

TRIUMPHALISM IN THE GOSPELS

by DR W. A. VISSER 'T HOOFT

I.

WHILE the words 'triumph', 'triumphal' and 'triumphant' are words with a long history, the expression 'triumphalism' is a modern invention. It seems to have started its career when first Bishop de Smedt of Belgium and later other speakers used it in their speeches in the early sessions of the Second Vatican Council. Through the innumerable articles and books about the Council it became widely known and became a current expression in the terminology of writers on religious themes. The speed and extent of its success showed that it pointed to the existence of an acute problem in the life of the churches. This problem was clearly stated in a contribution to the council's debate on the nature of the Church by Bishop Laszlo of Eisenstadt. He said, that many people consider that there is a great difference between the concretely existing church and the church which the theologians and preachers describe. What answer must we give them? 'Our answer must not be triumphalist or hypocritical. . . . It must be realistic and honest.' We have no right to proclaim with regard to the church in our present world a conception of the glorious Church which will exist at the end of time.

Before long, theologians of other churches also began to use the term. For in all churches this contrast between the tremendous claims made for the Church and the realities of church-life had been a constant problem. The word 'triumphalism' helped to identify the issue. Triumphalism was really an application of worldly standards to the church. The triumph as perfected in ancient Rome had revealed a deep tendency in human nature to conceive of human greatness in terms of power, acquired by the military or political victory over actual or potential enemies and to demand public recognition of such greatness. And this conception had also entered the life of the churches as a story of uninterrupted success. They had boasted on the basis of very unreliable statistics about the numbers of their adherents. They had often spoken and acted as if they did not need the help of the Holy Spirit, since they were already the owners of all the gifts which the Holy Spirit could give.

The growth of the consciousness that triumphalism is a mortal enemy of the Church is one of the most hopeful aspects of the present religious situation.

2.

It is natural that in the light of the discussion about triumphalism the question is raised whether in the life of Jesus there is not one important example of the triumphalist attitude: namely the so-called triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The expression 'triumphal entry' is not found in the New Testament, but has become part of the traditional terminology of the church in Bible translations, in commentaries and in liturgical texts. It has been taken for granted that in the four versions which we have in the gospels of the events which took place at the final stage of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, the real point of the story is his arrival in the city and the joyful public reception which he received. Even for those versions in which there is no specific mention of any particular reaction of the city, the heading 'triumphant entry' is often used. When the adjective 'triumphant' is left out, the emphasis on the entry suggests nevertheless that there was something quite unusual and sensational about his arrival. The use of this terminology is really a form of unconscious, rather arbitrary, exegesis. For it is based on reading into certain verses a meaning which is, as we will see, not or not necessarily the original meaning.

3.

Is it true that the relevant passages in the four gospels (Matthew 21, Mark 11, Luke 19, John 12) describe the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem? A detailed and thorough study of this question has been made by the Indian theologian V. Mariadasan in his doctoral thesis at the Catholic University of Louvain: 'Le triomphe messianique de Jésus et son entrée à Jérusalem' (1977; printed summary with the same title, published in 1978 at Tindivanam). He has come to the conclusion that the version in the gospel of Mark which speaks of a messianic procession in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, followed by an uneventful arrival in the city, is the most reliable and that it has been eclipsed by the Matthew version which emphasises the solemn public reception in the city. I find his exegesis of the relevant passages of Mark, Luke and John quite convincing. With regard to Matthew, I come to a different exegesis. In several respects I will draw conclusions which go considerably beyond those in his doctoral thesis.

A brief look at each of the four versions of the events which took place when Jesus approached and entered Jerusalem, shows that the evangelists describe an exceptionally solemn moment, when Jesus, riding on an ass, is acclaimed as the messianic king, but that none of them says clearly and explicitly that he rode into the city and that he was publicly acclaimed within its walls. Luke describes first the procession and acclamation which he locates 'at the descent of the Mount of Olives' (Lk. 19.37), but in his account the arrival of Jesus in the city is not a moment of triumphant joy, but a moment of sad awareness of the blindness of the people. 'Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes' (19.42). The entry is an entry with tears.

John speaks of pilgrims in Jerusalem 'who went out to meet Jesus' (John 12.13) and the acclamations take place before Jesus reaches the city. There is no indication that there was a triumphal reception within the city.

Mark locates the procession and acclamation 'on the road' (Mk 11.8) and makes no reference to any reaction of the people inside the city. According to him, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem (Mark 11.11) is not followed by a triumph but by a short visit to the temple ('it was already late'). There is no mention of any reaction of the people of the city.

The version of Matthew is the only one which speaks of a strong public excitement among the people of the city when Jesus arrives. This additional information is contained in the following two verses: 'And when he entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying: "Who is this?" And the crowds said: "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee."' (Mt 21.10-11) It is on these verses that the traditional conception of a triumphant entry into the city is based. So we must ask whether they provide a sufficiently solid basis for that tradition. It seems to me that the answer must be negative. First of all, because such a sensational public event as a triumphant entry would surely have been known to the three other evangelists, if it had really happened. At the same time, Matthew does not say clearly and explicitly that the inhabitants of Jerusalem saw with their own eyes a solemn procession in their city. He says that all the city was stirred. 'All the city' is a typically Matthean way of making an emphatic statement. His affirmations that 'all Jerusalem' was troubled when the wise men from the East came (2.3) and that 'Jerusalem and all Judea' went out to John the Baptist to be baptised (3.5; see also 4.23-4) are surely not meant to be taken as precise statements. What was the excitement in

the city about? Matthew does not give us a clear answer. For while the 'crowds' outside the city had acclaimed Jesus as a messianic royal person, the 'crowds' inside the city speak much less sensationally of the visit of a prophet from Galilee. Thus, Matthew does not seem to be sure that the welcoming of Jesus in the way of receiving royal personalities has actually continued after his entrance into the city. Is the excitement perhaps to be interpreted in the same way as in Matthew 2.3? There it was the rumour about the birth of a great king which troubled Jerusalem. Here it is what the people in the city hear about the strange events on the road leading to the city.

There are two further reasons why it is most improbable that Jesus' entry into Jerusalem took the form of a public and solemn event, culminating in his being acclaimed as the messianic king. The first is that such a demonstration would undoubtedly have led to an immediate reaction of the authorities. We hear nothing of any action by the occupation power at that time. The second reason is that at no point during the trial of Jesus is the entry into the city mentioned as a proof of the accusation that Jesus has claimed to be the king of the Jews. Thus, it seems clear that there is no good reason to doubt that Mark's version is reliable when it speaks of a messianic acclamation outside the city, followed by an uneventful arrival in the city.

4.

The substance of the story is therefore that Jesus makes arrangements for riding on an ass on the road near Jerusalem, that the disciples throw their clothes on the donkey so as to be used for a saddle, that others throw their clothes on the road, that many break off branches from trees in the fields and that all acclaim Jesus as the long expected royal visitor coming in the name of the Lord God.

Is the term 'triumphant' the appropriate one to describe this procession?

To arrive at an answer we must ask three previous questions:

- (a) what did the words 'triumphant' and 'triumphal' mean in the first century?
- (b) did Jesus know about the triumphs in the Roman and Hellenistic world?
- (c) is it probable that Jesus himself thought of this procession as a triumphal event?

In Rome 'triumph' had a clearly defined meaning. It was a highly

official solemnity, the nature of which was fixed by law. Every triumph was under the auspices of the *Senatus Populusque Romanus*. A private triumph was unthinkable. The Roman triumph had several aspects. First the military one. No army-commander was allowed to celebrate a triumph unless he had won a decisive victory in which 5000 enemies had been wiped out. Representatives of the conquered peoples were shown. There was also the religious aspect. The triumphator is raised to the rank of the immortals and he brings a sacrifice to the temple or the Capitol.¹ The whole ceremony is made as impressive and magnificent as possible. The triumphator crowned by the laurel-crown is standing in the beautifully carved quadriga drawn by four white horses and is acclaimed with the ancient shout: 'Io triumphe', which is probably derived from the Dionysian processions.²

The Roman triumph became, of course, a model for the whole world of which Rome was the centre. But were there not other types of triumph with which the story in the gospels has more in common? Yes, but all of them had the aspects of a public recognition that the triumphator had overcome the enemy and was therefore entitled to the highest possible honour and the powerful position which was its result. Thus, the concentration on the triumph means that the power-principle dominates the life of society and the struggle to satisfy human pride becomes the chief motive in the life of the individual and of the nation.

5.

But have we good reasons to presuppose that Jesus was acquainted with the character and shape of the triumphs in Rome and in the Hellenistic world? I think we have. There is in the first place the language of the coins which, at the time, were the main instrument of political propaganda. We know from the passage in the synoptic gospels about the paying of taxes to Caesar that Jesus was aware of the inscriptions and pictures on the Roman coins. He knows (Mk. 12.15 and par.) what the Pharisees will see when they look at a *denarius*. It is therefore, most probable that he had seen the different kind of coins which circulated in Palestine. These included not only the coins specially minted for use in the Eastern part of the empire, but also those

¹ Horace in Ep. I. 17: 'Captos ostendere civibus hostes attingit solium Jovis et caelestia tentat' ('to present to your fellow citizens the enemies you have captured is mounting up to the throne of Jupiter and reaching for the sky').

² 'Triumphus' is a Latin version of the Greek 'thriambos', one of the names of Dionysos.

brought by soldiers or civil servants from Rome. Now, at that time, each emperor made his own triumphs known by issuing coins on which the triumph was represented. So we have coins of Augustus and of Tiberius which were used in the first decades of the Christian era and which made their triumphs known to the world. A *denarius* of Augustus (see *Dictionnaire des Antiquités Grecques et Romaines*, Paris 1917, fig. 7097) looks like a lesson for school children about the triumph. For on the one side it shows the *quadriga* with the four horses, and on the other side the laurel-crown, the *toga picta* and the sceptre with the eagle-head. On an *aureus* of A.D. 15 or 16 we see Tiberius standing in the *quadriga*. But most other triumphal coins show only the *quadriga*. In the historical museum of Geneva, two such coins, issued during the life of Jesus, are exhibited.

Jesus visited a number of places in which the religion and culture were specifically Roman. Thus, in the cities of the Decapolis and in Caesarea Philippi he had probably seen triumphal arches.³

But the most important source of information about the triumphs must have been the stories told by older men and women. We know from the Psalms of Solomon (first century) that the contemporaries of Jesus had not forgotten the deep humiliation that in the tremendously impressive triumph of Pompey in 61 (B.C.) after his victories in the East, the Jewish king Aristobulus and three hundred Jewish prisoners were exposed to the insults of the Roman people. The Psalms of Solomon speak with sorrow and indignation about the arrogance of the pagans who took the Jewish leaders to the West 'in order to exhibit them': Jewish princes walking behind the triumphal chariot of a Roman general! And the stories about the wild, irregular triumphs of Anthony and Cleopatra in near-by Alexandria, which were really an exercise in self-deification would confirm the impression that there was something fundamentally wrong about the idea of a human triumph.

6.

Now must we take it that in the mind of Jesus there was some connexion between the official triumphs and the messianic procession on the road near Jerusalem which he instigated? If we call this modest event⁴ triumphal, we seem to suggest that Jesus followed the example given at Rome and Alexandria and thus tried to get as much

³ The triumphal arch which still exists in Gerasa is probably of a later date. But its existence shows that the Decapolis cities followed the custom of setting up triumphal arches.

⁴ Calvin speaks of the 'ridiculous' impression which it makes.

recognition of his high position as possible. That is indeed how Ernest Renan interprets the facts. Jesus, he says, had 'the human satisfaction' that he received 'une petite triomphe'. But has Jesus then suddenly forgotten all that he has stood for? Is this Jesus who wants to enjoy the acclamation of enthusiastic admirers the same Jesus who had rejected the satanic offer of 'all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them'; who declared that the meek were blessed; who told men to take the lowest rather than the highest seat; who warned them to take glory from God rather than from men, and who taught that he who would be great among his followers should be their servant? A Jesus who is content to receive a little bit of the kind of glory which Julius Caesar or Augustus or Tiberius received through their triumphs — such a Jesus has nothing to do with the Jesus we know from the gospels.

I believe that the very contrast between the splendour of the triumph in Rome and the unimpressive messianic procession near Jerusalem forces us to see that Jesus did not mean to imitate the famous triumphs of his day but to protest against the spirit which animated them and to show a better way of fulfilling the meaning of human destiny.

7.

If the description 'triumphal entry into Jerusalem' cannot be maintained, what is the significance of the procession on the road to Jerusalem? I believe that we find the answer to this question in the three chapters of the gospel of Mark (and the corresponding sections of Matthew and Luke) which precede the story with which we are concerned. In these chapters the chief theme is the persistent attempt which Jesus makes to explain the true nature of his messianic mission and the lack of understanding of the disciples. Three times he explains that Jerusalem, which is the goal of their journey, will be the place of a supreme sacrifice and not of worldly success.⁵ And in the tenth chapter of Mark's gospel we read again how far the disciples were from a true understanding of Jesus' conception of the messianic mission. As they think about the messiah and the messianic age their thoughts turn to the power which they as associates of the messiah may acquire. Jesus has to say that if they still think in terms of worldly ambition, they have

⁵ It may be that the form of the announcement of the passion has been influenced by the later developments, but to dismiss all announcements of the passion simply as *vaticinia ex eventu* is to re-write the text instead of explaining it.

not understood at all how he interprets his own messianic mission and the mission of the messianic community.

Why were the disciples unable to accept the explanation of the master whose authority they recognised? Precisely because he was for them the Christ, the anointed royal representative of God. They had been taught that this messiah would come in the shape of a most powerful ruler. According to the Psalms, God had declared that he would make his anointed: 'the first born, the highest of the kings of the earth' (Ps. 89.27) and given him the promise: 'I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel' (Ps. 2.8-9). The 'Psalms of Solomon', composed not long before Jesus' birth, spoke of the messianic king in similar terms: the poet prays that God may give strength to the messianic king, the Son of David, 'to purge Jerusalem from Gentiles that trample her down to destruction' (Ps. Sol. 17). So the disciples were quite unprepared for the message that Jesus had come in order to serve men. That conversation on the road to Jerusalem about true greatness (Mk. 10.35-45) is the last prediction of the passion before the arrival in Jerusalem. It is striking that Jesus speaks this time of his future suffering in a world-wide perspective. The idea of a national messianic king who comes to conquer and dominate all other nations is in Jesus' mind not rooted in the calling which God has given to Israel. For it is only a form of the general conception of the world as a place where the powerful, the kings of the earth, lord it over the peoples. The disciples have a higher calling. 'It shall not be so among you.' For they belong to the Kingdom of God which is based on a completely different conception of leadership and of human relationships. 'Whoever would be great among you must be your servant.' And the first servant is Jesus himself. How can he convince the disciples?

8.

When he finds that the disciples persist in misunderstanding the nature of his mission, he makes another attempt to explain it. But this time he does it in the form of a practical illustration, that is to say of emblematic prophecy.⁶

⁶ In Peake's Commentary (p. 744), Professor J. W. Bowman interprets the messianic procession on the road to Jerusalem as emblematic prophecy. Prof. G. B. Caird in his commentary on the gospel of Luke (Penguin, p. 216): 'Jesus intended a demonstration.' Prof. Joachim Jeremias mentions the choice of the ass among the parabolic actions of Jesus (*Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, p. 161).

An emblematic prophecy (*geste prophétique, Gleichnishandlung*) is the communication of a spiritual message in the form of an unusual and therefore striking dramatic action. The Old Testament provides many examples of such acted parables. Jeremiah used this form of proclamation of God's will very frequently. In the New Testament the clearest example of such symbolic action is the washing of the feet of the disciples by Jesus (John 13).

The washing of the feet is an attempt to get the disciples to understand that 'he who is the least among them is the one who is great', as Luke puts it. The disciples need this startling and even shocking demonstration because they have still their dreams of worldly greatness as associates of a powerful ruler. The ride on the donkey on the road to Jerusalem is to be seen in the same light. If the verbal communication has not led to a change of mind of the disciples, is it not possible to convince them by a visible proclamation?

If the right interpretation of the events on the road, as Jesus was approaching Jerusalem, is that they represent an acted parable, it is most probable that Jesus did not act in this manner in order to present himself as the messianic king to the Jewish people in general, but rather to explain as clearly as possible the nature of his messianic mission to the disciples. For it was to them that he had spoken of the humility and peaceful character of the messiah and of the difference between his kingship and that of the 'kings of the world'. But this conception of the messiah was so fundamentally different from the one which the disciples had in their minds that they had not been able to accept Jesus' teaching on this crucial subject. We hear again and again that they did not understand what he said about his death (Mk. 9.32, Lk. 9.45).

'This saying was hid from them and they did not grasp what was said' (Lk. 18.34). The old image of the victorious and triumphant hero who becomes the powerful world-ruler is too tenacious to be uprooted by words alone. Jesus now presents them with a different visible image. The revaluation of values demanded for entrance into the Kingdom of God can only take place if there is first a replacement of the images of God's way of saving man. The two chief images are those of the peaceful and humble king and of the servant washing the feet of the disciples (John 13). There are several points of similarity between these two parabolic actions. In both cases there is the element of surprise or even of shock-treatment. Both are dramatic illustrations of Jesus' fundamental affirmation concerning his calling: 'For the Son of Man

also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Mk 10.45). 'The point is not merely a moral lesson concerning humility but a teaching concerning God's plan of salvation' (Sir Edwyn Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, pp. 437 and 438). And the gospel of John confirms that both acted parables are stages in the process of getting the disciples to understand the full meaning of the ministry of their Lord. For in John 12, we read that the disciples did not understand what Jesus meant by riding on an ass and that they only remembered the prophecy of Zechariah when Jesus was glorified. And in John 13, we read how Jesus himself told Peter that he would understand 'afterward' the full meaning of the washing of the feet (v. 7). That 'afterward' refers obviously again to the glorification when Jesus will be lifted up from the earth and draw all men to himself (John 12.32).

The detailed description of the preparations made for the messianic demonstration (seven of the ten verses of the whole story in Mark) shows that Jesus attaches great significance to this action. They show at the same time that there is no good reason to dismiss the reference to Zechariah's prophecy as one of the many examples of Matthew's fondness for describing events in the life of Jesus as the fulfilment of ancient prophecy. For John speaks also of Zechariah's prophecy and it is undoubtedly implied in the versions of Mark and Luke. There is no need to complicate the exegesis by bringing in Matthew's theology⁷ because the concentration of attention on Zechariah's prophecy is so obviously in line with the message which Jesus seeks to communicate to the disciples. That prophecy was practically unique in announcing the coming to the city of a king bringing salvation but not as a victorious conqueror imposing his imperial will, but rather 'humble and riding on an ass' (Zechariah 9.9). So it is not surprising that Jesus used this particular prophecy as the right model for the demonstration which he wanted to make and which was addressed to the disciples.

So the story of the procession in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem is not a triumphal story. It is rather a protest against triumphalism. Shall we call it a counter-triumph? If we do, we describe a very important aspect of Jesus' action, for he wanted to expose the vanity of all attempts of human self-glorification. But the expression is inadequate in as far as it does not describe the positive intention of Jesus, which is to proclaim the re-evaluation of all human values and the transformation

⁷ Matthew's reference to two animals (Mt. 21.3 and 21.7) would seem to be a product of his literalism.

of the society based on self-seeking and power-politics by the community of service, of freely accepted humiliation for the sake of true human fellowship.

9.

Did the disciples understand what Jesus tried to show them by making his messianic demonstration in such an unexpected way? There are several indications that they did not grasp its real significance. The gospel of St. John says: 'And Jesus found a young ass and sat upon it; as it is written,

Fear not, daughter of Zion;
Behold thy king is coming
Sitting upon an ass's colt.

His disciples did not understand this at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that this had been written of him and had been done to him' (John 12.14-15). There is not the slightest sign in any of the gospels that the specific spiritual lesson which Jesus tried to teach them concerning the humble and suffering messiah, was understood by the disciples. The acclamations celebrate the coming of the messiah which they had desired and expected. They were happy that at last they could give him a public welcome. But they remain unwilling to accept what Jesus had taught about the messiah ever since the discussion in Caesarea Philippi. The behaviour of Peter when the soldiers come to seize Jesus shows that he still thinks in terms of defending a leader who uses violent means. Oscar Cullmann believes that Peter's denial is mainly caused by his great disappointment about Jesus' non-resistance (*Études de Théologie Biblique*, p. 83). It is only after the crucifixion and the resurrection that Peter proclaims that the cross is the fulfilment of the announcement of all the prophets that God's anointed should suffer (Acts 3.18). Similarly the disciples on the road to Emmaus had the wrong conception of the messiahship, until the risen Christ explained the meaning of the Scriptures. Triumph belongs to the world of 'the kings of the earth' who in the words of the second psalm used in the prayer of the early church, are 'gathered together against the Lord and against his anointed' (Acts 4.26). If then we speak today of a 'triumphal entry into Jerusalem', we use a terminology which is in line with the misunderstanding of Jesus' meaning in the period before the resurrection instead of a terminology based on a true insight into the mind of Jesus.

10.

It seems to me that this interpretation of the procession on the way to Jerusalem throws light on the question whether Jesus did or did not proclaim himself as the messiah. The discussion about that question began when William Wrede published his book *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien* (1901). Wrede's thesis was that the early church found it incomprehensible that Jesus had not been recognised as messiah and that therefore the theory was invented that he had forbidden the disciples to proclaim him as messiah. In this view, Jesus had no messianic consciousness. Unfortunately, Wrede's interpretation has had considerable influence on biblical scholars of the last few decades. It seems to me that a remarkably clear answer to Wrede was given in the writings of Julius Schniewind, and particularly in his commentary on the gospel of St. Mark. The critical operation which consists in eliminating all references in the gospels to Jesus' messianic consciousness on the ground that they are products of the imagination of the early church, reduces and distorts the story of the life and teaching of Jesus to such an extent that it becomes impossible to give a coherent account of it.

If Jesus never thought of himself as the messiah, the story of the procession on the road to Jerusalem becomes quite incomprehensible. Why should he have accepted in that case to be honoured as a royal visitor? Calvin remarks shrewdly that Jesus' problem was to show on the one hand that he was the anointed king of the promised kingdom, but to show at the same time that the nature of that kingship was fundamentally different from that of 'the kings of the world'. The uniqueness of Jesus consists precisely in the fact that he proclaims a conception of the mission of the messiah which differs fundamentally from any conception of the messiah or of a saviour which had been proclaimed before. It was certainly rooted in the history of Israel and he used insights that had been revealed to the prophets and teachers during that history. But the resulting conception of the messiah was new. He realised that it would be extraordinarily difficult to get the people to understand what he meant. If he were to speak of himself as messiah, the people would get the wrong impression, because in their minds the title was associated with nationalistic aspirations. So he tries in the first period of his ministry to avoid any discussion of his messianic mandate. But then comes a time, when he wants to share his deepest convictions with his disciples. At Caesarea Philippi, Peter makes the

confession that Jesus is indeed the Christ. Jesus accepts his confession with joy, but when he now explains what the messiahship really means, Peter shows that he has not even begun to read Jesus' mind. Jesus uses each opportunity to change the minds of the disciples. And the ride on the donkey as the humble and peaceful messiah is part of this process of education of the disciples. What has so often been called 'the triumphal entry into Jerusalem' is really meant as an opportunity for the disciples and any others who would follow Jesus to come to share the secret, namely that Jesus is truly the messianic king, but a king such as the world has never seen as yet.

Our conclusion must be that we should avoid using the expression 'the triumphal entry into Jerusalem'. For it is a misleading expression. It gives the impression that during his life when 'he emptied himself and took the form of a servant' (Phil. 2.7), there was one occasion when he acted like 'the kings of the earth'. But what happened on the road near Jerusalem, was not an exceptional act; it was rather a confirmation and clear illustration of the orientation which he had given to his whole life.

The messianic acclamation on the road to Jerusalem, is precisely a strong warning to the church and to all Christian believers to avoid the triumphalist temptation. Jesus said: 'If any one serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also' (John 12.26). The *via triumphalis* is therefore a forbidden road for the Christians.

In the history of the Church, these truths have often been forgotten and churchmen have behaved as if their Christian faith gave them the right to boast and to 'take glory from men'. But there have been anti-triumphalist prophets who have called the church back to the Day which Jesus had shown. St. Paul did so with great power. He says: 'If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness' (2 Cor. 11.30). For he knows that God's power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12.9). As a Roman citizen, he is informed about the Roman triumph. In two letters, he refers to it by the technical term *thriambeuein*, based on the Latin *triumphus* (2 Cor. 2.14 and Col. 2.15). He knows such details as the use of perfumes in the triumphal procession and takes it for granted that the Corinthians and Colossians understand these allusions. But in both letters the reference is to the triumph of the glorified Christ, not to any triumphal aspect of his life before the crucifixion. And in later ages, in different parts of the Church, witnesses rose up who reminded the whole people of God that they were followers of a humble saviour. We find St. Francis and

Pascal, Luther and Kierkegaard, Barth and Niebuhr, Dostoievsky and Bonhoeffer saying to the church: 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble' (1 Pet. 5.5).

W. A. VISSER 'T HOOFT

150 Route de Ferney

CH-1211 Geneva 20

Switzerland

The whole Church suffered grief and loss by the death of Dr W. A. Visser 't Hooft in July 1985.