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Candid Questions Concerning Gospel Form Criticism



Erhardt Güttemann

CANDID QUESTIONS CONCERNING GOSPEL FORM CRITICISM

*A Methodological Sketch of the Fundamental
Problematics of Form and Redaction Criticism*

by
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By Güttgemanns, Erhardt and Doty, William G.
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Translator's Preface

A. "In All Candor...".

Some of the dictionary synonyms for the "offen" of the German title of this work, *Offene Fragen...*, gather a semantic range that only limps through the working the author and I agreed upon, *Candid Questions...* *Offen* means first of all "open", as in "an open letter", i.e., a writing programmatically slanted toward concerned readers who may not be the explicit correspondence partners. It also carries overtones of "frank, sincere", and the book is certainly such: It honestly expresses exasperation with a methodological ostrich-ism that has ducked its head into the sand more frequently, ignored non-religious scholarship more completely, and pooh-poohed criticism from other academic disciplines more effectively, than now seems credible, given recent developments that have opened biblical studies toward literary-critical and other methodologies.

Offen leads on to "exposed", and the scope of Dr. Güttgemanns' treatment has meant that he has had to leave his flanks exposed at more than one juncture here, insofar as exhaustive argumentation and documentation have not been possible. *Offen* also leads to "overt", as "overt hostility", which is less politely repressed in continental academic debate than it is on this side of the Atlantic. The author alludes to the controversy surrounding this book in his Epilogue; he has not shared there the painful acrimonies of the debate, but perhaps I may just indicate that the book was often misread as an "overt" attack from a mindless debaser of the scriptural tradition-- which Erhardt Güttgemanns certainly is not.

Our term also contributes to commercial phrases: an *offene Rechnung* is an outstanding or unsettled account; some of those overtones resound where the "candid questions" are aporia that have been recognized (as by Bultmann, see Ch. #13), but remain *unresolved*. A "public, manifest", aspect is also present, and altered as *öffentlich*, so are the connotations of "publicized, publicity". Again the author's intention, as I see it: to drive exegesis out into the open, public, no-holds-barred agora, where self-conscious, explicit, even aggressive, debate may chase away at least some of the phobias adhering to interdisciplinary studies, where it may garner some of the delights of re-approaching sanctified texts by seeing them warped and woofed as tapestries belonging to the multiform *richesse* of Western literature, and not merely as patchwork snippets hidden in a cabineted *hermeneutica sacra*.

The approach comes no more easily than the diction--and this is a very dense, technical, and complicated work indeed. But it promises many openings as it challenges accepted scholarly truisms. Often practicing a hermeneutics of deceit, it asks us to re-examine many of our assumptions, particularly form-critical assumptions. (Note the way some of the traditional diction is exposed here: "sociological setting", often merely by consistently being set apart by quotation marks, constantly plays upon the tension between Gunkel's original usage, and what came to be made of it.) We are led to the German Romantics, to subsequent folkloristics, and later, even to gestalt psychology!

The book is *not* a work in structuralist linguistics, although it maps some of the linguistic background Gütgemanns will work from as he develops (primarily in the journal he edits and publishes in Bonn, *Linguistica Biblica*) his "gener-

ative poetics". It *is* a full-scale attempt toward exegetical accuracy, focused upon methodological aporias that have too often been shoved into the "must resolve...someday!" files. And it does attempt (Ch. 8):

to re-integrate the atomistically-splintered methodologies once again into a unity which will do justice to the unity of the linguistic phenomenon, 'text'.

Hence one of the key aims of the book; as expressed in Chapter #5, the author is working:

toward a more careful and more productive methodological development of form criticism by overcoming its stagnation and its unnecessary isolation from the linguistic and sociological disciplines.

But something more than that is attempted as well--or we might say, "form criticism is something more than that", in that Gütgemanns' style of exegesis, only anticipated here (the reader must follow *Linguistica Biblica* and its associated publications to see what I mean), touches much more than what is usually thought of as the "form" in form criticism.

When in 1970 I first read the second edition of this book, in German galleys, I suggested to an American publishing firm that the work surely ought to be translated. That did not happen then, and I later accepted Pickwick's request to translate it myself only hesitantly. Now I am glad I did, and wish the book the widest possible "candid" reception!

B. On the Translation.

My method of translating this book is a departure from that followed in *Semeia* 6 (1976): *Erhardt Guttgemanns' "Gen-*

erative Poetics", where I had the excellent collaboration of Norman R. Petersen, and where we were concerned not only to be accurate with respect to Dr. Güttgemanns' original essays, but so far as possible to work within translation conventions of international discussions of structuralist linguistics. Here I am not any less concerned with accuracy, but the material pre-dates the later involvement with Generative Poetics and developments in structuralist analysis, and I have worked alone, except that the author read and approved the English translation. He has also supplied additional footnotes reflecting recent discussion (indicated in the footnotes by [+1978: ...]), and an Epilogue--these have sometimes been extensively reworked by the translator.

I have preferred to present a translation that will carry the English reader through the extremely compressed style, finding ways of altering the German syntax so as to incorporate quotations within the structure of sentences and paragraphs, as the author so frequently does. Any first-year student of German knows the ways German can express in a compound word what English can only express in a string of words; that problem is exacerbated here in that the author refers to disciplines and terms unfamiliar to many biblical critics, or makes his own neologisms--saving space in German, but certainly not in English!

And finally, the translation has not been taken to the stage one normally takes a translation, i.e., moving from a literal to a "free" rendition in polished English style. It seemed more important to have the technical developments the author presents in his own patterns of expression than literary English (which would have increased the length of the translation substantially, by the way). Page numbers in the

original are indicated in brackets throughout, and anyone who wishes greater gracefulness for her or his own purposes is encouraged to adapt the translation accordingly. This is a *working translation* of an important critique of the form-critical method, meant for use by scholars and students.

Some specific aspects:

1. Translation of New Testament passages are those of the literal translation I prefer for working with the Greek text, the *New American Standard Bible: New Testament* (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1963), or my own.
2. I have generally *not* followed the customary practice of splitting the German writer's long dependent clauses into series of short English sentences with repeated subject. This makes for turgid English prose, but requires only that the reader carry forward the primary subject in her or his head.
3. Some conventions used:
 - a. *Gestalt/en* has been anglicized consistently: "gestalt/s".
 - b. *Ur*: usually "pre + substantive/adjective" (Urliteratur = pre-literature), but sometimes anglicized (urhistorical) where the technical nuance would not otherwise be clear. *Urchristlich*: consistently "primitive Christian".
 - c. *Gesetzmässigkeiten*: "regularities", etc., seemed too weak, so I have mostly used "laws", which in turn is rather too strong an expression.
 - d. *Sitz im Leben*: consistently "sociological setting" (as throughout my *Contemporary New Testament Interpretation*, 1972, justified there).

- e. *Kleinliteratur*: left in German, as explained in a page-note in Chapter #3.
- f. *-geschichte*, in compounds, presents the usual problems; when one component is emphasized by the author, I have used, for example, form-*historical* or *tradition-historical*; otherwise form, redaction, motif, and literary *criticism*, but tradition *history*, as is customary, though inaccurate.
- g. *Soziologisch* is simply "sociological" here, but the usage background is often a Comte-ian contrast between the collective and the individualistic rather than the more recent and less-philosophical American usage, where theoretical sociology receives a minor emphasis within the data-oriented academic discipline.

C. Technical Matters.

- 1. All words/phrases within quotation marks, and most hyphenated constructions, represent the author's own usage; however many originally-hyphenated constructions (e.g., *hermeneutisch-theologisch*) are divided by *and* (hermeneutical and theological).
- 2. Although English translations of works quoted here are frequently available, all translations in this work, with the exception of some extended citations from Latin and Greek texts, are the translator's.
- 3. The author's typographic emphasis is followed except for italicizing names of scholars in the text and the notes. Footnote sequence is sometimes out of numerical order, to accommodate the changes from German to English sentence structure.

4. The Table of Contents is complete, down to sub-sub-sections, to facilitate reference; given the mass of 1579 footnotes in the original text, it has not been possible to manage an Index.
5. Bibliographic citations are considerably reduced in this translation: I have cited only the actual edition quoted, and omitted references to series. Since the footnote numbers correspond exactly to those in the German edition, such information can be obtained readily. Many of the earlier works pertaining to form criticism, especially English-language works, are listed in full among the 238 entries in my own bibliographic survey, "The Discipline and Literature of New Testament Form Criticism," *Anglican Theological Review* 51 (1969) 257-321. Abbreviations in the notes mostly follow *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3rd ed.
6. There are many cross references within the footnotes; in order to expedite publication, we have introduced the author's *original paginations in brackets*: "See above, p. [29]" therefore refers to the page numbers given in brackets in the text, not to the pages of this translation.

I am grateful to the author for his contributions, and for a virtual archive of additional materials supplied over a several-year period; to editor Dikran Y. Hadidian, of Pickwick Press, for his patience; and to my wife, Joan T. Mallonee, for help in clarifying parts of the English text.

Quincunx, Amherst, MA

William G. Doty
August 1978

This book is one of the studies of the gospels announced in my dissertation. From the first I have thought of it as a project needing to be supplemented by additional essays. As such it only brings to light some of the aspects of a new conception of a New Testament theology that is oriented toward form criticism and that reflects hermeneutical theory, upon which I have been working now for several years. As "aspects" of a new conception, therefore, this work cannot promise exhaustive treatment. And above all, this self-limitation both in terms of my presentation and in terms of the references to theological and secular and scientific bibliography, is also due to the insufficient preparation of readers for the methodologies and modes of inquiry in this book. The scientific advance that we seek must not be loaded down with too much ballast in the hold.

To be sure, this book is not for those readers to whom scientific theories and hypotheses in N. T. theology have become such second nature that they can easily avoid consciousness of the problem and their own scruples with respect to the possibilities of knowing and describing the primitive Christian history. To such readers these pages will bring little joy, since seemingly everything that seems certain to them is brought into question here. I regret that I must contradict so many people in this book--especially my own teachers. Candor toward all fronts and the growing acceptance of Franz Overbeck's conception of a primitive Christian "pre-literature" [Urliteratur] with its "darkness with respect to the primitive historical period" seems to me to be quite appropriate to a

period in which traditio-historical reconstructions are apparently not bounded by fantasy. Whoever does not dare to inquire about the bases of his own premises may accuse me of historical scepticism; in this respect I feel myself in good company.

This book is the consistent development of form-critical argumentation that is already to be found in my dissertation, where I rejected a traditio-historical *argumentum e silentio* [argument from silence]. This further development of my earlier work is, to be sure, carried out by means that have been a surprise even to me. Although I saw earlier the clear necessity of a connection between form criticism and hermeneutic, my deeper affinity to Ernst Fuchs--seen in purely external terms--came about through concentration upon linguistics and [p. 14] literary criticism. This occurred entirely by chance, such as, for instance, reading a book by Harald Weinrich concerning systems of grammatical tenses. It was in this context that the question of christological thought patterns emerged anew, and that happened in a manner that was totally different from anything I had expected.

This book consciously plays, in its manner of presentation, with the double subterranean meanings of its title. It is directed both to the candid [offene] opening up of aporia with respect to "gospel form criticism", and with respect to frank questioning of positions we have all been taught. So both the book's frankness, and the need for these studies to be supported further are rooted in its subject matter. I am concerned about the practise of a theology conscious of its own problems that calmly sets the aporia to the side and does not reflect upon them with the same intensity that is granted to the hastiest of "solutions". Not hypothesis-construction, but consciousness of problems and preparedness for constant

revision are the marks of rigorous scientific method even for the historian.

This book was written in an atmosphere of unrest with respect to the neo-positivist splintering of N. T. studies that seems to disavow the fact that Rudolf Bultmann once developed a theological exegesis for Karl Barth's proposals that astonished his teachers, and which united exegesis and hermeneutics into an indivisible whole. "Pure historical criticism!"--again today this is the slogan of many exegetes. In a peculiar way the present situation is a variation of that earlier situation, since now the historical-critical method is used as a weapon against too extensive use of hermeneutics in N. T. studies, and the traditional boundaries of the disciplines are stressed. The right to establish appropriate boundaries for the theological disciplines is only established by the universal problematics of the subject matter treated in each instance; and only it can judge the adequacy of scientific description. The "purely historical" is always transmitted by language, and is only understandable by means of linguistic processes. It must therefore be referred to a linguistic critique of "historical reason", that amplifies the traditional humanistic hermeneutics by linguistic data, and in the process also causes modifications. In such a situation the estranged sisters, hermeneutics and linguistics, confront one another again in the exegesis of texts that are "given".

This volume could hardly have been written and completed without the unselfish help of Professor Hans-Georg Geyer, who, after several long and difficult years of library management, took me on as his assistant without respect to my area of academic study, and who shared with me his rich knowledge of philosophy and the history of ideas as well as his openness to unaccustomed areas of research; he gave me strength and cour-

age to complete this study. That he also did justice to the completed work greatly encouraged me [p. 15] in my endeavors. I also remember gladly the numerous technical discussions with Professor Johannes Botterweck (Catholic Theological Faculty of Bonn), Professor Johann Knobloch, Professor Helmut Gipper (Sprachwissenschaftliches Institut, Bonn), Professor Gerold Ungeheuer (Institut für Kommunikationsforschung und Phonetik, Bonn), Dr. Manfred Beller (Germanistisches Seminar Bonn, Abteilung für Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft), and Professor Hans-Dieter Bastian (Pädagogische Hochschule Rheinland, Abteilung Bonn). I first learned the correct nature of many interdisciplinary relationships in these discussions. Above all, Professor Botterweck and Professor Bastian sacrificed much time for me; and they are also to be thanked for supporting me wholeheartedly in another respect. Professor Ernst Wolf readily accepted my book in his series and also supported me in other ways during the past few years; I am grateful to him as well as to the [original] publisher, Chr. Kaiser Verlag, for careful printing. My self-effacing parents made possible this publication by their own sacrifices; the leadership of the Evangelische Kirche im Rheinland also contributed a subvention. Karla Maasshoff read the proofs; together with Erich Ott and myself, she compiled the index-- that work will be appreciated by the reader [not included here--W.G.D.]. I dedicate the book to my wife, who in recent years has patiently carried an overload of hindrances on my part and given me time for the leisure of reflection.

Bonn-Röttgen, March 1970

Erhardt Güttgemanns

Foreword to the Second, Corrected, Edition

I am pleased that my "candid" questions have found such strong echoes. Five months after the first edition I can make a few corrections and add to the bibliographic references. It is good to see, especially in Catholic Old Testament exegesis, a tendency to correlate form criticism and linguistics (cf., e.g., B. W. Richter, *Die sogenannten vorexprophetischen Berufungsberichte*, 1970; Richter, "Formgeschichte und Sprachwissenschaft," *ZAW* 82 [1970] 216-25). My mother was not able to experience the success of the book, so I dedicate the second edition to her memory.

Bonn-Röttgen, November 1970

E. G.

Introductory Remarks

This work represents only a selection of a further and much more inclusive study concerning the christological relevance of the gospel form. This relevance has been emphasized repeatedly by E. Käsemann in connection with the recently-revived question about the "historical Jesus", and it has been made the nodal point of the so-called "post-Bultmannian revision" of N. T. theology. Chapter #1 pursues these connections by tracing the horizons of Käsemann's theses concerning the christological relevance of the gospel form in the history of research and of theology. In the process it will also become clear that the problem set out by Käsemann cannot really be dealt with within the relatively-proscribed limits of the traditional theological disciplines, since Käsemann's theses are demonstrably not only obtained analytically and exegetically, but are also guided by definite dogmatic and hermeneutical interests that could only be analyzed by a study of their appropriateness that steps beyond the boundaries of the disciplines for the sake of the subject involved. The essential necessity for such a complex reworking of the problem indicated is rooted both in methodology and in the history of theology.

A *methodological* necessity follows from the recognition that there are certain form- and redaction-critical theses bound up with the conception typologically represented by Käsemann, and these concern an evaluation of the gospel-form in favor of a theological relevance of the "historical Jesus"

that is part of the methodological foundations of form and redaction criticism. We must therefore reflect upon these foundations anew. Can the gospel-form really be used in the ways E. Käsemann, G. Bornkamm, E. Schweizer, and others affirm,¹ namely to support a particular christological position within the contemporary debate about christology? It is part of the nature of this question that both in its answer, as well as in the methodological analysis of this answer, the boundaries between [p. 18] traditional historical-critical exegesis, hermeneutical reflection, and one's own systematic and theological position dissolve into one another. It would seem to me to be entirely improper, given this problematic situation (which will be described more exactly below), to plead for a "purely exegetical" discussion of the theme, and to screen out all questions situated on the other side of an apparently "objective" description as simply not belonging to N. T. theology. A conception that pursues a definite methodological intention, as does the one to be discussed here, can only be methodologically studied with respect to its propriety, its boundaries, and even its methodological miscarriages: "The question concerning the inner content of the N. T. is in fact a *systematic* question, which is valid to begin with so far as N. T. theology is concerned."² To be sure there are also many "purely exegetical" facts, which must be stated against E. Käsemann. But these facts require signifying, as do all "historical" details, if they are to be utilized in a particular design for a N. T. theology. However, the propriety of such signifying is to be thrashed out methodologically. In other words: Our attempt concerns *the methodological foundations of that N. T. theology* which earned its right to exist through R. Bultmann's epochal work.

The necessity from the point of view of the *history of theology* has thereby already been touched upon. With respect

to the history of research, an analysis of our situation concerning N. T. theology, and especially concerning a corresponding christology,³ results in my opinion in the pressing conclusion that in our "post-Bultmannian era" (J. M. Robinson) it is fundamentally possible only to hold to the unity of historical analysis and theological interpretation attained in Bultmann's entire corpus, and so to modify it so that it is appropriate to the new types of questions that have appeared in the meanwhile.⁴ Everything else seeking to remedy our everlasting methodological aporias, such as neopositivistic statistics,⁵ would seem to me to be a regression into a "pre-Bultmannian era", which the spiritual and theological level already attained should forbid.⁶ [p. 19] If therefore following R. Bultmann's proposed N. T. theology, we even attempt a modified and certainly in many respects revised presentation of N. T. theology or its parts,⁷ we may actually attain to new insights only by a methodological discussion of the foundations of such a presentation, if Bultmann's turn toward hermeneutics is still to be generally obligatory for us. Today it is certain "that we will not succeed by means of classifying the exegetical disciplines as 'historical' instead of 'systematic' theology, since that classification itself has become a *thema probandum* [thesis to be proved, justified]."⁸

At this point in the history of research, however, we are faced not only with the dismantling of a methodologically fragmented position, but also with the construction of a positive alternative. In these circumstances, what methodological criteria can be decisive for this construction? They can only result from that analysis of the history of research that thoroughly investigates the bases for what I consider to be the restrictiveness of form and redaction criticism, and that simultaneously seeks to provide revisions leading out of such restrictiveness by reference to the methodological framework

of form and redaction criticism, namely to general linguistics and literary criticism. J. Barr's criticism of a linguistically-naive theology, while temperamental and not always appropriate,⁹ as well as R. W. Funk's proposals, provide an indication¹⁰ that the time is ripe for such revision to be attempted.

Granted, initial attempts at revision will be plagued with many uncertainties concerning methodology and authorship so long as general linguistics and literary criticism are pushed onto the dark back shelves of theology, and until diletantism has been overcome by the strenuous efforts of all concerned. Some may regard our necessarily longer expositions concerning this aspect of our subject--materials questioning the restrictiveness of form criticism in N. T. theology in terms of linguistics and literary criticism--as a still hypothetical contribution to methodological foundations of a positive [p. 20] reconstruction after the negative dismantling. However, after long reflection it appeared to me to be the most appropriate means of initiating work on a N. T. theology that is oriented to linguistic phenomena.¹¹

Moreover, this approach results in what I consider to be a healthy distancing vis à vis those theses and premises that appear to belong to the self-understood aspects of our exegesis, without our noticing how questionable they are from logical, cognitive-theoretical, linguistic, literary critical, and finally also hermeneutical, viewpoints. If in this manner questions arise that turn back toward questions concerning the legitimacy of prevailing opinions within N. T. theology, the intentions of this work will be fully satisfied.

The specific types of questions and problems to be confronted in such an expanded form-critical founding of a N. T. theology will be indicated briefly in #3. Of course the completion of the methodological sketch presented there remains

for now a promise to be kept, since in many ways it makes too much of a demand upon the reader. Persons familiar with the situation will be aware how foreign and unaccustomed this new questioning is in light of the present place of form criticism in both N. T. and O. T. theology. Hence it seemed to me advisable to take up here only aspects of the new questioning that have been thoroughly worked through; they are treated sequentially and in their hypothetically significant aspects in the excurses, holding for a later monograph the ideas that take us too far from our immediate subject.¹²

For such reasons, the selection from the more complex methodological foundation of a N. T. theology presented in this book is limited to one major problem concerning the synoptic gospels developed by redaction criticism. This problem will be gradually worked through and sketched in its full acuteness in Part II, §§4-8, under the theme "The Oral and the Written". It will thereby be shown [p. 21] that the thesis in contemporary gospel form criticism concerning the traditio-historical continuity between oral and written materials is freighted with many more difficulties than is generally known and recognized. In that discussion we will point once more to the still unexplained nature of the gospel form.

In Part III this form will be methodologically connected with "gestalt" theory, in terms of the leading question: *To what extent* is the gospel form a literary "gestalt"?

Part IV presents a variation of this question: *Of what* is the gospel a literary "gestalt"? Is it an expansion of the kerygma, or should it be more adequately "derived" in some way other than by genealogy and tradition history?

Naturally, the self-conscious limitations of this work only allow me, if I may be permitted an archaeological analogy, to cut an exploratory trench through a very complex region. Hence the questions and the bibliography treated are deter-

mined by these limitations. Materials not dealt with here must await the anticipated monograph. Above all especially theological questions about the theologies of the synoptic writers, can first be discussed when prior questions about form-critical methodology are clarified. These selections from the larger enterprise are dedicated solely to this clarification, without relinquishing the long-range goals.

Notes to Introductory Remarks

1. Cf. nn. 1-18 in section #14 below.
2. E. Fuchs, *Marburger Hermeneutik*, 1968, 83.
3. Such an analysis is presented in E. Güttgemanns, *Der leidende Apostel und sein Herr*, 1966, 44ff., 386ff.
4. On the inherent Bultmann-criticism, cf. E. Güttgemanns, review of W. Schmithals, *Die Theologie Rudolf Bultmanns*, 1966, in *TheolPract* 3 (1968) 87-100.
5. Against neo-positivism, also H. Conzelmann, *EvTh* 22 (1962) 230f. On the rights and boundaries of the historical method cf. Güttgemanns, *Der leidende Apostel*, 388ff.
6. The view of the position of New Testament studies produced by such a standpoint is shown in E. Güttgemanns, "Literatur zur Neutestamentlichen Theologie," *VF* 12/2 (1967) 38-87.
7. Cf. R. Schnackenburg, *Neutestamentliche Theologie*, 1963 (original French ed., 1961); H. Conzelmann, *Grundriss der Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 1967; K. H. Schelkle, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, vol. I, 1968.
8. Fuchs, *Marburger Hermeneutik*, 91.
9. J. Barr, *Bibelexegese und moderne Semantik*, 1965 (orig. English ed., 1961). Cf. also F. Ferré, *Language, Logic and God*, 1961. Further literature is cited below in section #2, nn. 55f.
10. R. W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God*, 1966. Cf. also P. M. van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel Based on an Analysis of Its Language*, 1963; C. Michalson, *Worldly Theology*, 1967, 41ff.; D. O. Via, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, 1970.
11. A hermeneutically-clarified New Testament theology is a "language school of faith". Cf. E. Fuchs, *Hermeneutik*, 1958-2nd ed., 96ff.
12. In the planning stages: a publication with the theme "form criticism and linguistics", in which for the first time

all possible interconnections between the related disciplines might be extensively presented, so that the universal horizons of the program would be clearer. Cf. also E. Gütgemanns, "Sprache des Glaubens--Sprache der Menschen. Probleme einer theologischen Linguistik," *VF* 14/2 (1969) 86-114; Gütgemanns, "Linguistische Probleme in der Theologie. I.," *LB* 8 (1970) 18-29. [+1978: Preparation for the projected publication was aided by a grant of DM 180.000 from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft for a large scale research project, "Generative Poetics of the New Testament". Results of this research were published in articles in *Linguistica Biblica*, and in monographs in the series *Forum Theologiae Linguisticae*, starting in November 1970. In the process of the research, the aims shifted to "new frontiers", making necessary a revision of my original plans referred to in this note.]

1. The "Post-Bultmannian" Era.

J. M. Robinson characterized the new phase in post-war German theology dialectically as "post-Bultmannian": "On the one hand there is the fact that this movement was developed by Bultmann's students, evidence that it would scarcely have been conceivable without Bultmann's mode of inquiry, his methodology, and the results of his research. On the other hand the inheritance of such a critical and free spirit as Bultmann's cannot be preserved otherwise than by a critical revision of his own position."¹ Such critical revision mostly concerns three major theological complexes.²

(a) The Hermeneutical Problematics.

The result of the controversy about R. Bultmann's program of demythologizing³ was initially a development of a lively interest in hermeneutics,⁴ an interest that led--at first, to be sure, gradually and partially--to new positions in hermeneutics that have truly led to progress.⁵ Therefore it is today still [p. 23] generally undecided as to whether we already find ourselves, with respect to historical and analytical exegesis, meaningfully within a "post-Bultmannian" phase (since N. T. studies always remains aware, precisely in its analytical work, of the necessity of hermeneutical reflection produced by the task of theological interpretation), or whether there is not a noticeable tendency in exegetical monographs and essays to consider the "historical" method to be

hermeneutically neutral and presuppositionless.⁶ At any rate it must still be shown more clearly how far the hermeneutical consciousness prevailing since Bultmann is in each case introduced into exegetical work.⁷

(b) The Christological Problematics.

The christological problem immediately arises in the controversy concerning demythologization. Already R. Bultmann himself introduced the question whether a Christian understanding of existence, an eschatological posture, was possible without Christ.⁸ J. Schniewind took up this problem in asking "how the events of the cross and the resurrection were necessary for such an eschatological posture. If [Bultmann] turns away from the uniqueness of Jesus and understands the Christ event solely from the standpoint of our historical and personal existence, are not the Christ events simply symbols or stimulating concepts?"⁹ K. Barth regarded Bultmann as having apparently affirmed this question, at least *de facto*, and therefore raised the reproach of docetism,¹⁰ a reproach that has since been taken up repeatedly.¹¹ That is [p. 24] also the central issue of the newly revived question concerning the "historical Jesus", which is at the center of christological interests.¹²

(c) The Revision of Eschatology.

The "post-Bultmannian" revision appears to be endangered as much by eschatology as by christology.¹³ Although R. Bultmann considers the mythical eschatology of the N. T. to be "finished" by the simple fact of the delay of the parousia¹⁴ and so formulates the concept of the "eschatological event" in such a way as to include not only the elemental Christ event of Jesus' death and resurrection, but also the *existen-*

tielle alteration of the self-understanding made possible by the actual alteration of temporality,¹⁵ the revision of this concept has been subject to criticism,¹⁶ insofar as the historical *ephapax* of the saving event and the *extra me* that lies in historic uniqueness threatens to be lost in the eternal timelessness of the *nunc stans*.¹⁷ While eschatology is interested in the contingency and teleology of the course of time,¹⁸ and "in historical being the flowing of the course of time from the past to the future is constantly a given,"¹⁹ Bultmann's concept lacks any durational character of time,²⁰ so that not only is the saving history and therewith the assimilation of the Jesus-history to the history of the theologically thematized Old Testament lost,²¹ but also the hope, which maintains, carries, and draws faith forward,²² as well as the proleptic of history and the being which is analogous to it²³ and the [p. 25] future aspect of Christian faith, propagated in Jewish and primitive Christian apocalyptic, namely the universal victory of grace in the christocracy that leads to theocracy.²⁴ So it is not to be doubted that this series of questions--above all following Bultmann's own procedure--²⁵ has been dealt with more and more in terms of the systematic schema "history and eschatology".²⁶

2. Theological Interest in the Historical Jesus.

Theological interest in the "historical Jesus" remains today at the center of christological problematics.²⁷ This interest is widely understood as a necessary bulwark against the docetism evidently threatening in R. Bultmann's works, and against the feared evaporation of the historical figure of Jesus into an ahistoric myth or a transhistorical idea.²⁸ E. Käsemann initially in 1953 revived the debate that had certainly never died down completely,²⁹ and shortly thereafter, in a second lecture that contained a critique that was

partly damaging to Bultmann, stimulated reconsideration of the arguments brought forth by both sides.³⁰ Not needing to report his arguments here in detail, we can restrict our discussion to the aspect that is central to Käsemann, and that which must remain, within the framework of our theme, at the forefront, namely the christological relevance of the gospel form.

[p. 26] This relevance is summarized by E. Käsemann in the thesis: "Without the gospels, the gospel would not remain what it is. Kerygma becomes, except where it is not also narrated, the proclamation of an idea, and except where it is always narratively won anew, a historical document."³¹ According to this thesis, the moment of "narrative", which characterizes the gospel form, is the bulwark against both (gnostic) docetism as well as against (Ebionitic) historicism.

The theological appeal to the "historical Jesus" is therefore attempted here in such a manner as to exclude intentionally a relapse into a historicistic understanding of reality. The gospel is not to be reduced to the "historical Jesus",³² since this product of the Enlightenment has shown itself to be a *fata morgana* [mirage].³³ Since the N. T. does not recognize such a Jesus in and for himself³⁴ and the "historical Jesus" is only accessible by means of reconstruction,³⁵ the dissolution of history into *bruta facta*³⁶ as well as the relapse into an objectivizing thought³⁷ that seeks to establish faith by objective historical means³⁸ are excluded.

3. Connections between Theological Interest and the Gospel-Form: E. Käsemann.

Since the "history" of primitive Christianity has been transmitted solely in the kerygma,³⁹ a historical verification of the kerygma in the sense of liberal hermeneutics is

impossible.⁴⁰ According to his own intentions, E. Käsemann's appeal to the "historical Jesus" should by no means be a relapse into historicism, since he respects the primitive Christian view that a manner of questioning directed only to the "historical Jesus" is an abstraction.⁴¹

Rather the appeal to the "historical Jesus" is directed against a possible docetism, insofar as Käsemann criticizes R. Bultmann's historical scepticism,⁴² which would lead to resignation and disinterest in the earthly Jesus.⁴³ Such a position overlooks the fact that the kerygma of the N. T. reckons the earthly Jesus as one of its own criteria,⁴⁴ insofar as there is in the gospels a kerygmatic recourse to the form of the message. [p. 27] "The key to our problem as a whole lies not in the historical Jesus issue as such, and as an isolated alternative to the kerygma, but it is the kerygmatic recourse to the form of the message, following which enthusiasm, mythological presentation, and dogmatic reflection were successful in their own ways, as can be seen in the primitive Christian hymns."⁴⁵ Therefore the narrative form of the gospel documents the continued theological relevance of Jesus' history, so that the question about the "historical Jesus" is identical with that concerning the theological relevance of the gospel-form.⁴⁶

Disinterest in the earthly Jesus, on the other hand, also leads to a disinterest in the gospel-form,⁴⁷ so that the writing of the gospels remains for R. Bultmann "in the last analysis an inconceivable and superfluous variation of the kerygma".⁴⁸ Since the relationship to Jesus' history is best preserved in the gospels,⁴⁹ which by their form emphasize the *ephapax* and the contingency of the eschatological event,⁵⁰ and which by means of the past character of what is related emphasize the prevenience of God's act and the *extra nos* of salvation,⁵¹ memory of the earthly Jesus remains necessary in the

framework of the gospel.⁵² Therefore the form of the gospel possesses central christological relevance,⁵³ because even today it represents theological positions that are not to be given up. "Recourse to the form of the message of the gospels, to the narrative of the Palestinian proclaimer to the 'once' in contrast to the 'once-for-all times', to historicizing [p. 28] presentation in the framework of the kerygma, and last but not least to the Jesus who passed through Palestine, ensues as a theologically relevant reaction, accepted and maintained by the church, a reaction which had to do with the unavailability of the Christ, of the Spirit, of faith. The presence of Christ and of the Spirit in the church may not be misused in such a fashion that they are dissolved into the eschatological self-understanding of believers. The precedence of the Lord before his congregation and believers can and even must be expressed temporally. Present eschatology without this retrospective view toward the past of salvation is delivered without defense to enthusiasm, and anthropology and ecclesiology cannot be distinguished from, or appropriately separated from, christology."⁵⁴ This summarizing quotation demonstrates once again in conclusion the inner connections between the three main elements of the "post-Bultmannian" revision we sketched above, represented here by E. Käsemann.

4. E. Käsemann's Historically and Analytically Unproven Dogmatic Premises. (A Preliminary Summary Toward a More Extensive Hermeneutical Analysis.)

We cannot undertake here the task of developing a comprehensive analysis of the reconceptualizing of the christological problem outlined by E. Käsemann. We will presuppose such an analysis, however, and refer here to its results with respect to Käsemann's dogmatic premises,⁵⁵ which obstruct our

viewing of the historical phenomenon of the gospel-form in contemporary research.⁵⁶

(a) The Confusion of "Historical" and "Material" Questions.

E. Käsemann cannot close the gap in R. Bultmann's distinction between the "historical" and the "material" question within the christological problematics,⁵⁷ because he confuses or conflates the *existentielle* question (intended by Bultmann as the "material" question) about the truth of the identity asserted by kerygma and faith between the literally [p. 29] really-present Lord and the earthly Jesus⁵⁸ and the *history of ideas* question about the continuity and discontinuity between the "historical" Jesus and the Christian community. This is seen, for example, in his thesis that the material question develops "indeed out of the encounter with the historical phenomenon",⁵⁹ and therefore the historical question and the material question may not be as sharply distinguished as Bultmann suggests.⁶⁰ This confusion of categories corresponds to the lack of a categorical distinction between the "historical" Jesus and the "earthly" Jesus,⁶¹ since interest in the real human Jesus is *immediately* identified with "historical" interest in Jesus on the one hand,⁶² while on the other it is associated with interest in the gospel-form.⁶³

(b) Narrative "History" as the Understanding of Reality Most Appropriate to the Material.

This connection implies the postulate that the "narrative form" of the gospel represents the understanding of Jesus' reality most appropriate to the materials: "*History*" *must be narrated, if it is to remain "history"*!⁶⁴ In this postulate the distinction already necessary in form criticism

between the narrative form of the history of Jesus and the form of the reflection about the history of Jesus is converted into a hermeneutical scale of values: The only necessary form of reference appropriate to Jesus' earthly reality is tied *a priori* to "narrative". Thereby, somewhat as in J. Schniewind's hermeneutics,⁶⁵ the gospels have the uppermost place on the christological scale of values: they become the hermeneutical canon for propinquity to Jesus' reality.

(c) The Interpretive Circle between
"History" and "Narrative".

The principal correlation of Jesus' "history" and the moment of "narrative" is not univocal in its meaning. Since other [p. 30] forms also--such as fairy tale, saga, legend, novella, or even myth--serve "narrative",⁶⁶ it is a *petitio principii* [begging the question], without extensive examination of the various understandings of reality that in each case differentiate the so-called "elementary forms",⁶⁷ to recognize solely in the moment of "narration" an indication of "history", if the concept of "history" is to be made precise and opposed to myth.⁶⁸ With such *a priori* procedure the gospels' actual understanding of reality is concealed by modern premises.

(d) The Ideal and Typological Conception
of Docetism.

To these modern premises belong also the schematic antithesis of "myth" and "history" which has gradually developed since the Enlightenment, and which was based on the avoidance of docetism. This denies to myth any relationship to reality, since from the beginning it historistically narrows the con-