

Dr. Robert C. Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Lecture 14, Form Criticism

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Well, good morning. We've come to our last session here in Synoptic Gospel Course. We've looked so far at the historical Jesus, the Jewish background, the introduction to exegesis, the narrative genre, authorship date, characteristics of the synoptics, exegeting parables, the gospels as literary works, the synoptic problem, the geography of Palestine and Jerusalem, exegeting miracle accounts, the theology of the synoptics, controversy accounts, exegeting controversy accounts, and now we want to look at form criticism and redaction criticism.

We'll also want to finish up with some conclusions on gospel history. Well, we think a little about the terminology of form criticism. What is the word form criticism about? It's a rough English translation of two German terms, Formgeschichte, form history, or Gattungsforschung, genre of research.

Form criticism is a method of analyzing materials that have been orally transmitted in an attempt to recover their original versions on the assumption that their literary forms can be identified and restored to their primitive conditions. We're going to clarify this in a little bit here. The idea is that stories or sayings circulate orally, and as they do that, their content and complexity change in predictable ways, somewhat like the stories about the fish that got away that always seem to get bigger as the story is repeated over and over.

Well, the application of form criticism to the New Testament begins with Rudolf Bultmann just after World War I. What we want to do first of all is look a little bit at the background of form criticism, and then we'll come back and begin to describe it specifically. This approach, form criticism, did not suddenly appear with Bultmann, but has a lengthy background in biblical studies. Several strands of liberal thought were united in form criticism.

First of all, F.C. Bauer's reconstruction of church history. Bauer was a German church history professor in the mid-19th century and mid-1800s. Bauer adopted Hegel's philosophy of history and applied it to church history.

At this time, Hegel's philosophy and history, as well as the conflict of ideas, were very influential in Europe. He saw all history as a conflict between a new idea, which he called the thesis, which spawned a counter idea, the antithesis. Their conflict eventually led to some compromise ideas, which he called the synthesis.

So, a thesis conflict with the antithesis, leading to the synthesis. Most people are more familiar with how Karl Marx applied this idea to the struggle between social classes. Bauer was the first to apply these ideas to early church history.

He saw a struggle between two groups in the early church, characterized as follows. On the one hand, the Jewish church. On the other hand, the Gentile church.

Peter is the leader of the Jewish church. Paul is the leader of the Gentile church. Jewish church made up mostly Jews.

Gentile church mostly Hellenistic Gentiles. The Jewish church saw Jesus as a great miracle working man and Messiah. The Gentile church saw Jesus as God in a new mystery religion.

The Jewish church had an emphasis on the law. The Gentile church, an emphasis on the sacraments. The Jewish church, an emphasis on national salvation, salvation of Israel.

Gentile church, on individual salvation. Bultmann then later, in the 20th century, uses Bauer's ideas of two separate early Jewish and Gentile churches to date the sources that he claims to find in the gospel material. So that's the first element, if you like, that will be used by Bultmann in his form criticism.

The second was David Friedrich Strauss' mythical approach. Strauss, you remember, wrote the *Leben Jesu* back in 1835, and he said that much of the gospel was mythical, especially the miraculous. The gospels, he thought, are propaganda pieces that teach religious truth, but the events they narrate did not really happen.

Form critics, especially Bultmann, follow Strauss in seeing much in the gospels as myth also. Then, we have the third element, Bernard Weiss and H.J. Holtzmann's documentary theory. When we talked about the synoptic problem, we mentioned the two-document theory.

That was popularized by Weiss and Holtzmann, although Eichhorn had proposed it earlier. Here, Mark and Q are the sources used by Matthew and Luke. Form criticism sees Mark and Q as the literary sources behind the gospels, but then tries to go back behind Mark and Q to the original primitive oral materials.

A fourth element is old liberal arguments over the character of Jesus. As we had said earlier, with miracles removed from the gospels, we have conflicting pictures of Jesus. Some see him as a moral teacher, others a revolutionary leader, or a prophet of eschatological doom, or a charlatan.

Which parts of the gospel material are selected or rejected affects which type of Jesus these various different guys see. Bultmann and others hope that form criticism could clarify the picture and get back to the real historical Jesus. A fifth element behind form criticism is Wrede and Wellhausen's skepticism.

Wrede and Wellhausen proposed that even Mark and Q were theological constructs derived from the interpretation of the early church. And so, if that's true, then we have to dissolve the framework of these narratives and look at the isolated basic sayings. And this is what form criticism does.

But form criticism got started first in the Old Testament, and so that's kind of the sixth element. And this brings us to Hermann Gunkel. He distinguished small units in Genesis and in the Psalms, which he claimed had once circulated orally before being written down.

The units in Genesis, he said, contained legends designed to explain the origin of names, whether places or people. The units in the Psalms were worship or liturgical materials prepared for specific occasions or specific shrines. Gunkel tried to reconstruct the life situation, which comes to be known in German as a *sitz im leben*, in which these stories or Psalms originated.

Bultmann then tries to do the same for the units he finds in the Synoptic Gospels. That brings us then, finally, to form criticism in the New Testament. After World War I, Bultmann applied Gunkel's method to the Gospels, that is, to the pieces isolated from the framework of Mark and Q, as suggested by Wrede and Wellhausen.

Bultmann claimed his method, form criticism, could distinguish earlier material from later material, could distinguish Gentile from Jewish sources, and could thus determine which materials really went back to Jesus. Bultmann's methods have been refined since his time. They find their most avid practitioners in the members of the Jesus Seminar, which was mentioned back in our discussion of the historical Jesus.

So, that much then on the background of form criticism. Methods of form criticism. Well, the first question to ask, I suppose, is, what is a form? Well, to understand form criticism, we start with the basics.

There are all sorts of things that are called forms, and a number of these have some relation to our concern here. A form is a sort of mold which gives shape to some medium. For instance, we have concrete forms for pouring concrete into to make sidewalks and gutters and things of that sort.

We have jello molds for making jello salads and some other things of that sort. We might call these physical forms. By analogy, then we also have language forms, and language forms also give a shape to some medium, but the medium here is language.

These forms hold certain words fixed, which are then the form, and then vary other words, which we might think are the contents we pour into the form. And so that makes these forms useful for a variety of applications. We still think about this in rather common use when we talk about filling out a form.

So, you've got an application form, and it's set up for an application for a job or for college or something, and it's got certain forms, things fixed, name, address, etc., and what those are depends on what kind of a form it is. Some examples that perhaps are not called forms so much, a polite introduction is a form. You have kind of the space for a person's name, and then I would like you to meet, and then you put another person's name in there, so that tells you politely how you go about introducing somebody.

A sermon is also, if you like, a literary form or a verbal form. It can have somewhat different shapes, if you like, forms, if you like, depending on whether it's a textual sermon, a topical sermon, or an expository sermon. The classical sermon form consists of an introduction, a body, and a conclusion, and the body, especially for a classical sermon, should make three points and should be sprinkled with illustrations and exhortations.

The conclusion might well end in a poem or a prayer or an altar call, depending on the particular Christian denomination or background in which the sermon is being given. A good test for recognizing a form is can it be mimicked or parodied? For instance, a textual sermon on Mary Had a Little Lamb, which I've heard on a few occasions, is an example of that sort of thing. We also get legal or financial forms.

A check, for instance, if you pull out your checkbook and look at it, has got fixed words and a lot of blanks, and it's basically a little short memo or letter to your bank, and it's dated so that the bank can see whether it's been around a long time or not, and it tells who you pay the check to and how much, and it's got two places for that to keep the recipient from kiting the check, from sticking in some extra numbers to make it a larger amount, and then it's got your signature, and recent checks have, of course, name of the bank and all sorts of routing numbers down at the bottom and things of that sort as well. A deed or a will would also be examples of legal forms. In English, we have literary forms in poetry.

A sonnet, for instance, is fixed as being fourteen lines, and it's supposed to be in a particular meter called iambic pentameter and its lyric. It's about some topic like love or beauty of nature or something of that sort and often has a fixed rhyme scheme. So, here's a Christian sonnet by Francis Ridley Havergill, a fairly well-known hymn writer from the 19th century.

Love culminates in bliss when it doth reach a white, unflickering, fear-consuming glow, and knowing, it is known as it doth know, needs no assuring word or soothing speech. It craves but silent nearness, so to rest. No sound, no movement, love not heard but felt, longer and longer still till time should melt, a snowflake on the eternal ocean's breast.

Have moments of this silence starred thy past, made memory a glory-haunted place, taught all the joy that mortal kin can trace? By greater light, tis but a shadow cast. So shall the Lord thy God rejoice over thee, and in his love will rest and silent be. On the other end of the spectrum, we have limericks, which is a five-line humorous poem.

Three lines, first, second, and fifth, have three feet to their meter, and they rhyme. And two lines, a third and a fourth, are shorter two feet, and they rhyme. And the fifth line is the punchline.

There was a young lady named Bright, who traveled much faster than light. She set out one day in a relative way and returned on the previous night. One of my students wrote this limerick.

There was a professor named Newman, who was known for his wit and acumen. He gave out a test, but everyone guessed, so he flunked them without even fuming. This was by John Bloom, one of my former students.

Well, those are examples of literary forms, if you like. Let's take a look at the assertions that Bultmann and other form critics make. They say, yeah, okay, there are forms in written and oral literature, so what does Bultmann claim we can do with them? Here are the typical assertions of Bultmann-type form critics.

Some form critics are more conservative than he is, but Bultmann is head by far the greatest influence in New Testament studies. So, Bultmann and others of that sort assert. One, there was a period of oral tradition before the Gospels were written, and most people would agree that something oral was around for a while.

Bultmann argues for two generations of oral transmission, from Christ to perhaps 70 to 100 A.D. Secondly, during that time of oral transmission, Gospel sayings and narratives circulated as independent units. And then thirdly, these units may be classified by their form into groups. Typically, there are three groups; some will have more, and you can obviously subdivide the groups.

One of these groups is a saying, an isolated statement of Jesus, with no narrative supporting it. Another is a saying story, a proverb, or a sharp pithy saying with a story around it that helps you understand the point of it or helps you see the punchline or something of that sort. And thirdly, a miracle story, a narrative of a miraculous event.

Fourthly, Bultmann and others claim that the early church not only preserved but also invented many of these units to fill practical needs. And so, by knowing the emphasis of each unit, we can determine its source and show that many of these do not go back to Jesus. So, one of these is that the Palestinian or Jewish church saw Jesus as its Messiah and expected his return as the Son of Man.

So, that kind of material would point to a Jewish church background. The Hellenistic Gentile church, on the other hand, saw Jesus as the cult lord or deity of their new mystery religion and emphasized their present communion with the Holy Spirit. So, the early church preserved and invented many of these.

Fifth, these materials have little or no real biographical, chronological, or geographical value. The extent to which they've got those is not really, what, shall we say, authentic. So, whatever they tell you in these areas, this was added later in the oral tradition or made up by Mark to fit his framework or such.

Baltimore and such would point out that this tendency is seen in folklore. So, as we think, stories about George Washington are embellished with unhistorical details, like his throwing a dollar across the Potomac River or something of that sort. Note the implication here that the early church was sloppy with the truth and used their stories for propaganda purposes.

Fifth, the original version of each tradition unit may be recovered, and its oral history traced by using the laws that govern tradition. Well, what are these laws? They're derived from observing how stories, etc., develop. For instance, the traditions in Greek and Jewish literature.

The Letter of Aristeas, for instance, traces the origin of the Septuagint translation in the Old Testament. And as you hear the story of the origin of the Septuagint in later writers, it tends to get embellished in various ways, as reported by, say, Philo or Josephus or the church fathers or others. You can also see how it develops in parables in Talmudic and other Jewish religious literature, where you often see several versions of the same parable in different rabbinic literature.

Or the Apocryphal Gospels, as they borrow from the canonical Gospels. Or the canonical Gospels, Matthew, and Luke, as they borrow from Mark and Q. So these would be the places that Bultmann and others would use to try and develop their laws of how tradition changes the content of various oral statements. Well, that's kind of the assumption of form critics.

Then, we look a little bit at their procedure. Using these assertions, form critics process each unit to get its most primitive form and then try to decide whether that unit goes back to Jesus or not. So, their first step is to isolate the stories and sayings from the context, which is assumed to be a purely editorial invention.

So, they assume that Matthew and Luke both use Mark, and so they then basically try and take out these anecdotes, if you like, or these sayings, and if necessary, shave them down some to get back to the original form. To do this, they use the laws of tradition to recover the original or primitive state of each story or saying. For that, a primitive narrative is said to be characterized by a single scene, a short time period, only two or three characters, and any groups who are present act as a unit.

In fact, we often see these things. They're features of storytelling, okay? And whether those stories are historical stories or not, to convey something, what should we say in an understandable, interesting way? Those are common features if you like.

Development of the narrative then involves, according to Bultman and others, increasing elaboration and making details more explicit, adding names where none were original, converting indirect discourse to direct discourse, and adding miraculous elements. So basically, these are applied to try and get back to the most primitive form for each saying or saying story or miracle story. And then, fifthly, thirdly, excuse me, you try to decide which early group was responsible for this primitive form.

Possibilities? Early church, Jewish or Gentile, the Jews or Jesus, right? Just like we said before, Martin Luther came out of the Catholic Church and started Lutheranism. So, Jesus came out of Judaism and started Christianity. So, these other possible groups are all considered candidates.

What kind of criteria would be used to try and decide whether they go back to Jesus or not? One of them is multiple attestation. If a form appears in both Mark and Q, then it's more likely to go back to Jesus and dissonance.

Jesus actually said those things, which we cannot imagine any other early source would say—for instance, paying taxes to Caesar. The Jews didn't like paying taxes.

Christians didn't like paying taxes. So, it must go back to Jesus. Well, that's basically what we've got here.

Well, we look at some samples then of the application of form criticism. First of all, we'll go back and talk a little bit about these basic forms that we've identified. Typically, three basic forms identified in the gospel material, though some critics have more.

Notice the category of sayings has numerous sub-varieties. Miracle stories. Form critics find the following structure to miracle stories.

The problem is described. Some sickness of a person or a danger or necessity. Something of that sort.

Danger, the boat's about to sink. Necessity, these people are out here in the wilderness, and they might not even make it back to towns when their blood sugar gets too low or something, we might say. The problem is solved by the actions of the healer or whatever.

And Bultmann does remark that the actions of Jesus as a healer are very reserved compared with some of the actions of the healers in Josephus or rabbinic materials or magical papyri or apocryphal gospels or things of that sort. And then the effect of the miracle is stated. The person healed, his reaction, her reaction.

The reaction is the crowd, the reaction is the demon, things of that sort. We walk through a couple of examples here just to give you a little feeling. Mark 1:23 to 27, the demon-possessed man in a synagogue.

There's some contextual connection at the beginning of the story. Just then, et cetera, and critics say, well, that's the work of the editor. Okay, that's the way he connects this anecdote into the narrative so that you throw that out.

But you've got the problem. The man is possessed by a demon. You've got the solution.

Jesus speaks and heals the man. And Bultmann notes, as I said, that in comparison with the apocrypha and the Greek miracle stories, there's great simplicity in Jesus' healings. No magic words or ritual, though occasionally they point to ephetha as being some sort of a magic word, although it's just basically Aramaic for open, okay? And admittedly, some of the demon exorcisms that you see elsewhere, I think the one in Josephus, where Josephus tells us about, I think it was an Essene that had a ring with some herbs inside it that were specified in one of Solomon's magical books.

He takes the ring, holds it up to the nose of the fellow, pulls it, and the demon comes out. And the demon overturns a washbasin of water over here so that you know that he's come out, etc. So, well, the effect in this particular one we're looking at is the man possessed by the demon, Jesus speaks and heals the man, and then you have the reaction of the crowd, the demon, and the healed person in this particular case.

Or Mark 4:35 to 41, Jesus rebuking the wind and the waves. Context: on that day, throw it out, okay? Problem, the boat's sinking, and you've got high winds. Solution, Jesus rebukes the wind.

Rather, reserved action. Effect, calm. Disciples are amazed.

Both these examples fit Bultmann's primitive miracle story form. A single scene, few actors, crowd acting as a unit, etc. Well, miracle stories actually do have this basic form.

We see that already, and when we talked about miracle accounts back in our Exegetian miracle account and when we looked at Leland Ryken's characterization of a bunch of different kinds of narratives in the Synoptic Gospels. They do have a basic form, but that does not mean you can call them primitive or developed. It's a natural way to narrate something of this sort and would apply to any problem-solution anecdote if you like.

Saying stories. A saying story is a narrative with a saying as its central feature. The narrative is constructed to illuminate the meaning or impact of the saying.

Some general characteristics of New Testament saying stories. Some of these, suitably modified, would also apply to secular and modern forms as well. First, the emphasis is on a saying of Jesus or of one approved by him.

In the rabbinic literature, there is an emphasis on something that Hillel said, something Shammai said, something Akiva said, or something like that. The brief, simple narrative is just sufficient to make the saying comprehensible. You often have somebody that tells some story and then says, you had to be there, okay? In other words, he didn't tell the story very well, is basically what that means.

If you tell it well, the person can catch the point. Thirdly, the story contains some biographical interest. But Bultmann would say, this is only biographical interest regarding what people thought Jesus was like.

Bultmann claims that these don't have any real historical value, as they're not accurate. The post-Bultmannians, as we saw earlier, disagree with this, saying that if there's multiple attestation and dissonance and such, then biographical features may go back to the historical Jesus and have some value. And lastly, the story is rounded off by saying or an act of Jesus.

Sometimes saying is back in the middle, and the act, like Jesus healed the guy or something, is at the end, but more frequently rounded off by the saying. This functions to get in and out of the story nicely. It usually ends with the saying itself, or with an act of Jesus.

One of the things you notice when you listen to people who are not skilled or experienced storytellers is they have a hard time stopping. They don't know how to get out of the story they're telling in a satisfactory way. Well, let's look at some examples of saying stories.

Mark 3, verses 2-6, the man with the withered hand healed. This is not primitive, as we see a combination of miracle and saying story here, but since the emphasis is on the saying, the miracle is the scene that illuminates the saying. It needs some simplification, probably, to be a primitive form according to form criticism.

Context: the Pharisees are watching Jesus. The question is, he's got this fellow there with the withered hand. Will Jesus heal? The response, Jesus says, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath? And Jesus' healing miracle answers the question. Biographical interest, Jesus' anger, Jesus' concern for the sick man.

Rounding off, either healing itself or when the Pharisees leave, rather angry. Another example of saying story, Mark 2, verses 23-28, picking grain on the Sabbath. Here, Jesus answers their question with a question.

He rounds off the story by saying that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Biographical interest, Jesus' compassion for his disciples, etc. We have many cases where Jesus responds with a parable.

Question: who is my neighbor? Answer, parable of the Good Samaritan, etc. The first of these categories, then, is called Jewish saying stories. These are similar to those in rabbinic literature.

Somebody, an enemy, king, disciple, or person in the crowd, asks Jesus a question. And, asks the rabbi a question, excuse me. And the rabbi's characteristic answer is a parable or another question.

Naturally, this type would be older, but not necessarily from Jesus. Those two examples we gave you, the man with the withered hand and picking grain on the Sabbath, fall into that category. But, Bultmann also sees Greek saying stories.

And this is a much less definite form. The form is basically introduced by a stereotype formula. When he, the Greek philosopher or teacher or something, was asked by someone about something, he said.

There's no real story or background with it. This is the way anecdotes of various Greek philosophers were typically preserved. Well, there's one classic New Testament example of this.

It's in Luke 17:20-21, which uses this formula above. In the NASU. Now, having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming.

He answered them and said, the kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed. Nor will they say, look, here it is. Or, there it is.

For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst. As the Greek saying goes, stories are obviously later editions that show Greek influence. Bultmann throws them out.

According to Bultmann, Jewish stories may have Jesus, the early Jewish church, or the pre-Christian Jews as sources. But, Greek saying stories have the Gentile church as the source. So, that's the second category.

First, miracle stories. Second, saying stories. Third, sayings, or what we might say, isolated sayings.

Sayings that originally had no story with them, as the saying stories did. Some of these may now be grouped together to form sermons. Others may be part of a saying story now.

But, the original form was isolated. Some of them are still isolated here. How do we know if a sermon or story is the editor's invention? Why remove the story in one case and not in another? Criticism says that if the saying makes no sense without the story, then it's a saying story, not a simple saying.

But, if it makes sense without it, it may have been originally just a simple saying. Bultmann finds five kinds of sayings in the Gospels. Proverbs, which Bultmann calls Logia.

But, the term that has been fastened upon by form critics and is more understandable to the average person is Proverbs. These are like the Proverbs in the Old Testament books of Proverbs. Or, somewhat like Benjamin Franklin's Proverbs in Poor Richard's Almanac.

A short, pithy saying of some sort. The first shall be last, and the last first. Or, physician, heal yourself.

A second category is prophetic or apocalyptic sayings. These are sayings about the future, especially about the end of the age. Not one stone will be left upon another.

Two will be grinding in a mill; one will be taken, and one left, etc. A third category is law words or commandments. Sayings structured as commands or imperatives.

Turn the other cheek and go the extra mile. A fourth category is I words, where Jesus uses I in the saying. He's referring to himself.

These focus on the person and authority of Jesus. You have heard them said, but I say unto you, etc. These would be examples from the Sermon on the Mount.

And lastly, parables. Metaphorical sayings, often in story form, without the meaning embedded in the narrative. Baldwin was very much influenced here by Adolf Eulicher, who claimed that authentic parables make only a single comparison, have only one point, and are never allegorical.

The Parable of the Sower, they would say, might be authentic, but the interpretation is not because every item has an assigned meaning; that is, it makes the parable into an allegory. This is too complicated to be a primitive form. The parable of the wedding feast, which we looked at earlier, you remember where the guests are invited, and a bunch of them turn it down, and they go out and get some more, and then after they're in there, this guy shows up that doesn't have a wedding garment on, etc.

The parable of the wedding feast has two parts to it. The wedding invitation section and the wedding garment section. These were originally two parables combined by the editor Matthew 22.

The king's wedding feast, Matthew 22, is a revised version of the earlier rich man's banquet of Luke 14. The wars, the son, and the king were added later. Authentic parables of Jesus are related to the ministry of Jesus or to the coming of the kingdom, so Bultmann would throw any others out that have some other topic.

Well, that's kind of a quick tour of how Bultmann does form criticism without going one by one through all the different sayings, etc. Results for the life of Christ, according to Bultmann. The results by various form critics will vary considerably, depending on where the form critic falls on the liberal-conservative spectrum, but Bultmann is near the extreme liberal end.

Miracle stories. Even after reducing them to their primitive form, Bultmann concludes that these are not genuine. Why? Since his worldview does not allow miracles to occur.

See his Discussion and Evidence of Faith, pages 291 and following. It's a big assumption. He could have tried to explain them as misunderstood natural events but apparently did not want to be ridiculed like Paulus was.

Saying stories. Only two are genuine, that is, go back to Jesus, according to Bultmann. Bultmann threw out, using dissonance argument, all that could fit a Jewish or Christian background.

Do you remember what we said about Martin Luther in that regard? This is a rather strange methodology. If we threw out everything of Luther's which also fit Catholicism or early Lutheranism, we would hardly have anything left.

Perhaps his bondage to will, but even this has precedence in Augustinianism. Unless a person has no followers, we would expect to find parallels between his teaching and those of his followers. And unless he is very strange, we would expect to find parallels between his teaching and that of his culture.

The two saying stories that Bultmann admits are Mark 12:13-17, the tribute money, and his argument for authenticity is that neither the Jews nor persecuted Christians like paying taxes. Rebuttal. Maybe the source of the story was Herodians or Zealots, depending on whether Jesus is seen as speaking seriously or ironically.

Mark 14, 3-9, the anointing at Bethany. The argument for authenticity, allowing the perfume to be poured out, is strange given the interest in both Christians and Jews in helping the poor. The poor always had your idea, which was also thought to be strange.

So not scolding at a waste of money is unique, and so Bultmann thought that that was authentic. We move over to the isolated sayings. Bultmann sees only about 40 of these as genuine.

The Proverbs, he says, none are genuine. The early Christians were not interested in the life of Christ until about 70 or 80 AD. They then adapted Jewish Proverbs already in existence to provide materials to manufacture Jesus' teaching.

Need to have him say something. Two apocalyptic sayings. Some are from Jesus.

Others are Christianized Jewish apocalyptic sayings or sayings by Christian prophets later ascribed to Jesus. Bultmann and a number of form critics view early Christianity as being like the modern Pentecostal movement, which is not a compliment in their view. Basically, prophetic messages by various prophets standing up in congregations were later misattributed to Jesus.

Basically, what Bultmann claims. Law words. A few of these are from Jesus.

Most stem from the legalism of the early church, which they invented. And Jesus was not a legalist, as Bultmann thinks, so only the commands against externalistic religion are likely to be authentic as they go against legalism. Eye words.

None of those are from Jesus, according to Bultmann. These speak of his messianic ministry and his deity. Thus, Bultmann rejects them.

The Messiah idea, he thinks, was invented by the early church, rather as Vreda in his messianic secret theory. Parables. Some are genuine.

However, their context and interpretations are later inventions of the church. All predictive features are obviously late additions. Well, the results for this, then.

Information on the personality and life of Jesus is rather scarce. Bultmann thinks Jesus lived, suffered, and died, which, by the way, is more than some of your communist arguments would be willing to grant. Bultmann believes some people followed Jesus, but they misunderstood him if they thought he was the Messiah, much less if they thought he was Savior or God.

Further results. Information on the teaching of Jesus is somewhat clearer. From the 40 genuine sayings of Jesus, Bultmann thinks we can deduce some ideas.

He says, first of all, Jesus thought of himself as a prophet, sent in the last hour to warn men that the kingdom was coming and to call them to repentance and to lives of holiness. These points are all true, but Bultmann has scaled down considerably what Jesus claims and teaches. Secondly, Bultmann thinks Jesus pictures the coming kingdom as real and imminent, but he was wrong.

This is, in fact, a very common liberal view that Jesus and the apostles expected the kingdom to come during their lifetimes. Bultmann and others feel justified by the events, as the kingdom did not and has not come, although it's of some interest to compare this with 2 Peter 3.3, where Peter says, know this first of all, that in the last days, mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it has from the beginning of creation. Bultmann sees the real value of Jesus' teaching is the fact that each of us is always faced with the existential choice to live at every moment either for God or for the world.

Bultmann sees the only value of Jesus' teaching in our everyday life as this, there is no afterlife and there is no future judgment. This everyday value is real and present in Jesus' teaching, but it is only a small fraction of his teaching. Okay, well that's a very quick tour of form criticism and seen largely in terms of Bultmann, but who is the most influential of those? We come back now and think in terms of an evaluation of form criticism.

What are we to think of form criticism? I'll start the evaluation first of all in terms of the assertions that were made back earlier, the assertions of form criticism. So, the first of these, there was a period of oral tradition before the written Gospels. It extended some two generations, and the first Gospels were written in the span of 70 to 100 AD.

Well, there was an oral period since the Gospels themselves were not written immediately, but this only lasted perhaps 20 years until 40 or 50 AD, not the 40 to 70 years that the liberals claim. After only 20 years, there were still many eyewitnesses

alive since early events were seen by thousands. Thus, before about 70 AD, there were many around for verification.

After Jerusalem fell, most Jewish Christians were scattered, and many other eyewitnesses were dead. Paul wrote as early as 20 years after the events, and none of his letters were over 35 years after Jesus' ministry. He had close contact with the apostles and the Jerusalem church.

Early and pervasive tradition says that two Gospels were written by apostles and two others by their immediate associates. As a result, there's no real chain of tradition such as is essential to form criticism. In their scheme, you've got, you know, the event is here, and observer A sees some things, and he tells B, and he tells C, and C tells D, etc., until you get down here to Z or something, and then it's written down. A long chain of tradition. Instead, all information in the Gospels was first or secondhand with many witnesses, multiple testimonies, and plenty of opportunity for checking.

The second assertion of form criticism is that early sayings and stories circulated as independent units. Well, we do, in fact, observe that the gospel structure is often like beads on a string. Not always, but often.

Detailed incidents are tied together with brief connectives. We saw some of those when we looked over some of the miracle accounts there and just then and things like that that are very brief connectors. Form criticism says the early church created most of the beads and nearly all the string to hold them together.

Well, some of the gospel accounts probably were used as independent units in the sense that the apostles traveled around teaching what Jesus said what he did and who he was, etc. And they would naturally use individual incidents to illustrate points and teach facts in their preaching. But these incidents never had an independent, isolated circulation in their transmission from event to written gospel.

They may perfectly well have had some independent, isolated circulation that didn't involve that, but because the gospel writers were apostles or immediate hearers, they never had this independent, isolated circulation in that link, if you like. The apostles knew the string, as well as the beads, and other teachers like the Seventy, knew how the incidents went together, and this connecting information was never lost. If the traditional authorship information is at all correct, independent circulation is of no relevance to the content of the canonical gospels.

Besides, not all gospel material looks like beads on a string. The passion narrative is too tightly connected to have been independent anecdotes. Other stories are always closely joined together.

The woman with the hemorrhage in Jairus' daughter is always interlinked, even in the accounts where that occurs. Mark has a tightly united Sabbath day sequence in Mark 1:21-39. Some sayings are tightly associated, as in Mark 4:21-25 and Mark 8:34-91.

We see places where the single author who put the units together was a moral and poetic genius. For example, the Sermon on the Mount has striking Hebrew parallelism and poetic content. Its moral teaching is the best ever seen.

See also the chiasms noticed by Kenneth Bailey in his *Poet and Peasant* and the various remarks on the literary quality of the parables and sermons of Jesus in Leland Ryken of the *New Testament in Literary Criticism*. How did all these fragments made up by various early groups get woven into this moral and literary tapestry? What genius did this? Jesus is the best suggestion. But in that case, these units had only one source and were never independent.

Thirdly, the Gospel materials can be classified into forms. In some sense, any written or oral communication can be classified into forms. Beyond this, the beads-on-the-string structure of the Gospels allows many examples of relatively short, discrete forms, namely stories and sayings of various sorts.

Yet the formal character of some of Bultmann's categories is questionable. Four of Bultmann's five saying categories, all but the parables, are merely descriptive of contents. What style distinguishes a law word or an I word from a proverb? Furthermore, the passion narrative has no form in which it fits.

How can you reduce something this complex to a primitive form? The dating of formless materials cannot be based on the development of forms. Bultmann has decided in advance, independent of true forms, which materials are authentic and which he can't believe. We see him throw at all miracle forms, even when they have his true primitive form.

Fourthly, the early Church invented and expanded stories and sayings to meet their practical needs. Surely, one factor in the preservation of material about Jesus was its value to the early Church. But this was not the only factor, and there was no need to propose an invention.

What do we mean by practical anyway? Note that Paul's epistles are far more practical than the Gospels in meeting the needs of functioning churches, as they are written to real churches having real problems. This is very obvious in the great preponderance of preaching from the epistles that we see in practically oriented churches today. Yet, compared with Paul's teachings, it appears that many of the Church's interests are not found in the Gospels, and vice versa.

The Gospels tell us who Jesus is and what he did, salvation history, and biblical theology, but they do not answer many practical issues. Even the details of the practical applications of Jesus' atonement are found in the epistles rather than the Gospels, apparently because Jesus did not discuss this during his earthly ministry. That people were willing to follow Jesus, even follow him to their deaths, suggests that he must have done or said something noteworthy.

Much of the material in the Gospels is not directly practical to later churches but is important historically, especially in his dealings with the Pharisees and such. The Gospels are concerned with preserving Jesus' ministry, his sayings, and his actions, which is why the Church preserves them. Are the Gospels invention? Many practical things in the Gospels are impossible.

Sermon on the Mount contains much that people cannot do on their own abilities. Legalistic churches are careful not to invent commands that can only be obeyed by grace. When liberals say that Gospel material was invented, they claim that the early Church did not control what was being taught about Jesus, but the New Testament is concerned about truth, about trained elders, and rejecting false teaching.

Liberals try to dismiss much of this material, for example the pastoral epistles, by pushing their date to the end of the first century. But if there was a group of Church leaders who controlled Church teaching and content from Christ's death until the Gospels were written, then liberals are in trouble. In that case, the Gospels are historically reliable, liberal theology is wrong, and there is a judgment to come.

Fifth, the Gospels contain little of biographical, geographical, and chronological value. Well, the Gospels have lots of data in these areas. We cannot very well check it all out 2,000 years later.

We don't have time machines. Certainly, Jesus is pictured as making huge claims regarding himself and the coming judgment, and these implications continue to affect men.

To deny these claims and the historical value of the Gospels, one must assert that the early Church was not interested in the Jesus of history. This is contradicted everywhere. 1 Corinthians 15, about 25 years after the event, Paul says, If Christ is not raised, you are still in your sins.

Paul does not say, take my word for it, but appeals to many witnesses who are still living. Some 25 years after the event, one could still check the details about the life of Christ. Luke 1, 1-4 explicitly says that the author had an interest in what really happened.

He apparently interviewed eyewitnesses and investigated matters carefully. Acts 1:21-22, when selecting a replacement for Judas, the apostles picked someone who had been with them from Christ's baptism to the resurrection. Thus, the apostles were not only witnesses of Jesus' resurrection but also of his ministry.

This shows great interest in the history of Jesus. The early Church was also concerned that this material be transmitted carefully. See the concern in 2 Thessalonians 2:2, 2:5, 2:17, and 3:17, about fake messages and letters from Paul regarding the second coming.

Paul says he personally signs his letters as proof of his authenticity. Proof of their authenticity. 2 Timothy 2:2 says to commit to faithful men what you have heard in the presence of many witnesses.

So, Timothy had more than just Paul's word to go on. We see a similar statement, by the way, in the rabbinic literature. Mishnah, Ediyot 5-7, where Rabbi Aqabiyah ben Mehaliel is on his deathbed around 90 AD.

He tells his son to repeat only what he had heard from a majority of teachers. Ignore the tradition that comes from one only, even if it is his father. To hold on to their position, forum critics reject Papias' testimony regarding the close connection between the Gospels and apostles, though there is no external evidence against it.

We have obviously Papias' testimony that the apostle Matthew is behind the Gospel of Matthew, and Peter, through Mark, is responsible for the Gospel of Mark. Liberals make the apostle Matthew the author of Q at best, and say all other early references are based on misinterpretation of Papias. This is a big assumption.

Could Irenaeus be limited to Papias alone as his data source when his primary teacher was Polycarp? Note that the Gnostics had to go to the plot theories in order to claim authority for their teachings. They agreed that the public teaching of Jesus was just as the canonical Gospels had it but claimed it was incomplete and had to be supplemented with the secret words of Jesus. Compare the opening words of the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Judas, both of which make reference to secret teachings.

All this shows that the church was interested in who Jesus really was and that their written documents were good. Marcion even modified Luke instead of throwing everything out as unreliable. Sixth, the original version of each tradition unit may be recovered, and its history traced by using the laws that govern tradition.

Even if we grant that Baltimore's laws of tradition are valid, though in fact they have serious problems, this does not prove falsification occurred in the Gospels. Claims that during the transmission of tradition, details tend to increase, names are added,

and discourse shifts from indirect to direct do not fit with Mark being the source of Matthew and Luke, where Mark has lots of direct discourse and often more details than Matthew and Luke have. It is true that these tendencies frequently do characterize the transmission of stories and sayings, as in flushing out a sermon illustration, but even a tendency to do something does not prove it was done in any particular case.

The problem is that for an event that really happened, the people did have real names, they really did speak with direct discourse, and the events actually occurred in great detail. So, all these things were in the original event. Given two narratives of an event with different levels of detail, one less, one more, you have to guess which one is older.

Here's the original event here with all the detail, and then it comes back down, and then eventually it gets very low, and then people begin to invent stuff and does the long arrow belong over here with the short arrow behind it further away from the event or does the short arrow belong here and the long arrow back over here? You don't know. Even if one grants some falsification in the Gospels, is there enough to completely throw out the teaching of the Last Judgment? Liberals must say that the Gospels are totally unreliable in order to do this. Could this have happened in one generation within a group that was obviously concerned about truth? One cannot throw out miracle stories on the basis of laws of tradition.

This would resemble concluding from fish stories that fish do not exist. The laws of tradition only allow for the simplifying of stories, but they do not rule them out altogether. Bultmann and liberals throw out miracles on the assumption that they cannot occur.

Well, no scientist, much less Bultmann, knows enough to say that our universe is a closed system of cause and effect into which even God cannot penetrate. Bultmann's procedure guarantees finding a non-miraculous, unorthodox Jesus using the dissonance principle. But does it actually tell us anything about the real Jesus? Well, some positive lessons from form criticism.

First of all, the Gospel accounts contain just the sort of material we would expect in the authentic reminiscences of men who witnessed memorable events, especially if they were charged with teaching these events and had then done so for some time before writing. We observe, for instance, broad outlines. So, all the Gospels are the same in regard to the broad outlines, huh? A general sequence, an overview of the period.

We see many single, simple incidents, memorable occasions, anecdotes, things of that sort. We see some sequences. These involve both trivial and major items and the interlinkages between them.

We observe forms and rounding off. By the way, these are more characteristic of oral repetition by one person than of oral transmission through many individuals. The frequent reuse of materials in a traveling ministry would tend to shape striking statements and miracles into this form.

A person thinking through and learning by experience how telling a story did or did not get the point over and how he was able to get in and out of it and such without lots of words. So that's one of our lessons. The Gospel accounts do contain just the sort of material we'd expect in authentic reminiscences.

Secondly, form criticism is hyper-skeptical. If it were applied elsewhere, we would know very little about the past. Some skepticism is helpful, but with too much, you throw out much of what you need.

Once we get beyond living people, we must rely on written documents and oral traditions. Films and videos can't be trusted any more than writing. Thirdly, form criticism has made a positive contribution by showing that we have no tradition in the Gospels of a non-Messianic, non-miraculous, purely human Jesus.

If we take the primitive forms before Baltimore throws them out, we still have miracles and Messianic claims. Jesus considered himself able to forgive sin, claimed a close relationship with the Father, to be human but uniquely divine, all of which were noted by the post-Baltimoreans. Baltimore must go beyond form criticism with blanket worldview assumptions in order to throw this material out.

The Christ of the Gospels continues to be a contradiction to those who have ruled out the supernatural. Well, we're going to turn to redaction criticism here, but let's stop for a moment.