

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

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Creation and Salvation: A Study of Genesis 1 and 2

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Editorial ✝

This is the third annual Biblical studies issue, and it emphasizes trends in synoptic exegesis. The first three articles deal with the key question in gospel studies today: How does one explain the marked similarities and differences among the synoptic gospels? The question itself is not new to the church. Tatian the Syrian wrestled with it in the second Christian century. He prepared a single gospel, which effectively concealed all the differences. But preachers soon discovered that they were preaching the gospel according to Tatian rather than one or the other of the inspired, canonical gospels.

For the next 1500 years each commentator did his best to harmonize the differences, while ignoring the significance of the striking similarities. The rise of historical studies and literary criticism from the 15th to the 17th century led an ever-growing number of Biblical scholars to ask concerning the Synoptics: Why are they so much alike? Why are they so different? The question has not yet been finally answered; the riddle of the New Testament is not yet finally solved.

The basic explanation of the similarities and differences accepted by scholars in every theological camp today is that each of the Gospel writers is presenting a different theological interpretation of the meaning of the person and work of Jesus. But the precision, sophistication, and/or bias of the scholars varies widely. Some are content to observe that Matthew wrote to prove that Jesus was the promised Messiah; Mark to show that He was the powerful Servant of Yahweh; Luke to show that He loved all people; and John to make His divine nature clear.

From this simple but useful explanation, the gamut runs to the most sophisticated analysis, represented in this issue by Mr. Kingsbury's study of Matthew's treatment of "time" in his theological interpretation of Jesus' work and person. Has gospel interpretation become too esoteric, too speculative, when it reaches that level? Many parish pastors—and many professors of exegesis—feel that it has. But others feel differently. They argue that this kind of hypothetical work is necessary. It must be tested by the exegetical specialists, perhaps to be rejected, or at least to be refined considerably before its results can be incorporated into a practical commentary for the use of the parish pastor.

Many exegetes argue today that the synoptic patterns of similarities and differences require the interpreter and the preacher to make a distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. According to these scholars, the Jesus of history can never be really known. None of His followers, they say, attempted to write a straightforward historical biography. Instead, what we have in the gospels are doxological confessions of the theological meaning of His life, written from faith for the faith needs of specific first-century Christian communities. Mr. Elliott provides a perceptive analysis of the history of this approach, uncovering the presuppositions which colored the interpretations of many of its practitioners, and suggesting some of the legitimate insights which "the Quest" has provided for the kerygmatic and pastoral work of the church.

One result of 20th-century synoptic studies that seems certain to influence exegetes

and preachers for many years to come is the realization of the "unit makeup" of the gospels. The synoptic gospels seem to be made up of small units, stories or pericopes. These can be rather easily identified by the somewhat standardized introductory phrases such as, "and Jesus said," "and it came to pass when," "when evening came," "and Jesus went," etc. The form critics maintain that many of these units circulated in oral or written form before gospels were written. The synoptic authors chose from a larger number of pericopes those that they wished to include in their gospels. They arranged them and introduced them to accord with the particular theological portrait they wished to draw. The form critics erred in reducing the inspired gospel writers to pedestrian scissors-and-paste compilers, but their "unit theory" has gained wide acceptance. Synoptic interpreters today believe that it is necessary and helpful to ask why each writer chose certain units, placed them in certain context, then often reported them in a slightly different way.

Mr. Fred Danker demonstrates the use of this "unit type" interpretation in his article. In it, he throws an important challenge at Wilhelm Wrede, a form critic before the well-known form-critical movement associated with the names of K. L. Schmidt, Martin Dibelius, and Rudolph Bultmann. Wrede had argued that Mark's Gospel was of no historical value at all but rather was entirely creedal and confessional in nature. He based his argument on Jesus' commands to silence, which occur with striking force and frequency in the second gospel. According to Wrede, Jesus never uttered such commands. All of them were created by Mark out of whole cloth to explain to his readers why practically none of Jesus' Palestinian contemporaries had accepted Him as the Messiah. Mr. Danker differs with Wrede in the interpretation of a specific "secrecy" passage, that is, a passage in which Jesus conceals Himself from an eager crowd of listeners. Danker then shows how his interpretation offers a key to understanding Mark's basic purposes in writing his gospel.

But if exegesis requires this kind of technical skill and specialized study, will it not make the parish pastor and his people helplessly dependent on the professional interpreter? Three observations should be made to those who ask this basic question. First, very few of us really do our own exegesis today. We have accepted the exegetical or theological system of a seminary professor or popular theological writer, and this system provides us with most of the "exegetical insights" we use in our preaching and counseling. Second, the methods represented in this issue have been made available and usable for the parish pastor in dozens of commentaries. It is basically a matter of adding several judiciously chosen commentaries to one's library. Third, many who teach this kind of exegesis of the gospels, and the methodological parallels for other parts of the Bible, maintain that it is a simple and relatively easy method to master. Professors of exegesis insist that what is needed is merely the addition of the basic insights of this methodology to the skills already taught in seminary training.

The Braunschweig Theses, which appear in this issue in English for the first time, have aroused considerable interest in Germany as well as in other parts of the world. They represent a vigorous and unabashed rejection of the existential presuppositions of

Rudolf Bultmann, while endorsing the historical-critical exegetical method, which Bultmann employed with consummate skill. We print them because of their potential importance to the contemporary church. The staff neither endorses nor rejects any of the theological thrusts.

These theses have been criticized by some German theologians because they incorporate specific antitheses and rejections. The ecumenical spirit, some maintain, no longer permits the use of this tactic. Others have suggested that the theses sound the retreat from the theological ferment of the 20th century back to the peace and quiet of the 16th-century formulations.

The theses were adopted by a group of 100 pastors of the Lutheran Church of Braunschweig who are working for a renewal of the church on the basis of the Holy Scriptures and the [Lutheran] Confessions. The impetus for the Braunschweig movement seems to have been provided by the *St. Ulrichi Brüder*, one of several pastoral study groups, or *Brüderkreisen*, in West Germany. This group sees in the demythologization of the New Testament and in Heideggerian existentialism the cause of the "great crises of our church, which today is beset by false doctrine and preaching," by falling away from the faith, and by "faith-weariness."

We offer Mr. Wegner's study on "Creation and Salvation" as a clear and scholarly contribution toward effective preaching on this much-debated topic. It is not the last word; there are other sides and other arguments. But it is Biblical; it is Lutheran; it is pastoral. It reminds us that Genesis 1 and 2 are to be preached to make men wise unto salvation.

In this issue, then, some of the key issues in contemporary Biblical studies are presented for consideration by the parish pastors who make up the bulk of our readers. Will it be helpful? Most of our correspondence from individuals and pastoral groups indicates that previous Biblical issues have been appreciated, even by those who disagree with an author's position. It is often observed that The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod among the major denominations maintains the strongest closed front against the conclusions, the hermeneutical theories, and the sometimes speculative theories of the new Bible studies of the past 100 years. This may or may not be true. At the same time, it is probably true that only The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod would go to the great expense and trouble of trying to encourage its ministerium to study and evaluate Biblical hermeneutics together. Perhaps this issue will have some impact both on the closed front and the determination to stay together, 6,500 pastors strong.

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