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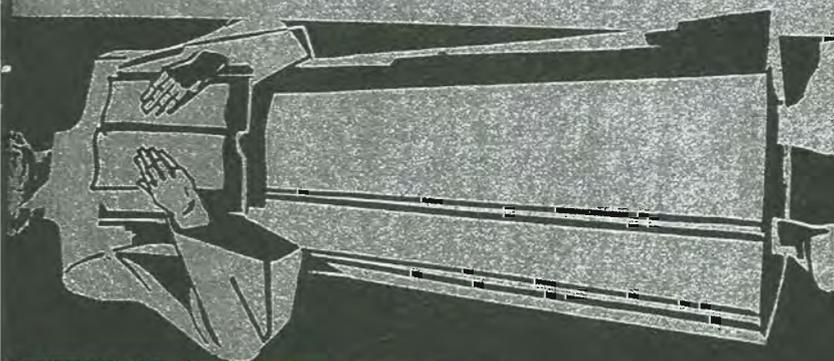
The Historical Critical Method:
A Short History Appraisal
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The Historical Critical Method:

A SHORT HISTORICAL APPRAISAL

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UNDERSTANDING ANY DISCIPLINE demands in part a presentation and a defense of its origins. The natural sciences are not as apologetical in nature as the social sciences, e.g., psychology, sociology, urban studies, anthropology, and the like. The HCM, if it is to be classified as a science, obviously does not belong to natural sciences but to the social sciences. The definition and purposes of the HCM will to a large extent be dependent on those recognized as founders by the current practitioners. To put it another way, the origin of the method is perhaps best identified by those recognized as experts in the field. Like any social science, it must be defensive concerning its procedures.

In a very curious essay, Kurt Aland, editor of the Nestle Greek text of the New Testament, holds up Celsus, one of the first really great literary enemies of Christianity, as an early if not the earliest example of the historical critical method. ["Celsus: Serious Pagan Criticism," *Saints and Sinners* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970) pp. 87-91]. Aland states that Celsus and not the Enlightenment first began with the literary attacks on Christianity, attacks approved by Aland. Among the positions held by Celsus in common with the Age of the Enlightenment 1500 years later, and still held today are the following: (1) The message of Jesus could have only been one, but there are four versions of it. Since all could not be right, there is a basis for criticism. (2) The Gospel writers were inventors not reporters. [A position held by many who identify themselves as Redaktion critics today.] (3) Since the Evangelists differ in the details, are they to be relied on in their reporting of the major events in Jesus' life? (4) Doubt is cast upon the resurrection, since Jesus only appeared to believers. Thus the faith of the disciples is the origin of the resurrection accounts. This is also held with near unanimity among those who practice the HCM. [Celsus gives a negative verdict to the psychological explanation. The HCM generally gives a positive one.] (5) Old Testament predictions only fit Jesus with great difficulty. [Scholars today differ on this one.] (6) Some stories, e.g. putting the demons in the pigs are highly improbable as the Jews were forbidden pigs. [Bultmann would classify such an account as legendary.] (7) As the Sea of Tiberias was really a puddle, the account of the storm is also improbable. (8) It was also held that Daniel was of late authorship, an opinion having near universal support today.

To show the similarity between the views of Celsus and modern day scholars, Aland writes thus, "If the available fragments of the writings of Celsus and Porphyry were published in modern language, one could easily get the impression that these are modern authors, not writers of the second and third centuries who are joining in the battle against Christianity." Aland asserts that the historical investigations

conducted by these second century opponents of Christianity do not destroy the Christian message. "We do not refute such criticisms by pretending that they do not exist. Present-day theological scholarship is not acting disrespectfully when it investigates certain human features in the Bible; it renders the church a valuable service. Such investigation shows that the church does not have to be afraid of these things. They are accessories which belong to the human history of the Bible and do not change the essence or message of the Bible."

Thus a certain attitude of the practitioners of the HCM can be detected in these words of Aland. The HCM can pass so-called historical judgments on the factualness of the miraculous occurrences of the Bible and the message of the Bible remains intact.

The church since the post-apostolic period has not been unaware of the so-called problems connected with the Scriptures. The existence of four Gospels has always been somewhat of a problem. Another question was adjusting the Old Testament to fit the New Testament. For example, for God to order the extermination of the heathen nations suggests an apparently different view of God than that of the New Testament. Marcion wrestled with the problem and simply eliminated the Old Testament and non-Pauline sections of the New Testament. This is an example of determining what is and is not entitled to be called God's Scripture by a solitary abstract principle. Strange as it might seem, Marcion worked with a type of Gospel principle that excluded anything that did not fit this principle. The allegorical method of interpretation, so prominent in the church for a long time, was in part an attempt to provide a unity to Scriptural interpretation which was not apparent in every case.

The church that Luther confronted used the classical fourfold approach to the Scripture: literal, allegorical, moral, analogical. The example most frequently used to demonstrate the fourfold approach is that of Jerusalem as recorded in Galatians 4:22ff. Literally or historically it means the city of the Jews. Allegorically, the reference is to the church. Analogically the point of reference is to the heavenly Jerusalem. Morally or tropologically it means the human soul. Much could be said about the method, the first of which would be the confusion of results, not unlike many contemporary methods. Secondly, this kind of a method divorces the theological sense of a message from the historical sense.

The mark of Luther and the other reformers was that they insisted on historical, literal, grammatical understanding of the Bible. Such a procedure is at the basis of any serious study of the Bible even to this day, but this method as such should not be identified as the HCM. Luther is sometimes pictured as a progenitor of the HCM as it sprang up two centuries after him in the Enlightenment. Well known are Luther's uncomplimentary remarks about such books as Esther and James. Whether Luther really employed anything like the HCM is doubtful. He did come to certain sections of the Scriptures which presented what for him were temporarily insoluble problems. The business of 'faith and works' in James simply did not square with his interpretation of Paul's 'by faith alone'. Perhaps Luther should have asked whether Paul's use and definition of the word "faith" had to

be the only proper use of this word. In any event, Luther enjoyed hand to hand combat with the Holy Spirit.

The age of Lutheran Orthodoxy presented a different situation. The Lutheran or Protestant Church had become an established ecclesiastical group that was engaged in defending itself against the tradition oriented Church of Rome. Scriptures provided a necessary and vital arsenal of weapons against the opponents. The defensive posture of Lutheran Orthodoxy was not of its own choosing, but was determined by the situation in which the Evangelical Church found itself. If the Bible was the only source of religion, then it must and should be the bastion to protect the church.

The man who is recognized as ushering the age of the HCM is Baruch Spinoza, a Spanish Jew, in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. From him to the present day certain principles have had canonical status in critical Biblical studies. Basic to the thinking of Spinoza was that philosophy, to which the spheres of truth and wisdom belonged, should be separated from theology, whose chief purpose was to evoke piety and obedience. With this type of procedure the Scripture could be criticized from a so-called historical perspective and it still does not lose any of its force in demanding obedience from the more pious and simple people. He made such statements "that the Word of God is faulty, tampered with, and inconsistent; that we possess it only in fragments, and that the original of the covenant which God made with the Jews is lost." A pious respect for the Bible from the view point of the faith life and a severe negative attitude to the historical reliability of the Scriptures anticipated the neo-orthodox exegetical methods of the mid-twentieth century. Another principle put forth by Spinoza is also basic to the HCM. He makes the observation that the Jews make no mention of secondary or particular causes. Thus for example if they make any money, God gave them the money. In applying this to the Old Testament, Spinoza asserts any divine act attributed to God's direct intervention would better be understood as something only occurring according to the usual laws of nature. Giving God the credit for these actions is but an expression of Jewish piety. Thus the HCM as used by its most prominent practitioners is not able to work with the supernatural in the sense of an entirely new occurrence for which there has been no recorded precedence or no natural explanation. An example of this might be that of the resurrection. This is said to be outside of the scope of what we know from history, therefore it belongs to realm of faith rather than history. Spinoza's principle that the recording of so-called miracles is not the result of an actual occurrence but rather the result of pious reflection can also be detected when certain scholars say that the writers of the Bible 'heightened' the description of the natural event to give God glory.

Spinoza's posture in studying the Biblical literature became characteristic of the entire HCM movement. Hebrew idioms are to be understood in their original sense. Each book should be analyzed and outlined by itself. Ambiguities, obscurities, and mutually exclusive statements should be noted. The original setting for writing the book should be reconstructed. Characteristic of Spinoza's approach

is that the interpreter always remains above the Biblical literature. He never becomes involved with any theological interpretations. At no time does the Scripture per se or the Scripture recognized as the word of God make any claims upon the interpreter. This of course was the spring of Rationalism, an age in which man prided himself in his self-proclaimed objectivity. A criticism which should be leveled against Spinoza and those who approach the Bible in a so-called historical fashion without consideration for theology is this: Can a book which claims to be theological throughout really be understood in any sense at all when the interpreter adopts a non-theological posture? Is it really ever possible to divorce theology from history in the Christian religion? This of course has been a hallmark of the HCM in one way or another.

Spinoza occupies the position of a "John the Baptist" in the HCM. The position of "Messiah" in the HCM is generally assigned to Johannes Semler (1725-1791). In an essay in "Occasional Papers" published by *Concordia Theological Monthly* (1966) Dr. Fred Kramer makes this observation concerning Semler: "Our church is today faced with the historical and literary criticism whose proponent was Semler in his day." (p. 77) Semler popularized what is commonly known as the HCM. Some of his views still extant in the HCM today and which have been influential need to be mentioned. (1) Scriptures and the Word of God were separated, thus one could make negative historical criticisms of the Scriptures without offending the Word of God. [This view was anticipated by Spinoza.] (2) Interpretations of Scripture conflicting with traditionally held doctrines are to be held regardless of previously held opinions or any concept of Scriptural unity. (3) Jesus and His apostles accommodated their preaching to commonly accepted views. Modern science can be used to indicate the points of accommodation. (4) Scriptures are not always correct in their description of what happened. [The HCM still makes the attempt to get behind the words to see what, if anything, really happened at all.] (5) Some Biblical accounts are mythologically conditioned by the times, e.g., creation. (6) Philosophy has the same content as theology, thus the mind becomes the basis of judgment. Scripture must be read in such a way as not to contradict the *Weltanschauung* of the interpreter. (7) Certain sections of the Scriptures may be criticized by other sections. Thus for example Semler, himself, preferred John and Paul as standards of judgment for criticism of other parts of the New Testament. [Marcion did the same thing 1600 years before Semler.] (8) He recognized two theological schools of thought in the New Testament the Petrine and Pauline/Johannine. [In this he has been followed by most scholars of the HCM in that the New Testament is composed documents amalgamating different and opposing schools of thought.] (9) The Word of God is not the Scripture but rather the Law and the Gospel. In this scheme the Gospel takes precedence since the Christian is totally liberated from the Law. [This concept is very much like current thinking in the church, but really can be traced to Marcion.] For Semler what is Gospel becomes the touchstone in determining what is the Word of God.

The whole HCM was well set on its path at the beginning of the 19th century. The philosopher Lessing printed the *Wolfenbüttel Fragmente* after the death of their anonymous author, Reimarus. Natural explanations were given to the resurrection of Jesus. Lessing himself published an essay, "The Ten Main Contradictions in the Resurrection Narratives." If Bultmann holds the position of prominence of those who use the HCM in the 20th century, then this honor belonged to Ferdinand Christian Baur in the 19th. Robert Grant of the University of Chicago called him "the most important New Testament critic of the nineteenth century." Baur's method of historical criticism consisted of two parts, speculative philosophy and the historical critical method in the style of Semler. Baur applied the thesis, anti-thesis, synthesis method of Hegel to the New Testament. The thesis was represented by the Judaizers, the anti-thesis or opposition by the Gentile Christianity of St. Paul and the results of the synthesis are found in the present Gospels and Epistles. Though New Testament scholars today scorn Baur's obvious dependency on Hegel's philosophy, they are agreed that the New Testament canon is a compromise of varying points of view. Some today are changing their negative verdict of Baur's approach to a positive appreciation. To put it another way, from the time of Jesus to the final formation of the canon there were not only differences in theological approaches but contradictory theologies. The writing and canonization of the New Testament represents ecclesiastical mediation of the issues. What is equally important in the HCM of Baur which is perpetuated in the 20th century is that the question of the resurrection of Jesus is transferred from realm of history to the realm of faith. Baur wrote, "For history, the necessary presupposition of everything that follows is not so much the factuality of the resurrection of Jesus itself, but much more the belief in the same." [As quoted from Manfred Kwiran, *The Resurrection of the Dead* (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt, 1972), p. 21.] The object of historical critical study is not the resurrection itself or the empty tomb with possible explanations for its emptiness as were offered in the heyday of Rationalism, but the concern is now with the faith of the disciples. The disciples' faith became a wall behind which the historical critic was not permitted to go. This same posture is assumed by Bultmann and his most prominent successors. Pannenberg in our day is a prominent exception to this theory. Baur had many students, the most famous of whom was David Friedrich Strauss, a virtual agnostic concerning the reality of Jesus. Baur by making the center of historical investigation the Easter faith of the disciples had opened the doors for the possibility that the disciples were deceived. Strauss took this option! Since what people thought or believed about the resurrection became the touchstone for the entire Christian movement, negative faith or unbelief could have equal standing with faith or belief. Strauss carried his teacher's views to a logical conclusion in his *Life of Jesus* in which he offered the conclusions that Christianity was a fabrication of the early Christian community and that there is **no evidence for the resurrection at all**. Paul was discredited as a valid witness as he received a vision. The Evangelists contradicted Paul as well as each

other, thus disqualifying their testimony. Strauss gave psychological explanations to the resurrection. For his radical position he was denied his post at a university and was pensioned off. He severely criticized other practitioners of HCM for holding on to certain supernatural events in the life of Jesus, even though the method as all used it eliminated all supernaturalism from the New Testament. In spite of Strauss' doom, Baur considered him his best student. Strauss must be praised for at least one good view. He treated the entire New Testament as a fabrication and did not look for layers of what appeared more authentic or less. For him it was all or nothing. Strange as it might *seem*, he found a kind of negative ally in the conservative exegete Hengstenberg at the University of Berlin who also treated the Scriptures as one cloth. Where Strauss found 'nothing,' Hengstenberg found 'all.' Neither man deviated from his established view point toward the New Testament. For one it was story and no history and for the other it was history and no story. Strauss in a way anticipated Herbert Braun and others who claim that if there was an historical Jesus we know nothing about him. Even Bultmann is a wee bit more conservative than that! Our purposes are not further served to survey the 19th century HCM, though such a study would not be without value because it is really questionable whether the HCM in the 20th century has proceeded much further than the 19th century. Perhaps the 20th century HCM is more cynical and agnostic in its hopes of finding the real historical Jesus. In closing this section reference must be made to the final and crowning point of the HCM in the 19th century as it reached this zenith in Adolf von Harnack. As if determined by fate he gave his lectures in the school year 1899-1900 to more than 600 students from all faculties at the University of Berlin. These extemporaneous lectures were later printed in a book entitled, *What is Christianity?* Through the use of the HCM as he saw it, he found three basic elements in Jesus' preaching. (1) God's kingdom and its coming. (2) God as the Father and the infinite value of the human soul. (3) Righteousness as demonstrated by the commandment of love. With these principles or methods, von Harnack stripped the New Testament.

Whatever greatness Harnack enjoyed because of his own literary productivity and as the highest point in the line of ascent in the HCM in the 19th century, it was virtually all destroyed by Albert Schweitzer who used a method which showed that Jesus should not at all be understood as an ethical teacher, as the 19th century scholars saw him.

The HCM came into existence as a recognized discipline at the end of the 18th century and reached its zenith at the end of the 19th century. It is generally recognized by most scholars that the era was brought to an end by Albert Schweitzer with his publication of *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, a classical anthology of the HCM in the 19th century. Rather than for me to render the negative judgment upon the first century of the HCM it would be better to listen to Schweitzer whose evaluation of New Testament studies in the previous century is questioned by few if any. Beginning with Reimarus and Semler and going up to Wrede and himself, he included rather extensive and pertinent sections from books and essays by prominent

New Testament scholars. Working with merely the principle of mutual exclusion, he showed that the HCM had produced mutually contradictory results on who Jesus was. Thus Schweitzer begins chapter 20. "There is nothing more negative than the result of the critical study of the Life of Jesus. The Jesus of Nazareth who came forward publicly as the Messiah who preached the ethic of the Kingdom of God, who founded the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, and died to give His work its final consecration, never had any existence. He is a figure designed by rationalism, endowed with life by liberalism, and clothed by modern theology in an historical garb. This image has not been destroyed from without, it has fallen to pieces, cleft and disintegrated by the concrete historical problems which came to the surface one after another, . . ."

The HCM claimed to push aside a doctrinal approach and an orthodoxy which prevented people from seeing Jesus as he really was, the so-called historical Jesus. The best way to find Jesus, so it was claimed, was to push away any doctrinal or theological concerns and see him through the eyes of the objective. The result, Schweitzer indicates, was that Jesus was painted in so many ludicrous images in some cases and so peeled down, that in the end there was no Jesus at all. Jesus became for Schweitzer the "Unknown." The heady enthusiasm of the unrestrained reason led to historical agnosticism. Schweitzer's book only first appeared in 1906 and in the intervening three score and ten has cast its foreboding shadow over New Testament studies and the HCM. The prominent historical critical scholars of the New Testament have ventured to say little more than Schweitzer's absolute minimum.

Schweitzer not only approached the problem of the historical Jesus by showing how contradictory the results were in his *Quest of the Historical Jesus*, but in an earlier work, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God* first printed in 1901 he listed four assumptions of what he called the "Modern-Historical Solution," all of which he disapproves and disproves. By calling them assumptions he demonstrated that the so-called principles of the HCM were what they really were "assumptions" and not any type of scientifically or historically verifiable principles. [*The Mystery of the Kingdom of God*. Translated by Walter Lowrie. New York: Macmillan Company, 1954]. Here are briefly the principles or assumptions of the HCM in the 19th century as outlined and refuted by Schweitzer.

1. The life of Jesus falls into two periods, one successful and the other unsuccessful.
 - 1a. Schweitzer claims that the first was an unsuccessful as the last
2. The concept of the Passion and the Lord's Supper and the Synoptics is influenced by the Pauline theology.
 - 2a. Schweitzer claimed that it was Jesus who spoke of the atoning value of his death, though who was to benefit from it was left undetermined.
3. The kingdom of God is to be ethically understood.
 - 3a. Schweitzer claimed that the kingdom is to be eschatologically understood.

4. The Passion of Jesus ushers in the ethical understanding of the kingdom.
 - 4a. Schweitzer claimed that the Passion of Jesus did not require any understanding on the part of the apostles and in fact they did not understand. The Passion to them was a secret dominated by an inexplicable "must."

The point is not whether we are ready to accept the principles of the 19th century proponents of the HCM or Schweitzer's demolition of them. Rather the point is that when the principles as used by those devoted to the HCM have been placed along side of each other, they tend to cancel each other out. Thus if an analogy is in order, if Schweitzer could not find an historical Jesus through the HCM because of its mutually exclusive methods and results, might it not be in order to suggest that it might become impossible to find an "historical" HCM simply because the methods and approaches and results are mutually exclusive? Unless one understands the scorched earth left by the HCM in the 19th century, he will not understand the situation which gave rise to the neo-orthodoxy of a Karl Barth, or the use of form criticism coupled with existentialism in Rudolf Bultmann. Even Redaction Criticism which is hardly a generation old still has not dared to sink its roots into the barren scorched "historical" earth of 19th and early 20th century theology. The HCM in contemporary theology in spite of its nomenclature is still running hard and fast from an approach to history that wants to ask questions and know about *what* happened in the past. A large question mark hangs over history and the contemporary HCM of today has not dared to remove it. From my vantage point, the three great prominent theologians of our time have been Paul Tillich, Karl Barth, and Rudolf Bultmann. Tillich at this juncture has no immediate interest as his purpose was to present a Christian philosophy to the world. Karl Barth should be mentioned in passing. So far as making any contributions to the HCM his name is not significant; however, he did offer an approach that still appears to be appealing to many. His *Commentary on the Romans* should not give the impression that he was primarily a New Testament scholar or a higher critical scholar in the sense of Bultmann or the 19th century scholars. This he was not. He worked out a system of theology which was essentially Platonic and not Christian in nature. He stressed the gap between God the creator and man the creature in a way that reminded many of the spirit-body dichotomy in Platonic philosophy. His own theology was called dialectical theology, emphasizing that two opposing concepts could be applied to one idea or object. What concerns us is how this method is applied to Biblical interpretation. Barth made a sensation in the theological world when he began unequivocally to call the Bible the word of God. This thought he contrasted with the Bible as the word of man. These two concepts he let stand without resolving the deliberately established tension between them. This was not an accidental use of language. Thus he held that in the Bible God speaks to us, but that at the same time he allowed and held theoretically to the HCM as it had developed up to his time. While some of his remarks had all the hall marks of orthodoxy of the older vintage, he could also write, "The Bible is the

literary monument of an ancient racial religion and of a Hellenistic cultus of religion of the Near East. A human document like any other, it can lay no apriori dogmatic claim to special attention and consideration." [As quoted Robert M. Grant, *A Short History of The Interpretation of the Bible* (New York: MacMillan, 1963), p. 184.]

Barth never engaged in the type of radical Biblical criticism that is so typical of the HCM. He acknowledged its validity and then proceeded as if it had no existence. Barth explained the Bible as it exists for the church today. He spent no time in determining historical origins. There was really nothing like Barth's method. The great liberal scholar von Harnack attacked Barth for holding a position somewhere between sheer agnosticism and downright fundamentalism. The appeal of the Barthian method is that it permitted scholars to explain the Bible as it really is today and rescued them from getting embroiled with stickier problems of the HCM. This opened the way for an entire generation which is still with us today where one man can both preach from the Bible in a traditionally orthodox way and then return to his classroom and use any number of historical critical approaches. No one can doubt Barth's appeal especially as the HCM had bankrupt theology at the end of the 19th century. Schweitzer had shown the cupboards of the 19th century HCM were bare. Barth did not refill those cupboards, he simply proceeded as if they were full. Barth did nothing to fill them with historical content.

In speaking of the HCM, our attention must be continually focused on the professor emeritus of the University of Marburg, Rudolf Bultmann. This is not to say that what he says is the only thing that qualifies as the HCM, but it is to say that all exegetical theology before him, contemporary to him and after him, funneled out through him. He is the focal point or the point of reference in the 20th century HCM.

New Testament studies in the first decades of this century did not present the same type of unified optimism that marked the 19th century. Von Harnack climbed the heights and was capitulated by the studies of Schweitzer, who gave an irrefutable verdict. Barth in the post-World War I years ignored HCM and gave us his own brand of orthodox theology. There were movements that were laying the groundwork for the HCM as we know it today. Three theologians can be mentioned as providing the raw materials for the reconstruction of the 20th century HCM. Their ideas were revived by Bultmann.

Wilhelm Wrede demolished a theory on which 19th century critical studies had been based. He showed that the Gospel of Mark was not really an historical description of Jesus but a theological one. Up to that time Mark was considered the untouchable historical measuring stick in judging the other Gospel accounts so far as valid history was concerned. In the 20th century, the HCM would follow Wrede's lead in no longer searching for a history of Jesus in the Gospels but would concentrate on the Gospels as theology. Willi Marxsen in very recent times demonstrated again that Mark was a theological book and not an historical one.

Marten Käbler approached the New Testament books as they were. Käbler gave no attention to the search for the historical Jesus but, as the title of his essay "The so-called historical Jesus and the historic Biblical Christ" indicates, concentrated on looking for the Jesus Christ of the Gospel. His swearing off of the HCM anticipated Barth who had little use for these questions and Rudolf Bultmann who did his kerygmatic theology as if there were no HCM.

Von Harnack, though discredited to a certain degree by Schweitzer and others for his ethical simplification of the message of Jesus, became the basis of Bultmann's historical search for Jesus. To show his appreciation for von Harnack's peeled down Jesus, Bultmann republished von Harnack's *What Is Christianity?* with its negative verdicts on supernatural Christianity. Von Harnack had kept alive Baur's thoughts of developmental Christianity from a simple Jesus to a dogmatic Paul. Again Bultmann was perpetuating these ideas further. It would not be unfair to identify Bultmann as a dualist. The theology of the Marburg theologian should not be confused with the form critical study of the Gospels which he has popularized for our time. An adequate caricature of Bultmann's theology is that it is Heidigger's existential philosophy presented in Christian language. Walter Schmithal's analysis is adequate at this point. "We can only talk about God in talking about ourselves." [*An Introduction to the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1968), p. 34.] Thus I do not speak of an objective creation of the world, but I understand myself as God's creature. God is not confronted in a history outside of me, but He is confronted in my existential situation. Only what belongs to objective reality existence.

The point here, however, is briefly to examine the so-called form critical method. Martin Dibelius and Bultmann systematized the forms. In *What is Form Criticism?* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969, 1971] McKnight lists the forms of Bultmann. There are two main divisions, the words or discourses of Jesus and narratives describing what he did. The words of Jesus are further subdivided into apophthegms and dominical sayings. The apophthegms are said to be short sayings of Jesus which are characterized by three types of situations: controversy, scholastic and biographical. These have their origin in the Palestinian church. The dominical sayings are divided into three groups (1) proverbs, prophetic and apocalyptic sayings (2) law and (3) community regulations. The dominical sayings reflect primarily the thinking of the Palestinian church, but the "I" sayings come from the Hellenistic communities. McKnight makes the remark that Bultmann admits to the possibility that some words attributed to Jesus might have actually had their origin with him, but there is no sure evidence that this is the case. Where we might have authentic words of Jesus, the words have been so adjusted by the community that we have no idea what the words meant when Jesus originally spoke them. It can also be noted that Bultmann's judgment concerning a form is made frequently on the content and not on the bare form. Thus "Whoever shall be ashamed of me . . . of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed" (Luke 9:26) is identified as an apocalyptic saying. "Whoever exalteth himself shall be abased" (Luke

14:11) is identified as a proverb. "Whosoever shall put away his wife . . . and shall marry another, committeth adultery" (Matthew 19:9) is identified as a community regulation. All of these have the same form but Bultmann makes the judgment of what kind of form it is according to content. This is not so much form criticism but rather *Sachcritik*, based not on literary methods but theological judgment.

Narrative materials describing the life of Jesus are divided into three sections: miracle stories, historical narratives and legends. A miracle story is one of a healing in which the disease of the afflicted person is described in some detail. While some of these are Palestinian in origin, most are from the Hellenistic communities. Bultmann treats historical narratives and legends together, as in most cases it is difficult to separate legend from history. A legend is an unauthentic story preserved by tradition and believed to be history. The legendary-historical material in the Gospel is such that given narratives have more of one quality than the other. Examples of pure legends include the narratives of Jesus' nativity, the temptation, the transfiguration, the Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem, the Lord's Supper and resurrection. There are some legends which have an historical base as the baptism of Jesus. Still there are others where more historical material is apparent, as in the Passion narratives.

There are some general rules or presuppositions that are inherent in the form critical approach. (1) The simplest ethical sayings of Jesus come closest to sharing some type of authenticity. Complicated theological statements must be attributed to a later development in the church. (2) There is a theological development from Jesus, to the Palestinian Church, to the Hellenistic Church that be detected in the writings. [This of course is a carry-over from Semler and Baur.] (3) Material was transmitted from individual to individual or community to community with more attention given to their forms and then to their content. (4) Though Bultmann asserts that historical and legendary narratives can not generally be separated, he does work with the separate form of historical narrative and legendary narrative and he does separate history from legend. As the forms which Bultmann applied to the words of Jesus were determined by content and not by form, so also here in life and activity of Jesus legendary and historical forms are predetermined by what Bultmann considers history and legend. Here again is an example that history is dependent on a preconceived philosophical judgment. Thus he has advanced not one step from the 19th century theologians who felt compelled to identify miraculous elements as non-historical because it did not fit their predetermined so-called scientific mind set.

Some of Bultmann's presuppositions are open to question simply on the basis of literary considerations. (1) There is evidence that instead of the development from simple to complicated forms that just the opposite is true. Here are a few examples. Language simplifies as it progresses. Complicated philosophical and scientific theories are deliberately simplified for educational purposes. Condensing literature is a natural thing to do. From the case of the New Testament, the Pauline theology is more direct, more to the point, more explicit than the material of Jesus recorded in the Gospel. Could not Paul's

theology be a later practical condensation of Jesus' theology? (2) Recognizing Palestinian and Hellenistic thought forms in the New Testament is also a questionable procedure. It overlooks the fact that the Palestinian society had been Hellenized in a sense since the time of Alexander the Great. Thus when Jesus appeared to conduct his public ministry, Hellenism had been present in Palestine for three and a half centuries. To attribute the miraculous more to the Hellenistic communities and less to the Palestinian seems to overlook the fact that miraculous events are frequently recorded in the Old Testament. This division between Palestinian and Hellenistic origins for the Gospels gives entirely too much credit to the nearly pure Hellenistic congregations in the early church. From the epistles, these congregations are pictured as having a difficult time understanding the miraculous. It is the Hellenistic congregations which have trouble accepting the resurrection and final return of Jesus. Still Bultmann claims resurrection forms as Hellenistic in origin. The New Testament was written in Greek but it breathes the Jewish air so heartily that Hellenism as a factor in the production of the Gospels should be reduced. The Greek language does not hide the fact that Jesus is a Jew in thought, word, and deed, as it is evidenced in His own prejudices. (3) Form criticism works with the concept that material was transmitted in certain forms without attention to the first sense in which these forms were spoken. Thus Jesus' words on Sabbath regulations refer to a legalistic problem in the early congregation regardless of what they might have meant when they were first spoken and regardless if Jesus spoke them or not. The sense of the words as they appear in the Gospels today were determined by the early Christian community and not necessarily by Jesus. A number of questions can be raised. Does the time between the alleged happening really allow for even the possibility of near agnosticism concerning the meaning of the words in their original setting? Is this not a strange type of devotion to man to be more intent on preserving the form of his words and not their content? [This is not to deny the important role that the Christian community played in preserving the words of Jesus and this is also not to deny that the inclusion of certain sections of the Gospel reflect the church situation at the time of the writing.] Bultmann's form critical method is open to criticism on the point that it attributed too much creative quality to the group which allegedly put the Gospels together. Perhaps, even apart from faith and religious commitment, we can come to the conclusion that the person who really was responsible for the unique qualities in the Gospels was the personality of Jesus Himself. (4) The forms of Bultmann and any theologian who tries to impose extra-biblical literary criteria on the Gospels seem in some cases quite arbitrary. In other cases the forms contain a built-in criticism of what is authentic or not. Legend, myth, and historical narrative are forms which already suggest predetermined conclusions. With all literature, Biblical or non-Biblical, the literary standards used in analyzing it must fit the literature itself. And it must be demonstrated that these principles could possibly be derived from the literature itself. Thus

the process in arranging a telephone book has nothing to say about interpreting the Star Spangled Banner.

Bultmann set down scientific principles for authenticating Jesus' words. Whatever could *not* be attributed to the early Christian community as known from the Gospels themselves and the Epistles and whatever could *not* be found in the contemporary literature of Jesus' time did have the *possibility* of being authentic Jesus' material. Perhaps only the word "absurd" or "ridiculous" should describe this procedure. Was Jesus such a cultural isolationist and was Jesus so uninfluential on his followers who made up the Christian community that there was no parallel or resemblance between the preaching of Jesus and his contemporaries or his followers? The type of Jesus found through his use of the HCM is a culturally isolated and non-influential rabbi who because of some still unknown flukes of history eventually was elevated to the status of "God" by the same community which did not preserve his words or understand the few that they might have preserved. In the end the Christian community and its faith became the norm, rule and standard of Christianity instead of the words and preaching of Jesus. Here is one question which the Bultmannian form critic cannot satisfactorily answer: If the early Christian community is really the motivating force so far as content is concerned behind the New Testament, how do you explain that Jesus in the Gospels sounds so unlike anything written in the Epistles? Where do you find in the Epistles a reference to the Son of Man and where in the Gospels do you find discourse on justification by grace through faith as Paul does in Ephesians? More could possibly be said about Bultmann's New Testament procedures. Though he is still living at this writing, his students and sub-contemporaries have followed three different avenues. They have adopted a more radical stance, moved to a more conservative stance or have tried to use entirely new methods of historical criticism. The HCM did not come to a finalized form in the method Rudolf Bultmann. Like all methods based on the dualism of neo-orthodoxy, Bultmann's method pushed out in several directions for a resolution of the built-in ambiguities.

Pushing for an even more radical method of New Testament procedure were Schubert Ogden, Fritz Buri, and Herbert Braun. In one way or another all contended that Christianity not only did not need the historical Jesus but not even the mythological Jesus or God. It did not need the kerygmatic Jesus or the faith of Jesus. Ogden said that authentic existence did not depend on faith in Jesus Christ and could be realized without it. Fritz Buri of Switzerland not only demythologized the apparently historical parts of the Gospels, but he demythologized the kerygma itself. This is now called dekerygmatising. Herbert Braun has no use at all for an historical Jesus. Jesus is only the symbol of self-understanding.

Some of those who have followed in the wake of Bultmann's procedures have taken the similar attitude or a slightly more conservative stance but not much. Gerhard Ebeling takes a more conservative stance than Bultmann in his attempt to show that the historical Jesus was really responsible in some way for Christian kerygma, something which Bultmann believes impossible to prove

and useless in the task of kerygmatic theology. However, Ebeling did not go beyond Bultmann in seeing faith as decision in present circumstances. This is still pure existentialism. Fuchs, another Bultmann disciple, moves Jesus from the realm of faith to the realm of language. Instead of being an event of faith, Jesus becomes an event language. Pannenberg, instead of finding Jesus in the language event as did Fuchs, actually finds Jesus and His resurrection as a self-explanatory event in history. This means the event of Jesus' resurrection is so clear that it needs no explanation. This is a total reversal of the "Word" theology of neo-orthodoxy which has predominated in theology since the advent of Barth's *Commentary on the Romans*.

While some scholars reacted positively and negatively to Bultmann's existential philosophy as applied to theology, others were more interested in his form critical approach as such. Form Criticism was never a completely satisfactory science. Not only were there questions about forms, but even when the forms were isolated these forms stood their in all their naked uselessness and neutrality. This complicated and dubious science was also useless in regard to preaching to the church. Conzelmann, Bornkamm and Marxsen are the disciples of Bultmann who are generally associated with a new discipline called Redaction Criticism. Without refuting the approach of Bultmann and heritage of 19th century theology, they have attempted to approach the Gospels from the position of the writer. The question which they asked of each Gospel writer was what was he trying to accomplish in the church by arranging or creating the Gospel accounts. Marxsen, who is the prominent proponent of this method believes that the Gospel of Mark was written to get the Christian congregation out of Jerusalem into Galilee before the Roman siege of that city. On that account the chief attention in the Gospel is on Galilee. All historical and geographical references in the Gospels are interpreted merely theologically. Historical and geographical details may have been adjusted by the author to fit his theological purpose at the time of writing. The best example of this is the appearance of John the Baptist in the wilderness. The wilderness has no reference to an actual place but its being mentioned indicates that the writer wants to associate John the Baptist with the Old Testament prophecy of a voice crying in the wilderness. More has to be said about Redaction Criticism. Dividing Scriptures into two separate levels so the historical meaning is sacrificed for the theological meaning seems to be a throwback to the allegorical method which plagued the church for over one thousand years. But on the other hand the main contribution of Redaction Criticism that the Gospels are primarily theologies and are to be understood theologically might have brought us a little closer to their true purposes. But the method as it is employed by its proponents sacrifices the historical meaning of a pericope to the theological one. I for one believe that neither historical nor theological meaning should be sacrificed for the sake of the other. The end result of sacrificing history for theology is a return to Gnosticisim. To sacrifice theology for history is to end up with meaningless facts.

Not all the development after Bultmann has been further to the left or an essential repetition of his program. Hans von Campen-

hausen did a form critical study on the Easter narratives and showed that they shared in the antiquity as did the other parts of the Gospel. Resurrection narratives were not necessarily tacked on to the end of lives of Jesus which presented him just as a teacher who died on a cross. Walther Kunneth publicly fought and debated the disciples of Bultmann in pushing for the fact that Jesus really rose from the dead. From this debate there came into existence the *No Other Gospel* movement which is a protest against demythologizing. Willi Marxsen gave a series of university lectures attacking the conservative group. Published as *Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth*.

Birger Gerhardsson and Harald Riessenfeld have offered a conservative but new approach in critical studies of the New Testament. They claim that Jesus Himself is responsible for the words attributed to Him in the Gospels. While HCM has concentrated on the differences in the Gospels, perhaps not enough attention is given to the similarities. These similarities are explained by the mode of teaching Jesus employed with his disciples. The dissimilarities are explained by the hesitancy of the disciples to quote their Master word for word when they believed that Jesus was God incarnate. Other dissimilarities are easily explainable by translation and the situation of the congregation in which these words of Jesus were later recorded. The Gospel of John is looked upon as the record of the informal speeches of Jesus delivered within the circles of the disciples.

CONCLUSION

The novice in the science of the HCM will be totally frustrated if he is looking for one method or for one goal. *The HCM involves an attitude, not a method.* These methods and goals are as varied as the theologians. From our perspective we can see weaknesses and strengths in the concerns of these theologians. More often than not since the time of the Enlightenment and Rationalism, the HCM has suggested a negative procedure with predictable negative results concerning the person of Jesus. Still today the big question mark hangs over the resurrection of Jesus and even his historical existence because of these methods or approaches.

It is impossible to take a method and use it as an objective one and fill it with Christian meaning. Ultimately the method must come from the Bible itself. Each piece of literature religious or other wise must be examined first of all within the canons that itself suggests. To read Mother Goose, the Midnight Ride of Paul Revere and Churchill's memoirs by standards taken from the one and applied to the other is futile and dishonest. For one reason or another, the claim that the Bible is the Word of God never becomes a factor in Biblical interpretation even though this claim is obviously made. No one is asking the inquirer to accept this presupposition but it is not unfair to ask that the student of the New Testament give it some consideration. Many interpreters of the Bible claim that the Bible is the word of God as the Biblical word comes to the hearer. While this might sound as acceptable pious Christian attitude, it is a literary dishonesty. If the interpreter is convinced that the literature is not the word of God because of its origin or at the time of its origin, then it

is somewhat deceptive to say that is the word of God at the moment of hearing. It is also not proper to approach the Scriptures with presupposition not drawn from the methods themselves.

The hermeneutical question needs careful theological consideration in our time. *Simply to endorse the whole range of HCM as an objective method is unfortunately to take with it the anti-supernaturalistic presuppositions of 18th century theology.* There also can be no wholesale dismissal of the concerns and procedures adopted. With Semler we must insist that the prime consideration be given the reconstruction of the historical situation. With Bultmann we are ready to recognize there are forms in the Gospels, though we might disagree on what these forms are and how they are to be determined. With Marxsen we can appreciate that the Gospels are theological or dogmatical books without accepting his theory of historical and geographical fabrication.

All this will need further study and organization. The big question so far as the HCM is concerned is finding the origin of the Christian religion. Does it rest with Jesus or His disciples? Unfortunately those who use anything resembling an existential view of history will get no further than the Easter faith of the disciples. Then they must wrestle with the problem whether they had a deceptive faith or whether even reports of their faith were fabricated.