ment, an awareness of the changed situation, an acknowledgement that the present is the ‘last hour’ (1 Jn. 2: 18; cf. Acts 2: 17; 2 Tim. 3: 1; Heb. 1: 2; 1 Pet. 1: 20; etc.), the End must come ‘quickly’ (Rev. 22: 7; 12: 20; cf. Heb. 10: 37); there is a realization that through the faith-union with Christ the church already partakes of the blessings of the End, and in Christ Christians have already passed from death into life (1 Jn. 3: 14). There is, at the same time, the awareness that still outstanding is the revelation of that which is true already only ‘in Christ’, the recognition that this delays for a season only on account of God’s gracious purpose for man and that therefore the church must undertake the proclamation of the gospel as a matter of urgency and as the specific task of the church in the present. It is the Spirit who unites these two elements, for as He is the arrabon and the aparche of the End and speaks of eschatology, He is also the one who inspires, directs and sustains the Christian mission, witnessing to and through the disciples and so speaks of grace.

It is, surely, of vital importance to the church of today that we recover this sense of duality in Christ’s ministry and in the life of the church itself. For it is as we recognize and understand these two elements in tension that we discern the true urgency of our present situation, the need to abandon all irrelevant ‘churchy’ concerns in favour of wholehearted commitment to the mission to which Christ calls, in which the Spirit leads and for which the End delays. In this recognition we make sense both of the NT’s promise of the Parousia and of the continued delay of that which was and remains ‘near’. Whilst we might long for the End to come quickly (cf. 1 Cor. 16: 22; Rev. 22: 20) and know that it is imminent, there is also point in being thankful that it delays and that we still have time for repentance and faith and time to preach the gospel.

The real meaning of the Parousia in the NT is that it is the revelation of that which has already happened in Christ: the real meaning of the nearness of the Parousia is that this revelation belongs necessarily to the incarnate events of Christ and is absolutely of a piece with His life, death, resurrection and ascension: and the real meaning of the delay of the Parousia is that this revelation, though imminent, is held back in the interests of grace, allowing for a while the church’s mission and the continuing possibility of faith.

Questions about the Gospels—I. History or Theology?

The series of three essays by Dr. I. Howard Marshall, of which this is the first instalment, is based upon lectures given at the IFES Conference for theological students at Moscia, Switzerland, in August 1967, and repeated at the TSF Conference at Swanwick in January 1968; the lectures are reproduced here at the request of the TSF Committee.

The SYNOPtic Gospels occupy the centre of the stage in contemporary New Testament scholarship. The most important finding of recent Gospel study is that their writers were evangelists, preachers and theologians in their own right, who were attempting to communicate their understanding of Jesus rather than simply hand down an inherited tradition unchanged. Earlier generations of scholars regarded the evangelists primarily as historians, and argued that if the history which they recorded was inaccurate their work had little value. The contemporary scholar holds that, whatever the value of history (and often he has a very low estimate of it!), the value of the Gospels as expressions of the theology of the early church remains unchanged; he therefore examines the Gospels primarily as theological arguments, and he would argue that it is only when we have learned to recognize and allow for the evangelists’ theological ‘bias’ that we can proceed backwards to trace earlier strata in the Gospels (Traditionsgeschichte and Formgeschichte) and perhaps ultimately to find out something historical about Jesus.
It will be clear that a number of important questions are raised by this trend in modern study, and the purpose of the present series of articles will be to try to clarify some of the basic issues. In the first article the general question whether the evangelists aimed to be historians or theologians will be discussed; in the second, the value of the history which they record will be assessed; and in the third, the theological validity of the history will be considered.

HISTORICAL METHOD
Our consideration of the nature of the Gospels as history must be preceded by a general discussion of history and historical study, so that we may have some agreement regarding the proper method and terminology to be used.

The science of historiography is concerned with past events and attempts to describe them and assess their significance. The events which concern the historian may be defined and limited in three ways: (i) the historian is interested in events which actually happened; he separates fact from fiction; (ii) the choice of events is limited to those which took place in or affected the life of mankind. Events in the physical world, for example, do not interest the historian unless they affected the course of human history; (iii) the events studied are those which the historian considers to be significant; this is a somewhat subjective approach, but it is a generally accepted one.

In general, a historian does not have direct contact with historical events. Even his own observation of events in his lifetime gives only a partial, one-sided view of what happened. His contact is indirect, and it is mediated to him through data or evidence of many kinds — contemporary documents, archaeological finds, and so on.

The historian applies his skill to the interpretation of the data which lie before him, making use of the generally accepted methods of inference and argument. Such criteria for evaluating data have been designated warrants by recent students of historiography.

Finally, on the basis of the data the historian composes his record of historical facts. The word 'fact' is here being used in a special sense which must not be confused with its everyday usage. A historical 'fact' is what the historian believes to have happened in the past, but since the historian may be mistaken in his conclusions or limited by inadequate evidence, his 'fact' may not altogether correspond to the 'event' which actually happened. The historian is like a man looking through a telescope at an object. The object is real and precise, but the actual image to which it gives rise as the light rays pass through the telescope and form an image in the observer's eye is not identical with the object itself; irregularities in the lenses, the inability of the telescope to view it all at once and the transition from a three-dimensional object to a two-dimensional image, can all exert a distorting influence. It is therefore convenient to retain the word fact for the historian's picture of what happened, and to use the word event for the actual happening.

The facts as established by one historian will not, then, be necessarily identical with the events. One historian's picture of the Battle of Bannockburn may not coincide in every detail with another, and neither description may fully correspond to the battle itself. The description of such a fact or set of facts is governed by the processes which have affected the transmission of the data (the data themselves are 'facts' and not 'events') and also by the competence and presuppositions of the historian.

This leads to an important conclusion. The Christian historian need not claim absolute, 100% reliability for the facts which he offers, and indeed as a historian he cannot do so. For all historical reconstructions have an element of uncertainty about them. Some new evidence may turn up which completely alters an accepted picture. A historian may produce a fresh, more coherent and intrinsically more convincing reconstruction on the basis of the data. Another may succeed in showing that a particular set of presuppositions has inhibited previous students from a proper appreciation of certain data. Absolute reliability is in principle unobtainable. But, granted that historical facts always have an element of uncertainty which is not shared by the propositions of logic or mathematics, this does not mean that the historian is reduced to methodological doubt and must include 'probably' or even 'possibly' in every sentence which he writes, rather like church announcements which include 'DV' in every prophecy of coming events. Some facts have been established beyond all reasonable doubt, and the historian who says that 'probably' or even 'almost certainly' the Scots won the Battle of Bannockburn is not doing justice to the nature of historical evidence. Other facts are
admittedly extremely doubtful because the evidence is too scanty, and in such cases the historian must be content to remain agnostic, at least for the time being.

It is often asserted that the impossibility of ridding himself of all presuppositions prevents a historian from recording objective history. A historian who has 'an axe to grind' or a particular hypothesis which he wishes to prove is bound to produce suspicious conclusions. This can undoubtedly happen, but it must be stressed that it is easy to be over-pessimistic about this matter. For, first, it is now generally agreed that progress in scientific research is made not so much by assembling all the facts and then framing a hypothesis to account for them, but rather by forming a 'hunch' and then assembling and examining the evidence to see whether it substantiates the hypothesis. The researcher often starts with a case which he is trying to prove, but nobody condemns this procedure as unscientific. Second, the historian carrying out research will be governed by his own fidelity to truth; this will lead him to record and assess the evidence both for and against his own opinions and to record the data fully and fairly so that his readers may test his conclusions for themselves. A historian who twists or suppresses evidence is universally condemned. He may, however, be prone to unconscious bias, and at this point a third factor is important, namely the practice of mutual criticism by scholars; the work of each must be tested by that of others, and when they produce a united testimony the lay reader may have some assurance that reliable results have been obtained.

Nevertheless, if it is impossible for a historian to be thoroughly objective, objective history is not impossible. Alongside those facts which are of doubtful validity there is a vast number which are morally certain. If history is a matter of probabilities, much of it is a matter of overwhelming probability.

THEOLOGIANS AS HISTORIANS
The question that now arises for us is whether the adoption of the role of theologian or preacher (the role ascribed to the Gospel writers) prevents a man from being a faithful historian.

If Christian theology were simply a matter of ideas, the question would not arise. There are many issues in philosophy and mathematics which are purely in the realm of ideas and are entirely divorced from history. Some people have regarded Christian theology in the same way as basically a set of ideas which would remain true (or false) independently of any particular historical events. It is concerned with 'necessary truths of reason', and such truths cannot be proved on the basis of 'accidental truths of history' (Lessing). This, however, is a false understanding of Christianity; it is not concerned primarily with necessary truths of reason, but with the interpretation of historical facts. Christian faith is not faith in the necessary truth that God is powerful, but faith in a God who raised Jesus from the dead. If the historical fact of the resurrection is denied, the deduction that it was an act of God is robbed of its basis, and faith becomes empty. The Christian gospel is based upon historical facts, and the gospel is empty if the Christian interpretation of the facts is untenable or the facts themselves have no historical basis in real events.

Have, then, the evangelists accurately recorded and correctly interpreted the basic facts on which faith depends, or does the fact that they have a vested interest as believers in Christianity mean that consciously or unconsciously they have presented us with a distorted account which cannot support our faith?

If what has been said in the previous section is a fair statement of historical method, it may be said immediately that there is not necessarily any conflict between the interests of the historian and those of the evangelist. A sceptic may want to argue that it was the Christian message which produced the so-called facts and their interpretation, but there is no logical necessity that this should be so, and the normal expectation is that it is the events which lead to the record of historical facts and suggest their own interpretation. If a historian presents a case, he does so on the basis of data; and he does not invent the data.

But, granted that there need not be conflict between the interests of the historian and of the evangelist, we are still faced with the problem whether there may have been, and, if so, how we may discover it.

THE SELECTION OF THE MATERIAL
It must be acknowledged that the choice of material recorded by the evangelists has been determined by their message. They wished to present Jesus in a certain manner, and therefore they decided that certain facts were important theologically and others were unim-
important. For example, they devoted much space to the last week in the life of Jesus, but they were only slightly interested in the period before His baptism. They are silent about His physical appearance, the details of His character, and the day-to-day development of His ministry.

It might well be asked whether material of importance has been omitted, material which might possibly lead us to a quite different estimate of the significance of Jesus. And here we come to a major difficulty. We have no check upon the story from an independent point of view. There is no other account of Jesus than the one in the Gospels. A historian is happiest when he has access to several independent sources of data, so that he may check them against each other and base his reconstruction upon their total evidence. How can we know whether the evangelists have selected the right facts?

The question must be answered somewhat indirectly. (i) There is scarcely any evidence available from outside the New Testament about the life of Jesus. Sources like the Rabbinic writings and the Slavonic Josephus have been carefully combed, but the results are meagre; it is not surprising that a newly discovered document like the Gospel of Thomas should be hailed with great joy as giving a possible check upon the Gospel tradition.

Such evidence, however, as is available from these sources does nothing to discredit the general impression which we receive from the Gospels. It does not produce a picture of Jesus which can stand in opposition to the New Testament picture. This is a fact of some importance, even if it must not be overestimated. The Christian faith had many enemies; it is significant that there is no reliable evidence preserved, for example, in Jewish works, which would refute the Christian understanding of Jesus.

(ii) Although the Gospels show a considerable amount of mutual dependence (e.g. the generally accepted theory that Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source), it is possible by the use of literary and form criticism to isolate a number of earlier different sources and types of material used by the evangelists. It then emerges that, despite all the differences of emphasis, very much the same estimate of Jesus and His message appears in them all. This has been shown convincingly by C. H. Dodd in *History and the Gospel*.

(iii) Another approach is to scrutinize the Gospels for details which have been unconsciously preserved by the writers, brief items in the story which the tradition preserved despite their unimportance for the main points at issue. Attention was called to a number of verses of this character by P. W. Schmiedel (*Encyclopaedia Biblica* II, 1901, 1881-3) in his attempt to find pillars for a reliable history of the life of Jesus. Schmiedel argued that details emphasizing the human character of Jesus were hardly likely to be inventions. More recently C. F. D. Moule in his important book, *The Phenomenon of the New Testament* (1967), has employed the same argument to good effect.

These are some ways in which the difficulty caused by lack of non-biblical evidence about Jesus may be circumvented, and they suggest that the data recorded by the evangelists were not necessarily unrepresentative or tendentious.

**THE CONTENT OF THE GOSPELS**

Coming now to the facts which the evangelists thought proper to include in the Gospels, we must ask how far a theological interest has determined the content as well as the selection of the material. The Gospels were written after Easter by men who believed that Jesus was the Son of God; has their post-Easter experience coloured their account of the pre-Easter story? Must their Christian belief be discounted if we are trying to get at what actually happened? Once again, we must remind ourselves that there need not necessarily be conflict between the presentation of a case by an advocate and the narrative of sober historical facts.

We may make two general points. First, the central item in the preaching of the early church was the death and resurrection of Jesus. But this does not mean that these facts were invented to meet the requirements of the preaching. On the contrary, all are agreed that only the resurrection faith of the earliest disciples can explain the origin of the preaching. The basic item in the preaching was not invented: something happened.

Second, the coincidence of some fact in the life of Jesus with the description in an Old Testament prophecy does not necessarily mean that the fact was invented to fit the prophecy. This may be arguable in individual cases, but there is no *a priori* necessity for it to be so. In the same way, the fact that a narrative or sequence of narratives makes a
good preaching point does not necessarily mean that it was invented for this purpose or that in principle it is more likely to be fictitious than historical.

There are a number of more basic problems. (i) If what we may regard as the same historical fact is given different interpretations in different sources, and if the details of the incident vary from source to source, we may suspect that some shaping has taken place. It is clear that there are differences of this kind in the Gospels. But so far as the general reliability of the Gospels is concerned, there is not in my opinion sufficient difference to justify doubts concerning the basic meaning of the facts recorded, still less to deny the historicity of the facts. Where interpretations differ, these may well prove to be complementary rather than contradictory.

(ii) If a fact is interpreted in terms of divine action (e.g. if I interpret my missing a plane which subsequently crashed as an act of divine providence which saved my life), a historian may question the validity of the interpretation and even the historicity of the fact. The Gospels prophesy the destruction of Jerusalem. It is immaterial, for the moment, whether the passages concerned are prophecy pure and simple, prophecy written up in the light of the event, or sheer *vaticinia ex eventu*; the point is that the Gospels are taking a historical event, which certainly happened and which can be 'explained' in terms of ordinary historical causes in the sphere of Romano-Jewish politics, and declaring that ultimately the destruction was an act of divine judgment, just like the earlier event in 587/6 BC. Is it proper to offer such an interpretation? By way of answer it must be said that in any case the historicity of the incident is not being called in question; it really did happen. The question of interpretation is one that must be faced by all philosophers of history who claim to see a deeper plan or purpose in history, and the validity of the biblical interpretation is as much a matter for open debate as any other view.

The Christian has good reasons for believing in a divine purpose in history (H. Butterfield, *Christianity and History*, 1949, is still worth study), and the presence of such interpretation of facts in the Bible is thoroughly legitimate from a historical point of view.

(iii) The problem is greatest when a fact is presented as miraculous: if it happened at all, it must have done so miraculously. Two schools of thought dominate contemporary discussion of facts. On the one hand, some scholars declare categorically that miracles do not happen and did not happen. Every miraculous story must be explained away, either as a misapprehension of what actually happened (e.g. when a 'miraculous' cure was really wrought by psychological means), or as a legend with no historical foundation. On the other hand, some scholars allow that a Christian may believe in miracles, but such events fall outside the field of the historian. The historian's field is said to be by definition the world in which phenomena take place in accordance with the strict natural laws of cause and effect; miraculous events fall outside this framework, and thus are beyond history; they cannot be included as such in a historical narrative. Thus G. E. Ladd writes: 'The supernatural dimension of the Kingdom of God which has invaded history in the person of Jesus creates an insoluble problem for the historian as historian, for he knows nothing of supernatural events; he can deal only with purely natural occurrences. The evidence of the supernatural is inexplicable to the historian. That is why the person of Jesus presents a continuing problem to historical scholarship, for the essential fact of his person and mission transcends historical explanation' (*Jesus and the Kingdom*, 1966, p. 188 n.).

In my opinion neither of these positions is satisfactory. (a) The assertion that miracles do not happen is scientifically unprovable; one must have an open mind on the matter, and the person who denies miracles is refusing to be fully scientific. Now there are good reasons why a scientifically-minded historian will usually be suspicious of miracle stories, but there are cases where such suspicion ought to cease. Developing an argument by W. Pannenberg, D. Fuller writes, with reference to the resurrection of Jesus, 'If the report of a unique event cannot be explained as a result of the witness's imagination, it must have happened. The historical method remains undisturbed by such irregularities, so long as we may assume that the witness has acted in a manner that corresponds with reality. The resurrection of Jesus took place in defiance of preceding causes in this world, but this was not the case with the report of the apostles. Their report was not brought about by imagination, for after the death of Jesus they wished only to disbelieve. Thus when the witnesses behave normally, we may accept their reports of miracles as true, provided that their reports can be explained only in this
way’ (Easter Faith and History, 1968, p. 251). If this argument is sound, there are occasions when the historian as historian can legitimately use the category of miracle.

(b) That such cases may arise within the Gospels is demonstrated in an argument by the philosopher, T. E. Jessop: ‘If the universe is dominated by a Spirit, miracles are possible; if by a Spirit that is Love, probable; and if that Spirit has become incarnate, this miracle would make further ones very probable indeed’ (quoted by A. M. Hunter, The Work and Words of Jesus, 1950, p. 59).

(c) If what has been said so far is reasonable, then it is not a desperate last resort to use the category of the miraculous in describing particular facts in the Gospels. One fact in particular demands such a supernatural explanation, namely the resurrection of Jesus (E. M. B. Green, Man Alive!, 1967). But grant the reality of that one miracle, and the possibility of others is established.

Admittedly, a non-Christian must reject the historicity of the resurrection and find good reasons for doing so. The Christian may not be able to convince him that he is wrong, but at the very least he can demonstrate that his own position is consistent, reasonable and scientific.

We conclude that the presence of miraculous narratives in the Gospels is not in itself an argument against historicity. Thus we have reached the point where we have considered a number of claims that, because they are theological writings, the Gospels cannot also be reliable historical writings, and in each case we have seen that the claims cannot be sustained. The presence of theological motivation need not mean the absence of a concern for reliable history.

THE PURPOSE OF THE EVANGELISTS

We have still to ask, of course, whether in fact the theological motivation of the evangelists has led to historical indifference or to unconscious bias; all that we have tried to establish so far is that there is no justification for assuming that this must have been the case. This is a major question which will form the theme of the second article in this series. But to conclude the present considerations and to prepare the way for the posing of this question, we may observe, finally, that the evangelists themselves believed that their message rested on history and made it their aim to present reliable history. This is a point which needs making with some emphasis, for a number of scholars have fathered their own historical indifference upon the early church and insisted that the first Christians were not concerned about the historical realities of the earthly life of Jesus.

There ought to be no doubt that the aim of Luke was to present true history as the basis of his theology (see D. Fuller, op. cit.; I. H. Marshall, ‘Recent Study of the Gospel of Luke’, Expository Times [forthcoming]). This is demonstrated beyond doubt by the preface to his work which speaks of providing for Theophilus evidence by which he might know the certainty of the matters in which he had already been instructed. It is true that this has been disputed by U. Luck, who has argued that Luke’s purpose was to give a guarantee for the content of the apostolic preaching by showing that the life of Jesus was a series of divine deeds worked by the same Spirit as was now operative in the church and testified to by the apostles who were chosen under the guidance of the Spirit. Luck therefore asserts that the asphaleia of which Theophilus had to be convinced was not concerned with a historically grounded certainty which only rested on the transmitted facts but rather with the recognition of the prophetic acts of God (‘Kerygma, Tradition und Geschichte bei Lukas’, Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche, 57, 1960, pp. 51-66). But this denial that Luke was concerned with the factual accuracy of the deeds which he recorded is false. It ignores the use of such words as ‘eye-witnesses,’ ‘accurately,’ ‘in order’ and ‘certainly,’ which point to a writer for whom correct history was a matter of importance. When John the Baptist sent messengers to ask whether Jesus was the Coming One, Luke records that the messengers were able to see the acts performed by Jesus for themselves. In his summary of the gospel in Acts 1: 3 Luke speaks of Jesus providing pieces of evidence that He was truly risen from the dead, and he is careful to list some of His concrete manifestations to His disciples. Evidence such as this shows that Luke was concerned to present historical facts, so that his readers might have a faith not built upon shifting sand, but upon the bedrock of solid history, a history in which God was active by His Spirit.

But we may go further back. Although H. Conzelmann has insisted in his studies of Luke-Acts that Luke was the first Christian writer to see the life of Jesus as a piece of redemptive history
and to write something like a biography of Jesus, in fact such an interest can be traced earlier. S. Schulz has argued convincingly that it is to be found in Mark, whose Gospel takes the form of a history of Jesus in which the various pieces of traditional material are fitted into a chronological and geographical framework. Mark, rather than Luke, is the first Christian historian (Studia Evangelica 11, 1964, pp. 135-145).

It is possible to work still further back. The earliest Christian preaching contained some account of the life of Jesus. If the scheme contained in Acts 10:34-43 and 13:23-31 is based on tradition, we have evidence here for an early, brief outline of the story of Jesus as the basis of the gospel. The extract in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5, the great antiquity of which is in no doubt, shows clearly that an appeal was made to historical facts as the foundation of the Christian message. From the very first, the early church regarded its theology as being based upon history and saw no contradiction between history and theology.

Here we must conclude our general considerations on the relation between history and theology in the Gospels. In the sequel we must ask more specifically whether the Gospel writers succeeded in carrying out their aim of producing reliable history. In particular, have form criticism and tradition criticism made it impossible for us to believe that the Gospel picture of Jesus is reliable? For the moment, our conclusion is that an affirmative answer to this question is unlikely. Theology does not necessarily imply the falsification of history; on the contrary it demands the reliability of the history.

Missionary Studies — Why and What?

A paper delivered to a meeting of representatives considering an evangelical fellowship for missionary studies, on 19th January, 1968, by ANDREW F. WALLS, MA, BLITT, Lecturer in Church History in the University of Aberdeen. Part of this paper appeared in The Kingdom Overseas, June, 1968.

THE SELECTION of a title for this paper was, I think, unconsciously influenced by a book which haunted my childhood, entitled The Wonder Book of Why and What. Its front cover depicted an apple-cheeked little boy framed partly by one of those awful soft hats that nice little boys wore then (everyone of my age or older will remember what I mean, the rest can find out from the illustrations in Winnie the Pooh) and partly by an enormous question mark. It contained edifying answers to children’s questions (I cannot recall asking any of them myself). The title of the opening chapter was simply — ‘Why?’.

All the other chapters were answers to the question ‘What?’ and ranged from casual enquiries like ‘What is the sun?’ or ‘What is at the bottom of the sea?’ to real posers like ‘What is inside a piano?’

Perhaps my treasury of juvenile instruction set a good example. The Wonder Book of Missionary Studies is, alas, not yet written: but its opening chapter must obviously be, ‘Why?’ and there is no reason why we should not think of a few other chapter headings beginning with ‘What?’.

1. We cannot understand either the church or the world today without them. Our own century has seen one of the most cataclysmic changes that God has