

What we find in the interesting tradition that Jesus was accused of sorcery is well-attested tradition. It is early, it is widespread, and it took on a life of its own in diverse post-Easter settings, invoked and applied in a variety of ways and in variety of religious settings and contexts. The "exegesis" of Jesus tends to be like that, for the historical figure generated a number of oral stories and literary texts and stimulated a rich and diverse legacy of debate and practice. The exegesis of the historical Jesus will inevitably be more complex than the exegesis of a written text. Accordingly, investigation of the historical Jesus requires careful consideration of a number of closely related fields of study. It cannot be purely literary. The task is daunting, but it is also rewarding.

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FORM CRITICISM AND NEW TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION*

Edgar V. McKnight

Form criticism is designed to enable scholars to get behind the written sources of the synoptic Gospels and the life of Jesus identified by early literary criticism and to describe what was happening as the tradition about Jesus was handed on orally from person to person and from community to community. Form critics have worked out criteria for distinguishing those strata in the Gospels that reflect the concerns of the church (both Jewish Christian and Gentile Christian) from the stratum that might be thought to go back to the historical Jesus. Critics showed that the church's vital life exerted a creative influence on the form as well as the content of the tradition. This makes it possible to classify much of the material in the Synoptics according to literary form.

THE PIONEERS IN NEW TESTAMENT FORM CRITICISM

With the necessity for a study of the preliterary period of Gospel origins established by New Testament scholars and the possibility for preliterary study established by Hermann Gunkel in his research on Genesis,¹ it was inevitable that the form-critical approach would be applied to the Gospel tradition. Three scholars are credited with beginning this new effort in the study of the Gospels

* The first parts of this essay are drawn from Edgar V. McKnight, *What Is Form Criticism?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969; repr. Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 1997), 13–33, 38–51. Used by permission of Wipf and Stock Publishers. www.wipfandstock.com.

1. Hermann Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis: The Biblical Saga and History* (trans. W. H. Carr; New York: Schocken, 1964). For insight into the work of Gunkel and its influence on New Testament Form Criticism and additional information about the form-critical study of Jesus, see McKnight, *What Is Form Criticism?*

in the years 1919 through 1921. In 1919 came *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu* (*The Framework of the Story of Jesus*) by Karl Ludwig Schmidt and *Formgeschichte des Evangeliums* (*From Tradition to Gospel*, 1935) by Martin Dibelius. These were followed in 1921 by Rudolf Bultmann's *Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* (*History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 1963).

Schmidt carefully studied the entire Synoptic tradition from the perspective of the framework that the Gospel writers gave to the life of Jesus. He also gave some helpful suggestions as to the nature and origin of the individual units making up the Synoptic tradition. But Schmidt did not really utilize the tools of form criticism to pry back into the oral period of Gospel origins. This task was left for Martin Dibelius and Rudolf Bultmann.

Dibelius was the first to apply form criticism to the Synoptic tradition. Indeed the term "form criticism" came to be used in biblical studies because the title of his 1919 volume was *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*. Dibelius's purpose was to explain by reconstruction and analysis "the origin of the tradition about Jesus, and thus to penetrate into a period previous to that in which our Gospels and their written sources were recorded" and "to make clear the intention and real interest of the earliest tradition."²

Bultmann's volume first appeared in 1921, two years after that of Dibelius, with the purpose of "discovering what the original units of the synoptics were, both sayings and stories, to try to establish what their historical setting was, whether they belonged to a primary or secondary tradition or whether they were the product of editorial activity."³ Bultmann submitted the entire Synoptic tradition to a searching analysis and, although Dibelius was the first of the two writers, Bultmann's name and method of analysis have been more closely associated with form criticism than has the name of Dibelius.

PRESUPPOSITIONS OF THE EARLY FORM CRITICS

Form criticism moves from the existing text of the Synoptic Gospels to an earlier stage that does not now exist. In order to do this, certain things must be established or presupposed about the nature, origin, and transmission of the materials.

The early form critics accepted and built upon the conclusions of *source criticism*. Source criticism, however, is merely the starting point for form criticism,

for when form criticism is seen as the task of discovering the original units of the Synoptic tradition and of establishing the earlier history of the units, the written source of any particular unit is a matter of indifference.

The "fundamental assumption," and in some sense the assumption that makes form criticism both necessary and possible, is that the tradition consists basically of individual sayings and narratives joined together in the Gospels by the work of the editors.

One body of material is seen as an exception to the rule that there were no connected narratives of the life of Jesus in the earliest period. This exception is the Passion narrative. The earliest Passion story, however, is not the Marcan story. Both Dibelius and Bultmann hold that the Marcan story is the end result of a very early process of transmission of tradition and that even in the earliest Passion story that we can reconstruct we do not have pure history.

The tradition served the needs and purposes of the church. This assumption is vital for Dibelius since he follows a constructive method and reconstructs the history of the Synoptic tradition from a study of the early Christian community. Even though Bultmann follows an analytical method that begins with the text instead of the church, he admits that he cannot "dispense with a provisional picture of the primitive community and its history, which has to be turned into a clear and articulated picture in the course of [his] inquiries."⁴ Dibelius sees the Christian movement as originating with the Aramaic-speaking Palestinian circle of Jesus, of course. Then comes a pre-Pauline Hellenistic Christianity in close proximity to Judaism. These pre-Pauline Christian churches were in Greek-speaking regions such as Antioch and Damascus and grew out of Jewish churches without making a logical break with Judaism. Still later comes the Pauline church, which is much less closely related to Judaism.

Dibelius declares that the Synoptic tradition did not acquire its form in the Aramaic-speaking Palestinian church or in the later Pauline church. The tradition acquired its form in the pre-Pauline Hellenistic churches closely associated with Judaism.

Bultmann's approach does not demand as detailed a picture of the church as does the approach of Dibelius, hence Bultmann is satisfied to divide early Christianity into two basic phases: Palestinian Christianity and Hellenistic Christianity. Dibelius and Bultmann assume that the materials can be classified as to form and that the form enables the students to reconstruct the history of the tradition. Dibelius says that a careful critical reading of the Gospels shows that the Gospel writers took over units of material that already possessed a form of their own. Dibelius is speaking of the "style" of a unit—a style or form that has been created

2. Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* (trans. Bertram Lee Woolf, New York: Scribner's, 1935), iii.

3. Rudolf Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (trans. John Marsh, New York: Harper, 1963), 2-3.

4. Ibid., 5.

by its use among early Christians. The specific use to which a unit is put determines its form, and in the case of the early church the forms developed out of primitive Christian life itself. The units, therefore, have a form that is related to their place in the life of the church.

Bultmann is in complete accord with this assumption. "The proper understanding of form criticism rests upon the judgment that the literature . . . springs out of quite definite conditions and wants of life from which grows up a quite definite style and quite specific forms and categories."⁵ Every literary category then will have its own "life situation" (*Sitz im Leben*), which is a typical situation in the life of the early Christian community.

THE "FORMS" OF DIBELIUS AND BULTMANN

Both Dibelius and Bultmann, following the example of a form critical study of the Old Testament, find a variety of forms in the Synoptic Gospels.

THE "FORMS" OF DIBELIUS

The main concern of Dibelius is with the narrative material of the Gospels, and he finds three major categories of narrative material in addition to the passion narrative: paradigms, tales, and legends.

Paradigms. The sermons of the early Christians did not contain simply the bare message of the gospel "but rather the message as explained, illustrated and supported with references and otherwise developed."⁶ The narratives of the deeds of Jesus were introduced as examples to illustrate and support the message. These *examples* constitute the oldest Christian narrative style, and hence Dibelius suggests the name "paradigm" for this category of narrative.

Tales. The tales in the Gospels are stories of Jesus' miracles that originate in their present form not with preachers but with storytellers and teachers who related the stories from the life of Jesus "broadly, with colour, and not without art." Indeed, "*literary style in reporting miracles*, a feature that we missed on the whole from Paradigms, . . . appears in the Tales with a certain regularity."⁷ The style of the tales compares with the style of similar stories from ancient to modern times: first comes the history of the illness, then the technique of the miracle, and finally

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the success of the miraculous act. Tales belong to a higher grade of literature than paradigms.

Legends. Legends, "religious narratives of a saintly man in whose works and fate interest is taken,"⁸ arose in the church to satisfy a double desire: the desire to know something of the human virtues and lot of the *holy* men and women in the story of Jesus, and the desire that gradually developed to know Jesus himself in this way. The story of Jesus when he is twelve years old (Luke 2:41-49) is the story of Jesus that shows most clearly the qualities of legend. "A narrator of legends is certainly not interested in historical confirmation, nor does he offer any opposition to increasing the material by analogies. But how much historical tradition he hands on in a legend depends on the character of his tradition only."⁹

Myth. Dibelius is convinced that the story of Jesus is not of mythological origin; the paradigms, the oldest witness of the process of formation of the tradition, do not tell of a mythological hero. The only narratives that describe a mythological event, "a many-sided interaction between mythological but not human persons," are the records of the baptismal miracle, the temptation of Jesus, and the transfiguration.¹⁰

Sayings. Although Dibelius emphasizes the narrative material of the Synoptic Gospels, he does deal with the sayings of Jesus. He finds preaching, especially catechetical instruction, as the place of formulation of such teachings, but he presupposes a law different from the law concerning narrative material to be at work in the sayings of Jesus. Just as the Jews of Jesus' day took the rules of life and worship more seriously than they took historical and theological tradition, so the Christians treated the sayings of Jesus more seriously than the narratives. As the sayings of Jesus were transmitted, however, some modification took place. The tradition emphasized and strengthened the hortatory character of the words of Jesus and thereby altered the meaning and emphasis of words that were originally hortatory. There was also a tendency to include christological sayings so as "to obtain from the words of Jesus not only solutions of problems or rules for one's own life, but also to derive from them some indications about the nature of the person who had uttered them."¹¹

5. *Ibid.*, 4.

6. Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, 25.

7. *Ibid.*, 70, 82.

8. *Ibid.*, 104.

9. *Ibid.*, 108.

10. *Ibid.*, 271.

11. *Ibid.*, 246.

THE "FORMS" OF BULTMANN

Bultmann provides a detailed analysis of all the Synoptic material within the two general divisions of (1) the discourses of Jesus and (2) the narrative material. The discourses of Jesus are divided into two main groups: apophthegms and dominical sayings; but Bultmann also gives a separate treatment of "I sayings" and parables although by content they belong to the dominical sayings. The narrative materials are also divided into two major groups: miracle stories and historical narratives and legends.

Apophthegms. Bultmann's category "apophthegms" is basically the same as Dibelius's "paradigms." It applies to short sayings of Jesus set in a brief context. But Bultmann does not agree that the form arose in preaching in every case. Because of this he uses the term "apophthegm" instead of "paradigm," for it is a category from Greek literature denoting merely a short, pithy, and instructive saying that does not prejudice the matter of origin. Bultmann sees three different types of apophthegms characterized by the different settings or causes for the sayings: controversy dialogues; scholastic dialogues; and biographical apophthegms.

In Bultmann's opinion all three types of apophthegms are "ideal" constructions of the church. They are not historical reports. It is true that Jesus engaged in disputations and was asked questions about the way to life, the greatest commandment, and other matters. It is also true that the apophthegm could easily contain a historical reminiscence and that a decisive saying of a dialogue may go back to Jesus himself. But the apophthegms as they stand are church constructions—Palestinian church constructions, as may be seen by comparison with similar rabbinic stories.

Dominical Sayings. The sayings of Jesus are divided by Bultmann into three main groups chiefly according to their actual content, although formal differences are also involved. The three groups are: proverbs; prophetic and apocalyptic sayings; and laws and community regulations. The *proverb* shows Jesus as the teacher of wisdom comparable with teachers of wisdom in Israel, Judaism, and throughout the Orient. Three basic "constitutive" forms are used for the proverbs, forms conditioned by the sayings themselves. These forms exist in all proverbial literature, not only in the proverbial sayings in the Synoptic Gospels. The proverb in a *declarative form* sets forth a principle or a declaration concerning material things or persons: "The laborer deserves his wages" (Luke 10:7). Exhortations are placed in an *imperative form*: "Physician, heal yourself" (Luke 4:28). Proverbs also exist in the *form of questions*: "And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life?" (Matt. 6:27).

In regard to the genuineness of the proverbs, Bultmann sees several possibilities: that Jesus himself coined some of the proverbs that the Synoptics attribute

to him, that Jesus occasionally made use of popular proverbs of his time, and that the primitive church placed in Jesus' mouth many wisdom sayings that were really derived from the storehouse of Jewish proverbial lore. Bultmann's judgment is that the wisdom sayings are "least guaranteed to be authentic words of Jesus; and they are likewise the least characteristic and significant for historical interpretation."¹² *Prophetic and apocalyptic sayings* are those sayings in which Jesus proclaimed the arrival of the reign of God and preached the call to repentance, promising salvation for those who were prepared and threatening woes upon the unrepentant.

Bultmann sees proof in the little apocalypse of Mark 13:5-27 that Jewish material has been ascribed to Jesus by the church and he asks to what extent the rest of the material must be similarly judged. In some sayings the immediacy of eschatological consciousness is so different from Jewish tradition that Jesus himself must have been the origin (Luke 10:23-24). But there are other passages that contain nothing specifically characteristic of Jesus and where it is most likely that there was a Jewish origin (Matt 24:37-41). Not all sayings that are judged unlikely to have originated in Judaism come from Jesus, for the early church formulated some passages. Such a church origin is more likely the more there is a relationship of the saying to the person of Jesus, or to the lot and interest of the church. Bultmann asserts that "one may with perfect right recognize among them authentic words of Jesus; and though the Christian community itself produced many a prophetic saying, as may be clearly shown, it must nevertheless be recognized that, according to the testimony of the earliest Christians themselves, they owed their eschatological enthusiasm to the prophetic appearance of Jesus."¹³

The third group of sayings is made up of statements regarding the law and Jewish piety and regulations of the early community. Bultmann declares that the history of the sayings can be seen "with desirable clarity" in the legal material. He indicates that the church possessed a stock of genuine sayings of Jesus. Especially important and genuine are the brief conflict sayings that express Jesus' attitude to Jewish piety (Mark 7:15; 3:4; Matt 23:16-19, 23-24, 25-26). Concerning these Bultmann says that "this is the first time that we have the right to talk of sayings of Jesus, both as to form and content." The tradition gathered these genuine sayings, "gave them a new form, enlarged them by additions and developed them further; it collected other (Jewish) sayings, and fitted them by adaptation for reception into the treasury of Christian instruction, and produced new sayings from its consciousness of a new possession, sayings that they ingeniously put

12. Rudolf Bultmann, "The Study of the Synoptic Gospels," in *Form Criticism: Two Essays on New Testament Research* (ed. and trans. Frederick G. Grant; New York: Harper, 1962), 55.

13. *Ibid.*, 56.

into the mouth of Jesus."¹⁴ Bultmann especially attributes to the church the Old Testament citations that are frequently found in combination with debating sayings, the sayings that contain rules for the discipline of the community and for its mission, and the sayings in which the church expressed its faith in Jesus, his work, his destiny, and his person.

The "I sayings" are those sayings attributed to Jesus in which he speaks of himself, his work, and his destiny. Bultmann admits that it is impossible to prove that Jesus could not have spoken in the first person about himself, but he brings such serious considerations against so many of these sayings that "one can have but little confidence even in regard to those which do not come under positive suspicion."¹⁵ The sayings as a whole express the retrospective point of view of the church. The "I sayings" were predominantly the work of the Hellenistic churches.

The *parable* is a concise and simple story that is much like a popular story in its concrete language, its use of dialectical language and soliloquy, and its repetition. It is a story told to call forth judgment on the part of the hearer; a judgment is made regarding the story of everyday human affairs and relations, then the judgment is applied in the realm of the spiritual life. Jesus, of course, spoke in parables, but the church transmitted the parables and used them for its own purpose. It is clear that here and there the form has been changed and applications added to the parables to make them more relevant to the later church. Such alterations are even seen in Matthew's and Luke's use of their written sources. But Bultmann sees more radical alteration by the church. The parables have been placed into particular contexts and given introductions that affect the *meaning* of the stories. At times the church placed a new parable alongside an older independent story. The church also enlarged parables by providing allegorical additions and explanations. Parables from the Jewish tradition were also used to augment the store of parables of Jesus.

The history of the parables in the tradition makes it clear that the original meaning of many of the parables of Jesus has become irrecoverable and that some of the parabolic material does not go back to Jesus but to the church. Bultmann concludes with a rule that enables us to discover genuine parables of Jesus. "We can only count on possessing a genuine similitude of Jesus where, on the one hand, expression is given to the contrast between Jewish morality and piety and the distinctive eschatological temper which characterized the preaching of Jesus and where on the other hand we find no specifically Christian features."¹⁶

14. Bultmann, *History*, 145-47.

15. *Ibid.*, 155.

16. *Ibid.*, 205.

Miracle Stories. Bultmann divides the narrative material of the Synoptic Gospels into two main groups: miracle stories and historical narratives and legends. He means by "miracle stories" what Dibelius means by "tales," namely, stories of healings and nature miracles in which the miracle constitutes the main theme and is described with considerable detail. Miracles occur among the apophthegms, but there the miracle is subordinated to the point of the apophthegm.

Bultmann compares the Synoptic miracle stories with the miracle stories of Jewish and Hellenistic origin and discovers that the Gospel stories have exactly the same style as the Hellenistic miracle stories. The condition of the sick person is described, the healing is recounted, then the consequences of the miracle are unfolded. Bultmann asks at what stage the tradition was enriched by the addition of miracle stories and concludes that a Palestinian origin is probable for several miracle stories. "[Judging Mk. 4:35-41 (Stilling of the Storm) by its content, a *Palestinian* origin seems probable if the Jewish parallels are taken into consideration." The same holds true for the feeding stories and the healing of the leper. But "for the rest, the Hellenistic origin of the miracle stories is overwhelmingly the more probable."¹⁷ The similarity between the miracle stories in the Synoptic Gospels and those in Hellenistic literature forces the conclusion that miracle stories by and large do not belong to the oldest strata of tradition.

Historical Stories and Legends. Legends, in Bultmann's definition, are religious and edifying narratives that are not properly miracle stories, although they may include something miraculous, and are not basically historical, although they may be based on historical happenings. Bultmann treats historical stories and legends together because he sees no possibility of separating the two. He acknowledges that some passages are purely legendary. An example is the narrative of the temptation of Jesus (Mark 1:12-13). But even the stories with a historical basis, in the view of Bultmann, "are so much dominated by the legends that they can only be treated along with them."¹⁸ The historicity of Jesus' baptism by John, for example, is not to be disputed, but as the story is told in the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 1:9-11) it must be classified as a legend. Its purpose is not historical but religious and edifying. It tells of Jesus' consecration as Messiah and is a faith legend. When the context is the faith or worship of the community, the result is a faith or cult legend; when the context is the life of some religious hero, the result is a biographical legend.

Bultmann observes that the legendary motifs in the narratives are of diverse origin. Some materials show the influence of the Old Testament and Judaism,

17. *Ibid.*, 240.

18. *Ibid.*, 245.

others show Hellenistic elements, still others have motifs that have grown up within the Christian tradition itself.

The comprehensive form-critical studies of Dibelius and Bultmann and their application of form criticism to the life and teachings of the earthly Jesus continue to influence studies today. The discipline and its application to the life of Jesus have been modified by the work of scholars following Dibelius and Bultmann, however, and the following pages will sketch the scholarly evaluation and use of form criticism following the earliest work in the field and provide an illustration of a form-critical approach to a synoptic text.

EARLY SCHOLARLY EVALUATION AND USE OF FORM CRITICISM

New Testament scholars differed widely in their reaction to form criticism. Some scholars continued to emphasize source criticism, accepting Mark as history, and virtually ignored form criticism. Others defended the *basic historicity* of Mark and the other sources of the Synoptic Gospels but were increasingly affected by form criticism.

BURNETT HILLMANN STREETER

B. H. Streeter was a source critic who summed up the results of the scientific study of the Gospels to his day in a great book, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins*. Streeter first published his work in 1924 and took no account of the work of form criticism. The analysis of sources was his object, and he saw the analysis of sources as extremely important in several respects. It assists in the study of the authorship, date, and locality of origin of the Gospels. But more important, it also enables us to evaluate the Gospels as "historical authorities for the life of Christ." Streeter feels that the range of sources (Mark, Q, M, and L) used by the Gospel writers very materially broadens the base for historical study of the life and teachings of Jesus and that the Gospels themselves must be seen as generally reliable historical documents because of the sources used by the Gospel writers.¹⁹

ARTHUR C. HEADLAM

The year before Streeter's book appeared, A. C. Headlam published a work, *The Life and Teachings of Jesus the Christ*, which utilized the results of the analysis of the sources of the Gospels. Headlam sees himself as a defender of the "general credibility of the traditional account of the life and work of our Lord" against a school of critics that, while accepting Jesus as a real person and founder of Christianity, holds that the greater part of the contents of the Gospel tells us not what he taught, but what the Christian Church that grew up after His death thought.²⁰

C. H. DODD

Although Streeter and Headlam wrote *after* the work of men like Wrede, Schweitzer, Schmidt, Dibelius, and Bultmann, they were still basing their work upon nineteenth-century presuppositions. After the work of the earliest form critics, however, it could not simply be presupposed that Mark was essentially a historical presentation of Jesus of Nazareth that, when supplemented from the other sources, would represent a reliable history of the life and teachings of Jesus. Such a thing must be *proved*, and the basic postulates of the form critics must be disproved. It is not surprising, therefore, that scholars attempted to refute the postulates that would deny to them the use of the sources as authorities for reconstructing a life of the earthly Jesus.

In 1932 C. H. Dodd challenged the assumption of form criticism regarding "The Framework of the Gospel Narrative."²¹ In particular, he dealt with the work of K. L. Schmidt. Dodd acknowledged that "Professor Schmidt seems to have made out his case that the main stuff of the Gospel is reducible to short narrative units, and that the framework is superimposed upon these units."²² Dodd denied, however, that the order of the units is arbitrary and he denied that the Framework is only an artificial construction. The conclusion Dodd drew is that "we need not be so scornful of the Marcan order as has recently become the fashion . . . there is good reason to believe that in broad lines the Marcan order does represent a genuine succession of events within which movement and development can be traced."²³ But it is clear that Dodd acknowledged a great measure of the presup-

20. Arthur C. Headlam, *The Life and Teaching of Jesus the Christ* (2nd ed.; London: John Murray, 1927), 9.

21. This is the title of an article by Dodd appearing in *Expository Times* 43 (1932): 398-400. It was reprinted in C. H. Dodd, *New Testament Studies* (New York: Scribner's, 1952), 1-11.

22. *Ibid.*, 3.

23. *Ibid.*, 11.

19. Burnett Hillman Streeter, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins* (rev. ed.; London: Macmillan, 1930), 2.

position of Schmidt and the form critics as far as the nature of the tradition is concerned.

T. W. MANSON

T. W. Manson, a noted English New Testament scholar and teacher, whose career continued until his death in 1958, remained throughout his lifetime much more confident of the historicity of the Gospel tradition than did the form critics. Manson's first and most important work, *The Teaching of Jesus*, is an admirable study of Jesus' teaching from the perspective of source analysis. It was first published in 1931 and it was written as if form criticism did not exist.

Manson's overall judgment on form criticism is that the discipline should deal strictly with the *form* of the various units. "In fact if form-criticism had stuck to its proper business, it would not have made any real stir. We should have taken it as we take the forms of Hebrew poetry or the forms of musical composition."²⁴

HARALD RIESENFELD AND BIRGER GERHARDSSON

In maturing reaction to form criticism, two Scandinavian scholars, Harald Riesenfeld and Birger Gerhardsson, attempted to prove false the postulate upon which the discipline of form criticism most depends, that the formation of the material took place in the later Christian community. They attempted to demonstrate that Jesus delivered fixed material, both teachings and narrative, to his disciples to hand down to others.

Harald Riesenfeld stated the basic arguments in an address delivered at the opening session of the congress on "The Four Gospels in 1957" at Oxford.²⁵ He admits that form critics had made some permanent achievements in their research: they made a formal analysis of the individual units in the Gospel material. These units originally circulated in an oral form but were eventually written down, first in small groups of independent units and then in our Gospels. The elements of tradition were influenced by the life of the church, which passed them on or gave them their final written form. But Riesenfeld holds that when form criticism went further and explained the *beginning* of the Gospel tradition by the activity of the early church it went astray. He asserts that the original source of the Gospel tradition was not preaching, catechetical instruction, or controversy,

but that "the beginning of the Gospel tradition lies with Jesus himself." In Jesus' day Jewish tradition was transmitted in accordance with firmly established laws. There was not a vague, uncontrolled diffusion of stories, tales, and anecdotes, but a rigorously controlled transmission of material from a master to a specially chosen student.

A pupil of Riesenfeld, Birger Gerhardsson, in his book *Memory and Manuscript*, carried forward Riesenfeld's work by presenting in great detail the evidence from Judaism and early Christianity that supports their case.²⁶ The first half of the book is a helpful discussion of how both written and oral Torah was transmitted in Judaism. The second half of the book uses the writings of Paul, Luke, and the early church fathers to try to find evidence of a transmission of tradition in early Christianity similar to that in Judaism.

BURTON SCOTT EASTON

Cautious acceptance and use characterized the attitude and practice of most New Testament scholars regarding form criticism. This was true of American and particularly of English New Testament scholars. Burton Scott Easton was one of the earliest American scholars to have evaluated form criticism. In December 1927, he gave a series of lectures at the General Theological Seminary, New York, in which he dealt with form criticism.²⁷ Some of the units of the tradition, in the estimation of Easton, may be classified as to form. The form known to Dibelius as paradigm and to Bulmann as apophthegm is an obvious form; the miracle story is also a "definite type of story with abundant parallels throughout the ancient world everywhere";²⁸ and the parable is a highly distinctive form of teaching. But attempts to classify other narrative and teaching material have not proved helpful, and form critics violate the "rule" when they classify in any way other than by form. "When Dibelius speaks of 'myths,' for instance, he violates this rule, for the myth has no set form of any kind. The name describes not the outward structure but the contents of a narrative."²⁹

The value of discovering the form is not nearly so great in the estimation of Easton as it is in the estimation of Dibelius and Bulmann. The very form that a narrative takes, paradigm and tale, for example, is taken by Dibelius to indicate date and historical value. But Easton, while agreeing that there are different ten-

24. T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus: Studies of its Form and Content* (2nd ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), 6.

25. Harald Riesenfeld, *The Gospel Tradition and its Beginnings: A Study in the Limits of "Formgeschichte"* (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1957).

26. Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Tradition in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (trans. Eric J. Sharpe; Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1961).

27. Burton Scott Easton, *The Gospel before the Gospels* (New York: Scribner's, 1928).

28. *Ibid.*, 67.

29. *Ibid.*, 61-62.

dencies in the paradigms and tales, says, "Neither need be the outgrowth of the other, ... why might not the preacher, the storyteller, and the teacher be one and the same person?"³⁰ Form criticism as a tool to establish the history of the tradition, therefore, has a very limited utility.

VINCENT TAYLOR

Vincent Taylor very cautiously evaluated form criticism as a legitimate tool, in lectures given at the University of Leeds in 1932. He does not see the discipline as a totally negative tool at all. In fact, he declared, "Form-Criticism seems to me to furnish constructive suggestions which in many ways confirm the historical trustworthiness of the Gospel tradition."³¹ It is obvious that Taylor has to modify the basic postulates and procedures of the earliest exponents of form criticism in order to come to his conservative results. Although he is in basic agreement that the earliest tradition consisted of small isolated units, he finds evidence of longer connected blocks of material and affirms that Mark is no "formless collection," although "the outline is less complete than has been supposed" by earlier critics.³² Taylor traces the historical materials in the Gospel back to eyewitnesses. The influence of eyewitnesses must be qualified; everything in Mark's Gospel does not go back to Peter's testimony. "But when all qualifications have been made, the presence of personal testimony is an element in the formative process which it is folly to ignore."³³ If the form critics who deny the influence of eyewitnesses are right, in the opinion of Taylor, "the disciples must have been translated to heaven immediately after the Resurrection."³⁴

Taylor's view of the *origin* of the tradition differs from the view of Dibelius and Bultmann. The church did not *originate* the tradition although it did take the recollections of the words and deeds of Jesus and apply them to its needs. As the church did not originate the tradition, it did not greatly alter the tradition. At times an "ideal" element entered into the tradition, circumstances were misunderstood, and words of Jesus colored by ideas and beliefs of those passing along the tradition. But "what is this beyond that which we might reasonably expect? ... A

30. *Ibid.*, 80.

31. Vincent Taylor, *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition* (London: Macmillan, 1933; 2nd ed., 1935), vi.

32. *Ibid.*, 47.

33. *Ibid.*, 43.

34. *Ibid.*, 41.

reconstruction which implies the untrustworthiness of the greater part of the tradition is wanting in probability and is not just to the Gospel records."³⁵

Some "forms" in the tradition are found by Taylor, but he does not feel that all of the materials can be analyzed on the basis of forms. The paradigm or apophthegm is a form "in which oral tradition naturally clothes itself."³⁶ But Taylor is not satisfied with the names used by Dibelius and Bultmann. "*Paradigmen* ... is too general and is too exclusively associated with the theory that the stories were formed under the influence of preaching," and "*apophthegmata* is literary rather than popular and, by concentrating attention too much on the final word of Jesus, it almost invites a depreciatory attitude to the narrative element."³⁷ Taylor suggests the term "Pronouncement-Stories." This leaves the possibility of origin open and it emphasizes the main element, a pronouncement of Jesus on some aspect of life, belief, or conduct. Taylor also sees good reason to assume the existence of another popular narrative form, called "miracle stories" by Bultmann and "tales" by Dibelius. He chooses to use Bultmann's term "miracle stories."

The general expression "Stories about Jesus" is used by Taylor for the remaining narratives about Jesus, for the material has no definite structural form. Although there is no one narrative form for these stories about Jesus, the narratives do have some common characteristics. "In almost all cases Jesus stands in the centre and usually secondary characters are not named or described. Conversations take place between two persons, or between Jesus and a group; in a few stories only, like the Penitent Thief, are three speakers introduced."³⁸ Taylor suggests that these speeches show that practical aims rather than narrative interests were responsible for the formation of the stories. He also suggests that the formative process of the stories about Jesus is more one of shortening than one of embellishment. Since "this is exactly what ought to be the history of genuine historical tradition ... the result ... of a study of the formal aspect of the Stories about Jesus is to strengthen confidence in their historical value."³⁹

Little justification is found for Bultmann's classification of the sayings of Jesus into proverbs, prophetic and apocalyptic sayings, laws and community regulations, "I sayings," and parables. "The terms do little more than describe stylistic features; they do not denote popular forms into which an individual or a community unconsciously throws sayings."⁴⁰ The parable, however, is a form that is

35. *Ibid.*, 38.

36. *Ibid.*, 29.

37. *Ibid.*, 30.

38. *Ibid.*, 166.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*, 31.

important. Taylor sees parables as circulating orally, singularly or in pairs, and later collected. Introductions were added by the Evangelists and sayings of similar character added to the original parables. But Taylor is very critical of Bulmann's skepticism of the authenticity of the parables, and in general Taylor is more confident of the authenticity of the Synoptic sayings than Dibelius or Bulmann. He acknowledges that there was a creative power of the community and that the tradition has been influenced in its transmission. But "substantially the sayings tradition is historically trustworthy," and "the tradition of the words of Jesus is far better preserved than we have any right to expect, and with much greater accuracy than is to be found in the record of the words of any great teacher of the past."⁴¹ "A limited tool" is Taylor's evaluation of form criticism. But he reminds us that a tool is something to be used, whatever its limitations may be.

ROBERT HENRY LIGHTFOOT

Form criticism received a champion in England in R. H. Lightfoot at the University of Oxford. Although Lightfoot disclaims the title of "champion" of the claims of form criticism, in the Bampton Lectures of 1934 he introduced the insights of the form critics to his countrymen,⁴² and in this series of lectures and later works he applied the method to the Gospel of Mark.

In a later work Lightfoot questioned whether form criticism "will help us to draw nearer to the central Figure of the Gospels, in His historical manifestation."⁴³ This is true because the church preserved the tradition not primarily for historical interests but for religious interests. The most valuable aspect of form criticism, then, is the way it seeks to relate the individual stories to the life of the church that preserved them and used them to give its message to the world. "In this way the gospels can be to us . . . within limits that need to be carefully guarded, a mirror of the hopes and aspirations, the problems and the difficulties, of the early Church."⁴⁴

The fact that the tradition had virtually no order and arrangement before being set down in the Gospels brought Lightfoot to ask what the writers sought to convey by their selection and arrangement of the material. This question placed more emphasis upon the personality and intention of the individual Evangelists than had earlier form critics, and Lightfoot's interest in the total purpose of the

Evangelists led him to apply form criticism to the Gospels in a different way than the earlier scholars. The purpose of Mark, according to Lightfoot, is not simply or chiefly biographical; it is doctrinal. Although Mark deals with history and contains materials that are important in a study of the life of Jesus, his chief purpose is "to show the history in the light in which he himself sees it, and wishes his readers also to regard it . . . to interpret the history and to set forth . . . its meaning and significance."⁴⁵ Lightfoot became a pioneer in yet another method of Gospel study, redaction criticism.

THE CHALLENGE OF STRUCTURALISM

In the 1960s and 1970s a number of different models of reading and interpretation attempted to complement or replace the form-critical model. Synchronic literary approaches used structural linguistics as a model. Diachronic historical models used historical linguistics as a resource. The most radical linguistic approach was offered by Erhardt Gütgemanns. His 1970 book⁴⁶ was not only a series of "candid questions," it was a declaration that the whole tradition of New Testament scholarship has to be shelved. Historical criticism had to be replaced by a linguistic exegesis based on the principle of structural linguistics. Form criticism was the first opponent to be demolished in Gütgemanns' work, for (according to him) history and the sociological situation of the early church had nothing to do with the essence of the self-contained small units or forms of the synoptic Gospels. The forms on a deep level grow out of nonhistorical anthropological and linguistic factors.

The power of the historical model was tested by the structuralist perspective, and form criticism will not be the same after this testing. Gütgemanns was influenced by French narratology to stress the profound level of the literary structure. An earlier East European formalism provided theoretical and practical resources for development and use of a view of textual unity or structure that is energetic and dynamic and capable of responding to cultural and individual development and valuation. Nonliterary factors influence literature not in a direct way or in a way to change the nature of literature. Literary structure is dynamic and not

45. Ibid., 98.

46. Erhardt Gütgemanns, *Offene Fragen zur Formgeschichte des Evangeliums: Eine methodische Skizze der grundlagenproblematik der Form und Redaktionsgeschichte* (BET 54; Munich: Christian Kaiser, 1970); English edition: *Candid Questions Concerning Gospel Form Criticism: A Methodological Sketch of the Fundamental Problematics of Form and Redaction Criticism* (trans. William G. Doty; Pitsburg: Theological Monograph Series 26; Pitsburg: Pickwick, 1979).

41. Ibid., 110-13.

42. Robert Henry Lightfoot, *History and Interpretation in the Gospels* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935).

43. Robert Henry Lightfoot, *The Gospel Message of St. Mark* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1950), 105.

44. Ibid., 102.

static, capable of responding to its different contexts and maintaining the nexus of internal relationships. The "determinant" structure of meaning is not a static "summative whole," but it exists in a ceaseless stage of movement.

A comprehensive New Testament study will be open to all sorts of questions: the different levels and kinds of historical and literary structures, the dynamic relationship between the nexus of literary factors and the reader, the dynamic relationship between the reader and the community, and the dynamic structure of the readers themselves. Nevertheless, the conventional form-critical approach to reading the New Testament text has not been effectively challenged by the linguistic and literary approaches.

A FORM-CRITICAL READING OF A SYNOPTIC TEXT:

MARK 2:13-17; MATTHEW 9:9-13; LUKE 5:27-32

A form-critical reading in the conventional sense is concerned with what the reader can discover and/or imaginatively reconstruct historically about the meaning and function of the unit of tradition passed down in the biblical text. The analysis and evaluation of the analysis will concentrate on the steps that are acknowledged as helpful and legitimate by the form-critical conceptualization. Central are the questions of "form" and *Sitz-im-Leben*.

An initial approach to the text will attempt to find the earliest written form so that the reader can concentrate upon that form. In the case of the double narrative of the call of Levi and the meal with tax collectors, the earliest form is Mark, so attention may be focused on Mark.

The reader has the task of moving behind the text of Mark by distinguishing between the traditional material and the framework provided by the Evangelist. Verse 13 is the redactional introduction of the Evangelist. This introduction situates the unit temporally ("again") and locally ("by the sea"). As is common (see for example 2:2; 3:7-9; 20; 4:1), it is stated that a large crowd comes to Jesus and Jesus teaches them. Verse 13 introduces the following unit and ties together the two narratives of the call of Levi and the meal with tax collectors in terms of action and locale. The two narratives are united in an external way by means of the word "tax collectors" but they are brought together in terms of content as in both Jesus accepts tax collectors and sinners in his community and thus makes visible the forgiveness of God.

The unity of the two narratives is shaped by the Evangelist—with the notice "and he got up and followed him" concluding the first narrative and the second connected to the first with a simple "and."

The time of the meal is not given so it is not evident why one should think of a direct succession of events. The change of scene from the tax booth of Levi

(verse 14) to the house in which "many tax collectors and sinners were sitting with Jesus and his disciples" is not spelled out. It is to be understood from the relationship set up in the narratives.

In whose house does the meal take place? When the two narratives are taken as a unity, the house is taken to be that of Levi. But when the emphasis is on the second narrative, it is natural to think of the house as that of Jesus.

For the first time the disciples of Jesus are mentioned. Their unexpected entry is made clear in the sentence "and there were many who followed him," a redactional statement of the Evangelist. Just as unexpected is the "scribes of the Pharisees" as opponents of Jesus. And it remains unclear when and where they direct their questions to the disciples.

We have here a combination of the paradigm and the controversy dialogue. In his example of a form-critical analysis, Heinrich Zimmerman notes the marks of the paradigm in the narrative of Levi's call: the rounding off of the narrative, its brevity and simplicity, its style of construction, the clear impression of the word of Jesus, and finally its conclusion and the simple exemplary action. It is a paradigm showing how the Lord calls and indicating what the one who is called is to do. Thereby the original *Sitz im Leben* of the narrative is indicated.⁴⁷ The second narrative is to be defined formally as a controversy dialogue. That is, it contains the report of a controversy of Jesus with his opponents, which is resolved through a definite act. That act is the sharing of the meal of Jesus with tax collectors and sinners. The opponents are characterized as scribes of the Pharisees. They take offense at the action of Jesus and challenge his disciples. Jesus himself pronounces that it is not the well who need the physician but the sick and affirms that he has not come to call the righteous but sinners.

The scheme of the controversy dialogue is easily seen: the unusual action of Jesus gives impetus to the challenging question of his opponents. Jesus' basic answer brings them to silence. The question of the opponents, "why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners" allows us to recognize that according to the opinion of his opponents Jesus should act otherwise than he has acted and shows that a complete separation from the opponents has not yet taken place.

Zimmerman cites D. Daube's conclusion: "The form dates from a time when it was vital to defend the ways of the new community—revolutionary actions—in a technical scholarly Pharisaic manner."⁴⁸ Zimmerman concludes: "Mark has formed the call of Levi and the meal with tax collectors as a unity. The originally

47. Heinrich Zimmerman, *Neutestamentliche Methodologie: Darstellung der historische Kritischen Methode* (Stuttgart: Kathologisches Bibelwerk, 1978), 184.

48. D. Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (Jordan lectures 1952, London: The Athlone, 1956), 175.

independent story of call is made into an introduction for the controversy dialogue that is to follow in which the word of Jesus carries the emphasis. In other words, out of the two originally independent narratives one paradigm has developed."⁴⁹

FOR FURTHER READING

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SOURCE CRITICISM OF ACTS

Joseph B. Tyson

In its simplest manifestation, source criticism is the study of a text with an effort to determine the sources used by the text's author. In some cases the alleged sources consist of other texts that are available to us, while in others the possible sources are hypothetical. For the most part, a source designates a written text, whether extant or not. But many practitioners of source criticism also include an author's use of traditions, which are usually thought to have existed orally. Others cite documents that may have influenced an author in the composition of the text.

Source criticism of the Synoptic Gospels is a classic illustration of the study of the interrelationships of extant documents. Since three Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—having substantial similarities are available to us, questions about their relationships are inevitable. Did all three Gospel writers draw on an earlier text that is no longer extant, or is one of the three a source for the other two, or is some other explanation to be sought? Source criticism of the Synoptic Gospels is a special study called the Synoptic Problem, a topic to be dealt with in another contribution to this *Festschrift*.¹

Here our attention will be focused on the source criticism of the Acts of the Apostles, where the literary situation is entirely different from that pertaining to the Synoptic Gospels. Acts is the earliest-known narrative of Christian beginnings, dealing with the activities of Jesus' followers in the years 30-60 C.E. Only the letters of Paul remain for us now as writings from the Jesus movement that deal with approximately the same period. Unless Paul's letters can be regarded as sources for data in Acts, source criticism of Acts is almost altogether confined to theories about alleged hypothetical texts and traditions.

It would seem obvious that the author of Acts would have used sources for his composition. If, as it is universally believed, this author also wrote the Gospel of Luke, it stands to reason that he would have used basically the same procedures

49. Zimmerman, *Neutestamentliche Methodenlehre*, 186.

1. See the essay by Mark Goodacre on pp. 177-92.