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THE CHANGE OF CONCERN IN NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLARSHIP IN THE
FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

BY

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A Thesis Submitted

to

The Faculty of Theology

United College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the

Degree of Bachelor of Divinity

1953

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INTRODUCTION

The Christian religion is grounded in something given. Christian faith has its origin not in general religious experience, not in some particular esoteric mysticism, not in a dogma but in a particular series of events in history. The Church knows that she is founded upon the "foundation of the Apostles and Prophets," who point beyond themselves to a "revelation" which has taken place in and through history. The Church, therefore, is founded upon the message of the Bible.

The centrality of the Bible in the life of the Church is not just something to be desired. It is also a fact. Where the Church is, there is the Bible in the centre. Or perhaps it would be even more true to say, where the Bible is in the centre, there is the Church! This is not to say that the Bible replaces Christ as the head of the Church. The fundamentalist churches which adhere to a radical Biblicism have not in fact put the Bible at the head; they are merely using the Bible to buttress something they have already created. Christ truly becomes the Lord of His people when they put the Bible at the centre, because the Bible never points to itself but always beyond itself to the revelation of the Creator and Redeemer.

Biblical authority has been taken more seriously by the Protestant Church than it has been by Rome. It is true that Rome says the Scriptures must be taken literally, but for them final authority rests not with the Scriptures but with the Church. For Protestants, the Bible, as it points to God's

revelation, is the content of the Church's message. It is true that Protestant Churches, some more than others, have all fallen into a false Biblicism, but this occurs because of their insistence on the Bible's authority for the total life of the Body of Christ. The Bible is the Word of God for the Church, and through the Church for the whole world. The Church does not create the authority of the Bible but merely acknowledges and gratifies it.

The Biblical message is authoritative because through it the Word of God is spoken to men. But the Biblical message has to be interpreted. God's revelation is not a static thing, given through lifeless propositions recorded in a book. It is a living revelation, given in and through concrete historical events which share in all the particularity that other events do. The Bible in witnessing (it not only "records" but also "witnesses") to these events shares in its livingness, its concreteness, and its particularity. This dynamic witness, then, must not be merely repeated, but interpreted. Only in this way will the Biblical message speak to men in the twentieth century.

The task of interpretation has been taken up by scholars in every communion. Men from both the Protestant and Roman communions have spent their lives setting forth the meaning of the Scriptures. It is not a modern phenomenon; this has been the case since the beginning of the Church.

But in the past two centuries something has happened in the field of Biblical interpretation which is quite new: "... a precise method of handling historical evidence and an unshakeable confidence in the adequacy of the new method."¹ This method includes the establishment of the text, philological investigation, study of literary forms, and a placing of the documents in their proper historical setting. It also includes the determination of authorship of the various documents as well as when, where, and why they were written. All this is to be done with scientific accuracy and objectivity.

Thus in the modern period we have entered upon a new method of dealing with the Scriptures. The results of this new literary-historical criticism were at first so shocking that the critics looked upon previous Biblical interpretation as being the result of primitive prejudice only. They became convinced that only the literary-historical method was adequate to discover the real message of the Bible. They severed themselves from former Biblical scholarship and they worked independently of the discipline of systematic theology. Approximately thirty years ago, however, a great change began to take place in critical scholarship, a change which has had tremendous consequences in the relation of Biblical scholarship to the other theological disciplines and to the Church. The purpose of this thesis is to examine this change and to assess its meaning.

1. Hoskyns and Davey, Riddle of The New Testament, P. 10.

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The Liberal Period

The critical approach to the Bible did not occur in a vacuum, but forms part of a great change in the thought and outlook of men in modern Western culture. We will properly understand contemporary New Testament study only when we examine it in the light of this great change. Let us, therefore, examine briefly the history of the past few hundred years in order to discover the reasons for this change.

The period after 1450, for a century or more, was one of unparalleled geographical discovery. These discoveries led to contacts with peoples hitherto unknown, to new relationships in trade and economics, and to a wider outlook generally; they revealed new horizons, of which the authorities, both secular and religious, had not taken account, and for which they were unprepared.

The close of the sixteenth century saw the beginning of a great development in the natural sciences, which gradually revolutionized the old interpretation of the universe. On one side, a new interest arose in the study of physics and mathematics. On the other side, through the discoveries of Copernicus it became clear for the first time that this earth is not the centre of the universe. This had momentous repercussions in theology, for, in general, the statements of the Bible had been in accord with the older, Ptolemaic explanation of the universe.

Partly as a result of the two changes we have just considered, the principle of authority found itself challenged in many unexpected ways. Until this time authority in every sphere of life was unquestioned.

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It was assumed that authority had provided answers to every problem that could arise. If they found themselves confronting a new situation, the question asked was not, Shall we examine it and learn how to deal with it? but, What is the authority for it? The Bible was one of these unquestioned authorities. But the Renaissance, and to a lesser degree the Reformation, undermined the Medieval veneration for authority, and a new spirit of enquiry spread from one discipline to another. The Bible also came under the scrutiny of the new method, but not until the latter half of the Eighteenth century did critical study of the Scriptures begin in earnest. Until that time the Biblicism of both Protestantism and Catholicism kept it away from the eyes of the new scientific-critical scholars. There can be little doubt that the study had its roots in the revolt against the unquestioning acceptance of established authority which goes back to the Renaissance. R. H. Lightfoot says that "The revolt was accompanied by a corresponding belief in the human capacity to deal with any situation with which a man might be confronted, and therewith in his ability to test and prove all things, even the oracles of God."¹

The old conviction that the Bible was a divine Book which must not be profaned by critical investigation was discarded by many New Testament scholars. Powerful conservative forces reacted against this, but in Germany especially the situation was such as to enable the critical spirit to grow strong. She had numerous theological faculties with a spirit of

1. The Critical Approach to the Bible in the Nineteenth Century, in The Interpretation of the Bible, ed. by C.W. Dugmore, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, 1944, P. 78.

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research such as no other country could exhibit. They insisted that the Bible, too, be submitted for critical investigation. Thus the Book which has been subject to so much study and interpretation came under the scrutiny of a new method.

The aim of this discipline was to examine the Biblical documents without being bound by creedal prejudice. The Bible, the new critics maintained, is a book written by human beings, and although it may be inspired, still it must be subjected to the same critical study as any other human documents. It was their concern to examine the books of the Bible as to their authorship, date, place of composition, readers, occasion and purpose, and, finally, content, and to do this honestly and objectively. If the results of such study did not conform to traditional beliefs, they insisted that the beliefs be modified and not the critical results. They further insisted that within its own domain criticism has the right to work by its own laws and reach its own results, without submitting to the demand that its results conform to a standard imposed from the outside. As A. S. Peake says, the ideal of criticism is to be "a passionless inquiry controlled simply by the desire to ascertain truth through the application of rigid scientific method."¹

Within the confines of this thesis we will deal not with critical scholarship as manifested in Biblical studies generally, but only as we see it dealing with the New Testament. The title of Albert Schweitzer's

1. The Nature of Scripture, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 1922, P.18.

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epoch-making book is a perfect definition of the aim of Nineteenth century New Testament criticism: The Quest of the Historical Jesus. It is true that all the books of the New Testament were submitted to the literary-historical method, but the great concern of New Testament scholars was with the Gospels; they wanted to discover the Jesus of history! It need hardly be said that the very phrases "the Jesus of history," and "the historical Jesus," are distinctively modern, and would have been unintelligible to earlier generations. They are a natural product of the new consciousness that it might be possible to get behind creed and tradition and gospel, to penetrate the mists of ecclesiastical dogma, and to find the simple historical truth about Jesus of Nazareth. This whole critical movement sometimes carried with it an appearance of doubt and denial which was intimidating to some Churchmen and often caused bitter opposition. But there can be no question that in an age when Christian faith had become for many reasons difficult, and when many earnest souls seemed to feel the ground giving way beneath their feet, an age in which religious doubt was a wide-spread and painful experience, the rediscovery of the Jesus of history came as a new revelation. The Christ of the Creeds might be a baffling and mysterious figure, but, after all, the Christological statements in the Creeds professed to refer to an actual historical person, who lived in Palestine at a particular time and "suffered under Pontius Pilate." Therefore, it must be possible to approach the figure of Jesus

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by historical methods, and thus at least make a beginning in the understanding of His significance. Moreover, when this was attempted, it appeared to be marvellously successful. The figure of Jesus seemed to stand out as it had never done before. The mists were penetrated, and there appeared the winning and commanding personality of the Man of Nazareth. They could now see Him as His contemporary saw Him, and they could feel the throbbing vitality of His human voice and touch. It seemed to be a rediscovery of the right starting point for an understanding of the Christian faith, which had become so obscured; for it was like beginning where the original disciples began.

It is almost universally agreed among present-day New Testament scholars that these men were not as successful in their quest for the historical Jesus as they had at first thought. The Jesus of history turned out to be a very elusive figure. As Liberal scholarship continued the amount of material that could be honestly trusted as pointing to the Jesus of history (as they conceived Him) greatly decreased, and they came to despair of ever being able to write a life of Jesus. R. H. Lightfoot's words are already famous: "For all the inestimable value of the Gospels, they yield us little more than a whisper of His voice; we trace in them
¹
but the outskirts of His ways." We must remember, though, that when they

1. History and Interpretation in the Gospels, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 1935, P.225.

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used the term "Jesus of history," they usually meant a figure who could be described and authenticated by a cold and detached criticism. But they had also already formed a picture in their minds of the Person that would appear as a result of their critical investigation. Jesus must be consistent: He must have the same message in much the same terms for everyone. Above all, He must be a popular teacher Whom the common people hear gladly, because His message is so simple that all can understand it. All is perfectly easy of comprehension by rich and poor, learned and unlearned, young and old. The parable was thus a pedagogic device to make these ultimate simplicities simpler still. ¹ The Liberal scholars did not find such a Person, but the fact that they did not discover the Jesus they expected does in no way destroy their tremendous contribution to New Testament study. There are four points we could mention in connection with the Liberal critics.

1. They proved conclusively the human-historical character of the New Testament documents. They are not divine gifts from heaven, nor are they the result of divine dictation. The writers are real historical figures concerned with their historical situation, colored by their environment, adopting the literary methods of their day, borrowing from their predecessors, shaping their sources for their own purposes, calculating and making mistakes. This is as true of Mark's Gospel as it is for First

1. Cf. T.W.Manson's treatment of this in his book, The Teaching of Jesus, Cambridge University Press, 1935, P.16.

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Corinthians. They arose out of the needs and experiences of the early Church. For instance, by setting the Gospels in their proper historical context, we are able to see the reflections of historical events which occurred long after Jesus' death and which had taken on great meaning for them (like the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.). If it is true that God reveals Himself through the New Testament, then He does so through this kind of book, a human book, containing the normal ignorance, prejudice, and provincialism of fallible human beings. The evidence shows that there has been a misconception as to the manner of God's revelation. The demonstration that absolute inerrancy can no longer be claimed for the Biblical records has compelled a salutary wrestling with the problems of inspiration and revelation. If today it is commonplace for us to think of revelation as given through events rather than propositions, that is largely due to the work of the critics.

2. But Liberal historical scholarship attacked another significant misconception; the uniqueness of Jesus' teachings and the formulations of the New Testament theologians. Study of the environment of both Jewish and the Christian religions has patiently accumulated parallel after parallel, antecedent upon antecedent, until the word "unique", as it has been sometimes applied to the New Testament affirmations, has lost much of its significance. The historians have shown how extensively the New Testament writers inherit, borrow, adopt, and adapt. Even in the concepts of Jesus Himself, assuming that we have some of Jesus' actual teaching recorded in the Gospels, we can see the direct inheritance from the Hebrew Old Testament religion. Christian theology still maintains the uniqueness of the Christian

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gospel, but it has been forced by Liberal scholarship to rest its case on different grounds than it has sometimes done.

3. Literary-historical criticism has shown that the Gospel records are not historical documents in the normal sense of the word "historical." The Gospels do not provide an ordinary biography of a man. Modern critical analysis has conclusively proved not only that the Gospels are not eye-witness biographies, but that they are the work of Christians removed by at least one full generation from the death of Jesus. Whether or not the Gospels preserve eye-witness material is a question with which we will deal later. But it is evident that the Gospels do not always record the actual words of Jesus, but sometimes put into His mouth teachings which will meet the need of the Church contemporary to the Gospel writers. The New Testament scholars were not, and are not yet, agreed as to what parts are genuinely the words and actions of Jesus, and what is the work and interpretation of the early Church; but they have been forced, and they have forced the theologians, to consider and wrestle with the problem of the relation of the gospel to history.

4. Finally, we must remember the contribution that Liberal criticism has made in the ideas of Christian theology about the unity of the New Testament. Prior to the birth of literary-historical scholarship, Christian theology often assumed that the New Testament contained a uniform theological formulation. From Matthew to Revelation it was thought that the New Testament supported one theological understanding,

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which, by the way, the interpreter often had when he went to study the New Testament. It is true that many men before modern criticism were aware of great differences in the New Testament documents. Martin Luther, for instance, saw how James' epistle differed from those of Paul, and he did not hesitate to call it "the epistle of straw." But the New Testament was, for churchmen, a unity and this unity was usually conceived of in a very static way. The analytical work of criticism soon made the old position untenable as the diversity of the New Testament documents became apparent. Not only are they different in literary form but they also vary in theological expression and content. The old static view of New Testament uniformity has had to be abandoned and it has forced New Testament scholars and theologians, who are convinced of its unity, to reconsider the nature of that unity.

These are some of the contributions of Liberal-critical scholarship, contributions which we have not, and will not, outgrow. It is true, as some are quick to point out, that many of the critical theories have been very untrustworthy, and have sometimes been proven to be false as soon as they were published. But, as John Lowe points out, "the fact that the course of Biblical criticism is strewn with the wreckage of abandoned theories no more condemns the method than the history of rejecting scientific hypotheses condemn science." ¹ Some present-day critics and

1. The Recovery of the Theological Interpretation of the Bible, in Interpretation of the Bible, ed. by C. W. Dugmore, Society for the Preservation of Christian Knowledge, London, 1944, P. 113.

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theologians, realizing the inadequacy of the conclusions of many of the Liberal critics, have dismissed them with derision. Such an ungrateful attitude forgets the immense debt we all owe to the work of the great Liberal scholars: indeed, without their labors - and their errors - we could not properly see our path today. A. S. Peake is right when he says, "..... the generally accepted results of criticism rest on a number of phenomena actually present in the documents themselves which the traditional view fails to explain Even were the critical theory wrong or defective, the facts would still remain to be explained."¹

This has been but a brief examination of the aims and accomplishments of the literary-historical school during the nineteenth, and the first few years in the twentieth, centuries. In citing its accomplishments, we have mentioned only those which are relevant to this particular study. For want of a better name, we have called this period the Liberal Period (note capital "L"). This must not be interpreted to mean we think liberal scholarship (small "l") stopped there. We are convinced that it did not, and sincerely hope it never does. The word liberal (small "l") indicates the attitude of one whose mind is open to receive new truth; it describes a man who knows that life is dynamic and cannot be contained in a static system. But critical scholars of this period just mentioned approached the New Testament with certain definite concerns and pre-suppositions, and we designate the period in which these men worked the Liberal Period.

1. The Nature of Scripture, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 1922, P.38.

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Present-day New Testament scholars and theologians appreciate the work of the men in the Liberal period; they are also very critical of it. But their criticism focuses mainly on the presuppositions of the Liberal critics. One great fallacy of the critics who maintained the rigorous scientific method was their belief that they had no presuppositions. They were convinced that they brought no answers, but only questions, to the investigation of the New Testament. But the truth was that they had implicitly given the answer to several extremely important questions. Amos Wilder, when dealing with this problem, says, "When at the end of the Eighteenth Century Gabler invokes a strictly historical procedure, he is likewise engaged in excluding a formulation viewed as dogmatic, though his own supposedly non-dogmatic approach was qualified by presuppositions which characterized all the historical work of the new period which was to follow." ¹ The Liberals unconsciously supported certain assumptions: (1) the working hypotheses of natural science, (2) the assumptions of modern anthropology, and (3) the modern philosophy of history, all became for them dogmas of theology. There can be no question that these assumptions not only affected to a large extent what they looked for, but also determined their interpretation of the facts discovered. The assumptions were as follows:

1. New Testament Theology in Transition, in The Study of the Bible Today and Tomorrow, ed. by H. R. Willoughby, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1947, P.423.

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1. God is immanent in nature and history.

This is not to be interpreted as pantheism. Nature and history were not in themselves God but rather moved completely in accordance with eternal laws which God had placed into their very nature. It was in this way that God was immanent. Any interference on God's part in the settled order of nature is barred, so the essential thing about God's sovereignty is that it should be acknowledged by men. God does not personally exercise that sovereignty by direct action in the world. The next step from that was that it was the business of men to build the Kingdom of God. God's Fatherhood is conceived only in terms of the eye of faith discerning Him to be such. Faith sees Him behind the order of nature and history as the Creator, and through the order of nature and history caring for us and determining us. "..... we are firmly convinced that what happens in space and time is subject to the general lines of motion and that in this sense, as an interruption of the order of Nature, there can be no such things as 'miracles!'"¹ Thus Liberal scholarship had no place for events which did not arise naturally out of the historic process and did not know what to make of eschatology in its Biblical form.

2. Human history is rising to ever greater heights through the operation of forces inherent in creation.

1. Harnack, Adolf, What is Christianity, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1904, P.28f.

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This theory was given impetus by the great scientific discoveries and industrial advances that took place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But it was Darwin's theory of the evolution of the species which gave to the doctrine of progress tremendous apologetic power, and it captured the thought and the imagination of the West. According to the doctrine of progress, life is getting inevitably better through the working of natural forces.

3. Men in their inmost nature are essentially good.

If given the proper education and opportunity people will seek the Good as against the Evil. There was a general optimism about man's nature which led them to attribute evil either to ignorance or to wrong environment. The Biblical assertions about sin were treated in one of two ways: (1) as an expression of primitive religion which we have no outgrown; or (2) they were interpreted to make them more congenial to modern humanistic ideas. They recognized the existence of sin but always conceived of it in moralistic terms only.

4. Because God is present with men only through the natural working of history (He does not personally intrude), there is no Divine revelation but only human discovery. Revelation became the "other side" of discovery. The conception that the Bible was Holy Scripture because it is the record of, and witness to, God's dealing with men for their redemption tended to give way before the conception of the Bible as the greatest of the classics of religious literature. Like other classics it was often recommended for its insights and spiritual appeal. The consequences of revelation being

1. For an example of this see E. F. Scott's book, The New Testament Today,

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turned into discovery was that Jesus becomes a moment in the religious evolution of man, a stage in the upward growth, important as introducing a new era and as a religious genius, but no more. We know, of course, that most of the Liberal critics thought of Jesus as being the very peak of the mountain up which all men climb, but to be consistent they could only say that he was the greatest yet known. C.C. McCown in his book, The Search For the Real Jesus, which was published only thirteen years ago, says, "Until a better than Jesus appears, he is the ultimate. No one can predict that a better never will appear."¹

If in Jesus we have not God entering the human scene, then His uniqueness is destroyed. And if the assumption is that God does not personally act in the human scene, then it is clear to us why Paul, John, and Peter were ignored. These three focus on the Person of Jesus because they believe that in Him God became Incarnate. Their writings were treated as being later accretions which are foreign to the teaching of Jesus. The focus of attention was placed almost exclusively on the Gospels in order to make Jesus, as a great religious personality, stand forth clearly. They tried to picture Him clearly, to make Him live in their own time, to appropriate His religion and through it to see God.

MacMillan Company, New York, 1921. It is true that E. F. Scott is not a nineteenth century scholar, but we see in him many of the presuppositions of the Liberal period coming to focus.

1. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1940, P.300f.

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Forces Toward Change

During the nineteenth century the book market was flooded with a seemingly infinite number of works on the life of Jesus. The New Testament scholars eagerly attempted historical reconstructions of His career, His personality, and His teaching. But in 1901 the Liberal scholars who shared this interest received a staggering blow by a book written by Wilhelm Wrede, entitled The Messianic Secret in the Gospels. Wrede tried to prove that the Jesus of history cannot be discovered and that the only attitude we can take to the whole thing is one of "thoroughgoing scepticism." However, Liberal scholarship was soon to receive a blow which would stagger it even more than Wrede's. This came from Albert Schweitzer's great work, The Quest of the Historical Jesus, which appeared in 1906. Schweitzer lashed out at the claim of Liberal interpretation that we can make Jesus live in our own time. He pursued criticism to a point which startled even Liberal Protestants. His historical conclusion is clear: all presentations of the preaching of Jesus that seek the kernel elsewhere than in His eschatology are reinterpretations which do violence to the historical truth. He saw that modern-historical critics always pushed the eschatological element aside as being the work of later and lesser minds than Jesus. Schweitzer challenged their ability to separate the true from the false, to be able to extract the "historical kernel." He insisted that they were faced with only two alternatives: if they persisted in trying to weed out the true from the false they would have to accept the thorough-going skepticism of Wrede; if they took the Gospels as they were then they must accept a position of thorough-going eschatology. Most New Testament scholars did not like either alternative.

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They were still trying to cope with Schweitzer when World War I began. This world-shattering event challenged two fundamental assumptions of the philosophy and theology in that period in which Liberal scholarship shared: the belief in inevitable progress, and in the essential goodness of man. The horrors of that war made it possible for men to appreciate to a greater extent the Biblical statements about evil forces in our world. And they could not so easily pass over Paul's insistence that men are lost except for God's grace. Many men did not lose faith in the possibility of progress but the optimistic doctrine of the world becoming naturally and inevitably better was almost completely shattered.

Another influence toward change came much more indirectly; we refer to the influence of the so-called "dialectical theology." In the thirty years since the publication of the second edition to Karl Barth's Epistle to the Romans, the theological climate has completely changed. Theology has been compelled to grapple anew with the Biblical kerygma. Now it is true that New Testament scholarship has in general proceeded independently of the theological disciplines. But Barth's mighty declaration about God's transcendence and man's sinfulness, which have radically affected theologians in the West, have also had their influence in New Testament study. New Testament critics were not quite so ready to discount the sections that referred to God's sovereign intervention in human affairs. Still we must remember that Barth and other so-called neo-orthodox theologians did not generally influence New Testament study directly but mainly through their influence on the whole theological climate. Barth's influence can be seen most in the works of the

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great form-critic, Rudolf Bultmann.

But liberal scholarship did not end with Albert Schweitzer, or with the World War, or with Karl Barth. It was put through the fires but withstood them and continued its work, purged of many of its false assumptions. One of the first manifestations of change was the renewed interest in the rest of the New Testament. Paul and John especially, who had been somewhat neglected, again came under critical study. The Synoptics remained the centre of interest but did not dominate the discipline the way they did before.

In Germany two men began to fight their way through the old presuppositions and the old critical results, and they initiated a new literary-historical method called Form Criticism. These men were Martin Dibelius and Rudolf Bultmann. This method assumes that before the Gospels were drawn up in their present state, the tradition about Jesus was circulated in stories that had very definite forms. For instance, there was the Nativity Story, the Passion Story, the Parable, each of which had very definite literary characteristics which were, the form critics maintained, created by a definite social situation. Dibelius and Bultmann believed that by discovering the exact form of the different units of tradition they can evaluate their historical worth. The result of their work was to prove that as far back as you can go in gospel tradition, you can trace a continual process of theological interpretation permeating and informing the tradition. Through the rigorous execution of the scientific method they discovered that theological interpretation was not something

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added to a tradition of "pure" historical material. Theology is no late accretion but is at the very heart of the gospel. For Bultmann especially, this resulted in almost complete historical scepticism. He wrote in 1926, "I do indeed think that we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus, since the early Christian sources show no interest in either, are moreover fragmentary and often legendary; and other sources about Jesus do not exist."¹ Bultmann argues that the church did not live by history nor did it preserve real history.

Bultmann is not without opposition. In Germany Oscar Cullmann has made very severe and very effective criticisms of Bultmann's statements. In England the latter's position has been questioned most effectively by four men: C. H. Dodd, William Manson, and Hoskyns and Davey. Hoskyns and Davey set the issue squarely before us with the terse question, "Is the Jesus of History wholly submerged in the New Testament or does that history rigorously control all our New Testament documents?"² Their answer, and the answer of both Dodd and Manson is that the history does control the New Testament documents. F. C. Grant, who is also a form critic, would agree with the English scholars. We will deal with these questions in a moment, but the important thing for us to realize at this point is that the concern is changed. The critics have not a purely historical interest

1. Jesus and the Word, trans. by Smith & Huntress, Ivor Nicholson & Watson Ltd., London, 1935, P.8.

2. Riddle of the New Testament, Faber & Faber Ltd., London, 1949, P.58.

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but also raise the question of the abiding and normative meaning of the New Testament. The prime task of the New Testament critic is no longer to "get behind" the witness of the Gospel writers to discover the simple untheological Jesus. They are no longer concerned to merely uncover bare historic facts, but rather to illuminate what the New Testament says. This is true of the scholars just mentioned, as well as of men like T. W. Manson, Amos Wilder, John Knox, F. C. Grant, Floyd Filson, Paul Minear, and many others. They are dedicated to the work of interpreting the meaning of the total New Testament witness.

But this new concern has raised for these scholars five very important questions:

1. What is the nature of New Testament literature?
2. What is the relation of history and theology?
3. What is the nature of New Testament unity?
4. What is the nature of Biblical authority?
5. Does Biblical study require "theological" exegesis?

It is to these questions that we now turn our attention.

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Significant Contemporary Problems

Any change of concern raises new questions: every new movement carries with it fresh problems. This was true of the Liberal movement in its initial stages, and is certainly evident in the contemporary "revolution" in New Testament study. It is to these fresh problems that we turn now.

A. New Conception of the Nature of New Testament Literature

The unquestioned assumption of nineteenth century critical study was that behind the Gospel records stood a simple, untheological, uninterpreted Jesus. They believed that all the New Testament documents, other than the Synoptics, were theological treatises, which in trying to interpret the meaning of Jesus' Person in terms of the common religious conceptions of that day, are often guilty of distorting His real meaning. The Synoptics, except for a few unfortunate instances, are not concerned to interpret but desire only to set forth the actual Jesus of history.

This assumption has been proven, mainly by the work of the form critics, to be untrue. Nowhere in the New Testament are events referred to simply as events. They are always set in a theological context and their record serves a theological purpose. The older method of criticism, in its search for bare facts, set out to eliminate whatever in the Gospels might be attributed to theological interpretation. In doing so, it deliberately neglected in them just those elements which in the eyes of their authors made them worth writing. Furthermore, analysis of the

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tradition preceding the writing of the Gospel stories in their present form indicates a steady unity of direction. The Synoptic writers did not impose ideas into the material at hand, but rather they are more like editors exposing a significance already in the tradition. Thus the Gospels are not biographies in the modern sense of the word. We search vainly in the Gospels for those things which any competent biographer supplies: details about the early years in education; the personal appearance and characteristics of his hero; specific notes of time and place in the story of his celebrity's life; a psychological attempt to unravel motives of action and to trace out his developing consciousness of the life work which gives him a place in history. Of all these, the Gospels tell us next to nothing.

But if not biographies, what then are the Gospels? The answer is that they are part of the early Christian kerygma, a part of the proclamation of the coming of salvation. Christianity rests upon the affirmation that a series of events happened, in which God revealed Himself in action for the salvation of men. The Gospels professed to tell us what happened. They do not set out to gratify a purely historical curiosity about past events, but rather to nurture faith upon the testimony to such events. The writers of the Gospels are evangelists. It is imperative that we remember that the Gospels as they stand do not simply profess to report important historical occurrences, but eschatological events, the climax and end of history, the revelation of the supra-historical, the coming of the Son of God. The purpose of the Gospels is

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thus to proclaim, to preach. "It is," as P. T. Forsyth puts it, "history preaching The history is history with a purpose, history unto salvation, history unto edification, history made preacher, history whose object is to create not an opinion on our part but a determination."¹

The Synoptic writers are at one with both Paul and John in that they proclaim the coming of salvation. It is true that they use a different form and perhaps do not always agree in their theological position, but the old belief that the Synoptics hold forth an untheological Jesus while the other New Testament writers present us a theological Christ is completely erroneous. This was not to be taken to suggest that there are no differences in the New Testament documents. These differences are fully recognized, but we must still insist that the New Testament literature as a whole is turned toward the one purpose of setting forth the meaning of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God.

B. The Relation of History and Gospel.

In the preceding chapter the problem of history and gospel was referred to briefly when we discussed the results of the new critical method, Form Criticism. It will now be discussed in greater detail.

The significance of the problem is clearly revealed by the question raised by Hoskyns and Davey, whether the Jesus of history is wholly sub-

1. Positive Preaching in the Modern Mind, Hodder & Stoughton, New York, 1907, P.14.

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merged in the New Testament or whether the New Testament is rigorously controlled by the Jesus of history. This question must still be answered. And it is a question to be answered not only for the sake of critical scholarship but also for faith. Was there a strict relationship between the profound faith of the New Testament documents and the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth? This is an extremely important concern which must not be turned aside by the suggestion that the interest in the historical Jesus is a mere product of the modern historical-critical movement, or that in some sense it is a merely "historical" and not a truly religious or Christian concern (Bultmann). It is precisely the religious concern which makes it so very important, and which gives urgency to the historical task. Christian faith will always be forced to ask whether or not historical material has been invented as a necessary means of expressing "theological truths." Even though it is true, as was stated previously, that the Synoptic writers do not impose their ideas on the material they use but rather attempt as far as possible to expose a significance already in the tradition, the question remains. Did Jesus do the things the New Testament says He did? Did He actually speak the words it records as coming from His lips? And most important of all, was Jesus the Person it would have us think He was? Or did those in the primitive Christian tradition, out of a certain conviction they had about the nature of God and the world, impose upon Jesus of Nazareth an interpretation of His Person which runs completely

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counter to the historic truth? If an affirmative answer is given to the latter question, then the Christian faith falls to pieces before our eyes. From beginning to end the New Testament claims to point to history. It is true that a unique quality of significance is claimed for the history to which the New Testament points, but it does not, because of that, cease to be history. But if the history has been misconstrued, if it will not bear the interpretation claimed for it by the New Testament, then the Christian faith becomes dust and ashes in our hands and the witness of the early Church can be explained away in terms of the psychology of religious experience.

There is a most profound debate going on at the present time over this question. Although the American New Testament scholars are very much aware of it, still they do not seem to share in it with the depth of understanding exhibited by the English and German critics. Rudolf Bultmann is the outstanding representative of the school of thought which maintains the relative unimportance of the history of Jesus of Nazareth; that is, he would hold that the Gospel of the Church rests historically upon the spiritual needs of the early Church and upon the existential encounter with the resurrected Christ and not upon the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. There may be many other German New Testament critics who agree with Bultmann, but the only important New Testament works in English are some of those by Dr. Edwyn Bevan and

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R. H. Lightfoot of Britain, and those translated from another German author, Martin Dibelius. The other scholars who have entered this debate do not necessarily stand together, but they have one thing in common - they all stand against Bultmann's conception of the relation between the history of Jesus of Nazareth and the faith and formulations of the Church. The men who will be dealt with in connection with this problem are Bultmann, Dibelius, Cullmann, Dodd, William Manson, and Hoskyns and Davey.

Bultmann and Dibelius, when they initiated the technique of Form Criticism, brought not merely a new method or a new set of results in Gospel study, but a relatively fresh approach to the whole historical problem of the Gospels. It is partly a matter of asking different questions of the Gospel records. Form Criticism is a movement which studies the Gospels historically, not by analyzing them into their various source-documents, but by distinguishing the various "forms," the various types of anecdote, parable, apothegm, wonder-story, that were used in the preaching of the early Church about Jesus and grew into Gospel tradition, in order to assess the age and significance of the individual fragments that make up our Gospels. In this process Form Criticism often seems to throw far more light on the question, "What was the early Christian preaching and message like?" than on the question "What did Jesus actually say and do and mean?" In fact Bultmann definitely expresses the opinion that "we can now know almost

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nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus." Not long ago those who adhered to an orthodox Christian position were often able to ignore the extreme negative criticism of the Gospel narrative because the critics seemed to be controlled by certain false assumptions, some of which have been enumerated in Chapter 1. But the Form Critics are not so easily ignored. If they leave it doubtful whether it is possible from the sources to gain any substantial knowledge of the career and personality of Jesus, they assure us that it is because the Gospels were not written out of any such biographical or historical interest, but in the interests of Christian faith,¹ which has nothing to do with the modern desire to reconstruct the Jesus of history. In the pre-critical period theologians believed all the material in the Gospels to be historically true. When historical criticism appeared, this was questioned in a wholesale way, but even the Liberals assumed that at least it was possible from the evidence of the Gospels to reconstruct the life of Jesus and recapture His personality. In fact they were con-

1. It should be mentioned here that the Form Critics were not the first to recognize that the Gospel writers were evangelists (interpreters). Harnack, in his book What is Christianity?, P.22, mentions the fact. But what the Form Critics had discovered, which is much the more significant, is that the Gospel writers do not impose on a bare narrative a certain interpretation, but merely expose the meaning or interpretation already in the tradition.

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vinced that modern criticism had made this more possible than ever. The Form Critics say this is not true because the Gospels do not lend themselves to such investigation. The interest of the New Testament writers in the Person of Christ has never had anything in common with the modern humanistic and biographical interest in the personality of Jesus. The latter, the Form Critics say, belongs to a different world, the world in which human personality is regarded as the supremely interesting thing. Intimate personal diaries, volumes of confessions, character studies, and all the talk about self-expression and development of personality is a part of our modern concern about human biography which is quite alien to the Bible. When we in the modern world discover in the Gospel story a remarkable personality, a heroic character or a religious genius, we are reading into the story something which is not there, something which the evangelist, or their sources, or the tradition they used, or their readers, had not the faintest interest. They were concerned about a divine drama, not a human personality. The Form Critics thus conclude that it is illegitimate to use the Gospels as sources for the historical reconstruction of the personality of Jesus.

Bultmann would agree if it was pointed out that the Gospels seem to tell the story, or some of the story, of Jesus' life. But he maintains that this story is so overlaid with the beliefs, experiences, and hopes of the early Church that it is not a reliable source for the knowledge of

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the history of Jesus. There are undoubtedly many genuine incidents from Jesus' life contained in the Gospels, but they are so entangled with material that is the precipitate of the experience of the Church that it is an impossible task to try to isolate these incidents. The encounter of the Church with the resurrected Christ was such an overpowering experience that everything they said about the historical Jesus was hopelessly colored by it. As a matter of fact, their main concern was not with the historical Jesus at all, but with the resurrected Christ who had confronted them. It is true that the One who was resurrected was the One who lived in Nazareth, but to give an outline of the life of this Man from Nazareth would not be really helpful for faith. The early Christians wished to proclaim the message of salvation through Christ. They wanted stories about Jesus which would be suitable for preaching and propaganda purposes. Confronted by opponents, they required material to give an apologia for the faith. They desired guidance on many problems of Christian faith and practice. It was to meet these needs and desires that led to the preservation and shaping of the Gospel tradition. If by chance some genuine historical information about Jesus of Nazareth is retained it is more by accident than design. For Bultmann this is just as it should be, because actually history is of little consequence for faith in Jesus Christ. That he takes this fact seriously is quite apparent when we find him putting quotation marks around the name "Jesus" to indicate its symbolic reference.

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This position has been received favourably in some quarters and unfavourably in others, but no matter what the attitude taken to it New Testament scholarship has been universally affected. The fact that the last quarter-century has produced only one big critical life of Jesus (Goguel) is due in no small measure to the Formgeschichte of Bultmann. But Bultmann has not been content to work only in the realm of Form Criticism. He sees his own task (and he believes it is the task of all New Testament scholars) as being to make the New Testament understandable to the modern world. It is evident to him that modern man is generally estranged from the Church and its language. Why, he asks, does the Church not speak intelligently to this modern man? He answers, because the interpreters of the New Testament leave off interpreting at just the critical point where real interpretation ought to begin. That point is: New Testament mythology.

According to Bultmann the primitive Church preached about an eschatological event. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ, which they apprehended, was an eschatological deed, and it revealed that the life and death of Jesus had a supra-historical meaning for them. In attempting to set forth the meaning of these eschatological events, the early Christians wrote and spoke in mythological terms. It was their way of showing forth something which had a supra-historical dimension. But the difficulty is, these myths are understandable only

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in terms of the world-view of the first century, which is entirely foreign to our own. The Kerygma of the Church must remain true to the primitive message but that does not mean that it must accept the mythological setting by which that message was preached. The Church will only communicate to this age when it extracts the supra-historical kernel from the primitive world-view in which it is clothed and correlate it with modern philosophic and scientific thought. Bultmann says that modern man does not and cannot think mythologically as does the New Testament. What the theologians and preachers must do is to interpret the mythological elements in a thorough-going way and establish a point of view from which the whole can be interpreted so that the modern man can feel himself addressed by it, and see it as a message concerning him. In other words, the mythos, which is nothing else than an expression of a certain understanding of man's existence, must be interpreted existentially. The Kerygma of the modern Church must be grounded in such work; that is, it must proclaim the kernel of the New Testament proclamation in modern terms, so that Jesus Christ becomes a present reality, challenging man to decide for or against Him. Christ's Cross and sufferings are present realities, but the mythological trappings by which they are set forth in the New Testament prevent them from becoming meaningful in the present to modern man. Bultmann maintains that it is only in the Kerygma of the Church that there is actually meeting with the Lord Christ.

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His central contention is that we meet Christ now, when in the proclamation of the Church He is presented to us and when we have to decide for or against Him. But if Church proclamation is not free from New Testament myths, then Christ will never be presented so that men can see that He is relevant for them in the twentieth century the same way He was for men in the first.

We must now ask the questions, What does Bultmann mean by "eschatological?" and, What does he mean by "myth?" We will understand best when we see that Bultmann thinks of Christianity as speaking of the fact of Christ in three different ways.

1. Historically: It speaks of Christ as a Being who lived at a certain time and a certain place here on earth (e.g. "suffered under Pontius Pilate").
2. Mythologically: Christianity conceives of Jesus as being the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. His death is thought of in terms of the Jewish metaphor of sacrifice; it is thought of as having in itself certain characteristics which mark it off from all instances of natural death.
3. Eschatologically: It is the way in which the Church speaks of Christ's life and death as being - though they occurred nearly two thousand years ago - not only relevant but all-important for the lives of our contemporaries today. To say of Christ's death that it happened

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in A.D. 30 is one thing; to say that it is of basic importance to us in 1953 is quite another.

Bultmann's concern is above all with the eschatological. It is true that he insists that Christianity is basically an event. In Christ something has happened. But it is questionable whether he takes seriously the historical element in Christianity. It seems that the really fundamental change brought about by Christ is a change in our way of understanding ourselves. Of course Bultmann holds that unless Jesus had been born we would not have come to this new and true understanding of ourselves. But it seems that once we have that knowledge the historical factors by which it was brought about are irrelevant. It is for this reason that there is ground for Barth's charge that, according to it, the real Easter event is not something which happened to Jesus¹ but something which happened to the faith of the disciples.

Bultmann's desire that the New Testament be demythologized stems from his conviction that these myths rest on an outmoded world-view. Not only have we outgrown this cosmology but we moderns do not think in mythological terms at all. It is therefore impossible for us to read the New Testament and apprehend the eschatological message that is there for us. The eschatological kernel, wrapped or clothed in the

1. In this section we have drawn much from Ian Henderson's interpretation of Bultmann in his valuable little book, Myth and the New Testament, S.C.M. Press Ltd., London, 1952.

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myths, will not speak to us until these myths are existentially interpreted. Until this work is done we will not hear the true Christian message. But let us remember that Bultmann would never say that the New Testament myths are to be translated into other myths. He rejects myth as such as being unable to do justice to the eschatological fact of Jesus Christ.

It would therefore be legitimate to say that both history and myth are significant only because they bear in the New Testament the eschatological "kernel." They both become for him the external framework which houses the very important eschatological message of salvation, a salvation which men have to decide for or against when they meet it in the kerygma of the Church.

These views concerning New Testament history are to be found primarily in his book Jesus and the Word. Those concerning myth have not yet been translated. They were presented first in an essay called "Neues Testament Und Mythologie: Das Problem Der Entmythologisierung der Neutestamentlichen Verkündigung," which was published as part of his book, Offenbarung Und Heilsgeschehen (1941), and was later reprinted in the volume edited by Hans Werner Bartsch, Kerygma und Mythos. These works have caused a commotion in the theological world comparable to Karl Barth's Epistle to the Romans. The major part of this theological discussion however, has been confined to continental Europe and Britain.

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A most significant objection to Bultmann's position has been made by Oscar Cullmann in his recent work Christ and Time. He says, "The 'Biblical history, ' which we can also designate as 'revelatory history' or - since indeed all revelation is God's love - as 'redemptive history,¹ is the heart of all New Testament theology." Cullmann insists that it is not true to say that one can give up the entire redemptive history of the New Testament and yet hold fast to the Christian faith. The redemptive history is no external framework which the Christian faith can unhesitatingly discard, because the "kernel" that remains is not at all a particularly characteristic feature of the Christian revelation. A brief outline of Cullmann's thought concerning what he calls Heilsgeschichte (redemptive history) will clearly indicate his position on the relation of history and theology.

The work of Christ is the mid-point of a special happening or process which extends the length of the time-line; this process can be designated as the Christ-process. The primitive Christian norm consists not only in a single historical fact, but in a temporally connected historical series of a special kind, namely, the Biblical history. The facts of which the normative Biblical history is composed - not all, but a great number - are capable of being established by the historian.

1. Christ and Time, trans. by F. Filson, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1950, P.26f, Italics mine.

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Nevertheless, this normative Biblical history must as a whole appear to the "pure" historian a quite queer construction, a completely arbitrary compilation. The real problem of the Biblical history is theological, not historical. That is, although individual basic facts of this Biblical history are subject to historical investigation, still as a whole, in its grouping, interpretation, and joining of events with the historical action of Jesus, it takes on meaning only when the central historical action of Jesus of Nazareth is recognized as the absolute revelation of God. That history will appear to have no meaning without this faith. But where this faith is present this Biblical history is designated as the history of revelation and redemption. Here the close connection between Christian revelation and history comes to life; all Christian theology in its innermost essence is Biblical history. On a straight line of an ordinary process in time God here reveals Himself, and from that line He controls not only the whole of history, but also that which happens in nature. Cullmann concludes by saying that there is here no room for speculations concerning God that ignore time and history.

God revealed Himself concretely in and through history. Primitive Christian theology treats this fact with great earnestness; it asserts that the climax and central point of all revelation is the fact that God once entered so completely into human life that this unique entrance can be dated like any other historical event. He entered history in all its particularity.

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The consequences of Cullmann's position are obvious. This history is not something of which the New Testament can be unclothed. The specifically Christian kernel, as we derive it from all the primitive Christian sources, stands or falls with the redemptive history. He would use Schweitzer's words and say that all presentations of the preaching of the primitive church that seek the kernel elsewhere than in its view of redemptive history do violence to the historical truth. According to him Bultmann a priori regards the temporal and historical element as a mythological covering that can be separated from a kernel, and Cullmann suggests that the existence philosophy of Heidegger, with which the kernel is found to agree, may be Bultmann's starting point. Cullmann agrees with the Form Critics when they say that the Gospels are not biographies, but witnesses of faith. However, this very witness of faith which comes to expression in the Gospel tradition has history itself as its object, since indeed it declares that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ of Israel.

The problem of the relation between history and gospel is very much alive in England at the present time, not just among New Testament scholars per se, but also among the theologians. The men in the New Testament field that have done the most outstanding work are C. H. Dodd, William Manson,

1. Cf. D.M. Bailey in his very significant work, God was in Christ, PP20-58.

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and Hoskyns and Davey.

Dodd has given us a full-blown statement of his thesis concerning this question in his book published in 1938, History and the Gospel.¹ He leaves us in no doubt about his position on the matter for he declares at the outset that historical events are the medium by which God's self-revelation takes place. For Christianity the eternal God is revealed in history. This does not mean that any striking episode which appeals to the imagination of an individual or a people may be indifferently regarded as the self-revealing act of God. Nor does it mean that the truth about God can be discovered by treating history as a uniform field of observation. This would be the case if God were to be identified with a tendency immanent in the historical process. The task of theology would then be to understand that process by purely "scientific" methods, for it assumes the process is homogeneous throughout, and that it is possible to collect data from all parts of the field and to arrive by induction at a conclusion. Dodd disagrees with the original presupposition, that God is only immanent in the "world" process, and therefore maintains that Christian theology cannot attach itself to the whole temporal series indifferently. Rather it must be bound by a particular series of events in which a unique intensity of significance resides. "Christianity takes the series of events recorded or reflected in the Bible, from the call of Abraham to the emergence of the

1. Nisbet and Co. Ltd., London, 1938.

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Church, and declares that in this series the ultimate reality of all history, which is the purpose of God, is revealed, because the series is itself controlled by the supreme event of all - the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This valuation of the series is not imposed upon it from without, but is an integral part of the history itself.¹ But Dodd does not see the life, death, and resurrection of Christ as being merely the most important event in the series; for him they are the unique and final events in which the God beyond history intervened conclusively to reveal his kingdom on earth. In the history itself is to be found a supra-historical dimension. Dodd defines history as consisting of events (occurrence) plus meaning, and then describes the story of the Gospels as a narrative of events whose meaning is eschatological. That is, in the events to which the Gospels point is to be discerned the mighty act of a transcendent God which brings history to its fulfilment. There is, then, a historical and a supra-historical aspect of the Gospel story.

Dodd admits that it is quite likely that certain elements in the primitive tradition may have been the result of an imaginative search for fulfilled prophecy. But he points out that the New Testament writers, for all their anxiety to discover fulfilments of prophecy and all their ingenuity in doing so, do not try to use the whole corpus of messianic prediction. The question is then: what was the principle of selection?

1. History and the Gospel, P.30.

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Dodd says that historical memory must have controlled their selection. Those elements of messianic prediction which claimed the hopes and imagination of the Jewish people of Jesus' time play little part in primitive Christian and New Testament theology. Rather they exploit sections of prophecy that by the Jews were not even considered to be messianic. The phenomenon of a suffering, crucified Messiah was an impossible scandal to the Jews, and Dodd insists that we can only explain its presence in the Christian tradition by saying that it arose out of history.

William Manson is in essential agreement with Dodd. He says that the messianic interpretation is not something tacked on later to a non-messianic tradition. There is no stratum of tradition capable of being isolated by literary-historical analysis that reveals a non-messianic basis. He therefore concludes that since the Messiahship was attributed to a Jewish teacher who died a death of shame on the cross, it could only have originated in the life of the Crucified Himself. If a principle of sufficient force to transform the Old Testament and Jewish ideas of the Messiah has thus to be postulated as a condition of Christian history from the beginning, Manson sees no justification for locating it in the mind of the Christian community after Jesus' death. He agrees with the Form Critics that the tradition is a function of the Church's faith and life, but renounces their idea

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that it is only a myth which the Church had woven out of a few uncertain traditions out of the life of Jesus. The tradition of the primitive Church took history, genuine history, up into itself and preserved it.

In the remarkable little book, The Riddle of the New Testament, Hoskyns and Davey deal with this knotty problem. By means of very effectively worded questions they set the issue at stake clearly before the reader. They see that the question which the scholars are trying to answer is this: "does the New Testament ultimately rest upon human spiritual and mystical experience, or does it rest upon a particular individual history which gave a peculiar direction to the knowledge and behaviour of the primitive Christians?"¹ Their analysis of the Gospels reveals a steady unity of direction and the writers are found to be mainly engaged in exposing a significance already contained in the material at hand and they conclude that this unity of direction was set in motion, not by the creative faith of the primitive church, but by the teaching and actions of Jesus of Nazareth.

But it is in Hoskyns' book, The Fourth Gospel, that we have the best treatment of this problem. He exhibits a profundity of understanding not to be found in the work of any other New Testament scholar we have yet read. He is concerned primarily to illuminate what the author of the Fourth

1. P.59.

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Gospel has done, but his conclusions are perfectly relevant to the Synoptics and give invaluable help for any study of the whole of the New Testament.

Hoskyns, in the tradition of the Form Critics, says that the writers of the Gospels are evangelists. They are not recording primarily what the crowd of eye-witnesses saw of the Jesus of history, but what the disciples saw of the glory of the Word of God; what they apprehended, as believers, when Jesus was risen from the dead. They are less witnesses to history than witnesses to that which is beyond history, but which is, nevertheless, the meaning of the "Jesus of history." To demand that these evangelists should narrate nothing but observable history would be demanding of them that they should not be evangelists. They are not describing the outstanding events of a hero's life, even if he be religious hero, but rather attempt to convey to their readers that Jesus was and is the Son of God, and that He was so because God had declared Him so to be. To this point, we think, Hoskyns and Bultmann could walk together. But now comes the parting of the ways. Whereas Bultmann would treat as relatively insignificant the details of the Jesus of history, and would advocate that we turn solely to the glory of the Word of God which was revealed to believers through the resurrection, Hoskyns insists that the visible, historical Jesus is the place in history where it is demanded that men should believe. He says that the Gospels,

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far from evacuating the observable world of any but secondary importance, establishes it as the place where men, living in the flesh, are confronted by the "eschaton." The whole intention of the Gospels is to force their readers back upon the life of Jesus in the flesh and upon His death in the flesh, as the place of understanding. But this seems inconsistent. If the Gospels are witnessing to that which is beyond history how can he say that their intention is to force their readers back to the life and death of Jesus in the flesh? It calls for a more lengthy and systematic explanation.

If we examine Hoskyn's thesis concerning the purpose of the Fourth Gospel we will then understand his position on history and gospel. He says that in this Gospel Spirit and History are inseparably joined. There were some Christians who were becoming unsatisfied with the Jesus of the oral and written tradition, who desired to be rid of his flesh and blood, and move out into the unhampered realm of the Spirit. They believed that it must be a choice between Spirit and History or Spirit and Flesh. If you held to the one then you were separated from the other. But the author of the Fourth Gospel believed otherwise. He agreed that flesh, history, was of no meaning for faith if it be mere observable history, the history which was seen by the Pharisees, Pilate, and many other eye-witnesses, none of whom saw in Him the activity of God. If the faith of the Christian

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turns upon, and is exhausted in, a series of historical episodes, it is a faith or piety from below, and is the same kind as the knowledge of the Pharisees or the Jews. If the flesh of Jesus was exhausted in history and was to be understood as information to be collected together, then the Jews were right, and the claims He made for Himself were only self-made. The author of the Fourth Gospel was determined to rescue the Church from any such misunderstandings. But he did not do this by throwing the Jesus of history to the winds; rather he insisted that the whole tradition concerning the historical Jesus had a meaning peering out of it at every point, a meaning which is beyond history, and which alone makes sense of the history. The purpose of his Gospel was to disclose this underlying meaning. Hoskyns grants that what was done is an offence to us who are so insistent on accurate historicity, but it could be done no other way. The Fourth evangelist was attempting to set forth the non-historical truth that underlies all history and which was the whole meaning and purpose of the Jesus of history. However, he did not invent historical material to set forth non-historical truths, but it is nevertheless true that non-historical truth must be set forth in non-historic form.

At first sight we might think Hoskyns is here saying the same thing as Mr. Bultmann, only in a slightly different way. This non-historic truth sounds much like the "eschatological kernel," of which Bultmann speaks.

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But there is this significant difference. Bultmann says the New Testament is primarily concerned with the risen glorified Christ who meets men in the "now". Hoskyns says the scandal and problem that complicates the whole New Testament, and which forced itself upon John, is the fact that "the history of Jesus has been apprehended by the apostles and by the apostolic church as the essential and unique basis of the preaching and understanding of the Gospel of God."¹ John did not "make up" a history to preach his Gospel; he has weaved together genuine historical material which can also be found in the Synoptics. It is also believed by Hoskyns that John presupposed in his readers a knowledge of the material that we find in the Synoptics. But even the traditions in which the Synoptics stood did not preserve the kind of history that would please the "pure" historian. It not only speaks of the things that any eyes were able to observe, though it might seem to have done only that. It intended that people should come to understand that Jesus was and is the Son of God. But ordinary description of history cannot portray this fact. The description of history in simple terms of cause and effect, and of observable values, cannot do justice to events of which the significance was not limited to their observable fact, or to their observable relation to other observable facts. "In spite of the almost unanimous convention of orthodox modern historians, such events must be described in non-historical language, and their details, selection and arrangement, must be controlled by their theological signi-

1. P.117. Italics mine.

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fificance, unless their meaning as events in history is to be depressed into identity with their observable actuality.¹"

But how does one come to discern the theological significance of the history? How does one come to know that one is confronted in this Person with the "end," that His word involves an ultimate judgment on the world and an ultimate manifestation of the love of God? Hoskyns would begin again by saying that the knowledge of God through belief in the historical Jesus is never itself a knowledge separable from the history through which God confronts men. There is no room here for mysticism, if by mysticism is meant an escape from the particular history; or a symbolizing of history; or an evaluation of history on the basis of personal and individual experience; or a free-moving exercising of religious imagination. This knowledge of God is an immediate apprehension, not of the Father, but of Jesus as an historic phenomenon. The humanity of Jesus is the focus of revelation, yet even so, men do not see God merely in observing his humanity, but only through that perception of it which comes through His Death and which is God given to us through His Resurrection. All knowledge of God, hangs not just on the Life and Death of Jesus but on His Resurrection. Insight into the true meaning of the flesh of Jesus, its meaning for the world and its meaning for us, is given only by the Spirit. By itself the flesh is meaningless and unprofitable - it is the Spirit who giveth life.

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We thus conclude our considerations of history and the gospel as it has been treated by six outstanding contemporary scholars. A more comprehensive thesis would have to include other men, Martin Dibelius, F. C. Grant, Amos Wilder, and John Knox,¹ to name only four, and it would be also necessary to deal with the problem with the profundity which it deserves. But as was asserted at the beginning of this section it is not a question which is to be answered only for scholarly curiosity but most important of all for faith. It is evident that the non-historical factor penetrates our supposed historical material and the historical is woven into what seems to be non-historical. The question is, is this non-historical interpretation superimposed on the history? It is the conviction of the present writer that it is not. It is, rather, the very meaning of the history that has been set forth. The meaning of the life of Jesus is not something which is added by an interpreter, at a later date, to an already existing naked historical narrative, something that can be removed by the critics. The meaning of the history of Jesus precedes and conditions its occurrence. Paul Tillich, in some unpublished lectures, compares the presentation of Jesus in the New Testament with a "picture." This picture is not,

1. Knox's latest work, Criticism and Faith, Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, Nashville, 1952, deals almost wholly with this question and is extremely good.

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however, the product of religious imagination. It is a historical "picture" which means it is not an invention but interpreted reality. The picture of Jesus as the Christ, which is given to us by the New Testament, is nothing else than reality interpreted by faith. It is for this reason that in the New Testament history and gospel are united. We have there only interpreted facts and we cannot get behind that interpreted fact. And Tillich, in a published article, tries to show the mistake of supposing that the picture of the New Being in Jesus as the Christ is the creation of existential thought or experience. "If this were the case, it would be as distorted, tragic and sinful as existence itself, and would not be able to overcome existence. The religious picture of the New Being in Jesus is a result of a new being: it represents the victory over existence which has taken place and thus created¹ the picture."

The fact that we cannot get behind the interpreted Jesus should not make us feel cheated. It is the event of Jesus Christ which brings to us salvation. But the event consists of two things: the fact and the reception of the fact. If you do not have the reception of the fact, you

1. Quoted by A. T. Mollegen in his Essay, Christology and Biblical Criticism in Tillich, found in, The Theology of Paul Tillich, ed. by Kegley and Bretall, MacMillan Co., New York, 1952, P.232.

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have only a very questionable legendary report about a man of the past, with whom we can do what we want, as we can do with every man of the past. It is therefore the "picture" (union of fact and faith) which is of ultimate importance and which bears to mankind God's redemption. To look upon this picture as being an imposing of an alien interpretation upon Jesus is to completely misunderstand. But it is no less a misunderstanding to pretend to agree with the picture and yet consider it unfortunate that we are unable to see more clearly through it to the "fact." History and gospel are in the New Testament made one. What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

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Significant Contemporary Problems (Continued)C. The Nature of the Unity of the New Testament.

Modern critical scholarship has brought to light many problems which were almost unknown before the nineteenth century. Its unlimited capacity to question, examine, and analyze, has taken it into areas which have been almost unexplored, and it has consequently made many significant discoveries. One of these was the fact of the great diversity of the New Testament document. That is not to say that variety of expression and theological content were overlooked before, but it never occurred to the pre-critical scholars that the variety or diversity, and not the unity, might actually be the chief characteristic of the New Testament. Although Liberal scholarship presupposed a certain unity, still it emphasized greatly the differences in the various writings. The New Testament was conceived to contain several different "religions," the religions of Jesus, Paul, and John being the most outstanding. The whole of the New Testament, of course, claims to point to Jesus but in reality, they said, the portions which come after the Synoptics distort the religion and the person of Jesus, manufacturing, in a sense, religions of their own around a mystical Christ, whom they associated with (or at times imposed upon) the figure of Jesus of Nazareth. We are presented, then, with diverse messages in the New Testament.

We are much indebted to Liberal scholarship for this insight, and at first we might think they have said the final word on the matter. There are twenty-seven documents in all, written over a period of not less than two

1. Cf. E. F. Scott, The New Testament Today, MacMillan Co., New York, 1921.

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generations by almost a dozen hands. There are Gospels; there is a history of a type; there are epistles, although that term covers many literary types, from a theological treatise (Romans) to a private letter (Philemon), and includes a rhetorical homily (Hebrews) and an ethical scrap-book (James); then the whole collection is rounded off with a series of apocalyptic visions (Revelations). And if we leave form and consider content, the diversity is more striking. The dominant theme of the Synoptic Gospels seems to be Jesus with His message about the "Kingdom of God;" of the Fourth Gospel, "eternal life;" of Saint Paul, being "in Christ;" of Hebrews, "the Priesthood of Christ;" and so on. Eschatology, mysticism, and ethics are interwoven in the documents. Jesus is called "Son of Man," the "Son of God," the "Second Adam," the "eternal High Priest after the order of Melchizedek," and the "Logos Incarnate." There is no question, then, about whether the critical scholars were right about the variety in the New Testament, and who could blame them for trying to push through all this to find the simple, uninterpreted Jesus? Such a Jesus was not to be found and scholars are still left with the very important task of discovering if there is any unity amidst the diversity.

Very able men have already taken up this task and have proved themselves equal to it. Such scholars as C. H. Dodd, John Knox, F. C. Grant, Oscar Cullmann, and A. M. Hunter, to name only a few, have done very constructive work toward the solution of this particular problem. George

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Ernest Wright, although an Old Testament scholar, has an article on¹ Biblical unity which is very relevant to our consideration of New Testament unity. He maintains that part of our difficulty lies in our conception of where the unity ought to be. This, he points out, was illustrated by our understanding of the word "theology." Theology to us too often means only propositional dogmatics. It is true that the New Testament does not articulate a common dogmatic theology. If we are prepared honestly to recognize the differences between Paul, John, and the Synoptics, then we are faced with a serious dilemma; there is no formulated system of theological thought which is common to the New Testament writers.

But that was not their concern. The authors of the New Testament books were not systematic theologians; they were preachers, and what they wrote was a part of their great proclamation of the good news. The Form Critics were perhaps the first to show that the Gospel writers were preachers, and that their "biographies" were the means by which they preached the message of redemption. But it is C. H. Dodd who has most effectively proved that the early preaching (kerygma) is basic to the New Testament tradition. By the word kerygma Dodd means something very definite. This early apostolic kerygma was a declaration of certain facts, an exposition setting forth Jesus in His life, death, resurrection, and exaltation (all con-

1. Wherein Lies the Unity of the Bible?, Journal of Bible and Religion, Vol. XX, No. 3, July 1952.

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ceived as one great act of God), the claim that this was the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy and that summons to repent and accept the forgiveness of sins in Jesus. Dodd maintains that this kerygma, which can be recovered most easily from Acts and from Paul, informs the whole of the New Testament. With all the diversity of the New Testament writings, they form a unity in their proclamation of one Gospel. As the material is surveyed afresh it has been found that all lines converge upon one centre, this crucial event of history, in which, by the common testimony of all the writers, the eternal God visited and redeemed His people. Although the language and thought-forms of these writers are, at times, very different, still they exhibit one common attitude towards Jesus. He is a man as other men, and yet is mysteriously ranked with God. They all declare: Jesus is Lord!

This does not, however, give the New Testament a "dull and static uniformity." (F. C. Grant.) As the revelation in Christ was a dynamic event, and as the Church which was called into being by that event was a community full of vitality, so was the New Testament a "living" book. Only when we recognize that will we be not only free to accept the rich variety of the New Testament witness, but to welcome it gratefully and joyously. These disparate voices are all bearing witness to an event whose concrete meaning far surpassed the power of any words, categories, or myths fully to express it, but which can be apprehended the more adequately because so many attempts were made and made so differently. R. H. Pfeiffer, in a reply to the article by Wright mentioned above, objects to such "reductions of the Bible to a unity."

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He says he "prefers the infinite variety and detail of concrete reality to the pale uniformity and abstract unity of theological speculation." ¹ It is obvious from this that he assumes the Biblical unity, of which some scholars speak, is necessarily imposed on the Bible by the scholars themselves. We cannot deal with the Bible as a whole right at this point, but this is merely to illustrate what we do not mean when we speak of New Testament unity. We do not create that unity by a process of "synthesizing" the originally diverse elements. The New Testament is a unity. To be sure, the different writers appropriated the meaning of the event, the Gospel, the kerygma, in different ways, and they seized on many different titles and categories to set forth its significance. But they all saw in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the activity of God, the climax of a great plan of salvation which Almighty God had been working out among the Hebrews to reconcile men to Himself. Jesus Christ is, therefore, the Alpha and the Omega, the centre and the content, the inspiration and the truth, the power and the glory of the New Testament writings. He constitutes the unity of the New Testament.

D. The Nature of Biblical Authority.

We are now in a position to deal with the question of Biblical authority. The fact of its authority is unquestioned, for the discipline of Biblical

1. Journal of Bible and Religion, Vol. XX, No. 3, July 1952, P. 201.

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scholarship as a whole by its very existence testifies to it. There is no other document (or series of documents) in the world that has been subject to such tireless and meticulous examination as has the Bible. This in itself gives us legitimate right to say that the Bible has some sort of significance and authority. But the nature of that authority is the important question, and every theologian, churchman, and Biblical scholar throughout Christendom (at least any one of them worth his salt) is wrestling with it continually. The problem stands at the centre of almost any significant discussion or conflict within the contemporary Christian Church. The war between the two Anglican factions is to a greater extent all the time centring on the question of where authority must finally rest. The Protestant-Roman battle has ever been waged over the seat of authority. The place of the Bible in the Holy Catholic Church is the chief concern of those who share in the Ecumenical Movement. We can turn nowhere in the Church without meeting this question, and surely an examination of the concerns and the issues of modern New Testament study would be incomplete without mention of it.

We have just pointed out that the very existence of the Biblical disciplines is an indication that the Bible possesses some authority. The Liberal scholars would be the first to agree with this, for to them the Bible was definitely authoritative. However, it is our contention that Liberal scholarship, by its very presuppositions, undermined Biblical

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authority. As far as they were concerned, God did not intervene in the natural world. It is true that they were convinced that the course of nature and history served higher ends, but this was because the Divine Purpose was implanted in the general laws of the Historic Process. There could be no historic deed or occurrence in which men were actually confronted by the end, the eschaton, and consequently all eschatological passages were weeded out of the Biblical corpus as being the result of primitive imagination only. To say that a particular people received a special revelation of God through eschatological deeds was a "scandal" to the Liberals. The nature of God could be seen by all by discerning His nature and activity through the total process of nature and history. Thus Bousset could speak of a "universal revelation."¹ Although Bousset and others could and did retain the word "revelation" it had come to mean something very different from the Biblical use of that word. T. W. Manson, in a most remarkable paragraph in his essay "The Failure of Liberalism to Interpret the Bible as the Word of God," indicates how Liberalism had twisted the meaning of revelation. "What we are left with in religion is the views held by all the more or less gifted people who have reflected on the divine nature and on human duty and destiny. And when Bousset declares that 'the revelation vouchsafed to the prophets which they announced was an absolute, decisive conviction concerning the meaning and

1. What is Religion, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1907, P. 289f.

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nature of life, its deepest foundations, its highest aims,' he is merely misusing the word 'revelation.' For conviction is one thing and revelation another. The prophet spoke with absolute conviction because the Word of God had come to him. But their conviction was not the Word. It was the result of revelation, not revelation itself; and every prophet knew the difference between 'Thus saith the Lord' and 'I am absolutely convinced.'¹

Liberalism was predisposed against a God who intervenes in the world and as a result came to look to the Bible not as a witness to revelation but rather as the record of the successive stages by which the Hebrew people gradually evolved religiously. The Bible then ceases to be truly authoritative. It stands with the religious literature of the world, another book reflecting the faith and conviction of a religious people. A valiant attempt was made to insist that in the matter of religious insight this particular group was definitely more "inspired" than others, but actually the claim of the uniqueness of the Biblical revelation was given up. We might treat the Bible with a certain authority, and hold it as our norm, but if God has not in fact spoken through prophetic oracles or the words of Jesus and His disciples, then it has no more intrinsic authority than the Koran or Plato's Republic.

Modern New Testament study, which began actually with Schweitzer,

1. The Interpretation of the Bible, ed. by C. W. Dugmore, P. 95.

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has been forced to acknowledge that if we discard the so-called "eschatological sections" then we must throw out the whole of the New Testament. Schweitzer, in his book, The Quest of the Historical Jesus, destroyed the Liberal idea that the eschatological features were merely unimportant additions. He affirmed, and it still holds true, that the "eschatological passages" could not be forced out on the margin of the New Testament but formed an integral and constituent part of the central message of Jesus and the apostle Paul, and so too of the whole primitive Church. This had disastrous consequences from the point of view of the Liberal's untheological Jesus. Because of a consistent undervaluing of the eschatological element, the Liberals were in general hostile to theology and the tendency was to reduce the theology of the New Testament writings to as low proportions as possible. Our Lord, at any rate, must be made quite simple and untheological; such theology as is found must have been tacked on later by inferior spirits. It was a great comfort that Mark, who had been proved to be the earliest Gospel, was also, so it was thought, the least theological. But Schweitzer's book made this idea untenable. And more recent scholarship, mainly through the work of the Form Critics has discovered that the New Testament scriptures arose out of the apostolic preaching, which preaching is uniformly Christological in content. No strand of the tradition can be isolated of which this is not true. If this is the case, then the New Testament from beginning to end is a theological book; that is, it is

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Christological, which means it is speaking of the historical activity of God, nay, even more, of the very Incarnation of God Himself.

The New Testament witnesses to the finality of God's revelation in Christ, the finality of God's act in Christ. There are to be no later Christs; He is not one in a succession of divine interventions, but the only Son. The Son through Whom God has finally spoken is the unique and only Son, through Whom He made the worlds, through Whom He sustains them, and Whom He has appointed to be the "Heir of all things." The uniqueness and the finality of the eschatological revelation in Christ is stated clearly and emphatically throughout the New Testament, which means the revelation, and consequently the decisive witness of the revelation, possess a unique and final authority.¹

But is this Christology of the New Testament grounded in history? In the preceding section this was argued to be the case. The New Testament interpretation of the Jesus of history is not one which is imposed on Him but rather grows right out of the history. The Church did not place upon Jesus a meaning which was not inherent in His Person; the meaning of Jesus, finally testified by the Resurrection through the Holy Spirit, created the Church. Jesus was not forced into a Christological form by His early

1. Cf. F. C. Grant's treatment of this in his Introduction to New Testament Thought, P. 206.

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followers; the fact that He was the Christ called forth from them the response whereby He made them into the body of which He was Lord. The controlling factor here is not the religious imagination of the followers of Jesus; the event of revelation, the Word of God, Jesus Christ, is determinative. God's revelatory deed had captured the mind, heart, will, and imagination of the apostles and had sent them out to proclaim the Gospel of redemption. As Sir Edwyn Hoskyns wrote, "The Gospel is, as the earlier evangelists had declared, the Word of God. And Jesus is Himself the Gospel, is the Word of God. The Fourth Evangelist does not personify the Word of God. The Word had created him and not he the Word; and the Word of God had confronted the apostles in the person of Jesus, the Son of God. The Word of God, petrified on Mount Sinai, written on two tablets of stone, was incarnate in Jesus Christ, The Evangelist saw that this, with its negative and positive implications, was the very heart of the faith of the apostles. In the course of his Gospel, the Evangelist draws out what is involved in Jesus as the Word of God. He is the Light, the Life, the Truth, the Bread of Heaven, the Way, the Door, the Good Shepherd, and the Resurrection. There are in the Fourth Gospel no ragged independent fragments, whirling about in their own right and of their own initiative. The figure of Jesus as the embodiment of the glory of the Word of God controls the whole matter of the Christian religion."

1. The Fourth Gospel ed. by F. N. Davey, P. 163.

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It is thus the Word of God that controls the testimony of the New Testament and it is for this reason that the Bible is authoritative. It is and can be truly authoritative only because it shares in the authority of God. The permanent and ultimate authority under which man's life is lived, which gives to man's life meaning and purpose, is never anything other than the authority of God. But the authority of God is not that of God in the abstract, but that of God as clothed in His Gospel. God has made Himself known in that series of events which has its climax and completion in Jesus Christ as set forth and interpreted in the Bible. The Bible is the indispensable witness to those events; in fact it is in a real sense a part of the events. The Bible is not only a document of historical revelation, but is itself the product of divine revelation, and this makes it also a revelation to us. "The Bible is the only report and record of revelation of God in the history of the Hebrew race and in Jesus Christ But revelation itself has an authority that is absolute, otherwise it would cease to be revelation..... The Bible as the record of revelation possesses the same authority as revelation insofar as that revelation is concerned." God speaks to us His Word in Christ through the prophets and apostles; through their word He speaks to us His Word of judgment and mercy. The Bible is therefore our authority not because it is their word,

1: Cf. V. E. Devadutt's contribution in Biblical Authority for Today ed. by Richardson and Schweitzer, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1950, P. 70.

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but because God Himself speaks to us through their word.

E. The Need for a Theological Interpretation of the Bible.

The problem of Biblical interpretation has always been and will always be the chief concern of the Church. But the problem is raised at the present time in a rather unique way. Until the nineteenth century the Bible was universally interpreted "theologically" without any hesitation or any feeling of doing injustice to the Book. With the coming of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, some men objected to such a procedure on the grounds that the Bible was not being allowed to speak its message freely. These men accused their contemporaries of going to the Scriptures with a completely formulated dogmatic system and of reading this system into the Biblical message. They advocated as an alternative method one which would free the Bible from its dogmatic fetters and enable it to speak what the original writers meant it to say. They advocated that scholars go to the Bible and judge it completely on its own merits and to examine it as they would any other literary document, by means of the strict, scientific, literary-historical method. This method included the establishment of the true text by means of textual criticism; the determination of the meaning of the words and their relationship to each other; the gaining of insight into the Biblical world of thought; the investigation of literary forms; the investigation of circumstances surrounding the creation

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of certain passages; the determination of the experience and personality of the writer. ¹ If all these principles were carried out objectively to the best of the ability of the interpreter, then the true meaning of the text would be evident. The Liberal scholars were concerned that the Bible be allowed to speak for itself, free from the slavery to theological systems, and they felt this would be the case if a critic remained faithful to the literary-historical message.

But if what has been said in the previous sections is true, then the principles as outlined above do not go far enough. They are quite valid as far as they go, and Christians must see that they do not stray from them, but if they go no further then they do injustice to the Book itself. The Biblical revelation is historical, and nothing can liberate us from the task of coming to terms with the concreteness and uniqueness of historical events. But the history of the Bible has a supra-historical, a theological, dimension which demands from the critic more than a straight historical interpretation. The history of the Bible is understood from its own characteristic point of view and it is impossible for the interpreter to separate the historic events from their theological meaning and interpretation. Therefore to do justice to what the Bible is trying to say, we must interpret as historian and as theologian.

1. Cf. James Muilenburg, "The Interpretation of the Bible," in Biblical Authority for Today, pp. 207-213.

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Until very recently Biblical scholars have been loath to interpret as theologians. It is true that they have not all avoided the theology of the Bible, but they have failed to make the distinctive Christian theological interpretation which is so necessary. Cunliffe-Jones illustrates this clearly when he says, "It is a properly theological question to ask: 'What did God say through Amos to the people of his own time?' but such a question is not the crucial theological question with reference to Amos. The crucial theological question is rather: 'What did God say through Amos as a witness to the Christian faith?' This latter question cannot be answered by neglect of the former question: but it is a different one, and one which brings out the vital difference between historical and theological study, in spite of the fact that their close relationship is so imperatively demanded." ¹ The New Testament asserts that in the fullness of time God came, that His activity with the Hebrews, to which the Old Testament witnesses, was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The end is not only yet to come but it has also come in Jesus, and Christians live in the power of a completed Gospel. They live by faith in Christ Jesus risen and glorified and it is impossible for them to return behind Pentecost to think what they might have thought if the Cross and Resurrection had never happened. It is, then, the task and the privilege of the Christian to interpret the Old Testament, as well as the New, in terms of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen again. If in truth God was

1. The Authority of the Biblical Revelation, Pilgrim Press, Boston, 1948, P.40.

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working with Israel, and if He was Incarnated in Jesus Christ, then Christ is the determining principle of the whole Bible. It is true that the Old Testament writers knew nothing of the historic Person, Jesus of Nazareth, but the ultimate meaning of what they wrote only comes to light when seen in the light of Christ of God. A genuine "Christian" theological interpretation of the Bible is therefore a positive necessity and such an interpretation must be carried on, not merely alongside of, but in conjunction with, a genuine, honest, historical interpretation.

Particular objection to the marriage of the historical and theological interpretations has been made by two modern Biblical scholars, R. H. Pfeiffer and the late Hans Windisch. Pfeiffer insists that "Facts and faith, history and revelation, historical research and historical speculation,"¹ be kept separate and distinct for their mutual benefit.² It is obvious that Pfeiffer does not see or understand the organic relation between faith and fact, revelation and history. To him revelation is merely some conviction the Hebrews came to have about their history. The Biblical view that God had

1. Cf. Pfeiffer's Presidential Address to the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis, in J.B.L., Vol. LXX, Part 1, March 1951; and Windisch's book, The Meaning of the Sermon on the Mount, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1951.

2. J.B.L., March 1951, P.14.

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taken hold of their history and was using it for His own purposes is subtly dismissed as being only a matter of "personal faith." Filson is right when he says, "Does not this imply that the New Testament explanation of Christian origin is not true, or at least that it is so unimportant or so disconnected from the actual operation of life that the movement can be studied, understood, and explained as a humanistic phenomenon? To raise this point is not to belittle historical study which is indispensable in dealing with a faith which has roots in history. The purpose is rather to point out that to exclude the New Testament view from the study of (Christian) origins not only results in a decidedly incomplete view but must distort the significance of the factors which are taken into account."¹

Windisch also advocates a strict separation of historical and theological exegesis. His recognition of the necessity of the latter is quite apparent but his understanding of its meaning is faulty. He defines the task of theological exegesis as being to "relate the religious and theological contents of the Bible, as it has been determined by historical exegesis, to the individual in his immediate situation, and to do this in such a way that it comes home to him as God's message directed to his particular need."²

1. The Central Problem Concerning Christian Origins, in The Study of the Bible Today and Tomorrow, ed. by H. R. Willoughby, P. 343.

2. Windisch, op. cit., P. 154.

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We might easily gather from this that the function of the theological exegete is that of a translator only, translating the message discovered already by the historian into terms understandable to the modern situation. But in another place he makes it clear that the theologian illuminates the great ideas of the Bible from a standpoint inaccessible to historical science per se.¹ This standpoint, according to Windisch, is a "religious" one; the theological interpreter stands in the "community of faith." We cannot help but feel, however, that Windisch, when he says the community of faith means rather a community of faith. Although he does not say it outright, he implies that the one who interprets from a theological standpoint necessarily does so from a certain creedal position. This is a natural assumption for a Continental, but not necessarily a proper one. It must be granted, as Windisch says many times, that there is a great danger of theological interpretation being only that; but the danger must be risked. The Bible will never speak to us what it is, by its very nature, supposed to speak, unless it is interpreted theologically.

Theological interpretation can be done only by one who lives by faith in the Living Lord of the Bible. As the men of the Bible only came to see the hand of God in their history as God Himself revealed it to them by His Spirit, so will we come to understand the meaning of what they wrote only as

1. Ibid, P. 159.

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God shall open its meaning to us. This sort of reasoning seems to go in a circle but that does not mean it is necessarily false. It is true that the theological exegete (which means every Christian) is dependent upon the work of the historian who can fulfil the principles outlined above,¹ but the task of piercing into the true theological meaning must be in the hands of one who interprets as believer. It is not to say that our Biblical scholars have not been believers, but they have to this point generally feared to interpret as such. The great need is for the great historical scholars to begin to open up the meaning of the Bible by interpreting it in terms of a revelation and redemption completed. The task of such interpretation should not be placed only on the shoulders of the systematic theologian, but should be carried as well by the men who have done so much thus far in historical studies only. When this is done, and only when this is done, will the function of the Biblical scholar be realized.

1. See pages 77 and 78.

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POSTSCRIPT

This inquiry was undertaken out of the conviction that the work of the Biblical critics is of great significance for the life of the Church, because the life of the Church is a continuous encounter with the message of the Bible and the realities of the world to which it proclaims that message. As the inquiry proceeded, this conviction of the significance of the work of the critics deepened. The painstaking labours of many who have given themselves unflinchingly to their task of establishing and expounding the text of the Bible has not had the result of drawing to themselves the acclaim of the world. In many cases their work has not been of a startling nature. But it has all been necessary in order to free the Biblical message from superstition and false interpretations that it might speak its word in power. The wider Church owes the critics an unpayable debt; it can never live without them. Theirs is a task, though humble, than which there is no greater: to protect and to release the message of the saving power of God, of which the Bible is both record and witness.

As we have seen in the course of this essay, Biblical criticism has been engaged in many different tasks and its work is never done. But of all the periods in which it has done its work perhaps it is not too much to claim that the one in which we are placed is the most exciting. This is so because a distinguishing characteristic of theological scholarship in this present time is the interpenetration of the different disciplines. The

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student has the feeling as he works in the various disciplines that he is dealing with one subject, and this is as it should be. For the power of God made manifest in Christ is the one ground of our faith, our life, and our hope; and to mediate in all ways open to us this saving power to a needy world is our one task.

There is still another reason why Biblical scholarship in our time possesses both excitement and promise. Whatever may be the status of the Ecumenical Movement at the present time it has become clear that if the churches are to make their witness effective before the world they can do so only out of the power of God made manifest in Jesus the Christ. Moreover, it is only in the power of that reality that the churches can find their unity. In bringing the churches to their imperfect awareness of this fact the Biblical scholars have played, and will continue to play, a most significant part. The fact that it rarely occurs to us to ask to what denomination a particular Biblical scholar belongs is evidence, both of the integrity with which they have performed their labors and the great contribution which they are able, by virtue of their integrity and their subject, to make to the Ecumenical task.

The task of Biblical criticism has been performed in the Church and for the Church. Only as the Church appropriates their labors will she be enabled freely to encounter the message of the Bible and meaningfully to

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articulate that message to the present day. Let us hope that this may take place, for only as it does will we Protestants experience again both the strength and the freedom of being "The People of the Book."

FINIS

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