

Inaugural Address

RICHARD J. SCHULTZ

I Believe One Holy Christian  
Church: What Does It Mean Today

BISHOP BO GIERTZ

Man: 1971

JOHN F. JOHNSON

The Faculty's Commission To Its President

CLARENCE W. SPIEGEL

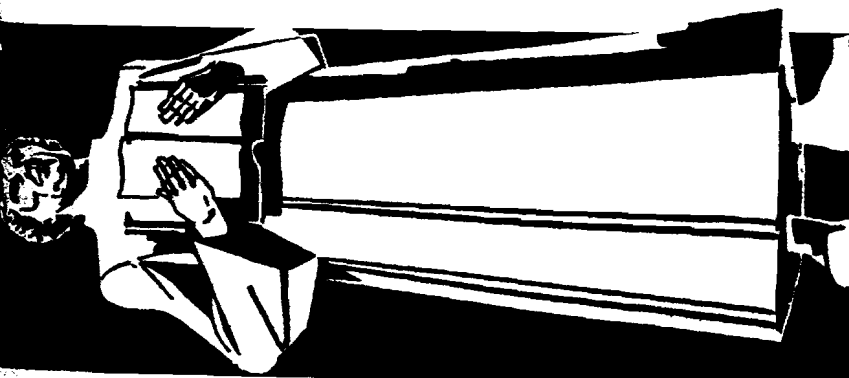
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## THE HISTORICAL CRITICAL METHOD

One of the live and current issues in the Missouri Synod is the use of the historical critical method. There are many names for this procedure. Sometimes it is called the literary or scientific method. Regardless of the nomenclature, the claim is made that it is a neutral method and that it may be used in a totally 'objective' way. Professor Sverre Aalen, New Testament professor in the largest Lutheran seminary in Norway, states in his article, "The Revelation of Christ and Scientific Research", that the method is based on the subjective bias of the New Testament scholar. Here is a section taken from his essay:

**"If I have seen it correctly, the so-called historical-critical method is not a method in the strict sense of this word, but rather a combination of philosophical and ideological presuppositions on the one side, and a trained methodical investigating of the texts on the other. The strict scientific investigation by no means just makes use of one special method, much less "the" historical method. As soon as science is divested of its false claim to absoluteness, the idea of a particular neutral historical method falls away. The final synthesis, the conception, can never be achieved through a neutral method. The general conception is always dependent on a philosophy of life. No one any longer believes today, that the meaning of life can be found or demonstrated by science. How can one then think, that the life of a bygone epoch can be grasped by a scientific neutral method? Does one imagine, that absolute reason has become incarnate in historical research? The historian as researcher is not supposed to have a lookout point outside of history, from which he could interpret it! But he is himself cast into history and surrounded by it. By what means is he to lift himself up above history?"**

As this is a burning issue in our church today, this article will be a real contribution.

# The Revelation of Christ and Scientific Research

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*Translation by Otto Stahlke*

THE WORD "SCIENCE" generally evokes the idea of an objective examination, in which every philosophy of life and personal attitude is eliminated. Science seeks objective truth, it wants to lay bare things as they are or have been.

In current Biblical studies we speak of the so-called "historical-critical research." This expression also evokes in most of us the idea of an objective examination without presuppositions. In the word "critical" there lies also an element of re-examining accepted viewpoints and conceptions. This criticism is directed primarily against a more naive and unreflecting reading and acceptance of the sources, which are the objects of examination. The narratives and the presentations of the sources are called in question by critical research. Have, for example, the Gospels correctly reflected the actual historical course of events, or have they not rather overdrawn and distorted it? But the criticism, which is practiced in the historical-critical research is applied also to the conceptions and viewpoints of the sources. Can the notions of faith, which have found their expression in the writings of the New Testament or in the later doctrine of the church, be accepted without alteration today? In the critical attitude there lies an element of destruction.

Indeed, on the other hand it is claimed that historical truth has been gained through this research and that therefore a true and honest Christianity now can be offered. On the basis of this objective truth, purged of all pious errors, these scholars think they can present the articles of faith found in the texts—and in the church—in a new but still adequate form.

Two divergent interests thus come to the fore in the historical-critical research of our time. First, the researcher, who is engaged in this form of Bible research, feels that he is the representative of an objective and neutral examination. He applies neutral criteria, which he handles like tools. He applies an objective method to the material, a method, which is self-contained and independent of every personal attitude of faith. But a second interest can also be observed in this researcher. He would like—in spite of all his negative results—to be a theologian, he generally confesses himself to be a son of the church and makes use of the traditional terms and concepts of the church or of the New Testament. He would therefore like his voice to be heard in the church. There is no critical Bible research, which

operates in an absolutely isolated position. Even those critical Bible researchers, who have brought the foundations of the traditional faith to the point of falling or shaking—want to profess the faith of their church but just this fact brings the church and the congregation, which adheres to the faith in Christ in the traditional form, into the greatest difficulties.

But what does this objective, truth seeking, historical-critical research look like? One speaks often of the "historical-critical method." This term is intended to emphasize, that the researcher applies certain rules, which are thought to be self-evident in a scientific examination and have validity within themselves. Although historical-critical research in the last one hundred years has by no means always come to the same conclusions—indeed not even in the most fundamental questions, for example, with regard to the person of Christ or concerning the central content of the faith—its advocates like to speak of the method here used as something in itself clear and definable. Only the idea that one carries on science and research by means of a method which in its principal elements is unchangeable and unmistakable, can explain the fact that there is such constant reference to "the" historical-critical method. To the scholars of this school the objectivity and clarity of their method seems so self-evident, that for the most part they consider it superfluous to present and critically analyze this method—their critical interest generally does not extend so far.

For a guarantee of the uniformity and clarity of the historical-critical method, its practitioners sometimes point to the far-reaching consensus which often exists with regard to certain results in the generation and the school of research, to which they themselves belong. They are not disturbed by the fact that in a previous epoch of critical Bible research an entirely different consensus was found in important questions. The explanation is given that one has now disposed of errors which earlier adhered to research. But a historical review leads to the surmise, that today's historical-critical researcher also belongs to a definite epoch and is shaped by it in a decisive manner. Indeed, he appears at times to have yielded to the fantasy, that his own generation has attained a definitive phase as to the results attained. He considers many of his results as more or less self-evident. But his impression that the results are obvious springs in most cases merely from the agreement with his like-minded contemporary colleagues and followers. Because of this agreement he feels little need to justify the premises of his own research.

In reality one is a victim of a self-deception when speaking of "the" historical-critical research or method, as if the matter under discussion were an unambiguous, objective method, independent of the philosophy of the researcher. I do not advance a new thesis, when I maintain that there is no historical research without presuppositions, least of all, when we are dealing with Biblical research.

And yet it seems more necessary today than ever to repeat this thesis, yes, even to nail it down. It is imperative to declare the prejudiced attitude of the radical historical-critical researchers and to emphasize and demonstrate the contingent character of their results.

Even a few simple considerations of a methodological kind can convince us of this, that no historical examination can be carried through without certain presuppositions. Rudolf Bultmann saw that this is so, in the case of what he calls the interpretation of the New Testament. But he was not sufficiently on guard against the danger of applying foreign presuppositions and approaches to the Bible, and without hesitation applied his existentialist philosophy to the texts. Neither did he see, that presuppositions are at work also in purely historical questions, and therefore he believed that he was exercising an objective neutrality in his radical, critical operations and results.

A distinction between the purely historical questions and the interpretation of the content of the New Testament can here, however, not be carried through. The presuppositions will evidently make themselves felt in the entire field, both in the theological interpretation and in the more important questions of the historicity of the narratives. If one considers for example that the essential concern of Jesus is exhausted by the proclamation of the existential decision for God, without taking his person and work into consideration, then necessarily an entire series of episodes and statements of the Gospels must be set aside as immaterial to the historical reconstruction of His appearance and work.

Already from the selection of specific problems or aspects of the material it can be seen that the researcher works under the influence of certain presuppositions, though perhaps unconsciously. Already the questions, which one poses and then finds answered in this or that way, or the viewpoints, from which the material is examined, reveal a certain conception of that which is essential or non-essential in the New Testament, in other words: what has thematic significance.

We want to illustrate these theses briefly. One can for example investigate the New Testament from the viewpoint of evolution. The aim is then to shed light upon rise and development of the religious and moral ideas, which are basic to the teaching of Jesus or the New Testament in general. Then one traces the development of these ideas both in Judaism and also in the history of Hellenistic religion and demonstrates, how these ideas merge into a general conception in the preaching of Jesus or in St. Paul. It is clear that by this method very definite limits are set to the peculiarity and uniqueness of the teaching of Jesus or of the theology of Paul.

Or one looks upon the history of the beginnings of early Christianity as the history of religious personalities. In this case the interest of the researcher is a different one. Now he tries to show, how certain

religious and moral ideas were absorbed and realized by a great personality. The researcher will have a different conception of his material again, if he is not speaking primarily of personality and ideas, but rather of personality and piety or personality and cult. His interest will then be in religion as an inner emotion.

This could be continued. Many today are interested in Jesus as the great teacher of ethics, as the representative of the highest morality. Others try to describe Him as an existential hero, although it is questionable to me, how far this conception has gained entrance among the broad masses. What I want to emphasize here is, that in the end there is no objective, cogent criterion, by means of which one could reject these different approaches and modes of investigation as false. History is simply human life, which transpired in the past, and why should I not regard what I consider as the essence and content of today's life also as the substance of human life in former times?

True, it is maintained that most of the viewpoints just named are today abandoned, written off as untenable. It is said that we now see clearly that Jesus could not be understood at all as a religious or moral "personality," that this aspect would miss precisely that which was essential in Jesus and His appearance, that, furthermore, His proclamation was not a presentation of ideas, but something entirely different; that Jesus could be properly understood only if one sees that He was the bringer of a message, an eschatological message, as one says, that is, a message through which God appears upon the scene with finality and places mankind before the decisive choice, which decides salvation or damnation. Or again: today we see, that Jesus is the hero of faith, Himself a believer and an organ of the faith. Or finally: that He is the great example, the forerunner, which we should follow. Through these new insights, which one pretends to have gained through a neutral scientific method, all previous attempts and aspects have been overthrown.

All this is however not so completely new, as one would like to regard it to be. Much of what one could read in the last ten or fifteen years regarding the historical Jesus, in reality means only, that there has been a return to older, liberal positions. To this we will return later. Without doubt certain aspects originate from existentialist philosophy. But whether the house has been built upon the rock of an objective science is another question. Bultmann indeed presumes to operate with a higher order of objectivity which has its base precisely in the presuppositions from which the researcher proceeds, that is, according to his opinion in the ideas of existentialist philosophy, which he considers to be the objectively correct one. In this manner it is believed that an objectively assured basis of the methodology of critical research and its results has been established. It is emphatically asserted, that the liberal theology has been left far behind, because its results were colored and conditioned by its own

time. The liberal theologians described Jesus according to a pattern, which had its roots in the ideals and conceptions of the former generation, which however amounted to a distortion of the real, historical Jesus. The result, it is said, was a modernizing of the figure of Jesus and the New Testament in general.

One must however ask: Is that which happens today any different? Is not our modern age the age of existentialism? By this I do not mean that common people run around as little existentialist philosophers. Yet, this philosophy corresponds to the atmosphere and life style of our time, is in reality an effluent of the same, which can, for one thing, be observed from the fact, that it underlies and has influenced a great part of the modern belletristic literature. After this model one attempts today to understand both Jesus and the entire early Christianity. It is not apparent then that such research rests upon certain presuppositions bearing the stamp of our time? This, too, is an attempt to modernize Jesus and early Christianity. This can easily be seen if we regard modern German research, with which we are here primarily concerned, in proper historical perspective.

Indeed, this existentialist background does not come to the fore to the fullest extent in all those scholars in an equal degree. Nevertheless, certain basic elements, which without doubt stem from such thinking, are common to most of them—I have in mind the present state of affairs in Germany. I need only name such concepts as “decision,” “freedom,” “future,” “event,” and “eschatology” (as realization of the demand of the present), in order to prove this thesis. Certainly, in recent years the motifs of liberal theology have come into the foreground in increasing measure with a number of representatives of this school. This was seen clearly by Bultmann. Not to the same degree he directed his attention to the motifs which unite his own view and with the entire school with liberal theology. Take for example the concept of “*Eigentlichkeit*” (“true nature”), which has a striking similarity to the realization of the own personality, which was so important to liberal theology, or the concept “*Bedeutsamkeit*” (“significance”), which corresponds to the liberal conception of “religious value.” Even more important is the motif of the nearness of God, which occupies a central place in both the liberal view and in the Bultmann school. The same applies to the motif of the immediacy of the relationship of God. We may add, in general, the dominance of faith in God, which, separated from faith in Christ, has again become a general concept, exactly as in liberal theology, and finally, the overemphasis upon the ethical obligation (decision, discipleship) at the expense of the message of grace in the Gospel. These and other motifs, which at present belong to modern German exegesis, in fact have their origin in the spirit of modernity and are foreign to the New Testament in the form in which they here appear. The affinity of these motifs with liberal theology confirms the conclusion

that also in the recent German exegesis of the Bultmann school there appears a modernizing of the New Testament.

But does not this school deserve credit for having brought the kerygma character of the New Testament to light? Is it not a genuine Biblical motif which has here been rediscovered? Is it not precisely the critical theology of our generation, which has developed the "Word" character of the New Testament in a creditable manner? Indeed, this is a merit, when compared with the wandering paths, on which liberal theology had lost itself. But this merit is only a relative one. The interpretation of the New Testament by the church naturally has always read and understood the New Testament as the Word of God. But above all one must ask: Is the "Word" character of the New Testament in fact taken seriously here? Is there not always a search for some "concern" (as one says) behind the Word, the "existential understanding," or the "event" behind the text, or the "immediate relation to God," of which so much is said today? Must not the text as Word here rather recede into the background and its character as a life-giving, authoritative Word be veiled? One of these scholars says expressly: "The immediacy of the event makes it unnecessary that anything should be said; words can cause direct interference, because they threaten the immediacy" (W. Marxsen, *Das Neue Testament als Buch der Kirche*, 1967, 2nd ed., p. 108). There is indeed much discussion regarding Word and kerygma. But is the Word actually heeded? Is the proper respect granted to the Word? It does not appear so.

The more we delve into this modern interpretation, the more emphatically arises the critical question: Are the results, which this type of research claims to bring to life, truly the results of the application of an objective historical method, of an unprepossessed investigation? In this question I am not thinking of the many details, with which the Biblical research of our generation and the previous ones has enriched our knowledge. Naturally, no one desires to deny the significance of the many discoveries, which have been put at the disposal of the interpretation and understanding of the Bible through research in the areas of philology, archaeology, and history, with regard to details. The reader will have seen that I am thinking of the solutions and conceptions, which are laid before us by the critical school concerning the central and essential questions and problems of the New Testament. Here the answer must be: No! The results have by no means been produced by an objective, neutral method. There is no such thing as "the" historical method. There are various kinds of approaches and aspects, partly such, which can be compared with tools to lay bare pure historical facts, tools, which can be used by the researcher independent of his personal opinion, but partly also such, which of necessity are more or less determined by the personal view of the researcher. It is not possible to reject by objectively convincing arguments a method or procedure of the



latter kind. A method, for example, which proceeds from the prior decision, that the Word or the proclamation in the New Testament has its root in inner religious emotion or in the cultic attitude of the individual, so that the main emphasis is laid on the religious experience, can ultimately not be rejected on the basis of reasons, which are convincing to everyone. The objection may be voiced that for example Paul expressly says, that the word which he preached came to him by tradition. But does he not at the same time also say, that he was instructed and taught by the Spirit? The Spirit is indeed within a man (I Corinthians 2:10-16)! Naturally I do not mean to say, that every theory claiming to have found the right approach to the understanding of the New Testament is, objectively regarded, equally as true or false as every other. I merely hold that the incorrectness of a theory of a basic kind cannot be made evident and convincing for all.

An important reason for this lies in the fact, that history is a part of human life. Every researcher will—and rightly so—proceed from the conscious or unconscious presupposition that history is human life in the past. He feels justified therefore, even compelled, to interpret the past by the aid of the same categories which obtain in life today. He will therefore always make the attempt to penetrate to what he thinks to be the moving factors of the historical process. Whether there may be forms of historical science, in which this is not the case, is a question which we can omit at this point. To the extent that the texts, which are to be researched, move in areas, which touch upon our philosophy of life, to that extent the above observations will apply. Most particularly will these philosophical presuppositions make themselves felt in the research of the Bible. This is valid for both the critical and the conservative research. As far as I can see, it is not even possible to undertake a simple comparison of any significance between two ideas, for example, except under the aspect of a previously established frame of reference, which will then most likely be determined by the basic view of the respective scholar. About the same will hold true for the distinction between principal and secondary matters, between that which is important and unimportant in the texts. A favorite theme among New Testament scholars today is the question concerning unity in multiplicity. It would be naive to think that this problem could be solved with the aid of a purely "objective" or neutral method.

At the moment we reserve the question, how it could at all be possible to interpret the Bible and Biblical history, if the personal presuppositions of the researcher are, and must be, in operation at every point. Naturally, the basic solution lies in this, that one must dismiss the false, that is, foreign presuppositions and prejudices and apply only correct, that is, relevant presuppositions and categories to the texts. A specific proof should indeed not be required, that an interpretation, which results in a modernizing of the New Testament

or of the person of Jesus, cannot be accounted as relevant. A closer analysis shows that the so-called "historical-critical" research in the form, in which we know it to be today, where it concerns the more important motifs of the contents, is a child of the modern time and has drawn its motifs from the spirit of the modern time. Its agreement with humanism or even with the existentialism of our time is obvious and perhaps denied by no one. That the decisive motifs, with which this theology labors, cannot be relevant to the material, reveals itself among other things also in this, that the principal element is not sought in the words of the text, but as was stated above, behind the words, even, at times in direct contradiction to the text. Is the existential interpretation not expressly seeking something, which lies under the words and merely finds expression in the words? It is held that behind the words there is the existential feeling or the understanding of existence, or the "attitude", or existence itself. According to this method the question very often concerns itself not with what was said or written, but what was intended, it seeks the intended sense, the "real" concern. One distinguishes further between "the matter" and the later interpretation and postulates antitheses between younger and later layers of tradition or between the author and his sources. Sometimes the real "matter" is excavated from the oldest layer, in which it has been buried, in order finally again to be brought to the light of day as a result of historical-critical research. An important idea which makes itself felt is then, that structural differences can and must be demonstrated between the different layers or sources. The researcher works according to the peculiar methodical concept, that the understanding of a source consists in the demonstration of its different character by comparison with other elements. But a research, which in these various manners does not respect the Word but roughly rampages through the Word, can hardly be a relevant research or interpretation of the Word.

Against this background the newly arisen interest in the "historical Jesus" is to be judged. Much is said of Jesus as the last Messenger of God. On first observation it seems therefore that He is placed into the category of a prophet. This category has the advantage in any case that it is drawn from ancient times. Of course, when He is further described as the eschatological prophet, complications arise. If there has ever been an eschatological or absolute prophet in the history of religion, then this must perhaps have been Mohammed. The person and the self-consciousness of Mohammed would then be the nearest parallel to Jesus. In fact, Mohammed appeared on the scene in the role, in which one today makes Jesus act and speak. In his message Mohammed placed mankind before the choice, and indeed this choice was final, and decided man's eternal fate. Are they truly willing to place Jesus in a series with Mohammed? The conception of an eschatological prophet is indicated not very clearly in Biblical history.

Basically, however, one is not interested in Jesus as a prophet. For the word of a prophet must be obeyed, not critically analyzed and interpreted in the light of some postulated "concern." The real interest of these scholars is rather directed toward a certain form of faith in God, which pleases and is acceptable to modern man. Basically, Jesus attracts only as the bearer or originator of this faith in God. The scholars, that I have in mind, do not always dare to state that it is so; sometimes they hide this. But it is clear, that they are not interested in faith in Jesus. It is not intended that one should believe in Jesus, one is to believe with Jesus or like Jesus; Jesus is reduced to the role of a mediator of the faith in God. Hardly anything is left of the second article of the Apostles' Creed except the sentences: "Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried." The relation of this view to liberal theology and thereby to the humanism of the new age lies at hand and should not be denied.

The modern presuppositions, which underlie the existentialist interpretation of Rudolf Bultmann, are apparent. The bequest, which Bultmann has taken over from liberal theology—in spite of all protestation against it—can likewise be documented without difficulty. With him, as with his disciples, a modernizing of early Christianity is patent, which can be called anything, but not objective and scientific in the sense of a research without presuppositions. Among other things there is a strain of rationalism in Bultmann, which clearly relates his school to liberal theology. Both schools are borne and determined by an evidently compact rationalism. This is expressed among other things in the pre-conceived opinion, that the process of revelation must be understood as without any supernatural intervention. In this world—inclusive of the process of revelation and the history of salvation—in principle only the immanent exists and can exist. All that is immanent is determined and limited by iron laws, which are analogous to the laws of nature. The historical process, also that of the history of salvation, is a closed system of effects. The Jesus, who is then shown, therefore has nothing divine about Him, nothing supernatural. Therefore the Christological titles must be removed from His sayings in the Gospels and labeled as secondary. There is no room here for a miracle. Quite logically, the possibility of a physical resurrection of Jesus is contested. Indeed, even His personal resurrection, as different from the physical, His deliverance from death, and His exaltation to God are hardly considered.

Indeed, one speaks of the salvation event and of God's action in history in the cross and resurrection of Jesus. But one does not mean an objective abolishing of the death of Jesus in the sense of a historical event in time and space. At most the question of the resurrection is put aside as immaterial. What is of interest to these scholars lies on another plane and in another dimension, which

is usually called the "eschatological." But if one examines this more closely, one discovers, that the category of the eschatological here has a striking similarity with the personal-spiritual sphere known from liberal theology since Schleiermacher. In both cases God reveals Himself in history without interrupting the objective continuity of history. That means: the action of God is relegated to the purely personal or spiritual plane, or, if one uses a modern expression, the existential-personal. All discussion of God's intervention in the objective development of immanent world events would mean, according to this conception, to subject His actions to objective observation, which here is accounted a priori as improper.

Naturally, no one will maintain that divine intervention can be made the subject of neutral examination or observation. But this is not the matter under contention. My protest is directed against the claim, that God's intervention did not take place in the realm of the objective. By "objectivizing" God's action, it is said, God and His action would be made into something immanent, that is, into something which man could control or master. Just as in the day of liberal theology, in other words, man is thought as a cognizant subject, and as lord over the object. That was an idea, which was prevalent in the age of liberal evolutionary optimism, which today however should be counted as written off, especially in the atomic age, in which the objective events in nature and history threaten to become the master of man—in spite of, or rather on the basis of scientific knowledge and cognizance.

It becomes apparent, therefore, that critical research, as we know it today, is by no means purely scientific in the sense of an objectivity without presuppositions. Certain presumed conditions and prejudices are everywhere brought to bear, namely such, which stem from the modern age. This shows itself in the questions that are asked. This shows itself in determining the "real matter," which one thinks to find in the texts and above all behind the texts. This shows itself in the rationalistic world view, into which one has slipped, and which is then made to underlie even the New Testament itself by means of critical "interpretation." This shows itself most of all in this, that one wants to recognize only such a Jesus, who is mere man.

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How shall the church look upon this research and its theses? The church need not deny the merits of this research, where such are in reality present. In many areas it has made advances, which have proved fruitful for the study of the Bible. One need only be aware of the form-historical examination of the Gospels in order to see this, although also this method in the critical school has mostly been tied to certain dogmatic premises. The main thing is this: In today's situation the structural or fundamental questions are in

the center of interest. The historical-critical school feels itself indeed to be the banner bearer of a theology, of a specific conception of the faith, and therewith also of Christianity. In this sense it is also received by the public. An evaluation must therefore look upon its basic tendency and regard its principal effects. A view is making its appearance then, which is structurally different from the faith of the church. Another spirit is speaking here which is different from the spirit of the New Testament. It is little help, if one speaks of "decision," if it is no longer the Christ of the New Testament, for whom one is supposed to decide.

The church must not be misled by the fact that the men of this critical trend take over the vocabulary of the Bible and the church in stating their ideas. In this fact the tragedy as well as the confusion of the situation indeed make their appearance. These scholars want to be theologians. They make the claim to speak of God and want to have a voice in the church. They want to represent the cause of the faith, and emphasize, for example, the exclusive position of Jesus in the history of mankind, as also His unique significance. This one must regard as an inconsistency, or as a compromise. The vocabulary of the Bible is used, but something else is meant. For example, the title "Son of God" is accepted for Jesus, but the New Testament content of the title is rejected. Resurrection and atonement are spoken of, but something else is intended than in the New Testament.

That these theologians have stopped at the halfway mark, can be recognized by the more radical signals of the so-called theology of secularization. Here the whole matter becomes more explicit. Even the concept of God is now in danger of falling away as mythological. The unique and exclusive position of the Bible as source of faith, which also the historical-critical trend has sought to guard up to this point, begins to be shaky. Yet even those belonging to this new school would like to defend the cause of the faith and of the church. Basically they are found to be in the same *non sequitur*.

The *non sequitur* lies in this, that one would like to ascribe an absolute significance to a Jesus, who was a mere man, not a divine person, not the Son of God in the sense of the church. If Jesus was only a prophet, and one needs no longer to believe in Him, but only to believe with Him or as He believed, then it makes no sense any longer to follow Him alone.

The church must not allow itself to be befuddled by the Biblical terminology of this theology. There have at all times been teachers in the church, who have tried to create a synthesis between the true faith of the church and the spirit of the times. That is nothing new. A church which is not prepared and in position to resist such doctrine, cannot abide.

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is not a method in the strict sense of this word, but rather a combination of philosophical and ideological presuppositions on the one side, and a trained methodical investigating of the texts on the other. The strict scientific investigation by no means just makes use of one special method, much less of "the" historical method. As soon as science is divested of its false claim to absoluteness, the idea of a particular neutral historical method falls away. The final synthesis, the conception, can never be achieved through a neutral method. The general conception is always dependent on a philosophy of life. No one any longer believes today, that the meaning of life can be found or demonstrated by science. How can one then think, that the life of a bygone epoch can be grasped by a scientific neutral method? Does one imagine, that absolute reason has become incarnate in historical research? The historian as researcher is not supposed to have a lookout point outside of history, from which he could interpret it! He is himself cast into history and surrounded by it. By what means is he to lift himself up above history?

There is no comprehensive method in science, neither in historical, nor in natural science. In every scientific effort there are several different methods. So also in Biblical research. Every method can render a relative service and have its relative validity. We are speaking for example of a philological method, a form-historical method, a traditional-historical method, and so forth. They can all be used and misused. They are misused when they are combined with the claim of absolute validity. They are also misused, when they are combined with prejudgements foreign to the matter and become a means to serve a certain conception foreign to the New Testament. This is the case, for example, if the method of the history of religion is used under the presupposition that early Christianity was a syncretistic religious manifestation, or when Paul is made into a half gnostic, or when Jesus is made into a Jewish prophet.

One can therefore not strongly enough emphasize and bear in mind the relative and conditioned validity of all scientific methods in Biblical research. As soon as the scientific method becomes the queen, it makes the Bible a slave under strange rulers. For the substance of the Bible is not open to a research, which regards the Bible and its contents as a purely immanent phenomenon.

Why do we oppose a research, which has in this manner placed itself at the service of presuppositions which are foreign to the Bible? Not only because we want to safeguard the Bible and thereby our Christian faith against these strange ideas. That too, but not only that. We do it also in the name of science itself. What is meant by science? We want to understand and know. Understanding is an essential element of knowledge. We want to understand the message and the testimony of the Bible. We maintain, that the methods, which are today employed in critical research, obscure and distort the content and substance of the Bible in essential regards and thus

lead to the opposite of understanding. If one has once committed oneself to the assumption, that Jesus and early Christianity are to be regarded as mere phenomena of immanence, that is, phenomena subject to the law of analogy, setting aside the supernatural, one must necessarily be led to a false understanding of the Bible. For an adequate understanding does not come about through relating the Bible to human existence and the like, but through the hearing of the Word, indeed as the Word of God. We are not seeking something behind the Word, neither human existence nor the understanding of existence, not an event as such, be it even the "divine happening" in "immediate encounter", if thereby we must depart from the Word. Instead we seek the event of redemption (*Heilsereignis*), as it is offered, explained, and present in the apostolic Word. It is not something behind the Word that we seek, be it even the historical Jesus, if one thereby means another Jesus than the one described in the Gospels according to the intention of the evangelists. Naturally, there is also the event, the action of God. This event is not identical with the Word. But we know and understand this event only in the Word and through the Word, the apostolic Word. There is also an earthly Jesus, but Him also we know only in the Word and through the Word. For this earthly Jesus is by no means identical with the "so-called historical Jesus", that is, with a Jesus, whom one postulates behind the Gospels and in opposition to their intention and presentation. This so-called "historical Jesus" never existed in real history, but is a reflection of the understanding of Christianity in modern humanism and existentialism.

It is said that Jesus was concerned about the "coming nigh" or the presence of God; that He Himself demanded no faith in His person and claimed no divine function. The opposite is true according to the Gospels. In no instance does Jesus say that God has come nigh, but He says that He Himself has come, and accordingly He invites: "Come unto me!"—not, as the prophets: "Return to God!" Again, He does not announce the coming or the appearance of God as a future event, but only the coming of the Son of Man in divine power and glory. He does not say as the prophets did: "Hear the Word of the Lord!" but He directs them to His own Word: "I say unto you!" Not God's Word abides forever, but His Word! He does not say: "God will forgive you your sins", but: "I declare to you the forgiveness of your sins." It is not God, who will gather Jerusalem under His wings, as one might expect from passages of the Old Testament, but He, Jesus. He does not present God, as the Old Testament did, as the Shepherd, the King, the Bridegroom, but He ascribes these divine functions and predicates to Himself. His disciples are not persecuted for God's sake, but for His sake.

Here speaks and acts a divine person, who is man at the same

time. It is inconceivable how one can think it possible to take away the so-called Christological titles from Jesus (Son of God, Son of Man, and so forth) against this background. He is obviously not a mere prophet. He does not speak as a prophet nor act as a prophet. He sends out prophets, thereby creating prophets and acting in the role of God.

To modern research of a critical trend Jesus is an unexplainable riddle. This research has made the attempt to fight one's way through the Gospels, in order to arrive at the historical Jesus. But research has found only its own reflection, nothing more. Historically seen, it wanders in a vacuum. Indeed, it cannot be different. He who seals up the sources, now sits in the drought. *The theology of the vacuum*—this seems to be the end attained by modern critical theology. After one has cleaned house, it is indeed possible to bring a variety of things into the empty space. But not history.

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The revelation of Christ and research—this is our theme. The revelation of God has made its entrance into our world through Christ. This cannot mean, that the reality of revelation has entered into the given phenomena of this world, has disappeared among them, and is available to us only by an interpretation of immanent events. True, the revelation must be interpreted and explained, otherwise it would at most be a puzzling *tremendum*. But it is present at the same time as a supernatural reality. Indeed the Lord Christ was among us in the form of a servant, in humility. The Son of Man has not, where He may lay His head and yet He was the eternal Son of God, His person is divine. Even here on earth power over all things is given to Him by His Father. Royal authority and dominion are given to Him by God. God has not come nigh but He has come nigh in God's stead. Only in this sense is God near. He performs miracles, mighty acts (*dynameis*), as only God can do them according to the Old Testament (*geburot*), not as a proof of His divine honor, but yet as a demonstration for the faith of men of His divine nature and glory.

These deeds He has accomplished in objective, real history. We do not understand why there should be fear of the thought, that the divine deed takes place in the objective world. Is not God the Creator, who has power over nature, over life and death, over the living and the dead? Death according to the Biblical view is everywhere a death of the body. Therefore also the resurrection of Christ must be in the body, if it has taken place at all. For only thus has He come forth out of death and returned to life. Likewise must His divine acts have taken place in objective reality, otherwise He would have no part in the creative power of God.

There is accordingly only one way, which leads to the goal, if we wish to comprehend the relation between research and revela-



tion. We must carry on a research, which consciously derives from and rests upon the faith of the church. Either so, or we fall prey to ideologies strange to the Bible. I repeat my thesis: We must carry on a Biblical research, which at its very outset has said yes to the faith of the church. Even Bultmann starts with the definite intention to speak of God, and his followers do the same. The error lies only in this, that they are essentially not speaking of the God of the Bible, not speaking of God in terms of the Bible, but of the God of humanism or of existentialism. Indeed, they do it in such a manner, that certain traits of the image of the Biblical God remain. But if one wishes to describe a face, it will not be sufficient to get the nose or the ear right. The whole has become different. Applied to our theme: we must make our beginning with God as He has revealed Himself in the Bible, in Jesus Christ, and we must speak of Him in the same manner as the Bible does. It is pertinent to speak as the Bible if one intends to interpret the Bible. It is pertinent and scientifically the only thing possible to speak of that Jesus Christ, who is attested in the apostolic Word, if one wishes to speak of Jesus Christ at all, for there is no other than the one attested here. Surely we do not wish to carry on a science, which chases after products of fantasy!

We must carry on a research which begins with and rests upon the faith of the church. This we must do for the sake of the church, for otherwise the heresies, which have fallen prey to strange ideologies, will gain the upper hand in the pulpit and in the Christian school. But we must do it also for the sake of research, because God, His activity and Word, can be understood only with God as the starting point. Only the church can in truth carry on exegesis, even if the auxiliary techniques and the training may be offered and learned at the university. Biblical research at the universities has provided us with an abundance of knowledge and insight. These insights the church may and must receive with thanksgiving. They can in many respects prepare and further true understanding, provided they are not associated with the claim to replace the understanding of the church. If research falls into the self-deception that it can go the entire way to the goal alone, then it first of all deceives itself, and secondly it falls victim to one or the other ideology and bars its own way to the true understanding of revelation. Only in the area of information is there a neutral research, not in the area of understanding.

The decisive matter is not, whether this Biblical science is carried on at the university or in a seminary of the church. What is decisive, is that the researcher picks his starting point in the faith of the church and searches and interprets the Bible in the conscience of having his final commission from the church. Only so will he be able to research, to understand, and to interpret the Word congenially and in keeping with its own character. Only so will he be

able to proceed from the presuppositions, which can set him in motion in the right direction. Biblical research must take place in the space of the church.

This does not mean that the researcher is to approach the Bible with preconceived results. The results are not given in advance, but the basis is, upon which the results are sought. Indeed, the previously established foundation implies, that the most fundamental questions have already been answered. But those are the answers, which make it at all meaningful to inquire and to search after something as a theological researcher. I speak of the foundation, which prevents us from slipping out into free space, which prevents us above all from slipping off into the area filled with denomic ideologies. For a "free research" in the absolute sense does not exist and cannot exist.

Science is an activity of the human spirit, of reason, if you will. As Christians we know, that there is no human activity, nor can be, in which one may declare himself free of the obligation of the faith. Why should science here form an exception? Or does one believe, that absolute reason has revealed itself in research?

Science is an activity of reason. But not of a reason that is absolutely free. There is no absolutely free reason. And yet reason is free in its legitimate areas. There are wide areas of reality, in which reason works, researches, and judges in freedom. Science is—to speak as a Lutheran in the widest sense—a special case of the empirical domain. Reason reigns in this realm, but it is not such a reason that abolishes or breaks away from the spiritual domain. If this happens, then reason falls prey to false ideologies, deceives itself, and is deceived. Just so in Biblical science. In this too there is a wide area in which reason distinguishes, analyzes, and judges. But never in opposition to the foundation, from which reason ultimately has its commission.

When reason researches and interprets the Bible, it should in fact be grateful for this foundation already laid. When it stands on this foundation, then it has by this fact already become privileged. Its vantage point is that of an extraordinarily favorable "viewpoint", from which it has a panoramic view over the world and reality of the Bible, and from which it can gain an insight into the Bible, which is not to be found elsewhere. Or, to use another illustration: What has been laid into its hand in advance, is the key, which fits and opens the door. What could be more precious to a truth seeking researcher than the key, which grants him the entrance to the understanding of the area, which he desires to research?

Now Biblical research is not only interpretation, exegesis. The second principal task of research is the historical one, the question as to what has happened in history. This question is the new element in modern, scientific Biblical research compared with the earlier

epochs of church history. For us the question is today unavoidable: What has really happened? It is not merely a matter of the individual data of the course of history. The researcher inquires also, and especially, for the connection, which links the individual events together, the continuum, to which the single historical item belongs. Here arises also the task, to reconstruct the appearance and activity of Jesus as far as possible, to understand His message within the framework of His historical situation, and to illuminate His self-consciousness.

The conflict with the so-called critical research becomes especially apparent in these historical problems. This research is not satisfied with merely uncovering the bare facts of history. For example it makes the presumption to be able to say, which kinds of reports in the Bible must be legendary and a priori unhistorical—for instance the miracle stories or the report of the empty tomb. Accordingly, this research holds that it can discount those sayings of Jesus as unhistorical, which presume a more than prothetic self-consciousness in Him, as also those statements, in which He speaks of the salutary meaning of His death, or presumes it.

Here a science which is bound by the faith cannot go along. In these matters, too, one must reckon with the reality of revelation. It will turn out, I believe, that also here the straightest way is the shortest. If one wants to create a meaningful image of who Jesus was and what He wanted, then one must begin with the fact, that He was more than a messenger, more than a prophet, in fact, more than a man. Only if one begins with the understanding, that He had or meant Himself to have a divine consciousness, will His Word and actions find their right place in the mosaic of history, and will a meaningful picture come into view. Otherwise the result will merely be that after half the pieces of the mosaic have been removed, the remaining components are forced into a pattern which has nothing to do with historical reality.

Do our conclusions lead us to say, that all critical historical examination of the foundations of faith are interdicted? Must one in the fundamental questions abstain from all historical re-investigation as to the tenability of the statements of faith? We must fix our view sharply and clearly upon this important question. Then we can first of all establish, that modern critical research has concerned itself little with this question. If conservative Biblical research has taken an "apologetic" position, when these last questions concerning the historical tenability of the faith appear, this is not less true of critical or radical research. The latter has only drawn the front line elsewhere than the conservative school. Critical research, as well as the conservative, has been anxiously concerned with establishing the meaning of faith in God and its right of existence and defending the unique position of Jesus and the New Testament in the history of religion apologetically. Feuerbach's theory

that the Biblical image of God is a reflection of the human spirit was rejected with indignation by critical research, when it at all concerned itself with the theory. It seldom entered upon a scientific examination of these fundamental questions—and with good reason.

A historical re-examination of the foundations, which would proceed independently and radically, is in fact impossible. Half measures will not be of any help. Only from within is a re-examination possible. *Mutatis mutandis*, the saying is valid here: "If you believe you shall see the glory of God." He who begins with faith, will discover the outline of a pattern, in which the activity of God in the history of salvation can be discerned. He sees so much of the solution of the crossword puzzle, that he may believe that he is on the right way. But whoever makes the beginning with the vocables of unbelief or is caught in the illusion of a research without presuppositions, remains lost in the labyrinth.

The approach that was attempted above does not mean, that one can naively or with uncritical harmonization reproduce all the details as they are told in the Gospels or otherwise in the New Testament. The contradictions in historical facts, as also the apparent errors in historical details, forbid this. But if we have once decided to place our faith in the main outline of the picture which the Gospels present of Jesus and His work, and if we discover that precisely in this way we make progress in our efforts, then we will not fall headlong into the critical habits and do not adopt criticism as a dominating principle or as a program. If the Gospels deserve our confidence in the most important matters, why not also in details?

But as stated, this does not excuse us from the critical examination, and in many cases we may say: It cannot well have happened, as this evangelist reports it. Either Mark errs in Chapter 10, verse 46 or Luke in Chapter 18, verse 35 with regard to the time and place of the healing of blind Bartimaeus. But observations such as these also come to our aid, when it becomes a matter of centering in upon the thing, which is the concern of the reporters, namely the testimony of Christ and the saving acts of God. The evangelists are not at all concerned, whether this or that detail corresponds to the demands of exact reproduction in the modern sense. The purpose is to narrate, and a narrative demands concrete visualizing, but not photographic reproduction. The emphases of the report are the words and the deeds of Christ, His acts for the men He met. That is what the text wants to tell us. We do not at all need to press behind the text in order to discover this. We need only understand it and listen to what it has to say to us. An atomizing method would not be in place here. The Gospels are governed by a definite intention, which we must constantly keep before our eyes. There are many ways and paths in Holy Scripture, on which one can be lost

and stumble. But the Scripture does not demand of us that we abide in these paths. It invites us to follow a great main street, and that means to say: The testimony of Jesus Christ, the Son of God who has effected our salvation and now sits at the right hand of God.

I conclude. I will not make an attempt to summarize, what I have tried to say. The following concluding theses must suffice.

The revelation of God has objectively entered into our world. The reality of revelation is present above all in the divine person of Jesus Christ and in His saving work, later also in the working of the Holy Ghost through the apostles and their word. The analogy to every other history is hereby broken and eliminated.

Our research must begin by recognizing the reality of revelation. If we do not do this, then we necessarily fall victim to some strange ideology, as we can observe in the so-called historical-critical research, in the form in which it dominates much of Biblical scholarship of today. By recognizing the reality of God and His action through Jesus Christ and His apostles we are made free to understand the Word of God and His action, and to interpret it in a relevant way, that is, to carry on theological science. In this manner we are also enabled to see the limits of reason and critical examination, and to apply critical reason within its proper boundaries.