wheeler Robinson's words are pertinent here: 'The time process can be said to exist for the sake of creating the actual, that which is brought into being once and for all and cannot *qua* event ever be altered.'³⁰ Time certainly is that which underlies history and makes history possible. Time understood in this manner is one aspect of the created universe and our being as well as our knowledge is subject to time. Humanity becomes actual in time, and that process is history.

The two Greek words used for time, *chronos* and *kairos*, may be helpful in our thinking here. The former stands for unchanging, characterless time; the latter for opportunity, occasion. So we may say that history is in effect the transformation of *chronos* into *kairos*. It is the making and using of opportunities where human freedom and will come into play that make history. Thus what would have been meaningless passage of nights and days becomes a series of actions and events of consequence.³¹

Time understood both as *chronos* and as *kairos* is part of our created existence. Time as *chronos* is the measure of our bondage to nature. Time as *kairos* is the measure of our freedom and of the redemption of time into purposeful and meaningful actuality. That something happens means that something is made actual, effective for us. That God revealed

²⁷ 'While all the ideal values may remain if you impugn the historic record set forth in the Gospels, these ideal values are not *certified* to the common man as inherent in the very nature of things.' H. G. Wood: *Christianity and the Nature of History*, p. 28.

²⁸ *Confessions*, XI, 14.

²⁹ *Physics*, IV, xii, 220.

³⁰ *Redemption and Revelation*, p. 60.

³¹ 'History is a movement effected by God which challenges man and gives him his destiny and his task. In this situation time cannot become a matter of indifference as merely the material form of life over which rises, as man's real home, the reality of the spirit with its regular and ordered world. But time becomes rather the unrecurrent reality which is given by God and which urges man to a decision; the reality which inexorably calls for a decision here and now and permits no rest in some secure position which is valid once for all.' W. Eichrodt: *Man in the Old Testament*, p. 37.

Himself in Christ, that He reconciled the world unto Himself in Christ, means that these are made effective and actual in a way that no universal truth can. There may be some truth in the saying that the Cross is in reality an eternal factor in the heart of God, but that Cross remains ineffective *for us* until a Cross is set up on Calvary.

It is here that the significance of the contrast between the Christian concern with certain particular historical events and persons and the neo-Hindu claim that the truth that the divine enters human life is the important thing and not whether Jesus or Krishna lived becomes noticeable. Radhakrishnan claims that 'the Hindu philosophy of religion starts from and returns to an experimental basis', which is not dependent on any 'particular historical datum'.³² This certainly has an attractiveness; it seems to save us from certain uncertainties and ambiguities that attend on our historical knowledge. But it attempts to escape the conditions of human existence where an event in time has a validity not otherwise obtainable.

Incarnation involved His coming into history, being subject to time. Altering a line of the *Te Deum* it is possible to say 'When Thou tookest upon thee to deliver man, Thou didst not abhor existence in time'. This was because identification with human existence made this necessary. This was the highest actuality possible for human beings. History is the realm where the empty potentialities of time as *chronos* are filled with what is actual. The Christian conception of eternity is not unrelated to time. The historical character of Christianity conceives 'eternity as manifesting and incarnating itself in time'.³³ The Biblical conception of God implies involvement in time and history.

Just as we emphasize the importance of time and history in Christian thinking, we should recognize the limits of historical enquiry. I mentioned above that faith cannot be produced by historical investigation. We can go further and say that there are certain events mentioned in the Gospel where the usual types of historical investigation cannot take us far. Bultmann has pointed out that 'the Resurrection cannot—in spite of 1 Cor. 15:3-8—be demonstrated or made plausible as an objectively ascertainable fact on the basis of which one could believe'.³⁴ This is perhaps true. A scientific investigator, whose thinking tools do not include ideas like the resurrection, obviously cannot go beyond saying that 'something happened which the followers of Jesus interpreted as resurrection.' It has been argued that the empty tomb was the physical substratum of that event whose meaning was the resurrection.³⁵ The presence of God

³² The Hindu View of Life, p. 19.

³³ N. Berdyaev: The Meaning of History, p. 67.

³⁴ R. Bultmann: The Theology of the New Testament I, p. 305.

³⁵ William Lillie: 'The Empty Tomb and the Resurrection' in D. E. Nineham and others: Historicity and Chronology in the New Testament. S.P.C.K. Theological Collections, 6, p. 134.

in history is obviously seen and known only by faith and not by historical investigation.³⁶ But it is also true that meaning and significance for us human beings does not float unattached, as it were, to historical realities.

We become what we are by what we do. Any particular action is less than what we are and is controlled by what we are. But what we are is the sum total of all our choices and decisions, our actions, performed in time. History is the realm where values are actualized, where we become what we are. It is into this realm of actualization or making actual that Christ came that He might be one with us.

This certainly is a scandal to many. Particularity is seen by some as a symbol of unreality, of lack, but the Christian affirmation is that the particular is the real, the effective and actual. M. M. Thomas has recently pointed out the similarities between the theological demythologization and the message of inward self-realization in Hinduism. He goes on: 'Either it is the great moment of spiritual communication between Hinduism and Christianity or it is a betrayal of the Christian faith. I am inclined to consider the latter; one cannot help but note that both of them starting from different pre-suppositions have come to the same a-historical spiritual core. To my understanding the Easter faith involves both the subjectivity of faith and the objectivity of *happenedness* in an inseparable relatedness.'³⁷

It is this faith, scandalous in its particularity ('unto the Greeks foolishness') that can sustain us in the uncertainties and ambiguities of our historical existence, because His life was lived under the same conditions. It is worth noting in passing that the earthly life of Jesus is summed up in the Creed in the words '*Suffered* under Pontius Pilate'. It is truth, not understood in abstract grandeur, but in concrete life situations, that can enlighten us effectively.

In conclusion it may be mentioned that the belief in the resurrection goes with the acceptance of this kind of meaning for history. Immortality of the soul, as distinct from the resurrection of the dead, tends to isolate the soul, showing it a way of escape from the historical; neither history, i.e. life, nor death has any real significance. But resurrection affirms the reality and significance of life as well as of death. Resurrection is an affirmation of the historical, based on faith in the power of God, that accepts and transcends the limits of history. Time and

³⁶ Cf. 'History may be able to demonstrate a process of social evolution with clear contacts and relationships, but history cannot say whether or not this process is the work of God. That is a question of faith, and cannot be answered on any other basis than that of faith. It is not a matter of establishing facts; it is a matter of interpreting the meaning of facts.' Millar Burrows: *More Light on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, p. 43.

³⁷ M. M. Thomas: *Gospel and History in India. 'Religion and Society'* (Bangalore), XII, 4, p. 41. (1965).

history certainly place absolute limits on man's achievements, his values, his culture. Death is the inescapable boundary which we do not and cannot cross in our own strength. But resurrection affirms man's achievements and values, not on the basis of man's immortal soul, but on that of the power of God who raised the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead.