

FORM-CRITICISM OF THE SYNOPTIC HEALING NARRATIVES

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II. PARADIGM AND APOTHEGM

THE serious defects in the general theory of form-criticism¹ will, naturally, vitiate its conclusions when it is applied to definite form-categories of the Gospels. However, form-criticism is essentially a method, and as such must be studied at work. Both Bultmann and Dibelius have applied their criteria to the whole field of the synoptic material, the former in great detail. Following the trend of recent rationalist criticism, they incline to ascribe more historical value to the sayings of Jesus than to His deeds.² This distinction is due in part to the hypothesis of a special collection of Jesus' sayings (the source Q), and in part to a recognition of the uniquely personal character of these discourses. The distinction is, of course, artificial, for some of Jesus' most striking sayings are intimately interwoven with the story of His deeds. It conveniently narrows the field, however, for the student of form-criticism who is interested in the general historicity of the Gospels. In the present articles we shall further circumscribe our investigation by considering only that particular group of narratives in which form-criticism is said to find its most satisfactory application: the stories of miracles;³ and because they form the bulk of the Gospel miracles, as also because the form-critics have devoted special attention to analyzing them, we shall select for our study one group of miracles: the healing narratives. In the classification adopted

¹The general theory of form-criticism was examined in the first article of this series: "The Principles of Form Criticism" [*Theol. Stud.* 2 (1941) 451-480.]

²M. Dibelius, *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*.² pp. 31ff.; R. Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*.² pp. 9, 51, and wherever a saying of Jesus is considered as (possibly) genuine while its narrative framework is rejected as artificial. (These two works are hereafter referred to simply as: Dibelius, Bultmann.)

³Cf. Bultmann. "The New Approach to the Synoptic Problem." p. 347. Regarding the Passion narrative, which defies all form-critical analysis, cf. E. Florit. *Il metodo della "storia delle forme"* pp. 67-159.

by Dibelius and Bultmann, most of these narratives have been ranged under two headings: Dibelius dividing them into paradigms and novellen, Bultmann into apothegms and miracle-stories. It seems best to consider successively the parallel categories of each author. We shall begin with the paradigm.

A. THE PARADIGM OF DIBELIUS

SITZ IM LEBEN. In Dibelius' opinion, the problem of the origin and nature of the synoptic tradition in the years between the death of Jesus and the writing of the first Gospel can best be solved by the constructive method, that is, by studying the conditions and functions of life in the first Christian communities. Supposing that in the circle of Jesus' disciples, His words and the stories of His life and death lived on, he asks what could cause men preoccupied with an imminent *parousia*, to busy themselves disseminating their recollections of the past. He finds the answer to his question in the prolog to the third Gospel: "Eyewitnesses and ministers of the word" (L 1:2): the first Christians, despite their indifference to future generations, felt that a missionary task had been assigned to them by Jesus. This prompted them to tell the story of His life, not in detail and out of biographical interest, but by repeating those memories which were full of power to awaken penance and win followers.⁴ Such stories were inevitably fashioned in those definite forms which could best stir hearts, convert the heathen, instruct the catechumens, exhort the assembled Christians. Thus for Dibelius, preaching, i.e. every possible type of Christian proclamation—missionary, cultural, catechetical—is the original *Sitz im Leben* of all tradition about Jesus.⁵

The first Christian missionaries, Dibelius believes, did not tell the life story of Jesus but merely proclaimed the salvation that had come through Him. The narrative portions of tradition, whether inserted in the preaching or presented in connection with it, served simply to vitalize their message. Examining the

⁴Dibelius. "Zur Formgeschichte der Evangelien" p. 190: "Die christliche Predigt geht auf das Ende dieser Welt."

⁵Dibelius pp. 9-13.

discourses related in the Acts of the Apostles and the summary employed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, he concludes to the early existence of a scheme for the presentation of this message. He further concludes that though there was a general interest in the history of the Passion and Resurrection, as being salvation in its accomplishment, the deeds of Jesus' earlier life were of but secondary importance for the preaching. If employed as illustrations, there was no need to speak of them in sequence or in detail: vividly told stories would only deflect the preacher from his goal. Such brief narratives were always subordinate to the message of salvation, and this fact determined their form. From their use as examples, Dibelius has named them *paradigms*.⁶

Their close connection with the early Christian preaching produced in the paradigms a narrative style remote from any expression of personal feeling but intensely preoccupied with the missionary aim: a style which Dibelius describes as "edifying." Moreover, because of their original use as examples, the primitive independent existence of the paradigms is still discernible. Finally, since they constitute the earliest form-category of the Gospel material, their purest type is to be found in what critics consider the oldest stratum in Mark, e.g. Mr 2:1-3:6, though even in Mark, because of the process of redaction, the purity of the type is sometimes obscured.⁷

EXAMPLES. Beside the Gospel of Mark, which offers the bulk of the material, some narratives from Luke may also be considered. The stories of the two blind men and the dumb possessed man in Mt 9:27ff. would be included, if Dibelius could feel certain of their originality; but he suspects that they are only compositions by the evangelists from current paradigm-motifs. In all, he finds eighteen narratives which more or less correspond to his expectations of the paradigm. Of these, eight represent the type with considerable purity, two of the eight being narratives of healing:

⁶Dibelius pp. 15-24. On the concept and ancient use of the word *paradigm*, cf. E. Fascher. *Die formgeschichtliche Methode* pp. 191-195.

⁷Dibelius pp. 35-39. On Dibelius' general theory concerning the growth of the synoptic tradition, cf. Lagrange. *S. Matthieu*⁴. pp. cxxix-cxxxiii.

The paralytic, Mr 2:1ff.

The man with the withered hand, Mr 3:1ff.⁸

Ten others he classifies as paradigms of less pure type, three of them being healing stories:

The possessed man in the synagogue, Mr 1:23ff.

The blind man near Jericho, Mr 10:46ff.

The man with dropsy, L 14:1ff.⁹

FORM. Having defined the *Sitz im Leben* of the paradigms as the early Christian preaching and having enumerated the eighteen examples which more or less meet his expectations of the primitive type, Dibelius now proceeds to analyze their form. He lists five characteristic traits of this category. The first is *external completeness*.¹⁰ The action is definitely circumscribed within the limits of the story: the essential mark of the paradigms' originally isolated existence. Hence, e.g., the healing of Peter's mother-in-law is not included here, since it forms an integral part of the account of a day's activity. Similarly, conclusions which indicate a close connection with other stories do not belong to the original form of the paradigm. Thus Mr 3:6: "And the Pharisees went out and straightway took counsel with the Herodians, how they might destroy Him," is a remark of the evangelist, intended to link not only the story of the man with the withered hand, but the whole section Mr 2:1—3:5 with the Passion. It is possible, indeed probable, that it has supplanted an original paradigmatic conclusion to the story. In like manner, the beginning of the narrative should also indicate its primitive isolation: the action commences without detailed introduction.¹¹

A second characteristic of the paradigm is *brevity and simplicity*. Only short passages could be introduced into the sermon; only simple description, confining itself to essentials, could

⁸Dibelius p. 40. The other narratives are: Mr. 2:18ff.; 2:23ff.; 3:31ff.; 10:13ff.; 12:13ff.; 14:3ff.

⁹Dibelius p. 40. The other narratives are: Mr 2:13ff.; 6:1ff.; 10:17ff.; 10:35ff.; 11:15ff.; 12:18ff.; L 9:51ff.

¹⁰"Äussere Rundung"; "Abrundung nach vor- und rückwärts." Dibelius pp. 42, 55.

¹¹Dibelius pp. 41ff.

avoid distracting the train of thought of the preacher and his listeners. We learn only enough of the situation to understand Jesus' presence in it: concerning more intimate details—the place, the time of day, the occasion, other men, Jesus' friends—almost no information is given. A striking manifestation of this simplicity of style is to be noted in the absence of character delineation. Of the paralytic and the man with the withered hand, of the man with the unclean spirit and the one with dropsy, we know nothing but their contact with Jesus and His response to it. At first sight, the narrative of the blind beggar of Jericho seems to be an exception to this rule: the name, Bartimaeus, is mentioned, and there is more description of his conduct than of the act of Jesus. Dibelius decides however that the real emphasis is on Jesus' pity as aroused by the man's faith in Him. He also considers it probable that the original paradigm told only of Jesus' mercy toward a nameless blind man, who was later identified with a well-known beggar of Jericho. Sometimes, instead of presenting these individual, impersonal types, the paradigm may depict the multitude responding after the manner of a chorus. Such group treatment, however, is not due to conscious art but to an ingenuous simplification of the real occurrence—*scil.* statement by one person or the varied acclamations of several—because only the content of the words, not the person of the speaker, is important.¹²

The healing stories among the paradigms clearly exhibit this simple narrative style, especially if one compares them with other tales of healing recorded in the Gospels and elsewhere. In the traditional style of the healing narrative, certain motifs repeatedly appear: an account of the ill man's history, details regarding the technique of the cure, proofs for the reality of the recovery.¹³ We find little or nothing of this "topic" of the healing story in the paradigms: a command of Jesus and its execution, that is all. When this is not so, e.g., in the account of the leper Mr 1:40ff., other formative forces than those inherent

¹²Dibelius pp. 46-50; cp. "Zur Formg. der Ev." p. 197.

¹³These motifs will be considered in Parts IV to VII.

in the preaching, are at work. In the cure of the paralytic, Mr 2:1ff., the emphasis is not on the healing but on Jesus' power to forgive sin. The healing in the synagogue, Mr 1:23ff., emphasizes Jesus' encounter with the demon, who proclaims His Messiasship, and is quite different, for example, from Mr 5:1ff. (the Gerasene demoniac) where the main point is Jesus' power, i.e., the healing proper. The accounts of the cure of the withered hand and the man with dropsy presuppose Jesus' healing power and are concerned only with the dispute about observance of the Sabbath. There is, then, in these paradigmatic healing accounts, no interest in the process of the cure, nor in the technical skill of the wonderworker. The point is only that Jesus healed and briefly revealed the meaning and purpose of His act to the sick person and the bystanders. This alone had import for the preaching.¹⁴

Here Dibelius proceeds from negative to positive characteristics of the paradigms. They possess not only external completeness and marked brevity and simplicity, but a third essential quality: a thoroughly religious, i.e., unworldly and non-realistic, coloring. In brief, they are presented in an *edifying style*.¹⁵

The result of this is *emphasis on the words* of Jesus: the fourth characteristic of the paradigm. Many paradigms reach their climactic end in Jesus' saying: though to bring this out it is sometimes necessary to indicate different conclusions than the ones presented in the text. Such sayings are always of general significance and point the whole story as a rule of faith or living, rendering it most useful for the preacher. Indeed the sayings probably did not originate with Jesus but were added by the preachers themselves, who thus transformed an ordinary incident of tradition into a general rule of life.

In those paradigms that do not conclude with a pointed saying of Jesus, another trait is found: the chorus-ending, expressing wonder and praise for what has taken place. The fifth

¹⁴Dibelius pp. 51ff.

¹⁵Dibelius p. 53.

characteristic of the paradigmatic style may therefore be described as *the ending of the story with a thought useful for preaching*: a saying of general import, an act of Jesus that may be employed as an example, a group acclamation praising such a deed. The fact that the choral ending is also characteristic of another group of Gospel stories, the *novelle*, is attributed by Dibelius to the intrusion of a "worldly" motif into certain paradigms that tell of miracles. He refuses, however, to classify these paradigms with the other miracle stories, basing the distinction on his opinion that the paradigms were fitted for use in preaching, the miracle narratives were not.¹⁶

HISTORICITY. Having constructed a *Sitz im Leben* for the paradigms, and analyzed their literary form, Dibelius concludes by a discussion of their historical value. Since the evangelists were merely collectors of traditions already fashioned, this problem does not concern the evangelists' knowledge of events and eyewitnesses. It is to be solved by considering the knowledge and intention of those who gave the paradigms their form—the preachers. Since this form was created by the preachers according to the needs of their task, subject to laws which sprang from the life of the primitive communities, style-criticism occasionally enables one to detect the primitive paradigm, as used by the preacher, in a narrative reworked by the evangelist. This may be done, for example, by removing a *vaticinium ex eventu* (e.g. Mr 10:38-40: future sufferings of the sons of Zebedee) which betrays an interest in the fate of secondary characters not consonant with the nature of the paradigm. But what of the historical value of the paradigm as such? From its form, the paradigm was clearly connected with the primitive preaching and the closer a narrative stands to this preaching, the less it is suspect. The paradigms, therefore, arose in the first decades after Jesus' death, and in circumstances which assure their relative trustworthiness.¹⁷

¹⁶Dibelius pp. 54ff.

¹⁷Dibelius pp. 56-59.

But of course, Dibelius hastens to point out, these stories are only *relatively* trustworthy. Precisely because they were used for preaching, they could not be told in neutral fashion: they were adduced to prove a message in which the preacher was deeply interested. Hence one must renounce the idea of literal authenticity in the sense of a juridical deposition. Anyone who clings to the opinion that every secondary circumstance happened precisely as it stands in Mark, or a critically purified Mark—thus transferring the old concept of scriptural inspiration in all its rigidity to a critically discovered nucleus—errs in not realizing that it is precisely the edifying, preaching style, excluding, as it does, full objectivity, which assures us that we are in contact with old and relatively good tradition. Neutral accounts, if we had any, would be suspect a priori. It is not surprising then, if even in the primitive paradigmatic tradition the sayings of Jesus are not always genuine. The early preaching required non-historical alterations in Jesus' words. Single incidents had to furnish universal principles. It is useless to try to remove the accretions and obtain an historically pure "*Ur-Urform*" for such a thoroughly original form never existed.¹⁸

Such, in outline, is Dibelius' presentation of the paradigm. It illustrates the new method at its clearest. *Sitz im Leben*, form-analysis, critical evaluation of the tradition—all are there. The fundamental principles which are here applied to a definite portion of the synoptic material have already been discussed, and a minute examination of the process is unnecessary. Accordingly, we shall confine our study of Dibelius' theory to some general observations on his method and conclusions.

CRITICISM. Fundamental to Dibelius' whole idea of form-criticism is his statement that the origin of all tradition about Jesus is to be sought in the primitive Christian preaching. He has extended this concept to include not only missionary preaching but also cultural exhortation, catechetical instruction, every possible type of Christian proclamation. Taken in

¹⁸Dibelius pp. 59ff.

its broadest sense, this means merely that the synoptic material was gradually developed in oral or written form by the leaders of the community, for the community's welfare. Aside from the fact that it implicitly denies the form-critical postulate of a creative community, such a principle tells us nothing about the origin of the tradition. Nor do we learn much from his picture of a community preoccupied with the *parousia*, lacking biographical interest in the past and indifferent to future generations—yet aflame with missionary zeal to tell a message from the past for the benefit of the future.

For the paradigms, Dibelius postulates as a definite *Sitz im Leben* the missionary preaching. Here his mingling of constructive and analytic methods leaves us without conclusive proof for any step in the process. From the constructive viewpoint we have practically no knowledge of early Christian preaching: from Acts and 1 Corinthians we learn only of the existence of a certain schema, followed, more or less constantly, by the early preachers. If anything, this would seem to indicate that the missionary did not create his material but received it already formed, even as early as the beginning of Paul's apostolate. Certainly it gives no indication of such a prevailing use of isolated incidents from the life of Jesus as sermon examples, that we can deduce from this a form-category and its characteristic traits.¹⁹

The transition from construction to analysis is equally unsatisfactory. From "the oldest stratum in Mark" (we are now in literary, not form-criticism) some stories are chosen as typical paradigms, although no proof is given that they were employed in preaching and no paradigmatic type has yet been established. With these as arbitrary norms, a list of paradigms is drawn up and analysis begins. Despite the exclusion of some and the pruning of others, it is admitted at the outset that more than half of the eighteen selected paradigms (three of the five healing stories) are of "less pure type." It would seem as if the

¹⁹Cp. Fascher. *Die formg. Meth.* p. 69: "Dibelius hat seine Paradigmentheorie also auf eine Predigt gestützt, die wir gar nicht kennen."

exception had become the rule. Prescinding from this, however, let us consider the traits which form-analysis has discovered and which are to prove, at long last, that the paradigm was originally an illustration employed by the missionary preacher.

External completeness, as Fascher notes,²⁰ is not necessarily a sign of use in preaching. It may be due to original isolated existence—doubtless there were single stories about Jesus in circulation—but it is not even conclusive proof of that. Generally it is due simply to the paratactic style of the evangelists. Brevity and simplicity are likewise not signs of use by the mission preacher. No healing story is shorter and simpler than that of the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, yet Dibelius assigns this to another *Sitz im Leben*. Nor is there any necessary relation between preaching and an "edifying" style: such a style might be employed in many situations. As for the ending of the story with a thought useful for preaching: is it not at least possible that the actual incident originally so ended? Jesus might well point His deeds by a saying of universal significance, and there is no more natural reaction to a miraculous cure than a spontaneous exclamation of wonder from those present. Any one of these eighteen paradigms, and many other stories not listed here, might well have illustrated missionary sermons. But Dibelius has failed to prove that they were so used and by such use were molded to their present form.

Since he has failed to establish preaching as a formative influence for these narratives, Dibelius' discussion of their historical value loses its point. It is important, however, to observe two tendencies in his treatment of the paradigms. The first is an inclination to fit facts to theory: the first missionaries did not tell the story of Jesus' life but only His message; where the type is not pure this is due to redaction; Mr 3:6 (conspiracy of Pharisees and Herodians) has supplanted an original ending; the name Bartimaeus was introduced later. This tendency is

²⁰Fascher. *Die formg. Meth.* p. 59.

particularly in evidence when he speaks of the healing narratives: in no case will he admit interest in the cure as such. The second observation concerns his strange concept of historical truth. Jesus' words are not always genuine, the story of His deeds is only relatively reliable—and it is precisely this which makes the tradition trustworthy! Not only did the community accept without difficulty compositions by the evangelists from current paradigm-motifs and the insertion of *vaticinia ex eventu*, but from the very beginning the missionaries who went forth as "eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word" could not tell "in neutral fashion" what they saw and heard.²¹ They created sayings of Jesus, they transformed ordinary incidents into rules of life. On fire with faith in Jesus, they could not kindle this faith in others by telling the objective truth which had so moved them. We shall speak again of this prejudice against the historical value of tradition.

B. THE APOTHEGM OF BULTMANN

Bultmann begins his study of the synoptic material by an analysis of the transmission of Jesus' sayings. He includes under this heading, however, a group of the units of tradition which approximate the story: passages whose point is a saying of Jesus set in a concise framework. These elements of tradition he names *apothegms*. They correspond, in general, to the paradigms of Dibelius.²²

EXAMPLES. Bultmann divides the apothegms into two groups, one consisting of *controversies* and *instructions*,²³ the other of *biographical apothegms*. The first group is subdivided according to the incident which occasioned the controversial or instructive conversation: healings by Jesus, His own or His disciples' conduct, questions by the disciples or by Jesus' adver-

²¹Yet speaking of "that ground of a quite unworldly Christianity in which the paradigmata grew up," Dibelius adds: "This means that we stand in a situation in which there were still many eyewitnesses of the life of Jesus who could correct the tradition when it was in error." "The Structure and Literary Character of the Gospels" p. 166.

²²Bultmann pp. 8f.; cp. "The New Approach" p. 351.

²³"Streit- und Schulgespräche." For Dibelius' criticism of this terminology, cf. "Zur Formg. der Ev." p. 195.

saries. In the first such subdivision, the following healing stories are classed as apothegms:

The man with the withered hand, Mr 3:1ff. and par.

The man with dropsy, L 14:1ff.

The woman with a spirit of infirmity, L 13:10ff.

The blind and dumb possessed man, Mr 3:22ff.; Mt 12:22ff.; L 11:14 ff.

The paralytic, Mr 2:1ff. and par.²⁴

Under the third subdivision is listed:

The reply to the disciples of John, Mt 11:2ff. and par.²⁵

One healing story is classified as a biographical apothegm:

The ten lepers, L 17:11ff.²⁶

Two others are appended to the list of apothegms without being assigned to either of the two main groups:

The Syro-phoenician woman, Mr 7:24ff. and par.

The centurion of Capharnaum, Mt 8:5ff. and par.²⁷

CONTROVERSIES. After a critical analysis of these and the other individual apothegms,²⁸ Bultmann proceeds to a form-analysis of the controversies as a group. First of all, they are *occasioned by an act* or way of conduct which is used by the adversary as basis for reproof or question. Since the typical character of the controversies stands out best when the occasion is a single act, an effort is made to narrate a definite act even when it is clearly a question of general conduct. Moreover, the controversies are all *ideal scenes*, i.e., not accounts of historical occurrences but artificial constructions vividly expressing an idea in a concrete setting. Though Jesus possibly, even probably, healed on the Sabbath, the first point to consider is not the historical value of the single accounts, but the *Sitz im Leben* of the controversy as such. This *Sitz im Leben* is the apologetic and polemic of the primitive Palestinian community. As they

²⁴Bultmann pp. 9-14.

²⁵Bultmann p. 22.

²⁶Bultmann p. 33.

²⁷Bultmann pp. 38f.

²⁸Bultmann pp. 9-39. The total number of apothegms is forty-four, including the nine which refer to healings.

lie before us, therefore, the controversies are ideal scenes illustrating in a concrete case an axiom which the community referred to Jesus.²⁹

The answer to the attack follows in a form that more or less *enunciates a principle*. It may be a counter-question, a metaphor, a scriptural phrase. This manner of debate is typically rabbinic. Hence the origin of the controversies is to be sought in the community's discussions on points of law, carried on with their opponents or with each other. Hence also, any additions that destroy the force of the argument are to be rejected.³⁰

In analyzing the controversies, the question arises whether we have to do with a unified conception or with a scene subsequently elaborated for an originally isolated saying. If the saying is intelligible only from its setting then it is clear that both setting and saying were conceived together. In general, however, and this is another characteristic trait, *unity of conception is lacking* in both the controversies and instructions. In Mr 2:1ff. (the paralytic), Mt 12:11f. (the man with the withered hand), L 14:5 (the man with dropsy) and many other cases,³¹ the saying preceded the story. It is probably merely a matter of chance that other sayings remained isolated. In judging individual cases one's decision will often depend not on objective criteria but on taste and tact. The general tendency, however, is clear: sayings of the Lord or themes of the community debates were clothed, according to rabbinic custom, in the vivid form of a concrete scene—the saying engendering the situation, not vice versa.³²

It is certain, moreover, that this material was formed preponderantly by the *primitive Palestinian community*. The Palestinian influence is clear from the analogy with rabbinic stories and from the thought-content of the problems and arguments, which is rarely Hellenistic. Community formation is evidenced by the fact that in most of these stories the disciples,

²⁹Bultmann pp. 40f.

³⁰Bultmann pp. 42-47.

³¹E.g. L 13:10ff. (the infirm woman).

³²Bultmann pp. 48f.; *Die Erforschung der synoptischen Evangelien*² p. 22; "The New Approach" p. 352.

i.e., the community, are attacked, not Jesus, and they defend themselves with an appeal to their Master.³³

If anything in the controversies goes back to Jesus Himself, it is, beside the general spiritual attitude, *the decisive saying*. However, even here community creations are to be found. This is especially true when the point is made by a phrase from Scripture,³⁴ for in the community debates scriptural proofs would be much employed and hence a polemic-apologetic collection of scriptural passages made, which could then be utilized in forming the controversies. Many sayings were simply at hand as elements of this polemic material: if anyone reflected on the matter, he felt sure that they had been received from the Master—naturally with an “internal” historical right. This, of course, does not preclude the possibility now and then of there being an “external” right also, i.e., that a text of Scripture which the community employed had likewise been employed by Jesus in controversy, but only the possibility of any longer establishing this fact. In general, though Jesus’ role as Rabbi may have been overstressed in this part of the tradition, one can hardly doubt that He really taught, gathered disciples, disputed. However little the individual controversies offer historical accounts of occurrences in His life, the broad lines of this life are correctly reproduced in them on a foundation of historical recollections.³⁵

Two more characteristics of the controversies may be noted here. One is a certain *procreative power*: the community becomes more and more inclined to clothe its sayings-of-the-Lord, its views and principles, in the form of the controversy. The other is a tendency constantly to assign the role of *adversary* to the *Scribes and Pharisees*.³⁶

INSTRUCTIONS. The instructions differ from the controversies mainly in their occasion, which is not a definite act but merely the question of some one seeking information. Unity of conception is generally present, though in Mt 11:2ff. (the reply

³³Bultmann pp. 49f.; *Die Erforschung* p. 23.

³⁴*Die Erforschung* p. 23; cf. pp. 24, 27.

³⁵Bultmann pp. 51f.

³⁶Bultmann pp. 53-56; cp. *Die Erforschung* pp. 17f., 39.

to the disciples of John) and in some other cases, an originally independent saying was subsequently given a setting. In general the instructions are idealizations: even when there was no traditional saying of the Lord at hand, the community's views would be presented in the form of an instruction as readily as in that of the controversies. Many scenes are historical only in the sense that the community fashioned them in the spirit of Jesus. They are the more likely to contain some historical recollections, the less they express a definite interest of the community. Like the controversies, they were formed by the Palestinian community and they manifest the same procreative power, particularly in the tendency to give a setting to freely circulating sayings of the Lord by an introductory question from the disciples.³⁷

BIOGRAPHICAL APOTHEGMS. The formal structure of the biographical apothegms varies more than that of the controversies and instructions. A decisive saying of Jesus generally comes at the end and may be evoked by a request, a question, a way of acting, rarely by Jesus' own initiative. Not all these apothegms were conceived as units but almost all are clearly of an ideal character (i.e., not really biographical), because in a vivid scene they express a truth which transcends the setting and thus renders it symbolic. In some, the person of the Master stands in the foreground; in others, the community. Thus the story of the ten lepers (L 17: 11ff.) exhorts the community to gratitude.³⁸

In general the symbolic character of the scene is brought out by the disproportion between the occasion and the emotional intensity of the saying. Frequently it is clearly impossible for the situation to have occasioned Jesus' statement: how could He know about the widow's mite? As for the miracle-story in L 17:11ff. (the ten lepers), "no comment is necessary." It may be said in general that from its very nature a biographical apothegm is not an historical account, in the case of Jesus or any other personality of history.³⁹

³⁷Bultman pp. 56ff.

³⁸Bultmann pp. 58f.

³⁹Bultmann pp. 59f.; cp. *Die Erforschung* pp. 23f.; "The New Approach" pp. 352f.

From comparison with the rabbinic tradition it is clear that the greater part of this material received its form in the Palestinian community. In some cases, however, the saying may belong to the Palestinian tradition, and its settings have been given it on Hellenistic ground. Even whole passages, like L 17:11ff. (the ten lepers) may be assumed to be of Hellenistic origin. In the community life itself, the biographical apothegms most probably originated as paradigms for the preaching: for though the preaching was not the general creative force of tradition, as Dibelius maintains—apologetics and polemics, community formation and discipline, even literary labor must also be considered—the biographical apothegms are best understood as edifying sermon illustrations.⁴⁰

GENERAL TRAITS. Having examined the controversy, the instruction and the biographical apothegm, Bultmann now sets down certain form-traits for the category as a whole. To begin with, *unattached logia* were appended to already existing scenes and thus the apothegms were expanded in the course of transmission. The apothegms' *procreative power* caused analogous situations to be developed for other sayings of the Lord (i.e., non-apothegmatic or non-symbolic scenes), especially through the motif of a question by the disciples. It also gave rise to *variants*, e.g., the three variants of the Sabbath healing: Mr 3:1ff. (the man with the withered hand), L 13:10ff. (the infirm woman), L 14:1ff. (the man with dropsy); the two variant stories Mr 7:24ff. (the Syro-phoenician woman) and Mt 8:5ff. (the centurion of Capharnaum). The *external completeness* and self-contained character of the apothegms has been sufficiently described by Dibelius: it is a sign of original isolation. The interest always *centers on the saying of Jesus*, which is presented concisely, and generally at the end of the apothegm; but the "choral-ending" of Dibelius is to be rejected since it belongs to the topic of the miracle-story and is unsuited to an edifying, preaching style. After Jesus' statement, the interest dies out: the tradition is not concerned with the subsequent history of the person healed. The *situation* is described with correspond-

⁴⁰Bultmann pp. 60-64.

ing *conciseness*. Time and place are not defined, or merely by chance. Such details, if given, have no value as history: they belong to the symbolism of the scene. To base chronology on indirect indications of the time of year, is childish; and all geographical data of Jesus' "northern journey," e.g., Mr 7:24 (the Syro-phoenician woman), must be stricken from the story as part of a fantasy.⁴¹ In other cases, however, it is not impossible, though contrary to the style, that one or other apothegm was transmitted with local details, e.g., Mt 8:5 (the centurion of Capharnaum).⁴²

In the primitive apothegm, the occasion for His saying is *presented to Jesus*. It is a sign of secondary formation when Jesus takes the initiative Himself. The action is merely an approach and question or a brief description of Jesus' behavior or miraculous deed. The characters are *depicted indirectly* and enter the scene without apt motivation, merely because needed for the story. As a rule they are only types. Evolution has begun when the story-telling impulse introduces more definite details: the originally undetermined questioners become Pharisees, Scribes, disciples, even one particular disciple. Indeed the naming of individual characters may well be a sign of relatively late formation of the whole passage. In such instances as the detailed characterization of the centurion in L 7:4f. we see the infiltration of novellistic traits.⁴³

CRITICISM. Such, in brief outline, is Bultmann's long, minute and none too clear exposition of the apothegm. It is such a mixture of arbitrary statements and detailed analysis, of capricious bias and clever dissection that it leaves the reader overwhelmed and confused. A few general observations, however, may be made.

The first concerns Bultmann's analysis of the apothegmatic form. One may readily agree with many of the characteristics noted here: an act of Jesus occasions a question to which the

⁴¹Cp. Dibelius. "Zur Formg. der Ev." p. 197: "Die angeblichen Reisen sind Rahmenwerk der Evangelisten."

⁴²Bultmann pp. 64-69. Regarding the passages in Luke which refer to world history, Bultmann says, *Die Erforschung* p. 38 (translation: F. Grant. *Form Criticism*, p. 70): "This is not really based upon a genuine historical interest, but is only the endeavor to bring home to educated Gentiles the universal significance of the Gospel story."

⁴³Bultmann pp. 69-72.

Savior replies; He generally does so in the rabbinic manner and frequently enunciates a principle; His statement is placed emphatically, often terminates the passage and in its import may transcend the concrete scene; the situation is concisely depicted and the characterization is simple. When Bultmann proceeds, however, from such objective form-analysis to determination of the primitive apothegmatic type, a subjective element enters the investigation. He suspects that, at times, definite acts have been invented as occasions for dispute: though the enemies of Jesus might well employ such single acts merely as pretexts for expressing their more general opposition; he eliminates certain verses simply because, for him, they weaken the force of Jesus' sayings; he rejects the unity of all controversies in which he finds the saying intelligible apart from its context. Likewise, he speaks constantly of the procreative power of the apothegm and leaves neglected the more fundamental question of how the category arose at all if most of the disputes and incidents never actually occurred. Finally, he rejects as secondary corruptions of the primitive type almost all details of time and place, all initiative by Jesus, all definite names and characterization, the constant opposition of the Scribes and Pharisees. In so doing, he constructs a typical apothegm but destroys its reason for existence. Jesus lives at no time and in no place; He does nothing of His own account; He moves in a world of impersonal shadows; there is no reason for His rejection, trial, execution. While being molded to fit the theory, the facts have disappeared.

The second observation concerns the *Sitz im Leben*. This is said to be the primitive Palestinian community in its apologetic and polemic, its debates, its preaching. That the community is of Palestine is deduced mainly from the rabbinic use of question and counter-question, metaphor and scriptural phrase. Yet what is more obvious than that Jesus Himself lived in Palestine and taught in the traditional manner of the rabbis? There is not the slightest proof of community creation in this rabbinic method of debate. Moreover, though the community undoubtedly disputed, we know nothing of the postulated collection of quotations from Scripture, at hand for use on such occasions; and it is fantastic to picture the early Christians of Palestine,

with eyewitnesses still in their midst, ascribing such texts to Jesus and inventing situations for the disciples which would be symbolic of their own.

Regarding the historical value of the apothegm we observe an all-embracing scepticism. Not only are single verses eliminated, tendencies decried, character description, chronology and geography deleted, but the apothegms as a group—controversies, instructions and biographical apothegms—are classed as “ideal scenes.” They are merely symbolic stories, created by the community to express in vivid fashion some transcendent truth. Sometimes the truth may have originated with Jesus, but we can never be sure of this. We can be certain, however, that the narrative setting originates from the community, that Jesus did not make use of trite occurrences to utter immortal sayings, that miracles are evident inventions. If Scripture is quoted or community interests are concerned, then possibly, and therefore probably, primitive Christians are at work: whatever we think of Jesus’ knowledge of the prophets or whatever reason we assign for the very existence of the primitive community. Variants abound as the community combines in different ways the sayings and settings it has created for apologetic, controversial or preaching purposes. Singly neither controversies nor instructions nor biographical apothegms are historical occurrences; but taken together they present in broad outline with an “internal” historical worth, the career of Jesus. All this is done by the community in the spirit of Jesus, who said: “I am the truth!” We shall speak again of this prejudice against the historicity of the synoptic Gospels.

C. PARADIGM VS. APOTHEGM

We may conclude this article by a comparison of the apothegm of Bultmann with the paradigm of Dibelius. The comparison is illuminating because each author sets out to apply form-criticism to more or less the same material. Bultmann’s category, it is true, includes forty-four passages (nine healing narratives) while Dibelius restricts his to eighteen (five healing accounts). Of these eighteen, however, only two are not included by Bultmann among the apothegms (both healing

stories). We thus have sixteen passages in common, three being accounts of miraculous healings. On the other hand, we notice that out of eleven healing narratives the critics agree on only three, even regarding general classification. This divergence regarding the application of the form-critical method to concrete portions of the synoptic tradition becomes more evident as we proceed. The terminology indicates this well: for Dibelius it is a question of paradigms, i.e., narrative examples; Bultmann is analyzing sententious sayings, apothegms. According to Bultmann the saying (if anything) goes back to Jesus; the framework was created by the community. According to Dibelius, the saying is often due to the preacher, but the story probably goes back to Jesus. In form-analysis the two authors more or less agree: Bultmann enumerates more characteristics than does Dibelius but he accepts all the latter's observations save one, which he emphatically rejects: the choral-ending. Despite this agreement on the analysis of style, their deductions from form to *Sitz im Leben* result in strikingly different conclusions. For Dibelius the category has its origin in the preaching of the Hellenistic communities. For Bultmann it springs from the debates of the community in Palestine. The latter does indeed postulate an Hellenic origin for some stories and admits preaching, together with apologetics, polemics and literary labor, as a *Sitz im Leben* for some of the apothegms. He does so, however, for less than one third of the narratives they treat in common and for none of the healing accounts included by Dibelius. Having agreed on the material, disagreed on the terminology and growth, agreed on style and differed completely regarding *Sitz im Leben*, the two critics conclude by a united denial of the strictly historical value of their respective categories. We may observe with wonder, as does Fr. Pinard, "in the disagreement of their partial solutions, the identity of their general conclusion regarding the value of the Gospel traditions."⁴⁴

In illustration of this comparison, it may be helpful here to summarize and present with brief comment the analysis of one

⁴⁴H. Pinard de la Boullaye, *L'étude comparée des religions*⁹ II, 137.

healing narrative, Mr 2:1-12 (the paralytic), as offered by these two authors. Bultmann treats the passage among the controversies occasioned by a healing:

The story has two points: 1. the miracle, 2. the saying about forgiving sins. The second motif has been superficially inserted in the first and hence 5b-10 are secondary: for the *pistis* (faith) of the paralytic and his bearers, amply proved in 3f. and verified by Jesus in 5a, is forgotten in 5b-10, and 11f. is the organic conclusion of a miracle-story: proof of the cure by the patient carrying away his pallet, impression on the bystanders. This does not fit in, for after 5b-10 one asks: what is the impression on the adversaries? Do they belong to those *doxazontes* (glorifying) in 12? We should rather expect their speechlessness to be recorded as in 3, 4, etc.! The debate 5b-10 has therefore been inserted. It has evidently⁴⁵ been composed on the miracle-story and was not originally independent. It obviously arose out of the dispute over the right (the *exousia*⁴⁶) to forgive sins, a right which is demonstrated by the ability to perform the miraculous cure. Mr 2:5b-10 clearly arose because the community wished to trace back *its* right to forgive sins to Jesus. The language and the analogies Mt 16:19, 18:18, show that it is the Palestinian community which by its miraculous power to cure, proves that it can exercise the right to forgive sins. By constructing this scene it traces its right back to a prototypical deed of Jesus.⁴⁷

Dibelius classifies the passage as a paradigm:

The first question: Which is easier, to forgive sin or to cure? is interrupted by the second: Who may forgive sins? The first determines the course of the action; it corresponds with Jewish ideas on the connection between sin and sickness that Jesus should confirm the forgiving of sin by the cure. Here it is a matter only of the reality of the forgiveness, not of Jesus' right to forgive. This right is stressed by the central portion of the story: Mr. 2:6-10. Scribes find fault with Jesus' behavior: He blasphemes, for only God can forgive sin. Jesus expresses their thoughts by asking: Which is easier, to forgive sins or to cure? The adversaries dare not answer, and so, having disarmed their ill-will, Jesus heals. The verses 6-10, therefore, contain only a feigned dispute, since the adversaries have not actually spoken. In the framework of the action, they serve simply to link the forgiveness with the cure. In

⁴⁵"Deutlich": to which L. Köhler. *Das formgeschichtliche Problem des N. T.* p. 18, replies: "Geht das nicht ein wenig rasch? Mehr Dekret als Demonstration? . . . Deutlich für wen?"

⁴⁶The meaning of *exousia* here is "power" rather than "right": cf. F. Zorell. *Lexicon Graecum N. T.*² (Paris, 1931) s.v.

⁴⁷Bultmann pp. 12f.

connection with the preaching, however, they are more significant, for here the *Christus* is proclaimed! It is not Jesus nor His historical adversaries who speak. The preacher has created this central section to show why the healing occurred: "That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins." For the preaching, the question of the right to forgive sins was more important than the other and hence it had to be introduced. That the historical occurrence was not completely transformed is clear, however, from the presence of the innocuous, non-christological choral-ending: "We never saw the like"—which sounds as if the story told only of the miracle and not also of the dignity of the wonderworker. This analysis shows clearly that the passage is not to be classified as a controversy. In controversies a theme is evolved by statement and counterstatement. In this and most of the other paradigms, however, the adversary serves only to emphasize the deed or word of Jesus. One has, therefore, no right to designate community discussions as the *Sitz im Leben*, nor to conclude that the Palestine community is here proving its right to forgive sin by its miraculous power to cure. First of all, it is seriously to be doubted whether such discussions were essential for Christian communities in the years 50-70. Secondly, dialogue plays no part of major importance in the paradigms.⁴⁸

In regard to this Marcan narrative, then, Dibelius and Bultmann agree that it is not strictly historical: verses 5b (or 6) to 10 have been inserted in a more primitive story. According to Bultmann, the secondary verses were created by the Palestinian community, to prove that community's right to forgive sins. According to Dibelius, the insertion was made by the preacher, to emphasize Jesus' Christological prerogative concerning forgiveness of sins. Bultmann sees in the passage an apothegm developed from controversies in the community; Dibelius discerns a paradigm employed in missionary preaching. Both reject the narrative as it stands, because it fails to fit the form-categories they have established.

After reading these two analyses and re-reading the pericope in Mark, one wonders whether either critic ever seriously envisioned the possibility that this most human incident might simply have happened as it has been recorded.⁴⁹

⁴⁸Dibelius pp. 63ff.

⁴⁹Cp. Fascher. *Die formg. Meth.* p. 226: "Bot eine Heilung den Anlass zum Disput für Jesus, so musste dementsprechend berichtet werden, auch wenn der Formgeschichtler nun nicht weiss, ob er eine 'Novelle' oder ein 'Paradigma minder reinen Typs' vor sich hat."