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FORM-CRITICISM:
A CRITIQUE AND AN EVALUATION

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of New Testament Exegesis
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by
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INTRODUCTION

Eight years ago the present writer was introduced to the fascinating, absorbing, and oftentimes dangerously bewitching study of form-criticism. At that time he reviewed Dr. Vincent Taylor's book, The Formation of the Gospel Tradition. What a revelation it proved to be with respect to the doctrine of inspiration of Scripture as he had learned to know it from the Bible itself! While Dr. Taylor's views were in the main orthodox, the views of the form-critics, whose theories he discussed, were novel, to say the least. More often, they were shocking.

In the first place, in order to obtain an appreciation of what the form-critics attempt and to get a glimmer of understanding as to the methods by which they arrive at their conclusions, we must bear in mind their idea that the Bible (particularly the Gospels, which bear the brunt of the form-critics' attack) is purely the work of human hands. Second, we must endure the agony of witnessing the form-critics wreak textual mayhem on what to all true believers is still the verbally inspired Word of God. As such, research into the form-critical method is frequently painful and tedious: painful to heart and tedious to mind.

Strangely enough, after the paper was completed, the writer found himself concurring with Dr. Taylor that form-

criticism might have its merits, if properly reined and applied. Determined at the time to delve into the subject more deeply, he made it his choice of topic for a thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Divinity degree. The ambitious heading, "Form-Criticism: A Critique And An Evaluation", was chosen as title for the work.

The present thesis cannot do full justice to that comprehensive title for the simple reason that the field of form-criticism is far too broad and complex for the writer to treat it exhaustively in one paper. This thesis will attempt in part to delineate for the reader what form-criticism is and how it works.

This is the plan of presentation. First, you will read what form-criticism is. The mass of literature expounding and analyzing the form-critical method is indeed imposing. One could spend months exhausting the material (and himself) on the subject. It was the writer's privilege to read only a few of the major works in this field. Of these the work already referred to, Dr. Taylor's The Formation of the Gospel Tradition, best describes and analyzes the form-critical school of thought. The salient points of his work have formed the present writer's concept of form-criticism. Dr. Taylor's views are used to answer in part the question, "What is form-criticism?"

The second part of this thesis will endeavor to demonstrate the workings of form-criticism. For that purpose we

shall employ chiefly one work by Dr. Martin Dibelius of the University of Heidelberg, Germany. Since Dr. Dibelius pioneered the method, and since the consensus of opinion is that he is by far the mildest of the form-critics, it is entirely fitting that we should examine the work selected. It is his book The Message of Jesus Christ (translated by Frederick C. Grant, an outstanding American scholar in this field), which attempts to restore "the pristine gospel tradition" as Dibelius thinks it existed before the evangelists allegedly handled it to suit their own ends.

Finally, an evaluation of form-criticism, simple and prosaic as it may be, will complete the thesis.

CHAPTER I

WHAT IS FORM-CRITICISM ?

Dr. William Arndt's notes on the course New Testament Introduction introduce the subject.

- A. Since about 1920 there has grown up in Germany the so-called Formgeschichtliche Schule. It is often referred to as form-criticism.
- B. The advocates of this theory try to go back beyond our Gospels and describe the situation before the Gospels were written. They think that many small documents were in circulation which can be classified according to their form.
- C. Such forms are:
 - 1. Miracle stories
 - 2. Pronouncement stories, paradigms
 - 3. Aphorisms
 - 4. Narratives (Tales)
 - 5. Legends
 - 6. Controversies
 - 7. Apocalyptic utterances
- D. By itself this theory would appear to be innocuous speculation except for its assumption of tales and legends.
- E. Its prominent representatives reject the divine character of the Scriptures.¹

There we have a concise summary of form-criticism, and in point E. the leading clue as to what our own judgment of form-criticism must be.

Bringing the matter up to date, form-criticism is by no means confined any longer merely to the German philosopher-

¹Wm. F. Arndt, mimeographed notes for the course New Testament Introduction (St. Louis: Concordia Mimeograph Company, c.1943), p. 34 f.

theologians who pioneered it. It has spread to England, France, and other European countries. Far more significant, it has spread to America, where its method seems to find enthusiastic approval and support among the critical elite. In the late 1930s and early 1940s the theological journals printed in America were liberally sprinkled with articles on the subject and at least twenty books on form-criticism are extant in the English language.

Point B. of the notes quoted needs no further explanation. It is the kernel hypothesis of the entire theory of form-criticism. With reference to Point C. our study will bring to light that the seven simple "forms" listed by Dr. Arndt have greatly multiplied themselves, to the confusion of form-critics and form "critics" alike. Point D. apparently takes the terms "tales" and "legends" as historical judgments. This conclusion is correct, practically speaking, but it is not the sense of the terms as they are first used by Dibelius and others of his school.

Who started all this "innocuous speculation" and why? While many others have joined themselves to its cause, the chief "credit" for the development of the theory must go to Dr. Martin Dibelius, originator of form-criticism, and to Prof. Rudolph Bultmann (University of Marburg, Germany), outspoken protagonist thereof. K.L. Schmidt provided a valuable assist to these two by previously "proving" that the Synoptic framework is purely an artificial construction. Schmidt's

Die Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu tells one all about it.

Apparently these higher critics, intrigued by the historical problem the Gospels pose, felt that their superior powers of ratiocination would enable them to reconstruct accurately and authoritatively that period of history in the early Christian church which formed the gospel tradition from which the Evangelists allegedly edited and compiled their Gospels. It is commonly referred to as the period of "the oral gospel" in the early Christian church.

The exponents of form-criticism apparently employ the inductive method of logic in trying to support their claims. They work from their established conclusions back into the realm of hypothetical facts. Therefore, no matter how authoritatively they speak, the entire procedure is arbitrary, has an Achilles' heel in its reluctantly admitted subjectivity, and, after much profound effort still leaves us at the threshold of the historical problem it set out to fathom.

However, because the theory of form-criticism pretends to graph the period of "the oral gospel tradition" for us, we are forced to examine its contentions.

Form-criticism analyzes the Gospels in order to discover and identify the particular form in which the tradition is found. In doing this, it shows that the Gospels (and the tradition) consist of a number of little paragraph sections which in their essential nature are separate and independent. Form-criticism shows that these ultimate structural units assumed their particular 'forms' as they were used in preaching.²

²D.W. Riddle, "The Influence of Environment on the Growing Gospel Tradition", Journal of Religion, XXI (1941), 135.

Form-criticism is not merely a history of form but a history of tradition. ... It should be clearly recognized as a sociological as well as a literary method.³

These two little dicta of form-criticism well set forth its chief tenets. The implication is plain. Those who believe that the entire Bible is the verbally inspired Word of God delude themselves. The form-critics bend every effort of reason to persuade others to embrace their "enlightened" view, to wit, our knowledge of Jesus as we gain it from the Gospel accounts is a product of redaction and compilation. That selective process (on the part of the evangelists, of course) is again a product of what the form-critics refer to as the "Sitz-im-Leben". Briefly summed up, it means this: what the Gospel writers selected and compiled was influenced by the needs of the primitive Christian community. Hence, the sociological import of the form-critical theory.

Since the Sitz-im-Leben hypothesis looms so large in the form-critical method, indeed being the basis on which the entire framework of Dibelius' theory is built, it behooves us to give it some consideration.

This Sitz-im-Leben is not a single historical occurrence, but a typical, permanent sociological condition in the life of the community. Dibelius rationalizes it to this effect: The early Christian community, influenced by Jesus' preaching of the coming of the Kingdom of God, stirred by the call "Repent ye! for the Kingdom of God is at hand!" believed that the

³Loc. cit.

Kingdom of God (a future state or condition, as the form-critics visualize it) would manifest itself in their day to them. Spurred by this glorious hope, stimulated by the urgent need to iterate the call to repentance to others simultaneously with the announcement of the Kingdom's near approach, these early Christians went out to preach that message. Missionary purpose was the cause of the rise of "the gospel tradition"; preaching was the means whereby the message was given "form".

That, briefly, is the Sitz-im-Leben (Situation-in-Life) hypothesis as propounded by Dibelius. It is the life situation out of which the materials of the gospel tradition spring. We are asked to believe that the situation in life in the early Christian community as described above conditioned the preaching of those who set out to missionize the unbelieving. Afterwards, Dibelius adduces the presence of Story-tellers and Teachers, who assisted the Preachers in the promulgation and propagation of the message. These men of course "shaped" the gospel tradition to the "form" best suited to their task. Hence the development of the various "forms" which the form-critics have discerned in the Gospels. The Gospels contain a crystallization of the most edifying anecdotes of the oral gospel tradition in their various forms, plus certain "evangelistic interpretative additions" to give the content smoothness.

It might be interesting to note with respect to the Sitz-im-Leben hypothesis that Bultmann (an exceedingly harsh and skeptic form-critic) also accepts Dibelius' fundamental theorem.

However, while Dibelius predicates the existence of an early Christian community and then seeks in the Gospels for "forms" that correspond to its needs, Bultmann prefers to conclude from the literary species (forms) discovered in the text of the Gospels what phases of community life created them. A Roman Catholic scholar in comparing the two viewpoints states that they are perfectly legitimate, and the result is a methodological circle, which, however, tends to a neglect for either form or Sitz-im-Leben. This scholar further points out that in practice Dibelius and Bultmann oftentimes switch their viewpoints. Dibelius frequently seeks to prove from the forms he has elected that type or phase of community life which created them; Bultmann often works from the principle of the established Christian community and then seeks in the Gospels for "forms" to correspond to the Sitz-im-Leben.

We might also point out, as the Roman Catholic scholar referred to has done, that the existence of the early Christian community, which is so useful to the form-critical method, is not definitely proved by its exponents but only assumed. Therefore we see at once that aside from its tacit error in subtly negating the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of Scripture, the form-critical method advances its claims from an exceedingly shaky foundation.

However, we digress. Let us continue with Dibelius' assumption (generally accepted in the form-critical school) that the early Christian community, eager for the imminent approach of the Kingdom of God, anxious to propagate the message which

Jesus preached concerning the Kingdom of God, first told that message by means of preaching and later, by a process of development - also influenced by rabbinic and Hellenistic tradition -, created the diverse "forms" which are to be found in the Gospels.

The theory is complex, and to this writer at least, confusing. Much space and the highest flights of philosophic fancy are spent in the attempt to trace accurately the development of the gospel tradition from its initial status as a group of many, isolated fragments (as the form-critics suppose) to the point where the material was refined, joined, and compiled. Attempts are made to define the locale from which each Gospel writer in turn drew upon his source of information. We hear of Judaistic Christian communities, Gentile Christian communities; reference is made to the tradition which Paul received (1 Corinthians 15:3 ff.)--from whom did he receive it and how did they obtain it? One of the salient arguments of form-criticism is sounded repeatedly, namely, that the gospel tradition was influenced by Jewish rabbinic literature and "form" and also by Hellenistic literature and "form". The argument from analogy is indeed imposing, but the differences among the three traditions, the gospel tradition, the rabbinic tradition, and the Hellenistic tradition, are at times so glaring, the discrepancies so great in purportedly analogous accounts, that the argument from analogy cannot be accepted as valid proof for the contention that the growing gospel tradition was influenced in its development by the other two.

This judgment is conclusively proved by Laurence McGinley, S.J., in his book Form-Criticism of the Synoptic Healing Narratives. On pages 145-149 of this book McGinley presents a detailed survey of the three traditions named. He proves that while in the main there are a great many similarities among the three, the analogy is by no means complete and conclusive. Each tradition is analyzed according to content, style, exposition, description of the healing, and finally the conclusion of the healing narrative (also called "healing miracle story"). Close study of McGinley's schematic outline reveals a gradual deterioration in "form" from the incomparable synoptic healing accounts through the credible narratives of rabbinic tradition to the credulous and ofttimes mythological treatment of the Hellenistic healing tradition. Therefore it can clearly be seen by any unprejudiced eye that the analogy from rabbinic and Hellenistic tradition cannot be forced. Another premise of form-criticism is thereby for all practical purposes voided.

Be that as it may, we must proceed to the next point of the form-critical theory, i.e., how did the Gospel accounts come at last to be written? The answer is simple, according to Dibelius. When the remnants of the older generation of the early Christian community perceived that the Kingdom of God apparently would not make its appearance to them, they felt the need of setting down the tradition in writing to safeguard the message for future generations. The various traditions were then set down (by nameless individuals, of course, for those traditions were products of community life and

needs, and as such, anonymous). One such anonymous tradition is termed "Q". "Q" is said by source- and form-critics alike to be the written form of the gospel tradition from which the Gospel writers Matthew and Luke allegedly drew much of their material.

From these units of tradition, fully shaped, we are told that all the Gospel writers drew their material, selecting here and there, afterwards editing their selections to form either a "chronological" or a "topical" account of the ministry of Jesus and the message he preached.

That, in essence, is the philosophy of form-criticism.

Documenting the form-critical theory of the emergence of the Gospels, here is a detailed summary of that theory as it is found in Chapter VIII of Vincent Taylor's book The Formation of the Gospel Tradition.

The emergence of the Gospels is traced through three periods of development, 30-50 A.D., 50-65 A.D., and 65-100 A.D. . Taylor hastens to add that his chapter title, "The Emergence of the Gospels", is concerned with the vital conditions out of which the Gospels came into being, rather than with the question of authorship, dates, and sources, though these latter considerations are not entirely ignored.

In the first period (30-50 A.D.) form-critics are of the opinion that the Christians preserved cycles of collected reminiscences associated with the various centers of the ministry of Jesus. This kind of recollection is the explanation of the Passion narratives and of those short connected cycles of Markan tradition dealing with Capernaum. Practical interests were uppermost, and thus it was that within about a decade the gospel tradition came to be mainly a collection of isolated sayings, stories, and sayings-groups. These, incidentally, were useful "anecdotes" for the early Christian preachers.

Moreover, the first Passion Stories were shaped by the earliest preaching and by repetition during the meetings of the communities to break bread. The principal agents who shaped the tradition were eyewitnesses and others who had knowledge of the original facts. Constant repetition gave relative fixity to the story, yet the material was flexible. Early

Christian leaders are mentioned as roving about from city to city, carrying details of their own community story to another community which promptly incorporated some of the new material presented into their own account of the tradition.

Purporting to go behind the scene to get at the thoughts and needs of the people of that era, form-criticism proposes the theory that the first Christians were a reflective people, thinking their way out of a situation that forced concentrated mental effort. We are told that the early Christians were by no means harassed or perplexed, for they had an answer to every one of their problems in the authoritative words of Jesus. Besides pronouncement stories, primitive sayings-groups were repeated and taught in the first Christian assemblies for the purpose of instruction. Free use was also made of isolated sayings. Furthermore, Jesus' deeds of compassion and victorious conflict with the powers of darkness were eagerly recounted by means of the healing-accounts and the stories of exorcism. Again, great interest was shown in the narratives which told of decisive moments in the life of Jesus and in incidents which pictured His habitual intercourse with men and which reflected ideas precious to the community. Other stories loved and accepted were those which revealed His attitude toward sinners, the nature of His message, and His dealings with individual men and women. In view of all this interest in fragmentary phases of tradition pertinent to the life of Jesus, form-criticism deduces that during the whole first period (30-50 A.D.) there was no demand for a connected

record.

The second period (50-65 A.D.) form-critics characterize as being concerned with the attempt to gather the scattered elements of the tradition into groups. Narrative tradition is in the main disregarded. The sayings of Jesus take the chief interest. They are arranged in topical rather than chronological succession for purposes of Christian instruction and defense. In this endeavor attention was naturally directed to the pronouncement stories. In isolation these stories had proved to be valuable; might they not be still more effective in combination? The form-critic Albertz has made an interesting study of Mark 2:1 to Mark 3:6, endeavoring to demonstrate the connection of the pronouncement stories into groups. The section consists of five pronouncement stories loosely joined together. Albertz points out that in these five stories there is a gradual mounting of opposition between Jesus and the Pharisees which reaches its climax in Mark 3:6.

In the first story, that of The Paralytic, opposition to Jesus is latent. In the second, an objection is voiced against Jesus: "He eateth with publicans and sinners." In the third, Jesus is questioned about His disciples' failure to fast as John's disciples had done. The fourth story suggests Jesus' responsibility for this breach of the Law. The final story of the group shows that Jesus' every move is watched with hostile intent. The final words of the story are, "And the Pharisees went out...and took counsel...how they might destroy him." The cycle is complete. Albertz now states that the section

(Mark 2:1 to 3:6) obviously has been carefully and deliberately compiled by an author earlier than Mark who wished to illustrate the way in which the breach between Jesus and the political leaders was effected. Mark, then, is a composition which gathered into itself earlier attempts to serve religious and apologetic needs, reshaping the material and supplying temporal and local connecting links so that the record became a literary whole.

Incidentally, the "development" of the document "Q" is traced at length in the same manner applied to the "evolution" of the gospel tradition.

The final period of Gospel compilation (65-100 A.D.) is regarded as proceeding without intermission from the second, carrying forward on a much larger scale the work of those who first grouped the pronouncement stories and expanded "Q". The special impulse to this task of Gospel compilation was given by the rapid expansion of the Gentile mission, the lapse of time, and the increased need for Christian instruction and defense.

Luke is mentioned as being the first of the Gospel writers to begin this larger undertaking, expanding "Q" with the addition of the Passion Story and local narrative- and discourse-tradition of Caesarea. The result: Proto-Luke, never published. Finally, after copious additions of extracts from Mark (the first completed Gospel, form-critics say), Luke's work, incorporating his own "superb idyll" of the Nativity, was completed, probably in the early eighties, form-critics

think.

Mark's Gospel is regarded as developing from the tradition he knew and from the special advantages he enjoyed in being a native of Jerusalem and in being Peter's literary interpreter. (Not all form-critics hold the latter view.) As a native of Jerusalem, Mark knew the Palestinian tradition; as a resident of Rome, he had access to the local discourse tradition of the Roman church and to the valuable material supplied by his bishop there, Peter.

Matthew is pictured as being responsive to the historical interests which motivated Luke and therefore he has allegedly re-edited and expanded Mark. Otherwise Matthew is not critically valuable, say the form-critics.

John represents the gospel tradition at the peak of its development, according to the more liberal form-critics. Some, like Bultmann, absolutely veto this view and go to the other extreme, completely negating the record of John's Gospel for the reason that since it was written near the close of the first century A.D. it is too far removed from the actual historical occurrences it speaks of for the form-critics to discern in it the pristine tradition from which John is supposed to have drawn his material. The majority of the form-critics, however, hold with Dr. Taylor that "John gave us the tradition in the form it came to assume in his mind after many years of thought and experience."⁴

⁴Vincent Taylor, The Formation of the Gospel Tradition (2nd ed.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. 188.

Again, Taylor in summing the opinion of the liberal form-critics with respect to the Gospel of John states:

It is the work of the Evangelist, but it is also the tradition of Ephesus, the form of the Gospel story which met its needs, answered its questions, and informed its Christianity.⁵

Summing up the form-critical theory of the emergence of the Gospels, Taylor iterates the form-critical conclusion:

We see Jesus better, for we behold him not only in the final form which the traditions assume in the Gospels, but also in the lives, thoughts,⁶ and desires of men throughout the formative period.

It is hoped that this rather lengthy documentation of the view propounded on page nine of this thesis has not proved too tedious for the reader to discern that all the elements of the development of the gospel tradition as form-criticism envisions it are touched upon therein.

Now that the basic theory of form-criticism has been outlined, we shall examine the method it seeks to apply to the Gospels, particularly to the synoptic Gospels.

⁵Loc. cit.

⁶Ibid., p. 189.

CHAPTER II

HOW DOES FORM-CRITICISM WORK ?

The method form-criticism seeks to apply to the synoptic Gospels may be likened to the process of gold mining and refining. Like gold miners, the form-critics chip or blast "the gold-bearing ore of pristine gospel tradition" from the hard rock of the canonical Gospels in which it is imbedded. Then, applying the forms they create, the form-critics smelt the foreign matter (evangelistic accretions, soteriological themes, and the like) from the pure gold of the "pristine gospel tradition" till the separation is clearly seen, and the pristine tradition allegedly formed in and by the early communities stands forth in all its glory alone.

The process has also been likened by the advocates of the method to a delicate, precise surgery of the Gospels, dissecting and removing the pure primitive tradition intact from the body of literature which surrounds it. By opponents of the method the "delicate surgery" has been termed "gross butchery".

Since it is not feasible to discuss at length in this paper every portion of New Testament Scripture to which the method is applied by sundry form-critics, it is perhaps the happiest choice to present "the pristine tradition" as Dr. Dibelius, first form-critic, envisions it, afterwards examining the form-method as applied to such important sections as The Infancy Narratives, the Passion Story, and the Resurrection account.

Dr. Dibelius restores the pristine tradition in these six classes of form: Early Christian Preaching, The Old Stories (sometimes called Paradigms), Parables, Sayings (Aphorisms), The Great Miracle Tales, and Legends. However, in the introduction to his book, The Message of Jesus Christ, wherein the tradition is thus catalogued, Dibelius is careful to state,

The selection of the passages from the Gospels is an experiment, the critical classification is an experiment, the translation is an experiment: and the experiment will be justified if on the unprejudiced ear the ancient words resound fresh and true...¹

Thus safeguarded, Dibelius proceeds with conviction to recount the arbitrary dicta to which his experiment has led him (and others).

Remembering Dibelius' favorite theory of the Sitz-im-Leben which first formulated the message of the gospel tradition, let us examine his examples of Early Christian Preaching. We use Dibelius' translation.

Here begins the Message of Salvation through Jesus Christ the Son of God:

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet---

A voice resounds in the wilderness:

Prepare the way of the Lord,

Make his path smooth,

So John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness and announced a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And he preached as follows: 'After me comes one who is mightier than I, and I am not worthy to stoop and loose the latchet of his shoes.

I have baptised you with water;

he will baptise you with Holy Spirit.'

¹Martin Dibelius, The Message of Jesus Christ (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), p. xx.

Now after John was cast in prison, Jesus appeared in Galilee and proclaimed the Message of God:

'The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Message of Salvation.'

-Mark 1:1-4,7-8,14-15 ²

The reader will note that the delicate surgery has begun. The verses quoted are "pristine" and allegedly formed the first fragments of the gospel tradition. The verses omitted (Mark 1:2,5,6,9-13) are deemed "evangelistic accretions" and other "forms" of the tradition. Verse 2, for instance, is a deliberate attempt on Mark's part to tie up the historic facts of Jesus' appearing with Old Testament Scripture prophecy (Malachi 3:1). Verses 5 and 6 are effective coloring and description of John the Baptist, but as such they are not essential to preaching. Hence, their omission in this example of Early Christian Preaching. Verses 9-13 of Mark 1 speak of the Baptism of Jesus and His Temptation. Both fragments of the tradition find their classification in another "form". Mark includes them, according to form-critical view, for smoothness' sake, progressing by means of them from John the Baptist to Jesus as the center of interest and attention.

Next, Dibelius adduces an example of early apostolic preaching. It is Peter's (edited) sermon to Cornelius.

You know what took place in the land of the Jews: how following the baptism, which John had preached, (the Gospel) began in Galilee with Jesus of Nazareth. God anointed him with Holy Spirit and with power. And he went about the country and did much good, and healed all that were in the

²Ibid., p. 3.

devil's power, for God was with him. And they hanged him on a tree and put him to death.

God awakened him on the third day, and let him appear visibly, not before all the people but before those witnesses whom God had previously chosen. And he bade us preach to the people and proclaim: He is the one whom God has ordained to judge the living and the dead. All the prophets bear witness to him, that everyone who believes in him shall through his name receive forgiveness of sins.

-Acts 10:37-43 ³

Notice the compactness of this example of Early Christian Preaching. Facts are crammed together without description or detail. It is, in effect, a brief formula testifying to the divine plan of salvation. From this Dibelius deduces that the record of Acts 10:37-43 and similar sermonic passages in Acts chapters 2, 3, and 13 are compositions of the author of Luke-Acts in which he set forth what he understood to be the message of the apostles. Here truth and error are mingled, and one amendment especially is necessary. Anyone can see that Acts 10:37-43 is not a complete sermon but rather a series of topic sentences, ending with the heraldic passage, as Dibelius terms it, to believe on Jesus for the forgiveness of sins because all the prophets (again a tie-in with the canonically accepted Old Testament Scripture) give witness to Jesus. The amendment to the conclusion mentioned above will be dealt with and enlarged later.

Before disposing of this example, the reader will note by comparison with his King James Authorized Version of the Bible

³Ibid., p. 4.

(or Nestle's New Testament in Greek) that the prefatory verses to this passage are omitted (for what reason the present writer cannot fathom) and the major portion of verse 39 has also been deleted. The reason for this bit of critical surgery is the oft spoken (and sometimes outspoken) tenet of the form-critical method that the testimony of eyewitnesses to Jesus' ministry is tenuous, unreliable, subject to idealization of Jesus. For confirmation of this statement, witness the opinion of form-criticism with respect to the Gospel of John, the disciple whom Jesus loved. Opinion 1): John represents the gospel tradition at the peak of its development. "He gave us the tradition in the form it came to assume in his mind after many years of thought and experience (cf. p. 14 supra)." This is the opinion of Taylor and others. Opinion 2): The Gospel of John must be invalidated with respect to authentic, valid eyewitness account; his work is too far removed from the history he records, and it is extremely liable to evangelistic coloration. This is the opinion of Bultmann and his disciples. Both opinions - one kind, one harsh - present the same conclusion. The testimony of the eyewitness John is ruled out of the pristine gospel tradition. Furthermore, and getting to the real issue at hand, the testimony of eyewitnesses (like Peter in Acts 10:39) is usually omitted by the form-critics because such eyewitness testimony does not fit into the prime thesis of the form-critical theory that the gospel tradition was shaped by nameless individuals in the primitive Christian community.

The third example Dibelius has selected gives us yet an-

other form of the tradition as used in preaching. It is the famous passage Philippians 2:6-11, often used by the form-critics to demonstrate the "Christological theme" of the early preaching. The translation is again that of Dibelius.

He lived a divine existence,
 but thought nothing of grandeur
 nor of the glory of divine nature;
 he gave up glory and grandeur,
 taking a poor existence in exchange,
 became humanlike in form
 and humanlike in bearing,
 He chose renunciation,
 obedient to death,
 to the death upon the cross.
 Therefore God exalted him to highest glory
 and gave him the name above all names.
 Now at the name of Jesus
 let every knee bow, of all that live and move
 whether in heaven or earth or the under-world,
 and let every tongue confess
 that Jesus Christ is Lord---
 to the honour of God the Father.

-Philippians 2:6-11 ⁴

Aside from the theological import of the translation, the "free translation" of *ὅς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ*, "who, being in the form of God", assumes too broad a latitude. This paves the way for the later assertion, a process of evolution in the form-critical philosophy, that Jesus the prophet of God was of such godlike nature that the early Christian community in shaping the gospel tradition according to a Christological motif gradually came to identify Jesus as God's Son, proclaiming him God, rather than considering him a "Son of God", that is, "One chosen by God in a special way to do a special work for Him". Jesus' special work was, according to the form-critics, that

⁴Ibid., p. 5.

he was the bearer of the final Message of Salvation from God.

In exposition of the translation Dibelius says,

The translation reflects the peculiar form of the section. It is almost a poem with regularly constructed lines, sometimes with a three-beat, sometimes a four-beat metre. Now it is hardly to be supposed that Paul composed such a formal hymn for the purpose of exhorting the Philippians. Obviously he must have used one that was already in existence whether written by himself or another person, perhaps for use in public worship - a hymn to the glory of Christ. Hence this famous 'Christological' passage must have had a wide circulation, and so may be taken as an example showing how the life of Jesus was viewed in the Pauline communities.⁵

The conclusion is deftly drawn. But may not the unprejudiced reader with complete objectivity also draw the conclusion that Paul, a highly literate man, disciple of the esteemed Gamaliel, also a scion of Roman culture, did compose this "formal hymn" exactly for the purpose of exhorting the Philippians, without resorting to an earlier tradition? That conclusion seems just as credible as the one Dibelius draws with reference to the anonymous "Pauline communities".

The final example of Early Christian Preaching which Dibelius adduces is this:

In the beginning was the everlasting Word
and the everlasting Word was with God
and of godlike nature was the everlasting Word,
hence it was in the beginning with God.
By its activity all things came into being
and naught that exists came apart from its activity.

And the everlasting Word became man upon earth
and sojourned in our midst
and we beheld his glory---
glory given an only begotten by a Father---
full of grace and truth.

⁵Ibid., p. 131 f.

And from his fulness we have all partaken:
 grace upon grace.
 For Moses gave the Law,
 but Jesus Christ brought grace and truth.

No one has ever seen God;
 the only-begotten Son,
 who was in the Father's bosom,
 he has made him known.

-John 1:1-3, 14, 16-18 ⁶

What is set forth here according to Dibelius is the common Christian faith in the revelation of God through the historical appearance of Jesus. In order to remove every incidental reference, those verses are left out which speak of the testimony of John the Baptist and so provide a connection with the narratives which follow in the Gospel.

This example of Early Christian Preaching taken from the Gospel of John and John's Gospel itself are regarded by a majority of form-critics as "a product of a peculiar type faith reflected back into the life of Jesus". The present section of John is adduced therefore only because it is considered a classical testimony to early Christian preaching. Otherwise the record of John's Gospel is virtually ignored by those who search for "pristine tradition". It is significant to note that the Gospel of John is referred to in The Message of Jesus Christ only nine times with reference to "probable" pristine tradition.

It is evident that Dr. Dibelius has not used every example of early Christian preaching in his presentation. In using the four examples listed he has in general covered the

⁶Ibid., p. 6.

field to substantiate his contention that preaching first conditioned the "form" of the gospel tradition. Following this, he proceeds to catalogue the remnants of "the pristine tradition" in their entirety according to the form-categories to which they allegedly belong.

The first of these form-categories bears the heading "The Old Stories", also called pronouncement stories, or paradigms. Answering his own question, "Is it possible to determine which stories were first told about Jesus?", Dibelius states:

In the second section we have ventured to restore twenty-six narrative passages (not including the Passion narrative) as examples of this oldest tradition. Back of this attempt lie two presuppositions. The first has already been named: it is the probability that the earliest tradition arose in connection with preaching. The second is that in several of these stories we find direct evidence of their relation to preaching.⁷

For the reader's interest we shall list The Old Stories of "the pristine tradition". Here they are:

1. The Healing in the Synagogue: Mark 1:21-27
 2. The Healing of the Paralytic: Mark 2:1-12
 3. The Call of the Tax Gatherer: Mark 2:13-17
 4. Fasting : Mark 2:18-20
 5. The Sabbath : Mark 2:23-28
 6. The Healing of the Lame Hand: Mark 3:1-5
 7. The Healing of the Man
 With Dropsy : Luke 14:1-6
 8. Jesus and His Family : Mark 3:31-35
 9. His Own City : Mark 6:1-4
 10. The Confession of Peter : Mark 8:27-29; John 6:66-69
 11. The Children : Mark 10:13-16
 12. The Rich Man : Mark 10:17-25
 13. Places of Honor : Mark 10:35-37, 41-45
 14. The Inhospitable Samaritans : Luke 9:52-56
 15. The Blind Man at Jericho : Mark 10:46-52
 16. The Cleansing of the Temple : Mark 11:15-17; John 2:13-17
 17. The Tribute Money : Mark 12:13-17
 18. The Resurrection : Mark 12:18-25
 19. The Anointing : Mark 14:3-7
 20. The Centurion at Capernaum : Matt. 18:5-10, 13; Luke 7:1-10
 21. The Message from the Baptist: Matt. 11:2-6; Luke 7:18-23
 22. The Phoenician Woman : Mark 7:24-30
 23. Two Followers : Matt. 8:19-22; Luke 9:57-60
 24. The Question About Authority: Mark 11:27-33
 25. On Misfortunes : Luke 13:1-5
 26. Mary and Martha : Luke 10:38-42
- The Passion Narrative: Mark 14:1, 2, 10, 11, 17-31, 43-54, 66-72.
Mark 15:1-15, 21-39; 1 Corinthians 15:3-5

⁷Ibid., p. 135.

On first glance it may seem odd to the reader to find that this conglomeration of narratives is classified collectively under the heading "The Old Stories". The stories range in content from several healing narratives through a variety of subjects to the story of Mary and Martha. Dibelius groups them thus as examples of the oldest tradition, allies and also component parts of early Christian preaching, for these reasons.

They all have this in common, viz. that an ordinary occasion provides Jesus with the opportunity for a healing or a pronouncement. Such acts had deep meaning for the early communities, and it is on account of this meaning that the stories were told. Healing and pronouncement accordingly stand on the same level; both spring from Jesus' divine authority; both testify to his mission...

Secondly,

Another feature is certainly common to all these passages: they show which concept of Jesus as Savior and Teacher prevailed in the Christian community. From them we see how he took hold of men just where he found them, helped them, warned and admonished them, and by word and deed proclaimed to them the coming Kingdom, the Judgment, and Salvation. Everything is concentrated upon this proclamation.⁹

Thus viewed, "The Old Stories" seem to fit the fundamental Sitz-im-Leben hypothesis very well, and they are certainly very appropriate examples to prove Dibelius' point.

The line of reasoning Dibelius pursues in accepting each of these narratives for "The Old Stories" category makes fascinating reading. He obviously exerts meticulous care in separating them from other stories which might qualify for this

⁸Ibid., p. 138.

⁹Ibid., p. 140.

"form" but are relegated to another category or even to the realm of "adulterated" tradition and "evangelistic accretion."

As a detective solves his problems by a process of elimination, Dibelius solves his problems as to what formed the pristine tradition in the same manner. Therefore, some material which is joined in the Gospels is divided by him and a portion of it is transplanted to another "form"; or, in some cases, that portion is ruled out of the pristine tradition entirely.

For example of such a transplanting, take the section Mark 2:18-22. Verses 18-20 are listed as being among "The Old Stories". Verses 21 and 22 apparently are joined to the previous verses; yet they are not included among "The Old Stories". Why? According to Dibelius, verses 21 and 22 are metaphorical sayings about the patch of new cloth on the old garment and about the new wine in old wineskins. They have nothing whatever to do with the saying about fasting (Mark 2:18-20) which is listed under the heading "The Old Stories". Instead, verses 21 and 22 find their proper place among the Sayings of Jesus under the heading "Similes". Therefore, according to form-critical view, though there seems to be a unit of tradition recorded in Mark 2:18-22, there are really two separate units of tradition forced into a union by Mark. The Old Story ending with the pronouncement of Jesus (Mark 2:19.20) is divorced from the similes which illustrate that pronouncement. Both portions of the divided section remain within the

precincts of pristine tradition, but now in different "forms".

Other Gospel material does not fare so well in this process of elimination which ferrets out the pristine tradition. For instance, in the Passion Narrative, which Dibelius classifies as "the only section of the old tradition which shows a long, continuous narrative", the following major scenes are omitted: Jesus' prayer-periods in the Garden of Gethsemane, the hearing before Annas, and the trial before Caiaphas. In addition, the scene on the cross is excerpted. These incidents are ruled out of "pristine tradition" because these portions of the Passion Narrative in Mark's Gospel allegedly disturb the sequence of the narrative.

Dibelius bars the Gethsemane scene (Mark 14:32-42) from the pristine tradition on several counts. He explains his reasons thus:

Like the entire Marcan Passion it (the Gethsemane scene) is orientated not psychologically but soteriologically. Its high point is the antithesis between Jesus' agonized resignation to the will of God (xiv,36) and the unsuspecting sleep of the disciples who know nothing of 'the hour'. That no historical tradition comes to expression here--- and indeed, against every Christology--- is seen in the fact that every kind of eyewitness is excluded from the essential part of the scene, since the witnesses are asleep. The essential content is presented as a mystery to which only the three intimate disciples were admitted, just as in the case of the only Marcan instance of raising the dead, and in that of the Transfiguration. But this comparison shows also the uniqueness of the scene, for the three intimate disciples do not now experience, as formerly, the revelation of Divine glory in Jesus; indeed, toward the end of the scene the separation of the three disciples from the others is left altogether out of consideration. Hence, it is artificial. And the real proceeding, Jesus' going to and fro between the place of prayer and the disciples, is also seen to be invented;

for the second act of prayer (xiv,39) is not completed with words of prayer, and the third (xiv,41) is in any case only referred to. ... Thus I cannot regard the scene either as an historical tradition nor as a Legend current originally in isolation. Luke himself filled it out with a 'legendary' content, but waived the threefoldness of the act of prayer(cf. p. 201 supra).¹⁰

Since the Gethsemane scene is thus ruled out of the pristine tradition, how does it come to appear in the Gospels, particularly in Mark's Gospel, accredited by form-critics as the first complete Gospel to be written? According to form-critical view, the scene is Mark's evangelistic construction. The thinking of Dibelius is this:

We may gather from Hebrews v,7 that independently of the Gethsemane tradition the view existed in the Churches that Jesus in His time of suffering had prayed to God with strong crying and tears. This conception probably rested upon the Psalms of suffering which were read as a record of the Passion, and all three of which (Psalms xxii,24; xxxi,22; lxix,3) speak of cries in addition to that of extreme stress and of prayer for deliverance (Psalms xxii,20; xxxi,9.10.22; lxix,1 f.). A presentation of the Passion must take account of this, and perhaps the oldest record used by Mark did so (cf. p. 187 supra), perhaps with a lament of Jesus and with the content of His prayer, and thus, to some extent, with a description of the same content as Mark xiv, 34 f. . Mark built up this material into a process. ... The whole grew, if only by suggestion, into an occurrence by extending the prayer into three acts of prayer, and by separating off the three disciples in the way already found in the Gospel tradition (Mark v,37; ix,2). In this way the material gathered out of the Old Testament became a revelation of Jesus' obedience in opposition to the inert and dull disciples.¹¹

Thus, while the Gethsemane scene is not "pristine" tradi-

¹⁰Martin Dibelius, From Tradition To Gospel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. 211 f.

¹¹Ibid., p. 212 f.

tion, Dibelius concedes that it is "probable" gospel tradition, based on and evolved from the Old Testament Psalms of suffering. The laborious, painstaking process by which the Gethsemane scene is eliminated from pristine gospel tradition and restored from its "probable" source is typical of Dibelius' method. The entire process has been evolved to circumvent the issue of the soteriological theme of Mark's Gospel, a theme most prominent in the Passion Narrative. The soteriological theme throws the form-critical Sitz-im-Leben hypothesis out of joint. Form-critics believe that the early Christian community wished merely to preserve and transmit the essential Message of Salvation and the coming of the Kingdom of God which Jesus preached. The fact that in the Gospels Jesus is presented not as "the bearer of God's final message to mankind (the form-critical view)" but as the very means by which that Salvation may be achieved, namely, through faith in Jesus as the Savior from sin, is thought by the form-critics to be a product of the development of the Christological motif in the later Christian communities. Hence the need to rule out from pristine tradition such sections as Mark 14:32-42.

The trial before the High Priest is disposed of in perfunctory manner. Dibelius says,

Again, an eyewitness' description of the proceedings when Jesus was interrogated before the High Priest and before Pilate is impossible. In the scene before Pilate (Mark xv, 1-5) Mark clearly indicates that he knows only that the question about being a king had played a part. This was known in the Church, since the reason for the execution was published in the usual manner (Mark xv, 26). But, as we have shown (cf. pp. 192 ff. supra), Mark made the

trial before the High Priest into the main point of the whole Passion story. We see from Mark xiv, 59 that in doing so he was not writing simply according to his own criteria. Perhaps occasioned by the old record (cf. p. 182 supra), Mark brings in a threat of Jesus against the Temple, but does not wish it to be decisive, and so explains that the witness was not sufficiently confirmed. Naturally this does not do away with the genuineness of the utterance, for it obviously deals with a saying which was current in tradition without an occasion, and which was taken up into the Passion story like 'watch and pray', or Luke xxii, 25 ff., 31 f., 36. Hence there obviously was no old tradition, duly confirmed, about the trial before the High Priest.

The point is not unimportant, since the question has been raised whether the Roman method of executing Jesus shows that there never was a process before the High Priest. The result of that process must have been stoning. Carrying such a thing out was not forbidden the Jews at that time, as John xviii, 31, and the usual opinion would hold, but was permitted in spite of the Roman rule. We cannot deal with the question here, whose discussion is not yet ended, but we must maintain that the only tradition preserved in the trial scene, the word against the Temple, is not bound up with this situation.¹²

In other words, Mark has seized upon one utterance, "Jesus' remark re the Temple (as form-critics put it)", and has again "built this material up into a process" as he allegedly did with the Gethsemane scene.

In the excerpts of From Tradition To Gospel quoted on the recent pages the reader gains an insight into the type of reasoning Dibelius employs throughout his examination of the Gospels. To follow his argument requires utmost care and constant checking of sources listed plus a comparison of his translation with the Greek of the New Testament. At times his treatment of the text is excessively free.

¹²Ibid., p. 213 f.

Perhaps this tendency to take liberties with the text reaches its peak when Dibelius interpolates, reading into the text what he thinks ought to be there. Witness the following example from The Old Story "His Own City (Mark 6:1-4)". The King James Version of the Bible correctly translates the Greek. Dibelius does too - in a fresher style. But the concluding verse of the section, v.4, he gives thus:

Then Jesus said to them: 'No prophet amounts to much in his own country, and no doctor can heal his own kin.' ¹³

The concluding clause is an interpolation, pure and not so simple. Dibelius adds it because an apocryphal text discovered among the papyri from Oxyrhynchus (vol.i, no.1) gives the saying concerning rejected prophets in double form (as above), and "this is upon several grounds to be accepted as a remnant of earlier tradition".¹⁴

Referred by Dibelius to p. 110 f. of his book From Tradition To Gospel for a substantiation of "the several grounds" upon which the interpolation is to be accepted as a remnant of earlier tradition, we find no proof listed. Rather, Dibelius compares Mark 6:1-4 with Luke 4:16-30, apparently considering them similar accounts of one and the same rejection at Nazareth. (Many Bible scholars consider Mark 6:1-4 as the account of a second rejection at Nazareth.) Thus it is that Dibelius

¹³Martin Dibelius, The Message of Jesus Christ (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), p. 14.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 139.

uses two lengthy paragraphs to explain that Luke gives the story another conclusion.

Aside from the unsubstantiated interpolation, Dibelius loses sight of the fact that while the apocryphal text from the Oxyrhynchus papyri may be a remnant of earlier tradition, it is not thereby at once to be accepted as a portion of the earliest (the pristine) tradition, as he most eagerly has done. It may be a product of "developed" tradition.

This instance of Dibelius' occasionally arbitrary treatment of the text has been cited because it is evident from considerable study that form-criticism's pioneer oftentimes changes the text to fit his theory.

The parables of the Gospels are preserved virtually intact as examples of the pristine tradition. A few are omitted because Dibelius says they permit no interpretation other than an allegorical one; these are the parables of The Tares Among the Wheat (Matt.13:24-30), The Man Without a Wedding Garment (Matt.22:11-14), The Wicked Husbandman (Mark 12:1-11), and The Ten Virgins (Matt.25:1-13).

A surprising addition to the Parables of "pristine tradition" is The Parable of the Widow's Mite (Mark 12:41-44).

The Widow's Mite is probably not an incident in biography but an imagined story of an earlier date which Jesus took over and which the evangelist introduced into the account of his life.¹⁵

So states Dibelius. No documentation is brought forward for the classification of this incident as a parable. Hence, it is purely an arbitrary classification. Since form-critics set aside no form for "biography" of Jesus, those biographic incidents must be classified elsewhere. Dibelius therefore classes Mark 12:41-44 among the Parables, because it is his view that the parables are stories which have come to us from Jesus himself. In these parables Dibelius has chosen we find

...either what we call a moral: 'Do so and so' or 'Do not do so and so'; or else one divines a purpose which is made clear by comparison. In either case the leading idea of the story is transferred into another area: for example, what the man does in the story, in his life or calling, is like what God does, or what the preacher of the Kingdom does, or what the hearers of this sermon ought to do. There can be no doubt that the stories which Jesus told all bore a special meaning, that is, were all meant to be applied.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 149.

Jesus used them to illustrate his preaching, not to obscure it; and it is reading back something later, and presupposes the Cross on Golgatha, when the evangelist makes Jesus use parables in order to mystify the people (Mark 4:11); the Jews are supposed already to have reached the point of rejecting Jesus and his message. ... Jesus did not 'compose' (parables) in order to entertain his hearers with the poetic creations of his spirit. He took up material lying close at hand, perhaps already in use (e.g., p.45: The Rich Man and Poor Lazarus), and made use of it for his own purposes, that is, for the purposes of God. He meant to move the feelings and thoughts of his hearers in a specific direction.¹⁶

The parables are then listed "without interpretative addition". Dibelius has purposely omitted the introductions and conclusions which have been supplied to the parables (by the evangelists, he assumes), because he feels those "interpretative additions" were meant to insure a specific application for the parables.

On the one hand, Jesus told the parables for a special purpose. They were all meant to be applied. "He meant to move the feelings and thoughts of his hearers in a specific direction." On the other hand, all introductions and conclusions of the parables listed have been omitted because they were meant (by the evangelists) to insure a specific application for the parables. A fine line of distinction has been drawn here. Perhaps the line is too fine. If Jesus meant to move the feelings and thoughts of his hearers in a specific direction, then certainly the various parables as He told them were meant to have specific application. Therefore it is not stretching a point to assume that the introductions and con-

¹⁶Ibid., p. 148 f.

clusions supplied to the parables in the Gospels are not interpretative additions, but in reality are also a part of "pristine tradition". The context of the parables may be accepted in the same manner in which the settings of Jesus' pronouncements or healings are accepted as pristine in the Old Stories.

The most notable example of the removal of "evangelistic interpretative addition" is perhaps Mark 4:3-20, The Parable of the Sower, which Dibelius accounts "a parable of the results of preaching". Verses 9-20 are deleted because the explanation which Jesus gave to the parable was presented only to a few (cf. Mark 4:10). Since therefore the majority of Jesus' hearers were left without that explanation, Dibelius feels we have the right to read the parable as those people heard it - without explanation. The explanation (vv.14-20) is the evangelist's, not the Master's. However, Dibelius admits, "It is of course not to be denied that Jesus himself, perhaps upon repeating the parable, may have given it some such wider meaning."¹⁷

Further deletions in The Parable of the Sower are explained thus: verse 9 is a conclusion the evangelist put there, not Jesus; verses 10-13 provide the "bridge" from the parable to its explanation. These verses are again "interpretative addition". The explanation of the parable (vv.14-20) is omitted

¹⁷Ibid., p. 154.

by Dibelius because he feels that as it stands in the Gospel it obscures the true meaning of the parable, i.e., consolation in spite of the failure of preaching. According to this thinking, the burden of the parable's meaning lies not upon the hearers; but upon the preachers. Dibelius' leading thought seems to be: Keep preaching! No matter how many times the message fails to bring results, it is bound to have success! (Some brought forth thirty, sixty, a hundredfold!)

It seems that Dibelius has overreached himself in dissecting The Parable of the Sower so completely. If he had permitted verse 9 of Mark 4 to remain in his reconstruction of the pristine state of this parable, the crux of his problem with respect to this parable would be solved. Then the explanation of the parable (vv.10-20) would be accepted as valid pristine tradition. Does he not say that Jesus told the parables to move the feelings and thoughts of his hearers in a specific direction? Verse 9 provides just that direction: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." This is still "a parable of the results of preaching", but the application is made to the hearers with the hortatory admonition of verse 9. The "specific direction" intended was to provoke deeper thought concerning the meaning of the story Jesus told. (He never told stories to entertain his hearers, form-criticism tells us.) What meaning, then, did He intend in telling it? That was for the hearers to find out, as verse 9 directs. If they were so moved, they could receive the exposition of the parable, as some did (cf. Mark 4:10).

Moving on in our discussion of the parables it is to be noted that Dibelius postulates differences of Form in them. He cites The Parable of the Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30 ff.) as an example of the comparison in the present. The Yeast in the Dough (The Leaven: Matt.13:33) represents the comparison in the past. The House on the Rock and On Sand (Matt.4:27 ff.) is an example of short didactic narrative. And the parables of The Good Samaritan, The Prodigal Son, The Unjust Steward, The Pharisee and the Publican, The Great Feast, The Laborers in the Vineyard, and The Talents all represent the detailed, comparative narrative of a Tale-like character.

These and other parables differ in Form because they differ in content. The material of the parables differs in each case. The story of the parable may contain what is commonplace, as in The Parable of The Leaven; what is typical, as in The Parable of the Complaining Children (Matt.11:16 f.; Luke 7:31 ff.), and of the Sower (Mark 4:3 ff.); what is extraordinary (no passage given); imaginary cases (no passages).

Because the parables differ in Form, owing to a difference of material, they differ also in their application. Some have the didactic thought in their application, e.g., The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-36) and The Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18:9 ff.). The former had doubtless a parenetic (hortatory) sense: "Go and do thou likewise." The latter wants to show the true attitude of man to God by the picture of the Publican and by the antithesis of the Pharisee.

In other parables the "story" clothes the leading thought. A didactic conception dictates the action, as in The Parable of the Tares (Matt.13:24 ff.). While discussing this parable and relating the unnamed "enemy" in it to the devil, Dibelius discovers this example of "a story which clothes the leading thought" to be allegorical in its interpretation. The reader will remember that it is this type of parable which Dibelius rules out of pristine tradition. Yet he gives no other illustration of a parable whose story clothes the leading thought.

It might be best to break off here with respect to Dibelius' labyrinth-like research into the Forms, material, and application of the various parables. What he states is indeed obvious to most Bible students anyway. Part of his trouble no doubt is due to the fact that he includes among the Parables many "parables" which are simply sayings of Jesus (not stories) and which might better be classified in the Sayings form-category.

The chief point to remember regarding the method Dibelius applies to the Parables is this: most generally he removes both introduction and conclusion of the parables as they stand in the Gospels, considering them evangelistic interpretative addition.

The Sayings of Jesus occupy the next category of Dibelius' forms. Over a hundred passages are here examined and classified according to their various saying-forms. Examples of each saying-form are listed below.

Concerning John the Baptist: Matt. 3:7-10; 11:7-11.
 Prophetic Appeals: Luke 6:20-23.
 Prophetic Sayings About the Kingdom of God: Luke 17:20 f.
 Prophetic Sayings About Decision: Matt. 10:34.35.
 Concerning Prayer: Matt. 7:7-11.
 Concerning Adversaries: Matt. 5:38-41. 44-47.
 Against Anxiety: Luke 12:22-24. 27-31.
 Concerning the Law: Matt. 5:21.22.27.28.33.34.37.
 Against the Pharisees: Matt. 23:4-32 (excerpted).
 The Sign of Jonah: Luke 11:29-32.
 Concerning Alms, Prayer, and Fasting: Matt. 6:2-6.16-18.
 Warnings: Mark 9:43.47.
 Similes: Matt. 10:29.30; Mark 2:21.22.
 Commands: Matt. 7:1.2.; Mark 7:15.
 To the Messengers: Mark 6:8.9.; Matt. 17:20.

One can easily see by reading the passages given that the Sayings of Jesus are of various kinds. But, as in the case of previously cited forms, not all the words of Jesus are included in Dibelius' attempt to restore the pristine tradition of the Sayings of Jesus. For example,

Only a few sayings, and these mostly in figurative style, appear to us to be wholly obscure when we take them out of their setting in the Gospels; they are accordingly omitted from the present selection. This applies, e.g., to the figure of the eye as the light of the body, or to the 'holy things' which are not to be given to the dogs, the 'seasoning with fire', the corpses and the eagles, or even the saying 'To him that hath shall be given' (Matt. 6:22; 7:6; Mark 9:49; Luke 17:37; Mark 4:25.).¹⁸

Second,

There is a large number of sayings in which the community-reference is clear but where the original form cannot be

¹⁸Ibid., p. 157.

recovered. These sayings must be left out of our collection, since in their present form the meaning of the 'message' of the Kingdom of God has been supplanted by concern for the life of the community. This applies to the section in Matt.5:17-20, the general sayings about the authority of the Law; to the saying about the Temple tax, Matt.17:25; that on binding and loosing in Matt.18:18; the sayings about Elijah (Mark9:11-13) and the strange exorcist (Mark 9:39 ff.); and to whole sections of the Mission and Apocalyptic Discourses (Matt. 10 and Mark 13).¹⁹

Further, Dibelius has left out almost as many sayings because

...as they now stand in the Gospels, they reflect the interpretation of the life of Jesus in retrospect, from the later Christian standpoint. Here belong certain specific predictions of the Passion; prophecies of the fall of Jerusalem; the saying about Satan's fall and the miracle-working power of the disciples, Luke 10:18 f.; and that rightly famous saying about the Divine Revelation, Matt.11:25-30. It is not to be doubted that here likewise words actually spoken by Jesus may have been incorporated. But the present text groups together what seem like authentic with what seem like unauthentic sayings, with the clear intent of offering the whole as an interpretation; and so it is impossible - since the solution would involve somewhat risky hypotheses - to recover what Jesus actually said.²⁰

Finally,

There is another group of sayings which has been omitted, even though some of them can be accepted without question as used by Jesus. There is a series of sayings in the Gospels which, either certainly or very probably, set forth bits of common wisdom in popular form - proverbs and figurative expressions, such as circulated commonly among the Jews. The metaphor regarding 'the wisdom of the serpent' and the one about the householder and his treasure may be mentioned in this connection (Matt.10:16; 13:52), and also the Jewish rules which summed up briefly the whole teaching of the Law (Matt.7:12; Mark 12:29-31). If Jesus quoted such sayings, he certainly did not originate them.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 161.

²⁰Loc. cit.

Wherever the impression of the original, radical Message is to be conveyed, confronting men with the necessity for decision, they are absent; for they modify this impression of a unique imperative in the direction of pedestrian common-sense.²¹

We trust that the reader has followed the line of reasoning used to justify the deletion of certain sayings of Jesus from the reconstruction of the pristine tradition. First, those sayings which cannot stand alone apart from their context, and hence cannot be isolated, are not considered a part of that tradition; for it is a prime tenet of form-criticism that the original gospel tradition consisted of many, isolated fragments. Second, a large number of passages which clearly reflect a community-reference obscure and supplant "the Message of the Kingdom of God". Only that "Message" is considered pristine. Third, those passages which reflect the interpretation of the life of Jesus in retrospect, from a later Christian standpoint, cannot be pristine. Fourth, "the wisdom words of Jesus" as quoted above are not pristine because they modify the original, radical Message which confronts men with the necessity for decision (cf. Matt.10:34. 35; Luke 14:26; 17:33; Mark 8:34.). That radical Message, in which the "wisdom words" found no part, is: "The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Message of Salvation (Mark 1:15.)." Such is Dibelius' thinking; this thinking has conditioned his reconstruction of the words of Jesus in the pristine tradition. If certain say-

²¹Ibid., p. 162 f.

ings do not conform to the inexorable call to the decision of repentance, they cannot truly reflect the earliest Gospel tradition which propagated the Message of the Kingdom of God which Jesus preached.

However, Dibelius admits:

We find ourselves, sooner or later, in the area of the critique of content; and here a decision is considerably less secure, since one's personal judgment is involved. The judgment that 'Jesus cannot possibly have spoken thus' can be passed only upon the basis of the conception one has already formed of the message of Jesus, and this conception is certainly subject to error.²²

The point is thus brought forward that full objectivity is lacking in the reconstruction of the pristine tradition. The entire material is presented on the basis of the preconceived notion that one specific pronouncement of Jesus, that in Mark 1:15, formed the exclusive substance of Jesus' message; furthermore, the word "gospel" (translated by Dibelius as "The Message of Salvation") in Mark 1:15 has a different connotation for Dibelius than is commonly understood. To Dibelius it means "the good news of the coming of the Kingdom of God (which he interprets as a future state)". That is the "gospel", the Message of Salvation. The Kingdom of God will come when the Son of Man shall appear. That Son of Man (the Messiah) is not Jesus. Jesus is merely "the bearer of God's final message to mankind", according to Dibelius. The early Christians, on the other hand, understood the word "gospel"

²²Ibid., p. 160.

to mean "the good news that salvation has come in the person and work of Jesus the Messiah, God's Son, sent by His Father from heaven to save His people from their sins". That understanding of the word "gospel" in Mark 1:15 and elsewhere obtains in the realm of Christendom to this day.

In examining the sayings which Dibelius has elected as pristine the present writer was struck by the passage in Matt. 10:17-20 (Mark 13:9.11), listed under Prophetic Sayings About Decision. Dibelius translates it thus:

They will accuse you in the courts,
They will flog you in their assemblies,
You will be dragged before governors and kings
To be sentenced on my account.

And when they do this, be not anxious over
what you shall say,
For the right word will be given you at the time,
And not your mouth will frame it, but the Spirit
of the Father.²³

Dibelius makes no comment on the passage other than to list it as he has done. Apparently, then, he accepts the existence of the Holy Spirit (Matt.10: τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν ; Mark 13: τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον), the Spirit of the Father whose "mouth" will frame the right words and give them to the disciples when they need them, e.g., in the courts. Yet with reference to the inspiration of Scripture, Dibelius does not believe that "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (2nd Peter 1:21)". Is this because of the word "spake" (not "wrote") in the passage quoted ? Does Dibelius

²³Ibid., p. 67.

apply the passage only to the men who delivered ("spoke") the prophecy "in old time" ? The questions beg for answer.

Similarly, is Paul's word to Timothy, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God (2nd Timothy 3:15.16.)," to be applied only to Old Testament Scripture ? So it would seem, until further research into the time of writing of the various New Testament books discloses a pertinent fact purely from the historical standpoint of chronology.

In writing his first letter to Timothy (circa 64-67 A.D.) Paul says, "For the Scripture saith, 'Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn,' and, 'The laborer is worthy of his reward.' (1 Tim.5:18)". The latter sentence from the Scripture is found only in Luke 10:7 and Matt.10:10 (a slightly different wording). Paul therefore quotes from existing New Testament Scripture. The statement of 2 Tim.3:16, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God", therefore certainly applies at the time of its writing already to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, and possibly also to the Gospel of Mark. We say "possibly to the Gospel of Mark", because various scholars postulate different dates for the writing of Mark. The date of its origin is held to range from 60-70 A.D. Therefore, Mark's Gospel could have been in existence already when Paul wrote his God-inspired letters to Timothy.

The entire theory of form-criticism ignores the facts just stated and thus by its silence negates the belief that "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God".

At times the method Dibelius employs in reconstructing the sayings is intriguing. For example, with respect to the sayings-group "Against the Pharisees" (Matt. 23:4-32; Luke 11:39-52) Dibelius has usurped "the collection method" which he ascribes to the early communities and to the evangelists in assimilating the words of Jesus from here and there to be compiled under one theme and topic. The reconstruction of the passages cited above is by no means composed of all the verses listed. This is the reconstruction. Dibelius lists Matt. 23:4 (Luke 11:46); Matt. 23:5-7, freely translated (Luke 11:43); Matt. 23:13 (Luke 11:52); Matt. 23:23 (Luke 11:42); Matt. 23:25 (Luke 11:39); Matt. 23:27 (Luke 11:44); Matt. 23:29.30 (Luke 11:47-50); Matt. 23:31.32 (Luke 11:48, in part). Twelve verses from Matt. 23:4-32 and ten from Luke 11:39-52 are considered pristine tradition of the sayings of Jesus under the theme "Woe to you Pharisees!" In addition, the following verses of the sections named are regarded as pristine tradition of the sayings of Jesus "Against the Pharisees", but they are not of the theme: "Woe to you Pharisees!" Those verses are Luke 11:19.20 and Matt. 12:27.28; Matt. 23:15; Matt. 23:16.17; Matt. 23:24. All other verses of the sections named are omitted, including several more verses which begin "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees..." (Matt. 23:14.15a.). The reason for the excepted verses may again be presumed to be either that they are "evangelistic interpretative addition, or, that they are sayings of Jesus belonging to another "form" (e.g., Matt. 23:12 - a Prophetic Saying About Decision).

In summing up the results of the form-critical method as applied to The Sayings of Jesus, Dibelius declares:

The parenetic interest in Jesus' words and sayings can be seen in the assembling and grouping of these sayings. ... In Matthew v, 21 ff. Jesus antitheses to the Law are reproduced in the form of a definite group of sayings with the lay-out: 'You have heard...but I say unto you.' Into this lay-out other sayings are interpolated which belong to the theme (Matt. v, 23 f., 25 f., 29 f.). ... Everything serves the production of a long, hortatory connected passage.²⁴

Matthew brought together the tradition of actual words into long speeches, where he offers the words of Jesus arranged on distinct themes. ... St. Matthew's Gospel really offers some of the preaching, of course in a historical frame, but with a systematic, pedagogic arrangement and cast. This is the earliest Gospel of which it can rightly be said that it contains 'the gospel'.²⁵

Luke places the sayings of Jesus into narrative contexts and puts them into corresponding places, i.e., into those which seem to him historically probable. He gave a narrative character to this tradition.²⁶

The Gospel of Mark is virtually ignored with respect to The Sayings of Jesus. This is because Dibelius feels that Mark used material already rounded off, fixed and interpreted. Because that material is fixed and interpreted, he feels that the earliest gospel tradition of The Sayings of Jesus can be only indirectly taken from the stories collected by Mark.

²⁴Martin Dibelius, From Tradition To Gospel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. 258.

²⁵Ibid., p. 263 f.

²⁶Ibid., p. 262.

The Gospel of Mark comes into prominence again with reference to The Great Miracle Tales. Of the thirteen passages Dibelius regards as pristine gospel tradition according to this form, ten are selected from Mark's Gospel. Two of the three others are from John's Gospel, surprisingly enough, and one from Luke. Again, for the reader's interest, we list the entire pristine tradition of The Great Miracle Tales as Dibelius has chosen them.

The Leper: Mark 1:40-44.

The Storm on the Lake: Mark 4:35-41.

The Exorcism of a Band of Demons: Mark 5:1-17.

The Daughter of Jairus and

The Woman With the Issue of Blood: Mark 5:22-43.

The Great Feeding: Mark 6:34-44.

The Journey Across the Lake: Mark 6:45-51.

The Healing of the Deaf and Dumb: Mark 7:32-35.

The Blind Man at Bethsaida: Mark 8:22-25.

The Epileptic Boy: Mark 9:14-29.

The Young Man at Nain: Luke 7:11-16.

The Marriage at Cana: John 2:1-3, 6-10.

The Healing at the Pool of Bethzatha: John 5:2.3.5-12.16.17.

The reader will remember that a number of healing-miracles were listed among "The Old Stories". Why are such not listed in the present form-category? Dibelius answers:

In the earlier stories the miracles were reported only in connection with something unique which Jesus brought into the situation--the forgiveness of sins, a breach of the Sabbath, the exercise of faith (pp. 135 ff.). Here, on the contrary, the interest is centred in the power which Jesus possessed. How he exorcised demons, and whether they went, how he asserted his dominion over the forces of nature, wind, waves, and even food, this is what the stories are really meant to describe.²⁷

Second,

²⁷Martin Dibelius, The Message of Jesus Christ (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), p. 166.

The 'old' stories aim to preach the gospel; these try to picture Jesus as the greatest wonder-worker of the time. . . . They owe their fulness of content, not to the tradition, but to convention, not to the recollection of eyewitnesses, but to the habits of story-tellers.²⁸

In other words, the sole purpose of the so-called Great Miracle Tales was to embellish and glorify the concept of Jesus the powerful wonder-worker. This, too, had its purposeful motive, as we shall soon see.

In The Great Miracle Tales there is a different style from that used in The Old Stories. The miracle-healing itself is described with greater detail, much more is said about the success of the healing, a stereotyped prohibition to publish the miracle-healing is usually added, and so on.

For an example of the difference of style between the healing-miracles of The Old Stories and those of The Great Miracle Tales, we are asked to compare Mark 10:46-52 with Mark 8:22-25. Both are accounts of healing the blind. Theme and content are similar. But,

The story of the blind man at Jericho (Mark 10) relates explicitly how the man staked everything upon reaching Jesus, and only briefly indicates his cure; in the story of the blind man at Bethsaida (Mark 8), on the other hand, a formal cure is described, including the use of spittle as remedy, and the laying on of hands; the conclusion is his restoration, which takes place in two stages.²⁹

Mark 8:26 is omitted at the close of the healing-account as one of those "stereotyped prohibitions to publish the heal-

²⁸Ibid., p. 168.

²⁹Ibid., p. 167.

ing"; it is, as usual, considered to be "an interpretative addition" of the evangelist.

Incidentally, the theory behind deletions of this sort (Mark 8:26) is that Mark is a book of "secret epiphanies" of Jesus. That is, the writer of the Gospel of Mark continually presented the record of Jesus' wonderful power, but always with the "secret" theme.

The miracle worker avoids the public because he is not a magician with a propaganda, but an envoy and revealer of God, who does not allow his action, i.e., God's action, to be seen by profane eyes.³⁰

Mark narrates the story of Jesus under the conviction that the glorious heavenly mode of existence was proper to the hero of his narrative. Indeed, His disciples saw Him in this mode of existence at the Transfiguration. In the time of His earthly life this glory is, indeed, hidden, and must be hidden--whence the theory of a secret. But the narrator rejoices in every moment in which at least to the eyes of the readers he can free Jesus from the earthly sphere and represent Him in His true worth.³¹

In the Gospel of Mark, therefore, the searcher for pristine tradition must exercise extreme caution, rightly dividing the pristine from all evangelistic accretions which have accrued from the "secret epiphany" motive.

The Story of the Marriage at Cana (John 2:1-3,6-10) is cited to demonstrate the "secularization" which The Great Miracle Tales brought to the developing tradition. Dibelius maintains that Jesus performed the miracle in this instance

³⁰Martin Dibelius, From Tradition To Gospel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. 94.

³¹Ibid., p. 278.

not to improve man's condition, e.g., by healing the sick, but only to relieve a social embarrassment. From such a motive the action is utterly incongruous on Jesus' part. Therefore, Dibelius deduces that The Marriage at Cana was perhaps originally a heathen tale of a helpful divine marvel and was re-arranged to fit Jesus' circumstances. The story's only justification, according to Dibelius, is that the writer John adds in verse 11 (omitted as unpristine) that "He manifested forth His glory, and His disciples believed on Him." Omitting that verse (and verses 4 and 5 as accretions, too), we are told that a parallel to a heathen tale of the god Dionysius is clearly seen. From that source either the Story-Teller or Mark (Dibelius does not say which) drew the material for The Great Miracle Tale of The Marriage at Cana.

Many other "parallel" accounts are adduced to show the tendency to secularization in the development of the form of The Great Miracle Tales. The implication is that The Great Miracle Tales either drew their material from, or were influenced by, the allegedly analogous accounts. However, it has been proved that these so-called analogous accounts fail to support the implication (cf. page 7 f. supra).

What conclusions does Dibelius form with respect to The Great Miracle Tales ? One, that they are developed in greater detail than those miracles listed among The Old Stories. Two, that The Great Miracle Tales were told and recorded to add an aura of glamor to the person of Jesus. The second conclusion is drawn in keeping with the theory of the development of the

tradition. As Christianity spread farther and farther into the world, its advocates became exposed to foreign material, which material they allegedly assimilated into their own message, re-shaping it in the process to fit their own ends. Their own ends were these: 1) to attest to their faith and to gain converts thereto; and 2) to provide sufficient convincing data of the worth of their faith in Jesus. Hence, form-criticism tells us, the development of The Great Miracle Tales, and also, as we shall discuss next, the Legends. As far as Dibelius is concerned,

Historical significance is proper to the Tales in so far as they are to be understood as witnesses to a Christian development.³²

³²Ibid., p. 102.

We come now to perhaps the most difficult and the most intriguing section of the entire form-critical method. It is the reconstruction of "the pristine gospel tradition" according to the form-analysis Legends.

Whoever reads this section, and its title, ought first to be clear about the relation between legend and history. A widely popular usage sees in the term 'legend' the designation for false history. But that is not the meaning of the term. 'Legends' mean, in the language of the Christian middle ages, stories of the life or death of a saint which were customarily read on the saint's day ('legenda' means 'what is to be read'). And this presupposes that legend has to do with a 'saintly' life and a blessed death, by which the believer can be edified and inspired to emulation. For this reason the legend must be told in such a way that two things are apparent: how the saint was so holy that he controlled his surroundings; and how this holy life, from infancy, was lifted out, by God Himself, from the mass of human misfortune. Legends, accordingly, are pious tales of pious persons whose memory men hold sacred - and this meant, in the middle ages, those whom men remembered at divine worship. That there were also legends of sacred things, places, and objects, has for primitive Christianity apparently no significance.³³

That is Dibelius' concept of the meaning of the term "legend". He applies the same concept to those stories he lists under the heading "Legends". Here are his "pristine" Legends.

About the Virgin Mary: Luke 1:26-35.³⁸
 About the Shepherds: Luke 2:4-19.
 Simeon: Luke 2:25-32.
 Jesus at the Age of Twelve: Luke 2:41-49.
 The Baptism of Jesus: Mark 1:9-11.
 The Contest With Satan: Matt. 4:1-10 (Luke 4:1-12).
 The Transfiguration: Mark 9:2-9.
 The Great Catch of Fish: Luke 5:3-6, 8-10.
 Zacchaeus: Luke 19:1-9.
 The Entry Into Jerusalem: Mark 11:1-10.
 The Empty Tomb: Mark 16:1-6, 8.
 Emmaus: Luke 24:13-21, 25-32.

³³Martin Dibelius, The Message of Jesus Christ (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), p. 174.

While Dibelius cites his definition of a legend as vindication of the view that the term "legend" does not necessarily mean false history, he nevertheless cites several references to prove that legends oftentimes are not completely trustworthy with reference to historical fact. That implication he also carries over to the Legends he has found in the Gospels. In proof, witness Dibelius' treatment of The Legend About the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:26-35.38).

The well-known difficulty that Mary was affianced, and, therefore could not have been astonished at the promise of a son, disappears when we see that her future husband Joseph does not belong to this Legend, but has been interpolated into the beginning of the Legend (1,27) by the evangelist, who wished to make a connection with the Nativity story.¹

¹The interpolation into Luke 1, 26 f., which we have supposed, is supported by its consequences. Only when we delete the words ἐμνηστεύετο ἄνδρὶ ἀπὸ οἴκου Ἰωσήφ 'espoused to a man named Joseph' is the overloaded sentence relieved and the relationship of ἐξ οἴκου Δαυὶδ 'of the house of David' made unambiguously certain: the Davidic descent is then asserted of Mary and not Joseph, and this is, in fact, all that concerns the narrative of a Virgin Birth.³⁴

Reconstructed by Dibelius with the deletion of Luke's "interpolation", this Legend About the Virgin Mary "is now thoroughly intelligible as a narrative of the Virgin Birth of Jesus".³⁵ The method form-criticism applies to the Legend-form can be clearly seen. The account as Dibelius renders it

³⁴Martin Dibelius, From Tradition To Gospel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. 124.

³⁵Martin Dibelius, The Message of Jesus Christ (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), p. 180.

is allegedly an accurate reconstruction of the type of Legend which circulated in the pristine tradition. The implication is that the early Christians, in order to add a special aura of glamor to the person of Jesus, "invented" the account of his miraculous Virgin Birth. Luke, to lend credence to the account, and to prepare the way for The Infancy Narratives, in which Joseph is mentioned, has "interpolated" the verse omitted (Luke 1:27).

In this way Dibelius resolves "the well-known difficulty that Mary was affianced". To Dibelius, "Mary's question, 'How is this possible? No man ever takes liberties with me (Luke 1:34 - *γινώσκω*)', is improbable on the lips of a bride-to-be."³⁶ For an objective study, that is indeed a wicked implication and an assertion unworthy of genuine scholarship.

In the very next breath Dibelius discounts the Legend of the Virgin Birth, which he has just so carefully reconstructed.

Moreover, in the legend of the shepherds, our Christmas Story (pp.108 f.), Mary is represented as the wife, not the betrothed, of Joseph; and nothing in this narrative at all suggests the virgin birth.³⁷

Therefore we are given to understand that while these Legends of the pristine gospel tradition undoubtedly give us historical facts concerning Jesus, they are not completely trustworthy and are told, more or less, from pious interests in the life of the "saintly person" Jesus.

³⁶Loc. cit.

³⁷Loc. cit.

The Legend About Mary, the Legend About the Shepherds, the Simeon Legend, the Legend of the Baptism of Jesus, and the Legend of the Transfiguration are seen by Dibelius to contain a heavenly message about Jesus. In this way of course those Legends served the ends of preaching. The messages are, in the Mary-legend: Luke 1:31-33; in the Shepherd-legend: Luke 2:10-12; in the Simeon-legend: Luke 2:29-32; in the Baptism-legend: Mark 1:11; in the Transfiguration-legend: Mark 9:7.

Important legends of Jesus are also found in connection with the event of Easter. And this too is very significant. For the indescribable factor in this event - Jesus crucified as a criminal, yet not abandoned by God in death, but rather exalted to His side - this factor can scarcely be expressed in any other way than the form of a legend. But again it is immeasurably significant of the restraint exercised in the growth of the legend that the New Testament has no Resurrection legend, but only accounts of the origin and spread of the Easter faith. The 'how' of the event is left unsaid: it is only the faith in the Risen One that is of interest. The two Easter-legends which appear in the New Testament as completely independent narratives, and are left almost wholly unrevised (pp.118,119 f.), appear not to give us the oldest tradition of the appearances of the Risen Lord; for the early Passion Narrative anticipates an appearance in Galilee, while the tradition recorded by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3 ff. points in the same direction (see p. 34). Nevertheless, the Empty Tomb and Emmaus legends make present and real the faith of the earliest community.³⁸

Several important points with reference to the method form-criticism applies to the Legends are brought to bear here. First, the reader will note that Dibelius describes the belief of the early Christian community, not his own. Second, the historicity of the Resurrection is subtly denied by the remark that "it is immeasurably significant of the re-

³⁸Ibid., p. 181.

straint exercised in the growth of the legend that the New Testament has no Resurrection legend, but only accounts of the origin and spread of the Easter faith (cf. p.56 supra)". The implication is that the shapers of the gospel tradition wisely confined their "story-telling about Jesus". A purported eyewitness account of the Resurrection (such as the apocryphal Gospel of Peter gives) would jeopardize the credibility of their message. After all, no one actually saw Jesus leave the grave. So to avoid turning their legendary account into pure myth (though form-critics assert there is a great deal of mythology in the legends already), the shapers of the gospel tradition exercised restraint in the growth of the legend. Instead of presenting a Resurrection-legend, the shapers of the tradition in the early Christian community transferred the center of interest to legends concerning the Easter faith. Third, Dibelius takes exception to the Empty Tomb and Emmaus legends for the reason that "they appear not to give us the oldest tradition of the appearances of the Risen Lord; for the early Passion Narrative anticipates an appearance in Galilee...(cf. p.56 supra)". That Matt.28:16-20 records that appearance in Galilee (which appearance, incidentally, was not guaranteed to take place first after the Resurrection), he counters with such irrelevant questions as "How does Jesus appear? How does he disappear? ... Which hill is meant?"³⁹

Matthew 28:16-20 naturally is nowhere mentioned among the

³⁹Martin Dibelius, From Tradition To Gospel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. 283.

passages listed as pristine gospel tradition. Rather, it is characteristic of "a mythical attitude in the words of Jesus". In words like these, allegedly put into Jesus' mouth by the evangelists and others of the later Christian community, Jesus is no longer pictured as "the old gospel tradition" pictures him, i.e., as a prophet, the bearer of God's final message to mankind; rather, words like "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth (Matt.28:18)" draw a picture of Jesus the god, elevated to the side of God as a reward of merit for work well done previously. Thus the form-critics attribute "the Christ-mythology" to later accretions to the pristine tradition. Concomitantly, the soteriological themes of Mark and Paul are products of this so-called Christ mythology.

The cycle is now complete. The tradition has evolved to that view and knowledge of Jesus which we have from the Gospels. Of that view and knowledge of Jesus, allegedly evolved from the so-called Christ-mythology, Dibelius says,

When we turn over in our minds the mythical journey of Christ from Heaven back to Heaven we shall not regard it as a miracle that the Son of God is superior to men but rather that He is like them.⁴⁰

The Legends of the tradition, then, and many of the words of Jesus, too (sayings which are omitted from the reconstruction of the pristine tradition), betray mythological interests and cannot therefore be true portrayals of the life of Jesus. The Legends and those words which represent Jesus in His ex-

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 268.

alted state are valuable insofar as they bear witness to the interests of the later Christian community (or, communities). Credence as to authentic history is denied them by the form-critics.

CHAPTER III

AN EVALUATION OF FORM-CRITICISM

The reader will note that the form-critical method has progressed from an analysis of literary forms in the examples of Early Christian Preaching to the realm of historical judgments in all the other "forms" of the pristine tradition it identifies. This statement is particularly true with reference to The Great Miracle Tales and the Legends. The Sitz-im-Leben hypothesis of the form-critical theory plays a very strong part in developing the historical judgments which Dibelius draws. Those conclusions, based on the Sitz-im-Leben hypothesis, lead Dibelius to make these statements which sum up the results of the form-critical method.

The fortune of primitive Christianity is reflected in the history of the Gospel-Form. ... The Passion Story, the most significant piece of tradition of the Christian faith, was told relatively early as a connected story. Moreover, isolated events from the life of Jesus, suitable for sermons, were told in short stories, and sayings and parables were used especially for a practical purpose. But pleasure in the narrative for its own sake arose and seized upon literary devices. The technique of the Tales developed, and lent meanwhile a fully secular character to the miracle stories. In addition, legendary narratives full of personal interest in the persons of the sacred story joined themselves to the periphery of the tradition. One told of these persons in the same way as similar narratives from the surrounding world spoke of other holy men. Already between the lines of the Gospel-Form one can see that the faith of Christendom moved from its fundamental strangeness in the world and its self-limitation to the religious interests of the Church to an accommodation to the world and to harmony with its relationships.¹

¹Martin Dibelius, From Tradition To Gospel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. 287.

The Formgeschichte of the Gospels leads finally to a theological outcome. For from the Forms it can deduce the leading interests of the tradition. It replaces the texts into the spiritual world from which they came. It believes, therefore, that it can show what significance the tradition of Jesus' words and deeds enjoyed when it first began to be told, and thereby it believes it can penetrate to the first and normative connection between history and the belief in Christ.

The first understanding afforded by the standpoint of Formgeschichte is that there never was a 'purely' historical witness to Jesus. Whatever was told of Jesus' words and deeds was always a testimony of faith as formulated for preaching and exhortation in order to convert unbelievers and confirm the faithful. What founded Christianity was not knowledge about a historical process, but the confidence that the content of the story was salvation: the decisive beginning of the End.

In saying this we have already touched upon the second theological goal of the standpoint of Formgeschichte. It undertakes to portray the understanding of the story of Jesus, by which the various formulations of the material are dominated. We showed in Chapter VII that the earliest Passion story, as far as it can be recognized in Mark, does not mean to present events in the historical sense. Although in a few places it depends upon the information of eye-witnesses, it does not purpose to narrate and prove the sequence of events, nor to stir and exhort people by the description of the Passion. But, as is also quite obviously the purpose of the editing by Mark, it proposes to describe salvation, i.e., the fulfillment of God's will as revealed in the Old Testament. But this presentation could only be made by one who had faith, i.e., the Easter faith. In the sense of history the undertaking would have been a tremendous paradox.²

And thus the mythology about Christ came to expression although it was only in some few words and stories (cf. Chapter X), but it began to place itself like a framework round the life of Jesus, and then the union of the tradition of the life of Jesus with Christology was completed. On the one hand, the Risen Lord could be regarded as the subject of the tradition, and on the other, as much as tradition offered could be said about the revelation of the Lord on earth.³

²Ibid., p. 295 f.

³Ibid., p. 298.

Are these conclusions of form-criticism validly drawn ? Do the materials of the Forms Dibelius has elected, especially The Great Miracle Tales and the Legends, conclusively prove a process of religious development in the early Christian community, as the form-critics maintain they do ? Further, is the Sitz-im-Leben hypothesis acceptable as a correct postulate ?

The reader will remember that Dibelius practices "reading between the lines of the Gospel-Form (cf. page 60 supra)" to draw his conclusions with regard to the development of the early Christian community and the accommodation of the gospel tradition to the world. The Forms in themselves actually tell us nothing of that development. There's the rub.

For example, as Burton Scott Easton, a critic of form-criticism, has pointed out,

The word 'legend' as the form-critics use it has nothing to do with the form of a narrative, but it is a historical value-judgment passed on the facts as set forth. Granting that a story is recognizable in a literary sense as 'legend', we have not by that fact alone made progress toward appraising its historical value.⁴

Further discrediting the historical judgments which the form-critics evolve from their method, Easton states:

Once we refrain from attributing an impossible simplicity of development to the earliest church, we must realize that form-criticism as a historical tool has a very limited utility. It can tell us that the manner of phrasing is conventional, and it can explain the conventions. It can tell us why a certain wording was used, why certain details were added or omitted. And it can tell us - within limits - something of the use to which the material was

⁴Burton Scott Easton, The Gospel Before The Gospels (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), p. 63.

put. But the study of forms as forms cannot carry us farther. In Synoptic research, at all events, it cannot give us even the relative ages of the special forms it identifies, and the absolute ages lie totally beyond its reach. Nor can it aid our historical estimate of the contents of any story. Form-criticism, by its very nature, cannot distinguish between a dialogue artificially built up from a striking phrase and a conventional abbreviation of a precise record of a conversation in which the same phrase appeared. It cannot distinguish between a popular legend of healing and a narrative, told in a popular way, of a successful use of psychotherapy. And so we are obliged to say: Form-criticism may prepare the way for historical criticism, but form-criticism is not historical criticism.⁵

Dr. Easton aptly brings to light the prime weakness of the Sitz-im-Leben hypothesis of the form-critical theory by stating that form-criticism cannot give us even the relative ages of the special forms it identifies, and the absolute ages lie totally beyond its reach. Ernest Findlay Scott, in his book The Validity of the Gospel Record, reaches the same conclusion.

Since form-criticism fails to allocate the development of the various forms to definite dates in the history of the early Christian community, the development of that community cannot clearly be shown, either. The Sitz-im-Leben hypothesis thus remains a hypothesis, and no conclusions with respect to it can validly be drawn. With the fall of the Sitz-im-Leben hypothesis the entire theory of form-criticism fails, for upon that hypothesis everything else in the form-critical method depends. The claim of form-criticism to historical criticism is defeated.

As to the method form-critics employ in the attempt to

⁵Ibid., p. 80.

authenticate their theory, even this brief dissertation has shown that it is subjective, arbitrary, and frequently inconclusive in proving its contentions; in addition, it is based on the mistaken premise that the Gospels are purely the work of human hands.

To support that mistaken premise, the highly-vaunted "scientific" approach of form-criticism completely discounts the historical testimony of the early church concerning the origins of the Gospels.

The information furnished by Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and the Muratorian Fragment, concerning the traditional origin of the Gospels, is passed by without reference. Justin's observation that the Gospels are apostolic memoirs is mentioned merely to reject it as misleading. The testimony of Papias, our oldest explicit witness to the authorship of Mark, fares little better. Bultmann refers to his description of Mark as the interpreter of Peter - as a source of error; Dibelius comments on his testimony to the authorship of Matthew and Mark, but concludes that he has been influenced by the ('false') view of the sub-apostolic age, namely, that the evangelists were really authors. And this all is - a strange lack of scientific completeness and perspective. As De Grandmaison remarks, 'it is the wisest method in these matters to prefer an ounce of ancient information which is authentic to a bookful of learned conjectures.'⁶

The subjectivity of the method is evident at the outset. The form-critics attempt to bridge a gap of time almost nineteen centuries long to tell us what the Gospels are and how they came into being. Meanwhile, the historical testimony of those who stood much closer in time to the actual period in history when the Gospels were written is discounted. The historical

⁶Laurence McGinley, S. J., Form-Criticism of the Synoptic Healing Narratives (Woodstock, Maryland: Woodstock College Press, 1944), p. 22 f.

testimony of eyewitnesses to Jesus' ministry is likewise discounted, paving the way for the "unique" form-critical view that Matthew (an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry) copied from Mark (not an eyewitness) when he did not use the source "Q" of the gospel tradition in compiling his Gospel.

Going deeper into the same consideration of the origins of the Gospels, it is to be noted that form-critics ignore the testimony of Paul in his letters to Timothy (cf. p. 45 f. supra). From the historical standpoint of chronology those letters, written in 67 A.D. or before, bear witness to two significant facts concerning the origins of the Gospels. In those letters Paul quotes from Matthew, quite probably, and Luke as existing Scripture, and on the basis of Christ's promise (John 14:26), we believe that what the apostles spoke and wrote came from God, "the Spirit of the Father framing the words". The claim of form-criticism that the material of the Gospels is a product of compilation and selection (on the part of both the nameless shapers of the tradition and the evangelists themselves) may be an interesting opinion, but that is all it is.

Further subjectivity in the form-critical method is apparent in this, that Dibelius' translations oftentimes violate the text to subserve the form-critical arguments (cf. p. 22 f. supra - the "Christological preaching of Philippians 2: 6-10; also p. 32 f. supra - Dibelius' interpolation to Mark 6:4, Jesus' words after the rejection at Nazareth.).

That same subjectivity undoubtedly conditions the arbitrariness of Dibelius' multiple excisions of the text of the Gospels. Many sections of the Gospels have suffered textual surgery in order that they might conform to Dibelius' admittedly preconceived notion of "the message of Jesus Christ (the prophet)". Many other passages which are absolutely chained in context to those materials which Dibelius has selected as "pristine gospel tradition" have been relegated to the categories of "later Christian influence", evangelistic interpretative addition", and the like. More significant, the themes of the Gospels are destroyed by this arbitrary textual surgery; and that havoc is wrought solely because those themes do not conform to Dibelius' mistaken concept of what "the gospel tradition" should contain.

That the form-critical method is frequently inconclusive in substantiating its arguments becomes evident definitely when we consider the weakness of its much employed "argument from analogy". The reader will remember that this argument seeks to prove that The Great Miracle Tales of the "pristine tradition" were definitely influenced in their formulation by similar accounts from rabbinic and Hellenistic literature. The Tale of The Marriage at Cana (cf. p. 50 f. supra) is cited by the form-critics as one example of such outside influence upon the development of the tradition. The reader will also remember that the premise of the "argument from analogy" has been definitely voided (cf. p. 7 f. supra).

Other instances of inconclusive and unsubstantiated reasoning we might adduce are Dibelius' treatment of The Widow's Mite (Mark 12:41-44) and the Legend About the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:26-35.38). Dibelius classifies The Widow's Mite as a Parable, because he feels "it is a story which has come to us from Jesus himself". The section of course reports a biographical incident in the life of Jesus. Because form-criticism deliberately removes all such "biographical" data from its reconstruction of "the pristine gospel tradition", The Widow's Mite has become a "parable". The whole procedure anent this classification is again arbitrary and certainly inconclusive reasoning. With respect to Luke 1:26-35.38 (The Legend About the Virgin Mary) the "conclusive" reasoning Dibelius employs to explain away Mary's question is overwhelmingly atrocious (cf. p. 54 f. supra).

The theory of form-criticism has been proved fallacious; the method form-criticism uses to reconstruct "the pristine gospel tradition" has been shown to be subjective, arbitrary, and rimose. There remains but a few remarks concerning the mistaken premise which prompted the form-critics to undertake their painstaking research.

That mistaken premise is, of course, the belief that the Gospels are the work of human hands entirely. The clearly proved doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, "the Spirit of the Father framing the thoughts and the very words which the evangelists wrote" is plainly ignored by the advocates

of form-criticism. Concomitantly, the form-critics advance other firmly held opinions which vitiate the chief doctrines of the Christian religion. Form-critics do not accept the doctrine of the deity of Christ. Instead, they strive to prove that the doctrine of the deity of Christ is a product of a Christ-mythology which arose in the later Christian community. The doctrine of the Vicarious Atonement of Christ is rendered meaningless in the form-critical ideology; in their opinion, Jesus was just a martyr to his cause - the prophetic preaching of repentance and the coming of the Kingdom of God. All Messianic concepts which Christendom applies to Jesus are ruled out by the form-critics. Indeed, the exceedingly skeptic critic Bultmann makes himself ridiculous by stating that Jesus himself was never conscious of Messianic claims, for "he always referred to the Son of Man (a Messianic title) in the third person; ergo, the Son of Man was someone other than Jesus."⁷ This is certainly a non sequitur argument.

In the face of so flagrant a testimony to unbelief, what can one say? The words of 2nd Peter 2:1 come forcibly to mind: "But there were false prophets among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction."

Such men "wrest Scripture to their own destruction".

⁷Rudolph Bultmann, "A New Approach to the Synoptic Problem." Journal of Religion, VI (1926), 354

Meantime, all true believers may rejoice that despite insistent and insidious attempts to undermine and discredit the Bible as the verbally inspired Word of God (and with it, the essential truths "which make us wise unto salvation"), it remains pure and invincible, proving consistently that "Scripture cannot be broken."

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