

Luther And The Ministry

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Luther: Right or Wrong

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A Response To The Leuenberg Concord

TRANSLATED BY JOHN DRICKAMER

The Outside Limits Of Lutheran
Confessionalism In Contemporary
Biblical Interpretation

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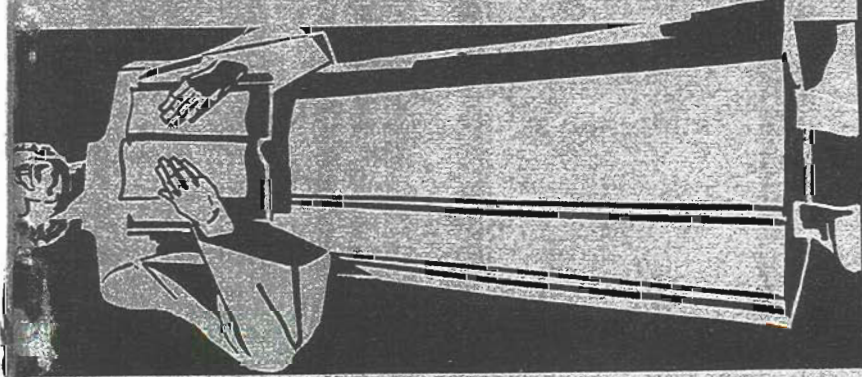
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The Outside Limits of Lutheran Confessionalism in Contemporary Biblical Interpretation

HORACE D. HUMMEL

PART III (1) HISTORY AND REVELATION

“OUR WHOLE PERSPECTIVE has been changed; our minds will never again be the same; we now know it to be axiomatic that nothing can be understood unless we know something of its history.—[It is] the greatest spiritual revolution which western thought has undergone.” With these momentous words G. E. Wright began a recent essay,³¹ and while there might be an element of hyperbole in them, one is inclined to suspect not too much of one. For better or for worse, everyone has been influenced by it to one degree or the other, even the most conservative. The *fides quaerens intellectum* inevitably pursues this line of investigation far more intensely than was once the case, and, moreover, now it is the faithful who (up to a point!) ask questions which previously arose only in unbelief. There can be little doubt that the new sensitivity to history has been one of the major catalysts in the entire modern theological ferment.

The question is no longer *whether* we shall recognize it, but *how*, to what extent, with what outside limits, etc. Obviously, the discontinuity with the past is not total, but in intensity and degree (especially in the explicit self-consciousness with which historical questions are pursued), it sometimes seems to approach it. Christianity (and Israel) knew that it was a “historical religion” over against all the pagan cults, but that every expression is, on the whole, a uniquely modern way of putting it. Inevitably, the Bible, as the “historical deposit” of the faith, would have to bear the brunt of the adjustment to the new outlook. Thus, the entire issue of the so-called “historical, critical method” of interpreting the Bible arose, and that issue we must explicitly confront here. (Partly for want of a better handle, partly because it is about as neutral a term as I can think of, I shall sometimes refer to that earlier period in the following section as “prehistorical,” but obviously not in the same sense at all as commonly used by anthropologists and others today.^{31a})

Basically, this sense of “history” is a result of the so-called “Enlightenment.” The same, of course, is true of the “historical-critical method,” our main focus here. It is *not* as some overzealous defenders have tried to establish, (apparently still much more so in America than in Germany) a result of the nature of the faith itself or even of the Reformation and its revolt against allegory. (There may, of course, be some genetic connection, in the same way that many argue that modern “science” is unthinkable except as an offshoot of Christianity.) If one wants to trace earlier roots these are to be sought more in the

humanistic Renaissance than in the Reformation. Up to a point, would even be prepared to defend the thesis that we have here a major example in recent times of how God has instructed his church through *heretics* (i.e., that they did stumble upon *some* correct answers, even if partly for the wrong reasons), just as especially the Old Testament emphasizes that He often instructed and/or disciplined Israel through her pagan neighbors. Or one could also consider to what extent one might have here a case of legitimate "development of doctrine" (which, properly defined, I think not even the most conservative deny in principle) and of the catalytic effect of alien influences upon such development.

The lineage of the approach is also apparent in its issue: the change in auspices of most systematic biblical study from the church (or synagogue) to the secular university. Thus, the genesis of the entire modern historical interest in the secularity and rationalism of the Enlightenment seems undeniable. (From a technical, philosophical viewpoint the "rationalism" of that period soon faded, but from a theological viewpoint few of the successors would be considered any less "rationalistic" or any more favorable to any postulation of supernatural revelation.)

Thus, as is often stressed, it is no accident that the Bible does not even contain a *word* that really translates as "history" (in the modern secular sense of the term). To a large extent, this is essentially still true of the Reformation and its literature although this can be overstated. Hence, having heard the question in far less intense form if at all, it is often very difficult even to interrogate the earlier literature as to its opinion on "historical" questions. One must generally be very cautious about asserting what *the* "traditional" answers were because it is often anything but clear that they were intended to reply to the precise form of our inquiries.

If there is no word or concept corresponding to our "history," what word can we use to describe the biblical viewpoint, which certainly deals aplenty with what we call "historical" matters? (Of course, there are various accents within the Bible, some accenting the miraculous and supernatural very much, others simply assuming God's control and guidance of ordinary, everyday affairs, but there is no real reason, *pace* many liberal critics, why we cannot generalize.) There is no easily or unanimous answer at all to the terminological question. The cliché of the past generation, "revelation in history," may be helpful, if defined properly, but its grave weaknesses are indicated by the ease with which in recent years champions of the phrase, often with the aid of some brand of "process" thought, have tended to forget about the "scandal of particularity" (special revelation at a particular time and place) and accent instead universal, general revelation and/or modern history (politics). Many scholars, especially those with a history of religions orientation, speak of the role of "myth" before the modern, secular "fall into history"; again there are possibilities here with careful definitions in controlled, sheltered contexts, but probably very few for general usage.³² I myself like to capitalize the words "History" and "Time" to indicate both the continuity with and the divergence from their modern, secular

counterparts; what we have in the Bible is not some Platonic escapism, something *less* than real history, but something which we confess to be infinitely *more*. Or, in a Lutheran context especially, the term “*sacramental*” may be helpful, denoting the “real presence” of God in grace and judgment” in, with, and under” the stuff of ordinary history. However, none of these terms is fully satisfactory, partly because none of them is fully adequate to express the supernatural irruptions into the ordinary hour of history which the Bible frequently records and with which the modern mind has the greatest difficulty.

Thus the problem is posed. “History,” by very definition, has to do with the externalities of *ordinary*, secular, everyday human events with their multifarious personal, political, psychological, sociological, and other aspects. It is vitally concerned with questions of sources, antecedents, motivations, interactions, interrelationships of all sorts. Investigation of changes or lack of it, whether for better or for worse, is its very bread and butter. The historian *qua* historian cannot investigate any supernatural or suprahistorical factors. He may—probably must—report that such otherworldly beliefs *were* present and *did* influence people in their historical decisions. He may himself personally agree with their confession—and may say so, but beyond that point, whether affirming or denying, either explicitly or implicitly, he becomes a “theologian.” But at what point does he cease being a simple historian or reporter and allow his prepossessions to determine the results? Only one who believes in the possibility of “presuppositionlessness” will give glib answers to that question.

In *theory*, at least, I think nobody but nobody will deny that modern historical study has made and continues to make signal contributions to biblical study. The modern zeal to investigate the history of Bible times cannot but be commended if Christ really did become incarnate and if his incarnation really was a climax and fulfillment of the “*logos incarnandus*” of the history of Israel, which, in turn, was, in one sense at least, of a piece with that of the ancient Near East. If the Bible really is, in one sense, a datable and dated, product of history, no stone will be left unturned in the attempt to hear it, first of all, in its original context as an ancient, Oriental book. Hence, up to a point, the argument is unimpeachable that historical research can help in hearing the Bible as “flesh of our flesh,” as speaking to the deepest issues of everyman’s life, etc.

But if, in a sense, it is man’s word, how is it also God’s word? When and where does it cease to be mere great literature from which the reader may derive great truths and morals and become God’s absolute revelation for all time? The Bible and tradition often put relatively little accent on what we call “history” precisely because of its concern to stress that it was *God’s* word, and if we accent the human side more, it is also imperative that we do not accent the revelatory less. At what point does the accent on history become historicistic, the secular secularistic, the use of one’s reason rationalistic, etc.?

One cannot forget the pacemaking slogan of Johann Semler (one of those often called a “father” of the historical-critical method) to “treat the Bible like any other book”—surely useful up to a point,

but beyond that point the very word "Bible" indicates that it is *not* like any other book. Or the recollection of the long association of historical emphasis with clear heresy should give one pause: (the Antiochene school and the Nestorians in the ancient church; the Socinians in Reformation times; the Pietists, with a certain clear anti-confessional tinge, more recently.) How does one employ history to understand and apply the Scriptures better rather than to relativize and evade them? The historian can always point to a time before something was and thus dismiss it. One thinks here of the glee with which many activists "free" themselves of the "two Kingdom" formulation because of its technical Augustinian origin—or of the ease with which Pannenberg & Co. can dismiss the Reformation's *sola Scriptura* anchor as a "Scripture-positivism" or "positivism of revelation" rooted in late medieval nominalism. Much of the concern to get behind the Christ of the Gospels to the "historical Jesus" has similar motives. The same is almost as true of parallels as of origins: if one tries hard enough, one can always find some roughly comparable idea or usage by which to relativize any Christian claim to uniqueness. That is, the problem is not with *history* as much but with the alien *value or truth judgments* which so easily enter the arena at the same time!

If the liberal tends to ignore such issues, the conservative often tends to answer them too superficially. This paper will insistently stress that major concern must also be given to the theological *reasoning* behind the answers rather than mechanical use of some checklist. Such a stress surely follows from "justification by faith": if even the best is worthless *coram Deo* except by virtue of the forgiveness of sins, it also follows that much (not all!) that in one context would be objectionable is "redeemable" by change of context. No doubt, in the vast majority of cases, which really are doctrinal, there is only *one* right answer, regardless of the reasons or motivations (although here, too, differences in expressions must be carefully checked out before being condemned). In other cases, too, there presumably is only one correct answer, but differences in opinion can then be considered "exegetical." No one will *want* to be mistaken in this respect either, but we are speaking of permissibilities, of course. Hence, I think it may be offered as a rule of thumb that a position *can* theoretically be considered "exegetical" if it *can* be defended without denial of any articles of faith (not only the "Gospel")—including, of course, that of Scripture and the hermeneutics of "*Scriptura sui ipsius interpret.*" In all such truly exegetical cases, it seems to me, one ought to refrain from speaking of "*denying*" a traditional position because of the nearly inevitable doctrinal implications of the verb; one may disagree with a large amount of traditional exegesis without any theological "denial" whatever. Obviously such a yardstick can be abused too (what cannot?), and must be applied with caution, as we have emphasized repeatedly. But it can also be useful in avoiding true legalism or the "orthodox pounce" which judges on a simple traditionalistic basis. There is a vast amount of theologically quite neutral probing in which we can and should share without acceptance of all the assorted assumptions which other probers may hold. Archae-

ology is perhaps one of the most obvious examples, but it applies in many other areas too. It is the presence or absence of the overall *hermeneutical* framework (Scripture interpreting itself) alongside our intensified historical investigations which determines whether or not the latter are simple extensions of the Reformation accent on the "grammatical sense" or something *toto caelo* different.

There is no denying that accent on history means explaining the *human side* or aspect of things, sometimes merely *more* than the Bible does, sometimes where the Bible speaks only of the divine causation. Within limits (i.e., where there is no clear indication of something strictly miraculous) the mere fact that the Bible does not *mention* various human factors does not necessarily imply that they did not exist. In *general*, the Bible is so interested in theological matters that it gives short shift to the precise things that excite the secular historian the most. Of course, the degree varies, as we have already noted, but it is widely recognized today that there are many types of historiography, even from a purely secular viewpoint. Most of what the Bible omits or construes differently from the way a modern historian might is in the nature of a *technicality*, which implies not any failure, but something minor which takes on meaning only when one looks at the problem from a different angle. Construed that way, it also implies that more attention should not be devoted to it than it deserves: the liberal lest he miss the "one thing needful," the conservative lest he add his own stumbling blocks to those which are inherent in the Gospel. In most cases, one *can* construe these various problems as "errors," but one need *not*, if one bears in mind what the writer's intent was and does not apply alien criteria.

Hence, it is all-important to stress that we are *not* proceeding along any of the dichotomizing lines we have already scored. In a way, it is the thesis of this paper that the *only* thing (as concerns us here) that has changed since Reformation times is the modern consciousness of history—and even that is nothing *essentially* new (is not that "heresy" by definition?), but merely a heightened *accent* on one aspect of the same totality. If this is the case, mere external departure in historical judgments from tradition cannot be regarded as the "camel's nose" leading to all sorts of doctrinal observations. He will not speak of any "*Geschichte*" divorced from "*Historie*," of "kerygma" divorced from facticity, of what is revealed or inspired from what is not, etc.

Corresponding to the two distinguishable sides of the one reality, however, we can sometimes note two basic different types of "language" or manners of speaking which again, however, dare never be pitted against one another. For example, up to a point, historical statements like "Paul argued," "Israel interpreted," etc., *need* not deny any revelation or inspiration, but simply explicate the human or historical circumstances of that revelation. We may make such *distinctions*, but dare never separate them, let alone act as though it made no difference. We will be aware that certain documents *accent* one more than the other, biblical ones often paying minimal attention to the external, and modern ones neglecting the supernatural altogether, but every effort will be made to retain the "incarnational" unity of the

Bible itself (and it cannot merely be taken for granted!). We will be aware that our culture probably makes imperative a sharper distinction of the two sides or aspects of the revelation-history paradox than was necessary (or possible) in earlier ages, but we can, if we will, turn the distinction to our advantage, not our detriment. (However, in principle it is doubtful if there again is anything new here; if there were, it probably really *would* be "heresy"!). It may be expressed as a distinction between *sola Scriptura* and *nuda Scriptura*. While we shall sacrifice nothing as concerns the former, interpreting Scripture by Scripture, when it comes to the strictly historical and exegetical issues, we shall use any and all available aids in attempting to understand it—the only real difference from earlier periods probably being that we have far more of them. The minute changes that appear to be called for on the "history side" *cannot*, as some appear to fear, carry over into theological matters, because by definition, the latter is an aspect or "side" which can only be revealed and accepted in faith, no human evidence can ever prove or disprove, validate or invalidate it. While, of course, it cannot be determined with *absolute* precision where the line between these two sides or aspects come (i.e., what is "doctrinal" and what is not), the principle that whatever contravenes a clear scriptural or confessional teaching, will not, I think, leave too much room for human failure or mischief. If truth is really one, and we keep it one, greater accent on the historical will enhance and illumine the theological, not subvert it, as well as vice versa. "History" by itself may, indeed, lead us into the relativism of "All in flux," but as part of God's whole, it may place in bold relief the magnitude of His gracious condescension.

Some of this can perhaps be illustrated if we return to the topics of "inspiration" and "inerrancy" briefly. It should be plain that, at least as used here, "inspiration" is theological language, describing through human analogy what we unhesitatingly confess to be true, but normally giving us no clear information as to the precise psychological or phenomenological accompaniments. It describes a *that*, but generally not a *how*. In most cases where we have a "God spoke to Moses" or "The word of Yahweh came to . . .," we really have only the theological affirmation that the utterance was ultimately God's as well as man's word. In and of itself this could be taken to imply that the exegete could postulate virtually anything under the sun about the text and then cry "inspired" as a sort of *deus ex machina* to solve all problems (as sometimes appears to be the case), but if used together with the other components of a confessional hermeneutic, this will scarcely be the case. However, theories or hypotheses about the psychological circumstances (ecstasy, etc.) or other earthly motivational factors certainly *need* not in any way conflict with the theological confession of inspiration.

Similarly when it comes to the change that is always a part of history, certain philosophical *a priori*s about how history *had* to evolve have always plagued us here, but if we can exorcize them and proceed as inductively and empirically as possible, there is no denying that history does normally involve *change* of one sort or another. The Bible by no means conceals all of this, but it is possible that it often tele-

scopes when details would not serve its purposes. If these are not construed as "errors," as they certainly do not *have* to be, hypotheses about such change are scarcely harmful—and may be great aids to historical understanding. In addition, the Bible is often concerned about the *theological* unity (of God's redemptive design), and later dogmatic emphases on the theological unity of the Scriptures underscored that even more. If one forgets, however, that this is often theological or confessional "language," and simplistically reads it as though it were merely the language of history, one easily arrives at an external uniformity that was probably not intended. Indeed, the unity of God (His faithfulness, righteousness, etc.) is the ultimate guarantee of the unity of Scriptures, but the Bible makes plain that the former is no absolute unchangeableness either. Again, great care is in order that the difference is not construed as "error" or that the difference in languages be an occasion for mischief, but, as such, it is the sort of distinction which seems inevitable—and helpful today. It is one of the many cases where the theoretician (systematician) does not always seem mindful of the concrete problems with which it is the exegete's chief calling to busy himself (not write articles like this!). It is also a case where one can easily be anachronistic in assuming some fundamental departure from tradition, where such *may* not be the case at all. The matter of theological unity in historical diversity is especially critical in the matter of the relation of the testaments (cf. below), but appears at many other points as well. On the surface, tradition can be read as all but assuming that change or development in God's revelation would be incompatible with God's nature, and some modern interpretations as contradicting that theology. Or the matter can be seen as primarily only a matter of the different *Fragestellung* posed by intense historical concern and the different language employed to explore that aspect of the matter.

"Verbal inspiration" can be misunderstood to imply that truth could only be expressed in certain words, but only if one does not allow historical exegesis to complement the theological confession. Defenders of orthodox understandings of inspiration are usually at pains to stress that it was never really understood in a "mechanical," mantic sense as in paganism (and I think correctly so), but I believe it should be recognized that a non-mechanical understanding today will have to come to terms with history in a way that was once not even an option. Certainly the Bible itself contains enough history that it cannot be argued that any biblical definition of these terms necessarily precludes any sense of historicity and development, as is often claimed. Much modern scholarship is disposed to assume many more hands—and generally anonymous ones ("schools," disciples, worship influences, etc.)—involved in the final form of most biblical books than tradition assumed. Much of this reconstruction is hypothetical; some of it is hypercritical. (Sometimes it would almost appear for modern scholarship that *none* of the biblical books had anything to do with their traditional authors). However, again, with careful qualifications and within outside limits, there is no *a priori* reason why such procedure should be considered inimical to the Holy Spirit. The variety in expression and theological accent among the writers

(however many there are) by no means need be construed as any sort of contradiction or error, although, of course, there is no lack of liberal writers who do just that. Again, before the modern period, change tended to be equated with "error," but, within limits, it may be no such thing, but rather an unfolding, a fulfillment, an application to different circumstances, etc.³³ In all these matters, then, what cannot be stressed too much is that it is the *extrinsic value judgments*, taking precedence over absolute biblical authority, which are pernicious, not the historical investigations as such. The former easily sneak in together with the latter, to be sure, but they *need* not—and "*abusus non tollit usum.*"

This problem of maintaining a historical study of Scripture as a *complement* to its theological meaning, rather than in competition with it, can be paralleled, of course, in many other areas of the church's life in the modern world. I select only two. One is the issue of the relation between psychology and theology, and especially of the role of psychology in the holy ministry. Heaven only knows to what an extent in many cases (also in Lutheranism), psychology-plus sociology and other secular concerns—have all but eclipsed the traditional accent on Word and Sacrament. At the same time, I think no one will deny that psychology may be an excellent *servant* of a ministry of the Gospel, as long as it is clear what is cart and what horse. Another parallel is provided by the academic discipline of "history of religions" (preferred today over the older "comparative religion"). There is little denying that few approaches have been so often "negative" in approach as this one, with its tendency to assume (and hence to "prove") that biblical faith is really in every respect only another "religion" among many, (and there are many indications that, after the interlude of neo-orthodoxy, academe is fast returning to the dominance of some such approach.) However, at the hands of *believing* scholars in this field (one would probably think especially of Eliade), it becomes clear that one can not only demonstrate the intrinsic uniqueness of the biblical type of "religion," but also that the investigations into the "phenomenology" of various types of responses which all religions make as they address themselves to man's ultimate problems helps one understand better the forms of one's own religion. (Of course, *believing* its uniqueness and really confessing it we still attribute to the Holy Spirit!)

The upshot of all this is that there really is no such animal as "the historical-critical method," and I think we will only get nowhere fast as long as that is the *Fragstellung* (at most we shall only reap increased polarization). This has been emphasized many times, of course, but the impossible generalization persists—so much so that it is often hard not to suspect ulterior motives in the persistence, and from both left and right. On the "right" the generalization makes it possible to hold up some of the most radical representatives as typical in order to proscribe virtually every approach and conclusion that is not of an absolute "*bleiben beim Alten*" sort. On the "left" the generalization makes it easy to defend a nearly total *laissezfaire* attitude in the name of complete academic "freedom," etc., as though there couldn't possibly be anything "negative" or "destructive" in critical

study. If the former group often shows itself *unable* to discriminate, the latter declares itself *unwilling* to. If the former is "prehistorical" (cf. above) in understanding, the latter loves to resort to double-talk such as: "We've *always* used the historical-critical method; now we're just using it to a greater extent." (The truth in the statement, of course, is that there has always been *some* historical interest in exegesis, especially since the Reformation; however, anyone who claims that, since the Enlightenment, there is not a question of *kind* as well as of degree plainly is not telling "the *whole* truth and nothing but the truth.")

Even from an academic standpoint (apart from any confessional or theological concerns), one can scarcely generalize about *the* method. I would even seriously submit that no one is really for "*the*" historical-critical method, but only his version of it (although, of course, with Voltaire, the "right" of others to express their viewpoint will usually be stoutly defended). It is only in that parenthetical sense that I think it possible to accept the common assertion, particularly among ecumenical enthusiasts, that "nowadays *all* biblical scholars of all confessions use the historical-critical methods"; the hidden agenda there is often revealed by the corollary plea for non-doctrinal, ecumenical pluralism on the basis of the alleged "many theologies" in the Bible itself (cf. above). In the late nineteenth century under the influence of a few towering scholars (like Wellhausen) with similar philosophic backgrounds, a degree of "critical orthodoxy" did develop. Some of the conclusions of that period still survive (in widely varying degrees), sometimes apparently for lack of convincing alternatives (and, of course, return to traditional viewpoints is all but unthinkable!), but enough so that many mediating attempts, which accuse conservatives of attacking a battlefield from which the enemy has, allegedly, fled, must be qualified very carefully. The mound of debris from once "assured results" on which "all critical scholars now agree" is high, indeed, but many of the older critical methods and views still seem to have at least nine lives. Some of the variety represents simply the "hypothesis and verification" procedure of any true science, but at least as much betrays the swirl of competing ideologies and axiologies. The general picture, probably today more so than ever, is that of about the widest conceivable variety of often mutually contradictory viewpoints and trends. One *must* always choose from among a babel of claims; the *only* question is on what basis. Many options are theologically neutral, but these cannot be hermetically sealed off from the basic ones which are theological.

As with other terms, perhaps it would be better to abandon the expression, "*the* historical-critical method." But with what shall we replace it? Shall we speak simply of "historical" study of Scripture? This does have in its favor (as "*historical-critical*" may not) the accentuation of the continuity with the past, where there has always been some sense of the "historical." However, as we have seen, the problem is inherent in the definition of "history" itself; the danger is very much at hand (as we see especially today in the case with which earlier *Heilsgeschichte* emphases have drifted into process

patterns) that a secular notion of history (especially the history of religions) becomes the interpreter of ideas, including those of the Bible, rather than the other way around; Bible like confessions, become only a "moment" in an infinite process, as history is used to relativize more than to understand. George Ladd has recently suggested "historical-theological,"³¹ but that too will require careful definition. Up to a point it is often helpful to distinguish "historical criticism" and "literary criticism." The former simply pursues more rigorously than most tradition the question of a writing's historical context, and, if it is not vitiated by some kind of secularism, conservatives have generally found it much the more congenial of the two. "Literary criticism," in contrast, simply analyzing the text in one way or another, may be a quite neutral and even beneficial exercise (cf. below on "form criticism"), but, in practice, it has nearly always tended to be extremely skeptical of a text's facticity, partly because of its own tradition of proceeding subjectively without external historical controls. No doubt, there are other proposals, but the issue is not really terminological as long as we say what we mean and mean what we say. For my own part, I am disposed to argue for retaining the term, but of indicating when and to what extent it is compatible with a scriptural and confessional hermeneutic and when it exceeds those perimeters, as we are attempting in this paper.

Usually when conservatives inveigh against "*the* historical-critical method" as inevitably "negative," "destructive," etc., what they have in mind is the naturalism or anti-supernaturalism (historicism, positivism, scientism, immanentism) which is often present: the insistence that history (including that of the Bible) is *solely* the story of *man*, and that its events must be explainable *solely* by antecedent *historical* causes and comprehensible by analogy with other historical experiences; hence, the almost automatic rejection or "demythologization" of miracles, etc. When, where, and to the extent that the charge is true, I agree emphatically that we have no alternative but conditional agreement. I do not have the slightest doubt that it often *is* true, but, as already argued, one must distinguish between that which is intrinsically incompatible and that which reflects simply a one-sided accent. Conservatives are, in general however, emphatically correct in their fears that any total, unqualified espousal of "*the* historical-critical method" will indeed have overwhelmingly "negative" consequences.

In many instances, at least initially and where a distinct confessional consciousness still remains, I am convinced that the problem is more often of the one-sided type. Confessional interests (and often theological interests in general) suffer more from *default* than design. Confessional theology is not so much denied as ignored. So much time and effort are devoted to the academic sports of literary sleuthing and second-guessing the writers that, even if none of that is objectionable as such, there simply isn't sufficient *time* for what should receive priority. So much accent is put on historical circumstance that the relativistic *impression* is easily left, even if not intended, that we have in the Bible only *models* or examples of how a "religious" man reacts to his problems---and of course we have utterly different ones today!

It is not the church that calls the shots, but the secular university—and if there is theological interest there at all; it certainly will not be of the confessional stripe. Of course, in the university context there will often have to be nearly exclusive concentration on *non*-theological matters, either in order to maintain neutrality or because the “formal principle” is non-Scriptural, so much so that the conservative scholar is easily unjustly accused of “neglect” of those areas because of his theological concerns. The neophyte of conservative background will not find it easy to maintain his balance. If the student, teacher, or school wants to “get ahead” and win the plaudits of his peers, he must play the game as the rules have been laid down. If the young graduate does not have deep confessional resources and determination of his own when he returns from the university to church service, only the non-confessional (or anti-confessional) interests and skills developed there will be employed. (With the demise of “biblical theology,” this problem is likely to be far greater in the coming generation than it was in the past, and the church will have to develop compensatory devices.) If the dream of the past that the confessional student could study only philology and ignore theology has proved somewhat naive, the solution is certainly not to leave the impression that he may now eclectically pick up whatever new theology—or abandon all of it—as he wishes! Soon such a pluralistic situation develops that confessionalism, at best, can represent only one position among many (probably scorned as “medieval” or the like), and a gentleman’s agreement never basically to challenge anyone’s theological position (or lack of it) becomes the only viable structure. In some respects, the problem is not a *totally* new one; probably all of us had exegetical teachers who were great linguists or historians, but who apparently had no theological antennae whatsoever. Of course, the concern expressed here must not be confused with the need for specialization, also in certain non-theological areas, and also in our seminaries to a certain extent, but such specialization must be clearly subsidiary to the central confessional concerns. (Sometimes the default on the latter does overlap with what the Germans so colorfully describe as “*Fachidiotie*”!)

To a fair extent I think the situation of simple default is more characteristic of Old than of New Testament studies, at least in America. In the former area, under the influence of W. F. Albright and of archaeological pursuits in general, the use of literary criticism with its general tendency toward skepticism, and especially the use of philosophical aprioris to interpret and reconstruct history have been strongly frowned upon, and conservative scholars have correspondingly been strongly attracted to this type of study. Because the New Testament, however, deals more directly with the *end* of history or of eschatological history under the Spirit, it has never been as accessible to the kinds of external handholds and controls which archaeology can bring to bear, and hence has been far more vulnerable to the vagaries of pure literary criticism, and to the mandates of philosophical (especially existentialist) presuppositions. (Nor have the regnant New Testament schools, especially in Germany, shown much disposition to use what external correctives are available, espe-

cially from Qumran!) In the Old Testament, however, it has been much more a problem of theology and hermeneutics all but being *eclipsed* by Oriental studies: languages, archaeology, historical and cultural reconstruction, etc. Such studies are rarely, if ever, as intrinsically and immediately "destructive" as the intrusion of alien philosophies or the spinning out of gratuitous literary skepticisms, but if that is *all* the student receives, he can scarcely be faulted for concluding that the Old Testament is of no real professional concern to him. Amphictyonies, suzerainty treaties, covenant lawsuits, etc., are not directly preachable! I mention current hypotheses toward which I myself am quite favorably disposed, and about which the student, in any event, must at least be literate, but the point is that without an explicit *theological* hermeneutic as well, such information is useless to the pastor. If he hears *only* of the external, secular models, analogies, and typologies, and little, if anything, in the same connection of the "analogy of *faith*," of *biblical* typology, etc., he will scarcely grasp how all this adds up to God's Word for *him*. In traditional terms, *mere* accent on the historical aspects of the Bible will never yield more than a "*fides historica*." In more modern terms, all that we have is the study of an ancient *religion*, in genetic connection with ours and important "background," of course, but little more. As we stress repeatedly, the "religious" accent may *contribute* to the traditionally theological if their unity is maintained, but the connection will have to be worked out explicitly and constantly. Otherwise, the Bible becomes only an object of academic interest, entirely without the traditional "mystique" of awe and reverence before God's holy word which in a confessional context dare never even become secondary. At most, the student of this "religion of Israel" may moralistically go back himself to see what is "relevant," what great ideas and ideals he may still consider valid, maybe even what "Christological analogies" he can discern, but all this is a far cry from a theological hermeneutics' concern with the *Holy Spirit* who brings Law and Gospel to *me*, with "prophecy-fulfillment," etc. In fact, in many "theological" seminaries today it is well nigh incredible to observe to what an extent the students are scarcely even able to think or communicate in such theological categories any longer! If only the secular *aspect* of God's revelation is considered, secularism can scarcely but triumph by default. Very often in biblical studies one learns so very much about what various scholars *think* about it, but precious little on what the Bible has to say for itself! Assertions that "*Israel* interpreted," etc., may be unobjectionable, as such, but it must also be made explicit, together with all its implications, that this is also *God's* revelation. Much "tradition-criticism" which tries to trace the stages of successive "reinterpretations" may be plausible enough (even if highly hypothetical), but if it leaves us with *only* the impression of the cogitations of a *human* religious community, as often happens, the "default" is tragic indeed.

What it seems to me we should be busying ourselves with is in explicating and practicing ~~a historical-critical method~~ that neither embraces some alien theological hermeneutic nor defaults to secularism, that uses neither it nor any other method to lord it over Scripture,

but that will welcome (at least experimentally) any device which may help unlock its treasures. I have no doubt that such a *confessional* use of historical criticism will always be relatively "conservative" as academe generally measures such things, but it should also take care lest traditional *exegesis* be championed (if not dogmatized) merely because of its patina. When restored to its proper context, many conclusions will appear acceptable (or at least permissible) which could otherwise never be *ultimately* right in a month of Sundays. A sturdy and unthreatened confessionalism might then display the same sophistication in evaluating the "left" as it has long displayed toward American fundamentalism on the "right." One might even quote, "Behold, I make all things new," at least in understanding and use of vocabulary." "Historical" will, of course, have to receive its nuclear definition from Scripture, not from any human philosophy, nor will it be denuded by default. "Critical" will not imply any basic axiological attempt to "criticize" Scripture, but rather the sophisticated use by the humble believer of all faculties in attempting to state as precisely as possible what God did—and does—reveal there. Similarly, terms like "genuineness," "authenticity," etc., will not be misunderstood as any sort of theological judgments, but as purely *literary* investigations of traditional viewpoints on the authorship, date, general context, etc., of a document or its parts—again, not in order to undermine or relativize its absolute authority in any way, but simply to attempt to *understand* better. Various historical and literary hypotheses will not be dismissed merely because they are hypothetical as long as they do not pretend to be more and do not trespass upon the theological domain.

If this kind of secure, relaxed (but by no means indifferent!) atmosphere can be established, it may still be that we are living in one of those periods where we shall have to permit (if not encourage?) *somewhat* greater flexibility and experimentation than was once the case. The vast cultural changes of our time dare not affect the Gospel itself, or course, but, assuming that no reductionism is involved, the problem of "translation" and communication of the biblical substance is more acute than ever. Furthermore, and more to the point of this paper, it is often almost as true of some aspects of biblical scholarship (especially of archaeology and its finds, when theological liberalism does not complicate matters) as of science in general that raw data continues to accumulate faster than scholars can come to terms with it. Conservative scholars should be participating in this kind of research at least as much as others and should be open to the hypotheses of others (if not vitiated by false theology).

In fact, there can be little doubt that such a *conservative spectrum* already *does* exist, albeit a far narrower one than that lumped together under the "liberal" label. Such a point is made, not in order to exploit and maximize it, but to encourage recognition of what is not only inevitable in this world ("until we know as we are known"), but also, up to a point, desirable as a sign of life and no-stagnation. **I think** this principle would apply about equally to what is explicitly confessional as well as to the broader "evangelical" context (the major differences, as concerns us here probably involving chiliasm

and/or dispensationalism). I think it demonstrable that in general, a sharper dichotomy of "critical" and "evangelical" has been urged in America than by European counterparts, due, no doubt, to various cultural factors. I think it is a quite open secret that the Lutheran free churches of Europe, especially Germany, have tended to be somewhat more relaxed on some isagogical and exegetical issues than many conservative American Lutherans. The same relationship would probably hold true between most British and American "evangelicals" (with the bulk of the solid literature certainly stemming from the former). Any reader of *Christianity Today* will be aware of the extent to which this is true even within America, also when no theological differences are discernible. In this connection, attention should be called to the recent Old Testament introduction of R. K. Harrison³⁵ a British scholar now at the University of Toronto. Harrison will hardly be labeled "liberal," and is widely regarded as the heir apparent of the late and redoubtable Edward J. Young. However, while he proceeds from what will generally be regarded as "evangelical" premises, he does evince considerably greater acceptance of some non-traditional positions than his influential predecessor. Of course, in spite of common premises, not all will agree with all of his conclusions, nor do I, but he well illustrates the point of a permissible "spectrum" and as a likely portent of a future which appear congenial to me, I shall refer to him frequently in the consideration of individual problems below.

FOOTNOTES

31. "Biblical Archaeology Today," in D. N. Freedman and J. C. Greenfield (Eds.), *New Directions in Biblical Archaeology* (1969), p. 149. Cf. also Aalen in *The Springfielder*, *art. cit.*, p. 218f.: "This question is the new element in modern, scientific Biblical research compared with the earlier epochs of church history. For us the question is today unavoidable: What has really happened? Is it not merely a matter of the individual data of the course of history. The researcher inquires also, and especially for the connection, which links the individual events together, the continuum, to which the single historical item belongs.—" As concerns G. E. Wright, however, it seems to me that his more recent theological reflections (esp. in *The Old Testament And Theology*, Harper, 1969) exemplify the shadow side of the emphasis on "history" almost as much as his earlier works (*God Who Acts*, Etc.) indicated its positive potential—i.e., the extent to which earlier *Heilsgeschichte* emphases have now generally allied themselves with "process" ideas, which are infinitely less compatible with any real biblical or confessional theology.
- 31a. I note that Herman Sasse also uses this expression on p. 85 of his essay "Luther and the Word of God," pp. 47-97, in Heino Kadai (Ed.), *Accents In Luther's Theology* (Concordia, 1967). The entire essay makes superb "collateral" reading to this article. On the same page, the following quotation seems in order: "The historian should refrain from trying to find in Luther a precursor of a historical-critical theology, for today's dogmatician is not allowed to go back into the time when even great exegetes were not yet aware of the historical problems of the Bible. Today's task of Lutheran theology is to find a solution that is in harmony with the Scriptures and the Confessions of the church."
32. Let it be underscored that, in my judgment, the term can scarcely be championed at all, not only because of its intrinsic ambiguity but because of its almost ineradicable connotation in the popular mind of simple untruth. However, at least for reasons of simple literacy, one must be aware of other more technical meanings which can be understood neutral

ly. Here I think some conservatives must be faulted for stopping their ears the second the term appears, and refusing to discriminate between varying definitions and presuppositions. At best, the term denotes belief in some overarching, supernatural order which controls and gives meaning to events. Thus, by this purely descriptive definition there are many myths (theologies), none of which can be proved or disproved "scientifically." The question is whether or not we *confess* the biblical and Christian "myth" or another one. Of course, in many positivistic circles the term always has pejorative connotations precisely because it cannot be established "scientifically," but, if so, one simply sees again the clash of competing "myths." Put otherwise, the term is of a piece with the entire modern tendency to banish religion to the purely "subjective," inner world of "interpretation," etc. Like many other modern terms, it is really intelligible only in the wake of Kantian philosophy, according to which real revelation or access to transcendent objectivity is impossible, and all we can do is study the "mythical" structures inherent in the human mind by which it apprehends and organizes its experiences. Thus, I think it is clear that any *confessional* theologian must, in effect, be pre-Kantian. He must, if you will, put Humpty Dumpty together again—or not put asunder what God has joined together. However, up to a point he can go along with the Kantian subjectivist, but also going much further in confessing that the Christian "myth" is no structure of the human mind, but God's very truth, albeit under the "masks" of human, anthropomorphic intelligibilities. Of course, the very fact that one must repeatedly make such explanations only underscores the unsuitability of the term for general use.

33. There have been quite a number of generally helpful studies of these topics recently from especially Roman Catholic quarters. On the topic of inerrancy, helpful up to a point, I think, is N. Lohfink, "Über die Irrtumlosigkeit und die Einheit der Schrift," *Stimmen der Zeit*, Vol. CLXXIV (1964), pp. 161-81. On the matter of inspiration, John McKenzie's, "The Social Character of Inspiration," *CBQ* XXIV (1962), pp. 115-24 is at least (and as always) very provocative. More generally helpful, probably is: D. Stanley, "The Concept of Biblical Inspiration," pp. 9-28 in C. L. Salm (Ed.), *Studies in Salvation History* (Prentice-Hall, 1964). Most stimulating is also the work of James Burtchaell (now provost of Notre Dame University), *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration Since 1810* (Cambridge, 1969). *Mutatis mutandis* the history it traces is quite easily transposed into a Lutheran context. For its heuristic and catalytic values alone I think it is to be highly recommended, although, in my judgment, Burtchaell's own critique in the final chapter brings the book to a rather unfortunate anticlimax.

One might be tempted to observe that Catholics, in contrast to most of mainline Protestantism, are at least still *talking* about the problem—or *were* until recently. How long it will continue even there is another question. Cf. B. Vawter's review of Burtchaell, *CBQ*, XXII:4 (10/70), pp. 601-603: "A friend of the reviewer recently suggested to him that writing a book on biblical inspiration these days strongly resembles overhauling the Edsel. Inspiration is, for all practical purposes, a dead theological category in Protestant circles, a *curiosum* of the old orthodoxy. Whatever effort is being expended there to understand better the ways of God's communication with man is likely to be cast in the terms of the new hermeneutic, to find how, as a *completely* human work—the Bible nevertheless mediates a word that is divine. Catholic theologians still make use of the traditional formulas, but—it is no longer evident that they can use them in their traditional sense." Much more acerbic is John McKenzie's review of Burtchaell (*Int.* 7/70, pp. 405-6) who calls the topic a "history of theological failure" and asks "whether inspiration may not be a pseudo-question."

From mainline Protestantism two recent works seem relevant. Especially so is B. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Westminster, 1970), one of the main points of which is the extent to which not even the relatively conservative and constructive "biblical theology" movement ever overcame

the basic hermeneutical subjectivism of modern times, and hence its vulnerability—and ultimate demise—to every shifting wind that blew (see esp. chap. 6: “The Shape of a New Biblical Theology”). In general, Childs plugs strongly for a *canonical* (i.e., non-subjective and non-historicistic) understanding of biblical authority. On inerrancy he writes (p. 104): “The mistake of employing such a concept as inerrancy, among other things, was in its defining of the medium apart from its canonical context.” There are, I think, possibilities in that statement if I correctly understand him to be saying that, at least as traditionally conceived, “inerrancy” tended to be too mechanical a concept, paying insufficient attention to the unpredictability of the Holy Spirit and the flux of history (although much of such criticism is anachronistic, as I have already noted). Some reactions to Child’s book which I have seen or heard tend to dismiss it as crypto-fundamentalistic, no doubt because its strong accent on the canon. (For a criticism of this sort from a “Lutheran” background, see D. Juel, *LQ*, 10/70, 369ff.) Other “vibrations” in response to the book have been more favorable. It is not inconceivable that Child’s work could spark a reversal of the current headlong flight from things biblical in most theological contexts. However, if there should be such a “new biblical theology” I have no confidence that the pendulum will not shortly swing back to matters more “relevant”—except in the stability that only a live confessional hermeneutic with its safeguard or full biblical authority can bring.

The second Protestant work which should be mandatory reading in this connection is James Smart’s recent *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church* (Westminster, 1970). As the title indicates, virtually the entire work laments the current situation, but of special interest is Smart’s description of how much radical Bible study has simply paralyzed the typical seminary graduate in the pulpit: it would take him so long and be so dangerous to explain to his congregation how and why he no longer takes the Bible at face value that he either resorts to clever doubletalk or else addresses himself to only the really “relevant” matters—i.e., the social and political concerns where most of his seminary training has sensitized him to feel the really crucial areas of the church’s mission lie anyway. Smart insists eloquently that it does not have to be so—desperately, if not pathetically, I would almost say, but it reminds one of the proverbial lament about the unlocked barn door after the horse has been stolen. One must also observe that Smart’s picture fits not a few Lutheran seminaries as well, something which one finds hard to believe would be the case to any degree if it were really confessionalism which was calling the shots.

34. In his commendable article, “The Search for Perspective,” *Interpretation*, 1/71, pp. 41-62 (the entire number speaks to the issue of the hard times that have again come upon biblical studies). Cf. also his earlier *The New Testament and Criticism* (Eerdmans, 1967). In contrast to his suggestion, Ladd retains the (to me) unfortunate generalization of “the historical-critical method,” but I have no substantive disagreement with him at this point. Another indication of the intrinsic ambiguity of the phrase (and one of the great ironies of the situation) is the extent to which the “new hermeneutic” has scored the inadequacy of “the historical critical method” because of its historicistic stress on “objectivity” as the sole approach to exegesis, and has urged its own accent on “subjectivity”—allegedly as a supplement (and often in appeal to Luther—cf. above), but very often, it is to be feared, more as a *replacement*—with some neo-mysticism or existentialist nirvana, “an exegesis of the exegete rather than of the text.” Of course, not entirely unrelated are many of the student protests of “irrelevance” and failure to satisfy their ultimate, metaphysical questions: when much philosophy had become only linguistic analysis, much “social science” only statistics, and with religion courses often failing to address themselves *even* to “humanistic values,” it is not too difficult to muster at least a little sympathy!
35. Eerdmans, 1970. Cf. R. Surburg’s review in *The Springfielder*, XXIV: 3 (12/70), pp. 235-7. Two other reviews in highly influential publications

will illustrate the vast distance in the *total* spectrum of biblical studies: I. Bailey in *JBL*, LXXXIX:2 (6/70), pp. 227-8; and G. Fohrer in *ZAW*, 82/3 (1970), pp. 486-7. Both provide superb examples of illiberal liberalism's peremptory and dogmatic rejection of views which challenge its own presuppositions, and in both cases the reaction apparently was sometimes so visceral that Harrison is not even always accurately represented.

Some More Random Thoughts

C. S. LEWIS ON JESUS AND PAUL

A most astonishing misconception has long dominated the modern mind on the subject of St. Paul. It is to this effect: that Jesus preached a kindly and simple religion (found in the Gospels) and that St. Paul afterwards corrupted it into a cruel and complicated religion (found in the Epistles). This is really quite untenable. All the most verifying texts come from the mouth of Our Lord: all the texts on which we can base such warrant as we have for hoping that all men will be saved come from St. Paul. If it could be proved that St. Paul altered the teaching of his Master in any way, he altered it in exactly the opposite way to that which is popularly supposed . . . The ordinary popular conception has put everything upside down. Nor is the cause far to seek. In the earlier history of every rebellion there is a stage at which you do not yet attack the King in person. You say, 'The King is all right. It is his Ministers who are wrong. They misrepresent him and corrupt all his plans—which, I'm sure, are good plans if only the Ministers would let them take effect. And the first victory consists in beheading a few Ministers: only at a later stage do you go on and behead the King himself. In the same way, the nineteenth-century attack on St. Paul was really only a stage in the revolt against Christ. Men were not ready in large numbers to attack Christ Himself. They made the normal first move—that of attacking one of His principal ministers. Everything they disliked in Christianity was therefore attributed to St. Paul. It was unfortunate that their case could not impress anyone who had really read the Gospels and the Epistles with attention: but apparently few people had, and so the first victory was won. St. Paul was impeached and banished and the world went on to the next step—the attack on the King Himself.

Quoted from *God in the Dock*, Erdmans, 1970, pp. 232F.