

THE SPRINGFIELDER

Vol. XXVIII

Spring, 1964

No. 1

THE SPRINGFIELDER is published quarterly by the faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois, of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

ERICH H. HEINTZEN, *Editor*

RICHARD P. JUNGKUNTZ, *Book Review Editor*

EUGENE F. KLUG, *Associate Editor*

MARK J. STEEGE, *Associate Editor*

PRESIDENT J. A. O. PREUS, *ex officio*

Contents

Page

EDITORIALS

Welcome to Our Finnish Brethren	1
The Matriculation Mania and The Church	1
CHURCH POLITY AND FELLOWSHIP IN AMERICAN LUTHERANISM	3
LOUIS J. BETO MEMORIAL LECTURE August R. Suelflow, St. Louis, Missouri	
EFFORTS AT LUTHERAN UNION IN AUSTRALIA	20
FRED C. RUTZ FOUNDATION LECTURE Henry Hamann, Adelaide, Australia	
A CRITICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE SO-CALLED HISTORICAL-CRITICAL METHOD IN THE INTERPRETATION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE	32
Manfred Roensch, Heidelberg, Germany (Translated by Martin Naumann)	
BOOK REVIEWS	43
BOOKS RECEIVED	63
SPRINGFIELDER INDEX: December 1959-Winter 1964	66
Arleigh Lutz	

Indexed in INDEX TO RELIGIOUS PERIODICAL LITERATURE, published by the American Theological Library Association, Speer Library, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey.

Clergy changes of address reported to Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri, will also cover mailing change of *The Springfielder*. Other changes of address should be sent to the Business Manager of *The Springfielder*, Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois.

Address communications to the Editor, Erich H. Heintzen, Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois.

Business correspondence should be addressed to Arleigh Lutz, Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois.

A Critical Investigation of the So-Called Historical-Critical Method in the Interpretation of Holy Scripture

MANFRED ROENSCH

The Reverend Dr. Roensch, a member of the Evangelisch-Lutherische (altlutherische) Kirche, generally known as the Breslau Free Church, is pastor of free church congregations in Heidelberg and Mannheim. He recently accepted an appointment by his church to the faculty of the Lutherische Theologische Hochschule at Oberursel near Frankfurt Main. In 1963 he was visiting professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and in November of that year delivered the following essay in Springfield. Translation of the German text is by Dr. Martin Naumann of Concordia Seminary, Springfield.

I.

IF I NOW UNDERTAKE to investigate and criticize the so-called historical-critical method of the modern interpretation of Scripture, I shall first of all have to be clear as to the stance I must take to make such an investigation and consideration. In other words, I shall have to ask myself where I stand and in what position I have been placed theologically and culturally as a theologian who has subscribed voluntarily to the Lutheran confessions because he is convinced that they are the true exposition of Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments. Since this concerns an investigation into exegetical methods of interpretation of Scripture I shall have to ask what position the Lutheran confessions take on Scripture. The clearest answer to this question, in my opinion, we find in the *Summary Content, Rule and Standard*, as expressed by the Formula of Concord (*Triglotta*, p. 777, 1.). We read there:

We believe, teach, and confess that the sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas together with (all) teachers should be estimated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and of the New Testament alone, as it is written Ps. 119, 105: "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." And St. Paul: "Though an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you, let him be accursed," Gal. 1, 8.

This says no more nor less than that for the Lutheran Church of the Reformation the only fount, source and norm of proclamation and doctrine is the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments, and that furthermore this declaration here is more than a dogmatic statement concerning the Bible; it is an article of faith by which the

Lutheran Church stands or falls. What weight the Holy Scripture gains in this declaration is evident. It is the basis of the faith of the church, not only of the Lutheran church but, according to the witness of the Confessions, of the very church of Jesus Christ, of the *Una Sancta*. C. A. VII Of the Church:

Also they teach that *one holy Church* is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered.

Word and Sacrament, the signs of the Church, God's means of grace, by which He works faith in the hearts of men (C. A., V) are no independent magnitudes, to be considered for themselves, but are given to us and testified to in the Prophetic and Apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments.

What does this mean for our discussion? It means that the Holy Scriptures are to me, as a Lutheran theologian bound by the Confessions, a closed magnitude and unit to which I am by faith bound, and which I must consider to be the Word of God on the basis of its own witness to itself. I beg to be spared the presentation of the collection of Holy Scripture's witness to itself in this matter. This means for my exegesis of Scripture that even in view of the fact that God has spoken by men in the Holy Scriptures, by men at various times, I must nevertheless be clear as to the fact that it is the Word of God that these men have written and that therefore it not so much formally but rather materially differs from every other word of men.

II.

In view of the position I have just taken, I expect that it will be objected that such a theological pre-supposition will make a purely objective exposition of Scripture impossible and will lead to a dogmatic violation of Scripture itself. Such an accusation will come most of all from such who affirm the historical-critical exegesis of Scripture and see in this the only legitimate method of interpretation of Scripture, since this method, or better these methods, alone make an objective exegesis possible. In answer to this we might ask the question: Are the methods of the historical-critical schools really objective and matter of fact? And second we ask: Is there really an exegesis of the Old and New Testaments without pre-suppositions?

Hans-Joachim Kraus, Professor of Old Testament at the University of Hamburg, says the following in his generally accepted history of the historical-critical research on the Old Testament about the research and work in the Old Testament in the 19th century:

The fathers of the historical-critical research all are victims of the fatal error to think that they have opened the road to objective exegesis by eliminating the orthodox-dogmatic pre-suppositions. In reality they put in place of the orthodox-

dogmatic considerations the new dogmatic premises of a theology determined by the spirit of enlightenment, romanticism and idealism.

At another place he says:

It is often claimed that the historical-critical research has placed a purely historic form of thought in opposition to the soteriological mixture of revelation and history. This is not correct. The historical-critical work simply put the concept of religion in the place of revelation. This method from the very beginning leads to a new mixture of history and religion in which the various standards of religion are subject to all kinds of definitions and dominate the historical picture. . . . This fiction cannot anymore be maintained, as if the father of the historical-critical method had promoted a pure method of historic thinking.

Herewith we have an answer for the first question we raise namely: Are the historical-critical methods of interpretation of Scripture really objective and factual? The answer turns out negative.

We turn to the second question: Is there actually something like an exegesis of the writings of the Old and New Testaments that has no presuppositions? and we find a surprising answer in Bultmann in *Kerygma and Myth*, p. 192:

It would be an illusion to think that an exegesis could ever be given independent of a profane conceptuality. Every exegete is dependent upon a set of concepts that has come to him by tradition, concepts unreflected and uncritically his own. But it is important not to proceed without reflection and criticism, but rather to evaluate responsibly the concepts and their origin. One may therefore say without fear it is a matter of the "right philosophy".

Changing Bultmann's statement somewhat, we would say concerning our presuppositions: In exegesis it depends on the question the "right theology."

Having marked our position in the discussion it may be time to ask the historical-critical method what it considers its work to aim at. DeWette, so to speak the father of all historical-critical research on the Old Testament, formulates the aim of this method as follows:

The highest aim at which the historical criticism of the Bible aims or to which it is to clear the way is the understanding of the phenomenon of Biblical literature in its genuine historical conditions and peculiarities; and to such an understanding have I conscientiously dedicated myself.

At another point he says:

Since the subject matter of Biblical isagogics is the history of the Bible, therefore its scientific character is historic

critical, that is to say, the Bible is viewed as an historic phenomenon together with other like phenomena and is completely subject to the laws of historical investigation.

In other words, the Bible is a historic document, or better said, a collection of historic documents, whose exact historic place and peculiarities I must define in detail with the help of modern historic methods, just as I would critically investigate, say, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. No long debate is needed to establish that such a method of investigation could never do justice to the divine character of Holy Scripture. It is therefore no wonder that such a one-sided historic-critical viewpoint has had to be modified from time to time. The modern historical-critical research in a milder form, is among others that of the Heidelberg New Testament professor, Guenther Bornkamm, who sees the Holy Scriptures much more under the aspect of tradition, an aspect which in view of the *traditio apostolica* of Irenaeus and Tertullian doubtless comes closer to the character of Holy Scripture than the attempt of DeWette and others after him. But even Bornkamm consciously and definitely stands on the basis of historical-critical research and in the preface to his well known *Jesus of Nazareth* he champions this method; at the same time, however, clearly showing his tendency. Bornkamm says:

Many are of the opinion that the way of the historic-critical research has proved misleading in view of this subject matter [he means the Person and Message of Jesus Christ], and ought finally to be abandoned. I do not share this view and above all I cannot see that this is the road of unbelief and that faith must forego it or even could forego it. How could faith be satisfied with bare tradition, even with those put in writing in the gospels? Faith must break through them and search beyond them to gain a view of the matter itself and perhaps to learn to understand the traditions anew from this viewpoint and even to regain them. In this endeavor he will meet everyone who simply and seriously first of all wants to gain historic insight. Certainly faith should not be dependent on the changing and insecure historic research; to ask this of faith would be foolish and blasphemous—but no one ought to despise the help of historic research in the illumination of the truth, which should be the concern of all.

What Bornkamm says about the relation between faith and historical research is very dubious, for on the one hand he makes it practically a matter of faith to search behind the fixed and written tradition of the gospels and on the other hand he sees the danger for faith if it depends on the ups and downs and on the to's-and-fro's of historical-critical research. But in the last sentence of Bornkamm: "no one ought to despise the help of historical research in the illumination of the truth, which should be the concern of all," I nevertheless see a positive note. In other words, historical-critical

research in service of the Biblical truth. No mistress of the Scriptures dare this research be, but maid and servant in the understanding and interpretation of Holy Scripture. Let us see which of the historical-critical methods are in our opinion apt to give such service.

III.

One should not expect me to present an exact and detailed description of the several methods of historical-critical research, for that would go beyond the frame of this discussion. The picture given of these methods can only be a sketch and we will have to content with presentation of the essential marks of these methods. In order to avoid confusion, it might be well that we distinguish between Old and New Testaments in this presentation, also because the historical-critical research hardly has the unity of Scripture-mind.

Historically seen, the first of the methods of critics applied to the Old Testament is the so-called source-critical theory. This source-critical theory is built on the supposition that the Pentateuch is the result of a redactor's work who has combined various literary sources in one work. This theory has determined the exegetical work with the Old Testament more or less in various ways since the middle of the 18th century to the beginning of the 20th. The main representative of this school of thought was Wellhausen. He tried to reconstruct the history of the people of Israel as he thought it might have happened, all on the basis of this source-criticism. He did this by placing the P code, the priestly code (contrary to the current opinion), at a very late date. Wellhausen caricatures the scientific opinion of his time by saying: "One proves the great age of the priestly legislation by placing it into a historical sphere created by its own legal premises, a sphere that is not found anywhere in history and therefore should precede it. Thus it keeps itself in suspension by its own hair."

We shall not now decide in what respect Wellhausen's theory is better than other critical opinions, but one thing is sure: it has nothing in common with theology or with theological exegesis of the Old Testament. This was recognized by Wellhausen himself and we must respect his honesty when he writes to the Secretary of Cultural Affairs of Prussia while he was professor at the University of Greifswald asking for his dismissal. He writes among other words:

Your Excellency will perhaps remember that I asked you at Easter time 1880 to transfer me, if possible, to the philosophical faculty and that I tried to give you my reasons at that time: I became a theologian because I was interested in scientific work with the Bible; only gradually I realized that a professor of theology has the practical duty of preparing students for service in the Evangelical Church, and that I could not meet this requirement, but in spite of my discretion and resignation made them unfit for the ministry. Since that time my theological professorship has been a heavy burden on my conscience.

Wellhausen finally left his theological professorship in Greifswald, at first took an assistant professorship in Halle, later became professor in Marburg and in Goettingen. This career of Wellhausen seems to find its parallel in the historical-critical method he presented, for this too gradually but surely developed itself out of the church and finally was usable only as a method of literary criticism for philologists and as a working hypothesis for secular history in the work of comparative history of religions.

It was Wellhausen's concern to present the religious history of Israel with the help of the Hexateuch (Joshua was added as a sort of sixth book to the five books of Moses). The same attempt was made by Duhm. He too wants to present an over-all picture of the religious development, but with a completely different presupposition. The title of the respective books lets us see these presuppositions clearly: *Theology of the Prophets as the Basis for the Inner Developmental History of the Religion of Israel*. He explains his intention in the words, "The following investigations on the periods of development of Israel's religion which joined to the names of the prophets, are of inductive and not didactic nature. That is, they do not proceed from any theological or historico-religious premises concerning Israel's religion and its development, rather, they want to help find and confirm the correct insight into it." Duhm, according to this, wants to find in the prophets first of all the theology of the prophets and furthermore at least to some extent the religion of Israel. He wants to do this without presuppositions. But his very concept of prophecy, which he develops, shows us that he in no wise works without premises but that he is, as Kraus says, "through and through oriented anthropocentrically." Of the earlier prophets Duhm says: "Their prophecy becomes or is the gift of nature." Only with Amos something new is added. This new point is, if we summarize the distinguishing marks, that the communion with God leaves the physical basis and natural means and now presents itself in moral acts. With Isaiah these moral acts reach their high point, and he says of him, 'He is on the road to founding a new prophetism on moral bases. In him, Isaiah, prophecy is about to make the 'word of Jahwe' its moral possession.'"

Since Duhm radically refuses to consider the prophets as vehicles of God's revelation, and since he is of the opinion that neither the Old nor the New Testament knows of a revelation in the sense of the dogmatists, it becomes evident that Duhm's methods of presenting the history of Israel from the prophets fails to consider the Old Testament as source of revelation just as much as Wellhausen and his school.

A promising innovation is to be found, to my opinion, in Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932). Gunkel takes up the thought of form-criticism which DeWett had coined almost a hundred years before him. Gunkel is of the opinion that the source critical method does not get at the bottom of things, for this purpose the tradition, which had been fixed in the literature of the Hexateuch, was much too

complicated. He proceeds to write a history of the literary form of Israel's literature. "Yet," he explains, "the history of the literature of Israel, if it wants to be honest, is not so much concerned with the personalities of the authors—although they will get their due attention too—but rather with the typical which lies at the basis of the personal, i.e., with the type of authorship. Israel's history of literature accordingly is the history of the literary form and this we indeed may attempt to deduce from the sources. Gunkel proceeds from the idea "that all religious matter is conservative in form and content; that form and content have their certain place in the community (*Sitz im Leben*); and that an astonishing similarity marks the traditions." (Kraus, p. 312). But even Gunkel declines a dogmatically formulated concept of revelation and thereby, as Kraus correctly states, introduces "foreign views and concepts into Biblical research." A sentence of Gunkel proves this fact: "Here," he says in one place, "the historian cannot get along without a 'Weltanschauung.'" In spite of this his commentaries on Genesis and his interpretation of Psalms have become significant for modern Old Testament theology and it is to Gunkel's credit that he has recognized the peculiar and unique character of the Israelite religion from his form-critical point of view. Thus he writes in his Genesis commentary: "The identification of divine figures with natural objects or concerns, battles of gods against each other, theogonies and the like, as we find them in mythologies, are eliminated in Genesis. One can thereby determine the unique character of the religion of Israel; the thrust of the Jahwe-religion does not favor the myths."

Gerhard v. Rad has taken up the form-critical position of Gunkel, but has greatly modified it, so that one could draw the conclusion that such a consideration measures up the true essence of Holy Scripture better than any other method with which the historic-critical research has approached the Old Testament. In v. Rad's book, *The Form-Critical Problem of the Pentateuch* (1938) we read the following:

Let us sketch the content of the Hexateuch just in general: God who created the world, called Israel's ancestors and promised them the land of Canaan. When Israel had become a large people in Egypt, Moses led the people with marvelous signs and wonders of God's grace into liberty and gave them after a long trek through the wilderness, the promised land.

These sentences, which delineate the content of the Hexateuch are in the sense of the sources, exclusively statements of faith. No matter how much of historically credible matter is circumscribed the manner in which the data of the history of the Hexateuch are described they are spoken alone and exclusively by the faith of Israel. What is here reported concerning the creation of the world or the call of Abraham up to the taking of the land under Joshua is "Heilsgeschichte." One could also call it a *credo* that recapitulates

lates the main data of the "Heilsgeschichte." v. Rad is, according to Kraus, "less interested in the *Sitz im Leben* of the ancient legends. He wants to know where the leading statements of faith in the Hexateuch have their *Sitz im Leben*. By this the whole problem of the form-critical question is moved out of the area of the "esthetic-archaic" (Gunkel) into the area of the Old Testament *credenda* and the history of their tradition." (Kraus, p. 403.)

IV

At this point I should like to break off in the discussion of the form-critical methods and turn to the historical-critical research in the New Testament. Matters in a way are simpler here than in the Old Testament, that is, the various methods of research are more easily presented under a general concept. For this we should like to make use of an excurs of Guenther Bornkamm, which he has added to his *Jesus of Nazareth*, called "Introduction into the history and pre-history of the Synoptic Gospels." He writes:

For us the beginnings of the Jesus tradition lie largely in the dark. Whoever wants to study its history must go to the synoptics. But they also give us opportunity to go back beyond them, with a certain reliability, to their literary sources and even further into the period of verbal and preliterate traditions. Concerning the question of the sources of the first three gospels, exact investigations have led to a first important result which has been recognized by most of the scholars, the two-source theory. This theory claims 1) that Mark is the oldest gospel which was worked into the next two, though in a manner different in each; 2) that Matthew and Luke used another source besides Mark, one which is called Q or the Logia or Spruch-quelle by most German researchers. This theory explains best why 1) the whole gospel of Mark is found in both other gospels; 2) that the order of material is essentially the same in spite of many regroupings; 3) that the linguistic forms agree to such an extent that one can be justified in claiming the priority of the second gospel and the dependence of the other two on this one. In distinction from Mark, Q is not preserved to us as a literary structure and must be deduced from the common tradition in Matthew and Luke. Only by way of accepting this second source can one explain the agreements satisfactorily, since both gospels do not betray anything of common knowledge or use. Beyond Mark and Q Matthew and Luke have some special subject matter. . . . The question of literary sources of the gospels, however, is only one station on the road toward illuminating the beginnings of the Jesus-tradition. The form-critical, so-called, first has taken this path methodically. (M. Dibelius, R. Bultmann, etc.) It showed that out of the character of tradition of the gospels the laws and forms of the preliterate verbal tradition

can be seen with some clarity. Especially important is the observation that at the beginning of tradition there is not the historic complex but the individual pericope, the individual parable, the individual saying, the story, surrounded by the gospels at first and often in various manner by a scenic frame and brought into connection by modest medietorial devices. These small units of tradition need to be viewed separately. They can be distinguished clearly according to various types, which got their final form in the life of the congregation according to their content and use or purpose. For the kind of form and law of tradition the rabbinical manner of teaching, the apocalyptic tradition, but also the popular verbal tradition offers many parallels. . . . The way each little pericope is a unit in itself and the type of reports demonstrate how the little tradition was really interested in a historic and chronic like report. The search for that which really happened historically and was really said, this even the historian must again and again set aside. The more important it becomes to show what connection every piece of tradition has with the life and interests and expressions of the congregation (sermon, teaching, polemics, apologetics, confession, cult, etc.). There can be no doubt that the tradition of the gospels had this very practical reference to life, out of which it grew and for which it was intended. Thus the question of the *Sitz im Leben* may be put for tradition, and in many cases can be convincingly answered. Herewith the first step is taken into the area of the origin of the Jesus-tradition in general.

We are grateful for one thing in this presentation of Bokkamm; namely, that he shows very clearly the hypothetical character of the method he proposes for the search after the Jesus-tradition as he calls it. To me the way of form-critical research in investigating the synoptics seems to be the more important, but also the more dangerous; for that reason I would like to show in a short comparison in what manner this way of form criticism could be at all considered for Lutheran theologians. Martin Dibelius describes in *Formgeschichte des Evangeliums* the essence and task of form criticism as follows:

The history of the form of the gospel, that is of this content, does not start with the evangelist, but it reaches a certain final form in the formulation of the gospel-books. . . . What lies before this are formation and growth of little units out of which the gospels are composed. Also these little units follow certain laws of formation, the more so because activities of the author play no role in their formation. To trace these laws to make the formation of these units clear, to work out their type and find it and thus to come to an understanding of the tradition, that means working with form-history of the gos-

Rudolf Bultmann clearly shows in his *Geschichte her Synoptischen Tradition* that he is willing to go beyond the form-critical start of Dibelius at a decisive point. What does he say:

Differing from M. Dibelius I am really of the opinion that the form-critical task, just because of the relation of the literary form to the life and history of the early Christian congregation not only presupposes objectively critical judgments by its literary critical premises but must needs also lead to objectively-critical judgments (concerning authenticity of a word, historicity of a report, and the like). For that reason consideration of that one main problem of early Christianity, the relation between the early Palestinian and Hellenistic Christianity, must play an essential role.

Where R. Bultmann got with his "objectively-critical" judgment we all know. "*Gemeindetheologie*" and "*Juengerglaube*" have to replace the authoritative words of Christ and His victorious resurrection as witnessed by the gospels; and the relation between the early church and the early Hellenistic Christian; faith serves him as a reason to call everything theological reflection which he is not ready to accept as historic fact. By one last example, I want to show that the form-critical research as represented by Dibelius to my opinion can be helpful for the interpretation of the gospels.

Joachim Jeremias, professor of New Testament in Goettingen, has worked out a new understanding of the parables of Jesus by way of the form-critical method. In his work, "The Parable of Jesus," we read:

Jesus' parables are not, at least not in the first place, works of art, nor did they want to impress people with certain principles (no one would crucify a teacher who told pleasant stories to enforce prudential morality), rather each one is spoken in a concrete situation of the life of Jesus, in a one-time, frequently unforeseen situation. Largely, yes, predominantly this concerns, as we shall see, militant positions, justification, defense, attack, even challenge: the parables are not exclusively, but in the main, weapons in a battle. Every one of them demands an immediate answer. From this conclusion the problem develops. Jesus spoke to men of flesh and blood, out of the situation of the hour to the hour. Every parable has a certain historic place in His life. To attempt to regain that place is the task. What did Jesus want to say at this or that certain hour? How did His words necessarily affect His hearers? We must put this question in order to get back, as much as possible, to the original meaning of His parables.

To understand and to interpret the Scriptures is the task of Lutheran theology from the times of the Reformation, and if we can possibly here and there apply some of the historical-critical

methods of modern exegesis to serve this concern of the Reformation, then it can only be in the sense of our Lutheran confessions, which know that the interpretation of Holy Scripture is assigned anew to every generation, otherwise the epitome of the Formula of Concord could not say: "But other symbols and writings cited are not judges, as are the Holy Scriptures, but only *a testimony and declaration of the faith* [author's italics], as to how at any time the Holy Scriptures have been understood and explained in the articles in controversy in the Church of God by those then living." (Trig., p. 779).

Let us remember where we stand. As Lutheran theologians we do not stand above the Word, but under it, and we therefore interpret Scripture not as lords over it, but as servants of the Word which we must preach for the salvation of souls.