

Some Aspects of Gospel Introduction (Part 2)

F.F. Bruce

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II

FORM CRITICISM

It is partly due to the disappointment felt at the comparatively meagre results of a century's intensive study of the Synoptic Problem along the lines of Source Criticism that more recently there has been a tendency to leave this well-beaten track for another which, to many, seems a more promising way to arrive at the truth about the origins of our Gospels. This new discipline is usually known in this country as "Form Criticism", in Germany as *Formgeschichte* (literally, "Form History"). The method itself is not, new, nor has its application been limited to Biblical literature. Eduard Norden's *Agnostos Theos*, first published in 1913, shows how widespread the use of stereotyped forms was in the religious language of the Gentile world in N.T. times¹; indeed, the term *Formgeschichte* occurs in the sub-title of the work (*Untersuchungen zur Formgeschichte religiöser Rede*). Hermann Gunkel applied the method to Biblical literature in his *Schöpfung and Chaos*, in which, as early as 189 f, he compared Genesis i and Revelation xii in terms of *Formgeschichte*. It is perhaps not an accident that Professor Martin Dibelius, the pioneer in modern Form Criticism of the Gospels, had his interest in comparative religion aroused by Gunkel.²

Even in the N.T., the Gospels are not the only books which lend themselves to this method of approach. R. Reitzenstein, in his *Hellenistische Wundererzählungen* (1906), shows, for example, how the stories of miraculous release from prison in Acts v, xii and xvi follow a recognisable pattern which can be traced elsewhere in the literature of the time. That an author should adopt a generally accepted literary form in telling a certain kind of story does not of itself justify any inference as to the historicity or otherwise of his narrative. Similarly, the healing stories in Acts not only resemble each other and (in literary form) stories of the same kind in secular literature, but

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also the healing narratives of the Gospels, on which we shall have more to say anon. The "Voyage and Shipwreck" story of Acts xxvii displays a literary form which can be traced back to Homer; Blass has pointed out a specific instance of Homeric reminiscence in that chapter.³ But the fact that Homer set the fashion in which such stories were regularly told in subsequent centuries does not lead us to any conclusion about the truth of these stories themselves; that must be decided from different considerations. It is necessary, then, that in our present examination of Form Criticism we should not regard this approach as one peculiar to the Gospels, or as one which in itself can establish or disprove the historicity of a narrative.

¹ "We may say," says Norden, "that about the time of the birth of Christ anyone who lifted up his voice for the purpose of religious propaganda considered himself bound by the old, solemn Forms, no matter what kind of truth about God and His worship he was recommending" (op. cit., p. 133; tr. from German).

² See the Biographical Note prefaced to his *From Tradition to Gospel* by his translator, B. L. Woolf (p. vii).

³ *Philology of the Gospels*, p. 186.

We have called Dr. Dibelius the pioneer in modern Form Criticism of the Gospels; the word "modern" was used intentionally, for adumbrations of this approach to the Gospels were not wanting even at the beginning of this century. Hints of such a new approach may be found in the Gospel studies of Wrede and Wellhausen, but the most striking foreshadowing of modern Form Criticism may be seen in a commentary on Mk. by Allan Menzies, Professor of Biblical Criticism in St. Andrews University, entitled *The Earliest Gospel*, published in 1901. Here we find many of the most familiar features of present-day treatment of the Gospels—emphasis on the lack of continuity in Mk., the part, played by meetings of Christians in the growth of the Gospel tradition, first in its oral, and then in its written form, an attempt to recover the "state of the tradition before Mark wrote", and so forth.

The present vogue enjoyed by this method of Gospel study dates from the days immediately following the War of 1914-1918. Dibelius issued the first edition of *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums* in 1919.⁴ The same year saw the appearance of *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu*, by Professor K. L. Schmidt, who argued that Mk. consisted of separate groups of loosely, connected narratives, these groups or pericopae being cemented together by *Sammelberichte*, editorial matter composed purely for this purpose, and devoid of historical value. The form-critical study was carried farther by Professor Rudolf Bultmann in 1921 in *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*,⁵ and in 1925 in *Die Erforschung der synoptischen Evangelien*.⁶

These and similar works directed the attention of N.T. students to the *forms* taken by the various types of utterances

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and incidents in the Gospels. A close study of these forms, it was held, would reveal the state of the tradition before it took shape in the Gospels as we know them. In order to attain this end, we must classify all the utterances and incidents recorded in the Gospels according to their literary forms. That classification is a necessary procedure in the scientific, handling of any subject-matter we have known since Aristotle's day; it remains to be proved that this particular classification is the best for dealing with the subject-matter of the Gospels. Other possible classifications besides that based on "form" occur to one; there is the classification according to source; which we have already examined; there is classification according to topic, a good example of which, with important conclusions, is given by Professor C. H. Dodd in *History and the Gospel* (pp. 92 ff.), and the Sayings of Jesus can be classified according to the audience addressed, as in Professor T. W. Manson's *The Teaching of Jesus*. Form-classification must be adjudged on its merits; according to Professor Dodd, its chief value is "that it enables us to study our material in fresh groupings, which point to distinct strains of tradition, preserved from various motives, and in some measure through different channels, and to compare these strains of tradition much as we compared Mark and 'Q', in search of convergences and cross-correspondences".⁷

The main division in form-classification lies between Saying-forms and Narrative-forms. This distinction is a perfectly natural one. We have seen that a document consisting chiefly of

⁴ 2nd ed., 1933; Eng. tr., 1934.

⁵ 2nd ed., 1931.

⁶ 2nd ed., 1930.

⁷ op. cit., p. 91.

Sayings of Jesus probably existed before one which told the story of His life. The reason for the priority of the Sayings document is not far to seek; we can remember what we have seen more easily than what we have heard, and therefore it is advisable to commit the latter to writing as soon as possible. Again, there are obvious distinctions between various kinds of Saying-forms. We naturally distinguish between our Lord's methodical instruction of His disciples, for example, and the replies He gave to questioners and critics. His discourses are divided by Bultmann into (1) Logia or Wisdom-words (themselves further subdivided according to their form), (2) Prophetic and Apocalyptic Sayings, (3) Law-sayings and Community-rules, (4) Sayings introduced by the pronoun "I", (5) Parables. We can all distinguish these different kinds of Sayings. But when we have distinguished and classified them, we are little,

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if at all, nearer to deciding about the authenticity of the various Sayings. It is, however, probable on other grounds that the forms in which we find our Lord's teaching are the forms which He Himself gave it. I have already quoted B. S. Easton's statement: "We have every reason to believe that the first tradition of the sayings-groups and the parables arose in Jesus' life-time and under his personal direction; the earliest content of the tradition he himself required the disciples to commit to memory."⁸ Dr. W. K. Lowther Clarke has a very fascinating argument which, in his own words, affords "reason for thinking that in Matthew's version of the Beatitudes we have, practically, the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus".⁹

The line of argument developed by C. F. Burney in *The Poetry of our Lord* suggests similar interesting conclusions. Burney made clear the large part which various poetical patterns played in the teaching of Jesus. Many passages, belonging to all the Synoptic sources and to Jn., can be turned into idiomatic Aramaic which shows of only those parallelisms of language and thought which usually survive in the Greek, but also in many cases clearly recognisable rhythm and rhyme. A discourse that follows a recognisable pattern is more easily memorised, and if Jesus intended His teaching to be memorised, His use of poetry is easily explicable. Besides, "since Jesus appeared to His contemporaries as a prophet, and prophets were accustomed to give oracles in verse, it is credible that we have here something approaching His *ipsissima verba*", to quote Professor Dodd again.¹⁰

Great importance is attached by form-critics to those Sayings of Jesus which did not form part of a regular discourse, but arose out of a particular situation. These are the Sayings which are called Paradigms by Dibelius, Apophthegms by Bultmann, and (more lucidly) Pronouncement Stories by Dr. Vincent Taylor.¹¹ They form a sort of cross between Sayings and Narratives; the Saying, usually a short, pithy one, arises out of the narrative, which is told mainly for the sake of the Saying to which it leads up. The most characteristic type of Pronouncement Story is that which leads up to a controversial utterance (Ger. *Streitgespräch*). Something is said or done by Jesus or His disciples to which exception is taken by others; Jesus replies in a pointed sentence embodying a general principle, the logical basis of which the gainsayers cannot impugn,

⁸ *Christ in the Gospels*, p. 41.

⁹ *New Testament Problems* (1929), p. 46.

¹⁰ *op. cit.*, pp. 89f.

¹¹ In *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition* (2nd ed., 1935), the best book on Form Criticism by a British scholar.

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such as: "They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark ii. 17), or "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: so that the Son of man is lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark ii. 27f.). An examination of Mk. reveals two collections of these *Streitgesprache*, which had probably been grouped together thus before their incorporation in the Second Gospel, a group of five in Mark ii. 1-iii. 6, and one of three in Mark xii. 13-34.

We must beware of the tendency to suppose that where such a controversial utterance or other Pronouncement Story does not exactly correspond to the usual form, we must fit it to a Procrustean bed in order to recover its original form. An example of this tendency is seen in the "sons of the bridechamber" utterance (Mark ii. 18ff.). Jesus is asked why His disciples do not fast; He replies, "Can the sons of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast". There, we are told, is the original reply, to which an addition was afterwards made, reflecting and justifying the changed conditions of a later day, when Christians fasted as the Jews did: "But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then will they fast in that day." But a counter-argument to this is supplied by Burney (*op. cit.*, p. 140), who shows that the whole reply of Jesus, as given in Mark ii. 19f. and parallel passages, together with the accompanying Saying about the old garment and the old wineskins (Mark ii. 2 i f. and parallels), takes the form of a continuous poem in the well-known *Qinah* measure (3: 2) of the O.T.

Against this tendency—which is but one aspect of the all too common tendency to prune facts to fit a theory—Dibelius utters a caveat:

"We must beware of the temptation to employ literary criticism and to delete 'additions' for the purpose of reaching a historical and completely purified original-original form from the original form found in the Paradigm. Such an original-original form never existed, or at least not in the region of missionary tradition in Greek."¹²

Even Dibelius, however, finds additions, e.g., in Mark xiv. 9, after the "Paradigm" of the woman with the flask of oint-

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ment. But in general, of all the Saying-forms, he regards the "Paradigm" as most reliable, depending largely on the testimony of eyewitnesses. "Because the eyewitnesses could control and correct, a relative trustworthiness of the Paradigms is guaranteed"—but "it is only a relative trustworthiness", because, as employed in later preaching, the form must meet the requirements of the speaker and hearer.¹³ That we must have regard to the practical requirements of the preaching is readily conceded, but this concession need not lead us to suppose that the preachers attributed to Christ words which, in fact, He did not speak. All the available evidence of apostolic days, as we shall see, is against this supposition.

¹² *From Tradition to Gospel*, p. 64.

¹³ *op. cit.*, pp. 60ff.

The forms assumed by the narratives have also been classified. We can, for example, easily distinguish Miracle stories, under which healing narratives may be subsumed. These miracle stories are not secular intrusions, as Dibelius would have us believe, but can be shown to be instinct with evangelic significance.¹⁴ The same is true of such stories about Jesus as the Baptism, Temptation, Transfiguration; and Resurrection narratives, but we cannot satisfactorily divorce evangelic significance from historic truth, as is done, for example, by Bultmann, in whose eyes these stories about Jesus "have no historical but a religious and edifying character" (*Geschichte d. syn. Tradition*, p. 260).

These *Wundergeschichten* and *Mythen*, to use Bultmann's terminology, have no one recognisable form. Of all such stories, the healing narratives best present such a form; wherever we find these, whether in the Gospels or outside them, we are usually given some account of the disease and its intractable character, the remarkable suddenness of the cure, and its effect on the patient and spectators.¹⁵ So far as *form* goes, the inscriptions in the Temple of Asklepios at Epidaurus¹⁶ present very similar features to the healing narratives in the Gospels and elsewhere in the Bible; but in spiritual content there is of course, no comparison. That the healing stories of the Gospels should follow this regular pattern is the most natural thing in the world, simply because this is the most natural way of telling such stories. But, as we have already said, the historicity of such stories is quite independent of this question of form. The form is of very little importance; it has remained roughly the same from the beginning of history to the

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"unsolicited testimonials" to the efficacy of this or that nostrum which appear in our daily newspapers. It is not the "form", but the context, the content, the atmosphere, the purpose of the narrative that give it its real value.

The form is not always pure; forms sometimes cross, as in the story of the paralytic (Mark ii. 1-12). This is both a healing narrative and a Pronouncement Story, leading up to the "apophthegm", "The Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins" (ver. 10).

An important study of the content of the various forms may be found in Hoskyns and Davey's *The Riddle of the New Testament* (1931), pp. 162ff. (ch. viii, "Miracles, Parables, and Aphorisms"), the conclusion of which is that widely diverse forms are equally permeated with the Messianic idea. A similar conclusion is reached by Dr. Dodd in *History and the Gospel*, pp. 92ff., where the Gospel material is classified in groups according to similarity of subject-matter, each group including various "forms" and representing various sources. No matter what classification we adopt, all parts of the record agree in emphasising the Messianic significance of all that Jesus said and did, and, to quote Dr. Dodd, "We can find no alternative tradition, excavate as we will in the successive strata of the Gospels" (op. cit., p. 103). And if

¹⁴ This fact is brought out well by A. Richardson in *The Miracle-Stories of the Gospels* (1941), the concluding words of which are: "Then we perceive that it is true of the miracle stories, as of every other part of the Gospel record, that 'these things were written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life in His name' (John xx. 31)."

¹⁵ Bultmann refers to O. Weinreich, *Antike Heilungswunder* (1909) and P. Fiebig, *Jüdische Wundergeschichten des neutestamentlichen Zeitalters* (1911), as revealing how the same form runs throughout Gentile, Jewish, and Christian miracle-stories of this kind.

¹⁶ One of the most interesting of these inscriptions, recording several cures, is given in *Inscriptiones Graecae* iv. 951; Dittenberger's *Sylloge*, 1168.

only because it supports this conclusion, the study of form-classification has not been unfruitful.

As regards the narrative element in the Gospels, we must remember that a stereotyped form was likely to develop at a very early date, as the stories were told over and over again in the preaching. This was desirable as well as natural, as the stereotype was to some extent a guarantee of accurate tradition. The important part played by such stereotypes in the Jewish and Gentile world of those days is emphasised by Professor F. W. Grosheide of Amsterdam in an article on "The Synoptic Problem" appearing in *The Evangelical Quarterly* for Jan., 19 (Vol. iii, pp. 57ff.). While I disagree with Grosheide in his practical exclusion of written sources behind our Gospels, he makes out a very good case for his thesis that "in the days of the apostles there existed a stereotyped preaching (Aramaic and Greek...) of the deeds and words of Jesus and it is this preaching, this oral tradition, which is the main source of our synoptic Gospels" (p. 64). In his hands, form criticism is an

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aid, not a stumbling-block, to faith in the accuracy of the evangelic record.

In an interesting chapter on "The *Formgeschichtlich* Method",¹⁷ Dr. Lowther Clarke arrives, along quite a different line of argument, at a similar conclusion, that the shape of the Kerygma became determinate at an early stage. After an attractive analogy from human life, he points out that our Gospels reveal just what one might naturally expect, that the periods which stand out most vividly in apostolic memory are the first day or two spent by Peter and the others in the company of Jesus, and His last days on earth, and continues:

"But in the, primitive Church at Jerusalem there was an extraordinary, even an increasing, enthusiasm. The personality of Jesus was vividly present. As 'they that feared the Lord spoke often one to another' hidden memories came to the surface; new meanings were seen in clearly remembered scenes and words. We cannot exclude even from the earliest tradition of all the possibility that the new meaning thus seen sometimes modified the account given of an incident in the Ministry. But everything was in favour of the preservation of what was valuable. In three directions the tendency would be strengthened. (i) The first Passover after the Crucifixion must have been of epoch-making importance for Gospel origins. As the anniversary drew near, memories would be quickened and the story would be retold. I find it hard to believe that much of importance was added to the Markan tradition of the last days after Easter A.D. 30, or 31, according to our system of chronology. (ii) Shortly after this, in all probability, began the Hellenistic movement with Stephen, and the beginnings of the break with Judaism. The controversy with Pharisaism, questions about ceremonial purification, the Sabbath, etc.—all this would create problems which would at once make the Christians ask 'What did Jesus do, or say, about this?' One of the main contentions of the *formgeschichtlich* school is that each section of the Gospel is to be studied on its own merits and we must ask each time what concrete situation in the early Church was responsible for it. The new point of view is really helpful; we can accept the position that the selective fixing of certain memories of Our Lord's Ministry was thus due to

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¹⁷ *New Testament Problems*, pp. 18ff.

the practical needs of the early Church. (iii) One day, after St. Peter or another disciple had told some reminiscences, someone said: 'Let me write that down.' In an age of writing this would be the most natural thing in the world. When all has been said about the wonderful memory of Orientals, or about the expectation of the Parousia making it unnecessary to commit tradition to writing, it still remains probable that someone would have written down stories about Jesus. After all, St. Luke says that *many* took in hand to draw up narrations; and Two Documents; or even Four, seem insufficient to justify his statement."¹⁸

Thus, in addition to Ramsay's suggestion that the Sayings of Jesus began to be written down during His lifetime on earth, we have now a further suggestion, based on form-critical considerations, that the written narrative of His public ministry and Passion began to take shape soon after His ascension.

That stereotyped "forms" are a guarantee of accuracy may be illustrated in various ways from ordinary life. For example, each Air Raid Warden has a pad of "Warden's Report Forms" in which he must record his reports during "incidents". The report must be arranged, under various headings, which are printed on the form, such as "Designation of Reporting Agent", "Position of Occurrence", "Approximate Number of Casualties", and so on. Instructions are given by the Ministry of Home Security as to the form in which items should be entered under these headings. Whether the report is transmitted orally or in writing, this form must be adhered to as closely as possible. The result is that, from the point of view of literary finish, wardens' reports may leave something to be desired, but the object of this stereotyped form is that reports may be received in as lucid, concise, and accurate a manner as possible. In the same way, a police officer giving evidence in a court of law allows no play to his imagination; he adheres rigidly to a prescribed "form". Do we consider that this adherence to a "form" detracts from the historical accuracy of his narrative? On the contrary, it is the best guarantee of accuracy; it is in order that the objective truth may be attained that he is trained to record all manner of events in this stereotyped form.¹⁹ So there is good reason to conclude that the

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fact that a narrative is told in a stereotyped form is no reason for doubting it; it is more probably a guarantee of its truth.

To continue the analogy of the police officer, he will probably describe various street accidents, say, in almost identical language, with only such variations as are required by the facts. The critic would be sadly in error who should conclude that the different descriptions are really variant versions of one and the same street accident. The similarity running through all the descriptions is to be accounted for in terms of form criticism. Perhaps we can apply

¹⁸ *op. cit.*, pp. 27f.

¹⁹ In connection with police evidence, the following words by a former Chief of Scotland Yard may not be irrelevant: "I have often wondered at the definiteness with which some police officers could repeat the identical language used by a prisoner on arrest, or in the course of a railway journey. In these men habit and training have developed a natural aptitude for accuracy. Eliminate, as the critics do, the work of the Spirit of God, and I have no hesitation in saying that if I had on one side the testimony of the police inspectors of the department I recently controlled, and on the other side that of all the apostles and evangelists, I should trust to the memory of the officers rather than to that of the saints. But an officer's duty requires that as soon as practicable after hearing any important statement he shall record it in writing; and if some months after the event I found that he had neglected that duty, and yet that he professed to repeat the exact words used in a prolonged conversation, I should lose all confidence both in his judgment and in his truthfulness" (Sir Robert Anderson, *The Bible and Modern Criticism*, p. 17).

this analogy to such apparent "duplicates" as the Feeding of the 5000 and of the 4000, the Commission of the Twelve and of the Seventy, the Great Supper of Luke xiv and the Wedding Feast of Matt. xxii, the healing of the nobleman's son in John iv and of the centurion's servant in the Synoptic Gospels, the anointing of the Lord by Mary of Bethany and by the woman who was a sinner, and so forth.

We have now to consider the "setting in life" (*Sitz im Leben*), so insisted upon by form-critics. It is a fundamental tenet of the more radical of their number that the various elements in the Gospels are to be explained as arising out of certain situations in the experience of the early Church. Such, for example, is the viewpoint of Professor Karl Kundsinn of Riga; "It becomes increasingly clear that the Gospels and their sources are primarily the expression and reflection of the faith and life of the early Christian churches which produced them."²⁰

Thus, from this point of view, the charge to the Twelve in Matt. x is not historically something spoken by Jesus Himself; it reflects the methods adopted by the first Jewish Christians who preached the Gospel throughout Palestine, thrown back by a sort of legal fiction into the mouth of Jesus in order to be invested with His authority. Similarly, the *Streitgesprache* belong actually not to the life of Jesus Himself; they reflect the controversies which arose between Christian and non-Christian Jews in the early days of the Church, or between the Judaizing and liberal parties within the Church. For example, the reference in Matt. v., 19 to the man who breaks one of the smallest commandments and teaches men so is regarded as a not very well veiled attack on the Apostle Paul. But if this is so, why was this practice not carried out, more widely and explicitly and usefully? The burning question in the Jerusalem Church about

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A.D. 50-60 concerned the terms on which Gentile believers were to be admitted to Church fellowship; why has this question not left a more distinct mark in the Gospels?

It could have been by no means so easy as some form-critics seem to think to invent Sayings of Jesus in those early years, when so many of His disciples were about, who could remember what He had said and not said. As Dr. Vincent Taylor says, "If the Form-Critics are right, the disciples must have been translated to heaven immediately after the Resurrection."²¹ Besides, so far as our definite information goes, the early Christians were careful to distinguish between Sayings of Christ and their own inferences or judgments. Compare Paul's careful distinction in 1 Cor. vii: "I, not the Lord," and again, "not I, but the Lord".

The early preachers had not only friendly eyewitnesses to reckon with; there were others less-well disposed who were also conversant with the main facts of the ministry and death of Jesus. The first proclaimers of the Kerygma could not afford in their preaching to risk inaccuracies (not to speak of wilful manipulation of the facts), which might at once be exposed by some who would be only too glad to do so. On the contrary, one of the strong points in the original apostolic preaching is the confident appeal to the knowledge of the hearers: "as ye yourselves also know" (Acts ii. 22), said Peter at Pentecost when narrating the evangelic facts; even the house of the Gentile Cornelius was presumed to be acquainted with the main outline of the story of Jesus from the baptism of John onwards (Acts x. 36ff.). Had

²⁰ In *Form Criticism*, ed. F. C. Grant (1934), p. 81.

²¹ *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition*, p. 41.

there been any tendency to depart from strict historical accuracy, this would have served as a further corrective.

Yet the *Sitz im Leben* principle is not without its value. What governed the choice of just those incidents and Sayings, to the exclusion of the "many other things which Jesus did"? Surely their suitability for particular purposes must have been a major consideration. Situations must have arisen in which the natural question would be, "What instructions did the Master give on this point? How did He deal with a situation, like this?" When a question about divorce arose, for example, they remembered how once He answered the question, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" (Matt. xix. 4). The incident of the half-shekel at Capernaum would be

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remembered and recorded when the question of paying the Temple-tax arose, as it must have done in the early Church, probably more than once (Matt. xvii. 24ff.). But Sayings and stories were not invented *ad hoc*; if this practice had once been allowed, it would have developed to an unmistakable degree. As it is, the original *Sitz im Leben* of the words and deeds of Jesus is to be sought in the days of His public activity, while the *Sitz im Leben* which brought them to memory and led to their recording may be found in the practical requirements of apostolic times.²²

As a general rule, it seems that the story of Jesus formed the main theme of the preaching (Kerygma), while His Sayings formed part of the apostles' teaching (Didache). Thus the narrative was stereotyped in the proclamation of the Gospel, while the words of Jesus were rehearsed, mainly in the "form" which He Himself had given them, in Church meetings. We have already seen that the Sayings and the Narrative were transmitted in the beginning along two different lines of tradition, represented by "Proto-Matthew" and Mk. respectively. But we should not credit the community at large with the production of our Gospels. Communities are uncreative as such, and this community, was no exception. The Gospels were produced within the community, and the community was the custodian of the recorded revelation, but the community was not the author. The idea that it was is on a par with the outmoded theory that the Homeric poems—works which bear unmistakably the impress of individual genius—can be accounted for as a collection of folk-lays. The authors of the Gospels were individuals, and each Gospel, whatever may be said about its sources, is an individual work of literature with its own distinct interest and purpose. We should not be misled by exaggerated claims of form criticism into underestimating the rôle in the transmitting of the Gospel tradition of such outstanding individuals as Matthew, Peter, Mark, Philip? Luke, and (for the fourth. Gospel) the Apostle John.

Professor K. L. Schmidt, in *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu*, emphasised the importance, in the development of the tradition, of early Church meetings, where believers would meet to talk about Jesus and exchange their reminiscences of Him. Still more important was the close relation pointed out by Dibelius between the Gospel narrative and the requirements

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²² "Of any story or teaching we may ask concerning its 'Sitz im Leben'—is it a 'Sitz im Leben Jesu' or a 'Sitz im Leben der alten Kirche'? It is sometimes overlooked that an affirmative answer to the latter alternative does not automatically carry with it a negative answer to the former" (T. W. Manson in *Expository Times*, liii, p. 249).

of preaching. We have already seen the significance of this relation in the light of the fact that in the early days at Jerusalem Peter was the chief exponent of the Kerygma. Outlines or fragments of outlines of this Kerygma have been discerned in Acts ii. 14ff.; iii. 12ff., x. 3 6ff., xiii. 16ff., 1 Cor. xv. 3ff.²³ The Kerygma begins with John's baptism, reviews the ministry of Christ, and goes on to dwell in greater detail on the great redemptive facts, the Crucifixion and Resurrection, showing the while how the whole story was foretold in the O.T. prophecies. This is exactly the scope of Mk., and indeed of the other Gospels, apart from the introductory Prologues and Nativity narratives of the latter.

But a still closer connection has been shown to exist between the Kerygma and Mk. Pursuing his view of the early currency of the Gospel stories in Church meetings, K. L. Schmidt argued that Mk. was not in any sense a continuous account of the story of Jesus, but (apart from the Passion narrative, which probably existed in its continuous form before being incorporated in Mk.) a collection of *pericopae* joined together by *Sammelberichte*, generalising summaries, invented by the editor to give an appearance of consecutiveness to the narrative as a whole. In an article entitled "The Framework of the Gospel Narrative" (*Expository Times*, Vol. xliii, pp. 396ff.), Professor Dodd examined Schmidt's thesis, which has been accepted by a large number of critics, and argued convincingly that these despised *Sammelberichte*, when put together, prove to be themselves a continuous narrative, an outline of the Kerygma comparable to those traced elsewhere in the N.T. The *Sammelberichte* which Dr. Dodd examines are Mark i. 14f., 21f., 39, ii. 13, iii. 7b-19; iv. 33f., vi. 7, 12f., 30; but an addition must be made at the beginning (perhaps Mark i. 1-13) and at the end in order to give a complete outline. So while we need not ascribe to Mk. so strictly chronological a character as Burkitt and others supposed, yet the general chronological outline is guaranteed by the presence of this skeleton Kerygma dispersed throughout the Gospel as a cement for the narrative material.²⁴ The outline Kerygma is so constructed as to lead naturally up to the Passion narrative. "On all grounds," says Dr. Dodd, "it seems probable that in the Passion-narrative we are in close touch with the primitive tradition. The story was not produced either by the preaching of the early Church or by

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theological reflection upon it. It is the story that underlies the kerygma, and provided the basis for the theology of the epistles" (*History and the Gospel*, p. 84).

The results of Form Criticism are not so important or so far-reaching as some of its exponents claim. The classification with which it works is not the most convenient or illuminating classification to which the Gospel material lends itself. But it will prove to have established a position for itself as a useful adjunct to other methods of research. It throws light on much that we can learn in other ways about the production of the Gospels and if it can, as is claimed, take us farther back than other methods can, then our faith may be all the more strengthened in the trustworthiness of the material which came to be written down in the form with which we are acquainted. Some people, it is true, tend to fight shy of form criticism because of the radical conclusions to which it seems to lead, especially in the hands of

²³ The subject is worked out by Professor C. H. Dodd in *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments*. In his *History and the Gospel*, p. 73, the same writer says: "When we further observe that most of the forms of the *kerygma* in Acts show in their language a strong Aramaic colouring, we may recognize the high probability that in these passages we are in fairly direct touch with the Jesus of history."

²⁴ See also F. B. Clogg, "The Trustworthiness of the Marcan Outline", in *Expository Times*, xlvi, pp. 534ff.

Bultmann and even of Professor R. H. Lightfoot. But these are not the necessary conclusions of form criticism; they are the conclusions of certain form critics. Conclusions equally radical or sceptical have been expressed by men who were not form critics. "That the *formgeschichtlich* method has been used to support very sceptical conclusions is no argument against its intrinsic value,"²⁵ says Dr. Lowther Clarke who, as we have seen, shows how it can be used to support very different conclusions.

Form Criticism has done great service if only it has taught us anew the lesson that we cannot know "Christ after the flesh". The Gospels were not written to provide us with a biography of Christ in the ordinary sense. The earliest evangelic tradition we can reach, whether it records the things He did or the things He said, portrays Him theologically, as the One foreordained, anointed, and exalted by God to be a Prince and a Saviour. In Mk. He is uniformly Messiah and Son of God; and this fact is so taken for granted in the still earlier "Q" material that it is there more usually implicit than explicit; yet it is to this earliest stratum of all that we must ascribe that "aerolite from the Johannine heaven" found in Matt. xi. 27 and Luke x. 22: "All things have been delivered unto me of my Father: and no one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him."²⁶ It is impossible

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to discover a "merely" human Jesus in our earliest sources, or even behind them. However much we disagree with Bultmann, he is right in emphasising that no materials exist for a biography of Jesus, that men may know Him *κατὰ σάρκα*. And it is here that the great majority of "Lives of Jesus" fail.²⁷ Mr. Douglas Jerrold tells us²⁸ that when he approached Dr. W. R. Inge to write a Life of Christ for Benn's Sixpenny Library, he received a terse post-card to this effect: "As there are no materials for a life of Christ, I regret that I cannot comply with your request." The answer, though paradoxical, was wise. We cannot know Him *κατὰ σάρκα*. We must either know Him as He is presented to, us in the Gospel, or not know Him at all. If we choose the earliest of the four Evangelists as our teacher, he will lead us to confess with the centurion under the shadow of the Cross, "Truly this Man was the Son of God the same goal in reality as we reach when under the guidance of the latest Evangelist we say with Thomas in the presence of the risen Saviour, "My Lord and my God".

(To Be Continued)

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²⁵ *New Testament Problems*, p. 28. In addition to works already mentioned, other able studies of the subject in English are *The Gospel before the Gospels*, by B. S. Easton (1928); *The Validity of the Gospel Record*, by E. F. Scott (1938); *Form Criticism*, by E. B. Redlich (1939).

²⁶ The passage Matt. xi. 25-27 is "re-translated" by Burney into Aramaic which shows both rhythm and rhyme (*The Poetry of our Lord*, pp. 171f.). Cf. for a very similar "retranslation" of verse 27, G. Dalman, *Words of Jesus*, pp. 284f.

²⁷ Cf. an interesting series of Articles entitled "Is it possible to write a Life of Christ?" in *The Expository Times*, commencing with the number for November 1941.

²⁸ *Georgian Adventure*, p. 309.