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EVIDENCE, ENTITLED BELIEF, AND THE GOSPELS

Nicholas Wolterstorff

In this paper I discuss the conditions under which a person is entitled to believe the gospels. And in particular, I have my eye on the Enlightenment thesis that one is not entitled to do so unless one has collected adequate evidence concerning the reliability of the writers and the content of what they said, and has adequately appraised this evidence. There is no way of answering our question, however, without asking it with respect to some interpretation of the gospels. Accordingly I explain and use Hans Frei's contention, that the gospels are identity narratives concerning Jesus of Nazareth.

Human beings in good measure live by tradition until their traditions are in crisis. The philosophers of the Enlightenment regarded the traditions of Europe as in deep crisis. In their judgment those traditions were the cause of pervasive benightedness, chicanery, and oppression. But even apart from that, the Reformation had fragmented the moral and religious traditions of Europe so that even if one still wished to live by tradition, one now had to choose which one.

It was in full awareness of this social crisis, and in response thereto, that the proto-Enlightenment philosopher John Locke insisted that, insofar as the press of one's other obligations permitted, one ought to *examine* what is handed over to one as tradition before accepting it. Of course Socrates had long before insisted on examining tradition. For Socrates, examination was a social enterprise, of one person propounding a thesis and others offering refutations—the Socratic *elenchos*. The examination proposed by Locke and embraced by the Enlightenment was different, not inherently social: Given a thesis, one first collects adequate evidence pro and con; one then adequately scrutinizes the relation of the thesis to the evidence so as to determine the probability of the former on the latter; and finally, one believes or disbelieves the thesis with a firmness proportioned to the probability one has determined it to have on the evidence. For the sake of convenience, let me call this complex activity, the *evidential* activity.

Some propositions are immediately evident to one or seen by one to be entailed by such. For such, one need not perform the evidential activity. But for any other proposition, being *entitled* to believe it is conditional on one's performance of this evidential activity—once again, insofar as time permits. In particular,

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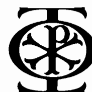

being entitled to accept what is handed down as tradition is conditional on having performed the evidential activity.

At the center of the moral and religious traditions of the West was the Bible—handed down as tradition and within tradition. The thinkers of the Enlightenment, including Locke, did not shrink from applying their entitlement thesis to believing the Bible. Some thought that the result of practicing the evidential activity on religious convictions would be the disappearance of "revealed religion" in favor, at most, of "natural religion." Others did not anticipate this result. But all agreed that one is entitled to believe what the biblical writers say only if one has *first* performed the evidential activity on that. Sapere aude!

In this paper I want to assess the acceptability of this "*not entitled to . . . unless*" thesis concerning believing the Bible—or rather, I want to consider its acceptability for the gospels, not on this occasion for the Bible in general. My discussion will thus probe one of the deepest points of contact and conflict between the Christian tradition and the mentality of the Enlightenment—a mentality which in large measure became, and in large measure remains, the mentality of modernity.

I shall not here ask what constitutes adequate evidence nor how one tells when one has it. Neither will I ask what constitutes adequate appraisal of evidence. Nor will I inquire into the nature of probability. All obscurities in these concepts—and they are rich in obscurities—will on this occasion be set off to the side so that we can focus on the heart of the matter: Is it true that to be entitled to believe what the gospel writers say one must first do this other thing: Perform the evidential activity? On this occasion I shall not even inquire into the proportionality thesis: That one ought to proportion the firmness of one's belief to the strength of one's evidence for it.

Among those who have rejected the Lockean thesis, some have espoused alternative proposals as to things one must do before one is permitted to believe the gospels. Though here I cannot consider those alternative proposals, our discussion will provide material useful for appraising them. And by the end we will have learned something about the proper role of Reason and reasoning in our lives, and something about the dynamics which lead to acceptance of tradition and our obligations with respect to those dynamics.

But there is an obstacle that the epistemologist must deal with before he can even set out on his inquiry. A vast variety of interpretations have been offered of the gospels. And different interpretations raise different epistemological issues; the epistemological considerations raised by Kant's interpretation are fundamentally different from those raised by a "literalist" interpretation. Thus the epistemologist has to choose an interpretation, or type of interpretation, with which to work. How is he to make his choice?

One feature of hermeneutics and epistemology in the contemporary world is

that they almost always go their separate ways. Especially is this true of hermeneutics in the continental tradition and epistemology in the Anglo-American tradition. Each typically thinks the other obscure or naive or both. Because I regard this indifference and scorn as regrettable, my aim will be to work with an interpretation of the gospels which, in its main lines, not only seems plausible to me but has standing in the hermeneutical community.

But let us back up a moment. Why not understand the activity of interpretation in general as the attempt to discover what a text says, and then pose our epistemological questions concerning what the gospel texts say? Why let hermeneutics get in the way of epistemology?

The tempting answer is that there are disputes over what the gospel-texts say. The correct answer is that there is no such thing as *what a text says*. Of course, strictly and literally only persons say things, not texts. But that is not my point. Even in a metaphorical sense there is no such thing, for a text, as what it says. And so no such thing as discovering what it says. Interpretation, at bottom, is not a matter of discernment but of choice and habit. We human beings *adopt* interpretations of texts and *follow rules which assign* interpretations to texts—often without deliberation. But for every text it is possible to adopt other interpretations or follow other rules assigning interpretations. To arrive at an interpretation of a text one needs more than careful reading of the text. One needs a *purpose* which the interpretation is to serve or a *criterion* which it is to satisfy. Different purposes and criteria lead to different interpretations of the same text.

Most of us most of the time for most texts want an interpretation which coincides with what the writer used the text to say. (Not with what he *intended* to use it to say; with what he *did* use it to say.) But sometimes we have goals which lead us to adopt other interpretations. The church in its liturgical use of the Psalms has long operated with interpretations far removed from what the original authors meant (said) with the text.

In saying what I have been saying, what have I been taking an interpretation to be? More specifically, what is the *ontological status* of that? An interpretation has, as its core, sequences of speech actions. And most of those speech actions can be ontologically assayed as states of affairs coupled with actions performed on those states of affairs: the action of asserting, of fictionalizing, or whatever. It is this core on which I shall focus my attention in what follows. Let it be added that this core does not exhaust what I mean by *an interpretation*. Texts typically have significance beyond the speech actions associated with them by the adoption of an interpretation; some of this also belongs to an interpretation.[1] By way of contrast to my usage here, there are things called "interpretations"—Freudian interpretations, for example—which are not speech actions associated with a text but explanations of the origins of the text.

I have not said, and will not try to say, what it is that one does with a text

and a sequence of speech actions when one adopts the latter *as an interpretation* of the former. The point I have wanted to make about adopting an interpretation is just that, for any text, one has options. Of course there are limits on the options. One cannot properly adopt a sequence of speech actions as an interpretation of a text unless it is possible to perform those speech actions with that text.

But if we are fully to understand why hermeneutics gets in the way of epistemology when we want to reflect on the phenomenon of accepting the gospels, we must do more than notice that, at bottom, interpretations of texts are to be adopted rather than discerned. For in principle there might be a *standard* interpretation of the gospel texts in a certain community—in the church, for example. If there were, it would be eminently relevant to ask: Under what circumstances would one be entitled to believe the *standard* interpretation of the gospels?

Though in the late antique and medieval worlds there was, apparently, a more or less standard interpretation of the gospels in the church, at least of their so-called "literal sense," that is no longer the case. Several developments have caused the change. Perhaps most important is that the canonical function of the gospels in the church, when combined with "the modern mind," gives powerful impetus to the devising of new interpretations.

For a community to take a text as canonical is to bind itself to use that text in certain ways. Those ways may be, and usually are, diverse. The community, for example, may bind itself to use the text liturgically. Yet it is typical, if not definitive, of canonical functioning that the text is regarded and treated by the community as *authoritative* for its beliefs and practices. This, in turn, typically has two sides: the community binds itself to believe (some, at least, of) the content of the interpretations to be adopted of its texts. And the community binds itself to treat its interpretations as authoritative for the process of arriving at beliefs on other matters. My phrase, "the community binds itself to believe (treat)" is intentionally ambiguous. The members of the community may hold that they have an obligation to do this. Or they may hold that one has an obligation not to ally oneself with the community unless one does this.

Imagine, then, a community and a text such that the members of the community believe that the text ought to function among them in ways which we (theoreticians) would describe as functioning canonically. Sometimes there will be a preference in the community for a certain version of the text—the community may even *authorize* a certain version. And always in such a community there will be the social practice of interpreting the text. As a consequence of the presence of that practice there will be preferred (though usually, nonetheless, contested) *methods* of interpreting the text, maybe even authorized methods. And for some or all of the text there may even be an authorized *interpretation*. The more or less articulate views in the community as to the canonical functioning of the text will include views as to what in the acceptable interpretations is

authoritative for life, and for which dimensions of life it is authoritative. A community can take a text as authoritative without regarding everything in it as authoritative and without regarding all of life as falling under its authority. (For example, authoritative "for faith and morals" but not for science.)

Now suppose someone argues to the community that at some points its hitherto-acceptable interpretations of its hitherto-acceptable versions cannot function, or should not function, in accord with the community's convictions concerning the authority of such interpretations. Then, if the argument is at all persuasive, the community will be cast into crisis, be it major or minor. In the extreme case, the community will respond by removing the offending text from its canon. Short of that, it has a variety of ways of extricating itself from crisis. It can reject the argument and continue on its established course. Or conceding the cogency of the argument, it can change its views on canonical functioning, or adopt new interpretations, or (sometimes) embrace new versions of the text.

What I have presented as a thought-experiment has in fact happened to the church in modern times with respect to its canonically functioning scriptures—in particular, with respect to the gospels. The church traditionally took the gospel writers to be assertively uttering the words of the text. And traditionally it took its commitment to the canonicity of these writings as including the obligation to believe what the writers said—the obligation to take as true the what-the-writer-asserted interpretation of the text. But many over the past three centuries have argued that they cannot, or that we should not, believe all that. This has loosed the whirlwind. All the strategies mentioned above have been followed without, for very many of the predicaments, consensus emerging as to which strategy is best. However, in many cases members of the church, wishing to preserve the canonical status of the gospels but finding themselves incapable of believing the older interpretations, have sought to ease the tension by adopting new interpretations. Thus it is that there is no longer such a thing as a standard interpretation.

What have been the claims of the dissenters? Many different claims. But four sorts have been prominent:

(1) That among the gospels there are discrepancies of such a sort that the members of a pair of writers cannot both be correct in what they claim to have happened.

(2) That we have good and sufficient reason, from sources external to the gospels, to suppose that some of the events which the writers claim to have happened did not happen—that we have good and sufficient reason, for example, to not believe that Jesus performed the "signs and wonders" attributed to him.[2]

(3) That we have good and sufficient reason to suppose that the interpretation of the identity of Jesus which the gospel writers present is not accurate.

(4) That we have good and sufficient reason to suppose that what the gospel writers say is incorrect with respect to its 'particularity.'[3]

II

All texts allow for different interpretations; and no longer is there in the church a standard interpretation of the gospels. That is what makes picking an interpretation about which we can raise our epistemological question a problematical matter. Of course it remains open to pick as one's interpretation what the writer (redactor) used the text to say. But since there is a multiplicity of views as to what the gospel writers used their texts to say, this does not deliver us from our predicament.

Perhaps, though, there is less reason for despair on this latter point than there appears to be. For perhaps most of the interpretations which have been proposed in modern times violate some general principle for determining what the writers used these texts to say. That, in any case, was the argument of Hans Frei in his now well-known book, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*.[4] I propose making use of Frei's argument for our endeavor.

The core of Frei's argument can be simply stated. Large parts of the Bible in general and of the gospels in particular, belong to the literary genre of *realistic narrative*. Any proposed interpretation of the gospels which does not appropriately acknowledge that genre of the text is unacceptable as a construal of what the gospel writers meant. In fact, however, most of the innovative interpretations offered over the last two centuries violate this criterion.[5]

Frei always credited Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* with first delineating the genre of realistic narrative and with pointing out that the gospels, for the most part, belong to that genre. Let me quote, somewhat lengthily, Frei's best delineation of the genre:

> By speaking of the narrative shape of these accounts, I suggest that what they are about and how they make sense are functions of the depiction or narrative rendering of the events constituting them—including their being rendered, at least partially, by the device of chronological sequence . . . . There are, of course, other kinds of stories that merely illustrate something we already know; and there are other stories yet that function in such a way as to express or conjure up an insight or an affective state that is beyond any and all depiction so that stories, though inadequate, are best fitted for the purpose because they are evocations, if not invocations, of a common archetypal consciousness or a common faith. In both of these latter cases the particular rendering is not indispensable, though it may be helpful to the point being made . . . .
>
> This is one of the chief characteristics of a narrative that is "realistic."

> In that term I include more than the indispensability of the narrative shape, including chronological sequence, to the meaning, theme, or subject matter of the story. The term realistic I take also to imply that the narrative depiction is of that peculiar sort in which characters or individual persons, in their internal depth or subjectivity as well as in their capacity as doers and sufferers of actions or events, are firmly and significantly set in the context of the external environment, natural but more particularly social. Realistic narrative is that kind in which subject and social setting belong together, and characters and external circumstances fitly render each other. Neither character nor circumstance separately, nor yet their interaction, is a shadow of something else more real or more significant. Nor is the one more important than the other in the story. "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?" asked Henry James.
>
> In all these respects—inseparability of subject matter from its depiction or cumulative rendering, literal rather than symbolic quality of the human subject and his social context, mutual rendering of character, circumstance, and their interaction—a realistic narrative is like a historical account.[6]

From this it is clear that, on Frei's view, there are two defining marks of realistic narrative. The one he mentions first is the one to which he most often appeals in his rejection of a wide range of modern interpretations of the gospels. The second—which unlike the first is strictly a genre of projected world rather than of text—comes to the fore when he elucidates the structure of his own interpretation of the gospels in his later book, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*.

What exactly is that first characteristic? Let me put into my own words what seems to me Frei's point. In an earlier work of mine, *Works and Worlds of Art*,[7] I developed the notion of *the projected world of a text for the author*: that conjunction of states of affairs such that the author's inscription of the text *counts as* his performing one and another kind of mood-action on those states of affairs. The projected world is that, along with whatever else would be appropriately extrapolated from that conjunction. Shortly I will clarify the notion of *counting as*. As to my neologism, "mood-action," I think its meaning will be communicated sufficiently for our purposes here if I cite just a few examples: asserting, commanding, asking, and fictionally presenting.

The fact that I do speak simply of the projected world of a text but rather of the projected world of a text *for its author* reflects the point made earlier, that texts do not themselves *say* something. Frei, however, regularly talks as if texts do just say something, and thereby do just have correct interpretations. I think that is due, in whole or in part, to the fact that though he has his eye on projected

worlds, he speaks of these as the *meanings* of texts.[8] For texts *do* just have meanings. A text is always a text in a language. It consists of a sequence of sentences in a language and those sentences have meanings in that language. But it is of prime importance to notice that the state of affairs we project with a sentence (and the mood in which we project it) can differ from one occasion to another without there being any difference of meaning in the sentence(s) we use. If you assertively utter "I feel dizzy" and I assertively utter "I feel dizzy," there is no difference of meaning in the words we have uttered. Yet we have asserted different things. So too, if I use a word in some sentence literally and you use it metaphorically, our words will be the same and will mean the same; but we will have asserted different things.

Of course the word "meaning" is a highly ambiguous word; one would not misuse it if one said, about the case just imagined, that you meant one thing, namely, that *you* felt dizzy, and that I meant a different thing, namely that *I* felt dizzy. It seems likely that what has happened to Frei is that the ambiguity of the word "meaning" has led him to speak of a text as just *having* a meaning, when what he has his eye on is the different phenomenon of someone *meaning something* by writing a text. A *text's* having a meaning is not to be identified with a *person's* meaning something with that text. Text-meaning is different from author-meaning. Frei's concern throughout is clearly with author-meaning.

Let me now, for the moment, blend Frei's parlance with my own. The meaning of a realistic narrative text is its projected world, its story. And that, Frei adds, is the *whole* of its meaning. What is it that Frei wishes to claim by saying that this is the *whole* of its meaning? That is not entirely clear, partly because of the weight Frei places on the slippery word "meaning," partly also because he wishes to exclude a wide range of options all at once. Yet I think one can see what he is driving at.

Frei characteristically says that it is a mistake to suppose that a realistic narrative is *about* something other than itself, a mistake to suppose that it *refers* to something other than itself, a mistake to suppose that its *meaning* lies outside itself. I think the best way to get a clear fix on the point Frei is driving at is to take two of his rejections as paradigmatic for what he wishes to reject in general.

One sort of text which Frei cites as not belonging to the genre of realistic narrative is the fable-text. Aesop, by composing his fable-text, fictionally projected a story; and his doing that *counted*, in turn, as his asserting something else, namely, the 'moral.' Another type of text which Frei cites as not belonging to the genre of realistic narrative is the allegorical text. Bunyan, by composing his allegory-text, fictionally projected a story; and his doing that *counted*, in turn, as his assertive projection of another state of affairs—that one also sequential in structure. Generalizing from these examples, I suggest that the point Frei wishes to make is that realistic narrative texts are texts which are apt for pro-

jecting—either in the assertive or the fictional mode—worlds which in their structure are 'realistic' narratives; and which are not apt for being used in such a way that one's projection of that world (story) counts in turn as one's projecting of yet some other state of affairs.

Of course Frei does not deny that realistic narrative texts often serve to express the feelings of their authors, are often genetically derived from historical episodes, often have consequences in the consciousness and lives of readers. But these are not, as he sees it, relationships of meaning.[9] Suppose we distinguish between two types of action-generation, that is, two ways of doing one thing by doing another: causal-generation and count-generation. By flipping the switch I turn on the light; the connection is a causal one. By turning on the blinkers I signal a left turn; the connection is that of one action counting as another. It appears to be Frei's intuition—sound one, I might add—that only count-generation yields meaning as he means 'meaning.'

The next point in Frei's argument is his claim that most innovative modern proposals as to the author-meaning of the gospels are implausible, given the realistic-narrative genre of these texts. Some have proposed mythical interpretations. But these are obviously not myth texts, says Frei. Some have proposed allegorical interpretations. But these are not allegory texts. Some have proposed fable, or parable, interpretations. But these are not fable or parable texts (though they *contain* some parables). Some have proposed locating the 'meaning' of these texts in the consciousness of those who composed them. But the sole 'meaning' of these texts is the story they are used to tell. Yet others have proposed identifying the 'meaning' of these texts with the various events that took place in first century Palestine which these texts are supposedly 'about.' But that is once again to fly in the face of the fact that the sole meaning of these texts is the story which they project.

Frei offers an account of why this "eclipse" of biblical narrative took place. Commentators on the Bible down through the ages recognized the realistic narrative character of large stretches of the biblical texts—in particular, of the gospels. They identified this history-like character of the text with the "literal" sense of the text; and they identified this, in turn, with the text's being about certain historical events (or perhaps Frei means to say, with the historical events that the text was supposedly about). "In the days before empirical philosophy, Deism, and historical criticism," says Frei, "the realistic feature had naturally been identified with the literal sense which in turn was automatically identical with reference to historical truth."[10]

But then arose the conviction that Jesus had not been resurrected, had not performed signs and wonders; etc. One possible response to this conviction, by those who shared it, would have been to conclude that the gospels perpetrated falsehoods. Very few chose this response, since almost all of them still embraced

the Bible as canon.[11] Hence the whirling search for alternative interpretations—a search which, in Frei's view, over and over bumps up against the stubbornly history-like (realistic narrative) character of these writings.

> Meaning and narrative shape bear significantly on each other. Even if one was convinced that the history-like or realistic character of the narratives finally bespoke an illusion, so that their true history either had to be reconstructed historically or their true sense explained as allegory or myth, the realistic character was still there. This led to the odd situation described above. Some commentators explained the realistic feature by claiming that the stories are reliably or unreliably reported history. Others insisted that they are not, or only incidentally, history and that their real meaning is unconnected with historical reporting. In either case, history or else allegory or myth, the *meaning* of the stories was finally something different from the stories or depictions themselves, despite the fact that this is contrary to the character of a realistic story.[12]

The solution, says Frei, is to recognize clearly that whether or not these are history-like is just a different issue from whether or not the author-meaning of these texts is accurate history. Frei speaks in the counterfactual mood in the following passage, but the thought expressed is his own:

> . . . in order to recognize the realistic narrative feature as a significant element in its own right (viz., as a story's making literal rather than allegorical or mythical or some other nonliteral sense regardless of whether the literal sense is also a reliable factual report) one would have had to distinguish sharply between literal sense and historical reference. And then one would have had to allow the literal sense to stand as the meaning, even if one believed that the story does not refer historically. But commentators, especially those influenced by historical criticism, virtually to a man failed to understand what they had seen when they had recognized the realistic character of biblical narratives, because every time they acknowledged it they thought this was identical with affirming not only the history-likeness but also a degree of historical likelihood of the stories. Those who wanted to affirm their historical factuality used the realistic character or history-likeness as evidence in favor of this claim, while those who denied the factuality also finally denied that the history-likeness was a cutting feature—thus in effect denying that they had seen what they had seen because (once again) they thought history-likeness identical with at least potentially true history.
>
> In both affirmative and negative cases, the confusion of history-like-

> ness (literal meaning) and history (ostensive reference), and the hermeneutical reduction of the former to an aspect of the latter meant that one lacked the distinctive category and the appropriate interpretive procedure for understanding what one had actually recognized: the high significance of the literal, narrative shape of the stories for their meaning. And so, one might add, it has by and large remained ever since.[13]

III

The story is the meaning of the gospel text, says Frei. And acknowledging that the story is realistic (history-like) in character carries no implication whatsoever as to whether the story is accurate history, or even *meant* as history. Once these points are granted, then two very different projects loom before one: the project of historical criticism and the project of literary criticism. Frei's great contribution was to have seen with clarity and argued with cogency that these are indeed two distinct projects. The gospels, he says, "tell a story of salvation, an inalienable ingredient of which is the rendering of Jesus as Messiah, and . . . whether or not he was so in historical fact, or thought of himself as Messiah (i.e., whether the story refers or not) or whether the notion of a Messiah is still a meaningful notion, are different questions altogether. To the 'narrative' perspective, these latter questions would have to do not with meaning or hermeneutics but with an entirely separable historical and theological judgment."[14]

But once the distinction is drawn clearly between the structure and character of the author-meaning of these texts, and the events of first-century Palestine, does not the person with religious interests turn from the former to the latter—from literary criticism to historical criticism? Does not Frei's argument have the consequence, ironically, that the motivation for historical criticism is not diminished but clarified and strengthened?

Eclipse gives no decisive answer to this question. It appears, however, to take the opposite turn from that proposed by this imagined objector. Frei shares the church's embrace of the Bible as canon. And he applauds what he describes as the "pre-modern" view that to accept the Bible as canon is to struggle to fit oneself into its storied universe.[15] For the person of religious concerns, the *narrative* counts.

What is not at all clear is what Frei has in mind as his rationale for this view. Frei's pre-modern predecessors were clear: We try to fit ourselves into the biblical story because that story tells us what happened. Indeed, it tells us of the most important things that have *ever* happened. Our weal depends on how we relate ourselves to those happenings. In *Eclipse* Frei appears to reject this rationale. With what does he mean to replace it? Does he believe that the narrative all by

itself serves to 'edify' the church?

The ambiguities of *Eclipse* are resolved by Frei's later book, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*. There he makes clear that he is not advocating a scripto-centric version of Christianity. In the Preface he says that he affirms the resurrection of Christ "as an indispensable Christian claim"; and the book itself is the out-working of that affirmation. This affirmation does not lead Frei to plunge into historical criticism. That continues to be of little interest to him.[16] Nonetheless he says that to be a believer is at some point to "make the transition from literary description to factual, historical, and theological judgment . . . ."[17]

This position also counts as Frei's answer to another way of responding to his main argument. I have said that Frei, along with all or almost all of those he criticizes, was concerned with the author-meaning of the gospels. But suppose that someone proposes discarding this concern. That seems to me to have been, in fact, what Kant proposed in his *Religion within the Limits of Reason*. Of course anyone who proposes this still has to cope with the realistic narrative character of these texts. Nonetheless, one's freedom is at once expanded if one no longer aims to adopt an interpretation which coincides with the author-meaning of these texts.

The terminology in which Frei conducts his argument prevents him from ever seeing this option with clarity. Yet one can surmise what his response would be. It would have two parts. The attempt to fit ourselves into the story projected by the gospel writers continues to be of benefit to the church. And whether or not Jesus had the identity that the gospel writers say he had/has remains of intense religious importance to the church, and indeed to all humanity.

IV

Before we turn to Frei's explication of the author-meaning of the gospels, let me reflect briefly on his picture of interpretation and explication as autonomous, texts-focussed, activities—a picture, I might add, that he shared with the New Critics in literary studies. I shall confine myself to points relevant to our project in this paper.

Suppose one shares with Frei the goal of adopting as one's interpretation of a text that which the writer used the text to say. Then surely taking Flaubert's works as fiction rather than history belongs to adopting an interpretation of his text, as does taking Gibbon's works as history rather than fiction. For what someone used a text to say consists of the speech actions he performed by his use of the text. And a speech action consists not only of a state of affairs but of a stance taken up toward that state of affairs. Frei, however, regularly speaks of the interpreter as having nothing to say on the issue of whether the gospels were meant as fiction or history. He observes, correctly, that the texts can be

used either way. He also observes, again correctly, that though their history-likeness makes them suitable for history, it does not establish that the world they were used to project actually occurred. But from this it does not follow that hermeneutics is unconcerned with the determination: History or fiction. What the historian asserts may be false and what the fictioneer projects may be true. So truth and falsehood do not determine whether a text is used for history or fiction. That is determined by the *mood* of the projection. But the mood belongs to what the author meant with the text.

Just as adopting an interpretation of a text is, in this way, not an autonomous, text-focussed, procedure, so also *explicating* an interpretation already adopted is not such a procedure. Consider the following passage from Frei's *Eclipse*: The position "that the *authority* of the Bible for belief is gone . . . was universally rejected among theologians and non-theologians. One either claimed that the texts really do mean what they state, that salvation comes through Jesus Christ alone and that this is a significant and not an anachronistic statement; or else one said that this, taken literally, would be an insignificant statement and therefore cannot be what the texts mean."[18] To this passage let us add a sentence which occurs just a bit more than a page later: "Hermeneutically, it may well be the most natural thing to say that what these accounts are about is the story of Jesus the Messiah, even if there was no such person . . . ."[19]

Let us suppose that the gospel texts contain the sentences "Salvation comes through Jesus Christ alone" and "Jesus is the Messiah." Let us suppose further that the interpretation we want to adopt is that consisting of what the first writer/redactor of these gospel texts used them to say. We now want to get a firm grip on the actual structure and content of these interpretations—on the content of these projected-worlds-cum-modes-of-projection. We want, in short, to *explicate* our interpretation.

So suppose that when the writer of the text wrote, "Salvation comes through Jesus Christ alone," he was referring to the existent person Jesus from Nazareth. Then for the projected state of affairs to occur there would have to be this person and salvation would have to come through him alone. Whether the world is projected in the assertive or in the fictive mood makes no difference to this.

Now consider the alternative possibility. Suppose that Jesus from Nazareth had not existed. Then no one could refer to him, no one could tell a story about him; etc. Frei says that "even if there was no such person," nonetheless "what these accounts are about is the story of Jesus the Messiah." Perhaps that is true—though I myself would have said that the accounts *present* to us the story rather than that they are *about* the story. But in any case, if Jesus of Nazareth had not existed, then these accounts would not have been about *him*, the writers would not have referred to *him*, etc. And so, different states of affairs would have been projected, states of affairs which do not entail the existence of Jesus.

The projected worlds of the two cases are different. Hence it is that explication, understood as the procedure of describing the contents and structure of the interpretation adopted, is not an autonomous procedure, to be conducted simply by studying texts. What one judges to be the content of the interpretation depends (among other things) on which words of the text one takes to have been used to refer. And that is not, in general, to be determined by scrutinizing the words.

But now thirdly, let us reflect on Frei's insistence that canonicity not be allowed to put pressure on hermeneutics. As we have seen, Frei operates with the assumption that a text inherently has a meaning; and he regards interpretation as the attempt to discern that meaning. If one thinks along these lines, then obviously canonicity is irrelevant to interpretation.[20] But once we see that arriving at an interpretation of a text presupposes an act of *practical* reason, then it is no longer obvious that a community's desire to use a text canonically is irrelevant to its choice as to which interpretation to adopt. Frei argues with great cogency that the genre of the gospel texts imposes stringent restrictions on what can properly be adopted as an interpretation—restrictions which most modern innovative interpretations have violated. But it remains true that the genre does not close down the range of allowable interpretations to just one.

I share Frei's assumption that there are powerful reasons, in the case of the gospels, for the church to adopt as its preferred interpretation that which the writers used these texts to say.[21] But for that choice, reasons are indeed needed; alternatives cannot all be dismissed out of hand as not even qualifying as interpretations. And it would be wise to remember that the New Testament writers, in the interpretations they adopted of Old Testament texts, often chose differently.

V

Frei's project in *The Identity of Jesus Christ* was to explicate the overall structure of that interpretation of the gospels which he had adopted. Though the gospels are oriented entirely around the person Jesus of Nazareth, they are not biography in the contemporary mode. They are, says Frei, narratives designed to answer the question, "Who is Jesus"? They offer "a rendering of the identity of Jesus" in history-like form.

Frei (along with most others) sees the gospel narratives as coming in three relatively distinct parts: Jesus before his public ministry; the public ministry; and the passion and resurrection of Jesus. Frei's view is that though we are not "to ignore the story of Jesus' ministry in identifying him,"[22] nonetheless ". . . Jesus' individual identity comes to focus directly in the passion-resurrection narrative rather than in the account of his person and teaching in his earlier ministry. It is in this final and climactic sequence that the storied Jesus is most of all himself . . . we are confronted with him directly as the unsubstitutable

individual who is what he does and undergoes and is manifested directly as who he is."[23] And what is "the identity of Jesus," as presented in the gospels?

> He is the man from Nazareth who redeemed men by his helplessness, in perfect obedience enacting their good in their behalf. As that same one, he was raised from the dead and manifested to be the redeemer. As that same one, Jesus the redeemer, he cannot *not* live, and to conceive of him as not living is to misunderstand who he is.[24]

Though Frei is certainly right in claiming that Jesus' role of redeemer is essential to his identity as presented in the gospels, to me it appears that Jesus' role of *authoritative spokesman for and about God* is also essential. And if that is so, then the second main part of the gospel narratives, the part concerned with Jesus' public ministry, carries more significance than Frei grants to it. But that can pass here. For on his central claim, that the gospels are meant principally to answer the question, "Who was/is this person Jesus?"—about that, it seems to me, Frei is right.

If the central purpose of these narratives is to depict the identity of Jesus, then the intent of the writers is not frustrated if the story, in some of its details, does not match what actually transpired. For it may not have been the writers' intent that it would nor their claim that it did. So as to present the identity of Jesus the writers may sometimes have taken actual episodes but put them into a different order from that in which they actually occurred, have taken things Jesus said on separate occasions and put them into one unified speech, etc. And if that is so, then the attempt to figure out in detail, on the basis of the gospel narrative, what actually happened, is an enterprise whose results will always remain shaky.[25]

Nonetheless, "This one thing historians and novelists have in common," says Frei: "they deal with specific actions and specific human identities. If a novel-like account is about a person who is assumed to have lived, the question of factuality is virtually bound to arise, for psychological if no other reasons, either at specific points or over the whole stretch of the account."[26] We must keep in mind, indeed, that "the force or urgency of the *question* does not make a positive *answer* to it any more credible."[27] Yet the urgency is there. And it is especially powerful when it comes to the narrative of the resurrection. For here there is more involved than just the fact that "the resurrection account, by virtue of its exclusive reference to Jesus, . . . allows and even forces us to ask the question, "Did this actually take place?"[28] "The passion-resurrection account tends to force the question of factuality because the claim is involved as part of the very identity that is described as enacted and manifested in the story-event sequence."[29] That is to say: the identity of Jesus, as presented by the gospels, *requires* that he have been raised from the dead. The resurrection is essential to his presented identity. "(D)isbelief in the resurrection of Jesus is rationally impossible," says Frei;[30] by which he

means, "to conceive of him as not living is to misunderstand who he is."[31] "To think him dead is the equivalent of not thinking of him at all."[32] And so, since the identity of Jesus matters to us religiously, the historicity of his resurrection matters.

At last, then, Frei poses the question: "What is involved in belief in the resurrection?" He makes one last bow to his long line of argument: "Having directed attention all along to the descriptive structure of the accounts and not the factual historicity of their contents, we must say that belief in Jesus' resurrection is more nearly a belief in something like the inspired quality of the accounts than in the theory that they reflect what 'actually took place.'"[33] But then he adds:

> at one point a judgment of faith concerning the inspiration of the descriptive contents and a judgment of faith affirming their central factual claim would have to coincide for the believer. He would have to affirm that the New Testament authors were right in insisting that it is more nearly correct to think of Jesus as factually raised, bodily if you will, than not to think of him in this manner. (But the qualification "more nearly . . . than not" is important in order to guard against speculative explanations of the resurrection from theories of immortality, possibilities of visionary or auditory experience, possibilities of resuscitating dead bodies, miracles in general, etc.)[34]

In what follows, I propose to work with Frei's explication of the author-meaning of the gospels. For this explication of this interpretation satisfies my initial requirement, that it not only seem plausible to me but have standing in the hermeneutical community. For those who do not wish to accept author-meaning as their interpretation, or dispute Frei's explication of that, what follows can be understood hypothetically: If this interpretation and explication are adopted, then what is to be said about conditions for being entitled to believe it?

VI

The question on everybody's lips was, "Who is this person Jesus?"—the mysterious wonder-working, Spirit-filled, charismatic sage and holy man from Nazareth who spoke "with authority." It was a question Jesus himself put to this disciples: "Who do men say that I am? And who do you say that I am?" In narrative fashion the gospel writers present their answer to the question. Their presentations were accepted by that element of the "Jesus-party" which became the church, and were handed down as canonical tradition. Presumably they were accepted because they themselves reflected tradition in the Jesus-party. Saying that he had tried to write "an orderly account," Luke compared his effort to

those of others who had "undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us." He suggested that he, along with those others, had based his narrative on what had been "delivered to us by those who were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word." The gospels are crystallized inscribed tradition. And at the bottom of that tradition is testimony.

What is handed down as tradition can, in general, be accepted in two quite different ways. Sometimes one can inquire independently into its acceptability without taking one's predecessors at their word on anything relevant to the matter; that done, one may find oneself believing what they said, thus accepting the tradition. The other way of accepting what is handed down as tradition is to take one's predecessors at their word—to believe what they said on their say so, on their authority. To take their word for it.

When tradition is complex, then sometimes one can blend these two. The blend may be of different sorts. One blend is this: If part of the tradition stands to other parts as evidence, and one discerns that it does, then one can accept the evidential part on sayso while determining for oneself whether the evidence supports the conclusion.

Though perhaps there are some who accept everything that the gospel writers say on their sayso, there are many who accept what they say in the blended way suggested. However, no one (since the second century) who accepts what they say does so without taking them at their word on some historical matters. Independent access to the propositions they assert is for us much too meager for it to be otherwise. Thus epistemological reflection on the phenomenon of accepting what the gospel writers say requires, unavoidably, reflection on the phenomenon of believing something on someone's sayso. Of course, if the gospel writers had not presented a narrative rendering of the identity of Jesus but propounded general moral claims, or general claims about the human condition, in highly pictorial language, then we might well have had independent access to the propositions they asserted and thus, in principle, found ourselves able to accept what they say without accepting any of it on their sayso.

A necessary condition of believing something on someone's sayso is believing it *because* he said so. His saying it must play a causal role in one's coming to believe. But how, more specifically, does the causal process go?

There has to be available a language for saying things. And then, if I am to believe p on your sayso, you must use the language to say p and I, *in the paradigmatic case*, must have a good enough grasp of the language to *discern* that you said p. My discerning that you said p then causes in me the belief that p. Your sheer utterance of the words might also evoke beliefs in me, as might your manner of uttering them. And in the odd case, the belief evoked by the words or the manner might be a believing of the very same proposition that you asserted. But that would not be believing what you said on your sayso.

What is it to discern that you said *p*? It's at least this: to *believe* that you said *p*. It's more than this, though; because I might come to believe that you said *p* without discerning that you did. But this point leads us to consider whether believing something on someone's sayso is a phenomenon which goes beyond the paradigmatic case in which I *discern* what you said. Suppose that I come to believe that you said *p* not by discerning that you did through attending to your words but by being told that you did, or inferring it. May I not nonetheless believe what you said on your sayso? It appears to me that I can. So I suggest that no matter how I come to believe that you said *p*, if I correctly believe that you said *p*, and this believing of mine immediately causes in me the belief that *p*, then I believe *p* on your sayso.

What is the qualifier *immediately* meant to do here? It's meant to eliminate cases of rationally grounded inference to *p* from my belief that you said *p*, coupled with my belief that *p* is a logically or causally necessary condition of your saying *p*. Suppose I reason: "You said *p*; but you couldn't say *p* without *p* being true; so *p*." Then I don't believe *p* on your sayso.

But suppose I have beliefs about the reliability of certain types of speech and that, appealing to some such conviction, I reason as follows: "Type such-and-such of speech is reliable; *your saying p* belongs to that type; so probably *p*." And suppose that this reasoning leads me to believe not just that *probably p* but that *p*. Or suppose my reasoning goes thus: Your saying *p* belongs to a reliable speech type (i.e., some reliable speech type or other); so probably *p*. Is coming to believe *p* along these lines—call it *reason-grounded* believing—a case of believing *p* on your sayso? Surely it is. Thus the qualifier "immediately" in the principle formulated at the end of the next to last paragraph excludes cases which should not be excluded if it were to be formulated not only as a sufficient, but as a necessary, condition.

One more point on the matter of identifying the phenomenon of believing on sayso. Suppose someone assertively utters "I believe it's snowing," and that my discerning that he said that causes me to believe that it's snowing. Might this not be a case of believing that it's snowing on his sayso? Yet it appears that he did not assert what I believe. For I believe *that it's snowing*. But he appears to have asserted *that he believes that it's snowing*.

Appearances are deceiving. By uttering the sentence "I believe that it's snowing," a person will normally assert not only that he believes it's snowing but that it's snowing. Such cases, then, leave the principle intact that only what one person asserts can another believe on his sayso. Of course it's possible to use the sentence without asserting that it's snowing—for example, by putting heavy stress on the word "believe": "I *believe* that it's snowing." If your saying *that* causes me to believe that it's snowing, then I will believe *p* not on your sayso but (probably) on what I *take to be* your sayso. We often believe something on

what we *take to be* someone's sayso when it is not in fact on their sayso that we take it.

VII

One's believing *that so-and-so said p* causes in one the belief *that p*: This is the phenomenon that constitutes the heart of believing *p* on someone's sayso. One can understand why the Enlightenment philosophers were wary. Our human practice of drawing the appropriate conclusion from a modus ponens argument seems to have an eminently good rationale: We *see* that the conclusion *follows*. Except in the odd case, however, between *that so-and-so said p* and *that p* we do not see any relationship of entailment. Their solution was to insist that believing on sayso ought always to be reason-grounded. And they spoke to the matter of the kinds of reasons and how we get them.

We must in everything be guided by Reason, said Locke—by which he (and his followers) meant: By Reason plus immediate experience. Our beliefs must all be grounded on direct insight into reality. How else are we to be delivered from wandering in darkness? Specifically, then: Having discerned that someone said *p*, we must have available to us adequate evidence that *his saying p* belongs to a reliable speech-type; we must also have available adequate evidence, pro and con, concerning the truth of *p* itself; and only if *p* seems to us more probable than not on adequate scrutiny of all that evidence are we to believe *p* on sayso.

Locke's insistence that it is possible to ground sayso-believing entirely on insight was already decisively attacked by Hume. Hume argued that the inductive inference, from experienced samples of a certain speech-type to the belief that the speech-type as a whole is reliable, is unalterably a product of custom/habit rather than of rational insight. But though Hume thus destroyed the foundationalist underpinnings of Locke's thesis that we are entitled to believe something on sayso only if our doing so is reason-grounded and our reasons acquired by the evidential activity, I see no evidence that Hume disagreed with the thesis itself. After all, Hume too was a person of the Enlightenment, sharing its hostility to unexamined tradition. The honor of first questioning the thesis belongs to Thomas Reid.

Reid's reflections on the topic began with the question: What is the dynamic which accounts for our believing things on sayso? He conceded that sometimes what is at work is reasoning from beliefs produced by induction. But he argued that not all believing on sayso can be analyzed as being of the reason-grounded variety. Some is the output of what he dubbed the *credulity principle*, and which he held to be an innate "original principle of our constitution"[35] implanted in us by God. His argument, persuasive in my judgment, went as follows:

> if nature had left the mind of the hearer *in equilibrio*, without any

> inclination to the side of belief more than to that of disbelief, we should take no man's word until we had positive evidence that he spoke truth . . . . It is evident, that, in the matter of testimony, the balance of human judgment is by nature inclined to the side of belief; and turns to that side of itself, when there is nothing put into the opposite scale. If it was not so, no proposition that is uttered in discourse would be believed, until it was examined and tried by reason; and most men would be unable to find reasons for believing the thousandth part of what is told them . . . .
>
> Children, on this supposition, would be absolutely incredulous; and therefore absolutely incapable of instruction: those who had little knowledge of human life, and of the manners and characters of men, would be in the next degree incredulous: and the most credulous men would be those of greatest experience, and of the deepest penetration; because, in many cases, they would be able to find good reasons for believing the testimony, which the weak and the ignorant could not discover.
>
> In a word, if credulity were the effect of reasoning and experience, it must grow up and gather strength, in the same proportion as reason and experience do. But if it is the gift of nature, it will be strongest in childhood, and limited and restrained by experience; and the most superficial view of human life shows, that the last is really the case, and not the first.[36]

Corresponding to the credulity principle and giving it relevance there is also in human beings, on Reid's view, an innate impulse to assert something only if one believes it to be true—a "principle of veracity":

> This principle has a powerful operation, even in the greatest liars; for, where they lie once, they speak truth a hundred times. Truth is always uppermost, and is the natural issue of the mind. It requires no art of training, no inducement or temptation, but only that we yield to a natural impulse. Lying, on the contrary, is doing violence to our nature; and is never practised, even by the worst men, without some temptation. Speaking truth is like using our natural food, which we would do from appetite, although it answered no end; but lying is like taking physic, which is nauseous to the taste, and which no man takes but for some end which he cannot otherwise attain.[37]

Reid was of the view that the principle of credulity is "unlimited in children, until they meet with instances of deceit and falsehood."[38] Our response to meeting with instances of deceit and falsehood is to begin discriminating between reliable and unreliable types of speech and to form beliefs about these types which then

become available to us as reasons. This has two results. Sometimes the activation of the credulity principle is *checked* by our reasoning that the speech before us is probably false because it is of a type which (we have come by induction to believe) is unreliable. And sometimes the activation of the credulity principle is *overwhelmed* by our believing what was said for the reason that it is probably true, since it is of a type which (we have come by induction to believe) is highly reliable. In the one case reasoning checks the activation of the credulity principle and in the other case it overwhelms it. But if the principle is neither checked nor overwhelmed in a specific case of discerning that someone said something, it does its work. Reason, says Reid,

> learns to suspect testimony in some cases, and to disbelieve it in others, and sets bounds to that authority to which she is at first entirely subject. But still, to the end of life, she finds a necessity of borrowing light from testimony, where she has none within herself, and of leaning in some degree upon the reason of others, where she is conscious of her own imbecility.
>
> And as in many instances, Reason, even in her maturity, borrows aid from testimony; so in others she mutually gives aid to it, and strengthens its authority. For as we find good reason to reject testimony in some cases, so in others we find good reason to rely upon it with perfect security, in our most important concerns. The character, the number, and the disinterestedness of witnesses, the impossibility of collusion, and the incredibility of their concurring in their testimony without collusion, may give an irresistible strength to testimony, compared to which, its native and intrinsic authority is very inconsiderable.[39]

Reid's suggestion, as to why none of us adults displays the unrestrained credulity which he attributes to small children, is that on the basis of induction we acquire beliefs concerning the reliability and unreliability of types of speech, and that these then function as *reasons* for believing or not believing what people say. But this cannot be the whole of the matter. Indeed, it cannot be what is most basic in the matter. For to get the inductive practice going we have to judge on independent grounds that certain items of speech are true and that certain items are false. What accounts for such judgments? Obviously not induction.

Suppose that by the use of my perceptual faculties I come to believe that the window is open—I saw it open, so I believe. But suppose that my mother remarks that it was closed. Normally I will believe my eyes rather than my mother. If this sort of thing happens often enough, the inductive practice will go to work and I will begin to distrust my mother on certain matters (especially if I have an explanation in hand for why she speaks falsely on such matters). But what accounts for my not believing my mother in the first place?

I propose the following model: All of us (after infancy) bring along a *framework of beliefs* to our apprehension of someone saying something. And whether or not we believe *p* on someone's sayso is a function (in part) of what we already believe, of how firmly we believe it, of how we came to believe it, and of whether or not we believe that *p* and our current framework of beliefs might jointly be true.

For a given assertion, one's framework of beliefs may contain one or more beliefs which function as *inhibitors* on one's acceptance of what was asserted, the inhibitors yielding either disbelief or non-belief. Only if one's belief-framework were different with respect to this part of its content would one's discerning that so-and-so said *p* operate on one in such a way as to produce in one the belief that *p*. (If the temporal order is reversed, so that first one believes on sayso and then one acquires the apparently conflicting belief, then the latter belief functions as *eliminator* rather than inhibitor.) The example already given of me, my mother, and the window, is of this sort. But let us have some more significant examples before us. Many in the modern world have come to believe that miracles cannot occur. Provided this belief is held firmly enough, it acts for these persons as an inhibitor on their acceptance of the identity-narrative of the gospels. Again, if I firmly believe that my access to the truth or falsehood of *p* is as good as yours, that will usually inhibit my accepting *p* on your sayso. And if Aquinas is right in his discussion of "faith and reason," then the principle holds that if *p* is self-evident to one, then it is impossible for one to accept *p* on someone's sayso.

Not only do the beliefs that one brings to an episode of someone saying something often act as inhibitors. Sometimes they act instead as *abettors*. That is to say, sometimes the beliefs we already have are a crucial component in the total circumstance which causes us (with such-and-such firmness) to believe something on sayso. Especially beliefs concerning the competence of the speaker and beliefs as to the purity of his motivation function thus. Suppose, for example, that I believe some mathematical proposition *p* because of the self-evidence dynamic: upon grasping it I both find myself compelled to believe it and have that experience classically described as "seeing it to be true." Normally that will act as an inhibitor on my accepting *not-p* on someone's sayso. But if a person whom I believe to be a great mathematical genius remarks to me that *p* is false, I might well come to believe that it is false on his sayso. Or again, many believe that the gospels are God's revelation, or were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Usually such a conviction will not simply be held as a theological belief about scripture but will function epistemically as an *abettor*, leading the person to believe more firmly what the gospel writers say than would otherwise have been the case.

The beliefs we acquire inductively concerning the reliability and unreliability of speech types fit directly into this model. The belief that the speech before me

belongs to an unreliable type often functions as an inhibitor. And the belief that the speech before me is of an unusually reliable type often functions as an abettor.

Let it be noted that an inhibitor/abettor belief concerning the reliability or unreliability of types of speech need not be such that there is some type of *which* I believe that *it* is reliable (unreliable) and that the speech before me is an example of *it*. It may just be the belief that the speech before me belongs to *some* reliable (unreliable) type *or other*. And surely the truth is that our actual discriminations between specimens of reliable and unreliable types of speech are, in their subtlety, far beyond our cognitive ability to single out those types.

One more supplement to Reid's articulation of his perspective is in order. Suppose that upon discerning that someone said *p*, I believe *p* on his sayso. Suppose further that I believe that *his saying p* is an example of a highly reliable type of speech. It doesn't follow that I believe what he said *for the reason that* it is an example of a highly reliable type of speech (from which I inferred that *p* is probably true—this causing me to believe *p* itself). It may still be that my discerning that he said *p* produces in me immediately the belief that *p*, with no mediation of reasoning/inference—by the activation of the credulity principle. In short, even if I *have* reasons for believing *p* on his sayso, my believing him may not be reason-*grounded*. If my belief that his speech is of a reliable type functions at all in the situation, it may function as an abettor without functioning as a reason. It is my own impression that the credulity principle is less often overwhelmed by reasoning than Reid seems to suggest. Even for adults, believing on sayso is pervasively the product of our credulity principle. Similar comments are to be made, *mutatis mutandis*, for the working of inhibitors.

And how does the Lockean thesis look when regarded from a Reidian perspective? It looks preposterous. We can't even bring it about that all our believing on sayso is reason-grounded, let alone bringing it about that all such believing has been prefaced by the evidential activity. The reason is not that striving thus to eliminate unexamined tradition from our lives conflicts with other duties of ours. The reason is that there could not be a human life of this sort. For there could not be a human life without a human community. And there could not be a human community, nor could persons be inducted into the community, without the transmission of beliefs from one person to another by way of the credulity principle. It is fantasy to suppose that one could suspend one's acceptance on sayso of all that one's fellow human beings have told one and hold it all up to judgment. All we can do is stand *within* our framework of beliefs, many of them acquired by believing on sayso, and test some of what has been told us by holding it up against other things told us—and now and then test some of it by looking, listening, tasting, calculating, reflecting, recalling, etc. Examination of tradition is always conducted within tradition unexamined.

VIII

It will be said that this is an outmoded point to be making. Almost no one anymore believes the Lockean thesis. Locke's thesis had some plausibility given his foundationalism; remove that, and there's little to be said for it. But one would have to search long and hard nowadays to find a defender of Locke's classical foundationalism. So why belabor the point?

On this occasion I have rejected the Lockean thesis not for its presumed foundationalism but for the reason that it holds out before us the illusory ideal of eradicating from our existence the phenomenon of immediately believing what someone says on their sayso and of replacing it with reason and insight. But let us take the objection as a challenge to carry the discussion farther.

Locke assumed that to be fully entitled to believe on their sayso what someone said, one had to believe it *for the reason that* it appeared more probable than not on adequate evidence adequately scrutinized. What about that basic assumption, that entitlement to believing on sayso requires believing for a reason. Is that correct? To raise this question is to touch on issues placed on the agenda of Western thought long before Locke—by Socrates and Plato. And let us now, as we press this most basic question, also narrow our focus to believing what the gospel writers say. What is the required place of Reason and reasons in believing their identity-narrative?

We must first speak a bit about the locus of epistemic obligation. Here we go beyond Reid; for Reid speaks almost exclusively about epistemic practices, hardly at all about epistemic obligation. Speaking truth, we say to each other such things as "You should not have taken her at her word" and "You should have believed what she told you." It's tempting to amplify such remarks as "You should not have *decided* to take her at her word" and "You should have *decided* to believe what she told you." But if the Reidian model of belief formation is correct, this temptation must be resisted. Beliefs are not the outcome of decisions but of dispositions.

Yet somewhere obligation enters the picture. Where? At those points where we, by decision, can affect the workings of our doxastic practices—can *govern* their workings. What points are those? At least these: By acts of will we can direct the attention of our epistemic faculties, by acts of will we can impair or improve our epistemic faculties, and by acts of will we can attempt to keep in or near the forefront of consciousness something we already believe.

Not only *can* we do such things by acts of will; often we *ought* to do them. And often the fact that we have not done them when we ought to have done them is reflected in what we do or do not believe on sayso. I ought to have reminded myself of the many times this salesman has misled me; I would not have taken him at his word if I had. It would not be amiss to express this by saying that I ought not to have taken him at his word.

Let us say that someone is *fully entitled* to some belief of theirs if it represents no failure of governance-obligations on their part. Naturally many of our beliefs are such that we are only *partially entitled* to them. We have fulfilled some of our governance obligations and some not; the belief in question is the outcome of that mixture.

Though an absence of full entitlement is the reflection of some failure of proper governance, it must be noted that not all failure of proper governance need be reflected in what one believes. It may be that even if one had inquired into what one ought to have inquired into, one would still believe exactly as one does now, having failed in one's duties. Being right in one's beliefs doesn't necessarily get one off the hook. When it comes to epistemic obligation, it is not beliefs but activities—*governance* activities—which are fundamental.

It's worth taking a moment to distinguish this notion of *entitled* belief from the concept of *warranted* belief which Alvin Plantinga has been analyzing in some of his recent writings.[40] Suppose that after adopting the Reidian perspective, which pictures all of us human beings, by virtue of our constitution, as engaged in a variety of doxastic, dispositionally-grounded practices, one takes a next step of granting that these practices, in a given person, may be working either *properly* or *improperly*. Then one can introduce the following concept—call it the concept of *warrant*: A belief is *warranted* for a person just in case the doxastic practices by which it was produced were functioning properly in the sort of environment for which they were designed. Plantinga theorizes that it is warrant, thus conceived, which constitutes the normative component in our concept of knowledge.

Once one adopts the Reidian doxastic-practice perspective,[41] then one can readily recognize and devise a variety of normative concepts applicable to these practices. Warrant and entitlement are just two of many. In this paper I confine myself to entitlement. It is my judgment that the word "justified," which figures so prominently in recent epistemological discussions, suffers the mortal defect of being ambiguous as between warrant and entitlement. For that reason I have avoided it—as I have also avoided the word "rational" as synonym for "entitled." "Rational" connotes Reason and reasons; how entitlement is connected to those is *a question to be raised*.

Let us now make the somewhat questionable assumption that it is within one's powers of governance either to not believe the gospel writers on their say so or to do so for reasons. *Ought* one to do so? Is this one of our obligations? If the believer does not believe for a reason, does it follow that he has not fulfilled his governance-obligations? I see no reason to answer "Yes" to these questions. Believing on say so need not in general be rationally grounded—*cannot* be. Why would this case be different? Why would it be wrong in this case to let that fundamental and indispensable component of our constitution, the credulity principle, do its work?

Normally if we want to know whether the believer has fulfilled her governance-

obligations it will pay to look in a different direction. Has she reflected as much as she ought on potential defeaters? If she had, would her belief-system have contained an inhibitor on her belief? Is she *entitled* to not have an inhibitor? When there's something wrong about somebody's believing something on sayso, usually what's wrong is not that their believing is not rationally grounded but that, if they had done what they ought to have done, they would believe less firmly, or not at all: Their belief-system would contain an inhibitor on this believing of theirs. And sometimes it would contain an abettor; they would believe more firmly than they do. Naturally this last point applies to the gospel case too.

Some will feel dismay over my rejection of the need for rational grounding and my embrace of the credulity principle as an entirely acceptable dynamic for believing the gospel writers. But if so, then reflecting on the character of the reasons relevant to such cases should evoke a dismay which is a sibling of this dismay. Fundamentally, all reasons for believing on their sayso what someone says are reasons to the effect that the person's speech is of a reliable sort. As already observed, these reliability-reasons are of two kinds.

(1) One believes that the speech before one belongs to *some* reliable type *or other*.

(2) There is some speech-type of *which* one believes that *it* is reliable and that the speech before one is an example of *it*.

Consider a reason of sort (1). One might hold (1) for a reason, a *good* reason; if so, that reason is presumably a belief of type (2). But one might also hold it immediately. Experience will have developed in one a certain belief-disposition; and the activation of that disposition on this occasion immediately produces in one the belief. But to judge such a belief an acceptable reason for believing—and often we would not be able to give any other—is to give one's blessing to a belief-disposition which, like the credulity-disposition, does not yield insight.

Suppose on the other hand that one's reason is of the second sort. Then the question is how one came to believe, of a certain speech type, that it is reliable. Certain logical inferences might of course be involved. But at a certain point, if the belief has been formed properly, one comes back to the fact that one has tested for reliability a certain sample of the type and made an inference from the sample to the type as a whole. Either that, or one believes someone who *tells* one that the type is reliable—in which case all the same considerations apply to *that* person's speech (unless) one believes that the someone in question who tells one that the type is reliable *cannot* speak falsely, for example, believing that God tells one that all of Scripture is reliable. Now if the inference from sample to type is to be reliable, the sample has to be representative. But as Hume observed, in the nature of the case neither reason nor any other mode of insight tells one that it is. The inductive practice is like the credulity-disposition in that it is not a species of reason or insight. That ancient beckoning vision, of

grounding our beliefs entirely on reason, or on reason supplemented with other modes of direct insight into reality, must be surrendered—*even if we believe that here and there we do have such insight.*

I have not contended that it is *wrong* for believers to believe for reasons. Nor have I contended that it is *never* obligatory for them to do so. Neither have I denied that there are some legitimate projects for which even something like the evidential activity is the required or appropriate implementation. I have only contended that it is *not in general obligatory* for Christian believers to believe the identity-narrative of the gospels for reasons. Christian belief does not have to be rationally grounded. But let it be observed once more that the fideism, or more strictly, the anti-evidentialism, which I have been defending (a near-relative of what Alvin Plantinga has called "Reformed epistemology") is not a form of *dogmatism*. For I have assumed that for some Christians, at least, there are certain objections lodged against the truth of the gospels of which they ought to take note and on whose cogency they ought adequately to reflect. Failure to do so may deprive their belief of entitlement.

Carrying out these obligations will require a good deal of reasoning. Sometimes it may even require the evidential activity or something rather like it. So reason, reasons, and reasoning are not irrelevant to the obligations of the believer. The question which naturally arises is whether it is possible to give some general description of their relevance, or more generally, some general formula for the governance-obligations relevant to believing the identity-narrative of the gospel writers on their say so. Gary Gutting has argued that religious believers are required to *justify* their believing to certain of those who disagree with them, on pain of no longer being entitled to their belief. Hans Albert has argued that religious believers are obligated to look for refutations of their beliefs; they are entitled to their beliefs only if, while looking for refutations, they have not found any.[42] And there are yet other proposals which have been made. None of those with which I am acquainted appears to me satisfactory. Nor have I anything to put in their place.

But perhaps what we need is a new model for our thought about these matters—a model more like that emerging from some recent discussions of practical rationality and hermeneutics. Perhaps every community operates with a whole texture of rules for proper governance which it then teaches to its young members. Perhaps these rules are usually at some points contested within the community, perhaps they change with more or less rapidity under a wide variety of pressures, and perhaps different communities operate with different such rules. And perhaps a given society's rules must be appraised not by reference to some "eternal" rules but by reference to how well the rules in question serve the flourishing, the shalom, of that community. Of course, the question of what constitutes the flourishing of a given community, and of communities in general, is also not without dispute. Following out these beckoning paths for reflection will have to

remain the project for some other occasion.

"No matter what the logic of the Christian faith," says Hans Frei in one place, "actual belief in the resurrection is a matter of faith and not of arguments from possibility or evidence."[43] To this he adds in another place, "I am well aware of, but not terribly distressed by, the fact that my refusal to speak speculatively or evidentially about the resurrection of Christ, while nevertheless affirming it as an indispensable Christian claim may involve me in some difficult logical tangles."[44] Frei's intuitions were more reliable than his apprehensions.

Frei speaks of faith; I have not. But faith does indeed enter the picture. One cannot believe the identity-narrative of the gospel writers without feeling called to believe in him of whom the narrative speaks—to have faith in him. The difficulty of doing that constitutes for many the great inhibitor. Perhaps to explain why some respond in faith and some do not, we must appeal to more than "flesh and blood"—to the working of the Spirit. For we touch mystery here. Two persons have the same objections. For the one, those objections inhibit acceptance. For the other, acceptance overcomes those objections.

IX

Our problems with traditions remain. The Enlightenment did not dispose of them. Traditions are still the source of benightedness, chicanery, and oppression. And our moral and religious traditions are more fractured today than ever before. In this situation, examining our traditions remains for many of us a deep obligation—and for all of us together a desperate need. But we shall have to make do without grand theses as to who ought to conduct what modes of examination. And we shall have to acknowledge what the thinkers of the Enlightenment would have found appallingly unpalatable: That examination of tradition can only take place in the context of unexamined tradition.

By formulating and publicizing their governance thesis, the thinkers of the Enlightenment hoped to bring about a rational consensus in place of fractured tradition. That hope has failed. In my judgment it was bound to fail. Sometimes epistemology does pry people loose from their worldview or religion; just as often, their worldview or religion pries them loose from a certain epistemology.

Yet we must live together. It is to politics and not to epistemology that we shall have to look for an answer as to how to do that. "Liberal" politics has fallen on bad days recently. But to its animating vision of a society in which persons of diverse traditions live together in justice and friendship, conversing with each other and slowly altering their traditions in response to their conversation—to that, there is no viable alternative.

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NOTES

1. See Part Three, section XI, of my *Works and Worlds of Art* (Oxford, Oxford University Press; 1980).

2. For a recent survey of the controversies on these matters, see Colin Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publ. Co.; 1984).

3. Particularity has two sides, worth distinguishing but often not distinguished: The historical particularity of God's salvific actions, and the historical particularity of those who have access to the knowledge of, and/or benefit of, those actions.

4. Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven, Yale University Press; 1974).

5. "To state the thesis: A realistic or history-like (though not necessarily historical) element is a feature, as obvious as it is important, of many of the biblical narratives that went into the making of Christian belief. It is a feature that can be highlighted by the appropriate analytical procedure and by no other, even if it may be difficult to describe the procedure—in contrast to the element itself. It is fascinating that the realistic character of the crucial biblical stories was actually acknowledged and agreed upon by most of the significant eighteenth-century commentators. But since the precritical analytical or interpretive procedure for isolating it had irretrievably broken down in the opinion of most commentators, this specifically realistic characteristic, though acknowledged by all hands to be there, finally came to be ignored, or—even more fascinating—its presence or distinctiveness came to be denied for lack of a 'method' to isolate it. And this despite the common agreement that the specific feature was there!" *Eclipse*, p. 10.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14. Compare the following passage from Frei's later book, *The Identity of Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press; 1975): "Realistic narrative reading is based on one of the characteristics of the Gospel story, especially its later part, *viz.*, that it is history-like—in its language as well as its depiction of a common public world (no matter whether it is the one we all think we inhabit), in the close interaction of character and incident, and in the non-symbolic quality of the relation between the story and what the story is about. In other words, whether or not these stories report history (either reliably or unreliably), whether or not the Gospels are other things besides realistic stories, what they tell us is a fruit of the stories themselves. We cannot have what they are about (the "subject matter") without the stories themselves. They are history-like precisely because like history-writing and the traditional novel and unlike myths and allegories they literally mean what they say. There is no gap between the representation and what is represented by it."

7. See especially Parts Three and Four.

8. For example, on pp. 170 and 280 in *Eclipse*.

9. See especially *Eclipse*, p. 278.

10. *Eclipse*, p. 11.

11. See especially *Eclipse*, pp. 122 and 132-33.

12. *Eclipse*, p. 11.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

15. Frei, on p. 3 of *Eclipse*, cites a passage from Auerbach's *Mimesis* (p. 15): "Far from seeking, like Homer, merely to make us forget our own reality for a few hours, it seeks to overcome our reality: we are to fit our own life into its world, feel ourselves to be elements in its structure of universal history . . . . Everything else that happens in the world can only be conceived as an element in this sequence; into it everything that is known about the world . . . must be fitted as an

ingredient of the divine plan." This sort of formula has now become commonplace among those who approach the Bible in terms of narrative. For example, in Garrett Green (ed.) *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press; 1987), Charles Wood on p. 13 says that "if a text functions narratively, to disclose a world in which its readers are invited to dwell, or to depict a character in relation to whom the readers are invited to dwell . . ."; Ronald Thiemann on p. 31 says that "the reader recognizes a followable world within the texts and accepts an invitation to enter that world"; and Kathryn Tanner on pp. 74-75 says that "Faithfulness to a Christian form of life . . . involves the constructive process of continually reinitiating a Christian self-understanding by imaginatively repositioning the particulars of one's own life within a story."

16. For Frei's attitude toward historical criticism, see esp. pp. 135f. in *Eclipse*.

17. *Identity*, p. 150.

18. *Eclipse*, pp. 131-32.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 133-34.

20. Frei argues that, given the realistically narrative character of the gospels, interpreters must aim at discerning the "literal sense" of the text. But it turns out that he means two quite different things by "literal sense." What he is conscious of meaning is literal sense as opposed to allegorical, mythical, and parabolic sense. But he also means by "literal sense," without being fully aware of doing so, what the writer *meant* with his text. In fact, adopting an interpretation of the gospel texts which is a literal sense in the former sense does not foreclose adopting an interpretation which is not a literal sense in the latter.

21. Suppose, for example, that rather than giving up on canonicity after coming to the view that Jesus was not at all what the gospel writers claimed he was, one interpreted the gospels as fiction—realistic narrative fiction. Then one would be in the position of embracing a story about a redeemer without believing that there was a redeemer. And so one would not believe in Jesus, one would not give him praise in the liturgy, one would not offer prayers in his name, etc., nor would one think it correct to speak of oneself and others as doing that. Obviously the alterations in the life and consciousness of the church would be gigantic if others went along with one—even though some of the old familiar words might continue to be used, but now for new purposes.

22. *Identity*, p. 143.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 142-43.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 141.

26. P. 140.

27. P. 141.

28. P. 140. Frei thinks that the second stage already forces this question: "In the second stage, . . . the lifelike or history-like representation of the specific individual in specific situations raises the question of historical veracity in acute fashion. About certain events reported in the Gospels we are almost bound to ask, Did they actually take place? With regard to certain teachings we asks, Were they actually those of Jesus himself?" (p. 132).

29. P. 146. Compare p. 143: "The realistic or history-like quality of the narrative, whether historical or not, prevents even the person who regards the account as implausible from regarding it as mere myth. Rather, it is to him a kind of hyperfiction claiming to be self-warranting fact." And compare p. 146: "The passion-resurrection account tends to force the question of factuality because the claim is involved as part of the very identity that is described as enacted and manifest in the story-event

sequence."

30. P. 151.

31. P. 149.

32. P. 148.

33. P. 150.

34. Frei adds, "On the other hand, because it is more nearly factlike than not, reliable historical evidence *against* the resurrection would be decisive." And in his reply to questions put to him by Carl Henry (*Trinity Journal* 8 NS, 1987, pp. 21-24), Frei says this: "Of course I believe in the 'historical reality' of Christ's death and resurrection if those are the categories which we employ. But they weren't always the categories employed by the church. There was a time when the church didn't talk about 'the Jesus of history' and 'the Christ of faith.' . . . In other words, while I believe that those terms may be apt, I do not believe, as Dr. Henry apparently does, that they are as theory-free, as neutral as he seems to think they are. I do not think that the concept 'fact' is theory-neutral . . . . If I am asked to use the language of factuality, then I would say, yes, in those terms, I have to speak of an empty tomb. In those terms I have to speak of the literal resurrection. But I think those terms are not privileged, theory-neutral, trans-cultural, an ingredient in the structure of the human mind and of reality always and everywhere for me, as I think they are for Dr. Henry."

35. Thomas Reid, *Inquiry into the Human Mind*, edition by Timothy Duggan (Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press; 1970), p. 240.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 240-41.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 238-39.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 240.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 241-42.

40. See, for example, "Positive Epistemic Status and Proper Function" in *Philosophical Perspectives, 2: Epistemology, 1988*, ed. by James E. Tomberlin (Atascadero, CA, Ridgeview Publ. Co.; 1988).

41. I borrow the term "doxastic practice" from Wm. P. Alston. See his "A Doxastic Practice Approach to Epistemology" in *Knowledge and Skepticism*, eds. M. Clay and K. Lehrer (Boulder, CO: Westfield Press, 1989).

42. For a discussion of Gutting's view, see my "Once Again Evidentialism—This Time Social" in *Philosophical Topics*, Vol. 16, No. 3: Fall 1988, pp. 53-74. For Hans Albert, see his *Treatise on Critical Reason*.

43. *Identity*, p. 152.

44. *Ibid.*, Preface. For Frei's dislike of general (as opposed to *ad hoc*) apologetics, see *passim* in this Preface; and pp. 128-30 of *Eclipse*.

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