

# Theology of Biblical Criticism

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## History of Biblical Theology

### I. Middle Ages

Biblical theology as such is a modern discipline. During the Middle Ages biblical study was almost completely subordinated to ecclesiastical dogma. The theology of the Bible was used to reinforce the dogmatic teachings of the Church, which were founded upon both the Bible and church tradition. Not the Bible alone, historically understood, but the Bible as interpreted by tradition was the source of dogmatic theology.

### II. Reformation

The Reformers reacted against the unbiblical character of dogmatic theology and insisted that theology must be founded upon the Bible alone. Dogmatics should be the systematic formulation of the teachings of the Bible. This new emphasis led to a study of the original languages of Scripture and to a recognition of the role of history in biblical theology. The Reformers also insisted that the Bible should be interpreted historically and not allegorically; and this led to the beginnings of a truly biblical theology. However, the Reformers' sense of history was undeveloped, and they did not pursue biblical theology as a distinctive discipline.

### III. Orthodox Scholasticism

The gain in the historical study of the Bible made by the Reformers was partly lost in the post-Reformation period, and the Bible was once again used uncritically and unhistorically to support orthodox doctrine. The Bible was viewed not only as a book free from error and contradiction but also without development or progress. The entire Bible was looked upon as possessing one level of theological value. History was completely lost in dogma, and philology became a branch of dogmatics.

### IV. Rationalist Reaction

Biblical theology as a distinct discipline is a product of the impact of the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) upon biblical studies. A new approach to the study of the Bible emerged in the 18th cent which gradually freed itself altogether from ecclesiastical and theological control and interpreted the

Bible with what it claimed to be "complete objectivity," regarding it solely as a product of history. From this perspective, the Bible was viewed as a compilation of ancient religious writings preserving the history of an ancient Semitic people, and was studied with the same presuppositions with which one studies other Semitic religions. This conclusion was clearly articulated by J. P. Gabler, who in an inaugural address in 1787 distinguished sharply between biblical theology and dogmatic theology. Biblical theology must be strictly historical and independent of dogmatic theology, tracing the rise of religious ideas in Israel and setting forth what the biblical writers thought about religious matters. Dogmatic theology, on the other hand, makes use of biblical theology, extracting from it what has universal relevance and making use of philosophical concepts. Dogmatic theology is that which a particular theologian decides about divine matters, considered philosophically and rationally in accordance with the outlook and demands of his own age; but biblical theology is concerned solely with what men believed long ago.

Gabler was essentially a rationalist, and his approach to biblical theology prevailed for some fifty years. Works on the theology of the Bible were written by Kaiser (1813), De Wette (1813), Baumgarten-Crusius (1828), and von Cölln (1836). Some scholars of this period were extremely rationalistic, finding in the Bible religious ideas that were in accord with the universal laws of reason. Others tried to reconcile Christian theology with the thought forms of the modern period. While this rationalistic perspective as such is long since passé, it is obvious that this historical approach to the study of the Bible is still the fundamental assumption of modern scholarship; and even Evangelical scholars employ the historical method, although with limitations.

### V. Rise of the Philosophy of Religion

Rationalism was superseded under the influence of the idealist philosophy of Hegel (d. 1813), who saw the Absolute Idea or Absolute Spirit eternally manifesting itself in the universe and in human affairs. Hegel taught that the movement of human thought followed the dialectic pattern from a position (thesis) to an opposite position (antithesis), from which interaction emerged a new insight or aspect of reality (synthesis). Hegel saw in the history of religion the evolution of spirit in its dialectical apprehension of the divine, from nature religions, through

religions of spiritual individuality, to the Absolute Religion, which is Christianity.

Under the influence of Hegel, Vatke wrote a biblical theology in 1835 in which the emerging critical views about the OT were combined with Hegel's evolutionary philosophy. His interpretation of the history of Israel's religion was much in advance of his day and was passed over for some thirty years until it was taken up and popularized by Wellhausen.

Under the influence of Hegel, F. C. Baur abandoned the rationalistic effort to find timeless truth in the NT, and instead found in the historical movements in the early Church the unfolding of wisdom and spirit. The teachings of Jesus formed the point of departure. Jesus' teachings were not yet theology but the expression of his religious consciousness. Theological reflection began over the question of the law. Paul, the first theologian, took the position that the Christian was freed from the law (thesis). Jewish Christianity, represented particularly by James and Peter, took the opposite position, that the law was permanently valid and must remain an essential element in the Christian Church (antithesis). Baur interpreted the history of apostolic Christianity in terms of this conflict between Pauline and Judaistic Christianity. Out of the conflict emerged in the 2nd cent the Old Catholic Church, which effected a successful harmonization between these two positions (synthesis).

Baur was less concerned with the truth of the Scriptures than with the effort to trace historical development. He has made a lasting contribution, for the principle that biblical theology is rooted in history is sound, even though Baur's application of this principle is not. Baur's interpretation gave rise to the so-called Tübingen school, which had great influence in German NT studies.

## VI. Conservative Reaction

These new approaches to the study of the Bible naturally met with a strong resistance in orthodox circles, not only from those who denied the validity of a historical approach but also from those who tried to combine the historical approach with a belief in revelation. Influential was E. W. Hengstenberg's *Christology of the OT* (Engtr 1829–1835) and *History of the Kingdom of God under the OT* (Engtr 1869–1871). Hengstenberg saw little progress in revelation, made little distinction between the two

Testaments, and interpreted the prophets spiritually with little reference to history. A more historical approach was structured by J. C. K. Hofmann in a series of writings beginning in 1841 (*Verheissung und Erfüllung*), in which he attempted to vindicate the authority and inspiration of the Bible by historical means, developing his *Heilsgeschichte* theology. Hofmann found in the Bible record of the process of holy or saving-history, which aims at the redemption of all mankind. This process will not be completed until the eschatological consummation. He tried to assign every book of the Bible to its place in this scheme of the history of redemption. This so-called Erlangen school (including also J. A. Bengel, J. T. Beck), did not regard the Bible primarily as a collection of proof texts or a repository of doctrine but as the witness to what God had done in saving-history. They held that the propositional statements in Scripture were not meant to be an end in themselves nor an object of faith, but were designed to bear witness to the redemptive acts of God.

The most important product of the conservative reaction for this discipline was G. F. Oehler's *Theologie des AT* (*Prolegomena* 1845, *Theologie* 1873; Engtr 1883). Conservative in his critical views and holding to the revealed character of OT religion, Oehler also recognized that OT theology is a historical discipline which must describe the OT faith as a phenomenon in history. He criticized the older view, which limited theological exposition to the didactic contents of the Bible, insisting that the discipline must "exhibit properly the internal connection of the doctrine of Revelation with the revealing history" (p. 6). Thus he found the OT to be mediated through a series of divine acts and commands, and also through the institutions of a divine state. A condensation of Oehler's large work was made by R. F. Weidner (1896). Other conservative OT scholars were Baumgarten, C. A. Auberlen, and the commentator Franz Delitzsch.

The Erlangen school had great influence in conservative circles upon such scholars as Tholuck, T. Zahn, P. Feine, and is represented in the theologies of F. Büchsel (1937), A. Schlatter (1909), and Ethelbert Stauffer (1941; Engtr 1955). Stauffer rejects the "systems of doctrine" approach and does not try to trace the development of the Christian understanding of the person and work of Jesus. Rather, he presents a "Christocentric theology of History in the NT," i.e., the theology of the plan of salvation enacted in NT history. The book does not distinguish between canonical and noncanoni-

cal writings and ignores the variety of the several interpretations of the meaning of Christ in the NT.

A new form of the *Heilsgeschichte* theology has emerged in recent years, for there is a widespread recognition that revelation has occurred in redemptive history and that *Heilsgeschichte* is the best key to understand the unity of the Bible. This will be developed later.

## VII. Liberal Historicism in NT Theology

Bultmann has pointed out that the logical consequence of Baur's method would have been a complete relativism (*NT Theology*, II [1955], 245), for the liberal mind could not conceive of absolute truth in the relativities of history. Under the influence of Ritschlian theology, the essence of Christianity was interpreted as a pure spiritual-ethical religion which was proclaimed by and embodied in the life and mission of Jesus. The kingdom of God is the highest good, the ethical ideal. The heart of religion is personal fellowship with God as Father.

This theological interpretation was reinforced by the solution of the Synoptic problem, with its discovery of the priority of Mark and the hypothetical document Q. Scholars of this "old liberalism" believed that in these most primitive documents historical science had at last discovered the true Jesus, freed from all theological interpretation. Biblical theologians of this school began with this "historical" picture of the ethical religion of Jesus and then traced the diverse systems of doctrine (*Lehrbegriffe*) that emerged as the result of later reflection and speculation. The great classic of this school is H. J. Holtzmann's *Lehrbuch der NT Theologie* (1896/97). Paul Wernle's *The Beginnings of Our Religion* (Engtr 1903/04) is another example. Adolf von Harnack's *What Is Christianity?* (Engtr 1901) is a classic statement of this liberal view.

This "old liberal" approach influenced even conservative writers. Both B. Weiss (*Theology of the NT* [1868; Engtr 1903]) and W. Beyschlag (1891; Engtr 1895) interpreted Jesus primarily in spiritual terms, placing great emphasis upon the centrality of the Fatherhood of God. These men were conservative in that they recognized the reality of revelation and the validity of the canon; but their picture of Jesus shared the features of liberalism. They also employed the "systems of doctrine" method, Weiss going so far as to discover four different periods of theological development in Paul, which he treated

separately. This approach is found in English in the writings of Orello Cone, *The Gospel and Its Earliest Interpreters* (1893), G. B. Stevens, *Theology of the NT* (1899), E. P. Gould, *Biblical Theology of the NT* (1900), and A. C. Zenos, *Plastic Age of the Gospel* (1927). The same method is used by even more conservative writers in Germany, such as T. Zahn, *Grundriss der NT Theologie* (1932), and P. Feine, *Theologie des NT* (1910).

## VIII. Victory of Religion over Theology

Along with liberalism developed the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*. In 1883 appeared Julius Wellhausen's *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*, which has been often called the most important work in OT criticism in the 19th century. Taking over Vatke's historico-philosophical interpretation, Wellhausen gave classic expression to the view that the story of Israel's religion was not to be interpreted in terms of divine revelation but in terms of evolutionary principles; the religious development of the OT period embodies particular examples of general religious laws manifesting themselves in history. Wellhausen popularized both the idea of evolutionary development of OT religion and the documentary hypothesis, illustrating how criticism and theology interact upon each other. In Wellhausen's reconstruction the religion of Israel began with Moses, not the patriarchs; the fundamental law of the Jewish community belongs to the postexilic community, not to Mosaic times; eschatology is a late postexilic development in the evolution of Hebrew religion; and the ethical monotheism of the prophets was the basic force that molded Israel's religion into a significant faith.

Wellhausen's work marks the beginning of the period that saw the apparent death of OT theology and the victory of the discipline called the "history of the religion of Israel." Even the name "theology of the OT" was seldom used; and when books were written with this title, as for instance by B. Stade (1905) and Kayser (1886), the contents were not theology but a history of Hebrew religion. Treatises on Hebrew religion were written by Smend (1893), K. Marti (Engtr 1907), E. Kautzsch (HDB, ## V. 612-734), A. Loisy (Engtr 1910), K. Budde (1910), E. Koenig (1915), ## R. Kittel (Engtr 1921), G. Hoelscher (1922), and M. Loehr (Engtr 1936). In English the approach is found in the misnamed work of A. Duff, *OT Theology* (1891), and it appears clearly in W. O. E. Oesterley and T. H.

Robinson, *Hebrew Religion: Its Origin and Development* (1930), A. C. Knudson, *Religious Teaching of the OT* (1918), G. A. Barton, *Religion of Israel* (1919), and in the widely used book of H. E. Fosdick, *Guide to the Understanding of the Bible* (1938; see Eichrodt's criticism in *JBL*, 65 [1946], 205–217). Although this approach has now given way before the revival in interest in the theology of the Bible, it persists in such works as I. G. Matthews, *Religious Pilgrimage of Israel* (1947), S. V. McCasland, *Religion of the Bible* (1960), and R. H. Pfeiffer, *Religion in the OT* (1961).

The interpretation of the OT as the story of the evolution of one Semitic religion naturally led to a comparison between Hebrew religion and other Semitic religions, and to the search for common patterns, particularly of ritual practice. W. R. Smith in *Religion of the Semites* (1889) emphasized the common elements shared by the Hebrews with the neighboring religions. The interpretation of biblical religion in terms of its religious environment is called the *religionsgeschichtliche Methode*.

This approach still persists in contemporary scholarship, particularly in what is called the “myth and ritual school,” which believes that a common culture pattern, at least in the sphere of religious belief and practice, had been diffused throughout the ancient Orient and is reflected in the OT. See S. H. Hooke, *Myth and Ritual* (1933); *The Labyrinth* (1935); E. O. James, *Myth and Ritual in the Ancient Near East* (1958). S. Mowinckel (*Psalmstudien* [1922–24]; *He That Cometh* [Engtr 1956]) traced the origin of eschatology to a New Year Festival in which the return of the rainy season with its resultant renewal of fertility was celebrated as an annual accession of the divine King to His throne when He resumed His divine reign. The existence of such an enthronement festival is not explicit in the OT but is assumed from the analogy of the Babylonian New Year ritual and from alleged traces of a supposed cult-myth in the Psalms. See also A. R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (1955).

During the early part of this period, efforts were still made to interpret the religion of the OT from a theological point of view. A Dillmann (1895) rejected the Wellhausen hypothesis and argued that a comparative study of Semitic religions would demonstrate the uniqueness of OT religion. Other works accepted the Wellhausen hypothesis, but tried to give a systematic view of Israel's religious outlook. C. Piepenbring (1886) found elements of permanent value in the historical development. H. Schultz adopted the Wellhausen hypothesis in the

2nd edition of his OT theology (1878), and tried to solve the problem of history and theology by giving first a historical account of the development of Israel's religion and then a topical treatment in which the several theological concepts were traced through the various periods. However, he felt that the diversity of religious ideas was so great that there were virtually different theologies in the different periods. In England, A. B. Davidson's *Theology of the OT* (1904) reflects the same uneasy truce between history and theology. Although he states that the proper subject of OT theology is the history of the religion of Israel (p. 11), he attempts to create a theology out of the religious beliefs and ideas in the OT, and in effect he has produced a theology of the OT. H. W. Robinson wrote a small book on *The Religious Ideas of the OT* (1913) in which he presented a few simple yet profound ideas which he found behind the variety of OT religion, and which he set forth with some indication of their theological value.

The works of Schultz and Davidson were the last efforts for a generation to attempt to set forth the theological significance of OT religion. The history-of-religion approach had triumphed. A philosophy of evolutionary naturalism was substituted for that of revealed religion. Many studies in the history of Israel's religion appeared, but even conservative writers did not attempt to write theologies of the OT.

This “comparative religions” approach also dominated NT study. Liberalism found the distinctive element of biblical theology in the simple ethical teaching of Jesus. While its representatives paid some attention to the influence of the religious environment of early Christianity (Holtzmann's *Theologie* devoted 120 pages to a sketch of Jewish and Hellenistic backgrounds), the essence of Christianity was treated as something unique, though Holtzmann recognized Hellenistic influences on Paul.

Otto Pfeiderer presaged a new approach. The 1st edition of *Das Urchristentum* (1887) took the same position as Harnack and Holtzmann; but in the 2nd edition (1902; Engtr 1906, *Primitive Christianity*) he interpreted many elements in NT theology in terms of their religious environment. The program for this new approach was presented by W. Wrede in 1897 in a little book entitled *Über Aufgabe und Methode der sogenannten NT Theologie*. He attacked the prevailing method of interpreting NT theology as a series of doctrinal systems, for the Christian faith is religion, not theology or a system of ideas. NT theology has the task not of formu-

lating timeless truths, whether these be mediated by a supernatural revelation or discovered by rational thought, but of formulating expressions of the living religious experiences of early Christianity, understood in light of the religious environment. Therefore the theology of the NT must be displaced by the history of religion in primitive Christianity. (See also A. Deissmann in ZTK, 3 [1893], 126–139.)

This new approach had two distinct centers of interest: the interpretation of NT ideas in terms of expressions of religious experience, and the explanation of the rise of these religious experiences and ideas in terms of the religious environment. One of the first to attempt the former task was H. Weinel in his *Biblische Theologie des NT* (1913). Weinel was not primarily interested in the value or truth of Christianity but only in its nature in comparison with other religions. He set forth types of religions against which Christianity is to be understood as an ethical religion of redemption. Books in English that reflect this influence are S. J. Case, *Evolution of Early Christianity* (1914), E. W. Parsons, *Religion of the NT* (1939), and E. F. Scott, *Varieties of NT Religion* (1943).

The basic assumption of this approach led to very different treatments of Jesus and Paul. In 1892, J. Weiss published a booklet of sixty-seven pages on *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes* in which he interpreted Jesus' message of the kingdom in terms of the milieu of Jewish apocalyptic. This approach was made famous by Albert Schweitzer's *Von Reimarus zu Wrede* (1906; Engtr QHJ), which gives a history of the interpretation of Jesus and then in a hundred pages interprets Jesus in terms of "Consistent Eschatology," i.e., as a Jewish apocalypticist who belongs to first-century Judaism and has little relevance for the modern man. This preacher of eschatology was diametrically opposed to the ethical teacher of the pure religion of the Fatherhood of God as sketched by Harnack and Holtzmann, and it became clear that the "old liberal" Jesus was a distinct modernization. Eschatology, instead of being the husk (Harnack), was shown by Schweitzer to be the very kernel of Jesus' message.

If Jesus was interpreted in terms of the milieu of Jewish apocalyptic, Paul was interpreted in terms of Hellenistic Judaism or the Hellenistic cults and mystery religions. Some scholars, like Bousset, still interpreted Jesus along the lines of liberalism but applied the *religionsgeschichtliche Methode* to Paul. Brückner argued that Paul found a ready-made doctrine of a heavenly man in Judaism, which

he applied to Jesus. Gunkel held that there had sprung up in the Orient a syncretistic religion, gnostic in character, with faith in the resurrection as its central doctrine. This pre-Christian Gnosticism had penetrated Judaism, and through this medium influenced Christianity, even before Paul. W. Bousset put this view on a firmer basis by arguing that Gnosticism was not a heretical new formation in Christianity, as Harnack had supposed, but was a pre-Christian pagan phenomenon, oriental rather than Greek, and religious and mystical rather than philosophical. In his *Kyrios Christos* (1913) Bousset traced the history of belief in Jesus in the early Church, and sharply distinguished between the religious consciousness of Jesus, the faith of primitive Christianity, which held Jesus to be the transcendental Son of man of Jewish apocalyptic, and the view of the Hellenistic Church and of Paul, who held Jesus to be a divinity, like the Greek cult lords.

The most important NT theology embodying this approach is Rudolf Bultmann's. Bultmann differed from Bousset in that he interpreted Jesus in terms of Jewish apocalyptic; but he followed Bousset in his understanding of the Hellenistic Church and Paul. However, Bultmann added a new feature in his existential understanding of these NT "myths," which will be discussed below.

## IX. Contemporary Return to Biblical Theology

During the 1920's a new viewpoint began to make itself felt which resulted in a revival of biblical theology. Factors contributing to this revival included a loss of faith in evolutionary naturalism, a reaction against the purely historical method, which claimed complete objectivity and believed in the adequacy of bare facts to disclose the truth of history, and the recovery of the concept of revelation. This led to the conviction that the OT contained both history and a word concerning the ultimate meaning of history. Thus the study of biblical theology turned its attention to discovering what is of permanent value in OT religion.

The first theological work on the OT in this period was by E. König (1922). König, however, wrote as an old man who had defended the conservative view of Israel's history against Wellhausenism, and who opposed the evolutionary method. The new emphasis is seen in essays by R. Kittel, C. Steuernagel, O. Eissfeldt, and W. Eichrodt published in ZAW. Rudolf Kittel (1921) admitted the shortcomings of

the purely critical approach and urged scholarship to recapture the study of the OT as a theological discipline. Steuernagel (1925) recognized that the other theological disciplines needed a systematic presentation of OT theology which the history-of-religion method could not provide. Eissfeldt (1926) urged that there were two different methods of studying the OT, standing side by side: the historical method, which deals empirically with the history of Hebrew religion, evaluating the objective data by reason and critical methodology; and the theological method, which recognizes by faith the timeless truths embodied in the OT.

Eichrodt (1933) rejected Eissfeldt's view of two different disciplines and held that a fruitful combination of the two methods is possible. The task of theology is to penetrate to the essence of the OT religion and throw light on the inner structure of its theological system. When Eichrodt later published his OT theology (1933–1938) he took the idea of the covenant from the OT itself as a center in terms of which all the theology of the OT was to be understood, and produced a systematic synthesis of the essential doctrines of the religion of Israel.

In the years that followed, a succession of OT theologies was produced in Europe. E. Sellin (1933) viewed the entire Bible as an essential unity and presented the major ideas of the OT in systematic form; but he selected only those basic doctrines such as God, man, and salvation which are common to the various parts of the OT and which give to its theology a consistent unity. The revived theological approach to the OT is more vividly seen in W. Vischer's *Witness of the OT to Christ* (1934; Engtr 1949). Vischer to a large degree disregarded the distinction between the Testaments and used allegorical exegesis to discover in the OT what Christ is.

Although L. Koehler's OT theology (1936) was more historical in approach, it attempted a synthesis of the thoughts and concepts of the OT that are or can be important. E. Jacob (1955) defended the view that the OT is one book, presenting one religion whose strands come together in Christ. He held that both the "religion of Israel" and the "theology of the OT" are historical disciplines, the former showing the variety of the history and its evolution, the latter displaying its unity. OT theology is the systematic account of the specific religious ideas which can be found throughout the OT and which form its profound unity. O. Procksch (1949) was influenced by von Hofmann and viewed OT theology from the perspective of saving-history.

T. C. Vriezen published an *Outline of OT Theology* in Dutch in 1949 which has been translated both into German and English (Engtr 1958). OT theology has as its object not the religion of Israel but the OT; and the OT is not to be studied in isolated detachment but in its relationship to the NT. He therefore selected the central themes and materials that are important for Christian faith. A later German work, that of G. von Rad (1957, 1961), is a sort of *Heilsgeschichte*; yet it is not a theological interpretation of the modern historian's reconstruction of the events of Israel's history, but the theology of traditions that Israel held about its own history. He has therefore been criticized by critical scholars for placing a gulf between history and theology.

The new theological approach to the OT made a strong impact on Great Britain but by the mid-1970's had produced few full-scale OT theologies there. H. W. Robinson reflected the new trend in the second volume of essays by the Society for OT Study (*Record and Revelation*, ed H. W. Robinson [1938]) in which he emphasized a *heilsgeschichtlich* (saving-history) approach to revelation. Revelation is not the communication of abstract truth but the gradual disclosure, through the concrete experiences of life, of a pattern of divine purpose steadily unfolding itself in history, and pointing to the climax in the NT without which it is incomplete. Later Robinson expanded this thesis in *Inspiration and Revelation in the OT* (1946), which was designed to be a prolegomena to an OT theology that he did not live to write.

N. H. Snaith vigorously criticized the comparative-religions approach because it ignored any distinctive elements in the Bible. He found theology in the distinctive beliefs in the OT which set it apart from other religions and which are further developed in the NT. H. H. Rowley wrote many volumes dealing with the thought of the OT, and in *The Faith of Israel* (1956) he, like Snaith, argued that OT theology is to be found in the distinctive elements in the religion of Israel. He recognized evolution and borrowing from other religions but was unable to account for the essence of Israel's religion in these terms. He saw within OT history and religion a self-revelation of God which results in something timeless and of enduring validity; this constitutes OT theology. The most thoroughgoing theological treatment was that of G. A. F. Knight, *A Christian Theology of the OT* (1959), which studies the OT not in terms of Israel's religion or historical development but in terms of the OT message to the 20th cent in light of the Christian revelation

as a whole. N. W. Porteous in the third volume of essays by the Society for OT study (OTMS) differentiated between OT religion and theology, finding theology in a critical evaluation of the knowledge of God resulting from the human reaction to the Word spoken in the events of OT history. This thesis is unfolded in his essay in the revised edition of Peake's *comm on the Bible* (1962).

The new theological concern also strongly influenced American scholarship. In 1940, W. F. Albright (FSAC) rejected positivistic historicism in favor of an "organismic" philosophy of history, defending the basic soundness of the main outlines of the OT tradition and tracing essential monotheism to Moses. This thesis was reinforced in ARI (1942). Millar Burrows in *An Outline of Biblical Theology* (1946) pointed out the loss of a note of authority in biblical preaching as a result of modern critical study of the Bible. Burrows then sketched the development of the several theological concepts throughout the entire Bible. He distinguished between history and theology by holding that theology asks for God's judgment on the religion of Israel and of primitive Christianity and seeks its modern significance. O. J. Baab in his OT theology (1949) admitted the sterility and failure of the pure objective-historical study of Israel's religion. He argued that we must interpret the biblical religion and history from the viewpoint of the faith by which the men of the Bible lived. R. C. Dentan in his *Preface to OT Theology* (1950) defined biblical theology as "that Christian theological discipline which treats the religious ideas of the OT systematically, i.e., not from the point of view of historical development, but from that of the structural unity of OT religion" (p. 48).

G. E. Wright showed that the OT teaching cannot be explained as a natural evolution resulting from environmental influences (*The OT Against Its Environment* [1950]). OT theology is neither a history of biblical ideas nor a systematic cross section of these ideas treated under the rubrics of dogmatic theology. It is rather a confessional recital of the redemptive acts of God in history together with their theological meaning (*God Who Acts* [1952]). This exposition Wright undertook in his essay on "The Faith of Israel" in the first volume of IB (1952).

Among modern Roman Catholic works is the *Theologie des AT* by Paul Heinisch (1940; Engr 1955). Heinisch does not make it his main purpose, as had earlier Roman Catholic writers, to use biblical theology as a tool for defending the doctrines of the Church. He interprets the OT in its historical set-

ting. OT theology is the systematic presentation of what the OT leaders, who were raised up and inspired by God, required as to faith and morals; while the religion of Israel shows how the people responded to the directives of their religious teachers and how the environment and cultural progress affected the development of spiritual ideas.

In spite of this renaissance in biblical theology, conservative writers have had little to contribute to the dialogue, at least on the level of critical studies. R. B. Girdlestone's *OT Theology and Modern Ideas* (1909) is not a theology of the OT but a series of essays on various theological themes. In 1948, G. Vos' *Biblical Theology* was published posthumously. The work breaks off abruptly in the midst of a discussion of the revelation in Jesus' ministry, and it is more an extended essay on revelation in the OT than a biblical theology. A contemporary writer in the same conservative tradition, E. J. Young, wrote an introductory study under the title *The Study of OT Theology Today* (1958). See also his remarks in EQ, 31 (1959), 52f, 136-142. Young assumed such a very conservative stance that he denied that the modern movement was really a resurgence of true biblical theology, for any theology that does not accept the complete trustworthiness of Scripture "is not taught by God, does not teach God and does not lead to God" (EQ, 31 [1959], 53). Young's position has been criticized by other conservative scholars for "passing judgment by implication on all works on modern OT theology" (E. L. Ellison, EQ, 31 [1959], 52). J. B. Payne has produced a comprehensive *Theology of the Older Testament* (1962). Payne, like Eichrodt, takes the concept of the covenant as the integrating center for OT theology; but instead of finding the meaning of the covenant in the OT concept of *berît*, he turns to the Greek meaning of *diathēkē* as it is used in He. 9:16ff, and structures the entire pattern of OT theology around this Greek concept.

The new approach to theology changed the complexion of NT studies. The historical assurance of liberalism was challenged by Martin Kähler in a book that has proved to be crucial for the modern debate. Kähler structured the problem in terms of *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche biblische Christus* (1898). The *historische* Jesus, i.e., the Jesus reconstructed by the liberal critical method, never really existed in history but only in the critical imagination of scholarship. The only Jesus who possesses reality is the Christ pictured in the Bible, whose character is such that he cannot be reconstructed by the meth-



ods of scientific historiography. The Gospels are not historical (*historische*) documents in the scientific sense of the term, but witnesses to the Christ. They are kerygma, not “history”; and it is impossible to get behind the kerygma. Indeed, the “historical Jesus” serves only to obscure from us the living biblical Christ. The real *geschichtliche* Christ is the Christ who is attested in the Gospels and who is preached by the Church.

Another signpost pointing in the same direction was the book by W. Wrede, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien* (1901). Wrede shattered the liberal portrait of the historical Jesus by showing that the Jesus of Mark was not the inspired prophet but a messianic (divine) being. Wrede differed from Kähler in that he did not accept the Markan portrait of Jesus as true but attempted to explain historically how the nonmessianic, historical Jesus became the messianic Christ of the Gospels.

In the years that followed, gospel criticism turned to the study of the oral stage of the gospel tradition (*Formgeschichte*) to try to discover the laws controlling the tradition which could explain the transformation of the “historical” Jesus into the kerygmatic Christ. One outstanding aspect of this study was the admission that form criticism could not find in any stratum of the gospel tradition a purely historical Jesus. The resultant “kerygmatic” approach has issued in two very different interpretations of the NT.

On the one hand, E. H. Hoskyns and Noel Davey in *The Riddle of the NT* (1931) show that all the evidence of the NT converges on a single point: that in Jesus, God revealed Himself for man’s salvation. The critical method has revealed most clearly the living unity of the NT documents. The historian is compelled to state that both the unity and uniqueness of this claim are historical facts. This claim, while occurring in history, transcends history, for it demands of the historian what he as a historian may not give: a theological judgment of ultimate significance.

Th “kerygmatic” interpretation of NT theology received its greatest impetus through the writings of C. H. Dodd. In his inaugural lecture at Cambridge University, Dodd called for a new emphasis on the unity of NT thought in place of the analytic approach, which had prevailed throughout the preceding century. In the same year (1936) he implemented his own suggestion in *Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*. Dodd finds the unity of the NT message in the kerygma, the heart of which

is the proclamation that the new age has come in the person and mission of Jesus. Here for the first time, a single biblical concept was used to relate the NT materials to a unified development. Dodd has enlarged upon this thesis in *The Parables of the Kingdom* (1935) and *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (1935), interpreting both the message of Jesus and that of the Gospel of John in terms of the inbreaking of the age to come. While this approach is sound in principle, Dodd’s work has the defect of understanding the age to come in terms of Platonic thought rather than biblical eschatology. The age to come is the “wholly other,” the eternal breaking into the temporal, instead of the future age breaking into the present age.

This kerygmatic theology has produced an extensive literature. The outstanding American protagonist has been F. V. Filson. His *One Lord, One Faith* (1943) defends the unity of the NT message, and his *Jesus Christ the Risen Lord* (1956) argues that NT theology must understand NT history from the theological point of view, i.e., from the standpoint of the living God who acts in history, the most notable event being the resurrection of Christ. Filson interprets the entire NT theology in light of the Resurrection.

A. M. Hunter expounded *The Unity of the NT* (1944, American title *The Message of the NT*) in terms of One Lord, One Church, One Salvation. More recently, in a slim volume *Introducing NT Theology* (1957), he has expounded the “fact of Christ,”; he includes in this term “the totality of what Jesus Christ’s coming involved, his person, work and words, of course, but also the Resurrection, the advent of the Spirit and the creation of the new Israel...” (p. 9).

Oscar Cullmann also follows the *Heilsgeschichte* interpretation, and provides an excellent corrective for Dodd’s Platonic approach. In *Christ and Time* (1946; Engtr 1950, 1964) he argues that the NT finds its unity in a common conception of time and history rather than in ideas of essence, nature, eternal or existential truth. Theology is the meaning of the historical in time. In Cullmann’s work, *Heilsgeschichte* theology has emerged in a new form; and the principle of *Heilsgeschichte* as the unifying center of NT theology has been widely recognized. We can accept the basic validity of Cullmann’s approach without agreeing with him that the NT shows no interest in questions of nature and being but only in “functional Christology.”

Alan Richardson in his *intro to the Theology of*

*the NT* (1958) assumed the kerygmatic approach by accepting the hypothesis that the “brilliant re-interpretation of the OT scheme of salvation which is found in the NT” goes back to Jesus Himself and is not the product of the believing community. In an essay on “Historical Theology and Biblical Theology,” Richardson argued that biblical theology cannot use a purely objective, scientific, neutral approach, but must interpret the biblical history from the standpoint of a biblical faith (*Canadian Journal of Theology*, 1 [1955], 157–167).

The exponents of this “kerygmatic” approach assume that the Christ proclaimed in the kerygma is continuous with the historical Jesus. The “kerygmatic” factor is the interpretative element that necessarily accompanies the event. A radically different use of the kerygmatic approach, on the other hand, is found in the writings of Bultmann, who found no continuity between the historical Jesus and the Christ of the kerygma. The historical Jesus, for Bultmann, has been quite obscured behind the layers of believing tradition, which reinterpreted the significance of Jesus in mythological terms. Historically, Jesus was only a Jewish apocalypticist who proclaimed the imminent apocalyptic end of the world and warned people to prepare for the catastrophe of judgment. He conceived of Himself neither as Messiah nor as Son of man. He did, however, possess an overwhelming sense of the reality of God, and He realized that He was the bearer of the Word of God for the last hour, which placed men under the demand for decision. His death was an incomparable tragedy, though this was redeemed from meaninglessness by the emergence of belief in His resurrection. The early Church reinterpreted Jesus, first in terms of the Jewish apocalyptic Son of man, and then in terms of a conflation of the apocalyptic Son of man, the Gnostic heavenly man, and the dying and rising cult deity of the mystery religions. The kerygma, i.e., the early Church’s proclamation of Christ, is a historical fact in the life of early Christianity; and therefore there is continuity between the historical Jesus and the kerygma. If there had been no Jesus there would have been no kerygma. The Christ who is proclaimed in the kerygma, however, is a mythological construction and had no existence in history, for mythology by definition is nonhistorical. Therefore, there can be no continuity between the historical Jesus and the Christ of the kerygma.

Bultmann’s interpretation of NT theology was controlled by his view of God and theology. God is the wholly Other who by definition cannot break

into history or act objectively in history. The place where God acts is in human existence. Theology consists not of eternal truths or revealed doctrines, but of theological thoughts explicated from believing authenticity. Theology is faith interpreting itself, i.e., it is the theological formulation of the meaning of authentic existence. Therefore, the order is: the kerygma, authentic existence, theological interpretation of authenticity (*Theology of the NT*, II, 237ff).

Thus for Bultmann, NT theology was not the explication of what God has done in past history; it was the explication of what God does in man through the kerygma. The kerygma was a present fact, not an element of ancient history. Authentic existence must be faith in God and in God alone; it cannot rest upon objective events in past history. If it did, faith would be faith in history or in the historian, not faith in God. Therefore, the believer need not know much about the historical Jesus, only that this man lived and died and was the beginning point of the kerygma. Indeed, Jesus and His message were for Bultmann no part of NT theology, but only one of its presuppositions.

Bultmann’s radical position stirred up a storm of discussion (see *Der historische Jesus und der kerygmatische Christus*, ed H. Ristow [1960]), and even many of his followers have been disturbed by the extremeness of his position, which divorced the historical Jesus from the Christ of faith and removed Him from the orbit of NT theology. They have therefore initiated a “new quest for the historical Jesus” who will stand in a real measure of continuity with the Christ of the kerygma. The most notable products of this “post-Bultmannian” school to date have been Günther Bornkamm’s *Jesus of Nazareth* (Engtr 1960), James Robinson’s *New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1959), and Hans Conzelmann’s *Outline of the Theology of the NT* (Engtr 1969).

Two other notable works have appeared. In 1969, W. G. Kümmel published *Die Theologie des NT* (Engtr 1973), a study of the theology only of the “major witnesses: Jesus — Paul — John,” with a small section on the faith of the primitive community. For Kümmel, the message of the historical Jesus is essential for Christian faith. Kümmel is concerned primarily with the unity and diversity of the major witnesses. While fully recognizing their diversity, he finds a central unity in that all the major witnesses give common testimony to the fact that, in Jesus, God has initiated His eschatological salvation, and in the Christ event God encounters men. Thus we encounter in the canonical Scrip-

tures the uniform witness to God's revelation in Jesus Christ.

In 1971 Joachim Jeremias published Volume I of his *NT Theologie* (Engtr 1971). Jeremias' position is almost exactly opposite to that of Bultmann so far as the historical Jesus is concerned. By the use of *Formgeschichte*, Jeremias has attempted to recover the main outlines of the teaching of the historical Jesus. Furthermore, in his view it is in the *ipsis-sima vox* of Jesus that men stand face to face with God. The Epistles are not revelation but are the response of men to the revelation confronting them in the historical Jesus. (See Jeremias' important statement in *The Problem of the Historical Jesus* [Engtr 1964].)

A position somewhat analogous to that of Bultmann was espoused by the American scholar John Knox in his *Criticism and Faith* (1952) and his books on Christology. Knox was concerned to make faith independent of historical criticism, and he did this by interpreting the "Christ event" as the historical Jesus plus the responses made to Him and the meanings found in Him by the Church. In his view, it is therefore not important what the historical Jesus said or thought, for what the Church thought about Him is included in the "Christ event" as the object of faith; and this area of meaning is independent of the findings of historical criticism. The "event" of Jesus Christ was the totality of fact and meaning — of fact responded to, remembered, and interpreted by the believing community.

One of the few NT theologies written in American is by F. C. Grant, entitled *intro to NT Thought* (1950). Grant's purpose was not primarily historical or descriptive; rather he tried to set forth the central concepts in the NT, such as God, man, Christ, salvation, and the Church. Although Grant found many different theologies, i.e., interpretations of the "divine event," he also recognized an underlying unity in the NT view of God, revelation, salvation, and the finality of Christ. Grant felt that we could not recover the historical facts about Jesus. He admitted that for the NT the risen Christ is identical with Jesus.

As in OT theology, Evangelical writers have made limited contributions to NT Theology. Vos's *Biblical Theology* (1948) breaks off abruptly in the middle of Jesus' ministry. His *Self-Disclosure of Jesus* (1926), although long out of date, has some excellent chapters on the christological problem in the Synoptic Gospels. Frank Stagg's *NT Theology* (1962) is a topical study designed more for pastors

than for scholars. The present author has published his own *Theology of the NT* (1974), designed to be a seminary textbook, which views the NT as the trustworthy record by various witnesses, and the normative interpretation, of the redeeming revelatory event in Jesus Christ.

G. E. Ladd

## Nature of Biblical Theology

### I. Introduction

Biblical theology is first of all a descriptive discipline. Its purpose is to set forth in its own historical and religious categories the teaching of the several parts of the Bible about God, man, redemption, ethics, and eternal destiny. This principle was long ago set forth by Gabler, and was more recently insisted on by Stendahl (IDB, I, 418f). It is finally the task of systematic or dogmatic theology to decide what is normative for Christian theology.

Recognition of the descriptive character of biblical theology would appear to be a great achievement, in that it set men free from dogmatic presuppositions so that they could interpret the Bible in an objective fashion. However, such "objectivity" has proved to be an illusion, for it has led some to interpret the Bible from the perspective of modern, rationalistic, naturalistic categories instead of in the Bible's own thought forms. The most vivid illustration of this is the "search for the historical Jesus." "The historical Jesus" is a technical term designating a Jesus capable of being explained in naturalistic, rationalistic categories. Modern criticism recognizes that the Gospels represent Jesus as a divine man, having an innate consciousness of an intimate personal relationship with His Father. Rationalism, however, has no room for divine men. The historian qua historian has no category of divine transcendence. Therefore, modern scholars have tried to reconstruct a Jesus who would be completely compatible with the categories of critical historiography — i.e., a Jesus who is only human. In other words, the modern "historical-critical method" is not neutral and "objective"; it is utterly prejudiced against anything supernatural.

The entire NT regards Jesus as a supernatural being, and biblical theology must set the teachings of the Bible *in its own thought categories and forms*. The idea of a divine man may be unpalatable to the modern critic; but if he is true to the task, he

will not try to dilute the biblical teaching to suit modern presuppositions.

The main theme of the Bible is the self-revelation of God. The Bible may be viewed exclusively as a record of historical people and events; however, the Bible itself is not interested in history for its own sake but only as it is the vehicle for the divine self-revelation. History is recorded, but the chief concern of the Bible is the God who acts in history.

The biblical theologian must ask: Is this claim true? Did God actually reveal Himself to me? The answer to this question transcends the tools of the historian qua historian. It can be answered only on the basis of faith. Only if the critic believes that there is a personal sovereign God who is Lord of both nature and history can he accept the Bible's witness. Furthermore, whether he accepts it or not will be a major determining factor in the way he writes biblical theology. This is why the present author has rejected the rationalistic "historical-critical method" and opted for the "historical-theological method" (see *NT and Criticism* [1967], pp. 14, 40), which approaches the task of biblical theology with the presupposition that such a God does exist.

In other words, if God does exist and has really revealed Himself in a series of historical events, only the critic who starts with this presupposition will be able to write biblical theology as it really is.

For the critic who takes this stance, biblical theology is both a descriptive and a normative discipline. What the theologian finds in Scripture of the self-revelation of God, he believes to be true. This is the stance from which the present article is written.

## II. Theology

Biblical theology has to do with *theology*, i.e., with the knowledge of the person and the creative and redeeming acts of God, of man seen in light of the knowledge of God, and of human destiny or salvation. Biblical theology therefore is to be distinguished from the religion of Israel and early Christianity. Much confusion has been caused by the frequent use of the term "biblical theology" by modern scholars synonymously with the history of the religion of Israel and of the early Church. The religion of Israel and of the early Church, however, included many elements of which the Bible disapproves. Israel frequently lapsed into the worship

of pagan deities, for which the prophets rebuked a backsliding people. The early Church included Judaizers and Gnosticizers, who are reproved by the apostles. Historically speaking, the theology of the Bible represents only one strand, or rather several selected strands from a very complex religious situation; but theologically speaking it embodies the normative interpretation of God's redemptive acts.

At this point, however, another historical fact must be recognized. It is an altogether too simple and unhistorical solution to suggest that biblical theology stands at every point in contrast with its religious environment. Here is an involved historical and theological problem that Evangelical scholars need to take far more seriously. The extreme *religionsgeschichtliche* school in both the OT and NT regards biblical religion as a syncretistic product of the religious environment. An outstanding illustration is Bultmann, who believed that, historically, NT Christology reflects the interpretation of Jesus of Nazareth in terms of a synthesis of the Jewish apocalyptic Son of man, the mystery religions' dying and rising nature deity, and the Gnostic heavenly Lord who descends and ascends. The extreme conservative view, under the influence of supernaturalism, is that biblical theology is strictly unique at every point.

Little reflection is required to demonstrate that God's self-revelation in history has often caught up elements from the religious milieu and incorporated them in *Heilsgeschichte*, so that they become instruments of revelation. For instance, one of the most common names for God in the OT, 'El ('Elohim), is shared with Israel by its Semitic neighbors as the name of the chief God in the pagan pantheon. Again, the rite of sacrifice, providing the background for the meaning of the death of Christ, is not distinctive to OT religion but is common to most religions. The rite of circumcision, which in the OT is the sign of God's covenant with Israel, was practiced by most Semitic people. The sudden unexplained appearance of elders in the NT (Acts 11:30) appears to be nothing but the adaptation of the Jewish synagogue structure; and the pattern of early Christian worship was undoubtedly taken from the Jewish synagogue.

This points to the conclusion that the revelatory element in *Heilsgeschichte* is accompanied by ordinary historical development and interaction with the religious milieu. There is no evidence that the primitive "Christian communism" pictured in Acts 2 and 4 was occasioned by revelation or is a part of revelation; it was a historical manifestation of

Christian love. Evangelical scholarship needs to devote far more attention than it has previously to the problem of the relation of history to revelation. The revelatory character of biblical theology is truly unique; but objective scholarship must freely recognize the degree to which revelation has made use of secular historical factors.

If biblical theology is the normative interpretation of God's redemptive acts, the question must be raised: What is theology? If theology is the permanent and normative element in biblical religion, tested by human reason and religious experience, or if theology is man's theological reflections based on authentic self-understanding (Bultmann), or if theology is the explication, the scientific self-consciousness of faith (Ott), we will have a very different understanding of biblical theology from that of those who regard theology as the theological truth in the inspired Word of God. One of the central doctrines of the Bible is revelation; and biblical theology must rest upon a biblical view of revelation. Traditionally, orthodox theology has tended to regard the Bible as the main vehicle of revelation. Since the entire Bible is equally inspired, it must be of equal theological worth; and theology has the sole task of synthesizing the many statements in the Bible into a coherent whole. However, the Bible is not *primarily* a book of theology but of history — the history of Israel, of Jesus, of the early Church. This leads to the insight that the divine revelation has occurred in historical events, the most important being the total event of Jesus of Nazareth. *Heilsgeschichte* designates the theology that sees the self-revelation of God in a select stream of historical events.

The events themselves, however, are not self-explanatory; there was always a divinely initiated prophetic or apostolic word of interpretation. That Jesus died is an objective fact that even the Pharisees could affirm. That Jesus died *for our sins* is no less an "objective" fact; but it is a theological event occurring within the historical fact which could be understood only from the prophetic word of interpretation. Revelation, therefore, occurred in the complex of event-Word. The normative, interpretative words giving the meaning of the redemptive events were sometimes immediately deposited in written form (the NT Epistles); but sometimes they were first given orally, preserved as an oral tradition, and finally committed to writing (the Gospels). Most of the references in the NT to the "Word of God" designate the spoken word, the gospel, the kerygma, not the written word of

the Bible. An Evangelical theology believes that the Holy Spirit superintended the entire process. The Bible is, therefore, both the record of God's revealing redemptive acts and the final, normative, authoritative deposit of the divinely given word of interpretation. Thus revelation includes both the self-disclosure of God to men, and the disclosure of the theological meaning of God's revealing acts.

### III. Biblical

Our discipline has to do not only with theology, but with biblical theology in the stricter sense. This term can, of course, designate any theology that is consistent with biblical truth. Such diverse theologies as Calvinism and Dispensationalism consider themselves thoroughly "biblical." Our discipline, however, designates the theology of the Bible viewed in its own biblical and historical perspective.

Theologies that do not regard the Bible itself as the Word of God and the authoritative interpretation of God's redemptive acting, tend to distinguish sharply between biblical and dogmatic theology. The former is viewed in strictly historical terms as the theology or theologies found in the Bible, and is often indistinguishable from the history of religion. Biblical theology may also be regarded as a cross section of the theological ideas in the Bible which may or may not have normative value. Dogmatic theology is the theology that the modern theologian regards as normative. Such theologies often find their normative element in some modern philosophy such as rationalism, Hegelianism, Ritschlianism, or existentialism. The theological statements of the Bible are used to give greater or lesser support for what each theologian feels to be theologically true.

An Evangelical theology recognizes biblical and dogmatic (or systematic) theology to be equally normative. There are, however, distinct differences between the two disciplines. Biblical theology recognizes progressive revelation in the course of redemptive history and therefore traces the stages of revelation in the Bible to its fulfilment and consummation in Christ. In the course of this historical development, biblical theology must distinguish between that which is contingent and temporary and that which is permanent even though expressed in contingent forms. Systematic theology, on the other hand, is a systematic arrangement of the end product of the history of revelation. Biblical the-

ology is primarily historical; systematic theology is primarily synthetic. Biblical theology, as we have seen, may be defined as the theology of the Bible viewed in its own biblical and historical setting.

A second difference between the two disciplines results from the systematizing principle of dogmatic theology. In pursuing this end, it must ask questions biblical theology does not ask. These questions admittedly come often from a Greek way of thinking. Some scholars insist that a theology that is biblical in any sense ought to be biblical in its form, and that a theology structured in terms of Greek categories must ipso facto be unbiblical. This does not follow. The very word “theology” is a Greek, not a biblical word. Since the theological materials in the Bible are not arranged systematically, any topical arrangement is in a sense artificial, for the Bible is a book of history and not a theology of the covenant. Biblical theology will endeavor so far as possible to retain the biblical order and its structure, while systematic theology may neglect the biblical form in favor of a synthetic or logical arrangement.

To illustrate: there cannot be said to be a “doctrine” of the trinity in the Bible. The very word “trinity” belongs to systematic theology. However, raw materials of a trinitarian theology are to be found in the Bible, for the Bible clearly teaches that the Father is God, that the Son is God, and that the Holy Spirit is God. Thus the Bible demands a trinitarian theology; but the Bible does not itself reflect on the problem of how there can be three persons in a single Godhead. The task of biblical theology is to discover what the various stages of redemptive history teach about God and Christ and the Holy Spirit and to go as far as the Bible itself goes. Systematic theology then takes the end product of biblical theology and asks additional theological and philosophical questions, going farther than the Bible goes in the formulation and expression of theology, yet remaining true to the biblical data.

A third difference is that systematic theology will often organize its materials around some single principle or scheme that may reflect the problems facing men at the time. Many diverse systems of theology appeal to the Bible, e.g., Calvinistic theology, Arminian theology, dispensational theology, and even dialectical and existential theology. Thus systematic theology deals with many questions that do not come within the purview of the biblical theologian, who is concerned with the theology of the Bible seen in its own biblical and historical setting.

## IV. Historical

That revelation has occurred in historical events and that biblical theology must therefore be primarily historical in character and arrangement require further exposition; for the historical nature of revelation is the modern “scandal” of the gospel. Since G. E. Lessing, the modern mind has found it difficult to accept the view that eternal absolute truth can be embodied in the particular, contingent events of history. History by definition involves relativity, particularity, caprice, arbitrariness, whereas revelation must convey the universal, the absolute, the ultimate. History has been called “an abyss in which Christianity has been swallowed up quite against its will.”

Further, God and history belong to who different categories. History is concerned with the observable, the natural, the human, while God belongs to the invisible, the supernatural, the spiritual. The historian, as a historian, feels that he can make no statement about God. He can observe what people have thought about God, but he does not feel he can observe God or the acts of God, because God stands above and outside human history and belongs to the realm of faith and spiritual experience.

It is for this reason that scholars like Bultmann have taken offense. It is to them incredible that God could act in history in the terms in which the Bible represents it. To Bultmann, “mythology” included not only ideas of angels, demons, heaven, hell, miracles, etc., but also every attempt to objectify God and His acts, to find the acts of God within the phenomena of world history. Bultmann thought that “we must speak of God as acting only in the sense that He acts with me here and now.” For Bultmann, by definition, there could be no *Heilsgeschichte* in the sense in which we have described it; and he tried to reinterpret the meaning of God’s redemptive activity in terms of personal human existence. He did this, however, only at the sacrifice of the gospel itself, which proclaims a redemptive history of which Christ is the end term. The fundamental issue at stake is not the nature of history but the nature of God: whether God is indeed Lord of history or stands quite apart from history.

A second difficulty must be faced. Not only is the Bible conscious that God has been redemptively active in one stream of history in a way in which He is not active in general history; it also is conscious

that, at given points, God has acted in history in ways that transcend ordinary historical experience.

This can best be appreciated by a brief consideration of the nature of “history.” The layman thinks of history as the totality of past events; but a moment’s reflection will show that we have no access whatever to vast areas of past human experience. There can be no history unless there are documents — records of past events. Ancient records, however, do not themselves constitute “history.” The writings of Herodotus are a sort of history, but they are replete with fancy, imagination, and errors. “History” therefore must be understood as the modern historian’s reconstruction of the events of the past by the critical use of ancient documents. In such a reconstruction there must be accepted critical procedures, “ground rules.” When one reads in Greek literature of the activities of the gods among men, he understands this not as history but as mythology.

Many historians feel that this same critical definition of history must be applied to the study of biblical history. This, however, runs head-on into a difficult problem. Frequently the Bible represents God as acting through “ordinary” historical events. The events that brought Israel into captivity in Babylon and later effected their restoration to Palestine were “natural” historical events. God used the Chaldeans to bring defeat to the chosen people and banishment from the land; but it was nonetheless a divine judgment. He also used Cyrus, “his anointed” (Isa. 45:1), as an agent to accomplish the divine purpose of restoring His people to the land. In such events, God was active in history, carrying forward His redemptive purposes through the nation Israel. This one stream of history carries a meaning that sets it apart from all others in the river of history. Within the historical events, the eye of faith can see the working of God.

Frequently, however, God is represented as acting in unusual ways. Sometimes the revelatory event assumes a character that the modern secular historian calls unhistorical. The God who reveals Himself in redemptive history is both Lord of creation and Lord of history, and He is therefore able not only to shape the course of ordinary historical events but to act directly in ways that transcend usual historical experience.

The most vivid illustration of this is the resurrection of Christ. From the point of view of scientific historical criticism, the Resurrection cannot be “historical,” for it is an event uncaused by any other

historical event, and it is without analogy. Indeed God, and God alone, is the cause of the Resurrection. It is therefore causally unrelated to other historical events. Furthermore, nothing like it ever occurred elsewhere. The resurrection of Christ is not the restoration of a dead man to earthly, mortal life but the emergence of a new order of life — resurrection life. If the biblical record is correct, there can be neither “historical” explanation nor analogy of Christ’s resurrection. In fact, its very offense to scientific historical criticism is a kind of negative support for its supernatural character.

The underlying question is a theological one. Is such an alleged supernatural event consistent with the character and objectives of the God who has revealed Himself in holy history? Is history as such the measure of all things, or is the living God indeed the Lord of history? The biblical answer to this question is not in doubt. The Lord of history is transcendent over history yet not aloof from history. He is therefore able to bring to pass in time and space events that are genuine events yet that are “suprahistorical” in their character. This merely means that such revelatory events are not produced by history but that the Lord of history, who stands above history, acts within history for the redemption of historical creatures. The redemption of history must come from outside of history — from God Himself. This does not mean the abandonment of the historical method in studying the Bible. It does mean that at certain points the character of God’s acts is such that it transcends the historical method, and that the historian qua historian can say nothing about them.

## V. Revelation

That revelation has occurred in history leads to the important fact that revelation is progressive. We have said that *theology* must be concerned with that which is normative and permanently true; but this statement does not imply a static view of revelation. Not all truth was given at one time; and the truth was often conveyed in vehicles that were temporary and transitory. Animal sacrifice and circumcision embodied a permanent theological truth but were not themselves permanent. God in the OT shows Himself to be a God of wrath in ways that violate our modern sense of humanity. That God is a God of wrath is a permanent theological truth emphasized in the NT; but the historical forms in which this truth is conveyed to Israel are temporary.

Because revelation is progressive, the OT cannot be finally understood by itself but must be interpreted in light of the completed revelation in Christ and the NT. The OT is itself conscious of being incomplete and of looking forward to something beyond itself to provide its fulfillment. While God rules over Israel as His people, the OT constantly looks forward to a day when the kingdom of God will be brought to consummation and God's rule over His people will be realized in its perfection. The institution of the written law is recognized as inadequate, for the prophets looked forward to a day when the law shall be written on the hearts of men (Jer. 31:33). The OT cult is not an end in itself, for the prophets anticipated a day when a true cleansing of the heart will be provided (Zec. 13:1; Ezk. 36:35). Even the OT covenant is not the final form of God's relationship with His people; a new covenant will be required which will accomplish what the old covenant could not do (Jer. 31:31). All these elements in which the theology of the OT looks beyond itself are fulfilled in the NT.

While there is progression in revelation, which comes to fulfillment in Christ, the OT must nevertheless be interpreted in its own historical setting. The meaning of the OT covenant must be interpreted in terms of OT history, not in terms of the Greek idea of a last will and testament, which is made use of by the book of Hebrews (G. B. Payne).

Progressive revelation explains the abolition of the OT cult in the NT, the discontinuance of circumcision, the substitution of the Church for a nation as the people of God, the transition from law to grace. Each stage of biblical theology must first be interpreted in terms of its own historical setting and then the difference discovered between the permanent and the contingent elements in every stage of revelation. This is even true of the NT and the revelation in Christ, for the NT repeatedly teaches that the revelation accomplished in the historical Jesus is yet to assume a different form at the eschatological consummation. Then, that which has accomplished as a mystery in Christ will be publicly displayed to all the world. "Christ" is the fulfillment of revelation, but the term "Christ" includes His parousia and the establishment of the kingdom in glory, as well as His life, death, and resurrection. Revelation still awaits its final consummation.

It simply is not true that the acceptance of the Bible's claim to inspiration means that everything in the Bible must be viewed on the same level of truth (H. Gunkel, RGG [2nd ed], I, col 1090). Inspiration means that the Scriptures are a faithful

record of redemptive history and an authoritative interpretation of the revelatory meaning of this history. It does not mean that all Scripture is of the same theological value. It leaves room for progressive revelation and historical interpretation.

## VI. Hermeneutics

We have taken the stance that biblical theology is primarily a descriptive historical discipline, but that for the evangelical Christian, who believes that the Bible is the Word of God written, the findings of biblical theology are also of a normative character. This obviously does not mean a one-to-one equivalence. The writings of the NT are historically and culturally conditioned and therefore must be *interpreted*. No one in our western culture is troubled by the problem of meats offered to idols. Most modern Christians do not apply *literally* what Peter says about female dress (1 Pet. 3:3f). Paul's instruction about the role of women is culturally conditioned. In fact, if Paul is taken literally, the evangelical Christian can have little interest in questions of social ethics. Paul explicitly commands his reader to "remain in the state in which he was called" (1 Cor. 7:20), even in slavery. Paul seems to regard all social institutions — whether of slavery or the family — as belonging to "the form of this world [which] is passing away" (1 Cor. 7:31). In such instances, the law of love must take precedence over the letter of Scripture. Scripture must be seen as a whole, not as a collection of legalistic proof texts.

Obviously this raises difficult questions, for equally devout and learned men will come to different conclusions as to the *meaning* of Scripture for us. Therefore it must be remembered that while the inspired Scripture is the only infallible rule of faith and practice, interpretation is a human discipline, which must be carried out in humility and in love.

## VII. Unity and Diversity

The study of biblical theology must bring out both the diversity and unity in the various portions of the Bible. Authors of several recent works in the field, e.g., F. C. Grant, E. Stauffer, A. Richardson, use the thematic or topical approach, which obscures the rich diversity of the NT. In this respect the historical approach, which studies NT theology in the Synoptics, John, Primitive Church, Paul, etc., is to be preferred.



An older approach to biblical theology was content to study the many diverse theologies in the Bible, but the modern approach seeks for some center of unity. The unity may be found in the stream of redemptive history. The Bible reveals one and the same God acting in the course of redemptive history to fulfil His purpose of salvation. “That which brings together indivisibly the two realms of the Old and New Testament — different in externals though they may be — is the irruption of the Kingship of God into this world and its establishment here” (Eichrodt). This is another way of describing the redemptive activity of God in history, which has as its goal the final establishment of the kingdom of God. There is therefore a common purpose running throughout the diversity of the Bible. There are vast differences between a small nomadic patriarchal family, a nation with a king, temple, and priestly cult, and the loose fellowship of believers, largely gentile, who welcomed Paul in Rome. Underlying all the diversity is a single redemptive purpose which unfolds itself throughout the history of Israel and of the Church.

### VIII. Methodology

This leads to the question of the method of structuring biblical theology. Should the approach be historical or topical? The older approach used a severe historical method because it found contradictory theologies, which of necessity must be analyzed separately. The modern method tends to use the topical approach, and to study the theology of both Testaments in a topical manner to bring out the basic unity.

Either method is valid; but when the topical approach is used, the historical development involved in the progressive revelation of the several theological concepts must be included. Because the historical period covered by the OT writings is so long and the historical problems are so difficult, it may be convenient to employ the topical method in studying the OT to seek out the underlying concepts of God, man, and salvation. The NT writings, however, have a much more explicit theological content than the OT, and the diversity is more patent. Therefore, lest the variety of interpretation of the meaning of Christ and His work be obscured, it may be preferable to structure NT theology historically along the traditional divisions of Synoptic, Johannine, Primitive Christian, Pauline, etc. In either method, biblical theology must preserve the diversity while showing how the diverse theologies

illustrate the central theme of the divine redemptive purpose.

### IX. Goal

If biblical theology is the study of the meaning of God’s redeeming acts in *Heilsgeschichte*, and if the purpose of God’s redeeming acts is to disclose Himself to men and thus to bring men to Himself, it follows that biblical theology is far more than an intellectual discipline; it has a spiritual goal, namely, personal knowledge of God. When biblical theology becomes only an intellectual discipline, it is not really theology but the study of the history of religion. In other words, biblical theology cannot be the subject of purely objective neutral study. The historian can observe what the ancients, both in the OT and the NT, thought about God and God’s redeeming works; but when the historian takes his task seriously, he “must state that the New Testament demands what he, as an historian, may not give, a judgment of the highest possible urgency for all men and women” (E. C. Hoskyns and F. N. Davey, *The Riddle of the NT* [1931], p. 263) — a decision for or against God in His self-revelation. This means that faith cannot be compartmentalized and made aloof from historical study; it means also that historical study must be carried on from the perspective of faith. The historian qua historian cannot talk about God; but the biblical student must be both historian and theologian, who recognizes God’s redemptive acts in history, who hears the call of God in the interpretative Word of God, and who responds to God’s self-revelation in faith. Biblical theology therefore has as its goal the description and the interpretation of God’s redeeming acts in history, whereby God desires to bring men into fellowship with Himself. “Objectivity” means neutrality, noncommitment; biblical theology demands commitment, faith, or it is not true to its essential character. “In fact, New Testament scholarship fails in its task when the scholar precisely in his capacity as scholar thinks he has to exclude this claim” (W. G. Kümmel, *The NT: The History of the Investigation of its Problems* [Engtr 1972], p. 405).

G. E. Ladd

### CRITICISM

[Gk *hē kritikē téchnē*—‘the discriminatory art’]. A comprehensive term embodying a number of techniques employed in the study of (among other things) written documents in order to establish

as far as possible their original text, the literary categories to which they are to be assigned, their sources, mode of composition, date, style, authorship, purpose, and so forth. The techniques applicable to literature in general are of great service in the study of the Bible; this article is concerned with *biblical* criticism. Biblical criticism embraces various critical disciplines, notably textual criticism, literary and historical criticism, and form criticism.

## I. Textual Criticism

The function of textual criticism is the restoration of the original wording of a document when alterations have been introduced (deliberately or inadvertently) in the course of copying and recopying. Before the invention of printing, when each copy of a document had to be written out separately by hand, scribal errors were especially apt to occur. If the autograph or original document survives, scribal errors can be corrected by reference to it. But if it has long since disappeared (as has happened with all the original exemplars of biblical books), and the surviving copies differ from one another here and there, the original wording can be determined only by careful comparative study of these copies. The scribal habits of individual copyists, and the remoteness or proximity of individual MSS to the original (which is not simply a question of their relative dates), must be investigated. The main types of scribal error must be classified — those arising in copying by sight being quite different from those which arise in copying by dictation. Expertness in textual criticism comes only by long study and practice, although some scholars do seem to be gifted with a rare instinct for divining the original text even when the available copies are almost hopelessly corrupt.

Textual criticism plays a very important part in biblical study, and is an indispensable handmaid to biblical theology, for biblical theology must depend on sound exegesis, and sound exegesis in turn must be based on a reliable text. Because of this basic character of textual criticism it was formerly called “lower criticism,” since it represents the lower, foundational courses in the structure of critical study. (For further details *see* Text and Manuscripts of the NT; Text and Manuscripts of the OT.)

## II. Literary and Historical Criticism

**A. Higher Criticism** If textual criticism represents the lower courses of the critical structure, the upper courses consist of those critical studies that can best be pursued when a trustworthy text is established — those which used to be lumped together under the designation “higher criticism.” This designation appears to have been first used in the context of biblical study by J. G. Eichhorn, in the preface to the 2nd edition of his OT introduction (1787): “I have been obliged to bestow the greatest amount of labour on a hitherto entirely unworked field, the investigation of the inner constitution of the individual books of the Old Testament by the aid of the higher criticism — a new name to no humanist.” By the “inner constitution” he meant the structure of a book, including a study of the sources on which the author drew and the way in which he used or combined them. This last aspect of the study is commonly called “source criticism.”

The structure of a biblical book is sometimes illuminated by internal evidence. From the narrative of Jer. 36, for example, we learn of the first edition of the collected oracles of Jeremiah, dictated to his secretary Baruch in 604 b.c., containing his spoken ministry of the past twenty-three years. This edition, which consisted of a single copy, was almost immediately destroyed by King Jehoiakim, but it was quickly followed by a second and enlarged edition (Jer. 36:32). Even the second edition was by no means the final one, for Jeremiah continued to prophesy for nearly twenty years after that. We have two extant editions of the posthumous collection of his oracles, together with some biographical and other historical material — a longer one preserved in the MT and a shorter one in the LXX. Fragmentary Hebrew copies have been found at Qumrân representing both the longer and the shorter editions.

The structure of many other books of the Bible is not so apparent from the record, and a greater measure of conjecture is necessary for reconstructing the history of their composition.

It is plain, too, from the book of Jeremiah that the author or editor of a prophetic book need not be the prophet himself; in this case the oracles are Jeremiah’s but it is to Baruch, who committed them to writing, that we should probably ascribe the authorship of the narrative sections of the book and the publication of the whole.

When a book actually claims to be written by a specific person, that is substantial prima-facie evidence for its authorship. In some categories of literature, however, such as wisdom books and apocalypses, a name may sometimes (but not invariably) be employed for dramatic purposes or the like: a good canonical example is Ecclesiastes, a postexilic series of meditations put into the mouth of Solomon. (Two examples in the Apocrypha are Wisdom of Solomon and the apocalyptic 2 Esdras, ascribed respectively to Solomon and Ezra.) Again, in Jewish schools a disciple was apt to ascribe his dicta to his master, on the ground that “whosoever says a thing in the name of him who said it brings salvation to the world” (Mish *Pirke Aboth* vi.6). It is noteworthy that a number of the most important books of the Bible are, strictly speaking, anonymous; this is so, for example, with the four Gospels and Acts. Their authorship has to be determined as far as possible by a consideration of relevant internal and external evidence.

**B. Source Criticism** Source criticism can be pursued most confidently when a documentary source has survived alongside the later work that has drawn upon it. In the OT the most obvious example of this is seen in the books of Chronicles. The books of Samuel and Kings were the Chronicler’s principal sources, and as they have survived we can make rather definite statements about his use of them. (It is specially interesting that an early MS of Samuel found at *Qumrân*, 4Q<sup>Sama</sup>, exhibits a type of text closer to that which the Chronicler appears to have used than to the MT.) In the NT the Gospel of Mark is generally recognized to have been a major source of the other two Synoptic Gospels, and since the source survives alongside the works that drew upon it we can without difficulty study the use Matthew and Luke made of Mark.

Where, on the other hand, the sources do not survive, source criticism is a much more uncertain and speculative business. In the 2nd cent a.d. Tatian unstitched the contents of our four Gospels and reweave them (with minor additions from another document) into one continuous narrative, the *Diatessaron*. If the four separate Gospels had disappeared completely and only the *Diatessaron* survived, it would be impossible to reconstruct the four in anything like their original form. It would be clear that the *Diatessaron* was a composite work, and it would be relatively easy to isolate most of the Johannine element in it, but to disentangle the three Synoptic records would defy the keenest critical skill, not least because of the large amount of

material common to the three. It might be possible in some degree to distinguish Matthaean from Lukan material, but the very existence of Mark’s record would probably be unsuspected. Exponents of the four-document analysis of the Pentateuch have at times aptly compared their task of distinguishing these four lost documents to the hypothetical task of reconstituting the four Gospels on the basis of the *Diatessaron*.

**C. Criteria for Dating** Structure, date, and authorship are the three principal concerns of the “higher criticism.” The criteria for dating an ancient work are partly external and partly internal. If a work is quoted or alluded to in a reliably dated document, we conclude that it is earlier than that document. The work may mention persons or events whose date is clearly indicated by other documents; thus some parts of the OT can be dated from their reference to people or incidents mentioned in Mesopotamian or Egyptian historical records. Contemporary Assyrian records enable us to date the oracles of Isaiah at various points within the forty years or so preceding 701 b.c., the year of Sennacherib’s invasion of Judah.

A work may date itself; thus some prophetic books of the OT name the actual years in which successive oracles were uttered or the reign or reigns within which certain prophets prophesied (cf. Isa. 1:1; Hos. 1:1; Am. 1:1; Mic. 1:1; Zeph. 1:1; Hag. 1:1, etc.; Zec. 1:1, etc.). As the history of the ancient Near East is reconstructed in ever more precise detail, it becomes increasingly possible to put the various books of the OT into their appropriate historical settings.

The predictive element in biblical prophecy necessitates special dating criteria for the prophetic oracles. To interpret all fulfilled predictions as prophecies made after the event is a completely uncritical procedure. A genuine piece of predictive prophecy will be dated before the events it predicts but after those which it records or presupposes as having taken place. Thus, if Nahum’s oracle is a prediction of the fall of Nineveh (as seems probable) and not simply an outburst of exultation over its fall, it will be dated before the destruction of the city in 612 b.c. but after the fall of Thebes in 663 b.c., to which it refers as a past event (Nah. 3:8f). Again, the oracles of Jeremiah and Ezekiel must be dated to the years preceding, during, and immediately following the Chaldean siege of Jerusalem in 588–587 b.c., since they record the happenings of those years as historical events, but before the return from exile and reconstitution of the Jewish commonwealth

(537 b.c. and the years following), which they definitely predict.

**D. OT Criticism** The central issue in OT criticism is that of the structure of the Pentateuch.

**1. Early Period** Discussions of the authorship of the Pentateuch took place among the Jewish rabbis, but the main question debated by them was whether the account of Moses' death (Dt. 34:5–12) was written by Moses himself, which was the opinion of Rabbi Simeon ("Moses wrote with tears"), or by Joshua — a view ascribed to Rabbi Judah or, according to others, Rabbi Nehemiah (cf. T.B. *Baba Bathra* 15a; *Menahoth* 30a). An interesting anticipation of a phase of later pentateuchal criticism is the remark ascribed to Ben Azzai that where sacrifices are mentioned in the Pentateuch God is always called Yahweh (Midrash Siphre on Numbers, 293).

Later Jewish scholars made further critical observations. Isaac ben Yasar (*Yishaqi*) of Toledo (d 1057) pointed out that the list of kings of Edom in Gen. 36:31ff must be later than the rise of the Hebrew monarchy, and dated it not earlier than Jehoshaphat's reign; he identified Hadad of Gen. 36:35 with Hadad of 1 K. 11:14.

Abraham ibn Ezra (d 1167), commenting on Dt. 1:1, where Moses is said to have spoken to Israel "beyond the Jordan," adds that his readers will learn the truth if they understand "the mystery of the twelve [probably the twelve verses of Dt. 34], 'and Moses wrote' [Ex. 24:4; Nu. 33:2; Dt. 31:9, 22], 'and the Canaanite was then in the land' [Gen. 12:6, a verse that he says "contains a mystery, concerning which the prudent man will hold his peace"], 'in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen' [Gen. 22:14], 'and his [Og's] bed was a bedstead of iron' [Dt. 3:11]." What he is hinting at is that these passages are later than Moses.

Isaac Abrabanel (d 1509) adumbrated the theory that the books as they stand were later compilations out of earlier archives.

Christian scholars were making similar observations throughout these centuries. Jerome (d 420) discerned that the law book discovered in the Jerusalem temple in Josiah's day (2 K. 22:8) was Deuteronomy (comm on Ezk. 1:1). Commenting on the phrase "unto this day" (Gen. 35:20; Dt. 34:6) he says: "We must certainly take 'this day' to refer to the time when the history was composed; whether you take it as said by Moses, the author of the Pentateuch, or by Ezra, the restorer of Moses' work, I have no objection" (*Against Hel-*

*vidius* 7). But he vigorously defended the authenticity of Daniel against Porphyry the Neoplatonist who, mainly on the evidence of ch 11, dated it in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (a dating revived in 1726 by Anthony Collins in his *Literal Scheme of Prophecy Considered*).

Hugh of St. Victor (1096–1141) thought that the list of kings of Edom in Gen. 36:21ff was inserted by Ezra, "for it seems frivolous to say that Moses narrated it by the spirit of prophecy" (PL, CLXXV, 36 d).

Luther drew similar inferences from Gen. 36:31. His contemporary Andreas Bodenstein von Carlstadt (1480–1541) said that no sane person would suppose that Moses recorded his own death, and since the style of Dt. 34 was that of the Pentateuch generally, the Pentateuch in its completed form was not the work of Moses, but was earlier than Josiah's time.

Other biblical scholars of the 16th and 17th cents, both Roman and Reformed, made further contributions to the question, as did also Thomas Hobbes in England (*Leviathan* [1650]) and Benedict Spinoza in the Netherlands (*Tractatus Theologicopoliticus* [1671]). But thus far pentateuchal criticism was concerned with detecting the presence of post-Mosaic elements in the Pentateuch, the conclusion being that the tradition of Mosaic authorship could not be maintained without qualification.

**2. Old Documentary Hypothesis** R. Simon, priest of the Oratory, argued in *Histoire critique de l'AT* (1682) that the duplication of certain narratives in the Pentateuch (e.g., the Creation and Flood narratives), accompanied by diversity of style, pointed to diversity of authorship.

H. B. Witter (*Jura Israelitarum in Palestina* [1711]) pointed out that the duplicate accounts of the Creation were marked by the use of two different divine names, 'Elohim and Yahweh. This last point was taken up by the French court physician Jean Astruc, who used it as a criterion to distinguish two sources (A and B) throughout Genesis — pre-Mosaic sources on which Moses drew (*Conjectures sur les mémoires originaux dont il paroît que Moïse s'est servi pour composer le livre du Genèse* [1753]).

Astruc's work was epoch-making, and marks the beginning of the continuous history of modern pentateuchal criticism. His criterion was a limited one, which could not be applied to the whole Pentateuch, since it fails after Ex. 6. The real question

raised by the use of the divine names in Gen. 1-Ex. 6 was later seen to be the question of *when* the name Yahweh is represented as first coming into use — whether in primeval times (Gen. 4:26) or in the days of Moses (Ex. 3:14f; 6:2f). But Astruc introduced on this basis the rudiments of a documentary analysis of the Pentateuch whose influence remains to this day. His general results were adopted by J. G. Eichhorn (*Einleitung in das AT* [1780]), who continued Simon's investigation into stylistic diversities in Genesis and found that they corresponded largely to Astruc's analysis.

K. D. Ilgen, in *Die Urkunden des jerusalemischen Tempelarchivs in ihrer Urgestalt* (1798), wrote out the documents from which he believed Genesis was compiled, and distinguished two unrelated documents that used the divine name 'Elohim.

**3. Fragmentary Hypothesis** The fragmentary hypothesis, propounded by a Scots Roman Catholic priest, Alexander Geddes (*Biblia Sacra* [1792-1797]; *Critical Remarks* [1800]), envisaged a much greater number of sources. The Pentateuch, he argued, was not in its present form the work of Moses; together with Joshua, it was written, probably at Jerusalem, not before David nor after Hezekiah but preferably under Solomon, and it was compiled from a large number of short documents or fragments. There is an obvious similarity between Geddes' hypothesis and F.A. Wolf's contemporary view about the composition of the Homeric epics (*Prolegomena ad Homerum* [1795]). Geddes' hypothesis was introduced into Germany by J. S. Vater in his three-volume commentary on the Pentateuch (1802-1805).

Vater's work greatly influenced W. M. L. de Wette. In his *Beiträge zur Einl. in das AT* (1806-1807), de Wette accepted Vater's views, except that he envisaged one fundamental Elohist document in Genesis which was expanded by the addition of other "fragment." This fundamental document was continued in the middle books of the Pentateuch — "the epos of the Hebrew theocracy," into which collections of laws, etc., were inserted from time to time.

**4. Supplementary Hypothesis** De Wette thus marks the transition from the fragmentary to the supplementary hypothesis — so called because it postulates one main document supplemented by others. But his chief importance in biblical criticism lies in his work on Deuteronomy. At the age of twenty-five he published his *Dissertatio qua Deuteronomium a prioribus Pentateuchi libris diversum alius cuiusdam recentioris auctoris*

*opus esse demonstratur* (1805), in which, accepting Jerome's identification of Josiah's law book (2 K. 22:8ff) with Deuteronomy, he went on to date the composition of the book in that period (7th cent b.c.).

The chief name associated with the supplementary hypothesis is that of Heinrich Ewald. In his *History of Israel* (Engtr 1867-1883) Ewald identified the foundation document (*Grundschrift*) with the "Book of Origins," so called because it was marked by the recurring formula "These are the origins" (Heb *tôledôt*, RV "generations"). Into this, he held, other (later) documents were fitted.

The foundation-document was also characterized (in Genesis and the early chapters of Exodus) by the use of 'Elohim for the divine name. But exactly a century after Astruc's work, Herman Hupfeld, in *Die Quellen der Genesis und die Art ihrer Zusammensetzung* (1857), distinguished two documents in Genesis that used the name 'Elohim. One of these was the primary "Book of Origins," which formed the framework of the whole Pentateuch; the other he called "the later Elohist." In addition two other documents had already been isolated in the Pentateuch — the Yahwist (so called from the use of the name Yahweh) and the Deuteronomist. These four were placed in that order, and indicated by the letters E1 E2 J D. The four-document analysis thus propounded by Hupfeld has been widely adopted in pentateuchal criticism ever since.

**5. Development Hypothesis** Thus far the analysis of the Pentateuch was conducted in terms of literary criticism alone. A new stage now appears in which literary criticism was supplemented by historical (especially religious-historical) criticism. This stage saw the emergence of the development hypothesis, in which the laws and institutions of the Pentateuch, classified in three distinct codes, are correlated with three distinct periods of Israel's religious development.

The development hypothesis took over the four-document hypothesis, but treated the fundamental document (E1) as the latest, not the earliest, of the four. Indeed, this had been done as early as 1834 by E. G. Reuss in lectures at Strasbourg, although he did not publish his views until 1879, in *L'Histoire sainte et la loi*. In 1835 W. Vatke (*Die Religion des AT nach den kanonischen Büchern entwickelt*) and J. F. L. George (*Die älteren jüdischen Feste mit einer Kritik der Gesetzgebung des Pentateuchs*) argued that Israel's religious development was gradual and that the Levitical legislation (i.e.,

the laws of Leviticus and kindred sections of Exodus and Numbers) was not only post-Mosaic but later than Deuteronomy, belonging, in fact, to the exilic period. Vatke and George were both greatly influenced by Hegel's philosophy of history, with its pattern of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis; Vatke in turn exercised considerable influence on Julius Wellhausen.

K. H. Graf, in *Die geschichtlichen Bücher des AT* (1866), dated much of the Levitical legislation to the age of Ezra (5th cent b.c.) He ascribed the greater part of Lev. 17–26 to Ezekiel, thus largely anticipating August Klostermann ("Beiträge zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Pentateuchs: Ezechiel und das Heiligkeitsgesetz," *Zeitschrift für Lutherische Theologie und Kirche*, 38 [1877], 401ff), who marked off these chapters as a separate law code, the "Law of Holiness" (H). It was objected to Graf's late dating of the Levitical legislation that, on literary-critical grounds, this legislation could not be divorced from the narrative of the foundation-document (E1), and must therefore be dated early. Graf replied that since the Levitical legislation was later than anything else in the Pentateuch, therefore the whole of E1 must be dated late. E1, as containing the "priestly" legislation, came later to be known as P, and E2 accordingly was thenceforth designated simply as E.

Graf's thesis was strengthened by the Dutch scholar Abraham Kuenen (*Religion of Israel*) [Engtr 1874–1875]; *Historisch-critisch Onderzoek naar het Ontstaan en de Verzameling van de Boeken des Ouden Verbonds* [2nd ed 1885], pt. 1 of which appeared in English as *An Historico-Critical Enquiry into the Origin and Composition of the Hexateuch* [1886]).

But the long regnancy of the development hypothesis is due mainly to Julius Wellhausen. He related the order JE-D-P to the religious history of Israel, paying special attention to the laws regarding sanctuary and sacrifice. "I differ from Graf chiefly in this," he wrote, "that I always go back to the centralisation of the cultus and deduce from it the particular divergences" (*History of Israel* [Engtr 1885], p. 368). Following Vatke's Hegelian pattern, he distinguished the following stages in the history of Israelite worship:

(1) **Thesis.** JE corresponds to the period of the settlement and early monarchy, when there were many local sanctuaries at which sacrifice was offered by local priesthoods or chosen members of local families.

(2) **Antithesis.** The eighth-century prophets attacked the whole institution of sanctuary and sacrifice as an obstacle in the path of true ethical religion.

(3) **Synthesis** of "cultic" and "prophetic" positions.

(a) **Preeilic.** The Deuteronomic law code prescribed the concentration of national worship at one sanctuary only; the Levitical priests who served the local sanctuaries (suppressed in Josiah's reformation, 621 b.c.) were to be attached to the staff of the central sanctuary.

(b) **Posteilic.** The Priestly law code, which takes for granted a single central sanctuary, makes much more elaborate cultic regulations. The priesthood is restricted to the family of Aaron; the supremacy of the high priest reflects the postexilic situation in which he was head of the Judean temple-state. The Levitical priests of the older local sanctuaries are depressed to the status of temple servants (Levites) with no sacerdotal functions.

The Graf-Wellhausen development hypothesis speedily attained a dominant position because of the apparent success with which it correlated the main strata of the Pentateuch with successive phases of Israel's religious history. But it was constructed on the basis of an excessively doctrinaire philosophy of history, and at a time when hardly any external evidence for the historical setting of the religion of Israel and her neighbors before the 9th cent b.c. was available.

The increasing evidence brought to light by archaeological research, and most of all the discovery and decipherment from 1929 onward of the Ugaritic texts, with their wealth of information about Canaanite myth and ritual, have revolutionized the situation. While Wellhausen's documentary analysis of the Pentateuch and his relative order of the documents (JE-D-P) are still widely adopted as a convenient framework, his reconstruction of the religious history of Israel has gone by the board, and many would agree with H. H. Rowley: "A mere concentration on the acknowledged difficulties of the Graf-Wellhausen view, and then on a selection of points that may seem to give support to a rival view, will not do. For none of the rival views can accommodate so many of the facts, or can escape far more difficulties than the view it seeks to replace. Yet having said this, it remains true that the Graf-Wellhausen view is only a working hypothesis, which can be abandoned with alacrity when a more satisfying view is found, but cannot with profit be

abandoned until then” (*Growth of the OT* [1950], p. 46).

**6. Since Wellhausen** Many others, however, reject the Graf-Wellhausen scheme even as a working hypothesis. Even in its heyday there were some who refused it completely and maintained the substantial Mosaicity of the Pentateuch, like W. H. Green (*Higher Criticism of the Pentateuch* [1895]), J. Orr (*Problem of the OT* [1900]), and A. H. Finn (*Unity of the Pentateuch* [1917]); more recently, similar positions have been defended by O. T. Allis (*The Five Books of Moses* [1943]), E. J. Young (*Intro to the OT* [repr [1963]]), and G. C. Aalders (*A Short Intro to the Pentateuch* [1949]). Of these three Aalders allows a larger post-Mosaic element than the others do; he looks on David’s capture of Jerusalem in the seventh year of his reign as the *terminus ad quem* for the final redaction of the Pentateuch.

Others have moved in the opposite direction and posited further documentary sources, subdividing J (e.g., O. Eissfeldt, *Hexateuchsynopse* [1922]; J. Morgenstern, *HUCA*, 4 [1927], 1ff; R. H. Pfeiffer, *ZAW*, 48 [1930], 66ff) or P (e.g., G. von Rad, *Die Priesterschrift im Hexateuch* [1934]). The seventh-century date of the Deuteronomistic Code, the linchpin of the Graf-Wellhausen scheme, has been called in question — some making it postexilic, like G. Hölscher (*ZAW*, 40 [1920], 161ff), R. H. Kennett (*Deuteronomy and the Decalogue* [1920]), and J. N. Schofield (*Studies in History and Religion*, ed E. A. Payne [1942], pp. 44ff), while others such as T. Oestreicher (*Das deuteronomische Grundgesetz* [1923]) and A. C. Welch (*The Code of Deuteronomy* [1924]) have pushed it back to the early monarchy; and E. Robertson (*The OT Problem* [1950]) dates it in Samuel’s time. The very existence of one or another of the four documents has been doubted: M. Löhr (*Untersuchungen zum Hexateuchproblem* [1924]) denied that there was ever an independent source P, and P. Volz and W. Rudolph (*Der Elohist als Erzähler* [1933]) have argued that the hypothesis of a separate E narrative represented a false turning in pentateuchal criticism.

Unaided documentary analysis has plainly reached the limit of its powers. Other critical approaches have been made in recent years to supplement the limitations of source criticism. The cultic and liturgical influence on the grouping of the material has been emphasized; e.g., Gen. 1:1–2:4a has been looked upon as a liturgical text for the Hebrew New Year’s Festival (cf. S. H. Hooke, *In the Beginning* [1947], p. 36); the whole complex of Ex. 1–15 has

been regarded as a liturgical text or “cult legend” of the Passover, which has not been compiled out of originally distinct documents but has been modified and added to in the course of time (ILC, III–IV, 726ff).

The “traditio-historical” school of Uppsala has presented a radical challenge of a different kind to the basic principles of classical OT criticism; it lays great emphasis on the part played by oral tradition, and on the great reliability of such tradition. The leading exponent of this “traditio-historical” criticism, I. Engell, distinguishes in the Torah and the Former Prophets two collections — the Tetrateuch (Genesis-Numbers) and the Deuteronomistic history (Deuteronomy-2 Kings) — which originally had no connection with one another (*Gamla Testamentet: En traditionshistorisk inledning* [1945], I).

The reconstruction of the early history of Israel, based on an evaluation of the OT texts in the light of archeological research, has made its impact on criticism. Among the pioneers in this field are: A. Alt (*Essays on OT History and Religion* [Engtr 1966]), M. Noth (*History of Israel* [Engtr, 2nd ed 1960]; *Laws in the Pentateuch and Other Studies* [Engtr 1966]; *OT World* [Engtr 1966]); and the versatile genius of W. F. Albright, whose influence has been exercised not only in his written works (e.g., *From the Stone Age to Christianity* [1940]; *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* [1942]; *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* [1968]), but also through his brilliant disciples (e.g., John Bright, *History of Israel* [2nd ed 1972]). But the radical differences between the historical conclusions reached by them has emphasized the need for more stringent methodological controls.

The situation in OT criticism is thus completely fluid, and a new school has yet to appear whose findings will command acceptance as a fresh “regnant hypothesis.”

### E. NT Criticism

**1. Paul and the NT** In the NT the Pauline collection of letters constitutes the critical pivot that Deuteronomy has long provided in OT criticism. A new and vitally important phase of NT criticism was launched in 1831 when F. C. Baur contributed his paper “Die Christuspartei in der korinthischen Gemeinde” to the *Tübinger Zeitschrift* (4 [1831], 61ff). Baur, whose theological position in Tübingen University caused the movement he unconsciously started to be called the “Tübingen school,” tended increasingly, as time went on, to interpret NT history as Vatke and others interpreted OT history.

The thesis and antithesis in NT history were represented on the one hand by Paul, with his liberal policy of the free admission of gentile believers into the Church, and on the other by the reactionary disciples in Jerusalem, headed by James the Just and the apostles Peter and John, with their insistence that only by accepting circumcision and other obligations of the Jewish law could Gentiles be admitted to the new Israel. The conflict between the two parties he saw most clearly in 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans, which were, in the Tübingen view, the only authentic writings of Paul and moreover the oldest books of the NT. The only other Pre-a.d. 70 NT book was Revelation, the one surviving document representing the opposite position. The remaining NT books reflected the outlook of a later generation, after a.d. 70, when the old conflict was not so sharp and the heirs of the two opposed parties tended to close their ranks in the face of imperial persecution and Gnostic deviations. The crowning literary manifestation of this later “synthesis” is Acts, in which Paul and the Jerusalem leaders are portrayed as maintaining harmonious relations throughout, and which was accordingly dated about the middle of the 2nd century.

Brilliant as the Tübingen reconstruction of NT history was, it was too vulnerable to endure in its pristine form. The historical and textual research of J. B. Lightfoot, A. Harnack, W. M. Ramsay, and others undermined its case for the late dating of the Gospels and Acts, and the antithesis that it postulated between the church of Jerusalem as a whole and the Pauline mission proved to be much exaggerated; in particular, the idea of a Judaizing Peter was little more than a figment of the imagination. But NT criticism has never ceased to be influenced by the work of the Tübingen school; witness the protest against its continuing influence by J. Munck in *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (Engtr 1959). Indeed, it has enjoyed a substantial and vigorous revival at the hands of S. G. F. Brandon (*The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church* [1951]), with arguments that, if not acceptable, demand a freshly reasoned confutation.

Even more radical than the Tübingen criticism was that of the Dutch scholar W. C. van Manen, who treated all the Pauline Epistles as pseudepigraphs. His views were popularized in the English-speaking world through his contributions to EB, but retain little more than curiosity value.

**2. Gospel Criticism** Some rudimentary Gospel criticism was practiced in the patristic age. The

difficulty of harmonizing the order of events in the Synoptic and Johannine Gospels was discussed by Eusebius, who, in reply to arguments that the Evangelists disagree with one another, points out that the events in the earlier chapters of John antedate the imprisonment of John the Baptist (Jn. 3:24), whereas the Synoptists record that phase of Jesus’ ministry which began after the Baptist’s imprisonment (HE iii.24.8–13). Augustine (*De consensu evangelistarum*) deals in detail with the relations between the Gospels; on the most frequently quoted remark in this work (i.4), that “Mark followed Matthew as his lackey and abbreviator, so to speak,” B. H. Streeter observed that if only Augustine had had a synopsis of the Gospels in parallel columns before him, he would have seen at a glance that, where Matthew and Mark have material in common, it is not Mark who abridges it.

The Synoptic Gospels were so designated by J. J. Griesbach in 1774, because they have so much material in common that they lend themselves to a “synoptic” arrangement where the three can be studied side by side. Some 606 out of Mark’s 661 verses reappear in somewhat condensed form in Matthew; some 350 of Mark’s verses are paralleled in Luke. Matthew and Luke, again, have about 250 verses in common that are not paralleled in Mark. The approximate number of verses in each Gospel not paralleled in another is 31 in Mark, 300 in Matthew, and 550 in Luke. The interpretation of this distribution of common and special material in the three Gospels has been the principal task of Synoptic criticism for nearly two centuries. An epoch-making contribution to this study was made in 1835 by C. Lachmann in *Studien und Kritiken*, when he argued that Mark was the earliest Gospel and was a principal source of Matthew and Luke. His main argument, that Mark’s order is the common order of the three, is not so conclusive as has often been supposed; but his thesis has been supported by other and weightier arguments, and enjoys general, almost universal, acceptance. It is also fairly generally agreed — though here the area of dissent is wider — that the common non-Markan material of Matthew and Luke was derived by these two from another documentary source, a compilation of sayings of Jesus, called Q about the beginning of the 20th cent independently by J. Armitage Robinson and J. Wellhausen. Whether the special material in Matthew and Luke is derived from earlier documentary sources must remain very doubtful, although we have the assurance of Luke himself that, at the time when he wrote, many had



taken in hand to draw up a narrative of the gospel events.

Source criticism in the Fourth Gospel (cf. R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* [Engtr 1971]) has never been carried out convincingly; the criticism of this Gospel has centered round its historical character, purpose, theology, date, and authorship. See articles on the individual Gospels, and see Gospels, Synoptic.

### III. Form Criticism

Form criticism (Ger *Formgeschichte*, “form history”) represents an endeavor to determine the oral prehistory of written documents or sources, and to classify the material according to the various “forms” or categories of narrative, discourse, and so forth.

**A. In the OT** This approach has proved particularly fruitful in the study of the Psalms; their classification according to their principal types (Ger *Gattungen*), where each type is related to a characteristic life-setting — e.g., Psalms of lament and thanksgiving, both individual and communal; royal Psalms; liturgical Psalms; etc. — has done more for the understanding of the Psalter than almost anything else in the 20th century.

H. Gunkel also applied form critical methods to the creation narratives and to the apocalyptic symbolism that later drew upon the ancient cosmogonic imagery (compare the overthrow of the primeval dragon of chaos in Ps. 74:13f and Isa. 51:9 with the downfall of the great red dragon of Rev. 12:3, 7–9).

More recently form criticism has illuminated the OT law codes. Albrecht Alt pointed out in *Die Ursprünge des israelitischen Rechts* (1934) that the pentateuchal laws fall mainly into two categories — case law (beginning with a phrase like “If a man do so-and-so ...”) and apodictic law (“Thou shalt ...,” “Thou shalt not ...,” or “He that doeth so-and-so shall surely be put to death”). The case-law category reproduces the form known from the other ancient Near Eastern law codes; the apodictic category is not found in these. Apodictic law does, however, resemble in form the conditions embodied in interstate treaties of the ancient Near East, especially treaties between an imperial power and its vassal states. Since such treaties are essentially covenants, concluded in the names of the deities of the high contracting parties, it is evident that

the apodictic laws of the OT (among which the Ten Commandments are the most prominent) represent Israel’s distinctive covenant law, imposed on the nation by Yahweh. See also Covenant, Book of the.

**B. In the NT** Form criticism has been intensively applied to the Gospels from 1919 onward. The pioneer in this study is usually reckoned to have been Martin Dibelius, whose *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums* appeared in 1919 (Engtr *From Tradition to Gospel*), followed in 1921 by Rudolf Bultmann’s *Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* (Engtr HST). But several important aspects of this form-critical approach had been anticipated as early as 1902 by Allan Menzies in *The Earliest Gospel* (a comm on Mark).

**1. Classification** The main division in form classification of the Gospel material is that between narratives about Jesus and sayings of Jesus. Narratives have been subdivided into (1) pronouncement stories, (2) miracle stories, and (3) “legends”; sayings into (1) wisdom sayings, (2) prophetic and apocalyptic sayings, (3) law pronouncements and community rules, (4) “I”-sayings, and (5) parables.

Pronouncement stories (which is Vincent Taylor’s name for them; Dibelius called them “paradigms”) partake of the character of both narratives and sayings. In them a situation develops that elicits from Jesus a pithy saying (an “apophthegm,” in Bultmann’s terminology), which constitutes the point of the story. Frequently the situation is a controversial one; some action or utterance of Jesus or His disciples arouses criticism, and Jesus replies to the criticism with a decisive pronouncement, e.g., “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mk. 2:17).

A narrative may be assignable to more than one “form”; thus the incident of the paralyzed man (Mk. 2:1–12) is a pronouncement story because the criticism that breaks out when Jesus forgives the man’s sins is silenced by Jesus’ pronouncement that “the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (Mk. 2:10); but it can also be classified as a miracle story, more specifically a healing story. Healing stories are readily recognizable; all over the world from early times to the present day they follow a well-established form which emphasizes the interactivity of the disease, the despair of the patient, the completeness of the cure, and sometimes the impression produced on the bystanders. But that a healing story conforms to this pattern tells us

nothing conclusive about its historical truth.

“Legends,” as Dibelius calls them, are such stories about Jesus as the baptism, temptation, transfiguration, and resurrection narratives. Bultmann, who calls them “myths,” says that they are not “historical in character [but] are religious and edifying” (HST, p. 244). But this is not a form critical judgment; form criticism as such makes judgments about form, not substance.

Similarly, the classification of the sayings of Jesus according to form can throw but little light on the authenticity of individual sayings. Sometimes, when what is substantially the same saying or discourse has been preserved in two different “forms,” it may be possible to penetrate behind both to an earlier “unformed” stage of the tradition of what He said. At other times, however, the probability is that the form in which His words have been preserved is the form He Himself gave them. Much of His recorded teaching reproduces the well-known forms of OT poetry, as found, for example, in many of the prophetic oracles. Since Jesus was recognized by His contemporaries as a prophet, it is reasonable to conclude that here we have something approaching His *ipsissima verba*.

T. W. Manson, who himself operated very fruitfully in *The Teaching of Jesus* (1931) with a classification of the sayings of Jesus based on the different kinds of audience addressed, remarked in characteristically down-to-earth language that “if Form-criticism had stuck to its proper business, it would not have made any real stir. We should have taken it as we take the forms of Hebrew poetry or the forms of musical composition. But,” he went on, “Form-criticism got mixed up with two other things. One was K. L. Schmidt’s full-scale attack on the Marcan framework; the other was the doctrine of the *Sitz im Leben*” (*Studies in the Gospels and Epistles* [1962], p. 5).

**2. Framework** Many form critics, and outstandingly K. L. Schmidt (RGJ), have envisaged the Synoptic, and primarily the Marcan, tradition as consisting of originally unrelated units of narrative or discourse, joined together into a continuous narrative by means of connecting editorial summaries devoid of independent historical value. (It is conceded that the Passion narrative existed as a continuous record from early days.) An impressive answer to this argument was made in 1932 by C. H. Dodd (repr in his *NT Studies* [1953], pp. 1ff), who argued that the “editorial summaries” in Mark, when put together by themselves, constitute a coherent out-

line of the ministry of Jesus, comparable to those outlines of the early apostolic preaching which can be recovered from the speeches in Acts and various passages in the Epistles. Moreover, the general Marcan picture of the ministry suggests a sequence and development too spontaneous to be artificial and too logical to be accidental.

**3. Life-Setting** It has become common practice among form critics to explain the various elements in the Gospels as called forth by some “life-setting” (Ger *Sitz im Leben*) in the early Church. For example, the mission charge in Mt. 10 has been held to reflect the methods used by Jewish Christians who evangelized Palestine between a.d. 30 and 66; likewise the controversial discussions that end with some authoritative pronouncement of Jesus are said to reflect disputes in the same period between Jewish Christians and other Jews, or between legalist and libertarian groups within the Christian community. An extreme example in this last respect is the argument that the warning in Mt. 5:19 about the man who “relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so” is a covert attack by stricter Jewish Christians on Paul.

But one might ask why this practice was not carried on more widely and helpfully. The circumcision question, for example, was a live issue in Christian debate in the quarter century between a.d. 45 and 70; why has it not left a more distinct mark in the Gospels?

Early Christians, in fact, probably made a clearer distinction between their own views on disputed points and the teaching of Jesus than they are sometimes given credit for. Paul, for instance, in answering questions about marriage and divorce, distinguishes sharply between those matters on which he can quote an authoritative saying of Jesus and those on which he can express only his own judgment (1 Cor. 7:10, 12, 25).

It must not be forgotten that during the period a.d. 30–70 many people could remember what Jesus had said, and attempts to claim His authority for things that He had not in fact said could not have been so successful as is often thought. The presence of eyewitnesses would certainly place a check on the free creation of the early Church in the manner presupposed by many form critics. If the evidence of Acts can be accepted, the appeal to public recollection of the ministry of Jesus is a recurring feature of early apostolic preaching (Acts 2:29; 10:36; 26:26). A life-setting in the early Church — in preaching, in

worship, in debate, in the training of catechists — will certainly explain why many Gospel incidents and sayings were preserved and recorded. When a question arose about divorce, or fasting, or sabbath observance, or the payment of the temple tax, it was natural to remember what Jesus had said on the subject. But such a setting in the life of the early Church does not account for the *origin* of the saying; its origin must be sought in a setting in the life of Jesus.

**4. Conclusion** The sweeping claims that have been made by some form critics for the value of their discipline must be subjected to a heavy discount. It cannot of itself, no matter what is said to the contrary, lead to conclusions about the historical genuineness of the material. Even the modest claim of J. Jeremias that it helps us to remove a later Hellenistic layer which has overlaid an earlier Palestinian layer, and so to move back from a setting in the life of the early Church to a setting in the life of Jesus, must be treated with caution (ExposT, 69 [1957/58], 337), if only because Palestine itself was not free of Hellenistic influences, and there were Hellenists in the primitive Jerusalem church, if not indeed in the entourage of Jesus Himself.

Form criticism does, however, make one more aware of the influence of early Christian life and witness on the shaping of the Gospel tradition. It underlines the inadequacy of documentary hypotheses alone to account for the composition of the four Gospels, and provides a fresh classification of their material which sometimes, when comparative study is possible, helps one to penetrate behind written sources to the oral stage of the tradition. It then becomes clearer than ever that no discernible stratum of Gospel tradition, written or oral, knows any Jesus but the one whom the NT presents as Messiah and Son of God.

A particular variety of form criticism relates to the study of the structure of the NT epistles. An impetus to this approach was given by Paul Schubert in his *Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgivings* (1939). Until this work appeared, it was widely supposed that, apart from the conventional salutation and thanksgiving at the beginning and the greetings at the end, Paul's letters were unstructured for the most part; study since then has brought to light fairly well-defined structures in the main body of the letters. It is precarious, however, to use this recognition of structural forms as a means of removing as unauthentic passages which do not fit these structures easily; the structural forms are Paul's servants, not his masters.

## IV. Redaction Criticism

What is called redaction criticism has been pressed into service more recently to do more justice to the authors and redactors of biblical documents than they received in the heyday of source criticism and form criticism. This discipline has been applied to various parts of the OT, as for example to the Chronicler's use of the material which he inherited — much of it still extant in earlier OT writings — so as to present his distinctive understanding of Israel's history. But it has proved particularly fruitful in Gospel study, with reference to the way in which the individual evangelists shaped and presented, in accordance with their distinctive perspectives, the "tradition" which was delivered to them.

Thus, the First Evangelist, perhaps the spokesman of a school or other Christian community in a specific area, is well described as a "scribe ... trained for the kingdom of heaven ... who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (Mt. 13:52); he arranges the teaching of Jesus according to its subject matter in composite discourses which might serve, among other things, as a manual of instruction for catechists and catechumens. He is clearly interested in the Church as a fellowship in which the teaching of Jesus is to be embodied and handed down from His resurrection to the end of the age. Mark not only writes to encourage Christians suffering for their faith (in Rome and elsewhere) to think of this as taking up their cross in the way of Jesus; he also gives prominence to the "messianic secret" — the veiling of the true nature of Jesus' person and ministry even from His disciples until it is divulged in His death, as is symbolically indicated by the rending of the temple veil and by the centurion's confession, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mk. 15:38f). Luke views the ministry of Jesus at the midpoint of time as the continuation and consummation of the mighty works and prophetic words in which God revealed Himself in OT times and also as being itself continued and amplified in the apostolic witness. John restates the essential gospel without changing its essence; its permanent and universal validity is brought out by its portrayal of Jesus as the eternal Logos or self-expression of God, incarnated in a real human life, active now in the new, spiritual creation as earlier in the old, material creation. Here, in the ministry and supremely in the death of Jesus, the glory of God is manifested to all who are given the power of seeing it.

## V. Criticism and Christology

In all this we have dealt with criticism as it affects the external features of the biblical record, rather than its revelational essence. But, since the biblical revelation is so closely interwoven with the historical record, historical criticism in particular can become extremely relevant to the heart of the biblical message. Above all, when we consider the biblical presentation of Christ's incarnation, earthly ministry, death, and resurrection as the midpoint of history, historical criticism, when it sets to work on the gospel story, may affect our understanding of the gospel itself. This is no reason for telling historical criticism to approach thus far and no farther; on the contrary, we must be grateful for historical criticism and all the help it can give in showing the historical Jesus in His own times. "It would seem that the only healthy attitude for conservatives is to welcome criticism and be willing to join in it. No view of Scripture can indefinitely be sustained if it runs counter to the facts. That the Bible claims inspiration is patent. The problem is to define the nature of that inspiration in the light of the phenomena contained therein" (E. F. Harrison, in C. F. H. Henry, ed, *Revelation and the Bible* [1958], p. 239).

Historical critics are not free from the influence of their intellectual milieu, and it is not to be greatly wondered at if Jesus, who a couple of generations ago was portrayed as the ideal of nineteenth-century liberalism, tends to be pictured today as a twentieth-century existentialist or as a social revolutionary. It takes a bold and independent spirit like that of Albert Schweitzer to break loose from

contemporary influences in this regard as in others; but even boldness and independence are no guarantee of truth, and Schweitzer's portrayal of Jesus as an apocalyptic visionary (cf. QHJ) has inadequacies of its own.

The tone and thrust of biblical criticism cannot remain unaffected by the critic's own attitude; it will in the end make some difference whether or not he adopts a theistic viewpoint in harmony with that which informs the biblical record. And when the critical issue relates to the Jesus of history it will in the end make a considerable difference whether the critic is content to know Christ "after the flesh" or shares the estimate of Him reflected in the apostolic witness.

Criticism can carry us so far in bringing us face to face with the Jesus of history; but when it has brought us there, it brings us up against the christological question: "Who then is this?" The various critical presentations or reconstructions of the Jesus of history have been deeply influenced by the critics' Christology, realized or unrealized, false or true. That is why Lives of Jesus so often tell us more about their authors than they do about their subject; as T. W. Manson put it, "By their Lives of Jesus ye shall know them" (C. W. Dugmore, ed, *Interpretation of the Bible* [1944], p. 92). If the Jesus of history is the Christ of the Bible, when we are brought to Him we are brought to the very vantage point from which history must be reviewed if it is to be understood aright. Criticism has then done its perfect work, and Christology takes over.

*F. F. Bruce*