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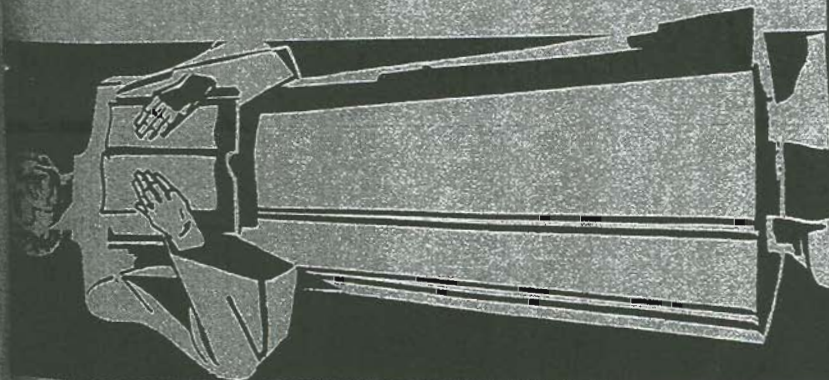
History A Proof For The Christian Faith?

H. P. HAMANN

The Outside Limits Of Lutheran
Confessionalism In Contemporary
Biblical Interpretation

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The Outside Limits of Lutheran Confessionalism in Contemporary Biblical Interpretation

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Part III (2)

Before we leave the subject of terminological ambiguity, we should also consider "form criticism" briefly. Because of its prominence today,³⁶ the term is often used as a virtual synonym of "*the historical-critical method*," and again one confronts the same kind of tendentious generalizations by both the "left" and the "right." There are both the indiscriminate, blanket condemnations as well as the tongue-in-cheek assertions that "We have *always* used form criticism, only to a lesser degree previously." And again there will be no communication, let alone progress, unless we define our terms carefully.

The truth in the assertion that "form-criticism" has always been used is the fact, as we observed above in connection with "inerrancy," that it has always been recognized that Scripture makes *some* use of parable, metaphor, hyperbole and other symbolic and non-literal "forms." If that, and that alone, is what we understand "form criticism" (in the strictest sense of the term) to mean, our problems will not be great. The only real *theological* question, then, will be that of "outside limits," within which there may be considerable exegetical variation (although of course, no one will *want* to be exegetically wrong either!) What plainly *will* be out of bounds, then, is that argument in a circle which blithely and arbitrarily declares a text to be "myth," "legend," "parable," or otherwise non-literal, and thus makes it mean whatever is desired. That such a pseudo-scientific procedure should be very handy both for those who do not believe in the supernatural and for those who are hyperskeptical of all ancient historical traditions is quite understandable, but that it is also really specious procedure, both theologically and historically, should not require demonstration here.

At the same time, we will want to look very carefully at all available evidence, some of it very new, which may force a reconsideration of some traditional positions. We will try to be faithful to the sound Reformation principle of following the natural, literal sense except for compelling reasons to the contrary. These may be internal (indicated in the text itself or by comparison with other biblical texts), or they may be external. What the writer *intended* is, of course, the literal sense. If he *intended* to write figuratively, it is really "literalistic" to interpret him literally, just as, obviously, it is reductive to interpret him figuratively if that was *not* his intent. But the trick is to *determine* that intent if possible. Here external evidence is often very important, and exegetical judgments will often vary. The extra-biblical literature of the ancient Near East now available from archaeology, with the insight it affords into the usages or

"forms" and the psychology of that world, offers many new suggestions for understanding the biblical forms which previously never came into mind. The basic interpretative principles remain the same, but there are now infinitely more data to consider. New data always provoke reconsiderations, sometimes in major as well as in minor respects. Of course, one must not apply the extra-biblical parallels in a mechanical way, as has often been done. Not only was Israel not that unoriginal (even humanly speaking), but very often the literary forms of its neighbors were part and parcel of their mythology, and it is clear that Israel did not "borrow" (if one may use the term at all) indiscriminately. In many instances, however, there obviously is substantial identity of forms, and the accumulation of our new evidence bids fair to put "form criticism" (in this definition) on an increasingly objective and scientific basis.

A few examples. As we note elsewhere, there are obviously many types of historiography: some very explicitly theological, others only implicitly so, some quite exhaustive, others hitting only the high points with vast lacunae and syncopations. NOT "errors," mind you, if one bears in mind the writer's intent!³⁷ To no little extent our external evidence will help us determine what his intent was. Any "conservative" will want to stick with the most obvious, surface sense as long as possible, but sometimes new, external evidence will make it likely that that must not have been the writer's intent! If there were space, the patriarchal histories would be a good test case; the tendency which is still fashionable in many quarters to regard them as historically worthless is certainly not acceptable, but the fact that we have something like half a millenium of history compressed into some forty chapters with an overriding theological interest (the "promise") should restrain naivete. In the case of the New Testament gospels, the evidence is more internal in nature, but it is now widely accepted, even in many conservative circles, that they are neither the simple chronicles or biographies which tradition assumed them to be, nor the "creative" and "kerygmatic" products with minimal factual content that liberalism tends to assume. Rather we apparently must think of a special genre of literature called "gospel," which each evangelist adapted to his own specific needs. (Or, if you will, it is "testimony literature," but it makes a world of difference whether we use that phrase exegetically and form-critically, or hermeneutically with the relativistic implication that the Bible merely "contains" the Word of God!)

One major area where this kind of form criticism is invaluable in helping us understand an ancient type of historiography which is anything but native to us is in the symbolic use of numbers and similar schematic devices. The principle, as such, is not new, but archaeological finds have underscored the commonness of such practices in the ancient orient and perhaps given us some clues to the interpretation of certain details. This context makes it increasingly plausible that hyperbole is the explanation for certain extremely high figures in Scripture³⁸ (although, obviously, such a principle must be used with caution). It is not news that some biblical genealogies omit some generations and use various schematisms,

and it becomes increasingly likely that sometimes, especially in earlier periods, they intended to describe political, not genetic relationships. Likewise, while it has long been accepted that the numeral "forty" is sometimes used symbolically (perhaps e.g., of the wilderness wanderings), the external evidence which has accumulated in favor of the *late* date of the Exodus (as increasingly accepted also by conservative scholars) makes it imperative that we also understand the "480" of I Kings 6:1 as having been intended symbolically (twelve generations of forty years apiece?). Probably nobody but nobody accepts the 4004 date for the creation of the world any longer, and in general, Ussher's chronology is today in quite universal disrepute.³⁹ However, it is important to emphasize that, in these as well as in a host of other examples, it is *not* (at least in confessional circles) a matter of taking Scripture less seriously—or even less "*literally*" (as measured by the writer's intent), but of better "form-critical" understanding in the light of more and better evidence of just what that intent apparently was.

It seems to me that conservative scholars have often not been as alert in exploiting this approach for their apologetic purposes as they might have been. For example, it is clear that doublets and recapitulations were a common part of the ancient Near Eastern epic style, with the result that the literary critics' postulation of different sources, etc., is often, at best, unnecessary. Another extremely important application would note that "form-critically" none of the biblical writers intended to write a *summa* of theology, but rather only "tracts for the times," i.e., addressing only specific and limited goals. Hence their omissions and varying accents and formulations cannot be made to signify any real "pluralism" of conflicting theologies. Doctrinal authority still rests on the totality of the canonical collection with Scripture interpreting Scripture, not upon whatever part of it one happens to find congenial.

So far I have championed a relatively limited definition of "form criticism," which can be very useful, and which is not in principle any different from what has always obtained in serious exegesis. However, one would only contribute to the ambiguity and duplicity which sometimes surrounds the phrase if he did not also emphasize that there is another usage—which we most certainly have *not* "always" employed. As concerns this wider usage, the term "form criticism" is often almost a simple misnomer. The usual German term, "*Formgeschichte*" ("*history of forms*") is somewhat more accurate because it denotes the tremendous amount of concern for development which usually accompanies the enterprise. (Sometimes the German "*Gattungsforschung*," i.e., "investigation of types" is used to denote the earlier, more restricted and objective type of research in contrast to that which we now discuss.) Understood this way, "form criticism" by no means limits itself to the mere analysis of the types of literature, but devotes great effort to trying to **reconstruct** the *history* of their combination, expansion, etc. Sometimes more technical distinctions are made between form-criticism and "tradition criticism" and/or "redaction criticism." In fact the latter two arose in corrective of earlier form-criticism's atomistic

concentration on individual units, and attempt to indicate how the oral tradition or the final editor combined those small units into the larger ones we have today. In practice, however, all of this research is often subsumed under the caption, "form criticism," and hence the ambiguity.

As I argue elsewhere, even such investigations cannot be dismissed out of hand. There is no *a priori* reason why the charisma of inspiration had to be limited to one writer per book, and not offered to the whole choir of saints who contributed to the book's final form. Unfortunately, however, this type of research is not often approached in an atmosphere of such reverence for objective Scriptural authority! More typically it is associated with a high skepticism, both theologically and historically.⁴⁰ Most conservatives, I think, agree that nearly any type of pure literary criticism without objective referents is an unlikely tool for determining historical truth. Especially the currently popular use of the criterion of "dissimilarity" (Perrin, etc.), according to which only sayings of Jesus which have no close parallels are considered genuine, appears to contradict all historical probabilities. Hence, the less the likelihood of any certain results, the greater the danger of "default" of what really matters, especially when such vast energies are devoted to the pursuit of the will-o'-the-wisp. Of course, in addition, the misguided attempt to find authority in some "historical Jesus" before his Christological obfuscation in the later tradition, and similar theological radicalisms, make it wholly understandable, even if regrettable, that many conservatives reject out of hand anything and everything associated with the phrase, "form criticism."

Before we look in a bit more detail at some specific examples, perhaps it will be fruitful yet to review a few points by considering some of the major objections to "*the* historical-critical method." The danger of course, is that they become generalizing slogans too, applied prematurely and too comprehensively without paying sufficient attention to the reasoning and motivation *behind* the hypothesis, as though it really made no difference whether or not they are prepared in the confessional context of the objective authority of Scripture.

The major objection, with which we have expressed our most emphatic agreement, is the naturalism and nationalism which is commonly associated with higher criticism. We have already stressed, however, that sometimes those different conclusions do not arise from any motive of excluding supernatural causation, but simply of pursuing the apparent historical causation more vigorously than the Bible did. As long as the new hypothesis does not *eliminate* the former, (presenting the product as merely a human, "religious" reaction to ancient circumstances analogous to how I must react to mine, rather than God's Word for all time) but merely articulates the historical *side* or *aspect* of revelation there would seem to be possibilities. The fact that the Bible accents that side less must also be a cautionary norm for us lest we lose its real message by default. Many non-confessional scholars (and probably even ag-

nostics) may *externally* reach the same conclusions, but their overall *theological* context will be several light-years removed!

This problem of anti-supernaturalism becomes much more acute, however, when the issue of miracles or predictive prophecy is raised (we return to the latter below). Obviously, any sort of closed-off naturalism is even beyond consideration. Not much better is the "resurrection minimalism" played by many, according nearly all other miracles a genteel (at best!) skepticism, or a demythologizing cultural relativism ("If the writer had lived today, he would not have expressed transcendence in supernaturalistic terms"). My experience has, indeed, often been that in sermons or discussions on such texts about all that *does* come through is the speaker's desire to demonstrate, above all, that he is no "fundamentalist" or "literalist"! If one truly believes in the resurrection of the body, it is hard to see on what consistent grounds *any* miracle can be denied. At the same time, if it is plain that no *theological denial* is involved (including that of Scripture) there is probably some *slight* room for *exegetical* difference in judgment on what the writer really intended to say, although in a confessional context this will indeed be slight, and will require cogent evidence for those exceptions (the cogency of which perhaps not all will view equally). Sometimes (by no means always) it seems clear that a "sign" in biblical usage was broader than "miracle," i.e., apparent *only* to faith and representing no break in the natural order. There may be some difference in judgment as to precisely where that line comes, and the extent to which those "miracles" in a broader and narrower sense may overlap and fade into one another suggests the possibility that *sometimes* the biblical writer may not have *intended* to report any literal miracle, but is using a literary device to try to communicate to mortals "what eye hath not seen . . .". As we shall note below, such an approach *may* represent a valid use of "form criticism," but it obviously is pregnant with great abuse and must be applied with the greatest caution. One will scarcely want to judge anyone's orthodoxy in this respect on a purely quantitative basis (a non-literal understanding of two miracles acceptable, for example, but of three not!), but at the same time something is plainly fishy if one meets offhanded "explanations" of this sort for any substantial number of supernatural occurrences. Generally, I think, a better case can be made for such understandings (if at all) at certain times when the miracle is a part of an extended literary unit (where many more criteria are available for judging) than if it is essentially a pericope unto itself. Somewhat similarly with predictive prophecy! there are *possibilities at times* that the biblical writer may be using literary techniques of "foreshadowing" or the like (describing a more general, immanent operation of the Word in history) rather than literally reporting a prediction (cf. below).

A second major objection is the *historical* skepticism which often accompanies the theological type. One must, of course, try to distinguish a certain "*heuristic*" skepticism or "liberalism" of even a *good conservative critic* as he tries to avoid *naïvete* and discover what the text really says, from the skepticism or "liberalism" of a more

basic ideological sort, but the problem remains. We have already noted the deep philosophical roots (back to Descartes at least) of this kind of skepticism of literary records. They may be granted some credibility for the period of composition, but very little for the earlier period which they purport to describe—and the traditional tendency has generally been to maximize the interval between the two. Generally, one might say that the facticity of the accounts is considered “guilty until proved innocent”, i.e., until “proved” true “scientifically”, and, of course, that kind of absolute proof is very hard to come by—even in contemporary events, as witness nearly any courtroom trial! Thus the “histories” of Bible times produced by many modern scholars are very often more accurately histories of their author’s skepticism—and there is very little a German university professor can’t doubt! (Sometimes one could almost cynically argue that his “*Wissenschaft*” is valued in direct proportion to his skepticism, as it once apparently was in direct proportion to his ability to date biblical documents very late!)

In his presidential address at the 1970 banquet of the “Society of Biblical Literature” in New York, the eminent Jewish scholar, Harry M. Orlinsky (scarcely any fundamentalist!) observed how, not only is almost nothing commonly held by critics to have been actually written by the one to whom tradition ascribed it, but that virtually *nothing* in the Bible would be believed had it not been for archaeology! However, even then one notes how grudging the concessions to facticity have generally been—and still are. The extent to which the underlying skepticism still remains very much alive is seen clearly in the fact that it is *precisely* in those areas which, because they deal with private or non-official groups, are difficult of access to external (especially archaeological) verification, that high skepticism and the arbitrary sportsmanship of purely literary investigations (especially form criticism) still reign supreme: the premonarchical history of Israel (skepticism generally increasing the further back we go), and the history of early Christianity in the first century A. D. When to this historical skepticism one adds the theological naturalism we have already scored, one begins to grasp the extent to which “creative biblical scholarship” has really rigged the rules of the game in order to permit maximum “freedom” and gamesmanship (or “*creatio ex nihilo*”!) in which the conservative scholar can participate with only the greatest difficulty without compromising his principles. Here too one must be careful not to tar everyone with the same brush in broadsides at “*the* historical-critical method”, but neither will one feel any obligation to run interference for what can in this respect often only be judged execrable *method*, “scientifically” as well as theologically. When one observes how the skeptical presuppositions breed skeptical results, one will no longer feel any need to retreat into some realm of subjectivity in order to (allegedly) protect the Gospel from the acids of hypercriticism poured out on the Bible, and *a fortiori* one will abjure those further spiritualizations which would even make virtually all concern for historicity a sign of unfaith and the like.

In contrast, a “confessional” principle will surely proceed on

"innocent until proved guilty" lines—and probably on historical as well as theological grounds, although this will be a major example of how the two interact. Except for the "heuristic" type noted above, there seems to be no possible justification for such incorrigible skepticism, outside of the philosophical system or "hermeneutical circle" in which it thrives—and the confessional scholar is by definition outside it! If the conservative sometimes overreacts by excessive rigidity and literalism, it will certainly be understandable, although that we will try to correct too. Even historically, more conservative options are always available, and, if this is not driven into the ground, it seems self-evident that the confessional scholar will prefer them. And if, in the light of further evidence, adjustments have to be made, it is not always a sign of arteriosclerosis if the conservative is not among the first to champion them. Especially if one remains aware that it is not only history or tradition as such that are at stake, but the Gospel and the church, the "conservative" may well judge that, in the balance, he has more to gain than to lose by allowing others to make the mistakes in sifting out the wheat from the chaff.

A third and related common objection to "*the* historical-critical method" is the *atomism* that is often associated with it. There is, undeniably, substantial truth to this objection, but here especially one must avoid generalizations. Perhaps the only generalization which will stand is that scholarship itself has repeatedly launched correctives of its fissiparous tendencies, only to slip almost invariably back into the same bad habit, perhaps in only slightly different form. Form criticism, it will be remembered, with its holistic accent on the "*Sitz im Leben*" began partly as a corrective to the atomism of the older literary criticism. When form criticism, in turn, began to emphasize individual units unduly, "tradition criticism" and "redaction criticism" developed to explore how the smaller units had been combined into larger wholes. And, in a way above all, a major part of the agenda of the "biblical theology" movement was to accent the unity of the Bible—only to degenerate, in turn, into the current fashion of accenting the allegedly fundamental differences among the various "theologies." Thus, one could really make a case for the thesis that a sense of the unity of the Scriptures will likely *never* establish itself unless it is accepted simply as a confessional axiom to start with, based on a belief in the common divine authorship of *all* the writings, whatever the historical vicissitudes.

Even so of course, the danger is great, as we have already stressed, that the dogmatism will ride roughshod over the exegete in confusing unity with uniformity, or almost in dictating to the Holy Spirit how he must have inspired. In and of itself, it is hard to see how multiplicity of authorship or complexity of literary development is any theological issue. It soon becomes theological, of course, if onesided attention is paid such investigations in default of more important matters, and especially when hidden agendas insinuate themselves . . . but one should aim his defense precisely at the bullseye.

A very closely related objection is the evolutionism or developmentalism which still lingers so ineradicably, in spite of archae-

logical disproof of much of it and the collapse of the philosophical underpinnings which once supported it. At the same time, as has also been emphasized, the wider cultural shift from accent on nature or being to stress on history has inevitably brought with it a sensitivity to the "change and decay" that is an inevitable part of all history. However, it must be explored empirically on the basis of *evidence* (which archaeology has often provided), not on the basis of philosophical (and really most unscientific!) dogmas about how things *must* develop! (To the extent that one is exploring the purely *secular* aspects of biblical history, it is a good thing to be a "historicist" or "positivist"!) Again, as the modern exegete sometimes accents external change in contrast to the Bible's accent on the internal, theological unity or continuity, he must be at pains to demonstrate that it is again a matter of the complementarity of "sides" or "aspects," not of dichotomy, let alone error or contradiction.

However, in the case of both the atomism and the developmentalism, the *theological* issue is really joined when alien *value judgments* enter in, subverting the objective authority of the canon. These the confessional exegete must strive to exorcize with all his powers. It is another example of how the two camps may often agree *externally*, but ultimately not at all. The list of these extrinsic axiologies is too long to do more than sample here, and often they are determined largely by the subjectivity of the individual scholar. Most of them erect some kind of canon *within* the canon: the prophets (or part of them) before later additions and priestly and apocalyptic corruptions; or the "historical Jesus" before the later Christological speculations and other degenerate tendencies of "early Catholicism", etc. If these "later and hence inferior" assumptions are *not* present, however, much of this research becomes far less objectionable, and perhaps even mildly desirable, if, by exposing the development of a text, we can understand it better. Knowing what we think we do about ancient procedures, one need not posit any sort of fraudulence if, within limits, it be proposed that not all of the prophetic or gospel literature represents *ipsissima verba*, but may have been refracted or expanded *technically* by later disciples or worshippers, applied and reformulated in new contexts, etc. (in a way comparable for example, to the later Trinitarian formulations which are not *technically* "biblical" either). Similarly, even many conservative scholars now concede that various symbolical or topical interests often took more historiographic priority over chronological sequences than was traditionally assumed, with the result that some of the traditional types of harmonizations (e.g., of the four gospels) no longer seem to be called for. Self-evidently, however, the question of "error" or the like will not even come up if we judge the biblical writers by what apparently were their *own* standards.

Having said all this, however, I still doubt if this type of research can even hold the attraction for the conservative scholar that it often does for others simply because he does not *desire* to find some authority *behind* the text, as the "liberal" commonly does. By the same token, he will probably *also* entertain far less confidence in the likelihood that these procedures will ever obtain very certain

results (especially to judge from what we have seen so far). Be that as it may, the all-important thing to accent in this connection is that it is the complete and traditional canon which is our authority, not *any* hypothetical stage behind it, however firmly established. Of course, if that earlier stage is congruous with the "analogy of faith", one can probably not object to its use, but the proper hermeneutical explanations and safeguards must still be insisted upon.¹¹

A final objection to be considered is the sense of *distance* and, hence, *irrelevance*, which critical study of the Bible easily produces. No doubt, there is great truth here if one is not very careful. History, by any definition, deals with things past, and if one stays stuck there, the point of it all goes by the board by "default", which, as I have already lamented, happens all too often in biblical studies.

In modern scholarship, the problem has been dealt with in basically two ways. The classical liberalism of the late nineteenth century tried, as it were, to skim the cream off the top of the milk, i.e., to disengage the "timeless" values and "relevant" ideas and ideals from the historically conditioned and otherwise "inferior." Of course, in practice philosophical and other extraneous standards became the real "canon," and, as we have noted, much *pseudo-scientific* higher criticism (late datings and judgments about literary unguineness) was employed as a sort of argument in a circle to demonstrate the presuppositions. In addition, one suspects that much *popular* exegesis which is not strictly in the classically liberal tradition proceeds, nevertheless, along essentially the same lines: moralistically and analogically extracting whatever it finds "relevant." It should also not be overlooked that this procedure, in its basic neglect of history, is really *allegorical*—a most ironical circumstance when found in moderns to whom theoretically "history" is sacred and "allegory" virtually an obscene term. One may even argue (and rightly, I think) that many who are theoretically orthodox and confessional, in practice subscribe to the same method in a one-sided accent on doctrine (without retracing its exegetical roots), and in homiletical efforts which accent the "timeless" instead of demonstrating the applicability of the text's literal and historical meaning for all time. (I am aware that many people carelessly use "timeless" in the latter sense, but that usage appears to me to parallel the medieval homilist's demand for sermon material, which was one of the great pressures which enabled the allegorical method to flourish).

The second way of dealing with the problem, that of "*Religionsgeschichte*" (which may be experiencing a great revival at the present time), has been very common in academic circles (although, at times, again, it appears to be guilty of nothing more than overspecialization). Its approach is that of accenting with a vengeance, and often exaggerating, the antiquity and utter strangeness of "an ancient and Oriental book," accompanied, at best, by a sort of romantic appreciation of ancient and exotic cultures. On the functional level, however, the upshot was more likely to leave such irrelevancies almost entirely to the "specialist."

It is probably true on every level, lay and conservative as well as others, that the modern cultural stress on history has made it far

more difficult for us to read the Bible with the unselfconscious immediacy that was generally characteristic of our fathers (or, at least, grandfathers). Ralph Bohlmann⁴² has commented on what he calls the "omnihistorical" character of the Confessions, and the term would probably apply as well to most pre-Enlightenment theological literature. Because no further development of history on earth was postulated (in contrast to our exaggeration and usual glorification of change), it was easy and natural for them to think of their time as the end-time, i.e., to "identify" readily with the eschatological consciousness of the New Testament itself. With almost equal ease they could understand the Old Testament christologically too, whereas we are keenly aware of both its greater chronological and its greater theological distance from us (but cf. below). In general, we are aware of a greater sense of distance in the use of many traditional proof texts. We can no longer apply many of them as *directly* to our precise historical situation as once appeared to be the case. In some instances, better historical understanding seems to veto their traditional application altogether. More often, however, once one has worked his way through the historical particularities, their *general* import remains very much the same. One thinks here of not only the texts bearing on the role of women in the church, but, e.g., of I Cor. 11:27 with reference to the age of confirmation, and many others. All of this applies *a fortiori* to Old Testament texts.

Thus, there is no denying that the far greater sense of historical distance to which we are heir does result at least in a greater initial relativization of its meaningfulness as well. Whether it is only initial or whether the final result also is that of relativization of biblical authority depends upon the hermeneutics or theological context in which all our work is done. Only if with the Bible itself we have a concept of History, i.e., only if we are able to confess that the same Spirit who originally inspired the ancient texts will bring them out of the remoteness of history to *us*, can we overcome mere historicism and antiquarianism. In that context we will begin to see the other side of the coin, viz., that our momentary concentration on "what it *meant*" will also illuminate and rectify our understanding of "what it *means*."

FOOTNOTES

36. It is possible, however, that form-criticism's heyday is over (although I think we shall believe it when we see it). Rolf Knierim, a leading American form-critic (in an unpublished paper presented at the Society of Biblical Literature meeting in New York, Oct. 27, 1970), quotes none less than von Rad himself as having made this observation already a decade ago! Knierim thinks the statement is true only with respect to what he considers the present methodological impasse of the approach. Or it is another case where an academic fad catches on in America at the time when it is on its way out in Germany?
37. Thus, in the light of this entire paper, it should be clear that any critique or modification of the "Brief Statement" must not be with respect to its hermeneutical **concern** for the "inerrancy" and **inviolability** of *all Scripture* as such, but for its failure (for which in its day and its context it cannot be entirely faulted) to take into account some newer data, including this understanding of "form criticism" bearing on what the

sacred writer's *intent* may have been (and sometimes, apparently, its refusal even to countenance hypothetical explorations along those lines). Similarly, more clear distinctions between what is really doctrinal or hermeneutical and what is only traditional exegetical opinion are also imperative when LCMS church conventions make pronouncements on matters of Scriptural interpretation.

38. Cf. Harrison, *op. cit.*, pp. 1163ff. and *passim*.
39. A recent study on this topic in our circles which I think deserves to be hailed is that of Fred Kramer, "A Critical Evaluation of the Chronology of Ussher," pp. 57-67 in P. A. Zimmerman (Ed.), *Rock Strata and the Bible Record* (Concordia, 1970). Kramer arrives at different conclusions than Luther and most earlier tradition, but with him it plainly is no matter of "errors" or of trifling games with the text, but simply of what, in the light of all available contemporary evidence, the text intended to say. I believe that this is a proper type of "form-critical" study of which we need to see much more. Of course, not all confessional scholars will agree on precise results either, but it will be plain that it is then a matter of *exegesis*, not doctrine.
40. There have, of course, been more conservative applications of form-critical methods (even in this wider sense), which posit far more technical continuity between Jesus and the church, and which theologically are more conservative too. However, especially in Germany, such conservatism always has a difficult time maintaining itself. Oscar Cullmann wielded considerable influence in that direction for a time, but he and his methods are currently anathema in all the "in" circles. (Just read some of Kasemann's and Conzelmann's sarcastic footnotes, especially if you think the debate is any matter of "scientific" objectivity!) There are also scholars, especially outside Germany, who appeal to the Qumran evidence, in particular, to establish considerable historical plausibility for an early, Palestinian setting of many Gospel traditions—but most German form-critics have found that evidence uncongenial to their own *a priori*, and hence simply ignore it. Attention here may be called to the just translated work of the Swedish scholar, H. Riesenfeld, *The Gospel Tradition* (Fortress, 1970) with its massive challenges to many form-critical dogmas. Another rather helpful little work which may be mentioned is: Otto Betz, *What Do We Know About Jesus?* (Westminster, 1968).
41. John Reumann has devoted a recent study to this problem which I think is helpful and generally acceptable: "Methods in Studying the Biblical Text Today," CTM, CL, 10 (10/69), pp. 655-681.
42. "Biblical Interpretation in the Confessions," p. 24 in *Aspects of Biblical Hermeneutics* (CTM Occasional Papers, No. 1, 1966).

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