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Historical-Critical and Evangelical Theology

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The Foundations

Whose Theology?

The word “theology” carries a different sense in historical-critical circles than it does among evangelicals. We are accustomed to speak of Bultmann's theology, or Barth's, or Moltmann's, or Jüngel's. But which of us speak in the same sense of Spener's theology, or Wesley's, or Moody's, or Spurgeon's? Did the latter group fail to make a theological contribution? Of course not. But they did not attempt to construct their own theology. That is, they did not construct a theology containing specific, subjective divergences from God's word, divergences of which they would have to be called the authors.

It is only at the cost of considerable divergence from God's word that one becomes the author of his/her own theology. The person who loyally subordinates his thinking to God's revelation constructs no theology of this kind. That person also faces no pressure to make a name for himself. For such it is sufficient if the Lord says, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

Roots of Historical-critical Theology

*There is nothing in historical-critical theology that has not first made its appearance in philosophy.*¹ Bacon (1561-1626) and Hobbes (1588-1679), Descartes (1596-1650) and Hume (1711-1776) laid the foundations: inductive thought as the only source of knowledge; denial of revelation; monistic world view; separation of faith and reason; doubt as the foundation of knowledge. Hobbes and Hume established a thoroughgoing criticism of miracles; Spinoza (1632-

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1677) had already thought along similar lines, laying the basis for biblical criticism of both Old and New Testaments. Lessing (1729-1781) invented the synoptic problem. Kant's (1724-1804) critique of reason became the basis for historical-critical thinking. Hegel (1770-1831) furnished the means for the process of demythologizing, effectively implemented a century later by Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976)—after the way was prepared already by Martin Kähler (1835-1912).

Kierkegaard (1813-1855) served as the executor of Kant's philosophy in the theological realm. The melancholy Dane reduced faith to a leap that left rationality behind. He cemented the separation of faith and reason and laid the groundwork for theology's departure from biblical moorings. It is, therefore, not surprising that late in life he wished for a reformer with the boldness to forbid Bible reading among common people, or that he harbored the opinion that Bible Societies (groups printing and distributing the Bible and its message worldwide) had caused irreparable damage.² To be sure, the person who knows God's word does not let himself be blown about by every wind of doctrine that philosophy kicks up.

Kierkegaard procured for biblical criticism a broad entrance into theology by writing such criticism off as irrelevant; it could do no harm, he maintained, to a genuine faith. This view spread with disastrous effectiveness in part because Kierkegaard was a pious man who uttered many an insightful word. But it is precisely the pious among biblical critics who are most effective at winning to their cause those persons who at first—and on sound biblical grounds—oppose them.

Heidegger (1889-1976) laid the groundwork for the reduction of Christian faith to a possibility of self-understanding.

From Karl Marx—who not only condemned the Christian faith as the opium of the people but was probably also a Satanist³—came Marxist wolves in the guise of (Christian) sheep with their baleful ideologies; theology of hope, theology of revolution, theology of liberation.

Positivism, for which all God-talk is meaningless, and for which God's word itself is already dead, produced the various “God is dead” theologies. Here the connection to the Bible is no more than

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a nostalgic reminiscence giving emotional appeal to a new ideology, thereby helping it sound more convincing.

The imposing oak of historical-critical theology is not rooted in God's word but in a philosophy that is inherently hostile to God, does not recognize God's revelatory acts and words, and withholds due recognition from the One who has already appeared as "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). It is quite apart from that One that philosophy has steadfastly pursued its vain quest for truth.

Evangelical Theology: Its Present Status

The basic characteristic of evangelical theology is that it is rooted in God's word and relies on God's revelation as its source of knowledge. As a path, fidelity to Scripture passes through the narrow gate of conversion and repentance, a comprehensive turning to Jesus as Savior and Lord. Included in this is the conversion of the believer's thinking. This in turn brings with it the repudiation, in Jesus name, of the influence of historical-critical theology by those who have succumbed to its wiles.

Along with rootage in God's word, a second indispensable feature of evangelical theology is that the mind of the believer takes its bearings from God, the triune Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The mind is like the needle of a compass: without the presence of magnetic north, the needle swings aimlessly, helpless to resist diversions. Only the magnetic pole enables the compass to serve as a reliable guide. God is the magnetic pole for the Christian.

The mind is a whore, Luther says. There is nothing for which logical arguments cannot be adduced. (Example: Gas chambers.) We should resist beguilement through logical arguments. Our minds are swayed by logical arguments, but such arguments are value-free. They are always wrapped up in a complex of presuppositions. It is not just that questionable arguments exist: arguments themselves are questionable; that is, they must be traced back to their presuppositions. Insofar as they are logical, they may appear to be neutral, but they are most assuredly not.

That is why God's Word admonishes us: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" (Prov 3:5, NIV). Is this a denigration of our God-given intellectual capacity? No; it is simply a reminder of what our minds were never designed to be: objects in which to place our total trust.

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Evangelical theology should be alert, mindful of the possible hidden presence of the historical-critical theologian in even the most pious evangelical. This hidden presence in the “flesh,” is the sinful nature. The question is whether we heed the admonition of God: Make no room for the flesh (cf. Gal 5:13). It is also true for the conversion of one's thinking that the Christian life is an ongoing process of repentance. This does not mean wearisome agony, but rather the joyful purifying and liberating, jettisoning of deadening encumbrance.

Pitfalls of the Historical-critical Method

Evangelical theology should be a mighty oak, rooted in God's revelation and nourished by the guiding light of God's presence. But is this image really accurate—or is the actual situation often otherwise? Are the following factors not often in evidence, despite honest effort to avoid such pitfalls?

1. A naive, uncritical acceptance of the methods and tools of historical-critical theology, with no careful consideration of the philosophical-atheistic background that permeates and largely determines the usage of those methods and tools.
2. The wholesale acceptance of the basic assumptions of historical-critical theology, with occasional restriction of marginal character. Whoever takes up historical-critical theology's tools and fundamental assumptions, insofar as they appear acceptable, or at least not dangerous, becomes enmeshed in their presuppositions, whether he is aware of it or not. He goes astray even when he then takes a stance in direct opposition to historical-critical theology.
3. Thoroughgoing acceptance and *Meinungsstatistik*, the tallying up of scholarly opinion, rather than the citation of biblical truth, as a method of establishing facts and validating arguments. Ernst Lerle has called attention to the presence and hazards of this common approach.⁴ It is dangerous even when the list of authorities cited distinguish themselves to some extent by the inclusion of work by evangelical scholars. The truth of God's word is not, however, dependent on the solutions to problems that are favored by the majority.
4. Uncritical acceptance of the manner in which questions are posed by historical-critical theology. We commonly encounter attempts to give evangelical answers to historical-critical questions.

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But such questions presuppose a grid that rules out all answers that do not conform to and that do not reinforce the overall outlook of historical-critical theology. Answers are not sought in God's word, but rather—for evangelicals as well as for historical-critical theologians—in the secondary literature, although the evangelical will show a certain preference for evangelical secondary literature. A distinctively evangelical manner of posing crucial questions seldom comes into view.

5. Selection of non-controversial, out-of-the way topics for personal research, such as, biographical subjects or some other inoffensive matter. This tendency is quite understandable among doctoral candidates, avoiding conflict that could be deadly to receiving their degrees. But is it any less common among established persons? Is there, perhaps, at work here a strong desire to receive recognition as “scientific” or “critical” right alongside historical-critical colleagues?

6. Especially symptomatic is remoteness to the Bible. God's Word is hardly to be found in theological works, unless it happens to be the explicit object of investigation. God's revelation is not taken seriously as source of knowledge. Such an approach implicitly shares the understanding of Scripture common to historical-critical theology, even if the writer has no intention of taking up all off the latter's results. In intellectual labor the writer does not live on the Holy Scriptures (as Jesus did: see Matt 4:4), because he/she is still wrapped up in the separation of faith and thought, a separation that historical-critical theology picked up from philosophy. Such a scholar is really not dependent on the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, who waits to lead us into all truth, according to Jesus' own words. The truth that spiritual matters require spiritual understanding (cf. 1 Cor 2:12-16) receives no consideration; Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, appears at most as the object of theology.

To a considerable degree, unfortunately, present evangelical theology does not resemble a tree that—rooted in God's word—grows independently. It resembles rather an ivy plant which, even if rooted in God's word, ekes out a somewhat meager existence draped around the tree of historical-critical theology. It is not fully one with the tree,

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but it is also never fully removed from it. It occasionally distances itself from its host, but basically maintains constant close contact.

The Implementation

Critical Claim: “Scientific Theology”

The claim. Historical-critical theology lays claim to being scientific theology. However, what does not conform to historical-critical conventions is not acknowledged as scientific; it accordingly remains disregarded and is suppressed. The blessing of “scientific” extends only to those who accept historical-critical premises and who move within the traditional framework of the disciplines.⁵

The reality. The actual procedure, however, does not measure up to the demands for a scientific approach. Premises are not openly admitted, and their prejudicial character, by no means the result of scientific work, is suppressed. In the implementation of research, these premises are treated as established verities and passed along to students as unassailable facts and foundational knowledge.⁶ These premises include the following:

1. Research must proceed as if God does not exist. In this manner God's revelation is barred from consideration at the outset. But the manifest God will not bear being pushed to the side, even temporarily or provisionally, as if He were not there. Anyone who speaks like this does not realize what he/she is saying. As a basic principle this premise is a-theistic or, more correctly, anti-theistic. It denies God, who revealed himself and is therefore manifest. One cannot suspend trust in this God for the sake of research goals. But with this unjustified demand, historical-critical theology makes the denial of faith in the living, triune God its basic premise. Spurgeon rightly concluded that “the weed of modern theology is nothing other than unbelief that is too cowardly to own up to its name.”⁷

2. A monistic world view, which reduces the explanation for all causation to naturalistic principles only, and gained ascendancy in the philosophy of the Enlightenment. This is made the foundation for theological thought and discourse.

3. Kant's critique of reason is respected like an unalterable decree of the Medes and Persians. I can still remember how Bultmann stated in his lectures: “We must bear in mind that we live after Kant, and that it is no longer permissible to think as

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people were allowed to think prior to Kant's philosophy." Even where it is not so clearly formulated as this (which is a flat contradiction of the first Barmen thesis⁸), the state of affairs that Bultmann describes is widely adhered to.

4. Every new philosophy that appears is treated as a revelation commanding respect. Without realizing it, many follow in Hegel's train by treating the philosophical constructs of an individual as the self-disclosure of the absolute Spirit. These constructs are immediately generalized: thus thinks modern man. Such generalization leads subsequently to the propagation of these individual mental games. The foundation here is not God's word but rather—following Hegel—the dubious concept of truth as conceived in humanism.

5. In historical-critical theology, "scientific work" is held to take place when a scholar sets up a hypothesis, supports it with a few arguments, and stabilizes the original hypothesis, using some additional reasons. In this manner, card houses are erected that arrogantly call themselves "scientific," but share with real science only the name.⁹

In the natural sciences an hypothesis is the foundation for research. It is tested either through experiments or through methodologically formulated, wide-ranging observation. If it fails this testing, it is rejected. In so-called "scientific" theology, however, there seems to be widespread ignorance of the fact that an hypothesis—a supposition that something is so—is nothing more than an assertion. According to basic mathematical procedure, the scholar must first clarify the presupposition and then adduce the proof.

Instead, theological hypotheses that have found acceptance are treated like scientific results and circulated as facts. Certainly, experimental confirmation is not often possible in the realm of the humanities. Still, particularly when the theologian claims to do scientific work, he/she should feel obligated to adduce data that will furnish at least some broad evidential coverage of the claims. Instead, many are content to make isolated observations in support of a hypothesis, treating contrary considerations as if they simply did not exist.¹⁰ Less concern is shown for the object of research than for—largely rhetorical—interaction with other hypotheses. "Scien-

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tific knowledge” is seen as that which has become established in the interplay of opinions and not—as one might expect—that which has withstood earnest investigation, subjecting a given hypothesis to searching light.

The result: *Under close scrutiny, the result that forms the basic scaffolding for critical theology's major disciplines turns out to be that which will, for whatever reasons, furnish the basis for a consensus.*

As soon as we cease to be deterred by the consensus of established opinions and arbitrary judgments, as soon as we cease pitting hypothesis against hypothesis, but rather begin to investigate the object of the hypotheses with scientific rigor, we find that the allegedly scientific results that have become supporting pillars of historical-critical theology are untenable. Six examples of widely held but presently untenable hypotheses are as follows:

1. The carving up of the five books of Moses into various sources (the documentary hypothesis) can be passed along to students only by ignoring the findings of the last 100 years of archaeology, and by closing our eyes to the manner in which this alleged “assured result” of Old Testament theological research ever gained currency in the first place.¹¹

2. The alleged assured results of historical-critical study into the Exodus and the Conquest turn out to be untenable if, first of all, we make use of the wealth of material furnished by archaeological research in recent times, and second, we employ a synchronic chronology instead of trusting the fictitious Egyptian chronology of Manetho (ca. 180 B.C.). Manetho's concern in gathering his material was to win respect from the Greeks for the Egyptians. He did this in part through greatly exaggerating the length of their history.¹²

3. The prophetic books, seen in their simultaneous and subsequent historical context, make critical reconstructions, which regard as genuine only a few verses in every chapter, seem ridiculous. The evidence that the prophets' promises were fulfilled right down to the fine details was set forth long ago.¹³ It is still, however, widely disregarded.

4. Literary criticism of the New Testament (including form criticism and redaction criticism) turns out to be untenable because

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precise investigation of the evidence in the synoptic gospels reveals that the alleged synoptic problem does not exist. There are no conclusive data that support theories of literary dependence among the synoptics. That fact leaves the two-source theory (and all other such theories) hanging in thin air. The literary criticism of the New Testament is in this sense finished. Form criticism, which built “the history of the synoptic tradition” on the foundation of the two-source theory, has no foundation, and redaction criticism, which constructed the theology of the evangelists from the changes they allegedly made to the written sources they had before them, turns out to be groundless.¹⁴

5. It has long since been shown through detailed study of Gnosticism that all Gnostic literature known to us did not arise until *after* the onset of the Christian era. In spite of this, historical-critical theology still makes use of Gnosticism as a source and origin of essential segments of the New Testament (e.g. John 1, Philippians 2:6-11). The literary evidence renders acceptance of a pre-Christian Gnosticism impossible. But this evidence is conveniently ignored by maintaining the existence of traditions that allegedly existed in pre-Christian times; these are said to have formed the basis for Gnostic treatises.

Why argue for such pre-Christian traditions? Because there is evidence for them? No; one will search in vain for such evidence. The reason is rather apt to be that otherwise the scholar could not chalk up the New Testament passages that speak of Jesus' pre-existence to Gnosticism, nor could he/she dismiss these passages as non-binding as a result.

6. Another set of allegedly pre-Christian traditions that will not stand up to scrutiny are those relied on by theories of pre-Christian Jewish apocalyptic literature. Such theories have been widespread even though historical-critical theology itself dates nearly all the Jewish apocalyptic writings to a time when the New Testament writings had already been completed. Certain parts of the Book of Enoch are dated to the first or second century B.C., and the presence of portions of Enoch among Qumran documents confirms their pre-Christian date. The portion of Enoch, however, that would be comparable to the New Testament and that is required to justify the assertion that Jesus borrowed the title “Son of Man”

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from Jewish apocalyptic, is not to be found in the Qumran documents. The Similitudes or so-called parables (I [Ethiopic Apocalypse of] Enoch 37-71), which are now dated by Kautzch “before 64 B.C.,” based on the dating on the whole Book of Enoch, are now dated by Klaus Berger to “no earlier” than 4 B.C. (67:8 refers to the death of Herod) and perhaps as late as A.D. 70 (56:5—speaks only of Jerusalem’s seizure by the Parthians in 40 B.C.).”¹⁵

These two proof-texts, however, cannot support the burden of proof for the date of the document that Berger places on them. The proposed dates, therefore, are open to question:

a.) The first passage (67:8) speaks generally of “kings, rulers, and exalted ones” for whom the warm waters are medicinal. In this connection there is no talk of death, and certainly no word about the death of Herod. True, Herod sought the warm waters of Callirrhoe, but he was neither healed there, nor did he die there.

b.) The second passage (56:5-8) does not agree with the events of 40 B.C. According to 56:7a, Jerusalem cannot be seized by the Parthians; according to 56:7b, they will begin murder among themselves; and according to 56:8b, Sheol will swallow up the sinners before the eyes of the elect—and all this will take place “in those days” according to 56:8a.

But in 40 B.C. what happened was this: The gates of Jerusalem were opened for the Parthians; they plundered it and withdrew with their booty. They began no murder among themselves, nor did any other troops involve themselves in such murder. No one was swallowed up before the eyes of the elect.

No proof has been brought forth to show that either the title “Son of Man” or the apocalyptic sections in the New Testament have been pro-conditioned by Jewish apocalyptic literature. If we abide by extant writings and do not rely on alleged traditions, then, it is the New Testament that is original, not the Jewish apocalyptic writings.

It is worth noting that a number of verdicts of so-called “modern” theology formed part of the arsenal of the most ancient foes and detractors of the Christian faith. Two examples:

1) Criticism of the Book of Daniel, and the attempt to place it in the second century B.C. rather than the sixth, go back to the

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Greek philosopher Porphyry (A.D. 233-304). His motive for this redating was to reduce the already fulfilled promises found in Daniel to *vaticinia ex eventu*—“prophecies” concocted after the events had already occurred.¹⁶

2) Lessing's remarks on the literary dependence of the synoptic gospels are a rather precisely detailed repetition of what Celsus (ca. A.D. 178), a sworn enemy of Christianity, stated long ago. He was roundly refuted by Origen (ca. A.D. 185-254) in the following century.¹⁷

These are just two examples: This number could probably be increased through intensive study of the sources.

The “results” of historical-critical theology provided above call into question the alleged “scientific” nature of such theology. “Scientific theology” is a colossus with clay feet.

We are not, of course, maintaining that historical-critical theology, which has produced thousands of researchers over the years, has no results whatsoever to show for its labors. Certainly many useful, detailed investigations have been produced. Since, however, the most basic underlying presuppositions informing this theology are wrong, it is understandable that the individual results, among which are to be found the most sober scientific labors, are often impaired, because they are closely connected with the erroneous underlying presuppositions.

Evangelical Theology Claim to Scientific Character

Similar claims. The claim to exclusive validity, the claim to be scientific, which historical-critical theology makes, exerts a powerful pressure on evangelical theology to conform. Since there is widespread failure among evangelicals to see through both the doubtful presuppositions of this alleged scientific character and the questionable nature of its results, a high premium is placed on being regarded as just scientific. After all, evangelical theologians are prepared, willing, and in a position to pursue full involvement in scholarly work. However, there is no possibility for evangelicals to succeed in the enterprise, because what is recognized as “scientific” receives that recognition only from historical-critical theology, which—in spite of its numerical minority in the entirety of Christendom—occupies all the key positions and is always in a position to state, at its own discretion: “That is not scientific.”

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The procedure. This breathless competition has an unfortunate outcome. Evangelicals give little consideration to the crucial questions needing distinctively evangelical answers. Instead, they are driven to give evangelical answers to historical-critical questions, as far as this is possible. Much good, sound effort is expended that, strictly speaking, has little relevance for the evangelical context, but only furnishes more stones for building up academia's ivory tower. Compelling investigations, corresponding to direct felt needs among evangelicals, are not taken up. Evangelical scholars are so much accustomed to the manner in which historical-critical theology places questions that the topics evangelicals choose to work on often do little more than echo what the historical-critical agenda has already established.

The result. The situation sketched above has an unfortunate outcome. From the historical-critical point of view, evangelical books and articles often fail to measure up to expected scientific standards (as defined by historical-critical theology.) At the same time, from an evangelical vantage point, the same writings fall short of a thoroughgoing fidelity to the Bible. Work designed to do justice to two worlds of thought is fully claimed by neither. Ought this situation to persist? Or could it be time to consider and discover alternatives to this state of affairs?¹⁸

A New Theological Beginning

Rooted in God and His Word

We should be aware that an inexhaustible source of knowledge stands at our disposal in what God has revealed. In most areas of life and knowledge we have not even begun to draw from this source. All too obediently, we have submitted to the separation between faith and knowledge that philosophy has argued for and historical-critical theology has observed for centuries. Even evangelicals have reduced the infallibility of the Holy Scriptures to that which is necessary for faith and practice. They fail to notice that in making this reduction they have made a false turn.

Service Oriented

Theological work that is loyal to the Bible has a different value than “theological science” in historical-critical theology. It does not exist “to research whatever admits of investigation”; it is rather a

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service-performing activity intent on the Lord's commission to furnish help for fellow-believers. *"Ivory tower" scholarship, as commonly done, and theological work that is loyal to the Bible are mutually contradictory endeavors.*

In historical-critical theology *the principle of "the initiated"* reigns. Prior to the Second World War, only a small elite of such "initiates" functioned, in keeping with Semler's erstwhile counsel. In the 1950s and -60s a gradual increase of the ranks of the initiated developed to include more who had received academic training. We may liken these initiates to clergy who have taken holy orders.

Within the spectrum of religious initiation, there are also "lower orders." Since the late 60s, these lower orders have come to include initiation into the synoptic problem and source criticism of the Pentateuch, critical theories that are now being dished up in every deacon and lay-believer seminar. Since the 80s, at the latest, these theories have even been thrust upon school children. The principle of "the initiated," however—the differences between the initiated of various levels who talk the same language on the one hand, and those who are content to let such matters lie, on the other—still remains in effect, despite the expansion of its membership.

Theological study that is loyal to the Bible, by contrast, must never forget that all who believe in Jesus Christ our Lord are taught by God. The Holy Spirit has been poured out in our hearts and will lead us into all truth. Indeed, our Lord Jesus thanks his Father in heaven that He has hidden truth from the wise and knowledgeable, but has revealed it to infants (Matt 11:25). Woe to us when we set ourselves up as an intelligentsia who dictate to the so-called layperson what he may and may not derive from his reading of God's word.

Theology that is loyal to the Bible, as already stated, is a service-performing activity. That does not mean, however, that it should take its cues from short-term (and perhaps short-sighted) needs of the moment. The Lord gives instructions for the work that needs doing; but brotherly fellowship aids in hearing what He is saying. "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain" (Ps 127:1, NIV) holds true also for theology that is loyal to the Bible.

The brotherly service of theology that is loyal to the Bible should grow out of faith and love. "Whatever is not from faith is

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sin” (Rom 14:23, NKJV). “Do everything in love” (1 Cor 16:14, NIV).

The theologian who is loyal to the Bible is free, thanks to redemption in Jesus Christ, from the demand that he make a name for himself. “My Father will honor the one who serves me,” says our Lord Jesus (Jn 2:26, NIV). That is sufficient. True, we are admonished to pursue love earnestly (1 Cor 14:1), but we are not under pressure to compete with each other. The promise of James 1:5 applies to theological work, too: “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him” (NIV). What a glorious, relaxed, and fruitful task is ours under such auspices!

Undertakes New Approaches

The way questions are posed should emerge from what is needful, not from the complex of traditions that comprise the disciplines of theology. The methods to be employed are not simply those already present in the historical-critical nexus. With the help of God-given wisdom, methods should rather—to the extent needed—be newly developed in connection with the respective tasks at hand and commensurate with the object.¹⁹

Also in need of new development—or transformation—are the forms in which the fruits of scholarly labor are transmitted. For example, the writing of commentaries.

In historical-critical theology, commentaries have the function (among other things) of bringing the recalcitrant biblical text into line with the hypotheses that the critic uses. Exegesis thereby takes on the function of explaining the data that count against the pre-decided hypotheses, or adjusting those data in the course of interpretation so that they conform to the perspective the critic has adopted. Since the exegete follows the critical belief in *Tendenz* (the general bias that is allegedly at work in a passage and that should, therefore, guide its exegesis), but wishes his work to be original in detail, individual explanations of the same passages in various commentaries often contradict each other. The large number of details requiring explanation, given the presuppositions of this approach, make it necessary to use a commentary. The differences between explanations mean that any one commentary will not be sufficient.

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By contrast, a commentary that is loyal to the Bible has the task of making a specialist's knowledge available as a brotherly service. This knowledge is not absolutely essential to a profound understanding of the word of God, but it can render essential aid in that direction. Such a commentary can help in at least five ways:

1. Support can be given our fellow Christians by providing clear grammatical analysis of the original text based on a thorough knowledge of the original languages. Such an analysis could also pass along possible alternative translations, weighing the presuppositions behind and consequences of each one, and setting forth the preferred translation in a fair and responsible manner.

2. The meaning of words could be illuminated through concept analysis (that is, through the relaying of results of this field of investigation along with references to the relevant literature). The basic meaning of words should constantly be passed along, since this will shed light on many variant meanings. Here etymological derivation and important variations of a word in the history of its usage have their place.

3. Also helpful are: findings regarding the cultural environment of the Old or New testaments; relevant research summaries of archaeology, illustrated where appropriate; insights from extra-biblical history.

4. The course of thought and organization of the Scriptures can be opened up more effectively on the basis of intensive study of them.

5. An overview of God's word can be made available by adducing parallel passages for those with little Bible knowledge. The basic insight that Holy Scripture interprets itself must receive due weight in the composition of a commentary that is loyal to the Bible. Every biblical writing is a part of the entirety of God's revelation; the commentator must bear this in mind, even as he seeks diligently to do justice to each individual portion, correctly handling the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15).

A commentary that is loyal to the Bible should do all of the above. Yet the fact remains: God's word is not dependent on some formal process of interpretation. It is directly accessible to every child of God through the Holy Spirit. For this reason, the use of commentaries remains an option for consultation when one has

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need; it should never be overplayed as a moral necessity. All children of God are taught by God. We ought never overlook that fact.

Critiques Critical Methods

Although theological work that is loyal to the Bible should grow from its own basis, it must still perform the service of staying abreast of historical-critical theology.

Considering the nature of historical-critical theology, it would not be difficult to refute all its fundamental tenets. We are, indeed, dealing with presuppositions and pre-judgments having no solid foundation in God's word. But we must be quite clear on this point: it will be a battle with a twelve-headed hydra that replaces each head that is lopped off with two more! New arguments will be advanced constantly, as we can already observe in the area of the synoptic problem.

We can expect a general turning away from historical-critical theology just as little as we can expect a similar disavowal of the untenable theory of evolution. Critical interaction with historical-critical theology will not—unless God directly intervenes—be a sweeping victory; it will rather engulf us in a wearying trench warfare. Many have not yet seen fit to bring themselves to this disavowal, long called for by God's word, because they regard historical-critical theology as “scientific” and consider its alleged scientific character to be indispensable. We need God's leading, therefore, to recognize those points where we should take up the battle so as not to dissipate our energies unwisely.

Endnotes

1 It is the service of Norman L. Geisler to have made this clear. Cf. his essays “Philosophical Presuppositions of Biblical Inerrancy,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. by N. L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 19??), pp. 303-334, 473-475, and “Inductivism, Materialism, and Rationalism,” in *Biblical Inerrancy: An Analysis of Its Philosophical Roots*, ed. by N. L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), pp. 9-22.

2 For these little-known utterances of Kierkegaard see the references in N. L. Geisler (previous note) to Kierkegaard's journals as they appear in R. G. Smith, ed. and trans., *The Last Years: Journals of S. Kierkegaard 1853-55* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 209.

3 Cf. Richard Wurmbrand, *Karl Marx und Satan*, 1978²; also Willem J. Ouwenell, *Evolution in der Zeitenwende*, 1984, pp. 298-302.

4 *Moderne Theologie unter der Lupe* (Newhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1987), pp. 97-101.

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5 Cf. Linnemann, *Wissenschaft oder Meinung?* (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1986), pp. 125-137 (=Historical Criticism of the Bible [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990], pp. 130-141).

6 Cf. Linnemann, *Wissenschaft oder Meinung?*, pp. 106-117 (=Historical Criticism of the Bible, pp. 114-123). Further support for this statement is forthcoming in the second half of chapter one in my upcoming book *Gibt es ein synoptisches Problem?* [Is there a synoptic problem?] (Neuhausen-Stuttgart/Grand Rapids: Hänssler/Baker).

7 C. H. Spurgeon, *Auf dein Wort. Andachten für jeden Tag*, ed. by Wolfgang Bühne (Christliche Literaturverbreitung e. V., 1986², p. 124.

8 The Barmen Declaration was a statement issued in May 1934 by church leaders in Germany. It renounced Christian complicity in and collaboration with the Third Reich. The "first thesis" cited above includes these words: "Jesus Christ, as he is testified to us in the Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God, whom we are to hear, whom we are to trust and obey in life and in death. We repudiate the false teaching that the church can and must recognize yet other happenings and powers, images and truths as divine revelation alongside this one Word of God, as a source of her preaching" (see John H. Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*, 3rd edition (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), p. 520).

9 Cf. Linnemann, *Wissenschaft oder Meinung?*, pp. 125-132 (=Historical Criticism of the Bible, pp. 130-137).

10 This phenomenon is abundantly in evidence in literature dealing with the synoptic problem. See my *Gibt es ein synoptisches Problem?* (n. 6 above).

11 Cf. Samuel R. Külling, *Zur Datierung der Genesis-P-Stücke* (Riehen: Immanuelverlag, 1985³), passim. Also informative are some of the sources adduced in J. McDowell, *More Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernadino: Here's Life, 1981¹²), pp. 17-184, 327-363.

12 See Immanuel Velikovsky, *Die Seevölker* (Ullstien, 1983), p. 229, as well as the multivolume *Zeitalter im Chaos*, passim (on the Ipuwer papyrus, see vol. 1, *Vom Exodus zu König Echnaton* [Frankfurt am Main: Umschau Verlag, 1981], pp. 38-69).

13 Cf. among other works J. Urquhart, *Die erfüllten Verheißungen oder Gottes Siegel auf die Bibel* (Barmen: Emil Müller, 1924⁹); J. McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernadino: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972), pp. 147-184, 277-236; Werner Gitt, *Das Fundament* (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1985), pp. 118-148.

14 Cf. my upcoming *Gibt es ein synoptisches Problem?* (n. 6 above).

15 Klaus Bayer, *Die aramäische Texte vom Toten Meer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), p. 226.

16 See David C. C. Watson, *Fact or Fancy* (Worthing: H. E. Walter, 1980), p. 88f.

17 See Watson, *ibid.*, p. 89: Celsus "'considered that the different Gospels were incorrect revisions of one original' (B. F. Westcott, *A General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament*, 1889⁶, p. 405 n. 2), which some believers remodeled and remolded in various ways to answer objectors. To which Origen replies: 'I know of no people who remodel the Gospel except the followers of Marcion and the followers of Valentinus and perhaps those of Lucian.'"

18 Cf. my *Wissenschaft oder Meinung?*, pp. 125-137 (=Historical Criticism of the Bible, pp. 130-141).

19 As an example I refer to the second and third chapters of my *Gibt es ein*

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synoptisches Problem?, where a methodological apparatus is developed in response to the particular task needing attention.