

# Theological Studies



## FORM-CRITICISM OF THE SYNOPTIC HEALING NARRATIVES

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#### I. THE PRINCIPLES OF FORM-CRITICISM

**E**ARLY in 1919 appeared a work by Martin Dibelius entitled, *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*. It was followed shortly by a book of Karl Ludwig Schmidt, *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu*. Two other Gospel studies, nearly complete at the time, were published early in 1921: *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*, by Rudolf Bultmann, and *Die synoptischen Streitgespräche*, by Martin Albertz. In these four

works, essentially independent of each other in their origin and hence representing a movement rather than a school, form-criticism of the synoptic Gospels began. The new theory soon found both friends and foes, and the literature on the subject grew rapidly. Because of its pretensions and its presuppositions, its successes and its failures, its strange mixture of new truths and old errors, form-criticism has stirred general interest. It has seemed, therefore, that a study of it in English would be useful to the Catholic Scripture student and apologete.

The scope and plan of the following articles may be indicated briefly. That accidental differences of opinion among form-critics may not obscure the fundamental principles of the method, only the theories of the two admitted leaders of the movement—Dibelius and Bultmann—will be considered in detail. The investigation will also be restricted to the first three Gospels, because from the start they have been the principal field of form-critical labors. A definite portion of the synoptic material must be selected, however, if a detailed and concrete study is to be possible. Because of their special suitability for form-analysis, in the opinion of the critics, and because of their intrinsic importance for the Catholic apologist and exegete, choice has been made of the miracles of healing. Accordingly, after this introductory article on the general principles of form-criticism, two articles will be devoted to considering the application of the method to the narrative portions of the Gospels, and particularly the healing stories. The most important argument of form-criticism, in general and in relation to narratives of healing, will then be considered in detail: the argument from analogy. For this purpose a form-analysis of all references to healing in the synoptic Gospels will be followed by a similar analysis of the general rabbinic and Hellenic healing tradition, the results being summarized in a schematic outline in the concluding article.

#### A. THE RISE OF FORM CRITICISM

At the end of the nineteenth century, rationalist critics generally agreed that the solution of the synoptic problem was to be found in the "Two-Document Hypothesis." According to

this theory, the mutual relationships of the first three Gospels—their strange *concordia discors* in content and wording—could be explained by ascribing to Matthew and Luke two common sources: for the narrative material, the Gospel of Mark; for the rest, a postulated but otherwise unknown collection of the sayings of Jesus, referred to as the *Logia* or *Q* (*Quelle*). Numerous opinions were advanced regarding the details of this general hypothesis, the use of other sources by Matthew and Luke, the existence of a primitive Mark or *Urmarkus* and of an earlier form of *Q*, the relationship between Mark and *Q*, the manner in which each evangelist employed his sources. Despite sharp differences of opinion on these important points, the hypothesis won general acceptance. The critics concluded that in the Gospel of Mark could be found an accurate historical outline of the life of Jesus, and they devoted their energies less to investigation of sources and more to a study of the development of Jesus' career, especially His "Messianic consciousness" and its gradual unveiling.

Their conviction of the general historicity of Mark was shaken by the works of Wrede and Wellhausen. In studying the "Messianic secret",<sup>1</sup> Wrede came to the conclusion that though the author of Mark had genuine historical material at his disposal, he grouped and interpreted it in accordance with his own dogmatic ideas and the beliefs of the Christian community. Tradition must henceforth be distinguished from the evangelist's redaction; the framework of Mark could no longer be considered trustworthy. The reaction of the majority of critics was a renewed effort to analyze the sources and uncover strata of historical validity. There was another, less widespread tendency, however, to solve the problem by analysis of the Gospel material as we have it, without further recourse to source-hypotheses. This tendency, which has culminated in form-criticism, was influenced from the first by the commentaries of Wellhausen.<sup>2</sup> One of its fundamental principles has

<sup>1</sup>W. Wrede. *Das Messias-Geheimnis in den Evangelien*. (Göttingen. 1901.)

<sup>2</sup>J. Wellhausen. *Das Evangelium Matthaei*<sup>2</sup>. (Berlin. 1914); *Das Evangelium Marci*<sup>2</sup>. (Berlin. 1909); *Das Evangelium Lucae*. (Berlin. 1904). On the recent trends in biblical studies which have led to form-criticism, cf. R. Bultmann. "The New Approach to the Synoptic Problem." [*Jour. Rel.* 6 (1926) 337-344.]

been his conclusion that in the Gospels we have an historical picture not of Jesus Himself, but only of the concept of Jesus which prevailed in the primitive community. Tradition fashioned and transmitted, as words of Jesus, ideas actually arising from the faith of the community.

The older such traditions were, the more faithfully they would portray the spirit of Jesus still active among the first Christians. But before separating the layers of tradition created by the community, it was necessary to distinguish the tradition itself from the editorial redaction of the evangelists. K. L. Schmidt undertook this task for Mark, in his book on the framework of the history of Jesus.<sup>3</sup> Examining the individual units of the Gospel material and the transitions that bind them together, he concluded that the units themselves existed in definite, fixed form prior to the composition of the Gospels. The framework of the history of Jesus was a creation of the evangelist, offering neither chronological nor geographical details for an historical life of Jesus. The ground was therefore clear for a study of the form of the individual units of tradition.

The method employed by a number of investigators of this problem has come to be known as *Formgeschichte* or form-criticism.<sup>4</sup> It aims to distinguish earlier and later strata among the single units of tradition—among the miracle narratives, for example, or the disputes or parables or prophecies. It also aims to evaluate the historical worth of the units by discovering their primitive form, i.e., the style and structure of the story or discourse before the writing of the Gospels. It

<sup>3</sup>K. Schmidt. *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu*. (Berlin. 1919) Cf. p. 317 for a short summary of his conclusions.

<sup>4</sup>F. Braun. *Où en est le problème de Jésus?* (Brussels. 1932) p. 217, speaks of "ce nom intraduisible" and always refers to it as "la 'formgeschichtliche Schule.'" H. Pinard de la Boulaye. *L'Etude comparée des religions*<sup>2</sup>. (Paris. 1929) II, 136f, calls it "la méthode morphologique." F. Grant. *Form Criticism* (New York. 1934) has indicated the most acceptable English equivalent in his title, though he also speaks of "form-historical" in the course of his work. K. Grobel. *Formgeschichte und synoptische Quellenanalyse*. (Göttingen. 1937) p. 125, n. 2, suggests "category-criticism" as a better English term, thus preferring the "Gattungsgeschichte" of R. Bultmann. "Evangelien, gattungsgeschichtlich (formgeschichtlich)." (*Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*<sup>2</sup>. II, 418) Dibelius coined the name "Formgeschichte," though E. Nordens's book *Agnostos Theos* (Leipzig. 1913) had as subtitle: "Untersuchungen zur Formengeschichte religiöser Rede."

is a method that was applied to the Old Testament by Herman Gunkel.<sup>5</sup> In logical dependence on the introductory work of Schmidt, the method was independently presented by two other scholars, Martin Dibelius of the University of Heidelberg, and Rudolf Bultmann of the University of Marburg, and applied to the synoptic Gospels in general.<sup>6</sup> Certain elements of the synoptic material were analyzed in the new manner by Albertz, Bertram, and Fiebig.<sup>7</sup> Literature concerning the movement grew rapidly and it soon found an industrious historian and critic in Eric Fascher.<sup>8</sup>

For our present purpose it will suffice to consider the method as presented by its two leading exponents, Dibelius and Bultmann. Dibelius considers the task of evaluating the Gospel tradition by means of the form-critical method to be twofold: investigation of the individual units to discover the laws that governed their formation and transmission, and establishment of the relationship between the resulting form-groups and the primitive Christian life.<sup>9</sup> Bultmann, in his investigation, aims to portray the history of the individual units of tradition in their origin, modification and crystallization in the Gospel; and he be-

<sup>5</sup>H. Gunkel. *Genesis*. (Tübingen. 1901); "Israelitische-jüdische Literatur." (in *Kultur der Gegenwart* I: VII. Berlin. 1906); "Formen der Hymnen." [*Theol. Rund.* 20 (1917) 265-304]; *Das Märchen im A.T.* (Tübingen. 1917) etc. On Old Testament form-criticism in general, cf. *Eucharisterion* (H. Gunkel . . . dargebracht. Göttingen. 1923) I: 1 "Zur Religion u. Literatur des A.T." A. Olrik. "Die epischen Gesetze der Volksdichtung." [*Ztschr. f. dtsh. Altertum.* 51 (1909) 1-12] may also be mentioned as influencing the new method considerably.

<sup>6</sup>M. Dibelius. *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*. (Tübingen. 1919. 2nd. ed. 1933); R. Bultmann. *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*. (Göttingen. 1921. 2nd ed. 1931) The second editions of these two books are always referred to in the present articles, and are cited simply as "Dibelius," "Bultmann."

<sup>7</sup>M. Albertz. *Die synoptischen Streitgespräche*. (Berlin. 1921); G. Bertram. *Die Leidensgeschichte Jesu und der Christuskult.* (Göttingen. 1922); P. Fiebig. *Der Erzählungsstil der Evangelien im Lichte des rabbinischen Erzählungsstils untersucht*. (Leipzig. 1925)

<sup>8</sup>E. Fascher. *Die formgeschichtliche Methode*. (Giessen. 1924). Cf. pp. 5-51 for a detailed study of the predecessors of form-criticism. On the application of form-critical method to books of the New Testament other than the synoptic Gospels, cf. M. Dibelius. "Zur Formgeschichte des N.T." [*Theol. Rund.* N.F. 3 (1931) 207-242]; "The Structure and Literary Character of the Gospels." [*Harv. Theol. Rev.* 20 (1927) 168f]

<sup>9</sup>Dibelius pp. 7f; "The Contribution of Germany to N.T. Science." [*Exp. Times* 42 (1930) 42]

believes that the primitive Christian tradition can only be understood when the form-categories are considered in their relation to motives active in the community's life.<sup>10</sup> Despite differences in the detailed working out of the method, we may, then, ascribe a common goal to these two authors: the study of the preliterate transmission of the Gospel material by analysis and classification of forms; and the interpretation of these forms in the light of the primitive Christian life. In this article we shall consider their general theory, which rests on five fundamental principles:

The synoptic Gospels are popular, sub-literary compositions.

They depict the faith of the primitive Christians who created them, not the historical Jesus.

They are artificial collections of isolated units of tradition.

These units originally had a definite literary form which can still be detected.

This form was created by a definite social situation.

In subsequent articles we shall examine the application of these principles to the synoptic narrative material, especially the healing stories.

#### B. FIVE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

**KLEINLITERATUR.** Form-criticism begins with the supposition that the synoptic Gospels belong essentially to *Kleinliteratur*. Dibelius understands by this term that sub-literary group of compositions which does not employ the artifices of artistic, literary writing and is not concerned with its public.<sup>11</sup> In such compositions the personality of the author retires into the background rendering the presentation anonymous in tone. Topography, chronology, and character portrayal are neglected. There is no effort to compose. On the other hand, the edifying or the marvelous is stressed over purely objective information, and the account has a social character, the compiler being merely a mouthpiece for the community or milieu.<sup>12</sup>

If this be *Kleinliteratur*, then we cannot accurately assign the synoptic Gospels to such a literary class. For if the Gospel of

<sup>10</sup>Bultmann pp. 4f; cf. Bultmann's article "Evangelien" (RGG<sup>2</sup> II 418)

<sup>11</sup>Dibelius p. 1; cf. Bultmann. "Evangelien" pp. 418f.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. K. Schmidt. *Die Stellung der Evangelien in der allgemeinen Literaturgeschichte*. (Göttingen. 1923) pp. 76-124.

Mark differs from the writings of Josephus, it differs also from the collections of rabbinic anecdotes.<sup>13</sup> The first three Gospels lack, it is true, the strongly personal tone of John. Direct character portrayal is rare; their biographical information has an apologetic aim; they were composed amid and for the primitive community; they do not belong to the stream of classical literature. But it is equally true that Matthew, Mark and Luke have each their distinctive personal traits; topographical and chronological details form a simple but definite framework; characters are concisely but vividly portrayed in speech and action; composition is subtle, Oriental, but purposeful, as is clear from the apologetic aim. Above all, the lack of originality, the indecision, the amorphous, repetitive, and digressive development characteristic of sub-literary compilations strongly influenced by the community, are noticeably absent from the Gospels. They are not to be classed with the fairy-tale and the saga and other products of *Volksliteratur*. The Gospel accounts form a separate class in the history of literature to which no other compositions can be accurately assigned. They may profitably be studied in regard to traits possessed in common with popular or classical literature. But it is methodologically false to assign them, *a priori*, to *Kleinliteratur* and then conclude from comparative study of popular traditions that, e.g., the topographical or chronological details are generally fictitious and have been added merely to enhance the interest of the tale.

COMMUNITY PRODUCTION. "One must clearly recognize, of course, that what we are dealing with in the tradition is, first of all, the earliest community. . . . It is through the medium of the community, accordingly, that the figure of the historical Jesus appears."<sup>14</sup> In these words Bultmann touches on the second fundamental principle of form-criticism: the Gospels record

<sup>13</sup>After comparing Mr. 10: 46-52 with an account of a miraculous rainfall procured by Honi the circle-drawer (M. Ta'anith III 8), Braun. . . . *le problème de Jésus* p. 247, concludes: "Autant d'un côté tout est spontané, autant de l'autre tout est morne et artificiel. Si le miracle de Honi Hameagueel relève de la *Kleinliteratur*, il faudrait en conclure, par suite de la diversité des genres que la guérison de l'aveugle Bartimée n'en fait pas partie."

<sup>14</sup>R. Bultmann. *Die Erforschung der synoptischen Evangelien*<sup>2</sup>. (Giessen. 1930) p. 32. (Translation: Grant. *Form Criticism* p. 60); cp. R. Bultmann. *Jesus* (Berlin. 1926) p. 15.

only the faith and concepts of the primitive community.<sup>15</sup> With this Dibelius agrees, indeed it mingles with his concept of the Gospels as *Kleinliteratur*.<sup>16</sup> By both authors, therefore, the interests of the community are considered a primary factor in the forming of the synoptic tradition. Current community issues found their way into the preaching material; foreign material was adapted to community aims; the most trustworthy details have only the sociological background of the early community for guarantee.<sup>17</sup> Sayings, scriptural proofs, whole scenes were fashioned by the community in the spirit of Jesus; the disciples of the Gospel narrative are really the members of the community in an idealized defense of their beliefs and practices.<sup>18</sup>

Naturally, the community exerted an influence in the shaping of the synoptic tradition and the writing of the Gospels. Out of the multitude of facts about the Son of Man, which were known to the first Christians, only a few have been preserved: in this selection, the practical interests of forming and instructing the first communities played a definite part. The writers who fixed that tradition lived in the primitive Christian milieu and in their Gospels they sought to answer the questions of those who had not been among the "original eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word" (L 1:2). One dominant interest, however, must be kept in mind: the intense desire of the early Christians to know this Jesus, in whose Name alone was salvation. Through neglect of this, the second principle of the form-critical method rests on a double error: a psychologically false theory of collective creation, and an historically inaccurate picture of the primitive Christian community.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup>"Glaubenbücher . . . aus dem Glauben über den Glauben für den Glauben gesammelt," is the terse summary of Grobel. *Formgeschichte* p. 9.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. M. Dibelius. "Zur Formgeschichte der Evangelien." [*Theol. Rund.* N.F. 1 (1929) 215]

<sup>17</sup>Dibelius pp. 29, 99, 60.

<sup>18</sup>Bultmann pp. 41, 51, 57, 50: *Die Erforschung* p. 27. Cp. O. Cullmann, an enthusiastic Gallic disciple of the theorists beyond the Rhine: "La tradition évangélique tout entière, a été créée et transformée par la communauté primitive." "Les récentes études sur la formation de la tradition évangélique." [*Rev. d'Hist. et Phil. Rel.* 5 (1925) 472]

<sup>19</sup>Dibelius writes, "Zur Formg. der Ev." p. 188, "Die formgeschichtliche Betrachtung ist also bewusst antiindividualistisch und soziologisch." For the sociological concept of religion which lies at the basis of many of the theories of form-criticism, especially the



Any strong religious movement, such as primitive Christianity, is pervaded by a warm and stimulating atmosphere. The contact of member with member within the group stirs and inspires to stronger feelings and a more vivid expression of them. But the common force is stimulating, not creative, expansive and not determinative. Its real but indecisive power can be pointed to definite activity only by an individual intellect and will: the choice of definite means to a definite end is always personal work. Thus though the synoptic Gospels show the stimulus of a believing milieu, they also indicate by their apologetic aims the guidance of a leader. They possess, moreover, a sober reality in tone that is far from the unchecked exuberance of community creation. Jesus' words are strong, original, revolutionary; His most extraordinary deeds are presented without complacency; in His personality He is as different from Clement or the author of the *Didache*, both members of the early Christian communities, as He is from men today. None of this can be reconciled with community creation.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed the theory of the collective origin of the synoptic tradition would suppose that there arose almost spontaneously an intense faith in the divinity of a crucified Jew, a complete and sublime system of dogma and moral, an organized cult life—all without the dominant personal influence of Jesus, or even of Paul, since it prevailed at Rome before his advent. Such a supposition contradicts everything we know of the primitive communities. The early Christians were men of varied race and culture and spiritual origin. Their new faith demanded of them complete submission to the moral precepts and absolute *latría* of the person of an obscure Jew, crucified by a Roman governor. It also required complete severance from age-old forms of worship in Israel and the fascinating mystery religions. Yet this

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*Völkerpsychologie* of Wilhelm Wundt and the more developed system of Emile Durkheim, cf. Pinard. *Etude comparée*, I 471-492.

<sup>20</sup>L. de Grandmaison. *Jesus Christ*. (Eng. transl. New York, 1935) I 196-202, treats the creative community clearly and succinctly. Cf. also I 50, II 117-121. Bultmann, in particular, credits the community with an extraordinarily fertile imagination and at the same time an astonishingly slight recollection of Jesus' life: cf. Fascher: *Die formg. Meth.* p. 135.

had been accomplished in places as far distant as Rome, in the short time between the death of Jesus and Paul's letter to his Roman brethren whom he had never seen. In other words, there was released, at the death of Jesus, a dynamic, *formative* influence which demolished, in a short time, the racial and spiritual barriers of centuries. This force was not a product of community activity: it produced the community. And it is this force itself, the message of salvation and not merely the community it formed, that reaches us in the Gospel pages.

From the beginning, the person of Jesus was the focal point of the whole Christian faith.<sup>21</sup> What He said, what He did, was of paramount importance simply because He said or did it. Hence it was imperative to possess the story of His teaching and His deeds, and for this it was necessary to have recourse to competent witnesses. It was as witnesses that the twelve began their mission,<sup>22</sup> and it was by eyewitnesses that the first narrative accounts were formed.<sup>23</sup> Gradually, the primitive catecheses and the summaries, such as were used by Peter and by Paul,<sup>24</sup> were presented with more detail and in longer groupings; the history of the Passion, the mission activity of John the Baptist together with the narrative of Jesus' baptism and temptation, the doctrine of Jesus on the relation of the Gospel and the Law, and so forth. Under the authoritative guidance of the twelve, especially St. Peter, an oral tradition was formed whose rhythmic Aramaic composition helped it to resist interpolation even in the Greek.<sup>25</sup> How early this tradition was committed to writing, we do not know, but throughout there reigned a concept of its inviolability. The teaching of Paul, even when given in the Spirit, was to be clearly distinguished from "the

<sup>21</sup>"Then Philip, opening his mouth, and beginning at this scripture, preached unto him Jesus." Acts 8: 35.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Acts 1:22 (Matthias chosen to be co-witness with the eleven); 2:32 (in Peter's first sermon); 3:15 (to the people in Solomon's porch); 4:20 (Peter and John before the council, etc. <sup>23</sup>L 1:2. <sup>24</sup>Acts 10:37-43; 1 Cor 15:3-7.

<sup>25</sup>Bultmann himself admits the extraordinary importance of Peter in the formation and stability of the most ancient community: cf. the quotation in Grandmaison. *Jesus Christ*. I 105, n. 1. On the hierarchical nature of the primitive Christian community, cf., *inter alia*, E. Ruffini. *La gerarchia della Chiesa negli Atti degli Apostoli e nelle lettere di S. Paolo*. (Rome. 1921); on the rhythm of the oral style in the New Testament, Grandmaison. *Jesus Christ*. I 203-213 and references there.

word of the Lord."<sup>26</sup> There was no anonymous, uncontrolled elaboration of community preoccupations and pagan anecdotes into an idealized conception of Jesus. A revolutionary message, that rapidly transformed Syrians, Greeks and Romans into Christians, was told in growing detail, under the supervision of the "witnesses" and their authoritative successors, from the first Pentecost sermon to the writing of the prolog of Luke. The synoptic Gospels, and the oral and written tradition they fixed in permanent form, represent Jesus—not merely the community that adored Him.<sup>27</sup>

ISOLATED UNITS. The third fundamental principle of the method called form-criticism is this: the synoptic Gospels are a collection of small, independent units, artificially linked together by the evangelists. So Dibelius: the composers of the synoptic Gospels were not authors in the literary sense but merely collectors; they joined together small units which already possessed formal completeness; their activity consisted, above all, in transmitting, grouping, reworking the materials they received; this material originally had independent existence, as isolated units.<sup>28</sup> Similarly Bultmann: "It may be seen quite clearly that the original tradition was made up almost entirely of brief single units [*Einzelstücke*] . . . and that almost all references to time and place which serve to connect up the single sections into a larger context are the editorial work of the

<sup>26</sup>1 Cor 7:10, 12. Cf. also: 1 Cor 15:2-15; 1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 1:13; Jude 17. Dibelius concedes that among the Hellenistic communities of the Diaspora, to which he ascribes the formation of the tradition, there was a respect for tradition which would prevent the missionary from altering it at random, though not for definite community purposes. Dibelius p. 29.

<sup>27</sup>L. Cerfaux. "L'histoire de la tradition synoptique." [*Rev. d'Hist. Eccl.* 28 (1932) 594] concludes thus: "La tradition n'est pas une vie de 'formes' littéraires; elle reste essentiellement, à travers des formes littéraires qui l'ont présentée aux premiers chrétiens, un témoignage." For an interesting treatment of the oral stadia of the tradition, cf. J. Huby. *L'évangile et les évangiles*. (Paris. 1929) pp. 9-64. A detailed study of the process by which our first three Gospels came into existence involves, of course, the whole synoptic problem, and cannot be considered here. Cf. M. Höpfl—B. Gut. *Introductionis in Sacros U.T. Libros Compendium* (III: Introductio Specialis in N.T.<sup>4</sup> Rome. 1938) III 146-185, for a brief summary.

<sup>28</sup>Dibelius pp. 57, 3, 2, 39, 41; cp. "Zur Formg. der Ev." pp. 187, 189 ("die mosaikartigen Charakter der 'ältesten Evangelien'"); "Jesus in Contemporary German Theology." [*Journ. Rel.* 11 (1931) 183]: "All connecting links in the Gospel narratives [are] . . . the work of compilers—of the evangelists or their predecessors."

evangelists.<sup>29</sup> While admitting readily that the evangelists employed various, independent sources in composing their Gospels, that the transition from scene to scene is frequently stereotyped and sometimes awkward, that Matthew, e.g., preferred topical arrangement to detailed chronological sequence, that the composition of all is simple and akin neither to the romantic biography nor the scientific history, we must still reject this concept of patchwork Gospels in which the rôle of the evangelist is restricted to that of a compiler.

The extreme attitude of form-critics in this regard rests, in part, on the theory of collective productivity discussed above. It neglects, once more, to consider the concrete, historical nature of the primitive community where eyewitnesses and their authoritative successors were present to preserve the tradition at every stage of its development, where the apocrypha were rejected and each Gospel had for its best guarantee a link with one or other of the Apostles. The principle also rests on an inaccurate appraisal of the synoptic tradition as a whole and the synoptic Gospels singly.

Were the Gospels mere compilations, their heterogeneous origin should be conspicuous in the tenor of their story. Yet it is a striking fact that in these three converging and diverging narratives their reigns a simple but unmistakable consistency; there is no contradiction in Jesus' doctrine nor in His deeds, no inconsistency of word with action; the story of His success and failure flows logically to its end; the description of the land in which He lived and the people whom he encountered—a land and people never seen by many of the early Christians—has never been convicted of inaccuracy. Such unanimity of presentation would be impossible in a collection of isolated units.

Because of the lack of artifice in its composition, the Gospel of Mark is especially selected for form-critical dissection.<sup>30</sup> Yet

<sup>29</sup>Bultmann. *Die Erforschung*. p. 13 (Grant. *Form Criticism* p. 25); indeed the aim of his large work on the history of the synoptic tradition is "ein Bild von der *Geschichte der Einzelstücke der Tradition* zu geben," Bultmann p. 4, Cp. "Evangelien" p. 420.

<sup>30</sup>Grandmaison. *Jesus Christ* I 48f justly complains of the arbitrary way in which Mark is taken as a norm, atomized, and then used to evaluate the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The synoptic tradition is a combination of all three accounts. It is unfair

this Gospel, with its plebeian vocabulary and unrhctorical constructions, with its Latinisms and its frequent Semitisms, with the vivid color of its details and the monotony of its transitions and narrative schemata, sufficiently indicates in its short compass that it is the work of one author throughout.<sup>31</sup> The unity of Matthew is still more evident. Here is a Semite, educated after the rabbinic tradition, who has subtly interleaved his narrative with five doctrinal discourses, each ending with a partly identical formula of transition,<sup>32</sup> while permeating all the story are such motifs as Jesus the Messiah, Jesus the Son of God, the Kingdom. This Gospel is also a personal product. In Luke both the choice of material and the style of the account permit us to discern one not of Jewish origin, talented and well educated, a competent historian in personal observation and the use of sources, endeavoring to write "an orderly account" in chronological sequence as far as his sources permit. Not unacquainted with medical terms and definitely under Pauline influence, the third Gospel is the most personal of the three, despite a manifest disinclination of its author to tamper with the material received. Neither in the single synoptic narratives, therefore, nor in the tradition as a whole, is there trace of numerous isolated units, artificially juxtaposed by a compiler. These Gospels are the personal products of individual authors.

FORM. The principles heretofore considered are, in substance, only the groundwork of form-criticism as laid by K. L. Schmidt. The next step, in which the form-theories of Gunkel are applied to New Testament research by Dibelius and Bultmann, is more distinctive of the new method. It may be summarized thus: primitive literary expression makes use of more or less fixed literary forms. This "form" or "style" consists not merely in the choice of words and construction of sentences,

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to measure it by the "primitive elements" of the simplest factor, even—indeed, especially— if that factor could be proved to be a mere compilation.

<sup>31</sup>For detailed analysis of the unity and style of Mark, cf. M. Lagrange. *Évangile selon saint Marc*<sup>4</sup>. (Paris. 1929) pp. LXVII-CVII. Among Protestant critics defending the unity of Mark, may be mentioned C. Turner. "Marcan Usage." [*Journ. Theol. Stud.* 26-28 (1924-1927)] and *The Gospel according to St. Mark*. (London. 1931.) For others, cf. Braun . . . *le problème de Jésus* p. 254.

<sup>32</sup>Mt 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1. On the unity of Matthew cf. M. Lagrange. *Évangile selon saint Matthieu*. (Paris. 1923) pp. CXXIV-CXLVI.

but in the whole manner of presentation which constitutes a literary category, e.g., the dispute, the miracle story, the pointed saying, the discourse.<sup>33</sup> It is produced by the definite needs and vital manifestations of the community and steadily evolves, subject to definite internal laws that transcend the individual. Form-criticism endeavors by a study of these forms and their laws of development to establish the typical or primitive form of each category, e.g., the typical miracle story. These primitive forms are then used as norms: to shed light on the growth of the Gospel tradition in general, and even to estimate the historical value of individual passages by detecting secondary modifications of the primitive form.<sup>34</sup> For this purpose, the Gospel story is divided into brief single units (*Einzelstücke*) and these are classified according to various categories and sub-categories, each of which, as will be explained in the next step, is ascribed to a definite phase of the community life.<sup>35</sup>

There can be no doubt as to the existence of such forms in primitive as well as modern literature, and in studying the origin and evolution of these forms the influence of the milieu must be considered. New Testament research can with profit investigate the use of narrative and expository forms in the Gospels and it will be helped in this by a comparative study of the forms found in contemporary rabbinic and Hellenic literature. One phase of such labor must inevitably be a more or less detailed classification of the synoptic material and its parallels, accompanied by an analysis of their common traits and differences. It is essential, however, in the use of any method, to be fully aware of that method's limitations.

Even primitive literature, as Bultmann notes, makes use of only "more or less" fixed forms.<sup>36</sup> At best, then, we have no

<sup>33</sup>Dibelius p. 7; "die gesamte Vortragsart . . . die . . . konstitutiv für die Gattung ist." Cp. "Zur Formg. der Ev." p. 200. Fascher. *Die formg. Meth.* p. 210 distinguishes between style as meaning everything ornamental, and form as meaning everything constitutive, but the form-critics are less precise.

<sup>34</sup>Bultmann pp. 4f, 7; Dibelius pp. 1, 4, 7; "Jesus in Contemp. German Theol." p. 182.

<sup>35</sup>Concerning various systems of classification, cf. M. Goguel. "Une nouvelle école de critique évangélique" [*Rev. de l'Hist. des Rel.* 94 (1926 II) 128-145] On form-critical terminology, cf. Fascher. *Die formg. Meth.* pp. 187-207; Lagrange. *S. Matthieu* pp. CXXV-CXXVII.

<sup>36</sup>Cp. Bultmann. *Die Erforschung.* pp. 14, 18.

steadfast norm for measuring individual examples, that will exclude the subjective element if the critic attempts by form-analysis alone to define the historicity of an individual unit. Yet Dibelius and Bultmann have attempted this, not only regarding single units but even for single verses—introducing an arbitrary tendency into form-criticism much blamed by opponents of the method. This essential vagueness, rendering a detailed “typical form” or gage impossible, has been brought out more clearly by the fact that the two leading exponents of form-criticism developed their theories independently of each other. Beside the natural disagreement in terminology which this occasioned, it gave us an opportunity to test the method by comparing the results. Inevitably, in regard to individual units, Dibelius and Bultmann have disagreed. The very fact that literary forms, however primitive, are only *more or less* fixed, renders rigid classification and its concomitant conclusions unattainable.

There is another difficulty inherent in the method: the presence of *Mischformen* or “intermediate” forms, which exhibit traits common to two or more categories. Thus of eighteen “paradigms” or narrative examples, employed, according to his theory, in missionary preaching, Dibelius lists *ten* as being of less pure type (*minder reinen Typs*).<sup>37</sup> Bultmann recognizes some intermediate forms,<sup>38</sup> but usually prefers to eliminate the recalcitrant traits as secondary modifications of the original unit. In either case there is apparent the neglect of another limitation of the method. Not only are we dealing with forms only more or less fixed, but we have no *a priori* right to determine which of two forms is objectively the purer, i.e., more primitive. Simplicity is not an infallible guide, since it does not necessarily precede complexity. Thus the realistic novel or play of today is actually a development of—and reaction to—the romantic style of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, since we

<sup>37</sup>Dibelius p. 40. On intermediate forms in general, cf. “Zur Formg. der Ev.” pp. 202f. Goguel. “Une nouvelle école” p. 158, remarks: “Ce serait à peine un paradoxe que de dire qu’il n’y a que des *Mischformen*. La matière évangélique est, en tout cas, rebelle aux cadres dans lesquels on voudrait l’enfermer.”

<sup>38</sup>E.g. Mr 2:1-12; cf. Bultmann pp. 223, 38f.

are dealing with books to which the world has conceded at least a general historical validity, we may well question whether in such compositions strict simplicity of form would not be a sign of artifice. Human events from their very nature resist molding in pure literary forms; the events in Palestine were no exception.<sup>39</sup>

With these limitations of the method in mind, we may examine what means are at hand for study and classification of the forms. Bultmann observes that "two factors must be noted in a study of form: first, the stylistic pattern which prevails in a particular kind of utterance, such as folk-tales or riddles; and secondly, the laws conditioning the transmission of the literary fragment in either oral or written tradition."<sup>40</sup> For the Gospels, this may be done in three ways: by observing the modifications undergone by the material of Mark and Q in their reworking by Matthew and Luke; by provisionally reconstructing a literary form older than the one before us in the text, through the elimination of secondary developments; by the use of analogies both for the form of the individual elements and for the history of the tradition itself.<sup>41</sup>

The first way, observation of the modification of Mark and Q in Matthew and Luke, involves the form-critics in great difficulties. It not only implies an acceptance of the general outline of the Two-Document hypothesis as a basis for form-criticism—which admittedly introduces the uncertainties of divergent source-theories into an already delicate undertaking—but it presents as a norm for judging concrete developments, the at best hypothetical factor Q.<sup>42</sup> With Mark the critics are on

<sup>39</sup>Cp. L. Köhler. *Das formgeschichtliche Problem des N.T.* (Tübingen. 1927) p. 27; "Geschichtliche Erinnerungen widersetzen sich um ihrer Geschichtlichkeit willen, auch wenn diese getrübt ist, einer Umgestaltung in reine literarische Formen."

<sup>40</sup>Bultmann. "The New Approach" pp. 343f. <sup>41</sup>*Ibid.* p. 345; cp. *Die Erforschung* p. 15.

<sup>42</sup>Dibelius p. 8 speaks of it as "die nur postulierte Sammlung Q" and "ein völliges Rätsel" (p. 234). On p. 236 he says rightly: "In dieser wie in anderen Fragen müssen wir uns jedenfalls davor hüten, mit allzu grosser Selbstverständlichkeit von Q als von einer gesicherten Grösse zu reden. Solange wir dies ausser acht lassen, laufen wir Gefahr, mit der Quelle, die wir nicht kennen, ebenso sicher zu rechnen wie mit Markus, den wir vor uns sehen, und vergessen, dass wir es mit einer hypothetischen Grösse zu tun haben." Bultmann is less cautious: cf. *Die Erforschung* p. 10; "The New Approach" p. 337.



surer ground. The dependence of Luke, who "followed up carefully all things from the beginning" (Lk. 1:3), upon his predecessor Mark, is generally admitted<sup>43</sup> and the literary dependence of the Greek version of Matthew on Mark has been rather well established.<sup>44</sup> But the extent of this dependence is more difficult to determine and great care must be used in employing such dependence as a norm in concrete cases. Moreover, it is a well known fact that picturesque details—a sign of modification of the original form according to form-critical standards—are often more abundant in the Marcan version of a story than in the parallels in Luke and Matthew. Indeed, for an entire category of the Gospel narratives, Dibelius feels obliged to ascribe the more "primitive" style of Matthew to a modification of a modification found in Mark!<sup>45</sup> In general then, the deduction of the laws that governed the development of forms in the tradition prior to its fixation in the Gospels, by a comparison of Q or Mark with Matthew and Luke, may be said to be quite difficult, if not impossible.

For the second means, provisional reconstruction of an older literary form, Bultmann employs two principal criteria, besides those deduced from analogies. These are: a distinction between the earlier, Palestinian, and later, Hellenistic, developments of the form;<sup>46</sup> and the absence or presence of community interests in the saying or narrative.<sup>47</sup> The Palestinian influence is detected in rabbinic modes of debate, in the nature of the community problem that is expressed in a passage and the manner of its solution,<sup>48</sup> in Palestinian coloring of the tale.<sup>49</sup> Hellenistic origin is generally deduced from a study of analogies, especially regard-

<sup>43</sup>Cf. M. Lagrange. *Évangile selon saint Luc*. (Paris. 1921) pp. XLVIII-LXVIII.

<sup>44</sup>Cf. Lagrange. *S. Matthieu*. pp. XXXII-XLIII; Grandmaison. *Jésus Christ* I 116f.

<sup>45</sup>Cf. Dibelius p. 74.

<sup>46</sup>Bultmann. *Die Erforschung* p. 9; cp "Evangelien" p. 420.

<sup>47</sup>Thus an instruction by Jesus, or "*Schulgespräch*," is more likely to contain a kernel of historicity, "je weniger in ihm ein bestimmtes Interesse der Gemeinde zum Ausdruck kommt." Bultmann p. 57.

<sup>48</sup>Bultmann pp. 49f, 63; "Evangelien" p. 420.

<sup>49</sup>E.g. the comparison of Jesus' activity with that of Jewish exorcists in Mt 12:27f; the "Show thyself to the priest" of Mr 1:44. Bultmann feels, however, that similar stories, e.g. L 17:14 (the ten lepers), are only Hellenistic variants of a Palestinian pattern; that Semitic turns of style and words such as "Talitha, cum" (Mr 5:41) prove nothing: cf. Bultmann pp. 254f.

ing the miracle accounts.<sup>50</sup> The difficulty of such distinctions is rightly stressed by Köhler.<sup>51</sup> Indeed for such a criterion to be accurate, the influence of Hellenistic culture in the Palestinian milieu would have to be taken into account, yet this influence cannot be gaged with any satisfactory precision, and we know little of the internal character of the primitive Jewish as distinct from Greek communities.<sup>52</sup> When, therefore, Bultmann attempts to assign a saying of Jesus to the Palestinian tradition and its setting to Hellenistic ground,<sup>53</sup> an objective criterion has degenerated into subjective preference. As for the second criterion for provisionally reconstructing more primitive forms, i.e., community interests, it rests on the discredited theory of a creative community. The force of the Gospel tradition shaped the interests of the community—not vice versa.

Of the three means listed above for discerning stylistic patterns and the laws that govern their formation and transmission, only the study of analogies offers a practical, objective norm. In subsequent articles, therefore, a detailed investigation will be made of such analogies in a concrete case, *scil.*, healing narratives, admittedly a most satisfactory proving ground.<sup>54</sup> Meanwhile, some general observations on the use of analogies in form-criticism should be presented here.

The first is this: though there are numerous analogies for the various individual forms found in the Gospels, there is no parallel to the transmission of the tradition as a whole. The best comparison Dibelius can find is a collection of sayings and anec-

<sup>50</sup>Bultmann p. 255. On Bultmann's concept of the differences between Hellenistic and Palestinian Christianity, cf. his "Urchristentum u. Religionsgeschichte." [*Theol. Rund.* N.F. 4 (1932) 3f]. He champions, in general, the doctrine of W. Bousset in his *Kyrios Christos*<sup>2</sup>. (Göttingen. 1921): in Palestine there was an eschatological sect in the midst of Jewry; Hellenistic Christianity was a new religion, a cult-community in the framework of the mystery groups.

<sup>51</sup>Köhler. *Das formg. Probl.* p. 16.

<sup>52</sup>Dibelius, who himself believes that the formation of the tradition was preeminently Hellenistic, notes rightly: "Aber von der christlichen Gemeinden Palästinas wissen wir wenig und von ihrem Überlieferungsbesitz ist uns unmittelbar, d.h. in aramäischer Sprache, überhaupt nichts erhalten. Ihr Anteil an dem Überlieferungs-Vorgang kann höchstens durch Rückschluss bestimmt, nicht aber von vornherein festgestellt werden." Dibelius p. 27.

<sup>53</sup>E.g. Bultmann p. 64.

<sup>54</sup>Cf. Bultmann. *Die Erforschung* p. 18, and the detailed use of such analogies by both Dibelius and Bultmann.

dotes concerning the Fathers of the desert, which is known as the *Apophthegmata Patrum*.<sup>55</sup> Here, as in the Gospels, he discerns isolated units gathered soon after their origin, fixed in non-literary fashion, and in a tongue foreign to the tradition itself—the Fathers spoke Coptic, even as Jesus spoke Aramaic, but both traditions were crystallized in Greek. However, the differences, many of which are admitted by Dibelius, so far outweigh the similarity as to render the analogy practically unemployable. To begin with, the Gospels are not mere collections of independent units. This has been proved above and it is confirmed precisely by a comparison with the *Apophthegmata*: the latter lack unity so completely that we find the Greek collection ordering its material according to an alphabetical list of the Fathers and the dependent Latin collection arranging its units under subject headings.<sup>56</sup> Moreover the tradition concerning the Fathers took about 100 years to form, and some of its anecdotes and sayings are still older, as Dibelius admits. Its formation had no central, authoritative control. It was the work of many, independent transmitters, some of whom are named<sup>57</sup>. It was concerned with not one but several heroes. Above all, the message of this tradition did not form a new religious movement; it was merely the flowering of one already formed. The formation and transmission of the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, therefore, does not compare with that of the synoptic tradition and since this is the best analogy Dibelius can adduce, we may conclude that there is no real parallel for the transmission of the Gospel tradition as a whole.<sup>58</sup>

This conclusion is confirmed by the use made of analogies by Bultmann. It is true that he speaks of a "certain orderliness in change by which a body of tradition is always controlled in

<sup>55</sup>Dibelius p. 173: "Bei keiner der sonst hier untersuchten Analogien ist der Traditionsprozess so kurz befristet und so gut zu übersehen; und gerade er bietet die wesentlichsten Ähnlichkeiten mit der Überlieferungsgeschichte des Evangelienstoffes." The collections are contained in MPG 65:71-440; MPL 73:851-1066.

<sup>56</sup>The Greek collection begins with Abbot Antonius and ends with Abbot Or. The Latin collection is presented under such headings as "De profectu Patrum," "De Quieté," "De Compunctione," etc.

<sup>57</sup>E.g. MPG 65: 357: "Abbot Joseph narrated that Abbot Isaac said, 'I was seated once beside Abbas Poimen . . .'" (cited by Dibelius p. 117 n. 2).

<sup>58</sup>Dibelius' observations on the tradition at Epidauros will be considered in a later article.

its growth" and "the laws which govern literary transmission," e.g., a tendency to describe in ever greater detail, to introduce names, to employ direct instead of indirect discourse, to present certain characters always in the rôle of adversary<sup>59</sup>—but he argues to these mainly from a comparison of Matthew and Luke with Mark and Q (which at times proves refractory) and from provisional construction of a primitive type. Analogies are employed rather to determine the typical stylistic pattern for individual categories, e.g., the healing story, and, to a lesser extent, to indicate how such primitive forms have been changed in subsequent apocryphal sources. It is evident, therefore, that the use of analogies in form-criticism is confined to a comparison of details in the Gospel tradition with details in other literatures.<sup>60</sup>

This fact occasions a second observation regarding the use of analogy for analysis of form. Our conclusions will always be misleading unless the individual stories are viewed in their general setting; as there is no parallel to the Gospel tradition as a whole, so there is no adequate parallel to any part of it.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, analogies must not be gathered at random from milieux that have nothing in common with primitive Christianity—Buddhism, modern Germany. They must be analyzed completely: the differences as well as the similarities. The general tone must be observed as well as the individual details. Mere analogy must not be considered a proof of dependence—a fault which Dibelius and Bultmann generally avoid; nor still less an argument against historicity—a fault to which Bultmann particularly succumbs.<sup>62</sup> One further observation may be made here which applies not only to the use of analogies but to the

<sup>59</sup>Bultmann. *Die Erforschung* pp. 15-18; "The New Approach" p. 345.

<sup>60</sup>After considering various traditions from Aesop's fables to Franciscan legends and from Jewish apocalyptic literature to Doctor Faust, Bultmann admits: "Mir scheint, so sehr wir zum Verständnis der Einzelstücke der synoptischen Tradition der Analogien bedürfen, so wenig für das Evangelium als Ganzes. Die etwa vorhandenen Analogien lassen nur die Eigenart des Evangeliums um so deutlicher hervortreten." Bultmann pp. 398f.

<sup>61</sup>Pinard. *Etude comparée* II 137, observes: "Les 'lois de genres' étant dérogées de la généralité des cas, en des genres où l'abus est fréquent, l'abus passera aisément pour la règle."

<sup>62</sup>Cp. Köhler. *Das formg. Probl.* p. 37: "Eine Heilung ist nicht deshalb ungeschichtlich, weil sie Parallelen hat." On the precautions necessary in the use of analogies cf. Pinard. *Etude comparée* II 340f.

whole process of form-analysis which we have been considering. Such labor is essentially only dissection. At its end we have the fragments of the mosaic, the threads of the tapestry, the bones and tissues of the cadaver neatly arranged and labeled. We have learned much, but while we learned, the living reality of the whole has disappeared. It is only when we consider the Gospels in their organic totality, vitalized by the message and personality of Jesus, that our knowledge ceases to be sterile.

*SITZ IM LEBEN* Bultmann and Dibelius agree that the description and classification of forms is but one part of the task undertaken by form-criticism. They maintain that since there exists a relationship between the different literary species produced in a community and the various functions of the community life, this relationship can be detected and the historico-social situation which created a definite form to satisfy a definite need can be determined. Briefly, to each form-category can be assigned its corresponding *Sitz im Leben*.<sup>63</sup> This is the other major thesis proper to the new method and the last of the fundamental principles which we have been considering.

This *Sitz im Leben*—the phrase, originated by Gunkel, is quite untranslatable—is not a single historical occurrence, but a typical, permanent sociological condition in the life of the community: it may be cult in its various manifestations, toil, war, the hunt. In regard to it, form-criticism asks a twofold question. What literary species are possible or probable in the social situations of primitive Christian life? To what definite phases of that life are the species found by study of the text to be referred? Dibelius seeks the answer to the first question, by what he terms the constructive method: establishing a definite, fundamental *Sitz im Leben* for primitive Christian life and then seeking in the Gospel for literary forms that correspond to it.<sup>64</sup> Bultmann prefers to answer the second question by the analytic method, concluding from the literary species discovered in the text to the phases of community life that created them. In

<sup>63</sup>Dibelius p. 7; "Zur Formg. der Ev." p. 212. Bultmann p. 4; "Evangelien" p. 418.

<sup>64</sup>In "Rabbinische u. evangelische Erzählungen." [*Theol. Blätter* 11 (1932) 1] however, he advocates the analytic method. Cp. also, "The Structure and Lit. Char. of the Gospels" p. 156.

theory, each method has advantages and defects. In practice, however, neither author follows his plan consistently. Dibelius portrays the community life according to his analysis of form and Bultmann develops his categories according to his concept of community life.<sup>65</sup> The result is a methodological circle<sup>66</sup> which is legitimate *in se*—form and function being correlative should be mutually explanatory—but which tends to a neglect of solid proof for either form or *Sitz im Leben*. Thus Dibelius classifies certain passages as paradigms (examples) and links them to the primitive preaching—yet fails to establish either that the form of these passages indicates their use in preaching or that the primitive preaching employed this type of illustration. Similarly, Bultmann interprets the synoptic controversies as products of community debate, without proving community discussion on these specific points or demonstrating that Jesus' arguments with the Pharisees are only literary creations and not actual events. This methodology may explain in part the contradictory conclusions of Dibelius and Bultmann as to the concrete *Sitz im Leben* of certain categories.<sup>67</sup>

Beside this weakness in the practical determination of the correspondence of form to *Sitz im Leben*, the principle itself has several faults. First of all, it depends for much of its value on the supposition of uncontrolled, community creation—which did not occur in the development of the Gospel tradition. Again, there is the problem of intermediate forms: to what *Sitz im Leben* are they to be assigned? If to a complex community-situation, as Bultmann believes, why may not such situations obtain in regard to other, simpler forms? Indeed there is no

<sup>65</sup>Bultmann p. 6: "Sowenig Dibelius eine deutliche Vorstellung von den Motiven des Gemeindelebens gewonnen hat, ohne dass er schon formale Beobachtungen gemacht hätte, so sehr schwebt mir bei meinen Analysen ein freilich noch vorläufiges Bild von der urchristlichen Gemeinde vor . . ." Cp. Dibelius p. 38. On the obscurity resulting from this procedure, cf. Fascher. *Die formg. Meth.* pp. 53, 57.

<sup>66</sup>Bultmann p. 5: "Wesentlich ist aber die Einsicht, dass es sich bei der formgeschichtlichen Arbeit, grundsätzlich nicht anders als bei aller historischen Arbeit, um einen *Zirkel* handelt. Aus den Formen der literarischen Überlieferung soll auf die Motive des Gemeinschaftslebens zurückgeschlossen werden, und aus dem Gemeinschaftsleben heraus sollen die Formen verständlich gemacht werden."

<sup>67</sup>Thus Mr 2:1-12; 3:1-6; L 14:1-6 (all healing accounts) are depicted by Bultmann as a product of community debate, by Dibelius as receiving their form in missionary preaching.

objective reason why several motives might not mingle in any given passage<sup>68</sup> and then the whole principle that from the form one can deduce the situation breaks down, for it is built upon the relation of a definite form to a definite *Sitz im Leben*. Moreover, both Dibelius and Bultmann admit that forms may be retained through mere custom, in other words, that traditional stylistic patterns are often employed as technical aids to narration. In such cases—and they are difficult to detect—there is obviously no dependence of form on *Sitz im Leben*. We must conclude then, that though a correlative study of the Gospel forms and primitive Christian life may well be profitable for New Testament research, it cannot indicate more than general trends. It cannot tell us, at this late date, why many of the forms were chosen nor whether there ever was a definite relation between them and the life of the community. To postulate such a definite relationship and then employ it as a measure of the historicity of individual passages—as Bultmann and Dibelius have done—has been severely and justly criticised as a serious defect in the method.<sup>69</sup>

Of the various concrete *Sitze im Leben* advanced by these two form-critics, those which concern healing narratives will be considered in the following chapters.<sup>70</sup> Meanwhile we may note one startling omission. Neither Bultmann nor Dibelius will admit as *Sitz im Leben* for any of the categories of Gospel forms, what Köhler terms "*das biographische Interesse*."<sup>71</sup> Interest in the person of Jesus, a desire to know the life of Jesus—these are assigned no part in that life of the primitive Christians which formed the Gospel! Though they lived in

<sup>68</sup>Goguel. "Une nouvelle école" p. 159: "On ne voit pas au nom de quel principe on pourrait affirmer que tel morceau qui pouvait être utilisé pour la prédication ne pouvait pas l'être en même temps pour l'instruction, pour la controverse ou pour la mission et peut-être aussi tout simplement pour la satisfaction de l'imagination et de la curiosité pieuses." Similarly Köhler. *Das formg. Probl.* p. 34.

<sup>69</sup>E.g. Köhler. *Das formg. Probl.* p. 26.

<sup>70</sup>On cult as *Sitz im Leben* (a theory much stressed by Bertram. *Die Leidensgeschichte*) cf. Bultmann. *Die Erforschung* p. 34, "Evangelien" p. 419; Fascher. *Die formg. Meth.* pp. 214-220; Grandmaison. *Jesus Christ* I 52.

<sup>71</sup>Köhler. *Das formg. Probl.* p. 34: "Die Synoptiker sind beides: die Überlieferung dessen, was aus der Erinnerung an Taten und Worte Jesu dazu diene das christliche Leben zu gestalten, und die Überlieferung dessen, was das biographische Interesse befriedigte." Cp. Fascher. *Die formg. Meth.* pp. 221ff.

obedience to His law and broke bread in His memory, though they died with hope of salvation in His Name, though all their views of this world and the next were shaped by men who had walked and talked with Him—it was not “biographical interest” that impelled them to write His story or any significant part of it. Such an hypothesis is as significant as the reasons advanced in its defense. Dibelius’ argument is arbitrary and “constructive”: the primitive community was too concerned with an immediate *parousia* to busy themselves disseminating recollections of the past.<sup>72</sup> Bultmann’s argument is arbitrary and “analytic”: form analogies show that the material is the product of Jewish or Greek community creation according to community interests. Both decisively reject the possibility of historical recollections preserved by the community merely from biographical interest.<sup>73</sup> Such a position is completely indefensible. Despite any “apocalyptic enthusiasm,” the early Christians did tell the story of the past.<sup>74</sup> And whatever Semitic turns of thought or Hellenic phrasing that story may contain, it still tells of Jesus of Nazareth, not of the problems of primitive Christianity—whose ritual and organization and evolved theology are absent from its pages. Without deep interest in the personal history of Jesus neither the Gospel nor the community itself can be conceived. If such an extreme, radical attitude as this is necessary for form-criticism, the method stands indicted from the beginning.

<sup>72</sup>“Eine Gemeinde unliterarischer Menschen, die heute oder morgen das Weltende erwartet, hat zur Produktion von Büchern weder Fähigkeit noch Neigung.” Dibelius p. 9.

<sup>73</sup>Bultmann p. 40 n. 2; *Die Erforschung* p. 34. Dibelius p. 12 n. 1; “Zur Formg. der Ev.” pp. 197f; “The Structure and Lit. Char. of the Gospels” p. 161.—In regard to this attitude, E. Florit. *Il metodo della “storia delle forme.”* (Rome. 1935) p. 47 rightly notes that it renders psychologically unintelligible the Christians’ evident love for Jesus: “Ignoti nulla cupido . . . ad ignotum nulla oratio.”

<sup>74</sup>Regarding primitive Christian ideas about the *parousia*, cf. Grandmaison. *Jesus Christ* III 82-88 regarding the pertinent Gospel texts; J. Colon. “Paul.” (*Dict. Theol. Cath.* XI, 2:2388-2409) and E. Allo. *Première Epître aux Corinthiens.* (Paris. 1934) pp. 451-454 for the attitude of Paul; cf. also J. Chaîne. “Parousie.” (*Dict. Theol. Cath.* XI, 2:2043-2054). The leaders of the community clearly distinguished their uncertainty as to the hour, and their desire of its speedy coming, from a belief in its imminent arrival—and the formation of the Gospel tradition was in the hands of these authoritative leaders.



## C. SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

**HISTORICAL TESTIMONY.** Such is form-criticism in the broad outlines of its general theory. In the following articles we shall consider some of its specific applications. Meanwhile three observations should be made. The first regards method. In any book that seeks to arrive at an understanding of the synoptic Gospels in their transmission and composition (Dibelius) or to portray the history of the synoptic tradition from its origin to its crystallization in the Gospels (Bultmann), some place should be given to historical testimony. Yet it is totally neglected.<sup>75</sup> The information furnished by Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen and the Muratorian fragment, concerning the traditional origin of the Gospels, is passed by without reference. Justin's observation that the Gospels are Apostolic memoirs,<sup>76</sup> is mentioned merely to reject it as misleading.<sup>77</sup> The testimony of Papias, our oldest explicit witness to the authorship of Matthew and Mark,<sup>78</sup> fares little better. Bultmann refers to his description of Mark as the interpreter of Peter—as a source of error; Dibelius comments on his testimony as to the authorship of Matthew and Mark, but concludes that he has been influenced by the (false) view of the sub-apostolic age, namely, that the evangelists were really authors.<sup>79</sup> And this is all—a strange lack of scientific completeness and perspective. As Fr. Grandmaison remarks, "it is the wisest method in these matters to prefer an ounce of ancient information which is authentic to a bookful of learned conjectures."<sup>80</sup>

**THE TIME ELEMENT.** Our second observation also concerns method. In developing such an intricate theory as form-criticism from either the analytic or constructive viewpoint, one of the investigator's primary concerns should be to discover a suit-

<sup>75</sup>H. Dieckmann. "Die formgeschichtliche Methode u. ihre Anwendung auf die Auferstehungsberichte." [*Scholastik* 1 (1926) 389]: "Die Form wird zum alleinigen Kriterium der Echtheit, unter Missachtung der Zeugnisse und damit die Türe zur historischen Skepsis weit aufgemacht."

<sup>76</sup>*Apophnemonemata: Apologia* I 66 and elsewhere (MPG 6:429, 717 etc.)

<sup>77</sup>Bultmann p. 397; Dibelius p. 36.

<sup>78</sup>In Eusebius. *Ecclesiastical History* 3, 39 (MPG 20:296-300).

<sup>79</sup>Bultmann p. 1. Dibelius p. 234 n. 2; cp. "Zur Formg. der Ev." p. 189.

<sup>80</sup>*Jesus Christ* I 115.

able external "control" by which he can test his conclusions. Such a "control" is at hand for form-criticism of the Gospels. It consists in determining *the length of time* required for a tradition to evolve in the manner proposed. This is not extremely difficult. The natural impression that such an evolutionary process extends over a long span of years can be tested by a study of those "general laws governing popular narrative and tradition, such as stories and anecdotes,"<sup>81</sup> and particularly by considering the development of the rabbinic and Hellenic literatures so much employed in form-criticism for analogies of style. Yet form-critics have consistently neglected any precise statements on this point, and it is significant that Dibelius considers the formation of the *Apophthegmata Patrum* a good analogy precisely because it was accomplished in so short a time.<sup>82</sup> However, prescind from the centuries in which the Talmud was gradually formed and the two hundred years and more during which the tradition at Epidauros evolved,<sup>83</sup> let us take as the minimum the "hundred years or so" which Dibelius suggests regarding the *Apophthegmata Patrum*.

What corresponds to this in the synoptic tradition? First of all, two very definite facts: the formation began after the death of Jesus; it was substantially completed before the composition of Mark. Now the death of Jesus took place not earlier than the year 29/30, and the Gospel of Mark was probably written between 55 and 62, at any rate not after 70.<sup>84</sup> The formation of the synoptic tradition, however, had been completed prior to this: for according to the theory of form-criticism, Mark is merely a collection of units already existing in definite form,

<sup>81</sup>Bultmann. *Die Erforschung* p. 15.

<sup>82</sup>Dibelius p. 173.

<sup>83</sup>The transmission of interpretations of the Law existed in organized form since the time of 'Ezra—cf. H. Strack, *Einleitung in Talmud u. Midras*<sup>5</sup>. (Munich. 1921) pp. 6f—but the main evolution of our present Talmud took place between the time of Hillel (ca. 70 B.C.—10 A.D.) and the early sixth century A.D. (Strack. *Einleitung* pp. 8, 118, 71) The cult of Asklepios at Epidauros probably began in the sixth century B.C., since there was a filial foundation in Sikyon about 480 B.C. [cf. R. Herzog. *Die Wunderheilungen von Epidauros*. (Leipzig. 1931) pp. 36f] The present inscriptions, i.e. the main collection, are dated by experts as not later than 300 B.C. (*ibid.* p. 2). These two traditions are mentioned because, as will be seen in subsequent articles, they are the most used by form-critics for analogies to the healing stories.

<sup>84</sup>Höpf. *Compendium* III 75-78. Cp. A. Harnack. *Neue Untersuchungen zur Apostelgeschichte u. zur Abfassungszeit der synoptischen Evangelien*. (Leipzig. 1911) pp. 88, 92f: "Spätestens im 6. Jahrzehnt n. Chr."

and according to the unanimous tradition of antiquity, the Aramaic original of Matthew was the first of our canonical Gospels. Unfortunately we cannot date this first crystallization of the synoptic tradition with any satisfactory accuracy—somewhere between 50 and 60 seems the most probable opinion.<sup>85</sup> We do know, however, that before his captivity in 58, Paul had written to the Romans and Corinthians, the Thessalonians and Galatians, in a way that supposes on their part a detailed knowledge of the person of Jesus.<sup>86</sup> Considering both factors, therefore, we can conclude that the formative period of the synoptic tradition cannot be extended beyond the year 50. Moreover, the beginnings must have been slow: from the form-critical viewpoint because the postulated lack of biographical interest and the expectation of an imminent *parousia* had to be overcome by the rise of other motives, whether missionary activity or the interests of the growing community; historically, because the early persecution of Judea caused a temporary dispersion of the church of Jerusalem (*circa* 35/36; cf. Acts 8-9). We may conclude, therefore, that no more than fifteen years can be assigned to the active evolution of the synoptic tradition as understood by form-criticism.<sup>87</sup>

The importance of chronological considerations for the theories of Dibelius and Bultmann would seem therefore to be obvious. First of all, eyewitnesses of the events in question were still alive when the tradition had been completely formed: and among those eyewitnesses were bitter enemies of the new religious movement. Yet the tradition claimed to narrate a series of well known deeds and publicly taught doctrines at a time when false statements could, and would, be challenged. Secondly: despite its rapid growth in places as widely separated as Asia Minor, Greece and Italy, the tradition was formed so univocally that thirty years after the death of Jesus the Petrine

<sup>85</sup>Cf. Höpfl. *Compendium* III 44.

<sup>86</sup>Probable dates for the epistles are: 1 and 2 Thess: 51/52; Gal: 54; 1 and 2 Cor: 56/57; Rom: 58.

<sup>87</sup>Cp. Köhler. *Das formg. Probl.* p. 25: "Vielleicht führt die Erwägung, dass die Bildung der Tradition nicht unmittelbar nach der Auferstehung eingesetzt und nicht sogleich zur Bildung unserer Evangelien geführt haben wird, noch genauer in die Zeit von 40-50 nach Christus."

Gospel of Mark found instant acceptance in Rome.<sup>88</sup> Thirdly: the fact that the whole process took less than thirty years, and its essential part was accomplished in a decade and a half, finds no parallel in any tradition to which the synoptic Gospels have been compared. Here, then, in the time element, is a definite external control for testing the complicated theory of form-criticism. It is probably the most serious defect of their system, that Dibelius has not fully faced its implications and Bultmann has entirely neglected it.<sup>89</sup>

**THE RESULTS.** Our third observation concerns form-criticism's general results. Any method of Gospel research has as its goal a better knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth. What, then, has form-criticism contributed to a solution of "the problem of Jesus"? It seems well to indicate the general answer here, before taking up any detailed application of the method.

One of the form-critical principles treated above was this: the synoptic tradition does not portray Jesus but only the community's idea of Him. Such a principle may be variously understood. At best, it may be merely a poor expression of a well-known fact: the picture of Jesus as given in the Gospel pages is due to those who formed the tradition for the community, and who saw fit (i.e., were inspired by God) to record

<sup>88</sup>Clement of Alexandria, *Hypotyposes* to 1 Peter 5: in Eusebius' *Eccl. Hist.* 6:14 (MPG 20:552).

<sup>89</sup>Dibelius p. 294: "Der ganze Prozess der Ausbildung der evangelischen Tradition bis zum Markus-Evangelium hat sich dann also innerhalb von 40-50 Jahren vollzogen." Yet elsewhere he says: "Eine Spanne von über einem Menschenalter liegt zwischen Geschehen und Darstellen. Sodann: diese Darstellung verrät in keiner Weise, dass sie die Niederschrift von Augenzeugen ist . . . Ja, auch Augenzeugenberichte aus zweiter Hand scheinen hier nicht vorzuliegen": "Zur Formg. der Ev." p. 188. Cp. also "The Structure and Lit. Char. of the Gospels" p. 152, and "Rab. u. ev. Erzählungen" p. 5: "Die evangelische Tradition hat zu ihrer ersten Formwerdung ein Menschenalter gebraucht, zu ihrer schriftlichen Redaktion ein halbes bis drei Viertel Jahrhundert." Bultmann in his long and detailed study of the Gospel material (*Die Gesch. der syn. Trad.*) passes the question by. In *Die Erforschung* p. 7 (Grant. *Form Criticism* p. 15) he merely says: "The Gospel of Mark . . . was originally written in Greek; whether this was before the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 or soon after, it is impossible to say . . . The composition of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke may be placed in the period from 70-100 A.D., probably nearer 100 than 70." These vague, inaccurate statements are considered sufficient. Neither author stresses the rapid crystallization of the synoptic tradition in comparison with the slow formation of the rabbinic and Hellenic traditions, in which, otherwise, they so constantly seek analogies.

only this part of all they knew about the Savior.<sup>90</sup> At worst, such a principle might be an expression of the theories of the mythological school of Arthur Drews, that Jesus never actually existed.<sup>91</sup> Just slightly short of the latter extreme position stands the form-critical interpretation. While reconstructing the transmission of the synoptic material, form-critics have attempted to estimate whether it could have been transmitted with historical truthfulness. Their conclusions have been negative.<sup>92</sup> Though Dibelius and Schmidt have been more moderate in their attitude than has Bultmann, complete scepticism is none the less the logical result of their united labors. Bultmann is ruthless: we know nothing of the life and personality of Jesus; it makes no difference whether the message of the Gospels is truly His; the reader can mentally place quotation marks about His very name as being merely a symbol of an historical phenomenon.<sup>93</sup> Form-criticism's answer to the "problem of Jesus" is: insoluble.

In 1926 Bultmann published a book entitled *Jesus*. From the preface to this work we can gage the utterly negative results to which form-criticism has led one leading exponent of the

<sup>90</sup>On the position of form-criticism in regard to the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, cf. Florit. *II metodo* pp. 37-42, 50 n. 3.

<sup>91</sup>A. Drews, *Die Christusmythe*. (Iena. 1924). For other works by Drews, J. Robertson, W. Smith, cf. Braun . . . *le problème de Jésus* pp. 162-165. The fantastic theories of P. Couchoud were more recently presented in "The Historicity of Jesus." [*Hibb. Journ.* 37 (1939) 193-214]

<sup>92</sup>Bultmann. *Die Erforschung* p. 14 (Grant. *Form Criticism* p. 28): "The result is primarily negative . . . the whole framework of the history of Jesus must be viewed as an editorial construction . . . a whole series of typical scenes, which . . . we had looked upon as scenes in the life of Jesus must be viewed as creations of the evangelists." Cp. "The New Approach" p. 359; Köhler. *Das formg. Probl.* p. 24; Fascher. *Die formg. Meth.* p. 212. Yet in *Die Erforschung* p. 32, Bultmann writes: "By no means are we at the mercy of those who doubt or deny that Jesus ever lived." (!)

<sup>93</sup>Bultmann. *Jesus* p. 12: "Denn freilich bin ich der Meinung, dass wir vom Leben und von der Persönlichkeit Jesu so gut wie nichts mehr wissen können . . ."; p. 17: "Als der Träger dieser Gedanken wird uns von der Überlieferung Jesus genannt; nach überwiegender Wahrscheinlichkeit war er es wirklich. Sollte es anders gewesen sein, so ändert sich damit das, was in dieser Überlieferung gesagt ist, in keiner Weise"; *ibid.*: "Wer dieses 'Jesus' für sich immer in Anführungsstriche setzen und nur als abkürzende Bezeichnung für das geschichtliche Phänomen gelten lassen will . . . dem ist es unbenommen."—On the theology of Karl Barth, in which Bultmann has sought escape from the sceptical pessimism of his own conclusions, cf. the short bibliography in Braun . . . *le problème de Jésus* p. 227 n. 1.

method. In three pages the historical value of the Gospels is thus mercilessly dissected out of existence:

We know nothing of Jesus' life, only His message.

We possess this message only as it was presented by the community.

The Gospel of John is not a source of this presentation.

In the synoptic Gospels everything of Hellenistic origin is to be set aside.

Of the remainder, all that betrays community interests or advanced development is to be excluded.

The resultant oldest stratum was possibly the product of a complicated process no longer discernible.

It is questionable how far the picture of Jesus presented by the community in this oldest stratum is a true one.

The thought-content of the stratum is probably Jesus', but it makes no difference if it is not.<sup>94</sup>

It will suffice to record the terse comment on this passage made by another rationalist critic, Ludwig Köhler: "Es ist absolute Skepsis."<sup>95</sup> If we were to judge it by some of its fruits, the latest method of New Testament research would indeed stand condemned.

(to be continued)

<sup>94</sup>Bultmann. *Jesus* pp. 15ff.

<sup>95</sup>*Das formg. Probl.* p. 22; cf. p. 17. It is remarkable that after such savage demolition as that summarized above, Bultmann can write: "Es ist freilich zuzugeben, dass auch das Begreifen einfacher Dinge Schwierigkeiten machen kann, was dann aber nicht im Wesen der Dinge begründet ist, sondern darin, dass wir das einfache Sehen verlernt haben und zu sehr mit Voraussetzungen belastet sind. Dies ist in der Tat für unsere eigene zeitgeschichtliche Situation charakteristisch . . ." *Jesus* p. 18.

