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Methods in Studying the Biblical Text Today

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The Black Church: Its Implications for Lutheran
Theological Education

CHARLES SHELBY ROOKS

Situationism and Law in Christian Ethics

PAUL JERSILD

Theological Observer

Homiletics

Book Review

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Methods in Studying the Biblical Text Today

JOHN REUMANN

This article substantially represents a paper originally read at a series of conferences on hermeneutics sponsored by the Division of Theological Studies of the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A. in 1968 and at a conference in Austin, Tex., January 1969, sponsored by the Lutheran Institute for Religious Studies. The author is professor at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pa.

A rich variety of methods exists today for studying Scripture—text criticism, philology, literary criticism; source, form, and redaction criticism, *Religionsgeschichte*, and a host of other "*Geschichten*"¹—so that the Bible is probably the world's most closely and minutely studied book. But how can all these techniques be put together into a method, in the classical sense of *meth' hodos*, a "way" "after" something, a way for getting from one point to another, from the text to the practical goal that concerns us here, proclaiming or communicating the text today?

It is the purpose of the art and science of hermeneutics to provide for that movement from the text to preaching. Yet Manfred Mezger could ask in 1959: "Who has mapped out the route?" He went on: "The number of books and articles worth mentioning which today provide basic as well as practical instruction for the route

from scripture to preaching is so small that one can count them on the fingers of both hands."² The 19th century produced a number of hermeneutical manuals, but most of those current in English today are in many ways antiquated or rigidly Fundamentalist, of a Bible school level, and often Calvinist in outlook.³ There has been a gap

² "Preparation for Preaching—The Route from Exegesis to Proclamation," in Rudolf Bultmann et al., *Translating Theology into the Modern Age*, Vol. II of *Journal for Theology and the Church* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), p. 159. Mezger excludes from his remarks such worked-over areas as the history of preaching, the doctrine of preaching, and collections of sermons. It is the route from text to preaching that is "a unique no man's land" (p. 160).

³ Among these can be mentioned Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1883); Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook on Hermeneutics for Conservative Protestants* (Boston: W. A. Wilde, 1950, rev. ed. 1956; complete new rev. ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House); Robert Traina, *Methodical Biblical Study* (New York: Biblical Seminary, 1952); H. E. Dana and R. E. Glaze Jr., *Interpreting the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1961, revision of *Searching the Scriptures*); Irving L. Jensen, *Independent Bible Study: A Guide to Personal Study of the Scriptures* (Chicago: Moody, 1963); Fred L. Fisher, *How to Interpret the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966). Reflecting the Calvinist heritage: L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1950); A. Berkeley Mickelson, *Principles for Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); E. C. Blackman, *Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957); Howard M. Kuist, *These Words upon Thy Heart* (Richmond: John Knox, 1947); Marcus Barth, *Conversation with the Bible* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964). Needless to say, some volumes represent both a Fundamentalistic and a Calvinistic approach, some reflect touches

¹ For the various technical terms and the rise of various areas in modern Biblical study, see the companion paper by Edgar Krentz, "A Survey of Trends and Problems in Biblical Interpretation," *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, XL (May 1969), 276—93. This paper was required reading for those attending the conferences on hermeneutics sponsored by the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A.

in interest in hermeneutics, down to the last decade when the "new hermeneutic"

of liberalism; all these volumes have some helpful advice, but none of them appears to me satisfactory for explaining the path of exegesis for today. Though limited to one part of the New Testament, R. C. Briggs, *Interpreting the Gospels: An Introduction to Methods and Issues in the Study of the Synoptic Gospels* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969), is helpful.

Additional titles are listed by James M. Robinson in *The New Hermeneutic* (*New Frontiers in Theology*, II; New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 15, note 41. On pp. 17 f., the statement is well substantiated that between 1720 and the late 19th century books on hermeneutics appeared regularly; then a dearth set in. Robinson also surveys the literature in German; it is noteworthy that the second edition of the standard German reference work, *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (1927—31), touched on hermeneutics only under "Explanation of the Bible," whereas the third edition includes a separate treatment by Gerhard Ebeling, which runs 15 columns, plus 5 more of bibliography (III [1959], cols. 242—62).

To Robinson's discussion on Roman Catholic approaches to hermeneutics can now be added René Maréchal, *Introduction to Hermeneutics* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967), and the excellent survey, "Hermeneutics," by Raymond E. Brown, S. S., in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp. 605—23, plus the articles in *Exégèse et Théologie: Les Saintes Écritures et leur interprétation théologique*, ed. G. Thils and R. E. Brown (*Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium*, XXVI; Donum Natalicium Iosepho Coppens, Vol. 3; Gembloux: Duculot, and Paris: Lethielleux, 1968), with a superb bibliography, pp. 282—315.

Among the most recent German Protestant treatments are Ernst Fuchs, *Marburger Hermeneutik* (*Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie*, IX; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1968) — not to be confused with his earlier *Hermeneutik* (Bad Cannstatt: Müller-Schön Verlag, 1954); and the appendix on "What Does Preaching Have to Do with the Text?" in Eberhard Jüngel's volume of sermons, *Predigten* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1968), pp. 126—43. In my own opinion, the most significant volume for the average preacher is Kurt Frör, *Biblische Hermeneutik zur Schriftauslegung in Predigt und Unterricht* (Munich:

took up the problem as an outgrowth of Bultmann's work.⁴ New insights from language analysis, existentialism, and advanced techniques of Biblical criticism have been brought to bear, but one must question whether the new hermeneutic, with its elaborate jargon, has gotten through to many pastors or produced widespread and positive results as yet in parish preaching.

Rather than attempt to analyze and confute the various books available today and their approaches on how to interpret the Old or New Testament — Berkhof, Traina of Biblical Seminary, Howard Kuist, Berkeley Mickelson, Ernst Fuchs, or even Kurt Frör, let alone Markus Barth's "twenty technical and spiritual steps to exegesis," which grow out of his "conversation with the Bible"⁵ — we shall turn to three recent efforts by church groups to speak in this area of hermeneutics.

1. On the Roman Catholic side there is the encyclical of Pius XII, issued in 1943, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, and the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revela-

Kaiser, 1961), an edition of which has been printed with supplementary material by H. Halbfas and K. H. Schelkle for Roman Catholic use in Germany under the title *Wege zur Schriftauslegung* (Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1965).

⁴ On the "new hermeneutic," cf. the discussion in Krentz's paper (cited above, note 1), J. M. Robinson, *The New Hermeneutic* (cited above, note 3), and Carl E. Braaten, *History and Hermeneutics* (*New Directions in Theology Today*, II; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966); pp. 130—59, for example; also Günther Stachel, *Die Neue Hermeneutik: Ein Überblick* (Munich: Kösel-Verlag, 1967).

⁵ For details on titles, see note 3 above. Barth's list, often of quite specific, common-sense suggestions, grows out of his work as a seminary teacher; pp. 201—311 of his book expound many of the suggestions.

tion, promulgated on Nov. 18, 1965, during the final session of Vatican II.⁶ *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, the work particularly of Cardinal Bea, has rightly been called "the liberating encyclical" for Roman Catholics; it opened the way to new, critical study of the Bible in the Church of Rome and generated many of the influences felt at Vatican II. This encyclical cautiously endorsed many of the methods developed in chiefly

⁶ The translation of *Divino Afflante Spiritu* is conveniently accessible in, among other places, *Rome and the Study of Scripture* (St. Meinrad, Ind.: Grail Publications, 7th ed., 1962), pp. 80—107, and the Constitution on Revelation in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S. J. (New York: Guild Press and Association Press, 1966), pp. 107—32. Especially to be noted for our interests here is the statement in *de Revelatione*, § 19 (p. 124 in the edition cited): "The sacred authors wrote the four Gospels, selecting some things from the many which had been handed on by word of mouth or in writing, reducing some of them to a synthesis, explicating some things in view of the situation of their churches, and preserving the form of proclamation but always in such fashion that they told us the honest truth about Jesus." In this statement form criticism, source analysis, and redaction criticism seem to be given each its due. Among the many recent surveys on Roman Catholic Biblical work and examples of it, the following titles are representative examples, helpful for orientation in the area: J. L. McKenzie, S. J., "Problems of Hermeneutics in Roman Catholic Exegesis," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXVII (1958), 197—204; B. C. Butler, "Roman Catholic Biblical Scholarship," *The Expository Times*, LXXVII (1960—61), 113—14; John M. T. Barton, "Roman Catholic Biblical Scholarship, 1939—60," *Theology*, LXIII (1960), 101—109; C. Umhau Wolf, "Recent Roman Catholic Bible Study and Translation," *Journal of Bible and Religion*, XXIX (1961), 280—89; E. B. Koenker, "The New Role of the Scriptures in Roman Catholicism," *Lutheran Quarterly*, X (1958), 248—54; Luis Alonso-Schökel, *Understanding Biblical Research* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1963); and Augustin Cardinal Bea, *The Study of the Synoptic Gospels: New Approaches and Outlooks* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

Protestant, especially German, Biblical study over the previous century and roused fresh interest in letting the text speak for itself. The Constitution on Revelation and discussion over its meaning show how the effects of such study and methods are increasingly being felt in Catholic circles.

2. The "Oxford Report" of a World Council of Churches' task force, produced in 1949 to provide a basis for ecumenical use of the Bible by Christians of varied confessions to let it speak to social and political questions, appeared next,⁷ though its contents reflect ideas long at work in Protestant circles. The assemblage at Wadham College, Oxford, which produced the report, can be criticized for not spelling out all the presuppositions involved (e.g., in the view of what Scripture is) and for the limited character of its participants; yet it has with justice been termed "the first time in Christian history that a group of Christians, in an ecumenical setting, representing as they did various points of view and geographical backgrounds, attempted to put on paper the area of their agreement in the difficult field of biblical hermeneutics."⁸ The five steps in this re-

⁷ Reprinted in *Biblical Authority for Today*, A World Council of Churches Symposium on "The Biblical Authority for the Churches' Social and Political Message Today," ed. A. Richardson and W. Schweitzer (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1951), pp. 240—46. Also available in *Interpretation*, III (1949), 456 ff. For subsequent work on hermeneutics by the World Council's Commission on Faith and Order, cf. *New Directions in Faith and Order*, Bristol 1967: *Reports—Minutes—Documents* (*Faith and Order Paper No. 50*; Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1968), pp. 32—41, 59; also reprinted in *Faith and Order Studies 1964—67* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1968).

⁸ G. Ernest Wright, in *Interpretation*, III (1949), 456. The conference can be criticized

port on historical interpretation of a specific passage show agreement at many points with those accepted by *Divino Afflante Spiritu*. Evidence of a growing consensus is the fact that these steps are cited in a third document on hermeneutics, this time from Lutheran auspices.

3. "A Lutheran Stance Toward Contemporary Biblical Studies," a report by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, appeared in 1966.⁹ Here the same five steps appear (though with technical terms like *Sitz im Leben* and *Formgeschichte* omitted), plus clear theological presuppositions and a statement on methodological controls.

It is, I think, possible to speak of some sort of broad consensus in these documents

for limited participation since 8 of the 18 present were from the British Isles, the general complexion of the group being Anglo-Saxon in theological outlook. There were no Bultmannites, no Roman Catholics, and no parish pastors. Previous study conferences, on which this report built, are not specifically mentioned, and while there is firm emphasis on "the unique position of the Bible," nothing is spelled out on such classic topics as "inspiration." The stress on *Heilsgeschichte* in the report was criticized from the standpoint of liberalism by C. C. McCown in a mimeographed response entitled, "Ecumenicity and Biblical Interpretation," distributed by the World Council of Churches Study Department (October 1952). It can also be claimed that the specific purpose of the Oxford Conference, to apply Scripture to social and political problems, might lead to interests that differ from those of an exegete who looks to preaching or teaching as his goal.

⁹ Available from the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, 210 N. Broadway, St. Louis, Mo. 63102, as is also a mimeographed statement on "Answers to Questions Raised Regarding the Document . . ." adopted by the commission Sept. 28, 1967 (Exhibit 10C [9-67]).

and in many of the individual books today on Biblical interpretation.¹⁰ Even conservative Protestantism, as represented in a recent book by G. E. Ladd of Fuller Seminary, would identify with most of these five steps.¹¹ The differences seem to come in the degree of rigor with which methods are applied and the theological assumptions involved. One can begin to speak of some sort of "agreed methodology," combining many of the widely practiced methods, as necessary for getting at the meaning of the text. In the light of this widespread agreement, how shall we structure a methodology, a route from text to preaching?

I

Obviously more than one approach is possible. We might, for example, picture a procession of witnesses through the ages, stretching from the text to us. We are not the first to have preached on a given text or to have wrestled with it. There has been a series of proclamations based on it, a sequence of interpretations. We always stand on the shoulders of others; and others will use this text after us — and, we hope, see even more of its meaning, as

¹⁰ The Catholic scholar Jean Daniélou has, for example, spoken approvingly of the Oxford Report, and James Wood, *The Interpretation of the Bible: A Historical Introduction* (London: Duckworth, 1958), pp. 168 f., points out parallels between it and the 1943 encyclical: common emphases on (1) text criticism, (2) literary form, and (3) historical situation; (4) the meaning intended by the author, the literal sense, is to be stressed; and (5) the two testaments are seen in relation to each other.

¹¹ *The New Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967). There are chapters on text, linguistic, literary, form, historical, and history-of-religions criticism, though none on *Redaktionsgeschichte*.

Luther liked to say in his sermons.¹² Indeed, the text was in some cases originally a proclamation itself in Biblical times.¹³ And so in using it, we stand in the ongoing sequence of its history of proclamation. That is why, I take it, good commentaries have always told us what an Augustine or Aquinas or Luther or Calvin did with a text and why there is renewed interest currently in the history of exegesis.¹⁴ There

¹² "Luther has concluded sermons with the observation that he has not succeeded in coming to grips with this text, indeed, that he has only partially understood it. Often we hear him say: 'We will hear more of this at another time. May God grant that others after me do better.'" M. Mezger (as cited in note 2), p. 168.

¹³ Ibid., p. 164: "Our texts themselves originated as sermonic materials. They once *were* preaching, they *are* preaching; essentially, therefore, they can again '*become*' preaching today."

¹⁴ Note such series as *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Biblischen Exegese*, ed. O. Cullmann, E. Käsemann, and others (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1955—), the volumes to date taking up the history of exegesis of such passages as 1 Cor. 6:1-11, Rev. 12, John 2:1-11, Luke 10:25-37, Acts 10, the temptation of Jesus, and Moses; or *Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie*, ed. G. Ebeling, E. Fuchs, and M. Mezger (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck]). A study of the history of interpretation of John 13 has appeared in the series *Biblische Untersuchungen*, I, by Georg Richter, *Die Fusswaschung im Johannesevangelium: Geschichte ihrer Deutung* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1967) and similar studies might be added in French and in patristic series. In *Basel Studies of Theology* have appeared (1) *The Hermeneutics of Philo and Hebrews*, by Sidney G. Sowers (1965), and (2) *The Hermeneutic of Erasmus*, by John William Aldridge (1966) (Richmond: John Knox). In English it may be noted that a section of the 1967 session of the Society of Biblical Literature was devoted to the work of certain American scholars important in the history of exegesis, one of these, by Robert M. Grant, "American New Testament Study, 1926-1956," being published in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXXVII (1968), 42-50.

is, in short, a *Verkündigungsgeschichte*,¹⁵ or history of proclamation, for a passage, with ourselves among the witnesses proclaiming what a text says.

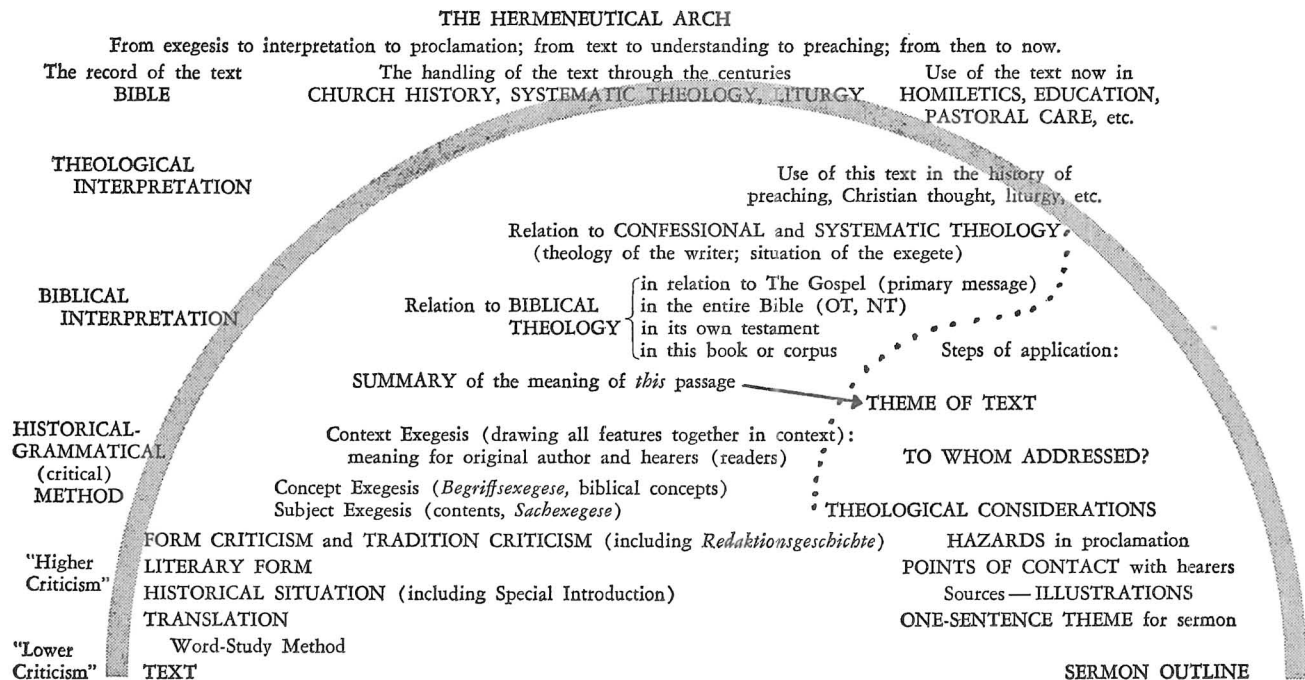
I choose, however, another manner of describing our situation and method: appropriately for a paper delivered originally in St. Louis, the figure of an arch, a hermeneutical arch stretching from the text we want to interpret to the preaching we seek today. Our concern is with the steps, the method for handling the text for preaching purposes, and so we shall include just enough by way of suggestion on the "preaching" side of the arch to give form to it, without fully expounding these aspects of the arch process.¹⁶

Actually, one could speak of a series of arches; for the right-hand side, denoting the concern today in employing the text, might involve teaching in a seminary seminar or inner-city catechetical class or use of the Bible in pastoral care as well as homiletically.¹⁷ In such cases the steps on the

¹⁵ The term has been effectively employed by Willi Marxsen in his *Introduction to the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), where the aim is not to survey exhaustively all the possible theories on each New Testament document but to choose *one* so that the book can be treated exegetically, as proclamation, in a specific early Christian situation.

¹⁶ See the chart on p. 660. On the background of my use of the arch as an appropriate figure, see the literature cited in note 20.

¹⁷ It would take us too far afield to list and try to characterize much of the literature that has been produced on use of the Bible in teaching, counseling, personal devotional study, etc. It is obvious, however, that the depth and intricacy of study methods will vary with the purpose involved. It is one thing to treat Scripture for exposing its literary values in a public school course—cf. *On Teaching the Bible as Literature: A Guide to Selected Biblical Narrative for Secondary Schools*, by James S. Acker-



Historical, Biblical, and Theological Interpretation cannot, of course, be completely separated; textual decisions, e.g., may involve theological factors.

Major steps in the left side of the arch are given in capital letters. However, the sequence of steps may vary from text to text (e.g., literary before historical); not all steps may be applicable to every verse; one must often be doing several steps at once, and may have to reexamine earlier findings in light of later ones.

OT texts will require special handling not only with regard to Tradition History down to the Israelite author involved, but also with regard to later NT use of the text ("OT and Christian theology").

In the *Synopsis* one will have to deal (moving backwards chronologically) with (1) the evangelist's meaning in context; (2) use in the source(s); (3) oral usage; and (4) use by Jesus. In the *epistles*: 9 (1) meaning in present (edited) context; (2) Paul's own meaning and that of his hearers; (3) meaning of pre-Pauline material(s).

right would differ from those given for preaching, and in all honesty I would have to say that those of the left, the steps in interpreting the text, might vary a bit too, at least with regard to the intensity with which they are applied. For what we stress in handling a text has some connection with the purpose for which we seek to employ it.¹⁸ I have used homiletics as the example here, and I share with you an outline developed in teaching with several colleagues at the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Philadelphia.¹⁹ Anyone is at liberty, of course, to insert other steps on the right or left or rearrange the steps as

mann, with Jane Stouder Hawley (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1967) — and another to concentrate on its values for counseling. But some similar study methods ought to be involved in all cases even if the level of application varies. For what it is worth, I record my impressions that far more has been done on educational than on pastoral use of the Bible, and that in the realm of religious education German scholarship has done a better job of relating new critical methods to instruction of young people. While we have books that seek to equip teachers in this area in English (cf. Clifford M. Jones, *The Bible Today: For Those Who Teach It* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964], for example), I know of nothing quite like Hans Stock, *Studien zur Auslegung der synoptischen Evangelien im Unterricht* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1959), or the series edited by Stock and others (most of whom have done dissertations in Biblical studies), *Handbücherei für den Religionsunterricht* (Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1965—).

¹⁸ As Mezger puts it, "Preaching reminds exegesis of its consequences" (as cited above, note 2), p. 161.

¹⁹ In particular, this version with Professor Harold Albert in 1967—68 but dependent on earlier suggestions and work by colleagues in Old Testament, Robert E. Bornemann and Foster R. McCurley Jr., and by Dr. Albert and Professor Gerhard Krodel in an interdepartmental course, "From Exegesis to Preaching." The particular formulation here is my responsibility, however.

desired. We shall assume that the goal of our method is communication of the message of a text through preaching.

This whole way of looking at the text via an arch owes a great deal to a number of theologians, notably Gerhard Ebeling and Heinrich Ott.²⁰ Some of the terms stem from a handbook for students by Otto Kaiser and W. G. Kümmel.²¹ The ap-

²⁰ G. Ebeling, *Word and Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), especially "Word of God and Hermeneutics," pp. 305—32 (reprinted as "Word of God and Hermeneutic," in *The New Hermeneutic* [cited above, note 3], pp. 78—110), and Ebeling's theses, pp. 424—36; also *Kirchengeschichte als Geschichte der Auslegung der Heiligen Schriften* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1947), translated in *The Word of God and Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), pp. 11—31. Heinrich Ott, "What Is Systematic Theology?" in *The Later Heidegger and Theology* (*New Frontiers in Theology*, I, ed. J. M. Robinson and J. B. Cobb Jr.; New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 77—111; note esp. pp. 79 ff.: "A single arch stretches from the Biblical texts to the contemporary preaching of the church. It is the arch of the kerygma and of the understanding of the kerygma" (p. 79); the witness must be translated, transferred from the one shore or side of the arch to the other (p. 80). It is a continuous, unified movement, combining exegetical, systematic, and practical theology. The arch is not to be confused with the "hermeneutical circle" (where the interpreter and the text stand in a reciprocal relationship—on which see below, p. 669), though Ott sees the two figures as related (pp. 83 f.). Ott further develops the idea in *Theology and Preaching* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), pp. 18 ff.: here, it is stated, exegetical, dogmatic, and practical theology "form at bottom one sole continuum of reflection which stretches from the Biblical testimonies to the Church's preaching mission," and church history is termed "an indispensable auxiliary to all three," presenting itself as the history of exegesis, of dogma, and of Gospel proclamation (p. 18). There is a summary of the position in C. E. Braaten, *History and Hermeneutics* (cited above, note 4), pp. 140—44.

²¹ Otto Kaiser and W. G. Kümmel, *Exegetical Method: A Student's Handbook*, trans. E. V. N. Goetchius (New York: Seabury,

proach assumes, further, a number of things. One such assumption is the importance of the Scriptural text so that, for an interpreter like J. A. Bengel, no labor is too great to get at what Scripture means — in order that we can speak God's Word today.²² Another assumption is the steps widely followed in the Oxford Report and elsewhere. It assumes also that these steps can and ought to be put together in some sort of meaningful sequence — though I certainly would not protest if someone wanted to take up, e.g., the literary before the historical aspects of a text or make other changes.

Above all, two things need to be pointed out.

1. This way of looking at the process, as an arch, suggests that church history, the intervening centuries of doctrine, life, and thought between the New Testament and us, is of considerable importance in moving from the text to its proclamation today. It can be claimed, of course, that all one needs is the Greek New Testament in

1967). This booklet is no ideal solution but at least provides some help through the jungle of method. Presumably German students face a similar bewilderment that preachers in this country do, for they requested such a study guide. Unfortunately the styles of the chapters on the Old and the New Testaments are not coordinated as carefully as they might be, terms vary, and it is always a problem trying to show how an exegete does his work with *German* reference works and commentaries in a book intended now for *English*-speaking users, even though many of the reference works are now available in English.

²² Bengel's advice and comments are often still quite pertinent, combining pietism and scholarship. Cf. Eduard Haller, "On the Interpretative Task," *Interpretation*, XXI (1967), 158—66, where steps for exegesis are given (pp. 164—66) and Bengel's own words on the health of the church and Scripture (p. 166).

one hand and today's New York *Times* in the other; or, again, that exegesis is concerned with "what it meant" back there then, whereas there is some separate discipline or treatment for "what it means" in the church today.²³ While I have profound sympathy for what these dicta are trying to say, I am even more impressed by Ebeling's suggestion that church history can be regarded as a history of how the texts of the Bible — and ultimately the Gospel — have been understood or misunderstood and how we stand separated by centuries of thought, life, doctrine, and liturgy, which not only color but also may confuse or enrich our interpretation.²⁴ I have furthermore specifically committed myself above, at least to a degree, to the proposition that the purpose of one's exegesis will shape the work and that the stance of the exegete is of some import — we ought to go to Scripture without preju-

²³ The latter distinction is stressed by Krister Stendahl in "Biblical Theology, Contemporary," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), I, 418—32, and in his essay in *The Bible in Modern Scholarship: Papers Read at the 100th Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature . . . 1964*, ed. J. P. Hyatt (New York: Abingdon, 1966), with a response by Avery Dulles, S. J. Legitimate as such a "division of labor" is in a theological faculty, one fears that Biblical scholars have sometimes stood aloof from necessary theological and pastoral involvement.

²⁴ See the titles cited above, note 20. Jaroslav Pelikan endorses the view in *Luther's Works, Companion Volume: Luther the Expositor, Introduction to the Reformer's Exegetical Writings* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), p. 5: "The history of theology is the record of how the church has interpreted the Scriptures." Ebeling, it should be noted however, works with a quite broad understanding of what constitutes "exposition": preaching, teaching, but also deeds, suffering, cult, prayer, organization, church politics, etc.

dices, but certainly we will have presuppositions²⁵ and, I hope, certain commitments. Of that, more later. All this is to say, it is a matter of more than just "the text" (an object) and an objective computer labeled "*tabula rasa*" in exegesis.

2. That brings us to the other point. I assume that broader concerns of Biblical theology and even of confessional and systematic theology will enter in during the process of moving from a particular text to its proclamation today.²⁶ I have accordingly structured these items near the top left of the arch, but in all honesty we must constantly ask to what degree they do—and should—enter in already in the steps of the historical method.

We can now, against this background, note rapidly some steps involved—I suggest five of them—in the historical-grammatical approach to Scripture, the methods on which there is such consensus.

1. *Text and Translation.* I assume that everyone agrees on the need to recover the oldest text that the manuscript evidence permits and then on the necessity of putting this into a meaningful vernacular

translation. Very few of us are text critics. The minimum ought to be, however, that we will look into problems of text where the Revised Standard Version has a footnote rendering, or where it differs greatly from the King James Version or the New English Bible, or where the new American Bible Society Greek New Testament text gives a variant, for example.²⁷

Regarding translation, I assume that we shall at least compare KJV (because many, often older people still know it), RSV, and some other freer rendering—NEB (as a paraphrase), *Today's English Version* (excellent for the inner city), or perhaps J. B. Phillips or Beck or the Jerusalem Bible or, to name an older one for whom I have increasing respect, Moffatt.²⁸

²⁷ The whole area of reference works for study of the original text is well set forth in F. W. Danker's volume, *Multipurpose Tools for Bible Study* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1966, second rev. ed.). *The Greek New Testament* referred to above is that edited by Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Bruce M. Metzger, and Allen Wikgren for the United Bible Societies (New York: American Bible Society, 1966); its double apparatus seeks to provide only those variants that are deemed exegetically significant and those alternatives in punctuation that various famous renderings have adopted in the history of translation. A companion volume of commentary by Bruce M. Metzger will help the student handle the evidence on these passages. The Bible Society has recently published its Greek text with the English translation of *Today's English Version* (see note 28) in parallel columns, under the title *The New Testament in Greek and English* (1968).

²⁸ What might be called *Übersetzungsgeschichte*, the history of how the Bible has been rendered into the vernacular, is a branch of Biblical studies of particular importance to those who work primarily with a translated Bible (most of us!) and who preach on a translated text. Standard treatments include F. Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958, rev. ed.): F. F. Bruce, *The English Bible: A History of*

²⁵ Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, "Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?" in *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann*, trans. Schubert M. Ogden (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), pp. 289—96.

²⁶ Cf. Metzger's remarks: "In preparation for preaching, every problem which agitates theology can, strictly speaking, become actual. . . . Preaching does encompass the whole spectrum: church history and doctrine, Old and New Testament studies, faith as well as conduct, worship . . . instruction . . ." etc. (as cited in note 2), p. 162. Such theological problems as can crop up in preaching are illustrated by H. Ott, with regard to Matt. 25:31-46 and Ps. 1, in *The Later Heidegger and Theology* (cited above, note 20), pp. 103—105. What I mean by confessional and systematic theology is indicated on pp. 668 and 669.

I should hope that pastors might also sometimes venture their own rendering of a preaching text for their own situation. Mezger refers to such translation as "the backbone of the entire . . . endeavor."²⁹

Translations (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961); in briefer limits, my study, *Four Centuries of the English Bible* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1961); and more recently, Geddes MacGregor, *A Literary History of the Bible from the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968). *The Jerusalem Bible* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1966), the product of French Dominican scholarship, has attracted much interest, but on the literary side one must ask whether a translation via the French is the best way of producing an English translation, and on the critical side whether some of the notes may not reflect an overly conservative position. In Lutheran circles in particular, *The New Testament in the Language of Today*, by William F. Beck (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963, paperback ed. 1964), has gained a good-size following. Other translations will come and go, e. g., the paraphraselike *Cotton Patch Version of Paul's Epistles*, by Clarence Jordan (New York: Association Press, 1968). The rendering made by Robert Bratcher on the basis of the United Bible Societies' Greek text (see above, note 27) for the American Bible Society's centennial, *Today's English Version of the New Testament* ("TEV"; New York: Macmillan, 1966), has had amazing success, especially in its paperback form, *Good News for Modern Man* (American Bible Society).

²⁹ Mezger (cited above, note 2), p. 166. Translation, he goes on, is not just "a necessary evil," but "next to reading, . . . the most difficult art there is" (pp. 166, 165). One may compare Ott's metaphor of the entire operation as "trans-ferring" ("trans-lating") from one shore to another (see above, note 20). The point is also emphasized by G. Ebeling: "The very heart of all exegesis is this business of translation, of making the text understandable by translating it into a language that is intelligible to the hearer" (*The Problem of Historicity in the Church and Its Proclamation*, trans. G. Foley [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967], p. 15). Ebeling indicates (pp. 10—31) why translation afresh is always needed and shows "the theological significance of the act of biblical translation" (p. 18): (1) No translation can ever be so perfectly

In this initial work ought to be included somewhere the *word-study method*, the careful analysis of key terms like *faith* or *grace*, using resources such as Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* and other works now available.³⁰

I realize that James Barr has raised just criticisms against certain examples of word study, but I know no substitute for the endeavor of tracing what a term means through etymology, extra-Biblical usage, the Old Testament, Septuagint, New Tes-

adequate as to replace the original; (2) every translation is itself part of the historical past, for languages live and are constantly involved in change. Hence the history of translation always permeates our understanding of a text. Those who are tempted to downgrade Biblical languages in theological education and in the pastor's work ought to look at Ebeling's presentation on pp. 21 ff.; it is precisely on the grounds of practicality, for the life and praxis of the church, that he calls for linguistic-historical study.

³⁰ The *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Stuttgart, begun in 1933 and still in process), edited first by Gerhard Kittel and now by Gerhard Friedrich, is so well known as to require little comment. Some of its articles appeared in English as monographs in the series *Bible Key Words* (New York: Harper), and now six volumes of the entire work have appeared as the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964 —). Criticism was leveled against some of the articles and their methodology by James Barr in *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), but Kittel has also been widely imitated, and a recent study by David Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings: Studies in the Semantics of Soteriological Terms* (SNTS Monograph Series, V; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1968) seeks to reapply the word-study method to selected New Testament terms more carefully than the *Theological Dictionary* sometimes does. For Barr's critique of Hill (whose practice is said to contradict his theory) and Barr's own "second thoughts" and clarifications, cf. "Common Sense and Biblical Language," *Biblica*, XLIX (1968), 377—87.

tament developments, and the history-of-religions evidence, on into the patristic church. In the beginning of exegesis, as of John's Gospel, is "the word."

2. Advancing from what is called "lower" or textual criticism to "higher criticism," I would next list attention to the *historical situation* out of which the passage under consideration arose. Here would be involved not only general knowledge of the world of that day ("Zeitgeschichte") but also "special introduction," that is, what we can tell of who authored a given passage, at what date, and above all—for these matters of author and date are often quite uncertain—how this witness and writer of Scripture looked on God and man and life.³¹

3. Next, and of tremendous importance, I should place *literary matters*. Here I do not yet have in mind the forms that the form critics analyze in order to describe oral transmission of a unit but rather the broader and more basic questions of the type of book or writing involved, the place of our unit in the outline of that book, and the literary laws of composition and rhetorical devices and figures of speech that appear in all literature. Literary sensitivity, sharpened by experience with En-

glish and other world literatures, is a necessary tool for the interpreter.³²

4. I group together the well-known and related methods of *source, form, and redaction criticism*,³³ covering the study of how the Biblical material was transmitted orally for a time, then (in many instances) collected together in blocks or units (presumably written), which in turn served as sources for some editor like the Chronicler or the evangelists. Granted, many of our conclusions here are mere educated guesses or at best likely hypotheses when we seek to recover the earlier history of a unit in our Scriptures. But there is often, I submit, enough evidence of a linguistic or historical nature to make such exploration a necessity. I do not intend to bleed for

³² Most of the hermeneutics cited above in note 3 treat the literary devices, though one suspects that nowadays there is less knowledge of such "tropes" than formerly. For literary laws, Howard Kuist's *These Words upon Thy Heart* (cited above, note 3) is suggestive; Ruskin's "Essay on Composition" (about artistic method in painting) is applied to literature and the Bible.

³³ The methods, of course, are dealt with in all New Testament introductions, such as those mentioned in note 31, and further bibliography is provided there. On form criticism the works of Martin Dibelius and Rulolf Bultmann are most important; see the forthcoming article in the *Anglican Theological Review* by William Doty, surveying the area. For *Redaktionsgeschichte*, cf. R. H. Stein, "What Is Redaktionsgeschichte?" *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXXVIII (1969), 45–56; surveys are provided by Klaus Koch, *The Growth of the Biblical Tradition: The Form Critical Method* (New York: Scribner, 1968), who gives excellent examples, and Joachim Rohde, *Rediscovering the Teaching of the Evangelists* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969). The two volumes appearing in 1969 in Fortress Press's *Guides to Biblical Scholarship* promise to be useful: *What Is Form Criticism?* by Edgar V. McKnight, and *What Is Redaction Criticism?* by Norman Perrin.

³¹ We obviously cannot begin to list all the material available on the world of the New Testament and on introductory problems. Of importance, however, are collections of source materials, like C. K. Barrett, *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961); survey interpretations of such material, such as Bo Reicke's *The New Testament Era: The World of the Bible from 500 B. C. to 100 A. D.*, trans. D. E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968); and an "Einleitung," such as that by W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. A. J. Mattill Jr. (New York: Abingdon, 1966), or that by Marxsen (see above, note 15).

the Q hypothesis, but I think it quite apparent that there was a stratum of material, chiefly sayings by Jesus, shared by Matthew and Luke but not found in Mark. And we can, I think, analyze the structure of certain types of gospel narratives or sayings and guess at how our ancestors in the faith were employing them before an evangelist built them in, often at different points and with varying emphases, in his gospel book. Most clearly of all, we can tick off pet phrases of Mark, special emphases of Matthew and the community behind that gospel, and theological motifs in Luke.

The importance of such distinctions is the help they afford us in analyzing a chapter like Mark 4. As conservative an interpreter as Joachim Jeremias points out the stages of development from Jesus through the early church to the hand of the evangelist-editor, Mark, in this chapter.³⁴ Clear traces of the early church and the evangelist are found, and since Professor Jeremias strives mightily to convince us that the parables themselves go back to Jesus historically and provide His *ipsissima vox*, we thus have reflections of the historical ministry, the usage by the early believers, and the hand of the editor, each making a witness about the kingdom of God. We may dispute this or that precise detail in the process, but it seems undeniable that these parables have passed through a process of transmission and preaching some

40 years, from Jesus' Aramaic to our finished Greek gospel.

Much the same thing can be done for parts of Acts, the epistles, or the Apocalypse: origin or background, oral usage or a written source, putting the unit in place by the Scriptural writer, and occasionally touches from a later scribe or editorial hand.

It is precisely the disciplines of form, source, and editorial criticism that enable us to trace something of the life of a text as preaching in New Testament times.

* * *

5. We have now listed four steps in a method for moving from the Scripture to exposition of its meaning for today: (1) text and translation; (2) historical setting; (3) literary aspects; (4) the disciplines that help us trace out how this tradition or passage unfolded in Biblical times. The fifth and final step is the necessary task of putting all this together and of asking, (5) *What is the meaning of this passage?* in light of the contents, the concepts involved, and the whole context (these phrases come from Kaiser's section in the handbook *Exegetical Method*³⁵). How can I summarize the gist of this pericope, true to its contents and what my study of it has revealed? Not of Scripture in general or the Gospel as a whole or principles of theology, but what do these verses, uniquely, out of all the Bible, really say? It is worth making a separate step, of submitting it to the discipline, of crystallizing in a few sentences, the meaning of this one passage.³⁶

* * *

³⁴ Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Scribner, rev. ed. 1963), pp. 13 f., esp. 14, note 11. Eta Linnemann, *Jesus of the Parables: Introduction and Exposition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 114—19, reconstructs the history of the material somewhat differently, in part because she is convinced that the original meaning of the parable is lost.

³⁵ Cited above, note 21, pp. 24 ff.

³⁶ Again, many of the hermeneutical manuals mentioned in note 3 make suggestions about summing up. There are suggestions that go

I have warned you that while I intend our method to yield the succinct meaning of the particular passage under study, I do not pretend this can be done in isolation, as if only this one patch of Scripture existed. At this point, if it has not entered in previously, I think some attention must be paid to the relation of the passage under discussion to the rest of the Bible and of later theology. Accordingly, there must be listed in the hermeneutical arch some aspects worth considering, first as regards *Biblical theology*.

For a starter: How does this passage fit into the book where it is found or into the corpus of related writings? The chances are that any exegesis of Rom. 3:21-26, e. g., would pay attention, as it went along, to the place of these verses in Romans and in the Pauline corpus. If not, here is something that needs doing at this point.

Further, there is need to see how this passage fits into the entire Testament where it is found. It may well be that the message exegesis finds in James 2 or Heb. 6:4-6 (to take examples famous among

Lutherans) is out of step with the bulk of the New Testament witness, and we may wish to question its preachability for us.

In some cases we must go further, particularly with an Old Testament text, and try to consider the relation of this passage's meaning in the face of the whole Bible. After all, in treating the Old Testament, we are Christian exegetes, preparing for proclamation in the church of Jesus Christ. What shall we then do with promises to Israel-after-the-flesh or injunctions to offer bulls on Yahweh's altar (Ps. 51:19) or beatitudes about those who dash Babylonian bambinos against the rock (Ps. 137:9)? Is such material to be handled allegorically? typologically? Is it a past chapter in the course of *Heilsgeschichte*? Or are we so bold as to say this is a dead letter for us? Sometimes the task of exegesis may be to tell us how remote and obsolete for us a passage really is! Even more difficult theologically (and politically in today's world) is a passage like Gen. 12:1 ff., on the promise of the land.³⁷

back at least to Bengel, reported in Haller's article (cited above, note 22), pp. 165 f., on summarizing and "final check-up" (one sentence, on the central point of reference, asking again about the specific points of this text, and in relation to *Heilsgeschichte*). There is a helpful discussion and some warnings about the "scope" or "nerve" of a text in Günther Roth, "Der Skopus eines Textes in Predigt und Unterricht," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, LXII (1965), 217-29. E. Jüngel warns against making the summary a flat repetition of a phrase out of the Bible in his statement that what is to be preached "is, not the text, but what comes to expression in the text as 'to be preached'" (cited above, note 3), p. 130. Cf. also the essays by Willi Marxsen, *Der Exeget als Theologe: Vorträge zum Neuen Testament* (Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1968).

³⁷ For the significance of the promise of the land to a sensitive Jewish reader today, cf. A. J. Heschel, *Israel: An Echo of Eternity* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969). The question of the relation between the Old Testament and the New Testament is too large an area to treat here in any depth. However, a good survey of some of the issues and answers is provided by James Smart in *The Interpretation of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), pp. 65-92, and a penetrating analysis of what modern commentaries are doing—or failing to do—is offered by Brevard S. Childs, "Interpretation in Faith: The Theological Responsibility of an Old Testament Commentary," *Interpretation*, XVIII (1964), 432-49. Two standard collections of essays are those edited by Claus Westermann, generally reflecting a *Heilsgeschichte* position, akin to that of Gerhard von Rad, *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics* (Richmond: John Knox, 1963), and *The Old*

Finally, I should hope, we shall measure every passage in the light of the Gospel, the Good News of God's redeeming work for us through Jesus Christ.³⁸

It may well be that some of these aspects are in your mind as you carry out the steps of the historical-critical method. It may be

Testament and Christian Faith: A Theological Discussion, ed. Bernard W. Anderson (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), which includes more of a Bultmannian viewpoint. See also James Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation: A Study of the Two Testaments* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), bibliography included; and John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1967). "Typology" receives specific attention in a number of these volumes, e.g., Smart, pp. 93 ff.; Westermann, pp. 17—39; and Barr, pp. 103—148. But there is a further, extensive, and varied literature on the theory of "types."

³⁸ There is a tendency in some writers to speak of the "Christ event" in the sense that "Gospel" is employed above. For example, H. Ott, in *The Later Heidegger and Theology* (cited above, note 20), pp. 86 f., distinguishes "Christ event" and "Gospel" as, respectively, "the unspoken poem" and the poems that a poet writes reflecting in each case his basic (unspoken) poem. The sequence would thus run: Christ event, gospel of Christ, and then the gospels according to Matthew, Mark . . . Luther, Calvin, Bultmann, Barth. It is not clear where Ott would place "kerygma" in such a sequence (presumably as the equivalent of the gospel of Christ). We would prefer the distinction, if such a sequence must be presumed, to be expressed as follows: God revealed in Christ, the Gospel, the canonical gospels, and then the gospel witness throughout church history. For Ott, the "systematic" aspect in the hermeneutical task "consists in looking through the complexity of what is spoken to the indivisible unity of the unspoken, the subject matter itself that is called upon to be present in all that is spoken." Again, "We preach . . . on a particular text" but "what counts is to preach, together with the text and taking up its call, the one and whole gospel" (p. 89). It may be a matter of the nuance that is given these words, but is there present a possible overemphasis on "an eternal gospel" that exists independent of the text?

that you apply them consciously only after you work out scientifically what your passage means. My concern is that somewhere along the line due recognition be given to such aspects of Biblical theology.

* * *

I use that last term advisedly. We all know there are really a variety of Biblical theologies. *Redaktionsgeschichte* is, in a sense, especially a means for getting at the theology of Luke or some other author.³⁹ But it seems to me that there must also be involved an effort sometimes at a composite picture of what the entire Bible says theologically, even if we distinguish the theology of each author or corpus and of the two testaments as, say, Conzelmann or Bultmann do, for the Biblical composite is often quite different, for all its variety, from the outlook in the Greek world or the ancient Near East, or of the apostolic fathers or "modern man."

Finally, I have dared in charting our hermeneutical arch to allow confessional and systematic theology a role — indeed, at the keystone of the arch — for I am convinced that in moving from text to proclamation we are all systematians of a sort. The only question is, What kind of logical dogmatians or theo-logical thinkers shall we be — good or bad, open or closed (even to the stirrings of the Spirit, through the text as well as through the church and world around us)?⁴⁰ We all run the text

³⁹ See the titles in note 33 above. More specifically, cf. Hans Conzelmann, *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), esp. pp. 140—52.

⁴⁰ H. Ott, in his essay "What Is Systematic Theology?" (cited above, note 20), answers that it is the "between" that links exegetical and practical theology; hence, doctrine lifted out of the "arch" becomes an undertaking with-

through some sort of confessional grid, denominational or personal, or a combination of the two. At the least there is a "hermeneutical circle," involving the interpreter's end of the arch, stretching from his presuppositions (existential or inherited from a confessional stance or derived from his world view) to the text and, it is hoped, reshaped by a movement from the text, as carefully interpreted, back to his own position. In one way or another, in other words, there is theology involved in exegesis.

No one will dispute it if one says that Paul and Luke and the Deuteronomist were theologians (perhaps even systematic

out foundation (pp. 81 f.). But systematic theology also provides supervision over the work of the exegete, he goes on (p. 83), because, quoting Martin Kähler, "Surely no one detects the hidden dogmatician with such sure instinct as one who is himself a dogmatician." Further, systematics is directed not to a single text but at the whole horizon of Biblical texts (p. 86). In this way Ott forges links and notes differences between the work of the Biblical and the systematic theologian; "... when a text is heard not only 'historically,' but rather as a text for preaching . . . , then the path via this 'between' of dogmatics is unavoidable" (p. 103). In *Theology and Preaching* (cited above, note 20), pp. 19—28, the continuity and reciprocal influence between preaching and dogmatics are further indicated: they belong together more than the Bultmann school allows, for dogmatics is "preaching to the preacher" (cf. the theses on pp. 31 f.). To illustrate, how would a Bultmannite, Ott asks, preach on Matt. 10:29 ff., since it involves divine providence?

On the Roman Catholic side, a recent collection of essays, all of them originally in German, explores the area of relationships between these two areas of theology, *Dogmatic vs. Biblical Theology*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (Baltimore: Helicon, 1964), though the term *versus* suggests an opposition found in many quarters since the time of Pietism, when Biblical theology was championed against dogmatic (systematic, confessional) theology.

theologians) of a sort — at least like Luther, if not like Aquinas.

But I mean more. I am suggesting that we, the exegetes, all operate with certain "life commitments." For some, and this is obviously true in confessional churches, these are in part spelled out in certain historical documents, like the Lutheran Confessions. For others, the commitments reflect the views of the current theologian or school by whom the exegete has been influenced. For all of us, these commitments derive from our view of life and the questions about our own existence that lurk in our minds as we pore over a text.

Much could be said about all these areas. I confine myself to elements from the Lutheran tradition that are significant for the exegete today. Ralph A. Bohlmann has recently attempted to elucidate the *Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions*.⁴¹ I list three from our heritage that seem to me extremely important to sustain today — without comment, all of them well known and subject to much current discussion:

the canon within the canon;⁴²

⁴¹ St. Louis: Concordia, 1968. The discussion by Bohlmann (on which cf. H. Hummel, "The Bible and the Confessions," *Dialog*, VIII [Winter, 1969], 51—55) of the confessional stress on the Bible and the enunciation of principles found in the Confessions only begins to explore the meaning of these matters for today, however. Note the examples given by Edmund Schlöck where contemporary exegesis raises questions about and for the Biblical interpretations in the Confessions (*Theology of the Lutheran Confessions* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1961], pp. 297—317).

⁴² On "Kanonsgeschichte," cf. W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction* (noted above, note 31), § 37, and "The Continuing Significance of Luther's Prefaces to the New Testament," *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, XXXVII (1966), 573—81. Kurt Aland, *The Problem of the NT*

a theology of the cross, in contrast to one of glory;
and the proper distinction of Law and Gospel—without using this differentiation to ride roughshod over the text, and with an awareness that *Gebot* is not *Gesetz*.⁴³

In applying all these suggestions methodologically to a text, let me repeat, I do not insist they all be taken up mechanically in every instance and each be given equal

time. Sometimes some steps must be omitted. They can be reshuffled. But they are items that deserve a place again and again in interpreting a text.

Finally, let it be noted, I have not tried to structure in the role of the Holy Ghost or of believing prayer, but I would regard these also as a part of the exegete's stance and expectation.⁴⁴

* * *

II

The proof of the pudding is in the eating. Ideally we ought now to apply the method we have sketched to a series of texts. Here we shall be able to choose just one example, a parable, and for reasons of space limitations we shall omit some of the steps at that, in order to pose a closing question. It is with one eye on

Canon (*Contemporary Studies in Theology*, II; London: Mowbray, 1962). Ernst Käsemann, "The Canon of the New Testament and the Unity of the Church," in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (*Studies in Biblical Theology*, XLI; London: SCM, 1964), pp. 95—107. G. Ebeling, *The Problem of Historicity* (cited above, note 29), pp. 35—80, especially 61 ff. W. Joest, "Die Frage des Kanons in der heutigen evangelischen Theologie," in *Was heisst Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift?* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1966), and "Erwägungen zur kanonischen Bedeutung des Neuen Testaments," *Kerygma und Dogma*, XII (1966), 27—47. It is significant that Ott grants that we need not put all parts of Scripture on the same level, while speaking of the canon as "the linguistic room," the "linguistic net of co-ordinates" in which the church resides, the "totality of texts . . . given to the church as the primary attestation of its subject matter" (*The Later Heidegger and Theology* [cited above, note 20], p. 86).

⁴³ On Law and Gospel, beyond the well-known writings of Luther and those in the later Lutheran tradition, e. g. C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1928), cf. Paul Althaus, *The Divine Command: A New Perspective on Law and Gospel*, and Werner Elert, *Law and Gospel*, both in Facet Books, Social Ethics Series (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966 and 1967, respectively); and G. Ebeling, in *Word and Faith* (cited above, note 20), pp. 62—78, 247—81, and 386—406. In this issue, H. Ott is less willing to commit himself in *The Later Heidegger and Theology* (cited above, note 20), p. 95, n. 1, and pp. 70—76; but cf. his *Theology and Preaching* (cited above, note 20), pp. 29 f., and the remarks by C. E. Braaten (cited above, note 4), p. 143.

⁴⁴ Again, the literature is more extensive than we can do justice to here on the Spirit and interpretation. Cf. J. Smart, *The Interpretation of Scripture* (cited above, note 37), pp. 160 to 196, for an introduction. The remarks of A. C. Piepkorn, "What Does 'Inerrancy' Mean?" *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, XXXVI (1965), 577—93, touch on an aspect of concern to some. E. Jüngel's proposition is a healthy reminder: "Hermeneutics is . . . no competitor, but a diligent servant of the Holy Spirit" (cited above, note 3), p. 128. But such a relationship should not be perverted into a view where the validity of the exegesis is made to turn on the supposed sanctification of the theologian who does the exegesis, as Rudolf Bohren, "Die Krise der Predigt als Frage an die Exegese," seems to do, *Evangelische Theologie*, XXII (1962), 66—92. Bultmann's comment is worth pondering: "That prayer is the prerequisite for exegesis which is true to its contents . . . is as correct—and as false—as the statement that it is the prerequisite for every decent job" (*Glauben und Verstehen*, I, p. 127, note 2. Eng. tr. by Louise P. Smith, ed. by R. W. Funk, *Faith and Understanding I* [New York: Harper & Row, 1969], p. 158, note 11).

this particular question that we shall do our exegesis, the other eye on the space limits to any presentation here, some of the exegetical paragraphs and footnote references serving to compensate for the lack of fuller discussion.

The parable of the Marriage Feast in Matt. 22, or the Great Supper in Luke 14, appears twice in our church year selections, as the Gospel for Trinity 20 and Trinity 2 respectively, almost begging us to preach once on the Matthean form and once on the Lucan. For comparison's sake there is also now extant a version in the *Gospel of Thomas*. Most commentators are convinced a common parable stands behind the Lucan version and the opening part of Matt. 22, vv. 1-10.⁴⁵ But each synoptic version has its own features, and we must ask what the

message and intent of each is, and perhaps then the meaning of any basic parable lying behind them both.

Textually there are no real problems. The translation here provided is basically RSV, made more literal at points and placed in parallel columns in order to facilitate comparison. (See pages 672—73)

We shall not take space here for detailed word studies, but one ought to be aware of what the "kingdom of God" (Luke 14:15) or "kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 22:2) means in the synoptics — God's reign or rule — and of the Old Testament apoca-

of Jesus, SPCK, 1966). Pp. 88—96 plus notes.

FUNK, ROBERT W. *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God*. New York: Harper & Row, 1966. Pp. 163—98 (includes some theses on the interpretation of parables in general, growing out of treatment of this parable).

EICHHOLZ, GEORG. *Einführung in die Gleichnisse*. *Biblische Studien*, XXXVII. Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1963. Pp. 54—76.

BORNKAMM, GUENTHER. *Jesus of Nazareth*. New York: Harper & Row, 1961. P. 18 (uses it as the example of how Matthew and Luke "contemporize" Jesus' parables).

Additional standard literature on parables:

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DODD, C. H. *The Parables of the Kingdom*. New York: Scribner, 1935; rev. ed., 1961.

SMITH, CHARLES W. F. *The Jesus of the Parables*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1948.

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VIA, DAN OTTO, JR. *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967. Pp. 128—32 (on Matt. 22: 11-14 only).

BULTMANN, RUDOLF. *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*. New York: Harper & Row, 1963. Pp. 166—205. (Eng. trans. of German, originally published 1920).

FUCHS, ERNST. *Studies of the Historical Jesus*. *Studies in Biblical Theology*, XLII. London: SCM, 1964.

SCHARLEMANN, MARTIN H. *Proclaiming the Parables*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1963.

⁴⁵ That one parable stands behind the Matthean and Lucan versions is assumed by such commentators on the parables as Jülicher, Schlatter, Jeremias, G. Bornkamm, Linnemann, and Eichholz. Th. Zahn argued that separate parables stood behind each gospel version. For literature on this particular parable see:

HUNTER, A. M. *Interpreting the Parables*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961. Pp. 55 to 57 (treated under "the grace of the kingdom") et passim.

JEREMIAS, JOACHIM. *The Parables of Jesus*. London: SCM, 1954; rev. ed., Scribner, 1963 (paperback ed. available), pp. (rev. ed.) 44—45 (on how the church used parables in a hortatory way), 63—66 (on how the church adapted parables to its missionary situation), 67—69 (how the church allegorized parables), 176—80 (verse-by-verse detail, *Zeitgeschichte*; under the aspect of Jesus' message "It may be too late"), and 187—90 (on "The Guest Without a Wedding Garment," Matt. 22:11-13).

———. *Rediscovering the Parables*. New York: Scribner, 1966. A simplified version for laymen, omitting much technical material. Pp. 33—34, 50—53, 55—57, 138—42, and 148 to 150.

LINNEMANN, ETA. *Jesus of the Parables: Introduction and Exposition*. New York: Harper & Row, 1967. (British ed., *Parables*

Matthew 22:1-14
(Trinity 20)

¹ And Jesus, answering, spoke again to them in parables, saying,

² "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man, a king, who gave a marriage feast for his son ³ and sent his servants to call those who had been invited to the marriage feast; but they would not come.

⁴ Again he sent other servants saying, 'Tell those who are invited: "Behold, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and fat calves are killed, and all is ready; come to the marriage feast."' "

⁵ But they, making light of it, went off, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶ and the rest, seizing his servants, treated them shamefully and killed them.

Luke 14:15-24
(Trinity 2)

¹⁶ And he [Jesus] said to him [a table companion]:

"Some man gave a great banquet and invited many,

¹⁷ and sent his servant at the time of the banquet to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for all is now ready.' ¹⁸ And they all began at once to make excuses.

The first said to him, 'I have bought a farm, and I must go out to see it; I pray you, have me excused.'

¹⁹ And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to examine them; I pray you, have me excused.' ²⁰ And another said, 'I have just been married, and for this reason I cannot come.' ²¹ And the servant, coming, reported these things to his master.

Gospel of Thomas 64
(Aland; 65, Grant-Schoedel)

Jesus said,

"A man had guests, and when he prepared the banquet he sent his servant to invite the guests. He went to the first, he said to him, 'My master invites you.' He said, 'I have money [due] from merchants; they will come to me this evening; I will go and give them instructions. I pray to be excused from the banquet.' He went to another, he said to him, 'My master has invited you.' He said to him, 'I have bought a house, and it requires a day's attention; I shall have no leisure.' He came to another, he said to him, 'My master invites you.' He said to him, 'My friend will celebrate his wedding, and I am to direct the banquet; I shall not be able to come. I pray to be excused from the banquet.' He came to another, he said to him, 'My master invites you.' He said to him, 'I have bought a village; I go to collect the rent; I shall not be able to come. I pray to be excused.' The servant came, he said to his master, 'Those whom you invited to the banquet have given excuses.'

⁷ The king was angry, and sending his troops, he destroyed those murderers and burned their city. ⁸ Then he says to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹ Go therefore to the thoroughfares, and as many as you find invite to the marriage feast.'

¹⁰ And those servants, going out into the streets, gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good [cf. 5:45, 13:24-30].

And the wedding [hall] was filled with guests.

¹¹ "But the king, when he came in to see the guests, saw there a man who was not wearing a wedding garment, ¹² and he says to him: 'Friend, how did you come in here when you did not have a wedding garment?' But he was speechless. ¹³ Then the king said to the attendants: 'Bind him hand and foot, cast him out into the outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth' [cf. 8:12].

For many are called but few chosen" [Cf. 20:16, 19:30, Mark 10:31, and Luke 13:30].

(The passage appears in *Gospel Parallels* = Huck-Lietzmann, sections 170 and 205; in Aland's Greek synopsis, no. 279; in Sparks' synopsis based on the ERV, no. 203.)

Then the householder, angered,
said to his servant:

'Go quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and the poor and maimed and blind and lame bring here.' ²² And the servant said, 'Master, what you commanded has been done, and still there is place. ²³ And the master said to the servant: 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and urge (them) forcefully to come in, that my house may be filled. ²⁴ For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'"

The master

said to his servant,

'Go out into the streets,
bring those whom you will find,

so that they may banquet.

The buyers and the merchants [will] not

[come] into the places of the Father.

lyptic background for the hope concerning a messianic banquet or eschatological feast that flourished in some circles in Jesus' day.

We can also spare ourselves here any detailed discussion of the background of Matthew's Gospel or Luke's. We shall assume that they both appeared late in the first Christian century, after Mark, but employing additional material about Jesus, and each with distinctive emphases as it set forth the Gospel of Christ. We likewise shall skip over detailed discussion about the parable form; there is ample literature providing introduction to that topic.⁴⁶ Jeremias' books are especially good on contemporary details, if you want to know how many hectares of land the man owned who bought the five yoke of oxen. A. M.

⁴⁶ For details on the authors mentioned here, see note 45.

Hunter provides a very readable summary for the more general reader, often reflecting Jeremias' findings. Miss Linnemann's book offers notes on teaching the parables in German school instruction by teachers of religion; it is a revision of her doctoral dissertation, originally published with the aid of the Church of Hannover. Robert Funk's book, perhaps the best and most penetrating American work on the new hermeneutic, treats this particular parable as an example.

The *context* differs markedly in each Gospel, as a summary at the bottom of this page makes clear. Luke has used the parable in his Samaritan section in a unit about banquets, introducing it at 14:15 with a beatitude unique to Luke: "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." Jesus replies with a parable about a great supper.

LUKE — in a section of "*table-talk*" at the house of a "ruler who belonged to the Pharisees" (14:1-24, a "Lucan symposium" or "table-scene"), within his "*Travel or Samaritan section*" (9:51—18:15). Note references to "banquet" (14:1, 8, 12, 15, 16, 24).

14:1-6 Healing of a man with dropsy; Sabbath controversy

L source

14:7-14 Teaching on humility:

— for guests at banquets (vv. 7-11)

L

— for the host at a banquet (vv. 12-14)

L

14:15-24 Parable of the Great Supper, introduced by a "beatitude" spoken by a table companion: "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!"

L + Q

MATTHEW — in a series of *controversy* stories in *Jerusalem* during *Passion week*:

21:1-22 Jesus enters Jerusalem, cleanses the temple, curses the fig tree

As in Mark

21:23-27 Question about authority from the chief priests and elders: "By what authority are You doing these things?"

Mark

21:28-32 Parable of the Two Sons

M

21:33-36 Parable of the Wicked Tenants (Husbandmen)

Mark + M

22:1-14 Double parable of the Marriage Feast

Q + M

22:15-22 Question of tribute to Caesar (posed by Pharisees, Herodians).

Mark

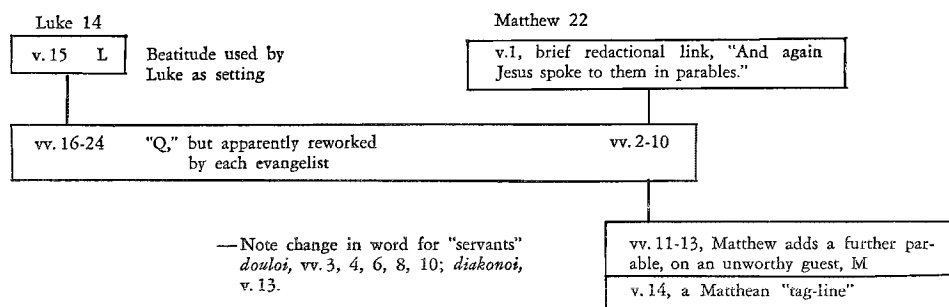
Matthew thus develops the conflict setting in Mark and heightens it by use of a series of parables; Matt. 22:1-14 is the last in this series, directed apparently against the priests in Jerusalem (21:23, 45).

In Matthew, on the other hand, the parable is set in Jerusalem, much later in Jesus' ministry, as the last of a series of parables reflecting conflict with opponents in Jerusalem, the priests. Matthew alone adds a strange closing section, vv. 11-14, about a guest at the wedding feast that Jesus describes, a guest who is expelled because he has no wedding garment.

Structurally what each evangelist pro-

vides can be easily charted. See chart at bottom of page. Each evangelist provides his own setting for a seemingly common parable about a feast, and Matthew adds what amounts to a second parable (vv. 11-13) and a closing comment or "tag line": "Many are called, but few chosen."

The *contents* can next be outlined, to show agreements and differences. See outline below chart below.



Luke 14

1. a great banquet (*deipnon mega*, v. 16)
2. a man (*anthropos tis*, v. 16)
3. begins directly with the story
4. sends *one* servant to summon guests (v. 17)
5. Those invited make excuses (vv. 18-20)
— farm, oxen, marriage
6. ———
7. the householder is angry (v. 21)
8. ———
9. He sends the servant (sing.) out in the city to gather the poor, maimed, blind, lame (v. 21)
10. There is still room, the servant is sent further into *highways* and *hedges*, to urgently invite people in (see Jeremias, *Parables*, rev. ed., p. 177, on "compel")

Matthew 22

1. a marriage feast (*gamous*, v. 1)
2. a king (*anthropō basilei*, v. 1)
3. employs the formula, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to . . ."
4. sends servants (pl., v. 3)
5. those invited "would not come" (v. 3)
6. sends other servants (v. 4), those invited make light of it (v. 5), and "the rest" kill his servants (v. 6)
7. the king is angry (v. 7)
8. he sends troops to burn "the city of the murderers" (v. 7)
9. he sends his servants into the *thoroughfares* to invite as many as they find (v. 9), the first people they find
10. the servants gather as guests all whom they find, "both bad and good" (v. 10)

We can readily account for some of the changes in the Matthean version: since the man giving the feast is a *king*, he must have servants (plural), not just one servant who summons the guests. Since Matthew will go on to tell of a guest who has no wedding garment, he calls the banquet "a marriage feast" for the king's son from the outset.⁴⁷

The biggest difference is at Matthew, vv. 6-7. Luke has no parallel to this idea that those invited not only make light of the dinner invitation but also kill the servants—and then the grisly detail that the angered king sends his troops to burn the city of the murderers. Odd behavior for declining an invitation to a marriage feast, as odd as it will be in vv. 12-13 when the king has a guest expelled, bound hand and foot, into "outer darkness"—just because the man lacks a wedding garment—even though, presumably, he has come in off the streets of a burning city!

It begins to dawn on us that we are not in the everyday world of reality, and we sense, as many a commentator has, that there is allegory in our Matthean parable.

Presumably, the Matthean additions in vv. 6-7 reflect the fall of Jerusalem in

A. D. 70, when the "murderers" who had refused God's invitation to the Messianic wedding feast had their city burned. God is thus the king; those invited, Jewish Israel. Allegory along history-of-salvation lines appears when we see how Matthew's threefold sending of servants with invitations to come parallels the course of God's dealings with men: v. 3, these servants represent the Old Testament prophets, sent to Israel, but the people of Israel "would not"; vv. 4-7, the "other servants" are the Christian apostles and missionaries sent by Matthew's church to the Jews, between A. D. 30 and 70, but seized, shamefully treated, and killed (unless one wants to see here the former and the latter prophets of the Old Testament period, cf. Matt. 21.34-36, the Wicked Husbandmen); v. 8, the king now concludes that those originally invited were not worthy, and their city is burnt; vv. 9 ff., the servants are sent out into the thoroughfares, for all men—the Gentile mission. That "both bad and good" are brought in through such a mission is characteristic of Matthew's view of the church: it is a *corpus permixtum*—not a sect consisting only of saints, in a rigorist view of the church—but a community where bad weeds and good seed grow together until God makes the Final Judgment (cf. 13: 36-43, Matthew's interpretation of the Wheat and Tares). We have a touch here of Matthew's ecclesiology and eschatology (cf. G. Bornkamm).

That is not all, however, in Matthew's picture of salvation history. While he depicts a church where all were invited and could enter, via baptism, into the "wedding hall" (v. 10), Matthew was insistent that Christians match their lives to their profession and bring forth much fruit. Men

⁴⁷ On the Matthean version of the parable, cf. Günther Bornkamm, in the volume on Matthew by Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth, and H. J. Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), pp. 20 f.; and Funk (cited above, note 45), pp. 169 f. It is argued by K. H. Rengstorff, "Die Stadt der Mörder (Mt 22:7)," in *Judentum, Urchristentum, Kirche* (Festschrift for J. Jeremias; Beiheft ZNW, XXVI; Berlin, 1960), pp. 106–29, that an age-old Oriental manner of description, characteristic of folklore, lies behind v. 7 rather than a retrospective reference to the fall of Jerusalem, but most exegetes have not been convinced that the details are to be traced back to such a literary convention and therefore possibly to the historical Jesus.

are not to judge their brothers, but God will. That is the point of vv. 11-13: God will one day judge; those who do not measure up will stand condemned. I do not claim to know exactly what the "wedding garment" was in Matthew's thought — Jeremias argues that it referred to justification and imputed righteousness (Is. 61: 10), but others doubt the interpretation.⁴⁸ We can also leave unsettled whether a parable told by the rabbis stands behind Matt. 22:11-13.⁴⁹ What is clear is that Matthew is presenting in his double parable an allegory that stretches from the Old Testament prophets to the Last Judgment. It rebukes Israel, it justifies the Gentile mission, it also warns lax Christians of their responsibility before God.

A summary might be attempted along

⁴⁸ Jeremias, *Parables*, rev. ed. (cited above, note 45), p. 189; Miss Linnemann (cited above, note 45) discusses and rejects the interpretation on p. 168, note 23.

⁴⁹ Such a rabbinic parable is assumed as background by Jeremias, *Parables*, rev. ed. (cited above, note 45), p. 188, and H. D. A. Major, T. W. Manson, and C. J. Wright, *The Mission and Message of Jesus* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1938), p. 518. The parable (*Shabb. 153 a*) is attributed to Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai (who died A.D. 80) and runs thus: "Like a king who invited his servants to a feast, and did not specify a time for them. The astute ones among them adorned themselves and sat at the gate of the palace. They said, 'There is no lack in the palace' [hence the feast might begin at any time]. The foolish ones among them went to their work. They said, 'Is there ever a feast with preparation?' [hence it will not occur immediately]. Suddenly the king asked for his servants. The astute ones among them came into his presence as they were, adorned; and the foolish ones came into his presence as they were, dirty. The king was pleased with the astute ones and angry with the foolish ones. He said, 'Let those who adorned themselves for the feast sit down and eat and drink. Let those who did not adorn themselves for the feast stand and look on.'" The point: always repent and be ready.

the following lines for Matthew's version. In a parable directed against Jesus' Jewish opponents in Jerusalem, it is described, in an allegorical way, how those who had been called rejected God's invitation, with the result that punishment ensued and the Gentile mission followed; but those now invited must still be clad in the wedding garment, else judgment will overtake them also. The passage is thus an allegory on the history of salvation.

* * *

Luke's parable of the Great Supper can be treated more briefly. Luke uses it in the setting of a complex of banquet stories to reinforce what he has had Jesus teaching at 14:13, about how the host at a feast should invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind. He even works those phrases into the parable itself at 14:21, where Matthew did not have such a reference.

There are other notes of Lucan redaction, touches of his editorial hand. Jeremias calls attention to the double invitation that emerges: first, v. 21, the servant is sent into the city (the city of God? Israel); then, after the refusal of those first invited, he is sent to all men (vv. 22-23), to the beggars outside, initially in the streets and lanes of the city (v. 22), and then in the highways and hedges (v. 23). This twice-repeated invitation Jeremias regards as a touch from the early church, differing from Jesus' own view that the Gentiles would be brought in only by God's own eschatological action, not His own ministry.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Jeremias, *Parables*, rev. ed. (cited above, note 45), p. 64. The position depends on Jeremias' claim, advanced in *Jesus' Promise to the Nations* (*Studies in Biblical Theology*, XXIV; London: SCM, 1958), that Jesus Himself nowhere envisioned His ministry as being directed

We can try to sum up the meaning of the Lucan parable, though recognizing that it was not necessarily Jesus' own original point in the story He told about a great banquet. In Luke, the purpose is to illustrate the warning of 14:12-14, on inviting the poor—one should be like the host in the parable who invited the poor, not the rich. However, such a meaning, Jeremias especially argues, represents a shift from the original eschatological thrust of the story to a hortatory one and reflects Luke's interest in "the poor."

* * *

Can we now move back behind Luke and Matthew to an earlier meaning, perchance to what Jesus meant when He told a parable about a banquet during His ministry, before Good Friday? Many commentators have tried.

Funk, for example, has suggested a basic outline that underlies both our canonical forms.⁵¹ The structure of the parable, reduced to its barest dimensions, would run:

- I. Introduction
 - a. A man
 - b. gives a banquet,
 - c. inviting those (socially) worthy.
- II. Development and Crisis
 - a. The banquet is ready.
 - b. He sends his servant with a courtesy reminder (Jerusalem custom; Luke, once; Matthew, twice).
 - c. The guests refuse to come or offer excuses, go off on pretexts (Luke, three excuses; Matthew, two pretexts

to the conversion of the Gentiles but expected that to take place in the future as a result of God's eschatological action, as certain Old Testament passages foresaw.

⁵¹ *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God* (cited above, n. 45), pp. 165 f.

and the response of "the rest"; Thomas, four excuses).

III. Denouement

- a. The man is wroth.
- b. He invites those (socially) unworthy (Matthew, once; Luke, twice).
- c. The table is filled.
- d. There is judgment on those originally invited. (In III, Thomas has only b and d.)

I omit from any discussion here possible later developments in the version found in *Thomas*⁵² and the possibility, raised by Jeremias, that Jesus employed a Jewish story in telling about the banquet feast.⁵³

There are a number of suggestions in the commentators as to what the meaning of the basic, original parable may have

⁵² Cf. H. Montefiore and H. E. W. Turner, *Thomas and the Evangelists* (*Studies in Biblical Theology*, XXXV; London: SCM, 1962), especially pp. 61—62, where Montefiore holds the version in *Thomas* superior to that in Luke; B. Gärtner, *The Theology of the Gospel According to Thomas* (New York: Harper, 1961), pp. 46—48, stresses the gnosticizing themes that have crept into the parable.

⁵³ Jeremias, *Parables*, rev. ed. (cited above, note 45), pp. 178—80, believes that a Jewish story about a rich tax gatherer named Bar Ma'jan, reported at *J. Sanh.* 6.23 c, does provide a source or analogy for Jesus' parable, a connection worked out in a dissertation by Jeremias' pupil, W. Salm. Linnemann, pp. 159—62, note 8, and Eichholz, p. 63 (both cited above, note 45), are less certain about such relevance of the rabbinic tale. The story in question tells how the rich tax-gatherer died and was given a splendid funeral, all the people of the city stopping work to escort him to his grave, while a poor scholar died and no one took notice of his burial. Why? Because Bar Ma'jan, though scarcely a pious man throughout his life, had done one good deed at his death: he had arranged a banquet for the city councillors, but when they did not come, he gave orders that the poor should be invited to eat it. Jesus, it is claimed, used this story of the behavior of the tax-gatherer to illustrate the wrath and mercy of God.

been.⁵⁴ Most interpreters make it a message about God's grace in freely accepting

⁵⁴ Some representative views on the meaning of the original parable are as follows (authors as cited above, note 45):

T. W. MANSON, *The Mission and Message of Jesus*, 1938, p. 422: No man can enter the Kingdom without God's invitation; no one can remain outside it but by his own deliberate choice — those excluded exclude themselves.

HUNTER (p. 57, taking the Lucan version as original): addressed to the self-deception of the professedly religious (like the table companion): the *grace* of the kingdom is at hand, but you are excluding yourselves.

JEREMIAS: addressed by Jesus to critics and opponents, to vindicate the Good News against their criticisms. "God's *mercy* for sinners" (so Jeremias' earlier treatment, cf. Linne-mann, p. 161). Now: "It may be *too late*" (p. 176) for the pious and the theologians; God's joyous banquet is for the poor.

LINNEMANN: "Now is the acceptable time" (pp. 90 ff.). In 14:15, the Pharisee said, "Blessed is he who *hereafter* shall eat bread in the kingdom of God," but Jesus teaches, "Blessed is he who *now* responds. . . ." Cf. p. 91, on how the parable "interlocks" with the fact that the table fellowship Jesus is practicing betokens the coming of the kingdom.

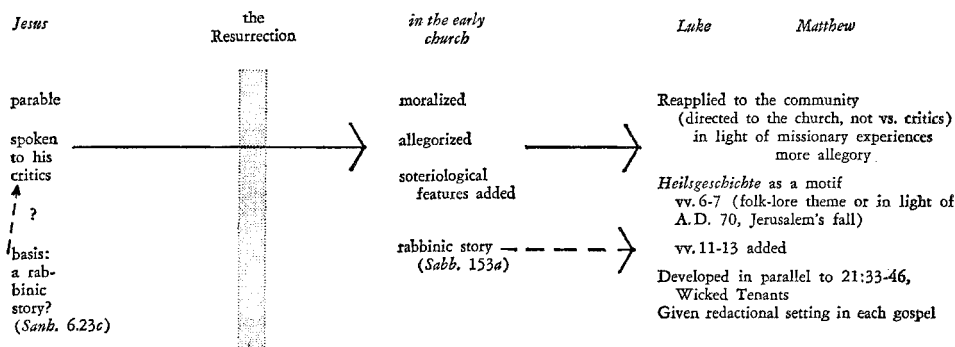
EICHHOLZ (pp. 64 f.): the *grace* of the invitation, the sovereignty of the mercy of God. God's mercy can be forfeited, but God's table does not remain empty.

VIA (p. 132, on Matt. 22:11-14): "One must *live appropriately* to the situation of grace The neglect of the demand resulted in losing the gift."

men who can say only "*Wir sind Bettler*" (to use Luther's phrase), though alongside the theme that we are beggars, there may also be a note of warning (so Jeremias) and a strand of eschatology of the "here and now" variety: Jesus' table fellowship with poor sinners signifies that God's goodness is at work — now — to the scandal of Pharisaic critics.

Whether you are convinced or not that any of the critics has precisely hit the nail on the head in summing up Jesus' original message, the possibility remains that the parable developed somewhat along the lines indicated in a final chart at the bottom of this page.

Jesus told a parable about a banquet, in answer probably to critics of His way of receiving sinners. Perhaps He employed a rabbinic story in shaping His reply. After Easter this story from the Lord was retold but subject now to new influences as the years went by. Now it was addressed to a different audience, to the church rather than to critics outside (like the Pharisees). Now it took on moralistic and allegorical features. Thus it spoke anew to Luke's church and to Matthew's. In particular Matthew added a final section, based perhaps on a rabbinical story, and each evangelist gave the parable a particular



setting in his gospel book—from which we seek to preach on it today.

* * *

It emerges that this parable we have treated is very much like Proteus, the old man of the sea, always changing shape. There is one shape to it when we look at Luke, with his emphasis on inviting the poor and outcasts to the banquet. Behind it may lie a different shape and emphasis (more shadowy) in Q, and yet another shape and meaning in Jesus' own lifetime and ministry prior to the cross—perhaps a defense of Jesus' table fellowship or His declaration that God accepts outcasts here and now. Matthew has given the parable another shape, allegorical and *heilsge-schichtlich*, and in adding a second parable he sends a shudder of warning down the back of lax church people.

* * *

III

Now to a question in closing. In preaching on this parable, which shape, which message, which stage in its development shall we proclaim?

This is a question to which hermeneutics does not always give attention. Frequently we just assume that, as our gospels record it, there are the straight facts from the ministry of Jesus. Or we sift and pick among the versions to discover the one that suits us best. It is the merit of methodical Bible study that we are confronted with the history of how a pericope has unfolded or developed. I have attempted to show here how this parable could speak with differing meaning in Luke, in Matthew, perhaps in Q, and in Jesus' own ministry. Which one shall we choose for proclamation today?

It is to the credit of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod statement on "A Lutheran Stance Toward Contemporary Biblical Studies" that it has raised the issue. It answers:

The authoritative Word for the church today is the canonical Word, not pre-canonical sources, forms, or traditions—however useful the investigation of these possibilities may on occasion be for a clearer understanding of what the canonical text intends to say.⁵⁵

While I have found more than a few exegetes who would agree with this judgment⁵⁶ and I sympathize with much of this answer—it is *canonical* Scripture that is Scripture; many of the precanonical forms are mere possibilities—I must confess that I am somewhat restive about preaching always on parables only in their Matthean redactional forms or about using the other gospels only to see Lucan *Heilsgeschichte* or Mark's Messianic Secret. Must we, to take a different sort of example, employ Phil. 2:6-11 only to teach humility and unity, not Christology or how Paul insisted on a theology of the cross? Are we to employ Paul's epistles only for his own emphases and not also for echoes of those who were in Christ before him?

I confess that I for one—though I am often unpersuaded by the attempts of Jeremias and others to recover the *ipsissima vox* of Jesus—have the urge sometimes to want to proclaim the point I think Jesus meant, about human existence under God,

⁵⁵ "A Lutheran Stance . . ." (cited above, note 9), pp. 9–10, C. 1.

⁵⁶ Cf. the discussion of what exegesis is in Willi Marxsen, *The Beginnings of Christology: A Study of Its Problems* (Facet Books, Biblical Series, XXII; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), pp. 1 ff.

and not that which Luke makes moralistically about good manners for dinner hosts during a poor people's campaign, or Matthew's emphases on the delay of the parousia or the Jewish-Christian understanding of *Heilsgeschichte*.

I have, of course, here sharpened the issue more than it needs to be, but my own preference ought to be clear: I prefer to allow the possibility that proclamation today pick up any of the several stages of meaning in a text that it had already in the Bible. Scripture is already a history of proclamation, a series of interpretations. Historical scholarship is a tool for uncovering this preaching of the past so that it can be our proclamation as well. What the critical method often gives us is several handles with which to grasp hold of a text. We ought to feel free to use the handle, to reflect the facet, which speaks best to the situation we face in the audience addressed today. All too often systematic theology and exegetical theology had dog-

matically insisted on one meaning and one meaning only in a text, overrigidly. While the grammatical-historical method ought to help us discover the meaning the text intended, the method can be too dogmatic if it does not open up the series of meanings that that text may have intended at various stages in its history.

To conclude and repeat: the Bible is part of, the beginning of, a *Verkündigungsgeschichte*. It is the normative Word of God for us—provisionally in the Old Testament, conclusively in the New. But already in Scripture we have a history of preaching, which careful study helps us unfold. The preacher today is to take one of these earlier, Biblical stages of proclamation and try to make it Word of God again. He tries. The Spirit of the Lord, of course, must add the power that convicts, convinces, turns, and heals, and then builds up—as He did in the day of Jeremiah, Jesus, Luke, or Matthew.

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